



# THE ORIGIN, MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT OF THE NAATH PEOPLE

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## INTRODUCTION

The term Nuer is interchangeably used with Naath as acknowledgment to the fact that these two words refer to the same people. The term Naath is an ancient concept that has been in existence as far as we could remember. The term was first mentioned by Cheikh Anta Diop in his book "Civilization or Barbarism: *An Authentic Anthropology*" refers to the use which gains popularity among the ancient people of Egypt. He noted that Nuer who were called Naath were part of the ancient Egyptian or Kemetic civilisation and that was used by the ancient Egyptians to refer to many black people that were living in Egypt. Under the name Nuer, there are many clans brought together by the term and called themselves Nuer. Most of them found themselves united either through blood or adoption into the tribe. The more you study Nuer, you will realize that through their mythologies and ceremonies, the Nuer origins are not the same and many of them have intermarriages with each other, adopted or through environmental association. This shows the distance of relationships that existed within the society.

The author would also want to make some clarification regarding these terms. Based on the researcher's analysis of the terms, the term 'Naath' could be associated with only two main families, namely Gaw Ran Gam Rolnyang and Gueh Gew Rolnyang with their progenies. These are the two families that could be referred to as 'Naath' in the distant past. The author could be mistaken; however, those who will read this research paper should understand that this conclusion arose from the study as well as an understanding about the origin of each sub-clan of the Naath people. It is worth noting that, the term 'Nuer' includes those clans that are currently part of the Naath people but are not related by blood and intermarriages have been the norm. The Gawar and Jakar clans are children of the "Sky-God". Both descended from the sky into the Jiath village of Leer County.

Reference to the genealogical instruction in the above diagram, the Jikany clan is divided into two, the Western and the Eastern Jikany. However, both Jikany communities have the same clans and sub-clans. Decades ago, when Latjor Duach decided to migrate, it was the young people who migrated, and in random fashion. Both Jikany from east and west of the Nile were adopted through marriage into the lineage of the Naath people a long time ago through their paternal grandfather, Kiir. It was the ancestor of the Jikany named Kiir who crossed the Nile and was received and hosted by Gaw Ran Gam Rolnyang, who then married wives for him. The children resulted in these marriages constituted the current Jikany clan that are inhabitants of South Sudan and Ethiopia.

The Lak and Leek clans (see the diagram above) are children of Keer Gaw Ran Gam Rolnyang. Keer got pregnant to a man who lived near a river as a result of the pregnancy she gave birth to the Lak and Leek clans. They were assimilated into the Gaw Ran Gam Rolnyang clan through their maternal lineage. Progenies of Keer grew and got married, their own children came and occupied the present-day Rubkona and Fangak areas. Her grandchildren became Naath by adoption and are now part of the Naath clans. Their mothers become Nuer and according to Nuer tradition, married girls do not belong with the Nuer but to their husbands' clan. These children should, therefore, not have been part of the Naath community but, instead, Baar/Luo or Reel, who are closer to the Anyuak/Shilluk and Atuot clans from among whom Keer's child's father is believed to have originated from unless the husband of a Nuer girl is adopted into the Nuer community, the children do not become Nuer. In Keer's case, however, she was not taken by her husband and decided to live with her father.

The Gaw Ran Gam and Gueh Gew Rolnyang clans (see the diagram above) are the two clans that largely account for the existence of the Naath or Nuer people of today. They journey from the northern part of Sudan to their current geographical location with the great migration and settled in Kuerkuong. These two clans are blood related refer to each other as cousins. The Gaw Ran group comprised of several children and now occupies the northern part of Unity State from Koch County to Mayom. Part of this composition crossed the Nile and settled in the present-day Upper Nile and Jonglei States. The children of Gueh Gew, on the other hand, settled in the southern part of Unity State from Leer County to Panyijiar County. The Gaw Ran Gam and Gueh Gew Rolnyang cousins can marry one another without any hindrance.

Elaborately, the Haak Clan are from the genealogy of Haak Bakol Kuoth (see the diagram above). This implies that they have no connection with the Naath people. They are also believed to have descended from sky God and are called children of the sky God just like that of Gawar and Jakar clans. In fact, Haak is comprised of only three main clans: the Kuey, Baek, and Jaloh. Interestingly, members of these clans can marry one another, which indicates that the three groups are not related by blood. They may have been united by the agreement that binds them together. Their totems indicate different beliefs and practices.

The author would want to be thoughtfully clear that such hypotheses may be wrong but given their origin and the fact that those clans marry from one another indicates that they are of disparate origins but are united either by the *Nguot* or by marriage. Furthermore, the author believed that when you read this article, you will realize that it was important that the researcher clarified these in order to avoid confusion and uncertainty. If most of the audience are knowledgeable about the Nuer ethnicity, then it lessens the burden it takes in order to clarify these issues for them to understand this piece. Given that this article is expected to have wider coverage, I must ensure that everyone is brought on board and their perceived doubts are cleared.



## THE ORIGIN AND MIGRATION



© THARJIATH LICH HOLY SHRINE IN KOCH COUNTY, UNITY STATE, SOUTH SUDAN.

During the research implementation phase in the Nuerland from 2014 to 2022 more precisely for the forthcoming book, “The Nuer Cosmology”, several elders interviewed formulated different theories regarding the Nuer origin, migration and settlement. One elder and traditional leader who is well known among his generation, when asked, informed that he has not pay attention on the origin and migration of the Nuer people. The author quote:

“My son, I may not know the birthplace of the Nuer. The generation of my father is Wangdel and he never told me anything about us. Now that you have asked, I will carry this forward and ask others. I am from the generation of Bilnyang. I was the chief who used to rule with Riek Dong from Dok, Malual Wuon from Nyuong, Riek Gatkuoth from Jikany, Munytuel Wechjang from Bul, Gatdet Kuach, Makuei Bilkuei from Ruweng. During our time, President Nimery used to meet us because we were important leaders in our society. I heard that Khartoum was our land, and we were chased away from there. The reasons behind the displacement may not be known to me.”<sup>1</sup>

Despite such an honest statement, other elders also had their own narratives of the origin. These theories mentioned different concepts held by different generations. Elders above 60 years have different concepts regarding the origin and migration and their knowledge was orally gained and transferred to them by their forefathers in form of stories. I will discuss these theories separately and bring their argument to focus.

