

Contested citizenship, religious discrimination and the growth of Nubian identity in Northern Uganda

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Abstract: Nubians are the people who first lived along the Lower Nile Valley near present Aswan High Dam in Egypt, where they developed one of the oldest and greatest civilizations in Africa. Having had a distinguished career as slave captors and soldiers in the Equatoria Province of the Turko-Egyptian Government, Emin Pasha brought them to Uganda from where they spread to Kenya, Tanganyika, and Somalia while serving as soldiers of the British colonial government. Today, Nubian communities are found in all these countries, but in northern Uganda, their citizenship and legitimacy is highly contested, leading to human rights violation, discrimination, and conflict. This paper discusses the history of the Nubians in northern Uganda with a view to illustrate how contested citizenship and religious discrimination helped to build their ethnic identity and sustain it among people who view them as aliens and relics of European colonialism. I conducted key informants' interviews, used archival records, and reviewed a host of secondary data to conclude that Nubians in northern Uganda face discrimination on the basis of their history and religion but rather than cry foul, they have used these to forge an identity and defend their citizenship.

Keywords: Nubians, contested citizenship, legitimacy, identity, discrimination, Uganda.

1. Introduction

Little of the contemporary scholarship on identity, citizenship, statelessness, and marginalization has focused on the Nubians of East Africa. Despite having come to what is now northern Uganda as early as 1859 when they built a slave depot at Palaroin, the present Gulu District as reported by Girling (1960), Nubians were only officially recognized as citizens of Uganda in the 1995 Constitution. The 1962, 1966, and 1967 constitutions categorized Nubians as "others", although they had been very active in forming and defending the very governments that promulgated these constitutions.

The Nubians of Uganda and the rest of the Great Lakes region got their name from the Nubians who live in the region known as 'Nubia' in southern Egypt and northern Sudan. They are a non-Arab Muslim population who were originally animists and Christians before becoming Muslims. The shift from animism to Christianity and finally Islam is indicative of the various stages of civilization and foreign rule that Nubian people faced before the modern era.

The etymological origin of the name 'Nubian' has never been settled. Some scholars believe the name originates from a word in the Nubian language meaning 'slaves'. Shiek Khelil, a Nubian and Qadi of the Gulu District, contends that the word developed from 'nab' a Nubian word for 'gold', and that the Nuba Mountains in whose foothills the original Nubians lived abounded with gold. This is in consonance with the views expressed by Ammar (1996) that ancient Egyptians used that term to refer to the Nubian Valley because of the gold mines that were nearby.

The problem of Nubian etymology and general history is compounded by the fact that the Nubians themselves are yet to write their history. The closest we can get to this is the opinion of Umar Kokole, who states that:

Part of the explanation of the origins or genesis of the term 'Nubi' or 'Ki-Nubi' may have to be traced to the fact that in classical Arabic the word for 'south' is 'Junub' and the 'southerners' of a country or particular region are called 'Junubiya' (Kokole 1985: 422).

If we are to go by Umar Kokole's position, then the word 'Nubian' or 'Nubi' simply means 'people from the south', with reference to southern Egypt. This further means the term was coined by ancient Egyptians. Be that as it may, ancient Nubians lived in a region known as 'Nubia', the southern edge of which lay along latitude 19° N, on the banks of River Nile.

This paper illustrates the long march of the Nubians from the Lower Nile Valley region of Nubia to East Africa, and analyses how contested citizenship and religious discrimination helped to build their ethnic identity and sustain it among people who view them as aliens and relics of European colonialism. How did the shaky citizenship status of the Nubians - prior to the 1995 Constitution and coupled with religious discrimination - help them forge an ethnic identity and maintain it to this day among the Acholi of northern Uganda, who regard themselves as the autochthonous people of the region?

I used the combination of a historical approach and in-depth interviews to gather the ideas contained in this paper. I conducted in-depth interviews in the Moyo and Nebbi districts among the communities where the Nubians first lived when they entered what became Uganda.

2. The Nubian march from Egypt to Uganda

When Mehemet Ali, that ambitious and expansionist military commander of the Ottoman Empire based in Alexandria, rebelled against his Commander in Chief and severed relations with Turkey, he declared Egypt independent and created a dynasty that ruled the country until the British conquest in 1882. To increase revenue, expand the army, and build a strong imperial state that measured up to the strength of Turkey, Mehemet Ali had to increase the number of Egyptian vassals.

He looked south along the Nile and saw abundant gold, ivory, rhino horns, slaves, and, above all, manpower for his army. Not many Arabs in Egypt were willing to venture into the interior of Africa, so Ali had to rely on the Black population of his country to penetrate deeper into the continent. His immediate choice was the Nubian population of Egypt. Being Muslims, the Nubians were more reliable for Mehemet Ali's ambition than the other ethnic groups of the Nile Valley.

