

# **The Nuba: A People's Struggle for Political Niche and Equity in Sudan**

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## **The background**

This article is divided into four parts. Part one examines the historical grievances inflicted on the Nuba people of central Sudan by pre-independence and successive nationalist governments. It essentially describes the Nuba as a distinct semi-homogenous group and their land within the boundaries of the modern Sudan. It also highlights Nuba existence beyond the borders of the Sudan which forms what could be termed the 'Nubian Triangle' with its corners resting on Egypt (Aswan), East Africa and Chad. While the theme of the article is to examine the compelling reasons for Nuba struggle to realise a niche parallel to their magnificent role in the making of the Sudan as it exists today, it also provides a tortuous trek of some prominent European anthropologists and social scientists into the Nuba Mountains, and how they became fascinated by the richness of Nuba culture and traditions. Part two provides a concise visit to the history of the Turco-Egyptian rule, Mahdism and Anglo-Egyptian Condominium chronicles, which are re-written to shed lights on gruesome policies adopted by these rulers to ridicule and reduce the Nuba as a people. The article also provides an explanation, in simple terms, of the concept of region in the Nuba Mountains, and how the modern religions come about to reshape their way of life. This is important because the Nuba are conscious of religious tolerance amongst different faiths despite the attempts of neo-religionists to reconstruct their social structure. These issues are addressed in part three.

Central to the conflict in the Nuba Mountains are factors related to race and religion-biased politics, lack of economic development, internal displacement, maltreatment by the Government powerhouse, land-use and subsequent environmental and ecological degradation associated with these activities. The Nuba people have attempted to address these problems through peaceful political protest. But when they failed to make a breakthrough, they resolved to military *coups* for change and actively engaged the Government of the day in Khartoum. The author underscores and accentuates the underlying premises of Nuba struggle to locate political niche and perpetuate their historical role in the Sudan in part four of the article.

## **Introduction**

It has been hypothesised that the Nuba people in the Sudan, besides other population of what used to be referred to as 'Closed Districts' in 1922, have been subjected to both 'historical and contemporary injustices'. The epoch of this 'historic marginalisation and injustices' has so long a range, covering both pre- and post-independence Sudan. The 'contemporary injustices', on the other hand, started with the ushering in of nationalist regimes; it is still continuing inescapably to

this very day, and generating open expressions of dissent. Against this backdrop, various attempts were made by the Nuba activists to change the situation, but these efforts have gone unheeded due to the stubbornness of the authorities. It is worth noting that race has been a determining factor in politics and policies of Sudan, as elsewhere, when ethnicity plays a great role in political conflicts. In the Sudan, politics can be a highly sensitive or emotive issue; and the peculiar problem of it is that it gives people a warped image of themselves as being sorted by race. This is a compelling reason for the study of some of events accumulated – and defined by race - to force the Nuba to take to armed struggle after exhausting all peaceful means, including political campaigning by their own pressure groups.

## **PART I**

### **The Land and the People**

The Nuba tribes are scattered all over what is known today as the Nuba Mountains in Southern Kordofan, the Sudan. Barbour presented a detailed physical description of the Nuba Mountains.<sup>(1)</sup> Although the main concentration of Nuba communities is in Southern Kordofan, there are colonies of people of related and cognate origin inhabiting rocky hills in Northern Kordofan – namely, Jebel Haraza, Katul and Kaja hills, Um Durraq and Abu Hadid. But these are aborigines with a difference. They had assimilated the surrounding Arab culture; had long been Islamised and clothed; and to the casual eye were not very markedly different from communities of sedentary Arabs. Midob and Birgid in Dar Fur are also linked to Nuba ethnicity. Given the affinities between the riparian Nubians in Northern Sudan, Nubian elements in Dar Fur and the hill people of Nuba Mountains, this linkage forms Robin Thelwall Nubian Triangle with corners at Wadi Halfa, the Nuba Mountains and Dar Fur within the Sudan. But this triangle can be extended to cross states' borders: the Nubians in Northern Sudan extend into Southern Egypt; the Daju in the Southern Kordofan stride a long belt across Dar Fur into Chad; and the Nubi, who are distinguished communities in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania, are the descendants of the remnant soldiers of Eduard Schnitzer's, otherwise Dr Mohamed Emin, who was otherwise known and more famous as Emin Bey. Upholding this wider perspective, the Nubian Triangle can then be resting on Egypt (Aswan), east Africa and Chad.<sup>(2)</sup> The name Kordofan itself has a Nuba origin. It is believed to have evolved from the name of a certain Nuba king whose name was Kalad; when he was increasingly irritated, his subjects would say: 'Kalad far,' meaning in Arabic Kalad was boiling or fuming with anger. The phrase was corrupted through years to become Kordofan.<sup>(3)</sup> Nonetheless, the discussion in this paper oscillates between the Nuba in the Nuba Mountains and those living in the capital cities of Sudan, mainly Khartoum.

In central Sudan, however, the Nuba society, as a semi-homogeneous community, consists of tribes and sub-tribal groups which are linked together by means of specific, social systems and unwritten cultural laws. In other words, they profess a collective social existence and common interests of life which unite human-beings together within their own society. The Nuba had been visited by the Seligmans, who learnt just enough about them to put their name on the ethnographical map of Africa.<sup>(4)</sup> But Nadel gave us 'a systematically ethnographic reconnaissance of these tribes, necessarily somewhat broad in scope, but yet detailed enough to furnish a fairly precise picture of their social organisation and culture'.<sup>(5)</sup> Nadel asserted that '[a]s a group, the [Nuba] tribes have, of course, no political unity.' This view was shared by

Daly who commented on them that: 'Although most of the Nuba communities were politically acephalous, the exigencies of turbulent times often resulted in the emergence of war-leaders who galvanised resistance.'<sup>(6)</sup> During the Turco-Egyptian conquest of Sudan (1821-1885), Martini wrote about his impression on the Nuba and their country in 1875, and so did Carcereri.<sup>(7)</sup> But intensive research work was undertaken during the Anglo-Egyptian period (1898-1956), in which Kauczor explained the relation between the Affiti Nuba of Gebel Da'ir and what he referred to as Nuba proper.<sup>(8)</sup> Hillelson contributed with descriptive notes on the Daju, with special reference to their settlement in Western Kordofan.<sup>(9)</sup> Yunis presented some notes on the Baggara and the Nuba of Western Korofan.<sup>(10)</sup> This was followed by what Hawkesworth described as '*The Nuba proper of Southern Kordofan*'.<sup>(11)</sup> Stevenson had written extensively on the Nyimang and Temein tribes.<sup>(12)</sup> In 1948, George Rodger travelled to the Nuba Mountains where he spent some time with the Masakin (Qsar and Twal), Korongo and Kau-Nyaro-Fungor tribes; his published photographs on these communities became widely acclaimed.<sup>(13)</sup> Using George Rodger's photographs of the Nuba, Strachan wrote on his experience '*With the Nuba Hillmen of Kordofan*'.<sup>(14)</sup>

Captivated by the famous photograph by George Rodger of wrestlers from the Nuba tribe, Leni Riefenstahl decided to find these people after failing to secure co-operation from Rodger. In 1962, this controversial German film-maker obtained a special permit from the Sudanese Government to travel to the Nuba Mountains where she spent a considerable time amongst Masakin Qsar and Korongo tribes. She later wrote about the techniques they used in building their houses, marriage customs, equality between men and women, political and religious authority, judiciary system, body decorations and the importance of maternal uncle in the kinship.<sup>(15)</sup> After spending seven years in the Masakin area, culminating in her book, *The Last of the Nuba*, she returned five years later to film amongst the people of Kau-Nyaro-Fungor, in the south-east extremities of the Nuba Mountains. It was from here where another controversy arose. It was alleged that Leni 'paid for young men and women to undress, participate in bracelet fighting and undergo scarification; she chased away the elders and the dressed.' Her fascinating photographs from that period now constitute a unique record of a way of life and customs of the people of Kau. It is also worth mentioning that her involvement in this part of the Nuba Mountains resulted in her second book, *The People of Kau*. This 'representational photography of the Nuba people' does not settle down well among her critics, who, like Jim Faris, went on to describe her work as 'obscene in the sense of grotesque, focused out of context and isolated from setting.'<sup>(16)</sup>

After seeing Leni's pictures on the Nuba and granting her honorary citizenship, President Nimeiri, in one of his tour to Kordofan, was quoted as saying: 'We found people so poor in the Nuba Mountains that they have no clothes on.' Nimeiri's address to the nation unleashed a salvo of anti-nakedness campaign in the 1970s. In fact, nudity *vis-a-vis* Southern Sudan was one of the motions put by the Sudanese Parliament in 1958 during 'Abd Allah Khalil's Government. It is imperative though to affirm that the issue of clothing for the Nuba is philosophical. They used to make remarks that clothes would need frequent washing which one might not afford to buy soap; and, if they were left unclean, they might develop vermin. So the best way out of this dilemma is to do without clothes. However, the Nuba are well known for their physique and strength - both necessary qualities for wrestling - which they are famous for, adding to body beautification through painting and scarification. It is, therefore, so natural for the Nuba to be naked to show those natural features; and clothing to

them is not but an indication of covering up a defect. So nakedness was not merely confined to the people of Kau. Most people of the Nuba communities, with varying degrees, went naked; and even scarification was not a phenomenon related to the people of Kau alone. It was a widely practised tradition by all Nuba tribesmen and women. Leni, therefore, did not bring bracelet fighting or scarification with her from Germany to the natives of Kau. The furore created by Leni's monographs on the Nuba is, however, an ill-conceived notion. The Nuba, with or without Leni's photographs, are being despised by a large community in Northern and Central Sudan, and Leni's work has simply provided an excuse to vent out their ethnic arrogance and cultural supremacy against the Nuba people. Calling some Nuba tribes with names like Masakin, Koalib and Ghulfan – which can be translated into Arabic as the poor, the dogs and the uncircumcised ones, respectively – is the sheer vileness of sentiment. The Nuba may argue that Leni made fortune out of simple people who were photographed for no reason other than her commercial enterprise. But, despite that, her work should be viewed as an addendum to the students of fine arts and anthropology. Before her death in 2004, Leni lived in an elaborate estate outside Munich, known as 'the house the Nuba built'.

Leni's pictorial work on the Nuba people has become a subject of artistic criticism, especially by George Rodger, James Faris and Susan Sontag, partly because of her Nazi background. Rodger's photographs appeared to have motivated a large number of Europeans to visit the Nuba Mountains, and the Luz brothers followed in his footsteps to spend time amongst the Masakin tribe, studying their way of life, death rituals, cosmetic traditions and seasonal festivals.<sup>(17)</sup> With the exception of ethnographers like Evans-Pritchard on the Nuer people and Wendy James on the Udok people, both of Southern Sudan, most of – if not all – these amateurish photographers merely treat the Nuba people as 'exotic wild species' to be photographed and published in books for the authors' and publishers' financial interests. Faris's research on the art traditions of Kau-Nyaro people draws a correlation between art and society; his work extended to cover the aspects of clanship and change in commodity production among these communities.<sup>(18)</sup> Roden traced the down-migration of the Moro tribe, and Isma'il provided an ethnographic study on the Tullishi tribe, focusing on their spiritual belief, ritual traditions and customs.<sup>(19)</sup>

Nuba artefacts, conventional weapons, agricultural tools and pottery have attracted the attention of a number of academics.<sup>(20)</sup> And their fighting spirit is a well celebrated phenomenon.<sup>(21)</sup> Known for this unique way of life, agricultural methods, customs, traditions, dances, sports, spiritual beliefs and cultural practices, the Nuba became a source of exhaustive, anthological research by anthropologists.<sup>(22)</sup> But amongst these anthropologists, Nadel was a pioneer, and his classic research on the Nuba was an outstanding academic feat.<sup>(23)</sup> Over centuries, the Nuba in Southern Kordofan have evolved an intricately frugal mode of living in their territory, which is the essence of their existence and the source of their economic survival. For these reasons, they have been wedded to their land and forests in the Nuba Mountains. To focus on the shattered aspirations of the Nuba people and the other estranged and marginalised citizens of Sudan helps to highlight some of social problems that the successive regimes have utterly failed to solve. This is caused by the pervasiveness of polarised policies that has, in turn, resulted in a confused context in which the disgruntled population have found themselves. It is not the diversity of persons that is at the core of the problem in the Sudan, but, rather, a plurality of public policies that is replete with favouritism towards others at the expense of so many a citizen. More importantly, the lack of 'ethical, social policy' is a driving force in this 'communal injustice'.

