

everywoman

SECTION E

Movie seeks end to female circumcision

By REBECCA FRELIGH
PLAIN DEALER REPORTER

The tortured squeals of the young girl being mutilated will ring in your ears long after you see "Fire Eyes," Soraya Mire's award-winning film about female circumcision.

Mire, a native of Somali now living in Los Angeles, made the documentary to tell her own story, and that of 100 million living women who have undergone the ancient rite of passage practiced in 40 countries.

She passionately urges this generation of women to defy custom and choose differently for their daughters.

"This must stop," says the first-time writer-director of "Fire Eyes," which is being screened this week at the Cleveland Cinematheque.

Gently, almost regally paced, the hourlong film nonetheless packs a punch. At its premiere last year at the Sundance Film Festival, two women reportedly fainted during the scene re-enacting a young girl's circumcision.

But that's the only such "live" scene. The real power of "Fire Eyes" lies in words. Mire builds her case deftly, through interviews with Somali women and men, historical and sociological narrative and thought-provoking questions of her interview subjects.

Perhaps the most riveting words come from Dr. Groesbeck Parham, a black American obstetrician and gynecologist who studied in Africa. He describes clinically and dispassionately the several levels of circumcision, and their physical effects: infections, discomfort with urination

and menstruation, lifelong pain, especially during sex.

Some women who are victims of the most extreme form, the doctor says, cannot deliver babies. Their babies die, trapped in the womb.

The consequences get worse. Why, Mire asks a Somali man in an interview, does he want such mutilation to continue?

He replies with a grin, "In the morning, when you leave your apartment, would you leave your door unlocked?"

At this point, the camera opens up to reveal the interview on a TV screen, being watched by Mire and a group of Somali women.

He does not understand, they say. But even some of these women say their daughters will be circumcised, as their mothers and grandmothers were.

There's the conflict: Centuries of tradition vs. — Mire says — physical and emotional victimization and loss of self.

Like the young girl's screams, "Fire Eyes" has resonances beyond the immediate subject to encompass all violence against women. Mire's intelligent script refers to this, but doesn't belabor it.

In interviews with a few enlightened Somali men, the filmmaker hints at the possibility of change. But in the end, Mire says the hope lies with women who will demand an end to the mutilation.

"Fire Eyes" will be shown Thursday at 7 p.m. and Friday at 7:30 p.m. at the Cleveland Cinematheque, 11141 East Blvd., Cleveland. Cost: \$5. Information: 421-7450.

HOT MOVIE

A preview of "Fire Eyes," which is coming to Cleveland at your request.

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