

The Ethiopian International Film Festival: The 7th Edition, 26 November - 2 December 2012

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Even though Ethiopia marked a notable event in the history of world cinema by experiencing film viewing at the very early stage of the development of world cinematic art in 1897, the practice could not maintain sustainability due to various socio-economic and political factors. The pace in which the film industry was initiated was so crawling that it drastically lagged behind those countries that were exposed to the art years later after cinema was introduced in Ethiopia. Cinema in Ethiopia took almost a century to establish itself as a culture medium; but flourished late in the last decade as video formatted productions in Addis Ababa. The increase in number of film productions in the early years of the new millennium, together with the awareness created from the past experiences of American and European embassies and cultural centers that attempted to run film festivals annually in the city, seems to have motivated few interested-groups to organize local film festivals. Of all those ambitious groups, it is the EIFF that succeeded in organizing and running film festival successively on annual bases, blending national and international film exhibitions. This paper thus attempts to provide a picture of the 7th edition of the Ethiopian International Film Festival that took place in Addis Ababa from 26 November to 2 December 2012. The paper hopefully would give a picture of an aspect of Ethiopian cinema for those International scholars with academic interest in African film in particular, and world cinema in general.

Keywords: Ethiopia cinema, film festival, video format, movie theatre, award

Background: A Century Creep Towards International Film Festivals

Ethiopia is one of a very few countries in the world who had the opportunity to view a motion picture at the early age of the development of cinematic Arts a century ago. The first film projected in Ethiopia in 1897, which painted the passion of Christ, was viewed in the grand palace for Emperor Menelik II, members of the royal family, the nobility and high ranking clergy (Ngongo, 1984 Eth.ca [1992], p. 336; Pariset, 1937, pp. 52-56). At the initial period of its exhibition in the first private movie theatre 1898 however, cinema faced a strong resistance and rejection from the clergy who took the new art as Satan's sorcery (Ngongo, 1984 Eth.ca, p. 336). This obstacle as well as other socio-economic factors adversely affected the proper pace of the development of the art, limiting the number of feature film production to less than five, and number of movie theatres to not more than 6 in 100 years. In the last decade however, the cultural and economic impact of globalization with the changes made on the Ethiopian socio-economic directions have highly motivated local film productions and exhibition. Now a day, the cinematic art that address the Ethiopian subject matters has been flourishing with the annual production of over hundred feature films. The number of public and private

movie theatres in Addis Ababa has exceeded 25; and there is at least one movie theatre in all major towns of the country. These circumstances on the other hands have paved the way for the emergence of film festival's culture to go in line with traditions of film exhibitions that had been held in Addis Ababa earlier in 1990s by the British Council, European Union, Ethio-Alliance Frances, Goethe German Cultural Center, Instiuto Italiano de Cultura, and Pushkin Russian Center for Science and Culture.

Following the drastic increase in number of feature film productions at the beginning of the Ethiopian new millennium¹, certain individuals attempted to organize film festivals; but could not succeed due to lack of experience in the given area. In 2004, Yirgashewa Teshome, Director of *Linkage Arts and Resource Center* (LARC) was advised by the organizers of the *First Amakula Kampala International Film Festival* to run a local film festival in Addis Ababa as a prerequisite to involve Ethiopian in international film festivals. Consequently, LARC organized the First Ethiopian national Film Festival in 2005 that run for a week at the Imperial Hotel. Then two prize award winner films were sent abroad to represent Ethiopia at the *First Amakula Kampala International Film Festival* held in Uganda. Within the following two years, LARC strengthened itself with experiences acquired from its exposure to Amakula international film festival in order to initiate the *Ethiopian International Film Festival* (EIFF) in 2007 in Addis Ababa (Interview, Teshome 8 January 2012)². In the mean time, *Shakaina Entertainment*, a private enterprise was also formed to run a festival in December 2007 with the ambition to involve 80 films in competition for the *Abyssinian Film Award*, but failed because of the dissatisfaction of members of the jury with the then proposed remuneration (Abeje, 1999 Eth.ca [2007]). On the other side, LARK maintained its sustainability by conducting seven film festivals on annual bases from 2007 to 2012. The feature and characteristics of one of the festivals, the *7th Ethiopian International Film Festival* is portrayed here below.

