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The Nubis of Kibera : a social history of the Nubians and Kibera slums

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Citation
Smedt, J. V. A. de. (2011, May 12). *The Nubis of Kibera : a social history of the Nubians and Kibera slums*. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/17638

Version:	Corrected Publisher's Version
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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

The Nubis of Kibera: a social history of the Nubians and Kibera slums.

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van

de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,

op gezag van Rector Magnificus prof.mr. P.F. van der Heijden,

volgens besluit van het College voor Promoties

te verdedigen op donderdag 12 mei 2011

klokke 16:15 uur

door

Johan Victor Adriaan de Smedt

geboren te Utrecht

in 1959

Promotiecommissie

Promotor:	Prof.dr. R.J. Ross
Co-promotor:	Dr. J.K. van Donge (Afrika-Studiecentrum, Leiden)
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Acknowledgements

First of all I would like to thank the people in Kibera that gave me their, sometimes precious, time to answer my many questions. Though many people contributed to this thesis, some deserve special mention (in random order): the late Mzee Yunis Ali (former MP), the late Mzee Hussein Juma Liba, the late *habooba* Ajiba Juma, the late *habooba* Maze Gabail, Mzee Makhado (Ali Yusuf), Mzee Ali Bala, Mzee Musa Ahmed, Ibrahim Amber, Abdelaziz Hussein, Yusuf Ibrahim Diab (Mengo), Husna Khamis, Halima Hussein (Mama Arus), Nila Titus Manene, Zainab and Saliha Osman, and James Robert Nderi.

This thesis could not have been written without the support, feedback and friendship of Abubakr Sebit (Jack Ruby), the late Abubakr Yusuf (Kachui), Jamaldin Yahya (Duke), the late Mohamed Ramadhan Faraj (Munduku) and Simon Njuguna Mungai, who have been extremely helpful in reconstructing the history of Kibera in all its aspects.

A number of people have assisted me with interviews and translations, some of them walking many kilometres with me through the dust or mud of Kibera: Zaid Ibrahim (from Lindi), Francis Ochieng aka 'Ochi' (Kianda), Halima Abubakr (Makina), Abdulhaneen Abubakr (Makina), Yusuf Osman Ahmed Koor (Kianda), Siama Yusuf (Ayany) and Sofia Abdi (Kambi).

I benefited much from the helpful comments on drafts of chapters and articles: David Clark (chapter 2 'From shamba to slum'), Justin Willis (chapter 4 'Kill me quick'), Rita Abrahamsen (chapter 5 'No Raila, no peace'), and several anonymous reviewers of my articles in African Affairs, the International Journal of African Historical Studies and of the BIEA grant commission. Thanks also to the members of the PhD committee for their constructive comments on the manuscript of the thesis.

Lastly I thank Mila for supporting me during the research and the writing up, and for feeding me....

Glossary

Askari	Soldier, policeman, watchman (Swahili)
Bazinqir	A trader's 'army' of armed Arab servants and soldiers (Arabic)
Boma	Compound, military camp (Swahili)
Busaa	locally produced maize beer
Chang'aa	Locally distilled alcohol
DC	District Commissioner
Debe	Large tin of 17-20 litres.
DO	District Officer
Dholuka	Traditional Nubi dance.
FGC	Female Genital Cutting
Gurbaba womeHn	Traditional colourful skirt-like garment of Nubi
Habooba	Grandmother (Kinubi)
Haraam	Forbidden (by Islam)
Halaal	Allowed (by Islam)
Jellaba	Petty, itinerant trader (Arabic)
Jenga yangu, jenga yako	"build mine, build yours" (Swahili)

Jihadiya	Egyptian army of black slaves (Arabic)
Kangara	Locally produced beer
Kanzu	Long Muslim dress (for men)
KAR East Africa	King's African Rifles, the British colonial army in
KENSUP	Kenya Slum Upgrading Programme
Kibra	Forest, bushy area (Kinubi)
Kinubi	Native language of the Nubis
KLC	Kibera Land Committee
Ksh.	Kenyan Shilling (national currency of Kenya).
Labi	Original meaning: "slave" (Juba Arabic). Refers (in Kinubi) to every 'non-Nubi' (derogatory).
Mzee	Elder. Respectful term of address / reference for "old man" (Swahili). Plural: wazee.
Mzee wa Kijiji	Village elder (Swahili)
MP	Member of Parliament
Muna distillation	Fermented (fermenting) brew, to be used for
NCC	Nairobi City Council
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation

Pipa	Oil drum of 200 litres (used for fermentation)
PC	Provincial Commissioner
PoW	Prisoner of war
Shamba	Farm, field for agriculture (Swahili)
Shayba	Elder (Kinubi)
Uhuru	Independence, lit. freedom (Swahili)
Waragi	Nubian gin (Kinubi, Arabic)
Zariba	Camp / village fortified with palisade or thorn fence, southern Sudan (Arabic)

Introduction

In the early twentieth century the East Africa Protectorate's army administration allowed its "Nubian" ex-soldiers and their families to settle on a military exercise ground near Nairobi. Today that military area is a sprawling slum called Kibera, with hundreds of thousands of people packed in an area of 550 acres, where the descendants of these ex-soldiers form only a small minority. They distinguish themselves from the other people by religion, language, food and dress code. And they still claim to be the only and rightful "owners" of Kibera, given to them as their pension after retirement from the British colonial army.

This thesis is about this particular group of 'Nubians', and their 'homeland', Kibera. It will follow the Nubians from their creation in the late nineteenth century in southern Sudan, through their 'migration' into East Africa, settling in Nairobi, and through the transformation of Kibera from rural area to slum, up to today, the beginning of the third millennium. The name "Nubian" is confusing, though: these "East African Nubians" have little to do with the ancient Nubian civilisation of northern Sudan[1]; their origin lies mainly in the ('primitive') tribes of southern Sudan, northern Uganda and eastern Congo. To avoid confusion with the northern Sudanese Nubians, it makes sense to use the term that the "East African Nubians" use to refer to themselves, which is "Nubi".[2]

All over East Africa one can find these Nubi communities; they are essentially 'recent immigrants', descendants of (slave) soldiers of the Egyptian army in southern Sudan, that were cut off from the rest of the army after the fall of Khartoum in 1885; they were then recruited into the British and German East African colonial armies and moved out of Sudan into East Africa. In those days, retired and demobilised soldiers were allowed to settle around the military barracks or garrison towns – they were allocated land to build a house and to cultivate. In this way 'Nubian' villages were established in Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya. Most of these villages still exist, but the Nubi communities have developed differently in these three

[1] Many (East African) Nubians seem to believe this, though; see for example the booklet 'The Nubian culture' (*no date*) by Ibrahim Kirsonaka, a Nubian from Uganda, or the website of the Nubian Cultural Information Center in Kampala: http://www.nubiancenter.org/ourhistory.html (16/05/2010).

[2] The term "Nubi" was also used in many official colonial documents. See also Hansen: 564.

East African countries. In Tanzania the Nubis have more or less disappeared, assimilated into the Muslim culture of their new homeland. In Uganda they have gone through an episode of turmoil during Idi Amin's stint in power – due to the Nubis' close link to the centre of power, many people changed their identity: "becoming Nubi" was almost as easy as putting on another hat. After Amin went into exile, many Nubis fled the country. In Kenya the Nubi identity appears to be under pressure as well, due to increased contact and intermarriage with people of other ethnic groups; many Nubis in Kibera fear that the Nubi identity could disappear in a few generations, as Kibera has turned into one of the largest slums of Africa, where the Nubis have become an insignificant group.

For the Nubis, Kibera is their 'tribal land', inextricably associated to the Nubis as a group, and to the continued existence of that group; hence their never-ending claim on the Kibera land. While the British, during the colonial era, tried to relocate the Nubis to be able to use the Kibera land for the expansion of Nairobi, the Nubis have always refused to leave Kibera. In the first place because they consider Kibera their tribal home area, the place where they were born, and grew up. Secondly, with Kibera being so close to Nairobi, the Nubis benefited from a huge market for the alcohol they illicitly distilled, Nubian gin. This must have been an important reason for them to want to stay in Kibera, as moving away from Nairobi would have jeopardised the alcohol business and the income it generated. From the 1930s to the 1960s the Nubian gin business provided the Nubis with the means to maintain a relatively high standard of living, and to support their idea of being different, and better, than the other Africans – they had all the money they needed to prove that. The British also thought the Nubis were 'a better class African', and the other Africans living in Kibera agreed: to them the Nubis were like '*wazungu*', white people. In the long run, however, the Nubis were not able to hold on to this comparative advantage. With the unstoppable influx of other people, Kibera became a slum area where the Nubis are now only a small minority; they control only a small part of the rental rooms that have been constructed over the years, and Kibera is no longer recognised as a 'Nubi area'. Violent episodes in the last two decades, most recently after the 2007 elections, have given other, larger, tribes the opportunity to take over parts of Kibera. The Nubis have lost their supremacy in Kibera, where 'politics' is now dominated by other tribes. Moreover, without the Nubian gin to provide an income, and dwindling income from the rental business, the Nubis have not been able to maintain their former standards of living. Their final hope is pinned on a possible

(promised?) communal title deed for part of the Kibera land, which has, however, so far not materialised.

The Nubis as 'strangers'

The Nubis have always been 'strangers' in the areas they went as soldiers and settled. Created as a group in southern Sudan, they moved into Uganda as a foreign group, known as 'the Sudanese', a group of foreign mercenaries – strangers were often used as soldiers to oppress populations.[3] They later moved to Kenya, Somalia and Tanzania, where they were also strangers. Towards the end of the colonial era in Kenya, considering a move back to Sudan, they found they were strangers even there.

Strangers have always been normal phenomena in every society – in 1908 the German sociologist Georg Simmel tried to come up with a sociological characterisation of 'the stranger as a social type'.[4] The stranger is here described as 'the man who comes today and stays tomorrow', rather than someone that just passes through. The stranger is an element of the group itself, at the same time close by, if he settles there, and remote: he remains a stranger, emotionally detached, with 'the specific character of *mobility*, which occasions the synthesis of nearness and remoteness – he comes incidentally into contact with every single element but is not bound up organically, through established ties of kinship, locality, or occupation, with any single one.'[5] Simmel's characterisation of the 'stranger' has several shortcomings. He failed, for example, to 'resolve the ambiguity in his treatment of the stranger, in one context, as an individual, in another, as a member of a social aggregate'. Moreover, strangers don't really constitute a 'sociological type', but are rather a social category in dynamic relationships with other social categories in human societies. Despite its shortcomings, and its initial incorrect translation and interpretation, Simmel's concept has stimulated analysis of the social status of strangers in the African context.[6]

Strangers or stranger communities have been present in many pre-colonial African societies, forming marginal as well as integral parts of African society – often as clients to chiefs, or in occupations disdained by the wider society: trade, pottery, or traditional medicine, while in other cases the

[3] Parsons 1999: 5, 61-2.
[4] "Der Fremde", translated by D. Levine, 1971 (1908).
[5] Levine: 29; Simmel: 145.
[6] Levine 1979; Shack 1979b: 38-9; Skinner: 279.

strangers were more numerous or powerful and conquered the hosts' territory and becoming the dominant community. Strangers were often tolerated only to some extent, not enjoying the same rights as the rest of the population (like for example in access to land or land ownership). Their status was not always lower than the local population, though: sometimes strangers became advisors to kings, in other cases they took over trade or fishing opportunities, or became the main business community (Lebanese, Asians). Differences in values and behaviour between host and strangers sometimes made strangers suspect to the wider population: they were blamed for problems, even if they were innocent. On the other hand, individual strangers (even smaller groups) were often adopted (they had to adapt) and assimilated into the host community – and thus stopped being 'strangers'. They became part of the wider, local community, and after some generations people often did not even realise they had once been 'strangers'.[7]

Under colonialism there was more protection for strangers; to the Europeans, they were all Africans, and were therefore often placed, by the colonial authorities, at the same level of the original population – 'strangers' became 'citizens', just like the 'hosts'. This was not always the case; in Kenya for example, the Somalis and Asians were not considered at the same level as the ordinary 'natives', but a step higher, resulting in higher food rations during World War II, as well as higher hut and poll taxes (...), but also in a higher standing (a position that the Nubis also coveted, but never got).

Independence brought again changes; political and economic competition for resources often re-marginalised the strangers, and increased intolerance towards them. In several former colonies strangers have been expelled after independence, especially if they were introduced and protected by the colonial administration, or if they were economically better off than the local population.[8] A well-known example is the expulsion of the Asians from Uganda, in 1972, by Idi Amin.[9]

The Nubis only came into being during the colonial era, under particular circumstances in what is now southern Sudan. In Uganda and Kenya they were strangers: foreign soldiers, Muslims, and speaking Arabic. They were

[7] Shack 1979b: 43, 44; see the collection of case studies in Shack & Skinner 1979; Shack 1979a.
[8] Challenor: 67; Levine 40-2; Shack 1979a/b.
[9] See J. Kuper 1979, Twaddle 1975.

however *powerful* 'strangers'; they had nothing to fear of a lower status or rejection by the local people, because they were 'under the protection' of the British – they were part of the colonisers, not the colonised. Their task was to beat the 'hosts' into submission rather than start friendly relationships and assimilate. However, despite their violent past as colonial henchmen, the Nubis were never expelled from Independent Kenya, probably because they were economically, educationally and politically speaking no threat to other Kenyans, and because more than 50 years had passed since those 'punitive campaigns'; moreover, at Independence the Nubis became Kenyan citizens and were therefore no longer 'strangers' that could be expelled.

In the last decades the Nubis have tried hard, though without much success, to become officially recognised as Kenya's 43rd tribe. The question has been raised whether the Nubis can be at all regarded as a 'tribe', as they are in essence a mix of people from other tribes, while in Uganda they are claimed to be a 'Muslim Club' rather than a tribe.[10] But, what exactly is 'a tribe'?

The invention of 'tribe'

There is a general consensus among academics that the African tribes as we know them, are inventions (or 'imaginations') of the colonial era.[11] The colonial administrators needed manageable administrative 'units' to be able to govern their territory with more ease. They believed that, like in Europe, people in Africa belonged to a nation, a fixed group, a 'tribe', with chiefs or other formal institutions of centralised political authority.

However, in pre-colonial Africa people identified themselves more in local (territorial or kinship) terms, at village level, belonging to this clan, lineage, family, or as subject of that particular chief, rather than as ´Kikuyu´ or 'Luo' – 'political tribes' did not exist. As Igor Kopytoff has argued, African societies were reproduced through continuous segmentation and fission, migration, and merging of groups whose size, power and alliances varied over time. Africans lived in centres and peripheries, networks, clusters, with high mobility, multiple membership of groups (lineages, religious cults, clans, etc), overlapping networks, shifting coalitions, and fluid boundaries depending on situation or context, and often without centralised political system; groups were often culturally related while clusters of dialects shaded into each other. According to Kopytoff, groups of people leaving

[10] See for example Kokole 1985.
[11] See for example Haugerud 1993, Lonsdale 1992, Lynch 2006, Ranger 1985, 1994.

established society (because of arguments, overpopulation, struggles for power and supremacy etcetera), would move to what he calls the 'African frontier', the (politically) open spaces in between existing societies, where no one (or hardly anyone) lived. They would, if all went well, establish themselves as a new 'group' (sometimes chasing away or incorporating the few people living there), develop their own (social, cultural, political) institutions, and in the long run incorporate new members and grow in local or even regional importance. Or they would merge with other, larger groups and disappear as a separate entity; the 'tribal' map was constantly changing.[12]

There were obviously differences between people and their neighbours, often related to differences in ecological niche, in livelihood (pastoralist have a different 'culture' from agricultural people), but there were usually no strict boundaries between groups – there was intermarriage, movement of people during dry periods, trade, adoption, causing the boundaries between different groups to be blurred and fluid. The pastoralist groups in the Rift Valley (Maasai) for example were very open to new 'Maasai' – anyone could become a member of the group by simply learning the language, taking over the pastoral lifestyle, and participating in pastoral social relations. One could move from one (ethnic) group to another and become one of the 'other' – a person's ethnic identity was open to negotiation (or manipulation), not a fixed given. A Kikuyu with many heads of cattle could 'become Maasai'; a Maasai who lost his livestock would move to Kikuyu area and 'become Kikuyu'. Belonging to an 'ethnic group' determined a person's access to resources – for example to land for agriculture or for grazing; without being a member of the group, this access would be denied, one would have no rights to land or other resources.[13]

The ethnic boundaries between different groups became less flexible during the colonial times. For the colonial administrators, a tribe was a group of people linked together by descent, with common language and culture, living in their particular territory, and with some sort of a leader; and, each man belonged to a tribe, and one tribe only. They wanted to have it clear to which 'tribe' someone belonged, to know *where* that person belonged, in order to be able to control the native people and their movements. Moreover, another reason for emphasising the existence of African tribes was to 'divide and rule': as Leroy Vail argues, if ethnic units could be strengthened (through indirect rule), it would slow the emergence of a

[12] Kopytoff 1987.
[13] Spear 1993: 12; Vail: 14; Waller 1993. See also Cronk 2004.

potentially dangerous territory-wide political consciousness that might develop.[14] Movement of African communities 'on the frontier' therefore was longer possible, but was 'frozen by the arrival of colonial administration'. In the same way, African traditions and customary law, always open to negotiation, variation and change, were 'frozen' by the colonisers, written down and codified, also thought to always have been fixed and static.[15]

There are many examples of tribes that were 'invented', or assumed to exist, by the colonial officials to facilitate colonial rule[16]; however, tribes were also actively constructed by Africans, who did not always simply accept the 'tribe' imposed from above. They contributed to the 'making of tribes' by complying with the British categories to use them to their own advantage – in dealing with the colonial state, it paid to conform, to adapt to the new, colonial context. Some tribes, like the Kalenjin or Luhya (in Kenya), were consciously created by Africans to form a larger group that could more easily compete with other groups at national level. Local elite and leaders used the new 'tribes' to gain more power and wealth (it's good to be leader of a big tribe), using ethnic sentiments in political competition with other groups, in order to secure political power ('political tribalism').[17] Others would simply change their ethnic identity whenever that was beneficial to them in their struggle for access to resources, for example to be able to stay in Maasai land without being labelled 'illegal settler', a Kikuyu would claim to be a Maasai. Another aspect of the 'invention of tribes' was the use of stereotypes: some tribes were thought (by the Europeans) to make good houseboys, others were hard workers or 'good for nothing'. Again others were 'martial'; the British considered the Nubis a 'natural martial race', reason to (initially) recruit boys from amongst the Nubi soldiers' sons for the army: "... walk through their village and select the most likely looking youngsters. ... you'll find them ready-made soldiers".[18] Africans looking for work would claim an ethnic identity that would help them in securing jobs with the highest wages.[19] These stereotypes could change over time; the Nubis for example were later replaced in the army by other 'martial tribes'.

[14] Spear 1993; Vail: 13.
[15] Kopytoff 1987: 6; Ranger 1994; Spear 2003.
[16] See for example Beidelman 1978; Janmohamed: 188; Ngolet 1998;
[17] Lonsdale 1994; Lynch 2006.
[18] Parsons 1999: 6, 61-2, 104.
[19] Eriksen: 80-2; Lonsdale 1992; Ranger 1985; See Gordon: 221 or Pendleton 1978 for some examples.

With the invention of tribes came, by necessity, the 'invention' of traditions, of 'tribal' history and other cultural artefacts to 'cement' the people together, to 'give meaning' to 'being Kikuyu' or 'being Nubi'. The continuous group formation on the African frontier required such re-invention of traditions as well.[20] These 'new' traditions were usually based on what people knew, on their own pre-existing conceptions. Sometimes they were consciously constructed; Ranger describes how Zulu customs and native laws were used (by the British administration, together with the Ndebele chiefs) to draw up, in a few days, a 'native law' for Matabeleland. In other cases this inventing of tradition could involve a redefining of existing customs or a 're-interpretation' (falsification?) of the group's history or ancestry, sometimes even a (conscious) review of the language, often by missionaries, thus contributing to a perception (also in the native population) that these people were a 'tribe' and had always been.[21]

In this way Africans made the Europeans believe that indeed tribes existed, and always had existed, in Africa. Thus Iliffe concluded: "Europeans believed Africans belonged to tribes; Africans built tribes to belong to."[22] This statement appears to suggest that there were no real, existing social groups in Africa. However, even if the concept of 'tribe' is an artificial colonial construction, and even if Africans could take on another ethnic identity to their own (immediate) advantage, it does not mean that there was 'nothing' before the 'tribe' was invented. There certainly was a 'group identity' – people were born in a group, and were automatically part of that group, with its cultural and social characteristics. They identified with their group on the basis of having been born into and socialised by that group. Moreover, people need to belong to a group, to identify with and to give meaning to their existence (psychological comfort). Furthermore, according to Vail, migrant workers (in southern Africa) needed their group in order to maintain their positions in their rural societies back home, and keep, through their group, rights and access to land, and thus exercise some control over their own lives. With the breaking up of groups and formation of new groups (on the African frontier), these group identities could change, they were constantly 'under construction', being manipulated, but they were a concrete reality for the people making up that group.[23]

[20] Kopytoff 1987: 33-9.
[21] Ranger 1985: 8-9, 14-6; Ranger 1989.
[22] Iliffe 1979: 324.
[23] Vail: 14-5. See also Ranger 1985: 4.

Moreover, 'tribes' were also actively constructed by Africans *before* the colonial era. There are examples of big groups, like the Anlo-Ewe or the Asante in Ghana, or the Zulu in South Africa, which may have had a sense of nationhood, or a specific ethnic identity. Clearly Africans were manipulating their ethnic identities already a long time ago; according to Spear, 'ethnic concepts, processes and politics predated the imposition of colonial rule'. There are limits to the 'invention' theory, and 'colonial power and ability to manipulate African institutions' has often been overstated, though obviously, colonial rule did have an impact on the ethnic processes that were already taking place.[24]

The Nubis are a case in point: they were not simply 'invented' by the Egyptians or British imposing an ethnic identity upon them. The Nubis did this themselves, to some extent consciously, because they set themselves apart from the local population. They regarded themselves a separate group, possibly even already in southern Sudan, but certainly in Uganda and Kenya, being Muslims and a military group/community, and 'strangers' in the areas where they lived. Certainly, the 'invention' of the Nubis was forced by events beyond their control, facilitated by the specific circumstances created by colonialism and political interests – without colonialism there would have been no 'Nubi tribe'.

Ethnic group

Until the 1960s the 'tribe' was the typical socio-cultural unit of investigation for anthropologists (as well as for historians and other scientists) in Africa; it then became increasingly clear that 'tribes' were a product of colonial invention and had little to do with the reality on the ground. Moreover, anthropologists were accused of conniving with the colonial governments to give legitimacy to the concept ('tribe'), to divide and oppress the African people – the term 'tribe' fell therefore into disuse in the academic world; 'ethnic group' became the preferred term.[25] Though the word 'tribe' is currently commonly used in Kenya (and in other parts of Africa) without any negative colonial connotations, here 'ethnic group' will be used.

'Ethnic group' can be loosely defined as 'a group of human beings that identify with each other, usually based on a real or presumed common origin'. In contrast to other groups, they usually also recognise some

[24] See for example Akyeampong 2006; Ngolet 1998; Spear 2003: 20-7.
[25] Ranger 1994: 25; Kuper & Kuper, Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences 1995, pp 1039-40.

common cultural, linguistic, religious or behavioural traits (real or presumed). Moreover, the group must also be recognised by others as being distinctive. This definition implies certain flexibility: ethnic groups are not static and unchangeable ethnic units – their size, composition and 'cultural content' may change over time.

However, there are no clear rules or criteria for considering a group an 'ethnic group'. The traits mentioned earlier can play an important role in some groups, but less, or none, in others. People may have similar cultures but not belong to the same ethnic group; language and religion can also be shared with other groups, or members of one recognised ethnic group may speak different languages (like the Luhya in Kenya). The groups are often endogamous, but not necessarily or exclusively so, or not anymore, with increased contact between different groups (mainly in urban areas). Most ethnic groups have a territorial basis (tribal land), but this is not necessarily so, as Newman shows for the Sandawe in Tanzania: there is no exclusive Sandawe domain that is perceived as inviolable, and the uncultivated land is open to anyone, even to non-Sandawe.[26] With such vague criteria, it has been suggested that, in deciding whether a group of people can be considered an ethnic group, what matters most is how these people define themselves vis-à-vis others -do they consider themselves to be 'different', in an ethnic sense, is there a 'group consciousness' (even if based on a presumed or constructed common origin)?- and secondly, whether they are recognised as a separate ethnic group by others.[27] These two criteria are the most basic: without them there would be no ethnic group – even one of them alone would not be enough.

Returning then to the question whether the Nubis can be considered a tribe, or rather, an ethnic group, or not, it seems clear that both basic criteria are fulfilled. The Nubis perceive themselves as a distinct community; in Kibera, the Nubis set themselves apart from the rest of the population, consciously creating a social distance. It is clear from many references in colonial documents that also the colonial British considered the Nubis a separate 'tribe'[28], while the Kenyan 'tribes' have always perceived the Nubis as a different group as well, with its own language, dress code, and food. Moreover, even if some of the more 'traditional' criteria for ethnic group are considered, one can claim that the Nubis do have their own language,

[26] Eriksen: 33-5; Newman 1978.
[27] Fredrik Barth, in Eriksen: 37-8, 69.
[28] See for example Major Edwards' memo (1936), the Kibera Survey Report (1944), and many other documents in the Kenya National Archives.

Kinubi, while the 'King's African Rifles' represent for many Nubis today a 'myth of origin'. Kibera (and Bombo in Uganda) could well be considered Nubi tribal land: most African ethnic groups have migrated to other areas before settling down in the place where they were found at the start of the colonial era; for example, the Luos are believed to have come to Nyanza from southern Sudan only a few hundred years ago, while the Kikuyu migrated into Kenya from Central Africa – the Nubis are simply a fairly recent group of 'immigrants'.[29] Johnson argues that the move into Uganda 'was the beginning of the "Nubi" community in East Africa and the origin of their perception of themselves as a distinct community', and Atieno-Odhiambo is also very clear: "By the time they got to East Africa, they were already a separate ethnic group".[30] The Nubis can thus, without problem, be considered an 'ethnic group', even if they are in essence a mix of people from a variety of backgrounds. They are of course not alone in this: many, if not most, or all, ethnic groups have at some point in their history incorporated strangers, accepted newcomers in their midst, and have moved to other places, merged with other groups. The Nubis may be different in the sense that they are a somewhat 'artificial' community: a large number of individuals, complete strangers to each other, and from various ethnic groups, was brought together under specific circumstances, and grew to become a separate ethnic community. But also here they are not alone – there are similar cases in various parts of Africa: the Chikunda in Mozambique, the Griquas in South Africa and the Creoles in Sierra Leone are all examples of such 'artificial' groups. These groups also have in common that they do not trace their origin back to one ancestor (and descent is therefore often less important), and that they did not occupy their tribal land in a normal process of migration but it was rather allocated to them by a powerful group of outsiders (usually colonial powers).

Of these three groups, the Chikunda are the most similar to the Nubis: they also started as military slaves[31] – from the mid-eighteenth century, on the Mozambican *prazos*, the huge Portuguese-run estates (run by individual settlers, not the colonial state). These military slaves came, like in the case of the Nubis, from many different ethnic groups, mostly from areas well away from the *prazo*; armed, they were used to collect taxes (and punish tax evaders) from peasants living on the estate, as well as to patrol and police the estate (including preventing peasants from running away). They were

[29] See Hansen 1991.
[30] Atieno-Odhiambo: 5; Johnson 1988: 151-3; Johnson 1989: 77-9.
[31] Not everyone agrees with this – Newitt (2005) claims they were 'free clients and soldiers of Portuguese warlords'.

also involved in slave raiding and trading for their 'owner', while being allowed to take slaves of their own. Selling yourself into slavery was a survival strategy in dangerous or difficult times, but 'becoming a Chikunda' had other advantages: it provided access to land, wives (often they were slaves, or from the local population, like in the case of the Nubis), imported goods, weapons, and power. The Chikunda lived in regimental villages located strategically throughout the *prazo*, separate from the local population. As 'military slaves', they "developed shared behaviors and beliefs, a patrilineal system of kinship and inheritance, and a rich repertoire of cultural practices that celebrated their prowess as warriors and distinguished them from the indigenous peasant population". The Chikunda also had their own language, a mixture of many local languages, and a special way of greeting each other; they filed their front teeth, and had facial tattoos, all to distinguish them from the other people. The collapse of the *prazo* system in the first half of the nineteenth century compelled the Chikunda to rethink their identity: some assimilated into the local population, others went back to their area of origin, and again others maintained their Chikunda identity and established or joined new 'Chikunda states' which made a living by raiding and slave-trading. The Chikunda ethnic identity continues to exist up to today.[32]

The Griquas of South Africa are another example of an artificial group, though one that existed only a relatively short time. In 1815, a community of 'coloured' people of very mixed origins and backgrounds (local hunting groups, escaped slaves, etc.) calling themselves 'Bastards' was renamed Griquas. Their story is marked by their struggle for acceptance and recognition, and their own land and independence: the Griquas tried to gain entry into and acceptance in the society of the Cape Colony, as respectable prosperous Christian people (while also living as aristocrats, dominating the Africans living around them). With the increasing racial stratification of the Cape society in the nineteenth century, there was no longer 'space' for these people (they were not 'white'), and they were pushed further away with each expansion of the Cape Colony, forced to leave 'their' land and move to a next empty space to start building up their lives all over again. The Griqua community grew by incorporating many newcomers – not so much through marriage (as in the case of the Nubis) but through immigration – groups of people, whole families, joined them, and again from many different ethnic groups or backgrounds, during their stays at Griqualand West and (later) Griqualand East, the small states they, for a short time, established. One

[32] Isaacman & Peterson: 2003.

may question how thick that 'layer' of 'Griqua identity' in those newcomers was – it appears as if 'being Griqua' was a 'life-style' rather than an 'ethnic identity', as if it was only a group of people with the same economical and political objectives, rather than an ethnic group (almost comparable to claiming that London stockbrokers are an ethnic group[33]). Nevertheless, according to the two basic criteria of 'ethnic group' discussed earlier, the Griquas would also qualify as an ethnic group. The Griquas existed only till around 1879; they dispersed and disintegrated after the annexation (by the British) of Griqualand East.[34]

Yet another 'artificial' ethnic group are the Creoles of Freetown in Sierra Leone. The Creoles are descendants of different groups of liberated slaves from the Caribbean and the United States, and were settled (by the British) on the Freetown peninsula between 1787 and 1850. Like with the Nubis, many local people were 'creolised', assimilated into the Creole community, especially women, through marriage. The Creoles became, as senior civil servants in the colonial bureaucracy and the judiciary, an elite group in Sierra Leone society, a position they managed to maintain after Independence. Like the Nubis, the Creoles claimed, until the 1950s, to be 'foreigners', Christian and civilised, not 'natives'; they exaggerated 'their distinctiveness, segregating themselves sharply from the rest of the African population'. Then, at the end of the colonial period, they denied that distinctiveness, something the Nubis did as well, in order to ensure their place in post-colonial society, in independent Sierra Leone (and the Nubis in Independent Kenya), not as 'foreigners', but as 'locals'.[35]

The Nubis and ethnicity

The above has shown that ethnic identities are actively made and remade, by people themselves, and used in a variety of manners, in changing political, social and economic contexts. This thesis will analyse the case of the Nubis of Kibera around a broad frame of 'ethnicity'[36]; it will show the Nubis as an example of an ethnic group that came into existence under specific circumstances created by colonialism (but not 'invented' by colonial administrators). It will demonstrate how the Nubis created and consolidated

[33] See Eriksen: 54-5.
[34] Ross 1976.
[35] Cohen 1981.
[36] 'Ethnicity' ultimately relates to the classification of human groups on the basis of their (presumed or real) shared origin, language, religion, race, culture, or other characteristics.

their ethnic identity to 'become Nubis', and how they have used, manipulated, exploited and changed their Nubi identity over the years. The thesis tells the story of the Nubis, from the start, their 'creation' in southern Sudan, to what and where they are now, in the third millennium, a marginalized ethnic group in a slum in Nairobi. In addition to this introduction, the thesis consists of a conclusion, three appendices (A describing my research methods, B on female circumcision in the Nubi community, and C with the survey form) and five chapters.

The first chapter is about the ethno-genesis and early history of the Nubis. It explains how those soldiers, from diverse tribal backgrounds, amalgamated into a new community and developed from a group of slave soldiers into an ethnic group, and demonstrates how this was forced by the circumstances at the time. It shows the different routes the various Nubi groups took into East Africa and Kenya, and how they eventually all got to Kibera. This chapter is based on information from a multitude of books and articles, putting the pieces together to arrive at a general overview of the early history of the Nubis of Kibera. Some discussions and brainstorming sessions with older Nubis on how things could have happened or could have been, have contributed to this chapter.

The second chapter, "From shamba to slum", tells the story of Kibera, the new homeland of the Nubis in Kenya. Kibera started off as military training grounds, then turned into "Nubian villages", and then, much later, into the (allegedly) largest slum of sub-Sahara Africa. This chapter shows how the Nubis have tried to use their 'being Nubi' as a negotiation technique to deal with the colonial government and keep control over the land in Kibera – after all, the Nubis argued, while appealing to their special relationship with the colonial government, they were brought to Kenya as foreign soldiers to fight for the British, and helped them to establish their East African colonies. Therefore, they claim, the British have an obligation towards the Nubis, and certainly concerning the Kibera land which was given to them 'in lieu of pension'. This strategy was relatively successful considering the Nubis managed, throughout the colonial era, to remain in Kibera, despite several attempts at relocating them. However, at Independence, with the departure of the British, this strategy could no longer work; to be able to maintain their claim on Kibera the Nubis had to rethink and transform their ethnic identity, from 'foreigners' to 'Kenyans'. This worked only to some extent: the Nubis were more or less accepted as 'Kenyans', but were unable to stop the influx of outsiders, who were supported by the local authorities, into Kibera and the large-scale construction of rental rooms; in that process

they lost their grip on large parts of Kibera. The information for this chapter comes largely from the older and oldest Nubis of Kibera, as well as from documents found at the Kenya National Archives (KNA).

The third chapter is about "Nubi ethnic identity"; it focuses on the development and growing (ethnic) identity of the Nubis as an ethnic group and on the many identity changes the Nubi community has gone through during its relatively short existence; it clearly shows that ethnic identity is not static, but open to change and manipulation. What started as a loose group of people from various Sudanese 'tribes', held together only by military tradition and Islam, became a close-knit community when they were in Kibera. It had generally been expected that in African countries after the colonial era, under the influence of nationalism and modernity, the different ethnic groups and the accompanying ethnic identities and distinctions would disappear, especially (first) in urban areas.[37] However, this has not been the case: ethnic identities often became even more important, especially in urban settings, playing a role in competition for jobs, housing, and plain (economic) survival. In urban areas there is much more contact between members of different ethnic groups than in rural areas, and in such situations ethnic identity often becomes more important – people feel more secure and at ease with people of the same ethnic background. Certainly in times of danger or threats to the whole group, people pull together and identify more with their 'fellow tribesmen'. The influx of (mainly Christian) outsiders into Kibera had that effect on the Nubi community: the existing differences between the Sudanese 'tribes' disappeared, the Nubis pulled together and became 'more Nubi'. Nevertheless, the Nubi community had always been quite open to outsiders, mainly to women that married into the group; however, these women had to change their ethnic identity, and 'become Nubi'. In this chapter attention is also devoted to Nubi ethnic markers and specific cultural traits as integral part of the Nubi identity. Information for this chapter comes mainly from interviews in Kibera, and as well from the archives (KNA) and other literature.

The fourth chapter deals with the important role distilled alcohol, the 'Nubian gin', has played in the Nubi community in the past; it shows how the Nubi women created and exploited an ethnic economic niche in Kibera. The Nubis introduced the process of distillation into East Africa, and had nothing short of a monopoly on Nubian gin production and sale for at least

[37] See for example Eriksen: 33; Janmohamed: 191-2; Spear 2003: 16.

three decades. In the long run, though, local (Kenyan) people managed to enter the liquor market and took over the trade when the Nubi women moved on to the next economic niche in Kibera, the rental business, which was initially also almost completely controlled by the Nubis. The Nubian gin allowed the Nubis to maintain a relatively high standard of living (for Africans) and this helped them in maintaining the distinction between themselves and the 'natives', strengthening their idea that they were better than the others. In that way the Nubian gin may also have contributed to keeping the Nubi community together and the Nubi identity alive. In addition, through the production and sale of alcohol the Nubi women became the economic force in Kibera, changing gender relations within the Nubi community. Most of the information for this chapter comes from interviews conducted in Kibera with "notorious offenders" (elderly Nubi women once involved in the Nubian gin production) and former Nubian gin consumers, as well as from the Kenya National Archives, where the large collection of files on Nubian gin is an indication of the obsession of the colonial government with alcohol. A shorter version of this chapter can be found in the International Journal of African Historical Studies, Vol. 42, No. 2 (2009), pp 201-220, published by the African Studies Center of the Boston University (USA).

The fifth chapter is about the role of 'ethnic politics' in Kibera (and Kenya). While describing what happened in Kibera during the 2007 post-election violence and previous violent episodes, it also analyses why this has happened. It shows that ethnicity, far from having disappeared after Independence, has become important as a mechanism for mobilisation in national Kenyan politics: politicians resort to the deliberate use and manipulation of ethnic identity in political competition with other groups, to secure political power and, often as well, their own wealth. It analyses how the situation in Kibera for the Nubis has changed in the last two decades, and how insignificant the Nubis have become within the context of Kibera – without political (ethnic) support, they lost their supremacy in Kibera, where the Luos have taken over as the main powerbrokers. Information for this chapter was collected while the post-election violence was on-going, while in-depth interviews were done in Kibera when calm had returned. A shorter and slightly different version of this chapter can, as "No Raila, no peace! 'Big man' politics and election violence at the Kibera grassroots", be found in African Affairs (Vol. 108, No. 433, October 2009, pp 581-598), published by Oxford University Press.

The concluding chapter will briefly summarise the main conclusions of the thesis and then shift the focus from ethnicity to look closer at Kibera itself and the plans for its upgrading, comparing it with slums or unauthorised settlements in other African countries. Lastly, it will briefly look at the future of the Nubi community in Kibera.

This thesis is about the Nubis of Kibera, a small community in a slum of Nairobi; despite this seemingly fairly limited subject matter, the Nubis represent a long and interesting story, which goes back to southern Sudan in the mid-nineteenth century. Their story will help us to understand better Kenya's colonial and contemporary history: it contributes to a greater general understanding of urban slums, in particular of Kibera. Kibera, though outside the city boundaries until Independence, was always somehow a functional part of Nairobi; this was due to the Nubis' presence which was perceived as an obstacle to the city's growth, while both the accommodation the Nubis provided to African workers and the Nubian gin which was sold all over town, attracted many town dwellers to Kibera. Not much has been written about Nairobi's colonial history, how it physically developed from a staging depot for the oxen and mules of the protectorate's Government to become a major African city. This thesis therefore contributes to Nairobi's urban history, describing how events in a small part of the town were closely related to changes in the city itself. This thesis also adds to the existing literature on (distilled) alcohol and its history in Africa, and on changing gender relations in African history. By presenting a case study of violence in Kibera, this thesis facilitates a perceptive view into the machinations of Kenyan ethnic politics at the grass-root level.

It is in fact surprising that so little had been researched and written about the Nubi community of Kibera or about the history of Kibera slums, and so little known – this document will fill a vacuum in this respect. It will hopefully also be useful to the Nubi community, to maintain a sense of collective identity to pass on to future generations, and in their struggle for justice and their land, as well as promote a sense of pride in their Nubi identity.

1

On the origin of the Nubis of Kibera

Though the early history of the "East African Nubians" has been relatively well documented[38], this has mainly been in small bits and pieces, covering different periods and different geographical areas, or in very general terms. This chapter provides a concise and more detailed overview of the origin of the Nubis, in which all the parts of the puzzle are put together in a more or less chronological order. The focus here is on the Nubis of Kibera: where did they come from and how did they make their way to East Africa and, in particular, to Kibera.

Starting with the concept of military slavery, this chapter gives a brief overview of the regional developments that took place during the nineteenth century that created the circumstances for the ethno-genesis of the Nubis and the context in which these (slave) soldiers and their families could merge and "become Nubi"; it also highlights the events that contributed towards the creation of a Nubi identity. At the same time, it will follow in some detail the main (largest) group of "Nubis-to-be", the soldiers that came to East Africa through Uganda, and briefly describe the ways some other groups of Sudanese soldiers came to East Africa and joined the others. Most of these soldiers have a similar military background and history, with the "*jihadiya*", the Egyptian slave army, as their starting point.

Pre-colonial history: military slavery

The use of slaves as agricultural labourers, house servants or concubines was common in many parts of the Arab world and Africa. Probably less known is the use of slaves as soldiers (military slavery), which was also a very common practice in many parts of the African continent, in state or private armies. Many early states depended mainly on slave soldiers, captured during raids on surrounding tribes, or traded with neighbours.[39] Slave armies were often used to collect taxes and control the population. In order to be effective, it was important that the slave soldiers would not

[38] See for example Atieno-Odhiambo 1977; Collins 1962; Furley 1959; Hansen 1991; Johnson 1988 and 1989; Lugard 1893 Vol. II; Middleton 1969; Mounteney-Jephson 1891; Pain 1975; Parsons 1997; Soghayroun 1981; Stanley 1890; Thruston 1900; Wild 1954.

[39] See for example Baer 1967; Isaacman & Peterson 2003; Johnson 1988; Kapteijns 1984; Mire 1985; O'Fahey & Spaulding 1974; Twaddle 1988.

identify with the local population - they therefore often belonged to other tribes. Furthermore, they were usually allowed to generate their own income, often by taking a percentage of the taxes they collected, or taking something extra from the population.[40] The slave soldiers often set themselves apart from the local population, and (perhaps unconsciously) forged a new collective social identity in which they idealised military service as a masculine virtue.[41]

It is against such a background that the Nubis "emerge". Sudan was for a long time a source of slave soldiers for Egypt, that, as early as 2700 BC, had its *jihadiya*, ('black slave army'), made up largely of Nubian slave soldiers.[42] Nubia, roughly the area around the Nile between Aswan (1st cataract) and Khartoum, was famous for its high calibre soldiers, who were either part of tribute paid to Egypt by the Christian Nubian kingdoms, or traded with ivory and gold in exchange for Egyptian grain. The Nubian Kingdoms themselves, like other independent Sudanese kingdoms like Sennar-Funj and Darfur, depended also mainly on slave soldiers for their army, captured during raids on their respective hinterlands. Even though these soldiers came from the areas around Nubia (Kordofan, Nuba mountains, the northern part of southern Sudan and extending as far as Ethiopia), in ancient Egypt these black slave soldiers were all identified as "Nubian". The term "Nubi"/"Nuba" was used to refer to anyone coming from the Sudan, and was almost synonymous with "slave"; it was later used to refer to Sudanese slave soldiers in Egyptian service.[43]

The conquest of Sudan

In 1805, during a period of near anarchy, Muhamed Ali, an Albanian officer in the army of the Ottoman (Turkish) rulers of Egypt, became Governor[44] of Egypt, and within a few years managed to bring Egypt under his control. Muhamed Ali's ambition was to make Egypt independent from the Ottomans, and in order to realise this, Egypt had to become strong economically and militarily. He started modernising the country, focusing on agriculture (expanding area under cultivation, building irrigation works,

[40] See for example Bredin: 39; Johnson 1988: 149.
[41] See Isaacman & Peterson: 257, on the Chikunda in Mozambique.
[42] Welsby: 290-295.
[43] See Johnson 1989: 82. See also Hansen (1991: 564) and Johnson (1988: 151).
[44] He later declared himself *Khedive* (from the Persian 'lord' or 'ruler'), a title also used by his successors, though it was only officially granted by the Ottoman Sultan in 1867.

etc.) and industry (textile, glass and sugar factories), as well as establishing government trade monopolies. This policy required a lot of resources, which Muhamed Ali thought to get from the Sudan – in 1820 Egyptian forces invaded the Sudan with two main objectives: to acquire gold and other goods to increase revenue for the Egyptian treasury, and to obtain black slaves for his army (*jihadiya*).[45] After Nubia was overrun, Kordofan conquered and the Funj Kingdom at Sennar swiftly defeated, a new capital was established at Wad Medani. To administer the conquered areas, the Egyptian administration developed an elaborate bureaucracy, which became marked by corruption, mismanagement and abuse of power. A Sudanese uprising in the Nile valley (in which Mohamed Ali's son Ismail was killed) lead to brutal revenge by the Egyptians, who devastated large parts of the country by burning villages and towns and massacring people; thousands of people fled.[46] After this brutal display of authority, Egyptian rule was not seriously challenged until the 1880s.

Sudan was not only to provide revenue to Egypt but should also be self-supporting. To increase revenue, agriculture was forcibly transformed from subsistence to cash crop production; the new Administration established monopolies on newly introduced crops (sugar, indigo, cotton) and fixed prices well below world market rates. A side effect of this was that less food was produced and food prices went up. Other factors influencing (reducing) agricultural production was the forcible conscription of local people and (agricultural) slaves to the Egyptian army. Heavy taxation of agriculture, a new thing in Sudan, was brutally enforced and resulted in many Ja'aliyiin and Danaqla (ethnic Nubians from Shendi and Dongola areas respectively) abandoning agriculture, and increased poverty and famine. Some of these Nubians joined the Egyptian army voluntarily, but there was also a certain amount of forced conscription, and possibly some were criminals, or people convicted for not able or willing to pay taxes.[47] More and more people left their ancestral land, and moved to Khartoum, Dar Fur, Kordofan and southern Sudan to become small (slave) traders (*jellaba*) or to join larger (slave) traders, mainly as soldiers.

[45] The main route for bringing slaves to Egypt, through Darfur, had been closed between 1810-1817, making it imperative for Muhamed Ali to secure another regular supply of 'recruits' for his army (Gray: 5). See also Prunier: 129.
[46] Hill 1959: 13-15.
[47] Bjørkelo: 71, 74; Bredin: 37-8.

Egyptian rule disrupted the economic life of the people, and brought ruin and poverty to the Sudan.[48] As a result, the Egyptians had to depend on their army to keep control of Sudan. The Egyptian army used for the initial invasion of (northern) Sudan consisted mainly of Turks, Albanians, Kurds, Circassians and Greeks, but they appeared to be ill-adapted to the Sudanese climate. Enrolment for the regular army was henceforth based on captured Sudanese, with the exception of the officers, who continued to be 'foreigners'.[49] In 1821 a training camp was set up in Aswan where the black slaves were vaccinated, trained by mainly European military officers and instructed in Islam. Apart from service in the Sudanese garrisons, this *jihadiya* would later also be used for the Egyptian invasions in Syria, Greece and Turkey.[50] Some soldiers even went as far as Mexico: in 1863 a contingent of about 450 Sudanese soldiers was lent out by the Egyptian Governor to Napoleon III, to take part in the French military campaigns in Mexico; around 320 of them returned to Egypt in 1867.[51]

During those first years of Egyptian occupation, the black slave soldiers of the *jihadiya* came mainly from tribes of the northern part of Sudan: Nuba, Baqara, Fur and Danaqla and Ja'aliyiin, though there were also Shilluk and Dinka from the frontier areas with southern Sudan.

The opening up of southern Sudan[52]

When Sudan did not bring the expected revenue, Muhamed Ali turned his eye further south. Central Africa and the White Nile were still relatively unknown areas, but the mystery surrounding the region gave way to wild speculations about commercial and strategic possibilities. In 1839 the first Egyptian expedition left Khartoum to explore southern Sudan.

The people of southern Sudan were isolated from their neighbours by a series of formidable geographical barriers: mountains, hills, arid plains, swamps and water. Only the fringes of the region were penetrated by the outside world; Islam was unheard of, commerce was (relatively) unknown.

[48] See Bjørkelo, chapter 4 and 5.
[49] R. Hill: 25.
[50]; R. Gray: 3; R. Hill: 47; Johnson 1988: 143.
[51] For the full story, see Hill & Hogg 1995. See also Kirk (1941) and H.B. Thomas 1940: 29-31. Some of these soldiers were later with Gordon in Equatoria (R. Gray: 114).
[52] This section is to a large extent based on Collins 1962, Dunbar 1965, Girling 1960 and R. Gray 1961.

The population was divided into large numbers of small tribal or kinship groups without any central leadership; they would never be able to unite against intruders, who could take advantage of this lack of unity.[53]

Initial contacts between the first Egyptian expeditions and the local people they met, the Dinka and Bari, were friendly, and brought rumours of a great abundance of ivory and of gold, copper and iron mines. It was however not Egypt that took the lead in exploiting these opportunities; Muhamed Ali lacked the resources after his expensive campaigns in Syria, and was not able to set up an administration in the southern Sudan. The development of Khartoum from fishing village to capital had attracted many Egyptian and Sudanese (Nubian) traders, as well as a small group of Europeans, and it was these European traders that took the initiative. They defeated, with help from the European nations, the Egyptian government's monopoly on ivory trade and gained, around 1851, unobstructed access to southern Sudan; not only for themselves, but also for Nubian, Egyptian and other traders.[54] In the wake of the Egyptians and the traders came a motley collection of other adventurers, ranging from rich travellers ('tourists'), explorers (biologists) to missionaries. Missionaries (Italian Jesuits) tried to establish themselves amongst the Bari around Gondokoro (near Juba), but due to never-ending problems (robberies, hostility) with the Bari, difficulties of supply, the climate, disease, problems reaching the other tribes in the hinterland, the untimely death of many missionaries, and the Baris' lack of interest in Christianity, they finally gave up and withdrew in 1860.

By far the largest group venturing into southern Sudan were the traders, large and small, attracted by the large amounts of ivory. In 1840, small Nubian traders were already in Shilluk area (border area); after the opening up of the ivory trade in southern Sudan, they penetrated ever deeper and deeper into southern Sudan. By 1859 they had already reached present day Uganda and established trading posts as far south as Falaro in Bunyoro. Ivory trade thus far had been in the hands of Arab traders going through Zanzibar and Tanganyika into Congo and Buganda; European traders, as non-Muslims, had always been excluded from this venture, and this was the moment for the Europeans to get a piece of that cake. Some big European traders made treaties with the Egyptians and got monopolies over large areas, and by 1860 there were eight European companies operating under Egyptian licence, apart from the many local traders without licence.[55]

[53] R. Gray: 9-11.
[54] R. Gray: 20-27.
[55] Girling: 129.

Throughout the 1850s, the ivory trade and profits grew. Most ivory came from the Gondokoro area, along the White Nile, which became an important trading centre. Initially there were huge stocks of ivory to be found, as the natives killed elephants only for the meat: the tusks were left lying around where the elephant was killed, or were used as poles to tie cattle to. But these readily available supplies were rapidly depleted. At the same time ivory became more expensive as the value of the beads used for exchange, decreased; it was one of the reasons for the deteriorating relationship between traders and the southern Sudanese tribes, which resulted in conflict and hostility, increasingly violent. The ivory trade brought in the occasional slave, usually through purchase, but slaves did not yet play a significant role at this stage: it was still easier and cheaper to capture slaves in Nuba Mountains, Blue Nile and the border-lands of Abyssinia, which the Egyptians continued doing in reprisal for not paying taxes or tribute.[56]

In the late 1850s the European traders started to undertake expeditions into the interior of the White Nile and set up, like the Arab traders, their own permanent stations, *zaribas* (a camp fortified with palisade or thorn fence[57]). Sometimes the traders would live there themselves; sometimes they would visit once a year and have an assistant to supervise the *zariba* and the 'work'. They would bring in groups –the big traders sometimes had more than two thousand people- of armed Arab servants and soldiers (*bazinqir*). Many of them were Ja'aliyiin and Danaqla fleeing the heavy taxation in the north, or Copts, Turks, Syrians, from further away. Local men and boys were increasingly incorporated into these traders' armies, often as slaves. Many of the Arab soldiers were in some form of bondage with their master, in debt and unable to repay. They were forced to buy their supplies from their master, at highly inflated prices, but were also allowed to rob and steal from the natives whenever they could; it was their only way of making some money. They instilled so much fear in the locals "by deeds of widespread cruelty and injustice" that the area around the *zariba*s would become depopulated. As the Arab servants and soldiers took local wives, slaves and servants, they gradually turned the *zaribas* into villages, reducing the local population to mere vassals, supplying the stations with food, porters, and wives. [58]

[56] R. Gray: 44-5.
[57] See Berlioux: 22-24 for an interesting description of *zaribas*.
[58] Berlioux: 21-22; R. Gray: 47. See also Baker (1888: 10-5), Johnson (1988: 146) and Johnson (1992).

The big traders would become virtual rulers of the area around their *zariba*, and form alliances with local chiefs, exploiting tribal warfare to their own benefit. The trader's army would assist the local chiefs to raid their neighbours for grain, slaves and cattle. The livestock was then exchanged for ivory with the surrounding villages; the local people could then also buy back their captured relatives. The slaves were often used to pay the soldiers, or soldiers could buy slaves from their master, that they could keep as wife, servant, or sell off in Khartoum for double the amount they themselves had paid for them.[59]

From the early 1860s, the declining rate of return of ivory forced the traders, who usually borrowed large sums of money from bankers in Khartoum at high interest rates, to look for other sources of income. Though the slave trade was officially abolished in Egypt in 1854, they soon developed a lucrative trade in slaves: most of them would have been bankrupt without it.[60] By then, the European traders had all but disappeared from Sudan; they had been overtaken by the huge number of Arab traders, some of them had died and their 'empire' disappeared, others had sold their business.

The traders moved further and further away from the White Nile, establishing new *zaribas*, and creating the same havoc everywhere they went. The use of violence had by now become an integral part of trading, in fact, there was no trade anymore, only raiding, looting and destroying. However, sometimes the traders suffered heavy losses in battles with the Azande and the Dinka, who were experienced at warfare.[61]

After the discovery of the Bahr el Ghazal river, the western part of southern Sudan was also opened up for the large-scale ivory and slave trade. Until then, the area had only been in contact with petty north Sudanese traders (*jellaba*) and through slave raids from Darfur. This changed when the Bahr el Ghazal was opened to river-borne trade from Khartoum; it followed a pattern similar to the eastern part – first ivory then slaves – but violence from the start. More and more *zaribas* appeared, sometimes at short distances from one another, until practically the whole of southern Sudan was covered. There were also more and more small Nubian/Sudanese traders in areas further away from the White Nile; under protection of the *zariba* system they could travel all over, and they settled in *zaribas* as traders, or as agents for other traders from Kordofan or Darfur, where they

[59] Girling: 131.
[60] Berlioux: 15; Collins: 14; Gray 49-51; Johnson 1988: 150.
[61] R. Gray: 58-65.

collected many slaves for transport to Egypt. Like the traders' soldiers, many of them married local women and started families, integrating to some extent in the local communities.

The Egyptians in southern Sudan

Despite the Egyptian Governors' promises to combat slave trade – to satisfy the European powers – slavery continued unabated, and policies put in place were hardly enforced. In 1860 the Governor (Khedive) Said himself ordered 500 negro soldiers for his bodyguard, and in 1865 Egypt still had 27,000 soldiers (of which 20,000 'negroes') stationed in the Sudan; forced recruitment into the army went on as before. As the Khartoum slave market closed, the trade moved through Kordofan and Dongola to Egypt, or through Darfur.[62]

In 1863 Ismail became the new Governor of Egypt; he followed in the footsteps of his grandfather Muhamed Ali, taking a keen interest in modernising and expanding the Egyptian empire. He saw potential in extending Egyptian control and establishing an "equatorial empire", covering the area of southern Sudan and northern Uganda. Reports of explorers (Speke, Grant, Baker) talked of densely populated, well-established kingdoms beyond the "utter savagedom" of southern Sudan, which had already developed, through contact with Arab merchants from Zanzibar, a considerable market for European goods. The easier line of communication with these kingdoms appeared to be through southern Sudan: a stretch of only 200 miles lay between Gondokoro and the kingdoms, much less than all the way to Zanzibar. An important target was the ivory trade, which passed entirely through Zanzibar.[63]

In 1869 the Khedive[64] Ismail hired Samuel Baker, a famous explorer and discoverer of Lake Albert, to establish that 'Egyptian equatorial empire', at the same time securing the Nile Basin for the water on which Egypt depended, and 'crushing the slave trade'. Neither Baker nor his successors managed to set up a well-functioning administration, though by the late-1870s the Egyptians had managed to establish some kind of nominal control over southern Sudan. They built military stations (forts) along the White Nile and to a lesser extent more inland in the Bahr el Ghazal, and further

[62] R. Gray 93-4.
[63] R. Gray: 79.
[64] *Khedive* had meanwhile become the official title of the Governor of Egypt.

south in the Equatorial[65] kingdoms of Bunyoro and Buganda. These Egyptian forts were manned by their slave army, with Egyptian and northern Sudanese officers - under the overall command of the Governor of Equatoria (Province), usually a European. The most well-known of these was Charles Gordon, who later became Governor-General of Sudan.

The Egyptian army, spread out over a large area, was forced to recruit large numbers of new soldiers. Quite a few of the new recruits were Danaqla from the north that had been living in the area for many years as small traders or as soldiers in the big slave traders' armies. Other new soldiers came from the surrounding local ethnic groups, conscripted or voluntarily, many of whom had also been soldiers for the big traders before.[66] In the mid-1870s the Egyptian army in southern Sudan consisted largely of Egyptian officers, northern Sudanese (Fur, Nuba, Baqqara, Danaqla, etc.) and southern Sudanese (Dinka, Shilluk) slave-soldiers that had been conscripted earlier for the Egyptian *jihadiya*, some of whom were also officers by now. There were also Danaqla who had recently joined the Egyptian army (as soldiers or as civil servants) and newly added (conscripted or voluntarily) soldiers from southern Sudanese communities.

Clearly, Egyptian control of the area was extremely slight, with those few forts scattered over a huge area and mainly along the White Nile. The garrisons' authority was confined to a radius of not more than a few miles, beyond which it was too dangerous to venture except with armed escort. Besides, these forts were manned by soldiers that were undisciplined and often (slave) traders in their own right, and basically lived off the country, looting and plundering. The European Governors' control over the army was equally difficult: scattered over a huge area, and without direct supervision, the officers and soldiers often did as they pleased. Disobedience, looting, stealing, slave hunting and rape were apparently the order of the day.[67]

Emin Pasha

In 1877, a German Jewish doctor turned Muslim, later known as Emin Pasha, was sent to southern Sudan as Governor of Equatoria. He also had a

[65] Equatoria is roughly the south-eastern part of southern Sudan and northern part of Uganda.
[66] Sikainga: 82.
[67] See Lugard Vol. II: 230-6.

hard time controlling his stations and undisciplined soldiers, but by the early 1880s the Egyptian forts seemed to have established good relationships with their neighbours, and some degree of peace existed. Hospitals were established in some of the forts, as well as mosques and Koran schools; there was a certain degree of islamisation around the stations and acceptance of the "imperial power". This was, however, mainly limited to the vicinity of the military stations along the White Nile, which were well-established; more to the west the forts were without much supervision from Emin Pasha, and the situation there was more chaotic and violent, with continued slave raiding, also by the soldiers of the Egyptian army.[68]

In June 1881 the long-awaited Mahdi[69] rose in northern Sudan and managed, with massive support from the Sudanese people, to defeat the Egyptian army on several occasions. While many of the northern Sudanese living in southern Sudan left the area to join the Mahdi, he was also widely supported by the arabicized ethnic groups of the northern part of southern Sudan. The Mahdi's agents tried to incite also the other southern ethnic groups to revolt, many of which joined the uprising; not necessarily for religious reasons, but to rid themselves of the unpopular (Anglo-)Egyptian administration.[70] Also many of the Danaqla and other northern Sudanese in the Egyptian army deserted and took the Mahdi's side.[71] They were, however, unable to entice any of the southern Sudanese soldiers to join them; the southerners were apparently oblivious of the Mahdist´s religious cause, and profoundly loyal and devoted to the Khedive, whom they looked upon 'with mystical awe'. Besides, being from Equatoria, it is possible that, as claimed by Collins, they felt they were defending their own country against invaders from the north.[72]

Emin Pasha withdrew with his remaining soldiers to the forts along the Nile and, when in early 1885 Khartoum fell to the Mahdists, the Egyptian army in Equatoria –whatever was left of it– was completely isolated, cut off from Egypt, and confined to their forts in a narrow strip of land along the Nile between Lado and Dufile, at Wadelai and the west bank of Lake Albert (see map 1, below).

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[68] R. Gray: 143-4; see also Soghayroun: 10-12.

[69] Literally "the guided one" (Arab.), a predicted and long-awaited successor of Muhammad (see Collins: 17-18).

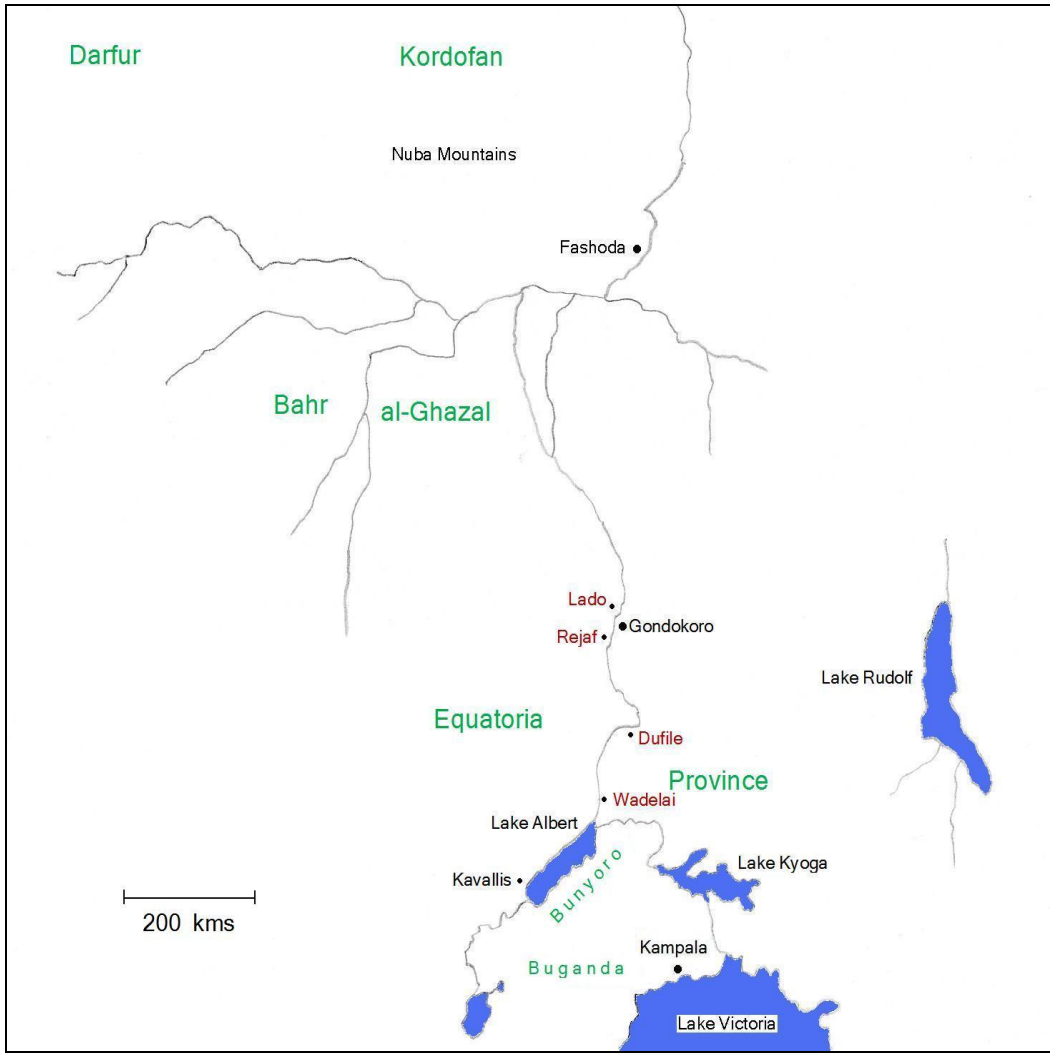
[70] The suppression of the slave trade may have played an important role in this (see Warburg 1981).

[71] Collins: 23-51. This seems to have been quite normal: (slave) soldiers "could switch allegiances fairly easily and serve whichever state was in control" (Prunier: 131).

[72] Collins: 22-4, 50-1; Mounteney-Jephson: 52; Soghayroun: 23-4.

This is an important episode in the history of the Nubis: without the rise of the Mahdi and the subsequent isolation of the soldiers in the south of Sudan, the Nubis would probably not exist. As it was, the remaining soldiers stayed isolated in their forts in southern Sudan for the next few years (the Mahdists did not come further south for a number of years); they lead a relatively easy life, to some extent mixing with the local population. They were able to develop some sense of community in and around the forts. It was the first step towards a Nubi community.

Map 1: Southern Sudan, 1880s (map by author).



The forts along the White Nile

Both Gray and Soghayroun provide interesting descriptions of the Egyptian forts as semi-Arab, semi-native.[73] The main group of inhabitants consisted of the soldiers, who came from Equatoria, northern Uganda, Congo, and even West Africa[74], but were Islamised as soon as they joined the army; another group was the civil servants, clerks, storekeepers, etc. working for the Egyptian administration – they were often Egyptians or northern Sudanese (Danaqla), or even Greeks, Copts, Moroccans or Jews. The forts' dominant culture was clearly Arab and Islamic.

