Recurring Troubles

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Short Stories from Southern Sudan
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## Contents

Dirty Wealth.........................................................................................1
The Honey of Matiok...........................................................................3
Life in Misery.....................................................................................4
The Dead could Listen.......................................................................8
Little is better than Nothing...............................................................10
A Man and a Lion...............................................................................13
The Greedy Hyena............................................................................15
Glossary.............................................................................................18
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P. Mapuor Madit
Introduction

The nature of human life is a process with uncountable events that are not easy to remember except when retold and retold. These events are what we sometimes call stories. They could be joyous or sad to hear.

The focus of this book is on few stories that occurred and similarly have been recurring in the country of Sudan – during the time of war, hunger and other natural disasters.

When people see situations like this, they reflect on the past and there, they begin to change into the way that will make their life more appropriate to the prevailing situation.

The younger generation would not know what had happened before, but they hear sayings like - *little is better than nothing*, proverbs like - *water goes back to its source* and songs that are extracted from certain stories.

This book is developed for adults students Learning English as Second Language. They incorporate very important aspects of the language and exciting stories which stimulates the reader’s thinking and make him/ her able to critically look into problems of life.

P. Mapuor Madit
Dirty Wealth

Some hundreds years back, in the land of black, there was a big fight that caused the death of many people - men, women and children - in one of popular villages. People could not settle in their homes and even food could not settle in their stomachs. This was due to many reasons – either they weren’t able to get enough food or unable to eat the little they had. When children heard a cry, they got scared and couldn’t eat or hold the breast, when mothers thought of their children, they became anxious and too restless to eat, when men saw or recalled their murdered friends; they lost their appetite and forgot about food. Everybody was affected and couldn’t dream of any good future to come at all.

One man from a different village heard about the event. Though the event was a disaster for people, he thought of it differently, because he had never experienced a bad situation in his life. He wanted to gain out of those suffering people through his wrong business. He had one milking cow which he wanted to begin the business with.

“My cow produces enough milk that I can sell and get money out of” he told his wife.

“But who will buy the milk?” asked the wife.

“We can go and live in that village where people are starving. They will buy the milk at a high price because they are hungry. They need milk for their young children and therefore the demand is high” he replied.

He discussed this with his wife and agreed to go with their cow and stay over there. Though the woman was hesitating, the man imposed his ideas on her. They left and spent two days walking on their way because the village was far. At last they crossed a river and came to the village. The man and his wife just occupied one of the abandoned houses and stayed in it. The following morning he milked the cow and took the milk out to sell. The milk was all sold on the way before reaching market. He did the same thing the following morning. Many people were in need of milk and became his customers. The man didn’t bother to take the milk to market any longer. The customers always came to buy the milk from the house.
When he saw that people were really in need, he added water into the milk to increase the quantity. People complained about that but he was very unkind and so did not change his attitude of cheating. They still bought that poor milk because they and especially their children were very hungry.

The man continued selling his watery milk and gained much money out of it. He decided to buy more cows with the money. He bought a hundred cows and kept them with his original one. He became proud of them but nobody bothered about his riches as the war was their main problem.

After a few months, people had peace and everything settled down. The poverty reduced and there was no hunger any longer. The man then decided to return to his home village with his corrupted cows. He told his wife to pack their things and leave. They had to cross the river but unfortunately the water was deep this time, due to flooding. His wife advised him to wait till the water subsided but he didn’t accept the advice.

They left with the cows and reached the river. The man drove the cows into the water to cross the river. He forced the cows to get into the water thinking that they could swim across. The current and waves were too strong and all the cows drowned except the one he had brought from his home village. The scene was very sad but the man couldn’t rescue anything. He cried and cried until there were no more tears coming out of his eyes. He just remained wandering with his wife and later they crossed the river and left for their village for good with their single cow. He regretted his actions and regretted that all his time and energy had been lost.

