

Response to reviewers
By Dr. Vanessa Wijngaarden

Dear editors and reviewers,

I express my gratitude for receiving the comments and positive recommendations of both of the reviewers, which may help to further develop this film project and its use for 1.) understanding tourism interactions and 2.) teaching ethnography.

As both reviewers comment, one of the weak points of the film is that there are several parts of lower acoustic and cinematographic quality, which may distance the scene from the audience. This is mostly due to the fact that the scene was originally shot for research purposes, in which a distanced, wide angle overview of the various actions during the events unfolding was of importance. Moreover, the distanced position of the researcher prevented an overly intrusive camera presence. Especially in the context of ethnographic film, I believe this approach should not be automatically discarded, as it is part of what Reviewer 2 refers to as 'proper ethnographic, filmic realism', even if it can give the viewer a harder time to identify with the subjects and the actions that take place.

In the postproduction of the film, I have decided to retain the single take as I considered the real-time following of the events of higher value than a smooth viewing experience. The viewer can thus more fully enter the experience of 'being there' with the participants. The raw way in which the material was shot, has been described by film critics¹ as adding to the viewing experience by reflecting the rugged and inhospitable environment, and making the presence of the wind and dust tangible. The shaky camera presence has been commented upon as a reminder of the presence of the filmmaker, which is of importance in a reflexive viewing of the material (something which is complemented by Eliamani's remark in the direction of the filmmaker). Moreover, according to South African cultural studies scholar Barnabas,² it helps the audience to enter the scene as the symbolic third child of the family, feeling as uncomfortable and distanced as our featured brother and sister seem to feel. Furthermore, Barnabas commented on the strategy of filming tourists' backsides as a welcome subversion, and commented on the shot where the raised

¹ I.e. Christoph Dobbitsch, *Review Eliamani's Homestead*, September 2017, accessible from <https://vanessawijngaarden.wordpress.com/academic/screenings/review-eliamanis-homestead/>

² Shanade Bianca Barnabas, "*Eliamani's Homestead*: Screening and discussion of a film on Maasai cultural tourism", School of Communication seminar series, 31.05.2018, University of Johannesburg, South Africa. The resulting review and accompanying interview has been accepted for publication: Barnabas, S. B. & V. Wijngaarden. Forthcoming. "When We Are Laughing Like This Now, We Are Also Being Recorded by Them": *Eliamani's Homestead* and the Complicity of Ethnographic Film. In: *Visual Anthropology Review*. DOI: 10.1111/var.12191.

behind of the Dutch woman is in full view as 'the antithesis of early representations of a highly sexualized Africa as bums and breasts—African bodies on display.'³

The choice to present the Maasai women mostly by name, while using general descriptions for the tourists, is another subversion of 'the trope of the named explorer visiting the archetypal, indiscriminate anonymous indigenous'.⁴ Naming part of the protagonists helps to identify them and coloring the subtitles in different shades further supports the viewer to identify who is speaking, as throughout the scene multiple dialogues unfold simultaneously. Following both these conversations burdens the viewer with a lot of subtitles to digest, but also allows an intimate view into the interpretations, fears and judgements on both sides, which makes the film so unique. These subtitles give insight into the whole spectrum of issues and feelings that remain untranslated between the two groups, and allow for a multivocal experience in which a variety of perspectives can be entered by the viewer. Indeed, the film may not be suitable to watch only once with the expectation to catch everything. Different layers of interpretation are possible, and the short format as well as the richness of topics central to anthropology and tourism studies that are raised by the film (for example authenticity, reflexivity, postcolonialism and gender relationships), make it suitable for repeated watching.

