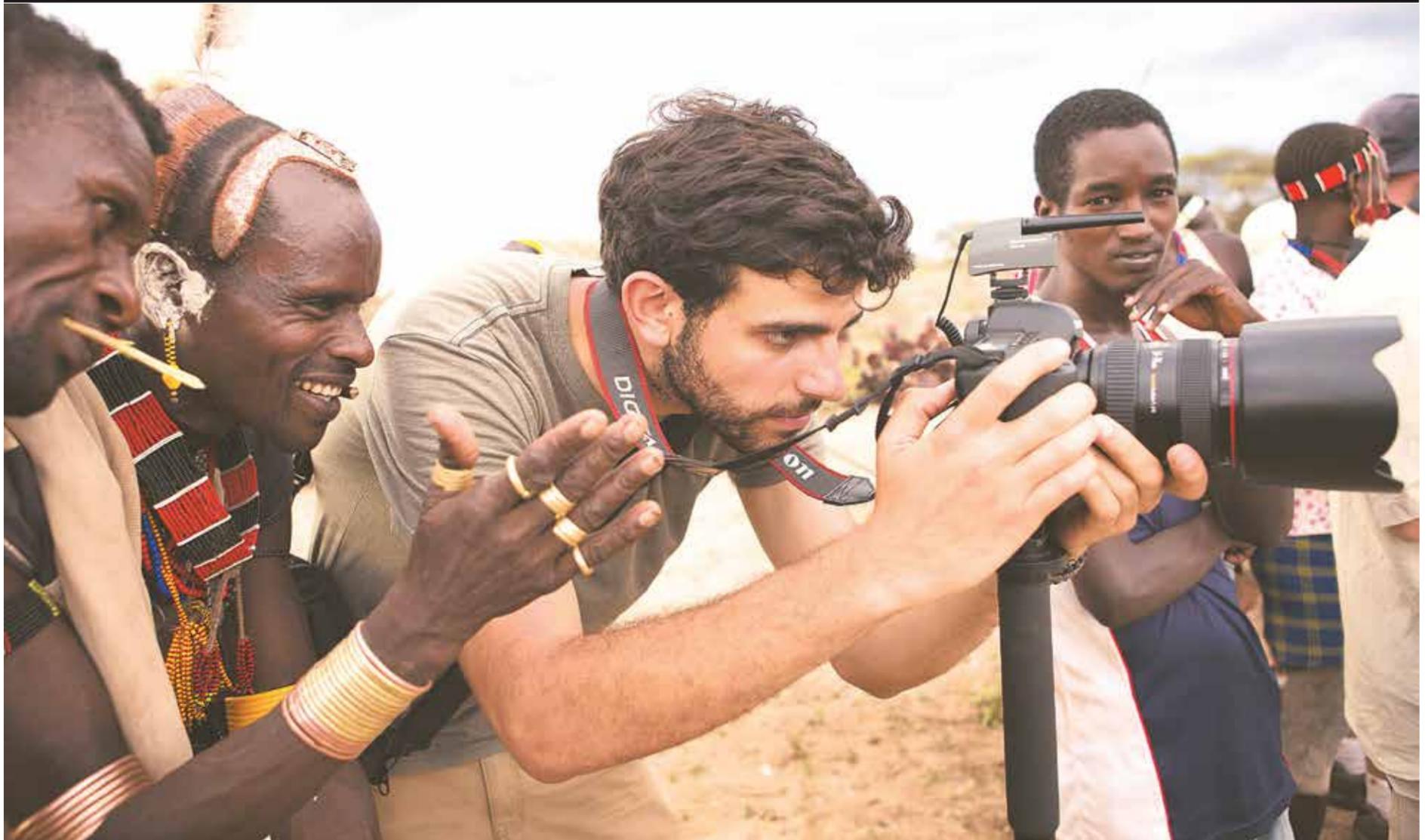


44 **BIG INTERVIEW** By Melissa Hekkers

Eric Lafforgue photographed Constantine Savvides (above) taking photos at a Hamer Bulljumping ceremony near Turmi, Ethiopia. At this coming-of-age event, a man must jump across the backs of lined up bulls four times without falling in order to be eligible for marriage.

