

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Martial Frindéthié, Ph.D.

ONCE UPON A TIME / Keletat (2016)

Kidist Yilma

OVERVIEW

Auteur Kidist Yilma is among Ethiopia's most prolific and successful directors. She has directed four features: *Rebuni* (2014), *Meba* (2015), *Keletat* (2016), and *Doka* (2023). She is married to Ethiopian actor Amanuel Habtamu, whom she cast in two of her films, *Rebuni*, which won Ethiopia's most prized award, the Gumma, and *Meba*. The success of Yilma's features, coupled with the blossoming of new Amharic-language TV stations in Ethiopia in the mid-2000 have prompted Yilma to start producing TV content. She is credited as being among the Ethiopian filmmakers who are contributing to the fast-growing Ethiopian cinema.



Film The literal translation of the film's Amharic title "Keletat" is "once upon a time." It suggests a fairytale ending to the tragic stories of two women victimized either explicitly or tacitly by men. The fairytale ending of the film foretells a better future for women in Ethiopia.

Background Each year, thousands of women are raped in Ethiopia. Fear and shame prevent Ethiopian rape victims from reporting their rapes. With this film, prolific Ethiopian filmmaker Kidist Yilma wants to pull back the cloak of silence around rape and its complex consequences. *Keletat* is a low-budget production, shot in Ethiopia with local actors. Critics see the film as one that contributes to the emergence of a new cinema in Ethiopia, driven by female filmmakers.

CHARACTERS

<i>Bruktawit</i>	A young woman, who is raped and impregnated and decides to keep her pregnancy
<i>Semeret</i>	A young woman, who is raped and impregnated and abandons her newborn in a cemetery
<i>Mr. Girma</i>	Bruktawit's father, who refuses to see his daughter or her child born out of marriage
<i>Besufikad</i>	Semeret's biological child, who is raised by Bruktawit

SYNOPSIS

This is the tale of two Ethiopian women who make different decisions when faced with the same dilemma, and how their decisions determine their lives. Bruktawit and Semeret are both raped, three years apart, by the same man, Seyume, and they become pregnant as a result. Bruktawit decides to keep the fetus and give birth. For that she faces her father's wrath, drops out of school, and stays at home to raise her son. Semeret, on the other hand, tries to get rid of the fetus in order to pursue her studies. Her attempt to terminate her pregnancy, however, fails and she gives birth at the same moment as a bereaved Bruktawit, who lost her three-year-old son in a drowning accident, is mourning him day and night on his grave and calling for God to resurrect him. Semeret leaves her newborn at the cemetery for Bruktawit to find, and she goes on to complete her studies and become an influential woman. Bruktawit picks up Semeret's newborn, convinced that it is her resurrected son, and raises him with love. Years later, gnawed by remorse and guilt, Semeret tracks down her son and starts to spend time with him. When she learns that the son she once abandoned in a cemetery has a critical heart problem from the drug she took in an attempt to abort him, she demands that Bruktawit give back her son so that she can send him abroad to be treated. The feud between these two mothers boils over and settles into a moment of conversation, when they decide to tell their stories. Semeret learns that the man who raped her is the same man who raped Bruktawit. Semeret abandons her demand to regain her son, but she agrees with Bruktawit to play a part in the boy's life.

SCENES

BRUKTAWIT

Bruktawit is pregnant The mood at Mr. Girma's home is somber. Bruktawit, Mr. Girma's unmarried daughter, is pregnant. The girl's mother has sought an elder man in the community to break the news to her husband and ask him for forgiveness on behalf of her daughter. Mr. Girma still cannot contain his anger. He grabs a picture of his daughter on a shelf and smashes it. He complains that his daughter has killed him. He swears that he would have put a bullet in his daughter's head if the elder man did not plead using the name of the Virgin Mary.



Bruktawit is Shunned by her father Alone in her room, Bruktawit is devastated and inconsolable. She sobs. She looks at her high school diploma and her good grades that now seem to mean nothing. Bruktawit's pregnancy is now fully visible. Her father does not want to see her. He has ordered her to move to the servants' quarter of the compound. She has taken particular interest in the Bible and reads it regularly.



Besufikad Bruktawit has given birth to a boy, who is now three years old. She named him Besufikad, meaning 'God's Will'. She is still living in the servants' quarter with her son. He is a curious child, and he likes to help his mother. Bruktawit gives her child a Christian education.



Girma meets his grandson Bruktawit's father will neither talk to her nor see her child. He does not even want to hear the child cry. Whenever, Girma comes home from work, Bruktawit grabs her child and runs to hide him from her father's view. And when the child cries, she covers his mouth to avoid seeing her father upset. Girma is having his feet washed by his wife. She hears some noise in the compound, and she leaves the room to see what the matter is. Girma leans back in his recliner and closes his eyes. He feels someone touching his foot. He opens his eyes and sees his grandson trying to wash his feet. The old man's face lights up. He smiles at the child. The child laughs.



