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WERE NUBA AND HADJERAY STATELESS SOCIETIES?
Ethnohistorical problems in the eastern Sudan region of Africa*

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Introduction

In a series of important publications based on research in the western and central Sudanic regions of Africa which appeared in the 1980s, a regional and historical approach to nineteenth-century political systems and their legacy emerged, which went beyond the old dichotomy between states and stateless societies, with the former confronting the latter (Sharpe 1986). Studies by Philip Burnham (1980a, b), Jean-Loup Amselle (1985), Elisabeth Copet-Rougier (1987) and Richard Fardon (1988), based on research in the western and central Sudan, drew attention to the radical interpenetration of centres of power and their peripheries and to the permeable, mutable and dynamic character of social boundaries. Despite the specific regional focus of this work, it was obvious that, by implication, the classic ethnographic monographs of the eastern Sudan, which were premised on the distinction between societies organized as states and stateless societies constituted as ethnic groups (tribes) and which were devoted to the latter, could no longer be read in quite the same way.[1] However, confidence in such a conclusion needs to be reaffirmed because of the effect of the recent violent political crises in the region, the accompanying scholarly commentary, and certain developments in the wider context of anthropology that are usually referred to as ethnohistory, all of which have tended to restore the old dualism.

In both the Republic of the Sudan and Chad during the last twenty-five years, struggles for mastery of the state at the centre and rebel movements projecting themselves from the state's peripheries have become hooked up to local conflicts of interest, amplifying them and conferring on them a national significance. The cultural diversity and social fluidity of the populations of the Hadjeray uplands in Chad and the Nuba Hills in the Sudan has left them vulnerable to savage repression by a suspicious, even paranoid state, no matter which faction was in power for the time being. Some young Hadjeray men migrated to the Sudan in order to escape the violence and even to Khartoum, where they no doubt encountered young people in a similar predicament from the Nuba Hills. Others joined rebel movements, while yet others stayed but retreated with their households further into the hills to relative security but considerable hardship because of the scarcity of cultivable land. In the context of these contemporary political

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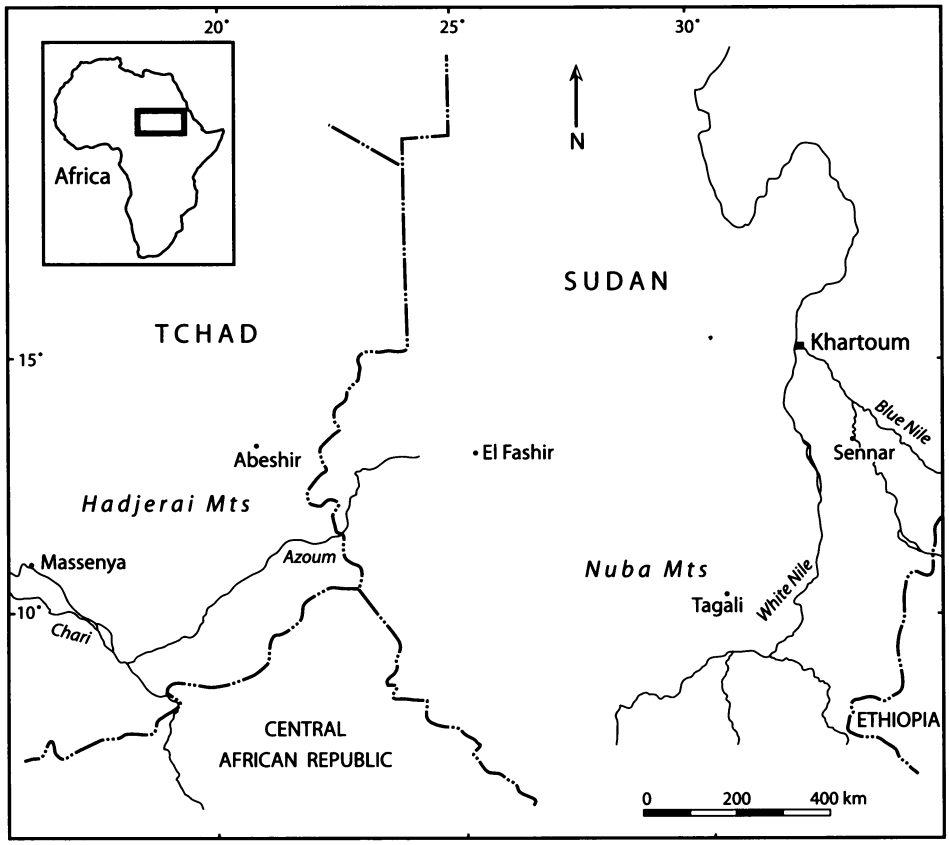
1 E.g. Nadel (1947), Fuchs (1970).



The eastern Sudan region showing principal locations mentioned in the text (map: G. Hampel).

struggles and brutal hostilities between the state and its people in the eastern Sudan, the old dichotomy between the state and the stateless society seems to be acquiring a new validity.

