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NUBIANS IN THE  
URBAN DIASPORA  
CHANGE AND REVIVAL  
OF ETHNIC IDENTITY

LONUMBA TITO EMAN

1997



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The American University in Cairo  
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

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**NUBIANS IN THE URBAN DIASPORA:  
CHANGE AND REVIVAL OF ETHNIC IDENTITY**

A Thesis submitted to  
Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Psychology

in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Master of Arts  
in Sociology-Anthropology

by  
**Lomumba Tito Eman**  
BA, University of Alexandria, 1990

January 1997



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**NUBIANS IN THE URBAN DIASPORA:  
CHANGE AND REVIVAL OF ETHNIC IDENTITY**

A Thesis submitted by Lomumba Tito Eman

To Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Psychology

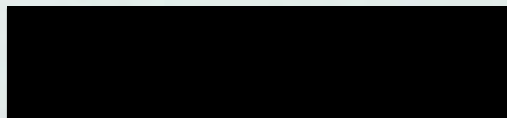
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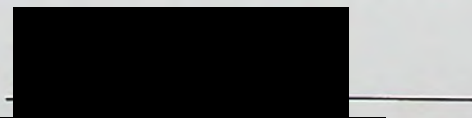
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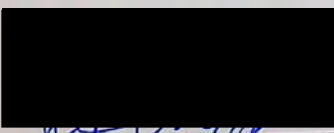


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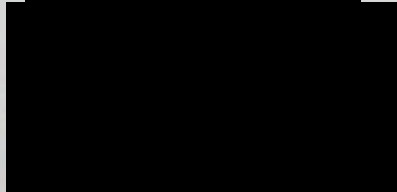


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## Dedication

*To: our father, Tito Rowng Eman, hung in public, buried in an unmarked grave in an unknown place, whose children know him only through photographs; and our mother, Rosa-Ashaam Gabriel Yak, who taught me English alphabet, this work is dedicated as a first fruit of their mission as my loving parents.*

L. T. Eman



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As one of the luckiest beneficiary from a "noble" academic and linguistic assistance and interest given to this study by Dr. Donald P. Cole, thesis advisor, and full attention and constructive suggestions from Dr. Nicholas Hopkins, thesis reader, and then flow of comments and alternative path for presentation of primary data rendered by Dr. James Toth, thesis reader, to all of them I forward an everlasting thanks, for without their endless guidance this thesis would have not been accomplished or inhaled this synthetical analysis.

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I am specially grateful to all the respondents and friends at the General Nubian Clubs in Alexandria and Cairo. Without their outstanding help this thesis would not have been accomplished. Their generous responses and assistance during the fieldwork are remarkable and beyond my thanks. Respondents' words and experience have built up this thesis and also their ideas enlightened my understanding regarding the Egyptian society and its "ethnic fabric". This work is a product of what the informants narrated in the interviews; however, this reconstructed form of ideas and organization are the author's responsibility.

Above all, my special gratitude goes to The Ford Foundation, to whom I am indebted for the sponsorship which enabled me to obtain this Master of Arts in Anthropology from the American University in Cairo.



The American University In Cairo

**NUBIANS IN THE URBAN DIASPORA:  
CHANGE AND REVIVAL OF ETHNIC IDENTITY**

Lomumba Tito Eman

Dr. Donald Cole, Thesis Advisor

**Abstract**

This thesis focuses on change and revival of ethnic identity among Nubian migrants in Cairo and Alexandria: in what they call the "Mahgar", diaspora. A review of some literature on ethnicity is provided as well as some review of writings on the Nubians. The thesis follows the method of in-depth interviews with individual respondents. Eleven respondents were interviewed, among them four females. This thesis also utilized the focus group method and observation of public events. For this study the author choose respondents from different Nubian social environments, since most studies prior to this concentrated on Nubia and the Nubians in terms of the need to preserve their valuable socio-cultural heritage after the inundation of their homes by the High Dam lake. The thesis tackles the expressive cultural activities and inter-ethnic relations in order to address issues of Nubianization of the urban life of people of Nubian origin as a means of resisting the impact of the *Mahgar* and the process of Egyptianization (full integration into the larger Egyptian society). The findings reveal the existence of a dual identity among the subjects who in public interact as Egyptians and in their homes as Nubians. This is manifested in the allegorical self-presentation of Nubians, in contrast to other Egyptians, in the context of socio-cultural activities and associations. The marriage system, and especially songs at wedding parties, turns out to be the means of conforming to ideas of the past and reviving Nubianism. The sole theme of Nubian literature, plays, and poems, is the comparison of how bitterly Nubian life has change after the inundation of Nubia, and how poorly they were compensated for the property they lost. These issues have come to be a major factor of collective Nubian identity, the Nubian case (*el qadiya el nubiya*) in the *Mahgar*. People identify themselves as being victims (*dhaiya*) of Egypt's development. The study found that Nubian women are more effective keepers of Nubian ethnic identity than men. Some respondents believe that Nubian women are the backbone of Nubian existence and persistence in the *Mahgar*. The study found that though Nubians complain of other people's prejudices, they also are not free of ethnocentrism against others. Nubian elders mourn the loss of their young persons born in the *Mahgar*, because they assume that the latter are inevitably Egyptianized.



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## Chapter One

### Introduction to the Study

This thesis attempts to contribute to the existing literature on ethnicity through describing and analyzing the changes in and especially the upsurge of ethnic identity among Nubian migrants in Alexandria and Cairo. The thesis also aims to explore and describe the nature and concept of ethnic identity. Although Nubians generally are among the better studied groups in Egypt, the transformation of their ethnic identity in their "diaspora," (*Mahgar*), in Alexandria and Cairo has received little research attention. Therefore, I have chosen to study ethnic identity among Nubian people whose ethnic identity, in one way or another, can be said to have been affected positively and/or negatively by policies of their own country, the Arab Republic of Egypt. These changes also result from their changing relationships with the non-Nubian majority of other Egyptians in urban areas.

It is worth mentioning that there are Nubians in Egypt and in Sudan. Egyptian Nubians are mainly Kenuz, Fadija and Arab-Nubians, while the Sudanese Nubians are mainly Mahas and Danagla. The Egyptian Nubians, according to Fahim, amounted to an estimated 120,000 people, or "...0.29% of the total population of Egypt at the time of [their] relocation [from Nubia south of Aswan] in 1963 ...,including those who work or live in the cities" (1983: 10). However, according to Nubian respondents I interviewed, the number of Nubians all over Egypt is currently about two million. Another respondent argues that if



only a half of the two million were to go back to Nubia and to settle around Lake Nasser, they would be the ones to disseminate what a Nubian should be like.

This thesis argues that "ethnic boundary and essence" (Barth 1969) can be maintained through the revival of some cultural aspects to distinguish a people from others and also can be revive or changed through the use of references to major catastrophes (manmade or natural crises) that may have affected a group of people. In this study the revival and transformation of ethnic identity is examined on the basis of data collected on the topic. This study especially emphasizes the maintenance of relatively peaceful ethnic boundaries between Nubians and other Egyptians.

With the hope of recording the ethnic experience of the Nubians and with the aim of understanding the change, revival, and or upsurgence of ethnic identity among Nubian migrants, this study probes inter-ethnic relations, tensions, and Nubian socio-cultural activities. Furthermore, this study approaches its respondents through employing a relationship and reference method from one respondent to another. However, the results of this research cannot be generalized to all Nubians in what they call the *Mahgar*, in Alexandria and Cairo. Interviews were done on individual bases and with discussion groups, and the respondents all have different ways of seeing and evaluating their various social situations. That this is so shows the existence of variation of experience and of perception among the different people interviewed. Yet, the findings provide evidence of revival, upsurgence and of other changes in the ethnic identity of Nubians.

This thesis is arranged in the following manner. The remainder of this



chapter provides a brief historical overview of Nubia and the Nubians and elaborates the scope of the study and its specific research questions, along with a literature review and collection of data. Chapter two illustrates Nubian experience and ethnic relations of Nubians in the *Mahgar*. It considers gender roles and activities in the *Mahgar* and provides a focus on gender issues. This chapter also addresses aspects of the difference between Nubian and Egyptian and the existence of ethnic tension at the level of neighborhoods. Chapter two concludes with remarks about the impact of the *Mahgar* lifestyle on Nubians.

Chapter three is devoted to inter-ethnic marriages and how the marriage system is manipulated to revive and sustain the Nubian identity. Obstacles that have hindered intermarriages, as well as changes that are taking place, are probed. This chapter shows that the inter-Nubian marriage system is used as a means to avoid assimilation. Moreover, Nubian wedding parties are seen to be important in teaching Nubian phrases and vocabulary to the younger generation, while Nubian wedding ceremonies, dance and song are shown to be means of asserting an ethnic distinction.

Chapter four tackles "the Nubian case," (*el Qadiya el Nubiya*), manifested in Nubian novels and poems and in the existence and activities of Nubian social associations, the *Jamayaat* and the General Nubian Club. These social associations are studied as means and signs of the revival and upsurge of the Nubian ethnic identity. This chapter concludes that the associations and other dimensions of the Nubian case can be understood metaphorically as ways of asserting ethnic identity.

The final chapter is devoted to a discussion of the findings and concluding



remarks. Fieldwork interactions and allegorical responses are discussed as means of asserting the Nubian identity. Also, this chapter discussed duality of identity among Nubians. Areas of possible future research are also indicated. However, limitations and the existence of material that is more implicit rather than explicit are due to lack of enough time in the field. Indeed, most respondents were busy with their own engagements and some of them felt shy while talking about certain topics. Many did not feel free to talk openly about their ethnic identity in hopes of not offending, or challenging, the notion of national unity in Egypt.

### **Historical overview**

With reference to ancient Egyptian history, the Greek historian Herodotus, who visited Egypt and Nubia in the fifth century BC, was among the first to write about Nubians. Moreover, the name "Nubia" was mentioned in the writings of the Greek author Eratosthenes around 200 BC.<sup>1</sup> Although Egyptologists have different opinions about the origin of the word "Nubia," most agree that the name comes from an ancient Egyptian word, *nub/nab*, which means "gold." Ancient Nubia was known as a land of gold mines that supplied Pharaonic Egypt with this precious metal. Moreover, historic Nubia was situated along the banks of the Nile from south of Aswan to the second cataract in northern Sudan.<sup>2</sup> Despite differences of opinion about the origin of the term "Nubia," Nubians in contemporary Egypt comprise linguistic minorities and also an ethnic group.

Moslem scholars, such as Ibn Khaldun and el Maqrizi, wrote descriptive histories of Egypt and Nubia, and in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries some European travelers and scholars managed to visit Nubia and wrote about its



people and culture (Rouchdy 1991). According to Adams (1977), most of the writings on Nubia were derived from "the romantic traditions of Diodorus and Herodotus."

By probing into ancient Nubia's history, Hamid (1973) and Rouchdy (1991) both point out that some contemporary Nubians, specifically the Kenuz, are the products of intermarriages which took place long ago between Nubians and the Arab Beni el Rabiya nomads who had migrated into southern Egypt. Burckhardt (1822), Daffalla (1975), Adams (1977), Jennings (1995), and others who have studied the Nubians, point out the existence of Arab influence in the genealogical composition of the Nubians. In the same vein, other sources confirm that not only did Arab nomads mix with Nubians but that human in-flows have come into Nubia from the north, west and south. Moreover, an archaeological survey in Nubia and excavations of "A-Group to the end of X-Group" provide evidence of a mixture of human races with different origins in the area (Emery 1965 and Reinser 1909).

In *Balad el Nuba*, Abu Bakr (1962) says that the word "Nubia" first appeared in a geography book written by Listerapon (25 BC) and that it refers to lands that lie west of the Nile.<sup>3</sup> In addition, this area west of the Nile had the ancient name of Keniset and Ta-Seti, which means "Country of the Bows Bearer" or the "Land of the Bow," as Jennings (1995: 21) called it. The same Bows Bearer name was given to places in the area from the first cataract up to Kom Ombo in southern Egypt.<sup>4</sup>

However, a respondent from among the contemporary Nubians in Egypt states simply that Old Nubia was a place where peace, security and stability



existed. Consequently, Nubians used to live there in what they see as a state of tranquility in marked contrast to their present life in Kom Ombo, Alexandria and Cairo. In these new environments, Nubians are living with neighbors about whom they know little and who differ from them in terms of manners and behaviors.

Nubians in Egypt are recognized as being divided into three main linguistically-defined ethnic groups. These are the Arab-Nubians who speak Arabic and claim an Arab origin, the Fadija (also known as Kissim in Arabic), and the Kenuz (also known as Mattuki).<sup>5</sup> Studies and my own research show that "Mattuki" means those who came from the east in the Fadija language, while "Fadija" in the Mattuki language refers to those who fled from death in Sudan in the south during the Mahdist era.<sup>6</sup>

However, a Fadija informant pointed out that the term "Fadija" has two different meanings. In Fadija, "fa" means a field, basin or land for growing vegetables, while "dij" means "five". Thus, putting the two words together as "Fadij" results in "five lands" or "five fields." The second version is said to have come into use during the attack of the Mahdist *Darawish* army in southern Egypt. When this army approached southern Egypt, the British army commander urged the Nubians to completely evacuate their villages on the west bank of the Nile. Meanwhile, the British army guarded sources of water so as to prevent the *Darawish* army from its use. When the *Darawish* and their wives reached the Nubian villages, they found only the disabled and old people and had no access to water or food. Many of the *Darawish* spoke Mahasi, which is the same as the Fadija language spoken by the Fadija Nubians in Egypt (see Adams 1977). Finding themselves among the disabled and old people and without food or water,



these *Darawish* said in Fadija (or Mahasi), "Fea dejo." "Fea" means "we" and "dejo" means "lyingdown" or "dying." "Fea-Dejo" can thus be translated as "we are dying or perishing like the disabled," which was an apt description of the *Darawish* at that time because they were in great need of food and water, and even protection.

Concerning the Kenuz (or Mattuki) their genealogical roots have two different explanations. According to Hamid (1973), a Nubian king converted to Islam in the 14th century; consequently, the rest of the society was Islamized. Also, during that period a number of Arab clans of the Rabiya tribe migrated to Nubia and settled there. Among these Arab clans were the Beni el Kenz who turned out to be very strong and influential. Later on and as a result of peaceful social interaction, marriages took place between Nubians and these Arabs who had migrated into Nubia (Adams 1977: 525; el Qousi 1976: 47; and Jennings 1995: 26).<sup>7</sup> In referring to the role of Beni el Kenz, an apparent conclusion is that, since they were the most vigorous, the name "Kenz" became the basis for the name of the Nubian Kenuz.

Meanwhile, the Arabic language became the *lingua franca* in the area. Thus, "*Mahasi* [or Fadija] Nubians are obliged to converse with members of other ...groups in Arabic ..." (Adams 1975: 48). However, in an open discussion with a focus group in the General Nubian Club, some of the Kenuz rejected an Arab origin and argued that Nubians had been in existence for a long time prior to the incursion of the Beni el Rabiya or the Beni el Kenz or of a person known as Hebatallah Kenz el Dawla. Furthermore, they said that it is not correct to assume that this specific Nubian group refers to themselves as the Kenuz in honor



of Kenz el Dawla or that they are his descendants.

Nonetheless, the historical fact is that Kenz el Dawla and his Arab followers did marry some Nubian women. In one way or another, some Arab ancestry seems likely for at least some of the Nubians.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, some of the Kenuz who participated in the discussion of the focus group asserted that they consider the Arab Kenz el Dawla to be their ancestor. Others say that the name "Kenuz" is due to the fact that the Nubian Kenuz were known for their love and accumulation of gold. "Kenuz" in Arabic means "treasures," and thus they are called Kenuz because of their accumulation of gold.<sup>9</sup>

This assertion raises an interesting trait of Old Nubia and of the old Nubian society. According to respondents, maternal uncles were expected to bequeath their property to their sister's sons, because of matrilineality. The patrilineal Arabs had different marriage codes and systems of inheritance. Thus, the son of an Arab man and of a Nubian woman would inherit property from his father and from this mother's brother. As a result, the Arabs benefitted more from intermarriage than did the Nubians.

Discussions and debates about origins and about intermarriages with Arabs in the past are important to the Nubians today. However, manmade changes along the Nile south of Aswan are especially significant and are of direct importance to their contemporary situation. The successive dammings of the Nile south of Aswan in 1898, 1907, 1912, 1924 and 1934 and the construction of the High Dam in 1964 are major historic events that have had direct impacts on the Nubians and their ethnic identity, as Rouchdy (1991) also argues.<sup>10</sup>

As a result of the construction of the High Dam, all of Old Nubia was



inundated and is now lost under the waters of Lake Nasser. The Nubians were forced to leave their homeland and its isolated villages circumscribed by the geographical barriers of the cataracts, the Nile and the desert. Egyptian Nubians were resettled in Kom Ombo north of Aswan, while the Sudanese Nubians were relocated to Khashm el Girba in eastern Sudan (Daffalla 1975).

Although some authors point out that Nubians have migrated to the northern parts of Egypt since the Pharaonic era, the dammings of the Nile in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also pushed some of them to emigrate, with Cairo and Alexandria being their main destinations. The migration of these Nubians to Cairo and Alexandria has not only been in hopes of getting jobs but also with the hope of finding places in which to reside. Typically, these Nubian migrants to the northern cities of Egypt, as most authors agree, have worked as domestic servants in the houses of rulers and other elites and have also worked as cooks and waiters in relatively high class restaurants and clubs. This migration and the jobs they have typically held have also affected their ethnic perception.

### **Scope of study and research issues**

The scope of this study covers some of the urban neighborhoods where Nubians reside and their cultural and social activities. The study especially explores aspects of Nubian culture--including arts, language, marriage practices, dance and wedding ceremonies--in an attempt to understand how these aspects of culture relate to the resurgence and change/transformation of ethnic identity among Nubians as a group within the context of the wider contemporary Egyptian



society. The study also addresses the *Qadiya el Nubiya*, or "Nubian case," which is relevant to one of the main questions this thesis aspires to answer, which is why Nubian cultural practices not only continue but also are undergoing changes.

Why do these cultural practices take place and even become more assertive than in the past?<sup>11</sup> Is it just to preserve the Nubian identity among people outside of their homeland? Or, is the continuation and upsurge due to attacks and accusations made against some Nubians by some Egyptian nationalists and newspapers that claim that Nubians are threatening Egypt's national unity? Do some of the Nubians feel that their identity is not under threat, while other Nubians feel that it is threatened? What are the indicators of ethnic upsurge and change and, also, of the accommodation of more than one identity?

Furthermore, this study focuses its attention on the stresses that challenge and promote the renewal of ethnic identity among the Nubians. The study attempts to navigate into the hidden ethnic tensions between Nubians and other Egyptians that tend to be disavowed in the wider Egyptian society. In general, this thesis investigates the revival, change and/or transformation of ethnic identity among the Nubians and the issue of the "Egyptianization" of Nubians in the *Mahgar* or "diaspora."

This research shows that three main variations exist as to how Nubians identify themselves within the wider Egyptian context. "Nubian Egyptians" form one group and they argue that they are Egyptians first and Nubians second. Most of this group are Nubians who do not care about the continuation of Nubian endogamy and/or hold government posts. Another group is "Egyptian Nubians" who say they are Nubians first and Egyptians second. They consider themselves



to be the "authentic" group and strongly prefer Nubian endogamy, although a very few of them are products of marriages between Nubians and other Egyptians. When speaking about themselves, people from this group almost always make a qualification when saying that they are Egyptians to indicate they are first and foremost Nubians. Finally, there is a group of Nubians which does not care much about the issue of identifying themselves as Egyptian first or Nubian first. Unlike the other groups, they form a kind of "neutral" group--content to be Nubians or Egyptians, depending on the situation. Thus, a kind of continuum exists with Nubian Egyptians at one end, Nubians in the middle and Egyptian Nubians at the other end.

However, Nubians in Egypt are considered by some Egyptian elites and much of the media as completely absorbed into the wider Egyptian community. They have become Egyptianized, regardless of the existence of Nubian languages, for example. The Nubians are aware of this seeming contradiction, or of the question of their ethnic identity. The issue of identity is a question that confronts both Egyptian society at large and the Nubians in particular. Indeed, El-Messiri (1978) states that there is an identity problem in Egypt. Moreover, Dr. Saad Eddin Ibrahim points out that in the late 1950s and 1960s Egyptian nationalists have stressed Egypt's Arab identity, asserted claims of being descendants of ancient Egyptian Pharaohs, and claimed African as well as Mediterranean identities.<sup>12</sup> With regards the existence of an identity problem in Egypt, one of the respondents in this study said,

...Egyptians are looking for an identity, because they lost their ancient origin ... On the contrary, Nubians have less to worry about concerning identity issues, for present-day Nubians are descendants of the ancient Nubians, and they possess historical references and records which confirm their origin and identity.



This point seems to indicate that Nubians are not facing a problem of identity. Or, we can argue--from a counter perspective--that, if the whole society has an identity problem, then a small group (such as the Nubians) will show the same or similar symptoms as is the case within the context of the wider society at large.

Yet, it is necessary to note that prior to the building of the High Dam, the inhabitants of the villages south of Aswan in Nubia were referred to as tribes people of Kenuz, Fadija and Arab-Nubians. When the initiative of constructing the High Dam came about, the late President Gamal Abdul Nasser addressed all of these as one group and called them Nubians. Since then, "Nubians" has been the common name for the people who were affected by the inundation of Nubia as a result of the High Dam.

As already referred to, labor migration of individuals from Nubia to Cairo and Alexandria, mainly for work in domestic service, preceded the group exodus from Nubia and the relocation of these people in Kom Ombo. This migration has continued since the relocation. These urban migrants, when they returned to their villages or to Kom Ombo, were called by the titles or occupations (lawyer, judge, doctor etc.) of their employers. This suggests the value placed on new occupations; and migration, now from Kom Ombo, continues and has probably increased--especially for education and for gaining "real" titles and new occupations. Meanwhile, many Nubians have hired Sa'idi, or Upper Egyptians, to cultivate the land provided them by the Egyptian government in Kom Ombo, where they were also given houses.

The relocation of people from Nubia in Kom Ombo brought together people from the old villages and did not follow the old residence pattern wherein



one's neighbors were also one's relatives or kin. Nubians today often argue that they do not like their new settlement, because it displaced kinspeople into different neighborhoods. Also, they say the houses are too small. On the other hand, it can be argued that relocation in the new settlement at Kom Ombo has played a role in advancing the notion of a Nubian people, which President Nasser advocated. With increase of their population size and with economic shortcomings, the memory of Old Nubia and the mean compensation they were given for their old houses and date trees form the basis for their case, or *Qadiya*, against their lifestyle and conditions in the *Mahgar*.

Having shared one place and having passed through the same experience of losing date trees and homes and the inundation of ancestral villages, these people stick to the common name of Nubians. That this is so accords with Roosens' (1989: 17) comment that the "ethnic 'past' is always a subjective reconstruction." Thus, Kenuz, Fadija, and Arab-Nubians keep referring to themselves as Nubians, and also see themselves as forming a special case in Egypt, due to their collective experiences before, during, and after the inundation of their villages.

## **Literature on Nubians**

Numerous studies have been conducted by foreign and local scholars on the Nubians both before and after the construction of the High Dam. For example, Adams (1977) addressed the archaeology of the region and reached the conclusion that there are linguistic and racial similarities among Nubians and other peoples living along the upper Nile valley. Various archaeological surveys



about Nubian antiquities have been conducted, and studies that address contemporary Nubian social and cultural activities also exist.

Above all, Fernea (1966) colorfully narrates the Nubians' migration to Alexandria and Cairo and their experiences in the urban areas, as well as the trauma of their forced relocations as a result the inundation of their homeland. Fahim (1969; 1983) has described and analyzed ritual changes in the Friday prayers and the Zikr in Kanuba village and has also Fahim tackled the poor planning of the resettlement of Nubians, which caused the loss of Nubian lives and wealth. According to Freid (1983) the loss of properties are/were major factors making Nubians feel that the "central government" betrayed their demands, and this is one of the strongest motivators of renewing and resorting to a collective Nubian identity.<sup>13</sup>

Shifting from contemporary Nubian socio-cultural changes to ancient Nubia genealogical composition, Burckhardt (1822), Hamid (1973), Rouchdy (1991), Jennings (1995) and others have illustrated that the inhabitants of Old Nubia had roots of cross racial flow. Most of these authors focus on the influences of Arab racial flows to ancient Nubia, which have produced the Nubian Kenuz. Some studies on Nubia also show that due to the human flow from sub-Saharan Africa, and specifically from southern Sudan, the negroid look came about among the Nubians (Hamid 1973).<sup>14</sup>

Reviewing other aspects of contemporary Nubian social life, Geiser (1980) has focused on their marriage institution, among migrants in Cairo, and showed the combination of equal influences of Islamic teachings and Nubian traditions. Also, Fernea tackled the origin of the Nubians and their past, as well as their



polity. Furthermore, he investigated Fadija marriage ceremonies and the rites of the 'saint cult' among the Kenuz. In addition, Geiser found that the marriage age of Nubian males and females was upset by urban economic stresses but that Nubians still kept their system of cousin marriage. Kennedy (1977) targeted socioeconomic and cultural changes in Nubian society after moving from Old Nubia and describes a Nubian's lifestyle in Kanuba village and the obstacles he faced in Alexandria, which shaped his social status. Kennedy's study documents the experience of this Nubian individual in the streets of a quarter in Alexandria and in schools, where he suffered from his poor knowledge of Arabic and his accent, as well as because of color prejudice against him by other kids. This "induced in him a fundamental insecurity that would not be alleviated until he settled in Kanuba" (Ibid: 175).