Girma discreetly visits his grandson Girma spies on the people in the compound to make sure that no one can see him, and he sneaks into his grandchild's bedroom to look at him. He feels the child's head to make sure he is not sick, and he kisses his grandson's feet. Then, he discreetly gets out of the child's bedroom before anyone can see him. However, a servant notices Girma being affectionate to his grandson.



Bruktawit is happy Bruktawit's mother urges her to return to school and leave her son to her care. She tells her that it pains her to see that her daughter, who was among the best students, is now behind her peers. Bruktawit tells her mother that she should not worry about what people think of her. She tells her that if people knew how happy she felt inside just by being with her little boy, they would be envious.



The accident Bruktawit does not notice her little boy wandering away from her sight. After a few minutes, she starts looking for him in the compound and calling his name. She gets no response and starts to panic. Then, she sees her child with his head buried in a bucket of water. She rushes to pull him out, and she cries for help. Her mother and the servant come running. Nothing can be done to save the child. Little Besufikad is buried in the Orthodox Church graveyard. His mother will not leave his gravesite. Bruktawit's mother and the maid try to remove her by force, but her father asks them to let her mourn her child. Over the coming years, she comes to her child's grave to mourn him every day, and her relatives come to fetch



her in the evening. Bruktawit talks to her deceased son. She tells him that she will be waiting for him until the day he comes back from heaven. Bruktawit's father, who has been watching her discreetly, sends the Orthodox priest to talk to her. The priest tries to convince her that her son will not return, but that God will give her many other children. The priest cannot change Bruktawit's mind. My baby is sleeping. Bruktawit has brought her deceased son's favorite toys and blankets to his grave site. She talks to the dead in the cemetery, asking them to be quiet and not wake her sleeping child. Her father watches her from afar, saddened.

SEMERET

A father's pride At the beginning of the film, Semeret's family is celebrating her graduation from high school. Her mother and father dance with her, and her father showers both her mother and her with money. Semeret's father exclaims that he has no regrets about not having a son because he has an intelligent daughter. He is glad that his daughter brings him as much joy and pride as a son would to a father. Semeret's father thanks his wife for blessing him with an intelligent daughter. His wife thanks God for blessing her. He removes his necklace and proudly puts it around his daughter's neck and kisses her forehead. The young girl bends and kisses her father's knee and hugs and kisses her mother, who ululates with joy. The father proudly takes his daughter to visit her new college and to settle on campus.



Semeret rejects Seyume Semeret is studying for her final exams at the university library with a male friend. Seyume, a student, flanked by his two best friends, is gazing at her from afar. Seyume's keen interest in Semeret draws mockeries from his two friends. On the exam results day, Semeret goes with her friend to check her performance with her study. They both have passed. Seyume is there, too, is gazing intently at Semeret. Seyume approaches Semeret in the library. He compliments her on her beauty and her intelligence. He tells her that he would like to go out with her because he knows she has no boyfriend, and there are many aspects to this campus that she needs to know how to navigate. He tells her that he can help her with that. Semeret dismisses his proposal. Seyume is upset. Seyume insists on talking to Semeret. Seyume hates seeing Semeret with her study partner. He fumes each time they pass him by. Semeret and her friend are reviewing in a park. Seyume and his three friends follow them there. Seyume wants to talk one-on-one with Semeret. She refuses and tells him that they can talk at the university café if it is that important. One of Seyume's friends orders Semeret to get up and talk to Seyume. Semeret's friend asks Seyume's gang to leave Semeret alone.



Seyume rapes Semeret The gang overpowers Semeret's friend and beats him until he loses consciousness. They drag Semeret to a secluded place and allow Seyume to rape her. When Semeret's friend comes out, he crawls in the woods looking for Semeret. He finds her rolled up and sobbing.



Nobody must know When Semeret tells her friend of her ordeal, he wants to alert the police. She begs him not to. She tells him that she is walking dead, and that nobody must know about what she went through. Her friend beats himself, angry and powerless. Semeret starts to feel the symptoms of pregnancy. She is distraught and does not know to whom to turn. Seyume and his friends proudly talk about their exploit. Nonetheless, Seyume is perplexed as to why Semeret has not talked about her rape to the authorities. One of his friends replies that Semeret is like any other girl, ready to die for her honor and therefore, will keep silent to maintain the perception of honor. On campus, Semeret now walks around with her face hidden under a hoodie. When she passes by Seyume and his gang, they laugh at her. Semeret's mood has changed, and she can no longer focus on her studies.



Seyet: she disgusts me Seyume's friends want to know if he is still enamored with Semeret. He tells them that now she disgusts him, and that he cannot bear her sight. They tell him that raping Semeret has healed him of his obsession for her, and that that is all that matters.



Semeret is pregnant and wants an abortion Semeret buys herself a pregnancy test kit and gets confirmation that she is pregnant. She goes to see a doctor, who tells her that her pregnancy is developing very well. Semeret tells the doctor that she needs to abort the pregnancy. He wants to know why. She tells him that she does not need the child, and cannot give birth now even if she wanted to. The doctor tells her that her pregnancy is about twelve to fifteen weeks, and that she has entered the difficult stage for an abortion. She insists. He asks her to think it over and come and see him the next day. Semeret spends the day wandering in the woods and in the streets, thinking. She stops at a pharmacy and picks up some drugs. The doctor also tells Semeret that he was hoping she would change her mind because it will be unethical for him to terminate a pregnancy at this late stage. He adds that an abortion now would endanger both her and her unborn child's lives. Semeret pleads with the doctor that he must help her, and that she has an exam the next day. The doctor remains inflexible. Semeret is devastated.



