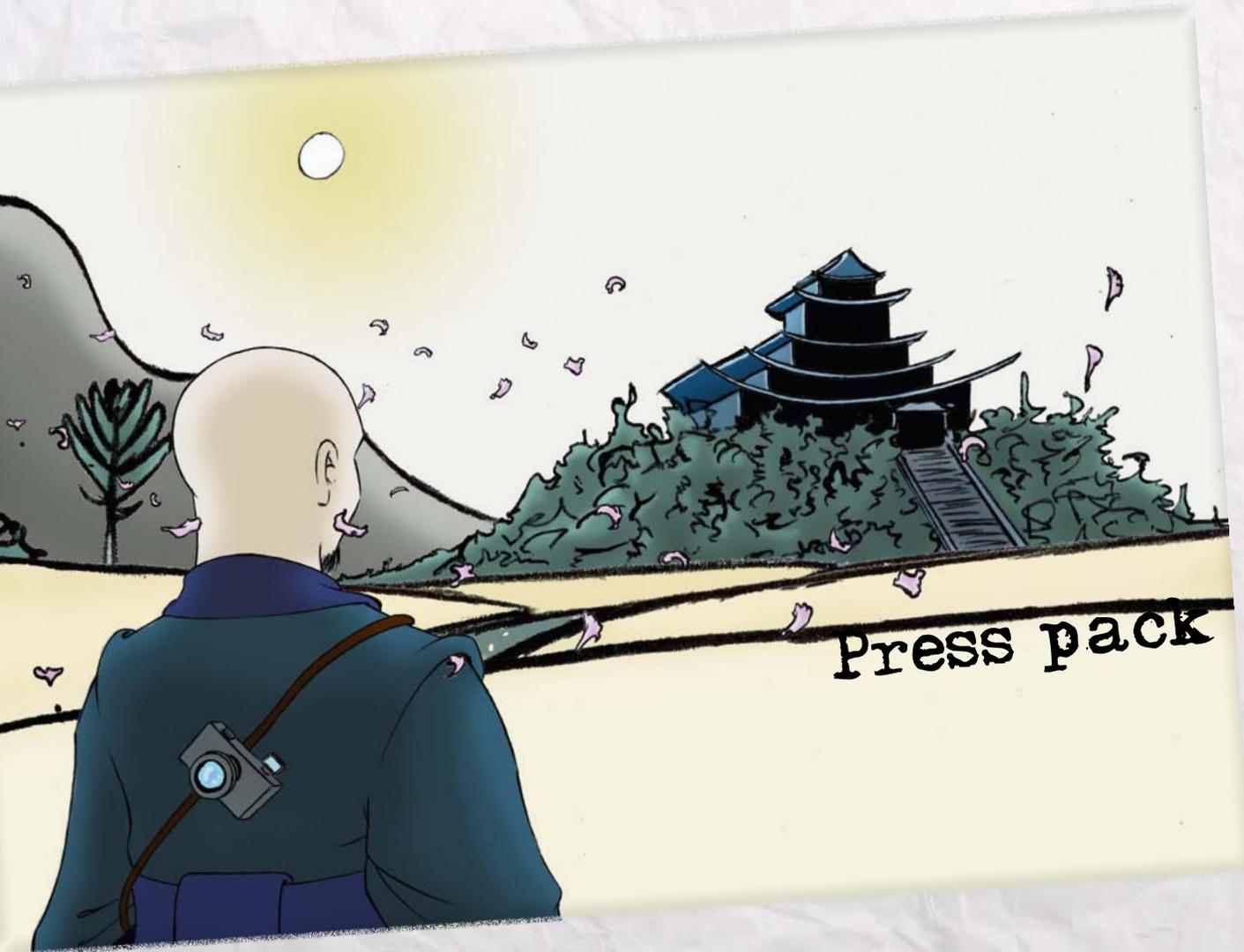


# Mugabe, Me and a Million Tampons



A Documentary Film by  
Karin Stowe & Hanna Adcock  
[press@photophormations.org](mailto:press@photophormations.org)

# Main Credits

Director, Camera, Editor - **Karin Stowe**

Co-director, Editor, Animation - **Hanna Adcock**

Animation illustrations - **Johnny Jenkins**

Original Music - **Jake Wittlin and Simon Adcock**

# Additional Credits

Additional Sound effects by:

Mike Koeng, Ceser Garcia, Suonho, Fugeoqam, Bmccosa, Gurdonark, Herbert Boland, Aelfric3333, NoiseCollector, Bruce H McCosar,

Additional tampon images courtesy of:

Malin Maskros, Erica Snider Ross and Jamie H. Clary, Charles Johnson, MSunflower, Amelia Mulkey Rosewal, Sandi K Barr, Jennifer Williams, Juergen Horn

Additional Mugabe images courtesy of:

Koffi Junkie, Siegfried Woldhek, Tamer Youssef, Jim Downie, Mangwanani



# Directors Statement

I was initially asked to create a promotional film for an NGO working in Zimbabwe; I was to record the transportation and distribution of tampons to Zimbabwean women. However, the project changed when the truck full aid went missing and the we couldn't cross into Zimbabwe. On returning to the UK I convinced the NGO to fly me back to make my own way back into Zimbabwe to find the missing aid.

Crossing into Zimbabwe was the hardest thing to pull off at first. This meant travelling as a wildlife photographer to avoid being caught and punished by Mugabe's henchmen. Mugabe has spies and informants everywhere so you are constantly moving around and never stay in the same location for long. You need to rely on local fixers who work for you and hopefully keep you safe.

I quickly realised that the story of Zimbabwe needed to be told in depth and I then started to make this film. Having worked as a photojournalist across the world I have seen many horrors, but what I found in Zimbabwe really shocked me. It made me question the ethics of my profession and made me really appreciate the people who put their lives at risk every day. I found myself getting angry at the lack of coverage places such as Zimbabwe receive in the press - which is reflected in the film.

As the situations I found made me contemplate the many complications that countries like Zimbabwe have, it turned the film from a straight documentary to one that required narration that not only told a story, but mused on the implications, causes and roles we all play within it.

I think the film should be seen as a window into reality and not thought about as strictly a documentary film. The film breaks the 4th wall of communication and reaches out to the viewer, pledging, accusing and requesting. The film culminates with a final desperate last request to everyone out there, a request that could change Zimbabwe's plight, but a request that goes beyond storytelling and into the realm of interactive audience participation.

- KARIN STOWE



## Synopsis (main)

With a filmmaker hell-bent on changing the horror, **Mugabe Me and a Million Tampons** takes you on a gonzo journey into a nation held in fear and torn apart by corruption. Packing a million tampons, a camera and a romantic notion of being able to alter this reality, the odyssey into Zimbabwe unveils a land of chaos and slaughter finding people willing to defy the monster. The film opens a docu-live-real-time-doorway into events happening right now and offers you a unique chance to change Zimbabwe's future. Will you p(l)ay?

## Tag line

Mugabe, Me and a Million Tampons follows the story of a disillusioned photojournalist travelling to Zimbabwe with a truck load of tampons, a romantic dream and an uneasy conscience.

**Would you kill one  
man to save a nation?**

Mugabe, Me and a Million Tampons



## Synopsis (mid-length)

With a filmmaker hell-bent on changing the horror, Mugabe Me and a Million Tampons takes you on a gonzo journey into a nation held in fear and torn apart by corruption. Packing a million tampons, a camera and a romantic notion of being able to alter this reality, the odyssey into Zimbabwe unveils a land of chaos and slaughter finding people willing to defy the monster.

The film, in equal amounts of humour and shock, witnesses colourful characters, shocking stories and corruption. The film examines issues around the practise of filmmaking and the difficulties faced having to juggle saleability, poverty, tampons, corruption and an uneasy conscience.

The film opens a docu-live-real-time-doorway into events happening right now and offers you a unique chance to change Zimbabwe's future. Will you p(l)ay?

## Synopsis (long)

With a filmmaker hell-bent on changing the horror, Mugabe Me and a Million Tampons takes you on a gonzo journey into a nation held in fear and torn apart by corruption. Packing a million tampons, a camera and a romantic notion of being able to alter this reality, the odyssey into Zimbabwe unveils a land of chaos and slaughter finding people willing to defy the monster.

Beginning in South Africa, the film light-heartedly shows the complications of a UK charity organising the distribution and transportation of women's sanitary aid into Zimbabwe working against

the interference of Mugabe's informants. The film, in equal amounts of humour and shock, witnesses colourful characters, including the prominent zany Zimbabwean activist, Tabitha, who receives notice of an arrest warrant and prepares herself for incarceration.