The 7th Ethiopian International Film Festival

The 7th Ethiopian International Film Festival was held in Addis Ababa from 26 November to 2 December 2012. The theme of the Festival "Many Dreams, One Vision" was coined in the year that preceded the 50th anniversary of African Union; at the time when the issue of Pan Africanism besieged the atmosphere of Addis Ababa through national media. The spirit seems to fit with a call for the harmonization of "diversity in unity", where by the film community from different countries meet at a mutual platform and share global experiences in order to enhance the quality assurance of cinematic arts. Following the announcements and calls for participation on FM radios and private news papers, films representing Africa, Europe, Asia, north and South America have participated on the festival. The festival was sponsored by AMA Art Moves Africa, Hubert Bals Fund, Cinema Mondial Tour & Jan Vrijman, Bedele Special Brewery (the Title Sponsor), Sheger 102.1 FM Radio, Infiniti Digital Printing & Advertising, Instiuto Italiano de Cultura, Midastouch, Pushkin Russian Center for Science and Culture, and Republica Federativa Do Brasil.

Five members of the jury for the competition of Ethiopian films were recruited to represent the Ethiopian Film Association, the Ethiopian Writers Association, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, School of Theatre Arts of the Addis Ababa University, and the film society. Just a month ahead of the festival, a workshop on the procedure and criteria of evaluating films and movie makers was conduct by EIFF for the jury. The jury was

¹ The second Ethiopian millennium was declared on September 11, 2008 as there is eight years difference between Ethiopian calender and European calendar.

² Teshome, Yirgashewa. 2012. Interviewed by the author, 8 January, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

also briefed that the festival would comprise nine award categories for: Audiences' Best Choice, Best Actress, Best Actor, Best Cinematography, Best Director, Best Feature Film, Best Screenwriter, Best Supporting Actress, and Best Supporting Actor. As all the members of the jury were permanently engaged with government and NGO career, each member had to set his own convenient time-table to roam around movie theaters for evaluation. It was mandatory for each member of the jury to present a weekly progress report to the director of the festival every Fridays at lunch sessions sponsored by LARK. This tradition had become a good mechanism to narrow the gaps of the jury's performance in meeting the deadline for the festival. Furthermore, special arrangement was made with film producers to screen movies at the Shalom Cinema continuously for two days so that those few members of the jury who had lagged behind would cope-up with others in submitting the results of the evaluation.

The films were screened in 15 movie theatres in Addis Ababa. The five public movie theatres that hosted the festival were Cinema Ambassador, Cinema Empire, Cinema Ethiopia, Cinema Stereo, and The Ethiopian National Theatre. The eight private movie theatres were Aggona Cinema, Alem Cinema, Cinema Embilta, Cinema Yoftahie, Habesha Cinema, Sebastopol Cinema, Shalom Cinema, and WaFa Cinema. The two cultural centers were Instiuto Italiano de Cultura, and Pushkin Russian Center for Science and Culture. Almost all the public and private movie theatre including Pushkin Russian Center for Science and Culture had run four to five screening sessions a day during the festival week. The ticket price 5 Birr (\$0.25), a 75% discount from the regular entrance fee, was relatively affordable to the bulk of urban youth to attend many festival films.

Opening Ceremony

The opening ceremony was held at the Ethiopian National Theatre in the presence of invited film professionals, representatives of cultural associations, performing and visual artists, and embassy communities. An opening speech was delivered by director of Ethiopian International Film Festival, highlighting the accomplishments of EIFF and its future missions. A film *Fikir Eske Meqabir (Love unto Grave)*, considered to be a premier by EIFF was screened for the invited guests.

