

**"...immensely powerful"** Jumana Farouky, *Time Magazine, Europe*

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF "DIVORCE IRANIAN STYLE"  
AND "RUNAWAY"



# THE DAY I WILL NEVER FORGET

a film by Kim Longinotto



A WOMEN MAKE MOVIES RELEASE

in association with HBO/Cinemax Documentary Films

# The Day I Will Never Forget

## synopsis and credit list

A nine-year-old girl, wearing a pure white dress, recites directly to the camera a poem she has written - „The Day I Will Never Forget.“ She is remarkably composed, her delivery strong. She tells us about herself, her fear, and unforgettable pain - a child, lured by her mother, dragged and pinned to the ground and forced to be circumcised.

In this intimate and powerful documentary, Kim Longinotto (known for such exceptional documentaries as *Divorce Iranian Style* and *Gaea Girls*) explores the continuing practice of female genital mutilation in Kenyan society. With great sensitivity, she delivers the delicate substance of the custom via both her documentarian's sense of distance and the extraordinary access she has to people affected by it. While Longinotto is clearly sympathetic to the young victims, she also gives voice to the older women who advance the practice in the name of tradition, never losing sight of the moral, spiritual, and physical dangers involved. *The Day I Will Never Forget* is ultimately hopeful, finding spiritual sustenance in the courage of a young girl to confront her mother, the strength of an enlightened nurse, the rebellious spirit of a group of young children who defy their parents and find refuge in the power of the law, and always, the potential for change to be found in education, intelligence, and time. --- *Diane Weyermann, Sundance Film Festival Catalogue*

*Somali, Swahili, Masaai, Kalenjin with English subtitles*

Directed  
Produced by:

Editing:  
Script:  
Cinematography:  
Music:  
Characters:

Kim Longinotto  
Richard McKerrow  
Paul Hamman  
Andrew Willsmore  
Kim Longinotto  
Kim Longinotto  
Charlie Winston  
Fardhosa Ali Mohammed  
and NDaisi Kwinga



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UK · 92 Min. · 35mm



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# The Day I Will Never Forget

## festivals

Sundance Film Festival  
IDFA- International Documentary Film Festival  
— *the Amnesty International - DOEN Award*  
Hot Docs Documentary Film Festival  
— *Best Documentary UK Spotlight*  
Hong Kong International Film Festival  
— *Humanitarian Award for Outstanding Documentary*  
Britspotting, British Independent Film Festival, Berlin  
— *Best Documentary*  
Viewpoint Documentary Film Festival — *Best Film*  
Festival International de Films de Femmes de Créteil — *Best Documentary*  
TURSAK Film Festival — *Best International Documentary*  
Emden International Film Festival — *Best Film Audience Award*  
Setubal Film Festival, Portugal — *Audience Award*  
Barcelona Human Rights Film Festival — *Special Mention*  
One World Media — *Women in Society Award*  
Torino Women's Film Festival — *Best Documentary, 2<sup>nd</sup> Prize*  
Valladolid International Film Festival — *Time of History Jury Awards, 2<sup>nd</sup> Prize*  
Television Workshop Development Politics — *One World Film Award*  
Cologne TV Conference — *Best Non-Fiction Film*  
WIN Award — *Best Documentary Film*  
New Directors New Films  
San Francisco International Film Festival  
Sheffield International Film Festival  
Adelaide International Film Festival  
Jeon Ju International Film Festival  
Sithengi Film Festival, Cape Town  
London Film Festival

## quotes

“Longinotto is known for her insightful, compassionate studies of women’s lives, and the pull between tradition and change. In this new film, she achieves a difficult task, namely to make the complexity of the issues comprehensible, even when the practice itself may seem just the reverse.”  
London Film Festival

“...an immensely powerful critique of female circumcision...Longinotto makes an intimate connection with many of her subjects, showing how the consequences of the act reach beyond the physical to the emotional, educational, familial and societal.”  
Jumana Farouky - *Time Magazine, Europe*

“Gripping, devastating, but ultimately hopeful...Longinotto’s latest film demystifies the practice



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of female genital mutilation through engrossing stories of Kenyan women.”  
Sheffield International Film Festival

## The Day I Will Never Forget

### FACT SHEET FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

- 2001 Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), also known as female circumcision, is the term used to refer to the removal of part, or all, of the female genitalia.
- 2002 At least 135 million girls and women around the world have undergone FGM. Approximately 6,000 girls undergo FGM each day.
- Practiced primarily in 28 North African and Middle Eastern nations, FGM is not inherent to any specific religion or culture.
  - Physical problems women often face as a result of FGM include infection, shock, hemorrhaging, abscesses, benign nerve tumors, cysts, excess scar tissue and sterility.
- 2003 In the past ten years, laws prohibiting FGM have been passed in many African countries as well as in European, North American and other countries where immigrant communities who practice FGM have moved.

*Sources:*

Amnesty International  
Equality Now



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# The Day I Will Never Forget

