

# Commission on Nomadic Peoples

“‘The reward of life is death’: warfare and the Anyuak of the Ethiopian-Sudanese border”

Conradin Perner

Nomadic Peoples, Number 32, 1993

The Commission on Nomadic Peoples of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) is collaborating with the Ford Foundation to digitize, preserve and extend access to the journal of *Nomadic Peoples*. For more information regarding the journal *Nomadic Peoples* visit the Commission on Nomadic Peoples website at [www.nomadicpeoples.info](http://www.nomadicpeoples.info) and the Berghahn Books website at [www.berghahnbooks.com](http://www.berghahnbooks.com)

# "The reward of life is death": warfare and the Anyuak of the Ethiopian-Sudanese border<sup>1</sup>

Conradin Perner<sup>2</sup>

The traditional life of the Anyuak in Sudan has been completely disrupted by the warfare in the country. This paper discusses the various aspects of war among the Anyuak and the Sudanese. The author concentrates on the foreign impacts on the Anyuak, and describes the consequences of war brought from the outside, which are threatening the very existence of the tribe as a distinctive cultural entity.

"All our bad things came from the white people", the king of the Anyuak, Nyeya Agada Akway Cam Gilo, explains: "Clothes, money and firearms...". The statement sounds like the conclusion of a study about the history of the Anyuak tribe in the 20th century. Indeed, it shows some reasons for the suffering of a people living a difficult life under harsh ecological circumstances in one of the most remote regions of Africa, who all of a sudden found themselves at centre of international tensions and a seemingly endless civil war.

Clothes and money may stand for European and Arab civilization, and thus for completely different moral values, patterns of social behaviour and beliefs. While both are essentially foreign to Anyuak culture, they nevertheless tend to change traditionally self-sufficient, self-conscious and proud people into people too poor to buy any future, and yet "for sale" to the unknown. Clothes and money are indeed the means by which a traditionally independent society can be destroyed from within, by creating new classes and new economic dependencies. It is one of the more paradoxical consequences of modern war in Anyuak country that these two foreign "inventions" gained in popularity and daily importance as a direct result of displacement, lack of self-sufficiency, starvation, and the presence of soldiers, relief-agencies, and refugee-camps. Even before the most recent civil war in the Sudan, for example, the social

revolution in Ethiopia succeeded in replacing the Anyuak marriage-beads (*dimui*) with money, thereby transforming something which was formerly without price—women—into an object which could be purchased like anything else. Cultural change is a normal and permanent process, but it should grow naturally, and not be the result of foreign intervention or even cultural oppression. War is an interruption of such a process of social change and natural development.

Firearms, of course, do not simply mean war; they stand more generally for the possibility of the (mass-)killing of people and animals alike, for the destructive power of the wealthy and the reckless. They also mean the end of a society built upon intellectual arguments and social concordance. Many small tribes in the Southern Sudan have been armed by foreign powers, in order to create unrest and bring about a permanent state of tribal tension and war. Instead of blaming parties to the conflict for making use of the arms at their disposal, one could well ask where those weapons come from, and who is making most profit out of other people's suffering. When blaming the white people, the Anyuak king may not have been completely wrong!

It is worthwhile noticing that king Agada Akway Cam Gilo did not talk about war itself, nor its consequences, for war, after all, has been with the Anyuak since the very beginning of their history. The term *Anyuuaa*

comes from *nyuak* which means "to share in fighting (to join in fighting)", and if the Anyuak have survived as a tribal entity in spite of all attacks by other tribes or the destructive policies of different governments, it is because of the Anyuak's famous spiritual and physical fighting capacities. Tribal wars were—and are—very cruel incidents in their otherwise peaceful existence. Yet there are natural limits to manslaughter and suffering: the limits of the tribe's self-interest. Thus, when talking about modern weapons, the king expressed his fears of the consequences of a war which is out of social control, and where the people may never see the fruits of an eventual victory. The old king may also instinctively feel that his absolute, divine power will come to an end once it has become possible to buy military force and to gain political might by money, or from foreign people; when thinking about his own power, he actually means the power of a people who find in him their political identity and their spiritual force.

This is not the story of a people who went to war to fight for independence and liberty. It is rather the story of a tribe which did not want war, and which was already engaged in fighting its "aggressive" neighbours. Geographical circumstances, rather than anything else, forced it to participate in a war on two sides of an absurd border—more passively in the Sudan, more actively in Ethiopia—and suffering everywhere from the presence of foreigners and their goals.

In the following paper, I illustrate how the traditional life of a small tribe was completely disrupted because of a war exported to their country, which, regardless of its eventual outcome, threatens its very existence as a tribal entity. The paper concentrates on *foreign* impacts on the Anyuak, and describes the consequences of wars not directly linked to traditional tribal activities.

## The traditional life stricken by warfare

The Anyuak belong to the Luo-group of the Western Nilotes, the Shilluk being their closest relatives. In the course of a long migration, the Anyuak gradually separated from their fellow kinsmen as a consequence of internal power-struggles, foreign aggression, or in response to changing ecological conditions. The fact of having been forced to continuously adopt themselves to new environments and new military situations has helped the Anyuak to survive under extremely difficult, constantly changing conditions, and has at the same time increased their consciousness of their own identity.

After their separation from the Shilluk, the Anyuak settled along the banks of the River Sobat and its tributaries in the south—the Baro, the Gilo, the Akobo and the Pibor; other groups of Anyuak, however, reached the present country more directly from a place in the South called *Wi-Paari*, north of Lafon. The Anyuak occupied their present country in small groups, building their small villages on elevated places (*bur*) which normally do not flood in the rainy season, and where people can plant on fertile soils. The Anyuak are now specialized in agriculture, but in ancient times they owned large numbers of cattle, exactly as do the Nuer, the Dinka, the Shilluk and the Murle. Although many customs still give witness to the former importance of cattle, the Anyuak never got their bridewealth from cattle alone, and were probably always more interested in agriculture than some of their pastoral brothers. Asked why they do not have many cattle, the Anyuak refer to the presence of the tsetse-fly in their country and to the cattle-raids undertaken by their neighbours, the Murle and the Nuer. Given that Anyuak country is rich in fish and game, and agriculture assures the people of a decent existence in spite of a difficult environment, the abandonment of a pastoral life was possible. The highly elaborate political structure of Anyuak society

depends moreover on a well-organized, intense life in a village-community, and Anyuak traditions prove that these structures have deep and very strong roots.

