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The West African (Fallata) Communities in Gedaref State : Process of settlement and local integration

C. Miller & A.A. Abu-Manga

Introduction

People of West African (W.A.) origin living in Gedaref State make up one of the most important W.A. communities in Sudan. In terms of demographic weight, they represent the second ethnic group in the area. In Gedaref State (as in the Gezira), W.A. have been mostly described in terms of agricultural labour force (Barnett & Abdelkarim 1991, Davies 1964, Hassoun 1952, McLoughlin 1962)¹. However, their socio-economic profile is far more complex. They are involved in many different kinds of economic activities and are settled in both the urban centres and the most remote rural villages. The peak of their migration took place during the colonial period, and the majority of them have now permanently settled for more than fifty years. They are daily mixing or interacting with the other ethnic groups and they share many common socio-economic concerns with their neighbours due to environmental changes, degradation of soil and fosters (manure), and expansion of mechanized agriculture. But they also face specific problems due to their historical background and status. In this paper, we will focus on two related issues: historical patterns of settlement and processes of identification and integration.

The issue of settlement raises many questions concerning when and how the different W.A. communities came to settle in Gedaref area, their links with older W.A. communities - especially those of the Blue Nile -, their relations with the local Arab groups, and the role and ambiguous attitude of the colonial administration². We will try to reconstruct their main itineraries of migration, a rather difficult task. While Condominium archives tend to emphasise the lack of a strong relationship between the Blue Nile and Gedaref W.A. communities, our informants tell their story in terms of active networks and ongoing ethnic clustering. While forming a Diaspora network throughout Sudan, they consider that their history in the area allows them to claim local territorial rights. The issue of settlement was and still is very sensitive as it is the key for being granted Sudanese nationality (citizenship) and for having access to land and to political representation. With the re-implementation of a new kind of Native administration in 1990s, the issue of homeland raises the question of the identification and the integration of the former W.A. communities in the local society.

Until the beginning of the 19th century, many W.A. have been totally or partially assimilated to local Sudanese groups or more or less recognised as "indigenous groups". During the 19th-20th century, this assimilation process has been slowed down by the magnitude of migration patterns and W.A. communities are still clearly distinctive, in spite of

¹ The question of the West African labour force is covered in many reports on the irrigated schemes (Gezira, Gash, Wadi Halfa and Rahad). A number of these references can be found in Bushra & al 1996.

² The internal contradictions of the colonial administration are detailed in R. Hasterok's paper.

many cultural changes. They are still mostly regarded as foreigners, whatever their length of stay in Sudan may be, and they are mostly known and labelled under generic terms such as *Fallata*, *Takarir*, *Nigerians*, *Westerners*. However two remarks are important here. First, the status of the W.A. communities is far from being similar in all areas of Sudan. It varies according to the fabrics of the local and regional societies and to the specific history of the W.A. in each area. Second, this regional characteristic influence the cohesion of the different W.A. sub-groups, their identity affiliation and their interaction with the local society. While other Sudanese perceived them as a single entity, W.A. are far from forming a homogeneous group. They are characterised by their diversity in terms of ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, socio-economic status, political affiliation, period of stay in the area and degree of assimilation to the Northern Sudanese core culture. The diversity and complexity of the different W.A. groupings and sub-groupings raise the question of their internal cohesion *vis à vis* the “others”. They do not react equally to the fact of being considered by outsiders as forming one ethnic group and they do not all agree on the benefit of unifying themselves to form an active supra-ethnic grouping mobilising itself to acquire more rights, including political ones. It is this process of identification and ethnic grouping that we will investigate in the last part of the paper.

It seems very difficult to describe the W.A. (known as Fallata) communities in the Gedaref area without referring to W.A. Sudanese communities in general as they share a common history. W.A. communities in the area represent the Sudanese furthest point east of a long process of migration from West to East (Hijaz) throughout Africa and Sudan. To clarify the situation, we will therefore start with a brief general presentation of these communities, asking the reader to consult the relevant references for more details.

West Africans in the Sudan

In this study, the terms W.A. include the following four ethnic groups: Fulani, Hausa, Kanuri (also henceforth Borno) and Songhai (Zabarma). Each group belongs to a different African language family: Niger-Kordofanian (Fulfulde), Afro-Asiatic (Hausa) and Nilo-Saharan (Kanuri and Songhai), according to Greenberg's classification (Greenberg:1963). Each group forms a large and dispersed entity resulting from complex historical processes of mixing and integration that we will not discuss here in details³. West Africans are spread all over the Sudan, including the southern provinces, with a concentration on two areas: one stretching across the central Sudan (Rep.) from Al-Jineina on the western border to Port-Sudan on the Red Sea (pilgrimage road), whereas the other extends from Wad Medani in the Gezira south along the Blue Nile up to the Ethiopian border (see map 1).

The demographic weight of the W.A. population in Sudan is extremely difficult to assess for a number of reasons. Former migrants have been assimilated to local groups or may have become detribalised. Others, anxious to be recognised as Sudanese, tend to hide their West African origin. In the British records, they are estimated at 21,000⁴ in 1912; 50,000 in 1918; and 80,000 in 1924⁵. In the 1956's census, W.A. were estimated to be between 600,000 and 900,000 out of a total population of 10 million (8.8% of the total population)⁶. The

³ An overview of such diversity within the Fulbe (Fulani) groups of Sudan is provided in Abu Manga 1999. See also Eguchi & Azarya 1993 for the Fulbe in West Africa and Sudan.

⁴ Cf. NRO Intel 4/7/55 'Fellata settlers in the Sudan'.

⁵ Among the 80,000 West Africans, 40,000 were settled, 15,000 in the process of settling, and 25,000 eventually returning to their homeland. (MEM).

⁶ According to Davies (1964), W.A. were at least 602,086 in the 1956 census, but he considered the figure as underestimated. Balamoan (1981:64-68) discussed in detail the results of the 1956 census and came up with the

highest rate of W.A. was found in the eastern part of the country (Kassala Province and Blue Nile). In the 1993's census, W.A. (under the label Nigerian tribes) are estimated to be 1,431,338 out of a total population of 21,226,241 i.e. 7.42 % of the total Northern Sudan population. The highest rates are found in Sennar State (22,75%), Blue Nile State (20,83%), Southern Kordofan State (18,09%), Gedaref State (16,94%) and Kassala State (11,52%)⁷.

The Hausa are estimated to be the biggest group among all the W.A. in Sudan and this community is believed to be the largest Hausa Diaspora in the world (Argungu 1988). They are mainly found in towns or in farmed land in the plains and in the irrigated and mechanized schemes of western, central and eastern Sudan. They are known as cultivators, fishermen, manual workers and petty traders (see Birks 1978, Duffield 1980, Hino 1986, Yamba 1995). The Fulani can be divided into cattle owners and urbanised Fulani (Ahmed 1973, Braukämper 1992 & 1993; Delmet 1994, Duffield 1981). Communities of pastoral Fulani are found in Darfur, Kordofan, Blue Nile and the Kassala-Gedaref area. The main Fulani settlements are found along the rivers (towns or villages): the Blue Nile (Sennar, Maiurno, Shaikh Talha, Damazin, Roseires), the White Nile and the Rahad, Atbara and Setit Rivers in the Kassala-Gedaref area. The Kanuri (Borno) represent an old community especially in Western Sudan. Like the Hausa, Borno quarters can be found in many towns of western, central and eastern Sudan. In Gedaref and Kassala towns, they are believed to be among the earliest dwellers. Most of the Kanuri in older settlements have been fully Arabized. The Songhai (Zabarma) are the smallest Sudanese W.A. community. The Songhai speakers of the Sudan comprise two ethnically distinct groups: Songhai proper and Fulani. The former refer to themselves as Zabarma; they live in some 15 villages in eastern Sudan, scattered between Rahad River and the Ethiopian border. The latter, i.e. the Songhai-speaking Fulani, on the other hand, are found in 5 villages on the Blue Nile near Sennar town (Abu Manga 1995). The original homeland of both Songhai-speaking groups is in the Niger bent (including the present-day Niger Republic and Mali).

Members of these communities have settled in the Sudan through out different periods, ranging from the 16th century up to the 1950s (Abu Manga 1995, 1996; Braukämper 1992, 1993; Duffield 1981; Y.F. Hassan 1994; Hino 1986; Nasr & Duffield 1980; O'Fahey 1980). No exact date for the beginning of the W.A.' migration and settlement in the Sudan is agreed upon⁸. There is evidence that Fulani and Kanuri settlements in Darfur can be dated in terms of centuries (Braukämper 1993). However the early history of W.A. in Sudan requires further investigation. W.A. Muslim scholars played an important role in the Islamization of Western Sudan and many W.A. had been fully integrated or occupied prominent position in these areas, (Abu Manga 1996, Bedin 1996, Kapteijns 1985, O' Fahey 1971, 1977 & 1980, O'Fahey & Spaulding 1974). The last decade of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century represent the turning point of W.A. large-scale migration. The Attahiru-Maiurno *hijra* is considered as a major event and a line is usually drawn between pre-*hijra* and post-*hijra* migrants (Duffield 1981, Hino 1986).

The establishment of the W.A. communities in the Sudan can be attributed to the following main religious, political and economic factors: pastoral movements (mainly

figure of 900,000. Balamoan included as West African the following categories of the census: French equatorial tribe, Nigerian tribes, foreigners with Sudanese status of West African origin, foreigners with non-Sudanese status of West African origin. Nigerian tribes alone were estimated to number 300,000.

⁷ See map of distribution of W.A. in 1956 and 1993's censuses. At the provincial level the highest rate are found in Dinder P. (44,46%), Gedaref P. (30,34%), Rashad P. (28,27%) in 1993.

⁸ Y.F. Hassan (1994:186) and Duffield & Nasr (1980) mention the 18th century as a possible period for the beginning of these migrations. But new evidence (Braukämper 1993) shows an earlier date, probably the 17th century for the Fulani migration to southern Darfur. O'Fahey (1980:4) also suggests the 17th century for the arrival of the Fulani in Darfur, either pilgrims, traders or cattle nomads.

Fulani), pilgrimage and religious teaching, joining the Mahdist movement, moving eastward with the advent of colonialism in West Africa (the Attahiru-Maiwurno *hijra*), finding employment in the Agricultural schemes. During the British Condominium period, their settlement was encouraged near the large agricultural schemes (Balamoan 1981, Davies 1964, Duffield 1983 & 1988, Hassoun 1952, Mc Loughlin 1964, O'Brien 1986). Until now, W.A. and Western Sudanese make up the major labour force in these schemes (Barnett & Abdel Karim 1991). In many cases, these different factors (i.e. pilgrimage, joining the Mahdist movement or the *hijra* and economic migration) have been related.⁹ Migration patterns varied according to each group but members of the different groups joined together in different occasions especially in the case of the Attahiru-Maiwurno *hijra*.

This long history of migration and settlement explains the diversity of W.A. communities in the Sudan and their various degree of integration. But there was a continuous link between the former and the later migrants (Duffield 1981). The old centres established by the *muwallidun* helped in the settlement of the more recent migrants. *Zango* (pilgrim) stations developed into permanent settlements. Pilgrims visited established relatives and many decided to settle in Sudan when joining their relatives on their way to or from Mecca. Thus people arriving from Ethiopia would join relatives coming from the Blue Nile. The diversity of the migration patterns does not necessarily imply that W.A. migrants were disconnected. Another important feature of most W.A. communities is their ongoing networks with far-established relatives (living either in other parts of Sudan or in West Africa or in the Hijaz). All the people interviewed in the Gedaref area still have connections with other W.A. communities, with whom they maintain a relationship (visiting for ceremonies, intermarriage, exchange of news, etc.).

Historical background and patterns of West African settlement in the Gedaref area

In the present Gedaref State, the Fallata are concentrated in specific quarters of the main towns (Gedaref, Showak, Al Hawata, Wad Al Hilew) and along the Atbara, Rahad and Setit Rivers in the southern parts of the state (see Map and Appendix). The highest concentration is in Gedaref Province where they make up more than 40% of the total rural population (Showak R.C & Wad Al Hilew R.C). The most important group is the Hausa, followed by the Fulani, Kanuri (Borno) and Songhai (Zabarma). The West African presence in Gedaref State preceded the Turkish era in the Sudan (1821-1882), but few documents are available for this early period. The majority of W.A. settlers arrived during the Condominium period. Economic factors (e.g. search for better farming and/or grazing lands) but also pilgrimage make up the central motives for their immigration.