Trap for Seyume One of Semeret's classmates comes to see her while she is studying. She complains about the difficulty of the exams and is afraid that she will fail. Semeret tells her that she can help her study for the exams if she helps her solve a small problem. Semeret whispers what she wants her to do in her ear. Semeret's classmate enthusiastically agrees. Semeret's classmate is with Seyume at his place. She starts screaming for help at the exact moment Semeret arrives with the police.



The police kick in Seyume's door, and Semeret's friend rushes out. The police arrest Seyume for attempted rape. As he is dragged away with his pants down, Seyume sees Semeret and her friend celebrating, and he understands that they framed him. Semeret's old study friend has some good news: Seyume and his gang have been expelled from the university. He tells her that she has nothing to worry about any longer. Semeret informs her friend that her father will be visiting her on campus, and she is worried. He advises her to act as if nothing happened. He thinks that Semeret is referring to her rape. He does not know that she is pregnant.

Semeret gives birth Semeret is in class when she suddenly starts feeling some contractions. Semeret discreetly goes to the hospital. She has a painful and difficult labor, but she gives birth to a boy. She takes advantage of the doctor's few minutes of inattention to run away with her newborn.



The gift After fleeing the hospital with her child, Semeret walks painfully to the cemetery with her newborn, wrapped in his bloody blanket. She deposits the newborn on the grave of Bruktawit's child and leaves before anyone can see her. Early the following morning, Bruktawit returns from the cemetery shouting with joy. She has a newborn in her hands. She tells the maid and her parents that her child has come back from the dead. She tells her parents that God has performed a miracle and asks her father to bless "her" baby so that she does not lose him again. Girma blesses the newborn and wraps his daughter in his blanket as a sign of affection and protection.



I want my son back Semeret come to knock on Mr. Girma's gate. The maid opens. She wants to know if Bruktawit is home. The maid tells her that Bruktawit does not live there. She wants to know where her newborn son is. The maid replies that she does not know what she is talking about and slams the gate on her. Semeret bangs on the door, begging to have her child returned to her. Semeret comes and sits at Girma's gate without anyone letting her in.



SEVEN YEARS LATER

A successful woman Seven years later, Semeret has become a famous women's and children's advocate in Addis Ababa. She often appears on TV to talk about issues concerning women and children. Her parents watch her appearances and are proud of her.



Besufikad is ill Bruktawit is the mother of a bright seven-year-old boy of whom she is very proud. She lives in a small home in a poor neighborhood of Addis Ababa. Besufikad has a health problem. He often has difficulty breathing and uses an inhaler. Besufikad collapses on the playground while eating a piece of chocolate. He is taken to the hospital and hospitalized for several days. Besufikad tells his doctor that he knows he is not indifferent to his mother, for he keeps checking her out. The doctor protests that he has never done that. Besufikad's mother comes to see him at the hospital. The child tells her that she neglects her appearance, and that he is ashamed when she dresses down. Besufikad's doctor tells Mr. Girma and the child's mother that he is baffled by Besufikad's survival. He tells them that it is a miracle that the child is still alive, but now, he will need a special treatment. The doctor tells them that the boy must be taken abroad for a heart surgery or he will not survive.



Semeret watches Besufikad From her office, Semeret has a view overlooking Besufikad's school. She often stands by her window to watch the pupils and their teachers on the playground. She comes down to the school to reprimand a teacher for not being strict enough with Besufikad. Semeret tells Besufikad's teacher that she saw the child hit her without being punished. The teacher tells her that Besufikad is different from the other children. Semeret replies that this is precisely why he should not be given special treatment, for if he is not disciplined in society, he might be stigmatized as a "fatherless boy" raised by a complacent mother. The teacher notices that Besufikad is eavesdropping on the conversation and orders him to go back to class. Semeret turns around and sees Besufikad. This is the first time she sees him up close since the day she gave him away as a newborn. She is visibly disturbed.



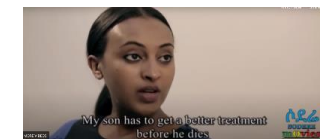
"Fatherless boy" At home, Besufikad grabs a dictionary from the bookshelf. He wants to understand what the term "fatherless boy," which was used to describe him, means. Besufikad's mother comes to the living room with a loaf of bread she has baked for the family. The child asks his mother the meaning of "fatherless boy." Bruktawit is furious and asks him where he heard this expression. Bruktawit comes to confront Semeret in her office about calling her son a "fatherless boy." This is the first time the two women face each other. Semeret is shocked.



