

Film Panel: Rethinking Ethiopian Studies through Film Representation



The 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies

Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Building 2, Auditorium 3, Trondheim

July 4-6th 2007

Program 1. Filmmaking and Soul Searching

Tezkar, an ethiopian pledge never to forget

1999, 53min. English Subtitles
by Makeda Ketcham (France)

Keywords: Wollo, Looking back on the path of ancestors, Tewodros, Protestant missionary, Azmari
Synopsis: The author is going on the traces of her ancestors, characters who crossed the

History of Abyssinia from the mid XIXth to the beginning of the XXth century. From the research and confrontation to the Ethiopian memory of our days, intimate and collective

thread will be revealed and remixed in a spirit of encounter and commemoration, symbolized by the title, Tezkar from the Ge'ez root "zekere" remembering.

The Return of the Obelisk

by Samson Giorgis (Ethiopia) 2007, 64min. English Subtitles
Keywords: Axum Obelisk, Cultural identity, Collective memory of the Ethiopian people
Synopsis: Almost seventy years after the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, the Axum Obelisk –a stele 23 meters high and one of the most important historical monument of Ethiopia-, finally returned to its home country in April 2005. The film focuses on the incredible history of this monument, which is considered since 1980 as

world heritage by UNESCO. Throughout its story, the film recollects the history of Ethiopia: its relationship to Italy, its fight for independence, and since then, the struggle it has been carrying out for the past 70 years for the handover of this priceless piece of art. It looks at the multiple aspects that this struggle symbolizes in terms of cultural identity, international recognition, hope for the future, and what its return means for the collective memory of the Ethiopian people. Axum is part of the oldest known civilization in sub-Saharan

Africa. The Aksumite stele survived in its present location for almost two millennia. It is part of our earliest civilization where numerous stele, large palaces, temples, churches, man made water reservoirs and statues stood in Aksumite urban centers. The film also intends to disclose to the public, and beyond, the rich cultural heritage of Ethiopia. This will contribute to showing a different image of this country, which has long suffered and still suffers from a unique and widespread representation in Western media.



Program 2. Camera as Evidence of Communication and Collaboration

Room 11, Ethiopia Hotel

2006, 23min. English Subtitles
by Itsushi Kawase (Japan)
Keywords: Street Children in Gondar, Limited spatial setting, Communication and interaction with the filmic

subject
Synopsis: This film aims to capture a sense of the life of children living on the street in Gondar by witnessing the interaction between two children and the film-maker. Although it is

about the children's life on the streets, the entire film was shot in the film-maker's room in the Ethiopia Hotel. This limited space allows the film to focus on communication between subjects and film-maker and to reveal some of

the ideas that enable them to endure and survive on the streets.

Bury the Spear!

2004, 72min. English Subtitles
by Ivo Strecker and Alula Pankhurst (Germany/England)
Keywords: Arbore, Borana, Konso, Tsamai, Hamar and Dasanach, Peace making, Anthropologist as a mediator
Synopsis: Is peace possible? When we look at the

history of mankind, questions arise about the inevitability of war and the impossibility of peace. These issues have never been more important to our future than they are in now in our globally-conscious, post-911 world. Made by the anthropologist/ filmmaking team of Ivo Strecker and Alula Pankhurst, Bury the Spear! focuses on

the 1993 peace-making efforts of the Abore, Borana, Konso, Tsamai, Hamar and Dasanach to end decades of ethnic war in the southern Ethiopian Rift Valley. The title of the film comes from the climactic scenes of elders uttering curses as they use stones to blunt the blades of their spears. The weapons are then carried to a

termite mound, broken and placed on the mound for the ants to devour. Then the spears are replaced by tools of peace, like hoes for gardening and whips and sticks for herding. Formerly plagued by endless war, the groups of elders now chant for good fortune to ensure the peace between themselves lasts.



