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Strangers Everywhere: Exclusion, Identity and the Future of Nubians in Northern Uganda

By

Charles Amone

Research Article

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Charles Amone

Head of Department of History in Gulu University, Northern Uganda.

Email: amonedelcol@yahoo.com, Tel: +256 0471432922, Mobile: +256772462901.

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses Nubian identity formation vis-à-vis the politics of exclusion in Uganda during and after the British colonial rule. It traces the history of the Nubians from the time of their imperial service as slave soldiers of the Egyptian Government in the Equatoria Province up to the time of settlement in Northern Uganda's Gulu and Kitgum Districts. The main argument is that Uganda's Nubians have always been regarded as strangers by the people among whom they settled. The author contends that the future of the Nubians in northern Uganda lies in their willingness and ability to assimilate and to be assimilated.

Keywords: Nubian, Identity, Strangers, Exclusion, Slave soldiers, martial race.

INTRODUCTION

The Nubian phenomenon in Uganda, as well as in other parts of East Africa, is not a sudden, alien intrusion but an integral part of its modern history (Zubairi and Doka, 1992: 1). Although Omar (1985: 428) has argued that the term "Nubian" in East Africa, and particularly Ugandan sense, is a comparable misnomer, a creation of Ugandans and other East Africans, and that there are no links between the Nubians of East Africa and the real Nubians of Upper Egypt and Northern Sudan, there is reason to believe that the Nubians of East Africa take their name from the original Nubians of Egypt and Sudan. Evidence provided by Stanley (1890: 319), Baker (1862:21) and Johnston (1903: 163) show that the Nubians of East Africa descended from the 19th century slave traders from Egypt who commanded small military forces in their raids in what is now South Sudan and Northern Uganda. Some of these slave traders could trace their ancestry to the former Kingdom of Nubia in Northern Sudan and Southern Egypt, which was Arabised in the 13th century. "Kinubi", the language of the Nubians of East Africa, was introduced by these Egyptian Government ivory and slave traders, (Stigand, 1923: 29, Kasfir, 1979: 379).).

Nubians are the people with a history and traditions which can be traced to the dawn of civilization. They first settled along the banks of the Nile from Aswan. Along this great river, they developed one of the oldest and greatest civilizations in Africa. Ancient Nubia had a wealth of natural resources such as gold, ivory, copper, frankincense and ebony, but they also produced and traded a variety of goods such as pottery (Nakayi, 2007: 25). For a long time, the Egyptian Government depended on the Nubians for the supply of gold, ivory and slaves but when the Aswan region became denuded of these, the Government was forced to extend its area of operation farther south to the Upper Nile Valley. The Egyptian Government employed Nubian and Dongolese militia to raid villages in the Upper Nile Valley up to the boundary of Bunyoro Kingdom (Lwanga, 1987: 3).

The eradication of these slaving gangs, who were raiding throughout the southern part of Sudan's Equatorial Province, was the task given to Governors Samuel Baker, Charles Gordon and Emin Pasha, in 1878. A German doctor christened Eduard Schnitzer, Emin had converted to Islam and adopted the Turkish form (Emin) of a fairly widespread Arabic name "Amin" signifying 'faithful' (Leopold, 2006: 180-199, Konczacki, 1985: 615-625). When the Mahdist revolt succeeded in Sudan in 1885, Emin Pasha was cut off from the Egyptian Government with a large force of about 4000 including soldier's wives, slaves and children.

In 1889 Emin Pasha was rescued by H. M. Stanley leaving the Nubian soldiers behind (Konczacki, 1985: 615). In the same year, Captain F. D. Lugard reached an agreement with Salim Bay, the commander of the Nubian forces to enroll them into the British colonial service. This was done and the Nubians formed the core of Uganda's first national army, the fourth battalion of the King's African Rifles (Furley, 1959: 312). These soldiers were deployed in various parts of Uganda and afterwards throughout East Africa and Somalia. The Nubians of Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Somalia descended from this force. They were resettled in diverse places of East Africa and Somalia

after World War 1. In Uganda, they were resettled in Kasese, Bombo, West Nile (North-Western Uganda) and Northern Uganda. This paper tackles the Nubians who were resettled in Northern Uganda, among the Acholi.

