

Anywaa King (Nyie) and His Daughters

Angelo Welo

History of Migration:

Angelo Wello Agwa is an ordained Pastor serving the Lord with South Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church. He holds Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership from Africa International University – Nairobi Kenya, a Bachelor of Arts in Theology from Nile Theological College – Khartoum Sudan and Postgraduate Diploma in Humanitarian Studies and Conflict Resolution from University of Juba. He is currently pursuing Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies with ST. PAUL UNIVERSITY in Kenya.

The Anyuak or Anywaa, as they call themselves, are Nilotic ethnic group of the Luo-speaking people which include the Luo of Bar el-Ghazal in South Sudan and the Luo of Kenya. There are also Luo groups in both Uganda and Tanzania. The language the Anyuak people speak is known as dha Anywaa, which is part of Eastern Sudanic language family that includes many other Luo groups in South Sudan, including the Acholi, who are also found in Uganda and South Sudan, the Paari in Eastern Equatoria State in South Sudan, the Jur Chol in Bahr El Gazal region in South Sudan, the Juo Luo in Kenya and Tanzania, and the Collo or Shilluk in Upper Nile State in South Sudan.

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Moreover, the Anyuak people are said to have been living in a fertile Island between the Blue Nile and White Nile in the Sudan. The region is known today as Al-Jazeera, located south of present Khartoum. Although their migration southward remains unclear, it is believed that this migration took place in the 12th or the 13th century, before the Dinka could follow them to southern Sudan.

Many factors contributed to the migration of the Luo group throughout their history, including continuous search for greener pastures for their animals. In addition, there were societal and cultural factors that, in many cases, prompted groups to break-away from the main group, including rebellions by sons seeking to gain greater independent from their fathers. Frequent disputes and disagreements among brothers also contributed to numerous migrations. Sadly, the situation seems to have remained unchanged today even after hundreds of years. Natural disasters such as frequent drought also hit the Luo

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people hard, forcing the people to migrate at various times in their history.

By the 14th century, according to oral tradition, the Luo people were the inhabitants of Rumbek in South Sudan. By the 15th century, the Luo continued their movement and migration Southward, however, this time they moved more rapidly than they did in the previous decades, with a section of the clan wandering further north from Rumbek. Again, more defections took place as the group marched northward. One group settled west of Wau in southern Sudan, whereas another disconnected itself from the main body and migrated north, eventually settling in the east. This group was led to the Sobat River by Gilo, the founder of the Anyuak nation. He settled with his people in the areas around the valleys of Baro, Akobo, and Pibor rivers. In the 17TH century, after eight or ten generations, another group moved south from Anyuak land to Lafon Hill in Eastern Equatoria. They called themselves Paari. A second clan, known as Pajook, moved further south into Acholi territory in northern Uganda. In the meantime, the original party, composed of few families, marched northward to Wipac in the environs of Lake No, with two brothers; namely Nyikango and Dimo, leading the group. Again, due to a disagreement between the two brothers, Dimo and his followers left the group and moved first southward and westward before finally settling in the district of Wau where their neighboring Dinka referred to them as Jur (alien in the Dinka language). This group was relatively small in size.

Nyikango, on the other hand, moved northward and veered east, and was able in the process to assimilate other non-Luo people in order to strengthen his small clan. Nykango and his people called themselves Collo. They settled along the White Nile and eventually dominated the White Nile until the middle of the 19th century.

Led by Gau, another group of Luo wandered northwestward from Lake No into the southern part of Kordofan, a dry region which they named Ker-Kwong. Because it was customary for each Luo group to absorb members of other ethnic groups during their numerous migrations, it was not unusual that Gau married Kwong, a non-Luo woman. Their son, Gaa, who became known as the "Chief of the Leopard Skin" became the most dominate leader of the people we know today as the Nath (Nuer). The Anywaa people are found in the areas of Akobo and Pochalla of South Sudan and in the Gambella region of western Ethiopia. The Anywaa land is a kingdom. The Anyuak king is known as Nyie. He provides leadership to the entire Anyuak people. He lives in a royal palace called Pan dong (the big house) in South Sudan.

