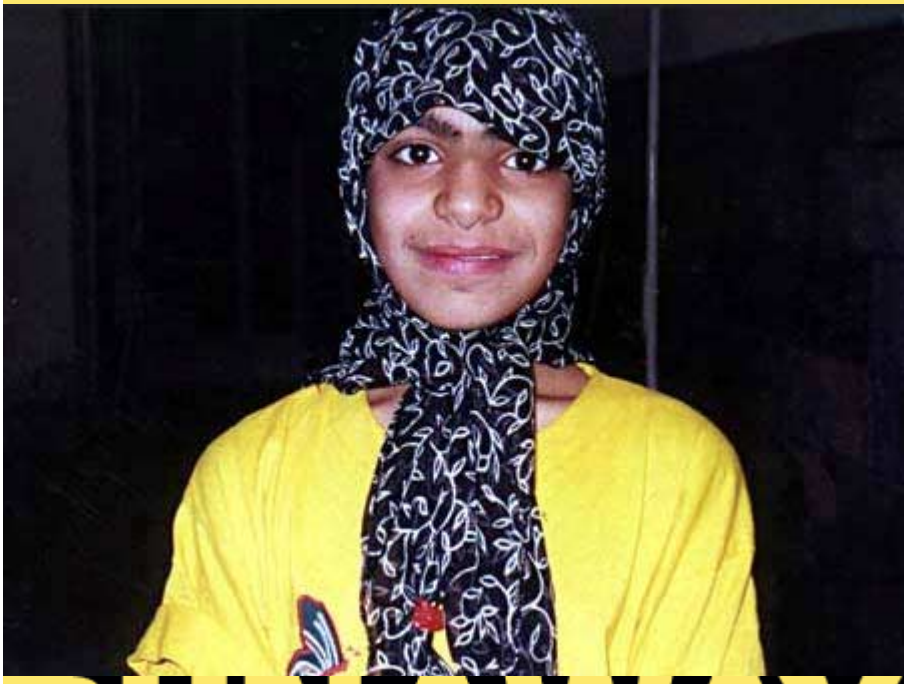
FROM THE DIRECTORS OF "DIVORCE IRANIAN STYLE"



RUNAWAY

A film by KIM LONGINOTTO and ZIBA MIR-HOSSEINI

A WOMEN MAKE MOVIES RELEASE

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RUNAWAY

A film by Kim Longinotto and Ziba Mir-Hosseini

Synopsis

“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 me in 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 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. She separates the truth of their stories from their occasional exaggerations, and, realising that in many cases life at home is probably their best chance of survival, negotiates terms and conditions of reconciliation. She has meetings with their families, fearlessly taking fathers and brothers (and mothers) to task for their mistreatment of the girls, and insisting that they sign agreements stating that they will not repeat their abusive behaviour. Other girls, who feel there is no way back, are helped by her to find jobs and lodgings, moving forward to a rare and precious independence, and challenging the old rules of their society. “

— *Jenny Leask* *55th Edinburgh International Film Festival*

RUNAWAY

A film by Kim Longinotto and Ziba Mir-Hosseini

FILM FESTIVALS

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
Thessaloniki International Film Festival
New Zealand Film Festival
DocAviv International Film Festival
Thessaloniki Documentary Film Festival
International Festival on Human Rights One World
It's All True Sao Paolo International Documentary Festival
Newport Beach International Film Festival
Seoul Human Rights Film Festival
Seoul Women's Film Festival
Iranian Diaspora Film Festival

RUNAWAY

A film by Kim Longinotto and Ziba Mir-Hosseini

QUOTES

"…engrossing…[It] reveals the compassionate side of Islam rather than following the Western media's more clinched demonizing, and leaves the viewer free to decide**"**
— *Derek Elley, Variety*

"…heartbreaking…**"**
— *Jessica Winter, The Village Voice*

"extraordinary**"**
— *Edinburgh International Film Festival*

"*…*a thoroughly compelling work which stands as a fine testimony to the girls' resourcefulness and incredible courage.**"**
— *Sheffield International Documentary Film Festival*

"… an astonishing and intimate look at family problem-solving under an Islamic regime. **"**
— *Imaginarium Online*

"Thought-provoking documentary…Longinotto and Hosseini have created an honest and open account…excellent film. **"**
— Elf*, Inside Out Film*

"As a feminist project, it shows the universality of these girls' struggles to find and assert their strength. As a film, its powerful images remain with you long after the credits have run. **"**
—Shiva Balaghi

RUNAWAY

A film by Kim Longinotto and Ziba Mir-Hosseini

Directors
Kim Longinoto
Ziba Mir-Hosseini

Camera
Kim Longinotto

Editor
Ollie Huddleston

Sound Recordist
Mary Milton

England • 2001 • 87 minutes • Color • 35mm
Farsi with English Subtitles

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RUNAWAY

DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHIES

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 Conventry. 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 *Shinjuko 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 latest film *Runaway* was made with Ziba Mir-Hosseini and is set in a refuge for girls in Tehran. She is currently planning to make a new film in the US.

Filmograhpy

Pride of Place 1979; *Theater Girls* 1980; *Cross and Passion* 1983; *Underage* 1985; *Fireraiser* 1989; *Eat the Kimono* 1990; *Hidden Faces* 1991; *The Good Wife of Tokyo* 1992; *Dream Girls* 1993; *Tragic but Brave* 1994; *Shinjuko Boys* 1995; *Rock Wives* 1996; *Mike Leigh* 1997; *Divorce Iranian Style* 1998; *Steve and Dave* 1999; *Rob and Chris* 1999; *Gaea Girls* 2000; *Runaway* 2001

RUNAWAY

DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHIES

ZIBA MIR-HOSSEINI is an independent consultant, researcher and writer on Middle Eastern issues, specializing in gender, family relations, Islam, law and development. She obtained her PhD in Social Anthropology in 1980 at the University of Cambridge; and between 1990 and 1993 she held a Research Fellowship at Girton College, Cambridge. She is currently Research Associate at the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge and at the Centre for Near and Middle Eastern Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

Dr. Mir-Hosseini is the author of *Marriage on Trial: A Study of Islamic Family Law in Iran and Morocco* (I. B. Tauris, 1993), *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran* (Princeton University Press, 1999; I. B. Tauris, 2000), and most recently *Feminism and the Islamic Republic: Dialogues with the Ulema* (Princeton University Press, 1999). She has also produced with Kim Longinotto, two feature-length documentaries on contemporary issues in Iran: *Divorce Iranian Style* (1998) and *Runaway* (2001).

