

**INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR HAKIM BALABBES**

NICK: Can you describe the relevance of the ritual for defining a Moroccan sense of masculinity?

HAKIM: I think it's a rite of passage. I guess, like, I know that from what I came to learn about a lot of African cultures on the Continent, it's basically the same, it is some sort of an early childhood rite of passage or preparation into manhood. I know that circumcision happens later, at a later time in the life of a young man in different parts of the world. I also know that it happens also to women in what I believe is a very different context. But for a child within the Moroccan culture I think it takes its root from a tradition in the religion, in Islam. The story that the Prophet Mohammed was actually circumcised by a set of angels or something when he was a baby. There is the element of Hygiene, of cleanliness. This is at the root of what circumcision means.

But there is also the idea of the shame that comes with somebody not having been circumcised. I know of some people who did not get circumcised and they don't talk about it, I mean, these are adults now, and I also know people who happen to have been circumcised at age 18 or 17 and they did it medically. They went to see a doctor and it was done as surgery basically. But the people who didn't get a chance to have it done to them would usually not talk about because it almost takes away from your masculinity or from your manhood.

As a matter of fact I was always curious about how that is viewed here in America because I know that there are people who are circumcised and there are people who are not circumcised and as we talked about this on the phone, the idea is just to talk about it. I mean, why not? Not to stir any controversy or not to blunt about it but, you know, get it on the table and get people to talk about it. And to talk about what it does, in this case, to a child, emotionally. So that was my interest in it.

NICK: Maybe I'm sort of projecting a more western take on the scene, but it seems like there is an implicit critique of that tradition in the way that the scene is presented in the film. Do you think that's the case?

HAKIM: It's interesting, No. I mean, one thing that I tried to- not that I tried to avoid, but I didn't- I never intended for it to be a critique. I mean, if, by mere raising of the issue that becomes a critique I don't know but the idea for me is just to talk about it. I do, by nature, I am interested, I'm curious, I want to talk about things that people don't talk about. But it's

perspective, my instinct is, automatically I wanted to ask you, are you circumcised?

NICK: No.

HAKIM: Ok, so that makes sense that you say 'from a western perspective' but, you know, a western perspective, I mean, maybe in this room there are people who are circumcised. So, it's exactly about that. Even if it gets me, or if it gets us to understand a little bit about who does it, why do they do it? I mean I'm, and this by be just my naive perception of who gets circumcised and who doesn't in America, I'm thinking, if you're catholic I guess you don't. Is that right? Or if you're protestant you do? Or-so, who gets circumcised and who doesn't? But I know there are people who are circumcised and I know there are people who are not. So I don't know that it is quiet an eastern and western issue because I know that it happens in a lot of different cultures. But I guess therefore, you're wondering about it from the perspective of somebody who hasn't lived that.- who hasn't undergone the experience. Is that right? That's interesting.

NICK: Although normally- That's another question I had about the fact that the ritual takes place at a later age...

HAKIM: Normally, even in a culture like Moroccan culture the circumcision happens at an early age. It usually happens within the first three years of the birth of a male child. But there are a lot of instances where, especially because the country is a rural country, we are, or- Morocco is a rural society, and therefore outside of the big metropolitan cities or environments it is still, people still do things in little towns and villages pretty much the same way that things were done years ago, like the circumcision and, as the scene in the film shows, the actual circumcision is done by a barber. Whereas in the town next to where we shot it would be inconceivable that a barber would do it. It would have to be a doctor. And there's also why- that's why, even in my hometown, there is an NGO now that was started by a group of doctors who offer to circumcise kids who come from poor backgrounds for free and just organize the whole thing every year. So...

NICK: Yeah, I was gonna ask you about, firstly, why you chose in the film to shoot an actual circumcision ritual rather than to enact it?

HAKIM: Well, we shot it both ways. We did shoot- I guess we shot it just from 2 different angles and one, you know, we did it so that it could get the feeling of what's going on. And I also considered the idea that less is more in this case, where if I don't show it then I would get more mileage out of the scene. But to me, I don't know. I think it was just, one- it was an issue that I thought I really wanted to kind of lay out on the table and see what

people will say about it. And maybe, and I'm just processing this thought now as I'm talking to you, maybe my initial intention was that if the scene was or had been shot differently maybe it would not have had the impact that now it does because it was shot as documentary or cinema verite or however you want to label it.

