

Magazine _____ EXCLUSIF

KWACAKWORDO :

**“Dans le milieu du désert les Anyuaks
ont créé un centre d’humanité”**

Au Sud-Soudan, Conradin Perner (KWACAKWORDO) a vécu de longues années avec le peuple Anuyak et leur roi. Les Anuyaks font partie du peuple Nilote, dont les frères les plus connus sont les tribus Dinka, Nuer et Shilluk. Ils vivent dans d’inaccessibles marais du Sud-Soudan. ils sont beaux et fiers, étranges et apparemment arrogants. Mais plus que tout, ils ont une haute opinion de la personne humaine. Ces quinze années de recherche avec pour résultat un travail remarquable, font de Conradin Perner le plus grand anthropologue de la question. En Suisse, le premier volume - il y en aura huit - “The Sphere of Spirituality” vient d’être édité. L’originalité du travail de l’auteur dépasse l’intérêt des spécialistes ou des scientifiques en la matière, puisque c’est de la “nature humaine” qu’il s’agit. “... malgré les difficultés, les Anyuaks prétendent vivre dans le meilleur des mondes, car organisant leur vie selon leurs croyances, ils vivent avec dignité et fierté, là où d’autres peuples auraient perdus tout courage et tout espoir.”

En exclusivité Conradin Perner nous livre ses réflexions et répond à notre interview. Un message d’espoir.

PHOTOS & INTERVIEW : (C) Alexis DUCLOS / GAMMA

Conradin PERNER (KWACAKWORO)

Ethnologue, spécialiste de la tribu des "Anyuaks"

Conradin Perner (Kwacakworo) est né à Davos en Suisse, il suit des études de comparatistique à Aix-en-Provence, Uppasala et Zurich avant de rédiger une thèse sur Gunnar Ekelöf et Stéphane Mallarmé et d'enseigner à l'Université de Kisangani (Zaire) puis à celle de Khartoum (Soudan). De 1976 à 1979, il vit aux côtés des Anyuaks dans le sud du Soudan. Il leur rendra ensuite visite tous les ans jusqu'en 1984, date à laquelle a éclaté la guerre civile.

Le Comité International de la Croix Rouge a régulièrement fait appel Conradin Perner pour des missions au Bangladesh, au Vietnam, en Inde et au Soudan (1989-1993). Il est actuellement conseiller auprès de l'Unicef pour le Sud-Soudan.

Conradin Perner est régulièrement invité par l'Université de Nanterre et par la Sorbonne et donne de nombreuses conférences dans d'autres universités européennes. Outre la publication de nombreux articles, il a également publié un dictionnaire doublé d'une grammaire Anyuak (quatre volumes publiés par HRAF. New Haven) et a constitué une vaste collection d'objets Anyuak conservée au Musée d'Ethnographie de Genève).

Les Anyuak font partie des peuples Nilotiques et font partie du même groupe que les tribus Dinka, Nuer et Shilluk. Ces noirs, sont des gens d'une grande beauté, un peuple fier qui vit dans les marais inaccessibles du Sud-Soudan. Ils sont connus pour leur amour du bétail et plus encore pour leur extrême timidité. Les Nilotes mesurent tous au moins un mètre quatre-vingt et sont encore plus inaccessibles que la région où ils vivent, ils sont distants, inapprochables et extrêmement suspicieux. Ils paraissent d'autant plus grands qu'ils ont l'habitude de se tenir la tête légèrement en arrière de façon à regarder le monde et les gens de haut. Même les enfants adoptent cette posture que les étrangers prennent pour de l'arrogance. De même, cette façon qu'ils ont de se tenir tout droits et la démarche traînante des Nilotes est mal perçue par les Européens qui y voient dédain et fierté. Les visiteurs étrangers sont frappés, voire irrités, de voir ces gens vivant entièrement nus au fond d'une savane oubliée, qui ne savent ni lire ni écrire, et n'ont apparemment développé aucune forme d'art, considérer avec condescendance les avancées de la civilisation Arabe et Occidentale qu'ils considèrent comme totalement inutiles. Il n'est pas vraiment plaisant de réaliser que notre propre vanité n'a aucun effet sur ces gens qui nous regardent ébahis et parfois même avec un dégoût flagrant : ils semblent voir au travers de tous nos vêtements, nos idées et notre imagination comme s'ils ne représentaient absolument rien.