The first theory of Nuer origin states that *Tharjiath Lich* was the place of creation. It’s the location where all the Nuer people were created. One of my informants mentioned that:

“I was informed by elders that Nuer came from Tharjiath Lich and that all Nuer are from Lich, and we are children of Lich. The mother Lich produced us just like the way you see termites coming out of the holes during rainy days. This is how we were created. This Lich tree is near Gor (place in Jagei County in Unity State). Anyone passing this area will have to tie a robe or leaves of trees to the trunk of the tree. One of the surrounding trees is the palm tree which is symbolizing happiness that the place was an area where people were created”.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pech Chuol Kuoth, 80 years. Interviews on Nuer Migration at the Protection of Civilians (POC), 2016 Bentiu Unity State, South Sudan.

<sup>2</sup> Diang Machar Jaguar, 68 years. Interviews on Nuer Migration at the Protection of Civilians (POC), 2016 Bentiu Unity State, South Sudan.

This theory is common among the older generation of the Nuer ethnic group who entirely depend on oral stories passed down from one generation to another. What they said during the interview indicates that *Tharjiath Lich* is the centre and origin of creation. Furthermore, the author was also informed by the two elders who mentioned “Lich is the home... the fact is that Nuer and Dinka were one family, and Nuer were referred to as Gaatnyatuoy Deng while Dinka were referred to as Gaatnyaruop Deng. This shows that they were children of God because according to Nuer, Deng is the name of God. Tharjiath Lich was the place where people were created and divided, and Nuer referred to Lich as Lich Chuor. Chuor is the oxen name of Lich and Nuer are known for giving children their oxen names”.<sup>3</sup> Another informant believed that Tharjiath Lich has the marking of the birth rites by stating that “When you visit Tharjiath Lich, you will see the knees of the mother Lich stuck on the ground for generations. This tells you that the first ancestor was born in Lich”.<sup>4</sup>

The Nuer believed that Tharjiath Lich held their birth rites. The eastern Nuer refers to the western Nuer land as the place of “**Tuok Chak Naath**”. The trees have become a spiritual centre for the Nuer people, and when you are passing near the tree, you have to honour it by tying a leave of a palm tree or a rope made from a palm tree. *The spiritual tree is equally known as Koat Lich or tamarind tree. The place was full of many palm trees and tamarind trees. Some of these trees have aged and collapsed. This was where the ancestors of Naath, Ran Gam Rolnyang and his wife Nyawel Beeh, settled and started their family. This is where their descendants were born. Lich is the shoot of the palm trees that grew up there. It was believed that when Nyawel Beeh gave birth, she had nothing to eat, and her husband uprooted the shoots of the palm trees and gave it to her. The tree has great significance to the Naath and Tharjiath Lich in Jagei County is the most sacred place in Unity State. It was here that Nyawel Beeh knelt and went into labour as she gave birth to her children. Interestingly, the Naath still believe that the spot where she knelt could be seen.*

The family of Ran Gam Rolnyany came from Kuerkuong “... which is characteristically arid and without water and vegetation, is place is considered to be barren because animals cannot get good grass. It is therefore not productive, and hence people were forced to move to the swamps where they could cultivate crops and graze their cattle”<sup>5</sup>. The term Kuerkuong is a Nuer word that means (the high ground of Kuong). Kuong was believed to be the migration leader who brought the Nuer from the north of Sudan to settle in the Upper Nile Valley. The description of Kuerkuong shows that “the soil of the land was heavy clay, broken by the sun into deep cracks during the dry season, and there was limited rain...it held water and allowed green vegetation to grow tall during the dry season, providing grass for the cattle...”<sup>6</sup> The Kuerkuong stretches from Lake No in the North of the Unity State, Mayom in the west, Panyijiar in the south, and Leer in the southeast<sup>7</sup>. At Kuerkuong, Nuer Nguot, laws were made. This was the first of its kind when Nuer gathered around over hundred years ago and agreed on the Nguot that will govern them. The laws were shared orally and memorized by the arbiters and members of the community.

3 Geng Maker Nyuot, 68 years. Interviews on Nuer Migration at the Protection of Civilians (POC), 2016 Bentiu Unity State, South Sudan.

4 Ding Ding Kuol, 83 years. Interviews on Nuer Migration at the Protection of Civilians (POC), 2016 Bentiu Unity State, South Sudan.

5 Liah, K. J. (2019). *The Progenies of the Babylonian Empire: The Origin, Migration and Settlement of the Black African* (1st ed., p. 300). Africa World Books Pty Ltd.

6 Liah, K. J. (2019). *The Progenies of the Babylonian Empire: The Origin, Migration and Settlement of the Black African* (1st ed., p. 300). Africa World Books Pty Ltd.

7 Liah, K. J. (2019). *The Progenies of the Babylonian Empire: The Origin, Migration and Settlement of the Black African* (1st ed., p. 300). Africa World Books Pty Ltd.





© THARJIATH LICH SHOWING A VISITOR WHO TIED ROPES AND LEAVES ON THE TREE AS AN HONOUR TO GOD.

