

Introduction

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This book is the fourth collection of research papers on Nuba Mountain languages. The other three volumes are *Nuba Mountain Language Studies*, edited by Thilo C. Schadeberg and Roger M. Blench (published in 2013), *Nuba Mountain Language Studies – New Insights*, edited by Gertrud Schneider-Blum, Birgit Hellwig and Gerrit J. Dimmendaal (published in 2018), and *Langues des Monts Nouba / Languages of the Nuba Mountains*, edited by Nicolas Quint and Stefano Manfredi (published in 2020). If one looks at the table of contents in these volumes, a good number of authors are listed again and again. Thus, it does not come as a surprise that, over the years, colleagues from different countries have become familiar with each other and that their – our – relationships and interests go far beyond that of scientific work. We know each other, know each other's families and suffer with those who are in trouble. And those of us who are in a safe place now, in October 2024, suffer with those who have to bear the misery of the civil war in Sudan or who are homeless now because they have had to flee the country. Those who are safe wish they could help and are yet helpless.

This book is special, because it presents contributions on the Nuba Mountain languages and culture as if life continues as usual. But nothing is as usual in Sudan since the fighting started in April 2023, one and a half years ago. However, it was the expressed will of our friends within Sudan that this book should be made to happen and thus we all did our best, wherever we were at the time of organizing and writing.

A number of contributions found in this collection were first presented in February 2023, during the fourth international conference on Nuba Mountain languages and cultures, which took place in Khartoum, Sudan. The previous three conferences focusing on the Nuba Mountains were carried out in 2011 in Leiden (The Netherlands), in 2014 in Paris (France) and in 2017 in Cologne (Germany). Originally, the plan had been to have the conference in Khartoum in 2020, keeping the previous three-year rhythm, but the political situation in Sudan and then also the Covid-19 pandemic led the organizers to postpone the conference in the hope of quieter, safer times. Over almost three years, heated

debates over whether or not to conduct a conference under the given circumstances preceded the decision to finally have it, against all the odds.

This fourth conference differed from the previous ones in that, along with presenters and scholars, people whose cultures were in the limelight of the most recent studies on the diverse ethnic Nuba groups were also able to attend. The number of participants was overwhelming and way beyond expectation. Even the biggest hall of the University of Khartoum was not big enough to accommodate all who were interested. On behalf of the organizers we sincerely apologise to those who could not enter and whose needs could not be met.

The selected contributions, based on presentations delivered during the conference, are supplemented by studies from researchers who could not attend but who share our interest in the culture of the Nuba population. As was expressed by some of the authors, they would have loved to improve their contributions by taking on board valuable ideas that came up during the conference's discussions and/or by considering suggestions from reviewers. However, shortly after the conference, the violent conflict, which started in April 2023 between Sudan's state army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in greater Khartoum and soon spread beyond this area, prevented any kind of further fieldwork, a situation which still continues.¹

It is not the first time that research in Sudan (be it linguistic, anthropological, historical, archaeological or of any other kind) has been hindered or has come to a halt and that Sudanese scholars, as well as their guests from abroad, have been prevented from doing their work the way they had planned to do it. Schadeberg & Blench (2013: 11) alluded to this fact by saying: "The period between the 1st and the 2nd Civil War made it possible for foreign academics to conduct research in the Nuba Mountains."² We take this occasion to feature

¹ "Protagonists in the power struggle are General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, head of the army and leader of Sudan's ruling council since 2019, and his former deputy on the council, RSF leader General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti." <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/whats-behind-sudans-crisis-2023-04-17/>

"Together, they toppled a civilian government in an October 2021 coup but are now locked in a power struggle that has derailed an internationally backed transition to democracy and is threatening to destabilise a fragile region." <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20230428-sudan-army-and-rsf-say-they-agree-to-extend-truce-but-fighting-continues>

"Tensions had been building for months before fighting between Sudan's army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) erupted in the capital Khartoum on April 15, 2023." <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/whats-behind-sudans-crisis-2023-04-17/>

² The first civil war started, virtually simultaneously with the political independence of Sudan (January 1956), in 1955 between the southern regions and the northern government. It ended with the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement in 1972 (see, e.g., Dabitz 1985: 8). The second civil war started in 1983 (with a military coup in 1989 and the

two of the researchers who were able to go to the mountains in this period of relative peace, in order to present an intimate picture of their research situation in the 70s and 80s. That is, we are looking over the shoulders of the linguist Thilo Schadeberg and the ethnologist Günter Dabitz.

