



GRADES 7-12 CLASSROOM GUIDE

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TEACHING THE FILM:

Difret is a narrative feature film about a teenage girl and a women's rights lawyer who challenge gender traditions and power structures in their native Ethiopia. A class screening of the film may supplement a global studies, legal studies or women's rights curriculum. Taught in conjunction with this guide, **Difret** will challenge students to think critically about the global struggle for women's rights. Discussion questions and supplementary materials facilitate further research into related topics such as culture and tradition, feminism and legal process.

All SFFS Youth Education materials are developed in alignment with California educational standards for media literacy. SFFS Youth Education welcomes feedback and questions on all printed study materials.

Please direct all comments and queries to Keith Zwölfer, Youth Education Manager:

San Francisco Film Society Youth Education
39 Mesa Street, Suite 110 · The Presidio San Francisco, CA 94129-1025
kzwolfer@sffs.org
415.561.5040



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USING THIS GUIDE

This study guide is intended to flexibly support educators in preparing for and following up on a class screening of **Difret**. Support materials

are intended to facilitate group discussion, individual and collaborative creative exercise, subject-based learning and access to resources for further investigation of material. Educators are encouraged to adapt and abridge the content as necessary to meet their unique learning objectives and circumstances.

ABOUT THE FILM

In rural Ethiopia, a few hours outside of Addis Ababa, men on horseback, following local tradition, kidnap 14-year-old Hirut (Tizita Hagera) in a bid to force her to marry another villager. Her attempt to free herself from a preordained future sets off a legal firestorm in this powerful drama inspired by a true story that pits the law against an entrenched cultural mindset. Hirut's only hope of escaping a dark fate comes in the form of Meaza (Meron Getnet), a confident young lawyer from the city and an advocate for women's rights. In taking on Hirut's case, which has become a cause célèbre, Meaza confronts both the government and entrenched attitudes toward women—attitudes that affect her and her career as much as they do her client. Director Zeresenay Berhane Mehari captures Ethiopia's scenic beauty, as well as the ugliness of customs that endanger the lives and futures of young women. Based on a true story, **Difret**—the winner of audience awards at the Sundance and Berlin Film Festivals—is not only a compelling, suspenseful equal rights saga, rife with political, cultural and legal insights, but also a hopeful, moving and provocative drama about resilience and the pursuit of justice. —Tim Sika

Zeresenay Mehari (Ethiopia, 2014)
99 minutes, Amharic with English subtitles,
Grades 7-12

Recommended Subject Areas:

Art/Media
Social Studies
Legal Studies
Global Studies
Women's Studies

Key concepts / buzzwords:

Adolescence
Education
Ethiopia
Family
Feminism
Law
Rape
Self-Defense
Tradition
Tribal Cultures

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-VIEWING TOPICS AND DISCUSSION:

Difret tells a challenging story about the struggle for women's rights in a developing nation and an agrarian society with wide gaps in gender equality. If students are not familiar with the geography and culture of Ethiopia, you might take the time to locate the country on a map and to talk briefly about its recent history. Maps and links are included in the Supplemental Resources section of this guide.

You may remind students that **Difret** is an example of an Ethiopian filmmaker using his artistic medium to raise awareness about social issues. In order to frame the film in a cinematic context they are familiar with, you might talk about American films that address social issues.

POST-VIEWING DISCUSSION:

Character and Story

- 1) Describe Hirut.
 - What are her goals and dreams at the beginning of the film?
 - What is her life like in the village?
 - How does she change during the course of the story?
 - What do you think the future holds for Hirut?
- 2) Describe Meaza.
 - What is Meaza's background? Why did she become a lawyer?
 - What are Meaza's goals and values?

WHAT CHALLENGES DOES MEAZA FACE IN REPRESENTING HIRUT?

- Why is Hirut's case so important to Meaza?
 - What challenges does Meaza face in representing Hirut?
- 3) Describe Hirut's family.
 - How are they like the other families in the village and how are they different?
 - How do they react to Meaza's offer to represent Hirut in court?
 - Describe Hirut's relationship with her sisters.
 - In what ways do Hirut and her sisters represent the past, present, and future of women's rights in rural Ethiopia?
 - What do you think will happen to her family once Hirut is released and the court case is finished?
 - 4) Who are the male characters in this film?
 - Which male characters are "good," which are "bad," and which are more complex?
 - Why does the prosecutor dislike Meaza? How do you think the men in the village feel about Meaza?
 - What varying models and representations of masculinity do you see in this film?
 - How do you think these models will continue to grow and change in the aftermath of Hirut's case?

