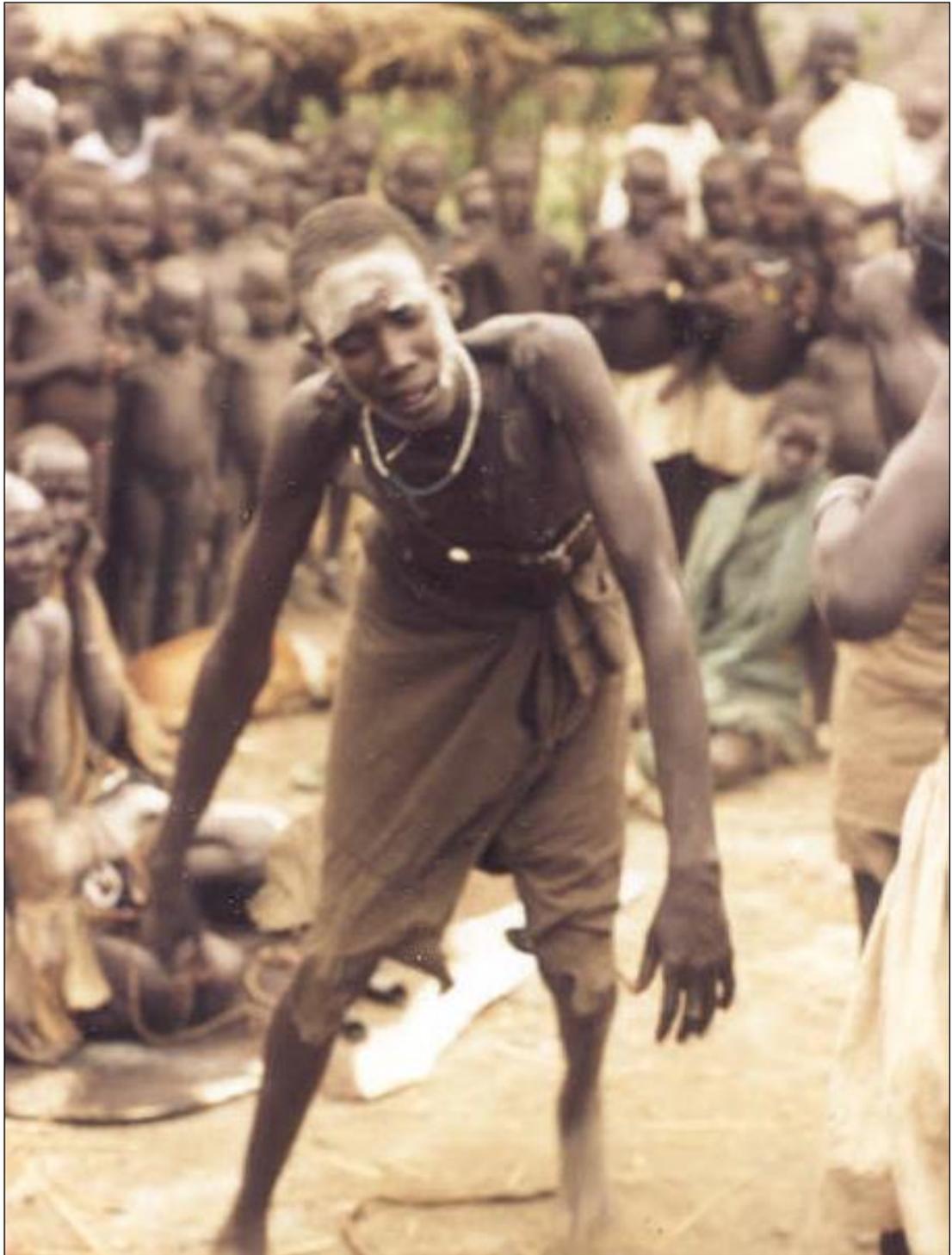


Sickness and Disease¹

The people in the Southern Sudan do not recognise organic causes for sickness.
(NUER)



¹ For more details on this subject, see Kwacakworo's *"Introduction to traditional approaches to sickness and healing in the Southern Sudan"*, Lokichokio 1993 (OLS/Unicef), 28p.

Because sickness and death are almost daily experiences for the inhabitants of the Southern Sudan, and because most *people don't believe in fate or fatality*, they spend a lot of time on finding out the *deeper* causes of their existential problem: there *must* be something responsible for the breaking down of the original state of harmony and health!

From daily experience they know, that *there is a reason* for everything, for quarrel, social unrest, bloodshed etc. Things do not just happen like that but there is – there must be - an *explanation for everything*.

People find it relatively easy to discover the more fundamental causes to an evil and are able to locate the places of origin of a problem : For sure, the cause to the breakdown of the original state of peaceful harmony cannot be found in the sphere of the earth which is so generously providing people with everything they need: food, water, animals, crops and shelter. Therefore (and in some paradoxical sense: *obviously*) the evil must emanate out of *the sphere of the unknown, virtual, the sphere of transcendence, the sphere of spirituality...* “*We don't know what is happening up there in the sky*”, the *Anyuak* say, and locate many of the diseases which they can't understand in the sphere where winds are moving and from where lightening and thunders crash down to the earth (especially sicknesses affecting the head are believed to come from the sky). “*Sickness is caused by God...*”, a *Suri* explains, “*and by the heat...*”.

However, *Nature* of course *has also its own spiritual dimensions*, it is a *living* entity which does not like to get hurt: all earthly matter can be upset and provoked to take action, the sites where local Spirits are residing being particularly sensitive to any type of disturbance; and there exist obviously also *animals* who can be potentially dangerous to the humans, physically but also on a spiritual level: some of them – as for example the giraffes, snakes, scorpions, the lions or the buffaloes - possess spiritual qualities, reason why certain clans or villages sometimes associate themselves with them²; occasionally, ancestors have turned into a particular animal which then of course has got a special but not always positive relationship with the humans: the *Sere* and the *Panabongbar*-clan of the *Atuot*, for example, turn after their death into lions³.

The most disturbing element in creation, however, is obviously *the Human Person* itself, with his temper, his humours, changing character, feelings of jealousy and hatred: to make “mistakes” is human! The root to the problem is that *the Human Being is a spiritual matter by itself* and can through its consciousness harm other persons – out of anger, out of envy, in order to gain justice or to take revenge, or simply because of the sadistic pleasure to disturb, to torture or to kill other persons... The organ through which such person can harm and even kill is either the *eye* (well-known to have also *evil* powers), the window of human spirituality, or *language*, the most current carrier of human consciousness: language is very powerful indeed, it can bless and bring fortunes or it can curse and – provided it is not stopped in time on its way – bring disease, blindness and death.

For all the people in the Southern Sudan, *ancestors* (and indeed all dead people) continue their existence on earth and – though invisible – show great concern for the people they have left behind: if unhappy with the people's behaviour or when feeling offended, these ancestors are most likely to teach the survivors a bitter lesson or even seek cruel revenge.

In the following, we shall further elaborate on the different beliefs regarding the deeper causes of sickness, disease and death before concentrating on the people's methods to *prevent* misfortunes

² Such animals would not harm the people related to them and the people would not kill or eat them.

³ That's why the *Atuot* (and actually the *Dinka*) are believed to eat people...

before they have arrived and to heal open wounds by *restoring* the harmony which had been broken; in the framework of this general paper, it will of course not be possible to describe the different approaches taken by the people of the Southern Sudan in details (differences exist not only between the many ethnic groups but also between regions, villages and even between clans); in view of the imminent campaign for the prevention of HIV/Aids, a paragraph commenting on *sexual diseases* has been added.

The understanding of possible causes to Sickness and Death

The nature of sickness is the whole system of existential forces and the events of the physical world which are not controlled by man...
(PÄRI)

The people of the Southern Sudan do not believe that it is “natural” to fall sick and to die: “*The Moruba*”, one of our interlocutors explained, “*the Moruba don’t imagine that death could be something normal: they always relate it to something which has happened*”. The Avukaya still believe “*that people fall sick or die because of some mistake committed, a mistake which has made the ancestors unhappy... But there are also witches... And sickness is also carried by the wind, so one can get infected... But old people are taken away by God*”. Searching for plausible explanations, they all agree that there are only three major causes for misfortunes, disease and death: God and Spirits, Witchcraft and Curses, the latter category including ancestors, dead people who are in many regions – and especially in Western Equatoria - held responsible for most of the people’s existential problems. The importance of each category varies from place to place and even inside of individual families: there are a lot of *individual beliefs* which require particular ways of behaving. “*If someone dies,*”, an Avukaya tells, “*people believe that he has been bewitched*”. While *witchcraft* is everywhere existing and much feared, the most dangerous and widespread “disease” is certainly the *curse*: “*Curse is a very powerful source of disease*”, a man from the *Ndogo-Sere* states, explaining that “*in a family, the mother and brothers can curse. But a curse becomes only effective after death*⁴. *Then, the person who is cursed will visit the grave and ask for pardon*”. Indeed, while spirits may react violently because they were not honoured in a respectful manner and while witches may just want to satisfy their sadistic desires, curses are more directly linked to an individual person or a specific group of people (a family, a entire village etc.). Unlike the senseless evil doings of a witch, the reason for a curse can, at least theoretically, easily be understood by the person or the group of people concerned: whoever has committed a mistake may find here the most plausible reason for his health-problems, his persistent bad luck or, in case of a village, an epidemic.

