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**“We Did Not Come as Mercenaries...!”: Linking the Origin, Ethnic Identity and Settlement of the Nubis in Uganda**

Abdul Mahajubu, Balunywa M. and Musisi F.

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **“We Did Not Come as Mercenaries...!”: Linking the Origin, Ethnic Identity and Settlement of the Nubis in Uganda**

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**Focusing on the period 1894 to 1995 and drawing on both written and oral sources, this article explores the origin, ethnic identity and settlement of the Nubians since their advent in Uganda. Ugandan Nubians abandoned some aspects of their former African traditional customs and adopted new ones borrowed from the Arabic culture, constituting a unique and distinct ethnic group. Using a historical research design and adopting a qualitative approach, the article articulates the fluidity and formation of the Nubian ethnic identity on one hand, and the strategies that the Nubians have used to define and sustain themselves as a distinct ethnic group in Uganda. The article therefore suggests that the question of the Nubian identity in Uganda, through tracing their origin, ethnic identity and settlement since their advent, goes beyond the primordial understanding of ethnicity that tags ancestral location or settlement pattern, language, family history to a particular group claiming itself ethnic.**

**Key words:** Ethnicity, Nubians, Nubis, origin, identity, settlement.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Who are the Uganda Nubians? What historical connection do they have with the Nubians of Southern Egypt and Northern Sudan? Do they constitute an ethnic group or not? Why is it that they do not possess an ancestral land in Uganda like other ethnicities yet they are categorized as one of Uganda's indigenous ethnic groups? Scholars of ethnicity in Uganda have grappled with these questions for long without reaching a common understanding. The answers to the stated questions can be appreciated by tracing the historical link of the Nubians of Southern Egypt, Northern Sudan, East Africa

and the Uganda Nubis as they are conventionally known as the Nubis.

### **Tracing the historical origin of the Nubians from Egypt**

The original Nubians were found in Upper Egypt, occupying the Aswa area along the Nuba Mountains. These Nubians also referred to as “Nubian proper” were descendants of the Nubian Christian king called Silko.

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This king ascended to the throne in the fortieth century. Hilliard (1998: 68-69) observes that a line of kings lived in the Northern Nubia region of Qustul much earlier than the first Pharaohs of Egypt. Early Nubians sociologically evolved along the course of the river Nile valley. Its geographical scope was believed to have stretched from Egypt to Sudan. One-third of its area was found in the southern part of the modern day Egypt and the remaining two-thirds in the nation of Sudan (the land of the blacks). Supplement that the original Nubians were the Nubis from Nuba who forms part of the medieval Christian kingdom. By 1896, this area was part of the Anglo-Egyptian occupation. This brings to the fold of the observation that this category or classes of the Nubians were part of the long historical ethnic existence of both the Egyptian and Sudan modern states. The same argument points to the originality of the Nubians in question.

The settlement pattern of the original Nubians was mainly determined by the flow of river Nile. This could have been due the fertility of the land which facilitated their agricultural life. It was due to the divergent flow of the Nile that explains the separation of the Nubians to different areas forming independent settlements. While commenting about the divergences that exist among the Nubians Khaldūn et al. (1958), argued that the River Nile which had many branches was divided in many channels. The first branch, which passed through the Mediterranean Sea at Alexandria, was called the Egyptian Nile. In this Egyptian Nile lived the Nubians of the Nuba location in Egypt. It is believed that these constituted the Nubis "proper". The other branch of the river, which ran westwards into the surrounding sea was called the Sudanese Nile. In the Nile, lived all the Negro nations of various tribes, which formed part of the Nubi community. Supplementing on the works of Khaldūn et al. (1958) and Hilliard (1998), Ibn contends that Nubia in the Egyptian literature was a known powerful state around the second millennium BC. It was at one time described as the Nubian empire that encompassed the Kush kingdom in Egypt in the 19th century B.C

Though there appears to be a clear distinction between the Nubians of South Sudan and Egypt, there also seem to be a common thread of historical construction of all the Nubians. Alluding to this school of argument, Adams (2017: 1) states "There must be a genetically intermixing and different nationalities among the Nubians. This is because the ancient Nubians bought slaves from the south and sold them to the Egyptians. This in itself meant that there were central similarities between the Nubians of northern, Southern Sudan and Southern Egypt". This means that the Nubians, no matter where they migrated to, shared a common history that is traceable from Southern Egypt and Sudan. Their migrations into different nation-states made them to be categorized as Kenyan Nubis because they immigrated and married among the Kenyans, Tanzania Nubis, simply because they settled and married among the Tanzania local tribes. This was the case with the Ugandan Nubis.

Thus these three trajectories gave rise to different ethnicities of Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania tracing their history from both Southern Egypt and Northern Sudan.