### **Literature on ethnicity**

To launch with, I want to paraphrase Fishman's (1985) notion that ethnicity is both the sense and the expression of collective ethnic and intergenerational cultural continuity. For example, ethnicity is the sensing and expressing of links to one's own people. Many contemporary definitions of ethnicity are similar and assert that ethnicity involves a form of collectivity within a larger society and is usually marked by a distinctive origin, a different language, a set of shared values and so on. To add on to that, this study considers the uses of "ethnic identity" by its holders to be flexible and always in motion, or changing. Moreover, in exploring ethnic identity this thesis benefited from employment of Geiser's (1989) conceptualization of "receptive and non-receptive (ethnic groups)."



According to Geiser, a receptive group is one that is composed of individuals

receptive to the values and norms prevalent in the host society ...[but] maintained their ethnic identity. Thus ... responses to the societization process can be considered accommodative. The constituents of some ...[ethnic] groups are loosely bound by distinguishing cultural and traditional ties but their social and occupational skills are rewardable within the societary context and they become assimilated into the general society (Ibid: 3--4).

A "non-receptive" group is one that has lived for generations within a cultural context which is different from its own but manages to be less affected by the pattern of the surrounding cultural environment and still retains its identity. This is in response to the feeling of keeping one's origin. As a result, there emerges an urge to unite and to be cohesive. The sense of sticking together as a specific ethnic group creates a notion of "Us vs. Them" in terms of what Barth (1969) describes as "ethnic boundaries."

This thesis employs Barth's (1969) concept of "ethnic boundary" as a form of asserting an ethnic identity and, also, Devereux's (1975) notion of "ethnic personality". Barth and De Vos both agree on how and why boundaries are maintained by ethnic groups. They noted that maintenance of such boundaries occurs with respect to ethnic external relations. De Vos views these boundaries as psychological in nature and not territorial. "These boundaries are maintained by ascription from within as well as from external sources which designate membership according to evaluative characteristics which differ in content depending on the history of contact of the groups involved" (De Vos 1975: 9).

With regard to this, I would like to point to the relevance of ethnic identity upsurge, change and revival as one of the critical issues in the contemporary world. Relating the topic worldwide, there are numerous ethnic civil strikes as well as wars. Some of these ethnic conflicts are related to the issue of renewing



and reviving an ethnic identity against the trends of mainstream national cultures.

Furthermore, De Vos and Romanucci-Ross (1975) present approaches to ethnicity starting with the concept of "ethnicity" and what it means. They state that an ethnic group

...is a self-perceived group of people who hold in common a set of traditions not shared by others with whom they are in contact. Such traditions typically include 'folk' religious beliefs and practices, language, a sense of historical continuity, and common ancestry or place of origin ... (De Vos and Romanucci-Ross 1975: 9)

Devereux states that ethnic personality and ethnic identity overlap. He sees ethnic personality as

... a conceptual scheme derived inductively from concrete data of two not very distinct types. The first consists of directly observed behavior which, as ... data become more numerous, appear to be typical of and distinctive for a particular group ... The second type of concrete data is directly observed verbal behavior consisting of generalization about the ethnic personality by informants acting as self ethnographers (Devereux 1975: 45).

Certainly, ethnic personality and/or identity may carry not only its own norms and features but also some social aspects adopted by its individuals from the host community. Also, ethnic group members may take with them some aspects of their culture and identities to the host culture. An indication of this is the case of "Chinatown" in most places around the globe. According to Hsien Rin (1975), the Chinese in countries they migrated to used to build Chinatowns and temples and perform folk religious rites they brought from China. In addition, Wong (1982) stresses that some Chinese live in the "affluent suburbs" and neighborhoods of America's metropolises, yet they preserve their separate ethnic identity.

Moving to ... [an affluent suburb or] neighborhood does not necessarily wipe out ethnic identity. The ... argument is enhanced by theories of social scientists who agree that it is possible for members of an ethnic group to take up ... way of speaking, dressing, and living and at the same time retain their ethnicity (Wong 1982: 104).



Bringing in Barth's conclusions, a strategy of ethnic groups is to create and use a social position or boundaries, even though it is peacefully interacting with its host. Also, they may "...organize activities not formerly found in the larger society [that] could generate sound movements ..." (Wong 1982: 103). Such activities become strong stimulators for an ethnic individual to affiliate him/herself with a collective identity.

Furthermore, Epstein's (1978) theme of study, which is devising a "...groundwork for exploring ethnic identity in its various faces and dimensions," is useful. In order to pursue such aims, Epstein considers questions of,

...how the sense of collective identity is generated, transmitted, and perpetuated; how new social identities come to be formed and their interaction with pre-existing ones; and the circumstances in which established identities are abandoned or simply disappear ... Ethnicity is essentially a political phenomenon, involving a struggle for power among ethnic groups in furtherance and in defence of collective interests (Epstein 1978: 5--93).

Although not a systematic or comprehensive review of studies on ethnicity, the above cited literature has assisted me in shaping, molding and analyzing the topic of this thesis. Through employing insights gained from this literature, this thesis probes into how Nubians change, revival and resurgence, and develop their ethnic identity.

## **Data collection**

In the Spring of 1994, I went to the General Nubian Club (GNC) in Cairo and managed to establish contacts and relations with some Nubians who later on, in 1996, introduced me to other Nubians in Alexandria. During the period of one year and a half, I frequently visited the GNC and attended Nubian weddings, lectures, and a conference concerned about Nubia. During the *Id el Adha* (1995),



I traveled to Kom Ombo and spent a week there. Interacting with these Nubians, I collected parts of the data, especially from focus and discussion groups in the GNC.

In addition, I conducted fieldwork in Alexandria and Cairo from February 15, 1996, to March 30, 1996. For this data collection, I scheduled fieldwork for 25 days in Cairo and 20 days in Alexandria. During this work, four interviews were held in the houses of respondents. The rest of the interviews were conducted in the GNCs in Cairo and Alexandria.

An obstacle the interviewer failed to overcome in the field was the direct manipulation of Nubian males over the answers of Nubian females I sought to interview. Most females were interviewed in the presences of males; consequently, the interviewer observed how the males directly influenced and suggested to the females the answers they should give. Moreover, some male respondents promised to fix interview appointments with some Nubian females: but all my efforts to interview them went in vain. First, this is due to Nubian and/or Islamic tradition that prohibits interaction of their females with a foreigner. Secondly, a Nubian man must be present if a Nubian woman is undergoing an interview; otherwise, no interviews.<sup>15</sup> Also, the interviewer tried but failed to reach some male respondents due to circumstances related to them.

All interviews were conducted in Arabic, and I aimed to conduct in-depth interviews with 15 respondents during the fieldwork period. However, only 11 respondents were interviewed. These 11 respondents are from the three different Nubian groups: Arab-Nubian, Fadija and Kenuz. However, among themselves the disputed over who is and is not Nubian. Some from the Fadija group considered



Arab-Nubians to be intruders. Some from the Kenuz group considered themselves to be the original and authentic Nubian people. Moreover, some Fadija considered both Arab and Kenuz as non-Nubians.<sup>16</sup> In the data analysis these 11 respondents are classified according to the earlier stated continuum as Egyptian Nubians, Nubians, or Nubian Egyptians.

An explanatory table to the classifications of respondents

| Egyptian Nubian<br>"hardcore"  | Nubian Egyptian<br>"moderate"   | Nubian<br>"un-biased"   | Focus group   |
|--|---|---|---|
| This group are Nubians born & educated in <i>Mahgar</i> . They are eager to learn Nubian languages and above all some of them are products of Nubian-Egyptian intermarriages. Their views are strongly pro Nubianism, first. | This group are mostly Nubian elders who hold posts in government offices and some young persons born in <i>Mahgar</i> . The elders know Nubian languages, but the youngsters do not. They prefer to be called Egyptians first & then Nubians. | This class includes both elders and young Nubians who do not mind to refer to themselves first as Nubians or Egyptians. To them Nubian languages are not more than " <i>rotana</i> ". | Under focus or discussion group there are hardcore, moderate and un-biased Nubians. |
| 6 main respondents and 4 from discussion group.  | 3 main respondents and 4 from discussion group.   | 2 main respondents and 2 from discussion group.   | respondents in this section range from 3 persons to 7 in a certain discussion.      |

In the above table, the first three groups are mainly interviewed respondents of the study and the fourth column are respondents to whom the interviewer threw research questions while discussing at the GNCs, Cairo and Alexandria.

As cited earlier the respondents included males and some females from different age groups. In selecting them, this study chose a qualitative approach and used "references" as its technique.<sup>17</sup> The four main respondents missed are Arab-Nubians. However, the interviewer compensated for these missed respondents by respondents from discussion/focus groups. Generally, it was observed, that some of the respondents were skeptical and suspicious, in one way or another, and feared that their individual identities might be revealed through



tracing their life backgrounds. Aspects of their life histories are presented as a generalized analysis in an appendix without revealing individual identities. Within the body of the thesis, the collected data, or responses, are analyzed "topic by topic."



## Chapter Two

### The Nubian Experience in the *Mahgar*<sup>18</sup>

This chapter addresses important aspects of the experience of Nubians in urban Egypt. Issues related to gender are considered, with a special focus on some rituals practiced by Nubian women. The Nubians' self-presentation as a form of ethnic identity is discussed, along with their ethnic relations with other Egyptians and the impact of the urban Egyptian lifestyle on the Nubians.

Nubians refer to Alexandria, Cairo and some other Egyptian cities as *el Mahgar*, "the diaspora," because these cities are not their home villages in Nubia. In this thesis most of the interviewed respondents are either Kenuz or Fadija who reside in Abdeen, Buolaq and Embaba in Cairo or live in Kom ed Dakka, Laban and Ezzba Tomas in Alexandria.<sup>19</sup> There, in these urban quarters, Nubians often live near each other, which has been important in preserving and promoting their ethnic identity.

It is said that Cairo and Alexandria are not homogeneous social bodies but are communities with heterogeneous social groups. To analyze the social and cultural spheres in the *Mahgar*, one can not dodge the low status of some groups. There, the most influential groups are high up on the social scale, have high occupational positions and are often seen in the media. Groups which are less influential have sunk to the bottom of the social hierarchy; and, as Jennings points out in the case of the Nubians, such groups struggle to protect their cultural existence. In Jennings' (1995: 145) words,



Many Nubians, in response ...have consciously held on to many of their traditions, ...as a matter of preference, and try to shield their families and ...life from encroachment from the outside ...Others, feeling humiliated in a society in which to be Nubian is to be different, and to be teased for so being, try to erase the differences as much as they can. They allude to the fact that occasionally Nubians are ridiculed ...as country bumpkins, and that old movies on T.V. sometimes show a character in blackface and typical Nubian garb as a figure of fun ...

In the same fashion, most informants reported that they refuse the view that ridicules the Nubians and also the label of "minority". However, after the aborted minorities conference of the Ibn Khaldun Center (1994), the media gave attention to Nubians not as a minority but as part and parcel of the large Egyptian society. A Nubian conference was held in Alexandria, and many newspapers discussed the issue of accommodating Nubians not as a minority but as Egyptians.<sup>20</sup> In many ways, the informants argued against being called a minority because that would degrade their participation in the country. Rather, they prefer to be called a "linguistic minority in Egypt". This is contrary to what Fahim spelt out "[i]n comparing the Nubians to black Americans, ...[that the] persistence of exclusively Nubian villages, repositories of a distinct culture, has helped this people at all times to retain a sense of who they are. The black American is now attempting to discover a heritage all but obscured by generations of white domination" (Fahim 1983: 10--11).

The influence of the *Mahgar*, as cities, has affected the Nubians positively and negatively. Positively, they are exposed to urban life and engage in wider social interaction than was possible in their villages. Negatively, the economic power of some Nubians does not meet the needs for life in a city, and this contributes to their social ties among themselves becoming loose. For instance, Ariis, who is an informant, says; "...Nubians' family ties turn to rank second after work, and city life makes a relative become a stranger". Another respondent,



Adelab, took the same path and said that among Nubians a kind of new solidarity based on relations regulated by work interests and transactions is formed.

Contrarily, other informants point out that some Nubians are capable of overcoming the *Mahgar*'s social and cultural impacts, because a Nubian person forms social ties with fellow Nubians at the *Jamayaat* and the GNC. Also, as will be discussed later, Nubian funerals and weddings in the *Mahgar* become places, or events, where people meet in a form of social solidarity.

However, some informants state that in the *Mahgar*, there is a wave of imitation occurring among Nubians, and some of them have imitated foreign patterns of life. Most informants agreed that some prominent Nubian figures with posts in state offices have changed their ethnic affiliation and no longer call themselves Nubians. These people simply say they are from other parts of Egypt.<sup>21</sup> In addition, Shaaer and other informants agreed that an observer may detect easily what contemporary Nubian youth look like. For example, those who stand around the GNC in Cairo dress differently and cut and style their hair in ways similar to that of European musicians.<sup>22</sup>

According to the authentic Nubian group, this change proves a social shortcoming Nubians are facing in the *Mahgar*, as the appearance these youths cultivate is not related to Nubian traditions or considered typical for Nubian males. Moreover, among the Nubian migrants males are the ones most affected by *Mahgar* cultures. The females are less influenced by these cultures. Also, most informants considered that Nubian males in the *Mahgar* are rather less concerned about their Nubianism than is the case among their counterparts, the females.



## Nubian women and gender issues

Much of the literature shows that, before the Nubian exodus as a result of the High Dam and the inundation of their villages, Nubian women were the keepers and guides of Nubian families in the absence of their husbands. According to Ibrab, a Nubian boy in those days was called by his mother's name, say, son of Zeinab or Mohammed Daria. This was not a shame, for it was the mother who took care of the children while the father was away working in the *Mahgar*. However, when Mohammed Daria reached adult age, then his father's name replaced that of his mother.

This system of calling a boy by his mother's name has its roots deep in ancient Nubian history. Uduul confirmed this point while lecturing about his book, *Nubia Breathes Under Water* (1993). To stress the point, Ibrab says that in Old Nubia, the girls' place in the family or society was recognized to the extent that if a king had a sister who is older than his son, then kingship would go to her instead of the son when the king died. The case of Queen Nefartare, he said, was a good example. This proves that women were respected and had their own identity apart from that of men. However, it has recently become a shame among Nubian males to be called by their mothers' names.

Nonetheless, the Nubian woman's role complements that of the Nubian man, a notion which was confirmed by most respondents. A woman has a say in the marriage of her daughter and even of her son. Some Nubian women contribute ideas and suggestions to their husbands, according to an informant who said that women's ideas are taken into consideration by the men. However, age is an important factor, as an old Nubian mother is far more aware of Nubian



traditions and manners and even the Nubian *Qadiya* than is the case for a young contemporary Nubian lady, who may be a holder of the best education certificates but has less knowledge about the Nubian identity.

Respondents report that Nubian women, generally, in the *Mahgar* are loyal to Nubian manners, values and traditions. As previously mentioned and as interestingly pointed out by an informant, Shaaer, the women are even more concerned about Nubianism than the men. Yet, according to this informant, Nubians born and raised in the *Mahgar* are seen as being different from the generation of their parents in many ways. For instance, some of them are said to be mannerless and to act like urban people. Some males wear rings on their ears and pay little respect to the elders. By contrast, it is reported that Nubian women are not frequently seen on the streets--usually, only if they are heading to another Nubian house where there might be a social occasion, such as a funeral. In such cases, they move in congregations and less as individuals from one house to another.

Unlike the women, Nubian men have invaded the *Mahgar's* streets and corners in groups and as individuals. There, they have been exposed to a new and different social atmosphere which, in turn, has created some "defects" in their manners. As an informant said, if there is a social gathering, it is likely that some males will be encountered who have little concern about Nubian manners and behaviors while it is almost impossible to witness similar behavior among the women. This change among the men is seen to have affected the Nubian image and identity.

The public role of Nubian women in the *Mahgar* is acted out by them



according to Nubian traditions and within an Islamic framework. Since Nubians are Egyptians and their country--like other Middle Eastern countries--has a majority of Muslims, women's activities and appearance are judged by religious values. Probing into literature on their religious background, Christianity long ago was the religion of the majority in Old Nubia. At present, as the informants report, all contemporary Nubians are Muslims, and there is no Christian among them. Generally, through reviewing literature on Muslim women one can conclude that their movement in public space is regulated by Islamic teachings. Also, such women sometimes invent private networks. As Jennings (1995: 15) puts it,

Muslim women in Africa, like women in other parts of the world, are greatly dependent upon their social network for information sharing for social control. Networks, which can be defined as the people with whom an individual maintains consistent contact, may also include ...social aggregations as solidarity groups ...

In Alexandria, it was reported by informants that Nubian women use social contacts and ties to voice their views from behind "the traditional barriers".<sup>23</sup> For instance, a personal experience narrated by a respondent, Jaffrab, is that he was on secondment to Alexandria (in 1974). His stay there afforded him with opportunities for close interaction with other Nubians and he was able to have knowledge about the high tension of *Assabia*, or "tribalism" between the Fadija and the Kenuz and the role of women in it.

Jaffrab says that as a bachelor at that time he had plenty of free time after working hours. In hopes of filling up the emptiness of that time, he arranged to be introduced to the Fadija *Jamaiya* and, with little tribal consciousness, he joined it. He says that although he is a Kenzi, he became an active member of the Fadija *Jamaiya*. With time and as his social activities there flourished, his father's



sister learned about his role and activities among the Fadija and urgently sent out for him. According to Jaffrab, his aunt sent "two tall and well-built Nubian gentlemen to convey her complaints against my roles in the Fadija's *Jamaiya*." The two tall fellows were Kenuz and they asked the respondent to renounce his membership in the Fadija *Jamaiya* as requested by his aunt. Accordingly, in his words, "I had no option but to give in and to act as my aunt had decreed."

Most respondents reported that Nubian women at the level of Nubian families and communities have the right to voice their opinions regarding social issues and also share in making major decisions, which is also mentioned in much of the literature. However and while this may be the case, it appears to an observer that the places and activities of females in Nubian communities are wholly secluded from those of males. This observation, however, is not contrary to most literature on Muslim women's place in Islamic societies. Still, most Nubian women, and specifically those in Alexandria, have recognized roles in their communities and are known for being socially active. Another feature of Nubian women is that they want to be part of decision-making processes for issues that relate to them.

For example, an informant from a focus group narrated the ensuing confrontation of Alexandrian Nubian women against what is assumed to be "males' decision" about them.<sup>24</sup> The informant illustrates an incident in 1990 when Alexandrian Nubian women acted contrary to a decree by Nubian elders that women should be prevented from wailing at funerals, as well as taking an active part during processions for the deceased. This idea had been brought up by a young educated Nubian male named Mohab (a member of the focus group)



to the council of Nubian elders in the neighborhood of Farahda. The idea was spread around the neighborhood, and it was urged that all Nubian females must conform to the restriction.

Mohab said that a Nubian woman regarded to be a ring leader recruited women to protest what the males had decided to implement on them. This ring leader managed to disseminate among the women a proclamation against the males' decision about the issue of women and their roles in funerals. Sometime later, a Nubian died in the quarter. As news about his death reached the neighborhood, almost all Nubian women of Farahda street put on their black clothes as a sign of mourning and proceeded toward the house of the deceased. They filled the house and many of them rested outside, wailing and lamenting for the soul of the deceased.

To contain the situation, Mohab and some other young Nubian men decided to send those women away. The women refused to disperse. Consequently, the mission of the young men seemed to fail. However, when the deceased was to be taken out for burial, the young Nubian men tried to encircle the women in order to keep them out of the procession for the dead. The women struggled to free themselves from the young males, but in vain. This informant asserted that Nubian traditions and Islamic teachings do not allow any body contact between the genders if they are not close relatives, a point of view which is in accord with the literature. According to Shaaer, among Nubians it is inappropriate for a male to touch a female who is not a relative on the assumption that she can later become a wife to that person. Above all, it is a form of respect, he says, to women. Therefore, the young men who encircled



those women divided themselves and lined themselves around their female relatives. Thereby, the women's protest was contained.

In agreement with Shaaer, Ariis also states that Nubian mothers deserve complete respect for keeping Nubian traditions. According to him, Nubian women are proper housewives and teachers of discipline and good conduct to Nubian children. Both Shaaer and Ariis said that the new generation of young ladies who have grown up in the *Mahgar* is different from the generation of their mothers. Ariis says that the Nubian ladies nowadays are destroying the image of Nubian women. Furthermore, Ariis says,

...the young Nubian ladies are adopting the floating African fashion which is an intruding culture ...a Nubian lady in terms of manners is typical like an Eastern lady ...but the African way she is adopting in her clothing and in dressing her hair apparently shows that such a girl is not a Nubian ... However, one of the basic features of a Nubian woman is that she must be less seen in public places, but the growing up ones are ...touring the town here and there ...wearing jean pants.

In addition, says an informant, the use of foreign cultural aspects can be interpreted wrongly, and this is what Nubians fear. Nubian men do not want their sisters or daughters to throw off their traditional Nubian women's outfit. According to Ariis, "Nubian ladies should be like their counterparts, the Egyptian Saidi ladies, who did not, for instance, wear Nubian clothes." Following in the same vein, Umm Ezzba says that Nubian women in Nubia, as well as her own generation, are not like the contemporary ones in the *Mahgar*. She states that the latter put on clothing like [other urban] Egyptians. In her words,

In our days a Nubian woman wore Nubian clothes, *Jarjar*, and did not imitate others ...Nowadays, Nubian young ladies dress according to what they see on TV and videos ...What they are putting on are not our Nubian outfits ...And they are looking and behaving differently than us ...<sup>25</sup>

Likewise, Najwa pointed out that younger Nubian women have changed much more than have their mothers and that this change is more than just



adopting the clothing that other Egyptian ladies wear. According to her, some Nubian ladies claim liberty and that is why they dress the way they like. Most respondents agreed that a Nubian woman who came with the first Nubian migrants was always a housewife. Today, after more than 40 years in *the Mahgar*, she still speaks poor Arabic and does not know the way to the market. Such women are just housewives and teachers and keepers of Nubian traditions, according to an informant. On the other hand, some older educated Nubian women have distinguished roles, work outside their homes as nurses and are still keepers of Nubian traditions and manners.

In the same manner, Wad-Ezzba mentioned that there are women who in the past few years were accepted into the universities and are now university graduates who hold formal posts. These educated women retain and have even started to revive their Nubian identity through orientation lectures on Nubian issues, including the Nubian *Qadiya* (case)--which has drawn the attention of all Nubians.<sup>26</sup> Elaborating on the issue of women and their changing role, Jaffrab argues that the role of Nubian women has not changed too much as a result of education. In the houses of Old Nubia, women were the teachers of Nubian traditions, customs and languages. Women are still the ones most responsible for passing on old Nubian tales and stories from one generation to another. While raising their children, the mothers take care about Nubian customs, values and manners. It is especially from the nurture of women that the contemporary Nubians develop distinct manners from the rest of the host society. At home, Nubian women introduce and train Nubian children to Nubian ways of doing things.



An informant, Nurab, recounted that during her childhood her mother shielded her and did not allow her to interact on a wider scope with non-Nubian children. Moreover, her mother always reminded her about what Nubia was like--with the Nile and the date trees--and told her how the flood swallowed up all of the Nubian villages in 1964. Her mother also told her Nubian tales and stories and recounted famous events of the Nubian past. This case shows that the informant's mother managed to create a picture of Nubia in the mind of the informant when she was a young girl growing up in the *Mahgar*. In the same fashion, most informants agreed that since childhood their mothers had gradually sowed in them the seeds of affinity to Nubian traditions. Therefore, one of the major roles of Nubian women in the *Mahgar*, as informants agreed, has been to keep alive Nubian traditions and the Nubian identity.

