

"Kibra Is Our Blood": The Sudanese Military Legacy in Nairobi's Kibera Location, 1902-1968



Timothy Parsons

The International Journal of African Historical Studies, Vol. 30, No. 1 (1997), 87-122.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0361-7882%281997%2930%3A1%3C87%3A%22IOBTS%3E2.0.CO%3B2-O>

The International Journal of African Historical Studies is currently published by Boston University African Studies Center.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/buafc.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to creating and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

**"KIBRA IS OUR BLOOD": THE SUDANESE MILITARY
LEGACY IN NAIROBI'S KIBERA LOCATION,
1902–1968***

Timothy Parsons

A contemporary map of Nairobi shows the southwestern suburb of Kibera as an unobtrusive collection of minor streets just south of the Ngong Road and west of Nairobi's Wilson airport. In reality it is a sprawling slum that differs little from the other lower-class enclaves surrounding Nairobi. It is a place of over-crowded, substandard housing with unreliable water, poor sanitation and minimal social services. Yet there is also much that makes Kibera unique. While Kibera's current population is ethnically heterogeneous, the location is still recognized as the social and political center of the country's Sudanese, or Nubi, community.

Kenya's Sudanese are part of a larger community stretching throughout East Africa that was shaped by the institutions of slavery and military service. Linked with the Janissary tradition in the Ottoman Empire, the southern Sudan was a source of slave soldiers for the independent Sudanese kingdoms of Sennar, Tegali and Darfur and ultimately Muhammad Ali's Egypt. Isolated from surrounding populations by their almost life-long military service, distinctive language and culture, they settled in colonies of ex-soldiers near military camps (*zaribas*), and reproduced their military identity in succeeding generations through assimilation of weaker ethnic groups, marriage to other ex-slaves and the adoption of orphans.¹ These slave soldiers have been referred to either as Nubis or as Sudanese in both historical literature and common usage, but both terms are relatively inaccurate. The former reference relates to their supposed ties to the fourteenth-century African Christian kingdom of Nubia that was located north of modern Khartoum on the Nile River. The designation Sudanese (or Soudanese) comes from an Arabic term for the region, and reflects their primary links with what is today the southern

* Research for this study in Kenya and Great Britain was funded by a Fulbright Grant and an SSRC-MacArthur Foundation Fellowship in International Peace and Security. I would also like to thank Dr. Douglas Johnson for his comments on a draft of this paper.

¹ Douglas Johnson, "The Structure of a Legacy: Military Slavery in Northeast Africa," *Ethnohistory* 36 (1989): 73-79.

Sudan, but this label is equally misleading. Through the dual processes of military recruitment and assimilation, slave soldiers of the southern Sudan absorbed a heterogeneous array of peoples with origins in the modern states of Egypt, Ethiopia, Uganda, Zaire and even Nigeria.² During Kenya's colonial era these people called themselves Sudanese to emphasize their claims to non-native status and military patronage, but switched to the label of Nubi after independence in order to portray themselves as an indigenous Kenyan ethnic group.

The Sudanese who served in Britain's East African colonial forces, the King's African Rifles (KAR), were originally recruited for the Uganda Rifles (later the 4th Battalion KAR) by Captain Frederick Lugard (later Lord Lugard) in 1891. They were drawn largely from remnants of Emin Pasha's garrison of Egyptian outposts in Equatoria which had been cut off by the rise of the Mahdist state. In spite of their entanglement in Ugandan politics and a mutiny in 1897, their fighting qualities and willingness to serve made them the backbone of the early KAR. Many were sent to Kenya to guard the new railway. By 1897, 256 of 1050 men in the East Africa Rifles (later 3rd Battalion KAR) were Sudanese; by 1902 this figure had risen to almost half of the entire battalion.³ Although Kenya's considerable distance from the southern Sudan made it impossible to secure sufficient replacements to maintain these numbers, the loyalty and experience of the Sudanese ensured that they dominated the ranks of the KAR's "Native Officers" and senior African non-commissioned officers (NCOs) until the beginning of the Second World War. Many Sudanese made the KAR their career, and served lengthy terms, some lasting as long as thirty years.

Problems arose, however, when these men became either too old or sick and injured to be of further military value. While conventional histories of the KAR and personal accounts of officers are full of praise for the loyalty and service of the Sudanese, the civil administration of Kenya would have preferred them simply to disappear when discharged from the army. The land on which their settlements were founded was increasing in value, and their communities were labeled breeding grounds for crime and resistance to colonial rule. Kibera, being the largest of the Sudanese settlements, was considered the greatest problem. Originally a remote military exercise ground⁴ assigned to the army in 1904 (only two years after the formal establishment of the KAR), and settled by the first Sudanese veterans in

² Dennis Pain, "The Nubians: Their Perceived Stratification System and Its Relation to the Asian Issue," in *Expulsion of a Minority: Essays on Ugandan Asians*, ed. Michael Twaddle, (London, 1975), 177-8; S. Lwanga-Lunyiigo, "Uganda and World War One," *Makerere Historical Journal* 3 (1977): 27; Hubert Moyses-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles* (Aldershot, 1956), 59.

³ Moyses-Bartlett, *King's African Rifles*, 104, 140.

⁴ Kibera is said to be derived from the Sudanic Arabic word for forest.

1911, Kibera became a perpetual irritant to the European government and citizens of Nairobi as the town gradually grew out to meet it. From the 1930's onward, the colonial administration tried either to evict the Sudanese veterans, or at the very least to redevelop the settlement along more orderly lines. These efforts failed in part because Kibera was quite similar to the ex-soldier colonies of the Sudan. Far from being a static settlement of aging military pensioners, it was a dynamic community which grew through inter-marriage and assimilation of local people.

Thus the history of Kibera is an excellent illustration of the factors which influenced the formation of ethnic identity in colonial East Africa. Kibera continues to exist today because the military identity and traditions of the Sudanese made them much more difficult to deal with than any other ethnic group in colonial Kenya. As "detrribalized Natives" they had no legal claim to land in the "Native reserves," thus their tenure in Kibera was based on their status as former servants of the British Crown. The Kiberans' life-long military service put the British in their debt, and they were able to call in a host of powerful military patrons to oppose any attempt at eviction. This protection was a tangible reward which encouraged the Sudanese of Kibera to embrace firmly the tradition of military service as part of their identity, and along with Islam, it became the main factor in defining them as a group apart from the greater African population of Kenya. Yet when British rule in Kenya drew to a close in 1963, a younger generation of Kiberans, under the influence of African nationalism, recast their ethnic identity to define themselves as Nubis, an indigenous "tribe" entitled to full rights as Kenyan citizens.

The Establishment of Kibera, 1904–1928

Before the First World War, the numbers of askaris (soldiers) discharged from the KAR were not large enough to constitute a problem for the civil administration. The Kenyan government assumed locally recruited soldiers would simply return to their reserves, where they would be cared for and supported by extended family networks. The Sudanese, however, were not natives of Kenya (or the East Africa Protectorate, as it was then known). As a matter of security, district officers encouraged them to settle near government stations in order to provide a form of military reserve should their services be needed on short notice.

Little thought was given to the long-term ramifications of this policy. The expansion of the KAR from six to twenty-two battalions during World War I produced a community of "detrribalized" askaris who, because of their long military service, or conversion to Christianity or Islam, either could not, or would not, return to their homes in the "Native reserves." In the case of the Sudanese, their Islamic faith and remote origins in the southern Sudan qualified them for "detrribalized" status.

John Ainsworth, writing as the provincial commissioner of Nyanza Province in 1916, was one of the first colonial administrators to become concerned with the "problem." He worried that "detrribalized" askaris would degenerate into a class of "professional beggars and hangers on" after spending their disability or war gratuities, and proposed hiring them as caretakers, headmen or watchmen for European farms and businesses. In certain limited cases, he envisioned land grants to "detrribalized native" veterans or their widows.⁵ Since they were not part of a "traditional" African community, the Sudanese were not assigned a native reserve," nor were they under the jurisdiction of the "native tribunals." As these mechanisms of indirect rule and "tribal law" were unworkable, Ainsworth proposed settling the Sudanese near administrative stations where they would pay a nominal rent, and be supervised by district commissioners (DCs) with the power to evict them if they became unruly. Ainsworth was opposed to making the settlements too large because he correctly foresaw that they had the potential to become ungovernable permanent communities: "The fewer the number of detrribalized people we are required to deal with eventually the better." Thus, he proposed a scheme where only disabled veterans would have the security of rent-free tenure, while healthy men and their families would become a class of rent- and tax-paying tenants residing at the will of the colonial state, subject to eviction at any time.⁶

It is against this background that Kibera must be considered. In 1911, the KAR's training ground was informally settled by survivors and widows of the Sudanese askaris of "B" and "C" Companies of 3 KAR. They were soon joined by other Sudanese veterans who had been evicted from their settlements near Machakos and Kiambu that same year. Kibera's proximity to the 3 KAR barracks appears to have been the main factor in drawing the Sudanese to the area. By 1912, the KAR officially sanctioned their residency by permitting 291 Sudanese askaris to live in what came to be known as "the KAR shambas." Only veterans with more than twelve years of service were eligible for "shamba passes," which allowed them to live rent free as a form of unofficial pension (those with nine years service were already eligible for a lifetime exemption from either the hut or poll tax).

During the First World War, many Sudanese veterans of Kibera returned to active service, and in 1918, the colonial government officially gazetted the area as a

⁵ Memorandum by J. Ainsworth, 8 January 1916, Kenya National Archives (KNA), PC CST 1/11/68/2; Ainsworth to Chief Secretary, East Africa Protectorate, 21 February 1916, KNA, PC CST 1/11/68.

⁶ Report by J.W. Barth, J. Ainsworth, W.J. Monson and O.F. Waktins, 3 July 1916, KNA, PC CST 1/11/68; Ainsworth to PC Lamu F.W. Isaac, 29 September 1916, KNA, PC JUB 8/3/3; Ainsworth to o/c Masai Reserve, 25 September 1916, KNA, PC CST 1/11/68/4.

Military Reserve.⁷ Yet the Sudanese tenure in the location was far from secure. By the end of the war, it had become clear that the land on which Kibera was located would be too valuable to leave to the veterans, and Nairobi's European residents were already beginning to complain about the crime and disorder that invariably sprang from having an army base so close to the city center. By 1919, the government developed plans to move the 3 KAR lines roughly twenty miles south of Nairobi to Mbagathi. The 4,198 acre "Reserve Shamba" (Kibera) was to be relocated to a smaller 2,000-acre area in Fort Hall district, "where the KAR askaris may be allowed to live in perpetuity in place of the present reserve."⁸ Although the plan floundered due to its cost, it marks the first of many attempts by the colonial regime to remove the Sudanese veterans to a more remote region where they could be more easily controlled.