Semeret apologizes to Besufikad Semeret waits for Besufikad after school to apologize to him. The boy tells her that he forgives her, but he warns her never to use the term "fatherless boy" to refer to any child. He tells her that it is insulting both to the child to whom it is applied and to the woman who uses it. Semeret hugs Besufikad.



Semeret wants to help Semeret has been talking with several doctors to see what she can do to help Besufikad. She meets with Besufikad's doctor. She tells him that she is the boy's real mother and is willing to do what she can to get him the best treatment possible. The doctor tells her that she must not ruin Bruktawit's life by revealing that she is Besufikad's mother even if this is true. He tells her that while she has everything, Bruktawit only has Besufikad. Semeret tells him that Besufikad is her blood, and that he needs her now. Therefore, she will not allow him to die for fear of hurting Bruktawit's feelings. Besufikad's doctor tells Mr. Girma that Semeret claims to be the boy's real mother, and he knows it. Girma calls her a liar. He asks the doctor to tell Semeret to stay away from his family. Mr. Girma comes to Semeret's office to ask her to leave his family alone. She informs him that she has been looking for him for a long time, and that he has been avoiding her. She tells him that now is not

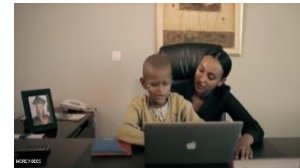


the time to fight but to save Besufikad, who is gravely ill, and that she wants to help. Semeret tells Girma that she made a mistake abandoning her child. This time, she will not make the mistake of letting him die. Girma asks her what kind of mother she claims to be if she can easily dump her child by a gravesite. He asks her if she knows what motherhood means. Semeret lowers her head in shame.

Matchmaker Son Besufikad, his doctor, and his mother are having dinner at a restaurant. The boy tries to set his mother up with the doctor; however, the doctor is too shy to engage Bruktawit. The boy gets up to go to the restroom, and the doctor follows him there. Besufikad scolds the doctor for not trying hard enough to woo his mother.



I am your mother Semeret spends some time with Besufikad in her office talking, playing, and telling stories. The boy tells Semeret a long story about how great his mother is to him. He is out of breath and takes his inhaler. Besufikad's effort to catch his breath brings tears to Semeret's eyes. She tells the boy that he can think of her as his mother. Besufikad tells his mother that he spent his lunch time in Semeret's office and played on her computer. He also tells his mother that Semeret has asked him to consider her as his mother. The boy increasingly spends his lunch hour with Semeret and takes a nap snuggled up against her before going back to his afternoon classes. Semeret also takes him out to eat at restaurants. At night, he sleeps in Bruktawit's bed. Bruktawit cries when she sees that her son comes back with his lunch box untouched.



Bruktawit confronts Semeret Bruktawit goes to Semeret's office to tell her of her disapproval about feeding her son strange food and spending too much time with him. Semeret tells Bruktawit that it is time she give her back her son. Bruktawit is shocked. She starts shouting that Semeret will never take her son away from her. Semeret tells her that, in this case, the matter will be settled in a court of law. Semeret shouts that Besufikad is sick and needs treatment. She tells Bruktawit that the medication she took to abort the child weakened his heart. She tells Bruktawit that she shortened her son's life expectancy, and that Besufikad is bound to die soon. Besufikad, eavesdropping on the conversation, opens the door and collapses in front of the two women.



Besufikad is hospitalized Besufikad is rushed to the hospital. His two mothers and his grandfather wait anxiously. The two women are still at odds. Nonetheless, the two mothers and the grandfather take turn watching over the boy. Bruktawit and Semeret have a conversation. Bruktawit tells Semeret that she cannot fathom how she abandoned her son, and that she would never do that even if she had the whole world against her.



How Bruktawit got pregnant Bruktawit tells Semeret the circumstances in which her son was conceived. It was on the night of high school graduation party. She was drunk and woke up in the bed of a student. Later she learned that she was pregnant by him, and she decided to keep the child. She never told him about the pregnancy and forgave him for what he did to her.

Seyume raped Bruktawit, too. Bruktawit pulls a passport-size picture of the man she has kept just in case her son asks one day who his father is. Semeret is shocked to see that the man who date-raped Bruktawit is Seyume, the same man who raped her.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

BRUKTAWIT She is a strong, irrational, and caring woman. She defied her father's and her community's disapproval and kept her pregnancy and gave birth to a boy, whom she raised with love and care. When he died, however, she was convinced that he would come back to life, and later she believed an abandoned newborn to be her resurrected child. She raised that child with the same love she gave her son and protected him against negative remarks. Her world starts to crumble when the biological mother of the child resurfaces.

Strong Bruktawit was raised in a conservative religious family by a strict father for whom having a child while unmarried amounted to a sin. Therefore, Bruktawit's familial and cultural logic dictated that she should have no sex before marriage, and if she faltered and became pregnant, that she should get rid of the pregnancy. However, Bruktawit did not yield to her cultural imperatives. She kept her pregnancy and delivered her child, agreeing to become a pariah in her father's eyes. Her decision displays an unusual strength.

