MIM Working Paper Series 24: 1

YAHIA SALEH

To Identify with a Memory

On Nubian Post-displacement Ethnic Identity (Re)Construction in Contemporary Egypt

MIM Working Paper Series 24: 1

MALMÖ UNIVERSITY
MALMÖ INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES
OF MIGRATION, DIVERSITY AND
WELFARE (MIM)

MALMÖ 2024

MIM Working Paper Series No 24: 1

Published
2024

Editor
Anders Hellström, anders.hellstrom@mau.se

Published by
Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration, Diversity and Welfare (MIM)
Malmö University
205 06 Malmö
Sweden

DOI: 10.24834/isbn.9789178774982
ISBN: 978-91-7877-498-2

Online publication

YAHIA SALEH

To Identify with a Memory

On Nubian Post-displacement Ethnic Identity (Re)Construction in Contemporary Egypt

ABSTRACT

More than one generation of Nubians have been living dispersed in various locations in Egypt. Decades after the latest 1964 displacement and the memory of the lost homeland does not seem to fade. Focusing on the memory of Old Nubia among younger generations, this research examines how they (re)construct their ethnic identity away from their ancestral homeland. Through in-depth interviews, the study uncovers the complex process of ethnic identity development among Nubians. The findings emphasize the profound influence of memory and imaginaries of homelands on Nubians' ethnic identity, contributing to a deeper understanding of contemporary Nubian community. Furthermore, the research sheds light on the interplay between displacement, diaspora, and memory, offering valuable insights for studies of ethnic minorities in the Middle East and North Africa. By exploring the intersections of diaspora, memory, and ethnic identity, this study illuminates the resilience and cultural continuity of the Nubian community despite geographical dispersal.

KEYWORDS

Nubia, Ethnic identity, Collective memory, Diaspora, Egypt

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Yahia Saleh is a researcher, author, and social worker. Saleh's work focuses on the intersections between migration, forced displacement, memory, sexuality and masculinity. His research is grounded in active involvement in socio political initiatives in Egypt and Sweden, focusing on Nubian cultural and lands rights and social engagement in civil society organisations, migrant and black queer communities. Saleh holds an MA in International Migration and Ethnic Relations from Malmö University (Sweden), and is the winner of MIM Master Thesis Award 2023.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to extend my deepest feelings of gratitude to the participants of this study for the generosity they showed by sharing their intimate and personal stories, and to my Nubian community that continues to inspire and teach me every day. I wish to thank Katarina Mozetič, my supervisor for believing in me and for all the support she gave me throughout the process of conducting this study.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

This working paper is a revised version of one of the winners of the MIM master essay award 2023

CONTACT

yahiazaied@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Almost six decades have passed after the last Nubian displacement in Egypt and Sudan, yet the memory and the trauma does not seem to fade. The stories of the displacement of 1964, the dreams, and demands for a permanent return and reallocation are still the core of the Nubian issue and identity (Kaddal 2021; Janmyr 2016). Furthermore, younger generations, born and raised in diaspora, seem to relate and identify with a displacement and a homeland they have never witnessed (Agha, 2019: 2). In this context of displacement, memory, and diaspora, the young generation of Nubians negotiate their belonging and (re)produce their culture and identity. What I will be looking at in this paper is the relationship that connects the displacement and the memories of older generations to their own identity, this would give us an insightful understanding of how Nubians today navigate their past and present as an ethnic minority in a society that tends to ignore the trauma inflicted on them (Gilmore, 2015a: 71). From this angle, it becomes interesting to understand how, and why such a diasporic and displaced identity is re-lived and reproduced.

Nubians, as a group, have been the focus of different strands of academic research. A great attention was given to Nubians at the time of the displacement; however, it was mostly ethnographic and keen on documenting the life of a community being displaced and a place about to vanish permanently (Fernea, 1963; Fernea and Kennedy, 1966; Fahim, 1973). Decades after, triggered by years of political turbulence since 2011, and the rise of questions of human rights, advocacy and minority rights in particular, the interest in the Nubian issues was revived by another strand of academic literature (Janmyr, 2017; 2018; Madbouly, 2021). Moreover, looking at Nubians in a context of diaspora seemed to have caught the attention of scholars interested in Nubian literature and nostalgia (Abbas, 2014; Agha, 2019), with a recent current of comparative studies that compares Nubians to other diasporic and indigenous populations (Haqqi, 2020; Maatouq, 2022). The proliferation of studies of Nubians in Egypt is certainly a positive trend, however, very little attention has been given to individual narratives and identity development.

This paper is based on a qualitative study I conducted to write my master thesis and aimed to investigate the intersection between forced displacement, diaspora, and ethnic identity. It will examine the connection between memory, homeland imaginaries, and ethnic identity development to explore their interrelationships among post-displacement Nubian generations, born after the displacement of 1964 and living in Egyptian urban centres.