Filmograhpy

Divorce Iranian Style 1998; *Runaway* 2001

RUNAWAY

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Iran's Runaway Girls Challenge the Old Rules
Ziba Mir-Hosseini

Runaway, a documentary film directed by Kim Longinotto and Ziba Mir-Hosseini, was shot in late 2000 in Tehran, and is set in Rayhaneh House, a shelter for runaway girls. Following the stories of five teenagers, the film explores their longing for freedom, their hopes for a brighter future, and their experiences of society's double rules and standards when it comes to gender rights. Each of them shows courage and resourcefulness in leaving a domestic situation that has become intolerable to them. The shelter is run by the dynamic and charismatic Mrs Shirazi, who, together with a team of counsellors, protects the girls from their families and helps them to renegotiate their relationships. Like their earlier *Divorce Iranian Style*, *Runaway* shows how Iranian women are learning to challenge the old rules, and how rapidly their country is changing.

The film presents us with portraits of the courage and resourcefulness of the rebellious new generation of Iranian women. It opens with Monireh, a teenage girl who has run away from home - as she tells us – "maybe twenty, thirty times". She is not new to Rayhaneh nor are her complaints unique: they are shared by many teenage girls in contemporary Iran who feel that they have little freedom to do what they want in life, that their parents do not understand them. Monireh wants to choose what to wear, how to live her own life, but she cannot. She asks, "Don't I have any rights in life?" She resents being constantly criticized and told what to do. "They can criticize, but they shouldn't interfere with everything I do. I want to live apart from them for a while. But I have nowhere to go," she says.

Then come the stories of the film's five main characters. Maryam, a boisterous and skinny 12-year-old, comes from Doroud, a small town in the west, far from Tehran. She wears her scarf tight round her head, to cover the fact that it was shaved when she arrived at Rayhaneh to get rid of the lice. She ran away from her abusive brother. "We have a big cable and he beats me with it," she says "if anyone beat you with it, you'd be in bed for three days and nights." Setareh's family broke

up after her mother's death; her father became a drug addict and dealer and prostituted her to feed his addiction. After he disappeared (most likely he was arrested), Setareh became homeless and was eventually picked up by the police. After some time in prison, a judge sends her to Rayhaneh to help her to rebuild her life. At the shelter, 19-year-old Setareh starts to reinvent herself, and becomes a source of strength and comfort to other girls. A close friendship develops between her and 17-year old Parisa, who, the counsellors suspect, is not revealing her true identity. Indeed, it turns out that, far from being with family as she first claimed, Parisa is engaged to be married. She ran away because she failed her exams and was frightened that her father would beat her. Supported by Setareh, she is reconciled with her family and her fiancé. Atena, already twice divorced at 18, was first married off at the age of 12 by her mother, who no longer wanted her at home. Her first husband kept her chained up, but Atena managed to get a divorce and returned to her mother. When her step-father tried to rape her, she escaped, but she had no other option than marrying again. Her second husband turned out to be a drug addict; she got another divorce, and this time ended up in Rayhaneh. Despite all this, she is desperate to go back to her mother and sisters. The film ends with a second Parisa, an 18-year-old, who ran away from her abusive father and brother - both drug addicts who deprived her of her very basic rights and took out their anger and frustration on her. After a week on her own in the park - surrounded by "wolves" - Parisa turns herself in to the police. She is sent to Rayhaneh, where she is offered a chance to continue her studies and start an independent life. But Parisa decides to go back to her family, who desperately need her despite having abused her. At the end of the film, when her family comes to take her from the Centre, and as the drama of her dysfunctional family unfolds in front of the camera, we come to understand the reasons for her decision to go back. We even come to feel for her macho brother. We all know the ties that bind.

Facing Up to Reality: The Creation of Rayhaneh

Girls suffering abuse at home and running away from intolerable situations are neither new in Iran nor confined to particular sections of Iranian society. They are age-old and deep-rooted phenomena that until recently were shrouded in secrecy and silence, and ignored by the authorities. But the creation of Rayhaneh House in October 1999 as a temporary shelter for runaway girls, and the media attention that this Centre has received, are transforming the issue from a taboo subject into a pressing social problem.

Two factors are at the root of this transformation. First, a new generation of girls recognize that they have rights and are no longer prepared to put up with domestic abuse. By running away from home, these girls both register a protest and seek to change their situation. Secondly, the unexpected victory of Mohammad Khatami in the 1997 presidential election, and the birth of a reformist movement, also brought a less ideological approach to social problems, which has gradually opened a space for a public debate on many taboo subjects.

Rayhaneh House opened its doors to runaway girls in October 1999. It had its origin in a 1998 project funded by Tehran municipality (dominated by the reformists) to deal with the problem of street children. It was discovered that many of these children were runaways, and a number of them were girls. Two Centres were created in 1998: Green House for boys and Rayhaneh for girls between the ages of 12 and 19. It was also found that the most likely early destination of runaways was either a bus or a train terminal, so offices staffed by social workers were set up in all the Tehran terminals to identify runaway children as they either tried to leave Tehran or arrived from the provinces. In its first year of activity, Rayhaneh dealt with 497 runaway girls; 334 of them were referred through the social workers located at terminals, 42 came through the social worker at Ayatollah Khomeini's shrine, 31 were picked up in parks and streets, 69 were referred by the judiciary, and finally 21 girls came to Rayhaneh of their own accord. Of these 497 girls, 394 were returned to their families, 218 directly from the terminals, after counselling, and 175 girls after a stay at Rayhaneh, usually lasting between a few days and few weeks, during which their families were contacted. Of the remaining 103 girls who could not be reconciled with their families, 47 were referred to the social services, 21 came under the protection of charity institutions, 14 were handed to the police, and two ran away from Rayhaneh.

The very existence of Rayhaneh, its philosophy and its strategy for dealing with the problem of runaway girls run parallel to the history of the reformist movement which found a voice in the structure of power after the election of President Mohammed Khatami in 1997. Since then the reformists, who enjoy massive popular support (as shown in the four further elections conducted since), have been locked in a fierce political battle with their opponents, who have so far managed to block most of their legislative moves. At the heart of the battle lies one of the main ideological conflicts that is now being fought in Iran - over the very notion of rights. The early discourse of the Islamic Republic, premised on the notion of duty (taklif) as understood and

constructed in Islamic jurisprudence, is now challenged by a reformist discourse premised on the notion of right (haqq) as advocated by modern democratic ideals.

