

Sexuality during Childhood



Work and Education

Basically, only moral and social values are transmitted” (PÄRI)

Work and Education

From early childhood on, children are trained for their future work: girls will stay with their mothers at home while boys are moving with the father to the fields or stay at the cattle-byres, herding first goats and sheep and later on, when grown bigger, cattle. During the hunting-season, small boys are moving with their dogs to catch antelopes and are securing the household’s need of meat.

The children’s education follows the same pattern: girls (*“they are needed at home, should serve the parents and generate bride-wealth”*, as a *Didinga* underlines) are educated by the mother while boys get most of their knowledge from the father. In fact, the children are not so much taught by words but brought up within the specific environment of men or of women: it is experience which is their teacher. Only by night there is something like education when the children listen to the stories told by their grandparents or when they are gathering for dancing, for playing or simply for conversing. Children also learn a lot from own observation of adult persons’ behaviour and through discussions with age-mates: from early childhood onwards, boys of a same age eat and move together, sharing experiences and learning from each other. *“Children have no formal education as such”*, *Lomodong Lako*¹ explains, *“but they learn through traditional ways. Their learning is through practical activities: doing, seeing, and listening to legends and fairy tales from elders. They practise shooting with bows and arrows, and throwing spears. They re taught how to identify their father’s goats by colour and special marks cut on the ears of the animals. Girls on the other hand make baskets, pots and earthen-ware. They go to the bush to collect fire-wood, wild fruits and green vegetables”*.

Sexual education

Asked if there was something like sexual education in their respective communities, my *Jur-Bel* interlocutor replied *“No, in our society, we do not have sexual education. We only have the removal of the teeth² from the lower jaws, - four teeth, and some have two removed”*... Most of my other informants confirmed that *“there is no sexual education, not even at the moment of the boys’ initiation. Boys are supposed to control themselves and the girls are just told to be careful not to get pregnant before they are married”* (*Nuer*). There is *“no sexual education”* also for the young *Moruba*, *“but the mother talks to her daughter when problems are coming up”*: *“when the child informs her mother that she has got a problem, at the moment of her first menstruation or at any other time”* (*Didinga*). The *Dinka* as well do not speak about sex *“unless something goes wrong. The girl’s brothers are always concerned and give advise to their sister. The mother and/or aunts can also help”*. The problem concerns usually the moment of a girl’s first menstruation, *“when the mother speaks secretly to her daughter”* (*Azande*); generally, *“the talk is of a purely moral not of a physical nature”* (*Didinga*). However, not all communities in the

¹ p. 7

² Regarding the removal of teeth, see the second paragraph in the chapter on “Sexual Life during Adolescence”

Sudan neglect sexual education *before* “there is a problem”. While an *Atuot* mother discusses sexuality with her daughter and advises her on behavioural issues (such as, for example, how to cross the legs while sleeping in order to make it impossible for a boy to make love to her), an *Atuot* boy will be taught “*how to clean his penis and how to stretch it out of the foreskin (this can be very painful); it is called ‘leny’ and is done by older boys well before the time of initiation; his mother will tell him how to remove dirt from the penis and how to clean it with water.*” We are told that amongst the *Azande* the father of the children tells stories at night-time “*in order to teach them; it happens between seven and nine o’clock by night*”; our *Zande* interlocutor remembers that he received his own sexual instructions from an uncle at the age of thirteen. I am not sure if, when the *Azande* instruct their children in the evenings, both girls and boys are present or if, like in the culture of the *Ndogo-Sere*, the sexes are separated and the girls are told stories by their mothers. The *Murle*, too, seem to instruct their children from an early age on (“*it starts from seven up to the last age...*”, we are told), with the emphasis laid on the children’s early temptation to experience sexuality (so the *Murle* warn them “*not to play sex*”). With the *Toposa*, education seems to be rather strict: “*The mother keeps tight control over the girl’s education*”, we learn, “*and actually, the girl stays from three up to marriage with her mother; she is just stealing away herself from time to time, when working or at other occasions... The brothers as well keep control on their sister, they are very serious in looking to what may happen. Concerning the boys, they get their education from the father. This happens early in the morning, at about 3.30 or 04.00 hrs., when the minds are still fresh. The talk includes instructions on how to clean the body and the private parts.*”

If the children in the Southern Sudan know actually already at a young age quite a lot about sexuality and sexual behaviour, it is partly from discussions with age-mates and partly from own experiences: “*Sexual education occurs when the children are together, mostly during night-time and during dancing*”, as a man from *Lopit* explains. “*Sex is discussed frequently between age-mates, but the information exchanged there is kept confidential*”, a *Didinga* relates, “*but the discussions are very open*”, “*the boys relating their early sexual experiences*”, as a *Nuer* adds. If girls are as eager as boys to discuss this obviously very fascinating matter, “*they yet never do it in presence of boys, and nor do the boys speak about it when girls are around*” (*Dinka*). The *Atuot* girls share a lot of time with other girls “*and share a lot of things they would never reveal to their mothers. They would tell the names of the boys with whom they have slept or speak about the boy they love*”. “*Boys discuss sexual matters only with the girlfriends with whom they are engaged secretly*”, an *Ingessana* confirms the previous statement. “*The only thing the Murle would never speak about is the anus*”, we are told, - and yet children’s songs use precisely this disgusting term quite often in their “funny” songs...