Sur quoi peut donc reposer cette réserve qu'affichent les Nilotes, cette supériorité apparente, cette fierté effrontée - et pourquoi cette attitude nous dérange-t-elle ? Pourquoi prenons-nous cette négation de notre propre identité tellement à cœur ? Il y a-t-il d'autres valeurs que le savoir, la richesse matérielle, l'art et l'imagination, les vêtements et la beauté, la religion et le pouvoir, la puissance militaire et l'intelligence ? Qui pourrait nous surpasser dans les domaines de la pensée, de l'action, sans parler du succès ? Mais quoi que nous fassions pour nous impressionner nous-mêmes et les autres, ils sont là, noirs, nus, grands et silencieux, ils nous regardent comme si nous n'existions

même pas, comme s'il y avait quelqu'un derrière nous, comme si nous étions transparents. Ils ne posent même pas de questions, ils ne regardent même pas ailleurs, ils ne bougent même pas, même lorsqu'ils se déplacent...!

Toutes les valeurs des Nilotes sont apparentes, clairement en vue et parfaitement visibles : elles ne sont liées en rien avec une quelconque profondeur ou de quelconque richesses matérielles. Ces gens sont fiers de ce qui peut se voir, leur corps, leur terre, leur humanité nue. Tout cela serait aisément compréhensible si notre esprit n'était pas constamment animé du désir de trouver un sens caché à la vie et de remplir la personne humaine de valeurs autres que la simple existence terrestre. Nous pensons que certains facteurs intérieurs et extérieurs distinguent l'homme de l'animal, comme si la personne humaine en elle-même ne pouvait être en soi une valeur, comme si le sens de nos existences ne pouvait résulter que de facteurs extérieurs, de la spiritualité, de Dieu, de l'histoire, d'avancées intellectuelles et bien sûr de progrès techniques et de succès matériel. Pourtant, la conscience nilote, ne se concentre que sur la personne humaine et son existence terrestre; elle s'efforce de maintenir la spiritualité à distance respectable. Dans un monde qui n'offre aucune protection, l'humain est nu dans la lumière intense d'un paysage entièrement dégagé et découvre qu'il n'y a nulle part où aller : quelle que soit la direction vers laquelle il se tourne, ses yeux n'embrasseront que d'impénétrables murs de verdure, que plaines inondées grouillantes de serpents et de poissons, savane aride couverte de buissons épineux et horizons inaccessibles. Ici, l'humain se trouve au centre de la vie, il ne peut pas s'enfuir, même s'il se perd ou s'il est pourchassé par les bêtes sauvages, il n'y a aucune issue, la course ne mène nulle part, l'on n'a d'autre choix que de se replier sur soi-même. C'est cette conscience même d'être l'Humain qui rend les Nilotes si forts, si solitaires, si sûrs d'eux, si fiers et invulnérables, et qui leur donne la force de défendre leur humanité contre vents et marées...

Mais, l'Humain représente également la conscience de la Terre, les forces de la croissance et la fertilité de la transgression : l'inébranlable réserve des Nilotes est profondément enracinée dans l'existence physique, dans la foi en l'essence strictement terrestre de la vie humaine. Moins les conditions semblent favorables à la vie plus forte est la détermination à rendre la terre habitable et à défendre les valeurs humaines avec dignité. Seule une conscience aussi forte de la valeur humaine rend la survie possible dans un monde apparemment hostile à l'homme.

INTERVIEW

GAMMA : First of all, one intriguing question : You are well-known in the Sudan by the name of Kwacakworo. From where did you get this name, and what does it mean ?

Conradin PERNER : For the Anyuak, a name is the key to eternity. While on earth, the Anyuak exist in fact only as living references to former generations. In a social context, people are hardly ever called by their own names but exist as "sons" or "daughters of" another person, a clan, a village. By honouring the people's origins, one expresses respect for the person's ancestors, fills one's still growing identity with the density and strength of past existence and gives oneself the glorious sensation of being immortal.

The Anyuak take different identities all according to the social context. First of all, every person carries a *personal name* which reflects the history of the family, the circumstances of birth etc. *Tuoc-bèr*, for example, is a name which means "*fetter him tightly*" and refers to a man who has conceived a woman without having married her and who should get his due punishment... Only near family-members and friends use such private and intimate names.

Secondly, people have so-called *honorific* names which link them to their clan, their village of origin or their ancestors, both from father's and from mother's side; these are very respectful terms used by people who are closely or distantly related to the addressed person and who want to give emphasis to the existential links which tie one person to the other.