Life at 1/100th of a second

In search of adventure, Constantine James Savvides found his calling and a new direction in life following a chance meeting when writing a paper on Somali piracy in Africa

As a 22-year-old undergraduate student, American-Cypriot Constantine James Savvides, with a passion for photography and an unquenchable desire for adventure, dropped everything and grasped the opportunity of a lifetime to accompany internationally acclaimed French travelling photographer, Eric Lafforgue on his assignment through Africa.

Lafforgue's work can be found in many publications, both printed and online, including *The National Geographic*, *Geo*, *The CNN Traveller*, *BBC*, and *The Blue Planet* who use his images to illustrate the people of North Korea, Papua New Guinea, the tribes of Ethiopia, Somaliland, Djibouti, and United Arab Emirates to name a few.

His images showcase people, one of the most important elements of a country, and it's clear that Lafforgue approaches this, as mentioned on his official webpage, "through the perception of an ethnologist and the heart of an artist, prevailing regions or populations in danger and less usually visited countries."

In 2011, both Lafforgue and Savvides found themselves in the small Muslim town of Lamu, in Kenya, where each, on different ventures at the time, were attending the Mawlid Festival – Prophet Mohammed's birthday. Lafforgue was continuing his journey into photography which began in 2006. In contrast, Savvides had just discovered his passion for photography, a realisation that propelled him to travel and seek new adventures.

"I did my undergraduate studies in International Relations and Global Business at the University of Southern California. In my junior year, I had an awakening that impelled me to really engage in life, to live it to the absolute fullest.

"I realised that I was happiest when I was taking

risks, doing things I was terrified of, things I was uncomfortable with, things I had never thought of doing before.

"I began to see a world where the opportunity for adventure was and I decided to dedicate my life to seizing that opportunity," recalls Savvides.

Savvides took an intensive course at the London School of Photography in the UK where he learned the fundamentals of the art form, only to return to California determined to do his final semester of University abroad.

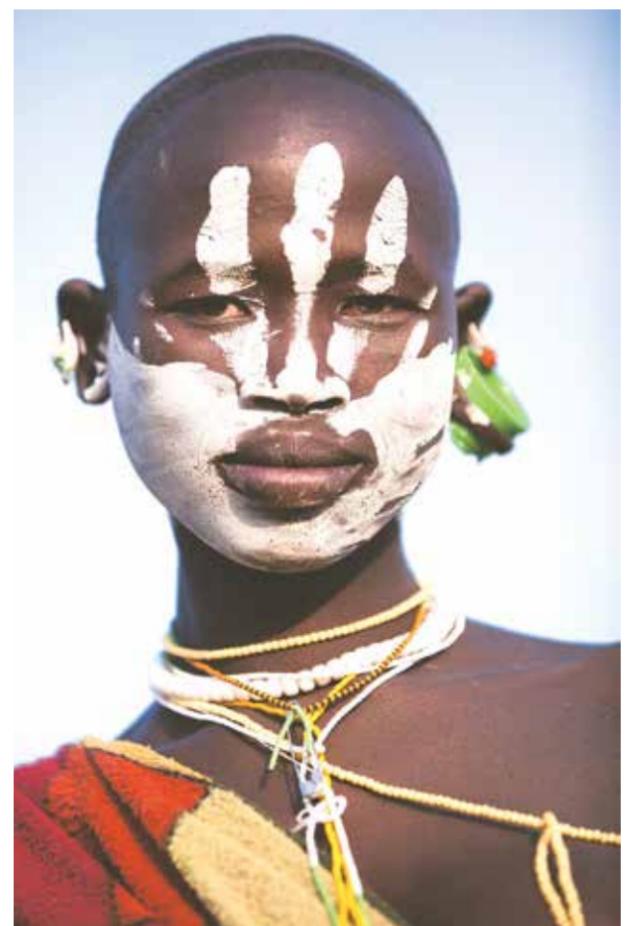
"I looked for the most exotic programme my school offered and found one where I would get to explore Kenya and Tanzania, learn Swahili, and write a research paper on a subject of my choice," Savvides told *The Cyprus Weekly*. His research paper, based on Somali piracy, was the initial spark between himself and Lafforgue.

