

The Policies of De-Nubianization in Egypt and Sudan: an Ancient People on the Brink of Extinction

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Introduction

This paper deals with the officially explicit and illicit policies aimed at marginalizing the Nubians in both Egypt and the Sudan by, first, driving them away from their historical homelands by systematically impoverishing their region; secondly, re-settling Arab groups in the lands the Nubians leave behind; thirdly, pushing the Nubians into Arabicization through biased educational curricula at the expense of their own languages and culture; fourth, nursing a culture of complicity among the Nubian intellectuals so as to help facilitate these policies. Three cases will be discussed in this regard; (1) the case of the governor of Asuan, Egypt (the capital of the Nubian region in southern Egypt) in granting leases of land and built homes to non-Nubians; these are the lands from where the Nubians were evacuated under the pretext of building the High Dam in 1964. So far, the incessant complaints of the Nubian have fell on deaf ears. 2) The official guarantees made by the then Minister of Interior of the Sudan (General-Brigadier Abdul Rahim Muhammad Husain- presently the Minister of Defence) and the then State Minister of Agriculture Dr al-Sadig Amara to the Egyptians regarding the safety of Arab settlers from Egypt into the Nubian basin in northern Sudan. 3) The decision taken lately by the minister of Education in the northern State forbidding the Nubian pupils from uttering a word in Nubian languages within the precinct of the schools 4) The massacre of Kajbar on 13 June 2007, when an army regiment pretending to be an anti riot squad opened fire on a peaceful



demonstration in a remote and tiny village deep in the heartland of Nubia. Taking their position atop a small hill, the soldiers showered the demonstration with live ammunition; four young people fell immediately dead (one of them aging only 18) with more than twenty injured. 5) At the end the paper will draw on the racist pro-Arab policies toward the Nubians, in both countries with special emphasis on Egypt. It will discuss in this regard the racist, anti-black approach of Egyptian policies toward the Nubians in particular. In the Sudan it will draw attention to the fact that the ethical premises of slave trade are there lurking behind the scene, targeting non-Arab people in general. In this context the paper will discuss the massacre of the Sudanese refugees committed by the Egyptian army and police with cold blood in Cairo, December 30th 2005, at the footstep of the UNHCR office and in front of the cameras of international media.

Then in the conclusion the paper will shed light on how it is quite possible and predictable for the Nubians in both Egypt and Sudan to join the rising waves of ethnic rebellions in Sudan, thus bringing Egypt to the table of reckoning along with the Islamo-Arabist regime of Sudan. It concludes with certain recommendations for this conference to adopt.

The De-Population of the Nubian Region in Sudan and Egypt

In 1964 the construction of the High Dam in Aswan was completed, a matter that resulted in an area of 500 km along the Nile course (310 km in Egypt, 190 km in the Sudan) to be submerged under the reservoir. The reservoir, i.e. the lake, bears two names, 'Lake Nasser' in Egypt, and 'Lake Nubia' in the Sudan. This has led to the resettlement of about 16500 Nubian families in Egypt (with a similar number of Nubian families on the Sudan side) away from their historical lands. In the case of Egyptian Nubians, the area resettlement was a barren place



called Koum Ambo near Aswan. In the case of the Sudanese Nubians the area of resettlement was a place called Khashm al-Girba in middle-eastern Sudan, known to be of rainy autumn, contrary to the Saharan Nubian region.

In 1963 the Aswan Regional Planning Authority (ARPA) was founded by the Egyptian government to be developed in 1966 upon recommendations from both the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) into Lake Nasser Development Centre with a Six Years Plan. In 1975 upon the project findings the High Dam Development Authority was established. Developmental planning has continued up to the present time with constant help from the UNDP. Two economical activities have been available to the local people; namely fishery and agriculture. In this regard it is worth mentioning that the majority of the either the fishers or the farmers are not Nubians, but rather are people coming from other areas with the encouragement of the Egyptian government which monopolizes the marketing (for fishery, *cf.* Lassaily-Jacob, 1990; for agriculture, *cf.* Fernea & Rouchdy, 1991).

The main question here is why did the governments of both Egypt and the Sudan evacuate the area if they were truly keen on development. No development, even the most mechanized one, can be achieved without man power. The Nubians were driven away from their historical homelands on the bank of the Nile at gunpoint. This experience has proved to be very traumatic to them, a matter that their endeavours to go back and resume living in their old villages have been reflected in their vocal music and songs (Mannan, 1990). A new genre of songs of homesickness has been developed of which the late Hamza Eldin (1929-2006) with his melancholic melodies and music stands as an example (*cf.* www.hamzaeldin.com).



