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2019

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Civic Intervention Documentary: A Socio-culturally Attuned Rhetorical Address to the Neglect of South African Adolescent Orphans

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A thesis submitted to the Wits School of Arts, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Johannesburg

29 August 2019

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CHAPTER 1

Documentary and Civic Commitment, through an Interdisciplinary Lens

Introduction

Over three decades ago, Allan Rosenthal (1986) agreed to the then, and still currently, unchallenged view that the documentary could best be used to ameliorate society and bring about social change, but he deplored the fact that many studies had, until then, failed to determine *how* the documentary could achieve that civic duty. He therefore advocated the need for studies to clarify various issues of the documentary medium, suggesting that when pertinent issues of the medium were clarified, it would then become evident *how* the documentary could function as a conduit for the amelioration of society and social change. Now, studies of the documentary have brought to our knowledge its complex history and various theoretical perspectives, covering a plethora of issues pertinent to the documentary film: some have dealt with epistemic concerns of defining the documentary (Carroll 1997; Curie 2006; Plantinga 2011) while others have interrogated the rhetorical and representational modalities in the documentary film, encompassing debates on truth, authenticity and/or objectivity in documentary film making (Arthur 1993; Renov 2004; Bruzzi 2006). There also exists an abundance of works that have explored ethical issues for documentarists (Nichols 1983; Pryluck 1988; Ruby 1988), as well as the implications of images of violence in documentary films (Brink & Oppenheimer 2012).

Within this diversity of perspectives and accounts, there prevail claims of the documentary's commitment (and ability) to addressing social issues. This is evident in Barnouw's (1993) classification of documentarists as explorer, reporter, painter, advocate, observer, promoter and catalyst. For Barnouw, these roles are closely linked to different historic moments which bring different *functions* to the fore. Like Barnouw, Renov (1993) thinks of documentary as a tool to raise awareness of unperceived worlds. And Winston (1988; p. 270) proposes that documentary films should constructively discuss the persistence of a social problem which they are, "at a fundamental level," supposed to ameliorate.

Despite the abundance of studies propounding the view that the documentary can be used to ameliorate social problems, evidence as to *how* the documentary can do that remains, to this day,

sparse, abstract and generally speculative. This is besides the fact that these studies are predominantly atemporal and acontextual. In this respect, one cannot ignore John Grierson's seminal account of the documentary's power. For Grierson (1932), the documentary film should serve the task of ordering social chaos and fulfilling the best end of citizenship; it should be socially conscious; it should illustrate social problems in the present and anticipate solutions for the future. Grierson's commitment to the documentary's civic function was so strong that he went on to propose the same approach for a number of countries, including South Africa, Canada, and Australia (Tomaselli 2014; Williams 2014; Druick 2014). But in his far-reaching influential theory, Grierson's reasoning is predominantly abstract and speculative: it does not rest on any verifiable empirical evidence of *how* the documentary performs such a function. The proposition that the documentary can order social chaos and fulfil the best end of citizenship can thus be seen as a matter of personal conviction eloquently justified.

For my purposes, this is a very telling anomaly: it reveals a-historical propensities supported by the fact that there is no record of Grierson's study where he undertook any in-depth examination of the temporal and/or socio-cultural conditions that framed the social problems which informed his theoretical position. Nor is there any record of him investigating the *implication*s of such conditions on the documentary's effectiveness in resolving particular social problems, in particular socio-cultural contexts, at a particular time in history. This anomaly also permeates recent studies that associate the 'activist' documentary subgenre with the amelioration of social problems (Marfo 2007; Aufderheide 2007; Verellen 2010; Waddell 2010; Faulcon 2012). These studies confer to the documentary the ability to engage the process of social change outside of the documentary screening, but it is in Grierson's case, there is *no comprehensive examination* of social processes that must be altered in order to bring about social change. Nor is there any meaningful attempt to refute the necessity or utility of such an examination.

Notable, in this respect, are studies that demonstrate how some documentary films have effectively activated an alteration in thinking, leading not only to changes in public policy but also to the formation of social change infrastructures. A case in point would be *An Inconvenient Truth* (Davis Guggenheim 2005).

Documenting former US Vice President Al Gore's campaign to educate American citizens about global warming via a series of slide shows, *An Inconvenient Truth* is credited for further raising awareness of global warming internationally (Aguayo 2005; Nielsen 2007). It is also said to have informed the launch of "Inconvenient Youth" – an initiative launched in 2010 and built on the belief that the youth can contribute to solving the global warming crisis (Payne 2010). Also noteworthy is *Who Is Dayani Christal* (Marc Silver 2013), a film that traces the journey of an unidentified Honduran immigrant found dead on the Mexico-US border. This film is credited with having led to the creation of a non-profit organization, "Bodies on the Border", whose mission is to identify and repatriate missing Mexican migrants (Bacha 2015). Similarly, *Black Gold* (Nick & Marc Francis 2006), which tells of a man's quest to save struggling Ethiopian coffee farmers from bankruptcy, is said to have helped generate donations to the coffee farming community and the rebuilding of the dilapidated school featured in the film (Francis & Francis 2006).

Even though some of these claims emanate from textual analyses of documentary films about social change, there is a pervasive lack of substantive analysis of the films' affective address *in relation to* the socio-cultural conditions that frame social issues to which these films are said to have brought some resolution. Nor is there any consideration of how such a relation plays out on the affective address of the documentary's rhetorical strategies in the context of specific socio-cultural conditions that frame social issues.

The same approach extends across impact studies that assess the extent to which social-issue films have led to social change (see, for examples, Hendrie *et al* 2014 and De Rosa & Burgess 2014). Karlin & Johnson (2011) and Diesner *et al* (2014) stand out in this category: while the former argued for a social science approach to discuss the context of the documentary film and its impact, the latter developed a theoretically grounded, empirical and computational solution for assessing the impact of social justice documentaries. Their methodology entailed analysing, in the former, the social network of stakeholders (audiences, governmental and non-governmental agencies) involved with the main topic of a documentary film and, in the latter, the content of the information produced and shared by these stakeholders.

Nonetheless, they too remain omissive of the interaffectivity between the documentary's rhetorical address and the socio-cultural processes that frame social issues. My study problematizes these omissions. If we consider that ***socio-cultural structures*** are contextual factors that encompass processes and thought patterns that can open up or close down possibilities for social action (Johnson *et al* 2004), these omissions present blind spots that need addressing. Riddled with such blind spots, previous scholarship prove a-historical. Apart from the fact that such scholarship consists mainly of analysis of film texts using pre-existing theoretical templates, they are a-historical for (1) being entirely removed from their socio-cultural, historical contexts and (2) for the paucity of laborious, careful analyses of the inter-affectivity between the rhetorical principles of the documentary and various socio-cultural underpinning of social issues. For my purposes, such a laborious, careful analysis is necessary to elucidate the contextual validity of claims, respective of the socio-cultural contexts to which they apply. Without such an analysis, claims of the documentary's ability to effect social change seem arbitrary, and are therefore prone to adverse implications for both the theorisation and the practice of the documentary. I discuss these implications at length in the 'Literature Review' section.

By way of an introduction, I wish to highlight some questions that arise regarding claims that social change has been the rationale for certain films without evidence that these films were produced with the aim of generating impact in *the* specific ways they did. For example, the *Black Gold* directors' statement makes it clear that the aim of the film was to remind the audience that "through just one cup of coffee, we are inextricably connected to the livelihood of millions of people around the world who are struggling to survive" (Francis & Francis 2006, p. 1). It does not make allusion to the rebuilding of the school as a goal of the film, but the rebuilding of the school is theorised as evidence for the documentary's ability to effect social change. Because one cannot forge a link between thee positive outcome of the film and the objective of the film, ascribing to the documentary such ability appears arbitrary. Similarly, *An Inconvenient Truth* is said to have contributed to world leaders signing the Paris Accord on climate change (TakePart 2016), which was not explicitly stated as an intended outcome of the documentary. Through the lens of information theory this is essential to ascertain the effectiveness of communication. Under the concepts of 'equivocation and noise', information theory states that effective communication happens when the information available at the receiver's end is the same as the

one at the source (Juarrero 2002), these studies prove wanting: they cannot show the correlation of effects intended at the source (by the filmmaker) and the receiving end of audience members. In these cases, questions on matters of validity, academic rigour, and theoretical accuracy become evident. One can ask: on what ground does one then assess the accuracy of these claims? What evidence do we have that such claims are not arbitrary? And to what extent can such claims ascertain an intentional (not accidental) correlation between the documentary's impact and its rhetorical address?

These questions further problematize the totalising approach of previous scholarship. The issue is not necessarily on the specificity of the film's impact. It is, instead, on the unverifiable link of the intention to the outcome, and by extension to the documentary's affective address. In fact, these questions seem even more implicating when we consider the fact that, in many accounts, claims of the documentary's ability to effect social change are based on *post-priori* abstract analyses of a small number of films *already* known to have inspired social change, whereas their validity has not been verified both empirically *and* practically. This then becomes equivalent to what Deutscher (2014) sees as Kant's reproach of abstract principles: that in an abstract principle, people see what already preoccupies them. It also amounts to an unwitting selective tendency to interpret evidence in favour of one's view, at the exclusion of evidence contentious to one's interest – a tendency decision science calls 'confirmation bias' (Gravett 2017). This becomes very much the case when we consider the inability to demonstrate that the principles which contributed to the success of selected films cannot be found in similar cases of unsuccessful films. That this tendency persists despite a notable increase in empirical research on the documentary's social impact, exemplified by Karlin & Johnson (2011), suffices to highlight the lack of significant research on the *inter-affectivity* between the rhetoric of the documentary and the socio-cultural processes that shape issues addressed in social impact films.

To ignore such inter-affectivity suggests that these claims unduly purport equal validity across diverse films and cultures. In my view, such blanketing does amount to nothing less than cultural homogenisation based on unjustifiably totalising theoretical approaches. This could be linked to the fact that most of these studies are framed through a Western perspective which, as Juarrero tells us, gravitates epistemologically towards the view that "deduction from timeless and

contextless laws is an ideal not only of science but also of any form of reasoning" (Juarrero 2002, p.3).

My thesis goes against totalising theoretical approaches. It follows in the footsteps of a host of Africanist scholars who reject, rightly, the universal validity of Western canonical paradigms. My allegiance to such scholarship is therefore epistemological: it employs methods that question the scope of validity of theoretical positions conceived in the West, for the West, in non-Western socio-cultural contexts. It does so in the tradition of the Conversational School of African Philosophy according to which a thorough African philosophy has to be grounded in African thought systems (Iroegbu 1995; Chimakonam 2013). Concerning cinematic practices, my thesis is contiguous with contemporary Africanist scholars who suggest that African films take inspiration from culturally specific modes of address and aesthetics, refuting, *ipso facto,* Euro-American theoretical paradigms as cannons to conceptualize and/or analyse African cinematic practices (Gabriel 1985; Enahoro 1998; Ukadike 1994, Ebrahim 1998, Tapsoba, cited by Barlet, 1997). However, my allegiance to these positions will be limited to their epistemological utility for my inquiry. This is because my study focuses on the rhetoric of the documentary and its ability to institute instrumental solutions to social issues, which is not the focus of these works. Even in works that posit that the documentary mode has the ability to contribute to the task of nation building (Akudinobi 2001; Ambala 2006), the focus is neither on the rhetorical principles of the documentary, nor its instrumental effectives to curb social issues.

For purposes of accuracy and as necessitated by my scope, this study will draw on views that show more relevance to its interdisciplinary and contextualist aspects. Here, some non-Africanist views will become equally essential. Cases in point are the views that (1) time and context frame all human actions and their conscious non-action, and that (2) social problems are sustained by larger public narratives embedded in complex power relations that serve certain interests, at certain times (See Williams 1966; Turner 1996; Hall 1996; Appadurai 2004). From these vintage points, my study questions the accuracy of claims that confer to the documentary the ability to effect social change without exploring the causations for social issues. Instead, it proposes that to assess the documentary's ability to effect social change, one would need to establish the extent to which the documentary's rhetorical devices can be deployed to subvert these narratives at their roots. This essentially implies accounting for the socio-cultural specificity within which a social

problem can be solved, which is important to avoid undue generality that undermines the merits of 'the particular'. Such generality does not negate the validity of 'the particular', but it does overlook its complexity, thereby making it less understood. With such a limited understanding, comes limited knowledge of the roots of a particular social issue. Consequently, one's view of how the documentary can address a social problem remains speculative at best, and arbitrary at worst. So would be one's choice of appropriate narration strategies to maximize the documentary's service in social change.

That I take issues with these culturally undefined theoretical approaches should not be read as my disputing the claims that the documentary can effect social change. I question the validity of such claims in the absence of any accompanying investigation of socio-cultural processes that frame social issues, knowing that such processes constitute a medium within which possibilities for social action, and consequently for social change, can be opened up or closed down (Johnson *et al* 2004). Hence, my study investigates the rhetorical efficacy of civic intervention documentary *in tandem* with an empirical examination of socio-cultural processes that frame inaction against neglect of South African adolescent orphans. The study also entails a practical evaluation of the research findings through the production of a documentary film on the same issue. This aligns my approach with the Hegelian-Marxist notion of *praxis* as practice informed by theory, and also theory informed by practice. As interpreted by Johnson and colleagues, *praxis* implies taking one's own and other people's theories seriously enough "to seek to act and live by them, letting what is learnt in *the living* also test and develop the theories" (Johnson *et al* 2004, p. 92 – *my emphasis*). This notion of *praxis* is a conscious step towards a theoretical-cum-methodical break from the totalising approaches highlighted above.

As I seek to test my own and other people's findings through *the living*, I will be, in effect, foregrounding the contextual particularity demanded by the socio-cultural specificity of the object of my research. That makes my approach *post-theoretical* in the sense that it opposes a totalising approach to theory, and instead, favours a contextually grounded search for solutions to contextually motivated theoretical problems (Bordwell & Carroll 1996). It accordingly privileges analytical methods and a theoretical framework that logically correspond with the sociality, partiality and cultural specificity that underpin this project. For that, I am adopting an interdisciplinary framework to complement the shortage of film theories that can adequately

frame an analysis of socio-cultural processes. In defence of such a framework, I argue that accounts of the documentary's ability to effect social change overlook the multidimensionality of the spectator's experience. Because such multidimensionality incorporates concepts that have been cultivated in related fields outside the film studies tradition, particularly cultural studies, decision science and philosophy – since social change calls for actions that encompass changes in socio-cultural processes – my thesis is that to re-examine the documentary's rhetorical principles through a convergence of concepts from film studies with concepts from other disciplines can significantly increase the understanding of phenomena that shape the audience's perception of the documentary. For my purposes, such convergence of concepts is indispensable.

I describe concepts relevant to my study in the "Critical Framework" section. For now, it suffices to say that I have only included concepts that are directly applicable to this project's socio-culturally specific, post-theoretical commitment. In that light, this thesis advances an interdisciplinary-grounded defence on how socio-cultural formations can undermine the documentary's rhetorical address, and – conversely – how such knowledge can inform the formulation of narration strategies that can enhance a documentary's ability to mobilise an effective civic intervention into a social problem.

Here, ***civic intervention*** is defined as a physical act driven by one's desire to serve one's community, and aimed at providing a solution to a problem in that community. Hence, modelled on Winston's (1988) suggestion that a documentary film should constructively discuss the persistence of a social problem which it is fundamentally supposed to ameliorate, ***civic intervention documentary*** will mean a documentary film that challenges the socio-cultural underpinning of a social issue with the primary aim of resolving it at a very fundamental level. I draw upon Sorokin (1968) and Sztompka (1993) to define ***social change*** as an alteration of quantitative or qualitative aspects of a social system, to an extent that the alteration redefines dimensions of social reality. It is important to note that even though the definition of 'civic intervention' above distinguishes it from social change, both concepts refer to processes premised on change and, on a closer look, they concertedly alert us to a connection between social problems and socio-cultural structures. Consequently, both concepts connote a potentially useful framework through which one can examine a social issue.

For the sake of this study, ***socio-cultural structures*** refer to contextual factors that frame a particular social issue, the power relations that sustain it, and the configuration of interests that such relations serve (Appadurai 2004). Socio-cultural structures are useful to this study because they encompass processes that can open up or close down possibilities for social action (Johnson *et al* 2004).

I model the definition of ***documentary rhetorical principles*** on McKee's view that a principle is not a rule but a practice that works and "has through all remembered times" (1997; p .3). Thus, documentary rhetorical principles herein mean the basic units of a documentary's mode of address that can be generally accepted as *characteristic* of the documentary's ability to persuade an audience to take a certain position, depending on the film's central argument. In the following section, I engage particularly with claims that these principles confer to the documentary the power to effect social change. The criticism thereof leads to my research problem, its aims and its importance.

My use of the concept of ***affect*** is in keeping with Plantinga's (2007) view of a film as an orchestration of multiple affects rather than a text that generates a single affective state. For Plantinga, affect is an emotional state which results from the sharing in the emotional experience of film characters. I acknowledge that the contextual and ontological limitations of this concept would make it appear irrelevant to my purposes, especially the facts that it pertains principally to a fiction film experience, and that it has not been primarily defined in terms of the rhetorical principles of the documentary. However, the fact that it encompasses the idea of 'sharing in the emotion experience' of the film character makes it utile to my purposes. It renders it continuous with the rhetorical principle of the 'presumption of public relevance' which assumes a collective sense of interest between the documentary participants and the audience. Thus, the term ***affective address*** will mean a filmic utterance geared toward generating emotional and intellectual responses that have the potential to cue documentary audiences to an allegiance with the individuals depicted in the documentary. By extension, I presume, such allegiance would prove advantageous in eliciting, in the audience, the need to see the predicament of the documentary participants resolved.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In *The Sociology of Social Change*, Sztompka (1993) proposes that theories of social change, the non-recurrent alteration *in and of* the constituent elements of a social system, should take into account the social reality of the system: it must establish how life situations and social norms determine beliefs that, in turn, influence or fail to influence actions. For Sztompka, this means accounting for the complex interplay of various components of a system. In this account, social change must affect the linkages between the ideological, the normative, and the interactional (organizational) as well as the opportunistic, hierarchical, dimensions of the socio-cultural field. From this view, it would make sense that theories that seek to establish the ability of documentary to effect social change should, by default, demonstrate how the rhetorical tactics of the documentary can alter the network of relationships that form the core of social reality. It would also make sense to expect such theories to provide an *understanding* of the dynamics through which documentary films enable changes *in/of* certain components of a social system. This, in turn, will require demonstrating how the documentary film can alter the constituent components of a social system to the point of altering the entire social system.

Understanding how the documentary can effect such a change is the object of this literature review. It focuses on works that address the subjects of documentary rhetoric in relation to social change. Accordingly, and stemming from the prevalence of theoretical accounts of the documentary as a conduit for social change, the investigation of these works is to be framed by theories of social change. It will draw principally on the view that social change must involve an alteration of quantitative or qualitative aspects of a social system and, mediated through individual actors, must redefine dimensions of social reality (Sorokin 1968; Sztompka 1993).

Underlying this investigation is the need to uncover methodological and theoretical approaches that are adequate in the analysis of the instrumentality of the documentary as civic intervention. It questions the necessity of social change, seeking to establish whether it is prerequisite for the documentary to involve social change in order to serve as civic intervention in social problems.

On Documentary Rhetoric and Social Change

Though it is only a recent development that the activist documentary is garnering greater distribution and achieving critical acclaim (Marfo 2007; Aguayo 2005; Karlin & Johnson 2011; Diesner *et al* 2014), the use of the documentary to ameliorate social problems is not a recent concept. It is reported to have had its first wave in the 1930s where the activist documentary had as a mission to acquire visibility for the people and ideas at the margins of society (Hardy 1966; Aguayo 2005; Aufderheide 2007). In the second wave, which was precipitated by the development of affordable portable video technology in the 1950s, activist documentary became a conduit for political dissent (Aguayo 2005). This wave, notes Aguayo, was not necessarily committed to agitation for the redistribution of economic resources. That according to Aguayo, led to its failure to reach its objective of radical social change. The current wave, which is the third, is said to have begun in the 1990s (Aguayo 2005, Marfo 2007).

Based on retrospective analyses of documentary films of this phase, many accounts of the activist documentary of the third phase advance the view that the documentary has the ability to effectively engage the process of social change. Cases in point include VanDecar (2013), Brook (2014), and Nash & Corner (2015). And as to how this is achieved, we have a wide variety of views: According to Verellen (2010), it entails thinking about appropriate and realistic distribution methods in the development phase of the film, determining how the film fits into the need of the social movement for change, creating platforms for audiences to engage actively and immediately with the social issue, and putting mechanisms in place to generate further demand for the film. For Finneran (2015), it comes from a well-executed story combined with an innovative approach to building outreach strategies that are tailored to the issue and the sector with which campaigners are working. The demand for the film will also depend on the mood and the tone of the film rather than expecting that there is a one-size-fits-all to outreach and engagement tactics. In fact, opines Finneran (2015; p. 26), "it is more likely that unusual innovative approaches and calls to action will inspire audiences, rather than familiar and repeated tactics". Similarly inclined, award winning documentary filmmaker Julia Bacha (2013) proposes that there should be a clearly defined change that the film is intended to make, that activist documentarians must carefully consider which audiences are most crucial to shifting *deep-seated*

beliefs and narratives and then build a proactive outreach strategy for delivering the message to the film's key target audiences.

These accounts are complemented by recent impact studies that use a variety of methods to assess the impact of various documentary films (Karlin & Johnson 2011; Hendrie, Blakley & Nemtin 2014; De Rosa & Burgess 2014; Diesner *et al* 2014). Because of these studies' paucity of detail regarding the rhetoric of the documentary, what follows is an in-depth review of a few cases that stand out for their depth and, more especially, for drawing upon major rhetorical and critical theories to situate the documentary's ability to mobilize social change.