By the 1920's, Kibera's reputation grew as a site for receiving stolen property and the illegal distillation of what became known as "Nubian Gin" or "Arak." In 1926, Kenya's colonial secretary, G.A.S. Northcote, expressed concern that former African government employees "squatting" in urban areas would "tend to crowd out towns and produce a shiftless population, utilising ground which is required for other purposes."⁹ It is interesting to compare the resiliency of Kibera to the fate of Kileleshwa, a neighborhood of Nairobi that is now solidly upper-class, but in the 1920's was another informal settlement of "detrribalized Natives." While Kibera was under the jurisdiction of the KAR and almost exclusively Sudanese, in 1926, Kileleshwa's population of 709 souls was a much more heterogeneous mix, which included substantial numbers of Kikuyu, Kamba, and other Africans from as far away as Uganda and Tanganyika. Of the 264 registered plot holders, only sixteen were veterans of the KAR. Without the protection of military patronage, the African residents of Kileleshwa could do little to stand up to their influential European neighbors, who complained that the Native settlement was a breeding ground for crime and disease. In 1927, the location's entire population was evicted forcibly under the "Resident Natives Ordinance."¹⁰ Kibera, like Kileleshwa, was also deemed too valuable and too near European settlement to be left to Africans,

⁷ Major W. Gerald Edward to Chief Native Commissioner (CNC), 6 March 1936, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/1/28; T. Colchester and Miss N.M. Deverell, "Report on an Economic and Social Survey of the Sudanese Settlement at Kibera," 31 July 1944 (hereafter cited as "Kibera Survey"), KNA, MAA 2/1/3/1/1/96a. Colchester was the municipal Native Affairs officer and Deverell was the social welfare officer for Nairobi.

⁸ "Transfer of 3 KAR Lines to Mbagathi, 1919," KNA, MOH 1/3244.

⁹ Secretariat Minute by G.A.S. Northcote, 24 November 1926, KNA, PC CST 1/11/68.

¹⁰ DC Nairobi to CNC, 18 May 1926, KNA, PC CP 16/2/1; DC Nairobi to Senior Commissioner Ukamba, 15 June 1927, KNA, PC CP 16/2/1.

but in Kibera the military connections of the Sudanese safeguarded them from summary expulsion.

Unfortunately for the Sudanese, the King's African Rifles was a fickle and unreliable patron. Since KAR officers were limited to a maximum of two tours of two to three years, officers who understood and respected them were gradually replaced by new men who knew nothing of their past exploits. Moreover, the contraction of the KAR during the lean economic years between the two World Wars meant that the army saw the continued military administration of Kibera as an unjustifiable drain of manpower and funding. In 1926, the original KAR residency passes of the Sudanese were withdrawn by order of the commander of 3 KAR. By 1928, the Kenyan government and the KAR agreed that no more permits would be issued, and the plots of deceased residents would not be reallocated to other Sudanese veterans. Kenya's senior commissioners, meeting in the same year, decided that "detribalized natives squatting on the KAR Reserve" had no claim to special privileges. They optimistically declared that the Sudanese would be moved when the operational headquarters and barracks of 3 KAR was shifted from Nairobi to Meru in 1928, thereby rendering further military supervision of the community impossible.¹¹ Thus, the Kiberan Sudanese were quietly placed under civil administration for the first time during their residency in Kenya.

Kibera Under Civil Administration, 1928–1939

The withdrawal of military authority was to prove more problematical than the Kenyan authorities ever imagined. Although it was now under formal civil control, Kibera still lacked both direct European administration and any form of "traditional" authority through whom the government could rule indirectly. The closest approximation was a poorly respected unofficial headman who had no legislative authority or coercive force at his disposal. Kibera was an administrative grey area in which the poll tax was not collected until 1946.¹² The area therefore became extremely attractive to large numbers of non-Sudanese Africans who were drawn to Nairobi in search of work and opportunity — many of whom were forced to survive through burglary, bootlegging and prostitution. In 1932, the Carter Land Commission recorded that half of the householders of Kibera were women, many of whom were described as prostitutes, and that two-thirds of the population of the

¹¹ Edward to CNC, 6 March 1936, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/1/28; C.G. Usher to o/c 3 KAR, 19 March 1928, KNA, BN 46/4/42; Senior Commissioners' Meeting, 27 March 1928, Minute 6, KNA, PC CP 9/15/1; Usher to o/c 3 KAR, 21 March 1928, KNA, BN 46/4/43.

¹² Captain W.H. Kitching, Superintendent of Kibera, to DC Nairobi, 28 June 1946, KNA, MAA 2/5/172/III/6.

settlement were Kenya-born Africans rather than immigrant Sudanese.¹³ Moreover, to the frustration of the civil administration, Kibera also drew large numbers of veterans from other Sudanese settlements in East Africa, who were technically illegal residents because they lacked an original KAR "shamba pass." Thus, the withdrawal of the military Cantonment Regulations actually brought about an increase in the crime and disorder associated with Kibera.

As a civil responsibility, Kibera now came under the jurisdiction of the DC of Nairobi, whose main goal for the settlement was to stem the influx of non-Sudanese Africans by either moving the community away from Nairobi or reorganizing it along more disciplined lines. In 1930, the DC considered a site in the Maasai Reserve near Ngong as an alternative settlement for the Sudanese veterans of Kibera. The Sudanese were generally receptive to plans for their relocation to good agricultural land close to Nairobi, and were amenable to a move to an area known as Kasura located between the Kiserian and Mbagathi Rivers. Unfortunately, the main stumbling block to relocation were the Maasai, still angry and distrustful of the government due to their extensive land losses earlier in the century, and simply unwilling to surrender the territory in question.¹⁴

The area around Mbagathi Township, in what was then known as the Nairobi Commonage, was also available for settlement in 1931. Unfortunately, a government soil survey conducted in 1931 found that most of the area's 1,500 acres were poorly watered, and thus unsuitable for farming.¹⁵ Furthermore, while not part of the Maasai Reserve, it was coveted by a much more powerful interest group. In 1931, the game warden of Nairobi protested the proposal to settle the Sudanese on the Nairobi Commonage because it was the only part of the Southern Game Reserve that did not belong to the Maasai, and as such it was the only practical site in the entire region for a game sanctuary. He argued that:

Nairobi has a priceless and unique possession in the proximity to its centre of the most remarkable pieces of game country in the world. Indeed I have not seen, nor heard of, any area of the country so small in extent which contains a variety and abundance of animal life at all comparable to that found in the Nairobi Commonage. . . . Natives, whether detribalized or not, have children; they also have, or hope to have, cattle, sheep, goats; many will doubtless want to

¹³ Evidence by E.B. Hosking, DC Nairobi, in Kenya Land Commission, *Evidence*, vol. I (Nairobi, 1933).

¹⁴ Commissioner for Local Government to Kenyan Colonial Secretary, 16 March 1938, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/1/64.

¹⁵ Report by G.H. Gethin-Jones & A.C. Bailey, 1931, KNA, PC CP 9/15/3.

make gardens: in short they introduce a variety of factors making for the spoilation of nature. . . . Indeed I suppose that less than five percent of [Nairobi's] inhabitants have ever taken the trouble to penetrate a couple of miles into the Game Reserve beyond the aerodome. Game is still too much of a common-place, and is taken for granted. It will not always be so.¹⁶

Thus, the preservation of wildlife won out over the interests of the Kiberan Sudanese, and the Nairobi Commonage is known today as Nairobi National Park.

With the failure of these relocation plans, the government turned instead to the reorganization of Kibera. In 1931, the DC of Nairobi, E.B. Hosking, accompanied by the municipal Native affairs officer and the police inspector of Kilimani, held a baraza (meeting) with the Sudanese of Kibera. Kiberans holding legal residence permits received round metal door plates stamped with the letters "KAR" and numbered from 1-350. Hosking, although sympathetic to the plight of the Sudanese, declared residency rights in Kibera could not be inherited, but blood relatives would be permitted to settle in the community so long as no additional houses were built. All other residents without legal permits were to be evicted, and Hosking warned that a criminal conviction of any legal resident would also result in expulsion. The Sudanese reaction to these measures was defiant. Many rejected the registration discs as an insulting form of "kipande."¹⁷ Although possessing no formal legal deed or title, they argued the KAR had given Kibera to them and their descendents in perpetuity.

Unlike many of the DCs of Nairobi who were to succeed him, Hosking was conscious of the military debt owed to the Sudanese ex-askari:

His attitude at present though truculent and difficult is understandable. He thinks that Government persuaded him to remain here and make his home here as a loyal reservist and now when he is no longer needed as a soldier he is turned adrift into the world, hundreds of miles from his home.¹⁸

However, this relatively sympathetic attitude did not mean that Hosking was willing to fight to preserve Kibera. In 1931, he wrote to the commissioner for local government that "their reserve is in the wrong zone of the town for Native

¹⁶ Game Warden Nairobi to Commissioner of Lands, 26 June 1931, KNA, BN 46/4/56.

¹⁷ A much hated labor registration form used to regulate and control the African labor force.

¹⁸ E.B. Hosking, DC Nairobi, to PC Kikuyu, 27 April 1931, KNA, PC CP 9/15/3.

settlement, and must eventually be alienated for European residential holdings."¹⁹ At this point, however, he did not have the support to carry out an eviction, even on generous terms; so he allowed the Sudanese to substitute painted numbers for the objectionable registration discs despite their ease of counterfeit.

Their victory, however, was short lived. In 1932 and 1933, the "Kibera problem" was brought before the Kenya Land Commission, which considered the many land claims that had sprung up from the European occupation of the Central Highlands and the imposition of "Native reserves." The Kenyan government hoped the Commission would provide legal sanction for the removal of the settlement, and marshalled a great deal of evidence to show that the Sudanese had no title to the land and were a source of crime and disorder. Hosking's successor, C.H. Adams, told the Committee that "land around big towns is much too valuable to start 'native farms' adjoining them," and argued that the Sudanese were in fact "tenants at the will of the Crown" who could be evicted by the Minister of Lands at any time. Adams maintained that Sudanese veterans received a discharge gratuity in cash payment, and not legal title to Kibera. Colonel R. Wilkinson, the commander of the KAR's Northern Brigade and the highest ranking officer in the colony, did nothing to defend the Sudanese. He favored relocating Kibera because the Sudanese no longer enlisted in appreciable numbers. Captain B.F. Montgomery, the adjutant of 5 KAR, was more sympathetic. He argued that only the second generation of Sudanese who failed to fulfill the residency requirement through military service should be evicted. The older ex-askaris, he argued, should still be allowed to spend their final days in Kibera.²⁰

The Sudanese themselves were allowed to offer testimony to the Committee, and in a joint memorandum repeated their claim that Kibera was their pension. This hearkened back to an older practice in the Sudan. Under the institution of military slavery old soldiers were given land in recognition of their service, and Sudanese veterans of the KAR logically expected the same treatment.²¹ As for the second generation Sudanese, Aminalla Mohamed declared he needed his son to look after him in his old age. Mohamed bin Abubaker invited the government to conscript the younger Sudanese: "We think that as we are retired servants of the King's African Rifles our children should come under the King's African Rifles

¹⁹ DC Nairobi to Commissioner for Local Government, 13 May 1931, KNA, PC CP 9/15/3.

²⁰ Evidence by C.H. Adams, DC Nairobi, Colonel R. Wilkinson, o/c N Bde, 28 March 1933 and Captain B.F. Montgomery, Adjutant 5 KAR, 7 February 1933, in Kenya Land Commission, *Evidence*, vol. I.