Throughout decades, the brutalisation of the Nuba people has taken shape and size in a two-tier process: psychological and material. Psychologically speaking, the successive Sudanese authorities have, since time immemorial, created an environment in which they have sown the seeds of abrasive racism in terms of oral folklore, media publications, cultural attitudes and school curricula, to name but a few. The production of these ill-thought literature and abusive slurs is so profuse that some Nuba are made to believe in themselves as inferior and that it is the irony of fate that has made them to arrive in this world in such a miserable situation. This is evident in some rather confused Nuba who tend to refer to their leaders as ‘racist’, thus reflecting the inferiority complex by reiterating what the Arabs say about them. It is due to pervasive ideology, which insinuates itself into bodies and minds and inclines them to act against their own interests. Such an ideology is a product of state institutions, or institutional state apparatuses. This lopsided view of mental manifestation is a psychological disease, and it needs a healing treatment. The psychological and cultural propaganda have created a group of Nuba opportunists who put their personal interests before the interests of their own people, and, by so doing, they have declined to take part in political strife together with their fellow tribesmen either peacefully or militarily. To keep these Nuba people psychologically scarred and continually befuddled, the material factor has been brought in, including the denial of education opportunities, fair leadership competition, economic investment, entrepreneurial enterprises and constitutional civic rights. The vicious and organised brutalisation started during the Turco-Egyptian Rule and took full shape during the second half of the nineteenth century until today.

## **Historical Roots of the Conflict Revisited**

### **Some effects of Turco-Egyptian regime on the Nuba**

With the exception of the documented annals of the Kingdom of Tegali, the pre-colonial history of the Nuba Mountains is very sketchy indeed.<sup>(24)</sup> But the colonial history of the Turco-Egyptian regime in the Sudan symbolises a crucial chapter in the socio-political life of the Nuba people. This is quite so, however, not only because it represents more than half a century of naked brutalisation, but because it also reveals some of the racially aggravated events which took place during this time. Undoubtedly, race played a catastrophic role in the mayhem that was created by slavery during the Turco-Egyptian era in the Sudan (1820-1885). The Nuba people, as a negroid group, were condemned to slavery not only by the invading Turco-Egyptian forces, but also by the marauding Arab tribes in the vicinity who acted as local agents. One of these local warlords was Badawi Abu Safiyya. Abu Safiyya, who lived in al-Obeid towards the end of the Turco-Egyptian Rule and at the beginning of the Mahdism, led several raids against the Nuba, killing and enslaving hundreds of them. It was under the banner of *Jihad* (holy war) that these campaigns were undertaken. These captured Nuba slaves were not entirely destined for exportation to the world markets, but some of them ended up inside the Sudan as concubines, shepherds and chattel slaves performing all domestic chores. The literature on these raiding parties – sometimes working as a combined force of colonial army, nomadic and settled Arabs – is abounded in foreign archives and studies, which are undertaken by non-Sudanese scholars. This compromises the concept of equality, which should be served with only one proviso: none must attempt to force its views on others. What the majority of Northern Sudanese intellectuals – with the exception of Ahmed al-Awad Sikainga and Mohamed Ibrahim Nugud, Secretary-General of the Sudan Communist Party – seem incapable of understanding is that history cannot

be swept clean like a blackboard, so that they might inscribe their own future there and impose their own forms of life for those they despise as lesser people to follow. As these intellectually corrupt researchers were inveigled into 'academic fraud' for the purpose of misinformation, they normally shy away from such contentious subjects as slavery for fear of jeopardising the alleged social cohesion and contested national unity. By so doing, the intellectuals shift away from articulating what is believed to be part of the real problem at the heart of Sudan.

For the Nuba, this period represented an era of local resistance against enslavement and its consequences – for example, tribal warfare, starvation, kidnappings, looting, raiding and rapine. It was the time when survival mechanisms were mostly needed, that is, the question of to be or not to be. The human consequence of such warfare was immense: the large presence of the orphans, widows and disabled. What is known of slave-trading and conditions in the Sudan in the mid-nineteenth century does not make edifying reading. It was reckoned that 10,000-12,000 slaves from the Nuba Mountains passed through al-Obeid each year during a fifteen-year period extending from 1820 to 1835, and the area must have lost as many as 150,000 -180,000 people. On one occasion, '[t]he troops in the garrison of Kordofan area, such as at al-Obeid, would be ordered into the Nuba Mountains for the annual slave hunt, which usually took place in September or October.'<sup>(25)</sup> However, '[t]here is a record of one such hunt in the 1830s, led by the Governor Kurstapha Bey, capturing some 2,187 people, many of them *were* women and children; the depletion of the male population meant that there were few recruits to the army.' It is reported by Pallme that in one expedition:<sup>(26)</sup>

The first village of 196 souls surrendered without a fight, the sheikh telling Pallme that when the Turkish raids began eighteen years before, in 1820, the population stood at 3,000. Another village of 500 was reduced to only 188: 'Every hut was filled with bodies of the aged and the young indiscriminately, for those who had not fallen by the sword in battle, had put themselves to death to elude the dreadful fate of slavery.' However, one group of hill tribesmen, armed only with spears, put this formidable army to flight.

No wonder that '[t]he report of the arrival of [Bishop Daniel] Comboni in Kordofan had spread terror among the slave traders; they knew that his work was approved by the Khedive of Egypt who had also requested Comboni to present plans for the abolition of slavery.'<sup>(27)</sup> Comboni founded a mission in al-Obeid in 1872, then another two missions in the Nuba Mountains at Delen [Dilling] in 1874 and in Malbes in 1876 in which the priests and sisters not only educated the children, but taught the people a better way of life.' From everywhere that Comboni travelled, he reported the laments and complaints of the aggression of the slave traders. The Arabs were the inveterate enemies of the Nuba, and undoubtedly had been responsible for the retreat of the latter to fortified villages among their rocky hills. Comboni wrote:<sup>(28)</sup>

The Nuban population has been decimated by the slave traders, above all by the Arab-nomad Baggara. From half a million in this zone, they have been reduced to about 50,000... passing through the gorges of these mountains, the missionaries had evident proof of the diligence of these people for the mountains from the slopes of the tops are cultivated without wasting a yard of ground. The Nubans have fortified themselves against the invasion of the plunderers, but the uninhabited dark summits of some of the mountains show the severity of the slave traders' invasions.

It is reported by one author that:<sup>(29)</sup>

The Government *ghazawat* (raids) enslaved as many as 40,000 highlanders [Nuba people] in the first four or five years of the Turkiyya. By the late 1830s, one observer estimated that the *ghazawat* had taken 200,000 Nuba hill slaves in about the first 17 years of the Turkiyya; another supposed that between 10,000 and 12,000 highlanders arrived annually at al-Obeid as slaves.

Racial arrogance has a lot to do with the decimation of these indigenous people. The Nuba had been persecuted by the Turco-Egyptian marauders and their rapacious allies – that is, Arab settlers - greedy for slaves, wealth, resources-rich lands which they had lived on and dismissive of their right to life. Other spoils, which the occupying forces set to exploit in the Nuba Mountains, were the gold mines of Sheibun. It is worth noting that a few centuries ago, a group of riverain Arabs who were fleeing retribution by their local chieftains sought refuge in the Sheibun area causing a social engineering effect through intermarriages and concubine relations with the local women. The product was a population of mulattoes called Shawabna - that is, named after the area, who were then, and certainly today, characterised by an identity crisis. A typical example of this was the ill-thought and executed plot by Arab settlers and enslavers at Talodi in 1906 against the Condominium's attempt to combat slavery in the Sudan. Ironically, these sons of ex-slaves, who were fugitives running away from their Hamar Arab masters, settled on plains around the Nuba hills. They became infamous for robbery and slavery too. Because these rebellious slavers were championing the wrong cause, they were resisted and defeated by local chieftains – both Nuba (Kadugli and Miri) and Arabs – who backed the authorities in their counter-insurgency efforts. Not only was the enslavement of the Nuba by this detribalised group and their Arab minders conceived as a means of economic source, but it was also retained by these offspring of ex-slaves to pander to their 'inferiority complex' of being the descendants of slaves. But instead of exacting their revenge on the perpetrators, they vented out their venom on the victims through the perpetual act of enslavement.<sup>(30)</sup> These demi-Arabs were later to be exploited by the central regimes as part of Arab militias against the embattled Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), executing the job with eschatological fanaticism, obsessive notoriety and unwarranted viciousness. There are some settled groups of Arabs in various parts of the region, in particular in the neighbourhood of Kadugli, and these people, while proudly claiming Arab blood, are intermarrying with the Nuba and becoming physically indistinguishable from them. In fact, they are adopting some of the Nuba cultures and social customs, such as wrestling, Nuba names and so forth. They shared with the Nuba their agrarian lands, water resources, pastures and commercial activities.

The Nuba's stiff resistance against the Turco-Egyptian invasion can be understood from the fact that this invading army had its base in Egypt, even if domiciled in the Sudan, and could with some equanimity feel that it was protected at its back as if a strong wall had existed behind which it could retreat if need be. The Nuba, on the other hand, had their base in the Nuba Mountains itself, so that during those turbulent times everything was at stake. If they lost their ground in the Nuba Mountains, they lost all. There was no wall to which they might retreat for shelter. Theirs was the last stance for the last of the Nuba. To conquer such an adversary in his own terrain, equal courage and enduring fortitude were needed, including the fighting of the Nuba in the town of Bara which was erected by the displaced Nubians from Northern Sudan as their second urban centre when they were forced to move southwards. Like many other harsh and difficult lands, the Nuba Mountains represented a challenge, and, as so often elsewhere, where men take up that challenge, they become devoted to the cause. They aimed at achieving higher aspirations as the

only substitutes for surrendering, but ultimately survived to face yet another peril, the Mahdism.

### **The impact of Mahdist rule on the Nuba**

The Mahdiyya – or, the Mahdism – in the memory of the Nuba people is a byword for enslavement, anarchy, pillaging, plundering, crops burning and the abduction of Nuba women and children. This can be understood in the alliance of warlords and ex-slavers who allied themselves with the Mahdi after their business was threatened by General Gordon's policy of uprooting the slave trade. A certain ally was famously known as Osman Digna whose full and proper name was Osman Ben Abu Bakr Digna. Osman Digna, a great guerrilla leader, came of an Arab family which had settled in the Sudan in the seventeenth century; these migrant Arabs had subsequently intermarried and become members of the local Hadendowa people. Like the rest of his family, he was principally a slave-trader, but also handled other goods as well. He was in partnership with his three brothers and doing nicely until his brother was captured, by a British ship, when trying to cross the Red Sea with a cargo of slaves. All four brothers were imprisoned and their property was confiscated. The family was ruined. After a half-hearted attempt to earn a living legally, Osman threw in his lot with the Mahdi, who created him an *Amir* of Eastern Sudan. His task was to raise the Eastern Sudan and capture Suakin. It is, of course, easy to assume that Osman was a mere guerrilla warrior, enjoying his task, but without any genuine belief in Mahdism. The view may not be entirely correct. Osman was undoubtedly a man with grievance, for he felt the British had unreasonably ruined a very profitable occupation which did no harm to anyone of consequence. Osman's reaction to his punishment for being a slave-trader was probably much the same as the owner of cattle, because human traffickers were then treating slaves like animals. He regarded anti-slavery movements as mere anti-commercial nonsense, and his feelings of being ill-used were a drivingly burning force for revenge. It was this matter alone, perhaps, that entirely inspired him to lead guerrilla warfare in Eastern Sudan over many years.<sup>(31)</sup> After the capture of al-Obeid city by the Dervishes, the slave-traders of that city joined the Mahdism. The avowedly pronounced banner of the Mahdist movement was 'a people rightly struggle to be free'. This vision ignored the position of the slaves whose freedom was hardly likely to be assured by the Mahdi's army, judging by the Nuba's experience.

