Tribe or nationality? The Sudanese diaspora and the Kenyan Nubis

Douglas H. Johnson

Independent scholar,

Available online: 02 Mar 2009
Tribe or nationality? The Sudanese diaspora and the Kenyan Nubis

Douglas H. Johnson*

Independent scholar

(Received October 2007; final version received March 2008)

The settlement of Sudanese soldier colonists throughout British East Africa was a legacy of colonial expansion and pacification. These settlements were developed from the institution of military slavery, which was marked by a close association of slave soldiers with the state and the isolation of military slave communities from the general populace. But once pacification was complete new policies representing new interests made the presence of these non-indigenous Africans redundant. Terms of settlement altered after World War One, and the right of Sudanese, or Nubis, to remain in their original settlements came under attack. The largest, and most problematic, Sudanese colony in Kenya was the former military encampment of Kibera, on the edge of Nairobi. Sudanese claimed that land had been granted to them as a community ‘in perpetuity’ in lieu of a pension, and in recognition for their services to the Crown. The resulting struggle to retain land ownership in Kibera drew on ideas inherent in the old institution of military slavery and was presented in terms of a reciprocal loyalty between the Sudanese and the British Crown and Empire, rather than the specific legal jurisdiction of the Kenya Colony government. These arguments for a special status within the Empire have since been turned against the Nubis to deprive them of citizenship and land rights in post-independence Kenya.

Keywords: Sudanese; Nubi; Nairobi; colonial history

The Nubis of Kenya, and more particularly the Nubis in Kibera, are currently the subject of controversy, with their citizenship and right to own property under threat.¹ This is not the first time that their presence in Kenya and their tenure in Kibera has been questioned. Both the Nubis and Kibera are legacies of the period of colonial conquest, and to understand the present controversy one must examine the Kenyan Nubis in the context of the wider Sudanese diaspora in East Africa of which they are a part, created by, and emerging from, the nineteenth-century institution of military slavery.

The Kenyan Nubis have much in common with their better known relatives, the Ugandan Nubis, who are often represented as immigrant mercenaries, a colonially constructed ethnicity, and a group who outlasted their usefulness and outstayed their welcome.² It is their colonial employment which is seen as defining the character of the new community; yet of more lasting importance and influence was that they originated from slave soldiers, with all the ambiguities of status and power, patronage and servitude, and separation from and assimilation of a civilian population inherent in the institution of Sudanese military slavery in the nineteenth century.³ The transformation of that institution in the twentieth century changed the relationship between communities of Sudanese

*Email: douglas@wendoug.free-online.co.uk
soldiers and the colonial states of the Uganda Protectorate, the Kenya Colony and the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. The current dilemma of the Kenyan Nubis has its origin in the way that Sudanese diaspora communities presented themselves to those states in the 1930s and 1940s, especially in relation to the definition of their status under colonial law, and their resistance to the tribal definition of identity that the colonial states attempted to impose upon them.

Military slavery in the Upper Nile

The terms ‘Sudanese’ and ‘Nubi’ (or ‘Nuba’, ‘Nubian’), by which the Sudanese diaspora in East Africa have been known, denoted at different times geographical origin, racial stratification, ethnic identity, and social status. As such they are shifting categories, into and out of which individuals and whole groups of people often moved. This has caused some confusion in modern studies of the diaspora in that nineteenth-century terms and institutions have been given late twentieth-century ethnic and national meanings. To better understand the ambiguous history of the Sudanese diaspora we must first examine the evolution of these terms in both the Nile Basin and East Africa, and the role of military slavery in that evolution.

Ambiguity lies at the heart of social status and ethnic stratification in the Nile Basin. Terms that are now taken as representing ethnic identities – Funj, Hamaj, Nuba, Amhara, Shankilla – were (and in many respects still are) political categories denoting status within and in relation to a succession of Nile Basin states. Such categories often have ‘paradoxical implications, related to the alternative views possible of . . . authority within a stratified structure’. Since many of these states exerted power through slave armies, the status of slave soldiers was thus both paradoxical and ambiguous.

Peoples living within the slave-raiding periphery of these states took on, at the very least, an enslaveable status, and their names, or the names imposed on them, denoted this. In the Nile Basin both *bilad an-Nuba* (Nubia) and *bilad as-Sudan* (the Sudan) described areas which provided slaves to Egypt or other states in the area. To be a Nuba in relation to either Egypt or Sennar meant essentially the same thing: one was either a slave or provided slaves to the state. ‘Nubian’ slaves in Egypt came from virtually any part of what is now the Sudan, even if the Nubian speakers (Danaqla, Ja’liyyin, etc.) merely provided slaves in tribute or trade. The ‘Nuba’ soldiers of Sennar were slaves captured from the Ethiopian foothills as well as from the present day Nuba Mountains. Slave regiments in the Egyptian army, made up increasingly of Southern Sudanese, continued to be called ‘Nubian’ (*Nubi*) regiments into the mid-nineteenth century. This is the origin of the term ‘Nubi’ which is currently applied to the ex-slave soldier communities in East Africa and the Southern Sudan.

‘Sudani’, which now has the more generalized meaning of ‘Sudanese’ nationality, was originally more restricted in both a racial and a social sense, referring exclusively to black slaves. In the nineteenth century it began to supersede ‘Nubi’, perhaps as a recognition of the different status Nubian-speakers held in relation to Egypt’s African empire and the slave-raiding hinterland of the Southern Sudan. Thus both ‘Nubian’ and ‘Nuba’ came to be applied as specific geographical and ethnic names, while ‘Sudani’ was applied generally to those of black African, and specifically Southern Sudanese, origin. In the nineteenth-century travel literature of the Southern Sudan ‘Nubian’ distinguished the free Danaqla and Ja’liyyin from the black slave soldiers employed in private merchant armies. Similarly, an 1897 Egyptian Army census of reconquered Dongola (a ‘Nubian’ province) classified the population as ‘Native’ (Nubian), ‘Sudani’ (black) and ‘Arab’ (Western Sudanese).
'Sudani' appears as a personal name far more often in the military rolls of Sudanese regiments than any other ethnic tag. In late nineteenth-century military parlance 'Sudanese' was used to distinguish African riflemen from all other soldiery in both the Egyptian and Mahdist armies. British officers who had formerly served in the Egyptian army continued to use 'Sudanese' as a military category when serving in East Africa. These military associations gave the term 'Sudanese' a higher value and status in East Africa than it then enjoyed in either Egypt or the Sudan.

Military slavery as practised in the Upper Nile during the second half of the nineteenth century developed from two parallel strands: the Egyptian army of the Viceroy or Khedive of Egypt, and the private armies of independent merchants. The two types of armies fed into each other, especially in the 1870s and early 1880s when a number of private armies were taken over by the Egyptian government in Bahr al-Ghazal and Equatoria. This cross-fertilization meant that military slavery in the Upper Nile prior to 1891 was distinguished by three main characteristics: patronage, the reproduction of slave garrisons through the capture and assimilation of a civil population obtained from the slave-producing periphery, and the merging of military and commercial activities. All of these contributed to the legacy bequeathed to the Sudanese diaspora communities in East Africa following their introduction into Uganda in the 1890s.