At the Lich tree, there is a spiritual dimension and Nuer believed that the God Marpiny dwells there. They also believed that during the migration, the God Deng gave powers to Marpiny to guard the place. When you see travelers at Tharjiath Lich tying palm leaves, they only honor the God Marpiny who is guarding the sanctuary. The place is a sanctuary because when Nilotic came from the north, the place gave them rest and peace. Ruai Biel Top who is an elder aged 65 years at the time and who is knowledgeable about the interpretation of most of the songs of the God-Maani who possessed Kulang Ket in Jagei Nuer had this to say about Marpiny presence in Tharjiath Lich:

It was first known that the spirit of Marpiny lived in the tree when a man named Dar Gual Yien provoked the spirit. He was the descendant of the first man and woman who settled under that tree. Once, he put firewood around the tree and set fire to it. Due to the spirit in the tree, it could not catch fire. He did this to provoke Marpiny, knowing there was a spirit in the tree. He repeatedly set the tree on fire on different occasions until one time, the tree caught fire. After Marpiny became tired of his stubbornness, he sent an elephant to chase Dar Gual. The elephant ran after him for a long distance without stopping until it eventually stopped. Dar Gual was also tired and yelled to the elephant, "You claim to be a spirit; why don't you move away from the tree? Instead of sending an elephant, why don't you come by yourself?"<sup>[1]</sup>

The elders mentioned that the spirit was left there at the time Deng brought people from the north Sudan and instructed Marpiny to guard the place. This could explain why the tree had special powers and people passing by had to pay respects to the tree. Marpiny was later realized to mean the messenger of Deng who directed the migration of the Naath people from Bab-diiit [Red Sea], Egypt, Sudan to Upper Nile. He has been standing side by side with the Nilotic group throughout their journey.



© BURIAL MOUND FOR THE PROPHET KULANG KET. HE WAS BURIED IN 1927 IN NAAK VILLAGE IN LEER COUNTY ABOUT 95 YEARS AGO. HIS BURIAL GROUND COULD BE SEEN ON THE SIDE TOWARD ADOK PORT.

The second theory believed that Nuer came from the North. The North refers to countries along the Nile or even beyond. The Nuer think that they came from Sudan and Egypt or even beyond. An elder of 80 years mentioned that he was informed by elders that Nuer came from Egypt and settled in Mer. According to Nuer Mer refers to Merowe. Nuer lived in Mer before they were pushed out by the enemies until they had to follow the Nile corridors until they settled in Kuerchieng Tang which is another name for Kuerkuong in Unity State. He further mentioned that:

“When we came from Egypt, we reached Khartoum and settled in Gul near Tutti Island. Foreign forces such as the Arabs and their allies came with better weapons and fought us. They managed to push us away from that place. We came following the Nile by foot. We had no cars or aeroplanes. We only had our animals until we reached Upper Nile and settled in Kuerkuong in current Bentiu. All the clans of the Nuer dispersed to occupy the current locations”.<sup>8</sup>

The island called Tutti was a Nuer settlement. The interviewee confirmed that when he used to work as a brick maker in Tutti Island, whenever, they dug the soil for making bricks, they found broken pots and the Arab businessman told them that this used to be the land of Nuer. This happened in 1961. He further mentioned that he thinks Tutti Island was named after someone called Tut and he must have come from Egypt. That place could be the same area mentioned to have been ruled by King Tut of Egypt.<sup>9</sup> The understanding is that Nuer came through Egypt and followed the Nile to Sudan (Meroe) and then to Khartoum. Some Nuer lived in the place we called today Omdurman while others settled in Tutti. The name Tutti is believed to belong to a Nuer man. After that, some Nuer went to Darfur and Central Africa. While others Nuer came to Bentiu.<sup>10</sup> Such understanding is what many believed to be another part of the migration of the Nuer people as they moved to settle in the Upper Nile Basin. Khartoum in the North Sudan, which is also known as Kadro area, where former relocated University of Juba is believed to hold some evidence of the Nuer settlement. Excavations conducted show that ornaments, cows, and goats remain were found that signified Nuer presence at one time in history. Though the common legendary history of the Nuer is that all the Nuer people were born in Lich Tree in Jagei land.<sup>11</sup>

8 Gatwech Gatphan Mut, 80 years. Interviews on Nuer Migration in Kawangware, 2016 Nairobi Kenya

9 Reek Mathoan, 83 years. Interviews on Nuer Migration at the Protection of Civilians (POC), 2016 Bentiu Unity State, South Sudan.

10 Simon Koak Bol, 60 years. Interviews on Nuer Migration in Juba, 2016, South Sudan

11 Mabor Nyak, 72 years. Interviews on Nuer Migration at the Protection of Civilians (POC), 2016, Juba South Sudan.



The third theory mentioned that some groups of the Nuer came from eastern Africa. This was belief by some elders. “We were from Kenya, the birthplace. Dinka people seem to be moving with us and what confused me is whether we dispersed from Tharjiath Lich or somewhere else. We all know that Dinka was one of the brothers of Nuer and what made them have their own lineage started with the story of a cow the Dinka stolen from his brother Nuer. This story of a cow was told to me by my father when he was a young man”.<sup>12</sup> The majority believed Kuerkuong was the place many Nilotic dispersed to find a suitable environment to live.

The migration of the Nilotic out of Kuerkuong took two routes. The first route was through the western part of Kuerkuong through the current area of Mayom County inhabited by the Bul-Nuer. This route was taken by many Luo groups who went and camped in the geographical location that is currently called Western Bhar el Ghazel and established the town of Wau.



©NUER ELDER, NYAL TOWN, PANYIJAR COUNTY, UNITY STATE.