The introduction of the characters in the information titles may be minimal, but the essential residents Pendo and Eliamani are identified by name (as well as a description in the case of Eliamani, who carries her child on her back) and their situation is sketched as to help the viewer identify with them. They are followed throughout the film. The contrasting way in which the camera is positioned indeed facilitates reflexive thinking on the part of the audience, as Reviewer 2 has noted. I perceive the camera to be present in a way that helps to tell the story, as it challenges the viewer to identify with both sides simultaneously, creating a 'battle within'. The story line first introduces the background of the Maasai homestead, placing the viewer within it, but then follows the tourists as they enter inside and explore the area. Finally camera and viewer remain behind with the Maasai women as the tourists leave, the change in positionality coming full circle. Through this, the storyline and camera hopefully provide the viewer with a journey that may change their perspective on the events and challenge their ideas with regard to cultural tourism.

I agree with Reviewer 2 that the English used might be awkward for native speakers, but the formulations used do make the titles more easily understandable for an East-African audience, or others who are not fluent. They were created in cooperation with Tanzanian and Kenyan nationals and therefore reflect the local uses of English. I chose to show the posters for a relatively long time in order to make the film more accessible to Tanzanian and Kenyan nationals, who often speak English as a third language, and

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

especially for Maasai who often have basic knowledge of English and little experience with reading. The film has been brought back to the community where it was shot, as well as to the tourists present, in order to continue the conversation with both, and allow further reflections on the interactions and the research. In the context of a Wenner Gren *Fejos Fellowship for Ethnographic Film* I am currently working on the postproduction of a feature film which includes a wider contextualization of the scene of *Eliamani's Homestead* as well as similar village visits I filmed. This film focuses on the reactions of the local Maasai and featured tourists as they reflect on seeing the footage of their own interactions, explain themselves and engage in subsequent communication with 'the other' through video messages. In the process the Maasai and Dutch question each other and themselves and come to new understandings and connections, challenging the audience to deepen their empathy with both sides.

As the reviewers point out, the scene portrayed in *Eliamani's Homestead* is widespread and is of considerable ethnographic value. It has been well received by both Northern and Maasai audiences, and the sometimes emotional reactions and deep and lengthy discussions following the screenings show that the messages present in the film and (sub)titles have been understood despite the challenges mentioned. The film has inspired the discussion of a variety of critical and pervasive issues with regard to cultural tourism amongst the public in diverse settings in universities and film festivals all over the world. In reactions, many viewers express they feel very uncomfortable, even angry or sad, and often mention they have come to new understandings as well as new questions which they never thought of before. The extent to which a wide variety of audiences are touched by the film and start discussing realities otherwise taken for granted shows that viewers do identify themselves with the subjects, despite the challenges the reviewers mention. This is supported by the fact that the film was part of the official selection of festivals on four continents, and was awarded 'best documentary short film' at the *Lisbon International Film Festival* in 2017. For many, the film is not easy to digest, as it shows a reality which simultaneously touches upon issues of global inequality and asymmetric power relations, but also alludes to the similarities in thought processes and emotions which connect us all as human beings.

I agree with the reviewers that at times the camerawork is unsteady and distracting, due to the fact that the film was originally shot for research purposes. However, to replace these moments with jump shots would greatly diminish the power of the film, as it will lose its real-time aspect. Most contemporary audiences are highly sensitized, and can even be suspicious as they have been exposed to a wealth of suggestive editing in commercial and personal usage of media (for example in television broadcasts, commercials, social media and even news broadcasts). They are greatly aware how easy it is to bring a powerful message by creative cutting. More natural and lengthy film material is more difficult to digest, and increasingly rare, as this era is a fast and flashy one, especially in the realm of media.

If the specific scene of *Eliamani's Homestead* were to be cut up, the end product may be more stylish, shorter and its message more clearly univocal. However, the film

would lose much of its unique attractiveness, because its multilayered complexity as well as the sense of 'being there' would suffer. The discontents of cultural tourism have certainly been filmed before, and often in cinematographically more attractive ways. What makes this film powerful is that the continuity of the rolling camera underlines the tormenting slowness of the events in which the tourists are uncomfortable in the process of buying jewelry and the Maasai are tortured by the lenses aimed at them. As minutes seem to drag on like hours, the viewer accesses the scene with an accumulated intensity and passes through reflective stages which otherwise would be lost. I also believe that to many audiences, including myself, jump-cuts would be at least as distracting as a short unsteady moment or a quick zoom with the camera.