Pre-Condominium era

The Takarir, the Shukriyya and the Dabaniyya are the three major groups of the Gallabat-Gedaref area quoted by the historians of the Turkiyya period (Al Gaddal 1973). W.A. presence in the Gedaref State is proved by the existence of the sheikhdom of the Takarir of Gallabat founded during the Funj kingdom by a supposed Fur personality (Forinkwei) in the second part of the 18th century. The majority of its citizens were pilgrims and the Takarir were estimated to be up to 45,000 individuals. However, the ethnic composition of this sheikhdom is unclear and seems to have encompassed mainly Wadaïan and Darfurian (Al

⁹ See Al Naqar 1972 and Birks 1978 for detailed accounts of the relationship between pilgrimage, joining the Mahdist movement, the *hijra* and economic migration.

Naqar 1988; Al Gaddal 1973; Shuqayr 1972, Smyth 1924). The Takarir were middle tradesmen between Ethiopia and Gallabat, and for this reason played an important role in this strategic region. During the Turkiyya, the Takarir *shaykhs* (Fur) cooperated with the Turkish administration and remained the leaders of Gallabat. However there seems to be very little connection between this old Takarir community and the following W.A. migrations. Today W.A. in Gallabat province are estimated officially to make up only 5% of the population (1993's census).

Historical records testify also of the early employment of Takarir (Borno and Hausa pilgrims) as labourers in the Gash (Kassala Province) and Baraka cotton schemes during the Turkiyya. Those Takarir established settlements in the Gedaref and Gash areas¹⁰. No other record is available and therefore it is very difficult to specify a date for the beginning of W.A. settlement in the Gedaref area. According to our informants in Rahad¹¹, Fallata people (mainly Hausa) came to stay in the western part of the State (Rahad) during the Turkiyya. They first settled near Arab villages in Mafaza, Emura, Al Gergeri, Atrash Samma (or Atar Samma), Hillat Khalifa (Bazura) but they often lived in their own separate settlement, and in some cases a particular place is known under two names: an Arab one and a Fallata one¹². Among the first original Fallata settlements is Al Guwesi, also known as Kau Wuntsulu¹³. Hausa informants also claimed to have been the first permanent settlers of Al Hawata town before the Mahdiyya¹⁴. In the eastern part of the State, Doka appeared to have attracted earlier Fallata migrants.

During the Mahdiyya, the Takarir of Gallabat, as well as the other tribes of the area, were split between the opponents and followers of the Mahdiyya and Gallabat became an important military centre. A number of W.A. pilgrims were stationed on the Ethiopian border during the first Italian-Abyssinian war of 1888. Many W.A. (either Mahdist followers or pilgrims) were enrolled in the Mahdiyya army in Omdurman and sent to Kassala Province and on the Abyssinian front¹⁵. At the end of the Mahdiyya, these W.A. soldiers settled in the Kassala-Gedaref area which has been largely depopulated. According to British records : "The Nigerians with these armies (Khalifa's army) saw that the country was agreeable to them, and when they were disbanded many settled at Kassala, Gedaref and elsewhere. The Nigerians were attracted to Kassala and Gedaref towns where it appeared that Nigerians had been settled since before the Mahdiya, (...) the Wadai Natives (Borgo) settled near Qala al Nahl under Musa Yaqub who had himself been a member of Ahmed Fadil's army"¹⁶. Our informants in Rahad¹⁷ quoted as Fallata villages established during or just after the Mahdiyya:

¹⁰ The early employment of Takarir (mainly Hausa) as labourers in these schemes was due to the failure of Mumtaz Pasha (a Turkish governor) to recruit the Beja for this task; see Tothill (ed) 1948 : 709.

¹¹ Collective interview, Al Hawata 13.3. 1996.

¹² For example, the name Hillat Khalifa was applied to the Arab settlement and the name Bazura to the nearby Hausa settlement.

¹³ Al Guwesi is said to have been built around 1898. See the collective interview, Al Hawata 16.3. 1996.

¹⁴ The name Al Hawata (the fishermen) is said to have been given by Arab pastoralists (Massallamiyya) in reference to Hausa fishermen coming from Medani and Mafaza to this water point, a summer camp for both Arab pastoralists and Hausa fishermen. A Hausa *shaykh* called Mohammed Mitaro is believed to have established the first permanent settlement. During the Mahdiyya, Ahmed Fadil stopped in Al Hawata. (cf. collective interview in Al Hawata 13.3.1996).

¹⁵ See MEM p. 30 : "During the Mahdia, West African pilgrims were often pressed into the Dervish army, which many served at Kassala and on the Abyssinian frontier" (see also Duffield 1981:52, 1983:292). Informant Maryam Sidiq Mohammed (interviewed in Gedaref 5.3.1996) stated that her grandfather, who was a Mahdist soldier, moved from Omdurman to Gallabat and Gedaref where he settled during the time of Ahmed Fadil (1894-1899).

¹⁶ Cf. MEM: p.30 & also K.P 4.1/023/125 "Report about Burgo tribe".

¹⁷ Collective interview, Al Hawata 13.3. 1996.

Jazirat Abu Fatna (Westerners & Fallata), Antakosa (Fallata), Al Shaga (Westerners & Fallata), Um Fago (Fallata & Kenana).

Condominium era.

The area which became depopulated during the Mahdiyya witnessed a re-settlement phase at the beginning of the Condominium period. A large flow of Fallata immigrants, either pilgrims on their way to or back from the Hijaz through the Massawa road or settlers arriving from other Sudanese provinces (Blue Nile, Kordofan, Darfur, Omdurman) constituted one of the main population stream. The majority of the W.A. immigrants arrived during the second, third and fourth decades of the 20th century, especially after the completion of the railways in 1929 (Davies 1964). The first decades of the Condominium era witnessed a pilgrimage boom. The resettlement of the population facilitated the reopening of the pilgrimage route through Kassala¹⁸. A number of these pilgrims were sent back from the Hijaz (between 1924 and 1934) and stopped in the Kassala-Gedaref area where they worked as labourers. During the second Italian-Ethiopian war, pilgrims were also stationed on the border. The Gedaref area remained attractive for overland pilgrims up to recent times (Birks 1978) and many chose to settle there¹⁹. Immigrants first settled in Kassala and Gedaref towns, then in and around Mafaza, on the West bank of the Rahad River, and from 1925 along the Atbara and Setit Rivers. They were looking for land either for grazing or cultivating, as supply of land was greater in Kassala province than on the Blue Nile²⁰. They were allowed to settle in the largely uninhabited and wild areas of the southern districts of Kassala Province (used by Arab pastoralists as summer camps) and to establish their own separate settlements.

Most of the W.A. communities refer to prior settlement in Sudan before their coming to the Gedaref area: Blue Nile, Kordofan, Kassala, Tokar, the Gash, etc. The Blue Nile area appears to be especially important for the Fulani, Kanuri and Songhai of the Eastern part of Gedaref State. Many of our informants interviewed in the different villages along the Atbara and Setit Rivers (Amara, Mailaga, Magharif, Hillat Talata, Ajab-Sidu and Sifawa) confirmed that their fathers (or grandfathers) migrated to this area from the Blue Nile: Maiurno, Sennar, Hillat Al-Ber and some other villages to the South of Maiurno on the way to Damazin (see below). The importance of the Blue Nile lies in the fact that it has been the location chosen by both Mahdist followers²¹ and *Hijra* migrants. The present-day Maiurno town, founded in 1906-1907 was the last station of the Attahiru's-Maiurno's *hijra* which started from Sokoto (N. Nigeria) following the fall of the Sokoto Caliphate in March 1903 in the hands of the

¹⁸ Due to British control and imposition of a quarantine station in Soakin, an increasing number of pilgrims chose the less controlled Massawa road until the Italian war. The Massawa route was passing by Gedaref, Sofi, Wad Al Hilew, Um Hager, Gulluj, Tesenei to Keren and Massawa. See MEM:19; CS 2/5/24 "Reports on the Pilgrimage" by Willis and K.P. 2/010/39 "Pilgrims".

¹⁹ Birks (1978: 67) shows that until the beginning of the 1970s, overland pilgrims were still passing through Sudan either to work or to visit relatives. He mentions that around 30% of them were staying in the Gedaref area to work and fund their trip. The Gedaref area appears to be the most attractive place in Sudan.

²⁰ A number of Borgo came from Sennar following ethnic confrontation between local Arab populations and West Africans in 1927. They moved to Qala an Nahl in particular, where they joined their relatives under Musa Yaqub Khutt. Following this confrontation and the Closed District Policy, W.A. were not allowed to settle South of Roseires and moved to Kassala Province. Cf. K.P 4.1/023/125 "Report about Burgo tribe".

²¹ Many Fallata Mahdist soldiers moved from Omdurman to the Blue Nile. In 1919, 17 "Derwish villages" (as opposed to 10 new villages created by post-Mahdiyya migrants) were recorded, the most important being Sabun. See MEM, Duffield 1981:24-25.

British colonial army. Abundant literature exists on this famous *hijra*²² led by Attahiru, the grandson of Shaykh Usman Ibn Fodio and then by his son Muhammad Bello Maiurno. During the first decades of its establishment, Maiurno witnessed waves of both internal and external sub-migrations. The sub-migrations which are actually important to our study were those which took place from Maiurno to other places South along the Blue Nile and East towards Dinder, Rahad, Atbara and Setit Rivers. Some of these internal sub-migrations were incited by the desire of some clan chiefs to establish hegemonies independent of Maiurno. Other migrations followed expansion purposes, whereas others were a result of political conflicts between Maiurno and his Sokoto ruling circles on the one hand, and rival Fulani clans, especially from the eastern Emirates, on the other hand²³. An important historical question concerns the relation between the British administration and the Sultan of Maiurno, Maiurno himself encouraging his followers to settle in the Gedaref area, a then rather uninhabited land.

Patterns of settlement according to ethnic group

In what follows we will try to trace the historical background and the patterns of settlement for each W.A ethnic group. This ethnic division is sometimes problematic as members of different groups could join in the same settlements. The archival material is poor and concerns only the establishment of Wadd Al Obeid on the Rahad in 1917 and Sifawa in 1925 (in official records, Hillat Hakuma). These records show that in 1931, 15 Fallata villages were claimed by Maiurno to have been established along the Rahad River between Mafaza and Abu Urug, those villages being under the Kawahla *'umudiyya*, while 30 Fallata villages were established between 1925 and 1950 in the Sifawa district²⁴. Most of our information is based on oral sources. The archival material coupled with relatively numerous interviews in many Fulani villages allowed us to draw the three main itineraries followed by the Fulani settlers who appeared to have been headed by prominent leaders and to have followed clanic lines. For the other ethnic groups, we could not always trace major itineraries back when patterns of settlement did not follow a clear order. This could be due to a less organised type of settlement (as in the case of Hausa pilgrims and settlers who did not seem to have followed collective movements), but in any case our data in this regard require more systematic investigation and the following presentation does not intend to give a definite picture.

W.A. settlement foundation in Gedaref State displays some recurrent patterns:

- temporary stay stations before foundation of the final settlements.
- settlement in co-ordination with the local native authorities in the concerned areas.

²² See Abba, I. & J. Shea (1988); Al-Hajj, M.A. (1971, 1973); A. Abu-Manga (1989); M. Crowder (1968), D.J. M. Muffet (1964). This *hijra* included a gathering of Fulani intelligentsia and political leaders from various regions in West Africa and from Nigeria in particular, including the Melle and the Borno Fulani, the Kanuri (Borno) and the Songhai (Zabarma).

²³ An example of such conflicts is the one that arose between the Borno Fulani and the Sokoto ruling circle, whereupon the former sent for their leader, Ahmed Messau, who was then in the Hijaz. In 1915 Ahmed Messau came back and gathered his people and proceeded southward to establish the present village of Galgani (formerly Damaturu). Duffield (1981) analyzed this conflict as a political one between the Mahdist and non-Mahdist Fulani, those from the eastern Emirates being Mahdist followers. Duffield's explanation is incorrect because the greater majority of the Galgani people, including the ruling family, is not Mahdist.

²⁴ See R. Hasterok's paper in this volume.

- final settlements being on the riverbanks (Rahad, Setit and Atbara); West African settlements are usually concentrated in specific areas²⁵.
- settlement established under the leadership of a *shaykh* by a small number of people (10-20) joined later by dispersed relatives or other people.
- development of new villages out of old ones.

