

Cattle

that mean the world to the

Mundari

HOLGER HOFFMANN





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With 12 million cattle, South Sudan is one of Africa's countries with one of the highest cattle populations.

The Ankole-Watusi cattle of the Mundari are considered the "kings of cattle" thanks to their imposing horns. To say that the Mundari love their cattle is an understatement. Nothing means more to them. Owning as many cattle as possible means high social standing and good retirement provisions. They are a kind of "mobile bank account" that must be protected and increased, if necessary, by force of arms.

Besides the cattle, they have practically no material possessions. At the marriage, the value of cattle to the Mundari becomes particularly evident. It is important to have enough cattle to be able to pay the bride price. This has more than doubled since the end of the war. The price was between 20 and 40 animals in the past, but today, it can be as high as 100.





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The financial pressure on the young men is enormous. It is, therefore, not surprising that the number of cattle thefts in Southern Sudan has increased massively. Since cattle herders are no longer armed with spears but with Kalashnikovs, some 2,500 people die each year in South Sudan in cattle raids and the resulting reprisals.

When I arrive at the camp, located in a clearing, in the afternoon after an hour-long drive through dense bush, I encounter tall young men and women, just ash-smeared boys and a few infants. No one is over their mid-thirties. All of them smiled at

me curiously but in a friendly way. The older Mundari live in villages loosely arranged from typical African round huts, where they grow sorghum, corn, peanuts, and sesame in addition to raising livestock. However, I look in vain for cattle in the camp. They are out grazing during the day and return only shortly before sunset. According to the stakes they are tied to at night, hundreds of them must be. Some boys are still busy picking up the cow dung and piling it into cone-shaped piles. The idle hustle and bustle ends abruptly when the first cattle appear at the forest's edge. Everyone rushes to the stakes and waits with

the cords in their hands for each animal to find its place, willingly letting itself be tied up. Although the stream of cows does not want to end, everything goes smoothly and without hectic. Afterward, the men lovingly rub the hide and horns of their cattle with the ashes of last night's dung fire. The ash, which is as fine as talcum powder and serves as an antiseptic, dusts the air peach-colored in the evening backlight.

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Occasionally, the sweeping, curved horns of the favorite animal are also adorned with tassels that drive flies from their eyes with every movement. The owners proudly pose with their favorite and imitate the swing of the horns with their arms. In the meantime, the manure, which is accurately piled

up into cones, is ignited, and smoke clouds rise in the setting sun, glowing red, enveloping the camp. The women and boys use the blue hour to milk the cows. The darker it gets, the more clearly the flames and embers become visible and illuminate the heads of the cattle standing around them. Now, the people also camp around the fire, either on simple wooden platforms

or in the still-warm ashes, talking or smoking shisha. They spend the night like their animals in the immediate vicinity of the fire, which protects them from mosquitoes. At night, music played on horns resounds through the camp. People sing near the fires until they fall asleep under the starry sky next to their cattle.



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The camp comes to life at dawn, when it is still pleasantly cool. At their morning toilet, I notice the sometimes quite large twigs serving as toothbrushes and their way of showering: they put their head under the urine stream of a cow. The Mundari also drink it because they believe that cattle urine cleanses them internally. It is also popular among men to dye their hair orange with the help of ammonia in the urine. Afterward, the skin of the cattle is again rubbed with ash, but now also their own upper body and head, in order to protect them from the heat of the scorching sun. Before the boys – mostly naked – start collecting and piling up the cow dung that has accumulated during the night, they quench their thirst and hunger by drinking directly from the cows' teats, just like the calves. A common practice of the Mundari to stimulate the cow's milk production is to blow air into her vagina for minutes. Until adulthood, milk and yogurt are virtually the sole foods of the Mundari. Only on special occasions such as initiation rites, weddings, or funerals is an animal slaughtered or milk mixed with blood.