Runaway gives us a glimpse of how this wider ideological struggle is playing itself out in the lives of individuals. It is the story of a struggle for dignity, respect and human rights. As each story unfolds in front of the camera, we learn about the gender biases, contradictions and double standards of the patriarchal culture in which these young girls live. We come to appreciate how strong and resourceful they are, how much they are needed by their families, and yet how, in the name of preserving the "family honour" and "fulfilling their duties", they are deprived of very basic human rights. We also learn about the Centre, its counselors and their conflicting judgments and decisions about the girls; we learn about the world outside the Centre, which both girls and counselors refer to as "full of wolves". It is a world that is changing fast: old rules and boundaries are breaking down and the new ones are hazy and fragile. In this world, women still have no place and few rights outside the family; men still see themselves as "watchdogs" vis-à-vis their own sisters and as "wolves" vis-à-vis other girls; the legal system continues to be regulated by the mandates of pre-modern sharia, which puts men in control of women. Where can girls seek refuge from abusive families in a society where there is no law to protect them?

The lucky ones who make their way to Rayhaneh find shelter, and some kind of protection, and other women who can negotiate for them with their families and the authorities. But Rayhaneh can offer them only temporary solutions. It sees itself as a station, as a point of respite for the girls; and its main objective is to facilitate the girls return to their families through counseling of the girls and of their families. Rayhaneh also tries to mediate between them. Counselors try to bring the girls to their senses, to make them realize the futility of running away from their families. They tell them there is nowhere to go and they have little choice but to accept their situation: the world outside their home is "full of wolves". They tell the parents that the young girls have rights, and that they must treat them with respect. In a society where family honour is defined through the behavior of its women, reconciliation is possible only when the girls are still intact, i.e. virgin. Every girl undergoes a virginity test before being sent to Rayhaneh either by the police or by the court. The unlucky ones who fail the test are treated as "offenders" whose loss of virginity is taken as proof that they committed the crime of zina (illicit sex). If they are over 18, they are liable to receive the fixed punishment (hadd) of 100 lashes. If they are under 18, their fate is in the hands of the judges, who might send them to the Centre

for Correction of Juvenile Delinquents or to Rayhaneh. If they reach Rayhaneh, the counsellors try to find a solution to their problem, which can mean either negotiating with their family to accept them back or tracing the person responsible for the loss of virginity and persuading him to marry her. In no way do the staff of the Centre address the issue of the complicity between the state and the Iranian family, first in having institutionalized virginity tests, and secondly in maintaining the ideology, the supreme importance of the criterion of “ntactness”. They do not question why “loss of virginity” should be regarded as such a threat to the family and the state.

Making Connections: Shooting Runaway

By 2000 there were 22 centres for runaway girls nation-wide. Rayhaneh is the only one that allows media access. The rest, mostly run by the Social Services Organization, impose a strict ban. Aware of the important role of media, Rayhaneh is keen to have its philosophy and the plight of the runaway girls publicized. But it has also had to deal with the harmful impact of media attention on the girls. Concerned about the possibly intrusive effect of a film crew on the girls, the Director, Mrs. Shirazi, at first agreed to let us film only for a few days. But girls accepted us almost immediately; as they began to trust us with their stories, we - the three women in the film crew (myself, Longinotto, and sound recordist Mary Milton) - soon became part of the healing process. It was only then that Mrs Shirazi gave us a free hand and let us stay until we had completed our shoot. We tried to be as unobtrusive as possible, but we never filmed without the consent of the girls or their families. We filmed at Rayhaneh over a period of four weeks in November and December 2000. At the time, there were 15 girls who had been in the shelter for some time, but we sought stories structured by arrivals and departuress, following the stories in between. Our decision was largely based on the fact that the emotional drama was high; and we wanted our stories to have resolutions. Once we had chosen our characters, we kept close to them and followed what was happening to them as closely as we could. When editing the film, we were concerned to place the focus on the girls and their individual stories, rather than on Rayhaneh as a Centre or on the world outside.

As in *Divorce Iranian Style*, we were aware that we were dealing with another universal issue; the problem of runaway girls is not peculiar to Iran. We wanted our film to give a voice to these girls, to let them tell their own stories, and through their stories to show Rayhaneh, the counsellors and the dynamic and powerful Director,

Mrs Shirazi. We wanted the film to show their consensus approach to the problems, and how they set up delicate reconciliations between the runaway girls and their families. We see these women disagreeing with each other, and giving differing advice to girls, we see them exasperated by the lack of legal support for their organization. At one point, we hear Mrs Shirazi telling Parisa's father that, if he fails to keep to his guarantee and starts to maltreat Parisa or she runs away again, she will take him to the International Court in The Hague. Perhaps it is an empty threat, certainly it is a bluff - but it tells of the extent to which Human Rights discourse has made its impact in reformist Iran. Likewise, the fact that, unlike in the case of *Divorce Iranian Style*, we did not have to go through an ordeal to get our permit to film tells something of the ways in which the reformist government of Khatami has been successful in creating a more open society in Iran. This time our main negotiation was with Rayhaneh and Mrs Shirazi, whose principal concern was to protect the girls from the film crew.

VARIETY

THE INTERNATIONAL ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY ■ SEPTEMBER 3-9, 2001

RUNAWAY

(DOCU – U.K.)

A Vixen Films production for Channel 4. (International sales: Vixen, London.)

Directed by Kim Longinotto, Ziba Mir-Hosseini. Camera (color), Longinotto; editor, Ollie Huddleston. Reviewed on videocassette, Edinburgh, Aug. 21, 2001. **(In Edinburgh Film Festival — Imagining Reality.)** Running time: **87 MIN.**

In "Runaway," U.K. documaker Kim Longinotto ("Dream Girls," "Gaea Girls") returns to Tehran to observe with characteristic detachment a refuge for young women suffering familial abuse. As in her fascinating "Divorce Iranian Style," also made with Iranian-born anthropologist Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Longinotto gets privileged access to behind-doors meetings and lets her subjects do the talking, revealing a surprising gallery of half-truths and misunderstandings. Fests and cable spots beckon for this engrossing docu.

