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From Namibia with Love – The Dissertation Paper

A Reflective Essay supporting the

Documentary Film 'From Namibia with Love'

With special references from the director's and editor's perspective on making a politically sensitive documentary film

By

Laura Merilainen

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This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature.....Date.....

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Abstract

This dissertation paper is a reflective essay supporting the documentary film *From Namibia with Love* (FNWL). The aim of this essay is to examine and analyse the production challenges, ethical considerations and the reconstruction of reality in the making of the film FNWL. The essay explores these issues from the director's and editor's point of view with special references to academic literature and different documentary films.

FNWL is a documentary film which tells a story of an elderly Finnish-Namibian couple, Anita and Salatiel Ailonga. The film is a "political love story" since it intertwines the love story and the relationship of the Ailongas with the Namibian liberation struggle, where the couple took part in the politics by defending human rights. The film is politically sensitive as it highlights human rights violations committed in the 1970's by the Namibian Liberation movement, SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organisation). During the liberation struggle many SWAPO members faced great suffering and torture. This was due to the political power struggles that went on inside SWAPO which victimized hundreds and perhaps thousands members of that movement (Groth, 1995: 7). In Namibia these victims are referred to as "SWAPO dissidents".

The findings and practical examples of this reflective essay support the notion that politically sensitive documentaries are particularly difficult to make. The documentary film might harm the reputation of those involved in the film and hence the making of these films involves a number of ethical dilemmas, for example and perhaps most importantly, deciding what the filmmaker can reveal about the main characters' lives without endangering them.

1 Introduction

From the birth of documentary film, documentary filmmakers around the world have tackled topics that are controversial and sensitive. Particularly films that expose the wrongdoings of government, political parties, liberation movements and highbrow politicians. In essence, the main purpose of these kinds of films is to give voice to the ordinary people who have suffered from injustice. For example Michael Moore's documentary film *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) and Lucy Bailey's and Andrew Thompson's *Mugabe and the White African* (2009) can be viewed as politically sensitive films as they expose political scams and government corruption. These films concentrate on showing how these political actions have affected or victimized ordinary people.

The making of politically sensitive documentary films entails a high degree of risk and is very challenging as there tends to be individuals or organisations who do not want these controversial stories to become public. Still these stories should be told as they defend the freedom of speech and create awareness around sensitive and often silenced issues. These documentaries are particularly important in Africa where so many countries still battle with democracy and a variety of injustices. A documentary filmmaker, whose film is controversial, has an important and sometimes difficult task of balancing between telling a story and making the film according to ethical standards, for example, ensuring no-one involved in the making of the film suffers from any consequences.

This reflective essay looks into the making of the politically sensitive documentary film *From Namibia with Love* (FNWL). I directed and edited this film as part of my Master of Arts degree in Masters in Media Theory and Practice at the Department of Film and Media Studies at the University of Cape Town (UCT).

In the promotional material developed for the film, I have captured the essence of the story as follows:

A young woman from Finland is sent to Africa as a missionary in the 1950's. In Tanzania she falls in love with a Namibian man. The couple end up in the middle of the Namibian Liberation Struggle which changes their lives forever. From Namibia with Love is a touching story about the couple's life, love, war, injustice, hope and devotion for Namibia.

This dissertation reflects the production process in light of my experiences which is supported by academic literature. Following the introduction, chapter two concentrates on examining the

historical context around the film as well as explaining the documentary film FNWL. It also explains the so-called “political love story” definition that best describes the film. The production process, from pre-production to post-production is analysed in chapter three. It concentrates on describing the challenges of making the film FNWL and highlights obstacles in the production of this politically sensitive film. Throughout the production process ethical problems and limitations as well as cultural limitations are discussed. Chapter four concentrates on the analysis of the feedback following the film’s premiere in South Africa and Namibia. Chapter five looks into the challenges of reconstructing reality in a documentary film. Ethical considerations when making a politically sensitive film are discussed in chapter six. Finally, chapter seven draws the major conclusions together.

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2 The documentary film *From Namibia with Love*

2.1 The historical context

The main character of the film, Anita Ailonga, a Finn, is 77 years old while her husband, a Namibian, Salatiel Ailonga, is 78 years old. The couple met and eventually got married in the early 1970s in Tanzania, where the young missionary Anita Smeds (a Master in Social Sciences graduate) was employed by the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission and also where Salatiel Ailonga studied theology. Like her husband, who was one of SWAPO's founding members, Anita Ailonga had a close relationship with exiled SWAPO leaders. For example, she helped the liberation movement pay its rent and buy furniture for its Dar Es Salaam office (Williams, 2009: 85). During that period, many Scandinavian countries supported SWAPO and Anita Ailonga was a valuable link between SWAPO and various aid organizations in Finland.

In 1974 the Ailongas, at SWAPO's request, moved on to Zambia, where several SWAPO camps had been established to provide refuge for an increasing number of Namibian civilians, who had gone into exile, as well as for the SWAPO freedom fighters who, from Zambian soil, were fighting for the liberation of Namibia from the South African Apartheid occupation.¹ Salatiel Ailonga worked as a pastor at the Old Farm camp, some 40 km out of the Zambian capital Lusaka, where he quickly became very popular among the exiles (Groth 1996: 40). Anita Ailonga assisted him in spiritual duties and in various daily tasks.

During the Ailongas' stay at the Old Farm camp, SWAPO faced an increasing amount of criticism from its own ranks. This criticism concerned the authoritarian management style adopted by the movement in both the running of the camps as well as the ongoing military operations. Pressured by the demands of war, SWAPO adopted an even more authoritarian stance to any criticism and this led to a series of human rights violations – including illegal detentions, torture and murder – against its members (Wallace 2011: 280-284, 308 and Leys & Saul 1995: 40-65). The Ailongas spoke openly against these violations which led to a conflict between them and the SWAPO leadership. Tensions came to a head when the Ailongas organised a BBC interview, on their Focus on Africa programme in 1976 of two survivors of the atrocities, which was subsequently aired to the entire world through the BBC World Service. Salatiel Ailonga's SWAPO membership was withdrawn and the couple faced

¹ It has been estimated that nearly 90,000 Namibians left the country between 1959 and 1988 (Töttemeyer 2010: 115)

several death threats, culminating in June 1976 when they were suddenly deported from Zambia by SWAPO (personal interview with Anita Ailonga on 1/6/2010, see also Groth, 1996: 41). They moved to Finland and lived there until 1990 when Namibia gained its independence. After Namibia's independence, the Ailongas moved to Owamboland in Northern Namibia, where Salatiel has his origins. They still live there on a smallholding, relying on small scale farming and Anita's pension to survive. The couple never had any children.

