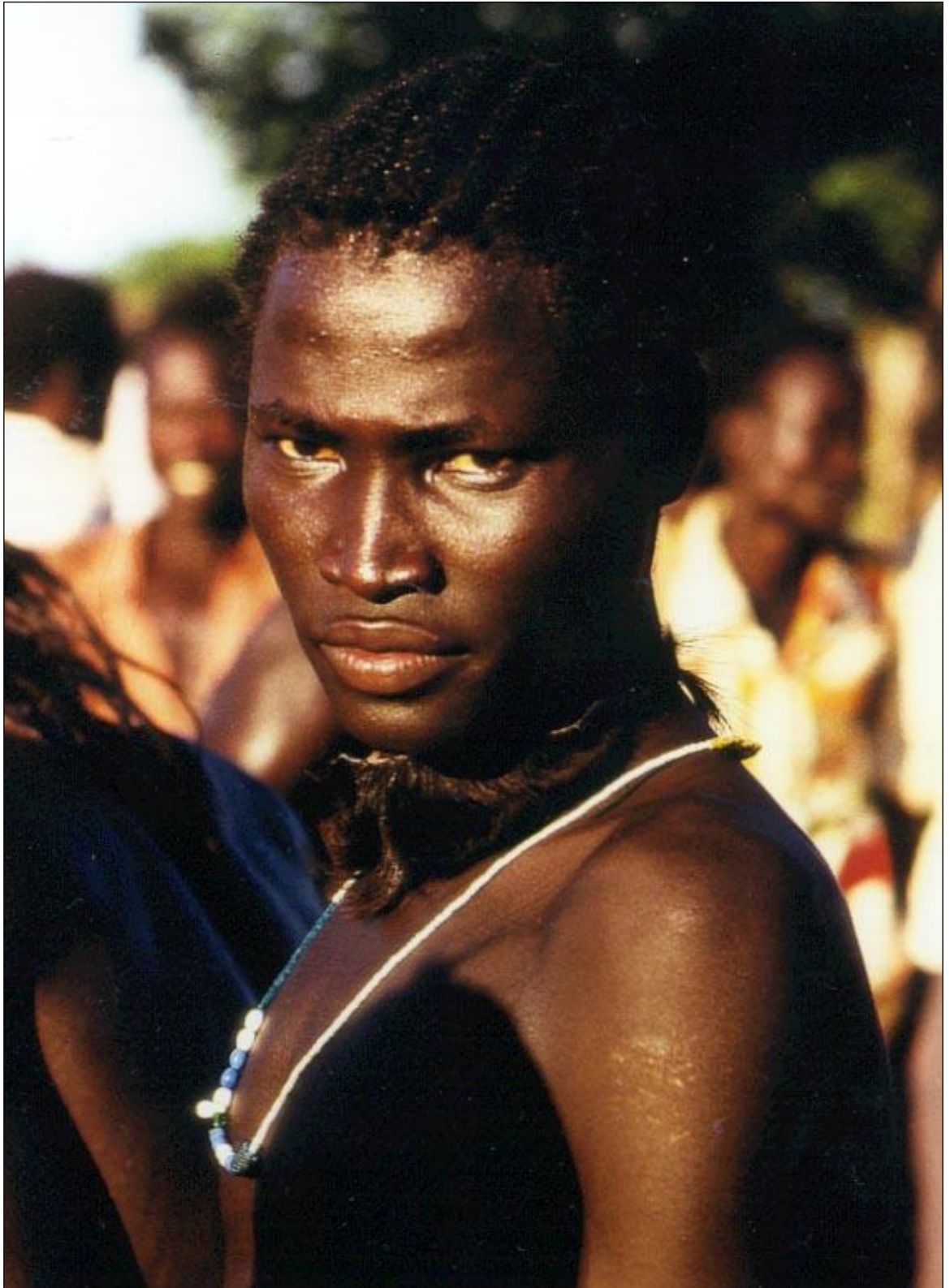


*Sideways and Stigmas*



## Adultery

Except for the *Lopit* where the men apparently do not commit adultery (“*except sometimes*”...), the *Lokoya* (where adultery “*is not common because if they impregnate girls they cannot be forgiven*”) and “*formerly*” for the *Didinga* (who feared that adultery would bring death to one’s children), all interlocutors stressed that adultery was “*frequent*” (*Didinga, Acholi, Balanda, Nuer, Jiye, Baka, Moruba, Azande, Toposa* etc.), “*very frequent*” (*Dinka, Avukaya*), “*so common that it happens on a daily basis*” (*Murle*), that “*adultery is a custom*” (*Belanda*) or that they are “*uncountable numbers of cases of adultery*” (*Anyuak*) in their respective places. Not surprisingly, the majority of cases handled at the chiefs’ courts concern adultery, but one can guess that most cases are not even discovered: “*if a woman gets pregnant, the girl would of course not tell anybody*”, one informant added, “*confessing*” at a same time that he himself had committed, before he could get married, “*at least fifty times*” adultery...

*Not to have the means (the necessary bride-wealth) to marry* is surely one cause why adultery is so frequent, especially in those cultures where girls are given away for marriage while still very young (sometimes at birth!) or where a man has to wait until all his older brothers are married and his turn of getting a wife has come. But there are many other reasons for adultery: a *Päri*, for example, stressed that lovers are frequently separated by the parents who choose another man as husband of their daughter: when the love is deep (and the husband disliked), the lovers will continue to meet... When a *Murle* mentioned “*poverty*” as a reason for adultery, he probably was thinking of the same situation, but his other explanations (“*ugliness, greediness*”) are perhaps less obvious reasons for committing adultery. “*Greediness*” possibly refers to the women’s frustration when not receiving the expected love and affection, and the occasional “*misunderstandings*” are certainly also due by the women’s desire of experiencing some moments of joy after all the daily heavy work.

The following confession by my late Anyuak friend *Kwot Ogala*<sup>1</sup>, an Anyuak from Ojwa, is to illustrate how people at court can discuss problems related to adultery; one notices of course the attitude of the girl and her preference for the adulterer:

“...That's all. Now I am simply living here. I don't quarrel with anybody. I don't have many things. I am just living with my good mood. I help the people, too, and people know that. If I tell you all this, it is to tell you the truth. I am not lying. Everybody here knows that Kwot Ogala is not a liar, and that I am not deceiving people. I was telling you the truth.

So I stayed here quite well, and I didn't make any mistakes. But one day, walking in a small place, I made a mistake. A story with a woman. I committed adultery. I was caught by the woman's father, tied up and tortured. My eyes were swollen up, almost got bad. I was brought before the people at court.

They asked me, "Do you want this girl?"

I replied, "No, I don't like her. She refused with her husband."

They talked about me, and my case lasted several days. The girl said: "You are a bad person. I didn't make a mistake. I helped you a lot."

Finally, when the case was decided, the people who had beaten me up were fined. I told the court that they should not be fined, and not be put in fetters:

---

<sup>1</sup> The story is an extract out of Kwot Ogala’s Auto-Biography which he entitled “*The Reward of Life is Death*”.

"You can fetter me, I was mistaken. I did commit adultery. They wouldn't have beaten me if I had not refused that girl. They are not mistaken", I said.

When the verdict was pronounced, the court said: "Well, you will have to be fined. The government does not refuse money (while the Anyuak would insist in getting marriage beads)".

We paid. Then they asked, how it was with the bloodprice<sup>1</sup>; I said:

"Why don't you give it to the government, too?"

"And what about the girl?" they continued to ask.

I answered: "I don't want her."

"And what about the blood-price?"

