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MAKING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE WORK

"GBUDUE IS NOT COMING AGAIN TO ADVANCE" CORONATION ACCOUNT OF KING ATOROBA OF THE AZANDE KINGDOM



This essay was written by Isaac Waanzi Hillary, who attended the coronation of His Majesty, King Atoroba Peni Rikito Gbudue in Yambio, the capital of Western Equatoria State, on 9 February 2022. He observed and photographed most of the processes, procedures, and rituals as they were performed at the tomb of King Gbudue. He later had the privilege to interview a prominent member of the royal family and an elder about the coronation. Hillary is an ethnic Zande and an anthropology student at Central European University. He has written essays on Azande culture and custom for his blog [Worondimo](#), and published a guest blog for [Invisible Children](#) and an article for [Civil Wars journal](#).

The history of the Azande kingdoms under the Avongara dynasty is known especially for the reign of King Gbudue.¹ King Gbudue is renowned for his heroic resistance against outside attempts to conquer, or control, his kingdom, be it by Arab invaders from the north, or three different European colonial powers: Belgium, Britain and France. He engaged in, and won, many battles against these powers, but was eventually killed in 1905 in the present-day Yambio.² Subsequently, colonial rule disrupted kingship in Gbudue's and other Azande kingdoms. Though the disruption has lasted for over a century, the lineage of the Azande kings lives on, and with it the hope that one day the Azande kingdom would be restored.

On 9 February 2022, more than 100 years after Gbudue's death, his descendants gathered to restore the Azande Kingdom by enthroning a new King as the successor. To make this historic event known across South Sudan and beyond, a team from the Rift Valley Institute witnessed the event and the restoration of the Kingdom as a form of customary authority in South Sudan.

GBUDUE DAY

Even before the restoration of the Azande kingdom in 2022, South Sudanese Azande in the diaspora³ had been celebrating 'Gbudue Day' to commemorate and celebrate the legacy of King Gbudue. However, there has been some confusion about the precise date. Popular knowledge and colonial accounts hold that King Gbudue died on 10 February 1905.⁴ An inscription on the shelter that protects Gbudue's Tomb reads: 'The Tomb of His Royal Majesty King Gbudue Banzingbi Martyred On 09/02/1905.' A prominent member of the royal family, Prince Badagbu Daniel Rimbasa, explained:

The reason why Gbudue Day was set to the ninth instead of the tenth of February is that people have no clear information that Gbudue died on the ninth or the tenth because he died at night. On the night he died, there was a heavy downpour of rain. Whether he died before or after midnight people do not know. What is known is that they declared his death on the tenth. That was what happened, and because our King [Atoroba Peni Rikito] decided to return on the date of the ninth we had to make the celebration on that day.⁵

The selection of February ninth also accords with the Azande notion that a new day begins at dawn and ends the next dawn. It therefore makes sense to say that King Gbudue died on 9 February.

Gbudue Day was then chosen as the return of the heir apparent—then-paramount chief of Yambio county, Atoroba Peni Rikito—to ascend to the throne as King of Azande. From 2015 to 2016, when conflict was fast spreading in Western Equatoria State, the paramount chief was involved in a peace dialogue between rebel groups and the state government. Atoroba's involvement in the dialogue, and his criticism of the abuses that civilians suffered during the conflict, caused some in the state

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- 1 Scholars outside South Sudan have spelled his name 'Gbudwe', but written Zande in South Sudan has no 'dw' thus I opted for the spelling 'Gbudue.'
 - 2 Douglas H. Johnson, *South Sudan: 'A New History for a New Nation'*, Ohio University Press, 15 November 2026; Kuyok Abol Kuyok, *South Sudan: The Notable Firsts*, Author House, 2015.
 - 3 Speech of Deputy Governor, Dr. Gaaniko Baime, 10 February 10, 2021.
 - 4 Zoe Cormack, 'Research from the South Sudan National Archives: The Political Life of King Gbudwe's Grave', Rift Valley Institute, 2020, <https://riftvalley.net/news/research-south-sudan-national-archives-political-life-king-gbudwes-grave>.
 - 5 Interview with Prince Badagbu Daniel Rimbasa, 30 May 2022.

