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The American University in Cairo

School of Humanities and Social Sciences (HUSS)

**On Displacement and Music: Embodiments of Contemporary Nubian  
Music in the Nubian Resettlements**

A Thesis Submitted to The Department of Sociology, Egyptology, Anthropology

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
The degree of Master of Arts in Sociology-Anthropology

By Fayrouz Kaddal

Under the supervision of Dr. Hanan Sabea

Fall 2020

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# Abstract

Between 1961-1964, an estimated number of 113'000 Nubians, who were living south of the site of the Aswan High Dam, the area now beneath Lake Nasser, and Wadi Halfa, north of Sudan, were displaced to an area near Kom Ombo, 20 kilometres away from the Nile and 50 kilometres north of Aswan. This major project of resettlement occurred for the construction of the Aswan High Dam, Nasser's signature mega-project. The 1961-1964 displacement was the culmination of earlier waves of relocation that Nubians witnessed during their recent history. In 1902 the British constructed the Aswan (lower) Dam by the first cataract in order to maximise the benefit from regulating the water of the Nile. This smaller dam and its subsequent heightening in 1912 and again in 1933 resulted in population relocation which fed into a pattern of Nubian emigration towards the cities of Cairo and Alexandria. Such pattern was already a feature of Nubian social life during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and was mainly motivated by seeking employment opportunities.

In this thesis, I study the relationship between displacement and music in the Nubian context. I focus on Nubian musical practices in the displaced village of New Toughka, Kom Ombo, where my ancestors were relocated in 1964. I also examine Nubian music available immediately prior to the 1964 displacement, as well as popular Nubian music.

There are limited recordings, and even less scholarly studies available on Nubian music, prior to the 1964 displacement: despite the anthropological and archeological studies by various researchers and institutions right before and during the displacement, music was not a significant consideration throughout this period. However, Countess Anna Hohenwart-Gerlachstein made numerous audio recordings in various villages of music and songs during her two journeys to Nubia in 1962 & 1963. The recordings, which are held at the Phonogram archive of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna, are among the earliest field recordings of Nubian music to be made, and cover the period immediately before the displacement, including recordings from the village of Toughka, the primary site of my field research.

By analysing Nubian music archived, joining music practitioners from both villages and engaging as a musician in their various events and locations, whether in weddings, concerts, or production studios, I ask what is the relationship between displacement, memory and music in the context of Nubian displacement. How years after the Nubian resettlement project, music continues to be an "archive" and a living historical memory of the displacement? What role does music play in shaping the younger generations' understanding of "Nubian-ness"? How do spaces and temporalities influence people's understanding of 'Nubianness' and musicians' practice of "Nubian music"? And finally, how do the socio-economic and political contexts, as well as the development of the music globally, contribute in shaping the different constructs of Nubian culture, musical practices and identities.

# Introduction

I walk in the village searching for clues. I have been searching for almost all my life. Perhaps a sign or a message from my ancestors. A clue for how did this all happen and an explanation for the now. How did I become Alexandrian ? How somewhere in my soul Nubia exists?

An old lady sat on the floor. She was recommended to be the perfect informant. Like many others, she has lived through the displacement. She had stories and memories to share. But she didn't give me any new information. I was about to say goodbye and leave. Until she asked me again for my name. "You are a member of Kaddal ?", she asked. I answer "Yes". In a very relaxed pose she looked at me saying: "Your ancestors came here in the first ship, I was in the last one." I was left dazed, content and unsure.

Nubians are an ethnic minority living along the banks of the Nile river between south of Egypt and in North of Sudan. They are known to be descendants of the ancient Kingdom of Kush. The Sykes-Picot agreement in 1916 between France and the United Kingdom has divided Nubia between Egypt and Sudan, regardless of any ethnic consideration. Nubians are divided into two main ethnic groups the Fadekka<sup>1</sup> and the Kenouz. Due to the Nile river, being a major trade route, throughout history more groups have migrated and settled in Nubia, such as the Arabs of *Olaikat* ( I develop this theme more in Chapter 1). In the 20th century and where this thesis is mostly concerned, Nubians have been experiencing waves of migration and displacement repeatedly, for regulating the Nile flood, maximising usage of water and land farming, as well as generating hydro-electric power. In 1902 the British-Ottoman constructed the Aswan (lower) Dam by the first cataract. The Aswan Dam went through two phases of heightening one in 1912 and again in 1933. In each of these three dates the Nubians had to move their homes, leaving their agriculture lands to drown under the Nile and move uphill. Until in 1964 and under President AbdelNasser's government, an estimated

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<sup>1</sup> According to Menna Agha, a Nubian scholar Fadidja means (Fifth section) Fa (part) dija (number 5) it is an historical administrative designation and not an ethnic one, that's why there are different ethnic groups under this term. In this thesis I make a conscious decision to use the word Fadekka instead of Fadidja, based on how Nubians pronounce it in the displaced villages today.

number of 113'000 Nubians in Egypt alone, had to be relocated to a new area, near Kom Ombo.

The major relocation project was due for the construction of Aswan High Dam that has resulted not only in drowning temples and archeological sites, but also the drowning of 40 Nubian villages of *Fadekka*, *Kenouz* and Arabs of *Olaikat*, under what is now Lake Nasser. Sudanese Nubians in Wadi Halfa as well had to be relocated to new areas, New Wadi Halfa, due to the construction of Aswan High Dam that has also drowned Sudanese Nubian villages in Wadi Halfa. The construction of the Aswan High Dam was President AbdelNasser's gateway and promise to Egypt for entering modernity, development and prosperity. In his speeches AbdelNasser promised Nubians that the relocation would offer them a better life and future, more families reuniting through work opportunities in Aswan and Kom Ombo. However, the hardship that Nubians faced during the resettlement phase were massive.

In this thesis, I study the relationship between displacement and music in the Nubian context. I do so as a descendant of Nubian family who have been displaced in 1964, as well as a practicing musician. My research questions focuses on the following:

## Research Questions

- What is the relationship between displacement, memory and music in the context of Nubian displacement?
- How years after the Nubian resettlement project, music has been a form of archive and a living historical memory of the displacement, by that continuously shaping the younger generations' understanding of "Nubianness"?
- How do spaces and temporalities influence people's understanding of 'Nubianness' and musicians practice of "Nubian music"?

- What does constitute “Nubian” music and what does not? What are the different factors of socio-economic, political and technological advancement contributing in shaping this “Nubianness”?

## Literature Review

By studying literature relevant to this project, I have reviewed three bodies of literature: Nubian displacement and resettlement, displacement and music, and finally memory and music.

In reviewing the literature available on **Nubian displacement**, I focus on the ways in which the scholarly work addresses music. The Nubian displacement has been widely researched amongst scholars from different disciplines and practices through the work of Scudder (2016), Kennedy (1977; 1978), Fernea and Fahim (1973; 1974; 1975; 1977; 1981; 1983) and more especially in the period right before the displacement from 1960 to 1964, the period after the resettlement from 1970 to 1981, and again in the last four years.

In the *Encounters of Nubia, The Story of the Nubian Ethnological Survey 1961- 1964*, Nicholas S. Hopkins and Sohair R. Mehanna look back at a major research project commissioned by the Social Research Center in the 1960s. The scholars explain the anthropological methods and framework used at the time of the resettlement anthropology, arguing for “the concept of salvage anthropology, based on the urgency of preserving a record of a culture about to disappear”, “a ‘culture’ (...) consisting of isolable traits” (Hopkins & Mehanna, 2010, p. 14), and “of the vanishing country”(Hopkins & Mehanna, 2010, p. 283). In the case of Nubian resettlement, the old villages of Nubia were threatened to be submerged under what is now Lake Nasser, leaving social scientists, anthropologists and archeologists in a moment of panic to ‘salvage’ whatever they can save and/or document. The Nubian Ethnological Survey was a major research project led by Robert Fernea (Nets and Anchors) to conduct surveys in all Nubian villages, as well as communities of Nubians living in the city. Staff recruited for this project were anthropologists from diverse areas of interests:

irrigation and development, family and kinship, linguistics, development and construction of dams.

However, none of them was interested in music.(Hopkins & Mehanna, 2010, p. 46) Music is

addressed by Anna Hohenwart-Gerlachstein, an Austrian anthropologist who has joined the Nubian

Ethnological Survey in the 1960's in order to study the Nubian language and culture.

"Hohenwart recorded aspects of the culture using a camera, tape recorder, and notebook. The recordings have been deposited in the Phonogram Archive of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna. They include folktales, texts and also music. (...) Hohenwart also collected over one hundred items of Fadija material culture in the period before the relocation." (Hopkins & Mehanna, 2010, p. 46).

As part of the Nubian Ethnological Survey Hohenwart-Gerlachstein's collection offers a valuable,

and seemingly unique archive of Nubian music before the displacement. In her essay "Field

Research and Training of Autochthonous People", Hohenwart-Gerlachstein points to the

International Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) Regional Nubian Center's

efforts, towards the end of years 1990's and early 2000's, to collect material on non-physical

heritage, including music.(Hopkins & Mehanna, 2010, p. 285)

Despite the fact that the Nubian Ethnological Survey offers valuable studies on how the displacement

had happened and after the move, and particularly Hohenwart-Gerlachstein's recordings which

point out how language and music are intertwined, the absence of direct efforts to record, describe,

analyse and document the music and lyrics of the Nubian villages<sup>2</sup> before the displacement leaves

me curious whether in the 1960's anthropology believed in studying music as a tool to understand a

particular culture? Or research "done in areas that are in danger of great changes"(Hopkins &

Mehanna, 2010, p. 281) thought that music is able to survive and resist change? In times of crisis

when anthropologists are concerned with salvaging a culture from disappearance what has been

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<sup>2</sup> Though music features in Hohenwart-Gerlachstein's recordings, her focus was to study language, not music.

saved and what has been left out? Or are there other elements effecting the lack of knowledge around Nubian music other than the salvage approach in anthropological practices?

In *The Nubian Exodus*, Hassan DafAllah, (Daf' Allāh, 1975) a Sudanese civil engineer placed by his government to be in charge of the 1964 displacement in Wadi Halfa, narrated his experiences of displacement. His book is divided into two sections. Based on the author diaries, the first section describes the old town of Wadi Halfa, Nubians ways of life, their traditions, ecology and land economy. The second section, talks about the process of displacement with all its humanistic problems up to the evacuation of the inhabitants to the New Wadi Halfa. The author's special positionality as a civic practitioner allows him to provide valuable information, narrating the administrative and practical aspects of the Nubian displacement in Sudan, yet he is not concerned with Nubian art in relation to the resettlement project.

John G. Kennedy, is a cultural psychiatrist and psychological anthropologists who extensively contributed to the Nubian Ethnological Survey. In *Nubian Zar Ceremonies as Psychotherapy*, he describes a very unique and particular moment of the *Zar* ritual practiced amongst Nubians. Despite that the dynamics of the *Zar* revolves around music, he only gives a brief description of the instruments used and the structure of the songs sang in such events, which is very important in understanding the relationship between psychology, rituals and music for Nubians. It would have been of great importance to delve into the lyrics and the texture of the music in relation to the *zar* ceremony and its efficacy in healing. (Kennedy, 1967)

Thayer Scudder a development anthropologist, has spent most of his life studying the impact of building dams on the populations living in river basins in Sri Lanka, Egypt, India, China and Zambezi. His work on the Nubian displacement and resettlement; (Scudder, 2001, 2016) is very constructive in thinking about the sociological and agricultural impacts of dams and displacement inside and outside Egypt.

In *Hikayat Shaab - Stories of Peoplehood*, Alia Mossallam, talks about Nasser's politics in Egypt through songs in the duration of 1956 and 1973. In Chapter 5, the anthropologist questions Nubian/Arab identity, what does it mean to be Nubian? What does it mean to be Nubian living under the Nasser regime and forced to give up one's home, believing it is for a national general benefit and cause for Egypt? Mossallam collected in the village of Gharb Soheil in Nubia, unrecorded songs that were sung before the Aswan High Dam was built as well as during the move. In the proposed project, I intend to engage with Mossallam particularly concerning the relationship between displacement, music and the construct of "Nubianness" in collective memory. (Mossallam,2012). I also would like to depart from Mossallam's work to delve deeper in the analysis of music from a compositional as well as lyrical perspective.

Only while writing up this thesis that I have come across a MA dissertation by Regan Lyle Homeyer, from The University of New Mexico, titled "Sounding The Nile: River Politics, Environment And Nubian Musical Expression", May 2020. Homeyer's amazing work addresses very much similar questions to this thesis, especially that her work is inclusive of Nubians living in the diaspora, particularly the US. In Egypt, her fieldwork departs from Elephantine Island in Aswan, struggling to do fieldwork and access the displaced villages of Nubia. In this thesis, I engage with Homeyer's theoretical concepts and fieldwork in order to build upon them.

There is a wide literature produced around **displacement and music**. The work of Levi & Scheduling (Levi & Scheduling, 2010) addresses the dichotomy between displacements and mobilities on one hand and musical practices in Europe, by case studying Jewish community living in Palestine, Irish diaspora and German musical practices in Exile. McCredden (McCredden, 2007) offers a study of Australian popular song lyrics by focusing on understandings of belonging and home. AbdAllah Shamo (Saleh,2016), Chuen-Fong Wong's work (Wong, 2013) examines the relationship between displacement and musical practices amongst the Uyghur people, a minority ethnic group living in



northwest China. Angela Impey discusses questions on mobility and belonging through studying Dinka songs in South of Sudan as well as in diaspora (Impey, 2013). The only scholarly work available on displacement and Nubian music is produced by Moustafa Abdel al- Qādir (‘Abd al-Qādir, 2017).

In *أثر تهجير النوبيين على طقوس دورة الحياة* *The Impact of Nubian displacement on Life Cycle Rituals*, Moustafa Abdel Kader researches the impact of the Nubian displacement of 1964 on rituals and traditions related to child birth, marriage and death. In chapter 6: *المظاهر الاحتفالية* *The Festive Manifestations*, the author gives a detailed description of Nubian jewellery, songs and rhythms. (‘Abd al-Qādir, 2017).

Another work that addresses Nubian music, though not in relation to displacement is *موسيقى مصر و السودان* *Music of Egypt and Sudan* by AbdAllah Ibrahim Saleh, a practicing musician and a scholar born in 1961 in Sudan. He focuses on documenting the different beats, rhythms and songs that are unique to the Nubian music in Egypt and Sudan, as well as providing a bibliography of the most famous Nubian singers from both countries. (Saleh,2016). In this thesis, I depart from these two studies to think of the relationship between music and displacement as something that is always changing through time, space and people’s practices, something that is in flux and fluid. Moreover, I think of musical practices including, but not limited to, professional and/or commercial musicians and singers. Yet I think of musical practices as a communal social activity, where the musician as well as the audience are participants in the creation of music.

In *Music and Displacements: Diasporas, Mobilities and Dislocations in Europe and Beyond*, Eric Levi and Florian Scheduling edited a rich book on displacement and music focusing on the European continent in the aftermath of World War I & II. The book critiques earlier methodologies for ignoring historical facts related to displacement and trauma in studying music. It also looks at music not as static concrete, but rather something that is fluid and particular to the practitioner and his/her

historical background, which offers a useful understanding of musicological and ethnomusicological ideas. By focusing on experiences of displacement and music in the European continent only, through following composers and musicians throughout their careers, I would have appreciated more insight into their relationship with the wider society and the everyday activities and struggles (Levi & Scheding, 2010).

In *Southern Borderlands: Music, Migrant Life, and Scenes of a “Mexican South”*, Alex Chavez tracks musicians crossing borders between Mexico and US, weaving into his account historical, political, and social lives of Mexican migrants to the US. Although Chavez’s work offers detailed information on the surrounding scene, the author talks about migration in the broad general sense, thus surpassing the uniqueness of individual experiences. (Chavez, 2015)

Chuen- Fung Wong examines the music of a minority group of Uyghurian Turkish-speaking people living in China, a production of popular music that forms a sort of “repository” for the Uyghur traditions. By following music practitioners in their work, performances and everyday life activities the author talks about displacement in relation to appropriation and authenticity, which is very helpful for my project. Yet, the author does not link questions of authenticity to music of before and after displacement (Wong, 2013).

The third and final body of literature to be reviewed relates to **memory and music**. I will start with the work of Kay Kaufman Shelemay titled *Music, Memory and History* where the author examines the axes between memory, history and musical practices of Syrian Jews living in the US, by providing personal accounts of people, musical notations for hymn “pizmon” and ethnomusicological investigational methods. The author’s work offers a valuable reference for ethnomusicological methods on memory and music to think about whilst studying musical practices in relation to memory in New Tushka (Kaufman Shelemay, 2006).

In “Sound, Memory and Dis/placement: Exploring Sound, Song and Performance as Oral history in the Southern African Borderlands”, Angela Impey uses the sound of traditional instruments to stimulate Nguni women remembering of songs they used to sing whilst walking, as well as stories and feelings of displacement. The author argues that music is an archive of experiences that survived traumatic experiences of displacement, as well as temporal and spatial “ruptures”. Also on her research on the Nguni women using traditional instruments, in *Songs of Mobility and Belonging* (Impey, 2013), Impey uses sounds to look at meanings of belongings, as well as the dynamics around lands in relation to memory. Impey’s work provides valuable information on the ethnomusicological methods used with Nguni women, as well as the usage of songs in identifying routes.

In “Music, Memory and Nostalgia: Collective Memories of Cultural Revolution Songs in Contemporary China”, Lei Ouyang Bryant uses revolutionary songs to question how collective memory around the Cultural Revolution in China is constructed and how it differs among generations. The research’s methodology is done through conducting interviews and surveys, the latter does not help the researcher to build rapport with his interlocutors, the author is thus somehow distant from the musical practices and from the community he is studying. (Bryant,2005)

## **Positionality and Entry to the Field**

Year 2004. My first ever visit to Tushka *El Tahgeer*, the village of my ancestors. I joined my great uncle Hussein and his family, to attend Eid *Adha* and to celebrate the wedding of a family relative in the village. Eid Adha is the time of the year when most Nubians living in distant urban centres travel back to Nubia to celebrate feast with their families and attend weddings. It was my very first time to go to *El balad* (the village). At this point in my life, I was an undergraduate student of French Literature at Alexandria University and a flautist trained in western classical music at the

Conservatoire. I had decided to quit flute playing after struggling the harshness and roughness of western classical music education. Attending a Nubian wedding I was mesmerised with the highly-skilled drum playing, their body moving and dancing whilst playing and the call and response singing of singer. It all crept into my heart and body, touching my soul in a way that no piece for Bach or Mozart could do. Suddenly, I felt that the long hours practicing flute techniques and fingerings, practicing how to play baroque trills and ornaments different from renaissance ones, was in vain. In the middle of dance circles in Tushka, trying to learn how to dance Nubian dance, I remembered my flute tutor's advice on focusing on studying western classical music being the greatest of all music genres, thinking to myself no this is wrong, at least not to me. I remember after this wedding thinking I want to play music that I can understand, feel and relate to. Music is not about hierarchy, music is about belonging. After the wedding, I decided to spend long hours with my great uncle Hussein to ask from him about Nubia, what happened to the Nubians, why they no longer live by the Nile, why is Tushka called Tushka *El Tahgeer*, and how my family ended up in Alexandria. In the open-ceiling court yard in the middle of his house, we sat down till late at night talking about Nubia. Uncle Hussein explained to me that his father had left Old Nubia to Alexandria, hoping to find work opportunities. When they reached retirement, my great grandparents moved back to their village in Old Nubia, and when the Nubian displacement occurred in 1964, for the construction of the Aswan High Dam, they moved amongst other 113'000 Nubians to the displaced villages of Nubia, near Kom Ombo. My great grandparents and family's migration to the north of Egypt and back to the village after retirement, were very common movements by the majority of Nubians in the 20th century.

Year 2010. I accompany my brother to an art's space in Alexandria called Al Cabina. He introduced me to a band, called High Dam Band who were having their weekly rehearsals at Al Cabina. They were all Nubians born and raised in Alexandria, originally from different parts of the displaced

villages. Knowing that we also had ties to Nubia and I was a flautist, they offered me to join one of their rehearsals and maybe join the band. From 2010 until 2015, I became High Dam Band's flautist, trying to move away from depending on music sheet notes to focusing on my ears and memory to make music. At High Dam Band, we were interested in the revival of Nubian folk tunes, using different instrumentation, which has allowed us to strongly be part of and be at the same time unique is within the so-called "underground music scene" in Alexandria, that flourished with and after the Egyptian Revolution (2011) allowing the music scene in Alexandria to expand more than classical (Arabic and western) and metal music. Amongst my friends and bandmates, I was for most of the time the only female member, but also referred to, with no hard feelings nor bullying, as نص بغلة, half a mule. A term very similar to the term "mualetto", widely popular amongst Nubians referring to those who have one of their parents as non-Nubian. At the age of 25, I was new to this term and new to being strongly part of a Nubian group, having been raised in French catholic school; I was more part of Alexandria's francophone community and not really with strong ties to my Nubian extended family. For most of my childhood I was strongly related to my maternal grandmother, an Alexandrian Italian woman who was part of a large community of Italians who settled in Alexandria in the 19th century and married to an Egyptian Alexandrian man. At school, colleagues used to frequently ask me if I was Egyptian, my response was always "Yes, but my grandmother is Italian". Only when I grew up, I realised that my colleagues' questions was due to the fact that I had Nubian facial features of darker skin colour and curly hair. But to me as a child, the outsider in our household was not my Nubian ancestors, it was the Italian woman who contributed strongly to my upbringing. So the 'half a mule' was because my mother was not Nubian and that because in how I was brought up being more Alexandrian than Nubian. I recall in one of our performances, in the Bibliotheca of Alexandrina, a couple of Nubian girls came to ask me if I was Nubian. I was with Loai El Nakib, our Keyboard player at the time, packing up after the concert. He answered them saying "No She is not Nubian". They smiled back with a nod, as if his

answer made sense. He then looked at me explaining that it would be very odd and confusing for these girls to know that a Nubian girl is on stage performing part of a male band, as it is not common for Nubian women to be part of bands. I grew up always wondering of who am I and where I belong; am I Alexandrian or Nubian or both ? My time with High Dam Band, when I made sure I learned more about Nubia's history, has left me even with more questions: who are the Nubians? Who falls in the category of Nubian and who doesn't ? Who is Egyptian? Who is the insider and who is the outsider ? Insider and outsider to what really ?

I ask my great uncle Hussein about the term نص بغلة or half a mule, he laughed and said “ Years ago, your father once asked me the same question an answer that left me surprised. When I asked my father about the same term, he explained that when he was growing up, the term was used to refer to those who have a member of their parents who is not *Fadekka*. My paternal grandmother was a *Kenzi* woman whose family were originally from the village of Maria, migrated to Toughka *Gharb* (West) after the second heightening of Aswan Dam during the 1931 flooding of her family's lands, and leading to their migration amongst many other *Kenouz* to Toughka *Gharb*. In Alexandria, she met and married my grandfather, a *Fadekka* man from Toughka *Sharq* (east).

In 2018, interested in ethnomusicology and the intersection between the social and musical practices, as well as folk music, I joined the MA program for Sociology- Anthropology at the American University in Cairo, aiming to focus on studying the relationship between migration and music amongst Nubian musicians living in Alexandria. However, a trip to Aswan and Toughka *El Tahgeer*, in winter 2018 with my husband, in order to look at the “origins” of Nubians and the starting point from where my ancestors migrated to Alexandria, has completely changed my mind and ended up to be the preliminary field trip for this thesis. My fieldwork in the displaced villages of Nubia started during summer 2019 (July) and I went back during Winter 2020 (December - January), where I spent my fieldwork in the house of my great uncle Hussein Kaddal in Toughka *El*

*Tahgeer* that my great-grandparents have received as a compensation for their lost home in 1964. Thanks to uncle Hussein, I was able not only to live in Toushka for a few months, but also to reconnect with my extended family and with people living in Toushka (east and west). Although I am a member of Kaddal family, to the field and in Toushka, I am both an insider and an outsider to the field. Again, I am a نص بغلة , half a mule. Being both an insider and an outsider to the field has had its benefits and limitations. I was a girl from the city, who still had a lot to learn about Nubia, but also who looks Nubian, can play Nubian music and knows Nubian songs by heart. As an interlocutor told me “When I see you in front of me with the *gergar*, Nubian dress and hair covered, you look Nubian to me. But when I see your Facebook Profile picture with a short dress and a white man (my husband) you don’t look Nubian”. To avoid feeling hypocrite, I purposely wore jeans and a shirt on my way to Aswan for a day trip. Despite being a half a mule, I always felt that my non *Fadekka* and *Kenouz* interlocutors, strongly thought of me as a member of *Fadekka*. There were times when my family name, linkages and Nubian facial features have opened doors for me, allowing my *Fadekka* and *Kenouz* interlocutors to feel at ease and comfortable to share information that probably wouldn’t have been shared with non-Nubians.

My positionality as a woman doing research in music also offered its challenges and limitations, as the music milieu in the displaced villages of Nubia is predominantly very male centric. As a method of research I was keen to join singers in wedding performances and play along with my flute. However, such suggestion was not very well received claiming that my family wouldn’t be happy. During my interviews with musicians and singers, I felt there was a barrier that I am unable to cross, that conversations probably would have been easier and more open with a male interviewer. With non-musicians interlocutors, being a woman didn’t present any challenges, in fact it was very easy and welcoming to join women in their conversations. From time to time, I did receive from other women inquires and comments on leaving my husband on his own in Cairo whilst I was in

Toushka doing fieldwork, as well as postponing plans to have a child. For a lot of these women, there was a clear expectation that having a family should be a priority over studies and professional career. On the other hand, I felt appreciated by non-musicians male interlocutors for the work I have been doing. For a lot of them being interested in my ancestors history and heritage was something that was highly valued.

Departing from the displaced villages of Nubia and particularly the village of Toushka, in this thesis I bring together my interest in my family's migration and displacement experience, with my passion in music to study the relationship between both to address the research questions of this project.

## Conceptual Framework

Departing from the literature reviewed, in this thesis I hope to contribute to Nubian studies, displacement and music by filling the gap of studying Nubian music. It also emphasises the importance of studying musical practices as a tool in interpreting cultures. In *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, Martin Stokes focuses on the importance of music as a social practice in its contribution to peoples' identities and cultures, as well as the importance of studying music to understand the particularity of a space. Stokes emphasises studying a culture through its musical practices, a concept that I adopt in this thesis. From my personal experience and engagement in musical practices with Nubian communities and from Hohenwart-Gerlachstein's statement "Of great importance were our invitations to wedding parties, the biggest ceremonies and festivities the Nubians celebrated in Old Nubia"(Hopkins & Mehanna, 2010, p. 283), I came to be confident of the vital importance that music holds for them, it being essential in the perseverance of language and culture.

After identifying the gaps in the reviewed literature, in this thesis I think of Nubians and Nubian music not as a one fixed category that never change, but as a rhizome in the Deleuzian sense. Where



Nubianness and Nubian music are ever changing and constant moving matters, that can have different becomings, grow from “multiple roots” and in various forms that can be “broken or shattered at a given spot” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). As explained in the introduction of this thesis, Nubians faced multiple waves of migrations and mobilities, people moving into the Nubian region and/or out of it, which has contributed in the shaping and ever changing understandings of who are the Nubians and what is Nubian music, by that contributing in becoming Nubian. Therefore building on thinking of “rhizome” as a multiple, non-hierarchical, non organisational structure, I use Deleuze’s notion of “deteritorialization” and “reterritorialization”, where one gets detached from one geographical milieu and gets attached to another where he forms new ties and connections. I follow Deleuze to trace Nubians’ constant movement, as well as the different thoughts, feelings and understanding of “Nubianness”. Moreover, Nubian musical practices, as any form of music “have always sent lines of flight, like so many “transformational multiplicities” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Such musical practices are not only produced and practiced in Nubia, but also in the new spaces and territories where people, songs and lyrics moved, and where the memory of displacement is alive through music and songs. The idea of “rhizome”, “deteritorialization” and “reterritorialization” all are part and parcel of how Deleuze and Guttari talked about “the becoming”. They argue becoming as “surplus value of code, an increase in valence, a veritable becoming, a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp. Each of these becomings brings about the deteritorialization of one term and the reterritorialization of the other; the two becomings interlink and form relays in a circulation of intensities pushing the deteritorialization ever further.” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Following this quote, I argue that the Nubian displacement might have formed a range of musical “becomings”, as well as the shaping of different forms of Nubianess, practiced in different spaces whether in the resettled villages of Kom Ombo such as New Toushka, or in the migrations to and between these and Cairo or Alexandria.

On the other hand, Bergson's ideas on time interlinks with Deleuze's notion of *becoming*, where time, becoming and unbecoming always occur through what he calls the durational force "the force of temporality is the movement of complication, dispersion or difference that makes any becoming possible and the world a site of endless and uncharitable becomings" (Grosz, 2005). Whereas Trouillot tells us that time has no starting nor end and where past and present overlap with each other. In this thesis, I use Bergson and Trouillot's notion of time and temporality to question how can we draw a distinctive line between past and present in dealing with memories of displacement and musical practices. Although the Nubian displacement in 1964 seems to be a clear rupture of time, I think of past and present not as categories with a fixed start and end, primarily because memory cannot be so easily categorised or compartmentalised ; the difference between events happening in the old times and today are very blurry. In memory as in music, using Bergson's understanding of time I question if there is a clear, fixed, solid distinction between music of the past and music of the present? Or is music fluid and in flux; one generation inspiring another, a grandmother singing to her grandson and the grandson singing the same song that his grandmother taught him every day and adding to his song new elements?

Moreover, in the last chapter of this thesis, I put aside my hat as a musician and put on the hat of a flaneur and a wanderer of the streets of Tushka and the displaced villages of Nubia. I follow Lefebvre's notion of *rythmanalysis* where I open up my senses and share with my reader how different, smells, sounds, sceneries and tastes contribute in *becoming* Nubian today in Tushka.

Despite that this thesis doesn't tackle questions around power, governance and the state, in an elaborate detailed chapter. However, it seems impossible to think of contemporary life outside of state practices, where the state creeps into our lives in every possible direction, and into minds and bodies either by force or by influence, in order to control, govern and implement certain ideologies. A major event such as the 1964 forced displacement of a racial and an ethnic minority such as

Nubians in Egypt, as well as major land dispossession, allows me to invite my reader to think of governance and state practices in relation to becoming Nubian. Governing and controlling the Nubian subject can be interpreted in different ways; by constantly shaping and reshaping Nubia as a space and by forcibly displacing its people. But also governance is manifested in bureaucratic systems and processes and through representation and ideological state apparatus.

In talking about Power Foucault asks "How?"; "How is it exercised?" and "What happens when individuals exert (as we say) power over others?". (Foucault, 1994, P.337) In studying the mechanisms and tools used to govern subjects, one can understand how power is used and practiced and hence define what is power. What Foucault is trying to tell us that power is not limited to institutions, yet power is relational through practice. It shapes us and has an effect on us, in order to "reinforce, strengthen and protect the principality" (Foucault, 1994, P.90) of what the state possess; Power and control are two sides of the same coin. Similarly, Hardt and Negri define biopower as "a form of power that regulates social life from its interior, following it, interpreting it, absorbing it and rearticulating it." (Hardt & Negri, 2000, P.23).

Therefore, I invite my reader to constantly think throughout this thesis, of state's governmentality Nubia as a space. I also invite my reader to think of power and control as part and parcel of subject making, in the sense that by displacing Nubians from their homes and away from the Nile, as well as through every day practices of control through bureaucracy, education and media the Nubian subject becomes always in flux and is therefore in a in a constant process of becoming.

## **Methodology**

### **Auto-ethnographic fieldwork.**

As mentioned earlier in this introduction, I have conducted my fieldwork in my great uncle's house in Tushka *El Tahgeer*, received from the Egyptian government in 1964. Through incorporating my

positionality as a descendant of a family who has experienced the displacement, but who is born in Alexandria from a Nubian father and an Alexandrian mother, I think and share with my interlocutors, with the people I meet every day and discuss, personal understandings of “Nubianness” and question my identities and its relation to displacement. Also, as musical practices are a central feature of all communal gatherings and parties, as a musical practitioner and a member of a Nubian Alexandrian band in Alexandria, I share and recall memories from being a band member. I meet and join music practitioners in the displaced villages of Nubia in their gatherings and weddings. I have accompanied and observed music practitioners in their different sites and where music is performed, in villages like Abou Simbel, Nasr El Nouba and Touthka. This has allowed me not only to experience Nubian music as played in the displaced villages of Nubia, but also to understand how music is taught, communicated, appreciating in the process understandings of musical feel, style, aesthetics, and mastery.

### **Participant-Observation**

In addition to sharing with interlocutors my positionality as an intersubjective application to research. I also play the role of the participant-observer who observes people’s thoughts, conversations, comments, feelings, reactions about displacement and music in social gatherings and weddings. In addition, my participation in musical practices and performances allowed me to observe and collect indepth information around people’s feelings and understanding of their own music.

### **Semi-structured and oral history interviews.**

Throughout summer 2019 and Winter 2020, I have conducted open ended-interviews with music practitioners and local villagers with the understanding that musical practices are not limited to singers, composers and instrumentalists, but are accessible by mingling audiences with local villagers in interviews. This helped in interpreting a lot concerning the particularity of a culture, the

understanding of the different identities, and thoughts on the uniqueness of their music. Moreover, observing mothers and women spending time with their children, has been very important in learning how Nubianness and the memory of the displacement are passed on from one generation to another.

### **Musical and Lyrical Analysis**

In order to interpret a music of a culture, I analyze Nubian songs through lyrics and musical composition and arrangement, in relation to displacement. As I do not speak any Nubian language, I have asked for help from more than one member of the community in translating the lyrics of the songs so as to ascertain a clearer sense of the meanings.

Finally this thesis builds upon research I already completed through the Cairo Institute for Liberal Arts (CILAS), where I completed a year long study of social sciences and arts, between Y2015-2016. The research focused on understanding what does it mean to be a Nubian born and living in the urban, particularly Alexandria. Also, what is Nubian music for those who are living in Alexandria. I do so through structured and semi- structured interviews conducted with two Nubian Alexandrian bands: RT Nuba and High Dam Band. Moreover, in this thesis, I recall memories of being part of High Dam Band to answer questions related to Nubianness and music.