The Hausa

The actual typical concentration of Hausa settlement is found in the western part of Gedaref State along the Southern part of the Rahad River. In this strip, they claim to make up about 50 % of the total population²⁶. Our informants in Al Hawata²⁷ were able to list up to 52 (out of 118) settlements of different sizes (with inhabitants numbering between 500 and 7,000)²⁸ of either exclusively Hausa or where the Hausa constitute the dominant elements of the population. This indicates clearly that the area was inhabited before the arrival of W.A. as no villages South of Al Hawata town were built before the completion of the railways (1929). The fact that W.A. have been among the first settlers in the southern part of the Rahad strip was also recorded by Galal Ed Din in 1975 during his survey for the Rahad scheme²⁹. However very few W.A. were allowed tenancies in the Rahad (Gruenbaum 1979). The Hausa settlements along the Rahad River developed through roughly 4 itineraries and have little to do with the Blue Nile³⁰ :

- People moving out of Mafaza, the then district capital of the region.
- People coming from different regions of the Sudan, mainly the Gezira.
- People on their way to or back from the pilgrimage
- Settlements developing out of already existing ones (e.g. Al-Guwesi, Atar Samma, Al-Tinedba, etc.) in the same region. This is the dominant pattern. Sometimes, the same founder may shift twice or three times to found new settlements. Al-Guwesi (Kau Wuntsulu) appeared to have been a stop-over for many immigrants. People moved from Al-Guwesi to establish Al-Wahidu and then Hillat Bello. Others moved from Al-Guwesi to establish Al-Tineidba and Dandugul, and from Dandugul to Amarat Kirba.

As already mentioned, this settlement process started before the Mahdiya and continued over a long period of time, from the 1920s up to the 1970s, spreading southward towards the Ethiopian border:

²⁵ In Rahad, Galal Ed Din (1975) noted that the Fallata villages were contiguous. In the Humran *'umudiyya* (Fashaga province), the Humran villages were on the eastern bank of the Setit River while the Fallata villages were on the western bank. Cf. *'umda* Ali Awad Ijel, int. 9/3/1996 in Wad Al Hilew.

²⁶ This claim cannot be sustained by the official figures of the 1993's census which provides data for ethnic group at the Provincial and State levels only. In the Rahad Province, W.A. Africans (i.e. Nigerians) are recorded as 11,49% of the population.

²⁷ Collective interview, Al Hawata 13.3. 1996.

²⁸ For population figures, see the 1993 census (Ireton).

²⁹ See Galad Ed Din: in 1975, Fallata made up 33% of West Rahad's population and represented the first ethnic group, with 3,320 members. The seven Fallata villages surveyed were established between 1917 and 1947, while the Arab villages were established mainly after 1945. In Eastern Rahad, Fallata are the sixth ethnic group and most villages are mixed. In the northern part of the Scheme areas, Arab groups are dominant, settlements are older and population is more dense. This survey of the Rahad area shows clearly that the southern part of the area was still very little inhabited in the beginning of the 1970s and that West Africans were among the first settlers.

³⁰ We did not investigate the Blue Nile connection in the case of Wad Al Obeid village created under Maiwurno authority.

Immigrants first joined older settlements like Mafaza, Atar Sama, Hillat Yusif, Al Guwesi or created new villages around 1905-1906: Al Ushara (Hausa & Fulani), Al Wahidu, Kukur Sambo.

Settlements established around 1925 included Kuka & Malam Gallo (both displaced in 1977 after the Rahad scheme), Amarat Kirba also known as Khaskhasha, Dandugul, Hillat Bello, Hillat Salih (Hausa and Fulani), Hillat Sherif.

Other creations followed in the 1930s: Garin Baka (Fulani and Hausa), Garin Arzika (Hausa and Fulani).

In the 1940s: Awal Baniyya, Al Tineidba, Al Gireifat, Garin Dogo, Garin Djarme, Hilat Elyas, Katako, Dankola, Um Kura (Fulani and Hausa), Wad Meskin, Hillat Malawlaw. The process continued up to the 1970s. Among the last settlements are Umwala (Hillat Suleiman), Ali Babikkir, Hillat Zakaria, Tangarara. All these latest settlements are said to have been established either after displacement caused by the Rahad scheme or as offsprings of older settlements.

In the eastern part of Gedaref State, the Hausa concentrate in Fashaga Province³¹ - along the Setit River (about 20 settlements of different sizes), including Wad al-Hilew, the province capital - where they constitute the majority of the inhabitants³². Among other Hausa settlements are Um Duban, Katurji, Taradona, Hileiba, Taybun, Abu Ushar Shark. On the contrary in Gallabat Province, exclusive Hausa settlements may not count more than five. Otherwise, Deim Bakur in Gedaref town represents an old Hausa quarter with a substantial number of Hausa inhabitants - believed to have developed from a *zango* (pilgrim rest house). No direct connection in pattern of settlement was recorded between the Rahad area and the Atbara-Setit area. Our informants in Wad al-Hilew claim that their fathers came from different places, such as Kassala, Gash and Gedaref in the 1920s, 1930s or 1940s³³. They were either older settlers in the Gash scheme³⁴, repatriate pilgrims or migrants coming from the Abyssinian side of the Setit River who were attracted by labour opportunities³⁵. Another itinerary traced by a direct migration from West Africa should also be kept in mind, but for reasons pertaining to the issue of citizenship, informants can hardly be expected to admit it. Hints for this assumed itinerary can be drawn from the names of some of their villages in the area under study which correspond to names of villages still found in present-day N. Nigeria (e.g. Karaye, Katurji, Kazaure and Bunza).

The Fulani

Most of the Fulani in Gedaref State live in the eastern part, in Al-Fashaga and Gallabat Provinces, along the Setit and Atbara Rivers. Their migration (mainly from the Blue Nile,

³¹ The Fashaga Province created in 1995 included part of the Showak R.C. and Wad Al Hilew R.C. of Gedaref Province in the 1993's census.

³² According to informant Shu'aib Hassan Al Shaykh, member of the National Assembly representing the Fashaga constituency in 1996, Hausa are the largest community both in Fashaga province and in Wad Al Hilew town.

³³ Idris Mohamed Mustafa, 75 years-old, and Gaafar Musa, 43 years-old, interviewed in Wad al-Hilew, 8.3.1996.

³⁴ In 1932, there were approximately 15,450 West Africans in the Gash Delta, among them 9,700 Hausa, 2,800 Fallata, 1,700 Borno and 1,250 Borgo. See NRO K.P. 1/80/368.

³⁵ In a colonial record, the DC of Kassala reports to the Governor that: "a certain number of these people (i.e. Westerners, probably (including) Hausa), some of them with their wives and families, have already moved across and are now in Kassala or in the Gash Cf. Report No. K.D./95-D-4, dated April 17th, 1935, Kassala, NRO. In the same report the DC suggests to the Governor that these immigrants should not be allowed to stay near the border, but be instructed to move further inland.

henceforth BN) has followed three main itineraries under the guidance of prominent Fulani leaders and following colonial incentives. No collective itinerary was reported for the Rahad area.

The first itinerary: from Maiurno to Mailaga.

It is related to the group led by Mailaga from Maiurno to the present Mailaga village on the Setit River some 15 Km South-West of Wad Al-Hilew, the capital of al-Fashaga Province. Mailaga was the head of the Sisilbe (also Sullubanko'en) Sokoto Fulani clan, mainly cattle herders and partly farmers. They left Maiurno (BN) after the Great Fire (Nguluwa) in 1924, "not for any internal dispute"; they headed East in search of better grazing grounds - but also with the Hijaz in mind³⁶. They stayed first among the Ta'aisha in Showak for 10 years, under the Nazirate of Wad Zayid (Dabaniyya). They then got permission from 'umda Ali Igel (of the Humran) and crossed to the present area to found the old Mailaga village (1930s) off the river, where they stayed for another 10 years under the sheikhship of Bushara - a Ta'aisha. In the early 1940s, Mailaga was officially recognised as their *shaykh*, and they moved to the Setit bank and founded the present Mailaga village a few years afterwards (1943-1944). At the time of its establishment, Mailaga comprised about 45 families (households), out of which all the present Mailaga inhabitants (around 830 people) descend. Some people moved from Mailaga and founded other villages, such as Abu Ushar and Hillat Hajj Ahmed (a cousin of Mailaga who was formerly living in Irediba).

The second itinerary: from Maiurno to Sifawa

Listed second in terms of chronological order, it represents the most important itinerary, because the Fulani settlements (as well as those of the other non-native ethnic groups) that developed through it were the result of an official arrangement and continued to develop until they got the status of *Shayakhat Khutt* in 1990.

In 1925³⁷ Maiurno was requested by the Governor of Kassala Province to send his people to develop (*ya'ammir*) the Upper Atbara River³⁸. The exact official procedure of this offer cannot, for the time being, be determined because the official letter has yet not been found in the NRO. However, subsequent correspondence between the colonial administrators of Kassala and Blue Nile provinces was substantial enough to provide undisputable evidence of this arrangement³⁹. In 1925, Maiurno, accompanied by two of his councillors - Wali and 'umda Abdullahi of Dindir - undertook the journey to the suggested area, delimited the site of the central village, which is now Sifawa⁴⁰, and returned. He himself inaugurated this settlement, a fact certified by one of the colonial reports⁴¹.

³⁶ Now many of their relatives live permanently in Madina, Saudi Arabia, as proper citizens. The remaining relatives concentrate in Kassab Garbey on the eastern bank of the Blue Nile within Maiurno native authority.

³⁷ An informant - Mohamed Taman Zooleen, 82 years-old, interviewed in Sifawa 12.3.1996 - also confirmed the date to be 1925.

³⁸ The opening of this area by Maiurno with the understanding that it would be under his sovereignty (which, to his disappointment, happened not to be so) created a great problem between him and the colonial administration. Correspondence on this issue continued for almost ten years. See R. Hasterock's paper on this issue and NRO CS 66/8/57 & K.P 4.1/14/81.

³⁹ For example, a letter from the Governor, BNP dated May 12th, 1926, addressed to DC Gedaref begins as follows: "Can you let me know what is your policy as regards new Fellata settlement. Last year Maiurno was allowed to start a small settlement". See NRO, K.P 3/139/614.

⁴⁰ Named after Sifawa village, some 30 km West of present-day Sokoto town (N. Nigeria), where Shaykh Usman d. Fodio spent most of the jihad years (1804-1812).

⁴¹ "The situation is complicated by the action of my predecessor in allowing the Sultan to open in person the village HAKUMA [sic]". From the Governor, Kassala Province to Governor BNP No. K.P/SCR/35.A.2, dated 20th January, 1930.

The following year (1926), Mohammed Majidadi - a Dukku Fulani, member of the *hijra* - was commissioned by Maiurno to go and establish the settlement and develop the area. He spent the rainy season in Al-Gurresha (see map) along with three families, and then proceeded afterwards to the site in question⁴², which was then under the control of the *Nazir* Wad Zayid of the Dabaniyya. Both our informants and archival sources emphasize the wild nature of life in this area, and Majidadi and his companions were regarded by his followers as adventurous heroes⁴³: "Our uncle and his companions were brave and courageous people. They said that he (i.e. Majidadi) had a sword which he used to open the road while moving. Besides courage, they also had *asrar* ("secrets" i.e. supernatural powers). People say that this area was inhabited by demons; without "secrets" they would not have been able to open it"⁴⁴

At first the arrangement was that the settlement should strictly be limited to 50 miles. But afterwards it was decided to remove the limit on the settlement and encourage its expansion as much as possible⁴⁵. After Majidadi had established himself in Sifawa, people heard about him and started to join his settlement. They then got his permission for founding new settlements, and then would be assigned specific sites, usually a water-fetching place (*mushra*). Most of them came from the Blue Nile, especially Maiurno; others came from within the region (Wad Kisseba, Doka, etc.), whereas others came from beyond the Ethiopian border⁴⁶ and as far as Darfur. The majority of these people were Fulani, followed in terms of size by Hausa; later on, other tribes (Zabarma, Borno, etc.) started to join⁴⁷. Following the above procedures, Majidadi's *'Umudiyya* (sub-district under native administration) continued to expand, and new settlements continued to be founded during the 1930s, either as new⁴⁸ or as off-shoots of the older and larger ones⁴⁹. In 1996, 35 settlements of different sizes (ranging from 500 to 5,000 inhabitants) were listed by our informants as being included in the former Majidadi's *'Umudiyya*. Being of such a size in terms of number of settlements and population, the above *'Umudiyya* got promoted in 1990 to *Shayakhat Khutt* and was separated into two divisions: the northern and the southern. The northern division includes about 30,000 inhabitants and is now under the leadership of *'umda* Mohamed Omer Majidadi (a nephew of the founder), whereas the southern division includes 38,000 inhabitants, and its *'umda* is a Daju from Tabarak Allah. These two *'umudiyyas* constitute together a *Shayakhat Khutt*, and

⁴² See Abu-Baker Omer Majidadi, 59 years-old, interviewed in his house in Sifawa, 11.3.1996. In contradiction with our informants, the colonial records state that the first eight families had come from Gueisa - which is very doubtful. It might be that Majidadi was joined by one or more families from Guwesi on the Rahad River on his way from Maiurno to the Atbara, or the eight families in question may have joined him immediately after. For the colonial report in question, see: Acting DC Gedaref to Governor KP, 1. July 1925.

