

The London School of Economics and Political Science

***Hikāyāt Sha'b – Stories of Peoplehood
Nasserism, Popular Politics and Songs in Egypt 1956-1973***

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Declaration

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Abstract

This study explores the popular politics behind the main milestones that shape Nasserist Egypt.

The decade leading up to the 1952 revolution was one characterized with a heightened state of popular mobilisation, much of which the Free Officers' movement capitalized upon. Thus, in focusing on three of the Revolution's main milestones; the resistance to the tripartite aggression on Port Said (1956), the building of the Aswan High Dam (1960-1971), and the popular warfare against Israel in Suez (1967-1973), I shed light on the popular struggles behind the events.

I argue that to the members of resistance of Port Said and Suez, and the builders of the High Dam, the revolution became a struggle of their own. Ideas of socialism and Arab nationalism were re-articulated and appropriated so that they became features of their identities and everyday lives.

Through looking at songs, idioms and stories of the experiences of those periods, I explore how people experimented with a new identity under Nasser and how much they were willing to sacrifice for it. These songs and idioms, I treat as an 'intimate language'. A common language reflecting a shared experience that often only the community who produces the language can understand. I argue that songs capture in moments of political imagination what official historical narratives may not. Furthermore, I argue that these songs reveal silences imposed by state narratives, as well as those silences that are self-imposed through the many incidents people would rather forget.

The study contributes to an understanding of the politics of hegemony, and how an ideology can acquire the status of 'common sense' through being negotiated, (re)-articulated, and contributed to, rather than enforced on a people suppressed. It also contributes to our understanding of popular politics, and the importance of exploring the experiences and intentions of people behind historical and political milestones; understanding politics beyond the person of politicians and the boundaries of the nation state.

Note on Transliteration

I have used a simplified version of the International Journal of Middle East Studies' system of transliteration of Arabic words. Diacritical marks are given only to the Arabic letters 'ayn (') and hamza (') and the stressed alif (ā) and yeh (ī). The Arabic letter jim has been rendered as J, when used as such (by Upper Egyptians in particular) except when the Egyptian pronunciation G (gim) is more common in the area where the word or name is used. In that regard I have also spelt song lyrics as they have been pronounced (thus often using 'il' rather than 'al'), as most are colloquial phrases. All Arabic names are transliterated following the JMES system, except in cases where a more commonly accepted version exists (Mohammed) or when the person named has provided a transliteration (Atteyat).

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Translation list of commonly used terms and phrases

Balawta – Reference to the citizens of Port Said

Bambutiyya – *Bambut* is said to come from ‘pump-boat’ and so *babmbutiyya* is the dance of the pump-boat fishermen

Bunāt al-sadd – Builders of the High Dam

Al-Dammah – Literally means ‘to come together’ and refers to a collective singing tradition in Port Said

Al-Difa` al-sha`bī – Popular defence. Members of the civil resistance in Suez between 1967-1973 (acknowledged, though not supported by Military or intelligence)

Fida`iy (pl. *Fida`iyyīn*) – General reference to civilian resistance and civilian fighters in popular warfare

Fallah (pl. *fallahīn*) – Egyptian peasant usually from the Delta

Futuwwa – A neighbourhood strong-man

Gam`iyyit Muhibi al-Simsimiyya – The organisation of *simsimiyya* lovers – a band in Suez

Ibn balad (pl. *wilād al-balad*) – Literally son (or children) of a country. Person who is reliable, and genuine

Kalām al-sadd – Literally ‘the language of the Dam’. Language of common terms shared by builders of the Aswan High Dam

Al-marhūm kān ghaltān – ‘The Deceased was at fault’. Message carved on caskets of workers who died working on the Aswan High Dam.

Munazamat Sina` al-Arabiyya – Arab Sinai Organisation – Armed civilian resistance sponsored by the intelligence during the War of Attrition

Munazamat al-shabab al-`ishtiraki – Socialist Youth Organisations existing between 1963-1976

Naksa – The Setback of 1967

Al-sadd al-`ālī – The Aswan High Dam

Sa`idī – Upper Egyptian (from the *sa`id*)

Sawaysa – People of Suez

Sha`b – A people or populace

Sha`bī – Popular. Adjective used to describe songs in this thesis

Simsimiyya – A five-string instrument particular to the people of the canal

Tahjīr – Migration

Tahjīr 'Ijbarī – Forced Migration

Thaghra – The breach that occurred after the October 6 1973 crossing, leading to Israel's besieging of the Egyptian Army in Sinai and advancing towards Suez

Al-'Udwan al-thulāthī – The Tripartite aggression of 1956 in Port Said.

Wilad al-ard – Children of the Land. Name of a band in Suez.

Ya baladna – Meaning 'Our Country', is a phrase common to many popular songs in a plea to the people of the country

Chapter 1. Re-imagining 1952

1.1 Introduction

The study of the popular politics behind the 1952 Revolution places us in a tricky situation, for this is neither a study of a popular revolt, nor the politics of protest waged by a people contending with empire or imperialism, or an autocratic state. Rather it is the study of the workers, marginalised citizens and resistance fighters who built a revolution that silenced their struggles.

This thesis explores the popular politics behind political and industrial milestones of a Revolution waged by an army in the name of the people. It unpacks popular politics through people's own political intentions, their representations of their 'peoplehood' and the extent to which they were willing to sacrifice for their revolutionary communities.

Indeed, the Revolution itself occurred in a context of popular mobilisation; the decade leading up to 1952 was one rife with political activity (Beinin & Lockman 1987), on the part of communists, Islamists and the intelligentsia. In the months prior to the Revolution, protests in January 1952 driven by anti-British sentiment in Ismailiyya suspiciously transformed into the 'Cairo Fire.' This incident of burning and looting of the city, led to calls for a state of emergency (*ahkam 'urfiyya*) allowing for the palace supported by the British to control the escalating situation. A movement, born of anger and a desire and will for freedom, was already spreading through the country prior to the Army Officers' coup.

This study argues that that three of the main milestones of the 1952 Revolution could not have been possible without the mobilised will of a people. It was they who were behind the building of the High Dam, the political success of the 1956 war in Port Said, and the perseverance and resistance by civilians to occupying powers from 1967 and through the War of Attrition and the 1973 war in Suez. Their 'belief' in the ideology propagated by the state and their willingness to make sacrifices for it contributed to its successes, and their championing of the Revolution's ideology is what has it linger in popular Egyptian memory and politics until this very day.

Although this study does not minimise the importance of the regime's tactics of oppression, the interviews show that people's willingness to make sacrifices for their nation(s) came not from fear of oppression, but their readiness to believe. A 'utopian longing' or belief in a 'revolutionary truth,' as I will elaborate in later chapters, fuelled their politics and mobilised their will. This did not however make them blind to state failures, as my analysis of their stories and songs testifies.

Exploring a popular history of Nasserist Egypt becomes important in understanding the politics of hegemony. The Revolution's ideology was able to mobilise consent and political will through articulating the aspirations, desires and politics of a people. This hegemony was characterised by contradictions and complexities, from the contradictory consciousness experienced by those who ascribed to the Revolution, to people's contributions to its ideology even when it faltered, sometimes even going to lengths that politicians behind those ideas would not. It helps us understand the Revolution and that moment of a breach in the political imagination beyond the figure of Nasser.

The significance of exploring the popular history of this period also lies in the way it informs us of the politics of a people long considered apolitical and 'fooled' by the rhetoric of the Revolution or oppressed by its apparatus. The study of this period was long focused on Nasser's policies and reactions to the West, with at best an assessment of the effects of his policies on the populace. Rarely, if ever, were the political drives and intentions of the people who carried out these wars and industrial feats considered, nor what this moment in time meant to them.

This study comes as particularly significant at a time (2012) when a popular movement that opposed thirty years of dictatorship, also explicitly contests sixty years of Military rule. For, a military regime once again attempted to rule Egypt, building on its nationalist repertoire of a "revolutionary army", or "champions of the October 6 war"; repertoires which the findings of this thesis distinctly question.

Some testimonies (particularly chapter 6) offer an 'oppositional memory' that contends with the official history of the war, its events and the question of its victories and losses.

In a sense therefore, the testimonies in this thesis challenge the official narratives of a glorious 'revolutionary' or 'heroic' military.

I explore how people articulated their own revolutionary values and how they saw themselves as a *sha'b* (people) in the context of their Revolution, as opposed to how they were constantly structured as a *sha'b* by Nasser and the Revolution's cultural institutions.

My investigation of popular memory relies on oral history interviews, but more importantly, on songs, poetry, idioms and children's ditties that tell of the events. Through these, I explore how people have attempted to represent the events, but more significantly, themselves as communities and as a people. Songs, poetry and idioms are articulated in forms of 'intimate language' that at once bind these communities through their experiences, and encapsulate events in a language for future generations. They provide, not only an account of the events as they unravelled, but the actual experience of these events: the magnitude of the losses and the thrill of the personal triumphs. They also expose us to the politics of an event and the sense of the nation or imaginary they construct, beyond the nation-state and the person of politicians.

I thus explore the revolutionary moment of the Nasserist period through the experiences of the builders of the High Dam and the Nubians who migrated to make it possible, the civilian resistance in Port Said in 1956 and the popular resistance in Suez in 1967 onwards. In doing so, I identify those moments of the breach in post-colonial, political imagination, where the building of a nation that would better serve and accommodate its people seemed to them, if even briefly, possible.

In the remainder of this chapter, I look at the literature to which this study contributes and the methodology on which it is based.

1.2 Review of the Literature

Most of the literature on this period consists of analysis, praise or critique of Nasserism, (Nasser's) Arab Socialism, (his) Arab Nationalism, or is Eurocentric in its perspective. As such, many of the events behind the history, and the people behind those events, have been written out. This writing out of subaltern politics has been on account of the scholarly contention of the period that revolves around Nasser's policies, a review of Western policies towards Nasser, or ultimately the silencing inflicted by the revolution that spoke in their name.

In focusing on three of the era's main milestones – the resistance to Tripartite Aggression in Port Said, the building of the High Dam, and the war of Attrition in Suez – I shed light on the popular struggles and politics that underlie the period. What has been silenced by most narratives ranges from alternative narratives to, in the cases of Port Said and Suez, an almost different reality. Here their accounts are challenges to state narratives including their telling of the absence of the military (and thus the state) at key moments.

In all cases, there is a process whereby Nasserist ideas were negotiated, re-articulated and adapted as people tailored their identities to the newly imagined communities and contributed to the set of values and ideas that became known as Nasserism. These contributions were both concrete in terms of the industrial and political feats for which this period is remembered, as well as the ideas of Arab unity and Arab socialism that continue to be associated with it.

In exploring the movements behind the idea, ideology or 'ism,' I contribute to a wider literature both on the Middle East and beyond that explores a people's politics behind the ideologies, policies and political projects of formal politics. I focus on those moments of fluidity when the existing social and political structures are questioned, and new ideas start to appear. Those are the fleeting moments of 'political imagination' that are lost in history's attempt to account for the end of one political era and the beginning of another.

In the second section, I explore the strides taken in Egyptian historiography to account for a people's history of events, particularly in its analysis of developments beyond the state

and the nationalist movements beyond the elite and intelligentsia. I then move into the existing Nasserist historiography highlighting the Western and Arab ‘meta-narratives’ and their exclusions. For this, I draw upon the work of both academic and ‘non-academic historians.’

By non-academic histories I refer to accounts by journalists, members of military, intelligence, and the Revolutionary Council and others who draw on their personal experiences. More particularly however, I rely on the various publications by the citizens of Suez, Port Said, Aswan and Nubia who have taken it upon themselves to document their own versions of controversial events and assert their own versions of history. Some of these have been published with limited finance, others remain as personal documents and diaries, to which I was generously given access.

These accounts challenge what Anthony Gorman calls an “institutional forgetting” (Gorman 2003, 3-4) or state-sponsored amnesia that excises the experiences of particular groups or issues from the historical record. These written sources complement and support my predominant reliance on oral history interviews and forms of popular culture that make this research a project of subaltern history. Such an account reflects the history of the nation’s many fragments and contributes to the methodologies set out by the subaltern schools and popular memory group which greatly inform my approach (Guha 1982a; Pandy 1997; Popular Memory Group 1982).

In step with engagement with non-academic histories, and given that the 1960s was also characterised by a colloquial poetry and popular literary movement, I also dedicate a section to the popular literature of the era. This literature narrated a history of the periphery beyond socialist realism that captures elements of the collective imaginary that continue to shape memories of the 1960s in Egypt.

1.2.1 Beyond Nasserism – A Popular History of Political Ideas

In order to understand the 1952 Revolution, the significance of the values it invoked, and the projects through which these values were manifested, it is necessary to see Egypt as part of a larger movement at the time. This was a movement made up of nations recently

liberated and soon to be independent from colonialism, claiming a stance of non-alliance with the first and second worlds. Countries such as Egypt, India, Indonesia, Algeria, Vietnam and others in Asia, Africa and Latin America were the self-proclaimed 'third world.'

Although there is a vast body of literature on and of 'Third Worldism'¹ and the Non-Aligned Movement by intellectuals of these countries during the period, there is little work on the subaltern politics of an era characterised by the liberation of peoples. The published voices of the third world are those of intellectuals, or scholars whose focus has been on the literature or rhetoric of the movement and the politicians who championed it (Ferguson 1986; Malley 1996; Berger 2009; Kiely 1995; Larsen 2005). In these works, Third Worldism is most often framed as somehow reactive to and pre-determined by Western policies and imperialism. One work that stands out is Vijay Prashad's (2008) study, which sets out to narrate a 'people's history of the Third World.'

Prashad looks at the Third World as a political platform, championed by the 'three sharks,' Tito, Nehru and Nasser, who decided to ally with neither the 'first' nor 'second' worlds of the Cold War. He charts how they instead created an alternative movement identified by the history of their struggles against colonialism and their programme for the creation of justice. Prashad's account also highlights the pitfalls of the movement, in particular the dynamic of military rule, the risks of nostalgia and ultimately economic dependence on the first and second worlds.

My work relates to Prashad's in obvious ways; he draws out a framework for a movement that Egypt was part of at the time, and most of the educational and cultural and historical projects I will highlight to indicate how Nasser mobilised hegemony drew upon on those wider projects. Prashad's work also underlines how an essential aspect of the movement was to refute or challenge the idea of European nationalism, adopting instead an idea of wider belonging with those nations that shared a struggle and the dream for a common

¹ Champions and intellectuals of the Third World movement' include Albert Memmi, Jean-Paul Sartre, Frantz Fanon, Gerard Chaliand, Paulo Freire, Anouar Abdel-Malek, Mahmoud Hussein, VY Mudimbe, Kwame Nkrumah, Ernesto Che Guevara, CLR James, Aimé Césaire and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o.

future. It is in this context that Nasser's quest for pan-Arabism and his bringing Egypt's struggle back to an African context can be understood.

I wish to take Prashad's work deeper however to the people behind the movement, those "everyday people (who) played complicated roles ...developed highly sophisticated and often very different political ideas from the people who ruled them..." in an attempt "to excavate this multifaceted history" (Prashad 2008, ix). Although these are the aims the book sets itself, it remains focused on the political leaders and the projects they championed, a valuable contribution but one that can be taken further in terms of being a 'people's history.'

Nationalism for the Third World movement was based on a belonging that looked to a common future. It is here that 'struggle' emerges as having a central place, for the common future is one that challenges established interests and as such necessitates common struggle. This seems to have become the measure for 'belonging' and the ultimate element defining communities for the builders of the High Dam and the resistance in Port Said and Suez. Nationalism became the Dam, Palestine, Sudan; stretching farther than the boundaries of the nation, and deeper than one place or another. Such struggles contributed to the larger idea and sentiment that charged the 'Nasserist' era, arguably even creating it.

In considering ideas of socialism and Arab nationalism as they may have been appropriated, understood and lived by ordinary people in Nasser's Egypt, my work is comparable to the body of revisionist social and cultural history of Stalinist Russia including the works of (Fitzpatrick 2000, 1996; Figs 2008; Figs and Kolonitskii 1999; Kotkin 1995). These works look at Stalinism beyond Stalin's despotism and explore how his ideas may have been hegemonic. Fitzpatrick looks at the everyday lives of peasants, exploring how they react and adapt to Stalinism as a culture, and less as a political idea. Figs, meanwhile focuses on language, "looking at songs, texts, symbolic flags, and monuments, banners and slogans, common speech and rumour, ..." (Figs 1999,1) tracing a shared language between ruler and ruled for negotiating allegiance and reinforcing identities.

However it is Stephen Kotkin's (1995) work that considers the politics of ideas, and how Stalinism was adopted by a society through belief, resistance, negotiation and accommodation that is most relevant to my project.

Kotkin's work focuses on Magnetic Mountain, an industrial project that took place in an area of that name, "[bringing] the revolution there...and how the inhabitants of the resultant urban centre took part in the creation of what would come to be known as Stalinism" (Kotkin 1995, 2). Magnetic Mountain, much like the High Dam becomes a site, not only for an industrial revolution, but also for the politicisation of a community that ultimately 'builds' the revolution. Stalinism, like Nasserism becomes "not just a political system, let alone the rule of an individual, rather a set of values, a social identity and a chosen way of life." (Kotkin 1995, 23)

In exploring these values as they are created or appropriated, I mainly draw on songs, poems, idioms, sayings and other 'intimate' forms of language that become specific to the community and event in question. These forms also become the way people 'remember' best; they encapsulate the event, but also the struggle, and the emotional experiences that accompanied it. Indeed, the ultimate difference between the history of a political idea within the structure and institution that sustains it, and the history of the development of that idea through the ambitions, dreams, and sacrifices of a people, are the feelings that are associated with it.

The way in which I look at understandings of socialism beyond structural politics can be compared to the work of Ilham Khuri-Makdisi (2010). She explores the history of global radicalism in the Mediterranean at an earlier period (1860-1914), as ideas of socialism and anarchism developed amongst groups of intellectuals and workers, before the advent of political parties or institutions that would later frame and promote them. She argues that the various radical experiments that took place during the period in Cairo, Alexandria and Beirut were either "obliterated by a nationalist historiographical framework or forcibly incorporated into the nationalist narrative." (Khuri-Makdisi 2010, 8)

She attempts,

....to prompt a rethinking of the meaning of the Left, too often associated with political parties and rigid official ideology and with notions of class consciousness and other traditional categories of the Marxist left. Instead I seek to underline the multiplicity of lefts that existed before World War I, before the Russian revolution and the establishment of more orthodox, party defined movements (Khuri-Makdisi 2010, 8).

Besides looking at the growth of a political community that extended beyond the boundaries of nation-states (challenging the nationalist-centred narrative of the movement at the time), she traces a movement of ideas that was a precursor to the more renowned era for collective action and experimentation with ideology, 1880-1925. Furthermore, in looking for those spaces where structures of politics and class were “investigated, discussed, reworked, and synthesised” (Khuri-Makdisi 2010, 9), she explores theatre, plays popular poetry and other political and artistic spaces where experimentation was most vivid.

Through looking at a history of the 1952 Revolution through the songs, poetry and stories of those who realised its feats, I explore the development and articulation of socialist ideas in their everyday lives, forging their communities of struggle. In this way, I present a history that stretches beyond the making of a state, a movement beyond the will or idea of one man, and a sacrifice that extended beyond the nation.

In the following section I will trace the strides already taken towards a people’s history of Egypt.

1.2.2 Egyptian Historiography, from Below

Much work has already been done in the field of subaltern history in Egypt, exploring the role of ordinary people, workers, and peasants in the development of ideas, the shaping of states, and the structure of local and global economies. This literature challenges dominant nationalist and imperialist discourses of the nation, economy and state.

Khaled Fahmy’s work, for instance, contests the dominant nationalist discourse of the reign of Mohammed ‘Ali, through a history of his army’s soldiers. He argues that “through

a process of violence, silence and exclusion,” the state managed to forge, impose and teach the essential truths of an Egyptian nation (Fahmy 1997, 314). He tells stories of numerous rebellions, mutinies, acts of defiance, desertion and self-mutilation on the part of soldiers to resist being made part of the state’s nationalist institution ‘par excellence’. John Chalcraft’s (2005) work on craftsmen and guilds, in the 1860s and until 1914, meanwhile, explores their impact on the disaggregation of the guilds, the structure of the state (through addressing and challenging it), and how a wave of protest in 1907 may have contributed to the development of the nationalist movement, challenging the idea that it was predominantly elitist. Chalcraft casts light on forms of collective action beyond the factory floors, and formal and informal organisation methods including petitions. Other works that explore subaltern politics in the context of empire in Egypt include (Tucker 1986; Rieker 1997; Baer 1964; Abul-Magd 2008; Chalcraft 2007; Gorman 2007; Lawson 1981; Beinín 2001)

Significant amongst works that look at nationalist movements beyond the elites, is Juan Cole’s study (1999) of the cultural and social roots of the 1882 ‘Urabi revolt, which had fallen out of the mainstream history of the soldiers’ movement. He focuses on the two decades leading up to the revolt, in which “a leading but not dominant role was played by the Egyptian military officer, Ahmad ‘Urabi’” (Cole 1999, 14). Cole’s account challenges the British narrative of Egypt’s slide into anarchy and the growth of nationalist resentment against Turkish rule that justified the British invasion. The significance of this work lies not only in its challenge to the narratives of the revolt, but specifically in his assertion that this was indeed a revolution.

Finally, leading up to the period in question, there is Beinín and Lockman’s (1987) pioneering work on the development of the workers’ movement 1882-1954. They explore the development of class consciousness, organisation and collective action in a political and economic context structured by foreign domination. They look at the workers’ role in the national political arena and the nationalist movement, as well as the influence of the communist, socialist and Islamist movements on their formation. This is taken further by Lockman’s (1993) edited volume on formation of working class consciousness that stretches to the 1977 protests in Egypt.

Most of these works rely predominantly on archival sources. There remains little work exploring a subaltern history of Egypt, and particularly a history of political struggle, that does not rely on documented forms of protest or opposition to the state. An exception is Reem Saad (1988, 2002)'s work on peasants' experience of land reform policies in Egypt.² She explores how peasants experienced land reform as more than just the re-appropriation of land, rather the transformation of power relations between peasants and feudalists, so that even those who did not benefit from land appropriation still saw this as the 'law of freedom' (2002). While she looks at Peasants perceptions of history in Egypt (1988) highlighting through her work how perceptions of history are inseparable from their personal experiences of this nationalist history (here she focuses on the 1967 and 1973 wars). Her thesis of how temporal concepts are used to identify communities, relate or differentiate them from the larger nation and its hegemonic historiographical discourse, greatly informs my own analysis of perceptions and creations of history, particularly as expressed and experienced in Suez.

Finally, my work draws on a wider tradition of subaltern history and 'history from below.' This is particularly so in my reliance on memory and analysis of the politics and contradictions behind memories and silences, as I will elaborate upon in the discussion of methodology.

1.2.3 Accounts of 'Nasser's' Egypt: Port Said, the High Dam and Suez

The history of Egypt's 1952 coup d'état is an account of events, wars, victories and capitulations in which the actors were Egypt, the Arab world, and more broadly, Britain, the United States, Israel, the Soviet Union and France. It is a history in which the Egyptian nationalist movement, the rise of Arab nationalism, the fall of the British Empire, the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Cold War all feature. As such, there is a battle over narratives

² Hamied Ansari (1986) touches upon the "Kamshish" affair bringing peasant politics behind land reform to light, but only in an attempt to analyse state policies with regards to land reform and (failure) to dissolve the landed elite. There is also Shahenda Maqled's memoirs (wife and long-time companion of Salah Hussain who was killed in 1964), a (communist) activist and champion of peasant movement in Kamshish for most of her lifetime (Abulnaga 2006).

in relation to the milestones of the period, around which the events that are my focus revolve.

While there is a plethora of literature focusing on the Revolution, much of it is either about Nasser himself, or takes him as a point of departure in understanding Arab socialism, pan-Arabism, or simply Nasserism (Younis 2012; Abd al-magid 1994; Abdelmalek 1968 ; Abu 'Izz el-din 1981; Ajami 1974; Alexander 2005 ;Beattie 1994; Crabbs 1975; Gordon 1992; Gordon 2006; Joeston 1960; Lacouture 1973; Mansfield 1969; Nutting 1972; Woodward, 1992; Podeh and Winckler 2004; Stephens 1973; Jankowski 2002).

There is also a significant body of cultural history of the period, both of arts and artists inspired by the Revolution and those that opposed it. Works that I will draw upon in my thesis include (Al Mahalawi 1998; Booth 2007, 1992; Beinin 1994; Danielson 1997; Gordon 2002; Jacquemond 2008; Mehrez 1994; Stokes 2009, 2008, 2006).

The remainder of the literature focuses on key policies and events that define this period, including the Aswan High Dam, agrarian reform, educational reform, the war in Yemen, the student movement in 1968, the Socialist Youth Association, the Port Said War in 1956 and the Six Day War in 1967. Most of these are academic works highlighting policies that affected or were affected by events, or accounts of 'non-academic historians' who were part of these experiences.

In the rest of this section, I will point to some of the main literature related to the Aswan High Dam, the Tripartite Aggression in Port Said and the War of Attrition in Suez.

Port Said, 1956

The Tripartite Aggression, globally known as the Suez Crisis, did not actually take place in Suez, but in Port Said. The literature on the Tripartite Aggression of 1956 is narrated through cause and effect on British policies (Eden 1960; Hugh 1970; Kunz 1991; Kyle 1991, 2003; Nutting 1972; Lamb 1987; Lloyd 1978; Shuckburgh, 1986), American policies (Copeland 1989; Eisenhower 1965; Freiburger 1992; Hahn 2004; Kingseed 1995; Meyer

1980; Neff 1981), or both (Ashton 1996; Hahn 1991; Louis and Owen 1989; Lucas 1991). Events are also written from the perspective of Israel (Black and Morris, 1991) and France (Luethy, 1956). Books such as that of Louis and Owens (1989) offer a collection of different perspectives organised by those looking at the 'crisis' as one internal to Egypt and an external one.

The focus on the 'crisis' the 'affair' and 'the descent', turns the event into a series of diplomatic blunders on the part of the West and reactions from Nasser. The way a war was waged by Anglo-French forces on mostly unarmed civilians for seven days of continuous bombing is almost completely written out of international history as well as Egyptian history (for lack of documentation on one hand, and the glorification of nationalist achievement on the other).

In Egyptian sources, the aim appears to be to counter Western discourses and focus on the political victory, widely accepted as a military defeat (Abulfadl 2001; Farid 1997; Fawzi 1987; Heikal 2004, 1986, 1977; ' 1989; Al Qadi 2010; Shemes and Troen 1990). In this process of glorifying Nasser, there is little space for the recognition of the fact that the army was trapped in Sinai leaving Port Said to the defense of civilians.

As with most events related to Nasser, there is writing by his confidant, advisor and speechwriter Heikal (1986, 1987, 2004). With his ever-emphasised 'insider' perspective, he conveys Nasser's opinion on matters, proceedings of meetings, letters and other political intimacies that often only he was privy to. Otherwise, in the absence of historical archives, or scholarly work on the matter, we have memoirs of Hafiz Isma'il (1987), then manager of the military commander's office; Abd al-Fattah Abulfadl (2001), vice president of intelligence; as well as members of the Revolutionary Council, such as Sayyid Marie (1990) and Abd al-Latif al-Bughdadi (1977).

Academic works on the battle of Port Said are mainly military history books (such as Farid 1997) that focus on the military's experience, predominantly in Sinai. A recurring concern in these works is the price paid when military endeavours are driven by political rather than strategic agendas. However, these accounts do highlight the often-overlooked fact

that the military never made it to Port Said. Still, the focus remains on the military as an institution, the effects on it and its plans of action, rather than the people implicated.

Finally, there are personal accounts of members of the resistance of Port Said as well as members of the communist party who came to Port Said to volunteer (Hamrush 1956; Nassif 1979). Notably a number of citizens of Port Said took it upon themselves to document the history of events, (Al Qadi 2010; Al-Sha'ir 2006) cataloguing pictures, events, oral history interviews of various periods.

Given that the 'official' history of civilian resistance is minimal, an account of those experiences becomes necessary. Such an account not only highlights atrocities overlooked by historians and social scientists, but also sheds light on a movement that preceded the Revolution and continued through it.

The Aswan High Dam

Most literature on the building of the High Dam is contextualised within the politics of the Cold War. It focuses in particular on the Aswan 'rebuff' (the retraction of US funding by US secretary of state John Foster Dulles) and the question of how this affected diplomatic and economic relations (Doughetry 1959; Alternman 2002; Burns 1985; Hahn 1991). This literature spills into literature on the 'Suez Crisis,' since 'Abdel Nasser's announcement of the nationalisation of the Canal was read as a reaction to this 'rebuff.' Both Aswan and Suez are narrated with a large degree of Eurocentricity.

Few works focus on the actual process of building the Dam, whether the technology used, the available resources, or the chronology of dramatic events and achievements (Fathi 1976; Little 1965; Waterbury 1979; Moore 1980), save for governmental documents that highlight the technical aspects of the process (Abu Fetna 2010; Hafez et al 1977; Kinnawi et al 1973; Yasin 1989). Most literature assessing the 'pros and cons' of the Dam starts after its completion in 1970 and is associated with the rule of Sadat when much criticism was levied against the Dam in the context of his dismantling Nasser's legitimacy.

There is little if any literature on the actual experience of the builders or engineers who worked on the Dam. There is none at all of their political experience of the Dam with the exception of the work of Elizabeth Bishop (1997) on Egyptian engineers and Soviet specialists.

Bishop considers the politics related to knowledge and control of the Egyptian Nile in the years of Anglo-Indian dam management, leading up to the building of the High Dam and the Russian assistance. Her work is the first to contemplate the politics of Egyptian-Russian relations as they struggled to find post-imperial grounds for cooperation. I draw on Bishop's work significantly in drawing a backdrop to the narratives of relations between Egyptian workers and Soviet specialists, exploring how their memories both complement and contradict the official narrative.

Finally, I also explore the Nubian experience of the politics of the Dam, how they express their sacrifice of accepting to be migrated, and how they continue to remember. Once again, I explore how they themselves appropriated ideas of Arab nationalism and socialism, and how they related them to their own cultures and 'ways of life.'

Most of the existing literature on Nubians is archaeological, focusing on the transport of temples such as Abu Simbel, and the Egyptian (as well as German and French missions) to 'collect and document' Nubian heritage, before the move. Many Nubians I interviewed expressed resentment of this focus; it is as if their creations were more valued than their own lives.

The exception to this is the work of Fahim (1981, 1983) and a group of works catalogued by Hopkins and Mehanna (2010). The latter includes 'encounters' with the Nubians, "present(ing) a picture of Nubian life before the move" (Hopkins & Mehanna 2010, 3) in the period between 1961-1964. Fahim's approach in studying the displacement and struggles of resettlement however, is still one of a cost-benefit analysis. At times he is more sympathetic to the Nubians (1983) and at others more focused on the necessity of the Dam (1981).

These studies leave little space for agency on the part of the Nubians; they are less an attempt to understand the experiences of the Nubians than an attempt to understand *through* them. There is little questioning of whether or not they felt the Dam should have been built in the first place, and how they may have contributed to or objected to the decision. Their presence in these works is limited to providing information on the circumstances and conditions. Ultimately, the sentiment projected on their behalf is acceptance of the migration.

Suez, 1967-1973

The War of Attrition is once again set in a highly charged international context.

Before looking into the literature, I would like to return briefly to what I alluded to earlier in terms of the 'temporal boundaries' or histories as experienced 'from below.' Although in mainstream literature, and state narratives, the *Naksa* of 1967 (or Six Day War) and the triumph of October 6 1973 (Yum Kippur) are two separate events, attributed to two different political eras, to the people of Suez they are one struggle. For them, this period was a continuous state of battle, as resistance operations continued from 1967 until they were disarmed by the government in 1973 – unbeknownst to them – in preparation for the war. After the Egyptian army crossed over on October 6, it was besieged in Sinai, and the Israeli tanks rolled into Suez on October 24. The civilian resistance continued in what they describe as the 'War of 101 days.' My research on Suez thus starts with 1967 and ends with 1974. Although this seems to extend beyond my period of study (Nasserist Egypt from 1952-1970) to stop any earlier would be to ignore their own definition of the revolutionary era, and their role in that context.

Egyptian literature focuses on the question of whether 1967 was a failure on account of the army or the military institution in power (Hadidi 1974; Huwaydi 1992; Shazly 2012; Lutfi 1976). Also given much attention in the literature is the question of whether or how 1967 signalled the demise of Nasserism, Arab nationalism or the Revolution embodied in the man crushed by this defeat (Dawisha, 2003; Hussein, 1973; Ra'if, 2001; Smith, 1992)

This literature is complemented by the personal accounts and biographies of members of the army, including works such as that of General al-Shazli (2012) and others. The writing of Al-Shazli was censored until recently as it recasts the celebrated victory of 1973 as a defeat and minimises the role of Hosni Mubarak as a fighter pilot.

Meanwhile, most Western literature focuses on the policies of the great powers, framing Nasser and the events as they unravelled as reactions to these policies and decisions (Ashton 2007; Mcnamara 2003; Neff 1984; Roi & Morozov 2008; Garwych 2000). This also includes Israel's perspective on the war of 1967 and 1973, particularly its own 'fight for survival' overlooking Israel's acts of aggression (Donovan, 1967). Although counter-narratives do exist in Israel revealing the agendas behind the wars (particularly the 1967 aim of destroying Nasser), these are mainly personal memoirs (such as Moshe Sharette's diary in (Rokach 1980).

The experiences of members of the resistance and soldiers in the army narrate a war with a different timeframe, negate national state victories, celebrate others and challenge the basis of the legitimacy of the two presidents who came after Nasser. Their 'oppositional memories' (Swedenburg 2003, 110) are a threat to the metanarrative especially in their lack of engagement with state narratives. For the resistance in Suez, the claims go further than understanding October 6 as a defeat; some claim that the 1973 war was 'staged' as Sadat would not have been able to justify a peace treaty without the war. Armed with their own memories and narratives, their struggle continues, unaccommodated by the state, and their autonomy (in history and commemoration) persists.

1.2.4 Popular Literature, Alternative Imaginaries

The 1950s and 1960s were a period of heightened cultural production, whether encouraged by the state or in opposition to it. Much art was sponsored through state publishing houses, theatres and radio. Singers such as Umm Kulthum (Danielson, 1997) and 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz (Stokes, 2006, 2008, 2009) were inspired and encouraged by the Revolution. Besides the official platforms for the arts framed by a socialist imaginary, the 1960s witnessed the growth of a counter-culture that made theatres of cafés, factory floors, and apartments.

This counter-culture was literary in the new forms of colloquial poetry championed by Salah Jahin and Fu'ad Haddad (Radwan, 2004) and supported by the state. Others were politically dissident, such as Ahmad Fu'ad Nigm and Sheikh Imam who in a sense became the orators of the students and workers' movements, and continued to play such a role into the Mubarak-era (Booth 2007; Bein 1994). The 1960s is also known for a new literary movement, championed by writers and poets such as Sun'allah Ibrahim, 'Abd al-Rahman al-Abnudi, Yahya al-Tahir 'Abdallah, Amal Dunqul, Nagib Surur, Gamal al-Ghitany (Jacquemon 2008; Mehrez 1994) and others, who not only refused to abide by the encouraged cultural framework of socialist realism, but brought the voices of those who were 'silenced by the voice of the battle'³ to the forefront.

These writers according to Mehrez,

...give voice to the exploited, oppressed, marginalised, and silenced subject...[and] bridge the gap between the literary and historical, the personal and collective, and aesthetic and ideological (Mehrez 1994, 10)

For, "the writer will bear equally with the historian, the responsibility of producing a counter record, an alternative discourse" (Mehrez 1994, 34). An alternative discourse becomes particularly significant with regard to a period, where not only is the mainstream discourse engineered by the state, but where there is little documentation of what actually happened in the wake of the 1967 and 1973 wars.⁴

Noha Radwan (2008) looks at similar literature, in a later era (in the 1990s) and argues that through the strength of their narrativity, these novels "question the referential authority of the historical archive and claim that the events inscribed in them, had they really happened, would still have been bound to stay outside of the hegemonic narrative" (Radwan 2008, 16).

³ In a speech regarding the Tripartite Aggression of 1956, Nasser said, "All voices are subordinate to the voice of the battle," which became a much-cited phrase, of the period and beyond.

⁴ According to Amr Al-Shalaqani (Professor of Law at Cairo University and the American university in Cairo) (Al-Shalaqani 2012) no documents pertaining to the 1952 Revolution have been released by the government for archiving over the last sixty years. And according to Khaled Fahmy, no records or archives of the 1967 war have been made available or accessible through archival institutions. Lecture by Professor Khaled Fahmy, Head of the History Department at the American University in Cairo. Recorded by author, Cairo 2010.

It is thus worth studying the cultural productions that emerged from this new literary movement, a movement that attempted to tell the stories of those who lived through events that were highly sensationalised. In many ways, they form a kind of 'popular' counter-memory to the nationalist memories with which the lingering songs of Umm Kulthum and 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz leave us.

On the building of the High Dam, the most popular work is that of 'Abd al-Rahman al-Abnudi, the Upper Egyptian poet who came to Cairo to write. His work was geared towards the production of a genre, where stories are written to be 'read', as a contribution to popular culture⁵. Al-Abnudi's most known work is *Jawabāt Hiraji Il-Gitt li-Zawgatahu Fatna 'Abd al-Ghaffar* (Letters of Hiraji Il-Gitt to his wife Fatna Abd al-Ghaffar) (2001), made up of a series of letters a worker on the High Dam exchanges with his wife, highlighting the contradiction between the 'glory' of the general experience and the bitterness of his individual reality.

Sun'allah Ibrahim also co-wrote a book on the Dam (with Kamal Al-Qalsh and Ra'uf Mus'ad) *Insān al-Sadd al-'ālī* (The Human High Dam 1967). The book, written not long after the authors ended a term of imprisonment for charges related to communism, includes a compilation of interviews with workers, engineers and the Soviet specialists, as well as the minister of the Dam. Years later in the 1970s, Ibrahim wrote another novella, *Nigmat Augustus* (The Star of August 1980), shunning the Dam as a project. It can be read in part as a revision of what he later came to see as his naïve contribution to the propaganda machine of the Revolution earlier in his life.

Although Nubian arts are predominantly oral and performative, Hagaag Aduul, a Nubian writer living in Alexandria, became the literary voice of Nubian displacement. His novellas (2006) narrate the experiences of the migration, but also the details of life before and after, championing the cause before both local and international audiences.

⁵ Most of his novellas are thus in prose and distributed in audio as well as in written formats

Most written about is the controversy of the 1967 war, and the War of Attrition. The most popular of these works is Gamal al-Ghitani's *Hikayaat al-Gharib* (2009) (The stories of the stranger), a series of stories that become metaphoric for the countless anonymous heroes, in Suez during the War of Attrition. Al-Ghitani also published *Al-Rifa'i* (2009), a novel, this time about a real character, a commander of a brigade in 1973. He brings to the mainstream a hero of Suez that is well-remembered by citizens and soldiers alike in that war. These stories become important because they compensate for the lack of fact, record or national remembrance of the events between 1967 and 1973, and the people behind these events.

1.2.5 Conclusion

Through this literature review, I have sought to highlight how I contribute to a larger body of work on the social history of ideas and the movements behind them. This is particularly so through my study of how ideas of socialism, anti-imperialism and Arab Nationalism were articulated by the builders of the Dam, the Nubians and the resistance of Port Said and Suez.

I also explore how stories of the people behind these events contribute to the existing narratives on these feats or wars. This may be to reveal truths written out of the histories, or realities that were suppressed to create narratives that legitimised military rule and political authority.

Finally, I draw upon a body of popular literature that contributes to the larger collective memory and imaginary of 'Nasser's Egypt,' that have played a role in filling the historical gaps.

In the following section, I will highlight the theoretical framework and methodological aspects of my research, particularly in an attempt to address a concern articulated by Anouar Abdel-Malek (1968) about the period several years ago.

...it has thus far been so difficult to understand fully the deep nature of the popular reactions in the face of "socialism" imposed by a state that in everyone's view is still the military apparatus. There is virtually no way of knowing whether the general principles of this economic and social policy

satisfy the wishes of the various popular classes, how these classes conceive the socialism that they would have liked to see as a replacement to the old order, indeed the period of military dictatorship itself, nor in what way this massive body of new measures has succeeded in altering the daily life of the masses... (Anouar Abdelmalek 1968, 367)

My contention that there is indeed a 'way of knowing,' particularly through a people who have found a way around that which is 'imposed', either through resisting, or making it their own.

1.3 Approach and Methodology

I started this research in search of resistance. I imagined in a moment of such mobilisation, at a time when the state dictated a nationalist sentiment on behalf of a populace through songs, speeches and cultural institutions, that there would be resistance to this state. I imagined that in those peripheries where ideas and art forms were not as controlled, and where people experienced first-hand the gruelling feats, they would refute the ideas of an often hypocritical state.

I sought to move beyond Cairo, partially because I did not want a representative 'art scene' that expressed ideas and sentiments 'on behalf of a people.' Rather, in the words of Stuart Hall, I explore popular culture as a "theatre of popular desires" where people "discover and play with the identification of [themselves], where [they] are imagined, where [they] are represented, not only to the audiences out there who do not get the message but for [themselves], for the first time" (Hall 2005; 474). It was the art and experiences of those who played a central role in the achievements that made this epoch, namely the building of the High Dam and the Port Said and Suez wars, that I was particularly interested in.

Through looking at songs, poems, idioms and stories of the experiences of those periods, I explore how people experimented with a new identity under Nasser and how far they were willing to go for it. I explore how continuing to sing these songs, has kept alive the struggle for social justice and against western and Israeli imperialism. Looking at how this struggle evolved over Egypt's various political eras, I show how those songs and struggles poured into Tahrir Square and other squares across Egypt in January of 2011.

I look at these songs as ‘intimate’ language, a common language reflecting a shared experience that often only the community who produces the language can understand. I borrow the term from Lila Abu-Lughod’s (1986) description of Egyptian Bedouin poetry as a “discourse of intimacy” (Abulughod 1986, 292), a form of ‘confidential communication’ and discourse ‘well integrated into social life’ rather than an abstract form of art, apart from everyday life. She looks at constructs of honour as they are reflected through poetry and describes how the poetry becomes a coded form of expression expressing one incident or emotion in the form of another encapsulated by the poetry.

I argue that songs capture in moments of political imagination what words cannot. A song may capture a contradictory sentiment, such as the intense despair of a moment in 1967 associated with the strength of the conviction that pulled the resistance all the way through till 1974. Or the combination of shame and sacrifice experienced by Nubians for agreeing to move for the Dam and leaving the Nile behind. Songs can also express the depth of a human experience, for, whereas words may express the numbers of people who died during the building of a High Dam; the way these people died, and the feelings those incidents instigate, leave us with the magnitude of the sacrifice.

These songs reveal the many silences, imposed by state narratives. I show that there are also self-imposed silences, whether over the struggle of how people choose to narrate the experience, or criticism of an institution or person that people prefer to value.

In a period as dramatic as the 1950s and 60s, when a world-order was ruptured, and many world-views and ideals were put to the test, I argue that what matters as much, if not more than the context and politics of the period, is the people and ideas that created these contexts. In those moments of emancipated imagination lies the thrill of a new world, the disappointment of failure and the euphoria of possibility throughout; it is those sentiments that sustain the continued struggle.

In the remainder of this chapter, I highlight the types of songs I collected and how I use them, the experience of my ethnography, and how I plan to organise my research.

1.3.1 Fann Sha'bī (Popular Art), Beyond the Microphone

In this section, I elaborate on the kind of *sha'bī* songs I draw upon, and how I chose and used them. Where people sought to describe the importance of song and performance, a comparison would be drawn to distinguish between 'sha'bī' (popular or folk) performance and songs 'of the microphone.' Sha'ban, the nephew of Sidqi Ahmad Silim a famous Nubian singer in the 1960s, described songs of the microphone as 'impotent.'

You hear a song on the radio and if its Abdel Wahab or Umm Kulthum, it's certainly beautiful. But then you hear it again and again, and it's the same old song, you can't interact with it, and it doesn't vary with your mood or the context you're in. That's the difference between songs of the radio and the songs we sing. We sing how we feel, we sing what's happening around us, and whatever we sing is who are as a people at that moment. If we don't feel like that again, we don't sing the song again.

In another instance, Ibrahim al-Mursi, a singer and mechanic in Port Said, explained,

A microphone automatically means that someone is singing and the rest are subjected to the roles of a 'listening audience;' whereas with al-dammah⁶, it's a collective group experience. The song isn't complete until people get up and contribute. That's how the best songs are made up.

These two quotations perhaps best describe the role and purpose of songs as I explore them. They both point to the internal workings of a community, and the collective nature of cultural production. The fact that some songs are collectively improvised makes of them a political space, where ideas and identities are experimented with and affirmed, and where others are challenged.

Furthermore, the songs that persist – the most remembered and consistently sung – are those that have reaped the most consensus over the largest number of people, over the longest period of time. This could be described as a form of natural selection, through which songs are chosen as more representative to remember and sing history.

⁶ A traditional form of singing in Port Said (that I elaborate on in Chapter 3) that involves the audience and singer 'coming together' (literal meaning of dammah) to sing during a performance

This is not to say, however, that if a song is not sung frequently it is therefore irrelevant. There are songs that though sung less, remain like an echo in memory. And it is in these that a contradictory consciousness or a silencing can be traced.

I thus explore the songs for their political function at the time, as well as for the way in which they remember.

A significant body of academic work has looked at the role of poets and uses of colloquial poetry in 'educating' and politicising the masses or spreading a certain nationalist consciousness in the periods between 1882 and the 1960s (Booth 1990; Fahmy 2011; Radwan 2012). Other works have explored how colloquial poetry was used to (re)present the struggle of the 'masses' or the working-class during the period between the 1950s and 1970s (Booth 2006; Beinín 1994). What has been little studied however, is the actual use of popular culture to express popular politics, and the experiences of the 1950s and 1960s, particularly those that became national milestones narrated by the state.

Such forms of popular culture or intimate languages, spanning from idioms to poetry to song, encapsulate and remember particular events. More than that, they also do much in the construction, self-identification and representation of communities, socially and politically. This is not only particular to the 1950s and 1960s, but rather should be seen in a historical-cultural context that elevates poetry.

Poetic eloquence has long been a valued trait, without necessarily being tied to literacy or education. These oral traditions also gave prestige to tribes and communities:

A tribe's poet was the tribe's spokesman...members of the political and military elite in any tribe were expected to be able to compose poetry by which to record their historical decisions, wars, alliances and sometimes, express their personal feelings. The word for poet in Arabic, *sha'ir*, also means 'the knower,' he who knows or senses or feels. Lines of poetry were used as proverbs, and moral references. The more a line of poetry is beautiful, the more it was used as a proverb, and therefore as a moral authority....In other words the more people liked a line of poetry, the more they believed in its truth and judgment (Al-Barghouti 2008, 8).

Thus, during my research, the more eloquent a person was, the more my respondents recommended him or her for interviewing, and conversely advised against my interviewing those they did not consider to be proficient with words. The prestige these people were assigned as trusted 'tellers of history' was associated with their eloquence, just as poets and singers were considered authentic voices because of their eloquence. How well a person can weave the story of an event gave weight to the event itself, thus capturing not only what happened but how the event was 'experienced' and felt.

There is a growing trend in the study of popular culture in the Middle East, "in a field where scholars have been wedded to the written word" (Tucker 2010) championed by scholars such as Walter Armbrust (Armbrust 1996, 2000, 2009). However there is still some way to go in terms of reading politics through popular culture, understood as an expression (and enactment) of popular politics and identity.

Existing works that do read history or politics through song in Egypt and the Middle East either focus on the ethnography of ballads and their singers (Slyomovics 1988; Reynolds 1995; Cachia 1975) or read politics through Bedouin poetry focusing more on an analysis of the poetry itself, and the social context of its production such as the works of (Abuloghud 1996; Holes and Abu Athera 2009; Al-Ghadeer 2009). A new developing genre looks at the politics of singing related to performers and bands (Nooshin 2009) and less as a virtue of everyday lives. Although the growing body of work on songs and politics looks more at song as cultural production with a focus on 'songs of the microphone,' it does bring ethnomusicology in closer contact with politics looking at how memory persists through songs and singing, and how nations are imagined and re-imagined through song.

Looking at songs as cultural productions of the state becomes useful in understanding how they are used to mobilize and manipulate, whilst the politics of 'everyday' performances helps me understand the significance of songs in popular politics and the struggle over memory and the nationalist imaginary.

1.3.2 A Subaltern History

Beyond the archives and forms of protest and rebellion through which subaltern politics have been read, the work that has explored history through forms of oral history or popular culture in Egypt is limited.

In looking at memory through song, I draw on a wider subaltern history tradition (Guha 1982a; Guha 1982b; Pandey 1997; Popular Memory Group 1982; Amin 1995; Spivak 1988) that explores the history of 'the fragment' and the importance of multivalent histories silenced in the process of creating unified nationalist histories. The work of Ted Swedenburg (2003) on the Palestinian revolt (1936-1939) emerges as particularly relevant in his use of Gramsci's ideas of hegemony and resistance. Swedenburg explores a popular history without claiming to provide an 'alternative narrative,' but rather explores the politics of narrative, memory and silence. An idea central to my work is his use and interpretation of an aspect of the subaltern school of history, such as 'oppositional memory,' which are,

...those remembered popular practices that official historical discourse neither criticises nor celebrates but simply ignores. Authoritative historical accounts have relegated a whole range of peasant activities during the revolt to the margins, no doubt because they are regarded as 'pre-political' and insignificant. In general, the popular contributions to the movement are not discussed, acknowledged, or interpreted in standard nationalist accounts (Guha 1982a, 3)"...standing 'outside' or 'adjacent' to national histories, they were often recounted unselfconsciously. Having remained relatively unaltered by dominant discourses, they represented potential, rather than overt, counter-discourses to the official nationalist views (Swedenburg 2003, 110-111).

The notion of oppositional memory is a particularly useful one in making sense of the way in which events and experiences are narrated through stories and songs by my respondents. They are oppositional to the mainstream narrative and not completely or 'merely' alternative to it. They contest the mainstream narratives' heroes, victories and defeats, by instead narrating their own. The state's desire not to accommodate the strategic difference in narratives of events leaves these popular narratives untouched, or celebrates their heroes while portraying their actions as pre or non-political.

In her study of popular protests in Qina between 1700 and 1920, Zainab Abul-Magd (2008) defines her approach to subaltern history in part by challenging Gramsci's definition of subaltern politics as "always subject to the ruling groups even when they rebel and rise up" (Arnold 2000, 34). She draws upon Guha's argument that subaltern politics in colonial India constituted an "autonomous domain, which neither originated from elite politics nor did its existence depend on the latter," (Arnold 2000, 34). Guha argued rather that the roots of resistance to colonial rule could be attributed to pre-colonial practices that continued to emerge under British rule.

While I do not make an argument that subaltern politics and consciousness constitutes an autonomous zone, I argue that they are not determined by ruling groups. I argue that although this consciousness is negotiated and oftentimes a re-articulation of a hegemonic political idea, their politics emanate from a sense of belonging, community and sacrifice that is not necessarily 'dependent' or subject to the ruling elites.

1.3.3 Doing Ethnography at Home – the Politics of 'Re'-presentation

Having started my fieldwork in Aswan, much of the nature of my relationship with respondents throughout my research, and my role in relation to the material they provided me with was shaped by this field trip. In light of this, I will highlight the events of that first trip that most affected the decisions I made with regard to my field-work.

