



Andrew P.  
**Davidson**

*The Passing of Lineage Society*

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OF HISTORY**

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 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 1996 by Transaction Publishers

Published 2017 by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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Library of Congress Catalog Number: 95-25160

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Davidson, Andrew Parks

In the shadow of history : the passing of lineage society / Andrew P. Davidson.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-56000-230-1 (alk. paper)

1. Nuba Mountains (Sudan)—Economic conditions—Case studies. 2. Households—Sudan—Nuba Mountains—Case studies. 3. Kinship—Nuba Mountains—Case studies. 4. Economic anthropology—Sudan—Nuba Mountains—Case studies. I. Title.

HC835.D38 1995

306'.09628—dc20

95-25160

CIP

ISBN 13: 978-1-56000-230-7 (hbk)

This book is dedicated to my parents,  
Helm and Frances, and to my children,  
Swati and Malcolm. They all hold a  
special place in my heart, no matter  
where our paths may lead.



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## Preface

This book attempts to explain some of the reasons for the unevenness of development processes and to document some of the consequences on people's lives resulting from their different integration into the modern world. While it is true that people make their own lives, they do so in a world not necessarily of their own choosing. Some benefit; others do not. Wider pressures—in this case modernization—bring about different structures of opportunities and constraints that routinely influence and shape individual decisions and actions. Our starting point, however, is with households and the communities in which they are embedded.

The household, as a basic unit of human social organization, represents, in large measure, a focal point in everyday life. Of course, the ways by which households are organized, the livelihood strategies formulated, and the activities its members carry out vary considerably. But households are not discrete entities; together with other households they form communities which, in turn, are connected to the wider society. In particular, this book reveals how those connections lead to the passing of lineage society and examines the different trajectories taken by three villages in the Nuba Mountains region of the Sudan into the modern world.

This book represents the outcome of an ambitious program of research that began in the mid-1980s and led to nearly two years of fieldwork in a rather remote area of the western Sudan. The initial intent, which changed little over the subsequent years, reflects a long-term interest in the transformation of rural economy and social organization. In the course of these years I have come to dismiss the notions of either disconnected “westernized” and “traditional” societies, or of a monolithic world-system that reduces everything everywhere to so many variations of the West. We must come to realize that there is no absolute logic of development, no “iron law” providing for neat unilinear outcomes in nice unambiguous forms. I hope that this book reconceptualizes development in such a way that the dynamics of historical transformation are made clear.

I first became curious about the Sudan while a student of South Asia—British India, to be exact. In attempts to understand the historical processes of British imperialism on the subcontinent, I became increasingly aware of furtive references to the Sudan, especially after the rise in the demand for cotton and Britain's growing uncertainty of maintaining global hegemony over world trade. Names such as Gordon, Gladstone, and Kitchener were the stuff of legends, but for me they increased my sensitivity to the growing interconnections in the burgeoning world economy. Later, I endeavored to understand just why the processes called modernity and capitalism were so successful in transforming the globe. This led me to begin reading about the Nuba Mountains as an area whose unique landscape and relative remoteness appeared to have suspended it in history. I was wrong.

The Nuba Mountains region was never isolated from the forces shaping the world. For one thing, it comprised a place to which peoples fled in times of turmoil or journeyed to in search of profit. The rugged mountains gave solace because they offered refuge, a haven of safety. It gave profit because historic trading lanes dissected the region and because many individuals calling it home eventually found themselves bonded in slavery. Nevertheless, even in the face of British imperial suzerainty, little progress was made in rationalizing social life and all that ensues. It has only been in recent years that we can begin to talk of the spread of modernity and the creation of a specifically capitalist market, both of which have led to the breakdown in longstanding social relations.

The Nuba Mountains thus presented me with an opportunity to glimpse firsthand the "logic" of modernization—the heavy-handed side as well as its seductive face. As with all social phenomena, it is not possible to accurately pinpoint the exact moment of its inception in the region, but it is a relatively recent arrival. One of the central development issues that this book addresses concerns transition and the absence of a firm division between "modern" and "traditional" societies, capitalist and noncapitalist societies. These ideal-typical situations rarely exist—if at all—in most countries. In light of this, the principle theoretical aims of this study are: to delineate a conceptual framework for household analysis; to discern the nature of the Nuba Mountain's society; and to reformulate the peasant debate with an eye towards recognizing the social complexities of small-scale household-based production.

As with any book, its writing is a rather long, frequently tedious, and always painful process. Now that it is finished, I can look back on the

experience and smile, with tremendous gratitude to the many people who made this book possible. Needless to say, many people contributed to this study. My deepest appreciation goes to the people of the Nuba Mountains, especially the villagers of Somasem, Shair Tomat, and Shatt Damam, as well as the people of the provincial capital of Kadugli. Mahdi, Juma'a, Kuku Kaki, Tio, Osman, Umkom, Bakhit, Kubiya, and Faiza are just a few of the people who helped me along the way. They kindly made my concerns and efforts their own. To the degree that this study is a good one, it is due to their infinite patience, insights, and understanding. And now, with reports of genocide in the Nuba Mountains and the forced relocation of women and children to the north—committed by Sudanese troops and paramilitary organizations—I fear for their safety, and I mourn.

