

Film Review *by Hank Foley*

THE WHITE HOTEL

**Directors/Producers.....Dianne Griffin,
Tobi Solvang**

Personal digression is part of the story throughout *White Hotel*, begun as a documentary about AIDS in Eritrea (East Africa), a country celebrating the end of 30 years of war with Ethiopia upon Dianne Griffin and Tobi Solvang's arrival, a country surrounded by the highest rate of H.I.V. infection in the world, nearly all of it transmitted heterosexually in a strict Christian/Muslim society.

The intrepid documentarians (in out-back where few women travel alone) met a Dr. Ephram who was a freedom fighter

and a prisoner of war for four years. He had been slashed by a captor with a serated knife on forearms and shins, electrocuted, beat on the soles of his feet until the skin split, forced to stand, or upon falling, kicked in the face until his teeth were knocked out. After the fighting ceased, he looked for his tormentor in a work camp. Dr. Ephram found the man. He asked him, "Do you remember me?" The man replied, "Yes." He asked, "Do you remember what you did to me?" The man, again, replied simply, "Yes." Then, Dr. Ephram gave the man a bag of oranges and told him that he forgave him. This reminded Dianne Griffin of a story concerning a fondness for oranges stemming back to hardship in Norway during World War II that her father, killed in a train wreck just before the shooting began, had told her.

Skulls and bones of intended soldiers who had paid with their lives for refusing to fight were the focus of another scene. Grisly details were juxtaposed with the vacation romance of Tobi Solvang and an Eritrean man resulting in her being exposed to gonorrhoea and possibly to H.I.V.

"Dianne and I had very different ideas about the direction the documentary would take," said Tobi.

The ending scenes of the official Eritrean Independence Day ceremony were thrilling. The excited crowd cheered, "Freedom! Freedom." For this documentary, I say, Bravo! Bravo! and commend early sale to PBS, TLC or the Discovery Channel.

White Hotel will be screening at the New Documentary Series at Museum of Modern Art, Thursday Jan. 20th at 3 and 6 PM

NEW YORK INDEPENDENT FILM MONITOR