## **Chapters Layout**

In Chapter 1, Migration, displacement and Becoming Nubian, I ask who lives in the displaced villages of Nubia today, starting with and focusing on Tushka. I lay out the different ethnic groups living in the displaced villages of Nubia today; *Fadekka*, *Kenouz*, Arabs of *Olaikat*, *Saidis*, *Ouchi* and the *Ashraf*, using historical literature and interviews where interlocutors self-identify themselves part of these groups, sharing stories their ancestors passed down orally from one generation to another. In this chapter, I argue that Nubians and Nubianness is not one fixed

category, nor a cluster, and that it is in constant changing and shaping. This change can be in relation to migration, historical events, social, political and economic conditions that contributes in and to “becoming” Nubian.

In Chapter 2: Nubian Music, I follow the same question of who are the Nubians and argument of becoming Nubian, already discussed in Chapter 1, and ask what is Nubian music to argue that Nubian music is also not a music with defined aspects, boundaries and criteria that makes it unchangeable or fixed. I do so by sharing practices of music around the displaced villages of Nubia, by the three main ethnic groups; the *Fadekka*, the *Kenouz* and the Arabs of *Olaikat*. I also look at popular Nubian music and practices of Nubians living in Alexandria, and which I was personally part of (2011-2015). Moreover, I look at how, where and when Nubian music is practiced in Nubia today, by following musicians in the displaced villages in their gatherings.

In Chapter 3, Memory and Remembering 1964, I focus on the question of memory and songs. Through lyrical and musical analyses I look at examples of songs by *Fadekka*, *Kenouz* and Arabs of *Olaikat* expressing the hardships of 1964 displacement and the lamenting of Old Nubia. By that I argue that lament songs form a living archive and memory of the displacement, orally passed on from one generation to another, taking part in the formation of Nubianness. I then expand the study of the relationship between memory, displacement and songs, by looking at musical productions of Nubians living in the urban centres (especially Alexandria), the diaspora, as well as, other songs lamenting sunken villages that are outside of Nubia. These examples of creative expressions allow us to reflect on how the displacement has become part and parcel of what forms Nubian identity, by that bringing all those who have experienced displacement, or who is related to someone who has experienced it, all together.

Also in chapter 3, I look at other historical events that occurred in Nubia through songs. Moreover, as I am writing this thesis in a middle of Covid-19, I share practices happening in the Nubian

displaced villages to overcome the hardship of living in the middle of a pandemic, following what is remembered to have happened by their ancestors during the times of cholera.

In Chapter 4, The sounds of becoming in Nubia, I take my reader on a trip and navigate the different sounds, smells and rhythms of life in Tushka. I explain how these different rhythms and soundscapes take part in constituting the becoming of Nubianness. Although 1964 displacement might seem to be a rupture in the flow of time and that everything in the displaced villages of Nubia today is dependant on this one major event, times don't have a start or an end, that starts in 1964 and ends in Kom Ombo today. In this chapter, I share observations of changes happening in Nubia, in farming practices from subsistent to monoculture farming, changes in musical practices due to intonation and mass produced instruments.

I conclude this thesis, by suggesting areas of study and gaps that might be of interest and concern for musicians, ethnomusicologists, anthropologists and scholars interested in Nubian studies in general.

# **Chapter 1: Migration, Displacement and Becoming Nubian**



# Introduction

“What I want to do is to redefine the notion of social by going back to its original meaning and making it able to trace connections again.” (Latour, 2005, P.1)

As explained in the abstract of this thesis, Nubians have repeatedly been displaced from the Nile valley multiple times in the twentieth century for dam construction. However, patterns of migration around the Nile valley occurred way before the 20th century. Historical literature on Nubia, tells us that the geographical location from Aswan to Wadi Half, the territory known as Nubia, has seen different settlers that go back to ancient history.

In this chapter Migration<sup>3</sup>, displacement and becoming Nubian, I weave together ethnographic, auto-ethnographic and historical material, pertaining to the multiple histories of migration in the Nubian valley. Bruno Latour (Latour, 2005) talks about the notion of reassembling the social, where he traces the meaning of the word “the social” and how we understand society. He deconstructs the preassumptions of what the social means and work on tracing the different elements, such as law, psychology, economics, politics and culture, that connects for a social to assemble and examine the different relationships that reassembles what we understand to be the social. Therefore, I go back in time and trace connections of the different subgroups that constitute what is recognised today to be the Nubian community today (Latour, 2005, P.2). I examine the displaced villages of Nubia<sup>4</sup> and in

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<sup>3</sup> I make a conscious decision of using the word migration and not only displacement, as I shed light on different movements and waves of migration that are not always forced migration nor displacements.

<sup>4</sup> In 1964, 50’000 people have been displaced from Nubia to a new area near Kom Ombo, in order to build Aswan High Dam (Hopkins & Mehanna, 2010).

particular the village of *Toushka El Tahgeer*, Toushka the displaced<sup>5</sup> the village of my ancestors "not as a special domain, a specific realm, or a particular sort of thing, but only as a very peculiar movement of re-association and reassembling." (Latour, 2005, P.7). Whilst Nubians rightly claim to originate from a particular geographic space known as Nubia, waves of migration and displacement have contributed to the understanding of what it is to be Nubian. Through migration and displacement Nubians have continued to engage in a process of what I term becoming Nubian. Therefore, I explore how Nubianess as a category is shaped through personal identification, historical, geographical, economic and social contexts, by asking how the social gets to be reassembled through migration and displacements.

Discussing historical events leading the different groups to be considered Nubian today, would ignore the very real and personal implications these migrations still have on the personal experiences. As these historical events would tell the victory or defeat stories of leaders and rulers, dismissing people's personal narrative and the implications that these historical events had on people's self identification and daily lives. It risks othering those I write about and to whom I am related. Therefore I adopt Abu-Lughod's approaches of writing about communities, where "focusing on individuals encourages familiarity rather than distance and helps to break down "otherness" (Abu-Lughod, 2008, P.29). In doing so, I intend to avoid writing in ways that create "the effects of homogeneity, coherence, and timelessness, it contributes to the creation of "cultures"(Abu-Lughod, 2008, P.29) , and to understand migrations and displacements as part of the personal experience of the process of becoming Nubian.

In the upcoming section, I focus on individual stories, placed within historical and spatial context, so as to unpack the notion of becoming Nubian. Whilst Nubia is a space, the experience of being Nubian is not singular, as Nubians are not a fixed category or a cluster. By speaking to and of

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<sup>5</sup> Nubians refer to the 1964 displacement as تهجير *Tahgeer* in arabic meaning forcibly displaced, which is different but derived from the word هجرة *Higra* meaning migration. Later in this chapter, I explain why the displaced villages are called by Nubians قري التهجير Villages of displacement and not New Nubia and the dynamics around that.

individuals within what is conceived to be the Nubian community, and considering their specific circumstances, I ask who are the Nubians? How do Nubians identify themselves? How are they classified by others and on what basis? What are the different histories of migration and mobilities related to these people? Who lives in Tushka today and how did they come to inhabit this territorial space? As will become apparent later in this chapter, writing about sensitive racial and class issues, in a general language as well as preserving interlocutors' identity can be useful.

## El Khetout: Lines of Migration, Mapping and Kinship relations

My flight from Cairo to Aswan arrives at 6:00 AM. I feel the cool breeze gently caressing my face. I flag a taxi to take me to الموقف (microbus station). Breaking the silence of an hour drive and noticing Nubian music being played in the car, I ask the driver if he is Nubian. He looks to me in the mirror and with a wise look he answers “كلنا هنا وافدين، نوبي وافد و جعفري وافد” (We are all here new-comers: Nubian new-comer and *Ga'afari* new-comer.) Khaled, the driver, explains that his ancestors were *Ga'afra* migrants from the Arabic Peninsula, settling near Aswan airport. We arrive at Aswan's microbus station, and Khaled helps me to find a microbus heading to Tushka. Calls for *Tushka El Tahgeer*<sup>6</sup>, *Tushka Moubarak*, *Kom Ombo*, *Abou Simbel El Seyahi*<sup>7</sup>, *Abou Simbel Tahgeer*<sup>8</sup>, fill the sonic space. These calls distort the social imagination of touristic adverts of Nubia. Rather than a place on the Nile in the South of Egypt, (Taylor, 2002, P.106), calls for *Tushka El Tahgeer* (Tushka the Displaced) are a reminder of the displacement of 113'000 Nubians to new resettlements in Kom Ombo, for the construction of Aswan High Dam in 1964 (Hopkins & Mehanna, 2010, P.10). The village names use the same title given by my own

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<sup>6</sup> Tushka the displaced

<sup>7</sup> Abou Simbel the Touristic

<sup>8</sup> Abou Simbel the displaced

ancestors, and those of Nubian academic and researcher Menna Agha; they refuse “to call these settlements New Nubia and instead called it *Tahgeer*, meaning place of displacement” (Agha, 2019, P.2). However, after 1964, the displaced Nubian villages were officially referred to Nasr El Nouba, the new administrative centre of Nubian displaced villages. For example, in official paperwork Tushka is referred to Tushka, Nasr El Nouba, whereas, Nubians would call it Tushka *El Tahgeer*. In Arabic, *Nasr* means victory, derived from the Arabic word *Nasser*, like Abdel Nasser. However, the word *Tahgeer* means the displaced, two words reflecting different power dynamics competing against each other, over a territorial space and the history of displacement.

Leaving الموقف (the bus stop) we drive north on a road parallel to the train tracks. It takes only a few minutes for a sign to appear for قرى الجعافرة (the *Ga'afra* villages); houses built with clay deposits atop of rocky hills, looking like they have been there for centuries. Vast green fields full of tall palm trees fill our vision. Most passengers on this microbus work and live in the displaced villages of Nubia. Words from the Quoran recited in pentatonic<sup>9</sup> notes surprise my ears, which are used to listening to Quoran recitation in Arabic *maqam*<sup>10</sup>, whilst reminding me of the particularity of this geographical region.

The intimacy of the space inside the microbus instigates all sorts of conversations; relationships are reconnected, news are circulated. It serves as a customer service booth for those confused about Sisi's 100'000 Health Campaign<sup>11</sup> or complaining about the bureaucratic complexities and paperwork of Sisi's compensation efforts for Nubians who lost their homes and lands in raising the Aswan Dam in 1912 and again in 1931. After 20km, the Nile suddenly appears unintroduced in a

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<sup>9</sup> A pentatonic scale: is a scale that uses only five musical notes. It is known to be widely used around the world mainly in the African and asian continents.

<sup>10</sup> Microtonal arabic *maqam*: is a set of music modes. Each *maqam* contains seven musical notes and includes microtones (interval that is quarter of a whole tone). It is widely used in arabic classical music.

<sup>11</sup> Campaign initiated by the President El Sisi, through creating medical booths all over the country for running health tests

glorious, dominating, and charming view, capturing the eyes of all passengers. This 45 minute journey is routine for many of the passengers, be it for work or study purposes. Yet, the captivating view of the Nile has reminded me of a slower boat journey that more than 50 years ago took my ancestors to a new life, and for others to their death.

We reach مزلقان بلانة (*Ballana's* railway crossing) and stop as a train passes. By crossing the train tracks, we turn away from the Nile, facing instead two narrow canals, to enter what is referred to by a lot of people as خط تهجير النوبة (*Nuba's displaced line*) *Nouba Kom Ombo*, or قرى التهجير (displaced villages) villages arranged in a line, connected by a two sided toll road running parallel to the two canals. This خط (line) is the same line that Nubians draw today on a piece of paper when drawing maps of the displaced villages (see images later in this chapter). Before 1964 displacement, a line drawn on a map of Nubia would not refer to a toll road, but the Nile, the source of inspiration and prosperity for both of the ancient Kingdoms of Kush and the Pharaohs. Now there is only one two-way road, الخط (the line) heading out perpendicular to the east of the train tracks, far from the Nile. Today the Nile is substituted with two narrow man-made canals that keep the Nubians in the displaced villages alive<sup>12</sup>. This is not the only change; before the 1964 displacement, the villages were reversed in order compared to their current placement. Starting from Aswan running south to the Sudanese borders, Nubian villages constituted of “forty ناحية (district) of which seventeen were Kenuzi, five were Arabic-speaking, and eighteen where *Fadija*<sup>13</sup>, according to the languages spoken” (Hopkins & Mehanna, 2010, P.10). Today in the Nubian displaced villages streets are marked by number: street no. 1, street no. 2, etc. However before displacement, in Old Nubia streets

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<sup>12</sup> The two canals literally keep those who live in Nasr El Nuba alive. During my fieldwork, I have been following up on news from people in Tushka struggling from water of the canal as it is polluted by sewage. Family members and interlocutors have shared with me their struggle to get clean drinkable water that they have to transport and get from other villages.

<sup>13</sup> also known as *Fadekka*.

were marked by *nahias*, district, each *nahia* was dedicated for a certain family. For example *gadalab* (The Kaddals) is the *nahia* or district where all members of Kaddal family live.



Image taken by me. Canal passing through the displaced villages of Nubia, marking *Khat El Tahgeer*.

As it stands now, my microbus driver passes through *Ballana*, *Adindan*, *Qustul*, *Tomas wa Afia*, *Abu Simbel El Tahgeer* and *Toushka*, the village of my ancestors. If he were to continue he would have passed by *Eneba*, *Armena*, *Masmas*, *El Geneina wel Shubbak and Ibrim*, by that leaving the *Fadekka* district and entering into Nasr El Nouba and the Arabs area of *Malki*, all the way to the *Kenouz* district. This is the opposite to travelling South from Aswan by boat. The Nile waters, pumped into the canal, now run through *Ballana* first, while it was the last village prior to the displacement.

The change in order of Nubian districts in relation to Aswan distanced the *Fadekka* people from their fellow *Mahhas*<sup>14</sup> in Wadi Halfa, placing them closer to the *Saidis* and *Gaafra* of Aswan and

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<sup>14</sup> The *Mahass* known to be the Nubians of north Sudan, mainly inhabiting the villages of *Wadi Halfa*, *Mahass* and *Sekot*.

Kom Ombo. Similarly the *Kenouz* district became the furthest from the Nile than any other displaced village; the village of *Korosko* is 35 kilometres away from the Nile, further changing spatial and political mobilities.

My Great Uncle Hussein Kaddal is a short, rounded man in his 70's. He is as a grandfather to me, especially as my grandfather passed away when I was a child, not having the chance to ask him about Nubia. Uncle Hussein is always keen to tell me about Nubia and the displacement, and regularly invites every member of the family to visit *Toushka*, including my husband, a foreigner, as it is important for him that we stay connected to the land and family there. With his characteristic broad smile, Uncle Hussein was very happy when he knew that my MA thesis was about the Nubian displacement, creating opportunity to share his passion for geography<sup>15</sup>. Over the years since my childhood, he has often told me how the village of *Eneba* was the political and administrative centre of Nubian villages prior to the displacement. This is where he went to *Madrasset Eneba El e'adadia*<sup>16</sup>, the only one with dormitory in all forty Nubian districts. The resettlement of Nubia moved political power from *Eneba*, in the *Fadekka* district to an entirely new village, Nasr El Nouba, close to the Arab district where a court, a bank and other governmental offices serve the displaced Nubian villages<sup>17</sup>.

Arriving at *Toushka*, I ask a Tuktuk driver to take me to the street<sup>18</sup> where my Great Uncle's house is located. A street separates *Toushka* into *Toushka Sharq* (east) and *Toushka Gharb* (west); the

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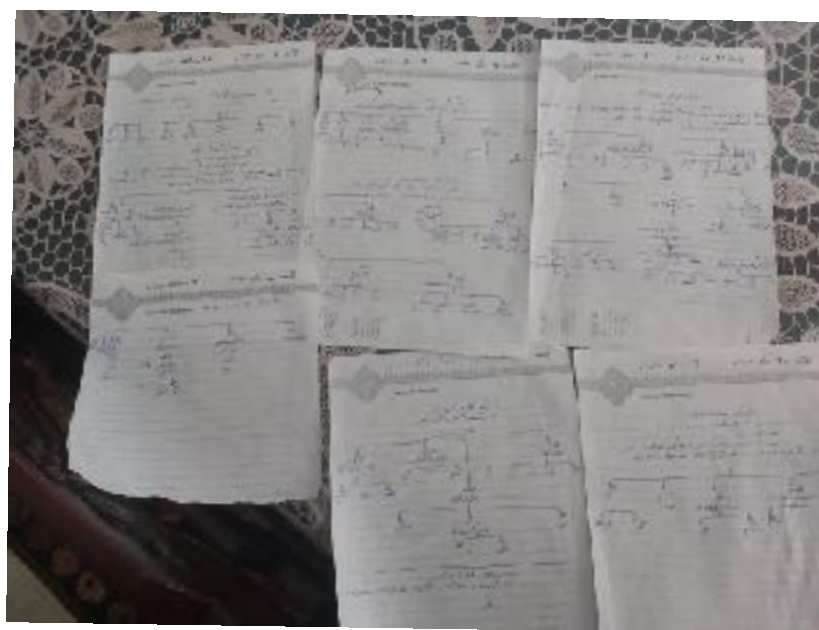
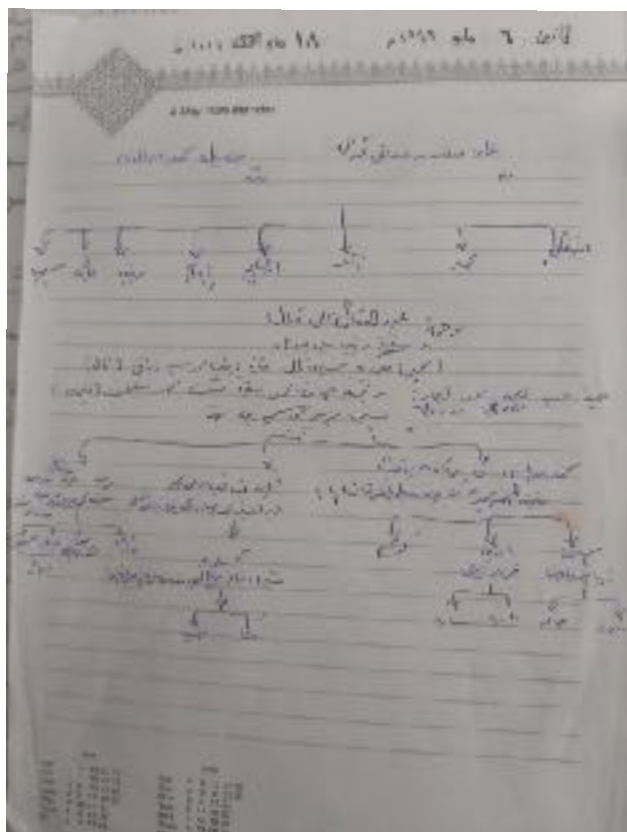
<sup>15</sup> Uncle Hussein left Old *Toushka* to Alexandria to study Geography in the Faculty of Arts. After graduation, he remained in Alexandria working in his field of study, and now has homes in both *Toushka El Tahgeer* and Alexandria. He continues to farm sugar cane in *Toushka*.

<sup>16</sup> School phase between primary and secondary

<sup>17</sup> References to older political centres in Nubia can be found in (El Noubi Aly, 2019, P. 17).

*Toushkas* were originally two villages separated by the Nile. *Toushka Sharq* is mainly inhabited by the *Fadekka* people, while *Toushka Gharb* is mostly *Kenouz*.

As a girl whilst trying to understand who are the Nubians and know my ancestors, Great Uncle Hussein would bring a pen and a paper and start drawing our family tree. I was impressed by his ability to remember all these names and relations. During my fieldwork in 2019, Am Amin did the same thing to explain how one of our relatives had light skin and green eye colour. In learning the history of Nubia as a child, Uncle Hussein would send me home with three maps, three *khetout* (lines), that represents paternal lines, as shown in the pictures below: Nubia before displacement, Nubia after displacement, and a family tree. When Uncle Hussein drew these three maps, I always noticed that they intersected. Each village mentioned was a way not only to mark territoriality, but also to trace kinship relationships.



Images of Uncle Hussein's family tree



Struck by this pattern of remembering relations and geographies in winter 2020 I joined Uncle Hussein on a trip by microbus to Kom Ombo. I noticed that passengers introduce and get to know each other by laying out their family trees. No matter where they are located around the world, it is through these names, family and village relations that people start to recognise each other. Maps of before and after the displacement, when combined with a family tree become, as Janz states, a way of “tracing nomadic subjectivities and exploring the contingent, multifarious ways they come into themselves” (Janz, 2001, P.392), a means to understanding “boundaries, internal interactions, and identity of the territory in question” As Janz (Janz, 2001, P.392) further explains "To suggest that the map is not the territory is to recognise that the territory is more than the abstractions of the map”(Janz, 2001, P.393). It is important to note that it would be difficult to think of Nubians as nomads for their struggle and fight over territory and the right to return to ancestral lands, as well as expressing belonging to Old Nubia as a territory in a lot of their songs. A theme that is discussed further in chapter 3. Similar to what Janz tells us, if we want to think of a map for Nubia, we will have to think of Nubia more than its territorial space, but also in the Nubians who move. The map of Nubia then is something between a territorial and kinship map, for it to be accurate one would have to draw the map of the whole world, tracing all the migrant birds<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Migrant birds I mean people moving. But migrant birds is a theme that I explore at length in Chapter 3.

## Entering Tushka *El Tahgeer*



Photo taken by me. A Street in Tushka Gharb- January 2020

The Tuktuk passes the *souq*, a few *ahwas* (cafeterias mainly for men), a pharmacy, a butcher, bread and sweets shop, and Tushka's Cultural Palace<sup>20</sup>. After this we leave *Tushka Gharb* and enter *Tushka Sharq*. Today a street separates *Tushka Sharq* (east) from *Tushka Gharb* (west) and one can walk from one village to the other; prior to the 1964 displacement this would have required a boat as they were situated on opposite banks of the Nile. Whilst the 1964 displacement has brought these two villages closer, *Tushka Sharq* is still mainly inhabited by *Fadekka*, and *Tushka Gharb* the *Kenouz*. I have learned from my fieldwork, that more and more *Kenouz* build houses in *Tushka*

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<sup>20</sup> Tushka Cultural Palace is a cultural venue affiliated to the Egyptian Ministry of Culture. Every 5 villages in Nasr El Nouba are associated with one cultural palace. The Tushka cultural palace was first established in 1964 to host different performances and cultural events. It has been renewed recently and reopened after 3 years of closure in February 2020, on the occasion of alignment of the sun on Abou Simbel Temple. It is important to note that all cultural palaces around the displaced villages of Nubia are affiliated to the Aswan Cultural Palace, where the yearly cultural programs are already planned.

*Sharq*, and thus space in relation to ethnicity is not fixed. These two majority groups, with their different Nubian languages, result from different periods of historic migration and displacement to old Nubia. These histories continue to have influence on contemporary aspects of Nubian society and relations between families and villages. In this upcoming section, I follow these different histories of migration, trying to explain who are the Nubians and how they have settled and became part of the displaced villages of Nasr El Nouba today.

## **From *Robi'a* Tribe to *Mattoukeya* and to *Kenouz***

The first time I went to meet Am Galal GahAllah, a *Kenzi*<sup>21</sup> retired educator, I was very excited to get to know the only relative I have of my paternal grandmother remaining in Tushka; the rest of my grandmother's family has moved and settled in Alexandria. Am Galal introduced me to his wife, daughter and grand children. His wife is likely in her 60's or 70's, but her rounded face makes her appear younger. She is beautiful, with perfect black eyeliner so as if she was born with it. Her very dark coloured lips remind me of *Kenzi* Nubian women in old photographs, leaving me wondering if this is natural or cosmetic. With a gentle smile she tells me stories of when my grandparents would come to visit. Neither Am Galal, his wife, nor I, know exactly how we are related, but we know that our kinship is distant. Whenever I ask how are we related, he and Uncle Hussein, would both answer "We don't know exactly, but your grandparents used to come spend a couple of days with Am Galal's family, whenever they visited Tushka, as a way to keep family ties strong."

Am Galal, wearing a white *gallabeya*, looked at me with his soft wrinkled skin and with eyes full of excitement to know about my studies, states "Ask me whatever you want, I will answer all your questions". He tells me the story of how the *Kenouz* settled in *Tushka Gharb* in Old Nubia:

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<sup>21</sup> *Kenzi* is the singular of *Kenouz*

“After the heightening of the Aswan Dam<sup>22</sup> in 1912 and 1933, our agricultural lands completely drowned and we had to move from our village further south. Your grandmother’s ancestors were from Maria, but other people settled in Touthka *Gharb* coming from the villages of *Ambarkab*, *Gersha* and *Kalabsha*”.

The first Aswan Dam elevation was not the only time the *Kenouz* have had to migrate. Am Eissa, a well respected *Kenzi* man in his 80’s, with a sense of humour matching his age, worked for the water company in Nasr el Nouba, as well as being a tambour<sup>23</sup> player. He and his son, a farmer, are fond of history; he explained to me a previous wave of migration. In their story, passed down orally from one generation to another, during the Fatimid dynasty, “the word *Kenouz*, where the word *Kenzi* is derived from, was the name of the army under the leadership of *Kanz El Dawla*”.

This is supported in (النشاط الاقتصادي و الاجتماعي للنوبيين ١٨٠٥-١٩٣٣), The Financial and Social Activity for the Nubians (1805-1933), by Halima El Noubi Ali. She quotes *Ibn khaldoun* stating that *Abi El Makarem HebatAllah*, head of the *Robi’a* tribe was given the title of “*Kanz El Dawla*”, meaning “treasure of the state”, by *El Hakem B Amr Allah*, Fatimid ruler, for defeating and ending the revolt of *Abi Rokowa El Amawii*. All living around Aswan were then known as *Awlad Kenz*, sons of *Kenz*. (El Noubi Ali, 2019, P. 56). Both Am Eissa and Am Galal GahAllah, and almost every *Kenzi* I have met during my fieldwork affiliated their lineage to *Ambarak* or *Moubarak*, son of *Negm El Din*, ruler of Aswan and head of the Fatimid army and his seven sons: *Own Allah*, *Amir*, *Gholam Allah*, *Amer*, *Geddis*, *Gharby* and *Wanass Bel Rahma*<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> It is important to mention that Aswan Dam was built in 1902, which of course has led to surrounding villages to move away.

<sup>23</sup> Tambour is a string instrument, similar to the lyre.

<sup>24</sup> Information also available in Ambarkab’s Association in Alexandria’s blog. <https://ambarkab.wordpress.com/%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D9%88-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AB/>

Today, *Fadekka* refer to the *Kenouz* as *Mattoukeya*<sup>25</sup>, meaning people coming from the east.

According to a blog by Ambarkab's Club<sup>26</sup> and Association in Alexandria, "*Matooki*" means "those coming from the east, east of the red sea and Arabic Peninsula", where the *Robi'a* tribe were originally from (El Noubi Ali, 2019, P. 55), and by that, becoming the *Mattoukeya* or *Kenouz*.

Ahmed Hussein Dahab, professor of geography, originally from Tushka, writes about the older *Kenouz* migrations in *Nubia & Sails and Nile Valley Civilisation (1996)*, going back to the ancient kingdoms. He divides Nubians to two ethnic groups: 1. *Dongola/Kenouz* 2. *Fadekka/Mahass*. He states:

"(..) the original domicile for the *Danagla* was around *Dongola*, and extended southward to Khartoum. Then a group of them emigrated towards the northern extreme of the Nubian Kingdom, during the Roman invasion of Egypt, to repel their attacks. This group which was commissioned to guard the borders, lived with their families, between *Edfu* and *Madik*, but they were pushed back south from the zone, between Aswan and the commanding sites of Aswan and their place was taken by new inhabitants from the conquering Arab tribes. These settlers intermarried with the *Danagla* and produced a new generation which was known by the Nubianized Arabs, or *Kenouz*, who married the Arab blood and spoke the dialect of their mothers, mixed with many Arabic words." (Dahab, 1996, P.15).

Walking around Tushka, my Great Uncle Hussein, pointed out *Kenzi* houses of more than one floor with fancy paintings and designs, saying "After the 1964 displacement *Kenzi* young men were the first to leave *Tushka* to the gulf searching for work and sending money back"<sup>27</sup>. *Kenzi* investments in building properties are a sign of success and wealth. Walking around *Tushka*, one could tell that more *Kenzi* men were migrant labours than the *Fadekka*; the landscape of *Tushka Gharb*, which is predominantly *Kenzi* features more two storey buildings. In contrast with *Tushka Sharq*, a *Fadekka*

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<sup>25</sup> The *Kenouz* are aware of them being referred as *Mattoukeya*. However, I haven't witnessed anyone self-identifying as *Mattoki*.

<sup>26</sup> One of the numerous Nubian social and cultural organisations in Alexandria and Cairo.

<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Katherine Hoffman describes migrant workers from the Moroccan village of Ashelhi, when she says "Financially successful migrant workers tended to announce their prosperity by building ostentatious homes in their native villages" (Hoffman, 2001, P.939)

area, the majority of houses are only ground floor and similar in design to Nubian houses received from the state in 1964.

## The *Fadekka*: a blend of *Mahass*, *Kushaf*, *Ouchi* and more



Photo taken by me Touthka Sharq- January 2020

*Touthka Sharq* (east) seemed to be calmer than *Touthka Gharb* (west) with fewer shops. A large mosque on the main street faced by مدرسة توشكى شرق الابتدائية (Touthka East's Primary school), are *Touthka Sharq*'s main landmarks<sup>28</sup>. The majority of my relatives on my paternal side are *Fadekka*, and live in *Touthka Sharq*. The stories told throughout my childhood and during my fieldwork, about the *Fadekka* and their history of migration do not go further than 1964, the year of the displacement. As if *Fadekka* history all starts in 1964 and that there is a rupture of an older history of Nubia. Despite that this is how *Fadekka* history is remembered in my family, in Chapter 3 I explain how ancient civilisation of Kush becomes a strong part in self-identification.

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<sup>28</sup> Both Touthkas contain primary and secondary schools.

My families stories of 1964 displacement has led me thinking of how the *Fadekka*, after interviewing and comparing histories of other ethnic groups living in Tushka, might perceive the 1964 displacement as a rupture in their life in Nubia. As if the *Fadekka* had no major other historical events other than 1964. In Chapter 3, I unpack more on Nubians sense of originality and history. The only sense of learning about former waves of migration are through my father and great uncle mentioning that there are Kaddals in Sudan. This was confirmed by Ashraf Awad, a Sudanese *Oud* player, whose mother was from Wadi Halfa, who was familiar with my family's name, which he says is common in Sudan.

A northward migration of the group who would become *Fadekka* Nubians is supported by Halima El Noubi Ali. She explains that *Fadekka* was given to people migrating north from *Mahass* and *Sekout* tribes in Sudan during *Mahdist* revolution (1881-1899) (El Noubi Ali, 2019, P.58). The *Fadekka* mixed with other ethnic groups who “also settled among and been assimilated into Nubian society (Hungarians, Bosnians, Kurds, and the like, mostly resulting from Ottoman military garrisons)” (Hopkins & Mehanna, 2010, P.11), as a result of the Nile being a major trade route. The title *Kushaf*, taken during Ottoman rule in Egypt in 1500's (El Noubi Ali, 2019, P. 60), means “rulers” in *Fadekka*, and has continued marking the role and higher social positions of the title holders. Aunt Sekina, the wife of my Great Uncle Hussein, was a very kind and sweet woman and like many others amongst the *Fadekka*, had fair skin colour and green eyes. These are perceived by the *Fadekka* as signs of the Turkish penetration and kinship relations with the *Mahass* people.

A further group that have become part of the *Fadekka* are the *Ouchi*, also referred to as *Oucha*, the *Fadekka* word for slaves. The Nile as a primary route for cargo from sub-saharan Africa northward was a route for the slave trade managed by the *Arabs of Olakat* (El Noubi Ali, 2019, P.61). Some of these people remained in the Nubian communities, though despite the end of legal slavery, as Hopkins and Mehanna highlighted “There were some differences in social status - small groups of

socially stigmatised ex-slaves from southern Sudan lived among the Nubians had been Nubianized” (Hopkins & Mehanna, 2010, P.11).

During my fieldwork, stories shared by *Faddeka* opened another understanding of how the *Ouchi* came to be *Faddeka*. According to my interlocutors, the *Ouchi* were the descendent of *Mahdist* soldiers, under the leadership of *Abdel Rahman El Negoumi* - also known as *Wad El Negoumi* (El Noubi Ali, 2019, P. 117). During the *Mahdist* uprising, the Battle of Tushka<sup>29</sup> (1889) was fought close to the village of *Tushka Gharb*. This significant battle between the *Mahdist* troops and the British led Egyptian army was the first significant defeat of the *Mahdist* army, ending their attempts to invade Egypt. Captured soldiers and their families<sup>30</sup> were taken in *Faddeka* homes as slaves<sup>31</sup>. In many cases the *Faddeka* gave the *Ouchi* their family names. Despite being given family names, the *Ouchi* were not afforded equal status to the *Faddeka*. Official equality came later with the 1964 displacement when Abdel Nasser’s government surveyed the houses in Old Nubia in preparation for the displacement. Social workers counted the number of families and members of families living in each house, without consideration of ownership and origins of those living there. This meant that each displaced family in Nubia was compensated with a home, irrespective of their social class or status origins<sup>32</sup>. Cheers of happiness were manifested in song; chanting “AbdelNasser has made us equal to you” the oppressed *Ouchi* were empowered through property ownership in the new villages, and their legal recognition as equally Nubian.

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<sup>29</sup> Also referred to as the Battle of Tushki and the Battle of Toshka, the *Darawish* or the Dervish Battle.

<sup>30</sup> In his *The River War: An Account Of The Reconquest Of The Sudan*, Churchill often makes reference to the fact that both the Anglo-Egyptian forces and the Mahdist army were accompanied by “followers”. These support forces to the armies were constituted of the families soldiers (Kindle version P.66 of 281).

<sup>31</sup> The trade and ownership of slaves was officially prohibited by the British Authorities at the time, but as is repeatedly highlighted by Yacoub Artin *England In Sudan*, they often ignored in fear of the economic and political instability. This appears to be one such situation (Artin, 1911, P.49,77, 104,174).

<sup>32</sup> Other comments shared by my interlocutors highlighting the negative implications they had to deal with, due to structure of the surveys conducted by Abdel Nasser’s government prior to the displacement.