Thus, Nubians of Egypt and Sudan became the dominant race in the Egyptian army that raided the Upper Nile region for slaves, ivory, and other valuables. The other groups of people were conscripted as carriers, guides, and soldiers under the command of Nubian officers. These recruits not only joined the Egyptian army against their will, but they were also forcefully converted to Islam. Their service in the Egyptian army can best be described as military slavery. According to Leopold (2006: 182),

Military slavery was an important aspect of Sudanese slave systems but it was not the only one. There had always been an export trade to the Middle East and elsewhere and, after 1850, slavery in southern Sudan (and later northern Uganda) received a massive boost from the ivory trade based in Khartoum.

Through military slavery, the Egyptian authorities extended their government throughout the Nile Valley, up to the northern edges of the Bunyoro Kingdom in present western Uganda. They called that section of their empire covering what is now northern Uganda and South Sudan, the 'Equatoria Province' of the Egyptian government.

Imperial Egypt acquired ivory, slaves, and soldiers from the communities living in Equatoria Province. Soldiers were required to capture the slaves and guard them. This was how the Egyptian army became a multiversity of Kakwa, Lendu, Acholi, Dinka, Nuer, and other ethnic groups of modern South Sudan, northern Uganda, and parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The successive leaders of Egypt after Mehemet Ali did not wish, however, to continue with

the plunder of the empire, especially the slave trade and slavery. Khedive Ismail, for instance, was Western educated and more friendly to the Western World than the Middle East. He also expected military and financial aid from Britain and France. He had to join the anti-slave trade movement as a condition for closer ties with the Western World. This was how Europeans like Samuel Walker Baker, Charles Gordon, and Emin Pasha became military commanders and governors of the Equatoria Province in the Egyptian Government.

In 1881, a self-proclaimed Mahadi - or expected messiah - emerged in Sudan "to liberate his country from the foreign, exploitative and evil rule of Egypt" (Mounteney 1890: 247). He built a large army of freedom fighters known as Ansars. The Ansars captured Khartoum in late-January 1885, and killed General Gordon, Commander of the Egyptian garrison. With this victory, the Equatoria Province was cut off from Egypt and was isolated. Emin Pasha, the reigning governor of the province was sandwiched between hostile Ansars in the north and Omukama Kabalega of the Bunyoro Kingdom - with whom his predecessor Samuel Baker had fought in the battle of Masindi ten years earlier in the south.

Emin Pasha had a string of garrisons to command. His survival at this point depended on the goodwill of neighboring communities and chiefs. He visited and pledged cooperation with the rulers of the Bunyoro and Buganda Kingdoms. Meanwhile, in the north, the Ansars incessantly called upon him to surrender or face slaughter like they had done to Gordon. Rather than surrender, Emin Pasha expanded his army by recruiting nearby societies like the Alur, Acholi, Madi, Lughbara, and Kakwa on whom he also depended for food supplies. His defiance compelled the Ansars to attack his base at Difule in what is now the Moyo District of northern Uganda. About this attack, Mounteney (1890: 241) writes that:

The Battle of Dufule was fought at the fort of Dufule, Uganda on November 28, 1888 between Mahdist forces and a garrison loyal to the Khedive of Egypt. This followed a three-day siege in which the fort was penetrated and members of steamer crews were killed in the harbor. The 1200 garrison troops were led by SelimBey while 1400 Mahdists were led by Umar Sālih. The Mahdists lost between 210 and 250 killed and were repulsed.

Two weeks before the attack on November 17, SalimBey, the commander of Difule, was informed about it. He evacuated European officers, including Emin Pasha, as well as women and children farther south and across the Nile to a village called Arana on the eastern bank of the Nile, in what is now Amuru District.

I gathered from Mr. Jomanywal Patrick, the current Site Attendant of Fort Emin, that after the battle with the Ansars, SalimBey abandoned Dufule because of the stench and general destruction caused. He moved with his Nubian soldiers to join Emin at Arana, to which he had been evacuated before the attack. This site proved difficult due to severe cases of sleeping sickness. The Nubians crossed the Nile again to the western bank, where they built the present Fort Emin. It was at this point that H. M. Stanley met Emin Pasha and 'rescued' him.

Growing public opinion in Britain following the death of General Charles Gordon in 1885 compelled the government to organize a rescue for Emin Pasha, who was the next target of the Ansars. Henry Morton Stanley led this rescue mission in 1886. He took the long route from Tanzania to the Congo and through impenetrable Ituri Forest to Wadelai, losing most of his men, animals, and supplies. When Stanley finally found Emin Pasha at Wadelai on April 29, 1889, he was in such bad shape that it was he and his few surviving men that needed rescue by Emin. Others have said that it was Emin who rescued the rescuers from starvation. Emin Pasha did not want to be rescued. He did not want to go anywhere. However, after a year, he reluctantly followed Stanley

to Bagamoyo in Tanzania, as stated by Warom and Okaba (2013).

