

LAND OF AKON BUOI

BY
CHOL KUOTWEL MANHOM

Picture: young beautiful girl (very tall, black and decorated with traditional beads and aluminum anklets) kneeling before a grey bearded old man, dressed in leopard skin (father) who seems to be discussing something serious with his daughter. The old man is sitting on a traditional stool.

**Short stories from southern Sudan
2008**

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To Kuotwel and Aweildit my beloved children

Introduction

This book is an effort to shed light on some aspect of our society that we sometimes called myth (s). These myths to some extent shape our thinking and even define us as a people because if you study them very closely, you find one or more elements of the myth written on the face of everything that defines us as a people including our spiritual beliefs.

All these elements put together, give the myths or stories of oral tradition the credibility of being true stories that had happened in a very distant past. As our history has been passed down to generations from an immemorial past, there is the likelihood that these oral traditions might be heard in different versions nowadays. Simply it had been passed on orally and as we are all aware that oral communication always gets distorted somewhere when it passes through many mouths.

There is the possibility also that much of the myth's contents had been omitted sometimes back to suit the time and place, thus resulting to an incomplete story/myth or even distorted sometimes.

But all in all, these myths still stand true to define our societies and even our outlook to life and our general behavioural pattern for sometimes to come. I felt that there is a need to put these myths in such a context that helps reflection and soul searching. For non Dinka, I hope this work will give them a glimpse of who the Dinka people truly are because the truth of these myths reflects itself in all the Dinka thinking and behaviour.

At this juncture, I acknowledge my indebtedness to all those who supported me in various ways including those who offered suggestions and moral support, not forgetting my family, Madam Monica Ding for consistent support without whom this work could not have been possible.

Chol Kuotwel Manhom
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Chapter one

The taming of a buffalo calf

Picture: Buffalo calf strongly tied to a big tree, three young men with spears stand by it as if resting after a fierce struggle with the beast- Stone Age appearance

Long long ago, when our great grandfathers didn't even exist, there lived a small clan, nomadic people I should say or nilotics as they are called these days. Tall, smooth black skinned people, living in a very hostile unfriendly environment where only the fittest survive, in a habitat where they tried to live and succeeded in killing buffalo's mother, which was one of their fierce enemies.

The buffalo's mother killed many people from this small clan, and the warriors of the clan vowed to kill the buffalo's mother, and put an end to one of their formidable enemy.

The warriors also managed to capture the buffalo's offspring. They were two calves and one broke loose and ran away, they took with them the calf they caught, kept it at home and fed it properly, looking after it in a manner that surpasses the treatment given to human child.

The wise men of the clan named the calf cow or weng in thuongjang or (Dinka as many people falsely called them) but in fact the true name of the Dinka is correctly called Muony-jang, here Muony means man and jang means peoples so put together and read properly, Muony-jang means man of peoples. Therefore, Dinka is not the correct name as one school of thought attribute it to a misinterpretation of Deng Kak one of the oldest chiefs of Abeliang clan by a foreign visitor.

This small warrior clan called Muonyjang. Somebody somewhere , one time, one day had come across the meaning or real meaning of the name Muonyjang, and since that time these somebodies have been working against this group to undermine even their mere existence. These nilotic Dinka people or Muonyjang have now grown to be a big nation of peoples, a very big family despite the challenges they faced from their fellow human beings and from the harsh environment where they dwell.

Nowadays that the members of this warrior clan have had access to formal education, you find them saying that they are a people because somewhere it is written that:

"A group of individual human beings who enjoy some or all of the following features

- a) a common historical tradition
- b) racial or ethnic identity
- c) cultural homogeneity
- d) linguistic unity
- e) religious or ideological affinity
- f) territorial connection
- g) common economic life"

this is the definition given by justice Michael Kirby or sometimes you find this learned people from the warrior clan use the definition of some experts who further stated that the " group as a whole must have the will to be identified as a people or the consciousness of being a people."

The warrior clan did in fact have the consciousness of being a people , they live together , hunt together until the day they took the buffalo's calf home and renamed it "cow" or weng in Dinka dialect.

The encounter with a handsome buffalo

Picture: two young buffalos standing facing each other romantically or as if sharing a secret

The calf grew to be a first class heifer, and one day the heifer went to the bush to graze. There she met another handsome creature that looks exactly like herself except for the big muscles on the handsome creature. After many meetings, the heifer fell in love with handsome buffalo, very intimate lovers, and every time the heifer goes to graze, she sneaked to their secret meeting place. After several meetings, the heifer got pregnant and all her body system changed even her mood.