"I don't want it", was my reply. The girl interrupted:

"Why do you ask him, ask me instead!". The court-people replied: "Tell yours then!". "I am going to be his wife", she said, "and when he falls sick one day, I shall help him. Hasn't he been beaten for my sake only? He was tortured for my sake alone. If I leave him and he marries another girl, and if he gets sick then, the other girl would not work for him like me, because he has not been beaten for her sake. Because he has been beaten because of me, I should become his wife. If anything happens to him, I shall help him. Nothing separates us." Many people said that I should take her as my wife. I said: "it is not possible!" The girl's father asked: "And why do you refuse her?" "It's not me who does not want her", I explained, "but this girl, she is married! Her husband, will he not get upset? Maybe when he gets really angry, maybe I will be killed. Maybe, when he comes and sees my cock beside her, he will understand and say 'well, is this not the chap of the other day?' No, the bride-wealth of that man has to be returned first. "Who shall return them?", the people asked. "My father shall return them", the girl said, "so that I can stay with him. I am exhausted now". The things were brought, and they were given by the father. And that girl became my wife. Here ends the story. When the father returned the bride-wealth to her husband everything was well. Nothing bad happened after that anymore.

The fact that most ethnic groups do not want their women to have intercourse after having given birth and usually for the whole period of weaning a child is an obvious invitation to adultery: if a man has not several wives, he will have to "*look elsewhere*". But old men seem generally to be more inclined to deceive their wives, and of course they are looking for young women.

If sterility is generally believed to be the women's "fault", in the case of adultery it is rather the men to be blamed, - and, not so surprisingly, especially the older ones (who look for women younger than their wives). Indeed, a woman is supposed to concentrate on the home and the family while a man is free to go anywhere, by day and by night. Men are often away, frequently for longer periods of time; such absence makes a wife feel lonely and abandoned, and it invites her to look for a lover.

The following song created by a *Dinka* woman from Bor<sup>2</sup>, is a good illustration of what is bound to happen if a man is absent: the singer had got an illegitimate child (whom she called '*Dhala*' what means 'I am scorned') and was then seeking divorce because her husband had left her alone for a long time:

*Is that a husband?*

Why is the case not decided?

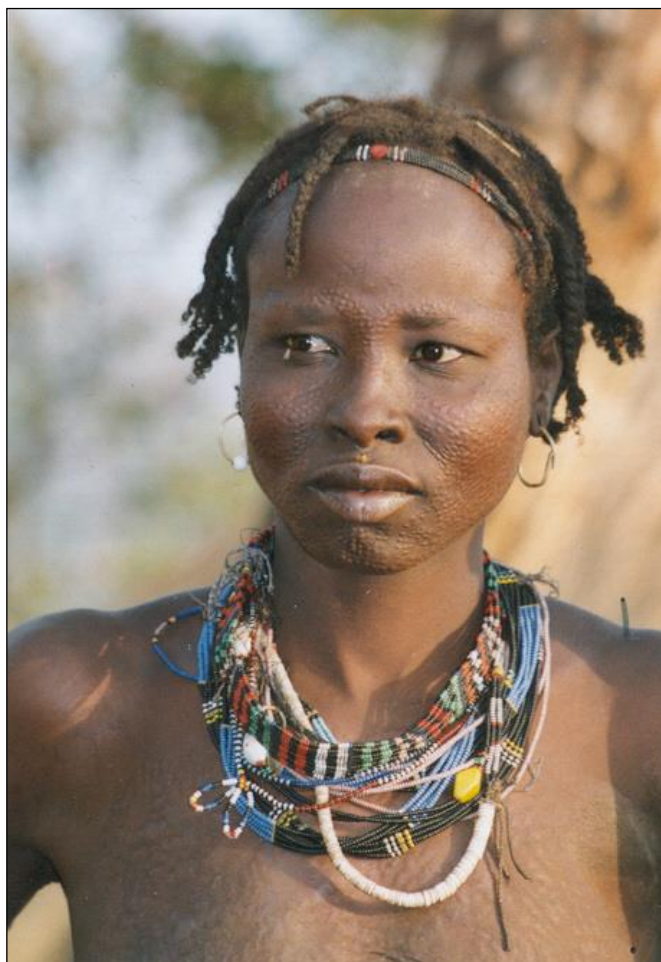
The case of my supposed husband, Awer Rial?

So that I can defeat the man?

---

<sup>2</sup> Published by *Francis Mading Deng* in his book "The Dinka and their Songs", Oxford 1973, p.227

Why does he gaze into my eyes  
 As though he is about to escape?  
 'Aluel, the man still considers you his wife.'  
 'Decide the case, his words are lies.  
 He knew I was his wife  
 Yet, he went away as far as Anyaar  
 Do you call that a husband?  
 O my son, Dhala,  
 I am scorned for a right case.  
 There are women who say  
 'What shall I do with the husband of another  
 woman?  
 Women, do you say the same?  
 We are not all agreed  
 Each person has her own mouth  
 True, we are a group  
 But all are different and yet they fall into groups  
 There is the army, the police, and the prison wardens  
 They are all part of the government;  
 Mangok and Monynuer are both part of the  
 government.  
 When he returned, he stayed for five days  
 A bewildering thing has happened in my family  
 I do not know what is killing the man  
 He sleeps until it dawns;  
 I will leave  
 I hate such things.  
 'Man, get up,  
 There is something knocking at the door.'  
 But he will not wake,  
 He falls back to sleep,  
 I will leave  
 I hate such things.



Jiye Woman

The *Balanda* merit to be mentioned especially not because instances of adultery would be more frequent than elsewhere (statistics would be interesting but are of course impossible to get) but because they have a quite special custom: “*If a woman committed adultery while pregnant,*”, our informant explains, “*at the moment of birth she will put a stick around the child’s neck, in order to let the husband know that she has slept with someone else.... This in order to prevent that the child falls sick and dies. The husband can dismiss her or forgive her. Each time she commits adultery, she will make another cut in the child’s neck-stick... After the third time, the husband may divorce her....* Note that our *Balanda*-friend had himself seven girl-friends before he got married – and all of them had already a husband...

Particularly delicate are cases of a wife’s *pregnancy due to adultery*: birth is the time when a woman will be urged to confess<sup>3</sup> and to name her previous lovers; the husband’s reaction differs and goes from pardoning to claim of a fine to possible death. In *Dinka* and *Atuot* society, “*adultery-cases are only taken to court when a woman got pregnant. One would wait until the woman gives birth, moment when a mother is forced to reveal the name of the child’s father. But the court would only meet for discussing the case once the child is eight months or one year old. If that woman had more than two children from her husband, the issue will be discussed privately before it is made public; this is to protect the children and the family of the wife. The woman’s*

<sup>3</sup> See the chapter on « Pregnancy and Birth »

*parents and relatives will be very angry with their daughter who had brought such shame to the family. The child due to adultery will stay with the mother up to the age of seven for a boy or fourteen for a girl before they will go to their real father (who had to pay fourteen cows for a girl and between seven and ten cows for a boy); the boys are taken early because their training for adulthood takes place between seven and seventeen, but perhaps more importantly because the father has to assume responsibility for all the 'crimes' they may commit. Keeping boys is a liability. But the girls will stay longer with their mother in order to learn from her, her future behaviour and knowledge reflecting on the mother's family."*

Interesting in what concerns the frequency of cases of adultery is the remark by our Toposa expert: "Because of gun-power," he explains, *the youth has become very rich, is often richer than the parents. The young men have no problems of paying the fine, they just go and raid some cattle... As the problem of paying the fine is not there anymore, the youth can do what they want. As a consequence, there is an increase both of cases of adultery and rape"*.