²¹ I am indebted to Dr. Douglas Johnson for drawing my attention to this institution.

and not the District Commissioner."²² The military credentials of the Sudanese did their speaking for them. Of the ninety-eight veterans who petitioned the Commission in 1933, fifty-one had served between eleven and twenty year terms, while twenty-eight had served an impressive twenty-one to thirty years. There were twenty-two sergeants and sixteen senior warrant officers in the group, and one, Adam Hamsi, had even reached the rank of captain before the KAR discontinued the practice of commissioning Native Officers.²³

While a formidable group of European witnesses testified against the Sudanese, the Commission declined to sanction their outright eviction. It did find that ". . . there is nothing whatever to support the contention of the Sudanese that the whole area was given to them as a reserve forever. They were merely given permission to live there." However, it qualified this statement by noting they were also owed certain obligations:

We consider that Government had a clear duty to these ex-askaris either to repatriate them or to find accommodation for them. They were told that they might make their homes at Kibera and in our judgement they ought not to be moved without receiving suitable land elsewhere and compensation for disturbance, and we consider that a similar obligation exists in respect of their widows, or sons who are already householders in Kibera.²⁴

The Sudanese were expected to die out slowly, and their presence could be tolerated until old age removed them. The Commission denied the Sudanese the right to build more houses in Kibera as it accepted the argument that the settlement had become "useless" as a military recruiting ground. Such houses were to be destroyed after the death of veterans and widows, with the second generation Sudanese eventually moved to the Muslim neighborhood of Pumwani. As Kibera's population shrank, it was to be concentrated in a smaller corner of the settlement, with full compensation paid for any houses that had to be removed to do so. If relocation was necessary, the Commission felt the government had an obligation to settle the Sudanese on good land within easy reach of Nairobi. It recommended that an area be leased for them from the Maasai between the Kiserian and Mbagathi rivers. The non-Sudanese who owned 320 of the 571 houses in Kibera were to receive no special treatment in resettlement, and the Commission singled them out as the primary cause of disorder

²² Memorandum by Ex-Soldiers of KAR, 7 January 1933, in Kenya Land Commission, *Evidence*, vol. I.

²³ Sudanese Petitioners, Kibera, 14 October 1933, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/I.

²⁴ Kenya Colony and Protectorate, *Report of the Kenya Land Commission*, (Nairobi, 1933).

in the community. They were to receive the "bare cost" of their houses and crops, and were to move to Pumwani or their home reserves.²⁵

The Kenya Land Commission's recommendations pleased neither the civil administration nor the Sudanese. The Sudanese claim to Kibera was repudiated, but the government was not given sanction to summarily evict them. Moreover, the optimistic hope that some order could be imposed on the settlement until the ex-askaris conveniently died of old age proved to be entirely unfounded. Native-born Kenyan Africans continued to see Kibera as a sanctuary from colonial authority. Since the veterans did not have the will or the ability to impose order on the community, complaints about Kibera continued to mount throughout the 1930s.²⁶ The Sudanese acknowledged that illegal brewing of "Nubian gin" did go on in Kibera, but defended it as the only support for old women of the community. Major W. Gerald Edward, a former officer with 3 KAR, wrote to the chief Native commissioner in 1936 to explain that the Sudanese were forced into illegal activities because they were denied service pensions.²⁷ These arguments, however, carried little weight with the civil administration, which considered increased police raids to be the only means of dealing with crime in Kibera.

The Sudanese complained bitterly about the conduct of the police, and charged that their women were sometimes dragged naked from their beds in the middle of the night by the constables. A 1933 petition from the "Nubians of the KAR Shambas" to the commissioner of police asked for permission to police their own community:

We respectfully submit, that having served the Empire in many wars, as our records will shew, and proved our loyalty to Government, we are, as a body, entitled to some consideration in matters of this sort, and that it is grossly unjust that the majority should suffer for the misdemeanors of a few, who, if we were given the necessary powers we ourselves would control.²⁸

²⁵ *Ibid.* It is difficult to assess the accuracy of the population figures for non-Sudanese residents of Kibera. David Clark has argued that reports of the disruptive presence of non-Sudanese were exaggerated, and that there were only one hundred additional residents in the early 1930s. Unfortunately he does not cite the source of this figure. David Clark "Social Organization in Kibera Nairobi" (M.A. thesis, Makerere University, 1973?), 2.

²⁶ Municipal Native Affairs Department Nairobi, Annual Report, 1933, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/1/2.

²⁷ Meeting between CNC & Union of Sudanese, 29 December 1938, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/1/113; Edward to CNC, 6 March 1936, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/1/28.

²⁸ "KAR Shambas" to Commissioner of Police, 14 October 1933, KNA, MAA, 2/1/3/1/27.

This request highlighted the ambiguous position of the Sudanese in Kenya. As "detrribalized Natives" and former servants of the government, they were able to secure a privileged position in Kibera, but, on the other hand, their "detrribalized status" also meant that they lacked officially recognized "traditional authorities" through which to control their community. The commissioner of police, on the other hand, considered elective eviction of criminals and women of "undesirable character" to be the best remedy, and proposed to give Kibera its own "Native council" with the highest ranking Sudanese veteran as headman.²⁹ In 1935, the commissioner for local government called for the eviction of any person associated with criminal activity.³⁰

Moreover, the Sudanese no longer had the sympathy of the DC of Nairobi. By 1935 the position was held by Major A.W. Sutcliffe who, although himself a former military officer (non-KAR), had developed an intense dislike of the Sudanese. For Sutcliffe, the removal of Kibera became something of a personal crusade, and he sought to undermine the Sudanese cause through a series of venomous letters and Secretariat minutes. He believed residency was conditional upon good behavior, and charged that the veterans escaped punishment by using their wives and daughters to do the illegal brewing. Although he acknowledged that Sudanese women were rarely prostitutes, he claimed that the sex trade in Kibera was carried on by their "half-breed" daughters who were the children of local women. He grumbled that the military had infringed upon civil authority through the issue of what he considered illegal land grants. In Sutcliffe's view the original residency passes from the KAR were invalid on the grounds that:

No civilian or retired non-native soldier or officer in this country or in Europe would feel much security of tenure for his land by the possession of a chit from his Colonel, and I cannot conceive any ex-soldier being given or accepting a chit from his Colonel to occupy land and build on Salisbury Plain.

Furthermore, he similarly dismissed the notion that residency in Kibera was a substitute for a pension:

In the first place every ex-soldier received a gratuity in full in accordance with the terms of his service; further compensation in the shape of land might create an undesirable precedent and would

²⁹ Commissioner of Police to Colonial Secretary Kenya, 28 May 1934, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/1/5.

³⁰ Minute by Commissioner for Local Government, Lands and Settlement, 5 June 1935, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/1/10.

possibly give rise to applications from other individuals who may have served Government in any capacity for a similar privilege.³¹

Sutcliffe was backed by a substantial and influential portion of the European community, which was growing increasingly impatient with the Sudanese presence on what was becoming some of the most valuable real estate in Nairobi. A satirical editorial in the *Kenya Weekly News* in 1938 scoffed at the Sudanese assertion that they were not responsible for the Arak trade, and mockingly referred to Khamis Juma, the president of the Union of Sudanese, as the "Sultan of Kibra."³² As the weight of European public opinion swung more decisively against the Sudanese over the course of the decade, the colonial administration felt more confident in implementing the recommendations of the Kenya Land Commission. As a prelude to eviction, the value of Kibera's 397 buildings (plus 15% for "disturbance") was assessed at sh.136,206 (£6,810) for the purpose of compensation. The DC of Nairobi interpreted the commission's recommendations as sanctioning the eviction of all but the immediate family of elderly Sudanese veterans:

. . . the recommendation is that the ex-askari and his wife and family should be permitted to remain undisturbed until the death of both the ex-askari and his wife, but obviously this should not be read as meaning a decrepit, old askari with possibly a grown-up and married family, on his death should be succeeded in occupation by that grown-up family and a wife or wives whom he may have recently married and who might be a very young woman, in some cases younger than the so called family.³³

Sutcliffe and the rest of the civil administration were not willing to take any chances; Kibera would die a natural death as its only legal inhabitants passed away.

The Sudanese, however, were not without their own allies and resources. They sent appeals for aid to their former officers, many of whom were now influential men.³⁴ Moreover, the Kiberans had the additional advantage of support from some settlers and former KAR officers who had settled in the colony. In April, 1936, the *Sunday Post's* "Plain Speaking" column laid the blame for disorder in Kibera at the doorstep of the civil administration, which had allowed

³¹ Memorandum by Major A.W. Sutcliffe, DC Nairobi, 6 April 1936, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/1/37a; Sutcliffe to PC Central Province, 14 June 1938, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/1/91.

³² *Kenya Weekly News*, 9 December 1938. The Central Province Intelligence Report for July 1940 found most brewing was done in the Kiambu Reserve and not in Kibera. KNA, MAA 2/3/16/11/32.

³³ DC Nairobi to Commissioner of Lands, 13 April 1935, KNA, BN 46/6/10.

³⁴ Secretary of Sudanese Union to Lord Lugard, 20 August 1940, PRO, CO 822/106/14.

"Kibera to fill up with all the rag-tag and bob-tail of East Africa, and among this scum the decent old sober-living Nubians, who have given the best part of their lives to the service, are compelled to live."³⁵ Major Edward was one of the loudest critics of government policy towards Kibera. He made the Sudanese cause a personal concern, charging that serving KAR officers who gave evidence before the Kenya Land Commission were anti-Sudanese, and that the veterans' long service had been forgotten by the government. In his letter to the chief Native commissioner, Edward pointed out that after four years of service with the Sudanese during the First World War, he was "intimately acquainted" with them, and recommended that Kibera be returned to its original state as a fenced-in military reserve with KAR pickets undertaking any necessary liquor raids. Non-Sudanese would be expelled and replaced by newly discharged veterans. Sutcliffe scornfully rejected this proposal: "These ex-soldiers would naturally love to be subject to an authority with no executive power and which they could consequently defy or profess to obey as the situation demanded."³⁶

Although Edward's suggestions came to nothing, they forced the KAR back into the debate over Kibera. The military agreed that the location was a source of disorder, but there was still some support for the interests of former askaris. Colonel J.A. Campbell, the commander of the Northern Brigade, considered Kibera a negative influence on 5 KAR, which was then quartered in Nairobi. However, he blamed non-Sudanese civilians who were given to "riotous living." Campbell also told the colonial secretary that the KAR did not have the resources or the desire to reassume responsibility for Kibera, suggesting instead that a small advisory committee of ex-officers be formed to represent the interests of Sudanese ex-askaris.³⁷ Major General G.J. Giffard, the inspector general of the KAR and Royal West African Frontier Force, was not as accommodating. On his visit to the Colony in 1938, he held a baraza with the Kiberan Sudanese to firmly defend government policy towards the settlement. Giffard told them their land belonged to the government and that when they or their widows died, their huts were to be pulled down and their heirs relocated with compensation. When the Sudanese complained their children would be destitute, he told them to join the KAR.³⁸ Giffard's stand was determined primarily by his obligation to support the policies

³⁵ *Sunday Post* Reprint, 26 April 1936, PRO, CO 822 106/14.