At independence in 1990, SWAPO became the ruling party in Namibia and has remained so ever since. It currently has more than a two thirds majority in the parliament. The opposition is weak and fractured. The situation means that Namibia, with a functioning multi-party system and with a good record in human and political rights after independence, is a de facto one-party state (Keulder 2002). SWAPO's strong support is to a large degree due to its credentials as the liberation movement (Du Pisani, A. & Lindeke, W.E. 2009: 44). The topic of the "SWAPO dissidents" has been a taboo in Namibia. Unlike South Africa, Namibia did not set up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission where human rights violations committed by all parties would have been addressed. Instead, the government opted for general amnesty (Töttemeyer, 2010: 122). Namibia's national healing process still has a long way to go. There has been no rehabilitation of the former SWAPO dissidents; they are still branded as traitors and they are still waiting to be publicly rehabilitated by their government and by the SWAPO leadership (Groth 1995: 179.) Anita and Salatiel Ailonga are such dissidents; hence their story as told in the film can be seen as an important step in the national healing process.

Owamboland, where the Ailongas are staying, is the heartland of SWAPO support. After settling down on their smallholding in 1990, the couple quickly noticed that they were not welcome in the community and that they were treated as social outcasts. The Namibian community viewed the couple as traitors because they had exposed SWAPO's human rights violations to the world. (Ailonga, A. 2010, see also Swantz 2005: 238). Salatiel Ailonga started to work as a pastor at the local church but after only three years of service he was put on indefinite suspension. He was never told why but the couple suspects that as the church is very close to the SWAPO Party, the church leaders had received orders from SWAPO to get rid of him. According to Anita Ailonga (Ailonga 2010) she started to teach English in the community, but before long all her pupils dropped out.

2.2 The film *From Namibia with Love* and the idea of “political love story”

The film *From Namibia with Love* (FNWL) has three main threads: 1) the way the hardships the Ailongas experienced in the 1970s still haunt them, 2) the love story of the couple, and 3) their devotion to Namibia. It concentrates on two time periods of their life: the events that took place in the couple’s life in Zambia in the mid-1970s and the present day where the consequences of those events still colour their daily existence.

The film makes use of a three-act structure in which Act One introduces the Ailongas and their dedication in supporting SWAPO and Namibia’s independence, their fallout with SWAPO and subsequent deportation from Zambia. Act Two concentrates on the obstacles the Ailongas have faced in Namibia after their return to Africa. Act Three shows a series of events that partially resolve the conflicts that have arisen, and a bitter-sweet end. Not everything is resolved as the reputation of the couple remains tainted but they have accepted the past and find joy in their daily life.

Even though the film is a story of the Ailongas as a couple, the story is mainly told from Anita’s point of view. In addition to Anita and Salatiel, the film includes interviews with two other people. These people are Tangeni Nuukuawo and Sheeli Shangula, two surviving SWAPO dissidents who received assistance from the Ailongas in Zambia in the mid-1970’s.

Categorizing documentaries can be challenging particularly when contemporary documentaries often combine elements from various documentary genres. I prefer to describe FNWL as a “political love story” although – since this is a documentary film – a more precise name for the genre would be a “political love documentary”. However, no such academic definition exists whereas the term “political love story” is widely used in the media as well as in film and book reviews to describe both fictional and documentary films that have a strong love story affiliated to a political theme. As FNWL has a strong love story and a political theme, thus the best definition for it would be a “political love story”. A good example of a documentary film which could be categorized as a political love story is Pat van Heerden’s *White girl in search of a party* (South Africa, 2000). It tells a story of Pauline Podberry, the daughter of Lithuanian immigrants in South Africa and the trade union hero H.A. Naidoo. The political thread of the film includes Naidoo being listed as a communist, the couple’s exile in Hungary and London, and Naidoo's disillusionment with the Communist Party. Other South African examples include Toni Strasburg’s *A South African Love Story: Walter and Albertina Sisulu*

(South Africa, 2004) and Ron Orber's *A Love Divided: Johannesburg* (Great Britain, 1991). These films and FNWL share the common narrative structure: in these films the love story is the driving force in the narrative and the "political landscape" has been created around the main characters and the major political changes in the landscape have been told from the couple's point of view. The films subtly bind together the political and love stories.

Other possible categories for FNWL include biographical documentary and a historical-political film. However, neither of the two is as suitable as the category, "political love story". Biographical documentaries, according to Aufderheide (2007: 95) are popular documentaries with a close focus on a particular person, often somebody famous – or, as Snyman (2007: 12) remarks, about an ordinary person with fascinating story. However, to call FNWL a biographical documentary would be too thin, considering the strong political theme running concurrently with the main characters life story. But neither is FNWL a political documentary, like Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* (USA, 2004) and his other films, which have the sole purpose of unravelling hidden political schemes. In my observation political documentaries for example *Fahrenheit 9/11* and the documentary film *Client Number Two* (Finland, 2000) - a documentary film about Anton Lubowski, the first white Namibian to join SWAPO – rely on facts not on emotions, even though these political documentaries use dramatizations and emotions to highlight dramatic events. FNWL is a character-driven film that concentrates on emotions even though factual information plays an important role.

Finally, one must note that even if a documentary filmmaker would categorize his or her film as belonging to a certain genre, the viewers might have a different view. To many Western viewers FNWL is first and foremost a love story whereas Namibians have viewed it primarily as a political story (feedback forms from screenings in Cape Town 22/9/2011 and Windhoek 8/12/2011).

3 The production process

3.1 Pre-Production of *From Namibia with Love*

3.1.1 The idea

The pre-production started in March 2010 when I wrote the first draft proposal for the film *From Namibia with Love* (FNWL) though I had started to develop the idea for the film much earlier.

