



Adwok Nyaba with Kwacakworo's nearly 100 years old mother (2009)

PETER ADWOK NYABA

If I was a writing a book of fiction and was looking for a story full of drama, I would look for a protagonist who would scare away people by his mere threatening appearance and by his long wooden stick, I would impress my readers by the deeply black colour of his skin, by a skull full of bumps, by brilliant silky eyes, a powerful voice and a strong body of gigantic dimensions of 2.24m height at least, - and I would make my hero to be born in poverty, let him grow up naked in a boundless, dangerous wilderness of shining rivers, elephant-grass and treacherous swamps in the middle of vultures, beasts and large herds of cattle, but would eventually bless him with the miracle of finding a place for

education, would allow him to travel, to experience hardship, to live exciting though often painful adventures in countries like Hungary or Austria and to let his studies of geology get rewarded by the title of a PhD; in order to bring some more turbulence and action into my story, I would change my hero's identity several times and make him to play successively the role of an aggressive rebel, a fearless guerrilla-fighter, a strong-minded political agitator and eventually a fierce advocate for human rights; and of course I would have to give my story a solid historical frame, situate it in war-times, fill it up with all kinds of horror and bloodshed and eventually add a touch of tragedy by making the tall man lose one of his long legs during the fighting and disrupt his happy family life by the losses first of his young boy and later of his brilliant daughter; if I wanted my story moreover to be of existential significance and touch the reader's sensibility by the drama's social, cultural and human dimensions, and if, eventually, I wouldn't fear that my story could get overloaded by the great number of emotional events, political battles for power and personal misfortunes I would surely copy the different elements found in Peter Adwok's life-story and use them as the script for a novel, a thriller or even a film.

I always thought that Peter Adwok shouldn't waste all his energy on writing sharp political analyses and aggressive pamphlets only, but take the leisure to write about his own,

private life, about his simple childhood in the beautiful land of the Shilluk, his parents and relatives, his education at universities abroad and the long years spent with the liberation-army, about his wife and his children, his friends and his numerous journeys to foreign countries, about his feelings, his sorrows, his fears, his love, his anger, his hopes, his ideals, his doubts, his regrets, his beliefs and his visions – not forgetting his never-ending struggle to find a less painful prosthesis for his amputated leg! I would have wished that the coming generations of South Sudanese would get the privilege to keep a testimony about the personal life of one of its most devoted freedom fighters while at the same time gaining insight into the background of the long war for the liberation of South Sudan from the North. The life of any fighter is surely full of interesting stories, but the story of Peter Adwok is of an exceptional significance, because he was not only a brave fighter (the only commander losing a leg while fighting!) but one of the most outspoken personalities in the long struggle for freedom and human rights, a political activist of great intellectual pungency.

Peter Adwok is an old and trusted friend of mine, and surely one of my best friends in South Sudan. We first met some thirty years ago, but our friendship and cooperation are not much more than fifteen years old. Our collaboration during those intense years was very close, fruitful, mutually inspiring and always pleasant. I spent many happy hours in

his home in Nairobi or Juba, and he visited my hometown Davos many times, became a friend of my family and my close friends. Casually, we happened to meet at workshops inside or outside of the Sudan. In January 2020 we met in Juba, possibly for a last time. This is to say that, when looking back on our cooperation, Peter Adwok stands up in my private and professional life in South Sudan as a source of inspiration, energy and joyful feelings of friendship. But to work with Peter Adwok was not only a permanent challenge, it was also entertaining, encouraging, and often full of fun; in his presence, I would never feel alone, abandoned or helpless.