### The East African Nubians

The East African Nubians belong to the Hamitic group, showing their physical and linguistic characteristics. The East African Nubians were predominantly Negros's in physical features; they lived under the government of Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. In specific, the Ugandan Nubis were asocial creation of many Southern Sudan tribes. They had a common history, religion (Islam) and had gone through the same social experience. The Nubis largely participated in the construction of Uganda. They are former combatants of Emin Pasha who succeeded Gordon after his demise during the battle of Amadi in 1885 and not as mercenaries. This view is highly emphasized by Isa Abdul Faraj<sup>1</sup> when he states, "...we Nubis did not come voluntarily, we did not come as mercenaries or people looking for greener pastures but as soldiers of the British army." This therefore means that the Nubis largely participated in the construction of Uganda as colonial soldiers and not as British colonial mercenaries. According to Kokole (1985: 439), the East African Nubis migrated from Southern Sudan and intermarried with other tribes of East Africa. For the case of Kenya, the Nubis who settled in Kibera intermarried with indigenous tribes, which resulted into the Neo-Islamic cultural melting pot of Nubian expansion. Kokole's argument on the origin of East African Nubis however contradicts that of Smedt (2011: 10) who contends that Nubians are 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. Nubis are believed to have settled in Kiambu, Mazeras, Machekos, Kibigori, Kibos, Kissi, Kisumu, Mumias, Eldama, Ravine and Nairobi. They are believed to have originated from the tribes of Southern Sudan, Northern Uganda and Eastern Congo. This in itself explicitly implies that they were East African citizens, who never had a holistic ethnic descent.

Another source argues that the Nubis were believed to have constituted the seven non-Arab Muslim tribes, which originated from the Nubia region of Aswan Dongola. This is in agreement with Ssemuwemba who states that the term Nubians meant a mixture of different tribes in Sudan and Egypt. The Nubian region stretched between Egypt and the African tribal kingdoms. From 1500 until 1800 the Ottoman Empire encroached upon the Nubia region many Nubians migrated to remote areas

<sup>1</sup> Isa Abdul Faraj is the chairman Nubian council of elders currently living in Kenya. Interview dated 01/10/2018

along the Nile waters from which different groups evolved and were named according to their locations. It was from then that the Nubian settlement gave rise to what was later described as the Nubian territory. This territory stretched from the first cataract of River Nile at Upper Nile Province in Egypt to midway between the third and fourth cataract at Wadi Halfa in Sudan. The Nubians who settled near Wadi Kenuzi came to be known as the Kenuzi. Those who settled in Dongola were described as Dongolawi, and so were the rest of the Nubian tribes elsewhere in Africa. This alludes to the fact that the Nubians, regardless of where they came from, they were part of the historic ethnic heritage of their respective establishment.

Contrary to the aforementioned assertion on the origin of Uganda Nubis by Kokole Constantine (2011: 12) contends to the same Nubian origin when he argues that the Nubians emerged as British slave armies from Egypt and Sudan following the Turko-Egyptian conquest of Sudan. Complementing on the same premise, Labidi<sup>2</sup> notes that the migrations and military expeditions of the Nubi Sudanese in East Africa started under Emin Pasha's command but also under the Sudanese Selim Aga Bey who was sought out by Captain Lugard Fredrick of the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC). In tandem with the previous argument, Otago (1898: 61) contends that the Nubi who historically constitute part of the Sudanese origin were believed to have been remnants of Khedive Ismail forces in Sudan. They were believed to have stationed in the Equatorial province under Emin Pasha and Captain Casati, being under the personal command of Selim Aga Bay, who received his appointment from General Gordon. To this point, one can argue that the creation of the Nubians as an ethnic category was a colonial construction. This ideological belief fits in the constructionist ethnic school of thought, which tags the conceptualization of ethnicity to colonialism, globalization, modernity and nationalism. In this respect, according to Adparvar and Tadros (2016: 1), ethno-genesis (the process leading to the emergency of ethnicity) was linked to colonialism.

### **Nubis in Uganda**

Ugandan Nubis are different from other Nubians of Egypt, Sudan and East Africa. What makes them different is that when they came in Uganda, they intermarried with the rest of the Uganda tribes to form a unique ethnic cluster composing of different tribes from the Central, Western and Northern tribes of Uganda. On arrival in Uganda, they settled among the Acholi, Madi and Lugbara and formed the Nubi/Madi, Lugbara and Acholi Nubi ethnicity. The mentioned tribes adopted the Nubi culture, practice

and social structures. In respect of this argument, narrates that the Aringa, Kuku, Pojulu, Nyepo, Liggi tribes adopted the Nubi culture and tradition, thus becoming ethnicized. The same was with the Nubis in Buganda kingdom; a good number of the Baganda adopted the Nubi way of life, intermarried with them and some even adopted the Nubi religion (Islam). On this ground, Rowe (1988: 273) states "Ganda Muslims were looked down upon by everyone else and their strange manner of Nubian Arab dressing (turbans and Tarbushes). This narrative remarkably confirms some Baganda Muslims having been Nubianized.