Festival Week

The festival week painted a bright flamboyant cultural atmosphere in the city. From early morning to evening, young filmgoers flocked to various movie theatres. They made long cues at the entrance gates; talked about films they attended; socialized around the nearby cafes with pop-corn, sandwiches and soft drink; then rushed into the auditorium to secure comfortable sight-line. After the end of each films, they disused with excitement about what they saw and then hastily looked at the festival's program to choose the upcoming exhibitions and venues, and capture the next screening. Indeed, the festival week was a cheerful and pleasing moment, particularly for movie lovers of the low income strata that enjoyed fresh releases with relatively affordable entrance fee. Of all the time, cinema had escalated as hot issue in the festival week. The EIFF, together with the Embassy of Brazil had also organized a special session where a Brazilian film was screened for Ethiopian film professionals with an objective "to create a forum for sharing experiences on film industry strategies and for solidifying mutual cooperation between the Ethiopian and Brazilian film makers" (Interview, Teshome, 4 April 2014)³.

³ Teshome, Yirgashewa. 2014. Interviewed by the author, 4 April, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Festival Films

A total of 44 films⁴: 22 Amharic feature films from Ethiopia; 5 documentaries, 7 features, and 10 animations from abroad have participated in the festival.

International Films

International films that came to Ethiopia for the festival were from 11 countries: Brazil, Chile, China, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Russia, Serbia, South Africa, Syria, and United Arab Emirates. These films were screened exclusively at the Pushkin Russian Center for Science and Culture⁵ and Instituto Italiano de Cultura. They were *A woman from Damascus* (2008), *De Jueves a Domingo* (2012), *Goodbye* (2011), *King Nakin and the Thundering Hooves* (2011), *Last Train Home* (2009), *Love net-Russian Animations*, *Qarantina* (2010), *The City of Photographer* (2006), *The Invisible Policeman* (2011), *The Salt of life* (2011), *Tilva Rosh* (2010), and *Winter Vacation* (2010). Similar to the practice of the 6th Ethiopian International Film Festival, the 7th edition did not accommodate international films in the prize award category due to lack of financial and managerial capacity of LARC.

Ethiopian Films

One of the criteria for local films to register for the 7th Ethiopian International Festival was the duration in which the film was produced. It was only the 2011/2012 released feature films that were eligible to sign up for the 2012 festival. Here below are the highlights of the 22 films that had participated in festival. *Abro Abbed* [Co-psychopath] is a comedy revolving around Eyob (Moges Chekol) who by chance meets with a psychopath girl, a daughter of an Ethiopian army member who paid life sacrifice at the battle front during Mengistu's regime. Eyob, being highly touched by the condition of the girl, devotes all his time and money to help her recover from mental disorder. As the consequence, he goes bankrupt to the extent of being homeless. The girl, after three years disappearance, returns back from war front, being decorated by EPRDF (the party that her father fought against) as a heroine, and reinstates Eyob's life in return to what he had done to her. The film is unusual in daring to positively recall at this time the life sacrifice and heroism of the army of the military government which had been in combat with the army of the current ruling government—the EPRDF. *Amen* [Amen] tells about Lucy, an Ethio-American girl, who travels with her father to Ethiopia in order to give response to her identity crises. By a thorough observation and analysis of the culture of the Ethiopian people, she gets absorbed by the kindness and hospitality of the rural community. At last she prefers to get married to a country boy and stay permanently in Ethiopia. It is a comedy that gives value to the Ethiopian rural traditional beliefs and practices. It successfully employs variety of camera angles and other cinematographic requirements to professional standard, but with deficiency in voice clarity. *Balageru* [Countryside Man] is a low comedy that praise the naivety, kindness, clean heartedness, and bravery of the Ethiopian rural society, in contrast with egocentric urban culture. The film attempts to create awareness by painting urban cultural shock in order to discourage the exodus of the Gojam-Amahara peasants to Addis Ababa. But it missed its target when screened for the Addis Ababa youth who often despises the rural culture as uncivilized. An Amhara nationalist could consider the film as derogative and offensive. This problem occurred due to deficiency in the technical know-how of feature film production. *Be Lidetie Qen* [On my Birthday] is a low comedy based on the theme of the reversal of fortune. A boy travels from Awasa town to Addis Ababa to celebrate his birthday with his

⁴ The acknowledgement of the International and domestic films is referred in the filmography section.