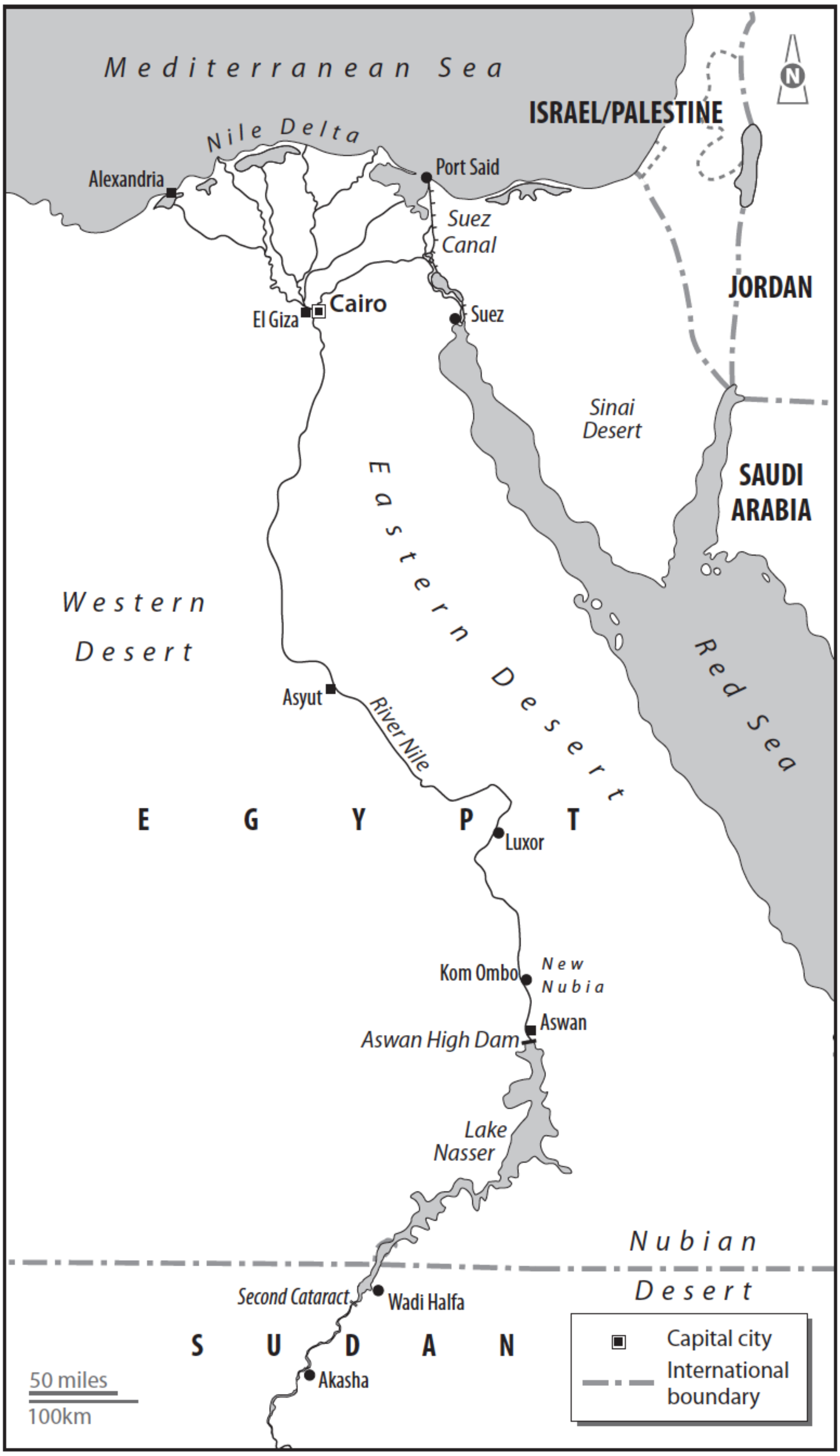
Mediterranean Sea
ISRAEL/PALESTINE
Nile Delta
Alexandria
Port Said
Suez Canal
JORDAN
El Giza
Cairo
Suez
Sinai Desert
SAUDI ARABIA
Eastern Desert
Western Desert
Red Sea
Asyut
River Nile
EGYPT
Luxor
Kom Ombo
New Nubia
Aswan
Aswan High Dam
Lake Nasser
Nubian Desert
Second Cataract
Wadi Halfa
SUDAN
Akasha
50 miles
100km
▣ Capital city
International boundary
N

Figure 1. Map illustrating the location of Old Egyptian Nubia (Submerged by the lake), Displaced Nubia (New Nubia), and Aswan High Dam (Hughes, 2011: 127)

EGYPTIAN NUBIA AND THE DISPLACEMENT

Nubia is a region and an ancient land on the Nile that for thousands of years inhabited the area between the first cataract south of the city of Aswan in Egypt, to the fifth cataract in the north of Sudan (Agha, 2019: 1). Nubians see themselves as descendants of an independent civilisation, inhabiting villages along the shores of the Nile between the two cataracts and maintaining their movement, and relationships while preserving their own distinct languages, sub-cultures and traditions for thousands of years (Janmyr, 2017: 717). In 1899, the agreement between Egypt and the British colonial power that set the borders between Egypt and Sudan, arbitrarily divided Nubia and Nubians between two different countries (Janmyr, 2016: 127). In Egyptian Nubia, Nubian population consists of three linguistically and culturally different groups, The Kenuz (Mattoukki), The Arabs, and The Fadicha. Respectively residing the area from Aswan all the way south to the borders with Sudan (Hughes, 2011: 129)

The tangible effects of the division of Nubia first showed after the implementation of development projects and dam constructions, firstly by the construction of Aswan's low dam in 1902 and its consecutive risings in 1912, and 1933. The rising water levels behind the dam forced Nubians in Egypt to flee either to the north from their region or to higher levels of land, in the same place where their villages are if possible (Janmyr, 2017: 718; Madbouly, 2021: 376). Already then, a large number of Nubians with a majority of males used to migrate to the north, to Cairo and other Egyptian urban centres due to poverty, scarcity of resources and marginalisation in times before the dam construction. However, the construction of Aswan's low dam reinforced and institutionalised this type of migration. By 1963, right before the latest displacement the numbers of labour migrants reached an approximate of 53,000, of which the half were permanent emigrants while the other half were circular labour migrants (Riad and Abd El -Rasoul, 2010: 155-160; Agha, 2019: 8; Hughes, 2011: 129).

Nevertheless, the latest displacement in 1964 was a turning point in Nubian history, The water reservoir behind the dam would submerge the entirety of Nubian territories within Egyptian borders and parts of Nubian territories in Sudan and the entire Nubian population in Egypt would be uprooted. An approximate of 50,000 permanent residents in Nubian villages were forced to a resettlement around the area of Kom Ombo in a new deserted area far from the Nile to the north from the city of Aswan. Furthermore, this displacement has buttressed the migratory waves that took place in the preceding decades to Egyptian larger cities (Agha, 2019: 1-2; Janmyr, 2017: 718; Madbouly, 2021: 376; Scudder, 2016: 1- 4). In addition to this the Egyptian government co-lead a massive international campaign with UNESCO aiming to rescue and preserve all the archaeological sites impacted by the dame construction (Hassan, 2007).

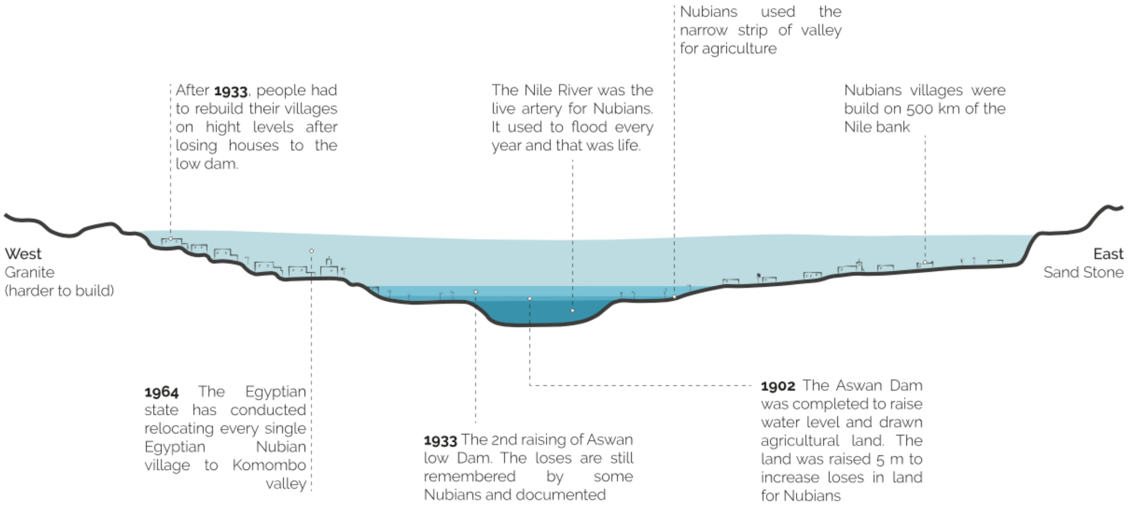
Nubians used the narrow strip of valley for agriculture
After **1933**, people had to rebuild their villages on hight levels after losing houses to the low dam.
The Nile River was the live artery for Nubians. It used to flood every year and that was life.
Nubians villages were build on 500 km of the Nile bank
West
Granite
(harder to build)
East
Sand Stone
1964 The Egyptian state has conducted relocating every single Egyptian Nubian village to Komombo valley
1933 The 2nd raising of Aswan low Dam. The loses are still remembered by some Nubians and documented
1902 The Aswan Dam was completed to raise water level and drawn agricultural land. The land was raised 5 m to increase loses in land for Nubians