## Biography

Director / Producer

Kim Longinotto

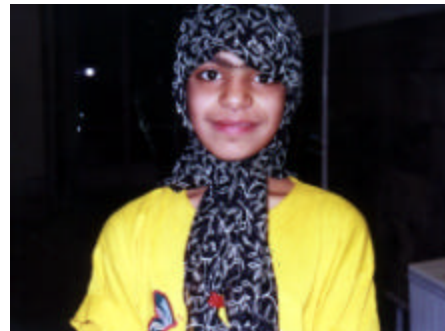
**KIM LONGINOTTO** studied film and directing at the National Film School. While there, she made *Pride Of Place*, a critical look at her boarding school, and *Theater Girls*, about a hostel for homeless women in London. After the NFS she worked as camera on a variety of documentaries. During this time she made *Cross and Passion*, about Catholic women on the Turf Lodge estate in Belfast and *Underage*, about unemployed adolescents in Coventry. She then made *Fireraiser* with Claire Hunt, about Sir Author "Bomber" Harris. Claire and Kim then made *Eat the Kimono* about Hanayagi Genshu, a Japanese dancer and activist, *Hidden Faces* about Egyptian women and *The Good Wife Of Tokyo* about women love and marriage in Japan. Through out this time she made a series of ten broadcast and non-broadcast videos on special need issues including *Tragic But Brave* for Channel Four. With Jano Williams, she then made *Dream Girls* about the Takarazuka theater revue in Japan and *Shinjuku Boys* about women in Tokyo who choose to live as men. After that, she made *Rock Wives* for Channel 4 about the wives and girlfriends of rock stars and the following year *Divorce Iranian Style* with Ziba Mir Hosseini, set in family law court in Tehran, about women and divorce in Iran. She then made two short films for the *Best Friends* series on Channel 4—*Steve and Dave*, about two friends who work as a drag act, and *Rob and Chris*, about two homeless young men. Then she made *Gaea Girls* with Jano Williams about a young girl's struggle to become a professional wrestler in Japan. Her *Runaway* was made with Ziba Mir-Hosseini and is set in a refuge for girls in Tehran. Her latest *The Day I Will Never Forget* was shown at 2003 Sundance Film Festival.



## Selected filmography

### *Runaway (2001)*

"In the middle of the night a big man came into my room. There was nothing I could do - I'm an eighteen-year-old girl, how could I fight a strong man? He did it to me several times. When I came out I saw my father sitting in the corner, he was smoking and he was drunk... My father hit mein the face, I'll never forget it. He said that if I loved him I'd put up with it - my mother and sister had to... I used to tell myself, 'This is my father, I have to rely on him, he can help me.' But he didn't, instead he forced me into a life of misery and darkness." (Satareh, a teenage runaway) Satareh is one of five Iranian girls whose lives we encounter in this extraordinary film, co-directed by Kim Longinotto (who co-directed last year's *Gaea Girls*) and Ziba



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Mir-Hosseini (with whom Longinotto collaborated for the remarkable *Divorce Iranian Style*). It is filmed in a refuge in Tehran, where girls come in an attempt to escape the abuse and intolerable restrictions they suffer at home. Satareh's story is more extreme than others, but beatings are commonplace, and girls generally have few rights or freedoms. The refuge provides them with a place of safety in which to receive support from the staff and from one another, while they decide on their next move. Many of them do eventually return to their families, thanks to the determination and patience shown by Mrs Shirazi, who runs the shelter.

*IDFA Amsterdam – Joris Ivans Award Nomination*  
*Philadelphia Festival of World Cinema – Jury Prize for Best Documentary*  
*Osnabruck Film Festival – Children's Rights Award*  
*Zanzibar International Film Festival – Silver Dhow Award*  
*Chicago International Film Festival*  
*Edinburgh International Film Festival*  
*Margaret Mead Film Festival*  
*Sheffield Documentary Film Festival*  
*Hot Docs Canadian Documentary Film Festival*  
*Munich International Documentary Film Festival*

### ***Gaea Girls (2000)***

"This fascinating film follows the physically grueling and mentally exhausting training regimen of several young wanna-be 'Gaea Girls', a group of Japanese women wrestlers. The idea of them may seem like a total oxymoron in a country where women are usually regarded as docile and subservient. However, in training and in the arena, the female wrestlers depicted in this film are just as violent as any member of the World Wrestling Federation, and the blood that's drawn is very real indeed. One recruit, Takeuchi, endures ritual humiliation not seen on screen since the boot camp sequences of 'Full Metal Jacket'. In 'Divorce Iranian Style', Kim Longinotto cinematically explored the previously unexplored world of the Tehran divorce courts. Working with co-director Jano Williams, Longinotto has been given access to shoot an insider's verite account of this closely guarded universe." - Chicago Film Festival



*Chicago International Film Festival, Silver Hugo*  
*Toronto International Film Festival*  
*Berlin International Film Festival*  
*San Francisco International Film Festival*  
*Margaret Mead Film Festival*  
*Edinburgh International Film Festival, Best of Festival Section*  
*Sydney International Film Festival*  
*Sheffield Documentary Film Festival*  
*Auckland International Film Festival*  
*Rencontres Internationales de Cinema a Paris*



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***Divorce Iranian Style (1998)***

Hilarious, tragic, stirring, this fly-on-the-wall look at several weeks in an Iranian divorce court provides a unique window into the intimate circumstances of Iranian women's lives. Following Jamileh, whose husband beats her; Ziba, a 16 year old trying to divorce her 38 year old husband; and Maryam, who is desperately fighting to gain custody of her daughters, this deadpan chronicle showcases the strength, ingenuity, and guile with which they confront biased laws, a Kafkaesque administrative system, and their husbands' and families' rage to gain divorces. With the barest of commentary, Longinotto turns her cameras on the court and lets it tell its own story. Dispelling images of Iran as a country of war, hostages, and "fatwas", and Iranian women as passive victims of a terrible system, this film is a subtle, fascinating look at women's lives in a country which is little known to most Americans.



*Chicago International Film Festival, Silver Hugo Award*  
*San Francisco International Film Festival, Grand Prize for Best Documentary*  
*Viewpoint International Documentary Film Festival, Belgium, Best Documentary*  
*Jerusalem Documentary Festival, Honorable Mention*  
*Sheffield Documentary Film Festival*  
*Amsterdam International Documentary Film Festival*  
*Viennale International Film Festival*  
*Edinburgh Film Festival*



***Shinjuku Boys (1995)***

From the makers of *Dream Girls*, *Shinjuku Boys* introduces three onnabes who work as hosts at the New Marilyn Club in Tokyo. Onnabes are women who live as men and have girlfriends, although they don't usually identify as lesbians. As the film follows them at home and on the job, all three talk frankly to the camera about their gender-bending lives, revealing their views about women, sex, transvestitism and lesbianism. Alternating with these illuminating interviews are fabulous sequences shot inside the Club, patronized almost exclusively by heterosexual women who have become disappointed with real men. This is a remarkable documentary about the complexity of female sexuality in Japan today.

