

# The Dynamics of Identification in the Nuba Culture<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

There are no domestic conflicts that carry greater destructive potential in today's nations or states than those between culturally distinctive and communally antagonistic groups, whose desire for self-identification may or may not lead to self-determination, and the state's desire to assimilate such a distinctive culture into another, because of its political orientation or fundamental ideological differences. Consequently, the multitude of 'traditions' – some surviving against the overwhelming odds, some others resurrected or invented – vie for loyalty and the authority to guide personal conduct, with the hope of establishing a commonly agreed hierarchy of values and norms that would save their addressees from the vexing task of making their own choices. And anything that is visibly deflected from custom will be seen as such a breach. Without recognising and considering cultural diversity within a nation, it will be a naivety to view the contemporary communal conflicts in the Sudan, especially the clash between Nuba African and Arabo-Islamic cultures, as simply the consequence of new patterns of social interaction and competition for resources generated by economic modernisation, underdevelopment and the institutional framework within which this competition occurs.

This article is not about a comparative study between African Nuba culture on one hand and Arab one on the other hand, because 'building a defensible case for differential 'adaptability' of two cultures or societies requires several analytical steps.'<sup>2</sup> First, models of the two 'traditional systems' must be constructed, which concisely outline a set of contrasting structural features within a framework of more general similarity. Second, differing structural changes in the two systems must be identified. Finally, these changes must be traced through time as processes of transformation in the traditional systems.

Although the paper cites the systematic categorisation of the structural features of Nuba culture, it does not necessarily concentrate on the analysis of these features with longitudinal tracing of change or their receptivity to contemporary change. The specific 'adaptive changes' are related on one hand to the presence of particular antecedent structures of coercion or subtlety and on the other hand to given new conditions. However, the paper focuses on some aspects of Nuba culture, asserting that specialised cultural traditions is less adaptable to change, whereas generalised cultural tradition is susceptible to change.

Salient issues that arose from some of the subjects of this article resonate with the following questions: is there a unique Nuba culture? And if yes, what are their aspects? And how do these cultural features characterise the Nuba as a people to the point of cultural self-identification?

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<sup>1</sup> The title is borrowed from a book with a similar title by Deng, F M, *Dynamics of Identification: A Basis for National Integration in the Sudan*; Khartoum University Press: Khartoum, 1973.

<sup>2</sup> Henderson, R N, *Generalised Cultures and Evolutionary Adaptability: A Comparison of Urban Efik and Ibo in Nigeria* in Melson, R and Wolpe, H (editors), *Nigeria: Modernisation and the Politics of Communalism*; Michigan State University Press: Michigan, 1971, Pages: 215-245.

How some of these cultural attributes are practised? And what are the changes that have occurred to some of them through the time factor, as a process of transformation, or human coercion?

## I. The Nuba culture at a glance

It is well perceived that geography plays a significant role in shaping the identity of every nation, and it can even be a pivotal element, among other factors, in defining the character of every individual. The inextricable connection between culture and identity explains why the word agriculture, which relates to the soil, has been used by its Latin lexicographers to designate the art of mastering the land to which the community belongs. A person's identity is, therefore, crucially defined by nature, or by the place of residence, in addition to the assumed physiological relatedness he has acquired by birthright.

Among many other definitions, including the one 'seen by some investigators as the comprehensive totality of human activities and behaviour',<sup>3</sup> culture can be referred to as 'shared perceptions, attitudes and predispositions that allow people to organise experiences in certain ways.'<sup>4</sup> As it embodies the dynamics of self-identification, culture has been a bitter source of socio-political disputes since time immemorial. This is because it prescribes all shared articles that weld communities together: history, economic activities, individual egalitarianism, and the principles of collective responsibility, common languages, distinctive customs and binding traditions (age-set, lineage and clan systems), heritage, ancestral legacies and/or religious beliefs. Not only does ethos in every culture form a system or systems, but it also acts as an order in a social totality bent on uniformity and the soliciting of the disciplined, co-ordinated action of individuals. The Nuba ethos forms their characteristic spirit, moral values, ideas or beliefs – whether as a group, community or cultural entity. These values, whether classified into fundamental segments and secondary ones, are inter-linked values from which the Nuba derive their functional roles in the society and their identity. Also, there exist central values around which all other values revolve. The elements of these values collectively form the Nuba ethics and morality. It is essential to note here that 'ethics' is a word derived from two Greek words: *ethos* for habit and *ethikos* for character, while 'morality' comes from the Latin word *mores* for social institutions and customs. Since cultural products – such as, language, myth and customs – are vehicles of understanding culture, this article is designed to further our understanding of Nuba culture by citing some of its characteristic features in order to fathom the destructive potentialities inherent in a clash between assimilation and self-identification. Therefore, each culture needs to be understood from its own frame of reference. Because of their unwillingness to be assimilated into the state-sponsored culture of Arabo-Islamic orientation, the Nuba have faced discrimination, oppression and eventual civil war.

However, the components of cultural identification among the Nuba people are dynamic, with two indicators influencing their contemporary, social changes from African cultural values to pseudo-Arab orientation in the Sudan. These are socio-economic indicators (education, employment and migration within the Sudan or abroad) and state politics' machinations. While the former have proved to be slow, peaceful and individualistic, the latter are systematically orchestrated by the Government apparatus (locally as well as nationally) to 'de-Nubanise' the Nuba people. In the face of mounting nationalist hegemony in the post-independence Sudan, the

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<sup>3</sup> Khaleefa, O H and Ashria, I H, *The Concept of Culture and Social Sciences: A Cross-Cultural View, Encounters: Journal of Inter-Cultural Perspectives*, Vol 1, No 2, September 1995, Pages:53-73.

<sup>4</sup> Sesanti, S, *Manifestation of African Islam: A Case Study of African Muslims in Kwa-Nobuhle Township in the Eastern Cape, Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol 29, 2009, Pages 33-58.

Nuba culture has been increasingly targeted for 'de-Nubianisation' and eventual assimilation into aggressive Arabo-Islamic culture. More importantly, some Nuba languages are in danger of being extinct by the ascendant Arabic language. The Nuba have expressed their rejection of cultural impositions in the name of Islam in a fully blown war in the 1980s. It is the testimony of their refusal to mould the African cultural personality into a form passive rather than resistant to Arab cultural domination that gives them dignity, honour and self-satisfaction.

## II. The Nuba origins

The Nuba people of Southern Kordofan in the Sudan represent a unique and entirely self-contained society. Human movement has been a constant factor of life, and theories associated with it are often so complex an issue to prove. The complexity basically arises from the availability of sketchy information on medieval migration, and the inextricable displacement-cum-replacement process of such a human traffic. In the Nuba Mountains, some of the ancestral evidence of their origins are too fictitious to be treated as a factual testimony of their historic existence. In addition, the link between human characters and animals in a totemic portrayal has also added more confusion to efforts to seek the truth behind the Nuba origins, including allegations by some Nuba tribes that their ancestors descended from heaven, theirs were half human and half serpent and so forth. The existence of the Nuba Mountains in their current location is due to three types of human movement: regional immigration, 'national mobility' and 'local mobility'. As to how the regional migration came into existence, it would be a gargantuan task to attempt to trace and attest the mythical theories associated with it. A vast time span, lack of records and hardly any palaeontological artefacts render such an attempt impossible to solve the riddles. Despite all of these hurdles, the early inhabitants of the Nuba Mountains could be related to the trans-migration of the fugitive Egyptians, who revolted in the time of Psammetichus. Herodotus's information proves that they lived on the west of the Nile as Aristocreon places them, and he also proves that their country reached as far south as the Bahr al-Ghazal, thus putting these people in the southern parts of Kordofan not far from Bahr al-Ghazal. Wainwright employed comparative computation of distances travelled by late travellers and the Roman agents up to the Nile to locate the settlement of Egyptian deserters.

In his narrative about the origin of the Uduk people in Southern Blue Nile, Dawud Kaya Lothdha claimed that they were an enslaved people of the Egyptians, (and they) who came from Meroë and went to a place called Kush where they lived together with the Nuba. But they split from them, because of a quarrel over the head of a pig in the diviners' place. When they separated in Omdurman, the Nuba were left to follow the river [the White Nile] up to the Nuba Hills, to those places far away: Kadugli, Heiban, Abri.<sup>5</sup> This historical background, though combined with mythical elements is supported by oral tradition as retold by elderly native Nuba people. However, the story emphasises the divine position of pigs among the Nuba in the bygone era, and even as recently as in the twentieth century among the Tulishi tribe and the other parts of the Nuba Mountains.

During the 'national mobility' process – that is, in the Middle Egyptian Kingdom, say 2000 BC – the C-Group people invaded and settled in Nubia, coming, as it seems, from the south-west. Much later again, about 920 BC, the ancestors of the great kings of Napata came from the west and were successful in invading and conquering the Nile Valley. In fact, the state of feud between the Nile-dwellers and the inhabitants of western desert lasted on long after this. Strabo

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<sup>5</sup> James, W, *War and Survival in Sudan's Frontierlands: voices from the Blue Nile*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2007, Pages: 11-13.

mentioned that ‘the parts on the left side of the course of the Nile, in Libya, are inhabited by Nubae: a large tribe who, beginning at Meroë, extended as far as the bends of the river about the middle of the third century BC, but are divided into several separate kingdoms.’ Now, Southern Kordofan is the place where the descendants of the Nubae, the modern Nuba, still live, and it is the reservoir where the Nubae overflowed, finally as far as the Atbara River. It came to pass that there was eastward movement of westerners, definitely from Kordofan, that brought about the final destruction of the Meroitic Kingdom at the hands of Ezana, the king of Aksum, in 350 AD.<sup>6</sup> He called the inhabitants of the kingdom the Noba, that is, Nubae or Nuba (red and black Noba).

Nonetheless, linguists, anthropologists and archaeologists tentatively believe that the Nuba migrated from the medieval Kingdoms of Nubia and Alodia (‘Alwa) around the Nile Valley in northern and central Sudan, respectively, to the nowadays Nuba Mountains in Southern Kordofan. Also, it has been stated ‘that some of the northern tribes of the Kordofan hills are a branch of the Nubians, who migrated eastwards from a point somewhere between Kordofan and Dar Fur, expanding northwards to the Nile and southwards into Kordofan, where they settled in several groups of hills after dispossessing their inhabitants.’<sup>7</sup> This tenor of a historical belief is corroborated by language affinity between some Nuba groups in Southern Kordofan and Nubian tribes in Northern Sudan, besides the sharing of some sparsely cultural similarities. Prof Meinhof argued that ‘the separation of Hill people from their Nilotic kinsmen must have taken place at a very early period.’ He based this argument on the ‘absence of Greek and Coptic loanwords from the Hill dialects.’ And he concluded that ‘the period at which the separation took place must have been anterior to the time when Christianity was dominant in the Nile valley, and that there is, therefore, no foundation for the view that the inhabitants of the Nuba Hills are descendants of fugitives, who left the Nile Valley in consequence of the Arab and Muslim invasion.’<sup>8</sup> Apparently, Prof Meinhof was not aware of the ‘inverse migration’ that has been presented by linguists and anthropologists, and which could have been the cause of the ‘absence of Greek or Coptic loanwords from the Hill dialects’.

While considering the origin and connections of the northern group of Nuba speaking Hamitoid (Berberine) dialects, a theory forwarded by Dr Ernst Zyhlarz should be viewed. He stated that the homeland of the Nile Nubians was Kordofan. They were a populous nation divided into many tribes on account of dialectical differences, and separable into two groups: A and B. during the last century BC, sections of group A left the homeland, some moving westwards and settling in Jebel Midob, while others made their way into the Nile, dwelling side by side with the Libyan population already there. Later on, the remainder of the group emigrated from Kordofan – that is, the Barabra, who later left the country, on account of a quarrel for the possession of a sacrificial pig, by way of Wadi al-Malik towards the Nile, occupying the oases on the Araba’ in Road while the majority made for the region of Dongola where they found the earlier migrants of their own group.

Towards the beginning of the fourth century AD, Group B, which so far had remained in the homeland, invaded the Gezira and put an end to the Meroitic Kingdom. This very ingenious

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<sup>6</sup> Wainwright, G A, *Some Ancient Records of Kordofan, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 28, 1947, Pages: 13-24; also see Herodotus, *The Histories*; The Penguin Classics: Edinburgh, 1954.

