

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Facing social-political challenges: A historical examination on the survival methods of the Nubi ethnic minority in Uganda**

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Since the pacification of Uganda by the British Imperial Government in 1894, up to the time Nubians were recognized as an ethnic community in 1995, they continue to retain their indigenous ethnic identity, through professing Islam, speaking their traditional language (Ki-Nubi) and practicing their own traditional values, for example traditional dressings and foods. Nubians quest for survival as an ethnic group has been threatened over the time by the incursion of the negative political and social forces right from 1894 to 1995. This situation impacted their existence as an ethnic minority in Uganda. Using a qualitative approach and a historical research design, drawing on both written and oral information, this particular study established that Nubians faced myriads of both political and social challenges from the time of their systematic arrival in Uganda up to when they gained their ethnic recognition. This situation however, did not deter has not deterred the Nubis to identify themselves as an ethnic minority in a multi-ethnic Ugandan society. The Nubis as they are conventionally known devised strategies or methods that helped them survive as an ethnic minority of their settlement. The study concludes that regardless of the social-political challenges facing the Nubis of Uganda, they continue to survive as an ethnic cluster. through Islam which forms part of their culture and not a mere religion.

**Key words:** Nubians, ethnicity, survival, Nubis, traditions, Islam, language, conglomeration, discrimination, minority.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Nubis, a minority ethnic group in Uganda, were negatively affected by some social and political forces dating back to colonial era. Some of these negative forces included discrimination and political alienation ostensibly to extinct the group from being recognized as one of Uganda's ethnic community. It was not until 1995 that the Uganda Nubis were recognized as citizens and listed in Uganda's constitution as one of its indigenous communities, in spite of this development, the Nubis were able to survive as an

ethnic group visible in the areas of their settlement across the country. This situation captivated their determination and initiative to establish several survival methods which helped them to live as a ethnic community. The questions this study tried to examine were; What political and social challenges did the Nubis experience since their advent in Uganda from the colonial up to the post-colonial era? How were they able to survive as an ethnic minority yet they were not recognized

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as indigenous people by different political regimes including the British, their former colonial masters. Using ethnic constructivism approaches to ethnic survival, this particular study argues that the Uganda Nubis were able to survive as an ethnic minority because they were able to assert themselves as an ethnic group through embracing Islamic religion and making it part of their livelihood. To become a Nubi, the first qualification criterion was that one had to become a Muslim, regardless of one's ethnic background. In fact, there is a common saying among the Nubis "All Nubis are Moslems but not all Moslems are Nubis." Thus, Islam helped the Nubians establish themselves and construct a unique ethnic group with 'African Islamized culture.' The unity exhibited by the Nubi through Islam helped them employ various methods at different stages of their livelihoods into their independent futuristic human race as a Nubi cluster.

### **Constructivism approaches to ethnic creation and survival**

The Nubis like any other ethnic minority experienced social-political challenges to survive and sustain their existence, let alone acceptance among the majority ethnicities, which have lived on for centuries. What should be noted though is the fact, that ethnic minorities have transformed themselves into majority ethnicities using their ethnic minority power, influence and acumen. A case in point is that of the Baganda people from Buganda Kingdom, one of the oldest centralized kingdoms in East Africa. By the fifteenth century they constituted only nine clans with three counties of Busiro, Kyadondo and Mawokota. Using both conventional and non-conventional survival methods, Buganda till date is one of the biggest centralized kingdoms in East Africa with over eighteen counties and fifty-two clans. With their survival, the Nubi ethnic cluster has been able to construct new civilizations and discourses which today shape the social, political and economic welfare of not only themselves, but those where they settle.