While the *Didinga* relate sickness and disease to “*witchcraft, Gods and Spirits*”, the *Murle* relate it mainly to the activities of “*impure people...*” (and their witchcraft) “*...or otherwise it comes from Gods*”, the “*River-God*” or the “*God of Goats*” being especially feared. Explaining what was meant by “*impure people*”, our informant elaborated, saying “*There are at least two or three categories: (1) those who are killing people intentionally in a remote way, for example by*

⁴ This aspect is interesting as it prevents a person from taking profit from the results of a curse while still live.

intercepting an insect into his body and by releasing them later on into other people's bodies, (2) those who have naturally poisoning substances in their bodies without exercising any control over them and there are (3) those who believe that they are doctors who can bring out an infection or heal a person from a disease”.

Most Nilotes would agree when the Acholi enigmatically explain that *“something is happening, coming from somewhere”* before getting more explicit by saying that sickness is coming *“from the wind (that is God), from a curse or from ancestors”*; and our interlocutor to explain that *“the ancestors are crying for something to be fulfilled”*. The importance of ancestors in Acholi-culture is also stressed by Seligman:122 who writes: *“The spirit of the dead are regarded as taking a profound interest in the doings of their descendants and as being responsible for much of the good and most of the evil that befalls them”*.

In the life of the Avukaya, ancestors have always played a big role: *“In former times”, the Avukaya “did not know that there was such a thing like God... They knew only ancestors.”*



The Azande believe that sickness *“comes from the air.....that there is one God, and under him a number of small Gods...”* *“...but they believe more strongly in the power of curses”*⁵; however, *“the evil-eye is equally feared very much”*. And the Ndogo-Sere, who stay with the Azande, explain that *“all bad things (such as killing, adultery, deceit, beating etc.) can cause illness. The punishment is by God or the*

ancestors...As a remedy, you can visit the source of a river or go to the mountains and pray to God and to the ancestors. If they forgive you, you can get cured of your disease”.

Significantly, the Anyuak have one single term for ‘God’ and ‘sickness’: *“Jwok”!!!* Like most Nilotes, they make the spiritual powers (God, spirits) responsible for many cases of illness, even though *witches* also have a share in the responsibility for human suffering. The sickness brought by God is usually to be cured. Much more terrible and in fact disastrous are the *curse*s who ravage the country and who bring disease and death: *“about 80 % of all cases of sickness and disease are caused by a curse”*, as all Anyuak agree.

Protective measures, Precautions and Prevention

⁵ On the Azande and their beliefs, see Evans-Pritchard, *“Witchcraft and Oracles among the Azande”*.

“At the time, people were not just living because of the doctors!”
(AZANDE)

“Prevention is better than healing”... This proverb holds true everywhere, but more especially of course in a place where medical facilities are lacking and where there is little hope to get cured once a disease has befallen you. Perhaps because of such wisdom, but perhaps just because there are so many dangers of all kinds which are threatening people that the Southern Sudanese are very cautious and careful when dealing with things which can be found in nature and very suspicious indeed when meeting with human beings. Well aware of the dangers which may await them on the way, they are protecting themselves (and their beloved ones), taking all kinds of precautions and preventive measures, trying to avoid all encounters with potentially dangerous matters, if they were of a spiritual, human or animal kind. Most of the measures are of a rather defensive nature, but the so significant (and often spectacular) act of blessing a beloved person shows that luck can also be *forced* upon people and bring them prosperity and happiness.



The following list of types of protective measures stems from my *Anyuak* experience; therefore, it has only the value of an example which I believe nevertheless to be quite representative for most of the South-Sudanese ethnic groups, and surely for the Nilotes.

Hygiene

Hygiene may not everywhere in the Southern Sudan play the same crucial role as it does amongst the *Anyuak*: for them, cleanliness is the physical way of expressing human consciousness and of keeping all evil, dirty matters away from the places where people live, from the human body and indeed from their mind; the *Anyuak* take a bath two times a day, but more amazing is the way they are cleaning themselves: they take all their time to wash all parts of the body with greatest care and concentration, finally polishing their shining body as if it was a mirror reflecting all their understanding of human existence. Amongst the *Toposa*, sexual education includes instructions on personal hygiene: *“the children are instructed how to clean the body and the private parts.”* Young *Dinka* and *Atuot* boys are also taught (by older boys) how to clean their penis and how to stretch it out of the foreskin. Other ethnic group may not pay a similar attention to the importance

of cleaning one's body regularly: "Nowadays", a Suri exclaims almost shocked, "nowadays women take a bath even before marriage!!", and to explain a statement which seems amazing, he adds "In former times, women were not supposed to take bath, otherwise people would imagine that they have committed adultery!". A Balanda acknowledges that the hygienic behaviour of his people was formerly not so perfect: "A long time ago, people worked very hard..., ... from 6 o'clock in the morning up to five o'clock in the evening; they took only one bath daily. But nowadays they bath twice". Pregnant women are, amongst the Nuer, considered to be unclean, but apparently not only because of their exceptional physical condition but, as our interlocutor states, "because they don't wash themselves". "Not washing" is required from the Azande during funerals (three days for men, four days for women) and before going for hunting; while the reason for the former prohibition is relatively easy to understand as a strong physical reaction to a sad happening (where human self-consciousness is much stressed), the latter is to avoid that the animals "smell the humans" – another, indirect way of emphasising the fact that cleanliness is directly linked to the human person and shows in a physical way their difference from other, less conscious beings (such as animals, witches etc.).

Washing is a criteria for hygiene, - at least in the eyes of foreigners. In fact, it is not only water that cleans...! In an environment where the water is often unclean and infected, water may indeed not be the most perfect means to protect the body. There are other means of cleaning oneself, - even if a person afterwards may not look particularly "clean". Such means are *mud*, *sand* and *ashes*, materials which do not only clean the body but – perhaps more importantly – also protect it (for example by keeping mosquitoes away) and have, at least in the case of mud, also curative effects (skin-diseases are successfully treated by mud).

Nakedness

The arrival and implementation of foreign cultural values, the perception of 'nakedness' has absolutely changed – and with it not only moral attitudes but also the hygiene and the formerly so clean appearance of the people (who lack the means to purchase soaps or clothes). This is not the place to compare traditional values with the Muslim or Christian negative understanding of the naked human body. Times where men were naked and women had nothing but a hide are definitively on the way of disappearance, even in places where clothes are rather a hinder than anything else, - and clothes surely do not change the people's sexual attitudes.

For the Murle, "*nakedness is absolutely natural for boys and girls. The parents of the girl feel proud to see their daughter move naked, for this is to ensure that the girl has never slept with a man. Nowadays people are taught that nakedness is a shame...From the moment on when a girl is married, she is not going naked anymore.*" Nakedness was (and partly still is) usual for all the Nilotic people, who understood clothes as a sign of immoral behaviour, an approach which could be compared to the present reluctance to use condoms. The Atuot, too, would punish a girl wearing clothes: "*Girls and boys go naked while in the cattle camp and other homely places*", our informant on the Atuot says, "*only married men and women are allowed to wear cloth or leather. For a young unmarried women to start wearing cloth when there is no special occasion, this is considered uncustomary and she should be punished for it.*"

If, traditionally, all Nilotes moved about naked (married women excepted), there were yet specific moments where people linked nakedness to sexuality: "*a son-in-law should not see the wife's mother naked*", Seligman:118 notes for the Acholi, for "*otherwise he must give a sheep*

which she will add to her flock”. “However”, Seligman adds, “he is unlikely to see her naked as all the women wear a small fringed apron... If a woman should see her son-in-law naked, she must make beer for the whole of his local group – but as all Acholi-men are naked, this would amount to total avoidance!...”

We are told that, “in Lopit culture, nakedness is still normal” , and while the Anyuak interlocutors state that “Nakedness was much better than the present habit of wearing clothes”, their Pāri-relatives have given in to pressures from outside “because people are exposed to modern life”. As already mentioned, “nakedness is a natural thing for the Nuer”, Dinka, Acholi and all other Nilotes (under influence from their direct neighbours in the North, the Shilluk pretended to “cover” their nakedness by knotting a kind of bed-sheet on heir right shoulder).

Pastoral people like the Toposa, the Suri, the Tid, the Nyangatom or the above mentioned Murle are still not wearing cloth, and this for purely practical and hygienic reasons. Let’s note that some traditional methods of protecting a body from mosquitoes etc. by covering it with ashes or mud is not possible anymore when people wear clothes. Lack of money to buy clothes or soap (and in many places the absence of markets where such items could be purchased) is, as noticed, a real problem for many people; the solution proposed by one of our Nuer informants (who said “even though getting cloth may be difficult, there are always ways of borrowing clothes from someone else”) is, from a hygienic point of view, certainly not the best way to protect one’s body. If the Anyuak interlocutors have discovered that “nakedness was much better”, it is surely too late for them to get back to their old habits: “nowadays people stupidly get already embarrassed if they see somebody naked”, as a Pāri concludes.

The sedentary cultures in Western Equatoria (such as the the Azande) who have adopted many customs⁶ from Northerners do not share

the culture of being naked, well on the contrary: for them, we are told, “to see somebody naked is a bad omen” and therefore it is to be avoided; surprising people who have sexual intercourse is considered to be a bad omen as well, “and you are going to die”. The traditional clothing of the Jur-Bel consists for men out of a cloth made out of the bark of the “bogodi”-tree while the women “used to wear twigs or leaves of trees in front and on the back a bark of a tree called “kodu”.