<sup>7</sup> Lukas, J, *Linguistic Research between Nile and Lake Chad, Africa*, Vol 12, No 3, Page 338, quoted in Stevenson, R C, *The Nyimang of the Nuba Mountains of Kordofan, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 23, Part I, 1940.

<sup>8</sup> Meinhof, C, *Eine Studienfahrt nach Kordofan (A Study Trip to Kordofan) (Abhandlungen des Hamburischen Kolonialinstituts*, Vol xxxv), Hamburg, 1910 in *Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 3, No 4, December 1920, Pages: 286-290.

argument is based almost entirely on linguistic evidence, and is applicable only to the most northerly Nuba – that is, those speaking a Hamitoid language. This argument suggests that the Meroitic Kingdom did suffer two invasions in a very short period. However, the co-existence of the two groups of Nuba – that is, red and black – in Meroë Kingdom does confirm the early migration of Group A. The presence of two distinctively physical characteristics implies that one group might have intermarried with foreign elements, possibly the Libyan population or the Blemmeys (Beja), and reproduced this uniquely visible colour, while the black group might just represent the new arrival to the Nile, if we are to believe in the Dr Zyhlarz's theory of 'origin and migration'.

The Daju, on the other hand, claim that they were originally a riverain tribe, living near Shendi, and they were brought to Dar Fur by Ahmed Dag, or Daj, from whom they derived the name Daju. Ahmed Dag settled at Meeri in Gebel Marra, and thence made an attack upon the Furogé or Fertit. The spread of Daju to Wadai in Chad and Southern Kordofan was due to, firstly, the tyrannical regime of their Sultan, Omer Kissifurogé: 'nicknamed Kissifurogé owing to him having auspiciously commenced his reign by inflicting a crushing defeat on the Furogé or Fertit', secondly, the infiltrations of the Bergid from the east; and thirdly, the emergence of Fur Sultanate in the fifteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Domville-Fife believed that 'the earliest settlers in Kordofan of whom there is definite record are Dagu, a race of negro-pagans, who came from the East during the eleventh and twelfth centuries; remnants of this tribe are still to be found near Abu Zabad, Jebel Dago and in the Messeria country, living in a state of vassalage to different Arab chiefs.'<sup>10</sup> Being a mere direction that cannot be restricted to a particular land, east could be eastern Sudan or even Ethiopia, bearing in mind that the currently existing international borders were created by the European powers during their scramble for Africa in the nineteenth century. However, in such a relation – like the terms Domville-Fife has related Daju to east, that is, between a people and direction – the information is deemed inadequate to rely on, especially when neither some time at which the movement took place nor space (land) is pointed out.

Legend adds that the Nyima (Nyimang) and Koalib, migrated and occupied Dilling, Dering, Kulur and Shiama (the latter three of which are now uninhabited), as well as the present Kolaib ranges. They were driven out from the four former Jebels by the fugitives from the North, who at Dilling and Ghulfan established themselves like a wedge between Nyima and Koalib. This is said to have been confirmed by a certain present-day similarity in language, customs and the appearance of the Nyima and the Koalib Nuba.<sup>11</sup> This episode is partially confirmed by one of the several traditions relating to Nyimang migrations. This tradition has it:

[T]hat a large band [of Nyimang] came to their present hills from a large village named Kwija, about seven days' journey by foot to the west, near Jebel Tima. When they came to their present home, they found the Hill Nubian peoples in possession, and established a place for themselves by warfare, wedging themselves in among them and driving the

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<sup>9</sup> Hillelson, S, *Notes on the Dago: With Special Reference to the Dago Settlement in Western Kordofan, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 8, 1925, Pages: 59-73; and Macintosh, E H, *A Note on the Dago Tribe, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 14, Part II, 1931, Pages: 171-177. Also see Barbour, K M, *The Republic of the Sudan: A Regional Geography*; University of London Press Ltd: London, 1961, Pages: 82-83. Also, see Nadel, S F, *The Nuba: An Anthropological Study of the Hill Tribes in Kordofan*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1947, Pages: 4-7.

<sup>10</sup> Domville-Fife, C W, *Savage Life in the Black Sudan*; Seeley, Services & Co Limited: London, 1927. Page: 19.

<sup>11</sup> Sagar, J W, *Notes on the History, Religion and Customs of the Nuba, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 5, 1922, Pages: 137-156.

Nubian[s] further out.<sup>12</sup>

Koalib, on the other hand, claimed to have been pushed westwards from the Khartoum area, probably in the wake of the destruction of the once flourishing Kingdom of 'Alwa and the ransacking of its capital, Soba, by the coalition of Arab tribes, under the leadership of 'Abda Allah Jamma'a, who coalesced with 'Amara Dungus to establish the Funj Sultanate in 1405. In considering these calamities, the ancient Nuba people found it necessary to divest themselves of all the geographical notions, as they probably had only the vaguest concepts of territory. Natural frontiers, such as mountains were, of course, familiar to them from the strategic point of view. These mountains provided natural defences for the Nuba against their enemies during the hostile periods of Turco-Egyptian, Mahdist and Anglo-Egyptian rules. Without these mountains and Nuba's resilience to survive against all odds, they would have been decimated as a people.

'Local mobility', on the other hand, was dictated by the callous vagaries of climate and natural disasters within the Nuba Mountains itself. One vivid example can be drawn from Temein area, which is characterised by a rocky terrain with very small tracts of fertile lands. The Temein people have been accustomed to practising terrace cultivation to grow their staple crops, but occasional drought and the occurrence of pests often lead to crop failure and ensuing famines. Traditional anecdote records that at sometime in the distant past, a section of Temein tribesmen decided to leave the area for an agrarian land elsewhere. They settled in Wali, Keiga Jirro and Teisei Um Danab.<sup>13</sup> There were some individual migrations in which escapees were either fugitives, adventure-seekers or settlers due to marriage.

Last, but not the least, is the local mobility of Tulishi tribe, which is depicted by the reputable myth of the 'curse of Kakio (Gargio)'. Kakio, so the legend has it, was an old woman from the Tulishi tribe in the western part of the Nuba Mountains. In the past, they used to live in the south-western part of the Nuba Mountains – particularly, in the Miri tribal area – and their migration to their current homeland was due to the 'curse of Gargio'. She was incensed by the grandfather of Tulishi tribesmen. The old woman used to live on a site where she was able to see whoever entered or left the village, besides she was revered for her miracles and spiritual authority as a witchdoctor, *Kujour*. The whole notion of *Kujour* is rooted in the medieval theology that when a person becomes a *Kujour*, their nature is fundamentally changed; they become a different sort of human being. As such, they have a particular authority which deserves, and expects, an unquestioning respect. Once upon a time, while the old woman was sitting in her court, she saw the grandfather of the Tulishi passing by, but, to her surprise, he did not salute her in the revered way the people were accustomed to do. Instead, he called her by her name. She regarded this behaviour as a personal insult to her prestige after which she became furious, and conspired to hurt and punish him in order to deter others from following in his footsteps. When the man returned home, he tried to drink water, but it was salty. He then attempted to eat, but the food was no longer tasty. In fact, his entire household realised that every food item had turned sour. He sought advice from village elders, and those with experience in *Kujour's* acts of magic; they told him that he was cursed for a heinous crime he committed by disrespecting the old Gargio. After ritual ceremonies, they beseeched the old woman for clemency, but she refused at the beginning. Eventually, she relented on a condition that he would have to leave the place. He then left with his family and marched in the opposite direction into

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<sup>12</sup> Stevenson, R C, *The Nyimang of the Nuba Mountains of Kordofan, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 23, Part I, 1940, Pages: 75-98.

<sup>13</sup> Jirro in Arabic can be translated as runaway people, because they had abandoned their original habitat and chose to settle somewhere; whereas Um Danab is a derogatory identification of this section of Nuba as their women used to adorn their waists with loincloths with tail-like appendages.

exile. While they were trekking, they could still find the food and drink bitter until they arrived at the Tulishi area. A breeze then blew from a mountain towards them. It happened to have been carrying a nest. When they looked towards the mountains, they saw a few birds, which indicated that the area was an inhabitable place. The water was potable, and soon they realised that it was the location which was recommended by Gargio as their new settlement. When the grandfather climbed the mountaintop, he found that it was a plateau on which all means of life were abundant. He and his family lived there ever since, and his children reproduced into a number of villages. The mountain became known as Tulishi Mountain, and the tribe as Tulishi – literally, *tala asi*, purporting in the Tulishi language that he who touches fire. The legend is so pervasive in both Miri and Tulishi cultural heritage and in the unwritten history of the area.<sup>14</sup>

This legend is supported by the fact that Tulishi and Miri are categorised as sub-divisions under Talodi-Korongo class of language group. This group has class-prefixes of a different pattern and a concord system on a separate basis from the non-classes. And Tulishi to Korongo ‘is a large scattered group, stretching from Tulishi in the west right across the south of the Nuba Mountains to Kurundi near Eliri in the south-east, which belong together linguistically, and, although these hills – as a whole – have no self-recognised unity, the different sections have certain acknowledged interconnections like the links in a chain – for example, Tulishi with Keiga and Miri, Miri and Kadugli with Teis, Fama and Teis with Korongo and so forth.’<sup>15</sup> It may be concluded that recurrent natural disasters, wars, slave raids, frequent illnesses and high mortality also played their part in speeding up the splintering of communities; for they took place among people who attributed misfortune to human failures or human malice.

It is not very profitable to search deeply for the grains of truth in the sands of legends, which cover the early traditions of the Nuba people, but it is sometime interesting to conjecture how and why the legends were invented. To this must be added the fact that every nation has its own share of wisdom and literature. Judging by the Kingdom of Teglai, it would seem a matter most incredible if people with talent and foresight enough to establish kingdoms and invent social systems of their own had been without historical facts as to how and when they first made their appearance in the country they now occupy. But they have a history, both oral and traditional; and, therefore, a basis for a literature. Although the origins of the Nuba people still defies precise analysis, they are, in part at any rate, the native inhabitants of Sudan, who in their travels, nationally or locally, had for centuries battled their way over the mountains in search of permanent homes. In the process, the sense of social solidarity, internecine warfare and the vintage conservatism, which remained for centuries as the outstanding traits of the Nuba people, were undoubtedly developed. By exhibiting the distinct cousinship of aboriginal stock, the Nuba have been variously influenced by intruding religions, Arabic language, non-Nuba tribes and by geographical conditions.

The above examples of regional, national and local mobility form a collective community of ethnic groups and sub-groups often known as the Nuba tribes. Colson argued that ‘[t]he common classification of African political units as “tribes” downgraded the extent of political development in many regions [in 1870] and implied that African politics were of a lower order than those of Europe.’<sup>16</sup> She further elaborated that ‘[t]he term “chief” for a ruler or ranking official produced

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<sup>14</sup> *Al-Ayam*, Thursday, May 4, 2006, No 8491.

<sup>15</sup> Stevenson, R C, *The Nuba People of Kordofan Province: An Ethnographic Survey*; Graduate College Publications, Monograph 7, the University of Khartoum: Khartoum, 1984, Pages: 13-14.

<sup>16</sup> Colson, E, *African Society at the Time of the Scramble* in Gann K H and Duignan, P (editors), *Colonialism in Africa (1870 – 1960), Volume One, The History and Politics of Colonialism (1870 – 1914)*; Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1969, Pages: 27-65.

much the same effect.<sup>17</sup> She asserted that:

In common parlance, 'tribalism' usually refers to a continued allegiance to units smaller than the new states created during the colonial period. 'Tribe' is used for both political and non-political groupings, even though these may have none of the characteristics usually connoted by the term, which variously conveys the sense of a people under its own government, with a homogenous language, occupying its own territory and having a common history, but too few in numbers to provide the base for a complicated governmental structure. A 'tribe' is too small to be a 'nation'. It shares with 'nation' the implications of common language, common culture and common descent.<sup>18</sup>

However, the notion of a 'tribe' in itself, and as referred to by the Sudanese politicians literary and scholastic circles, infers a scornful concept of primitive, uncivilised people. In ancient Britain, Scotland was based on a tribal system, whose tribes were called the Picts. They used to paint themselves blue with woad to protect them – as they believed – against evil spirits, and to act as a camouflage during their nocturnal raids against one another. A few years later, their system was developed into a clan system. A pre-Roman Italy was populated by Villanovan invaders from Bohemia and Hungary, and dominated by Sabines, tribes of Indo-European stock, and Etruscans. These tribes were referred to as barbarians and savages by the Romans: a reference that would not have been accepted by these ethnic groups. However, Rome's domestic history during the two hundred years that followed the fall of monarchy consists largely of the struggle of the orders, whereby the plebeians sought protection from, and then equality with, the patricians. At the same time the richer plebeians wanted political and social equality with the patricians, who monopolised the senate and magistracies and controlled religion and law. For a long time, it was necessary for one of the priests to be present in court to see that the proper formularies of action were observed with strict verbal accuracy. This was, of course, an enormously powerful weapon in the hands of the patricians, since they alone were members of the priesthood. The plebeians demanded that the laws should be written and made known to all. In the heat of their struggle, the plebeians set up a new organisation of their own. Where the patricians had their two consuls, the plebeians had their two tribunes. Where the older state had its Senate and Assemblies meeting by groups called 'curies' and 'centuries', the plebeians had their Council meeting in 'tribes'.<sup>19</sup> This is an elaborate example of two communities involved in internal tussle with one another, and the members of the lower caste, who were falling into a state of virtual serfdom, being called 'tribes'.