The Nubianisation of Uganda's Military

The origins of the armed forces of modern Uganda were the Sudanese soldiers commanded by Dr. Emin Pasha, Governor of Equatorial Nile till 1889. These soldiers were of various tribes in Sudan under the command of Fadl el Mula, a 6 feet 4 inches tall Lugbara and Salim Bey, a giant Makaraka: they were, as mentioned, adopted by Captain Fredrick Lugard who was employed by the Imperial British East African Company (IBEACo.). This company needed military protection for a successful colonization of the people of the head waters of the Nile (Agami, 1997: 117).

Cut off from their original abode, the Nubian soldiers began a career that would have serious cumulative consequences for Uganda in general and their descendants in particular, some years in future. Lugard then established for them a chain of posts about two days march apart. He settled the majority of the troops in these new posts and then posted a number of British officers to command them. By 1895, by means of enlisting the grown up followers, the number of companies was brought to seventeen. These were scattered over Buganda, Toro, Buddu, Busoga etc and called the Uganda Rifles. All these amounts to saying that Nubians came to Uganda before there was any geo-political entity known as Uganda and they took part in making modern Uganda (Zubairi and Doka, 1992: 196-214).

Having pioneered the military in Uganda, the Nubians regard the army as their own historical occupation and the record of such a role is the pride of almost every Nubian family. For almost every Nubian man, a brother, father or uncle must have at one time or another served in the army. In fact most Ugandan Nubians claim their grand fathers had at one time or the other served in the army. The army was part of their life. Many Nubians still consider the army profession the most prestigious in terms of achieving total manhood. (Southall, 1975: 85-105). The Nubians regard themselves the martial race of Uganda and their colonial employers, the British, seemed to agree.

Martial race was a designation created by army officials of British India after the mutiny of 1857, where they classified each ethnic group into one of two categories, 'martial' and 'non-martial'. The ostensible reason was that a 'martial race' was typically brave and well-built for fighting while the 'non-martial races' were those whom the British believed to be unfit for battle because of their sedentary lifestyle (Gavin, 2006: 1-20). The British regarded the 'martial races' as valiant and strong but also intellectually inferior, lacking the initiative or leadership qualities to command large military formations. They were also regarded as politically subservient or docile to authority. For these reasons, the 'martial races' theory did not lead to officers being recruited from them; recruitment was based on social class and loyalty to the British. Elsewhere, we are told that the British had a strong tendency to categorize people in racial terms. They believed that ethnic background went a long way in defining the character of an individual.

British general and scholar Lieutenant-General Sir George MacMunn (1869-1952) noted in his writings "It is only necessary for a feeling to arise that it is impious and disgraceful to serve the British, for the whole of our fabric to tumble like a house of cards without a shot being fired or a sword unsheathed" (MacMunn, 1911: 57). To this end, it became British policy to recruit only from those tribes whom they classified as members of the 'martial races', and the practice became an integral part of the recruitment manuals for the Army in the British Empire.

According to Dr. Jeffrey Greenhut, "The Martial Race theory had an elegant symmetry. Indians who were intelligent and educated were defined as cowards, while those defined as brave were uneducated and backward." (Greenhut, 1983: 102). The excellent performance of the Sudanese Nubian forces against Kabarega of Bunyoro, 1893 to 1899, the Lamogi Rebellion of 1912 and in the First World War convinced the British that the Nubians were indeed a martial race. This is how Major Iain Grahame, a British Officer of the KAR, described one of the most celebrated Nubians, "During a particularly exhausting route march, after we finally passed the finishing post, Idi Amin was marching beside me at the head of the column, head held high and still singing... for all he was worth. Across one shoulder were two Bren guns and over the other was a crippled *Askari*" (Grahame, 1980: 39).

