Colonization and Sudan's civil wars have had tragic consequences for the Sudanese. However, the conflicts have not completely destroyed the ancient social, political, and religious structures of two Nilotic peoples, the Dinka and Nuer. In their own way, rather than submitting to economic (labor, money) and legal changes (modern laws), the Nilotic peoples have “digested” change. Their lives continue to revolve around livestock. This article looks at livestock’s role in religion, conflict resolution, and social and matrimonial relationships. The latest “innovation” in conflict resolution seems to have abandoned the former system of mediation by “religious chiefs.” Guns have replaced spears and the blood spilled does not have the same value; it exonerates all responsibility and possibility of reconciliation. Previously, the central government combated clan-driven conflict, creating a feeling of national identity; now it is incapable of stopping intertribal conflicts between hundreds or even thousands of young warriors fighting each other for livestock. These young fighters display ancient, primordial motives, but lack the moderating influence of now-absent ancestral and religious structures.

Keywords: Nuer – Dinka – Livestock – Gun – Justice – Spear – Money – Marriage – Sacrifice

Although they had subsided in the run-up to the 2011 referendum, the confrontations between the SPLA and “tribal” militias, as well as those between neighboring populations, have resumed in several regions of South Sudan. This shows the difficulty of forging a nation whose existence has heretofore relied solely on the resistance to a common enemy. Seven years after the signing of the Naivasha Agreement in 2005, the administration put in place by the Juba government is far from being fully effective, or fully

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Box 1 – Nilotic Peoples and Languages

In its most commonly accepted form, “Nilotics” (or “Nilotes”) refers to agro-pastoral peoples who live in the Nile basin, speak similar languages, share the same interest in livestock, do not have a centralized system of government but rather a kinship-based political structure, and who also practice a religion centered on sacrifice to a deity, in which priests fulfill the role of conciliator. The Nuer, Dinka, and Atwot make up this first “homogenous” ethno-linguistic group.

In contrast, the Shilluk, who live in the White Nile valley, are known for their “sacred” royalty. They give their name to a second linguistic group (Northern Luo), even though the populations in the group (Anuak, Junjum, Maban, Ragreig, Jur) do not share the same political principles: the Maban, for example, reject all political organization above the village level. Livestock plays a smaller role among the Anuak people, who also live in Ethiopia, and who share the same reticence towards authority.

The third group (Southern Luo) is made up of tribes that live in the furthest reaches of South Sudan (Pari), Uganda (Acholi), and Kenya (Turkana) and which are built around chiefdoms now reduced to a few villages, or around the necessary cooperation between stockbreeding families. The Lord’s Resistance Army movement arose in one of these, in Acholi country. The Alur, a farming community, live between the Congo and Uganda.

Some of the other Nilotic peoples who live in the same southern region in the Sudan, such as the Bari from the Juba region, have turned more towards agriculture since the extinction of their livestock, although livestock continues to play a key role in their ideology. They are grouped into four linguistic families: Bari (Bari, Fajelu, Kakwa, Kuku, Nyangwara, Maridi, Mandari), Latuka (Latuka, Birra, Katana, Horiok, Lango, Lofit, Lokoyo, Lorwama), Didinga (Didinga, Longarim, Murle, Beir), and Toposa (Population and Housing Census, Sudan 1993).

Among Kenyan and Ugandan Nilotes, the segmentary lineage system, or the system of kingship-chiefdoms, is giving way to sociopolitical systems based on age groups or generations. The Maasai of Kenya, who fall into the first group, represent an almost absolute form of pastoralism since some go so far as to reject all kinds of agricultural activity. In contrast, the Kipsigis, Nandis, and other tribes from the Kalenjin group in the Rift Valley live primarily from farming, while continuing to “value” livestock. The pastoral Karimojong belong to the second group and, instead of a clan-type organization, they have a very complex “generational system” that acts like a political system.
appreciated by communities who have not seen an improvement in their living conditions. Besides the reversals of alliances, violence against civilians during the war (Delmet 1994, 2008), and errors made in the disarming and social reintegration of ex-combatants, the current situation can also be explained by “traditional” social and political structures.