⁵ Pushkin Russian Center for Science and Culture had also served as an alternative venue for hosting 20 Amharic films during the festival.

girlfriend. He gets cheated by a shoe shiner and goes bankrupt, unable to afford for a taxi to travel to his girlfriend place. At last he wins a lottery; and with the money he receives, joins his girlfriend and his relatives. *Enjinerochu* [The Engineers] is a romantic comedy in which two engineers who were class-mates at the university strive to uphold their love with marriage bond. An American character appears as a token of jealousy and as a check balance to affirm whether true love exists between the engineers. The power of true love is manifested at last on the wedding ceremony of the engineers where the American ends up marrying another Ethiopian girl by coincidence. The film is more of an improvisational composition lacking strength in plot construction. It is overtly didactical in propagating the respect that should be given to labor. Despite the attention given to the synchronization of the make-up, lighting and camera shooting, inadequacy was observed in regards the voice as well as sound clarity. *Fikir Iske Meqabir* [Love unto Grave] is an Absurd Drama movie which replicates the title of the most popular Ethiopian novel written by Hadis Alemayehu. The movie attempts to philosophize death, and tries to justify suicide through Alazar's character that is portrayed as a psychotic professor of literature. The film did not appeal to the general public, and stayed on the market only for very few weeks. It was not clear as to why this film was selected as a premier by EIFF to be screened at the opening ceremony of the festival. *Guantanamo* [Guantanamo] is a romantic comedy about a poor man jailed in Bahir Dar town for stealing a car just to satisfy the instinctive lust of his pregnant wife.⁶ Paradoxically, the prisoner falls in love with a police woman who is in charge of the prison. The human right condition in the jail is apparently democratic and pleasing, as a compared with "Guantanamo", the worst jail in the world. The title of the film *Guantanamo* is thus a sign of criticism to call for the amelioration of prison environment. *Haa-Geiz* [Alpha] is a family drama that portrays a confused life of an illiterate orphan, brought up by an irrational old man who believes that wisdom is a source of evil deeds. *Hiaw Fikir* [Eternal Love] is a romantic drama based on a true story. It revolves around the life of an Ethiopian Diaspora who has been challenged by western culture in Frankfurt, but eased her hardship with the help of a German gentle man. The film also handles the advert effect of marriage of unequal as minor themes. The locations of the picture were Frankfurt and Ethiopia. *Hiywotie* [My Life] is a romantic film that tries to portray the sacrifice required to maintain true love, but the film is challenged by technical limitations in fulfilling its objective. The film was scheduled for evaluation on 20/3/2005 Eth.cal., but the producer failed to screen the film despite the presence of the jury and spectators at the movie theatre as programmed. *Kejerba* [From Behind], as a suspense drama revolves around Mannaye who becomes a rich person by involving himself in crime related to witch craft, and at the end dies for betraying the loyalty to the powerful wizard. The continuity and clarity of the complication of the movie are not clear, leading spectators to confusion. *Liyyounnet* [Deference] is about two inexperienced girls who bring together the power of friendship to tackle problems they face in life. *Lomy Shitta* [Lemon's Fragrance], a serious family drama adapted from a short story that revolves around a tragic life of a lawyer who lost his father by the Red Terror of the military government of Ethiopia, and as the quensquence lived a destitute childhood with a mother who contracted mental disorder from the social decadence of Mengistu Hailemariam's brutal reign. Out of the six literary adaptations screened in the last two decades⁷, it is *Lomy Shitta* that succeeded in treating serious

⁶ According to the old tradition, pregnant women often demand odd types of food and drinks other than what they take on regular bases. The lust for car in the film is an exaggeration to satirize the behavior of the over demanding woman.

⁷ Short Stories adapted to films are three: Endalegeta Kebede's *Yilungnta* (over consideration), Asaminew Arega's *Ye Troy Feres* (Trojan Horse), Adam Reta's *Lomy Shitta* (Lemon's Fragrance). Two novels adapted to film: Sisay Nigusu's *Girridosh* (Eclipse), and Getachew Ayalqe's *Qalkidan* (Vows).

