

*Marriage and Sexuality*



## The time of getting married

There are considerable differences in a girl's age of marriage. Previously, a child could actually get married at the time of birth: with the *Murle*, for example, *"a girl can be married while she is still immature, but she will have sex only once she is mature"*. This can also happen with the *Anyuak*: reasons for such early marriage are either a wish to initiate a relationship with the girl's family or, most of the time, the acute need for marriage-beads.

The average age of marriage of a girl lies with the *Ingessana* at fourteen, with the *Lopit* at fifteen, with the *Acholi*, *Shilluk*, *Nuer* etc. at sixteen (nowadays the marriage-age may be higher, around twenty), with the *Moruba* and the *Lango* between eighteen and twenty, the *Toposa* fifteen and eighteen, the *Päri* *"at fifteen or above"* while *"the appropriate age of marriage for a Jur-Bel girl is twenty"*.

With the *Azande*, 'modernity' goes the other way round: while the men previously would wait to marry until the girl is twenty years old (*"so hat she would even be mature in brain"*), it is nowadays possible that they marry already at the age of fifteen.

## Freedom of choice

The answer given by a *Didinga* on the question if girls and boys are free to marry the person they love may not be significant for the whole of the Southern Sudan: *"Yes"*, he says, *"now they are free... ..even though in some places the parents may still choose... In that case, the girl will run away with her lover"*. The *Murle* would not completely agree: *"In most cases, the girls are not free in the choice of their partner! ...and this because she may have chosen a boy who is poor or someone who is considered to have a bad behaviour, so the parents will not like to have him as an in-law. Exceptions may be there."*

*Lopit* girls are not free to choose their future husband and they are forced to get married at an early age (fifteen); the *Ingessana* are forced to marry already at fourteen, but before that time *"they are free to marry the boy of their choice"...*

The *Balanda* have changed their habits: while *"Previously, only the father could choose: he would move around in the neighbourhood and select a girl he wants his son to marry; he would put a creeping plant ('Seresere') and put it on the roof of the girl's house to show in public that the girl is taken...,but nowadays the boy informs his father about his intentions, and the father then visits the parents and asks them for their opinion"...*

The *Avukaya* (but also the *Azande*) have changed their previous custom, too, and are now allowing the girls and boys to engage and to inform the parents about their decision.

From our *Toposa* informant, we get (as usual!) alarming news: *"Since ten years, there is a real war, a real outbreak of new morals: the girls just marry whom they want, and the parents seem to give in. There are new ideas... There is an almost independent youth... Law and order is minimal, the age-sets and generation-systems are dying away..!"*

The Acholi parents do not select for the children but they may still refuse the boy: *“Girl and boy meet and when they are decided, they approach the parents: the girl will inform the mother about the boy’s desire. The boy will then get the reply, either that he is welcome or that his request has been rejected”*.



The Jur-Bel *“girls are free to choose their partner without any interference from the parents...”*

*...but afterwards the parents will come and see what type of person the girl has chosen. If the girl’s lover has not a good (hard-working) family-background, the parents will refuse. If the girl is insisting, the parents will give in and say “Ok, but we shall not come and visit your place...!”* Anyuak, Nuer, or Shilluk are all free to select their partner. When the parents are informed, they will agree, except if they dislike the family of the boy or the girl, or, more often, if the boy cannot provide the necessary bride-wealth. If the parents refuse, the girl has to give in. Such is presently also the case with the Lango where the girls were formerly not allowed to choose their future husband themselves.

This is how the Dinka lovers engage in view of marriage: *“The lover comes by night to the girl’s house, talks to her (she may be about fifteen years old); many other boys will come and do the same. Finally, you choose one. If there is agreement (the boy will declare his intentions through some girls), the boy gives her a special bead which she puts on the ear: now everybody will know that she is engaged. At that time, they already sleep together. The girl’s parents will enquire about the boy’s background, and possibly they will refuse”*.

With the Nuer, procedures are similar: *“The boy will inform his parents about his love; they will visit the parents of the girl and inform them. They will be asked: “but did they speak to each other?” ...If you doubt that the girl’s parents may accept, the girl will come to the man (to his house or to the house of a close relative) where they will stay for about three days. The girl’s parents will then start to look for their daughter. The boy will then tell his parents that he has actually taken the girl, and he asks them to go and tell her parents: they should not search for her anymore. – Then, discussions will start. If there is an agreement, the girl will return home before all the bride-wealth is paid. But if the girl’s parents are bitter, they will go and confiscate all the properties of the boy’s family (their cattle) and go to court. If the girl is conceived “without reason”, she will be questioned and she will reveal the name of that person. She will be sent to the boy’s house and if he agrees he has to take the girl back with cows (‘ruok’). ‘Ruok’ is a punishment for having done something in the wrong way. But then, procedures will follow.*

*Occasionally, the girl's family may go and seize the cattle of the boy's family and go to court. When there is an agreement, the remaining cows will be given (or are returned)."*

Peculiar and picturesque traditions exist with the *Moruba*: while you as a boy are free to marry, you still will have to be checked by the girl's parents: *"If the parents agree, there will be a big meeting: about fifteen girls will be there and the boy will be asked to identify the girl he loves... If she agrees (what she does, as the lovers have agreed before), marriage-discussions will start."*

## Bride-wealth

Even though the custom of paying bride-wealth<sup>1</sup> to the parents of one's future wife as a means to legalise a sexual union is of fundamental social significance and even though this custom is providing a lot of interesting information on the cultural set-up of a community, the bride-wealth itself is part of a social contract and – except that it leads to marriage - not really of great *sexual* relevance. When talking about the marriage-price, we shall therefore refrain from going into details.