The survival of the Nubis was examined by reflecting on the theories of ethnic construction. First, there is need to appreciate that long before the Nubis made entrance in Uganda, they were various social enclaves in Sudan who were brought together by the colonialists to form what we today describe as the Nubi ethnic identity. Within the social constructionist approach of ethnic creation, Adlparvar and Tadros (2016) argue that all ethnicities survive and get created using three approaches, namely the individuals as social agents of social construction. This approach contends that ethnicities survive through creation and recreation using every day actions of individuals. Such individuals perceive themselves as associated with certain ethnic identity. They act to confirm, contest and propagate their identity. The second

approach is the discursive formations. This approach attests that discursive formations and cultural systems result into the sustainability of ethnic identities. Third, is the role of broad social, political and economic forces in the sustainability and construction of ethnicities. This approach focuses on the processes of ethno-genesis, which is the process of formation and development of an ethnic group. Ethno genesis as a process is linked to colonialism, globalization, modernity, nationalism and the formation of nation-states. As we reflect on the Nubis, we need to appreciate the fact that they were partly introduced in Uganda by European explorers and colonialist as early as 1882 (Rowe, 1988)

The Nubi survival and sustainability in Uganda is best understood using the colonial lens. Those who allude to this school of argument state that the coming, establishment and settlement of the Nubis in Uganda was entirely the effort and selfish effort of the early colonial masters. Constructivists consider ethnicity in Africa to have been invented by both colonialists and African intellectuals within the colonial frame work (Ranger, 1989; Vail, 1989). In this respect Isajiw (1993) contends that ethnicity is something created and maintained by a foreign economy or a product of economic exploitation arising out of internal colonialism and cultural division. It is from this point of view that the Nubis emerged as a colonial construct since their systematic advent in Uganda back in 1894 was initiated by Captain Fredrick Lugard of the Imperial British East African Company (I.B.E.A. Co).

To clearly examine the survival methods of Uganda Nubis, one perhaps needs to take note on the social-political challenges they faced since their advent in Uganda as part of the British colonial army throughout the colonial period (1894-1962), and during the post-colonial era under different political regimes (1962-1995).

### **Social-political challenges that threatened the survival of Nubi ethnic cluster**

The process of Nubianization in modern Uganda has its roots in the slave raiding and Zariba system of the nineteenth century Southern Sudan. The Nubians were part of the slave army employed by the Arabs for slave raiding activities. They were a conglomeration of different ethnic tribes that shared their livelihood in a number of Arab settlements known as Zaribas. In these Zariba settlements, they acquired military skills, practiced Islam and adopted Islamic culture. The Egyptians and the British used the Nubis during their pacification struggles in Sudan and in East Africa. In Uganda specifically the Nubians were recruited as the British colonial army by Lugard to fight other ethnicities like the Banyoro of South western Uganda and the Acholis of Northern Uganda.

The Banyoro perceived Nubis as British colonial mercenaries while the Acholi hated them for their

involvement in slave raids. It is their military involvement with the British that many indigenous societies in Uganda regarded them as African fore runners of colonialism.<sup>1</sup> Due to their military role, the Nubis were resisted and were considered allies of the British by some other ethnicities. It is worth noting that some societies that lost their political sovereignty to the British like Buganda, Bunyoro and Toro, often blamed partly the Nubis because of their military role. The Nubis hence were at times isolated and discriminated against by other ethnic groups.<sup>2</sup>

The Nubis were at times discriminated against because first, they had participated in the Madhist revolt which almost led to an end of the European colonialism in Sudan and Uganda;<sup>3</sup> second, because they belonged to the minority religion (Islam) and most importantly their military skills, which was a threat to the imperial and local forces in Uganda (Hinamundi, 2012). Their survival was therefore at cross roads. The British who forcefully used them were not willing to support and promote their survival as an indigenous ethnic group but also regarded them as Sudanese. On the other hand, those they fought against for their colonial masters were not willing to sympathize due to their colonial military involvement. This argument is well elucidated in the words of Hinamundi (2012), "The Nubians were the guns that stood guard as Lugard declared Uganda a British protectorate in 1894, making them officers of the British crown throughout the over 60 years of British rule in Uganda"