Context

- 1) Describe the facts of Hirut's case.
 - What is the relationship in Ethiopia between national law and tribal law?
 - Where did those two legal systems differ in their treatment of Hirut?
 - Do you think there is a place for tribal law and a council of elders in a society like Ethiopia?



- Can a society remain connected to its heritage and tradition and also modernize to protect the basic human rights of its citizens?

2) Why does Meaza sue the Minister of Justice?

- What legal precedent is she trying to overturn?
- What challenges does the lawsuit cause for Meaza and her organization?
- What happens to Hirut in the aftermath of the lawsuit?
- Why did Meaza feel that she needed to take such drastic measures?
- What is the result of the lawsuit?

3) Why is marriage so important in a village like the one where Hirut and her family live?

- How are marriage and traditional family structures connected to villagers' livelihoods and economic well-being?
- Why does a tradition like abduction for marriage exist?
- What conflicts do formal education and higher education pose for traditional marriages?
- Why are people like Meaza and the local teacher criticized for remaining unmarried?
- What do you think will need to change about the culture as a whole in order for attitudes about marriage to change?

4) When Hirut first arrives at Meaza's house, she asks, "Are you a bad woman?"

- What is Hirut's definition of a bad woman?
- How does Meaza respond?
- Do you think that Meaza is a good role model for Hirut?

- Do definitions of good and bad women exist in your culture?
- How do role models like Meaza help to undermine narrow ideas about what makes a good woman?

5) While in the city, Hirut misses her family and the village.

- What does she miss about village life?
- What are the positive elements of culture, tradition and family that modernization and urbanization can threaten?
 - Which elements of a traditional lifestyle can coexist with women's rights and which are mutually exclusive?
 - What struggles do people all over the world face in working to balance cultural traditions and progressive values?

5) In the end of the film, Hirut cries because she isn't able to protect her younger sister.

- Do you think that Hirut has made a difference for her sister?
- Do you think that any of the villagers changed their minds about Hirut's case?
- What work remains to be done to ensure that women in rural areas enjoy full human rights?
- Do you think that this film is helping to promote women's rights in rural Ethiopia?

WHAT IS HIRUT'S DEFINITION OF A BAD WOMAN?

Style and Message/Reading the Film for Media Literacy

1) **Difret** is based on a true story.

- What challenges do you think the filmmakers faced in translating real events into a cinematic narrative?
- What changes do you think a writer/director makes to a true story in order to transform it into a film?
- Can you think of any stories that you have heard



on the news or experienced in your life that would translate well into films?

- What elements of the **Difret** story made it a good choice for a film?

2) **Difret** is a story about Hirut and Meaza and a complicated court case, but it also gives the filmmakers a chance to show beautiful footage of the Ethiopian landscape.

- Have you seen pictures or moving images of Ethiopia before?
- How did those compare to the imagery that you saw in **Difret**?
- What elements of the landscape and the built environment made the strongest impressions on you?
- How do you think the filmmakers wanted you to see Ethiopia?

3) What techniques do the filmmakers use to communicate Hirut's thoughts and emotions?

- How do you know what Hirut is feeling at any given time?
- What does the music sound like when Hirut is suffering?
- How are flashbacks and dream imagery used in this film?
- How do you think these techniques help the audience to identify with Hirut?

POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES:

1) Write a review of **Difret**.

- What were the film's strengths and what were its weaknesses?
- Would you recommend this film to other viewers in your age group? To other viewers in general?
- Why should people watch this film?

2) Using the materials in the Supplemental Resources section of this guide, write a journalistic report on the practice of child marriage around the world. You might expand this topic to include a survey of women's rights around the world.

- What is child marriage and why is it important?
- Where does child marriage continue to be practiced, and which organizations are working to prevent it?
- What can an interested foreigner do to support the prevention of child marriage while still respecting another culture's values and practices.

WHAT ELEMENTS OF THE DIFRET STORY MADE IT A GOOD CHOICE FOR A FILM?