People heard about the story and said,

“The water went back to its source” The statement meant that the water “in the milk” he had been selling, returned to the river. The man returned to his village with the only cow he had but not with a profit as he had expected.
Honey of Matiok

It was in one disastrous time when drought struck the whole land. There were not enough rains for several years, the land became barren and crops didn’t produce well. Every plant was dry and animals were dying. Life became difficult for people because there was not sufficient food. Many of them died of hunger. You could hear death reports from one house to another in the same village. It was just like an outbreak of a contagious disease.

Matiok was one of the intelligent men in the village. Though he wasn’t very rich, his family life was better than the rest in his village. He had a good number of bee-hives in the village. He collected honey from his hives and kept it in big pots in his own room. His family could eat some from it. Most people in the village knew about his honey and came to beg him as they had little to eat. Some of them were almost collapsing when they were refused a little honey to eat.

Matiok sympathized with their situation but was very economical in giving his honey. He agreed only to give little honey to those who were too weak but refused those who looked strong. It became his principle to only help the weak. The weak, hungry victims were taken to him everyday. He provided them with the honey to eat and they survived. He was like their god as people praised him in songs and respected him in the society. However he made it a condition to those people he rescued to refund him if they ever lived until a better time.

After a few weeks, rains fell and the crops produced a good yield. Life became normal and people resumed their activities. Matiok then claimed the refund from the survivors and he was given a heifer by each person. People were very grateful to him for rescuing their lives.
Life in Misery

It was a very tedious journey when a man and his wife escaped from an attack in the town they lived. Everybody was in danger as people ran in different directions in disarray. They looked behind and saw thick, dark smoke filling the sky. The man and his wife were running for safety. It would take them weeks to reach their home village. They carried nothing except the clothes they wore. They faced a lot of suffering. There was no food to eat and no shelter to protect them from effects of unfavourable weather.

Due to all these difficulties, the man became sick on the way. People could not even dream of medical treatment in that situation. Only traditional medicines from herbs were provided. Witch doctors also worked their magic but the man didn’t get any better. Within a few days, the sickness became severe and he was not able to stand or even sit by himself.

The rest of the people who came with them proceeded but the woman and her sick husband were left alone at that place. It was in a small village with very few wandering people. The community of the village was also facing some hardships. The man and his wife were left to stay in an old ruined police office. The local policemen were in the other new buildings. They visited them every morning to check their condition. The policemen sympathized with their situation but had nothing to support them other than counselling when visiting them. The sickness was deteriorating as the days went on and on. They didn’t get any good food and the sick man became very weak.

One day the poor lady went to market to sell her only pair of shoes in order to buy some food. Though the shoes were bought, she couldn’t find any food to buy. The people in market were just selling tobacco and other non-food items. She looked around to buy some food but only saw local beer bubbling in the pot. That was the only stuff people can buy to drink.

“Oh, my God! What can I get for my husband to eat?” she asked herself.
She walked back in bare feet with deep anxiety. When she arrived at the house her husband lasted a few minutes and died. The lady almost collapsed but controlled herself to seek some help from people. Her big problem now was the burial. She went to those policemen and informed them about the death. She asked if they could help to bury her husband. The policemen felt very sorry when they heard that sad news. The senior officer promised to send people to go and bury the body. He ordered the prisoners to go and do the work. They were then taken to the place and started digging the grave. The hungry prisoners complained, wanting to be given food for the work. The poor widow gave them the little money that she received when she sold her shoes. The prisoners needed at least to get something that could fill their stomach and obviously, the common food in the market is the beer.

One of the prisoners was sent to go and buy the beer while the rest were working. He soon came with a full pot being carried by the seller. The team stopped the work for some while and came to serve themselves.

“Yah, it is very nice!” they said. The beer was hot and made them drunk within few minutes. The dug hole was only about one metre deep but they were not able to dig any more. Some were feeling sleepy with dizziness and just staggered as they moved from place to another. There was no water for drinking and the lady had to fetch water. The policeman who was escorting the prisoners left them and went somewhere in the village. The guys were left alone in the house and got an opportunity to do what they wanted. One of them became too drunk and laid unconsciously next to the dead person in the room. The rest of his friends wanted to bury the body very quickly so that they could leave. They came in to take the dead person but weren’t able to distinguish between the two bodies. Very unfortunately they blindly carried their friend who had just fainted from drinking. They dumped him into the hole, filled the earth onto him and tried to escape from the place. The man was buried alive; he couldn’t breathe and definitely died. But the real dead body was left lying in the room.
When the lady came, she saw the guys leaving but surprisingly the grave was already covered which she didn’t expect to happen in her absence.