Another word which is generically related to tribe is tribute. A tribute (from Latin *tributum*, contribution) is wealth one party gives as a sign of respect or, as was often the case in historical contexts, of submission or allegiance. It also incorporated certain aspects of regulated trade in goods and services between the parties under a contractual relationship formed upon duress, and based upon the potential for threats if specific performances did not occur. A tributary or tributary state is a state, colony, region or people who pay tribute to a more powerful, suzerain state. Various ancient states, which could be called suzerains, exacted tribute from areas they had conquered or threatened to conquer. In case of alliances, lesser parties gave tribute to the dominant parties as a sign of allegiance and for the purposes of financing the agreed projects – usually raising an army. The term may also be used on religious tax used for maintenance of temples and other sacred places. The Islamic caliphate introduced a new form of tribute, known as '*jizya*', which differed significantly from earlier Roman forms of tribute. According to Patricia Saeed:

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Stobart, J C (4<sup>th</sup> Edition, edited and revised by Maguinness, W S and Scullard, H H), *The Grandeur That was Rome*; book Club Associates: London, 1971.



What distinguished *jizya* historically from Roman form of tribute is that it was exclusively a tax on persons, and on adult men. Roman ‘tribute’ was sometimes a form of borrowing as well as a tax. It could be levied on land, landowners and slaveholders, as well as on people. Even when assessed on individuals, the amount was often determined by the value of the group’s assets and did not depend – as did Islamic *jizya* – upon actual head counts of men of fighting age.<sup>20</sup>

*Jizyah* – or, *jizya* as a form of tribute – is often foisted by Muslim jurists upon non-Muslims either after the defeat of the latter in a holy war or in an Islamic state as protection money. This money is levied from them humiliatingly as revealed by the Qura’an, the holy book of Muslims: ‘Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the Religion of Truth, from among the People of the Book, until they pay the *jizyah* with willing submission.’<sup>21</sup> This translation may not give the exact meaning, but it is as an approximate interpretation as it has been put. Some Muslim jurists have affirmed that not only is *jizya* considered protection money, but it is also aimed at humiliating the Jews and Christians to conversion to Islam. Islam’s options for the People of the Book are either to embrace Islam, pay *jizya* or face war. As for the heathens, they have only two choices: either to adopt Islam or encounter hostilities. Undoubtedly, the Nuba – as some of them are non-Muslims – would have been subjected to *jizya* exaction in a truly Islamic state, which will be an infringement on their basic human rights, besides denying them of egalitarianism or equal opportunities that all the citizens of the state should enjoy.

### III. The Nuba languages: Who speaks what?

According to Dr Kurgatt, ‘language is the carrier of people’s culture.’ In other words, a people is recognisable as such only if it has a distinct language, and losing a language is not only tantamount to losing the worldview, but is also the loss of information that may not exist in other tongues. There are other languages which uniquely code knowledge of the natural world in ways that cannot be translated into a major language. So the loss of language is bad not only for linguists, but also for all humanity. This is all true because languages highlight the roots, philosophy, culture, heritage and communication of a tribe or ethnic community – or a speech community. Vernacular, or mother tongue, helps people to trace and retain their ancestral roots, cultures, heritage and traditions. And this helps promote unity among a community. Indeed, evidence shows that people understand things better if taught in their first language. It is now obviously interesting as to why Prof Meinhof suggested – in his book, *Eine Studienfahrt nach Kordofan (A Study Trip to Kordofan)* – that ‘it would be worth while to make languages like Nubian and To Bedaue [Beja language] the medium of instruction in the districts where they are spoken instead of promoting the use of Arabic.’<sup>22</sup> As there is great need to preserve the folklore and history of all tribes, whether traditional or based on research, vernacular languages must be protected from being extinct, moribund or endangered. A language is endangered if it is no longer learned by children or, at least, by a large part of the children of the community, according to the Unesco Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger of Disappearing, published in 2001. The key factor is the number of speakers of a language. Those languages spoken by large groups are unlikely to be endangered. Small languages are threatened by the more aggressive

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<sup>20</sup> See [www.wikipeadia.com](http://www.wikipeadia.com) under the subject of ‘tribute’.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Ali, A Y, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur’an*; Amana Corporation: Maryland, 1992, Page: 445.

<sup>22</sup> Meinhof, C, *Eine Studienfahrt nach Kordofan (A Study Trip to Kordofan) (Abhandlungen des Hamburischen Kolonialinstituts, Vol xxxv)*, Hamburg, 1910 in *Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 3, No 4, December 1920, Pages: 286-290.

surrounding languages. Conjugate

Language distribution is inversely proportional to the occupied land, and directly proportional to the population density. Consequently, a few languages are spoken over a very wider area, which tends to be the area of lowest population density. It is believed that:

The Jos Plateau in Nigeria and the Nuba Mountains of Sudan are perhaps the most concentrated areas of linguistic diversity in Africa. In both, villages only a few miles away from each other may speak totally different languages, and the speakers of each language may sometimes number only a few hundred. Such complexity suggests that a very long history in which the languages have diversified, and as both areas are hilly and easy to defend, it is clear that they have been used as areas of refuge where the earlier inhabitants of a region have been able to defend themselves against later arrivals, and so to preserve languages which have disappeared on the lower plains.<sup>23</sup>

The Nuba have such a variety of languages, and have been so isolated one from another by the nature of the country, by their custom of keeping as far as possible to their own hills, thus each community has tended to develop on its own lines and to produce its own customs, thus tribal traditions and *esprit de corps* are fostered. These languages are derogatorily referred to by Arabs and arrogant elites as *rutanas* – meaning, disparagingly, jargons. Paradoxically, what Arabs don't recognise is the fact that their Arabic language is a jargon to non-Arabic speaker as well. The fact that these languages are not written does not qualify others to degrade them and those who speak them. Though there may have been a few attempts during the colonial period – that is, during the Condominium Rule (1898-1956) – to record some of these languages and classify them according to their grammar, syllabus and phonetics using Latin or Roman characters, but only a very limited success was achieved. And some of the Nuba people can now read the Bible and traditional folklores in their own vernacular languages.

Nevertheless, the Nuba languages can be classified into three groups: Firstly, the 'Nubian' languages of northern Kordofan. Seligman suggested that the resemblance noted over half a century ago between Berberine (Mahass, Sukhot, etc.) and the languages of Kordofan applied, in fact, only to those spoken by a limited number of northern communities, and subjected to foreign influence for a considerable period; albeit Prof Westermann found it as impossible for these Nubian or 'Hamitoid' languages to have arisen as a result of foreign, largely commercial, influence. Among their distinguishing features are the remains of a tonic system and the occurrence of grammatical gender. Secondly, pre-Hamitic, 'Bantoid' or semi-Bantu class. This category – that is, Bantoid – possesses noun classes and alliterative concordance, and grammatical changes in both nouns and verbs which are produced by prefixes. The prefix languages employ prefixes (??), which recall similar formations in Ful and the Bantu languages. For example, *calenge jote* (Elliri), meaning 'a good club', is *malenga mote*. The third class of Nuba languages, which occupies the intermediate area between the northern Nubian and southern Bantoid, is typically Sudanic with plurals formed by adding suffixes, and with few prefixes.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *The Languages of Africa, Africa Today*, London, 1996, Pages: 7-10.

<sup>24</sup> Seligman, C G and Seligman, B Z, *The Nuba, in Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan*; Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd: London, 1932, Pages: 366-412. Also see Newbold, D, *Some Links with the White Anag at Gebel Haraz, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 7, No 1, 1924, Pages: 126-131; MacDiarmid, D N, *Notes on Nuba Customs and Language, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 10, 1927; MacDiarmid, P A and MacDiarmid, D N, *The Languages of the Nuba Mountains, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 14, Part II, 1931; Stevenson, R C, *Linguistic Research in the Nuba Mountains – I, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 43, 1962, Pages: 118-130; Stevenson, R C, *Linguistic Research in the Nuba Mountains –II, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 45, 1964, Pages: 79-102; Hair, P E H, *A Layman's Guide to the Languages of the Sudan Republic, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 47, 1966, Pages: 65-78; Bell, H, *An Extinct Nubian Language in*

The Sudanic languages are characterised by occurrence of the sounds *gb* and *kp* and by the use of suffixes and post-positions in forming the plural and other grammatical categories. For instance, *mung*, purporting ‘water’ in Temein language, becomes *kimunic* in plural, thus acquiring a prefix and suffix. The speakers of Sudanic dialects are said to be connected with the Nilotic negroids like the Dinka and Shilluk. The people of Tulishi call themselves, collectively, *Gatulishi*. The singular is *Datulishi* (male) or *Mdatulishi* (female).

Linguists are especially interested in the rules of grammar that seem common to all languages, because they provide important clues to how the mind works. For example, the distinction between singular and plural forms of a word can be pointed out – such as, ‘cat’ and ‘cats’. Trying to figure out the deeper rule that allows this distinction, a linguist who knew only English might come up with two possible explanations. One that is built into the brain: there is a basic binary distinction between ‘one’ and ‘more than one’. Alternatively, there might be in-built distinctions between one subject, two, three or more. In English, it is impossible to tell which of these processes is at work. But by studying many different languages, linguists find the common factor is the binary distinction.<sup>25</sup>

Apart from the Zulu of South Africa, African cultures are hardly hegemonic. They are not known to be aggressive, and they do not force conversion of weaker cultures either. Massaquoi ascertained that ‘to neglect these [African or non-African] languages on the ground that some day they must die, is to starve them to death, and thereby commit a philological crime.’<sup>26</sup> He passionately argued that:

All tribes and all languages should be allowed and encouraged to live until the world has heard what is buried in their bosom, until their special mission has been fulfilled among the great agencies shaping the destiny of mankind, until they have exchanged thoughts with the West, which may be of mutual advantage. The Vais may have a song to sing, a parable to utter, a prayer to offer or a law to interpret – all of which may be necessary elements in the progress and enlightenment of mankind. To suffer a single language to die – therefore, language through the medium of which alone the soul of humanity is reached – is to rob the world of its most brilliant jewel, its most effective instrument for the uplifting and [the] consolidation of races.<sup>27</sup>

The Sudanese Native Languages Centre, which was established in 1993 in Omdurman, is a successful move by expertise from the Nuba Mountains and Southern Blue Nile. As a result of assistance from the Summary Institute of Linguistics, this group of experts laid the basis of founding the centre. Until 2002, the number of linguistic groups affiliated to the centre was 67 languages. It is specialised in researching and promoting the indigenous Sudanese languages and cultures, and is aimed at assisting the Nuba Mountains region to write its languages and cultures

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*Kordofan, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 54, 1973, Pages: 73-80; Stevenson, R C, *The Present Position of Research in the Nuba Mountains Languages, Directions in Sudanese Linguistics and Folklore*, Sudan Studies Library, No 4, 1975, Pages: 58-62; Stevenson, R C, *The Nuba People of Kordofan Province: An Ethnographic Survey*; Graduate College Publications, Monograph 7, the University of Khartoum: Khartoum, 1984; Bell, H, *The Nubian Languages: An Annotated Bibliography*, compiled by Angelika Jacobi and Tanja Kummerle with a foreword by Peter L Shinnie, *African Linguistic Bibliographies*, Vol 5, Cologne: Rudiger Köppe Verlag 1993 in [www.hf.uib.no/institutter/smi/sa/5nubian.html](http://www.hf.uib.no/institutter/smi/sa/5nubian.html); and Bell, H, *The Nuba Mountains: Who Spoke What in 1976 (Internet)*, 3 – 5 December 1995 in [www.hf.uib.no/smi/sa/tan/nuba.html](http://www.hf.uib.no/smi/sa/tan/nuba.html).