California Media Literacy Standards Addressed In This Lesson:

- **Grade 7:** Standard 1.8 Analyze the effect on the viewer of images, text, and sound in electronic journalism; identify the techniques used to achieve the effects in each instance studied.
- **Grade 8:** Standard 1.9 Interpret and evaluate the various ways in which visual image makers (e.g., graphic artists, illustrators, news photographers) communicate information and affect impressions and opinions.
- **Grades 9 & 10:** Standard 1.14 Identify the aesthetic effects of a media presentation and evaluate the techniques used to create them (e.g., compare Shakespeare's *Henry V* with Kenneth Branagh's 1990 film version).
- **Grades 9 & 10:** Standard 1.2 Compare and contrast the ways in which media genres (e.g., televised news, news magazines, documentaries, online information) cover the same event.
- **Grades 11 & 12:** Standard 1.1 Recognize strategies used by the media to inform, persuade, entertain, and transmit culture (e.g., advertisements; perpetuation of stereotypes; use of visual representations, special effects, language); Standard 1.3 Interpret and evaluate the various ways in which events are presented and information is communicated by visual image makers (e.g., graphic artists, documentary filmmakers, illustrators, news photographers).

For more information about media literacy standards in your state, visit:

- MediaLiteracy.com: resources for advancing media education, United States Standards for media literacy education. <http://www.medialiteracy.com/standards.htm>
- Frank W Baker's guide to State Standards Which Include Elements of Media Literacy. http://frankwbaker.com/state_lit.htm

Common Core Standards Addressed In This Lesson:

This lesson addresses the English and Language Arts standards for Reading Informational Texts grades 7-12. Additional specific standard applications are listed below:

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2 Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3 Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.3 Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

MEDIA LITERACY RESOURCES

SCREENING WITH MEANING

We live in a world where technology mediates a large portion of human interaction and the exchange of information. Every projected image, every word published on a page or a website, and every sound from a speaker reaches its audience through the medium, through the language of the device. The ability to parse the vast array of media messages is an essential skill for young people, particularly in a mainstream commercial culture that targets youth as a vulnerable, impressionable segment of the American marketplace. Most students already have a keen understanding of the languages different media use and the techniques they employ to inspire particular emotions or reactions, but they often lack the skill or awareness to fully deconstruct the messages they continuously receive.

Analysis of a media message—or any piece of mass media content—can best be accomplished by first identifying its principal characteristics:

- (1) Medium: the physical means by which it is contained and/or delivered
- (2) Author: the person(s) responsible for its creation and dissemination
- (3) Content: the information, emotions, values or ideas it conveys
- (4) Audience: the target audience to whom it is delivered
- (5) Purpose: the objectives of its authors and the effects of its dissemination.

Students who can readily identify these five core characteristics will be equipped to understand the incentives at work behind media messages, as well as their potential consequences. Media literacy education empowers students to become responsible consumers, active citizens and critical thinkers.

CORE CONCEPTS OF MEDIA ANALYSIS

MEDIUM	<p>All Media Is Constructed.</p> <p>How is the message delivered and in what format? What technologies are used to present the message? What visual and auditory elements are used? What expectations do you bring to the content, given its medium and format?</p>
AUTHOR	<p>All Media Is Constructed by Someone.</p> <p>Who is delivering the message? Who originally constructed the message? What expectations do you have of the content, given its author(s)?</p>
CONTENT	<p>All Media Is A Language.</p> <p>What is the subject of the media message? What information, values, emotions or ideas are conveyed by the media content? What tools does the author employ to engage the viewer and evoke a response? To what extent did the content meet your expectations, given the format/author?</p>
AUDIENCE	<p>All Media Messages Reach an Audience.</p> <p>Who receives the message? For whom is the message intended? What is the public reaction to the media content and/or its message? What is your reaction to the media content and/or its message? How might others perceive this message differently? Why?</p>
PURPOSE	<p>All Media Messages Are Constructed for a Reason.</p> <p>Why was the message constructed? Who benefits from dissemination of the message? How? To what extent does the message achieve its purpose? What effect does the message have on the audience it reaches, if any?</p>



THE FICTION FILM WHAT IS A NARRATIVE FEATURE?

Narrative filmmakers work from a script, directing actors through a meticulous process that brings the written story to life. Most of the films that we watch for entertainment are narrative features. Like novels, these films tap into our cultural mythology, and they spark our imaginations. Fictional films introduce us to heroes and anti-heroes, villains and comedians. They transport us to worlds that are larger and more dramatic than our own. In writing fiction, authors share their beliefs and value systems with an audience, creating a dialogue around cultural values.

