

## BEHIND THE NAME MADING

In his essay 'Social and Cultural Implications of Some African Personal Names' Godfrey Lienhardt quotes passages from personal information I had provided him for the purpose.<sup>1</sup> The stimulating substance of the article and his request for comments made me decide to share with him some more intimate information on how I came to be called Mading.

The story goes back to my maternal background and the circumstances under which my parents married. My father's marriage to my mother, Achok, was complicated by the relationship between Kwol Arob and my maternal grandfather, Mijok Duor. Achok's lineage, Dhienagou, had been the divine leaders of the Bongo section of the Ngok. As a result of a blood feud, Mijok's grandfather, Maluk, had migrated from Bongo to Abyorm at the time of Kwol's father, Arob Biong. Maluk's father, Dau, and Arob's father, Biong, had maintained cordial ties as leaders of prominent lineages. Maluk had therefore been well received and honoured by Arob Biong and the whole of Abyor. He and his descendants had quickly established themselves as exceptionally gifted in the skills of war, talented with words, renowned for wisdom, and as divine leaders, endowed with curative powers. From that time on, they had been close associates and advisors to the line of Paramount Chiefs. Achok's father, Mijok, who was a member of Kwol Arob's age-set, Koryom, was the latest in the line.

Although I was still very young when my grandfather died, I have a sharp, loving and most admiring memory of him. Everything I have also come to know of him confirms the qualities for which I remember him. Even allowing room for flattery, the flowing words

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<sup>1</sup> See Godfrey Lienhardt's article on pp. 105-116 of this issue.

which were told me by elders in different contexts cannot fail to impress me about him and my maternal background. 'Your maternal relatives were our Divine Chiefs,' said Monyluak Row, an elder from the Bongo section of the Ngok. And he continued:

Any illness or disaster that befell the tribe was cured by them. Today, if the descendants of Maluk returned to Bongo and claimed the Chieftainship, people would step aside and say to them, 'Yes, this is your position. Take it.' Your maternal kin have always been known for wisdom and verbal skill. For instance, with your grandfather, Mijok Duor, if he were absent from his age-set for consultations, they would say, 'We must wait for Mijok before we begin the talks.' The same was true of your uncle, Ngor. When his age-set, Chuor, used to meet and discuss, Ngor used to be waited for if he were away. He is a man who weighs words this way and that way. The whole of Abyor recognized him as Mijok Duor, his father. 'Your maternal kin were the centre of the very ancient Bongo,' said Achwil Bulabek, the Chief of Abyor. Maluk Atokbek, son of Dau, was the man who immigrated into Abyor tribe. That is why you hear of the war song of Abyor: 'Milk the Cow, Ayan, of Maluk, the son of Dau; Milk Ayan of Maluk, the Buffalo.' When your great grandfather, Arob, was the chief, he called your maternal grandfather and said, 'Mijok, here is my son (Kwol); take good care of him.' Mijok and Kwol were of the same age, Koryom. They were also very close friends.

'Your grandfather, the elder called Mijok Duor, was a man of exceeding wisdom and verbal talent,' commented another elder, Matet Ayom. 'He was a man who spoke extremely well and said words of great wisdom. He was also a close friend of your grandfather, Kwol Arob.'

According to my maternal unclé Ngor, after two of Mijok's senior daughters died while in opposition to their proposed marriages, he declared in front of his ancestral spirits and God that he had abandoned cattle, normally acquired through marriage. He therefore gave his subsequent daughters away in marriage for virtually nothing. Then, he changed his mind when his daughter, Achok, came about. He slaughtered a bull to propitiate God and his ancestral spirits and performed other rituals to signify his change of mind. Ngor's account continues:

Mading, it was then that a man called Kweng came and said, 'I want the daughter of Mijok Duor.' Kweng spoke to his mother, Achai, from your clan Pajok. Achai came to see the girl. She saw Achok and approved.

When the people came to negotiate the marriage, Father said, 'Achok is the daughter with whom I intend to raise my children. If a man wants to marry her, he must make a betrothal payment of twenty cows. As she has not yet reached puberty, this payment will only be for betrothal. When she reaches

puberty, I will then say my word.'

Kweng's people went and returned with twenty cows and two excellent bulls: a huge tawny bull and a dark bull with a white stripe across the shoulders (Mabil). They were brought. I was now old enough to be aware.

