expanding herds. Although representing a ‘bewildering complexity’ of tribes, different cultures, interests, and grievances, most Nuba are sedentary farmers and share an experience of oppression. The subjugation extends from the slaving raids of the 19th century to the jihad declared against them during the civil war by the government of President Omar al-Bashir.

Long regarded as second-class citizens by Sudan’s Arab elite, the Nuba’s indigenous cultures and religions were suppressed, and local languages banned. Many reacted to political, economic, and social marginalization by taking up arms against the government in the mid-1980s. This followed harassment and government attacks on Nuba villages suspected of having joined the SPLA uprising in South Sudan. Under the leadership of a former teacher, Yousif Kuwa Mekke, they demanded ‘the right to be Nuba’ and an end to marginalization in all its forms. As ‘Africans’ within the political boundaries of Arab-dominated northern Sudan, they fervently supported SPLA Chairman John Garang’s vision of a ‘New Sudan’, in which all Sudanese would have equal rights and duties, irrespective of ethnicity.

The civil war in the Nuba Mountains was brutal. The government of Sadiq al-Mahdi (1986–89) armed the Baggara to fight their Nuba neighbours, politicizing age-old resource tensions. When the National Islamic Front (NIF) seized power in 1989, scores of villages were destroyed in joint army–militia offensives. In 1992, a jihad was declared in which all rebel supporters, Christian and Muslim, were denounced as apostates deserving of death. Villagers burned out of their homes were forcibly relocated to ‘peace camps’ in government-controlled areas. Nuba women were systematically raped and children forcibly伊斯兰ized.¹² The head of security in South Kordofan, who later sought political asylum in Switzerland, said the orders given to government troops were ‘to kill anything that is alive . . . to destroy everything, to burn the area so that nothing can exist there.’¹³

For 13 years, Nuba in SPLM/A-controlled areas went without humanitarian aid: the government sealed off the mountains from both relief and external monitoring. With no independent witnesses, the full extent of the atrocities in the area was revealed only when a small group of international NGOs organized a clandestine humanitarian airlift and a human rights monitoring programme in 1995. The attention sud-