Storytelling is one of the oldest human art forms. We tell stories about everything from our daily struggles to our deepest belief systems. Filmmaking is a process of visual storytelling. It combines written narrative with moving image and sound. Films pull us away from the myriad distractions of modern life and immerse us in the world of a story.

WRITING FOR THE SCREEN

Narrative filmmaking begins with a story and a script. Some film scripts are based on novels, and others are written specifically for the screen. The process of writing a film is similar to the process of creating any story; the screenwriter begins with an idea, develops characters, involves them in a plot with rising action, brings the tension to a climax, and then finishes the film with a resolution. Like novelists, screenwriters often make changes to these basic plot structures, but you may be surprised at how often your favorite films fit the model.

- **Can you identify conflict, rising action, climax, and resolution in one of your favorite films?**

BASIC ROLES IN A FILM PRODUCTION

SCREENWRITER The screenwriter creates a story with a plot and characters, and develops it into a script that can be acted onscreen. Some writers direct their own stories, and others work with a different director.

PRODUCER The producer is the organizer who carries a film from the script to the screen. Bigger film productions have many producers in charge of different functions, and in smaller films one producer wears many hats.

DIRECTOR The director manages the creative side of the film production, coaxing strong performances from the actors, and defining the look and feel of each scenes. The director may be assisted by one or many assistant directors.

ACTORS The actors embody the characters in the script and bring the story to life. Lead actors play the main roles and supporting actors play less central characters.

CINEMATOGRAPHER Also known as the director of photography, the cinematographer decides the composition and lighting of each shot. A support staff of camera operators assists the cinematographer.

SOUND CREW A sound mixer and boom operator work together to record speech and ambient sounds from each shot.

LIGHTING CREW The lighting crew is made up of the grip and the gaffer. The gaffer is the chief electrician on set, and he or she designs a lighting scheme. The grip magnifies some lights and blocks others to achieve the desired effects.

ART DEPARTMENT In a major film, the art department might employ hundreds of people. Their jobs include costumes, make-up, set construction, props, and special effects.

EDITOR The editor works with the director to build the footage into a story. Usually several assistant editors provide support.

SOUND DESIGNER The sound designer adds music and sound effects to the raw footage to create a soundtrack for the film. Many films have an original score, or music that an artist composes specifically for that film.

VISUAL EFFECTS The VFX crew works on the set and in the post production studio to create virtual and digitally-generated images and scene elements.

PRODUCTION

Once the script is written, the filmmakers need to transfer the story from the page to the screen. The film will need a **producer**, the manager or boss of the filmmaking process. Making a narrative feature film is a little bit like starting a small business. The **producer** finds **investors** who will pay the salaries of the **actors**, the **director**, and all of the many crew members who work together to create the magic of a movie. While the **director** oversees the creative elements of the filmmaking process, the **producer** makes sure that everyone at work on the **production** is doing a good job.

- Can you name the producers of any of your favorite films?
- Look at the table on the previous page to learn some of the different roles in a film production.

Production gets underway when the **director**, **actors**, and **crew** members begin filming the movie scene by scene. Some narrative films are shot in a constructed **set**, and others are shot **on location**, or in the actual landscape where the story takes place. The **director** helps the **actors** deliver strong performances that fit each character and helps the **cinematographer** or **director of photography** to capture the best shot.

The **editor**, **sound designer**, **visual effects artists**, and the rest of the **post-production** staff take the raw footage from **production** and build it into a finished film. Traditionally, **editing** involved cutting the film negative and splicing it together in new combinations. Today, **editors** work with computer software to simulate that process. The way a scene is **edited**, or **cut**, combines with the **sound design** to guide the viewer's reaction. A scary scene can easily become funny with a different **edit** and **soundtrack**, and vice-versa. Films that make heavy use of **digital effects**, like science fiction and fantasy films, take more time in **post-production** than films that rely on live action.

- Can you name a popular film that uses complex visual effects?
- Can you think of a film that uses soundtrack to guide the viewer's emotions?



SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

The Film's Official Website:

<http://difret.com/>

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Ethiopian Culture and History:

BBC Country Profile: Ethiopia: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13351397>

PBS: Ethiopia http://www.pbs.org/wnet/africa/explore/ethiopia/ethiopia_overview_lo.html

Detailed PBS Lesson Plan: Ethiopian Christianity: http://www.pbs.org/wonders/fr_cl.htm

Time for Kids: Ethiopian Day in the Life: <http://www.timeforkids.com/destination/ethiopia/day-in-life>

Ethiopian Food for Beginners: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/africa/travel-tips-and-articles/75930>

The Reporter, local Ethiopian Newspaper: <http://www.thereporterethiopia.com/>

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Research Materials Relating to Global Women's Rights

The Guardian: "Women's Rights Country by Country" Interactive Graphic: <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/ng-interactive/2014/feb/04/womens-rights-country-by-country-interactive>

Global Issues: Social, Political and Environmental Issues Worldwide: <http://www.globalissues.org/article/166/womens-rights>

Global Feminism Overview: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_feminism

The Guardian: "Uniting Global Feminism": <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/aug/16/western-global-feminism-third-world>

United Nations: Women: <http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/women/>

Human Rights Watch: <http://www.hrw.org/topic/womens-rights>

African Feminism: <http://africanfeminism.com/>

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Resources Relating to Child Marriage:

Girls Not Brides: <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/about-child-marriage/>

PBS: What We Know Now: <http://www.pbs.org/now/shows/341/facts.html>

New York Times: "Tiny Voices Defy Child Marriage in Yemen": <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/29/world/middleeast/29marriage.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>

National Geographic: Child Brides: <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2011/06/child-brides/gorney-text>

DIRECTORS STATEMENT

Zeresenay Berhane Mehari

I was born and raised in Ethiopia and came to the United States 15 years ago to study film at the University of Southern California. After graduating in 2002, I split my time between Los Angeles and Ethiopia working in both film industries. For the last ten years I have witnessed Ethiopia change and grow in ways that are conflicted.

I wanted to make a film that captured this flux and translated the struggle of moving from an old Ethiopia to a new one. DIFRET became that film by posing one simple question: What happens when traditions that are passed down from generation to generation become interrupted?

I answer this question by telling the story of Meaza Ashenafi, the founder of a legal aid organization that challenged one of the oldest traditions in Ethiopia called “telefa”. Telefa is the practice of abduction into marriage. It is a tradition that is taken for granted in many parts of the country and affects over 40% of adolescent girls.

Challenging old traditions is difficult. Moving from old to new is never easy. It is always unsettling and confusing. By making this film I hope to lessen this confusion and reveal the ways in which the human condition transcends when belief systems fall apart. Making this connection reveals that the politics of everyday life and how people respond to the many traditions they encounter shape what Ethiopia is to become in the future.



REVIEWS

Variety

Dennis Harvey

Illuminating a tradition in much of rural Ethiopia that grossly violates the rights of women and girls, “Difret” presents an important message, albeit in rather clunky narrative terms. More showing and less telling would have made this fact-inspired drama by Zeresenay Berhane Mehari as artistically compelling as it is informative. Still, festivals and other outlets attracted to social-justice issues will queue up for this relatively rare export-ready Ethiopian feature.

Meaza Ashenafi (Meron Getnet) is co-founder of a legal nonprofit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, that offers free counsel for women and advocates for their rights. The need for such activism is even greater in remote communities like one three hours away from the capital, where 14-year-old Hirut (Tizita Hagera) lives on the family farm. Walking home from school one day, she’s abducted by seven armed men, one of whom had already been refused her hand in marriage. Locked in a hut, she’s raped that night by her “suitor,” then manages to escape the next day with his rifle; in terror, she shoots him dead when cornered.

Such kidnappings are tolerated as a traditional if not universally approved means for men to get the wives they want hereabouts. And no matter that Hirut has been raped and beaten, local justice decrees that she be executed for murder (then buried with her victim). Before that can happen, Meaza and a regional colleague intervene, pulling strings to go over the heads of hostile area police. While Hirut is temporarily in safe hands, tribal elders decide the girl should be exiled rather than killed, a decision few villagers agree



with. Either way, she must leave home for her own safety, first being taken in by Meaza, then entrusted to an orphanage. City life is so alien that she's terrified by the sound of a ringing telephone, having quite possibly never heard one before.

Meanwhile, her judicial (as opposed to tribal) trial proceeds. Given that no witness is willing to testify on Hirut's behalf, Meaza takes a possibly career-ending public gamble in an effort to change the whole system's attitude toward women who kill in self-defense.