Meanwhile, there is continuity in some social rites and habits that many Nubian women in Cairo and Alexandria still observe. One such habit is no laundering of clothes on Wednesdays, as reported by some informants. According to Umm Sayid, in the Old Nubia there was a story that on a certain Wednesday a daughter of the Umda, or headman of a village, went to the Nile to wash. After finishing the job, she returned home. A rumor shot out in the village that a hoe was lost from a field and it was noted that none of the villagers had gone to the Nile that day aside from the Umda's daughter. The hoe was not found. The Umda's daughter was not accused for its loss, and Umm Sayid said it was believed that the girl did not take it. However, Nubian women came to believe, as a result of this incident, that accusing fingers will be pointed against those who wash on Wednesdays. Today, many older Nubian women in the *Mahgar* do not wash



clothes on Wednesdays, hoping to avoid the mythical accusations which they assume may occur even at the present time.

Furthermore, some Nubian women continue to practice the rites of *Mushahra* (Jennings 1995: 133) which, according to Adelab, refers to a month related to women's taboos.<sup>27</sup> Some Nubian women believe that misfortune may strike their families if *Mushahra* is not observed. Also, a person who has just arrived from the other side of the Nile is not allowed to enter into a room where a mother is nursing her infant, because her milk will dry up. Some Nubian women believe that if a husband has just shaved his beard he must not go in after the wife, because that bad luck may occur. In such cases, the wife is the one to enter to the shaved husband. Also, during their monthly periods Nubian women are not supposed to serve men. Although such habits and rites are not publicly explicit, they are still practiced and observed by many.

From the material presented above, one can conclude that although Nubian mothers, specifically, and all Nubians, generally, are sticking to Nubian manners and behaviors, yet changes are occurring. Meanwhile, as Shaaer says, if Nubians had not emigrated northward and were still living in their homeland, some of their manners and behaviors would not have changed and become like those of other urban people. And this is why some of the Nubians have wanted to enhance their ethnic image and position vis-a-vis other Egyptians.

### **Nubian-Egyptian relations, generally**

In a discussion among a focus group about the issue of Nubians generally, it was noted that Nubians are delineated as laborers in "humble jobs".<sup>28</sup> An



informant says that the university college of hotels and tourism in Aswan was established by the central authority to limit chances of Nubians going to other colleges. Some informants agreed and explained that decision-makers in the state are well aware of how much income and resources the Nubians have, but that the hotel and tourism school will just graduate more waiters and maids, which in Egypt are considered to be the Nubians' work specialization. Shaaer says this recalls to memory the old concept about Nubians being servants.<sup>29</sup>

Another respondent emphasized the point that, if Nubian parents in Kom Ombo want to educate one of their children in another educational field apart from hotels and tourism, they will have to pay too much money to send the son or daughter to a university in Cairo, whereas a person who lives in Cairo has higher income and more facilities and chances than does his counterpart in Kom Ombo. Shenab (who is a Nubian student of hotels and tourism in Cairo) replied, "do not be too fanatic in measuring things." She argued that hotels and tourism studies are not a "bad thing"; but Nubians, she said, must do away with their inner sense of the old image. A counter argument by another informant was that Nubians going to other colleges, such as engineering, education or medicine, will definitely help in changing the image about Nubians in the minds of "other Egyptians." According to another informant, Nubians living in the *Mahgar* are struggling to survive as Nubians and are not concerned about what other Egyptians think.

Several years ago, as Nurab recalled, she came to feel different from the rest of her classmates. Consequently, she experienced a self-alert and began a search for her ethnic identity while she was growing up. She came to learn that



there are differences between Nubians and other Egyptians. This self-knowledge was highly induced when she was in primary school and was filling out a form for examinations. One of her classmates (who was an other Egyptian) asked the instructor in Arabic saying, "Oh, teacher, we will write we are Egyptians in our forms, but what will Nurab write?" According to Nurab, everybody in the class looked at her and she felt alienated; however, the instructor replied that Nurab is also an Egyptian and must write the same. After school, she asked her father about what had taken place in class concerning her identity affiliation. His reply was, "Yes, we are Nubians; yet we are also Egyptians."

When Nurab was in intermediate school, she saw a map entitled *Balad el Nuba*, or Nubia, in her history textbook but none of the topics in the text explained what is Nubia.<sup>30</sup> One day she asked a teacher about that map of Nubia. As Nurab pictures the event, the teacher looked at her and then quickly turned her eyes in a suspicious way and replied to Nurab that there is nothing called Nubia or *Balad el Nuba*. However, the informant said that she understood from the movement of the teacher's eyes that the answer was not true. She had to wait two days for her father to come home from work, and when he arrived home she asked him the same question about Nubia. Her father answered, "It is *Baladna* (our homeland), it is in the south of Egypt and it is swallowed up by the water of the High Dam. In all, it is about 40 *Balad* (villages)."<sup>31</sup>

Another issue was raised by Adelab who said, "In schools, Nubian and Egyptian children have good relationships, but the former are called names." Adeeb, Jaffrab and Sayid all agreed that in schools there is prejudice against their skin color, and on the streets as well. A relevant case is that of Jaffrab's elder



daughter who is in a private intermediate school. When she was supposed to go on a trip with her classmates as part of a school program, she refused to go unless accompanied by her younger sister. The father explained that the elder daughter was not comfortable being alone with her classmates and said that she attested to the fact that being a dark-skinned Nubian makes her vulnerable to other people's eyes and tongues.

Contrary to the above cited events, Ibrab gave voice that the sense of being less than an Egyptian is dying away. To emphasize this point, Ariis said that there are "no social dissimilarities between Nubians and Egyptians, for some Nubians are working together with Egyptians." However, Ariis stated that the only difference between Nubians and Egyptians is that the former do not trust the latter." "I do not trust them," he said. This last point suggests a feeling of insecurity that one can argue has come about by Nubians being teased and by the lack of sufficient information about Nubia. Of course, one could also interpret his mistrust of non-Nubian Egyptians as an example of a Nubian stereotype about other Egyptians.

Fahmii (1990: 22) focuses on reconstructing facts concerning misrepresentation and misinformation about Nubians written by Abdel Wahab el Aswani in *el Ahali* newspaper.<sup>32</sup> He points out that el Aswani wrongly criticized a novel, assuming it was about Nubia while it was about Mansouriya island west of Kom Ombo. He further indicates that other writers in *el Ahali* criticized a play, entitled *el Daraweesh*, as a Nubian one, though it was not. As the writer points out, these errors are due to lack of proper information. Fahmii further argues the need to educate other Egyptian citizens about the people of Aswan.



Fahmii also writes that if one reviews contemporary history textbooks used in Egyptian schools, one will definitely be astonished that nothing is written about Nubia as a place with a recognized historical contribution in the Nile Valley. Consequently, what pupils and lay persons in Egypt know about southern Egypt, or Nubia, is little more than the characters played by the Nubian actor, Ali el Kassar, which is usually a *bawaab* (or doorman) or a household waiter or servant, or they only know Aswan as a city for winter holidays.

Meanwhile, some informants commented that some Nubians have started to exaggerate themselves as being better than Egyptians, or the *Guorbatti* (from a Kenzi word). According to Ahmed H. Dahab's book *el Nuoba wa el Shara wa Hdarat Wadi el Nil/Nubia, (Ferry and Civilization of The Nile Valley)* (1996), Nubians used to call Egyptians *Go-Batti*, with *Go* meaning land or field and *Batti* meaning to cultivate. Contemporary Nubians have modified it to *Guorbatti*, which literally means fellah (or peasant). Nubians scornfully use *Guorbatti* in reply when called *Barbara* by other Egyptians.<sup>33</sup> Also, they use *Ibn el Balad* (son of the country) or *Ahl Shamal* (people of the north) for all non-Nubian Egyptians. Citizens of Cairo are called *Masriyin*, *Awlad Arab* or *Ahl medina*. Alexandrian men and women are called *Ibn* or *Bint Bahri*. These terms are not negative as is the case for *Guorbatti*.

In addition to their personal praise of themselves, Wad-Ezzba recalled that sometime ago in Ezzba Tomas-wa-Affia a quarrel broke out between an Egyptian woman and her Nubian neighbor. The Egyptian said, "Who are you?" The reply was, "We are Nubians and are well known to any people, and who are you? If you do not know, *Hdra* prison is just nearby. Go and check for yourself how



many Egyptians, Saida, are there and see how many Nubians are there and what crime each group is charged for."

Ibrab says Nubians are known generally in the *Mahgar* for their decent conduct, manners and behavior. To confirm this, he said,

There is and never has been a Nubian who received bribes or was corrupt at work. Honesty, cleanliness and loyalty are and have always been the major features of a Nubian person. As said by many, these characteristics are imposed throughout among all the Nubians. This made the larger Egyptian society believe that a Nubian, *samara* [Brown] has *Zmma* [pact or immunity which is literally self-consciousness] and no doubt about that.<sup>34</sup>

In contrast to this image of the Nubians, Jebalee said, "At present, some Nubians flee beyond these characteristics. Some of them thrust themselves into the larger society and start to behave contrary to Nubian ways."

Still, the issue of Nubians reacting to the image they believe other Egyptians have of them is seen in the comment of one of the focus group who said,

Nubians believe that Egyptians look down on them as *Samara* or *Bawaabiin*. Such images have affected [Nubians] and made some feel lower than an average Egyptian. In the same manner, Nubians have fed and made their children to feel less than other Egyptians' children ... Nubians are made to believe that the pigmentation of [their] skin is a shame and an ignominy, which they brought to themselves.

An example of prejudice against them, says Nurab, is the bypassing of Nubian university graduates for certain jobs. She illustrated this by the case of a Nubian graduate from the college of information. The graduate had an excellent degree and applied to Egyptian TV in response to a newspaper advertisement. The graduate was short-listed for an examination and passed. However, later on after an interview, the graduate was dismissed and thereby not accepted to work as a newscaster on TV. The informant commented that there is no explanation for such an abrupt failure, except only because that graduate is



an *asmar* (or of brown skin). Today that rejected Nubian is a newsreader for one of the international mass-media. Consequently, Nurab states that there is a hidden inequality going on in most of the social and work levels.

At the work level, other informants reported that they did not directly confront any prejudices. But Adeeb says that he and some Egyptians were transferred from Alexandria to Aswan to work at the High Dam. There, one of his coworkers used to invite him and his Egyptian colleagues home. These colleagues are Egyptians with relatively light skin; but he as a Nubian has "chocolate" skin color. The informant realized that his friends with a light skin color were better welcomed by the sisters of their host, while none of them paid any attention to him. It often happens that Egyptian women prefer light skinned males; but if circumstances are against them, then they will think about a dark skinned fellow. In Egypt, skin color at times determines and reflects social relations.

In fighting for respect of their ethnic image and identity, Mostapha said, "We Nubians manage to impose our '*Nubiyatana*' (or Nubianism) through cultural activities, especially in Alexandria. And we made other Egyptians call us Nubians instead of *Barbara*. Now, it is not like the old days when a Nubian was referred to as *Barbari*." The term *Barbari* has gradually been eliminated. As Adelab pointed out, his Egyptian colleagues at work tell him "*Inta Nubi*", which means "You are a Nubian." Adelab also says that the Egyptian society and the media have both recently started to positively value Nubian people. This change is partly due to Nubian cultural activities which have played a great role in exposing quietly the ethnic identity of Nubians and upsurging it in the *Mahgar*. Nubian-



Egyptian ethnic relationships are further illustrated below.

Ariis, Annttar, Najwa, Ibrab and Adelab all argue against distinguishing Nubians from Egyptians, and they all agreed that Nubian-Egyptian relations are "very good." Also, they oppose the use and comparison between Egyptians and Nubians. Rather, they prefer to speak of Nubians versus non-Nubians. They also argue that Nubians have intimate social relations with Egyptians. In contrast, some other informants state that Nubians do differ in one way or another from the rest of the other Egyptians, and that is especially apparent in their languages.

According to what I observed, Nubians use strategic and philosophic methods in dealing with non-Nubians. Furthermore, Nubians in the *Mahgar* seem to be able to adapt themselves to the norms and regulations of the host community and at the same time retain their own separate identity. The Nubians' philosophy of interacting with other Egyptians is to maintain limits and to take much care. This is because the former believe that the latter underestimate them. Such tactics help Nubians to maintain their identity within the framework of national unity as a group with "special-ness," or *Khususia*. However, this special-ness is part of the fuel that keeps Nubianism alive.

Thus, Nurab says that although she was born, educated and grew up in Cairo, she has no Egyptian friends and only received Egyptians three times at her house. The first time was when her brother married and the second and third times were for condolences at the funerals of her parents. In return, she visits non-Nubian colleagues only during illness. Nurab says she has limited friendship ties with her Egyptian co-workers. She only interacts with them in the context of work. She says she always takes precautions when dealing with Egyptians. She



says she does not trust Egyptians, for she can be cheated. Furthermore, argues another informant,

Nubians cannot socially interact with *Guorbattiya*. This is due ...to the difference in ...understandings towards each other, in customs and even in the way of their looking on Nubians. Nubians are not treated equally like the rest of the people, for they are humble and honest. And perhaps because of color they are treated differently. Anyway, a Nubian who interacts with an Egyptian should always be careful or s/he will be driven into harm (*Daheya*) by those *Guorbattiya*.

Indeed, most informants confirm that they have many Nubian friends but few Egyptian friends. In the *Mahgar* and on the surface of things, it appears that the Nubians and other Egyptians are mutually absorbed in the wide Egyptian society. Yet, by navigating beneath the surface, one finds that there is a very different world.

### **Relationships in the neighborhoods**

According to Nurab, there are two Egyptian Christian families living in the building where she and her family reside. During childhood, she forged close relationships with these families. However, as an adult she mainly has Nubian friends and families who visit. This point is indicative of what is generally observed, which is that Nubians rarely visit their Egyptian neighbors but often visit and interact among themselves in the quarters, or neighborhoods, where they live.

Informants report that issues of manners and behaviors shape Nubian-Egyptian relationships and that Nubians are suspicious of Egyptians living in the same quarter. According to most informants, Nubians are known to serve each other not out of self-interest but for the sake of friendship and neighborhood and blood relation ties. The contrary is the case, they say, among some Egyptians who



serve each other while keeping in mind that sooner or later the service rendered will be paid back. According to Adeeb and most of the discussion group, a Nubian can be trusted even in the *Mahgar*. One can leave her/his house to a Nubian neighbor and later on find all of the properties untouched.

Most respondents agree that this would not be the case with a *Guorbatti*. It would be rare to find that the properties in the house would be left untouched. Furthermore, respondents say that no matter how long one happens to know and interact with some of the *Guorbattiya*, they are swindlers. For example, says Nurab, a Nubian family lived for more than 20 years as neighbors of an Egyptian family in the same building. The mother in the Nubian family died leaving behind four children and her husband. The four children are three daughters and a small boy. The eldest daughter went out leaving at home her younger sisters and brother. The brother later went down to play on the street. The two younger sisters were at home. The *Guorbatti* neighbor sneaked into the house and then assassinated the two sisters.<sup>35</sup> Fortunately, the small brother happened to return and saw the neighbor with some gold ornaments in his hand while his sisters lay bleeding on the floor.<sup>36</sup>

An informant recounted another incident that happened in Alexandria between Nubians and their neighbors in the late 1980s. The landlord of an apartment in which a Nubian family was living wanted to eject the Nubian. However, this Nubian family had a right according to the law courts and was allowed to stay in the house. Sometime later the same Nubian family had a fight with their neighbors. When the fight was over, everyone went to their places. However, the *Guorbattiya* neighbors did not give up and installed an explosive



pipe on the door of the Nubian family's apartment. When the Nubian mother of this family opened the trapped door, it exploded and she was killed. Comments from some informants are that such events seldom take place.

Informants' comments on these cases indicate that there is little common ground for open social interaction between Nubians and Egyptians, for Nubians claim they are treated differently. To prove this, an informant argues that one has to view the political map of Ministers in Egypt. There are some Coptic Christians among the prominent figures in the state and also in other recognized positions and offices. However, informants point out that there is no Nubian in such positions, although some informants proclaim that the contemporary Minister of Defence is a Nubian from Abu Simbil. In claiming this, they attribute him to ethnic group of his mother. Nonetheless, an informant says that it seems like they do not want a Nubian to hold a high post in the state, because, as most respondents argued, there is a fear that if a Nubian were to become a minister s/he would definitely help the Nubians.

Contrary to that, Annttar sees that the Nubian community has good relations with the Egyptian community. But, Nubians are unlike Egyptians for their social organization is governed by the norms of Nubian behaviors. There is also a difference in means of settling conflicts. Otherwise, Nubians act as Egyptians. This point backs up the notion that Nubians act with the host at public level as Egyptians and privately as Nubians. They have the ability to bring the two broad identities together with only a minor degree of tension.

In contrast, Umm-Sayid says that "Nubians are not like *Guorbattiya*. We are one thing and they are something else. We are not like people of this



country." As a result, she says that she refuses to let her children play with *Guorbattiya* children. Additionally, Adeeb views Nubians like any other human groups living in Egypt but says that they have a cultural and social *Khususia* or special-ness of their own. Since long ago Nubians keep within their chests the uncured wound of leaving their fathers' land in Nubia. Moreover, Nubians feel insecure in the *Mahgar*. That, according to Adeeb, is why Nubians agglomerate in parts of Abdeen, Buolaq Abu el Ella, and Embaba. Nubians in these quarters mostly deal among themselves and seldom interact with other Egyptians.

In Alexandria, Adeeb says Egyptians gave different names to Ezzba el Tomas wa Affia, such as Ezzba el Barbara, Jabel Barbara, Jabel el Farqh. Ezzba el Tomas wa Affia falls in between three fences. First, on the west side is a major canal and a high wall. To the north-west are the railways and a high wall, and north-east is *Hdra* prison with its high wall. It has a triangular shape, and within it Nubians live divided socially and geographically from the rest of Alexandria. According to the respondents, Nubians in Cairo have lived near Abdeen in order to get the palace's protection (during the king's era in Egypt) and in Buolaq Abu Ella because it is close to the Nile. As previously mentioned, Nubians in Alexandria and Cairo often say that they do not feel at home there. The same argument is made for other areas in which Nubians are living. For example, in Embaba or Sidi Beeshr an observer can detect that Nubians there live near each other and only rarely in a scattered manner. A reason behind that can be the need for security and intimacy.

Furthermore, Wad-Ezzba reports what Nubian elders used to say that a few years ago Ezzba Tomas-wa-Affia seldom had a "white" Egyptian entering it.



The area used to have a lot of open space and had a football ground. Later, that empty ground was turned into a building facing their houses. Wad-Ezzba says, "We Nubians have been affected by the building of those new houses. For we do not know who (inhabited it) live there and from where they are coming. We do not know their habits and manners. In Ezzba Tomas-wa-Affia, we know ourselves; but those in the new buildings we do not know." On this point, one can argue that it apparently tells how Nubians prefer living in a form of purely Nubian community but also interact with other Egyptians, and this helps, in many ways, the assertion of their Nubian existence and identity.

### **Impacts of *Mahgar***

At present, Nubians are not only living in the *Mahgar* in the quarters mentioned above. They are also scattered in many other places. Consequently, that has affected their children's relationship as Nubians to each other, as in Attariin most children on the street are Nubians, while in a place like Sidi Beeshr it is rare to come across Nubian children. From such a condition of being scattered, Nubians developed fears that their offspring may adopt "others' bad habits," behaviors and manners. Additionally, since Nubians are like Egyptians in particular and generally and fear "shame" and do not want people to point a finger at them, if a Nubian is reported to have been behaving in a shameful manner that will just destroy his/her personal image in the community. That is why most Nubians fear that their reputations will be contaminated.

According to Jebalee, to overcome the impact of *Mahgar*, "Nubians used to organize from time to time social trips and parties at *Jamayaat* and GNC in



order to introduce Nubian youths to each other." The invented form of bringing youth together is similar to what used to happen at funerals and weddings. However, the gathering at funerals and wedding as well as the trips all are meant to attain certain social relations and ties among Nubians, because in the contemporary *Mahgar* chances for Nubians to see each other have become less than before. Consequently, Nubian children now are growing up as victims of such condition. In the old days, most Nubians lived near each other and perhaps went to the same school. But today such chances are not there; for instance, children of the informant are in Victoria College, Alexandria, where there are few Nubian children if any at all. As a result, respondent Jebalee's children are friends of non-Nubian children. In order to build a bridge between his children and the rest of the Nubians, the informant use to take his children to the mentioned trips or to GNC for the educational feast or '*Eid el Ellm*' on which honor certificates and gifts are distributed to distinguished Nubian students from primary to university levels. This is to strengthen their social ties against the impact of scattering.

Scattering of the Nubians in *Mahgar* has negatively affected language use. According to Jebalee, in the last 15 to 20 years, Nubian languages are spoken by elders and youth. Contrary is the case of the Nubian youth and children (after 1970s) growing in neighborhoods where the majority are not Nubians. From the lack of having command of a Nubian language, children are compensating that lack with the fluent "Egyptian" Arabic they speak.

Succinctly, in the mission of enhancing their ethnic presence, Jebalee says that since the early 1930s Nubian communities in Alexandria tried to



accommodate with foreign ethnic groups (or *Jallyaat*). For example, back then in Alexandria there were ethnic groups from Italy, France, and Armenia and also Jewish. Each of the mentioned groups had Boy Scout teams, and fortunately Nubians' Boy Scout was the only non-foreign which represents Egyptians and this added certain credit to Nubian status. Furthermore, Jebalee says that "...in the late 1940s, Nubian communities were considered as Egyptian and valued as an enlightened society in Alexandria. For school(s) of *el Nhadh el Nuobiya* "The Nubian renaissance" was/is among first non-governmental schools which educated Egyptian children besides Nubian children." According to the same informant, the school managed to bring children of different ethnic backgrounds together and to create some sort of tolerance in the neighborhoods shared by Nubians and Egyptians toward each others. Informants above 45 years old and who were graduates of *el Nhada* school stated that it was from there they had come to befriend Egyptians.

In the same vein, Mostapha says he is now 67 years old and still has Nubian friends from *el Nhadh* primary school up to date. Those friends visit him and likewise he visits them just to recall the "good-old days." Contrary is the case whenever the informant checks for his Egyptian friends who he had at primary or even secondary school. Always his mind is searching for them in vain, although many of them are still living. Then, the informant states that this proves that some of *Ahal el Shamal* do feel less concerned about friendship, affection or *el Wuod*. Moreover, he says that "Nubians are honest, and this state of honesty means a lot. Succinctly, being honest in religion, *Zmma* (pact or immunity) and in work." In contrary Nubians received less affection and sympathies in *Mahgar*.



Furthermore, Mostapha affirms that in terms of Nubian-Egyptian relations, as well as the impact of *Mahgar*, are major concerns:

We [Nubians] do not dislike ...[Egyptians], but we have *Wuod* (the affection), that is, if a Nubian happened to know any person and made a conduct with, such relationship will abide by that Nubian in his life "expands" ...for a Nubian ...never betrays a friend. The *Wuod* in the Nubian context means to have friendship from time of introduction until one is dead. But among *Ahal el Shamal/Guorbattiya*, the *Wuod* must be for a hidden purpose or interest. Consequently, most if not all of Egyptians social relations demise by the time there is no, say, common interest. For example, if I'm a teacher at X school and have a relationship with other teachers there, by the time I'm retired or transferred to another school, that relationship will be over.

Another informant says a point which makes Nubians different in terms of social relations and identity than Egyptians which is the fact that they are zealous about *Seelaat el Rhem* or "womb relations". That is, they respect their parental relatives at extended family level. This kind of extended relationship urge a Nubian to visit most of those relatives and likewise, the relatives visit him. Mostapha says that generally some urban Egyptians lack such wide social networks of relations, but Nubians have these kinds of networks.



### Chapter Three

## **Asserting Ethnic Identity: Marriage and Weddings**

This chapter mainly addresses how Nubians manipulate marriage and wedding parties to assert their ethnic identity. Although the data presented in this chapter indicate how Nubians are conservative in inter-marriage with the other Egyptians, some informants admit occurrence of changes in mating patterns. In addition to what is mentioned above, the chapter also covers Nubian women dance and Nubian songs at weddings which they consider as means to revive their ethnic identity. The issues of marriage, wedding and song among Nubians and other Egyptians will be the focus of this chapter.