The native population became increasingly incorporated in the daily life of the stations, often attracted by work for the administration and the soldiers. Boys and young men worked as porters or 'gun boys', older ones joined the army as soldiers; some volunteered, others were conscripted locally as slaves.[75] The soldiers continued looting the surrounding tribes for slaves for the army (as well as for servants, wives and concubines). Conscripted men were apparently allowed to bring their families to the station.[76] Young slave boys could become part of a soldier's family, and later become gun-boys and soldiers. The number of local volunteers for the army grew with time, as the local population was aware of the advantages of having a family member in the army. Small businesses began to thrive around the forts; beads were exchanged for ivory and other produce. Whole villages moved closer to the stations, possibly also for protection. There was also the "inevitable string of Acholi, Bari, or Madi wives everywhere accompanying the soldiers"[77]; during campaigns, soldiers usually had at least one person accompanying him, a wife or a boy, to cook for him, carry his belongings, etc. The sons of the soldiers with these local women became later the logical new recruits for the army, starting their career as a 'gun boy'. The soldiers' wives and children lived within the fort as well, though it is unlikely that everyone could be accommodated there; soldiers with many dependents (wives, slaves, children) would have to keep them outside the fort.[78]

[73] R. Gray: 112-5; Soghayroun: 8-12.
[74] Pain: 178. The West Africans were most likely pilgrims on their way to Mecca that got stuck in Sudan and then, voluntarily or not, joined the Egyptian army.
[75] Johnson 1992; Soghayroun (p 7) also mentions "massive slave raids by the Sudanese soldiers".
[76] Cemiride: 31.
[77] R. Gray: 113; Johnson 1988: 153; Soghayroun: 10, 52.
[78] Johnson 1988: 152-3; Perham 1959: 372.

Thus the population of the stations became an Arab-African mix of Egyptians (senior officers, civil servants, clerks), Danaqla (clerks, some officers, and soldiers), northern Sudanese soldiers and officers[79], southern Sudanese soldiers, local servants/slaves, wives or concubines, and their children. Though by the late 1880s the majority of the soldiers would have been from southern Sudan, Islamic (Egyptian) culture remained dominant in the forts, and the *lingua franca* the northern Sudanese Arabic in its simplified form, 'Juba Arabic'.

The diary of a European visitor, Mounteney-Jephson (1888), offers an interesting description of one of the military stations (Dufile): a well-established station with clean, broad streets, shaded by huge trees; a large and spacious compound for the commander, one for visitors; fruit trees (orange, lime) and vegetable gardens (Mounteney-Jephson eats extremely well at the fort!); houses built with bricks, whitewashed inside, with doors and windows; and even a mosque. A palisade surrounded the fort, and a ditch filled with water for protection, making the fort impregnable. Outside the fort were some villages for the porters, interpreters and other local people, extensive and well-kept fruit and vegetable gardens, and the fields of the locals.[80]

Apart from their immediate neighbours, i.e. the local people who were attracted to the stations and with whom they had good relations, the soldiers were quite isolated from the rest of the native people. One reason was that they were largely self-sufficient: they received a salary[81], kept livestock and did some agriculture, including cotton growing. Another reason was their continuous looting of their neighbours, their raids for food, slaves and women (wives, concubines, servants). Another important factor may have been their attitude: due to their different "culture", being military and Muslim, and possessing guns, they possibly felt superior to the local population.[82] All men joining the army –conscripted or voluntary– received military training and they, like their wives, had to become Muslim, take on a Muslim name and be circumcised.[83] A new social identity was created in this new group, based on military tradition and Islam, which, together with

[79] These include the Fur, Nuba, and others.
[80] Middleton: 269-71; Mounteney-Jephson: 81-5.
[81] Even when forcibly conscripted, it is logical that soldiers would receive some compensation. Prunier (1992: 131) mentions a monthly pay for Egyptian soldiers of eight piasters, '*even for the negroes'* (italics are mine).
[82] Ashe: 179/80; R. Gray: 36; Mann: 234/5; Pain: 185; Soghayroun: 30-31.
[83] Female circumcision was also introduced at some point, but it's unclear (to me) when exactly; see also Appendix B.

the language, were important elements for cohesion. This new collective social identity, the group cohesion and attitude of superiority, setting them apart from the wider local population, formed the basis for the further development of the Nubi community. With time this social identity would only become stronger.

The disintegration of the Egyptian army in southern Sudan

For several years the southern Sudanese remnants of the Egyptian army remained isolated in their military forts: from 1881 they did not receive any news, supplies or salaries from the Egyptian government; the last steamer for Khartoum left March 1883.[84] The soldiers became increasingly undisciplined and unmanageable, no longer obeying Emin's orders. Most of the (approx. 65 remaining) Egyptians in the army in Equatoria were criminals ("penal outcasts") or had been involved in the nationalist rebellion in Egypt (1881-2); they had been sent to southern Sudan as a punishment. After the fall of Khartoum and the Anglo-Egyptian government (in Sudan) in 1885, they no longer felt the need to obey orders from 'above', becoming increasingly unruly, and inciting the Sudanese soldiers. Emin Pasha became "Pasha in name and title only", without much control over his army. The soldiers (mainly the ones that were not staying with Emin Pasha at the Wadelai fort) continued looting the surrounding country for food, cattle, slaves and wives.[85]

In April 1888, the explorer Stanley arrived at Lake Albert on the famous "Emin Pasha Relief Expedition"[86], bringing letters from the Egyptian Khedive, in which he told the soldiers that he had given up Equatoria and ordered Emin Pasha to come to Egypt, at the same time permitting the soldiers to stay in Equatoria if they so chose, but then without further assistance from the Khedive. However, the Egyptian officers and clerks did not believe the letters were really from the Khedive, and incited the Sudanese soldiers. Emin Pasha had allegedly mentioned at some point that he would leave the soldiers with 'his good friend Kabarega', the King of Bunyoro. They thought Emin Pasha might betray them, leaving them at the mercy of Kabarega when travelling through his country on their way to Zanzibar, from where they would travel to Egypt, or sell all of them as

[84] Dunbar 1965-i: 73.
[85] Mounteney-Jephson: 41-4, 98, 102; Scott Keltie: 97-8, 155-6; Stanley 1890 Vol. II: 132-3.
[86] See Stanley (1890, Vol. I and II), Mounteney-Jephson (1891) and Middleton (1969).

slaves to the English. Most likely, and possibly more importantly, since most of the men were from southern Sudan, they probably did not feel like leaving their homeland and their comfortable stations, leaving behind slaves, servants and belongings, and walking all the way to Zanzibar through hostile territory. Moreover, they had become virtually immobile because of their huge number of dependents: there were about 1500 soldiers, with more than 6000 dependents: wives, concubines, children, slaves and servants.[87]

As a result, at the end of August 1888, when Emin Pasha (with Mounteney-Jephson, a member of the 'relief expedition') was travelling to each fort to inform the soldiers of the Khedive's letters, a large part of the army mutinied. He was imprisoned at Dufile and put on trial for 'maladministration of Equatoria', then deposed. There was merry-making in the forts, and "the afternoons and evenings were given over to drunkenness and debauchery". As time passed, the rebel leaders (mainly the officers and Egyptian clerks) increasingly quarrelled among themselves, trying to divide the loot and secure the best promotions; the mood amongst the normal soldiers increasingly turned to favour Emin Pasha. Discipline sank to a very low level.[88]

In October 1888 the Mahdists suddenly appeared to be advancing south, to remove the last remnants of Egyptian rule (and most likely also to procure slaves for the Mahdi's *jihadiya*[89]), creating chaos and confusion at Dufile and the other forts. The rebel officers, not knowing what to do, turned to Emin Pasha for advice. Lado, the northernmost fort was deserted by Emin's soldiers; the next station, Rejaf, was taken by the Mahdists (with help from local natives) after a short fight in October 1888. An expedition sent to fight the Mahdists was almost completely destroyed, causing enormous panic at Dufile. Selim Bey, a respectable Sudanese officer was chosen as the new leader; all garrisons were subsequently concentrated at Dufile, while stations to the north were abandoned. The long columns of fleeing soldiers, servants, women and children carrying all their belonging, were constantly attacked by the local Bari people, taking revenge for all those years of oppression and looting. Many soldiers, including Selim Bey, wanted Emin Pasha to resume his former position and take charge of this emergency situation, but he did not want to: he had taken his decision to leave with Stanley to Cairo. Emin

[87] Dunbar 1965-i: 73, 77; Girling: 145; Middleton 1969: 430-1; Mounteney-Jephson: 42, 164; Scott-Keltie: 86; Wanji: 55-57.
[88] Mounteny-Jephson: 161-241.
[89] Warburg: 251.

Pasha was subsequently allowed to go to Wadelai with the women and children.[90] When the Mahdists eventually attacked Dufile in November 1888, they were defeated with heavy losses; they then withdrew to Rejaf where they stayed for ivory and slave raids, until dislodged by Belgian forces in 1897.[91]

There was violent disagreement amongst the officers of the Egyptian army on whether to leave Equatoria with Emin Pasha or stay. In the end, after voting, Selim Bey's faction won and it was decided to go with Emin Pasha to Cairo. Stanley was meanwhile camping at the southern tip of Lake Albert, at Kavalli's[92], and wanted to leave on March 26, 1889. Selim Bey went back north to evacuate all the remaining soldiers and dependents and bring them to Kavalli's, but before he could start, another Sudanese officer, Fadl el Mula, who had wanted to remain in Equatoria, mutinied, stole ammunition and, with the larger part of the soldiers, left for the hills. Selim Bey apparently tried to get his soldiers to regroup and follow him but did not manage to be back at Kavalli´s in time. This was partly because of Fadl el Mula's mutiny, but Stanley was also convinced that none of them, including Selim Bey, had seriously considered leaving with Emin Pasha. On April 10, 1889, Stanley and Emin Pasha (somewhat reluctantly) left for Zanzibar without Selim Bey; in the end only few of Emin Pasha's officers and soldiers (with dependants included they were less than 600 people, of which many absconded within the first few days) accompanied him to the coast.[93] Having arrived at Kavalli's too late, and with no other place to go, Selim Bey decided to stay there with his small group of followers (only 90 men and 300 women/children were remaining). Within days however they were first attacked by Fadl el Mula's group (to steal the remaining ammunition), and then by natives, after which Selim Bey remained with less than 40 men at Kavalli's, under the protection of the local chief, until more than 2 years later Captain Lugard found him there.[94]

The break-away group under Fadl el Mula was involved in some more battles with the Mahdists. Fadl el Mula, however, was thought to be untrustworthy, trying to make secret deals with the Mahdists - subsequently a large part of his group, 800 men, deserted him in March 1891 to join

[90] Collins: 64; Mounteney-Jephson: 241-314.
[91] R. Gray (1961): 163.
[92] The place was named after the local chief, Kavalli. Some authors call it Kavalli or Kavallis.
[93] Scott Keltie: 110-4; Stanley 1890 Vol. II: 160-4, 199-201.
[94] Lugard Vol II: 201-6.

Selim Bey at Kavalli's. It was a long march with more than 10,000 followers, subjected to attacks from the local population. They arrived at Kavalli's in September 1891, just a few days before Captain Lugard.[95]

Captain Lugard

In the Anglo-German agreement of 1890, Uganda had been recognised as a British sphere of influence. As the British government did not want to be involved in the administration of Uganda, the Imperial British East African Company (IBEAC) was given that mandate. Captain Lugard was despatched as its representative.

Lugard arrived in Kampala in December 1890; his small army consisted mainly of Sudanese soldiers, recruited in Cairo. Some of them had returned there with Emin Pasha, and from them he knew about the other Sudanese soldiers that must still be somewhere in Equatoria. From the beginning the IBEAC suffered from a chronic shortage of funds[96], but as Lugard was desperate for more soldiers, he needed soldiers that would live off the land and not cost the IBEAC anything: he hoped to find them, the "best material for soldiery in Africa", at Kavalli's. So he travelled west and met Selim Bey in September 1891, right at the time when that large part of Fadl el Mula's group was arriving at Kavalli's. Had he come a week earlier, he would have found Selim Bey with only 40 soldiers.[97]

As it was, Lugard found a large group of undisciplined, destitute soldiers, 'addicted to strong liquor', malnourished, and with a huge number of dependents. They were mostly dressed in hides and rags, or almost naked (the women and children), after having walked for several months. Nevertheless, Lugard was impressed by their prowess and loyalty to Egypt, and he was happy to be able "to secure so fine a body of men for the Company's service"[98], even as he recognised that the group at Kavalli's must've been "a terrible curse" to the locals, a "lawless band of soldiery, [..] recognising only the law of force". We can imagine what would have happened had Lugard not taken these soldiers to Uganda, they would have left "a fearful path of desolation, rapine, murder and slavery".[99]

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[95] Collins: 80-83; Lugard Vol II: 205-6; Mounteney-Jephson: 450-2.
[96] Vere-Hodge: 21.
[97] Furley: 313-4; Lugard Vol. II: 133-4, 200.
[98] Perham 1959: 332.
[99] Lugard Vol. II: 216-, 231-2.

There may have been around 850-900 soldiers with 9-10,000 dependents (some officers apparently had more than 100 dependents), though available figures are vague and contradictory in much of the literature. According to Lugard himself the group that went into Uganda with him consisted of slightly more than 8000 people[100], but, he thought, they must've left "a great many women and children behind".[101] Most soldiers appeared to be of a rather high rank. The original officers (mainly from northern Sudan) had all assumed higher ranks, and the later recruits (the sons of the older soldiers, and the locals) had apparently been promoted in the last few years; there were only very few privates. The group still used coins, and the Egyptian clerks still wrote official dispatches, like before; they had somehow held on to artefacts of 'civilisation'.[102]

Selim Bey, firmly in charge of the "Egyptian army", agreed to join Lugard at IBEAC on condition that the Khedive of Egypt would approve it (which he did one year later), and that he himself would be the commanding officer, taking orders from Lugard only. This was to create problems later on, just like the agreement on their payment, which was very low, and basically meant "live off the land".[103]

On 5 October, 1891, they left Kavalli's in three groups, at intervals of one day in order not to create queues too long to manage, for the 600 miles trip; they walked only a few hours in the morning to avoid the heat. Even in three groups, it was difficult: by the time to first people of the group arrived for camp, the last people still had to leave the camp of the previous night; the columns were seven miles long. They were attacked by local people, slaves deserted, children drowned; the "Sudanese were most callous to the sufferings of their dependents" –including small children– who were carrying all the belongings, and the weak. Lugard himself spent hours in the water helping women and small children across the rivers, and even had to establish a rear-guard to collect children that were simply left behind. The columns moved extremely slowly, also because the soldiers continued to loot and take slaves along the way. Lugard forbade them to do this, but to no avail.[104]

[100] Lugard Vol. II: 234. Lugard's figures indicate an average of nine followers per soldier.
[101] Perham 1959: 353.
[102] Lugard Vol. II: 217.
[103] Thruston: 90; Lugard Vol. II: 215-6; Lugard also mentions they would receive the same salary as in the Egyptian army (Furley: 314; Perham 1959: 327).
[104] Lugard Vol. II: 225-42.

This is a crucial episode in the history of the Nubis: the fact that Lugard recruited and took them to Uganda opened a new chapter for them; it ensured their continuity as a military group. An essential element here is the large number of civilians within the group, which allowed their survival as a community and later development into an ethnic group.[105] These soldiers and their dependents, moving into Uganda, were the first "East African Nubians", though at the time they were usually called "Sudanese". From this point onwards, they were "immigrants", strangers in the countries where they worked, lived and settled. As a result, a stronger sense of community could develop, which may not have been present at that particular moment.

Amongst themselves, this new community referred to themselves as 'Nubi'. The term "Nubi/Nuba" was apparently used in Egypt to refer to anyone coming from the Sudan, and was almost synonymous with "slave" – the Nubian kingdoms (in Sudan) supplied slaves to the Egyptian pharaohs for the black slave army, the '*jihadiya*'. The term 'Nubi' was later used for the Sudanese slave soldiers in Egyptian service. In southern Sudan, "Nubi" began to be used to refer to the communities of slave soldiers and their families. How, or why, the soldiers and their dependents would refer to themselves as 'slaves' is unclear, though it is possible that in southern Sudan the term 'Nubi' became so widely used for that particular (former slave-soldiers') community that the Nubis started using it themselves.[106]

The Sudanese soldiers in Uganda

Along the way from Kavalli's to Kampala, a line of forts was built at strategic places, to keep the kingdom of Bunyoro under control. In each fort Lugard left a number of soldiers with their dependents, usually around 2000 people, under command of a reliable Sudanese officer. They were to grow their own food, but they were also allowed (if not encouraged) to raid into Bunyoro for food.

Towards the end of 1891, Lugard and Selim Bey arrived in Kampala with the remaining soldiers and dependents, much too far from the garrisons in the Western part of the country to actually control them, as they were only to take orders from Selim Bey or Lugard. Without close supervision and "a

[105] See also Johnson 1988: 153.
[106] See Atieno-Odhiambo (1977: 3), Hansen (1991: 564), Johnson (1988: 151, 1989: 82), Soghayroun (1981:21), as well as Dunbar (1965-i: 79, footnote 11).

firm hand", discipline wavered and the Sudanese soldiers raided not only in Bunyoro, but also created havoc in the areas they were supposed to protect. The Toro king sent messages to Lugard "begging him to protect his people from the pitiless Sudanese".[107] Likewise, slavery, strictly forbidden by Lugard, persisted. The Sudanese continued their life as they had done in the stations in Equatoria as the Egyptian army: an isolated military group, taking wives, concubines and 'servants' (voluntarily or involuntarily) from the local tribes, looting and robbing their neighbours. In the Sudanese's defence it is worth noting what Furley says about their behaviour: "No doubt in a cruel age the Sudanese behaviour was not remarkable." Others agree: "It's in fact the traditional African system of warfare", and apparently the Swahili soldiers' "reputation amongst the local inhabitants does not appear to have been very much better than that of the Sudanese".[108]

Lugard was later heavily criticised for his decision to bring the Sudanese soldiers to Uganda, certainly when the rumour was going around that the Sudanese had made a pact with other Muslims groups to take power in Buganda and establish a Muslim state, or even link up with the Mahdists and other Arabs.[109] The rivalry between Muslim, Protestant and Roman Catholic groups in Buganda had caused civil war in Buganda between 1885 and 1890, and created havoc; many people were killed (by war and famine), and even more had fled the country. In 1890 the 'united Christians' with the Buganda king Mwanga, won the final battles; the 'Mohammedans' fled into Bunyoro, from where they continued raiding into Buganda. After a second 'Mohammedan war' (1891) in which the Muslims were beaten by a force led by Lugard, they accepted a peace offer in which they got three provinces to themselves; nevertheless, tension remained high.[110]

On 1st April 1893, with the IBEAC bankrupt, Britain took over the administration of Uganda. The Government Commissioner Sir Portal decided to abandon the western forts along the Toro-Bunyoro border and to bring the Sudanese soldiers to Buganda and Kampala as regular troops, to replace the more expensive and less efficient Zanzibari troops.[111]

[107] Furley: 317. For more references to the cruelty of the Sudanese, their lack of discipline, etcetera, see Ashe: 179-188; Dunbar 1965 ii: 22; Furley: 311-318; J.M. Gray 1953: 15; Leopold 2005: 119-20; Lugard Vol. II: 230-6; Wild 1957: 60.
[108] Dunbar 1965-i: 86; Furley: 318-9; J.M. Gray 1951: 129, 134; J.M. Gray 1953: 15.
[109] Ashe: 321; Furley: 318; Soghayroun: 39-40; Wild 1957: 60.
[110] Lugard Vol. II: 1-149; MacDonald: 179-97.
[111] Furley: 319.

In June 1893, when there was a serious threat for another "Mohammedan" revolt in Buganda, the Sudanese troops were quickly disarmed, and Selim Bey, who had continued to play an important role as commander of the Sudanese, was arrested and charged with 'mutinous behaviour', and subsequently deported to the Kenyan coast on retirement pay.[112] His role has never been completely clarified, though it seems quite clear that he sympathised with the Muslims, and even might have joined them in case of war.[113] Selim Bey, who had long been sick, died in Naivasha, on his way to the coast.[114] Some older Nubis in Kibera still tell a mythological story around the death of Selim Bey: where he died a well sprung up and the water formed the Lake Naivasha.

The growing strength of the Bunyoro kingdom seemed to pose a serious threat to Buganda. In early 1894, a large force, comprising of 400 Sudanese soldiers[115] together with eight Europeans and 15,000 Baganda spearmen, occupied Bunyoro. This was the first time the Sudanese soldiers could prove what they were worth, and even though they never engaged in serious battle with Kabarega's constantly withdrawing forces, they were praised for their discipline, and, it was claimed, they were "reliable, loyal and a terror to their enemies".[116]

The British were now anxious to enlist the Sudanese troops as 'regulars' and even recruit more of them, because many Sudanese soldiers were now advanced in age, too old for active service or even garrison duties, and about to retire. Furthermore, the Sudanese remained the cheapest soldiers, and Uganda could not afford anything else. So, when in early 1894 a large group of Sudanese soldiers with more than 10,000 followers were reported to be trespassing into British territory, Captain Thruston was sent to bring them all into Uganda.[117] It appeared these people were part of the original Fadl el Mula group (see above[118]) that served with the Belgians of the Congo Free State for about two years. In January 1894, after they had split up in two

[112] For a detailed description of these events, see MacDonald 1897. See also Ashe: 397–408 and Soghayroun: 56-79.
[113] Furley: 320-1; MacDonald: 222-70; Soghayroun: 35-40. Lugard (1893 Vol. II: 478-9) continued to defend Selim Bey.
[114] The Nubis in Kibera however generally believe that he was killed by the British.
[115] In September 1893, there were 700 Sudanese soldiers enlisted in Uganda, and there was a reserve force of 300 un-enlisted Sudanese (Furley: 321).
[116] Furley: 322.
[117] Furley: 322-3; Moyse-Bartlett: 58-9.
[118] For more details on the Fadl el Mula group, see Collins pp 80-83, 92-116, and J.M. Gray 1952: 32-33.

groups on their way to Wadelai (to claim the area for the Belgians), Fadl el Mula's group was ambushed and annihilated by the Mahdists. The second group, of about 350 soldiers with a huge number of dependants, managed to reach Wadelai and, in search of food, continued further south along Lake Albert. Here they were approached by Captain Thruston, who convinced them to enlist with the British in Uganda. Like before with Lugard, they went in long columns, walking for many hours; more than half of the group's dependants (slaves, women, children) disappeared (deserted or died) during the journey and at arrival in Uganda only a little over 3000 were counted.[119] Thus the second group of Sudanese, or 'East African Nubians', entered East Africa.

On 18 June 1894 Buganda was declared the Uganda Protectorate. The area excluded Bunyoro, Toro and Ankole, but extended to the east to include Naivasha in what is now Kenya. The area between Naivasha and the coast had for long remained a no-man's land, considered desolate and useless. However, the accessibility of the new Protectorate became an issue: the road north through Sudan was closed due to the Mahdists' presence and the long distance to the coast (800 miles) through inhospitable area would require 3-4 months on foot. As it became clear that a railway from Kampala to Mombasa on the coast would solve that problem of inaccessibility, that "no man's land", including the area up to the Juba River in Somalia, was, in June 1895, declared the "East Africa Protectorate".

On 1 September 1895, the official Ugandan army, the Uganda Rifles, was established and was made up almost entirely of Sudanese soldiers. They initially signed a 12-year contract and were organised in 10 companies which were under the command of European officers. In July 1896, the Uganda Protectorate was extended to include Bunyoro, Toro, Ankole and Busoga, covering the area that is now Uganda, and including the area up to Naivasha.

The following year, 1897, was a busy year for the Sudanese soldiers: they were almost continuously on the road, marching to and fighting in different places. First in Toro; then Kavirondo north of Lake Victoria; next a punitive expedition against the Nandi (Kenya), then back to Buddu in Uganda. This started to create problems. So far the soldiers had mainly been based in garrisons, without moving around much, and only engaging in the occasional raid. This garrison life had allowed for planting crops and having

[119] See Thruston: 165-88.

the family almost constantly around; overall a rather comfortable lifestyle. This situation, however, changed with all the campaigns and punitive expeditions going on.

The Uganda Mutiny, 1897[120]

After the campaign in Buddu, in September 1897, some Sudanese companies were almost immediately sent to Ngare Nyuki, near Eldama Ravine (Kenya), where they prepared for a long trip out of the Protectorate, into Equatoria. On the way from Ngare Nyuki to Eldama Ravine, from where they would start the long march north, they mutinied.

No one denied that the Sudanese had the right to complain. As Thomas & Scott put it: "Ill-clothed; marched, with little consideration or promises of rest, from one end of the country to the other and thus deprived of any settled cantonment life with their families; earning but a fraction of the pay received by similar troops in the adjoining East Africa Protectorate, and that pay, in poor quality cloth, often six months in arrears, they now found themselves attached to an expedition of unknown destination and duration".[121] The Sudanese were paid only four Rupees/month (a private), even lower than the carriers, who earned 10-12 Rupees.[122] Other complaints were that they were insufficiently fed, they were not allowed (on this expedition) to take their wives and children, their officers did not speak Arabic so they did not understand them, and they were treated 'like donkeys'.[123] Clearly there was already a certain degree of discontent and a tendency towards mutiny among the Sudanese soldiers. Moreover, the campaign to Equatoria was to take place under the command of the British officer (MacDonald) the Nubis held responsible for the deportation and death of Selim Bey some years earlier.[124] Wild however maintains that the leaders of the mutineers were determined to create trouble, no matter what; according to him, some of them still dreamt of that "Muhammedan kingdom" in Uganda, ruled by themselves, (secretly) feeling superior to the Christians.[125] It seems the mutiny leaders did not inform the other soldiers

[120] See Wild (1954) for a very detailed account of the mutiny, as well as Austin (1903; 34-116), Soghayroun (1981, chapter 4) and J.M. Gray 1953.
[121] Thomas & Scott: 37. See also Soghayroun: 83-6.
[122] M.F. Hill: 165; Matson: 286.
[123] Wild 1954: 16.
[124] Furley: 323-6.
[125] Wild 1954: 5-7, 23.

about what was agreed with the army commander, and exploited their sentiments in order for them to participate in the mutiny. Soghayroun points out that there was already a general Muslim unrest in the region, due to events in Sudan (the Mahdi), Congo and in German East Africa, and according to him this must have affected the Sudanese soldiers as well. They tried to get the Ugandan Muslims to take their side during the mutiny, in which they succeeded to some extent, creating more unrest and instability in Uganda.[126]

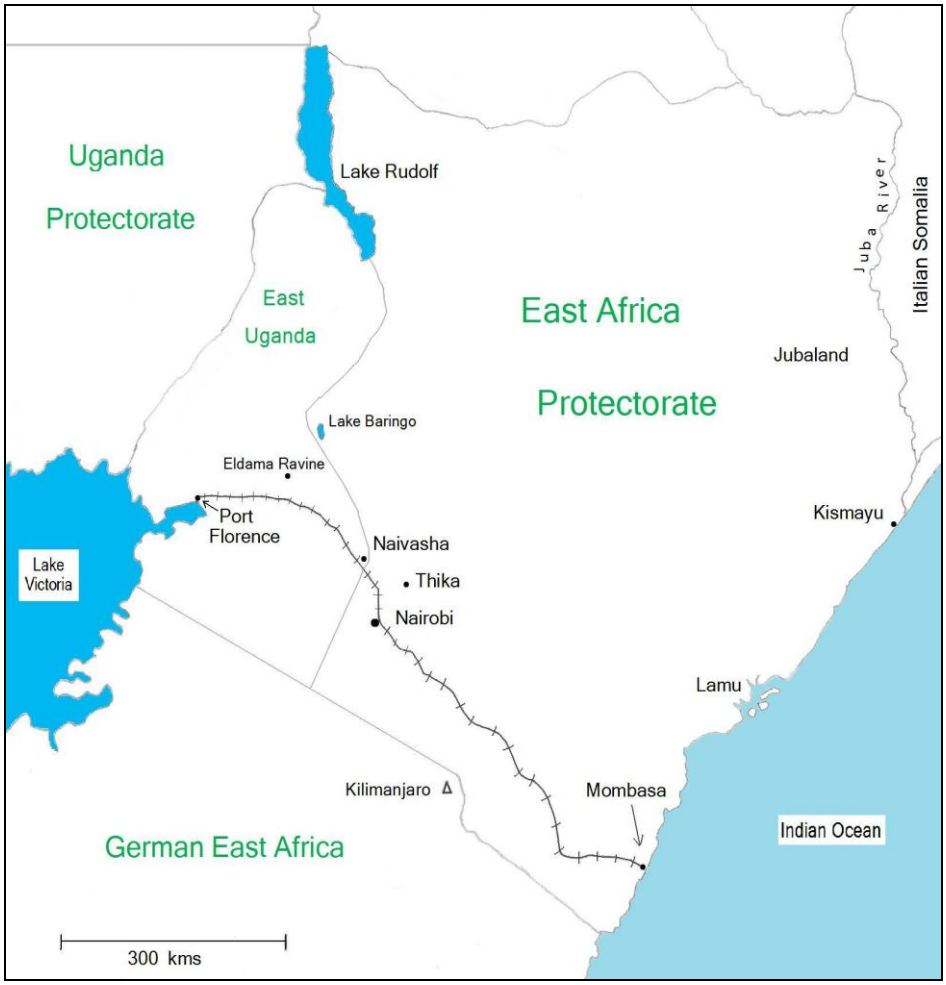
The mutineers withdrew towards Uganda, looting the military stations and villages along the way, killing people, destroying bridges, and stealing livestock and whatever else they could carry. They tried to convince (Sudanese) soldiers of other garrisons to join the mutiny, but most remained loyal to the British. The mutineers, now around 500 men, occupied the garrison fort at Luba's (near Jinja, Uganda). Surrounded by British troops, negotiations and some clashes took place, with heavy losses on both sides. It seems that at this point most mutineers were ready to give up and surrender, but the Sudanese officers, fearing to be held responsible for the mutiny, executed some British officers they had taken prisoner, knowing that from then on the mutineers could no longer count on mercy. In this way they implicated all mutineers, expecting them to continue to fight till the end. They also lashed and locked up anyone hinting at surrendering.[127] After 3 months of siege, early January 1898, the mutineers broke out of the fort and fled northwards to Lake Kyoga. Some battles took place in which the mutineers were defeated; many were killed and the rest dispersed, while women and children, as well as belongings, were left behind. Nine ringleaders were executed; a large number of captured soldiers was sacked, and a smaller number acquitted. The remaining mutineers fled further north, causing some trouble over the years. They were finally defeated in 1901 during the so-called "Lango expedition", the punitive expedition against the remaining mutineers; the army returned with 1485 prisoners, most of them probably women and children.[128]

[126] See Soghayroun: 56-122.
[127] Austin: 48-9; Wild 1954: 38.
[128] Dunbar 1965-i: 94-95; Moyse-Bartlett: 86; Soghayroun: 104.

The King's African Rifles

After the mutiny, the Uganda Rifles were reorganised: the number of Sudanese soldiers was reduced (but still at least 75%) and they were to be gradually replaced by Swahilis, Somalis, Indians and native Ugandan people. Salaries were increased to 18 Rupees per month.[129]

Map 2: the East African protectorates, 1901-2 (map by author).



[129] Moyse-Bartlett: 84; Furley: 326.

In 1901, all the armies of the regional British Protectorates[130] were organised into battalions of one colonial army. On the 1st of January 1902 the "King's African Rifles" (KAR) was born. The Uganda Rifles became the 4th battalion KAR, the East Africa Rifles the 3rd battalion KAR; both battalions had a large number of Sudanese soldiers. Notwithstanding a certain degree of doubt regarding the loyalty of the Sudanese, they formed the backbone of the early KAR: until World War II they also dominated the ranks of KAR's native officers; many made their career in KAR and served for long periods of time, some up to 30 years.[131]

There was enough to do in those early years for the Sudanese soldiers, as British rule met resistance in almost every corner of the Protectorates. There were punitive actions against the Nandi (1895-1906), the Kikuyu and Embu (1904-1907), and in 1909-10 in Somaliland against the "Mad Mullah". Much of the work concerned securing the Uganda Road (from Mombasa to Nairobi to Kampala) for trade caravans, escorting mail and food caravans, and protection of the Uganda Railway construction.[132] There were also military actions against the Giriama, Taita, Kamba, Kisii and Elgeyo tribes.

In 1902, after the railway had reached Port Florence (now Kisumu), the Uganda Protectorate ceded its eastern province to the neighbouring East Africa Protectorate[133], for the purpose of having the area crossed by the railway under only one administration. The new East Africa Protectorate territory consisted more or less of present-day Kenya plus the area further east, up to the Juba River in Somalia. Some 250 Sudanese soldiers were subsequently (in 1904) transferred from KAR 4th battalion (Uganda) to the 3rd battalion in the East Africa Protectorate.

Sudanese settlements

It was the habit in those days, in Egypt, Sudan, in the military forts in East Africa and Somalia, to allocate some land to the soldiers to cultivate and grow food for their families. Retired and demobilised soldiers were also given land near the barracks. Like the Egyptians before them, the British

[130] Uganda, British Central Africa, East Africa and Somaliland.
[131] Hansen 1991: 566; Parsons 1997: 88; Parsons 1999: 225.
[132] Moyse-Bartlett: 204-9; Page: 15. See Miller 1972 for a riveting account of the construction of the railway, nicknamed the "Lunatic Express". Construction started in January 1896; Kisumu was reached in December 1901.
[133] Moyse-Bartlett: 134.

used the Sudanese soldiers' sons for the recruitment of new soldiers, and found it very convenient to have a reserve force of veterans close at hand in case they needed experienced soldiers on short notice.[134] Moreover, the East African armies never had much money, and the protectorates tried to keep KAR as cheap as possible, so there was probably no money for pensions; giving land was a much cheaper option, and remained for a long time the KAR soldiers' only pension.[135]

Locally recruited soldiers usually returned to their rural home after leaving active service, but in East Africa, these Sudanese "detribalised" veterans had nowhere to go; they could not possibly go back to their original communities in Sudan. Being so inextricably tied to the military culture and life, soldiers for life, they settled permanently near or next to the forts, stations or barracks, with their families and dependents. Sudanese (Nubi) villages were established in Uganda, Somalia and Kenya, wherever the army had more permanent bases. In Kenya, they were established in Kiambu, Mazeras, Machakos, Kibigori, Kibos, Kisii, Kisumu, Mumias, Eldama Ravine and Nairobi, amongst others. Most of these places had been forts or barracks along the Uganda Road or the railway.[136]

Kibra, in Nairobi, became the main Nubi settlement in Kenya, being next to the main KAR barracks. Most of the Sudanese soldiers that served in the KAR in those days, would, at some point, have passed through Nairobi, based for a short or longer time at the KAR barracks. Many of them would ultimately settle in Kibera, after retirement or demobilisation.

The second and third 'road' to Kibera

Apart from the Sudanese soldiers that entered East Africa through Uganda and settled in Kibera, there were two other ways in which Sudanese soldiers came to East Africa and eventually ended up in Kibera: one way was through direct recruitment by the British in Egypt and northern Sudan to be despatched to Somalia, and the other way led through Tanzania: recruited by the Germans in Cairo to assist in suppressing native uprisings along the German East African coast.

[134] Johnson 1988: 147; Matson 1972: 116; Moise-Bartlett: 56; Parsons 1997: 95; Wild 1954: 29.
[135] Moyse-Bartlett 147-8.
[136] Matson & Sutton 1965; H.B. Thomas 1965.

Somalia

In 1882 Britain invaded Egypt to crush the Egyptian nationalists' rebellion and safeguard European investments and the Suez Canal; the Khedive Tewfiq, deposed by the nationalists, was reinstated, but remained a puppet, controlled by the British, who largely took control of Egypt and Sudan.

Sudanese soldiers were recruited in northern Sudan and Egypt to be used for the reconstituted Egyptian army, and to be sent to Somalia (Jubaland), travelling by steamer from Suakin on Sudan´s Red Sea coast to Mombasa. Like the other Sudanese soldiers before, they were allowed to bring at least their wife.[137] After the Anglo-Italian negotiations in 1886 the southern part of Somalia, Jubaland, was allocated to the British, and became part of the British East Africa Protectorate. A British KAR garrison was subsequently established at Kismayu, and at places further north along the Lower Juba River, like Serenli and Yonte; many of its soldiers were Sudanese.[138] A number of the newly recruited soldiers were most probably (southern) Sudanese soldiers that were made redundant by the Egyptian army after they lost Sudan to the Mahdi in the early 1880s. Others may have been former soldiers of the *jihadiya* and sons of soldiers, but there were also unemployed young men, or 'farmers without land' amongst them. Apparently the last draft of 300 Sudanese was recruited in 1899.[139]

The active soldiers were replaced from time to time, moving to other parts of the Protectorate to serve, and other Sudanese soldiers were moved to serve in Kismayu. In this way, the Sudanese soldiers coming from Egypt and Sudan straight to Somalia were mixed with the ones that had come to Kenya through Uganda. They came from a similar background and spoke the same language, making for easy integration. Some soldiers were retired in Kismayu or Yonte, and started Sudanese settlements of ex-soldiers there, often marrying Somali women. It was KAR policy to stimulate soldiers to have a wife or concubine, whether brought with them or 'married' locally; it was considered "conducive to discipline and stability". Many of those that

[137] Information from informants in Kibera. They did not know if the soldiers were also allowed to bring children, but maybe some did.

[138] The East Africa Rifles had 250 Sudanese, 300 Punjabis, 300 Swahilis and 200 locally recruited tribesmen (Moyse-Bartlett: 102; Page: 5).

[139] Moyse-Bartlett: 119-20. One of the soldiers recruited in that last draft in 1899 was Suleman Ahmed, son of a sergeant of the Egyptian army (Liversidge & Mackenzie: 91); he was later, from approximately 1938 until his death in 1969, Liwali (headman, chief) of the Nubis in Kibera.

came through Uganda and moved to Kismayu at a later stage kept their families in Kibera (or in other Nubi villages in Kenya) for the time they were based in Somalia; others –possibly the officers– took their whole families with them to Somalia. A number of soldiers that married local Somali women brought them back to Kenya when they returned; others left them behind.[140]

In 1925, after the British had ceded Jubaland to the Italians[141], the KAR soldiers were moved to the Kenya Colony. Many Sudanese ex-soldiers that had settled in Sudanese villages in Somalia came also to Kenya and were allocated land in Mazeras (near Mombasa), Meru or Nyanza; some of them later settled in Kibera. Others stayed behind in Kismayu, and even up to today, some of those 'Sudanese' families are still in contact with relatives in Kibera.

German East Africa

The East African coast was claimed by the Sultan of Zanzibar, and fell therefore within the British sphere of influence. In 1884, the British were confronted with an accomplished fact after agents of the Society for German Colonisation (GDK – Gesellschaft für Deutsche Kolonisation, a private enterprise) secretly made their way inland and signed treaties with twelve chieftains, thus claiming large tracts of land for Germany. In 1885 the GDK became a chartered company, which was granted imperial protection by the German government.[142] In their Agreement of 1886, Germany and Britain drew a line between the two main rivers in East Africa, the Tana and the Ruvuma, to divide the area up to Lake Victoria: Kenya, north of the line, was left to the British, who in return recognised Germany's claim on what was to become "Deutsch Ost Afrika" (German East Africa).[143] The GDK – which in 1885 had become the German East Africa Company (DOAG)– had meanwhile extended its territory through more 'treaties' with indigenous chiefs; in 1888 they coerced the Sultan of Zanzibar to give them control of the customs throughout the coastal strip, which until then had remained under the Sultan's control. While the DOAG's administration of the area was marked by violence and repression, the taking over of the coastal ports

[140] Clayton and Killingray: 242-3; Johnson 1988: 153.
[141] King 1928.
[142] Iliffe: 90-2.
[143] Taylor: 15. German East Africa would include what is now Tanzania, Burundi and Rwanda.

provided additional tension, which eventually resulted in the so-called 'Abushiri Revolt' (also called the 'Arab Revolt', from 1888-1890).[144]

After the Anglo-German Agreement of 1890 the Sultan of Zanzibar was forced (by the British) to 'cede absolutely' the coastal strip to the Germans; shortly afterwards, Zanzibar was proclaimed a British Protectorate.[145] In 1891, shortly after the Abushiri Revolt, the German government committed itself to colonial rule and assumed control over all areas claimed by the DOAG. The new colonial government continued the policy of violent repression that had started under the DOAG administration, and "the region was plunged into more than a decade of violence and continuous warfare".[146] There were several native uprisings, the main ones being the Hehe rebellion (1891-1898) and the Maji Maji rebellion (1905-1907); all were brutally crushed. This repressive phase in German rule in East Africa was to last till 1906. After 1906 German rule became more "enlightened", resulting in a relatively prosperous economy with two railway lines at the start of World War I.[147]

In 1888, when the coastal people revolted, and the DOAG appeared unable to suppress it, army Captain Hermann von Wissmann was sent from Germany to assist. On his way to Mombasa towards the end of that year, he stopped in Cairo to recruit Sudanese soldiers he had noticed there some years earlier. After Egypt's defeat at the hands of the Mahdists, many Sudanese slave soldiers had been released from service in the Egyptian army. They were unemployed, living with their families in the slums of Cairo and Alexandria, where they created havoc, "stealing and harassing the Egyptian shopkeepers". Von Wissmann eventually left Cairo with 630 Sudanese soldiers originating from central and southern Sudan, accompanied by 486 women and 170 children. Apart from the Sudanese soldiers, the Germans also recruited other Africans: Somalis, Shangaan from southern Africa, and local (Tanzanian) tribesmen.[148]

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[144] Iliffe: 93-4; Mann: 29; Taylor: 14-5.

[145] In this agreement of 1890 the problem of Uganda was also solved: in return for Heligoland (a small island in the North Sea close to Denmark and Germany), the British got Witu (near Lamu) from the Germans, who also "accepted the extension of the frontier [agreed in 1886] dividing the two 'spheres of influence' westward to Lake Victoria and across it to the boundary of the Congo Free State", effectively placing Buganda in the British sphere of influence (Taylor: 16; Wild 1957: 23, 33).

[146] Mann: 54.

[147] Iliffe 1979; Page: 25.

[148] Mann: 47-8, 234; Iliffe: 95-7.

The following decade, which saw the establishment of garrisons in the interior to facilitate the occupation and the German hegemony over Tanzania, was marked by brutal violence and continuous warfare between the Germans and the local population. Though discipline in the German army was very strict, stealing from the local population, extortion, rape and even murder were somehow tolerated.[149]

In 1890, an additional 600 Sudanese were recruited from Egypt, but in the last decade of the nineteenth century, more and more local tribesmen were incorporated into the army. The number of Sudanese soldiers in the German army reduced further because they got old and retired, while others died on duty (though mainly of disease and fatigue); many went back to Egypt after their contract expired. Moreover, the Anglo-Egyptian government refused to give the Germans any more Sudanese soldiers. By 1900, the Sudanese made up only 15-20% of the German army; most of the remaining Sudanese of the first group had by then become officers. The Sudanese soldiers were involved in all the military operations, including World War I, the famous guerrilla war when the German army, led by Von Lettow-Vorbeck, managed to stay, until the end of the war, out of the hands of the far superior (in numbers) British army.[150]

Like in British East Africa, having experienced veterans around was seen as an advantage, just in case they were needed later on. Therefore, also in German East Africa, retired Sudanese soldiers were given land to settle, often in areas where the Government was not sure about the loyalty of the local population, thus creating "*askari* (soldier) villages". By 1901, some 12 villages of 150-260 inhabitants had been created, scattered all over the country. The families of the soldiers usually lived outside the barracks; an estimated 40% of their sons ended up as soldiers themselves. Some retired soldiers joined the police; others became bodyguards of local chiefs, or became merchants and traders.[151] One World War I anecdote is still told in Kibera in which Sudanese soldiers fighting on the German and on the British sides discovered that the people they were shooting at spoke the same language and were in fact "their brothers". It is said that they then decided that one group would surrender to the other group, to avoid killing one another. Some Sudanese soldiers fought in both armies, moving back and forth after having been taken prisoner, or even depending on who paid more. Apart from getting a better salary, German *askaris* who had served for

[149] Mann: 229-30, 240-1.
[150] Mann: 83, 90-91, 220, 226.
[151] Mann: 197, 220-1, 224, 237-8.

more than 5 years also received a pension (contrary to the British native soldiers): the last Sudanese ex-*askari* in Tanzania received his German pension until his death in 1974.[152]

In 1917, the Tanganyika (6th) battalion of the KAR was formed from former German *askaris*. Most Sudanese soldiers that retired from the 6 KAR between 1919 and 1939, when 6 KAR was moved to Nanyuki in Kenya, probably settled in Tanzania but some came to Kenya: a few Sudanese PoWs settled in Kibera. The Sudanese soldiers and their descendants that remained in Tanzania formed Sudanese/Nubi communities there, with main villages near Dar es Salaam, Tanga, Moshi and Arusha. Nowadays the Tanzanian Nubis have virtually disappeared, assimilated into the Muslim culture of their new homeland.

Conclusion

The Nubis are essentially a mix of individuals from many different parts of the Sudan and surrounding areas that merged to become a new, military and Islamic, community; they formed the basis of a new ethnic group that developed in the late nineteenth, early twentieth century. Not much is known, of course, about how exactly this particular case of 'ethno-genesis', this 'beginning of a new community', happened. It is likely that during the time in southern Sudan (Equatoria) the Nubi community did not really exist as such; it was basically a mix of people somehow connected through Islam and military life around the forts. It was also a time of rapid change for many people: joining the Egyptian army, they left behind their families, and existing social patterns were destroyed; new patterns, bringing these 'strangers' together, had to be created to facilitate a *modus vivendi* for the new group.[153] Though creating such a new community's traditions does not happen overnight[154], new traditions and rituals would almost automatically, almost unconsciously, be invented – if someone got married, for example, they would have to agree on how to do that. Part of this was determined by Islam, the Egyptian army's religion: the marriage contract, the rights and duties of both groom and bride. The wedding ceremonies would have to be

[152] Mann: 238. See also Parsons 1999: 65.
[153] Compare Hobsbawm: 4-5.
[154] It would be much easier and faster if a new ethnic group is created through fission (splitting up) of a group, or extension of an existing identity, i.e. uniting similar groups under one banner (like a common origin), according to Eriksen (1993: 68-9) the two main ways of ethno-genesis.

invented and agreed upon: what shall the bride wear, where does the groom pick her up or meet her, do we sprinkle something over them once the marriage is sealed, and if so, what?; who provides the food for the guests, who pays what, etcetera. For these things they must have borrowed from the existing traditions, rituals and ceremonies of their own (former) Sudanese ethnic groups, from northern and southern Sudan and the extended region. Even up to today, the Nubis in Kibera make their own colourful food covers (*tabaga* and *kuta*) that show resemblance to the Darfurian '*mtabag*'. Some elements were clearly taken from their Egyptian masters: the language and religion, as well as the practice of female circumcision, which was practiced in its severest form, the pharaonic circumcision.[155]

Moving together out of southern Sudan and into Uganda may have created something of a 'community feeling' amongst the Nubis. Once in Uganda, the Nubis must have felt themselves a separate community – being military, Muslims, 'strangers', and powerful due to their link to the colonial administration, they were very different from the people they found there. Nevertheless, the Nubis had been 'created' only some decades earlier – it seems logical that it would take some time before social and cultural institutions that provided order and meaning to the lives of the group members were created, before the group was really a *community*.

Before they actually arrived and settled at Kibera, many other people were assimilated into the Nubi group: apart from other Sudanese soldiers that came to East Africa through Somalia or Tanzania, the Nubis also mixed with Ugandan, Tanzanian and Kenyan tribes and with the Somalis[156] – everywhere they went on campaign, the soldiers took wives, concubines, or 'house girls', some of whom would stay with the soldiers and later move with them to Kibera or another Nubian village. These women would have to adapt to the Nubi customs, in terms of religion, food, dress and language – eventually they had to "become Nubi". Also men could become Nubi: slaves and gun-boys could become soldiers, and then become part of the community; KAR soldiers from other tribes would also often learn the Nubi language and if they were or became Muslim, and stayed long enough with

[155] Johnson 2009: 117. See also Chapter 3 and Appendix B.

[156] Most Nubis (in Kibera) trace their origin, through their maternal or paternal ancestors, back to the tribes of southern Sudan, northern Uganda and eastern Congo, mainly the Bari, Mundu, Lendu, Kakwa, Muru, Shilluk and Dinka. There are others that claim great-grandfathers from the Fur, Nuba or even Fartit and Baqqara, and some have ancestors from Egypt, Kordofan, or even West-Africa (family names like "Diab" and "Senussi" seem to refer to that origin). There should also be some Nubi with Nubian (Danaqla, Ja'aliyiin) blood, though no-one in Kibera seems to refer to these groups as 'tribe of origin'.

the Nubis, or settled with the Nubis in a Nubian village, they could become accepted as one of them, often also marrying into the community. In Kibera some Nubi families have Ethiopian or Borana great-grandfathers, who served with Nubis in the same KAR battalion, settled with the Nubis in Kibera, and "became Nubi". This had logically raised the question whether this curious mix of people could be considered an ethnic group. That specific "Nubi-feeling" was probably not present at the time they migrated from Equatoria to Uganda, but rather something that grew over the years in Uganda and Kenya. A closer look at the Nubis in Kibera will show that this process of 'becoming the Nubi ethnic group' indeed continued for quite some time.[157]

The next chapter starts at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the Nubis arrived in Kenya and settled together in their own 'Nubian' villages, and in Nairobi, where they created over the years their own "tribal land", *Kibra*.

[157] See Chapter 3.

2

From shamba to slum – a history of Kibera

At the time when the Nubis settled in Kibera, in the early days of Nairobi, problems of cheap housing for Africans were already evident. Illegal African settlements, providing cheap accommodation, sprang up and were demolished again if they were in the way of the growing city. Kibera escaped that fate for historic reasons: it was probably the first legal African settlement in Nairobi, albeit for a limited group of people, the retired and demobilised soldiers of the King's African Rifles (KAR), the British colonial army in East Africa. Most of these soldiers being Nubi, the history of Kibera is in essence the history of these Nubis. Kibera remained a 'rural area' dominated by Nubis, until in the 1970s and 1980s it rapidly filled up with 'outsiders'[158] looking for cheap accommodation – today Kibera is a sprawling slum with hundreds of thousands of people packed in an area of 550 acres.

This chapter tells the story of how the Nubis settled in Kibera, and how they struggled to hold on to their land while their 'Sudanese' villages turned, within a relatively short period, into a slum. The first part of this chapter deals with the period up to Independence (1963), a period in which the Nubis settled in Kibera, generally leading a good life, even if they started to become marginalised. This section shows how the Nubis have tried to use their being 'foreign soldiers', and the special relationship they therefore had with the colonial government, to maintain access to special privileges and control over the land in Kibera. This strategy was relatively successful considering they managed to stay in Kibera, despite attempts by the British at relocating them. Independence was a major break-point for the Nubis as it was the start of a period in which they would lose much of what they had: most of their land, access to jobs, income from the alcohol production, supremacy in Kibera, and support from the Government. Therefore 1963 seems an appropriate cut-off point for the "good years".[159]

The second part of this chapter covers the period from Independence to 2000 and describes how Kibera became, within a short time, a congested slum area. As the British left Kenya without solving the problem of Nubi

[158] With "outsider" is meant anyone who is a non-Nubi and moved to Kibera roughly after the 1940s. Non-Nubis that moved into Kibera earlier, are now often considered (by Nubis) to be part of the Nubi community.
[159] See also Amis 1983: 154.

settlement and Kibera land ownership, the Nubis now depended on Kenya's 'African' government – their strategy of appealing to their past military services to the state no longer worked. To maintain their claim on Kibera the Nubis had to rethink and transform their ethnic identity, from 'foreigners' to 'Kenyans'. This worked only to a limited extent; while the Nubis were more or less accepted as 'Kenyans' and could stay in Kibera, they were unable to stop the influx of outsiders and the large-scale construction of rental rooms in Kibera. The outsiders were supported by local authorities of the same ethnic group, whereas the Nubis were on their own – they no longer had a political patron to help or protect them.
Finally, the last part looks at Kibera and the Nubis as they are now, at the beginning of the third millennium: a marginalised community in a slum area, where the (Nubi) land issue continues to be the cause of problems and unrest.

Kibera: the good years – from 1904 to 1963

Nairobi and its first African inhabitants

In 1896 Nairobi was only a staging depot for the oxen and mules of the Protectorate's Government, along the main road from Mombasa to Kampala. Some years later, in 1899, the railhead reached Nairobi and the Kenya-Uganda Railway headquarters was subsequently moved from Mombasa to Nairobi. In the same year the Ukambani provincial headquarters, situated too far from the railway, was transferred from Machakos to Nairobi; the East African Protectorate government followed some years later (1905). Within a few years Nairobi had become a town with streets, shops and hotels; by 1906 Nairobi had around 11,000 inhabitants, and in 1907 it was accepted as the official capital of British East Africa.[160]

Segregation of races was a key concept in early 20th century Nairobi. The Nairobi Master Plans, mainly done by South African planners in 1905, 1927 and 1948, systematically established racial zones in Nairobi, with extremely unequal residential densities, allegedly for reasons of "disease and sanitation". Europeans, Indians and Africans all had their own locations, with extremely unequal residential densities.[161] Africans were only tolerated

[160] Mungeam: 67, 206; Obudho & Aduwo: 50-4; Robertson: 13.
[161] Amis 1983: 100-101; Kimani: 103; Van Zwanenberg 1972; White: 66-68.

in Nairobi as a temporary workforce, not as permanent inhabitants, and certainly not with entire families. The low wages allowed only men to stay in Nairobi, and kept the families at home to work the family farms to take care of themselves and supplement the husbands' wages with extra food. As a result, most Africans in Nairobi were men.[162]

Already from 1901 Africans needed a special pass to be in Nairobi, but there was no provision to accommodate even those that were allowed to work and live in Nairobi. Most employers did not provide accommodation to their employees; it was left to the African labourers (men) to fend for themselves. They slept in sheds at work, in the store rooms, in the streets, or rented cheap rooms, sharing with many other men, often in illegal settlements.[163] Nor were Africans allowed to construct and own their own houses. Kileleshwa, Pangani and other African settlements were all demolished at some point, mostly in the 1920s, to make way for higher class Indian or European residential areas. The Africans had to move to Pumwani, a new settlement built in 1922 especially for that purpose. The land around Nairobi was simply too valuable to be used for African settlement.[164] Kibera never suffered the same fate; the land was allocated to the army and therefore the Nubis were in a privileged position – they were allowed to stay there, at a stone's throw from Nairobi.

Kibera

Initially the army barracks for the East African Rifles were established just north of the Nairobi River. Around 1903-4 the barracks, then of the King's African Rifles, were moved to Ngong Road, just a few kilometres south-west of the city centre (and effectively outside Nairobi's municipal boundaries), where now Kenyatta Hospital is. In 1904 the adjacent area of 4197.9 acres was allocated to the army as military exercise grounds. The Kibera area was surveyed by the government only in 1917, and gazetted as "Nairobi Military Area" in 1918.[165] It was in this area that the retired Sudanese soldiers would be allowed to settle, a place that they would call

[162] Kimani: 115; Nelson 2000; Robertson: 14; White 1990. In the late 1930s the ratio was 8 men to 1 woman (see Hake: 53; White: 94).
[163] Amis 1983: 100-101; Kimani: 103, 115; Robertson: 14; Van Zwanenberg 1972; White 1990: 66-68.
[164] White: 45-48.
[165] The Official Gazette, Kenya, Government Notice No. 204, p 577, July 10, 1918.

"*Kibra*": a bushy place, a forest; empty, save for the occasional Masai herder and wild animals.[166]

Even though at retirement from the army they did not receive a pension, the Nubis did not worry about the future, as they were exempted for life from paying Hut or Poll Tax, and there was plenty of land in Kibera to settle and cultivate; they assumed that this land was 'their pension', like it had been for generations of soldiers before. That this was not only the Nubis' opinion, is clear from a letter from the District Commissioner: "Provision of free land out of which a living can be made by those long-service Nubians who should, I think, undoubtedly be so provided for as a form of pension, for which there is no other provision" (though he does not specifically refer to the Kibera land)[167]. Furthermore, the Acting Chief Secretary wrote to the Union of Sudanese that they "have already been granted holdings at Kibira, after discharge from the Military Forces in lieu of repatriation expenses"; this seems to indicate that (part of) the Kibera land was *given* to the Nubis.[168] However, the official army permit to settle in Kibera, the so-called '*shamba*[169] pass', stated that the bearer "has permission to make a shamba in the Military Reserve", while later shamba passes gave permission to "live in the KAR Shamba and build one [or more] house"[170] – this would indicate that the Kibera land was *not given* to the Nubis, but rather just for their temporary use. Yet, there are colonial documents that use the words 'in perpetuity' when referring to a place for the Nubis to settle, words that the Nubis themselves have used a number of times when claiming that the Kibera land was *given* to them.[171] There is, unfortunately, no surviving copy of a document 'drawn up by the Commanding Officer early in the history of the settlement' with the rules and regulations for settlement in Kibera – it could have given some evidence on the agreement between KAR and Nubis concerning settlement in Kibera.[172] Some old Nubis mentioned that each

[166] Kenya Land Commission: 170; Parsons 1997: 88.
[167] Letter District Commissioner to Commissioner for Local Government, Lands & Settlement, 15/10/1930, KNA, PC/CP.9/15/3.
[168] Letter Acting Chief Secretary, 22/8/39, KNA MAA/2/1/3 ii.
[169] Shamba = farm, garden, plot of cultivated ground (Swahili).
[170] I have some photocopies of shamba passes, the earliest one of 1914 (someone claimed to have seen a shamba pass of 1905; however, I have not seen it). The shamba passes with new wording were apparently issued from 1926 (see Major Edwards' memorandum, 1936, Kenya National Archives (KNA) RCA (MAA) – 2/1/3 ii.
[171] Parsons 1997: 91. See also Johnson 2009: 119.
[172] This document is mentioned in a letter from District Commissioner to Provincial Commissioner, 23/9/31, KNA PC/CP.9/15/3. I have not been able to find this document in the archives.

soldier was given a certain amount of land, 1.3 hectares, or 'so-many' acres, and that each family was obligated to keep 10 goats, but there is no written evidence to support this claim.

The question whether the Kibera land belongs to the Nubis or not, whether it was given to them for ever, would crop up again and again, and would be the cause of dispute between the Nubis and the Kenya Governments up to today.

The first years in Kibera, 1904-1918

In principle, only demobilised or retired ("time-expired") soldiers with at least 12 years of service in the KAR were allowed to settle in Kibera, and only with an official shamba pass. Although official settlement in Kibera was allowed from 1912, it is unlikely that Nubis would *not* have settled there from the beginning: probably some informal settlement of the area close to the barracks took place from 1904: "Sudanese families appear to have taken residence on it from that date". There was much more space in Kibera than in the barracks, and ample opportunity for cultivation. Moreover, many soldiers had more than one wife, so needed additional space for their other families.[173] Settlement may have been by demobilised and retired soldiers and their families, but it is actually more likely that families of active soldiers settled there first, since the new barracks were for active soldiers. Retired soldiers would have settled earlier, and not have moved immediately with the battalion to the new barracks.

Over the years (between 1912-1934), only 291 shamba passes were to be issued, but some shamba passes were given to Nubis with as little as 3 years of military service and an increasing number of people would settle in Kibera without any permit at all: the sons of Sudanese permit holders would marry and build their own house in Kibera without actual permit, retired Nubis from other Nubi villages in Kenya would also move to Kibera and settle there without permit, and also some local people looking for land, work, or a place to stay.[174] Most (ex-)soldiers settling in Kibera were Nubi;

[173] Information from informants in Kibera. The quote is from the "Report on an economic and social survey of the Sudanese settlement at Kibera", by Colchester, the Municipal Native Affairs officer, and Deverell, Social Welfare officer, 31/07/1944. KNA RCA (MAA) – 2/1/3 ii. See also letter of Union of Sudanese to General Secretary, 24/2/38, same KNA file, and Kenya Land Commission report, Evidence Vol 1, p 1161.
[174] "Kibera survey report" by Deverell & Colchester, 1944; Parsons 1997: 93.

about ten soldiers of other ethnic groups were given official permission to settle in Kibera: some 'natives of Abyssinia, Congo, Tanganyika, Nyasaland and the coast'[175] – the ones that remained in Kibera, assimilated into the Nubi community.

Photo 1: Young Nubi soldier with his equipment (early 20th century). Photo from Kibera.

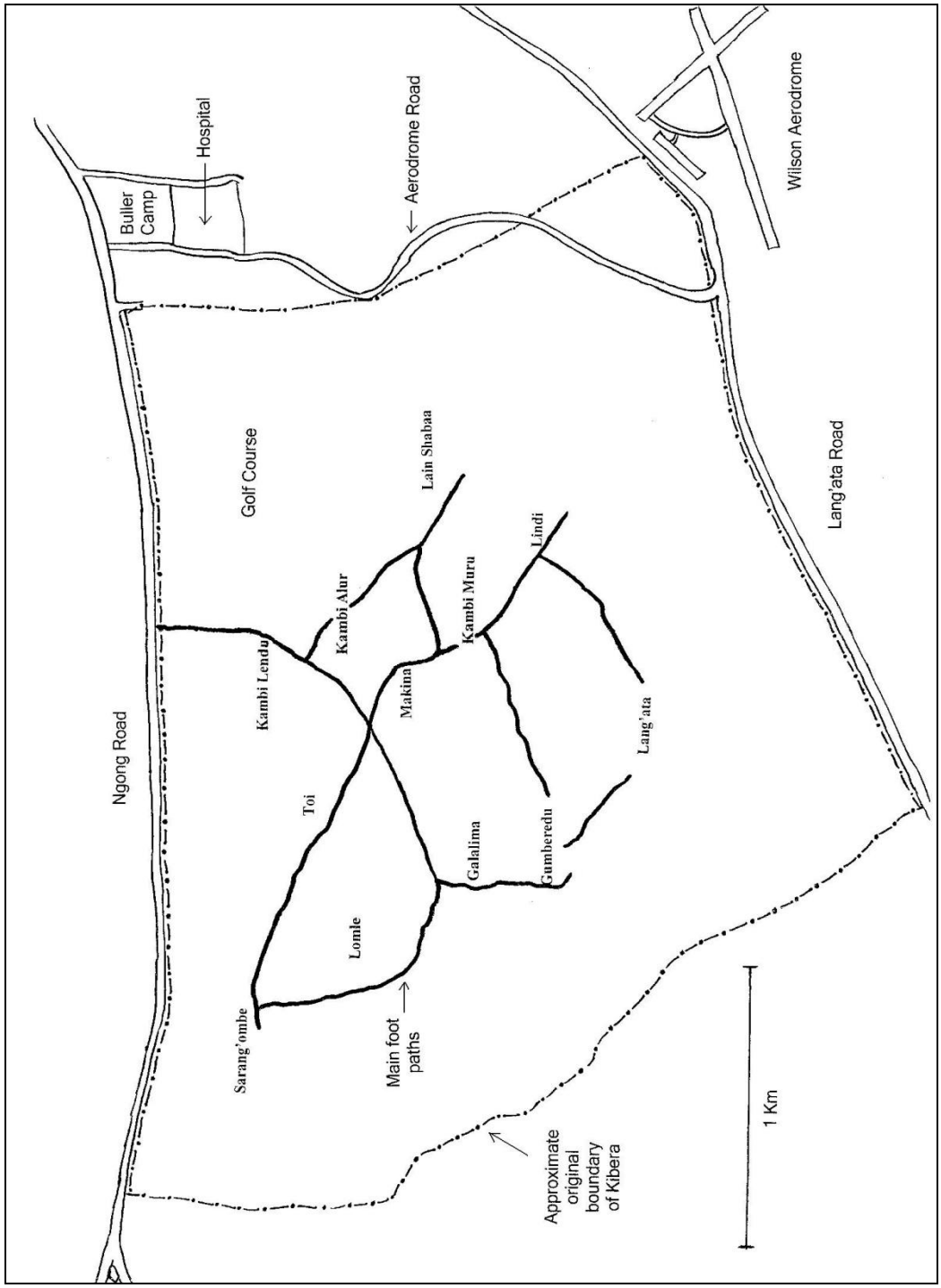
[175] "Report of an investigation", by La Fontaine, 13/11/1947, KNA MAA 2/5/172/iii.

The first years people lived near the barracks in a small settlement called "Kambi KAR" or "KAR shamba" (near to where now the City Mortuary is). Over the years they probably spread out over Kibera, moving further away from the barracks. Most likely a major movement took place from 1912, when settlement was officially approved, and the Nubis were told to "make their own selection within specified areas". Of the 291 shamba passes ever issued, 101 were given out in 1913.[176] The Nubis settled in small villages, or rather clusters of compounds, in the higher parts of Kibera, often together with relatives and people of the same original Sudanese ethnic group.[177] The sloping land towards the rivers was used for agriculture, while livestock was grazed further away. Makina became the main village in Kibera, situated near the main road passing through Kibera, where the weekly market was held. Some areas were inhabited by only a few families, like Lain Shabaa (the shooting range[178]), Galalima and Gumberedu (see map 3 below).

Many of the Nubi men were in the army, and during World War I many veterans and younger Nubis joined the army. After the war, there was large-scale demobilisation and the army gradually lost its appeal as an employer. The younger generation, instead of joining the KAR, increasingly looked for work in Nairobi town, as clerks or guards, like many of their retired and demobilised fathers; others went into business, some also opening shops in Kibera.[179]

[176] Major Edwards' Memorandum, 1936, p3; Kibera survey report, p2.
[177] Chapter 3 on ethnic identity will provide more detailed information on this.
[178] From the Kinubi word *shabaa*, meaning 'to aim, so shoot'.
[179] See also Moyse-Bartlett: 154-7.