Irrational After losing her child, Bruktawit would not leave his gravesite. She was convinced that he would come back to life, just like Jesus did according to the Bible. Her parents and the Orthodox priest's effort to tell her otherwise did not sway her in her belief. When Bruktawit found Semeret's abandoned newborn in the cemetery, it confirmed her belief of a miracle, and she raised the child as if he were her deceased boy and gave him that boy's name, Besufikad. Besufikad was a child suffering from acute heart problem, which necessitated a costly operation. Besufikad's biological mother wanted to help, but Bruktawit refused, seeing it as a scheme by the latter to take Besufikad from her, thus putting the boy's life in greater danger.

Protective/caring Bruktawit has been nothing but caring to her two children (her biological child and the child she found at the cemetery). She has devoted her life to them, nurturing them and loving them. She protected her first child from the unkindness of his grandfather by making him feel desired and loved in the servants' quarter where he and she were confined. She protected her second child from stigmatization by confronting Semeret about the derogatory term "fatherless child" Semeret used to speak of him. She thought that her child could have no better upbringing than the one she gave him, and she was ready to fight to prevent Semeret from getting him back.

MR. GIRMA

He is a strict, hypocritical, and remorseful character. He disowned his daughter because she got pregnant before getting married. However, he would hide and play with his grandson when no one was watching. When his grandson died, he was grief-stricken for having been so intransigent towards his daughter. He then became her accomplice in a years-long deception.

Strict Mr. Girma is a traditionalist for whom family honor must trump everything. As the patriarch of the family, he is the custodian of that honor. However, that honor's gauge is Bruktawit's purity. Girma considers that his daughter failed him by getting pregnant outside of marriage. He interprets Bruktawit's pregnancy as a dagger to his heart, saying that she killed him. Girma wants his daughter to be dead to him. He removes and smashes pictures of her and confines her to the servants' quarter where he will not see her or her child.

Hypocritical Mr. Girma openly refuses to see or hear his grandson because he views the child as a stain on the family's respectability. Yet, he sneaks into the child's room to watch him sleep or play with him when no one can see him. Mr. Girma also knows that the infant his daughter brought home from the cemetery is not hers. Yet he blesses the child when his daughter asks him to, and he calls Semeret a liar when she reveals that Besufikad is her son. His actions do not match his proclaimed Christian ethic of sincerity.

Remorseful Mr. Girma has been an insensitive father to his daughter and an invisible grandfather to his grandson. He began to feel remorseful the first time when his grandson came to him and smiled at him. From that day on, Girma secretly visited and played with the child. When Besufikad died, Mr. Girma's grief was intense. He wanted to help his grieving daughter overcome her pain. So, he pretended to believe her story of Besufikad's resurrection while he knew it to be implausible. Later, he tried to protect his daughter by denying that Semeret was the biological mother of Besufikad.

SEMERET

She is a transitional woman. Her path to emancipation by means of education took her through moments that she came to be repentant about. In fact, she failed in her attempt to abort her pregnancy. When the fetus did not die, she gave her newborn away. Later, as she felt remorseful and tried to reconnect with her child, she learned that her botched abortion seriously affected the child's heart.

Contrite From the very moment she abandoned her child for Bruktawit to pick up, Semeret started feeling remorse. She went to Bruktawit's home the following day to try to recover her newborn, but she faced the hostility of the people there, who pretended not to know what she was talking about. Semeret found her child years later, only to discover that the boy had a serious heart problem that needed immediate attention. She decided to help and consulted with the country's experts about what to do. She was ready to pay for Besufikad's travel abroad to be treated, but Bruktawit did not want her near the child, lest she should take him away from her. She threatened Bruktawit to take her to court to fight for custody of the child if this is what it would take for her to get him treatment. Finally, the women reconciled, and Besufikad received his treatment paid by his repentant biological mother.

Transitional Semeret represents a new breed of women in Ethiopian society, one that has chosen to emancipate herself through education. Some events, such as abuse from chauvinistic men, might come as obstacles to Semeret's plans for freedom and emancipation, but she has decided not to let such events derail her progress towards self-determination. Her message to Ethiopian women is one of perseverance in order to throw off the cloak of sub-alterity. By persisting, she has reached a status where she can no longer be victimized by patriarchy. And the determining element of her transition is education.

THEMES

SOCIETY

Education Like many Ethiopian films, *Keletat* stresses the importance of education as a means of social mobility. Semeret's father's pride when he sees his daughter's diploma is justified. He understands that by going to university, his daughter has passed one milestone towards changing her living condition and pulling the family to a higher status. Inversely, Mr. Girma's consternation when he learns of his unmarried daughter's pregnancy is explicable by the fact that it throws a monkey wrench in the works of individual and familial social uplift. Culturally, an unmarried mother is a victimizer. She damages the family's standing in the community. Socially, she is a victim, for raising her child without the support of a husband consumes most of her time, and thus gives her little or no opportunity to pursue her studies, which maintains her in a state of subalternity. Semeret gives her newborn away, and, by so doing, frees herself from the heavy burden of having to be responsible for a child, devoting, instead, all her energy to the pursuit of her studies. Semeret goes on to become a powerful woman in the country. As for Bruktawit, who was among the best students of her high school class, her dedication to her child stops her in educational tracks. And it is ironic that when Besufikad, the child to whom she dedicated her life, looks for a model of success, it is to Semeret, the mother that gave him away, that he turns, as he tells her repeatedly that he, too, will one day earn his diplomas with distinction, like her, the educated mother.