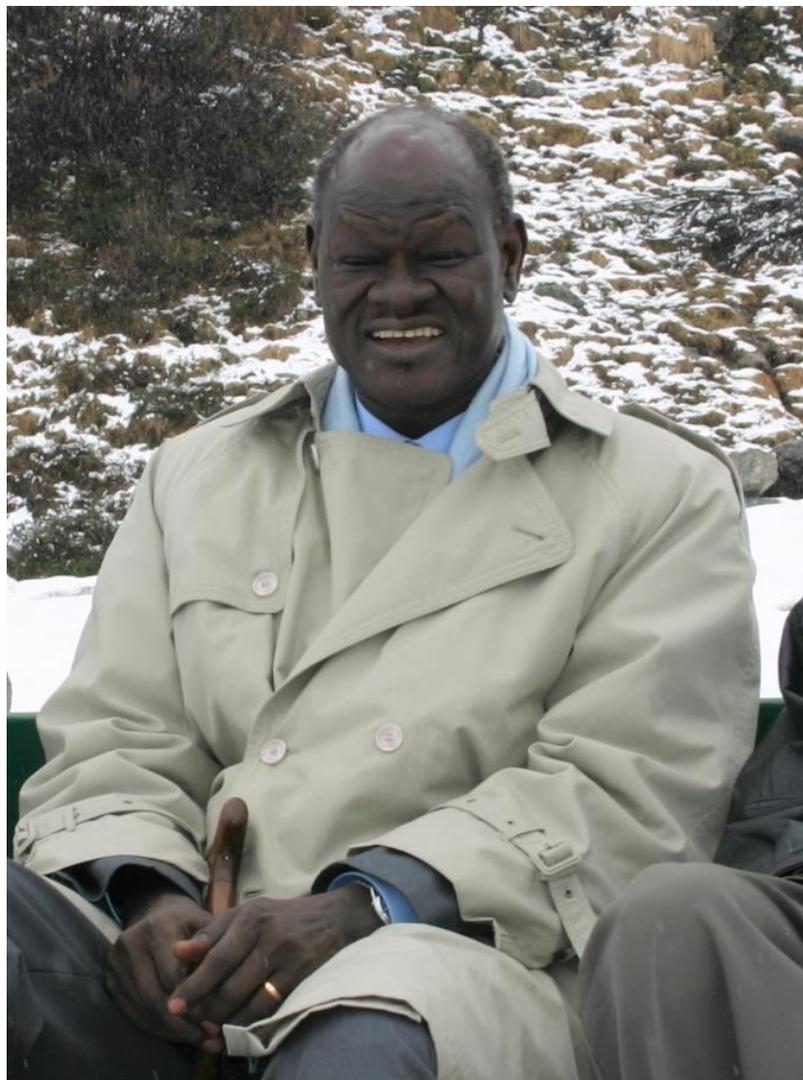
I have always admired Adwok's psychological strength, his physical bravery, his courage and determination, his intelligence, his knowledge and his capacity to focus on human welfare even under stress and extremely harsh circumstances. Adwok has a strong body and a strong mind, and he has a loud voice when attacking oppressors of all kinds; if he has been feared it was because he was known to be fearless and brave, he is respected because he didn't worry for his own life when – physically or intellectually - fighting the so-called “common enemy” during the liberation-war. People and readers may have liked or disliked Peter Adwok's opinions, but nobody would doubt his selfless intentions and the strong love for his country.

Believing of the historic relevance of Peter Adwok's life and quite serious myself when it comes to realise important projects, I spent years to convince Peter Adwok to write his autobiography, but all my efforts were in vain: Peter Adwok stubbornly refused and postponed the realisation of my project to a later time. Adwok seemed to believe that the most important goal of a fighter was to succeed in his fight, without looking back, and that, compared to the political goal, the personal destiny of a fighter was not that important.

But eventually Adwok gave in to my pressures and accepted to write this book, my long-awaited autobiography, and of course I should now be very happy about this late decision. I *should* be happy, indeed, - and yet I feel terribly frustrated!

As a matter of fact, by delaying to fulfil my wish to such a late time in his and my own life, my younger brother Adwok put me in a very awkward position: he dared to ask me to write a foreword to a book he knew I would never be able to read! Time passing, my eye-sight has become so bad that I can't read anymore let alone recognise the faces of people in the street... Considering my visual handicap, I first wanted to refuse to comment on Adwok's autobiography; to me, it seemed an impossible task. But when Adwok replied by suggesting to simply focus on our common work and our personal relationship, I eventually had to give in.

Peter Adwok's autobiography surely does not need my comments, and I have most probably little to add to his own explanation of our common work. All I could possibly do is



to enlarge the reader's understanding of the important role Peter Adwok played in the history of his country, and complete Peter Adwok's account by some information which could not find a place in his memoir because he was only indirectly part of it.

Peter Adwok Nyaba
in Davos (2005)

Writing about own achievements and to place oneself inside the historic context is an almost impossible task for anybody who has some sense of modesty, and in particular for a person like Adwok Nyaba who had never thought about himself, never worried about his personal security, his reputation or his professional career but exclusively concentrated on practical, social, political and humanitarian

issues. By definition, an autobiography doesn't look at a person from outside; the author may be self-critical and confess to regret some of his decisions, but he would hardly give evidence to certain features of his character (such as good or bad temper), and he wouldn't praise himself for his deeds, for his kindness or for the personal sacrifices he made while fighting for his people. In spite of being by nature aggressive and fearless, Adwok was never haughty or hurtful, he was always open-minded, respectful and even kind to interlocutors, ready for dialogue and seeking understanding – including me! For the last thirty years, we never quarrelled! I therefore thought that in my foreword, I should, first of all, give some emphasis to Peter Adwok's personal qualities and express my gratitude for all he has done for his country, including my own work as a peace-advisor.

Because cultural and not political issues were the basis of my relationship with Adwok, I want to highlight some of Peter's role in the field of culture in general and the promotion of peaceful ethnic co-existence in particular. Peter Adwok's military engagement and his political career have been impressive, and when looking back on his life, it will not be possible for him to avoid to outline and to comment on the political context which forced him to stand up against dictators and to fight for his convictions. The story of Peter Adwok's work as an activist of the South

Sudanese civil society is surely captivating and of historic importance, but to me, his greatest intellectual achievements and perhaps his greatest merits were his activities as an advocate for the House-of-Nationalities-peace-project, his work for the Gurtong-peace-website and his inventory and description of the material and immaterial culture of all the ethnic groups living in South Sudan. Tribalism was never a concept in Peter Adwok's mind, respect for all cultures was the guideline of his actions and the motor of his activities as a speaker, writer and political analyst.