In 1890s, Emin Pasha brought the Nubian soldiers to Kampala and settled them in the capital of Buganda Kingdom and other parts like Kololo, after the death of Charles Gordon. On their way to Buganda and Bunyoro, Emin Pasha recruited several people from the different tribes of Madi, Alur, Acholi, Kakwa from the West Nile districts of Northern Uganda. Such recruitments did not only convert the Ugandan into Muslims, but Nubi ethnic category. In respect of this argument, Nakayi (2007: 26) narrates "All these recruits later formed part of the Nubian contingents that remained in Uganda. They intermarried, multiplied in number and it became impractical for the colonial administration to repatriate them to Sudan". This, to me was the highest manifestation of the presenting and growing Nubi ethnicity in Uganda.

Kasozi and Ssebulime (1996: 35) demonstrates the Muslim Nubi military support for Baganda Muslims who had adopted the Nubi Islamic brand. When King Mwanga wanted to extinct Islam and Baganda Muslims in Buganda Kingdom, Selim Bey, a famous Nubian Commander fought in defense of the Baganda to defeat Mwanga. Selim Bey vowed to defend the Muslim Bagandas and assured them that we would be their protector. This marked the shifting of the Baganda Muslim allegiance from Mwanga to Selim Bey (Soghayroun, 1981: 70). This did not only show support of the Baganda but pointed to the fact that some Baganda had embraced the Nubi methods of work, culture and practice. This was because some of them adopted the special Islamic brand of the Nubis. The same process took shape in Bunyoro. Wherever the Nubis settled, they integrated and willingly accepted other tribes into their system. This is what Kasfir (1979: 106) has long described as the open ethnic boundary. The process of integrating other tribes into the Nubi establishment is what Mazrui (1977: 25) has described as the Nubianization discourse.

Uganda's political history has been constructed along ethnic lines, as such its power relations and social dynamics evolve out of ethnic conflicts, clashes, ethnic and colonial "divide and rule", ethnic "divide and get" and majority ethnicities versus the minority ethnicities. In this context, sociologically, the concept of majority and minority does not refer to numbers but power hegemony. According to Isajiw (1993: 12) majority ethnic groups are those who use their power to dominate over the majority

<sup>2</sup>Abdul Juma Labidi is the Chairman Arua Nubian Forum and A Cultural Preservation Award winner of the East African Nubian Awards 2017. Interviewed at his residence in Arua on 15<sup>th</sup>/09/2018.

ethnic powerless entities. For this case, the Nubis, who constituted the first King African Rifles (KAR) and colonial agents, used their power to not only shape the military politics of Uganda, but also dominate over other ethnicities in Uganda. On this intellectual premise, Lunyigo (1987) contends that the British, through Samuel Bake (2001). Emin Pasha and Gordon used the Nubi ethnic to conquer Uganda in the early 1870 and 1890s. To this end, one can argue that the Nubi were the first ethnic cluster in the making of the first Ugandan army, thus expanding the frontiers of what we today call the modern Uganda.

Before the colonial period, the Nubis were like other ethnicities in Uganda. The Nubis who were regarded as descendants of the Southern Sudan Dinka immigrant tribe into Northern Uganda were accepted as natives of Uganda. This was because some of them were actually part of the Acholi tribes, which tribes were across Uganda and Sudan borders long before the colonial state boundaries constructed during the era of the Berlin 1885 conference. The Nubian question as a questionable ethnicity in Uganda emerged in the colonial and postcolonial Uganda. Alluding to this argument is Bandyopadhyay and Green (2012: 5), they state "In the first case, that of the Nubi, the ethnic group in question did not exist prior to the onset of the colonial rule". This brings to the fold of the argument that the Nubi were an ethnicity long before colonialism. As soon as they entered Uganda's contested political space, they began being stigmatized. This conforms to Angucia (2010: 12) who argues that the Nubian identity got stigmatized because of their involvement into Uganda's political history. This led to Nubis ethnic stigmatization.

Conforming to this analysis, Okuku (2002: 20) contends that in Uganda, ethnicity was used to reconfigure state structures as a basis of power. He evidences his argument by stating that the 1971 coup d'etat was a result of ethnic and power rivalry between President Milton Obote and his army commander Iddi Amin. In this respect, Iddi Amin ethnically mobilized the Nubis against the Acholi and Lango ethnicities to capture political power. Mamdani (1976) alludes to the same argument when he states that Amin used the Anyanya and Nubi Sudanese mercenaries to assume political power. What Mamdani (1976) and Okuku (2002), is the fact that the Nubi were part and indeed constituted the bastion of the colonial King African rifles which later translated into the first Ugandan army after the Ugandan independence. In fact, the Buganda kingdom long used the Nubi Ethnic category to contain the Bunyoro hegemony. This confirms that the Nubis were accepted and integrated into the local tribes, which led to the introduction of the Nubi Islam. These social developments, in line with the situational ethnicity approach (Isajiw 1993: 3) based on rational choice theory of ethnic construction individual tribes among the Ugandan chose to be regarded as members of the Nubi ethnic category owing to the

advantages they hoped to obtain once part of the Nubi ethnic hegemony.