Map 3: The Nubi villages of Kibera, late 1930s (map by author).



Leadership and authority in the community was provided by the councils of elders (*majlish shu'uba* or *majlish shauri*)[180]. There were several of these councils in Kibera, each covering one or more villages, solving problems and guiding the people.[181] The highest-ranking army officers (there were a number of Regimental Sergeant-Majors in the community) were the natural leaders in Kibera; they were often also wealthier than the others. Around 1919 the first Liwali (chief or headman) was appointed, representing the Nubi community, and overseeing Kibera on behalf of the government.[182] There was also a *majlish* for the whole of Kibera, possible created by one of the Liwalis, with weekly meetings, and open to all people.[183]

The Nubis are Sunni Muslims, and, as Islam in Africa often tolerates 'continuation of traditional beliefs and practice, alongside its own', they also maintained a number of their traditional tribal customs and rituals.[184] Most Nubi children went to the Koranic school (madrasa) from an early age, but secular education was not considered to be very important: as one old man explained "education of this world serves you only for this world, whereas education of the other (after)world, serves you in the other world, and that is much more important". Secular education was also avoided out of fear for Christian influence – 'imagine the consternation when the children would come home singing Christian hymns!'.[185]
The boys spent much of their free time hunting and roaming around Kibera, and were expected to join the army. Several old Nubis recounted how the British, at the traditional *dholuka* dances, surrounded the dance area to catch the most promising boys for the army (and this usually with the silent approval of the boys' fathers). Nubi girls were mostly kept secluded inside the compound; they were trained to be good wives, learning to make the traditional handicrafts (mats, food covers), and cook the traditional food. Nubi women were expected to be quiet and obedient; they were largely confined to the homestead. Marriages were organised by the parents and

[180] From the Kinubi '*shayba*' (plural *shiyuba*), respectful term to address an old man (Wa7).
[181] Cemiride: 33-4; informant Wa5.
[182] The Liwali was probably more of an informal 'sub-chief' as he fell under the administrative officer in charge of Kibera. The first Liwali, Mohamed Mursal, served from approx. 1919 to 1936, followed for only a few years by Mzee Aminala Mohamed, and then by Suleman Ahmed from 1938/9 till his death in 1968, around 100 years old (for more information on Suleman Ahmed's life, see Liversidge & Mackenzie 2004). See also Clark 1975: 73.
[183] The Liwali was probably chosen by the Kibera *majlish*. It's unclear when exactly this weekly meeting was established. Informants Wa5, M16 and others.
[184] Soghayroun: 166-7. See chapter 3 for more information on the Nubis and Islam.
[185] Informants M3, M4. See also Hansen 1991: 577.

strictly within the Nubi community – from within Kibera or from another Nubi village in Kenya or Uganda. Once married, a man could look for a second wife of his own choice; she could be non-Nubi, and often was – many soldiers continued taking wives (by force or not) from ethnic groups in areas where they stayed for some years on a tour of duty, like Turkana or Somalia; a number of these would come to Kibera, and "become Nubi".[186] According to numerous older informants, having two Nubi wives was 'asking for trouble'; they would fight for supremacy in the compound. However, a Nubi woman would not mind having a co-wife of lower status, preferably a non-Nubi, whom she could dominate and who could help her in the house and compound. One elderly Nubi described the chance meeting he had in Turkana with unknown relatives: he was in the market place when a woman stopped him and said he reminded her of someone – to his surprise, she then started speaking Kinubi with her mother. The mother had been married to his grandfather… They had learned Kinubi while living in the *Kambi Jeshi* (military barracks) in Turkana; she had come to Kibera only once.[187]

The agricultural work in Kibera was mainly done by landless Kikuyu or Meru shamba boys looking for a way to survive. Since they were working for the Nubis, these shamba boys were in principle the only 'outsiders' (non-Nubi) allowed to stay in Kibera.

Kibera under pressure, 1918-1945

From the 1920s the Nubis were well established in Kibera. They lived scattered around the area, growing their own food in their shambas, keeping livestock, doing a bit of business. Additional income came from jobs in town: the Nubis were by many regarded as a "better class African", "with a capacity above that of the ordinary African"[188], and it was easy for them to get a job; many Nubis worked for the Kenya Bus Service (from the mid-1930s), the Police or as clerk in the Ministry of Labour.[189] At home the women distilled their "Nubian Gin", for the (mainly) men to enjoy, and adding some income to the household. In general, life in Kibera was very good indeed.

[186] See also Parsons 1999: 149. Chapter 3 deals in more detail with these changes in ethnic identity, 'becoming Nubi'.
[187] Informant M1 and others.
[188] The "Kibera survey report", p. 2.
[189] Informants; Obudho & Aduwo: 54.

The population of Nairobi continued to grow rapidly: from 20,000 in 1920, to less than 30,000 in 1926, to 33,000 inhabitants in 1930, to 49,600 in 1936 to 108,900 in 1944.[190] The population in Kibera increased gradually but remained low. After World War I more demobilised Nubi soldiers settled in Kibera, also some coming from other Nubi villages like Eldama Ravine. When in 1927 the African settlement of Kileleshwa (also in Nairobi) was demolished, some Nubi families living there moved to Kibera. There were also Nubis moving out of Kibera: a certain Juma Birinji for example went to Kisumu in the early 1930s, because he could get more land there – he sold his house and land to another Nubi. Or like Doka Fataalbab, who apparently did not get along with his brother and moved to Kitale to live with his 2nd wife. In 1934 the Nubi population in Kibera was estimated to be 1500-1700.[191] Other people, 'outsiders', started moving into Kibera as well – some Kikuyus looking for land for survival, as well as shamba boys, house helps and other staff and servants working for the Nubis. Furthermore, there was some intermarriage with (mainly) women of local (mainly Kikuyu) ethnic groups. But this was all on a small scale and the Nubis were firmly 'in charge' in Kibera – they were officially still the only ones allowed to live there.

The influx of outsiders increased further when in 1928 Kibera was quietly handed over from military supervision to civil administration – it now fell under the Nairobi District Commissioner, not the Nairobi City Council, even though the municipal boundary was expanded again, now including a small part of Kibera (part of Sarang'ombe and Toi[192]). Under civil administration, control of the area became even slacker than it had been under the KAR. As a result Kibera became more attractive to other Africans (non-Nubis) looking for work and accommodation (which remained in short supply) in Nairobi, and opportunities to survive; it is possible that many of them had to survive through illegal activities like prostitution and theft.[193]

[190] See Ferraro: 1; Hake: 52-53; Morgan: 100; Obudho & Aduwo: 58.
[191] This figure is based on a census done in 1934, mentioned in the "Kibera survey report" of 1944. I did not manage to find a copy of the 1934 census, but its information was probably used to make the map of Kibera of 1934 that I found in the same KNA file showing all houses with numbers, demarcated *shambas* and names of all heads of households (of which quite a few were unknown to old Nubis and presumably moved out of Kibera in the 1930s).
[192] Carter Commission 1933, Evidence Vol 1, p 1159-60.
[193] Parsons 1997: 92-3.

Kibera became also known for its illicit liquor, the Nubian gin. Possibly already before the 1920s the Nubis had started to commercialise their Nubian gin; they produced increasing quantities of their traditional liquor, drawing many people (mainly 'natives') to Kibera, especially in weekends.[194] Despite 'liquor raids' and increased fines and prison sentences, the production of Nubian Gin increased further during the 1930s. It provided a much-needed source of income for an increasing number of Nubi families: though the Nubis produced enough food in their shambas to survive, their standard of living was affected by the economic depression that hit Kenya in the 1930s.[195] Some Nubis, businessmen or with jobs in the army or government, were doing well, but many others were unemployed. However, despite the economic depression, the Nubis never got much involved in supplying food stuffs to the Nairobi population.[196] With the amount of land they had at their disposal, located so close to town, there would have been plenty of opportunities. The only product, apart from alcohol, that attracted their interest, was meat; more than half of the approximately 20 shops in Kibera were also used as butcheries, though the authorities suspected that at least part of these butcheries were owned by Kikuyus, and run in the names of Nubis (this was not the case, some older Nubis insisted). As Kibera fell outside the municipal boundaries, butchers were 'not required to be licensed, as they supply only Africans'. The meat did not need to be inspected by municipal authorities and therefore could be sold cheaply. Much of the meat went into town to supply butchers there, or was bought in Kibera by non-Kibera residents.[197] This lack of interest in supplying town with other produce may (partly) be explained by the income generated by the Nubian gin – there was no need for extra income.

Kibera's bad reputation and subsequent complaints by the European community urged the authorities to take steps to relocate the Nubis and demolish the settlement, like other African settlements before. The idea of using the sons of the ex-soldiers as the next army recruits had never materialised, so one of the reasons for Kibera's existence had disappeared. The value of the land, located so close to town, was of course another important factor in the proposed relocation of the Nubis – with Nairobi growing fast, it had soon become clear that the Kibera land, even if located

[194] See chapter 4 on the history of Nubian gin in Kibera.
[195] The "Kibera Survey Report", Deverell & Colchester, 1944, pp 5; White 1990.
[196] See also the "Kibera survey report" 1944.
[197] "Kibera Survey Report", 1944, p3; "Report on Kibera, 1945" by Superintendent Kitching, 12/12/1945, KNA RCA (MAA)2/1/3; "Kibera village", report by Senior Health Inspector, 1956, copy from Kibera; informant Wa7, a former Kibera Nubi butcher.

outside the official city boundaries, was too precious to be used for an African settlement, and that removing the Nubis would provide valuable building land for the growing city.[198] From as early as 1919, when Nairobi's boundaries were changed for the first time, the colonial administration tried to relocate the Nubis to areas further away from Nairobi – as the Nairobi District Commissioner wrote: "I admire the Nubi, but would like to see him happily settled say 10 miles from Nairobi".[199]

In the 1930s several areas around Nairobi, and as far as Thika (about 40 kms from Nairobi), were selected and investigated. However, all these options for resettlement of the Nubis away from Nairobi had to be discarded, for a multitude of reasons: wildlife conservation, resistance from local ethnic groups or European residents, unsuitability for farming, insufficient rainfall, the owners refused to sell, or because it was going to be too expensive to compensate the Masai.[200] Furthermore, the Nubis did not make it easier for the British to find suitable land: they did not mind moving, but insisted on farmland and pasture, and a place near enough to Nairobi to continue their jobs in town.[201] Moreover, they benefited from the lack of Government control in Kibera and the possibilities for the Nubian Gin trade; it is likely that they were unwilling to move just anywhere, unless possibilities for similar trade existed, to equal the profits made in Kibera – this basically meant staying near Nairobi.

The Nubis were also active complaining and fighting for what they saw as their rights; many British administrators disliked them for it[202], but they had powerful protectors in their previous army commanders, some now Lords back home in England.[203] Many thought the Nubis deserved respect in view of their past military record and support to the British colonial administration: 'it would be a grave mistake in policy not to recognise the loyal services rendered by the Sudanese ex-KAR soldiers, by some generous settlement in regard to land'; the Nubis gratefully exploited these

[198] See letter DC Hosking to Commissioner of Local Government, Lands & Settlement, 13/5/1931, KNA PC/CP.9/15/3.
[199] Letter from Chief Secretary to KAR Assistant Commandant, 7/6/1919 (KNA PC/CP.9/15/3); DC Nairobi Hosking, to PC Nyeri, 27/4/31, KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3/i; see also Parsons 1997: 91.
[200] See also Parsons 1997.
[201] Letter Union of Sudanese to Major-General Giffard, 24/2/1938; letter Nubi leaders to Chief Native Commissioner, 15/8/44, both KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3/ii.
[202] Parsons 1997: 101.
[203] For example Lord Lugard. See also Major Edwards' 1936 Memorandum.

sentiments.[204] So the Nubis remained in their privileged position in Nairobi, living near the city centre, enjoying the advantages of both rural and urban life.

At the same time, another process was taking place in Kibera: a reduction of the land. Being so close to Nairobi, the Kibera area was a logical choice for expansion of the town. Despite Nubi protests, large parts of Kibera were hived off over the years, starting in the late 1920s with the expansion of the (Royal) Nairobi Golf Club[205] (from 216 to 429 acres) and in 1937/8 the construction of the new Aerodrome Road. In most cases the land that was used was sparsely inhabited and usually did not require the large scale movement of people; only the re-alignment of the railway cutting through Kibera (1948) entailed the demolishing of 16 Nubi houses and relocation of people; alternative housing built for the relocated Nubis by the Railway Administration was refused (they were "constructed to an exceptionally low standard" and walls already falling down a year after construction[206]), as was (initially) the monetary compensation.[207] In other cases the land was used by the Nubis for livestock or as shamba, but monetary compensation was only given for houses: in the case of shamba or pasture, the Nubis just had to look for another place. In 1947, the Kibera area had shrunk from the original 4198 acres to about 1700 acres.[208]

But with the British looking for alternative space to move the Nubis to, and the hiving off of Kibera land, the Nubis realised that their claim on Kibera may not be as firm as they had thought[209]; the old arrangement of giving land to retired soldiers as their pension did not seem to work like before. The Nubis looked again for support from their former superiors, and sent letters and petitions to different levels of the administration.[210] They also testified for the Kenya Land Commission, which was to review all land claims in Kenya (1932), but their claim to Kibera was repudiated: Kibera was considered Crown Land and the Nubis "tenants at will of the Crown, liable to termination at any time". The Commission's conclusion was that

[204] Letter PC La Fontaine to Colonial Secretary, 7/6/40, KNA RCA MAA/2/1/3ii.
[205] The small Nairobi Golf Club was established in 1906 and located along Ngong Road, in Toi; the club was granted the title 'royal' in 1936. See also Royal Nairobi Golf Club 1996.
[206] Letter Deverell (Social Welfare Officer), 24/9/1949. Compare D. M. Anderson: 153.
[207] "Notes on a preliminary survey of the proposal to reconstitute the Kibera African Settlement Area", by E. Fox, District Officer, 18/5/1955, KNA MAA 7/458/314, p 3.
[208] 'Report of an investigation...', La Fontaine, 13/11/1947, KNA MAA 2/5/172/iii.
[209] Letter Nubi leaders to Chief Native Commissioner, 15/8/44.
[210] See for example the 1936 memorandum by Major Edwards, and there are many letters from the Union of Sudanese and others in the same KNA file.

the Nubis were only given permission to live temporarily ('their lifetime') in Kibera: to build temporary houses[211] and use the land for agriculture and livestock. The Commission did not agree that the land was given as a form of pension (that practice did not exist anymore in the 1930s) since the Nubis had received a gratuity on retirement, nor that all the Kibera land was for the Nubis' use, since also the KAR's shooting range ('Lain Shabaa') was within. The Nubis' only consolation was that the Commission did not agree with an outright eviction, and recognised their right to compensation with suitable land if they were to be moved from Kibera (the necessity of which did not convince the Commission). But they were also denied the right to build more houses in Kibera, and were expected to die out slowly, as only the ex-soldiers and their wives/widows would have rights in Kibera; their children would have to move elsewhere after both parents had died, but be compensated for the house that would be demolished.[212] Kibera's illegal (non-Nubi) residents had no rights of course, and were not eligible for any compensation.[213] Up to 1944, apparently 41 houses were demolished under that arrangement, but none of the older Nubis seem to remember this, nor do they remember Nubis (children of the original pass holder) having to leave Kibera – it is likely that those children simply built other houses elsewhere in Kibera.[214]

During the following years no suitable land could be found to move the Nubis to. With World War II about to start, the "Kibera issue" was forgotten, and laid to rest for the time being. However, the government saw no reason to support the Nubis or make their life easier: the liquor raids in Kibera continued, and no permission was given to supply clean piped water to the area[215] with the excuse that "it is undesirable that the settlement there should be permanent" – it was thought that neglecting the settlement would eventually force out the inhabitants.[216]

[211] The rule of temporary houses, built of mud and wattle, has been maintained up to today.
[212] Kenya Land Commission Report, 1933, p 170-4.
[213] See for example also a letter from Logan, Act. Commissioner for Local Government, Lands & Settlement, 10/8/1931 (KNA PC/CP.9/15/3).
[214] "Kibera survey report", p 1.
[215] People in Kibera used water from the rivers and wells (closer to home); in the 1940s apparently two water taps (near the DO's office) existed where long queues waited from 3 AM. Water selling became a big business in the 1950s, traders transporting water all over Kibera, but this stopped after the cholera outbreak in the early 1970s, when the Nairobi City Council finally provided piped water to the Kibera population.
[216] Letter DC Nairobi to Director Medical Services, 1941, quoted in Parsons 1997: 103-5.

Despite all this, life in Kibera had remained good for the Nubis: there was still enough space for livestock and plenty of food from the *shambas*; even with reduced employment, there were still men with jobs in town, and additional income from Nubian Gin to maintain a reasonable standard of living.

Photo 2: Well-to-do Nubis, probably late 1930s–early 1940s.[217] *Photo from Kibera.*

[217] These people were not rich because of the Nubian gin; one of them (standing left) is Ramadhan Jabir, a businessman from Kambi Lendu. Opinions in Kibera were divided about who the others are: the lady may be Botul, Ramadhan's wife, or Dawa Absura, whose family was originally from Uganda. The man standing on the right may be Abdalla Sikanasara, a supervisor at the Nairobi City Council's Public Works Department.

The influx of 'outsiders', 1945 - 1963

After the war the Nubis that had fought with the British army returned to Kibera and life continued as before. The Nubi population in Kibera increased slowly, from the estimated 1500-1700 in 1934 to probably slightly below 3000 at Independence (1963).[218] In between, a number of surveys and censuses were done in Kibera, with varying degrees of accuracy. In 1945 a total of 2023 Nubis were counted[219], but in other reports[220] a total of 2175 was used, while referring to the same census. In 1948, 1618 Nubis were counted but their total was estimated to be at least 400 more.[221] In 1955 a total of 2084 Nubis were thought to live in Kibera.[222]

The problem with all these censuses is that they were probably all rather inaccurate. Nubis would move in and out of Kibera and be absent for long times – sometimes they were counted, sometimes not. In his survey of 1948, Superintendant Kitching estimates that more than 400 Nubis were absent, many of them away to attend "a large wedding at Mombasa". There were also Nubis living elsewhere for work in the army or as businessman, but keeping a house and family in Kibera; there were 'adopted children' (often suspected to be simply employees or tenants), Nubi women in prison, and women from other ethnic groups living with Nubis as concubine. There were also many Nubis living in Kibera without official permission, mostly having moved in from other Nubi villages in Kenya; in 1945 this group of unauthorised Nubis was thought to be almost 75% of the total.[223] For obvious reasons, these people would not necessarily be keen on participating in a census. All this made it difficult to do a reliable census of Kibera's population.

What is clear though from these surveys and censuses is that the number of Nubis increased only slowly, while the number of 'outsiders' grew much faster – from a few hundred in the 1930s to probably more than 6000 at Independence. In the mid-1940 the number of outsiders in Kibera was thought to be around 317-600, mainly Kikuyu and Meru shamba boys.

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[218] Amis 1983: 115; Clark 1978/9: 36.
[219] "Report on Kibera, 1945" by Kitching.
[220] Report by La Fontaine of 13/11/1947; "Destitution at Kibera", report by Mr Charles Philips of the Social Welfare Office, 1947. KNA MAA 2/5/172/iii.
[221] "Census of August 23rd , 1948", by Superintendent Kitching, 13/9/1948, KNA RCA (MAA) – 2/1/3 ii.
[222] Census done in 1955 by Kibera Superintendent Major Small, quoted in "Notes on a preliminary survey...", by E. Fox, DO, 1955.
[223] Clark 1970:1; Parsons: 93; Kitching's "Report on Kibera, 1945" p 2.

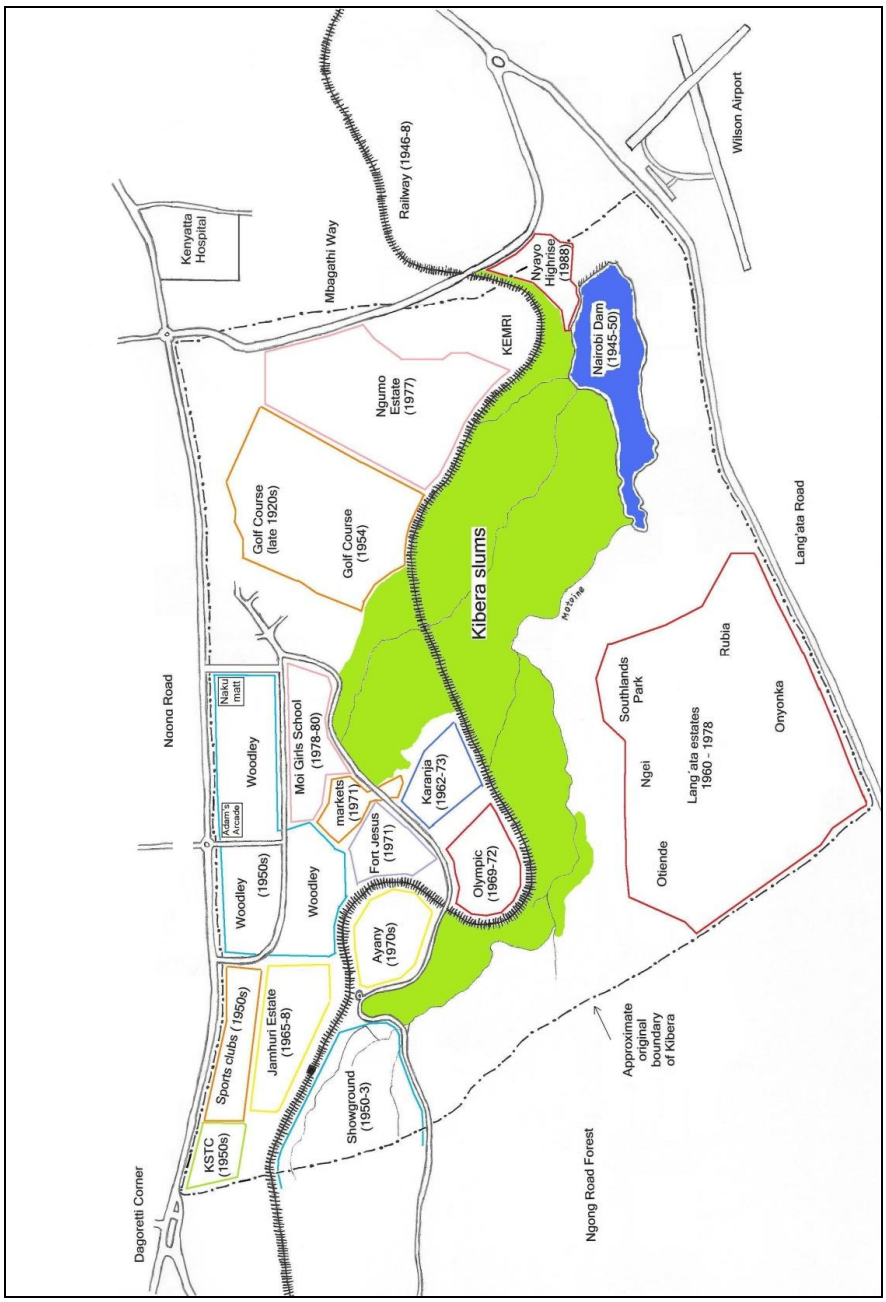
Kitching's 1948 census shows suddenly 1472 outsiders (which he still considers an underestimate) from many different ethnic groups, mainly Kenyan (mostly Kikuyu and Luo), but also many Ugandans and Tanzanians.[224] This is a huge increase from the previous figures, which were undoubtedly underestimated as well – large numbers of Africans moved to Nairobi during the 1940s (the World War II economy), and they would all need cheap accommodation. Somewhere in the early 1950s, the Nubis became a minority in Kibera.

However, the Nubis were hardly aware of the presence of so many outsiders, who mostly lived in the areas away from the Nubi homesteads, in the forest or in the shamba areas. Moreover, these outsiders were looked down upon and avoided as much as possible. The Nubis call "non-Nubi" derogatorily "*labi*" – the root of the word comes from the Arabic word for 'slave'; in Kinubi it means '*mshenzi*', 'an uncultured person' (Swahili), someone of lower status, rather than 'slave'. In daily life, contacts with these outsiders were kept to a minimum, and intermarriage was discouraged (though existed and increasingly so). The outsiders living in Kibera were not involved in the social and cultural life of the Nubis: the communities co-existed almost without any contact.

Meanwhile, the hiving off of Kibera land continued like before: the Nairobi Dam was built right after the war; in 1948 the railway line to Uganda was removed from the city centre and realigned to go around Nairobi, cutting through Kibera, where a small railway station was built as well; Woodley estate was built in the early 1950s; in 1952 land along Ngong road was given to some sports clubs (now the Impala and Harlequin Sports Clubs), and in 1950-53 the Royal Agricultural Society of Kenya built their new Agricultural Showground in a part of Sarang'ombe; in the early 1950s the Public Works Department had 150 African employees living in the PW housing at the end of what is now Karanja Road.[225] And like before, the Nubis continued to protest, to no avail, against the government using "their" land for its own purposes. Around Independence less than 1200 acres remained of the original 4198 acres of Kibera land.[226]

[224] Report La Fontaine 13/11/1947, p 5; Census of August 23rd, 1948", by Kitching; Parsons 1997: 108.
[225] See website http:/haibafoundation.org/ni/the_land_question.html - the Report on Kibera by the Senior Health Inspector, 1956.
[226] Cemiride 2002; see also Memorandum of "the Kibera Committee" to PM Harold Macmillan, 3/1/1963.

Map 4: Reduction of Kibera land, 1920-1990 (map by author).[227]



[227] Only the main areas are shown. The dates in the map are not all accurate due to contradictory information; in some cases it took years to finalise a project, certainly if implemented in several phases.

The relocation of the Nubis came also back on the agenda after the war. It was a time when the colonial government had started to invest more in social welfare and African housing, in "response to an emerging consciousness in Government circles that more should be done to provide for the social welfare of Nairobi's African workers, and to produce a more stable and productive workforce". New low-income housing estates were created, like Ziwani, Starehe and Kaloleni; Nairobi was growing, and became more and more urbanised. For Kibera this interest in social welfare resulted in a report on "destitution at Kibera" and an "economic and social survey", both of which were generally sympathetic towards the Nubis.[228]

With Kibera under civic administration, the policy had been that "no further grants should be made to discharged soldiers" in order to achieve the "gradual elimination of this settlement".[229] This 'gradual elimination' however never happened: many older Nubi men married younger women, often non-Nubi, to take care of them, and these women had the same right to stay in Kibera till they died. It was evident that Kibera would not disappear easily: "it may be 60 years or more from now before free settlement rights die out".[230] In 1944 it was therefore agreed to recognise the permanency of Kibera, if the Nubi community could be concentrated into a planned and orderly settlement with modern facilities and services. The area could then be handed over to the Nairobi Municipal Council[231] and supplied with water and other amenities. This set off a new round of efforts to relocate the Nubis, though this time the Nubis working in town could choose to remain within the Kibera area, though concentrated in one corner, on small plots; others could move further away, if they wanted, to an area outside Nairobi, large enough for agriculture and their livestock.

To achieve this, it was imperative to control Kibera better. In 1945 a European Superintendent (directly under the District Commissioner), Captain Kitching, was recruited to oversee Kibera, clear out unauthorised residents, control unauthorised house construction, ensure that no permanent buildings were erected, and to organise the proposed resettlement of the

[228] D.M. Anderson: 145-9; the "Kibera survey report" of 1944, and the "Destitution at Kibera" report of 1947 done by the Social Welfare Adviser Charles Philip.
[229] Letter Colonial Secretary to Commanding Officer of 3rd battalion KAR, 19/3/1928 (KNA PC/CP.9/15/3).
[230] Parsons 1997: 93; "Kibera survey report" p 1; "Destitution at Kibera" p 1.
[231] Kibera was still under the District Commissioner of Nairobi; Nairobi City Council refused to accept the area as part of the municipality unless the "Nubi problem" was solved, that is, once the area was physically re-planned and the inhabitants resettled and compensated.

Nubis. Kitching must have had a frustrating job, trying to achieve all that. Demolishing houses and stopping illegal construction, he became very unpopular with the Nubis.[232] And in the end, most of his work was for nothing, because the planned restructuring of Kibera and relocation of the Nubis did not happen: there were many delays due to financial constraints (Britain was economically in a very difficult situation after World War II[233]) and problems selecting a suitable area. Moreover, it appeared to be extremely difficult to control Kibera. First of all, Kibera was big and the villages and houses scattered; some unauthorised houses were demolished but at the same time many more were constructed unnoticed – possibly partly to replace the demolished ones.[234] In 1945 the Nairobi District Commissioner was ordered to stop removal of unauthorised houses of Nubis, not to "cause grave hardship on these unfortunate people".[235]

Controlling illegal residents appeared equally difficult: they did not have a permit to live in Kibera, but could not be prosecuted for unlawful occupation of Crown Land if they were accepted by the permit holders (the Nubi ex-soldiers) as "lodgers".[236] Several cases taken to court ended in a defeat for the authorities: the Attorney General ruled that the charges were not legal. Unwilling to burn their fingers again, the authorities stopped prosecuting people: "It is high time that a thorough clean up of the village was undertaken, but without the legal means and backing very little can be done". Furthermore, the fact that these illegal residents had lived there for so many years made it increasingly difficult to just evict them, without compensation or alternative place for settlement.[237] An attempt by the government in 1949 to issue new permits to all Nubis, their staff and visitors (each group a permit with a different colour) also ended in failure; the Nubis

[232] See for example letter of Sudanese Association to Chief Secretary, and Kitching's defence, unknown dates (1946?), KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3 ii.
[233] Throup 1987: 19-21.
[234] In 1945 it was found that 61 of the 295 houses had been built without authorisation. See Parsons 1997: 106. See also Superintendent Kitching's list of houses to be demolished; June 1946, KNA RCA (MAA) – 2/1/3 ii.
[235] Memorandum of DC to Commissioner for Local Government, Lands and Settlement, 1/3/1945.
[236] See Memorandum by Superintendent Kitching, 20/10/1949, KNA RCA (MAA) – 2/1/3 ii.
[237] "Report of an investigation" by La Fontaine, 13/11/1947, p5; Carter Commission report, 1933, p 171; La Fontaine, report 13/11/1947, p2.

simply refused to accept the new permits, and threatened with a civil disobedience campaign.[238]

Who then were all these illegal (and some legal) residents, these 'outsiders'? First of all they were the (mainly Kikuyu, Kamba and Meru) shamba boys and house helps that worked for the Nubis, many of whom had lived there for many years, and had meanwhile married and had families. They usually lived in a hut in the shamba, sometimes in a shed in the compound. There was also an increasing number of landless Kikuyus looking for a place to live, after having been pushed off settlers' land[239]; some were given permission to live there in return for part of the crops they harvested. They often lived in the more isolated parts of Kibera, on the slopes, away from the Nubi homesteads. Another group was the prostitutes and illicit alcohol brewers that often just lived somewhere, in the forest, in an empty house, or as concubine or caretaker of an old Nubi. Some rented rooms from Nubis: according to Kitching, Nubi women were "not averse to renting rooms to other tribes for that purpose [prostitution]". There were also other 'undesirables' in Kibera, but most were not really living there – these were people that would come during the day to "take advantage of the soldiers and houseboys visiting Kibera in search of amusement, licit and illicit". There were also the traders: men selling clothes, utensils, and (mainly Kikuyu) women selling vegetables and other produce (and they may have also been involved in prostitution). The women would come walking from Kiambu, which provided most of Nairobi with vegetables and staples. Traders did not need permits to be in Kibera, since they only stayed for the day: non-residents had to be out by 6 pm (and this government-imposed curfew was actively supported by the Nubi community, and according to several informants, especially the Nubi boys liked to beat up 'brother *labi*' who was found in Kibera at odd hours).[240]

The largest group of outsiders staying in Kibera were the African workers looking for accommodation near town, or near the industrial area where many of them worked; even if it was forbidden to live there without a special pass, Kibera gradually filled up with tenants. The first tenants may

[238] See 'Suggestions for rules to be issued by PC Central Province' (no date, no author mentioned); letter DC Nairobi to Chief Native Commissioner, 7/11/49; letter PC La Fontaine to Chief Native Commissioner, 10/11/49, all from KNA PC/CP.9/15/5.
[239] Maxon: 227-9.
[240] Kitching's "Report on Kibera", 12/12/1945, p 3; "Kibera survey report" 1944, p 10; Robertson 1997. Informants M1, M16, M4, Wa8.

have lived in Kibera already in the 1920s[241]; most probably some were there in the 1930s, and certainly in the 1940s. In the early days, accommodation in Kibera was not in large supply, but it was cheap, and initially sometimes even free of charge, a favour rather than business. With the growing interest of other Africans to live in Kibera, some Nubis added an extra room to their house, or added an outside door to one of the rooms in their house (while closing the inside door) as a private entrance for a tenant. The first tenants were mainly male staff of the white people living along Ngong Road, in Kilimani or Karen; some could not find accommodation in the servants' quarters (female staff got priority); others might have a room in the servants' quarters but no space for the whole family – they kept their wives and children in Kibera, while visiting them at night or in the weekends. Another group of tenants may well have been prostitutes, as claimed by Kitching.[242] Apparently during World War II, soldiers from the Lang'ata barracks kept their wives in Kibera[243] (these may have been prostitutes as well). Part of Kitching's (underestimated) 1472 'non-Sudanese' must have been tenants. Social Welfare Officer (and former PC) La Fontaine writes in 1949 that they believe "there are about 1000 lodgers in Kibera.[244]

Nairobi continued to grow fast: in the 1940s its population increased by 17% per year; the African population trebled between 1939 and 1952. The housing estates the Municipal Council had built were clearly insufficient, every year the deficit of housing increased, and all African settlements were overcrowded. By 1947 the housing shortage in Nairobi was desperate, and a growing number of people moved into Kibera: there was simply no alternative housing for Africans to be found in Nairobi.[245] Moreover, Kibera was close to town and cheap compared to other African settlements in town.[246] More Nubis started building extra rooms specifically for rental purposes; some may have needed the money to survive, certainly if they were not involved in the Nubian gin business. Like all other houses in Kibera, the newly built rooms had to be "temporary structures", made of sticks and mud, with a corrugated iron roof – these would usually be constructed within the compound, but at a distance from the main (Nubi)

[241] See D.M. Anderson: 141.
[242] Kitching's "Report on Kibera, 1945", p3.
[243] Parsons 1997: 104.
[244] Letter La Fontaine (Social Welfare Officer) to Chief Native Commissioner, 10/11/1949, KNA PC/CP.9/15/5.
[245] Parsons 1997:110-1; Throup 1987: 171-90.
[246] In the 1940s rent levels were around 15-20 Ksh per room, in 1970 it was 30 Ksh (Amis 1983: 237), on average below rent levels reported for other African areas in Nairobi (see White 1990).

house, and with its own latrines, in order to maintain a social distance between landlord and tenants.[247] The Nubis would ask the Superintendent for permission to repair a house and then secretly add a few rooms to rent out. In the late 1940s, according to Kitching, "... any available space such as goat sheds and even chicken huts is being rented".[248]

World War II had been a prosperous time for many (rural) Africans due to high commodity prices (which they produced) and increased employment; the Nubis also benefited – the market for their Nubian gin had expanded enormously with so many soldiers in Nairobi. However, after the war African discontent grew rapidly: squatter cultivation was restricted, and forced labour increased, while population pressure in the native reserves rose. Wages in town fell behind price increases and inflation. Unemployment in town soared, and opportunities for educated Africans remained limited. Many of the urban migrants were landless Kikuyu (squatters squeezed off the European farms or from the native reserves)[249], ending up in the informal sector and crime. African discontent increased until it erupted in the Mau Mau civil war; the State of Emergency was declared on 20 October 1952.[250]

During April 1954, in a month-long operation dubbed "Operation Anvil", some 16,500 people, practically all Kikuyu, Meru and Embu, were removed from Nairobi and detained or (usually the dependents) taken to their native reserves.[251] During this operation, the Kikuyu-dominated low-income housing area of Mathare Valley was demolished. As a result, Kibera remained one of the few areas offering cheap accommodation for Africans. People from western Kenya and Kamba people came to replace the Kikuyu workers in Nairobi. Settlement in Kibera was henceforth apparently actively encouraged, it being considered a 'loyalist' area.[252] Moreover, Kibera was popular with the new migrants from mainly western Kenya, because it was relatively safe[253] – the influx created an additional market for rental rooms in Kibera, and was capitalised upon: Nubis started constructing more rooms.

[247] The very first tenants actually often lived within the Nubi house; the tenant's room's would get its own separate entrance.
[248] Memorandum by Kitching, 20/10/1949, KNA PC/CP.9/15/5.
[249] Around 55% of the Nairobi workforce was Kikuyu (White: 158).
[250] Bogonko: 58-80; Kanogo: 96-120; Maxon: 228-31; Throup 1978.
[251] See Clayton 1976: 25. White (1990: 193) mentions a total number of 30,000 arrested people (in one day).
[252] See Amis 1983: 152-3.
[253] Clark 1975: 7.

These were mainly Nubi women that invested the money they had earned with Nubian gin.

However, the special 'emergency powers' were also used in 1955 to evict Kikuyus from Kibera.[254] Did the authorities know that Kenyatta and other members of the Kenya African Union used to hold (before Mau Mau) secret meetings in Nubi houses[255] in Kibera, and hide there for police when necessary? The Nubis sympathised with the fight for Independence, though did not support the Mau Mau openly or actively.[256] Quite a number of Kikuyus hid in Kibera during Mau Mau, possibly a few hundred, but these were not necessarily militants; most of them were just ordinary people, employees of Nubis, tenants, or friends. They would put on an Islamic dress and change their name, to appear Nubi. Some were actually children of Nubis' friends and employees that were detained; they would grow up within the Nubi family, and pretend they were their (grand)children (quite a few of those children would stay with the Nubis after the Emergency and become part of the community). Others were Kikuyu girls that, looking for a safe place, married Nubis and actually "became Nubi".[257]

In the late 1950s, most Nubi families would have had a few tenants only, maybe 2-4, a few families maybe some more, some families none; it was still an "emerging small-scale rental sector". It was mainly the women, more enterprising than men and keen on ways of generating a steady income for the upkeep of the family, who built rental rooms. Having tenants was not considered 'dignified' and most Nubi men did therefore not bother much with room construction; many did not even have the money for it. Other Nubis, who did have money (businessmen, senior officers), were not interested in having tenants, they did not need the money. As Islam allows women to have their own money and property, they invested part of their Nubian gin profits in the construction of rooms, ultimately resulting in a large number of female structure owners in Kibera: "landladies" rather than landlords. There were high returns on investments in rental rooms: building 4-5 rooms would cost around 300 shillings, and this was earned back within a short time, even with rents as low as 15-20 Shillings/month.[258]

[254] Parsons 1997: 117-8. Informant NN2.
[255] Apparently at Khamis Juma's and Ahmed Koor's.
[256] Informants Wa8, Wa11.
[257] Information from numerous informants. Chapter 3 of this thesis deals specifically with ethnic identity and 'becoming Nubi'. See also Parsons 1997: 114-5.
[258] See also Amis 1983: 153-4; Amis 1984.

Nevertheless, the income it generated could not be compared to that of the Nubian gin.

Towards the end of the 1950s restrictions on African movements were relaxed and the migration rate to Nairobi increased. People from western Kenya preferred to live in Kibera because it was relatively safe and not a Kikuyu-dominated area. With the lifting of the State of Emergency in early 1960 the Kikuyu returned to Nairobi in great numbers; a number of them settled on empty land along the fringes of Kibera, including Kianda and the Lang'ata side.[259]

Though largely forgotten during the Emergency, the relocation of the Nubis cropped up again after Mau Mau. Due to the high cost of construction of the low-income estates and the heavy debt burden of the municipal council and the government, it had been proposed to focus on large-scale African-owned development.[260] In 1959 the government came with a new scheme, with 5 neighbourhoods to be constructed in Kibera's areas with a low population density, and given out on tenant-purchase or owner-builder basis. The idea of relocating the Nubis away from Nairobi was now completely discarded: they could stay in the new scheme planned within Kibera, the 'Kibera African Settlement Area', measuring approximately 500 acres.[261] However, in the new scheme there was no longer a provision for agriculture and the grazing of cattle. It was thought that if Government would be firm and reasonably generous over compensation and land grants, there would be no justifiable ground for complaints.[262]

In 1962/3 the first phase of the new scheme, Karanja (or 'Salama', as the Nubis called it), was completed; small but affordable houses, and built according to the construction standards of the day. However, not many Nubis were interested in moving there: they had to give up their big house and plots in Kibera in exchange for a small house in Karanja, with a low ceiling, on only ¼ acre plots, enough only for growing some vegetables and

[259] Clark 1975: 7, 37.
[260] D.M. Anderson (2002): 148-9.
[261] This was more or less the area where Kibera (slum) currently is. The Lang'ata side of Kibera south of the river, then called the Temporary Settlement Area, was destined to be returned to the Military Authorities for possible future use. Both Settlement Areas were gazetted already in 1948, as a result of previous plans on relocation of the Nubis (see "Note on a preliminary survey of the proposal to reconstitute the Kibera African Settlement Area", by E. Fox, District Officer, 18/5/1955, KNA MAA 7/458/314, p 2.
[262] 'Plan for the development of Kibera', report by Ministry of Housing, 3/4/1959. Copy of unknown origin (Kibera).

keeping a goat and some chicken. Most Nubis did not think much of the houses: they were too small for Nubi families used to living in large compounds, and besides, the latrines were next to the kitchen or even inside the house, causing a kind of culture shock – in Nubi culture the latrines were as far as possible from the kitchen. Moreover, the new houses did not have any space for tenants, nor for the brewing of beer or distillation of alcohol (for hiding the equipment), which would make the Nubis lose much of their income, while at the same time they would, for the next twenty-odd years, be expected to repay the loans, something they were not at all used to. These were important considerations for many Nubis not to take a house in Karanja.[263]

Even though they generally showed little interest, the new houses were eventually all bought by Nubis. Many Nubis from Sarang'ombe moved to Karanja Phase 2, which was built specifically for them.[264] It was a time when agriculture had largely lost its importance in Kibera, and big plots were not really needed anymore. Many Nubis had become urbanised, and to some extent for some people the new houses in Karanja fitted well in that new life style. Moreover, there was the advantage of having a title deed to the plot in Karanja, and the provision of water and other services (proper infrastructure). Some Nubis bought a number of houses in Karanja, also for their sons, as every person above 16 years could get a house; some of them put tenants in their new Karanja house, if the children were still too small to live alone. Some of the Nubis that got a house in Karanja did not demolish their old house in Kibera, instead renting it out and getting money to pay for the new house, while polygamous men might have only one of their houses in Kibera demolished, while keeping the others. Even if a house was demolished, the rental rooms in the old Kibera compounds often remained standing as well, continuing to provide an income. Karanja provided only enough houses for a small part of the Nubi population. So, at Independence most Nubis were still in Kibera, living the way they had lived for the previous 60 years. At least, that was the way it seemed. A closer look would reveal that some things in the Nubis' lives had gradually changed, almost unnoticed.

[263] See also Clark 1975: 116.

[264] Most of the Nubis from Sarang'ombe that refused to move to Karanja Phase 2, built new houses in Mashimoni when Sarang'ombe was demolished in the mid-60s; Karanja Phase 3 (1973) was for the Galalima/Toi people, but only few Nubis, probably less than ten, ended up having a house there (M6).

The importance of livestock and agriculture had diminished over the years, though neither appear to have been very important to the Nubis for survival to begin with; they usually had other income, from Nubian Gin, salaries, business or tenants. A 1956 report claims that "some of this land is under cultivation, but most of it is lying dormant". Agricultural produce was seen as a supplement, complementing that monetary income. A wide variety of food was produced to eat, but not to sell.[265]

The trend of growing unemployment that started during the economic depression (1930s) was temporarily interrupted by the employment opportunities of the World War II, but restarted and continued after the war. This was for several reasons. In the first place, the Nubis' interest in secular education had remained poor: the only government (primary) school in Kibera was closed in 1941 due to lack of interest.[266] The few educated Nubis did very well, but the majority was lowly educated and had therefore very little chances on the labour market. Secondly, after the war there was much more competition for jobs from other Kenyan Africans, further reducing the Nubis' chances to secure work. While in 1947 more than 60% of Nubi men claimed to have a job, a survey in 1955 shows that only 17.5% of adult men had work.[267] Their growing unemployment was also caused by the Nubis' attitude towards work: quite a number of Nubi informants, female and male, claimed that many Nubi men did not really want to work, unless it was something of 'sufficient standard' – if a job was not 'good enough', they would rather sit at home and do nothing. Many that found a job, left again after one week. This attitude may have been caused by their feeling of superiority, but it was also a rational choice: many Nubis (their wives) had income from the Nubian gin, and did not really need a job to survive. Throughout the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, and into the 1960s, the Nubian Gin provided the Nubis with an income to maintain their relatively high standards of living in Kibera, without having to worry about jobs or education.[268] For the men there was no need to work, or to get a proper

[265] See Deverell/Colchester's report 1944, pp 3-4; Kitching's report 1945, pp 3-; Major Small's report of 1955, pp 10; "Kibera village", a 1956 report by Senior Health Inspector (copy from Kibera). Cattle rustling apparently became a problem in the 1960s and 1970s (several people told me this), resulting in many people losing or selling off their livestock.

[266] The Kibera Survey Report by Deverell & Colchester, 1944, pp 6-7 (KNA RCA (MAA) – 2/1/3 ii).

[267] Kibera survey report; 'Report of an investigation...', La Fontaine 1947, pp 5-6; Major Small's 1955 census.

[268] This does not apply to all Nubis of course; in the 1960s the first Nubis went to University and others went overseas for studies, and there was more interest in (secular) education in the younger generation.

education, no incentive to do anything at all; their wives earned much more than they would. As a result, the Nubis were no longer seen as a 'better class African', possibly even the opposite. Already in 1931 the District Commissioner of Nairobi wrote that "the second generation (Nubis) and the hybrids arising from mixed unions are degenerate and generally a disgrace to their fathers".[269] That is of course an exaggeration, but it may serve as an indication of a decreasing respect for the Nubis.

As Independence drew nearer, the Nubis, not knowing what to expect from the new government, and probably hoping that the British would come to their rescue in the last minute, tried again to get legal title to the land, sending letters, memos and petitions, amongst others to British PM Harold MacMillan (in 1963); they even sued the British government. But so close to Independence, the British lacked the will or influence to convince the Kenyan politicians to uphold colonial obligations towards the Nubis.[270] The political changes after the Emergency, and the growing nationalism in Kenya forced the Nubis to rethink their strategies. So far they had successfully used their close relationship with the colonial authorities; it was one reason why they were still in Kibera – they had emphasised their military past, their services to the colonial power, as a negotiating tool in order to get support from the Government. The Nubis had always profiled themselves as "Sudanese", 'foreigners', and advocated for the status as 'non-natives' in order to get special treatment. This would not work anymore; in a post-colonial, independent Kenya they would be strangers without special privileges or support from anyone. So already from the mid-1950s, the Nubis, in particular the younger generation, born and raised in Kenya, started using a different language: instead of "Sudanese" they saw themselves as Kenyans, and started referring to themselves as "Nubi, a Kenyan tribe", with the same rights as other indigenous groups. Moreover, as Kenyans they would possibly have better chances for a positive solution to the Kibera land problem, and the right to remain settled in Kibera in the face of competing demands by other Kenyans. Their position was delicate, not possessing any title deed to the Kibera land.[271]

Nevertheless, despite the problems of police liquor raids, unemployment, and increasing numbers of '*labi*' in Kibera, life for the Nubis had been good

[269] DC Hosking, in letter to Commissioner for Local Government, Lands and Settlement, 13/51931, KNA PC/CP.9/15/3.
[270] 'Memorandum on the settlement of Sudanese war veterans at Kibera, Kenya', by the 'Kibera Committee', 3/1/1963 – photocopy from Kibera; Parsons 1997: 120.
[271] See also Clark 1975: 115-7; Parsons 1997: 122.

throughout this period. They were comfortable, they had enough food and money to live, and were still officially the only people allowed to live in Kibera. The Independence of Kenya did not mean an immediate stop to these 'good years' in Kibera, but it was a major break-point for the Nubis. It was the start of a period in which they would become even more marginalised and lose much of what they had: support from the Government, most of their land, access to jobs, supremacy in Kibera.

The scramble for Kibera, 1963 – 1990

At Independence, the British left Kenya without solving the problem of Nubi settlement and Kibera land ownership; the Nubis were henceforth without their previous employers' support. This does not mean that immediately after Independence things changed, and life for the Nubis deteriorated, but in the long run it did have consequences. On the other hand, it also created new opportunities for the Nubis: a boom in the rental business. This section describes how Kibera became, within a short time, a congested slum area.

The calm before the storm, 1963-1974

In the first decade after *Uhuru* (Independence) Kibera stayed relatively calm. While other Africa n squatter settlements like Mathare and Kawangware experienced an expansion during the late 1950s and 'exploded' in the 1960s[272], Kibera remained in principle forbidden territory for people without a shamba pass or special permission to stay there. Expansion in Kibera was therefore limited.

Nevertheless, the increased migration towards Nairobi (the town's population nearly doubled between 1962 and 1969, from 267,000 to 509,000[273]) unavoidably had its impact on Kibera. Kibera's population (both Nubi and outsider) continued to increase, from around 9,000 at Independence to 17,000 in 1972.[274] In 1966 an unofficial census was done which shows that the Nubis were at that time heavily outnumbered: 3000

[272] White: 215.
[273] Ferraro: 2.
[274] Amis 1983: 155.

Nubis, 7000 non-Nubis.[275] Even with an increased interest in the Government to provide accommodation for Africans, low-income housing remained in short supply in Nairobi as the stream of Africans to town increased. In the 1960s it was relatively easy to build a hut somewhere on the periphery of Kibera or to get permission (from the chief) to expand one's house with a few rooms for tenants (or even without permission). Many Nubi families had started adding some rooms to their compound[276], though some families, resenting this influx of '*labi*', refused to build rooms to accommodate these 'intruders'. In 1972 the rental business was still quite small: a survey showed that the average number of rooms per (Nubi) house owner was 4.3; in the sample, only two landlords had ten or more rooms: one had 10, and one had 20 rooms.[277]

On 1 January, 1964 the boundaries of Nairobi were extended to cover an area of approximately 266 square miles, to accommodate future expansion. As a result, Kibera became part of Nairobi, but the Nairobi City Council (NCC) remained reluctant to take charge of Kibera. This was mainly for financial reasons: they regarded (as did the government itself) Kibera as a "Government estate", in which the Government was the landlord, and therefore obliged to build houses and provide amenities. The NCC was only willing, and this was agreed with the Government, to assume responsibility for Kibera once the area was physically re-planned and the inhabitants (Nubis) resettled and compensated.[278]

The hiving off of Kibera land continued like before. Official policy was 'demolition of unauthorised settlements'; a number of settlement in Nairobi were demolished, to 'keep the city clean'.[279] In Kibera several lower-income housing estates were built in Kibera area between 1963 and 1974: Karanja Phase 2 and 3; Ngei, Onyonka and other estates in the Lang'ata area. The

[275] Clark 1978/9: 36. It is unclear to me what kind of 'unofficial census' this was, or who had undertaken it.

[276] Rooms continued to be built in temporary materials because of "planned redevelopment". According to Amis (1983: 160) there was a total ban on construction of even mud houses between 1963 and 1969, but I have not found any evidence to support this.

[277] Amis 1983: 159-60. Most house owners were Nubis, but some of the long-time Kikuyu residents in Kibera also built some rooms in the early 70s, and probably even earlier (informants NN15, NN17).

[278] 'Record of a meeting held in the office of the DC Nairobi, at 10 A.M. on Monday 32rd December (1963) to consider the application of the Crown Lands (Kibira) Rules and whether any amendments are required'; 'Kibera estate – takeover' 21/8/64; 'Kibera', June 1965. Documents of unknown origin (probably KNA), copies given to me in Kibera.

[279] Amis 1983: 122-3.

Nubi villages of Sarang'ombe, Galalima and Toi were demolished to make way for Jamhuri, Olympic (then called 'the Hill') and Fort Jesus estates. Sometimes the bulldozers came with very little notice, and some older Nubis remember their fear, being woken up with torches shining in their face, and the cold when sleeping out in the bush after their house had been demolished in the middle of the night. Nubi families were often not even compensated; they had to live with relatives or friends while building new houses in other parts of Kibera. The (less than thirty) Kikuyu families that lived in Lang'ata also had to leave their houses; they were given the choice to move to Lamu (Mpeketoni) or to stay in Kibera; those that stayed (most of them) were allocated an area in what is now Laini Saba to build their houses, and called it 'Kijiji'.[280]

In the first estates to be built (Karanja), the Nubis got priority for the new houses, as well as compensation for their old houses (though not the rental rooms). But in the estates built in Kibera after Karanja, Nubis did not manage to get more than a few houses. It is possible that Nubis could not afford the deposit for the new houses[281], but it is more likely that many were not really interested as these houses were considered too small or did not provide opportunities for renting out rooms, which had by then become an important source of income for the Nubis.[282] Another factor was the corruption that had started playing a role: houses were no longer allocated to the most deserving but to relatives, clients and others in social networks for personal accumulation. Furthermore, despite official housing policy emphasising the poorer segment of the population, in reality, until the early 1970s, construction and provision of mortgages focused predominantly on middle-class housing estates, too expensive for low-income groups.[283]

Bit by bit parts of Kibera were converted into residential estates, and the Nubis were more and more squeezed into an ever smaller area; in the mid-70s only around 800 acres remained of the original 4200.[284] Protesting against this did not help: in 1969 the Minister of Lands "made it clear that the government regarded Kibera area as State Land, belonging to the

[280] In fact, most of the people that went to Lamu later ended up in Kibera as well, while keeping their *shambas* in Lamu (NN17, M16 and others).
[281] This seems rather unlikely, though: most people should have been able to get that money from somewhere. Besides, the houses were not very expensive and monthly mortgage payments were around 115 Ksh, which was something that people would be able to afford, certainly if one had a few tenants, which most Nubis did.
[282] Amis 1983: 157; DESWOS: 25. See also Wangui & Darkoh: 77.
[283] Amis 1983: 106-9; DESWOS: 9.
[284] DESWOS: 10.

Republic, as no one else could claim legal rights to the land".[285] And so, the Nubis' struggle for control of their land had to continue. The problem was how to convince the new Kenyan government to recognise their claims to Kibera, or at least give them some security of tenure. According to the new government, the Nubis had only rights to their houses, not the land itself. This would mean that, in case they would be moved elsewhere, the Nubis would get compensation for the old house, but this was certainly not always the case; they were often removed without compensation, and even without notice, to make way for new housing schemes.[286]

The Nubis considered themselves, after years of uninterrupted settlement, the 'de facto' owners of Kibera, but they lacked the political leverage to support their claim on Kibera and secure a title deed. Unfortunately, the good relations with the new President Kenyatta on account of their support to KAU in the 1940/50s, were not used to the Nubis' benefit. Khamis Juma, one of the main Nubi leaders in whose Kibera house Kenyatta used to have meetings and hide from the Police, was apparently once invited to come and see Kenyatta at State House, but he refused to go: "He used to come to me, should I now go to him? Let him come here." A golden opportunity may have been lost here.[287]

[285] Clark 1975: 3-4.
[286] See Wangui & /Darkoh, 1992.
[287] Several older Nubis told me this story.

Photo 3: Kenyatta in Kibera (probably 1960s). Photo from Kibera.

Another potential success story did not deliver any results. In 1969 a Nubi, Yunis Ali, was elected to Parliament, representing the Lang'ata Constituency (which included Kibera). He was supported by the Luos, who had moved into Kibera in large numbers after the murder of Tom Mboya, when they fled Kikuyu-dominated areas like Kawangware. Mboya had been quite active in Kibera in the late 50s, and it is claimed by some Nubi *wazee* that KANU's symbol, the cockerel, comes from the red blazers of the Nairobi Sudan Association (a football club?), which Mboya had seen when he was in Kibera.[288]

[288] Informants Wa8, M11, and others.

Photo 4: The Nairobi Sudan (Football?) Association, late 1950s. Note the cockerel on the blazers. Photo from Kibera.

In November 1970 the Nubi MP Yunis Ali tabled a motion, which was subsequently passed in Parliament:

> "that pursuant to Government's declared policy on slum clearance in Kibera Village and the fact that Kibera inhabitants are entitled to full rights to plot ownership like any other citizens in the country, this house urges the Government to introduce a scheme at Kibera whereby demarcated plots with title deeds will be allocated to the residents for putting up decent houses either on their own or with Government assistance, as opposed to the present housing scheme by the Ministry of Housing".[289]

[289] 'New Kibera housing scheme agreed', Daily Nation, 28/11/1970.

However, this motion was never acted upon, the Lands Act was not changed, nothing was gazetted, and title deeds were never issued. There was no political will to do anything for the Nubis; without their former employers, they were politically marginalised.[290]

With the influx of the outsiders in Kibera, things started to change in the Nubis' daily lives as well. Their traditions were slowly changing, the upbringing for Nubi girls became less restrictive, and there was increased interest in education, while the influx of outsiders brought the Nubi community closer together, which showed in the gradually decreasing importance of the old Sudanese tribal languages, traditions, ceremonies and cults in favour of a more homogeneous Nubi culture and identity.[291] People had become more urbanised, with less interest in farming, and much of the farmland was slowly filling up with houses. While the importance of Nubian Gin as the big money-maker decreased, the importance of getting income from the rental business increased. Renting out rooms carried no risk, and was less labour intensive. Besides, it was a one-off investment, with a high rate of return. Many Nubi women that had stopped Nubian Gin production, moved to the rental business, even if it never brought in the amounts of money that the alcohol had – it was their only option. Nubi men, the ones with an income, built rooms as well, but they generally had less money than women, and fewer men than women got involved in construction of rooms.

The new Kenyan government was increasingly dominated by the Kikuyus, from President Kenyatta down to the district level. After Independence, the (European) Kibera Superintendent was replaced by a Kikuyu Chief, while the last Nubi Liwali (assistant-chief), Suleman Ahmed, was not replaced after his death in 1968. As argued by Amis, in the early 1970s "big personalities became interested in shanty housing as an investment outlet. Given the clientilistic structure of much of Kenyan politics, [….] it is likely that ethnicity would be exploited – in this case by the Kikuyu".[292] It is claimed that in the years before the 1974 elections, many Kikuyus were registered as voters in Kibera, though they did not actually live there. As a Nubi man explained: "many people were trucked into Kibera to vote; the locals were wondering who all these people were. Checking the voter cards,

[290] Informant NN24, a former senior civil servant.
[291] This is more elaborately discussed in chapter 3 on ethnic identity. See also Clark 1972: 115.
[292] Amis 1983: 161.

it said indeed they were registered (and living) in Kibera, but they did not live there. They came the night before, voted and left".[293] As a result, Yunis Ali, the incumbent Nubi MP, lost the elections to Mwangi Maathai, a Kikuyu, who also benefited from a split in the Nubi vote, between the two Nubi contestants, Yunis Ali and Ratib Hussein. With Yunis Ali out of Parliament, Kibera lost its last source of protection; there were now Kikuyus at all levels of government. The (Kikuyu) chief considered the vast area of empty land as a place the Nubis should share with their fellow Kenyans, who also needed a place to live. According to him, it would amount to discrimination if only Nubis would be allowed to live there and build rental rooms; besides, the Nubis did not use all the land.[294] The doors to Kibera were thrown wide open.

The first wave, 1975 – 1979

A huge influx of people started, and Kibera's population grew spectacularly fast: from 20,000 in 1975 to 60-65,000 in 1980, while in 1979 Nairobi's population had increased to 828,000.[295] These new "Kiberians" were of all ethnic groups, moving to Kibera for its ideal location near jobs in the Industrial Area and in town, all within walking distance. The new landlords however, the ones that built the houses where all these new tenants lived, were no longer only the Nubis, but pre-dominantly Kikuyus, people with connections in the government, (senior) government officials themselves, fellow tribesmen, and friends.

Word spread quickly that there was land available in Kibera for construction, and people came from all over Kenya to invest. Very soon it was money that determined who could construct, rather than ethnicity or connections. Construction became more expensive because of its scale. The prospective landlord needed to buy the building materials and hire people to do all the work, usually for blocks of at least 10 rooms at once.[296] Prices for building materials and wages went up. The work had to be done fast, within one week, because the construction was in fact illegal, and not official government policy. Therefore nothing was put to paper; no license or

[293] Informant M19.
[294] Interview, former Chief of Kibera, February 2006.
[295] Amis 1983: 93, 166-7. Kibera on its own would have been the 7th largest urban centre in Kenya.
[296] People usually built blocks of 10-12 rooms, 5-6 doors on either side of the building, all under one roof.

allotment letter existed. In some cases a letter was given stating that permission was given to "repair the house", in case senior government officials would see the construction work going on; the 'permit' had to be given back once the house was ready.[297] Construction in Kibera was illegal, but continued simply because the local administration benefited from it: there was a "fee" involved. Therefore, in the end basically anyone who could pay the 'fee' would get permission to build. Yet again it was mainly Kikuyus that built houses; they were often the people with money. The main beneficiaries of the Kibera construction opportunities were the (Kikuyu) middle class and rich people. Looking for plots to develop, businessmen would come, senior civil servants, but also the local administration (chiefs, District Officers, etcetera). Their interest was not to live in Kibera but only to build rooms and rent them out – possibly more than 64% of the landlords did not live in Kibera in those days. These so-called 'absentee landlords' used agents to collect rent for them.[298]

Ethnicity however continued to play a role in access to construction of rooms, and also the poorer segment of the Kikuyu community got a chance. Sometimes they pooled their money, like a group of cleaners of Kenyatta Hospital; members of a dance group that used to entertain the president were rewarded with a plot in Laini Saba; there were retired people that came to invest their pension, build a house for themselves and as well some rental rooms for income to live on; most of the first Kikuyu immigrants, who had lived in Kibera from the 1920s or 1930s, also put up rooms.

Construction boomed. Tenants moved in as soon as a house was finished; newcomers had to wait for months to find a room. Construction started in the "empty" areas: areas that the Nubis (had) used for their livestock or *shambas*, areas further away from the Nubi villages, like Kianda, Shilanga and Laini Saba, which already had a small Kikuyu population.[299] Sometimes *shambas* were destroyed to make room for construction, though more often the *shambas* were no longer used. Gradually the construction moved closer to the Nubi villages.

Meanwhile the Nubis had also continued construction of rooms, in areas that were considered "Nubi territory"[300], though usually not on a very large

[297] Informant M19, NN15.
[298] Amis 1983: 207.
[299] Many had moved there after having been removed from Kibera's Lang'ata side, for the construction of new estates like Ngei and Onyonka.
[300] Mainly the villages of Makina, Kambi Muru, Lindi, and Lomle.

scale. As mentioned earlier, construction had become expensive, and many Nubis simply did not have that kind of money. The income from Nubian gin had by now decreased so even women did not have as much money as before. Most women that did have money became involved in construction, also lending money to other women to build rooms. Some richer Nubis (men) built rooms on a larger scale, like 20-30 rooms, some even more. Other Nubi men with less money, realising that the rental business was there to stay and could provide them with a good income, started building rooms as well. This is not to claim that men did not build in the 1950s and 60s; they did but not on the same scale as women – most men did not have the money for it.

The local administration, informants claimed, wanted to give the impression that they were working together with the Nubis, suggesting it was not (only) the administration, but (also) the Nubis themselves who wanted this construction. They therefore worked together with the *Wazee wa Kijiji* (village elders), some of whom were Nubis; they served as middlemen between the administration and the prospective landlords, and received part of the 'fee', while some got loans (from the Chief) to build their own rooms. Their task was to find empty spaces that could be occupied without expecting problems with a possible Nubi owner, and to forestall Nubi resistance in certain areas. They took advantage of the situation by building many houses themselves.

Conflict was unavoidable. There was increasing resistance within the Nubi community against the construction and resentment against the Nubis that got involved with it, the rich and the village elders (*wazee wa kijiji*); they were often seen as collaborators with the outsiders. Many Nubis thought it was getting out of hand, and feared that they were going to lose the little control over Kibera they still had. Resistance did not have much effect, though: Nubis were asked for their title deed, to show that they owned the land; they were told to go back to Sudan. While the Administration Police was used to intimidate protesting Nubis, the corrupt judiciary offered no help whatsoever. It was clear that the Nubis did not have any special position anymore in Kenya, no leverage with the Kenyan Government, and no one to stand up for them; large-scale construction of houses and influx of 'outsiders' continued.

The situation was aggravated by the fact that the reduction of Kibera land continued during these years. Nubi houses (including the rental rooms they had built over the years, some families lost up to 40-50 rooms, without

compensation) in Lang'ata, Laini Saba and Lomle were demolished to make way for new residential areas, while in 1978 houses in Kambi Lendu were demolished for the construction of Moi Girls School; in other areas Nubi houses had to make way for some churches, that, through their apparent links with 'important people', even managed to get title deeds. The demolitions forced Nubis to move from the relatively empty periphery into the central part of Kibera; many people from Lomle for example initially moved to Mashimoni to build new houses there[301], before returning to a newly built Ayany. This sometimes even caused problems between the Nubis, who not always wanted to make space for their displaced fellow-Nubis. By 1980, probably only about 700 acres remained of the original 4198 acres.

