

# *Scary Scarifications*







Scarification ceremony in the Surma tribe, Omo Valley, Ethiopia. The 12-year-old girl did NOT utter one word during the 10-minute ceremony and did NOT show any pain. Her mother used a spine to pull the skin and a razor blade to make the cuts. At the end of the ceremony, I asked the girl if it hadn't been too painful to have her skin cut with a razor blade and she answered that she had been close to fainting. It was hard to believe as her face had not betrayed any sign of pain. That would bring shame to her family. The child chose to get the scarifications; nobody forced her. Scarifications are a sign of beauty in these tribes. This is the tradition in the Suri tribe. Children who go to school or convert to Christianity are told not to do it anymore.





The skin of the tribes in Southern Ethiopia has a special reaction to cutting: the cicatrization creates raised scars. People may add ash and certain organic saps to the cut in order to make the scarring more prominent and/or embellished. The determination to bear the pain shown by a girl undergoing scarification is also an indication of her emotional maturity and willingness to bear children.



A woman of the Surma with a scarification covered chest. She is considered a beauty by the men in her tribe.





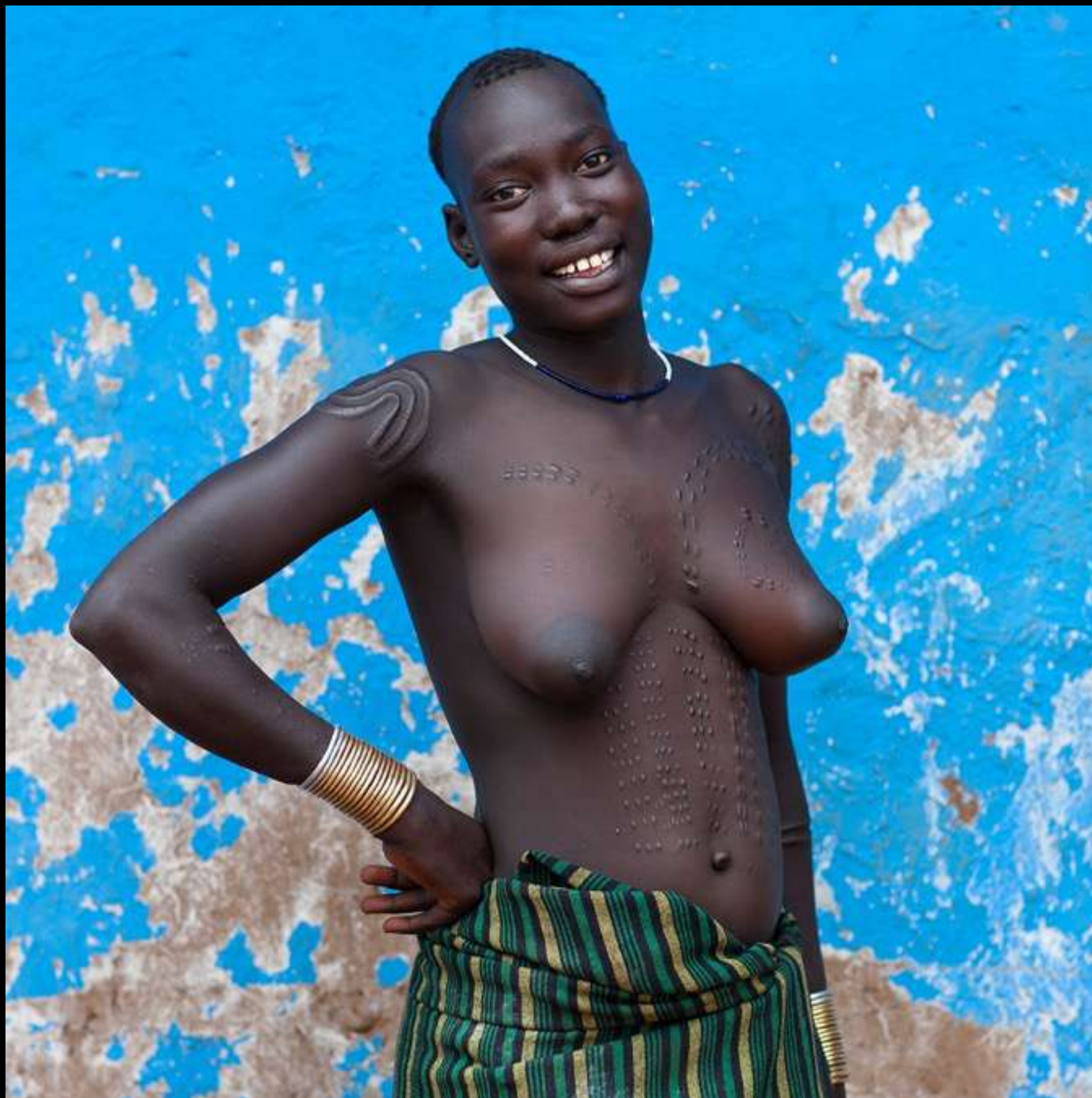
A Surma woman with fresh scarifications on her breast. Infections are common and sometimes turn scarifications into huge scars or even prove deadly for the weakest ones.