I arrived in Aswan on January 9 2010, the fiftieth anniversary of the building of the High Dam. Intending to commence fieldwork after a few days of reading, I went straight to a newly built ecolodge⁷ in the Nubian village of Gharb Suhail. I had not yet intended to work on the migration of the Nubians; rather my focus on the High Dam was to be through the workers who built it.

Upon arriving I conversed with a few people who ran the place, natives to the Nubian village and told them about my work. Three hours later, a man from the village paid me a visit and asked if I was the 'doctor' who was here to write about the Dam. Once I

⁷An environmentally-friendly guesthouse.

confirmed that I was, he told me the story of his uncle's displacement after the Dam was built, and asked me if I intended to write about the Dam from the Nubian perspective as well. I explained that I had not, and that I may not have space for it in my thesis. He gave me his contacts and asked me to reconsider, for there was much to tell.

His was the first of three visits I received that night. And with the first walk I had the next morning, I was pulled into the house of a former worker on the High Dam and my fieldwork with the Nubians began. I write about the Nubians because they insisted their story be told. I also write about the Nubians because the story of the building of the High Dam in the era of 'high modernism' must not be told only by those who built it, but by those who 'decided' to make the sacrifice for it to be built. That was the Nubians' sacrifice to this nation whose creation they all contributed to; that was how they 'built' the Revolution too. This was the first 'finding' that I was 'taught,' that I too was capable of silencing if I was not sensitive enough.

Once my introductions started and I was given a mission, the idea that I stay in a rented place or a hotel was refused. Of the many invites I received, I chose to stay with the family of the fiancée (Zizi) of one of the workers at the hotel, Hakim. Zizi's family lived in the village of Tinjar, just west of the Dam, and directly on the Nile. The village is one of the few that has barely moved since the first raising of the reservoir and was not displaced during the building of the Dam. A small village, with about fifty houses, it is known to be one of the older ones that has preserved many of its traditions. Zizi, in her mid-twenties, was the only university-educated woman in Tinjar. The nearest village was a quarter-hour car ride away, but there were no forms of transport in the village so we would wait for someone to be driving in or out, if we wanted to leave.

Being a 'girl of the capital' there was much for me to get used to, much for us to teach each other. The level of comfort I enjoyed with this family meant they felt at ease telling me off for having difficulty living without coffee, salt, pepper, tissue and other 'commodities' that were not planted or produced in the village, and thus not readily available. In one instance I stayed late in Aswan ('the capital'), Hajj 'Izz al-Din, Zizi's father, sat me down to explain that rules that applied to Zizi would not apply to me since I was

‘an educated intellectual and familiar with the ways of the city.’ Having said that, he then added that since ‘the city is the city, a cruel place,’ a curfew was necessary, as well as regular phone-calls when I was away. I was careful to abide by these rules, always fearful for their reputation.

This experience was metaphoric for my later experiences as I carried out my fieldwork. This was not because I was ‘taken in as a daughter,’ but because my own anxieties that the obvious class indicators that may create barriers between myself and respondents were in part overcome. In taking me into the family, the issue of class was not overlooked, but easier to talk about. Perhaps because I was a woman travelling on her own, it was easier to treat me as a daughter.

That I was a woman travelling alone brought with it discussions in more conservative communities as to why I wore my hair out, and questions about my piety, why I did not pray regularly for example. However, once we talked about this (and these conversations were many), and I was honest about my values and positions, I was happy to find I was, eventually, accepted for who and what I was. I write this without exaggeration, as travelling in Upper Egypt, this had been a particular anxiety of mine. Though respectful and abiding by the traditions of my respondents, I did not want to dress or act so much more conservatively than usual. My sense was that this culture was shared, after all, and that it was ultimately mine as well.

My relationship with Zizi’s family was also metaphoric for my experience in other places where I was researching, even though I did not stay with other families in Port Said or Suez. Because I had a genuine curiosity about a history I perceived to also be my own, my interviews were often discussions, where the goals of my research were discussed and my methodology brought apart. My instincts, initially, had been to be vague about the research topic, and ask as broad questions as possible to avoid discussions about my framework. What I learnt from Zizi and her family, however, was that the discussions in building this ‘shared’ history were its richest aspect.

For instance, Hajj ‘Izz al-Din invited friends over who had been displaced by the building of the Dam as teenagers. We would stay up at night contemplating what it felt like at the

time they heard about the move, once they were moved, and during the different periods and political epochs thereafter. They reflected on what it was like to be Nubian at all these different times, what it meant to be Nubian in Egypt, and how Nasser helped make the sacrifice of the move possible.

Zizi would listen to my interviews with me as I transcribed them at night, pointing out issues I may have forgotten, or she would listen to different interviews and tell me which parts she felt were important. Where my respondents did not speak Arabic, Zizi would attend the interviews with me and translate, and we would discuss the songs on our return home.

At a certain point, I was invited to talk about my research on a television programme run by the relative of one of my informants working on the Dam. Zizi was very nervous beforehand, and I was surprised to learn that she had skipped watching the programme. Later, she spoke to me at length about my responsibilities in 'presenting' the Nubians, and we spoke about my roles and responsibilities as a researcher.

How much of what I was hearing would I tell as I heard it? Would I interpret things in different ways? Did I understand that they were a private and proud community, and that I had to take this into consideration when writing about them? This was the beginning of a long journey in questioning what my role was in relation to my respondents. More than that, it was my realisation that anything could be a 'violation' of that intimate exchange that my interviews had become.

This anxiety on the part of my informants that I tell it 'right' was consistent throughout my fieldwork. It resulted somehow in a 'teacher-student' relationship in almost every research-context. In Nubia, 'Am 'Izbi, a folk-singer, met regularly with me to teach me the basics of the Kanzi and Fadjikī languages. He felt that even if I would not be able to understand the songs themselves, I should at least be able to appreciate the foundations of the language. In Aswan, Ahmad al-Nubi whose entire family worked on the Dam, gave me a few 'seminars' on the mechanics of the Dam and the process of building it; we even went on a trip through it together. Dīaa' al-Qadi, a retired bureaucrat who catalogued and published his own version of the history of Port Said (2010), gave me history lessons, as

well as talks on the writing of a 'systematic history' as well as accounts of the city's history in the early twentieth century. Finally, in Suez, Captain Ghazali taught me to understand songs and poetry through lessons on reading or singing them as they should be, thus allowing a song to explain itself to me. He also briefed me on a socio-political history of twentieth century Suez.

In each case I met with the 'teacher' regularly, in their desire to ensure I understood the events I researched and was able to convey their experiences with both sympathy and appreciation.

I have thus tried to excavate a history that people have been telling and re-telling to themselves and their own communities, lest, in these times of oppression, they forget or are made to forget who they are. I was told these histories as someone who had to write and tell their stories, and the discussions of what to tell, and how, were many.

I sought to be as honest as possible about what I intended to say, even if they felt uncomfortable about it. When people were against my interviewing certain persons on my list, for instance, I tried to be honest about who I was going to insist on talking with regardless of their differences. When I was lectured to about what was 'proper history' and 'what was not,' I tried to be open about not necessarily seeing 'eye to eye' with people's approaches to history.

I engaged in these conversations, as inconvenient and pressurising as some were, ultimately because I hope this history will be 'read' by all those people who entrusted me with it. I attempt to write this both as someone who is proud to have discovered such a rich history of struggle, as well as an activist who has better understood where her struggle has come from. But I also write this as an academic who believes that history needs to be seen differently, and as a political scientist who is deeply disappointed at how unimaginatively revolutions of today are being interpreted, mostly because a history of struggle has fallen out of the record. It is through a better understanding of that moment in the 1950s that I hope that this contemporary moment can be better understood.

That brings me to the significant evolution of my relationship with correspondents after the revolution. Their perception of me changed from a daughter or student who was a member of a generation that did not 'know' or 'appreciate' and took for granted the freedom that we had, to a comrade in a continued struggle. Before the revolution, the predominant perception of me as a 'member of my generation' was at first as someone who 'had to learn' to focus and pay attention to all I did not know, and eventually that I was perhaps an 'exception' to a generation that did not care about the struggle. A rupture in history manifested in the periods of Sadat, and particularly Nasser were clear, we were thus children of different struggles.

After the revolution however, this changed. My interest in Port Said and Suez was received with much excitement. There were discussions about 'our' revolution – comparing it to 'theirs,' comparing the meaning of sacrifices in the 2011 revolution to theirs of the 1950s, and the discussion about the difference (and similarities) between an external enemy and an internal one.

Poets such as Kamil 'Id, famous for his being one of the main poets of Port Said in 1956, gave me poems to read to 'members of my generation;' spelling out the similarities and differences in our struggle. The same can be said about my relationship with members of the resistance in 1967-1973 in Suez, who believed we revived and continued the struggle that they were part of.

Our interviews moved away from the grandfatherly tone and instructions to take close notes to convey the reality of the struggle well to my generation, and became more of a conversation. The event somehow transformed the 1952 Revolution from the realm of memory, to the realm of a continued struggle; 2011 became a continuation.

Indeed, perhaps the most significant 'shared' experience of this revolutionary moment in 2011 is not only this suddenly seeing 'ourselves differently as a people' on one long continued struggle, but a temporary lapse of nostalgia. In this lapse, people from different generations assess the role of the military institution in the previous revolution, and together retrace the elements of popular struggles that stretched throughout history, but were silenced, either by state apparatus, or by a peoples' forgetting.

1.4 Research Structure

My fieldwork was carried out in 2009-2011 between Aswan (Nubia and the city), Port Said, Suez, and Cairo, where I interviewed people who contributed to the events I was researching, and singers and poets who composed and performed during the period of research. In each of these places I arrived in the city or village, and started my research and the search for my respondents immediately. In order to map as much of the events and existing relations (and politics between them) as possible, I sought to find at least three 'entry points' to each of the fields of research.

In Nubia, I spoke to people in four main villages, Gharb Suhail, Tinjar, Abu Simbel *tahjīr* and Balana *tahjīr*⁸. My interviewees included both those who were migrated themselves (aged six to forty in 1964), as well as second-generation migrants. I collected their oral histories documenting the experience of the move and life thereafter. I collected songs that were sung at different points in the process, looking in particular for children's lullabies as well as those sung at weddings and other occasions.

In Aswan, I collected oral history interviews of workers from three main *musta'marāt* (compounds), where workers and technicians had been living since working on the Dam. These were Al-Sadd Sharq, a disintegrating camp built only for workers on the first phase of the Dam; Kima, which housed technicians associated with the chemical factory; and Sahari, which with the best conditions was built for Russian engineers, and now houses technicians. I also conducted interviews with technicians and administrators living in the village of Abulrish.

Since most workers and technicians refused to have their experiences remembered in 'song,' I explore popular memory mostly through their stories as well as idioms and anecdotes through which they remember building the Dam.

In Port Said, two of my three main entry points were musical bands, Al-Tanbura, a renowned 'folk' band, including many poets and singers known to Port Said since the

⁸Tahjīr means migration and thus indicated a migrated village

1950s, and al-Suhbagiyyah, a lesser known band. My third 'entry point' was a local historian, Diaa' al-Qadi, who had got in touch with me, once an enthusiastic bookstore owner informed him of my purchase of his books about Port Said's history. Each of these introduced me to members of the resistance from across the political spectrum. I also interviewed members of the communist movement in Cairo who had been involved in the resistance in Port Said.

The first of my three main contacts in Suez was Captain Ghazali, a member of the civilian resistance, and founder of the band Wilad al-Ard (Children of the Land). Wilad al-Ard was established in 1967 to keep the spirits of the resistance high and performed on the battlefronts in Port Said and Ismailiyya as well. My second main contact was another member of Wilad al-Ard, Sayyid Kaburya, a founder of the current renowned Simsimiyya band *gam'iyyit muhibi al-simsimiyya* (Organisation of the lovers of the simsimiyya). Kaburya and other members were part of the resistance during the War of Attrition and currently train new singers in the songs of resistance of old, to keep the *simsimiyya* alive. My final entry point was members of the armed resistance, those trained by the intelligence and disarmed before the 1973 war.

In both Port Said and Suez, I made sure to attend regular and commemorative performances, to observe which songs were sung and how.

Through the oral history interviews, I trace the events of the period as they unravelled and through these forms of intimate language – songs, poetry, idioms – I look at how people remember their experiences.

In the following chapter, I will contextualise what follows by laying out the historical narratives propagated by the state, contested, rearticulated, and accommodated in the popular memory I explore in later chapters. As well as looking at state initiatives, I look at the mainstream narrative through the songs that blared through the radio at the time, particularly those of 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz and Umm Kulthum.

In chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 I will look into the experiences of the resistance in Port Said, the builders of the High Dam, the Nubians who were displaced by it, and the resistance in

Suez, both through the stories and songs people sing about them. I will explore the popular struggle behind the well-known feats, how they articulated their own politics in relation to the Revolution, and the sentiments and experiences expressed by the songs.

I will then conclude, after an analytical chapter exploring the constructs of 'revolutionary community' that my respondents represented and the main aspects of their political and nationalist consciousness that have endured over the past six decades.

Chapter 2. *Hikāyat Sha'b* – A Nasserist Narrative?

2.1 Introduction.

This chapter will explore what might be considered the 'meta-narrative' of the 1952 Revolution. I will look at how it was narrated, the different ways the narrative was propagated, and what story it told.

However, in looking at this groundwork, I argue that the meta-narrative was far stronger than a simple narration of events and their justification; this meta-narrative was the very means by which the Revolution's ideology was spread. More effective than simple propaganda, it became a way of not only 'telling' the Revolution, but understanding it, and more importantly feeling, relating and contributing to it. Indeed, the most effective aspect of the 1952 Revolution, seems to be the way it was *felt* by a wider populace, and the extent to which they were willing to mobilise and sacrifice for it.

After laying out Gramsci's understanding of what he described as 'spontaneous philosophy' and 'common sense' (Gramsci, 1971), I explore the power of those aspects of Nasserist ideology that I argue formed part of the spontaneous philosophy and common sense of the period. These elements recur throughout the thesis, whether in revolutionary songs, or the memories of builders of the Dam, those who were displaced by it or *fida'iyyīn* (resistance fighters) during the 1956 and 1967 wars. I then elaborate on the means by which these ideas were spread, looking at movements and initiatives to re-write history, to embed the Revolution's principles into educational curricula, the establishment of youth institutions, and state control of cultural production, namely theatre and literature. Throughout, I emphasise how the strategy was one that aimed to increase people's sense of involvement with the Revolution (even if at times their creativity was limited within the realms of its world-view), spreading the ideology as a 'philosophy' of the Revolution and 'common sense' rather than explicit coercion and monopolisation by a single political idea.

The weight of this chapter is focused however, on the analysis of songs and speeches, whose lyrics, and phrases are the sayings, idioms and chants by which this period is most

remembered. These are also the forms of ‘revolutionary language’ that most of my respondents were exposed to, since the majority had not been educated beyond a basic (primary) level, and were not ‘official’ artists, patroned or encouraged by the regime.

I analyse the songs and speeches looking at their language, the ideas they communicate and the main themes they propagate. All the above-mentioned forms, and particularly the songs and speeches were meant to propagate an idea of what it meant to be a *sha'b* (people) at the time. They framed the *sha'b* that Egyptians came to see themselves as part of; drew on new terminology to express defeats, victories, ideologies, and other aspects of the Revolution highlighting the novelty of the period. They focused on making people aware of the details of significant political moves, from wars, treaties and defeats to the changes in GDP. The imagery of the language, and the ideas propagated through songs and speeches drew on history in a way that both framed this Revolution as a significant point in the country’s history, as well as placing it on a historical continuum of popular struggle.

Both the songs and speeches narrate the Revolution as it unravelled, they relate a series of experiments, and attempt to identify the Revolution’s philosophy, its values, direction and ideology as events unfolded. They did so, capitalising on the will of a people at times, and attempting to mobilise them at others. They also construct an ‘imagined community’⁹ of an ‘alliance of popular forces’ made up of workers, *fallahin*, the army and ‘nationalist capitalists’. This chapter will look at the basis of this community as it was imagined in the songs and speeches, while the chapters to come will explore the extent to which people ascribed to, identified with, or refuted this imagined community, and the ways in which they contributed to its overall imaginary.

⁹ Although I draw on the term ‘imagined community,’ coined by Benedict Anderson (1983), I relate less to his idea of nationalism as an imagined community whose borders and realms are dictated by modern institutions such as print capitalism, and draw more on Partha Chatterjee’s notion of ‘anti-colonial nationalism’ (1993). In Chatterjee’s work, the focus is on how people imagine themselves as part of a sovereign independent (or authentic nation), looking at how such forms of nationalism can be traced and reinforced through drama, language, spirituality and family values. Similarly, Ziad Fahmy’s work on the ‘modern Egyptian nation’ (2011) looks at the formation of an ‘imagined community’ through popular culture. While he looks at the role of culturally productive institutions, such as songs spread through records, and the theatre, I seek to look beyond the spaces of these institutions. In this chapter, I explore how an ‘imaginary’ of the nation – the way it was understood, felt and thought of – was constructed, along with how the imagined community that is its people was constructed.

Most existing literature, which considers the period's ideology, takes Nasser as a point of departure or creator of these ideas, as popular leader or military dictator (Woodward 1992; Nutting 1972; Ajami 1974; Abdelmagid 1994; Joeston 1960; Gordon 1992, 2006; Gordon 1992; Mansfield 1969, Heikal 1987). Literature is either critical of the ideology itself, the extent of its socialism, Arabism, or a critique and analysis of his policies ('Abdel-Malek 1968; Abu-Izzedin 1981; Ansari 1986; Beattie 1994; Jankowski 2002; Winckler and Podeh 2004). Little if any work considers the extent to which these ideas draw on the aspirations or the will of a populace nor its effect on them. Scholarly work that analyzes Nasser's speeches looks instead at the manipulative/mystifying effect of the rhetoric (Younis 2012; 'Abd al-Latif 2010).

While work on the cultural productions of the period, either focus on Abd al-Halim Hafiz and Umm Kulthum's art and its reception (Danielson 1997; Stokes 2007, 2009; Al-Mahalawi 1998), or the politics of Nasser's relations with forms of cultural production (Jacquemond 2008; Crabbs 1975).

I argue throughout the thesis that the Revolution's philosophy, though outlined by Nasser became hegemonic in the ways it was aspired to, adopted, contested, altered, as well as personalised and internalised by a wider populace.

For the purpose of this chapter, I have drawn on over twenty speeches given by Nasser in various governorates to students, workers, communities, politicians and wider publics between 1952 and 1968. I also draw on a similar number of the most popular songs from the same period. The lyrics of these songs ring strongest in the realms of popular memory, as the testimonies of respondents attest.

2.2 The Philosophy of the Revolution

In his *Philosophy of the Revolution* ('Abdel Nasser 1953), more like a manifesto than a comprehensive tract, Nasser attempts to explain the Revolution. He resorts to the language of 'philosophy' rather than ideology, personal intentions rather than governmental strategies, and hopes and dreams rather than policies and constitutions. Ultimately, the Revolution was in his framing 'initiated' by the free soldiers on behalf of

the people, while the invocation of the expansive values of 'liberation, unity and social Justice', implies collective responsibilities of the people to realise the Revolution and its values.

The Revolution was framed as a living, growing experiment that everyone had a role in constructing. It was usually depicted as something in the process of formulation, which in many ways it was. For the policies as they were shaped and formed, as they were implemented, and as they were described in documents such as *Philosophy of the Revolution*, show that the ideas were growing and shifting.

Nasser's idea of a democracy, for instance, varied over time. In 1962 he equated the term with the prevalence of popular will, declaring upon announcing the National Charter, "Democracy is all the power and authority to the people, that the people lead the Revolution, and thus socialism becomes synonymous with democracy in our context." He also explained why elections in the existing political context would not necessarily yield a democracy, given that manipulation by old political factions was still at play. After the 1967 war however, and in response to the student uprisings demanding reforms after the defeat, on March 30 1968 Nasser announced a set of new policies. He confessed that though the Arab Socialist Union (ASU) represented an 'alliance of popular forces,' its main flaw was that it had not been elected, and thus did not truly reflect the will of the people. He reminded his audience that earlier he had asserted that the members of the ASU should be hired, but that now, he realised the will of the people could not be realised in any way other than through their own choice.

In the same speech, he also reneged on an earlier phrase coined in 1961 '*mufadalat ahl al-thiqa 'ala ahl al-khibra*'¹⁰ (preferring trusted candidates over those of experience) where politicians were chosen primarily based on the Revolutionary's Council's trust. Now he declared was the time for a new policy, that of '*al ragul al munasib fil makan al munasib*' (the right man in the right place). He elaborated at length how the old policies may have been appropriate for the time, but now anything that did not clearly reflect the

¹⁰See Heikal (1961a) for details.

people's will would only mean a reproduction of the same structures of power, and that a popular revolution after all, should be flexible to the will of its people.

This change, like many others, was an attempt to prove how the Revolution and its policies developed and evolved with time in a way that was responsive to the will of the people. In the sections to come, I will highlight how policies regarding cultural institutions, education and the re-writing of history also developed, capitalising on movements initiated by intellectuals. The Revolution thus mobilised consent, by capitalising on popular will and existing movements.

Nasser's philosophy drew greatly on what Gramsci coined as 'spontaneous philosophy', not merely a system of beliefs that reflects a specific class or government interest, rather a philosophy that is "proper to everybody."

This philosophy is contained in 1. Language itself, which is a totality of determined notions and concepts and not just of words grammatically devoid of content; 2. "Common sense" and "good sense"; 3. Popular religion and, therefore, also in the entire system of beliefs, superstitions, opinions, ways of seeing things and of acting, which are collectively bundled together under the name of "folklore" (Gramsci 1971, 323).

Nasser's ideology and rhetoric drew on elements of spontaneous philosophy, and was itself eventually internalized into this philosophy as 'common sense'. This chapter presents an analysis of the Revolution's philosophy as it was developed and how its values were embedded in language. I will show how its rationale became part of 'conventional wisdom', how it drew on collective experiences, aspirations and desires, to become a collective social and not just political experience.

This analysis rests on an understanding that a cultural hegemony "depends not on the brainwashing of 'the masses' but the tendency to make some forms of experience readily available to consciousness while ignoring or suppressing others" (Lears 1985, 577).

Also, according to Michael Mann, ideological power is derived from three main sources: monopolising a claim to meaning, monopolising norms, and in the strength of aesthetic rituals of practice. He emphasises the importance of aesthetic rituals in strengthening the

effect of communicated norms, creating in turn “an ideological movement that increases the mutual trust and collective morale of a group [that] may enhance their collective power and be rewarded with a more zealous adherence” (Mann 1986, 22-23). I thus look deeply into the aesthetic rituals and their contribution to the ideology and effect on collective morale in this chapter, and in further chapters on how they contributed to this adherence.

Furthermore, in understanding ‘claim to meaning,’ this section will explore the framing of a national and cultural imaginary in a socialist context through control over institutions of cultural production, namely, the production of knowledge through education, culture through cultural institutions, and the re-writing of history. On the one hand, this framing managed to encourage and capitalise on creative production, while on the other it somehow limited the vocabulary of this creativity to a certain realm of meaning or understanding; namely a Nasserist socialist imaginary.

In the sections to follow, I explore the rhetorical strategy of the Revolution, the role of Nasser’s speeches, and the effects of the revolutionary songs, in enhancing collective morale, and in the mobilisation of a unified consciousness, and an individual and collective will. For this Revolution was not only one that was strategised, and constructed; it was aspired to, felt and imagined.

2.2.1 Education: The Social Engineering of Nationalism¹¹

You must delve deeper into the study of our matters; lest they say ‘what happened in Egypt was but a storm in a teacup.’

Gamal ‘Abdel Nasser, address to Cairo University students, December 3 1953

The nationalisation of education was one of the Revolution’s largest projects, along with the re-appropriation of land and the industrialisation initiatives. Education was to become accessible to a wider populace, and much emphasis was placed on the importance of an

¹¹ This term was coined by ‘Abdallah (1985).

educated and informed nationalist consciousness and the role of the student in spreading knowledge and awareness amongst the population.

The Revolution did indeed take giant strides towards its goal; the number of students increased by 145% in primary schools, 127% in secondary (high) school, and around 130% in universities from 1954-1965 (Faksh 1980, 45).¹² Critics of these policies however, insist that the infrastructure of the schooling system, namely school facilities and the quality of teaching and training, did not develop to match these changes.

The content of school curricula itself rose to be an issue of strategic planning. The 1962 National Charter, which itself was to become school material declared that:

The object of education is no longer to turn out employees who work at government offices. Thus, the educational curricula in all subjects must be reconsidered according to the principles of the Revolution. The curricula should aim at enabling the individual human being to reshape his life. Successive Egyptian youth were taught that their country was neither fit for, nor capable of industrialisation. In their textbooks they read their national history in distorted versions. Their national heroes were described as lost in a mist of doubt and uncertainty, while those who betrayed the national cause were glorified and venerated (The National Charter 1962, Chapter 5).¹³

In light of this, the Revolution took it upon itself to develop the schooling system to ensure it cultivated the necessary revolutionary consciousness. This included the revision of all social curricula (including geography, history and civics). In terms of history, this entailed the re-writing of historical accounts in most cases to omit certain events or characters to the extent that it was suggested that little would have been known about the pre-1952 monarchy had it not been overthrown in 1952 ('Abdallah 1985, 116). The social curriculum was ideologically saturated with values such as nationalism constructed in terms of loyalty to the state.

¹² State expenditure on education in 1952-1965 is estimated at three times the entire expenditure on education over the sixty years of British occupation, from 1882 until the Revolution ('Abdallah 1985, 102-3).

¹³ 'Abdallah (1985, 116), translation by author.

Besides these initiatives under the auspices of the National Education Committee, the new Ministry of Higher Education, established in 1961, introduced a new compulsory social curriculum into the university education system. It was made up of three main subjects, Arab society, Revolution and socialism. Although less demagogic than the secondary school curriculum, it was also ideologically based, and criticised for being poor in analysis and scientific or objective content ('Abdallah 1985, 117).

These efforts were not only adamantly aimed at 'infusing education with the principles of the Revolution', but also a particular and singular worldview. Under the National Education Committee, a new committee was established in 1959 for the development of a 'National Doctrine' and a programme for 'youth leadership' training (Beattie 1994, 167). This was the seed and precursor for *Munazamat al-Shabāb al-'Ishtirākī* (Socialist Youth Organisations)¹⁴ that appeared in 1963. Top-ranking high-school students, young workers and *fallahīn* from governorates across the country were enrolled in the Socialist Youth Organisations to develop their 'leadership' skills in community and 'political' work as well as their ideological capacities in a space that was to transcend class boundaries. Teachers in the organisation were prominent socialists and communists who were actually promised exemption of prosecution if they taught in these organisations.¹⁵ By 1966, the number of youth enrolled in the organisation was around 30,000 whereas by June of 1967, they were 250,000.

Six of the respondents interviewed for this thesis were members of the Socialist Youth Organisation during their teenage years. Four of these (Salamuni, 'Anan, 'Ezzelarab, Al-Gereitly) were students in public and private schools considered high performers by extracurricular and academic measures whilst two were workers, one from Aswan (Sanusi) and the other from Suez (Ghazali). They claimed they felt they were being prepared to proceed with the Revolution once the regime was out of power. They were

¹⁴ For a full account of the Socialist Youth Organisations (1963-1976), see Shukr (2004). The organisation's objective was to develop new leadership calibre with the socialist values of the 1952 Revolution, to ensure loyalty to the Revolution, and develop an intellectually elite army.

¹⁵ For more on this, see Shukr (2004). In 1959, thousands of writers and intellectuals suspected to be members of the communist party were arrested for refusing to dissolve the party. As of 1964, however, a number were released on announcing the dissolution of the party, and were given positions such as these.

encouraged to develop clear visions, often strategic plans, for future socialist development. Two of the six proceeded to volunteer there upon 'graduation,' while two of them ('Ezzelarab and Al-Gereitly) left quickly, highly critical of an experience that seemed demagogic and particularly after their disenchantment in the wake of the *Naksa* (setback) of 1967.

The education system, and a larger related system focusing on 'ideologising' youth, was thus one that devoted much strategic planning to creating a space where 'future minds' were trained to further articulate and develop a hegemonic culture that contributed to a Nasserist-socialist worldview. Socialism here was seen as a single means by which the world can be made sense of, knowledge produced, and a future constructed.

It remains interesting however, that a number of the members of the socialist youth organisations continued to be activists critical of Nasser, playing leading roles in the student movements calling for state-accountability and policy changes in 1968. Notable figures include Ahmad 'Abdallah Roza, Hani 'Anan, Hisham Al-Salamuni, Ahmad Baha' Al-Din Sha'ban, Siham Sabri, Ikram Yusuf, and Arwa Saleh who were prominent members of the student movements in the 1960s and 1970s and contributors (some founders) of the Kefaya oppositional movement that developed in 2003.¹⁶

The result therefore of these organisations, seemed not a brainwashing, but rather the building of a particular nationalist consciousness. One that some of its members continued to pursue, even if in opposition to the Revolution or its ideology.

2.2.2 *Re-writing History*

For the 'Nation' is but a composition of our understanding of the past, put to action into the present and the building of the future.

Gamal 'Abdel Nasser, address to Cairo University students, December 3 1953

¹⁶ See (Shukr 2004, 291-373) for names of leadership figures in student movements, political parties and independent labour unions (as well as ministries and government institutions) from the 1960s till early 2000s.

This theme of history and the importance of learning from the past, this imperative to never forget what it was to be slave-driven, dejected or estranged in one's own country, was one brought up by Nasser in most of his speeches. This was partially an attempt to emphasise the fruits of the Revolution and how far 'we' had come. More than that, it was also meant to position each of the Revolution's acts as a realisation of the dreams that had been accumulating since the movements of 1882, and 1919 in particular. A historical continuum of popular struggle was constantly constructed in an expressed attempt to 'reclaim' history from the long chain of imperialists that had ruled Egypt, and subjected its citizens to their version of history. In the words of Partha Chatterjee, this attempt to reclaim the past from foreign historians, "this mode of recalling the past, the power to represent oneself is nothing other than political power itself" (Chatterjee 1993, 77).

For this purpose, as well as the aim of building a unifying nationalist historical consciousness, much patronage and support was provided to a history-writing movement developed at the time. Although the movement can be understood as an institutional one adopted and led by the government, it seems it was one of the many initiatives founded by intellectuals and academics and only later encouraged, adopted and driven by the state.

The movement's beginnings were in 1961 when Mohammed Anis, a history professor at Cairo University, protested a university decision prohibiting the study of historical events that took place less than fifty years previously. He was eventually supported by the government and granted the position of chair of a committee responsible for the study of the social roots of the 1919 movement. In 1963 he was the key figure of a movement calling for the development of an archival centre to document Egyptian historical records, documents, and private papers of nationalist leaders such as Sa'd Zaghlul and Mohammed Farid to prevent them from being stolen or leaving the country (Crabbs 1975, 393-5).

Building on these efforts, the government called for the 'Project for the revision of modern historical writing.' This project emphasised and subsidised the study of Egyptian feudalism, domestic and foreign-owned capital and the history of the Egyptian working

class (Al-Sharqawi 1963, 22).¹⁷ The declared purpose was to “encourage historians to write ‘with a new consciousness’” (Al-Sayyid 1963, 90),¹⁸ although elsewhere the purpose was marked more clearly as one to make “socialist understanding a weapon of professors in our universities” (Al-Sayyid 1963, 90).¹⁹

The government commissioned Anis in 1964 to undertake a study of the popular resistance to the French invasion in 1798. Thus taking stronger strides towards a movement for the revision and socialist interpretation of history. With time, pressure seemed to increase (mainly through commissions and patronage of similar projects) for the development of a “particular Egyptian brand of historical orthodoxy” (Crabbs 1975, 400).

The movement did continue however where more and more interest in ‘populous matters,’ from working class history to folklore were taken up by university intellectuals, and supported by the state.

Before the Revolution, everything related to the people was subjected to ignorance and neglect, if not to attack and rejection. The prevailing belief was that any arts or crafts created by the people or what had sprung from customs and traditions was not worth recording in books and did not merit serious scientific study. After the Revolution, the people themselves became an object of respect; their heritage, life, and spiritual and material activities became an area stimulating investigation (Salih 1960, 21).²⁰

Students were thus encouraged to take an interest in these themes and national prizes were granted to historians studying nationalist leaders such as Ahmad ‘Urabi. This rewriting of history garnered international attention when ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Raf’i was nominated for a Nobel Prize for his ‘socialist reading of history’ in a series of articles and writings on nationalist movements, and Mohammed Anis attended the Havana conference – amongst others – to report on the ‘rewriting of history in developing countries’ in 1968 (Crabbs 1975, 397-404).

¹⁷ Cited in Crabbs (1975, 395)

¹⁸ Cited from Crabbs (1975, 395)

¹⁹ Cited in Crabbs (1975, 395)

²⁰ Cited in Crabbs (1975, 405)

It seems the effort was more one to record a 'people's history' where every triumph was that of a people's nationalist movement, and every evil, from the Crusades to Israel, was that of an imperialist. Although this was regarded as a socialist interpretation of history, it was perhaps once more an attempt to place the current Egyptian political culture in the long continuum of struggles and achievements for freedom and liberation.

Grants were also given to academic folklorists such as Ahmad Rushdi Salih and Zakariyya al-Higgawi who travelled around Egypt in an attempt to document forms of authentic Egyptian 'folklore' and publish them for both academic and wider readerships. Performers such as the troupe 'Fir'it Riddah' who performed dances from all over Egypt received significant patronage from the state. This mission towards an Egyptian art that reflected an 'Egyptian identity' I explore further in the section to come.

2.2.3 *The Cultural Industry – Building the Conscience of the Nation*

Historical writing is only one phase of overall creative literary activity. 'The historian and the novelist differ only in that the historians' account is supposed to be true (Collingwood 1956, 246).' Both men may affect a society's self-image – the novelist, poet and playwright in many cases far more deeply than the historian. For this reason governments that attempt to influence historical output will not at the same time ignore literary endeavor in general

(Crabbs 1975, 408).

Intellectuals were encouraged by the Revolution, to act, not as bystanders recording events and critiquing them, but as active participants, driving it with the force of their talent and creativity of their ideas. They were however encouraged to do all this within the realms of socialist realism, a genre (here literary) that promotes socialism through focusing on the plight of the working class or everyday Egyptian and the struggle for liberation.

In the first few years of the Revolution, dozens of intellectuals, particularly communists, but also Islamists and liberals, were arrested for their political opinions or expression, a campaign which by 1954 had spread to university staff. It was not until after 1956 that a series of policies and initiatives were developed to ensure that cultural institutions were

well within the reach and control of the state (Jacquemond 2008, 15). This was again carried out in the name of the nationalisation of such institutions, such as the press industry in 1960, the film industry in 1961 and an important part of the publishing industry between 1961 and 1965 (Jacquemond 2008, 15-16). A key impetus was to ensure they were, like education, accessible to a wider societal stratum.

A Council of Arts Letters and Social Sciences was created in 1956 to bring all literary output under government control. Control here implied patronage of approved authors, rather than outright censorship. Writers, much like historians were “coaxed rather than coerced” (Crabbs 1975) in the ‘right’ direction through incentives and making the publishing of their work easier or more difficult. As such, the state was acting true to its projected image and role as a guiding power, and one that grew with the ideas of its populace, rather than an established system with preset ideals and structures.

In 1957, the mandate of culture (originally a department under the Ministry of Education) came under the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance, responsible for arts, literature and the mass media. This was at a time when the press was heavily nationalised and some newspapers of liberal tendencies (or anti-Nasserist ones) were closed altogether. Meanwhile, new theatre houses were being created and theatre as a trend and genre, encouraged by the state.

A more popular art was also encouraged whereby the Ministry of Guidance produced a school of literary writing that was largely devoted to the poor. The Ministry of National Guidance, (later called the Ministry of Information), was responsible for the “formulation of a common collective memory, by publishing inexpensive popular booklets that propagated national history as well as works of cultural-educational character” (Winckler and Podeh 2004, 24). These writing classes provided opportunities for those of modest backgrounds and particularly in rural areas to pick up such a skill. Famous literary magazines and newspapers encouraged workers’ poetry as well, and usually had a specifically dedicated column.

With the Revolutionary Council’s clear decision to ‘become socialist’ in 1961, intellectuals and writers were required, not only to adhere to socialist values, but to actively commit

to the Revolution. In what became known as the 'crisis of the intellectuals,' a series of articles were written by artists unwilling to produce under such circumstances. The articles published in *Al-Ahram* newspaper also demanded that the military return to its barracks and expressed opposition to a number of policies, towards artists and intellectuals in particular. In response to these, journalist and advisor to Nasser, Mohammed Hassanein Heikal indicated that,

It is critical that the group of self-proclaimed 'intellectuals' not only collaborate with whom I call 'the revolutionary forces' but enter into a relationship with them and support them for the building and deepening of revolutionary work and the possibility of a radical transformation of this society...for the military carried the Revolution through a gaping vacuum in the realm of true popular leadership due to an already existing intellectual crisis (Heikal 1961b).

In other words, it was the army that had to carry the Revolution through, due to the existing intellectual crisis and that the crisis, regardless of a history of clashes between the army and the intellectuals, existed well before the military coup. It thus became the intellectuals' duty to overcome the crisis themselves and advance the Revolution; for "armies do not usually create revolutions, they protect them, whilst it is the intellectuals' responsibility to bring about radical change in society" (Heikal 1961b).

A number of writers however, refused to adhere to the realms of 'socialist realism' framed by the state. Although, they opted instead to create a 'new literary movement' that contributed to an alternative imaginary of the period,²¹ their work was generally not actively interrupted or censored by the state. The movement was one that included elements of folklore, myth, storytelling and at times a more 'popular literature'²², that was more committed to 'realism' and a 'humanism' than it was to socialism. Their works did not flourish until after 1967, when their disenchantment with the Revolution and regime prompted them to demand to be consulted and involved on matters of politics.

²¹ The movement included literary giants such as Naguib Mahfouz and Yahya Haqqi, but also newer writers such as Sun'allah Ibrahim, 'Abd al-Rahman al-Abnudi, Yahya al-Taher 'Abdallah, Bahaa' Tahir and 'Amal Dunqul.

²² The works of 'Abd al-Rahman Al-Abnudi (2001)&(2004) are an example. He wrote works that were to be heard (stories recorded on cassette) by a predominantly illiterate society rather than 'read.'

Thus through the 'soft' control of the institutions of cultural production,²³ the Revolution introduced ideas and trends conducive to its policies and directions, as well as leaving space for further ideas that may be produced. Through this system of patronage, coaxing, encouragement and discouragement, it produced a worldview and environment that was constituted of its own ideas, as well as a medley of those of intellectuals.

2.3 From Speech to Song: Weaving the Revolutionary Imaginary

This next section will focus on the Revolution's rhetorical strategies: what language was used to communicate Revolutionary values and what vocabulary and rhetoric was employed to build ideological constructs. It explores how the Revolution was communicated in a way, so that it operated in both private and public realms, merging the individual and collective experience. Revolutionary ideas thus became intimate, rather than simply political. It is in this sense that the philosophy of the Revolution can be understood as a spontaneous philosophy embodying "all sorts of sentiments and prejudices that have private, subjective meanings, apart from the public realm of power relations, yet it cannot be divorced entirely from that realm" (Lears 1985, 571).

Seeing that these words appealed to 'utopian longings,' (Jameson 2007)²⁴ before they appealed to rational ambitions, I will attempt to analyse them in the spirit with which they were communicated. This means taking analysis beyond rational deconstruction, and attempting to understand the emotive value and affect of words, when sentiments are triggered before the will is mobilised.

²³ Jacquemond (2008, 18) refers to this as 'a virtual state monopoly of culture' or 'pluralism-under-surveillance.' Under Nasser, a combination of mobilising intellectuals (such as Salah Jahin and 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz) with patronage, and the system of sabbatical grants for writers, meant that artists had space for creativity. But this was creativity under surveillance, because that space was also defined by nationalisation, and earlier arrests, which pacified the communist movement for some time.

²⁴ This is the idea that ideology in its strongest sense can be utopian, as it is driven by the individual's desire to be part of a larger community that is fuelled not by ideological motifs, but the desire for a sense of solidarity with members of a particular group or class.

2.3.1 *'Abdel Nasser's Speeches – Nasser's Imagined Community*

'We are not the callers of war, but the soldiers of a cause.'²⁵ This phrase of Nasser's made the crowds go wild! They may seem like only words, but these words are our history. Like fingerprints they left their marks on us. What really established Nasser's popularity is the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, I clearly remember the day of the nationalisation speech. It was a turning point in our mentality, in the Egyptian mind-frame and psychology! From that point on, people in Egypt, even the ignorant and the illiterate discussed politics all the time, in buses and taxis, in the streets and cafes. There was an unnatural love for Gamal 'Abdel Nasser. Everyone was prepared for the possibility of war; we were going to fight imperialism, we were going to fight to the very last soldier.

Abulmajd Abulwafa 2010²⁶

Nasser's speeches, better described as addresses, were tailored specifically to the context, and more precisely the audience he was addressing. The speeches usually included particular elements, such as starting with a little historical background to the event or topic of the speech, or a reminder of the Revolution being a continuation of (and learning from the mistakes of) Ahmad 'Urabi (1882) and Sa'd Zaghlul's (1919) revolts. In most speeches, Nasser made an explicit personal connection to the audience, whether it was his coming from the same place, or the same social or economic background, or having fought in similar wars, emphasising in this way his being one of them.²⁷ He tended to introduce his subject matter with much detail. Finally and most importantly, the speeches highlighted a particular role for the audience; people left with an idea of what they needed to do, stand or fight for, and why, and in this way, Nasser's speeches became a form of political engagement. Listeners may have agreed or disagreed with the designated roles, but the assigned scope for their contribution to the Revolution was clear.

²⁵ A quote from one of Nasser's speeches about the nationalisation of the Suez Canal and the possibility of war.

²⁶ Abulmajd Abulwafa, High Dam technician. Interview by author. Aswan 2010.

²⁷ For example, in his speeches to students, he would recall the days of his own student activism and if he spoke in Alexandria, he spoke of his simple upbringing and poor origins in the city. Almost every address stressed his proximity to the people; the extent to which this was internalised, to his credit, is clear in the songs.

Speeches did more than give people a sense of their involvement however; they also highlighted the features of an imagined community that they were constructed as a part of. This community was part of *tahāluḥ al-quwwa al-shaʿbiyya* (an alliance of popular forces) of workers, peasants, soldiers and nationalist capitalists; it was one that was part of a larger Arab nation that gave it weight and power vis-à-vis the rest of the world. It was a nation that had contributed to the establishment of Bandung and the Non-Aligned Movement (Prashad 2008), and was thus revered internationally, on a scale that was unprecedented for a previously-colonised country. And finally this nation, this community of elevated stature, was one that was socialist and, as of 1961, repeatedly described as modern, and yet powerfully conscious of its traditional values of honour, dignity and nobility. It was a community that was Revolutionary (and not diplomatic), hot-headed (and not necessarily rational), and also emotional “prefer(ring) a good word over a million dollars and never accept(ing) an insult even if for fifty million dollars” (Nasser 1956).²⁸

Moreover, as we will see, the speeches used a language that was both new to political rhetoric whilst at the same time commonplace, creating constructs of a period and a struggle that was familiar, continuing from historical struggles and still new, and progressive. An emotional language was drawn upon to refer to the political, making political struggles as familiar as the everyday struggles and decisions driven by integrity and a sense of dignity.

Part of the new terminology that Nasser introduced was one that defined the period, giving it an aspect of the denseness of the context with which we associate it today. For maxims such as *‘al-la silm wa al-la harb’* (not at peace, nor at war), described the state he insisted the nation was in; neither acquiescing, nor calling for war. It was a refusal to succumb to imperial powers or global power structures in the name of peace. For, “Right without might is the possibility (acceptance) of defeat...and hope for peace without the capacity to defend it is surrender... (Nasser, March 30 Communique 1968)”

²⁸ During negotiations for High Dam funds, Nasser warned the American representative that being ‘an emotional people,’ their response to insults would not be in diplomatic measures. Announcement of the Nationalisation of the Suez Canal, July 26 1956, Alexandria.

Other terms included “*adam al-tahayuz al-igābī*” (positive neutrality) or a situation of non-alliance with Cold War states that was not passive, but rather clear in its progressive policies and actions. It looked towards a third way beyond the US-USSR axis of the Cold War. The term *al-’ishtirākiyya al-’arabiyya* (Arab Socialism) coined by Nasser and which he referred to in his speeches were later picked up in songs as “*’Ishirākiyatuna*” (Our socialism), setting it apart from the rest of the world’s socialisms.

These maxims created a linguistic context that was meant to hold the 1952 Revolution apart from other historical periods, whilst also differentiating it from the rest of the world. They also resulted in the production of other forms of language, or a richer language of anecdotes, sayings and idioms that were produced on a popular level in relation to the period. However, they also became ways to justify actions or policies. One notable example is the March 30 1968 speech discussed earlier, in which Nasser reneged on an earlier form of ‘democracy without elections’ and justified it by appealing to the differing political contexts and the slogan of ‘men of trust over men of experience.’

Nasser’s abdication speech of June 9 1967 following the Six Day War provides a clearer example of how language was used to justify or evade responsibility. This speech, as with many others, was subject to assistance and revision by Mohammed Hassanein Heikal, journalist and Nasser’s trusted advisor. In an article analysing the original version of the speech, and Heikal’s suggestions to amend it, ‘Imad ‘Abd al-Latif reveals that Nasser’s *’istiqāla* (resignation) became *tanahī* (abdication), while his reference to ‘defeat’ was replaced with *’naksa*’ (set-back) (‘Abd al-Latif 2010).

Changing the term from *’istiqāla* to *tanahī* had an effect that was at least two-fold. The first was that the existing constitution at the time specified the procedures to be taken should the president resign, and resignation would thus lead to an immediate handover of power. The term *tanahī* on the other hand was less straightforward, and unaddressed by the constitution, the consequences and steps to follow were not as clear. Furthermore, being a new word, in the context of a critical moment and the shock of the 1967 defeat, the term led to much uncertainty. This uncertainty elicited even more of a

reaction from a populace that then filled the streets, than the term ‘resignation’ that had clear steps and consequences, may have had.

Although there are many stories from respondents who poured into the streets immediately demanding that Nasser revoke his abdication,²⁹ a few stressed that they did so because he could not just leave them having created such a mess. Na'im Sabri, a student activist at the time, said he was part of a group that were chanting “*aha 'aha la tatanaha!*” – repeating an obscenity followed by, ‘Don’t abdicate,’ suggesting it was less a demonstration of support for Nasser than a ‘don’t you dare abdicate after all this!’³⁰ Others indicated that he could not possibly leave after having been in complete control and authority for so long; who would possibly know what to do?³¹ Meanwhile, Hajj 'Izz al-Din, a cargo-boat driver and my host-father in Nubia, explained that upon hearing the speech on the neighborhood’s radio, and not having a strong grip on the language, assumed it meant that Nasser was dying. On account of that, they all rushed into the street.

The language of the *tanahī* speech, like the language in a number of Nasser’s speeches, served to introduce new political concepts, as well as a new way of experiencing and understanding every period or event. According to 'Abd al-Latif (2010), Heikal advised Nasser to use the term ‘*naksa*’ as it was not as final as ‘defeat’ and would not be associated with great calamities such as the 1948 defeat of the creation of Israel. In Arabic, ‘*naksa*’ is a term usually used for a relapse, when one is ill, recovers and quickly falls back ill, temporarily.

However *naksa* also had other connotations. Whether or not this was clearly remembered, Nasser had used the term when announcing the National Charter (*al-mithāq al-watanī*) in Cairo University on May 21 1962. Here, in one of the Charter’s ten

²⁹ Even opposition figures such as Ahmad Fu'ad Nigm, a dissident poet critical of the regime in the 1960s, described pouring out into the streets in reaction to the speech. Ahmad Fu'ad Nigm, interview by author, Cairo 2006

³⁰ Na'im Sabri, student activist in the 1960s. Interview by author, Cairo 2009.

³¹ In Reem Saad’s study of an Agrarian reform community in Fayum (1988) she describes how peasants protested in the streets following the abdication on June 9 and 10 with statements such as “You can’t just throw us into the fire and leave!”

sections, he spoke of the “Lessons learnt from previous revolts.” In it he referred to two *naksas* suffered in Egyptian history. One was during the French occupation, and the battle of Rashid (Rosetta), while it was the *naksa* of Sa’d Zaghlul in 1919 that was the more significant one. Appearing in several of his speeches, for Nasser, the *naksa* in 1919 happened since the national movement was made up of a number of political parties headed by elites and land-owning capitalists, who, though nationalist, could not possibly understand what the ‘people’ wanted or needed. This led to a series of negotiations after Zaghlul’s uprising, which culminated in the 1936 treaty, which, though it granted Egypt nominal independence, subjected the country to another number of years of British colonisation. Although it was a setback on the road to freedom, it was, in Nasser’s narrative, those struggles that eventually led to the Revolution of 1952.

This historical consciousness and historical contextualisation was an important element in all of Nasser’s speeches. In other speeches, Nasser was just as critical of the Ahmad ‘Urabi revolt that peaked in 1882. Though it had a strong popular base, the army headed by ‘Urabi was composed of a number of well-meaning nationalists, that also came from an educated elite, that were not of, and thus not close to the people. As such, the movement was much more easily compromised. This was, of course, in contrast to Nasser himself, and members of the Revolutionary Council who considered themselves, due to their modest backgrounds, as ‘of the people.’

A ‘history of popular struggle’ was announced and explained at length in the National Charter speech of 1962. For the Arab people (and not just Egyptian), Nasser often reminded his audience, were a people of great achievements and of popular struggle: *tārikhiyyan wa nidaliyyan*. In this section of the speech however, the history of popular struggle started with the Prophet Mohammed, (notably, not the pharaohs or the Copts) and proceeded to the resistance against the Crusaders and the French. The narrative continued through the suffering under Mohammed Ali who only cared to further his own interests, and to the nationalist movement with Ahmad ‘Urabi, Mustafa Kamil, and Sa’d Zaghlul remembered as heroes. Qassim Amin’s call for women’s rights was also remembered in this speech, as well as in many others, though it was the call itself that was remembered and rarely a feminist struggle.

This reclaiming of history was consistent throughout Nasser's speeches, and clearly part of the power struggle of establishing the independent modern nation. This was something he explicitly pointed to with his repeated reference to how 'historians,' particularly Western historians, would relate this incident in contrast to how he instead tells it. None of these historical forays were as strong as the speech nationalising the Suez Canal, in which he describes at length his negotiations with John Foster Dulles (US Secretary of State), Eugene Black (president of the World Bank) and the various representatives of the British, American and eventually Russian governments on funding the High Dam.

One particularly stirring section of his speech was the description of his final meeting with Eugene Black, during which Black read his terms. Nasser read these terms out to the audience, and then paused. He explained that while reading these very terms, Eugene Black transformed before him into Ferdinand de Lesseps, the French developer of the Suez Canal. He imagined the conversation de Lesseps had with Khedive Sa'id in 1854, when he convinced him that the Suez Canal would have great benefits and economic returns for the country. Nasser went into detail as to the terms Sa'id accepted, offering slave labour for the digging of the Canal, which resulted in 120,000 deaths, as well as cheating Egypt out of its financial share. He snapped out of the memory as Black was finishing the speech, and declared that history would never repeat itself again. This dramatic story-telling of history elicited much excitement from the crowd, along with a sense of triumph, both in reclaiming a history as well as a future on its accord.