Posing as a wildlife photographer, the filmmaker returns to Africa and enters Zimbabwe. Here, he begins to uncover the horrors behind Mugabe's lands. Working with multiple opposing anti-government groups and activists he visits forgotten orphanages, overflowing graveyards, hospitals and attends a protest that turns horribly violent; witnessing the beating of young babies and grandmothers.

Whilst witnessing the hidden horrors and problems of Zimbabwe, the film continuously reflects back to the UK showing the photographs that make it to the covers of the UK press – sharing a unique backstory behind many of the stories we read. It questions the effectiveness of the reporting of developing nations and explores the ethical dilemmas faced when photographing the dead, the dying and those on Mugabe's hit-lists.

Throughout, the film weaves interesting characters, comic moments and tragic stories to show the great contradictions that exist in a country like Zimbabwe. Unlike many other investigative documentaries, it offers a personal view on events and narration that makes the viewer contemplate their own roles in the change. It is self-reflective and uses experimental documentary forms to entwine the many different realities of the Zimbabwean story, creating a pseudo-live portal to events that are still happening now, but still not being changed.



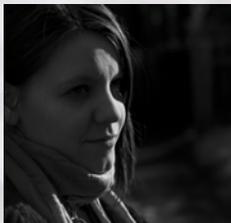
# Profiles

## The Directors/Filmmakers Karin Stowe



Karin Stowe has worked as a freelance investigative Photojournalist and Documentary filmmaker for the last fifteen years producing documentaries, articles and photo essays for the third sector and mainstream press. His work examines and investigates the individual and collective human struggle against oppressive regimes in countries like Zimbabwe, Burma and Tibet and his photojournalism and documentary film work has been screened worldwide and published in major newspapers and magazines. Alongside working freelance, he is also the director of VDB Films Ltd and Co-Director of Citizen Camera Ltd.

## Hanna Adcock



Hanna Adcock is a photographer and filmmaker specialising in the third sector. She is the company director of Citizen Camera LTD which focuses on participatory media projects; encouraging and assisting marginalised communities towards self-representation and empowerment, and also works within multimedia and motion graphics.

## The Music Jake Wittlin & Simon Adcock

Simon and Jake have written music together for 6 years, both for screen and for their band, Lund Quartet. Simon grew up in St Albans, Jake in Yeovil, and both moved to Bristol for the music scene. With differing musical styles (Simon is a classically trained multi-instrumentalist and compose, and Jake, a turntablist, hip-hop producer) they quickly formed a well balanced writing team. They regularly play on and compose for film, dance, theatre audio books and animation. The original music within the film explores Scandinavian jazz (EST), dub, hip-hop, trip-hop, classical, minimalism and free improvisation.

Simon and Jake are currently recording a début album with Lund Quartet, writing music for Lonely Planet audio books, scoring the music to an animated short film.

## The Artist Johnny Jenkins

Johnny Jenkins is a freelance illustrator and has worked on various projects including storyboarding films, comics, album art, posters, character design and children's book illustration.



# Film Description

## SPOILER ALERT

Mugabe, Me and a Million Tampons is an independent feature length documentary examining international aid, Mugabe's Zimbabwe and the very practice of photojournalism and filmmaking itself.

Beginning in South Africa, it light-heartedly shows the processes and complication of a UK charity organising the distribution and transportation of women's sanitary aid into Zimbabwe working against the interference of Mugabe's informants. It also introduces the prominent zany Zimbabwean activist, Tabitha, who receives notice of an arrest warrant and prepares herself for incarceration.

After the aid goes missing, the self-confessed down and out filmmaker and photojournalist, Karin Stowe and the charity team have to return home. Back in the UK, the film comically explores the tactics and secrets of filming and photographing in dangerous climes; morphing through multiple identities and hidden cameras as Stowe prepares to go-solo and track down the aid in Zimbabwe.

Posing as a wildlife photographer, he returns to Africa and enters Zimbabwe. Here, he begins to uncover the horrors behind Mugabe's lands. Working with multiple opposing anti-government groups and activists he visits forgotten orphanages, overflowing graveyards, hospitals and attends a protest that turns horribly violent; witnessing the beating of young babies and grandmothers.

As the events begin to affect the once light-hearted filmmaker, he becomes increasingly angry at the situation and, against all normal professional codes of conduct, begins to believe that he could make a

change and bring the multiple organisations together to create a united anti-Mugabe front to defeat the monstrous rule.