Figure 2. An illustration of the successive risings of water level and how it affected Nubian Villages along the river (Agha, 2016)

The new state-built settlements were in a much smaller and very condensed area, and lacked any resemblance to the lost Nubia or any infrastructure that would encourage Nubians to stay and create a new homeland. The resettlement process was also done in disregard to family and tribal structures, many families had to wait for new homes to be built while settling somewhere else, and as a result more Nubians migrated to larger cities seeking a better life and the wait was perpetuated (Agha, 2019: 7; Janmyr, 2016: 128). In cities, Nubians have created a network of associations and social clubs established both to maintain a sense of community through solidarity, and to maintain their connection to Nubia when they first migrated. When the numbers of Nubians started to increase, the associations started to assume an additional role in preserving Nubian language, culture, heritage and identity (Agha, 2019: 7; Madbouly, 2021: 376). In Cairo for example, this network consisted of more than 40 associations each representing a Nubian village and carrying its name. They act as a social and cultural hub where Nubians from the same village gather to reinforce their familial and social ties, thus preserving their and younger generations' "Nubianness" (Agha, 2019: 7; Madbouly, 2021: 378-379). Similar associations and clubs exist also in Alexandria, Ismailia and Suez.

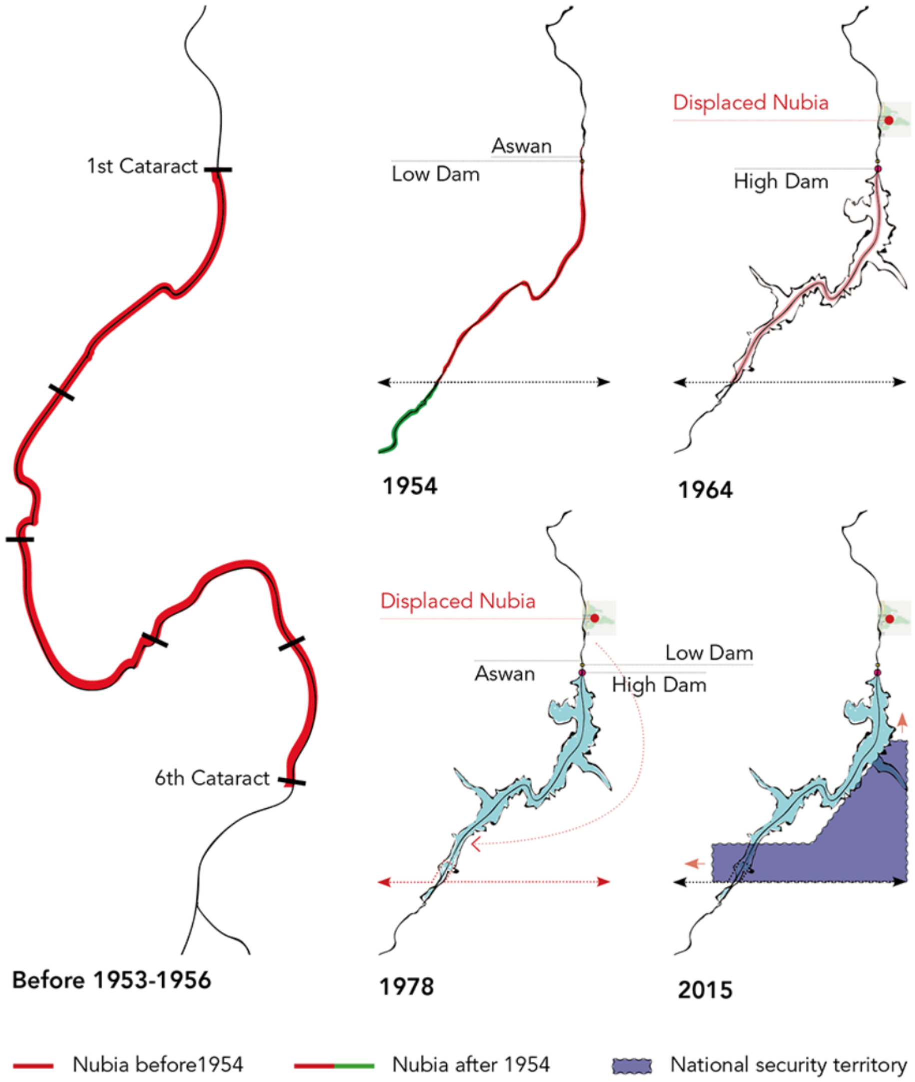
1st Cataract
6th Cataract
Before 1953-1956
Aswan
Low Dam
1954
Displaced Nubia
High Dam
1964
Displaced Nubia
Low Dam
Aswan
High Dam
1978
2015
Nubia before1954
Nubia after 1954
National security territory

Figure 3. An illustration of the changes of Nubian geography after the dam construction and land confiscations (Agha, 2020)

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

DIASPORA: HOMELAND IMAGINARIES AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY

Diaspora is originally a Greek word that signifies concepts of dispersion, or distribution. yAnd while it does not carry in itself a negative connotation, it became more commonly used to describe forced displacement and dispersion as in the case of the Jewish and Armenian diasporas (Dufoix, 2018: 13; Agnew, 2005b: 3). However, diaspora studies have gone through different phases, specified as four phases by Robin Cohen (2022: 1-19), and as a result the term also has expanded to include groups and communities it did not include before. The first phase went on from mainly designating the Jewish diaspora, the term gradually was extended to include the Greek diaspora, and throughout the 1970s it became a description of African, Armenian, Irish, and Palestinian diasporas as well (ibid: 1). During the 1980s, i.e. the second phase, the expansion of the term continued to include a vast group of people either self-proclaimed diasporic or labelled as such. The third phase started in the mid 1990s, marked by a social constructionist critique of the former periods and a notion to break down the main concepts of diaspora, that is homeland, Ethnic, or religious community (ibid: 1-2). Leading to the last phase throughout the 2000s during which the concept was consolidated. With a partial recognition of the social construction of identities and diaspora, an altered idea of diaspora that accommodates different analytical tools such as the core elements of diaspora, the common features of diaspora, and the Ideal types of diasporas (ibid: 2).