To begin with, Aguayo (2005) suggests that the activist documentary can encourage a collective, instrumental audience identity with the film text by exploring the good for one's community. For Aguayo, this requires the film to find a connection to a particular audience invested in the process of social change and to bring this audience to facilitate public debates geared to instrumentally alleviating the injustices *foregrounded* in the film. Accordingly, it is within the power of documentary to open up this space for publics to connect and organize for instrumental action, outside the film screening and production. That, Aguayo maintains, makes the film part of the process of social change rather than simply being its reflector. For that, she identifies the following rhetorical strategies: the graphic aspect of documentary gives it a richer sensory proficiency to offer plentiful details that exceeds the potential of language to explain the complex minutiae of a given frame. To that she adds the ability of documentary film sound to clarify explain, direct and advocate for a preferred reading of image and sonic evidence presented by the film. As a methodical approach, Aguayo suggests that by examining the dialectics between material reality and the discursive reality, it is possible to establish the film's role in a larger political programme for social change. This, she explains, is because cultural texts alone cannot evoke all the stages of social change.

She then goes on to identify specific structural, rhetorical devices of some documentary films that, according to her, made select films effective in effecting social change. In *Paradise Lost* (Joe Berlinger 1996), a documentary film about the trials of three teenage boys who were accused of the murder and sexual mutilation of three prepubescent boys in west Memphis, Arkansas, Aguayo observes that the main documentary participants bore markers of being

outsiders within a conservative religious community, which functioned to strengthen the audience's identification with the film's narrative. In Aguayo's analysis, identification with the depiction of foreignness follows the exposé of political and social marginalization. She also argues that *Paradise Lost* provides a stark counter-narrative to local news reports and legal discourse circulating about the court case at the time of the trials. With evidence based on the film, Aguayo notes that the effectiveness of these rhetorical devices were reinforced by facilitating collective identity which gave birth to a social movement against the sort of discrimination foregrounded in the film. Without this instrumental social movement to do the heavy lifting of social change, she opines, there is a question as to how much a documentary can sustain the process of social change. "Through collective instrumental identity", concludes Aguayo (2005; p. 220), "activist documentary has the potential to more effectively engage the process of social change."

In Aguayo's account, the possibility of finding a connection to a particular film audience presents an advantage of making social change appear easy, especially given that in most instances social change is often mediated by individual actors who see and believe in the need for change. What this account overlooks is the disparity of social subjects, especially those that do not see the need for social change. Even if we can reach them, the question as to how to convert them to the cause of social change remains unanswered, which exposes other flaws in the idea of the documentary's efficacy of effecting social change. Also, Aguayo's account offers no precise description of how the documentary can alter specific components of a socio-cultural field to induce change. In effect, social change appears a term used for convenient purposes as much of what can be said about social change is left out. For example, there is no mention of contextual socio-cultural factors that shape the issues foregrounded in the film. Neither is there any mention of how the documentary film, a cultural product by nature, can transcend itself so much as to progressively alter, instead of reinforcing, the social conditions that sustain a social issue. These omissions leave us unaware of the conditions under which the documentary film can alter social processes in a manner that results in a durable solution to a certain social issue in a given socio-cultural environment. Perhaps the gravest limitation of this account is the lack of attention to social processes that shape people's inaction towards a particular social problem. Without understanding the forces that sustain a specific social issue, it is my view that one

cannot exactly point out what the documentary is able to actually do to bring about social change.

The importance of understanding such forces can be deduced from Aguayo's very own commentary that if social change is the objective, aspects of modernist understanding of political participation is critical. This view calls attention to delimiting the parameters of political participation, implying – in the idea of 'modernist understanding' – an understanding of the historical context for social change. This is an important insight, but what this view does not acknowledge is the fact that political participation, or the lack thereof, can rarely be dissociated from cultural influences on the construction of value. It implies that to know the culturally specific grounds for one's action/inaction is to understand the value one attaches to the action/inaction. And to understand this value is to uncover partial causes of social issues.

Without understanding the cultural constructs that frame inaction against social problems, how effectively can we then define the adequate approach for documentary to effect social change? Without such an understanding, social change movements are more likely to be ineffective, if not exacerbate the issue they set forth to alleviate. This was the case which Harragin (2004) documents in his account of the failures of Operation Lifeline Sudan – a task force of relief workers formed to tackle the 1998 catastrophic famine in Southern Sudan. With good intentions, the task force set out to distribute food rations to those they considered vulnerable groups, notably children and the elderly. Against the knowledge of relief workers, local leaders appropriated the food rations to distribute them to members of their kinship groups. This, recounts Harragin, was then considered by relief workers as corrupt hoarding and elite capture of food rations. Consequently, relief workers bypassed local leadership structures and directly delivered the rations to the targeted groups. That did little to alleviate the famine, until the relief workers realized their mistake: blindness to the local culture. As Harragin reports from field investigation, the leader's appropriation and redistribution of food rations was in keeping with the locals' notions of economic ownership and social structure, where ownership of economic resources is a collective kinship affair. Accordingly, relief food had to be fairly distributed to all kinship groups (the lineages) who would then decide on the family deserving assistance the most. In Harragin's view, the perceptions of the relief workers reflected their lack of knowledge

of local cultural systems, accounting for their failure to intervene effectively despite their good intentions.

The same need to understand the importance of cultural systems in social change underscores Faulcon's "*Creating Change through Documentary Film*" (2012) wherein she opines that, in its ability to establish an argument and defend a position, the documentary film has a specific and definitive role in creating change within the parameters of society. Hence she stresses:

> The salvation of our earth and of ourselves is left to small number of committed and tenacious documentarians who deliver to us multiple messages conveying need for change on a myriad number of topics. Documentary filmmakers are the truth filters of our society; through film they provide the human face along the power of story […], serving us by facilitating our hopeful return [from a buffered existence] to our own fidelity of being. (Faulcon 2012; p. 65)

The salvation power which Faulcon accords to documentarians derives from her view that the documentary can deliberately activate an alteration in thinking, or a deeply profound collective shift in worldview, when it makes a compelling visual presentation that speaks to the eminence and the necessity for social change. Through its fluidity of forms, she adds, the documentary has the ability to confront and reconcile deep internal structures of assumptions and of knowledge; it can be a portal into another person's reality; it provides the viewer with a place to reset and a chance to regroup by providing a juncture between personal experience and the needs of society. By utilizing the shock value of spectacle to establish a point and create causal connections between the viewer and the subject, the documentary, asserts Faulcon, can perform the task of allowing the public to travel closer to an actual reality, realizing its role in it, and away from a buffered existence – a shift of viewpoint that must translate into fresh intent and action for social change.

Faulcon finds these aspects in a select number of documentaries among which a very good case is made for *An Inconvenient Truth* (Davis Guggenheim 2006) and *Climate Refugees* (Michael Nash 2010). With regard to both films, Faulcon highlights the means by which they undertake the task of transforming old worldviews about global warming into a new, hopeful vision of a sustainable reality. This, she affirms, is achieved by means of different rhetorical devices, namely: filling gaps in knowledge left out in American news media coverage of the ravages of

Hurricane Katrina; signalling a warning to the viewer about the effects of their actions on the environment, and refocusing the event by introducing a complex scientific notion into mainstream cultural dialogue. She also mentions the revelation of emotional stories of loss, alongside scientific evidence of our implication in such losses. She adds to that the use of metaphor, recourse to authority and the depiction of actual cataclysmic events in tandem with sobering numerical statistics that shift the argument to the long-term consequences of a social catastrophe. Such devices, says Faulcon, enabled these documentaries to persuade, motivate and activate social consciousness that occasioned further causes for social change.

Let us return to Faulcon's introductory statement that the documentary has the ability to confront and reconcile "deep internal structures of assumptions and of knowledge" (Faulcon 2012; p.3). From a cultural studies perspective, this will mean reconfiguring the very concept of culture as mechanism through which people make meaning. It will mean giving the documentary the power to elucidate, with the ability to transform, those aspects of culture that frame social life to the extent of instilling deep moral attachment, even to socio-cultural norms that, to use Appadurai's (2004) expression, degrade people's dignity.

Consider Falcon's assertions that the documentary reminds us that we are subject to the same forces in reality and that, by realizing that "we share a singular destiny […] we can become more cognizant of our mutual predicaments" (2012; p. 13) and that the documentary can perform the task of allowing the public to travel closer to an actual reality, "realizing its role in it, and away from a buffered existence" (2012; p.17). These assertions imply that there are forces that confine people into a buffered existence against socially cultivated predicaments. Outside this existence, uncertainty of action and/or of outcome is bound to be the order of the day. What else conditions this existence but culture? How possible is it to circumvent this order without the knowledge of its cultural roots? With regard to activist documentary, this should guide us to speculate that a comprehensive theory of documentary and social change cannot ignore the cultural dynamics in the social frame of an issue that needs changing – a point I will substantiate through Appadurai's (2004; p. 60) notion of the "capacity to aspire".

Speaking in the context of poverty-stricken communities in India, Appadurai (2004) proposes that in order to give the poor the capacity to aspire to good life, we must bear in mind that

aspirations are always formed in interaction with, and in the thick of, a social frame and setting. In this context, every case of aspiration to good life is part of a larger normative system of *local* ideas and beliefs. Therefore, posits Appadurai, strengthening the poor's capacity to aspire to good life requires a firm understanding of the context-ridden larger order of norms and cultural designs that bolster anticipation and risk reduction. So, he adds, "to the extent that poverty is indexed by poor terms of recognition for the poor, intervention to positively affect these [culturally constructed] terms is a crucial priority" (Appadurai 2004; p. 66).

Hence, I submit, to accept the ability of the documentary to effect social change is to imply that the documentary film has the ability to alter the socio-cultural terms that define a social problem. It is also to imply an understanding of how these terms can be positively modified for the remediation of the given social problem. That would consequently give documentary the ability to create a feedback loop between social norms and a specific goal of a social movement, which, in Appadurai's terms, "is the heart of all active social change" (Appadurai 2004; p. 80). Unfortunately, the literature reviewed so far fails to make that connection: we are given examples of documentaries that have led to a change in public policy, but we are not told exactly, what in the documentary rhetoric was the actual causal agent of change. We are told that the documentary can affect the core of people's thinking (see Faulcon 2012), but there is no elaboration of the cultural matrix of ideas that constitute people's thinking. Perhaps an outstanding limitation of these studies is their poor examination of the documentary within its specific socio-cultural context – the importance of which can never be overstated. We read it in Rao & Walton's (2004; p.19) view that "culture is a […] constructive factor in how life is valued"; we find it in Douglas's (2004) position that interaction and coexistence of a society's subcultures form useful ways to understand the joint production of meaning in a society; we are reminded of it in the view that failure to pay attention to local cultures will result in failure of a social movement to achieve its desired goals, regardless of the goodness of its intentions (See Grenier 1988; Harragin 2004; Jenkins 2004).

To that effect, it is now important to enlist a rather pessimistic view about the power of the documentary to effect social change. It is held by Waddell (2010) who opposes claims that the documentary can change people's thinking in substantial ways, denying the documentary the power of a conversion effect. In its stead, he argues, the documentary film generates a

reinforcement effect in the sense that it only consolidates previously held beliefs about issues to which the viewer is already sympathetic. This, he opines, is consistent with the concept of selective exposure bias according to which individuals tend to seek out media messages that are already aligned with their beliefs and attitudes.

A return to the accounts reviewed so far will reveal implicit biases towards the reinforcement effect. A case in point will be Aguayo's (2005) view that for the documentary film to activate social change, it must find a connection to a particular audience invested in the process of social change and to bring this audience to facilitate public debates geared to instrumentally alleviating the injustices foregrounded in the film. From this view, we can infer that the invested audience is one that is sympathetic to the social issue being addressed. It is this type of audiences that are instrumental agents for social change. In that sense, one can deduce that in the absence of this audience to facilitate public debates and acting as proponents for the required change, the ability of the documentary to act as a direct cause of social change becomes questionable. This will be more so if the competence of this audience is instrumental in mobilizing social change, which raises doubt about the possibility that the same audience might have been all along sympathetic to the issue but unable to address it competently. Even with competent sympathetic audiences that can facilitate public debates and mobilize social change beyond the rhetoric for social change, it remains unclear how a documentary film can be of immediate remedial material value to a social issue.

In defence of creating material value for the civic intervention documentary, I wish to enlist De Cauter's (2011) view that a work of art, if one does not somehow act with it in the public sphere, remains playful contemplation, commentary or mere condensation of significance and experience. For De Cauter, only when artists and academics assume the civic role of mobilizing constructive activism do their works become political action. Most artists and academics, opines De Cauter, are not political actors inside the public domain because of their increasing onslaught by destructive subversions, notably the economization of the academy and of the cultural world, by which it is meant giving precedence to economic value of academic and artistic work, undermining the work's political value. If De Cauter is right about the economization of the arts, the theoretical concern in relation to this study should therefore be how to (1) ascertain the economic use-value of a documentary film, (2) how to articulate its material remedial value to a

social problem and (3) how to effectively translate this material value into tangible solutions to social issues. That brings us to one of many concerns that remain inadequately addressed by previous studies and therefore constitute the object of my study.

Research Problem

From this review, it is apparent that the prevalent approach in previous literature tends to assume cultural homogeneity, with very little concern for cultural specificity and even less for socio-structural forces that shape public narratives that sustain social issues. I submit that knowledge of these forces, in socio-culturally specific contexts and attendant economic conditions, is important to understand the extent to which the documentary rhetorical principles can inform the production of a documentary film to effectively address a particular social issue. Without such knowledge, it proves difficult to point out what the documentary *can* actually do in a socio-culturally specific context.

Furthermore, broadly discussing the documentary in relation to social change undermines the *inter-affectivity* between social structures and the rhetoric of the documentary. I am of the view that exploring this *inter-affectivity* should shed light on the causal formations (socio-cultural and/or political) that must constitute the target of the documentary's rhetorical address for civic intervention purposes. I see such an approach as essential in assessing the documentary's effectiveness in bringing about meaningful social change. Such will therefore be a useful approach to this study.

Many studies that ascribe to the documentary the ability to effect social change have not investigated the rhetoric of the documentary in relation to socio-cultural conditions that frame social issues. Based on textual evidence from analyses of documentary films and from impact studies, many have partly attributed the documentary's effectiveness to its rhetorical address, but have overlooked the *inter-affectivity* between social structures and the documentary rhetoric.

Because social problems are sustained by larger public narratives embedded in complex power relations that serve certain interests (Williams 1966; Turner 1996; Hall 1996; Appadurai 2004), to assess the documentary's ability to effect social change, one would need to evaluate the extent

to which the documentary can subvert these narratives at their roots. But rare are studies that have taken this approach, and even rarer, those that have espoused *both* a practical and an empirical approach to demonstrate the validity of their claims.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this research is to examine the *inter-affectivity* between the rhetorical principles of the documentary and socio-cultural structures that frame a social issue in its specific socio-cultural context.

For that purpose, neglect of adolescent orphans in South African communities will be my case study, justifying my choice for an inter-disciplinary approach which comprises three complementary components: (a) a social scientific component that will entail an investigation of socio-cultural structures that frame neglect of adolescent orphans, (b) an interpretive component in the Humanities tradition to explore the documentary's rhetorical principles, and (c) a practical-cum-empirical component that will entail the production of a civic intervention documentary film which will be used to test the effectiveness of the documentary's rhetorical principles used as schematic address to the neglect of adolescent orphans in South African communities. Each one of these components is very crucial in reaching the aim of this research. And only in their interdisciplinary complementarity, can its objectives be achieved.

There are three of these objectives, located *respectively* in the social scientific, the interpretive and the practical component:

1. To identify and deconstruct socio-culturally constructed sensibilities and narratives that frame inaction against the neglect of adolescent orphans in South African communities. An understanding of such sensibilities and narratives informs my assessment of how socio-cultural structures can undermine the effectiveness of a documentary's rhetorical address, or how they can, in turn, be made susceptible to it.

2. To identify a framework of documentary rhetorical principles that can be attuned to the socio-cultural context of the examined social issue - neglect of adolescent orphans. I draw

upon an interpretive analysis of such principles to determine how these principles can be socio-culturally attuned, and how this attuning can enable a documentary's rhetorical address to subvert socio-cultural structures that frame inaction against the neglect of adolescent orphans.

3. To demonstrate *practically* and empirically if the framework identified (in objective 2) can indeed contest the socio-cultural structures identified (in objective 1), and thereby persuade its viewers to act against the neglect of adolescent orphans. The effectiveness of the film's rhetorical address will be evaluated at test screenings in the same communities where the social scientific aspect of the research will be conducted. Here, readiness for audience members to pledge support for neglected adolescent orphans will serve as a *measure* of the film's rhetorical efficacy.

Indeed, other factors such as, for examples, a film's awareness campaign as well as its distribution strategy may influence the documentary's ability to effect change in the public outlook on a social issue. However, because of the demands of its creative component, this thesis is limited, in scope, to rhetorical principles which pertain to 'characterization', 'narrative logic' and the 'setting'. The rhetorical stance is underpinned by the conviction that the documentarist who seeks to effect social change cannot avoid the urge to legitimate his/her own view; his/her primary aim is most likely to present arguments so as to persuade her audience to hold a certain position vis-a-vis the central issue of her film.

RATIONALE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

There are 3, 7 million documented orphans in South Africa, 150 000 of whom are believed to be living in child-headed households (UNICEF 2015). This is an increase of 18.7% from 122 000 in 2009 (Meintjes *et al* 2009). According to UNICEF, this predicament is partly attributed to the scarcity of alternative care programmes suitable for older adolescent orphans, who, to use Ebrahim's (2016, person. comm, 18 May) phrase, "are at a pivotal yet precarious moment of their lives". In my view, this predicament, especially the fact that the number is increasing, points to the incapacity of social movements and other entities to alleviate the plight of these orphans. This consequently calls for a novel approach to activism that has not been locally

recorded in the search for solutions to this issue. This study is a step in that direction – a step which promises an equally important contribution on academic and practical levels.

Original Contribution of this Study

On an academic front, this study proposes a methodological shift in the theoretical conceptualization of the documentary. This shift is envisaged to complement existing scholarship in two ways. Firstly, it espouses a contextualist approach to break the confines of theorizing the documentary as a culturally homogenous category. Secondly, by proposing a practical evaluation of the research findings through the production of documentary film, the shift introduces a deviation from the abstract to a *practical-cum-empirical* assessment of the documentary's ability to effect social change. Not only did study entail the production of film as text addressing the neglect of adolescent orphans in South African communities, it also entailed test screenings of the film to assess its affective address: As an autonomous text, the film was used to generate empirical data on the socio-cultural underpinning of the neglect of adolescent orphans in South African communities. The findings generated by using the film were then incorporated in the rhetorical strategies employed in another version of the film. The findings did, in particular, inform a socio-culturally attuned framework of rhetorical principles used in the latter version of the film. This version was then screened to audiences to evaluate the effectiveness of its rhetorical address to the neglect of adolescent orphans in South African communities. This cyclic *interfusion* of theoretical, empirical and practical forms of evidence constitutes a framework which is the original contribution of my study.

As a working hypothesis, I posit that such a framework cannot only tease, confirm or falsify existing theories; it can also have useful implications for South African documentary practitioners: it can inform their choices of creative strategies based on the knowledge of how the documentary's rhetorical principles work under specific contextual conditions, and why. From a social perspective, the proposed framework can inform fresher strategies for indexing, through the medium of the documentary, local forms of knowledge to inspire collective engagement in the formulation of constructive intervention programmes to address social issues. In a much broader context of cultural production, this study's contribution provides an answer to De Cauter's (2011) concern that a work of art, if one does not somehow act with it in the public

sphere, remains playful contemplation, commentary or mere condensation of significance and experience. For De Cauter, only when artists (and academics) assume the civic role of mobilizing constructive activism, do their works cease to be 'play'. As opposed to De Cauter, Ebrahim (pers. com, 4 July 2016) advises that 'play' can "transcend being a site of learning and cognitive as well as motor development, and become a site of serious political action". On another level, this study's contribution can be seen as heeding the call by the United Nations' Economic Commission for Africa (2014) to mobilize domestic resources as an important task to sustain the economic growth of the African continent. It speaks, in the same vein, to ideas that paying attention to local systems of knowledge can facilitate the design and implementation of culturally appropriate, cost-effective development programmes to help build more sustainable futures (Grenier 1998).

CRITICAL FRAMEWORK

For its critical, analytical lens, this study will draw on a number of concepts in cultural studies, philosophy and decision science. All these concepts will centre around the rhetorical principles of the documentary, with particular focus on civic intervention documentary as a form of social expression. Among them, 'cultural reflexivity' (Jonson *et al* 2004) and 'affirmative ethics' (Braidotti 2011) will feature prominently. But because of the Africanist focus of my study, the concepts of African Conversationalism (Iroegbu 1995; Chimakonam 2013) and Kawaida Philosophy (Karenga 2008; Snider 2010) will form an overarching critical-cum- practical framework of both the theoretical and the creative components of my study.

According to Jonson *et al* (2004), 'cultural reflexivity' is the view that various aspects of all research are bound by *relative* partiality and specificity. It acknowledges that nothing comes without its world, and so it requires contextualising the object of our study, the processes involved therein, and ourselves as researchers. While cultural reflexivity can be said to be continuous with cultural relativism – the view that different standards of morality, practices and belief systems operate in different cultures and cannot be evaluated from a standpoint exterior to them (Edgar & Sedgwick 1999) – I choose to privilege cultural reflexivity because it envisages partialities and specificities as opportunities and resources. Hence, this concept will inform my search for underlying opportunities in the interpretations of socio-cultural processes and of the

documentary's rhetorical principles; it will guide the socio-cultural re-contextualisation of these principles, and it will serve as a reference to keep my own biases in check.

