

Review: Red Sea title 'Shimoni' is both devastating and meaningful



JEDDAH: “Shimoni (The Pit)” — part of the ongoing Red Sea International Film Festival — was written and directed with a lot of feeling by Kenya’s Angela Wamai. It is a devastating look at what happens when a community fails to care for a fallen man. Wamai's ability to tell a story through long silences add to the tension, aided by some wonderfully neat editing. The use of light and shade to take us through the moods of the moment to create a fantastic feeling, and our hearts go out to Geoffrey (Justin Mirichii), who suffers through a childhood trauma and a punishingly long jail term.



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Wamai's writing presents an authentic picture of this deeply religious churchgoing village, where the pastor's word is the law. (Supplied)

Released from prison seven years after being charged with homicide, Geoffrey shudders when he is asked to live in the village where he grew up and where horrifying memories torment him. Once a brilliant English teacher, the former convict is uneasy when he is asked to do farm work. His boss is a talkative woman, Martha (Muthoni Gathecha), who is displeased with him.

The village priest has his own agenda — he wants Geoffrey to repent for his sins and gives the fallen man a sermon every night. But when the pastor insists that the young man meet with the victim's family, the uneasiness is excruciating.

What ultimately proves to be a tipping point is when village gossip becomes unbearable for him. Beatrice (Vivian Wambui), just about to get out of her teen years, is another source of irritation for him, when her curiosity pushes her to play with fire.

Wamai's writing presents an authentic picture of this deeply religious churchgoing village, where the pastor's word is the law. The only person who appears outside this circle is Martha, who loves playing the sleuth. Interestingly, the script offers a lovely

view of the relationship between her and Geoffrey — their meetings are both tense and witty and the movie, set in the Kenyan countryside, goes to underline the trauma of an individual when he has had a run in with the law.