Sudanese soldiers of the Egyptian army formed a far-flung diaspora soon after their initial conscription in the 1820s. They served in battlefields in Greece, Turkey and Mexico and were the mainstay of Egypt’s African empire. The collapse of that empire in the early 1880s allowed European powers to penetrate eastern Africa, and Sudanese soldiers, the orphans of that collapse, enabled these new empires to take root. Sudanese soldiers from Egypt helped Germany to secure its foothold in Tanganyika, Stanley’s ‘rescue’ of Emin Pasha and his Sudanese garrison served King Leopold’s purpose in expanding his holdings in the Congo, and the remnants of Emin’s force were the tools Britain used to secure control of Uganda and Kenya.

The introduction of Sudanese in East Africa

Slave soldiers are owned. They belong to a ruler or a patron, and service to that patron is an essential element in understanding a slave soldier’s allegiance and loyalty. That allegiance may be given to a patron’s representative, or invested in the patron’s emblem, such as a flag. The behaviour of the Sudanese Equatorial garrison between the departure of Emin Pasha in 1888 and the arrival of Captain Lugard in 1891 clearly illustrates this.

Most of the men, certainly all of the senior officers abandoned by Stanley and Emin, saw themselves as still in the service of the Khedive, and marked their allegiance by planting the Khedive’s flag in every garrison they established. This was brought home to Lugard when he met with Salim Bey and his men at Kavalli’s in September 1891 in order to negotiate their transfer to the service of the Imperial British East African Company (IBEAC). The Sudanese soldiers had repudiated Emin when he returned in July 1891 and tried to enlist them into German service. ‘Selim Bey represented that, being an Egyptian subject, and his men soldiers in the Egyptian Government service, he could not possibly accede to his request.’ Salim similarly explained to Lugard how he had grown grey in the service of the Khedive, and that nothing should induce him to swerve in his allegiance to the flag for which he had a hundred times risked his life; that if I had the Khedive’s permission, he would willingly join me, but without it he would serve under no other flag.
Lugard, who had served as transport officer in the Indian Army contingent at Suakin in 1885, replied

that England and Egypt were in close alliance, and I myself wore the ‘Khedive’s Star’ in recognition of our campaign for him against the dervishes in the Sudan, ‘I said I would write to the Khedive myself, and Selim should write, and according to his reply so shall Selim act . . . To this Selim agreed with enthusiasm, saying, I should appoint him a place wherever I wished, and he would remain there with his people and his flag, and serve the British till the answer came from the Khedive . . .’

Lugard was able to take over the Sudanese because he represented himself both as deputy and successor to the Khedive. His role as new patron and master is clearly implied in his speech to the assembled Sudanese soldiers on 17 September:

I addressed a few words to them, saying that I would place them in garrisons, and write to the Khedive to obtain his sanction for their enlistment, and that, if they obeyed orders and were loyal, they would find the British kind masters, who would do all in their power to promote their welfare; but that, if they gave trouble, they would find us hard to deal with.

The question of symbols of allegiance was deferred. Lugard and Salim formally agreed that once enlisted ‘under the British’ they would fly the IBEAC flag only, but until then they should fly the Egyptian flag. The potency of the flag as a symbol was demonstrated when the Sudanese troops paraded before Lugard, bearing their Khedivial flags, after this agreement was signed. ‘It was impossible not to feel a thrill of admiration for these deserted soldiers’, he recorded, ‘as they carried past flag after flag, torn and riddled in many fierce engagements with the Mahdists. They appeared fanatical to their loyalty to this emblem of the Khedive.’

Lugard as new patron and the Khedive’s flag as an old symbol between them secured the loyalty of these troops. Though Muslim themselves, they remained aloof from the Muslim party in Buganda in the continuing civil war there. Lugard offered two explanations for their steadfastness. One was that the Sudanese ‘remained loyal to me, and told [the Mohammedan party], so the story goes, that they were my people, and would fight for and not against me.’ Salim, he further reported, spoke on behalf of all his men when approached by the Muslims, and ‘loyally answered that they had fought long under the Khedive’s flag & were not now going to desert it’. Once this matter of allegiance and patronage is examined, it is difficult to maintain that the Sudanese were ‘mercenaries’, with all the overtones of unprincipled self-interest that implies. Certainly in later years colonial officials saw their own continuing obligation to the Sudanese as stemming from the service the Sudanese had already rendered.

Flags continued to be potent symbols. When Britain formally took over Uganda from the IBEAC, British officers were careful to plant British flags together with Sudanese garrisons in any new territory claimed, especially those areas once abandoned by the Egyptians. The importance of serving and living under the British flag would be raised by later generations of the Sudanese diaspora.

But who were these ‘Sudanese’ who clustered beneath the flags of old and new empires? Were they just those soldiers formally signed up in Company or British service? Did they include only those who originated from within the borders of what later became known as the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan? This was to become a much disputed question in the East African territories.
I have already shown that ‘Sudanese’ was a general term indicating social status as much as racial classification: northern Muslim ‘Arabs’ and ‘Nubians’ were not ‘Sudanese’. Lugard described the old Equatorial garrisons as consisting of many different Sudan tribes (mostly from the north), who had been enlisted and brought south by Baker and by Gordon, and were therefore aliens to the ‘Lake province’... The constant war in the Sudan had decimated the numbers of the original ‘askers’ [soldiers], and recruits (some of them from local tribes such as the Makraka [Azande], others from the followers of the soldiers from the north) had been enlisted from time to time to replace these losses.21

The ‘followers’ he described as ‘women (wives, concubines, and female slaves), children, and men slaves’ attached to the households of individual soldiers.22 Captain Thruston, who recruited a further contingent of soldiers based near Lake Albert in 1894 found not only Abyssinians but pygmies among the ‘pure-Negro’ soldiery.23 Lugard’s reference to ‘Sudan tribes (mostly from the north)’ has caused some confusion among scholars who assume this refers to Arab Northern Sudanese.24 It merely refers to the reservoir of Sudanese soldiers and slaves stationed along the Nile from Khartoum to Alexandria. Of the twenty-one officers and NCOs of Salim’s force who were voluntarily repatriated to Egypt in 1892, only two were Egyptian. The rest were all described as ‘black’, with the exception of one ‘Makaraka’ (Zande) who came to Egypt out of curiosity. Shortly after the arrival of these men and their dependants the Egyptian government formally repudiated its undertaking to repatriate soldiers from Equatoria, claiming they would accept only ‘those bona-fide Sudanese who were from north of Wadi Halfa’, which was then on Egypt’s southern frontier.25 Sudanese, then, did not even have to come from the Sudan. In fact, one of the most famous Sudanese officers in Uganda, Rehan Rashid, was a black African born near Tunis.26