issue with aesthetic flavor, hence became a box office hit of the season by attracting wider spectators from different age category. *Melihik* [*Anchor*] is a romantic suspense movie drama in which two stow-away suffer for weeks in a cargo ship to elope to Amsterdam as economic migrants. Unlike many film productions in Ethiopia, the film dares to face the challenges of high cost of production by making its locations outside Ethiopia—at the Djibouti port and Amsterdam. However, the desire seems to abort, creating disparity in cinematographic technique, particularly in handling the plausibility of the motion of the ship. The ship is seen moving only at the Djibouti shore. The cinematic actions that took place on the voyage all the way through Amsterdam could not merge with the regular sailing of the ship: The sailing to Amsterdam is seen without motion of the ship, obviously because the camera crew did not sail with the actors to Amsterdam due to high budgetary implication. The theme that propagates migration as the only choice towards success makes the film less credible and unethical. *Netsa Tigil* [*Wrestling*] is didactic farce that propagates gender equality through a struggle waged between husband and wife. Husband and wife switch over traditional family responsibilities, where by the husband takes over domestic house hold and the wife replace her husband as a manager of an industry. Like almost the majority of Ethiopian husbands, the man finds himself in a difficulty situation to perform kitchen tasks. At the end, both learn from practice that roles of husbands and the wives are equally important and respectful. The animation, the light and sound are technically well handled. The acting cliché of the famous comedian, Alemseged Tesfay has also differed from his earlier performance through variations of gesture and facial expressions. *Quncho* [*Quncho Agricultural Center*] is a low comedy portraying the mischief of a money mongering girl who is impregnated by Elias, the best man of her fiancé, but tries to disguise herself as loyal lover. Dina, at last discloses the ill deeds of her friend to end up as a wife to the honest lover. *Silliet* [*Calculation*] is a family drama in which Tedi finds himself in a difficult situation to live in harmony with his wife Dr Azeb. Ironically, family disintegration is saved with the support of a very considerate “prostitute”. *Tibbatibbe* (Dribbling) is a spectacular romantic musical drama based on the portrayal of dance competition held for African Talent Show Award. The directing and cinematographic quality of the film indicates the promising potential of the emerging talent in Ethiopia, moving forward to the international film standard. *Weframdu Duriyie* [*The Plump Scoundrel*] is a romantic comedy revolving mainly around the life of a fat orphan (Andualem), who wins the heart of Bitania, a very beautiful girl, with a kindness and the sacrifices he renders both to her and her American fiancée. Bitania at last brakes up with her jealous fiancée and gets married to the considerate orphan. *Yemechereshwu Kemis* [*The Last woman’s dress*] is an outstanding movie drama, dedicated to the Ethiopian Boy Scout organization which was denounced as Imperialist western culture during the era of Mengistu’s military government. In spite of its cinematographic quality, the movie could not attract many young moviegoers due to the seriousness of the theme related to HIV/AIDS. It is based on true story, about HIV/AIDS carrier girls who lost their parents as the result of the epidemic, and fight the syndrome in the rehabilitation center. *Yesiol Muushirroch* [*Bride and Bridegroom in Hell*] ambitiously attempts to handle a theme in the category of science fiction by showing the struggle between virtue and vice. *Yetekefelebbet* [*Reimbursed*] is family drama based on the conflict between emotion and conscience in which a neglected faithful house wife suffers due to the husband’s involvement with an office girl. The story ends didactically through self-realization of the husband in which decency and truthfulness are amplified as praiseworthy.

Closing & Award Ceremony

It was on 2 December 2012 evening that the award and closing ceremony of the 7th edition of the Ethiopian International Film Festival was held colorfully at the Ethiopian National Theatre. It was honored by the presence of high government officials from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and attended by invited representatives of embassies, leaders of associations, film society, practitioners of performing and visual arts, writers, journalists, producers, owners of movie theatres, and art scholars. The number of invited guests was more than the capacity of the hall—1200 seats, where late comers were seen standing at the back throughout the run of the ceremony. As introduction, the program of the evening was briefed by the master of the ceremony. After stage demonstration of modern and traditional music, the festival director made a short speech on the seven year's success of EIFF, and on acknowledgements of sponsors. Etenesh Kebede, the Chairperson of the jury then explained the procedure followed in the ranking of films for the award. Five nominees from each award category that had been officially disclosed few days in advance via FM Radios and news papers were again refreshed. Then the winners were declared, and the awards were handed over by Tesfaye Gessese, Solomon Bekele Weya, Selamawit Gebresilassie, Hailu Tsegaye, Abebe Ketsela and Shimelis Abera who are notable performing and visual artists. Feleke Ababa, who starred in *Yemechereshawu Kemis* secured the trophy for Best Actor. Elisabeth Melaku from *Lomi Shitta* won the award for Best Actress. Azeb Worku from *Yemechereshawu Kemis* was declared as the Best Supporting Actress. Abrham Gezahegn from *Lomi Shitta* was selected as the Best Screen writer; and the award for Best feature film was bestowed upon *Lomi Shitta*. Liul Selomon from *Yemechereshawu Kemis* was prized as Best Director. The award for Best Cinematography also went *Yemechereshawu Kemis*. *Yetekefelebet* received the trophy for the Audiences' Best Choice.