However, sensitivities on the subject of slavery in Nubia persist; though I have heard the term *Ouchi* used by some, none of my interlocutors has taken ownership of such history or would refer to themselves as descendants of *Ouchi*; they are now considered by others and by themselves *Fadekka*. I have made a conscious decision to write about it for two reasons; first, to shed light on the process of becoming-in the Deleuzian sense- *Fadekka* and hence Nubian; second, to highlight the unintended consequences of compensation in changing social inequality and the implications of it on displaced societies. I have also made a conscious decision to write in a more general style, by preserving details about my interlocutors for the sensitivity of the topic.

## From Syria to Nubia: *El Ashraf*.

Other than *Fadekka* and *Kenouz*, in Touthka today there is a minority group of people who self-identify as أشراف (*Ashraf*), meaning descendants of the Prophet Mohammed. They are also known as *Massalib* or *Hallaba*, though the *Ashraf* consider these labels very offensive words. *Ashraf* are always regarded to be of a higher merit and status. To prove such sacred relationship my interlocutor, who seemed to be in his 80's, shared with me an identity card, from the syndicate of *Ashraf*, stating that their family are descendants of the prophet. His daughter-in-law, with very white skin, rounded face and in her thirties<sup>33</sup> stated “مش مسلوب دي شتية، لما أرضك تتأخذ منك” (Wouldn't you feel offended if your land were taken from you). In Arabic, *Massalib* comes from the word *Massloub*, meaning something taken away by force or forcibly displaced from. *Hallaba* is a reference to Hallab in Syria. The first thought I had to my interlocutor's statement was that Nubians also had their homes & lands taken away, so in a sense they were also *Massalib*. However, I believe that a lot of *Fadekka* and *Kenouz* would think of the displacement as تضحية للصالح العام (sacrifice for the good of the rest of Egypt). In AbdelNasser's speeches regarding the Aswan High Dam, he

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<sup>33</sup> In this section, I do not share any details about my interlocutors for the sensitivity of the topic.

justifies the Nubian displacement as a sacrifice that Nubians will do for Egypt, in order to resist international efforts to hold back Egypt to be modernised. Therefore the Nubian displacement was the sacrifice that Nubians offered to Egypt, to generate electricity, expand agricultural lands, and unleash the modernisation of Egypt. Two sorts of displacement with different implications and feelings.

The story told describes the *Ashraf* as “A group of around hundred of people settled in Old Tushka, introducing themselves to us as *Massalib* coming from Hallab”. My *Fadekka* interlocutor adds “They used to gather during dates harvest in Old Nubia, playing the *Rababa*<sup>34</sup>, hoping to receive some food”. In 1964, they were displaced as the Nubians to Kom Ombo. According to my interlocutors the *Ashraf* do not marry outside of their group, and the younger generation of *Ashrafs* are known for being highly educated and filling positions such as professors and doctors.

Adopting a new identity and self-identifying as *Ashraf* in relation to displacement, seem to be a common practice amongst other minor ethnic groups. In his Phd dissertation *The Lahawiyin: Identity and History in a Sudanese Arab Tribe*, Ahmed Khalid Abdalla Tamador refers to an ethnic group called *Lahawiyin* who were living in the Kordofan and Darfur regions and faced displacement due to famine and drought in the 1980's. In a similar way to the *Ashraf* living in Tushka, the *Lahawiyin* found themselves impoverished due to famine, drought and displacement to a new hosting community near the Rahad River, near Butana. “ The adoption of the collective identity of *Ashraf* by these former *Lahawiyin* was a defiant assertion of Arabness in the context of a new situation. By linking themselves to a privileged ethnic group that was genealogically linked to the Prophet Mohammed, they sought to safeguard their social status which might otherwise have been lost within the social structure of the *Lahawiyin*” (Tamador, 2010, P.183).

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<sup>34</sup> Musical instrument with strings, popular around Upper Egypt.

In literature *Massalib* and *Hallaba* are referred to as two separate ethnic groups. In her introduction to *Gypsies in Contemporary Egypt: On the Peripheries of Society*, Alexandra Parrs situates the *Hallaba* or *Halebi* in a framework of Gypsies or *Ghajar*. It is important to mention that none of my interlocutors never mentioned *Gypsies* or *Ghajar*. She explains that the *Gypsies* are an ethnic groups who “are dispersed groups that suffered from traumatic departure, have constituted collective memories that serve as an anchor for the group identity, create strong boundaries that prevent their full integration into host society, rely on a myth of return to the (often idealized) homeland” (Parrs, 2017, 3). She also references Donald Kenrick saying “ Today in Egypt, we find the Halebi, possibly a million in number, living mainly from casual farm work, though some men work as veterinary surgeons and some women tell fortunes , as well as the Ghajar and some families of Dom (Nawwar).(..) The Halebi are said to have come originally from Aleppo, hence their name, and they do not speak Romani. They speak Arabic using a large number of words which are jargon. They are perhaps not of Indian origin. The same three groups appear in the Sudan but all seem to have lost their original language and speak only Arabic” (Parrs, 2017, 8) In his book *الزלט و الأصول الأولى لتاريخ الغجر* (The Zalut and the historical origins of Ghajar) Ebada Kehila mentions that gypsies or the *Ghajar* sometimes confirm and are proud of their identity and in other times they refer themselves to other identities (Kuhaylah, 2014, P.7). He also refers to Hallaba as people moved from Aleppo to Egypt in year 760 in Islamic calendar, due to disturbing events in Syria.

## **The Arabs of *Olaikat*: *Saidis* living amongst us.**

في نوعين من الصعايدة عندنا: ناس منهم كانوا عايشين في وسطينا في البلد القديمة و اتهجروا معنا في ١٩٦٤. و نوع ثاني جم علينا بعد ١٩٦٤.

“There are two types of *Saidi*; those who were living amongst us in Old Nubia, who were displaced with us in 1964 and another group who came to us after 1964”.

Uncle Hussein Kaddal, Fieldwork notes, April 2019.

After the 1964 displacement, the Nubian villages became geographically closer to the *Ga'afra* and *Saidi* villages of Kom Ombo and Aswan. Migrant workers commute daily in and out of *Toushka*, for a journey that takes only 45 minutes. They work as carpenters and help pharmacists but the majority are laborers employed by the *Fadekka* and *Kenouz* to work in their lands. Labor migration on a daily basis has proved to be easier with the appearance of minibuses, tuktuks and cars, which is different than transportation during the first half of the 20th century, when boats were the main means of transportation<sup>35</sup>.

In the village of *Malki*, where the majority identify as *Arabs of Olaikat*, and who have been living in Nubia before 1964, I meet Heba, a relative of Ali, an ambitious young professor in his thirties. They both express how the *دخلاء* intruders, a term widely used to refer to the *saidis* who have settled amongst Nubians after 1964, are unwanted and not allowed to live amongst them. During fieldwork in January 2019, I witnessed a conversation between two *Fadekka* about not allowing *Saidi* truck drivers to park in the village overnight for harvesting sugar cane in the early morning. The discussion around this matter was followed by Facebook posts about preventing thefts in the village.

The relationship between “Intruders” and “one of us” was clarified in April 2019. I was invited to attend a *Fadekka* wedding in *Toushka Sharq* by Nawal. In her 50's, Nawal works as a music teacher in *Toushka Sharq*'s Primary School. While it is common for men to travel abroad for work, it is less acceptable for women. Nawal is therefore somewhat unique in that she travelled to work in the Gulf as a teacher, leaving her husband and two young boys in the village. When she was younger she also farmed with her mother and husband in the field. I joined Nawal and a group of her female

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<sup>35</sup> Also mentioned in this reference النوبة الغريقة... حياة الأمان المطلق - يحيى صابر The drowned Nubia .. An absolute safe Life, by Yehia Saber



friends for a meal during the wedding. They laughed at my old fashioned *gergar*<sup>36</sup> design, and Nawal lent me hers. In trying to understand the different groups of people living in *Toushka* today, Nawal explains the term دخلاء (intruders). This term refers to the *Saidis* who settled in *Toushka* after the 1964 resettlement, coming from neighbouring villages in Kom Ombo to help the Nubians in farming their agricultural lands.

The following day, I visit Am Amin. Am Amin's, wrinkled face and hand are a testimony to his passion for farming. Before retirement he used to work as an administrator at Kom Ombo's ice factory. I join them for tea, overlooked by a portrait of President Sadat hanging in their bedroom<sup>37</sup>.

The telling of how the "intruders" moved to *Toushka El Tahgeer*:

"أيام السادات، الله يرحمه، الدولة بنت بيوت المغتربين، و طبعاً عشان أصحاب البيوت دي عايشين في القاهرة واسكندرية، في 38منهم ناس بدأت تأجر للصعايدة بيوتهم أو تبعها."

<sup>36</sup> *Gergar* is the traditional dress for *Fadekka* women. It is a long one piece see-through lace dress in black. *Gergar* comes from the word *gargar*, in arabic meaning sweeping away. It is called *gergar* as it is meant to swipe away women's foot prints on the floor so that she doesn't get to be followed. *Kenzi* women used to wear Sudanese *Sari*, long colorful piece of cloth wrapped around the women's bodies. Only in recent years that *Kenzi* women started to wear the *gergar* as *Fadekka* women.

<sup>38</sup> This statement doesn't mean that all Nubians actually did sell their houses. In fact there are few Nubians who kept these houses and inhabit them.

(During Sadat regime, mercy be upon him, the government has built houses for the Nubian expatriates and because they were already settled in Cairo and Alexandria, some of them started to rent their houses to the *Saidi* or sold their houses to them.)

*Beyout El Moghtarebin*, بيوت المغتربين known as expatriates houses, are a set of poorly built houses aligned one next to the other in the shape of a maze, situated at the outskirts of *Toushka*, it takes around 10 minutes walk from *Toushka Sharq* to reach the expatriate houses.

These were built during Sadat's regime to compensate Nubians who were living in the urban centres when the 1964 displacement happened.

It is important to mention that according to Menna Agha, Nubian scholar, prior to the displacement Nubians held a lot of respect and love for President Gamal Abdel Nasser and each house in Nubia had a picture of AbdelNasser on their walls. Until the dire situation of displacement and new life in resettlements, caused deaths for new borns, children and elderly people (including my step paternal great grandmother) who couldn't survive. This is when Abdel Nasser's pictures were taken off the walls with each death in every Nubian house. Then President Sadat started to gain Nubians' love and respect due to his efforts in encouraging Nubians to migrate back to the village from the urban cities by building the expatriate houses as a form of compensation for the loss that Nubians faced in 1964. Am Amin expressed his love and discontentment of Egyptian presidents depending on the services and goods they have provided to Nubians; AbdelNasser has built the Aswan High Dam but the displacement itself was a traumatic experience and the compensations were very poor. Al Sadat has built the expatriate houses. Hosni Mubarak has dug a second canal that is parallel to the first, to provide water for private high profile agricultural lands. The canal has caused a lot of cracks in houses (including my grandfather house). President Abdel Fattah El Sisi delivered Wadi Karkar's housing project of 2024 house, in 2017, built for the Nubians as part of a compensation plan for those who haven't received housing compensation during the 1964 displacement.



Learning about the different regimes offering compensations to the Nubians, speaks to the complexity and legitimacy of claims about dispossession but also disregarding Nubians problems of return to ancestral lands.

Image taken by me. Beyout El Moghtarebin, expatriate houses in Toushka El Tahgeer

The feelings of resentment expressed by Nawal, Am Amin and many of the Nubians I have met in the displaced villages, were anticipated by Mohamed Fikri Abdul Wahab, when reviewing attitudes prior to the displacement:

“In general we can say that the *Dabud*<sup>39</sup> people had a favourable attitude toward migration although there were interesting variations between sex and age groups. The minority who felt negative about the whole thing came mostly from old age groups, especially those who had never left Nubia; the young men and women where mostly enthusiastic. The resentment of the older people toward migration seemed to be directly linked with their resettlement in Upper Egypt and the consequent necessity of contacts with Upper Egyptians. Whatever they were told about the advantages of migration, they felt it cannot substitute for the security that they felt in their own homeland among their own people, despite the rocky mountains and arid land they had to connect with.” (Hopkins & Mehanna, 2010, P.235)

Mr. Karim, a *Saidi* man in his late 30’s or early 40’s, works as a teacher. Despite giving me his consent to be interviewed for my MA thesis, Mr. Karim seemed to be hesitant about our meeting

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<sup>39</sup> Dabud is one of the Nubian villages displaced.

and nervous of the type of questions I would ask. Knowing the kind of dynamics between the *Fadekka* and the *Saidis*, I was left with the impression that he is happy to live in Tushka and didn't want any problems. He has been living in Tushka for 15 years. His family are originally from Qena and they self-identify as Arabs of the *Olaikat*. He settled in Tushka in 1994, encouraged by his father who worked as farmer in agricultural lands in Tushka. As both of his parents were living in Tushka it made sense to him to join them and build a life in there. He built a house of his own by expatriate houses, where he owns a small supermarket, as a side business to being a teacher.

Mr. Karim's experiences contrast very much with Aly. Originally from the displaced village of Malki, the first time we met was through a common friend who introduced us. I was impressed with his passion for knowledge and politics. Aly is something of an authority for those interested in learning about Malki and the Arabs of *Olaikat* and is a highly active member of the community, organising activities in Malki's young men's club. He and his family have invited me to attend a wedding in their village, as well as explaining the history of their ancestors and how they settled amongst the Nubians. Aly and his family identify themselves as Arabs of *Olaikat*, their ancestors settled by the Nile in Old Nubia coming from the Arabian Peninsula, working as guides for trade troops navigating the desert. They were displaced to Kom Ombo in 1964 with the rest of the Nubians. El Noubi dates the *Olaikat* tribes settlement in Nubia to the 18th century. The valley where they settled became known as "Valley of the Arabs" (El Noubi Ali, 2019, P. 57). Mohamed Riad and Kawthar Abd El-Rassoul clarify that "The 'Aliqat tribe occupy central Egyptian Nubia from the 'umudiya of al-Madiq to the 'umudiya of Korosko. While they are the only compact and territorially contiguous Arabic-speaking group in Egyptian Nubia, their descent is rather obscure" (Hopkins & Mehanna, 2010, P.148). During my fieldwork period, I didn't meet any Arabs of *Olaikat* living in Tushka who have been displaced in 1964 with the *Fadekka* and *Kenouz* of Tushka.



During sugar cane harvest, Nubians (*Fadekka*, *Kenouz* and Arabs of *Olaikat*) hire Saidis to work in their fields or in a lot of times share the crops, cutting, grouping and moving sugar cane from one place to another. I recall doing fieldwork in Winter 2020, and witnessing conversations amongst the three ethnic groups of how it is not safe for truck drivers inside the villages, wanting them to be parked outside the villages. Stories of thefts and child kidnaps points out fingers at *Saidis* as the primary source of trouble makers. Moreover, in the village of Malki, Heba was agreeing on the usage of word دخلاء (intruders) confirming how the Arabs of *Olaikat* refused any of the *Saidis* to rent or buy homes in their village, even though they work on Nubians' lands. Uncle Hussein's categorisation of Saidi; "اتهجروا معنا" displaced with us and "جم معنا في ١٩٦٤", intruders who arrived after 1964, draws the *Saidi* and Arabs of *Olaikat*'s histories of migration, into practices of inclusion and exclusion in the displaced Nubia. The word "اتهجروا معنا" (displaced with us), implies that there is a shared feeling of lament, agony and pain of being displaced. The traumatic experience of being displaced from their homes, has left the *Fadekka* and *Kenouz* with an experience of shared trauma and need to connect with the Arabs of *Olaikat*, as well as a sense of collectively overcoming the hardship of displacement, in what Rodriguez calls "the transcendental force of suffering, [...] that created simulacrum of proximity, compassion and empathy with the victims and their relatives"(Rodriguez, 2018, P. 348). Rodriguez references Spinoza by saying, "its affect represents an energy, intensity and sensation that pushes us to act. (...) For Spinoza, affect drives us to act, it moves us to transform passion into action. As such it is an energy or "drive" that emerges through contact and encounter. It is a relational force permeating our bodies as well as resulting from our bodily ability to feel and connect with other bodies" (Rodriguez, 2018, P. 348). The force of suffering that happened to these groups as a result of the displacement has been a foundational part of becoming Nubian, where the "us in this relation refers to a constructed point of commonality, set within a rhetoric of national mourning" (Rodriguez, 2018, P.348). In 1964, the

*Fadekka*, *Kenouz* and the Arabs of *Olaikat*, altogether have seen and mourned their drowned homes, and have lived together the trauma of being forcibly displaced. This experience of displacement enabled the production of a whole category of music, to be elaborated in Chapter 3, which has brought them closer to each other and has transformed “passion into action”, allowing the Arabs of *Olaikat* to become “one of us”.

## Becoming Nubian

Enti Nubia? Are you Nubian?

Heissa Island, Aswan 2017.

Is she Nubian? No.

But she looks like one of us, states one of the local ladies to my tour guide.

You know, you look very Nubian!

New Tushka, Kom Ombo, 2019.

A teenage girl following me in the village, stops me and asks Enti Nubia? Are you Nubian?

I reply without thinking: No I am Alexandrian.

I look at the mirror and the unending question,

I am what I am!

My paternal ancestors were displaced in 1964! My maternal grandmother was Italian,

And now, I am Alexandrian, but I no longer live there !<sup>40</sup>

A common experience of these three groups is the collective memory of Old Nubia, considered as home and its loss. This traumatic experience has become part and parcel of what shapes Nubians, Nubianess and Nubians’ histories of mobilities as an unfolding story. A story without beginning, end, nor a singular narrative or flow of time, though as a narrative structure that is told as story where past and present blends in together, fluid in a sequence of events and where past and present stories lead to each other. In his *Politics of Storytelling: Variations on a Theme by Hanna Arendt*, Mickael Jackson describes “storytelling as a vital human strategy for sustaining a sense of agency in the face of disempowering circumstances. To reconstitute events in a story is no longer to live those

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<sup>40</sup> Extracted from Rain Over Nubia Album, KaddalMerrill Band, written by Fayrouz Kaddal.

events in passivity, but to actively rework them, both in dialogue with others and within one's own imagination" (Jackson, 2008, P. 34) Whilst many Nubian's would rightly consider that they are Nubian, regardless of their different origins and groups, I argue that Nubianness is not, and has never been a singular fixed category, not something that can be fixed by concrete elements. But rather Nubianness is a process of multiple facades, migration patterns, and shared experiences of living by the Nile. This should not be seen as an attempt to dismantle the existence of the Nubians or Nubian culture, nor undermine the forced displacement from Old Nubia and people leaving behind their drowned houses; rather thinking of Nubianness as a series of becomings highlights the richness of this region's community with its diverse origins, languages, sonic environments and musical practices, a theme I will elaborate in Chapter 4.

In *One Thousand Plateaux*, Deleuze and Guattari talk about the notion of becoming as an outcome of movements of deterritorialization and territorialization, that form a rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 3). Similarly, Clifford says that culture "is not an object to be described, neither is it a unified corpus of symbols and meaning that can be definitively interpreted. Culture is contested, temporal and emergent." (Clifford & School of American Research, 2008, p. 19). Having described how Nubianness is emergent from different ethnic groups settling in the Nile valley in Nubia, Nubian is the becoming in the Deleuzian sense, of diverse peoples, multiple histories of migration, of multiple lines of deterritorialization and territorialization. To think of Nubianness as an "object", that is static, unchangeable through time and circumstances, is to ignore how histories of migration, and the stories told of them, shape the people.

We encounter such becoming through people such as Hassan, a poet living in the displaced village of *Malki*, and an Arab of *Olaikat*. He is a muscly fit man, with strong facial features, big moustache and an قمحي skin colour, an expression in Arabic, meaning someone who has a skin colour of wheat. The first time we met was at *Malki's* Youth Club, community club where young people meet

and do cultural activities or play sports. I was impressed with his unique, eloquent Arabic poetry, which explained his famous reputation amongst the Arabs of Malki. When asked about Nubianness, his answer was: “I am geographically Nubian, but I am originally an Arab of *Olaikat*”, a statement that encapsulates the deterritorialization in Deleuzian notion of becoming. On the other hand, Hassan’s statement of being geographically part of Nubia, embodies what the Nubian community has experienced since 1964; they are no longer geographically in Nubia, but they consider themselves geographically Nubian. Hassan added that the Arabs of *Olaikat* were bedouin nomads known for their ability in protecting trade troops navigating the desert, and were exempted from serving in the Egyptian army until Abdel Nasser, who introduced compulsory military conscription for all Egyptian men. A simple act of governance has rendered the Arabs of *Olaikat* becoming fully part of the Egyptian state, by forcing them to serve the Egyptian army and taking part in military training, which Deleuze & Guttari would refer to as a “line of articulation” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 3). The line of articulation is the series of transformations and becomings. The excellency in Arabic poetry is a proof of the Arabs of *Olaikat* as a group of people, moving from the Arabian Peninsula to Nubia. The belonging to Nubia and having lived the 1964 displacement is another line of articulation that makes Nubianness not only about ethnicity but also about shared hardships. And again, by serving the military the Arabs of *Olaikat* become Egyptian.

Aly tells me of a story that he has learned from his parents and grandparents: “During the time of the 1964 displacement, the king of Saudi Arabia has offered the Arabs of *Olaikat* to be moved back to the Arabian Peninsula and reunited with Arabs of *Olaikat* in SA. However, our ancestors have refused the offer on grounds that they belong more to Nubia.” Belonging is a very important and pressing theme when we think of migration and people’s movements, a theme that I will be exploring more in chapter 3. Yet, such statement made me think of Deleuze & Guttari’s notion of territorialization and deterritorialization, in a sense that it is constant, movement and flow and where a

starting point fades into and interlocks with many other points in encounters, producing a novel or different assemblage of Nubianness.

Another example of becoming Nubian is relayed through kinship relations. Charles Callender and Fadwa El Guindi explain that the the *Kenouz* or *Mattoki*<sup>41</sup> are “a blend of Arab and Nubian features, emerged during the ninth and tenth centuries AD. (..) Those who settled in the vicinity of Aswan merged with their Nubian predecessors to form the people to whom the name Kenuz has been applied, in various forms, since about AD 1000” (Hopkins & Mehanna, 2010, P.111). A chain of becomings from being the *Robi’a* tribe, to *Kenouz*, to *Mattoukeya*, by that becoming Nubians. Similarly how Nubians are in constant becomings, a testimony of how the *Kenouz* have become Nubian is through language. Published on Ambarkab’s Association in Alexandria’s blog, Tarek Fathy Hussein explains how the Kenzi dialect is a mix between Arabic and the Nubian language<sup>42</sup>, or what Ahmed Hussein Dahab refers to as the *Mahass* language. Dahab says that verbs in Kenzi dialect start with the letter *b*, however in *Mahass* verbs starts with the letter *f*, with minor variations in the name of some things (Dahab, 1996, P.19). Simple variations between two Nubian dialects can be seen an outcome of continuous linguistic becomings.

It is important to highlight that I have not discussed ideas around the becoming Nubian with any of my interlocutors. I am not sure whether they would support such links or not. In fact, I highly suspect that they would agree with it, for the simple fact that power comes with unification, especially when there are demands for rights.

However, I would like to make it clear that my argument around trying to understand who are the Nubians is not against unification. In fact, it is to highlight the rich histories and musics, later explained in chapter 2, that makes Nubianness as we understand it today. Something that I only

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<sup>41</sup> meaning in *Fadekka* people coming from the east.

<sup>42</sup> <https://ambarkab.wordpress.com/%d8%aa%d8%a7%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%ae-%d9%88-%d8%aa%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%ab/>

was able to learn and comprehend, not through history books in school, nor in the conservatoire of music, but only through oral history, social sciences and fieldwork; Nubianness is rich in its history, diversity and is unified by having to share a territorial space and the living of a traumatic experience of being displaced in 1964.

## The Reassemblage of Nubia



In the picture, members of Kaddal family are reunited for the first Eid Adha after the Nubian displacement. Some members, like my great uncle Hussein (second person standing from the right) was coming from Alexandria to spend Eid with his parents. Picture from Uncle Hussein's archive. Unknown Photographer.

The first time I saw this picture was in April 2019 when I was with Uncle Hussein in his house in Toughka. He opened up a box and took out a pile of pictures, including the one above. The only thing I could think about looking at this picture was Bruno Latour's notion of the reassemblage of the social, where he defines society, by asking what are the linkages that connect members of a

community together. What are the different communications through which we can trace the social, and hence understand how a group of people who forms a society and how it gets to be reassembled (Latour, 2005). One picture that freezes the memory of first Eid spent together after the displacement, and where members of the family travel back to this particular geographical spot, in order to celebrate a special event. To me, this picture is a visual simple explanation to the constant Nubian reassemblage.

It is impossible to escape thinking of Latour's *Reassembling the Social*, with a displacement that is massive in scale as the Nubian displacement in 1964. During my fieldwork in July 2019, Egyptian President Sisi has announced compensation to be given to Nubians who have lost their homes and/or agricultural lands during the heightening of the Aswan Dam in 1912 and in 1933. Such announcement has become the main conversation around the displaced villages. The microbuses coming in and out of the displaced villages of Nubia, taking passengers to and back from Aswan has become the space where conversations held by everyone entitled to such compensation. The compensation and the microbus, both became what Latour refers to be "a type of connection between things that are not themselves social" (Latour, 2005, P.9). It was this moment in time and space that has allowed people to reassemble for a common benefit. In the same sense, 56 years ago when the displacement happened, it was the shared experience of being displaced, waiting to receive their homes that has formed the displaced villages of Nubia in Nasr El Nuba.

On the other hand, by "following the actors themselves" (Latour, 2005, P.12), the movement of 113'000 people, leaving behind social relations and forming new ones with neighbouring villages in a complete new territory, changes the kind of people who are "assembled under the umbrella of a society". (Latour, 2005, P.2), by that allowing new social relations to be formed.

Mohamed Fikri Abdul Wahab writes about his visit to Dabud, one of the displaced villages of Nubia, one month after the displacement. He narrates "The vegetable and kerosene peddlers now in

Dabud are not Nubians, but come from neighbouring Upper Egyptian villages. At first the Dabud people did not even allow them to enter their village, and the peddlers had to wait outside the village for buyers to go to them” (Hopkins & Mehanna, 2010, P.235). The relationship between the Nubians of Dabud and neighbouring villages grew out of necessity and need, what Latour refers to as “the science of living together” (Latour, 2005, P.2). Today in *Toushka El Tahgeer*, the village hosts a weekly vegetable *souq* whose venders are almost all saidis coming from neighbouring villages to sell their products.

## Conclusion

In the previous section, I have argued that Nubianess is not one fixed category, yet forever changing and in constant shaping and reshaping. Using ethnographic material as well as historical scholarship, I have laid out the different histories of migration finally settling by the Nile valley in the Nubian region and before being displaced in 1964. I drew on Deleuze & Guttari’s notion of becoming, territorization and deterritorization in thinking through the becoming Nubian and hence the reassemblage of Nubia. Although my argument using Deleuze & Guttari’s notion of territorization and deterritorization, might seem to disregard feelings of originality, belonging and longing to a particular territoriality. I delve more into this theme in chapter 3.

In chapter 2, I follow the same theoretical framework to argue that Nubian music is also not one fixed characteristic through a set of rhythms or only played using pentatonic scales. I do that by following the movement of musical instruments finding their way in and out of Nubia, changing in the instrumentation of Nubian music. Moreover, I focus on weddings as a social milieu where Nubianness and Nubian music get to be shaped, through the different musics of *Kenzi*, *Fadekka* and Arabs of *Olaikat*, bringing histories into contemporary musical practices.





## **Chapter 2: Nubian Music**

# Introduction

“Then what is Nubian music? (...) Members of High Dam Band, gave a definite answer to my confused mind by saying that the Nubian music is the music that is played around one of the four or five particular set of rhythms, accompanied by a melody using pentatonic scale. However, RT Nuba’s main vocal singer had a lengthier answer to my question, focusing on the aura, the feelings and the experience the listener goes through while listening to the music: “موسيقى اللي تخش الوجدان”, the music that penetrates your soul.”

CILAS, Class Y2017-2018, Research Lab, Final Project, by Fayrouz Kaddal.<sup>43</sup>



HIGH DAM BAND POSTER. PHOTO TAKEN FROM THEIR FACEBOOK PAGE.



RT NUBA BAND POSTER. PHOTO TAKEN FROM THEIR FACEBOOK PAGE.

In Chapter1, I have followed Deleuze & Guattari’s notion of the becoming to argue that Nubianness is not one fixed category by laying out all the different histories of migration and mobility that take part in the formation of becoming Nubian.

Similarly in music: Nubian music is not one fixed category that is static throughout the years. After following migration patterns of people, I follow Latour’s notion by thinking of objects as matters who have agency, a function and life of its own that is part of what constitutes the social. In this chapter, I follow objects and musical instruments that accompany people in their travels. Following

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<sup>43</sup> Y2017-2018, I was a yearlong student at Cairo Institute for Liberal Arts, conducting a research as part of Research Lab with Doaa Kaddah, looking at the relations between the 1964 Nubian Resettlement on Contemporary Nubian Music Alexandria. I have interviewed two Nubian Alexandrian bands (“High Dam Band” and “RT Nuba”), looking at their experience of becoming Nubians in Alexandria, as well as, their understanding of Nubian music.

Latour's notion of agency, I think of musical instruments as objects that have agency constituting part of the social. By tracing musical instruments travelling in and out of Nubia, I argue that "traditional" Nubian music is not confined within fixed instrumentation and sounds.

I also highlight the richness of Nubian music by analysing the music practiced by the different groups living in the displaced villages today. I do so by explaining the when, where and how Nubian music and Nubianness get to be practiced. I focus on music performed at three weddings held in the displaced villages of Nubia, as well as, Nubian music performed in other settings such as school events and folkloric performances.

To conduct musical analysis I will refer to recordings, made during fieldwork, commercial recordings, notations, and investigation of instrumentation. This leads me to talk about the concept of a musical rhizome, where musical production and practices are not confined in strict and rigid genres, yet are in constant change and redefined in its meaning and ideology. Before we proceed it is important to consider the implication of some of the methodologies applied.

## **Notes on studying Nubian music**

This chapter studies the music of the *Fadekka*, *Kenouz* and the Arabs of *Olaikat* in the displaced villages of Nubia. I follow Taylor's and Appadurai's notion of "ethnoscape" to study the musical "landscape of persons who make up the shifting world in which we live in: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest-workers, and other moving groups and persons" (Appadurai, 1990, P.7).

Taylor argues "the necessity of studying music as music" (Taylor, 1997), not as text. Studying the music of a particular group only from a lyrical standpoint is not a study of music, but rather of poetry. Therefore, I follow Taylor's argument that "music is also sound, and if we are to understand the ways that music affects the body and the way we feel and create meanings, we have to attend to music as sound as well and seek significations." (Taylor, 1997). I study Nubian music through

detailed description of the music, including instrumentation, melody, harmony, rhythm and arrangement, adding musical notations when needed.

Efficacy and accuracy of using western notation methods in analysing non-western music is a contentious issue with extensive literature addressing the subject. The depths of such discussions are beyond the scope of this chapter, especially that Western musical notation has limitations, particularly its reliance on fractional subdivisions of bars and beats while imposing considerable challenges for truly describing complex rhythms. Further, written music can not be taken as being a totally accurate representation, but rather an interpretation or a crude method of representation. That said, visualisation of sound, particularly when teamed with recordings and video, can help us draw attention to significant details of similarities and differences. As far as I am aware, there is an almost total absence of transcriptions for Nubian music; the music is mostly learned through communal participation. Therefore the notation I will refer to in this chapter, presents what Taylor calls “an approximation of the real sounds” (Taylor, 1997). These will be accompanied by links to the recordings from which these transcriptions are made. The intention is not to impose a western analytical framework onto Nubian music, but simply to use a widely understood musical tool to highlight significant details. Readers able to understand musical notation will be able to utilise this tool and all will have access to audio recordings from which the notations are derived.

## **Instruments with agency**

In chapter 1, I have focused on people moving from one geographical place to another. In the next section, I think of objects and musical instruments as “actors” and objects that have agency and a life to be traced. I “follow the actors in their weaving through things they have added to social skills so as to render more durable the constantly shifting interactions” (Latour, 2005, P.68).



This box was manufactured by the hands of Mahmoud Abdel Aal, in 1948, in El Atarin, Alexandria, for my great grandfather, Abdel Metaal Ali Kaddal. It carried his belongings and his son's Hussein Abdel Metaal Kaddal for decades. After Abdel Metaal Kaddal retired, the box traveled with him from Alexandria to the old village of Eneba in 1959. It moved with Abdel Metaal once again, in 1964, to the displaced village of Toushka, in Kom Ombo. And it has been in the same house since then, carrying the belongings of Hussein Kaddal.

Living in Uncle Hussein's house in Toushka, there was a room with what he said "all my parents' belongings that they have brought with them from the old village". Later on I realised that keeping old furniture and belongings in a locked room inside the house was not an individual practice. Nawal, a relative, has explained the amount of things that her mother brought with her during the displacement to Toushka *el Tahgeer*. "She brought with her all sorts of things: pots, pans, the old house's windows and door lock, everything". Seeing uncle Hussein's box (picture at the beginning of this section) containing my ancestors belongings has reminded me of Latour's actors theory; a box that has its own agency, its own story of being in this world; Uncle Hussein's box was part of my ancestor's hardships, telling the story of the displacement.

Similar to the box, musical instruments have agency; they produce sounds, make music, and act as enjoyable companions to a lot of people traveling together from one geographical location to another.

## The *Nuggara*



Nuggara. Picture taken by me from a *Kenzi* wedding in Tushka Garb. Fieldwork Winter 2020.

The first time I heard of the Nuggara was thanks to El Sheikh Fawzi, a *Kenzi* who serves as the sheikh of Tushka, and who has transformed the bottom floor of his house into a museum of Nubian artefacts. El Sheikh Fawzi explained to me how the Nuggara used to serve as an instrument announcing wars. The set of two big drums consist of metal, covered with animal skin<sup>44</sup>. It is very popular amongst *Kenzi* musicians and people as the instrument of

war that has become used in weddings. In chapter 1, I have mentioned the *Kenouz*'s history of battles and conquests, in which the Nuggara being part of this history as something that one could easily imagine, through its steady Do-Doom, Do-Doom, Do-DoomDo-DoomDo-Doom. The low frequencies coming from the Nuggara would make the floor shake, a sound that reflects a feeling of suspense and as if something big is about to happen.