⁴³ There are many details related by our informants on how Majidadi accepted to undertake the adventure of opening such a wild and dangerous area. Majidadi's epic continues in many ways the *hijra* epics of Attahiru and Maiurno. Many narratives about Majidadi present similar features with the narratives collected by Nasr in Maiurno.

⁴⁴ Abu-Bakr Omer Majidadi, 59 years-old, interviewed in his house in Sifawa, 11.3.1996. See also correspondence No. SCR.36-D-15, dated 4th Feb. 1930, NRO from DC Makwar to the Governor, BNP: "later he (Maiurno) expatiated on the dangers undergone by the early Fellata colonists in the wild bush, and said they would never have got them to go there unless he had taken his most respected sheikh from Maiurno [sic] (Maiurno) and established him there".

⁴⁵ From DC Gedaref to Governor Blue Nile Province, dated May 23rd, 1926, Kassala 3/139/614, NRO.

⁴⁶ E.g. the Borno (Kanuri) who came from Galluj in Ethiopia and other West Africans on their way back from pilgrimage through Masawa.

⁴⁷ Even some settlements which at first appear to have followed independent itineraries may still have been indirectly linked with Sifawa. E.g. the Ali Khalifa people started as part of Majidadi's group, but on the way they got separate warrants and diverted to other places within the area.

⁴⁸ E.g. Hillat Ali Khalifa, Haji Kawu, Hileba, etc.

⁴⁹ Dogon Dibba, Gazirat al-Dabi, Kunari and Birkat Nuren came out of Sifawa; Hillat Talata was an off-shoot of Hillat Ali Khalifa.

the former *'umda*, i.e. Abu-Baker Omer Majidadi (also a nephew of the founder) got promoted to *Shaykh Khutt*, with the two new *'umd*as under his supervision. The new *Shaykh al-Khutt* is, in his turn, directly headed by the *Shukriyya Nazir*.

The third itinerary from the Blue Nile to Amara and Ajab Sidu

It is the one followed by the Fallata Malle (also Mallo). This group of Fulani originating from the present-day Republic of Mali and Burkina Faso, were led in the Maiurno's *hijra* by Shaykh Alfa Hashim. Groups of them settled on the Blue Nile (Maiurno, Hillat Al-Bir and Dar As-Salam), whereas their leader proceeded with a considerable number of them to the Hijaz (precisely Madina, where they now live as proper citizens). On the way, some of them settled in Kassala and its surroundings⁵⁰. The main stream of the Malle Fulani moved to the Gedaref area during the 1930s from Hillat al-Ber (an off-shoot of Maiurno) and Dar As-Salam. They settled in two main villages: Amara on the Setit River and Ajab Sidu⁵¹ on the Atbara River. They were gradually joined afterwards by others coming from Kassala and the Gash⁵² and some others coming back from the Hijaz. Two other Malle villages sprang out of Amara, i.e. Al Mirebi'a and Hillat Zakaria. It is noteworthy that in the case of Ajab Sidu, the first distinguished Malle Fulani figures to arrive there did not come directly from the Blue Nile, but rather from Tokar on their way back from the Hijaz⁵³. However, upon their arrival groups of their relatives moved from the Blue Nile (mainly Hillat al-Ber) and joined them.

The Zabarma (Songhai)

The majority of the Zabarma living in eastern Sudan probably descends from the members of the Malle Fulani *hijra* mentioned earlier. As the Malle Fulani, the head of their *hijra* continued to the Hijaz, whereas part of them remained on the Blue Nile (Shaykh Talha village, precisely Hillat Wad Hashim⁵⁴). In the 1910s the latter group, in its turn, proceeded from the Blue Nile to eastern Sudan and established itself in three base-stations: Mafaza and Abu-Digin on the Rahad River and Wad Jabir on the Setit River. Most of the subsequent Zabarma settlements either sprang out of these three base-stations or are linked with them in one way or another.

The western part of the state used to include only four exclusively Zabarma villages (Abu-Digin, Um Fila⁵⁵, Harbasa and Tarfa) which all, except for Abu-Digin, have been incorporated into the Rahad Project site. Abu Digin was created around 1914 by a group of people coming from Hillat Wad Hashim, (Maiurno) staying four years in Al Guwesi before establishing Abu Digin, where they were joined by people from Omdurman. From Abu Digin, they developed other Zabarma villages on the Rahad (Villages 9 & 10 of the Rahad Project) and Murabba'a, Al Mintiq and Kuna Zabarma in the eastern part. Most of the Zabarma settlements in the eastern part of Gedaref State are found in Fashaga Province. As

⁵⁰ There they are known as Mallo; they have partly adopted the Hadendawa (Beja) way of life cf. *Sudan Notes and Records* 9,2 1925 "Notes on the Fellata Melle of Kassala", p. 85.

⁵¹ Ajab Sidu predated their arrival; it was founded before the Mahdiyya by a 'Sudanese' bearing this name. Before it was an old Dabaniyya settlement know as Wadd Al 'Ammas.

⁵² According to colonial reports (MEM), the Melle Fulani arrived in the Gash in 1911 and in 1925 they got enough money to buy cattle.

⁵³ These include Shaykh Babikir Mohamed Ali, father of one of our informants, interviewed in Ajab Sidu, 11.3.1996. In the Hijaz, they were soldiers of the Sherif of Mecca. They left the Hijaz after the defeat of the Sherif by King Saud (1924-1925).

⁵⁴ Shaykh Talha here also stands for Maiurno; the latter village continued for a long time carrying the name of Shaykh Talha, where his people first stayed.

⁵⁵ Um Fila was established around 1930. See Gruenbaum 1979 and Galal Ed Din 1975.

many as nine of these settlements have been mentioned by our Zabarma informants. These are: Wad Jabir, Al-Bagbaga, Hillat Khalil, Al-Bahkar Gharb, Al-Mintig, Shashola, Murabba'a, Kajjama and Al-Hamra. Wad Jabir on the Setit River is said to have been founded around 1923⁵⁶. Its founder, Shaykh Abdel Momin, came with his people from the Mafaza area and stayed first in Aradib near Al-Tomat. They then obtained permission from 'umda Ahmed Wad Zayid of the Dabaniyya to found their own village of Wad Jabir. At present (1996), it includes 275 families (around 1,650 individuals). Al-Mintig on the Atbara River was also founded by a group of people coming from Mafaza (Abu Digin) under the leadership of Shaykh al-Nur Abbaker around 1923⁵⁷. They stayed for six years with the Ta'aisha before crossing the stream and separating from them. They got permission from the 'Umda al-Tayib Nimir and the *Nazir* Awad al-Karim Wad Zayid (Dabaniyya) to establish their new settlement. Later on people coming back from the Hijaz also joined them. Its present total population is about 2,000 people (352 families). Only three exclusively Zabarma villages exist in Gallabat Province: Kuna Zabarma, Um Gazaz and Wad Arud.

It is noteworthy that the Zabarma have strong links with the Hijaz, due to the fact that a large number of them either once lived there or still have relatives there. This aspect of their history turned out to have a strong bearing on the distribution patterns in the different Zabarma villages in the area. Being followers of Alhaj Umar al-Futi (and later his nephew Alfa Hashim), founder of the Tijaniyya tariqa in West Africa, all the Zabarma can be said to have left their homeland as fervent followers of the Tijaniyya order. But settlement in or linked to the Hijaz led to the initiation of some of them to Wahhabism, whose principles contradict sharply those of Sufism. For example, Wad Jabir used to be a large village with a considerable majority of Wahhabites (Ansar al-Sunna). But due to the above Wahhabism / Tijaniyya ideological dichotomy, all its Tijaniyya followers left the village; some of them founded the villages of Shashola and Um Gazaz, whereas others joined their brothers in the Tijaniyya villages of al-Bahkar and al-Mintig. The Wahhabites are now confined to the villages of Wad Jabir and al-Bagbaga. Social interaction among the Zabarma in eastern Sudan is in general and to a great extent governed by this ideological division. Friendly relations exist only between villages belonging to the same religious order; otherwise, relations between the Tijaniyya and the Wahhabite villages can be described as hostile.

The Borno (Kanuri)

The Borno settlements in Gedaref State are not as numerous as those of the other three W.A. ethnic groups, but population-wise the Borno seem to be more numerous in Gedaref State than the Zabarma. The small number of Borno settlements must be due to their more urban lifestyle⁵⁸. In Gedaref town a large Borno quarter is found, but none for the Zabarma. In the western part of the State, the main Borno villages are Burbur⁵⁹, Riwina and Qurn al-Azrag, with substantial Borno presence together with other ethnic groups in four other villages. In the eastern part of the State the main Borno villages are Magharif⁶⁰, al-Jira, Hillat Taybun in

⁵⁶ Bashir Abdel Momin Omer, 55 years-old, interviewed in Wad Jabir, 9.3.1996.

⁵⁷ Informations provided by a group of four villagers interviewed in Al-Mintig, 9.3.1996.

⁵⁸ In British records, Borno are considered as being among the oldest West African settlers in both Gedaref and Kassala towns. In some places, Borno are said to have been among the first settlers but were then outnumbered by other ethnic groups.

⁵⁹ With a population of about 1,200 people, including few Hausa and Fulani - a base-village out of which other smaller Borno settlements in the region developed. Cf. collective interview in Burbur, 14.3.1996.

⁶⁰ With a population of about 5,500 including Borno (38%-40%), Hausa and Fulani.

Fashaga Province and Hillat Borno and Tabarak Allah in Gallabat Province⁶¹. Otherwise, the Borno are found in small numbers in other villages of the region.

Like the Fulani, most of the Borno communities living in eastern Sudan originate from the Blue Nile, mainly Sennar and al-Hijeirat village (some 20 km north of Sennar). Some others were pilgrims who joined their kins on their way back from the Hijaz, after a short stay in Kassala⁶², whereas those living in Gallabat Province are said to have come from beyond the Ethiopian border⁶³. It is difficult to know the exact date of Borno settlement in the above villages. Burbur on the Rahad River, for example, is said to have been founded in 1924 by Shaykh Musa Mohammad (d. 1966). The first group of its inhabitants left Sennar under the leadership of Shaykh Musa and stayed first in Ab-Sheiba, West of Mafaza. After a long time (length not specified by the informant) and some problems with the Kawahla Nazir Yusuf Al Ais, the *Shaykh* got permission from the *Nazir* Musa Ya'goub to found this village (Burbur). Other people from many places (Sennar, Gedaref, Kassala, Ethiopia etc.) joined it afterwards⁶⁴. In 1949 people moved out from Burbur to other villages along the Rahad River, escaping heavy taxes⁶⁵. The first group of Magharif Borno (Fashaga Province) claim to have left Sennar together with their families around 1950; they spent about seven years in the Gezira Scheme site and 20 years in Sifawa before proceeding to the present village (established by the Hausa in around 1925).

From our data, it appears that different patterns of settlement took place in the western and eastern part of Gedaref State. The Rahad area was one of the first places for Fallata settlement in the Gedaref area and Mafaza appears to have been a major stop-over for different waves of migrants in the first decades of the 20th century. These settlements (mainly Hausa) continued to spread southwards along the Rahad River until the 1970s where West Africans were joined by a growing number of Western Sudanese. The economic development of Rahad, i.e. the development of mechanized and irrigated schemes, attracted a large labour force and villages are nowadays ethnically more mixed. Since the early decades of the condominium, there have been conflicts between the W.A. settlers and the local Arab tribes, like the Kawahla in particular in the northern part of the Rahad (see Hasterok, this volume). With the expansion of the Rahad Irrigated Scheme, most W.A. who were not recognised as 'proper' citizens were excluded from the tenancies and had to move southwards. Today the competition for land is increasing. In the eastern part of the State (especially in Sifawa district), W.A. settlement was more closely associated with the *hijra* migrants of the Blue Nile, particularly the Fulani pastoral clans which chose this area for its grazing opportunities. They were included within the Dabaniyya *Nazirat* which seems to have welcomed them in order to give some strength to a then depopulated and weak *nazirat*. The number of W.A. settlements around Sifawa shows little increase since the 1950s⁶⁶ but W.A still make up an important part of the population and succeeded to get their own *shayyakh khutt*. Many villages are still quite isolated, ethnically homogeneous and their population is still mainly relying on a "traditional" agro-pastoral

⁶¹ There is also Hillat al-Barnawi, but all the Borno left it except the family of the founder, which has already shifted to Hausa in terms of language and culture.