The second group moved south of Kuerkuong, and these were mostly the Jieng who came and settled in areas around Mayiendit, Madol, Ador, etc. and later pushed southwards and established Yirol. They were following the Nile and later on moved west up to Bhar el Ghazel and Warrap. The two groups later crossed the Nile and established their presence in the eastern part of the Nile. This led to the settlement of the Sobat Corridor all the way to Lake Turkana in Kenya and the Omo River in Ethiopia. This was the first major dispersal among the Nilotics in their history. During this period, all the Nilotics practiced agriculture, animal husbandry and fishing. They had cattle, sheep and goats, and grew sorghum, bulrush and millet. Bethwell Ogot explains that “[i]t is generally accepted, on the basis of linguistic and historical evidence, that by 1300 Common Era (CE), the Luo had formed their first centralised kingdom. The Luo tradition concerning the foundation of their earliest politics indicates that some of them had lived in chiefdoms in southern Sudan where they interact with the Moru-Madi and the Eastern Nilotes group, before they migrated south to Uganda and Western Kenya”.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Stephen Mani Puok, 72 years. Interviews on Nuer Migration at the Protection of Civilians (POC), 2016, Bentiu Unity State South Sudan

<sup>13</sup> Ogot, B. A. (2009). *A history of the Luo Speaking Peoples of eastern Africa*. Anyange Press, Kenya.



The Gueh Gew Rolnyang clan of the Nuer section followed the Luo group to Wau and later branched through Lakes State and crossed the River Nile with his children. They followed the Chollo (Shilluk) and Anyuak who took the same direction until they returned to Tharjiath Lich in a place called today Dok in Unity State. This is the assumption communicated by elders as a migration from Kenya.

The Western Nilotes remained in Upper Nile after the rest of Nilotic had proceeded to East Africa. The Naath, Jieng, Shilluk and Anuak tribes made Upper Nile their home and the Naath named it Chieng Naath. The Kuerkuong inhabited by the Nuer in Upper Nile is swampy and these settlements are situated along both sides of the White Nile south of its junction with Bhar el Ghazal, which extends southwards to the Sobat River. The Sobat River is a major tributary of the Nile that is supplied by the two other major headstreams, namely the Baro and the Pibor rivers. All these rivers supply the Nile with fresh water coming from the mountains on the Ethiopian border. The descendants of the Nilotics spread to vast areas of the Upper Nile Basin which was flat and swampy with heavy-clay-soil plains stretching out broadly for hundreds of miles on both sides of the Bhar el Jebel from Mangalla in the south to the end of the Upper Nile region in the north, between the Nuba Mountains in the west and the Ethiopian highland regions in the east. At the current borders of Sudan and South Sudan, the exact location of Kuerkuong where the Nilotic people camped could be around that area – probably around Rubkona County and Lake No, which history points out as the place where the descendants of the Naath took different directions to settle in the vast land of the Upper Nile extending to Bhar el Ghazel region. Lake No is situated in the current Unity State of South Sudan that constitutes a boundary between the Dinka of Parieng and the Shilluk of the Upper Nile. It is situated along the Nile.



©NUER HOMESTEAD WITH LUAK. NYAL VILLAGE, PANYIJAR COUNTY UNITY STATE.

## MIGRATION OUT OF KUERKUONG

Kuerkuong is a term derived from the Naath language which translates as 'high ground of Kuong'. Kuong was the name of the leader of the migration that brought the Nilotics (including the Naath) from the Kush Kingdom to the Upper Nile Basin and established their campsite in what became the Kuerkuong. It was what the Western Nilotes considered to be their cradle land. This area was divided by many rivers with some, such as the River Nile, Pibor/Lou River and some small tributaries surrounding the land. In fact, Kuerkuong was what is called today Unity State or previously known as Western Upper Nile. It is the area mapped from Parieng in the north, Panyijiar in the south, Mayom in the west and Leer in the east. This was what the early Nilotics considered to be Kuerkuong where they immediately settled before they could move down the south and cross the Nile to the east.

C.G. Seligman in his book *Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan, 1933* describes Kuerkuong as the 'barren ground of Kuong'. The Nilotic people who after thousands of years could be classified as indigenous to the Nile Valley camped in this place. This was the place where the Nilotic people settled and rested before they could disperse into the Nile Valley. Kuerkuong is believed to have accommodated the Nilotic people for decades before they could move further. This is indicated by the names of the different Nilotic groups that stayed in Kuerkuong and the names of places established in the course of their movement. There are names in the northern part of Unity State, especially in the current locations occupied by the Leek and Bul clans of the Nuer that were previously occupied by the Luo group, and also areas in southern Unity States inhabited by the Haak and Nyuon clans previously occupied by the children of Jieng.

## GAWAR AND JAKAR GROUP

The mythology narrates that Gawar and Jakar are the children of the sky God. Both were believed to have descended from the sky in Jiath village of Leer County in an unspecified period. This period could be recorded to correspond with the time when the Nilotic group descended on the Nile Valley after they were displaced in the Kush Kingdom in North Sudan. They were told to have descended on a robe that connects the sky with the earth. This robe was later cut by a powerful bird and prevented both brothers from shuttling between sky and earth. Haak who came a different clan found Jakar and annexed him into his clan while Gawar refused that incorporation and established his presence alone in specific areas of Leer and Koch Counties in Unity State. Henceforth, these two clans Gawar and Jakar have no blood relations with the Nuer people and intermarriages have been the norm. Their ancestral land is the current Leer and Koch Counties until their migration across the Nile in the 1820s. The spiritual leader, Buok Kapel led their migration across the Nile to their current location of Ayod County. It has been emphasized that not all Gawar accepted the migration. A good number of them refused to go across the Nile and ended up being integrated and absorbed among the Nuer clans in Unity State. Few people of the Gawar were registered with their in-laws or their maternal relatives while bigger sections such as Cier and Padang managed to stay in Koch and Rubkona Counties after they were asked to return to Kuerkuong from Ayod by Buok Kapel. With the population, the majority of the Gawar are the ones in Ayod County of Jonglei today. Almost all the counties of Nuer in Unity State have some elements of the Gawar annexed into those societies and are being referred to with the name of those people though their totemic symbols remain the same to distinguish them from others.