Measures of Respect and Avoidance

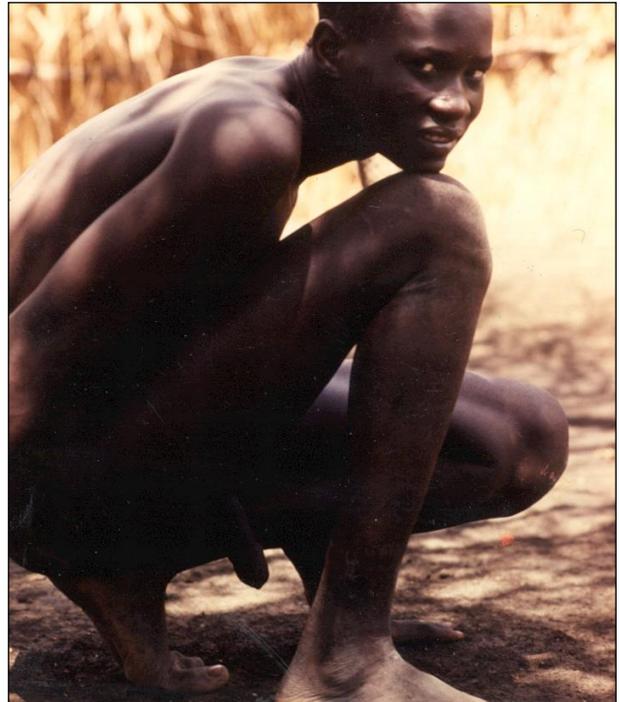


⁶ Amongst them the habit of circumcision.

The notion of respect is much linked to the notion of fear. Strong-minded and self-conceited characters (as at least the Nilotes are) would respect only what they fear, and that is why respected persons are met with great honours and respect; whenever possible, these potentially ‘dangerous’ persons are avoided. Such respected persons are *in-laws* but also *old people* and *young children*, persons who suffer of a physical or mental problem (blind, bold, mad or handicapped persons) and, most importantly, a person’s *ancestors*. *Spirits* are also given respect by obeying to the rules they impose (the *Anyuak* female God *Lero*, for example, wants by-passing men to be naked and to urinate in the way women do) and by sharing symbolically some food and tobacco with them. All lack of respect for such persons or spiritual entities will have bad consequences for a person and, most of the time, result in a curse.

Some people are not respected but simply feared: these are the *witches* which roam about in the darkness of the night, dance on graves, rub on people’s sleeping-skin to make them impotent, insert strange objects into a person’s body etc. etc. The tool allowing their hideous activities are the eyes, and that’s why one’s eyes should not remain on a person for a long time (provided one does not want to be mistaken as a witch!).

Nature needs also to be respected: the *Anyuak*, for example, need to get special permission by making a sacrifice to the forest before they could be allowed to cut a big tree. If people were failing to pay this respect, nature would seek revenge and surely kill some people when cutting wood or collecting firewood.

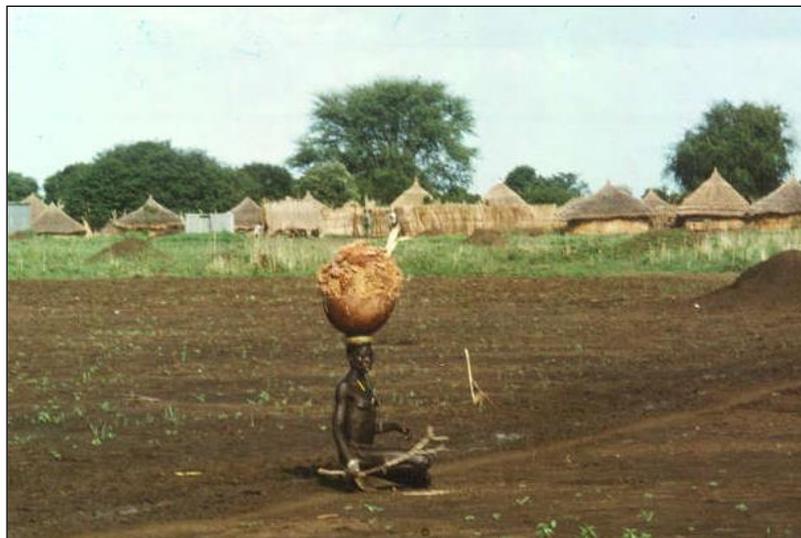


Anyuak position of respect

Animals, especially dangerous ones, should not be disturbed without real cause; this is the condition to a peaceful co-existence which is so necessary in a place where wild beasts and human beings live together. At the beginning of the fishing-season – to take another example from the *Anyuak* – people move to the river-side where a spiritual leader addresses the crocodiles in the water, asking the *foreign* crocodiles to leave the place and let the fishermen do their work in peace, while he will allow *native* crocodiles (which share the same interest in peaceful co-existence) to stay. There exists a strange kind of *solidarity* between people and other animals or even insects found at a place: “*No! The mosquito are good!*”, I was once taught when trying to explain malaria, “*they are from here, this is their home, they would not harm us!*”

Dreams are understood as messages from *Spirits* and the orders received will be executed; a woman who received the nightly visit of such a God and who would not name the child after the God (give it to him symbolically) would surely loose it.

If respect is one of the most important “ground-rules” of behaviour, there are also limits to it, as for example in this *Päri*-information: “If you see somebody urinating near to you, you should stop to show respect”... Respect, of course, should be mutual.



Anyuak woman kneeling in respect

Precautions

People take all kind of precautions *to keep evil away from the people, their homesteads, their livestock and their crops*. At a same time, people take their precautions when moving to other people’s places: “*The Balanda don’t go anywhere except for reasons*”, an attitude shared by most of the people living in the Southern Sudan.

In order *to manifest their human identity* and to differentiate themselves from spiritual beings and animals, the people (the *Anyuak*, at least...) do their utmost to create “a centre of humanity”: by keeping their places as clean and beautiful as only possible and by keeping their human consciousness alert all the time (through singing and by glorifying society and its historical deeds it is possible to create truly human space and human time), by surrounding the sphere of human spirituality by beads, colours, rings etc. and by protecting their heads (with head-gears and wigs) and bodies (by colours or by scarrifications), the people stress their purely human essence and give clear signals to all those who would be badly mistaken to think that this is wilderness.

At a same time, *people want to know the exact identity of other people*: are they truly human, or are they only looking like human beings but are in fact siding with the destructive forces found in the universe, are so-called “non-persons”? When someone is passing by night near a homestead, the Anyuak will ask: “*Who is walking there?*”; the answer does not consist out of a name but of a more important information: “*a human person*”, is the reply... The presence of witches in all places in the Sudan is well-known and would not be disputed by anyone. One better keeps one’s eyes open!

There are some people whose human essence is, to say the least, doubtful: such people are naturally twins⁷, circumcised people⁸ (or, in other places, people who are not circumcised), perhaps even certain mad persons (because they may be possessed by a spirit). Persons who are believed to have been *cursed* are normal persons who show a particularly bad behaviour; one should be careful with such people as well.

⁷ See the chapter on “Pregnancy and Birth”

⁸ See the chapter on “Pregnancy and Birth” (“children who are different”)

The precaution not to produce envy

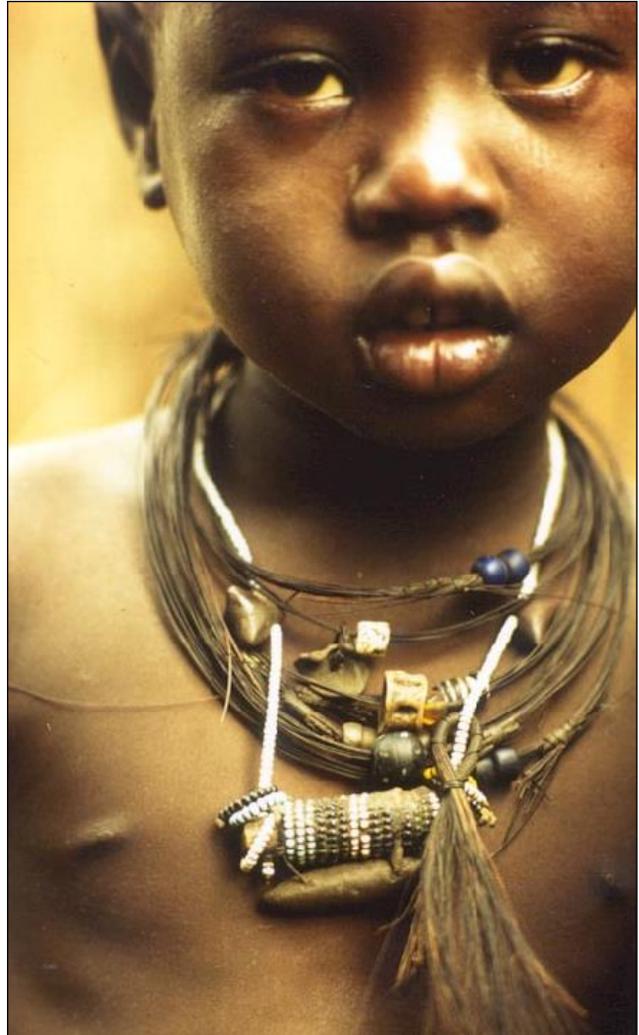
Boasting is strictly forbidden. It is not so much natural modesty (which may be there anyway) which makes people refrain from telling anybody how rich they are: there is the fear that boasting may result in envy and eventually in the loss of that property. This is why nobody would ever tell how many heads of cattle and how many children they have: if they would tell the truth, the cattle or the children would have to perish.