The British came to East Africa using the same colonial tactics they had perfected throughout their empire: consolidating power through divide-and-rule policies that irrevocably changed identity, politics and belonging in the territory now known as Uganda (Finnstrom, 2003: 62). Like elsewhere in Africa, the British colonial regime's practices engendered winner-takes-all politics, and with arguably more disastrous results, the normalization of militarized governments. The British followed the famous threefold principle in deploying Protectorate troops: a soldier should be of a different ethnic group; a different and distant geographical origin and a different religious faith from the population in the area of posting (Otunnu, 1987: 30). This was why the British found the Sudanese forces, being foreigners in Uganda, the most reliable team to administer the Protectorate.

The KAR fed its officers mainly on posho and beans-stuff which many Bantu communities are not familiar with. In 1917 the contingent from Uganda serving in Kenya suffered a death rate which illustrated the dangers of service far from home. Uganda soldiers were notoriously prone to gastric ailments caused by changes of diet,

especially the Ganda and Soga who were green food eaters from the shores of Lake Victoria, whose staple food was fresh plantains (Hodges, 1978: 101-116). Following this, a dispatch was sent from Kenya restricting mass recruitment to grain eaters whose men might not be as prone to gastric disease as the Ganda and Soga. The Nubians are grain eaters like most communities of Northern Uganda and south Sudan. This restriction paved way for them to gain supremacy in the colonial army.

The 1897 Mutiny and the British Fallout with Sudanese Troops

These Sudanese troops, with whom Swahili soldiers were merged to form the core of KAR, were a people whose strength of character and discipline was wanting; a people whom, as early as 1872, Baker had to make the rather unpleasant task of deciding their fate after defeating them at Patiko, of either recruiting them or sending them home without guns, only to be killed by their adversaries. Indeed the Acholi, among whom they had operated for sometime, were surprised that such a band could be recruited by anyone at all, least of all, the British Colonial Government (Lwanga 1987:3).

The Sudanese troops had been a problem to Baker, a puzzle to Gordon and when Emin Pasha took them over, there were no indications that their conduct had improved. For instance, the Nubian horde while traveling through populated arrears caused considerable headache by their continual capturing of women. Commenting on the discipline of the Sudanese Nubian soldiers, H. H. Johnston, Uganda Commissioner, 1899-1900 remarked; "themselves ex-slaves, they have all the cruelty and unscrupulousness of the Arab slave traders, whose names, principles and religion they inherited" (Johnston, 1902: 238). Little wonder that in less than ten years, these Sudanese troops were up in arms against their employers – the British Colonial Government. I am referring to the 1897 mutiny.

This incident posed the most serious threat to the establishment of the British Protectorate in Uganda. The main cause of the mutiny was that some of the Sudanese troops who had been engaged in numerous expeditions all over East Africa with hardly any rest, felt, not without reason, that the administration did not sufficiently appreciate nor reward their services (Otunnu, 1987: 22). The mutiny began in mid-September 1897 when, after a long march to and from Eldama Ravine in Kenya, a company of the Sudanese troops refused to join an expedition to central Sudan, under Major Macdonald who was then serving in Uganda. It took a dramatic turn when, later that year, a company at Lubwa murdered their commander, Major Truston, and five other European officers. The mutiny was quelled after seven months with the help of troops enlisted from India, Kenya (Swahili) and Somaliland.

The lessons of the mutiny cemented the feeling of common identity and cohesion among the Sudanese immigrants, as they had learned that their fate in Uganda depended on their ability to stand on their own. The mutiny and administrative reform caused a substantial reorganization, and in 1901, the King's African Rifles (KAR) was founded, covering all East Africa, the regular forces in Uganda, whose foundation was Nubians, becoming the 4th (Uganda) Battalion (Holger, 1991: 559-580).

To prevent another revolt, the colonial government diversified the composition of the military. It reduced the number of Sudanese recruits, increased recruiting among the Indians and Ugandan Africans, and increased the overall ratio of European officers to soldiers. The government also granted a 400 percent military pay raise. But by December 1900, military expenses were eroding the profitability of the colonial enterprise, so Special Commissioner Sir Harry H. Johnston organized a lower-paid constabulary of 1,450 armed natives.

