

By **Anna Pitton**

Racial and national identity is just one of the themes tackled by *Mugabe and the White African*, a documentary that tells the story of a man who defies Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe and his tyrannical regime.

Set against the controversial election of 2008, the film revolves around Mike Campbell, a 74-year-old white farmer who in 2000 fell victim to the land seizure programme launched by the Zimbabwean government. Determined to defend his property, which he legitimately bought after the country secured independence in 1980, Mike and his son-in-law Ben Freeth press charges against Mugabe before the South African Development Community (SADC) International Court based in Namibia, accusing him of racial discrimination and violation of human rights.



The fight against Mugabe's brutal regime proves tiring and dangerous for Mike, his family and his 500 farm workers, but he relentlessly stands for his rights, knowing that if he wins he will set a precedent that would delegitimise Mugabe's policies. Frustration marks the hearings, as Mugabe's team of attorneys continuously try to postpone proceedings, at one point leaving the court.

The documentary does not spare the viewer blood-spattered footage, such as that of Mike, wife Angela and Ben in hospital having been beaten up by Mugabe's thugs just days before appearing before the International Court for the final hearing.

Shooting the entire film covertly was risky, all the more since directors Lucy Bailey and Andrew Thompson used large cameras and cumbersome equipment, forcing them to plan the logistics very carefully. The result, however, is compelling: vivid shots, picturesque landscapes and an engrossing score add empathy to the already engaging story. Even when shot with a Sony A1 handy camera by Ben when the directors were not there, with shaky takes and noisy background sounds, the documentary is powerful.

Critics of the film have pointed to a lack of focus on the plight and hardships of other Zimbabweans. The voices of black farm workers are noticeably absent. Bailey, who held a Q&A session after the screening on January 22nd at the Tricycle Cinema in London, explained that the main focus of the film is the court case and the emotional side of Mike's story, rather than the political situation. By delivering real life drama, said Bailey, the film reaches out to everyone.

The situation in Zimbabwe has not changed. In July 2009 Mike's farm was burnt to the ground, and he himself is now bound to a wheelchair. He says he has turned into an old man overnight. Two of the people who appeared in the movie are now dead – not as a result of the shooting of the film, Bailey said.

However, according to Bailey, who has worked extensively in Africa throughout her career, the film can play a significant role in bringing hope and raising awareness. As Mike put it, publicity is the soul of justice.

Mugabe and the White African *is currently showing at selected cinemas. For more information see* www.mugabeandthewhiteafrican.com