



**Proud Ox
ceremony in
Dassanech tribe**



Around the Omo River in the south of Ethiopia, and its fertile lands, now cut off by the Gibbée 3 dam, and siphoned off to irrigate the new giant farms owned by foreign companies, lives the Dassanech tribe.



Dassanech women are famous for their beauty and adornments. In recent years, they use beer and soda bottle caps caps to make some colorful wigs.



The women beauty is contrasted with the simplicity of their houses made from whatever they can find, making them looking like homeless people...



Every man has a gun and a wooden pillow, the two things they never leave home without!



The ceremony starts with dances and gun shots... Real ones!



They start to kill some cows for a giant BBQ, complete with dances and chanting.



The best parts of the cows are kept in the middle of the camp and carefully monitored. Eating meat is a rare treat, since cows, being very expensive, are hardly ever slaughtered.



Then, they put the stomachs of the cows on the ground as everyone gathers round. I think they are going to read the future in the entrails as many tribes do, but no. Instead they all queue, a man opens the stomachs with a giant knife...



Everybody takes some of the contents and rubs it their chest, back, legs, arms, heads, and faces. Some even put the apply it on the back of a friend, like we would do with sunscreen, a very nice gesture in the Dassanech culture.



Some men bring dungs to offer them to friends.



Some kids try to hide in the huts to avoid the ritual!



Even the babies must go thru the ritual.



For us, it is disgusting, but for the Dassanech, taking the content of the stomach and putting it on their bodies is the highest tribute to these animals that they venerate.



The warriors are proud to be covered by the stomach content. Some wear an ostrich feather in a bun they make on their head. It has a special meaning: they have killed a wild animal or a man. There are few animals left in the area...



For the ceremony, the men use to wear the nicest clothes. They love to recycle everything they find. The latest fashion is to use half plastic shoes to make this decoration.



Once everybody has the new "all natural" make up on, the men sit in concentric circles. The center circle is comprised of the chiefs and the elders. The second, the young warriors, and around the periphery, wander the hungry children.



The best BBQ meat is offered to the chiefs and the warriors. Without setting down their Kalashnikovs, everybody eats.





The kids fight to find a good piece of meat, but most of them are just left with the bones.





Everybody returns home, the chief of the village goes back in his hut with a cow leg he'll keep inside!



Text + pics Eric Lafforgue
lafforgue@mac.com