**South Sudan's Colonial Administration**

Several years after the 1898 “reconquest,” North Sudan was fully operational once again. Local administration, law, and tax collection were implemented in rural areas through the involvement of tribal, lineage, and village chiefs who were not always the legitimate beneficiaries, as the latter were sometimes isolated out of mistrust or retaliation. Despite several neo-Madhist uprisings...
in Gezira and in the east, as well as struggles for independence, the colonial administration’s time there was relatively easy and calm, compared to the fate of the British in the south.

In some regions, the British found political structures they could rely on: “kingships” among the Shilluk and the Azande, “chiefdoms” among other peoples. The small tribes from Bahr el-Ghazal looked favorably on the British as they saw them as a way to escape the tutelage of the Azande in the south and the Dinka in the west. Competition among the princes of the Avungara aristocracy also helped the colonizers take direct control of the Azande kingdom, which they divided into three districts: Maridi, Tambura, and Yambio.

They were hampered by the absence of identifiable power structures when it came to governing the Nilotic peoples of the White Nile basin, mainly the Nuer and Dinka. They found more visible leaders among the Dinka than among the Nuer, where they searched in vain for anyone with permanent and valid authority. Indeed, the latter would trouble them until the 1930s. The situation was little different in the southeast where the Didinga resisted until 1922, and the Toposa until 1927. The eastern part of the Upper Nile did not come under control until 1925. The Anuaks of Donga did not see any government representatives between 1921 and 1950, and their neighbors, the Murle of Pibor, were left to their own devices. Punitive expeditions and the reorganization of population groups took place in the Nuer country until 1928 (including aerial and machine gun attacks on the followers of the Nuer prophet Guek Ngundeng).

Even in the most favorable conditions, the colonial administration’s attempts to establish intermediaries often failed due to a poor evaluation of both the local realities and the legitimacy of the designated chiefs (like the effective power of the Shilluk king, or reth). In cases where no hierarchies existed, it was even harder to designate those who would be in charge of the most urgent tasks: the construction of roads and local administrative buildings, tax collection, and the operation of the local courts.

1. Sudan People’s Liberation Army. Some have been formed among the Fertit, Mandari, Murle, and Nuer tribes by Khartoum. See also Alex de Waal in Bleuchot, Delmet, and Hopwood 1991, 71–83.

2. This agreement (The Comprehensive Peace Agreement) of January 9, 2005, between the Sudanese government (Khartoum) and the SPLM/A, granted the southern states a great deal of autonomy for an interim period of six years. At the end of this period, their populations had to choose between maintaining unity with the North, or separation, a solution that won more than 98% of the vote from nearly four million southerners. The independence of the Republic of South Sudan was proclaimed on July 9, 2011, but the two presidents, Omar Hassan al-Bashir and Salva Kuir Mayardit, did not sign the cooperation agreements until September 2012, thus finally silencing the weapons in the last disputed territories. Besides creating a demilitarized zone, addressing security issues, and renewing the border negotiations, these agreements covered the division of oil revenues and other legal, economic, trade, and financial issues.


4. Realizing that punitive expeditions were not enough to subdue the south, in 1928 the colonial authorities decided to ask experts to help them understand these societies and provide them with knowledge that would be useful in governing them. With the help of Professor Westermann, Director of the International Institute of African Cultures and Languages, a systematic study of the main southern groups was undertaken, which included E.E. Evans-Pritchard’s study of the Nuer. He thus succeeded Seligman, who had begun his field research in 1909, but did not publish his Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan until 1932.
Once “pacification” had been achieved, the colonial authorities invested as little as possible in human and material resources, and left the management to district commissioners who were given a great deal of leeway in how they “held” their district and introduced its population to assigned duties, government administration, and commerce. Their intention was not to develop a country, even less to construct a state. What mattered to them was putting an end to the fighting between neighboring territorial communities and the interminable cycles of vengeance (or feuds) sparked by homicides.