The method of replenishment which Lugard described again goes back to the pattern of armed camps (zaribas) of the merchant companies. Such camps included not only slaves belonging to soldiers (both free and slave), but subject or ‘protected’ populations surrounding the camps engaged in producing food for the people of the camps. More slaves were captured in raids in the hinterland beyond the radius of the camps’ ‘protection’. Wives and concubines, domestic servants and new recruits for the army were brought in from all these populations, so that the ratio of servile to free population within that radius could be as much as 26:1.27 The practice of collecting additional personal ‘followers’ – both children and adults – continued when the Sudanese were established in garrisons in northern Uganda and Bunyoro. This was eventually stopped by the authorities, and by 1908 there were few such followers left, as ‘most of the youths have been enlisted, the girls married, and the source of supply cut off’.28

The Sudanese in Uganda practised both exclusion and assimilation. In the early years of the colony, at least, the Sudanese, ex-slaves themselves, referred to native Ugandans as ‘abid, ‘slaves’: a term that carried the same connotation as the French indigène, and which was applied by extension to civilian porters pressed into service for the army.’29 The contempt which the Sudanese expressed for those peoples they helped the British subdue before World War One was to have important consequences in the inter-war years when the Sudanese resisted assimilation into these surrounding communities. Despite these expressions of contempt, assimilation of subject peoples by the Sudanese was a regular feature in the preservation of the Sudanese community itself. Boys and slaves attached to a soldier eventually became soldiers ‘and called themselves Lur or Dinka or Makaraka, &c., according to the tribe of their parents or masters, though they themselves may have been
born in Uganda or on the Upper Nile, or captured when very young in Latuka or in the vicinity of one of Emin's many stations. An amalgamation of customs, rites and ceremonies was regulated by elders within the community, and one British officer was to remark before World War One, ‘it is, to my mind, wonderful how these people have managed during all these years to keep up their customs and traditions and live like strangers in the land’.  

The diversity of customs may have been striking, but some – especially marriage, birth and circumcision – were mediated through folk Islam, and the customs relating to women were of particular importance in creating and maintaining a distinct and separate community. Girls were subjected to pharonic circumcision, marriages were arranged through the elders, and a dowry was paid in cash, cloth and livestock to the father of the bride. Thus were contacts between scattered Sudanese communities maintained, and the importance of marrying within the community increased.

Given that colonial authorities later disputed whether women constituted part of the Sudanese community, it is worth noting the attitude of Egyptian army authorities as early as 1892. When the Egyptian government was still considering whether to repatriate all the Equatorian soldiers as well as their dependants, Wingate, then head of intelligence, suggested an experiment in colonizing them in the Red Sea littoral around Suakin and Tokar. ‘Most of the men are old soldiers (blacks),’ he explained, and ‘they would not do for much more fighting, but their women have bred & are bound to go on breeding just the class of black required for the E[gyptian] A[rmy] ...’ This was, in fact, one of the reasons why Sudanese were eventually settled near garrisons in both Uganda and Kenya, to maintain a supply of recruits from a nearby civil population.

The Sudanese mutiny during the Macdonald expedition of 1897 shook British confidence in the reliability of the Sudanese as soldiers. Despite this, most Sudanese remained loyal throughout the mutiny and continued to form a substantial percentage of the East African garrison in the reorganization which led to the foundation of the Kings’ African Rifles (KAR). The reformed Uganda Rifles, soon to be 4th battalion KAR, was still largely Sudanese at the beginning of the twentieth century. Sudanese had been sent from Uganda to Kenya to help guard the Uganda Railroad, were there incorporated into the East African Rifles, and entered the KAR through that unit. Even after the Reconquest of the Sudan individual Southern Sudanese continued to travel to Uganda to enlist in the KAR. Some Sudanese who had been brought to Tanganyika by the Germans were also incorporated into the KAR after World War One. In both Uganda and Kenya many soldiers were then transferred to the police, but Sudanese continued to offer service to the government in other ways, notably as railroad employees and even in minor clerical capacities. The combination of commerce and military service, which had been such a notable feature of the Southern Sudanese zariba system, continued in both Uganda and Kenya. Discharged soldiers often became traders. Soldiers who had been trained as drivers and mechanics, especially after the two World Wars, went into transport in civilian life. The needs of a large body of Muslim soldiery to have properly slaughtered animals meant that many members of the Sudanese community became butchers and stock traders. In many ways the Sudanese saw themselves as offering continuing service to the government, even if they were no longer in the army and were involved in other trades. This, too, is important to understand when the colonial governments after World War One wished to restrict their obligations to individual ex-soldiers rather than to the Sudanese community as a whole.

Manpower needs changed recruiting patterns. Recruitment of East Africans had steadily expanded prior to 1914, for even then there were too few Sudanese in East Africa to meet increasing military demands. World War One merely accelerated this trend. By
1918 the 3rd and 4th battalions had ceased to be predominantly Sudanese. Post-war demobilization further reduced the numbers of Sudanese in the KAR. In the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan there had been a steady move even before 1914 to reduce the reliance on the old battalions of the Egyptian army (whether Egyptian or Sudanese); ‘recruitment’ of prisoners-of-war during the many pacification campaigns in the South could not meet demand. Instead territorial units were raised throughout the country, and in the South an Equatorial Corps was founded in 1913 which was intended to replace the old Muslim soldiers of the former slave battalions. In 1925 the Sudan Defence Force was severed completely from the Egyptian army, and by 1930 all the old Sudanese battalions had been disbanded. Descendants of soldiers living in the north continued to join the army, but the Nubi ex-soldier communities in the malakiyas (civilian quarters) of Southern Sudanese towns were no longer drawn into the army in the Sudan as many of their relatives were still being drawn into the army in East Africa. Nubis living in the Sudan continued to join the KAR through Uganda, especially during World War Two, but this was not officially encouraged. The old raison d’être for separate Sudanese communities, from the official stand-point at least, no longer had much force. They became an anachronism in the post-1918 East African system of tribal administration.

Native Administration and the Sudanese

Before World War One most East African Sudanese lived in villages attached to military reserves or cantonments, as at Bombo in Uganda, and Kibera and Eldama Ravine in Kenya. Up through the war they came directly under military, rather than civil jurisdiction. This meant that such Sudanese communities were not subject to Native Tribunals and did not pay native taxes; in Buganda they were specially exempted by statute. At different times in the 1920s and the 1930s both the Ugandan and Kenyan governments tried to grapple with the continuing presence of Sudanese in their territories, and tried to define the rights such a community might have. In Uganda government discussions revolved around military needs, definitions of immigrant status, and the authority of the Buganda government in Native Administration. In Kenya, more predictably, the issues were related to land and the dangers of ‘detribalization’.