To conceptualise the civic intervention aspect of this project, I privilege Rosi Braidotti's (2011) concept of 'affirmative ethics'. According to Braidotti, affirmative ethics consists in activating forces that index the present on the possibility of creating sustainable futures. The precondition for the sustainability of these futures, Braidotti stipulates, is the creation, *in the present*, of the capacity to "mobilize, actualize and deploy cognitive, affective and collective forces that will endure for future generations" (Braidotti 2011, p. 267). This is essentially continuous with development theories according to which sustainable development should meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED 1987; Grenier 1998). For my purposes, a useful aspect of affirmative ethics is its emphasis on a head-on engagement with the repugnant, the violent, and the traumatic realities of the present in order to understand the conditions that frame them. For Braidotti, such understanding is envisaged to facilitate the depersonalisation of atrocities of our times, and thereby maximise a *collective* deployment of resources for the regeneration of whole cultures from fragments of ruins. This, according to Braidotti, presupposes faith in the profound creativity of human ability, and it is what qualifies one to be called *worthy* of one's changing times. For the purposes of this study, that means finding ways in which filmmakers, film theorists, the film text and audiences can form a network of *forces* to mobilise instrumental action against the neglect of adolescent orphans in South African communities. The notion of affirmative ethics serves as a lens through which I investigate claims of the documentary's ability to effect social change. It informs my analysis of how the extant literature positions the documentary film in the processes of *indexing* a social problem in search for its solution.

For optimal efficacy, the concept of affirmative ethics will be complemented with Adorno's (1973) concept of the 'contradictory condition of social reality' according to which society is both a product of human action and understood by its members, and yet something that constructs its human members and stands against them as natural and objective. The implication of this theory is that it locates the agency for the formation of social reality in the ambits of both the individual and the collective. For this study, this is essential in investigating the role individuals play in collective social formations that constitute collective blanketing over the

neglect of adolescent orphans in South Africa. Knowledge of such formations is considered essential, at least as an index of the present, in devising the rhetorical approaches for the documentary film.

Because I envisage an Africanist rhetorical approach marked by the reframing of the documentary's rhetorical principles, my critical lens will therefore encompass Africanist philosophical thoughts that have a greater potential to facilitate such reframing. A case in point is African Conversationalism. This is an Africanist concept that holds that new episteme in African Philosophy can be created by making use of the usable past and the depth of individual originality in finding solutions to contemporary demands (Panteleon 1995; Chimakonam 2013). Although this concept appears to have little to do with the rhetoric of the documentary, its focus on critical rigour, its emphasis on originality and its alignment with creativity which draw on *the usable past* remain useful to my research. The concept will therefore provide an analytical lens through which I will assess the contextual relevance of the rhetorical strategies that can enhance the affective address which my creative component will adopt.

Another Africanist philosophical thought that will serve my purposes is the *Kawaida* Philosophy. According to Maulana Karenga (2008), *Kawaida* philosophy centres on Afrocentric thoughts that encourage ongoing dialogue with African culture. As a philosophy of life and struggle, it seeks understanding of fundamental issues that confront African people and humanity in general. In Alfred Snider's (2010) interpretation, *Kawaida* has always been concerned with affirming human dignity and enhancing the life of the people. This is of great importance to my purposes because the commitment to enhance the lives of neglected orphaned adolescents informed the aim of my research. Of greater use will be the *Kawaida'*s emphasis on the ongoing dialogue with African cultures. This is consistent with my aim of establishing public narratives that sustain the neglect of adolescent orphans in South African Communities. It will allow me to question socio-cultural processes that frame such neglect, pointing to the possibility that part of the fundamental issues that face African people stem from within African cultures. And if that be the case, then looking inward African cultures has a greater chance to highlight the agency of Africans in resolving social issues sustained by African socio-culturally constructed narratives. The *Kawaida* Philosophy will therefore be crucial in the formulation of the narrative approach of my film, *Forsaken*.

Such approach will also draw upon the concept of 'cognitive biases' – a Decision Science term for errors of judgement that stem from cognitive rules of thumb that humans use to reach conclusions by relying on a limited set of cues (Kahneman & Tversky 1974; Gravett 2017). This concept will be useful in highlighting the cultural constructedness of social processes that frame inaction against the neglect of adolescent orphans in South African communities. For the same purposes, this study will also draw upon critical and cultural theories, especially those that consider cultural products as extensions of political structures and social hierarchies (See Horkheimer 1972; Turner 1996). I privilege Stuart Hall's (1996) view of popular culture as a site of resistance and negotiation of marginal and disempowered groups within society. This view serves as a useful tool for rethinking approaches by which the documentary can take the form that enables it to be an instrumental negotiating tool on behalf of the marginalized, which could also mean investigating possibilities of situating civic intervention documentary in the domain of popular culture.

Behind the choice for this critical framework is my socio-political commitment to making an influential contribution to the on-going struggle for the self-determinism of Africans, both against self-inflicted atrocities and against tragic vestiges of colonialism. My commitment is fuelled by my belief that such self-determinism will not be handed to us as a gift, but it will come as a result of laborious endeavours to redefine ourselves in our own terms, starting with head-on engagement with our own socio-cultural processes that legitimate vested interests of tragic power relations that undermine social progress. This commitment is in keeping with the *Kawaida* philosophy which gives primacy to *communal* deliberation, discourse and action, for as long as they are oriented towards what is good for the community, what reaffirms human dignity and what enhances humanity (Karenga 2008; Snider 2010). Consequently, commitment to collective agency, deliberation and action is privileged in the process of formulating a framework of culturally attuned rhetorical principles of the documentary. Hence also, I shun paternalistic patterns of thought that confer a messianic agency to a handful of individuals in positions of power.

RESEARCH METHODS

For a comprehensive answer to the research question and its sub-questions, this study will employ an interdisciplinary mixture of methods. From the film studies tradition, it will employ an interpretive approach to analyse documentary texts and theories with a view to identify rhetorical principles that can be culturally attuned to subvert neglect of adolescent orphans. From the social science tradition, it will rely on personal testimonies and focus group discussions to explore subjective, socio-cultural factors that promote inaction against the neglect of adolescent orphans in South African communities. For purposes of developing a theoretical framework to inform the creative component, the research will rely on analytical approaches that fall in the tradition of the grounded theory method.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a research method defined by its focus on the generation of theory from empirical research data. It espouses a constant comparison of incidents related to a specific problem in order to generate and plausibly suggest theoretical properties of salient categories of the problem being examined. These categories may be classified as causes, consequences, conditions or dimensions of the problem at hand (Charmaz 2006; Glaser 2008).

For the sake of this study, the grounded theory methodology proves indispensable for many reasons. Firstly, its epistemological foundations enable the researcher to generate an empirically informed theory from the complexity of research data. Secondly, its methodological flexibility allows for a thorough investigation of a phenomenon within its "relevant situational and social context" (Charmaz 2006; p.11). Because of its contextualist perspective, this study will adopt a constructivist approach to grounded theory. Contrary to the objectivist approach which attends to data as real and does not attend to the social context from which data emerge (Bryant 2002; Charmaz 2006), the constructivist approach employs *interpretive* units of analysis that conceive of data and analyses as social constructs that reflect what their production entailed. By attending to the social context where data emerge, the constructivist approach aims to show the complexities of particular worlds: it recognizes diverse local worlds and multiple realities, and addresses how people's actions affect their local and larger worlds (Charmaz 2006; VanderLinder 2007).

In keeping with the constructivist tradition of grounded theory, my research data was analysed to identify trending categories that represent socio-structural conditions that shape the neglect of adolescent orphans in South African communities. This was done in tandem with a rigorous investigation of documentary rhetorical theories *in relation to* socio-structural categories that will emerge from the generated set of data. The objective of this approach was to find a culturally-attuned theoretical framework that could allow one to find the best fitting mediation necessary to optimize the efficacy of the documentary's rhetorical address. The resultant theoretical framework was then used in the production of a documentary film which forms the creative component of this study.

Personal Testimonies

As a research method, personal testimony entails the recording of life stories and personal narratives of research participants (Yow 2005; Liamputtong 2010). Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2005) maintain that the advantage of this methodology is its ability to enable the researcher to link up individual life stories with historical conditions as well as with social processes that define the lived experiences of the story tellers. It therefore assists the researcher to understand both the shared and the personal upheaval of the individual living within the world being studied (see also Sloan 2008). According to Pink (2011), the fundamental purpose of these testimonies should be to elicit, from the audience, responses which might lead them to question pre-existing assumptions.

In this study, personal testimonies entailed video recordings of the life stories of neglected adolescent orphans. Video clips from the orphans' life stories were then used as evidentiary stimuli in the form of a five-minute documentary for subsequent interviews with neglected adolescent orphans who were unwilling to be filmed. Data gathered in these interviews were analysed and the findings were used to fine-tune the first version of the film into a second version which was then used as evidentiary stimulus for focus group sessions.

The Focus Groups

Madriz (2000) conceives the focus group method as a collectivist research method that focuses on the multivocality of the participants' attitudes, experiences and beliefs. This multivocality has

very profound implications for this study: it affords means to obtain collective views on the issues of neglected adolescent orphans; it stands privileged to highlight the inevitable tensions and contradictions that must be negotiated in group interactions before collective decisions are reached.

For Liamputtong (2010, p. 174), the multivocality of the focus group can also "yield information on meanings that lie behind group view points, or on processes that underscore specific positions and actions". The focus group is also selected for its cost effectiveness, especially given the financial demands of a practice-led doctoral study.

To start with, the researcher screened a film containing selected video clips from the orphans' personal life stories to a focus group of six to ten participants. Participants of the focus group were then asked to make individual, subjective evaluations of how socio-cultural factors are most likely to have shaped the conditions of orphans depicted in the video footage. These individual evaluations were envisaged to capture the personal feelings unaffected by group dynamics. Subsequent to that, participants were encouraged to collectively enter into difficult conversations with the images and with one another, for a maximum period of two hours. The purposes of these conversations were (1) to shed light on socially inscribed, shared understanding of issues pertaining to the neglect of adolescent orphans and (2) to gain a deeper knowledge of how social interaction patterns and socio-culturally defined *group dynamics* construct attitudes that shape the realities of South African adolescent orphans. In particular, the conversations sought to uncover social narratives presented as justification for inaction against this social impasse.

Analysis of the focus group sessions was undertaken immediately and the findings were used to assemble longer film sequence that incorporate voices of community members who took part in the focus group sessions. This constituted the third version of the film that was subsequently used as evidentiary stimulus for depth interviews that followed.

Depth Interviews

In order to explore more comprehensively points which focus-group participants will have highlighted during group discussions, I conducted follow-up interviews with selected individual

participants at their own convenience. These interviews were complemented by interviews with experts on various aspects of the issue, among them academics, social activists, as well as community and religious leaders. In these instances, the focus was to assess the challenges surrounding the issue.

Each interview started with the screening of the third version of the film sequence. In all cases, the interviews were filmed with utmost care for inclusion in the resultant documentary film. Data gathered during the interviews were immediately analysed and the findings went on to inform the final version of the film which was eventually used in test screenings to evaluate the documentary's affective address to the neglect of adolescent orphans in South African communities.

To remain faithful to grounded theory tradition, focus group discussions and depth interviews were ongoing in a cyclic approach, that is, following each focus group discussion, data was analysed for salient categories. The findings were then used to inform subsequent depth interviews, which were analysed for emergent categories. The resultant findings went on to inform subsequent focus group discussions, forming a cycle of focus group sessions and depth interviews.

Population and Sampling Design

The sample was chosen from a population of socially, economically active adults in communities where neglected adolescent orphans live. The researcher used a combination of systematic sampling and theoretical sampling. While systematic sampling procedures involve a selection of a sample according to a predetermined random system, theoretical sampling procedures involve selecting a sample from the population of individuals who have considerable knowledge about the subject (Walliman 2011; Kothari 2004).

In this study, systematic sampling relied on selecting each focus group member from every fourth house after every fifth street in a township. In rural areas, it did consist in selecting members from every third of fifteen houses. With regard to theoretical

sampling, the sample was selected from a population of experts ranging from community leaders and social workers/activists to religious leaders and academics. Information from these experts was gathered through interviews. Each member of this population was selected on the basis of their body of work, and an interview request was sent to the selected members.

I used snowball sampling technique to select neglected orphans whose personal testimonies were used in film versions and those who were unwilling to be filmed. Even though the stories used in the different versions of the film were those of neglected adolescent orphans who agreed to be filmed, evidence from interviews with orphans who were not willing to be filmed was used to corroborate the information in the video clips that featured in the versions of the films. The selection criterion was that they were orphans between the ages of thirteen and seventeen years.

As submitted in the sections above, an understanding of the socio-structural processes that frame the social issue at hand was herein considered essential in establishing the target for the documentary's rhetorical address: After identifying categories of evidence that framed neglect of adolescent orphans, I analysed these categories for the cognitive biases that they could engender. In particular, I sought to understand how such biases closed off possibilities for action against neglect of adolescent orphans, and by extension, how they could subvert the documentary's rhetorical address. Such an understanding proved also essential in selecting and attuning documentary rhetorical principles used in my test film. It was equally essential in assessing the efficacy of the documentary rhetoric, particularly, its ability to mobilize support for neglected adolescent orphans.

Assessing the Rhetorical Efficacy of the Documentary

To measure the rhetorical efficacy of the documentary in mobilizing support for neglected adolescent orphans and to therefore assess the validity of the guiding theoretical framework, test screenings were held in communities where neglected adolescent orphans live. Audience members were requested to rate the impact of the documentary after each test screening. This was done through Summated (Likert-type) Scale tests. The advantage of these tests is that they are most reliable when measuring simultaneously the attitudes of respondents before and after the programme (Kothari 2004). In this study, Summated (Likert-type) Scale tests enabled us to

measure the viewers' attitude before and after the screening of the documentary in order to assess the impact that the documentary had on the change of attitude.

Because the aim of this study was to see if the documentary can generate immediate pledges to support neglected adolescent orphans, the Likert-type scale tests were constructed in such a way as to account for the correlation between the decision to make pledges and the documentary's rhetorical address. In addition, the scales needed to account for a comparison with other factors that may contribute to the pledging process. Since it was important that when pledges are made, they are not symbolic but can be materialized by active participation in the solution to the problem of these orphans, we only requested consent form signatures from respondents who were ready to take part in a fight against this issue in whatever way they deemed possible.

The following chapters 2, 3 and 4 discuss the findings of my research. I begin with an exploration of public narratives that sustain inaction against the neglect of adolescent orphans. I shed light on the cognitive biases which these narratives generate, and I discuss their potential impact on the documentary's rhetorical address. I pay particular attention to social cultural underpinning of these public narratives, as well as to the manner in which identified cognitive biases close off possibilities of action against the neglect of adolescent orphans. In chapter 3, I examine specific rhetorical principles used by documentarists inclined to social change. I pay particular attention to *context-sensitive* rhetorical principles that resonate with the historical, socio-cultural contexts that frame neglect of adolescent orphans. My focus is thus limited to rhetorical principles that show potential subvert the public narratives discussed in Chapter 2. But my emphasis is on their potential to inform rhetorical strategies that can undermine cognitive inertia stemming from the proven usefulness of previously held views. In every case, I define strategies which I have used to overcome the challenges of applying each principle in my film, *Forsaken*, for my purpose. Chapter 4 tests out and develops the examined rhetorical principles by reframing them from an Africanist perspective. In this chapter, I provide details of how the making of the film, *Forsaken*, was used as a research tool to test theories. I go on to show how the findings of the research contributed to the narrative approach of *Forsaken.* The chapter concludes with the findings of test screenings that were conducted to evaluate my *Forsaken'*s ability to generate pledges to help resolve the issue of the neglect of adolescent orphans in South African communities.

Ethical Considerations

Because my research involved vulnerable children, the university's Ethics Committee put together a list of criteria that I needed to comply with in order to receive clearance to conduct research. Of note was the stipulation that I had to approach the participants (neglected adolescent orphans) in the company of adult community members known to the orphans. This was very hard to comply with because neglected adolescent orphans were completely estranged from their communities. I did comply with that by using care workers and/or teachers with whom the orphans had been in contact or familiar. Those whom I selected were informed about the nature of my research, the research methods I was using and, in particular, the implications of filming the interviews. I then worked with them as consenting assistants who also helped as interpreters. With their assistance, I went on to explain the aim and the nature of my research to the main research participants – neglected adolescent orphans. During the information sharing phase, I detailed potential implications of their participation, more especially, their willingness to be filmed. In compliance with the conditions of the Ethics Committee, I gave the participating neglected adolescent orphans the option to remain anonymous. Since my research entailed their personal testimonies, which had the potential to rekindle the hurt related to their losses, I was required to interview willing participants in the presence of a social worker qualified to handle traumatic experiences. Before the interviews, the social worker reviewed the questions and suggested the best approach to the interviews, during which she had the right to object to any questions, and where need be, to stop the interview if it went detrimental to the emotional wellbeing of these orphaned adolescents.

After complying with the requirements of the Ethics Committee, I sought and obtained permission from the provincial offices of the Department of Social Development which stipulated that the resultant film was not to be used for any commercial purpose. In all cases, requesting permission from the Department of Social Development entailed submitting evidence of my registration as a doctoral candidate, the research proposal already approved by the faculty, and an Ethics Clearance Certificate from the University's Ethics Committee. Because the interviews were filmed, I had to seek consent for the inclusion of the filmed material in the documentary film. This meant enumerating all people who will have access to the filmed material, emphasizing that the participants' right to refuse to be filmed. Hence, the orphans

depicted in the test-screening film are those who consented to being filmed and had no objections to the fact that their images, likeness, voices and stories were to be depicted in the film. (Please see information sheets, consent and ascent forms, Department of Social Development permission letters and the University's Ethics Clearance Certificate in the appendix).

Besides these external conditions set forth for my research, I had my personal conviction to conduct my research under the most dignifying conditions. This was mainly because the choice of this topic for my PhD was greatly influenced by my personal affinity to the cause of uplifting the disenfranchised, which is a situation I have experienced. So I plunged into my research with a commitment to dignifying my research participants and protect them against all likely unethical research practices. After discovering the social injury that marked their living conditions, my commitment turned to an obligation to see to it that their participation in the research was constructive: that it contributed to their healing and not inflict further injury. As such, even though this was not stipulated by the University's Ethics Committee or the Department of Social Development, I opted to keep the technical crew minimal. During the interviews, the camera operators and sound recordists were present only during the rigging and de-rigging of equipment for the interviews. This was to ensure the comfort of the participants, as well as to negate potential voyeuristic propensities by on-looking crew members. The only moments when camera operators directly filmed these orphans were during the filming of the observation sessions that did not require any dialog lines or did not entail any private activity by the film participants. Even so, the social worker on set conducted debriefing sessions with all participants at the end of all the interviews and observation filming.

Also, after editing the first sequence, from various interviews, which was subsequently used as evidentiary stimulus in focus group discussions, we screened the sequence to the participants for their approval. This practice aimed to ensure the depicted adolescent orphans felt represented accurately enough to safeguard their dignity. For example, one of the boys felt embarrassed by a shot that revealed his teary eyes and requested the shot to be deleted. We removed the shot from the sequence and, in his presence, deleted it from the source footage.

CHAPTER TWO

Socio-Structural Underpinning of Neglect of Adolescent Orphans in South African Communities

Introduction

In Philosophy, action theory concerns the distinction between things that happen to a person and things that one does or makes happen (Bobro 2014). Here, the concept of 'sufficient reason' has been subject to interpretations that are pertinent to my study. According to Marc Bobro, 'sufficient reason' rests on the view that everything must have a sufficient reason to explain why it is as it is. While some action theory philosophers assume a similar position, others maintain that the idea of cause as a sufficient reason for action is mistaken. Of note is Alicia Juarrero (2014) who argues that 'cause', as 'reason' for action, cannot monitor a process and guide it to completion. It means that cause initiates action but other forces must sustain it, which implies that for something to be and *continue* to be, it must possess some internal property that allows it to sustain its existence over time. For my purposes, this view is very important. Taken etymologically, sufficiency connotes non-finality and, with regard to action, non-continuity: although there might be sufficient reason to explain a certain state of affairs, that such reason is sufficient does not exclude the possibility of *other* reasons that can explain why something is the way it is. In the context of my research, this means that every social problem will have a sufficient reason to be as it is, but there may be other factors that continue to sustain it beyond its causation. Accordingly, *neglect* of adolescent orphans must have its cause(s) and possibly other factors that sustain its prevalence. Since neglect is an attitude based on values and volition, my undertaking to address this issue cannot overlook any disposition for neglect; nor can it ignore the ends and forces that inform any sense of value associated with that disposition. This is essential in order to uncover evidence that can motivate a search for durable solutions to this social problem. In my view, the strongest evidence will therefore be that which unequivocally shows the forces and value systems that close off possibilities for remedial action against it.

To mobilise a search for solutions to any social problem, the documentarist's essential role is that of advocacy. Like advocates, documentarists hope they will persuade members of the jury and/or the presiding judge to accept such evidence as a warrant for action against the issue at hand. Unlike advocates, however, documentarists face different challenges: members of the jury and the judge are but one, i.e. a highly heterogeneous audience, with no special or common training in how to read and interpret evidence presented by the documentarist, and make a favourable judgement for the documentary's case. They have no prescribed ethical obligation to make judgement of any particular standard; they are not answerable to anyone else but their own conscience. Also, a documentary's address must pave a way through a congestion of opposing narratives; it must take into account the fact that the documentary's address will be subjected to heuristics – cognitive shortcuts or rules of thumb – on which humans rely to generate judgement and make complex decisions (Kahneman & Tversky 1974; Gravett 2017).

As interpreted by Willem Gravett (2017), these heuristics enable humans to reach conclusions without having to consider all the relevant information, relying, instead, on a limited set of cues, which leads to errors of judgement known to decision science as 'cognitive biases'. These biases constitute a huge hurdle which the documentary's rhetorical address must subvert if it is to be effective. For my purposes, the most challenging of them will be the 'confirmation bias' – an unwitting selective tendency to miss, ignore or dismiss evidence that contradicts pre-existing beliefs, preconceptions, and hypotheses (Nickerson 1998; Gravett 2017).

Since the documentary addresses audiences who come with a set of preconceptions, in the case where the documentary challenges these preconceptions, it stands to be negatively confronted by counter narratives fuelled by confirmation biases. So, to expect the documentary to be an effective intervention tool in a social issue is to expect of it to compete and unseat such narratives in the minds of the audience. Considering that these narratives are subject to the socio-cultural hierarchical conditioning of human society, I posit that the more a counter-narrative is associated with people highly ranked on the hierarchical social order, the harder it is to be challenged; the deeper it is entrenched, the harder it is to unseat.