My first few months were spent in Khartoum, with Khider Kadaki and his family. Whenever I tired of rural life, I returned to Khider's home where I was always welcomed. Angelo Wani and his family also extended their hospitality to me while I was in Khartoum. Ahmed Al-Dirdiri of the Sudan Agricultural Extension in Shambatt, Mohammed Abu Sabah of the Western Sudan Agricultural Research Project station in Kadugli, Abdul Rahman Al Tilib of the Gezira Board, and Juma'a Silma of the Nuba Mountains Rural Development Project station in Kadugli also deserve special thanks. I also thank the faculty of the University of Khartoum, especially Paul Wani Gore and El Wathiq Kameir, who arranged affiliation for me with the sociology department. Mohammed Salih, a rural sociologist, was also extremely helpful in giving me his insights into the Nuba Mountains.

Special appreciation goes to David Mayo and Abannik Hino, whose understandings of rural Sudanese life provided great insight, and to Ellen Perry, David French, David McPheat, Tin Hta Nu, and Bligh Grant, who gave me immeasurable encouragement. I would also like to thank Christina Groters, who somehow knew that I would eventually finish this project.

But, most of all, I want to thank two people. First, heartfelt thanks goes to Johnson Gom, who traveled with me the first few months in the Nuba Mountains. Without his assistance my life would have been infinitely more difficult. Johnson had a knack with people and provided keen sociological insights, despite having only three years of formal education. In many respects, Johnson represents the hope and potential of the Sudan. Second, I reserve special gratitude for my former doctoral advisor and now colleague, Dr. Harry Schwarzweller, whose intellec-



tual stimulation, arguments, and prodding helped me produce some of my best work. Throughout the years, Harry has also been a friend.

The funds for the fieldwork portion of this study were provided by the National Science Foundation's Divisions of Anthropology and Sociology, and by the Fulbright-Hayes Dissertation Abroad Program. I am grateful for their support.

# 1

## Introduction

The human development experience has been and continues to be uneven, a phenomenon particularly evident in the modernization and restructuring of village life in less developed countries. This book is about such processes of change in the Nuba Mountains region of the Sudan. In particular, this book is concerned with the transformation in the organization and operation of households and about how opportunities and constraints associated with modernization supplant older forms of social relations that are engendered within different systems and within distinctly different contexts. In pace with those changes, the very meanings of older social relations are rapidly being relegated to a distant and often murky past, especially by the youth. And, more importantly, this book is about how individuals, as members of households, struggle to maintain or expand their welfare in the face of continuous uncertainty, when control over their destinies is increasingly slipping out of the comforting confines of the village. In short, I have a story to tell about the unfolding and variegated impact of the spread of modernity and its effects on the everyday lives of people. Like many stories, it is often a sad tale told again and again by those whom history frequently forgets—the stragglers and the dispossessed.

### Overview

The Nuba Mountains, along with many other regions in the world, is undergoing enormously complex socioeconomic changes with far-reaching consequences to the well-being of its people. Stimulated by a wide variety of forces, the processes of development are dramatically reshaping village life and connecting, in ever more direct ways, the life chances of villagers to the burgeoning modern world. Of course, the

Nuba Mountains have never been immune from external forces that have intruded into the Sudan and northeast Africa. The region's turbulent past is convincing enough evidence.

Historically, the Nuba Mountains offered refuge to those displaced by episodic upheavals along the Nile River and elsewhere—this accounting in part for the diverse ethnic composition of its inhabitants. Interspersed on vast plains, the rugged mountain chains provided a natural haven from this or that empire or world-system. Despite the promise of sanctuary, the Nuba Mountains became a source of slaves and goods of local provenance as the strong preyed upon the weak, further unsettling the area. Later, Anglo-Egyptian rule, bringing a halt to the internecine warfare, introduced cotton production to the fertile plains by relocating whole villages, frequently by force of arms, to the fertile plains below the mountain aeries. And now, the modernization of agriculture and the expansion of product and labor markets appears to press people either to intensify the production of commodities or find other economic alternatives outside of their villages.

The casual visitor to the Nuba Mountains is immediately struck by the rather sharp cultural contrasts that set villages apart, differences that are readily apparent in settlement patterns, expressions of kinship, religious orientations, ties to secular urban centers, types of economic activities, and the organization of work. This impression is reinforced as the visitor traverses the region and as the grip of Arab culture in the north subtly gives way to the Africanized south. Without question, Islam is an important ethnographic fact in most areas of the Nuba Mountains, yet various indigenous belief systems still punctuate the rhythm of life in most villages, and a number of Nuba communities profess Christianity. Also, the location of a village itself attests as much to geographic terrain as it does to its relation with the world outside. Access to resources also varies markedly, as does the utilization of what is produced. Still, this impression, in many ways, rests on the surface. Despite initial conceptions, it soon becomes obvious that villages, in one way or another, are effectively tied into the national state and beyond through labor migration and remittances, cash-cropping and trade, schools and health dispensaries, and water pumps and flour mills. And, of course, the many government agricultural schemes provide a ready source of cash income. Clearly, the Nuba Mountains as a social entity is as much an artifact of its variant cultures as it is a creation of the modern world.