government to accuse him of being a supporter of the rebel groups operating in the area. In November 2016 he was arrested in Yambio, taken to Juba, and detained.⁶ He was later released apparently on the instruction of President Salva Kiir.⁷ While his detention and release happened in 2016, he didn't return to Yambio until February 2022 with the support of state and national governments. The 9 February has therefore become a symbolic date to celebrate the death of King Gbudue and the formal return of King Atoroba Peni Rikito Gbudue as the new King of the Azande Kingdom.



Tomb of King Gbudue Bazingbi, photo by Isaac Waanzi Hillary, February 2022

The preparation for the formal return of chief Atoroba and the restoration of the Azande Kingdom was driven by the Azande Supreme Welfare Organization (ASWO), an organization that was formed in 2019 by the Azande who lived in Juba. ASWO acted as the umbrella organization that brought together other Azande associations, organizations that are based in Juba and Zande regions within South Sudan, and the diaspora, and thus a high-level organizing committee was formed that took the responsibility for organizing the events marking the restoration of the Azande Kingdom. The existence of ASWO made the mobilization of resources possible and acted as a base on which, in the words of ASWO Chair, Hon. Kutiyote James, a 'strong platform of unity [was created] that made it possible for every Azande to come together and have a common understanding of the life of Azande and the need to restore the Azande Kingdom.'⁸

THE HEIR APPARENT

King Gbudue fathered many children. The heir to the throne came through the lineage of one of his sons, Prince Rikito. In precolonial times, a king claimed the throne through his seniority, the decision of an oracle, or 'waging war with other princes'.⁹ But for the restoration in 2022 a set of qualifications

6 Bruno Braak, 'Overcoming Ruptures: Zande identity, governance and tradition during cycles of war and displacement in South Sudan and Uganda', PhD dissertation, University of Leiden, June 2022; 'Zande community: arrested chief 'not rebel' *Radio Tamazuj*, 27 November 2016, <https://radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/zande-community-arrested-chief-not-rebel>.

7 'S. Sudan president reverses detention of Azande paramount chief', *Sudan Tribune*, 19 December 2016, <https://sudantribune.com/article59391/>.

8 Interview with the chair of ASWO, Hon. Kutiyote James, 5 March 2023.

9 E.E. Evans-Prichard, *The Azande: History and Political Institutions*, Oxford University Press, 1971.

was used to select the heir. Prince Rimbasa explained:

There was no need to consult an oracle because when Gbudue died, he did not [formally] leave the throne to a specific son. Then if we had to go by seniority it would be different and would confuse. That was why prominent chiefs sat and observed among the current chiefs, grandchildren of Gbudue, who were already qualified, who served as paramount chiefs, and [selected the one] whom people were already calling King.

It seems that among the current great-grandchildren of Gbudue, Chief Atoroba Peni Rikito surpassed all the chiefs in the region. His leadership skills were evident from a young age and he became a subchief at the age of 14. After ten years he was promoted to become paramount chief for another decade. When South Sudan gained its independence in 2011, there was a plan to crown Atoroba Peni Rikito as the King of the South Sudanese Azande. However, the process seemed to have been halted due to division and nonconformity among the royal clan regarding which prince should be enthroned, and which pre-colonial Azande Kingdom(s) were to be restored.¹⁰ Yet already since 2011 people were using the titles of 'King' and 'paramount chief' interchangeably when addressing him. What remains unclear for the moment is whether a similar set of qualifications shall be applied for future appointments of kings, or whether kingship will from now on be inherited through the lineage of Atoroba Peni Rikito Gbudue.