Common features of diaspora

For the purpose of this study a context of diaspora will be understood in accordance with the common features proposed by Robin Cohen (2022). In order to be able to identify, analyse, and understand a diasporic community, Cohen proposed a list of common features that would work as an explanatory tool to help in such characterization (ibid: 17):

1- Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to foreign regions; or the expansion from a homeland in search for work or in pursuit of trade;
2- A collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history, struggle, and achievements;

3- An idealisation of the real or imagined ancestral homeland and a collective commitment to its restoration, safety and prosperity, and even to its (re)creation;
4- A frequent development of a return movement to the homeland that gains collective approbation even if many in the group are satisfied with only a vicarious relationship or intermittent visits to the homeland;
5- A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history, the transmission of a common cultural and religious heritage, and the belief in a common fate;
6- a troubled relationship with host societies, or a sense of alienation, or the fear of another calamity might befall the group;
7- a sense of empathy and co-responsibility with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement even where home has become more vestigial; and
8- the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism.

These common features work mainly as guidelines to explain the making of diasporic communities and how individuals in diaspora make sense of themselves, their community and their ethnic identity. Different diasporas may not demonstrate all the listed features, and the presence and intensity of these features may vary across different contexts and evolve over time. Thus, a diaspora cannot be ideal, neither should diasporas be presented in a hierarchy. The significance then comes from the social consciousness that lies within, a shared history of displacement, the collective memory, and a maintained common culture (Agnew, 2005b: 4; Cohen, 2022: 16).

Memory and homeland imaginaries

In his very influential book *Imagined communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* Benedict Anderson proposed a definition that encompasses the nation as an imagined political community (2006). This imaginative nature is grounded on how members of such a community, regardless of its size, live with an image of their communion in their mind (ibid: 6). He continues to extend the definition to include other communities than nations in particular. When members of any community believe in a bond defined by a connection between them in present and another group of people, or a place in the past that they have never seen, these communities can then be distinguished as imagined (ibid: 6). Such imagined connection and attachment to the past, historical kinship, or historical land that is labelled homeland, evolves together with natural characteristics and ties that the individual did not choose, such as skin-colour and ancestry. They become a marker of the community, while adding a sense of "disinterestedness" to them (ibid: 143).

This connection between one's individual past and present, and the collective past, origin, and history of one's community is established by memories. These memories stay with each individual and define their present in many ways. Individuals living in a diaspora can experience a sense of influential tension between living "here" and living "there" that is remembered through memories of events and places of origin. All of that perhaps not even experienced or lived in. An entanglement of belongings between places of residence and other metaphorical homes (Agnew 2005b: 3-4). These memories, however, are merely a perspective through which individuals interpret their past and present in order to create an understanding of them that forms their futures (Stock, 2010: 24). Memories are personal when they represent events from the past of a single individual, a first-hand experience lived in a lifetime, but they are also collective when they represent memories of a group or a community for generations. Memories can then be distorted and altered by interest, desires, and fantasies and are in a continuous process of interpretation and reconstruction. They are, thus, simply a (re)construction of the past, not a factual representation of what actually happened. One can at least question the realness and authenticity of such representations of the past. Through memories and being affected by it, individuals and groups do pass, (re)construct, and perform their identities (Agnew, 2005b: 5; Hua, 2005: 198-199). In this study, collective memory is understood, in line with Maurice Halbwach's definition (1980; 1992 as cited in Hua, 2005: 198), as the shared past, and knowledge of past events that the individual has not personally lived but are collectively maintained and (re)constructed. Memory can be represented in literature, Music, historical records, rituals and ceremonies, monuments, and architecture. Memory is then the vessel of group history and traditions (Hua, 2005: 199).

ETHNIC IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

The term Identity in general, and ethnic Identity in particular are abundantly ambiguous. A myriad of definitions and uses for these concepts can be found in literature depending on what they are meant to emphasise and what they imply (Phinney and Ong, 2007: 52). Roger Brubaker and

Frederick Cooper (2000) did identify five main uses as which identity is understood and used by scholars to accentuate different aspects across different strands of literature. Firstly, as a basis for social and political action and as opposed to self-interest, here it is used to highlight the aspects that influence individual and collective actions. Secondly, as a collective phenomenon that signifies a central and meaningful sense of sameness among members of a community. That can be seen in acts of solidarity, shared consciousness, or collective action. Thirdly, as a core aspect of an individual or a group's selfhood, here it is understood to be an aspect of high value to be nurtured, recognized and preserved across generations. Fourthly, both as a product of social or political actions and a ground of further actions, and here it highlights the process through which the sense of groupness facilitates collective actions. Lastly, it is understood as a temporary and transient result of conflicting discourses, and by that emphasising the instability and fragmentation of the modern individual's sense of themselves (ibid: 6-8).

Similarly, ethnic identity is generally perceived to be constructed of multiple aspects through a complex process. However, it was defined numerous times depending on what aspect of it is emphasised (Phinney, 1993: 500; Phinney and Ong, 2007: 52). While one aspect of it is the sense of belonging to an ethnic group, some scholars emphasised the cultural aspects of it as in language, values, and knowledge of the group's history (Rogler, Cooney and Ortiz, 1980 as cited in Phinney, 1990: 500). Another scholar sees it as an element of one's social identity, deriving from their knowledge of their membership in a group, and the meaning and value assigned to such membership (Tajfel 1981 as cited in Phinney, 1990: 500). In this study, ethnic identity will be comprehensively examined, incorporating all the aforementioned perspectives. To examine how ethnic identity develops, which factors contribute to individual variations in ethnic identity, and how ethnic identity is related to significant contextual changes I will be utilising a three-stage model of ethnic identity development that Jean S. Phinney conceptualised (1993). That model was based on the writings of Erik Erikson and James Marcia on ego identity (ibid: 63-66). While it was initially developed and studied in the context of adolescents and young adults, it is, however, suitable for the purpose of this study. In fact, Phinney's model proposes a framework for understanding the process of ethnic identity development, which involves stages such as exploration, commitment, and achievement. These stages are relevant to the individual at various stages of their life, including adolescence, young adulthood, and beyond (ibid: 66-72):

Stage 1: Unexamined Ethnic Identity

This stage is characterised by 'lack of explanation of ethnicity', meaning that one's understanding of ethnic identity, if there is any, is not examined and rather copied from what they see around them at home, with parents, and extended family.

Stage 2: Ethnic Identity Search

This stage is understood to be initiating the time of adolescence and is characterised by an increased awareness of one's identity and its importance. At the same time confusion or understanding of the meaning of such identity takes place in relation to the majority population.

