

GANDANGA MEDIA LLC presents

SHUNGU : The Resilience of A People

A film by Saki Mafundikwa
Produced by Karen Mafundikwa
2009 | 54 min



Synopsis

Shungu is a compelling narrative of the strategies ordinary people use to survive in Zimbabwe today. The filmmaker takes us on a personal journey offering a rare, intimate insight as the country experiences political turmoil, economic meltdown and health care collapse.

We are drawn into the lives of a 30-something metalsmith and opposition supporter, a staunch government supporter trying to run a farm she took over from a white farmer and a doctor working amid health care collapse. Interwoven throughout is the tumultuous political power struggle and eventual reconciliation between President Robert Mugabe, and opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai.

The film gives voice to the hopes and challenges of ordinary people.

Director's statement

Shungu, my first feature documentary is pure emotion, it is my response to the situation in my country. It is also fraught with frustration at a situation that most people feel did not have to go the way it has. Zimbabwe is a young country which attained its independence 30 years ago offering a lot of promise for economic growth and stability.

It is a favourite pastime of most Zimbabweans to engage in heated arguments over where we went wrong and how best we can rise out of the misery that is most people's lives today. As a result of this, I decided to pick up my camera two years ago and drove around the country to find out from ordinary Zimbabweans how they were coping.

I found a once proud people wallowing in misery brought about by hunger, frustration and abject poverty. Over the last decade, it seems we have reversed all the gains attained at independence to become one of the world's poorest countries. Afrika's bread basket has become a basket case with millions now living abroad – most illegally. I did, however, find that, despite the misery, most people live with the hope that things will change and that we shall regain our former glory as one of Afrika's brightest hopes.

It is a hope and dream that I share.

About the Director

Shungu: The Resilience of a People is the first feature-length documentary film from Zimbabwean filmmaker, Saki Mafundikwa. He is also a graphic designer, design consultant and design educator of international renown. He worked for a dozen years in New York City as a graphic designer and art director at publishing giant Random House and an Adjunct Professor at Cooper Union, before returning home to Zimbabwe to found Zimbabwe Institute of Visual Arts (ZIVA) a design and new media training college in Zimbabwe where he is the Director. Educated in the USA, he has an MFA in Graphic Design from Yale University. He is the author of the book, "Afrikan Alphabets: the Story of Writing in Afrika." Saki has lectured widely on design issues and African media in Africa, Europe, Middle East, North and South America and has been published widely in international design journals and magazines.

FILMOGRAPHY

Shungu: The Resilience of a People, 54 minutes, 2009

World Premiere: IDFA (Amsterdam), 2009

Official Selection: Thessaloniki Documentary Film Festival (Greece), 2010.

Translated into French, will be touring African film festivals in 2010.

Won the Ousmane Sembene Award at the Zanzibar International Film Festival, 2010

Basilwizi: People of the Great River, in progress, 2010.

Jerusarema Dance, 30 minutes, 2007

A profile of the traditional dance, Jerusarema, as performed in Murehwa, Zimbabwe, created on the occasion of its recognition as a "masterpiece of humanity" by UNESCO

Mhuri Yekwa Simbanegavi, 15 minutes, 2007

A short documentary about a rural family of musicians who make and play the traditional instrument, mbira.

Luciano in Zimbabwe, 13 minutes, 2007

A profile of the visit and performance of reggae artist, Luciano in Zimbabwe in 2007.

Reviews

'Shungu' puts human face on ballot box

Helmer's docu on Zimbabwe election put camera on the voters

When Saki Mafundikwa began traveling around Zimbabwe in 2008, documenting the buildup to his country's presidential election, he had no idea what he was getting into. But the first-time helmer felt compelled to capture the campaign season on film, focusing on President Robert Mugabe and opposition candidate Morgan Tsvangirai. As the camera rolled, Mafundikwa was gripped by the human stories he encountered: a poverty-stricken opposition supporter trying to survive in the face of political violence; a doctor struggling to cope with the country's collapsing healthcare system; a middle-aged widow who was given a farm by the government during its controversial land seizures from white farmers.

Those ordinary people became the focus of **"Shungu"** (from Gandanga Media), which puts a human face to the headline news of Zimbabwe's descent into chaos. Since its preem at Amsterdam's Intl. Documentary Film Festival last year, "Shungu" – the Shona word for "resilience" – has been a hit on the festival circuit, as well as winning the top documentary prize at the Kenya Intl. Film Festival last month.