Precautions taken to avoid infection and contamination: isolation of patients

The people of the Southern Sudan are much aware of the possibility that disease can be transmitted to other persons. They are less (and in fact scarcely) aware of the ways diseases are transmitted and generally believe that *infection is a spiritual and not a physical process*. In practise, such knowledge may not matter too much, what is important is the existing awareness of the danger and the appropriateness of measures taken to avoid an infection: because the people are extremely eager to prevent disease from spreading, many of the present health-problems - namely those related to water-borne diseases or to malaria - could actually get much reduced if only the people could understand the causes to an illness or to a disease. At the moment, however, the people's concept of disease still remains on a purely spiritual level. The *Acholi*, for example, explain that *"There is the fear that serious diseases may affect other people. Therefore there is isolation of sick people, - especially children should not come near to a sick person : a spirit may haunt the body... but isolation is for incurable diseases "*. The *Toposa* call the isolation of a sick person *"katalak"* and explain it in this way: *"A person who is seriously ill will be isolated in order to avoid that evil bodies (witches) come near and take the sick person away... This really happens: the sick person is carried off, cut into pieces and the witches celebrate in joy"*. The *Anyuak* would also keep a seriously sick person away from other people; very significant for their understanding of transmission of diseases is the avoidance of walking in the footsteps of people who died because of a disease: *"if someone died because of hunger"*, they say, *"one should not touch their footsteps, otherwise you will get contaminated and you will starve to death as well"*. The *Dinka* also avoid physical contact: *"Someone with syphilis is not greeted by hand, is not to be touched. Someone with Aids would be neglected, so he would feel alone and expelled"*. The *Nuer* behave with seriously ill patients like most other people: *"If people feel that a disease is dangerous, they don't get near to the patient"*, – *"A very sick person must be isolated and is to be given special treatment. All his belongings are kept apart"*. The same holds true for the *Azande*: *"People with leprosy are isolated and their cooking-utensils kept separately. Traditional medicine was used for healing"*. Leprosy is a case which everywhere gets special attention, so also amongst the *Murle*: *"In case of Leprosy (which is very special) the person concerned can be isolated even from his own close relatives: a special room, separated from other huts by 15m, is made for him; he has his own cooking-utensils, but the food will be cooked for him, this if the case is serious and if the person cannot get out of his sleeping compound."* The *Lokoya*, too, are particularly careful with people affected by leprosy and serve them in a separate calabash. The *Balanda* informant hits at another important point which is the care people take of such patients: *"Sick people are taken out of the house and put in a special hut. The relatives go there and stay near to the patient"*. Indeed, isolation does not mean that people would neglect the patient and keep him in a state of psychological isolation. The contrary happens, even with persons affected by Leprosy, as an *Ingessana* is to underline: *"Handicapped people and persons with leprosy are to be isolated and given special care"*. Psychological

support of sick people is indeed essential and contributes much to a person's possible recovery, and this of course especially in places where people rarely have possibilities to get appropriate medical treatment and where care and love shown by relatives and friends are the only "medicines" available. *"The Moruba don't like to be isolated from other people"*, our *Moru* interlocutor remarks, stressing this important point.

There exist many other instances where people keep away from persons who are believed to be in an unusual and potentially dangerous state: such situations are those related to birth, to pregnancy or to death where people prevent from either causing harm (for example to unborn or new-born children) or from getting infected (for example by the matter of death). Vulnerable people are therefore either separated from the community or treated in a special manner; eating vessels are, like in the case of sick people, often kept separate from other members of the household. Finally, there exist also rules of avoidance of a sick person not so much because of the sickness itself but because of social reasons related to laws of respect; our example for such behaviour stems from *Dinka* society where *"neither your age-mates nor your husband are allowed to visit your mother if she has fallen sick"*.



Precautions of a more practical kind

There are not many health-problems which would not be immediately linked to Gods, to Witchcraft or to a Curse. As there always must be a reason why something bad has happened, even accidents may find their explanation in a curse. Nevertheless, there are some exceptions and they concern the people who obviously make problems for themselves by not listening to advises or by acting against common sense. To give only one example for such cautious behaviour: if one has walked under the sun for a long time and one's body is burning of heat, one better does not take a bath before having cooled down – otherwise the whole body will explode and one will die.

Protection of children

Children are the people's road to existence on earth after the own death. They have a sentimental but much more an existential and philosophical value: without children, the world comes to an end⁹. During pregnancy, at birth and during the whole period of infancy, the mother has to

⁹ See the chapter "Begetting children".

respect special rules which are meant to ensure the security and the health of the child. The whole period of weaning is supposed to be a time when the mother has no sexual intercourse (it can last two years and more) and must entirely concentrate on her child. But bigger children receive great care and love as well, at least up to the time when they start to have their own sexual life. Because of their importance for someone's life and because of their vulnerability, *children need to be respected* and are, while young, never beaten nor ill-treated by anyone.

If children are absolutely crucial for people who focus very much on their own life *after* death, the *mothers* become almost more important than children! If a study on sexual behaviour always tends to highlight the women's inferior position compared to the one of men, stressing the instances of neglect, violence and sexual abuse, it may be fair towards the accused male sex to underline the general *great respect, care and affection* of Sudanese men for women. The ill-treatment of women is not a rule but an exception, and the fact that women play an inferior role in society does in no case mean that they would not keep a very important position within the household. Indeed, women do not only care for children, cook and perform all the other (heavy) duties in the household (pounding, fetching water and firewood are amongst the most tiresome ones), they are also the only "source" of children! A woman's role in human procreation is so fundamental that people naturally tend to believe that sterility is only with women and that it is always the woman who needs special protection for being or remaining reproductive. Polygamy itself may be explained by the men's sexual desires (it soon becomes a burden) or by the need to share in the household-duties, but essentially it may simply be a kind of insurance for getting children, - and hopefully enough of both sexes! The very fact that the women are directly responsible for the welfare of their children (and therefore need special attention) is documented by the remarkable *Toposa*-belief that "*if a baby has got diarrhoea, the mother is breaking the rules*" (of abstinence while weaning the child)...!

If the protection of children has to start before they are born, all things which could possibly spoil a woman's fecundity have to be kept away from her. Such rules of precautions exist in all cultures of the South Sudan, and we give here only a few examples for it:

- "*Never leave the children alone!*" (*Avukaya*)
- "*A child should not be buried deep, otherwise the mother stops to give birth*" (*Didinga, Anyuak*)
- "*A dead baby is to be buried near to the mother's hut. The grave will not be build with stones before the mother has given birth to another child*" (*Azande*)
- a dead person is *not buried*¹⁰ "*because people believe that a buried person will curse the living ones and prevent them from producing children*" (*Murle*)
- "*There is the belief that is you sleep with a young girl, she will not bear children*" (*Päri*)
- "*If a man had intercourse with another woman, he should not enter his homestead without having taken a bath: if this is not done, you bring a curse with you and all your children will die*" (*Acholi, Madi*)
- "*We don't speak about the number of our children, - or we will not get any more children*" (*Anyuak*)
- "*A still childless widow of a man killed in a fight is not allowed to send anybody to fetch fire! If a boy comes and brings her fire, she has to make him sit down on the ground and must take the fire out of his hands, thereby touching his hands... If the woman does not touch he boy's hands, he will get spindle-bone-disease.*" (*Acholi*)

¹⁰ Amongst the *Murle*, only the red chiefs and their families are buried. Cf. Lewis, "*Red Chiefs and black Commoners*".

Protection of livestock and crops (sexual taboos)

Not only people, even cattle and livestock have to be protected from disease; being the very basis of human existence on earth, they need special care and attention, in case of the cattle even love. One way of protecting these vital matters consists in keeping away all things which could spoil the fertility of animals or the soil. Frequently, such matters are linked to sexual impurity (someone who had intercourse is believed to be temporarily impure) though not exclusively. Amongst the crops to be protected are not only fields for food-production but, very importantly, also tobacco-fields.

Crops:

- *“A person who has touched decayed meat should not go to the tobacco-field” (Acholi)*
- *“One should not cross the field of someone else, because this may kill the owner or destroy the crops” (Baka)*
- *“...but if someone has crossed your field, you can put a grass (it is called ‘Baabudumo’) there and this will curse the man, that is it will kill him or destroy his garden” (Baka)*
- *“A menstruating girl is not allowed to weed, otherwise the crops will perish” (Azande)*
- *“After sexual activities or when having the menstruation-period, you should not go to praying places, you are not weeding the groundnut- and tobacco-fields, you are not brewing beer and you are not carrying a newly born baby, your own one excepted” (Azande)*

Cattle and milk:

- *“A man who has been in touch with a dead body or who put someone into the grave should not enter the cattle-place” (Acholi)*
- *“A man who has killed a human being is not allowed to touch a cow or a breast-feeding woman, otherwise both the cow and the woman would lose their milk” (Didinga)*
- *“A person who has killed somebody should not go to the cattle-place” (Acholi)*
- *“During her menstruation, a woman is not allowed to milk; she can cook but using plates which never contained milk – if she does, the milk will change colour!”. (Dinka)*
- *“Before going to milk, a woman has to wash her hands, either with urine or water” (Dinka)*
- *“An adult man should not go to the cattle-place because he may have had sexual contacts and may cause the cattle to become sterile. (Shilluk¹¹)*
- *“A man who had sex is unclean and does not drink milk before the sun has set the following day” (Shilluk)*
- *“A child who drinks milk outside of home must have a bath before returning.” (Shilluk)*



¹¹ See Seligman:73 for this and the next two examples.