<sup>25</sup> Kleiner, K, *Language deaths ‘bad for us all’*, *New Scientist*, March 4, 1995.

<sup>26</sup> Massaquoi, M, *The Vai People and their Syllabic Writing*, *Journal of African Society*, Vol 10, 1910-11, Pages: 459-466.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

to avoid their loss. Through its annual, linguistic courses and workshops, the centre has trained a number of cadres to lead linguistic programmes among their tribes; it published curriculum books, set up the cultural syllabuses of different native tongues and extended its plans to promote awareness among tribal groups to form linguistic committees in order to teach their languages. As a result, around 15 languages centres were opened in various suburbs of Omdurman and regions. Its futuristic goal is to move from the simple concept of languages centre to the Institute of Linguistics, which will be furnished as an academic institution with scientific curricula on linguistics where students can study for two or three years to be granted Diploma. They will then act as scholars destined to develop the Sudanese languages and cultures in the future.

#### **IV. Religious belief and practice among the Nuba**

A settled community often tend to satisfy themselves with two demands: firstly, to pander to the bodily desires of food, leisure, sex and reproduction; secondly, the search of answers for the spiritual questions of faith. In this respect, religion has always been central to illiterate community folks as it tends to provide explanations for some natural phenomena, and their occurrence is normally ascribed to God's power as in every God-fearing society. People tend to have so many a reason to believe in a power beyond them. They see the wonders of nature – the sun, moon, stars, rain, wind, thunder and lightning; they see grass become green and grain ripen; human and animal offspring come into the world; men sleep and enter the realm of dreams and nightmares in which some part of them seems to leave their bodies; they die and leave the world for regions unknown. There is much that is pleasant, and yet much that is disastrous – drought occurrence, crop failure, the death of children immaturely, the outbreak of epidemic and the destruction of houses and cattle by lightening. With some people, culture takes the place of religion, but it is far commoner to find religion taking the place of culture: it did so with the Hebrew, and it lately did so to a greater extent among the Muslims.

One of the pioneers in the Nuba studies was Nadel, who studied the social and economic structures of the Nuba tribes he visited during the years 1938 – 1941 on behalf of the colonial Government. For practical reasons, he divided the tribes into cultural groups, using three criteria for this purpose – namely, kinship structure (paternal or maternal line), the structure of clan organisations and presence or absence of a certain shamanistic spirit-possession cult. Applying a 'Social Symbiosis' concept, Nadel understood this as 'form of social segmentation (more especially, clan-structure) in which every section assumes certain specific duties (religious or political) on behalf of community at large.'<sup>28</sup> As stated by Nadel:

[T]he religious life of northern tribes in the Nuba Mountains is dominated by a belief in spirit possession which crystallises in special mediumistic cult, best described as shamanism. Like the classical shamanism in North America and Siberia, the spirit possession in the Nuba Mountains centres round certain individuals capable of forcing themselves into a state of trance and mental dissociation which is interpreted as a visitation of the spirit. The same physical phenomena accompany this mental state – convulsions, yells, uncontrollable motor reactions suggestive of severe nervous disorders. Again as in typical shamanism, dreams and visions play an important part as symptoms announcing the vocation of the future shaman. Unlike the American and Asiatic possession priest, however, the Nuba shaman does not utilise as fully the stimulants of music and dance in order to produce his ecstatic state, but relies more on his power of concentration and

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<sup>28</sup> Hawkesworth, D, *Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 29, Part I, 1948, Pages: 137 – 138. Also see Fortes, M, *African Affairs*, Vol 47, No 187, 1948, Pages: 120 0 122; and Nadel, S F, *The Nuba: An Anthropological Study of the Hill Tribes in Kordofan*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1947.

autosuggestion.<sup>29</sup>

In dealing with men, a shamanistic priest uses an intermediary known by various names. The most popular name for shaman in the whole Nuba Mountains Region is Kujour. Mohamed Haroun Kafi, a Nuba politician, intellect and writer, describes Kujour as a popular sacred spiritual person who conducts many spiritual deeds. Depending upon tribe's language, a shamanistic priest, for instance, is called *abidi* in the Nyimang, *boil* in the Temein and the Dilling languages; *kuni* in Kwalib and *ta Musala/Masala* in Kadugli. Therefore, *Kujours* and priestesses take the chief parts in the celebrations of popular festivals known in the Nuba Mountains as Sibir(s) on which occasion they display their priestly functions in a most distinctive manner. Among some Nuba tribes, the *Kujours* combine the functions of spiritual and political chiefs. Other tribes have a king or a chief as well as *Kujours*. Domville-Fife, who visited Dilling, Fassu (Nyimang),<sup>30</sup> Temein and Julud in 1925-1926, gave a full account of the institution of *Kujour* as the beginning of his study of the Nuba spiritualistic beliefs, life and customs.<sup>31</sup> Later on, this holy institution of *Kujour* has become the subject of so many a study, including a description of a ceremony by which a Nuba chief became a *Kujour*.<sup>32</sup> Another typical episode in which a Nuba man became a *Kujour* is vividly portrayed by *The Kau Tragedy*. Highlighting the cultural ceremonies in the area, illiteracy, impoverishment and drought, *The Kau Tragedy* is a novel, which is centred on a young man called Hirbu, from the Nuba Mountains. Hirbu, so the novel runs, prepared himself physically and psychologically to announce his betrothal to a local girl named Sara. In the day of his engagement, Hirbu decorated his face with coloured material, put a copper bracelet on his wrist, took his axe-like stick, put on a leopard skin around his waist and hang a necklace - full of glittering beads - around his neck.

As soon as the *Kujour* (Musa) emerged from his hut, Hirbu sat in front of him amid the trilling of village women surrounding Sara whose body was transformed into an artwork of beautiful colours, and anointed with nice-smelling oil. The *Kujour* performed the rituals in an unintelligible language. There was a moment of silence. He sipped some milk into his mouth, and sprayed on the faces of the bride and bridegroom. He used a small knife to cut a gash on Hirbu's wrist and did the same on Sara's. He then put one wound on another until both bloods were mixed together. There was more trilling from the women, and yelling from the crowd after which the *Kujour* declared the betrothal of the couple.

Before the conditions became conducive to the wedding of the couple, Musa (the *Kujour*) suddenly died. No sooner had the *Kujour* died than Hirbu realised that he was haunted by a strange feeling. He felt that his body was lighter than it used to be. He also went into a dream-like state, feeling that he became a different person, and he did not sleep the night before. Instead, he kept trembling. He remained in this situation for seven days. In the last night, Hirbu saw, while sleeping, a mysterious thing: his mother giving birth to himself as normal as the

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<sup>29</sup> Nadel, S F, *A Shaman Cult in the Nuba Mountains, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 24, 1941, Pages: 85-112.

<sup>30</sup> Fassu, one of the Nyimang hills, has been renamed al-Faus, as part of the creeping Arabisation that is engulfing the Nuba Mountains. This is because Fassu, which purports fart in Arabic language, is deemed offensive.

<sup>31</sup> Domville-Fife, C W, *Savage Life in the Black Sudan*; Seeley, Services & Co Limited: London, 1927, Pages: 225-233.

<sup>32</sup> It was Chief Sernoub of Tendia in the Nyimang Group of Nuba hills who became a *Kujour* in 1930. See Hawkesworth, D, *A Description of a Ceremony by Which a Nuba Chief Became a Kujur*, *Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 23, Part II, 1940. Nadel, S F, *The Hill Tribes of Kadero, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 25, Part I, 1942, Pages: 37 - 79. For more accounts on *Kujour*, see Kafi, M H, *al-Kujour: Dor al-'Arrafa al-Ifreiqiyya fi Jibal al-Nuba*; al-Shareif Academic Bookshop: Khartoum, July 2000.

women do. He came pushing from his mother's womb after she rubbed her stomach with scented oil as she was told while he was still a foetus. Hirbu woke up and told his mother about the dream. The villagers also heard about the episode, and believed him because they held premonition that as soon as the *Kujour* died, the new *Kujour* would be born. A day after day, Hirbu was filled with the feelings that he was transformed into a different person. He became quiet, silent and sticking to himself. He chose to lead the life of a recluse even from Sara, his sweetheart.

Then the inspiration seized the would-be priest; he fell into a kind of fit or trance, caused, they say, by the appearance of ancestral spirits before him, and in the course of it, he uttered wild and whirling words. The people of Kau began descending upon his house, blessing and welcoming him as their new spiritual *Kujour*. But the poor man, according to the author of the novel, did not know that he became a *Kujour* in a difficult time because he had to prepare himself for a long, tumultuous journey. He had to - since that moment on, and according to his people's traditions - think how to bring rain to them. Then came the day the people of Kau, including Hirbu, had waited for so long. Hirbu had to ascertain his capability, achieve his people's dream and bring them rain, but he did not live up to their great expectations. As the days passed by sadly, the drought consumed all that left of streams. The people of Kau could not think of anything else rather than departure. Hirbu's life was shattered by displacement from his village to a city where he got lost in the wilderness of urban community.<sup>33</sup>

As we will see in the next pages, Nuba customs and modes of thought revolved about this oracular character of *Kujour* and the significance of a shrine for votive offerings, which they differ according to the occasion. According to Driberg, '[i]t should be observed, however, that while in a sense these gods have personal functions, they also, in part, owe their validity to their inspiration by the Power-principle, and the prayers are as often as not addressed to them, not in *propria persona*, but as intermediaries between man and the absolute Power – a function of intercession, which brings them more into line with the saints of Christian hagiology rather than with pantheistically independent deities.'<sup>34</sup> Explaining the fundamental difference between religion and magic, Hawkesworth put it:

Though some *Kujours* occasionally practise thaumaturgy, they are essentially tribal priests, and herein lies the distinct difference between them and the witch-doctors and the rainmakers of the African tribes. They are, in fact, the mediums or mouthpieces of the Ancestral Spirits, which are supposed to seize hold of them on certain occasions.<sup>35</sup>

For the Nuba people, there is much to elevate or inspire in their religions. As to the virtue belonging to them, it is portrayed in their reverence and strict sense of duty towards them. 'Religion' means 'binding obligation' to the Nuba; its source is fear of the unseen; its issue is mainly punctilious formalism. And they undoubtedly believe that the gods would punish the disrespect, and a worse thing would befall them, because an obvious breach of etiquette has been committed. This is due to the fact that the Nuba people are intensely religious, and one of the primary functions of their religion is the formulation of rules and standards of social behaviour.

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<sup>33</sup> The text is summarised from the Khartoum-based daily *al-Wifaq*, February 20, 1999, from a novel written by Abbas Mustafa Sadiq. The novel – in addition to *A Village on the Nile*, also written by the same author - made him earn a precious prize from the German Broadcasting Voice.

<sup>34</sup> Driberg, J H, *The Secular Aspect of Ancestor-Worship in Africa*, Supplement to the "Journal of the Royal African Society," Vol XXXV, No CXXXVIII, January 1936, Pages: 5-6.

<sup>35</sup> Hawkesworth, D, *The Nuba Proper of Southern Kordofan, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 15, Part II, 1932, Pages: 159 - 199.

Throughout the Nuba Mountains, the worship – or, rather reverence – of ancestral spirit, upon which tribal life and the life to come are established, finds expression in a reverence for some symbols of fertility, including stones. The connection between stones and the principle of fertility is universal throughout the Nuba Mountains over which, from time to time, an offering of ‘*merissa*’ (beer) or ‘*dihin*’ (grease) is made in the belief that an increase of crops, and flocks or herds will follow. No doubt that Nuba beliefs, founded primarily upon reverence for generative idea, might be described broadly as instincts refined by a code of ritual firstly established by more intelligent forebears. The origins of Nuba beliefs and ceremonies are for the most part unknown to the present generation, and, as a result of contact, principally, with new beliefs, the indigenous religion has become static and so degenerate.<sup>36</sup> In the Nuba Mountains region, the particularistic relationship of the Nuba to their entrenched culture is that they collectively regard themselves as the ‘rightful bearers’ of such unique culture, which tends to be foremost in their minds. But this innate and distinctiveness/uniqueness of culture may subside when they reside outside the Nuba Mountains. This mode of change in adhering to their ethos is due to the evolutionary forces of modernisation and direct exposure to urbanisation.

