

The Päre Kings and their Daughters

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Introduction

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Year after year, anthropologists collect and pile up ethnographic materials about various kingship systems throughout the world. To this day, the study is far from over. The topic is still relevant due to the fact that some cultures, especially African ones, have not been investigated adequately or have been insufficiently exposed by researchers. Earlier fieldworkers who made entry into Päre society of southeastern region of South Sudan failed to observe the relationship between Päre kings and their daughters. For example, Crazzolara, who conducted research among the Päre people in 1936, made no mention of this important subject. He simply listed some names of Päre kings (see Crazzolara (1951:154). Eisei Kurimoto who spent many years among the Päre people from 1980 to 1988, did not discuss about this particular aspect in his published articles. And although he briefly touched on the kingship system of Päre, Simon Simonse, who studied kingship systems among Lotuho, Lolubo and Lokoya (see Kings of Disaster; revised edition (2017:139-145), did not mention the behavior of Päre kings towards their daughters. This unique feature, worth of study, virtually remained unnoticed.

Päre Kings: Behavior towards Their Daughters

In the Päre society, as elsewhere in other societies, kings marry multiple wives. The children born to the king call themselves brothers and sisters. Kingship systems, which work well among some indigenous societies such as the Päre, consist of certain regular behavior between the king and the daughters. When serving the father, for instance, the daughter of a Päre king must kneel before her father as a sign of respect. And when talking, the daughter must avoid eye contact with the father. She must always gaze downward although she may stealthily see him. It is always considered disrespectful of a daughter to see the face of the father when she talks to him.

It is natural for a king or a father to care for his children and to lavish affection upon them. As far as Päre king is concerned, his relation-

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ship with his daughters is based on his power and authority. That is, authority as a king and as a father. A king may have genuine affection for his daughter but the authority of a father and the subordination of the daughter are always separated. When his daughters grow up and marry, he loses the authority of a father. At the same time, the daughter loses the privileges and support she once enjoyed when she was part of the king's household.

At early period of growth, a mother plays a big role in the upbringing of a child. In addition to loving the child, the mother nourishes and bathes the young ones. As children grow older, the responsibility for their traditional education is then shared between the father and the mother. Accordingly, the father takes the role of educating the boys. He teaches them to adapt to herding domestic animals; advises them to be good people, responsible leaders and respectful of elders. On her part, the mother makes sure that the girls are well educated culturally. They should know how to perform domestic chore duties, serve and respect visitors who come into the house. Likewise, they should respect the other wives of the king and treat them just like their own mothers.

Generally, children of the king live in close contact with one another. They share many activities such as work, travel, visits, among others. When the children of another stepmother visit the home of their stepmother, the host welcomes them and later on when the time comes for going back home, stepsisters and stepbrothers accompany them to their house. In many cases, children of the same sex move together like brothers and sisters. At times, the mother can grant or withhold permission over a number of actions. She can allow or prevent her children from visiting the home of a co-wife especially when the two wives have some disputes. But such a move is always done without the knowledge of the king. The king may order corporal punishment in case of disobedience and disorderly conduct.

From childhood until they reach maturity, daughters of a king enjoy special protection and treatment. They are well fed and all their needs are provided for by the parents. However, when a daughter becomes married, the king loses the authority of a father. The authority would automatically transfer to the husband. Correspondingly, the authority of a father decreases when the sons marry and establish their respective independent homes.

Marriage

Päre girls often marry when they are 16 years old or somewhat older. Marriage involves the payment of cattle to the family of the bride. Whereas the number of heads of cattle paid for the marriage of any other girl is fifteen, the daughter of a Päre king is married with twenty heads of cattle. For Päre girls, once a member of the age group is married, the other girls become susceptible to peer's pressure and would desire to be married as well. Each of the girls expects to be married within at least the shortest range of time possible. No

girl wants to be married at the later period because whoever is married at the later period suffers public scorned. She will be called all kinds of names, causing a trauma that no lady would like to bear.

Like others, a daughter of a king is free to choose a boyfriend she would like to marry. But the actual marriage will not take place as it requires an approval from the king himself. There are always conditions that have to be met to win the approval of the king. First of all, the boy concerned must have come from a family with good background; secondly, he must be physically fit and commands respect. More importantly, the family must be wealthy enough to be able to pay for the bride price which is usually given once at ago.

Prompt settlements of bride price, combined with oppressive behavior on the part of the kings, usually have negative consequences for members of the royal household, especially the king's daughters. This is because many of the would-be lovers tend to distant themselves from entering into relationships with the daughters of king mainly for fear of the ill treatment they may be subjected to. In fact, such a move amounts to sanctioning the king. A sanction of this nature would definitely cause psychological problems to the king's girls who yearn to marry and start their own families. The story of King Alikori's daughter named Nyilando, illustrates this. Nyilando, the daughter of king Alikori, was once boycotted by the youth of the area. Boys made partners with all the other girls, leaving the daughter of the king without any partner. The lady became agitated after all her age mates were married. The situation affected not only the daughter but the whole family. To him, although aggrieved, king Alikori kept the pain in his heart. One day during a function, the king, who was deeply worried about the whole situation, broke his silence. He asked the crowd why his daughter had been abandoned; and that no one came forward to marry her. But he changed his tone and told the people that there was no point in fearing him. All he needed was cattle only. Following this announcement, a gentleman from Kor village named Ayuga approached the king's daughter, made love with her and eventually the two partners got married to each other.