Blessing

The habit of blessing people (especially children and adolescents) is the “life-insurance” of all Sudanese: without it, nobody would leave for a far place! Blessing is one of the few moments where people express their feelings of affection and love, it is an almost *sacred* act of highly spiritual dimensions. A blessing actively protects a person from illness, accidents and all other dangers waiting on the road to a foreign place¹², may even bring a person luck and happiness!

Blessings are not only needed to get efficient and lasting protection, they are also used to *cure* a sick person from his illness and are able to bring back the former state of health. As a measure of *prevention*, blessings (that is human spittle) are expected to keep away certain dangerous diseases (such as measles) from a homestead and in particular from the children living there.

We give a few examples for the very procedures of blessings as a means of protection:



The *Didinga* bless a person “*by spitting into the hands, sprinkling water on them, on their feet, blessing the person by talking*”.

The *Anyuak*, too, use speech as a tool for blessing (“*Nothing will happen, nothing will happen, you will remain strong and healthy*” etc.) but spit directly on a person head; after having spit into the hands, they “smear” the elbows and knees with that spittle.

The *Ndogo-Sere* bless in the following manner: “*The mother fetches a rope (“kpöyo”): late in the evening, she chews it and puts it then on the door-entrance. The*

next morning, the boy kneels on that rope and prays to the ancestors, sings many songs. The rope is finally tied around the waist of the boy to be blessed or around a girl’s neck. What was wished for will then happen. Or they spit on the whole body (any part) and in the face.

If the spittle is mixed with water in a container, this water will first be put on the ground (to get rid of all possible curses) and is then spread on the person who is to be blessed.”

If you are a *Suri* and are blessing your child, you do the following: “*You take ashes and put them on the child, then you spit on its head*”.

The *Acholi* can – like many people in Western Equatoria - bless collectively or as an individual: “*Collectively you spit into a calabash in the name of an ancestor, but individually you spit into a gourd, mix it with water or oil and put it on the body of the person you wish to give your blessing*”.

In what concerns the *Toposa*, they use spittle and sprinkle with sand and water. “*A father will bless a much loved son by spraying urine on him*”. Spectacular is also the way they bless a person when leaving home: “*the departing person is passing under the legs of both men and women, eventually turning them the back and leaving without looking back*”. This fare-well-ceremony is shared by other people, such as the *Nuer*.

¹² People feel really safe and protected only in their own place; once away from home, they have to be particularly cautious. When an *Anyuak* moves to another place and intends to settle there for a while, he will take with him a quantity of native soil (earth); arrived in his new domicile, he will swallow every day some part of the earth; after some time, he will swallow a mixture of the soil from home and the one of the new place, changing the proportion of the mixture day after day. One day, the mixture will be of half native and half foreign soil, and some time later the proportion will change “in favour” of the foreign soil; at that moment, the person is already less foreign. When finally the mixture consists only out of foreign soil, the person can feel at home that is: protected by nature and safe from all bad surprises...

General medical care

My grand ancestors
I have given you our gifts to cool your hearts.
You snakes, do not bite my people.
You evil spirits, take away your diseases and illness
Far away from the land.
You evil god, leave us to rest and take all diseases
To Baria to drink milk there.¹³

“Great care is taken of sick persons, by the mother or the wife or wives: water is fetched for him/her, food is brought, the room is warmed up if so required etc.” This statement by one of our *Murle* informants emphasises one very crucial point in the approach taken by the Sudanese to problems related to disease and the people affected by it: the treatment of disease happens



essentially on a spiritual and psychological level where relatives and friends play an important, perhaps the most important role. Great tenderness, affection and love are the means by which people try to soothe a patient’s suffering, to appease his worrying mind and to give him or her new hope and courage.

In the absence of modern medical facilities¹⁴, people are left on their own and have to make use of what is available: medicinal herbs or more magical means such as language, blessing, charms etc. Most important is, as it was seen, the avoidance of potentially dangerous matters, precautions and prevention, behaviour playing a crucial role in it.

Each culture has its own understanding of the causes to illness and disease, and each of them has its own preferences in the way of treating the diseases. One could spend a lifetime in studying the different plants or the many (mostly magical¹⁵) means to expel a disease from a human body and could check their medical efficiency... Lacking such time, we have to satisfy ourselves with a very few examples of the general treatment of sickness; they were provided by our “witnesses” on the different cultures:

¹³ in: Lomodong Lako, “Lokoya of Sudan”, Nairobi 1995; p.53

¹⁴ It is true that this has – thanks to many NGOs working in the Sudan – but there are still many problems: many cases of disease cannot be treated at home and distances are enormous; where there is a dispensary there are often not enough medicines, and where there are medicines competent personnel is absent... Money of course also plays a role, even if this may not be the biggest of all problems.

¹⁵ Other methods exist: the *Anyuak* may tie up a person believed to be possessed by a bad spirit, put pepper in his eyes and whip him until he loses consciousness; when he wakes up, he has either “recovered” from his madness (the bad spirits were successfully driven out of the body) or his case will be considered to be hopeless.

Acholi: treat a sickness “by herbs or by blessing (spitting into a calabash filled with water and sprinkling it on the sick person’s body)”

Balanda: “This is an example for a remedy for a common disease (example): You prepare a potion of native medicine, simsim and groundnut and you drink it or rub it into the body... Then, you mix the remaining quantity with cold water and wash yourself with it... The sickness will go away!”

Murle: “With us, there are no special ways of healing, except two common ways which concern witchcraft or the River- and Goats-God when the sick person is fed on butter and animal fat....”

Sere: “In case of Malaria, a person’s head is covered with a basket... Then, cold water is poured over the sick person (it is dipping through the basket). A fire is made around the patient in order to chase the evil away.”

Baka: “If there is a disease in the village (such as measles), you go and cut a local “medicine” from the bush. It is put all along the road up to the entrance of the house. All members of the family step over it before going to the home. Then, it is collected, washed in water, and the water is scattered all over the place, on the road, in the homestead etc. You will stay in the house in order to avoid that disease. If you have many children, you do this at the 1st day of the year.”

Lokoya: “Both preventive and curative medical practices are closely linked to religious life. Regular blood sacrifices are performed to make peace with the departed ancestral spirits so that they in turn will protect the people from the evil spirits that bring sickness. When a disease or death strikes a family, a traditional ceremony is held and prayers are offered on the family altar or shrine. A goat is killed and the contents of its stomach are mixed with water. Saliva is spat on the mixture and the head of the family, usually the eldest member, sprinkles the mixture onto the family members and around the homestead”¹⁶

Avukaya: “There is a charm made of an animal’s skin to protect a child from getting measles. If there is an outbreak of measles in another village, people fetch a special kind of leaf in the deep bush: it is called “ono”; before the wind comes, one prepares a mixture of “ono” and water, leaves it one night, and then one makes a mixture in cold water of durra and beans. One calls the whole family and people will scatter the mixture of beans and durra as well as the “ono”-water all over the place in the house and even on the way to the compound. In that way, you prevent the measles to reach your place.”

Anyuak: the following table is to get a rough general idea of diseases found in Anyuak-country and of the way people understand it and try to get recovery:

<i>Problem</i>	<i>Cause</i>	<i>Treatment</i>	<i>by</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
Fractures etc.	Accident	Splinting of broken limb - a string of black beads around the ankle, wrist...	Person who knows...	
Wounds	Accident	Disinfected by water gained out of a bark + bark-powder		

¹⁶ Lomodong Lako, p. 9

Swellings	infections	Swelling on buttocks: a plant is cooked and eaten, a child stirs a gourd full of water on the patient's buttocks	specialist	
Skin-diseases	(leprosy) strikes a person who was robbed of her/his beads or cloth	By putting mud on it; body cleaned with oil.		
Snake-bites	Accident or Ci-jwok (<i>witchcraft</i>)	Patient is isolated; extraction of the poison by moving a gourd full of water on the limb	Specialist for snake-bites	
Worms	Guinea-worm in stagnant water	By pulling the worm out of the body by using a small stick		
Headache	Jwok / a curse	- Blood-letting - a string of red beads		
Brain-tumour		- powder of a tree is poured on the tumour	Maternal uncle	
Dizziness	ci-jwok	Fanning, massaging, putting beer on the forehead, shoulders and arms, spitting on the head; finally forcing the "soul" (<i>tipo</i>) back into the head by fire. - extraction of the curse - shooting it out of the head	specialist	
Madness	"ontological impurity"- a curse	- white bead for purification (twins etc.)	specialist	
Fever, Malaria, Sleeping-sickness etc.	Jwok (God)	- by praying - flagellation - making sacrifice - purifying with " <i>olaw</i> ", heirlooms (beads carrying the spittle) Places of the Tsetse-fly are Avoided.	Family	
Painful chest		Hot water to be drunk		
Coughing		Roots of a grass left overnight and drunk during some days - smoking tobacco (in heavy cases)		
Tuberculoses	ci-jwok	No remedy		
Lumbago		A shrub's roots are cooked and drunk		
Heart-failure	ci-jwok			