### **Marriage and ethnic revival**

Setting up a marriage is like sowing a seed for the continuity of a society. Historically, marriage procedures have come about to meet the human needs for procreation and for organizing sexuality. With the development of social and cultural methods and the regulation of societies, marriages have been used at times to meet certain ends, be they socialization or acculturation. In the ancient world, marriage relations between conflicting groups at times were used as a means of conflict resolution and/or mediation. History records that Egypt's queen Cleopatra went into a martial relation with Anthony in order to save her country and people from coercive foreign invasion.

Contrary to the above, Daffalla (1973) points out that Nubians have certain



reservations and prejudices against marrying non-Nubians. Such prejudices are not only confined to the Nubians, but other ethnic groups behave in the same manner. Also, this is true for some religious sects, which do not approve for their women to marry men from other sects.

In the present case, most respondents in the *Mahgar* intentionally support the argument that Nubian women are supposed to marry Nubian men. In addition, Nubians in the *Mahgar* are more ready to give their daughters and sisters to any non-Nubian so long as he is not Egyptian. At this junction, one wants to argue that though marriage among other people brings social and cultural harmonies, in some communities it is used to establish an ethnic entity and to maintain a distinction from the rest of the people.

Inter-ethnic relations in the *Mahgar* due to manners and to behavioral and cultural obligations between the Nubian and Egyptian societies have made marriages between the two uncommon. Not only that, but for some authentic (or hard core) Nubians, marriage is a strategy through which assimilation can be avoided or adopted. However, Jebalee says that in the 1940s in the *Mahgar*, if a Nubian male married *Bint Bhari/Balad* (Egyptian), his relatives will cast him out on the assumption that such a person did get out of the Nubian "unanimity or *Ejmma*".<sup>37</sup> Wad-Ezzba gives an example that, in a neighborhood near Ezzba Tomas-wa-Affia, there is a Nubian man who got married to an Egyptian woman; and since then, none of his relatives have ever visited him.

Informants manifested during fieldwork that Nubians in the *Mahgar* prefer inter-Nubian marriages rather than Egyptian-Nubian matings. Accordingly, it is reported that they hardly ever give their daughters in marriage to Egyptians,



because the Nubians believe that there are differences in manners and values between the two. Says Annttar, for example, "If an Egyptian happens to disagree with the wife, he may take her to court; but this is completely contrary to what will happen among married Nubians." Among Nubians, a family dispute (between husband and wife) will not be taken to court, for there is a council of elders (*called Magglaas Arab*) which is usually composed of relatives from the wife's and husband's sides. According to some respondents, for some Egyptians, however, such a traditional system does not apply; and they may not consider it because none of the elders in such a council would be their relatives. Above all, Nubians fear the issue of an outsider divorcing their girls; but if she is married to her Nubian cousin she will not be divorced, because of family ties.

Jebalee says that 10 to 20 years ago it was very rare for a Nubian male to get married to an Egyptian female. This is because he who was married to *Bint el Bhar* or *Bint el Shamaal* (or a girl from Alexandria or sea-wards) was considered as an outcast and as a person who went against the Nubian *Ejmma*. Putting the issue into practice, some Nubians view intermarriages with *Banat* or *Awlad el Bhar* as a shame and a risk for future generations of Nubians.<sup>38</sup>

Fieldwork observation indicates that fear and suspicions color Nubian relations with Egyptians; and this is one of the many reasons that Nubians refuse for their sons to marry *Bint el Bhari*. They assume that such a wife, since she has been brought up in a non-Nubian environment, will not be guaranteed as a Nubian wife. Emphasizing the point, most informants argue that some Egyptian women married to Nubian men showed their lack of comfort with frequent visits and crowding of husbands' relatives in the house. But for Nubian wives an



overcrowded house with relatives and visitors is part of Nubian life solidarity, commented Mostapha. According to informants, that is why a Nubian lady is preferred, for she will respect and endure her husband's relatives equally as her own. Consequently, as a father,

...I can visit my son's house any time even if he is not at home ...and his wife will respect me as her own ...Also, she will honor my wife, ...her mother-in-law. As Nubians, a mother-in-law has a special place, her son's or daughter's spouse will respect her and likewise cares and helps them ... in Nubian communities, a mother-in-law respects and cares for her daughter's husband even more than for her own son. I can not help my son to get married to a daughter of *Qhreeb* or an intruder ...I may tell my son to marry from his uncle's daughters, if not from Kenuz or Fadija, there are wide options and I will encourage him to get a wife either from ... Aswan, Sudan or Eritrea, for Nubians and those people share almost the same traditions and customs ...and most marriages of Nubian males to *Banat el Bhari* failed either prior to or after reproduction of children.

Adeeb says that the reasons why mating is not encouraged between *Banat el Balad* and a Nubian male is because there are many cases of failed ones. Moreover, such mating is considered "abnormal" in Nubian communities. Furthermore, informant Mostapha reports that he has two cousins, one of them married to a Nubian woman (informant's uncle's daughter) and the other to an Egyptian lady. The informant used to visit the cousin who married a Nubian and never visited the one married to an Egyptian, for he cannot act there as in a Nubian house. In the house of the cousin married to a Nubian wife the informant says he used to feel as if he is in his own house, for he can take a nap if tired and will be given a *gallabeya* (a traditional Nubian dress; large garment, long, from shoulder to foot) to wear. This can not happen in a house where a spouse is an Egyptian. Indeed, this is among the habits that an Egyptian wife can not tolerate, that is to entertain relatives at her house at any time. But a Nubian woman can endure that.



## Marriage and prejudices

In light of the above described marriage practices, one would like to argue that the position of Nubians in Egypt as ethnic groups is significantly controversial. Nubians exist as distinctive ethnic and linguistic groups. However, at the same time some Egyptians believe that the Nubians have been absorbed into the larger society. Some Nubians reject this belief and claim that they are not absorbed and are not even a minority group in Egypt. Rather, they believe that they form an integral part in the huge Egyptian human fabric. However, Nubians do not much allow their women to marry other Egyptians. But the former statement is urged in favor of national unity, as well as against the Ibn Khaldun Center's conference about minorities in the Arab world, as previously mentioned. Thus, at the public level in Egypt Nubians strive to be absorbed into the wider national unity; but at the core of social and inter-ethnic relations, they use marriage to keep their ethnic identity distinction.

Opposite to the above is the notion of Egyptian Nubians who argue that "Nubians have *Khususia* or special-ness in Egypt."<sup>39</sup> This *Khususia* must be kept through observing Nubian culture, languages and behaviors, as well as through Nubian-Nubian marriages. Accordingly, Mostapha and Nurab have a joint idea supporting this argument, which is that in order not to be assimilated and not to feel inferior as husband or wife because of skin pigmentation, Nubian-Nubian marriages are the best. This same point is illustrated in Ali's text *Dongola* (1993) when the main character of the play, *el Shalalee*, went to Buolaq Abu Ella to look for his mother's brother who married an Egyptian. At end *el Shalalee*'s uncle was reported dead and there was no sign of his widow.



In supporting hard core Nubian views, Mostapha argued that, "Generally, as Nubians we assume women to be weak creatures." Also, Shaaer says, "A Nubian lady is a weak. That is why she is not given in marriage to non-Nubians." However, literature on Nubian social and family relations points to the fact that it was hard to set up marriages even between Kenuz and Fadija villagers. This is because Nubians prefer marriages among immediate cousins. After moving from Old Nubia, such marriage boundaries were broken and inter-village marriages started to occur. For example, it became easy to set up a marriage between a Kenuz bride and a Fadija groom. The change in limitation of marriage boundaries applies to both genders among the Nubians. For instance, Adelab who is a Kanzi married a Fadija lady.

However, to have an Egyptian spouse was/is not allowed for Nubian ladies; but a male is allowed to marry a non-Nubian woman. An old woman (who is an aunt of Annttar) agrees with Mostapha's ensuing words,

...a Nubian male can marry and divorce a foreign wife whenever ...if he feels unsatisfactory ...that male may marry another woman, even a Nubian. Regarding a woman married to a non-Nubian male who is mistreated by the husband, her father can not take her back; and if she earns a divorce, it is likely that she might not remarry. Who can marry a divorced woman?

To avoid marriage failures, Nubians prefer and appreciate cousin marriages. In addition, says an informant, Nubians worry about marrying their daughters to Egyptians, as they believe that Egyptians might throw their daughters out of wedlock as soon as she got poor or disabled. Their worry is based on the experience of Nubian males who got married to Egyptian women. When those males got sick or became bankrupt, their wives just left them.<sup>40</sup> Above all, the main concern is that Nubians fear that their offspring will be absorbed into their



mothers' large society (Egypt) and that would mean the social extinction of Nubians.

For instance, Nurab reports that her uncle (who died in 1980s) was married to an Egyptian woman. The uncle was not comfortable with his wife and had a daughter. Later on, he decided to marry this half Nubian and half Egyptian daughter to any of his brother's sons or to any of his relatives' sons. His efforts were in vain. None of the relatives' sons or even their parents wanted to have the Nubian-Egyptian lady as a wife. Nubians viewed her as not a Nubian, because of her Egyptian upbringing. As in the informant's words, the sons of the relative told the old man "...we don't take an Egyptian in marriage". This indicates that Nubians are less eager to build inter-marriages with even half-cast Egyptians. After the uncle's death, his daughter got married to an Egyptian, and certainly this marked an end to the Nubian line in that uncle's family. Based on the above case, Nurab says, "She can not be a wife to an Egyptian". For such marriage will captivate and weaken the social ties among Nubians and even destroy the sense of togetherness and the collective Nubian identity. Above and over all, inter-Nubian marriages make Nubians feel that they are not assimilated yet. However, as an informant puts it, "Nubian marriages ...are a sort of struggle against extinction and sinking into the sea of millions of Egyptians."

To sum up, Nubians marry among themselves in hopes of avoiding perishing and such is a fear that can be counted as persisting against assimilation. The point revives the issue that Nubians consider children who are products of Egyptian-Nubian mating as non-Nubians or as Egyptian descendants. This is how Nubians have manipulated their inter- and intra-marriage regulations to serve



their social, cultural and ethnic existence. According to informants, some reasons why Nubian refuse to have marital relations with Egyptians is due to Nubians wanting to keep their ethnic identity unmixed. As Najwa proudly says, she is proud of her skin color, because it is not common like another color. Besides that, Nubians claim they have *dameer* or a self-consciousness and husband-wife respect that always keeps them alert whenever they intend to do wrong; and they believe this is contrary to the attitudes of other Egyptians. All of the informants agreed that it is/was true in some Nubians' families about 10 years ago that marrying an Egyptian is like an unforgiven crime.

### **Egyptian-Nubian marriage**

As a means of accelerating inter-ethnic assimilation and harmony, the encouragement of inter-marriages is vital. It will not be the same if intermarriages are hardly take place. Consequently, the efforts of bringing about ethnic harmony at times will be de-accelerated. However, it is observed that a Nubian male can marry an Egyptian woman, but for an Egyptian male to marry a Nubian lady is generally less prevailing. To relate the argument to reality, some Egyptians argue that Nubians are the ones who refuse an Egyptian male to marry a Nubian lady. In the same path, most Nubians agree that an Egyptian male has sets of manners which are quite different than those of Nubians; consequently, Nubian parents feel uncomfortable in giving their daughters to other Egyptians.

A personal experience of Nurab who was awaiting marriage is that her mother refused for her to marry an Egyptian co-worker who wanted her in marriage. According to Nurab, the mother told her eager Egyptian groom that



"*Intum Nas wa Ehna Nas*" that is, "You are a people and we are a people," which means there is difference between Egyptians and Nubians. As a flashback, according to Nurab, she refused the gentleman's approaches, but he insisted to meet her mother. Certainly, (according to Jaffrab) for an interpretation of the idea of refusing an Egyptian groom lies the notion that a bride might later end up repudiated or be subjected to rude male behaviors. Reported an informant that through observations the last statement seems to be part of Egyptian society regarding husband-wife relations. For instance, a man or "*Mr. Sayid*" who does whatsoever to his wife; however, a Nubian male can not do that.<sup>41</sup>

According to Jaffrab, Egyptian-Nubian marriage is rare, for it is not a preferred type of mating. Simply, as Jaffrab puts it,

... a Nubian woman is not acceptable in Egyptian society *Mush Mkbuel fii el Mugtamaa el Misri*. This is because some Egyptian males who are of marriage age have certain format for a wife. Further, skin pigmentation as an issue is hard for a person to swim against giant currents of such prejudices.

Moreover, most informants reported that skin color is a major obstacle that forms sorts of differences between Nubians and other Egyptians. Therefore, in a society where color prejudices float on its surfaces, according to Adeeb and Jaffrab, Nubians stick together and they have the right to keep their ethnic distinction and self-respect. Contrary to this, Umm Ezzba said,

...in the past years we [Nubians] did not give our girls in marriage to *Aqhraab* (aliens) or Egyptians. However, recently some Nubians started to give their daughters in marriage to Egyptians, as well as many of our boys are getting married to *Banat el Balad*. In the old days, we viewed such marriages as a mischievous event.<sup>42</sup>

In the same fashion, Jaffrab who continuously argues that if mainstream culture manages to bring unprejudiced values, Nubians will agree to let Egyptians marry their ladies.



Briefly, if an Egyptian wanted to marry a Nubian lady, this would rarely take place among Cairene and Alexandrian Nubians. As Adelab says, "There are certain reasons which prevent such matings". Among these reasons is the influence of the Arabs in Old Nubia, where through intermarriage some Nubians were converted to Islam and adopted Arab origins (Adams 1973 and Jennings 1995). Adelab says the old system of Nubian marriage was influenced by earlier Moslem Arabs. Consequently, the Nubians matrilineal system was changed by Arab *Assabia*, or group loyalty to their Arab tribes rather than to the Nubian ones. However, recently this same *assabia* also affected in one way or another the chance of Nubian ladies in marrying non-Nubian males. In other words, Nubians adopted tribal affiliation or *assabia* on patrilineal level, and that prohibits Nubian women to marry men from outside their immediate family males or related tribal groups. Furthermore, another informant said that the prevention of a Nubian lady from marrying from other group is based on the fact that "...if a Nubian woman is married to a non-Nubian man, she will procreate and increase the number of the man's group and not that of her own group. Also, most informants agree that according to the Nubian system of inheritance, a woman has the right of inheriting.<sup>43</sup> And since she has the right to inherit part of her father's or uncles' properties, her part in a way will be added to that of her husband. For instance, the mechanism of marriage in Nubia was affected by Arab *assabia*, but the system of distributing family properties remained Nubian. That is to say, the Islamic regulations of entitling a daughter (woman) to half of what her counterpart son (man) earns from family property did not disturb the Nubian way of equal sharing among sons and daughters. Consequently, it means an increment



in wealth and human power for the husband's tribe or family.

In addition, an informant reports that recently some families in *Mahgar* allowed their girls to marry Egyptians or *Aqhraab*--foreigners, but such cases are rare.<sup>44</sup> An informant Mostapha says,

... we (Nubians) still maintain our culture and traditions and specifically in marriages ...this does not rule out the marginal and exceptional odd cases of intermarriages taking place here and there ...but it is so rare that a Nubian girl is married to *Ibn el Arab* or *el Bhari* ...nearly most of our ladies marry from within Nubian groups. However, we prefer our boys to marry Nubian women, but as men, we allow them to marry ...non-Nubian women and if they marry *Beint el Bhari* they are males and they know how to deal with their wives ...and yet for a son who marry a non-Nubian lady, he will be looked down on as an outcast and less visited by his Nubians relatives ... that is why most Nubian males prefer marrying Nubian females ...

Further, the issue of inter-Nubian marriages was distorted by first Nubian migrants to *Mahgar*. For instance, earlier in Alexandria, most Nubian migrants were males. However, due to their job obligations and the distance between Nubia and *Mahgar*--and since they did not want to lose their jobs--some of them got married to *Banat el Bhari*. This type of marriage was negatively viewed by some Nubians as "death". For example, in Nubia if a son got married to *Beint el Bhari*, his mother and relatives used to organize a symbolic funeral as if he had died. Friends and relatives would come to pay condolence for the lost man. During 1920s and up to 1930s, that was the way Nubians used to react to their sons who married non-Nubian women.

Furthermore, Jebalee confirms that some reasons behind inner marriages among Nubians groups is that Nubians females adore their males' behaviors and manners. Nubian groups do not just refuse their women to get married to non-Nubians; also, in the last 10 to 15 years, it was hard to arrange *Fadija-Kenuz* marriages. The scene is changing, and inter-Nubian marriages these days seem



to be more common than before. Such shifting of attitudes can be alluded to in the avoidance of Nubians getting marriage partners from *Shamaal* or among other Egyptians.

Nubian marriages are the most effective cultural weapons Nubians still have up to date. Nubians value inter-Nubian marriages in order to encourage and keep Nubian socio-cultural and traditional ties firm among themselves, so that their social and ethnic identity do not perish. Indeed, most Nubian elders believe that through allowing their Nubian sons and daughters to marry each other, this will keep Nubian generations and existence intact. In the same vein, Nubian people appreciate cousin marriages, and as in an informant's words, "This is in hopes to protect the chances that Nubian ladies will be married to Nubian men."

### **Situational analysis and changes**

Though some respondents argue that keeping Nubian marriages among themselves intact is a means of avoiding assimilation, Adelab argues that ethnic assimilation will sooner or later occur all over the country. In the same way, Shaaer states that what supports the idea of assimilation is that it is taking place among Nubians in the *Mahgar*:

Nubian communities in a blink of an eye got moved from their indigenous setting to a quasi-urban ... and in a different social, cultural and behavioral air. Such abrupt changing of place and set of cultural rules have come about as a result of state's implementation of a decree. Certainly, there occurred numbers of negative and positive impacts on Nubians ... patterns and organization in both *Mahgar*. Later after settling in *Mahgar*, Nubians happened not to understand and cope with urban ways of life; consequently, they turned to adopt the philosophy of building snails covered-shell around themselves which can not thwart changes and state to hold/move them to and fro ... They adopted that style of self-circumscribing in hope of either keeping their Nubianism and allow a degree to acquire patterns of urban lifestyle ... being ... Nubians community and to a certain degree to accommodate from large society some aspects, Nubians in *Mahgar* fail to retain their own cultural existence or be like *Guorbattiya* (or Egyptians), they happened



to lead a sort of life which seems alien to native Nubians in New Nubia and even to host.

To paraphrase Shaaer's words that Nubians in the *Mahgar* have two options, either to be assimilated and get along with the lifestyle and/or to retain openly their Nubian identity. In other words, they can create appropriate means to build contacts with Nubian people in Nubia or they can assimilate. Unfortunately, some Nubians are trapped in the middle, as they are not keeping Nubian traditions but do not want to be assimilated into the mainstream way and, thus, do not know where to head. However, since such groups fail to build a bridge over the socio-economic and cultural gaps between themselves, they have come up with a unique social combination in the *Mahgar*, which is in-between the two, or the urban and the Nubian.<sup>45</sup>

For instance, the ensuing story narrated by an informant puts a light on what and how far the rate of Egyptianization/assimilation has occurred among Nubians born in *Mahgar* compared with their fathers. "Whenever and wherever ...his elder brother was, ...[he] used to hide or sneak into the nearest corner and leave the road for him." In addition, the informant's father never smoked in front of his elder brother although the age difference between them was not that much. Also, either the father does not smoke or never lets the elder brother notice that there is an ashtray filled with smoke filters or even a package of cigarettes. Such respectful relation is lacking these days among the Nubian youth. Nowadays, youth do not mind to smoke in front of their elder brothers or in front of any elder except their parents.

Adeeb recalls that there was a lecture about Nubia at GNC and that most attendants were over 40 years old. One of the attendants asks where were the



youth. The very informant replied that there is a wedding party tonight and properly those young males and females are there. Then those elders argued that the present day youth pay little attention to lectures concerning Nubia but devote much time to attend weddings. In a reply, Adeeb said that those young people while dancing there are demonstrating part of the mission of proving the Nubian existence through dance. Meanwhile, the elders struggle with verbal talks at lectures to attain the same end.

However, in the following section the interviewed informants narrate how Nubians in *Mahgar* celebrate their weddings and what will be the differences if one of the marrying group is non-Nubian.

### **Wedding ceremonies, women's dance and two songs**

Nubian weddings or *Affraah*, are one of the tools used by Nubians to assert their ethnic distinction in the *Mahgar*. The Nubian wedding stands shining as a guided compass telling non-Nubians that Nubians form a distinctive linguistic and ethnic group.

It is observed in the *Mahgar*, specially during Summer, that on most Thursday nights there are numerous Nubian weddings. In addition, if there is a wedding in the Buolaq quarter, invitations will be extended to close and far relatives, as well as to all friends.<sup>46</sup> In Cairo or Alexandria a note would be posted at *Jamayaat* or GNC. According to Fernea (1966), many Nubian marriage ceremonies used to take place after their last mass exodus in 1964. However, a number of non-Nubian elements that can be related to the patterns of *Ahl el Shamal* or other Egyptians have been introduced. Meanwhile, some Nubian



customs have been either dropped or simplified. This argument is true if literature and photos of Nubian weddings are shown. For example, women's dance at weddings was part of the celebration. As reported and argued about by some informants nowadays, Nubians still keep the dance of two genders separate at their weddings; and they refuse that women dance on the stage in front of "foreign" males, or males who are not close relatives of the woman.

Likewise, the idea of reappraising women's appearance in public spheres came up as an issue in a Nubian magazine, *Arrouss el Nil (Bride of the Nile)* (April 1987) in an article, "A Call For Discussion." Its author described that in one of the weddings,

...eyes of an old Nubian man bathed in tears and he is beating his hands while saying; 'there is no strength, no power but in God'(in Arabic; *La Hawlla wa la Kuowa illa be Allah*), our women and daughters are on theater stage ...if you Nubians negated your Nubianism, then where is your jealousy on the behavior of your wives and daughters" (Ibid: 33).

According to an informant, although women's dance among Nubians is not a shame, when it is on the theaters' stages (as observed in some weddings in Alexandria), women's dance become unfavorable. Not only that, as witnessed by another informant, even when Nubian musicians wanted to present Nubian music and dance on Alexandria TV, they employed Sudanese ladies to dance.

At present, Nubian songs at weddings are changing, though slowly and on the surface of social reality. For example, as said by Shaaer, the latest Sudanese Arabic songs are highly consumed by Nubian listeners at weddings. However, a typical Nubian wedding is a wedding party where both bride and groom are Nubians. There, most songs are either in Nubian languages or are Nubian songs in Arabic reviving the memory of Old Nubia and a bitter emigration (the point



will be explained later).

A Nubian wedding party, where both bride and groom are Nubians, is usually overcrowded and takes place in clubs or in an open air area. Nubians, be they relatives of the marrying couple or just Nubian people, will be the ones present at the wedding. The contrary will happen if either of the couple is non-Nubian. The non-Nubian audience at Nubian weddings will hardly exceed the fingers of a hand and is almost impossible to meet an Egyptian hanging around. This hinders the opportunity for Egyptian-Nubian inter-marriages. To compare a Nubian wedding with an Egyptian one, the latter usually has a small number of invitees but the invitees to a Nubian one exceed the size of a village and include all Nubians who happen to know that a wedding will take place.

...certainly, numbers of invitees depend on who are ...groom and bride, if any of them happened to be an Egyptian, the less will be the audience and contrary is true if none of them is Egyptian. However, those who are married and dance at their wedding ...have special meanings ...that is, it use to create an atmosphere of harmony, intimacy and soothing among groups of unmarried young Nubian females and males who are friends of bride and groom.

The Nubian wedding has changed in terms of its formats, music melodies, instruments and dance. Some of the younger Nubian generation, specifically those born in Cairo, like Inas who commented that the occurring changes "...are not a bad idea, since this still invites dance beside or on the stage where music is played ...". However, another informant insists that

...it is an alien cultural wave forcing its way in ...Nubians' wedding ...what is supposed to be is that all [invitee] must dance and sing in a Nubian wedding, so the idea of having a high place for the wedding couple and musicians is not an appropriate one.

In other words, some Nubians believe that indirect gender mixing at weddings (ladies and gentlemen seeing interaction under parents' eyes), will make it possible to start a sort of acquaintance and perhaps this may lead some of those



young people to plan for marriage. Further, Jaffrab says, it is at such weddings that most males point their fingers at a certain lady and ask their mothers to contact the family of the desired bride. Besides, the Nubian wedding, being a major place that indirectly amalgamates genders shopping for spouses, also forms the basis of a social network for knowing who is who.