Besides reclaiming and re-telling history, and assigning values of nobility and courage as a lasting aspect of the Egyptian character, Nasser focused particularly on the politics of the peasantry and the Upper Egyptians. His was always a mention of the morality of the peasantry, and the Upper Egyptian who had long been resistant to colonialism and never accepted defeat. Nasser also placed great emphasis in his speeches on workers, whether this was in the number of speeches that addressed workers directly, or in the recurrent theme of the importance of industrialising and the use of technology for modernising as a nation and a people. The centrality of workers was clear; at times Nasser praised them, at others, the effects of industrialisation on the nation from its economic benefits to its

ability to create better forms of technology to defend itself against its enemies. The songs in the sections to come will better illustrate how the pride in industry and in being workers was propagated during this period.

The workers, *fallahīn*, students, and members of the army were always recognised (along with 'nationalist capitalists') as the cornerstones of this Revolution. As the 'alliance of popular forces' they were to form the Arab Socialist Union and speak in the name of the people. Nasser's mention of them, and particularly in his mobilising speeches had the effect of raising morale, and making them feel involved in the Revolution and making of its policies.

During my research, interview respondents repeatedly spoke about feeling as if they were being directly addressed in Nasser's speeches. This was partially because he did indeed address them directly at times, but also because of the emotional language that was used throughout. The intimate detail Nasser went into was as if he were sharing with them the technical details of every decision and policy that was to be made. Notably the speeches regarding the nationalisation of the Suez Canal on July 26 1956, and announcing the March 30 Communiqué, went into minute detail. On the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, Nasser spent almost three hours reading letters, minutes of meetings and conditions stipulated by potential donor countries and the World Bank. Furthermore he went into detail of all the figures (in both US dollars and Egyptian pounds) that would be provided in loans and grants, and made a comparison of these amounts (what the Canal made, versus what Egypt would have had to borrow for the High Dam) before announcing dramatically that all this money would become Egypt's, and be used for the building of the High Dam.³²

Similarly in the speech on the March 30 communiqué in 1968, he announced the changes in policies, along with the reasons behind each change, as well as the next steps to be

³² Speeches such as these were addressed not only to a local audience but an international audience as well. This speech made it clear that British and American propaganda were vilifying Nasser before a wider public, and why they would be doing it. Towards the end of the speech, Nasser directs the speech to the donors and imperialists and says *mūtu bi-ghaydhukum* (Die of your spite), which became an idiom, used throughout the 1956 war in Port Sa'id, and still in use today.

taken, from the re-writing of the constitution to the elections of the Arab Socialist Union and the presidential elections. In a speech commemorating the second anniversary of the Revolution in 1954, Nasser described in detail the five-year plan, the situation with agriculture, the plans and achievements with regard to land appropriation schemes, as well as changes in the GNP and GDP. When the audience interrupted to cheer, he lost his temper, shouting that this was not a time for empty slogans, but now was time to “really concentrate so we understand where we are, and can think together about where we were going.”

Such speeches often raised morale, whether through increasing a public’s political engagement, or mobilising them, such as those of November 1 and 2 1956 (radio broadcast and at Al-Azhar respectively) when in light of the tripartite invasion, and the army’s being stuck in Sinai fending off Israeli troops, he called for popular warfare. At that point he listed an international history of popular warfare citing the successful struggles of the people of Yugoslavia, Indonesia, Greece, Cyprus and Algeria. More importantly was his proclamation that he and his children were staying behind in Cairo and would fight. This *‘sanuqātil* (we will fight) speech, produced the slogan, *‘sanuqātil wa lan nastaslim’* (we will fight and never surrender) that, according to respondents in Port Said, was said to fuel a lot of Port Said’s *fida’iyyīn* during the war.

This populist tinge in his speeches was at times however, demeaning. For instance, during the announcement of the National Charter in 1962 when he explained that having learnt from the lessons from the elitism of the 1882 and 1919 experiences, he declared that *‘al sha`b al qā`id’* (the people, as teacher) had “delegated to the nationalist army the responsibility of securing the nation-building process, while (the people) sat back and supervised the process with awareness and vigil.” Another instance occurs in the same speech where he described Port Said’s popular resistance against the tripartite army in the absence of the Egyptian military, as a prime example of a popular democracy where the people led the war against foreign and imperial armies. In this way, he abdicates all responsibility for the army not having made it to Port Said at the time of the invasion, transforming this failure into an example of people carrying out their ‘roles and responsibilities’ towards the Revolution.

Whether it was the speeches that lifted the people's morale, or people's morale was high despite those speeches that were demeaning, many people *did* feel a high level of ownership, engagement and agency during the Revolution. This was despite the circumstances that they may have suffered on account of its deficiencies. As we will see in Chapter 3 on the popular resistance in Port Said, people were conscious of the silences of the regime, both in mythologising the Port Said struggle and in not taking responsibility for the army's absence. Similarly in Suez after the *Naksa* in 1967 (Chapter 6), people were critical of Nasser for not seriously punishing the military.

The politicisation that came through an engagement in politics in an everyday language meant that people were not easy to sway in this direction or that. Rather, they were better able to inform themselves, and demand that the Revolution in its 'principles' be carried through, in spite of the disenchantment with Nasser's regime in the wake of 1967. The *Naksa* may have caused a crisis for the intellectuals of Cairo and beyond, but it barely had an effect on the work on the High Dam (Chapter 4 and 5) or the resistance in Suez (Chapter 6), which continued, save for the lack of trust in the regime (and those to come) from then onwards. Their work on the Revolution became their own responsibility; it was their sacrifices for this new nation they were both building and becoming a part of that would result in a greater international stature, as well as an increased level of morale, education and awareness in their own lives as well. However this sense of ownership of the Revolution despite their disenchantments, does not fully explain the absence of resentment towards Nasser for the many hardships he afforded them.

In a speech following his (dis)abdication speech,³³ he explained the steps that were to be taken to rebuild the army, accounted for the losses, and spoke of the industrial, economic and political effects of the *Naksa*. When he reached the point where he explained the restructuring of the army, the institution held responsible for the defeat and the leader of which was 'Abd al-Hakim 'Ammir, his long time friend, he asked "that it be taken into

³³ Nasser withdrew his abdication in a speech delivered on June 10 1967.

consideration that the matter is most difficult for me, given that I have in addition to all our losses, lost my dearest and closest friend.”³⁴

Soon after being removed from his post, ‘Ammir was suddenly, and suspiciously announced as having committed suicide. However Nasser is remembered much as he ended this very speech “I am, at the beginning and end of the day, only a human being...”

2.3.2 *Singing the Revolution*

We said we’d build, and here we’ve built it, the High Dam!
Oh imperialism, with our very own hands, we’ve built the High Dam!
With our very own funds and the hands of our own workers;
We gave the word, and here it is fulfilled!

‘Abd al-Halim Hafiz, *Hikāyat Sha‘b* (The Story of a People) 1960³⁵

This song, *Hikāyat Sha‘b* opens with the chorus (and audience during concerts) exploding into the famous chant “We said we’d build and here we’ve built it, the High Dam! Oh imperialism, with our very own hands, we’ve built the High Dam!” amidst clapping beats and ululations. The song then proceeds with ‘Abd al-Halim Hafiz interjecting, alerting the chorus to the fact that the story is not simply that of the High Dam, but a whole history of struggle that precedes it. After a few reactions by a chorus annoyed at having been interrupted, he starts to tell the ‘story’ of the Dam. The story of the people’s struggle starts with imperialism, and the incident of Dinshaway in 1906, an incident mythologised as a symbol of imperialist brutality and humiliation and a key moment of Egypt’s path to independence,³⁶ and ends with a Dam independently built.

The song then proceeds to describe in detail the Revolution championed by the army, the decision to build a High Dam for economic and industrial subsistence, and the long funding saga that leads to the peak of the song, the decision to nationalise the Suez

³⁴ From a speech regarding the restructuring of the army in June 1967, although the exact date is not available.

³⁵ This song is in the enclosed CD

³⁶ On June 11 1906, a group of British soldiers went hunting in the village of Dinshaway, only to accidentally kill a female villager. The situation escalated as confrontations became violent, and an injured British soldier died of sunstroke on his way to camp. A swift tribunal was set up where 52 villagers were tried with sentences ranging from public execution to life imprisonment to whip lashes, while villagers were forced to watch. The situation fueled the nationalist movement and gained legendary status as a symbol of imperialist injustice. See (Fahmy 2011, 92)

Canal. The song continues relating how from this point onwards, imperialist powers decide to react with war. Popular warfare is waged as civilians arm themselves to protect their city against Anglo-French forces that lay siege to Port Said. The war is won, and the High Dam was built “with our own hands, and our own funds, just as we said we would.”

Hikāyat Sha`b, first sung in Aswan on the site where the building of the Dam was starting in 1960, is one of the songs that resonates most with the memory of the 1952 Revolution. If Nasser’s speeches built the constructs of the prevailing social and political imaginary that coloured the period and dictated its values, these ‘revolutionary songs’ preserved them so that the hopes, achievements and grave disappointments of the period were committed to memory.

This song had some of the qualities of most of the revolutionary songs of the period: the chorus that represented a ‘people’ with the intermingling voices of the male singers, and the singing, clapping and ululations of the women, as well as the occasional switches between different genres of music that represented the Upper Egyptian, *fallahī*, and sometimes Nubian beats. The song like most of those I will explore in this section told the story of a particular event or aspect of the Revolution, highlighting the relationship between the people and Nasser, framed as one of them, and was highly zealous and mobilising. Other songs I will look at draw upon popular themes such as highlighting and simplifying the values of socialism, mobilising for work, and at times for war.

I will explore these themes through a number of songs, analysing the aspects of the songs that lent them the power for which they are still known today. Umm Kulthum and ‘Abd al-Halim Hafiz, whose names are particularly prominently associated with the Revolution, were two of the most popular singers of the period, and so it is their songs that will be my focus in this section.

Though such songs may be assumed to fall under the category of state propaganda, it is important to note that although Umm Kulthum and ‘Abd al-Halim, were indeed on good terms with Nasser, they were not necessarily appropriated, or used simply as tools for the Revolution’s propaganda. Many artists of the time, in conflict with the politics of the

regime, contributed to the 'propaganda' despite their independence or actual criticism of Nasser, as I will later elaborate.

Renowned colloquial poet Salah Jahin, arguably one of the best colloquial poets in modern history contributed greatly to revolutionary songs and was gravely disappointed after the *Naksa*. Others, such as writer Sun'allah Ibrahim, contributed to a book on the human experience of those who were building the High Dam in 1965,³⁷ which was particularly striking given that at the time, Ibrahim had just completed a prison sentence for being a communist before traveling to Aswan. In his later, work (Ibrahim 1976), he was more critical of the High Dam project.

In an article on popular culture in post-independence Zimbabwe in 1970s-80s, Taonezvi Vambe reflects on political singers who are not co-opted by the state but can nevertheless somehow be seen to promote its ideology. Vambe explains that,

Perhaps as Stuart Hall reminds us, the relationship between the state and popular artists cannot always be plotted on a narrow dialectic suggested by the double movement of containment and resistance. Sometimes popular artists become complicit by virtue of recognising certain elements of identification with state policies, 'Something approaching a recreation of recognisable experiences and attitudes to which people are responding (Hall 1994, 461)' (Vambe 2000, 75).

Whether it was Umm Kulthum, known regionally as *kawkab al-sharq* (star of the East)³⁸, who had achieved a status and reputation since the 1920s or 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz, known as *al-'andalib al-'asmar* (the dark sparrow), whose career was launched with the first anniversary of the Revolution, both their performances during this period are held in high artistic regard. These songs were written by renowned Arab and Egyptian (classic and colloquial) poets, ranging from Egypt's Salah Jahin to the Syrian Nizar al-Qabbani and the Lebanese Rahbani brothers; musical composers included Kamal al-Tawil, Baligh Hamdi, Mohammed 'Abd al-Wahab, Riyad al-Sunbati and Mohammed al-Mugi, unquestionably Egypt's greatest composers of the time, and arguably since.

³⁷ (Al-Qalsh, Ibrahim and Mus'ad 1967).

³⁸ Umm Kulthum is also sometimes referred to as 'the voice of Egypt' or 'the voice of the Arab world.'

Most of these works were heard on the radio. Introduced to Cairo in the 1930s, the radio was a general and central phenomenon in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly since the television, introduced in the 1960s, was a luxury only affordable to about ten percent of the population. The phenomenon of the radio was intensified in the 1950s, under Nasser when the number of radio stations and hours of transmission increased dramatically (Danielson 1997, 183). Radios blared through *ahāwi* (traditional cafes), shops, kiosks and households. It was the main means for keeping up with national, and sometimes international or regional news, as well as, most importantly, the central source of entertainment. Listening to the radio was a social event. Umm Kulthum's songs played at a particular Thursday of every month, precipitating social gatherings around radios to 'attend' it.

Umm Kulthum's songs, given her position as an established singer and a cultural authority in both Egypt and the Arab world, as well as her deep voice and her eloquence in singing classical Arabic poetry, meant most of her songs were more *anashīd* (anthems or odes). Her nationalist songs had a martial style to them, featuring a large orchestral accompaniment, and more often than not a men's chorus. The 1950s was a significant period in her career as she started incorporating popular elements into her music, using more Egyptian instruments, and singing in colloquial Arabic. Umm Kulthum, born in 1898 started singing when she was around six in the village of her origin (al-Sinbillawain), moved to Cairo around 1923 where she was trained professionally and gained popularity as one of Egypt's best singers as early as 1928 (Danielson 1997, 164-5). About half of her repertoire was built up in the 1950s and 1960s, made up not only of her nationalist songs however, but also love songs and a number of collaborations with other singers in that period.

'Abd al-Halim Hafiz was also a talented singer from a modest background. He lived in an orphanage for some years, before living in poverty with extended family after his parents' death during his early childhood. Although 'Abd al-Halim had started singing before the rise of Nasser, it was only upon singing for the Revolution that he rose to fame. His songs had a more 'popular' nature to them than those of Umm Kulthum, featuring much applause and ululation, and evoking much imagery and style from different areas or

governorates in Egypt. Both singers died in the 1970s, Umm Kulthum in 1975 and 'Abd al-Halim in 1977, compounding their association with the legacy of that period characterised by many who lived it as an explosion of hope in modern Egyptian history.

A History in Lyric and Rhyme

These songs *were* the Revolution to us...

Hania Hamdi 2012³⁹

A picture of the happiest of people, under the victorious flag
Oh do take a picture of us, time,
Time, do take our picture!

'Abd al-Halim Hafiz, *Sūra* (A photograph), 1966⁴⁰

The songs of the Revolution were mostly either anthems, an ode to 'Gamal' for example, or the tellings of a particular event or achievement related to the Revolution. The anthems, more like odes, detailed the significance of historical events and were sung by a cultural authority such as Umm Kulthum, these songs were often rich in their classical Arabic, and steeped in poetic meaning. 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz on the other hand excelled at those songs that had the effect of taking Nasser's words and values to a more 'popular' level. These songs were very festive, with episodes and stories interweaving with the applause, ululations and chants of a 'people.' The chorus was a medley of men and women, singing in the style of *fallahīn*, *sayyadīn* (fishermen) and workers, At times even including the voices of children or a chorus of self-proclaimed students.

'Abd al-Halim's songs were therefore portrayed as encapsulating the voice of the people. They simplified the idea and ideals of socialism, the principles of the Revolution and its achievements, underscoring their direct effects on peoples' everyday lives. They also mirrored Nasser's speeches in the way they highlighted the specific roles in the Revolution of every strata of society. In 'Abd al-Halim's *Al-Mas'ūliyya* (The Responsibility,

³⁹ Hania Hamdi. Interview by author. Cairo 2012. See Appendix 2 for details.

⁴⁰ By 'Abd al-Halim Hafez, written by Salah Jahin, composed by Kamal al-Tawil, 1966

1963) written by Salah Jahin, for example, the Revolution is made up of “the workers keeping factories alight day and night, boosting industrialisation, the *fallahīn* turning every patch of desert green, the army on the borders sacrificing their yearnings to ward away the enemy, and the intellectuals who enlighten us all along the way.” Many of the themes in Nasser’s speeches were taken up, values such as selflessness and unity were elaborated upon in stories and caricatures, and the habit of ‘telling a story’ was adopted. ‘Abd al-Halim would often explain the process to an impatient chorus (and audience in public concerts) that would burst into chants and ululations once the moment of victory had come.

Whether it was in the songs of Umm Kulthum or ‘Abd al-Halim, the repeated use of ‘we’ by the chorus, the repetition of key stanzas and phrases, such as ‘we will fight to your death’ and others, would entice the audience to sing along. The tunes were catchy and the words were moving; it is difficult to sing along without at least momentarily being part of this heightened state of enthusiasm, often still as effective five decades later. In her commanding presence, Umm Kulthum sometimes called for the audience to repeat after her as well, sometimes out of script and at other times, as part of the song, calling ‘*Rudu ‘alaya!*’ (Answer me!).⁴¹ Consensus, and not only participation, was thus part of the audience’s cultural experience.

Umm Kulthum’s famous anthems include the first song she sang, after the Revolution, *Misr Allatī fī Khātirī* (Egypt that is on my Mind, 1952), a soft celebration of the Revolution that is peacefully captivating and rich in its language and odes to the nation. Another is *Wallah Zamān ya Silāhī* (It Has Been Long, my Weapon, 1956) which combines a martial tune with words by Salah Jahin that could have well belonged to a love song. Its main verse ‘*Wallah zamān ya silāhī, ‘istha’tillak fī kifāhī; himm we ‘ul ana sāhī, ya harb walla zamān’* can be loosely translated as ‘It’s been long, my weapon, how I’ve longed for you in my strife, gather your courage and cry ‘I am awake’, oh war, it has been long.’

⁴¹ *Ya Gamal, ya Mithāl al-Wataniyya* (Oh Gamal, Nationalist Role Model, 1963).

Wallah Zamān ya Silāhī, first sung in 1956 was adopted as the national anthem until 1977. One can imagine its effect on students chanting in school lines, how much they have missed their weapons, and how much of their wrath the enemy will see. According to Maurice Bloch, the power of a song lies in the way that it 'cannot be argued' (Bloch 1974, 70-1). The act of singing a song focuses one's creativity on the lyrics that are already set, and the tune that is already assigned. This temporary suspension of a critical logic makes the lyrics of the songs, in this case a repetitive pledge, even stronger in effect, particularly when the lyrics may have resonated with concerns and sentiments of the time.

Other important works of Umm Kulthum include *Nashīd al-Galā'* (The Anthem of Freedom 1954), *al-Galā'* being the name given to the 1954 withdrawal agreement signed with Britain; and '*Asbah 'Al'ān 'Andī Bunduqiyya* (I Now Have a Rifle 1969), a famous poem by the Syrian poet Nizar al-Qabbani put to music by Mohammed 'Abdel Wahab. The song is a reminder that the Palestinian question is as much an Egyptian and Arab responsibility as a Palestinian one, and thus an ode to the Arab cause as a whole. Other songs are odes focused directly on Nasser such as *Batal al-Salām* (Hero of Peace, 1958), and *Ya Gamal, ya Mithāl al-Wataniyya* (Oh Gamal, Nationalist Role Model, 1963). Umm Kulthum's odes to Gamal were odes to a national hero, saviour and leader who has "lightened the day, brightened our lives...if the world (or life) has left us with anything, it is him (1963)."

This way of portraying Nasser along with Umm Kulthum's emphasis on the greater Arab cause and the glorious Revolution, contrasts with 'Abd al-Halim's more familiar ways of referring to Gamal and the cause as a whole. Also, whereas in her songs, Egypt is depicted as the cradle of every civilisation and "lighthouse for all revolutionaries," 'Abd al-Halim's depictions of Egypt are made up of more intimate details. In *Sūra*, for instance, he sings of "the Opera sending breezes of Art rippling along the Nile, stretches of rolling green fields and a generous sun" or "city squares that never sleep; Chimneys alight with the goldsmith's work and the welding of the steel of Egyptian determination."

Nasser, in 'Abd al-Halim's songs, was depicted and evoked as one of the people. In *Al-Mas'ūliyyah* (The Responsibility), 'Abd al-Halim sings, "*Rayissna mallāh wi m'adina, 'amil, fallah min baladīna*" (Our captain is a skilled navigator, smoothly sailing us through; a worker, a *fallah*, and of our village-folk). In other songs, such as in *Bustān al-'Ishtirākiyya* (Along the Gardens of Socialism), lyrics by Salah Jahin, boasting of all the merits and bounties reaped by socialism, the main constituents of this socialist dream were "a nation of heroes; of scientists and workers, and with us, we have Gamal." In some of 'Abd al-Halim's songs, 'Gamal' would come after a long list of oaths of all that is held dear, and was sung with a very long stretch, displaying his vocal talent and almost always called for an applause and encore. It is important to note that *gamāl* also means beauty in Arabic, and was played upon accordingly.

In 'Abd al-Halim's songs, the great achievements of socialism and the Revolution were either sung in stories by 'Abd al-Halim himself, or by the chorus, as different constituents of the nation claiming their allegiance and their own forms of responsibility. The stories, were all narrowed down to the simple details of the everyday, and an exaggerated utopian glory.

Al-Mas'ūliyya and *Bustān al-'Ishtirākiyya* were two of 'Abd al-Halim's most popular songs praising socialism. *Al-Mas'ūliyya* opens with a chorus of men, women and children chanting with their 'membership cards' held high, that they are now part of the 'official committee.' This 'committee' was none other than the alliance of popular working forces that Nasser tried to build and later develop into the Arab Socialist Union.⁴² Socialism was depicted in terms of its values, "it's in our principles, our values, our Revolution;" "There's no I, *ya masrī*⁴³ only 'we'; You and I and him and her, are to come together to build (create) a socialism" (*ni'mil 'ishtirākiyya*).⁴⁴ Much like in Nasser's speeches, the song drew upon the common, collective experiences; Socialism "starts with a simple word and transforms into a good meal, and that's all there is to it."

⁴² See Beattie (1994) for details on what he calls the 'civilian coalition' and the development of the Arab Socialist Union.

⁴³ *Ya masrī* means 'Oh, Egyptian.'

⁴⁴ 'Ishtirāk linked to 'ishtirākiyya (socialism) means to be part of some social group or organisation, and so in this instance it sounds like some form of co-operative.

Meanwhile in *Bustān al-'Ishtirākiyya*, the emphasis was on the values of work as well as all that socialism “finally promised.” It opens with the sound of people lifting and lowering planks of wood, (building the Dam), as they stood along the gardens of Socialism, “engineering along the Nile,” in the company of Nasser. Amidst the clapping and ululations, there is a description of socialism, that is simple in its highlighting of the values of work, and all of the happiness and victory promised. A well-known verse in *Bustān al-'Ishtirākiyya* that was typical of Salah Jahin’s colloquial poetry, and the heightened utopian sense of the time, went,

Put an end to all uncertainty and pass the sharbāt⁴⁵ ‘round;
Close your eyes and open them,
And find a rose for every thorn you’ve bound;
Plant beds of Jasmine in Jaffa, let them chant in fervour;
Open the box of ‘Id,⁴⁶ and the give the pretty girl a mirror.

All these loosely associated images of fear and uncertainty, allusions to festivities and a child-like excitement with a toy mirror, become moving, particularly in contrast to the images of work and a history of struggle. Also the mention of the beds of Jasmine in Jaffa becomes a more familiar way to emphasize the Arab cause. Thus the Socialism and the period in general is depicted as a dream come true. Another well-known line in this song, in reference to achievements, is the “shifting in the direction of the Nile” which is made to sound like a super-human feat, on account of a very physical achievement of the diversion of the flow of the Nile on May 14 1964.

This song, like *Al-Mas’ūliyya* and others is divided into sections whereby each one is sung in the specific dialect and style typical to different areas in Egypt (Upper Egypt, Suez or Aswan, for instance), with the musical instruments and celebratory zeal associated with each area. With the inclusion of these different groups in the song, their inclusion in the Egyptian nation and Revolution is indicated.

⁴⁵ Sharbāt is a drink that is served at weddings, births and other celebrations.

⁴⁶ ‘Id is an Annual Feast.

Socialism, or being a socialist was also a personal trait and one worn with pride. In a comic episode of the song *Baladī* (My Country 1964),⁴⁷ the listener is warned that “if you do not live up to your responsibility; if you are greedy, or thirst for power, strive for status, or abandon field or factory, then we will taunt and chant and call you a non-socialist!”. The ‘non-socialist’ (*‘adīm al-‘ishtirākiyya*) however is constructed so it sounds like ‘impolite’ and ‘irresponsible.’ It is a play on words that makes a value of socialism, and it’s lack a fault of the disloyal. This is reiterated as the chorus demonstrates how they would honk and jeer as the culprit passes by. In live performances, the audience often starts to sing along to this stanza.

Another common theme in *Baladī*, *Bustān al-‘Ishtirākiyya*, and in particular *Hikāyat Sha‘b* is the stories they tell. *Baladī* tells the story of the heroic young men who conspired against the tyrant monarchy, called for the Revolution on July 23 1952 and ousted the British. *Bustān al-‘Ishtirākiyya* tells of the building of the High Dam and the achievement of having changed the direction of the flow of the Nile.

Other songs that are informative include ‘Abd al-Ghani al-Sayyid’s *‘Idatnī al-Thawra Khamas Fadādīn* (The Revolution has Granted me Five Acres). Sung in an accent and dialect that is clearly *fallahī*, the song tells of how the Revolution has granted him his five acres, now farmed by his children, and all that is harvested goes directly to his family. On a general political level, it speaks of how with the values and principles of justice, “the Arab Republic is now a socialist republic, which entitles me to a fifty percent say in the great ‘gathering’, a fifty percent share that is distributed fairly amongst us (*fallahīn*) and the workers.” Reference here, is again to the Arab Socialist Union where half of seats went to workers and *fallahīn*.

These songs are significant not only for the information they disseminated and the spirit or zeal they spread, but also for the ways that they capture them for collective memory. Still played on contemporary radio, the songs can be more evocative than historical

⁴⁷ Unlike the terms ‘my nation’ or ‘my country,’ *baladī* has a very personal connotation to it; it is more emotional and implies a sense of belonging.

accounts of the events they describe. People also appreciated that Umm Kulthum and 'Abd al-Halim both came from very modest backgrounds like the majority of the Egyptian populace. Their talent earned them a reverence that might have been stronger in effect than the words of Nasser. They thus captured a particular period, with all the energy with which Nasser dictated to it, and the hope with which people experienced it.

The songs after the *Naksa* on the other hand, have a different feel to them. They carry the same kinds of phrases such as, "As long as I have my weapon and am armed with hope," as well as a series of oaths, and allegiances by all that every individual or collective holds dear. In her song '*Inna Fida'iyyūn* (We are Fighters 1967), Umm Kulthum draws on her powerful voice, sounding like a fighter herself, almost shouting, rather than singing that "the face of evil has been unveiled, the harsh truth has come through, but that every enemy has it coming, now that we are ready." Although mobilising, these songs were much less uplifting and carried more of a sense of loss than of zeal, mainly on account of the music and the way the lyrics were composed.

These revolutionary songs contributed significantly to the building of the 'imaginary' that was Nasser's socialism. If his speeches built the constructs, these songs sang them in the voices of the *fallahīn*, workers and sometimes even intellectuals. Every person could potentially hear his or her voice, his or her music, speaking in a language that mobilises ideas as much as it does hopes and dreams, and a will to work and build as much as to fight to the death. It glorified every achievement, as if one dream after another was being realised, and played continuously on radios in people's homes, streets and the transportation that took them across the city to their daily lives. These revolutionary songs are committed to memory and are the most prominent taste of this period that lingers today.

2.4 Conclusion

*Ya'ish ahl baladī wa binhum mafīsh, ta'aruf yikhalī al tahāluf ya'ish...
ya'ish ya'ish ya'ish!*

Long, long live the people of my country,
Though among them there lacks
An acquaintance upon which an alliance could pack⁴⁸
Long live every sect, of the other afraid
While between them the curtains, partitions cascade
But with every feast my people, eternal
We come together and chant an ephemeral
'*Ya`ish ya`ish ya`ish...*'

Ahmad Fu`ad Nigm, *Ya`ish ahl baladī* (Long live the people of my country) 1968⁴⁹

Ya`ish ahl baladī was a poem was written by dissident poet Ahmad Fu`ad Nigm and composed by his partner musician, Al-Sheikh Imam in 1968. At the beginning of their fame in the 1960s Imam and Nigm lived in a small apartment in the Khosh Adam Alley in Cairo, and started singing improvised songs critiquing the state after the 1967 *Naksa*. They were part of a movement in the late 1960s when writers and poets became increasingly critical of the state and its practices. They did this mainly in public spaces, such as street cafes.

Nigm and Imam soon joined forces with the student movement, and their dissident poetry resonates strongly as 'resistance poetry' until today. Much of their music was performed during and prior to the January 2011 revolution.

My interest in looking at this particular period through song and poetry started during my comparative study of the student movements in Egypt in the 1960s and between 2000-2005. I found that, amongst a generation of activists in the 1960s, there were people who found it easier to recount verses of poetry than tell the tale. This was particularly the case when recounting an event that was perceived as 'painful' or especially hopeful. This usually required me to know the songs and poetry that were abundant in the 1960s, which was not always the case, but I did become conscious of the 'thickness' with which poetry and lyrics drenched this particular period of time.

⁴⁸ A pun on 'The alliance of popular forces' (workers, peasants, intellectuals and nationalist capitalists) in the sense that this alliance could not exist when intellectuals and the workers and peasants did not even know each other, or interact

⁴⁹ See Nigm (2006). This song is in the enclosed CD

The sustained power of these songs can be explained partially in the way that the Revolution was expressed in such an emotive and personal language by Nasser himself. Its successes, moments of personal elation and heightened morale, as well as its defeat and moments of pain, were recounted by Nasser in a lyrical way. But possibly lyrics became the 'language' of this period chiefly because it was a time so rich in the songs that highlighted and 'coined' every event and policy.

This encouraged me, when researching the extent of Nasser's hegemony, to explore the intimate languages people used to experience, express, capture, or remember the incidents of which they were a part. This use of an intimate language is particularly pertinent when it comes to the milestones that marked the period and were made to become symbols or emblems of the Revolution's success, such as the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, the ensuing tripartite aggression against Port Said in 1956, and the building of the High Dam. Important also was the experience of the *Naksa*, particularly on the citizens of Suez, who had to mobilise for six years of popular warfare on account of it, a story which is barely heard, whether through speeches or songs.

The mark of a populist regime is the extent to which it speaks on behalf of its people, making of their triumphs and sufferings, in addition to its own, a story of a collective whole of which everyone is a part. I argue that these songs were however, not merely tools of propaganda, if propaganda is "a set of methods employed by an organised group that wants to bring about the active or passive participation in its actions of a mass of individuals....unified through psychological manipulation and incorporated in an organisation (Ellul 1965, 61)."

To understand the poetry and the songs of the period simply as propaganda would be to miss how people were not simply manipulated, nor were the songs merely consumed. Rather, ideas were reproduced, engaged with and critiqued. Even the institutions that the Revolution developed, such as the Socialist Youth Organisations, recruited young people, many of whom became leaders of the student movement critiquing the regime and calling for the values of the Revolution.

I argue instead that the socialist imaginary was hegemonic, that people related to it and willingly contributed and made sacrifices for it; I argue that the songs were powerful and thus effective. The power of music can be attributed to the “intensity and immediacy with which music evokes emotion and memory” (Nooshin 2009, 15). That is indeed how revolutionary songs tend to carry not only the lyrics of the experience, but a deeper meaning that the music conveys as an emotive or human experience associated with the event carried through song.

Thus, I argue that these songs were powerful in making the Revolution appeal to rationale, drawing on elements of spontaneous philosophy, so that aspects of its logic, policy and ideology were accepted and internalised as ‘common sense’. Moreover however I argue that the songs were effective beyond rationale, for,

Music’s non-discursiveness allows it to operate at a partially subliminal level and to present itself as part of the naturalised order of things, ‘to fly beneath the radar’ of critical thinking in the words of Friskopf (2009), to contest without appearing to do so (Nooshin 2009, 24).

In the chapters to come, songs sometimes contradict people’s own memories of events. Where an event may be remembered with pride, the songs may be laden with guilt, sadness or anger, carrying the sentiment felt at the time with it, as opposed to its justification in a constructed memory.

The songs also form a space that is both private and public where hegemonic struggles take place. Songs of the Revolution are public in that they become a shared rhetoric and a popular memory, contributing in their content, but also in and of themselves to this imaginary that joins the alliance of popular working forces together. Similarly the forms of popular culture I explore in the sections to come, create an intimate space, an intimate discourse amongst communities, private to them (as opposed to other communities) and yet creating a public discourse, an ‘entre-nous’ through which the events of the Revolution were experienced.

Throughout this thesis, I look at the ‘stories of the people’ as they experienced the milestones discussed in the songs and speeches in this chapter. I start with the popular

resistance that resisted the tripartite aggression in Port Said in 1956 (Chapter 3), followed by two chapters on the building High Dam through the experiences of its builders (Chapter 4), and the experience of the Nubians who were displaced by it (Chapter 5). Finally I look at the *Naksa* of 1967 as it was experienced by the people of Suez, who engaged in six years of guerilla warfare against the invading Israelis (Chapter 6).

Some of these stories have been silenced, others are narrated all the time, though differently from those who experienced them. All of them, however are told through the songs, idioms, and poetry in which the people in each of the above situations have chosen to preserve them. I explore an intimate language, for an intimate memory (amongst a community) for the possibility of understanding, what seems to have become an intimate revolution.

Chapter 3. “The simsimiyya gives voice to those whom history forgets.” Beyond the Suez Crisis. Remembering the Battle of Port Said, 1956

3.1 Introduction

When historical significance is attached to an occurrence, independent of the event, the facts of the case cease to matter. And where all subsequent accounts are parasitic on a prior memory, documentation seems almost unnecessary

(Amin 1995, 11)

What has been coined internationally as the Suez Crisis, and nationally as the *'udwan thulāthy* (Tripartite Aggression) is remembered as an event of global significance. It had political, economic and diplomatic repercussions on the British Empire, the Cold War, the Egyptian Revolution, Western-Middle East relations and the person of Nasser himself. “1956 made 'Abdel Nasser” as a number of respondents inside and outside Port Said would tell me.

The Anglo-French attack on Port Said started late on October 31, and as of November 1, *fiḍa'iyyīn* (popular resistance) were active in Port Said, with minimal backing or support from either *mukhabarāt* (intelligence) or the military. Resistance operations ranged from air force fighting battalions, popular committees to protect public utility buildings, to emergency groups to bury the dead and treat the wounded, and the smuggling of weapons into the city.

The victory became an emblem of the Revolution, of Nasser's popular backing and ability to mobilise a population. While little is known about the civilian resistance of men, women and children of Port Said, waged from October 31 until December 23.

It also became a victory of political proportions, providing Egypt with a certain international stature and sovereignty that was not previously available to it before the nationalisation of the Canal. But the military failures during the battle – both on account of the decisions that mobilized and withdrew the army to and from Sinai and the internal factions within the Free Officers' ranks that meant that the army could not be mobilised

back to the Canal region⁵⁰ – is barely engaged with in these narratives of victory. Despite attempts by Nasser and other members of the Revolutionary Council, the Military High Command refused to hold military leadership accountable for poor combat decisions in Sinai or Suez (Al-Bughdadi 1977, 361).

Narratives of the resistance in Port Said however, hold little bitterness for the army's failures, the lack of investigation into war-crimes committed by invaders or lack of official acknowledgement of the full extent of the sacrifices by the people of Port Said. For the resistance of Port Said, the battle was for their home and their communities, a continued battle against British imperialism that stretched prior to the Revolution. Rather than shun the military establishment for silencing their struggle to boost the Revolution, they actually relate their battle to the greater battle, and their community to Nasser's greater framed imagined community. Not, however, without emphasizing their own politics which drove and continues to drive their political activism.

Thus, I start this thesis with the first popular struggle waged by a people for the possibility of a new nation and a new imagined community. The events as they unravelled in Port Said reflect the weaknesses within the military establishment (and Revolutionary Council) that would later play a key role in the 1967 defeat.

I explore in this chapter, not merely 'the truth of what happened' in Port Said, but rather how the people of Port Said chose to construct their struggles against the tri-partite aggression vis-à-vis the state narratives of the event. I unpack, on the one hand the metanarrative of the event and explore how the state nationalized achievements, covering up for its own failures. On the other hand I display how the people of Port Said chose to represent their own struggles and the politics that drove them differently at times, while at others, tied these experiences to the mainstream narrative.

⁵⁰ 'Abd al-Hakim 'Ammir, military commander-in-chief refused to give orders for the retreat from Sinai to Port Said, and according to Heikal (2004) Nasser had to do it himself. Moreover, It is said that Salah Salim, a member of the Revolutionary Council, believed the Council should surrender themselves to the British Embassy (Heikal 2004, 612-613).

I approach these different narratives through the constructions of heroes and heroic struggles used to represent these events. I look at the metanarrative through the heroes the state chose to make legends of through history books, monuments and museums. While I look at more popular constructions of heroism through forms of 'intimate languages'. Particularly songs through which characters and events, and the politics behind them are remembered.

I explore the complexities and contradictions in the process by which Nasser's idea of an imagined community becomes hegemonic, despite its failures. The particular significance of this chapter is that it focuses on a time when the Revolution was struggling to establish its rapport in the country and abroad⁵¹. Port Said thus became a cornerstone in the development of the idea of the revolutionary community that is propagated throughout the rest of the era, and contested adopted or internalized in chapters to come.

Finally I highlight the 'historical continuity' of a popular struggle against imperialism that prevails in Port Said well before the Revolution and continues thereafter. Emphasising, as I do throughout this thesis, the politics of a people that transcended the physical and temporal boundaries of Nasser's Revolution.

Through looking at songs for a popular history and politics, I touch on Port Said's distinct musical culture of the *simsimiyya*, a five-string instrument particular to the people of the Canal (Suez, Ismailiyya and Port Said).

Singers and musicians of the *simsimiyya* are usually workers, fishermen, truck drivers, and although playing the *simsimiyya* requires talent, a number of the most popular poets, singers and musicians are illiterate, making of this a very oral tradition. Songs are passed along predominantly by memory.

Ibrahim Al Mursi (Itsh), one of the best known *simsimiyya* poets in Port Said explained to me that the "passion for *simsimiyya* in is one that runs in the blood of the original *wilād*

⁵¹ President Nagib had just been ousted by the Revolutionary council to be replaced by Nasser, there was much controversy and debate around the nationalisation of the Suez canal particularly with the prospects of war it implied.

*al-balad*⁵²...”⁵³. Most musicians are seen to have inherited the talent – a common sentiment towards singers of folk songs and ballads – that not anyone can sing them. A singer has to have the right combination of talent, articulation, and a sensitivity to the audience. The song is considered a responsibility, its message akin to a revelation.

The singing of songs, as will be revealed further in this chapter, is often compared to the writing of history; it is something they do collectively to bring different aspects of events together. Respondents also compared it to ‘the making of history’ as they attempt to assert and create political stances through their singing.

For the purpose of this chapter, I have relied on 22 oral history interviews with people who were part of the popular resistance between October and December of 1956, as well as singers and musicians who were in Port Said during the period. I draw upon military history books and when available, Egyptian ministry of defence publications (Wizarat al-difa` wa hay`at al-buhuth al-askariyya 1956), but predominantly memoirs of members of the Revolutionary Council and the military high command office (Abulfadl 2001; Al-Bughdadi 1977; Isma`il 1987). These memoirs give far more insight into the events of Port Said, than forms of official (military and diplomatic) history. The latter provide strategic plans as they changed and evolved, and military losses, but reveal little about the loss of human life and the strategic mistakes that led to them.

Far less literature exists about the popular resistance in Port Said, and for accounts of this, I have had to rely on oral history interviews as well as personal memoirs, of both members of the resistance as well as British and French paratroopers and soldiers (Leulliete 1964; Cull 2006; Thompson 2004; Turner 2007). I also draw on publications of the period, whether newspapers that were published between October and December of

⁵² Wilād al-balad means ‘children of this country.’ Usually used to mean someone who is ‘true’, genuine or reliable

⁵³ Itsh – Ibrahim Al Mursi. Mechanic and renowned poet. Interview by author. Port Said 2011. See Appendix 2 for biographies

1956 or British and Egyptian flyers that were produced in Port Said in the psychological warfare dubbed as the 'war of the flyers' during the two-month period.⁵⁴

Most of the singers and musicians I interviewed were from two bands in Port Said. The first is the well-known Al-Tanbura band, most of whose members were either musicians, members of the resistance (or both) throughout the 1956 battles, and the War of Attrition between 1967 and 1973. The other band Al-Suhbagiyya is a lesser-known band comprised of newer, less established singers.⁵⁵ Most of the songs used are songs performed in cafes, local commemorative events and casual street performances. These songs, were important during the war for mobilisation, as well as a means for communication when radios were confiscated and newspapers censored.

The challenge in understanding the Port Said battle, lies in the way it holds much significance in both Egyptian and international history on both political and diplomatic levels, while little is known about the actual popular struggle at the time, nor what it is they themselves fought for. Furthermore, the Egyptian state has chosen a few aspects of the struggle to make into legends, further silencing actual events (and particularly politics) of the struggle. Thus, this chapter can be understood as an attempt to explore an event so well remembered, and so subtly silenced.

In the larger context of this thesis, Port Said is the first popular struggle for the Revolution, and the first construction of the imaginary community that composed both this Revolution as expressed by Nasserism and the nation that people wished to construct. People sought to build themselves as part of this community, regardless of the Revolutionary Council's shortcomings.

Port Said thus, in a sense, introduces us to the Revolution. In the chapters to come, we explore the extent people were willing to sacrifice for their commitment to Nasserist

⁵⁴ I have obtained, from my respondents, 26 Egyptian flyers that were distributed between November and December 1956 in Port Said, as well as two issues of Al-Istiqlal newspaper published by the resistance at the time, and five flyers in Arabic dropped on the city by the British air forces.

⁵⁵ I attended four public performances in Port Said, Port Fuad and Cairo, as well as several informal gatherings where songs were improvised or sung by singers and poets.

ideals. But in Port Said, before the ideology was articulated, we explore how much people were willing to sacrifice for liberation from imperialism. Nasser was perhaps able to learn from this; in the chapters to come, we will see Nasserism as an articulation of people's aspirations, politics and features of a nation they strived to build.

I will start by highlighting the main events and popular resistance during the period between October 31 and December 23 1956, followed by an analysis of how the state and popular narratives have represented this resistance, and signified the politics behind it. I will then end with how a history of resistance that transcends this period has been sustained through songs, and what it portrays about the community of Port Said.

3.2 Seven Nights and a Morning – The Battle for Port Said

It was a British conspiracy; planned with French deliberation,
With the Jews they were a gang conspiring.
For seven nights and a morning,

With planes and tanks they charged; their failed attacks fell hard,
And we with our guns defended, for seven nights and a morning,
Through the night a car came strolling; through a speaker,
'The Russians have come!' blaring,⁵⁶
Such a vicious plot it turned to be;
for seven nights and a morning,

They blocked the Canal and nothing passes through;
they cut off water, the light too,
Life's become difficult and wearing,
these seven nights and a morning

Mohammed 'Abu Yusuf, *Ya Port Said shabāb wa rigāl*

(Oh Port Said of youth and men) 1956⁵⁷

On July 26 1956 and on the fourth anniversary of the Revolution, Nasser delivered an almost three-hour speech that was to become one of his most remembered. After

⁵⁶ A story told by many respondents: on November 6, British tanks rolled into Port Said with a Russian flag. People ran out of their hiding stations to greet their allies, only to be shot dead.

⁵⁷ 'Seven nights and a morning' are reference to the time of the bombing of the city between October 31 and the morning of November 7.

detailing the struggle to obtain funding for the building of the High Dam, he ended with the decision to nationalise the Suez Canal. The Canal that “was dug by Egyptians, was to become Egyptian,” he announced, and the “nation within the nation” that was the Suez Canal Company would return to its rightful owners.

Following the speech, the office of military command produced a number of reports, anticipating war. Within months, the military was mobilised in anticipation of an Anglo-French invasion that could come from the Delta (specifically Alexandria) or Suez Canal area. What the reports did not anticipate was that Anglo-French forces would collude with Israel, who would initiate the attack from Sinai. On October 29, as Israeli paratroopers landed in Sinai, Egyptian forces were mobilised in the Sinai to counter the attack. Within days, Egyptian forces near the Suez Canal at Ismailiyya were mobilised towards Sinai as well. Although they were recalled when the Anglo-French attack on Port Said started late on October 31, they did not seem to make it back to Port Said, leaving the cities along the Canal to the defence of their citizens and what existing army battalions were in Port Said (Isma'il 1987, 70; Al-Bughdadi 1977, 357).⁵⁸

The Anglo-French invasion was planned so that the first 48 hours of the attack would focus on debilitating the army and bombing economic and strategic targets, followed by a second phase focused on ‘breaking the spirit to fight back.’ According to Donald Neff,

This phase would last eight to ten days during which a massive “aero psychological” campaign would be conducted to break Egypt’s will to fight. That was supposed to be accomplished by dropping leaflets and haranguing the populace from airplanes equipped with loudspeakers (Neff 1981, 313).

Lord Mountbatten, one of Britain’s most distinguished military men, took his doubts to prime minister Anthony Eden. After indicating that the only places to land in Port Said

⁵⁸ According to Yahya Al-Sha'ir, a fida'iy in Port Said at the time, soldiers trickled into the city of Port Said on November 3 as individuals or in small groups. However they were in such bad shape after the Sinai retreat (see also Al-Bughdadi 1977 354), that they required assistance either in terms of rehabilitation or helping them get to Cairo. In his words, “...Seeing them come into Port Said in a disorganised manner as individuals in bad physical and psychological condition affected our morale drastically and gave us the mistaken impression at the time, that we were fighting this battle alone...” (Al-Sha'ir 2006, 157). Even though records indicate that Nasser ordered reinforcements of National guard and infantry battalions into Port Said on November 5 there is little record (or civilian testimony) to these battalions arriving before the ceasefire (Turner 2007,365).

were residential areas that they would have to first bombard by ship, he described the weaponry they had at their proposal, saying to the prime minister,

Think of the mess they're going to make, think of the casualties and horrors, think of all the photographs the Egyptians will take. We'll be plastered around the world as assassins and baby killers (Neff 1981, 315).

Fortunately for Eden and Mountbatten, there were not many photographers in Port Said, during the seven days of bombing. Further, little record was made of the damage and casualties to civilians and little investigation was conducted into the results of the battle. The only Egyptian sources I was able to trace documenting losses, were the publications by Diaa' Al-Qadi (2010) and Yahya Al-Sha'ir (2006), both citizens of Port Said who catalogued civilian operations and documented deaths during the battle. Diaa', a retired bureaucrat in Port Said, did his own research complementing the records of the Port Said governorate, and was able to ascertain the names of 1,360 men, women and children who lost their lives between November and December 1956.⁵⁹

In Port Said, the bombing started on October 31, the day after Nasser rejected Britain's ultimatum to Egyptian and Israeli forces to withdraw up to ten miles from the Canal. By late evening of the first day of the attack, British aircraft had bombed airports all over the country, destroying the air force on the ground (Turner 2007, 268). On November 1 the British air force attempted to bomb the main radio station, partially destroying it (Boyd 2003, 450), while most of the bombs landed on the Abu Za'bal prisons nearby.

Meanwhile, seeing that most of Egypt's military forces were in Sinai, and the forces stationed near the Canal had been sent to Sinai for backup, it became clear that there would be no military presence in Port Said for days, at least (Isma'il 1987, 70). Nasser made a radio address to the nation on November 1, announcing the Tripartite Aggression,

⁵⁹ An investigation by reporters Donald Edgar and Hanson Baldwin in 1956 indicate at least 1,000 killed, 5000 wounded and 25,000 rendered homeless in Port Said alone (Turner 2007, 436). Accounts of other war crimes against civilians can be found in the memoirs of: Pierre Leulliete, a French paratrooper in Port Fuad (Leulliete 1964); British and French soldiers in (Cull 2006); military historian and member of the Royal Marines Julian Thompson (2004, 486), as well as Barry Turner's (2007, 8, 387, 419, 430) account of the war. See also <http://egyptianpows.net/1956-war/> and Yahya Al Sha'ir's online record <http://yahiaalshaer.com/> for Egyptian (civilian) efforts to document the war crimes.

the situation with the army, and encouraging 'every individual to volunteer as a member of the liberation army.' Weapons were to be distributed in Port Said and all over Egypt, and on November 2, he addressed the public again from Al-Azhar mosque with a speech that is remembered for the slogan 'we will fight and never surrender.' In his own words:

We shall fight a bitter battle, from village to village and place to place. Let every one of you be a soldier in the armed forces, so you may defend our honour and our dignity and our freedom; let our slogan be that we will fight and never surrender, we will fight, we will fight, and never surrender.

Those who lived through this time in Port Said recount how the weapons were dispatched from trucks that made it to every square in Port Said, and how people fumbled with the weapons that were laden with grease and tar. In many accounts however this process of distribution was disorganised and the weapons weren't enough for the number of youth prepared to use them.⁶⁰

People divided themselves into plane fighting battalions, while others waited in ditches they had prepared in anticipation of paratroopers. The plane-fighting battalions were wiped out by the second day of bombing according to many respondents' accounts.

Others told of the fishing boats that started smuggling people out of Port Said to Damietta through the Manzala Lake connecting them. However, so many of these boats were bombed during their escape, that according to Madame Gizelle (2011) whose family tried to escape two days into the bombing, "The boats were stuck and navigating out of the harbour was no longer possible because of the sheer number of bloated bodies."⁶¹ These concentrated bombings effectively put Port Said under siege.

For 'seven nights and a morning' the bombing continued. On November 4, the UN Security Council called for a ceasefire, which the Anglo-French forces ignored. However,

⁶⁰ According to Mohammed Heikal (Heikal 2004, 645), 150,000 weapons were distributed all over Egypt. According to Yahya al-Sha'ir a small percentage of these reached Port Said, mainly because the number of weapons in the city's warehouses were very limited and the process of sending weapons to Port Said was complicated given the siege (Al-Sha'ir 2006, 140).

⁶¹ Madame Gizelle, employee at Suez Shipping Company. Interview by author, Port Said 2011. Her account is corroborated in the accounts of Yahya Al-Sha'ir (Al-Sha'ir 2006) and French paratrooper Pierre Leulliete (Leulliete 1964).

given increasing pressure from Eisenhower's office in the US, and the United Nations, the plan had to be shortened and a quick occupation was planned (Neff 1981, 402). On November 5, paratroopers were dropped onto the city, where they sabotaged the water and electricity stations, cutting all access to water and electricity.

Several battles ensued as they were met by groups of popular resistance and individual soldiers who were still in Port Said. On that night, oil depots were set alight, as well as several neighbourhoods by the airplanes (Abulfadl 2001, 158). Most respondents claim a 'white powder'⁶² was first released on the neighbourhoods of Al-Manakh and Abadi, as well as Mohammed Ali Street before they were set alight.

On November 6, the war ships docked in Port Said bringing in even more troops. In the troops' accounts, they claim they were confronted with civilians, including women and children (Neff 1981, 408). Active resistance by the civilians of Port Said started once the troops landed, the bombing stopped and the occupation secured. Popular committees developed in a number of areas to provide neighbourhood watches and ward off British and French troops.⁶³ A number of respondents recounted their attempts to collect bodies strewn over the city as a result of the bombings and battles on the evenings of November 5 and 6. In a number of cases, people carrying bodies were intercepted by occupying troops and prevented from burying the dead.