The handsome buffalo one day suggested to the heifer that she should come along with him to go to a far away land and start their family. He told the heifer that the people she calls her masters are the very ones that killed her lovely mother including the buffalo's parents. The heifer said that she is staying with her masters because she wanted to avenge for her mother that was killed by the warriors from this clan, the heifer went on to narrate the sad story of how their mother died in the hands of the warriors, how her brother flee and the manner in which she was captured and domesticated. She further explained how she was taken care of, adorned and renamed cow.

The heifer vowed to avenge her mother and said, "because my masters love me so much, I will be the cause of all their disputes, their death and their ultimate downfall."

The heifer had never said these words to any one until their encounter with this handsome buffalo that the small warrior clan called "Anyaar".

The handsome buffalo wanted to take his beautiful heifer for a wife, for procreation and multiplicity of their seeds or offspring to wage a good fight against the warrior clan that had killed their both parents. The handsome buffalo told his would be wife once again, "please come with me and leave these people you called your masters, they are in fact our parents murderers, come with me to the bush and let us find a home for ourselves."

The heifer said, " I totally agree with all what you said, I also acknowledge the need to avenge for our parents and for that very reason regardless of how much I love you, I have to stay to the end."

"I will try all possible means to be the cause of troubles, disputes, and fights among this warrior clan. I know that one day I will be in control of all the aspects of their lives, their thinking and behaviours and should any one of them die, I am sure I will be among the many causes of their death and downfall"

The handsome buffalo known locally as Anyaar was convinced beyond reasonable doubt that the strategy set out by his beautiful heifer is very lethal and will work to the ultimate downfall of this clan. He finally pronounced his resolve, swearing before the spirits and gods of the forest that he will keep on killing any member of the warrior clan that comes his way.

He asked his beautiful heifer to lure this Muonyjang people to the bush, the buffalo swore that either he got killed or continue the fight till the warrior clan see the consequence of their brutal killing of his mother.

The two lovers departed each fully committed to his/her mandate to bring about the downfall of these Muonyjang, they swore to keep their vows. The heifer went home to her masters and after some time gave birth to another creature very similar to her, which by no exception is also going to be called weng (cow)

The troubles begins

Picture: Chief looks on fiercely as his guards continue beating a young man severely with clubs after they threw him down full length-Stone age appearance

Then the trouble started, the owner of the cow in fact was a son of a veteran warrior whom people feared because of his strength and fighting skills. His son not surprisingly had stepped in to his father's shoes and even excels in some ways; all people admired him in his village. This young warrior was the one who caught the buffalo's calf after they had killed her mother.

When this young warrior caught the calf and carried her home, the paramount chief insisted that he takes the calf under his care on the pretext of keeping it safe for the young man.

By the time the heifer had given birth to a baby cow (calf) the news reached the young warrior in his village, which was not very far away from where the paramount chief stays. The young warrior was so delighted on the news and decided to pay a visit to the paramount chief to discuss arrangement for the heifer and its new born. He stayed for some days to digest his newfound happiness. When the time came, he went to the chief, he was given a warrior welcome, and at the end of his stay, he asked the chief to give him his calf that has grown now to be a big cow with calf.

The paramount chief refused to hand over the cow and its calf, after many attempts by the young warrior to take the two animals failed, he grew furious and suddenly a fight broke out between the paramount chief and the young warrior.

On seeing the fight, the guards stepped in, seized the young man and with only one fatal blow in the neck, he fell down full length and remained motionless for as long as it took the chief's diehards to realize that the man is dead. Fear gripped everybody including the paramount chief for the grave mistake they have done. They have to think wisely otherwise the possibility of an eventual war was looming. They fear the clan to which the deceased warrior belongs, and especially his father who was a fierce warrior.

The paramount chief called upon his wise man, who was his special advisor and a chief priest whom he always consults over the deadly delicate issues that puts the whole clan at stake. The wise man quickly went through his head as if looking for his old dirty files to find similar incidents and how he solves it. Without any delays the wise man came up with a solution and he started by saying, " long live our paramount chief, don't bother and don't even notice, for this is a very simple case, here is my solution. "And the wise one went on to reveal his suggestion, " your honour, this is how I am going to solve this problem, we are going to take the body and throw it in the forest, we will disfigure it to make people believe that he was killed by a wild beast or a buffalo. Our warrior will pretend to be going for hunting and on seeing the body; they

will send a runner to the deceased village to tell the news to the deceased father.”