Thirdly, a young Anyuak creates, at the age of maturity, his own *social name*: because it reflects the colour or the particular "design" of a bull (or an ox) it is also known as *bull-name*. The bull is a gift of society (represented by the king, a chief or any other important person) to its young member and provides him for the first time with a social status. All male Anyuak must have such a bull-name because it is only through this name that he can play a role in society and enter history. The name derives directly from the colour of the animal (all cows are known by their characteristics of colour, design etc.), but the individual will create his own bull-name and find a bold allegoric picture which is reflecting both the appearance of his personal bull and his own qualities: whenever a person has achieved something of importance (as the killing of a person, an animal etc.) he will shout his bull-name and make the world to know his courage and fighting spirit. The bull-name of the Anyuak King, for example, is *Mac Olal*; his bull is red (*Olal*), but the name created by the (then young) king is an allusion to the "rising sun" or the "red fire" which is, in the King's words, "destroying in its fury friends and enemies alike"... "*Kwacakworo*" stands for a bull (which I received from Chief Ading Okway of Dikole-village) which has a body covered by a great number of small patches: "*Kwac*" meaning "Leopard", it is relatively easy to find impressive allusions: while the King wants me to be the "man-eating Leopard" and often calls me in public "*Cibok*" (a name referring to the old, solitary and deadly dangerous leopard), other people call me by less cruel and more poetic names such as "Leopard amongst the stars", "Leopard of the Pleiade" etc. Unlike "normal" Anyuak men, I myself thus did not elaborate on the general name of my bull ("Leopard") but let other people create their own allusions or to stick more simply to the bull's basic colour-name which is "*Kwacakworo*".

**G : Why did you decide to study the Anuyak people ?
In which way are they special ?**

C. P. : Even this is a very common question. I can answer it now, but when I chose the Anyuak, I was not sure at all of what I would find. At the time, I was teaching literature at the university of Khartoum and decided to make a study on oral literature. The importance of oral literature for the understanding of a people has been recognized by quite a few anthropologists, but yet it was (and is) considered rather as folklore or as a source of historic documents than as a creation of art with its *own* significance. In Khar toum, I had read most books and documents on the Southern Sudan and found the Anyuak of a parti cu lar interest, not only because they have a so-called "divine kingship" but mainly because nobody had yet shared the life of these people for a long period of time; otherwise I knew very little about the Anyuak who are living in the most remote area of the Southern Sudan and ignored if their literature was of any significance.

G : Very little is known about them, the Anyuak are very difficult to approach aren't they ?

C. P. : What I didn't consider enough at the time is that the so-called unknown, "wild" people are not li ving along the road, that there are no documents on their language and that it may be quite risky to live for some years at a place which is completely cut off from the rest of the world during nine months of the year and which lacks any medical or other services... As literature can't be understood without a thourough knowledge of the concerned people's culture, history and traditions and of course not without understanding their language, I had first of all to concentrate on these two vaste subjects before venturing to talk about their literature... My dictionary and the monograph on the Anyuak were in fact in the beginning supposed to be nothing more than an comprehensive introduction to the study of Anyuak litera ture...

So when I left Khartoum for the country of the Anyuak, I did not know what would expect me there, physically and mentally... If I had known all the hardship awaiting me there, perhaps I would probably have hesitated to venture so far and so deep, but presently I remember everything as a wonderful adventure with the Anyuak people and their country and, not less important, with my own mind and body...

G : You say the Anuya have a king. What is his role and social or sacred functions ?

C. P. : Anyuak Kingship is a much too vast subject to be explained in a few words. It can be compared with the more well-known Kingship of the Shilluk people who are the closest relatives of the Anyuak. The Anyuak kingship is divine and thus immortal, its figurehead (the King) a godlike personality of a spiri tual essence with absolute power about his subjects. Like God, "*the king is above the people*", and like all true spirits he does neither eat nor sleep, gets never weak or falls sick, he doesn't die but may only pass away (the Anyuaks call it "to return to the river"). Near a King, people crouch on the ground like naked worms... Nobody would dare to look into his firered eyes or

even to talk to him in direct speech... Even the utensils belonging to the King (like waterpots) have to be respected as symbols of Kingship, people meeting them on the road falling immediately to the ground or run hiding in the bushes... But if the King is very much feared for his power and occasional recklessness, he is also adored for these very same qualities: if the Anyuak praise their king, they would not talk about his kindness, human comprehension and gentleness but about his arrogance, his bold mind and his pitiless cruelty, well aware of the fact that only a very strong power is able to bind strong-minded, self-conceited and quarrelsome individuals together, to enforce social peace, to assure law and order, to maintain political stability to the community and to lead the people to victory about their enemies, bringing them fame and prosperity...

G : How does the people see the king ?