Towards the end of 1978 the pace of construction slowed down.[302] President Kenyatta had died, and was replaced by Daniel Arap Moi, a Kalenjin – the Kikuyu hegemony seemed to be over. Lang'ata Constituency's Kikuyu MP lost the 1979 elections, voted out by the large numbers of non-Kikuyu tenants that now lived in Kibera.[303] Kibera's Kikuyu chief was suspended and replaced. It was a short period of uncertainty, people being replaced, others settling down in new jobs. As a consequence, everyone was waiting to see what would happen, and construction slowed down, though it never stopped.

Though 'demolition of unauthorised settlements' remained the official policy, the core of Kibera was never touched. It seems that demolition in those days focused more on visible settlements, often close to or within central Nairobi. Kibera was, like Mathare, much larger than most (demolition would make an enormous amount of people homeless), and more or less 'out of sight'. Moreover, in Kibera political and economical interests played a role; the investment in rental houses had to be protected. Furthermore, official policy became more pragmatic, realising that informal settlements play an important role in providing necessary housing and income for the poor.[304]

[301] A number of Nubis living in Ayany still have, up to today, their old rental houses in Mashimoni.
[302] See also Amis 1983: 170-1.
[303] Possibly people were also tired of the corruption in the administration. Philip Leakey, a white Kenyan, was elected MP in 1979; he had the support of President Moi, who, rumour has it, paid the former Nubi MP Yunis Ali to withdraw from the elections.
[304] Amis 1983: 127-9, 137-9.

Kibera becomes congested, 1980 – 1990

With a new Kenyan government, where the Kikuyu no longer dominated, other ethnic groups got their chances to construct in Kibera. Nevertheless, the Kikuyu continued to figure prominently amongst the new landlords; they were the most enterprising people, they had the money to build. A survey undertaken in 1980 shows that 66% of large landlords (with >20 rooms) were Kikuyu and 22% were Nubis, while the average number of rooms per landlord had gone up from 4.3 in 1972 to 12.2, a substantial increase. Being a landlord had become a profitable business: investment was recouped within a year, and with seven rental rooms one already had an income equivalent to an unskilled worker's wages.[305]

The tenants moving into Kibera were of all Kenyan ethnic communities, but with a strong bias to the western part of Kenya: in 1980, 40% of the tenants were from Nyanza (Luos), and 30% from Western Province (mainly Luhyas), while only around 10% were Kikuyus. Most tenants (76%) were formally employed, while average income was approximately one and a half times the official minimum wage, making Kibera an 'upmarket' slum compared to other slums. Nonetheless, people living in Kibera were poor: the official minimum wage in 1980 stood at 450 Kenyan Shillings (Ksh), while World Bank and the trade union estimated that a family would need 625 Ksh for their basic nutritional requirements alone.[306] Poverty and the lack of government built and managed low-income housing were the reasons for people to live in an illegal settlement.

Around 1980 President Moi was heard on the radio, banning construction in Kibera; he only allowed renovation of houses. Construction almost came to a complete standstill. However, this was very short-lived: for the right fee, the chief would still allow construction – only now it had to be done even faster. Instead of one week, people were given one day to erect a structure! Construction would start early morning and continue till midnight to finish 12 rooms. The next day they would put in the doors and windows and people would move in immediately. Houses were in high demand, and tenants would pay advances, even before a house was built. And so, construction, though forbidden, actually accelerated in the 1980s.[307]

[305] Amis 1983: 202-8.
[306] Amis 1983: 211-17.
[307] Informants NN15, a former construction supervisor'; M19, a former *Mzee wa Kijiji*.

By then, the so-called empty areas, away from the Nubi areas, were becoming congested and encroachment on the Nubi villages had started. Makina was hardly touched: it already quite full with structures built by the Nubis themselves; they would build as much as possible to fill up empty spaces, in order to avoid having outsiders in Makina.[308] This obviously led to more conflict between Nubis and administration. The administration continued to use force to claim land from protesting Nubis, beating or locking them up if they continued their resistance. The Administration Police was used to intimidate and beat up protesting Nubis, as shown by an angry letter sent to the DO: "why did your office decide to destroy crops on the plot without previously even informing the owners of the plot? Why did the chief's *askaris* [police, soldiers] decide to assault Mr. Suleiman Ramadhan, without an apparent reason?".[309] In some cases, rooms were simply built in an empty place, and when the Nubi came to complain, he was told to compensate the room-owner for his loss (if he would have to demolish his structures), after which the Nubi had no choice but to let it go. In other cases, according to a former *mzee wa kijiji* (village elder), "the Chief would show up with someone, and to the Nubi he would say: 'this is an empty space, I give you three days to construct; if not done, then this man will construct'. The chief had already received his money so had to make sure that the deal went ahead!".[310]

However, as the construction was against official government policy and was in fact (supposed to be) done secretly, room for negotiation developed. To avoid problems, prospective landlords (still mainly Kikuyus) were sent to negotiate with the Nubi who claimed ownership of that particular piece of land, suggesting that he would allow structures to be put up, some of which would then be given to the Nubi in exchange for the land (a normal ratio seems to have been 2:1). This system, which came to be known as "*jenga yangu, jenga yako*" ("Build mine, build yours", Swahili), was an attractive option for many Nubis. In the first place, many saw the irreversibility of the trend that had set in, they realised they would not be able to stop this invasion of outsiders anymore. More and more Nubis decided to put up structures as well, to preserve at least some of their land for themselves and benefit from the rental business. "If you did not build on your land, someone else would, and most likely an outsider; you would be left with nothing". Secondly, most Nubis did not have the money to build houses, and this

[308] There are now very few Kikuyu landlords in Makina.
[309] Many informants confirmed this. See letter of the 'Nubian Cultural & Welfare Society of Kenya' to the DO Kibera, 16/4/1980 – copy from informants in Kibera.
[310] Informant M19.

system was an easy way of getting houses and providing the family with income.[311] The Nubis had resisted as long as they could, but now started actively looking for people to do "*jenga yangu, jenga yako*", putting their land up for grabs in exchange for rooms. The younger people would later blame them, "you old people have sold Kibera", but looking back, were they right or wrong? In some cases Nubi youths forced their fathers to give in to the trend and build rooms, or, if they had a job, they simply built rooms themselves without their father's permission. Nubi women with money from Nubian gin or tenants joined in the race by offering other Nubis (often women) to build rooms according to the "*jenga yangu, jenga yako*" system; some big Nubian gin producers managed to construct hundreds of rooms for themselves. Nubis who had land but no money offered their relatives or Nubi friends with money space to build rooms, sometimes even without asking for rooms in exchange, but mainly to make sure that it was a Nubi who built on their land, and not an outsider.

The construction business became almost like a race against time: everybody putting up as many structures as possible, and as fast as possible. Rooms were built on roads, and latrines were demolished to make space for more structures, creating the conditions for Kibera's infamous 'flying toilets' (people defecate in plastic bags and hurl them away, over the roofs). People were at some point told (by the Chief) to remove fences around their compounds, so others could build rooms. Every available space in Kibera was used for construction.

Meanwhile the hiving off of Kibera land had continued. Land had been given out (by the Government) to some churches along Kibera Drive, and more construction had taken place, for schools, and for residential areas like Highrise Estate, looking out over Kibera, now a crowded slum area on an estimated 550 acres of land.

[311] Informants M3, M16, M19, and many others.

Kibera consolidated, 1990 – 2000

Had construction accelerated in the 1980s, it all but stopped in the early 1990s: Kibera was more or less full. Construction of houses continued on a small scale, filling in empty pockets here and there, within the 550 acres that had remained of the original 4198 acres. The main construction works were repairs or demolition of derelict walls and roofs, rebuilding rooms, or even re-dividing rooms into smaller ones, to create more rooms and space for more people.

In 1993, Kibera's population was estimated to be around 250,000, and 377,000 in 1999[312], the largest informal settlement of Nairobi (and of Kenya). People of all Kenyan ethnic groups were squeezed within the area that is now Kibera, with houses even on the steeper slopes and close to the rivers. Though people live mostly ethnically mixed (landlords don't like to rent out to people of the same ethnic group, in case they team up against her/him), certain patterns of ethnic clustering have been established. Kibera is now divided into a number of 'villages' (see map 3, below), each with its own characteristics in ethnic makeup: while most villages have people of all ethnic groups, often one group is dominant. Some of the old Nubi village names have disappeared, replaced by names of Kikuyu or other origin, or referring to the dominant ethnic group of that village.

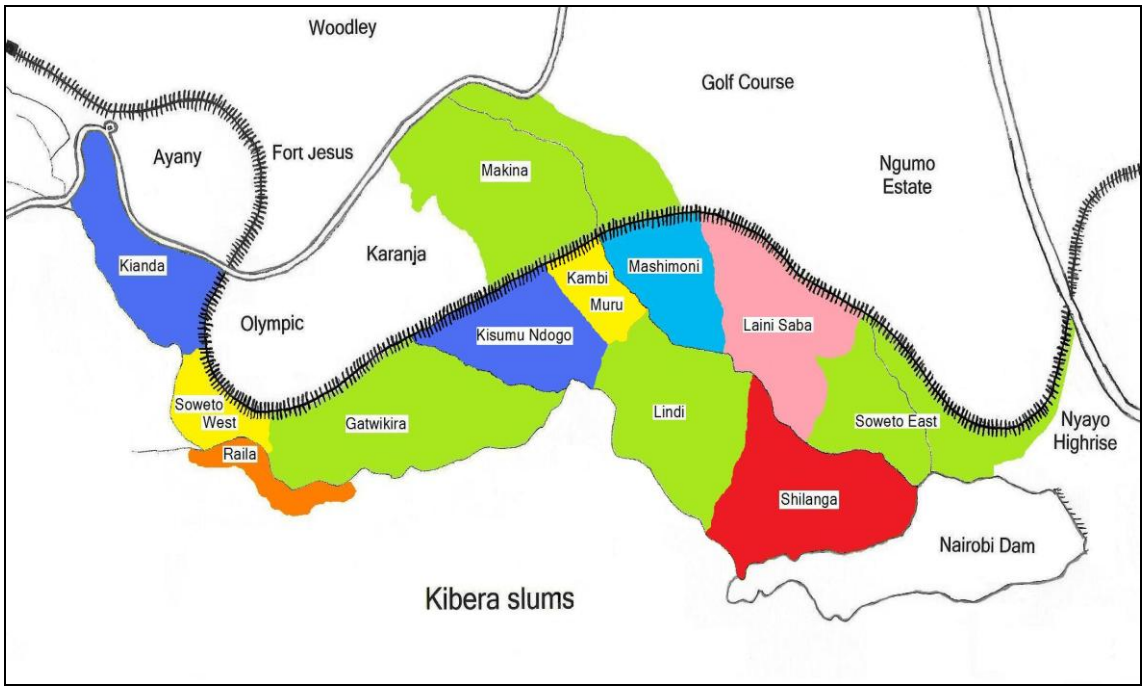
The Nubis live concentrated in Makina, Kambi Muru and Lindi, and own most of the houses there; tenants are of all ethnic groups. Gatwikira and Kisumu Ndogo (together they are often simply referred to as "Gatwikira") are dominated by the Luo (tenants), mainly young men fresh from Nyanza, though most houses are actually owned by Kikuyu. Laini Saba is dominated by Kikuyu owners/inhabitants, with Kamba, Luhya and (some) Luo tenants. Kianda is very mixed in terms of inhabitants, though more than 50% are Luo, while the house owners here are mainly Kikuyu and Kisii. Shilanga has mainly Kikuyu-owned houses, and mixed tenants, though many are Luo. In Mashimoni, most houses are owned by Nubi and Kikuyu, with mainly Luhya tenants. Nonetheless, in general, all villages have residents of all ethnic groups.

The life of the Nubis changed fundamentally in many ways. They were now surrounded by outsiders, and contact with them was unavoidable;

[312] Nairobi Situation Analysis report, 2001, p 36.

intermarriage had increased, and the Kinubi language gradually incorporated more Swahili words and was, in the younger generation, often even replaced by Swahili. The Nubian Gin production had almost completely ceased; agriculture and keeping livestock was no longer possible, there was simply no space anymore. Jobs were harder to get, they were for fellow tribesmen rather than for 'Sudanese'; discrimination had started.[313] The Nubis had lost control over Kibera; all they had left were their houses and the rental rooms they had managed to build, mainly in Makina, Kambi Muru, Lindi and Mashimoni, also called "the Nubian Village".

Map 5 – Kibera villages, 2008 (map by author).



[313] See Cemiride report, 2002.

Kibera in the third millennium – new challenges

The world is urbanising fast: by 2030 an estimated 60% of the world's population will live in cities.[314] At the beginning of the 3rd millennium, Africa is the fastest urbanising continent in the world. While in 1980 only 28% of the African population lived in cities, it now is estimated to be around 37%. Currently 71.9% of the urban population in sub-Saharan Africa, over 166 million people, lives in slums and squatter settlements without adequate shelter or basic services. Efforts of African governments to provide shelter for their urban population, and certainly housing that is affordable to the poor, have been insufficient. 'In Kenya, it is estimated that 234,000 new housing units are required every year yet only 20,000-30,000 units per year are currently being produced and a mere 20% of these are affordable to low and moderate income families'.[315] In Nairobi, possibly around 1.5 million people, 60% of the city's population, live in slum areas comprising less than 5% of the total municipal residential land. To compare: in 1960 only 6% of Nairobi's population lived in squatter settlements, in 1980 this was 38%.[316]

Kibera is now claimed to be the largest slum in sub-Saharan Africa, but population figures for Kibera are ambiguous: estimates range from 220,000 to more than one million.[317] Though there seems to be some consensus on 600-700,000 being a reasonable estimate,[318] there is no evidence that this is actually the case. Rather, there is more evidence for a much lower population. In 1999 the international NGO Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) did a survey in Kianda and estimated the population at around 23,000 people instead of the official figure of 75,000.[319] The "Map Kibera Project" did a door-to-door census in the same area in 2008 and found only 15,200 people. The Kenya Slum Upgrading programme (KENSUP), which is responsible for managing the slum upgrading in Kibera (with UN-Habitat) did a census in Soweto East, chosen to be the first Kibera village to be upgraded, and found around 20-23,000 people compared to the UN estimate of 70,000; the KENSUP figures have not been made public.[320] A document

[314] Gulyani & Bassett : 486.
[315] Report UN-Habitat 2004: 3-7; report IHC: 2.
[316] GoK/Habitat 2001: 90; Robertson: 19. However, Gulyani and Talukdar (2006: 5) estimate that in 1999 only 30% of Nairobi's population lived in squatter settlements.
[317] See reports by GoK/Habitat (2001), IHC (2007), Marras 2008, UN-Habitat (2004: 9).
[318] See also Bodewes: 31.
[319] I was Country Co-ordinator of the Spanish section of MSF at the time; we used a method that MSF uses in refugee camps to estimate its population.
[320] Marras 2008. See also the website www.mapkiberaproject.org (accessed April 2009).

on Lang'ata Constituency shows a population of 256,446 for Kibera, though it is unclear where the document comes from (the Kenyan government?) and on what data exactly the numbers are based (the official 1998 National Census?).[321] A recent study in Nairobi's slums found that the average family size is around 3 persons, and that there are on average 2.6 persons per room, much lower than most people would expect. The low number of people per room was also informally confirmed by KENSUP.[322] The "Map Kibera Project", by extrapolating its Kianda findings to the whole of Kibera, concludes that there are between 220,000 and 250,000 people in Kibera.[323] The preliminary results of the most recent survey, done by MSF-Belgium in May 2009 in all Kibera villages, show again a low population: between 201,000 and 244,000, with an average of 2.9 persons per room.[324] On the other hand, there is a big difference between Kibera's daytime and night-time population, and many of the 'cousins and friends' that sleep all over Kibera without any regular or fixed home, may not have been included in the above mentioned surveys and low population estimates.[325]

What can we conclude from this about Kibera's population? It seems clear that most official estimates are much too high. Assuming moreover that the above-mentioned low-estimate surveys and censuses may have missed part of the people, it seems prudent to estimate Kibera's population between 200,000 and 300,000 people (though it remains nothing more than an 'educated guess'). Is Kibera in that case still sub-Saharan Africa's largest slum?[326] Maybe not, but it is not a title to be proud of anyway.

Kibera is now densely populated, dirty, and dangerous; because it is considered an illegal settlement, Kibera is denied public services like infrastructure and health clinics, and like any slum, it is an unhealthy place to live. A 'slum' can be defined as an (often unplanned) section of a city characterised by inferior living conditions (inadequate housing, lack of potable water and sanitation systems, electricity, infrastructure), poverty, high population density, and often without (individual) security of land

[321] Internet: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Langata_Constituency (accessed March 2009).
[322] Gulyani & Talukdar (2006): 6, 9. A family could of course rent more than one room. Research International reports 5 persons per room in Kibera (2005).
[323] It could be risky to extrapolate Kianda data, as Kianda is relatively well off, and its population density may not be representative for the rest of Kibera.
[324] Personal communication; there is no final, public report yet.
[325] Bodewes: 31.
[326] I don't really know: I have tried several times to get information from UN-Habitat on the other large slums (and their population figures) in Africa, but have never received any answer.

tenure.[327] The general neglect of slum areas and informal settlements by the government shows also in the lack of reliable figures or estimates of even the most basic indicators. Nevertheless, some data are available to help create a general picture of the living conditions in Kibera.

Photo 5: Kibera slums (Laini Saba), 2008 (photo by author).

Housing in Kibera is generally of appalling standards; most rooms have walls built of mud and wattle, roofs of corrugated iron sheets and earthen floors. Walls are cracked, and some have large holes through which one can peek into the neighbour's room; roofs are leaking, and the noise of people, radios and TVs is all-pervading. Water and electricity are available in Kibera, but connections are private (including many illegal connections from the mains) and mainly used for business, which makes water and electricity even more expensive to slum dwellers than they are for the more affluent part of the city's population. The toilet ratio seems to be one pit

[327] See also UH-Habitat 2003: 12-3.

latrine (usually in very poor state) per 50-150 people (optimum is 10-20 persons per unit); one often has to pay to use a toilet, hence Kibera's notoriety for 'flying toilets'. The Nairobi City Council only collects garbage (and only at very long intervals) along Kibera Drive, the main road, so within Kibera waste is thrown outside and left to rot in the streets, occasionally washed away by the rain; burning piles of waste are a common sight in Kibera, contributing to respiratory tract infections and a generally unhealthy environment.[328]

Photo 6: Garbage in Laini Saba, 2008 (photo by author).

Access to health care is limited and expensive – there are no governmental or municipal health facilities in Kibera, and people depend on private dispensaries that have mushroomed in recent years. HIV/Aids is a problem, due to poverty; live sex shows are performed in Kibera, without condom, despite the HIV/Aids threat: "better die ten years later of HIV/Aids than

[328] See also KUESP report: 36, 60, 81.

today of hunger".[329] In general, slum residents have a high mortality burden from preventable and treatable conditions.[330]

Existing figures on employment are confusing; formal employment could be between 17 and 69%.[331] While in the early morning many people can be seen along the roads walking from Kibera to the Industrial Area, strolling through Kibera during the day shows that unemployment rates must be high, with many young men sitting idle by the side of the roads or in bars. Many people depend on the informal sector, casual work and 'business'.[332] According to a recent study, almost 50% of Kibera residents earn less than 7,000 and 24% between 7-10,000 Kenyan Shillings per month.[333] Getting three meals a day is often unachievable: in the same study, 38% of the respondents claim to frequently miss one meal in a day.[334] Alcohol and drug use is rampant, probably caused by poverty and unemployment: people are bored, 'people want to forget', and, alcohol takes away the hunger.[335] This situation creates conditions for crime: in the absence of formal income opportunities, many resort to theft. Every Kibera village has its gangs, and people fear going out at night. Nevertheless, Kibera has a "safe" image, particularly when compared with other informal settlements like Mathare, while there are also differences within Kibera: Makina is generally safer than for example Gatwikira.

Kibera's continued population growth is due to continuing rural-urban migration, and, probably more importantly, due to a natural population increase: Kibera has many long-time residents (30% has lived here more than ten years), and a very young population: 52% is below 24 years, and many of those were born in Kibera.[336] There are no official data on the ethnic composition of the population, but it is generally thought that the Luo are the largest group, then the Luhya, the Kisii, and others. The Nubi are now only a very small minority in Kibera.

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[329] Bodewes: 76-8; 'Shocking details of child porn' and 'Where live sex makes for public entertainment', East African Standard, 30/8/08.
[330] Kyobutungi et al. 2008.
[331] According to a GoK/UNCHS report (2001: 47) formal employment in Kibera stands at 17%, while Syagga et al (2002: 13) give 69%. Gulyani & Talukdar found (in 2006) an unemployment rate of 26%, as an average of all Nairobi slums (2006: 6).
[332] See also Bodewes: 66-8.
[333] In 2006, the exchange rate was around 72-74 Kenyan Shilling to the US dollar.
[334] Research International 2005.
[335] Bodewes: 133-40.
[336] UN-Habitat 2003: 219-20; Research International 2005.

The Nubis in the third millennium

Today, there are probably not more than 6-7,000 Nubis living in Kibera; a socio-economic census of the Nubi community undertaken in October / November 2007 found around 5400 people, but may have missed a number of families. No other Nubi surveys or censuses have been undertaken (completed) since the 'unofficial census' of 1966 that found 3000 Nubis, so it is difficult to compare and assess the veracity of the latest figures.[337] What is clear though from the 2007 census is that the Nubi community in Kibera is small in numbers[338], and insignificant in the political arena; their continued quest for Kibera land rights (or for recognition as Kenya's '43rd tribe') seems to stand little chance.

In 1995 some title deeds appeared to have been given out to well-connected individuals, but Nubi youths protested against this and when they found out that the title deeds were not registered and never legalised, the matter was put to rest. In 1996 President Moi announced that the Nubis would get a title deed for the land they occupied in Kibera, but like with the previous motion of 1970, there was no follow up on this[339], and no permanent solution to the "Nubian problem" was offered. In 1997, the Minister for Lands and Settlement announced his ministry's objective "to ensure security of tenure to the bonafide owners of the structures in these [informal] settlements [including Nubian villages] by issuing them with titles for the land on which the structures stand".[340] Indeed, people in Nubi villages around Kenya, in Mazeras and Kisumu for example, have received allotment letters or title deeds to their plots. Kibera was specifically mentioned in the minister's statement, however, no allotment letters or title deeds have been issued in Kibera, with the exception of a few churches and a few 'connected' individuals. This is most likely because Kibera is politically too sensitive, with the large Luo/tenant population and the extremely high value of the land (being so close to the centre of town), to divide the land amongst the landlords. The Nubis might not have agreed with the Government giving out title deeds to *all* structure owners: they consider the non-Nubi landlords as illegal. Several Nubi organisations were established at different times to coordinate possible actions and negotiations with the government over the Kibera land, but none of them have been very successful in securing concessions from the government on the land issue.

[337] The census data have not been analysed yet.
[338] The Nubi Diaspora was not included in this census.
[339] Only the Makina Mosque received a title deed; later also the Kibra Academy in Karanja.
[340] Press release Minister of Lands and Settlement, 23/10/97. Copy from Kibera.

Kibera has seen a number of violent conflicts over the years, always resulting in death, destruction and displacement. In 1992 and 1995 clashes erupted between Nubis and Luos, and may have been the result of frustration with the 'outsiders', or underlying tension between tenants and landlords. The Luos had by then become (one of) the largest ethnic groups in Kibera[341], not so much as house owners, but mainly as tenants. The next round of clashes, in 2001, was instigated by politicians who see Kibera more as a reservoir of votes than as a slum with people that need their support. In these clashes, again mainly between Nubis and Luos, houses went up in flames, and more than 30,000 people were displaced; 15 people were killed and scores were injured.[342] Calm returned after two weeks of violence, but Kibera had changed: in the Luo-dominated areas tenants have refused to pay rent since then, or pay only a fraction of the pre-clashes level. Many landlords lost their houses and their income in those areas. After the 2007 elections another round of violence broke out in Kibera (and in many other parts of Kenya), making headlines all over the world: thousands of people fled Kibera and many were killed or injured. This time, while the Nubis were not really involved in the clashes, the Luos seem to have used the (election) violence to chase away Kikuyu landlords and increase their control over Kibera. Chapter 5 will elaborate further on these violent episodes and the resulting changes in Kibera, by analysing the role of ethnic politics and the resulting diminished importance of the Nubis in Kibera.

There are now thousands of landlords in Kibera (while possibly 94% of Kibera residents are tenants[343]), with property varying in size between just one to hundreds of rooms. Sometimes tenants can turn into owners when buying the room they live in, or even become 'small landlords' if they can buy a few rooms from a 'retiring landlord'. Most of the landlords (73%) supposedly don't live in Kibera.[344] About 50% of the landlords are Kikuyu[345], but their numbers are going down, as rooms are sold off to people of other ethnic groups, after the 2001 and certainly the 2007/8 clashes, when being a landlord in Kibera lost some of its attraction and even turned out to be a hazardous business, and less profitable with the reduced

[341] It must be emphasised that there are no reliable statistics on Kibera population.
[342] Osborn 2006: 34.
[343] Report of the Business and Economic Research Co. Ltd., reference in Schwartz-Barcott: 55. However, this percentage would be based on the assumption that there are many more people living in Kibea than can be concluded from the available evidence.
[344] Mutsotso and Kinyanjui: 7. I don't know how reliable this figure is, but could be taken as an indication that there are indeed many absentee landlords.
[345] Information from the chairman of the Kibera Landlord & Housing Cooperative.

or unpaid rent. People sell their rooms as well when they retire and want to go back "up-country", or the children of the original owner sell the rooms when he dies and they do not live in Kibera. The Nubis possibly own about 10-15% of the rooms in Kibera, but they can't sell and leave the area, since they have no home area to go to.

The Nubis' financial position has deteriorated in the last decade. The rent clashes of 2001 reduced their income and increased poverty in the Nubi community: many Nubi families depend for their income on their rental rooms. Most Nubis are 'small landlords': an average Nubi family owns probably between 10-20 rooms, though some (like absentee Kikuyu landlords) own 50, 100 or even more rooms, and some (including an increasing number of younger Nubis) none at all. Moreover, the generation that built these rooms are now grandparents, sustaining their (unemployed) children as well as their grandchildren, who also occupy more rooms than before, reducing the number of rooms available to rent out. It means that larger families live off fewer rooms than before, while at the same time (food) prices have gone up and rent levels have gone down.

The Nubi community has also lost in many other aspects. Many Nubi youths drop out of school at an early age, resulting in continued low levels of education, and high unemployment. This, according to many people, has resulted in young Nubis getting involved in crime, and has increased drug use amongst them. Moreover, there is a certain degree of discrimination in Kenya against Nubis (and against Muslims in general): getting IDs, passports and jobs seems to be more difficult for them than for others – Nubi youths have to go through a special vetting process in order to get their ID.[346] This discrimination is a result of the Nubis' minority status and the resulting lack of political leverage. Moreover, in Kenya these days it is impossible to get a job unless you "know someone"; jobs and other perks often go to people of the same ethnic group, further reducing the chances for minority groups like the Nubis.

For the young Nubis there is hardly any incentive to do anything. Many stay at home idle and live off the rental income of their parents' houses. But what does the future hold in store for them? A family can survive on the income of 10 rooms, but at some point Nubi families will have to make do with the income from 4-5 rooms in order to survive, if rooms are split between inheriting children. One room brings in 500-1000 Kenyan Shillings

[346] Sing'oei 2008. See also Chapter 3 and website http://www.minorityrights.org/3951/kenya/muslims.html (accessed 11/5/09).

per month, hardly enough to live unless other income becomes available. With generally high levels of unemployment, the future looks bleak for the Nubi youth.

Many Nubis have moved out of Kibera in the last decades. In the 1970s some richer Nubis started buying land outside Kibera, in places like Kitengela, Ongata Rongai and Ngong, though many plots remained undeveloped; again, a majority of the buyers seem to be women. A few land-buying associations, like Akhwana Housing Cooperative Society (1988), were established (most members were women), but have not been very effective due to the low saving and purchasing power of the Nubis and misuse and embezzlement of the raised funds. Other Nubis, with jobs or money, have moved 'upwards', out of Kibera to estates within Nairobi or to the surrounding villages, or further away, to Mombasa, and some even abroad. Nevertheless, they all keep a strong link with Kibera and their relatives there, visiting regularly and coming for weddings and funerals.

The main Nubi organisations are the Kibera Land Committee (KLC) and the Nubian Council of Elders. The KLC focuses on the land issue in Kibera and had (in 2002) completed negotiations with the government on getting a communal title deed for the so-called "Nubian Village" (250-300 acres, half of Kibera), but has since been waiting in vain for the document itself. The Nubian Council of Elders became active after the 2001 clashes, trying to negotiate a return to normalcy with the elders of the other ethnic groups. They work on all aspects of Nubi rights and have initiated some suits pending in court, to sort out the issue of Nubi citizenship, against discrimination and one on the land issue at the International Court in The Hague. A court case on citizenship against the Kenyan Government is pending to be heard at the African Commission on Human and People's Rights in the Gambia.[347]

Demolitions, and the upgrading of Kibera

It is unclear what the Kenyan government's plans are with Kibera: demolition and forced evictions, plans for upgrading, and promises of a communal title deed for the Nubis have all been witnessed in the last decade. Since Independence the administration seems to have been reluctant

[347] See also chapter 3.

to offer a permanent solution to the "Nubian / Kibera" problem, while showing insensitivity in dealing with poor people.

Evictions and demolitions have continued in Kenya despite the government's stated policy of non-demolition: slum housing should not be demolished unless there is some positive and overriding developmental reason, and if there are alternative areas for resettlement. Evidence from a number of demolitions shows that this policy has been ignored.[348] Early in 2004 forced evictions and demolitions of houses took place in Kibera, to make way for a proposed road by-pass. Raila Village (a relatively new village in Kibera) was bulldozed without notice; 400 structures were demolished, including schools, clinics and churches, leading to the internal displacement of over 2,000 people and causing property losses in the millions of Shillings. Four years later there was still no sign of any activity or work on the by-pass. Forced evictions of this nature are in breach of well-established international norms and laws which obligate the Government (that ratified these international treaties) to provide the affected communities with adequate and reasonable notice, genuine consultation, information and adequate alternative housing or resettlement.[349] In the same year people were given notice for demolition of structures too close to the road, structures located under or near to power lines, and too close to the railway line. Though some people voluntarily demolished and moved their structures, these demolitions were suspended after a national and international campaign.[350]

Nonetheless, demolitions or threats continued: in August 2007, a seven-day notice was issued by the Ministry of Housing to residents in Soweto East. The Ministry planned to build a road from Mbagathi Road to Karanja Road and marked the affected houses with a red cross. No compensation and resettlement was offered to the residents. In fact, the Ministry has claimed that it will charge residents for the cost of the demolition![351] In mid-2008 the houses with red crosses were still standing, though some work was in progress at the junction of the planned road and Mbagathi Road.

[348] Syagga, et al 2002: 26-7

[349] Joint Position Paper of the Campaign Against Forced Evictions in the Informal Settlements in Nairobi, 2004.

[350] COHRE 2006: 53-6; 'D-Day for Kibera's derelict structures', Sunday Nation, 29/2/04.

[351] 'Rights groups condemn wave of evictions in Nairobi'. Media release COHRE & Haki Jamii Trust, 29/8/2007.

These demolition threats are bizarre since the Government had already in 2000 decided to develop plans for the upgrading of Kibera slums, in collaboration with UN-Habitat (the so-called Kenya Slum Upgrading Programme, KENSUP).[352] The plan was to build next to Kibera accommodation (6-700 apartments), the so-called 'decanting site', where a few thousand people (inhabitants of Kibera: both landlords and tenants) from a small part of Kibera would be temporarily resettled; their vacated houses would then be demolished and in the newly created open space, flats were to be built for the same people that had moved temporarily to the decanting site. Soweto East was earmarked to be the first Kibera village benefitting from the upgrading. However, the implementation of the upgrading plans has left much to be desired. Kibera residents received hardly any information on the plans, and they were clearly expected to simply rubberstamp the plans. Moreover, the demolition of Raila Village had created an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion between local population and the authorities. The earmarking of Soweto East started a rush for houses in that area, driving up the rent and cost of living. It was also very unclear how much the new houses would cost, and whether people living in Kibera would be able to afford it. The local newspapers showed nice drawings of the new flats, one to three bedrooms, toilet and bathroom, a living room and kitchen, and with water and electricity supply.[353] Could such a house cost the same as what people were paying in Kibera, between 400 and 1000 Kenyan Shillings (6-15 US dollars) per month? There did not seem to be any plans for financing, or mortgages. Moreover, neither the government nor UN-Habitat appeared to have much money available, nor long-term funding. There was also the fear for corruption – many thought (think) that connected people from outside will be put on the list of people entitled to a new house. Or that the poor will sell or sub-let to middle class people, and move to (or create) another slum – because it is clear that there is a market for very cheap housing.

Another major, as yet unsolved problem is the question of who should be entitled to a house in an upgraded Kibera: the landlords, in proportion to the number of rooms they own now, or just one house 'per person'? Should the tenants have rights to a house as well?[354] These questions are not easily answered, as there is a conflict of interest between the two groups. The landlords won't easily accept anything that reduces their rental income

[352] COHRE 2006: 102-4.
[353] 'New plan to transform Kibera slums', Daily Nation, 7/10/05; 'New, cosy homes for the dwellers of Kibera slum', Daily Nation, 18/1/07.
[354] See also COHRE 2006: 93-116.

opportunities in Kibera, they want the same number of rooms and continue with their rental business; tenants would obviously prefer to have their own houses. Moreover, ethnic politics will also be involved in this: the majority of tenants are Luos, while the majority of landlords are Kikuyu and Nubis. The Luo tenants will obviously want to have a share and own part of the new houses, and will be (are being) supported by their leader Raila Odinga.[355] The Kikuyu landlords have largely kept out of the previous clashes between landlords and tenants[356], but the Nubis have not: many of them depend on the rental business, and they still see Kibera as 'their land'.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the Nubis settled in Kibera, and how they have successfully used, during the colonial period, their being 'foreigners and soldiers' and their special relationship with the colonial authorities to maintain control over Kibera. After Independence the Nubis had to change their strategy and ethnic identity: they turned themselves from 'Sudanese' into a 'Kenyan tribe'. However, without political (read: ethnic) support in independent Kenya the Nubis lost their supremacy in Kibera – they were unable to stop the influx of outsiders and construction of rental rooms, and Kibera became, within a short time, a congested slum area. At the beginning of the third millennium the Nubis have become a marginalised community in Kibera. The recent upgrading plans have taken a long time to materialise, and are fraught with problems; it is unlikely there will be any substantial change in Kibera in the near future. But, no matter what will happen in or to Kibera, it is clear that the land ownership issue must be dealt with at some point, and that any solution must take the Nubis and their rights into account. The fact that the Nubis have been allowed to stay in Kibera for such a long time has created a legal precedent: 'claim to this land can be solidified on the grounds of longstanding and spiritual connection to Kibera, as their eviction would result in the destruction of the community's survival as a group'.[357] Even if they have never been given an official title deed, after more than 100 years of occupation the Nubis do have, according to Kenyan law, strong legal claims on (at least part of) Kibera. Besides, they have nowhere else to go; Kibera is their homeland, and, as many of them insist (and have shown during the various violent clashes), if they have to, they 'will defend it to the last man'.

[355] Raila Odinga became Kenya's prime minister in February 2008 (see also Chapter 5).
[356] See also Chapter 5 on ethnic politics in Kibera and Kenya.
[357] Sing'oei: 109-10.

3

The 'making' of the Nubis – on ethnic identity

In the previous chapter we have seen that before Independence the Nubis started identifying themselves as 'a Kenyan tribe', instead of as 'Sudanese'. Since the Nubis 'emerged' in the late nineteenth century, they have changed quite a few times of identity. Starting off individually as Dinka, Mundu or Nuba, they merged into a new military community linked to the Egyptian army; in those days they were possibly already known as 'Nubi'. After moving to Uganda, and in the colonial days in Kenya, they were identified as 'Sudanese', foreigners, an identity they insisted on for various reasons. In Kenya, in the final colonial years before Independence, they started presenting themselves as 'Nubi, a Kenyan tribe', reflecting the changing political context in Kenya. This chapter will have a closer look at Nubi ethnic identity and the many changes it has gone through during its relatively short existence. Analysing how and why the Nubis, after settling in Kibera, increasingly developed into a more homogeneous ethnic group, it will be clear that ethnic identity is not static, but open to change and manipulation, depending on the context and situation.

It was generally expected that in African countries after the colonial era, under the influence of nationalism and modernity, the different ethnic groups, their ethnic identities and ethnic distinctions would disappear, especially (or first) in urban areas – Africans would simply become national citizens: Kenyan, or Ugandan.[358] This has, however, not been the case: ethnic identities often became even more important, especially in urban settings, playing a role in competition for jobs, housing, and plain (economic) survival. In urban areas there is much more contact between members of different ethnic groups than in rural areas, and in such situations ethnic identity often becomes more important – people feel more secure and at ease with people of the same ethnic background, and they often support each other in the first steps in town after arriving from the rural areas, often settling in the same part (slum) of town, or even in the same area within a slum. Certainly in economically difficult times, or in case of danger or threats to the whole group, people pull together and identify more with their 'fellow tribesmen'. The influx of (mainly Christian) outsiders into Kibera had a similar effect on the Nubis – they pulled together, 'united' against the outsiders, and became 'more Nubi'. The cultural differences that had existed

[358] See for example Eriksen: 33; Janmohamed: 191-2; Spear 2003: 16.

between the Sudanese 'tribes' in terms of language, food and rituals, and that had continued to exist in Kibera, disappeared gradually. This chapter will describe this process of 'nubianisation', while also reviewing some Nubi 'ethnic markers', the special physical and ideological characteristics of Nubi culture – how do Nubis identify themselves? Special attention is reserved for some of these characteristics: 'endogamy' (marrying within the group), and the way in which the Nubis incorporated new members (mainly women through marriage) to the community. The relationships with 'tribesmen' in other Nubi villages in Kenya and in neighbouring countries (mainly Uganda) will be discussed, and finally, the legal struggle of the Nubis to be recognised as a Kenyan 'tribe' will be highlighted.

Creating a new community – from Sudanese to Nubi

The Nubis were not a homogeneous ethnic group when they arrived in Kibera; they were internally divided, mostly along 'Sudanese tribal lines'. A closer look at the social history of the Nubis in Kibera shows that this process of 'becoming the Nubi ethnic group' actually continued for quite some time.

Internal divisions

From the beginning, the Nubis settling in Kibera tended to stay closer to people of the same original Sudanese ethnic group, nowadays called "clan". In general the Fur and Nuba settled in the Sarang'ombe/Lomle area and Lindi, the Bari in Makina and Lindi; the Shilluk and Dinka were mainly around Sarang'ombe and Lomle; the Tagalaw in Galalima, the Mundu in Lang'ata and Toi, the Lendu lived in "Kambi Lendu", and likewise, the Kuku, Alur, and Muru all had their own "Kambi".[359] People were well aware of their tribal origins, they still had culturally more in common, and felt more at ease, with the people of their own clan / ethnic group, who would, for example, also prefer the same food: there is a big difference between what for example Dinka (cattle nomads) and Mundu (agriculturalists) would eat in Sudan, and this difference continued, to some extent, to play a role in Kibera. This shows for example in the food stuffs used in wedding or (female) circumcision rituals – the Dinka clan tend to use more milk, while the Mundu are more into sweet potatoes.

[359] See also Clark 1979: 37 and Clark 1975: 111. 'Kambi' comes from the English 'camp'.

There was also a preference to marry within the same clan – some people travelled far to look for a suitable 'same clan' marriage partner for their son in other Nubi villages in Kenya and even Uganda, and only if they could not find anyone suitable would they look at the girls of the other clans. Moreover, amongst themselves they continued speaking their own tribal languages instead of the "military" language, Kinubi, which was only used when people of different clans were together. Some of these tribal languages (f.e. Lendu) were spoken in Kibera by the older generation until the 1950s, when most of that first generation of soldiers had died. One old *mzee* still remembered some Lendu words, but never learned to speak the language.

The group of soldiers that had been recruited in northern Sudan or Egypt to go to Somalia, initially spoke proper Arabic and not the simplified "Juba-Arabic" or Kinubi. There was a tendency for those people to marry within the "northern group". In due course they unlearned the proper Arabic and used the Kinubi spoken by the others.[360] Apart from differences in language, there were differences in rituals and ceremonies (in weddings etc.) that in some cases remain up to today.

The preference in 'tribal' residence contributed initially to the development of a "sub-locality identity", strengthening kinship ties and other relationships within the different Nubi villages. Internal problems were solved by the sub-locality's elders (*majlish shu'uba/shaura*) who provided leadership at the locational level. The Nubi chief in Kibera, the Liwali, was not accepted by all Nubis; since he was from one of the sub-locations, people from other sub-locations would not recognise or accept him as their leader. Each sub-location had its informal leaders (usually the senior officers), some of whom rose to Kibera-wide prominence, like Khamis Juma or Ramadhan Marjan; there was an almost continuous competition for supremacy in Kibera between these 'big men'. Each sub-locality also had its own cultural group and football team, further indicating the importance of the sub-locality in social life.[361] This situation also led to a certain rivalry between the different sub-locations in which young and old were involved, sometimes (or, according to some people, often) ending in physical fights; after football matches, or during weddings or traditional dances organised by one of the cultural groups, a boy from Makina dancing with a girl from Lomle could be enough reason for trouble. The main rivalry was between Makina and the Lomle / Sarang'ombe area, where allegedly more progressive, richer and more educated people lived.

[360] Informant (Wa5) of the 'northern group'.
[361] Clark 1975: 50-6, 112-3; Clark 1978/9: 37.

The geographical separation of the different clans was not very strict, and became more blurred over time. First of all, there were clans with few people in Kibera: in settling they tended to mix with the other clans; secondly, the choice of location also depended on friendships established in the army, and friends from different clans settled together. Moreover, the Nubi community was quite small, and the number of potential marriage partners limited, even within the whole community; as a result there was increased intermarriage with the other Nubi clans. Over the years a substantial mix between the clans (and sub-locations) took place.

Some of the Nubi clans occupied a different, lower status position within the community, especially the smaller clans – they were by some Nubis even referred to as '*labi*'. Many Nubis were a bit scared of the Lendu and Alur, because of their alleged witchcraft powers; they were also looked down upon, because they kept much more to their old traditions and rituals than the others[362] – the girls of these two clans were not popular marriage partners for boys of other clans: until the 1970/80s they mostly married within their clan. The relatively low social position of the Lendu may also have to do with the fact that the Lendu joined the Nubi community at a later stage – the majority joined a few years before marching to Uganda, and others of the Lendu ethnic group begged to be allowed to join them due to famine in their area: they apparently became servants/slaves to the soldiers.[363] Later the Lendu also became soldiers, and 'full' members of the group.

The internal division in the Nubi community was also somehow reflected in the existence of two Nubi organisations in Kibera, both pretending to represent the community: the Union of Sudanese and the Sudanese Association. The history of both organisations is unclear and confusing, as community leaders moved from one to the other, depending on local alliances and on who was in charge of the Union or Association at the time. Part of the rivalry between the two organisations seems to have stemmed from the locational differences, and from jealousy between elders that could not accept each other as the leader. Possibly generational differences have played a role as well: at some point the Association was mainly made up of the older people, while the Union was more attractive to younger people. Again later the Association lost a lot of goodwill in the community by

[362] See also Clark 1975: 57-8.

[363] Lugard 1893: 205, footnote 1. Thomas & Scott (1925: 261) refer to the Lendu as 'their slaves' (of the Sudanese soldiers, in Uganda), while Matson (1972: 137) refers to them as being the 'carriers' on one of the Nandi punitive expeditions (in Kenya).

supporting the Government's plan to move Nubis to the new housing scheme of Karanja.[364] How deep the rift ran in the community is shown by the story of a student who in the late 1960s was doing research on Kibera's history; one day he interviewed a knowledgeable old man and was to return the next day to continue his questions. The next day, on arrival, the old man refused, he did not want to have anything to do with the student anymore, since he had found out that his father was in the Association!

Despite the tribal differences and divisions within the community, the Nubis presented themselves to the outside world as one community: 'we are a distinct homogeneous community in the middle of pagan Africa', the Union of Sudanese wrote in 1940 to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London. According to Deverell and Colchester, "the Nubis are a well defined group with established and well respected custom" and "high standards of community behaviour and respect".[365] In public the Nubis would invariably refer to themselves as 'Sudanese'[366], emphasising their status as 'foreigners' and their special relationship with the colonial authorities. They did not want to be classified as 'pagan African natives', but rather saw themselves in the same category as Arabs, Somalis and Comorians (all specifically classified as 'non-natives' in 1934[367]), and certainly not lower than "the Indian who came in large numbers and finds himself in a better and superior position than ourselves who lost our lives fighting"; they requested the Government to consider their application 'to be recognised solely as Sudanese and not as natives of Kenya'.[368]

Being recognised as Sudanese, as non-natives, would give them some monetary advantages over 'natives': during World War II the Asians had received higher food rations than natives.[369] Probably more importantly, being recognised as Sudanese would give the Nubis recognition for their services to the British Crown; this special relationship with the colonial authorities should be reflected in special treatment – to be allowed to stay in Kibera, and to continue the distillation of Nubian gin. How important it was for the Nubis to be considered Sudanese is shown when they refused to pay a new Hut Tax that was introduced in 1940 under the Native Hut and Poll

[364] See Clark 1975 and Parsons 1997: 109. Informants M3, M16.
[365] Letter Union of Sudanese, 14/10/40, KNA MAA/2/1/3; Kibera Survey report, 1944, p7, 10.
[366] Amongst themselves they would use 'Nubi'.
[367] Salim: 76.
[368] Letters Union of Sudanese, 14/10/40 and 15/8/44, KNA MAA/2/1/3.
[369] Kibera Survey report, p 10.

tax Ordinance of 1934 (12 Shillings per hut). For the first time the Nubis would also have to pay Hut Tax (the first generation ex-soldiers had been exempted for life), but they refused: they would rather pay the 30 Shillings non-native tax, as long as it was not a *native* tax. A cablegram was sent to get support from Lord Lugard, but in vain; some Nubis ended up in jail for refusing to pay the tax.[370] To the British, the Nubis were, after all, Africans and therefore 'natives (of Africa)'.[371]

On a number of occasions the Nubis suggested (or requested) "that immediate arrangements be made to repatriate all of us to Sudan where we will be able to live in peace", at the expense of the British Government.[372] However, there was never any serious response or support from the colonial or British government to this, and attempts by Nubis to return to Sudan were not successful. The Sudanese (colonial) government did not want the Nubis to come back to Sudan – since there was no 'Nubi tribe' in Sudan, the Nubis could not claim to be Sudanese.[373] Moreover, the Nubis had left Sudan such a long time ago, would they still want, or be able, to live there? The Sudanese government thought they would not fit anymore in the Sudanese agricultural life, 'under chiefs and headmen far less sophisticated than themselves'.[374] One Nubi, Haji Senussi, and his family left for Sudan in 1946; the Kenya government paid him compensation for his house in Kibera (which they apparently demolished) and a contribution towards his travel expenses. However, he returned soon after, and sued the government to allow him to return to live in Kibera.[375] The colonial government took all this talk of repatriation to Sudan as a bluff, a means of pressurising the government to leave them in peace in Kibera: "in fact it has been repeatedly emphasised that they are loyal citizens of Kenya and wish to remain here for good".[376] Yet, Sudan remained attractive to the Nubis. In 1956 (the year of Sudanese Independence) a delegation of Nubi leaders went to Sudan to check out the situation, and see if they would want to go back. Apparently

[370] Cablegram Union of Sudanese to Lord Lugard, probably 1940 - 1941 (copy of unknown origin, no date). Compare also with the Arab-Swahili groups, who were in a similar position (Salim 1976).
[371] Hansen 1991: 574; Johnson 2009: 124.
[372] See letters Union of Sudanese of 1/06/1939 and 14/19/1940, KNA MAA/2/1/3 ii; Parsons 1997: 115.
[373] See Johnson (2009: 121), Parsons (1997: 116), and the cablegram to Lugard.
[374] Johnson 2009: 122.
[375] See letter Haji Senussi to the Chief Secretary, 28/1/50 and the reply of 15/02/50, KNA PC/CP.9/15/5; see also Parsons 1997: 116.
[376] See letter DC Nairobi to Chief Native Commissioner, 7/11/49, and letter La Fontaine to Chief Native Commissioner and Chief Secretary, 10/11/49 (both in KNA PC/CP.9/15/5).

this trip was paid by the Sudanese government (probably the post-colonial independent Sudanese government). The conclusion of the delegation was that they did not like Sudan, they had become too urban, used to city life, and they did not like rural life, it was too hard for them.[377] Nevertheless, quite a number of Nubi went to Sudan, in the 1950s or later, in order to find their relatives. Some, like Abdallah Congo (nickname), found their relatives and stayed; he left Kibera in the early 1960s, and wrote a letter saying he would not come back, and he never did. Several Nubis married in Sudan and stayed there; others married in Sudan but maintain, up to today, two households, one in (southern) Sudan, one in Kibera.

From 'Sudanese' to 'Nubi'

With Independence around the corner, the Nubis' attitude towards their 'foreign' identity had to change; it was not a good idea to be foreigners, 'strangers', in an independent Kenya, without any special relationship with the authorities. As foreigners they would also somehow have to convince the new independent government of their claims on the Kibera land. In the years before Independence, the Nubis therefore started to profile themselves as a "Kenyan tribe". With the coming political changes and the growing nationalism in Kenya, they were forced to rethink their strategies. Whereas the older people found it hard to relinquish their special ties with Sudan, a connection they were proud of, the younger generation felt they had nothing to do with the Sudan; born and raised in Kenya, they felt Kenyan. While the older people suggested, at Independence, to move back to Sudan (they had no faith in an African government), the younger people were attached to (their tribal land) Kibera.[378] When, shortly after Kenya's Independence the Sudanese ambassador commented, in a speech commemorating Sudan's Independence, that the Nubis were after all Sudanese, some young men stood up and protested that they were Kenyans, and not Sudanese.[379] They started referring to themselves in public as 'Nubi'; the Sudanese Association became the Nubian Association of East Africa, and the name of the Sudanese Sports Club was changed to Kibera Sports Club (1963). Changing names was easy, but to be accepted as 'real' Kenyans proved to be more difficult. Throughout the post-Independence period, Nubis have been

[377] Informant M12, whose father was member of that delegation; other informants.
[378] Informant M4.
[379] Clark 1975: 115.

confronted at times with references to their Sudanese origin, usually in attempts to deny them access or rights.[380]

Another process was taking place at the same time in the Nubi community: the clan differences were gradually disappearing. First of all, with time, the original soldiers and their children, the first generation, the people that had come walking from Sudan to Uganda and then Kenya, passed away; with them the tribal languages gradually disappeared. From the 1950s, no one could speak those tribal languages anymore; only Kinubi was used. Increased intermarriage between clans had watered down old tribal ceremonies and rituals, as well as the general division between the clans and locations – everyone was somehow related to everyone.

This trend was enforced by the growing influx of outsiders into Kibera. The large numbers of outsiders (mostly as tenants of the Nubis) made the Nubis pull together and unite: social identity is most important the moment it seems threatened.[381] The 'threat' from outside made the Nubis forget their petty differences; the locational football teams merged, and a few social welfare organisations were established.[382] As these new people were almost all Christians, the Nubis felt their own religion threatened – as a result, Islam became more important and the Nubis more religious (though this was possibly also influenced by higher levels of education and literacy). Also the fact that they were outsiders themselves, foreigners in Kenya, made the Nubis pull together. The Nubis increasingly became 'one community'.

Nevertheless, even nowadays there are still some traces of Sudanese tribal differences present in Nubi culture and small divisions within the Nubi community. Until the 1980s (and maybe even later) girls in Lomle (Ayany) were warned not to marry people from Makina, as they were 'uneducated'. And according to some, up to today some people (the Lendu for example) still prefer to marry within their own clan. Some wedding ceremonies still have some rituals linked to food stuffs, which show the old differences: the Dinka using milk rather than cereals like the Mundu do. Apparently the Lendu still have their secret rituals around their Ngoza tree, linked to healing and other powers. Several clans have, since a few years, their own 'welfare associations', where people of the clan get together to discuss how to advance the clan economically or help one another. Since the people in a clan are often closely related, this is sometimes presented as "the family

[380] See Cemiride 2002.
[381] Eriksen: 68, 76.
[382] See Clark 1975: 113-7.

getting together to help family members". While initially there was much interest from clan/family members to join the 'clan association', this soon died down when people realised there was not much to gain from the association in terms of financial support.

These last traces of old Sudanese tribal differences seem to suggest that the process of 'becoming the Nubi ethnic group' is not over yet. However, it is more likely that some of these internal differences will take much longer or will never go away; no group is completely homogeneous, and probably all ethnic groups have this kind of locational differences and variations, or disagreements between factions within the group.

Nubi ethnic markers

If the Nubis are considered a more or less homogeneous ethnic group, then how do they identify themselves as a group? Every (ethnic) group has social and cultural characteristics, called 'ethnic markers' – they distinguish one group from another, and people use them to identify themselves as member of that particular group. Ethnic markers can be physical or ideological; they can be related to dress, food, physical characteristics, music and art, tools, language, or to common ancestry, legends, traditions, etcetera. Ethnic markers can be anything that makes people say 'this is typically Nubi' (though some markers could also be found in other groups, of course, but combined with other markers specific for those groups). At a more abstract level, ethnic markers allow individuals to interact with others who share their social norms (that is, usually, people of the same group) – people prefer to interact, and cooperate, with people with whom they share easily observable traits.[383] People are therefore often attached to their ethnic markers that can also be seen as symbols of group unity. The Nubi community has a number of common ethnic markers, some of which however have all but disappeared in recent years. This shows again that ethnic identity is open to change, and not static: ethnic markers can change or disappear, but the Nubi ethnic identity has continued to exist, albeit in slightly different form.

Easily visible ethnic markers are the public events like the *dholuka* dances with accompanying music, or the Nubi wedding ceremonies involving specific dress and jewellery for the bride. Though still undertaken, both the

[383] McElreath et al.

dholuka and the wedding ceremonies have experienced changes. In the past, the *dholuka* would be danced almost every weekend, nowadays only at special occasions; the musical instruments used for *dholuka* (mainly drums) were traditionally played by women, who also sang most of the songs; nowadays it is mainly men. The weddings (with ceremonies and parties), in the past lasting 4-7 days, are now often squeezed into one single day, or maybe two days if the family has the financial resources. Physical markers like skin colour or facial features were not used as ethnic markers – the Nubis were a mix of many different peoples, one could find all shades of skin colour, from the darkest black to the lightest brown, in the community, including some typical southern Sudanese features can be seen in some people in Kibera. A few old people have facial scars, which were originally, apparently, "the marks distinguishing the slaves of the invading Nubi troops", but became later "inseparably connected with being Mohammedanized". In Uganda in the 1920s these facial scars – three linear marks, also nicknamed 'one-eleven' – became a sign of high status (due to the Nubis' higher status as civil servants of the colonial government), and other ethnic groups like the Lugbara also started using it.[384] Nevertheless, in Nubis that came to Kibera through Somalia or straight from Sudan, these facial scars may be remnants of a northern Sudanese tribal tradition; in Kibera it is certainly not considered a Nubi tradition.

The Nubi language, Kinubi, is another specific Nubi ethnic marker, though nowadays also quite a few non-Nubi, born and raised in Kibera and living in close interaction with Nubis, speak the language fluently. A Creole language, Kinubi is largely a simplified version of the Sudanese Arabic, and has undergone considerable changes over the last century; there is a difference between the Kinubi the old people speak (which is still mostly Arabic) and the Kinubi of the younger people – nowadays much influenced by Bantu languages (Swahili) or other local Kenyan languages. The Kinubi that is spoken in Uganda is somewhat different from the Kinubi spoken in Kibera, but there seems to be no problem understanding one another.[385]

The Nubis also have a special way of respectfully greeting an older person (or a person of higher status): they take the hand of that person in their hand (or in both hands) and bowing slightly, they push the fingers (of the other

[384] Leopold 2006: 181-90.

[385] A Creole (language) is a stable language that has developed from a pidgin language (which is a simplified combination of two or more languages). See Heine (1982: 11, 17) and Wellens 2001.

person) against their forehead and then against the chin. Even nowadays, Nubi children learn to greet older people in that respectful way.

A number of ethnic markers were reserved specifically for the Nubi girls and women. The *gurbaba*, a large colourful cloth, worn as a skirt under the dress, used to be the every-day dress; nowadays it is only used at special occasions, like weddings and *dholukas*, when all Nubi women turn out in their best (and usually new) *gurbaba*. Nubi men usually wear European type dress or the Muslim *kanzu*, especially when going to the mosque or other religious functions. Nubi girls used to have a special way of plaiting the hair, which was done every Saturday by someone in the family; nowadays it is no longer done that way – all sorts of hairstyles can be found, including Chinese wigs. All Nubi girls would get a '*kipini*', a nose pin, when they were around seven years old. The *kipini* later became a fashion with the other ethnic groups, and was no longer something 'typically Nubi'. Nowadays, only few Nubi girls can be seen with a *kipini*. Apparently Nubi girls also had their lips tattooed to make them black; this, however, seems to have been a common practice in the region – and a very painful procedure, it was claimed.[386] Preparing the excellent Nubi food was obviously a women's task; the recipes are based on (northern) Sudanese tradition, and a far cry from the simple East African *ugali* (maize porridge): rich dishes of meat and vegetables, accompanied by rice or thin pancakes (*gurusa* or *kisra*).[387] These days few people can afford to eat the traditional Nubi dishes; they are reserved for special occasions.

All Nubi girls were subjected to female circumcision, which had its origin in the Sudanese traditions, and was probably introduced in the community in the early days in Sudan. It was one of the prerequisites for marriage for the Nubi girls that they should be circumcised; this was usually done at an early age, when girls were between six and ten years old, and was accompanied by public celebrations. According to old sources, the girls were subjected to the 'pharaonic circumcision'[388], the most severe form of female circumcision.[389] The practice was maintained throughout the years in Uganda and Kenya. However, around the 1950s (and possibly even earlier)

[386] Only one old lady told me this (informant W1).
[387] See Clark (1975: 33-6) for a long list of different food stuffs.
[388] This type of circumcision is defined by WHO (2006: 3) as: 'Narrowing of the vaginal orifice with creation of a covering seal by cutting and appositioning the labia minora and/or the labia majora, with or without excision of the clitoris (infibulation)'. See also Gruenbaum: 8; Yoder & Khan 2008, table 1, p 8.
[389] See also Johnson (2009: 117) who bases his statement that 'girls were subjected to pharonic circumcision' on a source of 1908, which refers to the Nubis in Uganda.

the tradition somehow lost its appeal in Kibera. The severity of the procedure was gradually reduced, until finally in the 1990s people had simply stopped doing it, possibly influenced by higher levels of education and the large numbers of outsiders in Kibera, amongst others.[390]

What becomes clear from this is that, like ethnic identity, ethnic markers are not static; they (can) change, transform or even completely disappear. Nevertheless, the ethnic identity continues to exist. The Nubi language, their dress code, dances and wedding ceremonies, have all changed over the years, influenced by other cultures; the nose pin has been taken over by other, non-Nubi groups, while the Nubi way of plaiting hair and female circumcision have disappeared. Nevertheless, the Nubi identity is still alive, albeit in a different form.

Apart from the physical ethnic markers, there are also a number of *ideological* markers, or principles, norms, which form part of the Nubi identity. Groups need norms to make social structure and organised community life possible, but these norms are not always completely complied with, rather they are used flexibly. Groups *have* to be flexible with (some) norms, otherwise community life would be near impossible. It will become clear that these ideological ethnic markers have the same characteristic as the other ethnic markers – they evolve, change; they are not static.

The most obvious ideological marker is religion; as many Nubis keep repeating: "all Nubis are Muslim, but not all Muslims are Nubi".[391] Originally, the Nubis belonged to the Maliki School of jurisprudence / religious law (which is currently followed by 15-25% of the Muslims, mainly in North and West Africa, including Egypt, and possibly also Sudan). Maliki is one of the four schools of religious law within Sunni Islam that basically deal with the observance of rituals, morals and social legislation. Due to a lack of preachers from the north (Egypt, Sudan), the Nubis had to follow preachers from the east, the Swahili coast, who were mainly 'Shafi'. As a result, most Nubis nowadays follow the Shafi school, but there are some that follow other schools and even some Nubi are Shia Muslims; it often depended on who they were interacting with, the 'school' of the community they mainly associated with. The differences between all these groups are in practice not substantial. This may partly be because interpretations were often adopted to African custom; Islam was flexible,

[390] A more elaborate section on female circumcision is added as Appendix B.
[391] See also Kirsonaka: 5.

and could tolerate the continuation of traditional beliefs and practice alongside its own. In the Nubi community, "like among the majority of African Muslims, African traditional culture remained vigorous"[392] – a number of their traditional tribal customs and rituals were maintained, also in Kibera. All Nubi clans had their own, different, cults and rituals. For example, the Lendu and Alur had their sacred Goza trees (there were apparently three of them in Kibera) with small shrines, where they made offerings to get their ancestors' blessings; the rituals were done until the 1980s, while in the last years they were already simpler, and shorter than before. One of the trees is still standing, but no longer used as 'Goza tree'; the other two were cut down (by Lendus!) to make space for a house. No one protested when it happened, indicating the diminished (or lack of) importance of the Goza rituals. People also believed (and many still do) in charms, ghosts and 'night-runners' (beings that go out at night, flying around naked, not harming, but only scaring people). 'Ancestor worship' rituals (*sibr*) were quite common in all clans, and possibly still exist; Islam and these traditional rituals exist(ed) side by side.[393] The first mosque in Kibera was built at Makina, in the 1920s. In the late 1940s Lomle added a mosque to their *madrasa* (Koran school); to some extent this was a result of the rivalry between the sub-locations, and contributed as well to further separation.[394] There are currently ten mosques in Kibera, and all imams are Nubis, though the mosques are used by all Muslims.

Another one of the ideological markers (principles/norms) is that the Nubis are patrilineal: kinship and descent are traced through the male line (which is according to the Islamic rules). Also in settlement after marriage: a girl would in principle move to the new husband's area of origin (patrilocal). However, Nubis (soldiers) travelled around a lot, and many Nubis moved away to or from Kibera, and settled where they married or married where they settled. After divorce, a woman could stay in her husband's area or move back home, and thus her children could grow up amongst their mother's kin, and, with increasing importance of the matrilineal group in their lives, even inherit there.[395] The Nubis were fairly relaxed about 'lending out' or 'swapping' their children (and adopting), and many Nubi children grew up in the house of an auntie or uncle, even if these lived in other Nubi settlements or as far as Kampala. This would have had an influence on inheritance practices.

[392] Informant M16; Soghayroun: 47, 165-7.
[393] Informants M16, Wa4, Wa11.
[394] Informant M3, Wa15.
[395] See also Clark 1975: 25-7.

Another ideological marker is the 'myth of origin': notions of shared origins or ancestry are usually crucial for the (ethnic) identity of the members of an ethnic group[396], and the Nubis are no exception. They take pride in their military history, claiming to be descendants of the Sudanese soldiers that came to Kenya with the British colonial army – this is the story that is communicated to the general public. However, in private conversations most Nubis would have little problem acknowledging their own Kikuyu (or any other ethnic group) ancestry, or naming all the Nubis they know that are (partly) Kikuyu. There is an overlap here with another ideological marker, endogamy. In principle, Nubis should marry someone from their own community. In the early days this meant marrying within the clan, or, for want of a suitable same-clan candidate, within the wider Nubi community, which became the rule in later years. However, also here reality is different - from the beginning, Nubis have married outsiders (mainly women, people without any direct link to the 'Sudanese soldiers') and incorporated them into the community. In public, though, they would all maintain the myth of single origin.[397] The next section will look a bit closer at the incorporation of new members into the Nubi community.

The myths of origin and endogamy: outsiders 'becoming Nubi'

In practice, ethnic groups have to be (and usually are) flexible with ancestry, the 'myth of origin', otherwise they would not be able to incorporate new members into the group, something every (ethnic) group has to deal with at some point: strangers joining the group, or men or women marrying into the community, outsiders that would not (usually) share the same origin with the other members of the group. There must be ways of incorporating these newcomers into the group; in some cases they may be forced to play an inferior role as 'second class members', in other cases they will become full members of the group.

The Nubi community in Kibera wouldn't exist if it weren't for its 'flexible ethnic boundaries', and people of other origin joining the group. Once the Nubis were 'established' as a separate group, they continued incorporating new members. This was mainly through marriage and adoption, but also included a few Borana and Ethiopian KAR soldiers who also settled in

[396] Eriksen: 59.
[397] See also Kopytoff 1987: 54-5.

Kibera and married Nubi girls; over time these new group members assimilated completely into the Nubi community.

In the early years, in Equatoria, and later in Uganda, Kenya and Somalia, the Nubi soldiers often 'married' women they took by force. Once in Kibera, this practice gradually died out, simply because a decreasing number of Nubi men were in the army. Nevertheless, one old lady claims to remember that after the "Italian war"[398] young Nubis came home with 'captured' girls – most of these boys were considered too young to marry, and the girls were placed in the care of the boys' mothers until they got married. Marriage with non-Nubi women (forced or not) followed the same rituals and ceremonies as with the Nubi women; they were 'real' weddings, and included the traditional *dholuka* dancing.