The coronation on 9 February 2022 was attended by countless prominent Azande chiefs, princes, and princesses and representatives from other South Sudanese kingdoms. This included: Prince Mboribamu, the paramount chief of Tambura and great-grandson to King Tambura; the eldest and senior Prince Etero representing Basukangbi; elder Tartizio Wandu; Prince Sako from the lineage of Mange; paramount chief Gangura; Prince Rangu Zungumbia Bimo; Prince Badagbu Rimbasa; Prince Sasa; Princess Jema Nunu from the lineage of Nguku, a great-grandson of Gbudue; and representatives from the Azande chiefs from the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic. Representatives from the Shilluk and Anyuak kingdoms of South Sudan were also present during the coronation. The presence of all these distinguished guests signalled their acceptance of Atoroba Peni Rikito Gbudue as the accepted heir to the throne of the Azande Kingdom.

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¹⁰ 'W.Equatoria: Tombura's new king', *Sudan Tribune*, 31 March 2011, <https://sudantribune.com/article38072/>.

TOMB, PROCESSION, AND RITUALS



A tuka, an altar for making offerings to the spirits, photo by Isaac Waanzi Hillary, February 2022

The tomb of King Gbudue Bazingbi in Yambio was a central point of the coronation process. Most of the arrangements, processes, and rituals mentioned here were designed and directed by the royal clan members with support from the ASWO organizing committee. The tomb shelter had been renovated, and its entrance was decorated with freshly cut palm tree leaves and flowers. The entrance was guarded by guards dressed in a loincloth with bare chests and armed with spears and shields that were made of cardboard but modelled on Azande traditional shields, which would have been made of rattan cane and wood. In the interior were two statues and a pot facing the entrance. Although old statues and pots have been visible at the tomb of Gbudue, one of the statues appeared to have been replaced with another old statue of a man wearing a traditional hat and guarded by another statue armed with a spear and shield. This new arrangement appeared to be a depiction of the late King Gbudue being guarded. Next, a folded bark cloth was placed on a traditional mat (*ira nvue*) just below the cemented plaque. The mat and bark cloth were later used to lay and cover the heir. Not far from the mat was a throne entirely covered with a piece of cloth and a footstool was placed in front.

In the courtyard, there was a *tuka*, an altar for making offerings to the spirits. The altar was installed just a few meters away from the tomb and in front of a traditional mat, stool, and chair (*kiti kpudu*). At the base of the altar, a throwing knife was placed on the leaves, and at top of the altar stood a gourd cup containing water and leaves. Two more gourds were hung on the branches of the altar. In the past, the altar was a vital medium that connected the world of the living and of the spirits, and during

this occasion it played the same role by connecting with the spirits of Gbudue.¹¹ The perimeter of the tomb was restricted to selected women who dressed in traditional Azande attire, the media and the high-level organising committee for the event.

Although the procession started earlier, my study of the cultural site of the event meant that I could only attend the procession from the moment the heir arrived at the tomb of King Gbudue in a Toyota pick-up. He was received by a crowd that cheered and waved tree branches. With him in the pick-up were Prince Mboribamu, Prince Rimbasa, the late-county commissioner Hussein Enoke (also from the royal clan), representatives of the Shilluk and Anyuak kingdoms, and two young women who carried bowls of flowers. The heir wore a brown generic formal suit and a hat made of bark cloth. In his right hand he held a 'throwing knife' with two holes, which would in the past signify the number of wives that the bearer had. As he waited in the pick-up, he appeared happy and waved his throwing knife at the crowd.

Before the heir could proceed to the tomb, elder Tartizio Wandu made an important announcement to honour Jemma Nunu Kumba, the Speaker of South Sudan's Revitalized Transitional National Legislative Assembly and former governor of Western Equatoria State. Jemma is a great-granddaughter to Gbudue through his grandson Nguku who fathered Tamburo James, the father of Nunu Jemma. Princess Jemma was the only female royal member who escorted the heir apparent to the tomb.

