

Local Resource Management in the Context of Civil War and Genocide: Identity, Cultural Tradition and Territory among the Nuba of the Sudan

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ABSTRACT Many Nuba groups in Central Sudan are today in a situation of open conflict with their government. The Khartoum regime is staging military “jihad” campaigns to force their version of Islam and Arabism upon the Nuba, denying them access to land necessary for their survival and relocating them to “peace villages”. The paper sets this contemporary crisis in the historical context of Nuba resistances and shows that they relate to issues such as Nuba access to land in competition with neighboring groups and also government land grabbing, and fighting for a Nuba identity in an environment of Muslim and Arabic groups. But such issues should not only be seen in the context of “outward struggles”. Through time, changes in economic adaptation, in land use, in leadership forms, gender roles, and religious affiliation have been ongoing processes within Nuba societies, signifying “inward struggles” through which various Nuba groups have sought to find their place in the wider Sudanese context. The paper also looks at such Nuba discourse about themselves and the others, focusing on land and labor relations, moral discourses about being a good Muslim, or a good man and women and issues of consumption. The conclusion is that the ways Nuba individuals position themselves in such discourses provide a constraint in the definition of a clear-cut Nuba identity, and also on the mobilizing potential in the physical struggle. This forms basis for a critique of the very term “Nuba” itself and the ways it has been essentialized.