I think the decision was made a little easier for me because I did have access to an actual kid who was at the age that I was thinking about whose family was willing to do it and who maybe would have had to wait another year or two if we hadn't helped them do it because they were not going to be able to afford it- to afford the party, I guess, which is part of the circumcision. You cannot have a circumcision ceremony without the party, without inviting people. And what- a lot of families actually would avoid doing it because they can't afford to do the whole thing. And it is kind of- people would look at you in the wrong way, or that's how you perceive people, looking at you the wrong way, if you do not invite the neighbors and the family and the friends to your son's circumcision. So there was that. There was also the fact that- and maybe it was just- I insisted on shooting a real circumcision because I had done that previously as part of a short documentary I shot a circumcision of twins who are my neighbors and that, the shooting of that circumcision ceremony was what triggered the idea that ended up in the film, when I later started to write, when I was writing the script, and I just remember being really struck by, one, the violence of it, two the confusion of feelings for the parents. The father who has to play the part of the patriarch and, although he might be horrified at the thought that something might go wrong and his son would end up being harmed. The mother, who has to play that double part or role of, one: having these elaborate, lavish clothes and putting up a show basically for the community and yet she's equally horrified inside about her son too. I mean, it is a violent act. But to me this all fell within kind of a big metaphor for what we do to each other in the name of love. And how we- to me it was just a great metaphor for what the price of love is. I don't know if I'm making myself clear but- It's almost like the conditions or the price that we have to pay to love each other and to be loved by each other. So- and in my head that's why when people say controversy about a circumcision scene, to me it's just a metaphor and goes beyond the actual act itself So... I don't know if I finished my thought but- I could go on. (laughs)

NICK: Going back a little bit, I think because, as a far as it being a controversy, what interests me is that it was kind of a cross-cultural collaboration. I mean, Don Smith was producing and you, a Moroccan filmmaker having lived in the United States for quite a while. Can you talk a little bit about the conflict that arose between you and Don? I know he didn't want to shoot an actual ritual.

HAKIM: Yeah, well, he didn't. In the same way that- I'm talking to him now about a script that I'm writing and part of it- It's a story that starts here about an Arab-American family whose kid ends up being deployed to Iraq and the story follows him to Iraq and we are in Fallujah and Don is like "you don't have to shoot in Fallujah. You don't have to go to Fallujah you can go to Morocco. But like, to me, I said no. I want to go to Fallujah. I want to be there (laughing). So I don't know. I guess it's just two different modes of thought. I mean, Don is talking from a producing standpoint that takes everything into account from safety to how much it's going to cost to, you know, liability insurance and all that stuff. I'm just thinking, and maybe this is in a way one of the, I don't know, one of the flaws I guess of being in a position like mine where, you know, you're imagining something, you write it and then you just want it to be as truthful- It's not even about reality I think, it's just about being as truthful as possible to a situation that you imagined. I think it- my- the fact that I insist on something like this also comes from maybe my background with documentary filmmaking. And also in the fact that the whole movie is a mix of documentary and fiction and, you know, different genres and different cultures and different languages and- Having said that, the burden, I think, ethically, that you have to think about- and that's something that-it haunts me, is that child that somehow I decided to shoot the scene with. And that his image that I am using- you know, I'm the one sitting here being interviewed because of this movie or whatever. What about that child whose image I am using? And to me that is something that- I don't know that I have worked out that kind of issue. I think it happens to me a lot. And I see it reflected more and more in how I write something or how I shoot something or how I edit something. Ethics is a huge part of it. That's why I don't like zooms, for example. I think they are just a mechanical manipulation of human beings. And so I always keep thinking to myself that as long as I'm being truthful and honest to myself about what it is that I want to do and I can claim that responsibility, then at least I'm not denying that. I mean it really is- It can become a very heavy thing. It's a heavy load to carry sometimes when you know that you have used somebody else's image or somebody else's body for something that you reap the benefit of but not them, regardless of whether you pay them or not. So that's still a huge thing. And I thing- I'm thinking now yeah, of course it's a lot easier to act a circumcision scene rather than to shoot the real thing and it wouldn't give people the headaches that it did. It wouldn't even have given Don the headache that it did give him and maybe I wouldn't have been burdened by it still in the way I am now. But I think, I don't know. I guess I'm thinking that if I were to do it again now or if I were to do something similar in a similar situation I think I would opt for pretty much the same kind of course.