An important feature of the so-called marriage-price is the fact – often neglected – that the importance of bride-wealth is not only about the girl's legal status but also about family-relationship: for the bride-wealth is, in most cultures, not provided by the boy's parents alone but by a number of well-defined relatives; equally, the bride-wealth will usually not be kept by the parents alone but are to be shared with a number of well-defined relatives. The bride-wealth thus strengthens the inner coherence of a kinship-group and provides it – through marriage – with new vitality and strength. For example, a *Nuer* would get contributions from the uncles and aunts from both the father's and the mother's side while the bride-wealth (cattle) would then be distributed to the uncles (seven cows) and to the mother (three cows), the father keeping fourteen cows for himself. If the principle is the same, the 'distribution-key' is different: the *Lango* get apparently even more support from relatives than the *Nuer* and pay themselves only 30% of the marriage-price; but they also widely distribute what they have received, to *"uncles, aunts, nephews and step-brothers"*. A *Murle* family *"always shares in a girl's bride-wealth, including relatives. The bride-wealth is then controlled by the most senior amongst the elders of the family and he would distribute them according to what possibly can be given to each of them..."*, explains our informant, and adds *"The 'funny' thing is that the mother's relatives are excluded! ...our customary law wants it like that, - and there is no discussion about it!"* With the *Ingessana*, the importance of the maternal uncle is predominant: *"the brother of the mother is the most important person when it comes to the distribution of the bride-wealth"*, we are told, *"but the father is also given his part as well as the woman who was nursing the girl during her childhood (she will be given a goat)"*. In a *Jur-Bel* family, *"each and everyone will give what he has, money, goats, honey... (but girls do not contribute at all)"*. With the *Ndogo-Sere*, *"the bride-*

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<sup>1</sup> There is a Dinka saga about the origin of bride-wealth (the song was created by Matur Makur Apac from the Cueibet-Dinka): *"Once upon a time, Vagina and Penis were lovers. One day they travelled to far distant place to see a friend, a friend who gave them a cow as a gift... On their way home, Penis and Vagina stopped near a river. Penis told Vagina to look after the cow while he was drinking water, and Penis went off to the river; Vagina remained sitting under a tree... She fell asleep and the cow disappeared in the bush. Penis came back and asked Vagina about the cow. Vagina got furious and said "It was you, Penis, who took the cow while I was asleep! I have noticed that, since we got that cow, you were behaving in a cunning way, do you think I did not noticed?"*. But Penis said *"No, I did not take the cow, I was in the river.."*. So they went home without a cow. But next morning, Vagina took Penis to court, accusing him of having stolen their gift. After long deliberations, the court ruled that Penis should give Vagina her share, and that's why today a man has to pay cattle to get a woman in marriage".

wealth goes to the boy who had been taken care of the girl (his sister), but there will be some money for the mother and for the father as well” and with the Azande, “5% will go to the mother, the rest to the girl’s brother: if he is already married, he will buy a radio, a bicycle or perhaps build a house...”. When money is involved, contributions from relatives may not have exactly the same significance than elsewhere: the *Moruba* will organise “a fund-raising-meeting, and family-members and friends will contribute: the friends are actually helping a lot!”. Once non-related persons get involved in the payment of the marriage-price, the custom may have lost its original significance for the family; yet it still keeps its sense of strengthening social bonds and of allowing people to share in the process of marriage.



It is well-known that, in the Southern Sudan, *cattle* play a significant role in marriage: a great number of people marry with cattle (all the pastoral societies like the *Nuer*, *Dinka*, *Toposa*, *Didinga*, *Nyangatom*, *Murle*, *Jiye*, *Lango*, *Päri* etc.) while other ethnic groups pay in kind and hand over objects, materials or tools which are important for their existence (the *Baka* give *spears*, *hoes* and *arrows*), *food* (*Suri* etc.), use symbols (such as *beads* or very special iron-plates) as bride-wealth (*Anyuak* for the former, *Avukaya* for the latter) or even pay in *cash* (*Acholi*, *Balanda*, *Moruba*, *Azande*). Most of the time the bride-wealth is composed out of different items, especially when things of a minor value are part of the marriage-price: for example, the *Ingessana* provide spears, hoes, goats, pigs and cattle, the *Jur-Bel* money and cattle, while the *Anyuak* have to add to their marriage-beads a precise number of old spears, etc. In-laws use to express particular wishes (any tool they would need), and it is this never-ending list of demands which will make a newly married man deadly tired: one of our informants, for example, a *Balanda*, paid 400 US\$ plus 67'000 Sudanese pounds, one bag of salt, two big hoes, one chair, a basin and shoes... Some cultures combine the marriage-price with some services which the young husband is forced to provide to his new in-laws and in particular to his mother-in-law: such services could be the preparation of fields and their harvesting<sup>2</sup>, the building of huts etc.

<sup>2</sup> For the *Lokoya*, see Lomodong Lako, p.100f.

Bride-wealth differs not only in type but also in quantity: while some people may only pay 100-200\$ (Azande), other may have to ‘pay’ the double. Except perhaps for the *Anyuak* who have a fixed ‘price’ (that is, according to the regions, four or three *dimui*-marriage-bead-necklaces<sup>3</sup>), all the bride-wealth is the subject of discussion and can therefore vary, though only within a given frame; some items can also compensate for others (someone only providing cash will obviously pay more than someone who is in addition providing hoes, spears and perhaps even ‘services’ to the in-laws). There is also the criteria of availability: people cannot ask for more than what is there; if they ask for too much, they will not be able to marry the daughter. The *Toposa* differentiate also according to the age of the man: for a young person’s marriage, 20-35 cattle are to be paid while the price to be paid by an old man would vary between 50 and 100 cows!

“A big bride-wealth obligates a woman”, a *Toposa* remarks, making a divorce more difficult and thus reducing the woman’s right to divorce considerable: such a woman will have to tolerate much more than a woman which was married with a lesser bride-wealth. Finally, we should take note of the particular *Shilluk* custom to *validate* the marriage-contract only after the birth of the first child.

### *Value of Virginity*

For the *Lango*, the *Lopit*, the *Anyuak* or the *Toposa*, it is not so important if a woman gets married while still a virgin: “*Virginity does not really have a great value*”, a *Toposa* notices, adding that “*there is a kind of laissez-faire...: the girls are allowed to make some exercise..., and provided they don’t get pregnant, it is not an issue. But of course, it is kept secret.*”

Elsewhere, “*virginity has lost its previous high value*” (*Moruba, Azande, Acholi*) and the custom of a mother checking her girl’s private parts is not there anymore. For the *Nuer*, they seem to appreciate if a woman is still virgin at the moment of her marriage but are more eager to know if the girl has already been impregnated or not: and “*if a woman has been impregnated twice before a marriage (if she did not marry the one who had impregnated her before), she will be considered to be only “second-hand” and the bride-wealth will be less*”.