Program 3. Filming “Pilgrims”

Lalibalocc -Living in the Endless Blessing-

2006, 30min. English Subtitles
by Itsushi Kawase (Japan)
Keywords: Lalibalocc, Rhetoric, Interaction between the

performer and audience
Synopsis: Lalibalocc are the group of wandering singers in Ethiopia who are believed to share the oral tradition, which condemns them and their descendants

to leprosy unless they sing, beg and bless for alms in the morning. The film allows the viewer to witness how Lalibalocc justify their activities using a variety of rhetorical expressions in conversations

and in the song text with the intended audience. Thus the film treats the detail of the interaction between the performer and audience as an integral part of their ever-changing performance-making process.

Pilgrimage to Ya'a

-Feasting the consumers of the sacred-
2006, 25min. English Subtitles
by Yasuo Matsunami (Japan)
Keywords: Islam, pilgrimage, Oromo
Synopsis: Ya'a is one of the biggest pilgrimage centers for Muslim in Ethiopia. It is located on the western fringe of the country near the Sudan

border. Ya'a became a pilgrimage center only after Al-Faki Ahmad Umar, A Tijsani shaykh who under divine order came from Borno (Nigeria), died there in 1953. The residents of Ya'a receive pilgrims who visit his shrine on Muslim holidays. The reasons for conducting the pilgrimage vary. Some of the pilgrims hope for relief from sickness, poverty and mental anguish etc, and others visit Ya'a for pure

reverence or love for Al-Faki Ahmad Umar. In January 2006, I accompanied a party of pilgrims traveling on foot, to co-experience the troubles they encounter and to inquire why they chose the alternative of conducting the pilgrimage to foot. The residents of Ya'a regard themselves as caretakers of both the mausoleum and the pilgrims who visit the mausoleum. The task of offering

meals (free of charge) for the pilgrims has become a sacred tradition taken over from the deeds of Al-faki Afmad Umar. Consuming the sacred meal is a highlight of the pilgrimage, whereby the pilgrims 'embody' the sacred element and thank God for the generous feast extended by the residents, who already 'embody' the sacredness through approximate residence to the mausoleum



Program 4.

A new approach to Anthropological Knowledge: Rethinking Ethnographic Film

Duka's Dilemma

2001 87min. English Subtitles
by Jean Lydall and Kaira Strecker (Germany)
Keywords: Hamar Women, Intimacy, Polygamy
Synopsis: Duka is a married woman and mother of five young children, living in Hamar, Southern Ethiopia. Ever since her husband married a beautiful, young, second wife, Duka has been in a state of emotional turmoil. Among the Hamar, who live with herds and cultivate small fields of sorghum in their remote, bush-covered country, men are allowed to marry more than one wife, but only a few men ever do so. Duka wonders why her husband married again; did he find her too old, or was he turned off because of her chronic malaria? Also, she doesn't know what to make of the new wife who is silent and never expresses her feelings except in rage? And on top of this, her mother-in-law keeps making

trouble and is angry with her son for marrying a second wife behind her back. Personal and intimate, the film follows the drama of this family in crisis, the high points of which are the birth of the new wife's child, and nine months later, a heated dispute between the mother-in-law and her son, which leads to the building of a new house. Duka, her husband, her mother-in-law and the second wife voice their different points of view as events proceed and the crisis finally gets resolved. The language of the film is Hamar, and is translated by subtitles. There is no need for extra commentary from the filmmakers, whose presence and close relationship to the people are always evident.



CHAALO, the voices of mourning

2004, 50min. English Subtitles
by Thomas Osmond and Jean-Marc Lamoure (France)
Keywords: Oromo, Spirit possession, Filmmaker's subjective voice
Synopsis: This film deals with the meeting of Jean-Marc Lamoure, the director of this movie, and Chaalo Magarsa, a mystic religious leader living in the rural areas of Western Ethiopia. Mister Chaalo, as he likes to be named, is a man dressed like a woman, worshipping through spirit possession cults the local divinities of the

area. Chaalo is the head priest of the Mo'aata, a religious group celebrating Demamiti, the female spirit who catches individuals affected by the death of one relative. Each year, in the end of the rainy season, the local community gathers around the shrine of the great religious leader of the area incarnated by Damfa, the patron saint of the whole valley. During these ceremonies, the religious group led by Chaalo performs a possession ritual to express its devotion to Damfa. It is in this celebrating context that Jean-Marc Lamoure met Mister Chaalo for the first time in September 2001. Haunted by the recent death of his brother, Jean-Marc Lamoure found

