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I am not a Witch

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Abstract

This is a film review of *I am not a Witch* (2017), directed by Rungano Nyoni.

Keywords

Witchcraft

Author Notes

William Blizek is the Founding Editor of the Journal of Religion and Film, and is Professor of Philosophy and Religion at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He is also the editor of the Continuum Companion to Religion and Film (2009).



I am not a Witch (2017), dir. Rungano Nyoni

This is the story of little Shula who is found abandoned in a small village where she is then accused of being a witch. She is given the choice of confessing to being a witch or of becoming a goat. She chooses, as much as any small child can make such a choice, identifying herself as a witch. She is then sent to a witch camp where all of the witches are put on a tether that keeps them under control. Sula and the other witches are exploited by the government overseer. They are often used for hard labor, picking crops or breaking rocks. Always tied to their tether. Because Shula is so young she is used by the government overseer to trick people. Sometimes she is said to determine the guilt or innocence of a suspect. Sometimes she is supposed to bring rain to a drought ridden land.

In the end, Shula runs to the end of her tether and dies. After her fellow witches perform the final ceremony for Shula, it begins to rain. Was she really a witch? Or, was she trying to escape being a witch? But we also see the truck that carries the witches' tethers and all of the

tethers have been cut. We hear the bleating of a goat. Have the witches escaped their fate or have they all become goats?

Apart from Shula's story, this film is a criticism of naming or labeling someone in order to create the other. By creating the other, we have someone we can abuse, revile, blame for our problems, and so on. We do not, maybe even should not, treat the other with respect. But we should be careful in constructing the other, even if this is the game to play in American politics.