Liver / gall	Food / ci-jwok	Leaven or lemon to stimulate appetite, leaven also against nausea, some roots make a constipated person vomit... Liver-pain needs operation (extraction of a foreign body)	Private In severe case by specialist	
Spleen		By rubbing ashes into the body, drinking water prepared with a root	Doctor	
Diarrhoea/ Dysentery	Bad food	Medicinal herbs and roots		Water is good, tasty...
No digestion / constipation		Different roots as digestive medicine, some of them causing also vomiting		Wrong dosage can lead to death
Jaundice		With the liquid prepared out of the <i>tuoro</i> -plant (highly effective, very dangerous)		
Uro-genital Tract		In case of pus, extraction by moving with a gourd filled with a grass. Difficult urinating by hot Massages. Painful urinating by urinating into a fire burning a special plant. Elephantitis: no remedy.	Doctors Or Private	
Impotence	ci-jwok	Drinking of a mixture ashes/water		
Breast-disease		By eating beans (<i>ngunatak</i>)		
Menstruation		Mixture of water and roots to relieve menstruation-pains		
Pregnancy		Special precautions		
Delivery		In case of the unborn baby's death, extraction with the help of hooks... After delivery, massage and drinking hot water		
Remaining placenta		Doctor's presence can bring the remaining placenta out	Specialist	
Child-sickness	Spirits	<i>Birds</i> may indicate dangers	Herbs, blessing	

Circumcision	ci-jwok	Not a sickness but an existential problem: siding with the inhuman, such people are harming others for no reason		Nobody talks about it (out of fear)
Stolen soul	Burning soles	Fire-therapy	Specialist	

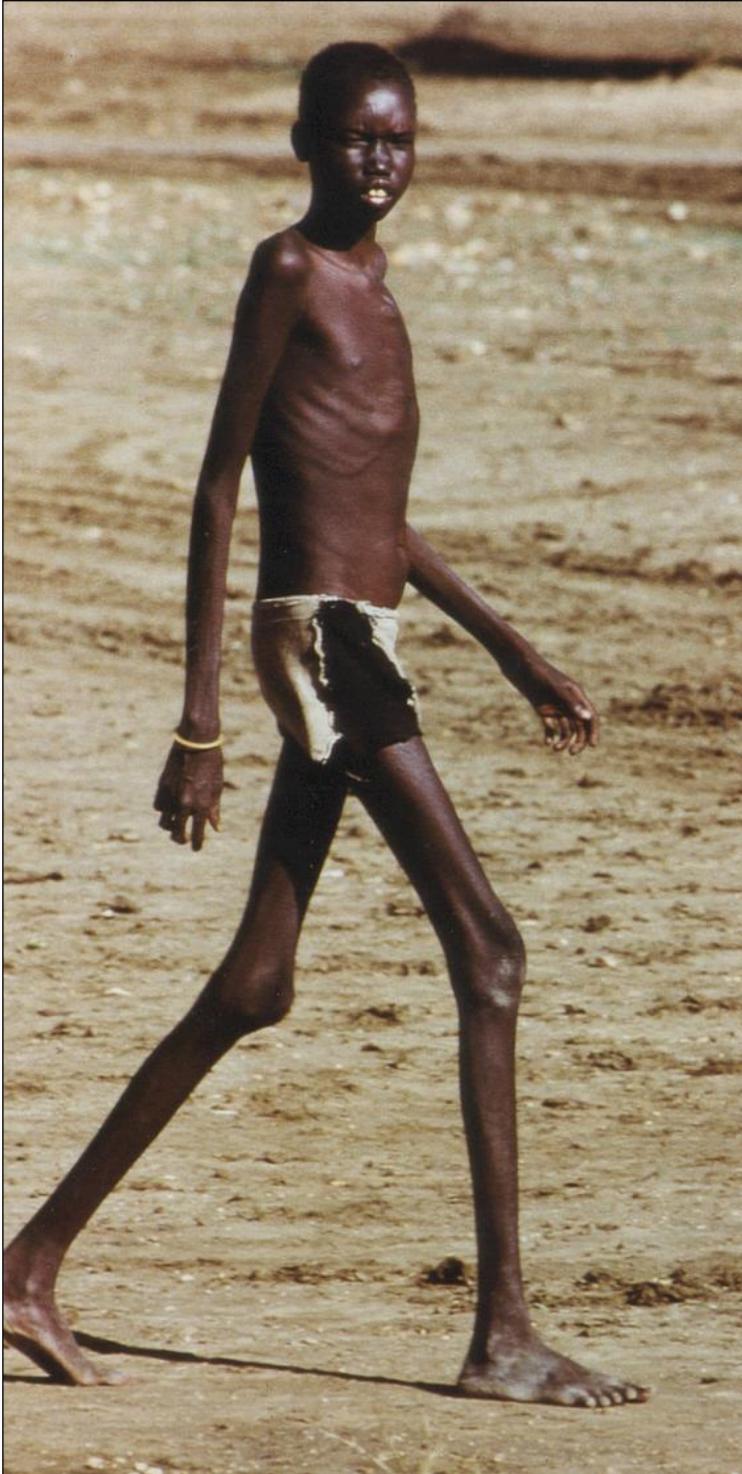
A final note may be added in what regards the sick people’s own attitudes: believing – in most cases of disease – that the origin of the problem is of a spiritual and not a physical nature, they expect “that spiritual matter” to leave the body all at once; indeed, it is difficult to imagine that, for example, a curse would only slowly disappear from a body. The consequence of such beliefs is that long-term treatment of diseases are a foreign, new way of understanding medical treatment, - and therefore must be well explained.



An Anyuak doctor extracting a snake’s venom from a child’s leg.

*Dealing with sexually transmitted Diseases*¹⁷

Sexually transmitted diseases (STD) are very frequent amongst the people of all ethnic groups.



While unknown for a long time, movements of people in and out of the Southern Sudan, contacts with foreigners (from neighbouring places or from abroad) or with people from the own country and the creation of population-centres (towns, refugee-camps etc.) have facilitated and more recently speeded up the spreading of such diseases.

Sexually transmitted diseases are considered important only if they lead to impotence and to sterility¹⁸; generally, not all people seem to be aware that such diseases can be transmitted through sexual contact. Nevertheless, what holds true for the Azande: *“No woman will agree to have sex with someone with a sexual disease, nor will a man go to bed with a woman affected by such a disease”* is elsewhere the case as well.

Beliefs regarding STD

The people don't differentiate between diseases according to physical let alone medical criteria but explain it either by witchcraft or by a curse (of ancestors or any other person).

¹⁷ Note that the pictures (all by Alexis Duclos/Gamma) show people who are not necessarily infected with Aids (but may suffer of tubercuklosis, a problem linked to malnutrition etc.)

¹⁸ See the chapter “Begetting children”

Knowledge and Terminology

My initial plan of enquiring – during my visit in the Sudan – about specific terms for the human body, for different sexual activities and for sexually transmitted diseases had, because of lack of time, to be abandoned. Vocabulary can give good information on the people’s knowledge and on the activities they know and perhaps practice, especially if there is a double translation (from English into the people’s language and then back into English). When asking some people to translate some terms into English, there were some misunderstandings: instead of a translation a was given an explanation... For the sake of curiosity rather than for any other reason, I am reproducing this “piece of information” which was provided by a young man from the *Jur-Bel* (in brackets the remarks by an *Anyuak* boy):

Genitals:	<i>“External sex-organs of a person”.</i>
Penis (“Cock”) :	<i>“It is the outer organ of a male, in humans and other animals; it is used for urinating and for having sex. (“You know (how) to work, when you are mature”)</i>
Testicles:	<i>Found with men, are two glands beneath the penis which produce sperm”.</i>
Sperm:	<i>“Is the liquid containing the cells which are forced out of the penis during sexual intercourse”.</i>
Vagina (“Cunt”):	<i>“Is the passage connecting external sex organs in woman’s womb”.</i>
Uterus:	<i>“Is normally in woman’s womb”.</i>
“to flirt”:	<i>“result of a lot of wasted intercourse” ...!!! (Päri)</i>
“to fuck”:	<i>“To have intercourse with someone”.(“To try sleeping with a girl”)</i>
to have an orgasm:	<i>“To have been infected by a disease”</i>
to masturbate:	<i>“To rub or strike one’s own or their partners sexual organs as a way of getting sexual pleasure”.</i>
to ejaculate:	<i>“When you release sperm into the vagina and through the womb”.</i>
Menstruation	<i>“Is a monthly period”</i>
Pregnancy	<i>“When a sperm of a male reproductive organ meet with the ovum of the female reproduction organ is fertilised it is known as pregnancy.”</i>
Rape	<i>“Is a violent intercourse without proper agreement with the lady concerned, it is done by force.”(“It is to force the thing”)</i>
Delivery	<i>“Come out or give birth” etc.!</i>

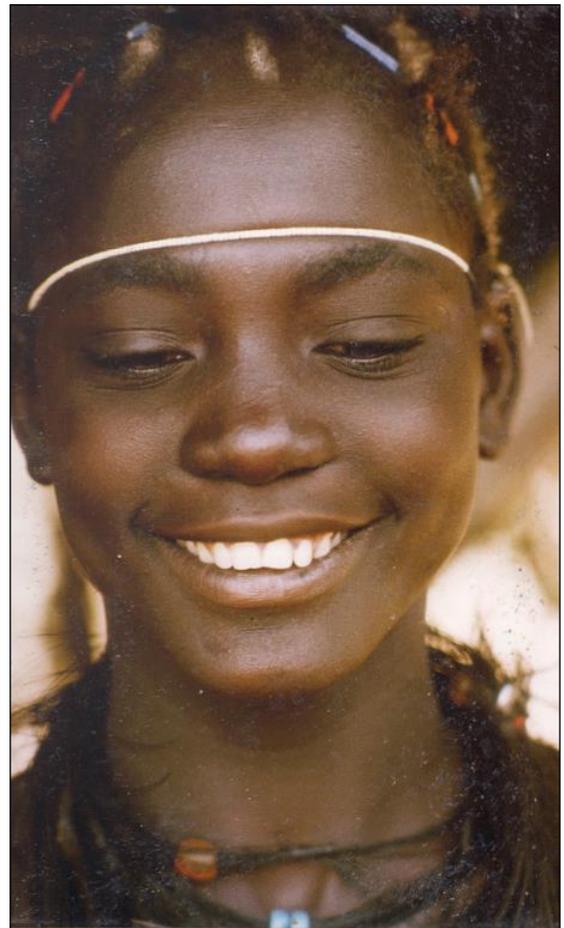
And these are the terms I collected with the help of a medical officer¹⁹ amongst the *Murle* on the Boma Plateau; even if one does not know some possible other meanings, it gives us an idea about the knowledge of the people, even if they may have been helped in their understanding by the mentioned medical officer:

Genitals:	<i>Dolanen</i>
Penis:	<i>kira</i>
Testicles:	<i>orose</i>
Sperm:	<i>zira</i>
Vagina	<i>nenge - gene</i>
Uterus:	<i>rukumbu</i>
Clitoris:	<i>ngoto</i>
Mon Pubis:	<i>imakpalakpari</i>
Vagina:	<i>nenge</i>

¹⁹ Mr. Ajang Mabor, a Murle-speaking *Dinka* from Bor, presently working amongst the *Murle*, the *Jiye* and the *Suri*.