The non-Nubi women marrying into the Nubi community were expected to 'become Nubi' – they would have to become Muslim, change their name, and learn Kinubi. They would also have to dress like a Nubi, using the *gurbaba* (a colourful skirt-like garment), and learn to cook the typical Nubi food. Girls were circumcised if that had not yet been done. Most of these women completely adapted to Nubi ways; later generations would not even know that these women were not born as a Nubi. It was something people did not talk about, and children were not supposed to ask anything: the origin of individuals was basically swept under the carpet and never spoken about.[399]

Though it was mainly women marrying into the Nubi community, there have also been some men that 'became Nubi'. Some of them were men working for the Nubis (shamba boys), that became Muslim and later married a Nubi girl. Others were adopted children that grew up with the Nubi family – they may have been orphans, or simply a child of a shamba boy that lived close to the family and gradually became Nubi. During the Emergency quite a number of Kikuyu children of shamba boys, friends or other Kikuyus living in Kibera, were taken care of by the Nubis – some of them remained with the Nubi family after the Emergency was over, and 'became Nubi', later marrying into the community. Like the women, some of these men adapted so well that younger people would not know his original non-Nubi ancestry; when such a man died, the question would arise where to bury him, in Kibera or 'home' – surprising half the community.

[398] This must have been around 1941, after Italy was defeated in East Africa by the Allied Forces.
[399] Informants M1, M3, M16, and others.

Usually though, men seem to have had more problems 'becoming Nubi' than women, and (therefore) also more problems being accepted as a Nubi, certainly if they 'became Nubi' at a later age.

Nubi girls apparently never married much out of the community; this may have been because there was already a shortage of Nubi girls for marriage (many Nubi men were polygamous), but according to some people, also because they were too expensive (dowry and bride price), and too difficult to maintain: they were somehow spoilt, used to a high standard of living compared to other Africans, and they 'needed' Nubi food...[400]

In general, after World War I, intermarriage with outsiders seems to have decreased. The norm was to find a Nubi girl of the same clan; if that was not possible, a Nubi girl of another clan; in the worst case, a Muslim girl from elsewhere. Nevertheless, intermarriage with non-Nubis never stopped completely; many Nubi men were polygamous, and second wives were often non-Nubi. Nubi businessmen may bring home a Turkana or Luo wife from areas where they would go regularly.

Despite the fact that no one spoke about it, it was obviously well known in the community who was an outsider, who had originally come from another ethnic group. It was generally not considered a problem, though, being from outside the community: many Nubi women had originally come from elsewhere, and many people had non-Nubi (grand)mothers or aunties. But somehow it was not something people would talk about, it was almost something degrading. This must have something to do with the fact that the Nubis generally did not like '*labi*', the 'outsider', whom they considered of lower class. No one wanted to be reminded that many of them actually were (full or partly) '*labi*'. Therefore, as soon as a woman had 'become Nubi', and made an effort to be part of the community (and many women became 'more Nubi than the Nubis'), she was accepted as a Nubi, and no more was said about it. Certainly, the Nubis could not afford to marginalise those in-marrying women – they were a small community and could not risk women leaving the group. They therefore had to be completely integrated, and the secret, of who is a 'real Nubi' and who isn't, well-kept. In this way, all women (and their off-spring) could hold their heads high and be publicly defined as (and claim to be) real Nubis.[401]

[400] Informant M1.
[401] See Kopytoff 1987: 47-8.

During the Mau Mau Emergency a number of marriages took place with mainly Kikuyu girls hiding in Kibera (see also Chapter 2). From the 1960s, with more outsiders coming into Kibera and younger Nubis schooling outside Kibera, there was more interaction with "others" – intermarriage increased again. Part of those inter-tribal relationships were the so-called "come we stay" relationships: simply living together. With a Nubi girl this was out of the question, but with girls of other ethnic groups it was possible. Such a relationship did not require a great deal of money, whereas a wedding to a Nubi girl would be hugely expensive. Some Nubi families would actually prefer their son to live with a Kikuyu girl rather than spend money (they did not have) on a real Nubi wedding – that could always be done at a later stage. Very often though these informal 'come we stay' relationships were at some point formalised, often during Ramadhan, under pressure from the family and community – it was considered 'not done', it is against Islam, just live together like that without being married. It depended mainly on the family, how much they would really accept a non-Nubi girl (married to their son) to become a Nubi; it was the mother and sisters of the husband who were expected to teach the newcomer the Nubi ways, of female behaviour, of cooking, dressing, family life. In some cases they refused, or did not try very hard; in other cases the girl herself did not try hard, or kept part of her Kikuyu customs – even this was not always a problem, some families accepted this, but such a woman would never be seen as a full member of the community. Some women that became Nubi mentioned that they were never really accepted by the community: "they will always let you know that you are not one of them. The Nubis are proud people, they will never accept you completely".[402] Up to today, when people are arguing, they can still bring up the origin of others, "ah, but you are not really a Nubi...." or "yes, but his father was a Kakwa, they are like that....". In a way, this is strange, because it seems unlikely to find any Nubi in Kibera that has no '*labi*' blood in his or her veins... they probably don't know it themselves! Nevertheless, it is mainly the older people that know the 'outsider' origin of other Nubis; the younger generations do not know and do not seem to care about it.

In the last two decades intermarriage with non-Nubi seems to have increased dramatically – according to some more than 50% of marriages nowadays is with non-Nubi. An attempt was made to collect statistics on marriages of Nubis within and outside the Nubi community, but it appeared that Nubi marriages were either not registered, or registered in many

[402] Informants W16, W26.

different places, making it impossible to get comprehensive statistics. What seems clear though is that intermarriage with other ethnic groups has become generally accepted.

Nowadays Nubis are more flexible with in-marrying people about their 'becoming Nubi'. Depending on the family, they may accept the woman (or man) in the family even if she does not make any effort to 'become Nubi'; other families may appreciate or insist on at least some concessions. The only condition is usually that s/he must be (or become) a Muslim. When asked who they would accept as a member of their community, most Nubis said they would accept anyone with one Nubi parent (father or mother) provided that person is raised as a Nubi (which is sometimes not the case if the mother is Nubi and they don't live in Kibera but grow up in the father's home area). In-marrying people, obviously without any Nubi parent, will also be accepted as Nubi, provided they are Muslim, and 'behave' as a Nubi, feeling themselves (and wanting) to be part of the community; this would involve speaking Kinubi, and to some extent participating in Nubi ceremonies, funerals, weddings, etcetera.[403] Many of the non-Nubi girls marrying a Nubi are actually from Kibera – born there, they often know the Nubi culture and sometimes even the language, and there is little problem in integrating. Nubi youths seem to attach little importance to marrying within the community. Some have joined a Nubi cultural club (mostly remnants of the old locational social groups) and want to promote Nubi culture and values, and the endogamous Nubi-Nubi marriage, but most seem less concerned about these issues. One reason is that many young Nubis are losing their own culture; they hardly speak Kinubi anymore, the *gurbaba* is only used for Nubi weddings and other ceremonies, the *dholuka* dance and music at weddings is being replaced by coastal *Taarab* music and disco. If people have the chance, they move out of Kibera. This raises questions and doubts about the future of Nubi culture and identity, though some people claim to have noticed a recent revival: an increase in Nubi-Nubi weddings, a return to *dholuka* and *gurbaba*, and increasingly popular 'Nubian nights'.[404]

[403] Compare Clark 1975: 82-3.

[404] These 'Nubian nights' are organised (at city hotels or bars) at irregular intervals: all-night parties with Nubi food, music and dance; not only for the young – many older people attend as well.

Other Nubi groups in East Africa

There is another aspect of Nubi identity that has continued to play a role in the lives of many Nubis of Kibera: the link with other 'East African Nubians'. The Nubis are spread out over a number of countries, and, possibly because they are few in numbers, they keep in close contact – together they form the close-knit Nubi community.

Within Kenya, there are a number of other Nubian villages (apart from Kibera) and quite a few places with sizeable Nubi communities, like Mombasa. The Nubi communities in these places have always been in close contact with each other, because of intermarriage in the past, or because people moved from one place to the other (usually to Kibera) for studies or work. Most Kibera Nubis visit the other places from time to time, to see relatives, or for celebrations like weddings or funerals.

There are also Nubi communities in Tanzania and Uganda, as well as a few Nubi families in Somalia. The links with these communities have remained strong, certainly in Uganda where the Nubis are a recognised ethnic group. In Somalia, only a few Nubi families remained after the British handed over British Somalia to Italy in 1925. They have mostly assimilated into Somali society, but have also kept in contact with their relatives that moved to Kenya, mainly by telephone. In Tanzania, the Nubis have almost completely assimilated into the Tanzanian Muslim communities; Kinubi is not spoken anymore. They are, with a few exceptions, no longer involved in the Nubi cultural exchange activities within East Africa. They know they are Nubi, but otherwise they are just like other Tanzanian Muslims. Nevertheless, there is still contact between a few people in Kibera and some relatives in (mainly) Dar es Salaam.

The links between the Nubis in Kibera and Uganda have remained strong for different reasons. First of all, Uganda has always had a sizeable Nubi community, and has been a major source of marriage partners; almost every Nubi family in Kibera has relatives in Uganda. In the old days, people looked for Nubi girls of the same clan (Sudanese 'tribe'), but it seems there have also been arrangements between friends from the same KAR company to marry each other's daughter, or as marriage partner for their son. Weddings still take place between Nubis from Kibera and Uganda, partly because young Nubis from Kibera study in Kampala and get to know Ugandan Nubis, as they often stay with relatives, or at least visit frequently. The Nubis have, since the late 1940s, organised football matches and

cultural events with their 'tribesmen' in Kenya and Uganda[405]; the Nubian cultural festivals still take place, usually around Easter and in December, during the holidays; one year in Kibera, the next year in Uganda (usually in Bombo, the main Nubi village in Uganda, near Kampala). Due to the economic situation of many Nubis the scale of the festivals has reduced substantially, but still many people travel between Uganda and Kibera to participate in the festivals and visit relatives and old friends, or for funerals and weddings.

In Uganda the Nubis had long been recognised as a distinct community, but their 'special status' had been a topic for discussion since the 1920s - here too the Nubis claimed status as foreigners, non-natives. They never got this recognition, but were placed, in 1938, under the authority of the King of the Baganda, while their land ownership in Bombo, the military headquarters near Kampala where many Nubis had settled, was confirmed. Their special privileges disappeared with the death of the ex-servicemen.[406] The events in Uganda were closely followed by the Nubis in Kibera, and gave some hope about ownership of the Kibera land, but had no further impact on the course of events in Kenya.

In the 1970s, the time of Idi Amin, the ties with Uganda were strengthened further. Though Idi Amin was not a Nubi himself, he was Muslim and a soldier, and had therefore strong links with the Nubis. Being in the King's African Rifles, he spent some time at the Lang'ata barracks in Nairobi, and must have spent time in Kibera as well.[407] Like the British in the past, Idi Amin relied on foreigners for his army; he recruited many southern Sudanese, available after the civil war there had ended, a few hundred Palestinians, and he incorporated a growing number of Nubis.[408] Many young Kibera Nubis saw opportunities in Uganda, and left Kibera to join Amin's army.[409] According to one former soldier, "it was like the Nubians had taken power in Uganda, so it was a good opportunity for Nubians, and

[405] The Tanzanian Nubis were initially also involved, though to a lesser extent. See also Clark 1975: 49-50.

[406] Hansen 1991: 570-4; letter Governor to Government House, 3/4/1947; letter Giffard to Colonial secretary, 2/3/1938, KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3/ii; 'Announcement' of Ugandan Government on Nubi status, appr. 1938/9 (copy of 'unknown origin').

[407] There is a lot of discussion about Amin's origins (see for example Kokole 1995, Southall 1973, Woodward 1978) but it's generally assumed that his father was a Kakwa and his mother a Lugbara – both ethnic groups have 'representatives' in the Nubi ethnic group.

[408] Hansen 1991: 578-9; Kyemba: 111-3; Woodward: 162.

[409] A number of informants (M13, M20, Wa11) had been in Amin's army. See also Kokole 1995: 46.

many got rich by associating themselves with Idi Amin, they got shops etcetera after the Asians were expelled (in 1972)".[410] It's not clear how many Nubi boys and men (and some women as well) went to Uganda, but their absence was noticeable in Kibera – possibly 1-200, maybe more; according to some people there was hardly any young (Nubi) man left in Kibera. Most joined the army, others, older and more experienced, were recruited for work in business and management.[411]

After Amin was defeated and went into exile (1979), Nubis in Uganda had to go in hiding; they were very unpopular, partly held responsible for the excessive violence during Amin's reign.[412] Many Nubis fled the country, and the *gurbaba* disappeared for a while from the streets of Kampala. Within 48 hours after Amin had fled, Kibera's Nubi population increased; several Kibera Nubis had died in Uganda, but most came back to Kibera, some through Zaire or Sudan. Moreover, many Ugandan Nubis came to look for shelter in Kibera, or a hiding place. Almost every Nubi household in Kibera had Ugandan relatives staying with them; some as many as ten. This influx of Ugandan Nubis created quite a bit of tension in many Nubi households, especially since many of them stayed for extended periods of time (some more than ten years!), often not working but depending on their Kibera relatives, who could do nothing but accommodate them. The richer Ugandan Nubis stayed in hotels in town, not in Kibera, before moving into rented houses; some later also invested in Nairobi, mainly in the public transport business (*matatus*). Most Ugandan Nubis eventually went back to Uganda, but often only after Museveni had come to power (1986) and had started returning property to the original owners – including Ugandan Nubis that had already been wealthy before Idi Amin's stint in power. Some built their own house and settled for good in Kibera.[413] As a result of this increased contact between Ugandan and Kibera Nubis, intermarriage increased and old relationships were renewed.

In Uganda, people that follow the Islamic way of life are generally known as 'Nubians', while 'Nubi' and 'Muslim' are often used synonymously.[414] This brings us back to the question whether the Nubis can be considered a 'tribe': Kokole claims that the Nubis "do not constitute a tribe in the usual African sense", because they don't have an indigenous language, no indigenous

[410] Informant M20.
[411] Informants M3, M4.
[412] See Kyemba 1997.
[413] Informants M3, M16, M13, M26, Wa11, W26.
[414] Hansen 1991: 578-9; Soghayroun: 45.

names, no tribal land, and no myth of origin. He argues that the Nubis are rather a "Muslim Club" that any Muslim can join simply by speaking Kinubi and dressing like a Nubi, and also leave when it is more convenient to do so. However, Kokole is referring to the situation in Uganda, where in the recent past many people have 'become Nubi', or rather, have 'masqueraded as Nubi' – to benefit from the sudden prominent position of this group (mainly during the reign of Idi Amin). As Leopold argues, for local ethnic groups in (mainly northern) Uganda, the "Nubi identity provided an elective, strategic, alternative 'ethnicity'", and, he adds, "undoubtedly many people were Nubi when trading in town (or serving in the forces), and Lugbara or Kakwa when they returned to the villages of West Nile." [415] However, one can question the veracity of Kokole's conclusion – those 'new Nubis joining the Muslim Club' may be perceived by the average Ugandan as Nubis (and this would be correct in situations where *Nubi* means *Muslim*), but the *real* or *original* Nubis know exactly who is a Nubi (meaning, member of the Nubi ethnic group) and who is "masquerading as a Nubi" (meaning, a Muslim).[416] The *real* Nubis are "those persons who can prove that they are the descendants of the Armed Forces of Emin Pasha and his predecessors or that from association with the Nubi Community extending over a period of many years they have lost all connection with the tribes from which they originally sprang".[417] People may 'become Nubi' (instead of simply 'masquerade' as one), but it is linked to a process of adaptation and assimilation into the community; it is not as easy as 'joining a club'.[418] The Nubi community in Kibera is certainly not a 'Muslim club'; they would accept 'new Nubis', but only if they assimilate, become part of the Nubi ethnic community, with all its ceremonies and ethnic markers, and with the social obligations that are part of 'being a Nubi'. In Kenya, *Nubi* is of course not synonymous with *Muslim*.

This discussion on the Nubis being a 'tribe' or not, and on 'who is a real Nubi' may seem trivial or irrelevant, but for the Nubis these questions are

[415] Kokole 1985; Nasseem and Marjan 1992. Leopold 2006: 181-91.
[416] Pain (1975: 184) distinguishes between the 'full' Nubi, and the 'marginal' Nubi who chooses to identify with the Nubis for convenience, while keeping other options (going back to his original ethnic group) open. Interviews with M1, M4 and others.
[417] From 'announcement' of the Government in Uganda, around 1947 (copy of unknown origin). See also Hansen 1991: 569.
[418] Hansen 1991; Kokole 1985; Kokole 1995; Leopold 2006: 195; Nasseem and Marjan: 204, 211-2; Obbo 1976: 381. See also Obbo's example (1980: 108-9) in which the 'nubinisation' of a woman takes six months (in Uganda).

important[419]: being considered an ethnic group will help in the claim on the land in Kibera, while being recognised as a *real* Nubi will become an issue when the Kibera land is eventually (if ever) allocated to the community – only *real Nubis* can be expected to share in the benefits.

The Nubis today – legal problems in becoming Kenyan

As mentioned earlier, after Independence the Nubis started to refer to themselves as a Kenyan ethnic group instead of as Sudanese, but to be accepted as real Kenyans was a different matter. Kenya has 42 recognised ethnic communities that have a national quota when it comes to recruitment for government jobs or places in national colleges. In censuses and other official statistics, all other people, including the Nubis, are put together in a rest group "others". The Nubi have been campaigning to be recognised as "the 43rd tribe" - apart from being entitled to a small job and college quota and part of the national cake, it would also mean a psychological boost to many Nubis. Moreover, it would have the advantage of easier access to national IDs and possibly give them a stronger claim on their Kibera tribal land. In late 2007, just before the elections, the incumbent president Kibaki promised the Nubis to recognise them as 'the 43rd tribe', but this was obviously merely an election gimmick to get votes.

The Nubis have had some problems in becoming recognised as Kenyans (or, a Kenyan ethnic group). The Kenyan Constitution basically states that everyone born in Kenya before Independence, and with one of his/her parents also born there, qualified to be Kenyan. This would mean the Nubis automatically qualify to be recognised as Kenyan citizens. Foreigners, like the Asians, were told to declare their intent to the government to become Kenyan citizen. The Nubis however were apparently told "you are not Sudanese, you are Kenyan", and so they did not bother to 'declare their intent'. This was later used against them – the last decade the Nubis have had serious problems in getting birth certificates, IDs and passports. Initially, Nubis were asked to produce their grandfather's birth certificate to prove that he was indeed born in Kenya. While the registration of births in Kenya remains inadequate at the present, it's impossible to imagine that the pre-1963 period would yield better records, if any at all.[420] This was clearly an excuse not to give IDs to Nubis. A court case against the State clarified

[419] Compare this with the Creoles in Sierra Leone, where the issue is also important; as the community is small, many people know who is 'real' Creole and who isn't (Cohen 1981).
[420] Sing'oei 2008.

the issue: the Government's position was that the Nubis had not renounced their Sudanese citizenship, and they had been negligent in not pursuing Kenyan citizenship by registration (like the Asians did). The High Court supported the Kenyan government, and demanded proof that the community was not a 'phantom': ***every*** member of the Nubi community was to sign a document saying they are Nubi and 'aggrieved'; a clear attempt to stall the case.[421] The matter was subsequently (in 2006, without further hearings in Kenya) brought before the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (of the African Union) in the Gambia, where a ruling for its admissibility is yet to be announced.[422] Nowadays, young Nubis applying for their ID have to pass through a 'vetting committee', two or three older Nubis that verify whether the person requesting the ID is indeed known to them as a Nubi. With the vetting committee's note of approval they can then go to the Police department dealing with IDs. The Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (an autonomous institution, created by the government) concluded in 2007 that "the process of vetting Kenyan-Somalis, Nubians and Kenyan Arabs […] is discriminatory and violates the principle of equal treatment". It is a violation of human rights to ask some Kenyan citizens supporting documents that go beyond those required of other applicants.[423] Some people mention that this discrimination stems from the global 'war on terror', in which Kenya supports the USA administration, and reason why Muslims in particular seem to have this problem in getting IDs. However, the problems were already there before '9/11'; the 'war on terror' may have exacerbated the existing problem.[424]

Conclusion

This chapter has looked in more detail at Nubi identity and the changes over the years, from their creation as a community, up to the new millennium. There aren't many examples of the creation of ethnic groups from a mix of 'strangers', like in the case of the Nubis[425], and there is therefore no real

[421] See also Sing'oei: 108.

[422] This Commission has no powers to enforce its verdicts; non-compliance cases will have to be brought before the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights in Arusha. The latest news is that the Nubi case (ACmHPR communication 317/06) would be heard by the Commission in June or July 2010.

[423] KNCHR 2007; Cemiride 2002; Sing'oei: 106-110.

[424] See website http://www.minorityrights.org/3951/kenya/muslims.html (accessed 11/5/09).

[425] The Chikunda on the Mozambican *prazos* (private estates) took a few hundred years to develop into an 'ethnic group' (see Isaacman & Peterson 2003 and Isaacman & Isaacman

measuring stick available to indicate whether the time the Nubis needed to become a relatively homogeneous ethnic community is long or short. Their creation could be considered to have taken place in the 1890s, when moving into Uganda with Captain Lugard; had they stayed in Uganda, the group might have disintegrated, or disappeared in another, maybe violent, way. Going to Uganda meant becoming a group of foreigners in a strange land, leading almost automatically to 'closing the ranks', and pulling together, a situation conducive to the creation of a group culture. The first decades in Kibera (and probably in other Nubi villages as well) the old Sudanese tribal differences continued to play a role, though, with the passing of time, of diminishing importance. The process of becoming a more homogeneous community was helped by the influx of outsiders into Kibera and the Independence of Kenya. It is clear from all the changes that Nubi ethnic identity has gone through during its relatively short existence that ethnic identity is not static, but open to change and manipulation, depending on the context and situation.

Despite the remaining differences and divisions within the community, and the incorporation of many 'foreign' women into the group, the Nubis can be considered an ethnic group – they regard themselves as such, and are regarded by others as such. The Nubi find a common origin in the area around southern Sudan, and they have their own language, distinctive cultural characteristics and ethnic markers, and a myth of origin or creation in the King's African Rifles, the British colonial army. They also have what could be considered their 'tribal land', Kibera in Kenya (and maybe Bombo in Uganda), an essential part of Nubi identity.

After Independence, contrary to expectations, ethnicity did not disappear under the influence of modernity; indeed, ethnic identities often became even more important, especially in urban settings, playing a role in competition for jobs, housing, and plain (economic) survival. The Nubis, being a small minority group, experienced more problems in securing employment – finding work often depends on 'knowing someone', usually a member of the same ethnic community; the larger and more powerful ethnic groups are therefore at an advantage here, simply because they will always have 'tribesmen' in any Government Ministry or department, or corporate offices. Ethnicity remains important in Independent Kenya, and the Nubis are at a disadvantage here; being recognised as Kenya's 43rd tribe would certainly help. Another effect of the growing importance of ethnicity has

2004). The Griquas in South Africa basically only existed between 1810 and 1879 before they dispersed (Ross 1976).

been a growing group consciousness after Independence, and an increasing homogenization of the community. On the other hand, due to the increased interaction and intermarriage with non-Nubis in Kibera, the young Nubi culture is already under pressure, and losing ground, increasingly being mixed with or replaced by elements from other cultures, including the mixed 'urban culture'. Nevertheless, despite the problems many Nubis have in getting IDs, they are, in general, being recognised and accepted as a Kenyan community.

It is highly improbable that there are Nubis in Kibera with 100% Sudanese/northern Ugandan (or: "original Nubi") blood, but this is in a way irrelevant because all these outsiders marrying into the community *became Nubi* by adapting themselves and conforming to the norms and values of the (developing) Nubi culture. Their off-spring grew up in the Nubi culture and was automatically Nubi. In-marrying 'blood' disappeared, was not talked about and became invisible. However, the bloodline is of little relevance: it is the culture and behaviour that counts. Despite the fact that the Nubis are made up of people from an enormous variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, they have managed to create a Nubi community that has, so far, withstood the test of time.

4

"Kill me quick" – a history of Nubian gin in Kibera

> *"Here," said I, uncorking a vial of medicinal brandy, "is the Kisungu pombe (white man's beer); take a spoonful and try it," at the same time handing it.*
>
> *"Hacht, hacht, oh, hacht,! what! eh! what strong beer the white men have! Oh, how my throat burns!"*
>
> *"Ah, but it is good," said I, "a little of it makes men feel strong, and good; but too much of it makes men bad, and they die."*
>
> *"Let me have some," said one of the chiefs; "and me," "and me," "and me," as soon as each had tasted.*[426]

Until they were introduced by the explorers Speke and Baker[427] in the 1860s, distilled liquors were largely unknown in East Africa.[428] These explorers distilled on several occasions alcohol based on banana and sweet potato for the local kings, who were very impressed with the strong drink; one of the kings, Kamurasi of Bunyoro, even wanted a Sudanese soldier, passing through with Baker and a trading caravan, to stay behind to distil for him.[429] The spread of distilled liquors in East Africa was closely associated with colonial rule, and particularly with the Sudanese soldiers of the colonial powers, the Nubis. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth

[426] Excerpt from: H.M. Stanley (1872: 334).
[427] See for example Baker (1888: 401-3) and Speke (1864: 354-6).
[428] Except in a few places along the coast, where Arab traders had been distilling probably even before Speke and Baker did (see Willis 2002: 41, footnote 71).
[429] Baker: 403.

century, their *waragi*, or "Nubian gin", spread across East Africa at the pace of the colonial conquest.

Kibera's proximity to army barracks and a major town created a huge market for the Nubian gin, which was exploited to a considerable extent: many Nubi women became involved in producing and selling Nubian gin and the amounts of money they made allowed the Nubi community to live a very good life indeed.[430] For a few decades they managed to monopolise the liquor trade as an ethnic business, an ethnic economic niche, until they were overtaken by events: the influx of other ethnic groups into Kibera and competitors (from other ethnic groups) entering the alcohol market. The Nubi women then moved to another ethnic economic niche, the rental room business, which was initially also almost completely controlled by the Nubis. Ethnic economic niches exist, or have existed, in a number of sectors; they can be linked to the ethnic stereotyping of the colonial days. The Nubi men for example had earlier also occupied such a niche: as a 'martial race' they dominated the African soldiery in the regional colonial armies. Other examples include the Luhya as houseboys, or the street sweepers of Nairobi that had been (until Mau Mau) almost exclusively Embu of Central Province.[431]

There is extensive literature on how African women try to escape male control and gain economic independence, and the options they have and strategies they use to achieve that – it would often involve migrating to town and cutting ties with the family back home. Nairobi in its early days was a male-dominated town with hardly any formal employment for women – they were supposed to stay at home. Apart from prostitution and trade, the production of alcohol was a commonly used survival strategy, because it did not require much capital or skills.[432] In Nairobi's Mathare slums in the 1970s, women involved in alcohol production also did very well financially. However, over the years they lost control over the business: in the '90s men had taken over the manufacturing of alcohol and women were only marginally involved in retailing distilled alcohol, earning much less than before.[433] The Nubi women were at a clear advantage, as they already lived in (near) town, and had easy access to a market for their product. Moreover,

[430] Also in Arua, Uganda, the Nubis controlled [in 1949] the illicit gin trade, 'perhaps the most profitable trade in the district' (Leopold 2006: 191).
[431] White: 214.
[432] See for example Bujra 1975: 220; Frederiksen 2002; Hake: 65-6; Nelson 1978/9, 2000; Obbo 1980; Robertson 1997; White 1990.
[433] Nelson 1978/9; Nelson 2000: 308-10; Rodriguez-Torres: 8-10. See also Hake: 157-8.

their fathers and husbands did not interfere too much with the alcohol production, nor did they try to take over the business. As a result of their income, the Nubi women became the economic power in Kibera.

In Kibera in the 1970s, with the huge influx of people of other ethnic groups into the settlement, the production of Nubian gin (by Nubis) had to be reduced and was finally stopped. But many Nubi women maintained their relatively strong economic position by switching to another source of income, the rental business. In other parts of Nairobi this process had already started earlier, with women investing their own money, often earned with prostitution or alcohol, in houses and land. Nelson and others have identified 'housing and property' as 'one of the most important financial goals of single women migrants' strategies for survival in Nairobi'. Luise White describes this process for women moving to Pumwani, the first legal African settlement in Nairobi, in the 1920s. House ownership was a good investment of their savings, and allowed women to earn a regular income and be completely independent in terms of receiving clients for sex or drinking. Moreover, 'landlady' was a more respectable position.[434]

This chapter tells the story of "the rise and fall of the Nubian gin" in Kibera. The Nubian gin has played an important role in the history of both the Nubis and Kibera; with the income it generated the Nubis could maintain, during the 1930s through to the 1960s, a relatively high standard of living. As such, it supported the Nubis' view of the world, in which they were different from and better than the other Africans. Moreover, it made the Nubis even more attached to Kibera, and reluctant to move from there to an area further away from Nairobi, with less (alcohol) business opportunities. Without the Nubian gin, the Nubis might have eventually relocated when the British wanted them to; the Kibera land would then have been used for Nairobi's expansion, to build middle-class residential estates, and Kibera slums would never have existed. Without the Nubian gin, the Nubis might have become impoverished, leading to a breaking up of the Nubi community. Furthermore, without the Nubian gin money the Nubis (women) might not have been able to build (as many) rental rooms as they did, and this would also have changed the course of events in Kibera, with fundamentally different results. In this sense, the Nubian gin may have contributed in an important way to a continued existence of the Nubi community and the Nubi ethnic identity, and essentially also to the creation of Kibera as a slum. More generally, the 'Nubian gin story' shows how alcohol production could

[434] Bujra 1975; Nelson 2000: 311; White 1990.

lead to shifting gender relations and to women empowerment in a male-dominated society, resulting in women dominating the economy.

The chapter will begin with an overview of the issues concerning alcohol during the early colonial days, before returning to Kibera for the actual 'Nubian gin story'.

Alcohol in the early colonial days

Alcohol played an important role during the colonisation of Africa; it was often used as barter in the exchange of slaves, gold, ivory and other African commodities, or even as payment for territorial concessions extracted from African chiefs. Many Africans, especially in West Africa's coastal regions, had thus acquired access to strong liquor.[435]

Africans had known alcohol for a long time, but these were simple fermented brews, with low alcohol content, and its use was often restricted, usually to the older men, or to be used in ceremonies and rituals. Production of alcohol was a family affair confined to the domestic setting, controlled by the older people.[436] Distilled liquors were hardly known prior to the colonial era; they posed an extra danger because they could be kept for long periods and were therefore always available – not only during rituals. Moreover, they became available to anyone with money, not just the older people, but growing numbers of young men (and women) as well.[437]

The Europeans (colonial authorities) were not in favour of Africans drinking: it was generally believed that alcohol was the principal cause of crime and violence, and "rendered all Africans stupid and quarrelsome". Africans were 'children and needed special protection from the dangers and evils of alcohol'.[438] However, despite a lot of pressure from temperance movements, churches and missionaries to protect the African natives from alcohol, it was hard to stop it: a lot of money was made through the alcohol business, by traders, but also by countries like Germany, Holland, USA and France.[439]

[435] Pan: 7-9.
[436] Pan: 23. See also Ambler: 165-7.
[437] Ambler: 168; Pan: 20-23; Willis 2002: 89-94.
[438] Pan: 11; Partanen: 58; Willis 2002: 95-97.
[439] Pan: 7-9, 15-19; Partanen: 58.

After the Brussels Conference in 1889-90, import duties on alcohol were introduced to control the alcohol trade and consumption by natives. Subsequent conferences, the most important of which resulted in the 'Treaty of St. Germain-en-Laye' (1919), further elaborated on "limitations on existing trade, progressively increased rates of import duties, banned spirits production on African territories (outside South Africa and North Africa), and forbade the introduction of spirits into areas where trade was not yet established (East and Central and Muslim West Africa)". The impact of all these measures was relatively limited; there were many loopholes in the legislation and many colonies, especially in West Africa, became dependent on the income of these duties on alcohol to cover the running cost of the colony – in some West-African cases more than 70% of the colony's budget was generated by import duties on alcohol. Many colonies could not afford to make a real effort to control the alcohol trade, and, despite the high tariffs, alcohol consumption remained largely unaffected.[440]

In Kenya the first liquor regulation was passed in 1897, prohibiting the consumption of distilled alcohol by the African population. Subsequent amendments and regulations aimed at prohibiting also the manufacture, sale and consumption of "native intoxicating liquors", the traditional fermented brews. This was not only to avoid problems of "disruptive drunken behaviour", but there was also fear that drinking would discourage the men from engaging in wage labour, which would be a problem in Kenya, where a 'rapid expansion of public works and white settler agriculture had created considerable competition for labour'.[441]

However, the Native Liquor Ordinances of 1907 and 1915 were only partly applied, and mainly in urban areas. The British rather depended on the local headmen and chiefs to control production, trade and consumption, but enforcement was almost non-existent, as the headmen were often corrupt, and liked to drink themselves.[442] In 1921 a new Native Liquor Ordinance was passed, but again only applicable to specified areas, and initially only applied to urban areas and some areas of white settlement.[443] In the same year the Nairobi Municipal Council forbade brewing of beer by Africans[444], and a Municipal "native brewery" was set up, producing beer of low alcohol content. It was an attempt to regulate alcohol consumption, deterring natives

[440] Partanen: 59. See also Pan: 31-63.
[441] Ambler: 168-74; Partanen: 59-60.
[442] Ambler: 169-70; Partanen: 61-2; Willis 2002: 126-38.
[443] Willis 2002: 129-131.
[444] Bujra: 222.

from brewing their own beer and possibly also to provide an alternative to the consumption of Nubian gin, which was apparently already becoming more popular at that time, and which was considered more dangerous than beer.[445]

Despite all these international and national control efforts, illegal production of distilled liquors spread, especially in urban areas where there was a ready market for it. Kibera was perfectly situated, next to the military barracks and a fast-growing town.

Alcohol in Kibera: Nubian gin

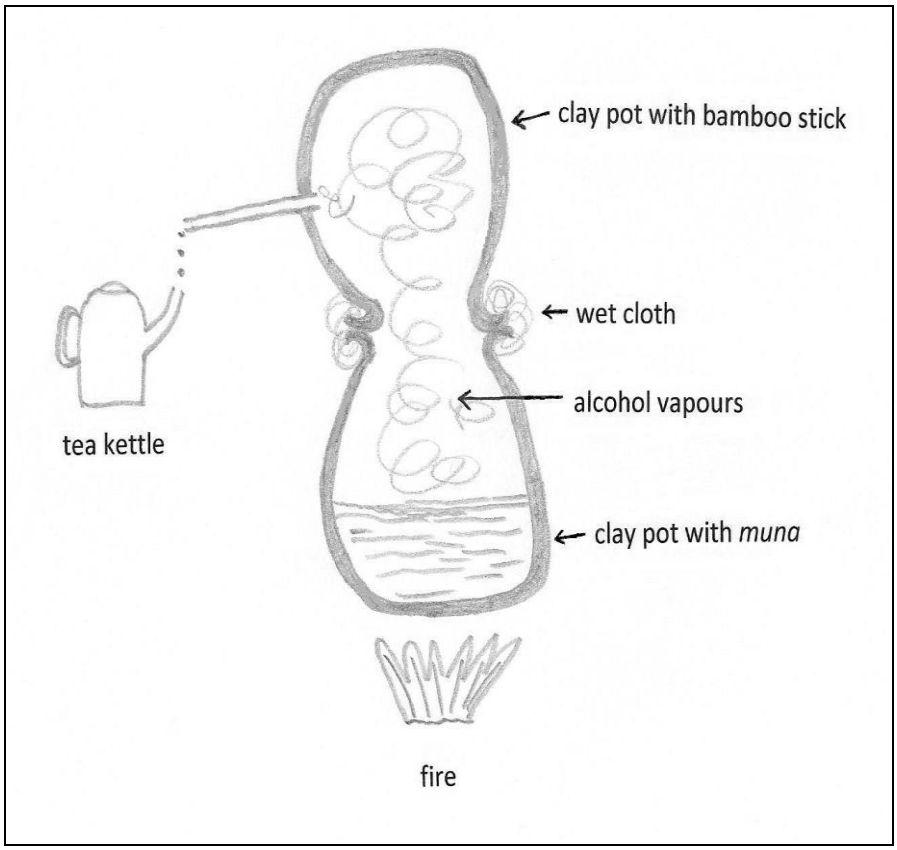
According to Captain Lugard, "the Sudanese [Nubis] are much addicted to strong liquor".[446] Their Nubian gin was the pre-eminent drink of the military: production and consumption was initially largely restricted to the environs of military encampments.[447] However, even if production was mainly for their own consumption, it is likely that from the beginning the Nubis also produced distilled alcohol for sale to other Africans. Already in the 1890s there existed a market in East Africa for fermented brews; in 1906 porters in western Kenya went on a wild drinking spree, buying alcohol from women living in the police lines; in 1915 a Sudanese woman (that means, a Nubi) had been convicted of selling liquor without a licence.[448] We can be quite certain that also in Kibera the sale –though most likely on a limited scale– of Nubian gin occurred from the early days of Nubi settlement: the nearby fast-growing town, and the military barracks provided a ready market for it. There is also little doubt that World War I further stimulated the market for liquor.

Almost every Nubi family in Kibera, except the most religious ones, would make Nubian gin from time to time. It was quite a long process, taking about 2 weeks, but at any given moment there would be Nubian gin somewhere; if not in your own house, then at your neighbour's. Families in the same village or neighbourhood would often take turns in distilling it, or distil together, so that everybody would drink for free at each other's house.[449]

[445] Van Zwanenberg: 191.
[446] See Lugard 1893: 210.
[447] Willis 2000: 2.
[448] Willis 2002: 101-2.
[449] Informant Wa7.

The process of distilling Nubian gin was entirely controlled by the Nubi women, mothers helped by their daughters, and maybe a shamba boy for carrying the water. Production starts with the preparation of an amount of fermented brew, called "*muna*" (Kinubi). In a big clay pot water was mixed with molasses or sugar, and with either *busaa* (maize beer) or germinated millet grains as catalyser to start the fermentation. The pot was then closed and covered, and two weeks later the "*muna*" was ready for distillation. The distillation process itself was quite simple: a clay pot (with the fermented brew) was placed on a low fire; on top of it was another pot placed upside down, and this was tightly closed with wet cloth so vapours could not escape. The upper pot had a bamboo stick as exit, for cooling the alcohol vapours (once outside the pot) and leading the drops of gin into another closed container, often a tea kettle, for collection (see drawing A).

Drawing A: original distillation set up with clay pots (drawing by author).



The first drops of the distillate were the thickest, the strongest, and the best. The longer the distillation process took, the more water evaporated with the alcohol, and the weaker the liquor became. In the early days production was quite low; the Nubi women produced mainly for home consumption, and only those first drops were used, to get the best gin.[450]

However, distillation was rather labour-intensive, as the process had to be strictly controlled: the pots had to be tightly closed so the vapours could not escape (except through the bamboo stick); the temperature within should not be too high, to avoid large-scale evaporation of water, reducing the alcohol content of the gin; and after distilling for a while, the residue of the fermented mix had to be replaced with fresh *muna*.

Production of Nubian gin was initially done at home, in the compound. Even though the production of alcohol was forbidden, the military authorities did not seem interested in making an effort or spend time on exercising much control over Kibera – the Nairobi District Commissioner referred to it as the "farcical so-called control of the military".[451] They were inclined to let the Nubis distil and drink their alcohol and make no fuss about it, because "the tribe has always been given to having sundowners".[452] And as long as Kibera was a military area, the police did not have complete and unhindered access; they needed permission from the military to enter the area.[453] Moreover, the Native Liquor Ordinance did not "permit African police to conduct searches for illicit stills or native liquor"[454], making it even more difficult for police to go into Kibera.

For the Nubis, drinking Nubian gin was very normal; it was a man's social pass-time: friends and relatives would drink it together, and it was drunk at social and cultural occasions, like weddings and the traditional *dholuka* dances. It did however not play any role in rituals or ceremonies. Social drinking sessions would usually take place during weekends. Being drunk was seen as a sign of weakness: "A strong man could take his Nubian gin and would not get drunk".[455] Most men would reduce their alcohol intake

[450] Informants Wa9, M16, W10 and others.
[451] DC Sutcliffe's response to Major Edwards' memorandum, 6/4/1936, KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3 i.
[452] See the 1936 memorandum by Major Edwards, KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3 i /28-40, p7.
[453] Information from many old informants.
[454] Letter Commissioner Police to Colonial Secretary, 28/5/34, KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3 ii.
[455] Informant M 16.

as they got older, though most would never stop drinking; some old men would have their cup of gin in the morning, as a "chest-medicine".[456] While men would drink gin, women would drink a light alcoholic (fermented) drink, *Kangara*, made of sugar and maize flour. This does not mean that women did not drink Nubian gin; they certainly did, when they were distilling or when men were not around, but never in public. The boys and young men were not supposed to drink Nubian gin; it was only for adults. From thirty years of age and onward, a man could drink but only with his own age-mates, never with the elders.

Islam forbids the use of alcohol and the most religious Nubis were therefore on the side of the British colonial government and opposed the distillation and consumption of Nubian gin. Most Nubi however did not see any problem with the Nubian gin: religion was often seen as different and separate from 'culture and tradition'. Besides, the average Nubi did not have much knowledge on Islam and its rules; it was practiced with a lot of flexibility. Drinking Nubian gin was clearly a matter of tradition, and therefore allowed. "The men could be drinking heavily in the afternoon, and the next morning, hung-over, they would meet in the mosque for prayers".[457]

The men would at some point start bringing friends (of other ethnic groups) from work over to Kibera to drink Nubian gin in the family house. In those days it was not possible to just come to Kibera and look for a place to drink Nubian gin – one had to organise this through a Nubi friend.[458] However, some market mechanism must have existed for selling gin to the soldiers and clients in town, because towards the end of the 1920s "Nubian gin" was already a source of complaints from the white community and the colonial authorities. And apparently already in the 1920s, Jomo Kenyatta bought Nubian Gin from the 'Sudanese' at Dagoretti[459], and then probably sold it in his 'Kinyata stores'.

It is hard to be specific about the quantities of Nubian gin produced in Kibera, the number of women involved, or amounts of money earned with the trade in the 1920s, but based on the few written and oral sources available, it is clear that most Nubi families produced gin, and that the quantities produced for sale gradually increased from the beginning of Nubi

[456] Informants M3, M16, Wa11.
[457] Informants M3, M4, M16, Wa11 and others.
[458] Informants M16, Wa11, amongst others.
[459] Murray-Brown: 96; Parsons 1997: 91.

settlement in 1904 till the late 1920s, early 1930s, when an increase in commercialisation of the trade seems to have occurred.

Increased commercialisation, 1930-1940

The population of Nairobi continued to grow rapidly: from 33,000 inhabitants in 1930, to 49,600 in 1936 to 108,900 in 1944[460]. More than 50% of these were African men[461], who were not allowed to drink imported liquors[462], and could drink traditional beers only in the unpopular Municipal beer halls. This resulted in a fast growing market for Nubian gin and other locally made (illicit) liquors.

Already in the early 1930s there obviously existed a big market for liquor in Nairobi: the police regularly carried out weekend "liquor raids" in Kibera (now that it was no longer military area, this was easier than before), and there was increased prosecution of Nubis found "in possession". The police "on numerous occasions disclosed the presence of hundreds of gallons of spirituous liquor". Nevertheless, the police admitted that the raids were "unlikely to achieve complete suppression".[463]

Total prohibition of (fermented) 'native intoxicating liquor' turned out to be unrealistic, and was in the 1920s replaced by a system of licensing; the Nubis could get a license to brew *kangara* for certain ceremonies or occasions like weddings[464], and in another African village, Kileleshwa, only one 'approved' person in the village would get a license for one year.[465] Production of distilled liquors however remained prohibited to the African population throughout colonial rule, while consumption of distillates was allowed only from 1955.

The authorities believed that it was mainly destitute Nubi women (widows, divorcees, old women) that distilled and sold Nubian gin in order to

[460] See Ferraro: 1; Hake: 52-53; Obudho & Aduwo: 58.
[461] See f.e. Obudho & Aduwo: 58, and White: 80 (table 2). Kibera fell outside Nairobi's boundaries and the Nubis were therefore not included in Nairobi's "African population".
[462] Willis 2002: 166.
[463] Letters Commissioner of Police to Colonial Secretary, 1/4/36, 28/5/34, KNA RCA (MAA) – 2/1/3 i / ii.
[464] Partanen: 59-61; Informants M3, M16, M19, W10, and many more.
[465] Letter DC to Ag. Colonial Secretary, 7/9/21, from unknown KNA file (photocopy found in Kibera).

survive[466], an argument that the Nubi leaders also used to press for permission to continue the distillation. The ex-soldiers, and their widows for that matter, never received a pension from the KAR. In old age they often were no longer able to work, and claimed that for many of them the only way of generating an income was the distillation of Nubian gin. However, the government would not allow it, and the raids and patrols continued. Only much later, around 1945-7, would they give destitute Nubis a monthly "compassionate allowance"[467], possibly to prevent them from distilling Nubian gin, but it would not have had any impact anyway, not even in the 1930s. This was because it was not really only the destitute women distilling Nubian gin… With the economic crisis and deteriorating conditions of the 1930s, many Nubi families had a hard time and were forced to try everything to generate income, in order to maintain (or regain) their standard of living, which had always been relatively high compared to other Africans.[468] Nubi women were not supposed to work outside the house, outside Kibera, certainly not for 'outsiders'; those women were looked down upon. Making handicraft (mats and food covers) was an option, but that brought in little money. The only real option for Nubi women to earn a reasonable amount of money was to make and sell Nubian gin.

But there was another very important reason to go into the liquor business: the money that could be made with the Nubian gin was much more than was needed for mere survival or maintaining the standard of living, it allowed women to buy whatever they wanted and lead a very good life in general. Who would say 'no' to such a business? Women wanted money for buying clothes, food and other things to make their life more pleasant; and so more and more women became involved in the illegal distillation, making more and more gin, and making more and more money.

Even young girls would start their own distilling business. One *habooba* (grandmother) confessed:

> I started distilling gin when I was 14 years old; I got money from my father and materials (and ingredients) from his shop, and I sold gin and returned the loan. All the profit was

[466] Letter DC to Commissioner for Local Government, Lands & Settlement, 15/10/30, KNA PC/CP.9/15/3; see also the "Report on an economic and social survey of the Sudanese settlement at Kibera", by Deverell & Colchester, 31/71944, p5, KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3 ii.
[467] See the July 1947 Progress Report of La Fontaine, KNA MAA 2/5/172/iii.
[468] See for example Deverell & Colchester's "Kibera Survey", pp 8.

> for me, and I used the money to buy my own clothes; I did not save anything.[469]

Many more women started at an early age, usually with start-up support from their mother or sister.[470] As Islam allows women to have their own property and earn their own money, the Nubian gin business was attractive to women: they started to control their own labour, income and expenditure.

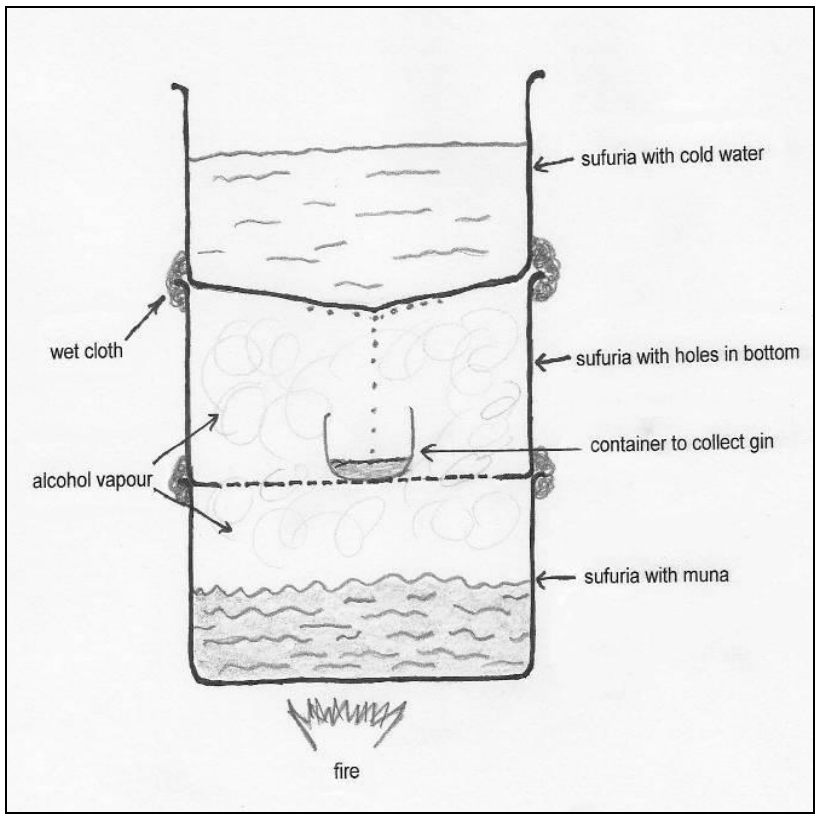
With the increasing commercialisation of Nubian gin, the old-fashioned clay pots were gradually replaced by larger oil drums ("*pipa*" in Swahili[471]) for fermentation. According to the oldest Nubi informant[472], this process started already in the early 1930s. The old clay pots used for distillation had already earlier been replaced by *sufurias*, metal cooking pots imported from India. The process became more labour-intensive due to the large quantities produced and large amounts of water needed. This required additional help; most women had a shamba boy or another hired assistant (non-Nubis) to do the heavy work.

With the use of *sufurias*, the method of distillation also changed. Three *sufurias* were required: one was placed on the fire; on top of it was another one with holes in the bottom, to allow the vapour to pass through; on top of that one was another *sufuria* full of cold water, to cool the vapours below so they would condensate against its cold underside. The drops of gin would then fall into a small container that was placed in the middle *sufuria* to collect the gin (see drawing B).

This was an easier and faster way of producing gin, and allowed a higher production, though apparently of a lower quality (less flavour). The big producers had many 'distillation plants' (the three *sufurias*) working at the same time, and often a complicated system with pipes for cooling the vapour and collecting the gin in one central container.

[469] Informant W7.
[470] Informants W6, W7, W18, W23, M3, amongst others.
[471] Initially the word "burma" (Kinubi) was used, later the Kiswahili word.
[472] Informant Wa7 (born in 1918/9).

Drawing B: new distillation method (drawing by author).



With the increased commercialisation, quality became second to quantity. Instead of using only the first drops of the gin, distillation went on longer to produce more (and weaker) gin from the same *pipa*. The fermentation process was reduced to one week, accelerating the speed of production. Chemicals came into common use only from the early 1960s (though certain additives, like baking powder, were used earlier), further shortening the process.

Nevertheless some women preferred to produce high quality gin[473]; it was less work and also fetched a better price from the wholesalers, who would mix it with water before selling it. Many Nubi women would actually do the same, mixing gin with water, claiming it would be too strong for most

[473] Informant W10.

customers. Some Nubi women produced only weak and cheap gin, for the poorer customers.[474]

The available evidence suggests there was something of a panic in Government from the mid-1930, roughly the same time as in Uganda.[475] This was also at the time when local distillation of alcohol seems to have become more common in East Africa.[476] When, in the 1930s, police "liquor raids" became more frequent and regular police patrols were introduced, the gin production (fermentation and distillation), especially of the bigger producers, was moved to the *shamba* (farm) or forest to avoid detection by the police. The *pipas* were dug in the ground, deep enough to have space for iron sheets to cover them, then sacks, then other cloth, and then sand to cover and level the ground - impossible to find, and strong enough to keep the weight of someone passing over it.[477] Small producers would usually continue to distil at home, inside the house, but most of the distilling, instead of in the homestead, was now done "in the heart of the cultivated area, where detection is well nigh impossible".[478]

The larger production sites also had to be closer to the river, because the distillation process needed large quantities of water: for the production of the *muna*, and for cooling the distillation equipment. This was another reason for the Nairobi Municipal Council to refuse to provide piped water to Kibera: "The process of manufacture of Nubian gin requires large quantities of water both for the making of [fermented brew] and for cooling the distillation plant. No doubt the Municipal supply would be ideal for this and probably would produce a purer quality and better flavoured beverage than is produced at present, while of course it would guarantee a steady output regardless of weather conditions".[479] The official reasons had been that Kibera was outside the Municipal boundaries, and that the Nubis should move elsewhere to make way for town expansion – providing piped water would encourage them to stay in Kibera.[480]

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[474] Informants M3, M4, M16; Wa2, Wa9; W6, W10.

[475] See for example the correspondence on Nubian gin in the Kenya National Archives; Justin Willis, personal communication.

[476] Willis 2002: 225.

[477] Informant W10.

[478] Letter DC to Ag. PC, 24/9/35, (KNA file: RCA (MAA) 2/1/3 ii). Confirmed by all informants.

[479] From letter DC to PC, 16/5/38, KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3 i.

[480] Letters from Acting Colonial Secretary to Mr Wheelock, 8/3/37 and DC to PC, 16/5/38; both letters from KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3/ii. See also Parsons 1997: 103. Piped water was only brought to Kibera in the early 70s, after a cholera outbreak.

The Nubis began to complain about the liquor raids and the alleged violence with which they were carried out.[481] They had always been used to distilling and drinking Nubian gin, and their leaders repeatedly pleaded for permission to continue distilling Nubian gin for their own consumption, and for survival of "those destitute women". Like in their attempt to stay at Kibera and hold on to their land, the Nubis tried to use their relationship with the colonial power (and former officials) to get privileged treatment. There was still considerable sympathy for the Nubis within the colonial government:

> While these old people cause a certain amount of trouble, one cannot help being touched or prevent one's sense of humour being tickled when one sees the same old faces and the rows of medals on the breasts of the really fine old type of Nubian, who in his younger and less alcoholic days did such magnificent work for the British Empire.[482]

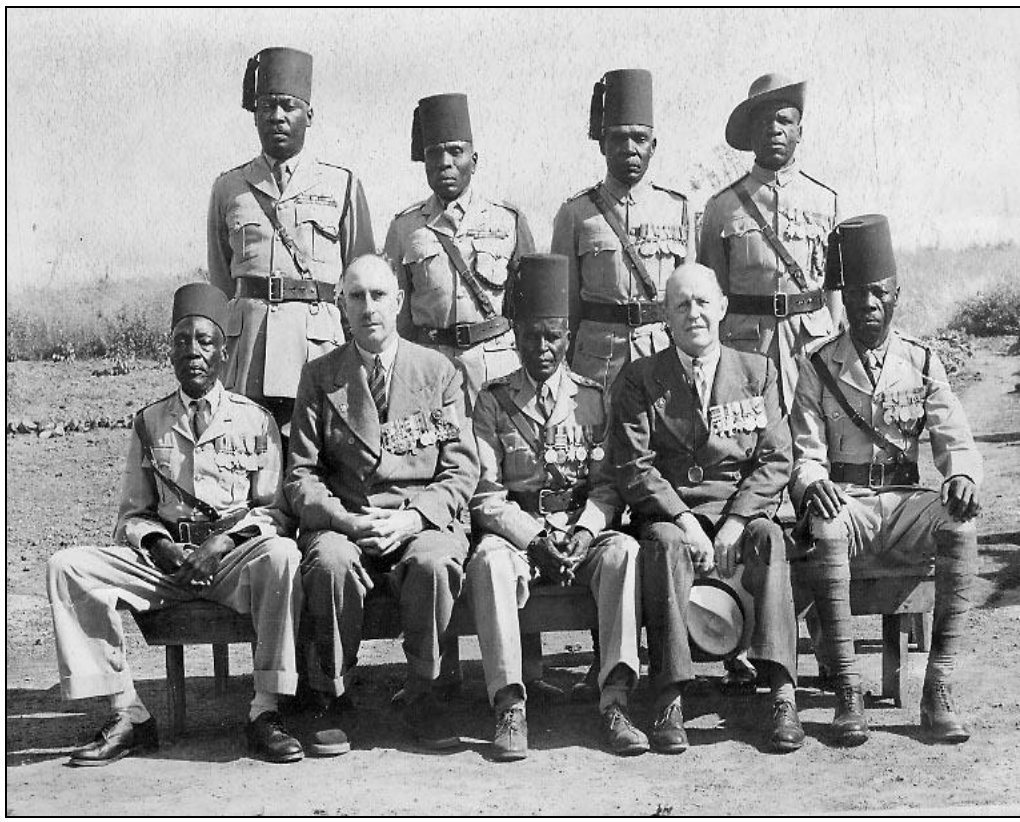
The Nubis also looked for support from their former KAR officers. Their (former) military superiors never had had any problem with them producing and consuming of alcohol. Major Edwards, who had during World War I served with the Nubis in the KAR and highly respected them, wrote a memorandum to the colonial government in defence of the Nubis, stating that "a Police Officer would not view the possession of a small quantity of liquor by a Nubian household as anything but natural and not a matter for prosecution".[483]

However, hundreds of gallons of Nubian gin cannot be said to be a small quantity for "the ordinary household needs of a family".[484] It is clear that there was a huge production of liquor in Kibera: during a police raid in the early 1930s, a Nubian gin distillery was discovered, with, allegedly, more than 30 oil drums used for fermentation.[485] Used to full capacity, this site should have been able to produce more than 2000 litres of Nubian gin per week! Most producers however were much smaller, though many women

[481] Letter to Commissioner of Police, 14/10/33, KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3 i.
[482] Extract from annual report for 1935 from the Municipal Native Affairs Officer, Nairobi, KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3 ii.
[483] See for example a complaint letter from the Union of Sudanese (1938), KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3 i / 81-82; see the 1936 memorandum by Major Edwards, KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3 i /28-40, page 7.
[484] Major Edwards' memorandum (1936).
[485] Informant M19. The number of 30 oil drums may have been slightly exaggerated.

seem to have had 3-4 oil drums for fermentation, still a respectable number and enough for two hundred litres of gin per week.

Photo 7: (Retired) Nubi officers of the King's African Rifles, probably late 1940s.[486] *Photo from Kibera.*



There was general agreement that the Nubis themselves did not cause any problems of drunkenness: "It is not the resident native of Kibera that is seen drunk, but it is the Kikuyu, a Kavirondo cook, houseboy labourer type".[487] But there were two other problems: one was that natives from all over

[486] Picture taken after WW II, possibly at the Victory Parade 1945-6. Standing from left to right: Juma Mohamed Saleh, Khamis Juma, Ahmed Koor, Juma Rakuba. Sitting from left to right: Bukheit Ibrahim, (probably) Sir Francis Fetherston-Godley (Chairman British Legion), Adam al Hashim, (probably) Lord Cromwell (Treasurer British Legion), Ramadhan Marjan.

[487] Letter Ag. Principal Labour Inspector, 24/9/35, RCA (MAA) – 2/1/3 i. Of course, drunk Nubis could not be seen staggering along the main roads of Nairobi: they would stay home in Kibera.

Nairobi would go to Kibera to drink ("Drunkenness is rife every weekend all over Kibera"), and once drunk, would cause a nuisance in town, with "drunken natives staggering about the main roads of Nairobi every weekend and many evenings during the week".[488]

The second problem was that Nubian gin was "exported" and sold all over Nairobi and even further away. The "very obvious increase of gin consumption in Pumwani" was traced back to Kibera, where a subsequent raid found gin in very large quantities.[489] It was alleged that Nubi bus drivers of the Kenya Bus Company "are largely concerned with the distribution of the Nubian gin and are constantly intoxicated with it at night themselves, while I have received information that even when driving buses some of these Nubians have been suspected by passengers of being under the influence of drink".[490]

In the Nubis' defence, it was said that it was not only them distilling Nubian gin: the Kikuyu shamba boys had learned how to distil while assisting the Nubi women, and they had taken over part of the business. Major Edwards claims that the Nubis "with some little feeling of jealousy, have now become the customers of their erstwhile clients".[491] This can hardly be true in 1936, the time Major Edwards wrote this. It is known that some Kikuyu shamba boys took their knowledge and experience home to Thika and Kiambu in the 'native reserves'. This was probably in the late 1930s, when "the trade in liquor was spreading to the Kikuyu reserves"; there is also some oral evidence from Kibera that confirms this.[492] It is well possible that some Kikuyus living in Kibera were involved in selling gin and local beer to the soldiers of Lang'ata barracks – according to some, they would buy Nubian gin, mix it with water and sell it.[493] It is also known that some other non-Nubis living in Kibera (shamba boys, Nubi concubines) were involved in distillation and sale of liquor within Kibera, but on a small scale, and possibly only from the late 1940s.[494] However, it is unlikely that the Nubis

[488] From the Sunday Post, 26/4/1936, article by 'the Gnostic'; letter DC to PC, 24/9/1935, KNA RCA (MAA)–2/1/3 i.
[489] Letter DC to PC, 23/9/31, KNA PC/CP.9/15/3.
[490] Letter DC to Superintendent Police, 4/6/37, KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3 i.
[491] Major Edwards' memorandum of 1936, pp 33.
[492] Quote from "Note", page 86 / 126 of KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3 I; Informants NN11, NN16; see also Parsons 1997: 99, footnote 32.
[493] Informants W10, NN16, and NN11, amongst others. Lang'ata barracks were built during World War II, Buller Camp being too small for the large numbers of soldiers passing through. The barracks provided many clients for the Lang'ata Nubian gin producers.
[494] Informant W7.

would have become customers of the Kikuyu at that time; many Nubis said the Kikuyu liquor "did not taste as good as the real thing"[495] – they would never drink it if 'the real thing' was available. Serious production of distilled liquor by non-Nubis in Kibera started only around the late 1950s.

The liquor raids continued as a matter of routine throughout the first half of the 1930s. Nubi women were arrested and taken to court. Fines varied from 12 Kenyan Shillings (Ksh) to a few hundred and in exceptional cases more than 1000 Ksh[496] – but many women had money, and fines were often paid swiftly in cash, after which most of them would immediately go back to distilling Nubian gin… There was simply too much money to be made in the liquor business: "The trade is so profitable […] that even the heaviest fine is worth the risk".[497]

In 1933, those fines, bearing "little or no relation to the profits [...] derived from the illicit trade"[498] were increased. Later still, prison sentences were introduced, as they were expected to have more impact. According to the police, they did: "the substitution of terms of imprisonment for the former inadequate fines has doubtless had a decided deterrent effect".[499] However, statistics seem to indicate otherwise: a survey in 1944 shows that all of the 100 older Nubi women interviewed had spent time in jail, mainly for liquor-related offences.[500] Prison sentences were usually a few months, but were gradually increased to up to 2 years[501], depending on the severity of the crime; if you were caught while distilling, the sentence would be higher than if you were found in possession of fermenting '*muna*'. It was confirmed by older Kibera informants that many of the Nubi women spent time in jail, though only for the shorter sentences, up to a few months; for the longer sentences they would pay the fine instead (which was later no longer possible). This would however also depend on the financial capacity of the women involved; the poorer ones (small producers) sometimes did not have the money to pay the fine and would go to jail. Sometimes the fine was paid by relatives or friends, 'business partners'; it was usually not the husband who bailed out his wife. The District Commissioner of Nairobi complained

[495] Informant W10.
[496] Information from many informants and from the Kibera survey report, Deverell & Colchester, 1944, p 9.
[497] Letter DC to PC, 23/9/31, KNA PC/CP.9/15/3.
[498] Letter Police Commissioner to Colonial Secretary, 1/4/36, KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3 i.
[499] Letter Police Commissioner to Colonial Secretary, 1/4/36, KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3 i.
[500] The Kibera Survey Report by Deverell & Colchester (1944).
[501] Most informants. See also the Kibera Survey Report by Deverell & Colchester, 1944, p 8.

about the fact that "no effort is made [by Nubi men] to produce the fine, and the woman languishes in jail"[502]; he was clearly not aware that the women themselves were responsible for production *and* paying the fine, not their husbands. It may have been their own choice to go to jail instead of paying the fine; in other cases the husband may not have agreed with the production of alcohol and therefore refused to bail her out, or he simply may have had no money.

From 1935 eviction became the policy - people convicted of a liquor offence would be given 2 months notice and evicted from Kibera.[503] This seems to have happened only a few times[504], though none of the oldest Nubis in Kibera can remember any case; probably most (or all) of them simply moved to another part of Kibera. In 1938, when Nubis said they would challenge the Government's position in court, this arrangement was cancelled by Mr Logan, the Commissioner for Local Government, Lands and Settlement, because it would be considered "inimical to public policy".[505]

The Nubis often got advance warning of a pending raid, from the Liwali (Nubi headman), who was usually informed by the Police Commissioner[506], or directly from police constables: some of them were Nubis, and many other policemen patrolling in Kibera were happy drinkers as well. Police were also said "frequently to be seen in a state of drunkenness in the streets of Nairobi", but this was denied by the Police Commissioner.[507] 'Friendly' policemen were later rewarded for their information on pending raids. With the advance warning, the women had time to hide the gin in the shamba or in the house: in the sofa, the ceiling, or in a hole under the bed. If caught unawares, they would pretend to be naked in bed, so that the askaris would remain outside, to give them time to dress. One woman said she would eat hot peppers, causing her face to swell, and her body to sweat and shake,

[502] From DC Sutcliffe's response to Major Edwards' memorandum, KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3 i /53-56.
[503] Letter DC to Commissioner for local Government, Lands & Settlement, 11/3/35, KNA file: RCA (MAA) 2/1/3 i.
[504] DC to PC, 21/2/38, KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3 ii. See also Major Edwards' memorandum (1936).
[505] Letter DC to PC, 21/2/38, KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3 i. See also page 2 of "Note", same file.
[506] Many informants mentioned that the Nubi headman (called "*Liwali*") would give them advance warning.
[507] Letter Commissioner of Police to Colonial Secretary, 23/10/35, KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3 ii.

giving the impression she was very sick – the police would leave her alone. The raids were a game of hide and seek, cat and mouse.