The status of the Sudanese in Kenya was brought before the Carter Land Commission in 1933. The main Sudanese settlement in Kenya was in Kibera (from the Sudanese Arabic word, kibra – ‘forest’), a territory of more than 4,197 acres, south of the Ngong Road, granted to the KAR in 1904 when it was then some five miles outside Nairobi’s city limits. The military reserve – which included the KAR lines, the golf links, as well as the Sudanese settlements and shambas – was transferred from military to civil administration in 1928. The expansion of the Municipal boundary to the Ngong Road produced a boundary dispute as Sudanese began building their huts within what was now considered Municipal territory. Kibera had an unsavoury reputation among European settlers, being full of ‘detribalized’ natives, prostitutes and ‘Nubian Gin’. It was also potentially valuable land as the city expanded, and the town wanted the Sudanese removed. Plans had been proposed as early as 1927 for the wholesale removal of all ‘detribalized’ natives from around Nairobi to a new reserve on the Coast or along the Tana River, but this was too large an undertaking to be considered. Yet it was thought in 1933 that some separate attempt should be made to solve what was already being called ‘the Sudanese problem’. Whereas Europeans, including many military men, were convinced that the Sudanese could not be allowed to stay in Kibera indefinitely, the Sudanese saw the matter differently. Evidence presented to the Land Commission by Sudanese elders (some of whom had
arrived in East Africa with Lugard) supported four main claims: 1) that ‘the Government brought them here and they live under the British flag’; 2) that ‘the lands were given to us and our descendants as a pension and in recognition of our services’; 3) that the Sudanese as a community had no lands of their own, no place else to go in Kenya, and their children were being deprived of land ‘given to us . . . in perpetuity’; and 4) that they would prefer to continue under military jurisdiction, and hoped that the government would continue to conscript their children and grandchildren into the KAR and police.38

The Sudanese had good reason to think that the land had been granted to them outright as a community, in reward for military service, in place of repatriating them to Egypt or the Sudan. Such a perception was entirely in keeping with their past experience of military slavery, because both the Anglo-Egyptian and East African authorities had used settler colonies of discharged Sudanese soldiers as part of their pacification policy. Following the Reconquest in the Sudan, discharged soldiers were settled along the main arteries of communication, just as in Kenya Sudanese had been settled around the forts protecting the Uganda road.39 Colonies of discharged soldiers were also often located near active KAR lines in Kenya ‘as Reserve garrisons’.40 Prior to World War One ‘Nubian’ settlements were often moved from one garrison to another, as when the Nubian settlement on the Kiu River was transferred en bloc to Fort Smith in 1912.41 Before the war ended one Provincial Secretary proposed to settle wounded and incapacitated ‘detribalized Africans’, by which he meant ‘members of other African tribes who have from time to time been brought into or drifted into this Protectorate as, soldiers, Police or workers in other service’, in settlements around government stations, not subject to tribal law, but to the Indian Penal Code and Ordinances.42 Another colony of ‘Sudanese pensioners’ and their families had been granted free plots on discharge in Jubaland. When that area was transferred to Italy after the war the settlers were offered the choice of staying in Italian territory, or being resettled in Kenya under different tenancy agreements.43 More to the point, when it was first proposed to transfer 4,198 acres of the 3rd KAR lines and ‘Reserve Shambas’ to civil administration in 1919, this was to be in return for 2,000 acres at Mbagathi being handed over to the military as a replacement site for the garrison, and another 2,000 acres near Fort Hall ‘where the KAR ex-askaris may be allowed to live in perpetuity in place of the present reserve’ (emphasis mine).44

Unfortunately for the Sudanese, while the land was handed over to the KAR as early as 1904, there was no formal gazetting until 1918, and there does not seem to have been any surviving record (or any record produced for the Commission) of undertakings promised to the old soldiers and their families before then, despite what was implied in the documents cited above. The Commission therefore concluded that the Sudanese contention that land had been granted to them in perpetuity as a pension was false. Still, it was felt that ex-soldiers were due some consideration for past services, and that this consideration should extend to their wives and to their sons, but to no other dependants or generations. The government was seeking to define past military service as a limited contract incurring only limited liability, and this was in keeping with the changed tenancy arrangements imposed on the post-war ex-soldier settlements on the coast.

The limitation of the government’s obligations to the Sudanese was further justified on two grounds: 1) that the Sudanese were no longer suitable for military service, as ‘the second generation is degenerate and in fact mostly in civil employment’, and 2) that they were now thoroughly detribalized and inter-tribally mixed. The second factor contributed to the former, and ‘detribalization is not a status to be desired or encouraged’. It was proposed that settlement be allowed ‘only to persons of recognized Nubian descent’, but it was further alleged that very few such persons existed, due to extensive intermixing with
local women. If right to settlement was granted on such racially exclusive grounds, then the problem would eventually solve itself and fade away. The contention that the Nubis were ‘detribalized’ through intermarriage was disputed by some European witnesses. It would later be disputed by the Sudanese themselves.45

The issue of the Sudanese tenancy of Kibera was briefly raised again, and apparently resolved, in 1938 when a group of ex-Native Officers, Warrant Officers and NCOs petitioned the Inspector General of the KAR concerning their future. Citing arrangements made by two previous commanding officers before World War One, which allowed them to build on government land, they asked for an alternative settlement site for the whole Sudanese community, should any town planning scheme encroach on their settlement in Kibera.46 The Inspector-General took the opportunity to reiterate that the land still belonged to the government, and that allotments had been granted individually to old soldiers who were allowed to build one hut and make a shamba, and live in them with a wife until both had died. He further informed them that on the death of both veteran and widow their heirs would be required to leave Kibera. This was resisted by the representatives of the old soldiers, who still insisted that the land was theirs in perpetuity, and that it was unfair to condemn their sons to destitution by expelling them from Kibera. To this they were told their sons could always avoid destitution by joining the army. This was not then an attractive proposition, as rates of pay for soldiers had dropped since the beginning of World War One to a rate below that which the original Sudanese soldiers had been paid.47

Matters came to a head at the beginning of World War Two. In Uganda the planned transfer of the KAR headquarters from Bombo to Jinja in 1939 reopened the question of the Nubis in Buganda, as they would no longer be under military authority if they remained in Bombo (where some 2,000 out of the 3,000 Nubis resident in Buganda lived). The Protectorate government decided that the most direct way to deal with the problem was to rescind the Nubis’ rights and require them, through the paying of customary luwalo dues (in labour or cash) and submitting to the jurisdiction of Baganda native courts, to integrate with the Baganda.48 The imposition of luwalo dues in Buganda in 1940 shortly preceded the announcement in Kenya that Sudanese must henceforth pay the native hut tax, which they interpreted as a ‘wives tax’, since each wife had her own hut. This led to a combined protest by the Sudanese in both colonies, their appeal to Lord Lugard in England for redress, and the demand to be allowed to go ‘home’ to the Sudan rather than be treated as ‘natives’ in Uganda and Kenya. It brought the existence of the sizeable Sudanese population in East Africa to the attention of the Sudan government for the first time.