Left without clear instructions on whose orders to obey, the Nubians developed a strong sense of loyalty to their commander, SalimBey. They also learnt that their survival depended on unity despite their different ethnic backgrounds. This feeling marked the beginning of the rise of Nubian ethnic consciousness. Hence, right from the beginning, being a Nubian in a Ugandan context did not depend on one's origin; rather it depended on religion, language, and loyalty to leadership. This explains why Omar Kokole has opined that being Nubian is not an ethnicity, but a club that one can join and quit. However, today the 1995 Constitution of Uganda recognizes 'Nubi' as one of the ethnic identities of Uganda.

In 1890, Captain F. D. Lugard, acting on behalf of the British East Africa Company, approached SalimBey at Wadelai and impressed upon him to join the Queen's military in Uganda. The entire force of about 10,000, including soldiers, children, and slaves left Fort Emin and followed Lugard to Kampala. Participating in the battle of Kampala was their "baptism by fire" in the British imperial service. The Nubian army later fought and subdued King Kabalega of Bunyoro, extended British rule in various parts of Uganda, and participated in the First World War as members of the King's African Rifle of Great Britain.

The total number of Nubian soldiers who came to Uganda is unknown, but Lwanga (1987: 3) reports that:

In October 1891 SelimBey crossed the Semliki River into Toro with around two thousand Nubian soldiers and another thirteen thousand followers, women and children. This Nubian contingent was further consolidated in 1894 when another ten thousand men and families under another Nubian commander, Fadhl-el-Maula were ferried into Bunyoro across Lake Albert.

Lugard trusted the Nubians so much that he used them to fight against all rebellious communities in Uganda. He described the Nubians as "the best material for soldiery in Africa" (Zubairi and Doka 1992: 198). This trust, however, began to wane when, in 1897, the Nubians mutinied against the British authorities. This mutiny, coupled with the aging of the original Nubian soldiers, called for their retirement and resettlement somewhere in Uganda.

Archival records and a comprehensive literature review helped to triangulate the views of my respondents in the Moyo and Nebbi districts. The archives used were those of the Gulu District and the Uganda National Archives in Kampala.

3. Settlement of Nubians in Northern Uganda

When the First World War ended, a large number of Nubian soldiers had to retire and be rehabilitated into civilian life. The momentous task before their British bosses was where to take them after retirement. At one stage, it was suggested that the whole of the Nubian population should move to northern Uganda and live among the Acholi, but a delegation of Nubians objected and demanded that only a fraction should settle in the Gulu District, while the majority should remain in Bombo (Hansen 1991).

The choice for Gulu or northern Uganda to resettle the Nubians was not ahistorical. Nubians comprised recruits from northern Uganda's ethnic groups including the Acholi, Alur, Jonam, Kakwa, Lughbara, and Madi. The British reasoned, and rightly so, that they would be more comfortable in northern Uganda than among the Bantu communities of southern Uganda. Besides, Nubians had - prior to their alliance with Captain Lugard - manned various forts in northern Uganda, including Palaro, Patiko, Difule, and Wadelai.

The opening of the Gulu and Kitgum towns in 1910 and 1911 respectively was accomplished

with the help of Nubian soldiers under the command of one or two British officers Ocitti (1966) writes. And when the Lamogi rebellion against the British broke out in 1912, Nubians were the most preferred officers to crush it. "In Uganda" states Lwanga (1987: 9),

Nubians were ranked first in the order of preference for soldiery work because they were an entirely alien mercenary element who did not have any sentimental attachment to Uganda and would be trusted to be bestial without any reserve or compaction. They were also Muslims which ensured that they remained safe from the virus of westernization, a virus which was cultured through the agency of Christianity.

Four years after the Lamogi rebellion, the Paimol rose up to oppose the British. Again, the Nubians were handy to defeat this revolt. After this, Acholiland was peaceful and the Nubians were resettled, states Ocitti (1966).

The first contingent of Nubian families to resettle in Acholiland was taken to Patiko near Fort Baker. At this time, the Acholi still had fresh memories of the conduct of the Nubian forces which they called the Jadiya. Their notoriety for capturing slaves, raping women, and raiding animals and foodstuffs had not yet left the minds of the Acholi. In brief, the Acholi became outrightly hostile to the resettled Nubians. Matters were worsened by the fact that Nubians - who were predominantly Muslim - were resettled in a region that is predominantly Christian.

Faced with hostility and little support from the British in terms of food, clothing, and medicine, the Nubians requested to live near an urban center. They were not used to rural life and the farming activities that the British expected them to perform. Hence, by 1928, the entire Nubian population at Patiko had relocated to Bungatira and Keyi villages near Gulu Town. More populations of Nubians arrived from Bombo, where the majority lived, and others from Kenya where they had participated in the war against the Mau-Mau insurgents.

