



FILM: **HONEYLAND**

FDG RATING: 3.8 ☺☺☺☺○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Tamara Kotevska, Ljubomir Stefanov: *director/writer*

Cast:

Hatidze Muratova

Nazife Muratova

Hussein Sam

Ljutvie Sam

Mustafa Sam

DATE: March 22, 2020

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **HONEYLAND**

Honeyland is an unexpectedly intimate journey into the rural hills of Northern Macedonia to experience the daily life of one of the last remaining bee keepers. We tend to expect documentaries to be tightly scripted, narrated, and include pointed interviews, but this Oscar nominated documentary happened by chance as the filmmaking team came across Hatidze unexpectedly while working in a remote rural area on a project for a nature conservation group. Over the next three years, Kotevska and her fellow director Ljubomir Stefanov camped out in tents and hammocks next to Hatidze's hut in the abandoned village of Bekirlija, as they filmed her crossing snowy fields and mountains to tend to her honey combs, walking miles to the nearest city to sell her honey at the market, and tenderly caring for her invalid mother who was only able to lay on a cot and be fed by Hatidze. The drama occurs when a dirt poor itinerant family with 8 children lands their over laden camper close to Hatidze's hut and destroys the fragile balance Hatidze has established with the colonies of bees.

We agreed the intruders are not really villains, but as the father is struggling to provide for his family, he becomes easy prey for the greedy vendor who pushes him to provide more and more homey to sell at the market after Hatidze has taught him the basics of bee keeping.

Looking much older than her 57 years, Hatidze is a warm, caring, wise spiritual soul, teaching us an important life lesson: Take only what you need and leave the rest for the hive, "half for you and half for me" was her mantra as she sang to the bees to coax them into making their honey. Leave something for tomorrow and those who are providing for you.

Discussion participants appreciated the moral message, especially at a time when we hear people in our communities across the country are hoarding medical and home supplies due to the coronavirus shelter in place guidelines.

We also recognized the enormous feat of editing 3 years of filming down to a tight, fluid, engaging, 90 minutes. And we applauded the tenacity and talent of the small film making crew who for 3 years endured repeated bee stings and rudimentary living conditions in the hopes of molding their footage into a worthwhile story.

The pace is slow, personal, and quiet without narration or interviews but the cinematography is mesmerizing capturing beautiful vistas of the rugged terrain and close portrait shots of the characters. The sounds are nature and their voices. One participant described Honeyland as a remarkably dramatic and intimate story of aging, neighbor relations, sustainability, and financial pressure. Another described the film as a song or poem because of its original style of storytelling without narration and minimal dialog.

A fascinating view into another culture and into the life of a gentle, resilient strong woman, Honeyland harvested a sweet score of 3.8 on our scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best).

Footnote: Adopting the spirit of the film's message, the film makes wanted to give back to Hatidze and the itinerant family. They bought a house for Hatidze in the nearest city, after her mother died, and raised a scholarship fund for the eight children.



See you at the movies!

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