Thilo Schadeberg, the initiator of the first Nuba Mountain Languages Conference in Leiden (2011), travelled to the Nuba Mountains at the end of 1973 to make the necessary preparations for his later survey, and then again from October 1974 until January 1975 for systematic data collection.³ Of course, and this has not changed over the years, one first had to get permission from the Sudanese authorities to travel by declaring one's reason for traveling. The preparations also include gaining separate permission for taking photos, although, as Schadeberg said, he did not even have a camera at that time. Once in the Nuba Mountains, he remembers vividly how he conducted interviews with representatives of different ethnic groups in the prison of Kadugli in 1973. This seems to have been a win-win situation: Schadeberg was able to collect data, while the prisoners had some welcome diversion from their monotonous daily routine.

In 1974/75, with a Land Rover at his disposal, Schadeberg travelled through the mountains for two months. All in all, as Schadeberg sums up, most of the people he encountered were in a relaxed mood. Certainly, one had to present the authorities' papers when asked to produce them, but a general tension between the Arabic population and locals was not observable. Quite the contrary, Arabic traders more often than not served as middlemen between him and local consultants from different ethnic groups. As Schadeberg explains: "The Nuba people distinguished 'Arabs' – traders, officials, policemen, teachers, etc. – from 'Baggara' living in tents and having cattle.⁴ Some Arabs having family ties with the northern centres (El Obeid, Khartoum, etc.) thought of the Baggara as one of the local groups in the Nuba Mountains." However, Schadeberg adds that he, as "a transient visitor with just a rudimentary knowledge of Arabic", may of course not have noticed tensions between the different groups.

appointment of Omar al-Bashir as president in 1993) and ended after more than twenty years in 2005 (see Meerpohl 2012: 68; Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, Tim Glawion: <https://www.bpb.de/themen/kriege-konflikte/dossier-kriege-konflikte/228561/suedsudan/>).

³ Thilo Schadeberg kindly shared his memories and original documents with us during two interviews in 2024. See also Schadeberg (1981e: 117) on some general observations on the Nuba Mountains. A number of publications from his research period in the 70s are listed in the references (Schadeberg 1981a-d, 1989, 1994, 2013), among them an overview on the 'Linguistic Settlement of the Nuba Mountains' that he co-authored with Robin Thelwall (1983), whom he had met in Khartoum in 1973.

⁴ With regard to the Baggara dialects of the so called Baggara belt, the interested reader is referred to Manfredi & Roset (2021).