The seeds of Mahdists' maltreatment of the Nuba people, however, were sown when the Mahdi sought an alliance with *Mak* (Kinglet) Adam Um Daballo of Tegali Kingdom to which he declined, albeit he allowed his son to join the movement. Adam's rebuttal to back the Mahdi against the Turco-Egyptian authorities was not out of fear, but it was a decision taken in his court by his advisors in favour of neutrality. Because the Kingdom of Tegali was apparently independent, its leaders saw no reason in joining the Mahdi in his grandiose political scheme. After the fall of al-Obeid and the defeat of Turco-Egyptian forces by the Mahdi, Adam and his retinue were summoned to present themselves at Mahdi's court in al-Obeid only to find themselves under arrest. His chief advisor, Mr Justice Mirghani, who dared to challenge the Mahdi and called him an impostor, was executed immediately. Adam – together with his sons – was forced to march in shackles towards Khartoum; he died in captivity on the way at Shabasha near the White Nile. For the Mahdi to subjugate the Sudan, the matter involved a number of desperate battles with the Nuba people. Although the Dervishes despised the Nuba and called them 'poor black slaves', they found them extremely dogged and brave opponents. As the

Dervishes were constantly thwarted, so they did become malicious. It was once said:<sup>(32)</sup>

‘On one occasion, when the Dervishes, led by [Hamdan] Abu ‘Anja and followed by the Gellabas, attempted to ascend the mountain, the Nuba allowed them to advance some way and then pounced upon the Gellabas in the narrowest pass; these men were badly armed and 400 of them were killed ... In another attack, the Dervishes succeeded in reaching the Nuba village, burning the huts and killing a large number of them and carrying off their women and children as captives to Rahad where they were sold as slaves.

‘Eventually, the Nuba agreed to submit provided [that] they were allowed to remain free and stay in their native mountains. However, when they came down from the hills to take the oath of allegiance, they were told to follow the Mahdi to the White Nile. The Nuba had no alternative, but to agree, but during the night they fled to the hills. The fight was renewed, but eventually the Dervishes broke off the attempt to eliminate the remainder in the deep recesses of the hills.’

Similarly, the Mahdist rule contextualised the Turco-Egyptian regime within the political brutality that preceded it, while the Nuba were apparently striving to keep their traditions evolving the way they wanted them to. There is no methodical chronicles about the past history of the Nuba people, but the Mahdi’s means in advocating the spread of his movement through unlawful, violent and armed aggression are passed to generations by their elders through oral recitations, and its effect is felt in the absence of the stalwarts of the modern day Umma Party in the Nuba Mountains. But the Nuba’s hatred to the Mahdism can also be explained in a somewhat different context too besides the material destruction left by Dervishes’ campaigns in their wake and slavery felt by the Nuba. It is the intrinsic instincts of the Nuba that have been acquired through their chequered history to loathe foreigners meddling in their way of life. This latent but ‘outward defensive mechanism’ to suspect foreigners of foul intension against them was developed by experience and exigencies as adduced to; and through legends and myths that were not a common knowledge by any tribesman. But these legends and myths were fairly retained by the elders of tribes who wielded and controlled their interpretation. These knowledge bearers would then connect it with the daily movement of tribes-folk in the forms of rituals, customs, religions and so forth. There was always a strong belief that a tribe would perish if the myth were to be desecrated, because after its desecration, it would then lose its vital power. Such superstitious legends are apparently holy, as manifested by local heroes and heroines; and treating them with contempt is a sacrilege. This is the spiritual, cultural and social concept of a tribal unity within every Nuba tribe. It glued them together. Protected by mountainous terrain against the neighbouring enemies and the encroaching foreign invaders, the Nuba developed their unique cultures and languages. The fact that these tribes share some cultural traits, linguistic features and general similarities indicates that they do share a distant past, but they were unceremoniously separated by the unpredictable changes of life through centuries.

The Mahdist revolt may have shaken off the yoke of Turco-Egyptian regime in the Sudan, but it exploited destructive methods against local communities through co-opting former slave traffickers, or the enlisting of ex-slaves as *amirs* – Hamdan Abu ‘Anja, to name but one – whose *modus vivendi* proved to be barbaric and preposterous, judging by the Nuba’s experience as adduced to. In fact, Mahdism was neither a purely nationalist movement nor a purely religious one. There were plenty of Sudanese who did not wish to serve the Mahdi voluntarily, and there

were numbers of Muslims who considered the Mahdist movement to be a form of heresy, and not to mention the riverain population of Sudan who doubted that the movement, at its inception, would succeed. These lots were reluctant to join in fearing the backlash of the Turco-Egyptian authorities, who perpetuated similar policies, if not the same, through the pacification of the Nuba people.

### **Some aspects of Anglo-Egyptian rule in the Nuba Mountains**

In executing the 'pacification policy' in the Nuba Mountains, the British - in their early years - were concerned with security: this policy was centred on the enforcement of 'law and order'. Such a 'pacification policy' involved the suppression of internecine warfare – a policy resented by strong tribes, but welcomed by the weak ones. This was an elementary necessity for both the economic development of the territory and its evangelisation. However, two measures were particularly implemented by the British to bring about the change in security situation in the Nuba Mountains. One was the use of British power. Known as patrols, the British regularly launched the so-called 'punitive measures' against the recalcitrant Nuba ending always in bloody casualties, arrests and the confiscations of fire-arms, cattle and other Nuba properties. The Nuba reaction against these campaigns was particularly reflecting that the foreigners were interfering with their part of the world to which they were entirely alien, albeit it had many causes and reflected many deeply held political and cultural grievances. So their counter-offensive was consistently articulated as a defensive action against alienation, combined with a more generalised fight for freedom from the colonial occupation.

During the Anglo-Egyptian period, it was believed that the tribute Nuba were ordered to pay was paramount to remuneration to the authorities to protect them from Arab slavers. But the Nuba themselves proved to be refractory. No sooner had they felt relatively safe than they reneged on paying the tribute. This relegation of authority by Nuba provoked the government to send a series of disciplinary campaigns against them. For instance, in Tegali in 1903, al-Shareif Mohamed al-Amin revolted against the regime. The resentful insurgent was backed by the Mak of Tegali, Adam Jayli, and a branch of Hawazma Arab called Jimi' tribe. Al-Nour Hussein, the *nazir* of this sub-tribe, played an important role in promoting al-Amin's cause which was Mahdism in its nature and political in its uprising. In 1904 a patrol was sent to the Nuba of Jebel Shatt and Jebel Da'ir to take punitive measures against the people of these areas for non-payment of tribute and for raiding. Also, an expedition led by the Governor of Kordofan was despatched to Jebel Mandal, but the Nuba delivered a crushing defeat to the Government forces; and in so doing, they won a significant psychological victory for themselves. In October 1904, the force sent to capture the Mak of Kitra was obliged to withdraw among rumours that two or even more Nuba communities were forming an alliance against the regime. The rebellion of Faki 'Ali, a Miri paramount chief, in 1915, is another example. Taking the advantage of the imposition of personal taxation instead of collective tribute payments at a time of economic hardship, a disappointed Faki 'Ali rebelled and fought the authorities in more than one battle.<sup>(33)</sup> 'Ali's frustration was the result of a change in the scale of rations issued among the newly-raised Nuba Territorial Company at Kadugli and quite possibly due to the appointment of a new chief in the Northern hills. The violent suppression of Sultan 'Ajabna's revolt in the Nyimang hills in 1917 is the sixth example.

All these examples explain how the British imperialism reacted to the Nuba resistance in their homeland.<sup>(34)</sup> The repercussions of the 1924 revolt was felt in Talodi. The defeat of Teimein and Julud in 1926 and the conflict in Jibal Tullishi (1939 – 1945) are all evidences that the Nuba in no way were willing to adopt new measures of life as long as these measures contradict their way of life.<sup>(35)</sup> Nonetheless, the Condominium establishment used the Hawazma Arabs against the Nuba in these campaigns: it was indeed, a short-sighted policy which did take years to heal its adverse consequences. Furthermore, Kobongo of Liri was also to be dealt with. Taking the payment of poll tax as an issue, a major conflict developed between Kobongo on one hand, and the Hawazma and the British authorities on the other hand. The situation exacerbated to a point where the British sent in a ‘punitive patrol’ supported by an aircraft that bombed the village. Kobongo was sent to the Kober jail in Khartoum North together with some of his tribesmen where he died.<sup>(36)</sup>

At the very beginning, the colonial authorities thought of enlisting the rebellious tribes into the army for a number of reasons, including absorbing their manly energy in fighting for the Government, a policy which would, as they put it, ‘civilise the Nuba’. But the policy was later dropped because it was precipitating Islamisation and Arabisation of the Nuba amongst the army recruits. On this very issue, it is important to note that the core of ‘Ali ‘Abd al-Latif’s White Flag League revolt in 1924 was hailed from the Nuba Mountains. ‘Ali ‘Abd al-Latif himself was half Nuba and half Dinka (his father was a Nuba and his mother was a Dinka), but he became detribalised by slavery. Although not attested by material and human evidence in the Nuba Mountains nor in the South, it is often argued by some Northern scholars that the British – at least at the beginning – aimed at nurturing the black African majority of Sudan to ‘inherit the throne’ and enjoy the spoils of power after decolonisation. But the premature revolt of ‘Ali ‘Abd al-Latif forced them to alter this policy, thus shifting – instead – to ‘fostering the sons’ of sectarian leaders, religious chiefs and native administrators. This was partly to ensure the loyalty of these groups to the Government, and because of the overwhelming influence these groups had on their subjects religiously, socially and politically.

The other factor in the ‘pacification policy’ was the introduction of Christianity in which the missionary enterprise represented both the supranational endeavour for the kingdom of God and an arm of imperialism. The involvement of Christian missionaries in the Nuba Mountains was meant to deliver a profound change in the religious, social and cultural attitudes of the Nuba people. Some of the Nuba cultural norms which the church endeavoured to dissuade them from practising were polygamy, excessive drinking that was considered debauchery and the beating up of rainmakers when they failed to call rains. Generally speaking, alcoholism is always considered as a great menace to the moral and physical life of all communities, including Christians, sapping their health and vitality, not to speak of their material resources. It has been recognised that the missionary attack on polygamy and ancestor cults represents a massive assault on the basic unit of the family. For example, the chastisement of rainmakers was outlawed by the new authorities and the practitioners of such a custom were punished by the law. Such a tradition was prohibited not only because it was ‘despicable superstition’, but because it was also an epitome of the brutal violation of human rights. To cite an example of such a belief in rainmaking superstition, the following story was told by Robin Crole, a Scottish civil servant who worked in the *markaz* (District’s Commissioner’s Office) at Dilling in the Nuba Mountains during the makship of Amina of Nyimang in the 1950s. Amina was a powerful old man with something of the reputation as a *kujour* (witchdoctor). The story goes, during a drought in 1952

endangered reputation of several of rainmaking *kujours*, and to account for it, it taxed their ingenuity severely. In the *markaz* at Dilling, Robin was in charge when he received a word of trouble at Sallara from which one rainmaker had come to him and asked if he could be put in prison because he was frightened that he would be killed for his failure of making the rains. Robin took a truck with a load of prisoners and, skidding and being pushed, they reached Sallara to find what seemed like the whole community assembled under the trees. Their *kujour* had failed to provide rain, and the tribe were demanding that he returned the gifts he had been given, including a new wife and some goats. *Mak* Amina and Robin sat at a portable table and discussed the matter at length. Eventually, the *kujour* admitted that only God sent rain and that the source of the trouble was the Government. What had happened, the *kujour* argued, was that the Government had set up a primary school and put all the children in red shirts and shorts! He continued to elaborate that God, looking down, saw the red and thought the tomatoes were ripe and that no further rain was required! As a remedy, the *kujour* prescribed a week's nakedness for the boys.<sup>(37)</sup> However, Robin's arrival coincided with a fall of rain. *Rijlak bakheit* (your arrival has brought good luck), the attendants under the trees remarked loudly, and the *furere* subsided. This incident is an invitation to the discussion of the concept of Nuba religious belief and the role of the missionaries in their communities.