In the same vein, most of the respondents agree that dance at weddings is one of the tools through which Nubians challenge assimilation and maintain their collective identity. There, in the wedding party, nearly all male invitees and especially close relatives and the uncles dance holding each other's shoulders, and their mouths move telling that they are also singing with the musician. Even though the song is in a Nubian language and they do not understand it, they will move their mouths. Besides that, nearly all female invitees dance holding each other's shoulders, and some of them sing along with the musician while two or a few more produce ululating *Zkuroot el Farah* or trilling cries of joy. The basic features of a Nubian wedding (dancing and performing of *Zaffa* as well as dispersion of gifts and sweets on the heads of invitees) all take place.

An apparent reason behind holding wedding parties in public places is related to the number of invitees. Back to the issue of changes in formats of Nubian weddings in the *Mahgar*, it is observed that nearly half of the songs chanted are Sudanese songs and the rest are Nubian.<sup>47</sup> To stress the point, an observer detects that almost all of the Nubians listen to Sudanese music. However, while reviewing Nubian cases of identity struggle, one would like to theoretically discuss the existence of asserting ethnic identity in 'allegorical manners'.



It is observed these days that in most weddings the group of singers are the heirs of those who perform the music. Regardless of the above discussed dispute concerning weddings, their formats involve the introduction of electronic instruments, and this is not just the case of Cairene Nubians dropping what is called the Nubian "*Kaff*" (clapping hands) and the "*Taballa*" (drum playing) in weddings, for this change has also occurred in New Nubia. Nubians celebrate their wedding parties at public theaters or clubs. The traditional Nubian *Kaff* of Fadija and *Yaniki* of Kenuz are seldom performed in the *Mahgar*.<sup>48</sup> Also, Nubian traditional instruments (*Kissar*, *Taabla*, and *Tanbouor*) are replaced in most weddings with electric guitars and electronic organs. An informant confirms that, recently, Nubian weddings have become like a sort of theater for entertaining, with the marrying couple on one stage and the musician on another and both facing the audience. However, Jaffrab said that in his wedding he danced with all the audience and did not take the idea of sitting on a stage separate from the invitees.

As mentioned, male invitees dance while holding each other's shoulders. While doing so they form a circle. Indeed, both females and males form circles, revolve around themselves, and shake their bodies in a dance called *Raqas el Nhar* (dance of the river). Or they dance holding their hands up and waving--or moving their hands slowly in a dance called *Raqas el Hamaam* (dove dance). *Raqas el Nhar* or dance of the river is in imitation of the Nile's water currents that react slowly when there is a storm. The dove dance or *Raqas el Hamaam* is an imitation of doves flying in the sky.

Moreover, the observer detects that there is the occurrence of an inflow



of Sudanese Arabic melodies which has accompanied the replacement of traditional musical instruments by electronic ones. Although some Nubians in the *Mahgar* sing Nubian songs, they do not sing Egyptian ones. According to Edinab from a focus group that, an explanation for the prestigious favor of Sudanese songs is the need of the Nubian younger generation who only speak and understand Arabic and do not speak a Nubian language. Meanwhile, the existence of Nubian lyrics continues in weddings to meet the need of elders who speak and understand their language. Consequently, Nubian songs turned to be a means of reviving ethnic memory and even maintaining ethnic identity or "boundaries" (Barth: 1969). However, to an observer Nubian songs at weddings tell a different reality, as they are played metaphorically to distinguish them from other Egyptians and to highlight their *Qadiya*. Based on that, one can argue that Nubians in the *Mahgar* prefer Sudanese-Arabic songs because they have the same rhythm as Nubian one and because the language accent used in these songs is understandable to most Nubians, old or young.

Nubian songs engulf the experience of successive migrations and are full of their tragedies and their mourning over Nubia and the date trees. Nubian mourn in the past and at present through songs, which they use to overcome shocks. Their songs often tell that time was not enough to care for their fields, houses, animals or farms swept away by the High Dam's water. As a result of that, Nubians lost their properties and some emigrated to Kom Ombo while others fled to the *Mahgar*.

However, the impression gathered about the issue of rekindling of an identity touches the concern of the host community and of the emigrated. This



is eloquently explained by Joan Gross et al., in "Rai, Rap, and Ramadan Nights Franco-Maghribi Cultural Identities" (1992). This article, relates the story of reconstruction of ethnic identities exemplified in Rai music, as a frame that attracts and exposes ethnic identity, and as far as employing nostalgic memories of the concerned cultures that are negatively involved with the main stream culture.

Therefore, Rai in Algeria, as Gross pointed out, emerged from the "shadows". However, like many ethnic group cultures it did not peacefully evolve. Rai is denounced as 'illiterate' and lacking an 'artistic merit' and yet it gains fame. This last statement is valid if applied to Nubian music in the *Mahgar*. Nubian music is slightly different from Rai and is less presented in media. Yet, it expresses a form of collective ethnic identity of emigrated Nubians. Similar to Nubian are the Maghribis in France who face direct racist confrontation but find their ethnic identity being expressed in Rai music, though they are heterogeneous ethnic migrants. By putting the two forms together, one can argue that a sense of collective identity is built through manipulation of songs and music among Nubians in the *Mahgar* as well as among Maghribis in France.

After a period of over 32 years, Nubian migrants regardless of changes which happened in time, space and place, Nubian songs at weddings (and arts movement) manage to accomplish a ground of inter-tribal ties and sympathies in the *Mahgar*. And they become a public class for learning Fadija or Kenuz languages. Since most of their songs are in the Nubian languages, the meanings are not known at times to a monolingual Nubian; however, it is observed that most Nubians at wedding parties know the meanings of these songs. Above all,



for those who do speak the languages and those who do not, Nubian songs are symbols of "we are Nubians" and, thus, of ethnic identity. An observer to Nubian weddings in the *Mahgar* will detect how lively the dancing crowd of young females and males born in the *Mahgar* becomes when a song calls for going back to Nubia. *El Heggra el Murra or Fakuoranna* are chanted while dance and all sing along with the singer.<sup>49</sup>

As most informants explain, most of the songs have almost the same theme of recalling to Nubian memories that the *Mahgar* is not home. They should go back even into history and to tell the world that they are offspring of ancient Nubian kings and queens. Thus, in the Nubian wedding in *Mahgar*, the songs create a collective identity of Nubians; for example, at a Fadija wedding a Kenzi song will be sung, and the opposite is true for a Kenuz wedding. Moreover, as an informant puts it, when dancing at wedding and listening to a song like *el Heggra el Murra or Fakuor-anna* a person feels his/her existence as a Nubian. Also, as reported in a discussion of the focus group, it is Nubian weddings from which most of those born in the *Mahgar* sip their first identity awareness and lingual lessons. From this juncture, it is necessary to illustrate the importance of Nubian songs. As an informant puts it, that Nubian songs seem to be a major tool of self-expression that have been used as a Nubian weapon. For they create a sense of collective and unified identity to all Nubians.

Nubian songs generally as stated are the first instrument used to expose identity tragedies. For example, at a Nubian wedding it is likely that one listens to a few songs praising the marrying couples and to listen to many songs in honor of Old Nubia as well as songs lamenting the emigration to Kom Ombo. However,



one can divide songs at wedding parties into songs which are sung for different occasions and for "national tragedy"; for instance, as cited earlier a song like *el Heggra el Murra and Fakhuor-anna*.<sup>50</sup>

Apparently, Nubian songs at a wedding revive memory of the Old Nubia to the elders who migrated. Also, they have a great role in educating Nubians born in the *Mahgar* who have never visited either Old or New Nubia. Besides, there is the juxtaposition of the roles of songs at weddings in animating their tradition and arousing the nostalgic good old days among elders as well as teaching the younger generation about the past. Here, wedding is a symbol and is an institution which keeps language, customs and tradition of the Nubians alive. In agreement with Swedenburg's paper on "Social Movements and Expressive Culture: Egyptian Nubian Identity" (1994), songs play a great role in revealing ethnic identity. To stress the point, occasionally it is observed the existence of reviving and asserting of ethnic identity in Nubian's songs.<sup>51</sup> For example, the song *Fakhuor-anna* ("I am Proud"),

(1) *Fakhuor-anna*:

I am proud, I am proud. I'm proud of my civilization and I will live with my generosity, with self-pride that never diminish, with my originality and kindness I am a Nubian, with assurance and my kindness. Ask the ancient history, who am I? I'm Meina's and Taharqa's descendant, I am Kushite's and Nabbata's descendant. Nafartare the daughter of Nubia, Natartare with her beauty is a Nubian ...

(2) *el Heggra el Murra* ("The bitter emigration"),

My name is there my country is there. Myself is there, Nubia is there. Oh ye people an evidence is behind the High Dam, Nubia. The bitter emigration was enforced on us. They told us Kom Ombo is the greenest heaven. There we survived miserable nights, walked longer years in diaspora. My name is there my country is



there. Oh thou Nubians male and female beat the drum of the future return. We will never kneeled whatsoever the torment may be Nubia is ours. My name is there my country is there. Our ancient history inscribed on the rocks thou (they) were kings in the beautiful valley. Thou with firm determination astounded the whole world until the date thou temples with pride stand. My name is there my country is there. Why the history of the Nubians is erased, and why mother's breast is forgotten. This day of departing beloved Nubia and for surety a shame mark on forehead of our forthcoming generations. My name is there my country is there. Oh folks they deleted a complete civilization and they assassinated the aspirations of the largeheartedness Nubia. The *Sakeiya*'s rattling are calling upon us that, they pounded the remnants of our grand fathers' bones.<sup>52</sup> My name is there my country is there.

Lastly, in agreement with some respondents that all of the previously stated reasons behind the slow inter-ethnic marriage and even the refusal of hybrid (*metisse*) persons in the Nubian community, there is a sort of setting a boundary through presenting Nubian "manners, habits and behaviors [that] have made [Nubians] not of better reputation only but also of a better status ...and a distinct group". Implicitly, their songs express Nubians identity in an allegorical manner. My argument about Nubian identity is that Nubian informants, while talking about their ethnic identity relative to that of Egyptians, talk about it in such a way that it inflates the ethnic boundaries existing between them and the (other) Egyptians.



## Chapter Four

### **Upsurgence of an Identity: Nubian Case, Literature, and Social Organizations**

This section focus on upsurgence of ethnic identity among the Nubians. The Nubian case/*Qadiya* and various types of social organizations, as well as Nubians literature, poems and plays are tackled in relation to upsurgence of ethnic identity. In this chapter, the mentioned issues are put together for they represent tools of expressing ethnic identity among the Nubians.

#### **The Nubian Case**

The *Qadiya el Nubiya* (Nubian case) involves issues related to the interaction of Nubians with other Egyptians, and this study considers the *Qadiya* to be an umbrella under which all Nubian groups come together. It is especially significant in determining relationships at the level of the state and the Nubian people. However, before thrusting into the issue of the *Qadiya*, it is necessary to provide a quick light on Egypt's ethnic and social framework.

Within Africa and the Arab world, Egypt has the highest population density; however, it has perhaps the lowest degree of ethnic tensions. This is because, as I have observed it, those concerned with Egyptian national unity have manipulated ethnicity and ethnic identity issues to meet their interests for unity. An observer of Egypt's media mobilization concerning ethnic relations will hardly detect the existence of ethnic heterogeneity. Thus, ethnic diversity is not very



apparent in Egyptian social interaction. What is seen floating on the socio-political surface are waves of national unity, with interruption by Islamic activists. However, down deep at the bottom of Egyptian society is the changing and upsurging Nubian ethnic identity backed up by their *Qadiya*.

What is the Nubian *Qadiya*? Briefly, an informant and some local Nubian magazines pointed out that *el Qadiya el Nubiya* can be summarized as involving (1) the question of unfinished payment of compensation money for the loss of Nubian properties due to the inundation of Nubia villages; (2) the failure to hand over farming lands which were supposed to be given to each Nubian family in Kom Ombo since 1964; and the failure for 32 years to construct houses for *Mukhtarbiin* (Nubian expatriates in the *Mahgar*). These items of the *Qadiya* are what Nubians manipulate to meet and support their ethnic identity distinctions.

Nubians generally believe that the government is to blame for the failure to solve the three items of the *Qadiya*. However, there are some Nubians who believe contrarily that the blame should not be thrown upon the government. This latter group argues that Nubians themselves have been passive towards attaining the items of the *Qadiya*. In other words, that when the flooding water of High Dam stabilized none of the emigrated Nubians happened to go to Old Nubia, even for the fishing business. Contrarily, it is people from Sohag (a city in Upper Egypt) who are fishing there.<sup>53</sup>

Nevertheless, Nubians from time to time wave the *Qadiya* which indirectly promotes their collective ethnic existence. However, when discussing issues concerning areas around the High Dam lake, the *Qadiya* turns to transform "Nubians" into a unit of victims and salvagers versus other Egyptians. Nubians



use a strategic philosophy to actively accommodate their *Qadiya* in hopes of attaining certain limits of a boundary within the large society as martyrs of Egypt's development. In the same fashion, a Nubian speaker voiced in a conference held in GNC Cairo on March 26th 1996 that

...Nubians are people of sacrifice. Nubians sacrificed their blood, souls, capital and land for the interest of the whole Egypt and Egyptians ... on Nubians' shoulders, on our [Nubians] grand fathers ruins electricity is made, water is uplifted and Egypt is put up.

Some literature on the topic has shown that some ethnic groups create from a catastrophe that occurs in their society and in a way or another the essence of that catastrophe can be used to transform and to upsurge forms of ethnic identity. Accordingly, Nubians have made the building of the High Dam and the submerging of Nubia as cores of their collective ethnic identity. In the *Mahgar*, Nubians sum up the tragedy of Nubia in the *Qadiya*. Besides that, they are aware of their "...critical position as a group which at any time can cause insecurity in the state," commented an informant.

Driving against the current of "violent ethnic identity", Nubians manage to play on a double line of identities (Egyptian and Nubian) in order to exploit the situation around them. Nubians apolitically use the *Qadiya*, which they assume to be a dangerous card if politicized. To compensate for not politicizing the *Qadiya*, Nubians pick up the *Qadiya* as a means of renewing and developing their ethnic identity and self-esteem. In the course of attaining an apolitical ethnic presence, the *Qadiya* generally is employed to mean demand for lost properties and this is apparent in Nubian lectures, vocabulary, arts and plays. In the same fashion, different groups of Nubians collectively on certain occasions plan for cultural activities to enforce their solidarity as Nubians. Therefore, Nubians



accelerate apolitical activities to cover their needs for keeping Nubianism.

The above issues related to the *Qadiya* are employed to illustrate and relate the point to social reality. Nubians in the *Mahgar* tend to adhere firmly to the *Qadiya* as part of Nubian identity and as a sort of struggle against assimilation. However, Adeeb argues that

...Nubians are mightily struggling, but lost a lot ...for Nubian identity was tied to Nile and in *Mahgar* there is no Nile ...and this prove Nubians are just attaching themselves to fragment of Nubianism ...

To some informants the *Qadiya el Nubiya* is not just confined to the above mentioned items but also includes the social changes Nubians in the *Mahgar* are facing. This tells that Nubian ethnic identity is scattered between national unity and local unity (just Nubians) for the sake of *el Qadiya*. This brings up what Sondra Hale (1973) terms "identity duality". In the same vein, nowadays a famous Nubian singer, is trying to accommodate identity duality, but the authentic Nubians consider that singer as a Nubian defector, for at the beginning the singer used to sing Nubian songs but nowadays changes the Nubian *selem* (or music tone). To relate the cases above, one can argue that they exemplify mostly the situation of contemporary Nubians born in *Mahgar*.

To emphasize the point, informants agreed that the generation of fathers who accommodate and assert double identity, Nubian and Egyptian, are also the ones who fluently speak Nubian languages. Unlike the fathers, the contemporary young generation include only a tiny group who do speak and understand Nubian languages but a majority that hardly understands or speaks them and which reveal their Nubian identity through nostalgia.

From the focus group, an informant points out that "...Nubians have to



voice their demands and rights and do away with their state of passiveness and fears toward their Nubian *Qadiya* and identity. That Nubians should stop mourning songs over Nubia for crying brings back nothing." Another point which the same respondent complains about is that Nubians should do away with what Shaaer raises as a point of owning land regarding the issue of Nubian identity. Furthermore, the informant says the loss of Nubia has a great part in shaping the identity affiliation of contemporary Nubians in the *Mahgar*. That is, most of them are not born in Nubia and such a person will not have a special relation to Nubia.<sup>54</sup> The same is true for a land from which a person eats. As Shaaer puts it, since Nubians lost their fathers' land, they, consequently, lost the essential ties of manners, values, norms, and even a link to ground that produces food for them. This leads some of them to be unconcerned about Nubia. Again, Shaaer went on saying,

...if a certain person eats from a certain land or field automatically s/he will be loyal to it and feel concern ...and this is true for Nubians who ...lived in Nubia. So those who are living or born in *Mahgar* ...become less loyal to Nubians' *Qadiya* because they do not eat from Nubia ...[fields]. Consequently, the issue is some Nubians born in ...[*Mahgar*] and who rarely visit Nubia, they are less loyal to Nubia ...or to Nubian traditions and identity ...such an individual may have less affinity to Nubia ...

In addition, the study viewed most of the cases studied as having posed a sort of metaphorical Nubian identity through employing the *Qadiya* and through relating it to the broader Egyptian national unity. Relating the issue of manipulating the *Qadiya* in a way or another to serve Nubian identity, some Nubian activists hold that it is part of the *Qadiya* to explain and foster Nubian social activities and the patterns of Nubians-Egyptian relationship. In an interview a respondent stated the following:



... that as Nubians intellectual, in order to achieve our *Qadiya*, our role is to establish a ground for trust and interaction with [other] Egyptians, [and] as Nubians elites, we call on policy maker that we Nubians are "peace loving people". We do not react politically. We love Egypt as any Egyptian else, and ready to serve its interest ...anywhere. But, treat us [Nubians] as we deserve and this may let our anger against you be calmed. Because Nubians are inactive volcano which can be active at any time and then react sooner or later ... Nubians are characterized to be peaceful, honest and loyal; consequently, our rights are taken and not repaid ...this is ... 'bad side of being a peaceful people', we are quiet for long time and this is why as Nubians intellectual ...are urging Nubians to be angry and not to abhor. As Nubians, we do not have a war dance as some other groups have. But since we are aware of others long-term plans against us, we better make a good use of what is meant to harm us. Nubians should make use of the media and have to talk to Egyptian elites and let them understand our *Qadiya* or case. As Nubians, we must put all our efforts in exposing our *Qadiya* to worldwide level. As individuals ... we want to let the world know that '... [Egyptians] are mishandling us under-a-cover [or as said in Arabic *Intum ta Aghduona dkkakeni*] and nobody knows ...

The mentioned issue of mishandling under-a-cover is meant to indicate the failure of compensation which, as said earlier, is a main issue of the *Qadiya*. Besides that, most informants agreed and pointed out their dislikeness of attaching some job(s) to Nubians as part of their identity. To relate the above statement to Nubians prior to the High Dam's construction, some were land owners--in Old Nubia; however, after emigration some of them became landless, in both Kom Ombo and not to mention some of them owning apartments in *Mahgar* and not lands. As Adeeb puts it, "...such a shift has led ...[Nubians] to stand as a group supporting their *Qadiya*". In illustrating the point the same informant states that "Nubians, for example, 30 years ago owned land, house and farm but now they own nothing and certainly their self-esteem is in question." Consequently, Nubians utilize their *Qadiya* in order to distinguish themselves as a "Nubian group" in the *Mahgar*.

In short, the *Qadiya el Nubiya* dominates a recognizable space in Nubian arts--for instance, novels, plays and poems. It is observed that authors of Nubian arts are either born or living in the *Mahgar*. In addition, the authors of Nubian



arts have succeeded in re-introducing and upsurging the Nubian *Qadiya* and tragedies in a fashionable manner, while also observing "national unity".

### Novels, plays and poems in upsurging Nubian identity

By the time the Nubian homeland was gradually being drowned, people were busy taking their properties and rescuing their children. My father was carrying his money's box, my aunt was running with her jeweller box, my uncle was gathering his cow. Others and I have had nothing materially, so we tried and decided to rescue Nubian culture, languages, arts, heritages and traditions ...

Hamza Edin<sup>55</sup>

el Jayar, Mddhad (1994: 13) says the following about Nubians

It is true they suffer throughout historic and geographic transformations ... But they are still affiliating themselves to this country and do not want to separate from it. Rumors are shot out against them, ...yet they wanted to go back to their roots ...migrated against time to Old Nubia which witnessed [their] Khususia or specialness of life [and arts] far from turbulence of crowded northern towns of Egypt ...

To relate the issue of upsurging Nubian ethnic identity, one agrees with most scholars on the topic and especially with Roosens (1989: 12) who points that the term ethnic group or identity often is used as a form of social organization that participants themselves make and employ certain "...cultural traits from their past, a past which may or may not be verifiable historically." Adding to that, though ethnic identity is a flexible situational condition and Eriksen (1992: 19) points out that it serves to "make sense of observed differences by making them *natural*" (italics in original). The cited arguments are true if applied to contemporary Nubian literature which strives to reveal the position of Nubians as an apoliticized ethnic identity.

A Nubian writer, Mohammed Khaliel Kaasim, is credited as the first Nubian novelist who wrote about Nubia and Nubians' way of life and their struggle against harsh environment and their social interaction in the *Mahgar*.



Kaasim's book *Shamanduora* (*Sail Mark*) (1968), is followed by Uduul's several books, of which the ones of concern to this study are *el Kuoshar* (*The Key*) (1992) and *el Nuoba Tatnafass Taht el Maa* (*Nubia is Breathing Under the Water*) (1993). There is a book by Idris Ali, *Dongola* (1991), and then Hassan Nur's *Bein el Nhar wa el Jabel* (*Between the Nile and the Mountain*) (1992).

Kaasim's style of narration in *Shamanduora* covers most of the socio-economic and cultural life in Gaata village and its relations with the rest of the Nubian villages. It is generally said that Kaasim's *Shamanduora* is a fountain head from which contemporary Nubian authors are quenched.

*El Kuoshar* discusses the tragedy of the flood that covered Nubia. The author tackles the theme of *Kuoshar* in both mythical and real manners. Further, Uduul pictures Nubian people who are Moslems as they divide among themselves into the camps of those who call for moving before flood time and those who believe in ancestral power and the "people of the river '*Nass el Nhar*'". Shortly, *Kuoshar* concludes with *Kabo* (a character of a homeless and parentless man who, according to the story, is from *Nass el Nhar*) saying that Nubians should not throw a human sacrifice into the Nile, or migrate northwards, but that they have to implement his suggestion of '*Moraaba el Qoua* Square of the Power' which is (1) Belief in God, that Nubians should be believers; (2) Unity, that Nubians should unite; (3) Education, they must educate themselves; and (4) Have capital, which they can get from contributing and saving, for instance, a pound on a pound.

Ali's *el Dongola* displays the role of a certain Nubian political activist, *el Shalalee*, who calls for an ideal unified state of Egypt. But after spending a long time in prisons, he returned to Nubia and then started to call for restoring the



Nubian Kingdom of Dongola. Moreover, Ali explains indirectly the historical relation between Nubia and north Sudan. In his book, *Dongola*, he pointed how some educated Nubian youth flee Egyptian military service and go to northern Sudan. In Sudan, some of them got Sudanese passports and visas to go to the Gulf states.

Nur, in his novel *Bein el Nhar wa el Jabel*, discusses the role of a *Sa'edi* fugitive who stayed among Nubians and turned out to be a source of corruption. On this point Nur agrees with Ali and Kaasim. Those authors in their different texts exemplified 'Saedi and/or Misri' person as the only source of corruption in Nubian villages.

Additionally, all these books have built on the theme or concept that Nubians are disadvantaged people; consequently, this asserts a form of an allegorical ethnic identity of "Nubians" in relation to how they tackle manmade flood, their emigration after loss of properties and their grandfathers' land, Old Nubia, and then the unquestioned exploitation of the government and unpunished *Qareeb* or foreigner. The ideal picture of Nubians and their community is equally true when informants compare Nubian life in the *Mahgar*, be it in Kom Ombo or in the cities.