The Sudanese in Uganda petitioned the Secretary of State for Colonies against the action of the Uganda government. Their argument was that they were ‘to be deprived of the special privileges which they have hitherto enjoyed for years in Uganda, involving their recognition as a separate community’, just as Arabs, Somalis, Baluchis and others had been recognized as separate communities. It was not just the luwalo dues which they minded, it was the fact that they were about to have ‘the protection of British Courts’ withdrawn. They referred to themselves as a community, drawing attention to ‘old records’ which documented that 500–600 trained men, ‘accompanied by about 8000 women and children, and followers’, had been ‘taken into British Service …’ They had come into British service from beneath the Egyptian flag, and quoted a passage from Jephson describing the guard of honour which met Stanley at Kavalli’s, flying the Egyptian flag ‘… in the circumstances it would be unfair to classify them, especially for the purposes of legal status, and its resulting incidents, as members of local tribes from which they have not
originated and to which they do not belong’. Before ending with continued professions of loyalty to ‘His Majesty’, they complained, ‘Your Petitioners say therefore that in recompense for their faithfulness and loyalty for so many years it will be a poor return if they are now to be degraded from the status which others rendering the government no special aid still retain.’ For good measure, a copy of this petition was forwarded to Lord Lugard (addressed to ‘Downing St., London’). In a covering letter the Nubis’ legal adviser stated, ‘The matter of the Petition is self-explanatory and simply says that the local government has recently altered the law and seeks to obliterate the identity of the Nubians, as a Community. Against this they complain.’

A few months after the April petition Lugard received a long cablegram, this time from the Union of Sudanese based in Kibera, Kenya. This not only raised the matter of huwalo, but a new matter in Kenya where the Sudanese were expected to pay a tax on wives, just like the ‘Pagan natives’. The Union implored Lugard to intercede on their behalf, but, failing that, they wished to be repatriated to the Sudan, rather than be treated like East African natives.

The agitation to return to the Sudan had been growing ever since the government’s proposal to abolish the Nubis’ special status in Buganda was announced in 1939. A deputation of Nubis applied for travel permits to go to Juba (capital of Equatoria Province in the Sudan) for the dedication of a new mosque. The Ugandan government informed the Sudan government of the Nubis’ current grievances, and of their expressed desire to return to the Sudan. Khartoum immediately rejected this proposal on the grounds that the Nubis were ‘mainly an ex-soldier community with urban tastes’ who would not ‘fit into the picture’ in the rural Southern Sudan. Nor was there any area in the Northern Sudan ‘which would be suitable for their reception’.

Some 114 Nubis did turn up at the Juba mosque’s dedication, much to the surprise of the officials there (who assumed all the old Sudanese in East Africa had been killed in the war), and the governor of Equatoria, Martin Parr, had to be brought into the discussion. He confirmed the central government’s refusal to consider the return of the Sudanese en masse. He was asked ‘If they could not be received as “Nubis” could not permission be granted for Baris, Dinkas, etc. etc. as such, to return to their tribal areas? As you are aware, all “Nubis” know their own tribal origins though some may be of mixed blood.’ Parr demanded to know what evidence there was that the Nubis could claim a tribal origin – what were their customs, their language, etc.? The answer from Uganda was not reassuring. All Nubis knew the tribal area of their forebears, though few had ever visited those areas. Some did still know something of the languages of their parents. As for their customs:

As a result of contact with other types of Emin’s forces, Nubis in general tend to ape what I believe are the customs of the Khartoum area rather than those further South. Their language is Arabic of a somewhat ‘pidgin type’. The women are ‘sewn up’ when young and wear the same type clothes and dress their hair as seen in Omdurman [sic]. They are all Mahommedans.

This was enough to condemn them completely. Parr, a life-long bachelor, known to many of his colleagues as a ‘Boy Scout’, had a particular horror of female circumcision (he later claimed that the whole aim of the Sudan’s Southern Policy was to prevent the spread of female circumcision and venereal disease to the South). He was a strong advocate of the rural virtues of Native Administration through customary law and local chiefs. The visit of the District Commissioner of Juba to Uganda confirmed that the Nubis spoke Arabic but not vernacular Sudanese languages, and that they preferred to live in towns rather than rural villages. Setting large numbers of them in Sudanese towns was out of the question.
Parr was more adamant when responding to Lugard’s eventual intervention. A mass immigration of such a Muslim community ‘into our very primitive rustic agricultural communities would be the source of endless trouble and friction . . .’ But these people could not even claim to be ‘Sudanese’, since they had been ‘very much watered down’ by enlistments from Ugandan tribes. ‘The main fallacy . . . is their claim to be Sudanese, there are a few (a very few) such, but at a guess more than 80% have no such claim’ Sir Philip Mitchell, the retiring governor of Uganda whose policy it was to ‘integrate’ the Nubis into Buganda, offered much the same argument when he, too, replied to Lugard’s well intentioned enquiry. ‘The Nubis in the last 40 years have continuously intermarried with Baganda, and the young people of today are little more Nubis than I am.’

The paradox was that the Ugandan Nubis could not claim Sudanese nationality because they could not satisfy the Sudan government that they belonged to a tribe. Yet they could not maintain a separate legal identity in Uganda because they were deemed to be mixed up with other tribes. We do not know whether the demand for repatriation was genuine or was a tactic to bolster their claim for separate status within Uganda. Certainly the attempt of the colonial government to integrate them into local tribal administration acted as an incentive to assert and maintain a separate identity as ‘Sudanese’. It was during the 1940s that various ‘Sudanese’ unions and associations became active throughout East Africa. The Sudanese in Kibera adopted much the same tactics as the Ugandan Sudanese when faced with similar pressures from the Kenya government.

The Sudanese living in Kibera had ceased to come under military jurisdiction since 1928. They were considered ‘detribalized’, yet the Nairobi municipality did not want to have them come under its authority. The Native Hut and Poll Tax Ordinance No. 40 of 1934 was not applied to the Sudanese until 1940, when they were informed that they would have to pay full hut tax. As in the past, genuine veterans had been allowed exemption from paying tax on one hut for life, and as each wife had her own hut, men with more than one wife regarded this unexpected enforcement of the law as a ‘wives tax’ on each additional wife. The resistance to this was organized by the Union of Sudanese (‘incorporated in Uganda, Tanganyika and Zanzibar, etc.’), whose headquarters was in Kibera. As in Uganda the Sudanese pleaded exemption because of their past service and their nationality, but they took the Ugandan argument one step further and argued exemption on the additional grounds of religion.

The officials of the Union of Sudanese (most of whom signed with their former ranks in the army) protested their loyalty to ‘the King-Emperor’ on many occasions. Their formal petition argued their case as a community – different generations of men and women together – and their distinctness within a sea of paganism. It is worth quoting extensively:

The Humble Petition of the Union of Sudanese as representing the Sudanese inhabitants of this Colony and Protectorate MOST RESPECTFULLY SHEWETH.