NICK: (something about consent) Could you talk a little bit about how the circumstances arose that enabled you to shoot that particular scene?

HAKIM: When we got to the location and we started looking into the possibility of finding a kid who would be five and a half or six years old who hasn't been circumcised yet and whose family would be willing to take part in the project somebody immediately told me that there was this non-profit organization made up of doctors who actually circumcise the kids every year. They do group circumcisions and they get donations from people and they put up parties for the families and they buy gifts for the kids and stuff and we got a hold of them. They gave us a list of the kids that had been- that they planned to circumcise and it turned out that I recognized one of the names on that list and the last name was that of a class mate, a friend of mine who went to grade school I think with me, who turned out to be the father of ----- the boy that we ended up circumcising. So the initial thing was that we were going to set the scene in the location that we were going to shoot in, get the boy who was going to play the part of the circumcised kid, shoot that scene, and then go to the group circumcision, wherever it was going to take place, and shoot close-ups of the actual circumcision. I remember having seen something like that in a film by Emil -----(?) I think. It was- father was away on a business trip. I think it was his second movie. This is the man from Bosnia who made "Time of The Gypsies" and "Underground". And there is an actual shot, a circumcision shot that is a real shot and I think the boy was- they did the same thing. They circumcised the boy in the film. But it was just a shot. So initially I thought, well, I guess if there's twenty kids getting circumcised, and I asked -----(?) to give me fifteen or twenty circumcision "cuts". I would have my pick. But there was something- that's not what I was interested in. It was not the actual close-up of a penis and a pair of scissors. That's not what I wanted. And actually, in the film you see that it is shot in such a way that you don't really see what is happening. And that was what I wanted more. Something that was close enough to get you within the confines of that feeling and yet not be just completely, you know, just throw it like that in a close-up shot or- So I got a hold of the father of the boy and he agreed to let his son be part of the thing and that's how we proceeded. But then came the argument with Don about now, you know, just shoot it from the back or so- just to be on the safe side we did. We shot it from two different perspective and then in the editing we just- And the other thing: We could only have one take of that circumcision scene. And the shooting of it even was interesting even for the men who were on the crew and what that did to pretty much everybody who was there.

I remember it was a pretty tough thing to do and the interesting thing is that a lot of people were talking about their own circumcision after we shot that and it was a pretty funny situation actually afterwards where everybody would open up about what they remember. Because I did not- I know I did not remember my own circumcision until the day I was shooting the

circumcision I was telling you about of the two neighbors of mine. So I'm thinking, there's something there.

NICK: You mentioned that- I know the kind of "controversy" response you got was entirely from audiences in the United States. Is that true?

HAKIM: No, I mean, it was different. I think people were more curious. That's why the term controversy sounds a little heavy to me. I mean, I told you about the first time it screened in Morocco, I was outside, I was not watching the film with the audience, and I hear laughter. I peeked in the theater and it turned out people were actually- and I know that maybe 95% of the audience that night were male, were men, I mean young men and adults and the whole theater, everybody was laughing at the moment when the boy was being circumcised. So, to me that says something about how nervous something like that made that audience. And it was also because it was not something that they expected. That was something that was never done in local Moroccan cinema and so it was completely- they didn't see it coming. I remember that the whole film was like that for a lot of people. After it was over I didn't- people were like- walked out like zombies. They just didn't know what to feel, what to say. It took some time; until the next day that people started to talking about what some images did to them. And it was not something that I- as I said that I wasn't initially saying I'm, you know, I'm gonna shock or I want this to be a controversy or I want, you know- In my mind it was just about telling a good story with a few good images and trying to find some beautiful metaphors.