A house with a courtyard on a nondescript side street, the Reyhaneh Center is ruled with iron patience and dedication to Islamic principles by Mrs. Shirazi and two counselors, Mrs. Aquizadeh and Mrs. Ghamgosar, who've all heard every yarn in the book. Adopting a traditionally consensual approach to social problems, the three women cross-question their aggrieved charges and parents, making both see the errors of their ways (several of the girls are shown to have wildly exaggerated their plights). Like "Divorce," pic reveals the compassionate side of Islam rather than following the Western media's more cliched demonizing, and leaves the viewer free to decide. Tech credits are pro throughout.

— Derek Elley

Runaway

Director Kim Longinotto, Ziba Mir-Hosseini
Running time 85 minutes
Made UK 2001

Reviewed by Elf

Previously responsible for the thought-provoking documentary, Divorce Iranian Style, Kim Longinotto and Ziba Mir Hosseini return to the country for this eye-opening account of life in a Tehran women's hostel.

The runaways in question are Iranian girls, all under 20, who have fled their homes to escape abuse and intolerable restrictions.

Twice divorced Atena, for example, is 18, forced to escape when her stepfather attempts to rape her. Her mother's response is to try and set her on fire. Despite all this, she is desperate to return home. Setarah, on the other hand, was raped as a child and has no home to go back to.

The hostel negotiates with the families on behalf of the girls, attempting to reconcile them, and, if this is not possible, helping them towards a hard-to-come by independence by arranging accommodation and jobs.

By recording the day-to-day activities at the hostel, rather than quizzing the girls individually, Longinotto and Hosseini have created an honest and open account, which leaves us to draw our own conclusions.

You are struck by the difficulties that women face in Iran just to gain the freedoms that we take from granted. However, this is far from a depressing film, as you are reminded of the quality of hope, burning bright within these young women, as they make their way in a hostile world.

As Setareh says to encourage another girl, 'You see this day. Our future is going to be like that. If you want it, our future can be as bright as that.'

Uncompromising, but excellent.

Imaginarium to/film

Life, Iranian Style

Runaway (directed by Kim Longinotto and Ziba Mir-Hosseini)

Reviewed by Mike Hertenstein

One big difference between recent Iranian films and cinema back in the U.S.S.R. is we never got exported Soviet documentaries as open and revealing as 1998's *Divorce, Iranian Style*, where the camera was set up like a fly on the wall in an Iranian divorce court. That film's award-winning directors are back with a new documentary, *Runaway*, where the walls this time are in a women's shelter in Tehran.

As in the earlier film, viewers are given an astonishing and intimate look at family problem-solving under an Islamic regime. Instead of a male judge, however, the professional functionary in this setting is a female counselor. And unlike the stereotype of an Islamic woman we sometimes imagine here in the West, this counselor is educated, sensible and clearly in charge. The film revolves around her intake desk, where she meets girls and discusses with them the problems that brought them to the shelter, which she then tries to help the girls and their families solve together and send them home.

In many ways, the family problems seem no different than what you'd hear about if the camera had been set up at the Department of Human Services in my Chicago neighborhood: the usual family dysfunctions and conflicts over grades and/or boundaries, stories of physical and sexual abuse, drugs, general communication breakdown, divorce.

Along with the scenes in the counselor's office, the documentary follows several girls through the entire process of coming in, working through their problems, and moving on to -- hopefully -- a better situation, either back home or out on their own. The relationships that develop among the girls are sweet and powerful, as they learn to support one another through hard times.

Watching the earlier documentary about the divorce corut, I found it nearly impossible not to be constantly distracted by my indignation at a patriarchical system that so patently, absurdly -- to my non-Islamic frame of reference -- denies women basic civil rights, even an official voice in determining their own fate. (And what made *Divorce, Iranian Style* a delight was the ways women made their voices heard in unofficial ways.)

In *Runaway*, however, we see women in charge for much of the film, and one can sometimes forget about the system under which they live and get caught up in the universality of their problems and problem-solving. One almost gets a sense that sensible, educated women actually run the country.

Sadly, this is far from the case.

The men DO make their appearance felt: first, by showing up, to collect daughters and sisters and try to talk them into coming home. This is where the sense of indignation rises in this film. For none of the men seem to have any interest in taking seriously the problems that brought the girls to the shelter. Over and over again, one hears from the male family heads concern that the girls, in their one or two nights on the street between home and shelter, lost their virginity: the concern is that they are still "intact". And, most infuriatingly, the concern has nothing to do with the girls themselves, and everything to do with family "honor".

We also hear discussion of the Police Unit for Combatting Social Corruption. Of arranged marriages between grown men and twelve year olds. We see a girl who has fled a step-father she accuses of trying to rape her talked into admitting it was her fault. We see another girl, who had been catcalled in the street, blamed for that incident because, her family insists, she walked "improperly". "All men are wolves," it is noted by men, more than once: and it's easy to agree with them. It's also easy to see how this attitude leads from moderate Fundamentalist Islam to a Taliban with its head-to-toe garments to protect men from their lust. The real crime is that the wrong people are punished under such a backwards system.

Despite the reminder of the oppressiveness of the regime, there is so much in *Runaway* that gives me hope, not least the fact that it was made in the first place and shown in America. The other thing that gives me hope is the common sense of the Iranian women, who clearly won't put up with this stuff forever.

Finally, what gives one hope is the glimpse into the common vice and virtue that both the documentaries and narrative films from Iran offer. My inevitable reaction to an Iranian film is the sense that this is a fundamentally (no pun intended) healthy culture which will sort out its social inequities and liberalize eventually. Without irony, I pray that Allah might soon will it.

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Documentary Box

YAMAGATA ' International Documentary Film Festival

Interview with

Kim Longinotto

Interviewer: Sarah Teasley

When Kim Longinotto and Ziba Mir-Hosseini's much-talked-about documentary *Divorce Iranian Style* won the FIPRESCI Award in the International Competition section at YIDFF '99, Longinotto was 300 km south in Yokohama, Japan, shooting the footage for her new documentary on women's pro-wrestling in Japan. *Gaea Girls*, the latest in UK-based Longinotto's series of documentaries about women in Japan, premiered to rave reviews at the Toronto International Film Festival this September, and will show in film festivals around the world over the coming months. Longinotto graciously agreed to meet *Documentary Box* co-editor Sarah Teasley in Yokohama the day after she and co-director Jano Williams finished filming.