Vagina orifice:	<i>ngbagene nenge</i>
external urethral Orifice :	<i>gene irimo</i>
Anus:	<i>gene mire</i>
Intercourse, to have (polite):	<i>witise yee</i>
“to fuck”:	<i>witise ni ume</i>
Rape:	<i>wi de ngba ome</i>
To have an orgasm:	<i>angbiro</i>
To have oral sex:	<i>nyoro ngbase</i>
to flirt:	<i>kbaraka</i>
To masturbate:	<i>kake kusayo</i>
To ejaculate:	<i>kafu nzira</i>
Menstruation:	<i>kaza ade</i>
Pregnancy:	<i>mubara</i>
Delivery:	<i>batika (vungu)</i>
Breast:	<i>mamause</i>

- Impotence: *Langarezhen* (Murle), *Luoch* (Nuer),
Kpirokoyo (Azande)
- Sterility: *Nyakuluk ilali Alam* (Murle), *Roul*, (Nuer),
Zangada (Azande)
- Syphilis: *Karongmar* or *Turpul* (Murle), *Lokumam*
(Jiye) *Wadh* (Nuer), *Kongoni* (Azande), while
for the Didinga, syphilis is “*unknown yet*”
- Gonorrhoea: *Bonga* (Murle), *Nabacu* (Didinga), *Azawei*
(Jiye), *Monyjiel* (Nuer), *Akperepuse* (Azande)
- Yaws: *Gede* (Murle), *Akede* (Jiye), *Angoikongoni* (Azande)



Since quite some time, people have some knowledge about the existence of *Gonorrhoea*, not really much about *syphilis*, *yaws*, almost nothing about *HIV/Aids* and if possible even less about diseases like *genital herpes*, *Trichomoniasis* (Yeast infections) etc.

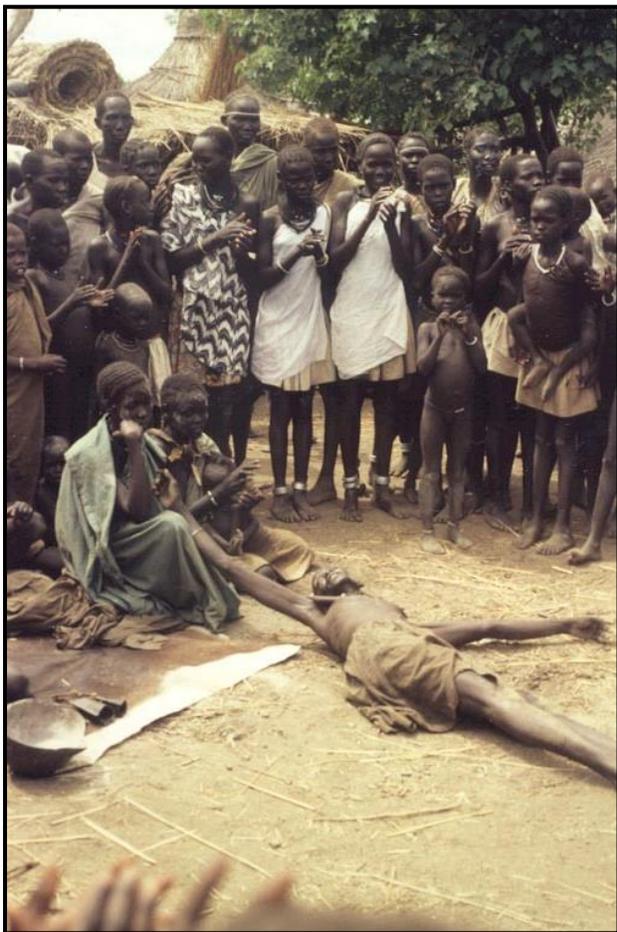
Terms for sexual diseases are not so important for people who have no access to medical facilities, they will have to remain with their own understanding of things and find relief wherever it is possible.

The best known sexual disease is said to be Gonorrhoea; it is shameful and will cause problems in sexual relationship. With the *Nuer*, for example, “*if it was brought by your wife, it can lead to divorce*”.

Treatment

Sexual diseases cannot rarely be cured by traditional medicine. In the Southern Sudan, it is the local doctor (or so-called magician) which knows what kind of medicines would help to get rid of the problem. Usually, he prescribes *medicinal herbs* which, at least amongst the *Azande*, are known or believed to be efficient. The *Didinga*, the *Azande*, the *Dinka* and the *Balanda* are all using this type of medicine; the *Acholi* would also bless the affected person, while the *Anyuak* and the *Sere* would prepare a mixture of different items, ashes, roots and water in the former and onions and roots in the latter case. The *Nuer* are apparently less fortunate, because they say that there is “*no traditional way of treatment sexual diseases in Nuer society*”; the *Toposa*, too, lack knowledge of medicinal herbs: “*we Toposa are very poor in herbs*”, my friend affirms, adding

“but we are good in witchcraft!”. Herbs may occasionally also help in case of *impotence* and *sterility*, but basically the treatment of such existential problems needs to take place on a spiritual level. In Murle-land, *“the local doctor could ask the relatives of the sick person to go and dig out the root of a certain tree, put it into water and boil it for some time and give it then to the patient for drinking. Sometimes, the doctor may instead give orders to slaughter a bull, a goat or a sheep of a specific colour; the fat gained out of that animal’s meat will then be given to the sick person for drinking. Finally, the doctor could prescribe female witchcraft as a means to heal the patient.”*



HIV/Aids

It is difficult to enquire about a problem which is not known by the people and it is therefore not amazing that our interlocutors, though mostly educated, could not provide much information either. Any statistical information is therefore lacking as well. In the following, I shall list up some of the answers I received on my question regarding the present awareness of HIV/Aids, add some notes on condoms and cultural obstacles to their use, before eventually continue my guess-work by imagining how people with Aids would be treated.

People at risk:

“The people most affected in the community of the Atuot”, we are informed, “are the travellers, the soldiers and the businessmen. The Atuot are the leaders in the livestock-trade with Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and various parts of Western

Equatoria. Even before the road was passable and secure, the Atuot businessmen were always able to make their way to Kaya, Koboko and Arua in Uganda, sold their cows there and purchased in return second hand clothes and other goods which they then took up to northern Bahr-el-Ghazal for exchange or further trade”. In addition to the mentioned three categories, a group which is at high risk to get infected is the one of prostitutes and of girls who became victims of rape (committed by soldiers or by drunk people), the prostitutes becoming themselves a source of disease (for soldiers but also for all common citizens).

Awareness:

The following answers are self-explanatory and show how little people are aware of HIV/Aids and the great risks they encounter when not being very careful in their sexual behaviour. The

current ignorance of the danger is, however, quite logic if one considers that information on this matter has been poor, and that it in any case never reached the more remote parts of the country.

Here some of the answers I received when asking about existing awareness of HIV/Aids:

From the *Avukaya*:

“People do not know..”

From the *Moruba*:

“People have got knowledge about Aids and its consequences, but they always relate it to something else, something which has happened.”

From the *Toposa*:

“Aids is an evil disease due to the evil-eye or due to an evil created by that person. Only the witchdoctor can give help, by isolating him, making a sacrifice etc.”

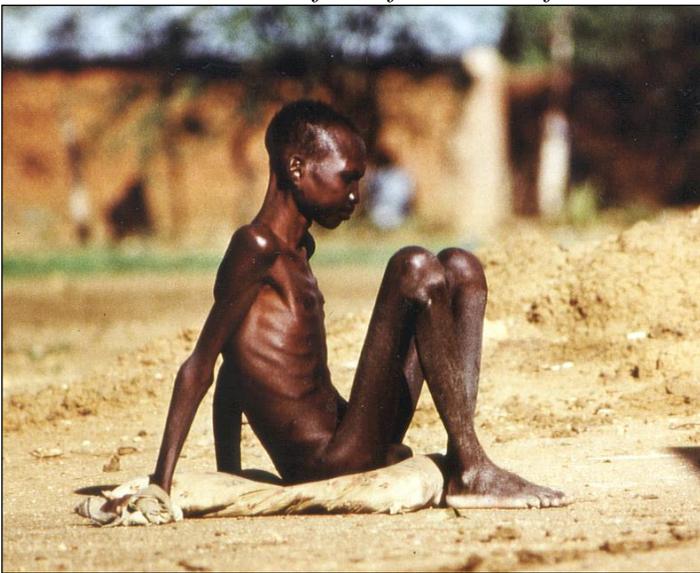
From the *Acholi*:

“They are ignorant, even though nowadays they have learned about this killer-disease. However, they associate it with TB”

From the *Anyuak* (who are neighbouring Ethiopia and are thus much exposed to the risk of infection):

“People returning from Dambala²⁰ may bring it home. Some people of Otalo have already died because of Aids, but at present there seem to be no such cases...”