On the left: Ana is from the Bodi tribe and lives in Hana Mursi. She now hides the scarifications she got when she was 12, as she is now studying at the police school in the town of Arba Minch. People with scarifications are seen as "primitive" by many urban Ethiopians and suffer from discrimination. On the right: A Bodi tribe teenager etched a heart on her arm to show her love to her boyfriend. She did it by herself using a blade.





Bodi women also bear coil scarifications on their shoulders. It is a very painful process as hot metal is used, like when they brand their cows. Pain seems to be an alien notion around here.





The Afar tribe in Ethiopia bear facial scarifications which patterns are similar to the Peul ones. They also use stones to carve their teeth into a V shape.





Women of the Karrayyu tribe in Ethiopia. The Karrayyu women follow the tradition of bearing scarifications on their cheeks, which makes them look like cats. Men also do this. But teenagers wanting to go to school are increasingly asking to not have these scarifications as they make them too easily recognizable by other tribes or ethnic groups when they travel in the country. As the Karrayyu live near the Afar tribe, these special scarifications allow them to know who is who.







Women of the Menit tribe. They do not use blades to create the scarifications but instead scratch their skin with stones in order to decorate it.





In Tanzania, on the Serengeti Plateau, women of the Datoga tribe bear strange scarifications around their eyes, which are believed to make them more beautiful.





Women of the Mursi tribe. In Ethiopia, scarification served as a symbol of strength, fortitude and courage in both men and women. Scars were used to heighten beauty and admiration.





These parallel scarification lines identify this man as a Nuer from Sudan. This tradition is not followed any more in modern areas as a result of education and the weight of religion. It is also a tribal marker that is too visible in a region that has seen a lot of tensions and deaths.



Dassanech women from the village of Omorate scarify their shoulders to enhance their beauty. They believe that the skin texture of a scarified woman holds sensual appeal for men.







Once married, Toposa women from South Sudan get these impressive geometric scarifications on their belly. They also have scarifications on their face.





Men of the Toposa and Dassanech tribes in Southern Ethiopia follow the same tradition: when they kill a man (which happens a lot as they steal each other's cattle in this region), they get scarifications on their chest and back. They are very proud of killing another man as it means that they are a hero for their community.





Sharing used blades is a huge problem in the tribes. For instance, hepatitis is starting to spread widely in Southern Ethiopia, as many infected workers from other parts of Ethiopia have come to work in the new huge plantations. AIDS also represents a new threat.







eric lafforgue  
[lafforgue@mac.com](mailto:lafforgue@mac.com)  
[www.ericlafforgue.com](http://www.ericlafforgue.com)