In general, African religions stress the values placed on kinship, the significance of membership in local territorial communities and the morality of people to refrain from committing crimes within the societies they live. They also recognise the moral significance of primary economic activities upon which the society rests. In this aspect, they neither had quarrel with Islam nor with Christianity. Nonetheless, both Islam and Christianity are opposed to some aspects of African religions despite the fact that all of them recognise the continued existence and importance of the spirits of the dead.

However, some of these Nuba African religious beliefs have gone through a dramatic change. These changes are dictated by two factors: time span and the level of exposure to Arab and Islamic influence emanating from the centre through trade transactions, migrant labourers to and from the Northern Sudanese cities or serving in the army. In the early 1900s, there was hardly any significant change in the practices of these customs, but, as time went on, changes began to evolve with tribes near the predominantly Arab and Islamic spheres being intensively affected. A moment of dynamic change in the other sphere of social identification appeared with the advent of the Anglo-Egyptian rule in the Sudan (1898 – 1956). Perhaps the most striking feature of the *bayel* cult – that is, the shamanistic priesthood – was the abundance of *bayel* priests. It was proved beyond doubt that the number of *bayel* priests had increased considerably during the aforementioned period, and the people of Koalib associated this growth of spirit possession with the arrival of British rule – some rather vaguely, others in elaborate rationalisations. There is indeed sense in this correlation of the advent of the Government with the cultural readjustment entailed in the political changes produced precisely the mental conditions under which *bayel* belief and *bayel* magic would thrive. Ascribed to as was taking place in two ways: the change, which affected the tribal life of the Koalib, broke down the security of traditional beliefs and modes of life, creating new desires and new frustrations. This fostered unstable and neurotic mentality, which found an outlet in the shaman cult. And secondly, the cultural changes caused an increase in offences, which demanded an increasing measure and the ministrations of *bayel* priests.<sup>37</sup> Undoubtedly, education and media contribute immensely to cultural change, and since culture in itself remains a dynamic entity rather than a static one, people adopt new ideas, embrace other religions, learn foreign languages and so forth through education and mass media, especially in the era of globalisation. Consequently, a change to a particular part or the whole

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<sup>36</sup> Bell, G, *Nuba Fertility Stones, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 19, Past II, 1936.

<sup>37</sup> Nadel, S F, *A Shaman Cult in the Nuba Mountains, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 24, 1941, Pages: 110-112.

system of material or non-material culture can take place through gaining, loss or the modification of cultural segments.

## V. The characteristics of the Nuba customs and traditions

This part deals with a number of oral concepts and practices, which control and guide the characteristics of Nuba customs and traditions, with special focus on the chief incidents in their life that include birth, passage to adulthood and death. All these Nuba customs, traditions and economic activities, including child christening, age passage, obsequies, agricultural ceremonies and harvest are usually marked by some appropriately religious ceremony. Some of these festivals are worthy of a brief description, for they are the authentic traditions of the Nuba people despite their variations from one tribe to another, or from one coterie to another. However, such a popular heritage contains wisdoms as well as material elements, beliefs and festivities that are fully accepted by the Nuba societies as social and moral norms. They are initiated by communities' gurus with the aid of unintelligibly phrasal expressions and special symbols performed by community members and passed on from one generation to another.

Like the indigenes of Beja, Nubians in far northern Sudan, the tribes of Dar Fur and/or Southern Sudan, the Nuba people have their own characteristic names and traditional methods of nomenclature.<sup>38</sup> In some parts of the Nuba Mountains, 'there are only six-place names for the boys and six for girls, in order of their arrival into the family.'<sup>39</sup> There are sometimes eight-place names in Ka Golo tribes – for example, Dameek, Miri, Keiga, etc. (males): Kuku, Kafi, Tiyo, Tutu, Kuwo, Keki, Tisso/Tosso, Kanno; (females): Kaka, Tatto, Koche/Kossay, Kikki, Kuwo (pronounced differently from that of a male), Keki, Tisso/Tosso, Kanno). After the eighth child is born, the list has to be recommenced and the vacant place name will be given, depending on whether the new arrival is a boy or a girl. Consequently, the ninth child will be called Kuku *Mirayray* (the second or junior), or Kaka *Mirayray* etc. Several variations are also possible for the one place name, and any one can use any variation at any time. In many African cultures, as confirmed by Driberg, '[t]he commonest system of family nomenclature is to give a son the name of his grandfather or of one of his grandfather's contemporaries.'<sup>40</sup> It is believed that this persistence of the old method of naming by alternate generations within the family may be taken as evidence of this, and a belief in reincarnation is the logical background to a social theory, which links up the ancestors with the living in so intimate a chain of causality. They are interested in the welfare and prosperity of their living descendants, just because they will one day re-inherit what they have transmitted.<sup>41</sup>

A typical example of the socially practised rituals can be shown by Nyimang circumcision and age-grade initiation among other Nuba tribes whereby the initiates are often fêted and feasted by the community.<sup>42</sup> The meaning of circumcision to the Nyimang tribe is the initiation to manhood

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<sup>38</sup> See Kafi, M H, *al-Kujour: Dor al-'Arrafa al-Ifreiqiyya fi Jibal al-Nuba*; al-Shareif Academic Bookshop: Khartoum, July 2000, Pages: 131-149. Also for the nomenclature among the Nuer people in Southern Sudan, see Evans-Pritchard, E E, *The Nuer: A description of the modes of livelihood and political institutions of a Nilotic people*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1940.

<sup>39</sup> Pickworth, M, *It Came to Pass*; The Book Printer, Globe Press: Blackburn, 1992, Pages: 94-95.

<sup>40</sup> Driberg, J H, *The Secular Aspect of Ancestor-Worship in Africa*, Supplement to the "Journal of the Royal African Society," Vol XXXV, No CXXXVIII, January 1936, Page: 12.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, Pages: 14-15.

<sup>42</sup> See Kronenberg, A, *Nyimang Circumcision, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 39, 1958, PP 79 – 82; and Kenrick, J W, *A Nuba Age-Grade Initiation Ceremony: The Sibirs of the Tail and of the Shield, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 26, 1945.



and its physical fulfilment, that is, marriage. Therefore, it plays the more significant role in the age-grade system, and it is deeply rooted in the religious concepts of ancestral spirits, fertility and so forth. Usually carried out one year before marriage, circumcision among the Nyimang people is performed annually during the four-year period of the fourth grade of the age-grade system. The age of the circumcised can vary between twenty and twenty-seven years, and this wide range is due to the rule that brothers must belong to different age-grade classes. It is governed by the customs that people circumcised together should never wrestle together; that they must help each other; that they must greet each other by embracing knees; and that they must use, after circumcision, new names as expression of a specially social relation or identity among them.<sup>43</sup> Initiation is also practised by the Temein people. Here the initiates are subjected to more or less similar ceremonial customs to those of the Nyimang.<sup>44</sup> As detailed by Kenrick, Nuba age-grade initiation ceremonies were held at Jebel Talodi, including age-sets which applied only to the Nuba of Talodi, Tasomi, Tadukha, Tum-Tum and Tata, all villages on Jebel Talodi, and no persons from other Nuba sections, related or otherwise, took part in the initiation ceremony under description, though similar ceremonies were held elsewhere among other Nuba tribes.<sup>45</sup>

Like most African societies, the Nuba maintained continuity through certain basic institutions, with the family lineage being at the hub of such institutions. Besides the lineage, the Nuba give importance to another grouping based on descent. This is known as clan. Each clan has a name, sometimes derived from a natural species. Usually, clans are exogamous and marriage with a fellow clansman is forbidden.<sup>46</sup> Unlike the *umma* in Islam, society can be understood as the 'existence of people, organisations, patterns and relationship.'<sup>47</sup> But 'the Muslim term *umma* can be viewed as the understanding of a society that comprises group solidarity, unity of Muslims, submission to God and commitment to Islam.'<sup>48</sup> In African term, society is 'seen in terms of groups, one larger than the next, like concentric circles or eddies – the family, the village, the clan and the tribe – with the family in the centre of the basic social unit; the units were an integral part of one social organism and all were held together, not only by initial contract or by choice, but by the biological bond of kinship and the immanent spirit of the tribe.'<sup>49</sup> Each clan within the tribe has its own reservoir within the tribal reservoir, and each family has its own within the clan reservoir. To make this system function efficiently, the 'theory of functional interdependence of parts' can be applied. The idea is that progress in one unit has beneficial effects for another, within small units as well as big ones, and they sufficiently develop to absorb the benefits in a two-way system of 'receiver and donor'.

In most areas of socio-economic life, however, the religious practices are so intertwined with customary rituals to the extent that no differences could be observed. Where agriculture is the basis of subsistence, or perhaps everywhere, men recognise their reliance upon the earth to which they attribute mystical powers. The pervasive universal power of earth is often invoked by living communities at local shrines which represent men's attachment to particular sites. Regular annual rituals are celebrated for agricultural cycle, whereas occasional rituals deal with

<sup>43</sup> Kronenberg, A, *Nyimang Circumcision, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 39, 1958, PP 79 - 82.

<sup>44</sup> Stevenson, R C, *The Nuba People of Kordofan Province: An Ethnographic Survey*; Graduate College Publications, Monograph 7, the University of Khartoum, Khartoum, 1984.

<sup>45</sup> Kenrick, J W, *A Nuba Age-Grade Initiation Ceremony: The Sibirs of the Tail and of the Shield, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 26, 1945, Pages 311 - 318.

<sup>46</sup> See Stevenson, R C, *The Nuba People of Kordofan Province: An Ethnographic Survey*; Graduate College Publications, Monograph 7, the University of Khartoum: Khartoum, 1984.

<sup>47</sup> Khaleefa, O H and Ashria, I H, *The Concept of Culture and Social Sciences: A Cross-Cultural View, Encounters: Journal of Inter-Cultural Perspectives*, Vol 1, No 2, September 1995, Pages:53-73.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Onuoha, B, *The Elements of African Socialism*; Andre Deutsch Limited: London, 1965, Page: 32.

emergencies. For example, *Sibir al-Lubiyya* (the Festival of Beans), which is manifested by celebrations and festivities associated with the early ripeness of vegetables in the homestead fields. The event is marked by an orgy of free food and ‘*merissa*’.<sup>50</sup>

Kadugli and Miri have the Festival of Antelope, which is also held by the Nuba of Buram and those of Tira al-Akhdar. It is held at the end of the rainy season – that is, before the dry season. Originated in Korongo hills, the festival’s purpose is to ensure the grain harvest. The rain-making ceremonies, on the other hand, may be held if the rains fail in the *Rashash* (the early rains). Actually when the rains fail to fall, the rain-making rituals take place asking God for mercy. It can happen whenever there is dry spell during the rainy season which could adversely affect the crops. It seems, therefore, that the rain-making ceremonies may be brought into play as emergency measures, but the Festival of Antelope may be considered as a display of adequate moisture during the summer season and successful crop season, which secured good crop harvest.

