

The Peoples and Traditions of South Sudan

South Sudan is one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse countries on the African continent. The country has over 60 major ethnic groups, **Acholi, Adio (Makaraka), Aja, Anyuak (Anyuua)Atuot(Reel),Avukaya,Azande,Bai,Baka,Balanda-Boor,Balanda,Bviri,Banda,Bari,Binga,Bongo,Didinga,Dinka, Jieng),Dongotona,Feroghe, Gollo,Ifoto,Imatong,Indri, Jiye,Jur(Beli&Modo),Jurchol,(Luo),Kakwa,Kara,Keliku,Kuku, Lango,Larim(Boya),Logir,Lokoya,Lopit,Lotuka(Otuho),Lugbwara,Lulubo,Maban,Madi, Mananger,Mangayat,Moro,Moro,Kodo,Mundari,Mundu,Murle,Ndogo,Ngulingule,Nuer(Naath),Nyangatom,Nyangwara,Pari,Pojullo,Sere,Shatt,Shilluk(chollo),Suri(kachipo),Tenet,Tid,Toposa,Uduk,Woro,Yulu**, and despite the presence of many commonalities between them, each one has many unique systems of social structure, livelihoods cultural traditions and a sense of identity. This diversity has at once presented both a unique opportunity for the country to enjoy the colorful richness of these traditions and a threat to national unity and a collective sense of national identity. In other words, much like the rest of black African, South Sudan has had to face up to the question of whether cultural diversity is an asset that aides the development of the country or a liability that could shatter the hope of a strong collective nationhood. This question about cultural diversity has been tackled by the philosophy of national development, by putting all the cultures, languages, traditions, the arts, social norms and the unique livelihoods on a national stage in order to equitably celebrate that diversity while teasing that which unites.

Of the most visibly diverse practices are the languages, the livelihoods, everyday objects of life, marriage systems and the perceived relationship between each ethnic group and the rest, between the state and the "tribe." Despite diversity and even disagreements between the ethnic nations, the long history of the liberation war has forced South Sudanese to think of themselves as one people, bound by a cause. That history spans 200 years of resistance to foreign occupation, from the slave trade to Ottoman rule to British Colonial order and the racist regimes of the old Sudan.

Marriage Practices: The most common form of marriage in South Sudan is polygyny, the practice in which a man can have more than one wife at the same time. In most instances, marriage is considered a union beyond the two individuals, a bond involving the two families, and in order for this bond to be cemented, marriage involves exchange of material goods, the kind of which depends on the ethnic group. For example, for cattle herders, a bride price is often paid in the form of huge number of cows by the family of the groom to the family of the bride. In other groups, the bride price may be paid in small livestock, money, agricultural implements or any other valuable asset such as labor, where a group of young men

from the family of the groom can ascend on the family of the bride and till the soil for cultivation.

The exchange can be seen as serving either of two main purposes. One is compensation for labor of the woman that is now lost to her marital family. The other is to make marriages strong by involving the families, with the exchange of goods symbolizing eating together as a family. Above all, most South Sudanese will be heard talking about marriage solely as a way to procreate, and that has implications for the freedom of the woman to decide on her sexuality, childbirth and work.

Finally, who marries whom is a function of ethnic belonging, the mode of livelihood, and the level of tolerance that some ethnic groups to allow their children to marry into "tribes" other than their own. For example, if a boy from the Zande has interest in marrying a girl from the Nuer, the whole affair can be quite complicated with regards to what the Zande family would pay to the Nuer family, with cattle as a livelihood of one and farming the other. On the other hand, for a country in search for a collective national belonging, such cross-ethnic marriages might become among the fastest way to integrate all South Sudanese into a national identity that is determined by citizenship and not by ethnic identity. This is an example of how modern times force social change.