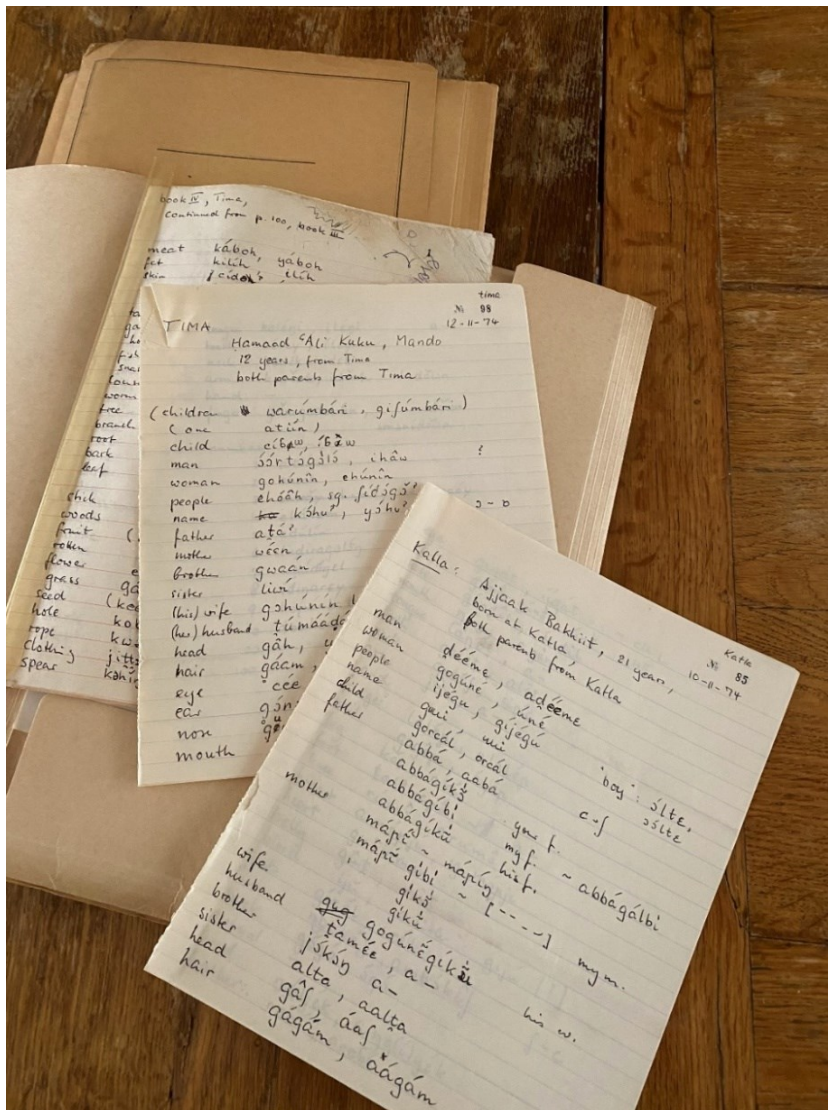


FIGURE 1: Excerpts from Thilo Schadeberg's fieldnotes

Schadeberg concentrated mainly on collecting the translational equivalents of the 200 words in the list compiled by Swadesh (1955).⁵ He used notebooks with consecutively numbered pages with carbon copies (see FIGURE 1). Whenever the opportunity arose, he separated the copies from the originals and sent them home. Both the original and the copied notebooks are still safely stored with him.

⁵ See Swadesh (1955); see also <https://people.umass.edu/ellenw/Swadesh%20List.pdf>.

In Kadugli, at that time, Thilo Schadeberg also met the controversial figure Leni Riefenstahl (1902-2003), who was known for her film work during the Nazi era in Germany and later for her biased and lopsided – though aesthetic – photos of Nuba people.⁶ Schadeberg mainly recalled from their encounter her questioning about who is still running around – to her Eurocentric eyes – naked. Sometimes worlds simply collide.

Ten years later, determined to do research in the Nuba Mountains, Günter Dabitz contacted Ronald C. Stevenson (1915-1991), who between 1983 and 1988 was head of the Department of Sudanese and African Languages in the Institute of African and Asian Studies at the University of Khartoum. Dabitz was in search of a topic for his doctoral thesis.⁷ From the selection of possible topics, Stevenson convinced Dabitz to study the Tima, with a focus on shamanism, as mentioned in Nadel (1946: 25). During his first journey to the Nuba Mountains, from November 1985 until September 1986, Dabitz spent several weeks in Kadugli and Lagawa, before he was finally able to visit the Tima in their home area, even if only for five days, because he had to go back to Khartoum for the renewal of his visa. With this in his hands, he went again to Tima and stayed there for three and a half months. As it turned out, and at first frustrating to him, he was unable to maintain his research with its intended focus on shamanism due to the people's denial of its existence, and thus he switched his research topic to the more general and open study of cultural change among the Tima.

Dabitz describes the atmosphere in the Nuba Mountains at the time of his first travels as enthusiastic, due to the fact that Nimeiri (1930-2009), the former president, had recently been ousted from power and that in the aftermath of Nimeiri's disposal many Nuba people had been freed from prison.⁸ A new era seemed to have started.

⁶ For a contemporary critical view on Riefenstahl's publications (1973, 1976) see Sontag (1981) and an article by Sontag translated in the German magazine *Zeit*: <https://www.zeit.de/1975/20/die-ekstase-der-gemeinschaft/komplettansicht>. See also Dabitz (1985: 149-154, especially pp. 151/152, indirectly confirming Schadeberg's memories; see also Schäffer (2016) and a review thereof by Anna Sophia Messner (2017). The documentary 'Riefenstahl' (2024) by Andreas Veiel gives insights into the work and attitudes of Leni Riefenstahl.

⁷ Before his travels, Dabitz had compiled his comprehensive bibliography on the *Geschichte der Erforschung der Nuba-Berge* ('History of Exploration of the Nuba Mountains'), published in 1985.

The information on Dabitz' research situation for this introduction was provided by Günter Dabitz himself in 2024, having gone back to private documents from the 80s, by personal communication.

