



FIGHTING FOR BEADS!

SAMBURU AND RENDILLE PASSION
FOR BEADS ORNAMENTS IN KENYA.

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Samburu and Rendille live in north Kenya, they are both pastoralists and semi nomadics. They look very close to each others, only the language is different. They have in common the passion for beaded jewelry.

Beaded adornments are worn mainly for their beauty, but it also can tell about relationships or special events.

It is not only tradition, but a sophisticated and evolving fashion!



From their young age, Samburu girls are offered strings of beads by their fathers. The first layers of necklaces are usually red, as it means the girl is engaged. It can be at a very early age...



Before getting married, teenagers enjoy a degree of sexual freedom. You can spot them with the heavy beaded necklaces , given to them by their boyfriend, a Moran (warrior) usually from her clan or even her family.



The girls become nekarai: steady girlfriends and sexual partners. At this occasion, her parents must build her a house, where the Moran is allowed to engage in sexual activity with her.



Lariyon is 15: « once married, i will have to remove the giant necklace offered by my boyfriend, and give it back to him, and i 'll need to forget him. As my parents have already chosen another man for me, from another clan »

The price of the necklaces can be up to 100 us dollars, and must be purchased from Nairobi, a huge amount for those nomads. Namusungu is 18, he is Samburu and lives in Ngurunit, he has been circumcised one year ago, and is a Moran:
« to show my love to my girlfriend, I need to buy her a huge necklace, but the priced is too high for me, so I have to conduct a raid with my warrior friends in the neighbouring tribes to steal them some cows. Then I'll sell the cows to get some money ».





Elisabeth is 16, she lives in Ngurunit: « Teachers at school try to make us stop wearing beads in order to stop the cattle raids, but i like to wear the beads for our ceremonies! »...



The neck of the girls and their necklaces are smeared with red ochra to avoid skin scratching





This woman wears the Nkaiweli on her left ear: a special earring that means she has already 2 or 3 of her sons being circumcised.



The women wear a brass earring to indicate they are married.



The women wear a lot of decoration on the head, made from Entai (buttons), from Ntarangrang (sequins) and Sayen (beads). All those decorations are expensive and most of the times, they exchange goats against them. The beads will show status and wealth.



The beads also refer to different periods of importance in the women life, as special patterns are used for special events. A necklace can be read as a history of their lives, it also can be seen as a diary.



Only in Rendille tribe, the women wear the famous Mpooro Engorio, the wedding necklace, also worn for ceremonies. It is made of giraffe or elephants tail hair , special beads that were formerly found in Ethiopia, and that are becoming very rare.



The Mpooro Engorio necklace has become rare as the giraffe and elephants have nearly disappeared from the region, and they are also protected from hunting.

The curios shops owners also chase those artifacts to sell them to tourists. Nowadays, doum palm fronds fibres are used instead of animal hair.

Mariam: « Many people tried to buy my Mpooro Engorio necklace but I want to keep it, this is the only one remaining in my village and even for 200 euros I won't sell it! It may also bring bad luck to me if I sell it»

A hair style in the form of an elegant crest (doko) is worn by Rendille women whose first-born is a son and they keep it until the death of the son or of the father.

In the old times, the doko was made with the own hair of the woman, so they could not remove it. Nowadays they wear an removable version of the Doko, made of weaving, red ochra, and butter.





Women like to wear an cross shaped ornament on the top of their head



The cross has no religious significance, even if most of them are now christians.