Stage 3: Ethnic Identity Achievement

This stage is ideally the final stage, once the individual succeeds in reaching a clear understanding of themselves and their identity. Nevertheless, the outcome of this stage does not in particular mean a strong sense of ethnic identity, it might as well lead to a weaker sense of ethnic identity or an internalisation of a hyphenated identity e.g.

Finally, by utilising a theoretical framework of diaspora, memory, and homeland imaginaries together with Phinney's ethnic identity development model I aim at developing a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the experiences and identities of the Nubian post-displacement generations in Egypt.

METHODOLOGY

PHILOSOPHY OF RESEARCH

This study focused on ethnic identity (re)construction and how younger generations shape their own understanding of their ethnic Identity through memories of an older displaced generation and imaginaries of a lost homeland. Such focus on the meanings, individual narratives and the construction of ethnic identity falls into the scope of a constructivist ontological perspective, according to which individuals and groups construct their realities through social and cultural interactions in a complex and constant process of modification and reconstruction (Castles, 2013:

17). Epistemologically, this study falls into the scope of a social constructionist perspective, emphasising the construction of knowledge through social interactions and historical contexts. Moreover, such perspective allows the researcher to create an understanding of social realities by interpreting and analysing individual narratives and the meanings assigned to these realities (Flick, 2018: 69-70).

The theoretical framework of diaspora, memory and homeland imaginaries, and Phinney's ethnic identity development model that underpins this study corresponds to these philosophical approaches well. Diaspora can be seen as a social practice understood by analysing different social and political practices. Through such practices, relationships between the displaced, younger generations, and their homeland are socially maintained, imagined, or (re)constructed (Müller-Funk, 2018: 253). Indeed, ethnic identities in diasporic contexts cannot be seen as a fixed reality, but rather as a fluid understanding of one's identity that is (re)constructed, reproduced and shared through generations (Chernobrov and Wilmers, 2019: 917). A social constructivist approach allows us to ask questions such as, what are the effects of diaspora as a socially constructed concept? and how does it affect the individual and their ethnic identity? (Turner, 2018: 41).

As I also become engaged in the process of construction and acquiring knowledge by choosing participants for this study, and by engaging in dialogue with them in order to reach a deeper understanding of their narratives. Together we construct a profound meaning of their different realities. A reflexive approach on my positionality as a researcher was therefore crucial to maintain throughout this research process (Mannik and Mcgarry, 2017: 129-131)

Research Design

Aiming to explore the (re)construction of ethnic identity in a diasporic context among Nubian younger generations makes a qualitative research strategy well fitting for the study. Qualitative research is usually used to investigate and learn more about social phenomena, people's subjective experiences and interpretations of the world around them. It is concerned by constructing a deeper understanding of social life and the meanings that individuals attach to their social interactions, and events that affect them (Leavy, 2017: 9). It accommodates a myriad of epistemological approaches such as the constructionist approach of this study, and various research designs (Flick 2018). For the purpose of this research, a single case study design is selected. Case study research is known to focus on dynamics and interactions within cases as a whole. It looks at the events, interactions, and practices and the effects resulting from them over time. And so, it does help us understand complexity and richness of social life as a whole (6 and Bellamy, 2012: 102).

Case studies are also characterised by flexibility that can accommodate changes along the way; it does allow the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the case without limiting their freedom in conducting theoretical changes based on new insights and findings (6 and Bellamy, 2012: 103). This flexibility fits quite well with the iterative approach I am taking in this study. Although such studies usually starts from a puzzle, or a question that the researcher try to develop an answer for without really knowing what in the field is relevant or applicable to the case of study (Stake, 1995: 3), a case study allows the researcher to have an iterative exchange in which new empirical findings may lead to new ideas and theoretical revisions (6 and Bellamy, 2012: 103). Such openness that allows the inclusion of concepts and ideas not explored before and might be fruitful to the research, is also present in data collection as well as analysis.

METHODS

I chose semi-structured in-depth interviews as the method to explore narratives of a group of Nubian post-displacement generations living in Egyptian urban centres. The fieldwork was conducted under a period of six weeks from mid-March to the end of April 2023, during this period I was able to conduct interviews in four different cities in Egypt; Cairo, Giza, Aswan, and Alexandria with the majority of the interviews conducted in Cairo.

SEMI-STRUCTURED IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

As I am interested in highlighting the social construction of ethnic identity, and the relation this process has to the context in which it is constructed, the interviews had to be capable of understanding such complexity (Castles, 2013: 12). Thus, the interview questions were meant to initiate an open-ended conversation between me and the interviewee. In this conversation each individual was given the space and the possibility to tell, explain, formulate and even reflect on their life experiences. And by doing so it gives me access to their consciousness and how they construct their own reality (Sánchez-Ayala, 2013: 123). The questions allowed me to have a broad terrain to explore together with the interviewees, to be able to address the research questions. It also provided an adaptable context for asking more specific questions and for explanations of some details along the course of the interview.

The interviews were conducted in places that were most convenient to the interviewees, some were at their homes while some were conducted in public places. Together we chose places that ensure a low level of noise, not to affect the recording process. Choosing to record the interviews was a decision well-fitting as it was needed to grasp every part of the told narratives and to be able to revisit the recordings to avoid any misinterpretations. I was also taking notes during the interviews to help me in the process of transcription and to note any detail I considered important to revisit without interrupting the interviewee. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed afterwards as soon as possible in order to maintain a crisp memory of the interview. The interviews varied in length between sixty and 100 minutes.

Sampling and Interviewee profiles

The sample group of this study included three key participants that I already knew from my former engagement in the Nubian community. As mentioned before, conducting research on such sensitive topics in Egypt can imply some risks, so I chose therefore to get back to my contacts within the community to ensure a certain level of safety for myself and for the interviewees. The rest of the group were chosen in a process that could be described as a snow-ball sampling (Sánchez-Ayala, 2013: 128-129). I Asked all the three initial interviewees to suggest two individuals that I can possibly meet. I then established contact with many of them and arranged for the meeting of the other three. I was also keen on ensuring some balance in the sample group as much as possible within the time frame I had for the field study in regards to gender, the village of origin, and city of residence to achieve diversity in the experiences and history of displacement. Following are the profiles of all the six interviewees:

- Ahmad: 34, Mattoukki Nubian. A middle-class male, 4th generation who was born and raised in Alexandria. His father was born in their village in Old Nubia and raised between the village and Ismailia while his mother was born and raised in Ismailia.

- Hassan: 40, Fadicha Nubian. A middle-class male, 4th generation who was born and raised in Giza. His parents were born in the displacement village and raised between the village and the city.

- Mariam: 30, Fadicha Nubian. A middle-class female, 3rd generation who was born and raised In Cairo. Her parents were also born and raised in Cairo.