From early 1936, regular police patrols during weekends in Kibera replaced the night raids that were stopped after complaints (by the Nubis). In the second half of 1938, however, it was agreed to carry out raids again, but only when there was sufficient evidence for the issue of a search warrant. Raids continued like before, but, according to informants, without (showing) a search warrant.[508]

In late 1938 a police post was established in Kibera to specifically focus on suppressing drunkenness and crime, and detecting infringement of the law.[509] All these measures may have had some impact on liquor production and consumption, but certainly not enough to suppress the business, and the gin clearly continued to be transported to other parts of the Municipality.[510] The sale of Nubian gin was too lucrative and the heavy fines and prison sentences imposed hardly a deterrent.

And so, despite the increasing measures to suppress the production of liquor in Kibera, towards the end of the 1930s Nubian gin had become big business.

Big business, 1940 - 1965

The market for Nubian gin continued to grow in step with Nairobi's ever-increasing population, which reached almost 270,000 around Independence, up from 109,000 in 1944 and 65,000 in 1938.[511] These were the official figures, but it is likely that the real figures were higher, with many illegal or unemployed people trying to evade censuses.[512]

[508] Letter Police Commissioner to Colonial Secretary, 1/4/36, KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3 I; see "Note" (unclear of what, looks like the minutes of a meeting), page 86 / 126 of KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3 I; Letter from the Union of Sudanese complaining about the raids, 25/1/39, KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3 I; Letter to the Governor of the EA Protectorate, 1/6/39, KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3 ii ; Informants M3, M4, W10.
[509] Letters of Town Clerk to Commissioner for Local Government and of Commissioner of Police to Chief Secretary; both letters 30/11/38, KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3 i.
[510] See letter from Town Clerk to Commissioner of Police, October 1939, from an unknown KNA file (photocopy from Kibera).
[511] Hake: 57-8; Obudho & Aduwo: 58; White: 80.
[512] Throup: 179.

The war economy occasioned by World War II created opportunities for employment and business; salaries increased as well. Moreover, during the war and the Mau Mau Emergency there was a large military presence in Nairobi[513], with Buller Camp and the new barracks in Lang'ata very close to Kibera. All these factors contributed to an increasing market for distilled liquor. Furthermore, in the early 1950s, at the time of the Mau Mau Emergency, "Africans boycotted the products of municipal breweries, leading to a proliferation in the illicit distillation of Nubian gin".[514]

During the 1940-50s (especially after World War II), the Nubis gradually lost their advantage as "a better class African"; their general lack of interest in secular education and the growing number of other Africans with good education, caused increasing unemployment in the Nubi community and a marked deterioration in their income. Especially during the 1950s, the need for additional income became apparently higher.[515] In response, more and more Nubi women turned to Nubian gin production, or increased their production.

Moreover, there was a growing number of female-headed households in Kibera, and these would almost certainly depend on Nubian gin for survival. In 1930, 41 out of 217 families (19%) were female-headed; in 1944 this percentage had gone up to 32%, and in 1955 it was about 42%.[516] This increase in female-headed households appears to come mainly from women (possibly second or third wives) that outlived their much older husbands. If the widow was old enough and had grown-up children, she could remain in charge of the compound, and be completely independent – these were often the main producers of Nubian gin. There may also have been an increase in divorces, but this is harder to estimate, and statistics are not available. Divorced women often moved with their children back to the family compound, and lived there to some extent independently – often living off Nubian gin income.[517] In the 1950s and 60s quite a number of women were simply abandoned by their husband, without official divorce – it is likely that these women would depend on Nubian gin as well.

[513] The State of Emergency lasted from October 1952 – January 1960. See Hake: 66; White: 147-50.
[514] Achola: 136.
[515] According to informants M4, W16.
[516] See Letter DC of 13/10/1930, KNA LND.7/3/4/4; The Kibera survey report by Deverell & Colchester, 1944, p 2; Major Small's 1955 census (p 5), KNA RCA (MAA) – 2/1/3 ii.
[517] Informants M3, 4, 16.

A few Nubi men got involved in the Nubian gin business as well – not in production, but in selling: they would buy it from Nubi women, transport and sell it. This was done in secret: "the imams in the mosques were fulminating against alcohol, and some of these men were in the front row every Friday… they could not be seen to be involved".[518]

Nubi informants estimate that, in its heyday, 70-90% of the Nubi families[519] were involved in gin production, in a small or big way; some claim that in every family, even the most religious ones, at least one woman was distilling gin:

> Everybody, ***every*** house had Nubian gin… also religious ones, the *mzee* would say 'you do what you want, I don't want to know'. Many people did not have a job, so they had no choice; if you did not brew, you would be very poor, and so everybody brewed.[520]

The gin producers came in different sizes. Small producers were often older women, with one *pipa*, that did not distil non-stop or even the whole *pipa* at once; they usually had a small group of regular customers, Nubi and outsiders, that would come into the house to drink. For them the gin income was often a supplement to any other income; sometimes maybe even the only income. These women would usually distil at home. The second group, the medium producers, was the largest group: most producers appear to have belonged to this group. These were the more energetic, often younger women, with 2-4 *pipas*, many producing non-stop, or at least very regularly, enough to have a decent income. The last group was the one of big producers, who could be found in every village in Kibera. There were around 10-15 families (in the whole of Kibera) that had more than 10 *pipas*, producing non-stop; huge distillation plants, with many fires and an elaborate piping system to connect all the *sufurias* and collect the alcohol; pick-up trucks and taxis would come to collect large amounts of Nubian gin; often there was some degree of conspicuous consumption of their wealth.[521]

As a result, poverty did not really exist amongst the Nubis, though there was quite a big difference in wealth between the big gin producers and the smaller or non-producers, especially if not being involved in the business

[518] Informant M16.
[519] This could mean only one woman, not necessarily *all* women of that family.
[520] Informant M19.
[521] Informants M3, M16, M19, W10.

was because of religious reasons. In 1947 a Government investigation into poverty amongst the 'destitute' Nubis of Kibera was stopped because "the answers were given in parrot fashion, which suggested a previous rehearsal" – it is not hard to guess why they had rehearsed the answers.[522]

There were different reasons for not being involved in gin production. Often it was forbidden by the father or the husband for religious reasons; in others it was because the husband had sufficient income, from a decent job like a Kenya Bus inspector, or if he was a big businessman: "If you have money, why would your wife have to be cooking that stuff?".[523] If the husband was with the police (and quite a few were), he could not be seen having an illegal "gin distillery" in his house.

In many cases though, women apparently did it anyway, distilling and selling gin in secret, and the *shayba*, the 'head of the compound' (the father or husband) either did not know, or (more likely) conveniently looked the other way, because they all benefited from the income it provided.[524] The number of families where no one distilled gin was probably very small. Some women distilled only for a short time and then stopped because they were scared of the police, or had spent time in jail, or had been caught by the husband or father… One woman explained:

> My husband was a very strict man, and when one day he came home and found that I was arrested for distilling, he got so angry, he said I could rot in jail. I had been arrested at night, and in the morning my friends came to bail me out, with 100 Ksh. After that I never made Nubian gin again.[525]

Other sources of income were available to women, like making the traditional mats and food covers, or selling food (*mandazi, sambusa*) in the market, or even renting out one or two rooms, but this brought in much less income. Working outside Kibera, for the white people for example, was not acceptable work for Nubi women.

Prostitution was another alternative that provided a good income, more than unskilled labour.[526] According to Bujra, there was "mention of 'native

[522] 'Progress report July 1947' of La Fontaine, 12/8/1947, KNA MAA 2/5/172.
[523] Informant W25.
[524] Confirmed by most informants.
[525] Informant W21.
[526] See White 1990: 197.

prostitution' in official records as early as 1911. Probably the first prostitutes in Nairobi were camp followers of the soldiers of the British East African Rifles".[527] In general however, Nubi women were not involved in this, at least, not in the early days.[528] Later on, in the 1950s, with many people drinking, the loosening morals and closer relations with regular customers (Nubi or outsiders), quite a number of illegitimate children were born in Kibera, and gossip was rife. Though most prostitutes were from outside Kibera (quite a number were Tanzanian Waziba[529]), there was also a number of Nubi women that got involved in prostitution; they lived alone, with female friends (often also prostitutes), or at the far end of the family compound; often they were also involved in the Nubian gin business. Even some married women were involved, and some Nubi girls worked in brothels in town. No one talked openly about it.[530] Prostitution was clearly not the most likely choice for Nubi women: making Nubian gin was more respectable and generated much more income.

Small huts in the shamba (often the ones where the shamba boys lived) were used to hide the equipment and to do the actual distillation. Women would usually work alone (but almost always assisted by one or more casuals or their shamba boys), and sometimes in groups with relatives (mothers, daughters, sisters) or friends. Each would then bring their own shamba boy(s) and they would assist one another, and use each other's equipment.

Distilling was usually done at night or in the early morning hours, when the police were not around (except in case of a 'liquor raid'). The 'outsiders' were not a problem at night: since the old days there was a Nubi-imposed curfew – non-Nubi 'outsiders' had to be out of Kibera by 6 pm.[531] The time of distillation often depended on the number of distillation "plants[532]" a woman had, and the number of fires she could keep going and control; the more assistants a woman had, the more she could distil, throughout the night.

On average, one woman with one or two assistants could distil one *pipa*, containing around 200 litres of *muna*, per night. An average producer, with

[527] Bujra 1975: 220.
[528] Confirmed by most informants, but see also Major Edwards' Memorandum (1936) or DC Sutcliffe's response to it (6/4/1936), both in KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3 i.
[529] See White 1990.
[530] Informants M3, M4, M16, W6, W10, W26.
[531] Many informants confirmed this.
[532] I refer to the simple equipment used for distillation: a stove with 2 or 3 *sufurias*.

3 pipas, had to make sure that her *pipas* "matured" on different days, and then she would work 3 nights a week. Large producers (or women working in groups) could distil a few *pipas* per night, working from early evening till dawn. Most producers distilled only a few nights per week. One *pipa* would give between 40 and 80 litres of gin – 40 litres of a stronger/better quality, or 80 litres of a weaker gin. It appears that most women preferred to produce larger quantities of a weaker gin – possibly because it required less attention and control of the temperature. Production was often non-stop: as soon as one *pipa* was emptied for distillation, it was filled again with molasses and water, while a small quantity of *muna* was left to start the fermentation process again. One week later the *pipa* was ready again for distillation. After distillation, the gin would be put in bottles[533] or in a *debe* (a large tin of 17-20 litres); it was now ready for sale.[534]

Selling Nubian gin was easy: often the wholesalers or the taxis they sent would be waiting at the house, early in the morning when the women and shamba boys came back from the shamba after a night of distilling. The *debes* would be loaded straight into the car, and money exchanged hands as soon as the quality of the gin was established. This was done by dipping a finger in the gin and then lighting it: good quality (strong) gin would light up with a blue flame. Selling to wholesalers was probably the safest and quickest way to make money, though the prices, and therefore the profits, were a bit lower (for the same quality gin). Most middlemen were Asians or Kikuyu, but there were even some 'whites' and police officers' wives. They would resell the gin in smaller quantities (often mixed with water) and make their own profit.

Another common way of selling Nubian gin was taking it into town to deliver it, sometimes twice a day, at the houses, offices, bars or shops of regular customers.[535] Usually the gin was put in bottles and tied around the waist under the *gurbaba* (a colourful piece of cloth traditionally used by Nubi women as a sort of long skirt), or in a shopping basket covered with vegetables, sometimes even carried by small children. It was more risky and time consuming, but brought in good money as well, and after selling, women would do shopping in town and take a taxi home to Kibera.

[533] They often used medical bottles (called "*banadura*"), given to them, in exchange for gin, by workers of Kenyatta hospital.
[534] This whole section is based on information from a large number of informants.
[535] Apparently some Nubis had their own shop in town where customers could order and collect Nubian gin; possibly this shop was only a cover to sell alcohol?

The third way of selling gin was to receive customers at home, in the compound. This way carried the most risk, not only because of the threat of police raids and patrols, but also the husband or father… Initially Nubi men would invite friends from work to come to the house and drink. Later on a special hut or room could be prepared for customers, but with the steady increase in commercialisation, and more and more outsiders coming into the compound and house, this became a problem. In compounds where women were in charge (mainly widows) there was usually no problem with non-Nubi outsiders coming into the house or compound, but the elders and husbands often did not like to see '*labi*' (outsiders) in their compound. Quite a number of elders did not really approve of the alcohol either, so both the production and the customers had to be kept out of sight, even if they knew what was happening.

In many compounds, new drinking space was created, where the customers would not have to come into the house, or even into the compound. The Nubi women were very inventive: they served quick drinks through the compound fence or through the window of the kitchen; space was created within and underneath the bushes of the compound fence, where people could quietly sit unnoticed; some had a special hut at the end of the compound, out of sight of the *shayba* (elder), where they distilled and sold. In one compound they even built a toilet with a secret passage into another room where gin was served! Customers would casually walk up to the house, to the kitchen and make a gesture of slaughtering, with the finger across the throat, as if to say "kill me quick", because "that was what the Nubian gin did, it was that strong". That gesture was enough; a glass[536] would be prepared and put at a place the regular customer knew; he would drink it in two gulps and leave the money on the tray. In fact, "*kill me quick*" was one of the many local slang words for 'liquor', in fashion in the 1950s.[537]

Customers were of all colours and ethnic groups. Many of them were Africans: policemen, soldiers from the army barracks, or workers (nannies, cooks, cleaners, house boys and shamba boys) of the white people living along Ngong road in Woodley estate. The weekends were the busiest, with workers coming from all over Nairobi. Even Asians and white people would

[536] Many different sizes of glasses and bottles were available, each with its own name. The *katό* was one tot (sold at one Kenyan Shilling); the *firi firi* (small bottle) was a bit more than 2 tots (for two Ksh.); the *fitila* = half bottle (4 Ksh); *gizaza* or *chupa* = full bottle (8 Ksh) (Informants M3, M19).
[537] Informant W26. See also Hake: 158.

venture into Kibera for a drink, or place an order and have it collected or delivered. Nubi men were also regular customers, in times when there was nothing to drink at home, or simply because some women produced better gin than others.

The government meanwhile continued to try and discourage people from distilling and consuming Nubian gin: through police raids and patrols, prosecution, fines and prison sentences for offenders (producers and consumers). They prosecuted some non-Nubi "bad characters" that were found in Kibera, for "unlawful residence on Crown Land"[538], as they believed it was these people causing most of the problems. But controlling these illegal residents of Kibera was difficult, because they were accepted by the Nubis as "lodgers" - several cases taken to court ended in a defeat for the authorities, when the Attorney General ruled that the charges were not legal. Unwilling to burn their fingers again, they stopped prosecuting these people.[539]

In 1940 there was a plan by the authorities to have a municipal beer shop and recreation centre near the Kibera police post, to "diminish recourse by ordinary Africans to more noxious pursuits"[540]; in the end however, it never happened. From around 1946-7, destitute Nubis were given a "compassionate allowance"[541]; this may have been to stop them from distilling gin, though this was also at a time when the colonial government had started to invest more in social welfare and housing for Nairobi's African workers, and to produce a more stable and productive workforce".[542] This resulted in a number of surveys to investigate poverty in Kibera.[543] However, as noted earlier, Nubi women did not necessarily distil Nubian gin out of poverty.

Another way in which the government tried to reduce consumption of Nubian gin was through the licensing of *kangara* (fermented maize beer),

[538] The Kibera survey report by Deverell & Colchester, 1944, p 10.
[539] Letter of Superintendent Kitching to DC, 28/6/1946; Memorandum by Kitching, 20/10/1949, KNA RCA (MAA) – 2/1/3 ii.
[540] Kibera survey report by Deverell & Colchester, p 10.
[541] In 1947 this '*compassionate allowance*' was 15 Shillings/month for a single person, 25 Shillings/month for a "*married pair*", though it was not a 'fixed system': see the July 1947 Progress Report of La Fontaine, KNA MAA 2/5/172/iii.
[542] See Anderson: 145-9.
[543] The survey done by Deverell (Social Welfare Officer) & Colchester (Municipal Native Affairs Officer) in 1944, and the one by Mr Philip, Municipal Social Welfare Adviser, in 1947.

first only for ceremonies, but later also for 'weekend drinking', attracting large crowds to Kibera for the "comparatively harmless […] consumption of native beer".[544] However, none of these efforts had the desired effect of putting an end to the distillation and consumption of Nubian gin.

Police raids therefore continued. The distillation sites were relatively safe: they were hidden, often far away from the compounds, in shamba or forest, with wild animals around, and the distillation was done at night. Police would hardly ever venture there, also because they did not know when exactly women would distil. The raids at home were more of a problem, because the women used to hide gin inside the house or compound. They were very inventive: bottles of gin were hidden inside the sofa seat and back rest, the ceiling, in the full water tank, or in a space in the floor. But even if they would get advance warning from a friendly policeman, there was always a risk of arrest and conviction, and of losing all the distillation equipment. Police raids and arrests increased during this period: between 1931 and 1936 there were 146 convictions, but in 1943 alone there were 123 convictions in or around Kibera for illegal possession of liquor, and 51 for drunkenness.[545]

Some people had good connections, and could be spared the hassle of repeated raids. For example the family, where all the women were involved in the Nubian gin business, and most of the men were heavy drinkers. One day, there was a raid, but by chance, the police did not find anything. The '*shayba*', who was an important man (councillor), went to the police station, and complained, and the Commissioner of Police gave instructions that no one should raid his house anymore, since he was an honest man. So the family compound was left alone, while 'there was a lot of liquor distilling going on'.[546]

Not everyone was that lucky, and with all those liquor raids and patrols going on, most women opted for bribing the police to let them distil and sell the liquor in peace, or inform them of a pending raid. This was done with liquor or cash, and possibly even sex[547]. Many policemen were also regular customers, so some sort of a relationship existed that made it easier to be

[544] Letter Commissioner of Police to Colonial Secretary, 1/4/1936, KNA RCA (MAA) 2/1/3/ii. Informants M3, M4, M16, amongst others.
[545] From Kibera Social Survey, Deverell/Colchester, p 8. Unfortunately no figures were found for the later period.
[546] Informant M19.
[547] Informant W6, M3, M16.

"friends". They would get a glass or a bottle for free now and then, or even –the senior police officers– larger quantities for wholesale, instead of money. The senior officers often preferred the larger quantities to resell; they would make more money that way. Women from the police barracks in Lang'ata would come to Kibera to buy wholesale and resell. Some women claimed they had a police "pay-roll"; every month they would give fixed amounts to the inspectors, the juniors, and the constables, though most women would just give their informants 'as required', and free drinks from time to time. Another woman explained: "if you have three pipas, the profit of one goes to the police, one is for the house and personal requirements, and one for food".[548] However, not all policemen were inclined to close their eyes for a fee – there is this story about a Nubi woman:

> She was a big gin producer, and was once arrested by her brother, who was in the police. Imagine the loyalty (of the brother/policeman)! The woman was taken to court and spent some time in jail. It caused problems within the family, for a while at least.[549]

This was not very common, though. In this case, there may have been some previous problems between the brother and sister.

With the very high fines and prison sentences, it was worth the investment to keep the police on your side. Bribing judges was also possible, but became increasingly expensive when judges realised how much money the Nubi women made; they charged ever-larger amounts of money to let women off the hook, even up to 6000 Ksh.[550] Nevertheless, despite all the bribes paid, most women did spend some time in jail; some "notorious offenders" even up to two years – they would not get the option of a fine instead. Sometimes the police had to 'satisfy their superiors' and produce some offenders and arrest people; sometimes someone had argued with the police, or there were new policemen who had not yet become 'friends'.

During the first years of the Emergency the number of raids increased drastically, but these were mainly to flush out Kikuyu 'militants' thought to be hiding in Kibera during Mau Mau. Most Kikuyus hiding in Kibera were just ordinary people, friends or employees of Nubis, or their children. After

[548] Informant W10.
[549] Informant M3.
[550] Informant W6, W10. This amount (6000 Ksh) would probably have been in the 1960/70s.

Mau Mau was under control, the raids were reduced and became less of a problem. There were regular patrols, but the policemen were known and could be seen from far, as Kibera was still open country in those days. Playing children were rewarded with a shilling if they warned their mothers if they saw the police coming. Only after Independence did the police start causing problems again.

Income from Nubian gin

It is interesting to look at the financial side of the Nubian gin production - how much gin was produced, and how much money was actually made?

Estimating the total production of Nubian gin in Kibera is difficult, simply because it was done secretly, and people often had no more than vague ideas of how many *pipas* other women had, or how often they distilled. However, for the purpose of getting a general idea of income, I will take an average producer with three *pipas*.

If one *pipa* could produce up to 80 litres of gin per week, then three *pipas* could produce 960 litres per month. This is the weaker quality (with higher production), which is what most women apparently produced. Assuming also that the production was not completely non-stop, but with some delays here and there, an average producer would manage to get 750 litres per month. Some of this would be drunk by the husband and his friends, or used in weddings and social events – let's assume 600 litres could be sold.

Prices for Nubian gin varied over time; in the early days it was 2 Kenyan Shillings (Ksh) per bottle of 750 millilitres[551]; for the early 1930s a price of 7 Ksh is mentioned[552] and in the 1940s the price stood at 6 Ksh.[553] However, most of the "notorious offenders and drinkers" in Kibera remember a price of 8/= Ksh per bottle, a price that remained stable for many years, possibly from the late 1940s, throughout the 1950s and well into the 1960s. That means that an average producer in the 1950s could earn

[551] People used to measure in different bottles, but the one most commonly used later on was the Gordon Gin bottle, which was 750 millilitres.
[552] This price is probably wholesale, which was cheaper than per bottle: "*Nubian gin is said to sell at Shs 24/- per gallon*", DC to PC, 23/9/31, KNA PC/CP.9/15/3.
[553] See the Kibera Survey Report by Deverell & Colchester, 1944, KNA RCA (MAA) – 2/1/3 ii.

6400 Ksh per month.[554] It compares with information from some informants: an average of 3000 Ksh per *pipa* was normal; some people made 15-20,000 Ksh in one month.[555] Of this amount, 1/3 would have to be spent on bribing the police and judges. It may be that women exaggerated about their income, or mixed up figures and years, or had simply forgotten details – the amounts of money are so high, that it is in fact hard to believe.[556] However, these quantities of liquor and profits have been confirmed by many informants, and the level of the fines (in some cases more than 1000 Ksh, already in the 1940s[557]) also shows that the amounts of money earned were very high. Nevertheless, even after allowing a liberal discount, enough remains to show that the Nubi women made a lot of money, substantially more than their husbands.

Average salaries for Africans in Nairobi at the time were substantially lower: a soldier would get 40-50 Ksh per month; a normal average wage for an African was 50-150 Ksh, and their highest income was around 500 Ksh.[558] For the "better class African" Nubi, a salary of 600 Ksh was a top salary. The comparison makes clear that the Nubian gin business was generating a colossal amount of money – and the Nubis basically had the monopoly on liquor production in and around Nairobi, everybody had to come to them to buy it, and they kept this position at least until the mid-50s. Many women earned much more than what a husband with a good job would bring home. As one old 'notorious offender' claimed: "a man would not earn more in one month than 25% of what I would spend on sugar (for distilling) in a week".[559] This may be exaggerated, but it is an indication of the difference in income between men and women, and the enormous amounts of money (some) women made. It is no wonder then that legislation, police raids and patrols, fines and prison sentences had so little impact on the liquor business.

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[554] From this total, one should deduct the investment in equipment, labour and ingredients, but these expenses were not high. A *pipa* cost around 20 Ksh. Distillation equipment (*sufurias*) was often shared; the smaller oil drums later also used for distillation wouldn't last more than 4 months (Obbo 1980: 132) and would probably be the main expense. Labour (shamba boys assisting with the heavy work) would not be more than 50 Ksh per month; the main ingredients, molasses or sugar, would cost no more than 200 Ksh.

[555] Informants W6, W10.

[556] Compare Burton (2005: 56): African women in Dar es Salaam made very 'handsome' profits in the lucrative alcohol trade in the 1930s. Burton thinks the profits may be exaggerated, but he may be wrong.

[557] See Kibera Survey Report by Deverell & Colchester, 1944.

[558] Information from Amis: 237, White: 188, Kibera Survey Report by Deverell & Colchester App. C, and Kibera informants.

[559] Informant W6.

Spending the Nubian gin money – the impact on Nubi society and Kibera

The next logical question is what the Nubis (women) did with all that money. Such huge amounts, properly invested, would have made the Nubis very rich indeed in the Kenya of today.

However, very little of it was invested. Most of it was simply spent on the best food, nice clothes, gold and jewellery (including gold teeth), school fees, expensive hardwood Lamu furniture, just anything they felt like. What initially may have started as a way to meet the family expenses, provide food and school fees and generally maintain the standard of living (in absence of the often unemployed husbands' income and support), had for many become a way to earn money to do and buy whatever they wanted. This stands in sharp contrast with for example the Kikuyus, who invested what they earned; there are many stories of shamba boys that worked hard (distilling Nubian gin, making and selling charcoal), saved and invested their money and became rich; "Kikuyus would save the money and then buy something or build whatever they had planned – the Nubis would spend it".[560]

The Nubis had in general quite an expensive lifestyle, certainly compared to other Africans: there was always a lot and good food in the house, every day meat, and whatever they wanted.[561] Cars and trucks, motorbikes, and the first gramophones could be found in Kibera. Many Nubis liked to gamble on horses, and would go to the Ngong Racecourse on Sundays. Being dressed smartly in good clothes was very important, for both men and women; one woman said that on a good day she would just buy a new suit for her husband, or 3-4 *gurbabas* if the trader happened to pass by: "you would just buy one, or a few, even if you did not need them, it was just for having them".[562] With every wedding, Idd or other celebration people would wear new clothes. Nubi children went to school wearing shoes, "when most teachers could not even afford them – they would take them from the children and give them back at the end of the year… probably used them

[560] Informant M19.
[561] Some food was grown on the *shambas* in Kibera, where the Nubis employed labour, but most of the food was simply bought in town – with the income from Nubian gin, there was no need to improve their agriculture and sell produce in town. See also the 'Kibera Survey' (1944).
[562] Informant W6.

themselves during the weekend!"[563] Money may have been spent on better housing as well: Kibera's Superintendent Kitching noticed that between 1935 (when a housing census was done in Kibera) and 1945 (when he did his own survey) "a building boom seems to have taken place: huts which were mud, wattle and grass -one room- have now blossomed into six or more roomed houses with corrugated iron roofs and in some cases concrete floors".[564] Money was also spent on social events, like weddings, traditional dances, Idd and other celebrations, as well as support to relatives and poorer community members, the ones that did not distil gin. Hospitality to visitors was important as well. The Nubis also travelled quite a lot, all over Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, to visit relatives in other Nubi villages, for weddings, funerals, or just for pleasure. There is a story of Nubis hiring a whole train to take them to Kampala and back, for a wedding; when returning, there were no taxis available in Nairobi: they were all waiting at the railway station to take the Nubis to Kibera.[565]

Certainly, differences in wealth existed among the Nubis, and many families could afford this expensive lifestyle only to a limited extent – certainly the smaller producers and the ones that were not involved in the Nubian gin business.[566] In general, though, there was money for everything they needed or wanted. As one informant said: "There was always money, women always had money somewhere".[567] It is not surprising that many of the other Africans living in Kibera looked upon the Nubis as "*wazungu*", white people.[568]

One woman offered an explanation for this spendthrift behaviour of the Nubis:

> Islam says that money from this kind of sources is in a way '*haraam*', forbidden, 'bad money', and it should be used, spent, not saved or invested; one should not benefit too much from this money.[569]

[563] Informant M24.
[564] See Kitching's 'Report on Kibera, 1945, KNA RCA (MAA) – 2/1/3 ii. These rooms may have been for renting out to outsiders.
[565] Informant Wa11.
[566] Most informants agreed with this.
[567] Informant M16.
[568] Informant NN2.
[569] Informant W10

People were in a way uncomfortable with the money they made, "they had the inner feeling that what they were doing was wrong, not right".[570] Thus, the money had to be spent.

However, even if it is correct that this kind of money would be considered '*haraam*' in Islam, most informants doubt that that would have been a reason not to invest it, certainly in the 1940s and 1950s. Religion played a minor role in most people's lives and in determining people's options, and in general women didn't know much about Islamic rules and what was in the Koran. Besides, they were distilling and drinking gin, which would be considered even worse than investing *haraam* money. Furthermore, from the 1960s they would actually invest some of that *haraam* money, and that was exactly at a time when religion started to play a more important role. According to these informants, the main reason for not investing the money seems to be that most Nubis did not have any other idea of what to do with it: due to lack of education and maybe exposure to the outside world, they did not see the opportunities, for example in business, or "real estate". Or in land, which was very cheap in the days after Independence; only few Nubis thought of buying. Most people did not think they would ever want or need any other land than the Kibera land. They did not look far into the future, their life in Kibera was very good, and they did not think things would ever change. For the same reason they continued to disregard secular education; "there was enough money to give the children anything they wanted, so why go to school and study"?[571]

Even though Nubis were still employed in town in 'positions involving responsibility'[572] many Nubi men had no work, or only casual jobs, they would work for a few weeks and then quit. Their general poor education reduced their chances on the labour market, certainly after World War II when an increasing number of Africans were receiving better education. Moreover, with their women earning so much money with the Nubian gin, there was no need for them to work. Many took to drinking heavily, sleeping late and spending the day with friends, talking, drinking and eating.[573]

[570] Informant M3. Compare with Nelson (2000: 309), other women did invest the money they made with alcohol production, and bought property (farms and houses).
[571] Informant M3, M4, M16.
[572] Kibera Survey Report, 1944; report La Fontaine, 13/11/1947, p6.
[573] Most informants confirmed this.

> The men would always eat well before drinking gin, to avoid being drunk quickly. Drinking sessions were often a kind of competition between the men, who could drink more and still walk straight. And then sometimes they would fight to see who is stronger… Some of the old men were famous for this.[574]

And even playing golf was a favourite pastime: many Nubi men had been caddy on the golf course next to Kibera. A former Nubi barman at the golf club claimed that the Europeans at the golf club would ask him: "How come all these Nubi men are always playing golf? Don't they work"? In 1924 the first 48 "totos" (children) had been released from the KAR school to be caddies at a golf tournament; over the years they learned to play golf really well, using the old clubs of the European golfers. Some Nubis (former caddies), like Burhan (Bob) Marjan and Osman Amber, excelled in golf, winning major East African trophies in the late 1960s after the golf courses were opened to Africans. One story is told about a big golf tournament taking place in Kampala where some European golfers would represent Kenya. Some weeks before there were championships in Nairobi in which the Europeans were decidedly defeated by Nubi players. It was then decided to send the Nubis to Kampala, where they subsequently won the tournament.[575]

Alcohol consumption became a normal part of life, not only for men, also for the younger people: boys started drinking at an ever earlier age, stealing bottles from their mothers and drinking them with friends, getting completely drunk – drinking alcohol became part of "growing up". Some girls were sent back to the parents' home after a few weeks of marriage, because of alcohol addiction. Women drank more as well: they now had their own 'social groups', and drank gin mixed with Tusker beer, a reflection of their new social status. Or they drank alone: some were drunkards like their husbands. The increased production of Nubian gin resulted in increased alcohol consumption.[576]

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[574] Informant M 16.

[575] Informant M19; "*Gloom as curtain falls on pioneer golfer*", Daily Nation, 12/1/2006; Railway Golf Club website: http://www.kgu.or.ke/courses/railway_history.html; Royal Nairobi Golf Club 1996.

[576] Informants M3, M4, M16, M19, amongst others. The '*waragi*' production in Uganda had a similar impact, see Baza (2002: 85-6).

In many families women were now taking complete responsibility for the household, paying all expenses, and taking care of the children, and of the husband. As one woman said:

> When a girl got married, she was forced to make Nubian gin: the new family would force her to, because the husband was not used to looking after others, so why should he provide for her? Most husbands did not provide for their wives and children. So, married women would make even more gin than before, because they now had to look after themselves, as well as the husband and the children.[577]

Apparently, even in cases where the husband did work (and the wife distilled), he often did not contribute to the household, since the wife already had more than enough money of herself – he would spend his salary the way he wanted: "the husband's income was spent by himself on himself: clothes, *dholukas*, fun…". The wife would usually not mind; if she had enough income from gin, she would prefer the husband out of the way, with his own salary or with some pocket money (from her).[578] Some women probably had to give (part of) their income to the husband, though this was apparently not common – the Nubian gin producer could generally use her income as she saw fit.

There was also an increasing number of female-headed households, now no longer the young widows whose old husband had died, but increasingly women abandoned (for longer periods or for good) by husbands that had more than one family – not necessarily married, but concubines or girlfriends outside Kibera.[579] These women were usually not supported anymore and had no choice but to take care of the family.

The women would now also make the household decisions, but for good form allow their husband to participate in making some decisions, and let them play their leading role in public – despite the increasing economic power of the women, the men, regardless of their own income, were still considered the head of the household. Few women would stand up against the husband, certainly in public. Sometimes they used manipulation, soothing the husband with presents, or they would simply not ask or tell him. Because they had money, women could also make their husbands act

[577] Informant W10.
[578] Informants W10, M16.
[579] Informants M3, 4, 16.

on their behalf in the public domain, like going to the chief to get permission to add a room to the house.[580]

> The women's power was not shown openly. In public, the man would be the boss; women would accept that, and not go against Nubi values; they would respect that tradition. But, inside the house, the women were powerful, no doubt about it.[581]

Women that would go against these Nubi values and tradition would end up divorced, and lose the respect of the community. Social status demanded that women were married; even if their husbands were of little use around the house, most women preferred not to divorce, not even if the husband had effectively abandoned them. Most women did not need the men economically, but only for social status. Some women would even give the husband money so they could 'provide' for the family, as was expected of them in traditional Nubi society. For a man it was easier to divorce, he could more easily marry another woman, but there was also an economic aspect: if his wife distilled gin and had money, he had an easy life. Therefore, even men would not push for divorce. As a result, (official) divorce was not very common.[582] There were also a number of rich, powerful women that took their own decisions and ended up divorced, but,

> they did not mind: their husbands were largely irrelevant to them. They went into business, became rich, and kept their independence; men were scared of them. There was Mama Ajoba, a rich Nubi businesswoman (widowed and divorced) who, in the late 1940s, got her driver's licence and bought and drove her own car, the first woman in Nairobi; at a time when even white women were not supposed to drive a car![583]

Divorcees and widows were usually among the bigger producers; they needed the income, and there was no one to stop them from producing on a large scale. Divorced women usually went back to the father's compound, often staying there relatively independent and often involved in the Nubian gin production, it being the only way a (divorced) woman could earn a living. If her father did not agree with it, her mother would intervene and

[580] Informants W6, W10, M3, M16.
[581] Informant M3.
[582] All informants confirmed this.
[583] Informant M3.

solve the problem for her. Widows, especially those with grown-up children, would take over the late husband's compound, and were then fully in charge; in many cases these compounds became big gin producers.

Married women were somewhat more restricted, but did not need the husband's express permission to make Nubian gin or hide *pipas* in his shamba. Most men drank, and expected their wives to make Nubian gin for them, like they also expected the wives to prepare dinner – it was up to them how. Even married women would usually do what they wanted, but provide their husbands with his daily gin to keep him happy. Of course, husbands could get difficult, and cause problems for the wives, forbidding them to make Nubian gin, but this was not common, unless they had sufficient income themselves and provided for the family, or were very religious. Many (unemployed) husbands were pampered: they received some pocket money, a new suit from time to time, and were left to spend the day as they liked. Since the husbands also benefited from their wives' income, it was unlikely that they would interfere with the business. Furthermore, for religious reasons, most men did not want to be seen to be involved with it (let alone take over from the wife); drinking Nubian gin may be a 'tradition', but trading Nubian gin was not, that was a religious matter, forbidden by Islam.

Throughout the 1930s to 1960s then, the Nubian Gin provided the Nubis with an income to maintain their "good life" in Kibera, without having to worry much about jobs or education. Within the same period, the Nubi woman had become the most powerful person in many Nubi households, earning most of the money, and deciding on how to spend it. This was quite a change from the docile and obedient womenfolk of only a few decades earlier, when they were powerless and completely secondary to men. The income from Nubian gin had given the women economic independence, and given them the opportunity to liberate themselves from male dominance, despite the fact that the men were still important in the public domain. The women had become the dominant economic force in Kibera, and with their money they could essentially do whatever they wanted. Most of what the Nubi women earned was spent: on food, clothes, on the good life in general; some of it was saved in a box under the kitchen floor for leaner times or to bribe a judge. Some was indeed invested: a few richer women bought land outside Kibera. Another very good opportunity presented itself to the Nubis at a time Kibera was changing more than ever.

The decline of the Nubian gin

During the 1950s and certainly the 1960s, Kibera itself had started to change quite dramatically – transforming from a Nubi-dominated rural area into a more densely populated settlement with a Nubi minority. More and more 'outsiders' moved to Kibera, finding accommodation in the rooms that were being constructed by (mainly) Kikuyus and Nubi women using their Nubian gin profits. Apart from initially stimulating the production of liquor –they turned out to be good customers as well– these 'newcomers' to Kibera began to spoil the liquor business for the Nubis in a number of ways.

So far the Nubi women had been the main producers around Nairobi (with the occasional Kikuyu shamba boy or concubine, or tenant, producing and selling gin in Kibera).[584] From the late 1950s, with the increasing numbers of outsiders in Kibera[585], an increasing number of distillers appeared on the scene, copying the Nubi distillation techniques and taking over part of the clientele and profits. Moreover, increasing quantities of home-made alcohol, now called *chang'aa*[586], were being brought to Nairobi (and Kibera) from Dagoretti, Kariobangi and even Kisumu. Apparently even some Nubis started importing *chang'aa* from Kisumu, it was faster than waiting for a week for the fermentation.[587]

According to many informants, the new *chang'aa* producers used all sorts of chemicals to speed up (or even replace) the fermentation process, like industrial alcohol unfit for human consumption. They would prepare *chang'aa* in only one day, which would kill or blind their customers with the chemicals that were used. Some informants, children of Nubian gin distillers, remembered seeing their mothers also add something to the *muna*, a white bar, a bit like a bar of soap.[588] Though only few (former) distillers admitted it, it is evident that in the early 1960s Nubi women also started using chemicals to speed up the fermentation process; probably they used 'sal ammoniac[589]', which apparently is not as dangerous for human consumption as 'jet fuel' (which came into use much later). They also

[584] Parsons 1997: 106-7; see also Kitching's report of 28/06/1946, KNA RCA (MAA) – 2/1/3.
[585] Informants W10, NN11, NN16, NN19.
[586] *Chang'aa* is the local generic word for "locally distilled liquor" (the [ng'] is pronounced as the "ng" in 'sing').
[587] Informant M3.
[588] Informants M3, M4, M16, M26, W30.
[589] Ammonium chloride, according to informant M26.

started using pineapple and bananas in the *muna*, or cinnamon and cloves during distillation, for a better flavour and smell of the gin; Angostura, added to the gin, came into fashion in the 1950s. Nevertheless, with the increased competition, income for the Nubis was decreasing.

By the late 1960s, early 70s, it was becoming difficult to find a quiet and secret place for distillation, with so many new people (tenants) living around and looking on, curious what was going on there at night. The Nubis' first response had been to move the *pipas* back from the *shamba* and forest closer to the house; they were now hidden in the ground within the compound, next to the house, or even inside the house, in a special room. The number of *pipas* had to be severely reduced due to lack of space within the compound, and because of the long distance to a water source – many compounds were too far from the river to carry the large amounts of water needed for more than one *pipa*. Furthermore, in the compounds there was a higher risk for police raids compared to production in the shamba, so many men did not want distillation to take place within their compound. Moreover, the presence of tenants within the compounds reduced the possibility of secret distillation. Women stopped working in groups, now it was each woman individually in her own compound, with often only one *pipa* remaining; that is, if her husband or father did not completely forbid it.

The alcohol business was also becoming more risky: after Independence, the police raids intensified and took place almost every other day. The amount of money spent on bribing police and judges was such, that it became almost unprofitable to continue the trade. Whilst in Uganda the distillation of alcohol was legalised after Independence (1963), in Kenya police repression continued – Kenya derived considerable and much-needed revenue from the legal alcohol industry and imported spirits, which was being undermined by the illegal business.[590]

Production and profits shrank, though the financial loss was partly off-set by increasing the price of gin from 8 to 16 Ksh per bottle; this was possible because demand for gin remained high, and apparently there was a lot of money going around, partly due to a boom in world coffee prices.[591] Many women started also producing more *kangara*, the traditional "fermented beer". *Kangara* had already existed in the early days of Kibera, and had been earning Nubi women a modest income as well, especially during the weekends. It was easy to make and already in the 1930s it was possible to

[590] Willis 2000; Willis 2002: 190-1, 201-2, 227.
[591] Informants M3, W6, W10, W18, and others.

get a licence to brew a certain amount for weddings and other social events (the occasion was then used to brew large quantities for sale as well). In the 40s and 50s, there were a few open spaces in Kibera where people would come during the weekends to drink *kangara*, in a sort of legalised manner. However, the *kangara* business was never very popular with the Nubis: it gave little profit compared to Nubian gin, and attracted a "lower class of noisy drinkers".[592] As *kangara* could be kept only for 1-2 days, it could never compete with distilled liquor, which could be stored for long periods and transported easily.

In the 1960s it had become easier to obtain a licence for brewing beer; in principle this was meant for customary purposes, but in practice this was understood to include also the sale of alcohol. The (unpopular) municipal beer halls were gradually closed, but at the same time this opened up economic opportunities for individuals. In the early 1970s the sale of traditional liquor was actively encouraged to increase revenue through licence fees.[593] The first licensed *kangara* bar in Kibera, "Tazamo Lako", a communal (Nubi women) bar, opened in the late 1960s. However, after a few years there were so many (licensed as well as illegal) bars in Kibera that also here the profits dwindled; "Tazamo Lako" later (early/mid 70s) collapsed due to embezzlement.

Even though they were instrumental in ruining the Nubian gin business, the increasing number of outsiders in Kibera offered at the same time a reasonable economic alternative: the rental business. It was less time consuming and only required a one-time investment with, in theory, perpetual profit. Moreover, the rental business was not forbidden by Islam, the money earned with it was not '*haraam*', and that may have put some people's conscience to rest; they were more at ease with this type of income. The earnings were not the same as with the Nubian gin, but it helped the family to survive; in those days, with 15 rental rooms one had a very reasonable existence.[594] At the same time, there was a lot of work in Nairobi, and the younger generation Nubis, with generally more education than their fathers, had more chances on the labour market; school leavers could choose between several jobs. Some of these new 'income earners'

[592] Informants M3, M4, M16, M19, W6, W10, and others.
[593] Willis 2002: 183-6, 198-206.
[594] In the late 70s the average monthly rent per room in Kibera was 99 Ksh; more than 50% of the landlords had 8-15 rooms, providing an income of 800-1500 Ksh. The minimum wages in 1980 were 456/month and 625 Ksh were required for basic survival (see Amis: 201-4, 216, 237).

made their mother stop distilling gin, now that they did not need 'that kind of money' anymore.[595] Nubi women started looking for work in town as well, in hair and beauty salons, or as receptionist.

A number of other factors played a role in the decline of Nubian gin production. There was increased competition from other kinds of beverages and drugs: from 1947 Africans were allowed to drink bottled beer[596] and soon the first Tuskers and Pale Ales were available in Kibera at "Dafala's bar", one of the first places in Nairobi to sell it. The African (and Nubi) elite would now drink Lager, which was associated with 'progress and development', and no longer Nubian gin (or other traditional liquors and brews).[597] This did not mean that bottled beer took the place of traditional brews: it was too expensive for the common man, and traditional alcohol continued to dominate the local market. In 1955 a new "Intoxicating Liquor Act" was passed; racial drinking restrictions were lifted and spirits were no longer forbidden for Africans, increasing the competition from other liquors.[598] Also *miraa* (khat), already available in Kibera since the 1920s, bhang and other 'modern' drugs, won in popularity.

In 1979 President Moi suddenly announced publicly that he was opposed to this business, and 'called for a ban on informal production and sale of beer and distilled alcohol'. One Nubi woman mentioned hearing him on the radio and deciding then and there to stop producing gin, worried about the rumour that offenders would be evicted from Kibera.[599]

Religion was another contributing factor: in the 1970s the Nubis became more religious, possibly influenced by higher levels of education and literacy (and the availability of translations of the Koran), and as a reaction to the influx of the mainly Christian outsiders into Kibera. Many Nubis had not been really comfortable with the *haraam* money they were making; their conscience could now be put to rest with the start of the rental rooms, this was *halaal* business – even if (part of) the investment came from a *haraam* source.[600]

[595] Informants M16, W7, W28, Wa11.
[596] Willis 2002: 171-4.
[597] Informant M19.
[598] Willis 2002: 183-92, 220-1.
[599] Haugerud: 86-91. See also Willis 2002: 213; Willis 2003: 244, 249.
[600] Informants M3, M16, W10.

Moreover, with the increasing number of bars in Kibera in the 1970s and the growing numbers of young people drinking alcohol, intoxication and alcoholism became serious problems. Nubi women and young people were openly drunk; adultery and infidelity increased. It seemed to some that the Nubi community was on the verge of collapse[601] – another reason for increased importance of religion?

All these factors contributed to the decline of Nubian gin – more and more Nubi women stopped distillation. This process started slowly in the 1960s, but increased significantly in the late 1970s. In the 1990s there was still a small, and continuously decreasing, number of Nubi women distilling small quantities of liquor, but the 'good old days' of the Nubian gin were over. However, many Nubi women managed to construct a number of rental rooms, and have, up to today, managed to keep their economic independence.

Nubian gin today

The *chang'aa* business, still illegal in Kenya, remains an important source of income for quite a number of women in Kibera, though not for the Nubis – the days of their ethnic economic niche have long gone. Nowadays the 'newcomers' are in that line of business, often the poorest women, and of all ethnic groups. *Chang'aa* is sold mainly by the glass, from home (usually just one room), which in day time serves as bar, and at night as bedroom. However, prices and income are low, and much of the profit goes to the policemen that know the offenders and visit almost every day for their "commission"; some women said there are days they even make a loss. There is also a risk for the drinkers: they can get arrested or be forced to pay a bribe, and with all the chemicals being used in the production of *chang'aa*, their lives are in danger as well. In 2000, more than 140 people were killed in one incident in Nairobi, and this kind of incidents is a regularly recurring news item. Of course, in these cases one can hardly speak of *chang'aa* as a distillate; rather it is simply a concoction of chemicals sold as distilled alcohol.

Though some *chang'aa* is still being produced in Kibera, most of the liquor sold there is 'imported' from Mathare slums. Transporting *chang'aa* from Mathare to Kibera is also risky: the traffic police know who is involved in

[601] Informants M3, 4, 16.

this business, and they take their 'commission', searching the mini-buses leaving Mathare.

Over the years, men have taken over the manufacturing of alcohol from women in Mathare, causing impoverishment of the women who had previously made a good living with the alcohol.[602] The Nubi women of Kibera never suffered the same fate; their men never took over their alcohol business, and the Nubi women switched in time to the rental business. That option is no longer open to 'newcomers', there is hardly space left for construction in Kibera (and Mathare); they have to make do with selling cheap *chang'aa*.

Only a few Nubi women, probably less than five, continue distilling Nubian gin in Kibera, according to the old recipe, but on a very limited scale, 10-15 litres per week, and sometimes only on "special order". Business is not bad, but with a small regular clientele, and high secrecy because of the police. Nubian gin is much more expensive than the *chang'aa* that is being sold all over the place at 10 Ksh per glass[603], but apparently there are people in Kibera that can afford, and are willing to spend, 100 Ksh[604] for a glass of decent, old-fashioned Nubian gin.

[602] See Nelson 1978/9; Nelson 2000: 310; Rodriguez-Torres 1996.
[603] Nubian gin sells for about 400 Ksh per litre, *chang'aa* for 90-150 Ksh per litre.
[604] In 2006, the exchange rate was around 72-74 Kenyan Shillings (Ksh) to the US $.

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"No Raila, no peace!"

'Big man' politics and the impact of the 2007 post-election violence on Kibera

When on 30 December 2007 the incumbent president Mwai Kibaki of the Party of National Unity (PNU) was suddenly declared the winner of the presidential elections – turning his main opponent Raila Odinga of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), into the loser – violence erupted in many parts of Kenya. Previous elections in the 1990s had seen similar "ethnic clashes", but this time it was at an unprecedented scale and intensity, creating the worst crisis since Independence.

The initial demonstrations rapidly turned into revenge killings, targeting ethnic groups linked to the "other political camp", and resulting in what could be labelled "ethnic cleansing"[605]: Kikuyu were chased from Kalenjin-dominated Rift Valley and areas (including slums) dominated by Luo and Luhya; Luos, Kalenjins and others were attacked in Nakuru and Naivasha, and evicted from Kikuyu-dominated areas like Kawangware and Dagoretti. Violence continued until a power sharing agreement was signed on 28 February 2008, after more than one month of negotiations led by former UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan. The two months of violence caused over 1100 deaths and up to 350,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs), while the economic loss was estimated to run to billions of dollars.[606]

Kibera was one of the places in Kenya most affected by the violence. Here, violence started immediately after Kibaki was announced the winner: most Kikuyu were chased away, shops and houses looted, property destroyed and burnt, people killed, women raped, and for several weeks angry crowds engaged the Police in running battles, leaving scores of protestors and innocent bystanders dead.

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[605] Ethnic cleansing can be defined as: various policies or practices, often including the use of force and intimidation, aimed at the displacement of an ethnic group (or groups) from a particular area in order to create an ethnically "pure" territory.

[606] Human Rights Watch, 'Ballots to bullets. Organised political violence and Kenya's crisis of governance' (HRW report, 03/08), International Crisis Group, 'Kenya in Crisis', Africa report N° 137, 21/02/08. See the so-called 'Waki Report' (2007). Judge Waki headed the 'Commission of Inquiry into Post-Election Violence'. Report from internet < http://www.eastandard.net/downloads/Waki_Report.pdf > (16/04/09).

This chapter is about the role of 'ethnic politics' in Kibera (and Kenya). It describes what happened in Kibera during the 2007 post-election violence and previous violent episodes, before exploring the possible underlying causes for the violence in Kibera and interpreting this more broadly against the background of Kenyan and Kiberian history and politics, where some of the root causes of this conflict lie. It shows that ethnicity, far from disappearing after Independence, has become important as a mechanism for mobilisation in national politics: political leaders resort to the deliberate use and manipulation of ethnic identity in political competition with other groups, to secure political power and, often as well, their own wealth. It demonstrates how, partly as a result of this, the situation in Kibera has changed in the last two decades, and how insignificant the Nubis have become within the context of Kibera, after a decades-long struggle to keep control over their land. As a small community they have no political leverage, and without this political (ethnic) support the Nubis have lost their supremacy in Kibera. The Luos, who do have this leverage, use it to their advantage, and have taken over as the main powerbrokers in Kibera; the role (and dilemmas) of one of the 'big men' of Kenya politics, the Luo leader Raila Odinga, will be looked at more closely in relation to this growing dominance of the Luos in Kibera. Significantly though, the Nubis (as landlords) have not been a specific target during the violence, in order to get them out of Kibera (unlike the Kikuyus); rather, it seems they are respected as people with certain rights and claims on the land. This fits obviously very well in the way the Nubis see it themselves, but the current situation has also made it very clear to them that they are no longer the 'masters of Kibera', but merely 'one of the masters', in their own small part of Kibera.

Post-election violence in Kibera

Chapter 2, 'From shamba to slum', has shown how Kibera became, in a short time, a congested slum area with possibly around 250,000 inhabitants. Most of these people are tenants; they are of all ethnic groups, including people from outside Kenya. Internal mobility is quite low, and finding a room is not always easy. People often live in "compounds", a number of blocks of rooms together (not necessarily all belonging to the same person), with its own gate (or gates), that can be locked at night. Compounds usually have a mix of tenants from different ethnic groups; landlords prefer this mix of people to having only or many people of one community, to avoid them

ganging up against him or her. The landlord may live with his tenants in the same compound.

Kibera's villages, with their own characteristics in terms of dominating ethnic group and relative wealth, and because of their different locations relative to the main road, experienced different levels of violence and chaos during the post-election violence; some villages were seriously affected, others hardly at all.

Kibera is Kenya in microcosm: as it is home to members of all Kenyan (African) ethnic groups, the relationships between the ethnic groups at national level are reflected here as well. Though people from the same ethnic group tend to live close together, they are also mixed with other ethnic groups, and there is a certain amount of (urban) intermarriage. The mistrust between the ethnic groups at the national level is also visible in Kibera – politics plays a role in this: politics in Kenya is to a large extent about competition between ethnic groups, and Kibera is an important 'battleground': Raila Odinga, the Luo leader of ODM, has his support base here. He has been the area MP (Lang'ata constituency) since 1992, when the first multi-party elections were held since 1966.[607] Before these elections, he allegedly made many Luos move to or register in Kibera, so they could vote him into Parliament[608], a strategy also used by a previous (Kikuyu) MP, Wmangi Maathai, in the 1970s. After Raila was elected, Luos continued moving into Kibera, probably as part of Raila's plan to remain the Lang'ata MP. Currently, the Luo probably form the largest ethnic group in Kibera, followed by the Luhya (reliable statistics are not available).

Kibera has experienced serious conflict in the past – usually about the rent levels, and usually between the Luo and Nubi communities. After living through several of these clashes, many Kikuyus sold their houses in Kibera, and more people of other ethnic groups had the chance to become (often small, resident) landlords, including many Kisii, Luhya and some Luo.

The 2007 elections

The main contenders in the 2007 presidential elections were the incumbent president Kibaki (PNU) and his former ally Raila Odinga (ODM). In the run up towards the elections, Raila had taken a big lead on Kibaki, though

[607] Grignon, Rutten, & Mazrui: 1.
[608] See Goux 2002: 328.

towards Election Day (27 December) this lead had dwindled to almost nothing – it would be a very close call.[609]

In Kibera there was no doubt who would be the next Lang'ata MP; Raila Odinga would certainly retain it. He has a large Luo following in Kibera, which is only a small part of Lang'ata Constituency (probably less than 2% of the area), but with more than 60% of its population. There were only few other contestants; the main one Stanley Livondo of PNU, but he posed no serious threat to Raila. The general feeling was however, that PNU would try to rig the elections in Kibera to keep Raila out of Parliament, and thus automatically disqualify him for the presidency: the president has to be an elected MP. One Luo youth explained, "Everybody was expecting the elections to be rigged, for many months, and everyone had been telling themselves 'we will not accept it'; they were all hyped up."[610] In the months before the elections, there had therefore been tension in Kibera, but no serious problems. The Kibera population, being pre-dominantly Luo and Luhya, was mainly in support of ODM. Kikuyus were mainly PNU (though apparently many young Kikuyus voted for Raila), but they are a minority in Kibera, like the Nubis, who in this case were divided between ODM and PNU.

In general there had been no problem between the different ethnic groups (within Kibera), except that many Kikuyu, especially in the Luo-dominated areas, reported to have been told by their (Luo) neighbours or customers, that "after the elections, no matter the result, this house / your shop will be mine", or "once Raila is president, you Kikuyus will have to go", and similar things. They took it as a (bad) joke.[611] Closer to Election Day, the situation became more volatile; people wearing PNU shirts were attacked in areas like Laini Saba, and their shirts taken away. In Luo-dominated areas like Gatwikira, PNU supporters usually kept a low profile.

On polling day there were some irregularities in Kibera: some voters' lists did not contain any name starting with R or O (most Luo names start with "O"). The problem was quickly solved, so voting could continue. On that same day, Luo youths[612] occupied and controlled all polling stations in Kibera to ensure that "no irregularities would take place", and to prevent the

[609] Cheeseman: 168-9.
[610] Young Luo man, Karanja, 14/04/08.
[611] See also Mueller: 203.
[612] In Kenya a "youth" is roughly anyone between 15 and 35 (or even 40) years old; see also Bodewes: 80.

expected rigging by the government; people and cars were checked, even Police cars, to prevent stuffed ballot boxes being brought in.[613] Unknown people from outside Kibera, who just came to vote, were given a hard time, unless they voted for Raila. Some Raila supporters had come from as far as Mombasa to vote in Kibera.[614] There were allegations about other irregularities: Kikuyus were not allowed to enter the polling stations to vote, or forced to vote ODM, PNU agents were not allowed to supervise what was happening in the polling stations, etcetera, though these allegations have been disputed by others. Despite these irregularities, the voting itself went on generally peacefully.

The incoming election results were shown live on TV, updating the public of each constituency that had counted its votes. It was clear that PNU was losing: a large number of ministers and political veterans, allies of Kibaki, lost their parliamentary seat. The party got only 43 seats out of 210, though including Kibaki's allies' seats, PNU had only slightly below ODM's total of 99 seats. Raila retained his Lang'ata seat without much problem; he got 70% of the vote: close to 60,000 votes, but his nearest rival Stanley Livondo (PNU) got almost 24,000 votes (28%), still a substantial number and much more than expected. Voter turnout in Lang'ata was low[615], apparently only around 54% – this is remarkable considering the importance of these elections. Were voters scared of possible violence, did registered voters from outside Kibera stay away? In fact, though the total nation-wide voter turnout was slightly above 69%, there were many constituencies with a low voter turnout (and varying between 7 and 115%).[616]

When Raila was leading in the presidential elections with more than one million votes, ODM supporters started celebrating, sure of their victory. However, Raila was leading because the first election results had come mainly from ODM areas; results from Central Province, Kibaki's stronghold, came in later. But as some opinion polls had led people to believe that Raila would certainly win, they saw his initial lead as a

[613] 'Tricky moment as voters register turns up short', 'Polling agent shot dead as two injured', Daily Nation, 28/12/08.
[614] Information from one of the 'occupying youths', April 2008.
[615] Lang'ata constituency had 157,603 registered voters; apparently only 84,678 voted.
[616] See <http://www.communication.go.ke/elections/constituency.asp> (16/05/09), the government spokesperson's website; unfortunately it appears as if the election results were not updated after 30 or 31 December 2007, and the interim Independent Electoral Commission never responded to my requests (by email) for the final results. See also <http://www.eck.or.ke/>, <http://www.electionguide.org/results.php?ID=1158> or <http://www.idea.int/vt/country_view.cfm?CountryCode=KE#Parliamentary> (17/8/2009).

confirmation.[617] With results from Central Province coming in, Raila's lead on Kibaki dwindled.

Suddenly, results from Central Province stopped coming in, and the first suspicions of rigging started. It then seemed clear that the tallying and compiling of the results was being rigged at Nairobi level – ODM noted that there were big discrepancies between the results announced at constituency level and the results shown live on TV. Moreover, there was a discrepancy of more than 325,000 between votes cast in the parliamentary elections and votes cast in the presidential elections, which was considered very suspicious indeed – which voter would come to the polling station to vote only for the presidential elections, and not at the same time vote for the parliamentary elections? Nevertheless, David Throup has doubts about these allegations, and plausible explanations: according to him it is clear that both sides rigged, but it remains unclear how this would have affected the final outcome – it remains unclear who really won these elections.[618]

Despite the fact that there were serious doubts about the results and protests from ODM side, Kibaki was suddenly, on 30 December at around 5:30 pm, declared the winner of the presidential elections, and quickly sworn in at State House less than an hour later, without playing the national anthem and in the absence of the diplomatic corps. The Kenyan Constitution states that all parliamentary and presidential candidates have 24 hours to lodge complaints, with the next 48 hours to be used to solve any disputes; only then can the winners be announced.[619] According to Human Rights Watch:

> The entire process quickly fell apart in confusion. In the face of public outrage and mounting pressure to reverse the move, five electoral commissioners publicly denounced the apparent fraud. Even the head of the ECK later said that he could not determine who actually won the vote. Nonetheless, Mr. Kibaki tried to pre-empt any challenge by having himself hurriedly sworn in to a second term in office before Kenyans even had time to register their anger and concern. All domestic and international observer missions swiftly issued

[617] Cheeseman: 168-9.
[618] Throup 2008: 298-303. See also Cheeseman: 176-8.
[619] See 'Why Kivuitu must be held accountable for poll chaos', by D. Kipkorir, Daily Nation, 5/1/08.

> statements condemning the tallying process and casting doubt on the result of the presidential election.[620]

Immediately after Kibaki was announced the winner, people in Kibera (and in many parts of Kenya) took to the street.

The violence in Kibera

People in Kibera had been keenly watching the live broadcast of the election results. On the 29 December, people were getting anxious and suspicious when the results from Central Province stopped coming in. Some shops were looted; tension was high. On 30 December, immediately after the announcement that Kibaki had won, Kibera exploded. As one lady[621] explained:

> Immediately we saw on TV that Kibaki had won the elections, people went on a rampage, destroying things. Kikuyu started moving out immediately. People took to the streets, shouting "Kikuyu have to go", everyone went to Kibera Drive [the main road through Kibera], shouting. People also started breaking into houses, looting, especially Kikuyu houses and Kikuyu businesses along the main road.

Shops and houses were looted (and sometimes demolished) all over Kibera, mainly those belonging to Kikuyus and known PNU supporters. Kikuyus were seen as "the same thing as PNU"; it was therefore justified to attack "everything Kikuyu", as well as everything and everyone linked to PNU, irrespective of their ethnic origin. Kikuyus were also told to leave immediately, and "go to Othaya[622]". Toi Market, an informal market in Makina, mainly controlled by Kikuyu traders, went up in flames; also the shopping centre in Olympic (an upgraded residential area, situated almost within the slum area) was looted and burnt, as well as many of the churches along Kibera Drive. During the violence, people were beaten up, robbed, some killed, women and girls raped.

Much of the violence became simply looting: the rigging of the elections was used as an excuse for people to loot shops and houses. People in Kibera

[620] Human Rights Watch report, p 22.
[621] Luo informant, small landlord, from Kianda, March 2008.
[622] Othaya is the home area of Kibaki, who is also the constituency's MP.

are generally poor, and an opportunity to get something for free cannot be ignored, certainly by unemployed, frustrated young men. However, not only young men were involved in the looting: also adults, women, girls and children – they were called '*siafu*' (safari ants), carrying everything away in long columns. Looting groups were (to some extent) randomly formed; youths from all parts of Kibera took part, and even from outside Kibera, of all ethnic groups mixed in different groups, including even Kikuyu youths in some areas. Some groups were organised by local (youth) leaders, often linked to a political party or candidate. According to most informants, the violence was mainly instigated by youths from Gatwikira:

> Groups of youths came looking for Kikuyus, especially youths from Gatwikira: in that area many Kikuyus were chased some years ago. Many people followed those groups, for their own safety – if you don't join them, you are seen as against them.[623]

They went all over Kibera, looking for shops and houses to loot: "*tufanye shopping!*".[624] After the initial "shopping spree" at Kikuyu shops and houses, they turned to shops of people of other ethnic groups as well, and even houses (of the well-to-do) were not spared. Sometimes shops and houses were also demolished: doors, windows and roofs were removed. The main affected areas were Kianda and Olympic, basically the richer areas of Kibera. In some areas looting was limited: in Lindi for example, only few shops were looted, the majority (including Kikuyu-owned shops) were protected by the Nubis and tenants. In other areas looting was limited because most shops were owned by non-Kikuyus. The upper side of Laini Saba, with many Kikuyu shops, was guarded by Kikuyu vigilante groups and also escaped most of the looting. Police did not do much to stop the looting, often just standing by and watching, but sometimes actively involved, opening the padlocks with their guns and going in first.[625]

Burning of property was not widespread: the risk of burning down hundreds of houses, including the perpetrators' own houses, is high in a place like Kibera, and fire was therefore avoided. It was mainly the shops along Kibera Drive that were burnt down, and some houses behind them. There was not much killing either, the aim being to chase away the Kikuyus; they usually lost all their belonging, but many were actually escorted out of

[623] Luo man, tenant, Kianda, March 2008.
[624] Let's do shopping! (Sheng / Swahili).
[625] See the 'Waki Report' for descriptions of violence and police failure in doing their duty.

Kibera to safety by their Luo neighbours. In some cases, if they were lucky, they could come back later with a (paid) Police escort, to collect their belongings, that had been kept by their neighbours or landlord.

In Kikuyu-dominated Laini Saba, in revenge, the same thing happened to the Luos living there: they were told to leave the area, and in some cases beaten; their homes were looted and mostly occupied by Kikuyus fleeing other parts of Kibera, mainly Shilanga. The Luos fleeing Laini Saba often found refuge in other parts of Kibera, in rooms deserted by Kikuyus.

Kibera was rife with rumour during this violent period: about a plot to assassinate Raila, that the army would take power, and many more. These rumours spread fast and wide, using modern technology like text/SMS messaging, while local radio stations broadcasting in vernacular (mainly Kalenjin and Kikuyu, but also Luo) also played a role in further inciting the people, fuelling fear and panic, and exacerbating violence, displacement, and the destruction of property. Rumour plays an important role in Kenyan politics; politicians may start rumours themselves, exploiting it to their own benefit. In this case, Michelle Osborn shows how the rumour on Raila's arrest brought many ODM supporters onto the streets to vent their frustration. The ODM leadership did nothing to quash that baseless rumour, instead using misinformation in an obvious attempt to keep their supporters on the streets, thus directly contributing to the violence. Text messaging (SMS) was also used to send inflammatory statements and "hate messages" around Kenya.[626]

After the announcement that Kibaki had won, violence had also erupted in other parts of Kenya, mainly Rift Valley where the Kalenjin community were destroying Kikuyu property, killing people and chasing away Kikuyus from villages where they had lived for several generations. Kikuyus took revenge and chased away Luos and Luhyas from Kikuyu-dominated areas like Limuru, Dagoretti and Kawangware. PNU and ODM started negotiations to stop the violence, but PNU hardliners seemed to block any agreement that risked invalidating Kibaki's election.[627] ODM called several times for nationwide demonstrations to put pressure on Kibaki; one of the popular slogans during mass action was "No Raila, no peace!", a slogan that

[626] Osborn 2008: 323, 325-6; Waki report pp. 295-303; 'I accuse the Press for igniting post election violence: fact or scapegoat?', Daily Nation, 29/02/08; 'Man in court over Kibaki hate message', Daily Nation 22/05/08.