In particular, fifty-year-old ethnographic monographs of the colonial era, such as Siegfried Nadel's study of the Nuba, are seized upon by local resistance leaders for the very reasons that anthropologists began to have serious doubts about them as portraits of supposedly self-sustaining bounded societies with their own unique and ancient cultures. Yusuf Kawa Mekki, the military commander of the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army in the Nuba Hills, has described how, when he was a student at the University of Khartoum, it was his revelatory encounter with Nadel's monograph, 'The Nuba', in the library of the University of Khartoum that transformed his political thinking about himself and his identity and background (Mekki 2001:32). He discovered himself to be part of an entity, the Nuba, that evoked a powerful sense of the presence of a complex

yet somehow understandable subject, a rich and unique culture, positioned between himself as an individual subject and the state, yet borrowing attributes from both (cf. Fardon 1999). Meanwhile, outside observers sympathetic to the resistance combine the compelling duality of the linked concepts of state and society, despite its modern historical origins (Mitchell 1999:77), with a vocabulary of deep historical roots to account for the current breakdown in social organization and the descent into violence, thus hypostatizing what were actually fluid and relative social categories. In its simplest form, the contemporary repression of non-Muslims (or Africans) by an Islamic (or Arab) state is the continuation by other means of the old pre-modern state-sponsored slave-raiding that ceased about a hundred years ago.[2] Other, more nuanced approaches present an unresolved ambiguity in which pre-colonial Muslim states persistently raided non-Muslim peoples, who nevertheless defended themselves and survived, it transpires, by a range of far-reaching strategies of transformation, from defiance to joining the raiders (e.g. Manger 1994:41–42). The attraction of reverting to the old state-and-society dichotomy in the context of the present violence is obvious.

In addition, a new consensus is emerging about historical continuity from the pre-colonial era, through colonialism and into the postcolonial predicament (Sahlins 1993). This represents a reaction to the view that peoples' claims to cultural continuity in the defence and reconstruction of moral communities that are faced with terminally destructive relationships with an alien state are inevitably bogus, and that the people have done so, however ingeniously, largely in terms of the images bestowed upon them by their oppressors. More recently Thomas Spear (2003:25), reviewing research in Africa, has concluded that historians have been naïve in crediting Europeans and African intellectuals with the ability to create such fictions as tribes, and have failed to appreciate how contemporary 'political tribalism' derives from 'forms of ethnic consciousness that lie in the past'.

The aim of this article is to draw attention to those awkward observations in the ethnographic and historical record of the Nuba and Hadjeray that are vulnerable to being filtered out by an approach based on the old state-stateless society dichotomy, an approach which may find some succour in an argument for historical continuity. On the other hand, these same features are significant and quite consistent in terms of the historical and regional approach developed in the 1980s mentioned at the beginning of this article.

The substance of the article is based on accessible published ethnographic reports on two rather similar groups of people, one in Chad which is usually known in the literature as Hadjeray, and the other in the Republic of Sudan, the people known as Nuba. Some of the most useful of these ethnographies were written at a time when structuralist and functionalist ideas prevailed in social anthropology, and one would imagine them therefore being especially difficult to adduce in a critical assessment of

2 E.g. African Rights (1995:15–16, 21).

assumptions about 'stateless' societies confronting the external threats and depredations of states. However, the observations recorded in detail by the ethnographers frequently proved to be so recalcitrant to a vocabulary of social systems theory that the use of these terms added little more than a superficial technical tone to the writing. Nadel (1947:9) described trying to identify a discrete Nuba society, or even several Nuba societies, as his main theoretical problem.

The eastern Sudan as a geo-political region

Both Hadjeray and Nuba, along with the inhabitants of the southern Funj region of the Sudan (Jedrej 2004), are positioned historically, geographically and politically in a way that confirms the complexity of the conflicts in the Sudan and Chad, despite the attractions of simplifications such as North vs. South, Arab vs. African, Muslim vs. Christian, or pastoralists vs. peasants. Hadjeray and Nuba exemplify those supposedly 'stateless' and pagan ethnic groups situated in opposition to the indigenous Islamic states, not only categorically but also politically and historically. The counter-argument being advanced here on the basis of the availabe evidence is that, in the nineteenth-century eastern Sudan, instead of a duality of states and societies, social relationships of alliance and hostility were realized as a hierarchical network of ranked positions. In other words, diverse relationships of power and domination penetrated from the elite in the centre out to the peripheries, creating one political field.

The mountain-dwelling Hadjeray and Nuba have for long been compared to similar old 'refugee' populations found throughout the geographical Sudan (Froelich 1968). In the eastern Sudan they are part of a region that has a unity by virtue of an internal coherence as well as by contrast with the western Sudan. This distinctive identity is evident in a number of ways. First Arabic is the language of trade and markets as well as of certain pastoralists and sedentary peasants who claim Arab descent and who are distributed through the region. Hadjeray are sometimes called Nuba by Arabic speakers, and nowadays they will more often call themselves Nuba than Hadjeray when they wish to refer collectively to all the peoples of the hills.[3] The history and character of the Islamic institutions of this region, especially the cult of the saints, sets it apart from those of western Sudan, so that one finds children from Chad being sent several hundred miles to the east to study in renowned Islamic schools associated with saints, such as that at Umm Dubban, east of the Nile.[4] The nineteenth-century travellers Gustav Nachtigal and Heinrich Barth wrote of their encounters with itinerant traders from the Nile on the banks of the River Shari in Chad. At the level of cosmology, Viviana Paques (1967:208–

[3] Fuchs (1997:9), Vincent (1975:79)

[4] Trimingham (1959:45–46), el Hassan (1993:56)

209) recorded a Baguirmian tradition, which may owe something to the medieval Arab geographer al Idrisi, about the subterranean movement of water linking the rivers Nile, Shari and Benue, and even the Niger with Lake Chad and the Mediterranean in one complex regional hydro-mythological system.

