

ETHIOPIA

Tribes sacrificed in the name of Economy

Ethiopia is building one of the most powerful hydroelectric dams in Africa: the Gibbe 3. According to the government, it will double the country's energy capacity. The water from dam will be stocked in a giant reservoir which will be used to irrigate to plantations owned by foreign companies (Saudis, Malaysians, Indians...) who all rent land at the paltry cost of one euro per hectare a year, and who export the crops. The dam will also change the lives of all of the 200000 inhabitants, considered as subhuman by the capitol, and who all totally depend on the river Omo.

The government plans to move them all to new villages, where they are promised access to health and education. These tribes, who've lived forever from agriculture and livestock, are seeing their ecosystem totally thrown into disarray. The UN has requested that all construction be ceased, but nothing is being done. The coup de grâce occurred on the 16th of July: the world bank and other institutions accepted to finance an electricity network linked to the dam which will hook up the Kenyan energy grid to the power generated by the Ethiopian dam.

During my 4500km journey, I met with the most menaced tribes: Surma, Mursi, Bodi and Dassanech. All of them live within a two-day drive of Addis Abeba, near the borders with Kenya and Sudan.

They all received the same notice from the government: leave your land, go to the new villages and change your lifestyle. No more ritual scarification, Dongas (very violent stick fights), discs in women's lips...

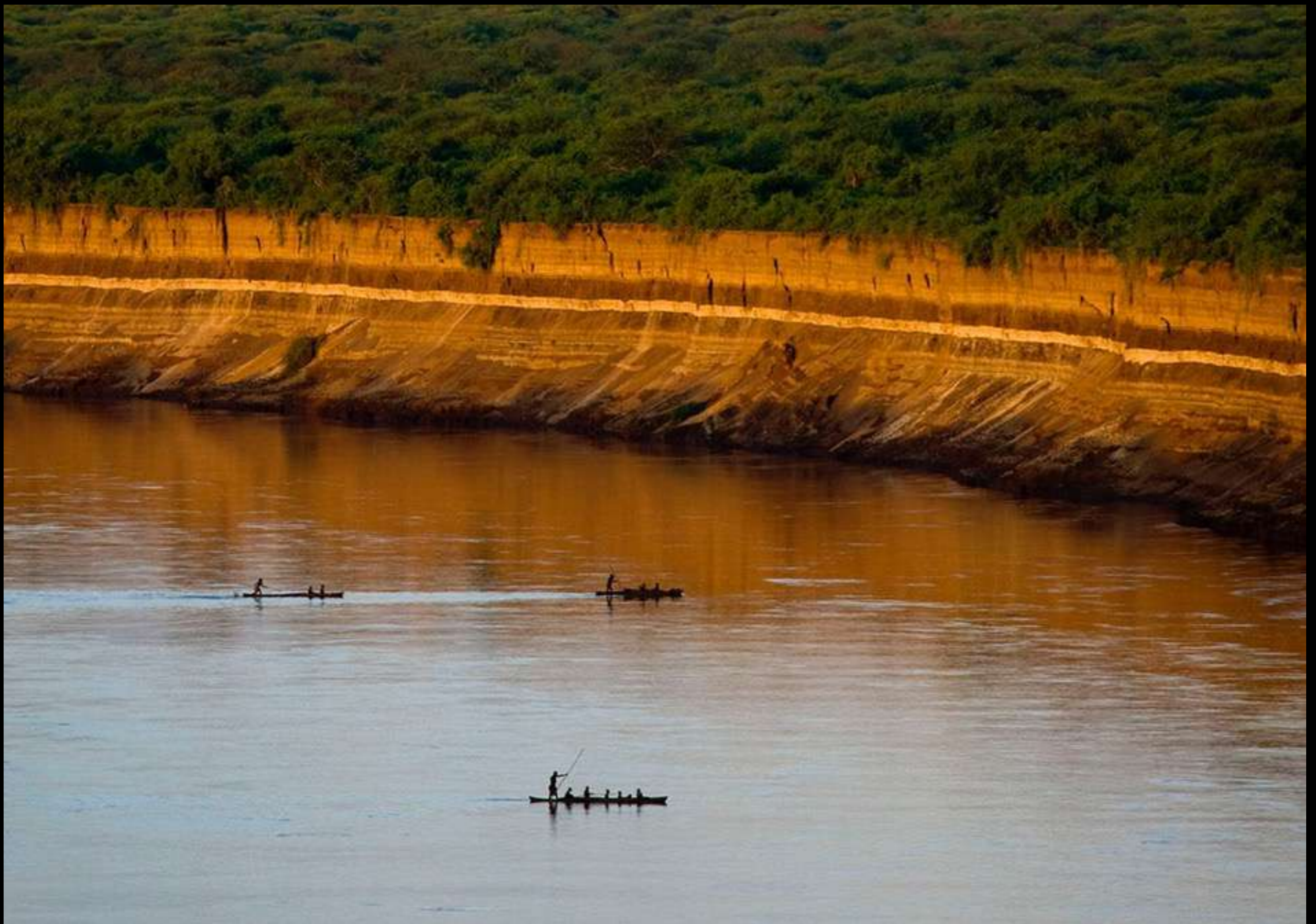
Some started to move, under the constraint of 2000 soldiers sent into the south, others resisted using the little means they had.