#### *Punishment for Adultery:*

If an adulterer gets surprised in another man's hut, he better takes to his feet, for he will be surely beaten up "thoroughly" (*Päri*), badly hurt and possibly even get killed. The following *Anyuak* story illustrates in a rather amusing way what can happen to an adulterer if discovered:

#### *The man in the barrel*

There was a man who was married to a woman. Whenever he left his home for meeting his friends, another fellow went to see his wife in order to have sex with her.

Sometimes it happened that the husband returned home earlier than expected, when the other man was still there: in such instances, the adulterer used to jump into a barrel and to hide there.

The husband had a little daughter who told him about the secret visitor and his hiding-place. The man was happy to learn about the treacherous behaviour of his wife and decided to punish that man. He went and brought some buckets full of human excrement and poured them into the barrel. Of course, the woman was not aware of this.

Then, the man informed his wife that he was going to see some friends. He left the house, but he did not go far, hiding himself near to the house.

Not long afterwards, the woman's secret lover entered the house. The wife's husband waited some time, but eventually he approached his home, coughing and calling his little daughter.

The woman urged her lover to go up and to hide in the barrel; naked as he was, he jumped into the barrel... ..and splashed into the human excrement! The husband asked his wife what noise came out of that barrel, but the woman replied that she had not heard anything. So the man took a light and went to look into the barrel: there, he saw the adulterer sitting naked in the middle of the excrement. The husband exclaimed happily that "Oh, finally I found the lover of my wife!". He took a stick and started threshing the fellow. The adulterer jumped out of the barrel and took to his feet. But when he ran out of the house, he rubbed the excrement from his body to the door, so that the whole house started smelling human shit.

This adulterer was probably rather lucky. But traditionally, people do not want an adulterer to be killed ("*not for that*", the *Anyuak* say and charge the man more than the usual blood-price), but want him to be punished at the chief's court: If the adulterer succeeds to escape and once his identity and his whereabouts are known (the wife will be forced to tell), he will get punished by

the chief and the elders. In *Murle*-society, a case of adultery can also be settled by relatives or by the age-groups.

The punishment varies but is usually only a fraction of the marriage-price or of the price one has to pay for killing a person. These are the fines to be paid in various ethnic groups:

*Didinga*: a heavy fine consisting out of twenty cows plus one ram for appeasing the Gods.

*Murle*: three milking cows and four bulls; nowadays it goes beyond ten cows. Expulsion from a village can also happen.

*Toposa*: seven cows, out of which one has to be slaughtered as a sacrifice.

*Dinka*: seven cows for a adultery with a married woman but four cows for an unmarried girl if she got pregnant and therefore has to marry that boy or man (but if they don't marry, the child will belong to the girl's father or brother).

*Nuer*: The fine amounts to six cows (four cows will go to the deceived husband and two to the court); after payment of the fine, the hostilities between the involved persons will cease.

*Päri*: one bull and one cow, plus one goat or sheep as a sacrifice for the offence.

*Jiye*: seven cows.

*Baka*: The punishment is one year of imprisonment – but for *both the man and the woman*. If the woman's husband wants his wife back before the year has passed, he can bail her out by paying 30-40'000 Sudanese £.

*Zande*: There is a fine and imprisonment. The fine is entirely going to the husband. Previously, the punishment for adultery was much more severe: the adulterer had to pay twenty spears and provide a wife to the woman's husband; sometimes, the adulterer got horribly mutilated (his lips, ears, genitals were cut and there could be amputation of the limbs).

In modern times, an adulterer takes definitively a much higher risk than before: since people have acquired the culture of gun-power, an unwanted visitor at home could easily be shot dead.

Legally speaking, the woman seems to escape punishment, even if she is probably as guilty as the man. But if it is true that the man committing adultery has to pay for his "mistake" and that the woman's husband is – in most cases - to receive some compensation for the humiliation, the woman will have to suffer as well: either she gets divorced (this would happen latest after the third case of adultery) or she will have to suffer physically: "*At the slightest suspicion (of adultery)*", *Seligman:516* notices for the *Azande*, "*a woman would be flogged, cut with knives, bound and tortured to make her confess the name of the lover*", methods which are certainly used by men from different ethnic groups as well<sup>4</sup>.

Illicit sexual activities can badly affect the household: not only that the peace in the house will be broken, there will often be serious economic consequences: "*if you have to pay cattle as a fine*", a *Nuer* stresses, "*you may have to sell all the grain you have and you will remain with hunger*".

---

<sup>4</sup> About 'domestic violence' see the chapter on « Sex and Violence ».