— The Editors

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1. ON INSIDER/OUTSIDER FILMMAKING

Sarah Teasley (ST): I'd like to jump right in and ask about Divorce Iranian Style, which showed in the International Competition of the 1999 Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival. How did you come to make the film ?

Kim Longinotto (KL): I'd wanted to make a film in Iran for quite a long time, mainly because there was such a demonized view of Iranian people in England, you know after the Salman Rushdie affair and everyone thinking it was a nation of fanatics. I'd been looking first for someone to work with, and then I met [co-director] Ziba Mir-Hosseini at a party, and we hit it off immediately. She was telling me about her work, and that she'd written a book about the law courts, *Marriage on Trial*. So I took the book, read it at home and loved it, and that's how we started to do the film together.

I really enjoyed working with Ziba. Sometimes you meet someone from another country, and when you're in your own country they're very laid-back and relaxed with everybody. Then you go back to their country, and they're kind of middle-class education and hierarchical, saying "Oh, we can't talk to them," and that sort of thing. Ziba and I went on a three-week research visit, and I was struck by how she was just so lovely with everybody, really warm and really open. There was none of that barrier between people at all. There'd be somebody selling something in the market, and Ziba would squat down beside her and start chatting. It was really really nice. That's when we decided to do the film together.

ST: You worked with Ziba, a native of Iran, on *Divorce*, but you've also worked with non-natives of Japan on many of your Japanese films, including *Shinjuku Boys* and *Dream Girls*. Does it make a difference to work with someone from the country in which you're filming?

KL: It's really hard to generalize because each film has its own sort of story, but sometimes being an outsider is an advantage. I made a film, *The Good Wife of Tokyo*, in Japan with a very close Japanese friend, Kazuko Hohki. She's in the Frank Chickens, which is a rather zany group. I made a film about her family, so there was all the stress of it being her own family, which made it hard for her. We'd go places and she'd get caught up in things.

The very first film I made in Japan, *Eat the Kimono*, was about Hanayagi Genshu, a kind of activist, and I came over with a Japanese woman from film school—I hadn't made a film in Japan before—and Hanayagi couldn't bear this woman, who was from a very rich family. She said that even the kind of language this woman used was belittling to her. So that's when I really thought, "Oh my god, I've been so stupid," I thought just bringing a Japanese person back was going to make it all right, and she's a student so she's young and it would, you know, I assumed it would be fine. And then it was a complete disaster, and then she said, "Look, either she goes or I'm not in the film." That's when [co-director] Jano Williams got involved in that one, because she was there with us, and she's living in Japan. Genshu just loved Jano.

So you can generalize and say that maybe [working with someone Japanese] would have meant a different film, but it depends on the woman. If it had been somebody who was prepared to be funny and relaxed and didn't look down on them in any way, someone who would treat them with respect, it would have been fine. But I can't really think of it, it would have been a different film, because it would have been a different chemistry. You're only three people: there's me, another person, and the sound recorder. So the film comes very much out the three of you as a team, as well as having its own momentum.

ST: What are the advantages and disadvantages of being an outsider, as you put it? For example, did not being Iranian have much of an effect on filming *Divorce*? The interviews in the law courts seemed somewhat unusual, and I was particularly surprised that you'd gotten permission to shoot in a mosque. You're shooting the male side of the mosque, so I was half-expecting to see a male photographer's name roll up in the credits, but there wasn't one, was there.

KL: Sometimes you can get away with things that you might not be able to get away with, for example you can break a few rules. Maybe you're not being polite, or as formal as you might be. Jano's language is strange sometimes, because she learnt it from her first husband, who was Japanese, and she sometimes uses the male form of address and things like that. I think it relaxes people. It's like they realize that she doesn't mind if they laugh at her. It makes for easy, relaxed filming. She's also very warm, so she can do things like hug people when they're upset, which could be hard for somebody if it's not that usual. A lot of terrible things happened while we were filming, and they really got into hugging. They'd say, "Oh, we like this." If I'd been Japanese I wouldn't have done that.

With *Divorce*, it was kind of the same thing: lightly breaking the rules, just standing there and assuming it's all right and seeing if you can get away with it. It's also about being able to show that it's just a flimsy little curtain. A man could definitely not have filmed the woman's side, but if a woman does it she can get away with it. Also, they'd seen us around, we'd been there for five weeks by then. I think that

something very strange that happens if you're a group of women. Somewhere like the mosque, we weren't a threat, we were just three women and we were filming them and they were part of their mosque and it was fine. Whereas if we'd been men... I think it works both ways.

But it can be to your disadvantage because people don't treat you seriously—with *Dream Girls*, sometimes, we'd ask for things and no one would bother. We'd say, "Can we have a quiet place so we can just talk to Anju Mira," but it never happened. Other film crews would be allowed to do things and we wouldn't, and it got progressively worse throughout the film. I think they just sort of thought there was no way we'd get it together because we looked scruffy. We came on the tube, you know, we had stuff in rucksacks, and we weren't in vans with logos, and there were three of us rather than the proper crew.

ST: So being an all-women crew makes a difference.

KL: Oh, absolutely. A society like Iran is two worlds to the extent that you go through different entrances, and when you're going in the courtroom men ought to give up their mobile phones while the women have to take off their makeup. When this division into two worlds is so extreme, the fact that you're women means that you're on the right side. When you're with women you're sort of all together and there's an immediate sense of togetherness; it's a lovely feeling and makes up in part for the sense of being annoyed at having to cover yourself up and worrying all the time. Ziba used to get really panicky about my hair showing because she thought we'd get into trouble, and so she was always telling me to hide my hair. So what makes up for all that kind of hassle is the fact that you're welcomed. Also, about language, I think because I can't speak, I tend to do lots of things with gestures. In Muslim countries, where it's a men-women thing, women are very very tactile, so they would touch all the time, they'll hold your hand, they'll sort of put their arm through yours. You feel very loved in a way, I know it sounds corny, but you really feel welcomed.

2. ON RELATING TO SUBJECTS

ST: You seemed very close to the women in the documentary. There were times in the divorce proceedings when the husband and wife would be arguing, and the wife would turn to you and say something, then turn back again. Also, what about your relationship with the men in the cases? You said that Ziba would go and talk to women in the corridor. I'm assuming that you then went and talked to their husbands as well.

