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Wajma (An Afghan Love Story)

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Abstract

This is a film review of *Wajma (An Afghan Love Story)* (2013) directed by Barmak Akram.

Keywords

Afghanistan, Women

Wajma (An Afghan Love Story)

Directed by Barmak Akram

World Dramatic Competition

It's a tale as old as time - young love turns family cataclysm after an unintended pregnancy "dishonors" the family name. While the tense drama



Wajma, "based on several true stories," takes place in Afghanistan, notorious for the virulently conservative strain of Islam embodied by the Taliban, this story could be set in any strictly traditional society around the world. In fact, and surprisingly, not only is the city of Kabul depicted as fairly modern, but Islam is only presented briefly, in a scene where the pregnant, unmarried Wajma's father (Hadji Gul), conducts his daily prayers. The film really is about the tension between the freedom available in the modern world and what even the city prosecutor calls Afghan's "outdated" society.

While religion is not an explicit driver of the brutality and shame that Wajma (Wajma Baha) faces, concepts like "family honor" and "virginity" certainly have their roots in the religious ideal of purity. Purity, as a symbol, is under constant threat; as anthropologist Mary Douglas famously illustrates, we

erect a wall to protect purity in all its forms with what we call taboo. Pregnancy, of course, is a permanent, visible sign that a woman's sexual purity has been compromised—which announces to the world that the one charged with protecting the family, namely the father, has failed. In the end, “family dishonor” is arguably about public masculine humiliation, and often the only way to reassert one's manhood is to destroy that which has humiliated you. Even if it is your own daughter.

Fortunately for Wajma the women in her life intervene as much as they can to keep her alive and give her options. The solution the whole family is able to muster is unexpected and heartbreaking—but in its own way represents a step away from the traditional absolutes of their outdated society into the messy world of modern freedoms.

—Dereck Daschke