In the course of investigation, questions arise over how to effectively conceptualize and comprehend the variable effects of development presented by the disparate character of the region's villages. Furthermore, within such diverse settings, villagers formulate livelihood strategies to maintain or enhance their welfare. Of course, these strategies reveal the rich mosaic of human needs and perceptions; nevertheless, the consistent patterning of outcomes, when taken together, can disclose the structural characteristics that condition human action. What this implies is that human activity is not random; it necessarily reflects and is limited by context realized by people in the form of constraints. More importantly, constraints are imposed more by circumstances than by intention. But, constraints are not rigid manifestations of "iron laws" because the conditions they create are shaped and reshaped through the course of purposive human action. Put another way, in the quest to locate systematic and meaningful commonalities of behavior, a central concern becomes how to effectively draw together macro- (structured process) and micro- (individual agency) levels of analyses. Household, as an intermediate construct, provides one means to integrate the two levels.

By way of introduction, let us note that a household as a primary corporate social unit may be defined as a group of individuals (seldom one) associated with a particular domicile whose livelihood efforts, in the broadest sense, are directed towards mutual survival. The universal necessity of organizing domestic activities, however, merely magnifies the multiplicity of ways that these activities may be accomplished. Thus, we cannot expect households to necessarily exhibit similar organizational forms nor to carry out the same activities to reproduce themselves over time.

The purpose of this book, then, is to recount the livelihood strategies advanced by individuals as members of households in this particular locality and to better comprehend these strategies through the utilization of appropriate theoretical guidelines. This requires that we take into account the larger context and the forces that are shaping the Nuba Mountains region, and that we trace variant development processes through time and space. Three relatively specific tasks are at hand: (1) categorizing households in ways that are appropriate to the range of domestic collectivities; (2) abstracting from observed behaviors the principle foci of social life and political economy; and (3) furthering our understanding of the nature of rural transformation, particularly the

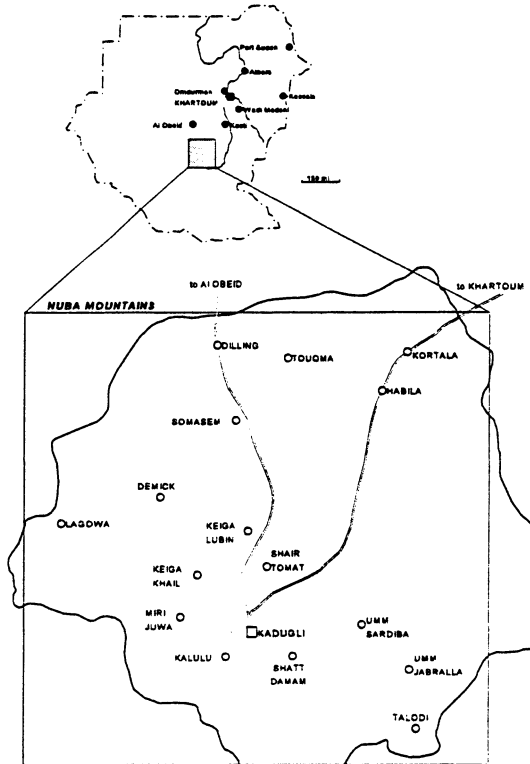
modernization of agriculture and the reorganization of village life. A central analytical challenge, therefore, is to identify the relevant social and economic relations—including their underlying structural “logic”—not only within households, but those relations that link households within the village and to the wider socioeconomic environment. Further, given our concern with household livelihood strategies, additional concerns become the consequences of: (1) commodity and non-commodity production; (2) formal and informal market activities; and (3) wage and nonwage labor.

Optimally, of course, longitudinal data best coincide with this type of pursuit. Unfortunately, practicalities demanded a different course of action, namely cross-sectional research. In order to minimize the risks involved in drawing generalizations from this type of undertaking, sensitivity to variations in household livelihood strategies can be achieved through detailed comparative analysis. For this reason, three villages were selected for detailed study—Somasem, Shair Tomat, and Shatt Damam (see figure 1.1, of the Sudan and Nuba Mountains)—in order to better understand the broad range of opportunities and constraints, which ultimately condition what people ultimately can and cannot do. These villages, more or less, represent the variabilities of social life and economic activities in this diverse Nuba Mountain region.

### The Problematic

Fieldwork is invariably preceded by the researcher’s interest in specific theoretical and substantive issues. This account is no different; it reflects my own broad interests in the transformation of rural populations or, within the context of the Nuba Mountains, the transition from a lineage-based society to an increasingly modern one. Here, modernization signifies “the increase in the capacity for social transformation” and “is clearly linked with the process of structural differentiation and an increase in the formal rationality of social action” (Roxborough, 1988:756; also see Moore, 1979).<sup>1</sup> In this respect, important concerns include the effects of increased commercial activities and a cash economy on village life, as well as the ways in which economic rationalism and market mechanisms influence village relations. Still, the very rapid pace of modernization in the Nuba Mountains in recent years is different than that which occurred in Europe over a significantly longer period of time,

**FIGURE 1.1**  
**Map of the Nuba Mountains, Sudan**



and thus the Nuba Mountains can serve to illustrate how some people contend with such rapidly changing and uncertain situations.