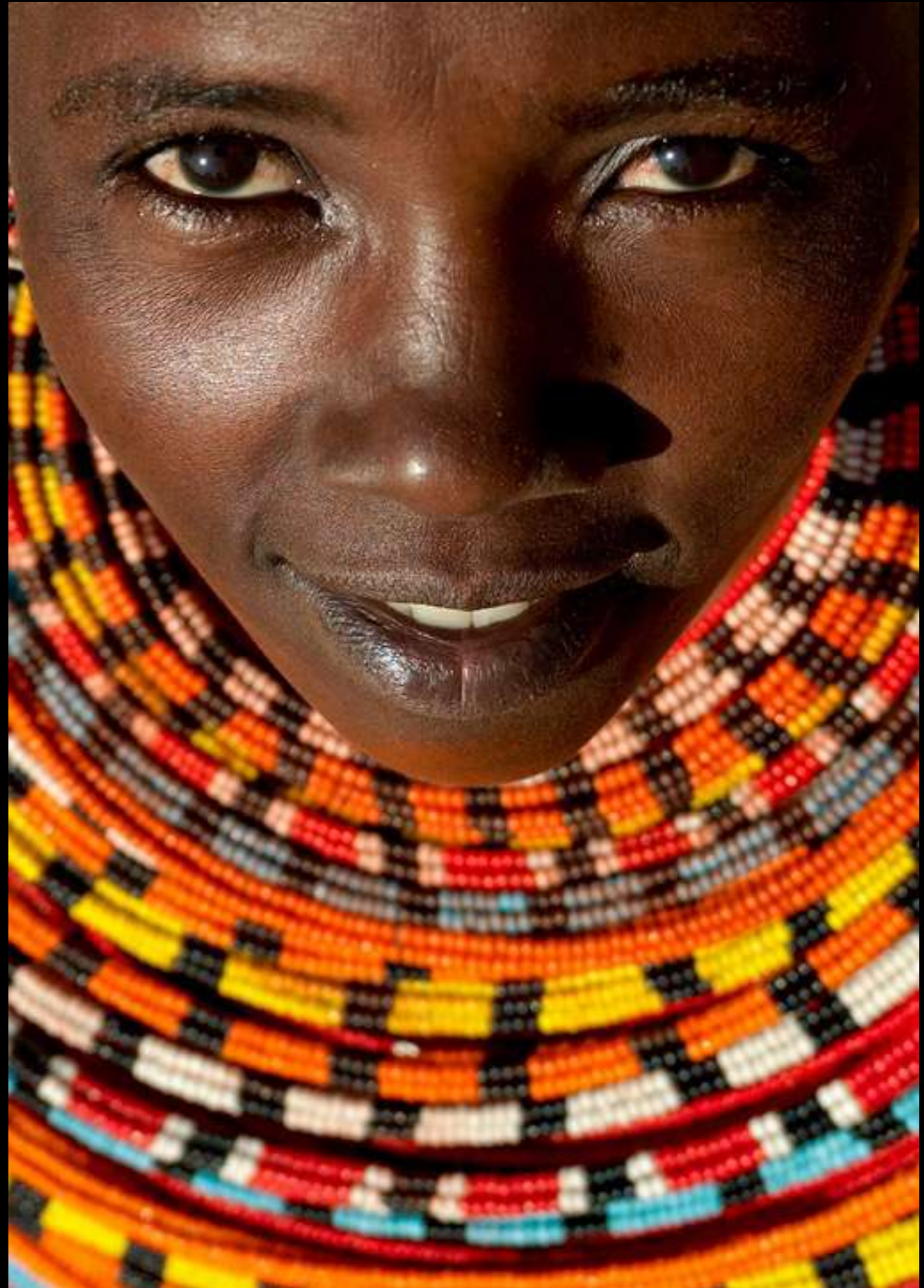
Marnay bracelets are worn by everybody : adults people... Made of beads and inner tubes !



Brass ankles: when they wear just one, it is called Surutei, when they wear many, it is called Surutia.



This strange earring is called Lodin, or Nshidai.



Each color has a meaning: white is purity and health because it represents milk which comes from a cow , black is hardship, yellow and orange melted are for hospitality because it is the color of the animal skins on guest beds, red signifies danger, bravery and unity.





Necklaces can even have magic powers : If a woman is sterile, she must see a witch doctor who will give her a collar of pearls. She must go to the first born man of a house, tie him with the necklace, and then leave with it. 3 months later, she may be pregnant. On the other hand, the man that she tied up with the necklace will become crazy or sick (the fortune of one will be the misfortune of the other).



Beads are everywhere, it is a real evolving fashion that mixes with modern stuff like watches, phones...





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Even the remote tribes are touched by chinese flood: few years ago, the plastic flowers have become part of the daily decoration on young people!



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