Such an ideal picture of Nubia in novels and the 'special' status of Nubians in Egypt has made some Nubian writers vulnerable to media attack. In *el Shaab* newspaper (1993) and then in *Akhbar el Adab* (1994) and *Nisf el Duniya* (1994), it has been written that Nubian literature and its authors are calling for dismantling Egypt's national unity. The same assault reached a direct accusation of some Nubians as working for the separation of Nubia from Egypt, through



calling for "United Nations protection". In addition, fingers of accusation are also pointed at foreign countries as dealers in conspiracy against "national unity". Defensively, Dr. Osman Ali Salih, who is a Nubian Sudanese, commented in a conference held on the subject of Nubian stories in Cairo, 12th June 1994, that

if someone is allowed to defame national loyalty of ...[the Nubians], and if that same one is permitted to stab the affiliation and love of ...[Nubians] to this land and its people, that is particularly a temptation or (*fitna*) of accusing others in literature debate as separatists ...who attempt to tear down Egyptian ethnic fabric and national unity. It is really an exaggeration which a Sudanese folk-say termed as *el Shaffagh allati Qaddt el Makkana*, 'it is a pity which chop off the engine.'<sup>56</sup>

Another comment stated by an informant on attacks of 1994-95, on Nubian arts, stated that

...it was a naive attack, for it meant to politicize Nubians' literature ...though it is arts. Those papers criticized Nubian writers, and their works from a narrow point of 'Press Ideology'; for example, *Nasserian Paper* accused Nubians literature to be an "American conspiracy" against construction of High Dam which existed ever since. Today they wanted to reactivate the same notion that the Americans are plotting against national unity and are sponsoring "separatist" movement in Nubia. *el Shaab Paper* which is an Islamist paper value Nubian arts as a tasty meat of disunity and a Zionist strategy to create state of Coptics and of Nubians in Egypt ...these papers wanted to make "press boom" and get away with it. For Nubians' case as an ethnic and linguistic group in Egypt is undebatable hot topic. Anyway, unintentionally these papers in a way revive the calmed tragic emigration of Nubians, unpaid compensation for drawn land and dates trees ... They do not want us to write or be creative, rather they want to talk for us ...

The above quotation raises allegorically forms of a collective Nubian identity versus any others, or that of a newspaper.

Furthermore, next to Nubian novels are Nubian plays whose themes are similar to each other. Though it is recently formed, the Nubian theater gains attention of most Nubians in the *Mahgar*. Plays are written by Nubian authors and acted by young Nubians who were born in the *Mahgar*. At the moment, there are three Nubian plays" (1) *Nass el Nhar*, People of the River, (2) *el Sarrqha*, The Cry, and (3) *el Tuoffan*, The Flood.<sup>57</sup> The three plays in common present the dilemmas of some Nubians to accept the government's plan for emigration to the



north as well as the 10 piasters for a submerged palm tree and 25 piasters for a drowned house. Also, these plays dramatically show the tragedies of the Nubians at the time Nubia was destroyed by the High Dam's water. Above all, the authors of these plays did not forget the issue of unfair, or underpaid and unpaid compensation for immersed properties. From this point one can argue that Nubian plays visualize the Nubians' *Qadiya*. Consequently, the rekindling of such memory helps in reviving the collective ethnic identity.

Like Nubian literature is their written poems. In the course of conducting field work with the discussion group, Mohey Edin Shareef opened his briefcase and pulled out a booklet entitled *el Jhur wa Ahlaam el Uodh (The Injured and Dreams of Going Back)* (1996).<sup>58</sup> Shareef read some poems which described the time of *Tuoffans* (floods) and "mean compensation". Also, he described Nubian tragedies prior to and after the construction of the High Dam.

Succinctly, most Nubian poems are either narration and nostalgic homage to Nubia or lamentation on the emigration to the *Mahgar*. Generally, nearly all Nubian poems show how beloved Nubia is among Nubians, especially after the High Dam's water inundated Old Nubia.

However, reading Nubians' literature, anyone can feel that Nubians and Egyptians are different. According to Jennings (1995) and other scholars, tales and novels about Nubia mentioned that Nubians and Egyptians, as well as Nubia and Egypt, were two different people and lands in one country.<sup>59</sup> This is what till present distinguishes Nubians as a distinct group in Egypt. Relating Nubian literature to their historic and catastrophic events that occurred in Nubia, they turned to have *Khususia/special-ness* (as said by Uduul (1993), el Jayar (1994)),



which is based on "heritage, culture and issue of unpaid compensations". The issues of heritage and culture are engulfed allegorically in the broad issue of unpaid compensations as a sort of an ethnic identity which upsurges frequently whenever Lake Nasser is concerned.

Generally, Nubian literature is employed as a tool of reviving and keeping Nubian ethnic distinction. For it presents Nubian tragedies during and after emigration. Also, it explains the framework of collective Nubian identity and unity seeking their lost home but within the concept of national unity. Viewing the Nubian arts, the main theme of their plays and poems are the tragedy caused by the High Dam and its blocked water and then the issue of unpaid and/or under paid compensation for damaged houses, date trees and fields. An informant states that contemporary Nubian arts stand as a self explaining episode to what happened to Nubia and Nubians. Emphasizing the point, Nurab says that Nubian arts are a sort of documentation of the events and grievances which took place before and after the High Dam floods. In short, this is clear in most of the plays which expose the issue of compensations as a issue of the Nubian *Qadiya* to both Nubian and Egyptian audiences.

As pointed out at many places in the text, Nubians retain a sense of identity in relation to the *Qadiya* and, at the same time, they are exposing a collective identity as Nubians in the *Mahgar*. This is what Nubian arts, specifically poems, do. They mark a refusal to accommodate cultural aspects and socio-racial teasing from the host society and also make a rekindling of the identity. Then, they form a reply to critiques in some Egyptian newspapers against Nubian literature, as the issue of "special-ness" floats on the surface of Nubian relations



with Egyptians. Succinctly, this point will be elaborated in the objectives and activities of Nubian social organizations, the *Jamayaat* and the General Nubian Clubs in the diaspora.

### **Nubian social organizations<sup>60</sup>**

During their earlier history in the *Mahgar*, Nubians used to present their demands to authorities through a group of elders. In the days of the king in Egypt, some of the Nubian migrants who were working in the palaces used their personal relations and in Alexandria contacted Princes Omar Tusoon and Saeed Tusoon (grandsons of Mohammed Ali Pasha, founder of modern Egypt) in order to collect money for the formation of *Jamaiya el Nhadh el Nuobiya*, the Nubian renaissance association. This *el Nhadh* established primary and intermediate schools which are functioning till now. However, after 1952 revolution the intermediate section was rented by the Ministry of Education, while keeping its name, *el Nhadh*. Also, the primary school came under the supervision of the mentioned Ministry. In addition, the same *el Nhadh* association managed to set up a workshop for handicrafts.

Shaaer argues that the ring-leaders of Nubian activities in the *Jamayaat* and GNCs are mostly people who were not born in *Mahgar* but are those born, educated and brought up in either Old or New Nubia. In addition, most informants say that the difference between the *Jamayaat* and the GNCs is basically in terms of which state administration each is attached to (also, both *Jamayaat* and GNCs play role of mediator in solving tribal disputes or *Assabia* or tribalism conflicts). *Jamayaat* are registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs,



while GNCs are registered with the Ministry of Youth and Sport. There are technical differences and roles of Nubian *Jamayaat* and GNCs; however, some details about each of these social associations are explained below.

## **Jamayaat**

A credit should be dedicated to earlier Nubian migrants and their educated youths for managing to sow the seeds of communality and the creation of *el Jamayaat el Nubiya* (Nubian Associations). Like rural migrants to urban areas in the Middle East earlier, Nubian migrants to the *Mahgar* came up with the idea of having and forming a special place for their meetings. Consequently, *Jamayaat* have come to be sort of bodies that preserved each Nubian group's existence. Fortunately, people from a certain village form an association and then name it after their village.

Earlier in the *Mahgar*, Nubians migrants used to meet at coffeeshops prior to the formation of *Jamayaat*. By the end of the 1920s, *Jamayaat* started to exist in Cairo and then in Alexandria in the 1930s. In those days, the role of the *Jamayaat* was mainly to receive newcomers from Nubia and to hold funerals. Later on, came the generation born in *Mahgar* who managed to form Nubian *Jamayaat*. Further, some of this generation were educated in a school founded by *Mssbah el Nuoba*.<sup>61</sup>

Consequently, by the time Nubian *Jamayaat* were formed in many quarters, they flourished actively in presenting Nubians' existence.<sup>62</sup> Egyptians of the quarters have come to realize the existence of different Nubian groups. Informant Inas stresses the point, that "...some Nubian young people, usually at



evening (after finishing work), go to *Jamayaat* to meet their villagers--to get together as Nubians and chat ...". Certainly, such intimacy day after day breeds a sense of collective Nubian identity. According to Helen Miles, a reporter in *el Ahram Weekly* (1994), there are 44 Nubian social associations in Cairo.

Adelab says his father used to tell him let us go to Mbarakab *Jamaiya* whenever there is a funeral, *Farah* or wedding. Thus, Adelab came to know *Jamaiya* through frequent visits he and his father made to it. Accompanying his father started since informant's early childhood. In addition, he later learnt that most Nubians inhabiting *el Farahda* street in *el Laban* quarter, Alexandria, are from Mbarakab village and this is where Mbarakab *Jamaiya* is. Adelab, like most Nubians born in *Mahgar*, encountered his first interaction with Nubian masses in the *Jamayaat* when they are paying condolence or attending weddings. Later as adults, they registered as full members in their *Jamayaat*. Also at adulthood they are entitled to run for elections or membership of the "Council of Administration of *el Jamaiya*". Moreover, to be a member of the last mentioned committee in a *Jamaiya* as Adelab puts it, one must be from that particular group who won the *Jamaiya*. In addition, in the last couple of years it was only via tribal nomination or *Tazzkiya* with elders' approval or appointment that a person can be an executive committee member. Recently, in some *Jamayaat* the selection is done through an election, but the condition that one must be a Nubian from "X"village still holds.

The role and objectives of *Jamayaat* are to render service to people who belong to each village according to the *Jamayaat* names. For example, *Jamaiya* Tomas-wa-Affia serves Nubians who are people from Tomas-wa-Affia, and the



same is applicable for the rest of *Jamayaat*.

According to an informant, basic social activity of *Jamayaat* has always been facilitating the processes of receiving male mourners (in a funeral) and receiving of newcomers from Nubia.<sup>63</sup> Besides that, some *Jamayaat* have sport and cultural activities. For instance, in Alexandria, *Jamaiya Tuoshka* and *Jamaiya Mbarakab* offer their registered members and visitors table tennis and football and also arrange courses for secondary school students. Furthermore, in Alexandria, *Jamaiya Mbarakab* used to produce two magazines; *Mbarakab* and *Mbarakab el Ryaadi (Mbarakab Sport)* and most of issues discussed in them related to the Nubian *Qadiya* and identity. However, in Cairo, some *Jamayaat* confine most of its activities to serving funerals and have less involvement in sport activities, but others organize public social lectures and short courses for secondary school students.

In the same vein, the Nubian *Jamayaat* are like many other ethnic clubs--or regional clubs in Egypt. For a Nubian, the *Jamaiya* is a place where a person resorts to when depressed, lost and dizzy from the mainstream social and cultural environment stresses. According to an informant's personal experience, when he is depressed he resorts to *Jamaiya*; consequently, he feels his existence and importance. This point indirectly retrieves the *Jamaiya*'s main objective as an informant puts it, is "...to help Nubian villagers; for instance, Tomas-wa-Affia in their happiness and sadness ...besides that, in *Jamaiya* one can meet Nubians friends and relatives from "his" own village."<sup>64</sup> Consequently, *Jamayaat* have great roles in exposing villagers identity. In short, as informant Adeeb says, fathers used to send their children to *Jamayaat* to spend time there and to know



their Nubian village relatives.

An informant highlights other reasons that made Nubians involve themselves actively with the *Jamayaat*. As the informant put it,

...since most ...[Nubians] by then are not rich and can not afford visiting coffee shop. Because going to coffee shop obliges a person to buy tea ... [However], usually in *Jamaya* most Nubians... living nearby in the same neighborhood; consequently, we stay and sometimes overstay without someone to ask ...[them] "what can I do for you", or say, staying without paying for tea although by then there was no tea but recently there is tea.

In addition, one day the same informant visited a Cultural House in a city in the *Mahgar*. There, he happened to meet a friend. That friend invited him to take tea with him. The following day, the informant did not go back to that Cultural House, for he had no money to invite his friend. Apparently, in *Jamayaat* all are Nubians and do not care about taking tea or repaying what a friend buys.<sup>65</sup>

As cited above, there is Nubian closeness and intimacy in the *Jamayaat*. Consequently, one can argue that these social associations exemplify Nubian villages and are places where Nubians feel at home while in the *Mahgar*. An informant confirms the point, "...to date if a person failed to go to a *Jamaya*, he may feel home sickness ...". In short, as another informant puts it, the educated Nubian be they managers, after work, all turn to be normal personalities in those *Jamayaat*, and they sit down, chat, and drink tea with lay-persons.

### General Nubian Clubs (GNCs)

General Nubian Clubs (GNCs) are the social and cultural houses rented by Nubians in the *Mahgar* and are usually open during evening hours until midnight. All Nubians are eligible for the status of membership of the GNCs after registering as such. Furthermore, the formation of GNCs was quite different



than that of *Jamayaat*. According to Jebalee, later after the formation of *Jamayaat*, some educated Nubian youth managed to establish "Club of the Nubian Youth (CNY)" in Cairo and Alexandria. Moreover, CNY was mainly a club for sports and Boy Scout teams. Later on, that same CNY was updated to become the contemporary GNC all over Egypt. GNC in the *Mahgar* is for all Nubians regardless of village backgrounds. The roles of GNC can be summed up briefly as offering entertainment to its members and expressing Nubian views and demands.

According to Jebalee, the GNCs came to existence in the late 1940s. In Alexandria, an apartment in which the GNC there is located was donated to the Nubians by the governor of Alexandria.<sup>66</sup> The case was different in Cairo where the first GNC was founded in a building which collapsed in 1960--located near the Opera House at Attaba. After that building collapsed, the government rented out the present GNC near *Tahrir* Square.

GNCs are found nearly in all the major cities of Egypt as well as (informally) in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states wherever Nubian people are more than ten. Generally, a GNC represents a recognized Nubian body which offers and organizes social and cultural lectures and trips. For example, there is an Association of Nubian Heritage which used to organize lectures and exhibitions on Nubians antiquities and also revive Nubian self-awareness in order not to forget who they are. Further, GNCs have a great role in inducing Nubian youth towards their Nubian background.

In the same fashion, rehearsal of Nubian plays, music and teaching of Nubian languages are carried out in the GNCs. Briefly, GNCs are active in



disseminating the emerging Nubian collective ethnic identity in literature, cultural lectures and folkloric songs, which all introduce and rekindle the Nubian tragedy of the inundation and the *Qadiya*.

Besides that, the GNC in Cairo is a place where some Nubian youth, both females and males, meet. Consequently, one can argue that GNC is the socio-cultural nucleus of Nubian activities. According to Jaffrab and Adelab in the 1970s the GNC in Cairo produced a paper called *Akhbar el Nuoba* (News of Nubia). This paper was abolished by the government.<sup>67</sup> An informant argues that Nubian concerns, demands, rights and collective identity are revealed through the GNCs. Although GNC constitution states that each is an apolitical body and its roles and activities are mainly social and cultural ones; however, as cited earlier on March 26, 1996, the GNC in Cairo (the headquarters) organized a conference about development and investment of the emerging lands around Lake Nasser.<sup>68</sup> At the conference, a number of Nubians and Aswan parliament members, as well as some other Egyptians were invited. Those parliamentary guests voiced their support in favor of the *Qadiya el Nubiya* through urging the government to give Nubians priority in the emerging lands (of the Old Nubia) for it is theirs and they should be the first to benefit from the expected land and its development. Furthermore, Nubians at the conference presented the issue of Nubian "rights of obtaining the land and compensations," which date back to over 30 years ago. They said that until now the promised compensations, which were supposed to be paid to the Nubians after emigrating, are not paid yet to some Nubians, as well as the houses of *Muktarabiin* expatriates are not yet built.<sup>69</sup>

Like in the mentioned conference, GNC used to be a vanguard and a



representative of Nubian social and political stands. Moreover, the GNC objectives basically are to reveal, to make decisions, and to present Nubian demands to concerned authorities. Although GNCs are apolitical, in one way or another they assert the socio-political needs of members and render them a moral protection. In sum, the apparent reality informs that GNC, besides its apolitical constitutional stand, is a body which raises what a Nubian person in the previous mentioned conference called "Nubians right and not demands" to the state authority. Besides that, GNC, being a domain of expressing Nubian collective identity and demands, has its membership and activities open to all Nubians. However, the GNC's executive committee excludes female participation, although women members of GNC have the right to vote in electing a male to the executive committee.

### **Women's social associations**

Concerning Nubian women's associations, informant Mostapha points out that there are several branches of women's associations in Alexandria; for example, el Suosur, Dar es Salam, Abu ed Der, and Dewan. Most of these association meet on Thursdays to produce handmade items. In addition, these women's associations reported annually that any Nubian women members have to subscribe by paying 12 pounds. With the subscriptions, reasonable numbers of appliances, utensils, blankets and mattresses and other household items are purchased. These household items are meant for service at Nubian funerals and weddings; for instance, if in a certain Nubian family there is an occasion, the mentioned utensils would be brought and used free as part of the women's



contribution to that family. The informant reported that women's associations in Alexandria also donate money for the expenses of funerals and weddings.<sup>70</sup>

A marvelous accomplishment of *ed Derr* Nubian women's association took place prior to Ramadan month in 1996. During the period, this women's association organized a pilgrimage trip to Mecca. The trip included about 52 persons, including Nubian males and females.<sup>71</sup>

One of the informants mentioned that in the last five years there was no organization for Nubian women. However, it recently emerged that there are some initiatives encouraging female activities. In Alexandria, there are groups of "Nubian Productive Families" and nearly all Nubian families are contributing members. Moreover, women's activities in Alexandria include exhibitions of handicraft products and the organization of social trips and get-togethers as part of efforts for bringing together Nubian families.

According to Nurab, generally there are many obstacles facing a Nubian woman, although recently they are exposed to formal education. Still, a female is confined by male and traditional ties. A woman's daily life is regulated by an endless list of don'ts. Above all, a female is/was not allowed to go to *Jamayaat*. However, it is lately that she is allowed to visit GNCs and gain membership.<sup>72</sup>

In addition, other sources indicate that in the 1970s, there was a Nubian woman activist, Ms. Enab (a wife of an ex Nubian political activist), who toured around the world mobilizing for the tragedies of Nubian people in general. Then, there was a Nubian women's association with objectives to enlighten, educate and teach women handicrafts. According to Nurab, the Nubian women's association accommodates all Nubian women except the Arab-Nubian women. Since the



Nubian women's association was formed, all of its members are either Mattuki or Fadija women and it is the same up to date.<sup>73</sup> In short, an informant says, "Unlike Cairo is Alexandria, which in the early 1970s and up to the late 1980s witnessed the recognition of the Nubian women's movement. And its fruits are the women's associations in the country".



## Chapter Five

# Reflections and Discussion

### Fieldwork interaction

Outside in the field there is a sentiment. It is a sort of skeptical feeling concerning any foreign researcher investigating Nubians. A researcher may not easily get accepted in a Nubian community, but with some reservations. On the first field visit of the study, an informant talked to the interviewer broadly about the possibilities of misusing Nubian data for ill purposes. He went on talking about such things as the easy penetration of Egypt's ethnic fabric and national unity or indirectly urging Nubians to call for the formation of a separate Nubian state, which they (the Nubians) are not in need of. Later on, the same informant turned out to be a "socialist oriented" person, who had ideological worries and fears that the interviewer not be too naive and be used by "Others" (Westerners) to obtain data and information about Nubians and that he may not know what those "Others" are planning to do with such data.

Furthermore, the interviewer on the first visit to the GNC (Fall 1994) tried to communicate with some persons at the club in Arabic, but in vain. Those individual Nubians spoke in English, perhaps, because the interviewer introduced himself as a graduate student at the American University in Cairo. One of the persons the interviewer first met, said that they assumed the interviewer is an African or a foreigner and not a Sudanese. For Nubians, a Sudanese looks



similar to a Nubian and this is especially true for northern Sudanese. However, the interviewer was introduced to the famous Nubian musician, Hamza Eldin, who said the southern Sudanese are in some ways related to the Nubians' ancestors.

Later on, the interviewer managed to form friendships with some of Cairo's GNC members, and the latter informed him that southern Sudanese are facing the same predestination or fate as is the case for Nubians. Moreover, among Nubian males with relatively light colored skin the interviewer was highly welcomed into general discussions about the fate or disadvantage of such people in a state, and he was invited to weddings. Contrary was the case with black skinned Nubians, though the interviewer is black. Nevertheless, the presence of the interviewer in the GNC did not draw much attention.

In spite of the interviewer's little experience in Egyptian society, he discovered that many Egyptian Nubians (in the GNC) follow the "Islamic regulation" which prevents females and males from hand shaking, and especially with a foreigner or outsider. Above all, though the interviewer spent two years and a half during which he frequently visited the GNC and was taken by his Nubian friends to Kom Ombo on '*Eid el Kabeer/el Adha*,' (1995), he feels alien among them. This is because many Nubians intentionally avoid a non-Nubian when certain incidents surface in a discussion. The only advantage a black interviewer among Nubians can attain is that s/he may move around with Nubians and visit their club without raising an concern. This is contrary to the case for a white interviewer who, because of color, would be easily detected. Regardless of all that, Nubians have the sense of being different from the rest of the Egyptians



which they always show when describing themselves.

Also, in the field the ensuing incident occurred when an informant directed the interviewer in his behavior. Jaffrab, who is the informant, observed some points concerning the response of the interviewer to a certain Nubian person. The latter had asked if the interviewer is a Muslim. The interviewer's reply was intentional and it provoked that person to interpret that the interviewer is impious. Jaffrab, after shortly talking with the person in question, talked for a long time with the interviewer about how to deal and act as a pious person with Nubian Muslims, in particular, and with other Egyptian Muslims, in general. Otherwise, the interviewer will get no cooperation from the subjects, for as Jaffrab put it "...here in Egypt religious issues are much more respected ...and are followed by many, if not all, Muslims."

### **Allegorical responses**

The interviewer in the course of collecting data has observed that, due to the above cited interaction, most of the responses indicate, in a way, a sort of allegory.<sup>74</sup> Nubians in the *Mahgar* allegorically link their ethnic identity to the ancient history of Nubian civilization in order to keep themselves distinct from the rest of the society. Such expression is a result of living in an environment that has a number of uncertainties, says an informant. This assertion is based on their emigration as a result of the High Dam's water overtaking Nubia, which led them to call themselves victims or *dhaiya* of Egypt's development.

Furthermore, an observer can detect the existence of allegorical phrases in Nubian songs and of allegory in other art work. Their wedding parties and the



non-wedding songs they chant combine the Nubian identity with Nubian demands. This can be alluded to further in the wording of songs and poems which always enhance Nubia and Nubians as having been victims of the High Dam, redeemers of Egypt's development. As cited earlier, in their art expressions in novels, songs and poems, Nubians narrated how mean the compensation was. This in a way is similar to what Roosens (1989: 97) points out about Huron villagers, where the issue of land usually "symbolized the integrity of the group, just as a 'fatherland' does for many nations ...[and specially, when all] had already been taken away ...in the sense, [it is] an irreplaceable *cultural element* of the group." Adding to this point, one can say that it exposes an allegorical "identity."

One more argument is that some of the directed questions which have captured respondents' perceptions about their living in the *Mahgar* have made their responses refer indirectly to the Nubian and other Egyptian ethnic relation. Moreover, they commented at the end of answering by saying, "*Inta Fahim/Fehemtane*" which is to say "you understand that" or "you understand me or try to understand the hidden meaning." Such responses made the interviewer interpret parts of the collected data as allegories in upsurging, presenting and reviving ethnic identity. Also, that same ending two words "*Inta Fahim/Fehemtane*" can be a way of talking, generally among the Egyptians.

Taking into consideration the sensitivity of Nubian identity in Egypt and the manipulation of media and policymaking, one also took some answers as allegories. To emphasize the argument, Lavie (1990) says that an allegory tells a story to convey a lesson or experience of a certain group in a collective manner.

Allegory, ... is a fragmentary form of inscription simultaneously serving two purposes -- poetic expression, and didactic-political lamentation of the ...past, now



almost disappeared but to be reincarnated at some point in the eternal future ... It is ...a ...symbolic representation of a moral and political kind ...healing the gap between the present and the disappearing past ...without interpretation [or with host] ... Allegory combines the parts to form a consistent whole ... It salvages the ruins of the past by using 'figural language' ... to fuse them artistically into a unified story (Lavie, 1990: 29--30).