It is important to mention that according to Sheikh Fawzi at the back of each Nuggara there is the royal Ottoman crest, to indicate permission for its construction, since at the time the Nuggara was

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<sup>44</sup> There is no information available on whether new Nuggara are still manufactured or the cost of it.

considered as a form of weapon. Contemporary manufacturing of Nuggara no longer exists, however when sacrifices of animals occur in the village, the animal skin becomes a donation for Nuggaras' renovation. Further in this section I highlight other research done on the historical aspect of the usage of Nuggara in wars. In this [link](#) we can see the army of Ja'alín Tribe, recruited by the Anglo-Egyptian Army in 1898, with the Nuggara in the middle surrounded with 3 peoples announcing the start of a war.

On the [National Army Museum's website](#), a picture and description of a similar drum to the Nuggara, under the name of Nihas or Nahad, explains that "The ownership of such a drum is a mark of respect and social standing. This example was reputedly taken as a trophy or souvenir after the overwhelming defeat of the Dervish forces at the battle of Omdurman in 1898, during the 2nd Sudan War (1896-1899)". Also, in 2019, [Collections, Library and Archive department](#) at West Dean College for Arts & Conservation, in the UK, conducted research of their collections, including a Sudanese war drum. In asking where is the object from, the project's researchers mention that the Sudanese drum is "One of Osman Digna's War Drums, captured at Tamai and presented by General Kitchener, December 2, 1886. So we know that the drum belonged to Osman Digna, a highly regarded commander in the Mahdist Wars, and the plaque is thought to refer to the battle of Tamai in Sudan, fought between British and Mahdist armies in March 1884." Moreover, in asking how did the drum become part of West Dean College's collection, they explain "In 1886, Frank James (the uncle of West Dean College Founder Edward James) travelled the Red Sea and stopped at the Sudanese port town of Suakin, near to Tamai, where he met General Kitchener and was presented with the Drum. We know this as the archive holds Frank James's diaries where he wrote a day-to-day account of his travels." The Nuggara and the Nihas or Nahad did not only serve as war instruments, but through travels accompanying people on the move, the object has become also a trophy, a sign of power and an object kept in museums and archives subjected to research.



I finally got to actually see the Nuggara and learn the beats played, notated and analysed later in this chapter, by attending a Kenzi wedding in Touthka *Gharb*, where men took turns to play it using sticks made of palm tree branches. Despite that the Nuggara is no longer a sign of power; today it is more a representation or a testimony of the past and a cultural heritage. It remains in people's memory as the instrument of war, its purpose has shifted to becoming solely played in weddings, allowing people to dance along its rhythms, to it becoming an object to be displayed in museums and object of research.

## **The *Tambour***

The second instrument I follow is the tambour, an instrument part of the Lyre family. My interlocutors strongly believe that it is dated back to pharaonic times. The Lyre also goes back to ancient Greece appearing in the Lyre of Orpheus (Davies, 1990), an instrument that charms with its melodies all the women that Orpheus seeks to approach. The tambour or Tanbour is made from wood arms, the main box can be in wood or sometimes in metal, covered with camel skin and with 5 metal wires serving as strings.

I encountered the tambour through Aswan Music Project in 2018, with the help of Ayaat Mohamed, director of AMP and Am Ahmed El Noubi, a *Kenzi* tambour maker, player and teacher who lives in Aswan. Ayaat Mohamed, explained that the tambour instrument is an instrument that has been played around the Nile valley for centuries “You will find it drawn on our temples, such as the temple of Kalabsha”. He added that when Nubians started to adopt Islam as a religion, poems expressing the love of God and praising the Prophet Mohammed started to be written and played along using the Tambour. According to Am Ahmed the Tambour has travelled along with Nubians who have moved



to Suez in 1902, in order to work in digging the Suez Canal and where the Tambour has become the Simsimiyya, an instrument made only from wood, and from an instrument of 5 strings to an instrument with 6, 12 and even 19 strings.

In her Phd dissertation *Hikāyāt Sha'b – Stories of Peoplehood Nasserism, Popular Politics and Songs in Egypt 1956-1973*, Alia Mossallam talks about

an instrument very much similar to the Tambour in shape; “The *simsimiyya* is an instrument said to date back to Pharoanic Egypt but came to Port Said, through Suez in the 1930s (Mossallam, 2012, P.112). Later she adds “Zakariyya Ibrahim, founder of Al-Tanbura band and political activist since the 1970s, described to me how the *simsimiyya* enabled them to resist with grace. “What you cannot say with tact, you can sing,” he explained. Described in similar ways by many of its ‘*ushaq*,’ the *simsimiyya* emerges as more than an instrument that simply characterises the people of the Canal, it becomes their language. *The simsimiyya* binds them through a history of struggle, for songs still start with the call that stems from the experience of the digging of the Suez Canal, where the singer calls “*Dumyāt bīlādī*” (Damietta – a delta city – is my country), to which the audience reply “*wal hābash manzālī!*” (and Ethiopia is my home). The call was literal at a time when workers from Damietta worked along side others from as far as Ethiopia” (Mossallam, 2012, P. 122).

Through Mossallam's work we learn how the Tambour has become- in the Deleuzian sense- the *simsimiya*. Travelling has allowed changes in the Tambour's role and function in relation to territorization and deterritorization, already argued in chapter 1 of this thesis.

I recall meeting Zakaryia Ibrahim in 2017. He explained to me how the extra strings added to the *simsimiya* has allowed for the instrument to play chromatic scale, as well as forming a quartet with other *simsimiya*. The Tambour, then not only has become a *simsimiya*, but also has become able to play in ensembles with other *simsimiyas* in harmony.

Thanks to the HussLab Travel Grant, I visited the International Library of African Music (ILAM), in South Africa, in January 2020 and have seen their instruments collection where a number of Lyre instruments are displayed. Meeting Andrew Tracey, South African ethnomusicologist and son of Hugh Tracey founder of ILAM and founder of African Musical Instruments (AMI), telling me about the presence of a tambour in Kenya, which traveled through Nubians who were serving the British colonial army and settled in Kenya. I was left wondering what name and function their tambour is taking. According to Andrew Tracey no research has been conducted on the Kenyan instrument.

## ***Oud***



As an Alexandrian Nubian musician, I was always told that the Oud was a “traditional” Nubian instrument. In my imagination “traditional” meant to me original, authentic and a starting point. Then in 2019, I meet Akram Mourad, a Nubian Fadekka Cairene musician

and composer, who is also the

nephew of Hamza Alaa El Din, the renowned Nubian singer, *Oud* player and ethnomusicologist. I was very excited to meet him and learn more about his personal journey in music, as well as about Hamza Alaa El Din's. In his young age, Hamza left Tushka and headed off to Cairo to study electrical engineering at King Fouad's University. His presence in Cairo allowed him to encounter the *Oud* and receive education in Arabic classical music. He has studied *Mowashehat* in *Ibrahim Shafiq Institute for Music (Arabic Classical Institute now)*. The *Oud* became his companion; playing, singing and producing new material. In his music, Hamza Alaa El Din not only played pentatonic music, with the *Oud*, but expanded to also using Arabic classical modes. Despite it being very difficult to prove that Hamza Alaa El Din was the first musician and singer to introduce the *Oud* to Nubian music, it is important to highlight that all my interlocutors (musicians, singers and members of the community) repeatedly acknowledged the role that Hamza Alaa El Din played in introducing the *Oud* to Nubian music. Similarly to how the Kenouz have become Nubians; through mobility, deterritorialisation and territorialisation, the *Oud* has become part of Nubian music.

During my fieldwork, I met Am Abdel Ghaffar, a *Fadekka* educator and an *Oud* player fond of Arabic classical music, through Om Kalthoum, Abdel Wahab and Fayrouz. He is a man in his 70's very calm, modest and soft spoken. In Tushka, he is thought of as a reputable and valuable artist for his passion for Arabic classical music. He shares his music with a very limited group of people, only playing for his personal pleasure. Am Abdel Ghaffar tells me the story of how his passion for the *Oud* started; "My brother was working and living in Cairo, one day he came back to the village with an *Oud*. I held it and started to play. I used to sit for hours by the radio listening to Fayrouz and Om Kalthoum and this is how I became passionate with Arabic classical music and particularly *mowashehat*." Meeting Am Abdel Ghaffar and listening to his Arabic classical compositions has deconstructed my understanding of Nubian music. A music that is only composed in pentatonic

mode and that the *Oud* is part of “traditional” and “authentic” Nubian music. Am Abdel Ghaffar’s musical practice tells that people and musicians are not rigid forms of musical genre; they get influenced by other forms and genres of music through listening to radio, TV or following other musicians and composers on the internet. Without openly acknowledging it, Am Abdel Ghaffar’s musical practice is a living testimony that Nubian music is in constant shaping and reformation, where “traditional” and “authentic” are only a moment in time from which to depart.

## Keyboard

As explained in the introduction of this thesis, in 2012 I became part of the contemporary music scene in Alexandria, by joining High Dam Band. The band decided the need of a keyboard player. Despite his popularity as a wedding singer, Loai El Nakeeb, a Gaafari Keyboard player, decided to join our band and venture into contemporary pop bands. Loai explained to me at the time that his interest in joining High Dam Band was out of love of Nubian music, but also his interest in learning to play harmony<sup>45</sup>, which was absent in wedding music. (I will unpack weddings musical practices later in this chapter). Loai El Nakeeb then started to add harmony to the main melody when playing with the band. However, performing in a Nubian wedding Loai focused only on playing the melody, complementing harmony with synth<sup>46</sup>.

During my fieldwork, I joined a group of Nubian musicians from different villages in Nasr el Nouba, for a *Gaada* (explained later in this chapter). We were all musicians coming from different villages in Nasr El Nouba with different instruments; Hisham Batta and Ahmed Hemat on the *Oud* as well as singing, Mohamed Hamza Gaber, son of Hamza Gaber, on the keyboard and myself on the flute. I asked Mohamed Gaber about his keyboard that seemed to me an advanced version of a

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Harmony is the playing of more than one musical note at the same time. Sonically the space feels more filled with  
<sup>45</sup> sounds than playing the melody on its own.

An electronic device that generates and modifies sounds, it serves a similar function to harmony by filling the space  
<sup>46</sup>with sounds, however has more electronic sound.

Yamaha manufacture with its USB input. I was curious about where he bought it from, especially that in the displaced villages of Nubia there was no sign whatsoever of music instruments' shops. Gaber explained that most of musicians who play keyboards in Aswan and in Nasr El Nouba ask their friends or relatives who live and work in Cairo or in the Gulf to bring it back for them. He added that prices of keyboards are much cheaper if bought from the Gulf than in Cairo. It was through Nubian migrant workers that the keyboard has made its way into Nubian music; changing sonic elements in Nubian music, with its automated pre-inserted rhythms, eliminating the role of 4 to 6 duff players, or any other instrument, with its ability to move from one instrumental sound to another at only the press of a button.

In this section, I have argued that the Nuggara, the *Oud*, the Tambour and the keyboard, all are instruments that are part of a social that has its own function and role, an agency moving in and out of Nubia and of Nubian music. I have also argued that the mobility of these instruments challenges our imagination and understanding of what is Nubian music and how does it sound like, allowing for Nubian music to be in constant becomings.

## **Let's make music: The when and where Nubian musical practices happen**

In High Dam Band, we were a small version of music played in the displaced villages of Nubia, a mix of *Fadekka* and *Kenouz*<sup>47</sup>, a reassemblage of the Nubian social. We were all born and raised in Alexandria, trying to rediscover our Nubianness.

Throughout this period, my understanding of Nubian music was limited to knowing the origins of singers, differences in lyrics between *Fadekka* and *Kenouz* languages, as well as rhythms and scales played. *Fadekka* songs are known to be played in pentatonic scales, yet *Kenzi* songs are known to

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<sup>47</sup> Except Boni, our Sudanese mentor originally from Juba, and Loai El Nakeeb an Alexandrian Gaafari, both of whom have become fond stars of Nubian music scene.

be played in diatonic scales. However, during fieldwork I have learned that Nubian music is much more complicated and complex than the simplifications we knew in Alexandria. Our efforts to preserve and represent "Nubian music" in a contemporary popular style, simultaneously added to folk musical practices through their commodification, whilst overlooking the many different histories of displacement of which contemporary Nubian society is composed (see Chapter 1). The different layers of migration that have contributed to the shaping of Nubian society is reflected in the sonic environment and musical practices in the displaced villages of Nubia today. In this chapter thus I argue that Nubian music cannot be reduced to a single category or a limited set of specific musical characteristics alone; efforts to do so, driven by the desire to identify the elements that are "authentically" Nubian, lead to reductionist simplifications that would negate how migrations have been a recurring theme in becoming Nubian, and their impact on musical practices. Instead of seeking an authentic music in fixed elements, we should study the music as we find it, as practiced in celebratory events and as pass-times amongst the *Fadekka*, *Kenouz* and the Arabs of *Olaikat*, living in the displaced villages of Nubia today. In doing so we can see both the influence of past migrations, their traces in bodies, sounds and melodies and the constant evolution of music as an ever changing practice, without reducing musical practice to a false sense of historic authenticity and purity.

Throughout my fieldwork, I have taken part and observed four different occasions in the displaced villages of Nubia, when music was practiced: school celebrations, *Gaada* or gathering, Folklore Troups and weddings.

## Schools

In December 2018, I travelled to Touthka *El Tahgeer* with my husband for preliminary research. We were having lunch at my ancestors' house, when a toktok with a microphone and loudspeakers

roamed around the village inviting everyone for a party, after Maghreb prayers, at Touthka Sharq's (east) Primary School. The party was to celebrate and honour a lifetime of achievements for the head of the school, who is a retiring Nubian woman, retiring and leaving her role for a successor. Challenging stereotypes around gender roles of village life, the majority of Nubian women work full-time, holding, leading and managing roles in the village, while looking after their families. Arriving at the school yard, I was very surprised at the scale of the event: four or five rows of chairs for elderly people and especially men to sit and attend the big event. The *Omda*, the sheikh of the village the head of the school and the head of Touthka *Sharq*'s secondary school, all were invited to give speeches, while my husband and I, as guests were invited to be seated in front rows. Cakes and desert were served to everyone, which was probably the entire population of Touthka *Sharq*. Recalling celebrations when I was at school in Alexandria, we had nothing compared to this in scale. After speeches were given, two students presented recitation of the Quran. Then one performance after the other followed for primary school boys and girls; karate performance and a dance performance of Nubian folklore. Seeing boys and girls performing karate, whilst only girls performed a dance of Nubian Folklore. A performance extracted from an Egyptian film featuring Fouad El Mohandess and Shwikar of يا قلبي غاوي خمس قارات , (Oh my heart ! In love with five continents). For those who do not know this song, it is one of the classic Egyptian films and songs, of a man confused falling in love with women from different five countries (Japanese, Parisian, American, Spanish and Egyptian). The plot twist is that the Egyptian woman, who belly dances wearing a traditional outfit of early 19th century, in fact was all five characters. My husband and I were asked to perform music for the audience, so we decided to play a tune composed by my husband and that is called *SimSim*, which was inspired by the music of Hamza El Din, a famous Nubian musician. The melody uses a pentatonic major scale and an interpretation of various rhythms encountered through listening to Nubian music. We were surprised that members of the audience seemed to pick up these elements, leading to conjecture that this was a traditional



tune from Wadi Halfa. We were left wondering what was about this tune, for it to be a traditional tune from Wadi Halfa? Was it the instrumentation? The melodies? Does these elements allow SimSim then to become a Nubian tune? Does a Nubian tune mean it is only composed by Nubians? We were left with no answers.

The event ended with offering a gift to the head of the school and a DJ playing for more than an hour of Nubian songs (*Fadekka* and *Kenzi*), allowing all school children and elders to dance <sup>48</sup>. My husband and I joined in with the dance, picking up from young kids some really good Nubian dance moves.

Attending these performances, presented by the students, demonstrated how both Nubianness, as well as, Egyptianness both are practiced through the state apparatus (Althusser, 1970). According to the Egyptian curriculum, the language and history of Nubia are not taught in schools, leaving such things to community efforts. The school therefore acts as a form of ideological state apparatus, where ideas of identity are focused on creating a homogenous Egyptian identity.

However, the music performed and danced at the retirement of the head of a state school was almost entirely of Nubian traction, in Nubian languages, and accompanied by Nubian dance. This can be seen as a form of resistance, even if unintentional, to an ideological state apparatus that doesn't invest in the Nubian language to be taught, thereby leaving it to die. (Foucault, 2006).

In her *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics*, Beth Baron talks about image, the visual and iconography in the shaping of nations' identity. She says:

“A nation is an abstraction. That is, it has no material form. Yet ever since the rise of nationalism, the nation has been represented visually. The nation is thus an “imagined community” that is sometimes imagined in human form. The purposes of this iconography are clear: images of the

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<sup>48</sup> *aragid* is a word referring to *Fadekki* wedding. People standing side by side in circles, holding hands, taking small steps to the side to the left and then to the right.

nation were meant to reaffirm the unity of the collective and give the concept of nationhood greater immediacy” (Baron, 2005, P.57)

The performance of the song يا قلبي غاوي خمس قارات , (Oh my heart ! In love with five continents) by the students, and the representation of the African continent, through Shwikar’s *bent el balad*’s character, a word to mark the Cairene working class girl, has left me wondering if it was a conscious decision made by the director of the film. The director’s decision can be interpreted as an extension of the state’s efforts, to create one Egyptian homogenised and popular character.

Bisenbiss is a renowned singer from Abou Simbel *El Tahgeer*, who has worked in Toushka’s Cultural Palace for many years, managing Toushka’s Folklore troupe. Only recently, he resigned after Aswan Cultural Palace’s repeated refusal to pay for the troupe’s transportation expenses. He demonstrated awareness of the use of film as a tool for Egyptianising Nubians, when he discussed a project called The Magical Lantern الفانوس السحري. During the late 1970’s, there was a weekly screening of Arabic and Egyptian films in Toushka El Tahgeer. The cinema projection was originally intended for the village of Abou Simbel *El Tahgeer*, as it was perceived as the artistic capital of Nubia. However, the people of Abu Simbel opposed it, being unhappy at the prospect of having improper romantic Egyptian films shown in their village, believing scenes often promoted undesirable ideas and values, such as scenes of women’s revealing outfits, dancing or even kissing men, which contradicts the desirable image of Nubian women working in the field and looking after their families. The Magic Lantern was then moved to Toushka, where it was accepted. A similar reason was also given cultural palace is in Toushka and not in Abou Simbel; people didn’t want undesirable values being spread in the village, but also saw, being in a nearby village they would have easy access to the cultural palace, if they wanted to. (Fieldnotes, Meeting Bisenbis, Sunday 29/12/2019). The fact that Abou Simbel rejected these projects, but they were accepted in Toushka shows the differing relations and levels of comfort engaging with both Egyptian culture and the Egyptian state to this day. Despite that Nubians, especially women, are good audience of Egyptian

TV series, films, TV programs and talk shows, it doesn't mean that people would follow the same behavioural, cultural and fashion style. In fact, during my fieldwork and whilst watching TV with family members in Tushka, sometimes I felt as if the TV served as a window to an outside world that rarely represent people living in Nubia. Tushka's cultural and social life is something unique that doesn't get represented in state ideological apparatuses.

## **Gaada, قاعدة Or Gathering**

“القاعدة حابة كانت بتتعمل زمان في البلد القديمة و دلوقتي احنا رجعنا نعملها”

*The Gaada or gathering was something our ancestors used to do in Old Nubia, but now we have been doing it.*

Hisham Batta, Summer 2019 Fieldnotes.

In her MA dissertation *Sounding the Nile River Politics Environ*, Regan Lyle Homeyer quotes one of her interlocutors Maher Habbob, a *Fadekka* scholar interested in Nubian studies and language, saying “we have something in Middle Eastern communities called *gaada*- a casual intimate meeting where people sit and where unplanned (spontaneous) songs are sung” (Maher Habbob, interview by author, Aswan, July 29, 2018). She then goes on by drawing a link between Nubian *gaada* with the *damma*, another participatory gathering very popular in Port Said. She also links the *gaada* and *damma* with the *jalsa* in Saudi Arabia. (P.73). To me the *gaada* seemed what a lot of musicians would call “jamming session”, a meeting where musicians get together to create new musical material and/or replay music with which musicians are already familiar. As a musician, I used to find jamming sessions very enjoyable as it was an opportunity to stimulate creative musical ideas, possibly leading to musical productions. It was also enjoyable for the fun and joy of playing music together and remembering tunes. In a jam session, a musician can start with an idea melody or

rhythm, inviting others to work together building on this idea. The one who is more expert or professional usually is the one who is able to lead a jamming session. Sometimes a jam session is an opportunity for musicians to play together a popular tune, for pass-time and leisure or for refreshing their memories on how the tune gets to be played.

I have witnessed several *gaada* in the displaced villages amongst *Fadekka* and the Arabs of *Olaikat*. It was almost impossible to witness a *gaada* by the *Kenouz*, as I have been told that the majority of *Kenouz* singers and musicians live in Aswan, Kom Ombo or in the urban, where there are more work (weddings) opportunities, leaving behind the displaced villages. Getting in touch and contacting the two renowned *Fadekka oud* players and singers Hisham Batta (Abou Simbel *El Tahgeer*) and Ahmed Hemat (Ballana *El Tahgeer*) to interview them for this thesis, they have suggested to get together at Hassan Fakhri El Din's Cultural Palace in Nasr El Nouba. The meeting extended to more than one, where I used to bring my flute and join the musicians in playing Nubian music entirely from memory. Collectively having memorised numerous songs a *gaada* can last several hours, and the collective knowledge of the music played provided a good opportunity for a researcher, with a lesser knowledge of the songs than the community participating, to join in a more informal setting. Other musicians who would regularly join our meetings were Mohamed Hamza Gaber (a keyboard player from Tushka *Sharq*), Mohamed DaifAllah (a keyboard player from Aswan, originally Gaafari) and Mohamed Youssef منشيد ديني, (a religious singer from the village of Ballana *El Tahgeer*). Despite that we all came from different villages in the displaced villages of Nubia, we all met at Hassan Fakhri El Din's Cultural Palace in Nasr El Nouba. Our meetings were usually past *Maghreb* or *Esha* prayers, when everyone would have finished their day jobs and had dinner. However, our meeting times made it impossible to find a microbus to commute to Nasr El Nouba. So, Hisham Batta and Ahmed Hemat would kindly pass by Tushka *El Tahgeer* to pick me up, sometimes along with others. Meetings among musicians living across the displaced villages,

were facilitated by private cars, something that would have been very difficult in Old Nubia where boats were the only means to commute. Moreover, there were other considerations at work in this effort; the choice of meeting at the cultural palace was primarily because I was the only woman among these musicians. *Gaada* are usually gatherings for men only, held in homes and where people can be more flexible and relaxed. As such it is not seen appropriate for women to attend. However, being a researcher, asking to meet for my MA thesis, has changed the dynamics around my presence in these *gaada*.

From the gatherings I have attended, I have noticed that music is played primarily to refresh musicians and singers memories of Nubian songs. There was a joy I could witness in people's faces singing a song with repetitive lyrics and melodies, as if we were all on a bus for a trip singing and playing music for the joy of doing so. In the songs sung there is often a common feature of many repeated short melodic phrases. The repetitive nature made these songs easy to remember, leaving me humming the melodies on my way home, despite my inability to sing nor comprehend the language. This feature of the music is important; whilst there are professional musicians who specialise in Nubian music, in most occasions where Nubian music is performed in the villages it involves communal participation. While there may be a professional performer or DJ, the music is enacted by the entire community coming together in singing and dancing. The predictability of these short phrases and repetitive structures, and monophonically (without addition of vocalised harmony), that do not require virtuosic, thus ensuring all can participate. Also, from my work with High Dam Band and fieldwork in Tushka *El Tahgeer*, I know that a lot of the young Nubians like myself, do not speak the language (*Fadekka* and *Kenzi*). The Nubian songs, thanks to its short melodic phrases, allow us be familiar with and sometimes learn by heart the songs, without understanding their meanings. This can be seen as a dual weapon, for the difficulty of maintaining correct pronunciations of words.

In *Gaadas*, translation of songs were given only when asked for. And as I was probably the only one in the *gaadas* unable to speak the Nubian language, I have decided not to repeatedly ask for translations, in fear of disturbing the flow of music-making. Music, melodies, harmonies and leisure were always the dominant of any *Fadekkka gaada*. Songs and music played were haphazardly chosen, one leading to the other, sometimes posing to think of which song to sing. A smile accompanying the start of each song, as if to mark the victory of remembering this particular song. As an outsider to the *gaadas*, it was clear to me that the learning and remembrance of songs was done through these gatherings.

Despite that songs sang in *Gaadas* or in weddings seem not to have a core, pre-agreed upon playlist, I have noticed that a lot of the songs sang in *gaada*, are the same sung in weddings not only in the displaced villages of Nubia, but also in Alexandria. Something that has led me thinking of the role that Nubian music plays in preserving a form of collective memory. In a sense of how to become part of Nubia and becoming Nubian also meant that people's bodies form an archive preserving Nubian songs. There were times during the *gaada*, in a similar way when I used to go to the Sudanese club in Alexandria to learn Nubian music, I wouldn't recognise the song played. Musicians then looked at me trying to teach me how to play on the flute the exact line of harmony in the original song. Any form of improvisation of the harmony, would seem an unwelcome change to the script preserved in people's minds and bodies; the song had to be played exactly the same, in every *gaada*, wedding, or jam session.

Leaving the *gaada* with Hisham Batta at Nasr El Nouba during summer 2019, I remembered when I used to cycle home after spending hours with my band at the Sudanese Club, learning Sudanese and Egyptian Nubian songs. It was thanks to High Dam band, the Sudanese Club in Alexandria, where my links to Nubia and Nubian music started to grow. The absence of institutional Nubian music and language education in Egypt, has allowed for the Sudanese Club in Alexandria and the

*gaada* in the displaced villages of Nubia to make important contributions in the becoming of Nubian musicians, in terms of when, where and how music making happens; music making being one of the key vehicles through which Nubianness is communicated.



*Gaada* with Arabs of Olaikat in Malki. Fieldwork winter 2020. Photo taken by me.

As with the Fadekka, I attended *gaadas* with the Arabs of *Olaikat*. I was invited to two *gaadas*, where once again, I was the only female. However, whilst one was held at the Youth Club in the displaced village of Malki, the second was in the home of one of my interlocutors. In both *gaadas*, I was with Hassan Abdel Rahman (a poet), Am Abdel Bary (a singer and a tambour player), Adel Abdel Moneim Taha (a professor of law at University of Aswan, very active in the community of Arabs of *Olaikat*). The *gaadas* I have attended in Malki were different than those in Nasr El Nouba, as the Arabs of *Olaikat* are known for their excellence in Arabic improvised poetry. Listening to Hassan Abdel Rahman, I was amazed of his ability to compose and improvise such complicated *fussha* and *ammeyah* poetry. It is also known that the Arabs of *Olaikat*'s poetry uses words that are

very difficult to comprehend for the rest of Arabic natives, and despite Arabic being my first language, on several occasions I had to ask Hassan meaning of a lot of words.

Music was played during *gaada* mainly using tambour and sometimes tar, to serve a purpose of accompanying the singer. It is important to note that the music I have heard of Arabs of *Olaikat* is much more simple in its melodic composition than those of *Fadekka* and *Kenouz*, as it does not contain any sequences nor harmony. Music played by the *Fadekka* and *Kenouz*, whether on *Oud* or Keyboard focuses a lot on harmony, which reflects the call and response format in singing. Arabs of *Olaikat*'s creative excellence relies in poetry, both that has been passed on orally from one generation to another, and the craft of improvising verse on the spot. Hassan Abdel Rahman recited poetry he has learned from his ancestors that they have learned from their ancestors, and where the original composer is unknown, similar to how oral history is often perceived in folk songs. He has also explained how in the same piece he has recited there were verses that he has composed and added to his ancestors poetry. In this we can see a fascinating performance of tradition as an intergenerational and communal creative process where, despite the virtuosity of their poetic abilities, individual recognition is less important than the active engagement and contribution to these poems. In this respect, the poetry is always in a state of becoming, and becoming a poet of Arabs of *Olaikat* becomes a strong part of that.

When I asked Hassan about the *gaada* he told me of the many trips he did with his friends in deserted places around the displaced villages, with their tents, water and food supplies, spending nights looking at the stars and writing poetry. The gendered nature of these *gaadas*, spent with the male figures of *Fadekka* and the Arabs of *Olaikat* has left me wondering whether there are similar practices and activities done by women.





Image of Nefissa. Taken by me

In Armena I meet Nefissa, who is the only female professional singer and musician (Tar) I have met in the displaced villages of Nubia. Unfortunately, in older times, Nefissa being a singer and a musician was not an oddity. Countess Anna Hohenwart-Gerlachstein's recordings (B 9453- B9454- B9458- B9460- B9461- B9462) held at the Phonogramm Archives of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna, are a testimony of such times and era where ceremonial life in Nubia was ran and orchestrated by women. A complete opposite situation to what I have witnessed in my fieldwork where men are the dominant figures.

When I asked Nefissa what had happened for such change in dynamics to occur, her response was:

“It takes only one Sheikh to say that it is *haram* for women to sing or make music for people to believe this should be the case” (Fieldwork, summer 2019). Also, as a flautist and my interest in Ethnomusicology, I tried to sense if it would be acceptable if I join in performing music in Nubian weddings. Yet the response was always “But your family will not allow you.”, an answer that gave the impression that it would not be acceptable for a Nubian woman to perform in Nubian wedding. It is important to note that community reactions today to women singing and making music in weddings, is very different than women joining Touthka Folklore Troupe. Yet, Touthka Folklore Troupe is always looked up to and well respected by Nubians, for its association with the Ministry of Culture and its work touring around the world, representing Nubian culture.

## Touthka Folklore Troupe

On 25th of December 2019, I joined Touthka Folklore Troupe to Aswan. They were performing at the Nile Museum, for the occasion of the Arab African Forum, supported by both the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

The Troupe is formed of 8 to 12 female and male dancers. A keyboard player, a singer and around 3 to 4 *tar* players. The bus was waiting for us in Abou Simbel *El Tahgeer*, as a meeting point for all troupe's members, who came from different parts of the displaced villages, to meet along with the choreographer and the band manager. Since Tushka Cultural Palace was originally supposed to be in Abou Simbel village, the troupe is predominantly formed of *Fadekka* people and focuses on representing *Fadekka* ceremonial life only.

The forum was full of young people working as volunteers, officials and politicians from different countries in the region. By the time we arrived to the Nile Museum the forum was about to end,



Tushka Folklore Troupe performing at the Arabic African Forum in Aswan. Photo Taken by me.

this is when

Tushka Folklore

Troupe was

requested to

perform.

The dancers were

wearing shiny

orange *gallabeyas*,

underneath the

Nubian see-thru

dress el *Gergar*;

their hair was covered with veils. Men were wearing white *gallabeyas*. The troupe's costume was close to the everyday outfit for Nubians living in the displaced villages, yet more glamorous.

Watching the dancers rehearsing before the performance, they were very coordinated, their performance was choreographed and staged in "tableaux", with a start and an end, with planned steps and moves, which is very different than in weddings where people stand side by side, close to each

other. We were accompanied with wives of the keyboardist and the band manager. They spontaneously joined the troupe to the stage, dancing *aragid*. To my eyes there was a contrast between a staged performance and communal spontaneous form of dancing.

It took only three songs for the audience to start dancing and some joined the troupe on stage to dance. I was surprised to know that songs lamenting old Nubia and the 1964 displacement were sang and performed by the troupe. But observing a performance like the Arabic African Youth Forum, I thought it was impossible for an international and an Egyptian audience to understand a song sang in Nubian language. Yet, this might have been possible for the same reason; overcoming a highly securitised political environment through a dying language.

Musically the tar players were playing along amplified keyboard. It was very difficult to hear the drums playing, despite they were playing very complicated rhythms. The keyboard and the singing were given more power over the drums. Something that goes against the idea of “presenting Nubian Folklore”. If the troupe was interested in presenting what would be the original or authentic Nubian music, then in this case, it would be reasonable to highlight and only focus on the drum and singing aspect of Nubian music. However, the keyboard being sonically louder and dominant suggest that there is no such thing called original nor authentic Nubian music, yet it is in constant shaping and reformation. A point I discuss more later in this chapter.

According to the band manager, the troupe was formed in 1997, for the occasion of the opening of Nubian Museum in Aswan and where they did their first performance. Before 1997, dance troupes were formed as independent initiatives by young Nubians. Their rehearsals took place in Touhska and Abou Simbel El *Tahgeer*’s Youth Clubs. However in 1997, these initiatives has become officially attributed to the Ministry of Culture.

It is important to highlight the importance of the opening of Nubian Museum in Aswan. Despite the silencing of the trauma and narrative of Nubian displacement in 1964, the opening of the museum

was still important to a lot of Nubians. Interviewing Akram Mourad, he told me “This is when Hamza Alaa El Din came back from the US to perform, through an invitation by the Minister of Culture at the time, Farouk Hosni. For Hamza Alaa el Din, this event symbolised the importance and start of Nubian integration in the Egyptian society. Something that he had struggled with and fought for a lot” (Fieldnotes Winter 2020). The opening of the Nubian museum and the formation of Touthka National Troupe, was a continuation of state’s efforts (especially with the Magical Lantern discussed earlier in this chapter), to engineer the integration of Nubians within the Egyptian state. These efforts can be interpreted as the attempts by cultural state agents attempts to produce the 1964 displacement as a successful resettlement, whether the state having fulfilled the demand of inclusion that Am Gaber has once expressed to me “كنا منسيين” (we were forgotten). One could argue following, Thayer Scudder ‘s “The Four-Stage Process for Achieving Successful Resettlement”, that this reflects “Stage 4: Handing over a sustainable resettlement process to the second generation of resettlers and to nonproject authority institutions” (Scudder, 2009, P.30). A Nubian museum that tells the history and story of Nubia by Egyptian cultural institutions would suggest that the Nubian resettlement project is not fully successful, as it has not reached stage 4.

Also, Bisenbiss , renowned singer and ex-manager of Touthka Folklore Troupe, has explained to me that Touthka Cultural Palace is associated with Aswan Cultural Palace. Every year, all cultural palaces around the displaced villages and in villages around Aswan, such as Wadi Karkar<sup>49</sup>, receive a plan for the events and concerts. Nubians have no decision in planning their own cultural events. Touthka Folklore Troupe might be designing their performances. Yet, contests get to be organised frequently between folklore troupes around the country, which poses questions such as who are the jury and on what criteria do they use to asses a good or a bad performance. As a musician myself, I was always against competitions when it comes to creative practices.

