

## Focus film: *Sisters in Law* (Ayisi/Longinotto, 2005)

### Overview

Longinotto's documentary was shot in **Super 16mm film** with an **Aaton camera** weighing over 5kg. She has a profound dislike of small cameras and 'over-filming'.

The Aaton Super 16mm camera Longinotto used is designed to be handheld and rest on the shoulder. It operates silently and synchronises sound, therefore making it a popular choice for documentary filmmakers.

16mm produces a grainy, gritty look and dense colours. It gives the film a rich texture. As a result, many documentary and fiction filmmakers still choose to shoot films in 16mm rather than digital.

### Approach to filmmaking

Longinotto's sound recordist, Mary Milton, used a digital Nagra at the time (a large and heavy piece of equipment).

Ollie Huddleston, the film's editor, used non-linear digital software, but his editing is minimalist and non-gimmicky.

Digital technologies did not have a great impact on the filming of *Sisters in Law*, but Longinotto did buy a digital camera after it.

Film is more expensive than digital which is why some low-budget filmmakers will shoot digitally.

### Key questions

- Why was *Sisters in Law* shot on 16mm film but edited digitally?
- How would you describe the aesthetic of the film? What does the effect of 16mm add to the film's aesthetic?
- Why were 16mm cameras a popular choice for documentary filmmakers who wanted to shoot in a cinema vérité style?

### The digital technologies debate

- Digital technologies have made the filmmaking process more democratic; in other words, it has become much cheaper and easier to make a film. We are now all potential filmmakers and can produce some amazing footage using just our mobile phones, if we are so inclined.
- The amateur quality of our 'little cameras' goes hand in hand with the idea of capturing reality, which is a major concern of the documentary filmmaker. Equally, their diminutive size allows for easier access to remote or difficult-to-film locations.
- The repertoire of archival footage available to a documentary filmmaker has grown exponentially since the beginning of the digital era.
- Non-linear digital editing has also opened up a world of possibility to the filmmaker, further democratising the documentary format.
- Some filmmakers still choose to shoot on film, preferring the texture and aesthetic of film to digital.
- In documentary film, archival material shot on film may be enhanced or restored digitally, e.g. by removing grain and scratches and even colourising black-and-white footage.