In the memoirs of Abd al-Latif al-Bughdadi (1977), a member of the Revolutionary Council, he and Nasser took to the Canal on November 4 in an attempt to survey the situation and encourage military forces to make it there. Once in Ismailiyya, they saw that in contrast to the paralysis of the Revolutionary Council (and the wreckage of military vehicles they encountered retreating from Sinai), the civilians of Ismailiyya were armed and in high spirits. In his memoirs, al-Bughdadi described Nasser's surprise that the people would be so willing to fight at a time when fear had frozen the Revolutionary Council and the military high command in particular (Al-Bughdadi 1977, 354).

⁶² Respondents claim this may have been Napalm

⁶³ Most of my respondents were from Port Said, where the British were stationed, whereas Port Fuad (Eastern district of Port Said separated by the Suez Canal) is where the French were stationed.

The other part of the warfare waged against Port Said was the siege, which not only made it difficult for any support or subsistence to be smuggled into the city, but also any news. Newspapers were kept out of Port Said, whilst a number of radios were confiscated by British forces (Boyd 2003, 450; Al-Sha'ir 2006, 92). Others who still had access to radio heard the Near East broadcasting or 'Al-sharq al-Adna' managed by British forces from Cyprus. The objective of the radio broadcasts was to deflate fighting morale by raising suspicions that a coup was being planned against Nasser in Cairo. This was accompanied by what became known in Port Said as the 'war of the flyers.'

British flyers were distributed warning of a growing coup against Nasser.⁶⁴ This one below describes how British forces had intercepted weapons in the Canal waters, implying that they were dumped there by plotters of a potential coup.

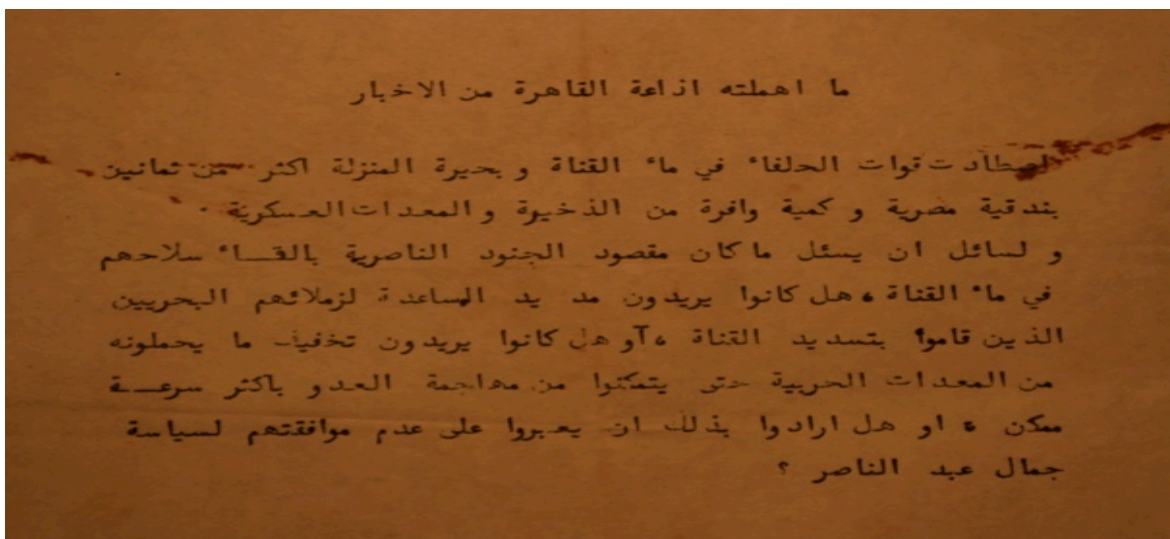


Figure 3-1: Port Said Flier: "What Cairo's broadcasting has failed to mention"⁶⁵

Other flyers warned that the food reserves would run out, while still others spoke of the wonderful times Port Said had enjoyed in the company of 'allied forces' prior to the Revolution, assuring that those days could be revived by working hand in hand with them to 'liberate' the Canal.

⁶⁴ An estimated 500,000 flyers were distributed between Cairo and Port Said by British aircrafts (Al-Sha'ir 2006, 94).

⁶⁵ These fliers are from the private collection of Diaa' al-Din al-Qadi who granted me access and permission to scan and use for the purposes of this thesis.

This one played on the image of the Salah Al-Din eagle representing the Revolutionary Council taking *Sa'id* (meaning happiness in Arabic) out of Port Said. Thus, Nasser's nationalisation was taking happiness and leaving *Bur* (Arabic pronunciation of Port), which means barrenness.



Figure 3-2: Port Said flier 2: “Once Happy, you are now left in barrenness”

Egyptian flyers were soon being printed in clandestine print-houses to raise the morale of the members of the resistance when communication and mobility were trumped in a city under siege by occupying forces, as well as intimidate the troops themselves.

Though it was local communities who produced most of the flyers, by December, a number of communist activists from Cairo smuggled into Port Said and started the publication *Al-Intisar* (Victory). The publication's purpose was to communicate international solidarity and the opinion of a world that was not reaching Port Said on account of the newspaper ban. However the print houses were often intercepted (at which point machines would be confiscated and owners arrested) resulting in only three editions being printed during December.

The flyers also became a means of spreading news and messages of solidarity. Flyers announcing solidarity with the resistance came from the Nubian, Sudanese, Greek and Italian communities in Port Said. The flyer below, indicates a meeting by the different committees in Port Said to unify the resistance fronts. It highlights the determination of all members of the resistance to, 1. Engage in armed resistance to oust occupational forces, 2. Refuse compromise on entitlements to the Canal, 3. Raise the general spirits, 4. Fight traitors and those who spread rumours.⁶⁶

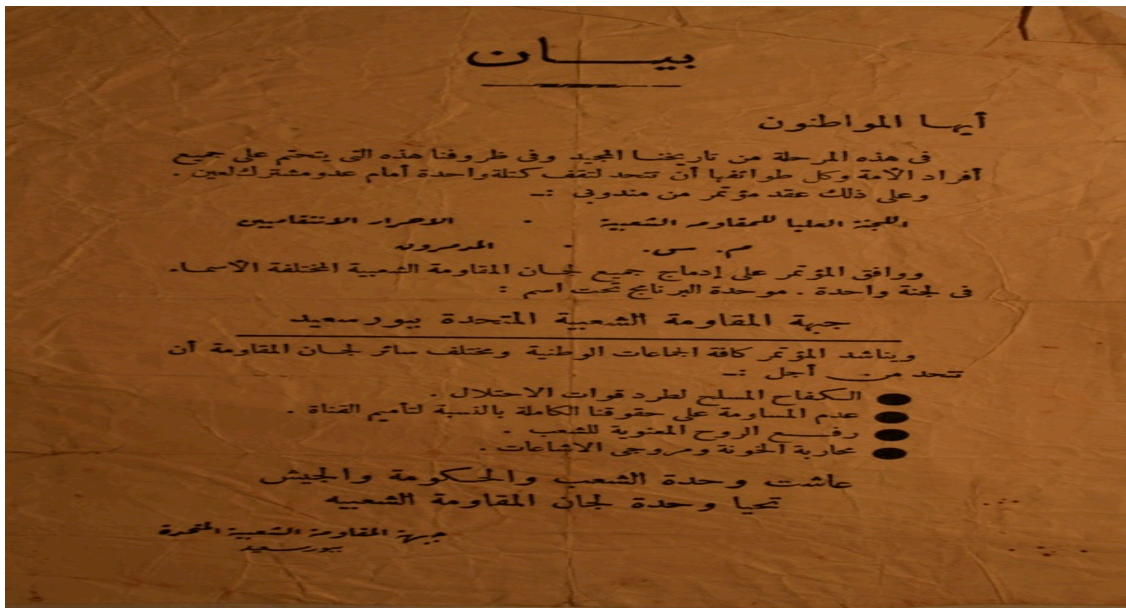


Figure 3-3: Port Said flier 3: “The united front for popular resistance”

The flyer ends with “Long live the battle of the people, the government and the army. Long live the committees of the popular resistance.”

Whilst the army’s absence is not remembered with bitterness, people who came to resist from outside Port Said (including students from universities in Cairo and Alexandria, and *fallahīn* and workers from other governorates), were remembered with high regard. This

⁶⁶ According to many respondents, ‘black lists’ were created where names of people who collaborated with the occupying forces were spray-painted on the walls of the city.

particularly remembered song from 1956, *Bahar ya wabūr* (Head North, oh train),⁶⁷ is said to be sung by Upper Egyptians as they made for the ‘people of the sea.’

Make for the sea ya wabūr,⁶⁸ and hurry, quick
For those of the sea await,
With my weapons to the sea, I’ll make
Oh you of the sea, your brother is always awake
In battle, I will always stand before you
No sacrifice, blood or soul too big for you,
Make for the sea ya wabūr, hurry, quick!

The song continues to indicate that the train stopped in one village after the other in Upper Egypt, as more and more volunteered to make the trip up to the people of the sea.

In the section to come I explore the politics of how these events and, in particular, heroes were represented by state and popular narratives. How popular narratives represent the battle differently at times, while at others the state narrative reigns hegemonic.

3.3 Heroic Constructs

On October 31, when the battle began some people went up to the Gamil on the outskirts of Port Said where the airport was; and others (like Mahran), shot at the airplanes. It was a fierce battle and he lost his eyes fighting; but history tells his tale... I, on the other hand, was defending my neighborhood.

And then the English and the French came into the country through planes and war ships, on November 4 or 5. But history tells this tale too.

We saw the battles on the streets – they came from Mohammed Ali Street in their tanks with the Russian flags out – and so we cheered them. It turned out to be a trick, and they shot at people as they passed through Mohammed Ali and other places. So many people died as they fought the Jews, the English and French. Because we were only armed with rifles, they were victorious.

⁶⁷ Bahar technically meaning ‘head to the sea’ is used to mean ‘head north.’

⁶⁸ Wabūr is an old colloquial term for ‘train.’

When we had a temporary ceasefire we went down into the streets. We found dead, bloated bodies everywhere... we tried to move them around using carts and anything we could carry them in.

History will not tell you this though.

Kamil 'Id 2011⁶⁹

This section first engages with the construction of 'heroes' by the state – those who have been made into legend. These *butulāt* – heroic feats – of Port Said became known through military awards, their stories told in books, museums and films. These are accounts that may have started with the state, but were eventually internalised by the people of Port Said as well. This is so in the sense that they are usually the first stories that are remembered or recounted when the battle is inquired into. These thus become the stories 'history tells' as articulated by Kamil 'Id.

Through an exploration of these narratives, I consider how these heroes were constructed, what understanding of the struggle and the state's relation to it was propagated by these stories, and how people (particularly these heroes themselves) reacted to these versions of their stories, debating, contesting or internalising them. For in each of these cases, the state's role in Port Said, was forged through these local battles.

I also look at how in remembering these particular aspects or members of the battle, the state acts to further silence the events of a forgotten battle, so well remembered.

In the next part of this section, I analyze the significance of songs as a form of intimate language, and what they reveal of popular constructions of the Port Said's community and signifying politics, often in opposition to state narratives.

3.3.1 State-sung Heroes

In this section I explore three 'heroic' cases, comparing their own testimonies to the state's accounts: Mohammed Mahran, who lost both his eyes in confrontation with paratroopers; the kidnapping of Lieutenant Anthony Moorhouse, an important event for

⁶⁹ Kamil 'Id. Renowned poet. Interview by author. Port Said 2011.

both the British and Egyptian army; and Zaynab Kafrawi, whose story is told exemplifying the role of women during the resistance to the Tripartite Aggression.

Mohammed Mahran was 18 years old, at the time of the Tripartite Aggression against Port Said in 1956. When people were dividing into battalions with the start of the bombing, he took a weapon and joined the ditches, where others had assembled in anticipation of the paratroopers. On November 5 and as paratroopers landed in Port Said, Mahran related⁷⁰ that he realised that the battle of the battalion against the paratroopers was futile and jumped out of his ditch, shooting blindly in an attempt to get as many troops as possible before he himself was shot unconscious.

Mahran awoke in a hospital in Cyprus, where as he relates in a dramatic narrative, he received a make-shift trial in the hospital by the surgeon, because his shooting had allegedly resulted in the loss of the eye of a soldier. The doctor then proceeded to interrogate him, specifically asking Mahran to denounce Nasser and his Revolution, warning that if he did not, he would also lose his second eye. When Mahran valiantly refused to denounce Nasser, he was given a shot, falling unconscious once again, only to awake in a hospital in Cairo having lost both of his eyes.

Pictures of Nasser and army chief of staff 'Abd al-Hakim 'Ammir with Mohammed Mahran in a Cairo hospital made the newspapers at the time. Mohammed Mahran continued to be awarded every year on the anniversary of the Tripartite withdrawal on December 23. Few others in Port Said (if any) were recognised with as many awards.

In Mahran's home in Port Said, one wall is decorated with pictures of his being awarded by presidents Nasser, Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak one year after the other, in the memory of the 1956 war. Another wall is lined with the medals themselves. Mahran was also permanently hired in the Port Said Museum where he walks with visitors through the 1956 section, recounting his experiences, as well as those of others.

⁷⁰ Mohammed Mahran, fida'iy during the tripartite aggression. Interview by author. Port Said 2011.

The museum's displays tell of the operations launched during the Tripartite Aggression and the resistance to it, but of civilian heroes, there is only mention of Mohammed Mahran and members of the kidnapping operation of Moorhouse, a British officer.⁷¹ Otherwise, all other heroes recognised in the museum's narrative were leading members of the military or intelligence who either died in Sinai or Port Said.

In choosing to repeatedly award Mahran, and make of him a symbol of civilian resistance, the state found a way of relieving itself of compensating, or taking responsibility for those whose lives, livelihoods or homes were lost during the battle. Rather than representing the plight of Port Said, Mahran's remembrance on a national scale, somehow silences it. He is remembered as the man who played his role in defending his country and Revolution, especially given that he lost his second eye not in battle but in refusing to denounce Nasser. Mahran's story thus ties the struggle in Port Said to a devotion to Nasser and a responsibility towards Revolution whilst other stories accountable to undocumented war crimes are forgotten, and casualties are barely recorded.

In his book *Silencing the Past* on the politics of power and silencing in the history of revolt in Haiti, Michel Ralph Trouillot explores the idea of 'a silence within a silence,' (Trouillot 1995, 58). The battle of Port Said is thus silenced twice; once when heroic feats are nationalised by linking and attributing them to the state, deeming the state triumphant rather than responsible. Whilst the second silencing occurs when only particular heroes are remembered, rendering others (those who died in burning homes, or were not acknowledged by the state) forgotten.

One of the effects of this 'silence within a silence' is to deflect attention from the military's shortcomings. The fact that the army failed to support the battle, is a state failure that is barely mentioned in either history books or public military records. Instead, there are accounts of the political and diplomatic manoeuvres that ended the war, making heroes of politicians. And there is the repeated praise in Nasser's speeches of

⁷¹The Moorhouse incident is attributed primarily to the coordination of Egyptian intelligence. Different versions of the kidnapping explored further below.

how well the people of Port Said lived up to their national responsibility to support the army. The battles of Port Said are thus framed as a responsibility towards the Revolution and state, and not celebrated as an act of bravery in its absence.

It is not to detract from Mahran's plight and the loss of his eyes at the young age of 18, to argue that in remembering him only, the state discounts the plight of others. In becoming a token, Mahran becomes the beginning and end of the state's responsibility towards Port Said and his story becomes the one that silences many others.

Zaynab Al-Kafrawi's story is told as that of the woman who defied imperialist soldiers. Although acknowledged less officially than Mahran – having not received national awards⁷² – she is remembered through newspaper articles, magazines, and more recently on blogs. Most importantly, a woman who carries out Zaynab's well-known operation features in the film *Port Said, the Unconquerable City* whose production started in December of 1956, and remains to this day the most famous film about the battle.

The most celebrated story associated with Zaynab's name, recounts her smuggling weapons into Port Said through hiding them in her nephew's pushchair. As she neared her delivery point, however, she was stopped by British soldiers who, playing with the child, said they wanted to search the pushchair. Zaynab stood her ground and told them off for touching the baby, slapping their hands away. When one soldier asked her what the child's name was, she told them it was Gamal 'Abdel Nasser, which started a commotion that brought the neighbourhood's men to her aid.

According to Zaynab, she was one of a group of seven women who assisted in weapon smuggling. Although she did play a lead role in the group, she feels the stories remembered of her were recounted with an exaggerated sense of glory, and more importantly that they were the least of her actual achievements, missing the experience of the resistance.

⁷² Although she did receive awards from the Port Said governorate during local celebrations in memory of the aggression

Zaynab was 16 in 1956, and her father's favourite of 12 children.

He volunteered me to the police force when they were thinking of ways to smuggle weapons. He told them 'Zaynab is the person for this job. She has the stride of a soldier, and when she walks her heels beat the ground with the strength of an army.'⁷³

The pushchair incident, she explains was the very least of her achievements. In her own opinion, one of her more dangerous tasks, was upon the kidnapping of British Lieutenant Anthony Moorhouse when all the buildings in her area were being searched for weapons. While she was helping neighbours hide their weapons, she suddenly remembered she had left weapons in her aunt's apartment. Unable to reach her because of the siege, Zaynab climbed out of her balcony, to the top of their building, and jumped from roof to roof until she reached her aunt's house. After helping them wrap the arms and hide them under floorboards and inside water pipes, she climbed back home.

"No one remembers a story like that," she challenged, and proceeded to describe other incidents, such as when the English were arresting *fida'yyin*, and she ran through the cafès they frequented barefoot.

I warned them one after the other, risking my life and theirs as I ran looking like a crazy woman. No one will remember that either. Why they remember that one pushchair incident in particular is beyond me!

Diaa' al-Qady, present during my first interview with Zaynab, insisted that she was remembered for the pushchair incident, as it indicated how strong a woman she was, quipping at British officers with Nasser's name. Meanwhile, Zaynab felt that the story was focused on her moving with the pushchair because it showed her carrying out a 'womanly' role. As such, it silences the other experiences that might have showed more courage or daring, and instead frames her in a very 'gendered' light, limiting her contribution to the resistance as one related specifically to her gender roles.

⁷³ Zaynab Kafrawi. Fida'iyya in 1956. Interview by author. Port Said 2011.

Furthermore, Zaynab's story much like Mahran's, is remembered such that the crescendo comes with the mention of Nasser's name. This telling sets up a strong link between his leadership and the battle. In contrast, Zaynab described how when they defied the British, they did not do so to defeat them, but to make their stay as difficult as possible, that they behaved out of patriotism and anger, but more importantly an attempt to keep invaders away from their homes. Saying that while her story was told in a way that made the resistance sound organised, they often felt that that there was a great chance they may not even survive the siege. In her own words, "history is but a series of coincidences, and the resistance in 1956 was no different."

Zaynab's insistence that reality was far less certain and deliberate than constructed in these celebrated stories, finds resonance in the case of the kidnapping of Anthony Moorhouse.

Moorhouse was a British Lieutenant who was kidnapped in Port Said on December 11. In the British version of the story, members of the resistance cunningly planned for the kidnapping of Moorhouse, and later killed him to avenge the arrest of members of resistance the day before.⁷⁴ In some accounts, the kidnappers were members of the Muslim Brotherhood, "an outlawed party of fanatics" (Egyptians Kidnap British Officer 1956), in another they were just "terrorists" committing an act of inhumanity (Black 2006).

In Egyptian newspapers (Akhbar Al-Yum 1956), on the other hand, the story was told of The Group of Five *fida'yyīn*, who in coordination with Egyptian intelligence planned the kidnapping of the lieutenant beforehand, in order to exchange for Egyptian prisoners of war. When their demands were not met, they killed him. The case was of the very few published stories in Egyptian newspapers at the time that indicated the struggle was alive in Port Said. Otherwise, on account of the siege it seems, little of what was happening in Port Said made it to Cairo's papers.

⁷⁴ See "The Kidnapped Lieutenant." Time Magazine, January 7, 1957.

The mainstreamed Port Said version, documented in the museum and local publications, was that the event was ordered and coordinated by the Egyptian army, considering Anthony Moorhouse a strategic target that would give them leverage. Five civilians, known as 'the Group of Five,' bravely took up the task, and hid Moorhouse in a room in a house. However, once the English besieged the quarters of Port Said where they had expected to hide Moorhouse, it became difficult to deliver food and drink to him, until he died.

Although the two surviving members of the operation, Tahir Mus'ad and 'Ali Zangir were too ill to be interviewed, I accessed a video-recorded interview by Al-Jazeera, of the accounts of the five members.

They remember that by December, the prospects of the British and French leaving Port Said were looking dim. After the arrest of several *fida'yyin*, three of 'the Group of Five' (Ahmad Hilal, Al-'Arabi Fadl and 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Sha'ir) decided to carry out some form of operation and contacted the others the night before.

"We knew the army could do nothing for us. We didn't want anything from them anyway. But the situation was such that we had to act."⁷⁵ 'Ali Zangir, a driver and member of the group, tells Al-Jazeera,

They came to me while I was in a coffee shop and told me 'we're thinking we need to kidnap one of them,' and I said, 'Why not?' The next day, we argued for some time, as to which street we should wait for our prey in. I still think we should have stood in Eugena, but they insisted on Sa'd Zaghul Street. As we sat waiting for an English car to come by, I heard a motor and said to them, 'Read the *fatha* boys, pray that God sends us something precious.'⁷⁶

When the car came through, they sent a boy on a bicycle to obstruct it. As soon as Moorhouse stopped his car to chase the boy away, the three men emerged, disarmed Moorhouse, put him into the backseat of their car and took off. At one point, Moorhouse made for a quick escape that they intercepted as he was leaving the car.

⁷⁵ Tahir Mus'ad. Video-recorded interview by al-Jazeera, Port Said 2005

⁷⁶ He uses a fisherman's prayer. 'Ali Zangir. Video-recorded interview by al-Jazeera, Port Said 2005.

We were just so flustered, we hadn't planned this at all! So we got out of the car, pulled him out, punched him and put him in the trunk. We then drove to the closest house we could use, blindfolded and gagged him and put him in a huge wooden chest.

Al-'Arabi Fadl's⁷⁷ account continues, "And that was the mistake we made," before adding with a hint of shame, that they "pushed the chest and placed it under the staircase of the building, upside down."

It was because Moorhouse was a relative of the Queen of England,⁷⁸ they believed, that in a matter of hours, a number of Port Said's quarters were besieged and searched. It was two days before his captors could get to Moorhouse again, by which time he was dead. They buried him near the house and Nasser handed him over to the British army after the war.

The way in which the story of Moorhouse's kidnapping is told varies in Port Said, between accounting for it with deliberation and planning, coordinated by the military intelligence, or luck and coincidence on the part of the kidnapers. The song however, written in 1956 by fisherman and poet, Dimirdash 'Abd al-Salam, known as Rayyis al-Dash, is sung with less controversy.

Moorhouse, oh why did you come,
from London to our country, our home;
Unjust you were, and oppressive,
and here you died in a house, alone,
The heroes of our country caught sight of you,
and pledged at once to capture you
In a black car you were whisked away,
and news flew to your family in a day,
Moorhouse, but why did you come?⁷⁹

The repeated question addressed to Moorhouse in this song, and the weight of the rhythm to which it is sung points to a sentiment with which much of the Moorhouse affair

⁷⁷ Al-'Arabi Fadl. Video-recorded interview by al-Jazeera, Port Said 2005.

⁷⁸ I cannot ascertain this but it is an important detail in accounts by fida'iyyīn and Egyptian intelligence reports.

⁷⁹ This song is in the enclosed CD

is remembered; though there is a pride in his kidnapping, there is certainly a sense of irony or regret in how he died. This feeling relates to having not been able to keep him captive as they had hoped. This is also reflected by the constant need to justify, even having to defend, Moorhouse's death (that there was no way to reach him).

The memories and songs capture, in the case of the kidnapping as well as several others, that instance of uncertainty, the attempt to do what the army was clearly failing to, the confusion and grappling with the magnitude of the task. Absent from state-sanctioned narratives, this emphasis encourages a continuum of resistance, as those who pulled off the feat were less the invincible cunning heroes they were portrayed to be, and more people who decided to do something necessary, even though they were ill-prepared or equipped to do so.

All three stories however seem to be attempts by the state to tie the victories in Port Said to the military establishment; either by emphasizing its role in organizing the operations, or tying the political intention behind the operations to Nasser himself. Thus, making of Port Said, an exemplary revolutionary community that supported the army and took to arms for the Revolution

3.3.2 *Singing the Balawta*⁸⁰ into History

Write oh history leave no one out, not big or small,
Write, for no one is ever too small,
None at all...
Write oh history
Write on a page; leave the other blank,
And tis those blanks my songs will fill,
I'll fill with flowers, with posies and jasmine,
I'll fill with the stories of a nation's youth who paid the price of freedom.

Ibrahim Al-Mursi, *Iktib ya tarikh* (Write oh history) 1973

⁸⁰ Fishermen pronounced Port Said as Bolsaid and so the plural of 'those who come from Port Said' becomes balawta.

The *simsimiyya* is a people's instrument. And what makes people love her, is that she sings only to and of her people.

Ahmad Migahid 2011.⁸¹

In this section, I focus on the significance of remembering heroes of Port Said through songs and stories. The heroes are 'sung' so that they are remembered by their communities, particularly when they are forgotten or neglected by state narratives. They are sung, sometimes in opposition to the state, and reflect the politics of the community of Port Said, beyond the boundaries of the Revolution's 'imagined community.' Most of these songs are sung to the *simsimiyya*. I will thus start the section with an introduction to the tradition of the *simsimiyya* and what it signifies to the cultural fabric of Port Said.

During *simsimiyya* concerts, held at street parties, Easter celebrations, or during the commemoration of the withdrawal of occupying forces in 1956 on December 23, the band sits lined up with its instruments before its audience. One or two members play the *simsimiyya*, one holds a triangle, another two spoons that he slaps against his lap, and at least one person holds a *tabla* (percussion instrument).



Figure 3-4: Performance by Al-Tanbura in Casino Al Nigma (cafe) Port Said April 2011

Second from right to left: Mimi on the *Simsimiyya*; Ahmad Migahid on the triangle, the spoons, and the *tabla*.⁸²

⁸¹ Ahmad Migahid. Housepainter and singer since the 1950s. Interview by author. Port Said 2011.

The singing either starts with the chorus of musicians, or with a single lead singer, man or woman. In performances in Port Said, the audience not only sings along with the chorus, but usually steps onto the stage (or into the centre of the crowd where the band is assembled). They start to chant slowly until they are all surrounding the singer. As the song progresses, members of the audience also come up to the stage or centre to dance the *bambutiyya*⁸³, while others continue to sing from their seats, or various ends of the stage. But true to the *dammah* tradition, at least a few people remain around the singer.

The *dammah* was the predominant singing tradition in Port Said, since the days of the digging of the Suez Canal under the reign of Khedive Sa'id from 1863-1879. The *dammah* tradition is said to have come with Upper Egyptians whose Sufi songs start with verses of *madih* (verses of spiritual love), until the singer is joined by others who stand around him and act as a chorus for the rest of the song. *Dammah*⁸⁴ literally means 'coming together' and is symbolic of the physical act of standing together during the singing, but also said to represent the 'coming together' of workers from all over Egypt, and beyond to dig the Canal.

The *simsimiyya* is an instrument said to date back to Pharoanic Egypt but came to Port Said, through Suez in the 1930s. Unlike the *dammah* songs which were more prevalent in weddings, street gatherings and events in Port Said, *simsimiyya* was associated with a more 'decadent' crowd or company, usually confined to coffee shops and brothels. It was also associated with the smoking of hashish; *simsimiyya* musicians maintain that an elevated 'state' (*hāla*) is required for both song-writing and performing.

⁸² Photographs are by author unless indicated otherwise

⁸³ The word *bambutiyya* is said to come from the English 'pump-boat,' pronounced 'bambut', and so the *bambutī* is the 'pump boat fisherman.' The dance draws on two traditions; the fishermen's light tapping of the boat with their feet in an attempt to attract fish. The other is the arm movements of throwing fishing nets out, pulling them in, and gesturing to sell the fish or other artifacts to larger ships.

⁸⁴ A sampling of a *Dammah* song is in the enclosed CD

Since the 1950s however, given that the war required mobilising songs with a strong beat that would lift morale, the *simsimiyya* moved into the streets where it addressed a wider audience. Until this day, *simsimiyya* is the predominant beloved instrument of Port Said, and the *dammah* songs are sung to its tunes and the *bambutiyya* danced to its beats.

The songs are written, much like the *dammah* songs are sung, collectively, and with a great degree of improvisation. Where the songs are not pre-written, the essence of a *simsimiyya* gathering is the improvisation of songs together in groups, especially on particular political, ceremonial occasions, or during war where writing in advance is impossible.

Describing to me the essence of the *simsimiyya*, mechanic and poet Ibrahim El Mursi ('Itsh) explains that, "the *simsimiyya* remembers those history forgets," and sings the song of Lufti al-Barbari as an example.

Lufti al-Barbari was an Egyptian truck driver in Iraq, who during the first days of the American invasion in 2003, carried out a suicide operation where he detonated his truck in an American camp. According to 'Itsh, Lufti was mentioned once fleetingly on the news, and then forgotten, "as the state often does with people they label as terrorists."

Thus, they sing,

Lutfi rose and called to the Arabs 'unite!
Blair and Bush, like monsters,
Pulled women and children into their fight!
Everywhere, God protect us, their bodies in pieces lay,
Lutfi called out to the turbans⁸⁵ of today,
Baghdad lay ablaze,
But when it came to a battle, there are those of you who were traitors, And
those who ran away,
He called to the people of the world, 'Liberate yourselves!'

The song tells of how Lutfi gave his life for the possibility of freedom in Iraq, at a time when Bush and Blair were committing mass crimes with little opposition by Arab

⁸⁵ 'Turbans' is a metaphor for Arab leaders.

governments. Lutfi's message, as it is sung, was one to the people of the world to liberate themselves.

In the eyes of those who sung his story, Lutfi represented their own stance towards the question of Iraq and a wider Arab Nationalism. Through singing about him they also committed to history a person who would otherwise have fallen through the cracks of official history-making.

The heroes of 1956 were remembered in a similar way, 'Itsh and many other respondents explained. Most of them were unlikely heroes, and forgotten by (official) 'history.' Some of the 1956 stories were sung on the spot, at the time of the battle, while others were sung later in remembrance.

Sa'id Hamada's story was written into song in 1956 by Kamil 'Id, a poet and songwriter who started writing that year, and whose poems were particularly famous in 1967. Sa'id Hamada was a security guard at the Italian consulate, who stood outside protecting it during days of heavy British bombing. On November 5 or 6, when the bombing intensified, the Italian consular called Sa'id inside, fearing for his safety, but he refused:

Listen to this story of a soldier of freedom,
Son of our country, the martyr, Sa'id,
He stands with his arms firm to his sides,
Protecting the foreigners in his country...
The Italian consular in all his humanity,
Called to Sa'id , 'Come in for safety!'
Save yourself from the carnage,
And to your courage we will always be indebted.

The song proceeds to tell of how Sa'id shot back at fighter planes, putting up a brave fight, eventually falling to his death. But the singing of Sa'id's story does more than tell of his own plight; it emphasises the 'humanity' of the Italian consular and Sa'id's courage in risking his life for the foreigners in his country. The song continues to elaborate how here, at a time of bombing and war, rather than protecting his family or looking out for his own safety, Sa'id chose to keep his position outside the consulate protecting it, in a futile effort against bombing.

The significance of this may have also been that a time when members of resistance were looking out for ‘traitors’ who joined the British occupation, there were still those brave enough to protect foreigners. The song may have been an emphasis on maintaining communal solidarity. For, the blacklists of dissenting civilians compiled on walls and in public spaces, and the struggle of flyers to unite resistance forces indicates that this may have been important to keep the fabric of the Port Said community together. That it was thus necessary to deflect suspicions outwards, rather than ones that were developing against ‘traitors’ (whether these were foreigners or people who collaborated with the British) inwards⁸⁶.

The emphasis on the ‘humanity’ of the consular resonates with a number of stories told of the kindness of some British soldiers. A common one recounts how British soldiers on finding a pregnant woman in labour in a house they raided, rushed her to hospital. The pregnant woman comes up in many stories in different contexts, always a symbol of British kindness, an annex to stories of the war as a testament that, ‘Mind you, they weren’t all bad.’ Perhaps, as with the case of Lutfi al-Barbari, Sa’id’s story allows for the expression of the stances of those who sing the story regardless of the state’s enemies and allies, as opposed to “the conventional nationalist histories’ emphasis on antagonism towards the British regime” (Swedenburg 2003, 111) that may render any acts of sympathy with the ‘enemy’ unpolitical.

Sa’id Hamada and Lutfi al-Barbari are two of many examples of heroes remembered by the *simsimiyya* when they would have been easily neglected or forgotten by the state. Others include Sayyid ‘Asraan who dropped a sandwich containing a bomb in the car of British intelligence chief in Egypt, John Williams on December 14 to avenge his brother’s death. The song celebrates this as the beginning of British disengagement in Port Said and correlates the end of the war to successful resistance operations such as this. Another is of Gawaad Hosni, a student who died in French captivity in Port Fuad but who wrote his

⁸⁶ There is also mention in Al-Akhbar newspapers dated November 19, that the Italian consulate used its quarters as storage for medication since hospitals were becoming bombing targets (Resistance Steadfast in Port Said 1956).

story in his own blood on the walls of his cell. Gawaad comes to represent the forgotten prisoners of war.

The singing of these people into heroes highlights the constructs of heroism, but also of the community that Port Said represents. It is how they remind themselves of who they are as a people, and how they 'represent themselves to themselves' in the words of Stuart Hall (2005, 474). Their heroes are a reflection of communal values, politics, and, particularly, as in the case with Lutfi al-Barbari, their stances on issues where they feel unrepresented by the state. In 'Itsh's own words "Egypt doesn't like heroes to speak in its name...but for us, he deserves a hero's treatment."

A hero more often than not starts out as a truck driver, a terrified, but angry woman, a group of five friends on a random operation that almost failed several times. The history of these heroic endeavours, is one that is a series of luck, miracles and coincidences. Told in this way, the emphasis is on the fact that they were unlikely heroes, anyone could have carried out these acts of heroism, but also that their success can never be foretold, and that their sacrifice was all the greater for that.

Most importantly, the story of the hero is one that is political, taking a political stance despite that of a state that may or may not represent them. And it is in these songs that the political strife of the popular is apparent, despite the state narrative's attempt to make them seem less so. Or make their politics seem completely tied, if not blindly devoted to those of the state and its representatives.

Thus the revolutionary community constructed by the people of Port Said is one with people of particular political stances at times independent of, at others, in opposition to those of the state.

In this next section I explore the politics of representation and silencing within Port Said, how certain narratives may prevail over others becoming hegemonic.

3.4 *'Ibn al-Balad al-Haqiqi* – The True Port Said? Who tells the History of Port Said?

That the battle of Port Said is so celebrated and remembered, and yet also silenced in those acts of remembering, makes the struggle over the authenticity of stories in Port Said particularly pertinent. For some, the authenticity or credibility of a narrative seems to turn on its closeness to accounts coming from the state. For others, the emphasis is on 'telling the story right' and the focus here is on the details and the articulation, while for still others credibility hinges on whether the speaker or singer is *sha'bī* (popular) enough and so representative of the 'people'⁸⁷.

I argue through this chapter, that the structured 'memories' promulgated by the state, somehow became hegemonic, despite the failures of the state in relation to the events remembered. Events are (re)interpreted by the state to signify them in a way that constructs the state as playing a central role during the battle.

It is not simply a struggle over the versions of stories told by the state versus those popular locally, nor even a struggle over which people to make into heroes. It is also a struggle internal to Port Said, amongst those who wish to adopt the official version of the city's glorious struggle and those who prefer the 'messier' popular accounts. The closeness to the mainstream narrative in some cases becomes one measure of credibility and authenticity.

Diaa' Al-Qadi, who wrote the *Historical Encyclopedia of Port Said* (2010), was anxious to identify and direct me towards people who would stick to the most 'accurate' (thus official) versions of history. He expressed opposition to my speaking to Tahir Mus'ad, one of the 'Group of Five' who carried out the Moorhouse kidnapping, because Tahir was openly cynical of Mahran's story. As Diaa' explained, "He dares raise doubts about a hero that Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak honoured...who is he compared to these people to

⁸⁷ This feud over which band is more 'sha'bī' existed between Al-Tanbura and Al-Suhbagiyya's band for instance. Where Al-Tanbura claimed to be more sha'bī since they resorted to funding to ensure they could produce music reflecting politics and 'true art'; whereas Al-Suhbagiyya claimed to be closer to the people given that his bands' performances depended on the changing tastes that albeit commercial, more accurately reflected and thus represented, the people.

determine who was a hero and who wasn't?"⁸⁸. This tarnished Tahir's credibility in his eyes.

Furthermore, Daa' was in a position not only to silence the 'Group of Five's own version of the kidnapping of Moorhouse, but even more than that by virtue of his post. For Tahir Mus'ad's father had owned one of the first printing machines to be confiscated by the British for publishing the *Intisar* newsletter and was arrested at the time. Daa' was in a position to determine whether or not this would be remembered.

Daa' was on a committee to name unnamed streets of Port Said, and had a roster of the 1956 heroes to be considered. He showed me, how despite the fact that Tahir's father made uncontested sacrifices, his name was taken off the list. Daa' said he stopped pushing for the name to be chosen, once he started arguing with Tahir, despite the fact that he had initially suggested it to the Supreme Council of Culture. "They didn't pick it see..." he said pointing to the paper of chosen street names:

...it's divine intervention. And I won't toy with that. He challenged the integrity of Mohammed Mahran, a nationally acknowledged hero and as a result his father won't be remembered for his truly heroic acts..

For Daa', challenging the metanarrative of the battle meant challenging Nasser and compromising Port Said's history. To him, heroes recognized or signified by the state, gave more weight to Port Said's contribution to the Revolution.

This resonates with a story Ted Swedenburg (2003) tells of a man, 'Ali, who carried in his pocket the list of people who died during the Palestinian revolt (1936-1939) and were not acknowledged by the state. After reading the names of those who died and deserved to be recognised, 'Ali mentioned the name of an 'Ahmad Sanunu'' who was not on the list, even though he was killed at the same time.

He was not there because his brother was 'no good'...Sanunu''s absence from the list exemplifies how local disputes or quarrels could create inconsistencies

⁸⁸ Daa' Al-Din Al-Qadi. Historian. Interview by author. Port Said 2011. .

in the memories of even the most progressive *thuwār* (Swedenburg 2003, 110).

These ‘disputes’ recurred several times. For example, in an interview with Mahmud ‘Abd al-Ghafur, a Cairo University pharmaceutical student who came home to join the *fida’yyīn* in 1956, there were several arguments when Dīaa’ was present. Mahmud insisted that he was part of a *fida’yyīn* group that included a member of the intelligence, whilst Dīaa’ insisted that the intelligence member must have been organizing the group and not merely a part of it.

An argument ensued between Dīaa’ and Mahmud, in which Mahmud insisted that things were so disorganised and the members of intelligence in Port Said were hardly capable of planning things on their own.

We operated solely on enthusiasm, had we known how to organise, there is so much more we could have done than make the invaders uncomfortable, kidnap a few people and smuggle in weapons. Our operations were a series of miracles and luck...⁸⁹

With Dīaa’s insistence that the military and intelligence could not have failed to be there and mobilise, there were many similar accounts from “even the most progressive *thuwār*.” For, in a number of narratives where people told stories of resistance and operations where there was no mention of the military at all, I would ask “...and so no members of the army ever made it to Port Said?” Quite often the answer I would get, even from engaged *fida’yyīn* such as Kamil ‘Id, ‘Am Migahid, and even Zaynab Kafrawi, was something along the lines of, “Of course the army and intelligence must have been here... We just never saw them.” These were quite often in contradiction with a story that indicated their lack of presence, as if the military must have played a central role, even if secretly.

This insistence on the part of some respondents that the military was there, at times when it was clearly not, seems to reflect their sense that the credibility of their stories,

⁸⁹ Mahmud ‘Abd al-Ghafur. Pharmacist in Port Said and fighter in 1956. Interview by author. Port Said 2011. .

somehow hinged on it. Their open declaration of the absence of a military would put their accounts in direct contradiction with the propagated image of a successful regime and the battle. Meanwhile, in insisting that the military and intelligence were engaged in their operations, gave their own stories more weight. Or, it could simply be that the people of Port Said were consciously supporting the success of the military, in their belief in the Revolution. For where the military may have failed, the Revolutionary council behind it, took a stance that did not compromise their liberty by nationalising the canal.

Nasser established his popularity on the projected success of Port Said. In 1956, Nasser was not yet a national hero, and the Revolution's ideology and policies yet to develop as they did later. The struggle in Port Said was thus most often expressed as a battle for families, homes, livelihoods and a sworn enemy. The struggle was for a community whose physical existence was greatly threatened, and less to a wider imagined community that was constructed through the Revolution and for whom many others made sacrifices as we will see in later chapters.

Yet, it is still in Port Said that people tied their own stories to that of the state, by giving it credit not borne out by the historical record. It was as if their existence and their struggle could not exist outside the mainstream narrative, and thus they were subtly tied together.

In all of my interviews, there was a focus on 'telling the story, right', and this expressed itself sometimes in endless debates on the exact time and place an event took place, at other times in relation to the question of eloquence. A story 'told right' was a credible or authentic one.

The local narratives of battles in Port Said maintain an intimate quality. People who fought for the city were heroes, but people who remembered the details of the battles as they unravelled were the true '*wilād al-balad*' (children of the country). In almost every interview, respondents would spend significant periods of time trying to remember exact details that may not have been relevant to my quest, such as the exact tank type that came rolling towards them, its colour or the number of a car license plate.

The most important details however, were the names of the streets and the exact locations where events took place. This meant that people at times escorted me to particular spots so that I could imagine an event as it unravelled. In one case, a respondent suddenly stopped a microbus in the middle of an interview, told the driver where to drop me off and pushed me onto it. He told me to come back and hear the rest of the story after I had surveyed the site he was talking about.⁹⁰

In interviews that involved more than one person however, identifying the exact location would become a competition. Someone would mention an event, and the question as to where it took place would be raised. The challenge was complicated by the fact that most street names had been changed since the 1950s. People would argue on which street, where precisely, and at what exact time an event took place. The person who would get it right first, would be coined by all as the *'ibn balad haqīqī'* (the true son of the country) of the gathering.

In the absence of documented facts, and sometimes recognition, these details become essential to establish that an event was history, that it did happen, and not simply a memory, debatable and possibly false. Furthermore, reviving the names of the streets where events happened, and linking them to the existing ones, keeps the physical memory of the space alive. It makes popular monuments the streets of Port Said. And every popular monument carries the memory of a struggle, but more importantly, a memory of who they are.

The struggle over the extent to which the memories of their experience were in tight relation with or independent of the state, seemed to be a struggle over how they perceived themselves as a revolutionary community. It seemed that at the time of the war, the people of Port Said mobilized to fight against an older enemy that they had been resisting for years prior to the Revolution, and in an attempt to protect their communities. With time however, as the Revolution grew in power, their desire to become part of this new imagined community, framed by Nasser and representing the

⁹⁰ Abu 'Abdu. Porter. Interview by author. Port Said 2011.

new nation meant tying their stories to that of the state. Partially because that gave weight to the credibility of a battle forgotten, and partially because that is the new community they wished to become.

3.5 A Continued History of Resistance

The *simsimiyya* has always resisted. Talk politics and you may end up behind the sun,⁹¹ but sing it and the people will feel it with their hearts. It's always swum against the current; that's why we sing, so we can say whatever we want.

'Ali 'Auf⁹² 2011

This section deals with how a history of resistance is preserved through the songs of Port Said, reflecting a political struggle that transcended the temporal boundaries of Nasser's state.

Zakariyya Ibrahim, founder of Al-Tanbura band and political activist since the 1970s, described to me how the *simsimiyya* enabled them to resist with grace. "What you cannot say with tact, you can sing,"⁹³ he explained. Described in similar ways by many of its "*ushaq*,"⁹⁴ the *simsimiyya* emerges as more than an instrument that simply characterises the people of the Canal, it becomes their language.

The simsimiyya binds them through a history of struggle, for songs still start with the call that stems from the experience of the digging of the Suez Canal, where the singer calls "*Dumyāt bīlādī*" (Damietta – a delta city – is my country), to which the audience reply "*wal hābash manzālī!*" (and Ethiopia is my home). The call was literal at a time when workers from Damietta worked along side others from as far as Ethiopia. The tradition and act of singing stretches the history of their communities from the digging of the canal in the mid nineteenth century through to 1956 and eventually the songs that were sung during the revolution of 2011. The songs are most often layered, with the original stanzas

⁹¹ 'Behind the sun' was a phrase coined in the 1960s to refer to the disappeared.

⁹² 'Ali 'Auf. Singer and dancer in Al-Tanbura group. Interview by author. Cairo 2011. .

⁹³ Zakariyya Ibrahim. Founder of Al-Tanbura band, established in 1982. Interview by author. Port Said 2010. .

⁹⁴ Rather than its 'musicians' or 'audience' '*ushaq* – meaning those who have a passion for her, is used.

from older songs, or sometimes new lyrics are sung to an old tune. This layering lends a history of struggle from one generation to another, creating a continuum of struggle across generations.

The singing, and dancing the *bambutiyya*, particularly to the songs of resistance, is a constant reinforcement of who they are as *balawta*, as they refer to themselves, and what their history represents. This sense of community is so strong that at times it is almost as if Port Said sees itself as a nation within a nation. In this section I will explore a few songs where this 'history of resistance' is perpetuated through projecting old songs onto new instances, and reflecting new instances through old songs.

One example of singing new lyrics to the tune of an old song, is a song written in 2006 to commemorate fifty years since the nationalisation of the Suez Canal called "*zayy al-nahardah*" (On a day like today).⁹⁵ The words are sung to the tune of the song of Lutfi al-Barbari, described in the previous section. In this version, it went like this:

On a day like today, fifty years ago,
We nationalised our canal and it was a glorious thing to do!
Gamal declared it in Al-Manshiyya!⁹⁶
These waters are Masriyya!⁹⁷
And he said to the peoples of the world, liberate yourselves!⁹⁸

It is metaphoric that the remembering of an event such as the nationalisation of the Canal and the commemoration of Nasser as a hero, is sung to the tune of Lutfi al-Barbari. In the song, he was a local symbol of courage, one that in his actions inspired the peoples of the world to liberate themselves. When it came to remembering Nasser, Lutfi's tune, and call to the world was the most fitting for Nasser's courage. He was thus compared to a local hero, and not the other way round.

⁹⁵ This is one of the few political songs that have been recorded. Most Simsimiyya songs recorded and distributed through audio forms are Dammah (madih) songs. This song is in the enclosed CD

⁹⁶ Al-Manshiyya is the square in Alexandria where the speech nationalising the Suez Canal was delivered in July of 1956.

⁹⁷ This line means 'These are Egyptian waters.'

⁹⁸ This song was written collectively by Zakariyya Ibrahim, Ibrahim Al Mursi and Mohsin Al 'Ashri

Another song that demonstrates a continuum of resistance across time, was the song '*bi-huruf min nur, wi huruf min nar*' - (In words of light, in words of fire) whose singer is unknown. This song was sung in 1956 this way:

In words of light, in words of fire,
Inscribe oh history the glory of the free;
In Port Said a volcano erupts
That imperialism would not dare interrupt
They trampled on our lands the invaders,
Since the days of Tawfiq, the traitor.

The song continues to relate the "Seventy years of misery" that Port Said suffered, before finally rising up. The song dates imperialism back to the days of 'traitor Tawfiq', ruler between 1879-1892 at the time the 'Urabi revolt was crushed and the British invaded Egypt in 1882, rather than the Khedive Ismai'l ruler, between 1863-1879, at the time of the digging of the Canal.

This song however, is one of many '1956 songs' that were brought to Tahrir Square during the revolution of 2011. A number of singers from Port Said contributed to the sit-in during the last week of the 18 days (when their own battles in Port Said ended), and sang the songs of resistance from the 1950s and 1960s.

By February 8 however, the lyrics of the song were tweaked so that they incorporated the contemporary struggle. Thus, rather than "in Port Said a volcano erupts," the lyrics went, "In Tahrir a volcano erupts; that the party of evil will never dare interrupt." And where the old songs sang of "Seventy years of misery," this one sang of "thirty years of humiliation, incarceration and torture," referring to the reign of Mubarak and the National Democratic Party.

The songs were uplifting and being of the 'songs of the 1950s' were known to some of the demonstrators in the audience who could sing along. More than that, these songs were also a reminder of triumph over oppression and humiliation, one epoch at a time, as if to emphasise that "we had prevailed before, and that we will again."

In the words of Ahmad Migahid, a singer and house-painter, “a song does not only sing of events past. A song can unravel into a new story...” He elaborated, explaining that a song can actually lead to an event; strengthen a spirit of resistance, remind you that you have prevailed before, so that you find the strength to do so again.

One final form of lyrical resistance, that I would like to explore here, is the annual Allenby ritual. It is a musical tradition that dates farther back than I was able to trace, the oldest memory of it being practiced in the 1920s.⁹⁹ Every Easter, dummies of Lord Allenby are made, and burnt in a bonfire. As the dummy burns, people dance around it and chant, “*Ya Allenby yabn Allanbuha, wi miratak wihsha wi sharshuha,*” (Oh Allenby, son of Allanbuha, whose wife is ugly and slutty). The chanting proceeds as they recount the ironic state of his affairs of his burning at the stake.

It is said that the Allenby ritual was prohibited in the early 2000s by the government on the basis that such bonfires are dangerous now that gas pipes run under the ground. But as fisherman Hamada declared after singing it to me, “Let an authority dare to stop an Allenby night and talk to us about gas pipes.”¹⁰⁰ There, the ritual continues. The reason why Lord Allenby was burnt at the stake may be linked to his role in quelling Sa’d Zaghlul’s movement in 1919 during his tenure as High Commissioner of Egypt between 1919-1925. However, with time, his story seems to have lost significance, as people have come to refer to life-size dummies as “Allenbies” not always knowing who Allenby was.

Allenbies were thus made of British generals in the Easter of 1957 after the triumph of 1956. Some respondents have also declared making Allenbies of Sadat’s ministers after the open door policies that turned Port Said into a duty free city, adversely affecting its social and cultural fabric. Some were also made, upon the Camp David peace-talks. Most people I asked denied making any Allenbies of Sadat himself or Mubarak, claiming that “that would be suicide,” however there is a limit to which a fabric as intimate, often

⁹⁹ The oldest interviewee to refer to it was born in 1913 in Zakariyya Ibrahim’s archive of recorded interviews. He too, did not know the origin of the story.

¹⁰⁰ Hamada. Fisherman. Interview by author. Port Fuad 2011. .

private as Port Said's could be penetrated. Like other songs explored here, this ritual is particular to Port Said and differs from one neighbourhood to another.

On April 25 2011 (Easter celebration), however, three Allenbies were made, for the most public bonfire of the last decade. Allenbies were made of three figures closely associated with ousted president Hosni Mubarak: Zakariyya 'Azmi (former chief of presidential staff), Fathi Surur (former speaker of parliament), and Habib al-'Adli (former interior minister). The Allenbies were sat before an expansive audience for a public trial for crimes that were chanted and called out, in the names of individuals and a larger nation. They were then sentenced to a public execution and burnt at the stake. The songs sung at this bonfire transcended Allenby, and drew upon the songs of the triumph over aggressors of freedom since the 1950s, and the traitor Tawfiq.

3.6 Conclusion

1956 was a military defeat, for sure. But it was also a turning point. It's when we could say, 'You may be bigger, you may be stronger, but this is ours, and we're not letting it go.' It was our first realisation that we are the ones who dug this Canal, and that meant an entitlement.