The fact that the Nubis belonged to a minority religion, which was not respected by the francophone and Anglophone religions of Catholics and Protestants posed a big threat to their existence and survival. No tribe wished to identify itself with the Nubis in Uganda. Islam, the religion of the Nubis therefore posed a great challenge of being accepted in the Buganda community. Not even the Bagandas who converted to Islam were accepted. This partly explains the religious wars in Buganda, where the Protestants and Catholics allied to fight the Buganda Muslims. This was made worse when the Nubian soldiers came in to protect and defend Islam and its converts. The fact that the Baganda Muslims were persecuted and isolated proves that the survival of the Muslim Nubis was at risk, bordering extinction. Evidence of persecution is provided by Wild (1955), who argues that Mukajanga persecuted the Sudanese Baganda Muslim followers on the orders of Mutesa I. On this note Katumba and Welbourn (1964) argue that Muslims had for 70 years been treated as no more than third rate Baganda. Rowe (1988) added, "Ganda Muslims were

looked down upon by everyone else and their strange manner of Nubian Arab dressing (turbans and tarbushes) and their discounted religion made them seem foreign". If those who followed the Nubian religion were persecuted and disrespected, one wonders what could have happened to the Nubians in Buganda. To crown up this argument, Mugaju and Oloka-Onyango (2000) state that religious sectarianism undermined the progress of the predominantly Muslim Nubis. It is therefore not in question that the existence of the Nubis in Buganda affected their growth and acceptance.

Mugaju et al. (2000), argue that the Nubis is a creation of the colonial establishment of indirect rule in Uganda; their colonial policy before 1945 was to keep African apart and promote disunity, ethnicity and parochialism. They implemented this through indirect rule. Magaju et al. (2000) therefore argue that the 68 years of uninterrupted colonial rule halted and froze the national process of ethnic evolution in Uganda. According to Magaju, et al. (2000), the process of cultural diffusion through trade, intermarriages and migrations was disrupted, because the British then emphasized the differences and prejudices, rather than similarities between the people of Uganda. To extend this argument to the Nubian position in Uganda, had the British colonialism not to have promoted the "divide and rule" policy, the Nubians could have been welcomed much better than they did. It is therefore succinctly clear that the resistance of the local ethnicities in Uganda was a seed planted by the British indirect rule, which hampered the progress and development of the Nubi community in Uganda. This argument is buttressed by Mugaju, et al (2000), who stated "The colonial regime had, in pursuit of the strategy of divide and rule armed the disadvantaged Sudanic speakers and demilitarized more privileged Baganda"

The Nubis were victims of ethnic manipulation. Although the British used them to colonize Uganda ethnic communities, the indigenous ethnic identities, especially the Baganda used them to fight off their adversaries. For example, the Baganda used them to expand the Buganda kingdom at the expense of the Bunyoro kingdom.<sup>4</sup> The Baganda Muslims used them to fight off the Baganda Christians. Amin used the Nubis as a buffer to capture and remain in political power. Obote eliminated the Nubis to create a powerful Langi Acholi ethnic cluster that would sustain him in power (Mugaju, et al 2000). Commenting about the ethnic manipulation, Banton (1994) contends "Ethnic identity is a social capital brought to bear on the political negotiation table by different groups at different times. As such, the selfish goods and goals of the ethnic identities are used as vehicles to achieve a measure in terms of wealth, power and status". These ethnic manipulations without any reward do not only affect the progress of the Nubis, but their existence and survival as a whole.

<sup>1</sup> Chairman Arua Nubian Forum and A Cultural Preservation Award winner of the East African Nubian Awards 2017. Interviewed at his residence in Arua on 15<sup>th</sup>/09/2018.

<sup>2</sup> Khemis Juma Kenyi is a retired teacher and a highly respected advisor on Nubian culture, as well as a radio presenter Voice of Africa Radio. Interviewed on 29<sup>th</sup>/09/2018 at his residence in Mpakawero, Bombo Luwero District.

<sup>3</sup> Chairman Arua Nubian Forum and A Cultural Preservation Award winner of

the East African Nubian Awards 2017. Interviewed at his residence in Arua on 15<sup>th</sup>/09/2018.