- Mohammad: 36, Fadicha Nubian. A middle-class male, 4th generation who was born and raised in Cairo and Giza. His parents were born in the displacement village and raised between the village and the city.

- Omar: 35, Fadicha Nubian. A middle-class male, 2nd generation who was born in Cairo and raised between Cairo and Aswan. His parents were born and raised in Old Nubia.

- Salma: 34, Fadicha Nubian. A middle-class female, 3rd generation who was born and raised in Cairo. Her father was born in Old Nubia and raised in the displacement village while her mother was born and raised in Cairo.

DISCUSSION

LIVING IN DIASPORA WITH IMAGES OF THE PAST

By analysing the collected data, it shows that Nubians in Egypt represent a case of diaspora, in line with the common features of diaspora proposed by Robin Cohen (2022: 17). Besides being historically, ethnically, and linguistically distinct, Nubians were also geographically and socially marginalised by originating from Egypt's most distant rural region (Abbas, 2014; Gilmore, 2015). Throughout the first half of the last century Nubians endured various waves of migration and displacements, followed by a final and infinite forced displacement as a result of the complete submersion of their homeland behind Aswan's High Dam in 1964. Ever since then, Nubians lived dispersed in different Egyptian regions and cities in addition to the state-built displacement villages (Agha 2019; Madbouly 2021; Scudder 2016).

Conforming to Rogers Brubaker's explanation of the criteria of diaspora (2005: 5-7), all the participants explained how Nubians in diaspora were keen on recreating a community similar to the one they lost, either organically by living next to each other in the cities and neighbourhoods they moved to, or in a more centralised and organised manner by establishing cultural and social associations. As strangers in a place with a totally different culture and language at the time, they felt the need to create a safety and solidarity network to be able to help each other just like they did in their villages. In fact, the community and the role it played evolved through generations maintaining the boundary between the Nubian and the non-Nubian through different acts of self-segregation and clustering (ibid: 6). It was clear in all of their narratives that this community had a crucial impact on them. Traditions, heritage, culture, and Nubian history, a collective memory that is, were preserved and passed on to younger generations through family and community as explained to me by the participants. This community was broadly defined, starting with extended family and neighbours, and is extended to include classmates and friends in college, the Nubian social and cultural associations, and even acquaintances in other cities.

What this community preserved, cherished, and shared is music and common narratives about Nubian history and life in Old Nubia. In such collectiveness, the memories of life in Old Nubia, become everyone's memory. The stories are shared and claimed across families, generations, villages, and sub-groups. The impact of these narratives becomes even stronger when one does not speak the language properly and is dependent on someone else who can to translate the meanings of Nubian lyrics, it becomes something that they understand together not individually. Nubian literature, that one usually gets introduced to through peers or one's family's book collection, is another important part Nubian collective memory (ibid: 5).

The findings of this study showed the centrality of the displacement in Nubian memories, being the event that inaugurated an era of dispersal, it became a part of the Nubian identity sustained for generations after the actual displacement. The displacement, and the submersion of the entirety of Old Nubia in Egypt became a point of reference. Everything that happened, existed, or imagined having been existing before it is compared to everything that is experienced now. It registered an idealised and romanticised image of Old Nubia that is collectively mourned and cherished, and for some, the community should be striving to return to this homeland and reconstruct this image again. In fact, music offers a good example of this, all the participants explained how music pre-1964 was focused on depicting mundane life, beautiful nature, and romance. While post-1964 music is more lament and mostly mourning the loss of Old Nubia, descripting and documenting the trauma of the displacement. And just like Nubian music, Nubian literature centred the displacement and the binary of village life and city life to highlight the diasporic struggle that Nubians endured. The contrast between this image of an ideal Old Nubia, and a present characterised by dispersal in huge cities away from the Nile is registered almost as a fact in Nubians collective consciousness. Especially that in their diaspora, and as conceptualised in Benedict Anderson's Imagined communities (2006: 54), Nubian language lost its status as the most important feature of distinction for Nubians, to be replaced by shared values, culture, memories and aspirations of return to a lost and idealised homeland. (Gilmore, 2015: 54).

IDENTITY (Re)CONSTRUCTED

To identify to which extent the romanticised memories of Old Nubia actually affected the participants' understanding of their ethnic identity, this study utilised Phinney's three-stage model of ethnic identity development (1993). The results of this study revealed the intricate and ever-changing process by which the participant formed their comprehension of their ethnic identity. Furthermore, it highlighted how collective memory, consisting of these idealised images of their homeland, influenced the process of (re)shaping their identity.

All the participants reported experiences from an early period in their lives when they were witnessing adults in their families and extended community demonstrating different markers of Nubian significance, such as listening to Nubian music, eating Nubian food, speaking Nubian, and reciting stories and memories about a life in an old village and a lost homeland. But at this stage, labelled as unexamined ethnic identity in Phinney's model, they did not actually assign any meanings to these practices, it was merely something that happens around them, something that they understood as the reality of everyone else. This stage was also characterised by a sense of uninterest as everything around them was taken for granted or lacked a significant meaning (Phinney, 1993: 66).

The older they get, the more such reality gets contested by the reality of the broader society. When they start to interact with the majority society at this stage, either by experiencing racism, just noticing a difference between the majority's culture and their own, or even meeting other Nubian peers, they start to assign deeper meanings to everything that was once merely considered a norm. They started to connect these differences to the origin of their families. Experiences of racism or friction with the other does complicate the feelings of displacement, marginalisation, and loss of one's origin and culture. At this stage that Phinney's model label as ethnic identity search, the participants awareness of their identity started to increase leading to an active exploration of what they now call their own history and culture, in order to create a personal understanding of it (Jenkins 2000: 7; Phinney 1989: 37-38; 1993: 69). The interviews conducted with the participants yielded many interesting insights in regard to this stage. With a significantly increased interest in their own history and culture they turned first to their families to get to know more about themselves, to know more about Nubia, old Nubia and what life there once looked like. Some of them realised then that they never got to learn their mother tongue as children. Such realisation actually left them confused and wondering why no one of their family members ever tried to teach them the language. The more stories they hear about the ideal life in Old Nubia, and how beautiful it was from the memories of the elderly, the music they listen to, and the novels they read; they start to think that the loss of this ideal place and their displacement might be the reason why they never got to learn Nubian. While their families' choice not to teach them the language might seem like an active choice, they believe it is all because they live in a different place that requires them to speak a different language. At this stage they also get to experience the regular visits to the displacement villages differently. They now see it as an ideal break of freedom and a sense of belonging among people similar to them, they get a glimpse of what the Nubian community used to be before the displacement. Keeping in mind that it does not match the romanticised image they have about Old Nubia, it made them value their identity more as they understood now what being a minority in a big city means.