At the time of independence in 1962, all the quarters in Gulu were dominated by Europeans, Asians, Goans, and Nubians. The Europeans lived in the Senior Quarters of Gulu Town, the Goans in the Goans' Quarter, and the rest of the Asians lived in the business center of the town where they exclusively owned the shops. The outlying residential places of Gulu Town like Ariyaga, Kabadopong, Layibi, Bardege, Pecce, and Highland were inhabited by Nubians. In time, some of the Nubians inter-married with the Acholi and went to live with their spouses in rural Acholiland.

Prominent Nubians lived in Atanga, Awach, Anaka, Pajule, Padibe, Lokung, and Pabo among the Acholi by 1962. For instance, the current Qadi of northern Uganda, Sheik Musa Kelil, revealed to me that he grew up in Lokung in present-day Lamwo District. Nubians were active in civic activities, including business, politics, and farming. Several outstanding Uganda People's Congress (UPC) leaders were Nubians. This is contrary to the popular opinion among Ugandans that Nubians were only fit for military roles. They did dominate the military in certain epochs of our history, but were equally successful in other domains.

4. Religious discrimination in Northern Uganda

Mwesigwa (2009) has argued that religion in Uganda has continued to be a source of polarization in the social, economic, and political life of the nation. The Christian or traditionalist Acholi people of the Gulu and Kitgum districts could not mix freely with the Muslim Nubians. The two communities differed culturally and historically, but what really distinguished the Nubians was their Islamic religion, which separated them from the surrounding communities of northern Uganda, a majority of whom are Christians and Traditionalists (Hansen 1991).

The Acholi people developed islamophobia, first, because the people who captured and sold their children into slavery were Muslims, and second, because of the atrocious conduct of Idi

Amin's government soldiers from 1971 to 1979. The greatest opposition to Idi Amin came from the Acholi who dominated the government of Dr. Milton Obote, whom Amin deposed in 1971. Acholi soldiers were singled out, rounded up, and summarily executed in Mutukula, Tororo, Moroto, and Lokung. The Lukung massacre victims were former soldiers and civilians who had attempted to join Obote in exile via the Republic of Sudan.

After his ouster, Obote had organized a camp at Owinyki-bul among the Acholi of Sudan to receive his supporters from Uganda, train them, and then use them to force his way back. People were clandestinely recruited from Lango and Acholiland to go to Owinyki-bul, but on their way they were intercepted by Anyanya II rebel fighters and handed over to Amin's soldiers. All were killed at Corner Ogwech P. 7 school. These executions were political and had nothing to do with the Christian and Muslim divide, but this has never been properly explained to ordinary Acholi people.

Unlike other religions that are hard to detect, Islam is a lifestyle and a Muslim is easily identifiable from their conduct, including dress, language, and frequent daily prayers. The Acholi noticed that all the resettled Nubians were Muslims. As has been noted,

The consciousness of their religious belonging has been the core of Nubian identity and has guided their attitude to other groups in Uganda. Their special brand of Islam has separated them from other people and has confirmed their position as a religious minority vis-a-vis the other religious groupings in Uganda (Holger 1991:559)

To ordinary Acholi, there is no difference between a Muslim and a Nubian. In fact, all Muslim converts in northern Uganda are called Nubians even though there is a clear distinction between a Muslim and a Nubian. And, until recently, when the HIV/Aids scourge caused an appeal for male circumcision, all circumcised people among the Acholi were regarded as Muslims.

During the 1979 liberation war, many Nubians lost life and property simply for being what they are. The war led to the ouster of Idi Amin in April 1979 and was carried out by a combined force of the Tanzanian People's Defense Force and a contingent of Ugandan exiles. Both the Tanzanians and Ugandan freedom fighters mistook all Nubians to be supporters of Idi Amin; hence the vicious attacks on them. This occurred not only in northern Uganda but throughout the country. Nubians formed the core of Amin's soldiers, so the fall of the dictator was interpreted by locals as the time to get their revenge on the Nubians for whatever crimes his soldiers and military operatives had committed during his regime.

Many roadblocks were mounted on major roads in Acholiland during and immediately after the liberation war. They were meant to screen out Amin's soldiers, but it soon turned out that they were targeting all Muslims, and above all, Nubians. Men were undressed and physically checked to find out if they were circumcised. Anybody found circumcised was first asked to speak in Lumasaba, the language of the Bagisu people of Uganda. If they failed to speak the language, they were robbed of property or killed. Those who spoke Lumasaba were spared because circumcision is a cultural practice among the Bagisu - the only ethnic group in Uganda that do it.