The anti-developmental nature of the depopulation of the Nubian region is demonstrated in the fact that a scheme of compensation had been implemented to redeem the evacuated Nubians. A true developmental approach to the whole project could have been achieved. The Nubians could have remained in their historical lands at the bank of the Lake Nubia, with new houses built in the same characteristic architectural and decorative design (*cf.* Wenzil, 1970). With such an approach one would not be in need for compensation. Even so, the compensation was not enough as usual in such cases, even though some scholars and officials might argue against that (for the case of Egyptian Nubians, see Fahim, 1972; for the case of the Sudanese Nubians, see Dafalla, 1975).

The Non-Nubian Re-Population of the Region

The Nubians in both Egypt and the Sudan did make many attempts to go back and establish small colonies of settlements and agriculture. They farmed the drawdown areas by pumping water from the reservoir (Fernea & Rouchdy, 1991). However, all these attempts were occasionally aborted by the fluctuating water level of the reservoir, a matter the Nubians believe it to be intentional by the authorities which never encouraged them to go back.

By the 1990s the Egyptian government began following a policy of repopulating the evacuated Nubian regions. It began encouraging Egyptians other than Nubians to settle in the evacuated areas around the reservoir lake. It did this while the Nubians were kept away from their own historical lands, living in a pigsty style of life in their barren area of Koum Ambo. The same thing happened in the Sudan, with tacit encouragement from the government to the Arab Bedouin who began settling in the evacuated area. The re-population of the Nubian region in Egypt has become an official policy entrusted to both the Minister of



Agriculture and the military Governor of Aswan. Villages with full facilities and utilities were built by the Egyptian government and distributed to individuals and families from outside the regions with bank loans to start with. The latest of this is the inauguration of the settlement at the old Nubian village of Kalabsha with 150 non-Nubian families, which was opened by the Minister of Agriculture Amin Abaza (cf. *al-Wafd Newspaper*, 18/05/2006). On 11/06/2006 the *Al-Ahram Newspaper* (the unofficial voice of the government) announced that tens of thousands of feddans were to be distributed in the Nubian region to people other than the Nubians. When the Nubians demanded that their lands be returned to them, they got an arrogant reply from the military Governor of Aswan: "If you want your lands, go fetch them beneath the water (cf. Rajab al-Murshidi in *Rousa al Yousef Newspaper*: www.rosaonline.net).

At the same time, the Nubians who ventured building their own colonies and farms in their old lands began facing obstacles at every corner. No one from the international community has come to help the Nubians in Egypt. They began voicing their problem through the internet, making use of the numerous Nubian websites, which mostly evolve around the home-villages bearing their names (cf. www.abirtabag.net ; www.jazeratsai.com ; www.karma2.com ; www.3amara.com ; www.nubian-forum.com/vb ; www.nubnubian.com).

This racist and Apartheid-like policy is adopted by the Egyptian government in order to contain the discontent among its Arab population who had been negatively affected by the 1992 Agricultural Law, which has come into effect by 1997. This law has liberalized the land tenure market by abolishing the old land rental and tenure by returning it to its old feudal owners, thus compelling the peasants to re-hire it all over again, with the threat of rental price increase looming over their heads. During the 1990s the price actually tripled and by now



it has quadrupled (Roudart, 2000/1). This has caused a turmoil and unrest among the peasants who began seeking other jobs. Migration of the peasants to other areas of agricultural schemes of reclaimed land, away from their home villages, was encouraged by the government. The Egyptian government adopted the policy of inter-migration so as to solve (1) its chronic problem of population explosion, and (2) to compensate those who have been negatively affected by its land liberalization law. Re-settlement in the reclaimed land of the New Valley in Sinai was officially encouraged, a matter the peasants were not enthusiastic about. Being riverain all through history, such a move was too much for them. That is how the Egyptian government began re-settling them in the Nubian regions which was evacuated four decades ago against the will of its historical people, the Nubians. In doing this the Egyptian government is consciously pushing the Nubians into being completely assimilated and Arabized, a policy pursued by the successive Egyptian governments.

The Settlement of Egyptian Peasants in the Nubian Region in Sudan

In the Sudan the Nubians faced the conspiracy of both their government and that of Egypt. Those who were affected by the construction of the High Dam, like their brethren in Egypt, were evacuated from their land and resettled in the Eastern region. The environment in their new home was completely different than that of their old home. However, only one third of them were affected by the High Dam, where the land of two third still remain unaffected in the old region. Being severely underdeveloped, the Nubian region continued to expel its people to the extent that whole villages are almost empty at the present, especially in the region of Sikkout.