A central aim is to analyze these types of changes through detailing variations in household livelihood strategies and by examination of the social and economic factors affecting the form and function of households. Of course, a crucial element in understanding household livelihood strategies is the distribution and organization of material and nonmaterial resources. A guiding assumption is that a household's access to and utilization of land, labor, technology, and other resources, such as off-farm employment and social networks, engenders specific sets of relations upon which the maintenance and reproduction of the household depends. This, in turn, affords the basis or normative framework crucial to the formation of livelihood strategies and, in effect, determines their subsequent range of possibilities.

This study explores the various strategies set in motion by households in the Nuba Mountains to ensure their livelihoods in a rapidly changing socioeconomic environment. It would be a gross error, however, to assume that a household can and does make livelihood decisions, that a household is a conscious actor in its own right. After all, as Wolf (1991: 32) reminds us, "the household can neither decide or think, since analytic constructs are not so empowered." Too, the reification of household implies that it is a "thing" and removes it from what it is—a particular set of structured social relationships that bind people. However, as soon as we mention individual in relation to household, we have forced a dichotomy. My sense of household precludes this because I am advancing household as a concept that joins individuals within a household unit such that the two are inextricably combined. Within this framework, individuals form livelihood strategies and, as they are members of households, the strategies entail outcomes, favorable and otherwise, for household members and for the household as a whole.

The conceptualization of household is not without inherent difficulty, especially with regard to specifying membership, boundaries, and temporal development. How these issues are ultimately resolved holds great import for social analysis. The use of household as an organizing concept can provide a means to draw together two seemingly disparate levels of analysis: society and the individual or, more reasonably, structure and actor. In other words, the actions of individuals are integrated into the broader underlying structural dynamics through the analysis of household as an important structural unit that mediates the two (Davidson, 1991). As Sorokin (1947:40) so aptly wrote: "The most generic model of any sociocultural phenomenon is the meaningful interaction of two or more human individuals." The household, however, is but one sort of patterned relationship formed under the impress of the ongoing processes of wider social realities; other such structures include economic classes, political entities, ethnic groups, kinship collectivities, religious sects, age grades, and so on.

In order to understand why households follow particular livelihood strategies, households need to be considered according to how they organize activities to ensure their reproduction. Of course, this assumes that each household, through the class locations of its members, dictates of gender, possibilities of age, religious orientations, and responsi-

bilities of kinship, has a certain set of material resources and, within these parameters, formulates livelihood strategies. The household filters the opportunities and constraints presented by the wider society, but always in conjunction with the needs, aspirations, and power of its respective members. Though households are capable of collective action, they are not necessarily democratic institutions, and consequently household strategies embody relations of superordination and subordination (Todd, 1985; Netting, 1993). Consequently, a household should not be thought of simply as an aggregate of individuals, as the sum of its constituent members. Furthermore, while specified social relations are delineated as a condition of household membership (e.g., husband/father, wife/mother, daughter, son, etc.), members are also bound up in social relationships outside of household affiliation, relations that may take precedence over those of the household. Household, as noted, represents but one structural parameter. How a household (through its members) relates to that larger socioeconomic environment will affect the strategies its members can and do adopt. The strategies adopted will, in turn, equally affect the form and operation of the household, the life chances of its members, and, ultimately, its reproduction (or demise) over time. Yet, while the primary unit of analysis is the household, broadly conceived, the research concerns must therefore be addressed at other levels as well. It is also important to note that how households respond to the prevailing circumstances is both cause as well as effect of the development process.

The overarching consideration of this study, as previously noted, revolves around the unevenness of the development process. Although this phenomenon is interpreted in many ways, social scientists remain in disagreement over the continued presence, even resilience, of what is commonly termed the peasantry or smallholders. The theoretical issue that shapes the general orientation of this study is intended to help specify the nature of rural transformation through an understanding of households, as well as the processes that affect changes in their productive activities and social organization. The point is, some households/smallholders are seemingly able to effectively cope with these changes, albeit in different ways and with different results, while others simply cannot. More importantly, over time significant and sometimes wrenching changes do occur that may expand or undermine the viability of particular types of households.



### Regional Context

Though commodity production and participation in market activities are not new to the Nuba Mountains, in the past these were largely intermittent and sporadic. Regularized commodity production, along with the routine sale of labor, began in earnest only in the past few decades (especially after the early 1970s) with the development of mechanized, rainfed farming under the auspices of the Mechanized Farming Corporation (MFC) and the Nuba Mountains Agricultural Production Corporation (NMAPC) (Mahmoud, 1984; Kursany, 1983; and Mohammed, 1982). These state-sponsored schemes were designed to modernize "traditional" agriculture. Earlier British colonial investment in Sudanese agriculture was primarily concentrated in the Gezira Scheme between the two Nile rivers near Khartoum and was aimed at expanding cotton cultivation for export to Manchester textile mills (Barnett, 1977). In the main, the Nuba Mountains remained outside British economic interests, with the exception of limited attempts to promote cotton production through the distribution of seeds and collection of cotton (O'Brien, 1980). Presently, agricultural practices include a complex pattern of production strategies, ranging from complete commercialization to household subsistence. Across the spectrum, however, farming has generally remained a small-scale enterprise.