People of light skinned complexion were also separated from the rest in those roadblocks, and further interrogated. The majority of Acholi are dark skinned, so all light skinned people were assumed to be Nubians. They were asked to sing a song in Luo, the language of the Acholi, to prove their ethnicity. Others were subjected to simple Luo idioms and riddles whose answers all Acholi people were expected to know. But such riddles are only mastered by rural people; children born and raised in urban centers are always uninformed about them. So, in those roadblocks, urban Acholi also became victims of cruelty by the very people who claimed to have liberated Ugandans.

Discrimination also took place in the formal education systems in Uganda. The

establishment of formal education in Uganda was linked to denominational identity, a factor that continues to significantly affect the administration of educational institutions and the development of the religious education (RE) curriculum (Mwesigwa 2009). Unfortunately, the denominations were religious. In Acholiland, there were Catholic Schools as well as Protestant Schools. In the opinion of Mwesigwa (2009: 56):

The primary aim of missionary education was not the promotion of a secular curriculum but the conversion of, as many people, as possible, and, provision for spiritual growth through the triune mode of instruction, conversion and formation of character. Muslim parents on their part, sent their children to Quranic schools where they were exclusively exposed to Islamic religious faith and practice.

The Quranic schools, however, did not exist in Acholiland until the time of Idi Amin. In the period prior to the ascension to power of Idi Amin, Nubian children had serious difficulties in joining and completing their studies in the Christian-founded schools. First, interviews for Primary One entry were conducted in Luo, so Nubian children ought to have mastered the language in order to gain admission. Luo was also the language of instruction up to Primary Five (Gulu District Archive, Box 527/ MUN2/Education Committee). Again, this disadvantaged the Nubian children.

However, the main problem was that school children were expected to pray every morning, evening, and on Sundays. The prayers were conducted in the Catholic or Protestant fashion. Ardent Muslims feared sending their children to such schools, lest they be converted to Christianity. In Uganda, the Protestant Church is called 'Church of Uganda'. The Protestant founded schools were clearly labeled 'Church of Uganda School'. The signpost alone was enough to scare away Nubian children who knew they were not Protestants.

What many Ugandans called the liberation war of 1979 was a war of oppression and subjugation to the Nubians of northern Uganda. The entire Nubian population fled Acholiland and all mosques in the land were closed in 1979. The few Muslims who could not flee in time were murdered in most cruel manners. The mosques naturally closed down because there were no people to pray in them. It was a great risk to conduct any sort of Muslim prayer anywhere in Acholi in 1979. Even the Acholi people who had become Muslim in the earlier period were subjected to torture, and renounced Islam due to the fear of losing their life and or property.

All property belonging to Nubians was either destroyed or confiscated by the victorious Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) soldiers or civilians. The property lost included land, houses, vehicles, and animals. Before the fall of Idi Amin, land around Gulu Town in such places like Layibi, Kabedoopong, Agwee, Eriyaga, etc. belonged to Nubians. Today, those plots are now owned by the Acholi, many of whom found the land vacant in 1979. On February 18, 1982, a Muslim delegation - led by His eminence the Chief Khadi of Uganda, Shiekh Kassim Mulumba visited Gulu and made a formal complaint to Peter Phillip Teko, the District Commissioner, about the property of Muslims which had been seized in 1979 (Gulu District Archive, Box 531/C.MSN.5/Muslim Community).

Such property has never been returned to the Nubians, except the mosques. Questions about why the government of Uganda returned the property of Asians that was confiscated in 1972 following their expulsion, but that that of the Nubians who fled or were murdered has not been returned have been asked. Both the Nubians and Asians were invited to Uganda by the British and many people feel that they should have been treated equally. As of now, the Asians who first came to Uganda to work on the Uganda railway project have received their property, while the Nubians have not repossessed their land, houses, or workshops, etc. confiscated in 1979.

5. Contested citizenship in Northern Uganda

The laws regulating citizenship and nationality have become increasingly restrictive in a number of countries in the last couple of decades, particularly with regard to minority and/or immigrant identity groups (Bøås, 2009). Nubians are among the minority groups in Uganda. They also double as people of immigrant identity. Indeed, for a long time the Nubians were known in Uganda as Sudanese. There were Sudanese refugees in refugee camps like Acholpii. The majority of Acholi people felt that the Nubians should have been placed in the Acholipii Refugee Camp with the hope of returning them to their home country, Sudan, in future. Incidentally, even the Nubians themselves toyed with the idea of returning to Sudan. As has been reported:

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 emotionally detached. 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. As of now, this is the position of Nubians in Northern Uganda (Amone 2013:5).

The Nubians were, for a long time, emotionally detached from the Acholi among whom they live in northern Uganda. The differences are not just religious and linguistic, but also cultural and historical. The history of the Acholi is completely different from that of the Nubians.