The struggle for the independence of South Sudan from the Northern part of the Sudan lasted more than fifty years; it was a seemingly endless history of suffering, bloodshed and misery, without hope for any kind of economic and social development. I dare to ask the question: Was it all a misunderstanding? The people of South Sudan were fighting for independence from the North, but the real reason for the rebellion against the rulers in the North was not political, it was essentially human: the fight for independence was of course a fight for a better country and for freedom, but it was essentially a fight for the respect of the peoples' culture and identity, a fight for dignity, liberty justice and development, it was an uprising against oppression, racism and exploitation. At the beginning, there was the strong belief that the liberation of the country

would change everything to the better, that people could enjoy their independence and find relief through development and the respect of human rights. That's what the people were fighting for – and thousands lost their life for reaching this goal.

The dream of peace, harmony and development got soon disrupted by the pitiless realities of the war. While fighting, one had to focus on the movements of the enemy, and there was no time to think of the time after a victory. Moreover, the force of the liberation-armies got – right from the beginning - weakened by internal rivalries about the leadership and even about the political direction of the different movements; this was the case during the Anyanya-rebel-movement as well as during the time of the SPLA: leaders were killed and replaced, and the internal scissions led to resistance and fuelled further ethnic unrest. While the SPLA, the liberation-army, was fighting the army of the government in the North, it had also to cope with the armed opposition of a great number of Southern tribal militias.

In 1992, somewhere near Nasir on the Sobat-river, I met with Dr. Riek Machar and Dr. Lam Akol. That was at the time when the SPLA had split into two rivalling military groups. Discussing the situation in the country, I encouraged the two leaders to try to unite the people of South Sudan: “You shouldn't only focus on your ‘common enemy’, as you call your brothers in the North, but first of all you should work

for the unity of your own people, tell them what they can expect from you after the victory, how you will bring peace and progress to their villages, how you will create a feeling of nationhood by uniting the ethnic groups. People want to be sure that their cultural identity will be respected and that their voice will be heard; at present they are witnessing a reckless dictatorship by you the military leaders.” The two men looked stunned but fortunately didn’t get angry. Eventually they answered: “You are right. But at the moment, we have to make sure to win the war and to gain independence from the North. That is our priority. After the victory, we shall work for unity among the ethnic groups and prepare for a peaceful future; we shall make sure that our cultural diversity will be respected and that development will reach even very remote areas; there will be democracy in the country, with political parties, workers’ unions, women-groups and a strong civil society. But this is not the time yet for those plans.” Thus, the original goal of the fight got postponed to the time after independence. Yet, hoping that unity would result out of a military or political victory was wishful thinking; even after independence, personalities and their fight for power would continue to split the country for a long time to come and fuel further ethnic conflicts. At the end of the war, there was great jubilation about the gained national identity, but frustration about continuous unrest and lacking development was to come soon.

It was during the mentioned period of the violent internal split of the SPLA that I met Peter Adwok for the first time, at the time when I was heading the delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Lokichokio in Northern Kenya. The radical split inside the liberation-movement had resulted in terrible military clashes between the two factions, and hatred and ethnic violence had spilled over from South Sudan to the ICRC hospital for war-wounded soldiers in Lopiding near Lokichokio: the mainly Dinka followers of Colonel Garang de Mabior had started to fight physically the mainly Nuer and Shilluk followers of Dr. Riek Machar and Dr. Lam Akol. To solve the conflict, the ICRC asked leading members of the two factions to come and appease the patients; the hospital was far too small to separate the wounded soldiers physically. In reply to the ICRC's demand, the humanitarian agencies of the two factions (SRRRA and RASS) sent some of their leaders for mediation; one member of the Nasir-faction's delegation happened to be an impressively tall man with only one leg, a man called Dr. Adwok Nyaba, - and that's when we briefly talked to each other for the first time.

