

A Few Things About the Work of the EFRC Part 2

Written by Tsigye Hailemichael
Thursday, 17 June 2010 03:35



In the last two years, the EFRC has rated over 30 films produced in Eritrea. On the basis of its evaluation the Committee came to the conclusion that the greatest weakness was found in the film scripts. This very fact was talked about at the seminar of October 10, 2009, in the presence of 300 participants involved in the film business and in the arts.

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Interview with Mary Mehari:

Q: Have you written scripts before or are you just beginning?

Mary Mehari: I have written one, which I am going to try to have produced. After the scriptwriting workshop, I realized there were some mistakes I made, so I am going over my script again and rewriting a few things. Especially there is one scene for which I will have to do research since there are medical matters involved in it.

Q: When did you begin to want to write scripts?

M.M: I did not start by wanting to be a scriptwriter. I used to sing, dance, and recite poetry. I began writing very early in my youth mostly poetry and short stories. In fact the first script I wrote was originally a short story. When I showed it to a few people, I was told that the story could be developed into a script and that is how the idea of writing scripts started for me.

Q: What did you learn from the scriptwriting workshop?

M.M:

This course was the first of its kind for me, because until then I could only search the Internet on

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the subject, read books or speak to other artists. In any case, the first thing I learned is that from one small plot you can develop a full-length story. The second thing I learned was about the diversity of styles. For example, that the antagonists can be other elements than human beings. And finally, the course gave me a sense of confidence.

Q: Which part of the course did you like most?

M.M: I would say analyzing films. I also liked the way that the course was taught. Margaret taught us how to work. We learned to think in terms of perspectives, symbolism, etc. We learned to look at the multidimensional aspects of things and gestures in movies. As a teacher Margaret is very friendly; she encourages you, makes you feel confident.

Q: What did you learn from viewing films from so many different countries?

M.M: First, for each film, I looked at the story, the way they look at life, and the angle they take. I learned that a film could be made with very few cast. In that respect, Daarat, a film from Chad, was simply fascinating. I also learned that music is not always necessary. That in some scenes, not having music is actually relevant.

Q: What other courses do you think should be given in the future?

M.M: Personally, I think that it would be very useful to have the same course given for a longer period of time and in depth. In addition, it would be useful to have courses on other aspects of filmmaking: directing, make-up, costumes, etc. Because just writing a good script is not enough, we have to piece the different parts together. For example, location is an important aspect of films. It is a job in and of itself. I am personally interested in looking for locations for shoots. I can visualize easily and I like to travel.

Q: What criticism would you have concerning the seminar?

M.M: I wish we had more written documentation. And practically speaking, courses could be given after working hours so people who could not participate this time can do it next time.

Q: Now, after the course, are you able to look at Eritrean films analytically?

M.M: There are several things that one can notice: the abundance of dialogue; the casting, which I think should be more varied. And also we should be careful to not write the same stories over and over again. We should pay more attention to costumes and make-up. I would say also that often the music is not always in harmony with the emotion of particular scenes. I think the main problem is that filmmakers are not using professionals: make-up artists, set decorators, musicians, etc.

Q: What was the impact of the course for you?

M.M: The course has changed the way I look at films. I look at a film first just to see if I like it. Then if I do, I see it again, this time paying attention to details.

Q: So you are up to writing many more scripts?

M.M: I was the youngest of the group so I understand that I have time for many more scripts. I will get feedback from my first script then I will see how to develop my skills.

I want to make something unforgettable. I know it cannot be that way in the beginning, but that

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is my dream as I grow to be a professional scriptwriter

Interview with Merhawi Meles:

Q: Have you written scripts before or are you just beginning?

Merhawi Meles: I already have two films in my experience as a scriptwriter and as a director. I also have two films I am working on for the near future.

Q: What did you learn from the course?

M.M: In Eritrea, most of us are not schooled screenwriters or directors but we are rather self-taught. So the first thing I learned was that learning makes you successful. Only experience is not enough, there are things you need to be taught. But what I found most interesting in the course was to be able to see movies by African directors, Indian, Brazilian, Kurd.... This was a great experience because I believe we should not limit ourselves to Hollywood films. This allowed me to see that you must look at your environment and write about what is around you and about what you know, about your culture. For instance, to see a film like The Battles of Algiers, from Algeria, is a great experience, you are taken far away in another world but it also teaches you to look at your own society. In Darrat, a movie from Chad, the hero is a savior to his own society. The actors are real Africans not Hollywood types. The music in the film takes you directly in the society where the film comes from. I was very impressed by the music. We need to have more of our own music in our films, use Embelta, Mesenko, Wat'a. That is how our Eritrean films become African. Music can create such wonderful, deep feelings, and I think that in our films we should really present the music of our cultures.

Q: What do you plan to do in the future?

M.M: Personally, I will focus on making films. I am also interested in video clips and I want to work to enrich that domain of musical films with what I have learned in the course.

Interview with Sinados Yacob:

Q: Have you written scripts before or are you just beginning?

Sinados Yacob: I have one draft in process. After the course I realized I had a lot to improve on. I can now implement what I have learned in the course and it has changed the way I look at my own script.

Q: What did you learn from the course?

S.Y: The first thing I learned is that you should write about what you know. The second thing that I learned is to see things in terms of layers: for example there are three layers you should take into consideration when writing a scene: the background, the middle ground, the foreground. Writers must write having these in mind. This taught me that the environment in a film is itself meaningful. In the course, we also focused on character development in theory, and in practice through watching and analyzing films. I also learned that there is a standard for writing scripts. This I must say was a very important aspect of the course for me.

Q: What do you understand are visual elements?

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S.Y: For example, in a given situation, the expression of a character needs to be seen rather than told. You have to do it in a way that people can see it without saying it in words. I was also interested in the possibilities that one can have to use the environment in an expressive way. That is why location is very important and every element in it should be meaningful. The relationship that one can establish between characters and the environments is very interesting to me.

Q: Do you think this course was necessary?

S.Y: We were waiting for this course for a long time. I had previously taken a course at NUEYS on writing, but it was about writing in general: short stories, drama, poems, etc. I then realized it was not enough for scriptwriters, so this course was very important. If you look at Eritrean films and compare it to the work done in other countries, it is easy to see that we have much to improve on. I think that everyone agrees on this, both my colleagues and the film viewers.

Q: What other courses do you think should follow this one?

S.Y: I am interested in the relationship between dialogues and images. In the course we learned to think in terms of visual elements and to use dialogue only when the elements of the story could not be visualized. Basically, you have to use dialogue economically, meaning only when it is necessary. So for upcoming courses, I would be interested in learning more about scriptwriting in depth. If you say: cut to- or dissolve-to, is there a difference? In other word, I would like to learn about the different concepts that are an essential part of the directives you give to the camera. But also, in order to develop my writing as a scriptwriter, I think it is important to learn about directing, editing, and cinematography, as it will shape the way one writes in the future.