In late 2003 news leaked out revealing that negotiations on highest levels with the Egyptian government had been made so as to facilitate the settlement of millions of Egyptian peasants, along with their families, in the triangle of the Nubian basin, Halfa-Dungula-‘Uwēnāt. The aim of this move is said, on one hand, to safeguard the Arab identity of Sudan against the growing awareness of Africanism in Sudan generally and among the Nubians in particular. On the other hand, it is said to serve a very cynical purpose; that is to help re-populate the Nubian region from which its people has kept moving away for the last half century. The Sudanese delegation, which was backed by a Presidential mandate, was led by Arabist Nubians, General-Brigadier Abdul Rahim Muhammad Husain (then Minister of Interior, presently Minister of Defense). A cover-up plan named “the Four Freedoms” which theoretically allows the Sudanese and the Egyptians as well to own agrarian lands and settle in both countries was officially declared. The cover-up plan has come out half cooked as both parties were too eager in their scrambling to create a *de facto* situation before the Nubians become aware of what was going on. There is no agrarian land to be owned by the Sudanese investors in Egypt. But there is land for the Egyptians in the Sudan. On 31/03/2005 a head news press release from the State Minister of Agriculture in Khartoum (Dr. al-Sadig Amara, an Arabist Nubian as well) revealed that 6.1 Millions of feddans in the triangle of Nubian basin had been sold to the Egyptians (investors and peasants) with long term leases, i.e. investment through settlement (*cf. al-Sahafa Newspaper*, No. 3892). There is no mention of the Nubians in all these deals which seem like have been made overnight.

In official visits to Cairo, the two ministers mentioned above held meetings with Egyptian scholars and intellectuals who were sceptical about the viability of resettling millions of Egyptian peasants in the Sudan (for Dr. Sadig Amara, see:



<http://www.ahram.org.eg/archive/index.asp?CurFN=file1.htm&DID=8373>). Such a scheme applied in Iraq a few years ago during the war against Iran resulted in physically eliminating the poor peasants immediately after the war ended. However the two flamboyant ministers chivalrously gave their solemn pledges reminding their audience that they are backed Presidential mandate.

The Minister of Defense went out of his way challenging his audience to bring forward their solutions about tackling the population explosion in Egypt if not by migrating to the vast areas of the sparsely populated Northern Sudan. Furthermore, lamenting the fact that the Egyptian migration to the Sudan has significantly diminished in the late decades after independence, he drew the comparison that the migration from West Africa has steadily increased. The State Minister on his behalf lamented the hesitation of some Egyptian intellectuals and officials, urging them to expedite moving to the Nubian basin before [sic] other people move there first (see: <http://www.ahram.org.eg/archive/Index.asp?CurFN=file5.htm&DID=8359> ; see also: <http://acpss.ahram.org.eg/ahram/2001/1/1/CONF20.HTM>).

The advocacy for this second objective was left to a collection of Pro-Cairo writers. In a symposium held in Khartoum and sponsored by the Ahram Strategic Centre (understandably the symposium was presided by an Egyptian journalist) and the Centre for Media Services (CMS, a media arm affiliated to Sudan Security organ) a Sudanese ambassador (Izz al-Din Hamid, cf. *al-Rai al-Am Newspaper*, 18/4/2004, P. 3) said: “The present integration has not gone beyond the bilateral relations. To have it [the true integration] the top priority should go to food security, agricultural integration and the expansion in wheat cultivation in the northern region of the Sudan so as to encourage the Egyptian peasant to cross the border into the northern region in order to achieve the structural demographic



equilibrium, which lacks attractiveness with regard to the Arab countries, especially Egypt, while it is attractive to people of West Africa who knew their way to the Sudan since long ago”. Muhammad Sa'id Muhammad al-Hasan, who is fanatically pro-Egyptian, went further to claim that the Egyptian demographic repopulation of the Nubian region is not only a necessity, but also a right (*cf. al-Rai al-am Newspaper*, No. 2351, 8/2/2005). In one of his Egypt-loving articles, which was published in a Sudanese Newspaper, we read “... the population inter-mix between the two parts of the Nile valley should take the first priority as it is necessary for the South [i.e. the Sudan] in the same way as it is a necessary for the North [i.e. Egypt]; it is the core of the integrative and unification process ... The acceleration of the 'Four Freedoms Agreement', especially the part that deals with facilitating the move of Egyptian peasants towards the southern part [of the valley, i.e. the northern part of the Sudan], will bring about a wide range of benefits in the Nile valley, not only on the level of agricultural produce and expansion and the creation of new productive areas, but also on the level of realizing demographic equilibrium. ... Thus we come to the role of Egypt in securing Sudan and bringing peace to it, and the reinstatement of the Joint Defence Treaty [signed with the May Regime (1969-1985) and nullified by the democratic rule (1985-1989)] ... As strategic necessity, it [Egypt] should restore its influence [in Sudan] and the Nile agreement along with the restoration of life and population density in the area of Old Halfa. During its rule of the Sudan, the British administration intentionally sent back home the Egyptians who worked in the Sudan, completely prohibiting their entry without a visa that was only granted to government officials. At the same time it opened the door for primitive immigration [*sic*] coming from neighbouring African countries ...”. A flow of pro-Egyptian, anti-Sudan newspaper articles began appearing regularly. They