“What did they do!?” she cried as she rushed into the room. The body was still there and she couldn’t imagine the reason why these men covered the grave before the burial.

She ran to police and explained what had happened. The policemen came to find out about that, and the first thing they did was to catch those prisoners. The drunken men were caught but one person was missing among them. During the investigation, they said that they had already “buried the body” (done the work) and didn’t know what had removed the body from the grave, back to the room.

People removed the earth from the grave to check what was inside. All over sudden, they discovered that it was one of their friends who had been buried. That was another crime they had committed and they got a lot of questioning. The two bodies were then buried with a police witness and later followed their trial.
The poor lady was released when she was found to be innocent. She continued with her journey to her home village. After some days she arrived home and was warmly received by the parents and relatives who made a big feast for her. She got help and stayed peacefully with her relatives.
The Dead Could Listen

Akec was left an orphan after the death of his parents. He stayed with a Good Samaritan neighbour who took care of him. The neighbour had a young boy called Achiek. The two boys stayed and shared everything together. They became best friends.

The boys grew up and became big men. They were still maintaining their strong relationship. Akec worked hard and made money. He made a big house for himself. People were very happy about him. He then got married to a beautiful girl and stayed happily in love. His friend Achiek got married to a beautiful girl too. The two families always visited each other.

One day Achiek got sick. The sickness became severe and he died within few days. Akec heard about the death of his friend but didn’t want to go to the burial place earlier. He waited at his house till people finished digging the grave. People were very surprised because they did not expect Akec to stay away for that long.

“He should have been the first person to attend the burial,” they said.
At last Akec went to the burial place when it was almost time to lay the body into the grave. There were very many people there including the parents of the late Achiiek. People saw Akec coming and they began murmuring.

“How could a person hear of the death of his friend from the neighbouring house and be the last one to attend the burial” they asked themselves. Women were weeping in deep sorrow – as they tied their stomachs with clothes, stood on bare feet, leaning their heads on their hands and steadily stared in one direction.

He came and stood quietly before the crowd but looked busy in his mind. People didn’t talk to him either. After the prayers the body was then laid into the grave and people wanted to cover it.

“No, no, don’t cover it?” he shouted. Everybody looked at him surprised. They wondered what he wanted to do.

“Let me say my words first,” he told the crowd. People allowed him and just looked at him. He then came and stood near the grave and looked down at the body of his friend and started his words by calling,

“Achiek, Achiek!” he called. “I think the dead can meet and I believe you will go and meet my father and mother. Please I would like you to carry my message to them. Go and ask them why they left me suffering. I beg you to go and ask them and let me get their reply”

Akec concluded his words from there and then told the people to continue their work. People were uncertain about what Akec meant and there was awkwardness among the crowd.

Closer relatives came to cover the grave. They gently placed a sheet of mat on top of the body to separate it from the soil that would be filled in after. People then got out from the pit and took the shovels for filling in the soil. Before they started filling they heard a sound from the grave.

“Is seee, is seee” Achiiek sneezed. They saw the body moving. Immediately they got into the grave and uncovered it. He gave a little breath and slightly opened his eyes. He rose from the dead! It was of great amazement to the people. They took him out from the grave and killed a ram and replaced it into the grave according to the tradition. He was taken home and given rest.
When he had rested for some while, he called his friend, Akec. He told him that he had conveyed the message to his (dead) parents. He was then asked to come back to forward the reply. The late parents told him that they were angry and didn’t want their son to become rich because he became responsible but couldn’t remember them. They said that Akec should get two bulls to slaughter on their graves as for their funeral rite and therefore his door will be open for better life. From there everyone believed that Achiek rose from the dead because of his friend’s message.