The mutiny put an end to the Sudanese as the main military force in Uganda, and forms a sad conclusion to their service as such. Lugard had been blamed over a number of years for introducing the Sudanese into Uganda (Furley, 1959: 311-328). Subsequently the Nubians were sidelined paving way for the Acholi and other northern Uganda ethnic communities to dominate the military. The Nubians still regarded themselves as the martial race of Uganda but the British saw them as a danger to their colonial establishment after the mutiny. Subsequently the martial race concept was gradually dropped with regards to the Nubians and the baton was passed on to the Acholi. This created a serious ethnic conflict in the army between the Nubians on one hand and the Lwo on the other which culminated into the 1971 coup.

The 1971 Coup-The Pinnacle of Nubian Ambitions

Following the British loss of trust in the Nubians in the aftermath of the mutiny already mentioned, the Lwo became the most favoured group for the army. They were not only grain eaters and politically segmentary, but they had also benefited from colonial education more than the Nubians who generally shunned Christian founded schools. This created some latent animosity between the Nubians and the Lwo, Acholi in particular. The latency of this rift ended in 1971, when General Idi Amin, a Nubian, toppled the Acholi - backed Government of Milton Obote, a Lwo. In January, Amin was swept to power by a group dominated by Kakwa Nubians all NCOs whom he had recruited and trained during the previous few years. Amin's background being Kakwa Nubian and a Muslim, and coming from West Nile

was to be crucial in the events that followed. (Mutiibwa, 1992: 81). Although Nubians led the coup of 1971, it was acclaimed throughout the kingdom regions of Uganda especially in Buganda. The Katikiro (Prime Minister) of Buganda Kingdom, Joash Mayanja Nkangi, was on cloud nine when he sent a congratulatory message to the coup leader. "The new revolution of the coup", he wrote, "is the country's resurrection". "My pleasure is beyond words and is really not expressible, just leave it at jubilations"(Mutiibwa, 1992: 84).

Amin's coup succeeded because of the politics of exclusion already in place not only in the army but also in the civil service. Nubians in the army were disgruntled that although they pioneered the forces in Uganda, Obote preferred the Acholi and Langi to them. Obote had suspected Idi Amin of subversive plans when he left for the Commonwealth Conference in Singapore. While in Singapore, Obote sent a radio message to his loyal officers in Jinja Barracks to arrest Amin. A Nubian signaler called Sergeant Major Moussa overheard the message and, out of ethnic loyalty, reported promptly to Amin. The coup occurred the next day (Southall, 1975: 85-105). Amin remained indebted to the Nubians and Muslims throughout his life. "As he became older and acquired power", writes Mutiibwa (1992: 81), "he considered himself first and foremost a Nubian, second a Muslim, thirdly a West Nile and fourthly a Ugandan". Consequently, the closest people around him came in this order which was later repeated in his choice of senior operatives and agents.

As men with little education but a respected military heritage, the Nubian soldiers had been unable to rise beyond the non-commissioned ranks. Thus, Amin's political network within the army leapfrogged the more highly educated Sandhurst graduates in the higher ranks, to reach the less well-educated non-commissioned officers who were in closer contact with ordinary soldiers (Kasfir, 1979: 365-388).

However, Amin's love for the Nubians was not without cost. Other officers of the army including those from West Nile were aggrieved and planned to oust him. One of them was Brigadier Charles Arube, a Kakwa. It would seem that one of the major causes of Arube's coup attempt of March 1974 was dissatisfaction at Amin's appointment of non Ugandans to key posts in the army and Government agencies. For instance he had elevated Malera-a Sudanese to the high post of Army Chief of Staff, and later relied heavily on Brigadier Taban, Lt Col. Gole, Lt Col. Sule (all Sudanese) and Brigadier Isaac Maliyamungu (a Zairean). Other influential Sudanese nationals in Amin's regime at the time were Farouk Minawa, Chief of the State Research Bureau, and Ali Toweli of the Public Safety Unit. (Mutiibwa, 1992: 107)