Success has come as something of a surprise to Mafundikwa, an accomplished graphic designer, who didn't expect to become a filmmaker when he returned to Zimbabwe in 1998, after two decades living in the U.S.

A year after returning to Harare, he founded the Zimbabwe Institute for Vigital Arts (ZIVA), a media arts school with the goal, he says, of "training students in the visual arts using digital tools." (The word "ziva" also means "knowledge" in his native Shona.) Buoyed by the academy's success, as well as his own laurels as a first-time filmmaker, Mafundikwa is now planning to offer a degree in documentary filmmaking at ZIVA.

Filmmaking, he says, has also proved therapeutic. "At that time, if I hadn't made 'Shungu,' I would've gone crazy," says Mafundikwa, recalling the turmoil of the 2008 elections. "By my silence, it would've looked like I supported what was going on."

He lensed the doc with support from IDFA's Jan Vrijman Fund and Trust Africa, although much of the coin came from his own pocket. Though he's working on his second doc, "Basilwizi," a story about the indigenous Tonga people of northern Zimbabwe, the emotive power of "Shungu" stays with him.

Mafundikwa recalls the story of Pamela, a young woman whose death from AIDS-related illnesses is the emotional climax of the film. When doctors told her family that they should have brought Pamela to the clinic sooner, they said they were too poor to pay for the treatments that could have saved her life.

The cost, says Mafundikwa, was just \$50.

"This country is depressing," he says. "But the reason I still live here is to share these stories."

Christopher Vourlias, *Variety*, December 7 – 8, 2010

“Those eager for the news from catastrophe-ridden Zimbabwe frustrated by being limited to journalists reports from the South African border or the odd undercover radio report will welcome Mafundikwa’s saddening documentary. The titular word has a range of meanings – from innovation and determination to frustration and longing – all expressed in the testimonies and faces of the half dozen main interviewees in Mafundikwa’s non-strident report, filmed from February 2008 to June 2009, just after MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai accepted his coalition role alongside Robert Mugabe. Mafundikwa’s analysis is a little cursory – and, understandably, reasonably diplomatic – but the images and stories are telling.”

Wally Hammond, *Time Out London*, October 18, 2010

A tribute to Zimbabwean resilience

Shungu is what Zimbabweans have in plenty, and Shungu is what has helped most of them survive the later years of Robert Mugabe’s rule. It means “resilience”, and graphic designer Saki Mafundikwa’s documentary, **Shungu: The Resilience of a People**, is his sad account of a few of those survivors – and in one case, fatal victim.

“In order to survive one must have shungu and that enables you to survive against unbearable odds,” he says in his quiet commentary. He acknowledges the successes of the first decade of independence, once Mugabe and his fellow-fighters had overthrown Ian Smith’s white supremacist rule. In that first decade “great progress” was made – but not on the issue of land, a key issue, just as it was when it was grabbed and used to underpin the colonial enterprise in what used to be called Southern Rhodesia.

Then things started to go wrong.

Mafundikwa – founder of the country’s first design and new media college, focuses on a metalworker, a female farmer, an anaesthetist, a widow and a young woman suffering from AIDS complications. He watches these stories unfold “with a heavy heart” and finds “people living in unimaginable misery.” He also gives us a potted history of post-majority rule Zimbabwe.

... As a view of Zimbabwe, it shows us lives we would not ordinarily see, and, along the way, some telling details – such as the doctor unable to wash his hands after examining a hideous case of Kaposi’s sarcoma, because nothing comes out of the tap in his surgery. In the end, the very unflashy quietness of tone adds to the starkness of its message.

This is a sincere chronicle of a country undergoing profound change, in the wrong direction.

Daniel Nelson, *OneWorld UK*, October 2010

Film Credits

director: Saki Mafundikwa

producers: Karen Mafundikwa
Saki Mafundikwa

writers: Karen Mafundikwa
Saki Mafundikwa

editor: Tichafa Tongogara

executive producer: Bob Coen

camera: Saki Mafundikwa

sound: Saki Mafundikwa

music: Thomas Mapfumo, Netsayi, Maungira eNharira,
Madlodlo Mambazo Choir, Mako Sithole,
Sounds of Africa & Project Rythm