I lived in Namibia for almost three years before I started my Masters studies at UCT in 2010. In Namibia I was always fascinated by the stories people told me about the Namibian liberation struggle. During my years in Namibia I came across many controversial stories concerning SWAPO. The most common stories concerned how SWAPO abused its power to favour the Oshiwambo tribe which was the largest tribe in Namibia. I found this to be a paradox since Namibia had been touted as being one of the most democratic countries in Africa.

I have always been interested in making documentary films about people who were under-represented in the mainstream media and after getting to know Anita Ailonga, the more I learned about the life of the couple, the more I wanted to tell their story. The injustices that the couple had experienced was something that needed to be told. It was also a story, I felt, many Namibians could relate to.

I initially planned to make a documentary film that would concentrate mostly on Anita Ailonga's life, her adventures through Africa and her cross-cultural relationship with her Namibian husband. I was particularly interested in her relationship with her husband and the way she had adapted to African culture and traditions. My supervisor, UCT lecturer Mr. Paul Weinberg suggested that I could mirror my own experiences of living in Africa and of being in a cross-cultural relationship in the film, making the film a self-reflexive documentary film. In a self-reflexive documentary the process of filmmaking is part of the subject matter of the film (Pramaggiore & Wallis, 2005: 255). I however disregarded this idea after my film recce (pre-filming visit to a location to work out its suitability for shooting) to the Ailonga's home in Ombalantu, Namibia in May 2010. During the recce my friendship with Anita Ailonga deepened. She started to trust me more and opened up to me about their life in Zambia, which is a painful time period in the couple's life. The recce was crucial as I then realized that the documentary film should focus on how the Ailongas had been victimized, just because they were courageous enough to speak out in defence of human rights during the Namibian liberation struggle. It seemed that Anita Ailonga was ready to speak about the past but Salatiel Ailonga was more hesitant. Nevertheless, they were willing to make the film with emphasis on the events around the

Namibian liberation struggle. That is when the documentary film's form developed into a "political love story".

3.1.2 The production team

I was very lucky to have talented and devoted team members working on my film. Marius van Straaten and Mareike Kramper, both fellow MA Film and Media students were immediately interested in the project. Van Straaten has been trained as a cinematographer and has been working as a Director of Photography (DOP) in the film industry for many years. He naturally took the position of DOP in the film. Mareike Kramper was a valuable co-worker as she also has experience on working on film productions. As a Production Co-ordinator and stills photographer she juggled many tasks on location. She was also responsible for sound. Kramper was invaluable in planning daily shooting time schedules. Key element in our relationship was that both van Straaten and Kramper were as passionate as I was about my idea for the film (telling the story of the Ailongas). During the shoot, which was very intense, we all lived and breathed the life of the Ailongas and the stories they told us. Rabiger (2009) explains that "experiencing a character's or story teller's point of view means temporarily leaving your own existence to enter someone else's and to experience their emotional and psychological reality" (Rabiger, 2009: 263). Rabiger refers particularly to a viewer's experience but in small intimate productions I feel it is applicable. It is important for the crew members to "leave your own existence" and relate to the main characters' life, particularly if the topic at hand is emotional.

3.1.3 Developing a script

Documentary filmmakers tend to fall into two camps: one camp holds that it is impossible to write a script for a documentary film and to the opposite camp that maintains that a script can be developed and is absolutely necessary. I belong to the latter group. If a documentary filmmaker knows his or her subject matter well enough and has done a recce to the field, a script can be made. During the recce to the Ailonga's home I observed the couple's daily routines in order to know what events of their lives could be captured on camera. Having a background in journalism helped me to write a script. As a freelance journalist writing stories has taught me to construct facts and events in a coherent manner. Bluem (1976) argues that "it is not merely by chance that the documentary concept has been characterized as existing in a "grey area" between art and journalism. The selecting and arranging process is fundamental to both subjective (artistic) and objective (journalistic) communication" (Bluem, 1976: 76).

During the script writing process I watched a lot of documentary films. *Ochre and Water: Himba Chronicles From The Land Of Kaoko* (South Africa, 2001) directed by Craig Matthew and Joelle Chesselet does an excellent job portraying the beautiful Namibian landscapes. This film inspired me especially in terms of cinematography and narrative structure. Other documentary films that had an influence on me were *Mugabe and the White African* (USA, 2009) by Lucy Bailey and Andrew Thompson, *Grey Gardens* (1975, USA) by Albert and David Maysles and *Three Rooms of Melancholia* (2004, Finland) by Pirjo Honkasalo.

Discussions with my supervisor Mr. Paul Weinberg, who is a professional photographer and a documentary filmmaker, were particularly helpful as Weinberg is familiar with the political landscape in Namibia. While preparing the script, an American filmmaker, an Emmy award winning documentary director Dante James was a guest lecturer at a documentary film course at UCT. James reviewed the *From Namibia with Love* script and gave valuable feedback. He identified the weaknesses of the script and pointed out that too many narrative themes would make the story superficial. James also identified the turning points in the documentary film. He divided the script according to the three-act structure. *From Namibia with Love's* three-act structure is analysed in chapter 3.3.

3.2 Production period

The shooting period lasted twelve days which were used effectively. The crew started working before sunrise and finished after dark in order to capture valuable footage. The shooting commenced by habituating the couple to the camera's presence. In the beginning Anita Ailonga often questioned the purpose of some particular shots, for example, she did not understand why we were shooting her preparing tea and other ordinary tasks. The necessity of these scenes had to be explained to her repeatedly until she eventually became accustomed to the camera's presence during her daily activities. The shooting process proceeded rather smoothly after that and we managed to shoot the entire script. A surprise occurrence was the disappearance of a baby goat that was missing for days and left Anita Ailonga heart broken. The goat was later found. In the final film the story of the baby goat became a central element in the plot line and carried a lot of symbolic value.