Deng Majok subsequently saw Achok at a dance and proposed to marry her. Chief Kwol Arob refused, partly in deference to his nephew, partly because Deng Majok had already married several wives in close succession, and also because of the intimate friendship between him and Mijok, which he feared the proposed marriage might disturb in various ways.

It should be noted that Deng Majok and his father were already known to have developed considerable animosity over the issue of succession, Chief Kwol Arob preferring Deng Abot, who was younger than Deng Majok, but whose mother Kwol Arob considered his first wife in a rather controversial contest of seniority between the wives. Deng Majok had decided not only to press his claim for succession to leadership, but working in cooperation with the Arab Chief, Babo Nimir, and the British administrators, to force his father into retirement and assume control. The conflict over the proposed marriage was therefore a part of a wider problem between father and son.

Although Kwol Arob refused to be personally involved in the marriage, he sent their age-set to Mijok to explain his position and to ask him not to interpret it as an objection to his son's marriage into the family. Indeed, the mission of the age-set was to persuade Mijok to accept Deng Majok, even if his father was not involved in the arrangements. Uncle Ngor had this to say about the visit of the elders to his father:

The age-set Koryom, which was the age-set of both your grandfather, Kwol Arob, and my father, came to our home at Nok-Jur. They came on horses. They all gathered there and tethered their horses. Father slaughtered in their honour and after entertaining them said, 'Gentlemen, my dear age-mates, what brings you? Is anything the matter?'

They said, 'We have something to tell you.'

He said, 'Very well! What is it?'

They said, 'You have lost two of your daughters. This issue of Deng Majok is going to associate your daughter with blood. No one will be able to face the feud of Deng Majok. Please, give up the cattle of Achai. Your daughters are still small. They should not be confronted with this. We say, leave the girl for Deng.'

Mijok said, 'Gentlemen, is that why you came?'

They said, 'Yes!'

He said, 'Is the man for whom you are speaking without a father's voice behind him?'

They said, 'There is no one to speak for him with the tongue. [By attacking Kweng] Deng himself has spoken with the spear. And he stands alone.'

'But where is the voice of Kwol?' he asked.

'Kwol has excused himself to us,' they said. 'He said, "Gentlemen, my age-mates, I am out of this. Deng is putting Mijok Duor and me in a potential conflict. Should Mijok accept, Deng will not be able to match the aspirations of Mijok. So, I had better keep out of it."'

Mijok was torn between father and son. On the one hand, he was a loyal friend to Kwol Arob, and on the other hand he admired the leadership qualities of Deng Majok and wanted to give him his daughter. When members of their age-set urged him to do so, he decided to give Deng Majok the girl. He returned the cattle of Kwol's nephew and asked Deng to pay only the cattle for the clan spirits and receive his wife. By now, Achok had reached puberty, but as she had been betrothed before puberty, it was still necessary to sacrifice a bull for the spirit of Agorot that would otherwise endanger the marriage. According to my uncle Ngor:

My father then called his relative, Dau Maluk, and said, 'I have given the girl away. Give me the bull, Mading, to be sacrificed for the spirit Agorot. Give me Mading with horns yet untampered with [according to the traditional way of training horns to grow into desired shapes]; that is what I want. That is the bull we should sacrifice for Achok's Agorot.'

Dau Maluk went and released Mading. My father called the members of his clan and said, 'Let us take this Mading to be sacrificed in Deng Majok's home. Let us go and invoke Mading; let us go and pray to God.'

He left with a number of people. Among them was a man called Chol Minyuon, an elder. And with them was Miyar Kac, an elder. He called a number of elders. And they went. They stood their sacred spears in the ground and prayed. My father said, 'God, what I have to say is not much. We ask you to give Achok a son whom we shall name Mading after the bull we are about to sacrifice. That is all we ask of you.'

My father and the elders with him prayed over the bull, Mading. They prayed and prayed and then sacrificed him. Then they left. They said, 'It is now up to God to decide whether to accept our prayers or to reject our word.'

To ensure that any grievances the maternal relatives might hold against my father for not having discharged his obligation in paying the bridewealth would not afflict me with any curse, my grandfather sought spiritual atonement with his relatives. Uncle Ngor's account explains:

After you were born, my father convened the elders of his clan and said, 'Chol Minyuon, do you not see anything pleasing to your heart? You will die. And I will die. And all of us assembled here will die. I have only one word to tell you. Is there any other name besides Mading?'