As a response to those in the field who were demanding reforms, the governor general of Sudan, Harold MacMichael, decided in 1930 to give local authorities as prominent a role as possible: “The policy of the Government in the Southern Sudan is to build up a series of self-contained racial or tribal units with structure and organization based, to whatever extent the requirements of equity and good government permit, upon indigenous customs, traditional usage and beliefs” (quoted by Daly 1986, 413). This was an arduous task as far as the Nilotic peoples were concerned. The Nuer, in particular, rebelled against all authority and had no traditional hierarchy.

**Kinship and Politics among the Nuer**

The Nuer are agro-pastoral who leave their permanent villages during the dry season for livestock and fishing grounds. They are celebrated in the work of E. E. Evans-Pritchard who lived with them in the 1930s and categorized them as a warrior people who were egalitarian, attached to livestock, and devoid of any apparent political organization; they served as the inspiration for his segmentary lineage system model.

Contrary to their neighbors the Shilluk, but like the Dinka, the Nuer do not have a king or any other form of centralized government. Although devoid of “autonomous” political and judicial institutions, these peoples do not live in a state of widespread disorder, but rather in an “ordered anarchy.” Their original political organization is based on their social organization and includes the entire tribe (the eleven Nuer tribes were some hundreds to thousands of people strong in 1930). Composed of the paternal line of descendants of a common ancestor, as well as individuals they had assimilated (by capture or adoption), the tribe is divided into clans dispersed throughout the whole Nuer country. One of the clans or main lineages occupies a dominant position due to their direct lineal descent from the founder, yet they do not hold an automatic and permanent power. Each local community (cien: hamlet, village, district, or section) is constructed around a segment of the dominant line, which “furnishes a kinship framework on which the political aggregate is built up” (Evans-Pritchard 1950, 278).

According to interests and the nature of the conflicts, groups and divisions are created at varying levels of the territory, lineages, and clans. Two segments that were initially opposed can find themselves united at a higher level
in order to oppose an equivalent segment. Group fusion and fission ultimately occurs at variable points of the common genealogy—the foundation for the lineage system and the tribe.

Since lineages “are not corporate groups in their own right,” and so as not to remain “an abstraction,” they “must be identified with the local communities within which they function politically.” “Political structure is thus conceptualized in lineage structure” (Evans-Pritchard 1973, 46–47).

Each local Nuer community is a “kindred community” where, in most situations, individual conduct is not determined solely by patrilineal descent, although this constitutes its integrating principle. Local groups and individuals are recognized and differentiated through their position in the genealogical chain.

Connected by their common filiation and various collective obligations and interests on economic (herding and protection of the livestock), social, and ritual levels, members of the lineage have to abide by the rules of exogamy, which require them to seek out partners who are not linked to either the maternal or paternal lines for several generations back:

This separation of the lineage from community life and its merging into it again is very largely brought about by the rules of exogamy which exclude marriage within the clan, thus giving that group distinctness, while compelling its lineages, by marrying outside the clan, to become multiple links in the network of kinship relations the strands of which form the texture of community life. (Evans-Pritchard 1973, 47)

Matrimonial exchange also forms the backbone of a social fabric whose chain is made up of descent groups. Bridewealth in the form of livestock is not only provided by the head of the bridegroom’s family, but also his other agnatic and uterine kin. Similarly, the bridewealth is distributed among the bride’s maternal and paternal kin. The livestock circulates through complex networks in which solidarity does not exclude tensions and disputes about what is due to each person, based on past contributions and claims on the shared herd. However, it remains difficult to challenge a head of family’s personal use (for a second marriage, for example) of livestock received for his daughter’s marriage, which is normally destined to be redistributed for his son’s marriage. Divorce also creates similar problems regarding restitution and can have a negative domino effect on other unions. It could be said that social reproduction depends on the state of the ancestral herd, and that, to some degree, men and animals live in symbiosis. A man without livestock does not exist socially and disappears from the genealogy. Only progeny obtained through the transfer

6. Karp and Maynard’s article (1983) outlines the main criticisms leveled at Evans-Pritchard. Previously, anthropologist Pierre Bonte (1979) had undertaken the same task.
of livestock assures his posterity. Moreover, belonging to the lineage and clan provides access to major rituals and sacrifices.