3.2.1 Safety zone shooting method

The Ailongas live in Ombalantu, in the heart of the Owamboland, Northern Namibia. The area's inhabitants are mostly of the Oshiwambo tribe, who form the majority of the SWAPO Party supporters. This is explained by the fact that SWAPO was "born" in the Owamboland area. "SWAPO emerged out of the Owamboland People's Organisation (OPO), which was founded in 1957" (Kaaapama, 2007: 30). Wherever we drove, we saw SWAPO flags hanging on bushes, windows and yards. It was clear that people around there would have not reacted very kindly had they known the real purpose of our visit: making a documentary film that could have been perceived as an "anti-SWAPO film". Even though *From Namibia with Love* (FNWL) is not an "anti-SWAPO" film, it could have been viewed as such by the loyal SWAPO supporters since it raises the issue of the SWAPO dissidents. As the Ailongas are seen as so-called SWAPO dissidents, we decided to keep the real purpose of our visit there secret. According to Töttemeyer (2010) the SWAPO leadership are known to attack anyone who criticises SWAPO. Pastor Siegfried Groth's book *Namibia, the Wall of Silence* (1995) exposes the fate of the SWAPO dissidents. During the publication the author and the book were attacked and condemned by the SWAPO leadership. President Nujoma even accused Groth publicly of being an apartheid agent (Töttemeyer, 2010: 120). In light of this knowledge we knew that we had to be very careful and be discreet about our purpose while filming. The community around the Ailonga's knows the couple's history and had they known that we were shooting a documentary

film about their lives, they might have not been receptive to our presence. Outapi, which is the nearest town from the Ailonga's is the hub for regional government and everyday we would see government vehicles driving around. This made us extra vigilant. Outside of the Ailonga's home we acted as though we were tourists and always hid our equipment in the car. Some might say we were acting paranoid - but knowing the political situation in Namibia and particularly the sensitivity around the issue of the SWAPO dissidents - the precautions we took were necessary in my view.

Because of the sensitive nature of our shoot and the risk of being exposed, a decision was made to practice a particular method of shooting. We decided to shoot as much as possible on a "safe zone" and leave the risky locations, "danger zone" to the very last. The safest areas were the Ailongas' home, their yard and their field. At these locations practically no outsider could see what we were doing. Midway through the shoot we started shooting scenes around the Ailongas' neighbourhood. During the last couple of days, shooting moved to the heart of Outapi town: the busy markets, the post office and the camping site. Staying under cover and keeping a very low profile is very typical for guerrilla film making which usually includes the element of danger and the risk of being exposed. The worst-case scenario, had we been exposed, involved confiscation of the footage we had shot. The cinematographer Marius van Straaten copied the daily footage every night on to two different external hard drives. For safety reasons we hid the other hard drive to the Ailongas' home and kept the other one with us at the camping site where we lived.

3.2.2 Interviews

Interviews create the spine for a documentary film and hence should be carefully prepared. As Aufderheide (2007) explains "documentaries are a set of choices – about the subject matter, about the forms of expression, about the point of view, about the story line, about the target audience" (Aufderheide, 2007: 127) – so are interviews a set of choices: when to interview, who to interview and how. Aufderheide (2007) further notes that "the genre of documentary is defined by the tension between the claim to truthfulness and the need to select and represent the reality one wants to share. (Aufderheide, 2007: 127). Every documentary filmmaker should keep the "claim to truthfulness" in mind also when conducting interviews. The director should never put words into the interviewee's mouth and let the interviewee speak as freely as possible. When conducting interviews with Anita Ailonga, it would have been tempting to pose questions in a way that would have given me the desired answer. For example a question to Anita Ailonga could have been phrased as: "Do you feel you were treated unfairly by SWAPO and how?" A question like this is

biased and loaded. Instead questions should be kept very neutral. The same question was better phrased as: “How did SWAPO treat you?”

Four very long interviews were conducted with Anita Ailonga. In the editing phase it became clear that the interview topics were too broad. This could have been avoided by narrowing down the questions and topics. We started off the interview with Anita Ailonga with non-emotional topics as Rabiger (2009) recommends. “Facts are safe, while opinions or feelings take a more confident, relaxed state of mind. Highly sensitive issues can be difficult” (Rabiger, 2009: 473).

Salatiel requested that he speak in Swahili in the interview and therefore Anita acted as an interpreter. (Anita and Salatiel speak Swahili to each other since it was their first common language when they met in Tanzania). Because there was no direct communication between Salatiel and myself, I was not able to conduct an in-depth interview with him. Salatiel is a very traditional African man and cultural factors might have also affected the interviewing situation. In post-production the Swahili translator, Otu Amaumo noticed that Salatiel seemed to be uncomfortable opening up to a young (white) woman, particularly when he was supposed to be talking about his emotions and the painful memories of the liberation struggle. Amaumo, who is Kenyan, noted that Salatiel could have opened up to a fellow African man of his age. Amaumo suggested that we could have asked one of his age mates to do the interviews in an informal setting (e.g. around a fire). Amaumo proposed that the conversation then could have been steered to the right direction by the director. This way Salatiel could have answered the questions more in depth.

In addition to the Ailongas, two of their friends were interviewed. Sheeli Shangula (interview in Opuwo, Namibia 09/2010) and Tangeeni Nuukuawo (interview in Windhoek, Namibia 09/2010) both SWAPO dissidents and close friends of the Ailongas were interviewed because of their involvement in the Ailongas’ lives in Zambia in the mid-1970’s. An American researcher, Doctor Christian Williams (interview in Cape Town, South Africa 09/2010) who has written his doctoral thesis *Exile History: An Ethnography of the SWAPO camps and the Namibian nation* (2009) was also interviewed but his interview was later excluded from the documentary film because though informative, the interview did not suit the style of the film. The inclusion of the interview in the film would have necessitated an additional interview with a SWAPO representative (in the interest of preserving balance and objectivity) as it would have represented the only academic viewpoint on the Namibian liberation struggle. However, *From Namibia with Love* is not a political commentary but a very personal, “point of view” film based on the experiences of an old couple.