## HAAK BAKOL KUOTH GROUP

The Haak group are referred as children of “Bakol Kuoth,” and Bakol is also the son of the sky-God just like the Gawar and Jakar. This implies that they have no blood relation with the Naath people. They could be referred as Nuer but not as Naath. There are theories attached to their convergence into the current Mayiendit County. Haak consists of three main clans mainly Kuey who are the owners of the land known as Mayiendit. Stories told indicates that the place used to be owned by a Dinka and the name Mayiendit came because of that. How authentic is this story remain a question to be explored? Before moving to Mayiendit, Kuey were believed to be the inhabitants of Bomdhor in Leer town and their great grandfather gave the land to the Gueh Gew who is the father of Dok that the land is named after. There are more narratives regarding this exchange of the places. Baek and Jaloh are another group that composed of Bakol group who dwells in the current northern part of Mayiendit and their main place is stretching from Mirnyal, Daplual to the borders of Koch and Leer County. How they came to settle in that place during the early time is not very clear. It is summed that the children of Jaloh and Baek could have come with the rest of the Nilotic communities and settled in their locations.

The three children of Bakol Kuoth converged and agreed that they should be treated as one group and decided to conduct their ceremonies as one group. That becomes a combining power to keep them together. When you examine their totemic powers and how they treat each other, you will realize that they have no blood relation between themselves, and they do intermarry among each other. Among the Haak Bakol, there are other ethnic compositions that were incorporated such as the Baar, Dinka, and others into their communities.

## GAW RAN GAM (GEAH GROUP) AND GUEH GEW (GUEH GROUP)

They are the ones that came through a journey from the north of Sudan to the current geographical location being inhabited by the Naath people. They are related by blood, and they called each other cousins. The group of Gaw Ran had several children which are occupying the northern part of Unity State starting from Koch County to Mayom while the children of Gueh Gew occupied the southern part of Unity State starting from Leer County to Panyijiar County.

## THE DESCENDANTS OF GAW RAN GAM ROLNYANY GROUP

Gaw Ran is the ancestor of the children who occupy areas around Tharjiath Lich and those who migrated across the Nile. He married Tartet Bhang who dwells in the village of Bhang between Gol and Koch town. Sometimes, but not so often, a village is named after the oldest and wisest person who is most respected by the people. Most of his children migrated away from Tharjiath Lich and some of them crossed the River Nile to the eastern part of the Nile. The reason for crossing was overcrowding which led to quarrels and fights between the brothers. Most of the Nuer who crossed to the eastern part of the Nile aimed to expand their territory and find a better place to settle. Below are the children of Gaw Ran, from the first-born to the last-born, and all of them were born in Tharjiath Lich.

**Thiang Gaw:** He was the first-born of Gaw Ran and Tartet Bhang. He migrated from Tharjiath Lich to Fangak in 1830s and established his homestead at the current Fangak area bordering the Shilluk and Dinka. He followed his sister Lak Gaw who got married and crossed to Fangak. He got married and had children and managed to push the Shilluk and Dinka away. He does not have a land named after his children because he was accommodated by his sister Lak Gaw. The other stories indicated that Thiang Gaw being an elder son of Gaw Ran participated in the fight between his sister



Lak and brother Dinay (Lou). Lak went to Thiang and begged for support to fight Dinay. Thiang accepted because he was the elder son to Gaw and he pledged his allegiance to Lak. When they went to war, he and Lak managed to kill many people from Dinay. As evidence to that, there is a place today known as Kuoony Lou where many people from Dinay were buried after the fight. Kuok Giel, who was the Dinay elder during the migration period, cursed Thiang by stating: "Thiang! You are the elder brother of both of us. You shouldn't have taken sides in this fight. Now you did and we have been killed in big numbers. From today, we will leave this land. And remember that this girl that you have supported to fight us, will always be named after this land. No land will be named after your children." After uttering such words, he left and established himself in the land of Lol.

**Dit and Dinay Gaw:** The two were twins who followed Thiang to secure their birthright. The descendants of both children are currently heading one of the biggest clans named after their bulls. Dit Gaw was the founder of the Rengyian clan, named after "tut mi reangyian", the bull with fawn markings. Dit did not migrate out of Tharjiath Lich when the rest of his brothers migrated. He remained there and still maintains Tharjiath Lich as his home base.

Dinay – sometimes written as Jinai – also known as Lou Gaw, named after his *tut mi lou*, the bull with mouse-coloured marking. Had children and migrated across the White Nile and settled in the land known as 'Muon Lol', named after an animal that was there. The animal was later hunted in an organised feud that led to its death. The animal blessed the man who killed it and handed the land over to him. He had children, namely Yien, Bany, Nyang, Nyabiel, Paduay, Kueywichyang or Kuey Duol, and Lew.

Lew Dinay did not migrate with his father and the rest of his brothers. He chose to remain with his uncle from Gawar who stayed in Guol near Koch County today. During the migration, Dinay first settled in the current location of Lak Nuer, also known as Fangak, and went to war with the Lak people. Lak is Gaw's daughter who first moved across the river and established herself with her children there.