*Chicago Film Festival, Silver Hugo*  
*Houston Film Festival, Gold Prize*  
*San Francisco Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, Outstanding Documentary*  
*London Film Festival*  
*New York Lesbian and Gay Film Festival*  
*Honolulu Lesbian and Gay Film Festival*  
*Sydney Lesbian and Gay Film Festival*



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***Dream Girls (1993)***

This fascinating documentary, produced for the BBC, opens a door into the spectacular world of the Takarazuka Revue, a highly successful musical theater company in Japan. Each year, thousands of girls apply to enter the male-run Takarazuka Music School. The few who are accepted endure years of a highly disciplined and reclusive existence before they can join the Revue, choosing male or female roles. Dream Girls offers a compelling insight into gender and sexual identity and the contradictions experienced by Japanese women today.



*Films de Femmes, Creteil, Best Documentary*  
*San Francisco Film Festival*  
*Jerusalem Film Festival*  
*New York London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival*  
*Los Angeles Lesbian and Gay Film Festival*  
*San Francisco Lesbian and Gay Film Festival*  
*London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival*

***Hidden Faces (1990)***

Originally intended as a film about internationally renowned feminist writer Nawal El Saadawi, Hidden Faces develops into a fascinating portrayal of Egyptian women's lives in Muslim society. In this collaborative documentary, Safaa Fathay, a young Egyptian woman living in Paris, returns home to interview the famed writer and activist, but becomes disillusioned with her. Illuminated by passages from El Saadawi's work, the film follows Fathay's journey to her family home and discovers similar complex frictions between modernity and tradition. Her mother's decision to return to the veil after twenty years and her cousins' clitoridectomies reveal a disturbing renewal of fundamentalism.



This absorbing documentary broaches the contradictions of feminism in a Muslim environment; a startling, unforgettable picture of contemporary women in the Arab world.

*Melbourne Film Festival, Best Documentary*  
*Films de Femmes, Creteil, France, Public Prize and Jury Special Mention*  
*Cinema du Reel, France*



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# Arts & Ideas

The New York Times

SATURDAY, MARCH 29, 2003

## FILM FESTIVAL REVIEW

### An Unblinking Eye On a Searing Topic

By ELVIS MITCHELL

Kim Longinotto's powerful documentary, "The Day I Will Never Forget" makes its points with a low-key directness. Ms. Longinotto knows that the subject is so discomfiting that it's best for her to let it unfold without hysteria.

That subject is female circumcision — also known as genital cutting — and the social conditioning that continues to make it part of life in Kenya after it has been outlawed. The slightest, but still detectable, note of upset creeps into the pleasant voice of the nurse Fardhosa, who runs a clinic in Kenya, when she has to deal with the consequences.

"That girl screamed and screamed, and up till today I still hear it," she says, speaking of a case with a victim who suffered painful complications. And such complications are routine: girls subjected to the procedure are stitched up afterward and suffer difficulties with urination and menstruation and sometimes sex.

Amina, a young woman who was recently married, has to cope with the complications of the stitches, too. She visits Fardhosa to have her stitches removed, and the nurse does her best to prepare Amina for the pain that she will have to endure. Amina finds she can't go through with the stitch removal while conscious, and that's when the director ingeniously introduces the real villain of the film. It's the driving force in Kenya that keeps circumcisions alive and well: shame.

Shame is what keeps Amina's husband from allowing her to have the procedure with anesthesia. "It will bring shame on my family," he tells Fardhosa. "Day," which plays today and tomorrow as part of the New Directors/New Films series, does not dress this moment up with a wandering camera or emphatic melodramatic pans from one face to another or other overwrought techniques. The mildly defiant



Film Society of Lincoln Center  
Two Kenyan girls in a film about genital circumcision.

### Turning an Unblinking Eye On Female Circumcision

Continued From First Arts Page

#### THE DAY I WILL NEVER FORGET

Written (in Somali, Swahili, Masaai and Kalenjin, with English subtitles), produced and directed by Kim Longinotto; director of photography, Ms. Longinotto; edited by Andrew Willmore; music by Charlie Winston; released by Women Make Movies in association with HBO/Cinemax Documentary Films. Running time: 92 minutes. This film is not rated. Shows today at 2 and 6 p.m. and tomorrow at 4 and 7 p.m. at the Walter Reade Theater at Lincoln Center, 165 West 65th Street, Manhattan, as part of the 32nd New Directors/New Films series of the Film Society of Lincoln Center and the department of film and media of the Museum of Modern Art. WITH: Fardhosa Ali Mohammed and Ndaisi Kwiga.

look on the man's face tells the story.

"According to our religion, it's the husband who makes the decisions, not the wife," he asserts blandly. When Fardhosa says that circumcision is not part of Islam but a ritual handed down by the pharaohs, he shrugs and allows that he was not around when Amina's parents had the operation performed.

Ms. Longinotto understands her subject well enough to know that information makes the case with unsettling forcefulness.

Early in the film an elderly circumciser explains how the act is performed, and weeps when she realizes that her daughters will probably undergo it. "Day" also shows Ngonyo, a tribal elder who details the rationale behind the operation.

"I'm not propagating anything," he says, and then propagates the belief that boys and girls have organs of both sexes at birth — foreskins are thought to be feminine and clitorises masculine.

It's shame, too, that leads to the climax of "The Day I Will Never Forget," which is perhaps the most self-explanatory title ever. A girl, with the aid of her sister, refuses to

undergo the operation and takes her father to court. Her father, shaking his head, is dejected, humiliated by the shame of having to open his family life to the public.

By using each case to show how deeply ingrained, and still accepted, the practice of genital cutting still is, Ms. Longinotto shows there's a long way for Kenya to go. While difficult to watch, "Day" is worth sitting through for the look on the face of the little girl — and her older sister, who supported her — when she learns the court's decision.