³⁶ Edward to CNC, 6 March 1936, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/1/28; Memorandum by Sutcliffe, DC Nairobi, 6 April 1936, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/1/37a.

³⁷ Colonel J.A. Campbell to Colonial Secretary Kenya, 27 March 1936, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/1/32.

³⁸ Major General G.J. Giffard to Sir Armigel De V. Wade Colonial Secretary Kenya, 2 March 1938, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/1/61.

of the Kenyan government in his capacity as the military advisor to the Colonial Office. His baraza, however, did not counter the Kiberans' strong base of unofficial support; many in the military still felt a strong sense of gratitude and obligation to the long-serving and highly-decorated Sudanese ex-askaris.

The Sudanese saw their military service as the key to tenure in Kibera, and deployed all the trappings of military tradition to justify their claims. Since they perceived military officers to be more courteous, understanding and fair than administrative officers, the Kiberans did everything possible to draw attention to the obligations due them as former servants of the British Empire. When Giffard visited Kibera in 1938, he was met by a parade of elderly KAR veterans, who offered to provide more recruits to help counter the growing Italian threat in Ethiopia. They also presented him with a petition naming specific former KAR officers who had given them permission to distill liquor for their own consumption. In May 1938, the Kiberans sent a petition to the governor of Kenya requesting a return to military administration and noting that ex-KAR officers had established the schools and mosques of Kibera.³⁹

Unfortunately for the veterans, these appeals to military tradition were weakened because many of their children had little interest in following them into the army. While the Sudanese continued to supply many of the NCOs in the KAR, the proximity of Kibera to Nairobi provided more lucrative opportunities, and many second generation Sudanese chose to become clerks, merchants and landlords.⁴⁰ In 1935, there were approximately 112 Kikuyu working for the Sudanese as sharecroppers in Kibera, and in 1938, the Sudanese veterans were forced to admit to Giffard that many of their sons were employed primarily in overseeing their labor.⁴¹ The colonial administration disdained this second generation, and held them responsible for the barrage of petitions and litigation that the Sudanese unleashed to defend Kibera. In 1931, Hosking wrote: "The old Nubi is a man to whom the Colony owes much, but the second generation and the hybrids arising

³⁹ Interview, Ismail Fathalmulla, March 1994; Ex-RSM Chief Suleman Hamed, Union of Sudanese to Giffard, 24 February 1938, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/1/61a; Petition by Union of Sudanese, to Sir Henry Moore, Kenya Governor, 6 May 1938, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/1/84.

⁴⁰ This same process also took place in the coastal Sudanese community of Mazeras. Settled in 1926 by ex-askaris evacuated from Yonte, Jubaland when it was turned over to the Italians, the former research station was intended to be a Sudanese agricultural settlement. Veterans received life-time leases for a nominal payment of one shilling per year, but by 1927, the settlement failed because most Sudanese had moved to Mazeras township to become petty traders. CNC to PCs Nyanza & Coast, 20 April 1922, KNA, PC CST/1/11/53; "Agreement between Colony and Protectorate of Kenya and Sallam Abdalla of Yonte," KNA, PC CST 1/17/28; Commissioner of Lands to Colonial Secretary Kenya, 22 August 1927, KNA, BN 46/4/28.

⁴¹ Sutcliffe, DC Nairobi, to Commissioner of Lands, 13 September 1935, KNA, BN 46/6/32; Giffard to De V. Wade, 2 March 1938, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/1/61.

from mixed unions are degenerate and generally a disgrace to their fathers." Sutcliffe added: "The younger generation of Nubians — who have never been soldiers and have no intention of ever being so, are highly sophisticated, politically minded and, in many cases, educated and capable of reading English."⁴² Thus, when the older Sudanese promised new recruits, they were offering a commodity which they were ill-equipped to deliver. Moreover, the more mercantile bent of the younger generation planted the seeds of the generation gap which divided the community politically in the late 1940's.

This gradual shift away from the army as the sole vocation of young Sudanese failed to weaken the Sudanese claim to preferential treatment for their long service. In 1935 Crown Counsel Theodore Wallace blocked the DC of Nairobi's attempts to move the Sudanese to a new "concentrated" settlement on the grounds they had been given written permission to reside in Kibera at the "will of the Crown." He noted that although their "shamba passes" implied they could be removed at any time, the Sudanese who had lived in Kibera for twenty years had been given to believe that their residency was a reward for military service, and had therefore never been warned they were subject to eviction. Wallace wrote: "to turn them off at this juncture without finding them a home elsewhere or without compensation is in the Attorney General's opinion if not illegal at any rate most inequitable while politically it might raise a storm of protest both at home and in the Colony."⁴³ Wallace's successor as crown counsel agreed, and in 1938, effectively squashed Sutcliffe's mean-spirited attempts to bar the Sudanese from making improvements to their homes on the grounds that the settlement was not permanent.⁴⁴ Thus Sutcliffe could evict only non-Sudanese homeowners in Kibera. Yet this too was difficult since the Sudanese secured legal residency for their agricultural clients by either adopting them or registering them as personal servants.

In 1939, the government conceded the round to the Sudanese. The chief secretary wrote to Captain Adam Hamsi that as long as the Sudanese were good citizens and obeyed the law "there is no intention of moving those of you who are ex-servicemen from Kibera without your consent."⁴⁵ Yet the promise was something of a Pyrrhic victory as the government, although forced to tolerate the

⁴² In Uganda, the Sudanese Regimental Sergeant Major of 4 KAR press-ganged twenty young Sudanese at a soccer match specifically organized to capture recruits. Hosking, DC Nairobi, to Commissioner of Lands, 13 May 1931, KNA, BN 46/4/49; Memorandum by Sutcliffe, DC Nairobi, 6 April 193, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/1/37a; Papers of Lt. Colonel J.R.V. Thompson, Imperial War Museum 79/11/1.

⁴³ Crown Counsel Wallace to Commissioner of Lands, 28 August 1935, KNA, BN 46/6/27.

⁴⁴ Crown Counsel Phillips to Sutcliffe, 2 December 1938, KNA, BN 46/6/104.

⁴⁵ Chief Secretary to Captain Adam Hasmi, 10 January 1939, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/1/120.

continued existence of Kibera, felt no obligation to develop it, since it was only a temporary settlement. An unspoken component of this policy was an intention to drive the Sudanese away by making life as uncomfortable as possible. Kibera began a slow but pronounced slide into poverty as it defied predictions, and grew until the resources of the surrounding area could no longer support the community.

One of the first manifestations of this poverty was the shortage of clean water. In 1937, most of the springs in the nearby Ngong Road Forest Reserve ran dry, forcing the residents of Kibera to turn to the seasonal and unreliable Athi River for their drinking water. Sutcliffe argued that a steady water supply would make Kibera "more attractive residentially" and aid the Sudanese in carrying out illegal activities:

The process of manufacture of Nubian Gin requires large quantities of water both for the making of 'wash' and for cooling the distillation plant. No doubt the Municipal [water] supply would be ideal for this and probably would produce a purer quality and better flavoured beverage than is produced at present. While of course it would guarantee a steady output regardless of weather conditions.⁴⁶

The government therefore turned down the community's request for a permanent water supply, and instead offered to assist any resident to move to a different Native location where there was water.⁴⁷ Thus, by the close of the decade, the Sudanese had fended off the government's attempts to either move them or regulate their lives more closely at the cost of their quality of life. The administration began a policy of what can only be considered malicious neglect in an attempt to force the Sudanese out by rendering Kibera unlivable.

The Struggle for Kibera, 1939–1949

To the Kiberan Sudanese the outbreak of the Second World War was both an opportunity and a threat. The war gave them the chance to reaffirm their claim to special status through military service. The Sudanese sent Sutcliffe a list of First World War veterans willing to re-enlist in a battalion of the "Sudanese Rifles." In return they asked for: 1) the promise "not to be mixed up with the Natives of Kenya or Uganda," 2) Asian-style rations, 3) boots rather than sandals, 4) sh52 per month as opposed to the standard KAR private's wage of sh28, and lastly, but most importantly, 5) confirmation of their title to Kibera. Sutcliffe, of course, would

⁴⁶ Sutcliffe to PC Central Province, 16 May 1938, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/1/76a.

⁴⁷ Commissioner of Lands to Colonial Secretary Kenya, 24 February 1937, KNA, BN 46/6/78; Colonial Secretary to P. Wheelock, 8 March 1937, MAA 2/1/3/1/46.

have none of this, and told the Sudanese that if they wished to show their loyalty, they should enlist unconditionally under the same terms as other Africans. When recruits failed to come forward under these conditions, Sutcliffe wrote to the chief secretary of Kenya to disparage the Sudanese profession of loyalty, noting he was able to recruit only one of the listed 850 men.⁴⁸

Sutcliffe's charges, however, were both false and unfair. His letter to the chief secretary was sent only two weeks after war was declared, and the Sudanese of Kibera came forward to serve in reasonably large numbers after Sutcliffe himself left Kenya to rejoin the military. Many of the older men were employed as guards and night watchmen, and considerable numbers of Kibera Sudanese served as drivers and mechanics. The exact number of Kiberans in frontline infantry units is unclear. In 1940, they constituted only one percent of 3 KAR.⁴⁹ Those who did serve earned high praise from their British officers, and senior Sudanese NCOs often occupied responsible positions in the fighting battalions. A young British officer appointed to command a mortar platoon with 1/6 KAR spoke very highly of the tact and professionalism of the Sudanese NCO who taught him to use mortars.⁵⁰ While overall figures for Sudanese enlistment declined, their substantially meritorious performance reinforced their claims to their land.

This positive record was offset by crime and disorder spawned by wartime conditions in Kibera. The location's reputation as an easy outlet for liquor and women drew large numbers of African and European soldiers from the many military bases surrounding Nairobi. In 1941, Nyasaland askaris based in Langata temporarily drove the police out of Kibera in a running battle sparked by a conflict with Gold Coast troops over women. The military was partially to blame for this as it could not provide married quarters for its askaris during wartime. As a result, many soldiers housed their wives in Kibera and broke out of camp to see them. In an attempt to control this disorder, the army instituted a series of regular military police patrols, which further eroded the reputation of the Sudanese with the civil administration.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Union of Sudanese to DC Nairobi, 24 April 1939, KNA, MD 4/5/136/7a; Union of Sudanese to Chief Secretary, 11 September 1939, KNA, MD 4/5/136/7; Sutcliffe to Kenya Governor, 18 September 1939, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/II/5.

⁴⁹ "Report on Tribal Composition of KAR," 22 April 1940, KNA, CNC 10/129/8a; Secretariat Circular, "Discharge Procedure as it Effects DCs," 26 March 1945, KNA, DC TAMB 1/9/9/19.

⁵⁰ Interview, M. Ruben, March 1994.

⁵¹ Central Province Intelligence Report, February 1941, KNA, MAA 2/3/16/III/3; Kibera Survey, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/II/96a & Report by Kitching, 12 December 1945, MAA 2/1/3/II/227a.