The Anyuak village is governed either by kings or by chiefs, each village forming a completely independent political unit. The area of kingship lies in the southwest, while chiefs rule in the rest of Anyuak country. There are formal differences in the structure of the two types of political organization; Anyuak kingship claims divine authority and eternal power, while the chiefs have a more earthly and thus less stable position, being periodically ousted from power by purely internal village-rebellions (*agem*). Permanent conspiracy and periodic *coup d'états* are the basic characteristics of the Anyuak political system, where the people retain final control over very strong and sometimes despotic rulers.

Anyuak country is not accessible from outside during nine months of the year, and villages in the rainy season remain separated by oceans of tall grass and walls of clay-soaked water. During this time of year, communications are poor and each community leads its own life as economically and politically independent units. It is the lack of internal unity which has made the Anyuak particularly vulnerable, for the lack of any mechanism of mutual assistance facilitates the work of an aggressor. Rivalries between Anyuak villages weakened the tribe as a whole more than foreigners could ever have done.

Without giving the impression of having suffered military defeat, the Anyuak nevertheless lost all their former territories along the Sobat a part of country south of the Baro, the region around Akobo (in 1983), and the large area of Ojwa which lies in the east of their country, between the rivers Pibor and Akobo (in 1973). This history of "defeats" can be interpreted in different ways; for example, one could emphasize the fact that it was only due to their courage and military skills, their endurance and cunning intelligence, that the Anyuak survived the almost permanent aggressions of more

powerful tribes and managed to remain in control of at least the more remote parts of their present homeland.

Before turning our attention to the war and its consequences for the Anyuak, it is worth reiterating the fact that history is not only the account of social and political events, but also the story of a more elementary existence. Indeed, one sometimes gets the impression that surviving under the ecological conditions prevailing in Anyuak-country is a war in itself, for rare are the years where the crops are not burnt by the sun, eaten by birds or grasshoppers, inundated by floods, mowed down by sudden thunderstorms, or destroyed by insects, porcupines or monkeys. Hunger, sickness and epidemics are almost daily happenings, causing constant human misery, suffering, distress and death. Survival in such circumstances is an art of overcoming hardship and resisting pressures of all kinds, physical as well as spiritual. The specific Anyuak "art of survival" consists of vigorously pretending that they are living in the most beautiful and the most generous of all worlds, in a paradise on earth where meat, fish and food can be found in abundance. It is because this world is so beautiful that everybody, human beings or spiritual entities, have the strong desire to occupy it, and to use it for their own goals. The joyful, bold Anyuak character is another aspect of this art of overcoming loneliness and fighting back against hostile elements in the spiritual, earthly, or human domain.

### *The borderline through Anyuak-country*

The Anyuak share with a number of other Sudanese (and indeed African) tribes the fate of having been separated into two parts by an international border. This follows the river Akobo, and means that some Anyuak live in the Sudan while others live in Ethiopia.

The division of Anyuakland into two "sides", had both negative and positive consequences. For example, when persecuted

by the Anglo-Egyptian government or by the Syrian administrator in Ethiopia, people could simply cross the border to reach safety, while "punitive expeditions" undertaken by both governments struck down people staying behind in their villages. These foreign administrators were attempting to gain military control, political stability and taxes, rather than promote development. However, ecological conditions and the strong, suspicious Anyuak character made it difficult for them to achieve their goals, and following a memorable victory by the Anyuak over the British in the beginning of the century, the latter preferred to keep away from these swampy, physically threatening regions. Similar activities were undertaken by the "Galla", who came down from the Ethiopian escarpment in order to profit from what was then called "Ethiopia's last slave-producing area", to poach ivory and to loot slaves.

If the ecological difficulties of Anyuak country worked as a kind of natural shield against foreign invaders, they were—naturally—also a hinder for development at times when this was possible elsewhere. Unfortunately, however, these ecological obstacles did not exist for tribes living in the same area, and once weapons of a more general use were introduced, the Anyuak had little chance to defend themselves against their more numerous or more bellicose neighbours (let alone governments). Far from being an entirely peace-loving people, the Anyuak certainly contributed to the continuous suffering of their own tribesmen; however, they never tried to occupy foreign territory, not even after their memorable victory over the Nuer in 1914, when their forces reached as far as the Nile and returned home with plenty of cattle and Nuer and Murle captives.

#### *The first civil war, 1955–1972*

Liberation movements are often directly dependent on the active or passive assistance they receive from neighbouring countries. Uganda, Kenya, Zaire and

Ethiopia were the countries showing sympathy for the Sudanese *Anyanya*-rebel movement, offering hospitality to refugees and guerilla-leaders, and allowing the passage of arms through their territory. Most of these arms came through Ethiopia, and thus passed across the border in Anyuak country, the Upper Nile region of Southern Sudan being the most difficult to control militarily. In consequence, many military activities took place in this region, and many troops, both government and rebel, moved through and fought in Anyuakland.

The Anyuak were divided in their sympathies. Although there was no reason to support troops from Northern Sudan, an internal power-struggle led Aguleh, a son of the former king Akway Cam and contender for the kingship, to join the rebels in the hope he could obtain Anyuak kingship with their help. Because of Aguleh's presence amongst the rebels, the existing Anyuak king, Agada, was thought to side with the enemy from the North. In the beginning, the Anyanya did not understand the situation and attacked Agada several times, forcing the king to fight back against the rebels. It was only after some time that the Anyanya understood that Aguleh's struggle for power was not their concern, and subsequently they turned their attention to more strategic goals.