⁶² This applies to some Burbur people. See informant Abdullahi Ibrahim, 65 years-old, interviewed in Burbur, 14.3.1996.

⁶³ Precisely from a place called Galluj in Ethiopia. See 'umda A. Majidadi, interviewed in Sifawa, 11.3.1996.

⁶⁴ These include the family of informant Abdullahi Ibrahim, 65 years-old, interviewed in Burbur, 14.3.1996, coming from Kassala on their way back from the Hijaz, immediately after the Italian war.

⁶⁵ Information yielded by our three informants in Burbur.

⁶⁶ In the Sifawa district, 30 West African villages were recorded in 1950. In 1996, 35 West African villages were listed by our informants.

economy. These different situations have diversely affected the W.A. patterns of identification. But before we analyse the issue of identification, it is important to understand how W.A. settlements in this area have been perceived by both outsiders and insiders because those perceptions had in turns played an important role on W.A. social interaction with the neighbouring groups.

British policy towards West African in the Gedaref State: the outsiders' view

The settlement of W.A. in eastern and central Sudan has been largely interpreted as the result of the British colonial labour policy (Balamoan 1981, Duffield 1981, Hassoun 1952, O'Brien 1986 etc.). In short, the colonial authorities facilitated the settlement of the W.A. near the irrigated schemes or in agricultural areas facing a lack of local labour force. In the first stage, some of them were given land to accelerate their settlement⁶⁷. Later on, with the development of a local labour force, W.A. were used by the colonial authorities to maintain low labour wages (Hassoun 1952:88, Al-Shazali 1988:188)⁶⁸ or to put pressure on the tenants (Barnett & Abdel Karim 1991). Therefore they were a decisive tool in the colonial policy and they played a major role in the economic development of the Sudan, particularly in its agricultural production (Balamoan 1981, Davies 1964, Hassoun 1952).

The British position towards the settlement of the W.A. in Gedaref is well documented in the official records. These records show a fluctuation in the British Policy according to the economic needs and to the political priorities but also to the general administrative context and to the administrator's own personality⁶⁹. Their settlement in the Kassala-Gedaref area was a matter of contention among the different British officials. During the 1920s, colonial district commissioners and province governors (especially of Kassala and the Blue Nile) debated thoroughly on where to settle the Fallata and how to make the best use of them as a source of labour⁷⁰. W.A. immigrants were encouraged to settle in under-populated areas outside the Gezira Scheme, particularly in the Rahad/Dinder where they cultivated their own rainland plots and could be taken as seasonal wage labourers for the Gezira scheme (O'Brien 1986:900). It is within this context that in 1925 the Governor of Kassala Province requested Maiwurno to send his people to open the region of Atbara and Setit Rivers up to the Ethiopian and Eritrean borders (see Sifawa migration above). This

⁶⁷ According to Barnett & AbdelKarim (1991:46) : "Some were offered small holdings to cultivate *dura* outside the rotation area. Some of their sheikhs, as well as other, probably influential, individuals were even given tenancies to attract more people to come and settle around and form the nucleus of labour villages".

⁶⁸ Al-Shazali (1988:188) notes: "imported unskilled labour ...helped reduce wage rates for unskilled labour in general. This was particularly so because foreign unskilled workers, especially West Africans were willing to depress the wage rates to their lowest level possible".

⁶⁹ For more details on the different phases of British policy towards West Africans, see MEM p.41, Hasterok's paper in this volume, Balamoan 1981, Duffield 1981, 1983 & 1988, Hassoun 1962, Nasr 1980 p.5-15. Among the main records quoted by scholars for this topic are CS/66/8/57, BN 1/125/175 & 1/125/180 and KP 3/139/614 & 3/139/615, KP 4.1/14/81. In short the colonial authorities were first defiant towards people conceived as mahdist 'fanatists'. Then their labour value was recognised and they appeared as the only way of repopulating and developing some areas. But with the implementation of the Native Administration in rural areas in 1927 they were not considered as a 'native and local groups' and were put under 'Native Arab' authorities. Later on with the development of Sudanese Nationalism it appears that the British were more and more reluctant to give them citizenship and administrative rights in fear of fuelling 'Arab' complain against 'foreigners'.

⁷⁰ For example, while the Governor of the Blue Nile Province suggested "discouraging the settlement of Fellata in adjoining provinces, e.g. Kassala and Fung, where they are of less labour value to the country ..." the Civil Secretary believed that "Fellata labour is of importance both in the Gash and Tokar Delta ..." cf. from the Civil Secretary to the Governor, Blue Nile Province, Wad Medani, No. CS/66-D.70, dated 27th April 1930.

policy was at the time justified by the depopulation of the area and the Governor of Kassala Province considered that "the Upper Atbara is in no sense an Arab area. Gedaref, Mafaza and still more Gallabat are in places very thinly populated, and the natural increase seems to be inadequate to fill up and develop the country"⁷¹. But due to the implementation of the Native Administration policy⁷², the colonial reports continuously emphasised the idea that Maiwurno had little influence in the Gedaref area and that most of the Fallata agreed to be ruled by local *shaykhs* (MEM)⁷³. The administrative relations between the Gedaref W.A. and the Blue Nile W.A. were cut and the W.A. remained under local '*umudiyya* and *khutt*. In 1932 they were administered by five *Nazir* in the Southern Gedaref District as follows:

- 1- Shaykh Hamad Abu Sin – Shukriyya, Abu Sin *Khutt*
- 2- Shaykh Awad Al-Karim Wad Zayid - Dabaniyya, Dabaniyya *Khutt*
- 3- Shaykh Musa Ya'goub – Borgu, Southern *Khutt*
- 4- Shaykh Abdullah Bakr – Fur, Central *Khutt*
- 5- Shaykh Adam Sharaf – Fur, Gallabat *Khutt*.

For each *nazirat*, the W.A.. only had village *shaykh* to represent them and were supervised by the local '*umda* (Ta'aisha, Humran etc.) except for Majidadi's '*umudiyya* in Sifawa. However there are evidences from the colonial reports that in the Southern part of Gedaref area W.A. asked many times to have their own administrative divisions.

During the Condominium W.A. were thus recognised as efficient workers but maintained more or less as a non-local group and were therefore not granted local political rights in the framework of the Native administration, except for a few cases. In the Gedaref area their status as 'foreigners'⁷⁴ was debatable during the Condominium period. They were not considered as total 'foreigners' as Yemenis, Abyssinians, Egyptians or Indians were by the British Administration but nevertheless their status remained ambiguous. However before Independence, their image as foreigners was further reinforced among the Sudanese nationalist movement that considered them as being tools of the colonial policy against Sudanese unity⁷⁵. The introduction of the Nationality Law of 1948 excluded most of them from Sudanese citizenship⁷⁶ and British administrators did not encourage Westerners to apply for citizenship⁷⁷. They were therefore excluded from salaried appointment and deprived of land rights and tenancy in governmental schemes (Barnett & AbdelKarim 1991) in spite of their agricultural skills.

⁷¹ A report by the Governor, Kassala Province, 25th June, 1925, K.P 4.1/14/81, NRO.

⁷² See Duffield 1981:47 and R. Hasterok's paper in this issue concerning Maiwurno's declining influence after the implementation of the Native Administration policy.

⁷³ "Many Fulani in Kassala Province look to Maiwurno as a sort of spiritual leader, but others regard his authority as confined to natives of Sokoto, while many Hausa in the Sudan are anxious to escape the domination of the Fulani...."Some of the Westerners regard Maiwurno as a sort of spiritual head but few have shown any desire for his temporal powers to be extended in their direction." (MEM:50)... "Villages of W.A. present few difficulties to executive authorities. Settlers are chiefly concerned with the natural advantages of the sites in which they settle, and as they appear content to accept the authority of indigenous chiefs, there is no need for the promotion of members of their own race to positions of responsibility. " (MEM:57).

⁷⁴ According to Duffield (1981:17): "During the colonial period, however, the separation of Nigerian and other western settlers from the indigenous Sudanese became an important feature of British rule and administration."

⁷⁵ This analysis is for example reflected in Balamoan 1981:247- 260.

⁷⁶ The 1948 Sudan Ordinance defined as Sudanese by descent any person who had been resident or who had ancestors residing in Sudan before 1887. The Nationality Act of 1957 repealed the Sudan Ordinance but did not alter the basic substance of the law. Under Nemeiri's regime, the date of 1887 shifted to 1924. In 1995 a law was proposed in the National Assembly to shift the date to 1956.

⁷⁷ The 1956 Ordinance gave the possibility of applying for citizenship to any person who had been residing in Sudan for at least ten years, providing he was of good character and had an adequate knowledge of Arabic. Owing to pressure from the nationalist movement, the Ordinance was not applied (Duffield 1988:129).

While most researchers tend to describe W.A. settlement in the Gezira-Gedaref area as a process firmly directed by the colonial government, the British records tend to indicate that W.A. settlement was largely left to individual choice: "They (W.A.) provide almost the only means of repopulating the fertile areas of Tegele, the Fung Districts and the Southern Districts of Kassala Province. Nothing positive has yet been done to influence settlers to choose one of these places rather than another, and their present distribution has therefore been guided by their own preferences only." (cf. MEM p. 56). This view expresses the colonial conception of W.A. migration understood as a natural phenomenon and a free individual choice connected with pilgrimage (Duffield 1988:127). W.A. self-representation largely reproduces this point of view⁷⁸. In our study, W.A. own perception has little to do with the general Sudanese perception of a manipulated labour force. They present the first settlers as pioneers looking for grazing and agricultural land, joining relatives or prestigious *shaykhs*, sometimes escaping urbanization and schooling and they rarely mention direct connection with the British.

W.A. perception of the settlement in the Gedaref area : the pioneering heroes of an open space.

West Africans always describe their settlement in the Gedaref area as an heroic and pioneering adventure⁷⁹. They all start by emphasising the wild state in which the first immigrants found the area and described it as "closed, black and ugly bush" populated by herds of elephants, hyenas and lions : "We used to come and construct our huts during the daytime and find them the following day destroyed by the elephants. We had to sit on a *rakuba* (grass-shed) knocking a tin the whole night in order to frighten the wild animals, especially elephants...The rivers were full of crocodiles... In order to fetch water from the river, we had to put heaps of thorns on the bank; crocodiles do not approach thorny objects, because they fear for their eyes"⁸⁰. The foundation of the early villages is portrayed as an epic undertaken by extraordinarily courageous people endowed with magical powers (*asrâr* "secrets") while at the same time praying the Almighty Allah for help: "We thus kept praying Allah, until through His might the area became clean and safe".⁸¹. Some founders, like Majidadi (the Fulani founder of Sifawa) became mythical heroes performing miracles (see above). In the Hausa narratives (especially among fishermen), a village could not be set up near a water-fetching site (*mushra'*) without the help of a *saykh al bahar* (lit. "a King of the River") who had the religious and magical power to "tie up the river", i.e. to neutralise the dangers of the river with magic incantations. It was only after that procedure that ordinary people would settle and clear the area for farming or grazing. Therefore many W.A consider that they were the only people able to settle in such wild areas, thanks to the power of their *shaykhs* and that later on, the other groups (and the pastoral Arab groups in particular) benefited from their courage and started to permanently settle.

W.A. rarely mention specific agreements with the colonial administration except for the case of Sifawa and related settlements. In this specific case, they consider that their settlement was meant to repopulate the area and to protect the eastern border from Ethiopian expansion. In the same line, settlers usually do not mention any settlement in reference to

⁷⁸ For example Yamba (1988) describes how Hausa labourers in the Gezira conceived themselves in terms of permanent pilgrims who prefer seclusion and accept hardship. Labour is here seen as one of a pilgrim's duty.

⁷⁹ The same applied to the Fulani people interviewed by Hino (1986) in Roseires.

⁸⁰ Abdel Razig M. Adam, 72 years-old, interviewed in Wad Al-Hilew, 8.3.1996.

⁸¹ Osman H. Mohammad, 83 years-old, interviewed in Mailaga, 8.3.1996.

Maiurno except again for the case of Sifawa and related settlements, where Fulani elders explain why their father responded to the Maiurno call: "My paternal uncle named Ali Khalifa went and got a warrant from the Sultan (Maiurno) to come and see the Gedarif inspector and be allowed on the new land. The Sultan's letter with a stamp on it is still in our possession. We moved with Majidadi to this area. But my father had a separate warrant and moved with his livestock, my uncle Ali Khalifa too had a separate warrant. (...) When we came, this land was under *'umda* Ali Al Ijel (Humran). Besides the Sultan's warrant, we also got a warrant from him (...). The first person to move from Maiurno was Majidadi, followed by my uncle (Ali Khalifa). They were cattle people who needed grazing lands, whereas the other tribes had no livestock. This is why they were the first to respond to the Sultan's call".⁸² One notes that, contrary to outsiders' perception, reference is made here to pastoralism and not to agriculture as a main cause of settlement.