The Kenyan government was also directly to blame for Kibera's problems; it had neither the time or resources to check the continued influx of non-Sudanese. Furthermore, wartime conditions made the water shortage more acute as open pools of water were oiled to prevent the spread of malaria, and the government again rejected pleas to introduce piped water. In 1941, the DC of Nairobi, E.G. St. Tisdall, told the director of medical services that: "The established water policy endorsed by the Chief Secretary is that no permanent water supply should be established at Kibra (sic) because it is undesirable that the Nubian Settlement there should be permanent."⁵² This willful neglect was also applied to schools and other amenities. In 1944, Reverend Leonard Beecher, the Legislative Council Member for African Interests, observed that Kibera's only government school had closed down and the community's two to three hundred children were served by only four Quran schools. He blamed the high crime rate of the area on poverty and lack of education, and argued it could only be rehabilitated through direct supervision.

The place is really a most awful slum; the roads are bad, the housing disgraceful, and the whole place filled with an air of neglect. ... Indeed, it is only by a rebuilding of Kibera, with the erection of clubs and social halls and schools, under the charge of a European location officer that I consider that the menace of Kibera to Nairobi can be reduced.⁵³

Kenya's new governor, Sir Philip Mitchell, shared these views, and ordered the community reorganized to include modern water supplies, a police station, a supervised beer hall, support for the elderly and the removal of "vagrants."⁵⁴ By the end of the war, the government placed Kibera under direct European administration in the form of a superintendent responsible to the DC of Nairobi.

All of these measures were part of the shift in overall post-war colonial policy to an emphasis on good government and social welfare. Kenyan officials envisioned that Kibera could be reorganized along planned rational lines to allow the settlement to be governed effectively until its Sudanese veterans eventually died off. In a 1944 meeting, the chief Native commissioner, the commissioner for local government, the DC of Nairobi and the municipal Native affairs officer agreed to recognize the permanency of Kibera, provided that the sprawling Sudanese community was concentrated into a planned and orderly settlement with modern utilities and services. Sudanese veterans would receive leases for their lots which would expire on their deaths rather than being passed on to their children. Under

⁵² DC Nairobi to Director of Medical Services, 10 April 1941, KNA, BY 13/302/2.

⁵³ Rev L. Beecher to W.S. Marchant, CNC, 14 February 1944, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/II/59.

⁵⁴ Minute by Kenya Governor, 5 March 1945, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/II/156.

this plan the government hoped that the younger generations of Kiberans would be gradually absorbed into the greater African population of Nairobi, and that the community would eventually wither away in thirty to forty years. There were several main reasons for this significant policy shift. By 1945, Kenyan officials estimated that the cost of relocating and compensating the Sudanese had risen to £200,000. Furthermore, the post-war African housing shortage in Nairobi meant even troublesome locations like Kibera could not be spared, as there was no place to put the Sudanese during the five years it would take to rebuild the settlement. In 1946, the "Committee for the Control of Kibera" acknowledged the absurdity of pulling down the village as most Sudanese homes were "fairly clean and well kept."⁵⁵

While significant economic and social factors forced the Kenyan government to accept the long-term presence of Kibera, its optimistic plans for rational reorganization were doomed to failure by the continued influx of non-Sudanese and the legacy of the policy of deliberate neglect. By the late 1940's, Kibera had become home to an increasingly ethnically heterogeneous class of urban poor. The 1948 Census showed Kibera's 3,085 residents consisted of 1,696 Sudanese, 420 Kikuyu, 161 Meru and smaller numbers of almost every other major African ethnic group in Kenya. They were joined by ninety-six Ugandans, sixty-six Tanganyikans, and thirty-two other non-Kenyans. Only ten households were headed by military veterans theoretically entitled to the same residency rights as the Sudanese.⁵⁶ Most non-Sudanese were tenants of the Kiberan Sudanese. Others acquired semi-legal status by either attaching themselves to Sudanese families or by acquiring their huts or permits. In 1945, Captain W.H. Kitching, the superintendent of Kibera, found sixty-one of Kibera's 295 homes had been built without authorization. In addition, the supposedly "temporary" huts of mud, wattle and grass fated for eventual destruction when the community was moved, had been replaced by structures with iron roofs and concrete floors. Many of these residences were occupied by people who had only a tenuous right to live in Kibera. Kitching found the following: married sons of permit holders, some of them in the KAR themselves; KAR veterans who lacked original "shamba passes" but had purchased them from legal residents; non-Sudanese who had never been in the KAR but had married the widows of veterans; veterans of the Kenya Police who had purchased

⁵⁵ "Future of Kibera," 28 December 1944; MAA/2/1/3/II/184b, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/II/128a: Secretariat Minute by CNC, 5 April 1945; Minute by Kenya Governor, 5 March 1945, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/II/156; Committee for the Control of Kibera, 19 March 1946, KNA, MAA 2/5/172/III/1a.

⁵⁶ East African Statistical Depart, *East African Population Census*, (Nairobi, 1950); La Fontaine "Report of Investigation into Resettlement of Sudanese at Kibera," 13 November 1947, KNA, MAA 2/5/172/III/126.

their houses and permits; and in one case a Kamba "housekeeper" caring for a senile veteran while using the house to brew illegal liquor.⁵⁷ The quasi-legal status of these residents made it difficult for the government to evict them.

While the accuracy of the overall population figures for non-Sudanese in Kibera is open to question given their unofficial and technically illegal status, the civil administration was certain the community of "detrribalized Natives" exempted from the rules governing the "Native reserves" was primarily responsible for disorder in the location. The 1944 Economic and Social Survey of Kibera blamed "undesirables" who took advantage of Kibera's "extra-municipal status" for most of the crime. The survey concluded that "it is tolerably certain that whatever the character of the house holders any settlement with the material characteristics of Kibera – on the borders of a large town, extensive, scattered and away from the eyes of authority, would tend to attract bad characters."⁵⁸ These "bad characters" drew the attention of the European community in 1944 when two Africans were murdered on the Royal Nairobi Golf Course (a section of Kibera excised from the location in the late 1930's), causing the club committee to worry about the safety of its members.⁵⁹ The Sudanese were not directly blamed for these sorts of incidents, nor were they held directly responsible for the widespread prostitution in Kibera. Kitching considered they merely exploited the housing shortage by renting out rooms to prostitutes from other ethnic groups. In 1948, the DC of Nairobi even accused the European community of contributing to the problem by "parking" their children's *ayahs* (nurses or nannies) in Kibera for lack of housing elsewhere.⁶⁰

While most of Kibera's poorest residents were not Sudanese, evidence indicates that by the 1940's, the Sudanese community was becoming increasingly divided along age and class lines. Many older Sudanese veterans and their widows, lacking families to take care of them, slid into poverty. By 1945, the superintendent of Kibera estimated there were at least fifty-two destitute elderly Sudanese who needed some kind of government assistance.⁶¹ Without old age pensions, many had little alternative but to take advantage of the lucrative illegal opportunities presented by Kibera. The Kibera Survey found that most of the Sudanese brewing

⁵⁷ Report by Kitching, 12 December 1945, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/II/227a; DC Nairobi to CNC, 26 January 1945, KNA, MAA/2/1/3/II/145; "Huts Recommended for Demolition," 28 June 1946, KNA, MAA 2/5/172/III/6a.

⁵⁸ Colchester and Deverell, "Kibera Survey."

⁵⁹ R.M. Macgregor to A. Vincent, 19 June 1944, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/II/92.

⁶⁰ Report by Kitching, 12 December 1945, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/II/227a; J. Pinney, DC Nairobi, to CNC, 20 September 1948, KNA, MAA 7/458/25.

⁶¹ Report by Kitching, 12 December 1945, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/II/227a.

"Nubian Gin" were older women with no chance of remarriage. The *East African Standard* declared in a 1945 editorial that:

We have allowed these conditions to develop without taking any corresponding steps to provide an economic outlet for the special needs of these people. We are now reaping the evil effects of our neglect and no amount of abusive comment or punitive action will substitute for the economic self-sufficiency which had been created in Kibera by this form of illicit trade.⁶²

The majority of the Kibera Sudanese, however, achieved a measure of prosperity from their military experience, education, proximity to Nairobi and unique status as Kibera's only legal residents. Their KAR "shamba permits" gave them de facto title to substantial amounts of valuable agricultural land, which they in turn made available to the local African community in exchange for rent in cash or in kind. By the 1940's, these holdings grew through the acquisition of the land of deceased or evicted permit holders, and explains the insistence of the Sudanese on relocation to suitable farm land even though most did not directly engage in agricultural labor. A study of the occupations of the heads of fifty households found eight working for the police or army, four for the Kenya Bus Company, five in government departments, three as headmen, two as tailors, one Muslim cleric and seven retirees. They earned from 87 to 150 shillings per month, well above the 28 shillings earned on average by domestic workers in Nairobi in 1946.⁶³

The Kibera Survey attributed the cleanliness and relative prosperity of the Sudanese to two generations of military discipline. Their prosperity was also, however, due to the unregulated status of Kibera, which created lucrative commercial opportunities. Outside the jurisdiction of the Livestock Control Board, its butchers sold cheaper, uninspected and uncontrolled meat.⁶⁴ Moreover, the explosion in Nairobi's African urban population in the later half of the 1940's provided lucrative real estate opportunities as the Sudanese rented rooms to prostitutes, labor migrants and other non-Sudanese Africans who drifted into Nairobi. Of the twenty-six Kiberan landlords David Clark interviewed in the 1970's, twenty-three were Sudanese averaging from forty-two to forty-nine years of residency in the settlement.⁶⁵ Thus, the Sudanese had a vested interest in defending the status quo in Kibera even though the crime and disorder that were its

⁶² *East African Standard*, 10 March 1945.

⁶³ Chief Secretary to CNC, 23 May 1945, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/II/201; Colchester and Deverell, "Kibera Survey"; *East African Standard*, 16 August 1946.

⁶⁴ Committee for the Control of Kibera, 19 March 1946, KNA, MAA 2/5/172/III/1a.

⁶⁵ Clark, "Social Organization in Kibera," 7.

by-products damaged their reputation with the government. These factors, coupled with an understandable distrust of government motives, led the Kiberans to oppose efforts to either concentrate or relocate their community.

Although the Kiberans were united in opposition to relocation, by the end of the Second World War, economic and generational differentiation caused political divisions within the Sudanese community. Throughout most of the 1930's, they were represented by the Union of Sudanese, which, judging from its leadership, appears to have been composed of older veterans of the First World War. The Union fought against the implementation of the Kenya Land Commission's recommendations and opposed the authority of Suleman Ahmed, the government-appointed unofficial headman.⁶⁶ Although they succeeded in derailing the government's plan, their influence was short-lived as a new generation of Sudanese, many of whom were World War II veterans, emerged to challenge their leadership. This new generation founded the Sudanese Association of East Africa in 1945 to oppose what they perceived to be the more accommodationist policies of the Union. Their goal was to unite the many isolated Sudanese communities scattered throughout East Africa to press the British government to grant them permanent title to their land.⁶⁷ In Kibera, the Association rejected the older generation's bargaining tactic of pressuring the Kenyan government to return them to the Sudan, and instead entered local politics by forging ties with the Kikuyu Central Association.⁶⁸

For its part, the Kenyan government had its own problems executing proposals for the reorganization of Kibera. Post-war economic priorities made it difficult to find the large sums of money needed to compensate the Sudanese for their property at its full market value. The government also still lacked the means to evict the non-Sudanese living illegally in Kibera. Kitching recommended a system of coded passes to distinguish legal residents and their employees, and a tax of ten

⁶⁶ PC Central Province to Chief Secretary, 11 April 1939, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/1/137; Central Province Intelligence Report, February 1945, MAA 2/3/16/IV/35.