One year later, at a time where clashes between the two factions had resulted in further bloodshed, I was working as an advisor to "Operation-Lifeline-Sudan" (UNICEF was coordinating 42 NGOs working in South Sudan). When I was told by the head of UNICEF, Philip O'Brian, to organise

workshops for the NGOs in order to provide them with information on the many tribes living in South Sudan, I rejected his idea. “I can lecture about the people living in South Sudan when I am in Europe, but not here”, I argued, “here it would be better to invite personalities from different tribes and to let them provide the foreigners with competent information”. The NGOs would not only learn about the tribes, but they would also even be able to meet personally with members of the various ethnic groups. Philip agreed and allowed me to organise a few workshops in Lokichokio. For each workshop, I invited about seven personalities (they were all prominent men or women known to me from the time of my work for the ICRC) and asked them to introduce the foreigners to the culture of their people. Each time, I invited two members of the bigger tribes (Dinka and Nuer, from different areas), together with five members from smaller and less known tribes. Each workshop was to focus on a different main-topic (such as agriculture, cattle and fish, medicine, material and immaterial culture etc.) and was to provide general information about the location, the environment, the livelihood, the language, the customs and the major problems of the speaker’s tribe. Thus, the participants from the NGOs could receive first-hand information and get competent answers to their specific questions. While this informative aspect of the workshops was expected to be of great benefit for the NGOs, another result came rather as a

surprise: the information provided by the speakers were not only to the members of the NGOs but even to the representatives of the other tribes completely new and often surprising. “But we also have this tradition and that belief, we are the same!”, some of them would exclaim in dismay. The “discovery” of the other’s human and cultural identity eventually led to mutual understanding, sympathy and a feeling of brotherhood. Political opinions and allegiances became suddenly less important than this awareness of cultural unity. At the end of each workshop, I used to invite the speakers from South Sudan to a farewell-evening in my home; this was always a joyful event which showed that different political opinions lose their importance when people meet on a personal level. The meetings had not been organised for making peace between the participants, and yet the split between the spirits had disappeared, was forgotten and had made space for friendship!

This practical experience showed that ethnic and political hatred can vanish when people get to know each other as simple human beings. All peoples in South Sudan live in material poverty, but they are all very proud of their cultures and their identity as human beings. Indeed, respect of the other’s identity is the key to understanding and peace, in South Sudan as much as elsewhere.

My experiences with meetings of South Sudanese from different ethnic and political sides would soon be tested on a higher level. The Swiss Ambassador in Kenya, Josef Bucher, a thinker, and visionary with a great sense for practical issues and cultural sensibilities, got the idea to invite some of the most important political and social leaders of the two factions of the liberation-movement of South Sudan to a brainstorming meeting; solutions to the peaceful settlement of the ethnic and political problems of South Sudan should get discussed. The meeting was to last three days and take place in the resort of Aberdare in Kenya. Willy Mutunga, the well-known human-rights-activist (later on the Chief Justice of Kenya), was invited to facilitate the meeting. The twelve participants were all standing on different sides of the armed conflict in South Sudan. Among them were such prominent personalities like Prof. Bari Wanji, Dr. Simon Lukare Kwaje, Telar Deng, Prof. Peter Nyot Kok, William Ajal Deng, Dengtiel Ayuen Kur, Mario Muor Muor, Simon Kun Puoc, Anna Kima Hoth, Monica Nyabol Aleu, Prof. George Nyombe, Gabriel Gai Riam, Oiyok David Oduho, Martin Odhuro Okeruk, Father Kinga George Dalku – and Dr. Peter Adwok Nyaba. Some of these participants were known to be particularly violent; they were called “Unguided Missile”, “Loose canon” or “Gun out of control”- and Peter Adwok was considered to be one of them! Because there was the possibility that the meeting between enemies could turn out to become physically violent, the

Embassy sent me to Aberdare as a kind of peace-maker – just in case there should be any necessity to cool down overboiling tempers. Because of my long experience in South Sudan, my good reputation both in Dinka and Nuer countries and my role in the epic escape of the so-called “lost boys” to safety in Kenya, I was well-known and respected by South Sudanese from all boards; my mere presence in the meeting should be a bearing element of calm, peace and confidence.

The meeting in Aberdare would allow me to meet Dr. Adwok Nyaba for a second time. It should become the



starting-point of many years of fruitful and pleasant cooperation.

To the surprise of all participants, the Aberdare-meeting of declared enemies ended very peacefully and had a promising outcome: Prof. Bari Wanji's idea to create a forum (he called it "House of Nationalities") where all ethnic groups and sections would be represented in order to discuss their problems and to find non-violent solutions to their conflicts, was unanimously adopted as the only possible way of bringing lasting peace to South Sudan.

After the successful Aberdare-meeting with its optimistic outcome, the government of Switzerland decided to play a more active role in the Sudan and appointed Ambassador Bucher as its Extraordinary Ambassador for the Sudan; I was to become the Ambassador's special peace-advisor. Ambassador Bucher and his assistant Salman Bal would be masterminding the whole project from a distance and make use of my cultural knowledge and my popularity in South Sudan for testing and implementing their ideas on the ground, during workshops, meetings and travels abroad. After Ambassador Bucher's transfer to Finland, Ambassador Daniel Bieler got appointed as Special Ambassador to the Sudan. Assisted by Salman Bal, he made sure that Switzerland continued its substantial support to the idea of a House-of-Nationalities; all workshops and meetings in five States of South Sudan and in the Nuba Mountains, as well

as the trip through African countries, would take place under Ambassador Bieler's farsighted guidance.