In Ethiopia, everyone lives in fear. Spy software is in full use to monitor telephone conversations and emails, and a law was passed that can imprison anyone for 15 years simply for using Skype.

The only ones who are not afraid of talking about the government are the tribes: they have nothing to lose, no one is helping them, and so they cry out in distress.

In only a few weeks, the repression stepped up a notch: the military killed 50 Sumas in Maji, then 11 in Dima, leaving their bodies to be eaten by hyenas, and last week, women and children were killed near the Malaysian plantation in Koka.

Thanks to my guide, who worked for 10 years with the tribes and who has seen the leaders and students of the revolution grow up, I have been able to bring back original photos: giant pumps on the Omo, the inside of the Koka plantation, its manager, and interviews with injured people, fleeing rebels, plantation workers, doctors...



The Omo River and its fertile lands, now cut off by the Gibbé3 dam, and siphoned off to irrigate the new giant farms owned by foreign companies. The 200000 inhabitants of the southern tribes are considered «behind the times » by Addis. They are moved by force, oppressed, put in jail, and some are even killed. 50 deaths occurred in Maji, 11 in Dima, 5 in Koka the last few weeks, including women and children.



Koka plantation in near Kibish on the east side of the Omo, run by a Malaysian company. The lands are confiscated and rented out for 1 euro per hectare for a year to Lim Slow Jin company. The workers are penniless.



The malaysian manager of Koka plantation in Kibish.

The manager of the plantation is the last foreigner to stay, all the other Malaysian workers have left, and the Suris warriors have surrendered, fearing attacks.

The Suris are angry at the plantation, as their cattle cannot cross the land anymore:

«Each family owns 50 cows; where can we go now to feed them?»

The trucks destroy the roads, and nothing is done for them: no new schools, no new health centers, no water system...We do everything by ourselves, we do not have any help».

A few Suri people work at the plantation, they earn 30 euros a month. Most of them work to buy cows that they won't be able to keep in the future, as there is less and less land to graze...



Suri kids at the entrance of of Koka plantation



July 2012: the government gave a big party for the Suris under the control of the army in Kibish. 2000 soldiers are in the area.

The local authorities, in front of the cameras of Ethiopian TV, organized a dance competition to show the country that everything was under control.

The first prize was 12 eggs. Suris never eat eggs. A few days later, 4 leaders were sent to jail for no reason in Tolum, where hundreds of Suris are detained. Nobody can visit them, and when they die the bodies are not returned to the families.



Since July 20, Suris are not allowed to sell their gold in Dima, and cannot access some areas of their own territory to dig for gold.



"I was going to my field when the military shot at me. I got a bullet in the knee. The military, they shoot, they kill without any reason. More than 11 people were killed on this day in Dima. They threw 4 bodies over a bridge and they were eaten by hyenas." A Suri man, July 2012.