(1) That the Sudanese inhabitants of this Colony and Protectorate are almost exclusively persons who came from the Sudan in the forces of His Majesty the King or are the wives or widows or the descendants of such original immigrants.

(2) That they have formed a community of their own, partly through being settled together by the military, but mainly by reason of the fact that, living as they do mainly in Nairobi or elsewhere it were not socially practicable for them to identify
themselves with, or merge socially in any other community or communities, tribe or tribes.

(3) The Sudanese as is well known, are a Mohamedan people, having been converted to Islam in the very earliest years of the Islamic faith. It is historically true that prior to that the Sudanese were people confessing the Christian faith.

(4) The above facts are mentioned by way of emphasizing that for centuries they have been followers of one of the major religions in the world and though technically natives of Africa they are not African Pagans.

(5) As such Mohamedans, they may, and in some cases they do, have more than one wife. But that is as enjoined in the Sheria and not ‘wives’ as understood by the African Pagans.

They went on to claim that for pagans each additional wife has an economic value in extra earning capacity, so ‘such an additional tax may not be inequitable’. This is not so for Mohamedans. They concluded:

(8) The Sudanese are and have been for centuries, Mohamedans, speaking as their mother tongue the Arabic language, living in their social economy like other Mohamedans and it is submitted that they should be treated like other Mohamedan Communities, viz. that for taxation purposes they be classed as non-natives and pay as Arabs, or Somalis pay – there would be no objection in principle to paying as Indians or other Asiatics. It is not the amount of tax, but the principle, which is felt to be irksome.58

The governor rejected their petition, and they subsequently appealed to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. In this, their final petition, they dwelt at some length on their military record, and claimed that ‘We are now to be found in Government service as clerks, or as traders, but, however we are employed, we are a non-native community, always ready, eager and willing to show our loyalty to the British Government, whose loyal and willing servants we have always been.’ They claimed that they had followed their own customs ‘just as other Mohamedans (notably Arabs) did, who found themselves in pagan Africa.’ They further argued that the wives tax was ‘contrary to the tenets of Islam’ because a woman should never ‘whether directly or indirectly, pay a poll tax’. They concluded with this plea:

(14) We repeat that we find it difficult to appreciate how we can be classed as natives of Kenya. To us it seems elementary that we can only be classed as ‘natives’ in the place where we have native rights, where we have our tribal lands, or at any rate, certain land rights. Natives of Africa, we may be, but so are the Egyptians, and numberless other Mohamedan peoples of Africa. We feel the more our present treatment when we consider East Africa and her past history. The Indian who came to Africa in numbers – we do not now refer to the Indian traders at the Coast – finds himself possibly because of his race and of the position in India, in a better and superior position than ourselves who lost our lives fighting. Comparisons are invidious, but they are inevitable.

(15) We like to feel that our military services are not and will never be forgotten, that our social system, manners and customs are not unduly interfered with and that our religion, its observances and practices are duly respected. It is with that feeling that we approach you and pray that there be a reconsideration of this
question of the status of the Sudanese, and that by the necessary amending legislation we may be classed as the Arabs, like ourselves a Mohamedan community settled in Kenya as free Mohamadians.\textsuperscript{59}

The secretary of the Union of Sudanese forwarded copies of all these documents to Lugard, hoping that he might be persuaded to speak on their behalf (he was not). In his final letter to Lugard he emphasized that the Sudanese would refuse to 'submit to a violation of their religious precepts or to any change in their nationality as Sudanese'. He rejected the, by then, common assertion that the Sudanese community had been watered down by intermarriage:

Evidently there appears to be an impression in some official quarters that the Sudanese have been absorbed in the indigenous native population of Kenya Colony and Uganda Protectorate respectively and have for all intents and purposes become the natives of these Territories. This is definitely not so. My Union wishes to state emphatically that not a single Sudanese has married any native woman so far, although some Sudanese women have married the natives of these territories, but the progeny of such unions loose [sic] their nationality as Sudanese.\textsuperscript{60}

The introduction of Islam in support of their claim to special status was a late development. Whether or not the Sudanese in Kenya really thought they were descended from the original Nubian converts to Islam or were defending their religion by refusing to pay hut tax, the argument that they should be treated along the same lines as other immigrant Muslim communities had some force. Their reference to their own customs also appealed to the logic of Native Administration as applied in many other parts of British Africa (including the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan). We have already seen the testimony of one British officer who, as early as 1908, commented on the tenacity with which the Sudanese held to their customs. And if these customs were by way of accretion and invention, what customs were not in colonial Africa?

The points developed in this series of Ugandan and Kenyan petitions which are of most interest, and which were to reappear are: 1) reference to the Sudanese as a community, containing both men and women, combatants and non-combatants from the very start; 2) the use of women to maintain that community; 3) the expanded definition of ‘government service’ away from a purely military reference to include clerical work and trade (entirely consistent with a background in the nineteenth-century zaribas); and 4) appeals directly to the ‘British’ government, ‘British’ courts, and a specific relationship to the Monarch, all of which by-pass and take precedence over the colonial governments and reintroduce the idea of a patron. Here, too, is the direct appeal to their very first British patron in East Africa, Lord Lugard. Thus by 1941 the Sudanese in East Africa were basing their claim to be a separate community on their past history in relation to the British (and not just the colonial) government, and the individuality of their customs and religion.

The claim to ‘non-native’ status was rejected by the governments of Kenya and Uganda, and the Colonial Office, on the automatic identification of ‘native’ with ‘African’. The granting of ‘non-native’ status went only to those whose own origin, or the origin of their ancestors, was extra-African. Thus, as one Colonial Office official minuted, Arabs in Kenya were ‘of course of Asiatic extraction’, and therefore non-native, whereas Swahilis along the Kenya coast were included within the definition of ‘native’. As for the Sudanese, another official commented, ‘they are, after all, Africans and in law the [Native Hut and Poll Tax] Ordinance undoubtedly applies to them’. Similarly the religious argument was dismissed (quite rightly) as bogus and irrelevant. Applying a rather inappropriate comparison with another part of the Empire, one London-based official concluded, ‘My
experience with Malays is that only the aristocracy can afford more than one wife, and that
to have two or more is regarded as a luxury; and it is the essence of good taxation to tax
luxuries but not necessities. The final episode in Sudanese relations with the colonial government in Kenya with
which I deal here is the post-war renewal of the Kibera problem, following upon the
expansion of the railway line there. It was decided in 1947 to evict some Sudanese from
part of Kibera to make way for new constructions by the railroad and the army. This was
the delayed confrontation anticipated by the Kenya Land Commission. The proposal to
remove the Sudanese prompted a renewal of some of their claims to having been given the
land in perpetuity. This time the government appointed Lt. Colonel S. H. La Fontaine,
DSO, OBE, MC – introduced to the Sudanese as an ‘old soldier of two wars’ – to make
recommendations for alternative arrangements for the Sudanese community. La Fontaine,
like many ex-KAR officers, was keenly sympathetic to the claims of the Sudanese. He wrote
in his final report:

The Sudanese have no lack of champions, some of them more ardent that [sic] wise. My
experience of them in two world wars and during six months intensive study of them at close
quarters has convinced me that they are superior to most other Africans in loyalty, in courage
and manly qualities. People with slender knowledge of them think of them mainly as purveyors
of Nubian gin and forget their outstanding services in the past.
It would be a fine gesture for Government in its search for a settlement area, acceptable to
them, to override all obstacles in the way.
It would strengthen, if that were possible, a loyalty unshaken by the attempts of seditious
Africans of other tribes to undermine it. It would deepen a love for the British connection, that
stands out like an island in a sea of native unrest.

