

San Jose to welcome *Migration of Beauty*

By Abebe Gellaw

The Stanford Ethiopian Forum (SEF), a non-partisan group aiming to encourage dialogue among Ethiopians, announced that *Migration of Beauty* will be screened in San Jose on Sunday, March 7 to be followed by another screening in Oakland and Stanford University.



President of the Forum, Dr. Worku Negash noted that sponsoring the widely acclaimed documentary movie is just the first in a series of activities SEF has slated to undertake in order to engage, encourage and promote civilized discourse among Ethiopians on pressing political and socio-economic matters.

He noted that the Forum is an opportunity created for Ethiopians or friends of Ethiopia to hold a series of dialogue sessions on critical issues affecting Ethiopia and its people. “SEF will strive to apply the principles of civil discourse, respect for peoples, ideas, cultural diversity, transparency, scholarship, openness and critical thinking,” he said. Dr. Worku has called on Ethiopians in the Bay Area to watch *Migration of Beauty* as it gives them a different perspective about them and their country as presented by an American film maker.

According to Dr. Worku SEF is planning a major event at Stanford, one of America’s prestigious universities. The conference, to be announced in the near future, will coincide with the Ethiopian sports tournament, which will be hosted in San Jose from 27th June through July 3, 2010.

Migration of Beauty producer, Chris Flaherty, said that the movie has been successful since its release last year. “I am delighted to see that *Migration of Beauty* has not only generated interest but also discussions on the dismal socio-political situation in Ethiopia,” he said.

Asked why he named the movie *Migration of Beauty*, Chris pointed out that the title was meant to serve more as a metaphoric idea than a direct interpretation. He further pointed out that the movie shows the current struggle for democracy in Ethiopia in the context of an American experience

Migration of Beauty will be shown on Sunday March 7 at 6 pm, at Camera 3 Theatre, 288 S. Second Street, San Jose, it was learnt. All are invited to this unique opportunity in the South Bay.

“No problem can be solved by simply ignoring it.”

Chris Flaherty, *Migration of Beauty* Producer



The following is an excerpt from an interview with Chris Flaherty, producer and director of *Migration of Beauty*, a powerful documentary about the struggle for democracy

AV: Why did you choose *Migration of Beauty* as the title of this documentary movie?

Chris: I'm amazed how the title of my film has captured the imagination of so many. I guess, if you approach it in a direct sense it could mean exactly what it implies. And while it does mean exactly that, a migration of beauty, there is so much more connected to it. I will say that it is meant to serve more as a metaphoric idea than a direct interpretation. In this sense it could mean many different things to many different people. In order to better understand my intention you have to ask yourself what the

word "beauty" in the title means to you personally while considering that my interpretation might be completely different than yours. It's not a straight-forward idea and it was not meant to be. I believe most people know where I'm coming from once they have viewed the movie.

AV: What has beauty top do with democracy in Ethiopia?

The movie does show the current struggle for democracy in Ethiopia but it is presented in the context of an American experience. While I have done much in the film to illustrate the dismal political situation in Ethiopia, I also used it as a way to draw parallels between the lives of Ethiopians in Ethiopia and the lives of Ethiopians in the United States. From the perspective of non-Ethiopian U.S. citizens, this is a classic story, one where the film's title becomes more apparent. They know it well. Immigrants come from a country burdened by tyranny and political repression are suddenly faced with the prospect of having a voice in their host government.

The American experience is truly the flip side to everything they have known before where criminalized political opposition, press controlled by the government, control of the population by use of the military and mass murder have been the orders of the day. For many, the true epiphany is not the moment they realize they have a voice in their host government rather it's the moment they realize they have the ability to direct their point of view

directly towards government officials in their native homeland. Quite simply, the political actions of many in the Diaspora would land them in prison or get them killed in Ethiopia.

A movie poster for the documentary 'Migration of Beauty'. The poster features a central image of a woman in a white headscarf looking off to the side. To her left, a group of men in white shirts are walking. The text on the poster includes: 'Migration of Beauty is a "must watch" movie!', 'CHRIS FLAHERTY', 'FLAHERTY DIRECTS THE HOME OF ETHIOPIA', 'Sensational! The EthioSun', 'A very moving work' David Calleja, Foreign Policy Journal, 'An award bound-doc' Ethlomeia, 'San Jose CA', 'March 7th @ 6:30PM', 'Camera 3 Theater Auditorium #3', '288 S. Second St San Jose CA, 95113', 'Information: 650-387-4940', 'Sponsored by the Stanford Ethiopian Forum', 'Official Selection of the 2010 Pan African Film Festival', and 'Pan African Film Arts Festival 2010'. At the bottom, it reads: 'In 2005 the Ethiopian government massacred 193 unarmed civilians. This is the story of how the Diaspora mobilized and took action. This is the story of an American experience...'

For those who might consider these people to be unpatriotic towards their homeland, please consider the millions of dollars the Ethiopian government has spent on U.S. lobbyists all in the name of upholding a system of oppression and tribal domination. I would have to ask you, exactly who are the unpatriotic ones?

AV: *Why did you decide to make Migration of Beauty?*

Chris: I like to make documentary films that do something if anything to encourage open discussion. I believe that no problem can be solved by simply ignoring it. Film is my medium of choice to speak out about the issues that matter to me most. Those issues are very apparent in Migration of Beauty- human rights, democracy and personal freedom.

AV: *How do you view Ethiopia, culturally, politically and economically?*

Chris: Well, Ethiopia and Ethiopians are quite beautiful culturally speaking. I say this from a very intimate perspective. I certainly think enough of Ethiopians to try to seriously learn the language and adapt to living inside their culture. I drew a lot of confidence from this very positive experience in order to make Migration of Beauty. When I speak about Ethiopia in economic terms I have to be realistic. The current economic situation in the country is deplorable. I could go on and on about the hardships but I'm sure no one needs me to air it out. Still, considering all the difficulties, it's hard not to be impressed by the efforts of Ethiopians everywhere who have made life better inside the country. Their efforts, sincere as they may be, do little if anything to address the 2000 pound elephant in the room. That is, the genuine effects of an oppressive government on the will of personal freedom. Quite often this factor is dismissed by most donor governments and NGOs. It appears that these entities are caught up in their own personal interest to the point of not willing to risk losing whatever influence they may have in the country.

AV: *But those who support the regime in Ethiopia say that there should be no strings attached to foreign aid?*

Western governments and NGOs pump billions of dollars into Ethiopia without the political will to seriously address issues relating to human rights and personal freedom. Currently, it appears they are maintaining a wall of silence on some of the most dire issues of the day. These are issues that will affect Ethiopians for generations. What exists today is an unspoken policy of appeasement, an appeasement that is at the expense of the Ethiopian people. Until the Ethiopian people achieve their personal freedom and have the ability to shape their own destiny politically, they are not likely to be able to resolve all the dire issues of which the country is known for. There is no getting around it. Governments and NGOs can pour all the money in the world into Ethiopia but it will still do little or nothing for the country's long term future.

For queries regarding Migration of Beauty in Bay Area or the Stanford Ethiopian Forum, please contact editor@addisvoice.com.