## Radio

Radios play an important role as an object that is carried along in travels, as well as connecting geographical spaces with each other. Earlier in this chapter, I have explained how the radio played an important inspiration for Am Abdel Ghaffar to produce music in Arabic classical modes, influenced by Abdel Halim Hafez, Abdel Wahab, Om Kalthoum and Fayrouz. The radio can then be seen as a tool where Arabic and Egyptian nationalism reach out to the rural more marginalised areas in Egypt, as well as a tool of inclusion or exclusion.

Hisham Batta mentioned of a weekly radio program that used to be aired of Nubian music of his ancestors. This music might be the only reference that the Nubian musician have for their ancestors work, at all. Today when I listen to the radio the only Nubian music that gets to be presented is Mohamed Mounir's music, a very popular star in Egypt. The problematics of only presenting Mohamed Mounir's music is the homogenous understanding of what is Nubian music, as if Nubia has no other musician other than Mohamed Mounir.

## Weddings

“الأفراح عندنا غير!” Our weddings are unique!

Nawal, Fieldwork notes, April 2019.

Throughout my childhood and early adolescence, I was always aware that weddings are the highlight of Nubian social gatherings and where music mostly gets to be played all day and night, with participation from both men and women. Wedding seasons in the displaced villages of Nubia usually happen during Eid Adha and Eid Moubarak, when Nubians living in distant cities travel back to their villages to celebrate Eid as well as weddings. Travelling from the village to the urban to attend a wedding and vice versa, is considered to be واجب, a duty and a must-do for a lot of Nubians. Therefore, there was no doubt to be focusing on observing weddings to be able to

understand how Nubianness is shaped and practiced and to explore Nubian music in practice during one of its most important social settings.

On many occasions, whilst growing up and during research, Uncle Hussein told me of times when Nubian weddings would last for seven days, seven days celebrating by dancing, singing and eating all together all day. Today financial burdens have put a lot of families under significant pressure, and the period and expenses afforded to weddings have been reduced; Nubian weddings now normally only last for two days: the *henna*<sup>50</sup> and the wedding day.

In the next part of this chapter, I focus on how Nubianness and Nubian music gets to be practiced. I argue that there is no one static definition to Nubian music. I highlight its richness by describing and analysing three different weddings I have observed throughout my fieldwork of *Fadekka*, *Kenzi* and Arabs of *Olaikat*.

## ***Kenzi* Wedding**

Am Galal GahAllah was my key entry to *Kenzi* people in Tushka *Gharb*. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 1, he is the only link I have with my paternal grandmother who was a *Kenzi* woman. Am Galal invited me to attend a wedding of a *Kenzi* couple in Tushka *Gharb*. He repeatedly highlighted that the father of the bride is a big admirer of *el fan el kenzi el assil*, authentic *Kenzi* art and keen on its preservation. Everyone around the village was talking about a group of musicians and dancers traveling all the way from Khartoum to perform the *Holy Holy* (to be described shortly). I collected my camera, my sound recorder, and got ready for a long night without sleep. Am Galal took me to sit in the house of the bride surrounded with a lot of women and their children, waiting for the wedding to start. I congratulated the bride and her family wishing them a

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<sup>50</sup> *Henna* حنة is the day that precedes the wedding day and this is when the groom and the bride gets to be prepared for the wedding day, usually the following day. The bride gets to have henna drawn on her body and the groom gets to dip his hand and feet in henna paste.



happy marriage, as well as asking them permission to take videos of the wedding. Men sat outside the house on the *mastaba*<sup>51</sup>, neighbouring houses opened their doors for more people to be seated. The wedding started with the Holy Holy performance. Young boys and men were all excited, surrounding the performers who came all the way from Khartoum for this wedding. I forced myself into the crowd, there were no other woman at this point. The *Holy Holy* dance consisted of 3 or 4 men taking big steps back and forth and sometimes jumping whilst clapping along a beat played by the *Nuggara* (a pair of large drums similar to kettle drums- See image P.60). I have asked Daniel Merrill, musician and composer, as well as, my husband to help with notating the Nuggara and the clapping.

From the recorded video and the notation above, one could easily observe how music amongst the *Kenouz* is practiced collectively. Notes above the line indicate notes played on the smaller of the two *Nugarra*, creating a higher pitch, while notes below the line indicate the larger, lower pitched *Nugarra*. R and L indicate which stick hand is used to strike the drum.

<sup>51</sup> The mastabaمصطبة is a seating area attached to the front wall of houses.

In the video we can see men taking turns to perform the *Nuggara* instrument. Also, the reader doesn't need to be a music expert to be able to see that the three different examples of notations of the *Nuggara* highlight that each player has a different way of performing the rhythm. Once playing, the drummer does not often vary the pattern, until fatigue sets in and another player takes over. For most players the right hand is the dominant hand, striking with more force and the left hand generally being softer, sometimes this is slight, sometimes distinct, similar to what in kit drumming would be termed ghost notes. These notes have been indicated in brackets ( ). In general the down beat is the most emphasised, coordinating with the emphasis of the clapping patterns that accompany this beat. However, in example three, where the ghost note is played on the higher pitched *Nuggara*, the beat after the ghost note is also heavily accented. The 4 bar phrases are purely a device for illustrating the repeating nature of the rhythms and should not be taken as indicative of the form or structure of the music of which this is a part. The music continues for several hours without interruption, moving from one song to another, where lyrics and melodies do not necessarily follow this phrase length, or even the same sense of metric division.

Accompanied by random rifle shots in the air another layer to the rhythm is added. A singer with a microphone, almost hidden from sight by gathering crowds, sings with a distorted and rough voice along with other men responding to his calls. It felt like hours when he sang the same sentence and the same melody over and over. The rhythm played on the *Nuggara* felt going on forever repeating the same rhythm. Repetition in music is a recurring theme. In a *gaada*, musicians sing songs over and over, songs that they already know by heart. But in a wedding, there is more time and space for melody to be repeated over and over.

The *Holy Holy* stopped suddenly after everyone has become sweaty and very tired. A procession started taking the bride from her parental home to her groom's. Two men with their drums; one who



is a singer as well as a *tar* player, accompanied with a *tabla* player. Surrounded by women and children, no presence of men, the singer started singing, encouraging his audience to respond to his calls. From time to time, I heard women laughing to some of the lines sang, probably enjoying the fact that they are singing along like little children on a school trip. I heard occasional “*zaghrouta*”<sup>52</sup>. It is very easy to distinguish an Egyptian “*zaghrouta*” from a Sudanese or a Lebanese “*zaghrouta*”. Women in Nubia follow more a Sudanese sounded-like “*zaghrouta*” with a constant “*yayayayayaaaaayy*”. However, occasional Egyptian “*zaghrouta*” would appear sounding like <sup>53</sup>“*lolololooleeeeyyy*”.

The singer led the procession with no microphone or amplification, paving the way for everyone to repeat after him, singing in a call and response form, singing a solo line that is then repeated by all in the procession. This use of repetitive imitation created a power by the contrast between the individual and collective expression of the same phrase. The singing was accompanied by several *tar* and the *tabla*, which, though playing in the same meter, played different, yet interlocking rhythms which completed each other, creating a motoring sound like a train on a track.

As the procession moved, the melodies and rhythms roamed around the village, resonating with the natural echos that the villages buildings and streets create, and emphasised by the musical echos of the singing of the women, the children and elder ladies following the procession. One could clearly hear the voice of the individual responding to the singer’s line but also one could hear the sound of the collective singing all together along the singer. I closed my eyes trying to zoom in and listen to each voice on its own, and then zoomed out to listen to the collective. The mass, the individual, the details, all formed a complete complex sonic tableaux that reflected unity and solidarity of a community that was coming together in celebration.

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<sup>52</sup> Zaghrouta: High-pitched trills performed by women, sounding like short phrases of screams.

The *Zaghrouta* and the wedding procession can be seen through this video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GLTOWA8u9rQ>

<sup>53</sup> [v=GLTOWA8u9rQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GLTOWA8u9rQ)

A procession of hundred of women and children walked around the village like in a maze. We stoped once or twice happily accepting water offered by neighbouring houses. The sky of Tushka was filled with beautiful echoed melodies and songs. Songs had no clear start nor end, moving from one to the next through constant call and response. The dynamic of a call and response to the singer excalerated with footsteps heading to the groom's house. It took almost an hour of walk to the groom's house and back. I was walking along the bride's aunt, in getting to know each other, she asked me about my thesis topic, her young beautiful face inviting me to ask her if she was born in Tushka El Tahgeer, with a smile she answers "I was born in 1964". We both looked at each other and laughed at the miracle of her survival the harsh dire situation of the displacement. I responded to her saying "You were lucky to survive! My family lost my great step grandmother in 1965!". I took a deep breath and looked up at the moon lightening Tushka's sky. It was almost past midnight and the village was as awake as if it was midday.

Coming back to the bride's family home, there was a third singer waiting for the wedding to take off; a stage hosting the famous Nubian *Kenzi* singer Hassan El Soghayar. I was in the procession walking into the bride's family house where the wedding took place in the street. We were singing along responding to the singer, when suddenly I couldn't hear my voice nor of the women around me from the amplified voice of Hassan El Soghayar. Suddenly the collective was voiceless, silenced and muted by the power of the loudest technology. Of course, the mass production of Yamaha keyboards and the advanced sound systems' were able to tongue-tie us. The sound of highly-skilled craftsmanship of the *duff* and *tabla* players was wiped out by the artificial, automated sound of a mass produced Yamaha keyboard with its artificial sound. The keyboardist soloing like a jet ski surfer on an ocean full of different sounds, surfing from the sound of an instrument to another with

only the touch of a button. At this point, zooming in and out was no longer possible; I could only hear the sound of dominance, power and individuality.

I joined the women to dance, after all the amplified sound system was fuelling everyone at the wedding with the power to dance. Women were grouped in circles, standing side by side, hand in hand, dancing *Aragid*<sup>54</sup>. The *Aragid* might seem to be very simple; one step to the left, then stop, then another to the left and stop. However, elder women with their Sudanese-like colourful saris had a unique way of dancing, as if they perform with their chest a syncopated beat to the rhythm. Their bodies subtly rolled from foot to chest and back, whilst maintaining the same steps as everyone. I looked at them trying to feel and imitate them, yet I failed.

I noticed Am Galal's daughter and grand daughter wearing *gergar*, exactly like *Fadekka* women. Men wearing gallabeyas in different colours were grouped dancing in an opposite side of the street. Unlike women, they were not dancing *aragid*, but rather holding sticks faced to the stage at Hassan El Soghayar, all dancing together. A group of young boys were happy to collect and play with bullet casings discarded on the floor, after some shots were released in the air to celebrate the happy wedding. It is always said that wedding processions taking the bride to the groom, as well as the *aragid* are particular to *Fadekka* weddings, which the *Kenzi* have adopted. Am Galal GahAllah and the bride's aunt, both have also confirmed such information. However, I have witnessed this same practice at *Kenouz* weddings as well. I have been unable to discover whether *Kenouz* adopted this from the *Fadekka*, and if so when this occurred.

To my ears the music and songs sung by Hassan El Soghayar sounded like quarter tones just like *saidi* song weddings in a language that I couldn't understand, which was more of a surprise. But at the same time it reminded me of *Kenouz*'s history of migration, already discussed in Chapter 1,

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<sup>54</sup> *aragid* is a word referring to *Fadekka* wedding. People standing side by side in circles, holding hands, taking small steps to the side to the left and then to the right.

where people came from the Arabic Peninsula all the way to Nubia. Music travels along with people, it accompanies them everywhere, it deterritorialise and territorialises back again.

At this point it was almost 3 AM, and the wedding was still going on. Very tired with achy legs and a head full of music, I decided to go home.

## ***Fadekka* weddings**

As the majority of my paternal family are *Fadekka*, my participation in *Fadekka* weddings goes back earlier than my MA fieldwork. I recall the first time attending a wedding was in Tushka *El Tahgeer, Sharq* in 2004, for one of our relatives. My memory around this wedding is very blurry as I was not attending for research purposes. Throughout my fieldwork, I have attended multiple *Fadekka* weddings around the displaced villages of Nubia; Tushka *Sharq*, Abou Simbel and Armena. In this section, I focus on one that I have attended on April 2019, for a couple where the bride is from Tushka *Sharq* and the groom is also a *fadekki* from Armena<sup>55</sup>.

It was the *henna* day, I joined uncle Hussein to the Bride's house. It was lunch time. Uncle Hussein told me that I have missed the slaughter of the cow after *Fajr* prayer. He explained that the tradition is to slaughter a cow and that food is cooked for the whole village. Yet because the bride is from Tushka and the groom is from Armena, the bride's family slaughtered a cow on the henna day and the groom would do the same in his village on the wedding day. Women of the village collaborated to prepare for the cooking, washing the dishes and men cook. The big pots, pans and huge amount of plates were owned by *Shabab Tushka*, (Tushka's Youth)<sup>56</sup>. On the plate it was written in green Tushka *East*. There were other plates and big pans marked in other colours, these plates and pans were borrowed from other villages in Nasr el Nuba. All the women contributed in the washing up of

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<sup>55</sup> *Armena* is also one of the displaced villages of Nubia, where the majority are *fadekki*.

<sup>56</sup> a number of young people who organise events in the Tushka East Club.

dishes. This was all done in the backyard of the mosque that is dedicated for such events. A member from the bride's family kept a record of who contributed in the washing up of dishes and who did not, so that if a lady has not contributed in the dishes, the family can argue that they will not help in this lady's children weddings. The lunch was a big tray with small plates, people sat around it and ate all together sharing the same meal. Women sit all together, and men the same. There was no mixing of gender while having food, but I did not feel that gender interactions were prohibited. I joined the women of the family after greeting the bride and her family. The bride and her friends were sitting with us in the same room, chatting and laughing.

After *Maghreb* prayers, uncle Hussein and I went to the bride's home to witness the *Katb Ketab*. Men of the village, all wearing white *gallabeya* were gathered at the back of the house to celebrate the religious ceremony. I was on the roof of the bride's family house with her and the rest of the women watching the *katb ketab*. Once the ceremony was over, Tushka was filled with *zagharit*, similar to *Kenzi* wedding; a mix of the 3 *zagharit*: Egyptian, Nubian and Sudanese. I met Hany, first time I have seen him was in 2004, first time I ever came to Tushka. I used to see him every now and then in Alexandria University where he studied business and I studied French literature, and where he used to introduce me to other Nubians studying at Alexandria University. He introduced me to his wife Salma and her sister Samira. Sara also studied French literature, at Cairo University, and now works for Egypt Air's office in Cairo. I was also introduced to Hany's aunt who is settled in Alexandria. Her son lives in the UK and is married to a British, which gave us something in common to talk about. Meeting Khaled again and his family, I felt somehow a sense of belonging, as we were all "those living in the city", but who have Nubian roots. I also thought how Nubia is not in isolation, people travel and with travel they build new connections.

On the morning of the wedding day, the bride went to the hairdresser in Aswan, then the groom went to pick her up and they both went for a ride around Aswan with their friends, taking pictures all around Aswan. They mainly sought places with view for nice pictures. Uncle Hussein told me that this is all new to their traditions to go to the hairdresser, wear a white dress and a suit, and roaming around Aswan for pictures. I joined women heading to Armena to attend the wedding. In the middle of the streets I noticed benches for people to sit on. Music was loud (a keyboard player and a singer). I could recognise a lot of the songs, they were the same songs played at Nubian weddings I have attended in Alexandria and Nubian social media platforms. To a half outsider, it seemed that these songs are what unites Nubians all over the country, or probably everywhere in the world. They sang songs of Wardi, Moataz Sabahi, Batta, El Soghayar, El Balabel. A mix of Nubian Sudanese and Nubian Egyptian singers. Recognising the songs being played and trying to sing along, I felt inclusion and part of a communal practice and one step closer to being Nubian. Here I was again, right in the middle of a chain of beats with my body, my ears and my recorder, side by side with other women. A circle of sonic wonders, as well as bodies where rhythms and melodies dwelling and dancing with constellation of stars all around the displaced villages' sky. I could feel unity through songs and dance.

There were more than one singer singing in the wedding, they took turns, not allowing for the music to ever stop, people had to remain together side by side dancing. The keyboard player had 3 or 4 keys set up on top of each other. He used to move from one song to another without stopping, one would not notice this move unless they knew the song by heart. Sometimes there was a change in key from one song to another and it was fascinating how he was doing a shift without it being sudden to the listener and without stopping the music. He would play a sort of synthesized chromatic scale and reach to his new scale destination. This slowed down people's dancing; as it was slowed down with the speed of the rhythms but never stopping the music. Despite the loud

sound systems, I spotted a toddler sleeping on his mother's shoulder whilst she was dancing, which left me thinking of the flow of rhythm passing through his body transmitted from his mother which many will allow this little toddler to dance and play Nubian rhythms very smoothly. Little children danced with a lot of complex moves and energy. They did not need anyone to teach them how to dance *aragid*, they were masters at it. The *aragid* becomes an intimate space where Nubianness is enacted. The men had swords in their hands whilst dancing. There was one gun shot in the air. I was next to the young man who had shot it, I felt the pressure, but very soon it caused problem, since all the men in the wedding surrounded the young man and the gun was taken away. I was laughing with Am Shawky about the usage of guns and whip in weddings. He told me that in the Bisharia tribes they used to beat the grooms on the henna night with a whip, if he survived they allowed him to marry the girl and if not he was not allowed to marry her. We both laughed but he said this was not what they did in Nubia and it was just an adopted practice to have whips, swords and guns in weddings.

The groom had a bottle of perfume in his hand to salute people, same as a lot of members of the family. Similar to the *Kenzi* old women, I have noticed that old *Fadekka* ladies performed an up beat with their chest that the music does not play. I was fascinated to see ladies wearing shiny gold necklaces (known as *djakek*) and earrings, similar to the ones in the Nubian museum and Azza Fahmy's book (Fahmy, 2007). Also, necklaces in a form of a chain of shiny gold, with coins of African faces pending from it. We danced *aragid* for hours and hours; men in circles and women in circles side by side. The music went on for hours until the groom gifted his bride with the *shabka* this was when the singers stopped singing and suddenly Arabic/Egyptian/Lebanese popular music was put on for a break.

The groom's uncle offered us (me and Am Shawky) some tea in his house nearby. Am Shawky was surprised to know that the uncle of the groom was also living in Alexandria, but he has never met him before. They talked about what happened on the groom's henna night; he had henna in his hand, but this was when his friends threw eggs on his head and flour, they all laughed saying that they never had these traditions. The groom's grandfather joined in, who also just came from Alexandria. This time uncle Shawky recognised him and they both shared names that they both recognise and updates about family members. We all agreed how fascinating that the world is so small; Alexandria, Cairo and Nubian villages were all so connected. I felt as if geographical location was present and absent at the same time. I left the wedding at 3:30 AM with Am Shawky, Sara, Sheri and other women in a microbus. We left together knowing that the wedding will continue till the morning. I have been told that usually weddings end at 8 am, since kids have to go to school and people have to go to work.

## **Arabs of *Olaikat***

I was invited to attend a wedding of a couple from the Arabs of *Olaikat* in the displaced Malki village. In front of the bride's home, men and women were gathered separately from each other, waiting for the ceremony to begin. A singer, two to three *duff* players and a tambour player were all ready to start performing. Unlike the *Kenouz* and the *Fadekka*, dancing in Arabs of *Olaikat*'s weddings is predominately performed by men, with the participation of one or two women. The rest of women sat together watching the dance. Music played was mainly to complement the dance and to allow for the dancing to continue nonstop, moving from one song to another. Men stood in a semi-circle, started hopping forwards and backwards from a women who had her face covered, so that her identity wouldn't be recognised. Men's dance was highly coordinated with each other and with the music. Once again, I asked Daniel Merrill, my husband to help me with notating some of



the tunes I have recorded at the wedding. In the upcoming section and with the help of the notation,

The image displays a musical score for a wedding dance sequence. It consists of five staves, each representing a different instrument or action: Clap 1, Clap 2, Clap 3, Tambour, and Tar. The time signature is 4/4. Clap 1 features a series of eighth notes with triplets. Clap 2 and Clap 3 show eighth notes with accents and dynamic markings like 'Rf'. The Tambour staff includes eighth notes and triplets. The Tar staff shows a sequence of eighth notes with dynamic markings 'D' and 'S'.

I highlight the communal practice of dancing and practicing music in a wedding.

Clapping 1,2 and 3 refers to patterns of clapping that happen consecutively throughout the wedding; and not at the same time. For example, men clapped together Clap1, then later would clap together Clap 2 and then Clap 3. This indicates how men were highly coordinated together as well as with the melody played as the clapping changed according to the melody performed by the singer. In Clap 1, men stand side by side, getting ready to synchronise their feet movements along with their clapping hands, when they are perfectly aligned and ready to perform as one body, they move forward hopping to a woman having her face covered, standing steady alone and sometimes accompanied by another woman. Arriving to her, the singer's voice raises in volume and pitch, allowing for Clap 2 to start and everyone to hop backwards. The dynamic becomes intense, music high, rapid body movements, all creating a powerful energy. The woman dancing forward and backwards to the men felt in a very powerful position despite being on her own.

In Clap 2. the accented clap on the first pulse of each measure is emphasised by both feet landing on the ground at the same time as clapping. A syncopated feel then occurs when a sort of scuffing kick is performed on the off beat, marked here with Rf. In general this is performed by a small hop with the left foot, while the right foot performs a sort of scuffing kick forward, which has the result of pushing the men dancing backwards. Children try to find their way in and joining the dance by following men .

A variation that occurs is when all of the men move forward together, while performing variations of the first clapping pattern. When all the men move together the movement is slower, coordinated by all performing the same pattern of four steps, where a forward motion is only achieved in one step of each four.

The *Tambour* and *Tar* stay relatively rhythmically constant throughout all of this, though the increase and decrease dynamically according to the singer and the dancing. Clap1 is the softest of the sections and forms a sort of shift passage for dancers to join, leave and recoordinate. Clap 2 is the dynamic climax, with almost explosive energy. Clap 3 is a sort of stepping back, a decrescendo from the action back to the level of clap .

A note on the rhythm and use of notation; the meter has been given as a having 4 beats. This is based on the 4 steps of the walking movement mentioned in the second movement, and that all of the different lengths of phrases in singing appear to be multiples of 4 beats; generally 4, 5 or 6 measure phrases. However, the rhythms are only approximations of the 4 beats, as it can be heard that the beats have a slight unevenness to them; not so much that they might be considered as feeling like a complex time such as 7/8, but wavering between 7/8 and 4/4. Part of this may come from the nature of performing the *Tar*, when it is supported and turned by one hand, and struck with the other. The movement of both the drum and hand that strikes it, and the striking of the drum in different parts of the skin in rapid succession creates a slight heaviness in the beats, which is

important to the feel of the rhythm. Having two or more drummers performing these rhythms, or slight rhythmic variations simultaneously creates a steady sense, and this "swing" should not be considered as a flaw or error, as it is essential to the feeling part of the bodies.

At this wedding the *Tar* performers held the tar in their left hand, whilst striking with the skin with the right. The D in the notation indicates the Dum, which is the sound produced from hitting the outer edge of the skin with the length of closed fingers, by that creating a low, full skin resonance. The S for stop, refers to the sound created by spreading the fingers and thumb out, and stopping the resonance of the drum with the tip of the finger, without the palm touching the drum. This happens further in from the rim of the drum, but not the centre. It creates a sharper, higher pitched sound than the Dum stroke, giving a sort of lifting feel. In the rhythms given above it is notable that the Dum strokes fall consistently on the beats whilst the Stops are the syncopations for when the steps are taken in the four step dance pattern previously mentioned, and when the dancers land from their hopping movements. The dum is therefore reinforced by the shaking off the ground caused by this collective action.

## **Music in the urban through High Dam Band**

In Alexandria there are only two Alexandria Nubian musical bands, that started off as one band: High Dam Band and RT Nuba. In 2008, High Dam Band established by young Nubian musicians keen on preserving Nubian music. The musicians were all born and raised in Alexandria, but their ancestors came from different parts of the displaced villages of Nubia and reassembled in Alexandria. The band formation was of heavy drums, electric guitar, bass guitar, keyboard, singer and percussion section of two people playing a range of tar, congos, shakers and tabla.

In 2011 the band split into two bands over a disagreement over the band's ideology, whether to stick by traditionalist ideas of what shapes Nubian music, or to depart from tradition and be part of a more modern global scene of music. This is where RT Nuba (RT in Nubia meaning island) started,

announcing that they are more interested in the traditional form of playing music. The new band still had a similar formation like High Dam Band, but they were more keen on performing wearing *galabeyas*, similar to the poster at the start of this chapter, playing concerts in the form of *Gaadas* and doing field recordings and fieldwork collecting unrecorded Nubian songs from elderly people. High Dam Band, of which I was a member between 2011-2015, were more interested in being part of a wider global scene, they were interested in African music and started to adopt sounds of marimba and other African instruments using the keyboard. They have played songs such as Malaika for Miriam Makeba and composed tunes African beats. They are also interested in Egypt's so called underground, as well as its popular music scene. They either supported in acts for underground bands or vice versa. They have refused to wear galabeyas in concerts, as a refusal to be seen as the Nubian character represented in media and films. Their performance outfits as shown in the poster at the start of this chapter is a reflection of African outfit, where they buy the material from Cairo.

Both bands separate ideologies led them to different spaces of performance. RT Nuba performed a lot in Makan, a music space and production house that is interested in folkloric and rural music of Egypt. High Dam Band performed a lot in Cairo Jazz Club, a night club that is interested in Egypt's popular music and Bibliotheca Alexandrina's summer festival, a yearly music festival that hosts a lot of Egypt's, and particularly Alexandria's, pop scene.

Despite the split between the two bands over a very important argument, the sonic and content of both bands didn't end up traditional nor modernist in the sense they were both looking for, yet the outcome of the two bands have become completely different. Something that supports my argument of Nubian music, as always in process of, reshaping, always becoming, and always reidentified.

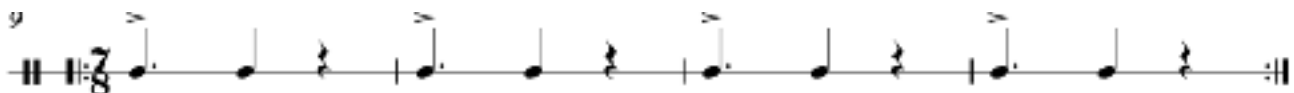
It is important to note that both traditionalist and modernist efforts in preserving Nubian music always kept the melody line and the lyrics of the songs unmodified. Changes were always done to

the harmony, instrumentation and performance and presentation of the music. It is also important to note that both bands faced critics from elder generations of Nubians who refuse the way younger generations are presenting Nubian music. Generational debates around Nubian music and culture has both bands as well as some of the younger generations to avoid attending events and gatherings in Nubian clubs in Alexandria, where elderly Nubians members of the community frequently go.

# Rhizome in Music

Attending both *Kenzi* and Arabs of *Olaikat*'s weddings, as a half outsider, I have noticed areas of similarities and crossovers. The clapping of *Kenouz* performing the *Holy Holy* reminded me of clapping of the Arabs of the *Olaikat*. Dance movements of hopping back and forth was almost the same. Recalling migration histories of both the Arabs of *Olaikat* and the *Kenouz*, I started to link it to contemporary dance and music performances. As explained in Chapter 1, both ethnic groups came to Nubia from the Arabic Peninsula. I met with Am Eissa and asked him if the *Kenouz* and the Arabs of *Olaikat* were somehow related, and whether he had an explanation to why hand clapping are very similar. Am Eissa denied any similarities and demonstrated clapping of both groups.

## Malki Hand Clapping



## Kenzi Hand Clapping



Unlike Am Eissa's confirmation that *Kenouz* and Arabs of *Olaikat*'s hand clapping are very different, the two notations above tell us that they are similar with their usage of complex time signature, the emphasis on the first clap and a weaker second clap. The Malki perform a third clap, when the *Kenouz* keep it silent. In chapter 1, using Deleuze & Guattari's notion of rhizome and becoming, I have argued that through migration and shared experience the *Fadekka*, *Kenouz* and Arabs of *Olaikat* have become Nubian. The analysis of *Kenouz* and Malki's hand clapping suggests that "Each of these becomings brings about the deterritorialisation of one term and the reterritorialization of the other; the two becomings interlink and form relays in a circulation of intensities pushing the deterritorialisation ever further" (Deleuze & Guattari, P.10). Since it is impossible to find sound recordings or videos of Malki and *Kenouz* weddings dated to when the two ethnic groups were in the Arabic Peninsula and before their presence in Nubia, the two notations and similarity in dance movements, can be seen as "lines always tie back to another" or a moment of "interlink" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, P. 9&10).

As mentioned before in this chapter, I have interviewed two Alexandrian Nubian musical bands part of my yearlong studies at CILAS. In the middle of my conversations with High Dam Band, one of the members pointed out that the majority of Nubian wedding singers sing folk tunes in G pentatonic scale, following the original folk tunes sang collectively in weddings, contrary to what musical theory tells us that we all do not have the same vocal range. Singing solo from the same vocal range can be difficult from one person to another, each person has his/her vocal range that

suits them. Generations after generations are singing songs using exactly the same scale. High Dam Band's observation came to a certainty when I have watched a video of RT Nuba in a cultural venue in Cairo, performing only with singing and Tar. The band's main vocal sang a folk tune from a note and scale that seemed to be uncomfortable for the range of his voice. I asked him about the original tune that was sung using the same scale he used. He took a moment to remember the original tune and his answer was yes!. This experience highlight how Nubia as a community, weddings and songs sang communally are very important in becoming Nubian, whether they are in the displaced villages of Nubia or in urban centres far away. Also it suggest that past and present temporalities are blurry and fade into each other when contemporary musical production is inspired by the past and is presented in the present moment.

In "1837: Of The Refrain", Deleuze & Guattari talk about the refrain, a melody or a rhythm that gets to be murmured and repeated, forming a "territorial assemblage ". Departing from the notion of refrain, I argue that singing in G pentatonic scale becomes a point of gathering for a lot of Nubian singers, whether they are singing collectively or solo in a wedding, and whether they are singing in a cultural venue in Cairo or in Alexandria. Singing a folk tune from a G pentatonic scale takes them back to a moment of refuge, out of chaos, a moment of certainty of being part of a collective and of becoming Nubian.

Similarly, throughout my fieldwork the theme of repetition in musical practices, described throughout this chapter especially in weddings and *gaadas*, suggests that the repetition of songs and melodies allow for Nubians to come together around songs, rhythms, melodies and harmonies. Nubian musicians and singers such as Hisham Batta, Ahmed Hemat, Bisenbis and Nuba Nour, all travel around the world performing to Nubian communities living in diaspora. From observing Youtube videos of some of these performances and learning from Hisham Batta that these performances are similar in musical components to the weddings I have attended with him in the

displaced villages of Nubia. The repetition of songs sung, of melodies and harmonies played, suggests that these songs form a “ wall of sound, or at least a wall with some sonic bricks in it” and a “territorial assemblage” for all Nubians around the world, whose “home does not preexist” and where “it was necessary to draw a circle around that uncertain and fragile center, to organize a limited space ” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, P. 311).

This does not mean that when High Dam Band, RT Nuba or Al Sarah and the Nubatones, sing folk Nubian songs with a rock instrumentation and feel, or in a retro popular style that they are not part of this same “circle” mentioned earlier. But they “improvise”, “open the circle a crack”, creating “lines of drift”, allowing for a *Milieu* and a *Rhizome* to be created (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, P. 312).

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented a musical shadowing of people who move. Following objects and instruments that accompany people, I have argued that musical instruments have a life of their own, it comes in and out of geographical spaces, contributing in sonic environments and in music.

By describing events where music is being practiced in the displaced villages of Nubia, I have pointed out to how and where Nubianness gets to be practiced, enacted and passed on from one generation to another. Using Althusser theoretical framework of state ideological apparatus, I have pointed out how Nubians are becoming part of the Egyptian state.

Thanks to the help of Daniel Merrill notating some of field recordings, and with a focus on weddings, I have argued and highlighted the richness of Nubian music.

Finally, using Deleuze & Guattari’s notion of Rhizome and becoming, I have argued that Nubian music is not one fixed category; through instruments and migration, Nubian music is in constant change and evolution. Also, following Deleuze & Guattari’s notion of the Refrain, I have argued



that musical repetitions in Nubian music and songs being repeatedly sung amongst Nubian communities around the world, form a sense of belonging to Nubia, a middle ground and a meeting point, but also a “Milieu”, a passage to new territorial spaces, thus allowing an opportunity of a Rhizome to develop and take place through territorialization.

# **Chapter 3:**

## **Memory and Remembering 1964**

# Introduction

“Today we woke up to the news that the ex-president Mohamed Morsi died in the court whilst being on trial. We were all surprised and sad. We were following up news all day. (...) I was at Salma’s place that day with her mother. Kiki is a young curious girl, who was very interested with what was going on. She was following up the news with us, asking very curious questions. She asked what does Muslim Brotherhood means, her mum told her that they are the people with beard that you see in the streets. She asked if Morsy was a good president, we all responded that he did not have enough time to prove whether he was a good or a bad president. She asked whether Moubarak was a good president, her grandmother said he was not and that is why there was a revolution. Kiki was hoping that Abdel Nasser would be THE good president, her mom spontaneously ‘دە هو اللي رمانا الرمية’ ‘السودا دي’, ‘he is the one who have thrown us in this horrible place’.

Field notes June 2019.

Throughout my fieldwork, I was concerned with why, 55 years after the Nubian displacement, we still write about the memory of 1964. Most Nubian studies are limited to issues of archeology, ancient Nubia, farming, the Nubian displacement, and relationship between displacement and memory. However, this is not only demonstrated in academic studies, but in Nubian society, where the Nubian villages in Kom Ombo are still called قرى التهجير - the displaced villages, with each village known by it’s name with the epithet “the displaced” (e.g. Tushka *El Tahgeer*, Tushka the displaced). We are constantly reminded of the significance of this event.