C. P. : *"The King - that is us, the people"*, the Anyuak like to explain, hinting at the fact that a King is only the physical incarnation of their absolute power and their immortal existence. If a King gets weak or falls sick, if he loses control over himself or his people, if he fails in generosity and a common sense of justice, his subjects are ready to kill him at any time and pass the essence of their collective identity (the Kingship) on to another person of direct royal descent. The symbol for the Kingship's "essence" is a rather ugly, big necklace of precious stones called "ocuok" (it means: "deceit"!) which can transform a mortal prince into an immortal Nyeya (King). A King is to be killed by suffocation (which is a way of keeping back his spirit), but if it happens, it is done secretly and not in a public or ritual manner. Traditionally, a dead Anyuak King is to be buried with his youngest wives, his maternal uncle and his best friend; to prevent them from escaping, their knees are crushed...

G : You were the king's friend !

C. P. : Being considered to be the old King's best (and only!) friend, this tradition was a real headache for me, the prospect of an early entrance into eternity being a very small consolation... The coronation of a new King is a very big public play, a drama in which the king (the essence of the people's power) is captured, brought by force to the village and installed by the people during a spectacular dance. Such ceremonies of investment with authority and power must, by the way, be repeated periodically, the Anyuaks being convinced that political power and spiritual strength have to be replaced or at least renewed from time to time. The principle of an "institutional rebellion" is one of the most interesting features of the Anyuak political system, both in regions controlled by a chief or in the regions of Kingship.

The King is a permanent ritual function by himself, but otherwise his personal ritual public duties are limited to a few special occasions (fighting, installment of age-groups, epidemics etc.); his main function is the political and judicial leadership of his people.

G : Is there anything like an Anyuak religion ? Are the Anyuak respectful of god ? What is their spiritual life ?

C. P. : No, properly speaking there is no "Anyuak religion", and this because the term "religion" seems to imply a "belief in God" - as if there were other possible beliefs. For the Anyuak, the question is absurd because God can't possibly be a belief - he is simply a fact: *"Everybody knows that there is a God"*, the Anyuak King once explained me, *"one must be blind or mad to deny it. And of course, there is only one God, only one, not two...! But this one God has made many small Gods, one for the Christians, one for the Muslims, others for the Hindus, the Chinese and so forth... There are many Gods in the world, working in different countries and at different places in different manners, but there can only be one God. Everybody has the same God."* Such logic is echoed by another wisdom: *"The Human Being is like a tiny ant"*, people explain, *"and how could you imagine such an insignificant tiny ant talk directly to God? There must be someone to act as a go-between, a smaller God, a Spirit which is nearer to the humans, more understandable to them and more concerned by their small earthly problems"*. The problem of the individual person or family is to find the Spirit (God) which is the best mediator between his private interests and the Supreme Spiritual Being. Not all Spirits (Gods), it seems, are able to protect the Human Person in a same way or under all circumstances; some may lose power or turn "bad", some others simply don't have the means to fight special evils (such as, for example, lightning). *"This is why we Nilotes have no problems in changing our Gods"*, an Anyuak man explains to me, *"sometimes we find that the God which we expect to protect us is not useful anymore, that he seems to lack or to have lost power. Then we change to another God and address our prayers to him, hoping that he will be more active, more successful and thus more trustworthy..."* "Religion" thus appears clearly to be a very personal, intimate and fundamentally a private affair, is in no case the problem of society let alone of a nation or a race - and for this reason it can't possibly become an argument for making war and killing each other! **In this context I would like to stress the fact that the otherwise for its brutality much blamed Black Africa has never tried to impose its beliefs on other people, neither by peaceful nor military means and has thus shown more signs of tolerance than the so-called civilized people!** The on-going civil war in the Sudan is therefore only a "religious" war in the sense that the Southerners do not want anybody to interfere in their private affairs (beliefs); the real roots for the Southerners' struggle for human dignity lie much deeper.

G : Is there an Anyuak religion ? Do they worship a god ?

Amongst the Anyuak, each family and indeed each father or mother has got its own "belief" in one or even several Gods (theoretically, they thus could be both Muslims and Christians at a same time - and some people are!), but all of them share the belief in the existence of the one and only supreme divinity, a God they call "*Jwok*" and which - because of its essentially inhuman nature - is approached with much caution, fear and respect and kept by all means at a cautious distance from the human habitat. The Anyuak recognize in God the caretaker of creation, the basic principle of order and peace on earth and the crucial notion of justice, but at a same time they fear his inhuman transparency. Because the Anyuak can't imagine God to be something else than a *just* God who has created the

world perfect, they can call on him to restore a broken order and to reestablish an original state of justice. If the Anyuak "pray" (like for the Hebrews, praying means to them *"arguing for justice"*) "all the time", it is because their world is constantly threatened and disturbed by misfortunes and calamities of all kind; some of them can be explained by human mistakes, but others are simply not understandable with a human mind and can only be explained by the malicious activities of spiritual forces. Because of their firm belief in God, the Anyuak do not accept sickness and death but refute them as "unnatural": only death during fighting or because of high age is acceptable to a human spirit always looking for good reasons for this or that happening. The fact that the term *"jwok"* stands for all matters of transparency, good and evil ones, and that the bad happenings disturb a person's understanding of the world much more than fortunate events, confusion is arising about the moral essence of God. Is he good or bad? In doubt, the Anyuak put all their confidence into the matter of the earth which has been created by God for the humans and which gives them the necessary support under all circumstances, even after a life and indeed in all eternity. Because the whole sphere of transparency is frightening and obviously inhuman, the Anyuak can't imagine paradise to lie elsewhere than on earth: it is here they spend their life and where they remain after their death, providing coming generations with all their spiritual and physical support.