The following (*Anyuak*) anecdote is to illustrate how children observe carefully and, if puzzled by what they see, ask friends or perhaps even the father or mother for more information:

A Boy and his mother

There was a small boy. His father was called Oriemi.

That small boy used to sleep with his mother. Every morning, when he and his mother woke up and his mother went out for passing water, he went with her; when his mother urinated, he sat in front of her and observed carefully how his mother was urinating. He thought that his mother had a penis like himself.

One day, when they went in the very early morning out for urinating and his mother spread her legs, the boy came very near and looked carefully between the mother’s legs. Finally, he said to his mother: “What, my mother, your penis is really a very tiny one”.

His mother slapped him, and the boy ran crying to his father. When he reached home, his father asked him why he had been beaten. The boy explained, saying “I told her that her penis was smaller than mine”.

“But don’t you know that your mother is a woman?”, the father replied, “do you think that she has got a penis like you? Women have no penis but a vagina!”

The following anecdote is to show how sometimes adults can be brought to speak about “shameful things” and to pronounce words they usually would not use:

Boys discussing the Clitoris

There was a man staying at his fireplace in company of his young sons. One evening, the boys started a conversation. The father was listening to their discussion.

One of the boys asked the other ones if there was any bone inside the clitoris. But the boys did not know.

The father was a clever man. He asked the boys if they really wanted to know. They boy replied that they were really very much interested in learning the facts. The father told them to jump up and to start fighting, pretending to beat each other. The boys got up and pretended to quarrel, the beating of their hands making the sound of “Tai-tai-tai”... The father shouted loudly, asking other people to come and help him to separate the fighting boys. When the boys were separated, the father made them to sit down. The women came out of the house and enquired about the cause of the boys’ fighting. The man answered that the reason for the boys’ quarrel wasn’t something to be told, that it was a shameful thing. The women insisted: “Why! Why don’t you tell us?”. The man said that he was too shy to tell them, but if they really wanted to know, he had to tell them that the boys actually quarrelled about the clitoris, that one boy pretended that there was a bone inside while others did not agree.

So one of the women, the man’s sister-in-law, told the man that the clitoris is not a bone: “it is nothing but flesh, without a bone in it”, she said.

To speak about sexual matters is considered to be shameful; age and sex are deciding if one can talk about the more hidden, private parts of life, - or not. Using bad terms alone is understood everywhere to be offending older people or persons of another sex, and such taboos on the use of a certain type of language in a certain social or private context may precisely be one of the reasons why young people *of a same sex and a same age* find such a pleasure in using such “forbidden” terms like those referring to sexual organs or to other “dirty” activities (like farting, excrement, snot etc.). Children’s songs are full of such references, and the dirty words seem to be most of the time the only “sense” of such singing: it is always a pleasure to do or say things which are not allowed by parents or other respectable persons!

The following “songs” (from the *Anyuak*) are to illustrate the mentioned pleasure of children to use forbidden words and to verbally throw mud at someone, someone perhaps called *Okoth*, *Owar* or *Okwini*... For unconcerned persons, these “songs” are obviously of a stunning senselessness:

Okoth the son of the poet said he would bring groundnuts,
That father of a big anus, his anus is placed on the back,
Okoth the son of the poet said he would bring groundnuts,
That father of a big anus, his anus is placed on the back...

Owar Nyang Digwei is hairless like a vulture,
His faces runs with grubs,
Wiw! I forgot, Wiw! I forgot...
Tang-ta-wi! I forgot, Tang-ta-wi! I forgot

This fellow without hair is like a vulture
His faeces run wiw-wiw with grubs...
Wiw I forgot, tang-ta-wiw I forgot
Tang-ta wiw! I forgot...

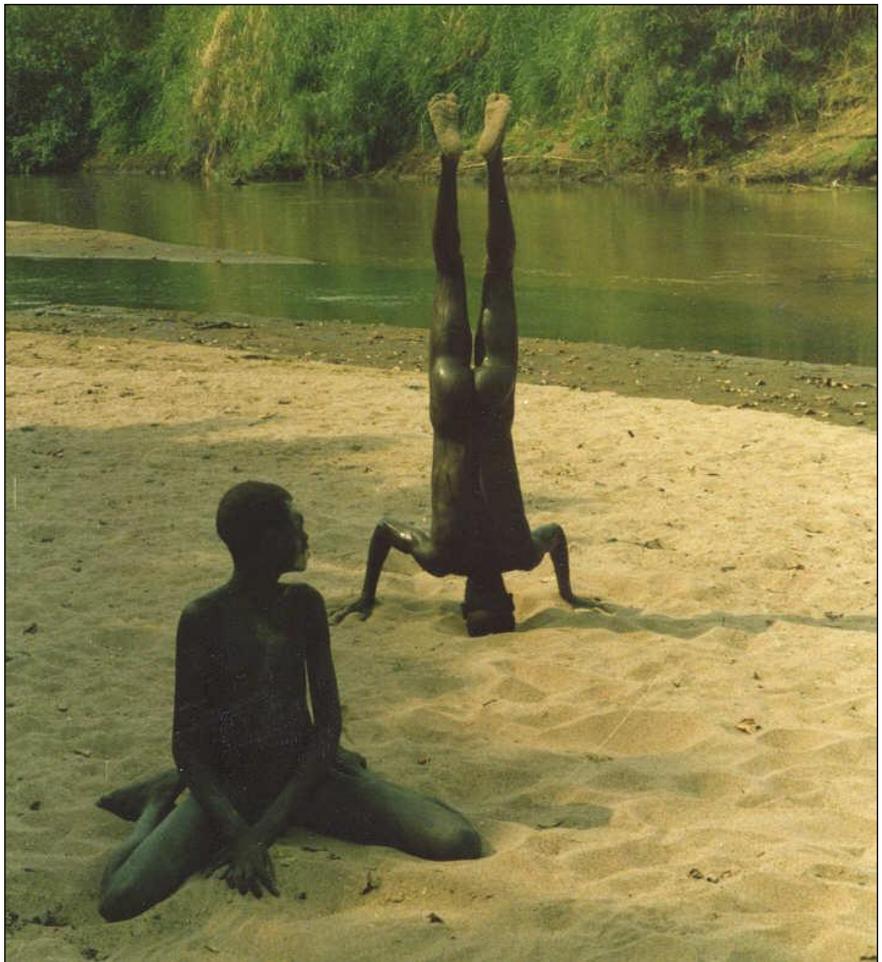
Okwini, Okwini fell over dried faeces,
When he took up the child, he farted,
Okwini, Okwini fell over dried faeces,
When he took up the child, he farted...