But virginity is “*of great importance if the husband found his wife fully virgin...*”, a *Jur-Bel* explains: “*...and this because it is maintaining the good reputation of a family when the girl has been married. Whatever had been given by the husband to such a girl as a bride-wealth cannot be taken away from them.*”

### **In-laws**

“*Marriage never ends!*”, a *Lango* complains, meaning that a man will never get rid of the claims of his in-laws and will constantly be asked to pay his debts or to complete the bride-wealth, and that this can almost lead to exhaustion... If the payment of the bride-wealth is indeed the very basic condition to marriage, it is yet not considered to be polite or respectful to pay all the bride-wealth at one time: this would be understood as a refusal of a continuous relationship with one’s in-laws and would, moreover, mean that a girl can be really be “bought” for cattle, money, spears, tools or whatsoever. If marriage is a contract, it is a fragile and a temporary one: the girl’s parents at least will always think that her daughter was only borrowed from them for a certain

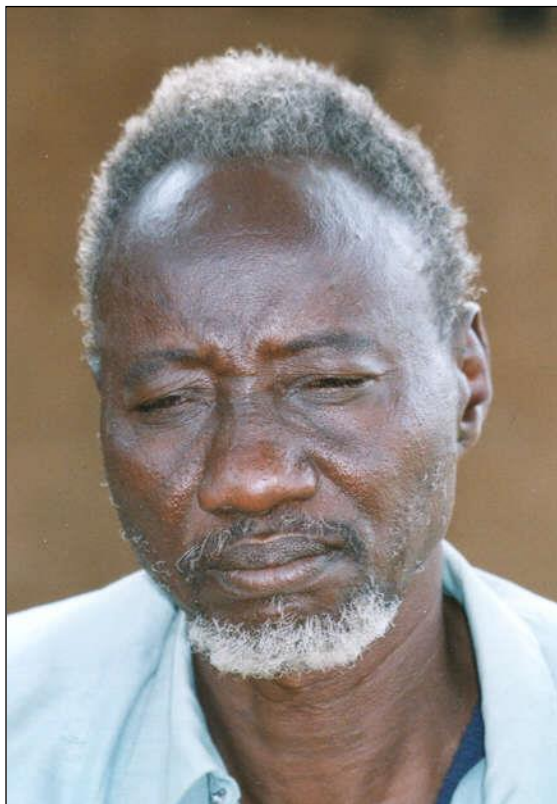
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<sup>3</sup> One *dimui*-necklace consists out of 200 plus five bluish beads; four have to be given in marriage, but two of them will be enough to initiate the relationship. The *dimui*-beads are of an unknown origin.

time (the time of getting children) and that she sentimentally still belongs to them; this is also why parents are so worried that her daughter could choose the wrong husband and thus get in bad hands and why they want, - while thinking of their own relationship to the man and his relatives - to make themselves the *best* choice for their daughter.

In-laws are potentially dangerous: knowing that they will carefully watch his conduct, a boy or a man have to show utmost respect for them and will have to follow strict rules of behaviour (avoidance, not to shake hands, not to see the mother-in-law naked etc.). These rules are of course meant to ease the tensions which naturally exist between persons interested in the same woman (even though for different reasons) and make quarrels and disputes almost impossible – the ones concerning claims on the bride-wealth of course excluded.

My late *Anyuak* friend *Kwot Ogala* explained me once how his people use to discuss when there are disputes concerning the payment of the bride-wealth and more generally about tensions in the relationship with in-laws:



Suppose there is a young man who has married someone's daughter. And suppose that the father of that woman is calumniating his son-in-law without ever going to his fireplace to discuss the matter. Suppose now that the son-in-law hears from other people all the bad talks the father-in-law spread about him. That boy will be very unhappy.

One day, the two may meet accidentally at some place, and the boy will understand that his father-in-law has some real grudges against him, that there is something bad in his mind... Back home, that boy will sit at his fireplace and tell his people what he had understood. "My dear friends", he will say, "today I have met with my father-in-law. He seems to be holding grudges against me. But he never told me anything. That person is angry, he is hiding something from me... But what can I do about it, how can I give satisfaction to him?"

Some of his friends will say: "Just leave him, you will hear from him one day". The boy will reply: "and then, if he comes now and asks me for something, in my present state, what could I give him? I am poorer than a dog with a tick. Every dog has got at least a tick, but me...? I did not hide anything anywhere. If he comes to me to start a discussion, what can I say??".

Another man will say: "Well, he is not here now. It is you alone, talking. He is at his place". "For what should he come here", the boy may argue, "when he is just turning around

himself talking parables? Why couldn't he come here to tell me what he has in his mind? The thing which should be given to me, from where can I get it, from where?! If it is a way of putting me in fetters, let him put me in fetters, and if he likes to kill me, let him kill me. It is all right. Is he better than others? What is he better at? Is it him who alone is strong? What shall I bring out for him? And what has he got himself? He is as poor as I am! We are all poor, all of us are poor... He is just talking against me, beating about the bush without saying it at point-blank. Why can't he tell me things directly? If he has to tell me something, he could approach me and tell me his claims. And if there is anything I could give him, I would give it to him. Now he is just talking to other people, saying that one day we would meet and talk matters over. But now, when such a talk will take place, it will result in fighting. If he comes here and insults me, there will be a fight! He just calumniates me out there. He slanders me and distorts the facts. He tells people that the son of a certain man has taken my daughter but did not give me anything in return. But I have paid the bride-wealth for his daughter! Why then doesn't he come to me? Why does he backbite me from behind? Doesn't he know my fireplace? Is this place here not my fireplace, a place where a fire is

burning, just like now? Am I not sitting here now? A real human person goes to the other's fireplace and sits down; he would be honoured as a father-in-law, and matters would be discussed... But what is this! Let him come, and let us fight until both of us are tied up and put in jail...!"

This is how we talk in Anyuakland. If a problem is tackled by force, a fight is the result, and the matter will be forwarded to the king, and eventually settled at court. If you are mistaken, you shall be convicted. If the husband of the woman has fought his in-laws, he will be convicted. The owner of the wife will be convicted. He will be asked: "How can you fight, as the woman belongs to you, as her vagina is yours? How can you fight the father of your wife? That boy will be blamed because he started to fight. And he will be fined: if it is a cow which has been asked from him, he will have to pay. And he will be put in a wooden block (*the Anyuak prison, called "orogo"*) and kept fettered until he has paid. Then, he can return to his fireplace. This is how the Anyuak settle their disputes.