The paramount chief consented to the suggestion and told the wise man to go ahead with all the necessary arrangements.

On hearing the news, the deceased father didn't shed tears because he knew a warrior lives to kill or be killed one day one time – that is what a warrior is meant for. The veteran warrior took back the body of his slain son to the village. He did the necessary rituals and after the mourning is over, the veteran warrior came to the paramount chief to investigate the cause of his son's and to collect the cow and calf that the paramount chief was keeping for the young warrior who is now dead.

The paramount chief without hesitation embarked on explaining the circumstances that he believed might have led to the death of the young warrior. When the deceased's father asked about his son's cow and its newborn calf, the paramount chief said that the cow had gone lost during the commotion that happened in his village when the people heard about the death of the young warrior in the hands of the wild beast. The chief then admitted presence of the calf and that he was willing to give it back to the father of the deceased. The veteran warrior took home with him the calf that belongs to his son. Back home, the veteran warrior stayed for some time until the calf was well grown and became a big cow.

Chapter three

The journey to nowhere

Picture: An old man and his wife follow the cow as other people (including children) trail behind all carrying luggages-Stone age appearance

Staying in the village no longer appeals to the veteran warrior, especially after the lost of his son. The old man decided to leave the village, he collected few belongings including his wife and the cow, he headed nowhere, but he knew down in his heart that he will one day find a place to live in the four corners of the planet (earth). He wanted to start a new home with new memories and leave behind this environment, which is reminiscence of his son death.

He walked many days with his family, the cow and few clansmen who didn't want to lose the company of their veteran warrior until they reached a place, which is so green and full of pastures, lakes and springs. On close examination, they noticed people living all around the green pastures. These people were very strange to the new comers; they only grow food and are very peaceful. These new neighbours were too homogeneous to mingle with and the warrior clan remained only in the grassland while the owners of the place occupy the woodland south of what is known today as Sudan central plain.

Akon Buoi the price for land

Picture: women with baby sitting (lonely) before a traditional hut- Stone age appearance

The old man came to know these people, they stayed in neighborhood for long time, and the days go by become bird, flock together and fly away. The veteran warrior's wife gave birth to a child, and on seeing that his wife had pulled out a baby girl from her body, he was very sad and disgusted, he wanted a baby boy to replace his slain son. He now knows that the future of his family is at risk as there will be no one to continue the lineage afterwards besides the fact that his property wouldn't be secure should other warriors happen to attack the family.

Out of frustration, the old man deserted his wife and the baby, went to the forest and stayed over himself so that he decides what to do with female child. He stayed in the forest for a long time. When the time came for naming the child, the mother named the child Akon meaning deserted in Dinka language. The mother felt deserted by her husband because she delivered a girl child instead of a boy.

After a long stay in the wilderness, the old man decided to come back to the family fully decided and resolved to take care of his wife and the baby, saying that may be one day, the child will grow and do well to the family. His stay in the forest allowed him to reflect on the death of his son and the fact that his wife brought a girl child who he believed will not fill the gap left by the decease.

The veteran warrior had a big plan in his mind that he didn't want to disclose to anybody. He stayed with his wife who fortunately gave birth to more boys and girls. The days go by, became birds, flock together and fly away. Akon grew to be a woman, even the family grew larger, and the cows increased in number beyond expectation.

The owners of the place who passively allowed them to share the land in the first place sensed troubles with their new neighbours, when herds of cattle always edged to their farms and occasionally destroys parts of the farms.

Their chief alerted the whole clan of the looming danger if animals continue to feed on the crops. A meeting was suggested to regulate random movement of cattle and how the two clans could coexist peacefully. The warrior clan promised peaceful coexistence with their counterparts and that their cattle would not pose danger since young herders were charged with guard of their animals. However, this never lasted long since the behaviour of the animals and that of the young people controlling them couldn't measure up to what the crop owners had expected.

Tension grew between the two groups to the level of sporadic violence over the land especially when herds destroy crops among others.

Paying the dear price

Picture: young beautiful girl kneeling (very tall, black and decorated with traditional beards and aluminum anklets) before grey bearded old man, dressed in leopard skin (father) who seems to be discussing something serious with his daughter. The old man is sitting on a traditional stool. This picture should be on the cover of the book.

