Elizabeth Tadic, director. *Umoja: No Men Allowed.* 2010. 32 minutes. Australia/Kenya. Women Make Movies. $250.00.

Elizabeth Tadic's film about radical awakenings among women typically viewed as far from the feminist fold tells an engaging and at times humorous tale. It presents a community of Samburu women in Kenya who were individually cast out from their original villages after suffering rape by British soldiers. Alone and abandoned, cut off not only from their homes and husbands but also from their children, the women were mobilized by the film's key personality, Rebecca Lolosoli, to join forces and establish their own village. They name their village Umoja (Kiswahili for "Unity"), hold Lolosoli up as their "chief," and forbid entry to men.

Lolosoli, who is also Samburu but not—as she is quick to point out—a rape victim herself, deploys her entrepreneurial spirit and education (signaled by excellent English) to coordinate the women. She confidently assumes authority in the telling of the tale and in the onscreen events, such as formally receiving a Samburu regional chief who attempts to reconcile the rebel women with their menfolk. His effort falls flat and the women all but throw him out of the village, with Lolosoli instructing him to tell the men to "leave these women alone." In other scenes, Lolosoli's networking skills are evidenced as she doles out clothing donated by a New York–based women's rights NGO, and she is praised by a female British tour operator who brings tourists to Umoja to purchase the women's beadwork and thereby support their independence. In watching the film, one cannot but admire the unity and strength these women develop after suffering rape, banishment, and separation from their children, and also Lolosoli for the clearly critical role she played in organizing them.

Supportive though one may be of the feminist agenda suffusing the film, the heavy-handedness with which it is espoused is the film's undoing. Tadic falls prey to age-old stereotypes about African patriarchy, painting Samburu men in uniformly and exclusively negative strokes ("These men are just sleeping under the trees, from morning until evening, doing nothing," says Lolosoli) and including interviews with men who insult and threaten further violence against the women should they ever return, blaming them for getting raped in the first place. In pastoralist societies like Samburu and other Maa-speaking communities, a gendered division of labor exists in which certain tasks like water and firewood collection, cooking, child-rearing, milking the cattle, and house construction fall to women, while men herd and care for the livestock, including performing daily inspections, administering injections, treating for tick-born and other diseases, addressing broken bones and infections, and migrating great distances with them during the dry season. Thus the hard work associated with a pastoralist life is shared, not borne singularly by women. Nor are all or even most Maa-speaking men prone to violence—another resilient stereotype about pastoralists, who are often depicted in the media as spear-wielding aggressors of hapless neighbors. Through the Samburu chief's pursuit of reconciliation,

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we see the presence of at least one man (an influential one at that, who presumably is not alone in his position) committed to communal peace over violence and who, significantly, seeks to reunite the women with their children.

In uncritically casting all blame for these women's plight on their husbands and male kin, Tadic glosses over the true source of their misery: the British soldiers who raped them in the first place. Mentioning them only in passing and indicating that an investigation proved inconclusive, Tadic essentially absolves these men of guilt in her rush to judge Samburu men, the easy target. We are inundated with media misrepresentations of and feminist attacks on traditional societies and how they reputedly disempower Third World women, who consequently require gender uplift by enlightened First World sisters. But the guilt of the British soldiers who took advantage of their privileged position and committed crimes against these Samburu as well as other Maasai women is practically ignored.

Laikipia and Samburu Districts have served as training grounds for the British military for decades, and charges of rape by British soldiers can be traced back over fifty years. Reports place the figure at over two thousand rapes in Samburu and Laikipia Districts over a fifty-five-year period, resulting in sixty-nine births (see Zachary Okieng, "Samburu Rape Saga Unfinished: Britain Won't Compensate Victims," http://english.ohmynews.com). In 2003 Amnesty International called for an investigation and Irene Khan, the organization's secretary general at the time, said in an interview that "regiment after regiment have been visiting those ranges in Kenya for training . . . and the same behavior seems to be repeated. The gang rapes clearly seem to . . . have been organized by groups of soldiers. So there certainly seems to be a culture permeating there, probably encouraged by the impunity that they enjoyed, because, you know, one rape takes place, nothing happens, so the next one takes place" (Matt Peacock, "British Soldiers Accused of Rape in Kenya," Australian Broadcasting Corporation AM Archive, July 3, 2003, www.abc.net. See also Natasha Walter, "Our Boys, Their Rapists? We Need a Public Inquiry," *The Guardian*, July 4, 2003).

When their claims were rejected by British authorities, the victims staged a 2005 march on the British High Commission in Nairobi to demand justice and rights for the children born of these rapes. However, the demonstration only met more violence as they were forcibly dispersed by the police. At no point in the film does Tadic deal with this legacy and the long-standing claims of these women. Nor does she confront the unequal global relationships that find British armed forces training in Kenya in the first place: a colonially tainted agreement that grants the British military training rights on Kenyan soil for a pittance. In 2010 a Kenyan MP representing Samburu East argued in the National Assembly,

> How can we, in any society where people can think of right and wrong, have foreign forces training on our soil in Samburu without an understanding between us and them, so that they should have some social

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> responsibility? . . . We know that even at this moment, the British Army trains on private land owned by a British citizen in Laikipia, and the owners get compensated to the tune of millions of Sterling Pounds. How can the Kenya Army . . . allow the British Army to train for free while the same British Army pays the white ranchers, who are very wealthy? (Hon. Lekuton, Minister of Parliament for Laisamis, Samburu East, to Kenyan Parliament, *National Assembly Official Report*, November 4, 2010)

In the same debate mention was made of compensation paid to Samburu victims of landmine explosions from training sites that were not cleaned properly, as well as to the march of the rape victims, showing that the issue remains a source of contention.

Lolosoli's efforts to assist her Samburu sisters merit praise, and one cannot but share the ebullient joy these women express when singing about their freedom from male domination or enjoying cuts of meat normally reserved for male elders. But the silence on the underlying problems in Samburu and Laikipia Districts that are the true source of these women's banishment matters greatly. They should not be ignored or underplayed, nor should the challenges that accompany the glorified choice of going it alone and rejecting the way of life that has defined Samburu culture be underestimated. There is no doubt pain felt by the women of Umoja at being excluded from their children's lives, and at not participating in the herding activities that they once enjoyed and that probably still carry great meaning for them. Yet these topics receive no attention either. Instead, this film focuses singularly on celebrating the alliance of Lolosoli with Western feminist ideals and organizations (and a Western feminist filmmaker) and with the attainment of a Western-style independence that entails a major break with Samburu lifestyles.

The complaint of Third World feminists iterated over and over for decades—that *their* actions and *their* agendas are forever sidelined in favor of those of well-meaning but ultimately patronizing Western feminists—rings loud and clear here. The Samburu and Maasai women who took to the streets of Nairobi in 2005, their racially mixed children in tow, tried unsuccessfully to set their own agenda. In 2006 the British government announced that it would not prosecute the soldiers accused of rape in Kenya; in response, the Kenyan MP from Samburu East caustically remarked, "How can you deny that there were no such rape cases when the women marched and demonstrated the product of that kind of action?" The women, undeterred, took their case to the United Nations, and their campaign continues.

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