

Photo Essay: Nowhere People

Greg Constantine presents images from two projects. One, “Nowhere People: The Global Face of Statelessness,” documents the lack of citizenship in various places around the world. The other, “Kenya’s Nubians: Then and Now,” offers a visual account of a particular group pressed to the margins of a nation-state. More information about and further images from the projects can be found at the photographer’s websites, <http://www.nowherepeople.org> and <http://nubiansinkenya.com>.



Nubians must prove their connection to Kenya at the age of eighteen. The process is called “vetting” and is required for Nubians to be issued national identity cards, which are essential for everything from finding employment to driving a car, obtaining a passport, or opening a bank account. Nubians are the only group in Kenya to be vetted. Nubian youth often have to wait years before they are issued identification. Two unemployed Nubian youths sit in their youth group’s office in Kibera.



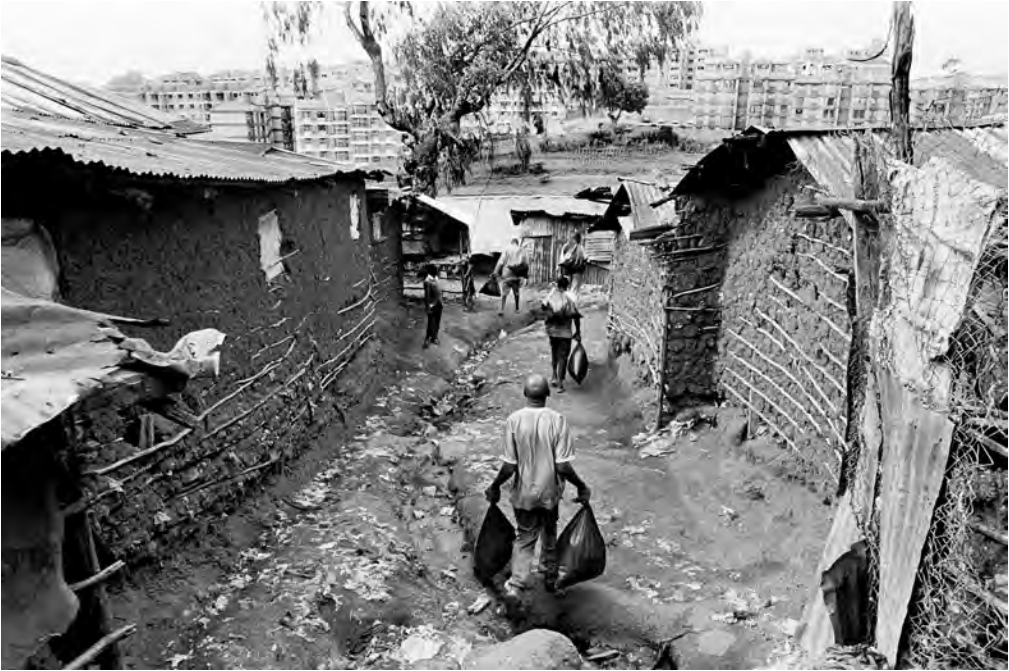
A Nubian woman holds a family photo of her grandfather as an officer in the King's African Rifles. He served in the British army in World War II and held a British colonial passport.



Since Kenya's independence, the Nubians have been denied many civil, social, and economic rights. Until the most recent census in 2009, the Nubians were not formally recognized as a tribe in Kenya but were instead considered to be "others." Elders in the Nubian community sit in a soda shop in the Makina section of Kibera.



In 1917, the British designated 4,000 acres of land outside Nairobi for Nubian settlement, because Nubians could not return to Sudan. The Nubians called the land Kibra or “land of the forest.” Over the past forty years, hundreds of thousands of rural migrants flooding into Nairobi in search of work have been encouraged to settle in Kibra, even as Nubian claims to ownership of the land have been denied by Kenyan authorities. As a result, the Nubian have lost almost all of their land. Eventually, Kibra, originally a Nubian village, became Kibera, one of the most notorious slums in Africa. This Nubian family home is almost one hundred years old and was once situated amid bush, mango trees, and green grass.



While people from larger tribes hold important positions in the public and private sectors in Kenya, few if any Nubians do so. Unemployed Nubian youth collect garbage to earn extra money. As land prices escalate in Nairobi, private development and unsuccessful slum upgrading programs surround Kibera.



While Nubians are now a minority in Kibera, they are determined to preserve their traditions and cultural identity. Nubian weddings draw people from all over Kibera. Over one hundred Nubians walk through the dusty paths in the Makina section of Kibera during a traditional Nubian wedding ceremony.



When people question Nubians about their connection to Kibera, many Nubians will tell them about the cemetery. Nubians have been buried at a Kibera cemetery since World War I. Nubian men must make a final prayer at the Nubian cemetery in the Makina section of Kibera. It is the only graveyard in Kibera, since the dead from other tribes are sent on the long journey to their rural homes to be buried.