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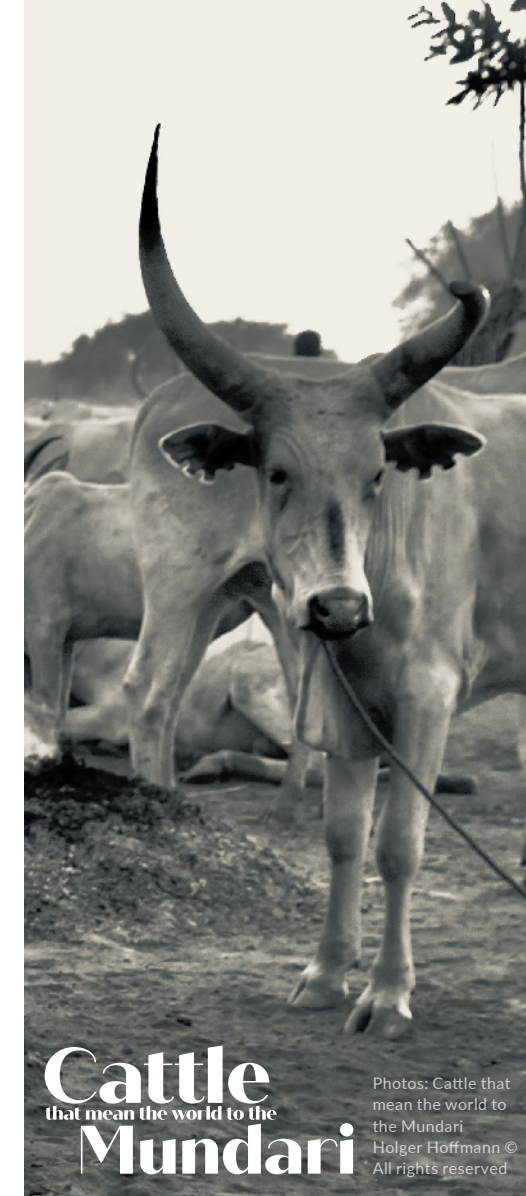
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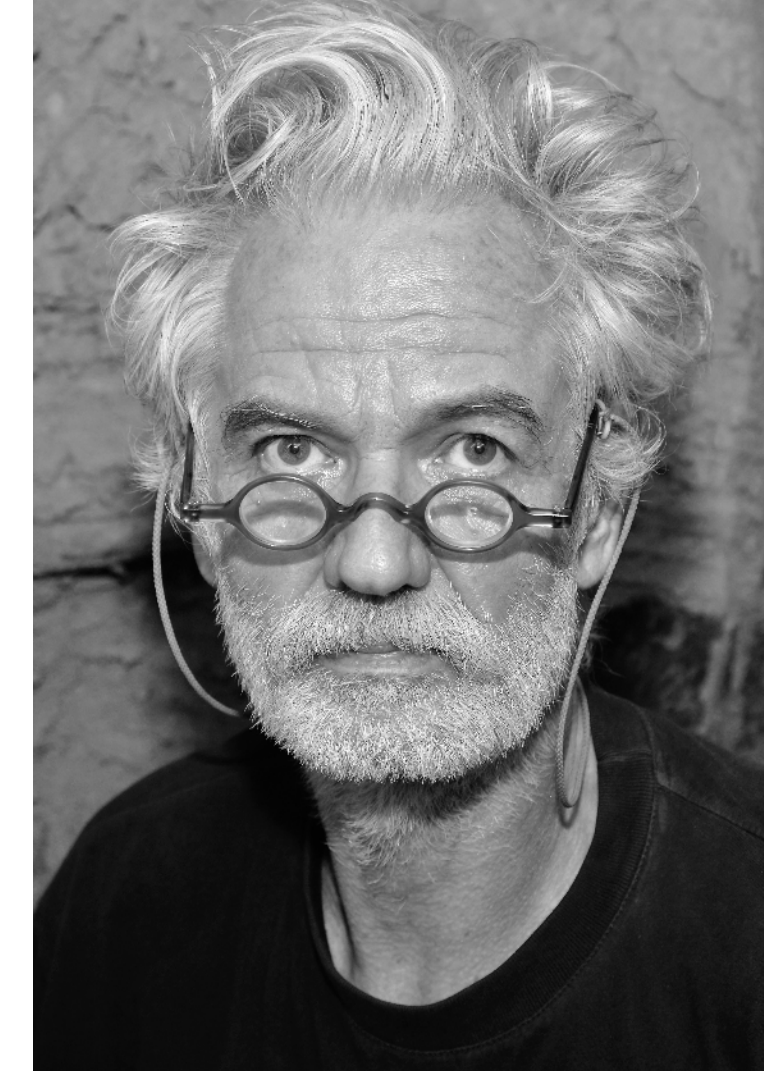


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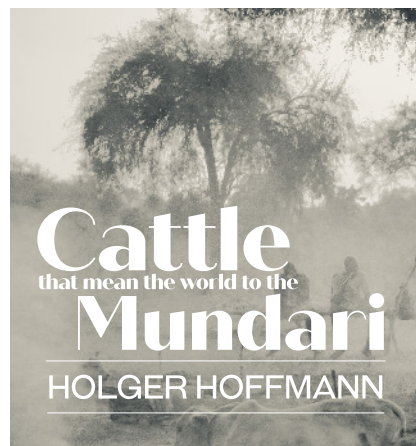
For over four decades, Sylvia Furrer, a Swiss lawyer/economist, and Holger Hoffmann, a psychiatrist, have embarked on an inspiring journey of exploration, traversing more than 60 countries outside of Europe on over 75 exhilarating trips. Their remarkable travels led them to establish Chaos Tours in 1995, with Sylvia as the director and Holger as the guide. Despite being the sole patrons of their venture, they find great satisfaction in the spontaneous and self-organizing nature of their travels, which keeps them receptive to the unexpected.

As their journeys unfolded, Sylvia and Holger became increasingly captivated by Indigenous peoples' cultures and daily lives, particularly those who tenaciously uphold their traditional ways amidst challenging living conditions in remote regions. From the unforgiving cold of Siberia to the scorching deserts of the Danakil, the lush jungles of West Papua, and the lofty peaks of the Himalayas, they developed a profound admiration for the resilience of these communities in the face of climate change and the encroachment of modernity.

Driven by their deepening fascination, the duo turned their attention to nomadic peoples, recognizing their remarkable ability to adapt to the evolving world. In 2012, inspired to share their awe-inspiring experiences with a wider audience, Sylvia and Holger commenced publishing their travel reports, seeking to enrich the experiences of fellow travelers with their unique perspectives and insights.



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