### *Sex with in-laws*

The question concerns basically the sisters of one's wife. Even though there is no blood-relationship, this is in many parts of the Southern Sudan not permitted (mainly because the bride-wealth should not come from a same family): "*one cannot marry the sister of one's husband's wife*", as an *Acholi* explains. A *Baka* man cannot marry his wife's sister, unless the wife has died, but he can have sexual relations with his brothers' wives (the *Azande* comment: "*someone sleeping with his brother's wives must be a mad person!*"). However, there are exceptions to the general rule not to touch on in-laws: *Seligman:61* states that "*A Shilluk man can marry his wife's sister; he has even the prior right to that woman though he has to pay the normal marriage-price*". The *Azande* can marry the *younger* sister of the wife but should not have sex with the older one, a rule which perhaps could be explained by the respect people have in general for all in-laws except of course the young ones: "*A man has to respect all relatives of the wife*", as a *Päri* states, "*and he cannot sleep with them or with their wives*".

### Bringing a girl to her new home

The moment when a girl is to move out of her parents home for staying with her new husband is, everywhere in the world, a very special event: by moving to her new place, a girl enters a new life and takes up the new identity of being a wife... It is difficult to imagine that a young woman could simply pack her things, leave her home and install herself in the home of some other people, people who are not even related, who are feared... It is more than likely that in all those cases where a girl's husband had been chosen by her parents and where she hated the idea of spending her life with that particular man (perhaps - but not necessarily - because she was in love with someone else), there was utmost resistance from her side: she would refuse, run away and would eventually get convinced by receiving gifts or simply be taken by force. But resistance is expected even in cases where a girl is in love with a boy and actually can't wait until she is allowed to be with him all the time: marriage-ceremonies have to follow specific rules which are often of a spectacular, seemingly even violent nature: the *Shilluk*, for example, traditionally organise a mock-battle during which the girl gets finally captured and 'abducted', while with the *Anyuak*, to give another example of the way a girl's natural resistance has to be overcome, a girl has to be 'kidnapped' at home (by her husband's friends) several times before she would finally accept to stay in an intermediate hut (where her husband could visit her by night) where a woman



would teach her the work of a married woman. In other places, the transfer of a woman to her new home may be less spectacular and less ‘violent’, and yet it should happen in different stages: with the *Balanda*, for example, “*the girl stays in the house of her father or her brother up to the age of seventeen; at seventeen, she moves to her husband’s house, stays there for one month and returns then home: she stays there for another year before she moves, finally, at eighteen, to her husband’s house. Formerly, a girl does not sleep with her boyfriend before she is married and has moved to his place*”.

One should notice that these procedures of *slowly* moving to the place of the husband are an expression of respect for the girl’s feelings and of her dignity as a human person; but the girl’s refusal (though perhaps only symbolical) to move to the new home has certainly also sexual connotations and wants to express the girl’s self-respect, her shyness and purity: a polite and well-educated girl is careful about her reputation and does not give in easily!

## Polygamy



If all cultures in the Southern Sudan follow the principle of patrilineary descent, they are also all polygamous: “*Polygamy enables more security...*”, we are explained, security in what concerns procreation as well as what regards the provision of food. The women may not dislike the idea of sharing the husband with some other wife, for the daily workload of a woman is really tremendous<sup>4</sup>; help is much welcomed! Polygamy becomes a problem only when the husband is not able to “administrate” (as people call it) his household properly by giving each of his wife an equal share in his sexual capacities.

In the following story<sup>5</sup>, a *Zande* man gives us an example of the way people may discuss the delicate issue of getting a co-wife:

“If man wants to marry a second wife, he may ask the first one, to help him in finding one. She will possibly refuse his idea in the beginning, but he will talk about his father who had many wives, or he will find some practical arguments: “If you fall sick, it will be very difficult for me to cook or to collect firewood. It is better you are two so

that one can assist the other in case of sickness. That’s how I mean it.” The wife will think that he has already another lover, but he will deny that. Eventually, she will give some spears and say: “Here, take your spears and marry a woman with them. Don’t disturb me anymore with that thing. Let her come, so I can leave you sometimes and go to rest at my relative’s place.” He will answer: “Oi, if you get angry like that, I

<sup>4</sup> She has to fetch firewood and water from far distant places, carry heavy loads, she must pound and prepare the food and occasionally the beer, she must help in the fields and clean the homestead, etc.etc. See the chapter on gender-issues, “Girls and Boys, Men and Women”.

<sup>5</sup> Streck, Bernard, „Sudan“, Köln (DuMont) 1982:268f.

shall not do it. I wanted to talk to you first, so that you can go and have a nice conversation with me. And in case we could have agreed, we could have gone with the spears". She will reply: "Am I your mother and should go and look for a wife for you? That will not happen with me, my brother. If you want to marry another wife, it is not me to quarrel with her – unless she starts. Our family does not hate co-wives. Let her come so she can make the things for you I do not make". Finally the wife agrees that a second wife will make her life easier, and she will even agree, to go with her husband for searching another wife. "Tie your spears together, so we can go. Otherwise you will pretend that it was me who hampered your marriage-plans. But let me warn you: if you will treat me like shit simply because you have married a young beauty, I shall pack my things and return with my children to my parents' place. I just want you to know this and that you keep it well in your mind. That's all".

In his book on the *Lokoya*, *Lomodong Lako:117* gives a number of reasons for the habit of polygamy:

- lack of children, one boy only, only daughters etc.
- adultery (a pregnant woman has to be married)
- sexual desire... (but the women are prevented from being with other men)
- a permanently sick woman and "*a wife who suffers from tuberculosis, madness or syphilis*"
- a careless wife... "*who does not pay attention to personal and household hygiene: she is likely to invite insults and inconvenience, fails to attract her husband because of her smell and discourages the friends of the husband from visiting the house...*".
- a woman who is "*shouting, nagging, fighting, begging...*", who is "*amorous or jealous*" or who "*does not look after her children*"
- a wife "*who is a foreigner... and who may find adjustments to the new culture difficult*"

The *number of a man's wives* varies much but depends essentially on the wealth of the husband. Chiefs can generally afford more wives than commoners.

