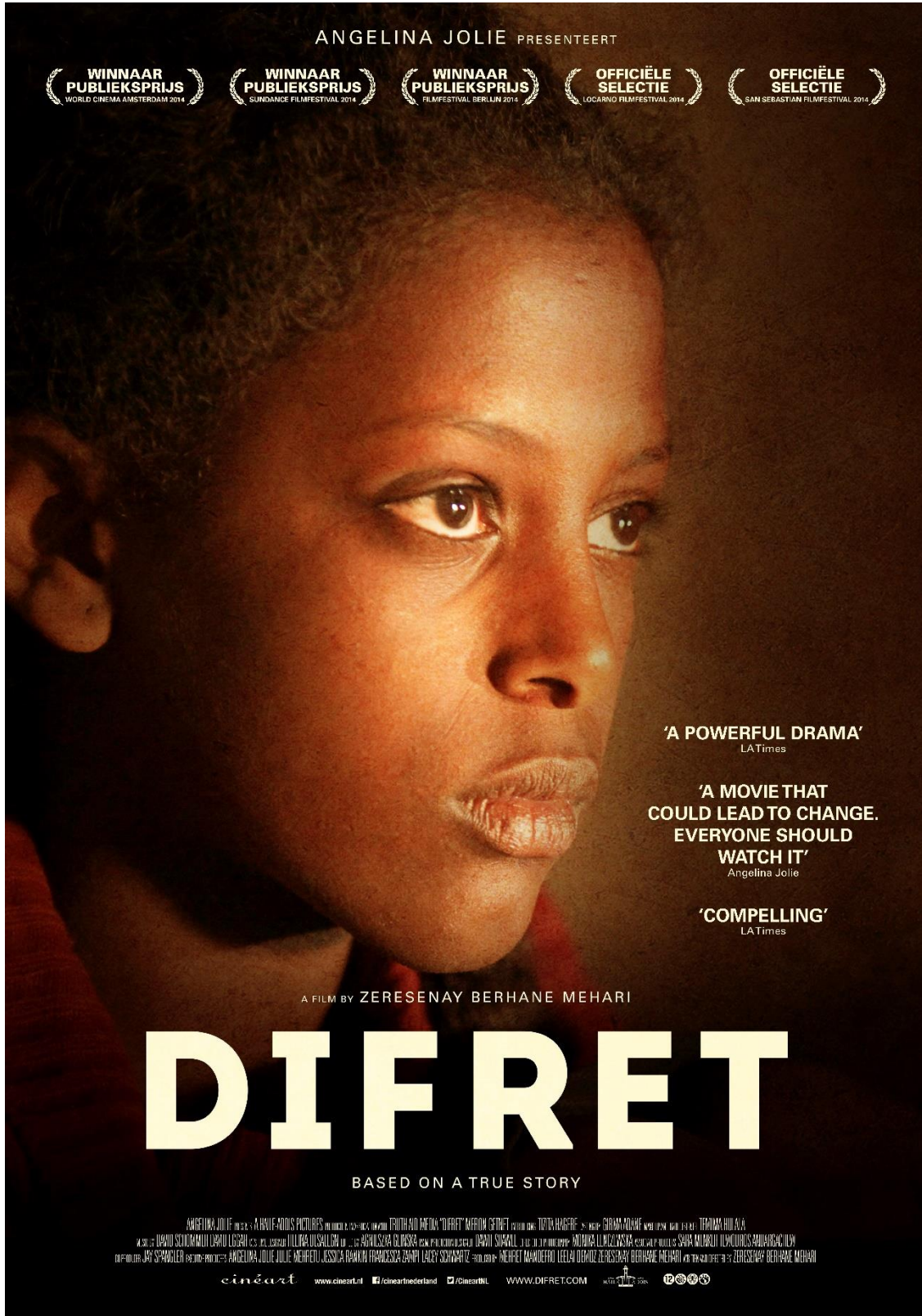


# Persmap



ANGELINA JOLIE PRESENTEERT

WINNAAR PUBLIEKSPRIJS  
WORLD CINEMA AMSTERDAM 2014

WINNAAR PUBLIEKSPRIJS  
SUNDANCE FILMFESTIVAL 2014

WINNAAR PUBLIEKSPRIJS  
FILMFESTIVAL BERLIN 2014

OFFICIËLE SELECTIE  
LOCARNO FILMFESTIVAL 2014

OFFICIËLE SELECTIE  
SAN SEBASTIAN FILMFESTIVAL 2014

'A POWERFUL DRAMA'  
LATimes

'A MOVIE THAT  
COULD LEAD TO CHANGE.  
EVERYONE SHOULD  
WATCH IT'  
Angelina Jolie

'COMPELLING'  
LATimes

A FILM BY ZERESEYAH BERHANE MEHARI

# DIFRET

BASED ON A TRUE STORY

ANGELINA JOLIE PRESENTS A HAUTE-BOUIS PICTURES PRODUCTION A FILM BY ZERESEYAH BERHANE MEHARI "DIFRET" MEFROW CEFRET COSTUME DESIGNER TOTO HAABERF MUSIC BY CIRAMA MOHRE WRITER/PRODUCER/CASTING DIRECTOR TEREMAN HUN ALA  
CASTING DIRECTOR LORIAN LIGORI COSTUME DESIGNER LILLIAN VUSVALLEN HAIR STYLIST ROSALINDA ELIASKA MAKEUP ARTIST/HAIR STYLIST DAWID SIKALLI EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS ANTONIA LILIC/ANASTASIA CANTALE/BOBBI SAVA/MILWAU/LEWIS/ROUSSEAU/REYNOLDS  
CO-PRODUCER JAY SPANGLER EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS ANGELINA JOLIE JULIE MEHREU JESSICA RAWKIN FRANCESCA ZANZI LACEY SCHWARTZ PRODUCED BY MEHREU MANDEFOU LEE-LAI DING/OLU ZERESEYAH BERHANE MEHARI AND TEREMAN HUN ALA  
WRITTEN BY ZERESEYAH BERHANE MEHARI

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cinéart - Herengracht 328 III - 1016 CE Amsterdam - T: 020 5308848 - email: info@cinéart.nl