were all characteristic with particular discursive clauses, such as “ the strategic demographic equilibrium” the Egyptians are assumed to realize in de-populated northern Sudan, “the dire necessity for Egyptian public presence in northern Sudan”, and cynical allusions to the claimed to be “free and un-inhibited move of West Africa into the Sudan”.

As the Nubian Memo to Kofi Annan (*cf.* Hashim, 2006) stated it, the Egyptians wanted the area of the reservoir completely depopulated of its indigenous people (i.e. all the Nubians affected in both the Sudan and Egypt). Disrupting the Nubian society of Northern Sudan and Southern Egypt has been a target for the governments of both countries as the Nubians constitute the only African entity on the Nile from Kōsti and Sinnār up the White and Blue Niles respectively down to the Mediterranean Sea.

The Curse of Dams

Kajbar is a small village in the middle of the Nubian Mahas region about 111km down the river from Dongola, the capital of the northern state. The most northerly part of the third cataract ends at Kajbar, where the government declared in 1995 its plans to build a dam. The Nubians have been traumatized by the dams that were built on the Nile since 1902 when the first Asuan dam was constructed all through to the construction of the High dam in 1964. So it was natural for their reaction to the project to be negative and to reject the idea with the intention of resisting it. To make it even worse, the government was so secretive about the project, totally ignoring to consult the concerned communities. Without denying the political implications in dams building, it is assumed to be a purely technical matter where transparency is most needed. The unit responsible for building dams in the Sudan had been under the authority of a technical ministry that is of



Irrigation and Water Resources, until the government put under the direct authority of the Presidency in 1999. Since then building dams has been politicized as never before a matter believed by many specialists and experts to have compromised the technical and professional aspects of dam-building.

The presidential Dams Implementation Unit (DIU) declared plans to construct more than 20 dams with four of them in northern Sudan; al-Shirēk Dam at the 5th cataract (affecting Rubātāb tribe); Mirwi dam at the 4th cataract (affecting all Manāsīr tribe and part of Shāyqiyya tribe); Kajbār dam at the 3rd cataract (affecting the southern part of Mahas Nubians and the northern part of Dongola Nubians); and Dāl dam at the 2nd cataract (affecting all Sukkōt Nubians and the no Mahas Nubians). The infamous policy of total de-population has been adopted in all these projects. The people affected by Mirwi dam (erroneously called Merowe, even officially), which is almost completed, have been resettled to areas far from their historical homelands under the point of gun. On the 22nd of April, 2006 in Amri island government security forces, militia groups and special paratroops belonging to the DIU opened fire on a small congregation of people who resisted being evicted. Three people were killed immediately with others injured. The Sudan Human Rights Organization reported the murderous attack with strong condemnation: “As relayed by several witnesses, as well as families of the injured citizens, the attack was planned and executed by the assaulting troop in collaboration with the security headquarters of the dam administration, which had been threatening with ‘severe reactions’ the natives opposing the dam’s location and the resettlement plans for the natives far away from their ancestral land at the Nile bank” (for more details of the incident, see: http://www.sudantribune.com/article.php3?id_article=15235). Unlike the



Nubians, the people affected by Mirwi dam did agree to the project, but not without a condition that is to remain living in their home areas, i.e. not to be evacuated. However, the government seemed to have other agendas. By then the regions of northern Sudan were reeking with wild rumours and conspiracy theories telling of secret agreements between the Sudanese and Egyptian governments upon which Egyptians peasants will be marauding the region. In fact they were far from being either rumours or conspiracy theories as they contained a grain of truth; the Four Freedoms has paved the way to bring about and realized these fears and rumours.