To proceed, the heir was required to cut a white ribbon that was tied on the path to the tomb. After cutting the ribbon, Princess Jemma and Prince Rimbasa held the hands of Chief Atoroba in a gesture of support as they led him to the tomb. At the tomb, they bowed before the statues and walked around it once while women chanted 'Lion, Lion, oh Gbudue! How we wish you were alive' (*bara ooo bara Gbudue so kadu nga ti unga*). This is part of a song composed in 2010 by Zande artist Emmy J. Yoere.

As Prince Rimbasa, Princess Jemma, and Chief Atoroba reached the cemented plaque and joined elder Wandu, Prince Etero, and Prince Sako, they stopped and performed a ritual. This ritual is called *peka atoro*—'to evoke spirits'.¹² Normally it is performed in the morning hours, but for this occasion, it was done in the afternoon. Gbudue's spirits were evoked upon the next king to strengthen him. The new king was made to lie flat on the mat facing the plaque, and then fully covered with a piece of bark cloth. Around him were royal members who knelt and faced the plaque. The spirits of Gbudue were evoked by Prince Sako, elder Etero, and Princess Jemma. Here follow the words of elder Etero and Princess Jemma.

Elder Etero waved a sacred whisk, which appeared to be the bushy tail of an animal, as he evoked the spirits:

Spirits of Gbudue, thank you for the work you did here in the inheritance of Gbudue.¹³ You did well. We have brought a small child who is your grandson to put him in your place. Let him be a person who will have power. Let him be a person who will have high esteem. And we put the

11 J.E.T. Philipps, 'Observations on Some Aspects of Religion Among the Azande ("Niam-Niam") of Equatorial Africa', 1926, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2843607>.

12 Isaac Waanzi Hillary, 'Zande explanation of life as spirits after death', 2020. <https://worondimo.wordpress.com/2020/12/17/zande-explanation-of-life-as-spirits-after-death/>.

13 Azande often refer to the territory that was under the control of King Gbudue as the inheritance of Gbudue or the home of Gbudue—*kua Gbudue*.

children of the world who may be there having evil thoughts against him, may their thoughts perish. We place him on your seat as our king in your place. You were the king of this world; we place your grandson who is this one before you. You put your spirits on him and blessings strengthen all that he shall do. We place all his subjects to obey him. Let no one disobey him. No one should dwell with an evil heart with him. We have placed him knowing that you will grant us these and that he will live for many years.

After these words, the sacred whisk was passed to Princess Jemma who spoke these words while evoking Gbudue's spirits:

We have brought your grandson who is Atoroba Gbudue. Let him be here ahead of us in your position, and the positions of you.¹⁴ You descend upon him today so that he can lead us in this kingdom that he ascends to your throne. May spirits be upon us all and this event goes well. You strengthen him and give him a long life and pray to God on our behalf and his behalf, so he becomes a strong king for us here.

As she completed evoking the spirits, Atoroba was uncovered and raised. Prince Rimbasa reached for the king's clothing, which was made of two different materials. The first was a white long-sleeved robe with decorations around the collar woven in a gold-like thread. The second was made of bark cloth with some decorations and other materials on it. The garment was designed in the form of a long robe but with an open chest that had paintings of the head of a lion and a throwing knife. The symbol of a lion came from the ancient totem of the Avongara royal clan, and the throwing knife symbolises authority. The crown was made of bark cloth with the same paintings and cowries at its band. As Prince Rimbasa began to dress the heir in the white robe, the crowd—particularly the women—burst out in cheers and ululations.

It was at this point that the throne next to the tomb was unveiled. Unlike all the Azande traditional seats I have ever seen, the craft of the throne was unique and modern. The throne stood on four reeded legs with the rear legs twice as long as the front ones. The throne further had a cushion, two arms, and back splat designed from a large piece of wood that made the height of the throne appear about one and a half meters. A similar throne with a depiction of flowers and pineapple at its back splat was placed in Yambio's Freedom Square where the event was celebrated by hundreds of people. They led the King to the throne, and he sat on it. While he was still on the throne, Prince Sako raised the black sacred whisk high and muttered something before handing it over to His Majesty King Atoroba Peni Rikito Gbudue. The King from that moment held the sacred whisk and a throwing knife.