## METHODOLOGY

The study adapted a qualitative historical research design to answer specific research questions on Nubian history since it involves exploring past histories, merging them with new historical evidences in order to draw present conclusions. Data collection sources involved extensive use of both secondary materials such as text books and journal, as well as primary data from archival written records like reports and oral data. Information collected from these sources were augmented with written stories from newspapers during colonial period (1894-1962). Some of these Newspapers include: *Uganda Argus* (1950-1970), *Uganda Herald*, *The New Vision* (1986-to date), *The Daily Monitor* (1994- to date), *The Observer* (2004- to date) to come up with a clear and a comprehensive understanding on the questions surrounding the history on the origin, identity and settlement of the Uganda Nubis. Information gathered was transcribed, studied and arranged thematically to come up with a narrative on the origin of Uganda Nubis, their claim to ethnic identity and circumstances surrounding their settlement since their advent in 1894.

## NUBIS ETHNIC IDENTITY

The creation of the Nubi ethnicity emerges from several small tribes originating from the Anglo Egyptian-Sudan and Northern Uganda, which was mainly from the Acholi sub region. Some of the tribes which integrated to forge the Nubi ethnicity included but not limited to the Bari, Kakwa, Madi, Kuku, Alur, Lendu, Dinka, Shiluk, Makaraka, Lugbara, Nuer, Pajuru, Mundari, Muru, Baka, Abukaya, Mundu, Acholi, Munyoro, Nuba, Tagalau, Fatit, Lotuka, Nyangwara, Zande, For, Tukurur, Jawama and Barna. On a larger note, Milner (1952: 121) argues that the Nubi were part of the Madi Nilotic group of Luo speaking tribes who for some centuries or more moved south from the Bar el Ghazal region of the Sudan. Driberg (1926: 9-10) adds that the Shilluk, Dinka, Anywak, Acholi, Lango, Alur, Jopaluo and Jaluo constitute to be the Nilotic. And further asserts that the bulk of the Acholi, Lango, Madi and Nubi all migrated from the Bar el Ghazal region. Driberg (1926: 30) with evidence cites Ajibu from the Aduka states in Lango who without prejudice narrates that his family came from Kachedungu two days in the north eastern direction of Moroto. Olemu of Ayer states that his father was born at a place called Ayer. Awal, a very old man, the uncle of Adiga of Ngai states that his father, Elyap was born in Abubu hills on the river Achake. These instances form the required sufficient evidence which are similar to those of the



Shilluk in the Bar el Ghazal region. It is clear that all the mentioned tribes willingly integrated and formed what came to be called the ethnic cluster of the Nubians in Uganda. In this respect, every tribe that followed the culture, practices of the historic Sudanese Nubis became Nubis and constituted the Nubi ethnicity. Using the post-modernist ethnic approach, one would inherently argue that the composition of the different tribes gave rise to what Aldiparvar and Tadros (2016: 1) referred to as the new approaches of ethnic understanding which involves setting up new frontiers of research on ethnicity. This is in line with the Ugandan Nubi ethnic category, which brings together different local tribes to form a new-ethnic dimension. And this is what the dual defines as the postmodern approach to ethnic understanding.

The dominant composition of the Nubi ethnic in Uganda's military structure and its primary historical construction in Uganda made it to fall victim of ethnicized politics. According to Tornberg (2013: 11), ethnicized politics arises when different ethnic groups in a state are given dis-appropriate access to power and other social institutions. In this respect, he argues that the Nubis were given "a raw deal" in Uganda's power sharing process, as the Baganda were given disproportion advantage in state governance, which favored them at the expense of other ethnicities in Uganda. Cementing the argument of the Baganda against the Nubi ethnicity in Uganda, Tornberg stated "In colonial Uganda, this kind of politicizing ethnicity is most obvious in the case of the British use of the Baganda as their preferred ethnicity of political cooperation in the early stages of colonialism, but also in the case of militarized, if you will, ethnicity of the first Nubians in the Ugandan rifles and then later the Acholi when they came to be the dominant ethnic groups in the military". This narrative alludes to the historical acceptance of the Nubis as an ethnicity in Uganda, and most importantly as the first military force that led to the introduction of Uganda's security and military system. To therefore ignore the Nubi ethnicity is to miss a historical point in Ugandan state as a sovereign entity.