Entertainment

There are so many different manners by which girls and – more particularly – boys can enjoy the time without the presence of parents and elders that it may be necessary to remind of the fact that we are concentrating on sexuality and issues directly or indirectly related to it. If it is certainly true that children have some fun in talking about sex and in pronouncing bad words, this aspect of their young life is not the most important one, even so it certainly is of significance for their future behaviour.

Stories

Stories are told by grandparents after the night has fallen, sometimes also by some expert in storytelling. Many of these stories are very scaring indeed, mixing humans with animals, the lion and the hyena being the most prominent figures. There are all types of tales, most if not all of them carrying a particular message of social significance; the more frightening, shaking or simply amazing the story is, the more the children get impressed and the better they will keep “the lesson” in mind.



Some of the stories are harmless and socially not relevant, but at least the last two of the following examples (taken from the *Anyuak*) can teach the children what can happen if one is not careful.

Why the Elephant's eyes are small

When God was giving the animals their various organs the Elephant said that such a big person as himself needed no eyes as no one would dare to attack him. Later Man speared him and he went to God and asked for eyes, saying that there was a person throwing spears at him and that he needed to see. God then gave him eyes but very small ones so that he cannot see well with them.

Why Man cannot see into the water

Once upon a time Man saw into the water and observed fish and crocodiles. These made a case before God and persuaded him to swim in the water in the form of a fish and to throw some water into Man's face so that he would not be able to see clearly under water. Now Man can see only a little way into water and hardly at all at night."

How the Dog got his mouth

"Once upon a time the Dog had a whistle but could not get a proper sound out of it as his mouth was so small, no larger than a man's mouth. When Frog (*ogwal*) saw him trying to blow it, he said that it would be better if he had the sides of his mouth slit. The Dog asked "Would that be so?" "Yes, that would certainly be so," replied the Frog. "All right, you do it for me," said the Dog. So the Frog took a spear and cut the Dog's mouth. Hence the Dog's split face and long mouth today. However, the Dog could blow the whistle even less after the operation than before it. Meanwhile Frog had plunged for safety into the water."

How Rain got the lightning

"Lightning was once the possession of the saddle-billed Stork (*Alil*). Rain said to Stork that he wanted it, but Stork refused, because it was his light, and every night he held it up while the birds were fishing, to assist them. The Rain poured down on him till the Stork shivered with cold so much that he dropped the lightning and the Rain immediately seized it and has kept it ever since."

Other stories are much more dramatic and much more open to different interpretations – certainly also in the mind of the children. The following two stories are told to *Anyuak* children.

A Woman and Her Son (Dhagò ki wädè).¹

There was a woman who had a young son. When her son had become a young man and wanted to marry, the woman told her son that in case he found a girl he loved, he should first introduce the girl to her before telling other people about their engagement. The son agreed to her stipulation.

One day, her son met with a beautiful girl. He talked to her and fell deeply in love with her. He took the girl to his home and introduced her to his mother. When they went to his home, they were in the company of a small boy who used to travel with the girl.

When they reached the home, the mother asked him: "Is this the girl you intend to marry, my son?"

As the boy replied that this was indeed his intention, the mother asked him to allow the girl to stay with her for a day or so in order to let her pound some grain for her. Her son agreed and told his mother that he and the little boy would go back. The mother told them to go but to come back the following day.

The next day, the son and his younger friend went back to the mother's place. When they reached there, the mother welcomed them: "Have you come now, my son?" she said.

"Yes, we have come, my mother", the boy replied.

¹ told by Mohammed *Caam Otwènyo*, at Otalo, May 21, 1978.