Many Anyuak engaged themselves in the rebel movement, and some even became commanders in Upper Nile Province. A great number of Anyuak lost their lives in the conflict, and those surviving the 17 year war never received any education other than military training. When the war ended in 1972, the Anyuak hoped to gain some benefit out of the newly established regional government in the South. They hoped in vain, however; except one or two officers and two politicians (one minister in the South, one ambassador and later governor in Malakal). The whole of Anyuak country fell back into its previous state of almost total isolation from the rest of the country—a wilderness shared only by other forgotten tribes.

### Ten years of "peace"

During my stay in the heart of Anyuak country throughout the ten years of "peace" and "autonomy", I witnessed the living-conditions of the Anyuak during this period, and in particular the life at the royal village of Otalo. For a few weeks, a school was somehow functioning under a tree, and very occasionally an unpaid medical assistant brought some medicines. Most of the time, however, people were left alone with their witchdoctors and their diseases, until epidemics periodically killed a great number of people. There was hunger, and there was war: first with the Murle (in 1973, when they attacked Ojwa-region, killing many people and carrying off cattle and children), and then with the Nuer at Akobo (especially in 1983).

The *Murle*, a small pastoral community living along the Pibor-river and its tributaries, are the most defiant enemies of the Anyuak, raiding cattle, abducting children, fishing Anyuak pools empty and causing trouble whenever they bring their cattle to the Anyuak rivers. Yet the Anyuak attest to the great bravery of the Murle, as well as their craftsmanship, and even admit that the Murle are a very kind people with whom they could easily coexist ("if only the Murle would not always break our solemn agreements"). Being a pastoral people spending most of their time in completely inaccessible places, the Murle are, if possible, even more neglected than the Anyuak, never having enjoyed a positive experience with any government or rebel movement. In times of internal conflicts and civil war, the Murle are the ideal people to be employed by a hostile party for breaking unity and peace. The so-called "Murle militias" belong to these small tribal groups which are given arms by political movements in order to create insecurity and unrest, the result of such activities is great hatred and more violence on all sides.

The *Nuer*, being a much larger tribe, represent for the Anyuak a more serious problem than do the Murle, for while the

Murle rarely settle in foreign territories, the Nuer are in constant need of expansion. "There was never any true fight with the Nuer", king Agada told me once, "they are chased easily". Nevertheless, the Nuer succeeded in ousting the Anyuak from many places where they were allowed to settle by their Anyuak friends, simply because of their greater number. Since independence, the Nuer also took advantage of the high positions of some of their tribesmen in the government or rebel movements, and chased the Anyuak repeatedly from Akobo-region, the only Anyuak stronghold in the Southern Sudan.

Though allegations of governmental involvement in tribal incidents are difficult to prove, the military success of both the Murle and the Nuer during times of "peace" in the region may well be due to such instigation. Similar tactics were also used at a later stage, when the government in Northern Sudan succeeded in splitting the rebels by arming certain tribes of the South. However, in spite of tribal incidents and almost total neglect by the regional government, the period between the first and the second civil war in Southern Sudan allowed the Anyuak to return to their traditional life and thus to regain the consciousness of their unity. Because of his fierce resistance, the Anyanya war strengthened the authority of the Anyuak king considerably, and allowed a return to the traditional, highly sophisticated political and judicial life at court: old cases could be settled and a new, solid stability obtained. Once the social order was re-established, it was even possible to renew and reinforce the divine kingship of the holder of the royal emblems, and to elevate a number of crown-princes to royal dignity, thereby bringing new political stability to villages scattered by war. The strong personal position of the king made him respected and feared, and maintained the tribe's identity to outsiders as well as insiders. This new self-consciousness of the Sudanese Anyuak was of great importance at a moment when the tribe's survival was seriously threatened on the other side of the border.

### A "revolution" reaches the "Ethiopian" Anyuak

While the clouds of the first civil war were slowly dissipating on the Sudanese side of the border, the social revolution led by Mengistu Haile Mariam brought new disorder to Anyuakland. To the fury of the Anyuak king in the Sudan, all chiefs were declared "normal" citizens and replaced by committees consisting mainly of young men who were required to reorganize the traditional Anyuak way of living into a socialist lifestyle. Socialist agricultural units and military forces were formed, while resisting villages were forcibly displaced and restructured; those fighting the new order fled to the other side of the border. Many Anyuak welcomed the new government, especially the younger generation who found new arguments to use against the traditional and not always competent rule of Anyuak chiefs. Traditionally, young people were not supposed to interfere in a village's political life.

The Ethiopian revolution had far-reaching consequences for the "Ethiopian" Anyuak, not only because it destroyed all previous political structures but also because it changed the Anyuak way of marrying. The so-called *dimui*-marriage-beads, which had an immaterial value and were thus a symbol for human relationships, were destroyed, and replaced by money; thus a value which lacks all spiritual dimension and which centers on economic power was introduced into a society not used to such types of interpersonal relationships. "Now, there is no difference between buying a piece of cloth at the market or purchasing a woman", an Anyuak girl complained.

The destruction of traditional ways of life, and the introduction of foreign politics into tribal existence, also had serious consequences for the political life of the Anyuak as it separated the Ethiopian part of Anyuakland structurally from the Sudanese Anyuak. The border was no more just a river,

but a real cut into the tribe's collective existence. In spite of all the damage done by the Mengistu revolution, during his time some social progress did take place, for example, there was hardly any village without a school and a minimum of medical services. This was in contrast to villages on the Sudanese side of the border, however, where children had to look for schooling far away from home, at Pibor, Malakal or Khartoum.