All the then settlers mention their contact with the local *nazir* or *'umda* (either Dabaniyya or Humran in Fashaga Province, Ta'aisha in Showak, Kawahla or Borgo in Rahad) who gave them lands to settle on. Most of the time, relations with the Native authority and the local Arab groups at this earlier period are described as "good" or without "problems": "We don't have problems with the *'umda* and his people because they are the people who helped us to settle here. We sometimes have problems with ordinary Arab citizens who ask 'when did you arrive, when did you get land', but the *'umda* and the *nazir* don't accept these words and they never treated us unjustly, even with this question of *bildat* (clay land farm). They always said to their children that Hausa are courageous and straightforward people, religious people who built this area"⁸³. This discourse is echoed by the then Native Authorities: "The people discovered the land and found it fertile and suitable for farming and they came. Whenever people came, we gave them a site for a village and land for farming, and in this way we could conserve the land against the Ethiopian expansion. In appointment of a *shaykh*, his people usually agree upon him and they write to us and accordingly we endorse him. People come asking for a place of settlement, we usually direct them to a certain area. They go and see a water-fetching site and the farming land. If they like it, I give it a license. They never refer to the *nazir* or to the Inspector. They live peacefully and until now nothing blameworthy has come from them"⁸⁴.

In the W.A. perception this harmonious 'past' is contrasted to the present tense situation. Few references are made to early confrontations with local Arab groups in spite of evidences from official records⁸⁵. The only confrontation told by the settlers is the Abu Dres "incident" of 1958 caused by the first gardens along the Setit River: "We used to cultivate *juruf* on the bank of the Setit River. The nomadic Arabs complained to Nazir Abu Sin in Gedarif, who sent a police truck to set fire to the village of Abu Dres. They expelled us to Wad Al Hillew and the *'umda* Ali Ijel (Humran) raised a case in the High Court in Khartoum against Nazir Abu Sin. Abu Dres was the only village which was burnt."⁸⁶ Many people remember this incident as their forefathers were forced to leave Abu Dres and came to settle in other villages.

⁸² Adam Al *Shaykh* Adam, 89 years-old, Fulani, Hillat Talata, 10.3.1996.

⁸³ Suleiman O. Abdallah, Hillat Bello (Al Hawata, Rahad) 14.3.1996.

⁸⁴ Omda Ali Awad Ijeel, Humran born in Wad Al Hilew in 1910, Omda since 1937.

⁸⁵ See R. Hasterok's paper in this volume for the confrontation which occurred between the Kawahla and the W.A. in Wadd Al Obeid on the Rahad River in the 1930s. Many other clashes between farmers (including W.A.) and nomads are recorded in the Setit and Atbara rivers cf. NRO K1/78/348 'General grazing questions'.

⁸⁶ Informant Babikir Ibrahim Zakaria 8.3.1996, Wad Al Hilew. Abu Dres was about 30 km from Wad El Hilew. Up to now confrontations between former Nomadic group and farmers (mostly Fallata) are frequent (see Khalid et al, this volume for the Lahawiyin).

Religious reasons are sometimes said to have determined processes of settlement. People went to join a particular *shaykh* or religious teacher. "At that time we were not settled, our father wandered here and there looking for a living (...) and then my maternal uncle, coming back from the Hijaz, told my mother not to stay there, because the children will not study in the *khalwa* (Koranic school) in Sennar, they would enter the town and get spoilt. He said 'take them to Gedaref, there is a *faki* there whom I left coming from Tokar. You go there and the *faki* will come and he will teach the children. It is an open place, you can farm as you like. The *faki* named Mahmoud Abbakar actually came'. We left in the same year when (governmental) school was brought to Maiurno. We were not interested in it. We came as individuals, we were seven people, we were still young. The Faki Mahmoud arrived before us, he was our host. His *khalwa* was kept for us. (...) We did not go to Shikeiniba (Blue Nile) because they are Qadiriyya and our fathers followed the Tijaniyya *Tariqa*"⁸⁷. One has to recall that strict adherence to religious precept through *khalwa* attendance has been a key symbol of W.A. religious legitimacy in Sudan for decades. Each W.A. village had (and still has) at least a *khalwa*, while many still do not have a public primary school. The level of primary education is still very low but *khalwa* attendance is higher than among the Arab pastoral groups⁸⁸. Public education was considered as *kufir* ('blasphemy') until very recently (Abu Manga 1990)⁸⁹.

A very important feature of W.A. process of settlement in Gedaref State was the role played by family or clanic networks. The historical patterns of settlement described above indicate that family, clanic or ethnic clustering was the rule in most of the W.A. settlements. This family of clanic pattern played an important role in the maintenance of networks with far established relatives throughout Sudan. In fact, and up to now, people living in ethnical homogeneous settlements have been maintaining relations with relatives living in older or previous settlements. The relationship is mainly through visits, attending ceremonies, and matrimonial alliances. For many decades people of small villages and who had the economic means preferred to marry individuals living in these related settlements (even if separated by a long distance) than neighbours from outside groups. This is why relations were maintained between the Gedaref settlements and other settlements. With the increase of population, marriage within the neighbourhood is now the norm and new patterns of intermarriage are progressively emerging among the young generations. Relation with far established settlements tend to become looser.

Ethnic clustering is by no means specific to W.A. communities⁹⁰, although it has often been considered as a characteristic of W.A. settlements, (Birks 1978; Gruenbaum 1979; Hassoun 1952:82-83; O'Brien 1986:901; Warburg 1978:164; Yamba 1995)⁹¹. This tendency towards seclusion is either considered as a phenomenon imposed from the outside (because of language barriers or unfriendly relations with local groups, i.e. local ostracism) or as a self-imposed phenomenon. Former pilgrims are said to prefer to stay in separate and unmixed settlements because they want to remain secluded from urban influences, especially schooling

⁸⁷ Abbakar Musa Mohammad, 86 years-old, Fallata Mallo, Ajab Sidu, 11.3.1996.

⁸⁸ This fact has also been recorded by Galal Edin (1975) in his survey of Rahad.

⁸⁹ However a new educational trend is emerging and more children are sent to both *khalwa* and public school. Even the *khalwa* teachers will militate for public education. Islamic legitimacy and non-religious education are no longer considered as antagonistic and education is definitely viewed as a means for social mobility.

⁹⁰ A survey of the Rahad villages in 1975 (Galad EdDin 1975) showed that ethnic clustering was the common norm in many small villages, Arab and Fallata alike. Ethnic clustering was at the time dominant in West Rahad and Al Fau, while ethnic mixing was prevailing in East Rahad and Abu Sharo districts.

⁹¹ Birks (1978:117) mentions that in Darfur 69% of W.A. settlements were secluded compared to 30% of mixed settlements.

(Birks 1978; Yamba 1995). These arguments were sometimes recorded in our data; especially among the isolated villages of Upper Atbara.

In the eastern part of the State (Fashaga and Gallabat provinces), many villages still form ethnic, if not clanic, units. In Sifawa District (Gallabat Province), on the west bank of the Atbara River, we recorded 16 villages with a single W.A. ethnic group, 5 villages with two W.A. groups and two mixed settlements, including the town of Sifawa (Hillat Hakuma). In Fashaga Province we recorded 36 villages with a single W.A. ethnic group, 6 villages with two W.A. groups and a single mixed settlement (Wad Al Hilew). Along the Rahad River in Al Hawata Province, we recorded about 50 villages with a single W.A. ethnic group (i.e. mainly Hausa), 17 villages with two or more W. A. groups and 16 mixed villages. In the mixed settlements, members of each group tend to cluster. A good example of such cluster is provided by Barbar, a mixed village on the eastern side of the Atbara River. The map provided by a medical survey shows that the village is divided into four quarters, each one with a dominant group (see map)⁹². Generally speaking, in urban environments, W.A. tend to live together or to mix with western Sudanese, as is the case in Gedaref, Wad Al Hilew and Al Hawata towns.

In their historical narratives about their settlement in the Gedaref area, W.A. describe a number of features which are supposed to characterise the W.A. *vis a vis* the Sudanese (mainly Arab) local population and which explains their choice of settlement: courage and hard working, adaptation to an hostile natural environment, strong religious adherence, sticking to family or clanic unit; avoiding contact with outsiders and avoiding public participation. In many cases they consider that they were among the first settlers and that they coexisted peacefully with their few neighbours. The fact that they settled in a mostly 'wild and empty' area explains why the W.A. had no problems at the beginning with the local groups and could perform successfully their traditional economic activities (agriculture, herding and fishing). However they were to be confronted with the major changes of the seventies which led to their partial marginalization.

Economical and Social changes

Today W.A. in Gedaref State are living both in urban and rural areas of the Gedaref State⁹³. In many ways they present features similar to those of the W.A. of the Blue Nile but with more emphasis on agriculture⁹⁴. In the urban sector they are mostly (but not exclusively) involved in petty trade, skilled professions and wage labour (especially in the Gedaref crop market) while in the rural sector they are involved in what is generally labelled as the subsistence or traditional sector of agriculture⁹⁵ and in pastoralism for few Fulani groups. Since the 1970s the rural W.A. communities have been facing the encroachment of mechanized farming and irrigated schemes, the deterioration of soil and the increasing incursion of other nomadic Arab groups in search of water and grazing land.

⁹² We would like to thank Bruno Bucheton who undertook the survey of Barbar and kindly provided us with a copy of his map.

⁹³ According to the 1993's census, among the 170,022 WA in Gedaref State 60,193 are urban and 109,829 are rural. They represent therefore 13.74% of the State rural population and 15% of the State urban population. See appendix for the distribution at the provincial level (Gedaref, Nahar Atbara, Rahad and Gallabat Provinces).

⁹⁴ See Duffield 1981 for an economic analysis of the West African community of Maiurno.

⁹⁵ For a more detailed description of traditional agriculture among the small farmers, see Duffield 1981, chap III, for the Fulani of Maiurno, and O'Brien 1977 for the Zabarma of Um Fila. A general description of traditional agriculture in Central Sudan can be found in Tothill (ed) 1948; Simpson & Simpson in Craig (ed) 1991:257-259.

Up to the sixties, W.A. represented an important share of the Gedaref agricultural sector. Davies (1964) considers that W.A. settlers were the first sorghum producers in 1949, the Gedaref sorghum production making up one third of the national production. For this reason the Gedaref area was selected as the first area of expansion of mechanized agriculture⁹⁶. Ironically, this expansion was to be carried out later at the expense of local groups, including the W.A. In accordance with the 1970 Unregistered Land Act⁹⁷ all unregistered lands, whether cultivated or not, became the GOS property and got distributed. Many W.A. who neither had Sudanese citizenship nor land registration were de facto evicted⁹⁸. While most of the native pastoral groups, like the Humran in Fashaga, shifted to mechanized farming⁹⁹, very few Fallata farmers own today large-scale mechanized farms; e.g. only 8 individuals among the Wad Al-Hilew Hausa and 7-8 people in Sifawa own more than 5000 *feddans* each¹⁰⁰. But this size is still negligible compared to general large-scale ownership. Most of the unregistered land was thus distributed to rich merchants who now own between 60% to 75% of the total size of cultivated land in the eastern part of Gedaref State¹⁰¹. This of course limited any possibility of expansion of traditional farming. In Sifawa, the total size of land owned by the small W.A. farmers is about 6000 *feddans*, i.e. smaller than what a single merchant may own. In the Rahad area, very few Fallata were allowed tenancies in the Rahad Irrigated Scheme due to lack of certificates of citizenship and a number of Fallata villages were relocated outside the scheme¹⁰².

For those who remained in the "traditional" farming sector (i.e. the majority of the rural W. Africans), this type of agriculture like in many other places, is no longer sufficient to meet annual consumption needs¹⁰³ due to the decline in yield, the limitation of land and the cost of production for the last thirty years. In many areas, small farmers sold part of their lands, became indebted and sometime landless, and had to seek other alternative activities (share cropping, renting land, wage labour, etc.). Most of the small farms are not yet officially registered due to lack of the minimum size of land for registration (250fds), costs of registration fees, and procedural constraints due to lack of certificates of citizenship and farmers are always afraid to lose their unregistered farming land. However social and

⁹⁶ See Davies (1964:229): "the settlement of West Africans here was encouraged especially after the completion of the railways in 1929. The result was that by 1949 it was estimated that about one-third of the 100,000 tons of dura marketed in Sudan annually came from this area. The successful production of dura sale here, in a large measure by West Africans, was one of the reasons why it was chosen for the development of mechanized agriculture which is now revolutionizing the economy of the area".