Having accidentally bumped into Lafforgue at the festival in Lamu and after having found out who he was, Savvides' future was about to take a new direction. "We arranged to meet for lunch the next day so I could pick his brain about photography and the photojournalism business. That night, I looked up his work and was completely amazed. His work was so stunning.

"This was the photographer I wanted to be. I couldn't believe that someone of his stature would be kind enough to sit and share his trade secrets with a complete stranger.

"The next day our short lunch turned into a three-hour discussion.

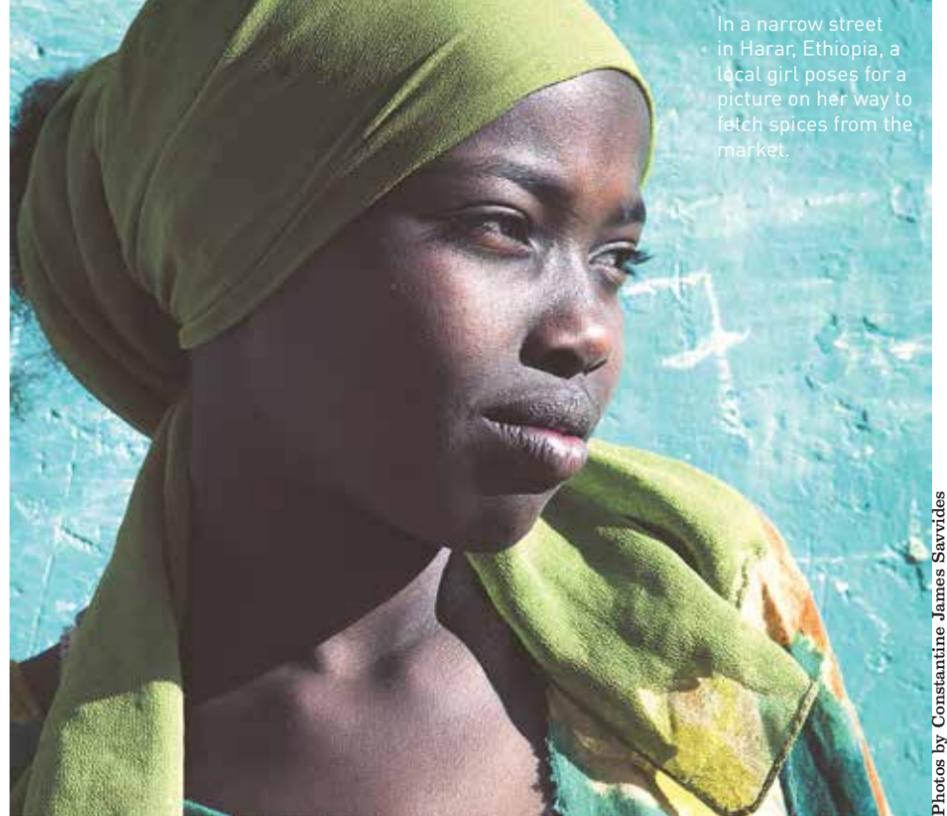
"I told him about the research I was doing on Somali piracy and how I wanted to go to Somaliland to interview some of the captured pirates.



The Surma women are known worldwide for their distinctive lip plates. To the chagrin of the older generation, most young girls shy away from this painful accessory and choose to demonstrate their beauty in alternative ways. Here, one such girl in Tulgit, Ethiopia, has painted a beautiful handprint decoration on her face.