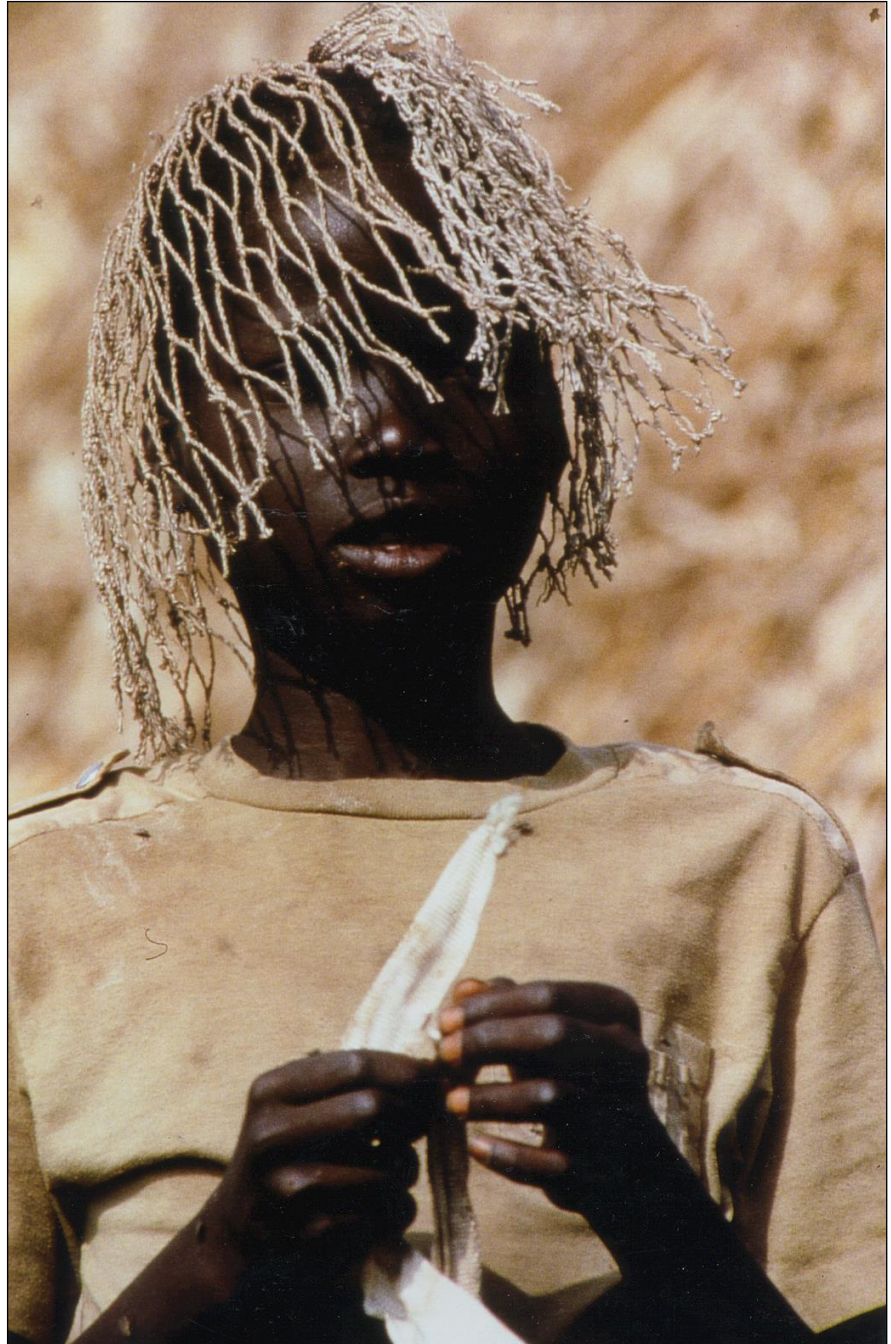
## Rape

Amongst all possible sideways on the road to sexual satisfaction, this is definitively the one to be completely avoided. Yet, some people take that road. Because rape is of a purely violent nature, this most outrageous kind of behaviour has been discussed in the chapter about “Sex and Violence”.

## Masturbation

As I felt uneasy to enquire about this subject, I did not gather much information. I don't know anything about frequency and ignore if masturbation happens only during adolescence or even after having reached adulthood, or if it could also happen between men and women, as a statement by one of our *Ingessana* interlocutors could possibly suggest: “Masturbation”, he explained, “is when people are rubbing or stroking the penis of the partner, in order to get some kind of intercourse”, an understanding apparently shared by the *Jur-Bel* people who understand masturbation as the act of “rubbing or stroking the own or their sexual partners reproductive organ as a way of getting sexual pleasure”... If both “sexual partners” happened to be men, such a relationship would have to be related to homosexual behaviour.

The practise of masturbation was confirmed by a *Murle* informant: “Yes, it does exist. Especially with boys aged between 15 and 25. Even with adult men at places where the women are absent. In *Murle*-language, masturbation is called ‘Zewinnet’.”



Speaking about himself, our *Balanda* informant said: “Yes, I could do that once... ..when I had seen how other boys, playing at the riverside, did it: they masturbated themselves with the help of a soap...”. A young *Zande* made exactly the same experience, also using a soap...

Amongst the *Atuot*, we are told, “masturbation is almost considered like a sport amongst boys: it is done in groups to see who is producing the greatest quantity of sperms (which is called ‘*piec*’).” Masturbation is also common amongst the *Dinka* and *Nuer*, where “masturbation is sometimes used to find out if boys are old enough to be initiated to manhood (that is to start speaking to girls)... It is a way of proving that they can actually produce sperm... and could thus be held responsible when accused of having committed adultery.”<sup>5</sup>

## Homosexuality

*It is believed to be there, naturally existing.  
But physically, it is not seen.*

(MURLE)

There is nothing more difficult than enquiring about homosexuality. Asking the very question about the existence of homosexuality is difficult, and not simply because the question almost always is not-answered by stating: “No, it is not there..” and occasionally by adding “it is with the *Arabs*, not with us”. Sometimes, answers suggest that something like homosexuality may be there anyway. One wonders what is the answer when an *Anyuak*, for example, states that “*this is not to be done...*”, or when a *Toposa* replies “no, it does not exist... ..but if you are discovered, you will be killed!” ... Exactly the same contradiction was found in another person’s statement: “Homosexuality does not exist in *Nuer* culture”, he said, “and those who would do would be killed...”. But when a *Päri* man consents that “it is there with very young boys”, one wonders what we are actually talking about when speaking about “homosexuality”. As it is not possible to talk about a behaviour which lacks precise definition, it is useful to quote *Daniel Vangroenweghe*<sup>6</sup>:186: “Concerning the motivations which determine homosexual practices, we can, worldwide, distinguish six categories some of which may be linked but which nevertheless cannot be found in all cultures and do not occur with a same frequency:

- 1) homosexuality by inclination
  - 2) homosexuality due to circumstances
  - 3) experimental homosexuality (children’s games)
  - 4) inborn natural tenderness, especially during adolescence
  - 5) acts of a sacred nature in the framework of a society’s institutions
  - 6) symbolic expression of power which asks for submission: aggressive homosexuality
- Only the first one looks for sexual satisfaction.”*

When accepting these distinctions, a discussion of the existence of homosexual behaviour in the Southern Sudan may be possible without disturbing sensitivities especially on a subject which obviously is extremely “taboo”.

---

<sup>5</sup> This reminds me of some report from colonial times : when a very young *Anyuak* boy was accused of having committed adultery, the president of the Court doubted that such a thing could be possible at such an early age. Instead of being happy with such a remark, the boy felt offended and immediately started to prove that he actually was able to have sexual intercourse...”

<sup>6</sup> *Vangroenweghe, Daniel*: “Sida et Sexualité en Afrique”, 1997/2000, EPO Anvers, Belgium



Concerning the first (and only purely sexual) point, one would agree with the different informants that “*such a thing is not there*” or that it is *extremely rare*. One could of course argue that a person who is homosexual “by inclination” would have no place in the traditional societies of the Sudan and therefore would need to hide and probably would have to marry. I witnessed once a case at the royal Anyuak court where a young man apparently disliked contacts with women and thus was blocking the natural circulation of the rare marriage-beads. People tried to convince the man to marry (“*Who will cook for you? Who will make beer? Etc.*”) and finally decided to solve the case by depriving the boy of his right on the marriage-beads; the young man strongly objected to the idea of losing such a value and eventually though reluctantly agreed to look for a woman... One of our more open-minded informant of the younger generation was more hesitant to deny the possibility of the existence of homosexual practices (in the cattle-camps): “*If age-mates are alone together, they can actually decide what they want to do. And if both of them agree, everything is possible... ...there are so many ways...*”; and when asking if people would have “real” sex (oral or anal) together, his answer was “*anything can happen, anything, actually*”. Another boy from another region was both equally vague and equally suggestive when he simply opened the whole sphere of imagination: “*Darkness*”, he said, “*but you know, darkness is a big thing*”.

While we really remain “in the dark” in what concerns homosexual practices (and even more its frequency) in the Southern Sudan, we know from Sir *Evans-Pritchard's* publications<sup>7</sup> that “the need for bisexual relations was culturally recognized amongst the *Azande*: even though men had women, they yet would marry boys as well. *Vangroenweghe 2000:203* has made a summary of *Evans-Pritchard's* findings<sup>8</sup>:

“Young boys and unmarried warriors who were living at the court and who would not limit their sexual activities to the sole masturbation – a practice which was absolutely not shameful – were forced to marry young boys aged between 12 and 20 to find sexual satisfaction. Some of them would take more than one boy. As they were repugnant to have anal sex, they satisfied their desire between the boy’s thighs.

These marriages lasted only up to the moment when the warriors could get married to a woman. The warriors who married a boy had to pay a marriage-price of five spears to the parents of their “boy”, exactly as if they were marrying a girl. Later on, when the conduct of a man who had married the boy was approved by the parents, that man could also marry their daughter.

The custom disappeared during the post-colonial period, not so much because the unmarried warriors had disappeared but because it had become easy to get a girl as soon as the old custom of severe punishment had disappeared as well.”

The fact that this very particular custom has disappeared from *Zande* society does not explain why the *Azande* (or at least our interlocutors) seem to be ashamed to acknowledge its former existence. Only a *Balanda* hinted at such ancient practices when – while speaking about homosexuality - he shamefully related that he had learned from his father that *Balanda* who had been captured by the *Azande* were “trained as soldiers”...