## **PART II**

### **Religion and Race: A Two-faced Coin in the Nuba Mountains**

#### **The Nuba and the missionaries**

As we have seen earlier, the power of the *Kujour* was religiously strongest among the Nuba tribes. One of his most important functions was the performance of ceremonies, which would ensure adequate rain. The Great *Kujour*, or King of the rain-makers, with his many subordinates, combined spiritual and political power. Of the chief who was chosen to represent a community in business with the Government was not the true religious chief, but a deputy appointed because the rules of sanctity did not permit the real chief to have dealings with the outside world.<sup>(38)</sup>

However, the Nyimang response to the British official clearly affirms their expressive belief in God as well as their instrumental acceptance of the superstitious powers of the rainmaker. Another example, which gives credence to piety, can be drawn from the Temein tribe in the rural district of Dilling province in the Nuba Mountains. The Temein tribesmen refer to both God and rain as *nangnat*: the intended designation is always construed from the context in which it is said. This can be explained from the fact that the rains drop from the sky – or, literally from heaven where God is presumed to be residing, and not to mention the importance of water for every living organism. This gives rise to two interacting lines of treatment: the dual causation notion of every event amongst the Nuba as a whole, which is exemplified by the Nyimang and Temein divine customs. One notion requires 'material' or 'natural' concept whereby rain, as a natural phenomenon, can be caused by the gathering of clouds, condensation and eventually rainfall, while the other view is directed at the 'mystical cause' of the rainmaker's witchcraft acting, in theory, as an active agent. This second factor is the social opponent of the dual causation concept, and 'social' here stands for the experience of the uniquely categorical demand of the

whole society. The same conceptualisation goes to disease which requires ‘material’ medicines specific to the observed symptoms and the ‘mystical cause’ without which the symptoms could neither occur nor continue. The role of *Kujours* is then to administer both ‘material’ and ‘superstitious’ medicine; the latter being normally in the form of rituals that may be either ‘expressive’ – trying to say something – or ‘instrumental’ – trying to do something. To this end, *Kujour* is a powerful magician; but his main function, as diviner, is to mediate between God and men in the great matters of society. In these, the *Kujour* has to be consulted, but he can do no more than reveal the will of God. He has no political power to enforce it. This dual causation notion of disease is also held by the Zande in Southern Sudan as described by Evan-Pritchard.<sup>(39)</sup>

The Nuba religions, thus, centre on such concepts as reincarnation, the immortality of the soul of ancestors and the idea that personal difficulties and ailments can be overcome with spiritual and mental cleansings. There is, in the history of the religions ‘of the book’ – Judaism, Christianity and Islam, a constant tension between the society of the message and social dynamics of the world in which it is being received or revealed by God through His prophets. It is a conflict that occurs constantly in their development. The missionaries referred to non-Muslim Nuba as pagans. Christianity, meanwhile, took the lives of the saints with a zest that was positively pagan in its relish for human detail; take – for instance, the festivities of Christmas Day and the pagans’ celebrations of winter solstice. Christmas is a secularised Christian holiday. But how Christian is it really? The early Christians never celebrated it, the Bible doesn’t tell people to observe it and biblical references to shepherds tending their flocks indicate that there is no way that Christ was born on December 25 in winter. This date was originally celebrated by pagans in the North who refused to stop their winter solstice celebrations to celebrate the return of the sun. Pagans in the South celebrated the birth of Mithras (a God predating Jesus) on December 25. The traditions of festive singing, exchanging presents and having Christmas trees again hark back to the pagans. They decorated their evergreen trees with decorations, food and runes to help keep the tree spirits close to their villages, sung joyous songs and swapped presents. The Christian authorities tried for years to stamp this out, so the pagans merely took their trees indoors, which is why it is still practised to this day.<sup>(40)</sup>

At Sallara, there was a missionary station manned by an Irishman called Donnelly of the Church Missionary Society. The church was built in the area in which the communion was taken using a small prayer book written in the Nyimang language. Thus, missionaries were the first in the field in the spheres of education and medicine. They established ‘vernacular schools at Sallara in Dilling district in 1938 and Katcha in Kadugli district in 1940.’<sup>(41)</sup> These schools were constructed, undertaken and patronised by the Church Missionary Society. In contrast with central Sudan, there was a feverish campaign by the Graduates General Congress which led to the construction of schools in Khartoum, Wad Medani and al-Obeid that were named after the congress. Both educational and evangelical work required linguistic qualifications, and one of the missionaries’ contributions to the Nuba Mountains was the study of indigenous tongues. Missionaries delved into languages and major dialects. In addition to school texts, they supplied the written form of these languages, and provided the beginnings of a translated literature. It was natural with biblical literature that the missionary translators began the Gospel of Mark as the first choice. This study of the Nuba languages by the missionaries gave the Nuba tribesmen a feeling that they were worthy of understanding and respect. ‘The study of the languages inevitably gave the missionary a more intimate understanding of the social structure of the people and of their outlook on life and the world.’ But ‘not all who came by this knowledge, of

course, evaluated it in the same way; [s]ome were rather scornfully condemnatory, while others discovered positive values they wished to preserve... The scorners carried their own Western social background in one package with the Christian gospel and so failed to appreciate the functional value of much behaviour in African societies.’ Based on this, an African was regarded in a colonial anthropological context as pathological child: difficult to subdue, but needing to be subdued anyway. But others took a more enlightened view. To those who did, African owes the pioneer studies of social systems and forms of religious belief – a world apart from the mere museum items picked up by passing travellers – which are accepted as standard monographs of the people concerned.<sup>(42)</sup> Now, we have seen that in the field of languages, it was the missionaries who reduced vernaculars to writing – if not all, but a few. Also, it was them who laboured on dictionaries and produced books – even if they were no more (or not less) than translations of the Bible. The pioneers in this field were the McDiarmids, Bell and Stevenson.<sup>(43)</sup> Not only did the missionary help the sick, but they also saw therapeutic work as a means of combating the influence of the *kujour* (traditional medicine man) whose parts played a vital role in indigenous culture and religion. However, the pioneers concentrated at first on curative medicine and subsequently developed some research and preventive measures. The Nyakuma centre for treating leprosy is an instance to adduce.<sup>(44)</sup> Despite the missions’ provision of schools, their general encouragement of economic change leading to greater material prosperity, and political change leading to social order lagged too far behind. This is because missionaries were necessarily concerned to eradicate any overtly pagan aspects of life amongst the Nuba people. The Nuba, on the other hand, had no desire to send their children to schools, and, if a few kids were to be sent to schools, girls were not at all or hardly at all amongst them. The Nuba preferred their children to learn the Nuba skills of wrestling, stick-fighting, bracelet-fighting and so forth and to look after cattle and goats because their forefathers were alienated by race and religion biased politics of the Sudan.

### **Despicable racism and dispensation politics: the birth of the Black Bloc**

Events leading to Sudan’s independence were marred right from the beginning by the suspicion of the British rulers following personification of the authentic black movement headed by ‘Ali Abd al-Latif. Soon after the quashing of the revolt, the literary schools of thought began to function in Omdurman, which meant to promote Arabo-Islamic culture through poetry competition, reciting Arab literature, memorising Islamic history and drumming up Arab nationalism. One school even refused to accept two of the literarily renowned brothers as members, simply because of their African background – or, as to the renunciation of their detribalised ethnicity or origin. They were none other than these Northern elites who hailed vitriolic abuse and racial insults on ‘Ali ‘Abd al-Latif, the leader of the White League Flag in 1924 adduced to earlier. Despite his nationalistic call for ‘united Sudanese tribes’, ‘Ali ‘Abd al-Latif’s message was not grasped by the sectarian leaders who were partly influenced by the British intelligence and also because of their vested interests. Questioning ‘Abd al-Latif’s ethnic belonging and social background was a clear testimony that race became part of political dispensation in the early days of political parties. The racial slurs which were echoed against ‘Abd al-Latif and his colleagues portrayed the deep-rooted crises of ethnicity and identity in the Sudanese society. ‘Ali ‘Abd al-Latif, and the other unsung heroes, was only exonerated posthumously. Notwithstanding their call for the Nile Valley – at some stage in their struggle – and their courageous stance, they were led down by their Egyptian colleagues in the army.<sup>(45)</sup>

However, these ethnically bound societies and coffee clubs were soon transformed into political parties. This led to the emergence of another opposing group, which began to organise itself into a popular movement if only to find itself being subjected to counter-measures by the authorities and the fledgling Northern parties. A racist attitude lurked beneath all these measures. This was what prompted Rev Philip Abbas Ghabboush to state: ‘It was in recognition of the danger of the growing economic, social and political power of small Northern elite that the first genuinely Sudanese political movement was begun.’<sup>(46)</sup>

The genuinely Sudanese political movement Ghabboush was referring to was *al-Kutla as-Souda* (the Black Bloc) which was founded in 1938 by Dr Mohamed Adam Adham. When the Northern political parties were taking part in the process aimed at Sudan’s independence, they deliberately refused to include the bloc in the negotiations marathon that led eventually to Sudan’s independence in 1956. So when these factions travelled to Egypt for a historical convention that decided the fate of the country, they were accompanied by nominal Northern parties which some of them were only represented by their leaders as they had no executive committees nor popular bases.<sup>(47)</sup> The bloc was rejected on the ground that it was a ‘racist movement’, and so was anything related to the Nuba and other marginalised people of Sudan ever and anon. The Condominium authorities were persuaded – or, rather ‘seduced’ - by traditional and sectarian leaders into refusing to register the bloc as a legal, political party. Nonetheless, the bloc wasted no efforts in establishing social organisations to help the impoverished communities in the capital cities. Not only was Dr Adham successful in creating shops and opening social clubs as a means of financing the bloc and enlightening the neglected non-Arab groups of the country, but he was also known to have been publishing a monthly magazine, *Afriqiyya (Africa)* in Arabic in order to highlight the cultural aspects and social matters of the poverty-stricken people of Sudan. The magazine was in circulation for almost two years (*circa* 1948/1949 – 1950s) before it ceased to exist. According to Yoshiko Kurita, the bloc was succeeded by the *Jam’iyya al-Wahda al-Sudaniyya* (the Society for the Sudanese Unity), which was established in 1942 as a political expression of the Negroid but detribalised people in the country. The main founders were ‘the ex-soldiers from the South and the Nuba Mountains and their sons, who were dwelling in the Northern towns.’<sup>(48)</sup>

The ‘Nuba policy’, as equal in effect to that of the ‘Southern Policy’, was meant to preserve the cultural identity of the Nuba people and to protect them against enslavement, Islamisation, Arabisation and exploitation by Arabs. This policy, as championed by its author, Angus Gillan, has been a subject of intense criticism by a number of Sudanese scholars.<sup>(49)</sup> Their arguments centred mainly on the pretext that the policy has been detrimental to national unity, and that it proved – as they alleged – to be the seeds of political conflicts and bloody hostilities in later years. In fact, the allowance by the British of Arabs to settle side by side with their Nuba counterparts in the Nuba Mountains and even entrusted the former to be in charge of Nuba and Arabs affairs alike is defeating these scholars’ arguments against the British in this respect. This fact is always under-looked by the critics of the colonial policies in the Nuba Mountains.

So why did the Nuba emerge from the colonial period without economic development, political power or educational benefits? The answer is that the British and the Egyptians, being the co-domini of Sudan, were not interested in developing the Nuba Mountains for a number of reasons. Firstly, the Nuba proved to be recalcitrant who refused to give up the fight until the 1940s, allowing the Northern Sudanese to enjoy the fruits of their early surrender. Secondly, those

Nuba who joined the army became a thorn to the authorities, particularly after their involvement in the White Flag League revolt in 1924, which called for the independence of Sudan from Britain and the unity of the Nile Valley. Their rebellious action led to the disbandment of the Nuba battalion in Shendi and the restriction on Nuba recruitment in the army before the Second World War (1939 – 1945). Eventually, this meant that after Sudan's independence in 1956, there were no highly ranking Nuba military officers to be appointed in leading positions in the army echelon, if they were to be allowed by their Sudanese colleagues. Thirdly, the racial element was particularly shown against non-Arab population by the colonialists in the unequal remuneration of the same job. If not for racial discrimination and prejudice, then nothing could explain the unequal payment to the Nuba and the Southerners in contrast with their Arab counterparts as it was a practice by the Condominium authorities. In the end, the lack of economic infrastructure in the Nuba Mountains meant service deprivation, lack of political participation, basic healthcare and hygiene and so forth. Because of this socio-economic backwardness, Davidson stated that 'even in the face of British imperial suzerainty, little progress was made in rationalising social life and all that ensues [in the Nuba Mountains].'<sup>(50)</sup> This political racism and economic discrimination against the Nuba bred an identity crisis among the African Sudanese only to fight enthusiastically to identify themselves with the non-Arab and non-Islamic movement as it will be discussed below.