It was not so much a controversy I think as a- more than a curiosity because invariably wherever I went, either Europe or here or the Middle East, people were curious about that scene. What happened, what is that about or what is going on there? So it was not an outrage about the scene more than it was like a curiosity about it I'd say.

NICK: It's interesting to hear that there were a few Moroccan critics who felt that it was kind of "folkloric" or-

HAKIM: Yeah. There were a couple of critics that basically saw the whole movie, and not just my film but a few other film that belonged to what everybody now in the country and France calls the Moroccan New Wave of directors. I don't know what that means but basically to me it just mean people who made a few movies this year or last year. But the idea was that because most of us, most of the filmmakers who have made movies recently in Morocco, most of them live somewhere outside of the country. And so, the fact that I live in the United States- first of all, when you come back from the United States with a movie and everybody's expecting you to come back with a movie that you've made that would be more of what they are used to seeing in their theaters which is basically what the factory

that's what Hollywood sends their way. So when you come back and you show something and it turns out it's a very rooted- culturally rooted story then there's something that disturbs I think, about that. The mere fact that you live somewhere else and for a long time and you're one of the filmmakers who're in, you know, the Diaspora or live in exile or you're an immigrant you get a lot of these labels. The idea that whatever you do as part of your work is going to be somehow- it's like your trying to show this "west" or this western culture where you live- it's like your trying to show them something so that they could like you or they could like where you come from. So therefore what you're trying to do is like you're trying to sell your culture and therefore, whatever images you're showing of your traditions, of your rituals and your rites of passage and your myth- your mythology, they perceive it was some folkloric, exotic thing that you're trying to export. And I find that to be almost- it is kind of like insulting to me because the idea is, as I said, those are tools for me- ritual s and rites of passage, local chants. They all fall in a, kind of a lyrical-

(Interrupted by beeping)

To me it's not about folklore, it's not about exoticism of a far away place. It's more about the human condition. It's more about the experience of man. And it is one of these bridges that I think I'm trying to use to connect both cultures. I happen to have studied African literature and I find the same tools used. I happen to be fan of Faulkner and James Joyce and F.Scott Fitzgerald and I happen to find these links that go beyond borders and geography and politics and to me that's the essence of what I do. That's the way for me to make sure that the person next to me is not going to come across as a total foreigner- that he's not or she's not going to be less or more of a human being- ultimately that the bottom line or the common denominator between the two of us is what we have both lived as people. So, I mean, that's where it starts and that's where it stops for me.

NICK: It seems like there's a - you mentioned Hollywood and the sort of- vernacular or the sensibility that people have in the United States towards what can be depicted in a narrative film versus what can be depicted in a documentary. I'm guessing here that the ethical questions that might automatically spring to the minds of western viewers that might not spring to the minds of Moroccan viewers who are familiar with the ritual that might almost pull them away from being able to look at it as a human question and think of it more in terms of a controversial or ethical question. Do you feel that in places where it was brought up as an ethical question do you feel like people were being distracted by it were just kind of missing the point?

HAKIM: No, to be honest with you I have not, and I've been following the film a lot places. I have not encountered anyone who was outraged by it or