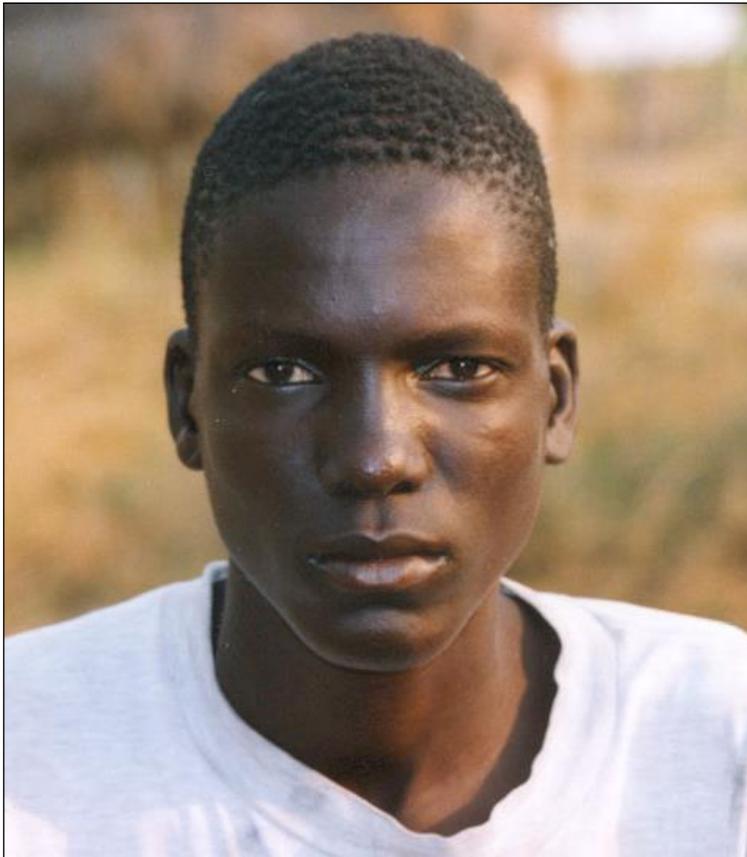
The mother asked who was the boy who accompanied her son, and she was told that this was a friend of his. Then his mother found that they looked hungry: "I shall go to the forest and fetch firewood", she said, and she left.

Her son did not see his girlfriend. He started thinking about his girl friend and about the place she might have gone to. He told the boy that he would enter the house in order to look for his girlfriend. The boy asked him: "How can you enter the house while your mother is absent. You were here when your mother left to fetch firewood." But he did not listen to his friend's advice. He just entered the house. His mother had made a high wooden stage (called *pem*) inside the hut. He looked on that wooden stage and found some blood on the bed. When he searched he found the body of his girlfriend. He wasn't aware of the fact that his mother was a lioness. He left the hut, called his young friend and told him that they were leaving. "Shall we not wait for your mother?" the friend asked.

"My mother has killed my girlfriend", he told his friend, "there is no reason to wait for her. But I shall find out why she did what she did". He left with his friend. Just when they were leaving, the mother arrived. The two friends started running and ran all the way, until they came to a tall coconut tree.

"If you are the coconut tree of my grandfather," the son said, "extend your branches to the ground and let my friend climb up". The tree did as he wished and let the boy climb up. The son proceeded running.

When the mother arrived she found that her son and his friend had gone. She took off after them. But she did not know which way the two had taken. So she took the ring on which she had carried the firewood and threw it into every direction in order to locate the route of the boys. Whenever she threw the ring in a wrong direction, the ring returned, but when she threw the ring finally on a narrow path, the ring took off and disappeared. The



woman followed the path, carrying an axe on her shoulder. She followed the path until she arrived at the coconut tree and found the ring lying on the ground. When she looked up the tree she found the friend of her son sitting up there. She was overjoyed: "God has given you to me, young boy", she exclaimed: "I wanted to eat you before".

The boy answered that if she wanted to eat him, she could remain under the tree. The woman remained under the tree, waiting for the boy to get down. After some time, she started to cut the tree. Very small birds (called *adwòt* pl. *adödè*) came to tease her while she was cutting.

When her son had reached home, he told the men of the village what had happened. He collected his spears and returned running.

The mother was busy cutting the tree. She sang a song "*ni tòk wà nyo may-ò tòk tuo yò pädhi nè yina tun kwara pödhi*" ("if you are my ancestor's tree, fall to the ground"). The young boy on the tree called at the *adwòt* bird to come and to urinate on the tree cuts. *Adwòt*

flew and pissed at the tree. The place cut by the woman resumed its shape as if it had never been touched. When the woman saw that the tree resumed its shape as if it had

never been cut, she was dejected and threw herself to the ground and wailed. But again she came up and started singing while cutting the tree.

Then, the boy sang a song: "*Ongwèc-piny-udo-yo jula-òì na podi ana cam ayangi-òì ana cama yi-nga?*", "*Ongwèc*, please, catch up with me in the wilderness of *Piny-udo* before the mother can eat me. On what grounds should she eat me? For if she could find and eat up *Ongwèc* her son, it could be rightful, because she laboured when she gave birth to her son *Ongwèc*."

At that moment, *Ongwèc* (i.e. her son) came running from a far distance. His mother still continued singing and cutting, urging the coconut tree to fall: "please coconut tree, if you are my ancestor's tree, fall to the ground."

The boy called at *Adwòt*, urging it to fly past and to urinate on the tree. When *Adwòt* pissed on the tree, the cuts made by the woman disappeared as if they had never been. The boy called on *Ongwèc*: "please *Ongwèc* rescue me in this land of *Piny-udo* before I die. I am to be eaten by your mother. For what cause should I be eaten?"