3.3 Post-production period

3.3.1 Creating structure

“In many ways a film is like a mosaic, made up of many little bits and pieces, which when put together properly let you see the big picture. Any documentary of a decent length will involve a lot of these little bits and pieces, for which you must find an organizing structure” (Hampe, 2007: 180). In the initial editing phase it is important to organize all the footage before thinking about creating structure. During the editing process I watched everything from fiction films to documentaries and TV shows to analyse how they had been edited and particularly how editing transitions between scenes had been executed. Before the actual editing can start, a filmmaker should always ask him or herself: what is the story that I want to tell? As film scholar Bill Nichols notes that “the logic of organizing a documentary film supports an underlying argument, assertion, or claim about the historical world” (Pramaggiore & Wallis, 2005: 250). I wanted the viewers to see the Ailongas as I saw them: a courageous and humble couple who had defended human rights even though they risked their own lives by doing so. The aim was that the viewers would feel empathy for the main characters but not to feel sorry for them. Even though the Ailongas have had a hard life and they have been treated very unfairly, they have still maintained joy and humour in their life. It was crucial that the joy would be reflected in the film as well. To portray the joy and humour in the film, scenes of the Ailongas taking care of their animals were created. The Ailongas never had children and their animals have become the centre of their world that gives them joy. The “animal scenes” also had a narrative purpose. The scenes with heavy political context needed to be balanced with something lighter. The “animal scenes” were perfect scenes to create balance as well as to show what the couple’s day to day life is like.

3.3.2 Three-act structure

According to Aufderheide (2007) “a shared convention of most documentaries is the narrative structure. They are stories, they have beginnings, middles, and ends; they invest viewers in their characters, they take viewers on emotional journeys. They often refer to classic story structure” (Aufderheide, 2007: 12). A more defined term “three-act structure” is often used to describe the

narrative structure in films. I found the three-act structure very helpful when I created the outline for the editing script.

In three-act structure “Act One introduces characters, goals and conflicts and ends with a first turning point, which causes a shift to Act Two. A turning point, which may be signalled through dialogue, setting, or other visual or sound techniques, represents a moment when an important change has occurred that affects a character or situation” (Pramaggiore & Wallis, 2005: 38). *From Namibia with Love* (FNWL) starts with an upbeat intro where Anita Ailonga drives home while a fast-tempo song plays in the background. This scene also includes the opening titles of the film. I got the idea for the intro from the drama TV-series *The Sopranos* (USA, 1997-2007). Every episode of *The Sopranos* starts the same way: the main character, mafia boss Tony Soprano drives in New Jersey and the visual images juxtapose close-ups of Soprano, his hands on the wheel and a cigar he is smoking. The images are cut to “drive-by” shots of different landmarks and city images of New Jersey while the song “Woke up this morning” by *Alabama 3* plays in the background. This is a very simple and effective way to introduce the main character and the environment where the story takes place. When I edited the scene I was pleased the idea, which I thought was my own at the time. Only later on did I realise that watching 86 of *The Sopranos* had unconsciously influenced me in making my choice.

The first actual scene in FNWL shows Anita in her kitchen preparing tea. Her voice-over explains how she ended up in Africa as a young woman. The viewer at this point has the basic information about the film’s main character. After she has poured the tea into a mug, the camera cuts to Salatiel Ailonga who is walking in the yard. The viewer has not yet seen the couple together. Salatiel Ailonga prepares a fire and his voice-over explains how he left Namibia as a young boy to get away from apartheid rule in the country. Then an element of surprise happens when Anita sits by the fire and hands the mug of tea to Salatiel. At this point the viewer realizes that they are a couple. In the three-act structure Act One also has to include a goal and a conflict, before shifting to Act Two (Pramaggiore & Wallis, 2005: 38). After the “fire scene” the viewer is taken back in time to Tanzania in the 1970’s when Anita and Salatiel got married and moved to Zambia to assist SWAPO, the leading Namibian liberation movement. Old photographs and video footage visualize the story. The main characters goal becomes known: the Ailongas wanted to support SWAPO and the Namibians in their goal of gaining independence. The conflict in this Act occurs when Anita and Salatiel become enemies of SWAPO. The turning point happens when SWAPO deports the couple from Zambia and they flee to Finland. At this part of the documentary an image of the mass grave of the Cassinga

Massacre in Angola fades to black and for few seconds the screen is completely dark. This marks the end of Act One.

In Act Two, the protagonist meets obstacles, possibly arising from the actions of another central figure who opposes him/her, called the antagonist (Pramaggiore & Wallis, 2005: 38). Act Two in the film concentrates on the obstacles the Ailongas have faced in Namibia where they currently live. The antagonist is the community around them that has not accepted them, and view the couple as traitors (because the Ailongas exposed SWAPO's human rights violations during the war for liberation). Snyman (2007) explains that if there is no action and tension developing over the course of the documentary, the film follows one straight, tedious line without any development. He further argues that "through the development phase the story should contain all the elements of conflict, battles to survive, striving to success, pain and suffering" (Snyman, 2007: 42). In FNWL the couple battle to survive, trying to fit in to a community that acts in a hostile manner towards them. I wanted to highlight the couple's suffering and emphasize it with wide shots of the landscapes that represent their isolation in the society. One such scene is the scene where Anita walks on the field and talks about how they never had children and their decision to not to adopt because of their difficult circumstances. The scene begins with a low-angle shot of Anita as she walks on the field. The camera slowly moves away from her (this was done by shooting the scene from a car that slowly drove away from Anita), exposing the wide and empty landscape around her. The purpose of this shot is to visually show the loneliness of the main character. The dry and empty landscape around her symbolizes the hardships she has had to bear. According to Rabiger (2009: 12) "[...] documentaries need to have characters striving to accomplish something and overcoming obstacles from their circumstances." How the characters do this and whether they succeed provides the dramatic tension that keeps us enthralled, argues Rabiger (2009).

At the end of Act Two hints of change in the character's life are shown. The Ailongas visit their neighbours and pick up fruits from a tree. Anita's voice-over explains that after twenty years living in Namibia, people are slowly starting to accept them as part of the community. Rabiger (2009) notes that a problem for many documentaries is that, unless the film is shot over months or years, development must be implied rather than shown because most human change is too slow to accommodate an affordable shooting schedule. Rabiger urges one to think how a film will imply that someone has grown or changed (Rabiger, 2009: 217). In the editing phase it was quite easy to identify the most crucial points of development and the growth of the characters as the film

basically details a major portion of main characters' lives (or at least the most important events of their lives).