Even in ceremonial and musical practices, the before and after the Nubian displacement becomes part of every interview in the displaced villages of Nubia. For example, before the displacement, women used to take their new borns to the Nile in a procession to wash the baby with water of the Nile, reciting prayers to the good and bad spirits in the Nile. After the resettlement such practices became physically very difficult to perform in a canal. In old Nubia, a widow would had to wash in the Nile after 40 days of her husband’s death, go back home and open her house for visitors. One of my interlocutors mentioned how after the displacement, a lot of widows were uncomfortable and

confused on how to go on with their lives with the absence of the Nile. Similarly, before his wedding a Nubian groom used to wash in the Nile, believing that such practice would affect his fertility. The Nile and water were substituted with other new ceremonial practices. Hisham Batta and other musicians talked about the relationship their ancestors had with the Nile being a source of inspiration for their creative practice. The Nile was a dominant part of Old Nubia, shaping people's beliefs, day-to-day practices and being in this world, forming what some Nubians would call نيلي كائن "Nilestic people". Therefore, taking away the Nile from the Nubians and the traumatic experience of being displaced, both seem to be a rupture that has affected Nubians, allowing for the collective memory on displacement to be present after 55 years and at the same time present and absent in people's everyday lives.

Moreover, in the opening of this chapter, Salma demonstrated how she was still able to tell her daughter about Nubia and the displacement, despite the absence of such event in schools' curriculum and influence of ideological state apparatus in telling the history of Nubia. In *Travellers' Tales Narratives of Home and Displacement*, T. Minh-Ha tells us that

"The boundaries of identity and difference are continually repositioned in relation to varying points of reference. The meanings of here and there, home and abroad, third and first, margin and centre keep on being displaced according to how one positions oneself. Where is 'home'? Mother continues to exert her power from afar. Even in her absence she is present within the teller, his blood, his source of life. From one generation to another, mothers are both condemned and called upon to perfect their role as the killjoy keepers of home and of tradition." (T. Min-Ha, 1994, P.20)

Salma's reaction is an individual one, Nubian mothers play a very important role in telling the history of the displacement, how did it happen and the trauma around it. There is possibly no chance of a Nubian growing up not knowing what happened in 1964 displacement, whether they are in the displaced Nubian villages or in the urban centers.

During my yearlong studies at CILAS<sup>57</sup>, during which I interviewed RT Nuba and High Dam Bands, I investigated how young people born and raised in Alexandria might have learned about the 1964 displacement and related to it through the production of lament songs. Members of both bands had something in common in their narratives: grandmothers. Members of both bands, all explained how their grandmothers played an important role in their upbringing and becoming Nubians through storytelling of, amongst other things, how the displacement happened, how the old villages of Nubia looked like, stories about their daily lives and ceremonial traditions in old Nubia and teaching their grandchildren the Nubian language.

An interlocutor added : “Whenever my grandmother saw me sitting doing nothing, with Nubian music playing in the background, she used to insist on telling me stories of old Nubia and how she ended up in Alexandria” (CILAS Final Paper, Research Lab, 2018).

Mothers and grandmothers play a fundamental role in keeping the memory of the displacement alive. For them the memory of the displacement does not need to be narrated in museums or in scholarly books or in schools, as it is already kept alive in people’s memory and bodies. In this sense, Nubians are the bodily memory that keeps the memory alive wherever they go.

“Our lives are stories. Were it not for stories, our lives would be unimaginable. Stories make it possible for us to overcome our separateness, to find common ground and common cause. To relate a story is to retrace one’s steps going over the ground of one’s life again, reworking reality to render it more bearable. A story enables us to fuse the world within and the world without. In this way, we gain some purchase over events that confounded us, humbled us and left us helpless.” (Jackson, 2013, P. 245).

Being displaced, seeing their homes sinking made Nubian grandmothers helpless to change the physical reality of losing Nubia forever. However, telling the story of the displacement, and romanticising lost Nubia, and passing this onto their grandchildren, has been a way to make the experience “bearable” “to overcome our separateness” and finally to allow them to gain some control over the hardships and trauma experienced.

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<sup>57</sup> Cairo Institute for Liberal Arts and Sciences. An independent and alternative space for teaching liberal arts and science.

Similar to many with whom I spoke, I originally learned about the Nubian displacement through my Uncle Hussein Kaddal. When visiting, he was and is always keen to teach me about histories of displacements in Nubia (including 1912 and in 1933), as well as about the family tree. However, growing up in Alexandria, I was unable to comprehend the importance of these stories; being physically and emotionally far away from Nubia. Until I started to follow Am Yehia Saber, a friend of my family and a writer, on Facebook in 2013, where he wrote and continues to write stories about the displacement, translation of Nubian songs, share family pictures and memories of his childhood in Nubia. His posts were not only his on personal page, but also in many groups and pages of young Nubians, intending to share his knowledge about Nubia and Nubian songs as much as possible with young people. This was only when Uncle Hussein's personal stories about the displacement started to connect and make sense, as it reached out to the outside of world.

Mohamed Abbady, lead singer of RT Nuba and myself agreed that efforts of our grandparents only made sense with the appearance of Nubian forums, website and social media platforms. He said: "Only then, I learned what does it mean to be Nubian." (CILAS Final Paper, Research Lab, 2018). Nubian social media platforms and websites seemed like a window, connecting stories told inside our homes to the outside world.<sup>58</sup>

Social media platforms, websites, forums, mothers and grandmothers are not the only way for us to learn about the 1964 displacement and how old Nubia was. Between 1964 and the birth of social media a whole new category of songs and poetry appeared lamenting old Nubia, by that contributing to the telling of history of Nubia. These cultural works tell a history of suffering and trauma that is not present in the Nubian Museum of Aswan, nor school and university curricula, or any state sanctioned media. Songs of Old Nubia and the history of displacement are told by the

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<sup>58</sup> A theme explored further in Chapter 4.

Nubians to their children in their bedtime stories, in *gaadas* (gatherings) and social media platforms.

This chapter focuses on the relationship between memory, songs and history. Through poetry and songs collected throughout my fieldwork as well as popular songs, I give examples of how the 1964 displacement and Old Nubia is remembered and to which the three ethnic groups living in the displaced villages of Nubia.

In this chapter, I argue how the *Fadekka*, *Kenouz* and Arabs of *Olaikat* going through the traumatic experience of losing homes and being displaced, brings them closer to each other and becomes part of *becoming* Nubian. In this chapter, I focus more on lyrical textuality as it “enables laments to refer, to be explicitly *about* something. (..) But textuality is more than words. Text is a repeatable, coherent set of signs – and this definition fits musical signs such as melodies (Laskewicz 2003:91), as well as lyrics. Lament’s musicality has attracted almost as much attention as its verbal text.

“Traditional people” characterise the music and lyrics of lament as being “about” grief or passion. People feel that lament melodies convey or bespeak of grief, with or without words. Thus musical and not only lyrical textuality help give laments their meaning (Wilce, 2009, P.14).

Textual analyses and music of lament songs and poetry produced by the three different groups, confirms my argument in Chapter 2 of how rich and diverse Nubian music and artistic production is. In Chapter 1, I have argued that Nubians are not one fixed category and in constant shaping, but this does not negate feelings of belonging to a place that Nubians consider home. In fact, through poetry and songs, we witness senses of longing and belonging to this place where Nubians lived for centuries and which they consider home. But also, thanks to different musical compositions and analyses we can spot the difference in lamenting Nubia by the *Fadeka*, the *Kenouz*, the Nubians in the urban and those in diaspora.

Speaking of the urban I also look at lament songs of the displacement produced by young musicians born and raised in the urban cities and despite never having lived the displacement they still express feelings of lament and belonging to Old Nubia, and hence the 1964 displacement contributes to their Nubianness.

Dam buildings and displacements has happened to people in different parts of the world, with the Nubian displacement being the first large scale displacement due to the construction of a high dam (it has been followed internationally by many others). In many places where this has happened the experience of home loss and trauma has found its way in lament songs and poetry. In this section, I share examples of lament songs from other cultures, arguing that despite the Nubian displacement being unique and particular to becoming Nubian, the experiences of a displaced person is of itself something that shapes our being and who we are in this world.

I also investigate how historical songs and poems about events pre-dating 1964 continue to inform ideas of Nubian heritage. In particular I will look at materials related to the Battle of Tushka in 1889, also known as battle of Toski, Wad El Negoumi's battle or the Dervish war, between the Anglo-Egyptian army and the Mahdist army lead by Wad El Negoumi. In this section, I argue how through oral history, songs and poetry form an archive not in the material sense of documentation, but an intangible source of knowledge that contributes to the telling of history. The memory of this battle finds its way and is strongly remembered by the three different ethnic groups living in the displaced villages of Nubia today, through song and poetry.

Finally and as I write this thesis during the Covid-19 pandemic, I share ceremonial practices happening in the displaced villages to help Nubians overcome the hardship of living in a pandemic, by remembering ancestral practices during the outbreak of Cholera in Egypt in 1947. These practices have been widely shared and explained in details on different Nubian social media platforms.



# Lamenting Nubia

“احنا ماشوفناش البلد القديمة، احنا عرفناها من أغانيهم”

"We did not see Old Nubia, we have learnt about it from their songs"

Hisham Batta, Field notes summer 2019.

Dalia is the mother of a member in Toushka Folklore Troupe. When asked about her memories around the displacement, she said “We had new colourful dresses made especially for the day of the displacement. We were told that we will live in heaven. Yet, the reality was completely the opposite.” Fieldnotes, July 2019.

The contrast between what was expected, feelings of joy for a promised new life full of prosperity and a dire reality, that Mohamed Fikri Abdul Wahab, Fernea, Kennedy and Hussein Fahim have all reported in their work (Hopkins & Mehanna, 2010) has inspired Nubians to lament their sunken homes in old Nubia. Hisham Batta, Bisenbiss, Ahmed Hemat, Am Abdel Ghaffar all talked about how the 1964 displacement contributed in the formation of a new genre in Nubian music; أغاني الرثاء or lament songs. In his book *Crying Shame: Metaculture, Modernity, and the Exaggerated Death of Lament*, James Wilce, quotes De Martino saying “Laments are windows on culture insofar as they represent the ways people confront crises challenging the order of life” (Wilce, 2009, P.10). He adds “If you want to think productively about history, life, suffering, or culture, lament (to borrow from Lévi-Strauss) is good to think with. As a means of grappling with loss, lament has served societies both ancient and recent. Today, observers of culture – journalists, literary critics, anthropologists, and anyone else commenting on any form of culture – and performers of culture (especially revivalists, but also psychotherapists and American clergy) invoke lament as they try to grapple with change (Wilce, 2009, P.10).

Lamenting old Nubia was a way to collectively overcome the dreadful new life, as well as to present a living archive for future generations, a form of collective oral history. An archive not in the material sense of documentation, but rather an intangible proof of hardships lived through the 1964 displacement. Songs lamenting Nubia are still sung at the present time in weddings and *gaadas*, or by groups such as the Touthka Folklore Troupe.

“In local traditions around the world, laments arose in, invoked, and helped constitute social life, in funerals and weddings and far beyond. They have touched on the politics of everyday life, gender relations, and religion (Briggs 1993; Holst-Warhaft 1992). Laments have moved people to action, aestheticizing and thus transforming suffering, shaping affect and social relations, sometimes providing performers with at least marginally legitimated public venues for voicing discontent or exercising resistance”(Wilce, 2009, P.10).

Nubians today reassemble around lament songs whether they are living in the displaced villages, in Aswan, in urban centres or in the diaspora. The famous case known as the Detainee of Duffuf, a group of young Nubians in 2017 took to the streets of Aswan peacefully protesting by singing Nubian songs, demanding to return to ancestral lands. Despite that they were arrested, but lamenting the displacements and sunken Nubia, was their way to “exercise resistance” through peaceful protests. Songs in this case were not sung for ceremonial event, but rather resisting the dispossession of land, resisting a present that Nubians are not happy with.

It is important to mention that throughout my fieldwork I have learned 18 songs of lamenting Nubia 9 *Fadekka* songs, 6 *Kenzi* songs and 3 Arabs of *Olaikat*’s poetry. However, these 18 songs and poems vary from each other: songs about migrating for work, songs about returning to old Nubia, songs about loss of old Nubia, songs about the hardship of life in the new Nubia.

As the displacement was experienced by the *Fadekka*, *Kenouz* and the Arabs of *Olaikat*, becoming part of their Nubianness, lament songs and poetry found their way amongst the three different groups. Hence, in this upcoming section I share and analyse examples of lament songs from these 3

ethnic groups, as well as from Nubians who were born and live in urban centres and in diaspora.

Thus displacement has become part and parcel of becoming and belonging to Nubia.

## The *Fadekka*

Probably every person interested in Nubian music would know the song *Abbayassa- Would it be possible?* This song was first written and sang by Ahmed Mounib and then became very popular through Mohamed Mounir.

### Song 1

Abbayassa - Would it be possible ?

Will we be able to ignore what has happened?  
Ohh Nuba, home for everyone and their big love,  
Your place is in our hearts, no and no.  
Please God! Dismiss hardships from us!  
Ohh dear! You are settled in our souls,  
With your routes down deep in our hearts,  
Ohh our Nuba, you are our big love and the love  
of everyone,

Will we be able to ignore what has happened  
Our enjoyable stories in the evenings were in the  
middle of the village The duffs rhythms, its  
melodies and our dance,

Did this all go without any return?  
And the beautiful Nubian village have seen its  
loss in safe and joy, May the green paths find its  
way back to the river,

May destiny allows us to encounter (see) these  
days,

Ohh dear! You are settled in our souls,  
With your routes down deep in our hearts,

Ohh our Nuba, you are our big love and the love

أباياسا - تري  
تري هل سيكون في وسعنا أن نعتبر كأن شيئاً لم يحدث؟

يا نوبة يا موطن الجميع وحبهم الكبير،

كانك في القلب لا و ألف لا، اصرف عنا البلاء يا رب

عمرنا أنت مستقرة في أرواحنا،

و ضربت جذورك في اعماقنا،

يا نوبتنا يا حبنا الكبير يا محبوبة الجميع،

تري هل سيكون في وسعنا أن نعتبر كأن شيئاً لم يحدث؟

،سهراتنا و حكايتنا الحلوة في دروب القرية

إيقاعات الدفوف و أنغامها و حلقات الرقص،

تري هل ذهب كل هذا إلي غير عودة؟

و قرية النوبة الجميلة التي شهدت تبخر حالها في أمان و  
سعادة،

ليت الدروب الخضراء إلي النهر تعود،

ليت القدر يمن علينا برؤية هذه الأيام،

يا عمرنا انت مستقرة في أرواحنا،

و ضربت جذورك في اعماقها،

يا نوبتنا يا حبنا الكبير يا محبوبة الجميع.

Song link: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yi0TZB2B\\_Pi](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yi0TZB2B_Pi)

The song is sang in *Faddekka* language, translated in Arabic through this link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KPnj7lUxVyl> . English translation made by myself.

Wilce argues that “A singer makes her song memorable by imposing on it certain crisp regularities; she may or may not consciously craft her performance to this end, but the very act of performing entails making oneself accountable for the very sort of structuring, coherence, or memorability we have been calling entextualization” (Wilce, 2009, P.34). I take the following Youtube link to build my musical analysis. The song is performed in a *gaada* Ahmed Mounib’s house in 1982, along with Mohamed Mounir on the drum and singing along with Ahmed Mounib on the *Oud*. The drum played a very steady rhythm, with very simple ornaments that instantly reflected in my mind people’s feet walking away slowly and sadly, thinking about all their lives in Old Nubia that has become only a memory. Mounir’s soft fingers on the drum felt as if he was caressing and consolidating his ancestors leaving Nubia. Mounib’s holding of the *Oud* and gentle singing reflects his ancestors’ hopelessness and grief. The video captures occasional smiles shared between Mounib, Mounir and their friends to celebrate the fact that they are gathered to share memories of old Nubia, music and lament. The song also expresses resistance to the mind’s ability to forget the fact that Nubia is now lost under water, and the need to move on. Only hope for destiny to bring them back for a return what make the present bearable. But does the need to move on makes life any easier in the present ? What can be done for Nubians to enjoy life again ?

## Song 2.

Tallo means where are we

احنا فين Tallo

Where are we and where is our language?

Enough of the time we have stayed here and let's leave,

We can pursue our right with one word and reunited,

Let's go through our route with a strong and brave heart,

Its ours! Its ours!

In October war it was through our language that we were able to cross Barlef line and raise our flag,

They have won the war with Allah Akbar Allah Akbar and raised the flag,

They question who are we. We are the ones who lightened the world. They look at us suspiciously.

We are the grandsons of Terhaka. Fadekka speak out don't shut up.

Kenouz argue and fight. In the past, they have built the dam and sunken Nubia.

احنا فين و فين اللغة بتاعتنا ..

كفاية كفاية اللي قعدناه و يالا نقوم نمشي

بكلمة واحدة و بصوت واحد نشوف حقنا. ندخل في طريقنا و

نقوي قلبنا. (أونا) بتعنا بتعنا. في حرب أكتوبر بكلمنا فتحنا خط

برليف، فتحنا الطريق باللغة النوبية و رفعنا العلم. الله أكبر دخلوا

بكلمة الله أكبر و رفعوا الراية أو العلم.

بيقولوا علينا أنتم ايه أنتم ايه، احنا منورين الدنيا ييوصلونا كدة و

كدة . احنا أحفاد تهارقة . يا فاديكا متسكوتوس اتكلموا. و يا

كنوز اتخنقوا (معروفين بالفتونة و القوة). زمان بنوا السد و غرقوا

النوبة.

Song Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYeJZL610t8>

Translated from *Fadekka* to Arabic by Nawal Fakkir. Translation from Arabic to English done by myself.

On 20<sup>th</sup> of November 2016, a group of young men (around 300-400 people) , all from the displaced villages of Kom Ombo, marched demanding their right to return to ancestral lands. The protest was a response to the state offering the area Hor Gondi حور جوندي, near Abou Simbel (the temple) for sale. Young Nubians were angry that these lands were offered for sale when it should have been offered to them, according to Abdel Nasser's promise to their ancestors to return to their lands once the water of Lake Nasser settles. With their farming tools, food and water, marching singing Nubian songs (example song 2), young Nubians were ready to forcibly possess these lands; by farming it.

Stopped by officials after Wadi Karkar, the march came to an end.

In *Tallo*, Ghazi Said laments a lost land and a dying language that is threatened of extinction. While his words express heaviness of loss, there is also an anger in this. The anger takes the lament out of a passive voice and into an active voice. He is inviting *Fadekka* as well as the *Kenouz* to take part in resistance, demanding the return to ancestral lands. The singer implicitly acknowledges that the *Kenouz* today are a strong part of Nubia, whilst being the grandson and belonging to one of kings of the old kingdom of Kush; King Terhaka. He also states Nubians' contribution to Egypt, by fighting for and part of the Egyptian state. An acknowledgment and a statement that goes against accusations of Nubians separatist movements. Ghazi Said is highlighting achievements done by Nubians and their sacrifice for the rest of Egypt, actively demanding Nubians to work together in order to go back to ancestral lands. *Becoming* Nubian is a constant process that doesn't separate Nubian from his past nor confine him from his present.

Although the two songs *Abbayassa* and *Tallo* both lament the Nubian displacement, both lyrically and musically have different reactions. *Abbayassa* sounds and seems more passive, more sad and hopeless of land disposition and forced displacement. Ghazi Said's active voice and singing encourages Nubians to take action. His playing on the Oud introduces power, as if he is saying there is no time to wait, we have to do something.

## The *Kenouz*

Song 3.

يا نوبية فينك نبنى بتنا من جديد، ندور على عش جديد مع بعضنا،  
ولا اللي بيمشي بيرجع ؟

Oh Nubian woman where are you? Shall we build our new home?  
Shall we search together for our new nest? Or the one who leaves comes back?

When I asked Am Eissa about songs he or his friends have sung during the displacement, he recited the words mentioned in this section. The song doesn't have a title nor is clear who had composed it. I was surprised that a highly skilled musician like him would have a hard time to remember the

melody, but the lyrics was strongly engraved in his mind. The traumatic and devastating experience of losing a home and the fear of not being able to return is traumatic, which may be the reason why Am Eissa can not remember the melodies of the song. In her Phd dissertation *Hikāyāt Sha'b – Stories of Peoplehood Nasserism, Popular Politics and Songs in Egypt 1956-1973*, Alia Mossallam talks about when she was searching for songs sung during the construction of the Aswan High Dam. Surprised at her question Mossallam's interlocutor explains how the construction site of the dam was close to a battle ground, where songs and melodies seem to be a luxury or an unwanted practice. In a similar way Am Eissa not remembering the melody of the song, seemed to me that the displacement and the post resettlement life conditions were so tough to still be able to sing and think of sequence of melodies and notes.

Also, the song verse is a conversation between a man and his wife, who are looking to build their home. The mentioning of Ohh Nubian woman reflects the multiple forced displacements that the *Kenouz* women had to face: first in 1912 in the first elevation of the Aswan Dam, second in 1931 in the second elevation of the dam, and again in 1964 for the construction of the Aswan High Dam. As if the *Kenzi* couple are used to finding homes and moving due to the dam. But particularly the Nubian woman, as the majority of men were living and working in urban centers, leaving behind women to take care of the households and farm the lands.

Song 4.

“ Tallii Ooh Ekhwani” by Hassan Gazouli

Come on my brothers ! Let’s go back to the great  
Nubia!

Please, ship blow your whistle and never stop it,

If you have passed by Daboud and reached Dahmit I  
will be waiting for you in El Sallamb,

Come on my brothers ! Let’s go back to the great  
Nubia!

Please, ship blow your whistle and never stop it,

If you have passed by Daboud and reached Dahmit, I  
will be waiting for you in Maraw,

Come on my brothers ! Let’s go back to the great  
Nubia!

Please, ship blow your whistle and never stop it,

From Ambarkab don’t go after Kalabsha,

If you are heading to Gersha, coming to El Dekka I will  
be waiting for you in Al Sallamb.

Come on my brothers ! Let’s go back to the Big Nubia!  
Please, ship blow your whistle and never stop it,

يلا يا اخوانا نروح النوبة الكبيرة

يا بوسته اطلقى الصافرة وما تبطلها

لو عديتى دابود ووصلتى دهميت منتطريننى فى السالماب

يلا يا اخوانا نروح النوبة الكبيرة

يا بوسته اطلقى الصافرة وما تبطلها

لو عديتى دابود ووصلتى دهميت منتطريننى فى مرواو

يلا يا اخوانا نروح النوبة الكبيرة

يا بوسته اطلقى الصافرة وما تبطلها

من امبركاب ما تخرجيش ورا كلابشة

لو هتروحي قرشة وتيجى الدكة منتطريننى فى ابوهور

يلا يا اخوانا نروح النوبة الكبيرة

يا بوسته اطلقى الصافرة وما تبطلها

لو هتروحي قرشة وتيجى الدكة منتطريننى فى ماريا

يلا يا اخوانا نروح النوبة الكبيرة

يا بوسته اطلقى الصافرة وما تبطلها

لو هتروحي قرشة وتيجى الدكة فى السالماب منتطريننى

Translated in Arabic by Ahmed Eissa El  
Gershawi and in English by myself.

Link to song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=43hbeH65CsA>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NW-G64Wp76w>

Hassan Gazouli is a Kenzi singer born in the old village of Gorta. Played in Maksoum beat and in heptatonic scale with synthesis, the song doesn’t fall in the normal stereotype or popular understanding of what Nubian music would normally sound like (See chapter 2). Being played on keyboard tells us that the production of this song is relatively new to the 1964 displacement, which shows that the feelings of lamenting old Nubia are still alive even after years and that has been



passed on from one generation to another. However, lamenting old Nubia takes a different shape than for example right after the displacement. Singing for an old Nubia becomes It is important to note that from the six *Kenzi* lament songs collected, two of them express the fear and sorrow of having to leave Nubia for labour and work purposes, which confirms what Uncle Hussein Kaddal has explained in Chapter 1, that the *Kenouz* were the first and the most to leave Nubia for labour.

## Arabs of *Olaikat* Lamenting Nubia

”أنا أصلاً عربي من عرب العليقات، و لكن جغرافياً نوبي“  
“I am originally from the Arabs of *Olaikat*. Yet, geographically I am Nubian.”

Hassan Abdel Rahman, Field notes, Winter 2020.

In Chapter 1, I discussed how the Arabs of *Olaikat* came to live amongst Nubians for centuries and that the experience of good and bad times living together has become part of their *becoming* Nubian and lamenting the 1964 displacement and the loss of Old Nubia. During a *gaada* in the village of Malki Hassan Abdel Rahman, who works as a cook and a poet, shared with me his wonderful poetry lamenting Nubia. It is important to highlight Arabs of *Olaikat*’s unique gift of poetry recitation passed on orally until today from one generation to another.

Hassan’s poetry highlights the uniqueness of Arabs poetry that relies on a very difficult and complex usage of Arabic language. It also suggests that Nubianess in its process of becoming, territorialisation and deterritorialisation, explained in chapters 1 and 2, brings along new meanings of who are the Nubians and what it means to be Nubian. Mentioning التربالة the *terbala*, a type of dance that is particular to the Arabs of *Olaikat*, described in chapter 2, again highlights the particularity of ceremonial life for the Arabs of *Olaikat*, and how it forms a strong part of expressing laments of Old Nubia, a strong identifying element of Nubianness.

How beautiful are the houses on the Nile,  
How beautiful time by the Nile,  
How beautiful the clear weather,  
How beautiful and how beautiful.  
Oh home, we imagine you with our gazelles  
running around,  
On the protective Nile you are spinning,  
And the dancing and the Tambour,  
How beautiful El Bagour's sugar,  
And British waves' bought,  
Oh home we imagine you with our gazelles  
running around,  
Those who lived you are glorious Arabs,  
A generous and giving people,  
They roll on rugs for their visitors,  
In you we found safety,  
Oh home we imagine you with our gazelles  
running around you,  
Your buildings were in mud bricks,  
With lime and drawings we decorated you,  
If it wasn't for the dam we wouldn't have ever left  
you,  
How I wish we would meet again over there,  
Oh home we imagine you with our gazelles  
running around,  
But we lived hand in hand,  
They will take us to a new valley,  
away from our dead relatives,  
Who will visit them during feast (Eid),  
Oh home, with love we talk about you,  
Love that accepts no doubt,  
After you we were separated,  
We cry in blood instead of tears, We cry  
lamenting you,  
Oh home we imagine you with our gazelles  
running around,

يا حليل البيوت على النيل،  
يا حليل الونس في النيل،  
يا حليل جو صافي جميل،  
يا مكثر حليل و حليل،  
يا وطن احنا حنخليك كأن يمرح غزالنا فيك،  
على النيل الواقى تدور،  
و التريالة و الطنبور،  
يا حليل سكر الباجور،  
و موج بريطانيا و التتور،  
يا وطن احنا حنخليك كأن يمرح غزالنا فيك،  
اللى سكونك عرب أمجاد،  
من أهل الكرم و الجاد،  
يفرشوا للضيوف سجاد،  
كان فيك الأمان موجود،  
يا وطن احنا حنخليك كأن يمرح غزالنا فيك،  
بالطوب اللبن ميناك،  
بالجير و الرسوم زيناك،  
لولا السد ما سيناك،  
يا ريتنا تاني تلقى هناك،  
يا وطن احنا حنخليك كأن يمرح غزالنا فيك،  
أنما سكنا أيد في أيد،  
هيودنا وادي جديد،  
من ميتينا نبقى بعيد،  
مين هيزورهم في العيد،  
بالريد يا وطن نحكيك،  
ريد مايقبل التشكيك،  
بعدك صابنا التفكيك،  
دم بدل الدموع نبكيك،  
يا وطن احنا حنخليك كأن يمرح غزالنا فيك،

Poetry 1.

Translation from Arabic to English done by me. Reviewd and edited by Ahmed Serougi.

## The Wadi Halfa Experience

The 1964 displacement effected both Egyptians and Sudanese. While this thesis focuses on Nubians living in Egypt, the border between the two countries has always been seen as somewhat non-existent, or permeable to Nubians. The border was drawn originally as administrative division between Sudan and Egypt, drawn by the British along the 22nd parallel in 1899 with no regard for local populations, and was later adopted (with some disputed areas) as a formal border by the Sudanese and Egyptian governments upon gaining independence. I recall when I frequently visited

the Sudanese Club in Alexandria, I was encouraged to become officially a member of the club, since for a Nubian it would grant me an easy crossing of the border without the need for issuing a visa. This situation has changed since the Sudanese revolution, which led to the imposition of greater restrictions.

Lamenting Old Nubia from the Nubian Sudanese was sang by Thabet Tabet, El Balabel and Mohamed Wardi with his very famous song “الطير المهاجر” or the migrant bird, a term that has been used a lot to refer to the Nubian who is always on the move.

In summer 2019, thanks to Ayat Mohammed, director of Aswan Music Project, I met Thabet Tabet, a tambour player originally from Mahass, in Wadi Halfa, who moved to Cairo for a few years and currently lives on Elephantine Island, Aswan. Thabet’s wife was born in Wadi Halfa El Gedida (the New Wadi Halfa), they both explained to me how important for them to live by the Nile, which was their main reason for relocating to Aswan, despite the active cultural life that Cairo offers.

In his home, Thabet has shared with me his song while playing on the Tambour.

#### Song 5.

I am dark Nubian... My grandfather is Piye  
Nubia is my home.. it is the land of my ancestors  
Halfa is ancient... Nubia is ancient  
If you have seen our homes .. it was inhabitant and  
with our hands decorated.  
But unfortunately ... it is lost my wife,  
But unfortunately ... it is lost my children,  
People are safe .. where are the family of Fatma,  
where are the family of Amna,  
Those who were with us and those who have lived  
with us.. have left their homes,  
*Arkonga Negoussa* ... they have left our country,  
*Barialty Aygouga* ... they have lived in the cities,  
My circumstances have deceived me ... it forced me

أنا أسمر نوبي .. أنا جدي بعنخي  
النوبة بلادي .. هي أرض أجدادي  
حلفا جديمة .. النوبة جديمة  
لو شفتهم بيوتنا .. كانت مسكونة بالأيد منقوشة  
لكن يا خسارة .. ضاعت يا حليمة  
لكن يا خسارة .. ضاعت يا ولادي  
و الناس أمانة .. فين ناس فاطمة .. فين ناس أمانة  
اللي كانوا معانا و اللي عاشوا معانا .. هجروا بيوتهم  
أركونجا نجوسا .. بلدنا تركوها  
باريالتى ايجوجا ... عاشوا في المدن  
خانتني ظروفى .. خلتني أهاجر  
اسيبها بلادي .. لأبد من يوم لحلفا نعود  
لديارنا نعود نعيش في سلام .. نعيش في سلام

Thabet's usage of words like loss, home and referring to the land of ancestors reflects the deep sorrow and sadness expressed as *Fadekka*, *Kenouz* and *Arabs of Olaikat* in Egypt. Also, looking forward to a return is an explicit invitation to return to ancestral lands, similar to Ghazy Said's invitation in his song *Tallo*. The recognition of his skin colour in "dark" suggest that blackness and territoriality intertwine together as a proof of belonging to a land. The word "dark" followed by "ancient" confirms this belonging and right to a land that is as ancient as Kush civilisation and that is worth recognising. "It is lost my children" suggests that this song is a conversation between Thabet and his family and his children, where he is sorry and hopeless for the loss of his home.

### Song 6.

I was happy when they said I will travel,	فرحت لما قالوا أني مسافرة،
It was Aswan when they said I will travel,	أسوان لما قالوا أني مسافرة،
I was happy all the way through that I will see the	فرحت طول السكة لأنني هاشوف البلد اللي وحشاني،
country that I was missing the most,	بلدي اللي صعبانة عليا هاشوفها في السكة،
My country that I was feeling sorry to see on the	فرحت لما قالوا أني مسافرة،
way,	كنت مستعجل على السفر،
I was happy when they said I will travel,	دة أنا مسافر أسوان حتى أني مسلمتش على أمي،
I am travelling to Aswan, that I didn't say	و ركبت الباخرة بسرعة عشان أضمن أني الحقها،
goodbye to my mother,	ركبنا الباخرة العتيقة، انذهلنا حتى قاربنا أن نموت من شدة
I made sure I was quickly on the ship to make	الاعجاب بها و بلونها الأبيض،
sure I would catch it,	و الباخرة لسة في المينا شوفنا ظلها في أدندان بلونها الأبيض،
We were on the old ship, we were surprised to the	ركبنا الباخرة العتيقة، الباخرة مشيت و دخلت في المياه العميقة،
point we were going to die fascinating with its	و راحت ناحية الجنوب و اطلقت الصفارة،
white colour,	روحي كانت سعيدة و قلبي كان بيرقص، دة أنا مسافر دلوقتي و
Whilst the ship was in harbour we saw its shadow	هاشوف بلدي،
in Adendan with its white colour,	
We went on the old ship, it sailed in the deep	

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7K6PKtuRqg>

Translation from *Fadekka* to Arabic by Nawal Fakkir and English translation by myself.

<sup>59</sup> Piye was an ancient king of Kush, founder of the 25th Dynasty of Egypt. He ruled Egypt from 774- 714 BC.

Song 6, Babour Kossona or the trip was written by Dr. Moustafa Abdel Kader Nubian folklorist, specialist in Nubian studies and poet, originally from the village of Adendan. The song was sang by the trio sisters El Balabel from Wadi Halfa. The song highlights how the Egyptian and Sudanese Nubia is one undivided space and where people have experienced the hardships of being displaced, reflected in the very famous song of *Babour Kossona*. Despite that the song is in pentatonic scale as a lot of the *Fadekka* Egyptian songs, the instrumentation and the arrangement of the melody is a very telling factor that the song is a Sudanese production. It is very easy to distinguish a Nubian Sudanese from a Nubian Egyptian musical production through instrumentation. A lot of the Sudanese songs use string ensembles and orchestras as well as brass section in its music. Growing up as a young Nubian musician, I always envied how Sudanese received institutional music education dedicated for pentatonic music, when in Egypt music education focuses only on Arabic and Western classical music. This suggests how race and colour play an important role in what is seen as music that is worth teaching. Middle class families in Egypt tend to be keen on teaching their children Mozart, Beethoven and Vivaldi on the piano, something that would explain why Sudanese Nubian songs as *Wabbour Kossona* has such rich and diverse instrumentation to it. Sudanese lament songs for Nubia lyrically might convey the same feelings of lament as Egyptian Nubian songs, however musically, the string orchestra is able to musically go beyond what the words are able to tell us.