The fact that all the tribes that accepted total submission to Islam, confirms that the Nubi establishment was fully an ethnic category. This is because the primordialist approach to ethnicity contends that once a given tribe willingly submits to a common religion and culture, their ethnic identity becomes complete, clear and recognized. The ethnic identity and inter-sectionality approach ethnic construction fully conforms to the true and unadoptable construction of ethnic cognizance among the various Ugandan tribes and accepted to be part of the Nubian ethnic cluster. Approving the creation and existence of the Nubi ethnicity, Kasfir (1979: 107) contends that the Nubian Ugandans have stretched the notion of common ancestry to its factitive limits by opening membership to Africans possessing objective traits of other ethnic units. This in itself conforms to the creation of a new-comprehensive ethnicity, which

swallows the pre-ethnic identities into contemporary ethnic creation. Kasfir (1979: 107) adds "one of the enduring results of the original Nubian patterns of socialization has been the ease with which an individual can cross ethnic boundaries and become a Nubian. The basic requirements are: ability to speak the Nubi language (pidgin Arabic), adoption of Islam, acceptance of certain physical dress and social customs, since military service is regarded as the most prestigious occupation a Nubian can undertake, joining the army can cement ones perceived identity, thus, a certain southern Sudanese can come to Uganda and quickly become a Nubi". Kasfir further argues that the Nubians in Uganda have maintained an open ethnic boundary for the last 100 years.

These ideological opinionated prepositions, with clear semblance alludes to the genealogical evolution of the Nubi ethnicity as advanced by Middleton (1955: 194) who observes that the Lugbara of the West-Nile district and their eastern neighbors, The Madi, are the only representatives in East Africa of the Sudanic speaking peoples, and belong to the Moru-Madi sub-group of the eastern Sudanic group. According to Middleton, The Madi who constitutes the bastion of the larger Nubi seems to have come from the north or northwest. And the myth of related peoples indicated that they might ultimately have come from the area of Lake Chad. Other members of this linguistic group lived in the northwest Belgian Congo, the South West Sudan and French Equatorial Africa. It is from this stand point of view that the Nubian language developed in the 19th century from the Arabic pidgin, which evolved as a result of integrating their original Nubian languages with the Islamic religion. Besides, as more tribes joined the Nubi, the more the Nubi Language grew rich in terms of cultural identity, semblance, but most importantly maintained Islam as the common uniting factor. It was in this context that Wairama (2001: 6) did contend that the Nubians were part of the small ethnic groups in Uganda who constituted the Nilotic languages of the Sudanic languages.

There is no doubt that Lugbara and Madi are by origin, language and culture entirely different from the Nilotic-speaking peoples such as the Acholi, Alur and Lango. Their connection with the western Bari speakers, most of them living in Sudan is less certain. Although there seems to be little or no relationship with the Acholi in Uganda, it is also a well-known fact that there is a strong substratum of the Madi in both Acholi and Alur. This in itself poses a lacuna in the genealogical construction of the Madi and generally Nubians. Let me hasten to further argue that the mere fact that both the Madi and Alur are found in two unrelated locations of Uganda and Sudan makes me to believe that both Uganda and Sudan had original Nubi-Madi people in their respective social constructions. That withstanding, the genealogical explanation of the Nubi origin, settlement and migration becomes much more complex a debate than I intend to

contribute to. However, the failure to settle this debate has long been echoed by Middleton (1955: 194) who once remarked "Historical accuracy is irrelevant in the context of genealogies of clans and other descent groups of societies that lack centralized political authority" (Middleton, 1955: 194). What is not however contestable is the clear fact that the creation of the Nubi ethnicity comes out as a result of other indigenous ethnicities abandoning their previous identity to the new Nubi ethnic identity. In such away the Nubi ethnicity was created. In defense of this argument, Adlparvar and Tadros (2016: 1) using the constructionist ethnicity theory argues that new ethnicities are created when previous ethnicities are abandoned by elites and ordinary people, either because of marginalization of some members. In a bid to free themselves from the benefactor, ethnic members form or join other ethnicities. According to the constructionist approach to ethnic creation at times creating new ethnicities can create ethnic violence, especially by the oppressed against the oppressors.

Wangi (1972: 20-21) once observed that the true original Nubis came from north and southern Sudan, involving the Bari, Dinka, Mondu, Moru, Kuku, Shilluk and Makaraka. The other Nubis who had come from Egypt in the Nuba Mountains were repatriated back to Egypt. It is however important to note that the Nubi from the Nuba mountains precisely constituted the high-ranking officers and were proud of having originated from the Nuba mountain. In this respect when Kabaka Mwanga asked them where they had come from, they mentioned "Nuba Mountains". Since then the Baganda called them "Banubi". And according to the Baganda, whether they came from Egypt North or South Sudan they were referred to as Banubi. It was from then that the English language improvised the term "Nubians" to make them distinct from other ethnicities.