The woman replied: "It is good if you come down and I touch your hair. I could avenge my labour today. Please *Ongwèc*, *Ongwèc* let me fall prostrate with satisfaction." She did not know that her son was coming from behind. She was dancing with delight. As she was about to cut the tree again, her son stabbed her to death with his spear.

Even the next and last example of stories told to children by night is a rather grim one; yet, at least the outcome of the tale is somehow comforting, - even if the hyena will exclaim: "*Didn't I tell you that all this will end in disaster?*":

Dilaro and her husband Wa-Dijwat ("*Dilaro ki cwòrè mo Wa-Dijwat*")¹.

There was a woman called Dilaro with her husband, Wa-Dijwat. There was great hunger in their village. People were living on wild fruits. The hunger was so terrible that men forgot about their children.

Wa-Dijwat and his wife Dilaro were living in an isolated area. Wa-Dijwat always went to the forest and ate the fruits there, without carrying any fruits home for his wife and his children. His wife fed her children out of nothing.

Dilaro went to steal grain from the village of lions. When she stole grain, she also stole flour. She returned home in the afternoon. Her husband was in his field which was near to their homestead. Dilaro cooked flour. She gave their children some of the cooked flour, and they ate. The remainder of it was made into round pieces; Dilaro told her children to go and to throw them to their father in the field. The children went and threw the balls of flour at their father gaily. The man asked his children: "*What kind of your mother's shit are you throwing at me?*". He was once again thrown at. He took a piece and looked at it. He saw that it was flour. He ate it. He collected the other pieces and ate them. Then he told his children to throw more of them at him. After having eaten all the balls the children had thrown at him, he got up and went home to his wife. He asked her about the place from where she had got the flour. She answered that she got it from somewhere. "*If you know*", she said, "*you would not come back anymore*". "*Please my dear wife*", Wa-Dijwat pleaded, "*let us go so that you can show me the place*".

His wife took him to the lions' village. When they arrived, the lions had gone hunting. He and his wife entered into the granary and took grain and flour. Dilaro got out from the granary while he remained inside. "*Why don't you come out of the granary, Wa-Dijwat?*", Dilaro called at him. "*I am still filling my ear*", he replied. "*Why don't you come out now?*" she asked again, and he answered "*I am still filling my armpit*". "*What! Wa-Dijwat!*" she urged him, but he replied "*I am not ready yet*". "*Why! Wa-Dijwat, I shall go now, otherwise we shall be discovered!*" the woman told him. "*You go*", Wa-Dijwat replied. Dilaro left and Wa-Dijwat remained.

¹ In 2/145-155 (L 279-282); other (English) version by Omot Ochan in L 276-278.

The lions returned from the hunt. They threw down their loads of meat. They smelled Wa-Dijwat who was still in the granary. The lions murmured that there was a smell of human being. They looked into the granary and found Wa-Dijwat. *"Who brought you here?"* the lions asked. *"Jony-Dilaro brought me here"*, he answered. The lions sent for Dilaro and Jony-Dilaro was brought together with all her children. Jony-Dilaro was asked what had brought her to this place. *"Hunger brought me here"*, she answered, *"we were dieing of hunger!"* The lions told her that they would eat her, her husband and all her children. Jony-Dilaro answered that she had nothing to say. In the morning, the lions wanted one of them to remain at home and to cook one of Dilaro's children. But they couldn't agree on the lion who had to stay at home. Jony-Dilaro told them that she was ready to cook one of her children. She had brought all the trouble on them, so she had no wish to escape. She was asked who was to be cooked first among them. She told them that she preferred to cook her children first. The lions proposed that her eldest daughter should be cooked first. Dilaro agreed, but once the lions had left she shaved her eldest daughter's hair and cut her fingernails. She collected waste-matters and dry bones. All those things she cooked. Then she took her daughter to the top of a very tall palm-tree (*tuòà*).

When the lions returned in the evening, they praised her for having cooked her daughter, saying that the food was really delicious.

The following morning, the lions went to hunt and Dilaro did the same thing with her second daughter: she collected waste-matters and bones and cooked them for the lions. She took her daughter up to the tree. The lions returned home in the evening and found the food ready.

Again, the lions went to hunt the third day. She did the same thing with her third daughter. When the lions came in the evening, they became very happy as they saw the food. *"Jony-Dilaro has cooked all her daughters, exactly as she had promised"*, they confided to themselves.

The fourth day they asked Jony-Dilaro about her husband as they intended to leave for hunting. *"I cooked my children"*, Dilaro replied, *"now I cannot spare my husband. After all he was the one who betrayed us"*. The lions left.

Dilaro ordered her husband to be ready to die because he was the betrayer of the family. *"I shall really cook you"*, she told him. Wa-Dijwat begged his wife to be spared and to do as she had done with her children. Dilaro first refused to listen: *"I shall cook you"*, she said, but lastly she agreed *"Ok, I shall spare you. Come let me shave your hair and you go and collect waste-matters and bones"*. Dilaro spared him and made him climb up the tree.

When the lions came back in the evening, their food was ready. They were pleased. They conversed, saying that the whole family of Jony-Dilaro had been cooked now.

The fifth day, only Jony-Dilaro was left. Some of the lions suggested that one of them should remain behind for cooking Jony-Dilaro. *"I cooked all my children and my husband"*, she told them, *"with whom shall I live now on this earth? You go, I shall boil water and throw myself into the water. When you come back, you shall find me cooked. You can eat me then"*. The lions were very pleased and left for hunting.