## METHODOLOGY

The examination of past experiences on the survival of Uganda Nubis calls for a Historical Research Design. A historical research design enables the researcher to systematically collect, evaluate and describe data to explain and understand actions or events that occurred sometimes in the past (Hassan, 2015) The design also involves establishment of the facts as provided by both secondary and primary sources in order to arrive at conclusions concerning past events (Golder, 2000). Secondary sources involved extensive use of written materials such as textbooks and journals, while primary sources included written reports and oral interviews from encultured informants since it involves exploring past histories on the survival of the Nubis. The design is important towards the collection of data using both oral and written sources as a way of explaining survival methods of the Nubis of Uganda amidst social-political challenges.

The narrative on the survival methods of Uganda Nubis is best explained using a qualitative data collection approach. According to Samuel et al. (2017), Qualitative approach was developed by Wilhelm Wundt in early twentieth century. Wundt advocated strongly that human life is encompassed of different aspects like culture, expressions, beliefs, morality and imaginations, and these aspects can only be researched qualitatively. Since the study involved all most all aspects outlined by Wundt, a qualitative approach was adopted. Shank (2002) also argues that qualitative research as a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning, is useful to a researcher to get a holistic picture from historically unique situation. The Nubis for that matter presented resilience towards their survival as an ethnic group, regardless of the social-political challenges they faced.

### **Survival methods of the Nubi ethnic minority in Uganda**

Right from the times of the colonialism, imperialism, capitalism and now globalization, weak ethnicities have disappeared and new ones have evolved. Strong ones still influence the social, economic and political mantle of social organizations. In this era of “You either swallow or get swallowed, you either eat or get eaten”, the Nubis ethnic cluster has been able to live on using many strategies, others crafted, adopted, innovated and developed depending on the circumstances that surround them. It is important to explain Nubis strategic survival methods as an ethnic minority in Uganda amidst social-political challenges they encountered.

### ***Pre-colonial ethnic survival***

The Sudanese Nubian cluster traded in ivory, which

became a prominent article of trade long before colonialism. They obtained ivory from Bunyoro and sent it to Karagwe in exchange for coastal goods. In this respect, Juma, a Nubian ivory trader gave Muteesa I of Buganda a present. In return king Muteesa gave him 700-1b weight of ivory, some of the ivory tusks weighed 901b. The king also gave him seven women and fifty cows. This followed the influx of the Nubis into Buganda; this resulted into the first intermarriages of the Baganda and the Nubis around the villages of Bombo and Kibuli. This intermarriage led to what Soghayroun (1981) described as “Gandanization” of the Nubis. The dual argue that a number of the Baganda Muslims intermarried with the Nubis and became Nubianized as they got influenced by the Nubis ways of life. This sustained their survival and continued legacy in Buganda and Uganda as a whole. The intermarriages with other indigenous ethnic groups during pre-colonial time helped them to expand as an ethnic entity, since whoever intermarried with a Nubi, became automatically a Nubi and had to abandon his or her former ethnic inclination. This clearly indicates that throughout the pre-colonial period, some Nubis who were able to survive as traders exploited their trading experiences to inter-marry with other groups they traded with.

### ***Colonial ethnic survival***

Being Ex-Sudanese slave soldiers, Johnson (1988) argues that the Nubis gave rise to the colonial governments of Sudan, Uganda, Kenya and were the nucleus around which nascent urban centers grew in northern Uganda. Families of professional soldiers descended from these slave soldiers and played an important role in the colonial and postcolonial armies. Daniel Spain, in his study of the origins of the Islamic military slavery identifies three essential characteristics of the military slavery: The systematic acquisition of the slaves by the army, specific military training and a life time of professional soldiering. Military slaves are state property owned by the government, not by individual masters and they are employed as instruments of state craft. A slave soldier has greater access to power and potential than other slaves. Even after the military slavery was replaced by convectional and regional oriented recruitment in colonial states, ex-slave soldiers continued to claim especial relationship to the colonial government, as the Nubis of Uganda did when in 1940 they objected to the colonial government to plan to include them in the tribal poll taxes, putting them at par with the people they had helped the colonial governments to conquer.