In the Nubian regions of Dongola, Mahas, Sukkōt people began organizing themselves to resist building any more dams. The Nubians of Halfa region that were affected by the High dam and long since have been resettled in the eastern Sudan joined their brethren in the fight against dam-building. To curb for this anti-government surge, the jackal government of Khartoum adopted a policy of obscurantism showering the people with different and contradicted statements about the dam-building. Tricky promises were made to the people up from the President down to the lowest rank official of the state government so as to sooth and lull the people. The most famous one was that made by the President and repeatedly referred to by the state governor and DIU officials was that no dam was going to be built without the explicit consent of the people of the affected area. The exact maps showing the boundary of the areas to be affected by the dams of both Kajbār and Dāl were kept secret. However, insiders from the Dams Implementation Unit leaked the information that the water reservoir of Kajbār dam will extend to 105km up the river to Dongola city; the water reservoir of Dāl dam will extend to 65km up the river to a small village called Kid Urma, just 6 km down the dam of Kajbār. Just then, when that became commonplace



information, the DIU began speaking about the areas to be affected, with every time increasing the size of the reservoir and submerged areas. Rumours broke in the region telling of the area of al-Shuwak, in Rahad area up the Blue Nile region close to the Sudan-Ethiopia borders as chosen by the government for the resettlement of the Nubians. A number of government supporting Mahas and Sukkōt personalities were said to have inspected the chosen area and agreed to it.

The Dāl cataract is the most southerly tip of the second cataract, which has been wholly submerged by the High dam. From Dāl down to Asuan the area is completely de-populated. Building the two dams of Dāl and Kajbār up the river from that point means that the area from Dongola down to Asuan will be completely de-populated. This shows that rumours and conspiracy theories can prove sometimes to be true.

The Massacre of Kajbar

Such were the contentions the Nubians had had when they began organizing village-scale demonstrations, especially in Kajbār area. Believing in the Presidential and official promises, they wanted to express their total rejection to the dam-building. On the 10th of April 2007 they organized a peaceful demonstration in the small villages overlooking the cataract, which was assumed to be the site of the dam. The special security force, which was putting on an army fatigue, opened fire wounding at least five people. Taking the injured people and heading back to the nearest hospital, at a certain river-mountain strait (called in Nubian ‘*Kidin Takkār*’) that allows for only one vehicle to pass at a time, the demonstrators came across a group of about 20 heavily armed men apparently meant as reinforcement. Outnumbering the armed men, the angry demonstrators



encircled the two vehicles and took the armed men as hostages after stripping them of their arms for about two hours before releasing them.

On the 13th of June 2007 the villagers organized another peaceful demonstration that started from a village called Farrēg and then headed down the river toward the cataract. About five km up the river from the cataract, exactly at the same strait where they had held the armed men as hostages, the demonstration was ambushed by a group of heavily armed force that was positioned atop the mountain. The force opened fire killing instantly four people with one of them (Muhammad Faqir) a teenager of only 18 years old. More than 15 people were injured. The whole massacre was filmed by a video amateur; it shows the armed men cheering and dancing when shooting the villagers (see: <http://www.youtube.com/user/nabielogr>). In the coming weeks more than 20 people were arrested, among them journalists who tried to report (see: <http://www.copts.com/english1/index.php/2007/08/07/amnesty-calls-for-release-of-sudan-detainees/>). Leading figures of Nubian senior activists resisting the dam-building were also arrested for months (see: <http://platform.blogs.com/passionofthepresent/2007/07/new-arrest-foll.html>). Young Nubian activists were also arrested in northern Sudan and Khartoum. (see: http://www.amnesty.org/en/alfresco_asset/55c51b81-a2ba-11dc-8d74-6f45f39984e5/afr540532007en.html).

The silencing of an Ancient Tongue: Don't speak Nubian

The Nubian languages, like all national languages in the Sudan, are on the brink of becoming extinct (*cf.* Hashim & Bell, 2005). The state not only did nothing to help enhance and promote the national languages, but look at them as a threat to the national unity. Of over 100 national languages in the Sudan (*cf.*



Hurreiz & Bell, 1975), not even a single one of them has been recognized by the state. The state-supported Arabic is encroaching at the expense of the dying national language. The successive governments of post-Independent Sudan have never heeded the calls from concerned bodies such as UNESCO (*cf.* UNESCO, 1988; or for recent reference, see: <http://www.unesco.org/most/ln2lin.htm#resources>) for using the national language as means of instruction, especially in primary levels.

The Nubian languages, especially the ancient form which was used during the Christian kingdoms, have been in use as the official language of the state and in daily use for centuries, from the 6th century to the up to the present (*cf.* Hashim & Bell, 2004). However the toll of the systematic onslaught on the national languages that that has been going on for the last six centuries has begun to show.

On 27/05/2006 the Nubians in the Sudan were shocked to read the headline news that the regional Minister of Education in the Northern state had given his explicit orders that no Nubian pupil to utter a word of Nubian language within the precinct of the schools. For decades, right from the beginning of the 20th centuries, the Nubian languages were fought against by the Arabization-oriented school administrations using the infamous tactic of the Ottoman Turkish Mijidi piaster (*cf.* Hashim, Forthcoming). The obsolete piaster was to be hung from a string on the neck of the pupil who dared utter a word in the Nubian language inside the school (they were mostly boarding schools). The piaster was to be passed to another pupil only when caught committing the sin of speaking one of the most ancient languages in the history of mankind. Checked twice a day, in the morning and the evening, the holder of the piaster was severely punished; four strong pupils would be summoned to hold the '*culprit*' [*sic*] from the feet and the



hands to be whipped ten lashes. This practice, however, has stopped in the last two decades as a result of the growing protest of the Nubians.