### The second civil war (1983-199?)

The second civil war started in 1983 in Bor. This time, the reason for the military rebellion was not only the economic domination by the North but fears of oppression in religious and judicial fields. A plan for the so-called "re-division of the South" had led, in 1982-83, to much protest, as this, the critics argued, would have meant direct dependence of each province on the North, thereby bringing to an end what had been obtained by the Anyanya movement in the peace agreement of Addis Ababa. Later developments gave credence to such fears, as it became clear that Khartoum had decided to impose its will and its laws on the peoples of the South.

In 1983, two rebel movements began armed conflict with the government in the North; one struggling for independence of the South from the North (the so-called Anyanya-Two-movement), the other one hoping to "liberate" all the Sudanese (those in the South as well as those in the North) from—in their eyes—a fanatic and oppressive government (the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement or SPLM). Before the fight against the North started, the two rebel movements fought bitterly among themselves and the SPLA finally emerged as the single force in the South.

The Anyuak lacked enthusiasm for the new movement. This was partly because they had never suffered any Arab presence, nor got anything out of the regional government, and partly because they felt instinctively that they would be the losers

once again, regardless of who would finally "win" the war. At present, with the war still on-going, one has to share these fears; while hopes for peace and stability are fading, prospects of a very difficult future are increasing every day.

While the Anyanya-movement had several countries as its backers, the only military stronghold of the SPLA outside of the Sudan was in the Ethiopian part of Anyuakland. Itang on the Baro-river (the Anyuak call it *openo*) was turned into the centre of military training, and soon received thousands of refugees from the war-torn Sudan. As the UNHCR and other organisations assisted refugees with food, shelter and schooling, the refugee-camps at Itang and Pinyudo attracted many Sudanese who were looking for a place to escape the horrors of the war, and to find food in times of starvation.

The strong presence of a "foreign" military power and of some 300,000 refugees, had great impact on the relation-ship between the Anyuak and the SPLA. In the beginning, the Anyuak were not unsympathetic to the Sudanese liberation movement. However, close links between the Ethiopian regime and the SPLA, and the "occupation" of Anyuakland by Dinka and Nuer refugees or soldiers, changed the Anyuak attitude. This was especially true when the SPLA put a Nuer administrator in the Anyuak town of Gambela in Ethiopia. The refugees brought foreign relief-workers to Anyuakland, but the Anyuak, representing the local population, did not receive direct assistance. Various incidents resulted in a growing feeling of oppression, and while the SPLA were fighting for the "liberation" of the Sudan, the Ethiopian Anyuak began to dream of their own liberation. A political resistance movement was formed—the GPLF or Gambela People's Liberation Movement—which fought simultaneously against SPLA-Nuer dominance in Gambela, and the Mengistu regime.

The fall of Mengistu in May 1991 was a serious setback to the SPLA. It was forced to evacuate Itang and the places in Ethiopian Anyuakland, together with the refugees, for

the other side of the border. Many refugees fled to Nasir on the Sobat, but the great majority ran to Pochalla on the river Akobo, where the rainy season prevented them from moving further. The arrival of some 100,000 people in a small village in a remote area was a dramatic event, last but not least for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) which brought assistance to the refugees, including some 10,000 unaccompanied children who had been living in a school in the UNHCR-camp at Pinyudo, and who now received special care.

### *Recent developments*

The fall of the Mengistu-regime deprived the SPLA of its most active military and ideological support. Tensions existing within the SPLM led to a rift when Cdt. Dr. Riek Machar, a Nuer, and Ctd. Dr. Lam Akol, a Shilluk, at Nasir, split off from the SPLA. The other faction remained under the command of Dr. John Garang de Mabior, a Dinka from Bor. As differences could not be settled peacefully, the two factions began to fight each other, enabling the government to take advantage of these internal problems, with Khartoum favouring the Nasir-faction.

This most recent development once again placed the Anyuak on different sides of the new conflict. While the Sudanese Anyuak had suffered from the activities of the Nasir-faction in Ciro-region, and thus supported the Dinka-dominated Torit-faction of Dr. Garang, the GPLM was still seeking revenge for past SPLM "mistakes" in Ethiopia and therefore provided both passive and active support to anti-Garang-movements. The fact that the liberation movement of the Oromo tribe in Ethiopia attempted to gain control of Gambela also brought about the GPLM's alliance with the EPDRF (Ethiopian People's Democratic Revolutionary Front), which had been helped by the Sudanese government in its fight against Mengistu. In short, the Anyuak in Ethiopia are presently supporting anti-SPLA-forces, while those in the Sudan are on the side of Garang, and, in any case, would not like the Nuer of the Nasir-faction to be successful.



The heavily-armed Murle, it should be noted, are also fighting their own war, by harassing the SPLA, Anyuak and Gatjaak Nuer alike. In general, small tribes are used by different political or military movements for goals which are not of their direct concern. Once the war is over, these small tribes then have to answer for their previous positions, and can already now be sure of future vengeance. The fact that insurgent groups have, through years of struggle and war, acquired a great amount of sophisticated weapons is of great concern in this respect.

### The consequences of war for the Anyuak

This periodical history of war and "peace" has already brought out a number of consequences for the Anyuak as a tribal entity. In this section various specific aspects of Anyuak life during and after the war are considered. These aspects should be understood as a whole; for *consequences of war are accumulative*, and bring not only physical hardship, but affects on the mental and psychological level as well.

Many of the usual consequences of war (as for example destruction of buildings and social services) were not felt so much amongst the Anyuak, simply because they have never existed and thus could not be destroyed or disrupted. Examples taken from other parts of the Sudan shall illustrate these types of consequences.

#### *Disruption of family-life and social activities*

When the war started, many Anyuak were outside of their home country, in places such as Bor, Malakal, Juba, or Khartoum. A great number were engaged in the governmental army, while others worked in the administration, and there were young people employed as cheap labour who hoped to be admitted to a school in the region. Some of the educated Anyuak joined the rebel

movement, but most of the people and in particular the children stayed in the towns, far away from their homes. Most of them endured very difficult living conditions in a hostile environment. Many of the Anyuak serving in the army were sent to the south to fight their brothers, and Anyuak casualties—in particular during the fight at Nasir—were said to be very high.