The outcome of the Aberdare-meeting needed to be put in writing, and since Peter Adwok was known to be a good and fast writer, Ambassador Bucher asked him to turn Prof. Bari Wanji's proposal into a concrete project. Without delay, Peter Adwok wrote a small draft on The-House-of-Nationalities-project and published it. But because this first draft was written in a fighting-spirit, Ambassador Bucher found it far too aggressive to be a convincing inspiration for making peace. Peter Adwok was asked to write a more neutral, sober and less emotional second version of the peace-project, and for doing this, he was invited to Davos, my hometown in Switzerland; here in the mountains, undisturbed by events at home, he could perceive things from a distance and write in peace. My still very young close friend Napoleon Adok Gai joined us in Davos; he had just obtained his Master in Information Technology at Leicester University in England and was now free to get engaged in the implementation of the project. Ambassador Bucher accepted my proposal to employ Napoleon; he was happy to see that the peace-project got an early and enthusiastic support from members of the young generation.

Peter Adwok spent a few weeks in Davos, discussing details of our project with Napoleon and composing his second, now very balanced version of the "House-of-Nationalities"-

booklet. As an introduction to the concept of peaceful co-existence, I wrote a short foreword to the pamphlet. To facilitate understanding, a summary of the concept was distributed as a leaflet of two pages in 2003; it listed all the 90 ethnic groups or tribal sections found in South Sudan.



*House-of-Nationalities-Meeting in the Panafric-Hotel in Nairobi
(Peter Adwok to be perceived in the middle of the last row, two rows behind
Ambassador Bucher; Napoleon Adok sitting in front on the left side.)*

The final concept of the “House of Nationalities” was the result of thorough discussions in many meetings; the idea was the creation of a forum where one elected representative of each of the ethnic groups (a section would be considered to be a tribe by itself) living in a State would meet on a regular basis in order to discuss their practical problems (these were conflicts about grazing-land or access

to water, occasionally armed conflicts due to cattle-raids or theft of children) in order to reach a lasting settlement; questions concerning local development (planning of roads, placement of hospitals and higher schools etc.) would be discussed in the forum as well; the practical, cultural or political worries and needs of the communities would be brought to the attention of the local government. The elected representative could be a chief, a man or a woman. Once established in the States, the ten forums, representing all ethnic groups of South Sudan, would meet periodically and function as a kind of second chamber in the parliament (the political and legal authority of such a chamber would need to be decided on at a later stage). Co-operation between ethnic groups would enhance peace and facilitate the work of the government, in the States as well as on the level of the Nation; the cultural identity of all ethnic groups would be recognised officially and receive substantial support from the government.

Peter Adwok's final booklet on the concept of the "House of Nationalities" was distributed among South Sudanese and discussed by the participants, first in two very big meetings in Nairobi which were attended by stakeholders of the social, political and military life in South Sudan, and later on in meetings for the youth (in Nairobi, Kampala, Akon, and Panyagor), for women (in Lokichokio and in three refugee-camps in Uganda), in Magui in Eastern Equatoria, in the

Nuba mountains (in Lwere and Dilling) and eventually in five of the then ten states of South Sudan. Napoleon Adok was organising these meetings, except the meetings in the States which were organised by Acuil Malith. Peter Adwok was present in all the big meetings held outside of South Sudan. At a later stage, Switzerland sponsored an educational trip through three African countries (South Africa, Botswana and Ghana); it was organised for chiefs and governmental officers in order to make them familiar with similar and successful concepts of peaceful tribal cooperation.

Visiting Kwacakworo's home in Davos (2005):



*James Oryema Peter Adwok King Adongo Amer Ajok King
John Luk Jok Mrs. M.Perner Kwacakworo Akway*

The biggest of all these meetings was held in Neuchâtel in Switzerland in the year 2005: the more than sixty very

prominent participants (leading women and men from the South Sudanese Civil Society, paramount-chiefs, the king of the Anyuak, leaders of NGOs and UN-organisations, human rights activists, researchers, intellectuals, politicians and ambassadors from various African and Western countries) adopted the House-of-Nationalities-project as a model for peaceful existence even in other countries than South Sudan. Peter Adwok was one of the participants.

The South Sudanese participants promised to do all they could to implement the House-of-Nationalities-project. “We shall stand for the House-of Nationalities in all weathers, if there is rain or sunshine”, Dr. Lam Akol promised.

But not everybody in South Sudan welcomed the peace-project. John Garang (the leader of the SPLA-mainstream) probably thought that the House-of-Nationalities-project was just an attempt to split the unity of his own followers; since many Dinka supported the House-of-Nationalities-programme, Garang was fearing for his authority and power. “Are you with the SPLM or with the House-of-Nationalities?” was the question asked by Garang’s followers! The question deliberately ignored the fact that the House-of-Nationalities was to unite and not to split the people of South Sudan. Unsurprisingly, nobody could explain why peaceful talks between representatives of ethnic groups should be harmful and dangerous.

