

***Slave – A Question Of Freedom***  
adapted from the book *Slave* (Virago Press)  
by Mende Nazer and Damien Lewis



Mende Nazer, 2024 (photo credit J Ribero)

Born and raised in the Karko tribe in the remote Nuba Mountains in Sudan, Mende Nazer was abducted along with 30 other children and sold into slavery at the age of 12.

In 1992 she was captured when Arab raiders attacked her village in the middle of the night. They rode in on horse back with flaming torches, burnt the houses made of mud and straw, murdered men and women and stole the children. Her best friend Kheko was killed. The terrified children were taken to an army camp and then driven thousands of miles away on the back of an open truck to the capital city Khartoum in the North of Sudan. There they were sold as slaves by an Arab slave trader. A rich woman called Rahab ‘bought’ Mende.

She was given a new name by her master, “Yebit,” which means, “black slave.” Kept in a shed, without any heating, she worked seven days a week, from first thing in the morning until last thing at night, with no holidays. Mende cooked all the family’s meals, cleaned the house and looked after her master’s young children. She was only given left-overs and scraps to eat and had to sit on a stool in the corner of the kitchen. For all the time that Mende was kept as a slave she had no rights and did not know if her family were dead or alive.

When she was 18 Mende was trafficked to London to work for high ranking Sudanese diplomat. They promised to take her home to Sudan but they lied. When the family went back to Sudan themselves on holiday she was left with a Sudanese family who treated her with kindness. She was allowed to walk to the shops on her own and there she approached people in the street to ask for their help. She finally found someone who listened to her story and believed her and with the assistance of sympathetic Sudanese people living in London, and journalist Damien Lewis she was able to plan her escape.

In September 2000, seven years after she had been captured she escaped, only to face another two year struggle for asylum.

During this time she wrote her best selling book *Slave* with the help of journalist Damien Lewis who had made documentaries in Sudan about slavery and whose family had befriended her. Initially her asylum application was turned down because the government said that slavery didn't constitute persecution. However, her book had become an international best seller and there was a media campaign backed by Baroness Cox in the House of Lords and eventually she was granted asylum. She became a British Citizen living and working in London as a hairdresser. She met and married her husband Yasin who is also from the Nuba Mountains but was living in America as an American citizen. Her dreams of becoming a doctor were shattered but after many years of study and hard work she qualified as a nurse. Mende joined her husband in America where she now lives and works as a nurse. She also campaigns all over the world for others who are less fortunate than herself.

*Slave* the book is a story that takes the reader on an incredible journey from the remote villages of the Nuba Mountains to the very heart of the British and Sudanese Governments. A constant presence throughout the book is the Nuba culture, which after many years of Civil War, is now seriously threatened with extinction. Mende Nazer is a remarkable, beautiful, young woman, who with her co-author, Damien Lewis, has given a voice to the voiceless and to a lost generation of Sudanese children and adults sold into slavery.

*Slave* by Mende Nazer and Damien Lewis is published in Great Britain by Virago Press.