When the lions had left, Jony-Dilaro called her husband down from the tree's top. He got down, shaved his wife's hair and cut her fingernails. They collected bones and waste-matters and cooked it for the lions. When it was cooked, they climbed up the tree.

When the lions returned from their hunt in the evening, they found their food ready-cooked. They sat down and ate. When they had finished, they took out their guitars and sang a song: *"Ding-ding-ding-ding, we ate Jony-Dilaro with her husband and all her children, no one is left to light a fire"*. Jony-Dilaro replied from the tree's top: *"Th-u-u-u, you ate your own shit"*. *"Ding-ding-ding-ding, we ate Jony-Dilaro with her husband and all her children, no one is left to light a fire"*. *"Th-u-u-u"*, Dilaro replied, *"you ate your own shit!"*. The lions heard this and hushed the others to keep silent. One of them urged the lion playing the guitar to play while the others should remain silent. The guitarist played *"ding-ding-ding-ding, we ate Jony-Dilaro with her husband and all her children, no one is left to light a fire"*. Jony-Dilaro replied *"Th-u-u-u, you ate your own shit!"* The lions turned their head and looked up the tree. Jony-Dilaro, her husband and

all her children were up there in the tree. They asked Jony-Dilaro how they had climbed up there. *"You look for a strong rope"*, Dilaro answered, *"you throw it up to us. But first you dig a deep hole around the tree and set fire in the hole. After that you throw the rope to us. I shall hold it for you"*, she told them.

The lions dug a deep hole around the tree and set a burning fire in the hole around the tree. They fetched a long strong rope and threw it up to Jony-Dilaro. Then the animals asked themselves who should take the lead. Hyena was asked but she refused, saying that she was lame. Ostrich was asked, but he refused, saying that his neck was long. Giraffe was asked and agreed to take the lead, followed by the lions and all the other animals. Only hyena refused to climb.

As they climbed up the rope and all of them had reached the middle, Dilaro cut the rope and all the animals fell into the fire. They all burnt to death.

Hyena shouted in astonishment: *"Didn't I tell them that all this will end in disaster"*, she cried, and fled away.

Songs

Children normally do not just sing songs but make them part of games where children move in the ways of those animals³, try to hit at people, move in circles etc. etc. *"In games"*, Francis Deng, a Dinka, writes, *"children act out such adult roles as age-grading, initiation, war, cattle-camp, family life, litigation, and the like. Consequently, they have ox-songs, cathartic songs, age-set insult songs, war songs and women's songs (in the case of girls)..."*⁴. But songs are often integrated into tales (in which certain actors use songs as a kind of magic to receive help) and can therefore be understood only by persons who know the story.

The following two short songs are part of those physical games of children mentioned above; in case of the "Monkey-song" the *Anyuak* children would obviously try to walk in the way of monkeys, with their bald buttocks high up...

Monkey-Song

Monkey does not walk with pride, his hands are black.

Däri (Monkey) does not walk with pride, his hands are black.

Be quiet, be quiet, his hands are like the hands of a human being!

Monkey does not walk with pride his hands are black, be quiet, be quiet!

The monkey's buttocks are bald, be quiet, be quiet!

Däri's buttocks are bald, be quiet, be quiet!

Warthog-song

Its teeth are on its head, its teeth are on its head,

it does not clean its mouth,

its teeth are made red by the sun

wany wèra rolls itself in the mud,

it does not wash itself in clean water,

wany wèra rolls itself in the mud.

It doesn't wash itself in clean water.

³ Such animals are often birds or relatively harmless animals (such as the frog, the warthog, the porcupine or the giraffe) or birds (Pelican, Marabu, Hammerkop etc.), that is animals which can easily be imitated – but lions may appear in songs.

⁴ Francis Mading Deng, op.cit. p.247

Riddles

In the children's education, riddles are not without significance: they touch on almost all things of social and private life, on animals and plants, activities, tools and utensils, challenging at a same time the children's intelligence and imaginative capacities.

The following riddles have obviously been chosen because of their references to sexual organs:

- There is a thing which does not know its relatives. (*"Gia ma kuc wadigi"*)
 - *"It's 'cul', the penis"*
- There is a long object with two bells, what is it?
(*Ito ki gia moro mo pure rae hi to kulangi rio*)
 - *"Cul", the penis*".
- There is something... its grandfather is *"Olat"* (red), his son *"Ocar"* (white), the granddaughter is *"Obuor"* (brown) and its children are black like *"Oceri"*... what is it?
 - *"The pubis, the penis and the sperm"*.
 - *"Not that...! It's the pot, the food and the fire."*
- There is something.... it stays on two eggs... What is it?
 - *I am a wise man, isn't it the penis staying on two testicles?*
- There is something... it is only one, not two... What is it?
 - *I am a wise man, isn't it "Cul-dhano", the Penis?*
- There is something... when it has fallen down it cannot get up anymore... What is it?
 - *It's "thuno", the breast!*
 - Something is dancing without a lover, what is it?
 - *"Thuno", the breast, that's it.*
- Something was stumbling yesterday and is still tottering, what is it?
 - *"Thuno", the breast.*
- There is something, it has got a hole in the middle and a pole in the hole, what is it?
 - *That's the sexual parts of a woman, isn't it?*
- Something can send you into the rain, what is it?
 - *"Ciedho", the shit.*
- There is something, it farts and jumps up.... What is it?
 - *It's "lek", the pounding-pestle.*
- There is something, it is a gun but cannot kill you... What is it?
 - *That's "kwodho", the fart.*
- Something catches the navel, what is it?
 - *It's "abala", a piece of a broken pot (which is used when the navel is to be dried up after delivery).*