Before exiting the shelter of the tomb, the party walked around it three times. Each time they reached the cement plate, they prostrated and muttered words to the tomb. It appeared the rituals that were performed around the tomb had weakened the newly enthroned King as he was at this moment supported by three people. Later, elder Tartizio Wandu confirmed this: 'The moment we completed the first rituals, the child (new King) had become so weak and I knew the spirits of his grandfathers had descended on him. So, we had to take him to the *tuka*'.¹⁵ As he was led to the altar, it became difficult to see exactly what happened there. A witness among the royal members later narrated what

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 14 The Princess used the Zande word '*oni*' a plural form of 'you' used by a junior in respect when addressing an elder or person in authority. But her use of 'positions' followed by the Zande plural *oni* might suggest more than the throne of Gbudue but thrones of other Azande kings as well.

15 A conversation with elder Tartizio at the church, 10 February 2022.

had occurred: 'When we led him to the *tuka*, he sat on the Zande traditional stool that was placed on the mat. They then took the gourd cup that contained water and leaves that were on the altar and sprinkled them on him as they evoked the spirits.' I later learned that in addition to water and leaves, the gourd cup had contained a concoction of *ngbuka* and several herbs which in the words of Prince Rimbaso are not supposed to be mentioned in public or in writing. The sprinkle of this concoction was the last ritual that made the enthroned king gain strength. From that point, four able-bodied men lifted him upon their shoulders while he sat on a *tepu* (a wooden coach) and marched slowly to the main venue as the cheering crowd followed.

THE DISPLAY OF MATERIAL CULTURE



Zande men holding throwing knives in Yambio / Photo by Isaac Waanzi Hillary, February 2022

This historical day was marked with a display of Azande traditional materials, particularly clothes. Most of the Azande men in attendance dressed in bark cloth in the styles of loincloths, and others in shorts, shirts, hats, and bow ties made from bark cloth. Azande women likewise dressed in bark cloth in the Azande traditional style being tied as skirts around their waists and breasts. Others had sewed them into skirts and shirts. Some of these women further added a *gaka* (traditional apron) and lines of beads over the bark cloth. Many celebrants were also dressed in clothes that had a striking earth-like colour. Prince Rimbaso offered the following explanation about the clothes worn by most attendees:

We made some of it (bark cloth) in Yambio. Because of scarcity, many people came for it, so we had to buy others in the market. When the bark cloth was completely sold out in the

market, we approved the cloth that looks like bark cloth, which was the brown cloth people wore on that day.¹⁶

This alternative cloth was also worn in the traditional styles: men wearing it as loincloth and women tied around the waists and chests, while others wore it as shorts, skirts and shirts.

This dress code was complemented by other cultural materials. Both men and women had traditional hats decorated with bird feathers and carried bags, gourd cups, and gourds. Some women carried the large flat baskets (*kiaga*) commonly used for winnowing, which women also use while dancing. Women further plaited their hair in the most traditional styles and had marks on their faces with traditional beads around their heads, neck, waist, and ankles.¹⁷ One dancing group of Azande women displayed a clay water pot with a depiction of a human head on top.

Another famous cultural material that was frequently displayed were traditional weapons. Besides the guards and the royals, several Azande men carried different types of throwing knives and spears. These weapons reflected the rich history of Azande Kingdoms as powerful military entities. Some of this Azande military grandeur appeared old and others newer. While a throwing knife and the holes in its blade used to symbolize authority and the number of women married by the holder, it appeared that in most cases this was deliberately not followed, or unknown.