Act Three entails closure and shows series of events that resolves the conflicts that have arisen – not always happily (Pramaggiore & Wallis, 2005: 38). The end of FNWL is “bitter sweet” as the film’s editing consultant Liani van Strateen aptly describes it. Not everything is resolved as the main characters’ reputation remains stained. Still they have accepted the past, found some kind of place in their community and find joy in their daily life. A very emotional scene at the end of the film is the return of the baby goat that had gone missing. The very last scene shows Anita and Salatiel walking in the field hand in hand talking about how they should let the farm rest. Anita’s last line in the film is: “...and we should rest too, it is our time to rest” (*From Namibia with Love*, 2011). The line binds everything together. It can be interpreted as closure relating to the ghosts of the past.

3.3.3 Use of archive footage

Archive film footage and old photographs were used to visualize the past in *From Namibia with Love* (FNWL). South African photographer John Liebenberg kindly gave me a permission to use photographs from his photography book titled *Bush of Ghost – Life and War in Namibia 1986-1990*. Pictures from the Ailongas’ photo album were used and Finnish missionary Raimo Holopainen’s old photographs. The most challenging task was to find film footage from the Old Farm SWAPO camp in Zambia where the Ailongas worked in the mid- 1970’s. I sent emails to nearly one hundred people around the world asking for any leads. I approached the following people and organizations: The Finnish Embassy in Namibia, the Namibian National Archives, Breaking the Wall of Silence NGO in Namibia, The Institute for Democracy in Namibia, The United Nations Information Centre (UNIC) in Zambia, The Finnish Missionary Association, The Finnish-Namibian friendship association, the Nordisk Africa Institute, several Finnish, Namibian, South African and German political researchers and many old Finnish missionaries and Namibia sympathizers. Finally a Namibian based, Swedish filmmaker Per Sanden contacted me. He had film footage from the Old Farm which he had shot in 1974, the same year the Ailongas worked at the camp. I also used clips from Sanden’s documentary film *Cassinga* (1978, Namibia) and *The Liberation Struggle in Namibia* (1974, Namibia). German news agency ARD kindly gave me film footage from the Namibian independence celebrations.

The archive footage was crucial as it gave the necessary historical depth for the film. The problem with the archive footage is that it does not always relate to the story perfectly. For example it was

very difficult to decide what footage to use to visualize the scene where Anita Ailonga narrates how SWAPO leaders came to their house in Zambia late one night in the 1970's. I could not show Anita Ailonga's "talking head" continuously as editing cuts had been made to the interview. The "jump cuts" had to be covered with some images. I ended up using footage of the SWAPO soldiers on a field to visualize the part. Van Straaten had suggested to me earlier that by creating re-enactments, the past could have been easily visualised. During the editing process I regretted that I did not follow his advice. Although by using re-enactments the documentary's style would have changed completely.

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4 The premiere and feedback

From Namibia with Love (FNWL) premiered in South Africa at the Labia Theatre in Cape Town in September 2011. Prior to the premiere I showed the film at the editing consultant Liani van Straaten's film club which consisted of various European and African filmmakers. There was a fascinating dichotomy in the interpretation of the film between the European and African filmmakers. The Europeans criticized the film, saying that the film does not make the following points clear.

- 1) Why the Ailongas were deported from Zambia,
- 2) Why Salatiel Ailonga was suspended from his congregation in Namibia,
- 3) Why the Ailongas had been excluded for so long in Namibia.

The African filmmakers on the other hand thought that these points were quite clear in the film. I started to suspect that perhaps the Africans had a fundamentally deeper understanding of the different aspects of the liberation struggles and the underlying post-liberation mentality and could therefore make better sense of the film.

At the premiere at the Labia theatre the audience was requested to fill in questionnaire forms (see appendix I) after the screening. The audience of about one hundred people was a mixture of students, film professionals, academics and others, both Africans and Westerners. Reviewing the feedback forms, two themes are repeated: 1) Praise of the main characters and the love story as told in the film. 2) Criticism on how the historical-political aspect of the story was told. People often wrote that they felt that they should have known more about the history of Namibia to understand the film's political references. Since this has been a recurring feedback, I am considering adding a "pre-text" to the beginning of the film summarizing Namibia's historical-political situation. This could be particularly useful if the film will be shown at European film festivals to audiences who do not know anything about Namibia.

Few people criticized the film being biased as it does not cover SWAPO's side of the story. Hampe (2007) notes that "when so many documentaries appear on TV; it's easy to connect documentaries with TV news" (Hampe, 2007: 25). The critics might have been expecting "news like-objectivity" from the film. FNWL is however a point-of-view film and its purpose is simply to tell the Ailonga's personal experiences around the Namibian liberation struggle. Also SWAPO's side of the story of the

liberation struggle is well documented but individual stories of those who were victimized during the struggle have not been told. Furthermore it is important that individual, grass-root level stories are told as Namibian authorities have made it very difficult for research scholars to access information that could help them make objective research on the struggle (Saunders, 2007). Saunders (2007) notes that "SWAPO's own archive, housed in Windhoek [Namibia], remains firmly closed to scholars, and there has been no hint of whether it will be opened" (Saunders, 2007: 21).

The Namibian premiere was held at the Outapi War Museum in Outapi in December 2011. The intimate screening was open to public but the audience mostly consisted of the people who appeared in the film and their friends and relatives. Anita and Salatiel Ailonga loved the film. Particularly Salatiel who had been a bit suspicious of the film's outcome was humbled and touched. The couple urged me to show the film all over Namibia. This to me was the most rewarding moment of the whole film process that had started 18 months earlier. On the 8th of December 2011 the film screened at Goethe Centre in Windhoek, Namibia. The feedback of the Namibian screenings understandably differed from the South African screenings as everyone understood the historical-political aspect of the film. It was very touching how positively the Namibian audience reacted to the film. Many Namibians thanked me for telling the story of the Ailongas and raising the issue of the SWAPO dissidents. Many people commented that it was important for the nation's healing process to address the human rights violations of the struggle and the issue of how the SWAPO dissidents have been sidelined after independence.