In this chapter, I explore such narratives in relation to the neglect of adolescent orphans, I shed light on the confirmation biases which these narratives generate, and I discuss their potential

impact on the documentary's rhetorical address. I unearth these narratives from previous scholarship. I then go on to present and discus my empirical findings on the social cultural underpinning of these counter-narratives. The discussion will focus on how examined confirmation biases close off possibilities of actions against the neglect of adolescent orphans, and thereby sustain it.

At this moment it is important to remind the reader that 'socio-cultural structures' refer to contextual factors that frame a particular social issue, the power relations that sustain it, and/or the configuration of interests which such relations serve. I wish also to iterate that socio-cultural structures are useful to this study because they encompass processes that can open up or close off possibilities for social action. In this section, I report on the findings of my empirical study in three communities: Alexandra, Johannesburg; Bram Fisher, Soweto; and Qwaqwa, Free State. While there were many of these structures found, I chose to discuss those that present an immediate, but not so obvious, hurdle to the documentary's rhetorical principles. I note that those that were excluded (for examples, personal temperament, family background, absence of fathers and its corollary failure to protect/guide the youth) were not in any sense contradictory to those that are included. I have listed the selected socio-cultural structures in a descending order of frequency and of their potential ability to subvert the documentary's rhetorical address. For each category, I offer a symptomatic interpretation where I seek to highlight narratives that underpin justifications for inaction against the neglect of adolescent orphans. My interpretation is symptomatic because it primarily zooms in on the not-so-obvious narratives that reveal embedded yet unacknowledged attitudes that frame various discourses around adolescent orphans. These include: trivialisation of adolescent orphanhood, a systemic erosion of empathy, an arbitrary sense of incapacity, an ambivalent spirit of community, and the feeling that it is someone else's job to care for neglected adolescent orphans.

Trivialisation of Adolescent Orphanhood

As of 2005, South Africa legally recognised a child-headed household – a household where all members of the family are children younger than eighteen years – as an *independent* family form and a *protective* measure. The legal framework for such recognition was, among others, to ensure the provisions of social services, adult supervision and the protection of property rights

(Sloth-Nielsen 2005). This piece of legislation was immediately condemned by scholars among whom Couzens and Zaal (2009) found it contravening children's rights to survival and development; Sloth-Nielsen saw it as exposing these children to acute marginalisation, exploitative practices and loss of their childhood. This study extends on this critique. It argues that such legislation amounts to a condensation of the figure of the child by conferring to it the ability to manage matters beyond its actual capacity. Drawing also on the body of literature which skims over the issue of adolescent orphans' neglect, what follows is evidence of a conflation that trivialises the challenges of adolescent orphans.

To begin with, let us consider Hanneretha Kruger's (2014) article, "The Legal Recognition of Child-Headed Households: Is our Focus Where it Should Be?" Here, Kruger discusses Mentjies & Giese's (2006) findings of their quantitative research in which they question the singular focus on orphanhood in the HIV/AIDS discourse. Mentjies & Giese's findings were that "a singular focus on orphanhood informs government policy and practice, and obscures the true vulnerability of children in general, particularly children living in poverty" (Mentjies & Giese, cited in Kruger 2014. p 127). Kruger's discussion of these findings is aimed at determining whether more recent quantitative studies confirm Mentjies & Giese's findings, which turn out to be the case. But what is important for us, here, are the points that Kruger highlights in her discussion, in particular, her contention about the 'the lack of clear definitions'.

Referencing Mentjies & Giese, Kruger rightly agrees with the view that international definitions of the term orphan do not correspond with the popular understanding of the concept. For Kruger, differentiating between half-orphans (children that have lost one parent) and double-orphans (those who lost both parents) is crucial in order to understand the social dimensions of the issue and shape an appropriate response. According to Mentjies & Giese, Kruger reports, this calls for an attentive use of the definitions in order to properly understand the nature and the scale of the tragedy. At face value, this point is indeed consistent with the approach that my study espouses: breaking away from totalising approaches to social issues. I indeed agree with the view that international definitions should not be *slavishly* adopted to explain issues of South African orphans. But unlike Mentjies & Giese and Kruger, I posit that the distinction between the national and the international is still not specific enough to address the issues of orphans in South Africa, in particular, adolescent orphans, most of whom live in child-headed households. There

is a need to index socio-culturally specific conditions which frame this issue as they appear in the communities where we find these orphans. In addition to that, more distinctions ought to be made to accommodate different needs for different categories of orphans.
This is because different age groups and social demographics present different needs that demand specific interventions to be resolved. It is indeed commendable that resources should be available to all vulnerable children. It is even more so that no special category should be favoured for help. But for this to be possible, categories of vulnerable children must be distinguished, and the needs for each category indexed, and category-specific interventions put in place. For, everything else being equal, each category presents different demands. Hence, Kruger and Mentjies & Giese's views seem therefore condescending and, at times, reductive.

Consider, for examples, these statements: that 57% of all children in child-headed households are older than fifteen; that *only* 8% of children living in child-headed households are double orphans and that the majority of children who were orphaned were living with relatives. In converse, these statements mean that 43% of all children in child-headed households are younger than fifteen; and a number of children who were orphaned were not living with relatives. Also, that *only* 8% of children living in child-headed households are double orphans implies that is a negligible number. All these statements are made in defence of the position that "children living in poverty-stricken communities are all vulnerable and government and sponsors that address the needs of orphans, at the exclusion of other children, are inappropriate" (Mentjies & Giese, cited in Kruger 2014; p131).

Here we have an example of a confirmation bias in the sense that the plight of the orphans are implicitly portrayed as 'not as alarming as they should be' just to defend yet another case of vulnerable children. Read in conjunction with the view that confirmation bias will lead one to interpret evidence in favour of one's view, this bias does not only rely on inappropriate evidence, but it also creates a subliminal counter-narrative that stands to reinforce justification for inaction by careless readers. Sadly, it conceptually belittles, without reducing, the plight of orphans.
For a civic intervention documentary, this is a considerable hurdle because its causation is held high on the social hierarchy: scholarly work published in a peer reviewed journal, which implies that it was approved by highly respected academics for publication. For a naïve reader, this stands to reinforce intuitive ideas that frame aversion to take part in initiatives to address the

issues of orphans. In conjunction with the fact that works which focus on *neglected* adolescent orphans are not frequent, it can also signify that this issue is of little importance or not worth the effort, thereby creating a cognitive bias according to which if academics and legislation do not treat such an issue with priority, then there is no sufficient reason for the general public to care. In a hierarchical society such as ours, this constitutes a powerful counter-narrative which our film, *Forsaken* (Mahoro Semege 2019), must subvert if it is to effect meaningful intervention into this social issue. But it must do so through a rhetorical address that challenges additional counter-narratives that can arise from other socio-cultural structures such the ones I discuss below.

A systemic erosion of empathy

My research participants acknowledged the plight of adolescent orphans, but only a very few described it as an effect of *neglect*. Following further prompting, however, they agreed that the plight of adolescent orphans was indeed an effect of neglect. This happened after the discussion of Section 28 (1) (c) of the Constitution of South Africa, 1996, which stipulates that a child's parents and family are *primarily* responsible for caring and providing for the child. In cases where the parents and family fail or are unable to meet their obligations, the responsibility passes to the state. When parents die, families relinquish their responsibilities and the state fails – a case for orphaned adolescents who have to fend for themselves, forfeit their own need to be cared for as children and assume the roles of caring adults for their younger siblings – it was agreed to be a case of neglect. Then came the question as to why it was so! Most of the reasons given pointed to *systemic factors*: it was said that the current political, social and economic systems have created a climate that promotes individual interests over those of the social collective. In this climate, it was often said, all actions are geared *first and foremost* at the satisfaction of the individual's needs without which there is very little concern for the pain of others. This was then seen as a breeding ground for a culture of disconnection between people. One interviewee described it as a culture that subsists on the mantra that "life matters only if it is my life" (Hara 2017. Pers. comm. July 15). In such a context, she said, efforts to understand the other person are hindered, and, as a result, our ability to empathise with another person is eroded. This consequently goes to inform tolerance of inaction against the neglect of adolescent orphans.

For the care workers interviewed, inaction was ascribed to a perception that many orphaned adolescents do not go for help. Others do not even want to, it was said. I wish to use this observation to corroborate tolerance of inaction against neglect. In my interaction with orphaned adolescents, the majority confirmed that they, indeed, did not go for help, but it was not because they did not want help. For most of them it was because they did not know how/where to go for help. For others, it was because they did not feel comfortable to do so as it made them vulnerable, so their aversion to seeking help was a coping mechanism against imagined possibility of being hurt. Why would they imagine such a possibility? The answer lies in the systemic erosion of empathy and a diminished sense of civic duty exacerbated by interpersonal disconnection. In my view, any distance between people connotes aversion of a possible danger that could be physical, emotional or psychological – real or imagined. So when neighbours keep their distance from orphaned adolescents, such fear becomes real for the orphans, making it hard for them to approach their neighbours for help and/or direction. At the same time, the lack of initiatives by neighbours offering their assistance to orphaned adolescents connotes an underpinning aversion to inconvenience in the form of additional responsibility. In either case, a sense of empathy is eroded; inaction against neglect of adolescent orphans is tolerated and the situation normalised.

The normalisation of inaction at this time in history presents a substantial challenge to our documentary's purpose of mobilising the same public to divert its attention to someone else's interest – someone they do not understand. The fact that inaction is neither a condemnable position according to any systemic code, nor a laudable virtue makes it a treacherous and problematic cultural construct to challenge. First of all, for the documentary to subvert it, it would need to codify it as a transgression despite the fact that it is not systemically codified as such. But for that to be effective, I am convinced, one ought to highlight the socio-cultural thought patterns that frame the transgression. In our case, that means, instead of linking the practice to individuals, the documentary must highlight the systemic factors that make it inevitable. For example, we could show how a capitalistic system harnesses thoughts that normalise human degradation and exploitation, which in turn renders people subconsciously hostile to interconnectedness. Since audiences respond to events in a film using cognitive activities pertinent to the ways they do to similar situations in their real worlds (Bordwell 2010),

this then amounts to an impediment to creating empathy for the individuals depicted in a documentary.

In film theory, mainly psychoanalytic theory, concepts such as identification, suture, and character engagement are all predicated on eliciting empathy for the film characters, or certain individuals portrayed in a documentary film, which is considered one of the determining factors for the success of any film. Conversely, anything that stands to block empathy becomes a significant problem that can hinder a film's affective address. In our case, this can amount to resistance to act against the neglect of adolescent orphans. To address the perceived impediment that a systemic erosion of empathy can be to documentary film, especially where thought patterns and behaviour tend toward interpersonal disconnection, the documentary's rhetorical address should heed the need to unify its participants and its audiences. It can benefit the film to put forth a strong suggestion that if a system dictates thought patterns that can be a source of injury to some members of the community, then the most effective way to escape that fate is to free oneself from the grip of such thoughts. The suggestion ought also to show that such an escape is possible.

Focusing on the *systemic* erosion of empathy has many advantages for a civic intervention documentary: it situates the problem in the broader context of the public sphere, thereby opening up possibilities to question deeply entrenched values to which members of society subscribe. More importantly, it presents an opportunity to reveal the repercussions of the pain caused by a social issue. This is possible by highlighting socio-cultural structures capable of fuelling various but equally injurious social processes which can physically affect *anyone* in the same socio-cultural context. In this way, the wounds of a social problem become perceptible not only in the forms experienced by the documentary participants but also in the possibility of recombinant forms of injury that can affect audience members who inhabit the same environment. Hence in *Forsaken's* narrative treatment, it will be crucial to show the underpinning of an eroded sense of empathy, as well as its broader effects, in particular those to which every member of our society is susceptible. I view such a treatment as an effective set-up to foreground the value of interconnectedness and thereby harness the understanding of adolescent orphans which, in my view, should increase the possibilities for an empathetic response that can translate into constructive action.

It is someone else's job

While examining the link between service providers and community actors, certain governmental bodies and NGOs were known to provide services to orphans but, according to many research participants, there was no known systematic link between the service providers and communities. In the strongest sense, the exchange of information about how communities can add values to the services provided by governmental bodies and NGOs was described by some social activists as *non-existent*. Mamiki Ramaphakela, Executive Director of Gauteng Children's Right Committee, also suggested that even community members who would love to get involved found no platform through which to access information about their possible participation (Ramaphakela 2017. pers. comm. May 12). As a result, communities feel exonerated, giving rise to an attitude that it is exclusively the designated service providers' duty to deal with the issues of adolescent orphans. So strong is this feeling that people will not even take the initiative to go out and seek information. Even stronger is inaction against the plight of adolescent orphans on the grounds that it is someone else's job. This results in a diminished sense of responsibility towards adolescent orphans.

The implications of such a shift of responsibility are many. For one, it can lead to counter-narratives that are detrimental to a civic documentary. A case in point could be that if one is not informed about how one can contribute to ending neglect for adolescent orphans, especially since one is not legally bound to do so, then one's aversion to acting against it must be normal. In the absence of a policy to redress this issue, and particularly given the broken link between the service providers and the communities, it can create confirmation biases based on a mistaken tendency to justify one's aversion to one's responsibility in the solution of social problems. Such a tendency is likely to give rise to narratives of shifting blame and, conversely, create cognitive biases that there is nothing wrong with the community members' aversion to militating for an end to the plight of neglected adolescent orphans. The justification would be that if governmental agencies, with all their resources, cannot tackle this issue, the responsibility to arrest this issue is beyond the capacities of communities – a narrative that normalises a chronic avoidance of civic duty by individual members of communities. Any counter-narrative to that is therefore most likely to be resisted.

In the case of *Forsaken*, such resistance can undermine the film's rhetorical address, it can impede its potential reception, and it can generate adverse counter-narratives to exacerbate the plight of neglected adolescent orphans. This is most likely to happen if the film adopts a heavy didactic tone. My view of an effective way of avoiding such a condensation and its corollary detriment to the film's reception would be to engage audiences as members of a collective who have some right to feel responsible and get involved in the circumstances of the individuals portrayed in the documentary.

Emphasis on collectivity has the advantages of harnessing a strong feeling of communal belonging whereby the film can then generate collective bounds of interest between the documentary's subject and the audience. Thus, the film is better positioned to persuade its audiences that the plight of neglected adolescent orphans is *everyone*'s problem. I view this as an effective way of subverting the narrative of blame shifting, a potential way of rekindling a spirit of civic duty, and a conducive climate for the mobilisation of action against the neglect of adolescent orphans. Once such climate has been created, mobilisation for action would then benefit from further investment in a campaign to intensify a dialogue on the impacts of injurious socio-cultural structures on the wellbeing of adolescent orphans and of the social collective in general.

An endemic but arbitrary sense of incapacity

The neglected adolescent orphans I have come across during this research live in communities with high levels of poverty. This rationalises remarks that members of communities, who should be helping adolescent orphans, themselves need help, which creates a public narrative that dissolves the plight of neglected adolescent orphans into the plight of the whole community. As such, the priority for most people is to preserve themselves against the adverse conditions that plague their communities. The aversion to lending support to adolescent orphans appears justified. On closer analysis, however, such justification lacks a convincing rational explanation: it was not clear how aversion to helping neglected adolescent orphans significantly harnesses the helper's wellbeing; nor was it reasonably justifiable that helping neglected adolescent orphans would significantly exacerbate the helper's difficulty to survive. Here, we are faced with an endemic but arbitrary narrative of incapacity often attributed to the lack of monetary resources.

In this context, money is not seen as an enabler but rather as the only way to help. Consequently, possibilities for supportive actions that do not require monetary contributions are closed off. For a film to mobilise audiences to think otherwise, it will require it not only to dispel the sense of incapacity, but also to highlight other possibilities for alternative actions, and how such actions are within the purview of community members, who may also be members of audiences. A social collective focus will be advantageous in that regard also: it can enable a stronger, unified, more effective social action through a cumulative effect of combined efforts, and it has the ability to encourage communal adoption of new points of view. The advantage is therefore that urges for self-preservation, in isolation, can be challenged by showing that through solidarity the wellbeing of a social collective can actually enhance the survival of its members, especially in communities with high levels of poverty.

To make such a rhetorical scheme relevant to the issue of the neglect of adolescent orphans, it will be important to incorporate a narrative that portrays adolescent orphans as individuated subjects who have aspirations that are linked to the wellbeing of the same social collective. In my case, this narrative treatment should aim to incite the audience to realise (1) that their involvement in the orphans' pursuits of their aspirations is an investment in a future of the present generation, and (2) that such an investment can take forms other than money.

This is indeed not to deny the usefulness of financial resources. It is rather an objection to the link between the lack of money and personal incapacity; it is an attack on thought patterns that degrade innate human capacities on the basis of a lack of financial resources.

An ambivalent spirit of community

Despite the proximity between community members, this research showed that the spirit of communal support remained relevant only during major gatherings such as weddings and funerals, and that a spirit of selfless concern and support for the wellbeing of neighbours was minimal in other contexts. Ambivalence seemed to dictate the level of communal engagement: on the one hand, one is drawn to commune with members of one's community; on the other hand, one is very aware of the limitations imposed on one by the demands for privacy which is a recognised legal right. This translates into uncertainty about the roles and extent to which community members can be seen to act in the best interest of one another. The result is a

received sense of caution that translates into a trend of *occasional* communal engagement which governs also the interaction between community members and neglected adolescent orphans.

Notwithstanding incidental acts of kindness towards adolescent orphans, this ambivalence gives life to a climate of disconnection similar to the one engendered by the systemic erosion of empathy, which I discussed earlier. But instead of connoting an aversion of a possible danger, it adds to it a climate of distrust which can have considerable implications for a civic intervention: people can develop an aversion to act against a social issue on the ground that the purposes of one's actions can be misconstrued; it can lead to misunderstanding of the real intention of those who initiate actions against social ills; in the case of *Forsaken,* it can even lead to a misunderstanding of neglected adolescent orphans. This can make it difficult to help them. It can breed tendencies to exclude them. It has the potential to sow bitter divisions in communities and thereby create an unfavourable environment for civic action against the plight of neglected adolescent orphans. This being the primary objective of our film, it will therefore be important that *Forsaken*'s rhetorical address heeds these concerns.

For one, the film needs to incorporate a subtext that highlights the larger forces that frame specific experiences of the orphans portrayed in the film; it would also do good to account for the consequences of these experiences. For my purposes, that will amount to demonstrating how an ambivalent spirit of community is a manifestation of culturally constructed narratives that provides entry into unknown social processes at work in the neglect of adolescent orphans in South African communities. That will then demand the film to show the effects of such processes. It could, for example, show how an occasional sense of communal engagement undermines possibilities for sustainable solutions to the plight of neglected adolescent orphans. It could also point to larger consequences that this situation can have outside the lives of these orphans. It is therefore my proposal that unless the film manages to forge an undeniable, unbreakable link between a social issue and the wellbeing of the social collective, a film's efforts to mobilise solutions to any social issues are more likely to have no effect.

Conclusion

The findings discussed in this chapter are presented as embodying the workings of socio-cultural processes that frame neglect of adolescent orphans in South African communities. However, my

focus has been on highlighting the embedded, subliminal narratives that these socio-cultural processes engender. In this way, I hoped to determine their likely implications on the effectiveness of a documentary's rhetorical address. For example, with regard to the trivialisation of adolescent orphanhood, it was shown that the plights of the orphans are portrayed as 'as not as alarming as they should be'. Because scholarly works are authored by highly respected academics who occupy a high position in a social hierarchy, I argued that such trivialisation, in the minds of naïve readers, can reinforce intuitive ideas that frame aversion to take part in initiatives to address the issues of neglected adolescent orphans. Concerning the systemic erosion of empathy, the implications were that inaction against neglect of adolescent orphans is tolerated, and the situation normalised. That 'it is someone else's job' was a narrative that I interpreted as capable of engendering cognitive biases that there is nothing wrong with the community members' aversion to militating for an end to the plight of neglected adolescent orphans. As to the endemic arbitrary sense of incapacity and the ambivalent spirit of community, the implications were respectively the closing off of actions that do not require monetary contributions, and a climate of distrust which created an unfavourable environment for civic intervention.

With regard to the aims of my film, a reflection on these implications pointed to the need for a rhetorical approach that foregrounds the wellbeing of the social collective, where, instead of portraying the plight of adolescent orphans as pain that affects them only, emphasis is put on the link between the plight of neglected adolescent orphans and the wellbeing of communities where we find these orphans. There was also a need to foreground collective efforts as the most effective ways of addressing this issue. Hence, the documentary's rhetorical principles I discuss in the following chapter were selected based on their ability to (1) contribute to the forging of that link and (2) to be attuned to a collective outlook. These two conditions also inform the narration and rhetorical strategies deployed in our film, *Forsaken*.

CHAPTER 3

Documentary Rhetorical Principles: Questions and Implications for Civic Intervention

Introduction

The distinguishing features between the documentary and fiction films that stand out, for me, are the modes and purposes of address for each type. Pertaining to the documentary, its mode of address finds a good justification in Gregory Curie's (2006) "Visible Traces" where he defines an ideal documentary as a narrative sustained by filmic images that represent *only* what they are of. This, for Curie, qualifies the images of an ideal documentary as *traces* which, according to Curie, can only represent something in the past and never anything in the future. In this conception of a documentary, he adds, meaning passes from images to narrative. To locate the meaning of the documentary's narrative in its images – traces of the real – has crucial implications for the documentary's mode of address: drawing on Donna Haraway's (1997) view that nothing comes without its world, we can infer that images which embody the meaning for a documentary's narrative will come with the history as well as the socio-cultural imprints of that which they are traces of. Because of the documentary's purposiveness – its intent to have the audience thoughtfully entertain the propositional content of the film and adopt a certain stance proposed by the documentary film (Carroll 2006) – its mode of address will often entail a critical engagement with actuality. But since actuality is accessible to all who inhabit it, such an engagement is justifiable if and only if there is something *invisible* within the familiar actuality that needs unveiling. As such, the documentary's mode of address will necessitate a strong rhetorical impetus to persuade audiences to notice and engage with the invisible presence in the familiar actuality.