This late measure of official and systematic cultural persecution has caused an outcry by the Nubians in home and diaspora with the international community giving no heed to it, as usual. The Islamo-Arab government, on both the federal and regional levels, has also given a deaf ear to the growing protest of the Nubians, the motto of the government being that one expressed with finite arrogance by the President Omer al-Bashir in the early 1990s: "We have assumed power with arms; those who want power, or want to share it, should be men enough and fight for it". Consequently, the marginalized African people of Sudan in Dar Fur, West Sudan, and the Beja in the East have taken to arms one after the other (with prospect of others in the North following them soon) in order to protect themselves from the state-sponsored projects of systematic cultural assimilation, impoverishment and persecution. Before the coup of the Islamic junta in the 30th of June 1898 the war zone was confined to the southern region of the South, Nuba Mountains and Ingassana Mountains. However, the Nubians in the far North have not joined the rebellion yet. The civil war to the marginalized African people of Sudan was not an alternative but rather a matter of necessity when there was no alternative at all; they were pushed into it by an arrogant and stupid regime. Unfortunately this regime now enjoys the Anglo-American support whose intervention presses the fighting groups to reach with it an agreement that does not solve their problem. Such agreements inject new blood in a regime that has outlived its days.



They kill Horses, don't they!

The culling of Sudanese Refugees in Cairo

In 1990, a year after the coup of the Islamic junta, waves of Sudanese refugees swarmed into Egypt in general and in Cairo in particular. That was expected and most of the western countries, which were the prime terminal the refugees sought, firmly locked their doors in the face of them. The western countries did this because of the high cost of supporting the waves of the refugees who will probably not go back to the Sudan as they were seeking permanent settlement in the west. On the other hand Egypt offered nothing to them whatsoever. Furthermore there was no work available for them there, even the lowest paid job. However, by 1995, it was generally believed, there was hundreds of thousands of Sudanese refugees in Egypt (some political opposition organizations based in Cairo even give estimated it to more than one million)). That could be possible as the doors of Egypt were the only ones open for them. But it was only a matter of a few days until the Sudanese refugees discovered that in fact they fled from the prisons of their own regime to be locked in the prison of the Egyptian regime. The Egyptian government made clear to the western embassies in Cairo that no one of the Sudanese refugees to be given a visa from Cairo. The reason was a quite good one: such an act would increase the flow of the refugees into Egypt.

Then why did the Egyptian authorities open the door for them in the first place? And how did those refugees, while receiving nothing from the Egyptian government, did manage to support themselves? They were mostly families, with women, old folk and children! The answers to these questions will not only reveal one of the worst exploitations of the misfortunes that befall people, but will further reveal the Master-Slave mentality that still characterizes the Egyptian



conduct when it comes to Sudan, consequent the whole of black Africa. The forsaken refugees relied ultimately on money transferred to them from their relations, whether from the rich, petroleum Arab countries or from the west. In 1999 in a visit to Cairo, the present writer was shocked to know that it was a common knowledge to every Sudanese and Egyptian intellectual alike the fact that the hard currency earned by the in-land revenue from the money transferred to the Sudanese refugees was much more than that earned from the Suez Canal. And that was not the whole story. The money which was usually transferred by fax, i.e. to be cashed immediately when the answer-back is received, was held by the banks for months before releasing it. The answer to this delay was that they did not receive the money. This answer was said in the face of the claimers who had the fax answer-back in their hands faxed to them by their relatives as a document to prove that the money was there in Cairo in safes of the Egyptian banks. Holding the money in that way could have never continued for years if it were not okayed by the Egyptian government in its policy to make the best out of the Sudanese calamities. In that visit and in another one earlier in 1994, the present writer left Cairo back to Khartoum without cashing money sent to him from Saudi Arabia. My visits were too short for such a difficult mission; in each one of them I *only* stayed for one month.