# Difret

## Een film van Zeresenay Mehari

*"Het is inspirerend om te zien hoe zo'n belangrijk verhaal zo mooi en met zoveel creatief talent verbeeld wordt", aldus Hollywood-ster Angelina Jolie, die als uitvoerend producent haar naam verbond aan dit speelfilmdebuut van de Ethiopische regisseur Zeresenay Mehari.*

*Al sinds mensenheugenis is de 'telefa' een geaccepteerde traditie op het Ethiopische platteland - huwelijk door ontvoering. Maar niet elke vrouw legt zich daar bij neer. DIFRET vertelt het waargebeurde verhaal van zo'n vrouw.*

*De 14-jarige Hirut is op weg van school naar huis als ze ontvoerd wordt door zeven mannen. Een van hen is een eerder afgewezen aanzoeker, die nu op 'traditionele' wijze zijn bruid probeert te krijgen. 's Nachts wordt ze verkracht, waarmee haar lot bezegeld lijkt. De volgende ochtend probeert Hirut te ontsnappen en schiet haar aanstaande man dood. Dat heeft grote gevolgen, want het lokale recht eist dat zij hiervoor ter dood moet worden gebracht. Dan grijpt advocate Meaza Ashefani in. Zij weet Hirut in voorlopige veiligheid te brengen en begint aan de belangrijkste zaak uit haar carrière. Ze stelt dat Hirut handelde uit noodweer en dus vrijgesproken moet worden. De lokale gemeenschap denkt er echter heel anders over.*

*Winnaar Publieksprijs van Sundance Film Festival en het Berlijn Film Festival 2014.*



Speelduur: 99 min. - Land: Ethiopië - Jaar: 2014 - Genre: Drama

Release datum bioscoop: 21 mei 2015

Distributie: Cinéart

### Meer informatie over de film:

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*Persmap en foto's staan op: [www.cinéart.nl](http://www.cinéart.nl)  
Persrubriek - inlog: cinéart / wachtwoord: film*