Some Anyuak returned from Khartoum following a long and complicated way via Ethiopia, but most Anyuak remained in the towns like the other refugees from the South. As the Anyuak in the towns retained contact, families staying behind in Anyuakland could from time to time receive news about their children and friends by people arriving from there, but such good news did not compensate for the loss of physical contact. Unlike other regions, the displacement of the Anyuak was not only due to the civil war itself, but also to attacks from other tribes and to starvation following a number of years of drought and flooding (1986–1991). Such displacement occurred mainly inside Anyuakland, where refugees could expect help from their relatives or friends, or from people bartering goods from the refugees staying in the UNHCR-camps in Pinyudo or Itang. Besides the human suffering and hardship connected with displacement and separation from the families, the Anyuak were in this regard certainly better off than other tribes, in that they were near a border where people could—at least up to 1990—escape the most immediate effects of the war while still staying inside tribal boundaries.

#### *Collapse of the economic system*

The absence of able-bodied men, due to their participation in the rebel movements, deaths in tribal clashes, or displacement in governmental towns, had serious consequences for the people, in terms of agriculture and other subsistence activities.

The Anyuak are fervent agriculturists, who raise crops of a high quality. Men alone plant the durra-fields, for "the women do not know this difficult work". The absence

of qualified men resulted in a lack of professional care for the fields, and thus in reduced crop production.

The fact that traditional social and political life was severely disrupted thus had a serious affect on the organisation of agricultural activities. The absence of men and lack of coordination in agricultural labour meant that the natural enemies of crops—weaver-birds, grasshoppers etc.—were able to prevail.

In this respect, the past five years in Anyuak and Murle country have been disastrous, from both an economic and an ecological point of view. Droughts and floods alternated, burning fields or washing away crops. While nuts, waterlilies and certain types of grass allowed people to survive for a time, many of those who escaped starvation perished later as a consequence of diseases. Weak people, women and especially children, could often not reach refugee camps or other assistance points, and passed away silently. Compared to other people, the Anyuak were probably better off from a nutritional point of view; their country is fertile and the Anyuak know to make use of hidden natural resources. Yet, their situation became desperate, for a number of reasons:

First, the constant population displacement did not allow the Anyuak a proper preparation of their fields. Instead, people on the move simply planted small fields of maize along the rivers. Second, the absence of a generation of men made it easy for other tribes to attack Anyuak villages, burning crops and displacing villagers. Recent examples include attacks by Nuer at Akobo and by Murle in Jor-region. Such loss of crops also made people insecure and reduced their willingness to plant on a large scale. No one could be sure to be available at harvest time at the same place, and people often reached a new place after the time of sowing: as a consequence, people planted only the necessary minimum.

Third, SPLA soldiers crossing Anyuak territory on their way to Boma or to Bor had to be given food for their journey, which was

another discouraging element and sometimes a reason to move to more hidden places.

Fourth, traditionally, the Anyuak in times of hunger or other hardship used to seek help from their relatives in more fortunate regions. During the war, this system of mutual assistance collapsed, partly because people would not move as easily as in normal times and partly because there were, for above mentioned reasons, no regions with a surplus in production.

Finally, Anyuak country never had an integrated market system, except at peripheral places like Akobo, Pibor and Gambela. The closure of markets consequently did not affect them in the same dramatic way it did in other regions in Southern Sudan, but the fact that trading become very difficult had a considerable impact on Anyuak wealth, for example items such as clothing, soap, salt etc. Consequently, the presence of aid agencies came as a relief for the starving Anyuak and helped them—indirectly—to survive; though the Anyuak did not receive anything free, they at least had the opportunity to barter food in exchange for Anyuak tobacco or alcohol.

To summarize, the war brought instability and insecurity to the country of the Anyuak, constantly displacing people without allowing them time to prepare their fields or take profit from their crops; interruption of traditional village-life, absence of the care-takers of the families, and family-separation brought the normal, economic system to collapse, which in turn led both to a physical and spiritual breakdown of people's energy and capacities of resistance. The effects of war were further exacerbated by natural calamities, which even in more peaceful times would have caused much human suffering. If the Anyuak managed to survive under such difficult circumstances, it was because they were already accustomed to fighting disease, hunger and death, and refusing to give up their struggle for a better life.

### *Lack of medical services*

Many regions in Southern Sudan have always lacked services in the field of health and therefore would hardly notice their breakdown as a consequence of war. This is also true for the country of the Anyuak, where the present popularity and prestige of witchdoctors is an indication of the lack of modern medical services. Other regions suffer more directly from the absence of drugs, medical personnel, proper water supply and the collapse of equipments, roads and means of transport. Relief agencies have tried to fill the gap, but their dependence on flights and flight permissions given by the government of the Sudan and the SPLA, has restricted their activities to a very few places, and left entire regions without medical care. The surgical hospital of the International Committee of the Red Cross offers approximately 300 beds to war-wounded soldiers and civilians, and has already saved a great number of lives. It is perhaps here one can best observe the human tragedy of war. This impression becomes all the more depressing when one realizes that most war-wounded will never be transported to the ICRC-hospital in Lokichokio in Kenya.

Though all health problems are worrisome when medical help is unavailable, some diseases are more directly linked to war than others. Such is the case with tuberculosis. Under the present circumstances, the majority of TB patients pass away because they can't reach the only hospital treating the disease. Even more terrible are the effects of the so-called *Khalazar* disease, which kills people in great numbers. It is directly linked to war since the transmitting agent—the sandfly—travels with infected persons or finds infected persons at formerly clean sites. It is thus the constant dislocation of the population which has allowed the disease to spread over a large area in a very short time. A Dutch organisation has tried to fight the disease, but their struggle was interrupted due to the ongoing conflict. Although it is possible to cure patients

within three weeks, this has become impossible, partly because treatment is extremely expensive, partly because patients need a lot of food to recover, and partly because the area in question lies on both sides of the war, between the North (Bentiu) and the South (Ler). Entire villages have been exterminated as a consequence of the disease, and refugees fear to return home if they know that the area is infected by *Khalazar*.