Against this background, the pre-modern political history of the region from the sixteenth century is on the rise and decline of indigenous states, the Islamic sultanates, and, what amounts to the same thing, the politics of interstate rivalry. This is because the former is generally a matter of subordinate centres seeking to redefine their relationship to a superior centre in terms of the ranking of a current ruling house in relation to others. Ideologically these states were not 'sovereign' in the way that, for example, sovereign states in the modern world are formally coequals in organisations such as the United Nations. It is also evident that they were not states in the sense of each being the realization of a nation, nor was this the view of the ruling dynasties and their courts. Rather, the concern of the ruling elite, besides the paramount matter of the sheer *jouissance* of exercising personal power and control over people, was with inequalities of rank and the protocols of precedence, not to mention the material benefits of tribute and exchange which flowed according to these asymmetries of rank, which, in the nineteenth century, were often expressed in the idiom of relationships to the Ottoman Sultan in Istanbul.[5] To some extent, interstate hostilities were always civil wars.

However, while the elites may have invoked the political prestige of the Ottoman court and asserted ancestral origins associating them with the prophet Mohamed, they also included in their essential state regalia non-Islamic sacred relics and traditions which linked them to the peoples of their hinterland, as did the ruler of Baguirmi in relation to the Hadjeray.[6] Such eclecticism was not only evident in the courts of the elite but also at different levels between the centre and the periphery. Significantly, twentieth-century observers of installation rites at the most local level sometimes judged the presence of Muslim holy men as being 'out of place' (e.g. Disney 1945:39).

Of course, the histories of these states, their rise and decline, is inflected during the nineteenth century by a number of external factors that began with the Turco-Egyptian invasion of the Nile valley in 1820 and the introduction of modern bureaucratic rule, which replaced the traditional Funj Sultanate of Sennar on the Blue Nile. Initially there was an intensification of slaving, since one of the motives for the invasion was to secure slave soldiers for the Egyptian army, with fearful consequences for regions such as the Nuba Hills. Although the Turco-Egyptian government in Khartoum established direct administration of the heartland of the Sudan, in the frontier zones such as southern Kordofan it was content to extract revenue through a form of indirect rule, using the truncated institutions of the old Funj Sultanate (Holt 1958:15–16). In 1885, the Khartoum government was overthrown by a rebellion that was in part an indigenous religious

5 Barth (1965:185), Hallam (1977:302), Nachtigal (1987:274)

6 Paques (1967:188-193), Fuchs (1973)

movement seeking a return to a pure Islam as understood in the Sufi tradition of the Sudan, but it was also a response to the Egyptian government's actions at this time to end slavery and the slave trade. With the death of its leader, Muhammad Ahmed, the Mahdi, the regime developed into an Islamic state. In 1898 this political era, the Mahdiya, came to an end when the Mahdist state fell to a British-led but nominally Egyptian military expedition, but not before the Nuba Hills were desperately plundered for supplies of livestock, grain and slave soldiers. Meanwhile Rabih, the most notable of the Sudanese warlords who had built themselves armies from the intense slave-raiding in the region of the Nile-Congo watershed, declared himself for the Mahdi and took his army north and west. Though repulsed by the forces of the Sultan of Waday, he overran a by now enfeebled Baguirmi and Bornu, but his adventures ended in a fatal encounter with the forces of the French. Waday, which had appropriated the Hadjeray hinterland from Baguirmi, turned against French hegemony in 1904, and its demise came after eight years of struggle (Hallam 1977, Azevedo 1998).

Hadjeray chiefdoms

The Hadjeray, who number about 185 000 people, inhabit the central massif of Chad. Anthropologists have distinguished up to eighteen ethnic groups (Fuchs 1970:29–47). Many of the ethnic names that have passed into the literature are of vernacular Arabic origin and are often congruent with neither speech communities, nor with the self-designations of the people themselves. For example, the name 'Diongor' is of local Arabic origin meaning 'pagan' and is applied to two adjacent groups who have different names for themselves and who speak quite separate languages (Pouillon 1964:20).

A settlement together with the surrounding land that the inhabitants exploit is recognised as a political unit, a chiefdom. Chiefdoms are represented by the people as very old, and they enjoy a unity and identity in opposition to other similar chiefdoms throughout the hills. Nevertheless, they are internally heterogeneous in several significant ways. With few exceptions, the inhabitants of a chiefdom are divided into those who are considered indigenous, referred to in French as 'gens de la terre', and those who are seen as the descendants of a group of conquering invaders, referred to as 'gens de la chefferie'. This distinction is encountered among similar populations in the western Sudan, but it is not reported further east among the Nuba. In the 1960s and 1970s the invaders dominated their settlements both politically and numerically and appear to have done so for many generations. According to indigenous population, they allowed the incomers to settle in return for gifts of livestock, which they, the locals, would sacrifice to the gods of the locality to ensure good harvests from the land and protection from misfortune for both the incomers and themselves. According to the invaders they physically overpowered the locals, who then gave up their daughters to them, for which

reason they consider the locals to be their inferiors. They are now masters of the land and therefore also masters of the people of the land. However, they acknowledge that the locals are able to deploy dangerous as well as beneficial supernatural powers, and they sometimes express anxiety about whether they will be killed by the locals, an anxiety which the latter are quite happy not to allay. The latter, despite being the original inhabitants – and in contrast to the incomers, who continually promote their identity as conquering invaders – resent being reminded of their status. Unlike the incomers they do not form a solidary group: for example, despite their association with the locality, individual autochthonous households are liable to move out and relocate themselves in the territories of other chiefdoms. This may cause the owners of a chiefdom to plead with the indigenous people to return in order that they may carry out the local rites that only they can perform.[7]

Charles Vandame was struck by the difference in political behaviour between the owners of the chiefdom and the autochthones, a difference that he relates to what might be called two different socialities. The households of locals, for example, are usually dispersed around the chiefdom, while the households of invaders are nucleated, occupying to the exclusion of others a particular neighbourhood or hamlet in the chiefdom. The locals seem to be more individualistic, each household head valuing his independence, while the incomers, the actual rulers of the chiefdom, cooperate together to sustain their solidarity and unity as the dominant group and to preserve their privileges and position. Sustaining the dominance of the group enters into all their calculations and the conduct of their affairs, from calling in the support of clan members living elsewhere to making strategic alliances through the marriages of their daughters (Vandame 1975:80).