G : You say that the only "sure and positive" value is the land. Could you tell us more about it ?

C. P. : Indeed, a culture gets shaped by various factors, but the physical environment is certainly the most fundamental amongst them: it conditions the modes of subsistence but even the character and temper, moral attitudes, social life and political structures, religious thoughts and particular beliefs, and of course the daily relationship with natural forces found in the immediate environment. Foreigners usually feel the extreme remoteness of Anyuak-country, its loneliness and isolation, the dangers of many kind, the physical hardship endured by the people, the general hostility of nature, call it *"a God-accursed wilderness, an empty limbo of torment for ever and ever"*, a *"desolation of desolations"* or *"an infernal region, a howling waste of weed, mosquitoes, flies and fever..."*, but in fact only very few people have - physically and over a long period of time - experienced what it means to be exposed to the forces of nature and to live under the permanent threat of sickness and cruel death: the struggle for survival in the Southern Sudan is a war by itself, demanding from the people a lot of courage, skill, physical and mental strength but also many sacrifices of human lives. It is amazing to hear then that the Nilotes pretend to *"live in the best of all possible worlds"* where they get everything freely: shelter, food, water, protection from evil spiritual forces and a home after death.

G : The Anyuak have a deeply spiritual relation to their environment...

C. P. : Yes and sometimes I wonder if the Nilotes' claim to "live in paradise" is not just a way of accommodating themselves with reality, a subtle technique of turning negative facts into positive energy and to give their difficult existence a sense. Whatever the truth may be, it is a fact that the firm

belief in the goodness of their country helps the Nilotes to survive under conditions which elsewhere would result in deep despair. Strong determination to maintain the human spirits and to preserve human dignity in a world full of misery, injustice and suffering has helped the people to endure the seemingly endless years of civil war, and hopefully it will allow the people to rebuild their "normal" existence once the war has ended - if only this war will not have destroyed all these vital human qualities!

G : From where do the Nilotes get their mental strength ?

C. P. : In negative terms, one could explain it by lack of choice: if they want to survive, they have to fight for existence, and if they want to have a decent way of living, they have to create their own human civilization in the middle of wilderness and to defend it against all evil. But the Anyuak would not agree with this pessimistic view but rather refer to the objective richness of their country: the soil is fertile and nature is generously supplying fruits, nuts, honey and many edible or otherwise useful plants, there are plenty of rivers full of fish, there are cattle to produce milk, antelopes and other animals providing people with meat, skins and objects of exciting beauty, and there is all the material needed for building huts, for cooking, for making tools and utensils. To all evidence, nature gives people everything, including a spiritual home after death! No wonder that people who are continuously disturbed by the treacherous matters of spirituality seek shelter in the sphere of the earth which gives them a generous support under all circumstances, and even after death!

Naturally, the special, intimate relationship between the people and the earthly sphere demands also special care and attention. For the Nilotes it is quite *obvious* that the earth is a living and therefore a spiritual matter as well, a force which is essentially positive and constructive but which also can get offended and turn destructive and hostile. It is therefore natural to approach the whole sphere of the earth with love, respect and caution and to avoid anything which could disturb or even hurt the forces working there. *The earth does not belong to the Human Being*, it is a loan and sometimes a gift; if the humans want to benefit of its generous nature they should not exploit it but enter in peaceful communication with it, thereby reinforcing and tightening the existential ties between them and the earth. The Anyuak make use of a representative of the site's oldest family (the one who has already deep roots in that part of the earth) to establish the spiritual link between the human and the earthly sphere: before cutting any tree, before preparing a new field, before fetching firewood in a still unknown forest and whenever doing any important intervention in nature, this "descendant of the site", has to be asked to mediate between the people and the earthly forces residing at the place and to negotiate peace with them in forehand. If this man is absent, people would rather not touch the place than risk to offend nature. Before planting, this special human representative of the earthly sphere may bless the future crops, and before fishing for the first time in the season, the "father of the river" will bless the river and chase evil forces away. Interesting in his talk is his demand to *foreign* crocodiles to leave the place: the *native* ones are allowed to stay! This leads us to the notion of *mutual* respect between the many inhabitants of a same territory.