Homosexuality is one of the subjects people do not like to speak about, and if they know what it is, it exists of course only with other ethnic groups... It would be interesting to make a research on “practices and patterns of behaviour” which apparently cannot be found in the own society but

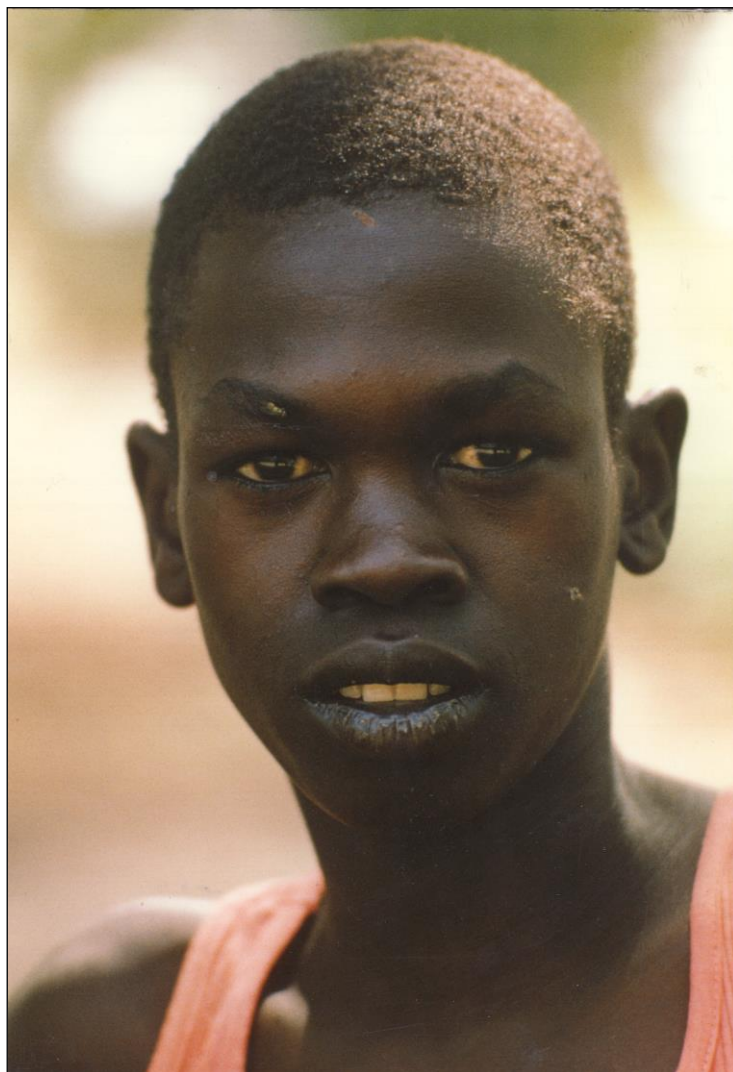
---

<sup>7</sup> See E.E.Evans-Pritchard « Sexual inversion among the Azande », in *American Anthropologist* Vol.72, 1970, p.1428-1434, and E.E.vans-Pritchard, “Man and Woman among the Azande”, New York, 1974 (Free Press), p.37

<sup>8</sup> our translation.

which “for sure” exist somewhere else: in the Sudan, the *Azande* and the *Murle* may be the main victims of such slanderous “beliefs”, but even the *Dinka* get sometimes the reputation to be... “...cannibals”! One could also enquire about the sources of and the reasons for such “slander” and would perhaps discover that travelers (and their writings) with their natural tendency to over-emphasize extraordinary things are not completely innocent... If a *Toposa* acknowledges that there existed in Toposa country “*insane persons who did it with boys and goats*”, it does not mean that such a behaviour would be common let alone culturally acceptable.

Amongst the criteria for homosexuality listed above, the one consisting in showing *natural affection for friends of a same sex* is the one which is generally existing in the Southern Sudan. One can ask the question if the sometimes quite intimate behaviour of boys and (especially) of young girls should really be related to what is normally understood by homosexuality, but it is true that such intimacy is part of the normal behaviour, - so normal indeed that only outsiders would take notice of it<sup>9</sup>.



An *Anyuak* story explains how it has happened that girls and boys are always together with friends of a same sex:

#### Vagina and Penis

Once upon a time, there was a river. Penis was living on one side of the river, Vagina on the other side. One day, it happened that both wanted to cross the river. They were meeting at the place where Vagina was staying. Penis asked her “Where do you go?” and Vagina replied “I am going to the other side”. Penis said “There you will surely not go!”, but Vagina insisted, saying “But for sure I will go, I will go where I want!” Vagina was very angry. They started quarreling and eventually started to fight. Penis threw Vagina to the ground and started to slash her. Vagina called loudly for help. All the people of the village came running, men and women; they all wanted to know what was happening. Everybody joined the fighting. The women helped Vagina while the men fought together with Penis.

When the fight was over, Vagina said to the women: “Because you have helped me, I shall live with you”. Speaking to the men, Penis said: “Because you helped me, I shall stay with you”.

---

<sup>9</sup> Friendship between men or between boys plays a very big role in all societies of the Southern Sudan, the bonds between a person and his/her “*best friend*” being – sentimentally - stronger than marriage-ties.

The separation of people of an opposite sex starts already during *childhood*, at a time when the young persons awake to sexuality and want to find out what it is all about. Such curiosity is universal and the adults of course know what children are sometimes doing when they are playing. Children would be rebuked when doing certain things, but normally these games are played when children are alone: in Sudanese societies, children (and especially boys) live from an very early age on in groups, eating separately from the adults, moving together and sharing their early adventures and experiences. As we have noticed before, Sudanese children seem to feel great pleasure in using bad words and in joyfully trying out all kind of forbidden things. Precise observation of human characters and behaviour is, without doubt, the strength of the youngest generation; no wonder that they want to make own experiences, imitate adult people and make fun of their strange behaviour. The following short song should just be a small example of how children can enjoy to make fun of other children (adults may not even understand what should be so funny...):

Nyingori, don't walk alone,  
Your temple is watery, watery,  
Nyingori, don't walk alone,  
Your testicles are full of water,  
Nyingori, don't walk alone,  
There is a lot of water in your testicles...

Impossible for an outsider to tell how far children would really go when practicing sexuality – with members of the own or members of the opposite sex. What is quite sure, however, is that these “sex”-games are nothing but ways of amusing themselves and of acquiring knowledge (and perhaps experience) in a field which is still new to them.

The existence of the type of homosexuality which has been classified as “*aggressive*” and which aims at a person’s submission cannot be denied: persons who have been defeated in a fight or who were simply made prisoners can be humiliated and tortured in many ways. This happens, unfortunately, everywhere in the world, but, fortunately, it is not a general rule either. The focus of the torturers is of course put on humiliation, not on own physical satisfaction. The following anecdote (of *Anyuak* origin) is perhaps a good example of what can come to the mind of people who suddenly get outburst of sadism:

*Othiri Alew and Bala Abadaw*

Othiri Alew and Bala Abadaw were great friends.

One day, Othiri and his friend Bala-Abadaw left their homes in order to go to another, far-distant village. On their way, they reached a pool where travellers use to drink some water and take some rest. It was there they met with a certain man against whom they had for some reason an animosity. As they were two, they went to capture that person.

When the man saw that he was going to be caught, he got afraid, fearing that he might be killed. So he adopted women-manners, behaving and talking like a woman of the female sex. Othiri and his friend said: “Eh, you! You behave like a woman! And what then is this, this big thing in front of you? Is not a penis?!”. “But this is only accidental to me”, the man replied.