The Suri people are the last to have kept their guns. They do not want to give them to the government. They claim that if they give away their guns, the Toposa tribes from south Sudan and Turkana tribes from Kenya, who are only few kilometers away, will attack them and steal their cows, which are their only treasure.



The army is looking for Welebiko, who is the main leader of the Suri tribe, the most famous rebel in the Omo valley. He lives in the bush, and is being pursued by the police. He is educated and is one of the few who claims that the sale of the lands is a part of a massive corruption system in Ethiopia.

«The government sees us as foreigners; they do not see us as human beings. But we are not beggars: we need our cows, we drink the milk and the blood; it is enough for us to feed ourselves.»

Elite shooters were sent by Ethiopian government at the end of July to catch him.

“They do not want to catch me, they just want to kill me”.



Menit men near the Toun village, in the new settlement. The government has taken their land, and they have already moved. Nobody will speak because they are afraid of the police around.



At Mago Park, a UNESCO site, on Mursi territory the bulldozers are hard at work.

Kibo, a mursi student:

«We are very sad, families had to leave their homes, the elders cannot walk, they suffer a lot. Kids do not have enough milk to drink. We do not suffer from hunger yet, but we have less and less milk and maize. Without good grass for our cows, we are nothing. The military chase us and we must find shelter in the forest, and build our houses by ourselves, where they ask us to stay. How will we live this way? Some of us are students who have access to the Internet at the university, and we have made facebook page, but we do not have any support»



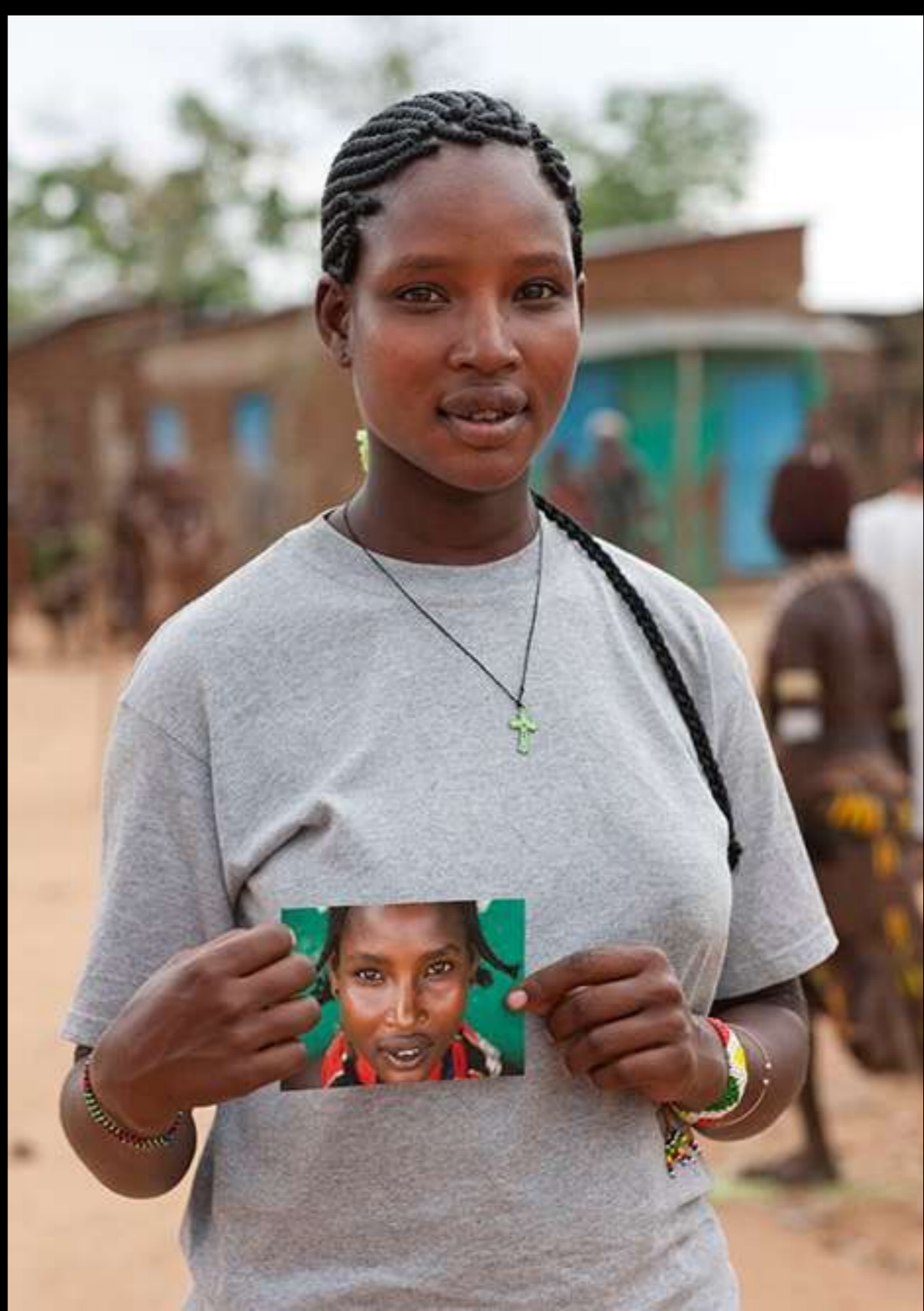
In Hana Mursi, bulldozers on the roads. Bodis tribe warriors had to give their guns to the Police, so they go out with their sticks and shields. *"My father was born here, he died here, and we do not want to move into settlements. If they force us, it will be war. I do not fear the government or Police because it is my home."*