The last object that was visibly displayed, though not of the Azande origin, was a trophy. It was publicly displayed by a woman who walked just in front of the crowd following the King. Although the trophy has little connection to Azande traditions, it had a picture of a throwing knife and an inscription in capital letters that read: 'King Gbudue Day Celebration League 9th Feb, 2022, Yambio South Sudan.' As the King was being carried on a wooden coach to freedom square, the trophy was constantly raised high in front of the cheering crowd.

THE KING'S PUBLIC ADDRESS

After his enthronement, the King gave a public address to the audience that gathered at Freedom Square. Despite being fluent in Juba Arabic and English, the King made the speech in Zande language with no interpreter. It appeared Zande language would be the only official language that he would be using when addressing his subjects. Before the King's public address, Prince Rimbasa formally introduced the King:

The Alpha Lion of Azande. Ngurä, Moabiko, Basanginonga, spirits of your ancestors. The wind is blowing and only a housefly is wiping its hands. The Alpha Lion of Azande in the country of Gbudue all over. Your grandfather who is Gbudue, your reign subdues. Your feet grandson of Gbudue! Your feet grandson of Gbudue! King, at this time your subjects have remained in total silence, the place is wiping hands as [if] they pour water into a gourd of coldness. The area [has turned] cold! As we are, only the hair on the skin of people falls and raises because of the marvellous thing they have never seen. In the country, which is this, King, your people are now ready to hear your words. We request you to slowly rise as they cheer you in the

16 Interview with Prince Badagbu Daniel Rimbasa, 30 May 2022.

17 Isaac Waanzi Hillary, 'Plaiting hair among Azande', 2019, <https://worondimo.wordpress.com/2019/10/25/plaiting-hair-among-the-zande/>.

inheritance of your grandfather who is Gbudue to come closer to your people and speak to them.

As Prince Rimbasa completed these words, the King was led by guards, young women, and elders who chanted a song in which elder Tartizio Wandu was the lead singer. But before he made a public address, the King honoured some 'dignified and respected' officials of the national and state government, and some representatives of customary authorities with an award. The award, which was designed from a silver piece of cloth and in the three principal colours of the flag of South Sudan (black, green, and red), had a painting of a throwing knife and the inscription: 'King Gbudue Day 1st Celebration 9th Feb 2022 Yambio, South Sudan'.

At the beginning of his public address, the king briefly narrated the events that led to the death of King Gbudue, his great-grandfather. In idiomatic Zande language, he blamed the death of his grandfather on a war staged by the 'red and white-eared' people who perceived King Gbudue as a 'barbarous' and cruel despotism' who hindered the slave trade and colonization.¹⁸ The 'red and white-eared' people referred to the Arabs and British forces who fought the last battle in which King Gbudue died. His speech touched on points related to why the Kingdom was restored, how it would relate to non-Azande communities, and how the kingdom might be sustained by its subjects and the national government. On these three key points, he said the following.

On the importance of restoring the Kingdom:

During the time Azande had a Kingdom, there were things that it used to accomplish. For a person to be a human being, it requires him to have a culture. What is a culture of a person? It is your food. It is your cloth. It is your language. It is your strength. It is your song. It is your dance. Several things constitute a culture of a person. That was why the Kingdom was good. We are restoring the Kingdom to fortify our culture, to raise our children in our culture, not to raise them to abandon the culture. Even if the world develops, the culture of the people is vital and that's why we think of returning to the Kingdom.

On how the Kingdom will relate to non-Azande communities:

Some people think that this Kingdom which is being restored, is the start of problems that the Azande are inciting. It will never be so. The Kingdom which has been restored is not of hatred, it is not of inciting problems, it is not of rumours, and it is not of whispering. It is not for moving from the land which we are in to extend into other lands. The land which God gave us during the reign of Gbudue we shall keep lingering in like a lake ... The Kingdom has not come to incite problems among people. The kingdom has come to unite the Azande with all the other tribes that exist with them and to live in peace ... Let people not fear, Gbudue is not coming again to advance, where he had reached it shall not be extended. We shall keep lingering like a lake ... It will go down in history that the Azande Kingdom was restored during the governorship of General Alfred Futuyo, an ethnic Balanda who worked very hard to make the restoration happen ... I am not only the King of the Azande, but a King of all those living within my jurisdiction. Here everyone will be allowed to freely practice their culture.