The Madhist revolt, which shattered the Khedive Ismail's empire, witnessed the influx of the Wanubi as then called in Northern Uganda in 1890. In 1894, they were enlisted into the Ugandan ruffles as mercenaries. In 1891 Lord Lugard took them to Western Uganda where he assigned them with the responsibilities of guarding

forts at Lorne, Ntara, Kirari and fort Grant. Lugard took some of them to Kampala, where he formed the new Sudanese company of armed Nubians. At this moment in time he paid them as Imperial British East African company mercenaries. They therefore survived on as British mercenaries. In the years that followed, the Wanubi were deployed against the resisters in Bunyoro between 1893 and 1897 (Okoth, 1972). This fits in Mutibwa (1992), who argues that by the time of the formation of the king African rifles; the Nubians were a monopoly of the 4th battalion. The Nubians since then saw the army as their natural calling, thus as their pre occupation. This meant that fighting on behalf of the colonial masters became part of their livelihood occupation.<sup>5</sup> Johnson (1902) contends that although the Nubis were originally slave soldiers, they transformed into mercenaries and began being used by both local natives and colonial forces to acquire and obtain valuable goods. They were used to fight off local resisters; for example, De Winton used them to support Kasagama of Bunyoro. The Nubis also used manipulation, trickery and alliances to survive.

Although they were introduced in Uganda by the British and worked for the British East African company, the British never recognized them as an ethnic group, making their survival as an ethnic community difficult. This forced some of them to rebel against the British colonial government. The amalgamation of the grievances raised by the Nubians or the Sudanese troops culminated into the Nubian Mutiny of 1897.<sup>6</sup> In this respect, Johnson (1902) states "Kabarega of Unyoro and Mwanga of Uganda took advantage of the Nubian mutiny to join hands with the Sudanese in a final effort to overthrow the British protectorate". Although this never worked out, it points to how the Sudanese Nubis survived in Uganda.

Desperate and hopelessly hoping for hope, the Sudanese Nubis resorted to raiding other fellow natives of animals and other goods. In this regard Johnson writes "... Sudanese mutineers had still remained in existence in a rather remote part of the central province (the Lango country) and as they were making themselves objectionable by raiding the adjoining natives" This implied that raids were part of their preoccupation for survival. This act was not new to the Nubis, it was a common practice that the strong raided and acquired wealth and necessities through raids from the weak natives. This practice was very common with cattle keepers in Uganda, especially the northern cattle

keepers, and so were the western Ugandan tribes.

Mazrui (1977) contends that the Nubis are not strangers, nor intruders in Uganda's body politic; they are part of the process that led to the creation of Uganda. This in itself implies that the Nubis were part of Uganda's political discourse; if anything they were the midwives that delivered Uganda, first, as a geographical entity; second as a colonial territory. It is in this respect that Wairama (2001) describes them as Ugandans of the Sudanese descent who were descendants of the military recruits who entered Uganda in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century of the colonial army. Their survival and sustainability largely depended on their superior military skills, which were then needed by the Europeans for the colonization of Uganda. Their survival and exceptional military skills became so central for their continued stay and establishment in Uganda.

The Nubis expanded and got accepted through what Mazrui (1977) describes as the Nubianization strategy. Nubianization was the process of converting indigenous Ugandan tribes into the Nubian culture. In this regard, the Acholis, Lugbara, and Banyoro were Nubianized. Nakayi (2007) adds that the Madi and Kakwa communities in Uganda became part of the first Nubian civilization which derives its central originality from the ancient civilization of Egypt and Sudan. The Ugandan adopted tribes constituted the bastion of the Nubian culture that sustained their stay and growth into an indigenous ethnic cluster.