an echo to its pain following the tracks of Chaalo through the sensitive path of mourning. This film rests on the collaboration of the film maker and Thomas Osmond, an anthropologist studying the local religious practices of this Ethiopian region mainly inhabited by Oromo populations. Jean-Marc Lamoure and he have produced different academic documentaries elated to anthropological issues in university contexts. With "Chaalo, the voices of mourning", they have decided to make an intimate film based on anthropological inquiries but led by the personal experience of Jean-Marc Lamoure. Indeed, this film is more a

rsensitive testimony than a scientific documentary. This hybrid approach aims to explore new trends in visual anthropology, including the issue of dealing with intimacy, subjectivity and expressions of human traumas.



Program 5.

Unexplored Historical Film Materials (presented by Wolbert Smidt)



Ethiopia in 1935
-Historical film material of Martin Rikli-
Keywords : Haile Selassie, Italo-Ethiopian war, Orthodox Church, Life at the court, Addis Ababa, Hararge, Somali

Ethiopia in the 1950s
-Historical film material from the "Wochenschau" (reportage)-
Keywords : Haile Selassie, Addis Ababa, documentary

Ethiopia in 1956:
The first film produced by an Ethiopian social anthropologist, Mekonnen Desta (in collaboration with Manfred Purzer): 'Ethiopia, an Empire between yesterday and tomorrow' (in German)
Keywords : Haile Selassie, Orthodox Church, legendary roots of the Ethiopian state, Addis Ababa

Time Table

July 4th

09:45	Opening Remarks by Itsushi Kawase (Kyoto University)
10:00	
10:00	Program 1. Filmmaking and Soul Searching <i>Tezkar, an ethiopian pledge never to forget</i> by Makeda Ketcham (France) 1999, 53min. <i>The Return of the Obelisk</i> by Samson Giorgis (Ethiopia) 2007, 64min.
12:30	
13:30	Program 2. Camera as Evidence of Communication and Collaboration <i>Room 11, Ethiopia Hotel</i> by Itsushi Kawase (Japan) 2006, 23min. <i>Bury the Spear!</i> by Ivo Strecker and Alula Pankhurst (Germany/England) 2004, 72min.
15:40	
16:00	Program 3. Filming "Pilgrims" <i>Lalibalocc-Living in the Endless Blessing</i> by Itsushi Kawase (Japan) 2006, 30min. <i>Pilgrimage to Ya'a -Feasting the consumers of the sacred-</i>
17:30	

July 5th

09:30	Program 4. A new approach to Anthropological Knowledge: Rethinking Ethnographic Film <i>Duka's Dilemma</i> by Jean Lydall and Kaira Strecker (Germany) 2001 87min. <i>CHAALO, the voices of mourning</i> by Thomas Osmond and Jean-Marc Lamoure (France) 2004, 50min.
12:30	
13:30	Program 2. Camera as Evidence of Communication and Collaboration <i>Room 11, Ethiopia Hotel</i> <i>Bury the Spear!</i>
15:40	
16:00	Program 5. Unexplored Historical Film Materials (presented by Wolbert Smidt) <i>Ethiopia in 1935 -Historical film material of Martin Rikli-</i> <i>Ethiopia in the 1950s -Historical film material from the "Wochenschau" (reportage)-</i> <i>Ethiopia in 1956: The first film</i> produced by an Ethiopian social anthropologist, Mekonnen Desta (in collaboration with Manfred Purzer): 'Ethiopia, an Empire between yesterday and tomorrow' (in German) -

July 6th

10:00	Program 3. Filming "Pilgrims" <i>Lalibalocc-Living in the Endless Blessing</i> <i>Pilgrimage to Ya'a -Feasting the consumers of the sacred-</i>
11:30	
13:30	Program 4. A new approach to Anthropological Knowledge: Rethinking Ethnographic Film <i>Duka's Dilemma</i> <i>CHAALO, the voices of mourning</i>
14:30	

There is a possibility of screening additional films.

Chief Organizers of the Panel:

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