The major crops of this area are sorghum (which is grown on eighty percent of the cultivated land), millet, sesame, groundnuts, cotton, and gum-Arabic (Mohammed, 1982). Although many basic agricultural activities have not changed, they have taken on added meaning within the context of a market economy. Sorghum and cotton serve as the main cash crops, while sesame and groundnuts primarily supply the local oil handicraft industry (Kursany, 1983). Sorghum is also important in the village exchange-barter system, is used for labor payments-in-kind, and is central to the *shayl* (money lending system).

Similarly, sesame has other "noneconomic" functions and is used for such ceremonial purposes as dowry and brideprice (Badigian and Harlan, 1983). And, while ruminant production remains important, it is probably becoming less so as a symbolic source of wealth and dietary supplement than as a marketable commodity in the regional markets and a hedge against the vagaries of the future.

Located in Southern Kordofan Province, the Nuba Mountains occupy an area about 250 km by 165 km. A plain of clay soil, broken by

rugged granitic boulders and mountains (*jebels*) that vary in height and distribution, covers the region. The Nuba Mountains receive about 500 mm annual rainfall, with the rainy season lasting from May to October (Mohammed, 1982). Although annual rainfall is not large and evaporation rates are high, water supply generally has been sufficient to supply crops to maturity (Badigian and Harlan, 1983). Nevertheless, the region is ecologically fragile, as recurring drought conditions emphasize, and thus requires highly diversified agricultural practices to avoid disaster.

Recent studies have shown that the basic structure of agriculture, and of rural life in general, is undergoing significant alteration. Traditionally, the most common form of land tenure was communal ownership, with land distributed among village members, usually along lineage or kinship lines (Khalafalla, 1982; Hadari, 1974). Under this system, land is heritable but cannot be sold. Farmers usually cultivate two or three nonadjacent plots, which combined are less than 10 feddans—1 feddan = 1.038 acres (Mohammed, 1982). A small supplemental garden plot (*jubraka*) near the household compound is generally worked by women. During the past decade, state and private ownership of land have increased (Mahmoud, 1984; Kursany, 1983). In these forms, land usage is restricted to tenants of the Mechanized Farming Corporation or the Nuba Mountain Agricultural Production Corporation schemes, or to private owners. In addition, some private and, especially, state landholdings, that occupy thousands of feddans of arable land, are creating increasing conflict over access to land and have resulted in the displacement of numerous pastoralists and peasant agriculturalists (Shepard, 1983). Finally, the expansion of mechanized farming has squeezed resources, pushing small cultivators into areas that have become marginal as their natural fertility is sapped.

The composition of the labor force is also undergoing major changes. Although family labor is still the most important source, wage labor is slowly replacing the communal labor exchange system (*nafir*) (O'Brien, 1980). Increasingly, some household members are finding it necessary to devote more of their time to laboring away from the farm. In fact, according to Kursany (1983), more than fifty percent of active family members sell their labor power at some point in the year, while more than one-quarter resort to hiring outside wage labor for production activities. Reasons for this include the increasing nuclearization of the family household unit, competing off-farm employment opportunities,

and production of commodities for market. For example, the *nafir* is generally used only to assist in the production of subsistence crops and not in crops for sale in the market, payment being in-kind. Moreover, *nafir*, as a rule, is limited to labor-intensive activities such as weeding and harvesting, while wage labor can be used for all activities. As a result, “push” factors are reenforced, while “pull” factors multiply.

Technological changes are also evidenced by the spread of both government-sponsored mechanization schemes and privately rented tractors directed at small farmers. This has altered the traditional division of labor, although its full implications have not been well documented (O’Brien, 1983). These changes—plus the spread of small village-based mechanized flour mills, relatively inexpensive consumer goods, the commercialized sale of water, and state taxation—have created a greater need for cash income (Khalafalla, 1982). In effect, this necessitates the sale of labor and/or commodities for cash. As a result of increased cash needs, many farm households find that even after a good harvest, seldom is there enough to see them through to the following year. Some households find that they must “mortgage” their crop for credit to the village merchant (*shayl*) at a price below market value (Kursany, 1983). In many instances, this practice leads to the merchant’s gaining control over the household’s production and marketing decisions.