Internal wars among and between indigenous Ugandan tribes were sustained using the military skills of the Nubis. This made them to be accepted as instruments of military might in Buganda. Rowe (1988) argues that the Nubis were formidable fighters whom the Baganda Muslims depended on to establish an Islamic state in Buganda. In fact, the Nubians, given their military might and influence discovered by both the British and the Baganda recognized them as military arbiters. The Baganda Muslims therefore relied on the Nubis to sustain themselves against Muteesa I and Mwanga of Buganda. Using the Nubis soldiers, the Baganda Muslims had won many battles against fellow Baganda Christians. As such the Nubis were able to dictate the balance of power not only in Buganda, but Uganda at large. Thus the Islamic factor became so instrumental in making the Nubis to be part of Uganda.

The Nubians carried out expedition for their colonial masters. This helped them to integrate, socialize and influence other ethnicities in Uganda. Busoga, Buganda and Bunyoro were some of the most common expeditions. The British colonial masters sent Sudanese soldiers to Busoga at Lubas palace in Busoga. A Sudanese garrison was sent to Bunyoro (Report by Her Majesly, 1898). This meant that the Nubis were able to spread, expand and grow in Uganda through several expeditions. Whenever they carried out these expeditions, they stayed there and established their homesteads; they adopted and spread their cultures far and wide. This

<sup>5</sup> An in-depth one on one interview with Yazeed Hussein Sebi, a Nubian representative in the Rukurato- (Toro Kingdoms' Parliament) on a Historical seat, interviewed on, in his residence in Kitumba-Kinubi Fort Portal on 17/12/2018

<sup>6</sup> An Extract of a Report by F.J Jackson to the Most Honorable Marquess of Salisbury. Robert Gascoyne-Cecil Prime Minister (1895-1902), Received November 15, 1897. Presented to both Houses of Parliament of Her Majesty in February 1898, Papers relating to Recent Events in the Uganda Protectorate. In AFRICA No.2, p.21. Printed by Her Majesty's stationary office by Herrison and Sons, St. Martins Lane.

made it difficult, if not impossible to limit their operations and survival in the indigenous communities.

The Islamic factor was central in explaining the survival of the Nubians in Buganda. Supporting this argument, Soghayroun (1981) states that the Nubians converted Kings into Islam. In this respect Bunyoro and Buganda kings embraced the Nubian Islamic religion. This partly explains why the Islamic religion was associated with the Nubian soldierly affiliation. Commenting about this standpoint, Emin Pasha in his diaries noted that Kabarega spoke the Sudanese Arabic very well. He explicitly stated, "Kabarega himself speaks it well, but in public prefers his own language". Strengthening the influence of the Nubian Arabic, Dr. Cook, a missionary in charge of the Nile province stated, "It is generally spoken and understood over a wide area from the Murchison falls two hundred, fifty miles south of the Mungella up to here... And understood by many among the Acholi, Madi, Bari and Latuka"

Prior to the Nubis, Soghayroun (1981) argues that there was no recognition of the Islamic law in Uganda. The Nubis enforced the introduction of the Islamic courts and made recognition of the Islamic law concerning marriage and divorce legally binding under the protectorate. The Nubis emphasized the Islamic law, which eventually got practiced by all the Muslim Ugandan converts. There was a right popular will of the people over the Islamic law, places with such considerable Muslim communities like Mbale on the eastern boarder of Uganda, Arua on the boarders of Congo, North of lake albert and Gulu, Kitgum and Acholi all willingly accepted the Islamic law.

The Nubis survived on in Uganda as peace builders and promoters. In this regard Johnson (1901) contends that by the year 1897 a little army comprising the Nubians had been formed for the maintenance of peace and resistance to aggression which was composed mainly of these Sudanese soldiers; some of whom had once been in the service of Egypt, while others were the children of slaves. Cementing this argument, Johnson (1901) adds that when Lugard first visited Uganda as the agent of imperial East Africa company, circumstances obliged him to intervene in the affairs of that kingdom and impose peace on the distracted factions-protestants, Catholics and Muhammedans who were bringing the country into utter ruin by their civil wars. It is argued that Lugard succeeded in ushering in peace in Buganda by using the experienced Nubi Sudanese under the respected Nubian commander Salim Bey. And without their support and intervention, the civil internal wars among the three worrying religious factions would have continued to cause instability.