Many and varied criticisms were levied at Evans-Pritchard’s proposed model: the complementary opposition and balanced interlocking of lineage segments was questioned, as well as the primacy of kinship and descent links over ecological, residential, and economic factors in the constitution of united groups in competition with others of the same or neighboring tribes. This went so far as to call into question the reality of lineages, and advancing the idea that groups were in fact organized for specific predatory actions (Sahlins 1961). Ultimately, it appears that this kinship structure was key to the Nuer’s amazing expansion into Dinka territory.

The Nuer System of Expansion

Between 1905 and 1928, there were twenty-six Nuer raids on the Dinka, but only three Dinka raids on the Nuer. These “conquests” have often been attributed to demographic pressure. This argument seems void if one takes into account...
the number of Dinka incorporated within the Nuer tribe. It is more likely that the inverse stands, as Kelly recalls (1986): the Nuer expansion increased the size and density of the tribe.\(^7\) If human density were the cause of Nuer expansion, why did they integrate the Dinka from the conquered territories, thereby increasing the population? Similarly, it does not explain why Dinka communities living in the same environmental, ecological, and climatic conditions would not have adopted the same “aggressive” behaviors.

If density needs to be taken into account, it is surely that of the Nuer herds, which were much greater in number than those of the Dinka. As meat formed a much smaller part of the Nuer diet, an explanation must be found in the social use of livestock, and most notably in the amount and selection of animals for a bridewealth, as well as in the latter’s origin and distribution. But the realization of these “cultural choices,” which also includes other food-related, sacrificial, and matrimonial (polygyny, ghost marriage) uses, also requires certain environmental conditions and a particular pastoral and economic strategy.

Several events influenced the number of animals comprised in a bridewealth: wars, droughts, famines, and floods. In the 1930s, an average of twenty to thirty head was the norm, some of which could be delivered at a later date. In the mid-1940s, according to Howell (1954), it fell to below twenty, then to around fifteen following a rinderpest epidemic in 1945 and 1946. By the end of the 1960s, during the first civil war, it had decreased to three or four head, or even a sack of grain among the western Nuer. In the 1980s, the average rose again to twenty-five to thirty. The unfortunate experience of the past showed how fragile the value of stock was, leading to a more rapid circulation of animals. There was no more waiting for the remainder of the bridewealth to be delivered years after the marriage had taken place and children had been born.

Despite stock mortality rates that sometimes reach 30% to 40%, they never have enough land. The lack of pasture leads to the need for long transhumances, even into Dinka country, where the Nuer set up large camps in the dry season. The Dinka migrations are much shorter and do not involve as many herdsmen. The specific characteristics of their lineage system exacerbate the vulnerability of their pastoral system. Dinka camps host groups that live in the same village during the rainy season, and that have no systematic genealogical connection in terms of kinship. The Dinka tribe has neither a dominant clan represented in each territorial group, nor an agnatic core to which other groups are linked, even matrilaterally (Kelly 1985, 179).

The Dinka camp is therefore made up of members from different clans, and notably several religious “spear masters,” who compete to rally warrior sub-clans. This competition leads to a weakening of solidarity that deprives the Dinka of a true collective defense when faced with the quasi-military mobilization of the young Nuer warrior-herdsmen; it forces them to practice a strategy...
of evasion and flight, taking the herds along when possible, but often leaving the women, children, and old men at the mercy of the assailants. However, because of the interest in taking captives, which, once integrated, strengthen the Nuer lineages, Dinka losses have never been very high. The Nuer experienced comparable, if not higher, losses in combat. In comparison, the Murle raids on the Dinka were much more devastating than the Nuer raids.

Religion and Sacrifice
Livestock is also the means to prevent conflicts from escalating into never-ending bloody confrontations. In the case of blood crime, it is absolutely imperative to avoid getting into a cycle of vengeance that would lead to the dislocation of local communities. One particular individual therefore intervenes. Among the Nuer, the “leopard-skin chief” is neither judge nor lawyer, but he strives to get the victim’s family to accept the principle of compensation in the form of livestock, which he delivers before performing purification ceremonies and sacrifices at their home. The closer the involved parties are, the more quickly the affair must be concluded. The risk of prolonged negotiations is lower when

Livestock among the Maban. Each night during the rainy season, the animals are brought back to the village where they are attached to stakes and spend the night protected from mosquitoes and other parasites by the smoke from dried dung. The livestock, which is cared for by young men, is essentially destined to become bridewealth (from six to ten cows), and is sacrificed only very occasionally. The Maban villages in this region poor in water resources consist of only a few families with enclosures that rarely hold more than a few dozen cows.

