

Cattle-leaping ceremony in Hamar tribe





The Hamar live on the eastern side of the Omo Valley in southern Ethiopia. After the harvests, the cattle-leaping ceremonies take place. These rites are a way for male teens to officially pass into adulthood. It grants them the right to marry, own cattle, and have kids. Before the ceremony, the “jumper” shaved half of his head and removes all clothing so he is completely naked.



The jumper's female relatives, covered in animal skins, butter, and ocher, dance in a circle while blowing into horns.



The elders wear their best clothes to attend the ceremony such as blankets made in China. They also cover their legs with a special and expensive green mud. Some tourists are permitted to watch the ceremony after paying a fee. It's a way for the Hamar to cover the expenses of two days of partying (food and alcohol served to hundreds of guests).



The Hamar dislike having their picture taken since the elders still believe that it drains their blood.



“Mazas” are men who have already leapt across the cattle, but are still single. They live apart from the rest of the tribe, moving from ceremony to ceremony. The “Mazas” whip all the jumper’s female relatives except his mother.



These women fight to be whipped first by the Maza to prove their love and their strength.



The Mazas seem timid faced with the fervor of the women.



The more abundant and extensive the wounds, the deeper the girls' affection for the boy who is about to become a man. They don't show any signs of pain.



Young girls are discouraged from getting whipped, even if they dance and sing in the ceremony.



This woman wears a necklace indicating that she is a first wife. Among the polygamous Hamar, the second and third wives are treated like slaves.



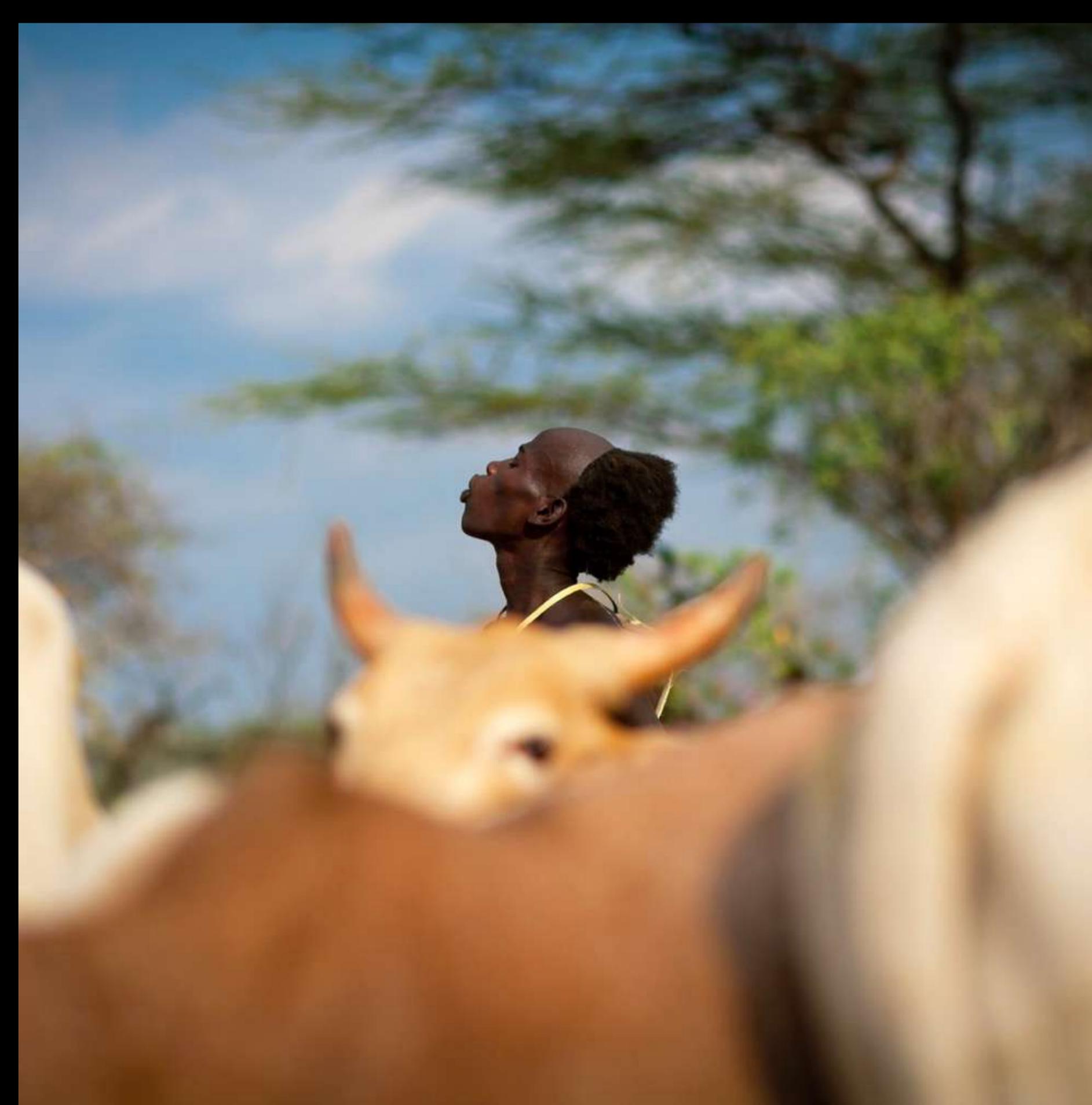
Even while the Maza prepare for the ceremony in the bush, the women keep on harassing them to whip them.



The Maza put on special adornments and purify themselves before going to select the cattle for the jumper,



A new seat will be given to the jumper, commemorating the event and symbolizing his new status in the tribe.



Concentration before the jump: For the "Ukuli", or jumper, to fall during the ceremony the is considered shameful and bad luck. A single fall is blamed on the movement of the animals. Any boy who fails to complete a minimum of four runs (two back and forth), however, will be publicly humiliated: he will be whipped by his female relatives, teased, insulted, and beaten.



Before the jump, all the women gather together next to the cattle. They raise their hands and whips and sing.



He runs speedily towards the cattle, jumps onto the back of the first cow and then runs across all the remaining animals. At the far end of the line he jumps down, turns around, then leaps back up again. This routine is repeated in the other direction. Altogether he makes four runs. If he wants to show how tough he is he may do more. Finally, if everything has gone well, the maza lead him out through the exit. The crowd erupts with wild dancing and excitement. The jumper is given the name of the first bull.



At the end of the leap, a huge dance takes place. The girls choose who they want to dance with and indicate their chosen partner by kicking him on the leg.



A few months later, the jumpers family will introduce him to his future wife. He will have to give twenty cows or goats to her family. Never ask a women how many cows her family was given for her, it's taboo! Saying the number will cause the death of the cattle. Some Hamar people are moving to town, going to school, and converting to Christianity like Miss Toro.

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