Whilst witnessing the hidden horrors and problems of Zimbabwe, the film continuously reflects back to the UK showing his work that makes it to press when he's on the ground – sharing a unique backstory behind many of the stories we read. It questions the effectiveness of the reporting of developing nations and explores the ethical dilemmas faced when photographing the dead, the dying and those on Mugabe's hit-lists. It also continues to follow the story of the activist Tabitha as she rises to fame in the UK, receiving awards and appearing on daytime TV.

As the filmmaker becomes increasingly disillusioned with the possibilities for change, he begins again to fantasize about the role he could have in changing the lives of those he meets and turns to the viewer to come up with a solution, asking the question... 'would you pay me a million pounds to kill Mugabe?' Turning to animation, the film plays out Stowe's wild imagination and reveals the fates of those he's met.

Throughout, the film weaves interesting characters, comic moments and tragic stories to show the great contradictions that exist in a country like Zimbabwe. Unlike many other investigative documentaries, it offers a personal view on events and narration that makes the viewer contemplate their own roles in the change. It is self-reflective and uses experimental documentary forms to entwine the many different realities of the Zimbabwean story, creating a pseudo-live portal to events that are still happening now, but still not being changed.



# Q&A with Karin Stowe

## **What instigated you to make MMT? Was the film planned from the outset?**

Initially the film came about from being asked to create a promotional film for an NGO working in Zimbabwe- whose main work was based on human rights issues, specifically around raising awareness about the lack of female sanitary aid in Zimbabwe. The campaign was about gathering as many female sanitary aids and tampons as possible in South Africa and then driving them to Zimbabwe to distribute them. The project altered when the truck full aid went missing and the NGO and myself could not cross into Zimbabwe. We had to return to the UK but I convinced them to pay for me to fly back to South Africa and make my own way back into Zimbabwe to find the missing aid. At this point, the project became a documentary about conditions in Mugabe's Zimbabwe.

## **How was it filming in Zimbabwe, was it difficult?**

Crossing into Zimbabwe was the hardest thing to pull off at first, and getting your kit in and making sure that the authorities didn't know who I was. This meant travelling incognito as a wildlife photographer. If I was caught in Zimbabwe as an investigative filmmaker, it would mean a long stay in prison or worse. The main dilemma you face is being sold-out by people in Zimbabwe, Mugabe has spies and informants all over the country. You are constantly moving around and you never stay in the same location for very long. You need to rely on 'fixers' who work for you and keep you safe.

## **What motivates you to work in difficult climates?**

Many people have asked this question, and it always surprises them to find out that most investigative practitioners do not consider the environments like Zimbabwe to be so dangerous or the job risky. Sometimes it seems more dangerous to follow a life of comfort. I believe that the job is not about thinking in that dangerous paradigm, for once the fear takes a grip you lose contact with the reasons for undertaking such work. It's a job, maybe unlike most, but the desire to undertake such work for myself is based on enhancing self- knowledge and the need to really observe and document differing realities. This, of course, becomes a form external truth that others perceive and digest, and that alone motivates me to go these places knowing that I'm actually taking others with me; that want to see, experience and gain knowledge about those places we hear about but rarely encounter.

## **What are your main film influences in documentary?**

The Vietnam War, I guess. Having observed and gathered knowledge from practitioners that worked on the ground for ten years during that war, it was the only way I could gain awareness from the event. It was more the photojournalists work than the filmmakers that have held my attention, their images are burnt into my vision, more so now as I have seen such horrors and been privy to the disgusting nature of that we can do to each other.

## **Do you think that photojournalism and documentary film can actually make a difference?**

I would've said yes, based on the Vietnam War and the effect the media coverage had on the war and



the audience. Now I'm not so sure, we have more films and more people out there making documentaries, but little seems to change in the places I have worked in like Tibet, Burma and Zimbabwe. But I'd like to think that it will, or I would not be doing what I do.

### **What are the main messages that you want to get across in the film?**

I think the film should be seen as a doorway to another world and not thought about as strictly a documentary film, but rather a window into reality. What is seen when watching the film should be thought of as real-time, as if you had a magic time machine that transported you to other worlds so you can relate your own lives against what you are seeing; compare their horrors to your own.