G : In fact, there seems to be a sort of code of good conduct between men and animals...

C. P. : Indeed, people believe that only co-existence can maintain peace and lead to prosperity. This holds true of course for the different interests of nature and the humans which have to be reconciled as well as for the sometimes difficult relationship between the humans and the so-called beasts and man-eaters, leopards, lions, crocodiles etc. These animals, too, have got a spiritual essence (though of course not of a human kind) and can claim their *right* on existence. In consequence, the humans are expected to respect them as living beings, and if they fail to do so they should know the risks they take! Of course, the animals must also respect the human territory and avoid entering it. If they should do it (as it happens frequently during the rainy season when food is scarce or when water drives them out of their usual territories), the "son of the site" will go and tell them to keep their distances; to be understood he speaks to them in a symbolic language, - for example by urinating in their footprints, making mud-balls out of the such impregnated soil and finally by throwing them into the animals' direction. People are convinced that animals, too, have a capacity to understand, even human talk (though some animals - antelopes for example - appear to be more stupid than others); when informing other people about the presence of a snake, for example, one should therefore not shout "*There is a snake!*" but rather whisper "*Something else is here*" - otherwise the snake may hear it and sneak away. But maybe I should not go into details...

G : On the economic level, how is the Anuya society organized ?

C. P. : Times are changing rapidly, but at present the Anyuak are still completely self-sufficient. Though they were formerly a pastoral tribal group like the Nuer or the Dinka, they have - for various ecological reasons - become extremely skilled and successful agriculturists who take their share of meat and fish from the antelopes or out of the many rich rivers crossing their fertile land.

G : Men and women have different duties...

C. P. : There is a strict division of work: the women are responsible for the whole sphere of the household (children, cooking, firewood, water and the control of food) and the men are responsible for the production of food, for hunting and fishing, for the building of houses and for the whole wide sphere of public life (fighting, political and judicial functions). But women and children help the men at the time around the harvesting when the weaver-birds, grasshoppers and other insects threaten to destroy the crops. The end of the dry season and of the rainy-season are often times of starvation, sickness and death where the joyous public life comes to a standstill. People then try to survive by collecting wild foods in the forests, by migrating to the riverside or by visiting relatives living in richer regions;

Self-sufficiency leads to great independence and strengthens the self-conscious character of the people, but hunger and death forces the people to show great solidarity in times of affliction and trouble, within the kinship-group as well as within the village-community.

On the purely economic level, the compulsory sharing of meat and fish may be worthwhile mentioning: a hunter who has succeeded in killing an antelope is not necessarily the owner of the animal but has to share it with three other people, provided they happen to be present or to pass at the spot of the killing; there are precise rules who should get which quarter of the animal. Trophies (ivory, skins) never belong to the hunter but have to be given to in-laws or relatives, the skins of leopards and the tails of giraffes belonging to the king (a way of reducing one's personal interests in such precious animals to a minimum). When fishing, the fish does not belong to the lucky fisherman but to the first person shouting "*I claim it!*". In this way, the Anyuak avoid the unnecessary killing of animals and make sure that everybody - like untalented fishermen - get their share in the many dishes offered by nature. The sharing of food is the most significant means of strengthening a spiritual relationship, with friends or with relatives, while the non-sharing of food is an equally strong argument for breaking a relationship and definitively understood as a sign of enmity.

G : War currently rages in southern Sudan. What are its consequences for the Anyuak ?

C. P. : Out of the Sudan's thirty years of independence, only ten years were not disrupted by civil war.. Needless to say that during this periods of unrest - in the more remote regions at any rate - any development was impossible and that the consequences of war for the were felt in their totality. It is quite impossible to provide a full account of the sufferings endured by the people and to describe the tragedy which each individual has passed through: **the constant displacement of people** because of fighting, **hunger and natural calamities**, the disruption of family-ties, the **destruction of natural resources**, the harm done to **wildlife**, the **lack of medical and veterinary services** with the subsequent spreading of **diseases and epidemics**, the steadily increasing number of **war-wounded**, disabled and amputees, **the sad fate of children** separated from their parents, cut off from their cultural environment and desperately looking for education, the **disruption of normal social life** with its **loss of experience and cultural consciousness**, and, last but not least, the **continuous tribal fighting** which now got all the dimensions of modern war-fare all contribute to a state of despair and hopelessness.

G : There is quite tragic observation to make...