This is not the place to go into the detail of La Fontaine’s recommendations, the
objections raised from many sections of the settler community against relocating the
Sudanese to any of the proposed alternative sites, nor even the failure of the Kenya
government to act on his recommendations at all. The Sudanese fight to remain in Kibera
is another story. There were specific economic interests at stake, not only for the Nairobi
authorities who wanted the Kibera land, but for the Sudanese settlers who had become
landlords and were renting out their properties. By the early 1950s the cost of the proposed
relocation had risen beyond the Kenyan government’s willingness to pay. In the early years
of the Mau Mau emergency, when there was every need to seek allies against Mau Mau
within the African urban population of Nairobi, it was no longer politically wise to
continue to deprive such a large group as the Sudanese of basic services, nor disturb them
through unnecessary relocation. Rather, I will focus on the way the Sudanese presented
their case.

La Fontaine’s reference to the ‘British connection’ was not just rhetoric. The Sudanese
made direct reference to their connection with the British government in their petitions of
the 1940s. One Kibera resident tried to put this case in a letter to the East African Standard
(letter was summarized by the editor to the Chief Native Commissioner for vetting and
was not, as far as I know, published). He claimed that the settlement in Kibera had been
given ‘in substitution of our motherland which we had lost in the Sudan many years ago
for the sake of the British Government... We could not have lost our motherland if the
British Government had not brought us to this country.’ He wanted to ask both the
government and La Fontaine these questions:

a. Who brought the Sudanese to Kenya and for what reason?
b. Has their work been good or bad?
He threatened that the Sudanese would send a deputation to the Sudan and Egypt to ‘bring the case before the International Court of Justice’.64

Given that the author’s ostensible complaint was about model housing being constructed in Kibera for the evicted residents, the appeals to the British Government and the International Court of Justice would appear to be extreme, in the best tradition of an experienced barrack-room lawyer. Similarly, when the president of the Sudanese Association of East Africa (Nairobi Branch) asked the District Commissioner of Nairobi, ‘can this place be regarded as a land granted to Sudanese-ex-servicemen by Government of Kenya, after their loyal task in the Service? Has there been a sudden change to Sovereignty of this British Colony of Kenya? to take and destroy by force what we poor possess?’, his immediate complaint was that the ‘Old Cambrians’ club was planting trees in Kibera in anticipation of the Sudanese evacuation. Yet it was all part of the same theme which the Sudanese harked back to, again and again, in all their correspondence, reminiscent of their petitions at the beginning of the decade. When forwarding a more serious complaint about the financial hardship suffered by residents of Kibera, the president of the Union of Sudanese once again stated:

> It is an admitted fact that our community was brought here while serving His Majesty’s Government and we believe, therefore, that this place was found us by grace of His Majesty’s Government as token of gratitute [sic] for the service – loyal – which our community had rendered to the King, and we naturally consider it as our home.65

But this fact was being admitted by few in the Colony or in London. Perhaps La Fontaine himself felt some of the same desperation as the Sudanese when he, too, gave an apocalyptic twist to common-sense advice towards the end of 1948 when urging his superiors, ‘in this time of international crisis we must remind ourselves of the wisdom of keeping a loyal tribe, with soldierly traditions, loyal to our cause by just and even generous treatment especially when the action proposed is in keeping with the recommendations of the Land Commission’.66 But on one point he erred: the Sudanese were not ‘a tribe’, and in this lay their dilemma.

**Conclusion**

I have presented in this article some aspects of the history of the Sudanese diaspora which have usually been overlooked in studies of East Africa and the Sudan. My contention is that the rhetoric of service and loyalty, and the references to the British Government and the Monarch, were not just debating points to argue against the payment of an irksome tax or for permanent tenure in a colonial slum. They are derived from the formative experience of the Sudanese diaspora: military slavery. In the colonial context in which they eventually found themselves they could maintain their identity only by constant reference back to that experience.

The ambiguity of status continued. The Sudanese did not conform to the definition of ‘tribe’ then employed in British administration throughout eastern Africa, so they very forcefully presented their own notion of nationality. They were ultimately denied their claim to the separate status accorded to other nationalities in East Africa purely on the grounds of race: they were ‘Africans’ (except in the Sudan), and would be treated as such. It
is significant that the post-independence generation in both Uganda and Kenya have dropped the term ‘Sudanese’ in favour of ‘Nubi’, with its implications of tribal, rather than national, affiliation.67

The final irony is that the Nubis’ earlier arguments have at last been accepted by the post-independence Kenyan government, but as a way of disenfranchising them. The Nubis are resented for a number of reasons: some have become landlords in the Kibera slum, and no one likes a slumlord. Others were recruited as KANU stalwarts during the last years of the Moi regime (a modern variant of ‘loyal government service’). The Kenya government has concluded that the Nubi claim to a special status, based on their origin outside of East Africa and on having remained aloof from the surrounding ‘native’ population, proves that they are foreigners and not Kenyan citizens.68 The Nubis have appealed to the African Commission on Human and People’s rights, in a case still pending at the end of 2007, giving their old arguments a post-colonial twist. No longer do they claim to have been willingly ‘brought here while [loyally] serving His Majesty’s Government’; instead they now claim to have been ‘forcibly moved’ to Kenya by the British,69 an experience consistent with a different kind of servitude from the one that brought them to East Africa.

Acknowledgements

Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the SOAS African History Seminar, the ‘Ideologies of Race, Origins and Descent in the History of the Nile Valley and North East Africa’ conference at St Antony’s College, Oxford, and the 5th International Sudan Studies Conference in Washington, DC. My thanks to participants in those meetings for their comments, and more particularly to two anonymous readers and Holger Hansen and Wendy James for specific comments on earlier drafts.

Notes


3. For general discussions of the institution of military slavery see Pipes, Slave Soldiers and Islam; and Johnson, “Muslim Military Slavery.” For details of military slavery in the Sudan in the nineteenth century see Johnson, “Sudanese Military Slavery,” “The Structure of a Legacy,” and “Recruitment and Entrapment”; Ewald, Soldiers, Traders and Slaves; and Hill and Hogg, A Black Corps d’Élite.

