

SPECIAL REPORT: Australia 45 Par picks Crichton's 'Congo' 4 Cabler seeks first-run funny bone 27

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FIRE EYES

(DOC)

Executive producer, directed, written by Soraya Mire. Camera (color), Nancy Moran; editors, LEEAN BENSON, Joe Slaton; music, Katherine Quattro; associate producer, Barry Elsworth. Reviewed at Sundance Film Festival, Park City, Utah, Jan. 21, 1996. Running time: 60 MIN.

"Fire Eyes," made by Somali filmmaker Soraya Mire, is a rare documentary that is equally effective as a personal and a political statement. Dealing with female genital mutilation, a widespread phenomenon in many African countries but little known in the West, this informative docu should be well-received on public TV, film festivals and wherever women's issues are aired.

Hourlong film focuses on female genital circumcision, which in its extreme form creates a chastity belt made of the girl's own flesh as she is literally stitched shut until marriage. Docu begins with a demonstration of a 7-year-old Somali girl about to undergo circumcision —

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her mother tells her that the "evil piece of flesh" between her thighs must be removed for her to become pure and worthy of a husband.

Mire makes a clear and useful distinction between male circumcision and its female version, which is much more drastic and excruciatingly painful. Pic gains poignancy and personal meaning when she relates how, at 11, she underwent this operation, which was framed as a necessary rite of passage.

As a mature woman, however, Mire perceives this mutilation as a manifestation of child abuse and an ideological mechanism designed to perpetuate women's sexual, economic and cultural inferiority.

Using a direct, uncompromisingly investigative strategy, Mire examines the wide range of results of this procedure: medical and psychological complications, psychological traumas and so on.

The filmmaker is sober enough to know that, as a ceremonial tradition still supported by many men, female genital mutilation might continue to prevail as it's transmitted from one generation to the next. But she also knows that without raising the consciousness of African women and without bringing the issue to the Western medical establishment, no change would be possible at all. —Emanuel Levy