### **The identity question: Africanism, Arabism and Afro-Arabism**

If anything, the Northern elites should be grateful to the Turco-Egyptian and the Condominium regimes in the Sudan for two reasons. Firstly, without these colonial powers, there would have never been a united Sudan with its identified borders as Joseph Lagu remarked in a broadcast interview despite the vociferous denunciations of the British that they had created the so-called the 'Problem of Southern Sudan'. Secondly, the post-colonial leaders in the Sudan were groomed by the British to wield power and authority when the direct colonisation ceased to function. These Northern elites were provided with the benefits of education and the tools of modern statecraft, financial means, political encouragements, social status and legal support. Before Sudan's independence in 1956, a strong alliance of *jallaba* (petty Arab traders), civil servants and ex-army officers formed the so-called political parties and inherited the throne. It is from these prerogatives that.<sup>(51)</sup>

The Northern Sudanese inherited the central authority and began to dominate the other non-Arab tribes of the country. Northerners feel that their Arab blood makes them different (and superior) to the Africans of South and West, but the Arabs of the Near East regard all Sudanese as cheap black labour. The Northerners' confused identity is a factor in their conflict with their African neighbours.

This hijacked legitimacy of hegemony was reinforced by the ideology of racial Arabism and political Islam 'as opposed to a different and more universal idea of citizenship and citizens' rights'. In their strident manifestations of politicised religious identity, the Northern Muslim elites have forced the non-Muslims to be wary of those who are as intransigent as they are wishing to regulate other faiths and get the state to succumb to their power. To be specific, it was none other than Mr Isma'il al-Azhari, the first post-independence Sudanese Prime Minister, who had rigged the votes and linked the country with the Arab world, and brought the country into the League of Arab States. As shown by the 1955 census, only 31% (4 million) of the total

population of 10.2 million claimed an Arab origin, and 61% registered as Africans. From the latter, there 'were 3.2 million people in the six Northern provinces – that is, 49% of the population there'. The rest – that is, 8% - was classified as 'others', and, in fact, they belonged to West Africa. Therefore, the percentage of Africans in that census was 69%. And it was from this very early era that the 'cultural and political identity of the country was rigged in favour of the Arabs; and, against the wishes of the majority of its people'; it – the identity - was brutally suppressed. Despite Azhari's failures – including his failure to deal with Southern Sudan disturbances in August 1955, he was - and is still – admired by some Sudanese as a great statesman, who declared Sudan's independence inside Parliament in December 1955, and the one who unfurled the Sudanese three-colour flag.

So what makes identity a thorny issue in the Sudan? Identity is the distinct personality of an individual that is regarded as a persisting entity or the individual characteristics by which a thing or person is recognised or known by. The Sudanese bitterly contested identity has always been viewed in the light of the three schools of thought: Africanism, Arabism and Afro-Arabism. In theory, the advocates of Arabism have been vociferous for so long a time about their pseudo-belonging to Arab identity until they succeeded to construct the Sudanese institutions on this monolithic approach since the advent of the Funj Sultanate. This is achieved despite internal opposition, and the fact that they cannot withstand the rigorous test of Arabism in the context of wider Arab world is unwittingly self-defeating. The Sudanese are referred to by their colour as *Suadna* (blacks) in Libya, *abeed* (slaves) in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf counties and, more insultingly, their agricultural products - namely, groundnuts or well known as the Sudanese peanuts – are called *fustuq al-abeed* (the nuts of slaves) in Lebanon and probably across the countries of the Fertile Crescent, including Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Palestine. The Afro-Arabism affiliates, on the other hand, have attempted to present a mid-way definition of the Sudanese identity. This school of thought was prominent in the 1960s, and their associates had identified the Funj Sultanate and its capital, Sennar, as a role model for their thesis which they referred to as 'the School of Bush and Desert' symbolising Africa and Arabia, respectively. But according to one scholar, this school, in fact, has provided a pretext for the assimilation process of African Sudanese into Arab culture and beliefs. Like all the inhabitants of countries that are located at the margins of the Arab world - including Mauritania, Somalia, Djibouti and the Comoro Islands – a section of Sudanese people continually struggle to assert themselves as Arabs despite the tacit rejection or racial discrimination inflicted upon them by 'pure Arabs' in the Arab Peninsula. The irritable reaction of some Sudanese intellectuals is somehow enigmatic: they sometimes claim that they are more Arabs than the Arabs themselves and the oppression of non-Arabs in the Sudan is the reflection of inferiority complex and internal crises in so brutal a form. That ethnicity can be at once an artefact of human imagination and rooted in the dark recesses of history – fluid and important yet manipulability to kill for – which make ethnic conflicts so terrifyingly difficult to understand and contain. With these concepts of hyper-inflated superiority, these Arabised groups in the Sudan are poised to rule the country according to the hypothesis of 'group dynamics' that is the most determining factor in influencing people with tightly cohesive characteristics. No wonder then, and, as a 'band of brothers' or camaraderie, their aims and objectives are the dehumanisation of others as monsters through the increasingly strident manifestation of politically religious identity. This is exactly so according to the 'bunch of guys' theory'.

Interestingly, ideology is defined as the process whereby 'ruling groups can - in their thinking -

become so intensively interest-bound to a situation that they are simply no longer able to see certain facts which would undermine their sense of domination.’ It was not impossible to say that in certain situations in the past the collective unconsciousness of a certain group in the Sudan obscured the real conditions of the Nuba society both to itself and others, and thereby stabilised these conditions to the point of stagnation. This is what Marx and his disciples have stated that if the masses ‘know not what they do,’ it is due to the pervasive influence of ideology which insinuates itself into bodies and minds and inclines them to act against their own interests. Thus, the whole problem of ‘false consciousness’ ensues: the masses are mystified, led astray, disoriented by the ubiquitous swarm of origins and slogans that they assimilate into their own lives in order to act in a social context. Some of these disoriented people, knowingly or unknowingly, impersonate the role of vanguards only to act on behalf of their oppressors as ‘devils’ advocates’.

The last category of school of thoughts is Africanism. Africinity (Africanness), or negritude as Dr Leopold Senghor of Senegal once called it, is a reflection of the reality of African Sudanese. This undeniable reality is vividly observed in their features, colour, culture and African noble religions. The Nuba have clearly stated their belonging to this distinctive identity, not as an allegation, but because they are none other than African Sudanese. However, there may have been some Nuba individuals who can be described as the ‘confused lot’ as a result of their absorption of the abundant literature of Afro-Arabism. Thus their consciousness, which is the subjective element, has become necessarily suppressed by ‘mechanical exploitation’ as an active force. In the partially-held parliamentary elections of 1986, which had never been free from controversy, Andrew McKeen established a political party called Zinjirab. It had no bearing on the thesis he expounded. As the name indicates, it represents a cross-breed of Negroes and Arabs. By putting Zinj (Negroes) before Arabs, Mr McKeen, himself a Nuba, neither identified clearly who were the cultural donors and who were the recipients of these cultural endowments nor was he able to present or provide the percentages of the resultant mixture of these two opposing cultures and races. But because of these irrational hypotheses, his party failed to attract adherents, and both the message and the messenger were reduced to ridicule by the Nuba. It is the dark illusion that has spread unquestioned through the minds of ‘docile bodies’ and begun to do its work of ‘identity pollution’. In actuality, such contemplation required self-assessment and ideology critique, because this kind of theorisation was not only rejected by the majority of the Nuba people, but it was also nonsensical and an ill-thought venture. Worse still, if it were to succeed, it would create a community of detribalised and uprooted individuals whose social background and identity crisis could only lead them to alienation and communal rejection. Identity cannot be based on causes that serve one’s own ideology; and individuals’ association with merely what they like cannot form a basis for identity. Identity should spring up from the cultural traditions and hereditary lineage of the concerned people.

### **The legacy of the Condominium Rule: power and prejudice**

According to the Self-Rule Agreement, as signed between Egypt and Britain in Cairo in February 1952, the Sudan was to carry out a referendum which will decide the independence of the country. But on December 19, 1955, Mr Isma’il al-Azhari, the leader of the National Unionist Party, passed a motion in the Constituent Assembly that promulgated the independence of Sudan inside Parliament, and the public celebrations of lowering the two colonial flags and

hoisting the three-colour flag of the newly independent Sudan were merely postponed for January 1, 1956. This was the way the Sudan achieved its independence, which was a hasty and a faulty one, if not to say an unconstitutional one, and not to mention the way the Northern leaders watered down the Southerners' demand for a federal system of rule for the South. Thus, the rights of the different ethnicities of the country were not properly addressed as the riverain politicians were hankering after power and jostling for personal interests. What might be termed as three schismatic parties would converge together around the race element to confront the Nuba and their like. The first of these three is conservatism – that is, sectarian and other Islamic parties. The second – namely, scientism - includes Communism. The third one incorporates racially oriented parties – such as, Arab Ba'ath Socialism, Nasserism, Arab Nationalism and others. In the Sudan, these ideological tendencies can be grouped together as a family around the race factor, and their differences as schism among brethren. Only individualists, and Republican Socialist Party, have positively looked at the diversity in post-independence Sudan. The bygone leaders on the eve of Sudan's independence cannot be forgiven: simply because they were alerted and advised by so few a Northerner who had put the interests of the country above personal pride and prejudice. To name but one, Ibrahim Badri; who could be described, at best, as a paragon of political rectitude. On May 13, 1951, Mr Badri presented a predictable memorandum to the Constitution Amendment Commission in which he urged the members of the committee to 'lay constitutional foundations in such a way as to preserve the rights of backward groups and minorities, to maintain the stability of the country and to allay the fears of religious sects.' Better still, Mr Badri went on further in writing and naming the targeted groups who would be adversely affected by unforeseeable events in the Sudan. These groups include:<sup>(52)</sup>

The inhabitants of the three Southern Provinces ... the Southern Funj, Blue Nile Province, as well as some of the inhabitants of Dar Fur and the Nuba Mountains of Kordofan. All of these people neither profess Islam nor speak Arabic, they can hardly understand each other; there are no traditional, religious, linguistic or cultural ties between them and the Northerners; the only tie is a territorial one, which can be traced back to the Egyptian Conquest in 1820.

Before organising themselves into a political body, the representatives from the Nuba Mountains used to attach themselves to the Northern parties to air out the grievances of their people back home. These individuals, who joined these northerly political factions, were soon to feel the heat of racial ideologies in the centre of these parties and the total neglect of their civil demands. Amongst these victimised personages was Hussein Khartoum Darfur who was one of the founding members of the Muslim Brethren since his youth days as a student in the Military School in Omdurman. His enthusiasm to group loyalty made him participate in one of their aborted military *coups* in the 1950s. Darfur was caught red-handed and cashiered. He then enrolled at the University of Khartoum, studied law and worked as a lawyer. Darfur was once more arrested in 1969 by the Nimeiri junta for an alleged plot to topple the civilian Government that Nimeiri himself had overthrown. Half-heartedly, the sectarian parties in the Sudan believe in democracy only because it is another route that can lead them into the corridors of power. Another route is the military. This is why these parties keep crypto-members in the Armed Forces. They had used them in the past, and they could use them in the future to topple regimes and install the one they like.

After the demise of the military regime of Lt-Gen Ibrahim Abboud in October 1964, the General

Union of the Nuba Mountains was reactivated after years of working underground. Needless to say, the reintroduction of democracy had made no significant change for the freedoms of Nuba politicians, and the arrest of Mahmoud Haseib, the Chairman of the Nuba Mountains Peasants Union, in al-Obeid and sending him to Khartoum for interrogation was a typical example. This incident took place during the premiership of Sirr al-Khatim al-Khalifa – that is, the caretaker Government that was installed in the wake of the October Revolution in 1964. Rev Ghabboush, on the other hand, was concentrating on a civil campaign to abolish the notorious poll tax that was introduced by the Condominium authorities in the 1920s but it was not revoked by the nationalist governments. What made this tax notorious was that ‘it was related to the earlier *digniyya* (*geziya* in Darfur) which had been levied from the Negroes in slaves and grains.’ Worse still, the tax, a part from its undignified nature, was only paid by the undeveloped parts of the country. It was not only the Nuba who were expressing their dissent against the parliamentary elections that took place in 1965, but the people of Dar Fur and the Beja were also amongst those who were extremely disappointed with the politics of the centre. Due to security situation in the South where violent hostilities were taking place between the Sudanese Armed Forces and Southern Sudan Liberation Army, partial elections were carried out in the South. This fraught situation led to the election of regional interest groups that comprised ‘ten members of the Beja Congress and seven of the Nuba Mountains Federation of Independents.’<sup>(53)</sup> But in the 1968 semi-general elections, the Nuba and the Beja MPs were reduced to five and two, respectively. The Africans in the Sudan grew more disillusioned with the parliamentary system because it had utterly failed to provide them with some sort of justice.

