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Print

Film Reviews

Moving out of Hell

The Last Survivor takes a poetic look at life after genocide

by Enrique Lopetegui



Courtesy photo

A still from Michael Pertnoy's and Michael Kleiman's *The Last Survivor*.

When Jacqueline Murekatete, a Rwandan girl who lost her family in the 1994 genocide, addressed the UN, you could have heard a pin drop. But you could have also imagined the faces of those present darkening with shame. After all, it was they who were supposed to stop the massacre.

But Jacqueline's spirit is not one of confrontation, and neither is that of this film, which won an Audience Award for Best Documentary Feature at the 2010 San Antonio Film Festival. What *The Last Survivor* shows is how four conflict survivors (from Rwanda, Sudan, Congo, and the Holocaust) find light at the end of the bloody tunnel. For the viewer, the journey is a poetic and moving one, and the film succeeds in putting individual, personal faces on the tragedy.

The timing of the screening could not have been more symbolic – January 9 is the day when the citizens of south Sudan will vote on whether they want to become a separate country from Sudan. The election is part of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the north and the south, which ended the 20-year Second Sudanese Civil War. But as we approach the election, the violence in the region has been increasing, and some fear the resurgence of full-fledged warfare. Thus, co-director Michael Kleiman will be available at the end of the film to discuss what people can do to help ensure peace in the region.

"The stories in the film bring a vivid message to our community," Judy Lackritz, community-relations director of the Jewish Federation of San Antonio, an event sponsor, told the *Current*. "We know that our efforts can make a difference, as seen in the American grassroots effort to protect the people of Sudan from genocide. This effort has at least slowed down the killings and rapes." Other sponsors include the SA Interfaith Darfur Coalition and Genocide Intervention/Save Darfur.

When we see Murekatete conclude her speech at the UN, the stone faces of the Rwandan delegation speak louder than any words. "The men, women, and children who lost their lives in 1994 would be here today if the international community had acted to prevent their deaths," she says.

But, again, her tone bears no anger. It resonates like a simple, sincere request for awareness, a common attitude shared by all the featured survivors, none of whom place themselves at the center of the story.

"The victims are those who are dead," says Hedi Fried, who escaped the Holocaust. "I survived. I have to do something with my life." •

The Last Survivor

Dir. Michael Pertnoy and Michael Kleiman

4pm Sun. January 9

Santikos Bijou at Crossroads

4522 Fredericksburg Road

\$7-\$10 through the Jewish Federation website, \$10-\$15 at the door

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