With regard to the subtitles, I acknowledge that it can be a challenge to read them. It has to be noted that already a selection was made of what to subtitle and what to omit in order to strike a balance between readability and nuance. To further simplify the subtitles by using more efficient language would take away a lot of the flavor and content of what is spoken, as well as the aspect of multi-vocality embraced in the production of the film. Reviewer 2 proposes to omit the names of the individuals in the subtitles, but these also help to identify the many people involved. I do not fully agree with this reviewer that it is impossible for the viewer to recognize the women (except Eliamani and 'grandmother') by name. For example, at the start of the film, Pendo is clearly in the frame alone, and identified by name in the subtitles, thus helping to recognize her. In my eyes it is of importance who is saying what, because the Maasai present cannot be seen as a monolithic whole.

Of the many examples I would like to mention that while Sabina is supportive of posing for photos, she is critical of the fact that the money flow is primarily received by the Maasai men. Grandmother, in contrast, is very suspicious of the tourists, but supports the male/female hierarchy. As the tourists, the Maasai women have very different positions, attitudes and opinions, and this becomes clear by what they say. Moreover, most of the meaning of what is being said, is in *how* it is expressed. Therefore the subtitles were constructed quite close to the literal expressions. The way for example Pendo asks: 'Is it not just to buy some food?' expresses the soft, careful and polite way in which she approaches the suffering and inequality experienced. Likewise, an expression like 'we do not look down on this small-small money' would lose its original and subtle meaning if translated into 'proper' English.

In Maa the grammatical constructions and expressions used are often different from what is customary in English, and I deem it essential to transmit these subtle meanings, even though English may not be the most suitable language to do so. The manner in which the subtitles have been constructed captures the way of speaking of the characters, so that the audience gets the opportunity to feel what they mean, because much of the meaning is expressed indirectly, and can only be captured by reading 'between the lines'. Of course this approach results in the viewer needing to

pay a price, that is, to make an increased effort when reading: In order to gain a deeper understanding the viewer is required to engage in an extra step to approach the material presented more actively. This is however rewarded with a greater identification and more subtle understanding of the persons portrayed.

The final remark by reviewer 2 that in the poster the reference to the neighboring Maasai 'ladies' should be replaced by Maasai 'women' as the former is an archaic expression can be taken into account. However, it would mean that throughout the subtitling the word lady (i.e. tourist lady) should also be replaced. It is interesting that the expression 'tourist woman' sounds more distant and less empathic, when in fact I aim to create a space of understanding for her position and perspective too. As the reviewer notes, the word 'lady' would be used in local Tanzanian-English, and it does have a colonial legacy. Therefore, to use this word for both tourist and Maasai women, and to start by using it to refer to Maasai women serves as a subtle reminder of the legacy in the form of another partial subversion.

After taking into account the reviewers' concerns, the solution I propose is to add to the abstract of the published film in order to prepare viewers for the kind of film they are about to see; that is, to produce a motivated account that explains why the filmographic flaws have not been edited out, and why the posters and subtitles may require more effort to read for (certain) audiences, so that disturbance is minimized while interest and effort to come to a deeper understanding and experience of the film is enhanced.

The culture and power dynamics of this encounter and the pervasive and critical issues brought up deserve center stage, and the responses of the Tanzanian and Dutch participants as well as film selection committees and audiences from other parts of Europe and Africa, as well as North and South America, show that it powerfully fulfills this function in its current form, despite its cinematic flaws. *As Reviewer 1 remarks, 'Eliamani's Homestead can be an important teaching film for researchers and anthropology students interested in the economic dynamics of cultural and eco tourism globally'. I therefore hope that it will not be judged primarily by contemporary and/or European standards of aesthetics and language in filmmaking, but by its ethnographic value and the issues it raises, and that any required revisions will not affect the power nor the nuances of the content.*

With high regards,

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