Nothing defines one's nationality in Uganda more than the 'tribe'. There are 56 recognized 'tribes' or ethnic groups in Uganda, as provided in the 1995 Constitution. Nubians were, for a long time, de-facto stateless people - not only in the Gulu District but throughout Uganda- because they do not belong to any of the indigenous 'tribes' of the country. To an ordinary Ugandan, the Nubian community cannot be taken to be a 'tribe' or ethnic identity. This is because a Nubian is simply identified with their religion, which is Islam, and language, Kinubi. Kinubi is a kind of pidgin Arabic. Anybody who is a Muslim and speaks Kinubi can pass for a Nubian (Kokole, 1985).

The nationalist feeling in northern Uganda concerning citizenship is that if one is not an Acholi, Madi, Langi, Alur or any of the autochthonous communities of the region, then one is not a Ugandan. The 1995 Constitution mentions 'Nubi' as the 51st ethnic group of Uganda. But the same constitution also provides that the Banyarwanda are the 20th ethnic group. The numbering is not based on anything other than alphabetical order. Hence, constitutionally, and - one may add, legally - the Nubians are Ugandans but, in Uganda, matters of constitution are for the educated. Ordinary Ugandans have not heard about the constitution, leave alone having seen or read it. Worse still, the constitution has not been translated into the traditional languages, meaning that only the highly educated can read it. This is why Nubian citizenship is still contested in rural areas.

Another historical mistake concerning citizenship to which the Nubians became victim was that the British colonial authorities essentially tied each individual to a specific, territorially-bounded polity. "After independence" writes (Bøås, 2009), "citizenship laws increased in importance, as the new African states had to permanently define who legitimately lived within the borders of their territory and who did not". The other ethnic communities of northern Uganda did not only boast of indigeneity, but also a territory. Nubians have no territory. Even Bombo, where the majority of Nubians live, is not taken as their land; it belongs to the Baganda. When they were sent to Patiko, the British should have mapped the place and named it Nubian land to match with Acholiland, Madiland, etc.

A lack of territory, coupled with their failure to speak an indigenous Ugandan language, has

denied the Nubians the support and cooperation of other communities of northern Uganda. An anthropologist would say that the Nubians have suffered social exclusion.

Broadly defined, social exclusion refers to the societal and institutional processes that exclude certain groups from full participation in the social, economic, cultural and political life of societies. The concept goes beyond the focus on income deprivation as a cause for marginalization of individuals or social groups (Deepa 1999: 4).

“Social exclusion”, says Deepa (1999: 2), “has quickly become an umbrella concept to highlight the role of social factors and institutional processes that lead to exclusion and deprivation”. Especially after 1979, the Nubians have been excluded from many activities: cultural, political, and economic. Currently, they are not in leadership at the district and sub-county levels anywhere in the districts that comprise Acholiland.

As a result of discrimination, Nubians have been called names that are derogatory. In the 1970s, they were referred to as ‘the One-Elevens’. This was because many of them had three vertical lines scarred on their cheeks (Leopold 2006). Most of Amin’s soldiers had these marks. Many Sudanese ethnic groups bear these marks up to today. It is an open secret that Idi Amin recruited most of his soldiers from among the communities of present South Sudan, especially among the Kakwa, Kuku, Lughbara, and Madi.

The three marks on their face reminded the Acholi and other ethnic identities of northern Uganda of the atrocious conduct of Nubian slave raiders who defaced their captives, in order to make it hard for them to escape and return to live happily among their kith and kin. This point has been corroborated as follows:

These scarifications were said to have originated with marks made by nineteenth-century Sudanese slave soldiers to identify their captives. At various times, and for different reasons, the ‘One-Eleven’ markings had been adopted by members of local West Nile ‘tribes’ such as the Lugbara, the Madi and the Kakwa, for whom over the course of the twentieth century ‘Nubi’ identity provided an elective, strategic, alternative ‘ethnicity’ (Leopold 2006: 181).

Anybody with the one-eleven mark became excluded, an outcast in northern Uganda after 1979. This explains why the children of Nubians, as well as Kakwa and Madi born after 1979, no longer bear those marks. The practice has been phased out, due to discrimination and affront against those who have followed it.

However, their lack of acceptance in society has emboldened the Nubian community’s resolve to use other institutions of government to address their problems (Mwesigwa, 2009). The Nubians have undertaken suing Ugandans in the courts of law. In one case, a Nubian was accused of murder during Amin’s era and, as per Acholi customs, he had to compensate the parents of the deceased. But rather than settle the matter traditionally, the Nubian sought legal intervention and won the case (Gulu District Archives, Box 538/SINT/6/Internal Security).

Discrimination against Nubians after 1979 was extended to all the peoples of West Nile origins. From time immemorial, farmers from the western side of River Nile had been allowed to farm on the eastern banks. It is common knowledge among the Alur, Jonam, and Madi people that the western banks of the Nile are infertile and unsuitable for farming. Legend also has it that the Alur and Jonam people lived with the Acholi people on the eastern banks of the Nile before the famous separation at Pubungu took place, following a clash between Gipiir, the father of Jonam and Alur, and Labongo, the father of the Acholi people. Gipiir and Labongo were children of

Olum, the legendary Lwo giant who brought the Lwo from Barelghazel to what is now Uganda.