who raised it even as an ethical thing. I mean the ethical part- I bring it up. It's never something that somebody accuses the film of or accuses me of. You know, as for the first part of your assessment here, to me there is really- I don't see the difference. I don't see that line that people use to divide narrative or fiction from non-fiction because a documentary is a narrative too. To me it's about story telling and so it is a really thin line there that I see. And I think it'll ----(?). I mean, I'm sure you've heard it, I mean a lot of people say it, they say 'this is not a film this is a documentary' 'as if documentary wasn't a film. I guess there's more and more that is happening today that is kind of throwing it in some people's faces that well, yeah ok, you've got a documentary that is awarded the Palmd'Or at the Cannes film festival- and I know a lot of people who could understand why or how 9/11- Farenheit 9/11 which is not even a film could be awarded the Palm D'Or which is the prestigious award at the Cannes festival but it still- I don't know, for me it just boils down to a good story. Whether people can connect with your intentions in the way you tell your story or not, that's a different subject. To be honest with you I do believe that I haven't yet mastered the tools that are at my disposal- that I can use in terms of cinema so that I can tell as straight of a story as I can with the most clear, crystal images yet. I'm, you know, I'm just starting and I'm not there. I doubt whether I'll ever get there but that's what's really interesting about the process, is that you keep trying to find ways- That's why, I mean, to me the circumcision was just a beautiful metaphor and I'm like, well how can I use that? There's a lot. There's a lot in the film that is ritual that I'm not seeing it as ritual. The henna, for example, used in the hands (?). I don't see it as a ritual of this herb that mothers use on their daughters' hands when they get married or when somebody dies and then 40 days later after you're done mourning you have to use henna to start again. I don't see it that way. I see more of the touch. I see two people touching each other. And so, the henna becomes just another exc- it's a pretext almost, for people bonding. And so while there are times when something lends itself very easily to a metaphor and people can see it and there's times when it's hard because of cultural differences or- But I believe that if you dig just a little bit beneath the surface you can get there.



STACY: I watched the film “Threads” that you produced and I have a couple of questions about.

DON: You watched the whole film?

STACY: Yes. What made you interested in taking on this project?

DON: I was on the project for five years, Hakim and I have collaborated for twelve or thirteen years and we had made three documentaries before in Morocco and we did a couple of things here so it’s a life-long collaboration so it wasn’t the material so much although this film is a narrative version of a documentary that we did.

STACY: So just to clarify this film was originally supposed to be a documentary?

DON: No, no there is a documentary called “Nest in the Heat” which from my perspective, I don’t know if he would say this, but from my perspective this is the narrative version of that documentary which is about 45 minutes.

STACY: So you’ve worked with Hakim before and done a bunch of stuff

DON: Yea

STACY: My biggest question with the film is that there is a circumcision that takes place and I was wondering if it was real?

DON: The circumcision scene was definitely real.

STACY: Now was that a conflict for you?

DON: Yes, I knew the scene was going to be in the film, as I said we developed the film over a long period of time and I pretty much thought that we would never shoot it for real and actually it never occurred to me that we would shoot it for real and we had sort of a false start in terms of production, we were going to start two years before we actually did and that was the first time that we actually discussed it because we got to the point where we were doing shot by shot and so I knew that he wanted it to be real and I knew that I would talk him out of it.

STACY: You said it was real, when did you realize that it was going to be

DON: When did I know when it was going to be real?

DON: When there was no backing out?

STACY: Yes.

DON: The morning of the shoot. So until that time, I still we would figure out a way to do it and we were...since you've seen the film there were shots in the film with the kid the whole story of the kid is about fifteen minutes not counting the circumcision scene we used a double for most of that. There's a kind of dream sequence for lack a better term – I don't think it's a dream sequence – that was a double so I thought there were ways still not to do it. But the morning – the actual morning I knew it was going to happen.

STACY: The actual morning you knew it was going to happen, if you had an actual double chosen, why did you go through with choosing a double and making plans for it to happen if you did not want it to happen?

DON: Well the double, the actual double was a great kid, I really liked this kid who seemed to be a street kid almost and he was just available there was a certain point where he was almost part of the crew and so we had access to him a lot easier so the scenes that we shot in the Hamam which is the bath we just had access to him and there was a certain sort of strategy that we – I have to say that this wasn't something weighing on me, I didn't think about it because when you're in the middle of a feature you're not thinking of the circumcision scene five days from now or even tomorrow. What you're trying to do is get through the day because when you're making a film especially a 35mm film in foreign country with lots of crew and fairly high production values you're here now it's sort of like – it was something I was concerned about days in advanced. We used a double because we – first of all we didn't know we actually had the kid who was actually to be circumcised for sure we didn't know how that was going to happen because certain things didn't happen the way we thought and we did have access to this other kid who was terrific.

