

Study Guide: Morocco Films by Hakim Belabbes

Hakim Belabbes

Born February 20, 1961, in the Moroccan town of Boujad, Hakim Belabbes was introduced to film at an early age because of his father's job as owner of the lone movie theatre in town. After earning his B.A. in American and African Literature in 1983 from Mohamed V University in Rabat, Morocco, Belabbes went on to earn a Diplome des Etudes Approfondies in African Literature at the Lyon University in France and a M.A. of Film and Video from Columbia College in Chicago.

As head of the Audio Visual Department at Hassan II Foundation in Rabat, Belabbes created films that document the experiences of Moroccan immigrants in Europe. He has produced and directed more than ten films that garnered awards such as "Best Scriptwriter" and "Best Feature" at the Dubai International Film Festival as well as "Best Midwest Feature Film" at the Milwaukee Film Festival.

"Through his films [Hakim Belabbes] is helping to broaden and liberalize the content of films that can be produced in Morocco. Yet he manages to epitomize the goal of socially conscious media by capturing private moments that evoke common feelings of both love and loss." – Staff, Global Engagement Summit

Film Synopsis: *A Nest in the Heat*

Boujad: A Nest in the Heat is a documentary film and a self-reflective portrait of Hakim Belabbes' relationship with his family and his hometown of Boujad. Exploring the tensions between the desire for independence and the need for validation, Belabbes struggles to leave the place that is simultaneously driving him away and pulling him back. He shares an intimate family portrait that is both heartwarming and painfully honest.

Film Synopsis: *Whispers*

Whispers is a narrative film that takes place in Belabbes' hometown. Rather than being propelled by dialogue, *Whispers* presents representations of dreams. Caught between chasing his past and accepting his impending end, a man follows his memories through the streets of Boujad.

Other Recommended Films from Morocco

- A Place for Atlas' Feet* by Sali Ma Ben Moumen (2007)
- Ali Zaoua: Prince of the Streets* by Nabil Ayouch (2000)
- In My Father's House* by Fatima Jebli Ouazzani (1997)
- Land* by Jan Williem van-Ewijk & Abdelhadi Samih (2013)
- Samba Do Maazooz* by Hicham Ayouch (2008)
- The Narrow Frame of Midnight* by Tala Hadid (2009)
- Tenja* by Hassan Legzouli (2004)
- L'enfant endormi (The Sleeping Child)* by Yasmine Kassari (2004)
- Sur la Planche (On the Edge)* by Leila Kilani (2011)
- My Land* by Nabil Ayouch (2010)



Filmmaker Hakim Belabbes in Morocco.



Image from *A Nest in the Heat*, courtesy of Hakim Belabbes.



Image from *Whispers*, courtesy of Hakim Belabbes.

Suggested Questions for a Q&A with Hakim Belabbes

General

- Describe the film industry in Morocco. Are there film schools? Studios? Available equipment for use?
- Is there government support and funding for filmmaking in Morocco?
- How are Western films received and perceived in Morocco?
- What films and filmmakers have influenced your career and why?
- What projects are you currently working on?

A Nest in the Heat

- Why did you document your decision to leave home and pursue an education and career abroad?
- Did you need permission to make films in Morocco?
- Was it difficult to film a documentary with your family?
- How long was the filmmaking process, from start to finish?
- How has your family responded to your work, particularly *A Nest in the Heat*?
- Tell us about the men praying in the graveyard. Is this a tradition?
- Tell us about the celebration in September. What is it called? What are they celebrating?
- Why do you think your brother cried?
- Talk about the difference in the siblings—the ones who stay and take care of parents, the ones who choose leave.

Whispers

- Explain the casting process. Who are the actors?
- Who wrote the score for the film? What role does the music play in the film?
- In the soundtrack, we hear a flute playing. Is this traditional Moroccan instrument? What is it called?
- Is there symbolism associated with the clay jar found in the chest and the one the man is making?
- Why do the characters of the man and the boy become invisible or fade out sometimes?
- What is the symbolism of the man and the boy in the grave?
- Why was the handprint on the wall?



Images from *A Nest in the Heat*, courtesy of Hakim Belabbes.