They then start to explore a relationship to a place that does not exist anymore, a place they can only imagine through memories passed on to them. They continue to nurture this relationship by more knowledge about themselves, and their culture. Gradually they started to see this culture, this heritage, this lost homeland, and even the displacement as something of their own, it ceases to be solely a part of their family or community's past. Many of the participants reported that with their increased interest and knowledge, they too became a source of knowledge to the older generation, their parents e.g. With a widened and modernised access to information, the knowledge stream became a circular one between generations. And if this made anything, it did reinforce their identity by adding a sense of agency and confidence in their own selves as Nubians. Their identity is not merely inherited anymore, it became something they (re)constructed themselves. Moreover, the value of the oral history and Nubian music as historical archives increased in such context, especially that any official account of the displacement and old Nubia is negligent to the emotional impact of the displacement or a proper account of how Nubia was before. Yet, with both their mother tongue and homeland lost, they became merely consumers for their own culture, and the ideal and romanticised images of Old Nubia became their only refuge.

The third stage in Phinney's model is labelled as Ethnic identity achievement and argued to be the final stage reached by the individual when they come to a clear understanding of themselves and their ethnic identity (Phinney, 1993: 71). Such understanding does not have to mean a stronger acceptance of one's ethnic identity however, as it showed with one of the participants who developed a critical view of his identity and the Nubian community. In fact, he adopted a humanist understanding of what identity should be, demonstrating a weak sense of his ethnic identity as Nubian. Differently, all the narratives of the other participants conveyed that, to them, being Nubian means being rooted in their ancestral ties to Old Nubia as depicted in novels and elderly recollections. They also described the desire to adopt a lifestyle that resonates with these cherished images. However, some of them expressed their understanding that these images are idealised because they are part of a romanticised past. For instance, one can question these romanticised memories when reviewing the statistics of labour migration that preceded the displacements (Riad and Abd El -Rasoul, 2010: 155-160). Thus, not only could these images have been altered over time, but they may also be challenging to realise in the present, given that the original place no longer exists, and the Nubian community today may have undergone significant changes from what it once was. (Agnew, 2005b: 9; Hua, 2005: 198).

Yet, these images concise a fundamental part of Nubian collective memory. Shared by the majority of Nubian population regardless of any lingual or sub-group associations, it makes it the bond that connects all Nubians, and the most recognised reference for their ethnic identity. Not sharing a certain geography or a language makes this imagined place their place of origin. Additionally, in a context where the right to return to the physical place is conditioned on politics that, for the moment, Nubians are not able to change, they chose to liberate their ethnic identity from the contingency of a place they cannot return to. They belong to this imagined place because it is the most accessible one, it remains in their memory and imagination, with them everywhere. Some of the participants even emphasised that before they return to the physical place, they do need to return to the ideal image of the Nubian, they need to revive an identity mainly based on these images from their collective memory first. A Nubian ethnic identity, as shown in the results of this study, has become a group identity originating from memory, history, community and family as sources of identity in a diaspora that keeps their lost homeland imagined, romanticised, and idealised (Anderson, 2006; Boyarin and Boyarin, 2010: 85-86). Such a collective group identity might not even have existed before the displacement.

Finally, and while all the participants reported a sense of clarity in how they see themselves and understand their ethnic identity. It is still important to remember that identities in general are a complex and dynamic social construct contingent on time, place, and social context. This makes it hard to confidently say that one reaches a final identity or that any understanding of it is to be permanent (Agnew, 2005b: 12).

CONCLUSION

Nubians in Egypt have been living in diaspora for generations as a result of various waves of migration and displacement. However, the latest displacement in 1964 left them dispersed between displacement villages in the desert and in a number of Egyptian urban centres, leaving behind an entirely submerged homeland. Revived in their collective memory, it became an ideal and highly romanticised place that lives with them as an origin of their group ethnic identity. In this context, this study provided an account of how ethnic identity is being (re)constructed in diaspora. By looking at how younger generations think of, and relate to the displacement and their ancestors' submerged homeland, this research was aiming at understanding how younger generations create a relationship to a place they have never seen and experiences they never lived in order to create a personal understanding of themselves, their collective memory, and their very own ethnic identity, half a century after the latest displacement.

The framework of diaspora, memory, and homeland imaginaries, along with the exploration of ethnic identity development, guided this research and deepened our understanding of how memories and images from an imagined past are romanticised. It also explored the impact of these images on Nubian post-displacement generations and the way they (re)construct their ethnic identity. It showed that a strong sense of ethnic identity is not necessarily the only outcome of such a process, as some of the results showed a fluctuant side of this process resulting in a much weaker sense of identity and more critical position to the strong attachment to the community and its collective memory. However, one of the most important findings of this thesis is that the idealised images of the past became the main source of Nubian ethnic identity today, and the reference of what it means to be Nubian. This position was of course reinforced, not only by the dispersal of Nubians in different locations, and the submersion of their mourned homeland, but also by the loss of the Nubian language as an important identity marker.

Additionally, the current political situation that seems to practically neglect any Nubian cultural and lands rights takes away any hope that might have existed in a possible return or reallocation of the Nubians to their ancestral land. As a result, these images of the past and the imagined ancestral homeland became a stronger bond that connects Nubian younger generations living all across Egypt, making it their origin that they have never seen and might never see. Together with the displacement, these romanticised images became an integral part of what it means to be Nubian, a collective ethnic identity built on culture, heritage, history and memories. This also de-emphasised the tribal and sub-group differences that might have been of higher value before the displacement.

In conclusion, this study gives us a close examination of the intricate interplay between diaspora, memory, and homeland imaginaries, shedding light on the complexities of ethnic identity development among Nubians, and reveals how memories and images from an unlived past can significantly impact how younger generations understand their cultural heritage and which meanings they assign to it. It offers a solid case of an internal diaspora, by analysing Nubians as an ethnic minority in an Egyptian and North African context.

REFERENCES

6, P. and Bellamy, C. (2012). *Principles of Methodology: Research Design in Social Science*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Abbas, F. (2014). Egypt, Arab Nationalism, and Nubian Diasporic Identity in Idris Ali's Dongola: A Novel of Nubia. *Research in African Literatures*, 45(3), p.147. doi:https://doi.org/10.2979/reseafrilite.45.3.147.

Agha, M. (2016). *Unsettled | Histories of Nubian Displacement*. [online] www.projectunsettled.com. Available at: https://www.projectunsettled.com/un-resettlementshistory.html [Accessed 29 June. 2023].

Agha, M. (2019). Nubia Still Exists: On the Utility of the Nostalgic Space. *Humanities*, 8(1), pp.1–12. doi:https://doi.org/10.3390/h8010024.

Agha, M. (2020). *Recognizing Nubian Displacibility*. [online] THE FUNAMBULIST MAGAZINE. Available at: https://thefunambulist.net/magazine/reparations/recognizing-nubian-displacibility-menna-agha.