There were indeed, many Rwandese, Congolese and Sudanese Muslims in Amin's army. One of the enduring results of the original Nubian pattern of socialization has been the ease with which an individual can cross ethnic boundaries and become a Nubian. The basic requirements are ability to speak the Nubi language (pidgin Arabic), adoption of Islam, and acceptance of certain typical dress and social customs. Since military service is regarded as the most prestigious occupation a Nubian can undertake, joining the army can cement one's perceived identity. Thus, certain southern Sudanese can come to Uganda and quickly become Nubians (Kasfir, 1979: 365-388).

Though Nubians have been marginal in the Ugandan system of stratification for several years, their involvement in trade and the army has been attractive to others without any power of wealth. Thus, other Ugandans adopted a Nubian identity for many years during Amin's reign. The possibility exists of becoming a Nubian intermittently- for example when in town or in the barracks- while maintaining ones original ethnic identity in the village. Alternatively, a person may make a fuller commitment to a Nubian identity. Amin was thus able to invite other Africans "to become members of the Nubian tribe", and to observe that "in Uganda there are Nubians who are Baganda, Basoga, Banyoro, Acholi, Langi, Batoro and Kakwa. In Kenya, there are also Kikuyu, Kamba and Luo Nubians (Kasfir, 1979: 365-388). The Nubian case demonstrates the fluidity of ethnic identity and its responsiveness to changes in political situations.

The Settlement of Nubians in Northern Uganda

In 1895 Colonel Colville wrote, "The difficulty of getting soldiers will soon be a serious one. A large percentage of the Sudanese are already too old for active work, and in a few years more than half of them will be unfit even for garrison duty, and I do not see where to lay hands on more... and without improved means of communication I do not see how we are to pay more expensive troops" (Furley, 1959: 311-328). It soon became apparent that land had to be found to resettle the Nubians not only because some had become too old to serve in the army but also, following the mutiny, the colonial government wanted to reduce their number and influence in the army.

When Bombo became the military headquarters in 1906, four companies were concentrated there. From then onwards Bombo became the most important settlement area for the Sudanese community. Land was granted to the community under the terms of the Buganda Land Law of 1908, and the Sudanese soon constituted a separate ethnic community (Moyse-Bartlett, 1935: 265). Soon after the end of First World War, a process of demobilization started, primarily in order to cut the army down to its pre-war size. The result was that a number of Nubians became ex-soldiers and returned to their dependents. It was suggested that the whole Nubian population should migrate to

the northern area and live among the Acholi, but a deputation of the Nubian leaders maintained that only a few would migrate, while the majority would prefer to remain at Bombo (Holger, 1991: 559-580).

The 1922 census of men, women and children gave the figure of 5648 Nubians in the Protectorate. Fifty three per cent of these lived in Buganda, while 26 per cent lived in the Northern Province, half of them in Acholi proper (Census returns in SMP C. 1923/1, Uganda National Archives, Entebbe). Many difficulties arose in connection with the settlement of the Sudanese as each armed man was accompanied by 7-8 dependants. Food supply was difficult, and the Sudanese continued their usual pattern of raiding the neighboring communities. (Holger, 1991: 559-580)

The idea of repatriation was also considered. The Nubian leaders sent letters to King Farouk and the Queen of England requesting support in their demand for 'repatriation to their own country'. The colonial administration gave permission to send their delegation to Sudan to see for themselves, and in spite of opposition from Sudan, 114 Nubians went to Juba and consulted extensively with both Governmental and local authorities. In the end, they found that it was impossible for them to return to Sudan and the whole idea was quietly shelved once and for all. (File No. MPC. 22/25, Uganda National Archives, Entebbe).

Nubian culture is as hard to define as Swahili, to which it has several similarities. It is essentially urban and Muslim, tied to the army and to the other kinds of service, such as railway station officials, institutional guards, and night watchmen, with shop-keeping and smalltime real estate business as adjuncts for those who do not serve or have retired (Southall, 1975: 83-105). This complicated any resettlement plans for the Nubians. They could not fit in a rural setting where land was available neither could they embrace the major economic activity in Uganda, farming.