Amina Shafiq 2011¹⁰¹

The story of Port Said's struggle tells the story of a community whose political struggle preceded the Revolution's ideology or the worldview it would later come to represent. However, Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal was an act they were willing to defend as part of a popular struggle against British occupation that started long before the Revolution and can be seen as independent of it. "We will fight and never surrender" became their slogan, after Nasser pronounced it repetitively in his speech mobilising civilians to take arms against the enemy on November 2.

Port Said was a success in terms of popular struggle that may not have been organised, but was certainly effective in deterring an occupational force. There is no denying the political victory, one that can be attributed to several international factors particularly

¹⁰¹ Amina Shafiq. Journalist and fighter in 1956. Interview by author. Cairo 2011. .

power play between the US, Britain and the USSR. More significantly, the victory of Port Said can be said to have 'made' Nasser, giving the Revolution a boost both in Egypt and abroad. However, it was also a significant lesson for Nasser and the Revolution, as expressed in his great surprise at seeing the people of Ismailiyya armed and mobilised, later remarking on the stark contrast between the struggle of a people, and the freezing of an army and Revolutionary Council in the face of its adversary (Al-Bughdadi 1977, 354).

Port Said became an emblem of the Revolution, and through this chapter I explored how the events were selectively remembered and interpreted by the state to create an understanding of the Revolution and the imagined community who carried out its nation-building duties. I then explored how in Port Said these narratives, whether propagated through museums, history books, monuments and the media, were engaged with as people struggled over how they would signify the meanings of their own sacrifices.

In terms of the acts of heroism that made the victory in Port Said possible, there is that which is remembered for them, and that which they remember themselves through their songs. Yet the two are not separate, for the people of Port Said are engaged with these 'mainstreamed' memories, whether insisting on differences in narrative, such as the lack of organisation and element of coincidence, contesting some narratives altogether, or favouring these state narratives over first-hand accounts.

While the battle of Port Said is one of the most 'remembered' events of that period, it is also silenced in a way that is multi-layered. The first layer lies in the state's choosing certain facts, events, or heroes to represent the battle, choosing those that reinforced its own cause, notably making heroes of those who used Nasser's name or refused to defame him. But the loudest silence is that of the failure of the army and the Revolutionary Council to control the military situation and coordinate internally, mistakes that were not admitted and that remained unpunished.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Abd al-Hakim 'Ammir resigned on November 10 after refusing the pressure to either send troops to Port Said or holding lower levels of command responsible for strategic mistakes. Nasser instantly declined the resignation to avoid rifts within the Revolutionary Council (Al-Bughdadi 1977, 361).

The silencing comes not just from outside Port Said in the form of the state, but takes place internally to the city's community as well. This is manifested in particular in the debates over the authenticity of memories expressed by the true *wilād al-balad* and the question of who is a reliable source of history.

Finally, the silence grew thicker over the decades. With the death of Nasser and the coming of Sadat, the importance of the victory of Port Said, associated as it was with Nasserism and the Revolution, decreased in significance in the state's imaginary.

Instead, Port Said was to become an icon of Sadat's reign. Sadat turned Port Said into a free trade zone in 1976, an emblem of *infitāh* – the Open Door economic policy – that traded socialism for capitalism, in Sadat's most significant move away from Nasserism. Port Said became popularly associated with the national source of imported goods that were affordable and somewhat accessible. This meant the changing of the social and cultural fabric of Port Said, as its economy flourished through commerce. With this, *simsimiyya* performances became less political and more commercial.

The significance of Port Said changed again under Hosni Mubarak. On a visit to the city in 1999, Mubarak was approached by Al Sayyid Hussain Sulaiman (Abu al-'Arabi), an unarmed citizen, who carried a petition. He was considered a security threat, and shot dead on the spot. The Abu al-'Arabi incident was publicised as an assassination attempt on Mubarak's life, and the existing government neglect of the city intensified. This included abolishing the free trade zone in 2001, without considering its effects on the local economy¹⁰³.

While the national significance of Port Said has altered historically from era to era, the *balawta* continue to represent their history and the national significance of their communities in a narrative of a history of resistance to imperialism and tyranny that continues until today.

¹⁰³ See 'Abd al-Nassir (2012) for effect of removing the duty-free status and how it is considered more of a political decision than an economic one on Mubarak's part.

The story of Port Said is particularly significant to Nasserism as it was a turning point and boost to his popularity. He had daringly nationalised the Suez Canal, politically won a war, altered the power balance between the West and the Middle East and, mobilised a population along the Canal into battle.

What we see in Port Said, as we will also see through the coming chapters on the experience of building the High Dam and of the Suez war, is that it was a people's willingness to sacrifice grandly that led to political and industrial feats in the absence of efficient or effective management. In Aswan and Nubia, willingness to make sacrifices is translated as their conviction and belief in Nasserist ideas and ideals. In Port Said however, at a time when these were not yet formulated, it was a willingness to sacrifice for their community, and for the liberation from foreign occupation.

In the sections to come, I will explore how Nasserist ideology was internalised, re-articulated and debated by people as they worked and sacrificed in its name. But perhaps what Port Said provides us with, is a root of this Nasserism: how he realised and continued to draw upon a people's thirst for freedom, political engagement and willingness to sacrifice.

Chapter 4. “We are the ones who made this dam ‘High’!”¹⁰⁴ A Builders’ History of the Aswan High Dam.

4.1 Introduction: An Inappropriate Time for Songs

This chapter explores the experience of building the Aswan High Dam, through the accounts of workers and technicians who took part in it.

Where Port Said was the first popular struggle for the values of a Revolution still in the making, the building of the Aswan High Dam illustrates people’s willingness to sacrifice for a project called for by Nasser. Although the Dam promised features of modernity appealing to those who came to work on it and Nubians who are displaced by it (see Chapter 5) their dedication and sacrifices as we will see in the pages to come were made mainly in their desire to become the revolutionary community that work on the Dam signified. For the Dam symbolized a war against imperialism, a test of honour, an opportunity at education and a challenge to the old Egyptian character who lived in fear and anticipation of the Nile’s floods.

The building of the High Dam thus reveals the builders’ internalization and re-articulation of the revolutionary values framed by Nasser, and how they made them their own.

In the case of the High Dam however, the workers refused to sing. For, though I started my research in Aswan, in search of songs and poetry as ‘intimate forms of language’ I learned quickly that the builders did not wish to recount their experiences through such lyrical forms, nor did they wish to be remembered that way.

My first interview was with ‘Am Nijm, a retired Nubian electrician who worked on the Dam between 1961-2000. As he proceeded to account for the milestones of his career, one year at a time, I interjected with a question as to the songs they may have sung as they worked on the Dam, or those they sang thereafter.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Abd al-Halim Ahmad, retired labourer. Interview by author. Aswan 2010. Technical studies of the Dam show the ‘High Dam’ to be a misnomer, but the rhetoric seems to refer to its distinction as a project and achievement, and some builders attribute that achievement to their own work. Other common sayings included: ‘we worked on this Dam before it was even high..’

He looked at me in disbelief and exclaimed, “Songs?! What songs? I lived through the Day of Judgment and you ask me about songs?!”¹⁰⁵ This was followed by the telling of a series of near death experiences and Herculean struggles with the mountain and the Nile, as if to assert further, that this was no place for melodies.

The experience of building the Dam was one of harshness. Memories are laden with the monstrous sounds of machinery, the explosions of dynamite, the crumbling of tunnels, the breathtaking heights they had to climb and the intimidation of dealing with technological equipment for the first time. It was the ‘Day of Judgment,’ as ‘Am Nijm described it, because it was an ‘other-worldly’ experience, where one had to prove oneself before a greater power; nature was the hand of God on earth. The High Dam was their opportunity not only to curb the Nile to their will, but also to shape their own fates. It was their opportunity to turn their fates away from the nation that offered little opportunity for the uneducated *fallah* and worker, and towards the possibility of prospering, learning, and transcending the boundaries of their class and background.

The High Dam was thus a personal experience embedded in a larger more political one. In the workers’ battle against time to meet the deadline of May 14 1964 when the Nile would be diverted, their dignity was at stake as builders, but also as a nation. They were conscious of a challenge, where they felt the world watched, hoping that they would fail. International politics became a realm of the everyday. In working on the Dam, its builders believed they were chipping away at imperialism, building the history of a new nation and inscribing themselves into it.

In this chapter, I explore the experience of building the Dam; an experience of workers, who referred to themselves as ‘soldiers of a cause,’ ‘the Egyptian construction army,’ and ‘the army of Nasser’. Most commonly, they were ‘*bunāt al-sadd*’ (the builders of the Dam), a title laden with the pride and prestige they associated with building the Dam. The builders demanded that all words, titles and experiences that may at first seem familiar

¹⁰⁵ He continued in jest as his family, surrounding us, laughed and it became the running joke until the end of my fieldwork in Aswan. ‘Am Nijm, started as worker, became technician, until retirement. Interview by author. Gharb Suhail 2010

be regarded with a particular reverence when associated with the Dam. Thus from this point on, in this chapter, I refer to workers and technicians as ‘builders’ as they choose to refer to themselves, except when the distinction needs to be made.¹⁰⁶

Towards the beginning of my fieldwork, although I was shunned for looking for songs¹⁰⁷, I was told repeatedly the importance of understanding *Kalām al-sadd* (the language of the Dam.) In the language of the Dam, they were not workers, but soldiers and builders of the nation and the future. Significantly however, *kalām al-sadd* included idioms such as ‘*al-marhūm kān ghaltān*’ (the deceased was at fault.) These were often recalled nostalgically and without context until they were inquired into. In the case of ‘*al-marhūm kān ghaltān*’ for example, the context (inscribing the phrase onto the casket of someone who died on the job) was in such stark contradiction with the glorious experience of building the Dam that it was often taken aback or brushed aside as ‘mere words.’

I argue that, even when certain experiences are constructed, and others silenced, intimate forms of language, in the forms of idioms and anecdotes, are laden with experiences and sentiments that are carried through time. They encapsulate within them the sentiments and emotions behind an experience that a sensible attempt to tell a straight story, may suppress.

The experience of the Dam, despite its many hardships, hazardous working conditions, unaccounted for deaths, and other difficulties, is still remembered by the builders with pride. I argue that this is the case not because they were brainwashed about the Dam’s benefits, but rather because they truly believed in the cause.

¹⁰⁶ When I refer to ‘workers’ I mean varying levels of labourers who worked on the Dam, doing manual, unskilled labour. Most have minimal education, and are sometimes illiterate. When I refer to ‘technicians’, these are people who were either hired as technicians or worked their way up to becoming technicians. Some of these have no education at all, and learned all skills on the job, while others have earned a technical (vocational) diploma. Biographies (Appendix 2) make these distinctions in detail.

¹⁰⁷ I learnt later of songs that workers and technicians sang to the music of the canal, the *anashīd* of Upper Egyptians and ballads of the *fallahīn*. Although the songs were relevant to my research, there was a resistance to using the songs in telling their story – and a preference, instead to unravel experiences through ‘*kalam al-sadd*’ which I have followed through.

In a study of a similar industrial project, Magnetic Mountain, in Stalinist Russia, Stephen Kotkin calls this the belief in a 'revolutionary truth.' He writes,

When a compelling revolutionary vision resembling the 'higher truth' of a revered religion is refracted through patriotic concerns and a real rise in international stature, we should not underestimate the popular will to believe, or more accurately, the willing suspension of disbelief. ...Revolutionary truth(s) (are) maintained not merely by the power of the security police but by the collective actions of millions of people who participated in it, for a variety of reasons, including the apparent authenticity of the cause – whatever its nagging deficiencies (Kotkin 1995, 230).

The authenticity of the Dam's cause was constructed, I argue, in experiencing the Dam as a war that they waged against nature and a class-based society, and a school where they could advance their skill and work-discipline. I then explore the 'less glorious' aspects of building the Dam and how these were remembered, looking specifically at the builders' relationships with the Russian specialists, the deaths experienced on site, and their expressed criticism of Nasser's policies and priorities.

This chapter draws on 53 oral history interviews; 23 I conducted myself, with retired workers and technicians from the workers' compounds of Kima, Sahari, Sadd Sharq, and the villages of Abulrish in Aswan and Gharb Suhail in Nubia, as well as the only female 'builder' who worked on the Dam, a chemist, retired in Cairo¹⁰⁸. The rest consist of 16 video-recorded interviews by a local human rights centre in Aswan (Hisham Mubarak Law Centre – HMLC) in 2009 on the fiftieth anniversary of the building of the Dam; and 14 transcribed interviews conducted with ministers, technicians and workers by communist writer and activist Yusuf Fakhuri in 2004.¹⁰⁹ The video interviews provided by HMLC were in celebration of the event and thus predominantly of positive experiences of the Dam, namely their career developments. However short (15 minutes each) they provided more access to workers on the Dam, some of whom I was able to pursue further. While

¹⁰⁸ Although a number of women worked in administration, especially after 1964, Kawthar Al-Subki was the only woman who worked on site, during the first phase of building between 1960-1964.

¹⁰⁹ Yusuf Fakhuri conducted these interviews with a plan to write a book on the Dam, which he never realised. He generously provided the interviews for the purpose of my research

Fakhuri's work provided access to interviews conducted with high level officials (ministers, planners and researchers on the Dam) that would have otherwise been difficult to access¹¹⁰.

Finally I draw upon a few testimonies documented in 1965 by communist writers Sun'allah Ibrahim, Kamal al-Qalsh and Ra'uf Mus'ad (1967), who at the time were writing a book about the Dam.¹¹¹ The testimonies are valuable for the insight they give into how the builders related to their experiences at the time, as opposed to my interviews conducted in retrospect. Though they are short, they are revealing of the motivations behind the workers' and technicians' experiences at the time, as well as the zeal of the moment of diversion. They contain no criticism of the Dam however.

Though there is a plethora of literature on the technicalities of the High Dam and the political struggles behind its endeavors (Dougherty 1959; 'Abd al-Basit 1976; Goldsmith 1984; Little 1965; Moore 1980; Musa 1965; Waterbury 1979), there is very little work on the experiences and political motivations of the builders who worked on the Dam, save for Elizabeth Bishop's (2007) work on politics between Egyptian Engineers and Russian Specialists on site. International literature on Dam building, particularly in post-colonial, post-war situations where a new political order is being built with the promise of prosperity and modernity, displays similarities in the conditions, political motivations, and the way the ideas of dams are framed and propagated (Goldsmith and Hildyard 1984; Miescher and Tsikata 2009-2010; Moore 1980; O'Bryan 2009; Schayegh 2012). However in this literature as well, the political struggles experienced, and the agency with which builders contributed to these projects is never considered.

I argue on the basis of my findings, that were it not for the workers' desire to build the Dam , the projects would have never come to light. This chapter thus explores, through

¹¹⁰ My interviewees lead me to sources of their own interest which include propaganda publications about the Dam issued by past or present governments or independent journalists or writers (Abu Fasha 2010) (first published in 1961) (Gallab 1985; Mahmud 1996) as well as a translation of Tom Little's (1965) book on the High Dam which garnered significant popularity amongst technicians in particular. I also drew on the workers' publication 'Al Sadd al-'ālī' (The High Dam) whose publication started in 1970.

¹¹¹ As mentioned previously the project was revised with a more critical book on the Dam a decade later (Ibrahim 1976).

their testimonies, why they did, despite the circumstances and introduces the realm of workers' agency to literature on Dam building.

This research was conducted in the period between January and March 2010 when I lived at intervals with a Nubian family in the Nubian village of Tinjar, west of the High Dam.

4.2 Constructions of the High Dam

The radio came to us, and we started hearing about the Revolution, and what Nasser was saying. We were all geared up and anticipating something big. We started buying newspapers and applauded his speeches; we were thirsty for freedom – 'Raise your head my brother...'¹¹² meant something significant to all our lives. He was talking about freedom at a time when there were oppressive landowners, and the Egyptian character was deprived.

By October of 1952 the Dam project was being studied; only four months after the Revolution! It was the songs that told us this story; the songs, anthems, through the radio and the folk songs that were sung according to them in the village. It created a spiritual bond between us and the project before it even started.

Once the state told the story, that we went to the World Bank and it wouldn't give us money and that this was a challenge people didn't want us to achieve, we were in a state of alert, ready to do anything it takes.

The Dam's story is the story of a people; the struggle of a people.

Abulmajd Abulwafa 2010¹¹³

Most of my interviews started with an inquiry into the first time people had heard about the Dam. Where were they, what were they doing? Who told them, and what did it mean to them?

This start and the rest of the interview was an attempt to distinguish their own personal experience of the Dam from the 'overall' recounted and accounted for experience (or meta-narrative) that people seem to draw upon. This 'overall experience' includes

¹¹² This was an allusion to Nasser's saying 'Raise your head my brother, the age of imperialism is over.'

¹¹³ Abulmajd Abulwafa, started as labourer, became electrician, until retirement. Interview by author. Sahari 2010

narratives shaped by the songs of the Revolution and Nasser's speeches. In his speeches, Nasser recounted not only the political events and stances that surrounded the decision to build and fund the Dam, but often also the heroic experiences of those who built it, and equally importantly diverted the flow of the Nile. Although these (generally accounted for) experiences lent a strong sense of heroism and agency to the builders, what concerned me is the question of their sense of personal agency in their own experiences of the Dam.

In this section I explore the main events and milestones during the building of the Dam through the prism of how it was experienced by those who built it.

Most workers it seems heard about the Dam, much like Abulmajd above, through the radio. They heard about the Greek/Egyptian idea's founder Adrien Daninos, and how (after the Dam proposal had fallen on deaf ears since 1948¹¹⁴) he was finally given the chance to implement it. The issue of funding was followed closely and made emblematic of the Egyptian struggle against imperialism, and the world's desire to 'see us fail.' In the words of Fu'ad, a technician who worked on the Dam, "Nasser realised his chances of building the Dam were slim, but he went for it anyway, out of *fatwana*¹¹⁵ ...and that is why we followed him..."¹¹⁶

Most workers in my interviews either went to the Dam because they had heard about the project and wanted to be a part of it, or knew of relatives working on a 'project in Aswan that hired anyone who walked to it.' In 1963 and 1964, Nasser developed a referral system where students of technical schools continued their last year at the Dam or were automatically hired there upon graduation.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ See Chapter 19 in (Goldsmith 1984) for details of why the idea was refuted then and why it became strategic for the free officers after 1952

¹¹⁵ Futuwwa is slang for a community 'strongman'. He is someone who decides to do something despite the odds, but usually in the name of a community. Fu'ad Shallal did not necessarily agree with Nasser's policies but joined out of a sense of obligation and allegiance to a man who dared do so much.

¹¹⁶ Fu'ad Shallal, technician, currently retired. Interview by author. Sahari 2010

¹¹⁷ Although records indicate that 'Othman Ahmad 'Othman was hired in 1962 as a contractor to replace inefficient Russian specialists, setting up recruitment centres all over the country, most interviewees indicate heading to Aswan to work on the Dam themselves, rather than being hired or mobilised in their governorate.

The Dam building was divided into three phases, the first two being the most significant. The first and most strenuous phase, focused on creating the new channel for the Nile's diversion, building the body of the Dam itself, and chiseling the tunnels for the turbines. Everything about the first phase is characterized in the narratives by novelty, uncertainty, dangers and impending disasters. The timeline was tight, the staff inexperienced, and the management inefficient. This phase was what builders refer to as the 'war' phase. The second, though less hazardous, was still very labour-intensive, and consisted of reinforcing the body of the Dam and the tunnels; and the third phase was the period following the Dam's opening in 1971. I chose to interview builders mainly hired during the first phase, since this was the most strenuous phase under the most challenging conditions.

A significant landmark in building the Dam was diverting the path of the Nile on May 14 1964 through a diversion channel that took it through the Dam's turbines and spilled back into the Nile's own bed¹¹⁸. This marked the end of the first phase of the Dam building which consisted of,

...digging the diversion channel and its tunnels, the installation of control gates at the inlet side of the tunnels and the building of the coffer dams at the upstream and downstream ends of the dam. It was essential that, at the appointed date, the coffer dams would be in position, so that the Nile would rise against the upstream (coffer) dam, turn eastwards through the diversion channel and resume its natural course north of the downstream coffer dam which would prevent a backward flow on the dam site. The river between the two coffer dams would then be left motionless and tranquil for the second stage, the building of the main dam and its fusion with the two coffer dams. The first stage was vital to the whole programme (Little 1965 85-86).

¹¹⁸ This can be viewed on the propaganda video in the enclosed CD.

The actual diversion of the Nile's flow was looked upon with awe and spoken of as the feat to control that great river, which generations of Egyptians throughout history had learnt, at best, to calculate and anticipate. The time appointed to the diversion was also very rigid as the river was expected to be at an all time low, and its failure could result in delaying the final structure for a year, and a loss in production worth around 200 million Egyptian pounds (Little 1965, 86).

Since there was still a risk that the newly-built Dam would not survive the river's gush when the Nile was diverted, the day turned out to be one of unforgettable euphoria as recounted by most. It was a day when a plan, set four years in advance, was met under the eyes of international figures, such as Mohammed V of Morocco, and Nikita Khrushchev of the Soviet Union. The Dam put Egypt – and its builders – on the map.

For the Dam as they experienced it, and as it was propagated, was a political project before it was a hydraulic one;

The specific decision regarding the High Dam must . . . be set in the general context of a new and unknown regime seeking to establish its credibility and to signal its citizens, and make known to the nations abroad, that it was prepared to do what no previous regime had dared contemplate or advocate to promote the country's well-being . . .

Politically, it had the advantage of being gigantic and daring, thrusting Egypt into the vanguard of modern hydraulic engineering. Moreover, during its construction and after its completion, it would be highly visible and fittingly monumental (Waterbury 1979, 99).

The process of accomplishing this feat, however, also meant deaths on a regular basis, whether it was on account of electrocution, explosions or falling off mountains. Some narratives, such as this of 'Abd al-Sami', a scaffolding worker, account for both extremes of the experience.

It was a whole other world!

36,000 people in three shifts, one after the other, and the place was a desert laden with scorpions. It was a project of global proportions! You would never even imagine it... There were very few houses for people to live in, the rest of us were living in the desert, in the wild! But people had a desire for this work, this project had to be implemented.

If you knew of the accidents we suffered though, your hair would go white.

And also, it was a national project. It included the fugitive, people with prison sentences, shoe-shiners, a world of people...it was a school... they would acquire a craft/skill, be able to handle machines like experts. They would develop professions. And it taught generations to come afterwards. I have ten boys and girls. I put them through school. Had I no job, I would not have been able to.¹¹⁹

Every builder's testimony contained within it a plethora of sentiments and experiences, bitter and sweet, both pride and shame. The story of the glorious experience of building the Dam, however, is not without contradictions. In the sections to come, I will explore the main themes of the experience. After looking at the Dam understood as 'war' and as a technical and political 'school,' I will turn to the contradictory realms of memory looking at the builders' relationships with the Russian specialists and the stories of those who died whilst building the Dam.

I emphasise, while exploring their memories of all that is glorious, and how they deal with all that is not, that these builders had a strong sense of ownership and agency in their building the Dam. They were mobilised by the idea of the Dam and how it was propagated, and they participated despite the odds. They were driven by the masculine ideas of honour and physical strength¹²⁰, but also by their conviction that they made of it the historic epic it became. This very sense of agency, however, allowed for a critical consciousness of both the hegemonic project, and those behind it.

¹¹⁹ 'Abd al-Sami' 'Abd al-Bassit, scaffolding worker, currently retired. Interview by Walid Hussain and Mahmud al-'Adawi, Hisham Mubarak Law Centre (HMLC). Video recording. Aswan 2009

¹²⁰ Although these masculine values of strength and the battle against nature are typical of High Modernist projects and particularly Dams, I engage with these masculine constructs as they appear throughout the research, more critically in Chapter 7

With Nasser's death, the builders of the Dam were deprived of the acknowledgement they anticipated upon the completion of the Dam, and stripped of all their benefits once they had retired. With those changes, a context collapsed and an era ended, leaving them as retired workers, 'third class citizens' in disintegrating homes, desperately reviving a memory in an attempt to change the way I perceived the Dam. For, the general impression was that I belonged to a generation that did not understand the extent of their sacrifice, and the truth that they were not 'workers' but builders of the Dam, members of a new class that transcended the boundaries and limitations of the old system.

4.3 The Glory of the Dam

4.3.1 *The Dam as War*

The first phase succeeded because of the political mobilisation that turned the High Dam into a patriotic symbol and a battle for the nation, full of challenges and progressions, and the fear of not achieving...with perseverance, a war-like heroism, as if fighting for one's life, and the terror of a setback and the fear of a global scandal, that thankfully, never happened, we succeeded.

Hassan Tawfiq 1965¹²¹

A feature common to all the testimonies is the reference to the Dam as a battle. A battle, a war, the Day of Judgment, and the end of the world, the Dam was momentous. The builders started work by dynamiting through the mountain and carving holes into its hard granite structures. They spoke of working for long shifts in dark tunnels with large machines that were so loud, that for eight-hour stretches only signing could be relied on to communicate.

The Dam was larger than life in its physical manifestation, but it was also larger than life in the sense that all fears, hopes, and anxieties of failure associated with it, were larger than any one life of those who worked on it.

¹²¹ Hassan Tawfiq, technician. Interview by Kamal al-Qalsh, Sun'allah Ibrahim, Ra'uf Mus'ad. Aswan 1965. (Al-Qalsh, Ibrahim and Mus'ad 1967, 38)

The High Dam was understood as a war against time, a battle against Nature and their expectations of themselves. It was a liberation that could only come through the confidence of achievement and a war against the world that did not believe they would make it.

It was a personal, almost physical struggle first and foremost, a struggle by some unskilled, and in most cases uneducated, builders to liberate themselves from a colonialist (colonised) and feudalist (slave) mentality, and manage themselves in a new industry. It was, in their accounts, where they had the opportunity to alter a feudal order and suspend classism.

In the words of Hassan Aswanli, the feudal order was suspended when one could prosper based not on one's background, but on one's own work and merits. Upon doing well on exams during his work on the Dam, Hassan was offered a scholarship to study in Russia, and went to his father for money. His father, in turn, went to the owner of the factory, a landlord in the area, who refused to believe him.

He went to his boss, and told him: 'My son ranked the first in the Republic!' And his boss retorted in disdain; 'Your son? How? Have him see me first.' And so I went to see him and he asked me many questions about the exam I took and the examiners who gave them to me – the questions proceeded until I showed him the degree. I told him I was a colleague of his son, Magid – you see I knew that Magid didn't qualify for the scholarships and this is what it was all about. Eventually, he congratulated me, and gave me a twenty-pound gift over and above the loan he granted my father for my travels.

In Hassan's eyes, this was a clear moment of the suspension of feudalism. His father was actually more privileged than his boss for having raised a successful son who had access to more opportunities than his boss's despite their different backgrounds.

The builders' challenge was a battle against time since the Nile had to be diverted by May 14 1964 when the flood levels were expected to be at their lowest and thus least damaging to the Dam. Rhetoric such as 'oppressing the mountain' and the 'taming of the Nile' indicate that the struggle was a physical one over Nature. Stories were told of how Egyptian farmers had learnt to fear, adapt to and anticipate the Nile, but never had the

power to control it. This was a genealogy they felt they overcame by diverting the flow of the Nile and thus conquering Nature. In the words of Hassan Tawfiq,

We were standing up to the forces of Nature, opposing it, somehow. And that was greatly against our own nature.

This very act of taking one's fate into one's own hands, and controlling and sculpting Nature to meet the country's needs, whilst predominantly drawing on local funds and resources, was symbolic and metaphoric of much that was 'national' as much as it was 'personal.'

The constant allusion to the building of a new, powerful nation was similarly symbolic on both a personal and collective level. In the words of electrician, Abulmajd Abulwafa,

The High Dam was an agricultural project, just as it was an industrial one. Agricultural because agriculture is our nature, industrial because this was the start of an industrial revolution... and for industry we needed electricity. The High Dam was going to give us industry, as well as water and thus agriculture. And so we'd have both. I would have industries that thrive off agriculture and thus I would be one of the very rich nations. Industry we needed for factories but also to fuel the tanks that we would combat Israel with.

The High Dam was thus the key to the industrial revolution, a thriving agriculture, as well as security and the building of an army against Israel.

In many contexts, the High Dam builders also referred to themselves as soldiers of an army. At times they were *gunūd qadiyya* (soldiers of a cause),¹²² the cause being the building of the nation; at others they were *gaysh al-ta'mir* (the construction army), and still others, the army of Nasser himself.

In referring to themselves as an army, or in fact the Dam as a war, the workers put themselves on a historical continuum of sorts. The references to wars were complemented with anecdotes and accounts of Nasser visiting a tunnel and crying upon seeing the workers' exertion and dynamite explosions, saying it reminded him of the 1956

¹²² This is an allusion to one of Nasser's 1956 sayings, 'We are not callers of war; we are soldiers of a cause.'

war in Port Said. In another account, it was said that Nasser compared the event to his own experience in the Battle of Fallujah of Palestine in 1948, significant in its being where the Revolutionary Council was born.

In this light the Dam was also seen as a continuation of the 1956 war particularly since that war was waged in reaction to the Nationalization of the Suez Canal to fund the Dam. Further weaving the Dam into this historical continuum was the fact that techniques engineered at the Dam were used in the October 6 war in Suez in 1973. The water cannons used to bring down the sand dams in Aswan, inspired the idea of using water cannons to breach the Ber Lev Line on October 6 1973.¹²³

The flip side of placing the Dam on such a continuum meant distinguishing it from these experiences as well. Mustafa, a treasurer in the Dam's administration spoke of his father's experience being part of the Dam's workforce.

It was something like being in the army... people are working on it as if they've been conscripted. But the difference is you're working with pleasure, not out of obligation and not by force...you're going because you're enjoying the work...¹²⁴

They expressed feeling mobilised, rather than conscripted, by a desire to be part of something and a yearning to achieve.

Similarly, reference was made by a number of workers to the digging of the Suez and Mahmudiyya Canals in the 19th century.¹²⁵ Interviewees indicated that it was just as important a project, but unlike the conscripted and coerced diggers, they were there because they wanted to be; they were the owners of this project, and not enslaved to anyone. Building the Dam was also contrasted to tilling someone else's land, especially

¹²³ The Ber Lev Line was a chain of fortifications built by Israel along the eastern coast of the Suez Canal during the 1967 Six-Day War.

¹²⁴ Mustafa Barakat, treasurer in the Electric Authority, currently retired. Interview by Walid Hussain and Mahmud al-'Adawi (HMLC). Video recording. Aswan 2009

¹²⁵ The Mahmudiyya Canal was built under the rule of Mohammed 'Ali to link the Nile to Alexandria between 1817 and 1820 with an estimated 300,000 workers conscripted. The Suez Canal was dug under the rule of Khedive Sa'id between 1859 and 1869 with an estimated 1.5 million conscripted, thousands of whom died under harsh working conditions

that most workers were previously *fallahīn*. Finally they were working on a project whose benefits they would themselves reap.

The reference to the war was also invoked in justifying the deaths that occurred during the building of the Dam. Given that the deaths were largely caused by management carelessness and employees' lack of experience, it was important to account for the deaths in a different way if workers were to maintain their commitment to the Dam as a cause. In the context of a war, it seemed, casualties were inevitable, unlike an industrial project where safety measures and precautions should be taken.

When conversing with a group of technicians in an attempt to understand how it was that there were no records of the dead, one explained that;

...relative to the size of the project, losses were not that great. Around 30,000 people worked on the Dam for ten years, so what if 2000 people died...? In any military operation, they expect a minimum of 25% losses, and so this is actually very small...

For the Dam was seen as a project that 'changed the fate of a whole nation', if 25% deaths were expected of a military operation, what then, it was emphasized, of the 'greatest project of the twentieth century'.

Thus thinking of the Dam as war helped justify the inevitability of deaths. They were in a war against Nature; a force previously unconquerable and so, as in any war, these deaths were inevitable. In a section to come, I delve deeper into the causes of these deaths, and how or why they are justified this way.

Finally, the ambition to 'fight for the Dam' was always expressed as one driven by 'desire,' and constantly compared to being part of a larger army, where the battle was for a cause. A cause, they reiterated, that was just as important as any national or historical milestone.

The fates of the builders were strongly tied to the Dam, for at stake was not only the nation's future, but their own access to knowledge, prestige, dignifying jobs, electricity

and water for their families' lands. In other words, their own futures were tied in with that of the Dam and the nation.

4.3.2 *The Dam as School*

Kima khallit lil-'awīl 'īma

Kima makes men of bums

Anecdote¹²⁶

The Dam was a revolution within the Revolution. If the military Revolution liberated the country, the Dam liberated the people. It helped us liberate ourselves from ourselves. It liberated us from fear.

Hassan Aswanli 2010

There were many references in the interviews to the Dam as a school. When the builders say, as they often do, '*al-sadd madrassa*' (the Dam is a school), they invoke a technical school, but also a place of political education. The builders here allude to the way their work on the Dam was a learning experience, not only because the industrial work and machinery was new, but also because training centres were established for skilled labour. But more so, as will be discussed further, the Dam is where the builders learnt discipline, applied a dedicated and loyal work ethic, and achieved a sense of self-worth.

In the words of Sa'id, a worker interviewed in 1965,

At first I was a *fallah*; I learnt everything I know from the Dam. I devoured the work because I am happy I'm learning something new. Everyone you see here was a *fallah* before the Dam.¹²⁷

The idea that they were all *fallahīn* recurs in the builders' narratives, as in this quote, not simply as descriptive, but as deeply metaphoric. The metaphor is two-sided. On the one side, *fallahīn* was used in its 'backward' or naïve sense; that they knew how to use little more than the axe, that they were used to living off tilling other people's lands, and to

¹²⁶ Kima was a chemical factory established in 1956 near the Dam.

¹²⁷ Sa'd Mohammed, electrician. Interview by Kamal al-Qalsh, Sun'allah Ibrahim, Ra'uf Mus'ad. Aswan 1965. (Al-Qalsh, Ibrahim and Mus'ad 1967, 38)

not being in control of their own destinies. On the other side, the *fallah* invokes the values of the peasantry; namely loyalty to the land, and a sense of ownership of it, as well as a strong sense of the *ghadr* (treachery) of nature. For nature, like the Nile, can be giving at one point, and destructive at another.

This section will explore how the Dam was remembered and experienced as a school of sorts, and how in these experiences and memories the *fallah* was ‘transformed’ into an independent, productive and ambitious human being, as the builders told it.

For most builders, the Dam was *fath biyut* (a means to start families and finance houses).¹²⁸ Workers and technicians were offered accommodation¹²⁹, an income, a meal stipend and transport. Health services were subsidised, if not free, and workers were entitled to a pension.

There were many stories of men working on the Dam who had never before worn shoes, never slept on mattresses, and whose families had known ‘no colours’ before the Dam.¹³⁰ Most workers and technicians I interviewed were able to put their children through school; some even managed to put their children through university, thanks to their work on the Dam, and their ambition for a better future for their children.

It was ambition, because for a number of workers, working hard on the Dam held the promise of a promotion for a more technically challenging job, despite low levels of education. For workers these possibilities of housing and educating their children were not only opportunities for learning and development, but also social mobility and the chance to change their relative class position.

¹²⁸ Workers were quite happy with pay, while engineers and senior specialists often saw their levels of pay as a sacrifice for the cause.

¹²⁹ For workers, accommodation was for bachelors only in the first phase but later, for their families as well. Workers housing conditions, however, were much simpler (receiving far less maintenance) than those of some technicians, and all engineers and Russian specialists.

¹³⁰ Um Mirvat, whose father and husband worked on the Dam referred to an anecdotal story of how poor families always wore black clothes because they could be worn for long periods without showing dirt; and so colours became an indication of relative wealth, having more than an outfit. Um Mirvat. Interview by author. Al-Sad Sharq 2010.

An emphasis on teaching and learning grew out of particular circumstances when in 1962, the Russians declared a production crisis amid a desperate need for more skilled labour. Significant changes were undertaken in the organisational and work structure of the Dam. These included ministerial and high-ranking officials working onsite, as well as the establishment of a training centre to address the lack of skilled labour by training workers.

Moreover, due to the system Nasser established in 1963 whereby students of technical schools spent the last year of the diploma at the Dam, most technicians I interviewed who did this were awarded with high-grades. This opened up opportunities for higher technical diplomas or university educations later in their careers.¹³¹ As of 1964, however, a new system was adapted where all students of technical colleges were to train or do part-time work at the Dam, and eventually work there upon graduation.

Beyond providing skills for workers, the onsite training centre also gave those who excelled in their work the opportunity to work in positions beyond their qualifications or current skills. This includes workers becoming technicians despite minimal education, and technicians becoming trainers; to some, these positions would have been otherwise unattainable. There were even those who, though they worked on the Dam as the lowest ranking labourers (*'atālīn*), had the conviction to attain higher positions. In the words of Abulmajd Abulwafa, for instance: "I decided I would become electrician come hell or high water!"

I was a *fallah*, but wasn't very convinced with farming, so I left the village of Abadi and , when I heard about the High Dam, went to Aswan. Once on site, I talked to engineer Haj 'Izz al-Din and told him I wanted to learn about electricity, and he used to say that I was smart, shrewd even...So he trained me and I was examined by the centre, until I was given the position as an electrician. I wasn't as excited with the position as I was excited about being in a place where I could ask about everything...and thank God, now there is nothing I don't know about electricity.

¹³¹ A number obtained law degrees, as well as business and economics degrees from 1967 onwards.

A similar experience is that of Mohammed 'Uthman who earned a technical diploma in 1962,¹³² and worked in a number of capacities, from builder to technician, before he eventually became a general manager in the High Dam Authority.

And it was this that some of them say lured them to the Dam; their appetite to learn and develop. It was thus the case that most workers I interviewed knew not only the technical details of their work on the Dam, but the larger plan, which parts of it were implemented and those that were not. This knowledge of the overall process, it seems, was one acquired, and possibly related to the builders' overall sense of ownership or belonging.

In the words of several builders, this was the age of *'irfa' ra'sak ya akhī'* ('raise your head my brother, the age of imperialism is over'), Nasser's well-known saying. It was an age in which workers and technicians not only had their own project, but also the authority to criticise any technical assistance regardless of where it came from.

They were encouraged to be critical of engineers, for example, to stand up to them and indicate when they felt a certain renovation was a bad idea. If they found a fault with a plan set by a senior, they were rewarded for it. In one instance, Hassan Aswanli found a fault in the design of a Russian machine, and proceeded to alert his superior. His manager, after grilling Hassan, took the critique up to the Minister of the Dam in Hassan's name, and specialists were brought in to look at it. When Hassan's criticisms were shown to be correct, he was sent to Russia for a training course.

This confidence vis-à-vis 'authority', based on their growing experience, can also be seen in the case of a labourer who went for a lunch break and returned to his post with an extra sandwich. He was stopped by a figure of authority policing the Dam, who prohibited him from entering the site with food. The labourer recounts that he argued back vehemently, asserting that it was he who was building the Dam, pushing past the authority figure and proceeding to his work.

¹³² Mohammed 'Uthman Hassan. Started as technician, became general manager. Interview by Walid Hussain and Mahmud al-'Adawi (HMLC). Video recording. Aswan 2009

This seems to be the most important sentiment that most builders communicated; the sense that the Dam was theirs. Their knowledge of it, their being 'bred' through it, was on account of their sense of ownership of it as a project. It was a project that benefited them not only now, but in bringing irrigation and electricity would benefit their families and larger communities.

In the words Abulmajd Sharq, a worker on the Dam,

We could argue and report each other to authorities, but never ever slack on our work; never jeopardise our performance. It was a psychological thing because this was something that was mine. I didn't let it be compromised, it had to be done right.

I'm not a mill-worker for instance, no sir, this is a High Dam, this is noble work, it belongs to the whole of Egypt.¹³³

Through building the Dam, they felt they were building a nation they could better fit into; where the opportunities available to them, would multiply and be accessible to their children. This was all done by virtue of their own work, while background was less likely to be an impediment.

Furthermore, Nasser's plan included the idea to develop a university in Cairo, Alexandria and Aswan for skilled labour. Technicians such as Hassan Aswanli, were sent to Russia to train for this, and most workers expected to become consultants for other Arab countries planning to build dams. As such the builders would form this *gaysh al-ta'mīr al-masrī'* (the Egyptian construction army) that would travel all over Egypt and build dams and other technologies to optimise use of resources.

This aspiration was clear in most interviews with engineers and technicians referring to themselves as *bunāt al-mustaqbal* (builders of the future). This seems to be a prospect that ended with Nasser's life, however. The workers expected to contribute to the country beyond the Dam, and the world beyond it with their knowledge and expertise.

¹³³ Abulmajd Sharq, started as worker, became supervisor of drivers. Interview by author. Al-Sad Sharq 2010

In the words of junior engineer, Anis Mu'awad interviewed in 1965, who left his personal practice to be part of the Dam,

My ambition is that I always work with my hands after the Dam...I'll go to Munkhafad al-Qatarra and Al-Wadi al-Gadid. I will live my whole life like this...away from urban centers. Engineers are like that; they go to places and build them, and once they're built, they move on and so forth. This is what our country needs, this is what the times we live in need...¹³⁴

4.3.3 *Relations with Russian Specialists*

Rusky, Arabisky, drujba, Blagorima Nasser, blagorima Lenin..¹³⁵

Russians, Arab, are all friends, Thanks to Nasser, thanks to Lenin!

Children's chant

Described as the 'Russian specialists',¹³⁶ they are widely remembered by the builders as having been honourable partners. The Russian specialists were impressed by the Dam as a project, believed in its feasibility and offered to provide a loan and design plans on the condition that the plans be implemented using Soviet equipment and specialists (Bishop 1997, 257).

While the Russians came to Egypt as 'specialists,' bringing expertise in dam-building, the emphasis in the builders' stories is on how their relationship was one of mutuality. As they saw it, the Russians were humbled by the Dam, and learnt as much from the builders as the builders were meant to learn from them.

In an interview with writer Yusuf Fakhuri, William Shinuda,¹³⁷ a geologist at the High Dam Authority, indicated that Egyptian authorities were weary of another imperial-subject relationship developing between Egyptians and Russians. Organisational measures were

¹³⁴ Anis Hanna Mu'awwad, engineer. Interview by Kamal al-Qalsh, Sun'allah Ibrahim, Ra'uf Mus'ad. Aswan 1965. (Al-Qalsh, Ibrahim and Mus'ad 1967, 41)

¹³⁵ The actual word is blagodarim, meaning 'thank you' in Russian, but I have transliterated it the way it was pronounced in song.

¹³⁶ While 'Soviet specialists' is the more accurate term, they are remembered as 'Russian Specialists.'

¹³⁷ William Kamil Shinuda, geologist and former vice president of the Ministry of Irrigation. Interview by Yusuf Fakhuri. 2004

taken to avoid this, such as having the Russians work across departments rather than through hierarchies. In the words of one technician, ‘their role was not to have a role;’ in other words, the transfer of their skills.

This section is dedicated to exploring the relationship between Russian Specialists and the Egyptian builders; as the builders perceived them, as opposed to how they were actually developing. Emphasising how these relations were reinforcing the builders’ ideas, experiences and sentiments towards working on the Dam and the prevailing production culture.

Russians as Teachers, Equals and Beneficiaries

In almost all interviews, there was reference to the Russians as ‘good teachers,’ with some adding ‘unlike others.’ Here they were compared to Egyptian or American trainers who came later on. The Russians were viewed as good teachers because they showed one ‘how to do things’ rather than ‘telling one what to do.’ They emphasised the importance of both managing a particular task, whilst understanding the role of their work in the overall structure of the Dam. Moreover, due to language restrictions, most training was hands on.

Russians were also credited for encouraging talents; they were seen to be interested not only in the workers’ technical skills but also their personal hobbies. Some workers and technicians spoke of how they were encouraged to pursue their acting and musical talents, or their interests in philosophy and literature. In Badawi al-Shazli’s words,

I’m a bulldozer driver, but I love music. My musical talents didn’t explode until I came to the Dam. The Russians noticed my talent and encouraged me to come to their club. So now, I beat at the Dam with machinery by day and play the copper trumpet with my fingers by night; I’m even a member of the Russian-Egyptian musical team; I’ve performed hundreds of times...¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Badawi al-Shazli, bulldozer driver. Interview by Kamal al-Qalsh, Sun’allah Ibrahim, Ra’uf Mus’ad. Aswan 1965. (Al-Qalsh, Ibrahim and Mus’ad 1967, 42)

More importantly however, the Russians were credited with teaching by doing. In the first phase of production, they worked around the clock and displayed an admirable and, it is claimed, a contagious work ethic. Their work ethic also encouraged a notable suspension of hierarchy. A Russian specialist 'no matter how high his rank', was remembered to bend down and pick things up, get his hands dirty fixing the machinery or even driving it. This was particularly inspirational and further reinforced the memory of the experience of the Dam as a space for socialist teamwork, socialism invoked here to mean that everyone was equal and equally responsible for the Dam.

'If a Russian specialist who came all the way from Russia got his hands dirty doing anything and worked around the clock – so should we,' was a sentiment often expressed. This was further reinforced when Sidqi Sulaiman, minister of the High Dam came to work onsite in 1962. This was often recounted along the lines of, 'even the minister worked with his hands and alongside workers all the time – this was the spirit of the Dam.'

This idea of equality with the Russian specialists was taken further by some workers and technicians, whereby the Russians were also great beneficiaries of the Dam. According to Faruq Ahmad, a worker in the tunnels,

The Russians were OK; there were nice ones, and there were difficult ones, but they were all very hard workers. Still, we managed to develop them. When the Russians saw the High Dam, they said '*mish ma'ul!*' (impossible!) They had seven dams in Russia and this was nothing like them. They loved the people of Upper Egypt, and they realised through working with us, that they were not the only hard workers; we were really hard workers too.¹³⁹

Hassan Aswanli, similarly saw the Russians as beneficiaries of the Dam, explaining that as they needed the work in Egypt as much as the work needed them, the relationship with the Russians was balanced. In his own words,

The Russians had as much to gain from being here as we did. We were broke, and they wanted to leave their thumb-print somewhere; to show the world

¹³⁹ Faruq al-Sayyid Ahmad, worker, currently retired. Interview by Walid Hussain and Mahmud al-'Adawi (HMLC). Video recording. Aswan 2009

that they too were a 'world power.' But for that, they needed to prove themselves.

In light of this, the Russian specialists were remembered as good teachers who were equals, who worked beyond hierarchies and encouraged talents, while still being open to criticism. This 'balance' was indicated and reinforced in every interview to indicate that the Dam was built by the Egyptians, not the Russian specialists, as is often publically assumed or alluded to, and that the workers gave them a good learning experience.

Alternatively, a very disgruntled Fu'ad Shallal constantly criticised the Russian presence as backward. An architect by training and technician on the Dam, Fu'ad was persuaded by his family to leave Cairo and come work in Aswan where he was from, all in the name of the national project. Fu'ad 's experience however was a damper on all his ambitions. Having worked on the first phase of the Dam, he despised having to do odd jobs to fill in for lack of work power. He did not like Russian techniques, and felt their machinery and technology was not at all suitable for the climate or kind of work. He viewed them as mostly inefficient.

Fu'ad's account is the closest to the official Russian accounts of work on the Dam, an experience they deemed highly inefficient.

The Russian Side of the Story

According to Elizabeth Bishop's research on Egyptian Engineers and Soviet Specialists in the High Dam (1997), Egyptian engineers were interested in Russian assistance in the form of financial support, technology and certain aspects of Soviet work values. Meanwhile, the Soviet interest was to develop an outpost of Soviet production culture in Egypt.

The aspects of Soviet production culture that interested Egyptian engineers included the development of a new skilled working-class cadre of technicians and specialists. This was motivated in part by the aim of developing a working-class loyal to the regime, and in part by the perceived need to remove an old class of specialists that might be of a different culture or class mentality.

It is interesting to note that it was this new Russian working-class that constituted the majority of specialists in Aswan, thus not only promoting a particular culture, but replicating their own experiences. For,

the Soviet state had promoted Soviet Aswan specialists from the ranks of workers as a means to remove those with pre-revolutionary technical credentials from positions of authority. As promoted workers, they participated in the mass campaign to move production workers into management and training institutions in order to create a new Soviet technical intelligentsia (Bishop 1997, 283).

The same dynamic it seems was at play in Egypt, which accounts for testimonies of the Russians' generosity with knowledge and the training of workers.

Other aspects of the Soviet production culture that interested Egyptian engineers, included the encouragement of a cultured workforce, particularly after meeting with 'cultured' workers in Russia.

Egyptians' meeting with a 'real worker' left them more impressed with such Soviet cultural tropes as the educated every man. Kovalenko gave Hassan Zaki and Musa Arafa¹⁴⁰ a copy of the booklet he'd written...Musa Arafa said he was surprised that a simple laborer could also be an author. Kovalenko enumerated several workers who were published authors, including welder Aleksei Ulesov. The Egyptian visitors were moved by their interview with a worker like Kovalenko to accept many of the claims Soviet production culture made for itself. Musa Arafa asked Kovalenko, "Are you sure you wouldn't like to come to Aswan?" Kovalenko replied, "What the hell, I agree, Mister minister." Several other of the worker-authors that Kovalenko listed for Musa Arafa were later transferred to the High Dam, Egyptian visitors sought to facilitate Soviet production culture's transfer to Egypt by hiring prominent Soviet workers and managers to recreate their successes abroad (Bishop 1997, 150).

Aspects of Soviet production culture, as it existed in Russia, included reliance on Soviet institutions so that extra labour could be brought in from nearby youth camps or prisons, the ability to renegotiate unmet targets, and the capacity of Soviet workers to pull (or be

¹⁴⁰ Hssan Zaki was Chairman of High Dam Authority at the time and Musa Arafa was Minister of Public Works

made to pull) consecutive shifts to 'storm' their goals. These were not available in Egypt however, and without this support system, the Russians faced a production crisis in 1962.

...The High Dam project was a disaster for its first two years. The problem was this: for once, Soviet specialists found that in Egypt, the plan was unforgiving. Egyptian engineers on the study of the long-term cycles in level of Nile Flood, had calculated that the ideal opportunity for diverting the Nile would occur in the Spring of 1964 (Bishop 1997, 283).

Indeed, the Nile flood was to be at a century low level in May of 1964 and this was an opportunity that could not be missed. This goal, non-negotiable by Egyptian experts, was after all, an anticipation of the Nile, a skill particular to the Egyptian specialists.

In a complaint to Interior Minister Zakariyya Mohieldin, Kulev, the Russian Embassy's economic advisor attempted to account for the production crisis through the fact that,

..there wasn't enough skilled labour at the construction site.... As a consequence, Soviet technical specialists were being called to step outside their accustomed professional obligations. Soviet technicians were even working as labourers. Things got to the point that several Soviet engineers got on the drills and did the jobs of roughnecks. This is entirely incorrect from every point of view (Bishop 1997, 233).

This accounts, ironically, for the issue of Russian humility that reappeared throughout the interviews. Perhaps this memory of emulated practice (getting their hands dirty and working across positions) would have been the one most in harmony with the idea of the Dam as an idyllic working environment, and the unified army that was developed to finish working on the Dam before the deadline.

The production crisis did not appear in any of the narratives of workers and technicians, save for the account of Fu'ad Shallal of the Russians' lack of efficiency. While the builders saw the Dam minister Mohammed Sidqi Sulaiman working onsite as further evidence of 'the spirit of the Dam,' it was this very crisis that led to his doing so and to the presence of all high-ranking officials onsite. After the 1962 crisis, Egyptian authorities restructured the project, transferring many of the functions of the Soviet specialists to Egyptian engineers through a private sector bid. Before 1962, the High Dam had been supervised by the

chairman of the High Dam Authority and his boss, the minister of public works. Most importantly however,

A second change was more subtle. In dismissing Soviet technical aid, Egyptian engineers demonstrated that they had recovered from technical insecurity that had dominated their exposition about the Nile since colonialism (Bishop 1997, 239).