Children playing sex

"At an early stage, the children are taught not to play sex with their friends", a Nuer relates, members of other communities confirming that these games are actually not only disapproved but also feared: *"it is forbidden, considered by the parents to be immoral"*, as a Lango explains, *"forbidden, yes, and yet it exists"*, as an Acholi adds. The Toposa seem to be an exception to the rule, for our interlocutor states that, in his place, *"nobody bothers, really"*. The existence of sexual games played by young children is not denied by anybody, in spite of the parents' warnings: amongst the Pãri, *"it is rare but it does exist"* as much as it is usual amongst the



Lotuho, the Murle, the Anyuak, the Nuer, the Shilluk, the Balanda, the Moruba, the Didinga and in fact all the other ethnic groups which were asked on this subject. Perhaps more interesting than the mere information on children's curiosity on sexual practices are possibly the

details which were given: rather vague and yet suggestive is the answer received from one of my friends from the Jur-Bel: *"Children just practise sex when they are playing, but nobody shows them how to deal with"*... The Lotuho are convinced that the children *"touch on the other's sexual parts, can even practise sex"*, a Moru remembers how furious he was when he and a friend, while still very young, *"had sex with a girl (she was a little bit older) and she ran to her mother to tell everything..."*, the Toposa *"touch each other and have sex together"*, the Dinka are reported *"to play marriage, including its sexual aspects"* and the Anyuak and the Balanda girls do the same when they *"choose their husbands amongst the small boys"*. Nuer children start, I am told, to play sex *"while still very young (from five years upwards)"* and *"practise sex orally when they are playing in their own places, by day or by night"* and my Didinga informant could only confirm this for his people: *"Yes, children's sex games are normal, children start already at the age of five"*, he says, adding that *"the children may sing sex-songs and even have sex together (girls and boys)"*.



Only our Balanda informant hinted at the fact that these games could also take place when small girls or boys are together with friends of the same sex (he had seen boys playing on the riverside); such playing between members of a same sex surely exists as much as the other

type of gaining more personal information about the other's body, last but not least because girls and boys are more often in company of children of the same sex.

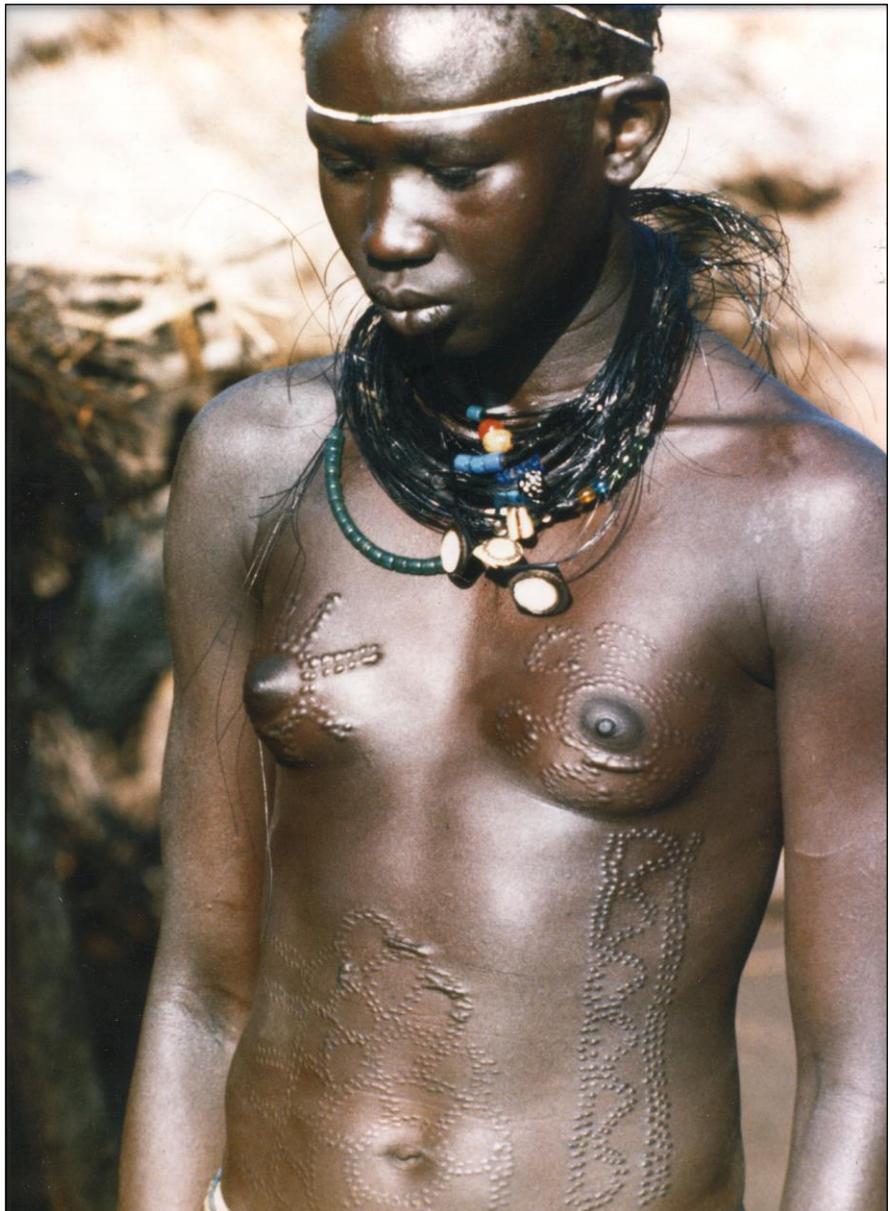
If parents are fearing, it is surely mostly because they fear for their girl and her future fecundity which, they believe, can be in danger when girls have sex while still young.