Shame Having abducted and raped Semeret, Seyume finds it curious that his victim has not yet reported her ordeal to the authorities. One of his friends replies that, like all women, Semeret values her honor and will be ashamed if people knew what happened to her. Indeed, one of the elements that seems to have guided Semeret's actions is shame, disappointing her parents, and more particularly her father, and being indexed in her community as a disgraced woman, who not only was raped—here, the victim becomes the guilty party, and the shame falls on the victim and not the victimizer—but who, on top of that, conceived a child outside of marriage. It is also the shame of being regarded in his community as unworthy of respect which consumes Bruktawit's father, makes him exclaim that his daughter killed him, and leads him to forbid his daughter from showing herself to him or presenting to his eyes the fruit of her shameless act, the child conceived from an illegitimate relationship. Ethiopian society is one in which shame often dictates decisions, and these decisions keep women, more than men, in a position where justice is denied. To obtain justice by circumventing shame, to have her rapist arrested, Semeret framed him with the help of another female student. Seyume was arrested and expelled from the university for trying to rape a student but not for raping Semeret. As for Bruktawit, she kept the story of her date-rape by Seyume a secret, out of shame.

CRIME

Rape In Ethiopian cinema, rape seems to be among the menaces that haunt the lives of Ethiopian women. The situation is all the more alarming since an antiquarian mentality, which tends to blame rape victims for being morally loose, prevents them from seeking justice from the authorities, thereby allowing their victimizers to continue their misdeeds without being arrested. Seyume's rape of Semeret is not his first crime. Three years earlier, he had taken advantage of Bruktawit being drunk at a party to rape her. And since she did not report Seyume's crime, he went on to rape other girls. Seyume is certainly a serial rapist. His victims have kept silent out of shame, and his misdeeds have undoubtedly put an end to the dreams of advancement of several women while he celebrates his deviant prowess. With this film, the Ethiopian filmmaker certainly sends a message that male honor, which makes women bear the burden of shame and reduces them to silence, must be challenged and defeated. Women must speak to name their tormentors. For this, their words must not be censored by patriarchal honor.

Guilt Soon after she abandons her newborn at a graveyard, and the infant is picked up by Bruktawit, Semeret is overtaken by guilt. Much later, she goes to Bruktawit's home looking for her infant, but she faces the refusal of Bruktawit's relatives to acknowledge her as the mother of the baby Bruktawit brought home from the cemetery. Bruktawit's father, who has shunned his daughter when she was pregnant and refused to see his grandson, also felt guilt. He accepted his daughter's story of her resurrected son and protected her, even though he knew the baby she brought home was not her child. He wanted to make amends for making her a pariah, and he felt guilty for not giving his grandson all the love that he could have afforded him. When Semeret sees her son for the first time, she is again guilt-stricken. Her guilt is heightened when she realizes that Besufikad has health problems, and she learns that the medication she took in her attempt to abort him is the cause of his heart problem. To redress her error, and also more because she missed her son from the day she gave him away, Semeret endeavors to spend more time with the boy and proposes to pay for his medical operation.

Loss Bruktawit's unwanted pregnancy is to Mr. Girma an incommensurable loss, the loss of the family's honor in the community. Mr. Girma represents his daughter's pregnancy as parricide. He laments that his daughter killed him with her pregnancy, while swearing at the same time that he would have killed her if he were not asked to forgive in the name of the Virgin Mary. Of course, Girma does not kill his daughter, but he makes her and her son lose the freedom to move freely in the family compound. Bruktawit is not allowed to let Girma see her or her son. And every time Girma enters the family compound, the women of the household rush to put little Besufikad out of his sight, and they cover his mouth so that his cries do not irritate the old man. In addition to her confinement and that of her son, which cause the loss of a fulfilling relationship between daughter and father, and grandson and grandfather, Bruktawit also loses the opportunity for social advancement. Her pregnancy interrupts her studies and keeps her in the status of a housewife. And when her son dies, and she is bereaved, Bruktawit gets another son thanks to Semeret insensitive act of abandoning her newborn in a cemetery. Semeret will feel this senseless act as a loss despite all the success that her education afforded her. Semeret is wracked by guilt of having abandoned her son, by the loss of filial love, and by failed motherhood, until she is given the opportunity to see her son, Besufikad, and participate in his growth and well-being.