The *Didinga* marry about three wives (chiefs five) and so did our interlocutor from the *Murle*: "*the number can vary between one and one hundred*", he jokes, giving the example of chief Ismail Kony who has got twenty-seven wives... The *Acholi* marry also according to the social status of a person, up to seven times, "*but one wife is the average number*"; the *Anyuak* have not more than three wives (their former king could have married up to fifty women!<sup>6</sup>), the *Nuer* "*five or more*", the *Jiye* three to four (previously three to seven), their chief living with five wives, and the *Lopit* have in average equally four to five wives. The *Baka*, we are told, "*have normally three to six wives*"; but while the interlocutor himself has got five wives (and twelve children, seven boys and five girls), his grandfather had not less than thirty-two wives ("*each time he visited a village he received a woman as wife*"). Our informant on the *Ndogo-Sere* has himself married three times, starting at the age of eighteen (in 1965): "*two of my wives have died; with the first woman, I had one child which died, but now I have twenty-three children, thirteen boys and ten girls*". The information on the *Jur-Bel* illustrates well the differences which exist because of wealth: "*This depends on your financial power*", we are told, "*if you are wealthy, you can take ten wives, but some others have only four, some three or two, and the poor ones have only one*"... The differences in the number of wives are great also amongst the *Azande*: "*the average*

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<sup>6</sup> Kings often marry for social reasons and are often asked to marry someone's daughter for no other than political or social reasons. The daughters of a king are, by the way, not supposed to be married and intercourse with them is a highly explosive enterprise!

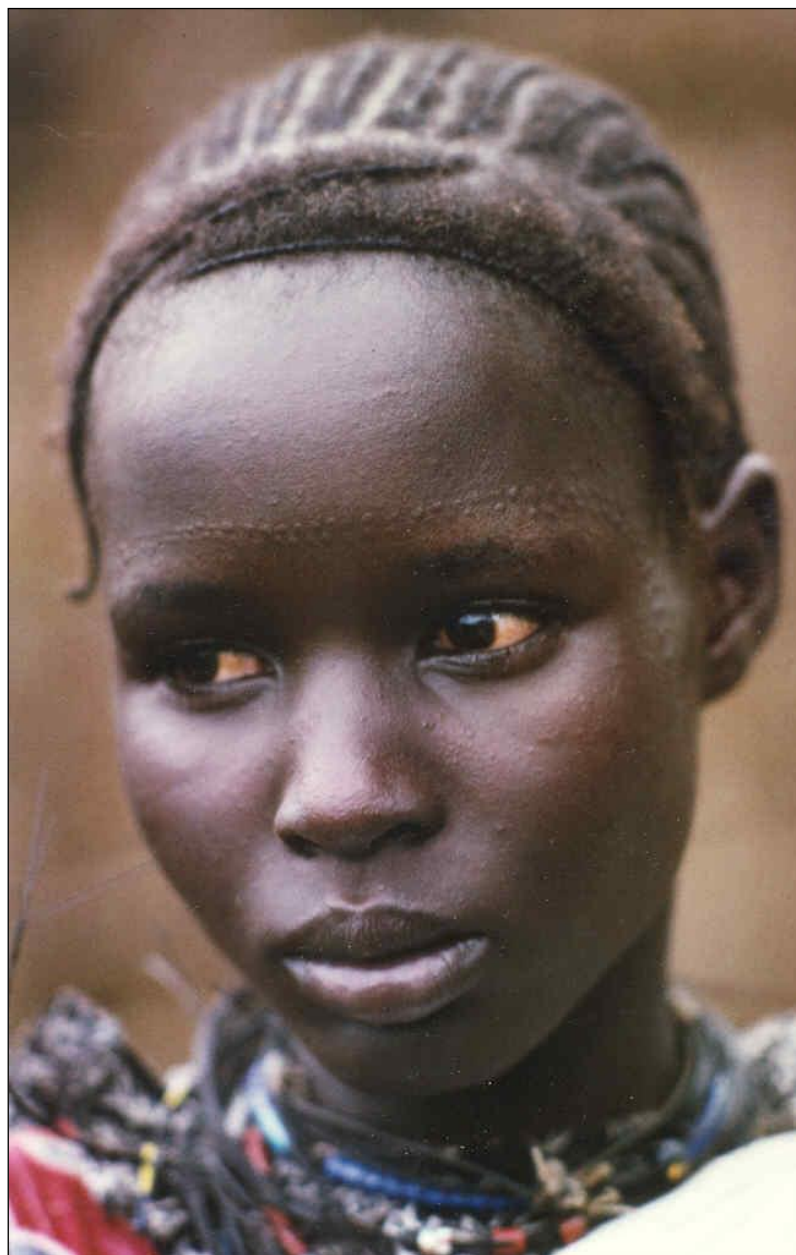
*is two or three or four, but it can well be between five and ten*". The *Toposa* have, apparently, no financial constraints when it comes to marriage: the number of wives is "*ten, can be twenty...But after ten, a man usually will not marry anymore because his sons may already be old and wishing to marry themselves*". Amongst the people asked on this point, only the *Moruba* (who are polygamous) marry normally only one woman ("*otherwise two or three*").

## Sexual aspects of family life

### *True Love*

Love during marriage is not, as a *Toposa* said when describing the sexual activities of the young male people of his community, a "one-day-business". It usually lasts for a whole life. Divorce is rare. Children are strengthening the household. If quarrels occur, they are yet exceptional. Life is hard and tormented, there are many other reasons to be sad or to get upset.

While speaking about customs and behaviour, and especially when concentrating on marriage and kinship, procedures and structures, one tends to forget that love exists: before marriage and during marriage. Tenderness is rarely seen in the open, and yet it is a striking feature in the character of the people who are normally better known for their aggressive arrogance and bold straightforwardness. In fact, people are essentially shy and cautious, their behaviour being guided by respect, respect for persons they fear (like in-laws and old people) but also respect for people they love. This respect and shyness includes the most intimate moments of sexual relationship: our *Didinga* interlocutor tells us, for example, "*the women do not touch the private parts of a man during the sexual intercourse, even try to avoid seeing it*" and from the *Dinka* we get a same information: "*The girl has a special respect for her boy-friend. She is shy, even after marriage*".