Agnew, V. (2005b). Introduction. In: V. Agnew, ed., *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp.3–17.

Anderson, B. (2006). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.

Boyarin, D. and Boyarin, J. (2010). Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity. In: J.E. Braziel and A. Mannur, eds., *Theorizing Diaspora : a Reader*. Malden, Ma: Blackwell, pp.85–118.

Brubaker, R. (2005). The 'Diaspora' Diaspora. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28(1), pp.1–19. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/0141987042000289997.

Brubaker, R. and Cooper, F. (2000). Beyond 'identity'. *Theory and Society*, 29(1), pp.1–47. doi:https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1007068714468.

Castles, S. (2013). Understanding the Relationship Between Methodology and Methods Stephen Castles. In: C. Vargas-Silva, ed., *Handbook of research methods in migration*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, pp.7–25.

Chernobrov, D. and Wilmers, L. (2019). Diaspora Identity and a New Generation: Armenian Diaspora Youth on the Genocide and the Karabakh War. *Nationalities Papers*, 48(5), pp.1–16. doi:https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2019.74.

Cohen, R. (2022). *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. 2nd ed. Routledge.

Dufoix, S. (2018). Diaspora before It Became a Concept. In: R. Cohen and C. Fischer , eds., *Routledge Handbook of Diaspora Studies.*, First edition. Routledge.

Fahim, H.M. (1973). Egyptian Nubia After Resettlement. *Current Anthropology*, 14(4), pp.483–485. doi:https://doi.org/10.1086/201362.

Fernea, R.A. (1963). The Ethnological Survey of Egyptian Nubia. *Current Anthropology*, 4(1), pp.122–123. doi:https://doi.org/10.1086/200347.

Fernea, R.A. and Kennedy, J.G. (1966). Initial Adaptations to Resettlement: A New Life for Egyptian Nubians. *Current Anthropology*, 7(3), pp.349–354. doi:https://doi.org/10.1086/200724.

Flick, U. (2018). *Introduction To Qualitative Research.* 6th ed. London: Sage.

Gilmore, C. (2015). A Minor Literature in a Major Voice: Narrating Nubian Identity in Contemporary Egypt. In: *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*.

Haqqi, R. M. (2020). A Self Beyond Spatial Terms: A Comparative Approach to the Faces of Nubian and Dominican Diaspora in Idrīs Ali’s Dongola and Julia Alvarez’How the García Girls Lost Their Accents= الهوية الذاتية خارج الحدود المكانية: بحث في أوجه الشتات النوبي والدومينيكي بين رواية (دنقلا) لإدريس علي و (كيف فقدت فتيات غارسيا لهجاتهن) لچوليا ألڤاريز.

Hassan, F.A. (2007). The Aswan High Dam and the International Rescue Nubia Campaign. *African Archaeological Review*, 24(3-4), pp.73–94. doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/s10437-007-9018-5.

Hua, A. (2005). Diaspora and Cultural Memory. In: V. Agnew, ed., *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp.191–208.

Hughes, E. (2011). Displacement and Indigenous rights: the Nubian Case. In: E. Hughes and S. Venkateswar, eds., *The Politics of Indigeneity : Dialogues and Reflections on Indigenous Activism*. London ; New York: Zed Books, Cop.

Janmyr, M. (2016). Nubians in Contemporary Egypt: Mobilizing Return to Ancestral Lands. *Middle East Critique*, 25(2), pp.127–146. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2016.1148859.

Janmyr, M. (2017). Human rights and Nubian mobilisation in Egypt: towards recognition of indigeneity. *Third World Quarterly*, 38(3), pp.717–733. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2016.1206454.

Janmyr, M. (2018). Indigeneity vs Development: Nubian Rights Mobilisation in Egypt. In: G. Corradi, K. De Feyter, E. Desmet and K. Vanhees, eds., *Critical Indigenous Rights Studies* . Routledge.

Jenkins, R. (2000). Categorization: Identity, Social Process and Epistemology. *Current Sociology*, [online] 48(3), pp.7–25. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392100048003003.

Kaddal, F. (2021).On Displacement and Music: Embodiments of Contemporary Nubian Music in the Nubian Resettlements [Master's Thesis, the American University in Cairo]. AUC Knowledge Fountain. https://fount.aucegypt.edu/etds/1591

Leavy, P. (2017). *Research design quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, arts-based and community-based participatory research approaches*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Maatouq, S.M. (2022). The Interrelation between the Threatening Violence of Dams Construction and the Atrocities of Indigenous Women and Nature: an Ecofeminist Reading of American Indian and Nubian Literature. *Transcultural Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(2), pp.31–41. doi:https://doi.org/10.21608/tjhss.2022.233095.

Madbouly, M. (2021). Remembering Nubia's Past: Space, Generations and Memorial Practices. *Middle East Critique*, 30(4), pp.373–389. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2021.1989553.

Mannik, L. and Mcgarry, K. (2017). *Practicing ethnography : a student guide to method and methodology*. North York, Ontario ; Tonawanda, New York, Usa: University Of Toronto Press.

Müller-Funk, L. (2018). Diaspora Politics and Political Remittances: a Conceptual Reflection. In: R. Cohen and C. Fischer, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Diaspora Studies*. Routledge.

Phinney, J.S. (1989). Stages of Ethnic Identity Development in Minority Group Adolescents. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 9(1-2), pp.34–49. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431689091004.

Phinney, J.S. (1990). Ethnic identity in adolescents and adults: Review of research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 108(3), pp.499–514. doi:https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.108.3.499.

Phinney, J.S. (1993). A Three Stage Model of Ethnic Identity Development in Adolescence. In: M.E. Bernal and G.P. Knight, eds., *Ethnic identity : formation and transmission among Hispanics and other minorities*. Albany: State University Of New York Press, pp.61–79.

Phinney, J.S. and Ong, A.D. (2007). Ethnic Identity Development in Immigrant Families. In: J.E. Lansford, K. Deater-Deckard and M.H. Bornstein, eds., *Immigrant Families in Contemporary Society*. New York: Guilford Press.

Riad, M. and Abd El -Rasoul, K. (2010). *Rehla fi Zaman Al Nuba [Journey in the Time of Nubia]*. 2nd ed. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation.

Sánchez-Ayala, L. (2013). Interviewing Techniques for Migrant Minority Groups. In: C. Vargas-Silva, ed., *Handbook of research methods in migration*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Scudder, T. (2016). *Aswan High Dam Resettlement of Egyptian Nubians*. Springer.

Stake, R.E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Stock, F. (2010). Home and Memory. In: K. Knott and S. McLoughlin, eds., *Diasporas: Concepts, Intersections, Identities*. London: Zed Books.

Turner, S. (2018). The Social Construction of Diasporas: Conceptual Development and the Rwandan case. In: R. Cohen and C. Fischer, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Diaspora Studies*. Routledge.