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## Spoiled for Choice

For two weeks in November, London played host to a prime selection of European film and talent as part of the Regus London Film Festival

BY JUMANA FAROUKY



**HOT SHOTS:** Screen veteran Jean Rochefort plays a retired school teacher and 60s pop icon Johnny Hallyday is the mysterious stranger in *L'Homme du Train*

*du Train*. Screen veteran Jean Rochefort plays a retired school teacher living in a small provincial village; '60s pop icon Johnny Hallyday is the mysterious stranger who rolls into town. When the two become friends they realize each wants the life the other has. Visually, the film is warm and comforting, all deep browns and yellows, and the camera finds beauty in every glorious fold and wrinkle of the aging actors' faces. Director Patrice Leconte shows complete trust in her actors, resulting in subtle performances that are funny in all the right places, touching at all the right moments. A heart-warming film that shows coming of age isn't reserved for teenagers...

Wednesday, Nov. 27, 2002

The London Film Festival may not get as many premieres as, say, New York, Cannes or Toronto, but its low-key approach means all the films are treated with equal respect. Fans of European film are always in for a treat, with the festival presenting everything from big names to independent first-timers. Here's a small selection of the best this year had to offer:

Some of the best cinema in the world is currently coming out of France, which makes the unevenness of this year's French line-up that much more frustrating. Luckily, hidden amongst yawn-a-thons like the tedious *The Cage* and unfunny comedy *Monday Morning* there were gems like the delightful *L'Homme*

**On the documentary trail, the festival was heavy on musical stories, from gospel to Chico Hamilton via the history of Britpop. But a different type of cultural insight was provided by *The Day I Will Never Forget*, an immensely powerful critique of female circumcision. Director Kim Longinotto travelled to Kenya and spoke to mothers, daughters, husbands and fathers, each with a different opinion, and organized their stories in a way that makes the complex topic more accessible. Using Doctor Fardhosa, an anti-circumcision advocate, as a mouthpiece, Longinotto makes an intimate connection with many of her subjects, showing how the consequences of the act reach beyond the physical to the emotional, educational, familial and societal. The scenes showing a circumcision ceremony are gut-wrenching, but seeing a 10-year-old girl eloquently scold her mother for having her circumcised offers hope that future generations will be brave enough to stand up to a centuries-old tradition.**



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DOCUMENTARY FILM MAGAZINE

**D O X**

## IDFA sneak reviews

*In the Joris Ivens competition*

### The Day I Will Never Forget

UK 2002, 92 min.

Director: Kim Longinotto  
Producer: Shine  
World Sales: Channel 4 International  
Tel: +44 20 730 68 782  
Fax: +44 20 730 68 363

The circumcision of women may be the ultimate act of subjugation, a brutal operation to control women physically, so they will go directly from obeying their parents to obeying their husband, without being carried away by sexual lust. And as we learn from *The Day I Will Never Forget*, it is an operation often performed by elderly, uneducated women using primitive instruments under not exactly the most hygienic circumstances. Consequently, some bleed to death, get infections or must 'merely' live with pain each time they urinate. And if the operation doesn't leave them with daily complications, then the day they lose their virginity, the experience involves unimaginable pain.

Circumcision is practised in some Muslim groups and also in some traditional African religions. In Kenya, Kim Longinotto visits Muslim Somali communities as well as communities based on traditional African religions. The film is structured around episodes. Her main characters are some young girls who are (or are about to be) victims of circumcision, and some admirable women in the



community who persistently, through patient conversation, work to change people's minds. And even though you would wish you could stop circumcision overnight, it is apparent that the women's efforts are

probably the proper course of action, but it will take a long time.

When confronted with all the sufferings endured by the women (or girls), both communities use the same defence: "It is part of our culture." No reasoning, just this answer that bear witness of why it is so difficult to stop. The film is conspicuously against circumcision, there are no misunderstood Western sympathisers arguing that circumcision should be allowed out of respect for a culture we do not fully understand. And Longinotto's position is forceful since it is the victims – girls and women – who speak the case in her film.

Kim Longinotto, operating the camera herself, once again demonstrates her ability to get close to the core of the action and discussions, sometimes asking questions, but mostly getting her points across by filming internal discussions, which then disclose how matters are talked about, rather than how they are presented to a stranger asking questions. This is quite essential for our understanding of the 'mechanisms' at stake, how narrow-minded the cultural beliefs are – how long a road the women will have to walk to change anything in the structure of the community. *Ulla Jacobsen*



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# MOVING PICTURES

Friday 22 November 2002 Daily 2 Saturday 23 November 2002

**Idfa**



Cruel tradition: female circumcision revealed in *The Day I Will Never Forget*

## **The Day I Will Never Forget**

Joris Ivens Competition

Dir Kim Longinotto, UK

Screening 23 Nov, 19.30, City 1

*The Day I Will Never Forget* is the first film Kim Longinotto has made since *Runaway*, her moving account of life in a shelter for runaway girls in Teheran, made with Ziba Mir Hosseini in 2001. It is also the first film she's made without a co-director since *Rob and Chris* in 1999. The irony of the title, which one might be led to suspect refers to a wedding day, quickly becomes apparent as the subject matter of the film emerges. Up close and personal, not to say confrontational, the film examines female circumcision in Kenya, where this form of mutilation is still a common practice. Longinotto depicts a circumcision at first hand in a small, messy room, in which two young girls are mutilated by an elderly woman.

"We were in the right place at the right time," Longinotto told *Moving Pictures*. "There were a lot of arguments about this within the

crew. No doubt we could have stopped the circumcisions at that moment, but they would have happened later anyway. But in my heart I still feel guilty."

Seeking to put the practice in context, Longinotto also looks at how female circumcision affects love, marriage, families, rebellion, community and change within Kenyan society. She also shot the film herself, which had an all-female crew - perhaps one of the reasons why some of the young girls are able to speak to Longinotto, on camera, about their experiences for the first time.

