

The Cøllø Political structure and Institution in South Sudan from 1545 to the present day

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Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<p><i>This article explores the Cøllø political structure and Institution in South Sudan from 1545 to the present day. Politically, the Cøllø state was divided into a number of multi-clan settlements. In each of these settlements, there was a dominant lineage around which other descent groups gathered to constitute a settlement. The study aims to investigating the autocratic government of the Cøllø Reth (The Shilluk King). This system was laid down by Nyikango Okwaa at that time around 1545 and still continues by his successors. The laid down system of marriage of the Cøllø girl is still now ten cows, which had not been altered by the succeeding kings. The Cøllø political system is unique than other tribes because it is centralized system. This system is laid by the king and the chiefs appointed by the king.</i></p> <p>Keywords: South Sudan, Cøllø Rathdom, Political structure and Institution, Autocratic government, Cøllø political sphere</p> <p>Note for Readers: Rath=King, Rathdom=Kingdom, Cøllø = Shilluk.</p>
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INTRODUCTION

This article is to investigate the Cøllø political structure and Institution in South Sudan in the 16th century when the Luo community was led by Nyikango to the present Cøllø land. Nyikango is believed by the Cøllø people as a culture hero and founder of their nation and assumed to have disappeared in a dusty storm or in the thin air at Akurwa, the ceremonial village in northern Cøllø. The Cøllø land is divided into administrative units (Lwak that is Southern Cøllø and Gar that is Northern Cøllø). All the Cøllø recognize a common head of their whole land, the Rath, who is referred to here as king. Because of this recognition, Cøllø gave Nyikango so many titles to mark him off from ordinary men, no less than his titles. The Cøllø people are well known for their highly developed divine kingship. The divine Rath is a spiritual and a supreme authority over the entire Cøllø Nation. Rath is divine in the sense that the other spirits of departed kings congregate around the new Rath. The Rath has the power to bless and to curse. He controls the Cøllø Soil and his word is final.

The root of Cøllø Rathdom

The Cøllø State was set up in the sixteenth century after the Cøllø left the Luo cradleland in Bahr al Ghazal and

occupied present Cøllø land. Nyikangø, the founder of the state, led a small group of proto Cøllø, Jango (Dinka) and Anuak elements from the Bahr al Ghazal to present Cøllø land where, obviously, they found several groups of people among whom were some Anuak living along the Sobat river, Kordofanian-speaking Nuba people in the Mountains: Liri-Nuba mountains area, and a southern Nubian speaking people called the Apuny or Funj. There is some indication that sections or all of these elements were absorbed by the Lwo speakers, thus giving rise to the mixed economy of the Cøllø. It is obvious, therefore, that pluralism was an important factor in the evolution of the Cøllø state.

Nevertheless, this was the case in point, Cøllø Local traditions suggest that the task of setting up the state was not an easy one. It can be observed that the Funj appear to have been a comparatively well-organized community compared with the incoming Lwo group. As such, they posed a great challenge to any party that wished to conquer their region. Nyikangø attempted to overcome the problem by forging an alliance with the Nuba people. This is suggested by the claim that Nyikangø married his daughter to an important Nuba, as a consequence of which a political

and military alliance was forged with the Nuba people. The clan is known as “kwa dwoy”. After securing the necessary military and political support, Nyikango then proceeded to conquer Cøllø land. Soon after laying down basic laws for the society, Nyikango disappeared into heaven because of the never ending disputes and quarrels among his people. But by the end of the sixteenth century or the beginning of the next century, the Cøllø people had occupied all of their present day homeland.

Cøllø political sphere

Politically, the Cøllø state was divided up into a number of multi clan settlements (Kwarri mog giir caro). In each of these settlements there was a dominant lineage around which other descent groups gathered to constitute a settlement. Traditional evidence suggests that the settlement sites were given to these lineages by Nyikangø. Later on, they were regarded as owners of the land. The fundamental unit of the political structure was the lineage rather than the clan. This was largely because Cøllø clans were dispersed or scattered over several settlements and could not in any way form a political grouping. It, thus, remained for the lineage or hamlet, rather than the clan, to constitute the basis of the political structure.

Above the lineage heads were settlement chiefs (jyaggi) who came from dominant lineages within each settlement. At first it appears that the jago was chosen by the citizens of the settlement, but in following years, however, he had to be confirmed in office by the Rath (king) who was at the top of the power structure. This tended to give more power to orri (kings) over settlement chiefs. Indeed, it is said that orri (kings) maintained their influence over the Jyaggi (chiefs) by plotting among them and inserting their men where they could.