Photo by Christian Delmet, Kwalgon/Dereb, Upper Nile, South Sudan, June 1983.
the parties are genealogically and spatially distant. Generally, only intertribal conflicts are settled through the use of weapons. Where minor offenses (theft, adultery) are concerned, the victim often enacts justice himself by seizing the animal he considers to be his due compensation from the guilty party’s herd; the latter generally has the good sense not to try to stop him.

Given to seal an alliance, or to avoid fatal reprisals, livestock is also used in order to restore order to both human affairs and the relationship with the divine by shedding its blood through sacrifice. The Nilotics do not worship their ancestors. The sacrifice at the heart of their religious practice is dedicated to “God” or, as is more often the case, to secondary divinities. Among the Dinka, Nhialic is a single creator-god (Lienhardt, 1961). Their description of him is quite similar to a certain popular version of Christianity: he is in heaven, and can be seen, heard, and so on. In earlier times, he had lived closer to his creatures but was separated from them after they had betrayed his counsel. Nhialic had warned his creatures not to wound him when using the hoe or the pestle, but ultimately this came to pass. God knows the just and the wicked, and punishes all faults, but the secondary divinities are primarily the ones who intervene in human lives and disturb them by sending disease and other torments. Religious thought is less an interrogation of the nature and attributes of a god than a search for the reasons behind the bad fortune that strikes an individual or social group. As elsewhere, one often wonders, “what have I done to deserve this?”

This quest is the business of specialists: healers, witch doctors, priests, soothsayers, and prophets who identify the evil, the power that sent it, and the reason for this punishment. Clearly, all wrongdoing is an offense against God, a clan divinity, or another divinity, but it primarily provokes disorder in interpersonal relationships. The bodily punishment sustained by a Dinka patient, who turns to the master of the fishing spear for aid, is the direct result of a lack of respect for the divinity of his ancestors, or of the infringement of rules and his duties toward his close relations or fellow man. The purpose of treatment and sacrifice is to restore order in both the sick person’s body and the social body. Negligence or an intent to harm provoked the intervention of god-related powers that must absolutely be “sent back” to the supra-human world. In this sense, sacrifice can be said to be a way to restore the general order, because these two worlds—the divine and the human—must remain separate (Evans-Pritchard 1954). Offering the divinity an animal filled with the illness to be chased out also allows for the reaffirmation of positions, rights, and duties within the framework of the kinship system: everyone’s share is defined precisely. The arrival of Christianity has affected the values embodied by sacrifice, the role of which has also been challenged by the introduction of modern

8. As in other African religions, a rope, pestle, or tree provided passage from the world of men to the world of the gods, but this object was destroyed after the act of disobedience. It is after this rift that humans come to know sickness, famine, and death.
The influence of evangelicals has led to an intellectual, but also concrete and social, confrontation between traditionalists and converts. For the latter, it is no longer God or divinities that inflict the illness, which can be cured by medication. However, although urban elites have benefited from innovations that question traditional cultures and favor individualism, this is not the case in the rural world, which has been left untouched by economic and social development. So, in the 1980s, the Maban, the northernmost of the Nilotics, only had access to plants, divination, and sacrificial practices to fight disorders of the body and spirit (Delmet 1984).

Forced displacements caused by war also paved the way for a weakening of clan ties. Yet, despite all this, the old system remains the backbone of Nilotic communities. Agro-pastoralism is the basis of the economy, livestock is a major interest, and new religions have not driven out the old. According to anthropologist Sharon Hutchinson, the many dilemmas posed by new challenges have not provoked brutal schisms, in either Nuer action or thought (Hutchinson 1996). Some new elements have been “digested” without too much difficulty, while others have led to the creation of hybrid systems without requiring a thorough medicine. The influence of evangelicals has led to an intellectual, but also concrete and social, confrontation between traditionalists and converts. For the latter, it is no longer God or divinities that inflict the illness, which can be cured by medication. However, although urban elites have benefited from innovations that question traditional cultures and favor individualism, this is not the case in the rural world, which has been left untouched by economic and social development. So, in the 1980s, the Maban, the northernmost of the Nilotics, only had access to plants, divination, and sacrificial practices to fight disorders of the body and spirit (Delmet 1984).