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## Cast

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Meaza Ashenafi	MERON GETNET
Hirut Assefa	TIZITA HAGERE
Members Yohannes	HAREGEWINE ASSEFA
Assistant DA	BROOK SHEFERAW
Mr. Assefa Bekele	MEKONEN LAEAKE
Mrs. Mulu Assefa	MEAZA TEKLE
Etaferaw Teshager	SHETAYE ABREHA
Village Police Captain	MOGES W/YOHANNES
Officer Getachew	MICKEY TESHAYE
Village Judge	TEFERI ALEMU
Aregash Assefa	KIYA KENNEHA
Tadele Kebede	GIRMA TESHOME
Mrs. Belaynesh	DERIBWORK ASSEFA
Mrs. Elifnesh	RAHEL TESHOME
Mr. Hiruy	GETACHEW DEBALKE
Alemayehu	TESFAYE KINFE
Village Teacher	YENENEH ENGEDAWORK
Dr. Tamrat	GENENE ALEMU
Emnet	HIWOT ASSEFA
Alemu	YOHANNES BELAY
Yordanos	FEBEN YAVAN
Mr. Zenebe	SOLOMON TEKA
Aster	KAL TESHOME
Mr. Gebeyehu Gebru	ESHETE ASSEFA
Customary Judges	AMAHA TEWEDAGE
	TEWODROS JEMBERE
	SEMAHEGN ALEMU
Supreme Court Clerk	ASSEFA ZERIHUN
Militia Leader	GETACHEW SILESHI
Militia Men	ABEL ABEBE
	MEHRET BELETE
Village Man 1	EFREM ADEFRES
Village Man 2	ABEBAYEHU ESTIFANOS
Radio Announcer	FELEKE ABEBE
Hirut's Best Friend	NARDOS YOSEPH
Horsemen	DANIEL OBSE
	TESFAYE GETACHEW
	ABREHAM W/EYESSUS
	ESSYAS ABEBE
	FEREW ABEBE
Stunt Horsemen	KUBA MEKONEN
	ABEBE TADESSE
	BELETE ENDESHAW
	BELAY FEKADU
	GEBREYES KEBEDE
Reporter #1	ENDALE BERHANU
Nurse	HERMELA NGUSSIE
Meseret Aessefa	GENET KEMA
Samuel	ALAZAR ADDIS

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## Crew

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Director	ZERESENAY BERHANE MEHARI
Scenario	ZERESENAY BERHANE MEHARI
Produced by	MEHRET MANDEFRO LEELAI DEMOZ ZERESENAY BERHANE MEHARI
Executive producer	ANGELINA JOLIE
Executive producers	JULIE MEHRETU JESSICA RANKIN FRANCESCA ZAMPI LACEY SCHWARTZ
Director of photography	MONIKA LENCZEWSKA
Production designer	DAWIT SHAWEL
Edited by	AGNIESZKA GLINSKA P.S.M.
Costume designer	HELINA DESALEGN
Music by	DAVID SCHOMMER DAVID EGGAR
Casting by	GIRMA ADANE
Co-producer	JAY SPANGLER
Line producer	CARRIE LYNN CERTA
Associate producers	SARA MENKER TEWODROS ANDARGACHEW
Hair and make up	TEMIMA HULALA
Production coordinator	YEMANE TSEGAYE
First assistant director	JONATHAN PETERSON
Second assistant director	ABEL GEMECHIS

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## Director's statement

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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.





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## About the production

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Ethiopian writer and director Zeresenay Berhane Mehari was born and raised in Addis Ababa, just three hours from the rural village where *Difret* takes place. But the tradition of abduction for marriage, or *telefa* in Amharic, was something he'd only heard about in news reports and television shows.

"As a kid, I was shielded from the day-to-day occurrences of rural areas," says Mehari. "We had electricity, running water, TV, cinema—all of that. The traditional place we'd see in Ethiopian dramas was just something in the back of my mind." That all changed when the filmmaker met attorney Meaza Ashenafi, the founder of a trailblazing Ethiopian women's legal-aid organization who defended teenager Hirut Assefa against murder charges for killing her abductor and rapist.