### **What made you decide to put yourself in a central role in the film?**

The reason I became part of the film is complicated, by eventually going by myself into Zimbabwe I found that I was becoming more involved with the groups of activist I was meeting. I started to stray away from just recording them and began thinking that I could possibly influence them. I believed in some romantic notion that I could be a catalyst to make these warring activist factions unite and start to use their collective abilities against Mugabe. I had started to venture from behind the safety of the camera and found myself entwined in their stories. Being forced to flee and leave the country and the friends and enemies I had made forced my story into the film, as I had not just watched from a far, but had become part of the story and the possible endings.

### **What are the reasons behind the stylistic considerations in the film, such as the typewriter, morphing and animation?**

Throughout my journeys into the madness and horror that this world

constantly conjures up, I have always dreamed of the events before they happen, during the troubles and then afterwards. The film reflects these states of reality – in my own private visual madness asleep I dream of animated justice. The changing you go through to alter your appearance and blend into cultures is ridiculous on one hand but vital on the other. In the film I wanted the audience to see visually the methods and madness that occurs when trying to traverse in and out of the two worlds I exist in. The controlled sanitised life in the UK, and the chaos of the realities I work in.

### **Do you think that it is appropriate to use comedy when telling such a horrific story?**

It may come across as humorous when I'm morphing in and out of differing appearances, or showing death as a game show, but this conveys all I believe in and reflects the tragic comedy and lunacy in society. The audience, I hope, will see the pathos and salient message which is being conveyed. Is a message that laughs at the farce of murder, human-rights abuse and continuous western tolerance not the saddest joke one could see and hear? I hope the visual rollercoaster the viewer experiences from murder to comedy heightens the polar opposites of each and generates a mixture of emotions that ultimately lead to a sense of anger.

### **Would you say you are cynical about the world?**

I would say the opposite, if I thought that people were apathetic and did not care about others then I would hang up my camera and retire to a little island and let the world go fuck itself. But I keep going and will keep going knowing that people can care,

Q&A



can make changes and things do change. One may argue that things seems worse now than ever, with wars being fought in the name of democracy, whilst people in other far-away lands are still ceremonially screwed over and democracy-driven-campaigns do not seem to apply to them, like in Tibet and Burma. But times are a changing and beyond the blue horizon, wait a beautiful day, as the songs go. I think when I'm done and too old to run around in Mugabe lands things will have altered and I'll be smiling.

### **You call this a 'gonzo tale'- why so?**

It's a word that fits the actions of the event and my own belief system. The very nature of trying to leave one world to record the horror in another, knowing you'll hopefully be back home in safety afterwards defines a form of lunacy to the job. The actions of myself as a doubting storyteller, that never really wants to give answers but more pose questions to people watching from a afar, means my style of work is, let's say, unconventional. This defines to me that I'm a go-between that is constantly trying to join the two realities together, one; the actual horror event and two; the audience that watches them in the comfort of their reality. But I hope that my work impregnates the viewer and leaves a sense of chaos, as if the two worlds are brought a little closer. Is this what documentary should do, yes I think so, is this called Gonzo? Well it's not the staple form of film making, so gonzo it is.

### **Do you think that the trends and styles of documentary film are expanding?**

Yes, more so now than ever as a new generation of filmmakers are embracing a variety of documentary forms that use differing techniques to tell so called 'true' stories. The modern audience has also become more verse in interpreting documentary films, and do not find the

application of, say, animation within a film as such a narrative jolt. I would say this is a time when film makers will embrace new methods of story-telling using CGI, 3D and alike. I can see a time when audience become the documentary and definitions of form become so blurred that audience will start to perhaps create documentaries based on interactive web based media. I can see that 'films' will be made by communities of peoples that are not traditional filmmakers and they will change history via web and mobile devices - a new revolution in altering history played out in real time, like what has occurred in Egypt. Imagine a world where people make real documentaries live at the time and generate change that occurs instantly. Then I'll be out of a job and can retire to my beach with a smile.

## Q&A

You are free to quote from this interview as you please. Please contact if you would like to arrange an interview with any of the documentary team.



# Contacts

## PRESS

For press enquiries, interviews or to request a press copy of the film, please contact:

[press@photophormations.org](mailto:press@photophormations.org)

or call:

01962851825 / 07737924915

## OTHER

For all other enquiries about the film, please contact:

[mugabefilm@photophormations.org](mailto:mugabefilm@photophormations.org)

## WEB

[www.mugabemeandamilliontampons.com](http://www.mugabemeandamilliontampons.com)

## FACEBOOK

<http://tinyurl.com/mugabefacebook>