They said, 'No, there is only Mading.'

He said, 'Then I am giving you a lamb with which to wash your hearts and pray to God and say, "God, our hearts are now

pleased; we no longer have anything bad in our hearts, now that we have our Mading. He will one day hear all these words."

Days passed. You continued here. Then word came that your family wanted the baby to be brought home to be seen. So Achok took you. Then she stayed longer than was expected. Word came that you had been given another name. My father said, 'Is that truly so?'

People said, 'Yes!'

So my father sent a number of women. They took with them beer and different kinds of foods. When the women went, they were told of the other name. Kwei said that the child had been given the name of Arob. It was then said that Mading had been renamed to be Arob Biong (after Kwol Arob's father).

The women came back and told my father the story. He said to them, 'Are you sure that you heard it quite accurately?'

They said, 'Yes, we are sure we did.'

My father took his spears and left very early before dawn. He arrived before your father was out of his sleeping hut. He sat outside. When the women got up and saw him, they said, 'What is the matter?'

He said, 'Nothing! I was just passing by to visit Achok before proceeding to Abyei.'

Deng Majok was then told, 'Awut's father is outside.' He got out of his hut and went to see him.

'Father, is all well?' Deng said.

'Yes, I was just passing by to see Achok and continue on my way. I am going to Abyei.'

Deng said, 'Very well.' A bed-seat was then brought out and he sat.

My father then said, 'Would someone call Deng Makuei for me!' (The villages of the two brothers, Deng Majok and Deng Makuei, were next to one another.) Deng Makuei was called. He came and joined them.

Then my father said to them, 'Sons of Kwol Arob, this tongue of mine was once invoked by Monydhang Biong [Kwol Arob's uncle]. He said to me, "Mijok, come and let us consecrate our tongues." We blessed each other's tongue. Then he said to me, "Should Kwol fail to become the Chief, you will be the one to inform me in the hereafter." I was the most senior member of our entire age-set, Koryom; Kwol was a much younger member of the set. His uncle was concerned that their clan might rob him of the Chieftainship since he was that young. It was I who secured the Chieftainship for your father, Kwol. If I have suddenly become an outsider to this Chieftainship, then let me know at once.'

They said, 'What is the matter, Father?'

He said, 'That daughter of mine, Achok, who is in your home, is not here because your father, Kwol Arob, went and sat down to arrange her marriage to you. Nor have you paid for her. All I wanted from the marriage was to purchase the Head [of Deng Majok] which ...drove away the cattle of my daughter's

marriage. That was the Head I bought and appealed to God. If God has now judged in my favour and has shown me the fruit of his judgment by giving me my Mading, how could you think of naming him Arob Biong? If you people have the spiritual power to ask for your grandfather, Arob Biong, to be reborn, why don't you pray so that Achok begets Arob Biong for you next time? As for this Mading of mine, never ever call him by any other name. Right now, I am taking my daughter, Achok, and the baby, Mading, with me.'

They said, 'Father of Awut, how could you act so severely?'

'Say no more!' he replied. 'Keep your silence, I do not want to hear any more!'

Mading, my father was a tough man. He was a man who could be so severe that once a word had come out of his mouth, he would never retract it. He stood up and went to the door and said, 'Achok, come out with the baby, we are going. After all, you came only to show the baby to the family.'

People all gathered and pleaded with him: 'Father of Awut, you cannot take the baby this way. At least, leave Achok to be brought to you by others.'

Then he said, 'I will leave her on condition that she comes this very day and does not spend another night here.'

Achok was brought to our home that same day. We spent the night. The following morning, Deng Majok got onto his horse and went with a number of elders to see my father. They spoke to my father and said, 'Father of Awut, why allow your heart to be angered by such a trifling thing? Even if the child is called Mading, as you wish, would he not still be Mading, son of Deng? There is no issue. He will be Mading as you want him to be.'

Father said, 'Very well, my son, that was all I wanted. If you have now come and apologized, the issue has ended there. We will not quarrel any more.'

Deng Majok returned and told his family, 'I do not want to hear the child called Arob any more. He will be Mading.'