⁸ For a chronology of key events in Sudan until September 2019 see <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14095300>; see also Abdelkarim et al. (1985); for more information on Nimeiri, see, e.g., his obituary in *The Guardian*: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jun/05/obituary-jaafar-nimeiri>.

Dabitz' second journey to Sudan took place between November 1988 and July 1989. By then, the situation had become tense again and the enthusiasm about Nimeiri's dismissal had vanished. Compared to his first stay in 1985/86, he felt that he was treated in a less friendly way by the Sudanese authorities and he feared he would not be able to obtain a travel permit. To make the best of it, Dabitz started his sojourn in Sudan working with Tima people living in El Droshab, a northern suburb of greater Khartoum. Among the Tima people living there, he mainly investigated the dynamicity of the migration process and also the socio-cultural organization and integration of the Tima people in their urban living environment. Despite the tension between 'northerners' and 'southerners', and thus somewhat unexpectedly, Dabitz all of a sudden received permission to travel to the mountains. As soon as possible, and together with his helper El-Eheimir, he then travelled to Tima again. His Tima friend Ismail not only provided Günter with a newly renovated house, but the Tima also held a feast with traditional dancing to honour their guest. On top of this, Ismail named his new-born son after Günter. Günter Dabitz had become a member of the family.⁹

The following is an excerpt from Dabitz' report on this second journey to the organization which funded his project:¹⁰

Neben der ethnographischen Aufzeichnung der Gegenwartskultur galt es aber auch verstärkt, die dem kulturellen Wandel zum Opfer gefallenen Rituale der traditionellen Religion zu dokumentieren und vor dem endgültigen Untergang zu bewahren. In diesem Zusammenhang hatte eine gefährliche politische Krise, die ursächlich unmittelbar mit dem Bürgerkrieg verknüpft war, den positiven Nebeneffekt, daß einige Rituale stattfanden, die in den letzten zehn bis fünfzehn Jahren unter dem starken islamischen Einfluß nicht mehr ausgeführt worden waren. Dies ergab eine wohl einzigartige Möglichkeit zur direkten teilnehmenden Beobachtung traditioneller Rituale zur Abwehr von bösen Kräften. Ein weiterer Schwerpunkt der Forschung war die Klärung der Bedeutung der Matrilinearität in der Sozialstruktur von Tima.

⁹ Even more than 25 years later, when visiting the Tima area, one of the co-authors of this introduction, Gertrud Schneider-Blum, was frequently asked about the whereabouts and well-being of [kunta], as the Tima pronounced Günter's name.

¹⁰ Translation from the original German version into English with DeepL Translator <https://www.linguee.com>, checked by the editors.

[In addition to the ethnographic documentation of contemporary culture, it was also increasingly important to document the rituals of traditional religion that had fallen victim to cultural change and to save them from their final demise. In this context, a dangerous political crisis, which was directly linked to the civil war, had the positive side effect that some rituals took place that had not been performed in the last ten to fifteen years under the strong Islamic influence. This provided a unique opportunity for direct participant observation of traditional rituals to ward off evil forces. Another focus of the research was to clarify the significance of matrilineality in the social structure of Tima.]

The following was not found in Dabitz' report:

After his return to Germany, the situation in the Nuba Mountains escalated. At the end of 1989, Tima, like other regions, also became the site of attacks and defensive battles, in which 30 Tima people and tens of Arabs died. Against this background, further trips to the Nuba Mountains were no longer an option for Dabitz. What remains are unforgettable, unique experiences and everlasting impressions of the Tima and their culture.

For many years, until the peace agreement in 2005, research in the Nuba Mountains was hardly possible and only in hazardous conditions. Of course, it was not only scholars from outside who were unable to travel to the mountains during these times of turmoil and fights, but also scholars from within Sudan who mostly stayed away. But time did not stand still. When travelling to the mountains was not possible, research, though more limited in its scope, was attempted in the diaspora, as the following paragraphs, concentrating on research within Sudan, illustrate.

Meanwhile, in Khartoum, the Institute of African and Asian Studies (IAAS) developed a strong profile in the study of Sudanese languages. It was the first address to contact when looking for information on minority languages and for making contact with speakers of indigenous languages. The IAAS was founded in 1972 – in the year of the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement – and consists of three departments, one of which was the Department of Sudanese and African Languages.¹¹ To many of us, the Department of Sudanese and African

¹¹ For a detailed description of the development of Sudanese linguistics in Khartoum, see Abdelhay et al. (2017: 269ff.).