Hence, the Acholi regarded the Jonam and Alur as their brothers and sisters. Their relations took a turn for the worse after Nubians settled among the Acholi. Scores of Jonam farmers were chased from the Acholi banks of the Nile and their crops destroyed. A letter from A. S. P. Ofungi, the District Special Branch Officer, West Nile dated 6/2/1964, to the Uganda's Inspector General of Police warned about an impending clash between the Jonam and the Acholi if the latter continued to farm on Acholiland (Gulu District Archives, Box 533/RC/6/Acholi-East Madi Elephant Sanctuary and Acholi Game Committee).

This lukewarm relationship is, however, improving. When I visited Fort Emin on Saturday November 12, 2016, I saw many canoes carrying Jonam farmers returning from their gardens on the eastern banks of the Nile. My informants in Gulu also confirmed that relations between the Acholi and the Nubians are beginning to improve. This is attributable to the deliberate steps made by the current government of Uganda to advocate unity and patriotism among citizens, as well as listing the 'Nubi' as one of the indigenous peoples of Uganda in the 1995 Constitution.

Although Nubians are recognized constitutionally as citizens of Uganda, doubts still linger in the minds of the rest of ordinary Ugandans about their status. Matters are not helped by the fact that the Nubian identity, as illustrated here, is constructed and not natural. The 'Nubi' identity is constructed by history, religion, and obedience. This makes the Nubian identity unique, and renders their citizenship a contested matter compared to other Ugandans, whose citizenship is associated with a specific geographic territory, and which challenges the Nubians to show their original homeland.

6. Growth of Nubian identity in Northern Uganda

Nubian pride and self-consciousness greatly improved during the period from 1971 and 1979 when one of their own, General Idi Amin, was president. This was also the epitome of the evolution of the Nubian identity in Uganda. Nubian officers in the Ugandan Army helped Amin to execute his coup in 1971. For this:

Amin remained indebted to the Nubians and Muslims throughout his life. As he became older and acquired power he considered himself first and foremost a Nubian, second a Muslim, thirdly a West Niler 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 (Amone 2013:4).

So, although from colonial times Muslims and Nubians have complained of being discriminated against by the Christians with the denial of key political positions, educational opportunities, and economic benefits, during the nine years of Idi Amin's regime, the reverse happened.

When the Nubians returned to Gulu in 1986 at the behest of the National Resistance Movement government of Yoweri Museveni, they still received hostility. The returned Nubians assembled at Pecce War Memorial Stadium but were attacked by the then Uganda People's Democratic Army, a rebel movement fighting against the government of Museveni. This rebel army was dominated by the Acholi, who felt that the Nubians had allied with the government against their interest.

From their side, the Nubians never expected hostility following the alliance which General Tito Okello had made with former Amin's soldiers at the White Rhino Hotel in Numule just before his coup in 1985. My informant stated that Nubian forces were instrumental in the ouster of Dr. Obote in 1985, because they were officially invited by General Tito to join them and remove the hated UPC government. Indeed, former Amin's soldiers guarded Kampala alongside the UNLA

before its fall to the National Resistance Army of Yoweri Museveni in January 1986.

Following the attack at Pecce stadium and the gruesome murder of one of their leaders, Mr. Ali Mamaru, the Nubians refused to resettle anywhere in Acholiland. Their argument was that, if they were hated and could be killed in Gulu Town under the watch of government soldiers, what would happen in the rural environs of Gulu District or anywhere in Acholiland where rebels marauded? With this setback, an alternative settlement was sought for the returned Nubians. The government established two camps across the Nile among the Banyoro for them. These camps are Kirasa and Masindi Port, where the Nubians still live up until today. The Nubians have, thus, been unable to claim back the land they lost in 1979.

Ethnicity evolves out of a shared memory of a unified-difficult past and common history (Atkinson, 1989). No other ethnicity in Uganda better fits this expression than that of the Nubians. Whereas other Ugandan ethnicities emerged out of a common ancestry or a homeland, the Nubians have nothing to do with those. Right from the beginning, it was a multifarious body of people assembled from most, if not all, the major ethnic groups of present-day Sudan, South Sudan, and northern Uganda. Their only known leaders were the military commanders SalimBey and Fadhl-el-Maula.

Nubians remember those two leaders, not as great ancestors, but as skillful commanders who mentored and led them through difficult times until the British took over their welfare and control in 1891. The most difficult moment in the memory of the Nubians is the period 1881 to 1890, when they were cut off from Egypt. No supplies came from the Khedive regime, yet they were surrounded by enemies. The military ingenuity and diplomatic tact of Emin Pasha, SalimBey, and Fadhl-el-Maulawas what enabled them to sail through this period.