Achiek’s wife and parents couldn’t believe their eyes. They were very happy and gave thanks to Akec and continued to live together.
Little is better than nothing

Once upon a time there were two friends who lived in a certain village. They liked and helped each other in all activities they could do for themselves. Their names were Gai and Lual. They had happy families. Gai was a farmer and Lual was a fisherman. Though each of them had different work, they were very cooperative and shared ideas and the benefits that they gained from their work.

It was after the crops harvest when Lual and Gai were conversing one afternoon.

“Please Gai, I’d like us this time to go to the river side together and share in fishing” requested Lual.

“Yes, Lual but we’d like to take some food with us.” said Gai.

“That is very important, we’ll take some ready and raw food as well.” replied Lual.

From there they asked their wives to prepare and pack some food for the journey. The ladies prepared Millet, beans, green grams and groundnuts paste mixed with honey. These varieties of food were special for long safari. They were delicious to eat and provide energy to the body as well.

“There are important materials we need to take with us” said Lual.

“Okay, what are these materials?” asked Gai.

“We need to get fishing-nets, hooks, spears and knives” stated Lual.

“Well can we also take our sleeping materials and water gourds with us?” asked Gai.

“Of course, those are very essential ones. Thanks for reminding me about these” replied Lual with smile.

The two men were ready to leave as everything for the journey was organized. The following morning they said good-bye to their families and then left. They walked for a whole day till they reached the destination in the evening. It was just near the river side where they joined the rest of the fishermen. They camped at the same place. Gai and Lual slept in the open air and it was very
cold for them. They covered themselves with blankets but Gai was still shivering with cold. Lual collected some fire-wood and made fire between them so that they could warm up. Soon they got warm and slept as they were exhausted from their long walk.

Very early in the morning Lual awaked Gai to accompany him to the river where they could fish. Gai got up and together with Lual collected the fishing-net, basket and spears. They went to the river and stood inside the bank. Lual first introduced Gai to what he should be doing during the fishing.

“I’ll be throwing the net into the water to catch fish while you’ll be assisting me in picking and collecting the fish from the net” said Lual.

“All right, I’ll be doing that” answered Gai.

Lual started to throw the net into the river.

“Shaaw.” it splashed. There was a good number of fish caught but they were very small. Lual pulled the net out of the water.

“Here we can pick the fish from the net.” requested Lual.

“What a very poor variety!?” exclaimed Gai.

“Let us not waste our time in picking these small fish. We should throw them back to the water and get big ones” he ordered. Lual agreed and the little fish were thrown back to the water.

He continued to throw the net into the water but still caught the same small variety. Gai was very disappointed and insisted on putting the fish back into the water. This time Lual threw the net further into the middle of the river. He pulled it out and asked Gai to pick the fish although they were small as before, but Gai didn’t change his mind. Lual hopelessly put the fish back into the water.

“Let us go and try from another direction” suggested Lual. Gai agreed and they went. It was now a deeper place.

“Shaaw” he threw the net and dropped into the water with great splash. Lual pulled the net but it was very heavy to remove. He called Gai to join him in support but yet they couldn’t move an inch backward. It was too heavy for them.

“What is wrong!?” exclaimed Gai.

“A fish caught this time must be a very big one” commented Lual.
Before they finished their argument, the rope of the net they were pulling began to get loose. “It is loose now! Let us quickly pull it out” said Gai very eagerly. “But I doubt it will be there, the fish must have escaped from the net” said Lual. “What a great loss if we don’t get it!” replied Gai.

They hopelessly stared at the river in very sad mood. Suddenly a giant crocodile emerged with the net on top of the water rushing towards them.

“Oh, my God!” they cried and ran away leaving the net, basket and spears in the river.

The crocodile angrily tore up the net with its strong sharp teeth and disappeared into the water. Gai and Lual were in great fear and ran to the camp. They didn’t talk to anybody when they ran to the camp. They quietly collected the rest of their materials and took their long way back home. They were very sad for their tedious walk and the material they had lost without any gain. No fish had been caught for the families and they wondered what to say when they arrived back home.
A Man and a Lion

Long ago there lived a husband and wife. The man liked telling stories and the woman liked singing songs. They were farmers and both lived a happy life. They grew sorghum around their house. It was during the crops harvest and they had plenty of food.