Languages and the IAAS are closely linked with Al-Amin Abu-Manga, who was first assigned to the Department of Sudanese and African Languages in 1987, when Roland C. Stevenson was head of the department. Stevenson was succeeded by Ushari Ahmad Mahmud and Abu-Manga himself became head of it in 1992. He has now led the department for more than 20 years. In addition, Abu-Manga became the director of the IAAS in 2002, after the sudden death of the then director of the institute, Sharafeldin; he held this position until 2010, when he passed it on to Abdel Rahim Hamid Mugaddam. In 2016, when the latter left the country for Saudi Arabia, Mona Mahmoud succeeded him.

For many years, Al-Amin Abu-Manga was the person who provided foreign researchers with invitation letters, helped with their registration and travel permits, established contacts whenever possible, had an open ear for the researchers' problems and tried to solve them. Although the IAAS (including the Department of Sudanese and African Languages) and the Department of Linguistics at the University of Khartoum were independent bodies, Abu-Manga contributed to the supervision of five PhD candidates from the latter department, namely Abdel Rahim Hamid Mugaddam, Nasir A. O. Satti, Sawsan A. M. Nashid, Suzan Alamin and Abeer M. A. Bashir (all of them employed at it).¹² For many years, Abu-Manga was supported by the linguist Leoma Gilley, a member of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) and staff member at the Department of Sudanese and African Languages (IAAS) from 1996 to May 2004.¹³ In these years, Leoma Gilley not only supervised a good number of students, but was also active in establishing workshops for language communities, in which speakers of particular languages were trained to analyse their own languages and also to translate the Bible into their own languages, among other things (see Abdelhay et al. 2017). In fact, Leoma Gilley was the linking element between SIL's activities and the University of Khartoum. Not only did some of those who had attended SIL workshops take courses in the IAAS, but linguists from within the country and abroad also worked with workshop attendants. As Abdelhay et al. (2017: 273) sum up this period of time: "Between 1994 and 2005, Khartoum became the meeting point for various individuals (Sudanese church staff, Western or Sudanese linguists, Sudanese intellectuals, social activists, individual members of communities, etc.) who, regardless of religious beliefs or political inclinations, shared a desire to codify and promote Sudanese languages."

A number of publications and unpublished studies are proof of these activities. Among those on Nuba Mountain languages are, e.g., Alamin (2002), Dafalla

¹² See the History of the Department of Linguistics by Suzan Alamin (this volume).

¹³ <https://sil.academia.edu/LeomaGGilley/CurriculumVitae>; see also Gilley (2007: 269-380) and Abdelhay et al. (2017: 273).

(2006), Ibrahim & Huttenga (2007), Ismail (2000, 2007), Jabr El-Dar (2006), Jakobi (2000) and Norton (1995, 2000), to name but a few.

At the beginning of the new century, the overall situation relaxed somewhat (but see, e.g., Meerpohl 2009, Chapter 1.4, where she describes the problems she encountered when wanting to do fieldwork in the Sudanese/Chadic border area between 2003 and 2007). With regard to research in the Nuba Mountains, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, signed on January 9, 2005, opened once more the doors for scholars.¹⁴ In the following years, the Sudanese government provided numerous researchers with travel permits to the area so that they could study the language and life of diverse ethnic groups in situ. Thus, researchers from within Sudan and outside the country went to the Nuba Mountains in order to focus on languages such as Dagik, Lumun, Katla and Tima, Koalib, Tabaq and Uncunwee (Ghulfan).

Although research was possible again, life in Sudan was never boring. As Gerrit J. Dimmendaal, for example, reports when he was in Sudan in 2003, when the Americans and their allies started attacking Iraq in March 2003, Khartoum experienced anti-American riots.¹⁵ Being from the Netherlands himself, Dimmendaal was asked to stay in the vicinity of the Dutch Embassy in case evacuation was necessary. However, after three days, as he remembers, the protests turned into anti-Bashir (the then president of Sudan) protests. Finally, the military intervened and the riots were stopped. Dimmendaal could stay in Sudan.