The Nubians have been conceived in tribal ethnic terms. In this context, Hansen (1991: 559) argues that by the mere fact that the Nubi have a language, cultural traits, religion and way of life, then they qualify to be an ethnicity. Those who contest their ethnicity argue that a society only qualifies to be an ethnicity in a given geographical location when they have an ancestral land in a state. As such they tend to look at the Nubis as a new tribe in Uganda. Others like Kokole (1985: 5) tends to consider the Nubi cluster as a club of people. This miss-conceptualization of ethnicity is contested as they are void of the growth of the terminology of ethnicity. Social scientists define ethnicity as "a shared" racial, linguistic or national identity of a social group. However, the concept is understood differently from country to country. In this case, there are two extreme understanding of the concept of ethnicity. The first state of understanding strives to preserve the ethnic hegemony of its population, emphasizing common ancestry, culture and history. In this respect, the only way of becoming a member of such a society is to be born in it (Hoffmeyer-

Zlotnik and Warner, 2010: 107). The second state defines the concept of ethnicity in terms of persons with common interests, values, institutions and political convictions. The second definition fits into the Nubi trajectory which migrated from Southern Sudan, took part in the creation of Uganda as colonial militant pacifiers and later became part of Uganda ethnic groups, dully recognized up to now in the Ugandan constitution.

It is only those who accept that the concept of ethnicity grows that will recognize the Nubi community as a transformed ethnicity in Uganda. In defense of this assertion, Nakayi (2007: 27) argues that the word Nubians came from the phrase "Nubi" which literally meant Nubian culture and religion. In Acholi, the term "Nubi" was synonymous with Islam or people professing and practicing Islamic or Muhammedan religion. The term Nubi no longer meant typical Nubians, but Muslims in general. This was because nearly all Muslims in Gulu spoke the Nubian language no matter what tribe they belonged too. This, in its true sense formed a unique ethnic establishment in the entire Acholi land. This conforms to Orville's argument who states that the Nubi people developed a unique ethnicity as individuals from various Sudanic tribes melded together in the new settlements of Uganda. This narrative has a lot to do with the social constructionist approach to ethnicity, which argues that ethnicity is socially constructed through continuous social interaction between the elites and ordinary people (Adlparvar and Tadros, 2016: 1). In line of this argument, the Nubi ethnic category in Uganda developed through socially interacting with other native tribes in Uganda. In this process, some ethnic clusters were swallowed, giving rise to the Nubi social ethnic structure.

If ethnic groups are conceived as separate communities, then deeper interrogation should be made about the progressive use of the word ethnicity. To therefore tag ethnic theories as propounded by the primordial approach to ethnicity is to miss the point that ethnicities grow, and at times transcend geographical boundaries in which they originated from. What we today describe as the original ethnicities were socially created by the power centers of the time. In this respect, true classical evidence narrates that the Bantu ethnicity, which is claimed to have its originality from Uganda, actually could have long migrated from Central Africa into East Africa. To make this argument much more empirical is to reflect on the fact that Kintu, the original Muganda is theoretically claimed to have come from Mountain Elgon, in east part of Uganda. All these exemplifications fundamentally prove that all ethnicities, including the Nubi ethnic migrated from where they originally got constructed to where they are today. It is therefore not a historical fact that existing ethnicities in Uganda are not located where they were originally.

Going by the fact that ethnicity changes, it makes it clear that ethnicity is dynamic and fluid. Its fluidity is

witnessed by constructions, reconstructions and deconstructions of social identities. In this regard, Isajiw (1993: 15) argues that the existing social dynamics leads to deconstruction and reconstruction of human identity. He adds that in a culturally pluralistic context, pressures are generated and extended on the objective aspects of all ethnicities to become adaptable to each other. For the case of the Nubis in Uganda, the intermarriages between the Sudanese Nubi community within the Baganda, Banyoro, Batoro, and Arabs exerted pressures on the indigenous Uganda native ethnicities to either split or adopt the Nubi cultural practices, which gave rise to what Isajiw (1993: 10) described as the secondary ethnic groups. According to Isajiw, the second ethnic groups are those who have their origin in societies different from the one in which they currently exist. In essence they are transplanted ethnic groups, which share their cultural and historical background with the society from where they migrated, but which do not depend any more on the original society from which they came from.

#### **SETTLEMENT PATTERNS OF NUBIS IN UGANDA**

For interrogating the settlement patterns of the Nubis in Uganda, we must appreciate the fact that traditionally, over a period of time settlements long changed over time. Whereas it could be true that different ethnicities had ancestral settlements and originalities. With the passage of time ethnic settlements changed due to either internal or external expansionist processes. For example, Buganda kingdom was originally a very small geo-political entity, as time went on Buganda expanded at the expense of her neighbors Bunyoro and Busoga; it annexed some of the neighboring parts. As a result, some Banyoro or Basoga ethnics could have been swallowed up into Buganda ethnic category or the reverse. This in essence altered the ethnic settlement of the locally colonized areas.