“Ok then”, the men said, “if you are a girl, you shall now really be a girl and sing the drum-songs which girls use to sing when dancing!”. And the two friends went to cut branches of trees for using them as whips.

The man started to sing dance-songs, moving up and down exactly in the manner girls do during the big drum-dance. Othiri and his friend behaved as well as if the play was real and started to run around the girl-man. Each time they came near to the “girl-man”, they slashed him with their whips. The fellow just continued to play in the girls’ way and sang to the highest pitch of his voice. He even created a song for the two fellows: “Othiri, son of Alew, and Bala-Abadaw, my eye is torn, Othiri, son of Alew, and Bala-Abadaw, my eye is torn...” The two friends just continued to

turn around that man, slashing him each time they passed, the sound of their whips growing wilder and wilder: “tai-tai-tai”.

When the two were tired of running, they decided to play the “okama”-part of the dance and ordered their “girl” to sing a love-song. The fellow did as he was told: “Othiri war Alew could be my husband during day-time and I would go to bed with Bala-Abadaw... Othiri war Alew could be my husband during day-time and I would go to bed with Bala-Abadaw...”.

The two friends were now dancing like mad, each of them throwing their imaginary horse-tail at the fellow’s face.

Lastly, Bala-Abadow advised his friend to have pity with that man and to spare him.

When “Okama” was finished, both men sat down. They told that man to kneel down.

Now Othiri war Alew took his penis and uncocked it. He took his penis and put it into the mouth of that fellow. “How does it taste?”, he asked, and the man answered that it tasted very, very nice. “And what does it taste like?”, Othiri continued to ask. “It tastes like the cooked musk-rat<sup>10</sup> I ate once. But it was not at your fireplace I ate it, that was somewhere else”.

Then it was Bala-Abadow’s turn to uncock his penis and to put it into the mouth of the fellow. “How does this taste to you?” he asked, and the fellow replied that it tasted “just wonderful, delicious”.

After this, the two friends proceeded their way, leaving the fellow where he was. They did not do him any harm.”

*Circumstantial homosexuality* like the one happening in this story may occur, but it is obviously very exceptional, even when men are forced to live without women for a long time; some informants mentioned that instances of homosexuality sometimes happen amongst soldiers, but one can wonder on what knowledge such information is based upon.

Homosexuality is most of the time associated with men, but one should not forget that women also can have inclinations for the own sex; in the Southern Sudan where homosexuality is scarcely ever more than a physical way of showing sympathy and friendship or expressing curiosity, the behaviour between girls does not differ much from the one of boys. If I could witness the great intimacy occurring between young girls, I know less about the (sexual) relationship which may exist between the wives of one man, but I could well understand that in a household with many wives, some of women may come physically close to each other. Such was apparently the case amongst the Azande, as *Vangroenweghe:190*<sup>11</sup> relates:

*“The lesbians were wives who could not get sexual satisfaction from their polygamous husband. A man who was married to twelve wives could have a sexual relationship with a wife not more than two or three times a month, and even less in very big polygamous households. Often, the husband was getting old and had lost his sexual capacities. A great number of wives started therefore to have a lesbian relationship and used in place of a penis a sweet potato or the root of a manioc, sometimes even a banana. Such relations between two women were following a whole ritual, and even though the Azande men did not like such a conduct, they could not oppose it easily. Once a woman had adopted this kind of lesbian behaviour, the men were convinced that the women would not leave it anymore.”*

#### *Punishment for homosexuality:*

Because “it does not exist”, there is no punishment foreseen in the different societies’ code of conduct. Nevertheless, people all affirm that such a person, if discovered, would be considered to be “insane” and get killed.

---

<sup>10</sup> Which is considered to be absolutely delicious.

<sup>11</sup> *Daniel Vangroenweghe, « Sida et sexualité en Afrique » ; see also E.E.Evans-Pritchard: « Sexual inversion among the Azande », in American Anthropologist Vol.72, 1970, p.1428-1434*

## Prostitution

*“Hunger is a big problem”*

(TOPOSA)



Prostitution was completely foreign to the cultures found in the Sudan; it is a modern phenomena which has its roots in poverty: money is needed for school-fees and living expenditures, and nowadays simply for surviving as refugees. In the Kakuma-refugee-camp, I am told, “*prostitution is rampant*”, and according to our interlocutor, “*Toposax is basically about procreation, not for sale.. But now Narus has become a big sex-market: life there is stagnant, is not moving. Narus is a “pick&go”: because of hunger, the girls sell themselves*”. In Zande-land, according to people from Yambio, “*a lot of loose girls can be found, from the age of fifteen upwards! It is nowadays a big problem.*”

*Dinka, Nuer, Atuot,*

*Jur-Bel* and indeed most other cultures do not know prostitution<sup>12</sup>, even though “*loose girls*” can be found everywhere: the following song<sup>13</sup> at least seems to prove that the concept of ‘prostitution’ is not completely foreign, not even to traditional societies<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Traditionally, all cultures in the Southern Sudan did not know money: girls could get a symbolic gift but would not be paid.

<sup>13</sup> The song is from Matur Apac Makur, a Dinka from Cueibet (Lakes-Province)

*My Makur what a good luck  
That you got a bell  
What a good luck!  
It's good news that Makur got a bell  
and me I am so happy  
about Makur's new bell  
so I am jumping up and down  
like a prostitute who got new clothes  
for attracting new men.*

According to our *Dinka* interlocutor, “*the prostitutes are often widows*”. “*Girls go to the town in the hope of finding there a good husband*”, an *Avukaya* explains, “*but then they happen to be without means and have to get money through prostitution*”. In the towns (that is in bigger agglomerations), prostitution does indeed exist on a more or less large scale, people meeting in coffee-shops. The fact that towns are places where people from many different places and cultures intermingle favours prostitution: people are out of their traditional context and feel free to do what they want.

The ongoing civil war with all the culturally “displaced” soldiers moving from place to place has certainly contributed to an increase in the number of prostitutes. But a *Balanda* understands things the other way around: “*As most boys are on the front-line, the girls are badly lacking boys... One boy can have seven to eight girlfriends at a same time. About three dollars a night. These are loose girls – in previous times it did not happen. But it is a secret “business”*”. Worthwhile noticing is the fact that the problem of prostitution was linked to the schools (and school-fees) and that it existed well before the present times of civil war; as stressed when we explained why girls do not go to school<sup>15</sup>, fear of prostitution is one major reason why parents keep their girls at home.

## *Drugs and Alcohol*

With the exception of the *Murle*, all our interlocutors confirmed that alcohol and drugs had become a problem; it is likely that the availability of alcohol (and drugs) was much lesser than in modern times: for the *Anyuak*, the brewing of beer was not frequent and not for sale, it was a sign of happiness and often linked to dancing; not surprisingly, people enjoyed it more than what was perhaps ‘reasonable’. Since the introduction of money as a means of exchange, beer and other drinks are more easily available and become indeed a problem at certain places. While for the *Murle*, any problem related to alcohol is “*not existing*”, the unmarried *Acholi* “*boys and girls did not drink alcohol or take drugs*.” In what concerns the *Päri* where “*sex is very common*”, they do not think that this activity is connected to drugs.