Since the Nubians were originally ethnically multifarious including Lugbara, Alur, Dongoli and even Acholi who served in the Egyptian army, it would have been easier for them to settle in Northern Uganda. However, throughout Acholi-land the Nubians are remembered for their notoriety in capturing slaves, raiding villages for women and pillaging homesteads. To be frank, nobody in Acholi-land wanted Nubians to settle there. This was the public opinion by 1910 when the first batch of Nubians arrived. To dampen the feeling of the Acholi the more, the first Nubians did not come as settlers but colonial askaris. According to Ocitti (1964: 37-48), the British colonial posts in Kitgum and Gulu were opened by people guarded by Sudanese Nubian soldiers. For instance, J. P. R. Postlethwaite was sent to open Kitgum, the headquarters of East Acholi, with a force of 100 Nubian soldiers (Postlethwaite, 1947: 53).

In the same year, the Lamogi Rebellion broke out among the Acholi. The Acholi were not used to and didn't want foreign rule of any sort. Above all, they never wanted to be disarmed. Disarmament was one of the first policies the British adopted upon occupying Acholi-land. Nubian soldiers commanded by a British officer ruthlessly suppressed the Lamogi Rebellion. They used poisonous gas to fish the Lamogi out of their caves and conducted wanton atrocities. Up to today the Lamogi still demand that the Queen should compensate them for the atrocities committed by these Nubian soldiers who took orders from British officers. So when Nubians arrived in Acholi-land to settle, it was like adding salt to injury.

The first Nubians to come to Acholi-land as settlers were taken to Ajulu-Patiko near Baker's Fort. This was the spot where Nubian Sudanese known as Jadhya used to assemble their captured slaves. Samuel Baker overran this camp in 1872 and in it, he built the popular fort that still stands up to today. The settlement of Nubians at Ajulu shows how insensitive the British were to the feelings of the Acholi. They faced open hostility from the Acholi forcing a good number to move to the suburbs of Gulu town. Today the Nubians occupy urban villages of about 4 kms radius from the center of Kitgum and Gulu Towns where they live in filth and poverty.

Discrimination against Nubians

The Nubians of East Africa have always been strangers in the areas they went and settled. Created in southern Sudan, they moved into Uganda where they were known as Sudanese soldiers. They later moved to Kenya, Tanzania and Somalia where they were also strangers. Considering a move back to Sudan, in 1944, a group of Uganda Nubians went to Juba, as a reconnaissance team. They found they were strangers even in Sudan! At this point, the Nubians considered themselves strangers everywhere. The stranger is someone who comes today and stays tomorrow...He is an element of the group itself but he remains a stranger, emotionally detached, with the specific character of mobility, which occasions the synthesis of remoteness and nearness. He comes incidentally into contact with every single element but is not bound up organically, through established ties of kinship, loyalty, or occupation with any single one (Simmel, 1908: 185). As of now, this is the position of Nubians in Northern Uganda.

Since their settlement in Northern Uganda, the Nubians have been the most invisible and underrepresented communities economically, politically and socially. Nakayi (2007: 4) has argued that the existence of a minority is a question of fact and not of definition. First of all, a minority is a group with linguistic, ethnic or cultural characteristics, which distinguish it from the majority. Secondly, a minority is a group that usually not only seeks to maintain its identity but also tries to give stronger expression to the identity. This is exactly the case of the Nubians in Northern

Uganda. A community becomes confident when it is recognized by other communities but the Acholi have refused to recognize the Nubians even though they have lived together for one hundred years.