I may illustrate the fearful attitude of those opposing the peace-project on purely military grounds or for reasons of personal enmity by a small anecdote from the Nuba Mountains:

In January 2002, the special Swiss Ambassador for peace-building in the Sudan, Josef Bucher, had conveyed a meeting between the Nuba rebels and the Sudan Government on the Bürgenstock in Switzerland. The result of the talks was the Nuba Mountains ceasefire which led to the creation of a military peace-keeping-force (Joint Military Commission) which consisted of officers from many European and Non-European countries and had the task to separate the fighting forces of the Sudan Government and the Nuba rebels. In the framework of this mission, I worked for some months as a commander in the rebel-held areas of the Nuba Mountains and became a trusted friend of the Nuba. When working in the Nuba Mountains, I discussed the “House of Nationalities” peace-project with the Nuba rebel leader Abdel Aziz el Hilu and the SPLA General Daniel Kodi. Abdel Aziz commented on the booklet enthusiastically by saying “I have thought so much about how to bring unity and peace to South Sudan, but here, in Peter Adwok’s booklet, I have found the solution: it’s the House-of-Nationalities!!!”. But when I asked SPLA-Commander Daniel Kodi if he had read the pamphlet as well, he replied: “No, I have not, and I will not read it. When I see the name of Peter Adwok on a book,

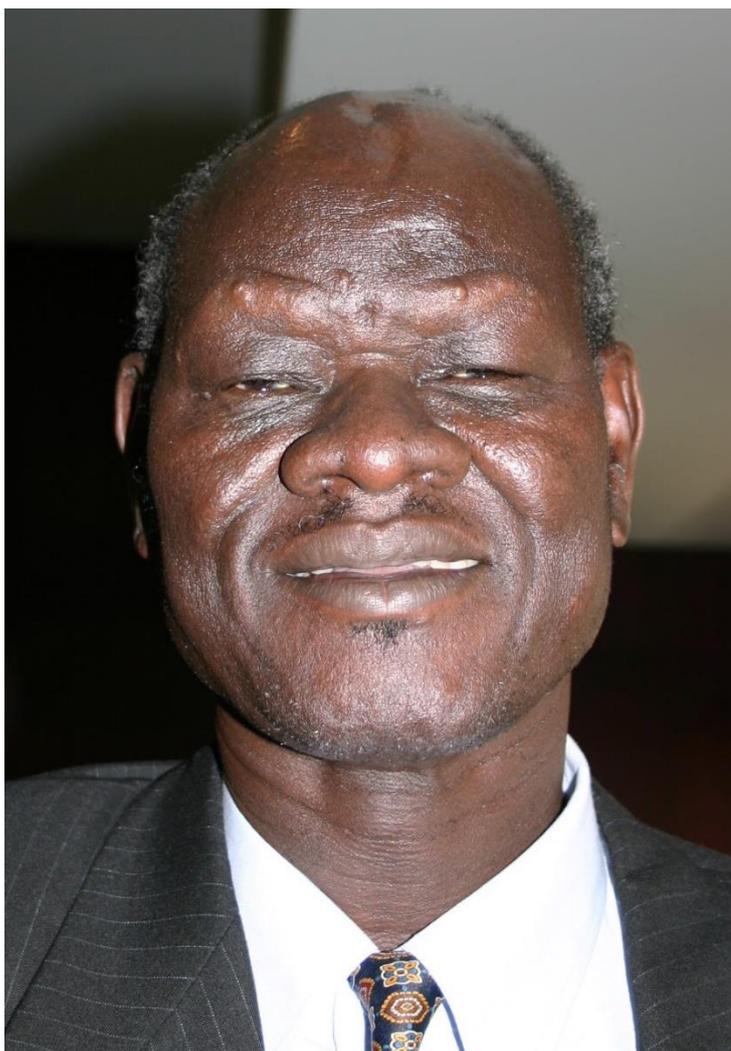
I know already what is inside!”. Daniel Kodi’s attitude was typical of those who rejected the House of Nationalities project without even wishing to know the ideas behind it and the benefits expected from it. Instead, they suspected people like Peter Adwok to use the project for weakening the power of the military. When I later discussed such superficial positions with the Nuba rebel-leader Abdel-Aziz who was himself militarily linked to the SPLA, he explained: “As You know, we are all officers and have to obey the orders of John Garang. What can we do?”. Like all South Sudanese, Garang would be very proud of his own ethnic origin but wouldn’t see the need to respect the cultural identity and to recognise the dignity of other ethnic groups; Garang had simply perceived the programme of cultural diversity and ethnic peace as a threat to his own authority and military power.

The House-of-Nationalities-project was planned to bring people of different ethnic origins and cultures together and to create a sense of unity and nationhood. Once implemented, political leaders would find it more difficult to split the people along ethnic lines. At a time when more than twenty local militias were opposing the liberation-army, unity of the people would make it much more difficult for the “common enemy” in the North to divide the rebel-movement; during the war, the government in the North of the Sudan was just too happy to see that the people in the

South could get so easily divided by internal scissions and ethnic rivalries.