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 'The London Gazette: Soudan Government, Governor-General's Office, August 25, 1905', *The London Gazette*, 1906, <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/27914/page/3444/data.pdf#view=Fit&toolbar=1>.

He added that while in Juba, before his full return to the kingdom, he had made many friends who might come to congratulate him in the palace. He cautioned everyone that when those friends would visit, let people not think that he has sold the land to them.¹⁹

On how the subjects can sustain the Kingdom:

You have tried restoring the Kingdom until here. It requires some support because during the reign of King Gbudue they used to do it, they used to donate items to the court. Some termites, cassava, and other things. For women, you should not donate them. Other items, you should donate. Right now, I am like a convict. In the past I could go out and find something for myself and could visit people but now I cannot. If you lock me up and leave me there, I will not manage.

On how the national government can sustain the Kingdom:

This Kingdom is not just for common things, if it will bring peace among the people, it supports the government. If it will develop the culture of the people, it supports the government. If it brings conflicts to an end, it supports the government ... I stand here to request the government that this infant needs to be supported. Right Honourable and Honourable Marial and the Governor of the State, if you don't support it, it will come to its knees and never progress. I appeal for the support of the National Government, our Parliament, our State, our Ministers, and all our Members of Parliament, you should be dropping some tax into it [the Kingdom].

Other government officials gave speeches after the King's address. As this historical event came to a formal end, it was time for a new form of celebration in which both Azande and non-Azande communities in Western Equatoria performed dances until sunset. The next day, countless people wanted to visit the king to congratulate him. The Rift Valley Institute's team was fortunate to be among those visitors whom the king received. Although that visit marked the end of our attendance of the event, it certainly did not mark an end to our interest in South Sudanese customary authorities. The Rift Valley Institute has been working with King Atoroba Peni Rikito Gbudue and other customary authorities in South Sudan since 2015, and it hopes to continue doing so for many years to come.

19 King's speech at Tiimbiro Church, 10 February 2022.

EPILOGUE: THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE RESTORED AZANDE KINGDOM

More than two years have passed since the Azande Kingdom was restored. Its first anniversary was celebrated in Yambio. As a subject of the Kingdom and an anthropologist, attending this first anniversary felt like an obligation. Unlike other subjects to the kingdom, I attended the anniversary with a keen interest to observe and document the celebration. It was also an opportunity to consider what has happened in the Azande kingdom's first year, and what the future may hold. I hope these few paragraphs answer these questions.

It appeared that many Azande were confused or didn't know what to call the celebration. Three weeks before the event, individuals who were assigned by headmen of respected residential areas to collect contributions for the event would simply tell the head of household 'we are here to collect contributions to celebrate the first anniversary of our King on the throne.'²⁰ While few people who made speeches at the event referred to it as 'Gbudue Day', the banner next to King's tent read: 'Azande Kingdom 1st Anniversary Celebration- Yambio 9th February 2023'. This confusion on the name of the event somehow replaced the initial idea to celebrate the legacy of King Gbudue on 9 February as Gbudue Day and the return of King Atoroba Peni Rikito Gbudue from detention in Juba.

Some Azande anticipated different things to happen on the first anniversary of the Azande Kingdom. While many attended the event for the feast and to enjoy the traditional dances, others expected the king to make big announcements. For instance, a friend I spoke to after the event out of frustration said: 'I thought the King was going to announce a reduction on the amount asked for dowry, but he did not say anything about it'.²¹ Though the event started late in the afternoon, people appeared enthusiastic and groups of traditional dancers and musicians kept them entertained.