Audience participation during the announcements of the nominees and the declaration of award winners was accompanied by irregular applause; sometimes amplified and other time understated depending upon the approval of the ranking. There was a moment when groups of spectators emotionally argued with each other and aired disapproval to some award declarations. The fact that all the juries' prizes were confined exclusively to *Lomi Shitta* and *Yemechereshawu Kemis* out of 22 competed movies had also been reflected as audience's suspicion in regards the fairness of the award procedure. The selection of *Yetekefelebet* as Audiences' Best Choice in particular had been a point of controversy among the spectators, where the transparency and genuineness of the edition was questioned.

Spectrum of the Festival

The 7th Ethiopian International Film Festival has successfully run throughout Addis Ababa from 26 November to 2 December 2012. The weeklong festival had become a forum of "diversity in unity" whereby cinematic expressions of people from different continents were viewed and shared by the Ethiopian people. The festival has served as medium of communication for world film practitioners to bring together the fruits of their talent at a given place so that others would compare and contrast their cinematographic standard for further amelioration. The 7th edition, among other things has vividly depicted the main characteristics and the current feature of the literary, performance, and technical elements of the Ethiopian cinema. Of the 22 films screened during the festival week, the great majority were romantic comedies, written and directed by young filmmakers bearing very limited life and artistic experience. Due to the limitations, what had been produced remains fitted merely to young spectators. Dream of the youth to acquire fortune in a short cut, lust to win ideal love, moral

perfection, and utopian class and gender equality predominate the Ethiopian film production, dictating the constituency of the Ethiopian movie spectators to youth film goers. The chance was rare to trace an adult in movie halls. “Young filmmakers for young filmgoers” best characterize the present Ethiopian cinema. The performance and the technical elements of Ethiopian films have also been highly affected by young novice writers, directors and cinematographers who by one way or another secured some amount of money to quench the desire of joining filmmakers’ community without adequate knowledge and skill. Kibralem Fanta, a film professional (Da’amate 214, 24) indignantly comments on this:

Of all the arts, it is cinematic art that is unlucky. Nowadays, cinema has become a business where laymen attempts to show their power and strength. It is ... film business that a Diaspora involves upon his return to Ethiopian; musicians make films; radio and press journalists make films; people in the neighborhood propose to jointly produce films; even a poor firewood seller has asked me to go into film business with him. A model girl suggests similar offer. These days, film commissioning has become a love token for a concubine, by which a rich man pleases a girl he adores to blindly enter into film business.