Then, in 2011, the internal situation became tense again. New fighting in Dilling (South Kordofan) made further travels to the Nuba Mountains once more impossible. Co-author Gertrud Schneider-Blum, who had planned to go to the Tima area in June 2011, but who only reached Dilling, remembers:

On our way to the Nuba Mountains, we had a scheduled stay of some days in Dilling. In the early evening of the first day, i.e. June 8, we heard that there was fighting in Kadugli, roughly 130 km to the south of Dilling. As we were told later on the same day, the road from Dilling to the Tima area (ca. 70 km south-west of Dilling) was blocked by the state army. Since, under these circumstances, it made no sense trying to travel to Tima, Hamid, the long-term Tima assistant,

¹⁴ <https://unmis.unmissions.org/comprehensive-peace-agreement>

¹⁵ For two retrospectives see <https://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/asien/20-jahre-irak-krieg-101.html> and <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/03/14/a-look-back-at-how-fear-and-false-beliefs-bolstered-u-s-public-support-for-war-in-iraq/>.

bought tickets for the first bus of the following morning, in order to return to Khartoum. While (ironically) being in the Peace and Development Center, we heard scattered shooting. As soon as possible, i.e. when there was no shooting for a while, we retreated to the compound of the university guesthouse in Dilling. Around midnight, we were woken up by crowing cocks, barking dogs and new shooting. The shooting got heavier, big guns in addition to rifle fire were heard. A swelling and subsiding battle. Sometimes it sounded further away, sometimes as if it was on the doorstep. Later we were told that SPLA (Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army) soldiers had attacked the state army's barracks in the village, which then led to an exchange of blows.¹⁶ The shooting lasted about two hours. After these two frightening hours, it remained calm and we were later able to go for the bus we had booked back to Khartoum. With us was an unusual high number of women and children. Others, as we saw, left Dilling on donkey carts, on bicycle and on foot. A veritable exodus. Two convoys loaded with soldiers came the opposite way.

After 2011, travel permits to the Nuba Mountains were no longer issued. Once again, most research on Nuba Mountain languages was thus done in the wider area of Khartoum.

Nevertheless, by then, the Department of Linguistics had developed into a research institution (see also Suzan Alamin, this volume). Special merits relating thereto go to the IAAS scholars Al-Amin Abu-Manga and Leoma Gilley for encouraging students of the Department of Linguistics to work on local languages, and to Abdel Rahim Hamid Mugaddam for his later engagement. All in all, research on minority languages was promoted, as illustrated, for instance, in MA and PhD dissertations in which certain aspects of Nuba Mountain languages are examined. Waleed Mudathir Alshareef (2016), for instance, scrutinized *Major word categories in Abu Jinuk* and Adam Mohamed A. M. (2013) worked on *The Noun Phrase in the Miri Language*, while Nada Faisal Y. M. Sukkar (2009) presented an initial description of the Miri verb structure. Furthermore, three PhD dissertations focused on Tima and Tira. That is, Bashir (2010) presented a *Phonetic and phonological study of the Tima language*, while

¹⁶ For more information on SPLA/SPLM, see, e.g., Scott (1985).

Alamin (2012) investigated the same language's nominal and verbal morphology. Only last year, 2023, Yahya B. Hammad completed his thesis on certain phonetic and phonological aspects of Tira. Then linguistic research in Sudan came to a complete halt with the fight for power between the two armies, i.e., between the (former) state army and the Rapid Support Forces, which started in April 2023 in Khartoum.

The violent confrontation between the armies marked the beginning of the third civil war in Sudan. One may wonder, though, what kind of fighting is covered by the term 'civil war'. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, a 'civil war' is "a war between opposing groups of citizens of the same country".¹⁷ But in Sudan, it is not citizens who are fighting, it is the two armies, at the expense of the civilians who had, in previous years, peacefully protested for democracy.

As one of the Sudanese scholars who have remained in the country, Sawsan Abdelaziz Mohammed Nashid wrote, in June 2023: "People keep dying all the time and by different means and still we have a belief in God's mercy. Khartoum is empty and destroyed." Seven months later, on January 5, 2024, she reported:

This endless war causes massive destruction of the infrastructure of Khartoum and beyond, countless killings and attacks on unpolitical, innocent people. The fighting of the two armies forces civilians to leave their homes to other places where they have to live in hardly to be endured circumstances, as reported by many. Because of the extension of the fighting to other Sudanese states, calls to arm civilians are raised by a number of activists to avoid oppression, e.g. Mohamed Jalal Hashim. The call to arms does not go unheard, though some states are opposed to it as it might lead to an ethnic war which will add insult to injury.

On January 7, 2024, Sawsan added: "We, the civilians, are the only ones who pay."