In the northern hills of the Hadjeray massif, there is a striking mountain peak which stands out in the landscape and is known as Tjeng in the language of the surrounding people ('Abu Tuyur' in Arabic). The people call themselves Tjeng ('Kenga' in the literature), a name also given to one of their chiefdoms. The mountain peak is said to be the location of the highest ranking spirit in a hierarchy of territorial spirits which are dispersed over various local subordinate shrines. Factions of Tjeng clans have migrated to other parts of the highlands, especially among people known as Sokoro, Barain, Koke, Mogoum and Saba, where they have established themselves as the owners of the chiefdoms (Fuchs 1994:77–79). It was in Tjeng that, according to Baguirmi tradition, the founder of the ruling dynasty and his companions lived for three years on their journey from the east before moving on, eventually to settle in Massenya.[8]

In addition to the invaders and the owners of the chiefdom, distributed among almost all the chiefdoms are people and the descendants of people who have moved within the hills from one locality to another or who have moved into the hills from outside. As local descent groups, these settlers inhabit a locality within the chiefdom and

7 Vandame (1975:79–80), Vincent (1975:54)

8 Paques (1967:187), Fuchs (1994:186)

come to be recognised as identifiable clans named after their place of origin. Though the term 'clan' is established usage in the ethnography, it seems to me that the English word 'folk' often makes better sense. Thus the descendants of people who came from Saba are known in the chiefdom in which they settled as 'the Saba folk'.[9] In this respect these recent incomers resemble the clan that owns the chiefdom rather than the clans of the indigenous people. The latter tend to have proper names with no etymology, at most a suggestion that the name may be that of the mythical ancestor who emerged from the ground. Sometimes the clan name refers to a mystical capacity with which the clan members are endowed ('the curing folk'). By contrast, and like recent incomers, the clan that 'owns' the chiefdom is identified by the name of the locality they came from or of the historical person who led them to the chiefdom, or both. Such names are elements from historical and legendary narratives about the journeying of the founder of the dominant clan and his companions to the chiefdom where their descendants now live and rule.

Some chiefdoms may include, or be entirely composed of, settlers who have moved into the hills from without. Some of these local descent groups are known to be the descendants of slaves or slave soldiers of the old sultanates of Waday at Abeshir and Baguirmi at Massenya. There are also Hadjeray whose ancestors were originally Baguirmi peasantry living in the immediate hinterland of Massenya but who moved into the hills from the west, perhaps to enjoy a less oppressive and more independent social and economic life compared to that which probably prevailed in the vicinity of the Baguirmi capital. From the east there has been a long tradition of migration of Daju-speaking people from the Sudan.[10] Nachtigal (1971:155), labouring with simple dualisms, described these Daju as 'Muslims who have not renounced their pagan ways'. He also remarked on cases of the descendants of migrants whom he might have described as pagans who have renounced their Muslims ways.[11]

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9 'From this perspective, clanship is often better seen as sub-ethnicity rather than as super lineage' (Burnham (1996:156).

10 Fuchs (1997:14–18), Vincent (1975:1–16)

11 In 1857, a holy man (*feki*), Ibrahim Sherif ed-Din, on his way to Mecca from the west, attracted a large and devout following when passing through the lands of Bornu. The ruler of Baguirmi, fearing that this large and growing caravan of pilgrims would empty his villages, led his army out to disperse them, but with fatal consequences for himself. When the caravan entered the southern foothills of the Hadjeray massif, it came under attack from war parties from local chiefdoms, and many were killed. Some of them turned back, others sought to continue by going north deeper into the Hadjeray to try and reach Waday and from there go east to Mecca, but 'some remained among the Pagans, and, so to speak, reverted to such themselves' (Nachtigal 1987:421).

Hostilities and alliances

There seems little doubt that many of the movements from one chiefdom to another within the hills are the consequence of internecine conflicts within chiefdoms between factions of the owners of the chiefdom, as well as of hostilities between chiefdoms, of the plundering of one chiefdom by another. Internecine hostilities could lead to serious violence and flight. Jean-Francoise Vincent (1975:28–29) reports an alliance between a faction of a ruling clan of one chiefdom with another chiefdom of a different ethnic group (speech community), which resulted in the massacre of several hundred of their rivals and the flight of the survivors to the safety of other chiefdoms. As regards hostile action between chiefdoms, typically a powerful chiefdom attacked and looted a neighbouring, weaker one. As the old men of Gone chiefdom told Vincent, they descended upon 'un village dont le chef n'etait pas fort' and took away all that they could: livestock, men, women and children. The women and children who did not escape were absorbed into the clan of the owners of the chiefdom. Some of the captured men were immediately exchanged for horses with Arab or Fulani nomads or for fabrics with iterant merchants from the Sudan. Vincent (1975:58–59) remarks that, at the time of her fieldwork in the mid-twentieth century, these historic events were invoked by the people of a chiefdom when they felt that a neighbouring chiefdom whom they used to pillage was not paying them sufficient respect. In the chiefdom of Sara among the Kenga, Vandame (1975:91) recorded several oral traditions of internecine hostilities between factions of the ruling clan of the chiefdom, as well as of raiding adjacent chiefdoms. The elders of Sara chiefdom recalled that, for ten years in the latter half of the nineteenth century, they were at war with the neighbouring chiefdom of Barama and then with the ritually superior chiefdom of Mataya.

