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We venture into the hearts and minds of far-flung indigenous tribes with award-winning documentary filmmaker Kire Godal. If music floats your boat, then read our review of Eric Wainaina's "Love and Protest", and get to know an African legend, Zimbabwean sensation Oliver Mtukudzi. We also profile one of Kuona Arts Trust's rising stars, and take a look at the sobering tale of a recovering alcoholic.

On Being Human

A conversation with Kire Godal



brought up in Aspen, Colorado. Over the past decade, Kire has travelled for months at a time throughout Kenya, often with her young son Kinna, a soundman, a cook and an ayah in tow. Returning home to Langata, Nairobi, with rare footage of tribal ceremonies, she has created such films as "Maasai: Last Dance of the Warriors", "Pokot: The Path to Manhood" and "Rendille: Ceremonies of the New Moon". In the future, Kire's contribution will no doubt be regarded as documents of culture that people will look back at and study, perhaps even to find themselves.

Her most recent documentary for Nat Geo TV, "Lion Warriors", is currently airing worldwide. It's about the Maasai learning to live with lions, offering historical perspective and a great boost to Kenya's conservation efforts. Both the iconic man and beast have been playing out a great drama under Mount Kilimanjaro and throughout its surrounding

plains. Traditionally, the *morans* (young warriors) hunt lions as a rite of passage into manhood. However, as competition for the African habitat worsens, lions have been killing livestock and the Maasai have retaliated, nearly decimating the

By Rupi Gill

A woman falls in love with Africa whilst reading *National Geographic*, leaves her successful modeling career in

America, and brings up three children in the throes of a life amongst cattle rustlers.

She is Kire Godal, a youthful, free-spirited documentary filmmaker

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population of these big cats.

In addition, for the *Menye Layiok* (Fathers of the Warriors) Project, Kire has made two films in *Maa* (the language of the Maasai). These documentaries teach initiates awaiting warriorhood about over-grazing, accepting



compensation for livestock taken by lions, and the importance of conserving their beautiful lands. They also highlight the consequences of not finding solutions for conservation—the stark future of living in urban slums.

Kire tells me that she spends months building relationships with the tribes she intends to film. She takes useful presents: ostrich feathers, spoons and medicines (the government will often give her worming tablets to distribute). Her team travels light and lives simply; they are not there to intimidate, impress or make people feel inadequate.

“Meetings are special. People should never feel exploited but, instead, respected. I have a curiosity and love for differences.” Kire adds, “Here’s a chance to tell their side of the story.” In fact, this is just how she is able to get someone, say, a man who has killed many lions, to talk candidly into her camera.

Kire goes on passionately about sharing knowledge. “People also feel they can come to me and ask questions. They want to know if—as I wear pants and drive a car—I am a woman, or whether I have been circumcised and am I a leader?” Does she never want to campaign for change, having seen willful mutilations? Kire is succinct and liberal in her outlook. “Circumcision is on its way out anyway,” she posits.

This filmmaker doesn’t want to preach. What observing the



Pokot and Rendille has taught her is that, because of the hardships of their lives, initiation ceremonies are preparations for life ahead. They are literally meant to prepare these indigenous peoples so that they will know exactly where they are at any point in time. The tribes are not obsessed with owning things but belonging. And they can sing and dance about it. The women are expressive and vocal; they have laughter, harmony and a togetherness that we in the West are so often missing. They almost seem more human than we are.

Kire tells me about the Pokot cattle rustlers: When a man kills an enemy, he must spend one month isolated in the bush. Food is left for him by an old lady who cannot be affected by evil spirits.

After a cleansing ceremony, he must be “scarified” (cuts are made into his body and he wears the scars



of his experience proudly). He must also be renamed as he is now another person.

Kire speaks freely about the loves of her life. She has had to be intense. For a long time, raising children and working were priorities, and to give herself more energy, she gave up parties and a personal life which she has now reclaimed.

“I am always hungry for life and get annoyed when I am interrupted by blandness.”