To celebrate their annual feast, the Bodis drink blood and milk every morning. They do not want to give up their traditions and their land for the new sugar cane plantations, and live in the settlements the government had planned. If the Konso attempt to set foot on their land with the support of the government, clashes will erupt say the Bodi elders.



Most of the tribes have given their guns to the government, so many use wood guns as replicas, to fool their enemies who might attack them for their cattle. An embarrassment for these warriors.



Miss Anna (Bodi tribe) has left the village and is studying to be a policeman. Then she'll come back to Hana Mursi. It's a way for the government to have better control over the local population, as tribes do not obey.
Miss Toro (a Hamar from Turmi, holding a picture of herself taken 2 years previously) is now Christian, settled, and educated



Ethiopian government is taking over and inciting girls to give up tribal customs such as scarification and lip plates. Without labret, a girl will be sold less for wedding (25 cows + 1 kalachnikov)



Only 1000 tribal people live in Hana Mursi. The government plans to settle 300 000 people from all over Ethiopia over the next few years into the area.

Along with the workers and soldiers, AIDS and Hepatitis B are coming too.

A local nurse said that he started to test the Bodis and found very high levels of Hepatitis B. The tribes don't use condoms. Mursi and Suris are used to fighting in traditional stick fights, and the winners get to choose girls. Free sex is common before weddings.



The giant pump in Omorate, set up by German company. The environing Dassanech tribe had to leave, only an old chief and his family remains, in the noisy atmosphere.



Irrigation system in the fields around Omorate



The Dassanech people start to be moved from their lands in the Omorate area. The place is on the Omo River, where oil has also been found.

Mid July, the Dassanech killed a woman from Arba Mich to warn the government that they will resist being moved to a settlement.

The war with the Turkana tribe from Kenya is also a threat.

«I was born here on the banks of the Omo River. My father was not rich so he settled here. I had a big farm before they took my land to put in a giant pump. They took everything; I just have a little piece of land to live on with my 34 children. I want to live in peace. I do not attack them, but they have taken all I had, what can I do?»



The bridge that will soon link both banks of the Omo River in Omorate, which will allow trucks to cross over. Up until now, crossing the rivers had to be done on tree barks... Giant infrastructures are underway for the Omo valley.



At the end of the line, the river Omo drying affects another country out: the north of Kenya. 300000 pastors. An El Molo village on the Turkana Lake where the Omo River flows to, and a Turkana chief.



The World Bank approved on July 12, 2012, a US\$684 million loan, for a 1000-kilometer transmission line that would supply power to Kenya from Ethiopia's controversial Gibe III dam.

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VALUE YOUR LIFE !!



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