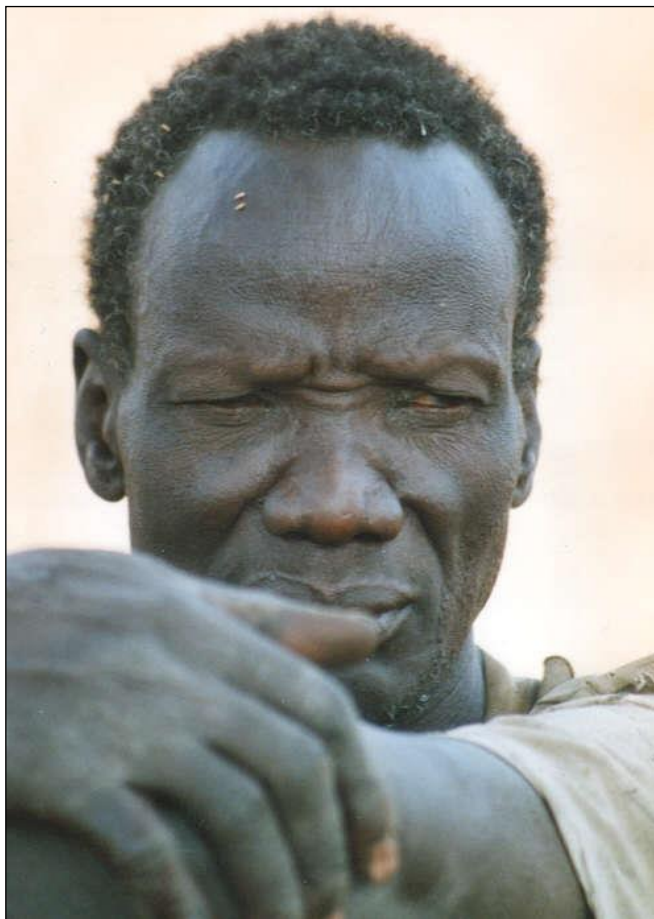


Love is indeed seen in the people's behaviour and in their work, - and this is also the reason why problems in the relationship between man and woman can be so easily detected: the man may suddenly become 'lazy', the woman starts to neglect the usual cleanliness of the home...*The family is the heart of the people's existence, their only raison d'être, the cradle of personal happiness. Once children are there, half the distance on the way to eternal existence is already covered.*

The *Jiye* even get public when expressing their love: *"If a husband and his wife are really in deep love, the woman is making a black skin and puts it in front of the homestead, in a way that it can be seen by everybody."* Our interlocutor explains: *"this 'sign' means that nobody can come to the place – the husband excepted – and have intercourse with her... It is to show her faithfulness, it is like swearing eternal love..."*

### *Regular sexual life*

A woman from the *Azande* is explaining the daily life in a household of her people, putting emphasis on the kind of behaviour a man expects from his wife and a wife expects from her husband. The interview was recorded by *Streck:268*<sup>7</sup>



*If a man wants to marry a woman, he wants her to be proper. And he does not accept it if she is lazy in the preparation of food. Also, he does not tolerate that she is looking for other men. If many people are coming, she should cook delicious food. These are the things a man is expecting from his wife.*

*A woman wishes, that her husband sleeps with her regularly, that he has a big field and that he is generous towards her relatives. Also, a husband should be generous in buying things for his wife. This is what a woman expects from her husband.*

*"Girl", the new mother-in-law tells the new wife of her son, "if you become a wife, you should always be clean, so wash yourself always and be never dirty again." The woman had gone to the father of the girl, given him some spears and argued in favour of her son. They eventually agreed, even though an older son-in-law would have been preferred: "For mature men are better son-in-laws than young ones. Adolescents are still childish, they don't know their obligations towards their in-laws while an adult man is much aware of it.*

*Everybody has problems with the fidelity of one's wife, for "the woman has no brain. If she sees an ugly adolescent, she is immediately ready to go to him... Then, the husband will advise his wife not to repeat such a mistake, and she will reply by saying "I shall not repeat such a mistake". Now, the husband will think that the matter is settled while the woman, as soon as she meets another man on her*

<sup>7</sup> Streck, Bernard: „Sudan“, Köln (DuMont) 1982:268:

way, while still remembering her husband's words just decides to ignore it and to go and sleep with that man.... "Yes, a man likes it when his wife wears nice clothes, and he is happy to see her beautiful, with her body shining of oil and her hair well-trussed. If she is looking that way, he wants to play sex with her. But my wife refused all my offers. Instead of clothes she was wearing leaves around her hips, she smeared all her body with ashes, her arms, her head, her face – while when she was with Mafata, she was always well dressed and her body well anointed! "That's the moment where the relationship between husband and wife becomes violent: "Yes, we Azande think that it is good for a man to beat his wife. All men beat their wives; for if a woman was wrong and has been beaten, she will understand that she was wrong and she will remember her mistake and not repeat it. But a man will never beat his wife without a good reason, only a mad person would do that. Because in reality, women are like children who are in need of education."

"A Toposa man with many women stays in his own, separate hut. But when he has got only one wife, they sleep in a same hut but not together: in the middle of the hut, there is a fire, and the man sleeps on one, his wife on the other side. The children sleep together, from three years onwards. They should not see what may happen between the adults." "The man sleeps with his wife whenever she needs a child. A woman has about four children", our Toposa interlocutor continues, "when a woman has got a child, she will not sleep with her husband for about two-and-a-half to three years. The oldest of a man's women functions as the administrator of the house and makes some kind of family-planning, - that is she informs her husband about the other wives' sexual desires".

What was called "family-planning" has nothing to do with birth-control but means the regulation of the husband's sexual activities. In a household with many wives, a husband has to be very careful not to neglect any of his wives and not to show any preferences; if he neglects this most important rule, there will be fire in the house and a lot of problems will ensue.