⁶⁷ L. Sharp, Special Branch, to Chief Secretary Uganda, 3 October 1947, KNA, MAA 2/5/172/III/120/1.

⁶⁸ It is difficult to accurately assess the composition and agenda of the two Sudanese parties as the Kenyan government seems to have often confused them. Most of the petitions from Kibera in the 1930's are signed by the Union of Sudanese, but in 1947, Charles Philip, the social welfare advisor in Kenya, described them as younger WWII-era veterans. By 1949, both organizations agreed to unite to represent Kibera, and disassociated themselves from "communist elements" to prove their loyalty to the Government. Furthermore, Clark claims that the Sudanese Association was challenged in the early 1960's by a new younger generation known as the "Union of Sudanese." It is not clear from this if Clark's information is confused, or if a new generation of Sudanese revived the older Union. Charles Philip, Social Welfare Advisor, to Accountant General, 17 January 1947, KNA, MAA 2/5/172/III/38; La Fontaine to CNC, 22 December 1949, KNA, MAA 7/458/202; Clark, "Social Organization in Kibera," 60-3.

shillings for each room over four in large residencies to discourage the Sudanese from becoming landlords. This plan, and others like it, floundered because the government had difficulty developing a coordinated approach to the Kibera problem, and because it still lacked the legal authority to evict tenants of legal residents.⁶⁹

By 1947, the resolution of the Kibera question took on an even greater urgency. Just 1,700 acres still remained of the original 4,000 acre KAR Reserve, but the expansion of military facilities at Langata required 550 acres, with fifty-two more needed for the realignment of the railway line. This meant at least forty-one Sudanese houses had to be destroyed. The government appointed S. H. La Fontaine, a well-respected former military officer and provincial commissioner, as a "Temporary Administrative Officer" charged with solving the Langata problem and developing a comprehensive plan for the reorganization of Kibera. His almost impossible mission was to find a way to concentrate the scattered Sudanese households to make room for the railway, protect the tenure and livelihood of veterans, control the non-Sudanese residents living without permits, and locate a site for a new "model village" where the Sudanese could eventually be moved. After consulting all the parties involved, La Fontaine proposed a five-year plan whereby Sudanese veterans would be given a choice. Those wishing to continue in agriculture could move to a new Sudanese village founded on a suitable 2,000 acre agricultural site within a reasonable distance from Nairobi. Those Sudanese wishing to continue to work in Nairobi were offered the choice of moving to a "New Kibera," located on land not required by the military or the railway. They would be offered leases on 122 modern houses (a total of four hundred rooms) to be built in a model settlement for them by the Kenya and Uganda Rails & Harbours (KUR&H). As compensation, they could choose either a cash settlement or a lease on the new houses.

La Fontaine's approach to the illegal residents of Kibera was a marked break from previous government policy. For the first time, he argued that all of Kibera's residents must be compensated on the grounds that their long term residency was tantamount to permission to live there. His more conciliatory and paternalistic policy was based on a number of factors. La Fontaine recognized that by 1947, the African housing shortage in Nairobi had grown so serious as to render outright expulsion unrealistic:

Even if the existing law allowed quick and effective eviction, the lack of housing and consequent over-crowding of African housing

⁶⁹ Report by Kitching, 12 December 1945 KNA, MAA/2/1/3/II/227a; Kitching to DC Nairobi, 28 June 1946, MAA/2/5/172/III/6.

has been so acute that, in the absence of an alternative settlement area, to throw a mass of Africans into already congested urban areas of Nairobi would have been both against the public interest and provocative of trouble.⁷⁰

Furthermore, he had to contend with the current realities of life in Kibera whereby it was now estimated that it would take at least sixty years for the Kiberan veterans to die out due to increased intermarriage with non-Sudanese Africans and the new generation of Second World War veterans. Also, the water shortage had grown so acute that poorer residents had to beg for it in nearby European neighborhoods.⁷¹

La Fontaine's first priority was to find a suitable alternative agricultural settlement for those willing to leave Kibera. After a considerable search, he narrowed the viable options to three: the Sudanese community in Eldama Ravine in the Rift Valley Province, 2,000 acres of veterinary quarantine land at Kibigori in western Kenya, and three unused farms near Thika in the Central Highlands. Of the three, only Eldama Ravine was a serious option; the other two were tied up by government regulations and settler opposition. Yet a government agricultural report showed that Eldama Ravine was already seriously eroded due to over-grazing. The Kiberan Sudanese also opposed it because it was too far from Nairobi, too small for their agricultural needs and had too few opportunities for trade.⁷² They continued to push for a settlement in Kiserian near Mbagathi (probably the original Kasura site) which had been offered them in the early 1930's, but this option was still impossible due to continued Maasai opposition.⁷³ Finally, after much debate in 1949, La Fontaine settled on an area called Kibiko. It was located west of Nairobi in an area bordering the Maasai and Kikuyu Reserves, where the Maasai had allowed the Kikuyu to graze their cattle in exchange for access to water. The Maasai were willing to trade this territory for another more useful area, but investigation revealed that they were offering land which could also be claimed by the Kikuyu. Not only was it already seriously over-grazed, but Central Province officials objected to its transfer on the grounds that it would

⁷⁰ La Fontaine, "Report of Investigation," 13 November 1947, KNA, MAA 2/5/172/III/126.

⁷¹ Philip to Accountant General, 17 January 1947, KNA, MAA 2/5/172/III/38.

⁷² La Fontaine, "Report of a Tour," 28 August 1947, KNA, MAA 2/5/172/III/94; La Fontaine, "Alternative Land for the Sudanese," 10 September 1947, KNA, MAA 2/5/172/III/101; PC Rift Valley to Chief Secretary, 26 September 1947, KNA, MAA 2/5/172/III/115.

⁷³ La Fontaine, Monthly Progress Report, February 1948, KNA, MAA 2/5/172/III/162; E.A. Sweatman, o/c Masai Extra Provincial District, to P. Wyn Harris, CNC, 31 May 1949, KNA, MAA 7/458/113.

inflare the Kikuyu at a time when land shortages in the Kikuyu Reserve were causing serious unrest.⁷⁴

Thus, with suitable land in the Maasai Reserve not an option, the Sudanese turned their full attention to opposing plans to move them from Kibera. In 1948, they wrote to Eliud Mathu, the Legislative Council Member for African Interests, threatening to take their case to their "leaders" in Egypt and the Sudan or to the new International Court of Justice. They told Mathu: "Kibra is our BLOOD (sic) which we poured for this country."⁷⁵ In an unpublished letter to the *East African Standard*, they described New Kibera as a prisoner of war camp and the "Hell of the Sudanese."⁷⁶ They rejected the new railway houses as being too small for their families and built to look like stables. In this they were correct as the houses were so poorly constructed that they began to collapse almost as soon as they were completed. The Kiberans did not mention, however, that much of their opposition stemmed from the fact that smaller houses would cut into the profits they earned from renting out rooms in Nairobi's increasingly tight housing market.⁷⁷

The Sudanese were supported by their former officers in the KAR who, while generally approving of the government's relocation policy, also pushed hard to ensure that their rights were protected. When Sutcliffe renewed his attacks on the Kiberan Sudanese in the post-war British press, many KAR officers wrote letters defending their ex-askaris' military service and reputation. Furthermore, the African Section of the British Legion took a direct interest in ensuring that the Sudanese moved to make room for the railway received adequate compensation.⁷⁸ Moreover, the Sudanese acquired a new and influential patron when Mitchell was appointed governor of Kenya in 1944. He was intensely proud of his own service with the KAR, and was interested in making sure the ex-askaris received a fair settlement. In 1945, he held a dinner party with other like-minded former officers to discuss the appointment of a welfare officer for Kibera, a post which was eventually filled by

⁷⁴ PC Central to CNC, 4 January 1949, KNA, PC NKU 3/13/21/47b; Sweatman to DC Kiambu, 6 March 1951, KNA, PC NKU 3/13/21/143.

⁷⁵ Sudanese Association to Chief Secretary, 17 September 1945, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/II/215; Sudanese Association to E. Mathu, 3 June 1948, KNA, MAA 2/5/172/III/200.

⁷⁶ G. Kinnear, Editor *East African Standard*, to CNC, 30 April 1948, KNA, MAA 8/117/28.

⁷⁷ Sudanese Association to General Manager KUR&H, 30 November 1948, KNA, MAA 7/458/83/1; Sudanese Association to Kenya Governor, 16 November 1949, KNA, MAA 7/458/196.

⁷⁸ Colonel A.E.T. Imbert to *Sunday Post*, 18 March 1945, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/II/181 & KNA, DEF 72/10/III/32/4.

La Fontaine. He also made a point of inviting four Sudanese veterans from Kibera to share the salute with him at the King's Birthday Parade in 1946.⁷⁹

Mitchell's actions, however, were not motivated by sentiment alone. As the opposition to European rule in Kenya increased in the late 1940's, the government began to realize that the Sudanese Kiberans' willingness to identify themselves as the loyal subjects of Britain could be a valuable asset. As a pro-Sudanese former officer, La Fontaine drew attention to this fact in his first report on Kibera, writing:

My experience of them in two world wars and during six months intensive study of them at close quarters has convinced me that they are superior to most other Africans in loyalty, in courage and manly qualities. People with slender knowledge of them think of them mainly as purveyors of Nubian gin and forget their outstanding services in the past. It would be a fine gesture for government in its search for a settlement area, acceptable to them, to override all obstacles in the way. It would strengthen, if that were possible, a loyalty unshaken by the attempts of seditious Africans of other tribes to under mine it. It would deepen a love of the British connection, that stands out like an island in a sea of native disorder.⁸⁰

The patronage and support the Kibera Sudanese received from their association with the military was not enough to allow them to remain in Kibera unmolested. It was just strong enough, however, to ensure that their dealings with the colonial government were carried out in the full light of public inspection.

Furthermore, the Sudanese determination to hold on to Kibera was not solely based on economic factors. One of the main weaknesses in the colonial administration's attempt to displace the Kiberans was that it failed to recognize that the shared experience of military service in the KAR had encouraged the development of a Sudanese ethnic consciousness, nurtured by the economic opportunities offered by Kibera. Although Islam was an important component of this identity, the Kibera Sudanese refused to mix with Muslim communities in Pumwani and other African locations in Nairobi. They fully recognized that their advantageous position in Kenya was dependent upon their ability appear separate from the rest of the African population of the colony. In their eyes they were entitled to the same official "non-Native" status enjoyed by Asians, Ethiopians, Comorrians and certain Somali clans, even though their position in Kibera granted

⁷⁹ Mitchell to Chief Secretary, 14 March 1945, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/II/174a; Central Province Intelligence Report, May 1946, KNA, MAA/2/3/16/IV/96; Philip Mitchell, *African Afterthoughts*, (London, 1954), 46.

