

Two women photographers who have roamed Africa's remotest parts for four decades have published perhaps their most stunning book yet, capturing seldom-seen dances and ceremonies





## Where dance was born

By NADINE DREVER

mind blooking photographs and accompanying text that took in the course of their work the two have faced political upheavals, closed frontiers, severe droughts and threats to their lives. They once organised a mule train of 16 animals for a trip to Surmaland in Ethiopia, travelling up and down 3,000m-high mountains near the border of Sudan for six days. "When we arrived in the first remote village, the women came out to mose its and some of them had never seen a white woman. We were deeply touched by how warmly they greeted us."

This trip had af tripkening climax. At the end of their five-week stay, they learnt of a plan to ambush their mule train. "We had broken a cardinal rule in Surma society —all Surma must be treated equally—and we had shigled out three villages of 20 people to work with, out of a total population of 14,000."

So their guide invited all the Surma chiefs to a goat roost at their camp and the photographers asked them at the end of the feast if they would do the women the honour of escorting them out of the region—at 3 am in the morning. The chiefs agreed. "At surnise we spotted Surma warriors hidden high up in the branches of trees pointing their skabsinkov rifes at us. But they were so awed by this procession of chiefs that they did not frie and we reached the border in safety."

The Suba kingdom in the Democratic Republic of Congo—famous for its carving traditions—invited them to record ceremonies that were normally held in secrecy and had not been photographed since the 1970s.

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how warmly they greeted us

After three weeks on this assignment they were told, due to elections in the country, that there could be langer at the airport in Kinshasa and when had to get out quickly.

"We got back to Kinshasa and when we were en route to the airport we got aught in a traffic jarn and reciple started going crazy." Beckwish said. "So we got out of the cart with our luggage and started walking, fraditional women came around us to protect us from bandis on the road. We valked out of the traffic jarn and then flagged down a vehicle to get us to the terminal."

They always try to learn at least 50 words of the local dialect. "We do this by writing the words on our tands so that we can look at people and kind of glance down at our hand and peek, and feel very comfortable in conversing with them. Even if the conversation is very simple. It starts on the hand and the words go down he arm as the days progress."

Some of the ceremonies they witnessed have never been photographe before and the two photographers instanted that 40% of these trituals now only exist in the pages of their books. "Over the years, we have had to go further and deeper into Alfrea to find ceremonies that were really still littact."

Beckwith and fisher adways try to show their images to the people they photograph. "The problem with peting photographs back into Sudan is that three was a civil war for 30 years. Carol and I had done a very highout with the Dinta people in Sudan, but we coulding get back. This read an an interview once." Once the orders opened we decided to go back in again, We went down to the New awayminards, and we found all the orders opened we decided to go back in gain, We went down to the New awayminards, and we found all the orders opened we decided to go back in again, We went down to the New awayminards, and we found all the words of the proper in Sudan, but we could be a starting and the was so movel.

They have learnt also on their travels the benefit of knowledge being passed from one generation to the text, the importance of elders

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RAFFIA HARVEST MASK, BURKINA FASO People in millet-stalk masks from the village of Balavé dance to the accompaniment of rapid drumming.

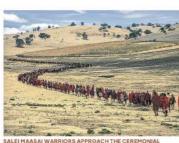
## YORUBA VOODOO MASK, BURKINA FASO This spinning sangbetu mask is assigned guardians who guide it around the village. According to legend there is no one inside the whirling mask except hight spirits. Those wearing the masks served as night watchmen and traditionally acted as an unofficial police force, wandering the





WARRIOR OF THE
NYANCE NYANG
SOCIETY CAMEROON
Nyang Nyang society
members of the Fongou
kingdom blacket their
bodies with charcoal and
Ol Once masked in this
guise they channel
ancestral forces to terrify
the enemy and banish evil
pairits. They also carry the
blackened homs of the
forcest antelope, the bongo,
to protect the Cameroon
royal kingdom.

## 'We have had to go deeper into Africa'



SALEI MAASAI WARRIORS APPROACH THE CEREMONIAL
MANYATTA, TANZANIA Salei Maasai warriors arrive at the 'eunoto'
ceremony to undergo their passage to elderhood.





WODAABE MAN PREPARING FOR CHARM DANCE, NIGER A
Wodaabe man wraps a 4m turban on his head in preparation for the
yaake dance, a competition of charm and personality. He applies pale
yellow powder to lighten the face; borders of black kohl to highlight th
whiteness of the teeth and eyes; and a painted line from forehead to
chin to elongate the noss. These applications are believed to enhance



African Twilght, The Vanishing Rituals and Geremonies of the African Continen is published by Rizzoll and can be purchased on Amazonicom. An exhibition of thiphotographs is on at THK Gallery in Cape Town until February 28. Carol Beckelin.