One evening after they ate their supper the wife suggested that they should spend some time outside, in front of their house before they go to bed. The moon was shining and bright during that evening.

“It is hot today, let us get some fresh air outside” said the wife, “Yes, my dear, I wanted to tell you a story in this bright moon shine” replied the husband.

“I’d wanted to sing a nice song for you too,” said the wife.

While they were entertaining themselves with stories and songs, the husband suddenly saw a dark creature in the sorghum field.

“Can you see that dark object?” asked the husband.

“Yes, but it seems to be moving” replied the wife.

“What could it be?” she asked.

“It must be a thief stealing our sorghum” answered the husband.

“I will catch him now” he stressed.

“No, it is terrible to catch a thief by yourself alone. Let us just scare him so that he runs away” said the wife.

“I’ll make good plans to catch him red handed” The man insisted.

He collected his spears with a thick stick and advised his wife to observe silently. He was going slowly and very tactically towards the stranger, by hiding behind small trees and not making any sound to alert his target. He was approaching closer and closer toward the stranger. He reached very near to it but the stranger was still unclear. He didn’t want to kill it but intended to catch it. The man thought that it was a person who wanted to steal the sorghum. But in reality, it was a hungry lion that had set a trap to catch rats in their holes. As the man was coming, the lion couldn’t sense anything because it was so busy waiting for the rats.
The lion was moving its tail from the right and to the left hitting the ground with great force. The man again thought that it was the thief picking the sorghum.

He gently put down his spears jumped upon the lion and strongly caught its huge body. The lion was shocked and with heavy resistance, it took off with great force and ran away roaring toward the bush.

When the man caught the lion he realised that it was a different animal and not a human being because its body was huge and rough with sharp, thorny hair. He panicked and anxiously ran back to the house.
After a while, the lion also realised that it was a human being who had caught it. The lion regretted running and was very annoyed because it had missed its food.
It wanted to eat the man. The lion ran in search everywhere around the house. The man and his wife had already got into their room and locked themselves in.
It became a lesson to the man and from that day he began to listen to what his wife said.
The Greedy Hyena

In the past, animals and man stayed together and could speak and understand each other. Hyena and dog were friends and lived in one house. Goat and sheep were also friends and they lived in their own separate houses. There was a beautiful girl in the village. Her beauty attracted everyone. Both hyena and goat wanted to marry her. There was a competition between them.

One day hyena asked his friend dog if they could go and visit the girl. On the same day, goat and his friend sheep decided also to go and visit the same girl. Both parties arranged their journey to be in the afternoon. However they didn’t know that their visits would collide at the same time. Each group of friends went on different ways leading to the same house but coincidently reached it at the same time at sunset.

The people in the house were happy to receive these important visitors but some were worried about how fairly they could be accommodated. They were accommodated in the same room although they weren’t comfortable to share one room. They had to bear the situation as respectful guests.

When it came to time for sleep, they were given two sheets of mats. These mats were made of animal hide. During the night the hyena became hungry. He wasn’t feeling comfortable because he heard goat and sheep were chewing something. Hyena thought that they were eating the mat while they were actually chewing the cud.

“Dog, dog!” hyena called.
“Yes, hyena” replied dog.
“Just listen to those friends and hear the chewing. They are eating their mat and so, we have to eat ours too” hyena whispered.
“I am not sure whether they are really eating the mat” said dog and refused to eat the mat.
“Please if you do not want to eat, let me eat my part,” said hyena angrily. The greedy animal began to eat the mat and left just a small part where dog laid.
In the morning the girl came to greet the visitors. She got goat and sheep sitting on their beautiful mat while hyena and dog were sitting on the floor. Hyena ate a big part from the mat and only left a very small piece.

Hyena and dog were very ashamed when they were asked about their mat. Goat and sheep just laughed at them. Dog was annoyed because both of them were considered as greedy friends who ate their mat. Dog told them that it was not involved in eating but it was hyena alone who decided to eat the mat.