After a long volatile period, the veteran warrior thought for a peaceful solution. He called some prominent members of his clan. He then presented the motion before the elders to discuss how peace can be brought between the two clans. The veteran warrior now became very wealthy with both livestock and human. They were to respond to the demand of the owners of the land who said, "you came to our land a long time ago; we received you and settled you in this land that you are now occupying. We stayed peacefully and as days go by; you have multiplied as well as your livestock. The same is true of our side also. Your animals and men are both a threat to our livelihood. You are therefore asked to move away and leave us our peaceful and productive soil.

The elders tried various options but they failed to reach any consensus on what should be a peaceful solution. The veteran warrior felt frustrated and asked for the meeting to be adjourned until a later date. By the time he called off the meeting, the veteran warrior is no fool, he had already made up his mind. The prophecy that his daughter Akon would one day do well to the family came to his memory. His solution was to offer his daughter (Akon) as a dear prize to buy the land but he wanted to share this feeling with his family to seek their approval before presenting the idea to the elders.

The veteran warrior wondered what method he could use to present the idea to his wife whom he expected to hold an opposite view of what the daughter could do to the family.

The veteran warrior came home seeming as if exhausted after a tedious walk. He lowered his bag made of leopard skin and entered the shrine. And without wasting time, he called, "why can't you come first and leave the bloody water for your daughter to bring, I need more than a water." His wife drew herself to her full height and hurried to the shrine. For about one minute, he stared at her as if he lost his words for her. Then he cleared his throat and asked whether his wife really cares for the peaceful life of the whole clan and her little children. She smiled lightly, knowing that her husband is up to something and asked whether it is her turn to say a word. Her husband replied with a big nod. She asserted that the life of the clan and that of little children comes before her own life. The veteran warrior smiled for the first time since the idea of offering his daughter for land preoccupied his mind. He went on to explain how life becomes worthless in a situation where what should be a brotherly co-existence is replaced with hatred and periodic violence.

He suggested to his wife that he has thought of a durable solution to the situation if only she gives her consent to it. The wife couldn't help imagine what on the earth the solution will be and quickly asked him to explain more before she gives her consent.

"Your daughter Akon, is the only choice for peaceful solution to the crisis befalling the two clans" he went on to say.

"Do you want to kill my only child, she sprang to her feet"

"No, be patient, replied the old man, I want to marry her to the paramount chief of the indigenous people as price for land and symbol of peace, you know we came from swampy areas and these people own the woodland, we must buy this land for our children" he asserted.

"Oh my God, she cried. Do you mean she becomes a wife of the strangers' chief only to buy a land and your so-called peace?"

"Of course yes, look, generations and generations of your grandchildren will remember her as not only a dear price for land but also a symbol of peace, she will live a happy life and her legacy shall live longer than human history"

With these words, mother of Akon gathered enough courage and consented to her husband wish.

The veteran warrior who is also a chief priest sprang to his full height and started singing songs of praise to the deity and the ancestors. His songs were like a preamble before a big declaration. All people in the neighbourhood converged in his compound wondering what had happened to the old man because such songs are only reminiscence of a great happiness, a sacrificial rite if not a war.

But the old man seemed unconcern about the worried faces inquiring what on earth he was singing for. He only asked people to inform elders for a meeting the following day. His wife who knows what happened was unable to tell the story because her head was racing with thoughts about her daughter.

The covenant

Picture: Two groups of elders facing each other in a meeting, the paramount chief on one side and the veteran warrior/chief priest on the other are remarkable e.g. wearing leopard skins

The veteran warrior told the elders that he has thought of a lasting solution to the crisis. His daughter Akon will be given to the paramount of the indigenous clan to buy the land and bring harmony between the two peoples.

All the elders applauded the idea and consented to it.

It was then agreed that few elders accompany him to the paramount chief to present the offer.

On arrival in the chief's palace, they stood under a tree in a distant place and sent one bodyguard to deliver the permission of entering the palace.

The paramount chief gave a warm welcome despite suspicion for the reason of the visit.

"Kudual", "Ci we bak", goes the greetings from both sides. With help of a translator, the veteran warrior presented the offer to the paramount chief stressing that prosperity would only come if both clans forge goodwill and friendship instead of violence.

The paramount chief felt impressed and couldn't hide his happiness but he first asked permission to invite his elders and the chief priest to have a say before he reacts. Upon arrival, like a president giving a message to the press at the reception, the chief priest commented that something to the best interest of peace is highly likely and ancestors will pour a blessing from the sky. Perhaps the deity told him so. This has created openness and the paramount chief started narrating the reason of the visit to his group.