Finally, the film shows how ancient traditions are being questioned by a new generation, particularly by a nurse who opposes the tradition. A handful of young people are even courageous enough to bring their parents to trial, a fact that first drew the filmmaker's attention to this subject.

**Mark Baker**

Prod Kim Longinotto for Vixen Films  
International sales Vixen Films



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# DAILY NEWS

Wednesday, March 26, 2003

## Lincoln Center greets new faces & films

By ELIZABETH WEITZMAN  
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

Lacking the star-driven flash of the Tribeca or New York Film Festivals, the New Directors/New Films showcase, opening tonight, is an event that discovers actors and directors before they become hot.

During the series' 32 years, those names have included Pedro Almodovar, Spike Lee, John Sayles and Steven Spielberg.

Highlights this year include stories in and about the city.

The opening-night picture, Peter Sollett's "Raising Victor Vargas," is a sweet, perceptive coming-of-age tale about Latino teens trying to work out the tangle of sex and love while hanging out on the steamy summer streets of the lower East Side.

The savviest New York kids populate "Camp," an updated take on "Fame" about budding Broadway stars spending the summer working out their angst between rehearsals. Director Todd Graff clearly adored staging the extravagant musical numbers, which are a joy.

As in past years, the series ventures around the world. In the heartbreaking documentary "The Day I Will Never Forget," Kim Longinotto explores female circumcision in Kenya. Her film provides the festival's most memorable heroine: Fouzia, a fiercely bright 9-year-



**RITEs & WRONGs:** "The Day I Will Never Forget" focuses on female circumcision.

old determined to save her little sister from the trauma she has endured.

"Infernal Affairs" is a twisty, visually dazzling Hong Kong thriller that tracks the clash of two double agents — an undercover detective and a gangster working as a mole in the police department. The film stars Chinese icons Tony Leung and Andy Lau.

New Directors/New Films runs through April 6 at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall and the Walter Reade Theater, and at the Gramercy Theatre. Tickets are \$12, \$9 for members of the Film Society of Lincoln Center or the Museum of Modern Art.

For schedules, contact (212) 875-5610 or [www.filmlinc.com](http://www.filmlinc.com).



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February 2003

***The Day I Will Never Forget*** to screen at FESPACO



A film on female initiation into adulthood in Kenya, ***The Day I Will Never Forget*** will be screened at the 18<sup>th</sup> edition of the pan African Film and Television Festival (FESPACO) in Ouagadougou (February 22-March 1, 2003) and also at the Festival of the Dhow Countries in Zanzibar (June 28-July 12, 2003).

Just as it stunned many at the 7<sup>th</sup> Southern Africa International Film and Television Market (Sithengi) in Cape Town last November, it is expected to leave an impact at the two festivals in East and North Africa.

*The Day I will Never Forget* is a 90-minute documentary feature exploring the initiation of girls into adulthood among various communities in Kenya. It also touches on love, marriage and family, showing what happens when modernity clashes with tradition.

This is a film that is likely to win an award as did its predecessor, *Runaway*, which won the second best (Silver Dhow) award in the documentaries category at the Festival of Dhow Countries in Zanzibar last July.

Co-directed by anthropologist Dr Ziba Mir Hosseini, *Runaway* offers a valuable insight into the plight of runaway girls and the complex familial relationships in contemporary Iran.

Like *Runaway*, *The Day I will Never Forget* shows girls grappling with the dilemmas of tradition amidst the onslaught of modernity.

Fardhosa Mohamed, a female nurse, takes viewers into her Somali community, where she attempts to open peoples' minds to try safer and more humane medical practices.

Ms Mohamed says that if girls must undergo circumcision, then it must be done humanely and safely. She otherwise opposes the practice saying it has no theological backing. "I always challenge any one who says FGM was initiated by God to show me the evidence in the Quran but they usually don't merely saying it has been practised since time immemorial," says the soft-spoken nurse.

And it is just minds like that of Mohamed that women in Kenya are using to challenge traditions that demean them.

For instance Simalo, a young Masai girl, confronts her mother for having married her off to a man old enough to be her grand father against her will. Also, sixteen young girls take their parents to a court of law to stop them from circumcising them!

Director Longinotto, who also doubles up as the cameraperson on all her projects, says *The Day I will Never Forget* "is about female genital mutilation but also about change and girls finding their voice" in a patriarchal society.



in association with **HBO/Cinemax Documentary Films**

The film is named after a poem written by Fouzia, one of the girls featured in it, after having undergone FGM.

Mohamed says it was coincidental that they stumbled upon the poem and decided to name the film after it. Fouzia asks her parents not to put her younger sister under the same circumstances they forced her through.

As the adage goes in Africa, habits die hard. And that is the way of traditions as presented in the film.

A candid interview with filmmaker Kim Longinotto on what makes her tick, follows:

**Ogova Ondego** (interviews her on *The Day I will Never Forget*.

**Ogova Ondego (OO):** Kim, I hope you will not be offended by my asking a little about you, the filmmaker.

**Kim Longinotto (KL):** It would be very hard to offend me.

**OO:** What theme(s) run(s) through all your films?

**KL:** I like making films about strong women, and particularly women who are brave outsiders we seem to see them too rarely on our screens and yet, wherever I go, I meet them.

**OO:** Whenever you embark on a project, what do you set out to do/and achieve?

**KL:** I want the audience to feel close to the people in my films, to identify with them in some way, to think: "that could be my sister, my daughter."

**OO:** Would you agree with any one who describes you as a feminist filmmaker out to empower female characters and to challenge society?

**KL:** when you put it like that, then the answer is yes.

**OO:** Are you for patriarchy in society?

**KL:** It's already here.

**OO:** Why do you work with mainly female crew?

**KL:** In some situations, it's much easier for example, in Iran there were so many women-only spaces I've made films recently where there's been a man working as sound and it's been fine - it depends on the person, of course. The last few films I've made abroad, Mary Milton has worked on sound We get on really well, she's a brilliant sound recordist and good fun too - so it's worked perfectly.