STACY: How did you get access to this kid. What was the story behind that?

DON: The double?

STACY: Yes

DON: Well he followed us around and Hakim knew him. Hakim knew a lot of people in the village, over half the people in the village. I can't

remember if he was – I think he was a neighbor or he was living with a neighbor and he was just followed us a round. So he was kind of like a favorite of everybody. He was a little bit older than the actual kid who got circumcised but he was small but he was always on the set so he was like cheerleader in a way and at a certain point he stopped coming but he was there for most of the shoot. He was a great little kid.

STACY: How old was he?

DON: I think he was 8 or 9 and the kid who got circumcised was six.

STACY: What's the normal age for a circumcision?

DON: 4 or 5 as I understand it so the kid who got circumcised used was a little old.

STACY: Do you know why he hadn't been circumcised?

DON: This is sort of second hand to me but they hadn't gotten around to it because they couldn't afford it so you pay a barber actually does it so there's a party and a whole ritual that goes with it. And they hadn't been able to come up with the money.

STACY: I'm going to back track for a minute and go through the relationship with you and Hakim. What did he say to you, why did he want to go through with this this way and how did you try to convince him otherwise?

DON: Well, he always wanted to do it that way. I don't think he ever wavered about whether he was going to do it I think maybe internally he did but he was always pretty straight up that he was going to do it. I think the reason, from my perspective I think the reason he wanted to do it I think that he's a documentary filmmaker even when he's making narrative films and I think that's his creative approach and I knew that. So none of this was a real surprise to me, the only thing that I tried to do to talk him out of it well leading up to it in those years was that I just said that we're not going to do it. And then the morning of the shoot – we would meet every morning and have a glass of orange juice in this café in the town square – it was very nice. And we talked about Eisenstein and the meaning of a cut and it wasn't really some sort of vague theory it was the whole idea of the meaning of a shot is based on the cut so that if you show a rooster for example getting its next cut and the next shot is after the fact with the kid that might work. So I wasn't trying to go around the corner, I mean we were actually talking about – it was a nice moment – it was a moment where the theory of filmmaking and actually filmmaking can come together in a real setting which is about as good as it gets so the conversation was

really quite lovely I have to say I really enjoyed it. And after it was over I knew we were going to do it. I knew there was no way out and that point, you know, I accepted it.

STACY: Were there other members of the crew who had issues with it?

DON: Yes, I think, yes, the crew was really international. The DP was an American woman, the AD was an American woman – a DGA AD – she had a little problem with it in that an AD's job, one of the ADs jobs is about safety and child welfare those are two really big jobs that ADs do so these were two really big issues that kind of went against the grain with her and she had thought of different ways of doing it. I don't think Maida, the DP I don't think she was that concerned about it. She knew it was going to happen. The sound person was Italian we had three or four Europeans and most of the crew was Moroccan. Everybody knew about it I think people who had concerns about expressed it pretty openly it was a really well-run crew it was very tight. It was a really tight crew. People could say what they were going to say and then once it was decided it was decided and we all said, "Let's do it". "Let's make the day". This was one of the few films that I've worked one where we always made the day; we always made the day in ways which were really surprising to me. We not only always made the day but we usually ended earlier. We were scheduled for a five week shoot, a six day a week, five week shoot I think we ended three days earlier. It was very well produced if I don't say so myself.

STACY: So you're talking about an international crew, what type of response do you get with an American audience versus a Moroccan audience?

DON: Right. I've seen the film in Europe a few times and in Canada and, of course in the America in a few places and it's only been brought up in Q & As. In all those screenings there have been Q & As and it's only been brought up in the US and it's always the first question and it doesn't tend to linger. Once it's asked and it's answered – I've seen Hakim answer this question a few times and he says he struggled with it a little bit and he did it and he still thinks about it but you know I think the scene is pretty powerful, I have to say, in the movie, it really leads to a certain point pretty effectively. I'm okay with it now. But it's an issue in the US. It may be an issue elsewhere but it doesn't seem to come up. I've also seen the film in Morocco with a really large audience a couple of times and there's a sort of point of recognition of what it is there that is really different from here.