## The urban experience through High Dam Band

أنا نوبي مصري، أفريكان، عربي... بحبك يا نوبة فعلا من كل قلبي  
أنا نوبي مصري، أفريكان، عربي... بحبك يا نوبة فعلا مش حاخبي  
أنا نوبي مصري أسمر جاي من الجنوب ... أنا نوبي مصري أفريكان عربي

I am Nubian, Egyptian, African and Arab... I truly love you Nubia from all of my heart  
I am Nubian, Egyptian, African and Arab... I truly love you Nubia and I will never hide it, I am  
Nubian Egyptian, dark coloured coming from the south.  
Song by High Dam Band<sup>60</sup>

You have traveled far away, bird. How did you manage to stay that far?  
You have walked far away, bird and never got bored of being away from home.  
Are you planning for a return, or you don't care of the distance.  
Do you feel nostalgic ? Or do you enjoy being away?  
If one day passes in a person's life, and distance has become your state,  
You will find what has passed is dead and being away has become part of you.  
Ohh you migrant bird !! Ohh you bird you have not received my message.  
Your nest is calling you, fearing to only be a memory.  
Missing you and longing for your return.  
It says: " You lost man, come back and leave hardship to God, Destiny will happen anyway and there is no way to escape".  
I have always sang in the past "Oh bird, for our nest we miss".  
You were supposed to return back yesterday, but when do you actually return.  
Ohh you migrant bird !! Ohh you bird you have not received my message.  
This is the last thing I will have to tell you! Have you

سافرت بعيد يا طير في البعد كيف ضليت ومشيت كثير يا طير  
في الغربية ما مليت  
ناوي الرجوع ولا الفرقة ما فرقة  
شاعر حنين ولا الغربية ليك أحلي  
ده العمر لو يوم فات والبعد صار حالك  
تلقني اللي فات راح مات وبقيت غريب دارك  
يا طير يا طير يا طير يا مهاجر يا طير يا طير مرسالي ما عابر  
عشك ينادي عليك خوفه يكون ذكري مشتاق يحن اليك و أمله تعود  
بكرا  
ويقول يا غايب عود سيب الحمل ده اللي انكتب مفروض وما غيره  
راح تلقاه  
غنيت زمان يا طير العش مشتاقين وبالأمس أن الاوان وميتين  
تقول راجعين  
يا طير يا طير يا طير يا مهاجر ... يا طير يا طير مرسالي ما  
عابر  
آخر كلامي إليك مرسالي جاك ولا ؟؟؟؟

June 2013, for the occasion of the Oufuqy Festival, which is a musical festival in Alexandria, High Dam Band, released a song addressed to all migrant Nubians around the world. The song was written and composed by Loon, lead singer and guitarist of the band at the time.

Looking at lament songs from young generation of Nubians who have never lived the displacement, born and raised in Alexandria, allows us to understand how the 1964 displacement is part and parcel of *becoming* Nubian in the twentieth century. Perhaps Loon's lyrics present what Wilce would call the "entextualization of a performance", a "packaging" that would allow "coherence" and "structure" in order to make the text "memorable" (Wilce, 2009,P.32). However,

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u8B2FfcYwDU>

Wilce argues that “textuality” becomes problematic when thinking about lament, as there is a whole theatrical performance that is missing when “representing lament” (Wilce, 2009,P.32). I was a member of High Dam Band, when we released *Ya Teer, Ohh Bird*. I recall that on this particular day, I was on stage behind Loon, holding my flute with shivering legs and sweaty hands. The song starts with a *Mawwal*, a form of improvised singing that does not follow a rhythm, yet maintains a pulse. Music in the background allows the singer to find his way through showing off his eloquent lyrics and wide range of his voice. The *Mawwal* was very powerful for Loon’s vocal and theatrical ability to move his audience’s feelings. It was a unique song in every possible way which made me very nervous of the audience’s reaction. Sonically and visually I was isolated from the rest of the stage, it was only me and Loon’s voice. The rhythm was very particular to Sudanese rhythms, which has emphasised the whole idea of lament and feelings evoked even stronger.

I remember my feet kept taking small steps to keep the pulse resonating in my body, but also to keep my anxiety on stage under control. Loon also had his feet moving as if we were, as a band, performing an *Aragid* dance in Nubian weddings, or even performing a Sufi dance, locked all together with our footsteps in a chain and with our minds and hearts lamenting the Nubia. By the time the song ended, I had tears in my eyes as if I was personally displaced from Old Nubia and lamenting it’s drowning.

# The diaspora with Al Sarah and the Nubatones



Pictures from Al Sarah & The Nubatones Facebook Page.

Song 8. Nuba Noutou - People of Nubia

Ohh People of Nubia,  
Ohh good people,  
Save Nubia,  
Hold it in your eyes,  
What is the slogan of Nubia?  
It is the smell of dates.  
In the green palm leaves,  
An image of date Kure\*,  
Our hearts are like milk,  
Kure: is the date in its stage of ripe in red colour.

يا أهل النوبة  
يا أهل الطيبة  
حافظوا على النوبة  
احملوها في عيونكم  
ما شعار النوبة ؟  
هو رائحة البلح  
في سعف النخل الأخضر  
صورة بلح كري\*  
قلوبنا هكذا كما اللبن .  
كري – Kure : البلح فى مرحلة من نضجه عندما يحمرّ أسف

Translation from Fadekka to Arabic by  
Ma3azef. From Arabic to English by  
myself

*Nuba Noutou* is a very famous old folk tune, rearranged by Al Sarah, written in *Fadekka* language by Mohie El Din Sherif and composed by the renowned Hamza Alaa El Din. Al Sarah is a Sudanese American singer and ethnomusicologist. Her musical arrangements and fashion reflects a fusion of American retro pop and Sudanese styles. In August 2018, I have attended Al Sarah and the



Nubatones concert in Darb 1718. I recall she has given a beautiful poetic introduction to *Nuba Noutou*, where she talked about how Nubia has faced a lot of hardships being divided by British colonisers and suffering from the 1964 displacement that has equally impacted Sudanese and Egyptian Nubians. She completed her introduction by emphasising the importance of Nubian reunification and how she sees *Nuba Noutou* as a song that should be the national anthem of Nubia.

As a member of an audience and a Nubian decent, Al Sarah's speech was very moving, powerful and inviting to think of a return to Nubia and belonging. Unlike High Dam Band, Al Sarah during this concert was in the position to have an active voice and talk about how Nubia was divided through the Aswan High Dam and that it should be reunited once again. High Dam Band's lament song can not do that for the political sensitivity of the topic and the implications that this might cause.

## Belonging



Photo taken by Daniel Merrill, in front of Uncle Hussein Kaddal's house. December 2018

During my fieldwork in Toughka, I have noticed that my great uncle Hussein's house in Toughka had a room that was full of his parents, my great grandparents, belongings. Same for Nawal, who has kept her mother's belongings that were brought to the displaced Toughka from the old

village. Nawal did explain "my mum has brought with her to New Toughka everything one can possibly imagine, knowing that her house will be soon under water, she made sure she had all of her pots, pans, windows, even her houses' door lock she

took it with her.”. Though I did not live the displacement and have never seen old Nubia nor the village from which my ancestors displaced, there was something very special and a unique feeling I had towards my ancestors’ house and their furniture brought with them from Old Nubia. During my fieldwork, I absolutely loved cleaning this house, looking after it, laying on my great grandfather’s *angareh*<sup>61</sup>, on which his name was carved. This gave me a sense of belonging to a family that I was not close to and to a village and a home that I have never visited, a sense of belonging to the displacement and to their hardships that I have never personally experienced, and finally to Nubia.

The Arabs of Malki went through a unique experience. According to Aly, a member of the Arabs of *Olaikat*, originally from the Arabic peninsula: “My parents told me how during the 1960 running up to the Nubian displacement, the King of Saudi Arabia has offered them to be returned back to their ancestral lands. Yet they have refused, for their feelings of belonging to Egypt and particularly Nubia.” Moreover, on an evening with my family in Toushka, a story got to be shared of a man who have decided to move with his family to Sudan saying that as a Nubian, he felt more related to Sudan than Egypt, by that refusing to be displaced to Kom Ombo an area that has brought the Nubians closer to Egypt. Dwelling bodies, belonging and territory are strongly intertwined and linked with each other.

In chapter 1, I have argued how Nubianness is not fixed, yet it is an ever changing state of peoples *becoming* Nubian. While my argument might seem to disregard the importance and notion of belonging, authenticity and origin, songs and art work associated with the band, such as album covers, posters and music videos displayed earlier in this chapter and explained in chapter 2, tells us that strong feelings for Nubia still exist in the hearts and minds of everyone who identifies themselves as Nubian, even those who have not lived in it. Lamenting its destiny was a grief

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<sup>61</sup> Nubian bed made from palm tree leaves.

expressed in every single song in this chapter. Thus, *becoming* Nubian doesn't mean that in the process of territorilization and deterritorilization, explained in chapter 1, one doesn't belong to any territory in fact within this process, feelings of belonging and original becomes something deeply thought of and questioned.

Belonging in the context of citizenship and nation-state is critical, where groups of people can remain in conflicts and wars trying to prove their ownership of lands, like in the case of Israeli-Palestinian and Spanish-Catalonian conflicts. This is especially true for the younger generations of Nubians, who have been working hard on what is known as the Right Of Return Movement, which presses demands for Nubians to return to their ancestral lands. In Song 2, protestors went marching singing and demanding to return to lands that belong to their ancestors. In such narratives, archeology plays an important role in nation building, providing evidence that is interpreted as demonstrating character and roots of a culture as distinct from the culture or country from which it seeks either independence or greater acknowledgement. In songs *Tallo* and أنا أسمر نوبي I am dark Nubian, are two examples of an extensive repertoire of songs where Nubians refer to the kings and the old Kingdom of Kush, presenting a historical birthing point for Nubia, and therefore where they belong as a nation. Claiming relationship to an ancient rich and prosperous kingdom through saying we are the sons of Piye, Mina and Terhaka, serves two purposes in the Egyptian context. On the one hand it offers pride and self esteem. While the stereotype of Nubians as humble cleaners and doormen persists in Egyptian society, the narrative of descending from the great Kingdom of Kush offers a sense of personal pride, as it offers present day Nubians the sense of connection with a glorious past. Simultaneously, this linkage situates Nubians as the original inhabitants, and authentic people of the region, giving precedence to Nubians as the rightful land owners. As in other nationalist applications of music and poetry, songs such as *Abbayassa* , *Nuba Nutto* and يا حليل Arabs of Olaikat's poetry, are examples of creative writings and songs that emphasise the impact of

the specific geographical and cultural features of a people who live there. In these songs Old Nubia's natural environment is presented as having been internalised through the shaping of Nubian character. In this sense, the water of the Nile, the palm trees, dates, animals, are both a lament for Old Nubia, and a reinforcement of the idea of a unique Nubian character shaped by these elements, therefore forever tying Nubians to this geographic location. However, the psycho-geographic imprinting of Old Nubia onto the consciousness of young Nubians, and the social-political narratives that it enhances, should not be read as an entirely false narrative. Posey (1992), Cocks (2006) and Taylor and Lennon (2011) have written extensively on the notion of bio-cultural diversity, where there is a strong correlation between indigenous people, natural landscape, social structure and ecological systems. Part of the preservation the natural environment is seen as essential for indigenous people to continue their social and agricultural practices in their ancestral lands. Such thinking has had impact upon more recent policy, to the point where the 2001 UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity announces the crucial role of "the protection of human rights of indigenous people, including respecting traditional knowledge and its contribution" (Taylor and Lennon, 2011, P.543). The Nubians were displaced prior to such academic thinking informing policies on dam building, but these lament songs stand as testament to the deep way in which Nubian society remains attached to the biosphere and geography of old Nubia.

In her MA thesis, *Sounding the Nile: River Politics, Environment and Nubian Musical Expression*, Regan Lyle Homeyer ( Homeyer, 2020, P.11) uses soundscape and acoustic ecology theoretical framework, by referencing R. Murray Schafer (Schafer, 2005), to argue that the Nile river has been a source of inspiration in Nubian-music-making. I second Homeyer's argument since during my fieldwork, Hisham Batta expressed how the Nile was a great source of inspiration to a lot of his ancestor's musical production, a privilege that he neither his friends have today. Growing up as a Nubian musician and listening to mythical stories of how Nubian rhythms and beats reflect the

sound of the Nile hitting the shore. Although impossible to scientifically prove using musical notation, that the Nubian rhythms are a reflection of the Nile water hitting the shore, there is a unique relationship that Nubians have with their surrounding environment, a theme discussed more in chapter 4.

## Remembering the displacement between past and present

Remembering 1964 Nubian displacement in 2020 gives the impression that there was a rupture in time that has made anything happening or being after 1964 depending on this particular moment in time. In this section, I ask why 1964 constitutes a rupture in time, especially that there were other two major migrations preceding this moment? What does it mean that past and present feelings of lament, mentioned earlier in this chapter, gets to be mixed up, where lament songs are produced by those who have never seen old Nubia nor were displaced.

In *Silencing the Past*, Trouillot tells us that “the past does not exist independently from the present. Indeed, the past is only past because there is a present, just as I can point to something over there only because I am here. But nothing is inherently over there or here. In that sense, the past has no content. The past - or more accurately, pastness- is a position.” (Trouillot, 1995, P.15). Salma’s explanation to her daughter at the opening of this chapter, that their presence today in the Nubian displaced villages is due to Abdel Nasser’s mega project in the 1960’s, is a perfect instance of Trouillot’s quote. The *Fadekka*, *Kenouz* and Arabs of *Olaikat* living in the displaced villages near Kom Ombo happen today to live in this particular geographical location only because the Aswan High Dam was constructed and the Nubians were displaced in 1964.

As previously mentioned, *Kenouz* settled in Old Tushka after the heightening of the Aswan Dam in 1931, while the *Ouchi* have settled amongst the Nubians in the late 19th century and before them the Arabs of *Olaikat*. Although we might think that these events happened one after the other, but in

fact “Time here is not mere chronological continuity. It is the range of disjointed moments, practices, and symbols that thread the historical relations between events and narrative.” (Trouillot, 1995, P.146).

Today in the displaced villages of Nubia, meeting members of these different groups felt as if history and the present are a collection of bits and pieces of events and stories. Trouillot also invites us to think of the past not as something fixed “But the cost accounting of historical suffering makes sense only as a presence projected in the past. That presence (“look at me now”) and its projection (“I have suffered”) function together as a new exhibit for claims and gains in a changing present” (Trouillot, 1995, P. 147). I recall visiting a friend in west Aswan where he was referring to Nubians living in the displaced villages as غلابة (people in dire conditions). It is very clear to anyone who is visiting Nubians who live in Nasr el Nouba and those who still live by the Nile like in the villages of Gharb Soheil or Heissa, to notice the “projection” of 1964 displacement on the economical, social and cultural “suffering” of those who live in Nasr El Nouba.

This contrasts dramatically with Nubia in the social imaginary in Egypt. Whenever I was travelling for fieldwork a lot of friends would get excited of how they absolutely love going to Nubia and sometimes express the desire to join me. However, Nubia that they know and visit is different from Nubia I have always known and where I have done my fieldwork. In the social imaginary in Egypt, Nubia is the small colourful villages by the Nile, where ancient temples are near all the very exciting touristic attractions. Trouillot sheds light on the problematics of tourist attractions representing slavery in the United States, that I find it very much similar to the learning about Nubia in Egypt. “What is scary about tourist attractions representing slavery in the United States is not so much that the tourists would learn the wrong facts, but rather that touristic representations of the facts would induce among them the wrong reaction.” (Trouillot, 1995, P.148). The absence of telling the history of displacement in school curricula and through the Nubian Museum in Aswan,

as well as advertising Nubia in state media as the place where people live happily by the Nile, all contribute in creating “the wrong reaction” about Nubia. In this case, Nubia’s history is partially remembered only by the Nubians.

Finally, thinking of when feelings of lamenting Nubia will ever stop to be expressed or when we as individual young Nubians have started lamenting Nubia are questions that can never be answered, especially since the individual is part of the collective that keep remembering relentlessly Nubia and the displacement all the time (see chapter 2).

“The problems of determining what belongs to the past multiply tenfold when that past is said to be collective. Indeed, when the memory history equation is transferred to a collectivity, methodological individualism adds its weight to the inherent difficulties of the storage model. We may want to assume for purposes of description that the life history of an individual starts with birth. But when the life of a collectivity start? At what point do we set the beginning of the past to be retrieved? How do we decide - and how does the collectivity decide- which events to include and which to exclude? The storage model assumes not only the past to be remembered but the collective subject that does the remembering. The problem with this dual assumption is that the constructed past itself is constitutive of the collectivity.” (Trouillot, 1995, P.16). As mentioned in chapter 2 and in the introduction of this chapter, Nubia and the displacement are remembered through grandmother’s bed time stories, in *gaadas*, in 7th of July festivals, and in lament songs, everywhere.

## **Lament songs from Nubia and beyond**

“Much has been written on the achievements of exile as an artistic vocation, but as a travelling voice from Palestine puts it, exile on the twentieth- century scale and in the present age of mass immigration, refugeeism, and displacement ‘is neither aesthetically nor humanistically comprehensible’. This ‘irremediably secular and unbearably historical’ phenomenon of untimely massive wandering remains ‘strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience’ (Edward Said).” (Robertson, 1994, P. 11)

In August 2019, KaddalMerrill, my latest and current band, released an album *Rain Over Nubia* and toured the UK presenting a series of performances. *Rain Over Nubia* is also a lament tune with no words and no poetry. Performing this tune allows us to remember the Nubian displacement and challenge the imagination of Nubia as this charming set of villages and decorated houses by the Nile in Aswan. One of our performances in 2019 was held in a 12th century tiny church in a village called Myndtown, Shropshire, United Kingdom. We were told that this was the closest village to Wales, without people needing to put their kids in Welsh schools. At the end of our performance, a very old lady came to speak to Mizo Gamal, Nubian drum player, and myself, expressing how much she could personally relate to our *Rain Over Nubia* piece, especially that her ancestors were also displaced from their homes in Wales, for the construction of a dam. Mizo and I, we were both moved by the lady sharing her story with us.

Despite the specificity and uniqueness of each experience of lost homes and land disposition, songs lamenting lost homes and displacement go beyond Nubia; Bella Hardy, a contemporary British folk singer laments the lost village of Derwent cleared and flooded in 1940 to create the Ladybower reservoir in Derbyshire.

Seven pink roses  
All that I saved  
Faded pink roses, crumbling, pressed in the page

Last of the roses  
My sweat and my blood  
My beautiful garden strangled weeds in the flood

When a heart can be drowned  
When strong stones so easily broken



Never more will bird song sound  
My fathers stories will no more be spoken

A single memorial  
The Church spire remained  
Cresting the waters surface, at least 'till today.

But they're coming with dynamite  
And she too must go  
She'll lie with the empty graves in that deep black below

When a heart can be drowned  
When strong stones so easily broken  
Never more will bird song sound  
My fathers stories will no more be spoken

Home is the landmarks  
Worn rock and marked tree  
The land is your family's story, that valley was me

Seven pink roses  
All that I saved  
Dark tempest waters washed their strong roots away



Image of a church flooded in Derwent Village, UK, 1944.



Image from the internet of a mosque flooded in Wadi Halfa, Sudan, 1964.

The melody starts with a set of chord sequences that reminded me of Beethoven's Moon Light Sonata. The chord sequence reflects sorrow and sadness in both pieces. A male backing vocal joins Bella Hardy's beautiful voice, to reflect that the pain of being displaced from home is experienced by both genders. The song holds a steady pulse very much similar to Mohamed Mounir's drum playing, in *Abbayassa*. Again, more feats dragging while being forced to leave home, but this time it was not in Nubia and not for the construction of the Aswan High Dam, but for Derwent Reservoir Dam, or Lady Bower reservoir, in 1944, in Derbyshire, the United Kingdom.

In November 2018, [an article on the BBC News](#), titled "Ladybower Reservoir's low water levels reveal abandoned village" shows pictures of remnants of a village that was once lived, which has left my heart aching hoping that perhaps one day if the level of water in Lake Nasser in Aswan lowers, I can get to see my ancestor's village.

Throughout my field work, [news and pictures](#) about an ancient town called Hasankeyf, in Turkey that was about to drown under another artificial lake, for the construction of another dam, has left me very sad thinking for how long we will keep witnessing lost homes and lost lands under waters, in the name of development and a promise of a better future that we know nothing about.

## Historical songs

Telling historical events through songs, has been a form of documenting history and orally passing on history, from one generation to another, in many parts of the world. However, oral history through songs differs from storytelling, in that melody and rhythm allow for lyrics and words to be more readily remembered, if in a more simplified or poetic form.

The National Library of African Music (ILAM) in Makanda, South Africa<sup>62</sup> has a category of songs about “Historical or notable events”<sup>63</sup>. A song called “Ngwindingwindi ishumba inoruma”, meaning “England is the lion that bites”, a historical song that marks the first time when the British came to Zimbabwe. “The actual incident which gave rise to this song was the appearance of the Pioneer Column marching across the Chibi District on its way up through Providential Pass to establish Fort Victoria and soon afterwards ‘Fort’ Salisbury in 1890” ( Tracey, Catalogue the Sound of Africa Series, Volume II, P.167). Another testimony of how historical events find their way after decades in the contemporary moment, keeping the memory of an event alive through oral history and songs. In his book *موسيقى مصر و السودان* (Music in Egypt and Sudan) AbdAllah Ibrahim Saleh (Saleh, 2016, P. 120) gives examples of songs related to two major historical events in Sudan: Resonance of 1919 revolution in Sudan, and a political activist movement under the name of *جمعية اللواء الأبيض* (The White Flag Association). In praising national resistance to the British occupation in Sudan under the leadership of Soliman Pasha, the song says:

How many time we have asked you Soliman  
before you would grow old?  
And your hand, O father, does as much as it turns  
How many grown kids has the war stepped on?  
How many kids did Cairo or Istanbul push to the  
limits?

كم يا سليمان شدولك على متبور  
و ايدك يا اب نفل تفعل قدر ما تدور  
كم كمل عيالا فوق الحرايه تدور  
كم عيالا حثت مصر و اسطمبول

Thinking about historical songs in rural Egypt and Nubia in the late 19th century, in relation to the British occupation in Egypt, a very interesting story appears during my fieldwork. In trying to understand who are the *Ouchi* (see chapter 1), I learned from the *Fadekka* that the *Ouchi* are the descendants of the army of Wad El Negoumi, leader of the Mahdist army in Sudan, who fought against the Anglo Egyptian army in a battle known as *حرب الدراويش* (Battle of the Dervishes).

<sup>62</sup> Thanks to the HUSS Lab, Travel Grant, I had the chance to travel to Makanda, South Africa and spend time in ILAM researching their archive, meeting ethnomusicologists and anthropologists in Rhodes university.

<sup>63</sup> Catalogue, The Sounds of Africa Series, Volume I, by Hugh Tracey P.34.

I remember well going back home after fieldwork during summer 2019, researching in literature around a war called the Dervish war. Only to learn that this war is also known under the name of Battle of Toski, or war of Touthka in 1889 where Wad El Negoumi leader of the Mahdist army in Sudan was defeated by the Anglo- Egyptian army in the old village of Touthka, Nubia.

Curious whether the *Kenouz* had any further information to share about the story, I asked Am Eissa, the *Tambour* player about Wad El Negoumi, this is when his wife came out of the kitchen, chanting a verse of a song repeatedly:

”دقي طنبورك يا سامحة جيت هاوس هزم ود النجومي”  
Samha ! Play your drum ! Gatehouse defeated Wad El Negoumi”

Then she calmly said: “This is how our ancestors used to tell us stories, through songs!”

Gatehouse is an amalgamation of two names that over a century has become Gatehouse. Gatehouse combines the names of Sir Reginald Wingate, the head of the British General Administrator in Egypt and Sudan and General Sir Josceline Heneage Woodhouse, the commandant of the frontier field force in Egypt (1888 -1892).<sup>64</sup> While the former was in charge, he was not present at the Battle of Touthka. The latter lead the Anglo-Egyptian army in the Battle of Touthka, repelling the invasion of Egypt by Sudanese forces.

Both Am Eissa and his wife repeatedly kept saying: “ We haven’t seen the battle! We haven’t seen the battle! But we have seen Wad El Negoumi’s tomb behind a hill in our old village of Touthka *Garb* (West) ” Witnessing Am Eissa and his wife telling me the story of Wad El Negoumi has left me thinking that of course, they have not seen a battle that broke out in 1889, when we are in 2020. But the power and intensity of the historical event and catchiness of a melody that has found its way throughout the years and remembered until today, all form a living archive of the Battle of Touthka. The reverence with which Wad El Negoumi is held by Nubians speaks to their position between

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<sup>64</sup> preceding Lord Kitchener.

Sudan and Egypt; when Negoumi's army were met by the Anglo-Egyptian force, they were attempting to connect with villages further north that were supportive of the Sudanese cause, and might be persuaded to rise up against Egypt. This and the fact a tomb was made for the dead General, who had achieved legendary status for having killed General Gordon<sup>65</sup>, and destroyed the Anglo Egyptian forces in Khartoum, shows a certain ambivalence within Nubia towards both the Egyptians and the British, and indicates that Nubians did not see themselves as particularly Egyptian at that time. That his tomb continued to be recognised into the 1960's, some 70 years later, as well as songs sung about him reflects the importance of oral history in telling the story of war leaders and battles in the region.



The Arabs of *Olaikat* had a different method of remembering the battle of Tushka. Famous for their excellence in poetry, a journal by the Malki's Youth Club produced in 2003 is one means through which the Arabs of Malki document what has been orally transmitted from one generation

<sup>65</sup> Negoumi's death was reported in various British News papers, and his armour and clothes sent as gifts to Queen Victoria, symbolic of Goron's death being avenged.

to another. The full page article documents what exactly had happened in the war and how Wad El Negoumi was defeated.

يومك من صعيدك جابك ... و في الغنيمة اخذوا ركابك  
و في رملة توشكى غزوا شنابك

In your day he brought you from your south ... and in the booty they took your horses.  
And in the sand of Tushka they invaded your moustaches.

Curious to know how come a battle dated to 1898 has found its way in the present and what makes the battle of Tushka and Wad El Negoumi so famous in the Nubian displaced villages, my interlocutors in the village of Malki tell me that members of each family in the Old village of Malki had to defend their homes from the horrors of a battle not far from their homes.

## Between *Kefead* and Covid: A reinvented *Karama*

“ 'Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past. (...) However, insofar as there is such reference to a historic past, the peculiarity of 'invented' traditions is that the continuity with it is largely factitious. In short, they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition.”

(E. J. Hobsbawm, 1983, P.1)

For most of 2020 I was working on writing my thesis, while we are going through a global pandemic; Covid-19. Fear, anxiety and tension about the future have been through the roof. News channels and social media became my companion during the day. The more news I learned about how the epidemic was developing around the world, the more I felt surprisingly reassured; not because the news were good, but rather because I thought I was in control of the situation. For a lot of Nubians being in control during times of epidemic was different. Scrolling my NewsFeed on Facebook, I found videos being shared by Nubian platforms around the globe such as Nubian

Instagram, Nubia النوبة, Nubian نوبيان and more of women performing a tradition that was “referenced to a historic past”. (E. J. Hobsbawm, 1983, P.1). The ritual was considered to be a *Karama*<sup>66</sup>, where a group of women surrounded around a big pot cooking and sharing a mix of different types of beans: flour, corn, cowpea, humus and broad beans. Women hands were constantly steering the beans while reciting prayers. My newsfeed started to become full of more and more similar videos performing this reinvented tradition from the past, from all over the displaced villages of Nubia, as well as in the cities. I call my extended family in Tushka, to make sure they were safe and they told me about this *Karama*, that they have been doing to overcome Covid-19.

Published in Mada Masr, Mohamed Saad El Hafeez talked about alternative communal healing methods in combating Corona. In reading the examples laid out from Mauritania, India, Iran and finally Alexandria, of people coming together to heal corona patients, using recitation of Quoran, drinking cow urine, visiting shrines and praying, this is when Nubian’s practices started to make sense. El Hafeez refers to Moustafa Hegazi’s book “التكافل الاجتماعي مدخل الي بسلوكولوجية الانسان” (The Social Underdevelopment... A Gateway to the Psychology of an Oppressed Person), to point out the different defensive strategies that third world nations turn to during times of crisis. Compulsive news following, visiting shrines, drinking cow urine, cooking and prayer recitation were all different forms of defensive mechanisms in times of crisis.

Since fieldwork is difficult during quarantine, social media and the phone became the only infrastructure through which I could reconnect with my field. (More on social media and infrastructure in Chapter 4). Yehia Saber, a friend of the family, is a very active member of the Nubian community in Alexandria and the author of *النوبة الغارقة*, The Sunken Nubia. For years,

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<sup>66</sup> A *Karama* is considered by Nubians to be the act of cooking and sharing food with others, as a form of sacrifice to God. Similar to *Saddaka*.

people have been sharing on social media memoirs of old Nubia transforming Facebook into more of a personal diary and a gateway for young generations like myself to learn about Nubia. In March 2018, he shared on his facebook updates, as well as other Nubian platforms, memories of his grandmother using the Nubian (*fadekka*) term *Malariin Seniga* or The Malaria year, to refer to the year when the malaria was spread all over the country, killing 100'000 Egyptians. The term *Troussa Sennii* was also used to refer to the same year when all the Nubians working in the north of Egypt returned to their villages in old Nubia.

On the other hand, Yehia Saber shared his thoughts about the resemblance between the term “covid” and “*Kefead*”, saying that *Kefead* in *faddekka* means the dark black colour of a mould affecting corn crops, turning its grains into a very dark black colour. He concluded his post praying that this virus does not become a *Kefead* and remains a covid.

Similar to the argument made by Mohamed Saad El Hafeez, Dimitris Xygalatas, in Explaining the Emergence of Coronavirus Rituals<sup>67</sup>, interprets remembering malaria times in old Nubia as a “cognitive makeup” . In struggles “to make predictions about the state of the world”, our brains “use past knowledge to make sense of current situations. But when everything around us is changing, the ability to make predictions is limited. This causes many of us to experience anxiety. That is where ritual comes in.” Similar to the ritual of Nubian women cooking and reciting prayers, Xygalatas argues that “rituals forge a sense of belonging and common identity that transforms individuals into cohesive communities.” He ends his article by saying, “As field experiments show, participating in collective rituals increase generosity and even make people’s heart rates synchronize.”

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<sup>67</sup> Published on 1st of April 2018, on SAPIENS, digital magazine.



Synchronisation is also an important element when talking about melodies and rhythms. The cooking of Nubian women was accompanied by prayers recited in a way that is similar to a call and response hymn; the woman who stirs the pot prays God to cure people from the corona, which is followed by her companions responding “Amen”. As someone who doesn’t speak the Nubian language, my mind started to interpret the recitation of prayers in a form of music. The rhythm of the word “Amen” felt like a rhythmic cadence; a metrically accented rhythm that allowed me to mark the start and the end of phrase within the prayer. Also, “Amen” in its very natural form of pronunciation constitutes in two musical notes B and A (or Si and La) that strongly suggested an implied harmony accentuated by the move from note B to note A, giving the feeling and sound of dissonance, relief and resolution after tension. In Stayin’ alive! How music has fought pandemics for 2,700 years, published in the Guardian, Ed Prideaux talks about musical practices as a refuge during times of crisis. His article starts by describing people filling their balconies making music and singing, a very similar scene happening for the past weeks all over Italy, Spain, UK and even Egypt. However, the author was referring to the plague of Saint Charles, in 1576 in the north of Italy. More examples were given for musical practices and chants during epidemic times throughout history; plaque spreading in Sparta in 7th century BC and in England during the reign of Henry VIII.

Prideaux quotes Remi Chiu, musicologist saying “When you’re making music, you’re submitting yourself – your mind, your body – to its regulation. And when you’re making music communally, or even dancing or doing the Macarena with your neighbours, you’re simultaneously contributing and submitting yourself to the larger goal of the group.” The Nubian women responding “Amen” might not have thought of their response as a form of music, but in performing a rhythmic cadence, accompanied by a sound of resolution their bodies naturally are “submitting their minds and bodies”, like an inhale and an exhale of a breath.

# Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how the displacement despite it being lived by *Fadekka*, *Kenouz* and Arabs of *Olaikat* at the same time, each group remembers and expresses the hardship and trauma of losing their homes differently. I have also expanded on other expressions of lamenting Nubia, by highlighting songs by musicians in Alexandria, as well as in the diaspora. On the other hand, also in relation to songs and memory, I have talked about historical songs as a form of a living archive that gets passed on from one generation to another, where human bodies become the deposit of historical events.

Finally, as this year is the year of lockdown and covid-19 pandemic, I share with my reader practices happening in the displaced villages of Nubia during the time of covid-19 to overcome the fear of living in the middle of a pandemic, by that remembering what our ancestors used to do when the cholera was spread all over Egypt.

## **Chapter 4:**

# **Sounds of *Becoming* in Toushka**

# Introduction

In chapter 1, I explained how migration and space form a strong part of *becoming* Nubian. In chapter 2, I have talked about the when, how and where Nubian music is practiced in the displaced villages of Nubia and how the different music produced by the *Fadekka*, *Kenouz* and Arabs of *Olaikat* form a strong part and shapes Nubian music, whilst Chapter 3, was concerned with memory and songs in relation to becoming Nubian, in the scope of the 1964 displacement.

In the closing chapter of this thesis, I conclude by focusing on the intersection between time, space, music, sounds and their contribution in *becoming* Nubian. In doing so I draw on Lefebvre's notion of rhythmanalysis, where he identifies rhythms beyond the musical understanding of beat and sound played in a particular sequence or movements. "Everywhere there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm" (Lefebvre, 2004, P.15). For Lefebvre, rhythm means repetition of time and space, the every day movements of things, objects and bodies, the interruption of a linear flow things and the start or the end of something by force.

In this chapter, I play the role of the "rhythmanalyst" who "calls on all his senses. He draws on his breathing, the circulation of his blood, the beating of his heart and the delivery of his speech as landmarks. Without privileging any one of these sensations, raised by him in the perception of rhythms, to the detriment of any other. He thinks with his body, not in the abstract, but in lived temporality" (Lefebvre, 2004, P.21). I do so by guiding the reader on a trip to the different forms of rhythms, I experienced during fieldwork in Tushka. As Lefebvre suggests I acknowledge that rhythms take many forms, that "smells are a part of rhythms ...odours of the morning and evening, of hours of sunlight and darkness, of rain or fine weather."(Lefebvre, 2004, P.21). I recognise that "The body consists of a bundle of rhythms, different but in tune. It is not only in music that one produces perfect harmonies. The body produces a garland of rhythms, one could say a bouquet,

though these words suggest an aesthetic arrangement, as if the artist nature had foreseen beauty- the harmony of the body (of bodies)- that results from all its history.” (Lefebvre , 2004, P.20)

Space, time, the movements of people coming in and out of Tushka, on a daily and on seasonal basis, the sounds and noises of the every day life in the village, all contribute in the shaping of Nubianness and the shaping of Nubian music. Intentional and unintentional sounds, natural sounds and surrounding sonic environment all find their way and contribute to Nubian musical productions, as well as the *becoming* Nubian.