In what follows, I examine specific rhetorical principles used by documentarists for such purposes. I pay particular attention to *context-sensitive* rhetorical principles that resonate with the historical, socio-cultural contexts that frame neglect of adolescent orphans. Since one of my research objectives is to determine how these principles can be socio-culturally attuned, and how this attuning can enable a documentary's rhetorical address to subvert socio-cultural structures

that frame inaction against the neglect of adolescent orphans, my focus is therefore limited, in scope, to rhetorical principles that show potential for inter-affectivity with specific socio-cultural processes in South African communities. They are accordingly the primary principles which informed the narration rhetorical strategies I have used in the practical component of my study – a civic documentary film herein referred to as *Forsaken.* Because of their evident complementarity, I have selected the principles of 'social injury', 'civic love', 'presumption of public relevance', 'futurity and hope', 'evidentiary editing', and of 'the discourse of sobriety".

Also these principles seem to present a direct response to the implications of the socio-cultural structures discussed in the in the previous chapter. In particular, the selected principles show the potential to subvert the identified narratives and their corollary attitudes. But on closer analysis, they reveal limitations vis-à-vis the identified narratives and their resultant cognitive biases. For me, this can be ascribed to the a-contextual framework through which most of these principles are presented. It is upon these limitations that I draw to formulate an *Africanist* framework of rhetorical strategies for my documentary.

To evaluate their utility for civic intervention, I examine these principles through a novel lens which I call the 'persuasive avowal and accommodation' lens. Through this lens, *avowal* conceives of persuasion as working on the premise that audiences will re-evaluate, to the extent of renouncing, their positions prior to a rhetorical address. For that to happen, I propose that a persuasive address must elicit the audiences' acknowledgement of and willingness to *accommodate* new regimes of meaning, which requires not only the re-examination of previously held world views, but also the acceptance of new ones. That means surmounting cognitive inertia that stems from the proven usefulness of previously held views. Hence, I propose the 'persuasive avowal and accommodation' lens as an ideal perspective from which to evaluate the persuasiveness of the documentary's rhetorical principles vis-à-vis deeply entrenched narratives sustained by *unchallenged* socio-cultural processes.

Throughout this chapter, I introduce selected *context-sensitive* rhetorical principles as theorised in previous studies. I then draw on the notion of 'persuasive avowal and accommodation' to discuss their possible implications for a civic intervention documentary film within the context of neglect of adolescent orphans. In every case, after highlighting how documentarists employ

each principle, I define strategies which I have used to overcome the challenges that come with the practical applicability of each principle in my film, *Forsaken*. Here, greater focus is on the inter-affectivity between the discussed rhetorical principles and socio-cultural structures that frame neglect for adolescent orphans in South African communities. The analysis is interpretive and the conclusions are *necessarily* hypothetical in order to form a basis for the fourth chapter in which I formulate an original framework of culturally attuned rhetorical principles of civic intervention documentary.

Social Injury as a Rhetorical Strategy

In *The Documentary: Politics, Emotion, Culture*, Belinda Smaill (2015) argues that the popular perception of the documentary in line with education, science, history and rational realism has never been adequate for the understanding of styles and themes of the documentary genre. Thence, she adopts an interdisciplinary framework underpinned by the notion that to fully understand the way documentaries circulate among different constituencies of viewers, the socio-historical worlds in which documentaries are embedded must be accounted for. For Smaill, there must be a need to grasp the particularity of historical contextualisation and its impact on textual production and circulation. This specificity is significant because it acknowledges the sociality of emotions and the fact that different moments and contexts produce different forms of prejudice and solidarity. Smaill's focus is on the connections between various emotions and politics – where the works of emotions are considered in respect to the specific historical, social and aesthetic features of the documentaries. Centering her analysis on eighteen documentary films, Smaill demonstrates how the documentary deploys such features to address the viewer-subject. Of importance, here, is the expression of 'social injury' as a rhetorical device for the documentary.

In Smaill's view, the expression of social injury is a rhetorical strategy that harnesses the emotion of pain and hurt. Here, perceived social injustices are articulated by the documentary as an injury which results from impaired access to social resources, which leads to exploitation, misrepresentation or exclusion of certain sectors of the community. In Smaill's account, this notion centres on the figure of the injured subject whose emotions are central to the performance of the self in the documentary. It encompasses a larger rhetorical economy based on perpetrator-

victim interplay, revealing how the social world is experienced as injurious to its members. Accordingly, the injured, Smaill notes, is the subject whose identity is articulated through a sense of exclusion from the established social order. Here, a key concept is *politicised identity* whose subjectivity arises from "historically specific developments and practices that have disturbed the relatively settled character of many populations and cultures" (Hall, cited in Smaill 2015; p.56). Hence, the experiences of the injured subject are narratively situated in the broader context of public sphere of social dispossession, pointing to *systemic problems* and not individual failings. As such, the rhetorical device demands that the documentary forwards the reconfiguration of the discourse: it demands that there be shifting of the terms through which social exclusion/exploitation/injury is produced, and so it shuns presenting pain as the reductive authentication of otherness.

The relationship between social injury and systems of power is a suggestion that, I think, no civic intervention documentarist should ignore. For it does not only ask of the documentarist to consider the social structures that must be examined and possibly subverted through the documentary's address, but it also implies that healing of social injury cannot be sufficiently attained without dismantling the systemic factors that sustain it. The implications of that is a rhetorical strategy that proposes indexing specific narratives that frame pernicious definitions of otherness, which will require going to the specificity of a socio-cultural system that frames social injury. This, in my view, presents fertile opportunities for mobilising sustainable solutions to social issues addressed in civic intervention documentaries.

I propose that such solutions would be maximised by understanding that to end the pain of social injury, the relation between pain and components of a social system needs to be indexed. But such indexing must serve the objective of facilitating change *in* socio-structural processes. To mobilise such change, a civic intervention documentary cannot ignore the reciprocity of influence between a system and its components. That means acknowledging that while any system has an overarching influence on the functional characteristics of its components, the inter-affectivity of a system's components have a strong bearing on the overall characteristics of any system. To mobilise for systemic change, the effectiveness of the rhetoric of social injury will therefore depend on its ability to effect change on the overarching system, as well as on its constituent components. This, I suggest, will find a better expression within a thorough

understanding of the contextual underpinning of a social issue. Without such an understanding, the rhetoric of social injury is more likely to be resisted.

In my case, resistance can stem from representing neglect of adolescent orphans as a systemic effect, without pinpointing the contextual underpinning of such neglect, or highlighting the manner in which its socio-cultural underpinning closes off possibilities of actions by individual members of the communities where these orphans live. In such a representation, resistance is most likely to be fuelled by the following: audiences may not understand their own potential to influence a system and may, therefore, feel incapacitated by the sheer power of an injurious system. They may also experience a sense of exoneration, feeling that it is a system's issue but not theirs and, therefore, resist all sense of responsibility towards change. This can be exacerbated if some audience members harbour feelings of being excluded by forces entrenched in the socio-political system of their time. For such audiences, a sense of exoneration is most likely to be based on their feeling of apathy towards a system to which they feel they do not belong. Unless change is conceived as benefitting such an audience, their commitment to systemic change is most likely to be very minimal. For them the reasons to act for a social cause are closed off.

However, mobilising systemic change by implicating all of a system's constituencies is likely to harness resistance to the documentary's address. For those who feel implicated, there are chances that a sense of guilt may induce superficial actions with no commitment to seeing the issue resolved but simply to save face. This becomes equivalent to the position of those who feel disconnected from a system and, *ipso facto,* consider their actions of little value due to their peripheral position to the system. Therein is the inadequacy of the social injury rhetorical schema: in either case, we end up with actions that cannot *sustain* systemic change.

To address this inadequacy and open up possibilities for action, *Forsaken* presents social injury from the perspective of 'ownership', a philosophical view that physical events and experiences such as pain belong privately to some sentient creature, and that all experiences and feelings represent things whose phenomenal aspects are to be understood in terms *of what they represent* (Tye 1999). My emphasis points to the view that foregrounding what pain represents, instead of who experiences it, opens up ways of interpellating audiences to own up to the pain experienced

by the documentary participants. Although neglect engenders private pain suffered by the documentary's participants who are essentially private individuals, implying that the audience cannot physically own their pain, *Forsaken* invites the audience to consider the effect of pain beyond a single individual who experiences it. It does not pretend that it is possible to make audiences experience physically the pain that plagues the documentary participants. On the contrary, it shows neglect of adolescent orphans as an injury sustained *from* social structures capable of fuelling various but equally injurious social processes which can physically affect *anyone* in the same socio-cultural context. In this way, social injury becomes plausible not only in the form of pain experienced by the documentary participants but also in the possibility of recombinant forms of injury that can affect audiences who inhabit the same environment.

The problem surfaces when the conditions that frame the documentary's issue are far removed from the reality of the audience. In the case of neglect of adolescent orphans, for example, that would amount to the audience's inability to identify with experiences of orphanhood. *Forsaken* addresses this problem by incorporating experiences of individuals who are not directly affected by the participants' predicament but who are, nevertheless, confronting neglect of adolescent orphans. These individuals have not experienced orphanhood in their lives but, because of their peculiar ways of thinking about the neglect of adolescent orphans, they understand the importance of their actions. *Forsaken* endorses their actions by locating them within a framework of the African rhetoric according to which human discourse and action are practices oriented towards what is good for the community and for the world (Asante 2005; Karenga 2008; Snider 2010). From here onward, I will refer to this rhetorical framework as the African rhetoric of communal commitment. In this framework, the film clearly maps these individuals' sense of awareness of the fact that the social injury suffered by adolescent orphans comes as a result of systemic structures with tremendous (often pernicious) power over solitary individuals. The film also highlights these individual's awareness of the effects of such power on the overall wellbeing of the social collective, thereby anchoring the film's argument that the injury suffered by neglected adolescent orphans is an injury to the social collective and will take a collective effort to heal.

This argument acknowledges cognitive biases: errors of judgement that stem from cognitive rules of thumb that humans use to reach conclusions by relying on a limited set of cues

(Kahneman & Tversky 1974; Gravett 2017). For my purposes, the argument seeks to engage biases that stem from socio-cultural processes that frame the neglect of adolescent orphans, in particular, in the often-cited impetus to self-preservation. The argument recognises the need for self-preservation but deplores the extent to which an irrational sense of self-preservation closes off possibilities for action against neglect of adolescent orphans. While some instances of inaction can enhance a person's self-preservation (for example, refraining from confrontation with an armed robber who threatens to kill you) irrationality is accounted for by ignorance of the fact that not all instances of inaction do enhance self-preservation. Nor does action jeopardise it. A case in point is an interview session where a community member wants nothing to do with adolescent orphans because he has his own problems to deal with. But when prompted to think and link his stance to the solution of his problems, he acknowledges that his aversion to help neglected orphans does not improve his situation in any significant way; nor would helping worsen it. *Forsaken* draws on this particular case to highlight the injurious effects of cognitive biases, as well as their socio-cultural *constructedness*.

Focusing on cognitive biases within the rhetoric of communal commitment has the advantages of removing the onus on individual causality to the injury, and of calling into question the collective trust in injurious socio-cultural processes. With these advantages comes the ease of promoting a collective commitment to healing the injury suffered by the documentary's participants, as well as a commitment to preventing such injury for future generations. Also, these advantages harness possibilities to elicit empathy towards the documentary participants. For that, I draw heavily on Montague's (2014) view that emotions are essentially experiential evaluative representations linked to *world-directed intentionality*. On this basis, I consider an audience's intention to view a documentary film on an issue such as the neglect of adolescent orphans as an indication of a world-directed intentionality which, on the one hand, signifies inter-personal connectivity to the collective and, on the other, a sense of an individual's indispensable contribution to a social collective.

I acknowledge the fact that some unruly emotions have a tendency to obscure their influence on actions (Ratcliffe 2014). When coupled with cognitive biases, they can even obscure and/or undermine one's sense of the worth of one's actions. This has the potential to exacerbate an individual's sense of disconnection from a social collective. Thus, the rhetoric of communal

commitment employs a strategy to tap into the audiences' intellectual emotions, in particular, those that motivate a person to have a sense that his/her activities are worthwhile not only for oneself but also for the community. As used in *Forsaken,* this rhetorical scheme privileges a sense of interpersonal concern as "an antidote to self-absorption associated with a pervasive sense of disconnection from other people" (Ratcliffe 2014. P. 75). It seeks to re-enforce people's perceptions of the values for their altruistic actions; it hopes to show the extent to which such actions can counter the suffering caused by a system to which we all belong.

In a *collective* rhetorical schema of social injury, I see other advantages for a civic intervention documentary film. First of all, by aligning a documentary's rhetorical address with audiences' perceptions of the values of their actions, we stand to override resistance caused by biases that are usually activated in defence against views that oppose one's own perceptions. So, to align the documentary's address with audiences' perceptions of the values of their actions minimises the sense of opposition which activates cognitive biases. Secondly, when one reveals alternative courses of actions as new opportunities for an improved version of one's perception of values for one's actions, we stand to harness a sense of interpersonal concern. This is most likely to enhance 'avowal' based on the perceptions of ourselves as inherently "good". As such, it presents possibilities of dissociating ourselves from a hurtful system. This, in my view, can engender a disposition to act altruistically as a validation of one's evaluative outlook on one's world. The danger is, however, a situation where one's action seems impotent vis-à-vis of an injurious system of power. Such feeling of impotence closes off a sense of agency, which in turn closes off commitment to act for another person. This is why *Forsaken*'s rhetorical address highlights the instrumentality of a collective participation in overcoming the forces that sustain the predicament facing many neglected adolescent orphans. For maximum impact, this address incorporates the rhetorical principle of 'civic love' which I wish, now, to explore.

The Rhetoric of Civic Love

In Western philosophy, the figure of Socrates is the most associated with dissent in the name of civic love. Smaill (2015) uses the 'civic love' term to describe Socrates's commitment to the avoidance of injustices. As applicable to the documentary, Smaill finds such a commitment in instances where documentarists show a desire to incite audiences to question deeply entrenched

articulations of power, using rhetorical strategies that cue the audience to dispute what they already know about a certain culture at a given moment in history. In Smaill's account, the rhetorical schema of 'civic love' positions the documentarist as having the civic devotion to caring for the social collective – a commitment that is marked by a mode of questioning and argumentation that manifest a deep attachment to the community.

In the true Socratic sense of irony, Smaill rightly observes that this rhetorical device runs the risk of distancing the filmmaker and the audience given that the intention of the ironist, although demonstrating an attachment to a community through advocating higher ideals, is based on elitist viewpoints that place him/her above the community. For Smaill, the documentary can overcome that through its performative act which must be read as expressive of an outcome of intention from an authorial subjectivity that has emotional investments in the public sphere. This, says Smaill, is possible (1) through the documentary's reflexive mode which employs strategies that undermine realism, and (2) by using a playful narrative construction of arguments that demonstrates loyalty to the social collective.

From a rhetorical standpoint, this device relies on the presupposition that by disputing articulations of power which represses the social collective, the audience will see the documentarist's sense of commitment to redressing injustices and consequently endorse or support the film's argument. It also implies that the expression of civic care will resonate as being in line with the public's best interest and thereby gain the audience's approval. On closer look, however, there are issues that must be addressed for this device to generate the persuasive power that it presupposes.

Notable is the issue of elitism which Smaill highlights, albeit insufficiently. That the documentary can overcome concerns of elitism through a performative act, which must be read as expressive of an outcome of intention, is not sufficient to negate elitism. It overlooks ontological concerns relatable to some of the concepts she uses, in particular, that of performativity which is not synonymous with disinterested care. Nor is it symbolic of selfless intention. Also, that such performativity expresses an outcome of intention does not negate the possibility that the authorial intention be fuelled by an elitist gaze. Moreover, the presupposition that the documentarist has an emotional investment in the public sphere, for public good, does

not unarguably translate into genuine civic commitment, regardless of whether the documentarist is a member of the community or not. That points to issues of sincerity and integrity.

The issue of sincerity pertains to the concern as to whether or not the documentarist's expression of civic love is a genuine manifestation of their devotion to the wellbeing of the community. This concern is very pertinent if the documentarist is a member of the same community as the documentary participants. The question in this case will be what the documentarist has done to prevent the issue from attaining the levels it has. This would then imply that the documentarist has to show his/her detachment from the articulation of power which s/he sets forth to dispute; s/he needs to present credentials that enable him/her to *minimise* suspicion of having a self-serving agenda. Emphasis on the word 'minimise' connotes my view that no intentional act can be free of a self-serving agenda: even when one's intention is fuelled by the need to serve a higher ideal outside oneself, there is always a self-gratification agenda in all free acts of will.

Accordingly, civic love, as a rhetorical schema, will suffer in the hands of a documentarist who foregrounds self-interest. This would be more so if the documentarist is not directly affected by the issues that affects the documentary's participants, particularly if s/he is foreign to the community from which the documentary's participants originate. For such a documentarist, there is bound to be suspicion of his/her motives, among which is the suspicion to exploit a subject for one's gain. This is something that I encountered while recruiting participants for my film, *Forsaken*. First, I was asked why, if I cannot speak the local language, people should consider my project as 'legit'. What, they insinuated, would stop me from disappearing after filming my participants. Also, in one of the focus groups, I received very little contribution, only to learn later that the majority of focus group participants did not feel comfortable to raise their concerns with a stranger, which I was to them. From these scenarios, I can accurately state that, for the rhetorical schema of civic love to generate its purported effects, the documentary need not only clear our suspicion of self-interested exploitation; it also needs to address questions of careful representation of the documentary's subjects and/or its subject matter, failure of which can be a documentary that the local community shuns.

To avoid the trap of a pernicious self-serving elitism, *Forsaken* elevates local voices above that of the filmmaker. My role is that of a catalyst, an enabler of a dialogue involving multiple voices

within the community where the documentary was filmed. The advantage of this approach is sincerity that comes from the clash between voices of the marginalised and those whose interests are safeguarded by the power relations that frame neglect of adolescent orphans. From this perspective, *Forsaken* foregrounds voices of the community that advocate ways of solving this social issue. I exercised care to present conflicting voices such that *in the clash of voices*, there is a potential of new meanings; and in the new meanings, a potential for persuasive avowal and accommodation.

Avowal is most likely to come from the realisation, by the audience, that voices foregrounded are those of the community members, particularly if these voices levitate around the wellbeing of the social collective at a *higher level*. For purposes of a civic intervention documentary, a higher level implies an existence at a level where solutions to social issues are evident, and where such solutions are within the purview of the social collective. Whether it encompasses dissent or not, foregrounding a social collective outlook has many advantages: it can avoid exacerbating the social issue which the civic intervention documentary is supposed to ameliorate; it has the potential to express civic love free of a paternalistic gaze; if successful, it has the ability to encourage communal adoption of new points of view. Even so, issues of integrity will still need to be addressed.

It is indeed as rare to imagine a revolution not premised on civic love, as it is highly improbable to distinguish documentaries that do not emanate from a place of civic love. If we consider the purposive nature of the documentary, the civic love rhetorical schema seems befitting the documentary genre. What needs to be therefore obvious is the extent to which documentarists harness the power of this device to make films that produce outcomes befitting civic love. In my view, this is a challenge that hinges on issues of integrity of action – undivided commitment to act for the advancement of humanity with an eye into the future. This relates to a question of how the filmmaker's commitment is perceived, not only in her capacity as a filmmaker but also as an individual. It also relates to questions of the principle's effectiveness: given the large number of social issues plaguing our communities, one wonders how effectively the civic-love rhetorical schema can indeed subvert repressive articulations of political as well as socio-cultural power relations. These issues, for me, stem from the facts that the civic love schema does not account for the audience's response vis-à-vis the subject matter, of its treatment or of the filmmaker's

point of view. This amounts to undermining the audience's capacity to oppose the documentary's argument; and with that, a remarkable limitation for the civic love rhetorical principle which is generally a question of integrity.

In *Forsaken*, the rhetoric of communal commitment, which I presented in the section above, is also used to overcome this limitation. Rather than foregrounding the concerns of the filmmaker as the one who cares for the community, *Forsaken* integrates civic love into a rhetorical schema that accounts for, and is informed by, explicit, ongoing *concerns* of the social collective. It underplays the expression of the filmmaker's voice in favour of voices that unequivocally represent perspectives that have epistemic roots in the communities of the film participants. To harness the rhetorical effectiveness of these voices, it becomes essential to integrate the principle of 'presumption of public relevance' (Chaney 1993; Nichols 2001; Sapino 2011), which I present here as a complementary approach to addressing other challenges related to the rhetorical principles of 'civic love' and 'social injury'. Within such a treatment, the filmmaker's integrity becomes of little concern as it gets dissolved in the vocality of local concerns about a local issue. As remarked by Haseenah Ebrahim (2019), the voices included in the documentary are still subject to the filmmaker's choice (Ebrahim 2019. Pers. Comm. 4 March). This is simply to say that the filmmaker's voice is relegated into the background.

Presumption of Public Relevance

According to David Chaney (1993), presumption of public relevance defines a cognitive state where the audience is engaged as members of a collective who have some right to feel responsible or involved in the circumstances of the individuals portrayed in the documentary. This view is echoed in Roberta Sapino's (2011) interpretation according to which presumption of public relevance entails a strong feeling of belonging to a community, giving the documentary the capacity to induce emotional effects in the viewers, based on the struggles depicted in the film.

As a documentary rhetorical device, 'presumption of public relevance' assumes a collective sense of interest between the documentary's subject and the audience. It relies on this sense of interest to generate emotional and intellectual responses from the documentary audience.

Through this device, the documentary acquires the ability to portray, and even produce, a subject with which audiences identify, in relation with themselves and the world they know. Based on the presumption of the audience's sensibility to the state of affairs portrayed in the documentary, and upon the supposition that the audience is bound to feeling a sense of responsibility to the individuals portrayed in the film, this principle implies that the documentary's rhetorical address will lead the audience to an alignment with the film's overarching argument. However, it remains to be known if such an alignment can lead to action against a social issue.