However, hostilities and alliances went together. Not only did Kenga chiefdoms raid other chiefdoms, they also entered into alliances to defend themselves and others from raiding. Such alliances commonly included herding groups of nomadic Arab pastoralists seeking protection for themselves and their herds from attack by other chiefdoms. 'Each Kenga chiefdom had "their Arabs" which they protected from the other Kenga chiefdoms' (Vandame 1975:92). In return for protection from cattle raids, a group of pastoralists would give the chief a cow at the time of an annual ceremony. Such alliances also permitted peaceful economic exchanges between agriculturalists and pastoralists, to the benefit of both parties. Finally, there are reports of the inhabitants of various chiefdoms from several different speech communities uniting to share and defend an especially secure and defensible location when slave-raiders from Waday appeared in the region (Vincent 1975:27, fn. 7).

Baguirmi and Waday in the Hadjeray Hills

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, Hadjeray experienced a shift in power from Waday to Baguirmi. This affected not only the Kenga chiefdoms and others in the north that had benefited from their historical and ideological relationship with the rulers of Baguirmi, but also chiefdoms to the south, such as those looking to the rulers of Gamkul and Korbol, who paid tribute to Baguirmi. In 1872, Nachtigal, in the court-in-exile of the sultan of Baguirmi (Massenya having been taken by Waday), was particularly impressed by the presence there of the chief of Korbol and his entourage.

> They were to some extent trusted allies of Abu Sekkin [the ousted sultan of Baguirmi], and were on a higher level of development than the other representatives of the neighbouring pagan tribes. The Bua of Korbol stood out particularly, who, close blood relations to be sure of their chief Woido, were dressed in real robes and rode taller horses, with bridles in the Bornu and Baguirmi fashion. They were magnificent figures, beautifully well-proportioned, with powerful shoulders, outstandingly well developed muscles, a broad face, open expression and self confident bearing (Nachtigal 1987:337).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Waday had established a regional centre in the northern hills at Korlongo, in what it called the province of Dar Kodro, from there, every year, armed patrols would set out in all directions to collect tribute. According to Peter Fuchs (1997:17), the Hadjeray people around Korlongo lived on good terms with Waday officials. In the mid-1960s the local social structure was quite different from what was general throughout the hills, and it has been suggested that this difference can be related to the changes introduced into the locality by the Waday Sultanate (Pouillon 1964:50–51).

At this point it is worth pausing to place this account alongside the model of hierarchical Islamic states plundering egalitarian stateless pagan societies huddling together to defend themselves. Most obviously the model emphasises hostilities between the states on the one hand and the stateless societies on the other; it therefore obscures the fact that the inhabitants of the hills had as much to fear from each other as from raiders from beyond their homelands, from Baguirmi and then Waday. Moreover, the classification of groups of adjacent settlements as communities, as in effect 'stateless' societies, originates in the perspective and interests of an outsider. From within, by contrast, there is an awareness of a subtle interplay between community and network, where the latter can manifest itself in both symmetrical and asymmetrical or clientilistic forms, as well as a tension between relatively stable local groups and a general history of movement and migration. Similar themes are evident among the people of the Nuba Hills of the Republic of the Sudan.

Nuba local communities

The ethnographies of the Nuba of south Kordofan in the Sudan describe an ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous population of around a million people. By the end of the twentieth century, a significant diaspora of people describing themselves as Nuba had emerged not only in the Republic of the Sudan but also internationally. Similarities with the Hadjeray are obvious, especially the themes of locality – an idiom of clanship that reflects flight and reformation – spirit mediums and shrine custodians. As before, the focus of interest is on the relationships among Nuba communities, as well as between them and the nineteenth-century pre-colonial centres of power in whose hinterland the inhabitants of the Nuba Hills then conducted their lives.[12]

As in the case of the Hadjeray, the names, which are of Arabic derivation, that are commonly used by ethnographers to identify the people who live in the many different parts of the Nuba Hills reflect the interests and perspectives of outsiders, as well as a certain contempt for the people so identified. While these classifications sometimes coincided with speech communities or with intermarrying populations, this was not always the case, nor were speech communities everywhere congruent with patterns of intermarriage. In the northern hills there seems to be have been a closer correspondence between the Arab classifications and those of the people themselves than in the southern hills, where there are indications that local identity and solidarity prevailed over an identity deriving from common ancestral origins. It should also be noted that as late as the 1960s, some Nuba communities in the southern hills did not believe that other Nuba existed besides those adjacent communities with whom they interacted.[13]

However, where intermarrying populations were more or less congruent with speech communities and were also articulating an institutionalised awareness of this collectivity as something to which they belonged and which conferred upon them a distinguishing identity, then such groups were to be found in the northern Nuba Hills. Nadel (1947:363) was impressed by the strong sense of an ethnic collective identity, evident in different ways, among the people of Nyima, Koalib and Dilling. This sense of being part of a wider and more inclusive community than a local descent group or a settlement was expressed in terms either of a recognition that the local groups were performing the same local rites, or of a deliberate coordination of different clan-owned cults addressing different aspects of the well-being of the entire community: a kind of ritual division of labour. There were, with one significant exception, no cases of this collective solidarity taking the form of a unifying collective or public rite in addition to the

12 The most useful general references for nineteenth-century Nuba institutions are Nadel (1947) and Stevenson (1984), but a number of recent detailed ethnographies of significant aspects of Nuba society contain valuable historical evidence about local matters, e.g. Baumann (1987), Faris (1989), Rottenburg (1991) and Manger (1994).