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revision of their overall logic and economic system, or a total questioning of social relationships. Such is the case with the combined effects of the judicial reform initiated by the colonizers, the opening up of the labor and commodity markets, and the introduction of money.

**Justice, Livestock, Labor, and Money**

In addition to its role in marriage and religion, livestock occupies a central place in a judicial practice that promotes reconciliation rather than confrontation. Theft and minor offenses are settled by the delivery of one or more animals according to a set scale. In the case of homicide, it is essential to prevent the onset of, or rapidly put an end to, a cycle of vengeance. “Nuer justice” does not have the accused appear before judges, but rather brings two groups face to face: the supporters of the accused and those of the victim. The purpose is not to punish the accused, but rather to come to an agreement about the compensation in livestock, and to seal the deal with a religious ceremony.

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9. The following material is based essentially on Hutchinson (1996).
The colonial administration wanted to put an end to the resort to violence in conflict resolution by introducing a modern code that only recognizes individual responsibility, thus ignoring the involvement of lineages, and the central principle of re-establishing social peace. The individualization of punishment and its immediate execution overturned the judicial system, the traditional balances between communities, and the connection to livestock. Reluctant to part from their livestock, the Nuer nevertheless traded it with the Arabs, prior to colonization, for spears, beads, goats, grain, and wheat, and in so doing established an interpersonal relationship rather than a simple commercial operation.

Without money, imposed fines could only be paid in livestock, and the courts did not hesitate to seize the only wealth the condemned party had, to put it back on the market or export it to the north. To avoid seizures for the non-payment of taxes, the Nuer resolved to sell the less-valued animals rather than those destined for noble uses (marriage, sacrifice). They traded more cattle for heifers (which the Dinka, contrary to the Nuer, were not reluctant to give up) and grain provided by the Arabs and the authorities during hunger gaps. Gradually, the courts reduced the importance of livestock in commercial transactions and the settling of fines; this increased the role of money and thereby reduced the power of elders, who held the right to use the livestock.
Money usage accelerated after the departure of the Arab traders, who were chased out by the first civil war and replaced by a new generation of Nuer traders. However, until 1960, livestock was rarely exchanged for paper money due to the fragility of the bills (they could easily be destroyed by fire or termites), and the fact that their face value could not always be deciphered easily. The development of farms in the Upper Nile in the 1950s and 1960s attracted young single men who, with their earnings from cotton picking and farm work, could return to buy one or two cows. Yet this market livestock is not comparable to that in the ancestors’ flocks. It is not subject to the rights of “kin,” cannot be claimed, and is not in the distribution circuit in the same way the stock affiliated to the original herd is.

In 1963, sixty-four villages and herds were attacked by combatants from both sides; the southern rebellion was fueled by men and beasts procured in Nuer villages, while other Nuer joined the government forces. After the Addis Ababa Agreement (1972), many ex-rebels were integrated into the army and the police. Others were recruited by the autonomous South’s new administration. The renewed peace favored seasonal migrations towards the northern towns. Civil servants’ salaries, as well as the wages of laborers employed mainly as masons for the construction of Khartoum, contributed to the growth of the money supply, whose use remained limited to everyday transactions. It was only later that it began to be used in exchanges that held a higher social and symbolic value.

In the 1980s, among the Nuer-Jikany, of the dozens of animals demanded for a bridewealth, the equivalent of one or two head could be given in cash. Such an evolution was only made possible by solving a double dilemma. Was the money earned from labor different from that obtained through the selling of livestock? Could the livestock bought with wages be mixed with the livestock received for a sister’s marriage? A distinction was made based on the source of the monetary gains. Money earned from the completion of degrading tasks, such as emptying latrines, could in no way be used to acquire animals destined to form part of a bridewealth or to be used in sacrifice. Inversely, an animal obtained with “honorable” earnings could reasonably be integrated into the initial herd, or offered to maternal or paternal kin. This transformation of livestock from (worthy, clean) money into “girls’ livestock”—that is to say, that which is received through a sisters’ marriage—allowed it to be integrated into the normal cycle, which meant a distant relative could lay claim to it.