In a way, this connotes civic love, albeit from the audience's perspective: by having a right to feel responsible for the individuals portrayed in the film, the audience is placed in a position to care for the state of affairs in the film's world – one which they too inhabit. The collective sense of interest can thus be read as linked to the presumption that what has befallen the film's participant can also happen to the audience. Such a presumption presents fecund possibilities of instigating intent to challenge socio-cultural processes that fuel the predicament facing the film's participants. This makes 'presumption of public relevance' an appealing rhetorical device to my project, particularly because social problems are often sustained by social processes that serve the interest of certain articulations of power. Since every articulation of power has its own justification, which makes it inflexible in many cases, the task of challenging power relations that frame a social problem will be eased by the audience's presumption of relevance of the film's issue, whereby a sense of solidarity can culminate in instrumental action towards the solution of such an issue. That is likely to be the case with an audience that is sympathetic to the documentary's central issue, either because it is invested in the issue to a certain extent, or simply because of its commitment to seeing the issue in question resolved. For audiences who are not sympathetic to the social issue, questions of relevance and ownership are most likely to impede the effectiveness of the documentary's rhetorical address.

Concerning relevance, the problem is with an audience that feels untouchable by the happenstances depicted in the documentary and, therefore, feel little sense of responsibility to the individuals depicted in the film. For such an audience to assume a sense of commitment to seeing the issue resolved, the documentarist will have to convince them that even though they may feel that they are immune to the predicament of the film's participants, they are not immune to the social processes that frame that predicament.

Some strategies in the 'Social Injury' section will be useful in this case also. I mean, in particular, incorporating experiences of individuals who are not directly affected by the participants' predicament, but are nevertheless making a difference in addressing problems that follow the neglect of adolescent orphans. I also refer to the importance of the rhetoric of communal commitment. In addition, but specifically with regard to the challenge related to the presumption of public relevance, *Forsaken* foregrounds *temporality* of the issue of the neglect of adolescent orphans. It depicts the *present* state of this issue as evidence and/or symptom of a more pernicious form of it; it emphasises the inevitability of such a predicament beyond the present. Both outlooks serve as warning that if the situation is not redressed, the same fate becomes inescapable for many. This warning is necessary to reach audience members who limit the issue of neglect of adolescent orphans to a personal level, thereby ignoring its repercussion on the wellbeing of communities.

Hence, to harness the possibility that such an audience will own up to the film's predicament and indeed feel responsible for the film's participants, *Forsaken* incorporates the same warning in the inevitability of a common fate that links the impact of orphan neglect on the wellbeing of a social collective. It forges links between the inaction against neglect and its future impact on the creation of sustainable futures. It forges another link between the current predicament and its past manifestations that were ignored. In this way, the uncertainty of the future gets expressed as a manifestation of issues left unattended in the present – an idea that is further emphasized through the principle of 'futurity and hope'.

Futurity and Hope

'Futurity and hope' is a rhetorical principle that positions the figure of the child as a discursive screen onto which a society's fears and hopes are projected. It acknowledges the fact that children lack social status even though they are protected by the discourse of rights (Smaill 2015). For rhetorical purposes, 'futurity and hope' adopts a narrative structure that circulates hope alongside uncertainty – uncertainty which the figure of the child embodies, and thereby becomes an ideal site for the exploration of the emotion of uncertainty, not only about the fate of the child but also of the social collective. According to Smaill, this casts the child as subject

agent either by representing it as acted on by social forces or by being involved in a narrative that explores adult aspirations embodied in the child, making the child the potent objectification of the time passing.

With regard to the narrative trajectory, the rhetoric of futurity and hope relies on the exploration of how children are affected by and meet the demands of the adult world. For Smaill, this is to foreground the uncertainty of the outcome, thereby generating a great need to see the change that images of children symbolically promise to deliver.

From a discursive point of view, this device does not isolate success and failure from systemic and cultural issues of social advantages and disadvantages. As Smaill puts it, social difference provides the terms through which aspirations and agency are constructed and used to frame the documentary performance. But the difficulty arises when the representation maintains the child as the object of fantasy caught in the trap of vulnerability. This, in Smaill's view, disempowers the child; it erases its status as agent but confirms adult power at the detriment of the point of view of children, undermining their creative and imaginative expressions. In its stead, suggests Smaill, it should incorporate a narrative that foregrounds the activity of children as individuated subjects beyond singular representations of suffering – not simply caught in the survival time or denied a clear assertion of futurity. Hence, Smaill suggests that *affective forces in the lives of the children* must be located in the children to open up the possibility that even without a clear pathway out of poverty, the children may represent the opportunity to explore a space of lived experience that offers hope in the face of the refusal of material mobility and futurity.

By emphasising expressions of aspirations amid uncertainty, the rhetoric of 'futurity and hope' is as potent a device as it is rhetorically problematic. Its potency is in its expression of aspirations as a means of overcoming social difference and harnessing a sense of certainty in a social environment where harmony regulates the social collective. In this sense, the rhetorical device disputes social structures that foster injurious social differences from which possibility of escaping become uncertain. This becomes problematic when we consider that, from a rhetorical point of view, the child and its performativity in the film constitute a ploy to align audiences to the film's overarching argument: when the child's agency is emphasised, the child does runs the risk of coming out as if they have everything under control, and, therefore, needing no help. At

the same time, if they need help, the risk is that their agency is undermined and *ipso facto* complicating the very concept of futurity. In the latter instance, the child is conceived as having little impact on the creation of the future. Although the hopes of the future may be embodied in the child, the realisation of this hope remains linked to the future status of the child as an adult, and not necessarily the child of the future. In this set-up, the relation of the current child to the children of the future is not clearly defined.

I propose that we ought to relate the childhood state of the current adult to the child in the present in order to accurately link the child to a healthy social collective in the future. We ought to examine the vestiges of childhood in the adults of now. We ought to show how this bears on the health of the social collective, *now.* I view that approach as enabling us to reveal evidence that the present state of the child has a bearing on the future state of the social collective of children and adults alike. I emphasise the social collective to avoid the trap of individualism, which, for our purposes, runs the risks of presenting the child as an individual after his/her own gratification. The consequence of this is a dissipation of care for audience members who may see no potential gain in the child's success. Such an audience cannot understand the inter-subjectivity of the lived experience; nor can it configure the adult aspirations embodied in the child. In the eye of such an audience, ideas of futurity become individuated – linked to fortune of individuals, with little to do with the collective. How to get such an audience to see the child's aspirations as embodying favourable outcomes for the future of their communities is a challenge that I took care to address in *Forsaken.*

Firstly, as mentioned above, *Forsaken* emphasises temporality. Here, the children's aspirations are presented as resulting from a historical predicament that fuels social injustice, in our case, the neglect of adolescent orphans. Secondly, it juxtaposes the child's effort to overcome their predicament with the community's inaction. It thereby intentionally creates a correlation between the outcome of the children's initiatives and the community's lack of involvement. Through this narrative treatment, I envisage that the documentary will foreground the importance of action *in the now* but geared toward the future of the social collective. Hence, the rhetorical purpose is to incite the audience to realise that their involvement in the children's aspirations is an investment in a future of the present generation.

Juxtaposing the adolescent orphans' aspirations with hurdles that are sustained by the communities' inaction, is not only used to dispute social structures that frame neglect of the adolescent. It also seeks to harness the possibility of action from audience members. By focusing on the effects of collective inaction, seen through the orphans' life stories and in commentary by expert witnesses, the film argues that actions from members of the communities will not only maximise the orphans' chances for a better life, but they will also pave ways to public involvement in the lives of these orphans, presaging the eradication of this issue for future generations. The film therefore advances the view that inaction can be overcome by challenging social structures that frame neglect for adolescent orphans.

Structurally, the observation mode has been adopted to maximise the forward movement of the film's participants. In addition to the observational mode, various alternatives are presented including (1) interludes from non-orphaned adolescents' outlook on the possible outcomes of similar aspirations, and (2) a comparison of aspirations, which is necessary to show the importance of an adult's presence in the lives of all adolescents, orphaned or not. Through these interludes and comparisons, I hope to highlight the impacts of injurious social structures on the overall wellbeing of the social collective.

Because the film's objective is to mobilise resources for the care programmes for neglected adolescent orphans, the *structure* of the film's argument becomes crucial. All the rhetorical structures discussed above are, therefore, embedded in an overarching structure that foregrounds argumentation, and its logical link to specific socio-cultural conditions that frame the film's central issue. At the helm of this structure are the principles of 'evidentiary editing" and the 'discourse of sobriety" whose intersection reveals indispensable aspects of the documentary's rhetorical address. The discussion in the following section focuses on these aspects.

Evidentiary Editing and the Discourse of Sobriety

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, the documentary's purposive nature confers it a rhetorical impetus that is *essentially* more remarkable in the documentary than it is in the fiction film. This impetus is tied to the documentarist's intent to get the audience to thoughtfully entertain the propositional content of the film as *asserted* (Carroll 2006) and hopefully adopt the

stance proposed by the film. This becomes a principle that guides not only the narrative structure of the documentary but its editing style as well. Contrary to what is the case in fiction films, the documentary editor's decisions are not driven by the need to enhance dramatic impact, or by the urge to maximise viewing pleasure. They are, instead, underpinned by a commitment to rhetorical effectiveness: shots are selected, shaped and arranged such that they harness and emphasise the logical construction of the film's argumentation. In this style of editing, affirms Megan Cunningham (2005), the documentary editor's decisions are informed by a subtext that highlights the larger consequences of specific experiences portrayed in the film. Hence, the law of evidence becomes paramount to the documentary editing style. Other narration devices that constitute the documentary's formal composition become, in essence, tools to sustain the narrative logic. Elements such as the traditional voice-over narration, expert commentary and the use of social actors are therefore valued not for their dramatic, aesthetic or technical qualities but for the testimonies which they lend to the film's argumentation. This can also be said about the principle of the discourse of sobriety.

As conceived by Bill Nichols (1991), the discourse of sobriety refers to a discourse that associates the documentary with instrumental power: the ability to shape people's perception and their understanding of a historical world. Through such a discourse, says Nichols, the documentary defines its relation to the real as direct, immediate and transparent. For Jonathan Kahana (2008) and Sapino (2011), the discourse of sobriety confers to the documentary an authoritative agency that possesses knowledge, an artistically refined text that transmits it and an audience eager to receive it. In Haseenah Ebrahim's terms, such a discourse gives the documentary a level of thoughtfulness which implies a high degree of thoroughness and rigour, all of which contribute to the likelihood that the documentary's narrative will be taken seriously by audiences (Ebrahim 2017. Pers. comm. September 18). As is the case with evidentiary editing, the focus is not on the enhancement of dramatic impact; nor is it on viewing pleasure. It is, instead, underpinned by a commitment to the transmission and assimilation of knowledge about a condition in a world at a given moment in history.

The essay film genre is a good example of this concept. Premised on questioning and redefining received representational assumptions, as well as notions of truth and judgement within the complexity of experience (Corrigan 2011), the essay film leans towards intellectual reflections,

aiming to elicit *pragmatic* responses. It has little to do with the kind of pleasure responses associated with other dramatic genres.

For similar purposes, the principles of evidentiary editing and of the discourse of sobriety become very crucial to my project, particularly because both principles lend themselves to demonstrating "how embodied knowledge provides entry into social processes at work in a specific social context" (Nichols 2001; p.39). Unlike in continuity editing where the editor strives to assemble sequences of events that harness the plausibility of *the plot*, evidentiary editing emphasises an assembly of sonic as well as visual elements as *evidence* for the strength and validity of the argumentation.
In *Forsaken*, this is exemplified by an assembly of sounds and images to illuminate the pernicious effects of socio-cultural structures onto the subjectivities of neglected adolescent orphans in South Africa communities. With regard to the discourse of sobriety, it is exemplified by a rhetorical address that foregrounds fresh regimes of knowledge pertaining to articulations of power that sustain neglect of adolescent orphans.

To make bare such articulations of power in a manner that influences desired action is indeed the main objective of *Forsaken*. As the film examines the conditions that frame neglect of adolescent orphans, it argues for the eradication of it, and so the manner in which this argument is presented must lead to that. Accordingly, *Forsaken's* editing style privileges juxtaposition of sequences and of shots that have clashing content. For example, you will find shots of struggling adolescent orphans juxtaposed with shots of carefree affluent adolescents. In many instances, the juxtaposition is framed by experts' commentary on the predicament facing neglected adolescent orphans, and as the narrative progresses, the juxtaposition places more emphasis on the uncertainty of solutions, should the socio-cultural conditions that frame these orphans' predicament remain unchanged. Such juxtaposition takes on a hypothetical tone in order to draw attention to the extent to which change in the socio-cultural structures can affect the certainty of outcomes for the orphans' aspirations.

To enhance the argument's logical validity and serve as evidence for the need for action, the film privileges communal segments of testimonies from expert witnesses who comprise academics, religious leaders, social workers and involved adults. These testimonies serve to harness a

positive attitude towards the film participants while teasing the impacts of social structures on the orphans' struggles. They present insights into the communities of the individuals depicted in the film; they consistently show the systemic characteristics of social structures, and their common objective is to demonstrate the susceptibility of these structures to a collective human action. Their proposition is therefore that neglect of adolescent orphans can be redressed through a collective mobilisation for change in socio-cultural structures. This proposition is very much behind the centrality of evidentiary editing in *Forsaken*.

Conclusion

The rhetorical principles examined in this chapter have been selected on the bases of their relevance in the context of the neglect of adolescent orphans in South African communities. During my examination, it became clear that these principles presented opportunities which were fraught with contextual challenges that cannot be ignored. This chapter has, therefore, focused on strategies to address the identified challenges. For examples, for challenges pertaining to the principle of 'social injury', I have opted for a strategy of 'ownership' which propounds an outlook of social injury as plausible not only in the form of pain experienced by the documentary participants, but also in its recombinant forms that can be equally, if not more, injurious to the wellbeing of a social collective. To maximise this strategy's potential, it became essential to incorporate the African rhetoric of communal commitment which proves also relevant to the principle of 'civic love' whose limitation called for a strategy that foregrounds interpersonal concern, and gives primacy to local voices over that of the filmmaker. For the other principles, I adapted strategies that range from presenting neglect of adolescent orphans as evidence and/or symptoms of more pernicious forms of it, to emphasising uncertainty of the future as a manifestation of issues left unattended in the present.

To take full advantage of the opportunities presented by each principle and to overcome their respective limitations, it became evident that the examined principles require reframing if they are to be effective in the context of my film. The required reframing entails cultural attuning that takes into account the specificity of the historical-cum-cultural context of the film's central issue. Such an attuning is seen as necessary for the filmmaker to give agency to the inhabitants of the film's world, including those that are not depicted in the film. It must be noted that the proposed

attuning was informed by the observation that the identified deterrents for the examined principles have been located *often* within the socio-cultural underpinning of the film's central issue. This chapter, therefore, lays the foundation for the cultural attuning of the documentary rhetorical principles, which will form the core of the fourth chapter.

At this point, the adopted strategies and the proposed cultural attuning of rhetorical principles are considered favourable to enhancing the generation of pledges of support for neglected adolescent orphans. Their effectiveness can, however, be determined only after the test screenings of the film. As such, they remain necessarily hypothetical and their envisioned outcomes, speculative.

CHAPTER 4

Reframing Documentary Rhetorical Principles: A Practical Example in *Forsaken*

Introduction

In the introduction to this thesis I highlighted, as a research problem, the fact that previous studies that support claims of the documentary's ability to effect social change were riddled with gaps pertaining to validity, and theoretical accuracy. In particular, I problematized the accuracy of claims that the documentary can effect social change in the absence of concrete evidence that the documentary films used in these studies had been produced with the sole intent of effecting social change in a specific predetermined way. I contended that, in the absence of such evidence, these claims were prone to being arbitrary; they could not stand against an unwitting selective tendency to interpret evidence in favour of one's view, at the exclusion of evidence contentious to one's interest. So, I argued that previous claims of how the documentary can address a social problem remained speculative, and so were the narration strategies that were said to maximize the documentary's service in social change. In my contention, I noted that these claims were based on theoretical approaches that were predominantly culturally undefined, a-historical and a-contextual.

I wish to re-iterate, here, that even though I take issues with the culturally undefined theoretical approaches of previous studies, I did not dispute the possibilities that the documentary can effect social change. I did, however, question the validity of such claims in the absence of any accompanying investigation of socio-cultural processes that frame social issues, knowing that such processes constitute a medium within which possibilities for social action, and consequently for social change, can be opened up or closed down (Johnson *et al* 2004). I, nonetheless, remained faithful to the essence of *praxis*, requiring that one take one's own and other people's theories seriously enough "to seek to act and live by them, letting what is learnt in *the living* also test and develop the theories" (Johnson *et al* 2004, p. 92 – *my emphasis*).

My theory is, as it was, that accounts of the documentary's ability to effect social change, with regard to a particular social issue, cannot overlook the inter-affectivity between the documentary's rhetorical principles and the socio-cultural processes which frame that social issue. Neither should they ignore the multidimensionality of the spectator's experience of the documentary film. While maintaining propositions that the documentary can have an impact on social issues, I then undertook to test out and develop these theories by reframing them from an Africanist perspective.

This chapter provides an introduction to such a perspective. It comprises four sections: in the first section, I give the biographies of all the participants, focusing on the importance of their participation in the film. In the second section, I provide details of how the making of the film, *Forsaken*, was used as a research tool to test theories. The third section looks at how the findings of the research contributed to the narrative approach of *Forsaken,* on the one hand, and the reframing of the documentary film on the other hand. In the last Section, I report the findings of the test screenings that were conducted to determine the effectiveness of (1) the narrative approach used in *Forsaken* and, consequently, (2) the documentary ability to generate pledges to help address the challenges of neglected adolescent orphans in South African communities.

Biographies of Film Participants

The individuals listed below include adolescent orphans, expert witnesses, activists and community members who defy the odds to lend hand to adolescent orphans. They all expressed their consent to be filmed for inclusion in the documentary. With regards to adolescent orphans, I have opted to focus on two families in order to keep the production logistics manageable and to explore the participants' situations in greater depth and focus. In order to show the breadth of the issue and that the selected participants are not isolated cases, the film will feature b-roll footage of other adolescent orphans. These are not included on this list. Nor are the community members – a choice that was dictated by space limitations.

Mamorwa Mokoena (17 years)

Orphaned at 16 years old and abandoned by her late mother's relatives because they did not get along with her (the late mother's) drunkenness, Mamorwa has ever since become the mother to

her two younger sisters aged 14 and 5 years respectively. Based in Qwaqwa, Free State, and doing grade 12, she is torn between her determination to go to university and her need to find work so she can continue to take care of hr sisters. Because of the exclusion that she has experienced both in the community and at school, her last source of pride, she says, is her faith in God even though she fails to understand why her own church does not help in her situation. And her faith is that God will keep her healthy enough to pursue her university studies without having to be away from her siblings, especially the younger one.

Given her living conditions, Mamorwa's story is an embodiment of resilience against dire adversity; it is evidence of endless possibilities for a positive human spirit. At the same time, it is a story of undeserved misfortune, of ignored social injury and of a society that turns its back on its own. Mamorwa's story is indeed a great weapon to challenge almost all the socio-cultural structures identified in the results above: her exclusion represents social injury and erosion of civic love and her aspirations exemplify futurity and hope against the arbitrary sense of endemic incapacity of her community. But can she do it alone, without support? What future is there for her siblings? These are the questions that we hope to answer on our observational journey with Mamorwa.

Themba Ncube (18 years)

Based in Alexandra, Johannesburg, Themba lives with, and takes care of, his 16-year old younger brother. They were orphaned three years before we met them and have been living on their own ever since. Themba's is a story of how debilitating the neglect of adolescent orphans can be: having been forced to become a parent unexpectedly, he could not cope with demands of his domestic duties and school work. He lost focus, failed grade 10 and contemplated quitting school, until last year when a neighbour volunteered to help with his school works which resulted in a pass to grade 11.

To manage the stress and the strains of having to take care of his brother, Themba trains to be the best baseball player in his team. His baseball skills, he said, become his primary source of a good self-esteem and a means to healing the pain that he endures in his situation. In his aspirations to becoming the greatest baseball player, he hopes to make his helpful neighbour proud. It is indeed the relationship between Themba and his good neighbour that made us select him: we hope it

will allow us to show how a simple act such as volunteering to help with homework can make a big difference in the lives of neglected adolescent orphans.

Themba's situation is exacerbated by a documentation problem. Born in South Africa to a South African farther and a Zimbabwean mother, both of whom passed on before sorting out the boys' identity issues, Themba's greatest fear is that he and his brother, who are both going to grade 11 this year, might not even write the matric exams, especially since all their attempts to secure themselves identity documents have yielded no positive result so far. Unable to access social grant, he had to partition their shack and share it with somebody who pays R200 monthly rent – their only source of income.

Through Themba's story, the film will challenge the arbitrary sense of incapacity described in the results section above. By focusing on Themba's passion for baseball which, according to him, gives him a sense of belonging, *Forsaken* will highlight different forms of valuable support that community members can give to these orphans.

Mr Tobias van den Bergh

Based on QwaQwa campus, Tobias van den Bergh is a lecturer in the Psychology Department at the University of the Free State. He is a registered Community Counselling Psychologist. His research interests include human development and risk taking behaviours amongst the youth. To strengthen *Forsaken*'s argument that the lack of support for adolescent orphans exposes them to many risks, Mr van den Bergh's insights on trauma and how it contributes to risk taking behaviour is indispensable for our project. The most interesting is his ability to link such behaviours to identity formation, which will allow the film to show the injurious nature of the public narratives that frame inaction against the neglect of adolescent orphans.

Dr. Mambwe Kasese-Hara

A senior lecturer at the School of Community and Human development at the University of the Witwatersrand, Dr Hara's research portfolio encompasses developmental and health psychology, race and cultural issues. Her contribution to this project will be primarily to shed light on developmental stages of adolescent orphans; how their loss of parents affects it, and how the burden of having to grow up fast shapes their identities. All these are areas that Dr. Hara has

covered in her 15 years of research in these and other related matters. Through her testimony, we hope to show the long-lasting effects of the neglect of adolescent orphans in South African communities. In our initial interview, Dr. Hara is of the view that the level of misunderstanding that governs the interaction between adolescent orphans is a contributing factor to the neglect of these orphans. Hence, in conjunction with the orphans' life stories, we also hope to highlight crucial information that can facilitate a better understanding of these children.