It is interesting to note this event, as one of many turning points in the feeling of independence and ownership of the Dam experienced by workers and specialists. However, this, the culturing of workers, and the space for growth and training are credited to the Russians, without experiencing a sense of superiority on their account.

Whether the production crisis and its consequences were intentionally omitted from the builders' narratives because it would discredit the Russians, or were forgotten for a smoother account of a natural spirit of giving and growth on the Dam, is difficult to discern.

Only in Fu'ad Shallal's bitter account of the overall experience of the Dam can an event such as this narrated in Bishops account be traced:

Aswan was no longer an Outpost of Soviet production culture. In preparation for Khrushchev's visit, protocol officers dusted off tokens of Soviet production authority and sprinkled them about the construction site. The Aswan High Dam construction authorities reinstalled Soviet-made machines and tools....creating the façade of Soviet production culture. After the esteemed guests left Aswan, Soviet-made machines and tools returned to their garages, and work continued under Egyptian direction with Swedish drills and English Engines (Bishop 1997, 239).

This is reflected in Fu'ads account:

When they finally realised the Soviets' inefficiencies and decided to hire more specialists and better machinery imported from other countries, they had to hire 'Othman Ahmad 'Othman to do it as a private contractor. Once the

American machinery came in, I would ride those yellow¹⁴¹ beasts and flaunt them everywhere before the stubborn Russians...

One thing for certain, however, is that the Soviets are remembered with much affection as compassionate partners to the building of the Dam. Their hard work was emulated, and their interest in the 'human builder' reproduced. They contributed with whatever of their culture was of interest, and whatever was not, resulted in their being sidelined from the second year onwards.

The lack of mention of such tumultuous circumstances and conditions perhaps served to introduce two perspectives of the Russians that worked on the Dam. One of them as always good and useful as opposed to another, as in the case of Fu'ad Shallal; always inefficient and backward.

However, they were certainly remembered by both sides with compassion. Although most workers had a story with a Russian specialist to demonstrate this compassion, one that was particularly emotionally and vividly recounted, was that of Abu Dayf,¹⁴² a driller, and his '*sadīq*' (friend) 'Alexie'.¹⁴³

Each of us had a Russian person they were working with, and 'Alexie was the man I was dealing with. 'Alexie was a beautiful man. He used to listen to me and if he got upset with me he'd say, 'go away!' And I would not go back to him. Much later I would return to work with him; he'd smile at me and say '*sadīq tamām*' (you're a good friend).

One day during the first phase, I was working using a larger drill with an extended cable. And a truck drove over the cable, sweeping it into the puddles of water underneath us, and spreading the electricity through it. Five or six of us were pulled into the water by the current and shaken up and down uncontrollably.

Then someone came in, shoved us with sticks, breaking the current and we all dropped to the ground. They took us to the hospital, and the doctor looked at

¹⁴¹ Fu'ad remembers the new American vehicles as being yellow.

¹⁴² Abu Dayf, worker, currently retired. Interview by author. Al-Sad Sharq 2010

¹⁴³ Alexie's name was pronounced so that it sounded close to 'Ali. This 'Arabisation' of Russian names and words was not only to make pronunciation easier but perhaps as a gesture of acceptance

us and asked one question: 'Where did these people come from?' And someone said, 'the tunnels.' The doctor said, 'then put them in five boxes' (Our caskets!)

But then 'Alexie came running in, and he found me lying on the floor, with the others. He lifted my chin, and realised I was still alive. He called the doctor and when the doctor insisted there was no hope, dragged him over to see that I was alive. The doctor came, gave me an injection in my back, and I came to life!

'Alexie swung me over his back and took me out of the hospital; the doctors kept shouting "Leave him!" But he took me home, where I spent a month recovering. Had it not been for my friend 'Alexie, I would have been dead like the others.

4.4 A Critical Consciousness

4.4.1 *Negotiating the Dead*

Al-marhūm kān ghaltān

The deceased was at fault

High Dam Idiom

This Dam was built with the bodies of its martyrs

Um Mirvat 2010

The first time I heard the phrase '*al-marhūm kān ghaltān*' was when an electrical engineer¹⁴⁴ who worked for two years on the Dam recounted, with amusement, that it was said that this was inscribed on the caskets of people who died on the Dam. When I inquired, alarmed, into what the phrase really meant, he reassured me it was just an idiom and naturally was never really inscribed on people's caskets.

Not a single interview proceeded without a story (or a few) of accidents, sometimes in the most vivid, if not gory, detail. The phrase '*al-marhūm kān ghaltān*' was uttered sometimes to explain that the dead were really at fault, to mention the inscription on the casket or to refer to how hazardous a decade it was for Aswan. If I inquired, however, into

¹⁴⁴ Hassanain Rabi', Electrical Engineer 1967 – 1969. Interview by author. Cairo 2009

whether or not the phrase was really inscribed on caskets, I was brushed off with the assurance that it was just an idiom.

The attitude towards this phrase can be understood as metaphoric for the deaths as well as many other aspects of the Dam's memories. Almost an inadvertent memory, they could not help but remember such an idiom; it somehow encapsulated the experience and sentiment towards it. However, once thought was dedicated to it, it seemed to contradict the general fabric of the memory, and was thus omitted.

The phrase implied that the death was the mistake of the deceased himself, as if the High Dam were relieving itself of any responsibility. In this section, I explore stories of the dead as they were recounted, and what their significance was to the overall memories of the Dam, in other words, how the deaths were dealt with in this highly idealised experience.

It is difficult to determine exactly how many people died building the Dam. In the interviews it was indicated as something that happened frequently. In the words of 'Abd al-Sami' 'Abd al-Bassit, a driver on the Dam,

A dozen caskets on the train each day; with '*al-marhūm kān ghaltān*' inscribed over them. On a daily basis there were accidents.

Otherwise, in many interviews the single indication of scale was that 'thousands of people died.'

The most tragic stories were those of complete shifts that died at once.¹⁴⁵ In some, they were on account of collapsing tunnels, in others unexploded dynamite left by one shift exploded, erasing the following shift. It is difficult to ascertain how many shifts died as such.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Shifts ranged from eight to seventy people – the number was smaller when reported by officials and higher amongst workers.

¹⁴⁶ Save for these stories and records kept by families of the deceased or their neighbours in the compound, I was unable to trace any records of deaths in the archives of the High Dam authority in Aswan, which held only technical plans and documents. Dam archives held by the state are reputed to be otherwise unprocessed and thus inaccessible. However I did not receive permission into the archives in time to research for myself

Deaths were accounted for by a number of causes, most commonly the workers' inexperience with machinery, dangerous conditions, being overworked, and often, even excitement. The lack of experience and dangerous conditions were justified by the fact that people mainly died because they were not accustomed to tools and techniques they were dealing with. So, for instance according to technician Mohammed 'Uthman,

...there were people who hung from ropes, chipping at the mountain, sometimes they would get sleepy and fall to their deaths... Before they blew up a tunnel, they would let a warning siren out, but some people were so naïve, they didn't understand what the sirens meant, so they used to get completely blasted into the rocks and disappear.

'Uthman's uses the term *'ala sagiyya* (naïveté); a term associated with *fallahīn* and evokes a certain kind of naïveté associated with lack of exposure to the world. As such, it was the *fallahīn*'s ignorance that was to account for the deaths, relieving management of any responsibility.

In other accounts of fatal accidents, ropes that lowered cliffhangers tore or workers would wedge dynamites between rocks in an attempt to blast them, but not be pulled up quick enough. Drivers would overload trucks when moving debris from one area to another, and the truck would flip backwards or sideways, or fall into the Nile. More often than not, this is depicted as the fault of the worker, victim to his own inexperience. This is also true of the many people who died falling asleep as they worked. The terror of facing such a fate, is clear from the accounts of various ways the night-shift workers used to stay awake.

Tunnels appear to be where most of the accidents happened. Besides the collapsing tunnels, there were also various incidents of electrocution. The combination of water, cables and equipment, proved fatal on various occasions. Work in the tunnels continued even throughout electricity cuts and blackouts.

In the Russian oral history accounts, however, fatalities are treated differently. That workers were not alerted to safety regulations was highly criticised in the accounts of the Russian specialists.

As Bishop relates in her study on the High Dam's Egyptian engineers and Russian specialists,

Kulev blamed the Egyptian side for work-related accidents on the construction site when he complained that Egyptian political restrictions kept Soviets from implementing safety measures: 'This year there have already occurred three fatal accidents. Now the Soviet side is prepared to communicate its experiences in the field of supervision and work safety...these posters are completely unpolitical.' At this point, the meeting transcript notes that Zakariya Mohiiddin laughed (Bishop 1997, 234-235).

Apart from working with unfamiliar machinery in dangerous conditions and being overworked, another cause of death is said to be the workers' excitement. Most of these stories relate either to Nasser's visits or the day the Nile was diverted. In one common story, a worker climbed an electricity box to raise a banner welcoming Nasser, and got electrocuted, frigid with his arms raised. They waited till the visit ended, cut the electricity source and brought the man down.

On the day the flow of the Nile was diverted, many workers, engineers and researchers moved too close to the banks of the gushing Nile and were pulled under. In other cases where warning systems failed to protect people from the Nile, William Shinuda, a geologist who performed initial research for the Dam in the 1950s, related that two of his researchers were pulled under due to an unexpected gush by the Nile.

In Russian reports in Bishop's study;

The ceremonies marking major events in the construction were especially likely to witness fatal accidents. Fatalities didn't just occur by accident; they were a consequence of the excitement workers experienced at construction events. At the closing of the Nile in 1964, Egyptian manual laborers crowded to the edges of the fill, balancing ladders from one bank...toward similar ladders balanced from the other bank so as to be the first bridging the gap in this haphazard, dangerous way (Bishop 1997, 267).

The significance of these stories lies primarily in the way deaths were remembered. People often got emotional whilst recalling events but there was an emphasis on how it was necessary that work continue unaffected. Some interviewees claimed that every worker had at least one relative or good friend that died in such an accident. They would

either wrap the body and ensure it was sent home, or in some accounts they took the bodies home themselves.

No one mentioned compensation unless I asked about it, and the answer was usually, 'of course we did', but none of my interviewees had a clear idea of the amount.¹⁴⁷

Sometimes casualties were mentioned only to emphasise how work went on despite the tragedies. The dead were remembered as though they were casualties of war, citing idioms associated with war, such as 'every battle has its losses.' At other times, references to martyrdom and mythical accounts of deaths were made, accentuating a certain heroic rhetoric that was very particular to these memories. The collapse of tunnels and 'crumbling of mountains' were made to sound colossal. Whether the Russians understated the issue, or the workers overstated the accidents is hard to say. In either case, it was often difficult to ascertain the numbers who died after an accident, as in the experience of crane driver 'Abd al-Karim.

An extension was being built, and then in a rumble, it fell apart. People didn't want to go there for fear of seeing the number of people who died. I sat on the earth-mover; we pulled the bodies and limbs in heaps and loaded the cars. And the ambulances took the people that were salvageable; It took six days to get people out...¹⁴⁸

Few were the instances where such a 'glitch' in the overall narrative of these glorious times were acknowledged. With the exception of a few interviewees who were critical of the period and Nasser in general, most people refused to separate from the experience enough to recount it objectively.

Perhaps this grew out of the need to glorify a very personal experience. This was true of the deaths, the insistence that they happened like any war-casualty, or the incidents recalled with much grandeur to justify the casualties as a necessity.

¹⁴⁷ Some guessed it was around eight pounds a month, others a lump sum of 25 pounds. No one could ascertain, but cited figures were low.

¹⁴⁸ 'Abd al-Karim 'Abd al-Karim, crane driver, currently retired. Interview by Walid Hussain and Mahmud al-'Adawi (HMLC). Video recording. Aswan 2009

It was also true, however, of the mention of a box of whips that was used on the construction site, referred to in a number of interviews. The whips immediately disappeared when they were inquired into. Like the story of the casket inscriptions, they made an appearance in narratives like a detail in the picture, but as I asked about them, they were taken aback.

In one interview, a worker explained that the whips were there for animals, but workers automatically assumed they were for them, being familiar with the conditions of building the Aswan reservoir in 1902, where whips were, in fact, used. Another account related how the use of whips was suggested to Nasser, but that he said that the Egyptian workers simply needed incentives, financial or otherwise, not whips, and they were removed. And in a final account, that they intended to use whips but realised that workers were so dedicated that they were not needed.

Though the stories are all told with much conviction and are convincing, the question is always why the box of whips appeared in the conversations in the first place, especially that I never inquired about it and especially that no one reported having been beaten. And why '*al-marhūm kān ghaltān*' a simple phrase laden with so much meaning is mentioned, if it will be clumsily taken back as soon as attention is drawn to it.

Perhaps it is these slips that tell more about the Dam, and their avoidance that tell more about the nature of the builders' memories. For like the unexploded dynamite that is wedged between the rocks, they lie dormant, but threaten to explode all. And perhaps what is at stake, is their current state of being, which albeit sad, hinges on a necessary history of glory.

4.4.2 Criticism of the Dam and its Signifier

Although the general sentiment amongst builders towards Nasser was one of gratitude and appreciation, particularly for opportunities for mobility or education, there was also a critical consciousness across ranks and positions. In this section I explore what Nasser meant to the builders of the Dam, not only in terms of their appreciation of him, but also in terms of their ability to criticise him, and how with his death, their 'era' also elapsed.

Considering Nasser as a worker, builders made repeated reference to the fact that he made frequent visits to the workspace. Countless, possibly mythical, stories were told of finding Nasser in a tunnel during a nightshift, or working alongside the others in working boots and a helmet. Some people professed that his coming was a *'īd* (feast) because it meant up to 15 days of bonus pay.

Others emphasise how motivating his presence was, by recognising their work and reacting to them. Common were the stories of workers who went to get their monthly pay and found an unexpected bonus on account of their work ethic or productivity levels. It changed the way they valued themselves as workers; there was now 'entitlement.'

Not all sentiments towards Nasser were so positive, however. Although there was the occasional criticism of his rule; there were a few interviewees who made the same criticisms far more openly and explicitly.

For example, Fu'ad Shallal, the technician who was bitter about wasting his life working on the Dam, claims that he spits on it as he walks by every morning. His criticism of Nasser is that he stood by the Russians for political reasons, overlooking the technical capacity for producing a more efficient Dam and the possibility of finding more state of the art techniques. He laments becoming a worker and neglecting his craft as an architect, of which he was one of the first graduating classes in Egypt.

Kawthar al-Subki, the head of the chemistry lab and only woman who worked onsite, is equally critical of Nasser. In her words,

His focus was on making political statements, on ensuring that we were fit to compete on international standards and levels. That he could prove to everyone that he could do it, neglecting internal affairs. What no one knows for instance is that he proceeded with the plan to divert the Nile in May of 1964, despite warnings by Russian specialists and others that this was not a good idea. As a result a number of the tunnels collapsed right after the

diversion. The damage was salvageable, but was a prime example of his priorities.¹⁴⁹

Criticism of the Dam as a project, although popular after 1970 through the work of (Waterbury 1979; Moore 1980; Goldsmith 1984) and others, was at the time rare.

This was not only because the criticism may have been suppressed by the regime, but at a time when the Dam was such a symbol of nation-building and patriotism, criticizing it could be viewed as a sign of treachery. For, in the words of John Waterbury;

The political decision (to build a dam) frequently embodies a symbolic package that is designed to catch people's imagination at home and abroad, to arouse the populace, to set collective goals and thus to find in motivational terms a substitute for war. This is an atmosphere fundamentally inhospitable to the niggling of conscientious technocrats who may be seen as front-men, witting or unwitting for the regime's enemies. Their sincerity will be in question.

(For) who would publicly stand up today to question the wisdom of sowing the desert with new cities or trying to make the Sinai green and populous? (Waterbury 1979, 247)

Lack of criticism can be seen as an inability on the part of technicians to be seen as opponents of the project. 'Ali Fathi 'Abd al-Basit, a professor and researcher on the Dam at the time explains

It became clear that competent technicians in government circles were collectively determined to overlook any signs of the deterioration of soil fertility . . . even as a hypothesis. This was the result of what might be called 'the High Dam Covenant', a psychological state born of political and other circumstances which has cloaked the project from its very inception ('Abd al-Basit 1976, 50-51).¹⁵⁰

Other criticisms of the Dam were of the process of building itself. One powerful criticism was that of 'Abd al-Halim Ahmad,¹⁵¹ a labourer on the Dam from the beginning to end of

¹⁴⁹ Kawthar al-Subki, chemist, currently retired. Interview by author, Cairo 2010

¹⁵⁰ Cited from (Waterbury 1979, 116)

¹⁵¹ 'Abd al-Halim Ahmad. Labourer, Interview by author. Al-Sadd Sharq 2010

his career. 'Abd al-Halim uses the same theme of being part of a historical continuum that most builders saw as a source of pride as the basis of his critique.

'Abd al-Halim's great-grandmother was enslaved in digging the Suez canal; she was made to dig with her hands and perished doing it. His father later worked on the Aswan Reservoir with the British and the Germans. Here he compares their experiences:

When the nationalisation of the Canal took place [in 1956] and all the British and Germans working on the reservoir disappeared, they were replaced by clueless Egyptian engineers. Things were a mess. But we knew that this was a time of Revolution and a time of freedom. So two of my colleagues and I got a potato sack and proceeded to write a letter: To Gamal 'Abdel Nasser, Manshiyyit al-Bakri, Heliopolis, Cairo. We described to him how poor the management was and asked him to return the international staff, otherwise we wouldn't get anywhere. In a matter of two days, my two friends had disappeared. I knew of the expression 'disappeared behind the sun' and so I ran away and applied for work at the Dam, where I knew I wouldn't be found. So how much more freedom has the Revolution granted me than my father or great-grandmother?

'Abd al-Halim's experience resonates with a number of stories, both those that are anecdotal and those that are more complete. Abulmajd Abulwafa, whose fondness of the Revolution and socialism, had him leave his village and family behind and seek a better self-educated life in Cairo, struggled to make sense of political events. He was flung into deep confusion when President Nagib¹⁵² was removed in 1954 and replaced by Nasser.

Allah¹⁵³ ... what did this mean? Wasn't Nagib the champion of the Revolution; and wasn't this Revolution supposed to end tyranny and control? With that, I head to Cairo. If there was going to be a revolt against Nasser to bring back Nagib, I would join it.

Abulmajd's move to Cairo meant enlisting in the 1956 war and eventually moving to the Dam and climbing the career ladder despite his minimal education. He was full of praise

¹⁵² Mohammed Nagib was made the 'face' of the Revolutionary Council and president in 1952, only to be removed and replaced by Nasser in 1954.

¹⁵³ An expression of wonder or confusion.

for all that he had studied about socialism, and the opportunity granted for him to become an electrician.

When, towards the end of the interview, I returned to the issue of Nagib's removal, he seemed to have an (in)coherent justification for it. At the time, Abulmajd explained, the issue of dealing with Israel was on the horizon, and Nasser having been involved in the battle of Fallujah, was best to lead, that was why they had to fire Nagib. He admitted, however, that this made of the Revolution a dictatorship.

The idea of the Revolution's dictatorship was in major contradiction with much of what Abulmajd preached about, both in terms of socialism as an ideology that he ascribed to, and Nasser's rule as democratic. When I asked about this, Abulmajd shrugged and suggested, "I don't know why he did this.. perhaps it was necessary at the time."

Whether the intended audience of this confused account was me or himself was difficult to ascertain. This self-learned highly politicized man, who played a role in propagating the values of Arab socialism amongst builders, knew very well the meanings of words, such as 'dictatorship' that he tried so hard to dilute.

Few articulated their sentiments in an analysis of Nasser's character as did 'Abd al-Halim, the labourer:

There's no denying that Nasser was a great man, of charisma, and a dreamer who communicated these dreams well. Nasser would have made a great coach, or a preacher maybe, but a president, or a manager of the affairs of this country? Certainly not.

Nasser's Death – the End of an Era

Many of the builders' accounts of Nasser's death characterised it as 'the blackest day in history' and several interviewees described it as an event far more difficult than the deaths of their own fathers or family members. Nasser's death, like everything was as personal as it was public, for it signified an end to them too. "When Nasser died," many workers explained "all our dreams died with him."

The death of the dreams of the Dam's builders is both figurative and literal. Hassan Aswanli, who was in Russia earning a higher diploma at the time of Nasser's death, described the day in Russia, where all transport was stopped, and for one minute the entire city came to a halt in mourning. He was as sad as he was proud, for Nasser had made them figures of international worth. Now however, after his diploma he was to return to Cairo; the workers' university project (for which he was studying to help set up) was no longer relevant and thus neither was a degree for him.

With the death of Nasser; the Dam was inaugurated in 1971 without him and without Sidqi Sulaiman, the venerable (ex) minister of the Dam. The Russians were soon asked to leave and the workers were left to retire, stripped of all benefits and subsidies they had been entitled to. The days of the Dam elapsed, the stature it granted them vanished, and its prospects for their futures dissipated, as did their chances at travelling over Egypt and the Arab world, replicating the experience.

4.5 Conclusion

Al-sadd baladī

The Dam is my country

High Dam Idiom

It's different now. They can come and break the door down if we don't pay the electricity bill... even though we dedicated our whole lives to [this project]. We are third-rate citizens, now. We are retired 'workers.' Workers, I tell you, what else can we expect.

Yahya 'Abd al-Mon'im 2009¹⁵⁴

With the end of 1970, and the last phases of the building of the Dam, the death of Nasser, and accession of Sadat, and the many changes that ensued, the workers felt themselves devalued from having been builders of the Dam to workers or civil servants. With the advent of Mubarak's era, and the complete collapse of the socialist rhetoric and significance of the Dam as a feat, the 'workers' were left in their decaying houses, in compounds that had become slum areas.

This, their current context, compounded with the propaganda leaflets of the 1960s they are left with, and the great propaganda machine that the Dam signified a large part of at the time, made their memories of the Dam, highly nostalgic.

The rhetoric of the time propagated by Nasser's speeches, and the revolutionary songs that boomed through the country's radios, propagated pride in the recurring image of the builders of the Dam, who once *fallahīn*, had become workers. The rhetoric also made the Dam emblematic of the struggle against imperialism, one 'we had to win to prove our capacity' to be self-sufficient.

Thus it may be argued that the way many of the builders' expressed experiences and memory of the Dam continues to be significantly affected by the Nasserist framing of

¹⁵⁴ Yahya 'Abd al-Mun'im, started as technician and became garage treasurer. Interview by Walid Hussain and Mahmud al-'Adawi, HMLC. Video recording. Aswan2009

their identities and the project. To put this down to effective ‘propaganda,’ however, would be greatly underestimating, both the project, and the builders’ experiences.

Nasser’s ideas appealed directly to the aspirations and ambitions of the builders on a personal, communal, and national level. His ideas were hegemonic because people could relate to them and they answered a desire for freedom and growth. This is in part what lies behind the builders’ sense of agency towards the Dam and prestige in being part of it. How, however, can we make sense of the fact that experiences as bitter as the deaths, and the box of whips, contradictory to the overall glory of the experience, are so willingly overlooked?

In his study of the Magnetic Mountain project in Stalinist Russia mentioned in the introduction, Stephen Kotkin describes this belief in an idea and willingness to ignore facts in contradiction with it as a ‘revolutionary truth.’

In that sense, people were mobilised by their belief in this ‘revolutionary truth’ and their ability and willingness to contribute to it. Yet it is their very sense of agency in the Dam that made them critical of Nasser and his policies at times. Though the builders may have been willing to suspend disbelief, the image of the caskets with the inscriptions and the box of whips were never far from their glorious memories.

Rhetoric of the Dam building the ‘modern man’ and a new class (possibly loyal to the new regime) was not very foreign to the propaganda behind the building of big dams, particularly those built in post-colonialist contexts.¹⁵⁵ However, even when such rhetoric was appropriated by the builders, it tended to be fragile as I will further elaborate.

Notions of the creation of new classless communities resonated amongst Dam builders, evident even in their use of the term ‘builders of the Dam’ referring to workers, technicians and engineers alike. However, while they spoke of becoming a homogeneous

¹⁵⁵ See particularly literature on Dams built amongst Bandung countries in the 1950s and 1960s; Akosombo Dam in Ghana (1952-1966) (Miescher and Tsikata 2009-2010), Kuroyon Dam in Japan (1956-1963) (O’Byrne 2009), Karaj Dam in Iran (1957-1961) (Schayegh 2012). Similar rhetoric on modernity, independence, and a particularly masculine rhetoric

community composed of Upper Egyptians, Nubians and *fallahīn*, idioms and jokes within each group belied a sense of superiority or deep distrust.

Furthermore, the egalitarian community that the Dam was meant to promote was hampered by the very structures associated with the Dam. Labourers who came to work at the Dam from its inception lived in shacks, sometimes without shelter, under conditions that did not allow for families or spouses to join them until the end of the first phase in 1964. Meanwhile, technicians and engineers lived in well-built compounds with sophisticated facilities and services, such as sports clubs, which more than fifty years later remain in good condition. A hierarchal or class structure was thus embedded into the very living conditions this 'community' shared.

Although most workers¹⁵⁶ I interviewed throughout my research had experienced some sort of upward mobility or other, others, such as 'Abd al-Halim and 'Abd al-'Azim, remained labourers from start to end. Workers who did not make it up the social ladder had much less to say about the glory of the experience of building the Dam.

It seems thus that the Dam was built almost equally, for the new class of technicians it would create, as it was for the people who would finally benefit from its electricity and control of floods. This class of technicians would spread the vibe of triumph, economic independence, and high modernity throughout Egypt, becoming representatives of the Revolution in their villages and communities.

Workers whose mobility was limited, and women whose chances of work were also limited were less able to speak of a glory as grandiose. Perhaps the grooming was focused on those whose voices would continue to reach other citizens, the media, and even researchers.

Still, no matter to what extent the builders believed and invested in the glory, there was also a critical consciousness maintained across class and position. Whether it was an

¹⁵⁶ Half of my interviewees started their work on the Dam as labourers

ability to be critical of the project, or the man behind it, this critical consciousness stemmed from their sense of agency working on the Dam and sense of ownership of it.

For the Aswan High Dam as a project may have been attributed to Nasser's person, but the Dam as a cause, became its builders'.

Chapter 5. ‘Nuba Niri’ – What it Means to be Nubian. Identity, Sacrifice and Dam Building through Nubian Lyrics

5.1 Introduction

And here we are, oh mother; and all we have left of you are our names,
Our memories, our tears and our songs,
Our memories ebb and flow,
Now rising within us, now throwing us off
And at the end of it all, we finally settled before the Dam,
Ask not and say ‘Happy?’
For you’ll find no answer.
Ay the prosperity, nay the heartache, mother

‘Abd al-Rahman al-Abnudi, *Radd jawāb min shāb min shabāb al Nūba wa ‘ilayha* (Conversation between a young Nubian and his deserted land) 1970¹⁵⁷

With the aim of exploring the building of the High Dam through the experience of workers in Aswan who survived it, my stay in Nubia was intended merely as a retreat. Arriving on the fiftieth anniversary of the start of work on the High Dam on January 9 2010, news of my research spread throughout the Matukī¹⁵⁸ village of Gharb Suhail. It was not until I was approached by people who had been displaced by the Dam, or whose parents or grandparents had been displaced, that I felt the need to document the stories that these people were in effect demanding be heard. For the story of the building of the Dam could not be told without the stories of those who consciously made the greatest sacrifice for its construction– their own homes and livelihoods.

Although written by an Upper Egyptian poet, the above poem reflects the contradictory consciousness I traced amongst Nubians encountered during my research; simultaneously bitter about being moved by the High Dam, while continuing to sing its praise. Convinced of the need to build the Dam, they are supportive of Nasser and optimistic about their

¹⁵⁷ Al-Abnudi spent time with both Nubians and workers on the Dam and wrote poetry to reflect their plights and personal stories, recording a ‘popular history’ of the High Dam. This poem is from a worker-published publication by (and amongst) workers called ‘Al-Sadd’ (The High Dam). (Al-Abnudi 1970)

¹⁵⁸ Nubian villagers are either Matukī-speakers of the Kanzī language (predominantly north of the High Dam), or Fadjikī (once south of the Dam but relocated when it was built) who speak Fadjikī

move. However the dismal conditions to which they were subjected pulls against their support.

Through song, this chapter traces Nubians' relationship to the Revolution and the High Dam. It explores how they made sense of participating in the wars they were pulled into and how they remembered the (forced) migration, as well as the rhetoric used to describe the events, and the emotions associated with them. This chapter raises questions about the ambiguities of hegemony and the contradictions of consent. The Nasserist hegemony was one the Nubians embraced, personalised and contributed to, rather than simply donned, in a similar way to how the workers on the High Dam related to the cause (of building the Dam) as their own.

According to Timothy Jackson Lears in his work on cultural hegemony, "consent for Gramsci involves a complex mental state, a 'contradictory consciousness' mixing approbation and apathy, resistance and resignation"(Lears 1985, 569). This chapter will explore these dynamics using lyrics through which this period was experienced, remembered, and often structured and justified.

Songs for Nubians are a culture of practice and not simply entertainment, even more widely so than was the case in Port Said (Chapter 3), while issues of masculinity associated with songs for dam builders (Chapter 4) were certainly not prevalent in Nubia. Singers had the role of making historical instances memorable, lifting peoples' morale, educating about life and politics, and committing events and experiences to lyrical memory. Song is also a practice at home as a means of maintaining a language increasingly neglected by a younger generation, and is part of the celebratory tradition associated with events such as weddings, engagements, births and circumcisions.

Singers are organic intellectuals in the sense that they play a role in "directing the ideas and aspirations" (Gramsci 1971, 3) of the communities to which they belong, facilitating the communities' conceptions, perceptions and interpretations of the world around them, and their attitudes towards it. Singers are thus revered as sources of history and cultural memory. When looking for songs, I was always initially directed towards such 'sources', before I was able to get a few songs out of respondents themselves.

The songs I have collected are mainly songs that were sung before the Dam was built, in preparation for it, raising awareness of its benefits; and songs that were sung as people were moving, in the ships that transported them. The latter were usually stories, whereas those sung during the construction of the Dam take leave of the song-singing traditions that are typical to these Nubians cultures, and somewhat resemble the 'revolutionary' songs transmitted at the time through the radio.

A talented poet or orator, is expressed as one who can create the spaces to improvise to make a song relevant to a particular context. In Upper Egypt, for example, popular stories (epics) that are told and re-told are used to make hidden analogies to political situations. These stories and analogies can only be understood by the community that knows the language, puns and stories, thus creating and reinforcing an *entre-nous* as well as a language, culture and realm that is specific to that community.

Since the song is changeable and flexible, it is listened to intently every time because it might be telling a different story, possibly one that only the existing group at that particular point in time can understand. Thus the audience play as important a role in the unraveling of the story, and the emotional state evoked by the song, as does the singer¹⁵⁹. This of course introduced the challenge that I rarely heard the same song performed exactly the same way twice, and brought with it all anxieties of authenticity¹⁶⁰. With time however, I was able to understand the essence of the song and its original context, and become more familiar with the coded language; the idioms, weighted sayings and 'populated'¹⁶¹ terms as I will elaborate upon in coming sections.

This changeability of these songs puts them in sharp contrast to the revolutionary songs of 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz and Umm Kulthum that were playing on radios throughout villages, especially during the 1960s. These songs sang the story of the Revolution and spread the

¹⁵⁹Ali Jihad Racy explores this relationship between singer and audience – how singers are co-authors of songs and not just passive recipients – in the introduction to his book on the culture and artistry of tarab (2003).

¹⁶⁰This was overcome, insofar as it can be, by living with a host family and thus hearing the song from at least two or three different people.

¹⁶¹This is in reference to Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of language as never being free of intention, and rather being 'overpopulated' with it.

nationalist consciousness articulated by the state. I will explore how this idea of nationalism was *adopted* as ‘common sense’ through these Nubian songs.

I thus consider Nubian popular songs that include elements of the revolutionary songs, exploring a struggle over identity. The struggle takes the form of how the communities choose to see themselves vis-à-vis the Revolution, how they justify the hardships imposed on them and how they chose to become a part of the Revolution. An exploration of these songs thus reveals a hegemonic struggle; how the Nubians wish to represent themselves, versus who the state dictates nationalist citizens to be.

If popular culture is a ‘theatre’ where “we discover and play with the identification of ourselves...where we are represented, not only to the audiences out there who do not get the message but for ourselves for the first time” (Hall 2005, 474), then in this light, I explore, through this chapter, how the Nubians fared under the hegemony of the microphone, how they identified with, and in spite of, the revolutionary identities propagated through songs and speeches on the radio. I look at how they ascribed to the revolutionary rhetoric, when they might have been expected resist it, and where the contradictory consciousness prevailed. Finally, I will then turn my attention to ‘dissident’ songs that were prohibited by the Egyptian government at the time, and the contrasting sentiments with which the same period is remembered by a later generation.

I have collected 25 songs relevant to the period and remembered by most Nubians I interviewed (committed only to memory, not recorded), and a little over forty songs that have been recorded, most of which are in the Kanzī and Fadjikī¹⁶² languages and a few in Arabic. Though I lived with a host family in the (unmigrated) village of Tinjar, west of the Dam, I collected songs from the migrated Fadjikī villages of Abu Simbel and Balana in Komombo, as well as the unmigrated Matukī villages of Gharb Suhail and Tinjar, through second-generation migrants. These songs were collected through twenty in depth interviews with Nubians living in all of the above villages as well as Cairo and

¹⁶² Matukī villages speak Kanzī, and Fadjikī (villages that were migrated with the building of the) speak Fadjikī

Alexandria, having been migrated from the villages of Dabud, Abu Simbel, Balana, Qustul and Toshka.

Although there is much literature on Nubians during the period of migration, much of this is focused on archeological missions documenting Nubian artifacts and traditions before the move; focusing on 'the heritage and not the people' as is often quipped by Nubian respondents. Literature that does focus on the effect of the move (Fahim 1973, 1981, 1983; Fernea and Kennedy 1966; Hopkins and Mehanna 2010) however is focused too much on the 'pros' and 'cons' of the move and portrays Nubians as subjects or victims, rather than people who might have had a say or an opinion on moving. Finally Elizabeth Bishop (2001) produced a research paper for the Forced Migration and Refugee Studies unit at the American University in Cairo, focused on the politics of the narratives of migration of Nubians who live in Cairo. Although this presents a very interesting perspective, I have focused my contribution on the experience of Nubians who continued to live in Nubia, their experiences during and after migration and how they justify their decision/agreement to move.

5.2 The Nubian Story of the High Dam - Dissecting a Unified Narrative

The ground of all culture is the spontaneous philosophy absorbed and shaped by each individual.

(Lears 1985, 589)

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of researching the 1960s, and most particularly the Nubian recollection of the period, is the thickness of the context that must be penetrated. In the case of the Nubians, it is not the nostalgia towards a 'glorious era' that needs to be penetrated, rather the specificity of their own context, culture, or worldview. With time and over several interviews, I was able to detect the general, or common 'narrative' through the unified idioms and sayings that were used to describe, account for, and quite often justify, their migration. These phrases were an agreed upon encapsulation or interpretation of history that was both rational, or made to become rational, as well as sentimental. It was nonetheless a top-most layer that needed to be penetrated.

It is important to take note of the idioms and phrases that constitute these layers of justification and rationale for several reasons. The first is because many of them draw upon the revolutionary rhetoric in the songs that propagated the constructs of the Revolution. The mirroring of this rhetoric signifies the communities' consent to the Revolution; its projects and policies; or at least the intention to explicitly declare consent. This layer includes their justification of why they agreed to move in the first place and the ways they managed to spare Nasser the responsibility of the conditions to which they were moved.

It is a layer, where private consciousness or memory, overlaps with, or draws upon, the public discourse, and rhetoric or rationale promoted by the Revolution. It was important to understand this in order to be able to dig deeper towards a more personal memory or space where this intersection was either contested, or more deeply accepted and adopted.

This relates to Gramsci's aforementioned idea of 'spontaneous philosophy', a philosophy contained in

“1. Language itself...a totality of determined notions and concepts and not just of words grammatically devoid of content; 2. Common sense (conventional wisdom)... 3....in the entire system of beliefs, superstitions, opinions, ways of seeing things and of acting which are collectively bundled together under the name of 'folklore' (Gramsci 1971, 323).

The language, the common sense, and the ways of collective seeing and reflection, will be further explored through the idioms and sayings in both interviewees' narratives and the songs themselves.

As in the case of Aswan and Port Said, there was more often than not an emphasis amongst interviewees that the context of the Dam and ensuing migration be better understood before I delved into the songs; “otherwise you wouldn't understand.” For Nubians there was not only the language barrier (songs were in the Kanzi and Fadjiki languages), but also the constant insistence that songs could never be translated into Arabic, only at best explained. More than that, I was told that I could not understand

what the 1964 migration meant, without understanding the history of Nubian migration(s) during the building and heightening of the Aswan reservoir (1902, 1912 and 1933) and the villages' relationship with the Nile.

On the basis of these enjoiners, I had weekly meetings with 'Am 'Izbi,¹⁶³ a folk singer in Gharb Suhail in his seventies who helped me understand the basics of Matukī and Fadjikī languages, as well as the history of migration of the area. 'Izbi was himself a high-school graduate specialized in tourism, and regarded as a cultural encyclopedia of sorts in Gharb Suhail and beyond. A range of interviews started with an attempt to furnish some background on "what it meant to be Nubian," or what the songs meant, before my interview continued. There was thus, as always, the emphasis on 'educating' me, first¹⁶⁴.



Figure 5-1: In 'class' with 'am Izbi¹⁶⁵.

The story of the 1964 migration, briefly, was that the building of the High Dam would have resulted in the inundation of the Nubian villages behind it. Thus, in the years of 1961-64 around 50,000 Nubians from 33 villages were (informed and) 'migrated'¹⁶⁶ to

¹⁶³ Mohammed 'Abd al-Bassit, known as 'Izbi. Retired tour guide and singer. Interview by author. Gharb Suhail 2010. See Appendix 2 for biographies of all interviewees

¹⁶⁴ This included taking a boat trip behind the to visit inundated lands, where each village and its degree of submersion was identified. The reservoir behind the where the villages are submerged is called "Lake Nasser", even though it was promised to the Nubians as "Lake Nubia", it was named after Nasser upon his death.

¹⁶⁵ Photo by Hoda Barakah

¹⁶⁶ The terms used for the move were 'tahjīr' (migration) by the generation of the Nubians who were moved, 'tahjīr 'ijbarī' (forced migration) by second generation Nubians critical of (or bitter about) the move, and "i'adit tawtin'

territories allocated to them north of the Dam, around 50km north of Aswan (Fahim 1973, 483). These lands, in Komombo, are remembered as barren, arid and inaccessible to the Nile. This was the biggest calamity for a people whose economic, cultural and psychological subsistence depended on the Nile. Furthermore the housing conditions were poor, and houses were made for immediate families while elders or widowers were to live alone, which did not fit with Nubian traditions of living in extended family quarters.

What follows is an amalgamation of the story of the 1964 migration as it was recalled and narrated to me,¹⁶⁷ by various interviewees who had themselves migrated, or who were children and grandchildren of migrants.

According to a story that was recollected by most respondents and a piece of information that cannot be officially verified, Gamal 'Abdel Nasser and a few members of the Revolutionary Council, called for a meeting with a council of Nubian elders at the time that the decision to 'relocate' the Nubians was being considered. During this meeting, Nasser sought their opinions as to whether they would like to be moved north or south of the Dam, and they requested north. One of the members of the Revolutionary Council recommended that the Nubians integrate with the rest of Egypt and be relocated throughout the country. Nasser reportedly heroically refused, with a noble statement about the distinct Nubian identity and heritage, which is to be respected and nourished.

News of the move was disseminated through schools and a mobile cinema that 'came to town.' The news highlighted promises of 'civilisational' benefits not previously available to them such as water-taps, electricity generated by the Dam, and access to better education. This thrilled the younger generation at the time (people up to their 20s and

(resettlement) by government documents. I use 'migration' here in an attempt to stick to the rhetoric I will further explore throughout the chapter.

¹⁶⁷ I draw upon eight narratives of people who were migrated from Dabud, Qustul, Abu Simbel and Toshka (in their teens-forties at the time of the move) as well as five narratives of second and third generation migrants.

even 30s at the time of the move), however less so the older generation, particularly those who spoke no Arabic.

There is the recurring story of an elderly man who refused to leave the Island and had to be left behind and fetched soon afterwards. The move itself was by ships that carried people and their furniture, food and livestock. They were entitled to a limited number of furniture and livestock, and many houses were left behind fully furnished in the hope of compensation.



Figure 5-2: Leaving Shallal in 1964.¹⁶⁸

There was a compensation system of about thirty-fifty piastres per palm tree and a similarly symbolic amount per animal left behind. However, as part of a culture that relied little on money, they realised only too late how symbolic the amounts were.

Once they arrived at the promised lands, there are many vivid recollections of the shock and confusion as they were dispatched in the centre of their villages with animals and furniture and sent to look for their homes and argue over their belongings. The houses were roofless and made of a cheap clay that eroded with time, and a common detail in the descriptions of this moment is that of the endless sun that beat down on them. The absence of a river contributed to the inescapable harshness of the weather.

¹⁶⁸ I was provided many pictures relating to the moves that were originally taken by archeological missions. This was from the private collection of Ahmad Shambo in Gharb Suhail (member of staff at the lodge where I stayed)

Many *mātu min al za'al* (died of sadness) as is a common saying amongst Nubians in the area. Grandparents and widowers were provided separate houses away from their extended families, and of course were said to be the first to die of depression. The replacement of the Nile by the nearest irrigation canal as a source of water resulted in many diseases, and according to most interviewees, the death of the whole of the generation born in 1964.¹⁶⁹

The fact that the houses looked alike was a source of grave demoralisation as the artistic quality of the household¹⁷⁰ was a source of great pride and they were not used to living in houses that looked like each other. “No fingers of any one hand are ever alike” is an often-repeated saying.

As for economic subsistence, they were barely able to make use of the land they were given on account of not being able to irrigate it. The lands in Nubian villages behind the Dam had been naturally irrigated by the Nile that rose during a few months of the year nourishing the land, and subsided leaving a naturally irrigated land suitable for cropping and harvest. Consequentially they rented the lands in the new villages to farmers and peasants living in nearby areas, who were better able to till it. However in line with their particular logic (and with the socialist and even Ottoman idea) that “land is for he who cultivates it,”¹⁷¹ most Nubians eventually sold the lands off to these farmers.

Perhaps the one common misery that all respondents related, whether they are first- or second-generation migrants, is the lack of security that comes from living amongst Upper Egyptians and *fallahīn*. The villages were redistributed in an order different from their original order, and a number of Upper Egyptian villages were dispersed amongst them.

¹⁶⁹ Although repeated by many interviewees, I could not verify this through records of the move. See (Fernea & Kennedy 1966, 35) for diseases that heightened mortality rates right after the move

¹⁷⁰ Built by women and decorated by children, both the architecture of the houses as well as the outward design was a source of pride.

¹⁷¹ In an interview they will say this as “al-'ard li mīn...?” “and who does land belong to?” Initially, I often stared back blankly until I caught on: the answer was quick and unanimous - “for he who cultivates it.”

This was problematic because Nubians were used to a level of security that meant that doors and windows were open at all times, and thus they encountered a number of thefts and were exposed to risks that were unprecedented in their historical memory. The saying that often appears in relation to feelings towards their new neighbours is *yakhudha temsah wala nigawizha fallah* (she'd sooner be taken by an crocodile than we marry her to a *fallah*).

Notwithstanding these negative experiences, most non-migrant villages and some migrant ones viewed the Dam as an industrial revolution of sorts. The Dam meant the creation of jobs, and the incentive to pursue an (higher) education or technical diploma. Amongst the Nubians, those living in the *bilād al-tahjīr*' (lands of migration) are known for being very ambitious and to have integrated better in cities such as Aswan, Cairo, Alexandria and even in the Gulf. Even though this is predominantly due to lack of sources of livelihood in the new villages.

It is worth noting that the lands they moved to are still called *bilād al-tahjīr*,¹⁷²—whereby migration remains in the continuous present, as if it is something that is still happening; thus the process never ended, and on the contrary is being kept alive.

It is also of significance that in the backdrop to this study, exactly fifty years since the inception of the Dam, a great outcry comes from Nubians requesting a 'return' to original lands, instigated by Nubians living in Cairo and abroad, led mainly by prominent Nubian intellectuals. The outcry finds an echo amongst those from the lands of migration, but it is largely bitter and angry Nubian youth who fuel the movement.

Particularly interesting was the answer to the question of whether interviewees thought things could have happened any other way, if they wished the Dam had never been built for instance. Most people saw what happened as an inevitable fate. In at least a quarter of my interviews, this was followed closely with the explanation; "*al-mayya kanit fil bahr*

¹⁷² Village names are suffixed with the term 'tahjīr' so Abu Simbel for instance is Abu Simbel Tahjir. This can be understood as a constant reference to its 'inauthenticity'.

day'a wil sahārī mushta' ilyh" (the water was lost at sea, whilst the deserts yearned for it). This is one of the catchiest phrases in the Revolution's most memorable High Dam song *Hikāyat Sha'b* (The story of a people) sung by 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz in 1960. The phrase was part of the explanation of how the idea of the High Dam was conceived; once a catchy lyric, now pure common sense.

5.3 A Nubian History, Sung

Songs in Nubian culture (and perhaps more generally Egyptian popular culture) play a number of roles. For the purpose of this thesis, I explore the songs that served to educate or raise awareness in relation to a particular event. As such, I will consider songs that spoke of the Dam, and explained how and why it was to be built, as well as songs that were sung at the time of the events, namely as Nubians were being moved by ship to the new lands and as they went to war. Songs were also sung to remember. Encapsulating an event in lyrics, meant they were easier to remember in rhyme, and the tune they were committed to carries additional layers of meaning. Most importantly however, the songs build the constructs of the Nubian identity, and tie it to a larger 'imagined community' that is a wider Egyptian and Arab identity, during this period.

The songs also served as means of communication. They were used as a substitute for letters between lovers that separated or husbands that left families to work in the city. The songs were sung to a messenger who delivered with equal if not elaborated eloquence, whatever news villagers wanted to spread of events or personal sentiments.

The lyrics of the songs have become so strongly associated with the events, steeped in both the emotion and the context, that when drawn upon, they are often sufficient to communicate the experience of the event, without having to retell it.

For the purposes of this chapter therefore, I trace through Nubian's improvised (and unrecorded) songs, their own representations of their identities vis-à-vis the Dam, and their sense of agency when it came to the move. How did they choose to remember their stance? How did they choose to remember their role in relation to the Revolution?

I explore the 'common sense' that is depicted by the songs - those stories, accounts or values that 'go without saying'¹⁷³ -, and the extent to which they infiltrated into Nubian songs and narratives. Were they refuted in these private songs, or were they internalised as a shared logic?

Analysing these Nubian songs in relation to the lyrics and rhetoric of the Revolution's songs adds an important dimension to the question of common sense. The most relevant song in this context, as was the case with High Dam builders is *Hikāyat Sha'b* (The story of a people) that tells the story of the High Dam from the rationale and decision to build it to the funding saga and the nationalisation of the Suez Canal.

Through analysing the Nubian songs by theme and context therefore, I explore the extent to which the Revolution's philosophy might have been internalised in local rhetoric. I say internalised bearing in mind that Nubians speak two languages other than Arabic, and most of these songs were in Fadjikī and Kanzī. Given that the songs were not in Arabic, they could have provided a space to contest an idea or eventually expressed in Arabic without being as confrontational.

Songs analysed herein, were collected based on their popularity, and their significance verified through triangulation by the respondents for these interviews. Those interviewed were either people who had migrated themselves or descendants of the migrants living in the same villages, moved to unmigrated villages or to Cairo or Alexandria. I was interested in the extent to which the story was maintained outside the lands of migration and how a wider 'Nubian identity' was reconsidered, and reinterpreted, during the period in question and thereafter.¹⁷⁴

Of the 25 songs I explore in relation to the events of this period, nine are songs by Sidqi Ahmad Silim who was known for writing and singing songs related to the Revolution in

¹⁷³ Barthes (1993) attempts to take apart 'what goes without saying' through demystifying ideologies and 'myths' in his work on Mythologies

¹⁷⁴ Besides my interviews, my research draws upon conversations and discussions with my host family as well as members of their extended family and friends who had themselves been migrated or were of migrated families.

the 1960s and was one of the most revered singers of the time. Sidqi spent most of his life in Gharb Suhail, working as an electrician in the village, as well as in Cairo. He settled in Suhail while working on the High Dam from 1960, and developed a reputation for his singing, becoming a legend after his early death in 1970. Although his repertoire is predominantly in Kanzī, with a few pioneering songs in Arabic, if I asked for songs related to the Revolution in Matukī and Fadjikī villages, I was usually pointed to his songs first. The remaining songs I use are 'folk songs' of both current and past migrations (of the Aswan reservoir and the High Dam), known to a number of families who had migrated themselves, or were descendants of migrant families. These songs were primarily in Fadjikī but existed in Kanzī as well.

5.3.1 The Onset of a Revolution

On becoming an intellectual of reverence amongst Nubian villages in the 1960s, Sidqi Ahmad Silim became an orator of the Revolution, in a similar way to which renowned singer Umm Kulthum gave a voice to the Revolution in Egypt and across the Arab world.¹⁷⁵ Sidqi's songs were key sources of information regarding the values of the Revolution, but more importantly in this context, regarding the building of the High Dam. According to his nephew, Sha'ban¹⁷⁶, a cook in Gharb Suhail, who relayed these songs to me, it was through his songs that people first started to understand what the Dam signified and what its benefits might be.

The first song he sang to me was *Dayman nasribu wu Nīl* (You are always triumphant, oh Nile)¹⁷⁷, an ode to the Nile written and sung around 1960, when word of the High Dam was spreading throughout Nubian villages. In it, he speaks to the Nile in Kanzī, coaching it, as if it too is afraid of what is to come.

¹⁷⁵ Ofcourse while Umm Kalthoum achieved lasting international (almost immortal) fame Sidqi was renowned on the level of Nubian villages, Matukī and Fadjikī alike.

¹⁷⁶ Sha'ban, Chef in Gharb Suhail. Interview by author, Gharb Suhail 2010

¹⁷⁷ This song is in the enclosed CD

You have always triumphed us [Nubians],
And provided a great source of life for us;
Be the same power to Nasser as you have been to us, don't let him down.

In this song the Nubians coach the one resource they have claim over, though ironically they are stripped of it by the Revolution and the construction of the High Dam, and ask it to support Nasser.

Although this is the song for which Sidqi is most remembered, the songs he wrote and sung, are more associated with the events of the period, than they are associated with Sidqi himself.

Another song, whose singer is less traceable, related to the coming of the Dam is *Al Busta*, the ship that took mail up and down the villages of Nubia. In it a young man asks the ship to take him up to the Dam to see it being built. It is infused - as most folkloric songs tend to be - with a love story. He wants to take his love to this great site to witness it being built, as though they will be romantically overcome with something as awe-inspiring as their love. This is said to have been sung in 1961 as the Dam was being built, and the Nubians were being prepared and 'psyched' for the migration.

In the examples represented by both these songs, it seems there was a 'build-up' for the Dam, as a noble endeavour and one that promised much dramatic progress, and a way forward.