[627] "The 2007 Presidential election: how the rigging was done." – ODM advertisement in Daily Nation 20/01/08; see ICG report, p 21-22.

resonated particularly strongly in Kibera. Demonstrations were invariably stopped by security forces using water cannon and teargas, resulting in more clashes all over the country.

In Nairobi, the security forces tried to keep people inside Kibera, to stop them from participating in the rallies and demonstrations. They succeeded in this: people from Kibera trying to march towards Uhuru Park were stopped and had to turn back into Kibera, where they went on a rampage, looting and fighting the Police in serious clashes, and causing loss of property and lives within the slums. The main road, Kibera Drive, was then barricaded by youths to prevent the Police from entering Kibera.

Meanwhile a rumour had started that the *Mungiki*, a violent, semi-religious, pre-dominantly Kikuyu sect[628], was coming to Kibera, to take revenge for what was done to the Kikuyus in Kibera. In many parts of Kibera vigilante groups were organised, from the first days of January: most men would stay at night in the streets to be ready for defence against Mungiki. Since Police had no access to many parts of Kibera, or at least, were not around to protect them, people had to provide security themselves: against Mungiki, but also to prevent more chaos, more looting from taking place, or burning of the houses. Despite all the rumours, there is little evidence that the Mungiki were actually there – most people appear to have only heard from others, and the ones that claim they saw Mungiki, saw only 'dark shapes at night'. It is possible that Mungiki were in Laini Saba, assisting the Kikuyus there with their defence against marauding Luos from Gatwikira, but it seems unlikely that they actually tried to attack or burn down Kibera.

The vigilantes continued their nightly vigils for a few weeks, until calm had returned. In some hard-core areas like Laini Saba and Gatwikira these groups of youths also checked people during the day, asking for the ID: if you were of the wrong ethnic group, you could be in serious trouble. There were also some clashes between different groups, notably the groups from Gatwikira (Luo) and the "defence force" of Laini Saba (Kikuyu), in which quite a number of people appear to have been killed.

[628] See for example Nyatugah Wamue (2001), Anderson (2002) and Kagwanja (2003) for an overview of Mungiki origin and changes the group went through over the years. The rumour was that displaced Kikuyu businessmen from Kibera had contacted the Mungiki and paid them 300,000 Kenyan Shillings (about 4600$) for them to come and burn down Kibera.

As the violence continued, life in Kibera became more difficult: in most areas the shops had were either empty after looting, or had closed as a security measure. Fresh food, if available, was very expensive. The supermarkets around Kibera could not always be reached, and even if most of the loot was for sale in the streets of Gatwikira, it was at highly inflated prices that few could afford. Some food aid was given by some churches (food vouchers for Nakumatt or Uchumi) and the Red Cross, but this was insufficient to cover the needs of the population.

Youths that initially had made money from looting, now started levying taxes on the inhabitants, for "protection", for being out in the streets at night as "vigilantes". Some put up roadblocks on Kibera Drive to collect money from passing traffic. Others offered their services for transporting furniture of Kikuyus out of Kibera, or for finding homes for 'newcomers': many of the Luos and Luhyas chased away from Kikuyu-dominated areas around Nairobi, like Kawangware and Dagoretti, came to Kibera, looking for accommodation. For 1000 Kenyan Shillings they would find you an empty house, and with some luck the house would not even have a landlord. Most of the houses that were vacated by the Kikuyus (tenants and/or landlords) were now being occupied by new people.

Calm returns

The first wave of violence lasted for about a week; after that Kibera calmed down, and shops opened again here and there. The situation remained very tense, though, pending negotiations between the political parties, with mediators like Desmond Tutu, John Kufuor (President of Ghana and Chairman of the African Union) and Jendayi Fraser (US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs). The calm was now and again interrupted by new clashes. When on 8 January Kalonzo Musyoka, the Kamba ODM-Kenya leader who had also run for president, was announced to be the new Vice President in Kibaki's cabinet, the Kambas also became a target in some parts of Kibera. Another round of riots occurred mid-January when ODM called for three days of mass action to put again pressure on Kibaki; in Kibera the railway line to Kisumu / Uganda was uprooted over a stretch of a few hundred meters.[629]

[629] This was to punish Museveni for supporting Kibaki; the destruction of the railway line would prevent supplies being transported from Mombasa to Kampala.

After Kofi Annan arrived in Kenya on 22 January to mediate between Kibaki and Raila, the situation in Kibera calmed down significantly, and most vigilante groups stopped their nightly vigils. However, violence in the Rift Valley continued, and even exploded again when on 24 January Kikuyus and Kalenjins started fighting in Nakuru, and then Naivasha. These events did not have a huge impact on Kibera, though there was increased tension and some revenge when a Luo traveller was taken from a bus in Naivasha and killed.

Photo 81: railway line uprooted in Gatwikira (photo by author).

The relative calm in Kibera was however disrupted by the assassination of the Embakasi MP Mugabe Were on 29 January. Mugabe Were of ODM was the unexpected winner in the Embakasi constituency, a Kikuyu stronghold; he won the seat because the Kikuyu vote was split between three Kikuyu candidates. His murder was seen as clearly politically motivated – this was a seat that PNU could win back easily, which was important in the attempt to

get a parliamentary majority.[630] The killing of Were triggered renewed attacks on Kikuyus in most parts of Kibera, with groups of youths now going from door to door to flush out all remaining Kikuyus, in some areas destroying rooms and shops belonging to Kikuyus. This time more people were killed, resulting in revenge killings of Luos and Luhyas in Laini Saba, the only Kikuyu stronghold in Kibera. In total between 50 and 60 people may have been killed in Kibera, about half of the total of Nairobi.[631]

The Kikuyus after the first wave of violence

Being the main target of the anger and violence, many Kikuyus had left their homes in Kibera almost immediately the violence started. This was certainly necessary in areas with a high Luo or Luhya population: Gatwikira and Kisumu Ndogo, Kianda (where groups from Gatwikira came to loot and "assist" the local Luos to remove the Kikuyus), Shilanga and Mashimoni. Also in other areas most Kikuyu left, sometimes only for a short while. Laini Saba was probably the only area where Kikuyu did not leave, and even received fleeing Kikuyus from other parts of Kibera, mainly Shilanga.

Many Kikuyus had gone to the nearby Agricultural Showground in Jamhuri Park, or further away from Kibera, to relatives or friends. A few thousand people ended up in the makeshift camp at the Showground; not only Kikuyus, but also people from other ethnic groups (including Luo), sending their wives and children to safety from the chaos in Kibera, and to a place where food (aid) was available. For non-Kikuyus this was usually temporarily, for one or two weeks, until calm had returned to Kibera.

In many cases, the fleeing Kikuyus were protected by their (Luo) neighbours, or could store their belongings in friends and neighbours' houses, certainly if they had lived together for a long time; some asked Luo friends to stay in their rooms to prevent looting. Quite a number of Kikuyus stayed on for a few days, but as the chaos continued, most of them left, sometimes under pressure of their neighbours, increasingly worried about their own safety with a Kikuyu 'hiding' in the compound. Only a few Kikuyus stayed on throughout the chaos; these were mainly young men that were born in Kibera. As one of them (from Gatwikira) explained: "I had no

[630] In the elections ODM had become the biggest party in Parliament, while PNU and affiliated parties together had just a few seats less than ODM – any extra seat would count. See also Cheeseman: 178-9.
[631] Luo Youth in Gatwikira involved in data collection for NGO; see Waki Report p307.

problem, the guys that came to the house, I knew all of them, they are my friends, we grew up together."[632] Most Kikuyus however lost all their belongings, leaving everything behind when fleeing. Their shops and rooms were looted as soon as they had gone, sometimes even by their direct neighbours. Their rooms were occupied by others: local youths, or newcomers chased from Kikuyu-dominated areas. At the end of January, there was hardly anything left in Kibera that could remind the random visitor of a previous Kikuyu presence.

A government of national unity

Throughout February, sporadic fighting and ethnic violence continued in Rift Valley and Western Kenya. Travelling remained risky, and thousands of (mainly Kikuyu) displaced people (IDPs) were transported by the government from makeshift IDP camps back to their rural homes of origin, in essence aiding the ethnic cleansing taking place. In Kibera the situation remained relatively calm, though tense, as people were watching how their political leaders negotiated with ups and downs; for many people the announcement of an agreement would be the sign that everything would be okay. The IDP camp at the Showground next to Kibera was closed on 19 February and the remaining people, mostly Kikuyu, were forced to find another place to stay. Some went to friends or relatives, up-country, a few went back to Kibera, but many others ended up at other camps, at the DO's office in Kibera, or places like Waithaka (10 kilometres from Nairobi), where a new IDP camp was established in the chief's camp – most IDPs here, a few hundred, were Kikuyus from Gatwikira.[633]

[632] Young Kikuyu man, Gatwikira, April 2008.

[633] They were mainly small, resident landlords; one (female) had more than 200 rooms in Kibera, an exceptionally high number for a resident landlord.

Photo 9: Waithaka IDP camp (March 2008, photo by author).

As towards the end of February the negotiations seemed to have ended in failure, Kofi Annan was preparing to leave Kenya; tension rose all over the country, and it looked like a new wave of violence would follow as political leaders appeared unable to control their supporters anymore. Suddenly, on 28 February a peace and power sharing agreement was signed, surprising everyone – Kibaki remained president, Raila became prime minister. Demonstrations planned for that day were called off, and calm was restored instantly almost everywhere. The peace agreement was the sign many people had been waiting for: expectations were that now everything would go back to normal, and displaced people would return back home. This is not what happened, though: most IDPs in displaced camps around Kenya (mainly in Rift Valley) remained in their camps, and only few Kikuyus returned to Kibera.

In a relatively quiet area like Nubi-controlled Makina most Kikuyus came back home. In Kianda, where Kikuyus and Luo had for many years lived together peacefully, a good number of Kikuyus came back, but not to live there: most of their rooms were still occupied, and they did not feel safe. In

some cases people managed to get their rooms back after talking to the people occupying their house, or with the Chief as intermediary, but it was always through negotiation, not eviction. Most landlords decided to let things cool down further before talking to the new occupants to come to some agreement about them leaving, or taking action to evict people. The Kikuyu businessmen came back mainly for the reconstruction of their shops, or for renting a new shop, along Kibera Drive – due to the high population density, Kibera is a very good place for business, and staying away might invite others to take your plot. Along Kibera Drive most shops had been rebuilt, and many re-opened. But, as one of the shopkeepers said: "Even if we do business here, we do it in fear". Ironically, it was mainly Luo youths from Gatwikira that were employed for the reconstruction of the shops, possibly the same ones that destroyed them. Also in Shilanga a number of Kikuyus came back, rebuilding their shops, but not always sure about actually opening or waiting for things to cool down. In those relatively safe areas, like Kianda and Lindi (areas not dominated by hard-core Luos), most Kikuyu business people would come in the morning to open their shop, and then leave again in the afternoon. They were still too scared to come back to live in Kibera, and mostly commuted from (for Kikuyus) safer areas like Dagoretti or Racecourse where they rented accommodation. Even if they would want to come back to stay, like some did, they would not be able to move back to their own house or old room, or even find a new place to live, since all rooms were occupied, often by people from outside Kibera. Sometimes these new people would be willing to leave, but had the same problem: where would they go to?

In most other parts of Kibera, no or very few Kikuyus came back. The few that did come back continued to experience aggression and threats; even Kikuyus that came back during the day for a quick visit to assess the situation were harassed:

> I went back with the District Commissioner (DC) and some other people; the DC (a Kisii) is new and wanted to see the situation for himself – he organised the trip. On the road I met some friends that told me, 'it's not a good time to come back'. We proceeded to Gatwikira, and at the Kamukunji ground [open space for meetings], when people saw us, they became rowdy, and we all had to run back… So, now it's

> clear that we will have to wait a bit longer… even the Police have no power in Gatwikira.[634]

The problem was that their rooms were still occupied by other people, who were often even using the Kikuyus' furniture and everything else they had left behind. In a number of places (Shilanga and Mashimoni for example) some Kikuyu rooms were completely destroyed and the plots grabbed by Luos, building houses for themselves or for renting out. In most parts of Kibera (even in 'safe areas' like Kianda), with the Kikuyu landlords absent, no rent was being paid since January 2008 (sometimes also other landlords suffered the same fate, not only Kikuyus), though in some cases it was collected by the Luo youths that had chased away the owners (unless they were occupying the rooms themselves). Any returning Kikuyu was therefore perceived as a threat – he would surely try to get his house and rooms back and collect rent. Whereas in the safer areas (not Luo-dominated) some Kikuyu landlords managed to get (some of) their rooms back, in the Luo-dominated areas this appeared impossible; any returning Kikuyu would be met with aggression. The only Kikuyus that returned here were a few of the young men that were born there, not considered an "enemy". Assistance from the local authorities (District Officer, Chiefs) to recover rooms was not forthcoming, certainly not in Gatwikira and Kisumu Ndogo, as they too were scared of going into those areas. Moreover, they were not able (or willing) to enforce rent payment, because of Raila's connection here – with Raila the prime minster, the Luos were now basically 'in power' in Kibera. It would be difficult and pointless to go against the people of the prime minister, and they (DO, chiefs) might even have been worried about losing their jobs. Besides, it was risky for the landlords as well – they realised that "the police is not going to guard me day and night; the Luos will just kill me."[635] Therefore, most Kikuyus preferred to stay in IDP camps or elsewhere, "waiting for things to cool down".

However, the problems between PNU and ODM continued – the delay in agreeing on a new cabinet (numbers of ministries, who would be minister…) resulted in increased tension again. When in early April the negotiations collapsed, Kibera became, on 8 and 9 April, again the scene of burning tires and clashes with the Police; the railway was uprooted again in Gatwikira. Nevertheless, in the end those problems were sorted out and on 13 April a new cabinet was at last announced, with Raila as prime minister.

[634] Young Kikuyu man, small landlord from Gatwikira, staying at Waithaka IDP camp, March 2008.
[635] Kikuyu man from Gatwikira, in IDP camp, April 08.

However, this did not change the situation in Kibera, or in other parts of Kenya: Kikuyus remained unwelcome. In Rift Valley, where leaflets appeared threatening displaced people (mainly Kikuyu) not to come back, the underlying cause for the resentment against 'outsiders' seems to be the 'land issue', which essentially has remained unresolved since Independence. Likewise, in Kibera, there are underlying causes for the continued tension and aggression against Kikuyus: to understand the issues, a brief review of the historical context of Kikuyu and Luo presence in Kibera is useful. Kibera's demography is more complex than can be captured here; for the purpose of this chapter, the focus is on the Kikuyus and Luos, the main 'actors' in the post-election violence.

The Kikuyus and Luos in Kibera

The first Kikuyus came to Kibera in the 1920s, and their numbers increased during the next decades; having lost most of their land to the white settlers, they were desperately looking for places where they could settle. From the early 1970s, when construction of rental rooms started on a large scale, the Kikuyus were the first to seize the opportunity. They built many rooms all over Kibera; some people invested their pension in the construction of a small house and a few rental rooms, others with more money (civil servants, businessmen, politicians), used large sums to construct hundreds of rooms. In 2007, the Kikuyus possibly owned about 50% of the rooms in Kibera.[636] The big, usually 'absentee' landlords, with many rooms, didn't usually live in Kibera; the small resident landlords, with up to 20 rooms, usually lived in Kibera, often in the same compound as their tenants, and in the same conditions; many of these small Kikuyu landlords are women.[637]

Already in the 1940s many Luos lived in Kibera[638], probably mainly as tenants of Nubis. In the 1950s, the Kikuyu workers that were removed from Nairobi in "Operation Anvil" were replaced by Luos and Luhyas, many of whom moved into Kibera. In July 1969 the number of Luos in Kibera increased suddenly: the murder of Tom Mboya created conflict between

[636] Informant NN4, chairman of the Kibera Landlord and Housing Cooperative, a (Kikuyu) landlord organisation. There are no reliable statistics.
[637] I have no statistics on this, but the majority of Kikuyu landlords I interviewed are actually 'landladies'.
[638] Around 26% of outsider population, 392 out of 1472 (both probably underestimated), according to the "Census of August 23, 1948", by Kibera Superintendent Kitching, 13/9/1948, KNA RCA (MAA) – 2/1/3 ii.

Kikuyus and Luos and forced Luos to flee Kikuyu-dominated areas like Kawangware; they found refuge with the Nubis in Kibera. However, unlike the Kikuyus and Nubis, the Luos seemed less interested in investing in construction of houses or rental rooms; they preferred to invest in education of their children. Furthermore, they planned to eventually go back home to Nyanza, so there was no need to own a house in Kibera. The Kikuyus and Nubis had no other place to go or return to; they had no choice but to build their life in Kibera. At the time Luos may have become more interested in owning property in the Nairobi area, Kibera was already divided, and full of houses. As a result, the Luos became the tenants of the Nubis and the Kikuyus.[639]

Before the 1992 elections many more Luos moved to Kibera, to ensure that Raila Odinga would win the Lang'ata parliamentary seat; in previous elections, other Luos (Achieng' Oneko, Omolo) had tried to win the Lang'ata seat, but unsuccessfully, as in the single party era basically the president decided who would win. With multi-party elections, the contest was more open and there was a chance to win the seat. In subsequent years, this flow of Luos into Kibera was to be maintained, to ensure the retention of the Lang'ata seat.[640] These new arrivals from Nyanza usually stayed with or close to relatives; an older brother, a cousin, an uncle, someone who could take care of them, pay school fees or assist in finding a job. The majority of Luos thus settled together, in Gatwikira (including Kisumu Ndogo). The trend continued throughout the years: many young people, mainly men, coming to Nairobi looking for work or for studies, settled there, and later, when Gatwikira became congested, in the surrounding villages. Currently the Luos are the largest ethnic group in Kibera[641] – most of the tenants in Gatwikira and Kisumu Ndogo are Luo, and so are a large part of the tenants in Shilanga, Lindi and Kianda. However, Kianda is different from the other villages in the sense that most Luos that live there came in the late 1960s, many were even born there: 'newcomers' are a minority here. In practice this means there is more understanding between the ethnic groups, and a peaceful co-existence with the Kikuyus. As many people said: "The Luos there are not fanatics like in Gatwikira". During the

[639] I'm not claiming that there were no Luo landlords; there were, but relatively few.
[640] Many informants, from Gatwikira. See also Goux: 328 and Osborn 2006: 38. One of the Kibera chiefs told me in February 2006 that "Luos keep coming, every day Luos are registering at the DO's office" (informant M7).
[641] It must be emphasised that there are no reliable statistics. This statement is based on information from Kibera residents. See also Marras 2008 on Kianda.

recent upheavals the Kianda Luos were abused by the Gatwikira Luos for being soft and for living (peacefully) with Kikuyus.

Over the years, Gatwikira / Kisumu Ndogo became a hard-core Luo stronghold. Its population consists of many young men (possibly more than 50%), fresh from the rural areas in Nyanza, where they would hardly meet people from other ethnic groups. They would find a similar situation in Gatwikira, and therefore often maintain a strong Luo identity. Moreover, due to the economic circumstances, many have remained unemployed, poor, and are often forced to share a room with up to 4-5 other youths; they are frustrated and angry, having come to Nairobi with high expectations. These young men hang around the streets, looking for jobs, for anything that can give them some income. They are available for anyone that pays them, be it to intimidate or beat up people, to loot, kill…. According to most informants, it was mainly these youths that were responsible for inciting (forcing) others to loot and destroy Kikuyu shops and houses, and remove Kikuyus from Kibera.

Over the years, the existing situation, with Nubi and Kikuyu mainly as landlords and the increasing numbers of Luos mainly as tenants, had caused problems.

Previous conflicts in Kibera – growing Luo dominance

Kibera has seen a number of violent conflicts over the years, always resulting in death, destruction and displacement. In 1992, at the advent of multiparty democracy in Kenya, the Luo candidate Raila Odinga had been elected MP for Lang'ata Constituency, reflecting the dominant position of the Luos[642] in Kibera, which became a political battlefield, a stronghold of opposition politics. Some months before the general elections, there were major rent clashes between the Nubis (landlords) and Luos (generally tenants), caused by the latter's refusal to pay the rent, claiming it was too high. Politics may have been involved as well, as the Nubis were supporting the ruling party KANU, while the Luos were in the opposition. The fighting spread over a large part of Kibera, and tension continued for many months, before calming down before the elections. The few Nubi landlords living in Gatwikira and other areas of high 'Luo-density' negotiated with their tenants and reduced the rent. Though the Kikuyus stayed out of the fighting,

[642] The Luos had by then become (one of) the largest ethnic groups in Kibera, though it must be emphasised that there are no reliable statistics on the Kibera population.

they also suffered, owning most of the houses in those Luo-dominated areas; they also had to reduce the rent, but some tenants refused to pay any rent at all to Kikuyus, driving out some of the landlords. According to one inhabitant of Gatwikira:

> The reason for paying rent to the Nubis was that they saw the Nubis as the rightful owners of the land, and respected them for that; the Kikuyus were not, they were simply trying to steal the land, they had no rights there, not more than the Luos.[643]

Another round of clashes between the Nubis and Luos occurred in 1995 – this time it started with a problem between two individuals, but then the rent issue was brought in to mobilise people, which can be seen as symptomatic for the tension between landlords and tenants. These clashes could also have been the result of some pent-up anger against the 'outsiders', or underlying tension between the different groups. Youth-led, these clashes were not organised, it was claimed; they just erupted. The fighting continued only for a few days, and though several people were killed, life returned to normal. Nevertheless, an underlying tension remained, between landlords and tenants, Nubis and Luos.

The November 2001 clashes between Nubis and Luos came at a time when Raila's National Development Party (NDP) was about to merge with President Moi's party, the Kenya African National Union (KANU), and join the government. In a public meeting in Kibera, Raila complained to President Moi about the high rent levels in Kibera. President Moi agreed and ordered the Provincial Commissioner (PC) to ensure that rents are lowered in Kibera, because, he claimed, the people living there were poor and the landlords did not really have any rights to be there – it was government land, not theirs. This was clearly a populist gimmick; it was about one year before the December 2002 general elections, and Moi, needing Raila's support, had to be generous to Raila's supporters (being mainly tenants). Lowering rent in Kibera was a way of securing support from Kibera's tenants for KANU and NDP, and Raila in particular. Raila must have known that his statements would ignite violent confrontations in Kibera.[644]

[643] Nubi man, landlord, March 2008.
[644] This merger took place in March 2002 (Anderson 2002: 555); Osborn 2006: 35; see Bodewes: 49.

While the PC recommended paying full rent pending negotiations between landlords and tenants, the tenants expected nothing less than paying no rent at all for the time being – NDP youth wingers were going around in Kibera threatening people not to pay any rent, and even Raila is alleged to have told his people (in the Luo language) at public meetings not to pay rent.[645] Depending almost completely on rental income, the Nubis generally refused to accept a reduction in rent; when a Nubi landlord in Lindi demanded his rent, the tenants refused to pay and fighting ensued. The clashes that erupted between (again) mainly Nubis and Luos made headlines all over the world. Houses went up in flames, and a mass exodus started: more than 30,000 people were displaced, many fled Kibera with all their belongings, others camped at the Kibera District Officer's office or slept at the mosques' grounds; 15 people were killed and scores were injured.[646]

Calm returned after two weeks of violence, but Kibera had changed for good. In the Nubi-dominated areas, mainly the Makina area[647], there had hardly been any problem during or after the clashes. Nubi landlords usually live within the same compound and have in general a good relationship with their tenants, many of whom have lived in the same house for a very long time; they continued to pay the same rent after the clashes. It was mainly in the Luo-dominated areas where the impact had been high; in these areas (Gatwikira, Kisumu Ndogo) hardly any rent was paid anymore, or lower rents. The absentee landlords (mostly Kikuyu[648]) lost control over their rooms; most of them gave up after a while and did not even bother to come for the rent anymore – their tenants became the *de facto* owners of the rooms. The smaller, resident landlords (some Nubi, and other ethnic groups) all negotiated lower rents with their tenants, and have had less problem with rent payments since. The small Kikuyu landlords, who had not been actively involved in the actual fighting, suffered more: it was mainly them that had problems getting paid. Some tenants did not pay at all, others would pay only half the rent or a token, depending on their mood or the money they had in their pocket. It was difficult to take action against the non-paying tenants, as the local administration (the Chiefs and District Officer that are based in Kibera) was not able to enforce rent payment there – they were said to be scared of the 'violent and fanatical Luos' in Gatwikira. Quite a number

[645] PeaceNet: 28-9, 39.
[646] See Goux 2002 and PeaceNet 2001 for a more detailed description of the events; Osborn 2006: 34.
[647] Makina area includes Kambi Lendu, Kambi Alur and Makongeni.
[648] Some of these 'absentee' landlords were small Nubi landlords that lived elsewhere in Kibera – they also lost their rooms.

of the small Kikuyu landlords (an estimated 20%[649]) left the area, though the majority stayed and accepted the new situation; they tried to make do with whatever the tenants gave them, they had nowhere else to go. This situation actually caused an internal Luo movement within Kibera towards the "free houses" in Gatwikira, especially from Mashimoni (which subsequently became a Luhya-dominated area).

Also in other areas with many Luo tenants, like Shilanga (and even Kianda), many Luos and even people of other ethnic groups stopped paying rent, or paid only a small amount once in a while. But here people were generally more willing to pay rent, and after meeting with the landlord or after intervention by the Chief, many would agree to start paying again, though usually at a lower rate. In general, rent levels went down in these parts of Kibera after negotiations between landlords and their tenants, though there remained a significant group of tenants that would not pay.[650] In Nubi-controlled parts of Kibera there had actually been very little problem with rent payments; nothing much changed there.

This situation of non-payment of rent persisted up to the 2007 elections, and formed an important part of the local dynamics of the post-election violence. These recent clashes continued the process of growing Luo dominance and expansion in Kibera: the Luo hard-core areas of Gatwikira and Kisumu Ndogo were this time "cleansed" of all Kikuyus (with a few exceptions) – the Kikuyus' rooms and businesses have been taken over, and it seems unlikely that they will return anytime soon. Luos have become the *de facto* owners of those areas. In other parts of Kibera the same process is now (2008) in its initial stages, and essentially comparable to the situation that existed in Gatwikira before the 2007 elections: many Kikuyu landlords have been pushed out, lost control over a large part of their rooms, and are in most cases not being paid rent[651], certainly not by Luo tenants. Some Kikuyus came back, re-opened shops, and occupied some of the rooms, but most were, six months after the events, still watching from a distance to see what would happen.

[649] Estimate of several informants from Gatwikira.

[650] Over time however, some rents went up again, certainly if a tenant left; the new tenants would have to pay the old, higher rent.

[651] Some landlords of other ethnic groups experienced the same problem, certainly if they were women without husband or grown-up sons in the house – tenants simply refused to the pay rent, and even threatened the landlord.

Were these upheavals in Kibera "designed" to boost that process of growing Luo dominance, or are there other explanations? With this background on Kikuyu and Luo history in Kibera, we now return to the question of the underlying causes of the violence.

Analysis of the causes of the violence in Kibera

The 2007 elections and subsequent violence have already been extensively discussed, and there is general consensus that it is an oversimplification to see the violence as an ethnic, or tribal, problem.[652] Instead most analyses emphasise 'underlying precipitating factors', while 'the elections provided the spark that ignited them'.[653] Some of these underlying causes are identified as historical grievances over resources (mainly access to land), deliberate weakening of government institutions (like the judiciary), and the gradual loss of the state's monopoly of legitimate force, allowing the large-scale proliferation of militia and gangs, that were in turn used and mobilised by politicians in their pursuit of electoral victory. Other factors include economic and political exclusion, as well as the strongly ethnicised discourse of Kenyan politics.[654] While these analyses point to the complexity and historical roots of this post-election violence, they all, to varying degrees, emphasise the importance of ethnicity and patron-client relations in Kenyan politics.

This section will explore the relationship between national 'big man' politics and violence at the grassroots in more detail. Raila appears to have an almost total control over his constituents in Kibera, and in the weeks after the elections the slogan 'No Raila, no peace' was frequently heard on the streets and in demonstrations. A closer examination will show that 'big man' politics cannot provide a full explanation of the post-election violence; local, socio-economic factors played a key role and lent the conflict its own specific dynamics. Moreover, while Raila's strong patron-client relationship with Kibera has in many ways empowered him as a national politician, in his current role as Prime Minister this relationship also restricts his political room for manoeuvre. As such, the focus on Raila's 'big man' status in

[652] See for example the special issue of the Journal of Eastern African Studies Vol 2. Nr 2, 2008.
[653] See Mueller 2008.
[654] See Branch & Cheeseman 2008; Cheeseman 2008; Bratton & Kimenyi 2008; Githinji & Holmquist; Lynch 2006.

Kibera illustrates the pressures faced by Kenyan politicians in mediating between their public roles and the demands of their constituents.

Kenya's 'big man' politics

The politics of patronage occupies a central place in discussions of Kenya's political history, past and present. Patronage was one of the characteristics of pre-colonial ethnic communities: the local 'big men' exercised authority by sharing out their wealth – the receivers of this redistribution, the poor, 'inevitably owed obedience'.[655] During the colonial period, the British introduced ethnically defined administrative units - 'tribes'- and as a result, 'ethnic groups became political tribes'.[656] The 'big men' stayed. In independent Kenya, President Kenyatta's politics to a certain extent reflected the old 'moral economy' of redistribution and obligation, but the encouragement and gradual emergence of ethnic big men, tied to Kenyatta through patron-client relationships, widened nascent ethnic divisions. This (new) elite colluded with Kenyatta to get and maintain access to wealth and privileges, without much concern or sympathy for the plight of the poor. In return they contained dissent from below.[657] A system of ethnic patronage thus became entrenched in Kenyan politics, whereby eventually all the ties of local, ethnic big men led to the all-powerful president, the ultimate 'big man'. In analogy of a royal establishment, Colin Leys describes this as 'Jomo Kenyatta's court', where the President is surrounded by close Kikuyu allies.[658] Politicians who became too powerful, independent or popular, and appeared to be a threat, were removed. In 1966 Oginga Odinga, the Luo vice-president, was manoeuvred out of his post and sidelined; in 1969 the leading Luo politician Tom Mboya was killed, allegedly at high-level Kikuyus' orders. Later that year, Oginga was imprisoned and the Luo party Kenya People's Union (KPU) banned, effectively introducing the single-party state.[659]

When Kenyatta was succeeded by Moi, the patronage system remained in place, but the political elite, earlier united under Kenyatta, became more fragmented. Moi had fewer resources available for distribution and favoured his own Kalenjin, excluding other ethnic groups. Unable to maintain elite

[655] John Lonsdale 1994.
[656] Lonsdale 1992; Lynch 2006: 236.
[657] Branch & Cheeseman; Lonsdale 1992: 7-8.
[658] Leys 1976; Lonsdale 1992.
[659] Maxon: 264-9; Ochieng'1989: 215-17; Ochieng' 1995: 101-2.

cohesion, Moi increasingly resorted to oppression, further alienating the excluded elite and effectively undermining their willingness to contain dissent; instead, the excluded leaders called for the re-introduction of multi-partyism.[660]

Multi-partyism, re-introduced in 1992, created new opportunities for ethnic 'big men', who could now profile themselves as the defenders of their ethnic group at the national platform, promising a piece of the national economic cake, including jobs, favours and hard cash, in return for votes. Though the presidency remains the biggest prize to be won in elections and 'the ethnic identity of a new president defines patterns of favouritism'[661], it is no longer the only centre of power like it was in the one-party era. Instead, there are more centres of power and even the incumbent leadership has to (re)build and maintain its support base.[662]

With ethnicity seen as central in determining the distribution of national resources, many of these ethnic big men resort to what Lonsdale calls 'political tribalism', the use of ethnic identity in political competition with other groups. This amounts to pitting one community against the other, exploiting latent (ethnic) grievances about scarce resources (often 'land'), and triggering ethnic violence through incitement, as a means of securing political power and facilitating their own accumulation of wealth. For 'political tribalism' to be successful, politicians will have to suppress local debates of 'moral ethnicity', that is ethnicity springing from 'below', as an ordinary aspect of daily life and social intercourse. As Lonsdale describes it, in such everyday engagements, ethnicity is imbued with moral values, traditions, civic virtue and responsibility, and is not necessarily disruptive within communities. Moreover, all ethnic groups, he claims, have renewable traditions of how their members should treat honourably with strangers.[663] During the post-election violence it looks as if a trace of this 'moral ethnicity' was at work within Kibera. There were quite a few cases where fleeing Kikuyus were protected by their Luo neighbours (and vice versa) – they were hidden, escorted out of Kibera, their belongings and rooms were kept safe. One young man for example moved his electronics to a friend's house, and hid for two days at another Luo friend's before dashing to safety; An elderly lady moved some of her things to a neighbour's house before she fled, the rest was later looted. When the looters also wanted to occupy her

[660] Branch & Cheeseman.
[661] Haugerud: 42.
[662] Throup & Hornby: 584.
[663] Lonsdale 1994: 140.

rooms, a Luo neighbour said they were his rooms, so they left; another lady spent two weeks hidden in a neighbour's house, and there are many more stories. Although it is impossible to quantify the extent of such actions, it is clear that some people were able to defend moral values, and to resist succumbing to 'political tribalism' towards their neighbours and friends. Lonsdale's 'moral ethnicity' was thus not entirely absent within the (imagined) 'Kibera community', resisting and challenging 'political tribalism', albeit on a small scale. The violence, in other words, was not caused by ethnic differences per se, but rather by its politicisation. At this moment in time, however, it seems that Jacqueline Klopp might be correct in wondering whether moral ethnicity can present a serious challenge to political tribalism. Her case study of Nandi nationalism shows that, as was the case in Kibera, there is resistance at the grassroots level to the politics of ethnic hatred. However, given its success as a political strategy, the current political elite may well prove reluctant to abandon political tribalism and its accompanying violence.[664]

Violence has thus become a normal part of Kenyan political culture. In the ethnic clashes of the 1990s, mostly instigated by politicians, over 3000 people were killed and over 300,000 displaced.[665] According to Human Rights Watch '... the 2007 election campaign had emphasized the ethnicity of the candidates and the parties. [...] It was unsurprising therefore that the violence following the rigging should take an ethnic form.' Politicians used the anti-Kikuyu sentiments in Kenya, stemming from the perceived bias in the Kibaki government towards the Kikuyu community, to whip up support. Kibaki, like before him Kenyatta and Moi, surrounded himself with his own 'tribesmen', excluding other ethnic groups; this contributed to a growing anti-Kikuyu sentiment in many parts of Kenya.[666]

[664] Klopp 2002; Lonsdale 1994: 132, 141; Lynch 2008: 541-68.
[665] Cheeseman: 170.
[666] HRW: 4; Lynch 2008: 556-9.

Photo 10: political rally in Kibera (Ratib Hussein), 1970s. Photo from Kibera.

These 'big men' usually have no specific political ideology, and a clear vision or political programme is thus largely absent. They use political parties primarily as vehicles for getting into power. According to Mueller, political parties, like 'big men', are driven by 'ethnic clientism, with a winner-takes-all view of political power and its associated economic by-products'.[667] As a result, it is not uncommon for political leaders to move from party to party, and take their ethnic following with them. By the same token, alliances with other parties, in or outside government, are made and unmade with seemingly little regard for political ideology or agendas. For example, in the 1992 elections Raila Odinga was in FORD-Kenya, in 1997 in NDP, in 2002 in NARC/LDP and in 2007 in ODM. He was imprisoned by President Moi several times in the 1980s, but nevertheless joined his government in 2001, before again returning to the opposition in 2002.

[667] Mueller: 186.

Today, Raila Odinga is one of Kenya's leading 'big men'. As ODM's charismatic Luo leader, he has been aptly described as 'a man who stirs up the strongest of emotions – be it Railamania or Railaphobia. Yet, love him or hate him, Raila holds considerable political clout, because of his fiercely loyal support base'.[668] Raila appears at times to have an almost total control over his constituents, drawing large crowds when visiting Kibera. But the reality on the ground is not quite that straight-forward. The following sections analyse how Raila's 'big man' machinations in Kibera (may) have contributed to the post-election violence. A key factor here is how during the violent episodes of the last 15 years, the Luos have managed to turn large parts of Kibera into 'Luo territory', chasing away the (mainly) Kikuyu landlords. It also shows how Raila's recent half-hearted attempts, as prime minister, at correcting the situation have not endeared him to his Luo voters in Kibera – he has to walk a tightrope between being Raila the prime minister and Raila the Luo 'big man'.

The underlying causes – economics, tribalism and Kenyan politics.

It is evident that there was a lot of anger in Kibera at the alleged rigging of the elections, which resulted in rioting, which then transformed into 'looting for economic benefit'. Poverty plays a role here, but so does resentment and jealousy of the 'rich' landlords, as the looters were mainly tenants. This was certainly not a politically motivated "rebellion against the existing social order", against a "landlord class", as Luos simply took over rooms and became landlords themselves.

However, apart from the underlying tensions between the tenants and landlords, there is also an ethnic dimension to this: to many Luos, the Kikuyus are the representatives of an oppressive order. They seem to control everything in Kibera, and the Luos resent the fact that they have to pay them for everything they need: the monthly rent, for water (it's mainly Kikuyus that have piped water to their compound and sell water per 20 litre jerry can), for electricity (only landlords can get an account and meter from the Kenya Power and Lighting Company), and most shops in Kibera were run by Kikuyus as well. As one interviewee perceptively put it,

> The anti-Kikuyu feeling was there before the election; people are not happy to pay for the rent, for the water, the electricity

[668] See also Lynch 2006: 255.

> – these are all in the hands of the Kikuyu, and they resent that. People feel they are being exploited by the Kikuyu.[669]

There are historical reasons for the Luos' anti-Kikuyu sentiments as well; Kenya has a history of failed Kikuyu-Luo alliances. In 1966 Oginga Odinga, the Luo Vice-President, was manoeuvred out of his post, and later even imprisoned by Kenyatta. In 1969 the leading Luo politician Tom Mboya was killed, allegedly at high-level Kikuyus' orders, and the Luo party KPU was banned, effectively introducing the single-party state. With Kikuyus in most powerful positions, their Central Province got the lion's share of development funds, at the expense of Luo Nyanza, that became isolated and economically marginalised.[670] In 2002, when Raila and Kibaki joined forces to oust President Moi and KANU, the Luos were betrayed by Kibaki (and by extension, again the Kikuyus) when he did not honour the agreement between him and Raila, in which the Constitution would be changed and Raila would become Prime Minister. As one young man summarised:

> The Kikuyus have now been chased from Gatwikira: it was a mix of dislike of Kikuyu and the fact that they are landlords. The Luo were economically marginalised by Kenyatta, and by extension, by the Kikuyus. It's the same now with Kibaki: the Luo were again cheated in 2002, it rekindled the hatred between the two tribes. It's all politics; the Luo again and again short-changed by the Kikuyu.[671]

These underlying anti-Kikuyu and anti-landlord sentiments were used by Raila (exploiting of this kind of sentiments is done by other Kenyan politicians as well) to his own benefit, to mobilise political support and voters: "Politicians see Kibera not as a large slum, but as a strategic reservoir for votes".[672]

Using ethnic discourse during election campaigns is not enough; the reciprocal nature of patronage demands 'redistribution' in exchange for votes. However, as Mueller shows, once political tribalism has become entrenched there may be no need to reward your supporters all the time, as oftentimes people will vote for their co-ethnics as a 'defensive strategy' in order to prevent another ethnic group from assuming power. This was

[669] Non-Luo informant from Gatwikira, April 2008.
[670] Maxon: 264-9; Ochieng' 1989: 215-7; Ochieng' 1995: 101-2.
[671] Luo informant, Karanja, April 2008.
[672] PeaceNet: 30.

confirmed prior to the elections, when several Luos in conversation told me that they would vote for Raila, even though he hasn't done anything for Kibera in all those years as MP – 'who else would I vote for?' In the longer term, however, if there is no reward, people may lose interest and not vote at all. The relatively low voter turnout in the 2007 elections (see above) may be an indication for this (in Lang'ata 54%).[673] Moreover, several informants mentioned that also Kikuyu youths voted for Raila – youths may not necessarily care for the ethnic identity of their political leaders, they might easily switch and vote for someone from another ethnic group.[674] Redistribution is therefore required at some point; 'big men' need their followers' votes to stay in power.

However, it is not only the votes that count. Additional 'support' is just as important – for example coming to political rallies, and creating mayhem when required. Already in the late 1950s the People's Party Convention had Youth Wing militants, and in the 1960s KANU used its Youth Wing to intimidate political opponents. In Kibera the KANU youth wingers were notorious for terrorising the population: they were harassing people, beating them, arresting or falsely accusing them to be bribed, stealing; they were brutal, often drunk. Even the Police had no power over them or Kibera. Later most other political parties followed suit, including Raila's NDP Youth Wing, which was also notorious in Kibera. In the 1980s it became commonplace for politicians to have their own (violent) gangs of supporters, generally of the same ethnic group. In Gatwikira, ODM has an unofficial office, a base for the local party mobilizers. From here they organise the (mainly Luo) youths that hang around, ready for a "job" – they collect 'protection fees' from shops, or 'repair tax' if someone wants to repair a house. It is these young men that form and join gangs like the Taliban, or in the case of the Kikuyu, the Mungiki.[675] This phenomenon is by no means unique to Gatwikira – most villages of Kibera and other slums have this kind of groups of youths, loosely organised gangs that easily adjust to the circumstances. Sometimes they are 'vigilantes', sometimes they 'support' landlords to kick out non-paying tenants, sometimes they are plain criminals. They are to a large extent *ad-hoc* gangs – one can join for a certain job, and thus be a 'member' for the duration of the job, and then not

[673] Cheeseman: 168; Mueller: 201.
[674] See also Lynch 2006: 235.
[675] These gangs have to be distinguished from the 'normal' criminal gangs in Kibera, small groups of boys/girls (usually multi-ethnic) that come out at night to mug people, within Kibera, or outside Kibera, where they would also do car-jackings etcetera. Each Kibera village has one or more of these gangs (informant M22).

for another job. It's about economic survival, and ultimately, for many of them, it would not matter whom they work for, or what the 'job' is. These youths can therefore also easily be mobilised for political interests – they make up the ODM youth wing, supporting Raila by doing anything necessary and required, whenever, to make him win the elections. 'The Gatwikira Luos are fanatics, they follow Raila, who controls them completely; they worship him like a God'.[676] Many informants (including Luos) claimed that it was mainly these youths that were responsible for inciting (forcing) others to loot and destroy Kikuyu shops and houses, and remove Kikuyus from Kibera. It is this kind of 'political' support that requires a 'reward for a job well done'.[677]

This reward can be simple and direct: informants revealed that the youths get paid for the job they do. For example, for uprooting the railway in Kibera at the height of the mass demonstrations in early January, they allegedly received 1-200 Shillings each.[678] Rewards can also be indirect, more substantial or long-term. There are for example persistent rumours that Raila, for many years (especially during the economically difficult 1990s), has paid rent for many of his supporters, and monthly allowances to his main 'mobilizers', although such information is of course notoriously difficult to verify. Furthermore, in 2001 Raila created a rent conflict in Kibera that he subsequently made no effort to solve – it would not be in the interest of his voters. In Kibera it is frequently claimed that during rallies, Raila would "talk peace" in Kiswahili but then throw in a few Luo words to the effect of "don't pay rent!"; as a result, many Luo tenants refused to pay rent because, as they claimed, "Raila told us not to pay rent".[679] While the veracity of these statements is difficult to ascertain, what matters in this context is the perception that political support results in material reward. In the recent clashes, these material rewards have been substantial: the looting; the burnt-down Toi Market, first Kikuyu-controlled, has been rebuilt and is now in the hands of Raila supporters; and most importantly, the expansion of 'Luo territory' in Kibera where no rent is paid, and where Luos have effectively taken over from the Kikuyus as the new landlords.

[676] Interview, Luo man, Karanja, April 2008. Many others expressed similar sentiments.
[677] Interviews with many Luo and non-Luo informants from different parts of Kibera, including an ex-Youth Winger; David Anderson 2002: 551; Bodewes: 80-2; Cheeseman: 170; Hake: 152-3; Mueller: 189-94; PeaceNet: 27-30.
[678] 200 Kenyan Shillings is the daily rate for unskilled casual construction work.
[679] Information from at least 10 non-Luo people that understand the Luo language.

Photo 11: Graffiti peace message on the wall of a shop that was burnt down, now under reconstruction (Kianda, March 2008, photo by author).

The question is whether this was part of a 'Grand Plan', a reward for Raila's supporters. Already after the 2001 clashes, the Nubian Council of Elders in Kibera concluded that "the political target was the Kikuyu community".[680] Understandably, many Kikuyus do believe that the violence was part of a plan to rid Kibera of Kikuyus and take over their rooms and businesses. Several people mentioned that before the elections Kikuyus received threats like "after the elections, this shop will belong to me", and that Luos were already "booking" houses and shops that had been marked for takeover.[681] Moreover, many people from outside Kibera were said to have been involved in the looting and violence. All this seems to indicate a certain amount of advance planning.

Many Kikuyu informants thought that it was probably not planned at a top ODM level, but at a lower, local, level: the "smaller" politicians, like councillors, the party-people on the ground, the youth leaders (the people

[680] See KNCE report, p 5.
[681] Different informants, April/May 2008. See also Mueller: 203.

based in those unofficial party offices), that must be seen to champion the Luo cause to climb up in the ranks – it is assumed that Raila leaves it up to them to do whatever is needed on the ground. Evidence from the Rift Valley also suggest that local leaders have considerable autonomy and that they organise the youths and pay them part of what they receive from 'above'.[682] There was a general belief amongst Kikuyu informants that if Raila had won the elections, it would have been worse for them: they would have been removed from Kibera with even more conviction, violence and impunity, since the Luos would expect to be protected by the new president himself. This may be true, considering that the local Kibera administration appeared to be powerless (or rather: scared) to stop the Luos from taking control of Kibera, grabbing houses and plots and keeping the Kikuyus out of Kibera.[683]

Raila's dilemma – the complications of the patronage system

On 24 April President Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga started their so-called "Peace Tour" around Kenya to ensure an end to violence and a safe return home for displaced people (IDPs).[684] In the Rift Valley the local Kalenjin MPs (mainly ODM) resisted a speedy return of IDPs to Rift Valley, at least not before an inquiry was held into the underlying causes of the problems and possible solutions. Leaflets were distributed, threatening people (displaced Kikuyus) not to return to Rift Valley[685], a further illustration of how deep the problem runs. Nevertheless, from 5 May, despite security concerns and IDPs' fears for their safety, the government organised transport and many displaced people were taken back to their homes in Rift Valley; sometimes with some financial support, in most cases without any provisions at the destination, and with continued hostility from their neighbours.[686]

The situation in Kibera is comparable; though there have been no 'hate leaflets', displaced Kikuyus are not welcome and their safety cannot be guaranteed. The Kikuyus are not looking for revenge ("revenge is bad for business"), but rather just a return to the previous situation, get their rooms back, or at least get their rent paid, if they really can't live there anymore.

[682] See HRW: 35-39.
[683] Information from "Kiberians".
[684] Quite unsuccessfully in the Rift Valley; see 'Don't return, refugees warned', Daily Nation, 01/04/08.
[685] 'Don't return, refugees warned', Daily Nation, 1/4/08.
[686] 'Thousands still in camps', Daily Nation, 14/06/08.

However, it will not be easy to go back to the previous situation. A first newspaper article highlighting the plight of landlords in Kibera and other Nairobi slums appeared on 24 May 2008. In the following days the government said that illegal tenants have to move out, and charged a peace committee with organising talks between landlords and tenants. The Kenya Tenants Welfare Union wanted to involve politicians, as "the whole problem is political", but the Deputy Provincial Commissioner stated "if the tenants will not heed our word to vacate the houses, we shall use force to evict them".[687] However, the use of force would not be effective as the lives of the landlords cannot be guaranteed after eviction of the tenants; it would have to be done through persuasion and negotiation, if at all possible. At first glance it may seem that Raila's intervention would be required, but would people listen to him and return the rooms to the Kikuyus? Besides, considering Raila did not make any effort to rectify the situation after the 2001 clashes, would he do it now?

On 29 May 2008 Raila came to Kibera (without Kibaki) for a peace meeting in which he mentioned the problem of people illegally squatting in other people's houses. He added that legal action would have to be taken by the Government against them, but that he himself was not in charge of that. With this diplomatic statement, "Raila the prime minister" confirmed that the occupation of rooms is illegal, but at the same time, "Raila the Luo politician" condoned it by not telling his people to get out of the rooms or pay rent. His not taking a position shows that patron-client relationships can be more complicated than 'one leads, the others follow', with the patron in total control.

Raila's Luo constituents expect resources, protection, and other advantages at national level from their 'big man' Raila. His earlier call for blanket amnesty for all post-election violence offenders can be seen in that light – maintaining the patron-client relationship, votes and support in exchange for protection (most people arrested nationwide during the violence were ODM supporters).[688] Being in such a powerful position, his supporters would expect even more from Raila – helping them to stay in their newly occupied houses, and keep their reward for supporting him. This puts him in a difficult position, wavering between being the prime minister and being the Luo politician. He is, to a certain extent, a prisoner of the political game he

[687] 'City landlords languish in camps for the homeless after tenants take over houses', Daily Nation, 24/05/08; 'Minister warns illegal tenants', Daily Nation, 26/05/08; 'Committee to evict illegal tenants', Daily Nation, 28/05/08.
[688] 'Raila: free youths without conditions', Daily Nation, 30/05/08.

plays, and his choice is in fact very limited: as prime minister he must be seen to follow the rule of law. However, this risks alienating many of his supporters in Kibera, and as such might ultimately affect his prospects of re-election and political career. It was claimed that Raila had some informal meetings in Kibera in which he was told by his support base not to try to get them out of their 'new' houses, at the peril of losing their support. Nevertheless, in October Raila's personal assistant Edward Ketta went, with the local administration, to Gatwikira for a meeting with the 'support base', and brought up the issue again – people should leave the occupied houses. The crowd reacted violently (it clearly is a sensitive issue in the Luo areas of Kibera) and Ketta had to leave in a rush, his car damaged.[689] This seems to indicate that Raila is not able to exert complete control over his support base, and that key constituents in Kibera do not automatically accept his authority. After this Raila's discourse changed; at his 'home-coming party' on 29 November 2008, while PNU minister Martha Karua was jeered when she asked Raila to help out in the 'house-issue'[690], Raila defended his people, saying that also many Luos were chased away, out of Kikuyu-dominated areas, and have also lost property.

Nevertheless, recent developments have shown that Raila's support in Kibera is being undermined by his failure to deliver, as prime minister and as Luo leader. His popularity in Kibera (and nation-wide) is decreasing because of rising prices of basic commodities (maize flour) and government corruption.[691] At his home-coming party Raila was shocked by the negative response of the people. Usually at ODM rallies, when a politician shouts "ODM!", the crowd answers "*chungwa moja*!" ('one orange')[692]; this time, Mudavadi (one of the ODM leaders) shouted "ODM", and the crowd answered: "*unga*!" ('flour').[693] There are rumours that in the next elections Raila will not stand in Kibera, since he is no longer sure to win there again after too many broken election promises. In the 2007 parliamentary elections he had only 70% of the votes against his rival Livondo 28%[694];

[689] It is unclear whether Ketta actually brought up the room issue; some people said he didn't (I myself was not present), but that people wanted to see and complain to Raila himself, not his assistant.
[690] 'Raila opens up', East African Standard, 29/11/08.
[691] See also 'Dozens dash for maize flour for the poor', Daily Nation, 10/12/08, and 'The coalition has failed and should resign', East African Standard, 1/3/09.
[692] "One orange!" (Swahili) – the orange is ODM's political symbol.
[693] Referring to rising prices of maize flour, used to make *ugali* (maize porridge), Kenya's staple food.
[694] Internet < http://www.communication.go.ke/elections/constituency.asp > (16/05/09).

reliable sources claim that Raila had been quite scared to lose these elections.

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the impact of 'ethnic politics' on Kibera, which can (partly) explain the different episodes of violence that have rocked Kibera. It shows clearly that ethnicity has not disappeared after Kenya's Independence, but rather has become an important tool for mobilising support in national politics: leaders like Raila Odinga resort to the use and manipulation of ethnic identity in political competition to secure political power. The Luos have taken advantage of Raila's support, which has allowed them to become the main powerbrokers in Kibera, replacing the Nubis who are now only a small community in Kibera. Without political support or leverage the Nubis have lost their supremacy in Kibera, and even lost control over part of their rental rooms. This process in fact already started much earlier, when the Nubis could not stop the influx of 'outsiders' in Kibera, in the 1970s; those outsiders were protected and aided by the authorities that were of the same ethnic group.

Just like after the 2001 rent disputes, Raila will probably try to let the current situation –no Kikuyus in 'Luo territory', no rent payment– slowly become the 'normal situation' in Kibera; he knows that the government won't be able to do anything about it, and his voters will appreciate it. It's unlikely that he will intervene in favour of Kikuyu landlords, but even if he would, it's far from sure that the Luos in Kibera will heed his words. It looks like in the long run, with every new round of violent clashes, Kibera will increasingly become dominated by the Luos, with less space for Kikuyus.

The Nubis will probably remain 'in charge' in the areas they have continued to dominate for the last two decades, and where they have managed to keep the damage limited during the violence; no houses have been taken over by others and tenants continue to pay normal rents there. Though they lack political support, there does not seem to be, as yet, any reason to suspect that they will be, at some point, dislodged from their small territory within Kibera to make space for another, more powerful ethnic group.

Post-script

A visit to Kibera in February 2009 showed that the situation concerning the Kikuyus had developed further – many Kikuyu landlords were leaving Kibera, for 'security reasons'; they were selling off their rooms, mainly to Luos. Prices of the rooms had not really gone down – in Kianda they were still around 30,000 Ksh per room, though some, in a bad condition, were sold more cheaply at 15-17,000 Ksh.[695] As it is now, it looks like a new round of clashes is not even needed to rid larger parts of Kibera of the Kikuyus.

The IDP problem has not been solved: in February 2009 many Kikuyus (and other displaced persons) were still in camps. Most IDPs had not been able to return to their homes in the Rift Valley, or to Kibera. There does not seem to be any political interest in the fate of these people – this will probably change only a few months before the next elections...

[695] It's unlikely that Kikuyu landlords would be able to sell their rooms in for example Gatwikira for a good price, if at all; for landlords of other ethnic groups the price may not have changed that much.

6
Conclusion – future perspectives of Kibera and the Nubis

The main theme of this thesis – ethnicity – returns in one form or another in all of its chapters. The first chapter is about the early history of the Nubis; it follows the Nubis of Kibera from their 'birth' in Equatoria in the late 19th century, and shows how the Nubis were created out of a mix of people from various ethnic backgrounds. It is in fact the story of how they *became* a 'tribe', or at least, passed through the initial stages of 'becoming the Nubis'. Their move from (what is now) southern Sudan into (what is now) Uganda, as a group of soldiers from very diverse ethnic backgrounds, with a large following of women, children, slaves and servants, determined to a large extent the survival of the Nubis as a group – had they stayed in southern Sudan, they might have broken up in smaller groups and eventually dissolved and disappeared. As it happened, they forged ever stronger ties between themselves, as 'strangers' in a foreign land, to the extent that a new culture and a new identity was created, a new ethnic group. As highly regarded soldiers of the British (and German) colonial armies, the Nubis were scattered over East Africa and parts of Somalia, before settling down, demobilised, in numerous 'Nubian villages' established near the army barracks. In this thesis the focus was on the most important 'Nubian' village in Kenya: Kibera.

The second chapter tells the 'story of Kibera', how the area was gradually occupied by the Nubis, who lived a fairly good life there: apart from their *shambas* (farms) and livestock, they had the Nubian gin which generated much-needed income. Moreover, as a 'better class African' it was easy for Nubis to find employment in Nairobi town. This chapter shows how the Nubis have tried to use their 'being Nubi', foreigners brought into Kenya by the British, as a negotiation tool to deal with the British colonial government and keep control over the land in Kibera. They were relatively successful in this during the colonial era; they managed to remain in Kibera, despite several attempts at relocating them. However, at Independence this strategy no longer worked; to maintain their claim on Kibera the Nubis transformed their ethnic identity – from 'Sudanese', 'foreigners', they became 'a Kenyan tribe'. This helped only to some extent: the Nubis were not able to stop the influx of outsiders, who were supported by the new Kenyan authorities (who were largely of the same ethnic group as those outsiders) nor the large-scale construction of rental rooms (also mainly by those outsiders). Independence brought other, major changes for the Nubis – with the

increasing influx of other people into Kibera, the Nubis became gradually more marginalised, and lost control over Kibera. Some of it was of their own making, as they themselves had started, already in the 1950s, building rooms to rent out to African workers looking for accommodation in Nairobi; some of it was beyond their control – the Nubian gin production had to be stopped, drying up their major source of income, and from 1975 the administration allowed many people, mainly Kikuyus, to construct rental rooms in Kibera, taking away land from Nubi families. The Nubis' protests were ignored, and in the end they had no choice but to participate in the wave of construction. Thousands of rooms were built, using all available space, eventually leading to Kibera being the large slum it is now, and where the Nubis form only a small and insignificant community.

The third chapter deals with the ethnic identity of the Nubis, the many identity changes the Nubi community has gone through during its relatively short existence and how they tried to find their place within Independent Kenya as a Kenyan ethnic group. It also shows how non-Nubi women that married into the group were assimilated through marriage and 'became Nubi', and how the Nubi ethnic markers changed over time. Nubi society has undergone significant changes in the short time of its existence. From a male-dominated military community it developed into a community where women were the economic force, and from a mix of individuals from many different ethnic groups, they became a 'Kenyan tribe', gradually more homogeneous, more 'Nubi', with the old Sudanese tribal differences disappearing. Some Nubi ethnic markers also disappeared, like female circumcision, or became less important, like dress code for women, while their religion, Islam, gained in importance.

The Nubian gin chapter (4) shows how the alcohol business was exploited as an ethnic economic niche, mainly by the Nubi women, and later replaced by the rental business. Allowing the Nubis to maintain a relatively high standard of living (for Africans), the income from liquor also contributed to maintaining a distinction between Nubi and native – and this may have contributed to keeping the Nubi community together and the Nubi identity alive.

The fifth chapter is about the role of 'ethnic politics' in Kibera (and Kenya), describing how ethnicity became important as a mechanism for mobilisation in national Kenyan politics, to secure political power. As a result, the Nubis have become insignificant within the Kibera context – other ethnic groups have, due to their greater numbers and with the help of politically instigated

violence, taken over as the main powerbrokers in Kibera, notably the Luos that have in Raila Odinga, one of Kenya's political 'big men', their undisputed leader. The Nubis have ultimately lost supremacy in their tribal land.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this. The Nubis are a good example of the limits of the 'invention theory' (that tribes were invented by the colonial powers) – the Nubis basically invented themselves, albeit under circumstances created by colonialism. They moved with all their dependents from Equatoria to Uganda and Kenya, laying the foundations for a new ethnic group, which, being strangers in their new homeland, increasingly became 'Nubi'. Secondly, the Nubi story shows that ethnic identities are actively made and remade, by people themselves, and used in a variety of manners, in changing political, social and economic contexts – the Nubis were first individual members of Sudanese ethnic groups, then became 'the Sudanese (soldiers)', then became a 'Kenyan tribe'. Moreover, the Nubis incorporated many people (women) from other ethnic groups; they also became Nubi. It demonstrates clearly that ethnic identity is not static, but rather flexible, negotiable, and open to change and manipulation. Similarly, ethnic markers are also flexible and subject to change: the Nubis' language changed, their religion became more important, and female circumcision disappeared. This does however not (necessarily) lead to the disappearance of the (ethnic) identity – the Nubi identity is still very much alive in Kibera. Finally, it is clear that ethnicity has not disappeared after Independence (as was expected to happen); the Nubis became 'more Nubi' in response to the influx of outsiders in Kibera, while in Kenyan politics ethnicity plays an important role in the quest for power ('political tribalism').

Kibera: future perspectives

It looks like the Nubis have, so far, managed to save their 'tribal land': Kibera is still there, and the Nubis are still in Kibera, against all expectations and intentions of the colonial masters that brought them to Kenya. Kibera is now considered to be one of the largest slums in sub-Saharan Africa; an illegal, informal settlement, practically in the city centre, on land with a very high value – almost a contradiction in terms. The story of the Nubis is therefore not merely a story of the changing meaning of ethnicity, but it is at the same time a story about the meaning of Kibera as a place, in terms of land, housing and social differentiation / stratification in an urban setting. In this section the focus will therefore shift from 'ethnicity'

to ‘place’, in trying to answer the question of what the future holds in store for Kibera.

A general picture emerges from the literature on African squatter life and settlements. After Independence, unprecedented urban migration coupled with ineffective or inadequate urban planning and disregard for housing for Africans, creates in many African countries a situation in which the urban poor are left to fend for themselves in the provision of housing, resulting in a proliferation of low-income informal settlements. The first squatters (possibly the most enterprising and ambitious of the urban workers) have no choice but to build their own dwellings without authorisation. In times of relative prosperity (this was often the case in the 1980s), they invest and upgrade their own houses as soon as there is some (perceived) security of tenure. As time passes, some sell their houses and go back home to the rural areas, some move to better urban areas, but many stay on and start renting out some rooms to newcomers. This emerging rental sector is a response to a demand for cheap housing from low-income groups that cannot afford to construct their own houses, and is at the same time an opportunity for the landlords to provide themselves with a continued income after retirement, some kind of pension. Those newcomers (tenants) usually come from the poorer segment of society, resulting in a general impoverishment of the area, as well as creating a higher population density. This process is accelerated in times of economic decline (generally the 1990s), when additional income from tenants is indispensable, and when more people need very cheap accommodation – this is usually a time when unauthorised settlements boom, ‘solving’ both problems at once.[696] The population density increases, not only because of growing numbers of tenants, but also because over time families have grown: the landlords (house owners) have now extended families depending on them, and jobless relatives staying at their compounds. Poverty plays a significant role in unauthorised settlements: house owners eventually often have similar socio-economic characteristics as their tenants (excluding absentee landlords, who usually own many more houses and are richer), and the younger generation has a difficult time, with rising unemployment, and no money to buy or even rent a house; women often take over as the main breadwinners. At the same time, there is less money available for house improvement and the informal settlement deteriorates further.[697]

[696] Therefore, as Tait claims, ‘most states now implicitly accept unauthorised settlements as a relatively painless and potentially profitable way to appease the poor’ (1997: 344).
[697] See for example Hansen 1997, Schlyter 1999, Tait 1997.

Broadly speaking, Kibera has followed a similar path, as described in chapter 2: a great demand for cheap accommodation at Independence, and an opportunity for Nubi (and later other) landlords to construct rooms and generate much-needed income to replace the loss of other income (from Nubian gin as well as normal employment), creating one of the largest slums of sub-Saharan Africa. As its existence was, for decades, tolerated by the colonial and independent Kenyan governments, it does look like 'Kibera is here to stay', or at least, it seems to be getting ever more difficult to 'remove' it. It is unlikely that Kibera will be demolished (by force) – there are politicians and civil servants with business interests in Kibera, while it provides livelihood and accommodation to many people. Besides, there are international laws on demolition which would force the government to provide alternative housing elsewhere, something that is currently not available in Nairobi. Nevertheless, the Kenyan government has ignored those international laws in the past, laws it had ratified. As shown in chapter 2, on a number of occasions have houses been demolished in Kibera, houses that were too close to the railway line, on a road reserve, or in the way of planned construction of residential areas – often the people were not warned in advance, and lost their furniture and personal items; in none of the cases were people offered alternative housing or even a place to rebuild their homes. This has happened not only in Kibera and other slums, but also in towns, where from time to time road-side kiosks (shops, bars, restaurants), often licensed by the city councils, have been destroyed, bulldozed, without warning (owners did not have the time to remove their goods) or even against court orders. However, nothing in Kenya has been as extreme as in Zimbabwe during "Operation Murambatsvina".

Zimbabwe in the 1980s was a prosperous country, where the proportion of the urban population living below the poverty line reduced from 60% in 1980 to 25-30% in 1990. During those years several slum upgrading programmes were successfully implemented, and slum areas like Kibera hardly existed in Zimbabwe – they had turned into upgraded High Density Areas (HDAs), albeit with many (illegal) backyard rental rooms to generate extra income. During the 1990s things changed dramatically – in 2003 72% of the urban population was deemed to be 'poor' or 'very poor', and Zimbabwe went through a phase of political instability, becoming increasingly isolated in the international community. In May 2005, the government suddenly declared that it intended to embark on a campaign to clean up the towns, enforce all by-laws and stop all illegal activities. Without much warning the Police started destroying, in towns all over the country, homes, kiosks (some licensed), informal workplaces, and many

people were forced back to the rural areas they had allegedly came from. Within two months up to 700.000 people had lost their livelihood and/or their homes, while an estimated 2.4 million people were affected in terms of health, education, shelter and income. This "Operation Murambatsvina" ('restore order', or 'getting rid of the filth' in Shona language[698]) was immediately denounced by the international community as a violation of human right, and deemed to be a crime against humanity. The Zimbabwean government, however, didn't really care, it had nothing much to lose – the political leaders probably wanted to clean the main towns of opposition supporters, and did not care much for any international outcry; Zimbabwe was already isolated in the international community.[699]

It is unlikely that the Kenyan government would go quite as far as that; though internationally criticised for its ethnic politics and widespread corruption, Kenya is not an international pariah like Zimbabwe, and the donors' influence is unmistakably present. Moreover, with the government's plans for slum upgrading it is hard to believe that one day Kibera will be bulldozed without any organised relocation of the people concerned. Chapter 2 has already given a glimpse of the Kenyan government's plans for Kibera, plans that included building a 'decanting site' a temporary accommodation for the inhabitants (both landlords and tenants) of (a small part of) Soweto-East, the first village of Kibera benefitting from the upgrading. The vacated houses would then be demolished to create space for flats for those people that had moved temporarily to the decanting site. The decanting site would constantly be in use as temporary accommodation for people waiting for their part of Kibera to be upgraded, until the whole of Kibera would have been upgraded.