13 Nadel (1947:267–269), Faris (1968:46)

numerous domestic or private rituals and clan cults. The exception was Dilling, where a paramount chief, referred to colloquially as the 'sultan' or *mek*, from Arabic *malik* (king), embodied the population at large as a collective entity. Here, for example, every household contributed to the building of a new complex of houses at the installation of a new sultan, and when he travelled to the court of the superior Ghudayat-Funj sultan to be confirmed as the new Dilling sultan, he was accompanied by men representing all the Dilling clans.[14]

Clans and clanship

Clans and clanship were still features of identity and sociality in the communities of the Nuba Hills in the first quarter of the twentieth century. James Faris (1969) reported on the vitality of clans in the south-east Nuba Hills in the 1960s, though by the late 1980s Baumann (1987:37) was writing of the 'demise of corporate clans' in the Miri Hills. Clans among the Nuba were commonly patrilineal. Matrilineal clans are reported from the southern and some western hills and, in the extreme south-east, an individual was a member of both a matrilineal and a patrilineal clan. Among the latter there is evidence from local traditions and the history of clan names that, as among their neighbours to the west, the population was originally organised into matrilineal clans, patrilineal clans being a later introduction from the north and central hills. Patriclans, or more usually their sections, controlled particular ritual functions or cults on behalf of the community, their origins being bound up with the introduction into the community of new cults for the benefit of the local population. Patriclan sections were identified by, and named after, the ritual functions for which they were responsible. A cult custodian was selected by the clan or clan section elders from these sections (Faris 1969:245).

Those who comprised a group of intermarrying clans dwelling together on a hill or a range of hills typically accounted for the origin of their clans not by means of a narrative of emergence from one point of origin and subsequent division, but invariably in terms of a historical and mythological coming together, usually from very diverse locations. The ancestors of the twenty-one clans recorded by Nadel in the Nyima Hills, for example, are said variously to have dropped from the sky, emerged from beneath the ground or arrived in the hills from different places on the surface of the earth. The people who make up a Nuba clan do so by virtue of an exclusive shared substance. This is particularly evident in the notion, which was widespread in the Nuba Hills, that only members of the same clan can infect each other with leprosy. Leprosy results from

[14] Nadel (1947:360), MacMichael (1922:203–206). The Dilling chief must be distinguished politically from figures such as the unique rainmaker who dwelled among the Nyima. Rainmakers are structurally unable to create a political community, being agencies in the political strategies of others rather than political agents themselves (Nadel 1947:448–453).

sexual intercourse between members of the same clan, and moreover the disease does not necessarily strike the offenders themselves, but any member of their clan. In the Dilling hills, clan members were defined and distinguished as the potential subjects of 'possession' by a certain spirit being whose identity is also that of the clan, so that a clan is known as the people of such and such a spirit.[15]

In Otoro the identity of each clan was expressed in terms of its reputed original location, its traditional point of origin in the Otoro Hills, and in symbolic practices that pointed to the place or direction from where the clan had migrated. Population movements have repeatedly taken place within the Otoro Hills, according to their own traditions, from the earliest legendary times, but they are also remembered as historical events, with radical consequences for clan identities. During the Mahdiya, the people of Kujama, the lowest and most exposed of the Otoro Hills, fled to two more secure communities deeper into the hills. Thirty years later these refugees from Kujama had become a single clan, 'the Kujama folk', despite the fact that in Kujama they had belonged to several different clans. On the other hand, fourth-generation, by then bilingual immigrants from the Tira Hills had retained and brought with them their own clan identities, and these clans had become part of the inventory of Otoro clans, and the people fully part of the local communities in which they now lived. Thus in hostilities between the Otoro communities in which the Tira immigrants had settled and those of their old Tira homeland, the immigrants fought with their Otoro neighbours against the Tira. During the Mahdiya, the Tira were joined by two non-Tira groups, said by some to be Arabs, seeking refuge in their hills. In adapting to Tira society and culture, their descendants came to constitute two Tira clans named after their places of origin, Loriyo and Lgegen (Nadel 1947:177). In the south-east hills large matriclans were composed of clan sections, the latter typically tracing their origins back to a tradition of a girl who was found in the wild; although she became a member of her finder's matriclan, her descendants now form a new clan section. As Faris (1969:246) notes, this is not the idiom of a segmentary lineage system but echoes instead the historical fragmentation and re-formation of communities.[16]

Hostilities and peace pacts

The dispersal of clan membership among several local communities does not seem to have moderated or affected the pattern of enmity and friendship between local communities. In the Otoro Hills there were about thirty-five dispersed patrilineal clans, with about seven to nine of them represented in each of the hill communities. Warfare was

15 See Nadel (1947:94, 95, fn. 1, 252, 304, 417–418).

16 For a similar ideology in a comparable region of the eastern Sudan, see James (1979:62–63) on the matrilineal Uduk of the southern Funj.

usually conducted between 'traditional' enemies. Yet the presence or absence of fellow clansmen does not seem to have determined whether or not another community was identified as a traditional enemy and therefore was a likely target for a raid. Nadel gave examples of such hostile relationships, as well as a list, though incomplete, of the distribution of clans among these Otoro communities. The evidence indicates that clanship had no mitigating effects on hostile relationships. Thus the settlement of Urila normally raided the settlement of Kujur, their neighbours to the north, with whom they shared four out of the nine clans represented in both villages. To the south there were two settlements on the slopes of Chungor Hill, with one of which Urila shared five clans and none at all with the other, though neither were considered to be traditional enemies (Nadel 1947:92, 147). The widely dispersed matrilineal clans of Korongo and Mesakin similarly had no impact on the pattern of hostilities and ties of friendship. Moreover, even among the same people, no attempt was made to proscribe spear-fighting contests between clansmen (Nadel 1947:274, 299).