### Theoretical Perspectives

One of the difficulties in analyzing rural transformation is in deriving categories that reflect the exigencies presented by the wider structural, cultural, and historical contexts, yet also accounting for local specificity (including individual agency). As is becoming increasingly obvious, development does not proceed in a straightforward manner; rather, it is a multidimensional and complex process that is fraught with conflict and tension. In the course of fieldwork this becomes immediately evident. In such regions as the Nuba Mountains, the rich diversity in the organization of production and exchange—both capitalist and noncapitalist—has proven to be a recurrent enigma in development studies (Vandergeest, 1988). Problems inevitably arise when integrating theory with empirical observation, and they are especially evident in underlying explanations of rural transformation. Disagreements center around how to conceptualize these multiform societies, particularly when

**TABLE 1.1**  
**Size of Plots Cultivated in the Nuba Mountains Area, 1979/80<sup>3</sup>**

Total Area of Cultivated Plots in <i>Feddans</i> (N=161)					
0.0-5.0	5.1-10.0	10.1-15.0	15.1-20.0	20.1-30.0	>30.0
31.8%	36.0%	15.5%	9.3%	3.1%	4.3%

(Source: Mohammed, 1986).

most economic activities are undertaken by small-scale household-based enterprises, or what is commonly referred to as the peasantry in Third World situations. The Nuba Mountains region is no different. Research indicates that agriculture in this region remains dominated by "traditional smallholders," with nearly sixty-eight percent of farmers cultivating 10 feddans or less (table 1.1) (Mohammed, 1986). Manufacturing, too, has made little headway, with Kordofan accounting for a mere 3.3 percent of Sudan's industrial labor force (Ali, 1980:167).<sup>2</sup> Within such societies, just how do people cope? And, more importantly, what is the "logic" behind their coping strategies?

The debate over the tenacity of smallholders, or the peasantry, resides largely in the effects of modernization and the ensuing integration of households and enterprises into a specifically market economy. Scott (1976), for example, forwarding the cause of moral economy, suggests that the transition to a market-oriented economy further reduces the economic viability of the poorer families in a village, enhancing only the life chances of the wealthy. Popkin (1979), on the other hand, argues the case of rational economy and concludes that the commercialization of agriculture increases opportunities for rural families to improve their welfare and security. I suspect that the answer cannot be easily reduced to questions of moral vs. rational economy. For our purposes, then, we need to come to terms with two seemingly contradictory tendencies: (1) the subjectivist logic of household production where commodity sales/purchases (especially wage-labor) present adaptive strategies to the then prevailing circumstances and where resource allocation remains, on the whole, a family affair, and (2) the increasing economic differentiation among the rural populace and the attendant decomposition of household-based production as evidenced by the increase of on-farm wage-labor, off-farm employment, and increased scale of operation.

What the development debate also suggests is that the issues involved in rural transformation—particularly those associated with modernization—are extremely complex and require far more sensitive theorization, moving beyond a single deductive logic “which identifies variation as systematic, but which theorizes it as unique or anomalous” (McMichael and Buttel, 1990:97). In other words, empirical evidence points to the fact that rural transformation belies propositional outcomes or axiomatic universals. Research in advanced industrial countries alone points to the unevenness of the development experience; there is no reason why it should be less so in the Third World. Unquestionably, the intensification of commodity production and market activities imparts definite and distinct implications for smallholders. Yet, the long-term outcomes of this process remain tentative. Most of the classical theorists (Marx, Weber) contend that market forces and competition will cause the demise of small-scale producers, leading eventually to the formation of a bifurcated system comprised of a small entrepreneurial class of property owners and a large class of wage earners dependent solely upon the sale of their labor. In contrast, the persistence perspective (Chayanov, Sahlins) emphasizes the internal dynamics of small-scale producers to effectively resist the rationalization of production through their ability to reduce consumption and use unpaid household labor.

Despite obvious differences, both perspectives suffer similar shortcomings in their ability to illuminate. Aside from a singular deductive logic, there is a tendency within the former perspective, particularly structural versions, to err towards linear, teleologic, and deterministic explanations of socioeconomic change (Davidson, 1989; Benton, 1984). On the other hand, the latter perspective, focusing solely on the internal dynamics of the household, forces a homogenous depiction of the peasantry and explains “changes in the composition and economic organization of the household mainly in terms of internal demographic and social processes” to the neglect of the “impact of forces external to the household itself” (Long, 1984:6). Certainly, household operations, where much of the labor derives from family members and where labor costs can be held to a minimum, are quite adaptable and tenacious in the face of unfavorable prices and economic hard times. Observed instances, however, reveal that neither scenario is necessarily inevitable; neither the decomposition nor persistence of smallholders is preordained as a determinant outcome of contemporary development (see Davidson and

Schwarzweiler, 1995; Whatmore, et al., 1991; and Marsden, et al., 1990). Imposing such rigorous consistency on rural transformations tends to obscure more than it reveals about developmental processes. What must be borne in mind is that the local basis of economy is being continuously redefined in various ways and with different results such that the current modernization of rural life reflects a multitude of different trajectories across time and space. As Cooper (1981:309) recognizes in the African context:

It is...questionable to see 'proletarianization' as the last stage of a direct sequence: independent cultivator to peasant to impoverished cultivator to worker. Some peasants did not become workers; some cultivators became workers because they could not become peasants; some workers became peasants. Some areas that were the least connected to export markets before the colonial era became the leading suppliers of workers, while some of the most incorporated were the least 'proletarianized.'

Thus, if we are to move beyond preconceived notions of rural transformation, we must account for a variety of organizational forms and directions in rural change in order to lend credence to historical and locational specificities.