A boy named Beay Chuol was among them and he sat near the elders whenever the elders discussed important issues pertaining to the migration. When it was time for Dinay's children to move on, the council of elders appointed and blessed Beay Chuol to lead the Dinay's migration to seek greener pastures and a place to live. It was orally stated that "Kuok Giel called Beay Chuol who was about 20 years old then and Kuok Giel removed a bead from around his neck (*duong*) and put it on Beay Chuol's neck and asked him to be strong and take the clan to a better place."<sup>14</sup>

Kuok Giel died while he was in Fangak. Beay Chuol took the people from Akobo to Bongjak. They spent many years in Bongjak and encountered diseases that could have included rinderpest and other tropical diseases. The health of the people was deteriorating and animals continued to die until Beay Chuol decided to return his people to the current Lou land. The first place that was established after their return was Bilkey while the Anuak were living in Akobo across the river. Bilkey was constantly attacked by the Anuak and some elders, including Badit Balieu and Kuoth Both, were sent to look for a better place to migrate to and it was agreed that the place should be on high ground and have water. When they found the midland of the current Lou County, Beay Chuol refused to go but he was forced to leave because it was a demand of the people. Beay Chuol told his people that he should be carried with his head facing Akobo because it has a water source that never dried. His fear was that the pool water would dry up in the future. In the midland of Lou, Panger Nger and Tang Nyang were first established before people could move to other locations within the area.

**Bol Gaw:** Followed the twins and he was the founder of the Bul clan. When he became a man, he moved his family to the western part of the Tharjiath Lich which is the current Mayom County. He pushed the Baar away from that land and assimilated many of them into his clan. The Baar were the inhabitants that lived in most parts of that area and, even today, there are descendants of Baar who were completely assimilated. For example, Chieng Cham Bel and Chieng Baak are all called "Baar-Nyitong". Nyitong was their great-grandfather and they lived in Noriak in Mayom and they

<sup>14</sup> Samuel Gai Lam, 40 years. Interviews on the Nuer Migration at Kakuma Refugee Camp, 2018 Turkana Kakuma District, Kenya.

have been completely assimilated. It is further explained that “In Nuer land, there are so many Baar/Anyuak who established their presence in the area. The Nuer refers to them as fishermen because they spend most of their time along the river, fishing. Noriak village in Mayom is their place. Most of them have been assimilated as part of Bul Nuer and their main clans include Chieng Chambel Yod and Chieng Baak. Now they are called Baar Nyitong. Nyitong was their great grandfather”.<sup>15</sup> Bol Gaw sired two children, namely Lek and Rem Bol. Rem sired Gak and Bapor Rem, while Lek sired Lou, Bul and Yol Lek. This is the reason why people say there are four descendants of Bol. Bul Lek has the current Bul section of Kuach. Bul is not their grandfather’s name but the name of their brother. The name Kuach came from a cow which had the colour of black and white.

**Keer Gaw:** is the younger sister of Bol and she was the founder of the clans of Leek and Lak, who are currently occupants of Rubkona and Fangak County. Some of her children crossed to Lak with their brother Thiang Gaw and settled. Keer Gaw met Reel at the riverbed while collecting water for their calves had an affair and got pregnant. She was beaten so as to reveal who had impregnated her and she confessed Reel is responsible. Reel was hiding among the papyrus along the river. When he was caught, he was fined and paid three cows to her brothers. Keer gave birth to Jueny Reel who later gave birth to Lak Jueny Reel. This clan named their daughters Nyayow, Nyatier and Nyaleek and their totemic symbol is the monitor lizard. The children of Leek were Chuak and Deng Reel and those children married and had many children, leading to the formation of the biggest clans in Rubkona. As of now huge section of the Padang section of Gawar also share the same county with the children of Keer Gaw. This section of Gawar returned from Ayod after Buok Kapel and settled along the river where the Jikany were living then and later left for Leek land.

**Geah Gaw:** He was the last-born of Gaw Ran Gam. He became famous in recent times and people thought that he fathered the rest of the children yet, in fact, he was the last-born of the family. He gained respect at the time of Kulang Ket where he incorporated Geah in his songs that referred to all the children of Gaw Ran Gam as “Geah in diit’, or the big Geah. This statement was later misunderstood by the generations as referring to all the children of Gaw Ran Gam as the children of Geah. Geah did not migrate anywhere. He was left in Tharjiath Lich and still living there until today. One of the clans that lives there are his children.

## THE DESCENDANTS OF GUEH GEW ROLNYANG GROUP

Gueh Gew had two wives. The first one was Khor Bol, who gave birth to Nyuong, Roal and Nyangeer, and the second wife was Nyueer, who gave birth to Dok and Kuach. Gueh Gew had five children, namely Nyuong, Kuach, Roal, Dok and Nyangeer. During early migration from Kuerkuong, the family of Gueh Gew followed the Luo and other Nilotic community until Wau in Bhar el Ghazel. Gueh Gew realised that the environment was not conducive for his children and turned through Rumbek and crossed the Nile. He camped in what was later known as Duk Padiet in Ayod. He stayed there for some time and built his *gew* – temporary shelter – there and stayed there until he returned to Kuerkuong and settled in what became Tharchieng.

Prior to this, before crossing the Nile, they had established their presence in Koireang. Gueh sent his children across the Nile using boats made of reeds. This expedition team landed on the bank of the Nile in a place called Magiir, proceeded to a place called Lel and settled there for some time. The team returned and called their father and later moved to Nyagiy in Kuyi. All of these locations were found in the current territory of Dokland. In fact, they followed the migration routes taken by the Shilluk and Anuak, who branched away from their main Luo group as stated below:

It was Nyikang (the Shilluk king) and his brother Dimo (Anuak king) who came and settled in the current Shilluk location of Wau Shilluk. Nyikang is a brother to Gilo and their sister Achol, which has given birth to Acholi people. Dimo had a stepbrother, which has given birth to

<sup>15</sup> Gatwech Gatphan Mut, 80 years. Interviews on Nuer Migration in Kawangware. 2016 Nairobi Kenya

Jurchol and Pari, who are the Lokoro people. The original home of Shilluk was Wau in Bhar el Ghazel. After they migrated, they established Wau village in Ayod County of Jonglei State. This place was named to remember their original home in Bhar el Ghazel. The trails of migration were Wau, Rumbek, Yirol, Wau in Ayod, Leer and Wau Shilluk. In Leer, the Shilluk built a shrine there in a place called Pan Fashoda which is a location that has maintained that name until today.<sup>16</sup>

Some of the members of the clans in Nuer still believe that Gueh Gaw was a member of the Luo community, and this was attributed to the fact of migration. Gueh and his family followed the trails left by Nyikang and his brother Dimo when searching for a better place to live. Below are the children who followed Gueh's migration routes after he established himself in Tharchaing Dok.