⁹⁷ For the issue of mechanized farming in the Gedaref area, see M. Assal's paper in this volume and also Davies in Craig (ed) (1991: 308-338), Barnett & Abdelkarim (1991).

⁹⁸For the question of the land tenure system, see Simpson in Craig 1991 who discusses the introduction of the 1970 Unregistered Land Act.

⁹⁹ According to the Humran in Wad El Hilew : "The eastern region of W.El.Hilew has not less than 800 schemes and not less than 8,000 small farms. The majority of the Humran possess mechanized schemes. Formerly, farming was traditional and on small scales - 5-10 Fds. Later on it developed due to the introduction of mechanization. So, it became more rewarding than nomadism. This is why our people shifted to farming. " Interview in the Humran *'umda* house, Wad El Hilew 9.3. 1996.

¹⁰⁰ The Fulani *'umda* of Sifawa (A.O. Majidadi) owns up to 8,000 Fds., whereas the total size of land owned by all the small farmers in Sifawa is about 6,000 Fds. As a native administrator, the *'umda* was definitely quite aware of the value of land and well informed about the procedure of its official distribution as mechanized farms. Therefore, he could compete with the outside merchants and get a reasonable lot out of the surveyed land.

¹⁰¹ Informant Shu'aib Hassan Al-Shaikh, 50 years-old, interviewed in Hillat Talata, 11.3.96. See also M. Assal, this volume.

¹⁰² See Gruenbaum 1979 for a socio-economic comparison between Um Fila, a Zabarma village, and Hilali, a Kenana village in the Rahad scheme.

¹⁰³ The economic situation of traditional farming and its dependence on other resources have been largely debated for the last 20 years. See in particular Gaim Kibreab 1996 for the Gedaref area & Bernal 1991 for the Gezira.

economic deterioration appears to be greater for the former Fulani pastoral groups than for the Hausa farmers and large disparity with regard to land ownership among W.A. farmers has been recorded. The average Hausa farmers in Wad Al Hilew were able to increase the scale of their farming land¹⁰⁴ and those in Al Hawata specialize in horticulture (fruit trees' gardens) and flood-plains farming (*juruf*). Today *juruf* constitute the backbone of the Hausa economy in the Al Hawata-Mafaza area and make them one of the most dynamic groups of the area. On the opposite, the former Fulani pastoral groups in Wad El Hilew (cf. the Fulani Mallo in Ajab Sidu the Dagara clan in Abu Ushar and the Sisilbe clan in Mailaga) lost most of their cattle in the previous decades.¹⁰⁵ As former pastoralists, they first reserved only limited plots of land for cultivation. When they lost their herds in 1984, they could not increase the scale of their cultivated land because of the expansion of mechanized farming. Today the average land ownership in these areas is said to be around 25 *feddans*. This deteriorating situation has led to a number of changes in the life and status of these pastoral Fulani who were considered in the past, as the upper-class society among all the non-Arab ethnic groups in the area. Now they have lost their economic status and have been compelled under the new conditions to accept new socio-economic relations with the landlords and the farmers and even to accept inter-marriage with groups they previously regarded as 'inferior' (like the Hausa).

W.A. farmers have also been confronted to the nomadic groups in search of grazing land especially in the southern part of the Rahad area¹⁰⁶. Increasing confrontation with the Arab pastoral groups have been recorded since the 1970s : "Before the Kawahla were in Rahad, the Hamad in Dinder, the Shukriyya in Gedaref. Each *Nazir* was given precise orders for the *darib* (pastoral tracks). With the dissolution of the Native Administration you don't know who comes from where. Cattle came from other provinces and usurped our agricultural land. This year more than ten fights were initiated by people who are not locals, coming from Dinder"¹⁰⁷.

This increasing competition over land ownership linked with the problem of citizenship have accelerated ethnic mobilisation among the W.A. They realise that economic prosperity could not be achieved without proper political representation. One notices a growing trend towards supra-ethnic grouping among the W.A. communities of Gedaref State, especially in the Rahad area¹⁰⁸. Quasi or supra-ethnic groupings are here understood as "entities without a recognizable structure, but whose members have certain interests or modes of behaviour in common which may at any time lead them to turn themselves into definite groups" (Sherif Harir, 1983). This supra-ethnic grouping includes two levels, not always related. The first one is the social level and implies a wider degree of mixing, including intermarriage between the members of the different W.A. groups. The second is political and implies calling upon supra-group solidarity to attain political objectives. As it is often the case, it appears that the re-appropriation of a former foreign generic label (here Fallata) may

¹⁰⁴ The claimed average land ownership among the small farmers varies considerably from one place to another: among the average Hausa farmers in Wad Al Hilew district it is said to have increased from about 4 *feddans* to around 100 *fds* following mechanization. In Amara (Fallata Mallo), poor farmers are said to possess 15-20 *fds*, the average farmers 100 *fds*, the well-to-do farmers possessing up to 150 *fds*. In Magharif (mixed Hausa, Borno-Fulani) the average is 25 *fds* and can raise up to 100 *fds*. In Sifawa (mixed) the average is said to be 10-35 *fds* in Sifawa. All these figures have been given by villagers themselves in the above mentioned villages in March 1996.

¹⁰⁵ Two main events affected pastoral production, i.e. the cattle epidemic (black spots) of 1949-1950 and the drought of 1983-1985, with effects of varying degrees from one village to another.

¹⁰⁶ Al Shazali (1989) indicates that Rufa'a and other nomadic groups are progressively settling in South Gedaref.

¹⁰⁷ Suleiman O. Abdallah, Hillat Bello (Al Hawata, Rahad Province) 14.3.1996.

¹⁰⁸ The same phenomenon has been recorded among the Fallata communities in Northern Kordofan (Kevane & Gray 1995).

help in the creation of a quasi-ethnic grouping which enables members of small groups to establish a common identity to face other groups.

The issue of W.A. ethnic identification to the Fallata grouping

As previously mentioned, W.A. communities in Sudan have always been considered as one indiscriminate group and labelled under generic terms such as Takarir or Fallata in Arabic and Nigerians or Westerners in English. Generic terms are commonly used in Sudan and are not restricted to W.A.¹⁰⁹, but as ethnic labels they reflect both ethnic boundaries and stereotypes associated with these boundaries. The above terms stress the foreign geographical origin of these groups and refer to either black or non-Arab groups as opposed to the so-called Arab groups of Sudan. The term Takarir (sing. Takrur or Takruni) was widely used in the Middle East and the Hijaz to refer to black Muslims from West Africa and the Chad Basin (Al-Naqar 1972:3), in relation with the medieval Muslim kingdoms of West Africa¹¹⁰. It had a religious connotation linked with pilgrimage but since Independence its use as an ethnic label has been tending to disappear, replaced by the far more common term Fallata. Contrary to previous researchers (Duffield 1981, O'Brien 1986, Yamba 1995) we did not notice the use of the term Takari for Hausa self-ascription in the Gedaref area. We notice instead the wide use of the term Fallata. Formally a Kanuri term referring to the Borno Fulani (Bedin 1971)¹¹¹, the term Fallata was extended to other W.A. groups in Sudan. Until the beginning of the 20th century, the term Fallata was mainly associated "with Fulani religious sheikhs or other notables of W.A. origin" (Duffield 1988). At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the term Fallata became associated with the main religious and political migrations to Sudan (*Hijra* and Mahdist followers) led by famous Fulani leaders and joined by many other W.A. (Al Naqar 1988:78. Bedin 1996:16-19. Duffield 1981:28 & 1988:125). Thus it started to be applied to all Nigerian and West African immigrants and pilgrims. During the colonial period, the term Fallata became popular and associated with the W.A. labour force. With the opening of the labour market to Chadians and western Sudanese, it came to include all non-Arab Westerners. Therefore the social status of the term *Fallata* underwent a drastic decline compared to what it is alleged to have been during the Fur and Funj periods (i.e Muslim scholars), the turning point being the colonial period when it became associated with wage labour, i.e. low-class status. The term *Fallata* now conveys negative or ambiguous overtones stressing poverty, illiteracy, religious fanaticism and obscurantism, wandering in the streets, petty trades, low-status jobs, menial works, and so forth¹¹². For some authors, these stereotypes reflect the heritage of a slave-owning society where manual work has always been performed by either slaves or low-status people (Mc Loughlin 1962, Warburg 1978). For others, these stereotypes reflect a class division stemming from the introduction of a capitalist economy (Barnett & AbdelKarim 1991,

¹⁰⁹ Other generic terms include *habash* (people from the horn of Africa), *halab* (people of North African, Egyptian or Syrian origin, and also gipsy) *jallaba* (Nile riverain traders), *baggara* (Arab cattle pastoralists), etc. Even ethnic terms like *nuba*, *beja*, *ingessana*, *fertit*, *funj* etc. are generic labels applied to supra-ethnic groupings.

¹¹⁰ For a detailed account of the history of the name and its relationship with the old Muslim kingdoms of West Africa, in particular the Muslim kingdom of Senegal in the 11th century, see Al Naqar 1969, 1971, 1972, 1989.

¹¹¹ Borno Fulani call themselves Fulbe (sing. Pullo) and are called Fulani (Ful, Fula etc.) by many Europeans and by the Hausa. They are called Fulata, Felata by the Kanuri and Peul (Poular etc.) by the French. In the North-West (mainly Senegal), they are called Toucouleur by the French.

¹¹² The derogatory values of the term Fallata have been pointed out by many authors; see Barnett & Abdelkarim (1991), Birks (1978), Bedin (1996), Davies (1964), Duffield (1981, 1983, 1988), Kapteijns & Spaulding (1991), Mc Loughlin (1962), O'Brien (1986), Warburg (1978), Yamba (1995).

Duffied 1988, O'Brien 1986) and the creation of a large labour force and a landless colonial peasantry: "The development of cash crop agriculture led to an underclass of people who were ethnically labelled as Fallata and whose corporate identity derived to a large extent from their common experience and discrimination as wage labourers. The Fallata (...) are but one example of the social construction of ethnicity in the colonial period" (Kapteinjs & Spaulding 1991: 97). In the central region, the term Fallata is implicitly associated with migration and with the state of being 'non-Sudanese' (Duffield 1988).

These negative stereotypes influence the reaction of the W.A. themselves towards this label. Each group tends to react differently to the Fallata identification according to its historical background, economical status, place of residence, interaction with local other groups. Recent publications and debates reported in the Sudanese newspapers indicate that agreement on the content of the Fallata label among the W.A. is far from being reached and this label still raises up passionate reactions¹¹³. In the case of the Gedaref area, attitudes towards the Fallata label are determined by factors such as ethnicity, social status, degree of urbanisation, interaction with neighbouring groups and political mobilisation. Generally speaking identification and self-ascription to the Fallata label is stronger in the Western part of the State than in the Eastern part and this seems to be linked to the following factors: the dominant economic role of the Hausa in the Rahad area, the strong competition for land, the greater degree of mixing between the different W.A. group .

In the small homogeneous villages of the Eastern part of the State, one identifies firstly with one's clan and secondly with the larger ethnic group. In most of these villages, W.A. languages are still widely spoken and ethnic identification remains strong. Identification with other W.A. groups or with a wider W.A. grouping is loose. People agree that Fallata supra-grouping includes the Fulani, Borno, Hausa and Zabarma groups. They acknowledge a closer affinity between these four Fallata groups than with any other group. This affinity is described in terms of common regional origin (West Africa), sharing certain common cultural practices (for example, cultivation of millet or marriage ceremony), strict adherence to Islam (including the role of Coranic schools, i.e. *khalwa*), and membership in the Tijaniyya *tarika*. This closer affinity may or may not lead to deeper mixing through intermarriage according to ethnic or religious preferences. For example, the Fallata Mallo in Fashaga may agree to intermarry with other Fulani clans or with the Zabarma but intermarriage with the Hausa is claimed to be a new phenomenon. In Wad Al Jabir, the Wahhabist Zabarma refused contact with the other (Tijaniyya) Zabarma groups and have contacts with the surrounding Hausa, but there is no intermarriage. Around Sifawa, Fulani women may marry Hausa men. The Borno of Magharif claim links with other Borno communities and dislike mixing with other W.A. communities, etc. This complex pattern of relationship between the different W.A. communities in the eastern part of the State reflects the old historical divisions of the former homeland (West Africa). Therefore most of the villagers in the eastern part of the State dislike or refuse the use of the term Fallata for self-ascription. They know that they are labelled as such by outsiders but they would rather prefer to be called by their proper ethnic name. This position is particularly advocated by the old generations of the Borno, Fulani and Zabarma, and above all by the upper strata of these groups who do not want to be associated with the pejorative stereotypes associated with the Fallata label. However, the rejection of the term Fallata as a self-ascribed ethnic label does

¹¹³ In the introduction of his book, Bedin (1996) clearly states that the origin of his book was his reaction to previous papers published in Al Khartoum newspaper. Similarly Al Fallati (1994) justifies his publication by the need to explain the term Fallata. In his book, Bedin (1996) called for a distinction between the Fallata "proper", the Fulani Fallata and what he called *al Fallata al Hulamiyyun* (the Gelatinous Fallata), i.e. all the other ethnic groups included in this generic term.

not impede attempts towards political solidarity as we noticed during the 1996's elections for the National Assembly.