I grew up wondering why I was the only son in the family without an ancestral name and it was not until my late teens that I learned of my silent name - Arob. By that time, there were so many half-brothers with ancestral names - Kwol, Arob, Biong, Allor, Monydhang, Kwoldit, Dongdeb, Bulabek, Jok, etc. - that I began to cherish the uniqueness of my name in the family. When I go to know more about the background to my name, my appreciation was infinitely enhanced.

Indeed, my name has always symbolized my grandfather's investment in me and expectations for my future. I have felt this very strongly from my early childhood, but it became even stronger the more I got to know about the background, and Uncle Ngor has been one of my most moving informants. Let me try to provide deeper insight with another extended quotation from him:

Then you became ill when you were still an infant. You were beginning to walk. My father was extremely fond of you. He

would watch you keenly as you played around. And very often, he would want you to sit on his lap or hold you and bounce you about as he chanted words of praise for you.

One night, while you were severely ill, he did something. It was raining very heavily, with frightening thunder and lightning. He decided to take you out in the rain that night. My mother objected; but he insisted. She cried as she tried to restrain him from going outside with you. At one point, he said to her, 'Ayak, did I not fetch you with my sacred cows?'

'Yes,' she said.

'And how could you question my ancestral duty? Open the door and let me go out.'

She opened the door and he went outside with you in his arms. Then he prayed: 'God, why are you thundering this loudly, is it in your heart to take him away from me? If you are thundering because you want to take him, then I pray that you take me instead and leave him for me. Take me this very moment as you are angry, raining, and thundering. And if you should decide not to take me, then let me return into the hut and let your water, which has fallen on him, be a blessing so that he can sleep well tonight and wake up tomorrow morning smiling and playing for me to see.'

You were crying as he held you and prayed that way. The next morning, you woke up miraculously well. He held you in his hands and seated you in his lap. And he smiled into your face as he saw you so well and smiling.

Then the following night, he woke up my mother and said, 'Ayak, are you awake?'

My mother said, 'Yes!'

Then he turned to me and said, 'Son.'

He said, 'Get up and sit here. Listen to my words very carefully. Did you not witness what happened last night?'

I said, 'Yes, I did.'

He said, 'Well, I surrendered myself to redeem Mading, I will die. And after I am dead, what you hear happening in Abyor about the Chieftainship will come true. Don't you hear that Deng Majok will take over the Chieftainship from his father, Kwol Arob?'

I said, 'Yes!'

He said, 'The Head [of Deng Majok] that imposed its will on me will probably make that happen. And should it happen that way, this Mading of mine will one day force his way and find a position there. When you grow up, never complain to your brother-in-law, Deng Majok, that he has not paid your sister's bridewealth. Never tell him. It is Mading who should eventually be told. Deng must not be told.'

'And you, Ayak, when you used to say that we should give our daughter to Kweng, I am going to die and you too will die. You and I might have found in Kweng's wealth a great deal for our own consumption, but what about something to be found by our children in the future? We do not know which of us two will die first. But even when we are both gone, Mading will not miss inheriting from my own Head, I, Mijok Duor. From

these two Heads, something will emerge in him. Should he inherit from the Head of his father, Deng Majok, that too will have become mine. And should he inherit from my own Head, that too would have become mine. That was all I wanted, my dear wife, Ayak, daughter of Deng Ngor.

'With Mading, I have compensated for the loss of cows. This tribe is ours. It is I who control the disease of cattle. And it is I who control the disease of man. That is why the tribe has flourished and multiplied this much. And yet, we have not found the central place in this section of Abyor. Chieftainship is inherent in us and it has continued to be attracted to us. But we have not found the centre in this tribe. Now, I have found the centre. I wanted to enter the centre.'

A few years later, he announced that he was dying and wanted the rituals of death to be performed. Since he looked well people did not believe him. But he was right; death quickly fell upon him. I was then back at home and in school. As he lay dying, people urged him to have me fetched and taken to him, but he refused. 'I do not want Mading to be involved in this,' he said. 'I have already given him my blessing.'

I have given this intimate and detailed account because I believe it substantiates in a concrete manner the point Godfrey Lienhardt has made in writing that 'For the Dinka ... in almost all names the "meaning" is still alive: and there were then few or no non-Dinka words with etymologies known only to a learned minority'.<sup>2</sup> Those most interested in the social significance of the name make sure that the person bearing it knows the background, the motivations, and the expectations associated with it. In my case, I was made well aware of all that, and there can be no question of its profound impact on my outlook.

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<sup>2</sup> See p.107 above.