But it was not only the ambitions of military leaders which were responsible for the fighting amongst the South Sudanese, members of the South Sudanese diaspora contributed actively to the divisions in the South: they were sending messages full of hatred, spreading wrong information, wild accusations and crude slander. Divided itself by ethnic tensions, the diaspora was constantly fuelling tribal unrest, calling for violence and revenge. Indeed, the violent voices of the South Sudanese diaspora were a very serious obstacle to any attempt to bring peace to the country, their goal was the exact opposite of what the House-of-Nationalities-project was trying to promote. What to do? Napoleon Adok Gai, the IT-expert, got the idea of creating a website which would spread the message of peaceful co-existence to the people living outside of the country by providing them with unbiased information on the situation in South Sudan. The platform would allow people to enter in dialogue and exchange opinions without insulting each other; it was designed to become a kind of virtual meeting-point for the civil society and all people who were not physically engaged in the military or political

conflict and who were sincerely striving for peace. Ambassador Bucher supported Napoleon's idea and asked him to install and to organise a peace-website. Later on, the well-known journalist Jacob Jiel Akol and Amer Ajok were to assist Napoleon in his daily work, and a board of directors would feed the site with new ideas; Peter Adwok was one of



these directors; as usual, his presence on the board was a constant source of inspiration and ideas. The website was called "Gurtong", an Anyuak term which stands (after a murder-case) for making peace among former enemies. Gurtong became immediately very popular both in the diaspora and among intellectuals inside South Sudan, not only because it allowed people to speak out or to comment in a polite manner but also because it provided unbiased, "objective" information about current political topics and about matters of a more general and cultural interest; even longer and intellectually more demanding papers and

analysis written by scholars and researchers living inside or outside of South Sudan were published on the website and thus made accessible to everybody. Gurtong was fighting gossip, it was a place of serious cultural and political exchange.

When still living in England, Napoleon decided to transport the concept of Gurtong even physically to the places of the diaspora; he thought that it was important to accompany the website by forums, where South Sudanese men and women could meet in order to discuss face to face the problems which were dividing the people both at home and abroad. The participants in those meetings would carry the spirit of peace to their friends and tribesmen, thereby creating a sense of togetherness even among members of the Diaspora. Within a short time, the mainly young friends of Napoleon founded a number of such “Gurtong satellite-groups” in countries where resident South Sudanese had been particularly active in dividing people at home along ethnic or political lines, such as the USA, Australia, England, Germany, Sweden, Norway and Finland. The beneficial effect of these Diaspora-groups got well reflected on the website’s very popular Gurtong-discussion-board, where the opinions now got a much more moderate, more reflected and less aggressive expression than before.

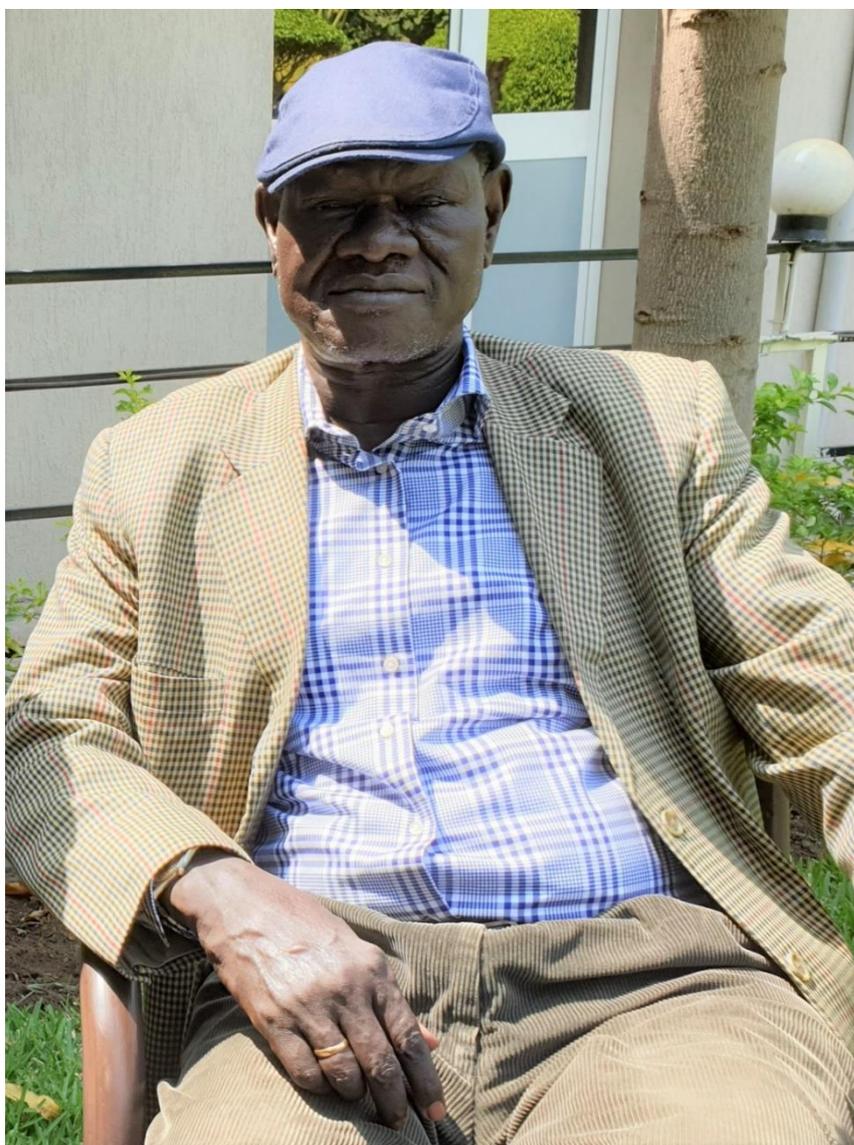
Napoleon’s role in the House-of-Nationalities-project became also important in another programme: John Luk Jok