As the Dam was being built, a song very similar to 'Abd al-Halim's *'Ala rās bustān al-'ishtirakiyya* (Along the gardens of socialism) sung in 1964, was sung by Sidqi. *Sadd iki yih runga* (An ode to the dam') deals with the building of the Dam and the *tahwīl*, (the Nile diversion) in 1964. The zealous song is in a sense an ode to Nasser, and speaks of how the world's eyes are upon "us" (as Nubians this time, rather than merely Egyptians), and that "they are jealous of our achievements; from the beginning of Nuba to the end of it, all the Nubians love you and all the Nubians need you."

In this song as well as others, it is not only the spirit of the Revolution's rhetoric that is present, but some key words are used in Arabic directly rather than translated. This is the

case, for instance, with the Arabic term *tahwīl*. Diverting the flow of the Nile was a significant milestone that builders of the Dam were working towards and is described in Abd al-Halīm's songs as a miracle.

Other terms such as *wihda* 'Arabiyya (Arab unity) and 'udwan thulāthī (tripartite aggression), in reference to Britain, France and Israel's actions in 1956 also permeate Nubian songs, particularly those by Sidqi. The significance of these terms could lie in the way that in the context of that period, they became the point towards which people's fears, aspirations, and yearnings were directed; what a nation was concerned with.

This use of Arabic terms was the way these Nubian communities bought into the nation. By using the same terms to refer to the same phenomena, they ensured that when they spoke of it in Nubian they were still connected to the larger cause. This adoption of Arabic terms is particularly significant given that most uneducated Nubians, especially those living in lands eventually inundated by the Dam, barely spoke Arabic at all, while others used it as a secondary language through work or school.

The power of these songs lies not simply in the way they have internalised and taken on the Rhetoric of the Revolution in glorifying the Dam. Their power also comes from being well-written and emotionally provocative. The songs are therefore 'felt', and not just considered or thought of, it is a sentiment that is verbalised, and communicated.

5.3.2 Identity, Self-representation

Another common theme that recurs throughout the Nubian songs is an assertion of Egyptianness, and at times of an Arab identity. This is noteworthy, because it is particular to the period, and is not alluded to in songs before or after the Revolution. Songs from before the construction of the Dam focused on specificities of Nubianness, such as the Nile, everyday agricultural practices, or ceremonies. Furthermore, these songs were entirely in Fadjikī and Kanzī. Given that Arabic was barely spoken or used at the time, save as a working language, there was no linguistic basis for reference to an Arab identity. Any reference to Egypt, would be perhaps to a lover gone away for work, or for current

generations (born in the 1970s and 1980s) in shunning their Egyptianness in relation to a threatened Nubian identity.

One folksong from the 1960s that speaks about the Dam, *Nuba Niri* (Nubia means), sings of what it means to be Nubian. Here the song speaks of Kalabsha, a Nubian village to be migrated, but also meaning the claws of a particular hawk. It then describes how Kalabsha flies with the building of the Dam, and ends up on the Egyptian flag – becoming the eagle in the centre of the flag¹⁷⁸. In other words, what is at the centre of the flag is representative of the Nubian village, and in this way this song forges an identity in light of their sacrifice to the Egyptian nation or the Revolution. The song is metaphoric for Nubians being at the beginning of Egyptian history, before the Pharaohs, and being central to the Egyptian identity, despite the irony of their marginalization.

Another song is one of those by Sidqi, *Tay, tay tay* (Come, come, come), which calls on its listeners to travel.

Let's go around the world Oh Arabs,
In every corner an Arab country to which we belong,
And wherever Nasser goes, we will go...
Before Nasser we all sat with our hands tied,
But now that he's here, we are all for him.

Perhaps this song also reflects the sentiment that was reflected in most interviews that with the Dam came civilisation and the Nubians' exposure and connection to the rest of the world. For with the Dam came sudden attention to their culture and heritage, to be preserved and collected, and even the creation of a museum. Infact a few respondents reflected bitterness towards the international efforts made to ensure Abu Simbel - the temple - was delicately moved to a carefully chosen spot, and that much less effort was made to relocate the Nubians of the village of Abu Simbel humanely.

¹⁷⁸The eagle on the Egyptian flag representing Salah Al Din, and an emblem of the Revolution was introduced into the 'Arab liberation flag', an unofficial flag developed by the Free Officers, from 1953-1958. The song must have thus referred to the Arab liberation flag, or was sung in retrospect in reference to the current Egyptian flag

With the Dam the industrial revolution also came to their doorsteps. All these villages catered to the Dam, with villagers working as workers and drivers or technicians and managers depending on the level of their level of skill, education or ambition. The Dam is remembered to have brought many jobs, but also training in industrial skills signifying not just the industrialization of a nation, but a people. Thus perhaps with these songs came the sense of opportunity that made the Revolution worth subscribing to, or being part of.

Another one of Sidqi's songs, *Fajr al-nasr tal 'aliyna* (The dawn of victory) is a call to Nubians to come to arms in 1967 and to serve Nasser loyally in the war against Israel. Notably, this song was both in Arabic and Kanzi. It calls for a fight to victory or death;

We are the generation of the Revolution!
And who has not heard of our people,
a fighting and resilient people,
who never cower and fight till victory!

The word used for people in this song is the Arabic *sha'b*, and so can be understood not as a reference to the Nubian people in particular, but as a reference to themselves as part of the Egyptian or even Arab community.

Quite a few of Sidqi's songs were sung in Arabic, which as we noted is significant given how little Arabic was spoken in the villages at the time. It may be that these songs were aimed at a younger generation more exposed to a world beyond Nubia, but perhaps also these songs sought to encourage Nubians to speak more Arabic. Especially given that their broken Arabic at the time was a marker of their difference, and often used to mock them through jokes, the mainstream media, and other means.

It is difficult to detect any particular logic in terms of theme of the songs sung in Arabic. *Fajr al-nasr tal 'aliyna* is one of a few songs that were in both Arabic and a Nubian language.

Also, some of Sidqi's songs were translations of their Arabic counterparts, such as 'Abd al-Halim's *Ya habayib bil salāma* (Come back safely our beloved ones) bidding soldiers going to war farewell. Sidqi's is not a literal translation; it was still a Nubian song, bidding soldiers going to war farewell in a more Nubian fashion, but with the Arab Socialist theme

expressed in the song's socialist rhetoric. Perhaps once again, internalising a nationalist sentiment in a Nubian fashion.

Another less obvious translation was a classic love song sung by Mohammed 'Abd al-Wahab¹⁷⁹ in the 1940s in classical Arabic, *Mudnak* (Victim of your love). A Nubian song of the same name, and equally dense and classical in style, was created to the same tune. Perhaps the purpose was so the sharing of a classic; the music would evoke a sense of the love song; the same feelings across the Nubian-Arab/Egyptian divide.

These iterations of famous Arabic songs stand in contrast to the way that builders of the Dam in Chapter 4, took the tunes to such notable songs and sung their own words to them, usually mocking the original song's subject or telling their own versions of the stories. In both instances however, it is as if they were taking ownership of a song that had such booming nationalist significance and thus becoming, themselves, part of that significance.

It is difficult to determine whether Nubians asserted their Arab identity and their dedication to the cause in these songs because they really believed in it, and accordingly decided to join the wars to fight for it, or because they had no choice. In other words, it may be that they did not entirely believe in it, but had to justify their having to fight in a war, and die building a dam that jeopardised their livelihoods; by reasserting that they were part of this larger, national throbbing whole.

"We are the army of Gamal", Sidqi's song 'Ode to Gamal' asserts, "the sons of Gamal, and the grandchildren of 'Abdel Nasser," evoking a language of kinship that could only strengthen loyalty.

5.3.3 Upon a Migration

There were two groups of songs that were sung as events unravelled or were taking place. These were the songs sung on the ships during the actual migration of the Nubians,

¹⁷⁹ Renowned Egyptian musician and singer (1907-1991), Mohammed'Abd al-Wahab was as famous as Umm Kulthum at the time of the Revolution. The poem was written by the famous poet Ahmad Shawki (1868-1932).

and those sung on departure to the 1967 war, where in fact many died. Not only do these songs serve to remember events in the present, but at the time were of greater significance in lifting morale during these arduous trips.

The songs of the migration were many. I focus here on seven. There were several recurring themes to them, and this included in particular loyalty to the motherland (the lands they deserted) as though it were one to be returned to.

In one folkloric song, *Ay nal kumli* (I have never encountered) said to be sung during migration, two lovers part, as the woman, Rim, is to travel south to Sudan and her lover, 'Izbi, north to Komombo¹⁸⁰. The man repeats again and again that he has never seen nor ever will a beauty such as hers. As the song progresses, they part, but keep exchanging letters. Throughout the letters it is clear that he has moved on, but still his loyalty to her, the original beauty, remains.

Another such song *Ale' Ale'* (Congratulations) is the song of a mother to her son. Known as a 'migration song' sung in the 1960s, it is also said to have been sung since the days of the 'older migrations' (specifically 1933). In it, the mother and the father had divorced and the mother has re-married. When the time came to migrate, she and her new husband go south, whilst the son, his new wife, his father and grandparents go north to Komombo. The mother's advice to her son is to move forward, to progress, and to celebrate his wedding in the new land, to start his life there with a festivity, to take care of his extended family, but never to forget his mother.

In both these songs, life does indeed get better in the new northern lands, but they do not forget their origins, their motherlands in the south. At times 'the south' represents the original village from which they had to migrate, and at others, it seems to be an allusion to Nubians closer to Sudan who are seen as having better preserved their

¹⁸⁰The names of the characters changed each time the song was sung to me (once even using my own). This was part of the feature of the songs' 'flexibility' that I spoke of earlier, changing the names of the characters, so people can relate more easily. The complete version, sung to me by 'Am 'Izbi, is one in which he used his own name.

identity. They still live by the Nile, unlike those who migrated north, forced away from the Nile and to assimilate.

Another important theme is remembrance. The songs are imbued with details of the move, and all they leave behind. In one song, as a father and his family walk towards the ships, the father asks his son to support the grandmother and help her leave, emphasising how difficult a task this will be for her to do on her own. "Take her by the hand, and help her leave, one step at a time..." In this song, *Ta te', Ta te'* (Step by Step),¹⁸¹ the emphasis is on the younger generation helping the older generation, to both let go of the old, and move on to the new.

The metaphors ring strongly with the grandson aiding the grandmother, in coaching people to 'let go', and unlike most of the *tahjir* or migration songs, it has a strong tug of sadness. In the song, as they pull away the boy encourages his grandmother to say goodbye to things in the village. They wave to the palm trees, they wave to the cats and dogs and other specific animals they left behind; they wave to their homes, and they wave to their dead in their cemeteries. They leave the dead behind to guard the lands as they move on to new ones. And we are left with a strong image of forlorn lands.

In another song *Gubaliyun* the singer on the ships calls to the people of every village from Dunqula, farthest to the South near Sudan, to Kalabsha, near the Dam. Not only does he call one village at a time, but he calls out the names of the villages in order. This is particularly important, as once the Nubians were moved, the villages were not settled in the same order they existed in before the Dam. It is a very high-paced song, where the villagers answer back *Gubaliyun* confirming their presence in excitement, and he involves them all in the singing as they move.

It was commonplace that I was given a brief history of Nubia at the start of interviews, and more often than not, this entailed that I take down the names of the villages as they

¹⁸¹ Neither the date nor origin of this song is known.

were ordered before the Dam. It is a detail not to be forgotten, and *Gabaliyun* is one of the ways to remember them.

One of the most important themes in the songs lies in the simple fact that a number of them were originally sung in the first or second *tahjir* (migration) in 1912 and 1933¹⁸². My initial reaction to this discovery was a frantic attempt to separate the songs that were sung exclusively in relation to the 1964 migration from the others. However the limits of that experience were not at all distinct, and if anyone attempted to make the distinction for my sake, I could not verify it with others. With time, and my increased understanding of the idea behind these songs as a part of everyday practice rather than entertainment, I came to accept the lack of linearity of the songs and the narratives.

These songs were organic processes; they were born out of the necessity to console a dismantled existence, a dismantling they may have had little say in, and had to justify as a noble endeavour, or perhaps one they felt was a required and noble sacrifice.

Perhaps through singing the same songs, a continual history of movement stretches from 1902 to 1964; unifying a community that has suffered the same fate, and reminding later generations that they too will recover, and they too will prosper. Through a past continuously made present, a continually relevant history is reproduced and stronger community is forged.

Whatever the case, the refusal to be defeated by that repeated fate is present. In the lyrics of one song for instance, *Sandaliyya*, which takes its name from the ship that moves the migrants, and sung in relation to the three migratory experiences since 1902, we hear ‘*Sandala*, keep whistling, we’re leaving Dabud because they are waiting for us in Kalabsha... let’s keep moving forward, let’s keep moving forward.’

¹⁸² Although the Aswan reservoir was built in 1902, and subsequent heightening took place around 1912 and 1933, the community seem to remember the High Dam as the third and not the fourth migration. Furthermore, previous migrations are remembered as ‘less severe’ as villages only shifted along the Nile, when it appears that in fact some migrations were just as badly planned and as disruptive. I was also usually given ‘tokens’ by interviewees, varying from pictures of inundated lands, or the move itself, as well as keepsakes that families kept from old lands. Although it was claimed that these were items related to the last migration (1964), sometimes especially in the case of the pictures, they seemed much older.

It was felt necessary that they look and move forward.

One woman I interviewed in her late eighties¹⁸³, who migrated to Abu Simbel Tahjir in her forties in 1964, mourned the beauty and morality of old village life where, she claimed that Satans and Jinns were more worthy neighbours than the scorpions and *sa'ayda* (upper Egyptians) of this new land. When I asked her about songs she had sung to her children, one of the five lullabies was to a child telling him to swim freely in the Nile, for there were no crocodiles on 'this' land here (Komombo); unlike 'there' (the original Abu Simbel), here, they would be safe. Contradicting all her stories before the song.

5.3.4 Contradictory Consciousness

In the song by al-Abnudī, mentioned in the introduction, a young Nubian says to his deserted land, "Ask not and say 'Happy?' For you'll find no answer. Ay the prosperity, nay the heartache, mother." The ambiguity here is obvious. However, in most of the songs, it was more difficult to trace this contradictory consciousness, their acceptance of the building of the Dam and their anger or refusal of how they were treated. The traces of a contradictory consciousness are not explicitly in the lyrics of these songs, but rather in sentiments such as sadness or guilt, that contradict a dominant narrative of hope and ambition associated with moving. For it was one thing to recall an event in retrospect in a composed and justified narrative, but to sing a song, entails drawing upon the language, music and sentiment of the past, evoking the emotions of the particular event.

A contradictory consciousness according to Gramsci, is the two simultaneous consciousnesses we live with; one that is implicit in our actions and reflects our true sentiments towards situation, or our true conception of the world and another which we 'inherit and absorb uncritically' and internalise by virtue of our tendency to conform to society's we are part of, the history of communities we belong to, or the power of hegemonic ideas (Gramsci 19971, 333). In my analysis of these Nubian communities, the contradictory consciousness lies in the difference between the unconditional support

¹⁸³Nafissa was always a housewife and speaks no Arabic. Interview by author, Abu Simbel Tahjir 2010.

expressed to Nasser, and the glimpses of anger, bitterness or even guilt that appear through the songs and interviews. This understanding of contradictory consciousness also highlights the contradictions of consent; that hegemony is not based on brainwashing. Rather people are actively convinced and feel as if they are contributing to an idea or worldview, while they are not completely blinded to its limitations or in Gramsci's terms, there is no self-deception (Gramsci 1971, 327). In song, however, these contradictions are as subtly expressed as the sentiments are experienced.

The generations born in 1948 and 1949 who had been exempted from military service to work on the Dam were recalled to join the army to fight in the 1967 war. The Nubians then asked the governor of Aswan to allow all the Nubian groups that were going to war to be sent together on one ship, in order to provide each other moral support, and he agreed. On the ship with them, Sidqi Ahmad Silim, sang a militant song, that is remembered to be as moving as the songs Umm Kulthum sang at the time, encouraging the men to go to war, chanting that "they had built the Dam, now it was time to liberate Palestine."

The rhetoric of the rest of the song (sung in both Arabic and Kanzī) *Bawadir al-Nasr bānet* (The signs of victory have started to appear), spoke of soldiers on the front whose eyes never closed, who "screamed in the face of adversity before the blazing fires of war; ' *hal min mazīd?*' (have you more to offer)?!" Both of these quotes are almost direct translations from 'Abd al-Halim's song *Hikāyat sha`b*, which was as we have noted, one of the most prominent songs celebrating the building of the High Dam.

In another song in Kanzī, however, also by Sidqi, *Ritha'* (Epitaph to the soldier), a father recalls his last farewell with his son, before his son went to war. He questions throughout the song how his son might have died; was he killed on purpose, did he come face to face with the enemy or was it in another way? The father recalls his last moments with his son before he left home, as he held his hand, and his son's tears fell as he bowed his head. The adjective used to describe his tears is *hira* means 'tears of confusion.'

Whether it is in the melancholy mood of the song, or that one fleeting phrase, the song evokes a moment of sensitivity when the father and son stood together, when the son

was not sure whether or not he wanted to go to war, whether he felt the cause was worthy of his potential sacrifice. It is as if the weight of the song's melancholy lies in this image; perhaps this was the father's regret that he did not hold his son back.

Perhaps there was also the question of why this young man was going to risk his life in a war that until a decade ago would not have been relevant to him. After all, prior to the 1960s and the building of the Dam, Nubians kept mostly to their villages, apart from those who went to Cairo, Alexandria and sometimes Port Said for work. Whether or not they were previously drafted to war in the name of Egypt, they certainly never sung of it as a duty. The significance of 1967 in particular, however, was that it was the spark of the crumbling of Nasser's hegemony, but that is for the next chapter.

The song ends with the father reassuring his son, and perhaps himself, that the soldier will be amongst the *abrār*, the innocent that go straight to heaven. Noteworthy is his word choice; '*al-abrār*' is the term given to people who die innocent (usually children), and not those who die as martyrs for a cause. Perhaps this word choice speaks to his being innocent of the cause and without a choice, unlike a determined martyr '*shahīd*' – as was the term used by the builders of the Dam in chapter 4, or the *fida'iyyīn* of Port Said and Suez in chapters 3 and 6, respectively.

The contradictory consciousness emerges particularly clearly in the Nubians' consistently positive sentiments towards Nasser, regardless of their bitterness towards the move.

Nafissa who sang the lullabies to me in Abu Simbel has these contradictory sentiments. She bitterly told story after story about how much better their lives were in the old villages. However when I asked her about her feelings towards Nasser, she related how when he died, they carried an empty bed -a mock coffin - from village to village, gathering a large procession, and eventually buried it four villages away¹⁸⁴. Since they could not join the mourning processions in Cairo, they performed their own rituals, honouring him, in Nubia.

¹⁸⁴This echoes the images in Cairo when the city came out to mourn Nasser and walk in his funeral procession.

When I asked her straight away if she did not relate the calamities of her life in this new place to Nasser, she threatened to stop the interview if my aim was to defame him. Other responses to this question about Nasser's relationship to their miseries, were along the lines of "it was not him but those who worked underneath him who were to blame," and that "he could not have known," that "he was surrounded by corrupt liars" and so forth. On the rare occasions that the responsibility was laid on Nasser's shoulders, it was by a younger generation.

For the Nubians were "socialists before socialism was coined," 'Abd al-Shahir, who was migrated from Abu Simbel in his 30s while he was working on the High Dam, explained¹⁸⁵. Socialism was the way they already lived, it was in their values and principles, how they worked and treated other people; Nasser had thus, in this estimation, coined an ideology of the Nubian way of life. Nasser gave it a name and in propagating it proved how much he believed in their ways as a people. For that, and other aspects of his personality, he was "*rājil nubī fī tab'uh*" (a man of Nubian principles), as related by many interviewees. For that, it seemed, anything was forgivable.

Hajj 'Izz al-Din, a cargo-boat skipper originally from Abu Simbel, and the head of the household that hosted me throughout my stay in Tinjar¹⁸⁶, explained to me how life stopped when Nasser was to give his long awaited speeches. "Once he started with '*akhī al-muwatin'* (my brother citizen), "the shivers would run through my entire body; from head to toe!"

"He was one of us!" other respondents explained. "He made mistakes..." 'Am Jum'a a school teacher and 'migrated citizen' of Dabud¹⁸⁷, explained, "but he never betrayed us;" here the implicit contrast is with Sadat who betrayed the '*ahd* (national pledge).

Much like the High Dam workers, they aspired to be part of a nation well articulated by Nasser; and they honoured him by writing him into their struggle.

¹⁸⁵ 'Abd al-Shahir, Interview by author. Abu Simbel Tahjir 2010

¹⁸⁶ 'Izz al-Din, cargo-boat skipper. Interview by author. Tinjar 2010

¹⁸⁷ 'Am Jum'a, retired school teacher from Dabud tahjir. Interview by author. Tinjar 2010

5.3.5 *Dissident Songs: Mamnu' al Iza'a- Broadcast Prohibited*

A fuller understanding of the past 'as it really happened' may require inquiry into unrealised possibilities

(Lears 1985, 580).

Although I could not find any songs that contested Nasser or critiqued the Dam outright, the closest to 'dissident' songs I could find were recorded ones, prohibited in the 1950s and 1960s.

One was a song by Hamza 'Alaa' al-Din, a musician who had moved to Cairo from Toshka in his childhood. At the time that the Dam was being built and the people of Toshka migrated, he formed a small band that wrote and sang songs. Their songs were mostly nostalgic, or recalling (and preserving through song) Nubian traditions, such as children's games, rituals, and love songs. Hamza eventually moved to the United States where he taught ethnomusicology and has since become a Nubian legend.

When he was in Cairo, his songs reached Nubia through messengers, and when he moved to Sudan and worked in broadcast in the 1960s, through radio. One such song, *Nuba Nut*¹⁸⁸ (Nubian people) subtly called for Nubians to move to Sudan rather than accepting the dismantling of their existence to which the resettling in the desert would lead. The song was not loud or militant, rather sad and probing, and talks about the sadness of *tahjīr* and suggests that they unite rather than separate in order to survive.

The song was not referred to by any of my interviewees,¹⁸⁹ possibly because it did not make it to Nubia, possibly also because it was a 'recorded song' and thus may have not been heard by all. It nevertheless remains useful to my research, as an example of the possibility of dissent for reasons of suppression or merely deciding against it, never happened.

¹⁸⁸ This song is in the enclosed CD

¹⁸⁹ These recorded songs interested me less than ones that were specific to the community and conveyed from one generation to another.

The other recorded song that might be described as dissident was *Wu hanīna* (Oh Nostalgia). This one I encountered in whispers whenever I explained the songs I was researching to interviewees. The response was often "are you looking for something like '*Wu hanīna*'?"

'*Wu hanīna*' was sung by Sayyid Jayyir, a singer born in Abu Simbel, in the 1930s, and subsequently migrated in the 1960s. It told the story of a Nubian man who returned to his homeland years after migrating to find it submerged under the Nile, with only the peaks of the hills still visible. He sings to the mountain who tells him how it crumbled in his absence, and a bird flies by asking "what brings you back here, stranger?" in what seems to be a reprimanding tone. The interviewees who told me about the song, emphasised how painful it was that the bird called him a stranger, and most refused to sing it¹⁹⁰, claiming it was too painful.

This song was censored for some time in the late 1960s or early 1970s; it evoked too many emotions and so they were not allowed to sing it in public events. The fact that most people were not able (or willing) to sing it to me now, gave the impression that they had not heard it enough to know it by heart, or that it was somehow internally censored as well.

What interested me here was that the emotion that could have brought apart their rapport or sensitive support of the Revolution, was not the anger or the bitterness about the move, nor a sense of injustice, but rather the guilt for having accepted it.

The Nubians had become part of a cause and had sung themselves into the nation. The fragile emotion that was necessary to avoid for these songs to ring strongest, and for their will to be most powerful, was the guilt about leaving. It implied a fragility in what held them and the Revolution together.

¹⁹⁰ Only the nephew of Hamza 'Alaa' Al Dīn, Karam Murad whom I asked to assist translate songs would sing it. Karam Murad, musician. Interview by author. Cairo 2010.

The newer generations born in the 1970s-1990s were not as able or willing to forgive, however. That people migrated, accepting their fate, was a shame that was not to be forgiven.

5.4 A Generation shamed

My name is where
My axe is; there
My name is there, and my homeland is there...

A history of Nuba, they tried to erase,
On the day we parted with our dear place,
But our history is inscribed deep in stone,
By a people who shook the earth with strength of will alone.
My name is where my axe is; there

Come oh Nubī and Nubiyya,¹⁹¹
Beat the drums of our return,
Beat the drums of the next migration
For when have we ever bowed to humiliation
My name is where my axe is; there.

There are martyrs oh people, behind the Dam ,
They imposed upon us a migration so bitter,
When they told us Komombo was a paradise to be gained;
While we walked in it, for years estranged.
There are martyrs oh people, behind the Dam

...And marks of shame on the foreheads of that generation.

Khidr al-'Attar, *Ismy hinnāk* (My name is there) 2008

This song, sung and recorded by young performer Khidr al-'Attar in 2008 epitomises the rhetoric used by most of the younger Nubian generation when referring to the migration and the High Dam. It has calls of a right of return amid the bitterness, reference to humiliation and insinuation of a forced migration.

Whilst in Gharb Suhail, at the start of my research, Yahya, an entrepreneur in his 40s living in the village, requested an interview. When I obliged, he began by telling me that

¹⁹¹ Male and female Nubians respectively.

the story of the High Dam cannot be told without hearing the perspectives and experiences of the second generation of migrants.

He insisted that none suffered as much as the new generation of migrants who not having an 'authentic' or real Nubian village to return to, and still not belonging to more prosperous Cairo, were stuck in between two worlds. "Every young Nubian," he explained,

goes through 'the search for the city'¹⁹²; where they yearn for a city-life away from village tradition and try their luck in Cairo. In a city as oppressive and discriminating as Cairo tends to be, if the Nubian came from an 'authentic village' he will always have a space to return, if not, he will always be stuck, a nothing there, with nothing to return to here.¹⁹³

Yahya made the distinction between a real or 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' village by invoking the Nile. A real Nubian village was by the Nile, while an inauthentic one has a canal, like the villages to which the Nubians migrated. At this point he quoted a famous campaign that was waged across Egypt in the 1980s to combat the *bilharizya* parasite that lived in irrigation canals: "Every Egyptian knows that he/she should 'Give their backs to the *tir`a*.'"¹⁹⁴ The *tir`a* was a canal of stale water that unlike the Nile was a source of disease and, if drunk from, could be fatal. An inauthentic Nubian village, therefore, was one to give your back to, it was also apparently one that could kill you.

Other common references by youth to the *tahjir* are that it was a *tahjir 'ijbari* or forced migration, rather than merely a migration as the elders referred to it or 'resettlement', as official records refer to it. This term alone points to a completely different tale, one of forced migration, oppression, injustice and the need to react against it. This is in sharp contrast to the narrative of their elders.

¹⁹²The term is a pun on the term 'search for identity.'

¹⁹³ Yahya, young entrepreneur. Interview by author. Gharb Suhail 2010

¹⁹⁴ The campaign was called 'Give your back to the *tir`a*' and sought to discourage people from bathing, drinking or swimming in contaminated irrigation canals.

Noteworthy also, is that *'Ismy hinnāk*, with all its affirmation of a Nubian identity was sung in Arabic, and not in Fadjiki nor Kanzi. It was unsurprisingly quickly disallowed by the Egyptian state, and thus the only way to hear it was the old-fashioned way, through having it sung live at get-togethers or events.

The irony behind the language choice lies in the way that “every language contains the elements of conception of the world...” and so “vocabulary helps mark the boundaries of permissible discourse, discourages the clarification of social alternatives and makes it difficult for the dispossessed to locate the source of their unease, let alone remedy it” (Lears 1985, 570). It was my initial assumption therefore that the Nubian Languages, that are undecipherable to those unfamiliar to them, would have provided that space where critique and disengagement from the Nasserist worldview and the imagining of social alternatives were possible.

However, it seems that Fadjikī and Kanzi linguistic realms were marked by a prevailing imaginary in which Nubians imagined, reflected, or constructed themselves as sacrificers for the cause and as an integral part of the new nation. I say imagined because they were never truly integrated and have always been marginalised socially and economically by the state.

For the younger generations to object to this imaginary, however, to be openly bitter, to demand that Nubians return to their original lands, it was necessary to break with the hegemony and sing in Arabic, a language they mastered far better than their elders. They sang in Arabic even if it was to stress their own identity against that of the nation that spoke the language. The imaginary in Nubian, and the Nubian attitude towards the Dam was so strongly built, that resistance to it came in Arabic

In the song, they cry against an unjust migration, invoking a civilization threatened, and sing as a generation subject always to the *dhul* or humiliation of a shameful past, and an unpromising future.

This then introduces the question of whether the resistance of this younger generation is directed at the state or the hegemonic idea propagated by the Nubians of the 1960s, that

the sacrifice was indeed 'worth it'. Or whether it was directed at both. This imaginary of their elders constituted a hegemony within a hegemony, an internal conviction that needed to be resisted, arguably even more powerfully than that of the state.

5.5 Conclusion

The study of ideology is among other things an inquiry into the ways in which people may come to rest in their own unhappiness. It is because being oppressed sometimes brings with it some bonuses that we are occasionally prepared to put up with. The most efficient oppressor is the one who persuades his underlings to love, desire and identify with his power, and any practice of political emancipation of this involves the most difficult forms of all liberation, freeing ourselves from ourselves. If such domination fails to yield its victims sufficient gratification over an extended period of time, then it is certainly that they will finally revolt against it.

(Eagleton 1991, 4)

Insofar as ideology is an imaginative framework, "of languages, concepts, categories, imagery of thought and systems of representation, which social groups display in order to make sense of...and render intelligible the way society works" (Hall 2005, 26), I set out looking for resistance imagining that it is through forms of resistance that these systems of representation and interpretation are challenged.

My initial questions concerned how the Nubians might have tried to preserve their dignity, at a time when I imagined it had been threatened through the disruption of migration. "It's not *what* happened, it's *how* it happened," some second-generation migrants kept insisting. How did those who migrated choose to tell their story to their children? How did they choose to remember themselves in this context?

The Nubians chose to remember themselves as heroes who sacrificed what they hold dearest: the Nile, their homelands and a culture and lifestyle they lost with it, for a cause they believed in. It was an ideology they believed in, a man they believed in and a nation they had decided to become part of. They projected values revered by the community, the values of loyalty and devotion, onto this larger 'imaginary community' that they deemed themselves a part of.

However the notion of hegemony holds that people are never really 'mystified;' rather, they actively contribute to this idea or worldview they feel a part of. Like the builders of the Dam in the previous chapter, it may be that the Nubians truly believed in the cause, or because they did not have a choice. Perhaps they realised they would have to move and so accordingly decided to justify it all by buying into the 'idea.'

It is only the younger generation that reaped the bitter fruits of this migration. Without having been drenched in the context that was the nationalist zeal of the 1950s and 1960s, there was not much compelling them to deem this move as having been worth it. They are neither part of this nation that marginalises them, nor are they of a more romantic village existence. They are haunted by the ambitions of a civilization that will not accept them, and a homeland that is no longer there.

Chapter 6. Suez, the Six-Year War (1967-1974)¹⁹⁵: A History of their Own.

6.1 Introduction

If Port Said became the symbol and emblem of the 1952 Revolution, and the Aswan High Dam an icon of its will and capacity for economic independence, the *Naksa* (setback) of 1967 came to represent the Revolution's defeat. Whilst Port Said and the High Dam 'made' Nasser, 1967 brought him to question, along with the many corrupt foundations of the Revolution.

The *Naksa* means something quite different for the people Suez however. It was not defeat, but the onset of a struggle, a popular struggle against a sworn enemy, a struggle to mobilise a country to war, and push for the principles of the Revolution that faltered in political priority. The *Naksa* symbolised the beginning of a popular warfare, stretching from the defeat of 1967, through the War of Attrition (1967-1970) until the October War (1973) through its end in February 1974.

What began for Suez in 1967 therefore, ended in 1974, and not with Nasser's death in 1970.

Thus, although the purpose of this thesis was to investigate the popular struggles behind the period of Nasser's rule, ending the study of Suez at 1970, would be siding with the line of official history that has ignored the plight of the people of Suez. Their struggle against imperialism, and for the values of Arab unity, continued until the end of the wars, in 1974. Thus, in stretching this chapter beyond 1970, I look not at the politics of a new era, but the popular struggle to assert the politics of an era they believed in, despite the failures of the politicians that championed that era.

The significance of exploring the six-year war in Suez, becomes shedding a light on a different version of the *Naksa*, the War of Attrition, and the October 1973 War. A version that critiques the military establishment, and questions the false legitimacies of both

¹⁹⁵ June 1967 – February 1974

presidents Anwar Sadat, the 'Man of Peace', and Hosni Mubarak, dubbed 'Head of the First Air Strike operation' during the October War¹⁹⁶. More importantly, it is one that questions the efficacy of military rule.

For the *Naksa* launched the onset of popular resistance followed by the 'War of Attrition', a low-scale war made of military operations, as well as civilian operations in Suez waged by members of the civilian resistance *al difa' al-sha'bī* (popular defence), as well as members of a resistance group armed and supported by Military Intelligence – *Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya*.¹⁹⁷ In 1973, and with the political decision to go to war, both groups of civilian resistance were disarmed by the military, and the stage set for the October war.

On October 24, and only two weeks after the historic October 6 crossing however, Israeli tanks rolled into Suez, after besieging the army in Sinai, resulting in what the people of Suez call 'the War of 101 days'. October 24 is a significant day in the history of Suez where civilian resistance, unarmed and unsupported by the military pushed Israeli invading forces to the edges of the city. Images of the empty tanks burning, after the Israeli soldiers' withdrawal, are still vivid in collective memory.

There are, however no monuments, statues, or museums in Suez and little documentation marking the popular struggle that began in 1967 and lasted until 1974.¹⁹⁸ There is no commemoration of the defeat in 1967 and those who died fighting under poor leadership, nor of the 101 days of popular resistance that followed the October 6 'victory'. It is as if the state has made no attempt to impose a fragile narrative of its defeats and victories lest it risk the possibility of having to recognise or accommodate the narratives of the people of Suez.

¹⁹⁶ Mubarak was Chief of Staff of the Airforce at the time, and his leading the airstrike has been questionable

¹⁹⁷ Military intelligence started recruiting, training and organising the popular resistance around 1967-68 according to interviewees. This was known as *Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya* (Arab Sinai Organisation), and included around twenty recruits from Suez ('Issa 2011) & (Gharib 2008-2011)

¹⁹⁸ Although a museum was being built over the last decade and planned to have opened to public on the October 24 2012, descriptions depict mainly archeological collections, and the museum itself is yet to open until the time of this writing (October 31 2012) (El Adl 2012)

In turn, while Egypt celebrates the October 6 military victory; Suez celebrates October 24, the epitome of popular resistance prevailing over an invading military.

For the October war is seen by members of the resistance in particular, as a sham, an arrangement to justify the peace treaty with Israel. The fact that a *thaghra* (breach through army lines)¹⁹⁹ took place a matter of days after the crossing, and that Suez was left to the defence of its recently disarmed citizens only added to this interpretation. Thus neither the war, nor those who waged it, garnered much legitimacy with members of the resistance in Suez.

In the absence of monuments that impose a state narrative of the war in Suez, there are a plethora of stories. Some are stories committed to song and poetry and some have been passed on as tales across generations. These include stories of the 'strangers' who flocked into Suez to join the resistance, a city known as *balad al-gharīb* (the land of the stranger).²⁰⁰

Renowned writer Gamal Al-Ghitani was a war correspondent for *Al-Akhbar* newspaper during the War of Attrition, after which he wrote a collection of stories in 1976 entitled *Hikayaat al-Gharib* (Stories of the Stranger 2000) about people who stayed in Suez during the war. One story recounts the efforts to seek to document the feats of a leader of one of the resistance groups, 'Abdallah Al-Qal'awi, through the stories of his compatriots. One comrade, 'K.Y', his closest, refused to speak.

Many of those curious, superficial writers or journalists, will use whatever material I give you to write about Al-Qal'awi, and what will they say about him? That he lived a hero? That he was brave? That he crossed the Canal over to Sinai over ninety times? Is that what he should really be remembered for, everything else forgotten?" K.Y then said to me that he would not participate in killing (the memory of) the closest of people to his heart. He said that Al-Qal'awi had to be remembered in a different way. That he will continue to live

¹⁹⁹ This was a breach that took place around October 16 when Israeli forces managed to besiege the Third Army and make its way into Suez.

²⁰⁰ Suez is known as *balad al-gharīb* because of the strangers that flocked to Suez since the building of the Canal to work in the Canal Company, and later the factories and oil industry. The appellation is also said to be in reference to a local saint, Al-Gharib.

here (and he beat his chest) amongst all the members of his group. (Al-Ghitani 2000, 191)

'Remembering in a different way' is a pertinent theme in the stories of the battles of Suez. The telling of stories of resistance in Suez resists particular symbols being made of the battle, much like in Port Said. In the few instances where popular resistance in Suez was recognised through forms of national media, it was Hafiz Salama, a figure of religious authority who was made to represent the struggle. According to Captain Ghazali a poet and *fida'iy*,

Hafiz Salama is an example of a person the state made an 'icon' out of. That is how the state writes history, through icons of a particular character; that is not how we do it.²⁰¹

The way 'they do it,' it seemed, was through stories and songs that do not make one person or one incident sufficient to represent an experience. Stories in Suez replace the legend of a particular hero or event, with multiple stories of operations involving heroic acts, sometimes of strangers never identified. This can also be seen as a response to a history that has written them out of the great victories, and national milestones despite their sacrifices. Instead, what little mention of the resistance is made in military history books, makes icons of Hafiz Salama, or the governor of Suez, both of whose roles in the fighting were contested by my respondents.

Through this chapter, I explore the struggle against the line of official history of national victories and defeats that are almost in contrast to the narratives of Suez. I look at how people in Suez chose to remember the events of a six-year war that, on a national and official scale, was for the most part forgotten. I look at how their struggle for the Nasserist values of Arab unity and anti-imperialism, outlived Nasser the person. I look at how the *Naksa* signifying the defeat of the 1952 Revolution was the start of a struggle for the people of Suez that, in a sense, continues until today.

²⁰¹ Captain Mohammed Ghazali. Leading member of the popular resistance and renowned poet. Interview by author. Suez 2011. See Appendix 2 for biographies of all interviewees

I explore these constructions of an oppositional history through songs sung during the War of Attrition up until 1974 and those sung in memory of particular events. These songs are rarely attributed to poets, but are remembered as having been collectively written. According to respondents, the songs were usually collectively improvised on the front with contributions from soldiers, members of the civilian resistance and members of the troupe, and so unless indicated in this chapter, have no particular writer. I have drawn on 210 songs,²⁰² related through interviews, performances in Suez and Cairo and a few local (Suez) publications.

The majority of these songs were compiled and performed by a band established in 1967, Wilad al-ard (Children of the Land). The band acquired national popularity once they started touring Egypt, and featured on the radio a number of times, aiming to keep the struggle in Suez alive in the consciousness of the rest of the country. After the 1973 war, however, they disintegrated. The three surviving members of the band remain the key sources of songs in this chapter. Captain Ghazali is regarded as a politicised intellectual, and trainer of the popular defence resistance groups, whereas the remaining two surviving members Sayyid Kaburya and Abul 'Arabi al-Masri were sailors with minimal education and are renowned for their singing and dancing.²⁰³

The 24 interviews that form the basis of this chapter include 11 members of the generation at war; seven of whom were active in the resistance from 1967-74, while the remaining four were civilians who became displaced after 1968. Added to these are nine recorded interviews of members of the resistance by Al-Jazeera.²⁰⁴ I have also interviewed four activists of the generation born in the 1990s who were involved in the 2011 revolution in order to assess to what extent the history and the songs, persisted across generations.

²⁰² The few songs that are known to have specific authors are credited to poets Captain Ghazali, Sayyid Kaburya, Kamil 'Id Ramadan and 'Abd al-Mun'im 'Ammar.

²⁰³ While Captain Ghazali has a high school diploma, neither Kaburya nor Abu al-'Arabi made it through primary school. Before the war Ghazali led Al-Bataniyya (The Blanket) band, while Kaburya headed the more sha'bi band Al-Nidal (The Struggle). In 1967, when members of both bands became part of the resistance, the two bands joined forces to form Wilad al-'Ard. They have had a fall out with each other since the separation being critical of each other's sha'bi or intellectual approaches to music. Much like the tension in Port Said between Al-Suhbagiyya and Al-Tanbura.

²⁰⁴ See documentary by Sharif Salah Thawrat al-Gharib, produced by Al-Jazeera, 2011

Much as with the situation in Port Said, there are few official sources that mention the popular resistance between 1967-1974, including members of the resistance sponsored by the Military Intelligence (as elaborated upon in the next section). Most military history books either chronicle the battles, or debate the usefulness or futility of the War of Attrition between 1967-1970 (Wizarat al-difa` w hay'at al-buhuth al-'askariyya 1998; 'Abd al-Ghani 1988; Fawzi 1983;'Awwad 2010; Al-Jawadi 2001; Al-Jawadi 2000; Ibrahim 1998). These include a few accounts by military historians and mainly rely on memoirs of former military leadership figures. Historians and members of the military that support the Nasserist ideology argue for the importance of the war in raising morale after the defeat, training the army, and keeping the enemy at bay; whereas supporters of Sadat regard it as having been a waste of time and resources when the army should have been preparing for a war. Literature on the October War engages in another debate, that of whether the war should be regarded as a military victory (Fawzi 1988; Hammad 1989; Jamasi 1990; Jamasi 1992) or a defeat given the events of the *thaghra* (breach) on October 16 (Salim 2008; Al-Nifyawi 2010; al-Shazli 2011). A key member of the latter group of writers is General Sa'd al-Din al-Shazli, chief of military staff during the October War, who struggled to have his writings about the defeat published outside of Egypt (during Sadat's rule), and was eventually tried and imprisoned for relaying army secrets under Mubarak's rule.

This chapter starts by highlighting the main events and milestones of the six-year war, based on official narratives, and the historical gaps my respondents fill. The chapter will then look into songs that were sung during the war, and their role at the time and in reasserting their politics in opposition to the state and through constructing an oppositional narrative of events thereafter.

Suez, in the context of this thesis, becomes the last struggle for an ideology whose leader faltered, and died, as the battle waged by the population of a city continued.

6.2 The Six-Year War

6.2.1 The Naksa, 1967

In response to perceived threats in May 1967 from Israel directed against Syria, with whom Egypt had a joint defence treaty, Egypt mobilised military forces into Sinai, and

requested that UN peacekeeping forces stationed there since 1956 be withdrawn. The troops withdrew from Sinai to the Straits of Tiran, a move which Israel regarded as a threat to international waters, and responded to by declaring war. After six days of battle, Israel had invaded the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights and the West Bank. The Egyptian military lost 15,000 men (between the dead, the missing and the captured), while thousands were injured, and the army lost at least 55% of its general capacity (Wizarat al-difa' wa hay'at al-buhūth al-'askariyya 1998, 14).

The staggering defeat of 1967 symbolised not simply the regime's failure to manage a war, but was testament to corruption within the Revolutionary Council's ranks. For the days spanning from June 5, when the war started, until June 9 when Nasser made his abdication speech, the radio blared with the number of Israeli planes that Egyptian forces were bringing down. According to Hania Hamdi, a 13-year-old student in Suez at the time, the radio blared with triumphs on June 5:

Bushra ya Arab!
Rejoice oh Arabs!
Today we've destroyed twenty of the enemy's planes...
thirty of the enemy's planes...
fifty of the enemy's planes...!²⁰⁵

Hania and her family were so relaxed by the news, that despite living in a bomb shelter, they went swimming the next morning. Meanwhile, in downtown Suez, a barber stretched a banner across an alley that read "Come to our new branch in Tel Aviv...opening next week." Their victory seemed certain.

By June 8, the cannon shots could be heard in Suez. "This confused my father," Hania recounted, "he struggled to find *Sawt Britania* [Voice of Britain] and *Sawt Israel* [Voice of Israel] radio stations, and seemed perplexed at conflicting news. While listening, he kept murmuring "How could they be shooting the cannons...the cannons could only mean a retreat...""

²⁰⁵ Hania Hamdi. Suez resident, evacuated during the war. Interview by author, Cairo 2012.

By the morning of June 9, in Suez the result of the war was clear. Egyptian soldiers trickled in at first, and then came in waves. For the week to come, soldiers poured into the city, wounded, humiliated, parched, and often hysterical. Moreover, clear to anyone with binoculars at first, and within hours clear to the naked eye, the enemy was camped on the opposite side of the banks of the Canal.

The shock was not simply a response to these events, but the realisation of the extent to which reporting on the war was laden with lies. The need to mobilise, however, to give returning soldiers the necessary care and prepare Suez for the possibility of an invasion (or evacuation) left little space for resentment.

Citizens mobilised in Suez to receive and treat soldiers whilst others organised into groups called *al-difa` al-sha`bī* (popular defence) to protect public utility buildings.²⁰⁶ These groups camped on the banks of the Canal in attempts to keep the enemy at bay.

For the first six months, according to many respondents, there was little military presence in Suez. Small operations were organised by the *fida`yyīn*.²⁰⁷ One of these was in July of 1967, when Israeli soldiers took a boat from the Eastern bank into the Canal that separated them from Suez, and attempted to raise an Israeli flag near the Western bank` (Gharib 2008-2011; `Utaifi 2011).²⁰⁸ Civilians on the other side of the Canal intercepted the boat, and took a few of the Israeli soldiers hostage.

This early operation led a few of the *fida`iyyīn* to consider more organised and systematic operations against the enemy. Israeli attacks got more aggressive however, with incidents such as the bombardment of Suez, Ismailiyya and Qantara on September 4, and later the bombing of Suez petrol stations on October 24 1967.

The day following the attacks on petrol stations, a decision was made by the government's local national security committees in Suez to evacuate 'non-essentials'

²⁰⁶ These included churches, mosques, hospitals, schools, as well as water, electricity and fuel stations.

²⁰⁷ Reference to the general independent civil resistance groups

²⁰⁸ Respondents recounted this as one of many attempts by the Israeli army to claim more territory before the arrival of international observers.

from the Canal regions (Ismailiyya, Port Said and Suez), and the surrounding areas. Save for workers in the public and private sectors, the police and government officials, most people were evacuated. By the end of October, the whole of Port Tawfiq (a southern district in Suez along the Canal) and half of the population of Suez were migrated (Shakur, Mehanna and Hopkins 2005, 26). These evacuations were choreographed by the government so that if people did not already have families to whom they wished to be moved, they would be allocated particular governorates. Government-organised 're-settlements' are recounted with bitterness by respondents in Suez and Port Said, particularly poorer migrants, who were migrated to factory spaces, school playing fields and classrooms (often divided to take four families at a time).²⁰⁹ City-dwellers were transferred to Fayoum, Giza, Bani Soueif and Menya, whilst *fallahīn* were migrated to Abis, an agricultural area near Alexandria (Gharib 2008-2011).

By the end of 1968, it is estimated that around 15,000 people remained in Suez, these were *difa` sha`bī* or there to service the army (Gharib 2008-2011), and with subsequent migrations (particularly in 1969 and 1973), by the October war in 1973, only 5,000 remained in Suez (Hammad 1989). Those who stayed behind were mainly government workers and members of the police, as well as members of *al-difa` al-sha`bī* who were allowed into Suez on showing their 'red passports.'²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ They were offered a stipend of four pounds per person (67 cents), or 12 pounds for families up to seven people (two dollars). However many respondents claimed the stipends were not regular. Compensation upon return was based on claims filed based on people's losses and there does not appear to have been a regular means for compensation according to interviewees. (See also Shakur, Mehanna and Hopkins 2005, 34-35)

²¹⁰ Also known as 'resistance ID's' – these were identification cards granted to members of the resistance, police, government workers and anyone allowed to stay in Suez during the war. Especially that they were allowed family visits every 15 days.



Figure 6-1: Sayyid Kaburya's Resistance ID (Red passport)²¹¹

6.2.2 *Harb al-Istinzāf (the War of Attrition) (1967-1973), and Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya*

The War of Attrition started in the aftermath of the *Naksa* as a strategy of both civil and military operations, to keep the Israeli army at bay and to wear away at their resources. This was a strategy chosen in light of the perceived impossibility of an outright war at the time. During the operations carried out by *al-difa' al-sha'bi*, many *fida'yyin* remember feeling encouraged to create a group like the Palestinian *Fatah* in order to engage in more organised, confrontational operations with the Israelis. According to Ahmad 'Utaifi²¹², a group of them then went to the intelligence office in Cairo in 1968 with this idea.

Respondents who were part of *Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya* relate how they were made to wait for hours until nightfall at the Military Intelligence headquarters before anyone came to see them. In both the cases of Ahmad 'Utaifi and Mahmud 'Awaad²¹³, they were

²¹¹ Sayyid Kaburya provided access and permission to photograph and use this passport for the purposes of this thesis.

²¹² Ahmad 'Utaifi, Member of *Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya*. Interview by author, Cairo 2011

²¹³ Mahmud 'Awaad, Member of *Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya*. Interview by Al-Jazeera 2005

made to come again the following day, waiting again until night when they were told they had passed the first test of perseverance. The way this story is told by members of the resistance emphasises how the intelligence did not take 'just anyone' into the organisation, and how hard they were trained. The emphasis from this and other instances is that they were becoming more 'official' members of resistance.

This has echoes of the situation in Port Said whereby people sought to tie their narratives in with those of the state to give legitimacy and credence to their own accounts (see chapter 3). There is little record of Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya in military history books. This could be because it was an operation supported by the intelligence. More likely, though, this absence can be explained as part of the silence that falls upon the resistance operations carried out by civilians during the War of Attrition, and later, those of the War of 101 days, as I will later elaborate.

Operations by members of the Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya ranged from observing the enemy, to planting mines on the opposite side of the Canal, to full-fledged offensives²¹⁴. One of the first of these took place on November 5 1969 when *fida'yyin* were sent to attack a group of patrolling Israeli soldiers and return with hostages.²¹⁵

With the Rogers Agreement signed in 1970 however, a ceasefire was called for. According to the *fida'yyin* in Suez, small operations that did not involve the military continued. So long as their territories were occupied, a ceasefire seemed irrelevant to civilian forces.

An effective ceasefire was imposed in 1973, however. By then, the songs that came from Suez calling for war rang loudly throughout the country, and so singers were arrested, and evacuated from the city, until the October 6 war. A disarmament operation also took place stripping members of *al-difa' al-sha'bī* and Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya of their

²¹⁴ According to respondents, the number in Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya was thirty, whilst in an article by journalist Ibrahim 'Issa, quoting member of the intelligence at the time, Fu'ad Husayn, there was a total of 770 civilians (mostly Bedouins) recruited to support Sinai operations during the War of Attrition, 22 of whom were recruited from Suez ('Issa 2011).

²¹⁵ This was recounted to me by Ahmad 'Utaifi and mentioned in a recorded interview with Mahmud 'Awaad ('Utaifi, et al. 2005)

weapons. Egyptian military and civilian casualties ranged up to 10,000 during the War of Attrition (Morris 1999, 362).