The nationalist regimes adopted – and adapted to – the quadruple concept of autocracy as it is known in sociology: these are power domination, wealth control, media monopoly to highlight the policies and accomplishments – real or imaginary – of Government institutions and the legislation and execution of laws in order to serve the interests of those in power. It must be reiterated that there is a temptation to see in the rationale behind this power control and its background as a mixture of two concepts: Arabism and Islam, in matters both racial and religious, and with race weighing heavily on religion.

## **PART III**

### **Economic Development in the Nuba Mountains**

It was interesting to note that the Governor-General once stayed with Robin in Dilling in 1954, and over their evening meal he told the Governor-General that in this premature independence of Sudan, he was handing over the Nuba to famine, disease and civil war; but he was told to shut up! According to the proceedings of international conference in Berlin in 1885, the participants promised, *inter alia*, to ‘watch over the preservation of the native tribes [of Africa] and to care for the improvement of their moral and material well-being, and to help suppress slavery and, especially, the Slave Trade.’<sup>(54)</sup> The conference was attended by fourteen European powers, as well as the United States. The British, as one of the signatories of the Berlin Declaration, might have ‘watched over’ the preservation of the native tribes in the Nuba Mountains, helped suppress the Slave Trade in the Sudan – including Gen Gordon’s attempts to control the trade in south-western Kordofan during the 1870s – but they failed to improve the material well-being of the

Nuba people. Ian Mackie's modest efforts were centred on combating appalling soil erosion, maintaining water resources and monitoring rainfalls as a sign of early warning system for famine. His successor, Arthur Staniforth, was responsible 'to look after the cotton ginning factory, fruit nursery, experimental farm and local resettlement for returned Nuba soldiers.'<sup>(55)</sup>

When the British thought of a plan for irrigating and bringing into agricultural production a broad belt of hitherto uncultivated fertile soil, they established it at al-Simeih, 60 miles up the railway to the south-east of al-Obeid, in Northern Kordofan. It was a scheme for using water from Khor Abu Habil – *chor*, meaning seasonal water course in Arabic – to irrigate some 10,000 feddans (4,200 hectares or 10,380 acres) of this land to avert the threat of a grain famine which was caused partly by locusts at the end of 1945. Khor Abu Habil flows seasonally from June to November, and it is fed from the heavy rains in the Nuba Mountains watershed (south-north water divide line). Eventually, the scheme was a failure due to both technical and human reasons. Technically, surveying land levels at 80-metre intervals had not given sufficient detailed information. The Kordofan black soil plain was not as uniformly flat as that of the Gezira or the White Nile irrigated areas. This meant that some of the holdings would need further levelling before they could be properly watered. On the human side, the local people, used to a different type of rain cultivation, were not immediately able to master or rather adaptive to flood irrigation of the Khor Abu Habil. Had the 1946 growing season been another dry year, the local people might have been encouraged to work harder at it, but it was a wet year and in the end, the crops in the *goz* (sand hill) areas grew exceptionally well while the black soils of the Abu Habil plain were too inundated to cultivate and became a breeding ground for mosquitoes. It is often too easy to forget, when planning development schemes, that success or failure depends on people.<sup>(56)</sup> Despite these small-scale enterprises, large agricultural schemes and water harnessing dams were not thought of in the Nuba Mountains.

However, at the conclusion of World War I there was increased international demand for cotton, especially by both Britain and the United States; a demand that skyrocketed cotton prices. To meet both the demand and to reduce cotton prices, Britain forced production of cotton in her colonies to supply its textile industries in Lancashire. Egypt and Sudan, among other colonies, were to provide the needed supplies because of their suitability for growing long staple and medium or rainfed short staple cotton, respectively. It followed that rainfed cotton was introduced to the Nuba Mountains in 1924 for its adaptability; and cotton ginneries were then established in Kadugli, Lagawa and Talodi in 1927. In no way at all was the purpose of these establishments to improve the economic or the livelihood of the poor Nuba. One can argue that the secondary objectives were to provide the sedentary farmers with a cash crop from cotton sales to enable them to pay the poll tax: a controversial issue as discussed earlier. Another objective was to bring the Arab nomads in agricultural enterprise with the aim of encouraging them to adopt sedentary life and to profess agricultural production. It was the British policy, then, to increase production by including as many producers as possible at a low cost. This assertion could be translated into the fact that production itself dependent on cheap traditional labour intensive farming methods (land preparation, sowing, hoeing, handpicking and hauling the product to the market places) whereas the role of Nuba Mountains Cotton Administration was only to provide the seeds and procuring the produce at low prices. It is logical to emphasise that one aspect of colonial legacy was communal work without remuneration. This exploitation continued even after Sudan's independence in 1956, together with other vestiges of colonialism – such as, *badal ragig*, purporting in Arabic slave perks, which used to be paid to

civil servants; it was eventually expurgated from the statute book in the early 1970s. The exploitation was also manifested and was evident in maintaining roads in the Nuba Mountains after the period of inaccessibility during the rainfalls by villagers within the boundaries of their tribal community without payment. The process of roads revamp would then be passed over to the neighbouring tribe and so on.

For fairness, however, it is worth noting that during the Anglo-Egyptian period (1898 - 1956), the Sudan witnessed a fair level of economic modernisation and growth including the introduction of irrigated agricultural schemes, construction of electricity grids, establishment of communications and marketing facilities and a network of railway system, though the railways were constructed primarily for military purposes to move large numbers of troops and their equipment to potential trouble spots, for example, the Kitchener campaign along the Nile. This infrastructure paved the way for the emergence of market economy and higher living standards for a section of population. Nonetheless, these facilities were totally concentrated in Northern and central Sudan, and they were associated with the rise and growth of the Northern Sudanese commercial and political elitism, which subsequently coincided with the political and cultural hegemony of Northerners. In contrast, the share of the Nuba Mountains – and other marginalised regions, including Southern Sudan - was a total neglect and isolation. So the post-independence governments, which were controlled by Arab-Northern Sudanese elites, continued to pursue the policy of neglect and isolation towards the Nuba Mountains region. This isolation has kept the semi-subsistent economy of the region relatively intact, but poverty, vulnerability to famine and lack of basic human services became the typical characteristics of the region. The Nuba have found themselves in the anomalous position of being geographically Northerners, but not equally sharing the North access to national resources. The present Northern Sudanese-controlled economy is a labour-starved system because huge supplies of cheap labour have always been of vital necessity to its very survival. The marginalisation of the Nuba, and other peripheral groups, serves as a dynamic source for the fulfilment of labour requirements of the system. According to Dr Douglas Johnson, it was until recently when:<sup>(57)</sup>

A broad regional band from the Blue Nile and the Nuba Hills [in the central west were classified] as a region of exploitable reserves, natural reserves and the reserves of labour. This included the largely non-Muslim inhabitants of that region whose labour was exploited in a variety of ways either in their home areas, exported as slaves or incorporated into various armies.

As a result of economic deprivation, there are no Nuba businessmen or philanthropists who may be able to invest in the region with the emotive sense of belonging to develop the area. In the past, charity work and relief NGOs were non-existent and socio-economic projects and community empowerment schemes were hardly carried out by the Government. Furthermore, parties drawing their support from the Nuba Mountains lack funding and financial opportunities for campaigning and other party's expenditure.

It was during this period - that is, early 1930s - when the Northern elites started to organise themselves into powerful political parties, and, helped by their economic successes which were achieved by an open support from the Condominium partners, the Northerners accumulated all sources of power – material as well as psychological and educational. The Nuba like other marginalised areas of the Sudan came out of colonial era without development or education that

would equip them to compete with the rest of the country's elites. This was the racial attitude maintained against the Nuba and the like throughout the Condominium till today. It is apparent that human well-being of the Nuba people was, unquestionably, not catered for and was out of the economic equations and formulae of the British authorities. The status quo remains far well beyond the successive 'national' governments that ruled the country; and the little economic development in the Nuba Mountains was not without price tag on both the Nuba people and their environment.

## **Pressure on People and Environment in the Nuba Mountains**

### **Pressure on people**

As discussed earlier, the inception of Mahdiyya in the 1880s brought new distasteful realities to the Nuba people. These realities had political and social implications in the area which include the commanding of military campaigns led by Hamadan Abu 'Anja to punish the population of Tegali for their rejection of Mahdism. These infractions led to a period of turmoil in the region, resulting in Nuba populations' shifts when the Nuba withdrew into their mountains as a natural response to the aggression, and as they were more knowledgeable of the area. This development brought about the concentration of people around the hills.<sup>(58)</sup> Chronicle of political events, slavery and population displacement and replacement during the early and mid-twentieth century significantly affected upward and downward population dynamics as well as social stratification in the Nuba Mountains in two dimensional pane: race and religion. Manger noted that while the population growth in Rashad District in eastern Nuba Mountains increased from 3.7% in the period from 1955-1956, the growth rate between the censuses of 1973 and 1983 was 6.8%.<sup>(59)</sup> This percentage was almost doubled over a 30-year period with an obvious impact on the local inhabitants of the district since the increase was related to the number of immigrants attracted to the area for better opportunities. The human rights abuses through history mount to genocide and ethnocide (or cultural genocide) against the Nuba who are increasingly under pressure to give up their traditional way of life, and lose access to their lands and other natural resources for immigrant Baggara and *Jellaba* ethnic groups supported by the state. This put more pressure on the Nuba and pushed them further to the marginal areas.

Nonetheless, the drought years of mid-1980s and the civil wars resulted in enormous demographic changes in the Nuba Mountains; and, as a consequence, more people moved into the mountains from Northern Kordofan, Dar Fur and Southern Sudan in addition to the settlement of the nomadic groups, already sharing the mountains with the Nuba. This situation is arguably qualified to assert that the movements of several ethnic groups into the Nuba Mountains constructed an environment whereby people involved in various economic activities (agriculture and animal husbandry) which caused severe strain on both Nuba people and the environment.

### **Pressure on environment**

Environmental and ecological changes are intertwined and have been of deep concerns over

many decades to scientists, scholars, politicians, people and environmental advocates because of inherent complexity involved. Douglas Johnson defines environmental changes - in broad sense - as long-term shifts in rainfall patterns, temperatures, vegetation cover and water courses while arguing that ecology describes shifts induced by people's activities and their relationships with the environment; and, depending on the nature of the activities and relationships, environmental and ecological stresses or pressures are created leading to crises and environmental degradation.<sup>(60)</sup> Therefore, the pressure on the environment is caused by a number of factors, including man and his activities and politics. During the drought of mid-1980s the Nuba Mountains area experienced increasing environmental stress due to the lack of political consensus related to resources distribution and exploitation. The disengagement of the decision-making apparatus and the pitfalls of lending a deaf ear to addressing citizens' needs sensibly did not prevent any action necessary to ameliorate the problems nor did it affect the way the communities utilise or perceive both their economies and their natural environment. Furthermore, the development within the Nuba populations of intensive and mixed farming eventually created environmental pressure on the limited hill resources and ultimately led to its disintegration. Manger identified two types of techniques employed, probably, to address these issues locally.<sup>(61)</sup> One technique was to build terraces on the slopes to reduce water run-off; thus limiting soil erosion. A second technique was to collect the dung from animals and used it as manure on the fields in addition to collecting fodder for the animals as herders could not roam freely with their animals on the plains. He further argued that this farming system required intensive labour for which manpower mobilisation was cumbersome and hence a form of communal labour group known as *Nafir* was formed. Not only did this communal labour serve as a labouring institution, but it had also defensive functions. He elaborated that Nuba always brought their weapons with them in the fields; they worked in lines which, if attacked, could quickly be made into lines of defence and resolve to fight the attackers with tenacity and serenity. These changes are not related so much to problems within the natural environment as they are related to the changing political and economic adaptations and measures.