Menstruation

The Toposa call it "mysterious lively blood".

The moment when a young girl experiences her first menstruation is for her a moment of great worry: usually, she does not know what happens to her. It is at that moment when her mother provides her with information regarding the woman's body and her sexuality.

A *Moru* mother "will tell her girl not to worry, that this is something what will happen normally and regularly". The *Toposa*, who call menstruation "mysterious lively blood" "tell the girl not to be afraid. The mother advises her. She will stay three or four days inside the hut. The mother will explain that her daughter is not well. Only the father and brothers know and understand what is the matter". With the *Balanda* and with the *Azande*, "this moment is kept secret. Mother and an elder sister alone know, nowadays perhaps even the father. People will think that she



is sick" and a *Didinga* girl "would not tell anybody either; it is known only to her mother and sister." But while with the *Didinga* and the *Suri*, "the girl just stays at home and pretends to be sick", an *Avukaya* girl "will behave quite normally and will do her usual work". This is

confirmed by the *Moruba*, where “*she will stay in the house and do her normal work, unless she falls sick; only mother and elder sister will know*” . Amongst the majority of the *Dinka* people , “*nobody will know it, except the mother and elderly relatives. One does not even speak with the father about it*”.

People from all parts of the Southern Sudan thus seem to behave in an almost identical way: the girl usually stays at home and it is only the mother, an elder sister and perhaps relatives who would know. That a father would not be informed about a matter which surely is of importance for him may amaze and one can wonder if the reluctance to discuss sexual matters is the only explanation for such a behaviour: but let us remember that at least *Toposa* fathers and brothers are aware about the young girl’s “problems”.

The only exception known to me concerning the people’s behaviour concern the *Dinka Bor* (*Dinka* living in the region of Bor): here, “*the moment of a girl’s first menstruation is the occasion to a feast and a ceremony: the mother’s brothers or sisters put the girl’s hands on the fire, make her gifts like rings etc. The ceremony is followed by some instruction and advises regarding the precautions on sexual matters*”.

If the moment of first menstruation is a particular moment - often experienced as a bad surprise - in the life of a girl, the parents start to worry as well: from now on, they have to fear for the girl’s “safety” . The *Murle* seem to be particularly careful: “*A menstruating girl is not supposed to work hard or to carry heavy loads*”, our *Murle* informant tells, “*she is always monitored when she moves to the forest, and her brother, father or mother are always with her in one room... They do this to avoid pregnancy before marriage*”. The *Balanda* speak probably for everybody else when they tell that, because of such fears, “*the girl’s father is always checking his daughter’s whereabouts*”...

Precautionary measures

Many (but not all) cultures in the Sudan understand a woman’s monthly period as something worrying, a temporary state of impurity, - most probably because of the bleeding involved. This is why we find in most (but not in all) Sudanese communities specific rules concerning the time of menstruation. To the exceptions to the rule belong the *Toposa*, the *Päri*, the *Didinga* and the *Murle*.

Some of these rules are of a hygienic nature, others of a social significance; however, most of these rules are of a spiritual essence and linked to the belief that a menstruating woman’s activities are potentially dangerous and may harm things.

Here a few examples for such rules:

- Girls should be clean all the time (*Jur-Bel*)
- Girls are prevented from playing with boys during night-time (*Lopit*)
- Girls are not allowed to shake hands (*Anyuak*)
- A menstruating girl is not allowed to drink milk during 15 days (*Dinka*)⁵
- She is not allowed to milk cattle (*Dinka*)
- A menstruating girl does not milk a cow and she does not drink milk (*Nuer*)
- She is not allowed to sit where the boys are (*Lango*)

⁵ Hofmayr:288 says that a *Shilluk* girl should not drink milk up to her marriage!

- She is told to keep her cloth during menstruation (*Lango*)



Even grown-up women have to respect a number of rules:

- With the *Dinka*, a woman having her monthly period, a woman is not allowed to milk cattle; if she does, the colour of the milk will change!

- Such a woman can cook, but she must use plates which never contained any milk.

- Before going to milk, she has to wash her hands, either with urine or with water.

- A menstruating woman will put mud on her face (*Suri*).

- During the menstruation-period, the *Acholi* don't sleep with their women
- A menstruating woman is not allowed to weed, otherwise the crops will get destroyed (*Ndogo-Sere*).
- During menstruation, a woman should not brew beer, otherwise the beer will have no taste! (*Ndogo-Sere*).
- A menstruating woman is never allowed to hold a spear: otherwise the spear would miss! (*Azande*).