Consequently, like the king of the Ganda, the Cøllø Rath seems to have exercised some measure of executive power over his subjects. He was more or less the supreme judge and the ruler of the state. He was also considered by his subjects as the spiritual head of the state, since every rath was believed to be an incarnation of Nyikangø. The preeminence of the rath was, therefore, not only reflected in political and religious fields. It was also obvious in the economic sphere, at least by the 19th century. The rath received different forms of gifts or payments which must have reinforced his own economic position. But these sources of income were not reliable, so they could not make the rath rich in the sense in which one could speak of a rich king of a medieval European kingdom or state. This was mainly because the wealth of the rath, and indeed that of any pre-colonial African ruler, was not regarded as personal but as the collective wealth of the community.

The cøllø economic sphere

The economic position of the Cøllø orri and jyaggi during the 17th and 18th centuries clearly resembled the Azande of Western Equatoria where the king gave only a certain portion of tribute, while he retained some; by the 19th century the situation had evidently changed as a result of the boom in ivory trade. The orri of Cøllø people thereby got the opportunity to acquire more wealth and thus to become rich. Some idea of this may be collected or learnt from the fact that 19th century orri Cøllø people had under their control men who came to be known as the “bang rath”. They were a group of men who had become the rath’s private military force, and thus a politically important body. Since members of this group appear to have depended on the rath for their livelihood, it is logical to assume that its size reflected both his wealth as well as his political power. This observation is confirmed by the fact that the “bang rath” executed the judgments of the rath, and was thus used to collect taxes, debts, and so on. Largely because of this role, they were viewed by the ordinary Cøllø as nothing but a symbol of the rath’s oppression.

The autocratic government of the Cøllø rath

The power of the rath was in fact checked by a number of factors, not least among which was the power and influence of settlement chiefs. These officials in fact exercised considerable authority over their settlements, and often acted independently of rath. The potential threat was also posed by members of the royal clan who are known as kwarath in order to strengthen the rathdom and the unity of the society. This was chiefly because of the fertility of the orri Cøllø ensured that there were many princes who might compete for power. Furthermore, the custom of sending princes to live with maternal relatives meant that they could develop local ties and rally sectional interest to support their bids for power. According to Cøllø traditions is that competition both between princes and orri Cøllø people and among princes themselves was common before and even at the present day. This is best illustrated by an incident (“liny Bel”) which happened during the reign of rath Diwaad. Following the death of his brothers in the fight known as “liny Bel” or the battle of Bel, Diwaad wad ocolo is said to have taken advantage of this to deprive his brothers’ descendants of aristocratic position. The result of this act was the creation of a new class of kwarath commoner lineages, called ororo, that later on lost any claim to the rathdom. However, the fact that his act was infrequently, if at all, repeated by succeeding orri (kings) meant that both the princes and kwarath as a whole remained powerful political forces within the society. There was, in other words, a balance of power between the princes, chiefs and orri. Honestly, it should be noted that for a prince to succeed to the Rathdom, it was not enough to rally sectional support

from his maternal relatives. It was also essential to win the support of the settlement chiefs on the Electoral College, which often elected the rath. This had the effect of increasing the power and influence of the latter. On the other hand, if we are to believe the Cøllø tradition of regicide (the killing of a king), the orri Cøllø also had to preserve the chiefs' support since ambitious princes could threaten the life of a rath particularly during periods of trouble.

Owing to the increase in the volume of the ivory trade in the 19th century, the balance was upset in favour of the orri. They became both wealthy and powerful. In spite of this, the chiefs remained influential, and their settlements retained a great deal of independence.

CONCLUSION

The Cøllø political structure and Institution in South Sudan was introduced by Nyikango Okwaa who was the founder of the Cøllø nation in 16th century after their departure from Bahr al Ghazal to where they are now. There were internal conflicts within themselves like Giilo and Nyikango after they had settled in Upper Nile Region about the struggle of power. It should be noted that for a prince to succeed to the Rathdom, it was not enough to rally sectional support from his maternal relatives. It was also crucial to win the support of the settlement chiefs on the Electoral College, which often elected the rath (king). In spite of this, the chiefs

remained very influential and their settlement maintained a great deal of independence.

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