STACY: Do you think they feel that the film did a good job of portraying this somewhat sacred ceremony?

DON: In Morocco?

STACY: Yes.

DON: I don't know about the specific scene but I know about the overall film. We were in the Marrakech Film Festival which is a really good film festival and highly recommend it, they do a really good job. It's mostly non-Moroccan films but of course this was a Moroccan film the audience was weeping there were people at the end of the film – it was probably my favorite screening of the film. People either wanted to see it again or maybe wanted it longer I don't know what they didn't want to leave. It was a really moving experience.

STACY: When the filming was going on when you found out that it was actually going to happen, were you present?

DON: During the shoot?

STACY: During the shoot were you in the room?

DON: No, I was in – most Moroccan houses have a very large courtyard and all rooms come off this courtyard and this house was actually a crew house I was living in this house with the DP and the AD and a couple of actors and so they took over our house and the circumcision took place in a bedroom and the crew in that room was a basic kind of essential crew and it wasn't essential for the producer to be in that room so I was outside the room and I could hear it and it was kind of excruciating in a way. I was with the mother who had a kind of difficult time because she wanted to be in the room. So there were not a lot of us out there maybe five or six people kind of propping her up and it seemed to take a really, really long time but the whole thing was one 35mm roll which is maybe 10 or 11 minutes.

STACY: The mother was in the room so she wasn't present, and he was a little bit older, if you did not pay the money for this would he have gone through with this eventually?

DON: I'm not sure, I don't know enough about it but yes I think they would have figured out a way to do it there was some sort of issue – there was an NGO or something – kind of like a Red Cross who actually did this as a public health service which fell through and part of the reason why this happened that day there was going to be this mass circumcision and that fell through and so people were sort of scrambling and we hired the barber and had this party and it would have happened and probably would have happened without a party. Now I don't know what this kid's attitude is going to be toward filmmakers or crews or anything like that -- probably not good. But it definitely would have happened.

**STACY:** Talking about the Moroccan screening and that was your favorite screening. Was this film made for any specific audience? Do you think you felt better about the film you saw in Morocco because it was for a Moroccan audience and it wasn't made for an American audience because it might be awkward?

**DON:** I think it was sort of unusual from a producer's stand point because one of the things a producer needs to do is figure out where it's going to play – you try to get distribution first. We had reasonably good hopes that we would get distribution outside the US which in fact we did and I didn't think it would really ever play in the US in distribution I wouldn't rule it out. We're still trying half-heartedly trying to do that but it definitely wasn't made for an American audience. We had a lot of people read the script in the US and people really loved the script and then when we'd say the movie's going to be in Arabic, that would be the end of the discussion. So it was always to me that we were going to make this movie in Morocco about Moroccans and that we would do it in English. It just seemed – that was really a lesson to me to be as upfront as possible about international films.

**STACY:** To market the film did you go to people who were interested specifically in Arab films?

**DON:** Exactly.

**Anu:** When Hakim was speaking he about the screening in Morocco he mentioned that people would laugh. How did you react to that? How did you react to being in a foreign culture?

**DON:** Morocco is certainly a foreign culture to me however I know Morocco fairly well and I've been there a lot and I've worked with Moroccan crews in fact this is the best crew I've worked with ever, in fact, I would take this crew anywhere, any time. It didn't have any effect at all on me that they laughed during that scene, they laughed during other scenes too and I think. It was just such a good experience the whole screening this film played at Venice which was the worst screening I saw, in one way. It premiered at Venice. And it was so.. I just couldn't stand watching it. I just felt so sick, you know, it just seemed so important and I saw every flaw in the movie and it was spectacularly unpleasant. In Marrakech it was just the opposite. I knew the flaws in the film but I just kept thinking, "God this is really a good film. I really like this film. I'm really proud of this." The print looked really great everything about it was really good and you could tell that the audience was totally into it. I guess I wasn't expecting people to laugh I think when people laughed I laughed. I laugh

in movies a lot anyway. It was kind of an interesting relief. I think they knew immediately that it was real. I think there was no question.