A Surma warrior in Kibish, Ethiopia, remains armed and ready for battle. The ongoing conflict with the government has escalated in recent months with the seizure of 100 hectares of tribal land and subsequent construction of a Malaysian palm oil plantation. The tribal resistance movement has proven itself willing to protect its territory by any means necessary. Hundreds have already been killed in violent clashes.



In a narrow street in Harar, Ethiopia, a local girl poses for a picture on her way to fetch spices from the market.

Photos by Constantine James Savvides

“He explained that Somalia was the only place in the Horn of Africa he had never been to. We decided to team up and the rest is history.”

Although photography was always something Savvides happily indulged in, he never really thought that he would pursue it as a form of art. “For me, photography has always been more a means than an end – it’s simply the best way to engage in adventure,” he says. And although he has predominantly published licensed photos in different entities and sold prints to private collectors, unlike his mentor, Savvides was sceptical about what the future would hold if he continued in the medium.

“I always thought doing your art for a living was a dangerous thing. When I played music I saw so many talented musicians forced to play what others wanted them to play and their passion slowly disappeared. I never wanted that to happen with my photography. But, as my Pappous (grandfather) used to say, ‘Do what you love and you’ll never work a day in your life.’ He loved photography and he was at a level where no-one would question him and business would thrive. Very few reach that point.”

It’s evident that part of Savvides’ passion for photography derives from his grandfather. Constantine Savvides, who Savvides is named after, was a well-known photographer in Nicosia who was completely self-taught and mastered all aspects of the art and pushed its boundaries.

My favourite smell in the world since I was a child is the smell of his darkroom, which was attached to his kitchen.

“Today, the smell is gone... It was almost as if he bequeathed his passion for photography to me. I regret that this was something we could never share together... I inherited some of his old Rolleiflex cameras and took it upon myself to learn how to use them. Photography, in part, is my way of honouring him.”

His father, Marios, was also a photographer when he first moved to the states in the 1980s and studied at Cal Arts.

Marios had his father as a mentor. “He learned from assisting his father at weddings since he was a boy,” explained Savvides.

As Savvides follows in the footsteps of his mentor, travelling and spending a great deal of time in unfamiliar places, you might expect that it would be tricky trying to describe his personal enrichment through these unique experiences.

Yet Savvides seems to handle all of this with relative ease. “One of the first things I remarked about Eric is his way of treating the world like his own personal photo studio.

“Without hesitation, he will approach a tribal warrior known for having killed many in battle and have the man laughing and exposing his soul to a camera in less than a minute.

“It’s this infectious openness and fearlessness that make his photos so powerful – in addition to having a highly developed sense of aesthetics of course.”

Eric is also responsible for Savvides’ interest in endangered cultures.

“The developing world has such a wealth of diversity and uniqueness, and I’m afraid this is something we

are slowly losing. Take the tribes in Ethiopia’s Omo Valley for example.

“It’s one of the world’s most isolated places and yet mainstream culture is having a more profound effect on them than ever before.

“People are giving up their traditional garments for T-shirts and jeans, the popularity of practices like scarification and adornments like lip plates has declined sharply among the younger generation. Ancestral lands that the pastoralists depend on are being leased to foreign corporations, forcing the tribes into villages.

“All over the world we are seeing the same trend: when national interests conflict with human interests, national interests prevail. In ten years, London, Paris and Rome will still be London, Paris, and Rome, but with the current rate of “development” who knows where these unique cultures will be.”

Clearly Savvides takes the ‘realities’ of life today to heart, which is why his assignment makes all the more sense.

“If we, as a global community, fail to protect the wealth of cultural diversity that exists today, I hope that my photos will in some ways preserve it.”

More information about Constantine James Savvides can be found on www.constantine-james.com Eric Lafforgue’s official webpage is www.ericlafforgue.com

**Part of the quote used for the title of this piece is by photographer Marc Riboud*



The gibbous moon rises over Mount Kilimanjaro as night falls on the silhouetted senecia trees below.



Somali Girl