Out of the impasse posed by the two seemingly incompatible polemics, Friedmann (1978, 1980, 1986a, 1986b), in particular, has attempted to revitalize the debate over small-scale household production by reconstructing and synthesizing the theoretical arguments advanced by both the decomposition and persistence perspectives. Such an endeavor traverses the discrepancies between macro- and microlevel approaches and combines elements associated with market domination and the noneconomic characteristics of household-based production units. Friedmann's reconceptualization of small-scale household production in terms of "simple commodity production" both maintains the integrity of the household by use of "double specification" of the internal characteristics of the household and the external characteristics of the wider society. Her approach thus allows for a household form of production based on the household's internal relations, while recognizing the importance of pressures exerted by the encompassing socioeconomic complex that impinges upon the household and sets limits to the range of livelihood possibilities (Bouquet and de Haan, 1987).

Nevertheless, Friedmann's ideal-type fails to effectively allow for a more discreet variability, does not adequately identify the major types

of units subsumed under "simple commodity production," nor does it facilitate a closer examination of how various economic and noneconomic elements interrelate. What is required is a better understanding of the manner by which households begin to rationalize production and the effects this has on the household's form and function. Hence, a more useful starting point is to consider how people organize and secure their subsistence and, more generally, how they secure their livelihoods (Moore, 1988; Fernandez-Kelly, 1982). In these terms, different livelihood practices, including social networks and other cultural devices, command different loyalties among their adherents, not just between different localities but within the same locality as well. While recognizing that substantive inquiries do have certain inherent limitations, it is important to recognize that people do act according to different "logics," though logics ineluctably grounded in broader considerations.

Broadly, this type of approach focuses on the critical technical, economic, and social variables operating within households, as well as on the extra-household relations in which they are embedded. This way, even residence of household members, demographic composition, and kinship can be potential elements of strategies, not just what is planted and who engages in what type of labor. Thus, at the village level, this approach specifies the structural linkages that internally differentiate and externally connect variant households, while within the larger society it vertically positions these households. Depending upon circumstances, then, changes within the wider society may broaden or limit opportunities for diversification of livelihood strategies and may reinforce or weaken older forms of social organization. Each element of a household's strategy, in turn, is conditioned by the other. The presence of external opportunities, however, provides competing alternatives within which households may diversify, change, or abandon current strategies. The ability to alter present strategies is, nonetheless, shaped by strategies previously adopted in response to then-prevailing socioeconomic and physical conditions, so that, once pursued, livelihood strategies create their own social and organizational constraints to the expansion or intensification of various economic activities.

Not only will such an approach free us from preconceived constructs of development and livelihood strategies, but it frees us from fixed definitions of household forms in the narrow sense and opens up the variability in its concrete manifestations that we seek to explain (Spiegel,

1986). Thus, we can speak of different types of households and strategies, not only through empirical construction, but by systematically detailing the various contexts within which household livelihood strategies unfold.

### Field Research and Village Selection

The information gathering approaches chosen for this study were tailored to meet the specific requirements of doing research in the Nuba Mountains, about which there is very scanty data. The information collected represents a rich blend of qualitative and quantitative information; the former help strengthen generalizations derived from the latter by fleshing out the analysis. While quantitative data lend themselves to uncovering patterns of structure, we run the risk of overrunning their deeper contextual meaning without collaborating qualitative information, which serves to verify the validity of quantitative data as well as to underscore the importance of human agency.

In the course of fieldwork, the researcher is faced with a dilemma: when does the point of diminishing returns mitigate the benefits gained from enlarging the study area. In part, this rests on the types of questions the research seeks to answer. For me, one village, a case study, was not sufficient. While understanding household strategies in a single village, it was not possible to generalize outside of that context or to fully explore the significance of different household strategies. In drawing conclusions, two villages lend more confidence by enabling a deeper understanding of important structural variations. Still, there is insufficient variation to provide adequate insight into larger processes that shape strategies. This comes only with increased variation in structural conditions. And while four villages may have contributed to increased ability to generalize, advantages fell short of the additional headache encountered in managing such a project, let alone in analyzing the data.

The three villages studied were Somasem, Shair Tomat, and Shatt Damam (see figure 1.1). The villages lie roughly on a north/south continuum extending from Dilling, a primary market town, to Kadugli, the provincial capital. At first glance, the most visible differences among the villages have to do with their topography, which partially tells the story of their settlement, of their inhabitants departure from their mountain havens. Somasem and Shair Tomat stand out on the expansive plains,



while the construction of Shatt Damam reflects its residents' continued ambiguity towards the world outside. The majority of householders here reside on the rugged slopes of the protective jebels, with only a few living quarters erected on the plains floor near the market center. In part, the answer abides in the fact that the Shatt have few farms located at a distance to draw them further afield, as did the Ghulfan of Somasem. Nor were they relocated as were the original inhabitants of Shair Tomat. Still, the Shatt remain leery of alien intrusion and retain a high cultural attachment to their ancestral *dar*, or homeland.