### ***Post-colonial ethnic survival of the Nubis***

Following Uganda's independence on the 9th October 1962, the Nubian soldiers continued serving in the newly

renamed Ugandan army. The Nubians were experiencing real xenophobia from their fellow Acholis and Langi soldiers for no apparent reason/ crime except their Sudanese origin. In this respect, several Nubians recount the difficulties they endured in the military barracks after independence from the Acholi who openly discriminated them. The threat of violence against the Nubian soldiers was regularly made even to the innocent Nubi wives and children while fetching water from the barracks water points (Lumumba, 2015). Their only recourse was silence. They exercised the highest form of patience amidst open and injustice confrontations. In this respect, Lumumba (2015) states Obotes' mistake was to go after an ethnic group that was in the army, well-armed and militarily trained. This forced the Nubians who reacted through what came to be called the Lubiri revolt led by Sergeant major Musa Aswa. Commenting on the survival instinct of the Nubian soldiers under the Obote I regime, Khamis, a Nubian soldier argues that they relied heavily on the Ugandan minority tribes when their extinction was under threat. Knowing that Obote was bent towards eliminating all the Nubian soldiers, Khamis, a former Nubian captain narrates that they forced Iddi Amin of the indigenous Kakwa tribe to over throw Obote. He adds that Milton obote had left instructions to have all the Nubis arrested, disarmed and executed because he believed that they were not loyal to him and his regime. In his own words, Khamis states "In fact, that day, 23rd January, prior to us breaking the armory, we saw that some of us were being disarmed and confined based on our ethnic origins. Even those who were supposed to be on duty were suspiciously told to hand over their weapons. They then locked us in the officer's hall... we actually called Amin much later... Amin turned up the next day (24th January). It is then that we asked him to be president... when he refused, our college put him at gun point, and told him that if he does not, he dies, because even us we will all die if Obote returns".<sup>7</sup> This was the highest manifestation of the Nubia survival instinct, which was under threat. They had to risk and employ such a method if they were to survive Obote's political machinations. Knowing their historical roots then, the Nubians realized that they would not fully be accepted to take over the political mantle of Uganda, as such they chose a native Ugandan to run the country rather than a fellow Nubian from among themselves. The Nubian coup therefore brought in Amin as the third president of the republic of Uganda.

Amin brought in thousands of Nubians with whom he had an ethnic affinity. Many Kakwas were in fact Nubians from Southern Sudan (Mann, 1977). Savolainen (2008) states that during the last years of Obote's first regime, Amin, as commander of the Ugandan army recruited

<sup>7</sup> Khemis Juma Kenyi is a retired teacher and a highly respected advisor on Nubian culture, as well as a radio presenter Voice of Africa Radio. Interviewed on 29<sup>th</sup>/09/2018 at his residence in Mpakawero, Bombo Luwero District.

most of the soldiers and police officers from the Nubian tribes. And when he captured power, he organized wealth for the Nubians and recruited most of them into the State research bureau. Amin was also able to invite other Africans to become members of the "Nubian tribe" (Lunyigo, 1967). This meant a good number of Baganda, Batoro, Kakwa, Acholi, Langi, Banyoro, Basoga became Nubians. The only qualification of becoming a Nubi was to profess the Nubian/ Islamic culture. Many Acholis and Langi began pretentiously claim to be Nubis in order for them to capture the sympathy of Amin.

Following the Indian expulsion, later to be called the Amin economic war, the Nubis benefited a lot by taking over established shops and other Indian businesses. In this respect, Hinamundi (2012) argues that the Nubian men spent most of their time in their shops at the trading centers, selling different commodities and the women trained their children in the ways of Prophet Muhammad. This gave rise to what later came to be called "Mafutamingi"- a local slung which described rich Nubis. Mutibwa confirms this narrative when he states "When Amin launched the economic war in 1972 and expelled all the Asians, most of the confiscated property was handed over to Nubians".