By 1998 the international community and the UN became aware of the Egyptian ghetto set up for the Sudanese refugees. The UNHCR began a programme of resettlement for the Sudanese refugees congregated in Cairo. The biggest diaspora in the history of the Sudan had begun as the refugees were dispersed all over the globe, especially in the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Europe and South America. By 2003 there were only a few thousands of them left in Cairo, whose majority of had already been registered in the UNHCR



Cairo office. Those were mostly from southern Sudan, Dar Fur, Nuba Mountains and many other areas of the Sudan. By 2004, with the development of the peace negotiation that were brokered mainly by the USA, UK and Norway that pressurized the rebel groups to reach a settlement with the present Islamic regime, the interest of the UNHCR in the refugees began decreasing to focus on other areas. This gave the Cairo office, which was manned by Egyptians, a free hand in dealing with the situation. It simply resorted to a well drawn plan of faked ineptitude, pretending to be local staff who did not have any power. However, the international staffs were there and they were all Egyptians. As a result of this hopeless situation, most of the refugees, either headed back to Sudan to try another exit, or out of helplessness resigned by staying in Cairo believing in the meek promises made by the Egyptian staff at the UNHCR office that things would eventually be sorted.

In fact those who continued to stay were the poorest as they did not have any people to send them money to support themselves. They relied ultimately on the UNHCR. Of course they were also the ones with most genuine cases being mostly from the conflict zones of the South, Nuba Mountains, Ingassana Mountains, the Beja in eastern Sudan and Dar Fur in western Sudan. This made them a real burden to the Egyptian society and government which just discovered that those are filthy black Africans infested with Aids and a host of infective disease. So with Naivasha agreement which was reached between the Sudan People Liberation Movement (SPLM) and the present regime in May 2004, the UNHCR Cairo office bluntly told the refugees that their cases had consequently lost their genuineness. It told them to go back to their country as there was no war. The Egyptianized international body pretended not to be aware that the wars were not confined to southern Sudan, itself not yet safe for civilians. The poor of



the poor were left to their own in the streets of Cairo, penniless, where they were looked upon with the disgust and contempt typical of an Arab slaver towards a slave who behaves like a free person.

The kept coming to the closed doors of UNHCR office every day dragging their feet with empty stomach to stay all the day there in the park of a mosque adjacent UNHCR office until it is time to sleep. On the 29th of September 2005 a group of homeless refugees decided to stay overnight there on the grass of the park. In a few days the number began increasing as there was no where to go to. That was the moment when they decided to campaign a picket at the footsteps of the international body. This prompted the other refugees who had a shelter to abandon them and join the picket. In one week the numbered exceeded 3000 refugees. A camp committee sprang out of them. They kept the vigil for more than three months, with highly civilized and meticulous organization of feeding, hygiene and sleeping, with places assigned to the women and children along with the old. Neither alcohol nor drunken people were allowed into the camp.

Right from the beginning the Egyptian society and government could not take in the scene of having such affluent area *blackened* by those filthy Africans. A host of derogatory and abusive language of dehumanization typical of Arabs dealing with Africans was introduced against which the poor of the poor pretended not to have heard them, walking with their heads raised high. While hatred and contempt continued building up against the picket of the refugees, the international office in Cairo completely identified with the Egyptian stand with the high echelon of the inept UN, ironically headed by a puppet black African, turning a deaf year to the moaning sounds of the refugees congregating at its doorstep. As usual, the UN was simply waiting for the refugees to get killed so as to make a well calculated wording of a statement expressing shock and concern



and then doing its best to contain the situation (cf. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4570446.stm>). The inevitable killing of the refugees came with a very cynical timing.

Just before midnight of December the 30th 2005, police forces and military troops supported with tanks began gathering and forming a cordon around the refugees camp. A delegation of the committee of the refugees tried to contact the police leadership to enquire about the reason for this cordon with no avail. With the advance of the first hour of the chilling morning the onslaught began by firing water canons (in the early hours of a winter dawn). Then the gendarme stormed the camp with more than 12 thousands, wielding truncheons and stamping people. The only thing the refugees could do as a reaction was performing prayer (Islamic and Christian as well), with others chanting religious hymns aloud. Chased by human demons which wanted to kill them in their own country, Sudan, and in Egypt, they were only left with one source of help, the Providence. But, alas, they were killed by hundreds.

The massacre caused an international outcry with no condemnation whatsoever to the bold killer. It was well covered by international media. The first move of Egypt was to down play the whole even by falsifying the number of the dead which they delimited down to 29. However, the true number as revealed by counting the dead in the various morgues Cairo's hospital brought the number to about 280. The Sudanese government shocked the free world when instead of condemning the killing of its own citizen, condoned what the Egyptian government did. Later the Egyptian officials revealed that the Sudanese government was informed about what it was going to do and they agreed. That was not all of it. The injured, even the ones with the slightest injury, happened to pass away once admitted to hospitals. Rumours had it that they were literally *put*



down in the theatre under anaesthesia after having removed any internal organ deemed useful for transplant.