The trend towards supra-ethnic grouping at the social level mainly concerns the W.A. living in the semi-urban context of Al Hawata Province, along the Rahad, where the villages are close to each other. Contrary to the Fashaga area, many settlements are mixed and Hausa language is known and spoken by the other W.A. groups as Hausa people form the majority of the W.A. inhabitants. Intermarriage is frequent, especially between the Hausa and Fulani. All the people interviewed in Al Hawata Province had a positive reaction towards the Fallata label and agreed that it could be applied as ascription and self-ascription, regardless of ethnic origin¹¹⁴. They consider the trend towards Fallata supra-grouping as a positive process that will give them social and political weight. This positive reaction toward the Fallata generic label indicates a cultural and political realignment.

The different attitudes towards the Fallata label reflect the different strata of W.A. communities in Gedaref State. Along the Atbara, the communities originating from the *Hijra* are still quite isolated and maintain the pride of their origins. They do not want to be associated with the wandering urban poors or the land-less labour forces and they consider that they have nothing to do with them. Moreover, the leading Fulani families of Sifawa have been integrated into the framework of the Native Administration as rulers of the district. They do not need to fight for political representation. They claim good relations with all the other groups in the area, including the Arab and the Beni Amer, even if intermarriage is still rare. In Al Hawata, the bulk of the W.A. first came as small farmers and labourers and, as such, were certainly more subject to social ostracism from the part of the Arab pastoral groups. As labourers, they mixed with the other labourers, W.A. or Westerners. A number of W.A. settlers lost their land during the planning of the Rahad scheme in the 1970s. In this sense they are far closer to the landless wage labourers described by Kaptjeins & Spaulding (1991) than the Fulani elite of Sifawa. A new extension of the Rahad scheme is on the way, and the W.A. farmers do not want the process to be repeated. Caught between the expansion of the scheme and the pressure from pastoral groups, W.A. realised that they had to rely on themselves to defend what they consider as their rights regarding land tenure.

After decades of low political profile, the W.A. have decided to use the new political setting to their own benefit. In 1996 our field work coincided with the National Assembly elections and we noticed a strong political mobilisation among the W.A. of Gedaref State. Three W.A. MPs were elected for the first time¹¹⁵; administrative divisions and membership in local councils or associations were a matter of heated discussions and negotiations. Under the legitimacy of an Islamic phraseology and the umbrella of the *Inqadh* government, W.A. candidates were running to defend their own community's interests. In this context, the mobilisation around a Fallata supra-ethnic grouping (expected to also attract Western Sudanese' support) was understood as a powerful tool in the local political arena. Aspirations for more equality and social rights were expressed in terms of 'tribal rights'. This political mobilisation on an ethnic or quasi-ethnic basis was in tune with the general political trend prevailing in the country. Tribal or ethnic political mobilization including the formation of supra-ethnic grouping is not a new phenomenon in the Sudanese social and political arena¹¹⁶ even when officially 'tribal' political organizations were banned as it was the case during the Nemeiri's regime. Nowadays ethnic affiliation has become the main means not only for social identification but also for political mobilisation. 'Tribal' organisations received official

¹¹⁴ Duffield (1980, 1988) and O'Brien (1986:901) consider that the term Takari became also a generic self-ascribed label in the Gezira. In our data, the term Fallata has here replaced the term Takari.

¹¹⁵ The MPs are Abdalla Musa Meiga in Rahad Province (Al Hawata), Su'aib Hassan Al-Shaykh in Fashaga Province and Yousif Muhammed in Gallabat Province.

¹¹⁶ Cf. see among others Al Din (1982), Harir (1983) Kevane & Gray (1995), Morton (1989), Saavedra (1998).

recognition (either as League *rabta*, or as Association *jama'iyat*, or as administrative unit such as *Nazirat*, *'umudiyya* etc.) and participate in official political ceremonies. Each ethnic group is organising itself in order to legitimate its claim to form a polity entitled to administrative and political rights¹¹⁷. In this context, one witnesses the emergence of supra-ethnic groupings (Nuba, Beja, Ingessana, etc.) acting as social forces and political lobbies but also as social restructuring processes. It is within this larger context that the actual Fallata mobilisation in the Gedaref area must be understood. This doesn't mean that the four Fallata groups will merge in a single unit nor that class difference among the W.A. will disappear. The process towards supra-ethnic grouping is still at its beginning and it is not sure that it will survive the social and economic disparities prevailing among the W.A. The following discussion recorded in Sifawa in 1996 and concerning the values of the term *Fallata* illustrates perfectly this point.

- Mohammed Omer Majidadi, (48 years-old, born in Sifawa, *'umda* of Sifawa, head of the public court, member of the Gedarif State Assembly):

"I am quite uncomfortable with the generic use of the term Fallata, for many reasons. I, as a Fulani, have my customs and traditions. Through these customs and traditions I maintain my personality and my identity, and thus they help in retaining my dignity and respect. Those who share the term with me have their customs and traditions of which I am innocent; i.e. they have some blameworthy practices which are socially unacceptable. These practices will also be attributed to me. Therefore, I object to this generic use. I agree with this trend but to a very limited extent. Sometimes, because of my position in the eastern Region and in Sudan in general, occasions may arise when I find myself forced to cooperate with these (Fallata) tribes. But this is another level of relationship, purely political; it has nothing to do with ethnicity. So on such occasions, we may need to cooperate under the term Fallata. So at the politico-administrative level, one does not mind it, but as a tribe, I don't accept to have other tribes associated to me".

Adam Mohamed Khalil, (46 years-old, born in Sifawa, former teacher, chairman of the Mugran Rural Council) :

"In fact, these (Fallata) tribes are usually regarded as one thing. Sometimes when we speak of them as Fallata, they do not like it; they insist on being called by the name of their specific tribe. But their (negatively regarded) practices are attributed to us. This has not yet disappeared from the people's minds. Because whatever they do is attributed to Fallata and this cannot be taken away from people's minds. I think it is better for us to accept this generic use of the term, while everybody knows his exact race. We can also try to eradicate the habits of these people, while remaining under one tribal name. Later, the other small tribes, such as the Zabarma, may not stand all by themselves as a significant tribe. In my opinion, there are more advantages than drawbacks in the generic use of the term".

This dialogue reflects the fact that former antagonism (especially among the Fulani elite versus the non-Fulani 'commoners) is far to be overcome, each ethnic group fearing the domination of the others in case of a Fallata supra-grouping. However it shows also that a growing number of people, including 'reformist people' who want to change what they consider the 'bad habits' of some Fallata groups, consider that this supra-ethnic grouping is the only way to gain some political weight and to be recognised by others. The trend towards

¹¹⁷ See Casciari's, Bushra' and Khalid & al in this volume for the Ahamda, the Rashayda and the Lahawiyyin.

a recognition of a Fallata ethnic grouping is not associated with a particular political stream even if it is clear that Islamist rhetoric may help the legitimacy of such a grouping (by opposing for example the legitimacy of the good Muslims vs. the Arab legitimacy). This trend is more clearly associated with a kind of social awareness and a process of identification. It transforms a pejorative label imposed by the outside ('Fallata', i.e. non Arab foreigners) into a positive self-ascribed affiliation.

Conclusion

In this paper we provided a quite detailed description of the historical pattern of settlement of the W.A. communities in Gedaref State. In doing so, the aim was to show that their process of settlement was not a random and unorganised phenomenon but that one can trace back different patterns according to each W.A. group. Not all W.A. migrants were poor pilgrims nor poor labourers. The former Fulani pastoral clans were directly linked with the Fulani aristocracy of Maiurno and the Blue Nile with whom they kept a long-term relationship. West African communities in the Gedaref area appeared as both "old timers" and "newcomers". As "old timers", they came to settle in an uninhabited area and developed it into a rich agricultural area. But with the noticeable exception of Sifawa, they were never entrusted with *'umudiyya* or *dar*, i.e. with their own administrative unit. They remained under the administrative control of the local Arab tribes considered as the "original inhabitants" by the colonial rulers. Therefore while living in their own villages and cultivating their plots of land or establishing themselves in towns, they remained the "newcomers". The ongoing arrival of new W.A. migrants, looking for labour, followed by an increase in the number of western Sudanese reinforce their image of newcomers and foreigners, especially in the Rahad area. Social interaction with the local pastoral groups did not lead to strong intermingling although W.A. adopted many Sudanese customs.

The shortage of land and the increasing competition over access to economic resources and assets have sharpened ethnic divisions in the area. At the present time, W.A. have to face increasing pressure concerning access to land, and also regarding their rights and legitimate claims to be recognised as proper citizens of the area. It is within this broader context that each group tries to mobilise whatever it can to strengthen its political and economic position. With few exceptions, W.A. are not part of the big merchants and landowners class but they represent an active part of the productive elements of the agricultural market as farmers, field labourers and crop market labour force. As such, they represent a potential social and economic force and they have been advocating their economic participation in the area since the 1940s. It is within this context that affiliation towards a supra-ethnic Fallata grouping can indicate a recomposition of the social and ethnic balance in the area.

West African people are clearly aware of the social changes induced by the mechanization and commercialization of agriculture and they do not want to be the losers in this changing context. They try to consolidate their position in the area by creating new alliances among themselves and also with other groups (western Sudanese but also sometimes local Arab groups). They also develop self-praising discourses to justify their economic and social role in the area, including their labour input in agriculture and their long-standing Islamic behaviour. They describe themselves as devote Muslims whose forefathers did not hesitate to cross Africa. They consider that their Islamic legacy is worth the racial legitimacy claimed by the Arab groups (both pastoral and Nile riverain groups). In the last decade, they succeeded in considerably improving their political representation in the Gedaref area, reaching not only the level of the local councils but also the level of the National Assembly. Therefore they seem to be on the way to become a powerful group not only in demographic

terms but also at the political level. This, in turn is far to be well accepted by the other local groups.

Appendix

Population figures for W.A. in Gedaref State

- In 1912, the W.A. were estimated at 1115 persons in the Kassala-Gedaref district and were settled mainly in Kassala and Gedaref towns. (MEM).
- In 1919, several villages were reported around Gedaref, Kassala, Mafaza (2,000 persons mainly recently arrived Hausa) and on the West bank of the Rahad (MEM).
- In 1930, 20,000 W.A. were recorded among a population of 70,000. 10,000 were listed as "Nigerians". Others were quoted as Borgo mainly settled in Qala Al Nahal under Shaykh Musa Yagoub *khutt*.
- In the 1956 census, W.A. made up 20.4% of the population of Kassala Province (191,526 people). In Gedaref District, they represented 36% of the population, (113,064). This figure includes 'Nigerian tribes', 'West Africans' and 'French Equatorians'. 63,856 W.A. were in Gedaref South (44.3%) and 49, 223 in Gedaref North (28%).
- The 1993 census recorded only 170,022 "Nigerians" among a population of 1,148,262 for Gedaref State (16%). But strangely enough, 178,483 people were reported to speak a West African language! The category of western Darfur includes groups previously labelled as W.A. or French Equatorians such as the Borgo. In the Gedaref State, 'Nigerians' were localised as follow in the four provinces.

Province	Rural	Urban	Total
Gedaref	40,42 %	22,31%	30,34%
Nahar Atbara	0,27%	7,83 %	2,50%
Rahad	9,94%	20,77%	11,49%
Galabat	4,34%	9,93%	4,68%

These above figures can be compared to some other provinces in Northern Sudan

Province	Rural	Urban	Total
Kassala	11,61 %	23,62%	15,71%
Dinder	48,20%	29,16%	44,46%
Sinja	15,17%	31,07%	19,44%
Damazin	49,94%	15,06%	37,48%
Roseires	18%	29,66%	20,79%
Um Ruwaba	11,27%	18,74%	12,29%
Rashad	31,60%	13,87%	28,27%
Dilling	15,16%	3,60%	12,78%
Kadugli	12,4%	5,33%	11,36%

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