The Anyuak King

The kingship in the Anyuak society is considered one of the oldest institutions that have some valuable traditions that reflect the true identity of the

Anyuak people.

It is a hereditary, patrilineal system. Most of the members of the royal family, usually princes (Nyipem), engage in deadly feuds over succession to the throne after the demise of the Nyie. However, a group of elders usually selects the crown prince who inherits the ancient bead ‘Ochuock’ and other royal symbols. Once a Nyipem is chosen, he is pronounced King of the whole Anyuak people. Although there are other chiefs and other kings who reign over their territories, they all have some moral obligations to pay respect and homage to the Nyie. All members of the Anyuak society are expected to respect him and to obey his edicts. The Anyuak King is surrounded by a group of advisors who provide counsel to him on matters relating to the running of the affairs of the kingdom.

Nyie sets himself apart from the rest of the Anyuak people in the way he behaves and conducts himself. He practices polygamy because he, like other Anyuak kings, strives to form a large and powerful royal household. In fact, there has never been an Anyuak king who had only one wife. Traditionally, the Anyuak king does not marry according to his wish, instead, his advisors travel the land in search of beautiful girls of about 16 or 19 years who are suitable to become the wives of the king. The advisors conduct their search mostly during social occasions such as the “bull Anywaa” (Anyuak traditional dance). When the team of advisors sights a beautiful girl, she is eloped immediately and taken to the royal palace after scaring off the girl’s relatives who dare to try to rescue their daughter. On arrival to the palace, the girl is put for some time under the watchful eyes of a minder. But if she manages to escape, she can return to her family. However, if the girl is unable to escape, she will remain in the palace and become the wife of the King against her will. This type of marriage is known as tieng in dha Anyuua. Traditionally, the king pays a larger dowry than any ordinary Anyuak man would.

Nyie and his daughters

The manner in which Nyie treats his daughters is both unique and difficult at the same time. For example, the king treats his daughters with high respect and, in most cases, he expects to receive a larger dowry when one of the princesses is married.

In all cases, the Nyie is the one who initiates the marriage processes of his daughters. It is his responsibility to give his daughters to wealthy grooms. Consequently, any attempt to establish an illicit love affair with any of the Nyie’s daughters has dire consequences, including the confiscation of one’s wealth or the abduction of at least three girls from one’s village. The result of such an act is so disastrous that it can affect up to ten marriage opportunities in the victim’s family, leaving members of

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It is possible that the demoi (an expensive special beads paid for marriage) to return back to the original owner in the process of marriages, since they are very rare. They are circulated and hence could even come back to the original owner in the course of several marriages.

The Anyuak dowry is so high that it could reach up to twelve (12) demoi (special beads) which an Anyuak groom must pay to the family of the bride as dowry. In addition to the demoi, Anyuak dowry includes several heads of cattle.

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The Nyie offers his daughters in marriage only to wealthy grooms and men of good standing in the community, and who are able to afford to pay six (6) demoi as a sign of high respect for the king's daughters.

Anyuak princesses are treated well in marriage, and are allowed to live with their mothers in the palace after marriage. Not only do married princesses live in the pan dong, but they also receive continuous important life-skills training and mentoring. The king's wives play a greater role in teaching their married daughters, who most of the time, prefer to live with the families of their maternal uncles instead of residing in the royal palace. Married Anyuak princesses prefer the great freedom which they enjoy while living in the house of a maternal uncle to life in the royal place, which they regard as a big prison with limited movement.

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P.O.BOX 619, Hai Jeberona next to Sunshine Hospital
Juba, South Sudan
Tel: +211 (0) 920 310 415 | +211 (0) 915 652 847
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