On hearing that, the girl immediately rejected hyena’s proposal. She told hyena not to come to her house again. Goat was proud because it was considered to be better than hyena.

The animals left the house and instead of walking on their different ways as they had come, hyena followed the same way where goat and sheep were going. When they reach the forest hyena started to attack and fight the three animals including the dog.

From that time onwards dog didn’t want to make any friends with hyena any longer. It took side with goat and sheep. They tried to fight but hyena was stronger and chased them.
Hyena became arrogant because it was big and strong. The three weak animals ran from hyena and went to where people live. They got protection and stayed peacefully with people. That is why hyena became a great enemy to dog, goat and sheep today.
Glossary

The meanings of these words have been given according to their context in this book.

Abandoned: Left someone or something somewhere and sometimes not coming to get them.
Accompany: To go somewhere with someone.
Anaemic: Loss of blood in the body due to illness.
Anxiety: The feeling of being very worried.
Appetite: The feeling that makes you want to eat.
Argument: An angry discussion with someone in which you disagree.
Arrogant: Believing that you are better or important than other people.
Bubbling: Forming a ball of air or gas with liquid around it.
Bury: To put a dead body into the ground.
Collapsed: Fell down and almost dying.
Comfortable: A pleasant feeling and being relaxed and free.
Converse: To talk to someone.
Corrupted: Do things with unkind heart and cheating people.
Cud: Animal food that it chews for the second time after it has already been to its stomach.
Current: The natural flow of water in one direction.
Delicious: Food with good smell and taste.
Demand: A need for something to be sold or supplied.
Destination: The place where someone or something is going.
Deteriorating: Becoming waste.
Disarray: Disorganised and uncontrolled.
Disastrous: Difficult and dangerous.
Distinguish: To recognize differences between two people.
Dumped: Put something somewhere to get rid of it.
Escorting: Going somewhere, with someone and often protecting or guarding him or her.
Experience: Something you have undergone and learnt through.
Fainted: Became unconscious for a short time usually falling down on the floor.
Grave: The place in the ground where dead body is laid to remain there.
Groundnut-paste: Groundnut fried and ground to become like butter.
Hesitate: To pause before you do something especially when you are in doubt or uncertain.
Hide: The skin of an animal which is used for leather.
Imposed: Forced one’s ideas on somebody.
Magic: Special powers that can make impossible things happen.
Misery: Unpleasant life or unhappiness.
Murmuring: Speaking quietly so that can be only heard by someone near you.
Panicked: Felt so worried and frightened.
Recurring: Happening again or many times.
Regretted: To feel sorry for what you have done.
Rescued: Saved from a dangerous or unpleasant situation.
Resistance: When someone disagrees with a change and refuses to accept it.
Route: The road or path that one follows to get from one place to another.
Ruined: Spoiled or destroyed.
Rushing: Moving quickly to somewhere.
Safari: Journey or a trip.
Seek: To try and find out or get something.
Shelter: A place that protects you from bad weather or danger.
Shivering: Shaking one’s body from cold or fear.
Shovels: A tool with long handle used for digging and holding things such as soil.
Stared: Looking at someone or something for long without moving your eyes.
Starving: Dying because there is not enough food.
Stuff: Referring to a kind of food.
Subsided: Became less strong.
Suffering: The state of being in pain, unpleasant emotion and difficulties.
Sufficient: Something enough for the purpose.
Survived: Continue to live after almost dying from accident, illness or hunger.
Sympathized: Understood and took care of someone’s problem.
Tedious: Difficult and boring.
Thorn: A small sharp point on a stem of a plant.
Thorny: Like or covered with thorns.
Unconsciously: Not awake or aware of himself or herself.
Unfavourable: Not encouraging or helping.
Victim: Somebody who faced problems in illness or bad luck.
Wave: A line of higher water that moves across the surface of the river or sea.
Whispered: Spoken extremely quietly so, that others could not hear him or her.
Witch doctor: A person that performs magic and other tricks.
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