## NYUONG GUEH GEW

Nyuong decided to move after realizing that there were no enough grazing fields. His new territory ran from Gakal to Dor, where they pushed the Jieng away. When he was expanding his territory, he was living in Naak, Liap, Thor and Lielluachni. His descendants, such as Baliu Wieu, initiated the migration. He was possessed by the spirit and became *guankuoth*. He was using Kol-Thoan slung on his shoulders. He was a war leader and *Kuarmuon* at the same time. He pushed the Jieng out of Wayni and Tuoluong until he reached the current Nyuong land. He sent Buor Both Wieu to conquer Ador. He blessed Both Wieu by spitting on his spears and his mouth, killed a black cow and sent him out to conquer.

The grandchildren of Nyuong were six, namely Liath, Lek, Muok, Tiel, Thak and Luach. Girls are not mentioned because the bloodline is always kept by the male child. All of these boys had their own powers. Lek was given the power of the spear and to protect. The spear is used in fighting and during sacrifices. Thak was given the power of *Kuarmuon* who settled social issues. Liath was the one who distributes all the powers. He accorded to himself the centipede as his totem. Tiel was given the power of the pestle and could, when ordered, destroy the spinal cord of the enemy. He can also determine the outcome of a fight by bringing a bungle (*ciek*) and connect it at both ends. Then the bungle will be placed on the peg with both ends connected. Muok was also known as *Kuar Thoach*. Had the power to dis-organize people by changing their direction so that they get lost in the bush. He also used *thuoch* to determine the outcome of a conflict. He did this by removing the thuoch and throwing it away. If it turned its head towards home, the fighting would be postponed. During a fight, he could break a spear shaft and the aggressors would be defeated. Finally, Luach also had the power of bith, the fishing spear, and the power to prevent and win the fight. When people want to bring the fight home, he could prevent it by placing the spear in the luak while the stick faced the main entrance. Once he performs the ritual, the fight would not come home.

## KUACH AND ROAL GUEH GEW

When they had grown up, the two children never moved out of Tharchiang. After some time, they were sandwiched by their brother Dok and the land of their grandfather was later named after Dok. Their existence is only felt during the representation of their chiefs but, orally, it is only Dok that has owned the land by dint of his name. The mythology states that their sister Nyangeer cursed them after they killed the man who had impregnated her. This curse has seen the two brothers disappeared from the memory of the land. They exist in practice, but in theory, the land is named after their brother - Dok.

<sup>16</sup> Kuanyreath Anei Udhong, 70 years. Interviews on the Nilotic Migration at the Aburoc, 2017 Upper Nile State, South Sudan.



## DOK GUEH GEW

This boy grew to become the most powerful among all his brothers. This is because he was blessed during the inception period when he was still in his mother's womb. The territory known as Leer County is also known as Dokland, named after him. His mother was called Nyueer.

The myth states that there was a man named Muoth Diem who was living in Phomdhor, an area where the current Leer administration is situated. Muoth Diem was pleased with Gueh and his wife Nyueer because he was taught how to cook food with fire. The wife of Muoth Diem used to dry food using sun rays. When Gueh and his wife came to visit him, the food they ate was cooked with fire. Muoth Diem later asked Nyueer to teach his wives the new way of preparing food. When Gueh was about to leave, he called the couple. By then, Nyueer was pregnant. Muoth Diem asked Nyueer if what was in her stomach could be a pregnancy, which she confirmed. He placed his hands on her stomach and said: "This one will be a boy and you will name him Doah, 'light porridge'." This was the food which she prepared. He further stated that the boy would be named after this land. He called his boys and sent them on an expedition to scout for new land. The boys followed the birds, "Kuey" or fishing eagles that came from far away and settled in the land known today as Kuey or Mayiendit headquarters. When Nyueer gave birth to the boy, he was named Dok and they migrated to Phomdhor, and this is how the land was named after Dok.

## NYANGEER GUEH GEW

She was the only sister to all the boys. The myth states that she was impregnated by a Jieng man who was employed to look after the cattle of Gueh. When the pregnancy became apparent, he decided to escape and the brothers of Nyangeer realised that he had escaped and went looking for him. He was caught with a calf, club and bith in his hand. He was asked to pay cows, but he told them he had nothing. Nyuong took the calf and Roal and Kuach were said to have killed him. Before he died, he gave Dok the bith and told him to take care of the child of his sister. He said that maybe the child would grow up into a man and would live with the uncle. Nyangeer had children, including the clan of Chieng Luom.

## THE DESCENDANTS OF JIKANY

The great grandfather of Jikany is called Kiir. He was said to have died in Demthou near Kot, which used to be home to the Bul Nuer. His originally from the Anuak ethnic group. It all started when the daughter of the king of Anuak was impregnated and due to fear of her being killed by the father, she fled the house. When she gave birth, the girl and her mother placed the child in a calabash, covered it and placed it on the Nile. The current of the river carried away the child. A Jieng man named Kiir Agal, who had a wife called Tharwath, and their son called Jiing Kiir took the child. The child grew up in Kiir's family and was adopted as the son to both Kiir and Tharwath. It was later discovered that the child had extra powers. When he was breastfeeding with Jiing, he would order the breast of their mother sucked by Jiing to stop producing milk and all the milk would shift to the breast he was sucking. Tharwath would have to beg him to allow the other breast to have milk.