Instead of appealing to the proto-ethnicity of clanship in order to control violence and raiding, by the end of the nineteenth century the people had deliberately established institutions throughout the hills dedicated to the mediation of hostilities, usually in the form of pacts between particular individuals in each community known as 'chiefs of the path'.[17] These individuals were widely recognized in their region and enjoyed immunity from attack. In the southern hills of Korongo and Mesakin, the chief of the path had to be a 'Big Man' in the material sense of being physically strong and rich in cattle, and with a large household and network of kin. In the northern hills – Nyima, Dilling, Kaduru and Koalib – a chief of the path was usually either a spirit medium or a close kinsman of one, or sometimes a man with a reputation for courage and integrity.[18]

The minimal tasks of a chief of the path were to liaise with his or her counterpart, act as a broker between hostile communities and, in interludes of prolonged hostilities, arrange for the ransoming or exchange of captives. Captives who were not ransomed were sold, and if into another local community they would be adopted as a son or daughter by the purchaser to strengthen his household and local descent group. The chief of the path's house was a sanctuary for strangers, some of whom may have come from hostile communities, as well as for traders. For example, in the late nineteenth century, there were four chiefs of the path in the four settlements of the Korongo Hills who facilitated peaceful interludes among their own settlements and with hostile communities in the Talodi and Moro Hills. Talodi women would then come to one of the chiefs of the path in a Korongo village bringing pots for sale, Moro would bring tobacco to exchange, and Arab pastoralists would come to barter metal tools and weapons for grain and sesame.

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17 Faris (1971:3–4) uses the expression 'peace priest' for south-east Nuba.

18 Nadel (1947:159, 309–311, 453), Stevenson (1984:87–88)

The chiefs of two communities might also go further and secure the protection and hospitality of the other by entering into a pact of 'friendship' (Nadel 1947:454). These agreements were extended to the kin and descendants of the original chiefs who had made the pact, and they sometimes embraced their entire local communities. Homicide involving individuals from communities so linked did not entail retaliation but rites of purification of the killer in order to ward off supernatural sanctions. Relationships of alliance conformed to the basic relationship between chiefs of the path in that they were essentially non-aggression pacts rather than alliances to attack third parties. However, there are indications that they included mutual assistance in dealing with raids on either community by third parties. The inhabitants of Delami, for example, recall how, during the Mahdiyya, one of their chiefs of the path concluded a pact of mutual assistance with the people of Kortala, about 35 kilometres to the northwest, and another with a group of Arab pastoralists known as the Togia, a section of the Hawazma (MacMichael 1912:151). The pact between Delami and Kortala was entered into by their respective chiefs of the path, that with the Togia Arabs by their sheikh. The sheikh swore on the body of each chief of the path, and the chiefs of the path swore on the Koran. Delami people told Nadel that on one renowned occasion, when Delami was attacked by some 'Arawgi' Arabs, their Togia friends, who were nearby though outnumbered, drove off the Arawgi, killing two of them and capturing seven horses.[19]

Instead of individuals, sometimes two clans from different localities established a relationship of mutual assistance with the declared purpose of promoting peaceful relations between the communities inhabited by the clans. The simple ceremonies that instituted these relationships were variants of those used to formalise relationships of friendship between individuals and symbolised their coming together and sharing life. Thus blood from two animals was mixed in one bowl and then smeared on to the representative clansmen present. These inter-clan relationships are reported only for the north-west hills (Stevenson 1984:151).

Asymmetric alliances

Of particular salience are the asymmetric alliances between local communities, which ultimately linked them to centres of power beyond the Nuba Hills and induced in the local Nuba communities an emulation of those centres. Such was the relationship already mentioned between the ruler of Dilling in the northern Nuba Hills and the Ghudiat-Funj sultan of Kordofan. Southern Kordofan was, according to Harold MacMichael, repeatedly invaded in the eighteenth century by the armies of the Funj sultans of Sennar.

[19] Nadel (1947:448). The 'Arawgi' in Nadel's account may be the Rowoga division of the Hawazma (MacMichael 1912:152–153).

However, something like a systematic subordination of the population was achieved by the Ghudiat sultans of Kordofan during their dominion over southern Kordofan from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the beginning of the nineteenth (Spaulding 1987). Tribute was paid to the Sennar sultan by the Ghudiat viceroy in 'cattle and iron' (MacMichael 1912:66–68). Even under Turco-Egyptian protection during the nineteenth century, the Ghudiat seemed to have maintained their authority and the prestige of a Funj tradition (Holt 1958:16). Nadel reported that, in 1938, the people of Dilling described their sultan as their tenth, which, assuming an average reign of fifteen years and the traditional inter-regnum of three years, would place the beginnings of the Dilling chiefship at the time that the Ghudiat were consolidating their rule over the region.[20] The relationship between the Dilling sultan and his Ghudiat superior, at least ceremonially, persisted well into the twentieth century. The conclusion of the complex installation of the Dilling sultan, which began with his seclusion and then investiture with the regalia of office, concluded with a procession by the new sultan, accompanied by representatives of all the clans who recognised his authority, to the residence of the Ghudiat sultan. Formerly, the Dilling sultan took with him a gift of two slaves for his superior. The latter reciprocated with the accoutrements of a mounted warrior: a horse and saddle, cape and sword. But the central rite, replicating similar installation rites throughout Sudanic Africa, was the shaving of the paramount's head and the placing on it of a skull cap and turban while holy men chanted blessings from the Koran.[21]