### **Agricultural development in the Nuba Mountains**

Although it is not our intention to discuss climatic and soil conditions in the Nuba Mountains, it is relevant, though, to highlight geography of the region in relation to agricultural production and government intervention policies in the area. Generally speaking, the Nuba Mountains region is a rich area in natural resources, and, climatically, it is classified as semi-arid tropical region. It receives an average annual rainfall of 750 mm (500 - 1000 mm between May and October). This amount of rainfall, evenly distributed over a relatively long growing season, is sufficient for crop production mainly food crops such as sorghum. Cash crops - such as, groundnuts (peanut), sesame and cotton - are also grown to secure cash flow to support the household. The soils of the Nuba Mountains are heavy clays characterised by high fertility and high water holding capacity. However, patches of soils, locally known as *gardoud*, traverse these plains, and the soils of northern most part of the mountains are sandy, and they are locally known as *goz*. While acacia trees - *Acacia arabica* (gum Arabic producing trees) - dominate north-eastern part of the Nuba Mountains, forests and timber do exist in southern most parts of the region. It follows naturally that animal husbandry is an enterprise attended to by the locals, especially, the Baggara Arabs (cattle

herders or nomads) as well as some Nuba. One can then deduce that the region is self-sufficient in food production with exportable surplus to other regions of the country, particularly, when it is adequately wet season and when pests and diseases are not threats to the crops.

It is imperative to observe that the Nuba Mountains Cotton Corporation (NMCC) was established in 1924 which became the foundation of the Nuba Mountains Agricultural Production Corporation (NMAPC) instituted in 1967, as a subsidiary of the Public Corporation for Agricultural Production (PCAP). The NMCC was solely concerned with the marketing, ginning of cotton and distribution of seeds. However, the reconstituted NMAPC was to promote a 'modernisation' programme, which involved providing mechanization to groups of farmers to stimulate cotton in the vicinity of the ginneries.<sup>(62)</sup> While the total acreage of cultivated area in Gezira Scheme fluctuated in the years 1931, 1932 and 1937 from 73,000 (30,660); 44,000 (18,480) and 161,000 feddans (67,620 hectares), respectively; the total area in the Nuba Mountains increased from 75,000 feddans (31,500 hectares) to 125,000 feddans (52,500 hectares) in 1934 and 1937; respectively.<sup>(63)</sup> However, the total acreage increased in the 1950s and the early 1970s with record yields. For example, the maximum cultivated area in 1954/55 growing season was over 200,000 feddans (84,000 hectares) producing a record yield of 900,000 kantars<sup>1</sup> (141,300,000 kg) of seed cotton or 45,000,000 kg of lint cotton. Since then the output has fluctuated widely, but with a general downward trend with 117,000 feddans (49,140 hectares) planted in the 1975/76 season.<sup>(64)</sup>

In 1973, the Sudanese Government introduced programmes to promote large-scale, privately owned agricultural schemes in many regions, including the Nuba Mountains. The efforts were redoubled as a result of International Monetary Fund (IMF) 'structural adjustment programmes'. Nevertheless, the exploitation of the fertile lands of the Nuba Mountains came to represent an indispensable asset to the system. Consequently, the introduction of these mechanised farming schemes at Habila, Kurtala and various areas in the Nuba Mountains contributed to both environmental disasters and Nuba impoverishment. As a result of the expansion of large-scale mechanised farms, the total cultivated area increased to 744,000 feddans (312,480 hectares) in 1976/77 growing season. Although the emphasis is still on cotton, cultivation of sorghum gained importance and its area increased to over 47,000 feddans (19,740 hectares) as well. Average yield and fluctuations in yield followed the trend of total area planted with cotton yield registering 550 kg of seed cotton, 270 kg for sorghum and 135 kg for sesame.<sup>(65)</sup> The opening of more land to cultivation pushed small peasants into marginal land between semi-arid and less lush savannah areas with the government unjustly instituting new land tenure laws and rules repressive and oppressive to the Nuba. An example of these measures is the refusal to grant leases for undeveloped land that had been marked for future large-scale agricultural uses to peasants, who were starving during the drought between 1983 and 1985. This wicked and iniquitous policy forced the Nuba to refuse relinquishing their ancestral lands to absentee landlords of civil servants, retired army officers and traders from Northern Sudan. The reaction of the Nuba angered the Government, and they were punished by flogging and imprisonment. What has particularly

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Kantar = 157 kg of seed cotton, 45 kg of lint cotton. It also corresponds roughly to 45 kg or 99 pounds.

angered the tribal leaders then is that in past centuries, their lands were recognised as collective lands and those tribal groups own land and they should be dealt with collectively. Collective rights are vital for tribal people, particularly the right to communal ownership of their land. Mining and other companies should recognise the rights of tribes to decide what happens on their land. If such consent is to be meaningful, it can only be given or withheld collectively. Nonetheless, by 1999, over 100,000 people had been forcibly displaced by the agriculture programmes from the Nuba Mountains, many of whom moved to urban areas, and were forced to face the difficulties associated with that type of transition. Worse still, the products of these confiscated lands are often marketed outside the region, leaving the Nuba to suffer from recurring famines.

The danger to the Nuba Mountains' environment and the ecosystem is made worse by extensive logging for firewood, charcoal and timber, removing tree cover that once retained rain. Charcoal making is lucrative and long-established business in central Sudan and it is transported to markets in Khartoum. The planted forests during the colonial period as a bulwark against desiccation at Hammadi, Dibeibat, Sunjukaya, Dilling and Kadugli have died or are now expiring, and they are worsening by irresponsible felling of trees and negligence by the Department of Forestation. The threat of desertification is currently greater than ever before, bearing in mind the ecological changes that are sweeping Africa as a result of global warming and the movement of sand dunes southwards.

What has remained of the Nuba and their land is vast open areas subject to environmental and ecological degradation effected by Government intervention through the establishment of agricultural modernisation and large-scale mechanised farming without planned considerations to local communities. This unwittingly practice aimed at changing traditional contexts of Nuba farming system because of the poor judgement and unwise decision-making process. On the other hand, population growth and the increase in livestock have led to the deterioration of soil resulting in a serious process of desertification, droughts and the movement of people from their ancestral lands to dwell in the peripheries of capitol cities only to face social exclusion, mockery and to be victimised in shantytowns.

## **PART IV**

### **Winds of Change in the Horizon**

#### **Social exclusion and displacement: victimisation of shantytowns' dwellers**

All along, we have been arguing that the Nuba people, together with other marginalised ethnic groups, have been excluded from national participation in power and wealth-sharing, but what are the 'structural' problems that cause people to be excluded from full participation in economic, social and political life? Levitas's analysis of 'social exclusion' identified three discourses which reflect different interpretations and understandings of the concept: one that emphasises inequality in society, one that attempts to frame the issue in moral and behavioural aspects of the lives of the excluded, and one which focuses on integration with a central focus on paid work. In the Sudan, as elsewhere, inequality in society is, in fact, the root cause of 'social exclusion': the inequalities of power, status and resources that are at

least, partly a function of a person's gender, race, disability and social class. It is a dynamic process emphasising inadequate social participation, lack of social interaction and lack of power. And social exclusion is widely perceived as mechanisms that act to detach groups of people from the political participation. It begets people or areas suffering from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, inadequate healthcare and family breakdown. But the response of the Sudan Government to 'social exclusion' meanders around the second discourse which is the moral and behavioural aspects of the lives of the excluded.<sup>(66)</sup>

After decades of military dictatorship and intermittent quasi-democratic periods, contrasting conditions have been created between the centre and the peripheries in terms of economic development, educational opportunities, healthcare and other social services. This wide gap has forced a number of marginalised communities mainly from the West and the South to move into cities. These groups include the Nuba and other marginalised people from the various localities of the country - such as, far northern or eastern Sudan. These movements, in search of better opportunity, brought misery to the lives of these people; and a number of factors thought to have created so much tension between the Nuba and the Sudanese authorities mainly in the national capital, Khartoum.

Firstly, the countryside populations who have quit their villages and headed to the cities to look for work often find themselves treated like second-class citizens in their own country. People born in rural areas in the Nuba Mountains find it almost impossible to become full urban residents. They find work in factories or on construction sites and lead a tenuous hand-to-mouth existence. Their slums provide low-cost accommodation for themselves as well as others. Slums also serve as networks of social support of new migrants to the cities.

Secondly, these urbanised villagers are constantly framed for crimes they have never committed, albeit their slums are a manifestation of increasing urban poverty and inter-city inequality, and their presence is the result of a failure of both national and urban policies. Such an association of slum with crime is, in some instances, more a fabrication of the media than a reality. In cities with high crime rates, poor people suffer more from violence and petty theft than rich people. These shantytowns dwellers are not born kleptomaniac. If anything, there are socio-economic causes that drive them to commit crimes, and the role of the authorities is to find out these reasons and attempt to tackle them. Failure to do so is the crisis of governance that needs taking a bold step to tackle. In these inner-cities, many young people have been subject to various forms of racism/classism while growing up and, as a result, have become involved in crimes as a means of escape from what they see as an unfair and unjust society. What is needed is for all children to experience a fairer society where, regardless of colour, race, religion or orientation, they will not be discriminated against.

Thirdly, these dwellers are targeted for the demolition of their makeshift houses and normally rounded up and thrown out of the cities in an inhumane manner. Instead of building physical infrastructure, Government capacity and economic activity, troops and police are frequently set about to destroy poor people's houses. The vast majority of slum dwellers, if not all, have no legal rights or recognition from the state. Successive Sudanese governments have cleared away slums, replacing them with new housing. The problem is that slum clearances fail to address the wider social problems that cause them to grow. This racially motivated campaign

of rounding up people in the streets, as it was popularly known as *Kasha* (mass arrests), began during the last days of Nimeiri's regime in the early 1980s. Later on, the Sudanese authorities embarked on a forcible recruitment of these detainees, and with a minimum of military training, they were sent to fight their kith and kin in war zones in Southern Kordofan (the Nuba Mountains), Southern Sudan and Southern Blue Nile against the well-trained SPLA.

Ironically, the marginalised people of Sudan, including the Nuba population, have found themselves precluded in social, cultural and political life twice: in their own respective regions within the 'national context' of marginalisation and in the capital and other Northern cities within the 'metropolitan context' of social exclusion. The former can be referred to as 'historical injustice', whereas the latter as 'contemporary injustice'. And, worse yet, this contemporary injustice still permeates through the pretty mundane life of the Nuba people. In fact, there is no distinct boundary between these two conceptualised phrases. They overlap each other, as it will be proven in the following two converging arguments. Firstly, the British and the Egyptians claimed to have come into the Sudan to 'civilise the savages', and the Nuba people were surely meant by such a pronouncement. Their measures in quelling the Nuba resistance were drawn up from this belief. Secondly, the Northern leaders – that is, the heirs of colonialism – perceive themselves as the protectors of Islam and Arab culture in the Sudan, and, if possible, such a protection could be extended to the neighbouring African countries. This notion, as we have seen, tends to generate bloody conflicts with the native cultures and religions, bearing in mind that both the Islamic religion and Arab culture have their roots outside the Sudan – namely, in the deserts of Arabia. Although the Arabs have lived in the Sudan for centuries, they still have no sense of culturally and territorially belonging to the country. As such, both colonialists and Arab nationals in the Sudan have felt threatened by a possible uprising of indigenous people, and, accordingly, they exploited all means to suppress any sign of dissent, including marginalisation – both national and urban. This is because educating a naturally born revolutionary is a risky venture, judging by 'Ali 'Abd al-Latif's revolt. The ensuing injustice from all these social dynamics is chiefly determined by race. It is to observe that the people of the margins in the Sudan have tasted and swallowed the bitterness of these injustices exemplified by forcible grabbing of their agricultural lands and giving them to absentee farmers. The accumulation and culmination of these oppressive measures prompted the Nuba to re-think their stance of peaceful remonstrations and the exercise of political protest through democratic process. And when these means failed, there left no choice for peaceful co-existence advocates, but to seek political change through military takeover; the Nuba resolved to military *coups* for change and finally joined the SPLM/A to actively engage and charge the central Government of the day in Khartoum.