KL: I think that closeness has to do with Ziba. She's been divorced three times, twice in Iran. When she'd go and talk to the women in the corridor, she'd say, "We're making a film about divorce, can we film you?" and then she'd talk about her own divorces. So immediately she got rid of this thing that somehow we were observing them as these bad women, which is what most of these women have become used to feeling, and they thought she was an ally. She knows an awful lot about the law system, so sometimes she'd give them advice. She really helped them, she gave them courage, particularly the young ones. She'd say, "I was your age, and I got through it." So when they're looking at us, the crew, they're actually looking at Ziba, looking at a friend, and that's why you get that very warm feeling.

When we approached women, if they were with their husband we'd always ask the husband as well. Actually I think the only times that we didn't film the women was when the husband said no, although Miriam was the exception here. That happened a couple of times. But most of the husbands thought they were in the right. They felt very confident and thought that the court was there to reinforce their rights, so they were quite happy to be filmed.

ST: Do you really just go up to people and say "Can we film you?" How do you decide who will be in your films?

KL: With [*Dream Girls*], we spent a few days working out who we wanted to film, and it was us choosing them, but also them choosing us. In Takarazuka there are four groups, then there are about four teenage groups, so it's massive, and we just didn't know who to choose. We spent about a week wandering around and not knowing who to choose. Then we were walking past a rehearsal room, and Maya Miki waved at us and said "Come in." She was confident enough but friendly enough to want us to [film her] and I think that's how it worked really with the rest of them. And then there was the woman who came and picked us up from the station, Uematsu. We liked her immediately, and she was kind of our special friend there , so she became a main character in the film.

With *Divorce,* we didn't know how long we'd have there, so there was this real panic to make sure that we'd actually have time to get more and less the whole story. We'd go to the court in the morning and [court secretary] Mrs. Maher—you know, the tough one with the little daughter—would tell us what cases were coming up. And we'd discuss them and we'd say, "This looks like a good one, that looks like a good one." We also know we wanted a custody case. One thing people always filmed in Iran during the Salman Rushdie thing—the Iranian government wanted it filmed as well—was this whole idea of mothers as martyrs, which they promote as the mothers who were glad that their sons would die, because they'd go to paradise. The government obviously thought it promoted a good image, because it was what they believed in, but to Europeans it seemed incredibly unfeeling, as if these women didn't have any love for their children. You don't think, "The reason we're seeing these [women] is because the ones that don't want to say 'I'm glad my son died' weren't filmed," but they were hand-picked. So Ziba and I were really keen to have a woman who was fighting for her children. When we first saw Miriam, we just knew from that presence she's got and that power. When we asked her she said no, she'd never let us film her, she's so used to everybody thinking of her as bad because she's breaking all the rules. It was only after we'd been there a week and she'd seen Ziba talking to other women about her divorces and saying, "Do this, do this," that she realized we were on her side, and the next time she came and she nodded to me and said, "Film me."

We knew we needed to have cases that were self-contained, that had a beginning, middle, and a kind of—you could tell what the end of it was. We cut this down by choosing characters: Miriam we loved; and then Ziba, we wanted a young girl; we also wanted a sort of middle-class, rather glamorous woman like Massi. I think she looks a little bit like Lady Di. We chose our characters, and then we stopped filming other characters, and edited more as we went along. But there were some wonderful scenes with other women that we couldn't use because they were either at the end of a case or they never came back, or... There was a scene with a woman who puts her baby on the counter, and says to her husband, "Look, if you're not going to pay

maintenance, you keep the baby," and she's sobbing, and it's a whole big drama that she's doing to get maintenance from him, but she's upset as well. Actually that was quite funny, that was right at the beginning, and I was really upset, I they were taking her baby away from her, I didn't know what the hell was going on. And at the end I said, "Oh, Ziba, she's lost her baby," and Ziba said, "Oh no, she got her maintenance."

3. ON FILMMAKING

ST: Your films are very entertaining—people laugh and are moved. They're very approachable, but at the same time, it seems clear that there's a message that you're trying to bring across. How do you see balancing entertainment with message?

KL: I think that you go with a set of things because of who you are. When we did *Shinjuku Boys*, obviously I was going with the idea that we would show these people in a positive way, I mean that was the sort of bottom line, really. But each film is a kind of a journey: it changes you as you film it, and you change it. So you never quite know, but you try to make it as easy to watch as possible. But there are some scenes in the new film (*Gaea Girls*, 2000), for example, where we came back and we were crying, because they're so painful. So obviously we're going to try and... We don't want the audience to sit through it and be absolutely bombarded. It has to be a pleasurable process, and making it possible to enjoy something is part of editing.

ST: *Divorce* has awful scenes, then there were things like the judge laughing and the clerk's daughter getting up and playing judge, so there's a lot of humor going on as well. Do you think about humor when you're filming?

KL: Definitely. With *Divorce*, it happened even when we were choosing the court. We didn't want to have a kind of judge like [the former Ayatollah] Khomeini, because that's what was everybody was expecting to see, and they're not all like that, there are as many judges like Deldar [whom we filmed] as there are like Khomeini. Also, if you're going to spend every day in a court with a judge, you might have some kind of relationship with them. A judge who struggled with implementing the law, and obviously had doubts and problems himself, seemed more interesting than a judge who just saw things in one way. Because the film is also about how a society is struggling to impose an old system on a new developing society where women are changing. So choosing Judge Deldar was going to have a kind of lightness in it because he was quite a quirky guy. And there was Mrs. Maher.

ST: It seems very much to be about negotiation: about negotiation between the husband and the wife, and the judge negotiation with the law. The episode when he's going to jail Miriam and put her in detention for five days, then put her in detention for one day, after which she can can go home, is an example of this.

KL: That was a perfect example, because he really didn't want to send her to jail, so when he asked us if she'd ripped up her divorce summons, we lied and said no, and that's wrong. That another thing that's happened at a lot of festivals: people have attacked us for lying, saying, "Look, you're filmmakers, you had no right to change the process, you should have told him that you'd seen her tear it." But there was no way we were going to do that, because we obviously didn't want her to go to jail, I would have lied more, I was really proud of Ziba that she lied. [The judge] wanted to

use us as kind of an excuse. He's not a nasty man, he's a kind man, but he was angry with her and she was a nuisance. He wanted to frighten her but he didn't want to send her to jail, so we were kind of convenient.