The first anniversary was held on Yambio's Freedom Square, where most major gatherings take place. But unlike the crowd that attended the coronation day, this time people who sat under the tent shelter posted banners that seemed to show which Azande clan they were from. Non-Azande communities and traditional dancers sat in other sections of the tent. Each of these clans and non-Azande community groups had a banner mentioning their name, a drawing of their totem/symbol of the community, and an inscription in Zande and English: 'For Peace, Unity, living together with other tribes, building other good cultures and development.' This new initiative appears to have been sponsored by a single entity. Though the banners did well to identify clans and non-Azande communities that live under the Azande Kingdom, they didn't represent all Azande clans.

Living in peaceful coexistence with non-Azande communities and the promotion of culture have been central messages from King Atoroba Peni Rikito Gbudue since the day he was crowned. In his keynote address, which was translated into Arabic-Juba, King Atoroba echoed the need for peace and unity within the Kingdom and to all South Sudanese communities that dwell in Yambio. Focussing on the unity of ethnic Azande, the King said:

When we came, we said; there is no more Tambura. There is no more Ezo. There is no more

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20 The same explanation was given by two different men and women who collected contributions from the household in Kuzee and Naagori residential areas.

21 Telephone conversation with Girisi, 9 February, 2023.

Gbudue. There is no more Mange. There is no more Wandu. There is no more Ikpiro. You are an individual, you are a Zande.

These words are not to be taken literally or as an intention of King Atoroba to ignore the history of the mentioned kings and chiefs.²² But the King wisely knew that disunity may come when Azande today identify by referring to these precolonial Azande authorities. For unity, he encouraged every Zande to identify him/herself as a Zande. Towards the end of his speech, the king referred to the spirits of Mange, Tambura, Ezo, and Gbudue as the four strongest pillars on which the newly restored Azande Kingdom rests. The new understanding of the spirits of four royal leaders may signify cooperation and unity among the great-grandchildren to these kings and chiefs to support only one kingdom to represent South Sudanese Azande.

Regarding his activities in this first year as king, he noted ‘we didn’t begin work at the start of the year [within the first year]. Time shall come when I will speak with [full] authority of the kingdom.’ While he did not specify which ‘work’ the kingdom should have assumed at the beginning of the year it seems it may include internal arrangements within the kingdom and a document that will separate the roles of the King from that of paramount chiefs, subchiefs and headmen.²³ As the King awaits the time to speak with full authority, he requested the mayor of Yambio town and county commissioners to discourage laziness and to promote farming in the region. He encouraged farmers to plant trees and cash crops such as coffee. The King praised the culture of dressing in bark cloth during the Kingdom’s anniversary. He also urged parents to send their children to school and to build houses with larger rooms so that they can increase the population of the kingdom.

In closing, he echoed the message of President Salva Kiir on forgiveness and reconciliation. The outbreak of the 2013 civil war and its spread through parts of Western Equatoria State left thousands of South Sudanese dead.²⁴ Though the civil war ended, it seems the grieving families that lost their loved ones still hold grudges, and grievances and are divided. The King asked: ‘... why can’t you forgive? Is it because they killed your relatives? Or because of the crime that was committed against you?’ While justice has been delayed for crimes and abuses that were committed during the war, in his capacity the King encouraged individuals with grievances to seek assistance from church Bishops or the kingdom. The churches and local authorities in South Sudan have been an effective instrument for forgiveness and reconciliation.

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22 These names are also of towns in Zande region.

23 Alex Bullen, ‘Why Azande King is yet to receive full powers months on’, The City Review, 2022, <https://www.thegSouth Sudan.https://cityreviewss.com/why-azande-king-is-yet-to-receive-full-powers-months-on/azette.co.uk/London/issue/27914/page/3444/data.pdf#view=Fit&toolbar=1>.

24 Francesco Checch, Adrienne Testa, and Abdihamid Warsame; ‘Estimates of crisis-attributable mortality in South Sudan, December 2013- April 2018: A statistical analysis - South Sudan’, ReliefWeb, 2018 <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/estimates-crisis-attributable-mortality-south-sudan-december-2013-april-2018>.

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