In sporadic spoken messages, Sawsan elaborated on the situation. Thus, she said in her message of April 7 that people in Khartoum have been suffering from a lack of electricity, lack of water and lack of means of communication for weeks. "We have nothing practically, nothing, practically." Also, "the way is closed [...] no-one can go out or come in. [...] But we are still alive [...], alhamdulillah,

¹⁷ <https://www.merriam-webster.com>

alhamdulillah.” Half a year later (October 14), she explained that at that time, i.e., in April, she and her family were living in Sharq Alnil, an area controlled by the RSF. People there (and probably also in other regions) have generally been cut off from communication since February 2 and are still cut off now. They have suffered from lack of electricity and water since the 6th day of Ramadan.¹⁸ Sawsan remembers this, since it was so difficult to fast in a time without electricity, water or ice. “We had nothing, and people start just falling down by malaria, and by other fevers.”

In addition, in areas which are controlled by the RSF, people live in fear, since the members of the paramilitary “kidnapped, they ... do everything ... you know. [...] People ..., they are afraid about their kids, their girls, their boys.” Members of the RSF come to the houses and take everything they want; sometimes they burn the houses. “For that, people start to run, when they hear that they are coming to any area, they leave eeeeeverything, and: they run, and they just run.”

Now (October 2024) Sawsan and her family live in Omdurman, where there is officially no RSF.

We are supposed to live in peace, secure, but what is really happening is that we receive attacks from these Rapid Support Forces. They sent eeeevery day, and, in some cases, it was twice per day, in the morning and in the evening, and some towns they just sent more than twenty *daana* at once. [...] I don't know what they are. It is called *daana*, it booms, okay, maybe bombs, and it destroys houses, it killed maaaany, maaaany, countless of people. In Omdurman. [...] It happens randomly, randomly, and they attack civilians. There is no any places for armies here; these are Al Sauwraat, and Manaara and all these areas, they just attack people randomly.

Until today (February 2025).

Three times, as Sawsan has told us, she has already survived such attacks, as she told us on October 14. The first time, two bombs exploded near her house, but – alhamdulillah – she and her kids were not physically harmed. Another time, she and her sister went to a new market, Suk Sabreen. “And it was full, full, full of people, full, really full of people. Just, we just arrived, then, we,

¹⁸ In 2024, Ramadan started on March 10 and ended on April 9.

suddenly we hear a very, very ... high sound: boommMMM. And people just lay down.” Instead, Sawsan and her sister ran away to get out of the market. Three more *daana* hit the market. The next thing the sisters saw was that bodies were being carried out, as well as injured people with missing arms or legs ... The third time was only shortly after. Sawsan and her sister wanted to go to a health centre to get a malaria check, when they heard another “boom, this high sound”. They hid, together with others, in a nearby house. More bombing. The house was not hit, all who were inside were neither injured nor killed, but “we live in fear”.

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18 months after the first fights broke out between the armies, the whole country is more or less afflicted. “This war reaches any part of the Sudan”, Sawsan wrote on July 4. Thousands of people are killed, abducted and missing, and countless people are displaced, since the armies’ fighting has led to a mass exodus from Khartoum.

Facing the facts:

Estimates of the number of fatalities range between 23,000 up to as many as 150,000.¹⁹ One of them is the Lumun teacher Hassan El-Nour Osman Alope, who died in December 2023 (see Smits, this volume). We still have hope for the youngest son of Al-Amin Abu-Manga, who was arrested in October 2023 (Abu-Manga, p.c.). In September 2024, Abu-Manga wrote that it is “now exactly 10 months and since then we have never heard his voice nor known exactly where he is”.

Displaced persons number around 11 million (8.1 million internally, 2.9 million externally), i.e., more than one fifth of the total population.²⁰ A complete list of those of our relatives, friends and colleagues who have been displaced would be endless and the places they went to are numerous. Those who had, by chance, been outside the country when the civil war started, did not of course return. Among them are Abeer M. A. Bashir (and family), Suzan Alamin (and family), Maha A. Aldawi (and mother) and Wafa Hussein. At the beginning of this year, Al-Amin Abu-Manga (and his wife and daughter) were able to leave Sudan for Saudi Arabia, where one of their sons lives. Others left for Libya (the Tima assistant Hamid Kafi Daldum and family), South Sudan (Siddig Ali Karmal Koko, who was later able to go to Egypt) and Uganda (Khalifa Jabr El-Dar). Still others left for their home areas within Sudan, as did Waleed Mudathir

¹⁹ See <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/sudan/> vs. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c748nk5pjdjo>.