The desire among ambitious young film makers has become highly exalted to the extent of looking for a market to sale once own kidney just to cover production cost for the script they write (Interview, Makida Afework, 6 April 2014)⁸. The widely accepted hasty generalization by some producers that “the majority of film customers are teenagers, and therefore, the form and content of films should target the interest of this age group for profit making” has been pressurizing the direction of the Ethiopian cinema to move towards farcical romantic productions. Though this is apparently true, the 7th edition has revealed the opposite reality that mature films can also best suit the bulk of teenagers if produced with the required aesthetic standard. This is substantiated by the release of serious social dramas such as *Lomy Shitta* that had become a box office hit. It was also observed that films with “sour” themes like HIV/AIDS, Red Terror, orphanage, prostitution, migration, revenge and psychopath had been welcomed during the festival. The attitudinal change of teenage filmgoers towards developing a fresh test for serious comedy and tragedy in 2011/2012 could also be considered as a sign of development of film appreciation in Addis Ababa. The major factor for the change is obviously the observed cinematographic progress in the year, motivated by filmmakers’ competition for market and prize awards. Between the 6th and the 7th EIFF, other considerable improvements have also been witnessed. The tendency of titling films with numbers (*Seventy-Thirty, 300 Thousand*), and giving English identification for Amharic movies (*Ladies First, City Boyez*) have been minimized as per the criticism rendered on the closing ceremony of the 6th EIFF. On the other hand, some factors expected to appear as gesture of progress after the 6th EIFF have not been observed. The technical quality of the images of most of the films seem to have lost a professional focus due to individuals shouldering unnecessary burden by monopolizing the tasks of writing, acting and directing. The participation of local and international films in the festival is still minimal. The basic question as to why only 22 films out of more than 82 films produced in the year (Limenih, 2005 Eth.Ca, 26) had registered for the festival needs to be answered from various perspectives. Likewise, South Africa should not have been the only African participant of the international festival organized in Addis Ababa, right at the heart of African Union. The “Internationality” of the festival is also under question for not adequately accommodating films produced by the most distinguished American, Australian, European, African and Asian companies. The festival had moreover, bounded itself to the city, not considering at least major towns in the

⁸ Afework, Makida. 2014. Interviewed by the EBS TV, 6 April, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

country as extension of film exhibition. The fact that LARK limited the venue of the festival only to 13 cinemas out of more than 23 movie theatres in Addis Ababa, in the meantime has doubted the fare geographical distribution of the festival's value to the people residing far away from "down town". Challenges related to film evaluation had also been observed as critical. Members of the jury had been unnecessarily pressurized with time constraint, often evaluating five to six films a day due to the tight program set by LARK. The transparency of the jury and the selection of the winner for the "audience Choice" award as well, had been a point of controversy among festival participants in relation to the issue of credibility.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The 7th edition of Ethiopian International Film Festival was successful in hosting more local and International films as compared to the previously conducted six festivals. The festival indeed was a uniting and jubilant week whereby filmmakers and film-goers of different sex, religion, race and age group had raised cinema as common agenda, exchanged views, shared artistic experiences, and enjoyed diverse flavors of national and international motion pictures. It also served as a yardstick to the Ethiopian film in that the literature, performance and technical elements, as well as the capacity to organize a festival are relatively on the track of progress. The director and the organizing team of the Ethiopian International Film Festival should be appreciated for all these achievements, particularly for maintaining the sustainability of EIFF for seven years. The sense of competition that EIFF generated among Ethiopian film producers, directors, performers and technicians has contributed to the qualitative enhancement of the arts. EIFF has to be credited also for being exemplary to others who have started to organize alternative national and international film festivals.

In spite of all these, there are significant points that LARC, as the frontrunner in Ethiopian film festival should consider more in the future. First and foremost, it should seriously review the merits and demerits recorded in its seven years' journey, and commit its self to designing a point of takeoff in order to ascend to the level of a full-fledged international festival organizer. For this, EIFF is required to build a better public and external relation's skills as well as organizational capacity in order to secure stronger partnership with renowned sisterly African institutions, particularly with FESPACO-Pan African Festival of Cinema and Television of Ouagadougou, ZIFF—Zanzibar International Film Festival, Kenya International Film Festival, Rwanda Film Festival, Amakula Kampala International Film Festival; and likewise with other international institutes such as Cinema African Film Festival—London, Stockholm African Film Festival, CANS Pan African-France, New York African Film Festival, Leuven African Festival-Belgium etc. The move towards such mutual cooperation would undoubtedly assist EIFF to be a truly International platform (as its name indicates) where more social responsible African and international films participate. This would also contribute to the popularization and distribution of Ethiopian films to the outer world, and at the same time pave the way for the substitution of low tech video formatted production style with more professional cinematic productions. In addition to that, EIFF should work hard to build up its credibility so that many locally produced films join the annual festival with trust and enthusiasm. The direction of the festival should be more accommodative by targeting the broader community living in all corners of the city and major towns in the regions. Above all thing, EIFF organizers should make an endeavor to the outmost to overcome the financial, human and material constraints, and see to it that the planning and the implementations of the forthcoming festivals are always done carefully and comprehensively.

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