This "sexual administration" is therefore necessary and exists wherever a husband has got several wives. The way the Toposa men (who apparently are "free to have sex with other women than their wives"! ) are administrating their household is not the usual one: usually there is a rather strict time-table to be followed. The Murle "establish a time-table on a weekly basis. Delivery of one wife may sometimes increase the chances of the other wives (the wives of a husbands are called 'nyigar')". The Acholi confirm that "a husband must have equal responsibility towards all wives. He makes a time-table and sleeps with each of them for two days. If he does not stick to it, there will be big problems". The Balanda men need sometimes also some rest: "The agenda is put up by the husband: two days with each wife, in the hut of the woman. Strict time-table with a hard administration and strict instructions. The woman 'of the day' has to clean the house etc. and cooks for the husband. The household's meat is always given to the senior wife who distributes it amongst the women. When the husband has completed his "tour of his wives", he takes two to four days rest.... During these days of rest, it is the senior wife who will be doing the cooking." Nuer, Avukaya, Anyuak, Baka and Zande men administrate their private sexual life in the same way, though we have no information that they would not need to take a rest from time to time... Unlike others, the Baka seem to go every day to another wife, what would probably be a more tiresome procedure for both men and women. Differences exist also in what concerns the place where husband and wife meet, as we hear from our informant on the Ndogo-Sere: "Arrangements are made by the husband: time-table or agenda of sexual activities with wives: husband sleeps two times in the house of one wife, then in the house of the 2<sup>nd</sup> woman etc.

*Other men have their own hut where they sleep with their wives in a turn. If this agenda is not respected, there will be fire in the house, big quarrel: the women may bite the man's nose...!*" The organisation of the sexual aspects of a polygamous household is left to the husband (and sometimes to his oldest wife); when there are only two wives, a husband may have sexual intercourse with both of them during a same night – though of course not in a same hut; such is the case with the *Anyuak*, the *Didinga* and certainly also other people. However, as a *Didinga* explains, *"there is no absolute necessity for a man to sleep with all his wives during a same night. He may choose according to his wishes. But this may lead to rebellion and strike! A woman may rebuke her husband and send him away, shouting 'What do you want here? Go there, go there, go to the other one!'. Fights between women because of their husband are frequent. Sometimes, they refuse to cook, even fight physically with the man!"*.

If it is true that *"the quarrel of co-wives is an ancient thing"*<sup>8</sup>, there exist other reasons than jalousie and frustration: *"The problem is that people are drinking and do not go home"*, a *Moru* notices: *"The woman at home will be angry and quarrel. Meetings between parents will solve the problem, the husband will be reminded of his sexual obligations etc."*.

Sexual frustration may also lead to more serious problems of adultery and divorce. It even happens that during fighting between man and woman, a mother's child can – accidentally – get badly hurt.

#### *Sex with members of the household*

Sexual relationship with members of the own household is strictly forbidden: *"Never!!!"*, a *Didinga* exclaims, *"all the father's wives are like mothers!"*. Circumstances can make it happen anyway: sometimes a father has young beautiful wives while a grown-up son may still be waiting until it is his turn to get the bride-wealth needed for marriage (at least in Nilotic societies, older sons should marry before the younger ones). *"If it happens and sometimes it does"*, a *Balanda* relates, *"that son is believed to have been cursed and he could even be killed"*. The following very popular song about a son who had sexual intercourse with his mother shows that such forbidden practices can happen and may be discussed openly: while the son, afraid of possible consequences, wishes that the night may never end, the mother tells him to forget about such illusions; the singer speaks to his favourite ox 'Makur':<sup>9</sup>

*Makur my bull...  
Don't be like a boy who had sex with his mother  
and wishes that the night should never end...  
The mother told him that  
there is never a night without end...  
Let this night end, my son,  
so that Monyjang can hear what we have done...*

While "strictly forbidden", the *Toposa* would consider the son to be a wizard *"and would kill him"*. From the *Baka* we learn that *"it cannot happen that a son sleeps with his father's wives. But a man can sleep with his brother's wives."* The *Avukaya* don't kill a son: *"if it should occur, the son would not be considered to be a real son anymore... ...and he would have to leave the*

<sup>8</sup> said by a Dinka woman in a song, cf. Deng, "The Dinka and their Songs", Oxford 1973, p.227

<sup>9</sup> This song "about the boy who had sex with his mother" is from Matur Apac Makur; translation by Adok Gai.

village.” The *Nuer* would react in a similar manner: “No son is sleeping with his father’s wives (while he is still alive)...”, we are told, but “it can, however, happen that a son sleeps with his father’s wife.. If discovered by the father, the elders will gather and advise his son; then, they will kill a cow or a goat between the father and his son: the father takes the lower part and the son will take the head and the other part. The son will leave the house and stay on his own.” With the *Dinka*, too, it can happen, and more, it can even be agreed upon: “If a man is old, the sons can sleep with his wives... But if this has not been agreed upon, there will be a curse. The children conceived by the father’s son and father’s wives will have the father’s name (so that a father’s son will call his own children ‘my brothers’).”

## A biography

During our travelling across the Southern Sudan, meetings were held with a considerable number of people from different ethnic groups. One of our interlocutors was a *Balanda* from Tambura county. He married at the age of twenty-two and has got two children, boys aged nine months and five years respectively. He completed the secondary school and is presently (temporarily) working as a plumber in Yambio-town.

### *Life-Story of Adriano Okoth*

Adriano started to have sex in 1988, when he was about 15 years old. He just met with a girl in the dancing-place and they immediately had intercourse, sleeping on banana-leaves in the open. He just slept with that girl twice, then did not meet her anymore. She is now married and has four children.

Since that time, he slept with some other seven women, *all of them being married*. He slept with them in his small *tukul*, only several times with each of them. This was of course secret, but his close friends knew about it (he has at present two close friends, one being a *Moro*, the other one a *Dinka*).

Adriano saw his future wife in the school in *Tambura*. She was living near to his house in *Nagero*. One day, he told his sister that he would like to marry that girl and asked her to inform the parents of the girl of his wish. Five months later, in June 1993, the sister went there and the parent agreed, asking for a bride-wealth of 200 US\$ (in Sudanese pounds).

Adriano and his wife used to sleep about four to five times a months, but as she is now with her second child, he does not have sex with her.

His life is from a family point of view ok, even if he sometimes quarrels with his wife. If they quarrel, the parents from both sides come in and settle the dispute, usually blaming both him and his wife for what has happened.

He quarrels with his wife because of her behaviour, and she quarrels him whenever he comes home late from dancing.

They have to share one hut, she is sleeping in the bed on one side, and he sleeps on the other side. This because of the child.

Once he slept with a woman after the disco, - and he was caught by his wife. She was very upset and insulted him, so he insulted her in return... Finally she run away and went back home to her parents. There, he found her the next afternoon. Discussions with the parents from both sides ensued, and finally the matter was settled.

When going out of Yambio, Adriano uses to meet girls in restaurants, and then he has intercourse with them. The girls ask for about 3 dollars, but you can give what you have.