However, the most insulting of it all was the timing. This massacre of Sudanese refugees took place just on the eve of the 50th anniversary of the Independence Day of Sudan. The Egyptian regime could not be more cynical and more vindictive. The message was clear: independence or no independence, you are still our slaves. While the ordinary Sudanese people were fuming with anger and humiliation, the political parties were going out of their way to rationalize what the Egyptians did. The irony was that Egypt was the first state to recognize the Islamic coup d'état of Sudan in June 1989, which plotted to assassinate its President, Hosny Mubarak in Addis Ababa in the mid 1990s. This prompted Egypt to sponsor the political opposition while working tacitly towards taming the wild Islamic regime. All the time dreading the idea of having a democracy in the Sudan, to Egypt a totalitarian regime in the Sudan is always convenient to deal with whatever the surface ideological differences. When it at last achieved this goal, Egypt ended with having both the opposition and government as friends. The regime is so keen to appease Egypt which poses as a strong ally that can help the Sudan in restoring its place in the international community with no sanctions or international criminal court. The opposition is believed by many Sudanese observers to have so far kept silent from condemning either the massacre of the refugees or the Egyptian occupation of Sudanese land because they have been on the payroll all through the years of their self-chosen exile in Egypt.

Well, one may wonder, isn't it slavery all over again?

At last, when they could bear it no more, the internationally-forsaken Sudanese refugees in Egypt (mostly Darfurians - who are Muslims) reached the point beyond despair; they reconciled themselves with a history-long adversary



religion and ideology. They began sneaking through Sinai to Israel seeking the asylum that they were declined in Egypt- Egypt the country-prison (*cf. Al-Sudani Newspaper* headline: “Last but not Least: Sudanese Citizens as Asylum in Israel”, 21/8/2007). With no Moses to guide them, waves after waves of those forsaken people began infiltrating the border into the forbidden land of Israel. Just then did the two regimes of Khartoum and Cairo take a feeble move to *tackle* [*sic*] the problem, however, without acknowledging its causes. They simply began coordinating so as to take tougher measures that will guarantee preventing the forsaken Sudanese refugees in Egypt from crossing borders to the forbidden land (*cf. Interview with Sudanese State Minister for Foreign Affairs Al-Sammani al-Wasila in: al-Sudani Newspaper, 26/8/2007*), tough measures that amounted to shooting them if caught while crossing the borders.

I end this with this quotation from Amira al-Tahawi (2007:3) who was one of the few Egyptian journalists to be brave enough to tell the real story:

“Since the massacre of Mustafa Mahamoud Square, and while Press Agencies are reporting the increasing daily rates of the Sudanese refugees infiltrating into Israel, and the deportation of some of them, if not caught and tried or killed by the borders guards, the suffering of the Sudanese refugees in Egypt has increased as they remain jobless with no income or health care. ... The [Refugee] Commission has completely abrogated its agreed commitment of 17/12/2005 toward resolving the problem the refugees, the commitment it came to assure after the massacre of Mustafa Mahmoud Square. As a result the situation of the refugees has deteriorated more than it was before the massacre, without any



one of them daring to hold a picket. The security forces arrest any one who might try to do this”.

Conclusion:

This paper concludes by demanding that the systematic and official obliteration of the identity of the Nubians in both Egypt and the Sudan as represented in selling out their historical lands on the bank of the Nile and their oppressing their languages should stop immediately. The Egyptian and Sudanese Nubians must have the right and priority to go back to their ancestral lands and villages. The two states in Egypt and the Sudan must do whatever possible to protect the Nubians against any encroachment of other ethnic groups into their lands unless it takes place in a natural and peaceful way that does not make the Nubians feel that they are being targeted and endangered. The international community is called upon to offer support and solidarity. This paper draws the attention of this esteemed conference to the fact that selling the Nubian basin in Northern Sudan by this present regime to the Egyptian in order to facilitate the settlement of Arabized Egyptian peasants will turn that region into a civil war zone. The paper urges the conference to condemn this move in its endeavours to enhance peace and reparation.

The paper also demanded that this Pan African conference includes in its programmes of reparation the Cairo massacre of December 30th 2005. The paper demanded that the conference calls for an independent and international investigation into the circumstances that had lead to the killing of Sudanese refugees. The least that can be done to honour the dead is to know for sure their number. Let us not forget that those people were killed while wearing the badge of the UNHCR. Compensations should be paid to those who suffered, whether by



losing a member/s of their family/s or by injury and the traumatic experience. Furthermore, their resettlement should be resumed. Let us be clear about reparation; there will be no reparation if the grievances have not been addressed.

Upon the demand of this essay, the esteemed Pan African conference held in Accra did pass two resolutions to the effect of the points mentioned above.

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