Externally, when the British conquered some parts of Uganda, they changed settlement patterns by themselves acquiring land for their own settlements and those of their either colonial agents or collaborators. To therefore understand and have grip over the settlement patterns of the Nubi ethnic category, we need to equally appreciate that since then to date settlement patterns have been changing more especially after the popular 1900 Buganda agreement, which divided the Buganda land between Mailo land and the Crown land. Alluding to this narrative, Harlow et al. (1895: 79) state "From the agreement there also emerged a revolutionary system of land tenure for Buganda. Johnson had no difficulty in securing the agreement of the Ganda leaders to his expropriation of about half of the kingdoms area as crown land". It was part of this crown land where a good number of Sudanese Nubis were settled. This argument is premised on the fact that the Nubis then never had

ancestral land for themselves yet they were working for the British in the extension of their influence. This therefore meant that the Imperial British had the responsibility of settling them. As we therefore reflect on the settlement of the Nubi ethnicity in Uganda, we also need to have a deeper understanding of the land question in Uganda because it was on the land that settlement took place.

The Nubi settlement pattern in Uganda is largely associated to the British extension and establishments. Kasfir (1979: 107) contends that as the British extended their tentacles into Uganda, they established homestead settlements for their army who were primarily Nubians from Southern Sudan. In this regard the British built exclusive schools for the Nubi children. In such schools they were taught crafts such as carpentry, mechanics and other trades. After completion of seven and eight years, they were taken straight into the army. They established them into an ethnic category. They helped them to establish home villages. This made them to set up new social identities around urban centers in Uganda. This led to the creation of what Kasfir (1979: 107) has described as urban ethnicity.

The Nubis found comfort settlement in the Acholi land after successfully over running the Acholi Lamogi resistance at Guruguru Mountain. Cementing this argument, Harlow et al. (1895: 107) state that the British stationed a permanent patrol of the Nubi King African ruffles (KAR) in 1911 to permanently put to rest to Acholi resistance against the British colonial rule. It is noted that these Nubi-KAR's were not moved afterwards; they remained in the Acholi land and ultimately established their settlement patterns therein.

The Lado enclave, now currently as the West Nile region is believed to have been the permanent settlement home of the Nubis. It is argued that long before the colonial rule in Uganda, the Nubis were natives in West Nile. The confusion and miss-information which have over the time been made about the native settlement pattern of the Nubis emanates from the colonial periodic boundary argument. Those who argue that the Nubis were immigrants in West Nile are those who ignore the changing colonial boundaries of the Lado enclave (West Nile region) between Congo of King Leopold, Sudan and Uganda. In this regard, this school of thought could as well locate the Nubians as having "originated" from Congo because the Lado enclave was originally part of King Leopold of Belgium Congo. Indeed, they at times as well extend their argument to locate the Nubian origin in South Sudan. The version of the Nubians having their origin from South Sudan is much more popular today. To these arguments, they would be temporarily right, but not permanently correct. This is because this school of thought misses the point that the Lado enclave has been shifting over time, depending on the colonial interests, power, hegemony and influence.

Those who consider the West Nile region as the

permanent home of the Nubis in Uganda are those who have closely followed and indeed appreciate historical antidotes which have over the time altered the nationalities of the cross boarder tribes in Africa. To this line of thought, in which I belong makes me to invoke historical facts to the effect that Harlow et al. (1895: 108) provide informational evidence that “Until the death of King Leopold of the Belgians in 1909, the area of West Nile-the Lado enclave was administered by Congo. It then past under the British administration in the Sudan. But in 1912, the southern half-hence forth to be called “West Nile” was transferred to Uganda in exchange for the Bari-Lotuka area of north east”. This narrative makes me convinced that as boundaries changed, its native people never changed, they remained where they were born and settled. The fact that the Lado enclave was at one-time part of the Sudan, where the Nubis originated from making me to believe that the shifting of the Lado enclave into Uganda simply changed the Nubian Nationhood from Sudan to Uganda but did not change their settlement patterns and origin. This therefore makes it clear that to a certain extent one can argue with an increasing amount of confidence and evidence that some Nubis were indigenes of Uganda, not of Sudan or Congo.

After the successful expansion of the British colonialism, the colonial administration in Uganda allocated the Nubis land in Acholi land at a place called Patiko Ajullu. This became their land of identity. Other Nubis settled in Gulu at Aria-aga”. Others chose to settle in Toro and Masindi district, which became to be called the Nubian quarters. The majority however remained in the West Nile district of Arua (Nakayi 2007: 26) This points to one key aspect that the Nubis were scattered but connected among themselves, they reserved contacts among themselves regardless of the distant places of their settlement. This was evidenced with the continuous cultural practices. They maintained a strong cultural bondage, which made them not to abandon their cultural practices, but influenced others into joining their new social identities. On this note, Karekona (2015: 3) argues that the 2002 population census estimated the Nubians to number to 336,600 people in Luwero and 413,100 people in Arua. On this ground, Nakayi (2007: 26) adds “the Nubians preserved their Arabic culture and dance, and to date can easily be identified by the famous Duluka dance. In terms of religion, they continued to practice Islam and acquired several pieces of land on which they built mosques and many locals converted to Islam”. This narrative explicitly confirms that besides the given land where they settled, they went ahead to acquire more land through personal or individual purchases. This meant that the natives then sold land to the Nubis on which they did not only settle but established worshiping centers which became an important source of integrating the native tribes into the new Nubi ethnic cluster.