I was rather anxious concerning the screenings in Namibia. Interestingly I was not criticized by the Namibian authorities or SWAPO sympathizers but by the Finnish Embassy in Namibia. Due to some misunderstandings the Finnish Embassy thought that I had linked the Embassy with my film. On the day of the Windhoek screening I received a rather harsh email from the Embassy stating that they (the Embassy) had received many concerned emails asking about the "Finnish produced anti-SWAPO film". The Finnish Embassy urged me not to make any links between the film and Finland's official view on the Namibian politics. This hurt me as I had never made any such connections. Nevertheless, I understood that this was part of the process of making a politically sensitive film. Hampe (2007) quite accurately points out that if the topic of a documentary film is controversial; someone is bound to attack the filmmaker and his/her credibility (Hampe, 2007: 142).

Further screenings will take place in Namibia and South Africa in 2012. The Finnish-Namibia friendship association in Finland and the Swedish-Namibia friendship association in Sweden will also screen the film soon. The overarching goal is to screen the film at film festivals globally. My intention

is also to approach the Finnish Broadcasting Company (YLE) concerning the possibility of screening the film on Finnish TV. As part of the media strategy, a Facebook page has been created for the film and a website (www.fromnamibiawithlove.com) to create awareness around the film.

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5 Reconstructing reality

The term “documentary film” was first used by John Grierson in 1926 when he wrote a review on Robert Flaherty’s documentary film *Moana*. The term derived from *documentaire*, a term applied by the French to describe their travel films. Later Grierson defined it as “the creative treatment of actuality” (Hardy, 1946: 11). One of the challenges a documentary film director faces is how to create something authentic from the reality he/she observes. There has been a lot of debate in the field of documentary filmmaking concerning the representation of reality and “truth” in documentary film. According to Sherman (1998) a documentary film is never objective as the camera reflects the filmmaker’s view. Sherman further argues that most filmmakers however, believe that their manipulation creates a “greater truth” (Sherman, 1998: 207). Even a decision to switch the camera on and off is a subjective choice and affects the end result. Aufderheide (2007) also argues that “documentaries are *about* real life; they are not real life. They are not even windows onto real life. They are portraits of real life, using real life as their raw material, constructed by artists and technicians who make myriad decisions about what story to tell to whom and for what purpose” (Aufderheide, 2007: 2).

I often thought about these questions concerning the representation of reality during the production process. Aufderheide’s statement “Documentaries are not real life, they are *about* real life” reflects many stages of the production of FNWL. For example: we shot a scene where Anita and Salatiel raise a Namibian flag on a flag pole. Initially the scene was supposed to be the end scene of the film and it was very important that it was shot well. Van Straaten shot the couple preparing the flag and pulling it up. As van Straaten zoomed to the flag, Anita and Salatiel greeted the flag and Anita placed her hand on her heart. Since it was not caught on camera, I requested the Ailongas to repeat the beautiful and emotional gesture while van Straaten filmed it. It did not feel unethical to ask them to repeat the gesture as I was just asking them to repeat their actions. But does the scene now represent reality? Or does it represent reality that I, a documentary film director have created?

These are questions filmmakers constantly battle with. Filmmakers throughout history have claimed to represent reality when in fact, those realities have been constructed. A good example is Dziga Vertov’s documentary film *A Man with a Movie Camera* (1929, Soviet Union). Analyses of Vertov’s films refer to a “life caught unawares” method of filming. Vertov’s great achievement is said to be that he “solved the problem of performance in documentary film, something not achieved by anyone before or since” (Hicks, 2007: 23). Vertov’s hidden camera does not intervene in the actions

filmed and therefore does not change them. (Hicks, 2007: 22). But when one watches *A Man with a Movie Camera* it is obvious that some scenes have been directed and constructed. Yet, one can argue that the film does represent reality of a particular time in the world, Vertov's view of the reality.

I found it helpful to watch and analyse all kinds of documentary films to get ideas on how to reconstruct the reality of the past. Although based on my own experiences I would suggest that sometimes it is better not to watch films that are *too* similar to your own film project. Before making *From Namibia with Love*, I had not seen many documentary films that could be classified as political love stories. It might have been wise because after watching few of them, the aforementioned: *White girl in search of a party*, *A South African Love Story: Walter and Albertina Sisulu* as well as *A Love Divided: Johannesburg* I realised how easy it would have been to mimic them in terms of how they approach visualisation of the past and how they intertwine the political and love stories. These documentaries share the same dilemma: how to visualize the past and how to balance between the politics and the love story. In many of these films the filmmakers had solved the problem of visualizing the past by sitting their main characters on a couch and asking them to look through their old photo albums and explain the past events and cutting the camera on close-ups of the pictures. I opted for a slightly different style. I did use old photographs but narrated them with a typewriter effect, not with the main character's voice-over. Anita Ailonga is in the process of writing her husband's memoirs and that gave me an idea of using the typewriter effect where text appears on the screen letter by letter. As the old photographs appear on the screen, text appears overlaying the images accompanied by the sound of typewriter keys being struck. The "type writer narration" reflects Anita Ailonga's point of view. For example the first "type writer narration" begins by typing that says: "Salatiel and I got married in 1973 in Tanzania. At the same time life in Namibia had become unbearable..." (*From Namibia with Love*, 2011). The "type writer effect" was an effective way of binding together the Ailonga's personal experiences and the historical-political context. It also supports the notion of reality in the film as Anita Ailonga was indeed in the middle of writing a book about her husband.

Constructing truthful political context and historical reality in FNWL was particularly hard. It was a long process to decide how much history and politics needed to be explained to the viewers in order to create a coherent and realistic ensemble. After all, the main focus needed to be on the personal story of the Ailongas. The two SWAPO dissidents, Tangeni Nuukuawo and Sheeli Shangula who are the only two characters interviewed in the film besides the Ailongas played an important role in

terms of creating reality in the film. Since FNWL taps on sensitive political issues it was important to me to show the two young men who the Ailongas assisted during the independence struggle. Some people have criticized me by including Nuukuawo's and Shangula's interviews in the film, saying that the "style" and the "reality" of the documentary is interrupted because of these interviews. I disagree with these critics as they bolster the Ailongas' credibility concerning their efforts in assisting SWAPO dissidents. Having these witnesses speak on the film supports the reality as the film is without doubt politically sensitive.