Bishop Paul Verryn

Bishop Verryn is a progressive theologian and an ordained minister of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. A very controversial figure in the church, he is referred to by his peers as a 'misfit bishop' (Verryn 2017; pers. comm. September 16), because of his staunch criticism of the hypocrisy of the church. Working mostly with the poor and the marginalised, Bishop Verryn is convinced that no structure is better positioned to serve neglected orphans than the church. But because of its obsession with looks and money, he says, the church has strayed from its mandate of serving the needy. Drawing particularly on the plight of neglected adolescent orphans in rural communities, Bishop Verryn speaks strongly about the failures of the church while providing useful insights about how the church and communities at large can effectively contribute to alleviating these orphans' plight. These are views that our film need to support its effort to mobilise its audiences to adopt new ways of looking at this social issue.

Ms Mamiki Ramaphakela

She is the Executive Director of the Gauteng Children's Rights Community. A Social worker by profession, Ms Ramaphakela's focus has been on children welfare in a developmental spectrum. She has worked with vulnerable children for over twenty-five years now, both in the Free State and Gauteng, and hence she possesses valuable experiential information that our film project needed: she has seen initiatives start and fail; she has worked on the revival of some, and, often adopting unconventional methods of intervention, she has re-instituted the then defunct Gauteng Children's Right Committee – all for the sake of the rights of all children. Her contribution will encompass commentary on the rights of neglected adolescent orphans, how these rights get violated and how they can be protected. Her testimony will therefore give us a solid ground upon which to base our film's argument regarding the lack of adequate care programmes for adolescent orphans.

Mr Godfrey Masongane

Having grown up in a child-headed household, Mr Masongane bears testimony that with limited material resources, a group of well-intentioned individuals can indeed make a difference against the neglect of adolescent orphans in our communities. *Forsaken* needs such a testimony to challenge public narratives that emanate from the socio-cultural construct known here-referred to as an endemic arbitrary sense of incapacity, often associated with monetary constraints. Without any funding, Mr Masongane started *Rohtle Sonke* in 2002 – a community-based volunteer care centre to service youth-headed households in Bram Fishersville, Soweto. His initial mission was simply to 'check on' these families, show them that they matter and listen to their problem and then solve those which they could and report others to the relevant authority. To this day, funding has remained a problem but the organisation lives on its members' commitment to serve when and where they can. Mr Masongane's testimony will serve as evidence of the diversity of resources that, beside money, can help to alleviate the plight of neglected adolescent orphans.

Ms Lerato Motloko

For Ms Motloko, we have become too relaxed with regard to social ills. So, regardless of her limited resources, she has opened her home and heart to Themba and his brother, helping them with school work, and when she can, buying them groceries and clothes. By coming in these boys' lives, she realised the severity of their problems and tried, in vain, to canvas community members to help. *She* did not give up; she continues doing what she can as long as it eases the Ncube boys' load. It is indeed paying off: because of her input, Themba, who contemplated quitting school after failing grade 10, has improved his school performance. Through her voice, the film hopes to show that this issue is not beyond our means; we can effectively rise up against it.

Theorisation through Practice

Faithfull to the Grounded Theory research method, my study's aim was to generate a theory from empirical data. Because I sought to generate a culturally and contextually delimited theory of the documentary's ability to provide a potent conduit to the solution of a social issue, the need to delimit the type of data to be collected became essential. It became equally essential to avail, to research participants, evidence of neglect of adolescent orphans in their communities. Hence, the

initial stage of my research involved filming the life stories of orphaned adolescents who head households without any support or guidance from their communities. Of the 7 orphaned adolescents who took part in the research, three did not object to having their personal life stories filmed. So we filmed the willing three, focusing on their daily struggles, coping mechanisms, and resilience. The footage was edited into a shorter, five-minute-long sequence that was then used as evidentiary stimulus in the interviews with orphaned adolescents who were not willing to be filmed.

These interview sessions started with screenings of the edited sequence. Orphaned adolescents, who viewed the sequence, were then interviewed with the aim of making a rapport between their life stories and the lives of those who were filmed and presented in the edited sequence. Data collected in these interviews were then analysed for the most recurrent evidence in terms of struggles, coping mechanisms, and a sense of resilience common to all the five orphaned adolescents. The final analysis revealed that most orphaned adolescents showed tendencies to isolate themselves from their respective communities: for most of them, this was a mechanism used to avoid having to disclose their loss and the resultant feelings of hurt which they considered inadequate in a sense that it made them feel susceptible to mockery. This isolation was therefore a protective shield against potential victimisation. Second to isolation were recurrent urges to commit suicide. Four, out of five, participants considered suicide as a possible way of ending the pain of their unbearable parenting loads. For the same reasons, the two girls, unlike the boys, confessed having contemplated prostitution as an alternative to suicide. Apart from the isolation and in contradiction to the urges to commit suicide, a very subconscious sense of resilience was observed to be common among all the five participants. This was evident in the forms of dreams and aspirations for themselves and for their siblings. For examples, while Themba aspires to play college baseball in the USA to sustain himself and his younger brother, Mamorwa's wish is to see her two siblings grow old enough to take care of themselves.

Following the un-filmed interviews with orphaned adolescents, the film sequence was then re-edited to a version that included only the above-mentioned recurrent forms of evidence. This version was then used as an evidentiary stimulus for subsequent focus group sessions with community members. One focus group session was held in each of the three communities where the orphaned adolescents who participated in the research lived: Alexandra and Braamfisherville,

Soweto in Johannesburg, Gauteng; and in Mabonela Village, Qwaqwa, in the Free State. The sessions started with the screening of the latest version of the sequence. This was followed by discussions that focused on public narratives and views held by group participants on the status quo established in the screened sequence. The discussion hinged, in particular, on the communities' lack of support for and, by extension, neglect of adolescent orphans. From the findings of these sessions, which form the core of the third chapter of this thesis, the second version of the film sequence was re-edited to include outstanding views that stood in stark contrast to the orphaned adolescents' predicaments and as expressed justifications for the neglect of adolescent orphans. In particular, the new sequence foregrounded views of community members who had had prior involvement in the lives of these orphans. On the one hand, a point in case is that of a Mabonela Village resident, Bernice Mojabeng. On two occasions, she took in two adolescent orphans, but in both occasions the adolescent orphans proved very difficult to live with and, in her terms, unappreciative of the sacrifices she had made to take them in. On the other hand, the sequence foregrounded an Alexandra resident, Lerato, whose involvement in one of the boys' life proved very beneficial to him and his younger brother.

The views of community members were integrated in the film sequence, which resulted in the third version of the sequence that then served as a reference for subsequent filmed interviews with experts in human development, social work and pastoral care. The aims of these interviews were to find explanations for all the views foregrounded in the third version of the sequence. Identified explanations were then incorporated into a twenty-minute long film sequence that was then restructured and polished for the final test screenings to assess the effectiveness of the film's narrative approach. This version was carefully assembled through an Africanist perspective, which entailed a reframing of the documentary's rhetorical principles discussed in Chapter 3.

I must, however, note that, as the sequence evolved, it proved essential to shorten its length so as to avoid redundancy of shots, if not of sequences. Although a longer film would befit a version for theatrical exhibition, for the sake of my study, it proved counter-productive: for most focus group participants, the length of the sessions was a major determinant of their participation, with a majority of participants unwilling to take part in focus group sessions longer than one hour. In fact, as time went by in the two-hour sessions, I observed a decrease in participation. Because the screening sessions involved Likert scale tests followed by discussions, it proved reasonable to

have a sequence that would not stretch the duration of the focus group test sessions considerably. 20 minutes proved therefore a reasonable length.

As it stands, the final test film only incorporates elements of the narrative strategies that, in my view, *best* illustrate the culturally inclined reframing of the rhetorical principles discussed in the previous chapters. It is for this reason that I clearly stated in the introduction to the previous chapter that my conclusions therein were speculative. So, some of the strategies presented there were not included in the final film. This does not, however, mean that elements of the narrative strategies included in the final film are in any way more effective than those that were left out. Nor does it mean that the latter are of lower importance. It was a conscious choice based on the demands of the research activities and partly necessitated by the scopic limitations of my study.

One such limitation was the rigour and depth required at the doctoral level of study: after careful deliberation, it dawned on me that a longer film would have reduced the depth to which I took my discussions and analysis of the test screening results. In addition, a shorter film had an advantage of demonstrating with better precision a concert of the rhetorical principles culturally reframed for the film: in a short film, especially because the selected principles used are in proximity, the extent to which these principles work together can be determined with better precision. So, as I discuss the findings of the test screenings in the final section of this chapter, I do so without making any assumptions that the screening of a longer film would have resulted in a greater, equal or lower impact on the viewer. That being said, I now wish to present the strategy I used to culturally reframe the rhetorical principles which I adopted for the narrative approach in *Forsaken.*

Film as Dialogue: Revisiting *Kawaida* Philosophy

As conceived by Maulana Karenga (2008), *Kawaida* philosophy centres on Afrocentric thoughts that encourage ongoing dialogue with African culture. As a philosophy of life and struggle, it seeks understanding of fundamental issues that confront African people and humanity in general. In Alfred Snider's (2010) interpretation, *Kawaida* has always been concerned with affirming human dignity and enhancing the life of the people. This is of great importance to my purposes because the commitment to enhance the lives of neglected orphaned adolescents informed not

only the aim of my research but also the impetus to revisit, here, the *Kawaida* philosophy. I am particularly drawn to its disposition to encourage ongoing dialogue with African cultures: in asking questions to African cultures, it first acknowledges that part of the fundamental issues that face African people stem from within African cultures. Of course this does not imply that external forces have no bearing on issues that African people face. It is a known fact that vestiges of colonialism continue to cripple Africa's struggles for self-determination. By looking inward African cultures, I posit that there is greater chance to acknowledge the agency of Africans in retracing where one went wrong. In my view, this puts one in a better position to correct the initial mistaken steps to a solution. The inward looking stance and the dialogical commitment of the Kawaida philosophy are indeed what informed the 'film as dialogue' narrative approach of my film *Forsaken*.

Because this film was also used a research tool, I have privileged the definition of dialogue as articulated by Richard Johnson and colleagues (2004). For these scholars, dialogue in research entails returning text to context and to our own positionalities, and interrogating our responses to the texts within the contexts. Accordingly, dialogue involves grasping the nature of differences and forms of power that circulate around the self and the other. For Johnson and colleagues, such dialogue is in a sense internal. For me, it is continuous with the inward looking stance of *Kawaida* philosophy. It is this sense of dialogue that I have adopted in reframing the documentary's rhetorical principles which form the rhetorical strategies and narrative approach of my film.

The first element of *Kawaida* that is foregrounded in *Forsaken* is a focus on community through a communal narrative treatment which permeates the entire film through a consistent, deliberate use of close-ups of talking heads, the absence of re-enactment and a minimal use of voice-over narration. The film opens with Lerato, an Alexandra resident, inviting the viewer to imagine a grade-ten child that has no parent or nothing in his name. This shot is followed by a one-minute montage of five close-up shots of orphaned adolescents speaking about their situations. The first part of this montage ends with Themba's close-up shot where he describes his urges to go and stand on the streets to beg for money for food.

Placing these shots in a short montage was intended to present these orphaned adolescents as a proximal community of people caught in a common predicament. Themba's shot is followed by a medium close-up shot of Bishop Paul Verryn of the Southern African Methodist Church. While Themba's shot faces the left, the Bishop Verryn's faces the right-hand side of the screen. This position and the similar size of these shots were a result of an editing choice which I made to simulate a conversation and emphasise the proximity between the two speakers; for what the bishop says is a commentary on what was said in that montage:

> *"If we can do this to our children, we must clearly know that we are on path to destruction – self destruction"*.

The choice of this shot, in particular, was because of the Bishop's uses of the plural pronoun 'we' and adjective 'our'. While deploring the predicament that has befallen these children, the bishop can be seen and heard foregrounding a sense of belonging to a community comprising him, the orphaned adolescents and the imagined viewers. My decision to cut to the bishop's shot at this moment in the film was informed by the inward-looking stance of *Kawaida* philosophy. Rather than placing blame on other people, the bishop's usage of 'we' and 'our' places him in the same discursive plane as the viewers and the children that spoke before him. It begs a self-reflexive response from the viewer. For the same purposes, the use of these words is again heard in the final shot of the film where Mambwe Hara, a human development psychologist, makes an appeal to an imagined audience saying:

> "W*e need a statement saying we will help our youth*…"

Placing Hara's shot at the end of the film was intended to invite viewers to own up and feel responsible for the struggles of the boys and girls depicted in the film. Similar to Bishop Verryn's warning that we are on a path to self-destruction, the strategic placement of the shots where the uses of 'we' and 'our' are prominent was also to position the predicament of the neglected adolescents as a social injury. They therefore functioned to bring the viewers in close proximity with that social injury, thereby challenging them to imagine their own position in relation to it.

The dialogic elements of the Kawaida philosophy are encapsulated in *Forsaken'*s cinematic structure and in the shot – reverse shot treatment. The entire film sequence is made up of four chapters: in the first chapter, the prologue, we have unidentified adolescent orphans and commentators speak of the severity of the neglect of adolescent orphans. I intentionally did not use title cards. This was to bring attention to the issue and not the people. In the second chapter, the orphans introduce themselves by names and the others are identified through title cards. Again, this is to place all the participants on the same discursive plane, with the camera favouring no one: all the speakers are filmed in medium close-ups.

In this sequence, we have a four-minute sequence of the film's main participants, Mamorwa and Themba, speaking of their daily struggles in the households. The sequence is followed by a one-minute montage of expert witnesses providing explanation of what such hardship does to any adolescent, and its possible long term effects on the orphans' identity formation, overall wellbeing as well as their psychological, physical and social development. This treatment places the expert witnesses as willing advocates for the orphans. And the orphans' testimonies serve as evidence for the experts' defence of the adolescent orphans' cases.

It is important to note that in the speeches, these experts are not addressing the orphans but an imagined audience. For example, following Mambwe Hara's comment that it can be traumatising for a child who suddenly has to become an adult, Mamiki Ramaphakela insinuates that, at that age, the child should be allowed to behave and think like child. Then we cut to Tobias Van Den Berg saying that being flung into a situation where a child has to suddenly become an adult can have negative impacts on the child's ability to cope in society. After this montage of experts, we cut back to the orphans confirming what has been suggested by the experts. Here, the shots selected are those in which the orphans speak about their isolation and reluctance to form new relations. This choice was to problematize the distance between the orphans and the communities and, by extension, with the viewers. However, to avoid demonising the viewers and community members, we cut to the third chapter: a montage of community members speaking about how difficult it is to deal with their adopted adolescent orphans. At this point, although community members present their justifications for inaction, their voices are used to invite the viewers to think about the relationship between the orphans and their communities. I push this line of thought by emphasising the empathetic positions of community members: I foreground voices of

community members who had previously offered help to adolescent orphans but faced problems dealing with the orphans. This treatment seeks to link inaction to experiences fraught with misunderstanding on both parts: the orphans' misconstrue their benefactors' commitment to them and the community members misconstrue the orphans' behaviours as resistance to being helped.

The dialogic markers in this conversation are that, in most of the shots, we have speeches in the second person, giving the impression of speaking *to* someone – in this sense the viewers. Although the tone is self-reflexive, the equal cinematic treatment of all the speakers, who are all filmed in close-up, emphasises the communal atmosphere. And in the difference in views about the issue, we have a dialogic marker that serves to draw the viewer's attention to the issue and not orphans. This is strategy I used to say that an issue to one is an issue to all. My intention was to provoke the viewers to re-imagine their positions in relation to this issue, so when they think of helping, it should not be about helping an individual. It should be about healing our communities.

This provocation is reiterated in the final chapter which takes a rather belligerent tone. In this chapter, I have juxtaposed shots of different speakers commending the orphans' resilience with shots of orphans expressing their rather negative views on society as well as their despair. This is a deliberate plea that something must be done! It is to say that despite the orphans' resilience, a helping hand can go along away. Faithful to the *Kawaida* philosophy, this is to position the viewer as responsible for safeguarding the dignity of neglected adolescent orphans, and the wellbeing of the social collective. This was the predominant motivation for adopting the "film as dialogue" narrative approach.

I have adopted this approach on my assumption that it will resonate well with the primary target audience for my film, namely mature adult black males and females. Although this assumption rests on my own bias against received paradigms of cinematic narration, it is motivated by the need to challenge these paradigms. With little variation in shot sizes and camera angles, I sought to encapsulate a communal spirit of unity and equality. I did that consciously, and aware of pervasive documentary modes (cinema vérité and dramatic mode for examples) that owe their existence to the need to disparage the so-called talking head tradition. I reverted to this tradition as homage to the African oral tradition of which the centre is the spoken word. I drew upon my

personal belief that all actions are, for good or otherwise and in principle, manifestations of the spoken word: rulers and leaders do what they do through spoken words; major decisions are expressed through spoken words; our identities are best expressed in spoken words. Whether this is applicable to film viewing or will lead viewers to respond as I have predicted are the questions I wish to address in the next section.

Assessing the Rhetorical Effectiveness of *Forsaken*

Making a documentary as part of my thesis was premised on my view that to ascertain the documentary's ability to effect social change, one must make a documentary with a specific form of social change as a predetermined end in sight. One must also test it for that. I made such a film and tested it. For the test, I targeted and approached forty-five potential audience members that fitted the profile of the film's primary target audience. The audience members were selected carefully through an initial conversation on the neglect of adolescent orphans, the purpose of which was to determine the participants' prior involvement with adolescent orphans. I excluded those who had familial relations to orphaned adolescents, people who worked with orphans of any category and those who expressed a high level of empathy and/or knowledge about the predicament of orphaned adolescents who live on their own. As such, I included mostly those who had very little knowledge about the predicaments of orphaned adolescents. After this preliminary elimination, I ended up with thirty-nine qualifying participants who showed up at the test screenings held respectively in Inanda and Parkgate townships in Kwazulu Natal.

The need to carry out the test screenings in these communities was two-fold: firstly, these communities were reported by the local offices of the department of social development as having a high number of child-headed households. Secondly I deliberately sought to remove the familial setting from the audience as a measure to curb manipulation through actual proximity between audience members and the orphaned adolescents depicted in the film. I reasoned that pledges from audience members who are geographically remote from the communities where the films participants live would be much more informative than those of audience members in communities where the depicted orphans lived. To another extent, this was also a data gathering initiative for comparison purposes: since the test screening film included voices of community members speaking of the experiences with orphaned adolescents, I sought a synthetic audience

response that did not necessarily come from a feeling of geographical proximity with the participants, but rather because of the proximity with the social issue explored in the film.

I limited the number of viewers to fifteen people per screening session. This was so as to accommodate a comfortable discussion after the screening. This resulted in three screenings held in the evenings at two schools in these areas. I introduced each screening with a short welcome speech in which I laid out the purpose of the session and alerted them to the test and the discussions which will follow the screening. All cell phones were switched off and we watched the film. After each screening my assistants distributed the test questionnaires (Figure: 4.1). I explained the purpose of the test and the viewers responded to the questions.

In order to ascertain the effectiveness of the film, I needed to establish clearly a measure of change. Hence the Likert type test was selected. The first four questions tested the respondents' attitude prior to the test. Questions 5 to 8 tested the effectiveness of the film's exposition, while questions 9 to 11 tested the viewers' emotional response to the film. Question 12 was used to measure the viewer's willingness to pledge. However, to ascertain the extent to which the film triggered the pledges, the following questions asked if the pledges were triggered by what the viewers saw in the film (Q 13) or by their personal background (Q14). The last question tested their commitment to honouring the pledges made. To ensure that the pledges are not symbolical, I then issued the consent forms and asked for signatures from only those who made pledges and were willing to honour their pledges by concrete actions. Of all the participants who attended the screenings, only one did not sign the consent form. The response of this participant was therefore not taken into consideration for analysis.

Title of Film : *Forsaken*
Director : *Mahoro Semege*
Main Participants : *Mamorwa Mokoena*
Themba Ncube

SECTION I

The following questions will test your response to the film you have just watched. Please answer to them as truthfully as you possibly can by ticking the box that best describes your position.

1. I have always been concerned about the wellbeing of orphaned adolescents who look after their siblings.

I strongly agree	I agree	Not Sure	Some how	Not at all

2. I have always understood the situation of orphans who are the heads of households

I strongly agree	I agree	Not Sure	Some how	Not at all

3. I have always felt a strong need to intervene in the lives of adolescent orphans who head households

I strongly agree	I agree	Not Sure	Some how	Not at all

4. I have spent a lot of time thinking about how to help adolescent orphans who head households.

I strongly agree	I agree	Not Sure	Some how	Not at all

5. The film has made me feel responsible for the wellbeing of adolescent orphans who head households.

I strongly agree	I agree	Not Sure	Some how	Not at all

6. The film has made me understand better the struggles of adolescent orphans who head households.

I strongly agree	I agree	Not Sure	Some how	Not at all

7. The film has revealed important information that makes me want to take part in helping adolescent orphans who head households.

I strongly agree	I agree	Not Sure	Some how	Not at all

8. The film has challenged me to do something.

I strongly agree	I agree	I can't tell	Some how	Not at all

9. The film has drawn me emotionally closer to adolescent orphans who head households.

I strongly agree	I agree	Some how	I can't tell	Not at all

10. After watching the film, I care more about the wellbeing of adolescent orphans who head households.

I strongly agree	I agree	Some how	I can't tell	Not at all

11. After watching the film **I am more** determined to act on behalf of adolescent orphans who head households

I strongly agree	I agree	Some how	I can't tell	Not at all

12. I pledge to take part by helping adolescent orphans who head households in any way I possibly can.

Definitely yes	Yes	Not Sure	Maybe	Not at all

13. My pledge has been triggered by what I saw in the film.

I strongly agree	I agree	Some how	I can't tell	Not at all

14. My pledge was triggered by my faith, cultural belief and my personal background.

I strongly agree	I agree	Some how	I can't tell	Not at all

15. I commit to live up to my pledge and act accordingly when the time comes.

Definitely yes	Yes	Not Sure	Maybe	Not at all

SECTION II

If necessary, please provide comments or information about anything that was not addressed in a certain question. You can also use this section to comment on answers that you were not sure about.