This asymmetric relationship between the Dilling and the Ghudiat sultans was reproduced in a subsidiary tributary relationship between the Dilling ruler and the chiefs of two settlements in the Nyima Hills, those of Nyitil and Kurmetti, about twenty kilometres to the south west of Dilling; a similar relationship with the chief of Kortala in the Koalib Hills, about seventy kilometres east of Dilling. But there are few details about the content of these relationships.[22]

There was a similar but much more elaborate asymmetric relationship between the Nuba-Funj Sultanate of Tegali and the communities in the eastern Nuba Hills, from Delami south to Jebel Shwai. The people in the crescent of the south-east hills, Kao, Nyaro, Funjor, Werni and Talodi, including Arab pastoralists, acknowledged the supremacy of the rulers of Gedir, who were installed by the Sultan of Tegali and who, like the Tegali sultans, emulated the Islamic Funj court.[23] These relationships ceased when the Mahdist army destroyed the Tegali Sultanate at the end of the nineteenth century. However, they provided justification in the twentieth century for a devolved administrative unit of local

20 Nadel (1947:360), Stevenson (1984:38)

21 Nadel (1947:457). For an account of the use of pacts ('blood partnerships'), normally made with peripheral and subordinated populations by the ruler of an Islamic state (Dar al Kuti) in order to establish a hierarchical network extending out to them, see Cordell (1979).

22 Nadel (1947:362), Stevenson (1984:119–120)

23 Elles (1935:15), Faris (1971:3–4), Ewald (1990), Manger (1994:42)

government established by the Anglo-Egyptian government which placed the south-eastern Nuba communities under the jurisdiction and fiscal authority of the Tegali elite (Ewald 1990:134).

Conclusions

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this review of what the ethnographic record concerning the Hadjeray and Nuba has to say about stateless societies resisting the depredations of states in the nineteenth century. While slave raids and plundering were visited upon them from centres of power beyond their hills, it is also the case that communities within the hills were engaged in defending themselves not just from outside intruders, but also from hostile actions from neighbouring communities like their own. Among the Hadjeray, communities were described as being divided into the rulers who had invaded the chiefdom and the locals they conquered. But it is also evident that these communities deliberately set about creating ways and means of mediating and circumscribing hostilities, as well as of entering into relationships of alliance for mutual support. In none of these undertakings is there any evidence that cultural features were anything other than incidental and contingent factors in what were essentially pragmatic negotiations in the interests of the security and economic well-being of local communities. These local communities were envisioned as being of considerable antiquity, with distinct, though permeable, boundaries. By contrast, despite their tendency to promote an exclusivity and continuity based on descent, in most cases the proto-ethnic 'clans' proved to be relatively impermanent, always subject to re-formation after disruption, flight and resettlement. Only with respect to the ruling clans of the chiefdoms or the clans owning particular cults or spirits could they be said to constitute enduring material features of the social and cultural landscape comparable to the local communities.

For both Hadjeray and Nuba, the image of their unifying identities as two distinct moral communities being forged in a common history of centuries of strife and enmity between themselves and with hostile intruders from beyond their homelands does not correspond to reality. In fact, the populations of both the Hadjeray and Nuba Hills were deeply penetrated by a network of hierarchical relationships that linked numerous local communities to each other and ultimately to centres of power outside the hills. The inequalities of these relationships were replicated at each level, from the most peripheral and, in particular, that of a ruling clan lording it over the indigenous people of its chiefdom while covertly respecting their access to the local gods, to the most all-embracing and general, that between the sultans and their respective pagan hinterlands. While Islamic symbolism was concentrated in the centres of power and became more dilute towards the peripheries, particularistic symbols were distributed among the diverse communities of the peripheries and became less obvious as one moved towards the centres.

Though these networks of hierarchical relationships of emulation were interwoven with a pattern of inter-community alliances and hostilities, the general movement of power and commodities, including slaves, was, as intended, towards their concentration in the hands of the sultans.

The ethnic terms which pervade current attempts to describe and explain what is going on in the eastern Sudan evoke a sense of the presence of a rich and ancient culture, of an enduring 'ethnic consciousness' mediating the relationship between the individual and the state. The evidence relating to the eastern Sudan in the nineteenth century does not easily conform to such a model of the individual subject in opposition to the state. The testimony of Yusuf Kuwa Mekki, mentioned at the beginning of this article, is relevant here. According to him, the emergence of the Nuba, and presumably the Hadjeray, as the basis of modern popular movements in the national and regional, as well as political and military, conflicts of the eastern Sudan has more to do with twentieth-century nationalism and the experiences and actions of educated Nuba in the modern cities of Khartoum and N'Djamena not to mention Paris and London than with what was going on in their hills during the nineteenth century.[24]

Finally if, as Sahlins (1993:4) has argued, 'we are assisting at a spontaneous, worldwide movement of cultural defiance', then we have to reflect on our own role as anthropologists in this process. It may be that, for immediate tactical reasons, a particular narrative is necessary for resistance, but such accounts should not be shielded from scrutiny for fear of critical analysis being seen as symbolic aggression or as subverting a people's stand against oppression. Indeed, movement away from a hopeless schismogenesis will require critical dialogue, not only between but also within groups at all levels.

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[24] There is less information on the history of Hadjeray cultural consciousness and ethnic politics, but what there is seems to indicate a similar trajectory to that of the Nuba (Anonymus 1988, Buijtenhuijs 1991).

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