Although money was accepted to some degree in the east of the Nuer country, for the majority of the Nuer, livestock could not be replaced by bloodless money. Blood is the vital principle, the origin of life; it is the mixing of male and female blood that gives life to human beings, in obedience to the divine impulse. Similarly, money cannot form part of the blood price which must primarily be paid in livestock to allow the deceased to make a posthumous (ghost) marriage with a wife who will give him an heir, and thus a life. Money cannot replace livestock in the main acts of individual and communal life. Since it has
no blood relationship with the herd managed by the head of the family, and therefore no relationship with men, it cannot by itself truly feed and consolidate social networks.

The reforms and changes of the colonial era and of independent “modern” Sudan, as well as the wars that caused millions of deaths among the Nilotic populations, do not seem to have fundamentally altered the philosophy and morality of the Nuer and other Nilotic peoples, for whom livestock remains the essential element of the economy and social reproduction, as evidenced by current events in the eastern provinces of the young state of South Sudan. The Nuer were led to revise their relationship to livestock in various ways. The “displaced” peoples in the north no longer had any direct links to livestock, but retained some through their “kin” back home, whom they helped to obtain “money livestock.” The “refugees” in neighboring countries, in camps run by aid organizations, did not have the same access to work and money. Those who remained in the rural South were predominantly dependent on humanitarian aid, and were only able to modify the livestock/money relationship and marriage norms in very marginal ways.
Spears and Guns

With conflicts in neighboring countries and in Sudan itself, an arms trade developed, which allowed guns to replace spears in the paying of compensation. The profusion of weapons, the experience of war, bombings, and fires weakened the divinity’s position as the prime creator and destroyer of social and moral order. Delivering death by gun does not create a relationship between the victim and the murderer like spilling blood with a spear does. Blood spilled by gun does not have the same value as that spilled by spear and does not create the same individual and collective responsibilities and obligations. Because how can one tell, in the heat of battle, where the bullet comes from and where it goes? A bullet is not the same as a spear because the blood connections cannot be seen. In a way, bullets dilute responsibility. They provide an anonymous death, placing it outside of the social and religious sphere. There is no longer a guilty party nor a victim, and no need for forgiveness and reconciliation. In fact, along these lines, the SPLA decreed that homicide committed under orders (police repression, war) no longer carries the religious charge assigned to murders committed in interpersonal or intercommunal conflicts (Hutchinson 1996, 51 and 355). In this way, Nuer government soldiers do not have to bear the “wrath of the gods,” and are protected and exempt from reprisals and purification/reconciliation ceremonies if they murder another Nuer.

Conclusion

This moral, legal, and religious upheaval is fundamental to understanding the contemporary violence that old and new mediators (tribal chiefs and churches, respectively) are trying to stop. But war convinced the young that force was the only way to resolve problems: “the smoke and sound of the gun has caused the youth to become crazy and to behave very badly toward you elders” (address of the prophet Wutnyang Gatakek, June 1992, cited by Hutchinson 1996, 355). New “warlords” have appeared. Faced with this situation, the SPLM, which itself fought against “tribalism” by placing the war in the north over and above identity affiliations and the combatants’ kinship relationships in order to galvanize South Sudanese patriotism has revised its position by seeking to involve the former leaders in the administration and justice systems. Yet this is a huge task, as the violence is entrenched and, for many young people, it seems to be the best way to survive.

As in the colonial era, livestock lies at the heart of the problem. Although some militia leaders are looking to carve out their fiefdoms in the oil zone, some of these groups are not looking for barrels of oil in their neighbors’ territory, but rather livestock destined for a dual purpose: the market and bridewealth. Lacking any other economic outlook, the sale of stolen livestock is often the only source of income.
Bibliography