²⁰ <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/sudan/>

Alshareef, the current head of the Department of Linguistics at the University of Khartoum. He left the capital for Jabel Aulia, to the south of Khartoum. This area is under the tough regime of the RSF. As we heard at the end of September 2024, Waleed is safe.²¹

Since April 2023, between 700,000 and 1 million internally displaced people (IDP) from all over the country have come to the Nuba Mountains. Besides the large number of people arriving, a poor rainy season, a plague of locusts and the closure of trade routes to the north have exacerbated the situation here.²² For instance, at the beginning of 2024, Ahmed Hamdan and his family managed to leave Khartoum in order to go back to his home area in the Nuba Mountains.

Malnutrition, food insecurity, inadequate shelter and poor water/sanitation/hygiene conditions are worsening the situation even more.²³ Accordingly, Ahmed Hamdan, in a message dated May 17, 2024, let us know that he and his family are safe in the Nuba Mountains, but that they are suffering from hunger, as do people in Sudan generally in these times.

On October 5, 2024, one could read in the German magazine *Zeit* that people from Omdurman have started going back to their neighbourhood, despite the town being reduced to ruins.²⁴ The town is no longer under the yoke of the paramilitary RSF; the former state army has control over it. Among those who went back is our friend and colleague Sawsan Abdelaziz Mohammed Nashid. She and her family were unable to return to their own house, though, because this was first robbed and then the bombing made it uninhabitable.

They took everything, eeverything, it is entirely empty, [...] We have nothing in our house. They took everything, the furniture, the refrigerator, everything, the oven, eevery-, every-, everything, our clothes, our gold, they took my gold, they took everything, simply, [...] so we have nothing; [...] The house is entirely empty, exactly. [...] And part of the house is destroyed by bombing. (message dated 2024-10-18)

²¹ We would like to thank Elsadig Omda for providing us with a clear picture concerning the area in general and Waleed Mudathir Alshareef for more particular details.

²² <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports-briefs/the-nuba-mountains-a-window-into-the-sudan-crisis/>

²³ <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/rapid-idp-assessment-report-kordofan-region-sudan-april-2024>

²⁴ <https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2024-09/buergerkrieg-sudan-gefluechtete-rueckkehr-fotografie>

As Sawsan reports, the whole neighbourhood was forced to leave their homes. She and her family are now staying with one of her husband's brothers. Sawsan wishes everything would just turn out to have been a nightmare.

Despite all these depressing news items, we all hope that the fighting and all the trouble that it brings with it will come to an end, the sooner the better. The restoration of peace in the country would not only improve the quality of everyday life for all those affected, but would also ultimately make scientific work possible again, building on the achievements of the past.

If it were not for hopes, the heart would break. (Thomas Fuller)

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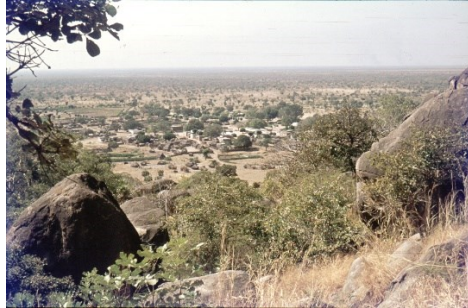
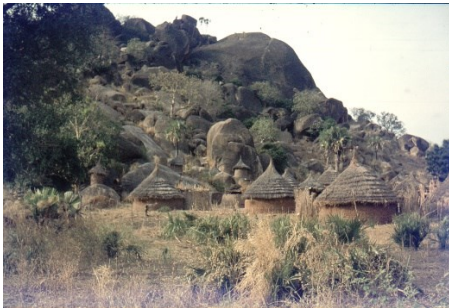
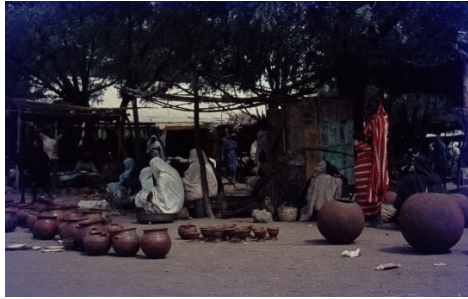
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Impressions from the Nuba Mountains in 1974 (photos: Thilo C. Schadeberg)