From the *Atuot*: sexually transmitted diseases are called “*Pagel*” (a word which is probably of Arabic origin) or “*rorror*”; these terms relate directly to infections of a person’s private parts and may also refer to problems of infertility. We were told that “*There is now a new word which refers to the HIV/Aids-symptoms and the person suffering from the disease; it has come to existence as a result of the few cases of AIDS seen in the surrounding of the Atuot and the neighbouring Dinka area and is known as ‘Adarwal’ which means “the defeater of medicines”.*



From the *Atuot*, we also heard the following anecdote regarding Aids and its possible consequences for the family:

“In 1995 there was of major case of a certain businessman call Anyor Makuac who was believed to be suffering from HIV/Aids and later died. He had many wives. As custom require that after his death is immediate brother or relative should inherent his wives to continue making children in his name. The issue became popular as few people within his group came to know about the disease which took the life

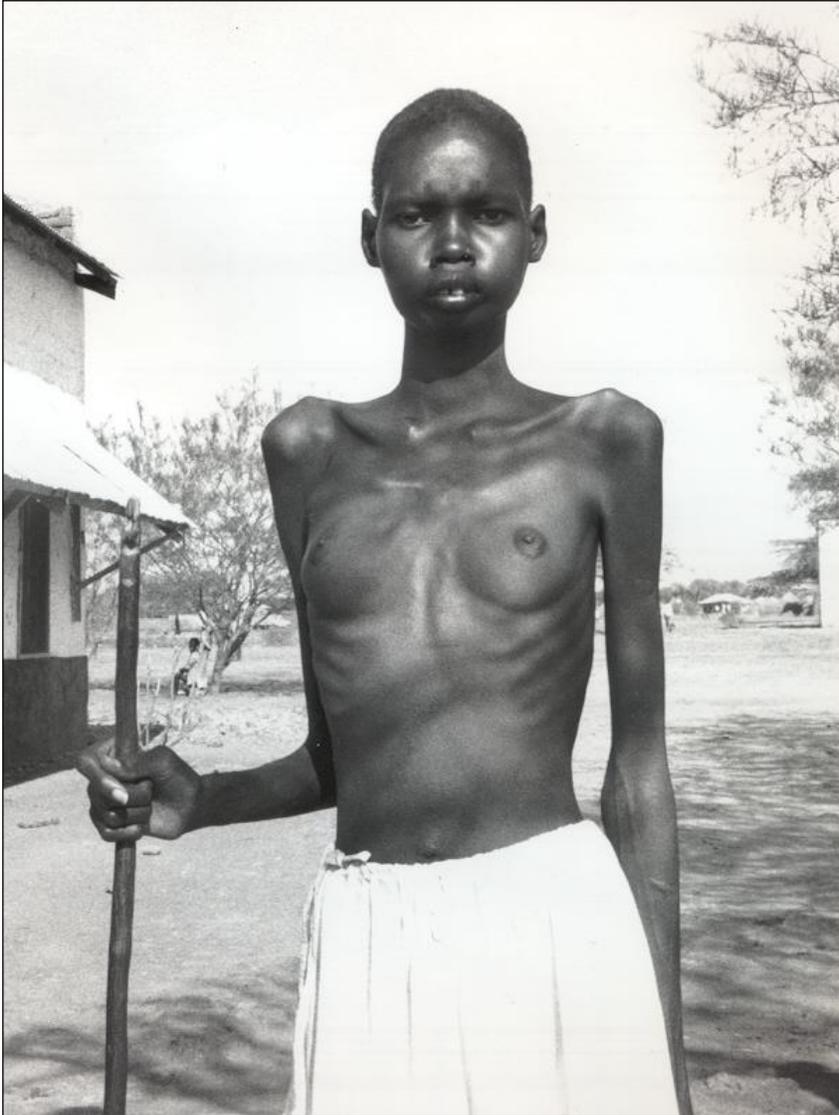
of a very powerful businessman who had everything and all the magic to protect him. The term for Aids, ‘Adarwal’ (which means “the one which defeats medicines”) came after the case of Anyor Makuac in Yirol. There has been many cases but lack of community participation has left the issue

²⁰ Dambala is a place in Ethiopia where young Anyuak – in search for getting the means to pay the bride-wealth - go for digging gold and where they intermingle with many people of different origins: there in Dambala “sex is absolutely free”.

untouched. Beside the Atuot tradition of no discussion of sexual issues, many STD are believed to be prevalent among the middle aged population."

Use of condoms

Condoms are of course only known in bigger centres (towns and refugee-camps) and perhaps in places with an NGO-presence. The *Azande* have got a term for 'condom', "*Kaza Ango*", and this is the only term we heard; some *Murle* in Kakuma suggested one could call it "*kabom chi kulo*"



what means "*penis-pocket*".

While it is not so amazing that condoms and their use are unknown in the more remote places in the Southern Sudan, it is a little bit more amazing that people living in the Western parts of the Sudan may still be ignorant about HIV/Aids. The *Moruba* and the *Jur-Bel*, for example, "*don't know that yet*", while the *Acholi* know but refuse condoms, being suspicious of the person using them and fearing bad surprises. In Yambio where the *Azande* and also the *Balanda* are living, "*some may use condoms in Yambio, many do not. But in the surroundings and the villages, no girl would ever accept a boy trying to use a condom!*"; and while our *Balanda* interlocutor admits to never use a condom at home, he says that he would use condoms when away from his wife... Our information seems to

underline the girl's responsibility for the general fear of condoms, an attitude which gets confirmed by the statement of a *Zande* (man): "*The boys sometimes use condoms, but the girls dislike it. If a man wants to have sexual intercourse using a condom, the girl will certainly refuse him*".

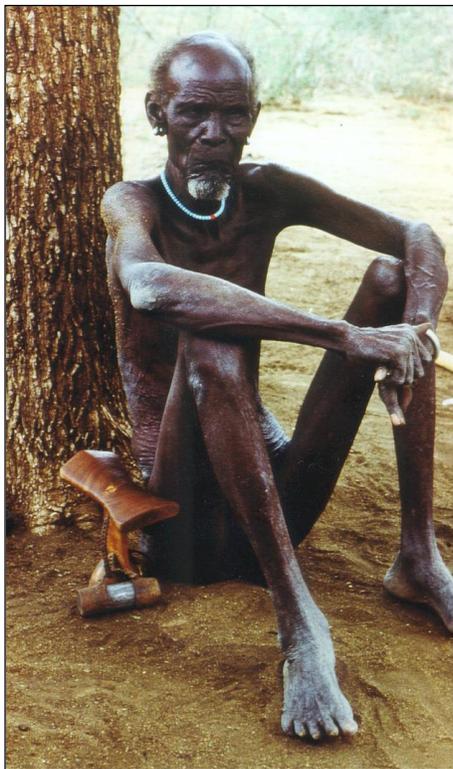
There is no doubt that the use of condoms would be met with greatest resistance. There are several reasons for this:

- 1) a girl asking a boy to use condoms (if there were) would immediately be accused of being a prostitute
- 2) a boy wishing to use condoms would be accused (by his wife or his girl-friend) to be unfaithful or of having a loose character.
- 3) girls fear that, after the sexual intercourse, the condom would remain inside
- 4) as the use of condoms is completely foreign to the people, a person using it will be accused of having been cursed... ..or to be a sorcerer... ..a person who may be even trying to do the girl some harm...

Some stories from Western Equatoria (which I learned from an *Acholi* friend) may illustrate such beliefs and behaviour:

“Someone came from Uganda to the Southern Sudan and wanted to sleep with a girl, using a condom... Horrified, she started crying aloud, fearing that this man tried to kill her... He was caught and fined one cow...”.

- *“A certain man was accused of having made a girl pregnant. He denied, but as she insisted, he had to explain himself: “Yes, I know this girl”, he said, “but it was not me who impregnated her because I used a condom”. The court-people then accused him of having used a condom... He was condemned to be slashed ten times to admit... Again he said he had used a condom... And again he was slashed. After the third time, he denied having used a condom...”.*



Treatment of Aids and Behaviour with Aids-infected persons

“People with Aids would be treated normally”, a Balanda states, perhaps unconsciously reminding of the fact that cases of Aids, wherever they could occur, would just be considered to be another type of disease, one amongst so many others... The “medical” treatment, in such a case, would be the usual one, prescribed by the local doctor and consisting in some medicinal herbs or some magical remedy.

Once people will know that HIV/Aids will cause death, affected people would probably be stigmatised and get socially isolated: *“infected persons should not get in contact with other people”, the Nuer told me, “they would be socially isolated and therefore feel expelled”. “Aids-infected persons are to be isolated”, the Anyuak agree and give an example: “Sometimes, young people coming back from Dambala are suspected to be Aids-infected: infected or not, they are socially isolated and will have no choice but to return to Dambala...”.* Aids would also, as an Anyuak noted, possibly have legal consequences: *“If a wife dies, her husband will be accused of having killed her...”*, he explained, a remark which shows how consequences of Aids can also affect a whole family and cause great judiciary problems for those who have to decide on the case.