Looked upon as a community of immigrants, the phenomenon of guided migration should be mentioned as a first explanatory factor for the Nubians of Uganda. This is because their move from a neighboring area into Uganda came as a result of a deliberate invitation from the authorities. This means that they were officially called to fill a gap and undertake certain functions - in the actual case in the army. We thus have a case of immigration in response to an official policy which parallels the immigration of workers in other parts of the world (Holger, 1991: 559-580). This argument is in itself unconvincing because the authority that invited the Nubians was alien and oppressive to the people. It was Captain F. D. Lugard who invited the Nubians to Uganda, not the Acholi, hence the latter lack any emotional attachment to the Nubians although this, by no means, justifies discrimination against them.

It is not a surprise, therefore, that the Nubians have remained at the bottom of the social ladder. In 1936 it was stated that their standard of education has not kept pace with that of other tribes and consequently the army had enlisted very few Muslims in recent years. Most schools in Northern Uganda are of Christian foundation and the Nubians don't want their children to attend Christian founded schools. This is because Islam and Nubian culture are so intertwined, that it is difficult for one to be Nubian without being Muslim. Because of this lack of education, there is not a single publication in the Nubian language in Uganda (Kasfir, 1979: 365-388).

Likewise the Nubians are detached from the Acholi culturally. Very few Nubians are married to the Acholi. The reason is that the Nubian traditional wedding "the Nikkah" is the same as a traditional Muslim wedding. One has to become a Muslim to marry a Nubian but the Acholi are mainly Christians and traditionalists. Another case is the strength of Islam in the Nubian family setting, where women stay at home, take care of the children and do artistic embroidery (Nakayi 2007: 26). Acholi women, on the other hand, have always been the main source of labor in the family.

Nubian women still dress in their traditional Muslim garb, which includes a wrapper, commonly referred to as "lesu", while the Nubian men spend most of their time in their shops in the towns and at the trading centres, selling different commodities. During my interviews in Kitgum Town, Amina who forbade me from using her second name, stated that the Nubian dress for women is not only for strict moral codes but also to enable them identity with one another easily.

Since most Nubians served in the army for reasons already given, they were identified with Idi Amin, Uganda's military dictator who was president from 1971 to 1979. After the fall of Amin, Nubians become targets of persecution and killings. Many lost their property through grabbing or destruction. Nubians concealed their identity by abandoning their traditional dress, religion and occupation, while some fled to Sudan, Congo and Kenya for safety. A good number returned in 1986 only to find their land grabbed and houses destroyed. Some of the returned Nubians have since concealed their Muslim identities. Bongomin Ali, whom I interviewed in Gulu Town, goes by the name Bongomin Elly.

In 1982, the Obote government signed a Banking Order that was largely seen as targeting the Nubians. Their accounts were frozen. In 2004, they filed a suit challenging the constitutionality of the order. They remain bitter over these historical injustices. When the current government of Yoweri Museveni came to power in 1986, Nubians got a sigh of relief because their slave raiding history is not known in Western Uganda from where the President hails. As for their frozen accounts, no public statement has so far been made. But it is clear that the current government is in good terms with Muslims many of them including some who served even in Amin's government are occupying senior posts in Museveni's Government. Nassur Abdul, one of the officers of Amin's regime who had been sentenced to death by hanging for committing atrocities against the Acholi was pardoned by Museveni. This was a positive gesture for reconciliation in post-war Uganda but the Acholi want justice done.

Without land or special skills, Nubians often became petty traders. In Gulu they set up stores near cotton collection centers, where they sold beer and distilled *enguli*. However, the forces structuring modernization in Uganda worked against the economic and social acceptance of the Nubians. As Muslims they were placed below Protestants and Catholics in the colonial social order. As northerners, they took second place to the southerners. Nor were these the only disadvantages. Since they were ignored by missionaries, there were fewer schools for their children to attend, and consequently fewer civil service positions for which they could qualify. (Kasfir, 1979: 365-388, Schacht, 1965: 91-136).