Kambala Festival is another ceremony of great importance in the Nuba Mountains. In the language of the Kadugli Nuba, the word *Kambala* apparently denotes an age-grade ranging from about 10 to 25-year old males being involved. It is also the name given to the type of dance, which may be danced at any time, employed at the biggest annual festival and is applied also to the festival itself. In Arabic, the festival is referred to as the *Sibir al-‘Aysh* or, more specifically, *Sibir al-Nagad* of Early Sorghum/Dura (*Sorghum bicolor* (L.)). Kambala is held once a year, generally starting sometime in September, in the season in which the rains are closing, and when the early quick-maturing sorghum has ripened and is fit for consumption. It lasts twenty-eight days, a complete lunar cycle, in each community. The festival is said to have originated in the village Tillo of Kadugli hill called Saburi many years ago. When the people of principal Kadugli hill, of Hagar al-Mak, first wanted to celebrate this festival, their King, Mak Ando (the grandfather of Mak Mohamed Rahhal), obtained the first ceremonial whip from Tillo. Tradition has it that the first Lord of the whip in Tillo was one Lambi of a clan called Hadad. The Kambala is held in all the villages of the Kadugli hills, Miri Barra and Miri Juwa. Certainly, the festival’s function is a two-fold: thanksgiving to God; and to secure the vigorous survival and maturation of the growing assets of the community: in humans, stock-animals and crops. In fact, the festival has three definite aspects: the youths comprising the Kambala age group and initiates to it are ceremonially beaten, the sorghum is ceremonially involved and the age-grade wear horns of bulls, cows or both.<sup>51</sup>

The Festival of Fire or the Festival of Pipe, called *Sibir al-Nar* or *Sibir al-Bokhsa* in Arabic, is held in December – that is, the time of harvesting when grain is being brought into the granaries and, at the time, the flames can be seen at night for miles meandering their way up the hills. Held after the Kambala when the harvest is ready for storing, the fire is thrown up to ward off disease, and, therefore, it is believed to drive away any curse or epidemic coming to them. Others just say it is merely a sign for other hills to start the same festival.<sup>52</sup> Celebrated in a different style, the Festival of Fire is practised in Kurtala at the end of agricultural season – that is, in November of every year. In this custom, big fire is lit up and a bundle of green grass is thrown into it, then the burnt grass is used to whip friends and families to exorcise evil spirits. If a young man succeeds to hit a girl with this burnt grass, it means that she is his future wife and the same goes to girls as well. This is all administered by the *Kujour*, and the month in which all these activities take place

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<sup>50</sup> See Tracey, C B, *Merissa, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 8, 1925.

<sup>51</sup> Corkill, N L, *The Kambala and Other Seasonal Festivals of the Kadugli and Miri Nuba, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 22, Part II, 1939, Pages: 205 - 219.

<sup>52</sup> Corkill, N L, *The Kambala and Other Seasonal Festivals of the Kadugli and Miri Nuba, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 22, Part II, 1939, Pages: 205 - 219.

is regarded as a holy one because people tend to forgive and bless one another, plenty of food and drink is served and traditional music instruments are played, including lyres and drums. This event is considered a public holiday, and it is accompanied by a dance for three days consecutively.

There are other ceremonies such as the Festival of Painting (*Sibir al-Jeer*), which is mostly performed by men. It is highly popular and favoured by the Nuba of Kau-Niaro hills in the eastern hills. Practised by men, painting ritual is considered to be the most stylish one, and is coincided with ritualised wrestling. Women, on the other hand, practise the Festival of Scars (*Sibir al-Washam*). The latter is done by sharp tools, needles or the blades of knives to make some permanent drawings on women's bodies in order to make them look beautiful. Those cultural facets and elaborate scarification are also meant to show some kind of courage and stamina, and as a treatment for some illnesses. Special scars can also be cut on the stomach of a pregnant woman provided that she is conceiving a legitimate child. The Nuba, however, are proud to go naked to show either their scars or paintings. As there is no some fixed canon in matters of taste, some Nuba standard of beauty, which shall be beyond question or criticism, is irreprehensible even in eager, restless times of constant experiments and veering fashions. So whatever may be the philosophical basis of aesthetics, it is undeniable that a large part of Nuba idea of beauty rests upon habit. Therefore, for thousands of generations of Nuba people, it has been agreed to their habit of aesthetically beautiful, and the proper use of this is to keep it as a compass in the cross-currents of fashion. This will play a crucial role in our daily lives all the time in an entertaining and rewarding fashion, reminding us of the diversity of our humanity.

The Nuba are also fond of self-adornment as they take to beautifying themselves with highly imaginative jewellery from materials such as colourful beads, leather, wood, roots and feathers. A peculiar feature of the Nuba culture is their art of face and body painting, the mode of physical and facial decoration, which contains elements of both classical and modern painting as well as tattooing which they perform for ritual reasons.<sup>53</sup> During the ceremonial celebrations, the Nuba are accustomed to painting their bodies based on their own aesthetic traditions, making temporary and sand mosaics. Certainly, these works are visually catchy: with their bold, diagrammatic compositions, finely co-ordinated grey or white colours and dotted patterns, they appeal to onlookers.

One section of the Nuba people, which has attracted a wide range of arts amateurs, film-makers, anthropologists and scholars, is the remotely scattered hills people of Kau-Nyaro and Fungor. The Nuba of these hills have been a subject of photography and study for a variety of reasons. Firstly, they are not far from the White Nile course, which can render their area accessible through the Nile route or by trekking for a few miles on hinterland. Secondly, and as an aboriginal people of the old stock, these Nuba have distinguished themselves with the practice of certain customs and adherence to unique traditions, including adorning and decorating their bodies with a wide variety of different objects that may or may not have intrinsic value. In a sense, their paintings feature images related to their cultural items, but that have then been subsumed into their powerful aesthetic, a mix of straightforward drawings and distinctively expressive symbols of grey objects. As a result, this artistic blend is realised in a style that carries objectivity and the grand vision which can be subjectively demonstrated by other forms of art – such as, sculpture. It has been acknowledged that:

Every individual among the south-eastern Nuba, covered by [James Faris's] study, is

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<sup>53</sup> See Riefenstahl, L, *People of Kau*, London, 1976; Riefenstahl, L, *The Last of the Nuba*, London, 1973; Faris, J C, *Nuba Personal Art*; Gerald Duckworth & Company Ltd: London, 1972; and *The Hidden Tribe*, *The Sunday Times Magazine*, February 10, 2002, Pages: 46 – 49.

involved in this art tradition, of decorating the human body, right from birth. All participate in its creation and all participate in the critical appraisal, which has kept it within the bounds of its own cultural tradition.<sup>54</sup>

A typical example of death rituals includes the people of Daju 'celebrating the mourning rites observed on the anniversary of the death of' one of the leading *omdas* (chiefs), called Kuku Hamdan. In one of these mourning celebrations, '[t]he head *Kujour* would occasionally break into strange gestures and yawns, which were regarded as mysterious manifestations of her superior functions, while the rest of the women were bowing before her, and reverently handing her some of the ornaments, which Daju women wear.'<sup>55</sup> The celebration was marked by men enjoying *merissa* and meat, followed by the whole party dancing under the baobab tree. Believing that by marching out of the village death was removed from the village and thrown into the forest, the whole party, according to traditional custom, maintained that everybody should run without stumbling or stopping and without looking backwards. Should anyone have the misfortune to stumble, fall or look backwards, he was sure to die during the coming year, an apprehension which threw everybody into great terror. Having left the village in a westerly direction, they returned from the west, running, supposedly, away from death and trying to reach their houses as quickly as possible, expecting there to find perfect health. According to Daju burial customs,

[They bury] their death in the yards of their houses, each man in his own *hosh*. An exception is made in the case of their sultan, whose body is buried in the forest far away from the village. The reason given for this is that the sultan oppresses his subjects by heavy fines and exactions, and, if he were buried inside the village, the seeds of his evil-doing might spring up and settle on his successors.<sup>56</sup>

Classical ceremonies associated with the deceased are described by N B H, which the Korongo Nuba, with the full involvement of *Kujour*, practise.<sup>57</sup> Another example is the description of *Sibir al-Maut* (the Festival of Death) at Fungor by Monteith in which the last respect was paid for a dead woman. It was dominated by wailing women, wild somersaults, sticks and drums beating.<sup>58</sup> The third example is a burial ceremony, which was reported by Nobbs. It involved the obsequies associated with the burial of Mak Lima at Dungor, some seven miles south of Heiban. Mak Lima had been the chief of Dungor for 20 years, but had lived in Attoro following a military expedition by the Condominium authorities against Dungor (Uru).<sup>59</sup> He was buried together with five goats of the same size, which were killed by beating with a heavy stick, water and grain to provide adequate food and company for his journey in the after-life. This act indicates their belief in another life after death. In many African cultures, death is regarded as a passage that reunites an individual, who has gone home to live for ever, with the ancestral spirits. In their belief that those who have gone away are not dead, Africans believe that the link between the departed (dead) and the remaining (living) continues. This is why when rituals are performed, Africans, including the Nuba, give a portion of what they are going to consume to the departed souls by pouring it on the ground where the ritual is performed. Due to courtesy and respect for the departed, the Shona

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<sup>54</sup> El-Tayib, G, *Faris: Nuba Personal Art, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 53, 1972, Pages: 218-219; also see Faris, J C, *Nuba Personal Art*; Duckworth: London, 1971.

<sup>55</sup> Yunis, N, *II. Nuba, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 5, 1922, Pages: 205-207.

<sup>56</sup> Yunis, N, *II. Nuba, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 5, 1922, Pages: 205-207.

<sup>57</sup> N B H, *A Nuba Wake, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 8, 1925, Pages: 184 - 186.

<sup>58</sup> Monteith, W N, *Sibir al-Maut at Fungor, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 31, Part II, December 1950, Pages: 307 - 308.

<sup>59</sup> Nobbs, K J, *The Burial of A Nuba Mek at Dunger, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 21, 1938, Pages: 325 - 327.

Africans of Zimbabwe would refer to the deceased euphemistically as saying 'is no more', 'is gone', 'has fallen asleep' and others.<sup>60</sup>

In some African communities, 'not all human beings can become ancestors in technical sense.'<sup>61</sup> This is because '[n]either those who died prematurely [children], nor those who have been outlawed or executed by the community [wizards and other malefactors], can be reincarnated as distinct personalities.'<sup>62</sup>

In the last century, the Nuba were held captive to superstition and witchcraft, and they lived in constant fear of the evil spirits. Superstitions exist concerning fatal diseases, which will attack those who cross the frontiers of diacritical limitations. Therefore, 'it would seem probable, however, that the Tira mother today may carry her axe of iron as a prophylactic, consciously or unconsciously, against the demons of puerperal fever or deficient lactation.'<sup>63</sup> During the season of the year called 'Ramaicha', each generation of men over five days beat the younger generation. This ritual was believed to keep the spirits happy and so ensure good crops. At another time of the year, men used to thrash any women, except for those three or more months pregnant, so the spirits would bless them with many children. These practices were held among the Moro.<sup>64</sup> Some of Nuba customs which existed among villages all around Heiban Mountain was the sacrificial killing of a goat and the blood of the slaughtered animals was smeared above the doorways of huts. And that a particular and familiar friend could not be called by his proper name, but only 'Aurika'. Similarly, brother-in-law should not be called by his proper name; he must be called 'Kwair'. With regard to father-in-law, mother-in-law, son-in-law and daughter-in-law, the term 'Ngwuma' for all these 'in-laws' relationships is always used, and never the proper name. Once upon a time, there existed some food taboos in which the people believed that by eating some of the forbidden articles, they would certainly become lepers. Another custom which once existed among a certain section of the Nuba, and one of the many reasons why the population did not increase as rapidly as it should, was that of burying infants with their dead mothers. In some cases, the father could resist the custom, and the child was given a chance of life. But if the father of an infant were to die, the mother would keep the child inside the hut for two months for fear that the spirit of the father might want to take the child. If the child did not yet learn to walk after a considerable period of time, the native practice was to seat the infant on a flat rock; and, for a company, he would be given some large black ants. The infant would quickly learn to use his organs of propulsion.<sup>65</sup> This conjectures the relationship between fear and response, the instant reaction of the infant to walk is the result of the casual effect of fear.

One of the Nuba's ancient custom which the Condominium Government was to deal with was the lynch law administered by the mob against the presumed 'rain-stopper'. This tradition was

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<sup>60</sup> Chitando, E, *Survival Knows no Bounds: A Study of the Participation of Blacks in the Death Industry in Harare*, *Journal for the Study of Religion*, Vol 27, Nos 1 and 2, Pages: 65-78; Pennington, D L, *Time in African Culture in Asane*, M K and Asane, K W (editors), *African Culture – The Rhythms of Unity*; Greenwood Press: London, Pages: 123-139 all quoted by Sesanti, S, *Manifestation of African Islam: A Case Study of African Muslims in Kwa-Nobuhle Township in the Eastern Cape*, *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol 29, 2009, Pages 33-58.

<sup>61</sup> Driberg, J H, *The Secular Aspect of Ancestor-Worship in Africa*, Supplement to the "Journal of the Royal African Society," Vol XXXV, No CXXXVIII, January 1936, Page: 12.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, Page: 20.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Corkill, N L, *Cretan Parallels in the Nuba Mountains*, *Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 26, 1945, Pages: 167-170.

<sup>64</sup> Black, K, *Saints and Patriarchs*; Bethel Ministries: Brisbane, September 2001, Page: 53.