Commenting about the Nubian settlements, Wairama (2001: 4-6) did state that the Nubis were located in Arua,

Bombo. The fact that they were colonial military agents, they settled around British military installations. The largest military installation then was in Bombo in Buganda. At Bombo was the largest military barracks.

While at Bombo, the Kabaka gave them forty Baganda women; as such they intermingled with the Baganda and adopted Luganda language. What should not be ruled out however is that some Baganda, the fact that they had officially been married to the Nubis, they could have adopted the Nubi culture, meaning that they became Baganda Nubians. Those who settled in Toro became Toro Nubians, and so were the Banyoro Nubians, thus giving prominence to a new unique ethnicity called the Nubis in Uganda.

Nakayi (2007: 27) argues that a good number of Nubians purchased land and property which belonged to the departed Asians in different parts of Uganda. This included the present day Gulu district. The overthrow of Iddi Amin made many Nubians flee, only to return in Obote II when their land and property had been taken over. When the NRM took over political power in 1986. The Gulu district administration gathered all the Nubians in Gulu at Pece stadium to address the Nubi land question. With the support of the Ministry of Rehabilitation, the Nubis were relocated to Masindi at a place called Kirasha. Nevertheless, the Nubis who had intermarried with the Acholis and acquired land and had set up businesses remained in Gulu. It is estimated that 5000 Nubians remained in Gulu for the very reason that they were now part and parcel of the Acholi people. Such Nubis had long established home steads in villages like: Anaka, Obiya, Opit, Rajab, Palaro and Awatch. To-date these villages remain predominantly for Nubis. Those who have interacted with them in those villages stand the risk or willingness to embrace the Nubian ethnic cluster. Buganda became the bastion of the Nubis settlement after the West Nile region. It is so far clear that the Nubis were settled in Buganda, particularly in Bombo, Entebbe and Kololo by Captain Lugard, they were as well welcomed by the Buganda kings as they wished to also employ them as mercenaries to fight off their adversaries like Bunyoro kingdom. On this note, the Buganda authority imposed the Luwalo tax as a condition for their allegiance, settlement and existence in Buganda. This was objected by the Nubis as they vehemently resisted the tax. The Uganda daily newspaper of 19th July 1940 states “The 16th July 1940, some fifty to sixty Nubians were sent to Luzira prison on remand for refusing to pay the Luwalo communication tax. Next morning the District Commissioner, Mengo’s office premises were besieged by a large number of Nubian women, who openly demanded the immediate release of their husbands”. This statement confirms the legitimacy settlement of the Nubians in Buganda. And further confirms the legal possession of land in Buganda. It is therefore not surprising that up to now, the Nubis predominantly occupy Bombo, their current Luwero district settlement.

## Conclusion

Drawing from written records and oral interviews from encultured interviewees, the study established that Uganda Nubis were former ex-slave soldiers from Sudan who were recruited from a conglomeration of various ethnic communities from Southern Sudan by the Arabs and the Nubians of Southern Egypt and Northern Sudan. This brings to the fold that the Uganda Nubis have got a historical link with the Nubians of Southern Egypt and Sudan through slave trade. It is evident also that the Nubians who finally settled in East African countries of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania originated from Sudan as their ancestral country of origin contrary to the view by scholars like Kokole who argues that the Nubians had no specific land of origin.

The facts presented in this particular study indicate how Uganda Nubis embraced a new Africanized Arabic culture by adapting to a new creolized Arabic language Ki-Nubi, embracing Islam and exercising Islamic values. This demonstrates the fluidity of ethnicities and how they were easily constructed. Ethnic creation however, involves abandoning the former status quo, like for the case of Uganda Nubis for various reasons. The fluidity of a particular ethnic group to adapt to a new ethnic identity, however, does not deny it an ethnic belonging like in a case of the Uganda Nubis.

Whereas it is true that different ethnicities in Uganda are attached to the ancestral land of origin, there has been lack of evidence in this particular study that the Nubis are attached to a particular ancestral land of their own. This was as a result of the failure by the British colonial authority and the post-independent regimes to offer the Nubis land as one of Uganda's indigenous ethnic societies that contributed significantly in pacifying the rest of Uganda. This un-allocation of land by the British even after the 1900 Buganda Agreement was signed, resulted into scattered settlements of the Nubis all over various districts in Uganda. This was as a result of their historical involvement in the military which required them to move to different areas within since they were involved in a number of military campaigns.

It is no longer in doubt that the Nubis are former inhabitants of Sudan and are part of the Ugandan established ethnicities. Their continuous existence threatens the old ethnicities as a good number of other ethnic clusters join the new dynamic Nubi ethnicity in Uganda. It is no longer in doubt that their settlement in Uganda is now a stamped and sealed question as they enjoy to obtain more land given the liberal capitalistic system which now empowers all Ugandans to settle anywhere in the country without any resistance.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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