Conflict in the Philippines in the 1970s and a need for laborers on palm oil plantations saw hundreds of thousands of people from the Philippines and Indonesia flood into Sabah, Malaysia. By 2005, one third of the residents of Sabah were foreigners. An estimated 10,000 to 30,000 children of Filipino and Indonesian descent in Sabah are stateless.



Children roam through the fish markets in Kota Kinabalu looking for customers. Loads can vary in size, from a few small bags of fish to goods that weigh several times more than the child. The boys are paid whatever the customer decides—usually no more than an American quarter.



After the market has closed, children loiter, playing cards and gambling away the money they have made that morning.



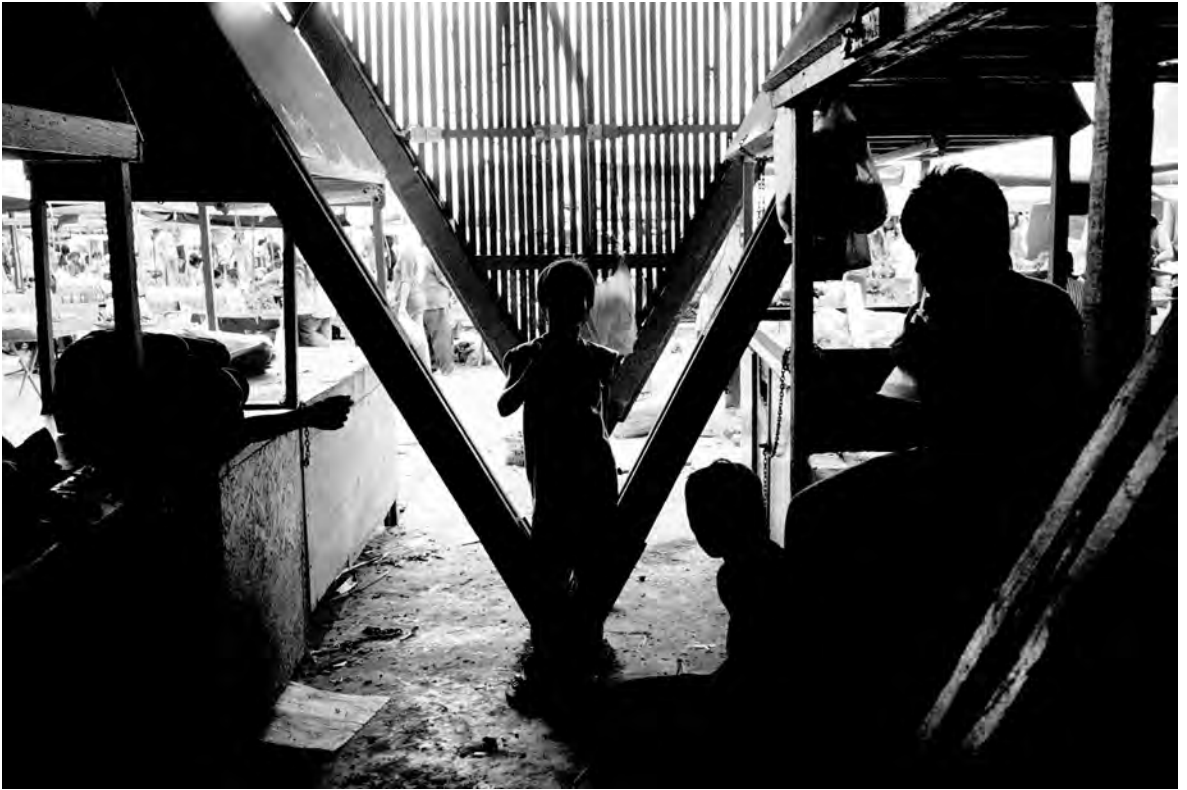
Many stateless children live in Palau Gaya, where migrants have created a floating slum on the island across the strait from Kota Kinabalu.



In a slum outside Kota Kinabalu, children do nothing during the day but sit around, play games, and gamble. All of the children were born in Sabah to illegal Filipino immigrants. Most have no form of identification and have never been to school.



A slum forty kilometers from Kota Kinabalu is filled with stateless youth. Children who possess the right documents are able to attend private schools and some public primary schools. Those who don't are shut out of most public programs.



In recent years, Malaysia has set up task forces to arrest and deport undocumented foreigners. As a result of the deportations, families have been separated and children left behind in Sabah fend for themselves. A group of stateless children lives in a produce market in Kota Kinabalu; most of their parents were deported. They make money from begging, selling cigarettes, or working in the markets. None of them have birth certificates or other proof of identity.