4. There is some debate over the legal status of military slaves in the nineteenth-century Egyptian army. Hill and Hogg (A Black Corps d’Élite, 5, 90) claim that slaves were formally manumitted before being conscripted into the army, but I do not consider that the evidence for this as a common practice is strong. Whether slave soldiers were considered legally free or legally slave, and whether or not they considered themselves actually slaves, their status remained ambiguous.


9. Ibid., 151–52.

10. Anon. “Table Showing Approximate Population,” 5. Wingate, “Report on the Arrival,” 10, where the soldiers Saadein Sudan, Farag Sudan, Abdu Sudan and Khamis Aswad are each unnecessarily identified as “a black.”
13. Lugard, Rise, 205.
15. Ibid., 210–11.
16. Ibid., 219.
17. Ibid., 214.
18. Ibid., 219.
20. E.g. “Colvile’s report on Unyoro expedition,” June 1894, SAD 257/1.
22. Ibid.
24. Wanji, “The Nubi in East Africa,” 20, 46, 49–50, where he says the officers came from Northern Sudan and Egypt; Pain, “Acholi and Nubians,” 41, who asserts that captive Southern Sudanese associated themselves with the dominant Nubian group; Hansen, “Pre-colonial Immigrants,” 562; Collins, Land Beyond the Rivers, 177.
29. Meldon, “English–Arabic Dictionary,” 147, 166. See also Sudanese soldiers calling the peoples of the Sudan–Uganda border abid (Blake, Imperial Boundary Making, 26, 78). British observers were often shocked by the way the Sudanese treated their own slaves (Thruston, African Incidents, 90–91).
31. Ibid., 133–35.
32. F. R. W. to Hunter, Cairo, 10 July 1892, SAD 253/9/6–7.
36. Meldon, “English–Arabic Dictionary,” 88. “Kibra” was derived from the Arabic ghabra, but was also similar to kibira (“forest”) in Lunyoro, from which the Banyoro village Kibiro derived its name (Doyle, Crisis and Decline, 18). The change of pronunciation might have been due to the Sudanese’s long service in Bunyoro.
40. Minute by G. A. S. Northcote (Chief Secretary) to the Governor on transfer of KAR Shambas, 24 November 1926, Kenya National Archives [KNA] PC/Coast 1/11/68, “Settlement of Detribalized Africans Wounded or Otherwise Incapacitated while Serving in East Africa (1915–27).”
42. J. Ainsworth to Chief Secretary, Nairobi, 21 February 1916, KNA PC/Coast 1/11/68. “Detribalized” Africans in this context was “intended to refer entirely to such natives as Coast Natives, ex-slaves, Sudanese, and other miscellaneous people and their descendants who do not
belong to any of the known tribes of this Protectorate,” John Ainsworth, PC Nyanza Province, Kisumu, 29 Sept 1916, to [F. W. Isaac], PC Lamu, KNA PC/JUB 1/8/3, “Settlement of Detribalized Africans Wounded or Otherwise Incapacitated while Serving in East Africa (1915–16).”

43. Chief Native Commissioner to Commissioner of Land, 20 April 1922, KNA PC/Coast 1/1153, “Sudanese Colony at Yonte.” Tel, Nairobi to Province Mombasa, 20 May 1925; Sr British Commissioner Jubaland Commission to Resident Commissioner, Mombasa, 18 June 1925; H.B.M. Consul, Kismayu, “List of Sudanese Pensioners Proceeding to Mombassa by the SS “Garibaldi” sailing this Date,” 5 August 1926, all in KNA PC/Coast 1/7/28 “Jubaland (1926–28).”

44. Transfer of KAR Lines to Mbagathi (minutes of a meeting on 4 April 1919), KNA MH 1/3244 “Re- Site for King’s African Rifles Lines. Land by Extension of Native Civil Hospital (1919).”


47. G. J. Giffard, Major-General, Inspector General, King’s African Rifles to governor, 2 March 1938, NA CO 822 106/14.


49. “The humble petition of the Nubian community, Uganda,” Rhodes House, Oxford [RH] MSS Lugard L85/3, and NA CO 822 106/14. In this and other petitions and correspondence the language was that of English (or Indian) legal advisers, but the ideas, and especially the symbol of the flag, were rooted in historical experience.


51. Angus Gillan, Civil Secretary to Chief Secretary, Uganda Protectorate, 21 May 1939, NRO EP 2/39/137.

52. Cox to Parr, 3 August 1940; Parr to Cox, 22 August 1940; Cox to Parr, 8 September 1940, all in ibid.


55. Parr to Lugard, 6 November 1940 in ibid and RH MSS Lugard L85/3.

56. Sir P. Mitchell to Lugard, New Delhi, 5 November 1940, RH MSS Lugard L85/3 17.

57. As in Representatives of Sudanese Union to governor, Kenya, 27 May 1940, RH MSS Lugard L85/3 30 and NA CO 822 106/14.

58. Union of Sudanese to His Excellency, the Governor in Council, Nairobi, RH MSS Lugard L85/3 32 and NA CO 822 106/14. Despite the direct comparisons the Sudanese made with the Somalis, as fellow Muslims, their circumstances were fundamentally different, as Sudanese arguments for special status rested primarily on their military service and the loss of their homeland while in British service, and only secondarily on religion. Somali claims to non-native status seem to have rested on a feeling of innate racial superiority (Turton, “Somali Resistance,” 128–35).

59. Officers of the Union of Sudanese to Secretary of State for the Colonies through Governor of Kenya, 14 October 1940, RH MSS Lugard L85/3 25–29.

60. Hassan Abia, Hon. Secretary, the Union of Sudanese, Kibra, Nairobi to Lugard, 14 January 1941, RH MSS Lugard L85/3 20–22 and NRO EP 2/39/137. In fact the Uganda Nubi community has always recruited women from outside its original circle, especially in recent years. Obbo, African Women, 108–10.


62. Report of an investigation by Mr S. H. La Fontaine, DSO, OBE, MC into the means for the resettlement of the Sudanese at Kibira, KNA MAA 8/117.

63. Parsons, “Kibera is Our Blood.”

64. G. Kinnear to P. Wyn Harris, 30 April 1948, KNA MAA 8/117.

65. Ramathan Marjan to D.C. Nairobi, 8 May 1948; the Union of Sudanese to D.C. Nairobi, 24 November 1946 [sic], KNA MAA 8/117.

66. S. H. La Fontaine to the Hon. Chief Secretary and the Hon. Chief Native Commissioner, Nairobi, 30 September 1948, KNA MAA 7/458. Prof. Jean La Fontaine, Col. La Fontaine’s
daughter, told me that he felt deeply that the Sudanese did not get a fair deal from the government.

67. Wanji, “The Nubi in East Africa,” 12, 24; Parsons “Kibera is Our Blood,” 122. But some ambiguity remains, as within the Nubi community people still know and refer to the tribal origins of their ancestors.


References


Anon. “Table Showing Approximate Population … in the Dongola Province.” In Intelligence Report Egypt 52 (February and March 1897), App. A: 5.