**OO:** Tell me a little about yourself: background, family, etc.

**KL:** I grew up in London and in a boarding school in the country. The first film I made - *Pride of Place* - was about my boarding school (it closed down soon after). I lived on the streets for a while after I left home the second film I made was set in a homeless shelter for women in London. I now live in London in a flat on the top of a hill. I didn't like being a child; I enjoy being an adult.

**OO:** Why was your former boarding school closed soon after you made a movie on it-did you expose it in bad light and the authorities acted on your information?

**KL:** I made a film about it when I was at film school. We had a big screening at the London Film Festival and lots of parents came. Some time later it closed down and they filmed Hammer House of Horror films there. I did show it as it was a crazy place where, because it was so cut off from the outside world, the authorities had absolute power



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It was a relief to go and make a film there and show how horrible it was; I'd been an outcast there.

**OO:** When/why/how did you leave home and live on the streets for a while? How did you get off the streets?

**KL:** I didn't think about it properly I just needed to get away from my parents I had no idea how hard it would be. I was on the streets for about 8 months but I got really ill and had to go back home. Then I went to university and never had to go back again.

**OO:** I notice that you attended the National Film School in London--how did this come to be?

**KL:** NFS is a wonderful film school. I went there after university.

**OO:** Are your films autobiographical? About your boarding school, a homeless shelter for women in London, runaway girls in Iran, etc?

**KL:** I suppose I go for subjects that attract me; the first two films were autobiographical.

Now I like filming people who are outsiders. I feel lucky to meet them.

**OO:** Why didn't you like being a child, and where are your parents and siblings?

**KL:** I didn't like my parents from a very young age. Like lots of people, I hoped I was adopted. But I wasn't! I don't see my sister much but I don't dislike her. I didn't like the way they lived, their values, or anything else about them. My dad grew up in Johannesburg.

**OO:** Are you married, and do you have any children?

**KL:** I'm not married. I have a son.

**OO:** What else would you like to say, to make this article compelling reading?

**KL:** If you can, Ogova, I'd love you to concentrate on [nurse] Fardhosa [Mohamed] - she's a fabulous person and so strong in such a gentle and compassionate way, you'll see what I mean when you watch the film.

#### **Other Works by Ms Longinotto:**

Kim Longinotto studied camera and directing at England's National Film School, where she made *Pride of Place*, a critical look at her boarding school, and *Theatre Girls*, documenting a hostel for homeless women.

After the NFS she worked as a cameraperson on a variety of documentaries including *Cross and Passion*, an account of Catholic women in Belfast, and *Underage*, a chronicle of unemployed adolescents in Coventry.

In 1986, Longinotto formed the production company, Twentieth Century Vixen, with Claire Hunt. Together they made *Fire-raiser*, *Eat the Kimono*, *Hidden Faces*, and *The Good Wife of Tokyo* which examine women, love and marriage in Japanese society.

With Jano Williams, Longinotto directed the audience-pleaser, *Dream Girls*, and *Shinjuku Boys*.

She then made *Rock Wives* for Channel 4 about the wives and girlfriends of rock stars.

Next she teamed up with Ziba Mir-Hosseini to make *Divorce Iranian Style*. This documentary is set in a Family Law Court in Tehran and deals with women and divorce in Iran.



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After this Longinotto made two short films for the *Best Friends* series on Channel 4: *Steve & Dave*, and *Rob & Chris*.

Working with Ms Williams, Longinotto made *Gaea Girls*, about a young girl's struggle to become a professional wrestler in Japan. Then came *Runaway* and, now, *The Day I will Never Forget*.



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Fouzia Hassan, left, and her sister Fardhosa were circumcised in their western Kenyan hometown of Eldoret. But in the documentary *The Day I Will Never Forget*, Fouzia fights back. (HBO)

## Taking on Tradition

How One Kenyan Girl Confronted a Cruel World About Her Circumcision

By Leela Jacinto

abcNEWS.com

March 12

— She was the toast of the Sundance Film Festival earlier this year — a 10-year-old who turned into a de facto ambassador-activist, pitching her voice against an excruciatingly inhumane, but ancient, practice that affects millions of women around the world.



When she was barely 8, Fouzia Hassan was pinned down on her living room floor by two local women in her western Kenyan hometown of Eldoret. They tied her legs, clamped her mouth and sat on her chest to prevent the frail schoolgirl from thrashing around, as a third woman circumcised her with a razor blade.

It was just one in an estimated 6,000 cases of female circumcision — or female genital mutilation, as it's commonly called — that occur every day, primarily in 28 countries in North Africa and the Middle East.

But for little Fouzia, the pain, horror and shock of her circumcision left an indelible mark on her psyche. Days after the incident, as she lay recuperating in bed with her legs tightly bound, she asked for a pencil and paper and composed her troubled thoughts into a short, incisive poem, which she titled "The Day I Will Never Forget."

That's also the title of a documentary on female genital mutilation, or FGM, in Kenya by British filmmaker Kim Longinotto that was screened at the Sundance festival in January and will be aired on HBO later this year.

A 92-minute film documenting the experiences of a number of women and girls— including Fouzia — who have been circumcised, *The Day I Will Never Forget* has been making the rounds on the international film festival circuit, picking up rave reviews and awards along the way.

But it was at Sundance that the documentary created a storm, aided to a considerable extent by the presence of Fouzia and another central character in the film, Fardhosa Ali Mohamed, a health-care provider who works with the Somali immigrant community in the town of Eldoret.

At a packed screening in Park City, Utah, Fouzia stood dignified and composed in her "party frock" as the audience— many of them with tears still streaming down their cheeks— gave the two Kenyans a standing ovation.

"It was *verieeee* nice," she emphasized during a phone interview with ABCNEWS.com days after she got back to Eldoret from her eventful U.S. trip. "I was very surprised how the people liked the film. I didn't think people would like it, but when it was screened, people were very happy."