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6 Ethical considerations

A documentary filmmaker is bound to face ethical problems and limitations throughout the film production. When making *From Namibia with Love* (FNWL) ethical issues were considered in both the production and post-production phases.

“The purpose of documentary film is to engage viewers by showing them some aspects of the real world. A documentary filmmaker captures and organizes visual images and sound to convey some truth of that real world situation” (Pramaggiore & Wallis, 2005: 249). When making a documentary film that is politically sensitive, a question arises: which aspects of the *real world* can a filmmaker reveal without jeopardizing the main characters’ lives? The Ailongas’ lives were in danger during the spring of 1976 in Zambia and also later in the 1990’s in Namibia. Their relationship with the SWAPO leaders had turned sour in the 1970’s and since then they were considered as enemies. Anita Ailonga says in the film: “They tried to take his (Salatiel’s) life at least twice that we know about” (*From Namibia with Love*, 2011). In confidence Anita Ailonga has shared the details of the murder attempts with me, but understandably neither she nor Salatiel wished to talk about such sensitive matters on camera –as well as point fingers at any particular individuals. I did not want to jeopardize their safety by exposing the details of these events - even if it would have created more drama in the film. Some other details of their lives have been left out as well in order to protect their safety. According to Rabiger (2009) “it is the responsibility of the filmmaker to guard those who trust you from consequences that you, not they, can see possible. These may include physical or legal danger or damage to a person’s reputation” (Rabiger, 2009: 354). In the case of the Ailongas they probably were more aware than me what the consequences could have been if they had talked about certain issues too openly.

Barry Hampe (2007) raises another ethical dilemma that filmmaker face: the question of truth. Hampe asks what the documentarian’s ethical responsibility is when he or she knows or suspects that an interviewee is not telling the truth or is not telling the whole truth. Hampe notes that “a filmmaker cannot ethically include statements that he or she actually knows to be untrue” (Hampe, 2007: 156). In an interview with Sheeli Shangula he argues that Namibia’s first president, father of the nation Sam Nujoma never took part in any battle during the Namibian liberation struggle. This is a very strong statement (even if it was true or not) and could have caused problems if it had been included in the film. Not being sure whether this statement was true, I decided to edit this comment

out. Of course I could have done research to check the facts, but since the comment did not contribute much for the overall story, it was easy to cut out.

Another ethical limitation faced was the question of using Namibian music in the film. Since the film can be seen as critical towards SWAPO, I was concerned whether Namibian artists would want to donate their music to the film and even if they did, whether it could hamper their careers in some unforeseeable manner. The Namibian singer *Tunakie's* music appealed to me and luckily after viewing the film she gave me a written permission to use her music in the film. This was unexpected as *Tunakie* is known to be a SWAPO supporter but she and her producer-husband Trace Garren nevertheless regarded the film's topic as important and kindly let me use her music in the film. Yet the ethical question remains: is it the filmmaker's responsibility if the film at some point harms the singer's reputation and career? For how long is the filmmaker responsible for the well being of the people who contributed for the film? These questions are difficult and have no clear answer. Fundamentally the filmmaker should make his or her intentions clear to the people involved in the film and treat everyone involved in a fair manner. It is important to act ethically since as Chapman (2007) notes; a documentary filmmaker is responsible for the reputation of the entire documentary film field (Chapman, 2007: 67-68).

7 Conclusion

Film is an incredible medium as it appeals to our logic and emotions. A documentary film can – at best of times – change the way we see the world and show us aspects of the world that we never new anything about. The world is full of untold stories, stories about normal people whose lives are connected to important historical and political events, human stories that deepen our understanding of the world. Certain stories also have a particular strong purpose: they need to be told so that human beings can better understand the past and move on. *From Namibia with Love* (FNWL) is one such story. As portrayed in the dissertation, a documentary filmmaker is the tool between these stories and the world. The filmmaker's task is not only to tell a story. A filmmaker has a huge responsibility to reconstruct reality in the film as truthfully as possible. A filmmaker needs to also take all the ethical problems and limitation into consideration and should always take care of the safety of the main characters in all possible ways.

Namibia is still a young nation and the wounds of the war are still fresh in many Namibian's minds. SWAPO's human rights violations and the maltreatment of the SWAPO dissidents are issues that are extremely sensitive in Namibia. In a country where the voices of the so-called dissidents have been silenced, documentary films such as FNWL might be able to help in building a more open society. In FNWL Anita and Salatiel Ailonga's story shows us the life and love of an elderly couple who are one of the many maltreated dissidents. The film introduces us to a world that is unfamiliar to most of us. Yet, from the unfamiliar world we can find familiar elements and emotions: desperation, the need to defend the weak, joy, hope and the need to belong to a community. The film is socially relevant, not only in Namibia but all over the world. The fundamental story is universal and appeals to our sense of justice.

Bluem (1976) notes that a documentary seeks to inform but, above all, it seeks to influence (1976: 77). Even though FNWL makes a strong statement and appeals to the audiences emotions and sense of justice, its purpose is not to be a propaganda film or an "anti-SWAPO film". In fact, I hope that the film awakens people's curiosity to examine the circumstances around the topic more closely. After all, a good documentary does not only speak to us on emotional and logical level; it pushes us to find out more, more about the world and ourselves.

Appendix I: Feedback form

FEEDBACK FORM

From Namibia with Love
an independent student film production
University of Cape Town
www.fromnamibiawithlove.com

Dear Viewer, any feedback on the film would be greatly appreciated. Please fill in this form or send email to the director, Laura Meriläinen-Amaumo (laulau811@gmail.com)

1. Did you enjoy the documentary?

2. What did you like most about the documentary (visuals, directing, sound etc.)?

3. What did you like least about the documentary?

4. Do you have recommendations on how we can improve the quality of the film (such as audio or narrative)?

5. Did you find the story easy to understand? Could we change something to improve the delivery of the narrative?

6. Any other comments

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