

If Only I Were That Warrior

Mila Tenaglia (February 03, 2016)



On February 11th Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò will host a screening of a documentary written and directed by Italian video maker Valerio Ciriaci. Shot in Italy, Ethiopia and the United States, the film takes a look at a rarely examined part of Italian history concerning the fascist invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. In collaboration with Primo Levi Center and the NYU Department of Italian Studies after the screen will be a conversation with director Valerio Ciriaci, producer Isaak Liptzin, Ruth Ben-Ghiat (NYU), David Forgacs (NYU) and Ethiopian-American writer Maaza Mengiste.

Valerio Ciriaci's beautiful documentary arose from the need to shed light on an historical period neglected by schoolbooks. Despite the fact that eighty years have elapsed since the Italians occupied Ethiopia, it is still a murky chapter riddled with questions.

The idea for the film came about in January 2013 in New York during a conference organized by the Centro Primo Levi at CUNY's J.D. Calandra Italian American Institute. That event concerned a monument erected in 2012 in Affile, a province of Rome, which commemorated Rodolfo Graziani, a member of the fascist hierarchy and a major figure in the Ethiopian War.



“I had heard about the inauguration of a monument and the protests in Italy but I wasn’t aware of the protests that the Ethiopian community was organizing here in the United States,” says the director. At the conference he encountered members of the Ethiopian community in New York and Nicola DeMarco, who would become one of the key figures in the film.

He discovered they were working with other Ethiopian communities to organize an international protest scheduled for 19 February the following year, the anniversary of the 1937 Addis Ababa massacre, known in Ethiopia as the “Day of Martyrs.”

Digging deeper into the subject of the fascist invasion of Ethiopia and the crimes committed by the regime, the Roman director decided to make a film “that was not a history but about history” and that sought answers to all the questions that had arisen by then: How could Graziani be remembered by the Ethiopians as a butcher and commemorated in Italy with a public monument? How much do we know about the wars in colonial Africa?

If Only I Were That Warrior finds the courage to open Pandora’s box, reconstructing with great sensitivity “the weight of a past about which we need to know more” and respecting historical accuracy without sinking into documentarian coldness.

“To our surprise we saw that there’s a lot of interest [in the subject], especially in the academic world. We have already been contacted by various universities in America interested in screening the film for their students and using it as a teaching tool.”

If Only I Were That Warrior was selected for the Big Sky Documentary Film Festival, a very important festival for documentary films in America. It will be screened on 27 February in Missoula (MO), providing a good opportunity to understand firsthand what interest this holds for American audiences. In Florence, If Only I Were That Warrior had its world premiere at the Festival dei Popoli, where it was given the ‘Imperdibili’ award for best Italian documentary.

The month of February is very important for the Ethiopian people since it marks the anniversary of the Addis Ababa massacre. Aside from being screened at the Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò, where Valerio will do a post-screening Q&A on February 11 alongside producer Isaak Liptzin, it will also be shown in institutions like the Centro Primo Levi. We wish this group of talented young artists involved in the cause of history and justice good luck.

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