### *Lack of veterinary services*

The health of cattle is of absolute importance for all pastoral people, both from a nutritional and a cultural point of view. It is thus not surprising that certain relief agencies, namely the ICRC and UNICEF, have understood the vital significance of cattle for the Nilotes and have conducted cattle vaccination programs in regions accessible to them. Tribes in more remote areas did not have the same chance, however. Both Anyuak and Murle cattle were not vaccinated, after an attack on Pochalla in March 1992 brought the beginning of the campaign to an abrupt end.

The vaccination programs were preventative, mainly against rinderpest, but not curative; thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of cattle died as a consequence of constant displacement and various diseases. Floods in the region around Bor, and Anyanya-2 raids in this area during the autumn of 1991, also had terrible consequences for people's livelihoods. In Anyuak area, Murle cattle died in great numbers, forcing the starving Murle to attack other tribes for food and cattle, and to kill antelopes in large numbers.

### *Lack of education and school-facilities*

Lack of education is possibly one of the worst consequences of war, especially in a country like the Sudan where cultural differences can only be overcome through the enlightenment and tolerance which education promotes. Lack of schooling lays the foundation for future wars before the present

one has ended. A 9 year-old boy in 1983 is now 18 years old without ever having seen a school. Unless he is very exceptional, he will never have a voice in his new country nor understand its complex problems.

Before the war, education was a privilege reserved for children of particular regions. As there was no school in Anyuakland, many Anyuak children ran away from home for education abroad, in Malakal, Rabak or Khartoum. After the outbreak of the second civil war, schools were closed almost everywhere either because of the lack of teachers and school materials, or because of hunger and the displacement of people.

The present long-lasting war has also led to frustration among all those Southern Sudanese who actually finished secondary school, and perhaps reached or completed university. In effect, the war has crushed all their hopes of finding work in a destroyed Sudan. The presence of sometimes haughty, occasionally ill-prepared, or even arrogant relief workers comes as an additional humiliation to this category of black Sudanese.

The fact that education plays a crucial role in the life not only of people but also of the state can be illustrated by the story of the now famous 10,000 unaccompanied children "of Gorkuoo". Gorkuoo was a village where children were re-settled in Anyuakland, having fled from the refugee camp at Pinyudo in Ethiopia to the ICRC centre in Pochalla. For security reasons, the SPLA later decided to send the children to a place near the Kenyan border, where the boys now wait for re-unification with their relatives. What brought these children into the headlines was not their suffering, or their personal problems of being separated for years from their parents, but the fact that they were practically only boys and all living together in a kind of boarding school. The suspicion was general that these children were actually sent to Ethiopia by the SPLA for military training, although such a thing could presumably have been better organised in a less public place than a UNHCR refugee camp, and 8 to 12 year-old boys were too young to be useful as soldiers.

Though the SPLA has got child soldiers like so many African rebel movements, the care-takers of these children probably speak the truth when they say that they are only occupied with their education. This is potentially believable given the total lack of school facilities in rebel-held areas in the Sudan. One can also consider the possibility that a rebel movement is thinking of the time after the war, when there will be a need for educated people. In order to ensure the future will not be empty in terms of human intellectual manpower, the SPLM seems to have encouraged some chiefs to send children from their village to the schools in Ethiopian refugee camps, where security, food and education were available. Such an understanding may explain why so many chiefs and military commanders have sent their own children to Ethiopia, and why some Anyuak bitterly complained that their children were not accepted. Indeed, by selecting only children from their own tribal group, or even from a particular tribal section, those responsible could make sure that the future was under the control of their people. "We would love to put an Anyuak at this post", the argument might run, "but unfortunately he lacks education...". Thus, if the boys were not sent to Ethiopia for military reasons, there was probably some other and more cunning reason behind the move, such as the wish that people of the same tribe (or tribal section) should have a leading role in the future of the country.

Nevertheless, it should also be remembered that one-third of the children actually escaped the terror of war, and were seeking refuge at a place where they would get food and find safety. The news that there was such a place, where everything was free, including even education, spread over Southern Sudan and incited many children to run away from home. Whatever the reason for the unaccompanied children's presence in the refugee camps in Ethiopia may have been, the individual fate of each child is a dramatic and sad one—an endless story of running away from the war, of escaping death, of witnessing the horrors of

war, of starving and falling sick, of loneliness and hunger for love. And though these children one day may be in the privileged position of an educated person, they will never forget what they have seen and what they have experienced. Moreover they will not have the type of private education which can only be found at home and during childhood. Culture cannot be acquired by reading books and listening to young teachers only.

### *Religious aspects of the war*

The Southern Sudanese would never imagine that a person would want to impose his own beliefs on another person. "Religion", to them, is not to be separated from experience and tradition, and if there is the firm belief in a supreme spiritual power (called God in its neutral form but having other names when revealing itself through particular appearances or actions), there is no religious doctrine that can be learned as the only truth in the world. "There is only one single God", king Agada Akway Cam explains, "but this only God has made many small Gods, one for the Christians, one for the Arabs, some for the Hindi...". Thus, if religion plays an important role in the present conflict, it is because some of the Islamic Northern Sudanese want to impose their own beliefs and religious laws on other people, an intention which naturally is a provocation to the Southerners' pride and self-consciousness. Everybody is free to adopt new beliefs—and Southern Sudanese frequently borrow Gods from other tribes—but nobody should impose his own beliefs on others. Belief, after all, is essentially a private, not a political force.