⁸⁰ La Fontaine, "Report of Investigation," 13 November 1947, KNA, MAA 2/5/172/III/126.

them roughly the same privileges while sparing them a higher rate of taxation. In a letter to the secretary of state for the colonies, they argued, with some justification, that: "To us it seems elementary that we can only be classed as 'natives' in the place where we have native rights, where we have our tribal lands, or at any rate, certain land rights."⁸¹ Yet the authors of the Kibera Survey concluded that, "what they really want is to be distinguished from the ordinary African and in some way accorded a Janissary or Praetorian Guard status." Moreover, the leading role of the Sudanese in the conquest of Kenya meant there was little chance the non-Sudanese of Kenya would be willing to sanction their special status in Kibera. The Sudanese actively exploited their supposed isolation. They appealed to Mitchell as a former KAR officer to endorse their land claims as they too were settlers, and because "the natives of the country hate us to the bottom of their hearts."⁸²

Yet it appears that the Sudanese were not as isolated from the rest of the African community as they claimed to be. While the Kibera Survey declared that the Kibera Sudanese rarely intermarried with other ethnic groups, there is strong evidence to indicate the Sudanese community was much more open than they officially admitted. Most Sudanese came to Kenya as part of military expeditions, with limited opportunities to bring Sudanese women with them. While there were cases where veterans returned to the Sudan to find wives, many married women from Kenyan ethnic groups.⁸³ Moreover, Kitching noted that this absorption of local people into the community was not limited to women; male laborers willing to convert to Islam and accept Sudanese culture were often "adopted" to secure them legal permission to work in Kibera. Kitching noted:

There are a number of natives of other tribes than Sudanese who are claimed as adopted sons and daughters by the regular inhabitants. [They] are very difficult to identify as they have been given Mohamedan names. The object of this adoption seems to be to procure a husband for the women and obtain a dowry or to reap the benefit of prostitution by these women. Men so adopted are hidden under this camouflage in order to run butchers shops or graze cattle in the location, for which they no doubt pay their adopted parents.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Union of Sudanese to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 14 October 1940, PRO, CO 822/106/14.

⁸² Colchester and Deverell, "Kibera Survey"; Sudanese Association to Kenya Governor Mitchell, 14 May 1951, PRO, CO 822/820.

⁸³ Interviews, Hussein Farjalla, March 1994; Suleman Haganas, June 1994; and Hussein Absura Bakhit, June 1994.

⁸⁴ Report by Kitching, 12 December 1945, KNA, MAA/2/1/3/II/227a.

In all cases, male and female adoptees or wives learned "KiNubi" (a language with an Arabic vocabulary and African grammar rules) and accepted the other main elements of Sudanese culture. It appears that by the second generation the local roots of these Kiberan Sudanese were entirely forgotten. In 1953, the "Rules and Regulations of the Sudanese Association" declared members only married other Sudanese, and forbade women to alter the Sudanese style of dress. This policy of integration was so successful that by the early 1970's, Clark found almost every Kiberan Sudanese whom he interviewed claimed to have been descended from the original KAR contingent which came to Kenya with Lugard.⁸⁵ There was a pragmatic side to this denial of local ties as well, for if the Sudanese admitted to intermarriage, they would have been considered Kenyan Africans, and thus not entitled to special consideration from the government. Moreover, the government would have been far less tolerant of a community that showed no prospect of dying out over time.

Thus, the Sudanese continually emphasized their historical ties to the Sudan while denying and concealing their local connections. Oral evidence indicates some Sudanese did travel back and forth between the Sudan and Kibera after discharge from the KAR, but in most cases these ties were celebrated to emphasize their separateness and to remind the Kenyan government of its obligations. It was for this last reason that the Sudanese continually demanded repatriation to the Sudan at government expense when confronted by plans to evict them from Kibera. In 1938, a petition from the Union of Sudanese to the governor of Kenya declared:

It is also common knowledge that owing to such long and continuous service we have entirely lost touch with our country of origin and have owing to such service embraced Kenya Colony as our country of adoption. . . . We wish respectfully to emphasize that if we are forced to return to our country of origin we and our wives and children could be absolute strangers in the Sudan.⁸⁶

This was basically a bluff, implying that since repatriation was impossible because of the Sudanese military sacrifice, Britain had an obligation to look after them in Kenya. While the Kenyan government would have liked nothing better than to have emptied Kibera by sending the Sudanese "home," it was both financially and politically impossible to do so. In 1935, Sutcliffe calculated the cost of travel to the Sudan via Aden would be more than the Sudanese would receive in compensation for their homes in Kibera. Moreover, when Hosking raised the issue with an ex-

⁸⁵ Sudanese Association of Nyanza to DC Kisumu, 4 July 1946, KNA, DC KMG 1/1/155; Clark, "Social Organization in Kibera," 24.

⁸⁶ Petition by Union of Sudanese, 6 May 1938, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/1/84.

provincial governor from the Sudan, he was told the "mixed origins" of the Kiberan Sudanese made them unwelcome. Thus by 1939, the Kenyan chief secretary was forced to play into the hands of the Sudanese by agreeing that repatriation was impossible.⁸⁷

This admission gave the Sudanese a great deal of leverage, but when Kibera once again became an issue after the Second World War, there was another push in the colonial administration to call their bluff. A Kiberan named Senussi Mohamed was sent back to the Sudan as a test case in July of 1946. He received 400 shillings compensation for his home (which was then demolished) on the condition that he relinquish all rights to residency in Kibera. Yet in September of that same year, the Sudanese government sent him back, and he hired a lawyer to sue the Kenyan government over its refusal to allow him to rebuild his home in Kibera.⁸⁸ The Senussi Mohamed case was an embarrassment to all concerned. It exposed the fact that the Kiberan Sudanese were not suited to return to the Sudan, and forced Kenyan officials to admit that Kibera was a local problem. The Sudanese government's firm rejection of the Kiberan Sudanese could now, however, be turned to the Kenyan administration's advantage. By 1955, the superintendent of Kibera could call their bluff, writing that "they are attempting to point a pistol at the head of Government, although the pistol is recognized by most thinking residents of Kibera as more likely to explode backwards than forwards."⁸⁹

Kibera in Transition, 1950–1959

Yet by the beginning of the 1950s, the great push either to reorganize or relocate Kibera as part of the post-war social welfare program had died a slow death. Much to his frustration, Kitching found that "The African Settlement (Kibera Settlement Area) Rules 1949," intended to give him authority to prosecute and evict unauthorized residents and the leaseholders who sheltered them, did not have proper legal backing.⁹⁰ Plans to shift the Sudanese into regulated and concentrated railway housing collapsed when the Sudanese refused to move. Moreover, the government's policy of compensating displaced householders failed because, in

⁸⁷ Report by Sutcliffe, 9 December 1935, KNA, BN 46/6/42a; Hosking, CNC, to Deputy Chief Secretary, 15 June 1939, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/II/145; Chief Secretary to Captain Adam Hasmi, Union of Sudanese, 22 August 1939, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/II/151.

⁸⁸ Chief Secretary to DC Nairobi, 6 July 1945, KNA, MAA 2/1/3/III/209; Senussi Mohamed to DC Nairobi, 22 August 1946, KNA, MAA/2/5/172/III/21; Minute to Chief Secretary, 16 October 1946, KNA, MAA 2/5/172/III/27.

⁸⁹ J.F. Small, Superintendent of Kibera, to o/c Nairobi Extra-Provincial District, 4 October 1955, KNA, OPE 1/365/17/1.

⁹⁰ Memorandum by Kitching, 20 October 1949, KNA, MAA 7/458/189/1.

fact, no alternative site existed.⁹¹ These problems were compounded when those Sudanese who had been moved to make room for the railway took the government's failure to pay compensation for their homes as tacit permission to rebuild, and often did so in areas which were no longer officially part of Kibera.⁹²

La Fontaine's relocation plans faltered because there simply was no suitable open land in post-war Kenya. In 1948, the chief secretary warned that giving the Sudanese land would spark similar demands from the Somali and Swahili communities: "All the land that we can find is urgently required for tribes indigenous to Kenya, and I am reluctant to suggest that government should hold out any hope for agricultural settlement for these people."⁹³ When La Fontaine finally made progress in persuading the Maasai to trade Kibiko for better-watered land elsewhere, the government objected to the plan's £250,000 price tag. In 1953, the permanent secretary for African affairs wrote:

In my opinion we cannot even contemplate the expenditure of nearly £1/4 million in moving a handful of Sudanese a distance of about 20 miles and moreover we shall not be in a position to put such a scheme into operation in foreseeable future.⁹⁴

Thus, the displaced Sudanese were allowed to rebuild their homes under close supervision in what was left of Kibera. This of course was a return to the old failed policy of trying to regulate the unregulable. La Fontaine's final contribution before giving up his post was the construction of a government school, the first major public welfare project in the location since the Second World War. He urged serving officers of 3 KAR to attend its inauguration to show the Sudanese that the school was a reward for their military service. To this day, La Fontaine is still remembered positively by some residents on behalf of the Kiberan community.⁹⁵

The Mau Mau Emergency in some respects was a setback for the Sudanese. In 1955, the Kenyan War Council, which coordinated operations against the mostly Kikuyu Mau Mau guerillas, declared Kibera a security risk, and used emergency powers to evict the Kiberans' Kikuyu tenants who had been legally out of the government's reach. Although the council admitted "law and order and cleanliness"

⁹¹ R. Turnbull to D. Ryland o/c Nairobi EPD, 30 December 1954, KNA, MAA 7/472/117.

⁹² Gassim Saghair, et. al. to La Fontaine, 1 December 1953, KNA, MAA 7/472/76.

⁹³ Chief Secretary to Kenya Governor, 23 November 1948, KNA, OPE 1/364/22.

⁹⁴ Sudanese Settlement at Kibera, 13 July 1953, KNA, PC NKU 3/13/21/155/1; Minute by L.F.G. Pritchard, KNA, MAA 7/472/58.

⁹⁵ La Fontaine to Director of Education, 21 November 1952, KNA, MAA 7/458/288; Interview, Hussein Absura Bakhit, June 1994.

had actually improved in Kibera since the rebellion began, it advocated a strict policy of "demolition, concentration, reconstruction and compensation." Major General W. R. N. Hinde, director of operations during Mau Mau, argued Kibera was an "anachronism," best dealt with during the Emergency rather than after it. Thus, the extra-legal powers granted to the colonial civil administration during Mau Mau offered the last and best chance for it to impose its will on Kibera.⁹⁶ Yet even so the Sudanese remained able to exploit the Emergency: Mau Mau was another opportunity to claim the rewards of loyal service. In 1953, they requested that attendance at the new Kibera government school be limited to Sudanese to avoid "contamination by subversive propaganda."⁹⁷ While they had made money from Kikuyu renters and sharecroppers, the Sudanese landlords did little to protest their eviction during the Emergency, as the Kikuyu in Kibera were quickly replaced by other ethnic groups from western Kenya.

