

The Nyepo Ethnic Group

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Who Are the Nyepo?

The Nyepo ethnic group is a distinct Karo or Bari-speaking tribe found in Kajo-Keji County, Central Equatoria State (CES), in the Republic of South Sudan. The correct name of this community is **Nyepo**, despite alternative spellings such as *Nyefo*, *Nyefu*, *Nyepu*, *Ngyepo*, or *Ngepo*, which appear erroneously in some of the literature. In keeping with the community's own self-identification, the authoritative spelling is **Nyepo**.

Origin and Identity

Nyepo history and identity are preserved through both oral traditions and written sources. Historical manuscripts such as *Sudan Notes and Records, Volume VII (1924)*, *A Tribal Survey of Mongalla Province, EQUATORIA – The Lado Enclave*, and *The Sudan-Contested National Identities* present a widely held view that most Nyepo ancestors came from Southern Bari and settled permanently in their present homeland. Traditional elders and historic chiefs also attest that their forefathers migrated from Rejaf. Nyepo preserves a chieftainship lineage through Pitia, Monga, Shube (Sobe), Gilo, Loku, Rume Ngorsuk, Lodu Boyo, and Logu'ya Lo Mansuk (Morjan).

The view that most Nyepo ancestors came from Southern Bari is supported by clan composition. About 60.7% trace their roots to Bari origin, while the remaining 39.3% trace their ancestry to communities such as the Ma'di, Pojulu, Lugware, Kuku, Mundari, and Nyangwara. These statistics came from a study conducted during a workshop organized by **Moret Na Nyepo (MONYE)** from April 6–8, 2006, at the Payam Headquarters in Kansuk. What matters most, however, is that these clans merged and integrated successfully to form the Nyepo tribe/Ethnic group. This diversity of origins reflects the historical interactions and movements that have shaped the Nyepo community over time. It is therefore important to acknowledge that the Nyepo ethnic group reflects a rich and mixed heritage.

A popular explanation of the name links it to the early settlers who refused to return, giving rise to the expression “**Nye-po**,” meaning “**not coming back**.” As a result, the land became known as Nyepo, and the people also came to be known as Nyepo. Nyepo is also the plural form of *Nyepotio* (singular).

Location

The Nyepo ethnic group is predominantly found in Nyepo Payam in northern Kajo-Keji County. The Nyepo homeland currently includes the four main Bomas of Kansuk, Rodo, Lori, and Gödöru. Ideally, Nyepo Payam should have five Bomas, but Kala Boma currently remains under the administration of Liwolo Payam.

Nyepo Payam is the largest payam in Kajo-Keji County. It is bordered by Ganji Payam of Juba County to the north, and by the White Nile and Lo'bonok Payam to the east until it meets River Sanga. From there, River Sanga serves as the boundary between Nyepo Payam and Lire Payam to the south, around the 85-mile mark when measuring the distance from Yei to Kajo-Keji.

To the west, Nyepo Payam borders Liwolo Payam at the point where Kai'bo Stream meets River Ki'bo. The boundary with Liwolo extends through Mount Mayat, connecting Pöröu to the Köndiri Mountains and

stretching onward to River Kiju. To the northwest, Nyepo Payam borders Lainya County at the 47-mile mark beyond River Kiju on the Kajo-Keji–Yei Road.

The Nyepo territory is estimated to cover about 900 square kilometres. According to the 2008 Sudan population census, the Nyepo population was recorded as only **23,075**, a figure that remains disputable for several reasons:

- **Kala Boma** was excluded from the count within Nyepo Payam, although historical records clearly state that it belongs under Nyepo Payam’s administration.
- The census also excluded **Nyepo people** who were outside Nyepo Payam on census night, including those in other parts of South Sudan, Khartoum, and abroad.
- But the strongest challenge to the figure is that **enumerators** reportedly ran out of questionnaires in Nyepo Payam for nearly **five days**, leaving many families uncounted while other payams in the county continued enumerating.

Culture

Nyepo cultural life is patrilineal, clan-based, and community-oriented in nature. There are about 28 known clans of mixed but predominantly Bari origin in Nyepo land. The community values togetherness, cooperation, kinship, and hard work.

The Nyepo people speak Bari, with some dialectal variation. According to *The Extensive List of Languages of South Sudan and Extinct Languages*, the lexical similarity between Bari and the Nyepo dialect is estimated at 86%, compared with 85% for Pojulu, 81% for Kuku, and 80% for Nyangwara. These figures indicate that the Nyepo dialect is most closely related to the Bari spoken by the Karo group.

Nyepo people also practice blacksmithing, hunting, agriculture, rainmaking, marriage customs, folklore, and communal ceremonies as key elements of Nyepo identity. Among the best-known Nyepo cultural dances are Kore, Bula, Gwele, Wayet, and Tibidi. Kore includes sub-forms such as Kutötti, Kili’di/Lopi’denge, Kisonde, and Lominimini. Tibidi is an exclusive Nyepo dance now uniquely used to represent the community on state occasions. Wayet, an important communal festival dance organized by the Reli clan rainmakers, is associated with blessing the land and giving thanks for a bountiful harvest.