The upgrading of Kibera is one of the projects that fall under the Kenya Slum Upgrading Programme (KENSUP); other KENSUP projects are implemented in Kisumu, Mombasa and Thika, amongst others. The programme is jointly funded by UN-HABITAT, World Bank Cities Alliance and the Government of Kenya. While the first grant agreement was signed in July 2002, the first years (the preparatory phase) were marked by confusion and problems between the different partners; in 2008 a new strategy document was produced to sort out those problems and have a clear

[698] See <http://www.sokwanele.com/articles/sokwanele/opmuramb_overview_18june2005.html> (accessed 16/07/2010), or Potts 2006.
[699] COHRE/ZLHR report, 2007; Potts 2006.

strategy for the future.[700] According to this strategy document, KENSUP is a programme of the Government of Kenya, implemented by the Ministry of Housing and the relevant local authorities, complemented and supplemented (mainly technical advice) by UN-HABITAT. The aim of KENSUP is 'by 2020 to have improved the livelihoods of at least 5.3 million urban slum dwellers (1.6 million households) countrywide'.[701] The total cost is estimated to be 13 billion USD (884 billion Ksh) for the period 2005-2020 (this amount is for all KENSUP projects, not only Kibera).

UN-HABITAT's KENSUP Strategy is based on several strategic principles and interventions: delegated decision-making, capacity building (of both the local communities and local authorities), participation of community members, social, environmental and economic sustainability, affordable housing finance (through cooperative saving schemes), partnerships within and between the local and central government as well as partnerships between local government on the one hand and civil society and private sector on the other; provision of basic infrastructure as an entry point to slum upgrading; communication and information; gender awareness, and others. Apart from the question where that amount of 13 billion USD should come from, KENSUP's objectives seem rather ambitious. Gulyani & Bassett[702], reviewing slum upgrading programmes in Africa of the last thirty years, argue that, while in the 1970s upgrading programmes were very ambitious in scale and scope, focusing on land titles, housing and infrastructure, they evolved (from the late 1980s) into more modest interventions that focused on selected sectors -mainly infrastructure- and fewer settlements, while community participation became more important. In the 1990s slum upgrading, criticised for its failures, became rather unfashionable; however, with the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals focusing on poverty alleviation, slum upgrading became again a popular option in the third millennium, with a tendency to focus on infrastructure.

One important conclusion of Gulyani & Bassett's review of upgrading programmes is that security of tenure is currently no longer seen as a precursor for housing and infrastructure investment, but rather the reverse: evidence shows that if a government (or municipal authorities, or project) invests in infrastructure and services for an informal settlement, its inhabitants will feel reasonably certain that their structure will not be

[700] UN-HABITAT 2008.
[701] UN-HABITAT 2008: 13.
[702] Gulyani & Bassett 2007.

demolished. With a *perceived* tenure security, through informal agreements, people will be encouraged to invest in their own houses. Some level of security of tenure is of course important: residents will need some assurance that investments made will be recognised by the state and houses will not be confiscated or demolished. Moreover, secure tenure could also play a role in fighting urban poverty, and increase the revenue base for governments.[703]

These conclusions are supported by examples from Zambia. Zambia has one of the highest urbanisation rates in sub-Saharan Africa: in 1990 an estimated 50% of the population lived in towns.[704] After Independence, Zambia's capital, Lusaka, experienced a rapid growth of unauthorised settlements, which in 1973 accommodated an estimated 40% of its population.[705] Unauthorised settlements were tolerated, because they provided cheap labour and a standby labour reserve, and thus allowed wages to be kept at low levels; however, there have been serious attempts at improving the low-income housing situation in Lusaka. Schlyter shows how people improved on their own houses in George compound after they were given an occupancy licence; Hansen demonstrates this for Mtendere, a site-and-service settlement where houses were only improved (by the owners) after services (infrastructure, electricity, markets, clinics, etc.) were provided by the City Council. Rakodi explains how Chawama was upgraded by the inhabitants themselves, without formal title to the land, after basic infrastructure was provided. Finally, Tait recounts the story of Kalingalinga, where inhabitants upgraded their area after being given a guarantee to (only) 30-years occupancy right.[706] Furthermore, striving for secure tenure in upgrading projects has its pitfalls – it can take a long time to get title deeds, which will delay the project; the trend nowadays is to avoid this and focus on infrastructure development to enhance tenure security. This can be fairly easily done, and depends mainly on the political will of the authorities involved: governments can remove the threat of eviction, by publicly announcing a cessation of eviction or including it in its urban policy, and explicitly allow and support infrastructure investment and basic services delivery in these settlements. [707]

[703] Gulyani & Bassett: 492-6.
[704] Tait: 160. According to < http://www.unep.org/dewa/Africa/publications/aeo-1/203.htm > (accessed 18/07/10), the average for Africa in 1990 was 31-32%.
[705] Rakodi: 298.
[706] Rakodi 1988; Hansen 1997; Schlyter 1999; Tait 1997: 262-7.
[707] Gulyani & Bassett: 493-6.

Apart from enhancing security of tenure, upgrading projects that focus on infrastructure also seem to make sense because they are much easier to implement, and have a direct positive impact on living standards and quality of life of the majority of the inhabitants. The fact that most people in informal settlements are poor, leads to two major problems in implementation of infrastructure projects: building standards and cost recovery.

Many African countries still have colonial building regulations, with high standards on housing materials used and sanitation. These standards are often based on non-tropical conditions, and thus inappropriate for African housing. During Operation Murambatsvina in Zimbabwe 'non-compliance with existing building regulations' was used as an excuse to demolish houses, whereas in Zambia in the Chawama upgrading project the building standards were lowered to an affordable (but still acceptable) level.[708] 'High standards' generally means 'high cost' and these are therefore usually beyond the financial means of the low-income population – inhabitants of unauthorized settlements simply cannot afford such high standards. High standard infrastructure is also often too expensive for many African countries – if such standards are applied, it leaves little money for other services like water or clinics in those settlements. Though in practice many upgrading projects have advocated for appropriate (lower) infrastructure standards and the revision of building regulations, in many cases African governments and beneficiaries have preferred the more expensive and higher standards.[709] No doubt the priorities of the beneficiaries of the project should be taken into account, but the question is what these beneficiaries are willing (and able) to contribute towards their future infrastructure and services – this raises the question of cost recovery.

Cost recovery gradually became a more important objective of upgrading programmes. This was in the first place a means of reducing expenditure on the project itself; secondly, it reduced costs for services provided by local governments. Thirdly, it serves as an indicator of the participants' commitment to the project, and fourthly, encourages active participation, once people have invested in it. The question as to what percentage of cost could or should be recovered has been answered differently by projects. As urban middle and upper income groups generally benefit more from

[708] Potts : 282-3 ; Rakodi : 301-2.

[709] Also because low-cost low-standard technologies can help create construction contracts for local builders as well as more local jobs, and thereby create additional economic benefits (Gulyani & Bassett: 498-9). See also Rakodi: 303.

government subsidies and investment, insisting on full cost recovery from the lowest income groups raises questions of equity, while it may also only assist relatively better-off communities that can mobilise resources, leaving the poorest communities un(der)served. In some cases communities have been asked to pay upfront for certain activities, as a prerequisite for being included in an upgrading project.[710] In practice, cost recovery appears to have been quite problematic in most upgrading projects, with participants unable or unwilling to pay their contributions for a variety of reasons, while enforcing payment or evicting people has been an unpopular move. Gulyani and Bassett found that a modest 5-10% is about the maximum that projects have managed to recover; as such this seems a reasonable target for upgrading projects, generally affordable to low-income groups, and therefore collectable.

How does KENSUP in Kibera fit into these general conclusions on upgrading projects? The overall aim of KENSUP's Kibera project is 'to improve the livelihoods of people living and working in Kibera through targeted interventions to address shelter, infrastructure, services, land tenure and employment opportunities, as well as the impact of HIV/Aids in the settlements'.[711] Even though KENSUP claim that their focus is on provision of basic infrastructure (such as water and sanitation) as entry point to slum upgrading, in reality they appear to want to do everything: provide houses, financing, infrastructure (and more). This seems overly ambitious (like the upgrading projects of the 1970s), and indeed, in practice not many of its earlier mentioned 'strategic principles' seem to have been adhered to in any meaningful way, while some of them appear to be simply lip service.

Participation of the community and stakeholders, for example, was mentioned as one of KENSUP's strategic principles – to support the project and enhance ownership of the upgrading process. However, the community was not involved in any way in the house design and planning of the project. Soweto residents, according to a report, "argued that they had no contribution to make since the District Officer and KENSUP had visited the area and informed them about the kind of houses that would be constructed. The villagers felt that a decision on the mode of housing had already been decided".[712] There was a lot of confusion amongst the residents, and many rumours were going around, an uncertainty made worse by long experience with corruption, and mistrust due to previous demolitions without warning.

[710] Gulyani & Bassett: 500-3.
[711] UN-HABITAT 2008: 64.
[712] Research International 2005b.

Another problem was that the housing financing plan was unclear to the Kibera population – the 'cooperative saving schemes' mentioned in the KENSUP document do not seem to exist.[713] The question was whether any financing plans actually existed: Kibera informants mentioned that Prime Minister Raila Odinga had proposed selling half of the houses (to richer non-Kiberians) to be able to pay for the other half for poor people – this was rejected by angry crowds. He later suggested people should rent out part of their unit to generate funds.[714] The Kenyan government recently claimed to have allocated one billion Ksh to start construction in Kibera, but this is a fraction of the total amount needed for Kibera's upgrading.[715]

In 2004, KENSUP carried out some socio-economic studies in Kibera[716]; the resulting reports contain information on the poverty of the people, their wishes regarding the new houses, and a warning concerning the security of tenure, specifically regarding the landlords. It seems, however, that KENSUP staff decided to ignore the advice of the researchers. One of the studies found that the Soweto inhabitants "did not express any wish to purchase the houses where they were living. For this reason, it is not realistic to assume that the proposed upgrading should entail purchasing of the new houses by the residents", but rather that people should rent at levels not higher than the current level, around 1000 Ksh per month. Moreover, 'tenants have a deep-rooted fear, that once the village is upgraded, the rents will go up'. Nevertheless, KENSUP appeared to plan for 20-year mortgages costing 1500-2000 Ksh per month, even as they realised that this would exclude (a large) part of the population.[717] This means that KENSUP was aiming for a 100% cost recovery, ignoring the information that most Kibera people cannot afford the flats and are not even interested in buying them. The risk in such a case is that eventually people will sell their apartment to the highest bidder (or rent it out) and move back to Kibera or another slum.

[713] Informal (secret?) information, from a participant in a meeting of the "stakeholders' committee" (September 2005), says that 'it is still a secret that the people of Soweto will be divided into 9 groups for saving money in those two years [it would take to build the decanting site and new houses] to have a down payment of 20% for when the new houses are ready'. This has apparently remained a secret and no more than a plan.

[714] COHRE: 2009; <http://www.communication.go.ke/news.asp?id=270> (22/07/10); Kibera interviews, February 2009.

[715] See <http://www.communication.go.ke/news.asp?id=270> (22/07/10), website of government's spokesperson: <, as well as: 'The time bomb in slum upgrading', (<http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/InsidePage.php?id=1144030468&catid=459&a=1>), website of the East African Standard (accessed 16/12/09).

[716] See reports by Research International 2005 and 2005b.

[717] Research International 2005: 5; Research International 2005b: ii; Information from the stakeholders' meeting in September 2005.

This is what has been labelled the "gentrification process": in the end it is the better-off, the people that can afford to pay a higher rent, that benefit from slum upgrading.[718] This process seems to have already started in the decanting site, soon after the first group of Soweto inhabitants moved there (see below).

One of the reports contained a warning concerning the security of tenure and landlords:

> The proposed upgrading has also caused fear among the landlords. Landlords fear that since they do not own the land where they have built houses, once the upgrading is effected, they would lose their tenure and consequently, their livelihoods. From their point of view, landlords would prefer to improve the quality of housing without disrupting the land tenure system prevalent in Kibera and without involving other stakeholders like the GoK [Government of Kenya]. In addition, they would like the GoK to issue them with title deeds.[719]

Clearly, the landlords would like to control the upgrading and get more secure tenure, and remain landlords in the new Kibera. They would, as Gulyani and Bassett claimed, be encouraged to invest in their own houses if there is a level of *perceived* tenure security. However, the Government of Kenya has not announced a moratorium on evictions, nor withdrawn the rule that no permanent buildings may be erected in Kibera (at least, not outside the KENSUP project), and indeed, the upgrading of Kibera was not meant to be a project for slum landlords (which seems fair enough). However, also in this case KENSUP seems to have ignored the available information – they did not pay enough attention to the landlords' position, did not take away their fear or even anger, by offering suitable compensation or by taking any other course of action. As a result KENSUP now face a long delay in the construction of new houses, due to a court case the landlords initiated after the first people moved to the 'decanting site'.

The decanting site, with more than 600 units, lies next to Kibera, just across the small stream that divides Kibera slums from Lang'ata area (see map in Chapter 2).

[718] Gulyani & Bassett: 504.
[719] Research International 2005b: ii.

Photo 12 – The 'decanting site', March 2008 (photo by author).

After the decanting site was built (which took more than three years[720]), it was left standing empty from early 2008, amid rumours that the apartments were for sale; only on 16 September 2009 people moved from Soweto East to the new flats.[721] However, after the people moved out, the landlords (who in principle also moved to the new flats in the decanting site, with their tenants) stopped the demolition and claim in a court case compensation for their (to-be) demolished rooms; they're obviously not happy with whatever (tenure) they will get in return after the new flats have been built.[722] By August 2010 the court case had not progressed to a conclusion, and the rooms had (therefore) still not been demolished. Moreover, the vacated rooms in Soweto East had gradually filled up again, sometimes by the same people that had earlier moved to the decanting site. After the initial excitement of moving to a new flat, people complained that the flats were

[720] President Kibaki laid the first stone in September 2004.

[721] 'Ecstasy as Kibera slum residents finally reach "promised land" after years of waiting'. East African Standard < http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/InsidePage.php?id=1144024186&cid=4&> (17/09/09).

[722] These may be mainly big or absentee landlords, who did not move to the decanting site and are bound to lose a lot more than a small landlord with only a few rooms.

expensive (1000 Ksh per room per month, as compared to 400-1000 Ksh in Kibera), while water and electricity were not yet connected. There was less space than they were used to in Kibera: in many cases, three families shared a two-bedroom flat (one family in the living room), the rooms were smaller, and they had to share the kitchen, bathrooms and even the key to the front door.[723] In addition, the new place had less space for income generating activities.[724] Soon after, some people decided to rent out their new room for 3000 Ksh per month, and returned to Kibera, making a handsome profit of 2000 Ksh or more (which is sufficient to buy food for the whole family for a month) – the 'gentrification process' has already started.[725] More people followed: one informant estimated that by July 2010 almost 50% of the people had returned to Kibera.

In short, KENSUP in Kibera does not appear to be a great example of the way a modern slum upgrading project could function; basically the available information (and advice) on poverty and social differentiation in Kibera was ignored. Of course, the situation in Kibera is rather complicated for a variety of reasons. First of all, the sheer number of people living in Kibera makes it a very large project, which needs a huge budget; this in itself is problematic for a developing country like Kenya. Because of the extremely high population density the new houses will (have to) be apartment buildings, but there may still be an 'overspill' of people that will not find space in a 'New Kibera' – this may require more land and more investment in housing and infrastructure.[726] The commercialisation of the low income housing has become the dominant process throughout African cities'[727]; this is in itself positive, as it ensures a steady supply of cheap accommodation for the low income population and generates income for the (often also low income) owner (and as such it can guarantee repayment of loans in the case of upgrading projects with loans for house owners). However, the situation in Kibera is quite extreme, with most (possibly up to 95%) of its inhabitants being tenants, and relatively few landlords, some of them with hundreds of

[723] People could choose how many rooms they wanted / could afford; in many cases that was only one.
[724] 'Former Kibera slum dwellers find life in new houses not as blissful', Daily Nation, 01/10/09; 'Kibera residents step up', East African Standard, 22/10/09.
[725] Though there is a benefit for the poor in making a profit by sub-letting their flat/room, it is short-lived – until the new houses are ready and they will have to move out of the decanting site.
[726] However, Raila claimed (< http://www.communication.go.ke/news.asp?id=270 > 22/07/10) that 2000 units will be built in the vacated area of Soweto, which would be enough for the families that lived there before.
[727] Tait: 344.

rooms – many of these landlords are not poor people renting out one or two rooms to make some extra money. There is obviously a conflict of interest between the two groups when it comes to upgrading (demonstrated by the stand off created by the landlords' court case), and bringing the two different positions together can be difficult. This is more so in a strongly politicised environment where most tenants belong to one ethnic group (Luo); considering the prominent role ethnic politics plays in Kenya, it will be clear that upgrading Kibera is far from easy.

The Nubi claim on Kibera land could be another complicating factor for the upgrading project. It is well possible that once the court case with the landlords has been concluded, the Nubis will again stop demolition (or rather, construction of permanent houses) in Kibera, and certainly in the area they claim for themselves, the 'Nubian village'[728], as this is perceived as affecting their claim on the Kibera land. Some Nubis have declared that they would get a court injunction to stop construction, and if that does not work, create mayhem and use violence. How sensitive the issue is, was shown again in August 2007 when Nubi youths invaded a church plot in Kibera where a fence and some houses had been erected, and burnt down a number of structures (classrooms and houses). The youths claimed the land belongs to the Nubi community.[729]

To sort out the 'Nubi problem', the government has for a number of years been negotiating with the Nubis on some form of compensation. The Nubi Council of Elders have insisted on getting (compensation for) the original 4200 acres (see Chapter 2); the Kibera Land Committee (KLC) seem more pragmatic, and have been negotiating for a communal title deed for the 'Nubian Village', an area of about 300 acres, as a starting point (continued negotiations should sort out the rest of the compensation). A larger part of the Nubi community would probably be satisfied with this[730] – they could then organise their own life in the Nubian Village within Kibera, and their own upgrading. Basic plans for the development of the Nubian Village had been developed some years ago by the KLC – these plans would include high-rise buildings with several apartments for each Nubi older than 18 years, one to live in and the rest for renting out, while also providing

[728] This is the area covering the villages Makina, Lindi, Kambi Muru and Mashimoni; this area is around 300 acres, more or less half of Kibera.
[729] 'Houses burnt in slum violence', Daily Nation, 18/8/07.
[730] This is my own feeling after many years of observation and research, confirmed by several informants.

mortgage/loans to pay for the apartments[731]; apartments could only be re-sold within the Nubi community. Current non-Nubi landlords in the Nubian Village might also be given opportunity to buy some apartments, while the plans would also include space for shops, clinics and schools. Clearly, the Nubian Village would not be a low-income area – apartments would probably cost at least 10,000 Kenyan Shillings (approx. 100 € in 2008) per month, an amount substantially higher than the 500-1000 Kenyan Shillings most tenants in Kibera pay today.[732]

The question is how the other inhabitants of Kibera would react were the Nubis to receive a communal title deed for half of Kibera. For many years it did not look like a realistic option, maybe creating even more problems for the government. However, recent information shows that at the moment it seems that the Nubis will indeed get a communal title deed for the Nubian Village – in September 2009 the prime minister, Raila Odinga, stated publicly: "we have set aside and processed a communal title deed for the Nubian people whose ancestral land lies within the slum".[733] Though creating a division within the Nubi community, negotiations between the KLC and the Government have continued; the Ministry of Lands has meanwhile determined the boundaries of the Nubian Village and is to start a process of verifying information on its inhabitants and structure owners, to ensure that the non-Nubi landlords get relocated and/or compensated. This should be the last obstacle before the title deed could be handed over to the community. It's ironic that the Nubis should be able to return to their former position of dominance in Kibera (albeit again a smaller Kibera than before), after many years of marginalisation.

However, the question is whether this communal title deed will not open a Pandora's box of some sort, and create more problems for the Nubi community. Part of the community, including the Council of Elders, is against 'selling' their Kibera land, and see the KLC as traitors and liars.[734] If the Nubis would indeed get their title deed, the opposing groups will have to overcome their differences and agree on a way forward, together. Furthermore, if they would then find donors to fund their own upgrading of the Nubian Village, a huge amount of money will become available; it's hard to believe that this would go without any serious problems as,

[731] KLC claims they had already found many (international) donors willing to provide the necessary funds (this was some years earlier, in 2002/3).
[732] These 10,000 Ksh. are the monthly rents paid in 'Highrise estate' next to Kibera.
[733] From < http://www.communication.go.ke/news.asp?id=270 > (22/07/10).
[734] Based on information from three Kibera informants (by telephone, email, skype).

obviously, the Nubi community, like any other community, is not free from corruption and embezzlement.

As for the upgrading of (the rest of) Kibera, at the pace KENSUP's plans are being implemented, it would take hundreds of years before the whole of Kibera would have been upgraded (even if the Nubian Village would be excluded). It seems likely that the project will continue to face delays (maybe eventually only financial) and maybe fizzle out after building some new houses in Soweto East village. In any case, while no real upgrading is done, or at slow pace, Kibera will largely remain the way it is: cheap, low-standard housing for poor people, with landlords doing little more than collecting rent. There is a big market for cheap housing in Nairobi, and that market will be there as long as there are poor people. Even if Kenya's economy is currently doing better than during the last decades, this does not mean that the urban (or rural) poor will benefit in any way.

The future of the Nubi community and culture

The future (or fate) of the Nubi community is closely linked to that of Kibera. It seems likely that, as long as Kibera exists, the Nubis will stay there – they have nowhere else to go. Kibera is for many Nubis the only hope for a future, for some kind of compensation for their houses, or for new houses in a "New Kibera" – they will have to hold on to Kibera and their claims on land rights. But the Nubis find themselves in a dilemma: something would have to change in Kibera, because the way it is now, it holds *no* future for the Nubis; income from the rental rooms remains the same, while due to growing families and high levels of unemployment, increasing numbers of Nubis depend on them for survival. Young Nubis, employed or looking for employment, or marrying elsewhere, leave Kibera if they have the chance[735], but the older generation stays put – they will probably never leave, and rather die in Kibera.

Therefore, getting that communal title deed would make an enormous difference for the Nubis; it would confirm their claim on Kibera, give them security of tenure, and provide them with a possibility to generate a reasonable income. That is, if indeed the Nubis would manage to find funding to upgrade the Nubian Village and build enough apartments for each individual Nubi to have one to live in and two to rent out (or some

[735] It may be one explanation for the (unexpectedly) low number of Nubis found in our census of 2007.

similar arrangement). On the other hand, with an upgraded Nubian Village, Kibera would change for good, and life there would be very different from what it had been before. Would those new apartments provide enough space for large or extended families, and to receive and lodge visitors from Uganda? Or would the Nubis in the end rent out all Kibera apartments and move somewhere else to live, scatter, and lose their sense of community? Would there be space for the traditional *dholuka* dances and other public events? And would Kibera continue to play its pivotal role in the East African Nubi community?

If the communal title deed in the end does not materialise (for whatever reason), and the upgrading continues at the same slow pace of the last ten years, a likely scenario would be that the Nubi community will stay in Kibera, but become smaller as younger Nubis will leave Kibera if they have the chance, and as older people pass away. Eventually, some Nubis will remain in Kibera, even if it is only to 'hold the fort', while continuing to hope for a solution to the 'land issue': compensation or part of the Kibera land (title deed). Nevertheless, Kibera would remain an important place of reference for the community as a whole; during Ramadhan, holidays, funerals and weddings, many Nubis living outside Nairobi or even outside Kenya come to Kibera, and the annual Nubi cultural festivals will probably continue to take place as well.

Likewise, the 'defence of Kibera' would also draw many Nubis back home, to their 'tribal land' – the Nubis still have some reputation as a 'martial race', which they again confirmed during the 2001 clashes, instilling fear in the Luos who lost quite a number of their men.[736] In 2009, many Kikuyu (landlords) were leaving Kibera, selling their houses, apparently mostly to Luos. It looks certain that Luos will increasingly dominate Kibera, and a sharper division between the different ethnic groups could mean that Kibera gets divided into 'ethnic zones', where one ethnic group dominates not only in terms of absolute numbers, but also in terms of house ownership and 'village politics'. These could be three or four zones: one large area dominated by the Luos, one area for the Nubis, one small part -Laini Saba- would remain for the Kikuyus, and (if the Nubis don't get a communal title to the Nubian Village) Mashimoni may eventually become Luhya-dominated territory, though many houses are owned by Nubis. Many Nubis claim they would defend (their rights in) Kibera with their life, whereas

[736] It was claimed that many of the Luos killed during those clashes were not from Kibera, but were brought in from outside. These men did not know the way in the maze of Kibera's footpaths and were an easy prey for the Nubi vigilantes.

most people of the other communities probably would not – Kibera is not their tribal homeland.

The question is if the Kibera Nubis, increasingly scattered over and around Kenya, will be able to maintain their ethnic identity and their culture, with or without communal title deed. Many older Nubis see that the younger generation increasingly marries non-Nubis and hardly uses the Kinubi language anymore; some fear that the Nubi culture will eventually disappear. Nonetheless, even in town 'tribal' affiliations remain important – many people in Kibera (and in other slums and towns) keep their links with home, the rural 'up-country', where the wife (or one of the wives) looks after the *shamba* and the homestead, where they go for their annual Christmas holidays and where they will eventually be buried. Some of their traditions may disappear or change, but people remain 'Luo' or 'Kikuyu', with strong links to the family and culture back home, even after many years in town. The same should apply to the Nubis; with important occasions like weddings, funerals and annual Nubian festivals, many Nubis should continue getting together, keeping the Nubi culture alive, and the community together. Whether that would be in old, traditional Kibera, or in a newly upgraded Nubian Village, or elsewhere, remains to be seen.

This thesis has touched upon a wide variety of topics related to the Nubis and Kibera, ranging from the Nubis' origin, to Kibera's development within the context of Nairobi's colonial and post-colonial history, its development into a slum, Kibera upgrading, Nubi identity, alcohol production (and consumption), 'big men' and ethnic politics at Kibera grass-roots, and female circumcision. There are still many topics left in Kibera and in the Nubi community that are interesting and important to research and to write about. One could for example further investigate the 'exodus' of Nubis from Kibera – not only in recent years, but apparently even in the 1930s and 1940s some Nubi families moved out of Kibera to other towns like Mombasa, or to Uganda, but also to other Nubi villages in Kenya. It would be interesting to find out who these people were, why they left, where they went to, and what link did/do they keep with Kibera and the other Nubis. Another topic would be the Nubi youths, their aspirations and plans for the future, how they are surviving now, and how they see their life and future in Kibera. The 'female circumcision story' would require additional research, to get to the bottom of what happened in Kibera – exactly what 'type' of FGC was done, and why and how it was abandoned. Very interesting as

well would be to study more closely the different gangs in Kibera, especially the Luo youths in Gatwikira.

This thesis contributes to a general understanding of urban slums, in particular of Kibera, and to the city of Nairobi during the colonial era. By presenting a case study of violence in Kibera, it hopefully also facilitates a perceptive view into the machinations of Kenyan ethnic politics at the grass-root level. The ultimate aim, however, of this thesis was to tell the story of the Nubis and Kibera. I hope it has done that without offending the Nubi community with some of the stories of the past, on slavery and Nubi 'misbehaviour' in the old days in Equatoria and Uganda, or about their 'un-Islamic' distillation and sale of Nubian gin. But, as some Nubi friends said, "it is all part of our history", and therefore it is unavoidably part of this story. I hope they can also find here (and in Nubi history) some things to be proud of, like the bravery of their grandfathers in military combat, and the cunning and intelligence of their grandmothers to outwit the colonial police looking for *waragi*, the Nubian gin.

Appendix A

Research methodology

This research was undertaken out of interest in Kibera and the Sudanese community; I was not part of any official PhD programme, or affiliated to any university. I moved to Nairobi in 1998 to work with the NGO Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, Doctors without Borders) which had a small community project with a dispensary in Kianda in Kibera. After a number of years, when I had stopped working with MSF, I decided to do some research in Kibera; I simply started talking to people about 'life in Kibera, and its problems' in general, absorbing information. I knew there were 'Sudanese' in Kibera, but in general, no one could tell me much about them, not even these 'Sudanese' themselves, other than that their grandfathers had been in the British army. One lady living in 'Highrise' estate (apartment buildings looking out over Kibera) told me that when she was small, her mother used to threaten her that, if she did not finish her plate, the 'Nubi would come and take her away' – the Nubi as bogeyman, almost an imaginary being. Only later, when I had spoken to a number of Nubis and had a better idea of the story behind them, did it become clear to me that this was a great story to research and write about, and I became convinced that the 'Nubi and Kibera story' should be written down, also for the benefit of the Nubi community. Despite the pride they take in their military past, most Kibera Nubis, especially the younger generation, know very little about their own history. Many know that their grandfathers were in the army, some may even have picked up some historical names and a few shreds of family history from their grandparents, but the information is incomplete and often incorrect. A few documents circulate in the Nubi community in Kibera, 'home-made' summaries of one book or another, even one attempt to completely re-write south Sudanese and East African history, with people that lived in different centuries fighting each other. Likewise, many of the official written sources, as well as the audiovisual media, that refer to the 'Nubians of Kibera' contain incomplete or incorrect information (of unclear and sometimes obviously dubious origin) on the history of these people, and of Kibera. This incomplete and incorrect information is being re-used again and again and has taken on a life of its own; with this thesis I try to correct the general (mis-)information on the Nubis and Kibera.

Another important motivation to write this thesis has been my interest in history – as an 18-year old school leaver I (briefly) hesitated in choosing between studying anthropology or history. Both subjects are actually closely

linked; one is not complete without the other. Anthropology needs historical depth in order to be able to understand and explain (African) society. In the colonial era anthropologists often ignored local history, and African societies were portrayed as a-historic, societies without history; anthropologists must look beyond what they themselves observe in the field, which is in fact merely a brief episode, a point in time, in the life or history of (ethnic) groups. Likewise, historical studies are not complete without analysis of sociological characteristics of societies, making anthropology an essential source for historians. A closer collaboration evidently does not mean a merging of sciences, and each of the disciplines will continue to use its own distinctive methods as well.[737] This thesis is in essence a historical ethnography, combining anthropological and historical methods and approaches (and reflecting my specific interests in anthropology and history).

I started my field work in early 2004, and stopped when we left Kenya in July 2008 (though I have kept in contact with several people in Kibera – everyone has mobile phone these days, even in Kibera, and many people have email). The research was undertaken more or less continuously but usually part-time as I continued working in humanitarian aid, for Oxfam Novib and other NGOs, in southern Sudan or Somalia (though always based in Nairobi); only from April 2005 to April 2006 did I work full-time on the research, before again taking on other assignments.

The fact that I lived in Nairobi has on the one hand facilitated my research and the writing up of the thesis (some chapters were drafted while in Kenya), but on the other hand, it has made it more difficult. Easier, because I could take my time to do the research, even while being employed. I could pop over on a Saturday afternoon, or on a day off from work (I lived five minutes away by car from Kibera). As many people have a mobile phone, it was also easy to make appointments at short notice for days / hours I was off work. In between jobs I would have more time and spend more time in Kibera. Besides, I always had the opportunity to go to Kibera for special events like a wedding or a political meeting, or, more importantly, to find people to verify something, or get feedback to something I had written. Living in Nairobi also made the research more difficult, because I was rather isolated from books and other literature, which were near impossible to find – I depended on annual visits in the summer holidays to (mainly) the Africa Studies Centre's library at Leiden University to get the books and

[737] Douglas 1970; Epstein 1992; Kopytoff 1973; Ranger and Murray 1981.

articles I had, over the year, identified as interesting or useful to my research.[738]

The main, or maybe it is just the most well-known, research method used in social anthropology is 'participant observation': by immersing him/herself in a society for an extended period of time, the anthropologist gains a deep understanding of that society, an understanding that can only come from personal experience. It involves living with the members of that society, eating what they eat, doing what they do –in short, participating in daily life– as well as direct observation of the behaviour of the group members, and asking questions, often through informal conversation. The group members may be aware that the 'outsider' is doing research, or the real identity and purpose of the researcher may be kept secret (this is easier if the researcher does not stand out in skin colour, language or other characteristics and is thus not easily identified as a stranger – impossible in the classic case of the white anthropologist studying an African 'tribe'). The researcher may actively participate (and even initiate) in the activities, or, the other extreme, limit him/herself to mainly observation.

The advantages of this method will be clear: the anthropologist gets detailed and first-hand information (including on hidden or secret behaviour), can verify what people tell him (by observing whether they really do what they say they do), and the method is relatively simple and cheap. Drawbacks are that the presence of the researcher may influence, and change, the behaviour of the group ('observer effect'), while data gathering may be unsystematic. Furthermore, the method is time-consuming (may even require learning the local language), and the researcher's objectivity may be under threat: if the researcher identifies too much with the group, it becomes impossible to observe objectively – a certain measure of 'distance' is required. If a researcher 'goes native' (more or less becomes a member of the group under study), s/he is no longer able to do proper research.[739] Although participant observation is usually classified as qualitative research, it uses a wide range of methods that can also include quantitative research techniques. Most anthropological research would use both qualitative and quantitative methods, and not only rely on 'participant observation'. In my research in Kibera I used many different research methods to collect and analyse data, both qualitative and quantitative; a number of these methods are part of 'participant observation', others are not.

[738] I did of course use the libraries in Nairobi of IFRA and the British Institute in Eastern Africa.
[739] Kloos: 137-51.

I did not really 'immerse' myself in the Nubi society; I did not live in Kibera, and did not even spend a single night there in all those years. I was there off and on, sometimes every day of the week, then for a longer period not at all. My participation in Nubi daily life was therefore quite limited. Nevertheless, all those years spent in Kibera, in people's houses, on the street, have given me a wealth of information on Nubi behaviour and relationships through 'observation', though also here I have to admit that, since my main topics were rather historical, observation was never a main research tool. Despite this relative 'distance' from the Nubi community, after all those years many people seemed to know me – they had been interviewed, or they had seen me at weddings, funerals, or at their house when their grandfather was talking to me, or had heard about me. It's a small community, and word spread fairly quickly – people often seemed to know that the day before I had been at so-and-so's house. However, I obviously did not play any role of importance within the community. I don't suppose I influenced any major event, though may have had a small impact on the lives of the Nubis closest to me, with whom many hours were spent in in-depth discussions or relaxed conversations.

Thus, my main research tool was the interview, formal and informal, unstructured and structured. A questionnaire was used only once, in the socio-economic census we did of the Nubi community in 2007 (see below). Interviews would usually take place in Kibera, at the homes of the informants; sometimes in a tea shop or restaurant in Kibera, sometimes at the Java House at Yaya Centre (a shopping mall near Kibera). I had studied Swahili for two and a half years at Leiden University (Department of African Languages), and, having also spent two years in Tanzania for studies and work, my Swahili was quite good (in the mid-90s). Initially I did some interviews in Swahili, but my Swahili was a bit rusty after not having used it for many years, and as I increasingly focused on interviewing Nubis, I stopped using Swahili for interviews. I had also learned Sudanese Arabic in the 1980s, and though largely forgotten twenty years later, it was still relatively easy for me to learn some basic Kinubi; at some point, I could more or less understand what people were talking about – though never speak it well enough to have a normal conversation, let alone conduct interviews. I used research assistants to organise interviews and to translate where necessary; most were Nubi, others were Luo, Kikuyu or from other communities. There is an advantage in being introduced by someone they know, someone from their own community; it creates a certain measure of trust, which makes people agree more easily to doing an interview, and may

make them more open. This has certainly been noticeable when talking to people about the post-election violence. Many Nubis speak good English, and, after the initial contact was established and I got more comfortable going alone into Kibera, I would increasingly go on my own to visit and interview people.

I had started interviewing the people I knew from my time with MSF, people from the health centre's management committee that I had kept in contact with. Those first general interviews were about their lives and Kibera, until I decided to focus on the Nubi community. Through those first contacts I met some Nubis, and then 'the snowball' rolled on from there. The Nubis were in general very willing to talk to me, and only few people have refused. In fact, I can remember only one very old man – he did not want to talk to me unless I paid him, which I refused. When he got sick I went to see him a few times, bringing him some tea, sugar and milk – he eventually suggested meeting the week after so I could ask my questions. Unfortunately he passed away before we could meet again.

Interviews were conducted with Nubis old and young, men, women, people involved in producing and drinking Nubian Gin, midwives and circumcisers, boys involved in crime and boys involved in cultural clubs, immigrants from other Nubi villages including from Uganda, Nubis involved in politics, and Nubi chiefs. Included were many of the oldest Nubis in Kibera, like Burhan Marjan (born in 1915), Ali Bala (around 1918), Aba Mai (early 1920s), Maze Gabai (1924) and Ahmed Fadlalla (1925) – during the years of my fieldwork many of them passed away. In that sense I was just in time to get first-hand information on the early days of Kibera, from the 1920s onward. For the period before that, I had to rely on what they and other people remembered of stories told by their (grand)fathers and mothers. There is an obvious risk in relying on (old) people's memory); this is clear in the article on Nubian Gin, when it looks as if there could be an exaggeration in the figures (of production and income) that people came up with. The information has been, as much as possible, verified with other people and cross-checked with information found elsewhere, for example in the national archives. Many interviews were also done with non-Nubi people: key civil servants of the local authorities of the old days, former chiefs, a former PC, people that had come to live in Kibera in the early days, tenants and businessmen of all different tribes, victims and perpetrators of violence, and non-Nubi women that married into the Nubi community.

For their protection, the identity of informants has not been exposed; this may have been necessary for the chapter on post-election violence, as up to today the lives of certain people (mainly Kikuyus) continue to be in danger. Also for chapters that deal with issues that many people did not really want to talk about, like the Nubian gin, I decided to use codes, to protect people's privacy, as I felt most people would be uncomfortable with other Nubis knowing they gave me that ('secret') information. Moreover, there are no (extended) case studies in this thesis that would require a more personal touch by naming people (even fictitiously). When referring to specific Nubi informants, I often use a code like M16 or Wa5; the 'M' refers to men, 'Wa' to *wazee* (elders), 'W' to women. I use 'NN' to refer to non-Nubi informants. In the chapter on post-election violence in Kibera, I usually give some more information on the informant: his/her ethnic group, from which part of Kibera, whether tenant, landlord, businessman, young or old, to be able to place the informants' comments in the context of the violence.

It's hard to say how many people I have interviewed over the years; a few hundred? Many people were interviewed only once, but I would keep meeting them in the streets or at other people's homes, and every short conversation could yield additional information. Other people I interviewed (formally or informally) or talked to so often in the course of those 5 years that I lost track and stopped writing down the dates. I also talked to people that I ran into in the Kibera streets, and such five or ten-minute conversations were sometimes very important in terms of collecting valuable and very varied information (I used this method a lot after the post-election violence of 2007/2008). The information I got from all these people was used to write the chapters; I did not use individual stories or life-histories, but rather distilled the chapters from the multitude of impressions, remarks and opinions that came from the interviews.

Apart from oral sources, information was gathered from books, publications, journals, newspapers, and internet. The reference list shows the sources that were used to provide background information, and to complement, support and verify, or contradict, the oral information, and put it into a context. For the early history I relied almost entirely on books and articles, not always specifically about Nubis, but with references to Nubi soldiers. A Nubi historian from Kibera, Abubakr Sebit, had written his BA thesis on the history of the Nubis of Kibera, based on his interviews with the community's elders in the late 1960s. Unfortunately, despite efforts to find a copy of his thesis in the university libraries, or from his old professor,

nothing could be found anywhere – it would have been a valuable document in writing up the history of both the Nubis and Kibera.

Archival material was used (mainly for the history of Kibera and the Nubian gin story), to corroborate (or to contradict) what people told me, or to create a context, looking at Kibera and the Nubis from the official perspective of the colonial power (though in the archives one finds references to the natives' responses to the colonial situation as well, of course). Much of the material of the Kenya National Archives (KNA) on Kibera was about Nubian gin, showing the obsession (and frustration) of the colonial authorities with the alcohol production in Kibera. In one of the files I found an old map of Kibera, of 1.5 x 2 meters, produced by the colonial authorities in 1934, with detailed demarcations of the farms and houses, with numbers and names of the owners. The map yielded information in discussions with old Nubis, but was also a welcome tool for the Nubis in their court cases on citizenship and land rights. I left some copies of the map in Kibera; these were copies made of my own copy – I could no longer find the original at the KNA. Though KNA staff was very helpful, many files could not be found, and with the carelessness they treated the files, it is likely that this will only get worse. For example, that old Kibera map was torn in two pieces in order to make a copy for me (it did not fit on the photocopier); it was then folded and carelessly stuffed back into the file which was closed and thrown on a pile somewhere.

An important aspect of data collection was the feedback from the Nubi community: most of what is written in this thesis has been read by and discussed with Nubi friends (who also sometimes showed it to other people). They recognised the importance of having a proper 'history of the Nubis', including the topics most people did not really want to talk or hear about. These discussions ensured that what I wrote was not incorrect in terms of factual information and also gave me some new ideas and insights. I take of course responsibility for all errors.

A number of photographs were collected (scanned) in the community by some Nubis concerned with the Nubi heritage and general loss of artefacts (including documents, photos); they generously shared them with me. The photos, some of which appear in this thesis (as 'photo from Kibera'), give some idea on the life of the Nubis in Kibera, and their level of organisation in football and cultural groups, as well as on the relative wealth of the Nubis, in particular some families, in the 1940s and 1950s. The photos of 'Kibera today' were taken by myself.

I encountered few obstacles while doing research in Kibera. Insecurity was not one of them: walking through Kibera, or parking my car inside the slum, I never experienced any problem in this respect. Simple problems, like people cancelling interview appointments, or simply not being at home at the agreed time, is a normal part of doing research – it happened regularly (sometimes for good reasons). One difficulty I encountered was the 'silences', the issues people did not want to talk about or be reminded of.[740] This was mainly about the Nubian Gin, the production of alcohol, which was for many people a shameful things of their past, something they did not want to be reminded of. Women denied having been involved in it; others said "it was a few lazy people doing that", or they told me that it was produced by 'lower class' people. In the end, however, I realised how important the alcohol had been in the Nubis' history, and discovered that a large part of the community had actually been involved in it, or benefited from it; many of the rich people, even prominent people of the community. Digging deeper, I found some people that told me much more about it. This was sometimes a long process, visiting the same person a number of times (at second visits I would usually bring some tea, sugar and milk or cigarettes), not only asking about the Nubian gin, but also about other things of the past and present; then gradually they would open up and tell me more about those 'hidden issues'. At some point I knew so much about it that I could ask very direct and focused questions, taking (reluctant) interviewees by surprise and making them answer where they might have preferred not to. Some other people had no qualms at all talking about it, and I was lucky to find a few of them. Bit by bit I managed to reconstruct the 'Nubian gin story'.

Other 'silences' were the Nubis' slave-raiding past and (Nubi) prostitution in Kibera: older Nubis reading and commenting on different chapters thought I should take those things out. But here again, other people said "this is what happened, you cannot leave it out". They are of course discussed in this thesis. Most Nubis would not know about the slave raiding and trading past of their ancestors, but the older generation should know very well who was involved in prostitution. I once initiated an informal discussion about it (only a few women present), and the older lady, to the shock of the younger generation, started naming a number of women that had been prostitutes, women that are perfectly respectable members of the community. No one talks about these things, of course, though it may crop

[740] Isaacman & Isaacman: 28-30.

up when people are arguing. In some cases, when trying to make a second appointment with people that had given me very interesting (almost secret) or personal information, informants tries to avoid me. They probably had the feeling that they had told me too much in the first interview, and were worried about telling me even more. This happened only in a few cases.

Another problem encountered while doing research in Kibera was the lack of reliable statistics: estimates of Kibera's population vary between 220,000 and more than one million. Likewise, there are no reliable statistics on the ethnic composition of Kibera's population, the numbers of houses, numbers and ethnic group of landlords, or on the Nubi community. Chapter 2 will go more into detail on estimations of Kibera's population. It seemed, however, relatively easy to remedy the lack of statistics on the Nubi community. Several attempts had been made earlier by the Nubis themselves, but these had been prematurely abandoned due to lack of financial means. In October 2007 we managed to do a socio-economic census on the Nubi community – a project in collaboration with two Nubi friends, Jamaldin Yahya and the late Abubakr Yusuf.[741] The purpose (for me) was to get an idea of how many Nubis there really are in Kibera, and some statistics on education, employment, income, rental room ownership, and such issues.[742] My Nubi collaborators were also interested in specific work experience of individuals, in order to find ways to improve employment of community members, and also in drug (ab)use, and the number of Nubis with a voter card, an ID or passport.

Unfortunately the census was fraught with problems, a malfunctioning data base, a computer crash in which all data were lost and prolonged absences of the IT collaborators; the data analysis is still pending. However, we do know that the number of Nubis in Kibera is much lower than estimated – we found only around 5350 people. Though the census may have missed some people, it seems hard to believe that there would be more than 6-7,000 Nubis in Kibera. This is much less than the figure I had used till then, around 20,000 Nubis, which until then had seemed a reasonable 'guesstimate' by educated Nubi friends. It is well possible, though, that there are fewer Nubis than people think; over the years, many Nubis have apparently left Kibera, to live in other parts of Nairobi, or they moved to Mombasa, Saudi Arabia (for work) or smaller towns around Nairobi. However, most of those have kept their property in Kibera, and left some family members there to take care of the rooms and collect rent. Apart from

[741] The census was kindly funded by Cordaid-Kenya.
[742] For the questionnaire form, see Appendix C.

data on population figures, the census could yield interesting information on for example the numbers of rental rooms the Nubis own, and the number of female room owners, to verify and substantiate some of the statements in the thesis. On the other hand, browsing through the filled-out questionnaire forms, we saw that respondents not always answered truthfully (as expected) and for example underreported the number of rooms they own, or a male respondent would claim that the rooms were his while it was known that they belong to his wife. Some other questions were unpopular: a question on the ID number was taken out (people did not like to answer that one), and one on 'drug use' (cigarettes, alcohol, khat, etcetera) was only answered with 'none'. It therefore remains to be seen what the real value of this census is; for the time being we have got a reasonably accurate list of the Nubi families (their members, with basic information on sex, age) of Kibera – this may also prove useful should the question of 'compensation' (for the Kibera land) arise.

Appendix B

"Elephants in Kibera"

or: the abandonment of female circumcision.

Female circumcision is a highly controversial issue which has generated much, and emotionally charged, debate worldwide. Activists claim it has serious effects on women's health and is a tool for continued oppression of women, and therefore, as a human rights violation, it has to be completely eradicated. Anthropologists ask for more respect for culture and understanding of local context and the reasons why people decide to circumcise their daughters; they point to the cultural importance the practice has, especially for women, in local (African) settings, the lack of which would be the main reason national and international eradication efforts have generally met with limited success. The women concerned, the 'victims', want to have the freedom to decide for themselves.[743]

Female circumcision, also called Female Genital Cutting (FGC) or, by feminists and activists, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), can be defined as "all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for cultural or other non-therapeutic reasons'.[744] It is estimated that between 100 and 140 million women worldwide have undergone female circumcision and that each year up to 3 million girls are being 'cut'. The age at which girls undergo circumcision varies widely: though the majority is six and ten years old, circumcision is also done shortly after birth, just before marriage, or just before having a first baby, depending on the culture. Most circumcised women live in African countries, a few in the Middle East, Asian and South American countries, and increasingly in the Western world.[745] Though the practice appears to be on the decline (mainly in urban areas[746]) in Africa, it remains widespread on the continent. The origins of female circumcision are unclear, but there is evidence that the practice is very old, and pre-dates both

[743] For a more in-depth understanding of this global debate on female circumcision, see Shell-Duncan & Hernlund 2000; Shweder 2002; WHO 2006, 2008; Hernlund & Shell-Duncan 2007.
[744] WHO 2006.
[745] WHO and others, 2008; Hernlund & Shell-Duncan 2007: 35.
[746] See for example SOCDA's The Monthly Watch (May 2006); WorldBank/UNFPA 2004; Balk: 63.

Islam and Christianity.[747] As such it is a cultural practice rather than a religious one, though oftentimes it has been (or is being) presented as a religious command.

This section (appendix) tells the story of the abandonment of female circumcision by the Nubis of Kibera. The Nubis practised a severe form of 'female circumcision' until the 1950s, when they started to gradually reduce the severity of the operation; by the late 1980s female circumcision was almost non-existent amongst the Nubis in Kibera. That's when 'the elephants' came to Kibera...

Female circumcision in Nubi culture (*Taaru*[748])

In Kenya most ethnic groups, including the Maasai, Kikuyu, Kalenjin, and Somali, circumcise their girls; the Luo and Luhya do not. While already in 1906 Protestant missionaries in Kenya denounced the practice as 'barbaric', subsequent campaigns and motions to ban female circumcision had little impact; it was outlawed only in 2001.[749] However, female circumcision remains widespread in Kenya as the law is rarely enforced, though there is a noticeable decline in prevalence: from almost 48% in women older than 50 years, to 32% in women between 15-49 years of age.[750] While in general complete abandonment of the practice is limited, there are some examples of rapid abandonment. The "Tostan communities" in Senegal are one case in point[751]; the Nubis are another.

The origin of female circumcision is quite clear in the case of the Nubis: it was introduced during the time of the "making of the Nubis", when they were still part of the Egyptian army. Apparently none of the southern Sudanese ethnic groups where the Nubis find their origin have practiced female circumcision in any form. However, both Egypt and (northern) Sudan have a long history of female circumcision, with evidence indicating

[747] WHO 2006; WHO 2008: 6; Gruenbaum 2001.
[748] In Sudanese Arabic female circumcision is called '*tahur*', meaning 'cleanliness' (Balk: 62), or 'purification' (Boddy: 47).
[749] L.M. Thomas 2000 and 2003; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1706140.stm> (12/05/09); IRIN In-depth, 'A case study of modern legislation against cultural identity'; <http://www.irinnews.org/InDepthMain.aspx?InDepthId=15&ReportId=62464>(11/05/09).
[750] Yoder & Khan 2008, table 1, p 8.
[751] Many Senegalese communities, working with the local NGO Tostan, have unanimously declared to stop female circumcision. See <http://www.tostan.org/web/page/586/sectionid/547/pagelevel/3/interior.asp> (18/07/09).

that it was common already thousands of years ago.[752] Almost 90% of northern Sudanese women were, and still are, subjected to it, mainly to the 'pharaonic circumcision'.[753] This tradition logically became part of the army's (military) culture in relation to the local (southern Sudanese) wives of the army's officers and soldiers, who initially were mostly from northern Sudan. We can only guess as to how the first step to start circumcising the southern Sudanese women who married the soldiers was taken. Maybe only the younger girls (slaves and soldiers' children) were circumcised, but it is well possible that older (slave or free) uncircumcised girls and women, that wanted to be part of the army's entourage, had to undergo the cutting before being accepted as a wife. The Nubis incorporated the practice into their culture, and maintained it in Uganda and Kenya.[754]

In the early days in Kibera, Nubi girls were mostly kept secluded inside the compound, and expected to be quiet and obedient. They were trained to be 'good wives', and one of the prerequisites for marriage was that a girl should be circumcised; without that, there could be no wedding. All girls were cut in the most severe manner: both *labia minora* and *majora* as well as the (tip of the) clitoris were cut away, and covered with a paste of ground coffee or fermented flour which would stop the bleeding and reduce the chance of infection. It would be applied only once, become dry and fall off after some days, indicating that the wound had healed. There was no stitching of the wound; the legs were simply tied together for some days until the wound had healed, thus creating an opening smaller than before. The (grand)mothers[755] would decide when the time was ripe for their daughters to be cut; usually when the girls were six to ten years old. This was often done in conjunction with the larger family and neighbours – a number (four or five) of age mates would be brought together for a collective, public ceremony.[756] A Nubi midwife would be arranged to do the cutting, which would take place early morning. The girls would usually not know in advance what was going to happen; a few women would hold the

[752] WHO 2006: 3.

[753] This type of circumcision is defined by WHO (2006: 3) as: 'Narrowing of the vaginal orifice with creation of a covering seal by cutting and appositioning the labia minora and/or the labia majora, with or without excision of the clitoris (infibulation)'. See also Gruenbaum: 8; Yoder & Khan 2008, table 1, p 8.

[754] See also Johnson (2009: 117) who bases his statement that 'girls were subjected to pharonic circumcision' on a source of 1908, which refers to the Nubis in Uganda.

[755] The men were hardly involved in the circumcision – most older Nubi men did not want to talk about it.

[756] Though richer families might do an individual party; the richer the family (families), the bigger the party (collective or individual).

girl and the legs while the cutting was done. After the cutting a party would be organised, with food and drinks – the richer the family, the bigger the party. Family, friends and neighbours were invited, and there would be new clothes and some presents for the girls. The girls, with their legs tied together, would not be allowed to walk for the (usually around five) days that were needed for healing; during this time the girls would receive visitors and get more gifts.[757]

The cutting ceremony was not considered a transition ceremony, a "rite of passage" signifying that the girl was now a woman, ready to be married – a girl of 6 years old cannot be considered of marriageable age, even if in the old days girls married relatively young: from around 12 years (though usually they were older). A girl was considered marriageable only after reaching puberty; FGC was just one necessary step towards marriageability. Non-Nubi girls marrying into the Nubi community were circumcised as well, if that had not yet been done; some came straight from southern Sudan, others were from Kenyan ethnic groups that did not practise female circumcision.

The common explanations given for cutting the girls was that it was "just a tradition, we follow our parents", that it was in the Koran and therefore was a religious command, and to reduce the girls' sex drive and prevent them from becoming prostitutes. Nubi girls were usually not told more than that, nor was the occasion used to instruct them on sexual matters or marital duties. The girls only knew that *taaru* had to be done, because, as a rule, an uncircumcised girl could not marry.

Despite the strong social pressure to have girls circumcised, there were girls that did not undergo the cut; some apparently still had to undergo it before getting married (thus at a more advanced age). Sometimes it was only found out during the wedding night, bringing shame upon the girl if she were sent back to her parents. Some men did not denounce their newly wedded wife for not being circumcised – they either did not realise it, or did not care. In some cases non-circumcision was only discovered when a woman was giving birth, in which case she would usually be circumcised on the spot, by

[757] Five days seems a short period to recover from a 'pharaonic circumcision'; it is well possible that the informants, midwives in their 70s and 80s, cannot recollect the details of the period required for recovery, which would in this case be three to four weeks (Elise Johansen, personal communication). Nor can it be excluded that 'pharaonic circumcision' had already been abandoned earlier, before my main informants (midwives) were born or started practicing.

force if necessary (reinfibulation after giving birth was not practised). These people not circumcising their daughter may have been the 'abandonment pioneers'.

Despite Nubi girls being circumcised, pre-marital pregnancies did occur in Kibera. In such a case the male culprit was traced and forced to marry the girl on the spot, or the girl was taken out of Kibera (to relatives in another Nubi village) to give birth secretly and her child was later presented as a child of her parents. A few cases ended in the death of the girl, killed, out of shame, by her father.

The abandonment of female circumcision

Most informants[758] claim that already in the 1950s the Nubis started to reduce the severity of the female circumcision procedure; it gradually changed from the severe form to cutting only the tip of the clitoris, or just an incision or prick in the 1980s. Instead of doing it at home, people started taking the girls to modern clinics in Dagoretti and other places near Kibera.

At the same time the ceremony also changed from a collective to an individual affair - in the 1970s it was a quiet ceremony, within the family, in the house. As a result, it was often no longer public knowledge who was circumcised and who wasn't, or in what way, severe or less severe. This change goes hand in hand with the reduction in severity of the cut, indicating the generally reduced significance of the ceremony and procedure. From the mid-90s female circumcision appeared to have stopped; most informants mentioned they had not heard about it anymore in the last 10-15 years. Nevertheless, there are still some hidden cases: it is claimed that some people (secretly) take their daughter to clinics in Eastleigh, the Somali area of Nairobi, for a hygienic cut.

How can this fast and (almost) complete FGC abandonment by the Nubis be explained? Such a fundamental change in the practice would require a 'collective, coordinated choice' and an 'explicit decision to abandon', or a critical mass of parents reducing or stopping female circumcision to convince others to do the same.[759] There does not seem to have been any

[758] Most Nubi informants on FGM were women; older Nubi men usually did not want to talk about it, while the younger generation (male and female) hardly knew it had once existed in their community.
[759] WHO 2008: 13; Hayford 2005.

collective decision on this within the Nubi community, but there must have been compelling reasons for it, or factors that contributed to such a significant change in tradition. It is all the more interesting as other ethnic communities in Kibera have continued practicing it, albeit at reduced levels.

Informants came up with many different explanations for the abandonment of female circumcision. Some of these were fairly simple and straightforward, though not always satisfactory or convincing, for example, 'People realised that "looseness" (immorality) cannot be controlled by cutting something', or 'the old midwives died and they did not pass on their skills'. Many referred to the increased education of Nubis in general and girls in particular: people could read what bad impact it had on the women's health. Nubi girls would meet girls from other ethnic groups in school, and be influenced by their new experiences – 'when girls started going to school, female circumcision disappeared'. However, education and economic development are usually not enough to reduce female circumcision prevalence, certainly not at the speed witnessed in Kibera; they can be contributing factors.[760]

What other contributing factors could there be? One is that the colonial government had tried to enforce the reduction of female circumcision. The Nubis had always been rather obedient towards the government, so it is possible that this legislation influenced the community's attitude. Moreover, one elderly woman mentioned that in the 1950s a midwife went for training to the King George Hospital and came back with a message against female circumcision, which had an impact in the community. Though the Kenyatta government did not do anything about it, the Moi government (from 1978) took a more active stance against it, which, according to some, also influenced the Nubi community. Some NGOs started campaigning through the mosques in Kibera, and it also became clear that it is not a religious command, not prescribed by the Koran.

The increasing levels of education meant that women could read anti-female circumcision messages, and understand the link between female circumcision and medical complications as well as in giving birth (though several Nubi women mentioned that in general there were very few medical problems associated with female circumcision). One informant mentioned that 'women did not want it anymore', though in general it had always been the women that had insisted on it – one woman mentioned that her father

[760] Hayford 2005; Worldbank/UNFPA 2004: 21.

supported her in her refusal to undergo the cut, though in the end (1970s) she did it anyway because of pressure from female relatives. Nevertheless, while Kibera in the early years was very much a (Nubi) man's world, in the 1950s Nubi women became more confident: they had money (from Nubian gin or tenants), while girls' education may have played a role as well in building their confidence. Women had more say in matters, and decided against it: "The men had sex with uncircumcised women [prostitutes, concubines etc.] anyway, so why should we women suffer all this pain if in the end it does not add anything? It serves no purpose!".[761] The men did not object; according to some, men were never much in favour of female circumcision.

The influx of other ethnic groups into Kibera and increased intermarriage was also mentioned as a reason; though most other ethnic groups in Kibera practise female circumcision, the larger part of Kibera's population does not: the Luo and the Luhya (together probably more than 55% of the Kibera population). Moreover, being in an urban area seems to have an impact: also the other ethnic groups in urban areas see a reduction in female circumcision levels.[762] This is most likely due to a decreased (traditional) social control and peer pressure in a (for most people in Kibera) new environment. Nevertheless, the other ethnic communities in Kibera have only *reduced* female circumcision, not *abandoned* it – they probably still feel the pressure from their relatives that remain in their areas of origin, keeping to some extent the culture and traditions alive even in town. The Nubis never had that social pressure since they did not have any group of traditional relatives 'back home' that could pressurise them into following traditional customs.

Other factors could have played a role as well. In the 1950s the Nubi community was changing fast: the Nubian gin brought a lot of money but also encouraged the consumption of alcohol (including women), resulting, according to informants, in loose morals and many illegitimate children. How would this have impacted on the tradition? Controlling the sexuality of the Nubi girls was possibly not so important anymore. Moreover, female circumcision was relatively 'new' in Nubi culture, just like Nubi culture itself – older people, born in southern Sudan and captured by the 'Egyptian army', could have been still alive in the 1950s (in Kibera); they could have remembered, and passed on that information, that in their original southern Sudanese community the women were not circumcised. Could this have had an influence here as well? It is possible that female circumcision being a

[761] Informant W26.
[762] Informant NN19; IRIN In-depth, 'A case study...'.

relatively new phenomenon made it easier for the Nubis to discard this "tradition".

Nowadays the younger generation of Nubis, including the girls, don't even know there ever was something called '*taaru*'. My female interpreter's first reaction, when I wanted her to translate a question on the topic, was: 'why ask this? We don't do that!'. She was subsequently shocked to hear about female circumcision traditions in her community in the past. At the end of the interview she also had reason to laugh, listening to the comments of one of the last traditional Nubi midwives in Kibera, in her eighties and with a great sense of humour:

> If it were up to me I would still circumcise the girls, because cutting and respect for women are one and the same thing. Look at all these uncircumcised girls nowadays, it's so ugly, they look just like elephants![763]

Conclusion

Even though female circumcision remains widespread in Africa, there are examples of reduction and abandonment of the practice. The Nubis abandoned it relatively rapidly – in a period of 30-40 years the community reduced the severity of the procedure and finally left it altogether. Looking for "lessons learnt", which could be used in other communities to reduce female circumcision and its impact on women's health, it seems difficult to draw conclusions from the case of the Nubis. It appears that here the abandonment has depended on a host of 'contributing factors', that together created the conditions, a conducive environment, for female circumcision to be abandoned.

My limited research on female circumcision in the Nubi community has in fact left many questions to be answered: exactly what form did circumcision on girls take in the early days, was it really 'pharaonic'? How, and why, did some parents decide *not* to circumcise their daughters? What problems, if any, did those first non-circumcised girls have in finding a marriage partner, or even in integrating in the community? Why did people stop the collective rituals? More research is needed to answer these questions, research which could, if possible, include physical examinations to investigate the extent of female circumcision across generations.

[763] Informant W1.

Appendix C – Questionnaire census Kibera

Full name (of head of household)……
Telephone: …….. P.O. Box: ……

Polygamous: □ **No** □ **Yes** □ NR Name husband/other wife + area in Kibera:……

The rooms/house they live in is: □ owned □ rented □ free of charge □ NR

Number of rooms occupied by household: ……..If rented, how much do they pay in total per month: ……. Ksh.

Fill in for <u>all members</u> of this household:

Who: name + relationship to head of hh.	SEX	Year of birth	Birth certif. Y/N	Marital status	Highest level of education completed	Higher degree + subject	Name + place of current or last school, + public / private	ID: Y / N	Drug use	Low / High use
Head of h.h.										

Part 2 - **Fill in for all members of this household <u>older than 15 yrs</u>:**

Pass-port Y/N	Voter card Y/N	All previous occupations / employments + years of work experience	Current main occupation	Current sources of income	* Total income	N° of rooms: ---------- own / get rent / 'lost'		

<u>Would you recommend Nubis to buy land outside Kibera?</u> □ No □ Yes □ N.R.
<u>Does this household own land outside Kibera</u>: □ No □ Yes □ N.R. When acquired: …….. Where: ……
<u>Acres</u>: …… <u>How has it been developed?</u>:
<u>Remarks</u>: …… **<u>THANK YOU!</u>**

* <u>monthly income categories: no income ; < 5,000 ; 5-10,000 ; 10-20,000 ; >20,000 ; N.R.</u>

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Curriculum Vitae

Johan Victor Adriaan de Smedt was born on December 1, 1959 in Utrecht, the Netherlands. He finished his secondary school, the Niels Stensen College, in 1979. After one year working through job agencies he went to Leiden University to study Social Anthropology. After 1.5 years he was fed up with all the 'theories' and went, with a fellow student, to Africa, on a 4-month trip that took them through Egypt, northern and southern Sudan, Uganda and Kenya, to discover the reality of the 'exotic tribes' they had been reading about. The following years he worked through job agencies and as a street musician, to earn money for a trip around the world and several visits to Africa. In 1985 he resumed the study of anthropology, and after a 6-month period of fieldwork in Tanzania, he graduated in 1991.

After two years of freelance work he started in January 1994 with 'Artsen zonder Grenzen' (Médecins sans Frontières / Doctors without Borders) in Rwanda, doing medical anthropological research in Burundese refugee camps. His work was interupted by the Rwanda genocide; he then went to the Rwandan refugee camps in Tanzania to set up a *mental health* programme to support traumatised refugees (also for 'Artsen zonder Grenzen'). After a short period in Mozambique he worked in 1996-7 in Kigali, Rwanda for the Dutch NGO 'Memisa'; in 1998 he left for Kenya to work as country coordinator for the Spanish section of 'Artsen zonder Grenzen'.

He stayed ten years in Kenya: four years with 'Artsen zonder Grenzen', and after that also with other NGOs, like 'Oxfam Novib', mainly coordinating projects in southern Sudan and Somalia. In this period he also did his research in Kibera slums, the basis for his PhD thesis.

Since August 2008 he lives with his wife and two children in Valencia, Spain, where he tries to make a living exporting and selling wine.