A WOMEN MAKE MOVIES RELEASE

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## Controlling Sexuality, Multiplying Health Complications

"Happy" is probably not a term most of the audience would have employed to describe their state of mind after watching the film.

"Appalled" would probably more accurately describe the reactions to the documentary highlighting what the human rights community calls "one of the most extreme forms of violence against women." It's a custom, they say, that is designed to control women's sexuality and "moderate" female sexual desire.

An ancient practice involving the removal of part or all of the female genitalia, FGM is carried out in a number of ways at a variety of ages across parts of Africa and the Middle East.

The most severe form is called infibulation, which involves the removal of the clitoris as well as the labia minora and majora. The World Health Organization estimates that 15 percent of all mutilations are infibulations. The majority, or 85 percent of mutilations, according to the WHO, involve either the removal of the clitoris (clitoridectomy), or the elimination of all or part of the labia minora.

In some parts of the world, girls as young as 3 undergo the process, often under unsanitary conditions where anything from razor blades, shards of glass, scissors or kitchen knives are used without any anesthesia.

Experts say the health consequences of the practice are numerous, from extremely painful menstrual periods and intercourse, to tearing of scar tissue during childbirth, a higher likelihood of stillbirth deliveries, and death due to bleeding and infections.

## Keeping Up With the Law

Although FGM today is universally recognized as a violation of human rights, it was not until the 1980s that it made it into international human rights agendas, overcoming barriers against dealing with "private" issues in rights concerns as well as postcolonial concerns that outside intervention would be perceived as cultural imperialism.

Today, a number of African and Middle Eastern countries have outlawed FGM, although there are often gaping lags between the law on paper and its implementation.

But that does not surprise LaShawn Jefferson, executive director of the Women's Rights Division of New York-based Human Rights Watch. "Legislation has to send a clear signal," said Jefferson. "Law has to lead the way. It's very rarely that people outpace the law."

The fight against FGM could well have remained a non-issue were it not for the work of several African — including Egyptian — women's activists since the 1950s.

And earlier this year, their efforts received a major boost when UNICEF, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, issued a pledge to eliminate FGM by 2010, calling on governments to abide by their commitments in a renewed "zero tolerance of FGM" policy.

## 'I Don't Know If God Will Forgive Me'

But while most activists and rights groups maintain that legislation is an important tool in eradicating FGM, they insist that nothing can substitute for education and public awareness — especially among women.

Among the more unsettling facets of FGM is the fact that women — including mothers, aunts, grandmothers, circumcisers and community elders — are often the greatest defenders of the practice. "It's another complication," said Jefferson. "The fact that women — and this is all over the world — sometimes commit violence against women."

In Fouzia's case, her father — an Eldoret businessman — was opposed to having his daughters circumcised. It was only while he was away on a business trip that her mother called in the local circumciser and had Fouzia and her younger sister Fardhosa circumcised.

For Fouzia's mother, Fatuma, a Somali immigrant, circumcision was a matter of following tradition, ensuring her daughters' marriage prospects, and adhering — she wrongly believed — to her religion.



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Her views were vociferously denounced by her little daughter, who convincingly — and correctly — argued that the practice has never been sanctioned by Islam and several *imams* (priests) around the world have publicly denounced the custom.

For her transgression against her religion, little Fouzia cleverly argued, she would not forgive her mother unless she promised not to circumcise her youngest sister, 2-year-old Fartun.

Her mother complied.

Today, Fatuma is a changed woman. "When I heard the poem, I regretted that I did that," she told ABCNEWS.com during a phone interview. "She [Fouzia] has forgiven me now. But on the Day of Judgment, I don't know if God will forgive me."

## The 'Soft' Approach

For Mohamed, a Somali immigrant who deals with the health complications arising from FGM every day at her clinic, Fatuma's about-face is proof of the long-term effectiveness of what she calls "the soft approach" in the fight against FGM.



**Fardhosa Ali Mohamed, a health-care provider who works with the Somali immigrant community in Eldoret, Kenya, is a tireless campaigner against female genital mutilation. (HBO)**

"I don't hate them for what they are," she said, referring to circumcisers and parents who have their daughters circumcised. "I just hate their actions. I don't feel it's a good way to bring in the police, to go to court. What will happen to the girls at home? How will they be treated?"

It's not just African and Middle Eastern governments that have to negotiate a policy balance between criminalizing the practice and investing in anti-FGM public awareness campaigns. Today, a growing number of Western countries — destinations for immigrants from countries that practice FGM — also have to confront the issue.

And by all accounts, countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and several European nations have a tricky set of challenges to overcome.

Although FGM is banned in many large Western countries, experts say Western governments have had virtually no success in prosecuting in any case of female circumcision occurring within their borders, despite occasional reports that a circumcision was about to happen in a community.

The failure, experts say, could be due to a variety of reasons, from unsubstantiated reports and rumors reaching the authorities, to silence among immigrant groups.

"A failure to report cases, if any, would be mostly because these are minority communities and people tend to be protective," said Nahid Touima, president of RAINBO, an international women's rights organization led by African women. "Even people who don't like what's happening do not want to blow the lid on the community."

## 'Holiday Circumcisions'

Another challenge facing Western governments is the modern adjustment of an age-old practice, a phenomenon commonly called "holiday circumcisions," when immigrant parents send their daughters back home to be circumcised during the summer holidays.

Experts say that by all accounts, the track record of destination countries having to confront this phenomenon has been disappointing.

"Many countries pass laws criminalizing FGM — largely because of pressure from rights groups and the media — and once the laws are passed, there's a feeling that the job is done," said Touima. "What is needed is the resources and will to reach minority communities at risk, efforts, for instance, that work within school systems so that teachers and fellow students are trained to identify children at risk of FGM."

Activists and experts say it's impossible to overemphasize the power of public awareness in the fight against FGM.



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"I saw it on the TV that it was wrong," said Fouzia. "I saw it on the TV that some girls had died because of circumcision and some got very sick. So, I knew it was wrong, but I could not stop my mother."