### **Political change through a military *coup***

Unconstitutional though it may be, a *coup d'état* is – in itself – one of the means of political change, which is usually perceived as a decisive method to wield power and control authority. As we have seen, political power in the Sudan has been entrenched in the hands of a few with vested interests through elements abstracted from many diverse a source, including the army. Such a process has been developed by different factors throughout

historical periods and human phenomena, yielding - at the end - a monolithic bureaucracy of hegemony. The Nuba's intention of divesting Arab-dominated power in the 1960s was of a two-fold objective: firstly, they would be able to redeem the socio-political decadence in the Nuba Mountains and other marginalised areas of Sudan through power-sharing, the relocation of resources and the redistribution of national wealth. Secondly, they would be well-ensconced to lead a dialogue with the rebels in Southern Sudan on equal terms, and without discriminations and prejudices, to settle what was then called the 'Problem of Southern Sudan'.

As the case of Hussein Khartoum Darfur, Rev Philip Abbas Ghabboush, a member of Nyimang tribe of the Nuba people who was born in 1922 in Omdurman became the leader of the General Union of Nuba Mountains (GUN) in 1964, and was elected an MP in 1965. Five separate Negro organisations with both civilian and military cells were brought together in April 1969 under Ghabboush's leadership to form the 'United Sudanese African Liberation Front' (USALF). In an unpublished interview with Rev Ghabboush, he confessed that the USALF was planning a military *coup* against Mohamed Ahmed Mahjoub's Government on May 29, 1969 by Brig Osman Hussein Osman, the brother of Lt-Col Hassan Hussein Osman, who would to lead an abortive *coup* against Nimeri's regime in 1975. But the USALF was being infiltrated by Nimeiri's group, which launched theirs on May 25, 1969, and Ghabboush's one fizzled out. Consequently, after Nimeiri's successful *coup*, they rounded up all active USALF members, save those who went underground.<sup>(67)</sup> Ghabboush was not deterred; his endeavours to forcibly take power and his attempts to secure military assistance and bases in Ethiopia and Chad were not materialised. Also, his formal agreement with Shareif Yousif al-Hindi in exile and his approach to the *Anya-Nya* fighters in Southern Sudan yielded nothing. If both the Northern and Southern leadership were less than impressed by Ghabboush's USALF, it was quite obvious that the Southern leaders lacked a broad vision. With the exception of the then Capt John Garang de Mabior, the Southern leaders addressed their injustice through a linear process of North-South dichotomy, without thinking of co-operation with other marginalised people in Northern Sudan. Although Capt de Mabior left his fellow Southerners in exile in East African countries and joined the *Anya-Nya* rebels fighting in Southern Sudan, William Deng over-trusted the Khartoum leaders. Before his murder by the establishment in the South in 1965, Deng formed an alliance with other marginalised people in the North, particularly the Nuba people.<sup>(68)</sup>

On September 5, 1975, Lt-Col Hassan Hussein Osman launched a military *coup* against the regime of Lt-Gen Nimeiri. There had been some Nuba involvement in previous attempts to seize power, but the significance of this *coup* lay in the fact that there were a number of Nuba military and civilians who were executed as a result of this unsuccessful bid to topple Nimeiri's regime. Amongst them was Abbas Barsham Farah, a law graduate from the Nuba Mountains who took part in the aborted putsch. Judged only through the crude prism of race, Barsham - and his co-plotters - was racially abused. Maj Abu al-Gasim Mohamed Ibrahim, one of the original May regime co-plotters, 'poured venomous racism' on him, combined with scandalous disregard for all the Nuba people. It was not even concealed, but rather thoroughly unscientific racism that radiated its way through the minds and hearts of all Nuba citizens. Maj Ibrahim lambasted Barsham: 'Since when have you, the Nuba, forsaken your habitat inside roof-thatched huts and decided to seize the reigns of power?' 'When did you abjure the menial jobs of cleaning toilets and sweeping streets and decided to seize power?' Maj Ibrahim asked him despicably. This

calculated racist outrage was not isolated remarks that could be taken lightly because Abu al-Gasim was neither privately nor publicly rebuked nor reprimanded by his superiors. Contrary, this fact indicated that they shared with him such motives. To them, the Nuba are meant to be the 'hewers of wood and the drawers of water'. Lieutenant 'Abd al-Rahman Shambi Nawai, a fellow Nuba too, also endured gross abuses before his execution because of his role in the putsch. It was reported that he was run over by a land-rover and ground to death by a tank. While Lieutenant Hammad al-Iheimer lost his life in action in a battle around Omdurman Radio station, Warrant Officer (WO) 'Ali Mandel, who was injured in the same battle was later sentenced to death and executed. In total, twenty-two army officers and civilians – mostly Nuba - were executed.

Disappointed by post-independence politics and factional squabbles, the marginalised population of Sudan organised themselves into various pressure groups. These were Dar Fur Development Front, the Union of Dongola People, the Beja Congress, the Union of Misseiriyya, Hawazma and Rizeigat People and the General Union of Nuba Mountains. With the exception of the Beja Congress and the Union of Dongola People, all these associations merged together into the Union of Western Sudan under the leadership of Mr Mutasim al-Tegalawi, a renowned lawyer from the Tegali area of the Nuba Mountains. As these lobby groups were in search of equality and civic rights, some of them were absorbed by sectarian and traditional parties, only to be marginalised as was the situation with their respective regions. The 1975 *coup* was planned and executed by the Sudan National Front (SNF). It is worth noting that the SNF was established on June 13, 1972, and it was organisationally complete by June 27, 1974, with Mr Mutasim al-Tegalawi as the first person to become the chairman of the front. The SNF also included prominent Nuba and non-Nuba activists – such as, Anwar Adham (lawyer), Mr Justice 'Abd al-Rahman Idris, Mr Justice Somay Zeidan, Mr Justice 'Abd al-Majeed Imam, who later became Minister of Justice and others who formed the core cadre of the front. The Command Bureau of the front comprised five men, and there were four sectors which formed the skeleton of the front. These sectors were the labour sector in which every three members formed a secretariat or a cell whose roles and duties were to secure and ensure the loyalty of labour trade unions to the front. The second sector was the farmers' sector, which acted in the same way as the former. The third one was the regions' sector: this was under the leadership of 'Ali al-Radi al-Bushari whose role was to communicate with and win over the loyalty of Native Administrators, tribal leaders and regional unions. The last one was the military sector, which fell directly under the responsibility of Command Bureau due to its sensitivity and importance. The SNF's principles were :<sup>(69)</sup>

- (1) The establishment of presidential, republican system of governance in the Sudan that would be represented by the five regions of Sudan, which were: Northern, Southern, Eastern, Western and Central region;
- (2) Legislating Sudan Constitution, which will include such principles;
- (3) The distribution of wealth, legislative and executive powers according to the democratic system of rule;
- (4) Absolute independence of judiciary;
- (5) Freedom of expression for universities and students;
- (6) The dissolution of *Tutu Kura* (lottery), which had brought corruption to the Sudanese people; and
- (7) Transferring power after three years and through fair and free elections in which the civil forces should be represented in the Military Prudential Council by the majority.

So when President Nimeiri assembled his cabinet in the wake of this mishap to discuss the regional complaints and the sufferings that fuelled the move of these disgruntled army officers, Maj Ibrahim was again quick to rebuff these regional demands, and categorically refused to acknowledge their grievances. The main rationale behind the *coup* was that the Nimeiri's regime abandoned the slogans it had raised at its inception, including the prevalence of justice, the development of marginalised areas and the declaration of combating thirst, especially, in the rural areas. Because of the ambitious project of water provision, General Tito, then President of former Yugoslavia, visited the Sudan in 1972 and donated US\$1m for water schemes, but the money was transferred to building oil pipelines from the city of Port Sudan to Khartoum, which ended in a sheer débâcle. These incidents left indelible scars of hatred and anger amongst the ranks and files of the Nuba personnel in the Armed Forces as well as amongst the Nuba people at large. This was why several revolts and armed resistance kept reappearing, including the Juba Airport incident on March 3, 1977, which was engineered by Rev Ghabboush loyalists in the Armed Forces against President Nimeiri.<sup>(70)</sup> The plan of attack was to coincide with the Unity Day celebrations in Juba to mark the fifth anniversary of the signing of Addis Ababa Accord in March 1972, which ended the seventeen-year-long hostilities in Southern Sudan.

Regime change through a military *coup* in the Sudan is characterised by two paradoxes. The first paradox is that if the *coup*, whether abortive or successful, is instigated by military officers belonging to Arab Sudanese from the centre, it is hailed as a national one, but, if it is carried out by non-Arab groups, even in collaboration with some Arabs outside the centre, then it is dubbed a racist conspiracy. The racist tag that is used in Sudanese *real politick* has rather lopsided interpretation. For so often these marginalised people are at the receiving end of discriminations and prejudices, and that they are frequently taunted as racists. Using unscientific method, the authorities so often start with a thesis that the 'plotters' were aiming to expel Arabs from the Sudan, and that they were intent on dastardly assassinations. By appealing to crude racial solidarity to win many hearts and minds, they would then spawn false hypotheses, put them together as evidence - however unrealistic they may have been - and presented to the public by state-controlled media. They 'vilely beautify' them in such a fashion as to conform to the notions and prejudices of a given public. Only a few would realise that these pretexts are pretty obviously exaggerated and distorted for a dramatic effect. These lies are normally realised by shrewd politicians because the panic-stricken officials often tend to forget erasing 'foregrounded elements' from their public statements. And a 'foregrounded element' is something unusual or a phrase placed in such a way that it warned us of a lie to come. The second paradox is the hysterical reaction of those in power against the *coup* plotters, even if the former have acquired power through the muzzle of gun. The instant execution of failed *coup* plotters utterly defies the logic and moral argument. However, these Nuba-led military outbursts were swiftly and ferociously quelled by the government establishments. The failure of these attempts to seize power in the centre forced so many a Nuba to think that a new approach was needed, and the resurgence of the SPLM/A provided a suitable opportunity for the Nuba activists to contemplate the next move as mentioned earlier. It is no surprise that a number of Nuba army officers and civilians who took part in 1984 and 1985 *coup* attempts did join the SPLM/A, including Isma'il Khameis Jallab, Yousif Kuwa Makki, Daniel Kodi Angelo and 'Abd al-'Aziz Adam al-Hilu, to mention but a few.<sup>(71)</sup>

## Conclusion

As we have seen, great injustice has been meted out on the Nuba – both ‘historical and contemporary’. The historical injustice, which can go back to pre-independence era, has laid the foundation for the contemporary marginalisation and injustice. But the contemporary injustice is hardly acceptable, because it is carried out by those who call themselves ‘fellow brothers’. Against this one, the Nuba are quite indignant. They have, therefore, attempted to redress the balance of power, uneven development, cultural assimilation and so forth through peaceful, political means in the first instance of their struggle, then through military *coups* like everyone else in the Sudan, but, instead, they have been persecuted, prosecuted and insulted. They went underground, forming Komolo - that is, a secretive Nuba organisation that weighed all options for political change, including armed struggle. So when the SPLM/A was born in May 1983, Komolo supplied it with Nuba recruits for the Nuba cause.<sup>(72)</sup> Thus, the Nuba retreated to the Nuba Mountains to defend their motherland, as they did after the destruction of Meroe civilisation and Soba Kingdom in the fourth and the sixteenth centuries, respectively: yet history has repeated itself in a brutal form.

The Northern political elite have continued to confuse their own private interests with the state and the institutions they serve. From what the Nuba have gone through, it is readily obvious that the intensions and motivations of prime actors – in this case, the Arab oligarchs – have been subjective, self-indulgent and self-interested, and the consequences of Nuba’s reactions or resistance in daily survival strategies to fight poverty, inequality and injustice went on unheeded. So there is a tenuous balance about to what extents do the acts of ‘passive or peaceful resistance’ can challenge the forces of oppression in order to maximise life options and minimise domination by the clique-oriented establishment. In fact, the peaceful resistance, which was characteristic to Nuba’s thesis as a counter-measure against the opinionated authorities in pre-civil war period, was underestimated by the policy-makers in Khartoum. Having realised that the thesis of peaceful demands was impeded by physical and psychological barriers, the Nuba opted for a decisive anti-thesis measure as a synthesis to the then remained deadlock situation. The mechanisms, approaches, dynamics and outcomes of these newly adopted anti-thesis methods will be discussed thoroughly in future work.

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