

Palesa Mopeli

JMS 4 – Television

10 minute Documentary - DYING TO LIVE

Critical Analyses:

From the onset of the production, the RagingFerrets decided that we did not want to portray this story as “another HIV/AIDS” story, in other words we wanted to eliminate the idea of covering one person’s story; instead we decided to let different people tell us their stories in their own way, which we tried to incorporate in the final product.

Initially it was a very difficult task to find people willing to admit that they are or were once antiretroviral (ARV) defaulters. We later discovered that with the camera present, people would only open up if they were in their own environment. Therefore, we filmed our subjects at their homes or places of comfort, so that it would be easier for them to talk about their situation and the problems that they were experiencing.

Our final product developed extensively from the initial idea that we had primarily conceived about the story. This idea was that people were mainly defaulting on ARVs because they did not want to lose the government grant which they receive if their CD4 count is low. During filming we discovered that we had new angles, besides our initial angle, that were emerging; therefore the story became more interesting in terms of the new factors that we had never thought about; or, I think, that we were just too conclusive on our main idea.

The final product thus ended up having a new angle to it. We tried our best to develop the story, the AIDS issue from a new and fresh perspective. Even though we eventually knew what kind of story we wanted to produce, the issue at hand was the investigative element of it. Therefore, we decided on that the story’s investigative edge would be that people were denying or were not willing to speak out about defaulting because of the stigma attached to it. This idea worked very well because within it we managed to include and answer the questions of why people were referred to as defaulters and how they were willing to overcome this.

To drive the piece further, we decided to use Sandile as our guide towards our answers. As the story had become a journey for us, using Sandile as the “driver” of our

journey encompassed the essence of our story in the sense that it showed how involved we were and that we did not distance ourselves from the people affected by the disease. In other words it was as if we were the tools they could utilise to come forth or to deny our new hypothesis; yet those that denied having ever come into contact or themselves having defaulted were counterbalanced by the more authoritative voices of Sandile and Jabu van Niekerk. The small inclusion of us in the piece (Richard driving the car, me singing with the people of the Jabez centre and Bryce's voice asking questions) removes the distancing and also adds to the investigative edge of the piece. This is also affirmed by the shaky camera shots of the first interview used in the piece of the woman sitting in the chair. This was a spontaneous effort as it was not a planned interview; it happened by chance, and it worked for our piece because of its authenticity and relayed the effects of our process.

The main issue that surfaced during our investigations was that most people become defaulters because they do not have enough money to buy the healthy food that they are required to eat. Thus, we discovered that poverty plays a great role in the essence of their defaulting. In order to represent this poverty, we used shots of the landscape (at the beginning of our piece) and desolate donkey shots to with the rainbow behind them. The juxtaposition in this shot (the donkeys vs. the rainbow) depicts a signal of hope as this piece, we anticipate, will instil awareness in society and thus hope will be infused within the communities affected by HIV/AIDS.

In post-production, we used an effect to correct the colour of our shots. This effect was used throughout the entire piece in order to bring out the colours more because we realised that the colours that we initially had were dull and mundane. Although the subject of the piece is usually made to be very sombre, we wanted to stray away from such a depiction. Our piece is one of hope and optimism, because the people we came into contact with had a platform to voice their grievances and to give their side of the story.

We decided to use symbolic cutaways that were not too literal and obvious. We used the shot of the woman who appears with the title of the piece as a symbolic reference to reaching a full circle; which is why she also appears at the end of the piece and also on the cover of our DVD. The entire role of symbolism is also created with the shot of the

child holding a beanie towards the end of the piece; this shot creates a feeling of the impacts of this disease and that if the situation is not attended to in the proper manner, the future of our country could be dying out before even reaching a significant age. But this shot also symbolises hope, especially when accompanied by the song at the end; this hope is that maybe one day society will overcome this problem and innocent children will also be given the chance to live.

The difficulties that we encountered during our investigations were many, but the main problem was the ethics of filming people affected by HIV/AIDS. This was in terms of how do we go about talking to people who do not wish to talk to us freely. Subjects such as Notutu, who has a speech impediment and has difficulty trying to clearly express herself; her sentences are disjointed and someone (Sandile in our case) has to finish them off for her. We agreed to carry on with our interview because she was well aware of what the filming entailed after Sandile and her niece explained thoroughly what we were doing. We felt very strongly about using her because her story was very sensitive and we wanted to show the impacts of how some people felt that they were being mistreated by the system.

There were a number of various aspects we failed to relay in the piece. The fact that we failed to get a voice of authority, such as a social worker or a government official to, results in our piece not really reaching a full circle because we seem to have only gotten the one side of the matter. I feel that such an individual would have made the piece more wholesome and relevant in terms of providing a more solid argument. We could have also tried, as it was suggested to us, to obtain shots of subjects in hospital corridors or more conducive cutaways. We failed at this because we were so caught up in actually finding defaulters, who we reckoned constituted the essence of our story. This was also affected by the way our team chose/chooses to work; which is covering the story as a team and not separating to cover the various aspects of our production. Although we all want to take part and experience the whole process together, I think that we need to re-evaluate this system for our next project, maybe then we will not have to suffer as much when it comes to the post-production phase. I feel that there is still some sort of mistrust in our team as to how certain individuals work.

The other problem is the language barrier which we chose to ignore. It would have been easier for us to find defaulters earlier in our task if we had let the people interviewed speak in the language that they are comfortable with. As we later discovered that a lady we had initially interviewed (together with the "tree folk") is actually a defaulter, but she did not admit to this because she could not express herself fully in English.

Another fault which we can avoid in the future is that of planning our arranged interviews thoroughly to the point of where we will not need to re-shoot them. Such as the interview of Jabu van Niekerk. The visuals of the first interview were appalling in terms of the colour saturation. This interview was done in studio and we realised that it was out of place as it was the only one conducted in studio. This compelled us to re-shoot the interview, this time around, in her office. We then synced up the voice of the old interview with the new one by putting cutaways of a lady "taking" her ARVs over the old interview.

There are a number of things I would have changed in our final product. For example, I feel that the part where Sandile introduces his ex-girlfriend (Zukiswa) was not really necessary to have been included in the piece. Another introduction could have been more useful because Sandile mentions her son, but in her interview she does not even mention anything about him. Therefore the information that Sandile gives us about Zukiswa is not elaborated upon by her; thus it just seems to be hanging solitarily without further explanation.

Although the end product of our investigate piece was somewhat successful in terms of our story's coherence, I still feel that with more preparation and vigour, the piece could have been a masterpiece as there is still a lot of room for improvement.