Participant's Full Name

Participant's Signature

Date:

Figure: 4.1. Screening Test Questionnaire

Below are the graphical representations of the results of the screening tests. For space and convenience, I used the following acronyms in the graphs:

NAO: Neglected adolescent orphans; BV: Before the viewing of the Film; AV: After the viewing of the film.

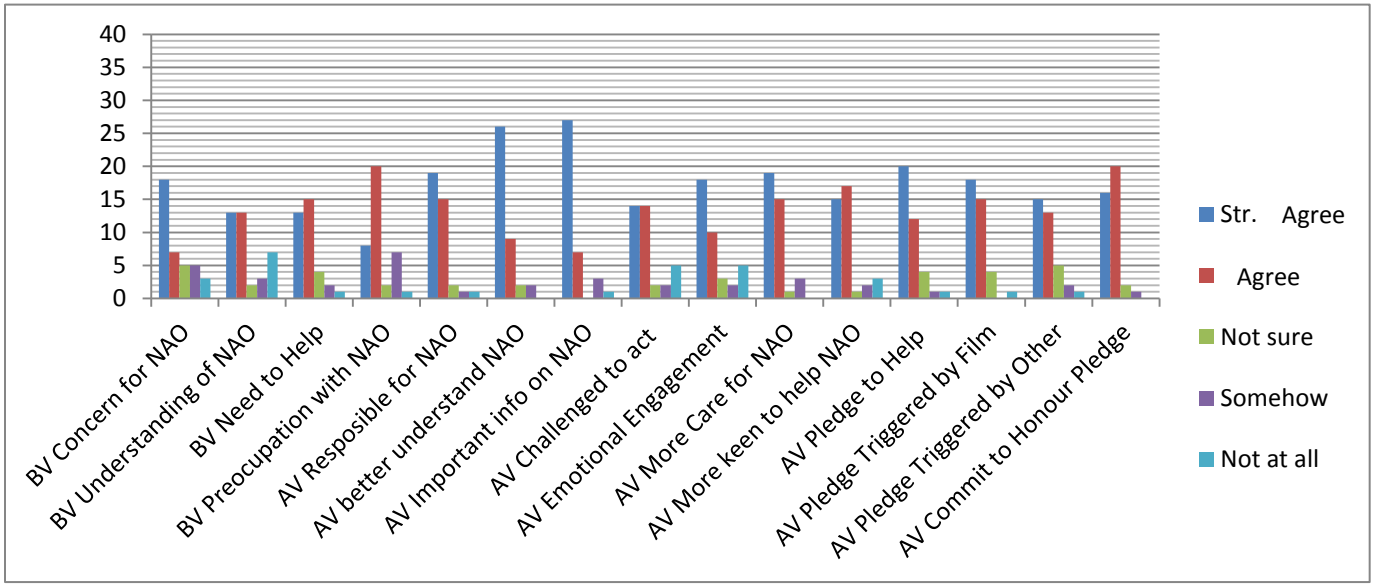


Fig: 4.2. Summative responses per question

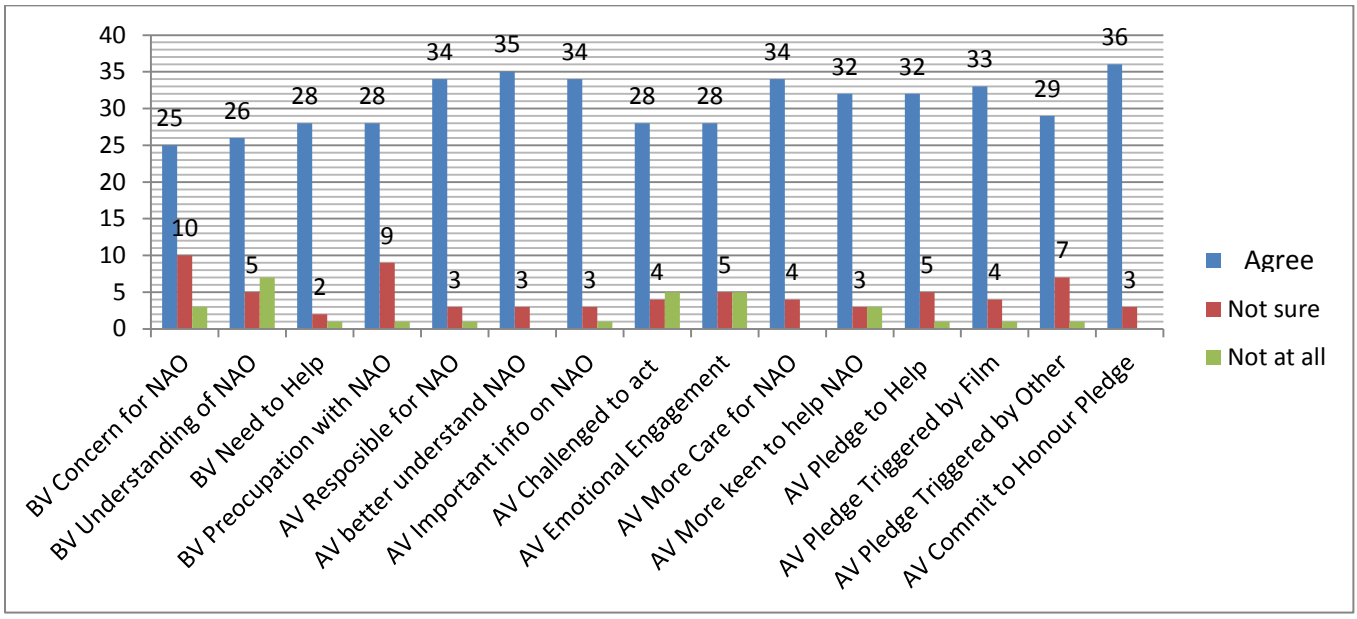


Fig: 4.3. Number of positive responses versus others

Discussion of the Results

Although my research technique was predominantly qualitative, I present quantitative data because of its utility to the research. Firstly, it proved useful to give a quick assessment of the trends in the result: immediately after collecting the filled questionnaire, the research team tallied the results to establish if the film (1) managed to provide crucial information to the viewers, (2) did generate the pledges intended and (3) if the pledges were triggered but what the viewers saw in the film. For my research, even though numbers revealed crucial trends, they still remained inconclusive. Though, for example, it became evident that majority of the respondents did make their pledges based on what they saw in the film, it was not clear what elements of the film triggered the viewer's willingness to make the pledges. This was in fact confirmed in the findings of the discussions that followed the answering sessions: the researcher replayed the film and asked respondents to pinpoint the elements that triggered their pledges but very few could confidently pinpoint those elements. What most of the respondents agreed about was that the film opened their eyes; it provided crucial information about the issues and, by extension, made them more sympathetic to the plight of neglected adolescent orphans. This called for an assessment of the effectiveness of the rhetorical strategies employed in the film. I therefore singled out and explicitly explained the narration techniques I used in the film. One such

technique was my peculiar use of the shot-reverse-shot treatment. But the viewers could not confirm nor refute its effectiveness. This confirmed Haseenah Ebrahim's (2019) advice that to assess the effectiveness of the rhetorical strategies I used, I needed to acknowledge that the audience was not film literate and would therefore not be aware of the film's techniques but they could point to content of specific shots and/or sequence as triggers of their responses (Ebrahim, 2019. Pers. comm. 4 March).

So a return to the content of the discussion was important, and revealed crucial information: the majority of audience members felt that the film did leave no questions un-answered as to what needed to be done about the neglect of adolescent orphans and why. In fact, one respondent, Thandazile, pointed to the fact the film provided an answer to every question that it raised. An example she gave was that after the film's prologue, she wondered what the community members, where these children live, could say. And she affirmed that she got her answer in the sequence with the community members, especially when one community member, Bernice Mojabeng, expressed her frustration dealing with the orphaned adolescents adopted in her family. Other respondents confirmed Thandazile's position by alluding to the fact that the experts provided further clarity on the orphaned adolescents' behaviours as well as the frustrations expressed by community members who expressed great empathy to the orphans.

For me, that affirmed the effectiveness of the conversational treatment I employed in the form of a shot-reverse-shot treatment: by presenting different speakers in different settings at different times addressing the same issue, I sought to break the distance and space barriers. In particular, my intention was to get audiences to focus on the issue being addressed in the film. And they did. It was also to trigger audience members to realising that, for example, the frustration expressed by community members can be overcome by a better understanding of the orphaned adolescents' apparent inclination to isolation as well as their reported unruly behaviours.

My test screening results do indeed confirm that: more audience members felt more empathetic to the neglected adolescent orphans depicted in the film and, by extension, other orphans who live in similar conditions. For me, this confirms the effectiveness of the dialogic and communal rhetorical strategies to which I attuned the documentary principles: in the film, the expert witnesses were given more screen time than other speakers. But when I asked the viewers to pinpoint the object of their empathy, it was unanimously agreed that the orphans did. So did the

community members albeit to a lesser extent. This was the intended response from my dialogic treatment. By eliciting empathy to neglected adolescent orphans and community members, the dialogic treatment sought to unify the orphaned adolescents and the community members. This, in turn, was intended to highlight that the social injury experienced by neglected adolescent orphans had an effect on the wellbeing of the social collective.

Concern for the wellbeing of the social collective was confirmed by other respondents who felt responsible for the adolescent orphans depicted in the film. Asked what they foresaw happen if the issue remained unresolved, these respondents pointed to a potential for a cycle of neglect in future generations, deterioration of proper parenting and disintegration of communal unity. It is important to note that although respondents did allude to the wellbeing of the social collective in their concerns for communal unity, I did not use the term community anywhere in my test screening questionnaire; nor did I in my questions during the discussions that followed the screenings. For me that confirms the effectiveness of my culturally attuned rhetorical strategies: by discussing neglect of adolescent orphans through a communal, dialogic rhetorical address inspired by *Kawaida*, a philosophy of life and struggle, I sought to advocate for the preservation of life and not of individuals. This is also why I decided to conduct test screenings in communities other than those in which the depicted adolescent orphans lived. Given that context, a pervasive allusion to community during the post-test screening discussion is evidence that (1) the film elicited an inward-looking stance from the viewers and (2) did challenge viewers and triggered them to make pledges to help neglected adolescent orphans. For my purposes, this is evidence that the film's rhetorical strategies paid off handsomely, especially because discussions that followed the pledges, revealed that most respondents expressed commitment to honouring their pledges. Even though I cannot ascertain whether the pledges made will indeed result into any action or not, I am pleased to report that *Forsaken* did indeed achieve its intended objective. This was empirically informed by the fact that all audiences members suggested that the film be screened to more people in different communities as they felt that it would be beneficial in encouraging communities to tackle neglect of orphaned adolescents.

For conclusive certainty about the effectiveness of the documentary's rhetorical principles I used and, in particular, of the manner in which I used them, further research needs to be conducted. One prompt for further research was the fact that viewers could not notice that I used rhetorical strategies that were culturally attuned to an African perspective. Hence further research could,

for example, be aimed at assessing the cultural attuning of the rhetorical principles, which could include European and /or Asian respondents. In this way, I think, a higher positive response from the African sample could be more informative. Such a research can also include a sample of highly film literate respondents who can deconstruct the film's language. This population could include film critics and scholars. Even this population too must comprise respondents from different racial and socio-economic groups. If possible, the research can entail pre-selecting screening audiences based on their explicit unwillingness or expressed lack of interest to take any action against the neglect of orphaned adolescents. Knowing their position before the test, a positive change of attitude after the screening of the film will generate more reliable findings. Hence, my conclusion speaks in favour of such research as *an extension* to this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

This research was formulated on the premise that to assess the documentary's ability to arrest social issues, the accuracy of such an assessment will hinge greatly on a rigorous examination of specific socio-cultural processes that frame a social issue in a specific socio-cultural context. For my purposes, this meant investigating socio-cultural processes that frame the neglect of adolescent orphans in South African communities. The aim was to establish pervasive public narratives used to justify inaction against the neglect of these orphans and, by extension, their neglect. That entailed examining the inter-affectivity between such narratives and the documentary rhetorical principles. On the one hand, the investigation was important in order to highlight and understand the cognitive biases which these narratives generate as well as the extent to which such biases propound embedded yet unacknowledged attitudes that close off possibilities of actions against the neglect of adolescent orphans in South African communities. On the other hand, the investigation was to shed light on the potential impact of such attitudes on the documentary's rhetorical address.

My approach was to test out claims that the documentary can be used to ameliorate social issues. It questioned previous studies that do not rest on any verifiable empirical evidence of *how* the documentary performs the function of resolving social issues; it problematized their a-historical propensities supported by a lack of evidence that these studies entailed any in-depth examination of the temporal and socio-cultural conditions that framed social issues. Such were studies that profess the documentary's ability to engage the process of social change outside of the documentary screening (Aguayo 2005; Marfo 2007; Aufderheide 2007; Verellen 2010; Waddell 2010; Faulcon 2012) and those that assess the extent to which social-issue films have led to social change (Hendrie *et al* 2014; De Rosa and Burgess 2014; Karlin and Johnson 2011; Diesner *et al* 2014).

My position is that, by overlooking the examination of social processes that must be altered in order to bring about social change, these studies take the easiest way out. And so, my inquiry went against a convenience approach. Instead, it sought to be continuous with Rosi Braidotti's (2011) view that to be called *worthy* of our changing times, we ought to have a head-on

engagement with the repugnant, the violent, and the traumatic realities of the present in order to understand the conditions that frame them and thereby maximise a *collective* deployment of resources for the creation of sustainable futures. This called for a heavy lifting task of identifying and challenging public narratives that frame inaction against the neglect of adolescent orphans in South African communities. It also meant identifying ways in which the documentary can effectively be used to unseat them, if possible.

My research revealed five predominant narratives used as justification for the neglect of adolescent orphans. First, a *systemic erosion of empathy* was accounted for by predominant views that current political, social and economic systems have created a climate that promotes individual interests over those of the social collective. In this climate, all actions prioritise the satisfaction of the individual's needs, with little concern for the need of others. Second to this was the narrative that the care of adolescent orphans *is someone else's job.* This resulted in a sense of absolution for community members who felt that it was the governments and/or NGOs' duty to deal with the issue of neglected adolescent orphans. This attitude was compounded by an *endemic arbitrary sense of incapacity that* saw the plight of neglected adolescent orphans dissolved into the plight of poverty stricken communities. This engendered a perception that all help comes in monetary forms. Even so, this perceived sense of incapacity could not sufficiently justify how helping neglected adolescent orphans significantly jeopardised one's own wellbeing. Nor could it warrant that helping would significantly exacerbate the plight of a person who chose to help.

The other narratives that the research revealed were based on an *ambivalent spirit of community* and the *trivialisation of the neglect of adolescent orphans.* The former meant that there was an endemic sense of caution that translated into uncertainty about the roles and extent to which community members can be seen to act in the best interest of one another. The latter was accounted for by the paucity of research on the neglect of adolescent orphans, as well as by a piece of legislation that recognises child-headed households as a protective measure for orphaned adolescents.

On closer analysis, these narratives were found likely to generate cognitive biases that, if ignored, can create subliminal counter-narratives that can conceptually belittle, without reducing,

the plight of neglected adolescent orphans. These biases do indeed present a threat to the effectiveness of a documentary's rhetorical address of any kind. For example, the trivialisation of the neglect of adolescent orphans can create a cognitive bias that if academics and legislators do not treat such an issue with priority, then it must be of little importance or not worth the effort, which can consequently undermine reasons for the general public to care for these children. Similarly, the systemic erosion of empathy – especially where thought patterns and behaviours lean toward interpersonal disconnection – can be an obstacle to creating empathy for the individuals depicted in a civic intervention documentary. To a similar extent, an arbitrary sense of incapacity can foreclose possibilities for supportive actions that do not require monetary contributions. Such foreclosure can also stem from the ambivalent sense of community which, as some research participants acknowledged, did engender interpersonal disconnection that lead community members to misunderstand neglected adolescent orphans.

Thus, the assessment of the documentary's ability to effect a solution to this social issue required, and would rely on, evidence that the documentary could challenge the public narratives that sustain it, subvert the cognitive biases that such narratives can engender and thereby trigger the need to intervene in the predicament of these orphans. For its validity and completeness, the evidence needed to be consistent with the intended effect of a documentary film produced purposefully to address the examined social issue. Otherwise, claims of the documentary's ability to militate for a solution to this social issue would remain arbitrary. This prompted me to conceptualise and produce a documentary film as a part of my research.

Titled *Forsaken*, this film was to be used as a tool to test the effectiveness of the documentary's rhetorical principles used in it. It was, in a sense, to problematize the socio-cultural relevance of rhetorical principles conceived from a culturally indefinite perspective. So, it became necessary to reframe selected rhetorical principles in order to become more relevant to the documentary's objective of bringing about a solution to this particular social issue. An Africanist framework was a step in that direction. It drew on a personal conviction that a cultural attuning of the documentary's rhetorical principles, if based on the specificity of the historical-cum-cultural context of the film's central issue, would inform pertinent rhetorical devices and strategies to effectively address this issue.

The framework selected for such attuning was *Kawaida* philosophy – an Afrocentric school of thought that encourages ongoing dialogue with African cultures in search of an understanding of fundamental issues that confront African people and the humanity in general (Karenga 2008; Snider 2010). The reframing of the documentary rhetorical principles went on to inform the rhetorical strategies and narrative approach used in the test film. *Kawaida* philosophy was found pertinent to that task because of its inward looking stance and its dialogical commitment: to ask questions to African cultures acknowledges that part of the fundamental issues that face African people stem from inside our cultures. Hence, I thought, by looking inward in African cultures, one is in a better position to go to the roots of a problem in order to find durable solutions to it.

Two elements of *Kawaida* were foregrounded in *Forsaken:* a focus on community through a communal narrative treatment, and the dialogic commitment encapsulated in *Forsaken'*s cinematic structure exemplified by a rather unconventional shot-reverse-shot treatment. These elements are evident in the deliberate use of close-up shots of different speakers in different settings and times juxtaposed to create a conversational atmosphere. This treatment also called for the absence of re-enactment, a minimal use of voice-over narration, and a cinematic structure as well as an editing style that place all the participants on the same discursive plane, with the camera favouring no particular speaker.

Through this treatment, I sought to capture a communal spirit of unity and equality. I hoped that doing so was relevant to the primary target audience for the film and would thereby elicit positive responses from viewers. Premised on subverting various cognitive biases, a focus on community was seen to have advantages of removing the onus on individual causality to the injury that befell the documentary participants. This proved advantageous in calling to question the collective trust in injurious socio-cultural processes. Given these advantages, it appeared possible to promote a collective commitment to healing the injury suffered by the documentary's participants, which remains crucial for the mobilisation of a commitment to preventing such injury for future generations. Such a systematic focus on community treatment was adopted because it seemed capable of harnessing a rhetorical address intended to elicit empathy towards the documentary participants.

Making the film using such treatment could not be a measure of the documentary's success in instituting a solution to this problem: the completed film had to be screened to a population of the film's primary target audience, and then the audience's responses had to be measured to assess the effectiveness of the documentary's rhetorical address to the neglect of adolescent orphans. I did that using Likert scales that measured different responses, namely, the audience empathetic responses to the documentary participants, the film's exposition, and the audience's attitudes to the issue before and after the film viewing. But the primary aim of the Likert scales was to measure the audience's willingness to pledge support for these orphans, *based on what they saw in the film.*

The results of the test screenings were largely positive: more people made pledges to take part in programmes to help neglected adolescent orphans because of what they saw in the film than those who made pledges on the basis of their faith, cultural background or personal principles. For my purposes, this was a crucial finding. First of all, the film employed a cinematic technique that is considered outdated, but it managed to engage its audience considerably: a high percentage of viewers agreed or strongly agreed that the film drew them emotionally closer to adolescent orphans who are heads of households. A large majority of respondents agreed that after watching the film they were more determined to act on behalf of these orphans. Many of these respondents also committed to honouring their pledges should they be called upon to do so. To that effect, 6 people approached me, asking how they could start helping.

Based on these results, and because my objective had been to use the film to generate pledges to help neglected adolescent orphans, I can safely say that the documentary, *Forsaken,* has challenged people strongly enough to make them want to act against the neglect of these orphans. I must acknowledge, however, that these results are not entirely conclusive: with the exception of those who approached me without me asking, one still cannot ascertain that all the people who made pledges can indeed honour them as they committed; nor can one accurately ascertain the truthfulness of the responses.

To overcome this, further investigations will be necessary. They will entail test screenings on a wider scale and an accompanying campaign for concrete action. This will need to involve organisations that can translate the pledges into actions and will therefore require more

resources, human power, and a much longer period of time than a doctoral study can accommodate. Such film-campaign based research can validate the roles of many NGOs dealing with this issue. It can be of even greater importance to governmental departments whose tasks rest on finding care programmes for different categories of orphans. In the hands of capable organisations, neglected adolescent orphans stand to benefit the most from such research.

To link the audience's responses to the film's rhetorical devices, such studies will need a laboratory type of experiments involving various stages of eliminations and null hypotheses. In such experiments, certain features of the film would be isolated and used as test tools to measure specific audience responses. For examples, viewers who agree to have been emotionally drawn to the documentary participants can be asked to associate their responses to a dialogic aspect of the film or its conversational structure. Similarly, to ascertain the effectiveness of the Africanist framework, there will be a need for cross-cultural experiments involving non-Africans. That will be important to Afrocentric film scholarship in particular and film studies in general. I personally wish to embark on such research after completion of my doctoral studies. I foresee such research as necessary to arrive at conclusive results about how Forsaken, and any similar documentary, can constitute an effective civic intervention capable of instituting a durable solution to the neglect of adolescent orphans in South African communities.

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APPENDIX

i. **Ethics Clearance Certificate**

ii. **Department of Social Development Permission to Conduct Research**

iii. **Participants' Information Sheets and Consent/Assent Forms**