But the Nubians took advantage of their frightening memories and difficult past to forge an identity that has stood the taste of time. Pursuing a frugal and simple lifestyle devoid of alcohol and leisure, the Nubians became entrepreneurs and owned property in almost all the towns of Uganda. To Kasfir (1979: 381),

Although the Nubians were a marginal group, they possessed some important economic advantages during the colonial period, as well as a special status that created social solidarity and made them attractive to some outsiders. They formed a trading network which, on a very small scale, connected different Nubian settlements in the towns of Uganda.

At different times in their history, every Nubian family had a member in the armed forces or the business community. They were denied land; hence, farming on large scale was out of question. Where the Nubians could not own large businesses, they were dominant in taxi business, shop ownership, and in the butcheries across the country.

When they finally settled in northern Uganda, Nubians were faced with many questions they could not answer. In Uganda, ethnicity is manifested primarily in an ethnic group's attachment to land, culture, and religious rites (Karekona 2015). Although the Nubians had religious rites which never differed from those of Muslims, they lack an ancestral land and a defined culture. This greatly affected their recognition and participation in the political leadership of the districts in Acholi where they settled. The limitation of the expression of ethnicity in district council politics, as Karekona (2015) has said, implies that ethnic minorities are not able to assert their land, cultural, and religious rights at local levels. The Nubians remained isolated and detached from the bulk of the population of northern Uganda.

One of the rights that the Nubians lacked in northern Uganda, like elsewhere in East Africa,

was land ownership and control. There is a direct link between contested citizenship and land rights. Land is a special substance; it is not increasable, is non-renewable, and is central to both material livelihood and the politics of belonging. It must, therefore, also be protected at all costs, as stated by Boas (2009). The Acholi, Langi, Madi etc. communities did not want the Nubians to claim an inch of their land, and their British masters did very little to secure land for their best military allies, the Nubians.

Hence, for most of their life in northern Uganda, the Nubians were not certain of their future. Even now, when the constitution of Uganda guarantees their citizenship, land rights in northern Uganda are still a tall order for them. This explains why, since 1986, they have remained in the temporary settlement at Kirasa and Masindi Port, as was already mentioned. Nubians feel betrayed by both the colonial and subsequent post-colonial governments of Uganda. But, among them, there is a high degree of cohesion. And, being a group that is adaptable to circumstances, they have been able to sail through all turbulent waters with a very exciting history:

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 (Amone 2013:7).

Up until now, membership of the Nubian identity has been open to anyone willing to abide by the strict codes of dressing, remaining a teetotaler, learning Kinubi, and becoming a Muslim. There is no discrimination among the Nubians on the basis of when they joined the group. Their strictness about their codes of conduct and lifestyle has, however, continued to haunt them in terms of discrimination by the other ethnic identities among whom they live.

Membership to the Nubian identity is as open and easy as that of their umbrella organization, the Uganda Nubian Consultative Forum, which originally was 'The Nubian Forum'. The change in name was to differentiate it from sister organizations in other countries like Kenya. This forum is a symbol of Nubian existence, unity, and identity. It has branches in all towns and regions of Uganda where Nubians are found. Aware of their marginalization and discrimination, Nubians formed this association to defend its members against human right's violations and the promotion of their culture throughout Uganda.

7. Conclusion

The British settled Nubians in Patiko in the Gulu District, aware of their history. They hoped that it would be easier for the Nubians to live among the Acholi or, at least, the Nilotics, because their original members were from the Nilotic ethnicities of Sudan and northern Uganda. With time, this became a triumph of hope over experience!

Although the 1995 Constitution of Uganda guarantees five fundamental rights, including freedom from discrimination, respect for human dignity, protection from inhuman treatment, and protection of freedom of conscience and religion, the Nubians have faced discrimination for most of the period of their life in northern Uganda. Their propensity to lead an urban lifestyle is dictated by a lack of land for sustained agriculture in rural areas, as well as the sense of insecurity they face, given the attitudes of other ethnic groups which surround them.

The Nubians have, however, survived against all odds and have forged an identity that is marveled at by many scholars (Mazrui 1976; Moyse-Bartlett 1935). Hence, the unique history that makes Nubians victims of discrimination and contested citizenship is also what makes Nubian identity very strong and resilient in the face of persecution. As has been said, "all societies are built from social groups rather than individuals, and these groups determine attitudes, beliefs,

identities and values, as well as access to resources and opportunities” (Deepa 1999: 2). In this article, I have attempted to determine how the Nubian identity evolved in northern Uganda, the challenges they faced, and how these challenges helped to build an ethnic identity with values, beliefs, attitudes and, above all, a history that differentiates them from other ethnic identities of the region.

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