Like the case of the Nubians is that of the dilemma of Mzeini identity as interpreted by Lavie who claims they cannot maintain the Bedouin identity beyond the fragments incarnated in allegory. However, one can argue that both subjects "were disenfranchised on their own land by continual ...occupations ... [their] paradox of identity rarely surfaced in ordinary daily conversation, but if it did, the conversation quickly turned into a heated debate" (Ibid: 39).

Further, Lavie points out that,

Mzeini women and men struggle to preserve their ...identity by trying to sort out their lives experience ...in order to reconstitute, at least temporarily, their own tradition as tribesmembers ... This reconstitution of tradition salvages ...identity from the cultural infringement ... (Ibid: 315).

Certainly, the above quotation in a way tells a situation which Nubians face; furthermore, Egypt's socio-political environment is directed to emphasize issues that can promote national unity, but issues related to a particular group are disallowed. Joel Fineman, who is quoted in Lavie (1990: 315), explains such a situation when he noted that "allegory seems regularly to surface in critical or polemical atmospheres, when for political ...reasons there is something that cannot be said." This statement supports, in many ways, how Nubians metaphorically upsurge, change and reveal meanings of identity while talking about the Nubian *Qadiya*.

In a similar manner, Roosens argues that,

It is possible that an ethnic identity will be assigned a comprehensive role in certain circumstances. In South Africa, for example, ethnic identity determines a series of identities in the social, political, cultural ...sectors. Because of one's ethnic identity, one is enclosed in some realities and simultaneously excluded from



others. But ethnic identity may have no significance. In certain types of society, individuals may, for their entire lives or for very long periods, assign only limited value to, or may ignore altogether, what would theoretically be their ethnic allegiance, and their social environment can support them in this [or otherwise] (Roosens, 1989: 16).

In almost the same manner, Wad-Ezzba states that

as we [Nubians] have agreed we are Egyptians but we are ...special from the rest in some ways. At the inception we were known for our honesty and trustworthy and that is the way we were brought up ...for example, we are advised not to cheat or be dishonest, not to steal others properties, and if we get any valuable item on ground we must hold it safely and give it back to its owner, also if we enter a house our eyes should be fixed on the ground even though that house is inhabited by a bachelor ... However, s/he who is educated in a such manner will always be honest, respect the elders ...[and this is a Nubian].

### Dualities: Nubians and Egyptians

According to Al-Saamak, author of *Aqalliyyaat Bayan el Uruuba wa el Islam* (1990), the ethnic unity in Egypt was 96%; this could emphasize what Fernea (1973) mentioned when he wrote that "Nubians and the Egyptians are in many ways a single people, sharing the all-important fact of a commonality ... Surely, as the years pass, the Nubian ...will come to share even more with the Egyptian majority." To relate the last cited arguments to the data collected for this thesis, there are those patterns of similarities, but also there are patterns of ethnic dissimilarities and identity duality.

Reviewing Nubian life in the *Mahgar*, one can argue that it shows Nubians' experience and a double-faced allegory of their ethnic existence. To stress the point, Nubians, on the one hand, are part of the Egyptian community. On the other hand, they are reviving a sense of "being Nubian" through literature, songs, plays and even in their clubs, where it is hard to find a non-Nubian Egyptian. This thesis concludes with the notion that Nubians have strategically absorbed themselves into the larger society but not totally.



The GNC (as cited in the text) is an active Nubian body enhancing their identity, and it held a workshop on the first Nubian film. The title of the film is *fii al-oshuq wa-al-safar* or *(In Love and Travel)* and was written by a Nubian novelist whose name is Ibrahim Fahmi. Members of the Nubian association for keeping Nubian heritage directed numerous critiques against what they say has been misrepresented about Nubian tradition and behaviors in the film (Eman 1994). Also, a point of clarification was made on the issue of whether there are Nubian arts or not. However, there is general agreement that there are Nubian arts that are quite unique from their counterparts--the Egyptian arts. However, putting a clear cut line between the two groups, Nubians and Egyptians, is only apparent in some sorts of music and songs that each has and that contribute to how they separately define themselves.

In the same fashion, it is argued by informants that since most weddings invitees are young males and females who are nearly all born in the *Mahgar*, the songs lead them to contemplate what they did not experience. Further, this can be valued as a challenging revealing of ethnic identity--as in Adeeb's words, that "...oh you *Guorbattiya*, Nubians are here and are existing and did not become extinct or absorbed ...". Although most of those young people at weddings do not speak or properly understand Nubian languages, yet they reveal their affinity to the Nubian identity.

Besides that, Nubians are fond of reflecting on manners, behaviors and attitudes as major elements of their identity. Many respondents agreed that average Nubian persons in terms of manners are relatively better than their counterparts among the Egyptians. Indeed, in the course of answering what



makes a person Nubian, a grown up Nubian woman who is a relative to informant Annttar says,

...a Nubian is a peaceful human-being ...is laborious, kind, honest and is loved by all ... A Nubian does not identify with violence ...among Nubians there are no violence-lovers ... A non-Nubian who happened to live in Nubia will reject violence; [consequently,] ...become like a Nubian ... This is true of a foreign infant born and raised in Nubia, will drink from Nubian state of peacefulness. That child growing up will never harm any human-being ...or beat people ...these features Nubians adopted them from the father of all Human-beings, Adam who harm nobody. A Nubian never hates a foreigner, but a Nubian ...views a foreigner as a brother or sister in Adam ... A Nubian is different in many ways, they are honest, humble, loyal and trustworthy ...

In the same fashion, informant Mostapha states that, "Nubians, with their manners, are the roots of this country and its origin ...Nubians were Egyptians before any Egyptian was born on this land ...Nubians are the indigenous people of this land and civilization." However, says Ariis, "*El Nuobi el Saah* (or a prefect Nubian) is like a rare currency ...is equipped by Nubian manners and behaviors. That is why the socio-cultural changes of the urban environment will have less impact on him/her."

Najwa says, in defining and presenting image(s) of Nubians, that generally a Nubian is generous or *Shham*. A Nubian, especially a male, is loyal to what his parents wanted and he usually devotes himself to their demands and words and never acts against what his father or mother wishes, even in the case of marriage. He will marry the girl his parents recommend. In agreement with Najwa, it is observed that Nubians prefer to be loved and to love others and do not want contested issues to emerge on the surface of their social and ethnic relations.

As in Umm Ezzba's words that a Nubian person is the one who abided with Nubian traditions and customs alongside the Egyptian mainstream culture. She says, "...a Nubian woman is modest and is not like women of this *Balad* (this



country). And among Nubians an elder is an elder. That is, an older person among Nubians deserves respect and his/her words should be tolerated by younger people; consequently, a young Nubian remains so in the presence of an elder and has to oblige and fulfil the elder's words."

Adeeb further commented that "a Nubian can still be a Nubian, if s/he still is living and having ties with Nubia; for example, speaks the language, keeps the Nubians' heritages and values ...". In line with the above words another informant says, "...Nubian is a person born to Nubian parents and is a person who can speak the language(s), ...attend Nubian funerals and weddings, is honest, and always in the company of other Nubians." Nurab states that contemporary Nubians are those who think Cairo is better than Nubia. For example, this type wanted to stay and buy an apartment here in the *Mahgar*, for they think that Nubia is already sunk under water and there is no hope for it. The offspring of this group will consequently perish as Nubians and will become Egyptians.

However, a group of educated Nubians, who know their role towards Nubian communities and *el Qadiya el Nubiya*, always give the advice that "...we must go back to rebuild our fathers' land." There are Nubians aware of the Nubian *Qadiya*, and they do thrust themselves to participate in Nubian social activities. They also tour the world presenting the *Qadiya*, as well as discussing Nubians life in Egypt.<sup>75</sup> An informant stated that "a Nubian is a person with a long breath (*Nafas Taweel*), that is s/he can endure pains and wait for a long time in order to reach the end".

According to literature and collected data, Nubians in the *Mahgar* generally define themselves as Nubians and consider themselves as special case in the



country. They do not say they are Kenuz (Mattuki) or Fadija (Kissim), but are Nubians. However, usually they introduce themselves as a Nubian from a certain village. The point is emphasized by Fahim (1983: 7) who wrote that Fadija and Kenuz "usually identify themselves as Nubians ...", although there are basic linguistic differences among them as cited earlier. An informant confirms this issue, as follows:

...we are all Nubians, be Fadija or Kenuz ...but the official documents say we are Egyptians, and yet we will never forget our great grandfathers who were Nubians and our land. We adopt what can help us live within this community although, we suffered and sacrificed a lot ...

Fahim highlighted the point with an "...educated Nubian provided a diagnosis for such common feelings when ...stated that ...fellow Nubians suffered from what ...is termed 'a dam complex'" (Fahim 1983: 31). According to the same author, the first dam forced Nubians to leave their "beloved" land and seek work in the "unfriendly" cities where they never felt at home. But the second dam was a total curse which ended a life-style that satisfied their basic needs and gave them peace and happiness. This point agrees with most of what informants reported about the social and ethnic relations they have in the *Mahgar* while trying to keep their Nubian manners, identity and behavior in hopes not to adopt those of the host.

The picture of Nubians as some respondents say that such features were highly represented and kept before Nubians exodus to the north and somewhat is still practiced in New Nubia. However, as Shaaer puts it that Cairene Nubians are not keeping the soul of Nubian manners, which in turn keeps the good features of Nubian identity. That is to say, there are some Nubians who fall victims to their life expectations in the *Mahgar*.



In the Old Nubia, an informant mentioned that trustworthy and loyalty are inherited from fathers and mothers; in addition, the size of a village and numbers of people made the issue of honor and trusting each other a must. Consequently, a person can not lie or even steal another's property, for villagers know themselves. This is why Nubians believe they are so honest as is known about them.

Adeeb puts a counter argument to the issue of manners and behaviors and its relations to identity upsurge and transformation that "trustworthy is not just don't steal, rather it means a lot; for example, tidiness, and carefulness in whatever one is supposed to do. Also, it means not to steal a look at X's wife or sister(s), take good care of a neighbor's child". According to respondents that contemporary Nubians are not like their grandfathers, certainly, they are not as honest as their fathers, and the same is true for Nubian children born in the *Mahgar*, who will not be as their fathers. Such changes of attitudes and cultural values occur as a result of losing the land and then growing up and adopting other ways of life.

Further, some Nubians went on that nowadays they overcome the complex of inferiority. In the same vein, Ibrab voices out that the sense of being less than an Egyptian is dying away. To emphasize the point Ariis confirms that there are "...no social harassment or teasing, the only difference between Nubians and Egyptians are that the former do not trust the latter." The feeling of insecurity as one can argue has come about when Nubians were teased for their skin color; for example. As a flash back, Jaffrab says that some of the first Nubian migrants to *Mahgar* felt harassed and then absorbed. Later, came a generation who are



born specifically in 1940s in Alexandria and Cairo, who launched into education. It is this generation of the 1940s who woke up and went beyond their Nubian self-disdain and searched for enhancing and upsurging and changing the Nubian identity. Moreover, Adeeb states that

...some of this generation did not satisfy with just equality and self esteem, for they Nubians have stayed too long in the stead of being ... undermined. As a counter reaction, some of them inflated themselves and then turn to look down up on other Egyptians. For example, whenever the very generation is called as a berberi, cynically they reply that the other are *Guorbattiya* ...

On the one end, the same informant commented that Nubians started to exaggerate about being better than "other Egyptians." On the other end, Ibrab says Nubians are known generally in the *Mahgar* for their decent conducts, manners and behaviors and such attitude is not limited to the Nubians. Yet, one of the discussion group referred to the existence of identity duality and the dilemma of Nubians or Egyptians, due to its novel upsurge. Informant Mohab, from the discussion group, is pro the Egyptian Nubian identity and not the Nubian Egyptian one. He argues that Nubians are first of all Egyptian citizens. Later, he says that Nubians are minor linguistic groups in Egypt. In his comments, Mohab realized the effects of who he really is after he passed through indoctrination in a history class in the intermediate school. In the second year of intermediate school, as he recalls, inscribed in the textbook and said by history teacher was that Egypt is one homogeneous society having no minorities. As a person arguing with himself, Mohab refutes the nonexistence of minority group(s) in Egypt. He acknowledges that Nubians are minority in terms of language they speak, as well as they are Egyptians.

Contrary to the above words, Adeeb says, "...no ...[he is] first a Nubian



and then Egyptian ...". The informant believes that he has been born into a Nubian family and he acquired some of *el Mahgar* social norms, but being a Nubian does not conflict with his Egyptian identity. For instance, the informant reports that he fought in the October war of 1973 sincerely for Egypt's sake against Israel and yet he is a Nubian. Adeeb says "...I'm like any Egyptian fighting the war; however, at tea break, we feel as Nubians ...". To illustrate the point such a shift occurs spontaneously, the playing to and from Egyptianized and Nubianized identities. Furthermore, the informant went on saying that if "...any person or state wanted to take away our Nubianism, be that Egyptian, Sudanese or Arab League, we will fight for the sake of Nubian identity, not because we are against Egypt, but to protect our identity."

In the same fashion, Adeeb and Jaffrab argue that because of Egypt's affiliation at larger levels, Nubians are Arabs and also Mediterraneans, but first of all they are Nubian Egyptians and not Egyptian Nubians. According to Uduul (1993), because of Egypt's wider regional affiliations, a Nubian has her/his own feelings and *Khususia* which an Egyptian does not experience or understand; and regarding such feelings, an average Arab or Mediterranean fellow will not understand. Therefore, that is why Nubians are sensitive about their Nubianism; and they are less willing to exchange that for being either of the previous listed label of identities. Firstly Nubians are Nubians and then comes whatever identities. But the contrary will be rejected. This is why others are/were accusing Nubians of betraying national unity and some used to charge that Nubians are separatists.

In addition, Uduul says that there are individuals who do not want to see



Nubians as Nubians see themselves. They are against cultural diversities and falsely portray a homogeneous society. An informant commented that in the trap of the last mentioned group fall some Nubians who are little aware of what is Nubian history and their *Qadiya*. Highlighting a moderate opinion in sorting out why being a Nubian first matters, Mostapha affirms that in terms of Nubian-Egyptian relations,

...We do not dislike ...[Egyptians], but we have *Wuod* (the affection), that is, if a Nubian happened to know any person and made a conduct with, such relationship will abide by that Nubian in his/her life "expands" ...for a Nubian ...never betray a friend(s). The *Wuod* in Nubians' context means to have friendship from time of introduction until one is dead. But among *Guorbattiya* the *Wuod* must be for a hidden purpose or interest. Consequently, most if not all of Egyptians social relations demises by the time there is no, say, common interest. For instance, if I'm (said the informant) a teacher at X school and have relationship with other teachers there, by the time I'm retired or transferred to other school, that relationship will be over.

Like valuing the importance of friendship, manners, and of being first Nubian, most Nubians value their wedding parties as an ideal Nubian-friendly atmosphere, as well as a language class where the younger generation learn Nubian languages. Singers are teachers and their songs the syllabus. In the same vein, a respondent commented that, after a period of over 32 years and regardless of changes which happened in time and place as well as in their lives, Nubian songs at weddings manage to accomplish a common ground of inter-tribal ties and sympathies in the *Mahgar* for the Nubian migrants to Cairo and Alexandria. Since most of their songs are either in the Fadija or Kenuz languages, the meanings are not known at times (to a monolingual Arabic-speaking Nubian). However, it is observed that most Nubians manage to know the meanings of these songs. Above all, for those who do speak the languages and those who do not, Nubian songs are symbols of "we are Nubians" or/and of ethnic identity.



As most informants explain, those songs have almost the same theme of recalling for Nubian memories that the *Mahgar* is not their home. They should go back even to history and tell the world that they are offspring of ancient Nubian kings and queens. Indeed and apart from Nubian weddings in the *Mahgar*, it is observed that songs create a collective identity for Nubians; for example, at a Fadija wedding a Kenzi song will be sung, and the opposite is true for Kenuz. Moreover, as an informant puts it, when dancing and listening to a Nubian song like *el Heggra el Murra* or *Fakhuor-anna*, a person feels his/her existence as a Nubian. As reported in a discussion group, it is Nubian weddings from which most of those born in *Mahgar* sip their first identity and knowledge about Nubia.

From this juncture, it is necessary to mention again the importance of Nubian songs. As an informant put it, Nubian songs seem to have been a major and old way of self-expression and have been used as a Nubian weapon. The songs create a sense of collective and unified identity for all Nubians. However, alongside the songs in Nubian languages there are some Sudanese Arabic songs. It was observed that Sudanese songs have a sort of popularity among Nubian respondents. The existence of Arabic songs has some reasons. First, most Nubians listen to Sudanese Arabic songs because of their musical rhythm. Secondly, as cited earlier, the youth who do not know Fadija or Kenuz listen to the Arabic songs, while some of them denounced their Nubian language. According to Jennings, she heard Nubians saying; "Arabic is a good language, while Nubian is a bad one, or that in fact, Nubian really isn't a proper language at all, but merely a dialect '*rotana*'..."(Jennings 1992: 145). In agreement with



Jennings, most interviewed respondents and members of the focus group accept the "invalidity" of Nubian languages [as languages].<sup>76</sup>

Considering what reality a tongue tells and, also, that Nubians are known for their fanaticism to their languages, yet a keen observant may note that the languages they speak and most of the names they have are influenced by Arabic. For instance, the contemporary Nubian languages--specifically, among the younger generation born in the *Mahgar*--have many Arabic words, and the Arabic influence is easily apparent. Edinab confirmed the point, saying that there are a lot of Arabic words being Nubianized. However, since language is a tool of assimilating to another culture, and as said that if an influential culture and language such as Arabic is in an interaction with "weak cultures" as those of Africa, the weakest will automatically dance to the melody made by the strongest.<sup>77</sup> Here, the cited point of view seemed vigorous. But there is the necessity for knowing the counter-influence of the weak culture. Obviously there is some, be it positive or negative. There could be a positive relation in terms of Nubianization of some Arabic names and words and negative in terms of full Arabization of Nubian male and female names. Indeed, Arabic names are rapidly replacing Nubian ones (although it is relevant that many of the Arabic names are Moslem names).

In the *Mahgar*, as argued by respondents and members of the focus group, Nubians are losing their language. In the same vein, Adeeb says,

... Nubians who refused to migrate ... still are reserving their languages and Nubianism, but those who accept to migrate are not but much little Nubians or *Msikh* (*disfigured*). The categories of *Mahgar* Nubians, apparently most of them are unable to speak fluently Nubian language, they do not have land as well as they lost the Nubian values and manners. Consequently, they are disfigured Nubians or *Msikh Nuobi*.



Furthermore, some Nubians still feel concerned about the continuation of Nubian languages while some are not. For example, it is observed that some Nubians, in their houses, communicate among themselves in Nubian language as well as in Arabic, but others use only Arabic. This, in turn, breeds a chance of acquiring bilinguality among the first group and monolinguality among the second; however, as generally observed those monolingual Arabic speakers seem to be many among Nubian youth. As a result, here comes a worry among Nubian activists concerning the issue that Arabic language and identity among Nubians are rapidly reshaping the present and future generations.

Based on fieldwork and collected data, this study suggests some areas of further researches among its subject group, as well as the larger Egyptian society. First, an area that needs to be probed into more deeply is the concept of ethnicity and nationalism and how Egyptians maintain them. Secondly, the impacts of the High Dam on Nubians' and other Egyptians' ideas of national unity and the expectations of and for Nubians need more attention. Thirdly, the origin of the contemporary Nubians is an interesting question to be investigated. Then, fourthly, in Alexandria the interviewer with the help of some informants came across a group of people called *Ranggo*. The Nubians say the *Ranggo* are the offspring of slaves; meanwhile, the *Ranggo* call themselves Nubians. In *el Wafd* newspaper (May 1996), it was reported that the *Ranggo* are people of African origin and are called as such because of their musical instruments. If the *Ranggo* are descendants of an African slave army of Mohammed Ali Pasha, their relation and affiliation to Nubians deserve a research.

Finally, Aswan as a major city in Upper Egypt as well as a close urban



center to the Nubian resettlement at Kom Ombo is study considered by this study as a promising field for further researches.

In conclusion, this study has explored the issue of Nubian identity as expressed among older and younger Nubians living outside of their flooded homeland in urban quarters of Alexandria and Cairo, *Mahgar*. The results show changes in how they express their identity, including the existence of contradictions and some mild disagreements. Although not stressed in the analysis, some of the changes in the Nubian identity reflect general changes taking place in the wider Egyptian society. However, most of the Nubians interviewed would probably see the changes as specific to them and their Nubianism--as, in fact, these changes have been presented in this thesis.



1. For further account see Arkell, A. *A History Of The Sudan From The earliest Times To 1821* (1961: 177), The Athlone Press. Rouchdy, A *Nubians And The Nubians language In contemporary Egypt* (1991: 1), Leiden.
2. Nubia land was inundated by High Dam blocked water which covers 320 kilometer southern Aswan and 180 kilometer of northern Sudan. This drown land is Nubia villages which are 40 villages (Hamid 1973).
3. The book is issued by the National Ministry of Guidance and Culture.
4. In the central Nubia, Korosko lives in the tribe called *el Wauwaat*, and *el Erist* in Tomas, *el Ayam* in Armanh and Buhn, *Saatao* around Tushuki, and then nomads *Mdjao* who are found in Sudan and also Lower Nubians.
5. Egyptian's late president Gamal Abdel Nasser was the first to refer to tribal people south of Aswan as Nubians. In addition, some of those groups are not only located in Egypt, there are also Nubians in Sudan. Viewing the three Nubian groups in terms of language they speak, Kenuz and Fadija speak related Nubian languages whereas the Arab Nubian only speak Arabic.
6. Among the indigenous name of Nubians groups: is Tuonoki group and those who came from Libya or West. Among the contemporary Nubians people, this group is rarely pointed at by Nubians themselves. It is not more than a name.
7. It was said that *Bani Kenz* Arabs were migrants from the *Nadj* desert. Also, Burckhardt in his *Travels in Nubia* (1822), pointed out that Nubian *Nasrallah* of Mbarakab village, *Abu Huor* were descendants of males of *Bani Kanz* Arabs. According to Hamid (1973: 29) those of *Dhameed* village are/were sons of *el Baqadidi*, who descend from Iraq, Baghdad. Further, Hamid points out that *Kenz el Dowlla* was entitled to be Ameer for he managed to capture an outlaw against the Fatimid ruler in Nubia.
8. Adelab reported that he has his family tree documented in Egyptian *Wazzaraat el Awqaf* and that written family tree traced Adelab family to be descended from Arabia peninsula.
9. In addition, an informant on the cons group claimed in comparison how filthy of certain numbers of men, who went for bath at sea shore contaminate most. if not the whole sea's water! The comparison is meant to illustrate that though Arabs overrun Nubia, yet they can not change Nubian origin into their own. This is assumed to have taken place according to cons group. Besides that, in the old Nubia, Nubians in general and with exception of Nubianized Arab have value to maternal uncles, in other words uncles are the ones who will be inherent by his sisters sons (check Jennings 1995).
10. See Fahim 1983, Rouchdy 1991, and a book entitled *The Migration of Nubians* ((1964) published by Egyptian Ministry of Social Affairs) for full account of Nile damming southern of Aswan.



