



Entertainment

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excerpts from:

Filming a Continent on Fire

BC filmmakers draw a sharp focus on Africa's struggles.

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***A Cry For Madiom* achieves something rarely seen in filmmaking: visual lament. In the ancient tradition of sorrow and loss, *Madiom* is a song of lament**



'A Cry for Madiom' from Africa to North Vancouver

'A Song for Sudan'

Born in Jerusalem a decade after the Holocaust, North Vancouver filmmaker Erez T. Yanuv Barzilay says the need to document acts of genocide is a calling that "chose" him fifteen years ago when he was sent to cover the story of breaking peace in Cambodia for an Israeli news channel. Walking in the "killing fields" he also was haunted by the thought: "how could this happen 25 years after the Holocaust --- didn't we say 'never again'?" The question has compelled him to film genocide the world over and is the reason he found himself in Southern Sudan in 1998 filming *A Cry For Madiom*.

On first impression, *A Cry For Madiom* is an unusual film, about as far from the previous two film's documentary style as one can get. There is little narration, no fast cutting and no slick soundtrack. Instead, the viewer is plunged without comment into a remote feeding centre in Ajiep, a village in Southern Sudan near the Darfur border, for 24 hours. Engulfed in largely unedited, unnarrated sequences, the viewer slowly begins to relax into the pace of the feeding centre where the sounds and songs of the day --- punctuated by the constant coughing of children --- serve as the film's only soundtrack.

Mothers wait hours in the sun to have their child assessed to determine if they will be able to receive supplemental feeding rations. A little girl picks the husk off her treasure of five corn seeds. The film's title character, Madiom Madiok, looks up a Yanuv Barzilay's camera and laughs a delighted laugh, incongruent with the grave setting.

Yanuv Barzilay's hand reaches out from behind the camera, any one of his fingers bigger than Madiom's emaciated little wrist. Madiom's mother's face lights up with a smile and she gestures, clearly indicating that even in the midst of tragedy, her son can laugh.

'Maybe tomorrow'

When Madiom is finally assessed, his five-year-old body weighs only 7.4 kilos, skeletal for his 82 cm. Yanuv Barzilay barely restrains outrage as Madiom is sent away with only oral rehydrating solution and milk. He will receive food "maybe tomorrow," the harried Belgian nurse from Medecins Sans Frontiers tells us. "Why do you ask such questions?" she bristles. Clearly she is doing her best with an unstable food supply in a remote area ravaged by drought and instability.

It's risky filmmaking, risky because it trusts that the viewer is intelligent enough to put it together. Stark and haunting, the film's subtlety is its power. True, the film is full of images that are anathema to many of the filmmakers in this story: starving, bloated children, flies in their eyes. But Yanuv Barzilay has managed to take 24 hours in a crisis that has been ongoing for 40 years and turn it into a something lyrical. *A Cry For Madiom* achieves something rarely seen in filmmaking: visual lament. In the ancient tradition of sorrow and loss, *Madiom* is a song of lament --- strikingly offset by the joyful singing of the children and women in the feeding centre. By no means a dirge, it is a song of the beauty and dignity of humanity, and of *that* loss --- the only fitting response to an inhumane crisis where upwards of 40 children are dying a day and where death is so commonplace it goes nearly unacknowledged.

Yanuv Barzilay admits that in making *Madiom* he "broke all the rules" --- both of filmmaking and of his own personal ethic. "I expose the victims by showing things I normally don't dare to document out of respect for the moment and the victim. But I also expose myself by using the footage as taken, not even editing out my mistakes with the camera." He felt it necessary to do this because, even though it has been eight years since he filmed *Madiom* "this is not one moment in life, this is the face of the genocide in Sudan for the last 50 years, yet nobody reports on it, nobody shows it, nobody cares," he says. "My goal was to share the actual experience of being there so that people could feel even ten percent of what I felt."

A Cry For Madiom has won three international film festival awards, including Best International Documentary at the Tuskegee Film Festival in February and was selected to the International Documentary Film Festival in Amsterdam. The film will be screened at the Red Cross Film & Speaker series at the Burnaby Public Library, Metrotown on May 10, 7pm.

For the full article:

<http://thetyee.ca/Entertainment/2006/04/28/FilmingaContinentonFire>