In the mid-1950's, the civil administration proposed to solve the Kibera problem through municipal legislation. It abandoned attempts to evict the Sudanese and drafted new measures to transform Kibera from a "Sudanese Ghetto" into a planned settlement open to all. As plans for Nairobi's new Woodley Estate included parts of Kibera, the government proposed that the location be absorbed into the city itself where municipal ordinances would provide the legal sanction to manage the community. Yet the Nairobi City Council refused to accept responsibility for Kibera until its substandard houses were demolished and the occupants compensated. In other words, the city council was unwilling to assume responsibility for one of the colonial administration's longest running problems.

The council's rejection forced the government to once again confront the problem of how to control the non-Sudanese residents of Kibera. The "African Settlement (Kibera Settlement Area) Rule, 1957" finally closed the legal loophole which had prevented Kitching from expelling unauthorized residents in the 1940's. Yet by 1957, the government had also become much more conscious of African opinion. The civil administration came to recognize that full and fair compensation had to be granted to all displaced residents, Sudanese or otherwise, to prevent them from supporting Tom Mboya and other newly influential African politicians who became prominent after the 1956 elections. This was a serious concern; the

⁹⁶ R. Tatton-Brown to Secretary for Local Government, 25 October 1954, KNA, MAA 7/458/298; Kibera, 19 December 1955, KNA, WC CM 1/5/22; W.R.N. Hinde to Chairman, Central Province Security Committee, 23 November 1955, Rhodes House Library Mss.Afr.s.1580/3/196; Kibera, by o/c Nairobi EPD, 5 November 1955, KNA, KNA, OPE 1/365/12/2; E.D. Fox, "Notes on A Preliminary Survey of the Proposal to Reconstitute the Kibera African Settlement Area," 18 May 1955, KNA, MAA 7/458/314.

⁹⁷ La Fontaine to CNC, 30 March 1953, KNA, OPE 1/1382/5.

administration's blatant neglect of social welfare in Kibera provided the politicians with a ready-made issue. The Nairobi People's Convention Party took an active interest in Kibera, and courted the support of the Sudanese Association by lobbying for improved health facilities, an end to the permit system and the replacement of the superintendent with a democratically elected African advisory committee.⁹⁸ Moreover, when the Sudan became an independent nation in 1955, the Kibera Sudanese acquired another powerful patron. Unlike the former colonial regime, the new Sudanese government took an active interest in renewing ties with the communities founded by the Sudanese military diaspora. In 1955, a delegation from Kibera (which included Senussi Mohamed) traveled to the Sudan for consultations on "the settlement of Sudanese in Kenya," and by 1957, the Sudanese consul general in Nairobi was included in discussions on the fate of settlement.⁹⁹

The Kibera Sudanese were uncertain as to whether to oppose the new development plans. While Kibera's inclusion in Nairobi would have effectively ended their agricultural activities, it also offered much needed and long-desired improvements in education, medical care and basic public utilities. Some Sudanese merchants cooperated with the new "African (Kibera Settlement Area) Rules" which improved overall sanitary conditions. This new spirit of cooperation, however, failed to end police raids. In September 1958, the Sudanese Association wrote to the commissioner of police to complain that the General Services Unit (GSU) raided the settlement three to four times per night during a two-week period. When the Sudanese protested the sacking of their homes and the molestation of their women, the GSU askaris told them to go back to the Sudan.¹⁰⁰ These incidents illustrate the increasingly tenuous position of the Kiberans in the late 1950's. While the opening of the political process to Africans prevented the colonial administration from imposing its will unilaterally, it was unlikely the soon-to-be-enfranchised

⁹⁸ R.A. Wilkinson, o/c Nairobi EPD, to Permanent Secretary for African Affairs, 30 July 1957, KNA, OPE 1/365/40; Meeting on Kibera at Ministry of Local Government, Health & Housing, 19 November 1957, KNA, BY 13/302/22; D.J. Penwill to K.W.S. Mackenzie, 22 July 1959, KNA, CS 8/9/29/2; Josef Mathenge to Minister for Local Government, 19 April 1958, KNA, BY 13/302/24a; Special Branch Intelligence Summary No. 2, February 1958, PRO, CO 822/1322.

⁹⁹ To the dismay of the Kiberan Sudanese, he sided with the civil administration, refusing to support them if they opposed the British Government, and brushing aside their complaints about Police liquor raids by citing the Quranic injunction against alcohol. Kibera Committee to o/c Nairobi EPD, 28 September 1955, KNA, OPE 1/365/7; Wilkinson to Permanent Secretary for African Affairs, 30 July 1957, KNA, OPE 1/365/40; British Embassy Khartoum to Kenyan Secretariat, 26 July 1956, PRO, CO 822/820; Special Branch Intelligence Summary, 1958, PRO, CO 822/1497.

¹⁰⁰ Health Inspector Nairobi to Permanent Secretary for African Affairs, 24 March 1958, KNA, BY 13/302/23; Ramathan Marjan President, Sudanese Association, to Commissioner of Police, 19 September 1958, KNA, BY 13/302/23.

African majority would extend special privileges of residence and tenure to a community which owed its position to its role in helping to establish colonial rule.

Kibera and *Uhuru*, 1960–1968

As independence from Britain became a recognized fact, the Sudanese were faced with the problem of how to convince an African Kenyan government to recognize their claim to Kibera. They were being pushed out of the location by a growing non-Sudanese population, and by the enforcement of the old restrictions on new building in the settlement. One strategy was to gain title to their land before the end of European rule. In 1960, the Sudanese lobbied the colonial administration for permanent legal title to the land on which they had lived for almost sixty years. The children of ex-askaris sued to gain compensation for lands expropriated by the government where their fathers were once given permission to reside. In a petition to the secretary of state for the colonies, they lamented "God knows where our grandchildren will live."¹⁰¹

Yet in a time of delicate political negotiations over the character of post-colonial Kenya, the British government lacked the influence or desire to convince African politicians to uphold colonial obligations to the Sudanese. Development proceeded without any consideration for historic tenure and privilege. In 1960, the Ministry of Housing under Mussa Amalemba, an African government minister, introduced plans to redevelop Kibera into five "neighborhood units" of 15,000 residents each, with piped water supplies, sewers and roads. Those who lost their houses were to be compensated and given the choice of either renting in the new settlement or accepting government loans to rebuild elsewhere. While these proposals were never fully implemented, in 1961, Kenya's Central Housing Board built five model homes in Kibera, and three years after independence, the Ministry of Housing built fifty-two more which it offered to the Sudanese on a "tenant-purchase basis." By 1967, the National Housing Corporation, which had replaced the Central Housing Board, added thirty-six more.¹⁰²

Although this building campaign made a small contribution to the quality of life in Kibera, it was no where near enough to undo the legacy of colonial neglect. Moreover, it marked an end to the Sudanese way of life. The Kenya Republic was not bound to uphold promises made by the colonial regime, and extended only

¹⁰¹ M.Y. Seroney, Advocate, to o/c Nairobi EPD, 30 September 1959, KNA, OPE 1/365/143/3; Petition from Kibera Sudanese Community, c1960, KNA, OPE 1/365/154/4.

¹⁰² J.J. Adie to Chief Secretary, 25 March 1960, KNA, OPE 1/365/166; Ministry of Local Development to Town Clerk Nairobi, 24 January 1964, KNA, KNA, BY 13/302/66; Clark, "Social Organization in Kibera," Appendix "G".

housing concessions, rather than land tenure, to the Sudanese. Although given priority in leasing the new houses, they no longer had any special rights in Kibera. Moreover, the smaller government homes were entirely unsuitable for use as rooming houses, depriving the Sudanese of one of their last key sources of income. What was left of Kibera was further constricted when the government took large portions of the settlement to build middle class housing and the Kenya Science Teacher Training College. In 1969, the Ministry of Lands closed the door entirely by declaring the remaining portion to be state land.¹⁰³

These fundamental changes opened substantial rifts in the Sudanese community. As colonial rule drew to a close, the older generation of KAR veterans continued to see military patronage as useful and important, and still depicted themselves as loyal British servants. In 1955, Ramathan Marjan, the President of the Sudanese Association and an old nemesis of the colonial administration, led a delegation of Sudanese warrant officers and NCOs to pay tribute to Colonel T.O. Fitzgerald (an ex-commander of 3 KAR) on his eightieth birthday. In 1959, the African Section of the British Legion again singled out Marjan at the Queen's Birthday celebration in Nairobi:

Once again the Sudanese ex-soldiers attended in strength and made an impressive spectacle in their immaculate turn-out with medals and decorations. Ex-RSM Suleman Mohamed, Liwali of Kibera who fought at Omdurman and Ex-RSM Ramadhan Marjan [sic] Chairman of the Sudanese Association who fought in Jubaland and both World Wars were present amongst many others with equally impressive records of service.¹⁰⁴

These older men were unequipped to adapt to changing realities in post-colonial Kenya. The Sudanese Association had strongly opposed government policy in the late 1940's; by the early 1960's it had essentially aligned itself with the colonial administration. When African politicians and their allies in the British Parliament criticized the Kenyan government for refusing to permit elected administrative councils in Kibera, the governor of Kenya, engaging in an equally remarkable reversal of policy, claimed the Kenya Land Commission had established Kibera as a Sudanese residence. He described the ex-servicemen who led the Association as

¹⁰³ Clark, "Social Organization in Kibera," 3-4.

¹⁰⁴ *Journal of the King's African Rifles*, 1959; British Legion Information Sheet No. 2, 1 July 1959, KNA, DC KT1 3/6/4/15.

the equivalent of a "village council" and as the legitimate representatives of the Sudanese community.¹⁰⁵

When the Sudanese Association agreed to move into the smaller houses offered by the government, a new generation of young Sudanese rejected the government's development plans for Kibera, complaining the civil administration had chosen "old men" to represent their community.¹⁰⁶ They felt there was no longer anything to be gained from openly emphasizing old connections with the KAR. The younger Sudanese abandoned the now pointless claim to "non-Native status" and chose to portray themselves as "Nubian" Kenyans. When the Sudanese ambassador to Kenya celebrated Kiberan ties with his country in a speech marking the anniversary of Sudan's independence, these young men rose as a group to contradict him publicly.¹⁰⁷

Thus the self-image of the Kiberan Sudanese was strongly influenced by the shifting patterns of colonial rule. With the departure of the British, the ground shifted under the Sudanese, and they were forced to recast themselves as Kenyan nationalists. They moved from "Sudanese" aliens deserving of non-native status to a "tribe" of "Nubian" Kenyans with the same claims and rights as any other indigenous ethnic group. As Nubians they no longer had any claim to special privileges, and were far too small in number to command any significant share of the nation's resources. Yet even today, as was the case when Clark interviewed them in the early 1970's, most are quietly proud that their ancestors had been the backbone of the KAR. Old medals and campaign ribbons are still valued, and stories of military exploits are passed orally to younger generations.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Kenya Governor to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 21 March 1960, PRO, CO 822/2475.

¹⁰⁶ "Sudanese Village" to Minister for African Affairs, 28 January 1960, PRO, CO 822/28 January 1960.

¹⁰⁷ Clark, "Social Organization in Kibera," 114-5.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.