ST: Your choice of how to film has you very much in the room: you have a fixed camera, and you're just going back and forth between husband, wife and judge; we never see you, but we hear your voice, and the judge and sometimes the women turn and talk to you; then in the end you do influence one of the cases. How do you see your position as filmmakers in this small space and as taking part in the proceedings?

KL: You're filmmakers and you're recording, but you're Ziba, who sometimes says things that when she'd tell me I'd say, "Ziba, you didn't say that." For example, when she says to Barman, the other Ziba's husband, "Serves you right for marrying a fourteen-year old girl," she suddenly gets a rush of anger. Ziba's volatility is something I really love, and something that's difficult as well. It's what makes her what she's like, and it's what made the film the way the film is. So I said, "Ziba, you didn't say that," but it was what she felt, and I felt it too. I mean, of course you shouldn't marry a girl who's still at school. You're the people that you are, and the way you relate to people is obviously going to affect the film.

ST: You're clearly interested in portraying some kind of truth; at the same time, you clearly have a strong connection to the women you're filming. As such, your films strike me as highly personal and subjective. Will *Gaea Girls*, about the Gaea Japan women's professional wrestling association, be in a similar vein?

KL: Yes. I do react very strongly to film and how I feel about things. I mean, with the Gaea Japan one, I feel like I've made friends and that we're really close to them now, and hopefully that will across in the film. It can't be objective at all.
We just finished it late last night. It's been like a kind of roller coaster, and as emotional as *Divorce* in the fact that was life and death, you know, people losing their children and all. But I think that for both me and Jano, it brought out a lot of feelings about being children, about authority, about discipline and all those things, because it has very heavy scenes of young girls being trained. We've been struggling with what we really feel about things, and kept changing our minds about how we thought about things as we went through. We'd say "Look, we'll film things as best as we can, and then we'll deal with this later," because it was too much... I mean, one moment you think, "Of course they have to have this very hard training, because the ring is going to be really dangerous and they're going to have to be really really brave and be able to put up with pain, it's all about putting up with pain." And then we'd think, "Oh no, that's too much pain, I can't cope with it." And because you feel so close to these young women...

You know, three nights ago, we came back to the hotel, and Jano and I just sobbed, because we'd seen our favorite, this girl that we absolutely loved, Takeuchi Hatakyu, being really beaten, and sobbing, and being turned to all the TV crews at the end and told, "Tell the room how long you can submit to this pain." Jano and I were crying, and then the other TV people started filming us, because they thought it was hilarious that we were crying. We went home and said, "Why didn't they think that was painful? Why weren't they shocked by what happened?" Then we'd think, "Well, do I feel critical of it?" Then we saw her debut match, which was two days ago, and she was absolutely brilliant. That was moving in another way. She comes on, and she there is, and a few days ago she was just a little girl, and she's turned

into something else, she suddenly looks like a wrestler. And you think, “Well, they have made her into this, and this is what the whole thing was for,” but you still sad for her that she had to go through so much.

ST: Speaking of dramatic moments, I’d like to get back to *Divorce*. Any court proceedings have an element of drama, and some of the scenes in *Divorce*—some of the women, Miriam for example—were incredibly dramatic. So you’ve got a documentary which is also dramatic.

KL: It is a kind of acting, but they’re acting for the judge: they’re acting out their rage or their despair or their need, really, so that he will then be in their favor. Their passion is all they’ve got. It’s what struck me first, that the passion was all coming from the women, and the men had the right on their side. So the women had to go with that to get the judge’s sympathy. But then you realize right at the end that even he was sympathetic to Miriam. He said, “Look, the children do better at school with Miriam, they’re not doing the work.” There is a great belief in education there in Iran, which is really good, everybody thinks that girls should be educated. So he’s obviously on her side, but law is against her. There’s nothing he can do, so he’s caught there. But I suppose she felt like “I want my child so much he’s going to have to let me give the child.” But even she can’t get him to do it.

ST: You don’t use a narrated introduction, then say, “Here’s the past history, now let me show you something,” you just jump right in. I’m assuming that this choice of seeming non-structure was actually quite conscious.

KL: Ziba and I really agonized about this, because we didn’t want a lot of narration. Films filmed by westerners about Iran, in particular, always have a voice telling you what to think and putting everything into a kind of normal framework, like, “This is wrong,” and, “we do it better in the West,” that sort of thing. We wanted people not to worry about what was happening so that they could feel comfortable enough just to enjoy the stories. In the three weeks before we finished it, we spent ages writing the narration, trying to cut it down as much as we could; but some things were very difficult, like the whole idea of the bride price—you could write a whole book about it. Ziba tried to make things understandable in a very succinct way.

4. ON DISTRIBUTION AND AUDIENCE RECEPTION

ST: I noticed that *Divorce* was a Channel Four production. What do you think about the relationship between television and documentary film-making today?

KL: It’s always really hard to get money to make these films, because there’s a real slant away from subtitled films in England, and people think that no one will want to watch them, and that they’re not going to be shown. The Iran one took about three years to get the money because there was the added thing of the women having their heads covered. People said, “You won’t be able to recognize them, they’ll all look the same, it’ll be very un-sexy.” Do you know what I mean, it’s not commercial. I went to the BBC to try to get the money and couldn’t get it; [Channel Four] was the only place I could get it from.

It’s very much about finding the right person in these companies. I went back to “True Stories,” [a series I’d worked with before,] to try and do this one about Gaea Japan, and the guy didn’t even write back to me. So then I had to go the BBC, and

that's where I got this money. It's almost like you have to find the right person, because the guy who gave the money for *Divorce* had left. It might seem like it's the TV, but I think it's very much the actual relationship that the filmmaker can have with the person giving the money. *Gaea Girls* is funded by a guy called David Pearson—he'd made a long film about a man changing sex into a woman, and so he was interested in *Shinjuku Boys*, and now this one. But he was the last resort—I think I got twenty rejections. It's this "Japan's expensive, you know, subtitles, women wrestlers, you know... who cares" sort of thing.

ST: Your films have all been aired on and funded by television, but do they screen in theaters as well?