Such political and cultural insights hold attention. But whether in an attempt to case-plead international viewers or biased local ones, everything here is spelled out in pedestrian fashion — most often verbally, no matter how easily we might glean that intel from the general events. The unwillingness to let nuance communicate lends a flat quality to the drama here; after the initial crimes, suspense situations are simply lopped off prematurely, the action jumping clumsily to their aftermath. (This is particularly inept when the leads are about to be attacked by vigilantes, then appear safe with no explanation whatsoever.) It's also disappointing that the pic starts out suggesting there will be a second major illustrative case, involving a woman battered by her alcoholic husband. But this thread is simply dropped after a couple scenes.

Performances are OK, the widescreen 35mm lensing handsome in landscape shots but otherwise uninteresting. Other tech/design contributions are likewise pro but uninspired, though David Schommer and David Eggar's score contributes some flavor with its mix of indigenous and Western-style sounds. Angelina Jolie's name as exec producer should help spread the pic's progressive message around; it's just too bad this vehicle is so short on style and subtlety.

The Hollywood Reporter

by Boyd van Hoeij

The debut feature of Ethiopian director Zeresenay Berhane Mehari, which has Angelina Jolie on board as an executive producer, is headlined by local star Meron Getnet.

A rural Ethiopian girl's kidnapping acts as a wedge between local traditions and the rule of law in Difret, the feature debut of Ethiopian writer-director Zeresenay Berhane Mehari.

Based on a true story that occurred in 1996, the film recounts the far-reaching consequences of the marriage abduction of a 14-year-old girl from rural Ethiopia who tried to escape her fate and ended up shooting and killing her kidnapper, a man who followed a traditional practice for obtaining a bride. The girl, facing a possible death sentence, was subsequently defended by a female lawyer from the capital who argued, in a court in Addis Abeba, that her actions were in self-defense.

Quite powerful despite relying on familiar storytelling tropes, this issue-driven drama, presented by executive producer Angelina Jolie, should be welcomed at festivals worldwide after its bows at Sundance and Berlin, though theatrical engagements will be rare.

Hirut (Tizita Hagere), a 14-year-old schoolgirl, lives in a village three hours outside of the capital and is the middle of three sisters. Her eldest sister, conspicuously never seen, fell victim to the tradition of telefa, or abduction for marriage, and one day, on her way back from school, Hirut similarly finds herself surrounded by a group of men on horseback who take her away with the intent of marrying her to their leader, Tadele



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(Girma Teshome). After he rapes her -- more inferred than shown onscreen -- she manages to escape with a rifle, which she subsequently uses when the men discover she's gone and come chasing after her.

Hirut and her story would have probably remained unknown if it weren't for Meaza (Meron Getnet), an Andinet Women Lawyers Association counsel who assists women who wouldn't otherwise have access to legal protection and representation. She hears about Hirut's case on the radio and presents herself at the rural police station where the young adolescent's held, simply stating she's her counsel. But when she gets to see Hirut, the shy and clearly shell-shocked girl has to admit to the stranger she doesn't even know what a lawyer is.

The local police chief (Moges Yohannes) and assistant D.A. (Brook Sheferaw), both men, are clearly not used to having to deal with a woman, and one from the city at that, and they try to obstruct Meaza's work. However, she's the kind of person who doesn't take no for an answer and at a certain point even decides to sue the country's minister of justice in order to avoid what she sees as a grave injustice -- namely that Hirut has to become a victim of the fallout of a situation that was created without her knowledge or consent.

Mehari, who also wrote the screenplay, structures his true story as a two-pronged narrative that's as much about Meaza and the tireless work of her organization as it is about Hirut and her specific plight. Indeed, Meaza is the stronger and more compelling of the two characters, not only because she's the adult and a headstrong doer but also because Hirut, after having shot the man who wanted to be her future husband, retreats into her shell and becomes an entirely passive character (she has no knowledge of her own rights or the legal system and even a ringing phone in Meaza's house scares her).

Young non-professional newcomer Hagere isn't the most expressive of actresses, which doesn't help either, and the fact Getnet, a popular film and TV actor in

her native country, is simply mesmerizing as Meaza is both a blessing and a curse in the sense that her showmanship only underlines how the rest of the cast is mostly just adequate.

Apart from a couple of scenes where the editing strangely avoids bringing the action that's been building up to a logical conclusion, the technical credits are fine, with cinematographer Monika Lenczewska playing up the contrasts between the city and the country, which clearly represent the loci for a fair legal system and traditional arrangements, respectively (coincidentally, *Difret* is only the fourth Ethiopian film ever to have been shot on 35mm).

The title means "courage" or "to dare" in Amharic, the national language of Ethiopia, though it can also refer to rape.