

## **Negotiating Access to Ancestral Land in Nairobi: The Case of the Nubians of Kibera**

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The Nubians of Kenya, until recently considered stateless, have been struggling for title deed for the land in Nairobi known as Kibera since their ancestors, soldiers in the King's African Rifles and their families, were settled there by the British in the early twentieth century. Situated on what the Government considers Government land, Kibera is one of the most well-known and populous informal settlements in Nairobi, making this claim to perceived ancestral land a particularly controversial one. This paper draws on a semi-ethnographic study of the Nubians' place in Kenya, conducted in 2009, and describes the Nubians' relationship to Kibera, or Kibra as it is known to them, and the activities undertaken to secure it with a communal title deed. The paper analyses the negotiations around access to this land in light of pre-existing tribal homelands, and argues that this land system compels the Nubians to struggle for a homeland of their own, at least partly so they can consider themselves and be considered by others as Kenyan. By drawing on theories of autochthony, rootedness, sedentarism and place, the paper makes explicit the connection between cultural practices related to the land, political practices related to land rights, and identity. A specific connection is drawn between these practices and the importance of collective recognition for ethnic groups and their land rights to guarantee a secure sense of belonging in Kenya.