When they became young boys, whenever a boy insulted him, he would kill him with his eyes. He was possessed by the spirit called "Wiw" which became the cult of the clan. In the village of Kiir Agal, about seven boys died mysteriously. The community got angry with him and wanted to kill him. He ran away and crossed the Nile. He was later found by Rem Bol near the river where he was only eating fish and wild animals. He was carrying *bith*, *mut* and a club. He was approaching the age of initiation.

When Kiir saw the cattle, he came out of hiding and Rem Bol saw him and told him: "You look like a person." Kiir replied: "I am a person". Rem Bol then asked him: "Can you turn your face to me so that I can talk to you?" Kiir replied: "I have a spirit that kills instantly. If I turn and face you, you will die unless you can arrange to sacrifice a cow to the spirit."

After hearing this, Rem Bol sacrificed a black ox and Kiir immediately turned his face to him. They greeted each other and he narrated his story to Rem. They both roasted fish and meat for their lunch and went to Rem Bol's village in the evening. Dit Gaw took a calabash full of water and washed his face. After many years, he was given a wife named Nyakuony who gave birth to his first born, Mathiang Kiir. When Mathiang was crawling, the spirit killed his wife. After some time, Kiir was given Nyabora Kuey Muong from Haak country, who gave birth to Kun Kiir. However, when the child was about to be weaned, the woman also died. Kiir's in-laws were not happy and the family of Gaw Ran decided to chase Kiir away. He ran away and sought refuge in the home of Lek Bol. He stayed there and herded cattle and cleaned the compound as a contribution to the family. Lek Bol had a daughter called Duany Lek and she was given to him. Duany had powers and during the day, she was a cripple while at night she walked with her legs. She gave birth to Majok Kiir and, after some time, Duany killed Kiir with her powers. After Mathiang and Kun Kiir had grown up, they heard of the death of their father. They came to the family of Lek Bol to pay their respects to their dead father. After some time, Mathiang was asked by Lek Bol to take the wife of his father since he was the oldest child in the family. As a result, Nyang Kiir was born.

## THE ATUOT CLAN AND MIGRATION

The Atuot were formally a component of the Nuer nation who occupied an area called Kuok between Rubkuach of Mayiendit and Mirmir towns of Koch Counties, and later migrated southwards as a result of conflict with the Nuer group. The Atuot could have left Nuerland at the time which could proceed twelve generations and they could have migrated 400 years ago.<sup>17</sup> As they migrated, they took along their cattle to the Toic Islands and settled in River Payii. Along the way, they found their current country inhabited by the hunters, trappers, fishermen and ironworkers.<sup>18</sup> Evans-Pritchard described the Atuot as more similar to the Nuer though they lived within the territory controlled by the Dinka, and they just adopted more Dinka habits. When talking about cattle raiding, Evans-Pritchard stated that the Atuot were not seen as legitimate prey by the Nuer due to their origin that was connected to the Nuer.<sup>19</sup> Based on an interview with an elder, the reason for their migration was that their cattle got congested in *luak* and most of them died, and in the process, their great-grandfather cursed the *luak* construction and decided to camp his cattle in an open area. The mosquitoes and other insects that were killing their cattle prompted their migration out of Nuerland to their current presence.

It is very difficult to differentiate an Atuot if you are not a Nuer because the way they communicate does not need translation. As you could see, "the similarity of the Atuot dialect to the language spoken by the Nuer indicates a relatively short period of linguistic divergence and hence of Nuer-Atuot separation".<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Kelly, R. C. (1985). *The Nuer Conquest: The Structure and Development of an Expansionist System* (1st ed., p. 328). University of Michigan Press, USA.

<sup>18</sup> Kelly, R. C. (1985). *The Nuer Conquest: The Structure and Development of an Expansionist System* (1st ed., p. 328). University of Michigan Press, USA.

<sup>19</sup> Evans-Pritchard, E. (1940). *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People* (1st ed., p. 224). Oxford University Press, USA.

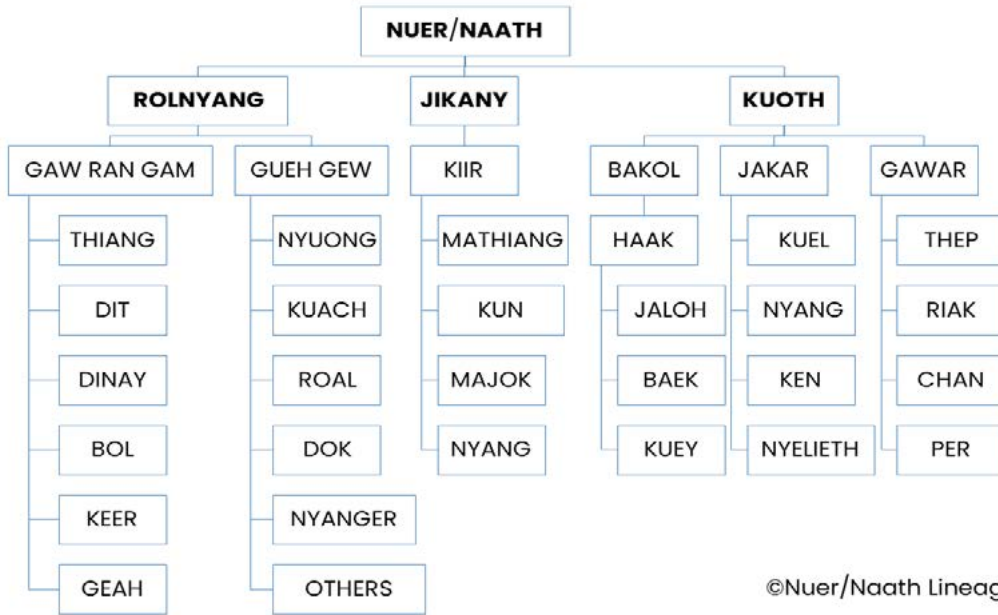
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# ANNEX 1.



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