Through many mutations, the descendants of the Sudanese slave soldiers remained simultaneously soldiers, traders and slaves, though from time to time one or another of these factors became pre-eminent or faded away (Ewald, 1990: 27). They are most popularly associated with the army and with Nubian Gin-enguli (the scorcher) in Luganda, or waragi, that is, arak, the Arabic word for distilled spirits (Southall, 1975: 85-105). The same trend is observed in the Kibera Nubian settlement of Nairobi. Descendants of former KAR soldiers occupy the Kibera slum where they are known for alcohol consumption and petty jobs like security guards, night club attendants and shop keepers as discussed by Parsons (1997: 87-122).

Discrimination against Nubians is not only in Acholi-land but in Buganda as well. Ugandan districts are often named after main municipal centres. The area in which Bombo town is located was initially a district. Bombo District was one of the first to emerge when Uganda became independent in October 1962. In 1967 the district was renamed East Mengo mainly to circumvent the Nubians since Bombo is known as the home of the Nubians. In 1974, Uganda reorganized from districts into provinces, and East Mengo became the Province of Bombo. There can be little doubt that this was due to Amin's influence. Following Amin's ouster, Provinces were reorganized into districts in 1980, and the district of Luwero was created, with Bombo reverting to a mere town council.

Residential areas in Gulu Municipality are named according to the original inhabitants. There are Senior Quarters which were for senior civil servants such as the European colonial administrators, Acholi Quarters for the Acholi, Goan's Quarters for Indian traders who settled in the town from about 1930 and Lendu Quarters (Cerelendu) for Lendu immigrants from West Nile. The quarters for Nubians is conspicuously absent despite the fact that they were the first people to settle in the town. Available records show that Mr. Sullivan, the first Commissioner of the district, opened Gulu Town in 1910 with the help of Nubian soldiers (Gulu District Archives, A/250/ Opening of Gulu Station). The soldiers were deployed every night at *Eriyaga* (Area under Guard) to provide security to Europeans and their installations. The families of those Nubian soldiers were the first to settle in Gulu Town but there are no specific quarters for them up to today. Likewise, the official figures for Gulu District residents are Acholi: 431,706, Langi: 21,428, Madi: 3978, Others 11, 342 (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2002 Uganda Housing and Population Census). The Nubians are considered under "others" yet they have lived in the district for more than 100 years. One is tempted to believe that Nubians are not considered, at the official levels, as permanent members of Gulu District and by extension, Acholi-land.

Although Nubians are recognized as one of the indigenous communities in Uganda in the third schedule of the 1995 constitution, the ordinary people don't appreciate this. Especially in Acholi-land, there have been calls for the Nubians "to go back to their country". This Nubian phobia shot to the fore in 1979 when the Government of Idi Amin was toppled. As mentioned earlier, Nubians formed the core of this government. "The talk of sending Nubians back to Sudan, which was a common political slogan soon after the fall of Idi Amin in 1979", write Zubairi and Doka (1992: 196-214), "is as ridiculous as asking Americans of African descent to repatriate back to Africa".

CONCLUSION

The Nubians have stretched the notion of common ancestry to its fictive limits by opening membership to Africans possessing objective traits of other ethnic units (Kasfir, 1979: 365-388). They live almost exclusively in urban communities, but have received little exposure to western education and thus have taken little advantage of the opportunities of modernization. In spite of this they are proud of their identity. The fact that they descended from a group that metamorphosed from slaves to the ruling elite makes them so. Allen and Derek (2003: 257-281) have revealed that in Central Africa, ex-slaves came to define themselves as sharers of a new social identity of "Chikunda" translated as conquerors. Up to 1979, the Nubians in Uganda also regarded themselves as conquerors.

Even more fascinating in the context of the concept of ethnicity has been the open ethnic boundary maintained by the Nubians for the past 100 years. Formed into an ethnic category by a distinctive life of banditry and military operations far different from the culture of their home villages, the first Nubians followed a pattern of establishing new social identities that is morphologically identical to contemporary explanations of urban ethnicity (Kasfir, 1979: 383). But this is not working well and the Nubians have since remained an isolated community. The future of Nubian communities in northern Uganda, therefore, lies not as much in their propensity to assimilate as in their willingness to be assimilated into the Acholi culture, among whom they were forced to live, by the dictates of history.

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