But while the plucky 10-year-old was unable to save herself from the ghastly practice — the consequences of which she will have to endure her entire life — she takes comfort in the fact that she saved her baby sister. And strength from the fact that she's determined to save many more little girls like her.

"I want to be a doctor like Fardhosa," she said in an acknowledgement of the health-care worker who encouraged her to speak up against the practice. "I want to help girls who are running away from their homes to avoid circumcision. I want to be a doctor and talk to their parents and save them." ■



A WOMEN MAKE MOVIES RELEASE

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April 28, 2004

## Mutilation by tradition



Clitoridectomy has been banned in Kenya, but the law is rarely enforced. Simalo, 15, who was circumcised, was married to an older man who raped her.

### **Kim Longinotto's film on clitoridectomy spares none of the grisly details, writes Stephanie Bunbury.**

In the middle of Kim Longinotto's staggering documentary about female circumcision, *The Day I Will Never Forget*, I simply had to leave the video running, go to the kitchen and stare at the kettle for a while.

Watching a little girl held down while an old woman mutilates her with a razor is more than the human heart can bear.

Clitoridectomy has been banned in Kenya, but the law is rarely enforced. Among Kenya's Somali, 98 per cent of girls between the ages of four and 12 are cut and stitched, but the practice is also prevalent among other ethnic groups, such as the Masai.

Altogether, 132 million women throughout the world are estimated to have had their genitals mutilated. Quite a few die in the process.

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Longinotto, 52, has become something of a specialist in documentaries on the women of ignored and hidden cultures: *The Day I Will Never Forget* came out of making a film on women in Egypt. She has won a string of awards and deservedly so. Her work is remarkable for the immediate identification we feel with subjects who are very different from us. *The Day I Will Never Forget* is deliberately different from any of the other films on this subject. There are no euphemisms or fuzzy dance sequences to make it a little more palatable, no experts or Western interpreters.

Instead, we hear women talk. Some are against clitoridectomy, while many others support it, even carry it out. All speak frankly: we hear every grisly detail. Yet, somehow, this makes everyone seem more human; these women are simply attempting to live life as they find it. Some of the diehards may appall us with their talk of the "dirty thing hanging down", but we are never given room to feel superior.

The film's linchpin is a nurse, Fardhosa Ali Mohamed, whom Longinotto met by chance after she had begun shooting. Fardhosa has spent most of her working life trying to mitigate the terrible effects of clitoridectomy on girls having sex for the first time and women attempting to give birth through a web of scar tissue.

We see her with a young bride, Amina, trying to "re-open" her so that sex will be possible, but the girl thrashes with fear whenever she gets near her traumatised vulva. She suggests that the operation be completed under general anaesthetic, but her new husband won't allow it. He would become a laughing stock, he tells the nurse. "I'd rather do it myself."

Fardhosa, incredibly, stays calm and smiles at him. If he changes his mind, she says, the door is always open.

"I think I learned a lot from her," says Longinotto. "She is a kind of Nelson Mandela character, a very committed and angry woman, but able to be very gentle and keep her sense of humour and compromise to do the best thing possible in every situation so that she has gradually won the trust of the community."

Fardhosa organized the filmmaker's access to the circumcision we see, begging her not to intervene no matter how dreadful it was. By being there, she explained, they ensured that the cut chosen was the least extreme that would be acceptable and that an anesthetic would be used. If they tried to stop it, the girls would certainly undergo something far worse later on.

"Emotionally, it felt like a terrible betrayal," Longinotto says. "I felt like a monster. But if I had stopped it, I would have had to take them away and they were not ready to do that. Girls who refuse to have it done are effectively deciding to be outcasts and face quite a lonely life, outside their families and outside their communities."

Sure enough, Longinotto says, when they visited the girls the next day they were already saying how glad they were that they were now, as they saw it, complete women.

Men who support circumcision say it is essential to take the vestiges of manhood out of women. And the girls had certainly been rendered more docile, more ready to conform. After so much agony, there was no fight left in them.

But some girls, incredibly, do fight back. *The Day I Will Never Forget* is not simply about victims; by the end, we feel less pity than astonishment. Dozens of girls have run away to the few existing shelters and, in a remarkable class action, 16 of them took their parents to court to get injunctions against them.

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The individual courage this demands is brought home when Longinotto goes with a 15-year-old girl called Simalo back to her village. Simalo was circumcised then married to an older man who raped her. She ran away to a shelter and has come back to the village for the first time. Her friends embrace her, but she will not speak to her mother.

For many girls, Longinotto says, it is the sense of betrayal by the women who have loved and protected them that is most devastating. Men may expect their brides to be circumcised - their guarantee that they will be marrying a virgin - but circumcision is women's business. Professional female circumcisers do the cutting, while mothers and aunts hold the girls down and laugh at them if they scream. Stoicism is important. They have to learn that a woman's life is full of pain.

Some, however, are jolted by that knowledge in ways their mothers could not have expected. *The Day I Will Never Forget* takes its name from a poem written in English by Fouzia, aged eight. Fouzia listened to a discussion about circumcision being recorded for the film, a discussion that included her own mother.

Afterwards, she approached Longinotto and urged her to come home with them. Once there, with the camera rolling, she recited her poem. It is heartbreaking. Then, still on camera, she tells her mother she will forgive her what she has done only if she promises to spare her sister.

Longinotto says hope lies in these astonishing shows of determination. Simalo was so traumatized that, in the months she spent at a girls' school, she hardly spoke. She knew she was blighted, that she would never be a normal wife.

School, however, was her hope. In a sense, this was her real revolt against tradition. Other girls were quite blunt about it. "I don't want to have 15 children," said outspoken Gladys. "I want a bright future, not just a marriage."

How moving that was, Longinotto says. It suggests another future for everyone. "The men are right about circumcision. Once the girls start questioning this one thing, they start questioning everything."

*The Day I Will Never Forget* screens at ACMI, Federation Square, on May 3 at 8.30pm as part of the REAL Life on Film program.

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