Adriano’s parents live in Khartoum. He has tried to get in touch with them – through the ICRC - , but there was no response. He does not know what happened.

He does not want to marry another wife. He feels that he missed his education, and he does not want his children to miss it. These women only quarrel all the time, it is hell for the husband, and then you will have so many children with no money to educate them. He does not want to have more than four children.

## Divorce

There was no proper investigation on this subject neither, so we are left with the very general information which was provided by our interlocutors. According to such information, divorce is *not frequent* amongst the *Moruba*, the *Päri* and in all pastoral communities (there even reported to be “*very rare*” by the *Didinga*) but *frequent* with the *Baka*, the *Avukaya* and other people of Western Equatoria (the *Azande* apparently divorce six out of ten marriage-unions).



Divorce is not easy, because it implies that the bride-wealth or, if there are children, at least a part of it, is to be given back. This is very difficult for people who have married with cattle which were distributed amongst relatives. The *Anyuak* may be a good because more simple illustration of the difficulties arising because of divorce: when a daughter gets married, her father will receive the bride-wealth (marriage-beads); this will allow him to marry a woman for himself or for his son, and the parents of that wife will of course do the same; as not all the marriage-beads are handed over at one time, one can actually marry before one has received all the beads... The number of marriage-beads thus is much lesser than the number of marriages concluded. In case of divorce the whole circulation of the marriage-beads would have to start again, only that it is now backwards... This can cause great problems as there could be a ‘chain-reaction’ of divorce... Fortunately, there will always be a family with many girls who may help out by lending some marriage-beads to the people in need.

Because of the difficulties of procedure, the men are divorcing more readily than the girls who will always be under their parents’ pressure: for while the men get their marriage-price (at least partly) back and thus do not loose, the girl’s relatives

have to look for the bride-wealth needed to finalise the divorce. Note, however, that the parents will never refuse their daughter to divorce if there are really good reasons for it (such reasons being violent behaviour etc.).

These are the most usual reasons for divorce and other details provided by some of our interlocutors:

- *Didinga*: Only in case of witchcraft.  
(When paying back the bride-wealth, one can deduce five cows for each child.)
- *Murle*:
  - disagreement
  - adultery



- *sometimes hunger*
- quarrel with husband's other wives
- death of children
- barrenness
- prostitution
- *Acholi:*
  - Happens when there is too much of fighting and if reconciliation is impossible.
  - Divorce is normal when a woman is known to have an affair with anybody, but more particularly with a brother or with a related person.
    - If a woman wants to leave her husband for another man, the latter may then give the bride-wealth to her father, who will then give it back to the deserted husband. But if the husband conceals her personal belongings, especially her "cip" or apron, she will not bear a child and may die. (Seligman:120)*
- *Anyuak:*
  - If the husband has been insulted by his wife, she may be divorced. (Part of the bride-wealth – but not all of it – must be returned.)
- *Balanda:*
  - One divorces only if the wife is considered to be a wizard. (If the marriage is recent, the bride-wealth is given back, but otherwise the bride-wealth remains with the husband, together with the children.)
- *Lokoya*<sup>10</sup>:
  - a man's excessive drinking, causing quarrels with the wife
  - if the wife is young, her age-group may instigate divorce, saying that the bridegroom is "old, lazy, lame or sick with leprosy" (*The husband will soon detect that the wife is rude, dodging appointments and cannot give him a mat to sit on. The new husband will sometimes elope with her and she is hidden for a long time without being traced. When the family of the first husband discovers what has happened they can demand the return of the bride-wealth*)
  - childless marriage
  - husband's impotence
  - hunger
  - a husband who does not have regular sex with his wife is likely to be divorced
  - difference in age
- *Dinka:*
  - People divorce because a man does not treat his wife well... „*but it is always the men asking for divorce! If the woman wants to divorce, she will be convinced by her parents to go back, and a gift will be made to the husband (so he can accept her again).*”
- *Nuer:*
  - *The wife of a late husband cannot be divorced!* Reasons: Control of the wealth as well as moral aspects (education of the children)
  - It could be because she committed adultery and was caught with another man.
- *Atuot:*
  - Divorce is strongly rejected as it is always a lengthy and complicated process. If the mistake lies with the woman, her family prefers to compensate their son-in-law for whatever inconvenience had been caused by their daughter: this can be a goat, or – as for example in case of adultery – a cow. If it is the woman asking for divorce, she may get the support of her family and in case of domestic violence, the husband's family would have to pay compensation to his in-laws; the mistaken husband would possibly have to pay more cows than he would receive in case of a mistake committed by his wife. But if a woman had been injured, the husband could be taken to court and he would be fined with ten

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<sup>10</sup> See Lomodong Lako, "Lokoya of Sudan", p. 126-129

- cows or even more.
- *Päri*: - happens when there is a quarrel between husband and wife.
  - *Shilluk*: - If it happens, it is because of the husband's failure of paying the marriage-price.  
- A woman making four to five adulteries is also divorced, and so is a barren woman, but this only in case she is not good otherwise.  
- Women believed to excel in witchcraft are also divorced.
  - *Lango*: - if a man is unable to pay the bride-wealth: the parents of the girl have the right to divorce her  
- misunderstanding between the husband and wife  
- the husband may not be a good and responsible administrator of the family  
- it may also happen that a woman is barren
  - *Lopit*: - If a woman has committed adultery  
- if she is misbehaving at home she can be divorced, but without demanding the return of the bride-wealth which had been paid.
  - *Baka*: - If a man is not good, she might be leaving him as well.  
If there are children, no bride-wealth will be given back to the woman's parents, otherwise the bride-wealth has to be returned.
  - *Jur-Bel*: - if she is an irresponsible wife who does not serve well husband and children  
- if she is an adulterous wife  
- if a wife eating alone  
- if a wife who is stealing
  - *Avukaya*: *The bride-wealth is to be given back if the mistake is the one of the husband.*  
If it is her mistake, the husband keeps one of the "digidigi"-iron-plates and gives back only two of them.
  - *Moruba*: If it happens, the bride-wealth is not paid back.
  - *Ndogo-Sere*: The bride-wealth will be given back, but not any fine which may have been paid nor the "milk-money" (the money for the person who was nursing the child).
  - *Azande*: Both man and woman will marry again. The children will stay with the father.