<sup>65</sup> MacDiarmid, D N, *Some Nuba Ideas*, *Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 7, 1924, Pages: 125-126.

widely known among all Nuba tribes. For example, the Tira tribesmen killed one about 1914, and all the Government had done was to take one or two of the offenders and put them into the army. They had killed another one in the 1920s, forcibly restraining two Government police while they did so, and the Government had made them pay a number of cows as blood money. These alleged 'rain-stoppers' were beaten to death with blows on the body. Using sticks, the mobs avoided striking the head believing that anyone doing so was liable to be the victim of the next thunderbolt. The authorities had to put up with this issue through the question that 'when a man commits an act which he firmly believes will have a certain effect, knowing that effect to be anti-social, and that effect comes to pass, while a sceptical twentieth century Government declines to agree with him that the effect was the result of his act, has he committed a tort, a felony or nothing at all?'<sup>66</sup>

Bestiality was a common feature of societies in the past. The pre-Islamic communities in Arabia used to bury their daughters alive for fear of shame, or poverty, believing that these girls might bring to their families through illegitimate sexual relations. In fact, they still commit culpable fratricide or filicide in the name of 'honour killing' should a sister or a daughter commit adultery or give birth out of wedlock. The ancient Egyptians used to sacrifice young girls to the Nile to ensure good flooding and a prosperous year of harvest. Punic religious rites – that is, votive offerings made to Baal Hammon by the people of Carthage before the razing of the city by the Romans in 146 BC – have revealed cases of the hysterically ritualised savagery of child sacrifice. The Igbo in Nigeria was a brutal society that oppressed women, sacrificed humans and even abandoned newborn twins as some kind of evil. The Tutsi in Rwanda used to anoint the sacred drum with Hutu testicles: a practice which was not only obscene, but it was also offensive. In the Sudan, Nuers' tom-toms used to be 'decorated with skulls, and having human bones inside so that they can be used as rattles...'<sup>67</sup> In the nineteenth century west Africa, humans were ritually sacrificed to pander to the whims of witch-doctors and reigning kings. Some communities across the world were even cannibals. Brutality certainly occurred, but it was the nature of all societies. Looking at any society fully, there can be none that can be excused on all these excesses.

The social and economic life of the Katla people, who live in their village located south-west of Dilling, is characterised by a number of ceremonial rites, which are related to agriculture, annual seasons, marriage and funeral burial. These customs and traditions are presided over by the spiritual leader of the tribe. It is worth noting that the tribe has two leaders: one is the *Kujour* whose role concentrates on various aspects of social customs; another is called *mak* (kinglet) whose role is confined to legal and administrative affairs. Being cultivators *par excellence*, Katla festivals, like most of Nuba groups, are very much connected to sowing and harvest, though at the same time, they are clothed with religious significance. Due to the importance of agriculture in their livelihood, the Katla community reserve a great deal of ceremonies for it, starting with rainfall. In a communal gathering, the village elders and women converge to *Kujour's* compound, offering sacrifices and pouring libation to God to bless the agricultural season. The rituals are repeated in mid-autumn and during weeding period, but special ceremonies are reserved for harvest. Before the start of harvest ceremonies, which is considered a public holiday, no crop can be reaped until all the customs associated with it are exhausted. They include the meeting of the entire community at *Kujour's* homestead, with each arrivee carrying a he-goat, a sheep, a hoe, a coil or a bracelet made of copper. The goat and sheep are offered to the *Kujour* in recognition of his economic power and social status among the tribe, whereas the coil, which adorns spear's butt, symbolises courage and the tribe's capability to defend itself against its

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<sup>66</sup> Owen, T, *Lynch Law in Eastern Gebels, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 23, 1940, Pages: 195-198.

<sup>67</sup> Domville-Fife, C W, *Savage Life in the Black Sudan*; Seeley, Services & Co Limited: London, 1927. Page: 57.

perceived enemies. As for the hoe, it indicates cultivation as an essential means of economy among the Katla tribesmen. The bracelet, on the other hand, represents their women and their noble role in the Katla society. Great feast is then served, drinks are consumed profusely and prayers are said as thanksgiving to God for the success of the harvest season; requests are made for the prosperity of crops in the next season. Whoever does not abide by these social customs and norms will be severely punished by a fine of a he-goat, a few bracelets and springs to be handed over to the *Kujour*. The Katla people believe that breaking the rules of this custom could infuriate God, and, by so doing, it will cause the failure of crops in the next season.<sup>68</sup> The divine relation between agricultural stages and religious practices shows the essentiality of both agriculture, as a material means, and religion, as a spiritual end, in the annual lives of the Nuba people. These customs inherently cut through the beliefs of the living to the dead souls of ancestors to invoke their blessings. This had been a subject of studies by colonial administrators and scholars.<sup>69</sup>

Corkill drew parallels between the Cretan customs and those of the Nuba. He ascribed these to a number of factors. He noted that the passage of the Egyptian soldiers from Kordofan and Dar Fur, provided by Saeed Pasha at the request of Napoleon for the army of Emperor Maximilian in Mexico in 1863, and the troops of Sudan Defence Force in North Africa during the Second World War (1939-1945) played a big role in this relationship. He also suggested 'that cultural influences from ancient Crete has possibly survived among the Nuba, for the Nile Valley is a natural road to the Mediterranean; there was a well attested traffic in commodities between Egypt and "Ethiopia;" we have seen that there is a record of black troops having been employed in Minoan Crete; it has long been claimed that certain of the Nuba are now well south of their former homes, and there have been parallels drawn between practices among the ancient Egyptian and the Shilluk of the present day.'<sup>70</sup> Taking the Nile Valley as a channel of transport and communications, the Nuba played a crucial role in the history of east Africa, especially during the turbulent events of the nineteenth century in Uganda.<sup>71</sup>

Now, a number of the above-mentioned traditions, customs and rites are either watered down or have become obsolete and decadent. And the once dominant mood of celebrations has been transformed into that of anxiety, resulting in the prevailing tone of a more reflective, nostalgic bent – as if rumination upon the past might indeed offer a valid refuge from the uncertainties and worries of the present, let alone the future. It is a recognition of the value of reflection and contemplation, as the present imposes its own priorities with each passing day. But part of this human appeal derives from its ability to balance realities and emotions in poised equilibrium while grasping confidently for future, so the misgivings are forever being swept aside by hope. Following the modern way of life, the gradual loosening of the grip of traditions is a reality. In spite of this, the surviving ones – whether gained by experience due to acquaintance with the elders or through 'innate principles', continue to thrive as the identifiable characteristics of Nuba culture.

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<sup>68</sup> *Al-Ayam*, Thursday, December 15, 2005, No 8375.

<sup>69</sup> See Bell, G W, *Nuba Agricultural Methods and Beliefs, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 21, Part II, 1938.

<sup>70</sup> Corkill, N L, *Cretan Parallels in the Nuba Mountains, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 26, 1945, Pages: 167-170. Also see Kirk, R, *The Sudanese in Mexico, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 24, 1941; and Thomas, H B, *Notes on the Sudanese Corps in Mexico (1863-1867) and on Fort Magungu, Uganda Journal*, Vol 8, Part I, 1940, Pages: 28-32.

<sup>71</sup> March, Z and Kingsnorth, G W, *An Introduction to the History of East Africa*; Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1965.

## VI. Nuba entertainment: music and dance

The African element in the Sudanese music is an undisputed reality, and it forms part of art, politics and cultural identification in the Sudan.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, the Sudanese culture, in which music plays a central role, has been a subject of an inconclusive debate among the literary elites: whether it is an Arab culture, an African one or a hybrid of the two cultures. Driven by Arab chauvinism and Islamic adherence, the advocates of Arabism cite Arab language and Islam as pivotal elements in the Sudanese culture, while they ignore the other proponents of culture, including, Christianity, African religions, vernacular languages, customs, traditions and even, more crucially, African blood. Thus, in actuality, the element of diversity must be implied here. Pandering to the diversity of Sudanese culture, ‘the voodoo party brew of Sudanese/Egyptian Collective Rango’ is a typical example. This is depicted by *Bride of the Zar*, which is a fabulously irreverent, vivacious collection – highlighting, including Major – frisky rhythm, the jubilation of Henna Night and Baladia Wey. These songs bring together rabble-rousing exhortation, mostly delivered by the band’s front-man/dancer, Tutu. They combine Islamic nostalgic melodies: it has a deeply unusual yet witty and life-affirming blend.<sup>73</sup> Music and singing, albeit they spawned popular admiration, had acquired negative conceptualisation within Arab sphere in the past. This was due to the fact that music was associated with slaves, prisoners of war and maidens, either as a means of expressing latent liberation mood in order to relieve their oppressed souls of the yoke of bondage, or as part of their mundane duties to entertain their masters and their guests. In fact, not only did Prophet Mohamed recognise that musical expressions would enrich Islamic spirituality, but he also encouraged the *Ansars* (Medinese) when he expressed his observation of their love for music.<sup>74</sup>

In the African world, on the other hand, the situation is entirely different. It is a matter of fact that in African culture, music or song forms the core of social, political economic life – joys, sorrows and successes are captured in song. In other words, singing helps as therapy. In fact, ‘music is, in African culture, inherent to the essence of being human and... integral to the experience of birth, death, rites of passage, religious ritual and work.’<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, singing and dancing are an inseparable part of the lives of Africans. They recite songs when they are working on farms, attending sport, celebrating the death of a very important person, herding their cattle, grinding grains, thrashing millet, winnowing sorghum or engaging in some sort of socio-economic activity.

Nuba songs and music, with their beautiful imagery, are no doubt based upon an African foundation. But they are also distinctively Nuba. These songs portray the rustic life of villagers, affectionate relations of youths, satirical lyrics and, as we shall see later, paeans in times of warfare. Singing can also take place during funeral services, and by singing dirge-songs and dancing, the deceased is usually given a suitably flamboyant send-off after the coffin is laid to

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<sup>72</sup> See Abusabib, M, *Art, Politics and Cultural Identification in Sudan*; Elanders Gotab: Stockholm, 2004.

<sup>73</sup> *Metro*, Friday, April 23, 2010.

<sup>74</sup> Al-Qaradawi, Y, *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam*; Kuwait; I I F S O, 1993 in Sesanti, S, *Manifestation of African Islam: A Case Study of African Muslims in Kwa-Nobuhle Township in the Eastern Cape*, *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol 29, 2009, Pages 33-58.

<sup>75</sup> Impey, A and Nussbaum, B, *Music and Dance in Southern Africa: Positive Forces in the Workplace* in Lessem, R and Nussbaum, B (editors), *Sawubona Africa – Embracing Four Worlds in South African Management*; Zebra Press: Sandton, Pages: 227-256 in Sesanti, S, *Manifestation of African Islam: A Case Study of African Muslims in Kwa-Nobuhle Township in the Eastern Cape*, *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol 29, 2009, Pages 33-58. Also see Peter Graff, D, *Pride and Prejudice: Songs of Civil war*, *Time*, November 3, 1997, Pages: 50 - 51.



rest. The Nuba also practise different forms of dancing. *Kirang* (drum) dance is popularly performed in almost every part of the Nuba Mountains in which the participants stamp on the ground very hard with their feet. Dancers of all ages can take part in such a performance in which girls sing, clap and dance, whereas men only dance. For hours at night, with perspiration pouring off them, boys and girls will jump, run and stamp their feet in the most vigorous dances conceivable. The stamping of feet on the ground is in unison that sounds like galloping horses. This is especially the game for moonlight nights. The dancing is the accompaniment of rhythmical singing. Most of these dances are picturesque and graceful.

*Kaysa* is a war dance that is practised by the Moro tribe in the southern hills in which two contenders from different clans wrestle. Before the wrestling commences, the two knights approach the ring, dancing among vociferous applause from fans. Each clan tries to raise the spirit of its knight by singing and dancing. There, also, does exist *Bukhsa* (gourd), which is a group dance whereby every one tries to mimic the sounds made by a certain bird. All instruments are made from gourds; men and women dance to the rhythms of these sounds. Dancing troupes often dress in colourful costumes, decorated with ornaments. They tend to sing and dance, while accompanied by drumbeats, which can move into a climax of regulated steps and rhythm. Enthusiastic onlookers cheer, clap and sway to the rhythm of traditional songs and dances. Performers with animal horns and hides demonstrated traditional dances and wrestling. As male dancers gracefully move their muscled legs and arms, the women twist their supple waists providing a feast for the eyes of hundreds of onlookers.

