

Synopsis :

FACELESS

A photographic essay
Mylène ZIZZO

Ethiopia - 2013

Between March and May 2013, I followed the work of « Project Harar » in Ethiopia.

« Project Harar » is an English association which organises missions in Africa to operate on people affected by the noma disease, as well as those with tumours or facial deformations such as cleft palette. Noma disease is closely linked to poverty and malnutrition. It generates atrocious disfiguration, attacking both the soft tissue and bones of the face, mainly in subjects who are very young. If they are not treated as soon as the first symptoms appear, there is an 80% chance of death; at best, they will bear physical and psychological scars for life.

Even now too many people are still unaware of this terrible affliction and there are very few associations helping its victims.

My principal discipline is portrait photography, but clearly the subject is not limited to the portrait alone. I feel that I have to highlight the necessity and urgency of bringing care to these people, who, despite living in a poor environment, may just be able to escape the destiny that this handicapping and traumatising disease has mapped out for them.

I also wanted to showcase the skill of the « men in green » in the operating theatre, in order to cast their surgical corrective action in a more « sacred » light.

We're not talking about cosmetic surgery here. As someone once told me: *"its so great just to find yourself with something that looks vaguely like a nose, to be able to unlock your teeth, open your mouth...to such an extent that many don't even come back at the time of the following mission, several months afterwards.* Most of them will however be able to return to their village with a new outlook on life, as at last they are looked upon differently.

The people shown in this series are either miraculous survivors of the noma disease, or people affected by other facial diseases.

I bear witness to their courage in « facing up » to their illness and to the world.

Mylène ZIZZO