



# ESCAPE

## Female Genital Mutilation & Child Marriage in Kenya

A Film by MARVI LACAR

29 minutes | Stereo | Documentary | In English | Not Rated

// [www.escapethemovie.com](http://www.escapethemovie.com)

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## **SYNOPSIS**

ESCAPE is a short film documenting the rescue and rehabilitation of Maasai girls who have undergone Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and early marriage, two practices that go hand-in-hand in Kenya. Female circumcision and child marriage continue to take root in poverty stricken communities that consider women as lucrative property to be “sold” to the highest bidder. The film depicts the lives of several young women and the various paths that some are forced to make.

The scene opens with the rescue of Seleyian Sekut a day after marrying a man twenty years her senior. Seleyian, whose slender body and small stature puts her at around 10 years old, is defiant toward her rescuers and demands to be reconciled with her husband, a man who paid for her with a substantial dowry. However, as we follow her through the process of her rescue, we discover a desperately confused child, torn by the pressure of a life that has been chosen for her since birth and the possibility of a world so unlike her own that, at the very least, it piques her curiosity.

At the Tasaru Safehouse, we are introduced to other young girls who have had similar experiences. Salula was rescued on her wedding day as well. Carolyn ran away from home while on an errand to buy provisions for her own wedding. She wanted to continue her education, a privilege that would end once she is married. Mary was raped when she tried to run away from her husband. As a form of punishment for her wayward behavior, her uncles pinned her down as she was being sexually assaulted by her husband. Others, like Teresia, didn’t wait to be officially betrothed to a man. She knew that upon the moment of her circumcision, her fate would be sealed and she would be considered a “marriageable woman.” So once her father started voicing his intent to see his eldest daughter undergo “the cut,” she made her way to the Tasaru Safehouse for the Girls.

At the safehouse, the girls are guaranteed safety from disgruntled relatives as well as free primary and secondary education in an urban environment. Others, like Naanyu Sekut, are not so lucky. Naanyu, approximately 13 years old, is to marry a man in his 30s. She didn't hint or voice a desire for a life outside of what her father planned for her, thus, she is never rescued. In the crowd during Naanyu's wedding ceremony is her cousin, a younger and recently circumcised Seleyian. She stands innocently behind the older girls unaware that within a year, it would be her draped in an elaborate wedding garb.

Interspersed throughout this 30 minute documentary are interviews with rescuers, health care providers and community activists who have long argued that female circumcision and child marriage are gender biased practices that are meant to subjugate women. Filmed over the course of three years, ESCAPE introduces viewers to Maasai girls and women who argue that education will in the long run uplift a family and subsequently, an entire community out of poverty. Despite being ostracized by the very society they aim to preserve, these women continue to challenge the status quo. By proving that they can remain respectful of their Maasai heritage while at the same time be educated and financially independent, they aim to influence their families and neighbors. These women have started a revolution that has gradually reached their brothers, uncles, and fathers – the men – who have been traditionally anointed as the determinants of their fate.

## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

I came to learn the story of the girls at the safehouse during a birthday party for a friend of mine. Next to me at the dinner table was Alicia, who had been a volunteer at the safehouse during her time with Eve Ensler's VDay, one of the safehouse benefactors. Alicia spoke of the girls' courage when they decided to defy their fathers' decision to either circumcise or marry them to a much older man, their resilience after they have been shamed and ostracized by their family and community, and their steadfast determination to finish their education. I was fascinated. A few weeks later, I found myself interacting with the girls who were previously just characters in a story.

Originally this project started like any other—with the pull to cover a story of import and urgency. So when my husband (on video) and I arrived at the Tasaru Safehouse for Girls in Narok, Kenya, I expected to be sympathetic to those fighting against Female Genital Mutilation and early marriage. I wasn't quite ready to be utterly enamored by them. Despite undergoing physical and emotional torment, they kept their grace and dignity intact.

The girls gave my husband and me Kimaasai names, to which we were supposed to answer in their native dialect. They were so tickled by our accents that they kept on with this exchange at all hours of the day for the month that we stayed with them. They would gather around my husband at night, asking him about America and the world outside Narok. They were tickled by the concept of "dating," the vision our dogs dressed in winter jackets, curious about spaghetti and Central Park. We weren't as successful in our attempt to describe our world. However, they were generous enough to give us entry into theirs and shared with us their dream of the possibilities that lie ahead.

## CREW BIOGRAPHY

### **Marvi Lacar**

Executive Producer/Director/Editor/Stills Photographer

(b. 1976) Marvi Lacar is a native of the Philippines and moved to the US at the age of 15. She started her career as a photojournalist in 2004 where she covered domestic and international assignments for clients such as The New York Times, Time, Newsweek, Stern, Reader's Digest, Marie Claire, Glamour and Discovery Inc. Lacar has been recognized by Communication Arts, American Photography and Photo District News, among other awards, for her photography.

Lacar's work on Female Genital Mutilation and early marriage in Kenya was her inspiration to transition from photography to film hoping for a medium that would allow the subjects to express their stories in their own voice. *ESCAPE*, her short film documenting stories of Maasai girls who were rescued or ran away from FGM and child marriage incorporate her still photographs. *ESCAPE* has since received awards from the LA Women's International Film Festival, International Women and Minorities in Media Fest, NYLA International Film Festival and has been screened in various other festivals.

### **Benjamin Lowy**

Videographer

(b 1979) Benjamin Lowy is award winning photographer based in New York City. He received a BFA from Washington University in St. Louis in 2002 and began his career covering the Iraq War in 2003. Since then he has covered major stories worldwide. In 2004 Lowy attended the World Press Joop Swart Masterclass, he was named in Photo District News 30 and his images of Iraq were chosen by PDN as some of the most iconic of the 21st century. Lowy has received awards from World Press Photo, POYi, PDN, Communication Arts, American Photography, and the Society for Publication Design. Lowy has been a finalist for the Oskar Barnak Award, a finalist in Critical Mass, included in Magenta Flash Forward 2007, as well as the OSI Moving Walls 16 exhibit. His work from Iraq, Darfur, and Afghanistan have been collected into several gallery and museum shows, and shown at the Tate Modern, SF MOMA, Houston Center for Photography, Invalides, and Arles. His work from Darfur appeared in the SAVE DARFUR media campaign.

In 2011 Lowy's Iraq I Perspectives work was selected by William Eggleston to win the Duke University Center for Documentary Studies/Honickman First Book Prize in Photography. The book is currently available and in stores now.

In 2012, Lowy was awarded the Magnum Foundation Emergency fund to continue his work in Libya. In the same year, he received the International Center of Photography (ICP) Infinity Award for Photojournalism

**Lisa Santoro**

Producer/Associate Editor

Lisa Santoro received her BFA from Kalamazoo College in 2009 where she was awarded honors for her senior thesis, Craving Color, a video documentary on color perception. Santoro currently produces and edits multimedia video for Marvi Lacar and Benjamin Lowy.

## CREDITS

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER | DIRECTOR | EDITOR | STILLS PHOTOGRAPHER

Marvi Lacar

PRODUCER

Lisa Santoro

CINEMATOGRAPHER

Benjamin Lowy

ADDITIONAL VIDEO

Marvi Lacar

Peter Githinji

ORIGINAL SCORE

Josh Rowley

TRAILER ORIGINAL SCORE

Ben Kass

SPECIAL THANKS TO

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Lauren Steel

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