C. P. : Soon the people have not only been displaced geographically but also in their culture, their ways of living and their patterns of behaviour. What about the pastoralists who have lost their cattle and who have been forced to learn the tasks of an agriculturist? What about all the children who never went to school and who never got any education at home? What about the women who have lost their men and who will have to care for their surviving children without the support traditionally provided by society? Or what about local tribal socio-political structures? What about all the people having spent so many years in big towns like Juba or Khartoum? Will they ever be able to survive under the difficult conditions in the South, physically, spiritually? What about those who were educated in the religion of the North, grown up with the values of a different culture? And what about the peace amongst the tribes, after so much hatred having been spread all over the places? And, finally, what

about the refugees and all the "unaccompanied" minors (and former minors) who will have to leave their school in the refugee-camp in Kenya and return to the educational emptiness of Southern Sudan? Obviously, amongst the many consequences of war, the worst is perhaps this loss of identity and the absence of any visible chance to find a new one.

If the human consequences of war - hunger, exhaustion, fear, sorrow, solitude, sickness and continuous death, homelessness, destruction of culture, lack of education and other basic services - can be listed, the real impacts of war cannot be measured, explained and understood because they will appear only in the unknown future. We can already see some of the results of years of human and ecological destruction, but we cannot see the wounds which are not bleeding, which lie in the heart and the mind of the people, and which may never heal. A war destroys much more than what is seen, and these invisible wounds are perhaps the worst of all consequences of war. It is sad to see that the Sudan, seems to lose its strongest argument for defending its natural beauty which is humanity, and which consists out of the formerly so fundamental principle of tolerance! But we, the self-named "civilized people" who brought all those weapons of terrible destruction, we hesitate to feel really responsible and prefer to ignore...

G : Will the Anyuak culture survive this war ?

C. P. : Perhaps I am wrong to be so pessimistic. The Anyuak King's words were seemingly more optimistic when he told me that *"Soon, very soon, things will be better. God shall create a new type of people. Completely new people. A new type of people who do not get tired!"* And as if there was any need for further comment, he added: *"For we people living now, we are so deadly-deadly tired, so completely exhausted!!!"*... But while the old King may have lost all illusion for a better life in this world, the younger generations are still struggling for maintaining their dignity and fighting for peace which *must* be the last consequence of war. Let's hope that for once peace will not prepare the next war but have time to heal the wounds, in tribal co-existence, in culture, nature and the hearts of the people. And let's be confident that foreigners will not only focus on war-situations but also help the Sudan in those overdue times of a future peace, when the consequences of war will still be felt in totality.

G : You have lived more than five years with the Anuya. From all these travels which remain the strongest personal impressions ?

C. P. : You can imagine how many souvenirs I may have acquired during the twenty years I have been - in one way or another - present in the Sudan and how difficult it is to decide which souvenir was the most memorable one. If I think about your question, I come to the conclusion that it is not a particular event which has been of significance for me but the Sudan as a whole, - and if I say the Sudan I mean of course its people, their proud self-consciousness, their courage and their deep humanity... Yes, I would like to have the time to talk to you about all the wonderful people I met during my lifetime in the Sudan, both in the North and the South, to recall all these unforgettable hours on the Blue Nile in my little village near to Khartoum, in the royal village of Otalo or while

crossing the beautiful Anyuak country on foot...

Of course I keep also a few "bad" souvenirs, the worst ones being of a more general nature and consist out of personal observations of racism, hatred between people of different origins and its cruel consequences; but the revolting suffering of children during the present times of war has left me most desperate, to the extent that I feel personally ashamed about my lack of power to help them, to help all of them...

G : What were the most difficult trials you have been confronted with ?

C. P. : On the more personal level, I had a great number of so-called bad souvenirs, but because I miraculously overcame the bites of various deadly snakes and scorpions, resuscitated from death due to lack of water, recovered from all possible tropical diseases, went almost untouched through a violent hail of bullets and survived three months of starvation, all these souvenirs eventually turned into good ones... The Anyuak may appear to be arrogant and difficult, but whenever you are in need of help you couldn't get a better and more loving company. Only two really bad personal souvenirs will always remain in my mind: one is the destruction of my home by fire, when all my cloth, my money and my whole paperwork got burnt, when I found myself naked and without any financial means in the wilderness... [But the following anecdote shows that even this event had funny sides: When I told the Anyuak in a big public meeting that I had now no money for building a hut and that I would have to leave the village if they wouldn't construct me a house free of cost, one of the elders shocked me deeply by saying: "*You, Kwacakworo, you can leave when ever you want...!*", but adding then, after a moment of silence, "*...but we don't allow you to go if you are not happy... Tomorrow we shall build a hut for you!!!*" And amazingly enough, the very next morning the people built a hut for me! As the Anyuak never do anything freely, I became extremely happy - and I didn't care that they had stolen the roof from an police-man away on duty....!]