The *Toposa* “*do not drink alcohol and do not take drugs. They would brew beer only once every ten years...*”, we are told, “*Drugs were planted for being sold to the Arabs... But nowadays, however, things have changed. Alcohol and drugs have become an epidemic: it is a new disease, and also a means of sexual transmission.*” Most interlocutors stressed as well the mentioned bad influence alcohol and drugs could have on the people’s sexual behaviour: In *Lopit* culture and for

---

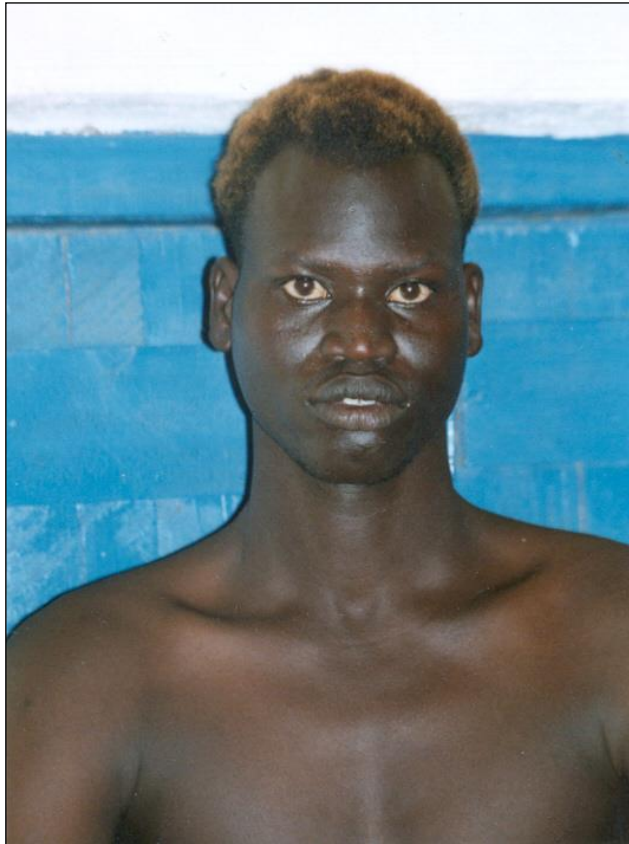
<sup>14</sup> Note, however, that the term ‘prostitute’ is generally used for ‘loose girls’ and not merely for girls who have sex because of money. Traditionally, sex was not a ‘business’.

<sup>15</sup> See here the article “Equal chances for education” in the chapter “Girls and Boys, Men and Women”.

the *Balanda*, “Alcohol is a stimulant for committing rape...Yes, this is indeed a very bad problem as it often leads to rape.”. The *Nuer* confirm that “it is very easy to have sex because there is no discussion... Just a little talk and take your part...” and the *Azande* think as well that, “under the influence of alcohol, a drunk person who meets a girl is likely to rape her” adding that it is “very frequent nowadays”. Our *Avukaya* informant explains that his people “smoke “bongo” (hashish), because this “stimulates and makes strong””, adding that it is very common: “People of all ages take it. People drink ‘araki’ as well, also in the dancing-places. It leads to fighting and sex...”. The *Didinga*, too, believe that “most sexual relationship is the result of alcohol”. “People also take ‘mira’ (kat)”, he adds, quite wrongly believing that “this is not for sex”.

The informant on the *Moruba* mentions the consequences of the use of alcohol and drugs for the relationship between husband and wife: “The problem is”, he explains, “that people are drinking and do not go home. The woman at home will be angry and quarrel. Meetings between parents will solve the problem, the husband will be reminded of his sexual obligations etc.”

The *Jur-Bel*, while thinking that “Drunk people have no power for having sexual relationship”, they recommend a much more potent drug: “if a man eats the back of a crocodile or if he burns it and puts the ashes on his back”, we are told, “this man will become extremely potent and for sure become a rapist...”



## Stigmas

In relatively small, closed and strongly structured societies as those found in the Sudan, there is no space for people disliked by society: every man has got his precise place within society, in his family, his clan and his age-groups, and his identity is directly linked to these structures; women are to join these structures through affiliation with their husbands while keeping their attachment with their own families throughout their life.

Small societies cannot afford to expel some of their members: “we are all thieves”, the late King of the *Anyuak*, would emphasise, meaning that a convicted person should have to compensate for his crime but should not be stigmatised for his “mistake”.<sup>16</sup> It is not in the interest of a small community (actually of no community!) to discriminate people, for such discrimination would only split the village and be a danger for the very survival of society.

Such a danger could stem from offended groups (which could even threaten the political leadership in places where it exists), it could lead to fighting and result in a split of society<sup>17</sup>, but

<sup>16</sup> When I once complained about the behaviour of a certain person, the King replied: “Yes, I know, it is bad... But then, you should see this man when there are big problems, he is so brave, so clever, so important for our success when fighting...”

<sup>17</sup> Such splits have occurred: many settlements were founded not only for ecological or economical reasons but also because of internal disputes (mainly about leadership) and the subsequent scissions.

it could (and normally would) lead to a *curse*, the weapon by which offended persons use to take revenge for ill-treatment and by which not only people but entire villages can be destroyed.

There are very specific cases where a person can become an outcast within society, as for example – in Nilotic societies - a thief who has brought shame to his age-group or a son who was found to have slept with his father's wife: having no place anymore within the own group, such a person has lost the vital part of his own identity and will have to decide to move away and to begin another life somewhere else.

## People with a disease<sup>18</sup>

Special attention is paid to this category of persons. People are careful that other persons are not getting infected, but this does usually not mean that they would be isolated socially. Sometimes, very sick persons are put in a special place away from society (this is normally within the village), but not in order to protect people who are not sick but in order to avoid contacts between the sick person and some other, possibly harmful “elements”; it concerns mainly people with open wounds.

## Witches

Witches and sorcerers are clearly social outcasts in the sense that everybody hates them, avoids them if only possible and tries to protect him/herself from their malicious activities. The only very practical problem is that witches move and act secretly, are usually active by night only and can therefore not be seen nor get identified: there are only suspicions and fears but no certitude. Certain birds (like the Owl and the African Hoopoe) and at least one animal (the Hyena) are also performing witchcraft. After the curse, witchcraft is the second most common cause for sickness, misfortunes and death.

## Circumcised persons

Circumcision is one of the few points where the people of the Southern Sudan may differ, both in beliefs and in practice. Because the male organ is crucial for procreation and thus for the continuity of one's existence (through one's descendants), it is quite natural that circumcision takes such a big place in the cultures where it is practised; more amazing is perhaps the fact that circumcision is of great significance even in those cultures where it is *not* done... It seems that circumcised people do not need to worry much while people who are not circumcised feel a kind of horror by only thinking of the possibility to touch on the integrity of the male organ; but why people are so much concerned about a habit which does not exist in their own culture is a question to which psychologists (perhaps) may find an answer.