Although a discussion of the religious aspects of a war is beyond the scope of this paper, it is worthwhile noting that Christianity gained in popularity precisely because of Islamic pressure. It seems that people felt that only unity could oppose an invading religious power using military force, and Christianity was regarded as the only force strong enough to assemble people

of various individual and tribal beliefs to resist growing oppression. In this respect, Christianity became not only a shield against the Islamic forces from the North, but also into a kind of refuge for Southern Sudanese who did not necessarily agree with the SPLA, and who could find within the church a space of liberty and freedom.

### *Ecological consequences of war in Anyuakland*

Ecological consequences of war are linked to the presence of the refugees in Anyuak country for many years, and to the over-exploitation of natural resources. The presence of several hundred thousand refugees at only a few sites, including Itang, Pinyudo and later Pochalla and Gorkuoo, was bound to have an effect on natural resources. For example, the formerly well-wooded area around Itang was completely deforested and turned into a desert. At Pochalla, one could witness how the forest virtually moved away day after day. Wood was not only needed for cooking but also for shelter, with large trees inviting people to choose the best of all available materials. Fortunately, Anyuak soil is very fertile and trees grow fast. At least in the Pochalla area, one can be confident that the damage done by the refugees will be healed by nature.

In Pochalla, the refugees survived due to the assistance provided by the International Committee of the Red Cross, but people were also greatly assisted by the generosity of nature. In the beginning, and at times of greatest hardship, nuts and different grasses could feed at least the children. As vital were, later in the season, fish found in abundance in the Akobo and Oboth rivers. The Anyuak complained bitterly that "the Dinka are emptying our rivers", perhaps without knowing that they could be right. For indeed, the fish were on their way to the source of the river to lay their eggs, and as they never reached their destination, there will be less and perhaps very little fish available during the coming years.

Anyuak country is not only rich in wood and fish, but also in game. At the beginning of the dry season, thousands of antelopes used to migrate from the South to Anyuak country, passing through Pibor and moving up to Pochalla. The Anyuak use to hunt these antelopes which provided them with meat for the rainy season.

Before the war, the Anyuak, together with other tribes, owned firearms, but as there were few of them and as ammunition was scarce and expensive, they were only used for fighting. Hunting was done exclusively with spears, although giraffe-hunting sometimes constituted an exception. Amongst the Anyuak, each dead antelope belongs at least to four persons, without consideration of those who participated in the hunt itself. This type of sharing meat is both economic and social, and keeps the relation between needs and damage in balance.

Modern weapons, however, do not respect the laws of coexistence between the human and the natural world. They kill easily, do not demand much effort or courage, and often destroy without real necessity, leaving many dead animals to the vultures. Before the war, the German *Frankfurter Zoologische Gesellschaft* began to establish the "Boma National Park", a project which would have deprived the Anyuak of their meat supply and the Murle from their grazing land, by banning hunting with spears and grazing of cattle. From an Anyuak or a Murle viewpoint, the fact that political events stopped this project may have been one of the few positive consequences of war. However, it is evident that wildlife must be saved, in particular from the army of any provenance and it is good news that the importance of the issue is now at least theoretically recognized by the SPLA. Before the war, the Sudanese army stationed in Pochalla used their "training-ammunition" for killing giraffes, elephants, antelope and other animals in great numbers. The present war does not allow bullets to be used for the purpose of poaching, but soldiers in Pochalla still get

their meat from the white-eared Cobe antelopes.

Present Murle hunting may be of an even more serious significance for the future of wildlife. As mentioned before, the Murle were—like the Anyuak—completely left out of relief agency programs, and suffered both from loss of cattle and natural calamities. However, unlike the Anyuak, the Murle are not specialists in agriculture, and thus even more exposed to hunger when crops fail or cattle die. As starvation has been general in Murle country in recent years, the Murle concentrated on the hunting of antelopes. Well-equipped with automatic weapons, they managed to kill a lot of the antelopes passing through their country. In fact, they killed so many animals that the antelopes changed the usual itinerary of their migration, moving far to the east of Murleland. As the Murle followed the antelopes, they entered Anyuak territory and came into conflict with the people living there. If the killing of antelopes continues on the present scale, these rare and beautiful animals may completely disappear from the region, leaving the Anyuak and the Murle without any provision of meat. As long as the war continues, there is little hope that the present situation will improve.

The ecological consequences of the present war in Anyuak country are thus a consequence of over-population, and its attendant over-exploitation of natural resources and lack of spiritual care which the Anyuak traditionally have for their country. Where respect for nature and its spiritual essence is neglected or forgotten, an earthly paradise is bound to disappear.

#### *Impact of the presence of refugees and relief-agencies*

The damage done by relief agencies is difficult to establish, for it might be too easy to blame people for actions which actually were of vital importance. Without a doubt, many Sudanese lives were saved by emergency relief actions. The fact that the presence of relief agencies attracted and thus

dislocated people should not be accepted as a pretext for leaving helpless people alone in their fight for survival. One should rather wonder why it is not possible to reach the needy populations in their home areas, why food is still used as a weapon in fighting military movements, and why it is the civilian population which is more affected by the war than soldiers. Though precise figures are unavailable, there is no doubt that thousands of people died as a consequence of continuous natural calamities, and of the direct and indirect effects of war.

The relief agencies were also absent in many places, and only a few small organisations dared to provide assistance without the consent of the Sudanese government. Financial problems also hampered the task of aid organisations, for while Africa as a whole is not popular in the media of the economically powerful nations, the Sudan and its problems are even less well-known to the public and therefore do not receive the urgently needed attention from the international community.

Some of the foreign organisations active in the Sudan have tried to emphasize the protection of the civilians, prevention of diseases through vaccination programs, and the importance of keeping food distributions, whenever possible, to an absolute minimum. This cautious approach to free food distribution was underscored by the Nilotes' critical attitude towards unconditional help. Indeed, free relief assistance makes them highly suspicious as they fear for the loss of their independence and personal pride. "The worst thing which could ever happen to us", a starving Nuer once told me, "is that we have to beg for food". Nilotes prefer to die in silence rather than to cry or to prostrate themselves.