When Amin lost power in 1979, Nubian in West Nile were a target in Gulu and the rest of the country. Thus, they fled for their lives, they were persecuted. In fact, the second Obote regime carried out an ethnic cleansing of the Nubians in the army which gave birth to what was later called Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA). This further intensified conflicts between the West Nilers against the Obote regime. As a result, the West Nile Nubians came up with several military organizations such as the Uganda national rescue front led by a Nubian Gen. Moses Ali), Former Uganda National Army (FUNA).

Although the Nubians were resistant to western education, with the passage of time they embraced formal education, which turned some of them into relevant professionals. In this regard Abdul Bekil argued, "Things are beginning to change with the rising generation of well-educated prosperous Nubians under way" (Hinamundi, 2012). This meant that the Nubians had realized that western education was paramount for them not only to survive but influence the thinking and perceptions of humanity in totality.

As political regimes continued abusing their rights and entitlements, the Nubis resorted to courts of law. The Obote II regime did not only discriminate them but marginalized them and further denied them their God given birth rights. The Obote regime froze their bank accounts after the over throw of the Amin regime, as such Nubis lost lots of money and investments. This put them in deplorable conditions. In respect of the rule of law, which seemed prevalent in the NRM regime, over 1000 of the Nubian origin in Uganda petitioned the Civil Division of the high court in Kampala seeking orders for their bank accounts to be reactivated and money

refunded. This petition was filled by Ismail Dabule in 2015 as a reaction to the national Consultative Council that had enacted a Banking Act which gave the finance Minister powers to make legal notices of 1982/1984 that led to the freezing of the Nubian Muslim's Bank accounts. Using legal procedures, Danube, the petitioner asserted that the Minister then instructed Bank of Uganda to take over their accounts which were held in Uganda Commercial Bank (Now Stanbic Bank), Glandly's Bank, Barclay's Bank, and Libyan Bank (now Tropical Bank) that later froze their accounts and other business accounts. The mentioned Banks held a meeting that saw the burying of the affected people from accessing their accounts and had their money transferred to Bank of Uganda. The said banks illegally and wrongfully through bank of Uganda accessed the petitioner's money and used it. Through their lawyers, Omongole and company advocates, the petitioners wanted court to compel Bank of Uganda and other named commercial banks to pay their money in Uganda shillings at a dollar rate of 1 dollar to Shs.7, a rate that was applicable in 1979 when the accounts were frozen (Kazibwe, 2015). Rather than waiting for the court's final decision on the matter, the affected Nubis have no other option apart from waiting. The fact that they appealed to court meant that they embraced the money economy as a strategy towards their survival and sustainability.

## Conclusion

Relying on both written and oral evidence, the study examined different methods the Uganda Nubis used which helped them survive as an ethnic group from the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. Drawing from the three constructivism ethnic approaches to ethnic survival, the Nubis are seen as agents for the construction of their ethnic identity by embracing Islam and Islamic values right from the Zaribas in Sudan. The adaptation of a unique ethnic identity based on 'foreign' Islamic values helped them a lot to survive as members of one family, irrespective of their former ethnic backgrounds. The social, political and economic environment, right from the colonial period up to the post-colonial era, also created both favorable and unfavorable conditions for the Nubi to survive as an ethnic community. This therefore brings to the fold that the survival of the Nubis as an ethnic group was mainly an invention from colonial forces that brought them together as part of their pacification process.

What however, should be taken into account is the fact that right from pre-colonial period, Uganda Nubis on several accounts have been struggling to survive as an ethnic community. They experienced cases of discrimination, marginalization and isolation during past political regimes, as well as their former British colonial masters. The reasons for their discrimination and

marginalization ranged from political as well as social factors. The study established that as Nubians were struggling to extend their livelihood in a country, which is constructed along ethnic lines, they managed to identify themselves as members of one ethnic group through Islam which was the major uniting factor.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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