Leadership Roles

Traditional leadership in Nyepo land combines political, judicial, ritual, and community responsibilities. The structure is built around the Mokungu (clan chief), Boma Executive Chiefs, the Payam Head Chief, and the wider county Paramount Chief. Chiefs oversee arbitration, tax collection, community mobilization, and local order.

The historic chiefdoms of Kansuk, Rodo, Lori, and Gödöru are linked through the Reli or Bura clan, and chieftainship is associated not only with governance but also with rainmaking and ritual authority.

Nyepo Notable Figures

Historical and contemporary notable figures in Nyepo land include the following personalities. This list, however, is not exhaustive, and additional names could be added to it whenever necessary.

- **Roba Lo Sure** – A Kansuk chief remembered for mobilizing the Nyepo people against the “Tuku-Tuku,” who invaded Nyepo territory from the Belgian Congo in the 20th century. He is famously remembered by this song:

*Walele Roba, Roba ngiro lo Sure,
En do ko tikin mugun riringa ko Gelatat,
Ti Nyepo ‘yurani ‘yura.*

- **Chief Logu’ya Lo Mansuk (Morjan)** – Remembered as a courageous Rodo chief, defender of Nyepo identity, and early supporter of formal education in Kajo-Keji.
- **Gogonya Wöri Waya** – Remembered in Nyepo history as the leading figure in the Gödöru chieftainship line. Gödöru Boma up to Kala Village was ruled by Gogonya Wöri Waya. He and Logu’ya Lo Mansuk were close relatives and great friends within the wider Reli/Bura clan. Both were defenders of Nyepo identity and were highly respected by their people. When Logu’ya Lo Mansuk slapped a British colonial administrator for mistreating his people, Gogonya Wöri Waya defended him.
- **Lodu Segen (Sergeant)** – Remembered as the first Nyepotyo police sergeant associated with the colonial era.
- **Marako Rume Morjan** – Son of Logu’ya Lo Mansuk and regarded as the first politician from Kajo-Keji County, as well as a major figure in the South Sudanese liberation struggle and Anya-Nya politics.
- **Brigadier Wilson Lupai** – The first Nyepotyo military officer from Kajo-Keji County to graduate from the Sudan Military College in Kereri, Khartoum, in 1960. He completed his training in the 7th batch alongside officers such as General Gismalla Abdallah Rasas.
- **Sitipano Lomugun** – A Police Sergeant Major and later Chief of Nyepo, remembered for protecting his community at the cost of his life.
- **Amosa Wani Lodu** – Son of Kiden Na Mansuk and Lodu Lo Miteng, a pioneering educator and the first Inspector of Primary Schools in Kajo-Keji County in the late 1950s.
- **Onesimo Lodu Jalinga** – Son of Logu’ya Lo Mansuk, who became Paramount Chief of Kajo-Keji in the 1980s and is remembered as a respected and firm leader.
- **Ezekiel Kenyi Sokiri** – Son of Kiden Na Mansuk and Sokiri Lo Jale, and a nephew of Chief Logu’ya Lo Mansuk of Rodo. He was among the early educated Nyepo cadres and later became an educator, serving as the District Education Officer (DEO) for Kajo-Keji District from 1982 to 1989.
- **Aggrey Manase** – The first Nyepotyo Public Administration Officer (Dabid Mejeles/Momur) in Mere, Kajo-Keji. The post of “Dabid Mejeles” is an important role in local government.
- **Hon. Ambassador Dr. James Pitya Morgan** – A major contemporary Nyepotyo career diplomat who became South Sudan’s Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Relations on 30 August 2023 and again on 28 April 2026.
- **Dr. Frederick Khamis Elias Gabriel** – Currently holds the rank of Brigadier General in the South Sudan National Police Service. He served in Kajo-Keji as Officer in Charge of the Police Sub-District from 1983 to 1987. At that time, he was the second person from the Nyepo community to hold such a position, following the footsteps of the respected legendary **Lodu Segen (Sergeant)**.

- **Hon. Ambassador Monday Simaya Kumba** – Another Nyepotyo career diplomat who was appointed by presidential decree in April 2025 as Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of South Sudan after Hon. Amb. Dr. James Pitya Morgan was reassigned as Special Envoy to the African Great Lakes Region.

Sources

- *Sudan Notes and Records, Volume VII* (1924)
- *Equatoria – The Lado Enclave*
- *The Sudan – Contested National Identities, Indiana Series in Middle East Studies*
- *Journal of the African Society – System of Chieftainship Amongst the Bari of Uganda*
- *Tribal Survey of Mongalla Province*
- *Daytranslations*