The refugee camps of the UNHCR in Ethiopia, however, had quite a damaging effect on people's mentality, for there food was given over a long period to people who were not starving. After some years, the refugees considered assistance not as a burden, but as a right, and thus lost their former approach to food as the most pre-

cious of all materials. Since the refugee camps were closed because of the war, refugees have to re-discover the reality of life as refugees.

### *Cultural damage*

Most of the above mentioned consequences of war are visible. Others, however, cannot be seen in the immediate term but have more long-term effects. This is true for the psychological state of the people and especially of children, but it is also true for the life of a community and for the survival of its culture.

Certain consequences of war for the Anyuak tribe as a whole were indirectly shown in the previous review of the recent history of the civil war; for example, the fact that the Ethiopian part of Anyuakland was highly politicized and pushed to different alliances with other political movements, while the Sudanese Anyuak remained with their traditional Nuer and Murle problems and refused similar political alliances. An attack by Ethiopian Anyuak on Pochalla in December 1991 was meant to strike the SPLA rather than the Sudanese Anyuak living there, and yet it became obvious that different political interests seriously disrupted the previous unity of the people.

Displacement and the presence of so many "foreigners" (Dinka, Nuer, Europeans etc.) also had a serious impact on the traditional life of the Anyuak village community. There is a whole generation of children which has been absent from home and which thus lacks all the experiences connected to traditional life; to the field of agriculture and cattle, to nature and wildlife, and, last but not least, to the whole sphere of traditions and socio-political activities. During a recent visit to Otalo, the residential village of king Agada Akway Cam, I found mainly elderly and old men and very young children with their mothers and grandmothers; the whole "leading generation" of adult men was absent. This present emptiness between generations, if it continues, will create serious conse-

## Conclusion

This paper has discussed various aspects of war among the Anyuak and the Sudanese: the constant displacement of people because of fighting, hunger and natural calamities, the disruption of family-ties, the destruction of natural resources, the harm done to wildlife, the lack of medical and veterinary services with the subsequent spreading of diseases and epidemics, the steadily increasing number of war-wounded, disabled and amputees, the sad fate of children separated from their parents, cut off from their cultural environment and desperately looking for education, the disruption of normal social life with its loss of experience and consciousness and, last but not least, the continuous tribal fighting which now got the dimensions of modern war-fare. However, it is impossible to provide a full account of the personal sufferings endured by these people, and to describe the tragedy which each individual has passed through. The question can be posed as to whether the Anyuak will survive as a distinctive cultural entity in the Southern Sudan and Ethiopia, and whether they will have a future through organic development. "Soon, very soon", the wise Anyuak king told me for fifteen years ago, "God shall create a new type of human being... Completely new people, people who are not tired yet..."; and as if there was need for any further explanation, he added: "for we people living now, we are so tired, so deadly tired...". The king is old now, but still alive and strongminded. His prophecy has not yet been realized. Many of his people have died. War does not make new people, nor does it necessarily create a better world. At present, an old Anyuak saying may contain the only truth, bitter and pitiless, when it says: "The reward of life is death"... Let's hope that the king's mentioned "new people" will soon find reasons to reach a more optimistic conclusion in a more peaceful Sudan.

quences, not only in the field of agriculture or warfare but in life at court, which is so decisive for Anyuak self-understanding. The generally acknowledged Anyuak intelligence, and their bold eloquence, is not a gift of nature but originates in the public debates at court, in the thorough discussion of problems, and in fine discernment of judgements. The Anyuak character is built upon these intellectual activities, which lead to social discipline, political awareness and a strong self-consciousness. Loss of these political, social and spiritual qualities undermines Anyuak culture from within, and may finally leave Anyuak identity without its present content.

### *Human consequences*

The human consequences of war can be listed: hunger, exhaustion, fear, sorrow, solitude, sickness and despair. The real impacts of war, however, cannot be measured, and will not be understood, because they occur in an unknown future. We can already see some of the future results of years of human and ecological destruction, but we cannot see the wounds which are not bleeding, which lie in the heart and the mind of the people, and which may never heal. A war destroys much more than what is seen, and these invisible wounds are perhaps the worst of all consequences of war. The war in the Sudan is not a forgotten war, as it is often said; it is simply ignored.

When speaking of human consequences, it is perhaps easiest to think of the future life of children separated from home for many years, mentally tortured by the events of the war, left completely alone with their fears and tears. Laughter helps them now to struggle on, to resist despair, and this laughter still gives us some courage to imagine better times. But their future is, at present, empty of any hope. And whoever looks at these children feels ashamed.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup>This article was previously published in T. Tvedt (Ed.), *Conflicts in the Horn of Africa: human and ecological consequences of warfare*. Uppsala: EPOS. 1993. Pp. 125-142.

<sup>2</sup>The information in this paper is based on the field studies of the author.

Conradin Perner, Ph.D., studied literature and languages in France, Sweden and Switzerland. From 1970 to 1972 he taught at the University of Kisangani in Zaire and from 1974 to 1976 at the university of Khartoum in the Sudan; between 1972 and 1992, he worked repeatedly for the International Committee of the Red Cross (Geneva), in Bangladesh, Vietnam, India and the Southern Sudan. From 1976 to 1983, he conducted field studies on the Nilotic tribe of the *Anyuak* in the Southern Sudan. 1989 and 1990 he was invited as a visiting professor at the French universities of Nanterre and the Sorbonne at Paris.

A short introduction to the Anyuak tribe (*Valeurs et fonctions de la terre*) was published in 1978 by the Musée d'Ethnographie of Geneva. In 1990, HRAF published *Anyuak Language: Dictionary and short Grammar (with an essay on the role played by language in Anyuak society)*.

The *Monograph on the Anyuak* (8 volumes) which contains many examples of oral literature is to be published between 1993 and 1996 with the help of the Swiss National Fund for Scientific research by Helbing & Lichtenhahn, Basel, Switzerland.