A senior elder gave a welcoming (spiritual) song (chorused by others) and wished the visitors a happy stay. The chief priest advised the paramount chief to talk without suspicion since peace and unity is what the deity wants than a continuous blood shed.

The paramount chief declared that for the best interest of peace and prosperous co-existence, he has accepted the offer. He further promised that the stretch of land edging the grassland (toich) is given to his inlaws for livelihood now and forever. The old man was couldn't belief his ears and the paramount chief's was in jubilant mood with his people.

After the meeting, the two clans organized a colourful wedding ceremony to be convened in the paramount chief palace.

During the handing over of the bride, the veteran warrior says to the loud of his voice, "May the legacy of my daughter remains for generations and generations. Elders responds, "Yenakaan" which means Amen in Dinka. He repeated this several times and the paramount chief's side accepts, "so shall it be"

The stretch of land referred to is what is known today as "Liet Akon Bui" (Land of Akon Bui)

Rumbek town falls in the middle of that land and Akon Bui cultural centre is established now north of freedom square behind the Town Council Offices- Rumbek town.

The two clans referred to are Jur (Sudanic group) and Akaar Dinka (Nilotic group)

Akon Bui continue to be a pride of Akaar people.

That is how Dinka people and Nilotics generally acquire pastoral live (by taming the buffalo calf) which shapes much of their social and economic lives and define most of their daily activities.

Glossary

The meanings of these word have been given according to the context of this book

- Arrangement: The act of putting things in to a proper order or pattern.
- Avenge: To carry out some form of retribution for a previous wrong doing.
- Beast: Large wild animal, especially a four footed one.
- Belief: A principle or idea etc. accepted as true, especially without proof.
- Co-exist: To live together side by side in spite of differences
- Consciousness: Physical and mental state of being awake and fully aware of ones environment, thoughts and feelings.
- Counterpart: A person or a thing, which is not exactly the same as another but which is equivalent to it in another context or place.
- Covenant: A promise to somebody, or a legal agreement, especially one to for pay for something regularly.
- Creature: Something, which has been created e.g. bird, beast, fish or a person.
- Delicate: Something requiring tact and careful handling
- Diehard: A person who stubbornly refuses to accept new ideas or changes
- Disgusted: Strong dislike or disapproval in something.
- Domesticate: To train an animal for life in the company of people or at home.
- Environment: The surrounding or condition within which something/someone exist.
- Formidable: Very difficult to overcome
- Frustrated: Feeling of agitation and helplessness at not being able to do something.
- Generation: All the individuals produced at a particular stage in the natural descent of humans or animals.
- Glimpse: To see something or someone momentarily
- Heifer: A female cow/buffalo over one year old that has either not calved , or has calved only once.
- History: An account of past events and developments.
- Homogeneous: Made up of elements that are all of the same kind or nature.
- Incident: A relatively minor event or occurrence, which might have serious consequences.
- Looming: An imminent event/situation, especially in some menacing and threatening way.
- Mingle:
- Motionless: Static, not able to move
- Multiplicity: State of being many and various
- Murderer: A person who killed another person unlawfully and intentionally.
- Myth: An ancient story that deal with gods and heroes, especially one used to explain some natural phenomenon.
- Pastures: An area of grassland suitable or used for grazing lifestocks.

Planet: A celestial body, in orbit around the Sun or another star, which has too small a mass to become a star itself, and shines by reflecting a light from the star around which it revolves.

Pretend: To act as if, or give the impression that, something is the case when it is not

Procreation: Being able to produce offsprings.

Skills: Aptitudes or abilities appropriate for specific job.

Spiritual: Belonging, referring or relating to spirits or ghosts

Sporadic: Occurring from time to time, at irregular intervals

Strange: Unfamiliar or alien.

Strategy: A process of or tactful means of dealing successfully with problem/situation

Swearing: To promise solemnly, usually by taking an oath.

Tradition: Something such as doctrine, belief, custom story etc. that is passed on from generation to generation, especially orally or by examples.

Version: One person's accounts of an event

Veteran: Person with many years of experience in an activity

Vow: A solemn or binding promise, especially one made to or in the name of a deity.

Warrior: A person who fights in a battle or war

Wild: living or growing in natural conditions, not kept in a house or on a farm.