Very seldom in the Pāri history will one find a daughter of a king becoming pregnant outside marriage mainly because the public often treat them with care and respect. As a rule, whoever wishes to marry the daughter of a king must go 'through the door', as the people say. In other words, he who wants to marry the daughter of the king must approach the king and ask for his acceptance. Aware of this, no one dares to disgrace the royal family by making one of the king's daughters pregnant out of wedlock. To do so, tantamounts to committing suicide. One can easily lose his life by being brutality beaten or in extreme cases end up being killed by the sons or servants of the king.

At times, marriage could be arranged between a bride and groom who have not met. This happens when the king and the father of the groom form a pact,

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disregarding the girl's wishes and consent. This arranged type of marriage usually does not require love and companionship. The daughter is just to comply and nothing else.

In-equality of Sexes

In Päre, women do not have property rights. Daughters of kings are not exceptional. Culture prohibits ladies from sharing with their brother's properties such as house plots, cattle, goats, cultivatable lands and the likes. These assets are often shared among the sons. The only properties daughters are entitled to receive are cooking pots, utensils, dance ornaments, a sleeping bed, plates, calabashes, and big pots for storing dura. These items are given to a daughter who has been married in order to enable her start a new home.

Unlike the sons, daughters have no hierarchy. As they are still unmarried, they are treated equally regardless of age. What is expected of them is to be married and to bring cows into the family.

In Päre society, a daughter is not given the opportunity to succeed her father and become a queen. This position is always held by the eldest son of the king's first wife. Other brothers would simply become subordinates. In May 1980, however, history was made in Päre land. For the first time, a woman became a queen in Päre society. This event happened after king Fidele died, leaving his elder son Peter Upwoyo who was thirty years of age at the time, as heir. As was a tradition in Päre society, the stepfather of Peter Upwoyo was to take the throne in the hope that he would hand back the throne to the heir when the boy has become mature enough to rule. But surprisingly, the unthinkable happened. Nyibur, the late king's widow, took the throne and inherited the responsibility of rain administration and became the most powerful person in Päre society. Because such a move had never happened in the traditional politics, the people murmured. Consequently, the new queen became the focus of the collective dissatisfaction of the entire village. In 1984, the opponents of the queen accused her of being the cause of the rain failure that year, and therefore, the ruling age-set killed her instantly.

Conclusion

Under modern conditions, violent punishment that characterizes behavior of kings, no longer suit the new civilized order that the world is being governed. Today, many girls attend schools and many more have not only been exposed to new cultures, but have also been empowered within their own communities. The knowledge acquired by women through education, makes it difficult for the king to force the daughters to appreciate kingship system. In other words, people have changed the order of their motions, and are different from what they were in ancient times. Like any other girl, a daughter of a king can now argue with her father over certain issues but without being punished. Likewise, boys are no longer afraid to make love with a daughter of a king. Further, the

knowledge that many girls have acquired through education makes it difficult for the king to force his daughters to appreciate the negative practices entertained in the kingship system. In other words, people have changed the order of things and have rearranged their priorities in life in a bid to remain proud of their forefathers. The change in the pattern of life for Päre women can be attributed mainly to social circumstances. A comparison of the lives of Päre girls of the post Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army- war years with that of their pre-war counterparts provides sufficient evidence of the changes in the manner in which the culture has treated Päre women during the last 30 to 40 years. For instance, thirty years ago, the husband was to pay twenty cows at once when marrying the king's daughters. These days, the practice has been relaxed. Payment of bride price in installments has been allowed so that the groom can now pay nine or eleven cows as a first installment. The payment of the remaining portion of the dowry is deferred to some future date.

Girls' educational level has risen considerably as several girls are being enrolled at different levels of (primary, secondary and even university) education. Today, you can find Päre girls holding positions and working in government offices. This developments no doubt has soften the positions of the kings with regards to the discipline of their daughters. These days, kings behave less harsh when dealing with their daughters. This attitude has come into play because of globalization wind that brought democracy and civil liberties. Yet, kings still express greater disappointments at these changes.

As a political institution, kingship was seen as important to the social organization of the Päre society. The underlying principle was that people who gathered around the king had a role to amuse the king. For example, both the sub-ordinate close to the king and family members often keep the king happy as a way to solidify his superiority. No one contest the king's authority. Allegiance and absolute submission to the authority of the king was the order of the day and the law of land.

The fact that powers of kings have more or less disappeared, or at least reduced because of the effect of globalization, it is unlikely that kingship system will end soon in Päre society. After all, the power is still being wielded by princesses who are members of this institution.

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