## **VII. Sports and leisure activities among the Nuba**

Cultural sports are popular in the Nuba Mountains. The chief sports indulged in by the Nuba are shooting, hunting, beagling, wrestling and so forth. As to the point, Nuba sport has numerous tasks, and one of them is to strengthen the character of the Nuba people, imbuing them with fighting spirit and steadfast camaraderie necessary in the struggle for their existence. More to the point, these athletics are the ultimate sporting fusion of mind and body: an intricate set of laws and norms involving tactics, strategies and requiring the broadest range of athletic ability and good manners. One example of these sports is wrestling in which the team of wrestlers come from different hills, all dressed in garish colours, with bodies painted white. The crowd form a circle around the combatants, who go through a stylised challenge, strutting past the insatiable crowds and basking in the melodies and applause of girls. The idea is not to hurt your opponent, but just to throw him to the ground, thus proving the superiority of your tribe. When a wrestler is thrown, the crowd surge in as the victor's mates hoist him onto their shoulders. He will be carried around in victory, followed by a group of dancing cheer leaders, young girls dressed in beads, their bodies glistening with oil. Wrestling, as an organised sport, is confined to the southern Jebels, where all the strongest young men are regularly trained, and develop magnificent physique. Villages challenge other villages, each cutting into the field some ten or twenty wrestlers, while the remainder of the population turn out to watch the result. The style is catch-as-catch-can, and the contests are usually fought out with scrupulous fairness and in a very sporting spirit.

Other Nuba sports include: bracelet fighting (Kau-Nyaro) and stick fighting (Moro and Masakin Twal). Among the manly sports indulged in by the Nuba, perhaps the most interesting is the bracelet fighting of Jebels Nyaro, Kau and Fungor – that is, those isolated hills some thirty miles west of Kaka Tijariya area. All young men have to take part in the bracelet fighting for a number of years as part of their training for manhood. Fights take place soon after the harvest or at any other time by arrangement and are always between different hills. Only hits on the head count,

and a win is determined on points by the referees. Also, only men of an inflexible cast of character are prepared to take these risks. Apparently as fatally dangerous as it looks, only one death was reported in twenty years. This must be due to two reasons: the difficulty of hitting with the inside of the wrist and the excellence of the refereeing.<sup>76</sup> The bracelet fighting and stick fighting have witnessed a decline because of their fatal nature. The SPLM/A in the Nuba Mountains had also intervened and prohibited or regulated this sport due to its ferocity and the danger it poses to the athletes' lives.

The Moro Nuba, who live between Kadugli and Talodi, are famous for stick fighting. These sticks should not be confused with stone-knob ones. The stone-knob stick, though it cannot be classified as a throwing-stick, is thrown with success at rabbits and rats when parties of youths hunt small game by firing dry grass.<sup>77</sup> Nonetheless, the stick fighting is also one of the sports which is practised after the harvest season as a thanksgiving tradition, and it is completely prohibited during the cultivation season, because it entices the youth to abandon work and spend their time on such an activity. It is carried out between different tribes or villages. Despite some basic protection of heads and other parts of bodies which are vulnerable, this 'ritualised violence' has led to a number of casualties, and is, therefore, banned by the authorities. Now, it is only performed in a theatrical way, and on special occasions.

Spear throwing was another form of fatal sports that was practised by the Korongo Nuba until quite recently. In this sport:

'One man throws and another takes the shock on his shield: a round plate of giraffe or elephant hide, mounted midway on a shaft decorated with goat hair. The spear thrown, the thrower in turn takes his shield, and his opponent throws. There may be four or five couples in the arena throwing in all directions, and the skill shown in attack and defence was equally remarkable.

'Indeed, there is no room for mistakes, and, should a man fail to interpose his shield in time, the penalty is very likely his life. Happily, though fatal accidents are not unknown, they are very rare...'<sup>78</sup>

A very popular game, which is played at certain seasons of the year, is a kind of unmethodical hockey. Hockey-like sticks are used, and usually the hull (protective covering of a palm tree seed) is used as a ball. The contest is carried out between two contending villages. This quasi-hockey game lacks two things: the proper rules of engagement and commitment to health and safety at play. In other countries, a similar game is played with the full protection of the vulnerable parts of players' bodies. For example, in a cricket game, players wear helmets with grills, gloves, arm and shin pads, and jock straps to protect heads, hands, arms, legs and genital parts, respectively, against injuries.

The above-mentioned games are characterised by a violent nature to the extent of fatality at some rate. But there are other games and leisure activities, which require quick mental reckoning to play it well, that the Nuba boys engage in, including pebbles tossing and playing with short

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<sup>76</sup> Kingdom, F D, *Bracelet Fighting in the Nuba Mountains, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 21, 1938, Pages: 197-199. Sumba is one of the few islands in Indonesia where the community still follow its ancestors' rituals, such as the Pasola ceremony, where hundreds of charging horsemen battle with spears, sometimes resulting in injuries and death (*Metro*, Friday, November 12, 2010).

<sup>77</sup> Beer, C W, *Notes on the Manufacture of Nuba Stone Knob Sticks, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 8, Part II, 1935, Pages: 293-297.

<sup>78</sup> N B H, *A Nuba Wake, Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol 8, 1925, Pages: 184-186.

wooden rods. The former, which is played in various forms all over Africa, involves two boys sitting on the ground opposite to each and tossing pebbles into small holes in the earth. Five pebbles are placed into each of the five little holes. Then from any one of the holes all the pebbles are taken and, working either to right or left according to which holes the pebbles are taken from, one pebble is put in rotation into each hole. The opponent will do the same, until the end of the game. The winner of the game is the one who secures the greater number of pebbles, and the stones in the holes at the end of rows are known as cows and goats.

### **VIII. Assault on the Nuba culture**

During the Anglo-Egyptian rule in the Sudan (1898-1956), the colonisers, who were pre-occupied with the implementation of law and order, were not enthusiastic to meddle with Nuba cultural practices. For the British authorities, they took things as they came and made the best of them with as little as possible to their pre-existing system and preconceived ideas. This explains why the machinations of the Government were cheaply, but efficiently, run. Only Christian missionaries, with some limited success, tried to rebuke the Nuba for some of their customs and traditions as they thought of them as pagan or non-Christian. Such an approach to root out these customary practices was pursued by subtle proselytisation. But the nationalist governments employed various aspects – on a populous level as well as an official one – to erode the Nuba culture, hasten its demise and accelerate its assimilation into the state-sponsored one – that is, the Arabo-Islamic culture. Thus, the ‘de-Nubanisation process’ took different forms which were all aimed at reaching the same conclusion: Arabisation and Islamisation. These aspects comprise education, mass media, discrimination and prejudice against all that is Nuba. As to when a language is taken as a basis for nationalism, the salient objective will be the uprooting and assimilation of other nations. By virtue of their isolation, the Nuba have kept hold of their distinct culture, and developed separate identities and more than 50 languages. The cultural orientation of the Nuba people into Arab and Islamic norms started before and after Sudan’s independence in 1956. But it is always said:

[Leni Riefenstahl’s] portrayal of Nuba lifestyle certainly opened up [Southern] Kordofan to anthropologists, photographers and documentary filmmakers. It also provoked a clampdown by Sudan’s predominately Muslim authorities, for whom the Nuba way of life was either an embarrassment or an affront to their religious sensibilities. Successive governments in Khartoum have tried to clothe the Nuba and do away with their ‘primitive’ ways.<sup>79</sup>

In 1972, the Nimeiri Government instructed the local authorities in the Nuba Mountains to deny services to those Nuba who reared pigs and went naked. A group of local Baggara Arabs took the law into their own hands, and slaughtered tens of thousands of Nuba pigs, thus denying them of a means of staple food. Like American Indian schoolchildren earlier this century, the Nuba children were not allowed to speak their native tongue, and they were severely punished by whipping if they broke this unwritten ‘code of conduct’. Instead, they were forced to speak in Arabic.<sup>80</sup> School pupils were given Arab names to supersede their Nuba ones at the behest of teachers. Not surprisingly, ‘the Nuba tribes are defined by Arabic names which have derogatory meanings – such as, “the dogs”, “the uncircumcised” or “poor/wretched”; but the Nuba are now trying to recover their African tribal names.’<sup>81</sup> Although the coercion of people to adopt a foreign language through education, trade, media, civil service and communication may spread the

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<sup>79</sup> Block, R, *Then and Now*, *The Independent on Sunday*, March 28, 1993; Pages: 14 - 16.

<sup>80</sup> *Al-Hayat*, Friday, August 31, 2001, No 14047.

<sup>81</sup> Pinnell, H, *Nuba pressed to give up religious tolerance*, *Church Times*, March 14, 1997.

respective language, it could have an adverse effect on the concerned language itself. The Roman history has it that Latin had remained the alternative language for educated people, the medium of international communication and even for diplomacy, until French gradually took its place. But what is the cause of eclipse of Latin language? One cause, perhaps, is to be found in the misuse of other languages by the pedagogues and philologists in school and examination-room. But another cause is discoveries about Greek civilisation, which have confirmed the opinion that Latin culture is in the main secondary and derivative. Passing through a stage of revolt against classicism, convention and artificiality, Greek culture is neither classic, nor conventional nor artificial, but Latinism is still apparently subject to all these terms.<sup>82</sup>

Through the 'de-culturalisation of the Nuba', there were numerous customs that had been altered in the past when the authorities began a rigorous process of cultural assimilation and religious orientation on the Nuba people. These customs had either died in full bloom or gone through subjective change; and, in their place, new ones had been stillborn. This multi-facet assimilation process is so done to foster aggressive nationalism, and to provide ammunition for the proponents of centrally unified culture of Arabism and Islam. Islam, albeit hailed worldwide as a universal faith, upheld some nomadic lifestyles and cultural traits of Arab nomads in Arabia. As such, the elements of historical, traditional and customary locality of Arab people were co-opted and amalgamated into the new faith. Now, the Nuba cultural customs are at great risk of vanishing because of systematic Arabisation and Islamisation policy that has been going on for decades in the Sudan, and unstoppably supported by all governments that have ruled the country. In fact, there is a big gap between the modern generation and the old one in the way of expressing themselves; it is very obvious that modern generation has lost important elements that make up their identity so significantly. This beckons the question of identity: who controls it, and who defines it is to be Sudanese. An unhealthy and self-deluding admiration among so many a Sudanese for all things Arab – an admiration that is especially marked in some *nouveau-riche* leaders of the country – all point to one inescapable conclusion: the failure to comprehend the complexities of Sudanese diversities. Undoubtedly, understanding the world and its people comes from understanding their languages, identities, histories, faiths and cultures. This humanistic doctrine offers the ability to make life more beautiful, profound, humorous and interesting. We will later realise that things have not mapped out the way the central authorities in the Sudan thought they would.

Since the socio-cultural factor of the civil war remains barely untouched, the above pages then shine some lights on this issue, and the authorities' methods of dealing with it, which are not a propitious route to drive out all the grovelling superstition and divine rites which took the place of religion in the Nuba Mountains.

## **IX. Concluding remarks**

This article has given expression to some cultural aspects as practised by the Nuba people in Southern Kordofan, the Sudan, in their struggle to retain their African culture in the face of overwhelming odds. Specific African cultural components dealt with are: historical existence, Nuba languages, religious beliefs, customs and traditions, social practices, music and dance, sports and leisure activities. The unrelenting move by the Nuba people to preserve and promote their African culture is a clear indication of the claim for self-identification. More importantly, the quest for cultural expressions is a reflection of a fervent desire to oppose subjugation in

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<sup>82</sup> Stobart, J C (4<sup>th</sup> Edition, edited and revised by Maguinness, W S and Scullard, H H), *The Grandeur That was Rome*; book Club Associates: London, 1971, Page 7.

whatever forms it may be manifested: political, cultural or religious. It is a bold step of rejection of others' societal traditions and customs, which the authorities have persevered to impose upon the Nuba.

A note can be added that historically diverse, cultural practices should not only be tolerated, but they should be also actively promoted. The determined drive by the Nuba people to have their cultural expression as one of the central components of Sudanese culture is a statement of their pride in their African identity. It is also a testament of the diverse culture of Sudan: the diversity that is not the same as division, but in the same way as unity within the house of Sudan, because a 'house divided cannot stand'.