Circumcision is practised in Western Equatoria, in Northern Bhar-el-Ghazal and in the Blue Nile Province while all other regions do not circumcise. Both circumcised and not-circumcised people love to insult each other, in songs and in sayings. In Eastern Equatoria, my *Baka* interlocutor was visibly most happy to be asked the question regarding circumcision: immediately, he started to

---

<sup>18</sup> See the chapter on “Sickness and Disease”.



sing a song in which non-circumcised were badly insulted. I do not know how popular such songs are, nor if they are meant to scorn another ethnic group<sup>19</sup>. Circumcision is certainly one “sure” way of identifying the ethnic origin of people, and it is quite possible that circumcision often simply stands as a kind of identification-mark for foreigners and potentials enemies. The following *Atuot* song<sup>20</sup> is just one example how external marks (circumcision or “*a mouth full of teeth*”<sup>21</sup>) can be used to differentiate “good” people (the own side) from “bad” people (the enemy-side); it is clearly making allusion to the “Arabs”:



The circumcised is throwing his gun away  
 The circumcised is throwing his gun away  
 Things are bad on the mount  
 I am tired of the words  
 The words of the foreigners  
 Malual, our tribe is cursed  
 The land is cursed by the youngest son of Cherjok, our father  
 Let us unite the land that our words be one  
 Arol too have their claim  
 Eat your grain;  
 I will remain.  
 Where has the Creator gone?  
 Save our land.  
 From where is the enemy?  
 The one with strange eyes whom I do not know  
 If it is me, take care!  
 Move your teeth away from me.  
 Cries of war were heard at Agher,  
 I killed the foreigners  
 And I killed their slaves  
 That people may sleep in peace;  
 The *circumcised* has troubled us,  
 One *with a mouth full of teeth*, rise  
 Return to your land  
 The *evil-eyed* has troubled us  
 One with a mouth full of teeth, rise,  
 Return to your land.  
 Return to your land.

Circumcision touches a person in the most sensitive parts of his understanding of human life. Non-circumcised people feel – to say the least - uncomfortable about circumcised people and instinctively take some cautious distance, - as if they were fearing something...

“*Circumcised persons will always bath alone, will feel very shy...*”, a *Didinga* interlocutor tells, while a *Murle* explains that “*Circumcision is forbidden up to now*”, adding “*To be circumcised is a very unfortunate state; such a person would have the reputation of being bad. He would get angry whenever the public laughs while seemingly looking at him, and he would be insulted by other age-groups; immediately, he would go and insult the others with all kind of strange songs. There is this proverb saying ‘Why are you angry like a circumcised person?’ which shows that circumcised persons are always angry.*”

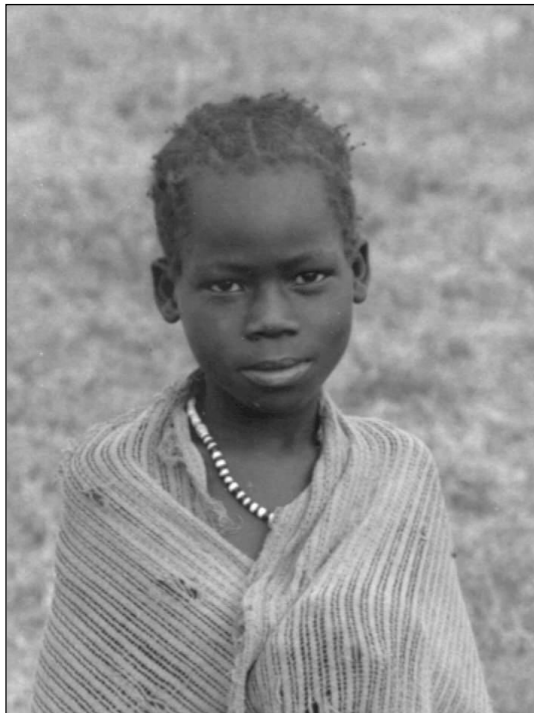
<sup>19</sup> Such as, for example, the Dinka. Worthwhile noticing is the fact that the Dinka are divided on this important issue: while those living in Northern Bhar-el-Ghazal circumcise, all the others do not.

<sup>20</sup> Published by *Francis Mading Deng* in his book “*The Dinka and their Songs*”, Oxford 1973, p.205

<sup>21</sup> The Nilotes extract their lower teeth. Tribal marks are frequently used to scorn other people, for example “those marked on the forehead by the feet of chicken”... as a reference to the Dinka-Bor.

While the *Moruba* who do not circumcise think that this custom is only for Arabs, the *Nuer* like many other Nilotic people do not only dislike the custom to circumcise (which they do not have) but are also deeply worried if a child is born circumcised: “*If a child is born circumcised*”, I am told, “*it will be shown to the community (relatives and neighbours); a bull will be slaughtered and prayers will be conducted in order to make sure that the family will be safe and that this unfortunate event will not happen again*”. More radical are the *Toposa* who simply leave a circumcised baby to die, explaining that this one was “*just on transit*”.

The *Anyuak* share this attitude and expect parents to let such a child perish. “*But, very unfortunately*”, they say, “*many parents do not want their child to die, even if circumcised, and that’s why circumcised people can be found in our land anyway*”. The problem would not be so serious if circumcised persons would not be considered to be wizards who find great pleasure in torturing people – often to death. Circumcised people may have problems to get married, as girls would rebuke them. *Othienho-wa-Ngic*, one of the most famous historical figures in Anyuak mythology, had the problem of being born circumcised<sup>22</sup>. Even though Othienho had extraordinary qualities<sup>23</sup>, he was rejected by the people and even by children:



Children are laughing.  
 Something big is with their mothers at home.  
 Children laugh at the circumcised penis of death  
 The greater one is with their mothers at home.  
 Children are laughing for no reason.  
 The white-brown (i.e. the clitoris) is with their mothers at home.  
 Children are laughing at the fighter’s penis,  
 The greater ones are with their mothers at home.  
 Children are simply laughing.  
 The big ones are with their mothers at home.  
 The longer ones are with their mothers at home.  
 Children are laughing at the warrior’s circumcised penis.  
 Something bigger is with their mothers at home.

But even worse than the children’s mockery was for Othienho the fact that girls did avoid him.

When a young girl stands like that  
 She does not know how I feel.  
 A young girl stood pushing her vagina forward.  
 She did not know how I felt.  
 A young girl stood carelessly.  
 She did not know how I felt.  
 When a young girl stands with her vagina protruding forward,  
 She does not know how I feel.  
 A young girl stands careless about her vagina.  
 She does not know how I feel.  
 A young girl stands naked.  
 She does not know how I feel.  
 When a young girl stands carelessly about her vagina,  
 She does not know how I feel.

<sup>22</sup> His mother *Omigi* (also called *Ajullo*) was of a foreign origin; she had both a penis and a vagina and gave birth in a tree. It was also Omigi who showed the Anyuak Chief Ngic how to make fire and how to give birth without killing the mother.

<sup>23</sup> He was an excellent craftsmen making very sophisticated spears and fishing-utensils, a great musician and an outstanding poet.

A young girl stands with her vagina protruding forward.  
She does not know how I feel.  
When a young girl stands carelessly,  
She does not know how I feel...

Frustrations growing, he became extremely aggressive and covered his paternal aunt (who favoured her own son) with insults of a violently obscene nature (“*Akango, my aunt, you sit well, the clitoris is digging into the dust...*”); driven by jealousy, he killed a girl who had refused him and eventually murdered his aunt’s popular son and rival, Gilo war Akango... Another rival of Othienho in the art of playing guitar, Kong, after having been mutilated by Othienho, composed the following song:

Othienho, you cut my fingers, but  
I am not the hyena who circumcised you!  
What are your reasons for cutting my fingers?  
Circumcised man  
You shall meet your fate....

Indeed, Othienho was hunted by the people of his aunt Akongo, and eventually got - in spite of all his spiritual powers - killed.<sup>24</sup>

Surely, poor Othienho would have had a less painful, more peaceful and more glorious existence if he had happened to live amongst, for example, the *Azande* or the *Ndogo-Sere*, the *Baka*, the *Ingessana* or the *Avukaya* who all frankly “abhor all those who are not circumcised”.



<sup>24</sup> Note that Othienho had nevertheless succeeded to get a child: after Othienho’s death, the child was not killed but laid on some ambatch, put in a river and sent away... People believe that he has given birth to the (circumcised) “Arabs”...