FLAWS

Pride Pride, and especially masculine pride, is a recurrent theme in Ethiopian cinema, as has been demonstrated in *Difret* (2014), *Lamb* (2015), *79* (2015), and *Embi* (2018), to cite only these few. In *Kelatat*, Semeret's father thanks his wife for giving him a daughter who makes him proud by earning her high school diploma. Though he would have been prouder with a son, he concedes that a daughter with a degree is as worthy as a son. He is joyful. He dances and showers his wife and daughter with money and proudly offers his daughter his prized necklace. Semeret's father's pride would have been crushed had his daughter been dishonorable. She understands that and, more for not disappointing her father than for her own sake, she tries to abort her unwanted pregnancy. When she fails to get rid of her pregnancy, she abandons her newborn in a cemetery. Semeret's undesirable pregnancy came as the result of her flouting a man's honor and pride. Seyume, the leader of a gang of four students, asked Semeret to go out with him, and she turned

him down. This, for Seyume, was an insult that needed reparation. Therefore, Seyume had his gang abduct Semeret for him to rape.

Unlike Semeret, Bruktawit did not care much about her father's pride and honor. She decided to keep her pregnancy, to the great consternation of her father. Of course, out of respect for her father, Bruktawit and her mother brought in an elderly neighbor to announce the bad news to him. For her father, it was an incommensurable humiliation. He lamented that his daughter had dishonored him, had killed him even. He swore that if the elderly neighbor had not evoked the name of the Virgin Mary, he would have killed his daughter for soiling his pride. And to keep what little pride he had left after his daughter's abominable act of getting pregnant while unmarried, Bruktawit's father forbade the people in the house to mention his grandson in his presence, and he ordered them to make sure that the child never came into his sight.

QUEST

Longing/desire The search for happiness is at the heart of *Keletat's* characters' preoccupations. For Semeret's father, happiness means maintaining the family's honor and respectability. While this happiness is usually achieved through the son, here, it is the daughter, Semeret, who, by obtaining her diploma, is its source. Semeret's father is proud of his daughter and exclaims that he is ready to die this day if it is God's will, because his daughter has made him a fulfilled man. The pride her parents take in her upbringing defines Semeret's main preoccupation: succeeding, finishing her studies and achieving a respectable position on the social ladder. To this end, Semeret eliminates anything that might stand in the way of this fulfillment. She tries to abort an unwanted pregnancy, and when this fails, and she is forced to give birth, she disposes of the child by abandoning it in a cemetery, on the grave of the son of a woman, Bruktawit. For Bruktawit, motherhood is non-negotiable. Although her disgraceful pregnancy contradicts her father's desire to preserve the family's honor through the purity of his daughter, Bruktawit will not get rid of her pregnancy. She nurtures it to term and gives birth to a boy. And when this boy dies by accident, she mourns him every day, asks God to resurrect him, and finds him again, in the form of the newborn that Semeret has abandoned in the cemetery. Although fulfilled, Semeret's and Bruktawit's quests still leave them longing. Semeret longs for a lost motherhood, and Bruktawit longs for the education she never pursued.

PAST

Transience Things will never be the same again after Bruktawit's and Semeret's passages in Ethiopian society. The authority of patriarchy, hitherto omnipotent and unquestionable, has been altered with Bruktawit's defiance of her father and her community. Mr. Girma is right to say that his daughter has killed him. In fact, she has killed his dogmatic, patriarchal and absolute hold on the family. By defying him, keeping her pregnancy, and raising her child openly and publicly, what Bruktawit says to her family and her community is that she is a line of flight that follows the trajectory of her own desires. She no longer follows an arborescent genealogy, whereby one is a "good girl" insofar as one behaves according to the father's commands. She has branched out. She is now a rhizome that grows new, lateral shoots. She desires a child, and she will have it despite her father's wrath and the community's disapproval. At the end, Bruktawit's resistance breaks the father's intransigence and makes him her accomplice. It is patriarchy reviewing its stance, becoming supple, adapting to a society where women demand to be heard and emancipated. That emancipation finds its realization mainly through education. For Semeret, it means forging through or around the obstacles to women's education, which can take the form of denouncing a chauvinistic criminal like Seyume, the rapist, getting rid of an unwanted pregnancy, or giving away an undesired child. As crude as this might seem, it is the expression of an individual desire, an anti-genealogical act, which harnesses more power for Semeret. Now, she is an influential woman, and she can have a chair at the decision-making table, as is shown during her appearance on TV. Semeret and Bruktawit, in their different ways, emancipate Ethiopian women from the grip of patriarchy.

Memory Yilma makes abundant use of flashbacks in *Keletat*, to the point that it becomes sometimes difficult to follow the storyline. However, the filmmaker uses this filmic technique as a pointer of memory. Their pasts haunt the characters, and these are pasts made of pain and regret. For example, Seyume is a constant fixture in Semeret's life. The images of his victorious snickers when he comes across Semeret on campus after the rape play constantly in her head and prevent her from relaxing and focusing on her studies. She becomes melancholic and hides her face under a hoodie. The further her pregnancy develops, the more the image of Seyume's violating her body resurfaces. Even the sight of the necklace

that her father once so proudly placed around her neck becomes a source of sadness. Seyume has ruined even the most precious memory in Semeret's life. She frames Seyume and gets him arrested, and this gives her some solace to continue her studies.