Mehari moved to the U.S. in 1996 to study film at the University of Southern California. After graduating, he began splitting his time between the U.S. and Ethiopia. In 2005, while working on a documentary in his home country he was introduced to Ashenafi through her brother. "She told me a couple of stories about what she was doing and I knew right away that I wanted to tell her story," he recalls. "I was inspired by the idea that a few hours away from where I grew up, *telefa* was a common practice that was not seen as a violation or even violence."

"Hirut's case established the first open civil dialogue about the tradition of *telefa* and its impact on women in Ethiopia," adds Mehari. "The fact that the story happened in June 1996, a month after I'd left Ethiopia, made it particularly resonant for me. I wanted to tell this story to the world and also to Ethiopian audiences."

Mehari spent three years researching and writing *Difret*. He interviewed numerous participants in the court battle and visited many of the places where the real-life events unfolded. Almost immediately after the screenplay was completed, a producer stepped up to finance the project. But when the economic crisis hit in 2008 the funding fell through and Mehari suddenly found himself back at square one.

In the ensuing years, Mehari turned down several offers by Western producers interested in making English-language versions of the script. "I was adamant about making the film in Ethiopia," says the director. "I wanted the film to be accessible to the people who are actually in these kinds of situations. I also wanted to set a new standard for film production in Ethiopia."

After a fruitless year trying to line up traditional film financing, Mehari started investigating unconventional funding sources, including NGOs and foundation grants. Then in 2009 he met Dr. ehret Mandefro, an Ethiopian-American physician and anthropologist and president of Truth Aid, an ethnographic media production company.

"I showed her the script and she really loved it and signed on as a producer," recalls Mehari. Under Truth Aid's auspices, the production initiated two Kickstarter campaigns that brought in tens of thousands of dollars from over 200 contributors. Then, in late 2010, Ethiopian-American artist Julie Mehretu and Australian artist Jessica Ranking agreed to provide additional production funds. "They gave us what we needed to start shooting." With a camera package provided by Panavision's New Filmmaker Program, everything was in place for production to begin.

Mehari knew he wanted to shoot the film in Ethiopia, but he also knew that doing so would present many challenges. "Ethiopia does not have a well-developed film industry, so it was difficult finding crew members and gear. Also, I had this crazy idea of shooting on 35mm film— not because it's

cooler or something, but because the countryside is so much a part of the story and I wanted to capture it in a way that integrated the locale into the film.”

Because 35mm filmmaking is extremely rare in Ethiopia—only three features had previously been shot on film there—all of the cameras had to be brought in, along with about three tons of film stock. There were also no local film labs, so a messenger had to hand-deliver the film to India each day and then return to the set with the dailies.

Mehari assembled a core crew of 10 seasoned production professionals from around the world. Then he hired about 50 Ethiopian crewmembers, including the production designer and casting director. *Difret* is unique among Ethiopian films in that many of the producers and department heads are women. For example, it is the first film in the country shot by a female director of photography.

The casting process took about eight months. The filmmakers met about 400 actresses for the lead role of activist and attorney Meaza Ashenafi before casting Meron Getnet, one of Ethiopia’s most popular television and film stars. “She’s truly an artist,” says Mehari. “She went to university and has a degree in art and theater. While we were shooting she was working on her master’s in development and the arts.”

An even more difficult role to cast was that of Hirut, the 14-year-old girl at the center of the story. After months of searching, the director finally found teenager Tizita Hagere at an afterschool acting workshop in Addis Ababa. “She had never been in a film before,” says the director. “In fact, she’d never been in any kind of professional acting situation. She is just amazing.”

Mehari was unaware when he cast Hagere that one aspect of her life closely mirrored that of her character. “When we asked to speak to her parents we learned that she lived in an orphanage with about 90 other kids,” recalls the director. “Her father passed away and her mother is HIV positive and lives in a care center.”

The rest of the film’s 71 speaking roles and 300 extras were filled entirely by Ethiopians, the vast majority of whom were non-actors. Principal photography began in September 2012 and continued for six weeks. The cast and crew worked six days a week, often putting in 14-hour days.

Although the film deals with a controversial event that was a huge media sensation in Ethiopia at the time, Mehari says government officials were supportive of the production. “They helped us bring in the gear and the film, which needed to come through customs without being x-rayed. They facilitated the crew’s visas. The Ethiopian consulate in L.A. did a great job of helping us.”