The worst souvenir stems from a very black night in Okadi. There was a terrible thunderstorm with continuous lightening interrupted only by the horrible, ear-piercing cries of a woman. The woman tried to deliver but couldn't, and her father had come to ask me for help: "*Please put your hands inside the woman and pull the child out, please, please, please ...*". But it was quite impossible for me (after all I am not a medical doctor) and I just didn't find the courage; so the father decided to pull himself, using a big fishing-hook as instrument, cutting piece after piece of the baby's body with his sharp spear... It was just terrible, really. The woman survived one night and died in the morning. Amongst the many nightmares I passed through when witnessing the suffering of the people, this one was definitively the worst! I felt both involved and responsible for my own helplessness.

I have told you that I can't count my many excellent souvenirs, my friendship with the great Anyuak King being perhaps the most extraordinary amongst them; but there is no really "best" souvenir... unless you can be happy with this one...: the African sky with its thousands of stars, covering the whole world from one end to the other, illuminating the mind, giving peace and joy to a tired body and a thirsty soul... To sleep naked under such a sky, covered only by the blue light of the moving stars... The best souvenirs consist out of sensations and have no content...

G : What could the Anyuak teach us on a philosophical or spiritual level ?

C. P. : Without doubt their positive thinking: The Sudanese teach us how to survive, how to keep self-respect while at a same time observing deep respect for other forms of earthly beings, and they show us how to maintain the self-consciousness of a truly human person in spite of all misery, injustice, ecological difficulties and physical hardship: by simply pretending that they are living in the best of all worlds and organizing their life and their beliefs accordingly, they succeed to live in dignity and with pride where other people would have lost all courage and hope. **In the middle of wilderness, the Anyuaks have created a centre of humanity.** Such a conception of complete and joyful trust in the essential goodness of life should inspire and encourage all those of us who, like myself, often feel lost in their own mental and cultural wilderness.

G : What in your opinion is the essential quality of an ethnologist ?

C. P. : I don't think that it is possible to define the qualities of the "perfect" anthropologist. The question if an anthropologist is "good" or "bad" depends of course on his character, his knowledge, his sensibility and his personal approach, but it depends also on the people he wants to study. It is the relationship between the foreigner and the native people who decides if a research will be successful: an anthropologist is never alone in his work, and even if he gives the impression "to master" his subject, he is in fact completely depending on the people he wants to study... The anthropological books do not always make that relationship transparent, each research-fellow presenting his study as a success... It is true that certain persons are more likely to succeed where others would probably fail, but I don't think that one person would succeed everywhere while others would always fail...

Besides professional knowledge and skill, *human qualities* are essential: *modesty* and *sympathy* with the people should be guidelines for all foreigners' (anthropologist or not!) behaviour, perhaps even a certain shyness: it is not necessary to know and to document everything to get a deep understanding of the people. You may think that these are easy qualities, but experience shows the contrary: visitors who want to "study" other people, to see "how they function" and to enquire about their "strange beliefs" are bound to have a difficult position when they are asked to consider the object of their study as normal human beings like themselves. It is never easy to look at others and to draw conclusions.

G : Time is your best ally ?

C. P. : Yes indeed. Another important point is *time*: anthropologists usually have not all the time of the world to spend with "their" people: at a certain moment they should have "finished with it". But it happens that events don't occur during one or two years only, that life is not just a summary of beliefs, structures and behaviour but a moving, changing and uncertain matter: unless you are satisfied to look at a foreign universe from outside, *you need time* and a lot of *patience* to share the contemporary history, the daily experiences and the more intimate feelings of the individual members of "your people". But if details are important for the truthfulness of a study, the time spent with a

foreign people is of course not by itself a guarantee for the report's professional let alone its human quality!

My final remark is to express regrets about the fact that anthropologists often lack poetic qualities, that they usually have a lot of information about "their" people but seem to be quite unable to present their conclusions to the reader in a pleasant and interesting manner (except in dry terms or even through formulas). Lévy-Strauss' "Tristes Tropiques" is an example how anthropology can become interesting even for non-professionals without losing anything of its scientific value, how it can actually change the mind of the readers. But unfortunately, most ethnographies remain quite boring. But if anthropological work does not reach the interested people and remains a self-conceited game-reserve for universities, it does not reach its fundamental aim which is to increase the understanding of the diversity of human culture and to contribute to a world with less prejudices, less hatred and more mutual sympathy. Anthropology could probably do more for peace than any other science, but unfortunately it doesn't... "*La poésie doit avoir pour but la vérité pratique*", the French poet Lautréamont said. This should also hold true for anthropology. We are all members of a same race, it's time to let it be known!

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