Later, however, it is the image of her abandoning her infant in a cemetery that comes to Semeret in shockwaves and makes her feel guilty and sad. To exorcise this painful memory, Semeret seeks out her child and tries to be part of his life, even tries to get him back, especially when she learns that her past foolishness, (taking a drug in the hope of getting rid of her unwanted pregnancy) has altered Besufikad's heart and reduced his life expectancy.

After Bruktawit loses her three-year-old child, the memory of him playing in the family compound becomes unbearable. The child's gravesite becomes her quotidian retreat, where she spends long hours, every day, waiting for his resurrection until the day she thinks to have found him in Semeret's abandoned newborn.

Mr. Girma cannot forgive himself for shunning his daughter and his grandson. This memory becomes difficult to bear, especially with the death of Besufikad. He tries to make amends with his daughter by comforting her and going along with her myth of Besufikad's resurrection.

Nevertheless, the past catches up to him and his daughter when Semeret's memory, of her painful past as a neglectful and selfish young mother, reappears and wants her child back.

Choice Both Semeret and Bruktawit made choices when they were faced with the same dilemma. Their different choices then shaped the direction of their lives and their respective positions in Ethiopian society. Both women were impregnated by the same man. Although their pregnancies happened in different circumstances, neither of them expected or wanted a pregnancy at the moment. Semeret was raped by Seyume, and Bruktawit was date-raped. While drunk at a graduation party, Bruktawit found herself in Seyume's bed the next morning, only to realize that she had had sex with Seyume without her explicit consent. Semeret tried unsuccessfully to abort her pregnancy, and when she gave birth, she abandoned the newborn at a cemetery and went on to finish her studies. As for Bruktawit, she decided to face her father's wrath and her community's gaze. She kept her pregnancy. She gave birth to a little boy, whom she named Besufikad (meaning God's will), and whom she showered with love and affection until the day he accidentally drowned in a bucket of water. Semeret's and Bruktawit's fates meet when Semeret abandons her newborn at the cemetery, and Bruktawit picks it up, claiming that it is her dead child come back to life. Free of the constraints of raising a child, Semeret graduates from university, climbs the social ladder, and becomes an influential woman. Bruktawit, on the other hand, devotes her life to her son as a homemaker and lives an austere life in a run-down neighborhood of Addis Ababa. Their choices of motherhood, for Bruktawit, and of freedom from the constraints of motherhood, for Semeret, determine their positions in Ethiopian society.

Selflessness vs. Selfishness Selflessness is defined as "concern more with the needs and wishes of others than with one's own. Selfishness is defined as seeking or concentrating on one's own advantage, pleasure, or well-being without regard for others. These two attitudes are dramatized by the decisions made by characters in the film.

When Semeret and Bruktawit discover that they got pregnant, their decisions are different. Bruktawit acts selflessly by deciding to protect her unborn baby in spite of her family's insistence that she have an abortion. She sacrifices her easy life and is disowned by her father.

On the other hand, Semeret's goal of completing her studies was compromised by a rape that resulted in an unwanted pregnancy. However, she decided that this pregnancy would not stop her in her pursuit of a university degree and a comfortable life. She strove to eliminate the growing child in her womb by taking medication, although her doctor warned her that an abortion at her advanced stage involved great risks. And when, against all odds, the fetus held on to life, and Semeret gave birth, she abandoned her infant in a cemetery.

Later, one learns that Semeret's ingestion of medication has compromised the health of Besufikad. Unless the boy undergoes an expensive heart operation, which Bruktawit cannot afford, the child will die.

When Semeret, the boy's biological mother, appears, who can afford to pay for his surgery abroad, and who proposes to do so, Bruktawit vehemently opposes it.

Both Semeret and Bruktawit act selfishly. When Semeret discovers that her son is living but has medical problem she attempts to get him back before spending her resources. However, Bruktawit sees in Semeret's act a ploy to steal "her" child. And Bruktawit is not entirely wrong. Semeret's proposal looks like blackmail. She seems to be saying that she will save Besufikad only if she is recognized as the biological mother of the child and have him returned to her. Semeret could have saved Besufikad through an anonymous philanthropic gesture, but she was too preoccupied with her desire to have "her" child back. And while the two women fight over the legitimate ownership of the child, Besufikad is dying. In a clever cinematic gesture, the filmmaker makes Besufikad overhear the two brawling mothers, enter the room unannounced and collapse in front of them. This emphasizes that the mothers' selfishness trumped over their love for Besufikad.

QUESTIONS

1. Why did the filmmaker choose to make Seyume the rapist of both Bruktawit and Semeret?
2. While Seyume is a bully and a rapist, the filmmaker chose Semeret's best friend in college to be a compassionate male figure. What is the filmmaker's message here about gender relations?
3. Why do you think Besufikad was so keen on setting up his mother with his doctor?
4. Does the filmmaker have a message for her audience about abortion? What is it?
5. The filmmaker seems to imply that women's freedom and emancipation rest solely neither on education nor motherhood but on a combination of both. How is this idea dramatized in the film?
6. The characters of Semeret and Bruktawit represent two types of women who represent changes to modern Ethiopian society. What are these changes?