Since infrastructure and technologies form a fundamental part of people’s movements on a daily and seasonal basis, where time, body, space, sounds and music all meet, I consider them as mediators of sound, where space, soundscape and time intersect together and are part of shaping Nubianness. I follow Larkin’s notion that “Infrastructures are the material forms that allow for exchange over space, creating the channels that connect urban places in wider regional, national and transnational networks” (Larkin, P.5), through considering specific train services that connect the displaced villages of Nubia with the urban cities, as well as Nubian social media platforms become an intermediate space that connects Nubians with each other, where Nubian music is shared and remembered, contributing in the *becoming* Nubian.

The last element of my rhythmanalysis is the factor of time and duration. Following Trouillot’s notion of time where past and present overlap with each other without a clear start nor end, I explore how Nubianess has been shaped and changed over time (Trouillot, 1995). Also, Bergson states that time, becoming and unbecoming always occur through what he calls the “Durational force”:

“the force of temporality is the movement of complication, dispersion or difference that makes any becoming possible and the world a site of endless and uncharitable becomings.” (Grosz, 2005, P. 10). I do so by highlighting the different temporalities coexisting in Tushka today. A theme that I have touched upon in chapter 3 and explore more in this chapter.

In her article, “Temporalities, time and the everyday: New Technology as a marker of change in an Estonian mine”, Keskula talks about different temporalities in the context of Estonian mining oil shaft. She explores what does it mean to be a mine worker in times of change between socialism and capitalism, where she explains how new technologies affects workers relationship with time and labour. Although Nubians have nothing to do with oil mining industry, however a lot of what Keskula’s argument on multiple temporalities, shifts and changes in work practices coincide with life in Nubia. In the displaced villages of Nubia and in Kom Ombo, visual manifestations of different forms of subsistent farming and monoculture farming exist quite clearly, by that reflecting Ssorin- Chaikov’s notion referred to in Keskula’s article of “heterochrony as different temporalities where a “linear historicist time is part of the picture but it borders and even partially overlaps with other temporalities”, as a crossing point of several temporal disjunctures that extent beyond the scope and the terms of a particular site/span.” (Keskula, 2016, P.523).

Despite the 1964 displacement being a rupture of time, a rupture in the rhythm of life in Nubia for “the continued story of high modernity and linear movement towards a better and more efficient life” (Keskula, 2016, P.526). However, one can easily recognise elements of life from Old Nubia coexisting with the modern life in the displaced villages: in farming, musical practices and ceremonial life both elements of the past and present coexist sometimes together, making this rupture and linearity of time intertwining with cyclical time.

## **Soundscape in Tushka**

December 2018. I arrive to Tushka, with my husband, for the first time since 2004. On first impression, I felt that things have changed, I was unable to pin point these changes exactly but I knew Tushka felt different then when I first visited it years ago. Maybe, there were less houses, less people, less noises. I don't know!

The moment we entered Uncle Hussein's house, I walked into the sun light that found its way in the middle of the courtyard. I could feel and smell the fresh breeze on my face. In the corner of the house, I have spotted two black birds, with orange beaks, flying in and out the house, singing to us as if they were greeting us. We decided to rest after a long sleepless night journey from Cairo to Tushka, before starting our tour visiting family members.

Although still in Nubia, Tushka is now far from the Nile banks. Across the irrigation canal are the sugar cane fields. Unlike the popular imaginings of Nubia, of peaceful life resting in dramatic landscapes, of pretty boat rides and picturesque walks on the corniche, there seemed little to be done in Tushka, nor in the rest of the displaced villages, apart from family and friends visits or weddings if it was the season for it.

Spending the afternoon in Uncle Hussein's house, it was very easy to have a deep long nap. The village was very quiet, as if there was an agreement of all Tushka's inhabitants that this is nap time, especially with the cold winter weather. The narrow roads are not surfaced with tarmac, only sand which absorbs the sounds of people and vehicles passing by. Similarly, the narrow, uneven streets prevent fast moving traffic, be that cars, vans or tuktuks, creating a softening of the soundscape. Occasional donkeys braying was one of the few sounds that interfered with the calm and quiet soundscape. Calls for *Asr* prayers came from two directions; one from the side of the village that fronts onto the the main road, and one from the opposite end of the village. The two calls intertwined and almost clashing against each other with their different musical modes. The Sheikh calling from the communally-built mosque of the front of the village was using pentatonic scale. However, the sheikh calling from state-built mosque at the rear of the village was singing in

Hegaz maqam.

In the evening my husband and I accompanied our family members, Am Ramadan and Aunt Tamah, his wife, roaming around the village from one house to another, meeting family members and friends of family. It was a joy to meet everyone again, after such long time, cheers of welcomes, joy and laughter were expressed in every house. Our meetings included a mix of Arabic and Nubian (*Fadekka*) languages, all filling the air, sometimes mixed with each other, to convey same meanings. Friends and family offering oranges and bananas for guests laughing that it is the start of the week when everyone has been to the Sunday *souq* in Toughka, buying vegetables and fruits for the week. A gathering that would have happened on Friday for example might have been limited to pop-corn and tea.

The sounds of the inside and outside of homes tend to get confused and sometimes mixed with each other, with the presence of courtyards, that has allowed for sounds to travel outward through the open roofs, and open doors to the outside and vice-versa. A complete contrast to my understanding of enclosed reverberant space in my Cairo apartment.

At the front of each house in Nubia, a مصطبة beautifully decorated bench with tiles, where people sit on having long conversations with neighbours, smiling at people passing by the streets with a welcoming اتفضل come in !

All this form a strong part of the rhythm in the Lefebvrian sense of life in Toughka today.

“Sound occupies a space, and the instruments of existence. The spatialisation of musical time cannot be deemed a betrayal. Perhaps music presupposes a unity of time and space, an alliance. In and through rhythm?” (Lefebvre, 2004) Sound and music in Toughka is manifested in women sitting on benches in the evenings chatting with their neighbours, it is in the sounds coming from homes through the courtyard and out to the streets and from the street to inside the homes.

Rhythms of Toughka are in the sound that travels further in the night’s cool air, are in the sudanese and Nubian music coming from the *ahwas* and the sounds of backgammons. Sounds, music, taste of



food, spaces and the different temporalities in Touthka, are all rhythms that forms a strong part of becoming Nubian living in Touthka *El Tahgeer* today.

## **A quest for an Escalay: Relationship between Rhythm and music production**

On a beautiful sunny winter morning, I ask Am Ramadan if he could take us to the fields, where he and almost everyone in the displaced villages of Nubia grow sugar cane. I asked him if there were any waterwheels still functioning that we can see. Am Ramadan's replied that it is very difficult nowadays to find any waterwheel left; the water wheel was required when the water needed to be raised great and variable heights from the Nile to the fields, according to the level of the Nile waters. Now the canal provides a constant flow at a relatively stable level, not that far below ground level. Motorised pumps are now turned on and off, pumping vast quantities of water much more rapidly, and with less supervision required than the animal drawn waterwheel. We stood in front of his fields, *tkiitiishhh tkiitiishhh tkiitiishhh tkiitiishhh* the water pump was very loud to the point that we couldn't hear each other talking.

As a musician obsessed with Hamza Alaa El Din's work especially with his *Escalay* (1971, Explorer Nonesuch Records), listening to the original sounds produced by the waterwheel was something I was looking forward to. *Escalay* is one of his most renowned works, which is remarkable given its nature. The album's title and music is a sonic interpretation of the different sounds produced by the waterwheel. The title track is a 21:39 minute extended work, performed on a constant rhythmic riff or musical phrase, whose repetitive cycles can be read as a sonic representation of the circular movement of the waterwheel as it is pulled by an animal or a cow. The duration of the work is notable; it makes up half the album, something unusual for commercial releases of the time, being more than four times longer than might be expected of say popular

songs, and yet it still has a sense of being able to go further; it may be that the format of commercial releases of the time, 12 inch vinyl, may have been the constraining factor, as the format can only handle 22 minutes per side. In broadening the temporal scope of the songs format, El Din gives a sense of the waterwheel consistency with which one might have heard the waterwheel. But then Hamza ends his piece by a slow down in volume of the riff played, a focus on one ending musical note and a sudden silence, as if with the displacement and the disappearing function of the waterwheel, its sound has been muted for eternity.

The sound of the water wheel was ever present element of Nubian life prior to the construction of the High Dam, commented upon by journalist William Cowper Prime when he wrote of his journey to Nubia in 1860, “It is seen at every hundred rods, and heard all day and all night long, creaking a most melancholy and mournful creak. (...)” (Prime, 1860, p.163). In describing an elderly Nubian man attending to the operation of the waterwheel Cowper Prime goes so far as to bring the musical element of the escalay to our attention: “The everlasting creaking of the wheels—that strange sound that no other machinery on earth emits— seemed, and was to him, the familiar music of his life.” (Prime, 1860, p.163).

Alaa El Din’s *Escalay* also draws on the practical and symbolic importance of the waterwheel in Nubian society, farming and daily life, and the reminiscences of the musician with the Nubian soundscape.

Over a century and a half later, Thayer Scudder would refer to Cowper Primes description, but provide a more detailed explanation of the same elements when reviewing the successes and failures of the Aswan High Dam Project, saying “The ownership of the water-wheel is connected with the ownership of the land, because every share owner of the land must help build the water-wheel and also donate one of its parts. The waterwheel system permeates all aspects of social and economic life. The water wheel has helped create a method of partnership in the ownership of cows

used to run the machine, and a useful system of land division, both of which strengthen the relationship of the various houses within families.” (Aswan High Dam resettlement, 2016).

In trying to imagine how the waterwheel has been collectively built, in my mind, I imagine the sounds of people’s bodies and their voices working side by side, trying to construct such a fascinating and massive machinery. Also, another example of thinking of “The body produces a garland of rhythms, one could say a bouquet, though these words suggest an aesthetic arrangement, as if the artist nature had foreseen beauty- the harmony of the body (of bodies)- that results from all its history” (Lefebvre , 2004, P.20). I think of when I asked Ibrahim Saleh Bidan to record him and his drum band playing. Ibrahim Bidan is one of the very few marching procession duff players and singers, left in the displaced villages of Nubia today. Wedding drum processions is today seen as something from the past or old fashioned, that young Nubians are no longer interested in. He showed me a very popular picture, that I was able to recognise, of his father singing and drumming in a wedding in Old Tushka.

When Bidan and his band the *tar* play together, they are a group of around 5 players; each play a beat that completes the other, by that forming a whole full rhythm that fills the sonic space.

For notation purposes, I asked if I can sound record them playing together and playing individually, so that I can easily notate the playing of each drummer. But they all looked at me saying that this was impossible and that they only could play collectively and together. Bidan and his band are what Lefebvre calls “a bouquet”, they drum together as one “body produces a garland of rhythms” (Lefebvre , 2004, P.20). However, the changing nature of what an audience finds pleasant and interesting is reflected in the Nubian becoming. Where in the past a wedding drum procession is a scene of a ritual, today a mass-manufactured keyboard is considered the highlight of contemporary weddings.

Heading to the fields with Am Ramadan, Aunt Tamah his wife and Daniel, my husband, all four of us in a toktok. It wasn't a very comfortable ride, as it was very difficult to have a conversation with such a long bouncy ride. We were unable to properly hear each other due to the loud distorting motor sound of the toktok. I could not help but being reminded of a picture of my brother doing this same trip, almost 10 years earlier, riding on a cart pulled by a donkey. I am sure that the sounds of the two wheels and the donkey's paused steps were not as distorting and loud as the sound of a toktok's motor. Instead of listening to the sounds of waterwheel and admiring even more Hamza Alaa El Din's piece, we heard a constant *teketiishhh, teketiishhh, teketiishhh, teketiishhh, teketiishhh* water pumping machine, pumping huge amounts of water into a narrow stream, that was as loud and distorting, as the sound of the Toktok. Contrary to Hamza Alaa El Din's Escalay, where the piece follows a flowing pulse, without a strict time signature, the water pump performed a rigid set of crotchets in an infinite number of four bars beat.

I went back home thinking of the relationship between natural soundscape and its contribution in the shaping of Nubian musical production. In her *The Soudscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of The World*, R. Murray Schafer tells us that :

“ Each type of forest produces its own keynote. Evergreen forest, in its mature phase, produces darkly vaulted aisles, through which sound reverberates with unusual clarity - a circumstance which, according to Oswald Spengler, drove the northern Europeans to try to duplicate the reverberation in the construction of Gothic cathedrals.” (Schafer, 1993)

In a similar way to northern European composers, Hamza Alaa El Din's work is more of an imitation and inspiration of the sounds of the force of nature, the sound of cows that dragging the water wheel allowing for the water to be lifted and poured. Moreover in a performance by Hamza El Din (1929-2006), he explains to his audience:

“I would believe every drum have the sound of 4 elements: the water, earth, fire and air. And when you allow your drum to play you, you hear these 4 elements” Hamza El Din, CA 1987<sup>68</sup>.

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<sup>68</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQo1g6CMBKI&list=RDeQo1g6CMBKI&index=1>

Once again, nature and environment are a common theme in El Din's both music and performance, not just implicit in the music but in his descriptions. Performing on a piece of tar, made from wood and animal skin, he explains to the audience, the different sounds of the Tar instrument in relation to the sounds of nature. There is an explicit message in El Din's statement when he says "when you allow your drum play you", as if he is saying if you allow the nature to play you; a harmonious relationship, allowing the forces of the nature to express themselves through you and vice versa. Despite that Murray Schafer's notion of soundscape is at the forefront of sound studies, however, other scholarly work have been very critical and analytical to Schafer's work. In his article "Listening against Soundscapes", Stefan Hermreich critics Schafer's usage of soundscape as a medium of "contemplation" where "noise" and urban sounds are sounds to be cast out (Hermreich, 2010, P. 10). Romanticisation or sentimentalisation of the work of Hamza Alaa El Din is not what I seek to achieve in this section. However, what I hope to achieve is to highlight the influence of soundscape in the becoming of Nubian musical production.

In the evening of the same day, we sat on the *mastaba*, a front bench of my great uncle's house, it was almost sunset time. We notice birds flying in front of us and standing on electricity wires, singing beautiful semi-constructed melodies. We look at each other and agree we have never seen these types of birds, with colourful fur and beautiful sounds in the crowded city of Cairo. I look at him with big eyes and say "الطير المهاجر", the migrant bird.

As previously mentioned in Chapter 2, the migrant bird is a recurrent theme in Nubian Sudanese and Egyptian songs. Echoed by the playing of the flute in Mohamed Wardi's song "الطير المهاجر", the migrant bird, the bird is also the Nubian who is always moving from one place to another.

Both the waterwheel and the migrant bird are natural sonic elements that travels in this very unique and particular space: Nubia, contributing in the shaping of Nubian character, artist and music.

Following Schafer's and El Din's ideological artistic practice, I ask if we would think that contemporary Nubian musicians living in Toughka or in the urban would find inspiration from soundscapes surrounding them, then the music and sounds they produce would be different from musical production of someone like Hamza Alaa El Din. Would it be less valuable or appreciated than music of El Din's ? Would it be less Nubian than El Din's?

I recall times when I was a member of High Dam band and we used to sit together to compose and arrange a new song. Our ideas were always an inspiration from music we had already heard on the internet and in popular media. Interesting rhythms or chord progressions would be the start of a new musical idea for a song. Despite the fascinating sea view we have in Alexandria, however our thoughts and bodies were completely focused on being part of a larger popular music scene in Alexandria and in Egypt. The band always knew that they were departing from a unique culture and music of Nubia, but they wanted to be included in the music scene in Alexandria. Music that was more of a fusion between pentatonic Nubian music and songs and popular rock music through instrumentation and sometimes rhythms. A complete different ideology from Schafer's and El Din's. This doesn't mean that High Dam Band's music is not Nubian enough or authentic in any way. Yet, it is only a representation of how Nubian music becoming can sound and look like. High Dam Band's music is also a good representation for soundscape and contexts influences musical productions.

## **Kom Ombo's Sugar Factory: The Sounds of Heavy Machinery**

Going to the fields with Am Ramadan, during sugar cane harvest. *Tssshhh ,Tshhhh, Tsshhhh, Tshhh* was the dominant sound of sugar cane being cut and transported to vans with the help of *Saidis*. Sounds of vans roaming around the displaced villages of Nubia was something that every Nubian

was aware of. A mix of colours between green, degrees of yellow, brown and blue all presented a beautiful image of the fields. We ask Am Ramadan where does the sugar cane go, he answers that it is the time when it gets transported to Kom Ombo's sugar factory, where the factory have a list of each and every landowner in the displaced village growing sugar cane. The factory sets a schedule of when sugar cane is supposed to be collected. Collection process happens twice a year: twice a year the displaced villages of Nubia is filled with sounds of cutting sugar cane, and vans roaming around the villages. Rhythms in this case is the intertwine of different elements: sounds of cutting, seasonal sugar cane collection, and Nubia as a space.

The next morning, my husband and I decided to spend the day in Kom Ombo. This was my first visit ever to Kom Ombo, a small city whose business is based around sugar cane and the production of sugar cane factory. Our microbus drops us at Kom Ombo's train station, where we find long train carriages carrying transporting sugar cane. Young men and boys risking their lives, running after the carriages trying to pull a sugar cane to chew. Kom Ombo's sugar factory can be seen from afar through its smoke polluting the sky of Kom Ombo. A massive grey, metal construction dominating a big part of this small city. The sounds, smells and tempo of Kom Ombo were completely different and dynamic than in the village. Kom Ombo's smell was covered in molasses, that made us feel very hungry. Sounds of cars and microbus intensified with the tarmac roads. The *souq* in Kom Ombo available on a daily basis, encompasses all sorts of vendors calling for their merchandise. People who inhabit and come in and out of Kom Ombo on a daily basis speak with different Egyptian accents. Every now and then our ears would pick up a conversation in Nubian language. Walking in the streets of Kom Ombo we found narrow train tracks that look very old and no longer used, we follow these train tracks to find out that it leads to the corniche of the Nile where containers specifically designed carry and transport molasses through the Nile. For a moment we thought that what we have seen are remnants of a colonial past, when molasses and sugar were exported to Britain. However to our surprise, we later see a specially designed train to transport



molasses. Elements of the past and present all mingled with each other in this one particular space.

Before sun set we were back to Toughka and back to the slightly slow tempo. In the

evening I decide to go to Nawal to spend some time with her. She pulls out from under the bed a blanket full of *molokheya*, looks at me smiling and says: “عمك توفيق لسة جاي من الزرع” (Your Uncle Tawfick just came back from the fields). We sat together on the floor and started peeling the *molokheya*. It was a lot of *molokheya* ! We could stay 3 full evenings peeling it. Another relative, who just came from Aswan to spend the weekend in Toughka, passed by to say hello to Nawal, automatically joined in. Our hands busy, all sorts of stories get to be told. Nawal told me of few years ago, when she and Am Tawfick used to grow their own food at the back of their house in Toughka *El Tahgeer*. She used to share tomatoes with people when food prices went high. She looked at me raising one eye brow saying “Of course we were fined for using drinkable water!”. Just before I prepare to leave, Nawal stops me and gives me a bag full of dates saying “This is for you! This is from our palm trees’ harvest for this year”.

Am Tawfick might be the only one I have met during my fieldwork who is still farming with his bare hands, growing fruits and vegetables for his family to use. The majority of Nubians have been asking *Saidis* (upper Egyptian) farmers to help out with growing sugar cane. The government offers easier payment methods for buying fertilisers for growing sugar cane than any other crop,



something that has encouraged a lot of Nubians to move from subsistent to monoculture farming.

The moment one steps out from Kom Ombo train station all the way to Minya, fields of sugar cane fill the horizon in order to serve the beast, the sugar factory in Kom Ombo.

Nawal sharing dates with me or even helping her peeling the *molokheya* was not a “new” or “nouveau” form of practice. In Old Nubia and right after the 1964 displacement women used to get together during عاشورة *ashoura*<sup>69</sup>, lunar eclipse, collection of harvest, child birth and weddings to help each other out, cooking and sharing food. Those busy hands were not only accompanied with stories and chit chats but also songs. Something that didn’t seem to exist anymore with the growing of sugar cane. In Malki they call it محصول الكسلان (the lazy crop), for how easy it is to grow sugar cane.

The contrast between Kom Ombo’s sugar factory, the harvest of sugar cane and Am Tawfick’s subsistent farming brings with it different rhythms in Lefebvrian sense: different smells, different relationships between bodies and different sounds. Although I did not see Am Tawfick working in the fields, but I could imagine Nubian women sitting together peeling crops, cooking together, singing together and telling stories to their children, something that does not exist with monoculture farming practices, where the relationship between the Nubian farmer his crop has become less intimate. Changes in farming practices in Nubia is very telling of how Nubianness is in constant change, and how relationships, sounds and rhythms gets to change and redefined along with this change.

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<sup>69</sup> Ashoura is the 10th day of the Ashoura month in the islamic calendar. It is a widely celebrated and remembered day for the death of Hussein the grandson of Prophet Mohammed.

# Nubia's Train and Social Media Platforms: Mediators of Sound, Music, Space and Time

Since this chapter is designated to the soundscape and rhythms in Tushka. Infrastructure forms the liaison between the village and the urban cities, that transport but as well as brings rupture to the daily routine and villages rhythms. Studying infrastructure and the rhythms that it brings to the village is important in understanding how Nubians connect with each other and in part understanding how Nubianness is shaped in relation to the urban.

In his *People as Infrastructure*, AbouMaliq Simone talks about Infrastructure as

“commonly understood in physical terms, as reticulated systems of highways, pipes, wires, or cables. These modes of provisioning and articulation are viewed as making the city productive, reproducing it, and positioning its residents, territories, and resources in specific ensembles where the energies of individuals can be most efficiently deployed and accounted for.”  
(Simone, 2004, P.407).

Before doing fieldwork, I had a misconception that the displaced villages of Nubia as completely cut-off from urban Egypt. However, in my preliminary fieldwork, I was amazed how relatives in Alexandria were up-to-date with news concerning my husband's and I, presence and itinerary around the village. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, people get to know and introduce each other using names of people they commonly know. Whereas born and raised in Alexandria, I tend to find my networks of people using schools and universities we have been through and jobs acquainted. Also, I recall growing up as a child and learning about my parents' wedding and grandfather's wake, how groups of extended paternal relatives traveled all the way from the displaced village of Nubia, to either congratulate or pay condolences in Alexandria. Nubia seemed to be a small place with how it is well-connected, through people's “collaborative practice is constituted through the capacity of individual actors to circulate across and become familiar with a broad range of spatial, residential, economic and transactional positions.”(Simone, 2004, P.408).

When the village celebrates a wedding or a special event like the retirement party of the head of Tushka *Sharq*'s headmistress explained in chapter 2. Tushka's flow of rhythms and flow of the daily life gets ruptured with other sounds, smells, music and temporalities.

Weddings seasons are usually during Eid or schools mid-year holidays in Egypt, as to allow Nubians living in the cities to travel to the displaced villages and celebrate their relatives weddings. Especially during Eid, weddings in Tushka can reach to 2 or 3 weddings in the same day, which given the length of the village, sounds of joy and music gets to be multiplies, louder and circulated in the village. People coming Tushka from the urban cities bring back home food and gifts. Animal slaughtering is a strong part of weddings and ceremonial rituals. All this are part new sounds, smell, music and temporalities that tuning in with the village's rhythms.

The train is the main source of transportation that Nubians use to travel from the urban cities to the displaced villages of Nubia and vice-versa. During Eid, as it is the time of the year when big numbers of those who are living in the urban cities spend the Eid with their relatives and loved ones in the village, the train becomes a very unique and special trip.

In her film Nubian Train 2002 by Ateyyat El-Abnoudy, accompanies thousands of Nubians in their yearly trip to Nubia for Eid. The documentary starts from the Nubian Club in Alexandria where people get organised to announce the available train seats for passengers. Each train car is dedicated to passengers from one of the Nubian villages. The documentary captures a trip of 18 hours, where people sing, play games and eat together. It is a place where Nubianness is enacted and passed on from one generation to another, through Nubian songs shared, meeting other Nubians from the same village, practicing speaking in Nubian language and sharing general conversations. The documentary captures perfectly the rhythms of bodies sitting side by side, singing together, eating together throughout an 18 hours journey. Nubian music, laughter and conversations all travel within

this metal narrow space in a very specific time of the year. The Nubian train during Eid is part of becoming Nubian for a lot of Nubians living in the urban.

In قطار النوبة رحلة سنوية أصبحت تقليدا نوبيا كل عيد أضحى, Train to Nubia: A yearly trip that has become a Nubian tradition every Eid Adha, another documentary by the BBC News, where a father share his eagerness to take his children every year to the displaced villages of Nubia, using the train, so that they would stay in touch and in contact with Nubia. The father also talked about feelings of belonging and how despite him moving to the urban, he still feels he belongs to Nubia; the land of his ancestors. Which confirms my argument on belonging raised in Chapter 3.

The train to Nubia can be seen as a space where Nubians are reassembled in the Latourian sense (See Chapter 1), a space where Nubians in the urban get reconnected with each other and with their families in the displaced villages of Nubia.

### Social Media Platforms

Also in relation to infrastructure and rhythms, the 20th century offers us virtual and much more fast way of communication, connecting people from around the globe regardless their geographical location.

In Chapter 3, I have talked about how Nubian social media platforms; facebook pages and Youtube channels, I was able to learn a lot about Nubia, Nubian history, meanings of Nubian songs and more. A page on Facebook called Nubian Geographic, always shares information and pictures of Old Nubia and the Kingdom of Kush referencing academic work and literature. Which helps Nubians to have access to literature and research done about them.

أغاني النوبة الجميلة Nouba's Beautiful Songs, is another page on Facebook that offers translations and explanations of Nubian songs. The sharing of Nubian songs has then moved from *gaadas* and weddings to another form of space, where bodies and sharing of sounds and music is more on an individual level.

Nubia النوبة page on Facebook shares updates and news of Nubians living in the villages as well as in the urban, by that allowing for Nubians to remain connected wherever they are. Nobin Dorekolod, offers an original and great source of teaching Nubian language through songs, by making videos of the song written in Nubian letters, as well as giving information on the singer, musicians, composer and lyricists involved in the production of the song. These pages are only examples of Nubian social reassemblage in the virtual world of social media and the internet.

Moreover, Nubi App, has been a major step in efforts to teach Nubian language to new generations. The app helped teaching how to pronounce Nubian language and it uses songs in order to teach both *Fadekka* and *Kenzi* languages.

Lefebvre's analysis of rhythms takes a different turn through usage of social media as a form of infrastructure and communication, where sounds is not through the sounds of trains, vehicles and toktoks but rather the beeping of smart phones with updates and notifications. Space as well has taken a different shape where bodies don't interact with one another, but rather interact virtually through social media. Social media as infrastructure is a strong part of becoming Nubian, as social media offers a strong source of information outside of homes and grandmothers' stories.

## Between the old times and today: Hetrotemporalities in Nubia

”عايزة تعرفي كل بلد في قرى التهجير ايه اللي بيميزها، شوفى هي كانت عاملة أزاى في الحضارة القديمة. قرية أبو سمبل معروفة بفنانيتها و مزيكاتها عشان في الحضارة القديمة قرية أبو سمبل كانت قدام معبد أبو سمبل و معظم سكانها كانوا فنانين و نحائين بيشغلوا في المعبد.“

Do you want to know what is unique about each village in the displaced villages. Search for what this village was known for in the ancient civilisation. Abou Simbel village in the displaced villages of Nubia is famous for its artists and singers, because in the ancient civilisation Abou Simbel was situated on the opposite side of the Nile bank, in front of Abou Simbel temple and most of its inhabitants were artists, sculptors working in About Simbel Temple.

Hisham Batta, Fieldwork winter 2020.

In chapter 3, I have demonstrated how past and present temporalities happen at the same time through songs remembering the 1964 displacement. Following Trouillot's Silencing the past (2005), I have explained how past and present overlap with each other, where past and present don't have a clear starting nor ending points.

In her article, Kesula (2016) references Bear (2014) talking about the present as "multiple divergent representations and techniques of time and rhythm, which are increasingly in conflict with each other." (Kesula, 2016, 523). The time spent with Nawal peeling *molokheya* described earlier in this chapter comes together and conflict the presence of Kom Ombo's sugar factory. Although subsistence farming is seen a practice of the past in Nubia, yet we do find remnants of such practice in the present moment. Conversations amongst women whilst peeling huge amount of *molokheya*, conflicts with the mass produced sugar cane in the displaced villages of Nubia to be sold to the Sugar factory.

Hamza Alaa El Din's *Escalay* can be seen as a commodified element from the sounds of the past finding its way in the present that conflicts and clashes with the sounds of water turbines. Tushka today encompasses elements of the past and the present existing at the same time. For example, Nawal celebrating her grandson's birth, by taking him to the canal and following birth rituals that her ancestors used to do. Although such ritual is no longer practiced as in the past, it still finds its way into the present. The soundscape and rhythms in the displaced villages of Nubia are also a mix of elements from the past and the present altogether. The sounds of the donkey, the state's mosque, the communal mosque with their different callings, houses with courtyards, houses with floors, the duff drumming wedding band, the keyboard playing in weddings are all elements from past and present conflicting and intertwining with other. All forming part and parcel from the becoming and the sounds of becoming in Tushka.

# Conclusion

In the closing chapter of this thesis, I have demonstrated following Lefebvre's rhythm analysis the different rhythms in Tushka I have experienced during my fieldwork. I have used elements of sound, smells, colour to share with my reader the different rhythms in Nubia.

I have demonstrated how sonic environment contributes in the shaping of Nubianness and Nubian music. I have also talked about how sonic environment in the village is different than in the city and how it affects musical production in both locations.

I have also explained how time, space and sound coexist together of past and present elements of Nubian life through farming practices.

# Conclusion



This thesis started as a personal quest, more or less a search of my family's histories. I was interested in bringing together the most two important words to me: displacement and music. I started my fieldwork hoping to find answers that would make sense to what is Nubian music and who are really the Nubians, do I personally fall into this category of a Nubian or not. But now writing this thesis I came to realise that fieldwork, this thesis, my understanding today of who are the Nubians and what is Nubian music are all a moment in time, a snippet that is not frozen and that maybe as I write this conclusion is already on its way to change. Future generations of people born and raised in Nasr El Nouba, by the banks of the Nile, children and grand children of Nubians in the urban centres of Egypt and in the diaspora, all will have their own understanding of being Nubian and practice of Nubian music. Will they be less Nubians? Or will their musical practice be less authentic? I believe this thesis has argued against that.

Doing fieldwork has been a mesmerising experience: the hand clapping, the feet dancing side by side hitting the ground, the dust in the air, the loud speakers, the *zagharit*, everything was absolutely magnificent and magical. An experience that will always be engraved in my heart and mind. But in reality and in terms of what we know about Nubia and Nubian music it is just a moment, a snapshot of a whole never-ending film. The field is a never ending story, always waiting for another anthropologist to unpack its mysteries.

The movement of people, relocation and forced displacement strongly affects ones understanding of his own identity and his personal creative practice, including music. The study of displacement and music are two minor examples of how anthropology, music and sound studies are intertwined. As demonstrated in this thesis, music has always been a strong part of life in Nubia, through ceremonial practices and expressing sorrow and lament over sunken homes and lands.

I hope that this thesis has presented an understanding not only of Nubian music, but its importance in understanding a culture. In chapter 1, I have used ethnographic material as well as historical

literature on histories of migration to argue that Nubians are not one fixed category and that they are always in the process of becoming in the Deleuzian sense. In chapter 2, by questioning what is Nubian music I discussed about the different musical practices amongst the *Fadekka*, the *Kenouz* and the Arabs of *Olaikat*. I have demonstrated how the richness of different musical practices, Nubian music is not confined in one solo definition. I also hope that the relationship between displacement and music in Nubia is clearer through navigating Tushka's contemporary soundscape, whilst recalling how it might have been different in Old Nubia, by that shaping the becoming Nubian. In chapter 3, I focus on the question of memory through music and songs, where I have analysed songs of lamenting Old Nubia produced by *Fadekka*, *Kenouz* and Arabs of *Olaikat*. I have also explained how a traumatising experience has brought these 3 groups of people together, but also each of their experiences is very particular and unique to the culture of this group. I have concluded this thesis, with chapter 4, where I guided my reader through a sonic and rhythmic wandering in Tushka *El Tahgeer*. I have shared the different sounds, smells and rhythms that form part and parcel of the becoming Nubian in Tushka.

For this thesis and thanks to the university's dean of graduate studies, I have received a grant to travel to Vienna and work closely on Countess Anna Hohenwart-Gerlachstein's collection of recordings done in Old Nubia between 1962-1963, part of the Nubian Ethnological Survey. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has made this trip impossible. I am looking forward to working on finding future funding to work on this archive. I believe learning about older Nubian music can tell us a lot about contemporary musical practices and more on Old Nubia.

This leads me to encourage anthropologists, musicians, folklorists and ethnomusicologists to undertake research filling more gaps in Nubian studies and Nubian music, such as: deeper studies on musical practices in Nubia before and after the displacement, archival research focusing on Nubian music, Nubian musical composition, rhythms and beats in Nubian music, farming practices

in relation to musical practices, collective singing in Old Nubia, study of the tambour: its making and its history, female Nubian music practitioners and singers, Nubian music in travel writing and literature. Outside of Nubian music: the study of jewellery making in Nubia, feminisation of life in Nubia before 1964 displacement and life of Nubians in Kenya.

I also would like to encourage researches and translators to focus on literature written by Nubians in Arabic language. There is a lot to learn about Nubia from Nubians themselves trying to document their memories in Old Nubia and share their knowledge about the history of Nubia. Translating this vast body of literature from Arabic to English is very important in decolonising knowledge production, by building bridges between non-Arabic speakers and Nubians, and vice versa. All these studies will be of great value to understand the becoming of Nubianness, how it is changeable not only through displacement, but also through different factors that influence in its becoming.

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