Mehari attributes the government’s support in part to the fact that the country has made great strides in changing its laws since the Hirut Assefa case. “Once the issue was in the public eye, the government took the position to do the right thing and ended up being on the right side of history,” he says. “They upheld the constitutional rights of the young girl and went as far as removing the minister of justice.”

Under a 1957 law, *telefa* was defined as a crime punishable by three years of imprisonment. But the same law provided that if the abductor agreed to marry the girl he abducted and raped, he would not face criminal charges. Hirut Assefa’s case galvanized public opinion and eventually motivated the government to amend the law. Under a revised 2004 criminal code, abduction and rape can result in a penalty of up to 15 years or more. The revised laws also defined gender-based violence and female-genital cutting as crimes for the first time in Ethiopian history.

However, enforcement of the law is not consistent throughout the country, according to Mehari, in part because police stations are few and far between in rural areas, but also because villagers still choose to defer to traditional law.”

“If the parents of a young girl were to go to the police, then the law would be enforced,” says the director. “But if they don’t, the police or D.A. would not push that in terms of capturing this person and enforcing the law. My wishes are that the film will help reopen this conversation and inspire dialogue about how this law is enforced.”

Nearly two decades after she was abducted, Hirut Assefa is still in exile from her home town and her family, says Mehari. Despite numerous attempts, the director was never able to speak with her. “Her family wasn’t forthcoming about her whereabouts,” he says. “I was told she was aware I was looking for her but she did not come forward. My guess is this was all done to protect her. The family of the guy who abducted her swore vengeance publicly. Because she was exiled under traditional law, if she went back and someone tried to kill her, the police and villagers would not protect her.”

Just prior to its premiere at the 2014 Sundance Film Festival, *Difret* received a boost when the official announcement that Angelina Jolie signed on as an executive producer was made. “We were super lucky,” says Mehari. “Our executive producer Julie Mehretu had mutual friends with Angelina and they told her about the film. She saw it and loved it and gave me a call saying she wanted to help in any way she could. She actually signed as an executive producer while we were still in post-production.”

Mehari notes that although his film explores the subjects of child marriage and violence against women in Ethiopia, these issues extend far beyond his home country. One in nine girls throughout the world is married before the age of 15, according to the International Center for Research on Women. The Washington D.C.-based advocacy group has also found that teenage brides are significantly more likely to be the victims of domestic abuse, contract sexually transmitted diseases or die during childbirth than women who marry in their 20s.

According to Mehari, the film’s title has a double meaning in Amharic, the primary language of Ethiopia. “In its most common usage, *difret* means courage or ‘to dare’—but it can also refer to rape. Challenging cultural norms is never easy but it often begins with individuals who dare to break with tradition and those courageous enough to support them.”





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## About the filmmaker

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### ZERESENAY BERHANE MEHARI

Zeresenay Berhane Mehari is a writer/director with more than a decade of experience making films. Born and raised in Ethiopia, Mehari moved to the U.S. to attend film school. He founded Haile Addis Pictures to produce his first narrative feature film, Difret. He has a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of South California's School of Cinematic Arts.

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## About the cast

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### MERON GETNET

Meron Getnet is an Ethiopian actress, poet, and playwright. With seven feature length films under her belt, she is the most sought after actor of her generation. Meron's involvement with the arts started early on when she joined a summer acting workshop at the renowned National Theatre as a young girl. There, she was spotted by a theatre director who included her on a cultural exchange trip to Japan where she studied the language and performed a solo act in Japanese. Recently, Meron was one of four Ethiopians selected to attend President Obama's African Youth Leaders Forum in Washington DC. With her highly rated TV drama currently airing in Ethiopia, Meron's star power is on the rise. Meron holds a Bachelors of Arts in theater from Addis Ababa University and she is currently working on her Masters on development and the arts.

### TIZITA HAGERE

Writer/ Director Zeresenay Berhane Mehari discovered 13 year old Tizita Hagere at a community-acting workshop while casting for Difret. Having had no prior experience with films or theatre, Tizita took on the challenge of playing a real life person who, in her own words, felt like a friend she never had. Now a freshman in high school, Tizita still attends the acting workshop and is focusing on her studies.