KL: Yes. Particularly in the US, more than Britain—it's quite hard to get theatrical screenings in Britain, but the US seems really good, actually. *Divorce* was shown at Film Forum and in lots of cinemas all around the US. There were also a lot of Iranians at the screenings in the US, so that's been good. I'm really keen for my films to be shown in cinemas, where the idea is that a group of you are watching it together. That's why they're all on film and they're all made for cinema.
ST: Has *Divorce* been shown in Iran?

KL: What's really fascinating about theaters in Iran—actually, I remember being really surprised by this—is that you go through doorways into the court, you sit in different places, everything's very very separate in the court, but when you go the cinema, everybody sits together, and it's dark. That said, we've got lots of copies of the video there which circulate among women's groups and it's gotten loads of reviews, really nice reviews, in film magazines there, but we can't get it shown in a theater. Our dreams is to get it shown in a cinema in Teheran and have those big anarchic groups own women see it. I think that would just be fantastic, but I don't know if we will get it shown there or not.

I had a showing of *Divorce* in Vienna, at the Viennale, with many Iranians in the audience. It was just lovely, women coming up and hugging me, lots of very strong, warm responses. And sometimes [there are] angry men, saying, "Why haven't you put in the men's point of view?" And I've just said, "The whole society is there to implement the men's point of view, so that's why the film is there," and also that we're women, so we're obviously... It's just quite strange, that: you see so many films made by men about men, and nobody every says, "Why haven't you shown the women?" But it's something you always get, you know, "Why have you only shown the women?" But then sometimes it's very kind of angry, like the women who didn't like them sitting down, the women who say, "Why have you shown working-class women, why can't show the middle classes?" even thought Massi is kind of middle-class. But [we've also gotten] that kind of a thing, people thinking it shows a bad image of Iran.

I suppose any film is going to be celebratory and also critical. *Dream Girls* is quite heavy at some points, like the whole cleaning thing and the army drills, and for me it was about showing how that's kind of part of the whole culture. It's a bit like England; I went to boarding school and we and to do similar cleaning, so the way people try and break women's sprits really struck a chord with me. So it's a double thing.

ST: I saw *Dream Girls* in Canada at a lesbian and gay film festival, and *Shinjuku Boys* in Tokyo with friends familiar with *onabe*, biological women who live and work as men, and observed very different audience reactions. With *Dream Girls*, the audience was obviously looking for indications of gender and sexuality and desire, whereas people I've talked to in Japan often say "Oh, it's those crazy fans again. " With *Shinjuku Boys*, it was "Oh, I know this person, I know that place," a very different reception again. So it's back to the insider/outsider question again, but how much do you think about audience when you make a film?

KL: I suppose in a way I think of women watching *Dream Girls*, but the wish is that it be for as big an audience as possible, really, to also show men that Japanese women aren't submissive. But the main idea is that somehow this one about these wonderful actresses could be an inspiration as well. But also, there's just a sense of pleasure in making the film just for itself. You do think of the audience but only at the very beginning and then once you start making it you're just not thinking of the audience at all; the film starts taking on its own momentum.
Really, all you can do is be as honest and truthful as you can. We did think very carefully about [*Shinjuku Boys* main characters] Gaish, Kazuki and Tatsu, and we sent them a video before we finished it just to make sure they were happy with it, and that we'd somehow been truthful to what they were like and treated them well. Ziba had a huge row at a festival in Sheffield because someone attacked *Divorce* by saying "Look, people are sitting on the floor, you're going to give people a bad view of Iran." That's something that didn't even occur to us, you know, but she was really upset. We said, "But people do sit on the floor..." You could actually drive yourself mad if you were always worrying.

5. ON JAPAN

ST: A very basic question: Why Japan?

KL: It all started, really, because I'd seen a lot of Kurosawa films. I loved Kurosawa, but you never really get close to the women. They're always there, and they're very beautiful, but they're very silent, and they're always in the background. And then I read this article about this women called Hanayagi Genshu, and the article said that she'd stabbed the head of [her school of dancing] and she'd gone to prison, and she was against the emperor. I thought, "It's hard enough being a rebel in the US or England, how amazing that for a country like Japan—what must this woman be like?" So there was this kind of complete curiosity and then this determination to come make that film, and then one sort of led to another. Once you come here... I kind of fell in love with the place. The more you come here and meet people and make friends here, it's not Japan anymore, it's Gaish, it's Kazuki, it's all the people. Jano and I are already talking about coming back and doing a little follow-up or something to see how they're doing in five years time or something. Jano got a few of her friends who live in Tokyo to go and see *Shinjuku Boys*, and came and met Gaish just after, and he was very happy and said everything was fine.

ST: Why the women's pro-wrestling theme? Why Takarazuka, and why *onabe*?

KL: Why the women's pro-wrestling? For that same reason: it's a very strong image. In England, even people you wouldn't expect it from say, "Oh, women are very meek in Japan, aren't they?" and stick in that word "inscrutable." And there's this idea that Japanese people don't show their emotions. But that could also be a

kind of nasty thing, which infers that people are hiding something, that there's something sinister behind it. I don't know if it's a hangover from the war or what, but there's definitely this sense that Japanese people don't show their emotions. So I've always wanted to have very emotional films in Japan, and people being very open, which is why I loved Gaish and Kazuki—they were so open and they trusted us so much. They took us into their world, and talked about things that I don't think many English people would have done. Gaish showed us some films that had been made by Japanese film crews, and one of them was like a wildlife film, with this woman in a hat out in the corridor outside his room stalking along, and saying "Oh [gasp], men's shoes!" "Oh [gasp], men's underwear." It was like he was a scary beast, and they were going in to film him. Once we talked to him about the kind of film we wanted to make, he was really excited about it, and I think he did enjoy doing it, we all enjoyed doing it together. It sounds very kind of do-goody, but it's all about breaking down barriers and showing that of course we're all different but of course we're all similar.

But with this wrestling one, it was almost like, "God, I'm so admiring of them"—I mean they are different, they're just really strong women. I couldn't have dealt with the half of what they've all had to go through to become wrestlers. I hope it's not going to be too strong for people, I hope they're not going to find it too upsetting, because there's a kind of a happy ending. Like *Divorce*, there's a definite beginning, middle, and end, and you don't know how it will end until you get there.

ST: From what you've said, I'm looking forward to seeing the film when it's done. The best of luck for it, and thank you very much for taking the time for this interview.