11. Nubians' literature was hotly debated on *el Shaab Newspaper* no. 800: Nov. 1994, in an article written by Makkawi, Huda titled "*el Udaba Yanaddidun biel Mukhattat el Amrikee li lhey el Naarat el Qawmiya bi Misr*" *The writers Negate the American Plan to Revive Nationalism sentiments in Egypt*. For further elaboration on the issue see Dr. Ted Swedenburg paper about Nubians and expressive culture (1994, n.d.).
12. Dr. Ibrahim, Sa'd Edin is a professor of political sociologist in the American University in Cairo.
13. Title of Freid's book is *Ahal el Salam wa el Nil/People of The Nile and Peace*. Furthermore, Jaffrab a Nubian activist (and an initiator of a group for collecting data about Nubian) he said that, before the building of High Dam and even afterwards Nubian live in a margin of social life in Egypt. Further, they were administered by whip. Jaffrab, says in those old days the Egyptian Governor of Aswan was seen as a spiritual father of Nubia and at times he whips to instruct the natives. However, Jaffrab adds that such treatment from Egyptian governor resulted in deep fear among Nubians of central government. But recently, he went on, in mid 1980s and early 1990s Nubians started to emerge to the surface of Egyptian community they are getting out of their shell. *el Qadiya Nubiya* can be summed up into failing of governments to paid compensations for natives' lost properties.
14. Furthermore, it is reported in *el Wafd Newspaper* (May: 1996), that there is a group known by *Ranggo* living in *Areesh el Abeed*, Ismaeliya, and assumed to have come from sub Sahar Africa. In Alexandria, Nubians used to call *Ranggo* "slaves" and believe that the *Ranggo* are coming from southern Sudan. But, *Ranggo* called themselves Nubians; however, they are rarely seen or associated with Nubians.
15. Both obstacles have affected this study negatively; for example, in the case where a man must supervise an interviewed woman. It is observe that he from time to time influences the answers of interviewed woman.
16. See Rouchdy 1991 for further explanation on this topic.
17. In the field the interviewer manage to reach each respondent through chains of references. For example, a certain informant knows an X respondent and the interviewer is referred and/or introduced to the second and so on. This type of references link help interviewer not only in Cairo, but also in Alexandria. This is similar to what Dr. James Toth have talked about in his lecture on methods of conducting a field research March 1996.
18. Generally, Nubians are known to sit in a collective manner, in diaspora they live together, in the Gulf state they stay the same. Nubians endure themselves and never expose each other defects. An informant reported that in Saudi Arabia, as Nubians sharing the same apartment, any of them can bring Ramadan food for all and will not ask the other to repay. Such mode of paying and helping each other continued even if there is someone who can not buy anything for the group. However, in the Gulf states, Nubians and Saedis used to share



- apartment as well as Egyptian Nubians and Sudanese. But those of Ismaeliya, or Delta generally do not stay with Nubians. It is thought that the Delta people are hypocrites and can speak against and can betray their friends. Sense of collectivity is apparent among Nubians in the GNC and especially in their invitation for tea. A Nubian can not betray.
19. Also there are some Nubians in Suez.
  20. A logo of Nubian's conference in Alexandria is "The Nubians reject minority label".
  21. Five informants in Cairo reported that the present Minister, el Tantawi, of Egyptian State Defence is a Nubian from Abu-Sembil, and a young Nubian man from that same village affirm that the Minister of Defence is his uncle. But, according to Cairo's informants that the Minister deny his affiliation to Nubian origin, rather he associated himself with people of *el Sharqiya/Eastern Egypt* where his mother is from.
  22. Those youth imitate the way Hippies and Punks make their hair and also the way Rap musician fashion their hair. For example, they tie their hair in a pony tail at the back of their heads. This is not Nubians way of hair fashion, said respondent Shaaer.
  23. I mean by "traditional barriers" in the text, the Nubian norms, customs and values that seclude women participation at public places. However, in the current study it is observe that some Nubian women in Mahgar have access to voice their opinions and suggestions, in spite of the traditional regulations. Further, these women either use their social network or some males relatives to disseminate their views.
  24. Focus group according to Dr. Nicholas Hopkins is a professor of anthropology at the American university in Cairo. Hopkins gave a lecture "Sudan Cultural Digest Project (SCDP)" team members on research methodology and he talked about "discussion/focus group" (by then the writer is one of the SCDP team who attend) or it is a group that a researcher throws his/her research question on them for discussion.
  25. Uniform wear by Nubians women, Kenuz group put on *Shuogga* which usually covers whole body except the head, while Fadija wear *Jarjar*. In Embaba most Nubian females put on their traditional cloth, except young ladies.
  26. *el Qadiya el Nubiya* is the question of compensation that are not fully paid and also the houses of *Muktarabiin--expatriates* which are not yet completed. Besides that, some Nubians are claiming that they want to return and live in places where the High Dam is not any more covering.
  27. *Mushahra* literary can be defined as a month related to certain taboo(s). Also there are certain things Nubian women used to bserve, otherwise misfortune will occur.



28. The types of humble jobs as an informant states, are/were what made rest of the society view Nubians not more than persons who labor at lower levels. Recently and according to (Nubian Kenuz magazine, Alexandria) Zharaat Mariya/Mariya's Follower Magazine (1987), that the Egyptian media misrepresent the image of Nubians. Mohammed Omer wrote an essay titled "An Audience Has an Opinion" as a reply to what a famous Egyptian actress said in one of her films "slave Nubian".
29. Shaaer is a graduate of el Azhar university. After graduation is appointed as an Imma of mosque in Aswan. Now, he is working as an accountant at a tourist office, Cairo.
30. Nurab states that Nubia and Nubians in contemporary Egyptian history text are not mentioned, but only in issues related to Islamic history, and briefly referred to.
31. According to *Tahjeer Ahalee el Nuoba/Emigration of Nubian People* (1964: 20-- and this book was published by Ministry of Social Affairs), that the Nubian villages are: 1. Dabuot 2. Dhmeed 3. Mbarakab 4. Kalabaha 5. Abu Hur 6. Marwau 7. Mariya 8. Jaraff Hussein 9. Kaarsha 10. Kushtamna West 11. Kushtamna East 12. Dakka 13. Kuortta 14. Alaaqe 15. el Sayyala 16. Mharaqa 17. el Mdaek 18. el Soubuh 19. Wadi Arab 20. Shattuorma 21. el Sinkhree 22. el Mallaki 23. Korosko 24. Reeqah 25. Abu Handal 26. Diwan 27. Dirr wa Tangalla 28. Tomas-wa-Affia 28. Qadta 30. Ibrim wa Gazira 31. Jennina wa el Shuobak 32. Ennyba (Bndar) 33. Massmass 34. Toushka West 35. Toushka East 36. Armana 37. Abu Simbil 38. Qostol 39. Balanna 40. Adendan.
32. Fahim book is *Nuoba Ard el Itr wa el Dahab: Ruyiah Miin el Daaqhil/Nubia Land Of The Perfume And Gold: A View From Inside* (1990). The text is published in *Yaaffa Leil Derassaat wa el Nashhr*.
33. According to Kennedy (1977), and the Egyptian Gazette in an article, by Mohssen Al-Arishi, entitled "We have no problem for intruders to discuss" (May 1994), the term *Barbara* is a plural of *Barbari* which mean a black(s). Also in the course of getting feedback on the issue an Egyptian computer-lab assistant--at the American university in Cairo says; "a *Barberi* means a Sudanese." In addition, this coincide with what some Egyptians commented while they are entering Tahrir metro station--which is near GNC, that this is "a great crowd of Sudanese". However, the meant great crowd are some Nubian females and males who use to roam and stand beside that metro entrance.
34. In Arabic they say *Ettman Leil el Nuobi / el Assmar wa Inta Muqhmeed*, that is belief a Nubian while your eyes are closed.
35. According to informant, this is seen in light of over 20 years as neighbors.
36. This cited incident happened in the mid 1970s--in Embaba.



37. *Ejmma el Nuobe* as said is Nubians unanimity of their traditional understanding(s). Its use is flexible, at time it refers to a social act(s) that Nubians reject and one of them is doing or did it.
38. The point is colored by color prejudices.
39. For further information about *el Khususia el Nuobiya* see Swedenburg (1994) paper about Nubians and expressive culture, and Uduul (1993).
40. Idris Ali in his novel *Dongola* (1993) illustrate a story of a Nubian young male who married an Egyptian and when the Nubian became old and bankrupted, the woman got rid of him. At the end of story the Nubian man was poisoned and died in hospital without a wife to look after.
41. An Egyptian expression for a tough male who deals with his wife as (he) master and (she) maid. Nearly all daily Egyptian Newspapers and magazines have cartoons about *Master Sayid* or a woman who overrule her husband as well as types of relation with mother-in-laws. As pointed in the text by the informants that this is contrary to husband wife relations, and in-laws.
42. Her elder son is married to an Egyptian lady.
43. Before the successive dammings and migration to Kom Ombo, a girl is not allowed to marry outside her immediate cousins and later marriage limit exceeded the level of close relative to level of the same clan, then the same village, the same tribe and recently between Kenuz, Fadija, Arab-Nubians, and even Egyptian.
44. Most informants reported that there are some Nubian families that married their daughter to Egyptians and not only that there are some girls who married *Aqhraab* or foreigner although their families refused. During interview, respondents are asked to reveal some case of intermarriages with non-Nubians, they did not mention any. Only a respondent reported one case in Cairo but he said he is going to write a fiction book about it. This is why there is no example of inter Egyptian or foreigners marriages to Nubian women. But, apart from that in Alexandria, a Sudanese who is married to a Nubian woman says, Nubians prefer Sudanese than Egyptian to marry their daughters and actually there are many Sudanese in Alexandria with Nubian wives. This point can be researched in future, on why Sudanese and not Egyptian marry Nubian women.
45. Reported by an informant that there is a group known as Ranggo, they are blacks and assumed were brought from southern Sudan. However, Ranggo called themselves Nubians, but they are rarely seen with or among Nubians in Alexandria. Further, Nubians use to call Ranggo, "slaves".
46. Also, in Nubia and specifically Kom Ombo, invitation will be to all members of say, guests at Umdh house in Mbarakab or Goshtamnah.



47. *el Khartoum Newspaper* (August: 1996, vol. 950), posted an article about two Egyptians singers (Mohammed Fouad and Veka--who is a Nubian) using Sudanese songs and both claim these songs are from Nubian traditions.
48. *Yaniki* is Mattuki's or Kenuz type of dance where a lady and a gentleman are encircled by gentlemen dancers. And while that lady dances the male with her hold his sword in a way to indicate he is protecting her. *Ferre* is Fadija's dance with a distinct numbers of steps and usually is played at *Aragiit*, the weddings.
49. See appendix section for the Arabic version of the mentioned songs.
50. Some of the songs are sung at wedding parties, *Fakhuor-anna*, *Hegrael Murra*. *Fakhuor-anna* is a song about ancient Nubians' kingdoms and its relation to contemporary Nubians. *Hegrael Murra*, basically is about forced migration and false promises given to Nubians that Kom Ombo is a green valley.
51. See appendix for the Arabic version of the two cited songs; *Fakhuor anna* and *el Heggra el Murra*. These songs are sung by a popular Nubian singer Kedr el Attar.
52. *Sakeiya* is a wooden weal used in drawing water for irrigation.
53. In a conference held in GNC on March 26th. 1996 about reconstruction of the emerging Old Nubia land as a result of a shrink in lake's water. However, the Egyptian government wanted to make that area a park for tourist activities as well as for other business. GNC in Cairo invites Nubians' parliament members as well as Egyptians to present Nubians *Qadiya* and also, that project of investment a priority should be given to Nubians business associations. According to research done by Dean of Tourist Institute in Aswan, the finding says that not a single Nubian fellow is fishing at all besides those of Sohag.
54. The point is similar to the notion of burying umbilical cord of Nicholas Hopkins among Mauinka of Mali. Hopkins in a lecture point that if a certain Malian person dies, according to traditions, should be in a village where her/his umbilical cord was buried.
55. Hamza Edin's comments at a conference held in General Nubian Club (GNC), Cairo, about Nubian's film: *In Love and Travel*, May 1994 (this is part of a fieldwork I did for course entitle "Problems in Social Anthropology" as a term paper).
56. The cited words written by Salih, Ali Osman (June 1994: 3) in a paper titled *The Civil and Cultural Context of Nubian Literature* which he presented at a conference about Nubians' stories in Cairo.
57. Besides that, there are other play under process.
58. It is a collection of unpublished poems.



59. Furthermore, Batalimous called Nubia land *Doduichacienous* which referred to old towns of; *Dabuot, Thafa, Kalabsha, Jaraf Hussein, Dakkh, Koban, Kourta and Mharaqa*.
60. According to respondents that *Jamayaat* are males' social domain or place of gathering, besides that most of the activities there are confined to men. However, the General Nubian Clubs (GNCs) are the Nubians' public places where Nubian women share and participate with men in activities.
61. *Mssbah el Nuoba* literally means Nubian's lantern (or an oil-lamp) an association which founded the first primary school in Derr, Nubia. That association sent a Nubian delegation to meet Ministry of Education *Wazaraat el Maareef*'s officials. In those days Saad Zaghloul was deputy to Minister of Education Sir, Dunlop Pasha. The Nubian delegation presented their suggestion of establishing a school in Nubia, those of Ministry of Education replied that in all villages of Egypt there were no schools, and how did they intend to establish a school in far southern Egypt and who will be its Headmaster. The delegation replied that Nubians can not afford to pay the cost of sending their children to Cairo or Alexandria. Fortunately, the Nubian delegation met a Nubian who was on scholarship in London and who was supposed to be a Headmaster of a secondary school in Cairo, they briefed him, he simply accepted the suggestion and then became the first Headmaster of Derr primary school. Derr school graduated its first Nubian poet and many others. Graduates of Derr school were the founders of Nubians *Jamayaat* and GNCs.
62. Although Nubians are divided into Arab-Nubians, *Fadija* and *Kenuz*, also each of these two groups contains numbers of clan-like grouping according to villages. Since each and every village exemplifies an entity; consequently, each village has its own *Jamaiya*--in its name.
63. Fernea, R. (1973) and Adams, W. (1977) both discuss the role and objectives of Nubians' *Jamayaat*.
64. Pronoun "He" is used because males are mostly visitors at *Jamayaat*, and this is confirmed by a lady informant that females are not supposed to go to *Jamayaat*, rather they (women) are allowed to go to GNCs, for it is considered as males' domain and this is only in Cairo. However, the case is different in Alexandria, there are women associations in villages' *Jamayaat*. Above all, both in Cairo and Alexandria, Nubian females are allowed to visit and have membership in GNCs.
65. Nowadays, *Jamayaat* serves not only tea but also soft-drinks and Nubians there buy any of those items for their visitors as a sign of Nubians' generosity.
66. The building in which Alexandria GNC is, was first a Jewish club for Boy Scout known as *Nadee Kashaffa Wadi el Niel*. This is according to informants *Ibrab* and *Jebalee*.
67. By then, later President Gamal banned most of the local newspapers due to some political development in the country.



68. Beneath Lake Nasser lay Old Nubia.
69. Observer detected at the conference of 26th March 1996 in GNC that most Nubians speakers talked in term of "we Nubians"; however, an Egyptian guest marked that out and address the Nubians that Nubians are Egyptians first and then Nubians. Then a reply was "we sacrificed a lot and in return we are not fully compensated".
70. The donated money is non-refundable.
71. As an informant puts it, Nubian men did not yet organize one such trip to Mecca before.
72. An informant requested not to disclose some information; however, she says that women are subordinated to males' and traditions dominate choices, and as a result a woman has no right or opinion, concerning her appearance in the public sphere. These regulations are meant to preserve women's reputation and appearance generally and particularly men's reputation. In addition, the same informant says, in Cairo GNC, there is a newly formed women association.
73. According to Nurab, the Arab-Nubians are not actual Nubians genealogically and even historically. They are called *Halab* or *Guorbattiya* among Fadija and Mattuki.
74. According to Lavie (1990: 30) the word allegory is composed of *allos*, a Greek word meaning "other", and *agoreuein*, "to speak in the *agora*", to speak openly in the marketplace or assembly. Furthermore, *agoreuein* connotes 'public, open declarative speech.
75. Second and third groups are Nubian activists, founder of *Mbarakab Paper* (in Saudi Arabia) who suddenly died and some Nubians are suspicious about the cause of death, that there might be after it.
76. Most literature agreed that it is only Nubian women are the one speaking Nubian languages at their houses.
77. Check Dunstan M. Wai book entitled *The Southern Sudan: The Problem of National Integration* (1973), Frank Cass. In the mentioned text, Dr. Ali Mazrui words are cited concerning the interaction and influence of Arab culture on the African ones.



## Appendix

### Life history of the 11 interviewed respondents

Ustaz Jaffrab, who is a Kenzi, was born in Dabuot 1941, is married, and has two daughters (Ustaz is an Arabic name for teacher. Nubians used the term Ustaz when addressing one another in a respects. Generally, Ustaz has other meanings and not just teacher; for example, if a person rides a bus in Cairo the conductor may call that person Ustaz(a) meaning that he did not know his/her name). In Alexandria, Jaffrab spent his early childhood, and attended primary and intermediate schools. In 1949, the respondent moved to Cairo and lives in *Ha'rat el Tabaq*-Quarter of the Cook. Jaffrab completed his secondary school in Cairo. He applied to a technical school in Cairo, and graduated as a TV and electronics' technician. After graduation, Jaffrab was appointed as a technician in the "Company Of The War Manufacturing *Shareka el Tassane el Harbi*" (Jaffrab at the Company of the War Manufacturing, is a member of trade union committee).

Ustaz Adelab is 33 years old, married, and a graduate of sociology from Alexandria University. He was born to a Kenzi father and an Egyptian mother, and was raised and educated in Alexandria. He is now working as a journalist in Cairo. He is from Mbarakab village and belong to a tribe known as Adellab (According to informant Adelab, the last "Ab" at the end of Mbarakab and Adellab, stands for an Arabic word *Al*, which means a family or lineage relation). According to Adelab, he is related to the founder of his tribe, Adel, who is assumed to be the son of Mubarak, the grand father of Mbarakab tribes. Adelab



says; in the lineage system, Mubarak was son of Nagm Edin who was the son of Zen el Abdeen, son of el Hussein, whose father is Ali Ibn Abi Taleb, who is a nephew of prophet Mohammed (According to Adelab that his genealogical chain agrees with Burckhardt's text *Kenuz Families Trees*. Interviewer did not come across the mentioned book.

Ustaza Nurab, who is 26 years old, unmarried. She is a daughter of Kenuz Nubian parents and was born and grew up and educated and is now working in Cairo. Her father served in the army (as a ranker officer). One day (at age of five) she accompanied him to work in the army barracks. Her first encounter seeing marching armies, she noted that;

...all of the army are not Nubians in look and have relatively lighter skin ...those army-men are white and they do not speak Nubian language ... [According to the informant she asked her father], ...who are those people and why they do not speak a Nubian language, and why don't you serve in Nubian army? [The reply was] ...those ...are Egyptians and do not speak Nubian language, and are not Nubians ...

Ariis is a Nubian born in 1965, educated, worked and got married in Cairo to a lady whose mother is Nubian and the father is Saedi. At childhood, he frequently visited Nubia and at age of 21, attended the wedding of his uncle. Lately, he annually visits New Nubia during *Eid el Kabeir*, but in the last two *eids* he did not visit Nubia. In addition, he is a member of the Abdeen Toughka *Jamaiya*. According to him, he was inactive in *Jamaiya* while active in GNC.

Ustaz Annttar, 40 years old and living in Embaba, says he is a Nubian born in a Nubian village called Adendan. He went to primary school in the same village, and first intermediate school in Ennyba in 1961. Then, with the mass emigration of Nubians to Kom Ombo, his father's family moved. By that time,



the respondent was in second year of the intermediate school. Annttar stayed in Kom Ombo until he finished secondary school. From 1971 to 1976 he was in Kom Ombo and then travelled abroad. He visited Sudan on his way to Saudi Arabia where he stayed from 1977 to 1984. Afterwards, he returned to Egypt, married and stayed in Embaba, Cairo.

Ustaz Ibrab, who is over 65 years old and married, says that he is a Nubian, and can speak both Fadja and Mattuki. He was born in Tuoshka, started primary school in Dirr village, and in 1925 moved with his father to Alexandria and finished primary school at *Rass el Taein*. He had his secondary school education at *Rass el Taein*. In 1936, he graduated from Farook College, now Alexandria University, and was appointed at the Ministry of Health. Later on, he worked in Nubia for 12 years before the High Dam migration. By then, he managed to visit all of his relatives in the Nubian villages.

Later on, Ibrab was transferred to Cairo, where his task was to prepare for the building of High Dam between 1952 to 1960. Along with colleagues he stated that he also participated in the project of Kom Ombo resettlement in 1965. Afterwards, Ibrab was transferred to Alexandria University as a Registrar and where he is till date. Besides his post at Alexandria University, Ibrab doubles as presidents of Tuoshka Club For Sport, and "Nubian Agricultural Company".

A married Fadja engineer, Jebalee was born in Old Nubia by the time Nubian people moved to the hill side (Jebal) to avoid the flooding water of Aswan's Dam in 1934. This informant was brought to Alexandria as a two year old boy and attended *el Nhada el Nuobiya* schools and graduated from Alexandria



University with a B. Sc. in engineering. Jebalee served as Director General of Ammeriya Petroleum Company, Alexandria. He teaches Nubian language (a Fadija) at GNC, is one of the active members of GNC in particular and generally is a Nubian activist.

Ustaz Adeeb 52 years old, married, from Tomas-wa-Affia village, was born in Alexandria, to a Fadija father and an Egyptian mother, finished primary school at *el Nhadh el Nuobiya*, intermediate in "French School" and then *Rass el Taein* where he obtained a diploma in Commerce. He worked for seven years in the army and fought in the Egyptian-Israel October War and retired in 1974. He worked in Saudi Arabia for two years. Also, he visited England for six months. He was awarded a state Prize for distinguished novel writings and is up to date one of the known Nubian play writers.

Ustaza Najwa is 23 years old, unmarried, an Arab-Nubian and was born in Cairo. Her father is a Nubian and her mother is from *Jaaffra*. She received her education and worked in Cairo. She did not visit Nubia. Her father rarely visits his Nubians relatives. As a result, she knows little about Nubian society and people. However, through a friend Najwa have come to realize and interact with Nubians in the last five years, when living in Sayeda Zeinab, Cairo.

A singer name Wad-Ezzba is 32 years old born in the Ezzba, unmarried, finished his primary school in *Omar el Farook* not in *Ezzba*. He did his intermediate school in *Fahimy Abdel Majeed* which is in the nearby neighborhood and then attended *Ras el Souda* for an agricultural diploma. Wad-Ezzba's father died when he was in the first year of diploma studies. By then, his mother used



to work in two places, during the day in *el Shaatbe Hospital* and in the evening in a clinic. He decided to help his mother; consequently, took over her post at clinic. But, Wad-Ezzba failed to harmonize between his work and studies. Later, after graduating from *Ras el Souda*, he moved from one job to another until he travelled to Greece where he spent four years working. After returning to Egypt from Greece, he managed to purchased in *Ezzba* an *Ah'wa* or coffee-shop and then a shop in el Ajamme. He has a Nubian Jazz Band. His Jazz group consists of three Nubian members; one each on Keyboard (organ), saxophone and drum, a Sudanese as lead guitarist, Egyptians on the keyboard and flute. In his words, most of his friends in *Ezzba* are Nubian with whom he grew up, but at present and due to his work he has some Egyptian friends.

Umm Ezzba born in 1926 and married in *Tomas wa Affia* village, Old Nubia, moved with her husband to Essina -- Upper Egypt and then to Alexandria since 1951 and up to date. She visited Nubia once, when she was supposed to receive a house in Kom Ombo. She is a mother to five children, all born in Alexandria.

According to proposed respondents of this thesis, 15 subjects are indicated, but only 11 provided an account of their lives' history. The four Arab-Nubians, interviewer failed to reach them. However, the interviewer compensate the missed four Arab-Nubians respondents, with respondents from focus group. It was generally observed, that some of the respondents were skeptical, and suspicious in a way or another they might be revealed through tracing their life backgrounds.



Arabic version of *Fakhuor-anna* ("I am Proud").  
Sung by Kedr Attar, a popular Nubian singer.

فخور أنا

فخور أنا فخور أنا

فخور أنا بحضاراتي

و اعيش أنا بهييتي

و عزت النفس اللي ما تزول

بأصالتى و طبعى أنا نوبى

با مانتى و طيبتى

اسفلوا التاريخ الماضى

مين أنا ؟

أنا ابن مينا و ترهاقا

أنا ابن كوش و تباتا

نفرتارى بنت النوبة

نفرتارى بجمالها نوبية

...



and *el Heggra el Murra* ("The Bitter Emigration"),  
also sung by Kedr Attar.

### الهجرة المرة

أسمى هناك بلدى هناك  
ذاتى هناك النوبة هناك  
الشهادة يا ناس خلف السد  
فرضوا علينا الهجرة المرة  
قالوا لينا كوم أمبو الجنة الخضرة  
عشنا فيها ليالى حزينة  
مشينا سنين فى الغربية  
أسمى هناك بلدى هناك  
هيا يا نوبى و نوبية  
دقوا طبول العودة الجاية  
متين للذل ركعنا مهما كان النوبة دى لينا  
أسمى هناك بلدى هناك  
تاريخنا القديم منحوت على الصخر  
كانوا ملوك فى الأودية السمحة  
بارادة قوية هزوا العالم حتى الان  
معابدهم شائعة  
أسمى هناك بلدى هناك  
لماذا تاريخ النوبة ممحوة  
لماذا حضن الام منسية  
دا يوم فراق النوبة الغالية  
حتميه عار فى جبين اجيالنا  
أسمى هناك بلدى هناك  
يا ناس هدموا حضارة كاملة و اغتالوا  
امانى النوبة السمحة  
اتين الساقية تناديننا دول طحنوا  
عظام اجدادنا الباقية  
أسمى هناك بلدى هناك



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