Upon careful observation, the routine of everyday life discloses the integration of the villages into the outside world. Village inhabitants readily recognize the effects of integration as new ways of doing things: tractors plough vast tracts of land, which necessitates the hiring of labor; lorries haul commodities and villagers to market; tea is steeped for those too busy to do so themselves; brideprice increasingly requires the addition of store-bought goods; family, friends, and neighbors periodically or permanently leave the village confines in search of education or employment; and so on. More importantly, all of these changes involve the mediation of money and, hence, the need for it. Some people look contemptuously on these changes, fearful of the consequences for the old way of life. Others see them as wonderful opportunities and avidly pursue them with the zeal of missionaries, labeling apostates as "backwards." Still others feel uneasy with the new economic realities and, finding few alternatives, reluctantly enter the labor and product markets. No one is without an opinion on the subject, and few have escaped its effects altogether. Table 1.2 depicts the broad means by which the three villages were integrated into the wider economy, taking note of the primary types of outside employment opportunities open to the villagers and the dominant source of capital available to them as well.

**TABLE 1.2**  
**Primary Means of Economic Integration of the Three Villages**

Village	Outside Employment	Source of Capital
Somasem	semiskilled labor	local merchant capital
Shair Tomat	skilled labor	government capital (NMAPC <sup>4</sup> )
Shatt Damam	unskilled labor	outside merchant capital

The selection of the three villages centered primarily on the basis of differences in access to and utilization of land, labor, and technology. As agriculture is the dominant activity in this region, it was assumed that factors affecting its organization would exert the greatest impact on household livelihood strategies. Labor thus provides an immediate insight into the developmental processes shaping the villages and indicates a household's general socioeconomic orientation. Table 1.3 displays for each village percentages for primary types of labor used for main farm cropping activities and the mean size of the main farm—wage labor in Somasem, family/household in Shair Tomat, and nafir in Shatt Damam.<sup>5</sup> (Somasem farmers employing tractors do not perform a first weeding, as plowing makes this task unnecessary.) Certainly too, the historical and cultural backgrounds of the three villages differ markedly, as suggested by their means of integration into the wider Sudanese complex. Nevertheless, the three villages were matched in all other respects insofar as possible. Commonalities included approximate distance to regional markets (market and employment opportunities), agricultural services (such as extension), village services (education, flour mills, and water), and the presence of a general store (local merchants). Of the three villages, Shatt Damam appears to be the least directly affected by modernizing pressures, while Somasem exhibits extensive elements of modernization. Shair Tomat lies somewhere in between.

The basic characteristics of the three villages are summarized as following:

**TABLE 1.3**  
**Source of Household Labor for Main Farm Cropping Activities by Village**  
 (Percent of feddans cultivated and sacks of sorghum/millet threshed by type of labor.)

	Somasem	Shair Tomat	Shatt Damam
Activity	Wage	Family	<i>Nafir</i>
clear	29.3	91.1	16.9
plow	90.7	65.7	8.3
1st weeding	2.4	67.2	35.4
2nd weeding	53.6	82.4	5.5
harvest	61.0	82.1	34.3
threshing	74.2	67.1	18.4

1. *Somasem*: The inhabitants of Somasem are “Arabized” Nuba and have lost much of their earlier “Nuba” past. At 16.2 feddans, the mean size of main farms is the largest of the three villages. Not surprisingly, the use of tractors is widespread. Farmers generally rely on wage labor for most but the easiest agricultural tasks. By lorry, this village lies four hours north of Kadugli and one and a half south of Dilling on the tarmac road connecting the two. Somasem is situated on the plains, though the majority of its settlers relocated here from surrounding jebels to be near their main farms. This occurred only after the cessation of violence permitted a degree of security for those opting to remain on the more fertile land.

2. *Shair Tomat*: Shair Tomat was established around 1932, when the British relocated a group of Hawazma Arabs residing in Daloka with instructions to “take up farming” and desist from slave raiding. The mean size of main farms is 13.2 feddans and are worked primarily with family labor. While the use of tractors is considerable, their use remains limited to cotton fields plowed by the Nuba Mountains Agricultural Production Corporation (NMAPC) at Kadugli. This village, one and a half hours north-northeast of Kadugli by lorry, is the most difficult to reach of the three. While it is possible to get there by lorry during the dry season, generally one gets off at the tarmac road running between Kadugli and Dilling and walks in.

3. *Shatt Damam*: Although it is changing, Shatt Damam still retains strong vestiges of its matrilinear past and remains predominantly “African” in its cultural orientation. The mean size of main farms is the smallest of the three villages, at 5.4 feddans, and is worked by hand with extensive use of nafir labor, although family labor is also important. This is a relatively old village, approximately one hour by lorry south of Kadugli on a seasonal road. The villagers relation with the non-Shatt outside world remains tentative at best.

### *Three Village Household Survey*

A difficulty in analyzing household strategies is the confusion over unit of observation and unit of analysis. Residence is a unit of observation, while the unit of analysis is a household. What I am suggesting is that residence is only the starting point for unraveling and constructing a household. Our ultimate goal, however, is not to dwell on residence per se but to deconstruct residence and reconstruct household as a mean-