had submitted a proposal to the Swiss Embassy, seeking educational support for young Nuer school-children. Asked by the Swiss Ambassador for my opinion, I suggested to replace John Luk's proposal by a scholarship-programme for children from disadvantaged ethnic groups (tribes or tribal sections), girls and boys which had no access to education-facilities. For the implementation of the House-of-Nationalities-project, it was vital that the representatives of the tribes could read and write, or were at least able to communicate in a language known to others. Ambassador Bucher and the Swiss Development Agency accepted my proposal. The selection of the children was difficult; unfortunately, tribes which had nobody who had ever gone to a primary school had to be excluded; in case of the Murle, even an adult man would get the chance to be further educated (it was Akot Maze, later on a well-known commissioner in Pibor country). After a difficult selection-process, twenty-one girls and boys from the Anyuak, the Jiye, the Didinga, the Larim, the Lolubo, the Lugbwara, the Jurchol, the Päri, the Lango and some children from very remote Dinka- and Nuer-areas were selected (by Anasia Achieng, Ines Islamshah Napoleon, John Luk and myself) and sent to secondary schools in Kenya for studies. Napoleon and myself were taking psychological care of the students who often felt very lonely. Of course, not all the students were successful (some felt homesick and never came back after school-holidays), but some of the children

made it up to the university and a few were quite successful in their future professional career.

Peter Adwok was not involved in the scholarship-programme, and yet he contributed to the education of future generations by compiling an overview of all the tribes living in South Sudan. Because the House of Nationalities was designed to unite all cultural identities (“tribes”) living within the borders of South Sudan, it was of course of fundamental importance to know them by name and to locate them. This study was a big academic and practical challenge, not only because there were/are so many ethnic groups but because many of them were not even known by name let alone recognised as an own cultural group. Peter Adwok accepted to make the needed research, conducted plenty of interviews and established a list showing each and every tribe living in South Sudan; he found 66 distinct ethnic groups, this without counting the various sections of bigger tribes living in separate areas! Peter Adwok’s list was/is showing a tribe’s location, relating its history, explaining its material and immaterial culture and hinting at the various problems the people of that ethnic group are facing at present. When I printed Peter Adwok’s information from Gurtong, I got a book (illustrated by pictures, maps, information on the relation of all languages spoken in South Sudan and enriched by a lecture by Prof. Wani Gore on ethnic groups in South Sudan) of not less than 300 pages!

Even if this information had no scientific ambitions and surely would need corrections and updates, this work of Peter Adwok is of tremendous importance for the cultural self-consciousness of the people living in South Sudan and will save many ethnic groups from formal disappearance. Since the so-called “cultural pages” will be a book of reference for all generations to come, it should be enriched, get published and made available to the public.



Dr. Peter Adwok Nyaba during our last meeting
in Juba, in January 2020

The website Gurtong is – because of lack of funds – on the way of disappearance, and the House-of-Nationalities has not been installed yet formally. In consequence, fighting and bloodshed continue, and ethnicity is still a source of discord; But the idea of an institution which will bring ethnic groups together will not die soon. There will be no peace without the respect of the dignity of all cultural identities. Eventually, the South Sudanese’ strive for the recognition of their human rights will be successful. During our last meeting, Peter Adwok concluded our discussions by saying “Only a revolution will bring change”.

I can only hope that further bloodshed is not needed to bring people to reason.

This is all I could say about my friendship and fruitful and pleasant cooperation with Peter Adwok Nyaba during the last years of my work as a peace-advisor in South Sudan. Even if it has taken him a long time, I am happy that my old friend has – finally! - written his memoir. It is a very precious historic document, left behind by one of the most devoted figureheads of South Sudan’s fight for independence and human rights.

Kwacakworo

Davos, September 2021