6.2.3 October 1973, and *Harb al-Mit Yum wa Yum (The War of 101 days)*

On October 6, the Egyptian army crossed the Suez Canal, with planes flying in first at a low altitude, and brought down the Bar Lev Line (a chain of fortifications built by Israel on the border of the Eastern coast of the Canal). Open war began in Sinai, with the advantage remaining with Egyptian troops for the week that followed. On October 14 however, there was a series of disagreements between chief of military staff Sa'd al-Din al-Shazli and Anwar al-Sadat (whose wishes were expressed through the minister of defence). The minister issued an order that the Second and Third Army advance east, despite the insistence of al-Shazli and others under his command that they stay put (al-Shazli 2011, 407).

As a result of the move, the Second and Third Army were badly attacked and the Third Army besieged as the Israeli army advanced towards Suez. This is known as the *thaghra* (breach). Sadat made several appearances on the media at the time, denying that the army was besieged and reassuring the nation that everything was under control (al-Shazli 2011, 456).

Civilians in Suez found out about the October 6 crossing at the same time it was announced to the rest of the country. Respondents recount with resentment how they were both disarmed prior to the event, and not told beforehand, despite their proximity and their dedication to the War of Attrition prior to the crossing. Sayyid Kaburya, member of the band Wilad al-ard²¹⁶, who had been evicted from Suez, tells a tale of stowing himself away on military trucks and trains to get to Suez to see for himself. The experience of the *Naksa* had made radio announcements difficult to believe.

²¹⁶ Sayyid Kaburya, Member of resistance and renowned singer (former member of Wilad al-'ard and founder of the Gam'iyyit muhibi al-simsimiyya (band and organisation). Interview by author, Suez 2011

By October 23, Israeli forces could be sighted as the tanks were rolling into Suez through the Ganayyin area, North of Suez. According to Sa'd al-Din al-Shazli's memoirs, "there were no military units in the city, save for a few soldiers that had resorted to Suez as a result of the fighting on October 23, with nothing but their personal weapons on them" (al-Shazli 2011, 445). Given the situation and the fact that civilians were completely unprepared, Ahmad 'Utaifi, Mahmud 'Awaad (former members of Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya at that point) and others organised themselves to plan for a counter-attack. Sheikh Hafiz Salama, a figure of religious authority at the time, having kept his mosque open throughout most of the War of Attrition,²¹⁷ suggested they collect weapons from dead soldiers on the front, and in the city's morgues.

The *fiḍa'yyīn* were highly disappointed in the reaction of government officials in Suez to the Israeli threat. Many respondents tell the story of the Israeli ultimatum communicated to Mohammed Badawi, the governor of Suez at the time. In response he sent a telegram to Cairo pointing to the severity of the situation in Suez, implying that the option of surrender be considered. In the recounting of this, *fiḍa'yyīn* are offended by his suggestion that the defence situation was dire in Suez. Also, head of intelligence in Suez, Fathi Abaas was said to have disguised himself as a patient in the hospital telling the *fiḍa'yyīn* to come to him if they needed anything but not to disclose the disguise. Fathi's shying away from the war, and Badawi's believing they should surrender are remembered with disdain.

These two stories (Badawi's telegraph to Cairo and Fathi's disguise) come up in most interviews.²¹⁸ This is especially pertinent given that military records (even those who mention the War of 101 days such as al-Shazli) attribute the defence of the city on October 24 to Badawi's organisational powers, Fathi's strategies, or Sheikh Hafiz Salama's mobilisation efforts. It seems that even where military documents acknowledge civil

²¹⁷ In Suez, Hafiz Salama's role during the War of 101 Days is remembered in his mosque sermons and how he ensured people were given a proper Islamic burial. Most people were buried hastily given the circumstances of the war, and this would cause much grief.

²¹⁸ It is even said that the police stations had raised white flags, surrendering themselves, which infuriated the resistance further.

resistance in absence of military forces, the resistance must be given a structure, leadership and heroic icons. The hailing of these heroes – from the governor of Suez to Hafiz Salama – comes at the expense of the civilians who claim to have mobilised on their own accord.

Once re-armed, former members of Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya as well as the *fida'yyin* organised themselves in several posts, anticipating the army's entering the city.

The story of the Israeli tanks confidently rolling into Suez and how they were confronted by resistance, is legendary in Suez, told with a zeal even when repeated by the same respondents. The battle unfolded so that *fida'yyin* shot at Israeli tanks, until they were able to shoot soldiers manning weaponry at the top of the tank, distressing those inside.

Eventually, the Israeli tanks stopped and soldiers poured out to take refuge in nearby buildings and particularly Al-'Arba'in Police Station. The battle continued through the afternoon, until the troops surrendered, while some were taken hostage and others made it out of the city. Eighty Egyptian civilians were killed on that day alone, with around 425 injured, whilst 100 Israeli soldiers were killed and 500 injured (al-Shazli 2011, 446).

The Israeli army responded by launching a siege that started the War of 101 days. While UN Security Council resolutions calling for a ceasefire started to be passed on October 23 (Resolution number 338), Israeli offences continued and it was not until October 28 that the United Nations emergency forces made it into Suez.²¹⁹

The siege and low-scale war continued until the disengagement agreement was signed between Egypt and Israel on January 18 1974 (al-Shazli 2011, 457). The ceasefire was completely effective when Israel withdrew from areas occupied on the western front in February of 1974.

²¹⁹ See <http://www.un.org/documents/sc/res/1973/scres73.htm> for all resolutions issued during the war.

The members of Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya were recognised for a few years by the annual national police celebration, and once, the first lady Gihan al-Sadat came to Suez and awarded each of them ten Egyptian pounds (1.5 US dollars). This incident is remembered with much humour and recounted as a metaphor for the recognition they received by the state. This is the acknowledgment, it is important to note, that members of the semi-official Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya receive, not to mention the thousands that joined the *fida'yyīn* in their capacities as *al-difa' al-sha'bī* for six years on end, who received little if any recognition. It is thus considered as particularly ironic in Suez that October 24 is not celebrated as a national holiday, whereas October 6 is. This is compounded by the fact that the operations of the 101 days are barely commemorated.

That the October 24 battle is forgotten is important so that the *thaghra* may be forgotten, and Sadat remembered as the hero of war that Nasser could not become. Furthermore, Hosni Mubarak's image as a veteran also drew on the events of October 6, for it is his position as 'leader of the first air strike' that is celebrated. If October 6 was remembered as anything less than a complete victory, the legitimacies of both presidencies and the military establishment would be at stake.

In Suez however, the cause of fighting Israel and for Arab nationalism outlived Nasser's lifetime and ideology. They continued to fight for the cause in the face of Sadat's efforts to lull the call for war with multiple attempts at ceasefires, and the people of Suez maintained the fronts until every last Israeli evacuated.

Theirs was a battle to protect their homes, despite the state failures, but more importantly their struggles were because they did not have a choice. For death, though imminent, had to be made meaningful in the context of the struggle.

In the words of 'Utaifi,

Your colleague would be next to you one minute and in another he'd be gone. In those moments when you carried out an operation successfully and you killed an enemy, you felt that your death may actually be worthwhile. And that is why we joined Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya, in the hope that our deaths would be for a price, that our lives would not be sacrificed in vain ('Utaifi 2011).

6.3 Singing the Alternative

Songs and singing became significant in Suez during this period in a number of ways. The songs played a key role in dispelling fear and boosting morale. They were a way of spreading the news from one front to another, at a time when the radio was trusted by few. The songs were also used as part of an attempt to mobilise a country to war, as the bands, gaining in popularity, toured the country singing to dispersed *Sawaysa* and other Egyptians alike. They also sang to criticise Nasser for a loss that was the fault not of an army but military leadership, as they later sang to criticise Sadat for a false peace treaty.

The songs sing to us now of a history otherwise largely untold, and people otherwise unremembered. They do now, what they did in the 1960s: narrate an alternative reality, telling of different heroes, disintegrating false symbols, and committing the names to memory. They sang in resistance both against an armed enemy and a state that tries to silence them.

The history of singing in Suez, like in Port Said, can be traced as far back as the groups that had come to dig the Canal, and possibly further. The *simsimiyya* scene however, unlike that of Port Said, was not considered 'decadent,' and rather was associated mainly with weddings, as well as the *Hinna* (bachelor/ette) parties preceding weddings.²²⁰

The songs draw upon a significant degree of folklore, which is at times difficult to decipher, and generally very difficult to translate.²²¹ The coded language is part of what makes of the songs themselves an intimate language articulating shared communal experience of triumph and pain.

This chapter explores the songs repeated the most amongst interviewees, and particularly across generations. The assumption behind this strategy is that songs that

²²⁰ The *simsimiyya* was also part of an annual celebration of Easter in the graveyards in Suez, 'al-'āda', where they remembered their dead. According to Madame Yasmine, this was Suez's most popular music before a wave of religious conservatism ended it. Madame Yasmine. Suez resident evacuated during the war and singer. Interview by author. Suez 2011.

²²¹ I have chosen at times to maintain the figurative language, with explanations in the footnotes.

continue to be remembered and invoked the most are, in some sense, chosen as the most representative of the events.

The songs are divided into two sections, the first concerns the songs that were sung during the battle, re-interpreting events, spreading news, asserting their own heroes and mobilizing politicians, activists and a wider populace towards their political goals. The second concerns the songs that were sung beyond the battles; re-presenting themselves throughout history, asserting a political identity that extended beyond the Nation and struggling against non-representative heroes and histories imposed upon them.

Throughout I look at how the people of Suez upheld their own political stances or values, from participating in the resistance, to the way they wished to construct and remember these experiences. For, while the values the people of Suez fought for were associated at one point with Nasserism, they outlived him, and the struggle continued until 1974, and arguably beyond.

6.4 Singing in the Midst of Battle

6.4.1 *The War of Attrition. Choosing their heroes.*

The song is my weapon,
The song is my struggle,
While alert is my cannon
On the banks of the Canal

Kamil 'Id Ramadan, *Al-Ghinwa* (The Song) circa 1967

We sang to remind the soldiers, that they would go home, eventually...

Sayyid Kaburya 2011

This section explores the role of songs during battle, and particularly in the first few months after the *Naksa*. Particularly relevant is how the heroes reflected through these songs stand apart from those 'icons' indicated by the state.

The singing, first and foremost, helped alleviate difficult emotions. The shock of the *Naksa* meant that fear was pervasive and sudden, and the ambiguity of all that was to come deepened that fear. The collective act of singing and the improvisation of the songs

created camaraderie between members of the resistance, and enabled them to articulate a shared experience, making it easier to deal with disappointment, sadness, hopelessness and the sense of defeat.

The singing in Suez focused mainly on the music of *simsimiyya*, percussions, as well as beats developed by traditional patterns of clapping. On the first few days after the *Naksa*, the popular defence allocated themselves along the Canal, and clapped with various patterns into the night, hoping that if they sounded larger in number so that the enemy would overestimate their strength.



Figure 6-2: Wilad al-'ard singing during the War of Attrition²²²

Raising the spirits of soldiers became a priority, given that after the *Naksa*, the image of the returning soldier had become a symbol of the Revolution's defeat. "To us..." explained Sayyid Kaburya, "every soldier that managed to come back, even if he had to crawl is a hero!"

He is a symbol of perseverance, of loyalty. Even at times when their leaderships failed them miserably, they managed to make it back from the front! We made sure all our songs hailed the soldier that made it through difficult circumstances and held their commanders responsible.

²²² From Ahmad al-'Utaifi's private collection, provided with permission to use for purpose of this thesis

In this way, the songs became an attempt to deflect the defeat off the battered soldiers returning from the front, and focus the shame on the military command.

One such song that sought to raise the spirits of fighters was *Al-Fatha*²²³ written and sung in 1968. While *Al-Fatha* is a verse in the Quran used in prayer, the song is fast and upbeat, relying on percussions and a constant chorus, calling for,

A prayer for the soldier
Sab` al-siba` al-fullali²²⁴
Standing with his artillery held tight,
A hero, guarding his station, with all his might...!

It then continues to the *bashawīsh* (simple security guard) who is never satisfied, not even when he has killed thousands, and each stanza that follows focuses on low-ranking foot soldiers in the army, praising their courage and zeal for war. One of the later stanzas is dedicated to the *fida'yyīn* as well – the civil resistance – in Egypt, but also Palestine, Syria and Iraq; “to every man whose goal is the liberation of Jerusalem or Sinai.” During the performance of this song, one of the singers performs the soldier described in every stanza. The enactment of lying in a ditch or attacking an enemy like a brave lion is both humorous and invigorating.

Other songs were more focused on the *fida'yyīn* and mobilising people to fight. One such song was *Barhum*, sung between 1967 and 1968.

Barhum ya Barhum,
Ya Abu Zayd Hilal,²²⁵
Go wake them all,
Our country needs us,
There's no time to stall!
Barhum, once a hashāsh²²⁶
Owned a pipe of copper

²²³ This song is in the enclosed CD

²²⁴ Sab' al Siba' is a folkloric reference describing the king of the jungle, literally the 'lion of lions.' Al-fullali indicates perfection, coming from the expression 'zay al-full' meaning perfect or beautiful.

²²⁵ Abu Zayd al-Hilali is a folk hero from a famous Arab epic (ballad) who came from the Gulf or Yemen in the fifth century, and travelled through Arab territories uniting Arab countries as far as North Africa.

²²⁶ A hashāsh is someone who smokes hashish.

Which he sold for a bullet
To fight his enemies off,
Barhum was a hashāsh
But he gathered all around him
'To Sinai!' he called to them
There's no time left to waste...

Barhum takes the ordinary citizen and transforms him into a fighter ready to avenge his loss. In another stanza, he becomes the worker who stays behind to protect the city's factories, then the sailor on the fighter ship who sinks the Israeli warship *Ilat*.²²⁷ *Barhum* is the story of the every day *hashāsh*, worker and sailor without whom the war could not have been fought. Much like the low-ranking soldiers, these everyday heroes stand in contrast to those recounted in official history such as Hafiz Salamah or the governor, Mohammed Badawi.

In *Barhum* as well as *Al-Fatha*, both victories and defeats are committed to memory, from the sinking of the Israeli warship *Ilat* (1967) by Egyptian forces in Port Said to the war crimes such as the burning of complete neighborhoods by Israeli forces during September and October of 1967. Such songs were disseminated to areas where people were displaced and sung in schools, in particular.

Another common role of songs at the time was to communicate news, particularly after the *Naksa* when faith was lost in the general (broadcast) state media apparatus. At first this started inside Suez, and with time grew so that songs could be used to communicate events from one front to another through Port Said, Ismailiyya and places where families had been migrated. Many related this as 'their own version of the news and not what the radio was blaring.'

Singing of deaths, particularly if they were of the *fida'yyīn*, was extremely important. The songs were used to spread the word across the front and across governorates.

In Captain Ghazali's words:

²²⁷ *Ilat* was an Israeli battle ship sunk by Egyptian forces in Port Said in 1967.

The most difficult moments are the moments when people start to wonder what may happen next, and how long this state would last. We thought it would be days for the war to start, and suddenly the years stretched before us. When the magnitude of our losses overwhelmed us, or when someone has an outburst, singing helps us deal with those emotions. Music brings them out, and the dancing brings them out, and they are easier to handle..

It was thus important to break the news of deaths with sensitivity, ensuring the deaths fueled the resistance and did not discourage it. One of the more moving songs recounting deaths of *fida'yyīn*, is *Marthiyya lil shuhadah* (Epilogue to the Martyrs) written in 1969.

Angry, came his voice,
From the depths of the heart of death,
Angry he berates us....
'Tis your silence that killed us,'
Sultan, Yusuf Hussain,
Two stars ablaze in the heart of Sinai...
Ya Farag, Ya 'Uwayss...
And all the martyrs of our country..

Blow, you winds of the morning,
Spread like fire unrelenting,
Lift the pain off our hearts,
And whirl it through the desert plains,
Whispering of our lives' tales..

Lights out ya baladna,²²⁸
Ya baladna all lights out,
And chew on your patience ya baladna,
Till we rise, we revolt...²²⁹

This song, written when the first members of Wilad al-ard died in July 1969, is particularly moving, both in terms of lyrics and tune, and is rarely sung without a show of emotion. It is one of at least five songs I have come across that remember *fida'iyīn* by name.

²²⁸ Baladna means 'our country.'

²²⁹ This was one of a number of songs that seemed to make a call for an uprising or a revolution, whether implicitly or openly. I was told by some that this was merely a call for war, whilst others claimed it was a more 'reformist' revolution they were calling for, to change existing politicians, rather than a revolution 'like 1952.'

The singing was a very collective experience. Either one person would start and others would contribute, or they would be born out of competitions in the ditches. These songs, collectively articulated during battle are ones that best captured a situation or event, and the feelings associated with it.

During the first few months after the *Naksa*, when events were heavy and the likelihood of a war was imminent, songs focused on raising morale, and commemorating victories and deaths. With time however, as an official ceasefire was announced in August of 1970, and Sadat's readiness to go to war became less apparent, songs played a more political role, confronting politicians, and demanding that national priorities remain national priorities. Songs were thus sung beyond Suez, ensuring that the call to war was for all to chant.

6.4.2 *il harb, il harb! A Call to War...*

Al-Suez 'ādān wi madna

Suez is the minaret, and the call

Khalidihum ya baladna (Immortalise them, ya baladna) 1973

As the War of Attrition dragged on from months into years, the prospects of actually going to war seemed to diminish, particularly after Nasser's death. Singers in Suez believed it was up to them to remind the rest of the country of the necessity of war in Suez and beyond.

By 1968 and 1969, singers were calling for solidarity from Cairo for *fida'yyīn* in Suez. At this point, the band Wilad al-ard, travelled from front to front raising spirits of civilians and soldiers, as well as performing in places where people were displaced to spread news of the conditions at home.

Given the situation in Suez, and the decreasing consciousness of the urgency of a war in Cairo, many songs either directly called for war, or criticised those policies that looked to measures other than war as a feasible solution. Of the first of these was a song actually written in 1967 to Nasser after his abdication speech, and thus before his declared interest in pursuing a war; it was called *Il harb Il harb* (To War, to War).

To war to war, of army and people,
Say no more, speak of little else too,
Only of war nothing less will do,
So the coming generations may live in peace
A popular war, nothing else will do,
Security Council will very little do,
A General Assembly means nothing too,
The solution is in my hand, and nothing else will do
Popular warfare! Of people and army!
Neither the power of America,
Its measures or politica
Nor a NATO will ever defeat me
Say no more, speak of little else too..

The song continues to chant of the hundred million – Arab population – ready to go to war, waiting to be armed, that socialism is the way to live, and that they would continue to mobilise the country for those goals the Revolution had always stood for.

This song was particularly popular, and remembered when the period in question (1967-1973) was raised in interviews. It was also popular on the front in Port Said, in 1967. Both the fact that the song was sung outside of Suez, and that it was tailored to reflect the sentiment in Port Said, is a testament to how these songs became an articulation of popular politics in the Canal region, and how and why they spread and persisted.

Addressing the intensification of the rhetoric of peace, a number of songs agreed that peace would be desirable, were it not for the fact that the enemy would always breach it. In other words, the only way to achieve peace, was to go to war with an untrustworthy enemy.

This theme of justifying what it is they had to do has been common throughout the contexts of the songs I have collected, though perhaps here the role was also to mobilise, and make aware of international politics. *Ya salām* sung around 1967 tackles this issue of 'peace'.

Ah ya salām, ya salām, ya salām,
At the prospect of peace, ya salām,
Before the attacks, all the talk was of peace,
What could we have wished for, then, more than peace

Ya salām is a satirical expression used when something beggars belief. Here it is used as a pun on the word *salām* meaning peace. The song continues to tell of the steps taken by the Revolution to secure peace and independence, from the nationalisation of the Canal and the building of the High Dam to developments in agriculture and industry.

But imperialism feared for its might,
And bit on its lips in spite,
Because they knew their empire would crumble
At the prospects of peace
And so the crow shrieked,
Gathering the demons around him,
And planned for wreckage and destruction,
Lest we live in or spread more peace
And Johnson feigned
Worry and concern
About peace,
And messenger after messenger he sent,
To protect his so-called peace
Ah ya salām..

Other songs were more angry, critical of any policies that attempted to prevail over ‘the voice of the battle.’ One such song, *Mal’ūn* (To Hell) also sung around 1967 sang, “damned every voice, that overcame the voice of the battle, and every word that may strip fighters of their weapons.” This song took Nasser’s famous quote (relating to the 1956 war) “All voices are subordinate to the voice of the battle” and built on it further. These songs calling for war during Nasser’s era were a kind of warning to him that the war, now, was the priority he must focus on.

With time, the songs became more focused on mobilising Cairo. This was considered particularly important because the *Naksa* heralded an onset of films and commercial music that were considered high in entertainment value and low in content. This was a trend that would later explode during Sadat’s rule. In Suez, *fida’yyīn* who stayed behind felt the new trends in the film and music industries were part of an intentional strategy to get people’s minds off politics in general, and the war in particular.

Some of the songs coming out of Suez in this period directly mocked the emptiness of an art that, as they saw it, should have served the war. Two such songs were *Al-’Ataba Gazāz*

(The doorstep is glass) (1971) taking its name from a popular movie starring a song of the same name (1969), and *Khallī Balak min Zuzu* (1973) (Take care of Zuzu), which took its name from a hit movie (1972) starring Egyptian actress and diva Su'ad Husni.

Al-'Ataba Gazāz (1971) drew on aspects of the movie, and placed them alongside contrasting images from Suez. One image from the original song was that of the voluptuous woman, here placed alongside the emaciated figure in Suez, mourning the Israeli bombing of her home, as her family's bodies lay before her. Every stanza thus focused on juxtaposing images, the song ending with a berating word for those who chose to find ways to laugh and pass time, whilst the lands of their ancestors were under occupation.

Although there were quite a few songs with bitter details focusing on the difficulty of life during the war, most songs used to mobilise Cairo were upbeat. Captain Ghazali explained they used songs with a repetitive chorus, ones they could sing in an area as vast as the Cairo train station that people could sing along to easily.

That way we knew they would sing the song again and again. These songs spread so much that there were groups in every governorate and in every university in Egypt that sang our songs. People singing our songs meant everyone was able to live our war.

This resulted in more support and hospitality to the migrated, and support to the front, financially and otherwise. They're all small things but they helped alleviate the horrors of war.

In many of the interviews I conducted, people explained that the songs drew on folklore, because it was important that they drew on a language they already knew. Here they referred not to the actual lyrics, but to the language of singing itself.

Mahmud al-Galad, a soldier in the 39th battalion in the October war, used a scene from a famous film about Islamic conquests *Wa Islāma* where soldiers almost dead, returned to life on hearing the call to prayer made by a woman in the midst of the battle. "The songs

brought life back to us, through reminding us that we can still feel, that there was still something to fight for.”²³⁰

The songs had to be subtle enough to carry a range of feelings, and direct enough to reveal meaning straight away, particularly if they were politically confrontational.

6.4.3 Confronting the State. Popular Politics Pressure Political Priorities

Songs criticising policies and politicians during the war were legion. They were not only sung in the ditches, but at any opportunity in which they could be heard by the politicians they targeted. In this section I consider the songs that critiqued those the resistance blamed for the defeat, as well as those they shunned for deflecting political policy away from the prospects of war. This was both their resistance to changes in policy from above, away from socialism, Arabism, or the desire to fight Israel, as well as their mobilising the wider population to also stand by these values.

One song written by Sayyid Kaburya in 1968, is said to have been sung in Nasser’s house, after the *Naksa*, when Wilad al-ard were invited to Cairo to perform. One part went like this,

’Ulna ya Bassit
La’ināha hāsīt
Salimnalū masr hurra
Daya’halna ’Abd al-Bassit

Laden with metaphors and folkloric references (particular to fishermen), the song sings,

With a prayer ya Bassit!²³¹
We found it being pulled asunder!
We’d entrusted him with a free Egypt
And he lost it, Mr. ’Abd al-Bassit

²³⁰ Mahmud al-Galad. Member in the popular resistance and soldier during the October war. Interview by author. Suez 2011.

²³¹ A fishermen’s prayer calling upon God, with the name Bassit, he who eases matters. ’Abd al-Bassit is the servant of God, the servant of the one who eases matters.

This occasion of performing the song in the house of Nasser was repeatedly cited in contrast with the songs that targeted Sadat. While Nasser accepted some criticism, singers would repeatedly imply, Sadat did not, and indeed one of their popular songs resulted in their arrest by the Sadat regime.

The first songs after the *Naksa* ranged from blaming Nasser outright to reminding him he was responsible and had to hurry with war preparations, such as *Inta Al Mas'ul* (You are Responsible for this) sung in 1969. In others, the six principles of the Revolution were listed, and his responsibility towards realising them invoked.

Rather than wait for Nasser to proceed with the war, members of the resistance thought to do this themselves. They stayed behind in Suez to ward off the enemy despite feeble resources, and sang songs that attempted to ensure policy was directed towards the realisation of the Revolution's goals and values, particularly in relation to going to war against Israel.

Even before Sadat's policies started to change the political and economic direction taken by Nasser, these songs became an attempt to be heard, to repeatedly assert themselves before a wider population, as well as politicians, they felt needed to be reminded of revolutionary priorities. Throughout the war, the people of Suez reasserted their politics – their stances, what they were fighting for, and their opinions on matters of policy – in attempts to propagate their own 'common sense.' This was a common sense that rearticulated the values of the Revolution in these new circumstances. They sought to win more people over to their cause, but importantly also, assert their own politics, especially when they were in contradiction with those of the state. The songs also focused on bringing the political back into perspective when they felt people were becoming less attuned with national politics in the aftermath of the *Naksa*, and particularly in Sadat's era.

Resistance operations in Suez ranged much farther back than 1967, to resisting the Tripartite Aggression in 1956, operations against the British in 1951 and 1952, and even in support of the war for Palestine in 1948. This is one of many explanations respondents had for why Suez is popularly known as hot-headed and 'politicised.' Others claimed this

was the nature of the *Sawaysa* themselves, predominantly Upper Egyptians, while still others pointed to the fact that they were migrants who had a hard life or that their ancestors built the Canal, and so forth. Meanwhile, for the younger generation who played a significant role in the January 2011 revolution, it was because they fought a bitter war for six years, only to have their history taken and re-told by the state.

Whereas songs dedicated to Nasser ranged from critique to encouragement, songs dedicated to politicians after him were bitterly critical.

One example is *Ya Hibāb* (You Scum), which talks about the politician (it seems here, head of parliament).

All praise to the giver, the wahāb,²³²
May he give us as he's graced you, ya hibāb,
Without a struggle or strife,
Or even knowing what it is for you may strive,
And though you're an idiot, insane,
Fate has favored you all the same,
Treasury, and presidency of parliament,
Switching one chair for the other,
To nod your head and say amen,
And make a grand earning of a hundred and eighty,
And make all of our lives, nothing but hibāb (1970)

This, like many songs, was critical of politicians' lack of willingness to go to for war. Most songs spoke of 'speaking the truth' versus 'merely agreeing with each other,' and this revolved around the necessity of war, and with time, probing for the truth of what happened in the aftermath of 1967.

Another song that was aimed at a politician, was targeted at Mohammed Hassanein Heikal, journalist, political analyst and Nasser's long-time confidant. Heikal was known to have written most of Nasser's speeches, and people in Suez seemed to be aware of his

²³² Wahāb is one of God's names, the gracious one.

strategically naming the defeat of 1967 the *Naksa*. The term was coined so it seemed more of a temporary predicament than a permanent defeat.²³³

The song called *Ya Farkuka* (1973) – slang for ‘know it all’ – starts by chastising him for not being pained enough by the *Naksa* and treating it all as general politics. But their issue with Heikal that led to the writing of this song was the fact that he had written a series of articles in *Al-Ahram* newspaper, of which he was editor-in-chief until 1974, where he had highlighted the importance of recognising that Israel was backed by the US, and thus should not be underestimated in power. This was interpreted by Wilad al-ard as discouraging the prospects of war.

The section in the song described the writing of the articles as such,

Mr Honest, as honest can be,
Killing our days with your every victory,
While as comfortable as can be,
Over our lives you tread,
From every article to the next,
Busting our hopes,
And making us look like fools.
Twenty years and more,
A darling to every leadership,
Able to justify all their blunders,
Ever the gifted storyteller,
No fear or shame,
But this bliss won't last for long,
And one day you'll be tried!

Their disappointment with Heikal lies with his making a war seem like something they were less capable of, at a time when they were trying to mobilise furiously and ensure it stayed top on the political agenda. More broadly, they were angry with him for not being more open about the need to stick to socialist principles, when it was clear that Sadat was reversing this trend, and taking strong strides towards free-market policies. Particularly that he has been close to Nasser and was thus expected to uphold his politics.

²³³This is discussed at length in Chapter 2.

The most important and common of songs that criticised policy on the other hand, were those sung about Sadat, and these were many. They ranged from children's rhymes, to songs that detailed the changes and effects of policies. Typical of the short rhymes is this ditty at the expense of Sadat:

Jablik ayh ya sabiyya 'Abdel Nasser lama māt,
Jabli 'igl min al-munufiyya ismu Anwar al-Sadat
What did Nasser get you little girl, when he died?
He got me a calf from Munufiyya²³⁴ called Anwar al-Sadat

Other songs were more measured and directed at Sadat's politics than his person. The two most popular of these recalled in Suez, were *Gala Gala* (1971) (The Sound of a Crow), and *Ya 'Am Hamza* (1972). *Gala Gala*, like *Al-'Ataba Gazāz* and *Khallī balak min Zuzu*, focused on the lack of empathy from the people of Cairo manifested in their attachment to the newest trends of fashion and popular culture and their lack of interest in the political.

One stanza of *Gala Gala* dedicated specifically to Sadat, describes a liar:

He gives speeches by the hour,
A liar, just like the radio,
In every word a false rumour,
Like a crow in his cawing

The most direct and common song of those that openly criticised Sadat was one sung in honour of the student movement rising to demand the war in 1972. This was called *Ya 'Am Hamza*.

Ya 'Am Hamza,
The students have grown,
And a thousand No's for you they've sown
Ya 'Am Hamza,
Talk no longer works,
Nor leather bags,
Full to the brim with promises of peace,

²³⁴ Munufiyya is the Delta governorate that Sadat was from.

You see the students
Have grown ya Hamza
And learnt the meaning of our pain,
And for that,
The students have risen,
And a thousand No's for you they sow!

The song draws upon an earlier one that is associated with the student movements of the 1930s whose singer is unknown. In that song, also, a 'Am Hamza was taunted with the return of the students. Similarly, in 1968 Sheikh Imam and Ahmad Fu'ad Nigm sang, *Rig'u al talamza ya 'am Hamza*, (The students are back, ya 'Am Hamza) in celebration of the student movements calling for the military trials of those responsible for the 1967 defeat.

Wilad al-ard travelled to Cairo in 1973 during the student strikes in the universities, singing these songs until the students learnt them. This was the last of their public performances, for those years. For within days, they were arrested and kept in the Citadel prisons for a few months, after which they were placed under house arrest with their families outside of Suez for 11 months. They were imprisoned in March of 1973, which meant they missed the October war, and the War of 101 days that followed the *thaghra*. Given the events that followed their arrest, they believed that they were put away because otherwise it would have been more difficult to cover up what they saw as a 'staged war' in Suez. They believe Sadat knew that they would not have been quiet.

6.5 Beyond the Battle. Re-presenting Suez.

6.5.1 Expressions of a Political Identity – The Nation beyond the Nation

This section explores the songs that indicate how the members of the resistance in Suez wished to represent themselves and articulate their politics. For these songs articulated and reinforced a political identity relating not only to the ideals of the Revolution, but locating Suez within a broader Arab struggle, most specifically that of the liberation of Palestine.

Although several songs sing of socialism for instance, these are not as readily remembered in the present. A number of these songs were by a *fida'iy* who became a soldier, 'Abd al-Mun'im 'Ammar. These were songs that spoke particularly of Arab unity,

as 'Ammar himself had fought in Yemen. Other songs focused more specifically on socialism and Nasserism, for instance on the *mithāq*, the charter Nasser issued in 1962. The *mithāq* was taught in school and students were to learn it by heart, and by putting it to song thereby making an oral version of it, the singers complemented this process of propagation of the *mithāq*.²³⁵

'Ammar's songs are similar to the songs in areas such as Port Said (Chapter 3) and Nubia (Chapter 5) in the way they articulate and communicate the Nasserist ideas propagated through speeches and mainstream songs on a *sha'bī* (popular) level. These were songs by people who believed in the power of the socialist agenda, the ideas of Arab unity and values of anti-imperialism, and conveyed and celebrated them without criticism. 'Ammar died during the 1967 war, however, which may explain the lack of criticism in his songs, for it was in the aftermath of the *Naksa* that disenchantment with the Revolution's leadership developed.

Many of Wilad al-ard's songs also promoted values of 'our socialism' close to 'our way of life,' articulating it as their own. In these songs, they separated socialism from Nasser, criticising him at times for not being socialist enough.

There were also a few mobilising songs that sounded like religious anthems, calling for God's support during the battle. However these were few, and the fact that they were known to veterans and only sung in official events about the October War, suggests that they were sung within the army to raise spirits and give courage during battle.

The songs that express political identity that echoed the strongest however, and continue to be sung in events and performances in Suez are songs relating to Palestine. These are songs either directly about the Palestinian struggle, or linking the Suez struggle to the Palestinian one through references to the *fida'iyyīn* of Palestine and Suez.

²³⁵ I discuss how the *mithāq* was propagated through educational curricula in Chapter 2.

There were many songs dedicated to *Fatah*, to Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, and to the poet Mahmud Darwish, for instance. It is important to note, in this regard, that most interviewees who were part of Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya – the resistance group that was supported and trained by the Egyptian military intelligence – said it was inspired by *Fatah*.

Some songs such as *Nashīd al-Gabha* (Anthem of the Battle Front 1968), gave equal weight to the fronts in Egypt and Palestine, as though it were one long stretch.

If they ask you my brother,
Say it loud, and say it strong,
An Arab fida'iy, am I, from the front,
And finish the rest with your rifle,
And if they ask you ya fida'iy,
Who are you and what of your identity?
Scream I am a fida'iy from the front,
And Palestine is my struggle,
And if they ask you young lady,
Straighten your back and say strongly,
I'm a woman of the front, fida'iyya
The sister of Amina Dahburi²³⁶

This song – related to me by a respondent – is particularly interesting in its reference to a female fighter, a *fida'iyya*, the only such reference I came across. It contrasts with the repeated assertion the place of a woman was never the front lines, but always as support and sustenance in homes, hospitals and shelters.

Because I only managed to attend one public performance in Suez (aside from a few others in Cairo by singers from Suez focused on the events of 2011), I did not hear many of the Palestinian songs. I did however come across as many of them in my interviews in Suez, and as much mention of Jerusalem in the songs of war, as I did in Port Said. And in Port Said, in the public performances I did attend – the atmosphere was not as tense after the 2011 revolution as it has been in Suez – the majority of political songs were sung of Palestine, and they were the most sung along to.

²³⁶ Female member of the Palestinian armed resistance in 1968

Performances aside, verses of the songs of the 1960s and 1970s did appear as chants and slogans in the protests that rocked Suez in the year that followed January 2011. As if the revolution of 2011, was a continuation of the battles, and a dedication to the causes and pledges articulated in the 1960s.

6.5.2 In Remembrance - An Oppositional Memory

Immortalise them ya baladna, immortalise them,
Immortalise them as they did you,
Lest you thrive and prosper

Khalidihum ya Baladna (Immortalise them) 1973

In the absence of formal recognition of members of *al-difa' al-sha'bī* or Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya, after the war, and given the lack of forms of official commemoration that recognised the battle in Suez, it was up to its citizens to structure and commit to memory what should not be forgotten. In this section I highlight elements of their oppositional narrative of the events.

There was a strong consciousness amongst members of the resistance and citizens of Suez in general that their history was taken by the state, writing them out of it. As expressed by two *fida'iyyīn* in particular, Ahmad 'Utaifi and 'Abd al-Mun'im Qinnawi, the problem with the history of Suez is both the lack of historical consciousness and curiosity that prevailed in the capital, and the fact that the state managed to summarise events in a series of dates, events and symbols behind which all else was silenced.

This section will highlight the dynamic of 'official' and 'unofficial' struggle as it prevailed during the battles, and how these oppositional memories prevailed as a result, thereafter. Significant here is not only how an oppositional memory involves the decision to 'remember differently', rather becoming an assertion of the marginalized politics of their struggle.

'Ghair rasmiyyīn' - Unofficial Resistance in Official Politics

Memories of the resistance operations, whether they are of members of independent resistance or those supported by army and intelligence are laden with their sense of

being '*ghair rasmiyyīn*' (unofficial) in relation to official forces. This alludes to the 'unofficial' status enjoyed by members of the resistance, which meant that they were to fight without having a say in the politics of the war.

Two incidents that highlight this official/unofficial dynamic, are the stories of Mohammed Sarhan²³⁷ (member of popular defence and Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya) and 'Abd al-Mun'im Qinnawi²³⁸ (of Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya) during the War of 101 days.

The first is the account of Mohammed Sarhan where he describes the UN peacekeeping forces patrolling Suez upon the 1973 ceasefire to demarcate the lines between both parties in the war. Knowing the *difa' al-sha'bī* wouldn't be involved in the process not being part of the army or acknowledged as an 'official' body of resistance, Sarhan and his comrades decided to force themselves into the UN group.

Sarhan, chosen by the group to act on their behalf, quickly realised that there were very few Egyptian forces on the Suez front than there were Israeli ones. He thus mobilised a group of *fida'yyīn* to sit at every point of the front that was being surveyed, and race to the next spot to be visited by the UN team, so it seemed the Canal was covered at every 100 metres. It was not long before the peacekeeping forces recognised the same faces, and realised that Sarhan was not an official and asked him to leave. However, he insisted on tagging along until the survey was complete.

This incident is one of many that members of the resistance talk about, exemplifying how they tried to take responsibility for 'official' matters knowing that official institutions (such as the military) may not protect their interests.

Another such incident relates to Abd al-Mun'im Qinnawi, from Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya, who was posted on the 'Itaqa mountains range south-west of Suez during the War of Attrition to survey enemy movements. After the October 6 crossing and upon the

²³⁷ Mohammed Sarhan. Member of Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya. Interview by Al-Jazeera, Suez 2005

²³⁸ 'Abd al-Mun'im Qinnawi, member of Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya. Interview by author, Suez 2011

siege, he was reposted on the mountain with little resources and less instructions. He remained there, coming down only when he saw the enemy retreat in 1974.

Besides his tribulations of living in the mountains with little sustenance, Qinnawi tells a significant tale of seeing a group of lost members of the Egyptian army wandering in the desert below him. He rushed to their assistance and was treated with much suspicion. He could tell they lied about their ranks as the best dressed of the group claimed to be the lowest rank. "He was dirty, unshaven and parched, but I could tell from the rim of his undershirt that he was *'ibn nās* (well off), so he must have been at least a general." He linked their suspicion to his own appearance having lived in the mountains for two months.

Qinnawi led the group to the nearest army camp, where they immediately turned him in as a traitor and had him arrested. Had it not been for a sympathetic commander in the army camp who was willing to listen to Qinnawi, he would have been jailed indefinitely, especially given that there was no evidence of his being part of Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya or being recruited by intelligence. Once his account was verified, Qinnawi left the army camp immediately, despite his need for resources. He felt there was no place for him here. Furthermore, Qinnawi tells of how he was never able to prove his stories in Suez until he spoke alongside Lieutenant General 'Abd al-Mun'im Wassil, the leader of the stranded army camp, at a panel in Cairo University, who remembered Qinnawi and verified his story.

I show this video [of the panel] to everyone now before telling my story. Since I was 'unofficial' I had no physical proof of being hired or supported by intelligence. No one would believe that a microbus driver like me would have played a role in facilitating matters for the army (Qinnawi 2011).

Being *'ghair rasmy'* (unofficial) meant the value of their sacrifices were undermined both during and after the battle. It also meant the need for a stronger struggle to make sure their unofficial (outside of military institution) interests were served, their politics represented, and eventually that they were remembered.

These risks were taken, however, because they felt they could not trust an official army, military rule, or even the official media to reflect their rights, their politics or even the realities of war accurately. Though they made these sacrifices on their own accord, this lack of acknowledgment leaves them with the sense that their wars are unfinished business.

Resisting Official Symbols of Resistance, Victories, and Defeats

In light of their 'unofficial' status as *fida'yyīn* during the war, the urgency to re-present and assert their politics and their own versions of the war persist through their narratives.

The first element of this has been holding leadership responsible for the *Naksa*. The image of soldiers crawling into Suez, and often Cairo, humiliated, became an almost universal symbol of the shame of the *Naksa* throughout Egypt. There was thus a great emphasis in the songs on both hailing the soldier and pumping 'him' with pride, but also pointing to the responsibility of the leadership. This responsibility and culpability was directed at Nasser as military leadership. However, it wasn't until recently that military establishment as a whole was to blame. In Sayyid Kaburya's words,

During those days, to be honest, we couldn't blame the military (institution). We blamed the leadership figures, we wanted Nasser to act responsibly and prepare for the war, and were angry with Sadat for ignoring it. But one wouldn't have thought of being critical of the military. Why, critiquing the military would be like cancelling yourself out! The military was the Revolution, so we were all the military! However it's different now. Having seen this revolution we're very weary of a military taking over. We know too well how a military state doesn't work.

As well as questioning the efficiency of military rule, the songs and stories in Suez, also delegitimise the basis of the leadership of both Sadat and Mubarak. The former, known as the 'man of peace', was to them a fraud. The first reason was his reluctance to go to war, the second was his disarming the civil resistance before the war meaning that they then faced the Israeli army unarmed, and the third is covering up the defeat, and the War of 101 days, with a treaty that was not in their name. In Captain Ghazali's words,

... we signed the Camp David agreements with their feet on our necks. Sadat signed it without weighing our situation during the war, and our relationship with Israel. And to cover it all up, he announced a false victory, and forged history. And the next one (Mubarak) just capitalised on all the fakeness to give himself a boost.

For, even Hosni Mubarak's famous 'first air strike', supposedly the launch of the October 6 operations has been debatable in Suez. In the words of Qinnawi,

This revolution (2011) is our chance to revive what Hosni Mubarak (God damn him and his likes) did to tarnish the memory of what happened on October 6! In attributing the airstrike to himself he erased from collective memory what it was that really happened.

What about the resistance? And all those people who carried weapons? Were they playing sega?²³⁹ Were they imposters?? And let's say he did play a big role in the airstrike...how about what happened ten days after the October 6 crossing? When the enemy gathered its strength and crossed to the eastern bank, where were our planes then?

When they reached Ismailiyya? Where were our planes? When they besieged Suez for 101 days, where were the planes?

If he really was the one responsible for the air force he should have been executed for what happened after the crossing...

Furthermore, hostility and bitterness towards Mubarak in Suez was not just based on his questionable role as a fighter pilot in the October War, but also the deteriorating economic situation in Suez despite its significant contribution to national income (Suez Canal and Oil returns). The people of Suez felt marginalized both historically and economically despite their entitlements on account of their struggles and their work on the canal.

Criticism was always made of the symbols of the war behind which all was lost. One local symbol however, was the man occasionally celebrated by mainstream media as representative of the popular resistance in Suez, the religious figure, Hafiz Salama.

²³⁹ Board game played on the sand

Hafiz Salama is said to have been a Sufi in his early days, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood at the time of the 1967 war, and a figure of authority for the Salafists since the 2011 Revolution. Hafiz, born in 1925, was reportedly arrested in 1948 after financially supporting the resistance in Palestine. He is also credited with playing a role in the War of Attrition, and recognised through the media, and what few mentions there are in history books of the civil resistance. Meanwhile, according to interviewed veterans, singers and *fida'iyīn*, his role during the wars was to bury the dead in accordance with Shari'a, since they were buried hastily during the battle, as well as giving sermons in a mosque to lift the spirits of fighters. A role that was thus highly appreciated, despite the fact that he never played a direct role in battle as is sometimes attributed to him.

Although I tried to meet Hafiz Salama through Hassan, one of his young disciples, I was not able to get an appointment.²⁴⁰ But even Hassan, who went to the school Hafiz Salama developed in Suez,²⁴¹ said Hafiz told him many stories, but never that he bore arms, nor actively participated in the resistance – for which he is credited by the media and state narratives of history.

Hafiz himself appeared at a conference in Cairo University²⁴² with 'Utaifi, Qinnawi, and two army generals, to speak of the War of 101 Days in 2010. He claimed that he played a leadership role, in arming his men on October 24 1973. Furthermore, he claimed to have taken decisions when the *fida'iyīn* were in disarray, unsure where to station themselves.

His testimony sparked a lively debate on the panel where his narrative was questioned, suggesting he claimed roles for himself that others had carried out. Indeed the testimonies of the *fida'iyīn* who were present on October 24 – including both 'Utaifi and Abd al-mun'im Qinnawi – are consistent in that none attribute to Hafiz an active role in the fighting.

²⁴⁰ As Hassan was trying to arrange an appointment, I got an anonymous phone-call one day telling me I could not meet Hafiz Salama, without being fully covered. I assured the caller I would cover-up in the meeting, but never got the appointment. This degree of religious conservatism was atypical of my experience in Suez.

²⁴¹ Hafiz is said to be rich on account of the donations he receives. Some of this money has been directed to opening a few schools in Suez, and offering university scholarships to high-performing students.

²⁴² Cairo University Lecture Panel on the Suez War (Sheikh Hafiz Salama, Al-Fariq 'Abd al-Mun'im Wassil, Al liwā' Mohamed al-Fatih, Ahmad Utaifi, 'Abd al-Mun'im Qinnawi, October 6 2010). Recording provided by 'Utaifi. See Annex 2

Those sympathetic with Hafiz claim his age may play a role in his growing antics about the war and his role in it. Meanwhile, the less sympathetic believe he was used by a state keen on symbols and icons, and with time and media attention began to believe these stories himself. There is thus an appreciation of Hafiz's role, but resentment in how once again a symbol (this time a local character) was used to silence the stories behind the battle.

In the end though, what 'really' happened on October 24 may never be rendered. That Hafiz, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood at the time was attributed with such an important role by the state is not only part of the broader silencing of the resistance in Suez. It could also be understood in the context of the fact that Sadat was intent on appeasing the Muslim Brotherhood²⁴³.

By using Hafiz Salama as a symbol of the civilian resistance such that he stood in for that resistance, the state thereby silenced the stories of a popular struggle. That struggle was never fully silenced, however, as the plethora of songs and stories gave Suez a powerful oral history which almost resists being written in a linear chronology of dates, heroes, and numbers. In Suez, the 'unofficial' struggle remains the 'more authentic' history.

6.6 Conclusion

Wi 'adm ikhwatna nlimu nlimu	And the bones of our brothers we will gather
Nsinnu nsinnu	And the bones of our brothers we will grind
Wi ni'mil minu madafi'	And of them we will build our cannons
Win dafi'	And with them, our country defend
Wingib al-nasr, hidiyya li masr	Until a victory in their names we will garner
Wi tihki al-dunya 'alayna	That the world will forever, remember

Captain Ghazali, *Fāt al-Kitir* (Much Time has Passed) 1967

²⁴³ This would require far more research to ascertain; research on what Hafiz Salamah has been depicted to represent, and the extent to which the resentments in Suez are related to his being used as an icon, or the role he plays as a Salafi at the moment.

The stories of Suez stand apart from the rest of this thesis in the stark contrast that their narratives of wars represent to the official narratives. The songs present us with a struggle, not only to indicate their version of what happened, but also a struggle to re-represent themselves, their political stances and identities in the context of two historical battles that were crucial in the history of the nation and the legitimacies of its rulers, particularly military rule.

The songs played a role during events themselves, keeping spirits up during a battle to which an end was not at all clear and communicating news of the battle, victories and defeats when state media was not to be trusted. The songs also played a confrontational role when state policies seemed to shy away from the possibility of a war. Sadat's reaction to Wilad al-ard by putting them in jail and keeping them out of Suez indicates that the singing was effective in influencing citizens and provoking politicians. Particularly that the band had garnered enough fame to perform in events outside of Suez.

Most interestingly and significantly to this chapter is that the songs show us how elements of the Nasserist ideology were fought for, despite Nasser's failures, and beyond his rule. This is clear in the assertion and re-assertion of their relation to the larger Arab cause and struggle and their relation to Palestine, both during the War of Attrition and the War of 101 days, as well as the fact that the songs are still sung today. It was also clear in their confrontation of Sadat in their insistence on pulling through with the war.

Finally, through keeping these songs, and most importantly the many stories of the 'strangers' of *balad al-gharīb* alive, Suez continues the struggle against Israeli politics, but also against the over-writing of its history. The citizens of Suez chose to become an 'unofficial' army in all that this has warranted of lack of acknowledgement by the state during and after the wars in an attempt to ensure their own political priorities were taken into consideration.

In Suez we trace a case of political agency that they reiterate was born well before Nasser, but that carries the values of the 1952 Revolution, against the champions of the Revolution when they faltered, and those who came thereafter.

And it is the songs of Suez that carry both the politics of this people, and the actual circumstances of war from generation to generation. Reminding themselves always, that their heroes were the *hashashīn*, the workers the sailors, and the low ranking foot soldiers. And reiterating the lack of courage and trueness displayed by officials, such as the governor, the head of intelligence, and presidents Sadat and Mubarak. The purpose of this is a reminder of their own role in the war, but also their current role in politics.

The persistence of these songs till the present has us question, not only the legitimacies of these presidents, but frames the failure of military rule. The experiences of the 1967 and 1973 wars, compounded with the experiences in Port Said of 1956, questions the military regime's efficacy, when the official historical narratives of these very events are what hold them in place.

On July 8 2011 as protests erupted in Suez, reasserting the demands of the 2011 revolution, I had heard the above verses chanted at a protest. Although people could indicate 'they have something to do with 1967' none of the young people I questioned could link them to specific events.

This poem, *'fāt al-kitir*, was sung by almost everyone I interviewed in Suez during my research, when asked about a song that moved them or that best articulated the experience of the war. Singing it always warranted a show of emotion. Although the context of this particular song was never spelled out to me, hearing it in protests *after* my interviews moved me too.

The intensity of the lyrics, and the devotion to those who died, carried on from generation to generation and used both as a pledge and reminder that the struggle continues, five decades later is very powerful. Particularly when chanted in a protest by an angry crowd, linking the struggle across generations; a reminder that one day their stories would be told.

My appearance in Suez after the 2011 revolution was seen in the context of the revolutionary events underway. The sense was that perhaps now, in the absence of either Mubarak and Sadat, the truth would finally resound. There was a sense that now that the

revolution had risen and Mubarak's airstrike had been removed as a glorious act, the truth behind the war would be unraveled. More than that, it was assumed by my interviewees that as a participant of the new revolution, I would naturally be interested to find out what happened, to continue this un-finished war.

According to 'Abd al-Mun'im Qinnawi in an interview in Suez, "It's up to your generation now, to wipe the dust off all those events, and all those people that have been buried, and revive the truth of what really happened in Suez." It is also due to the 2011 revolution, that much of the contradictions and complexities of the 1952 Revolution can finally be faced; Sayyid Kaburya's earlier-cited comments about the military were in a sense made possible by the events of 2011. "Now we can finally blame the military institution as a whole without jeopardizing our faith in Revolution," he said.

For the current generation of Suez, the battle is a continuing one. These were the youth who sparked the revolution through the rest of Egypt by waging a war against state security forces on January 26 2011, and winning it by the time the rest of the country started on January 28, two days later.

As the central security forces retreated, leaving their armoured vehicles behind, activists in Suez set them alight, as happened in the days that followed in cities across Egypt. But in Suez, they raised their spray cans, and sprayed the Star of the David on the vehicles.

In the words of Walid Hilani, an activist who participated in the battle on January 28 2011,

They were no different to us than the Israelis. And we had heard the stories so many times, that on those days of protest, and as friends of ours fell to bullets being shot at us, we felt like we were in those very scenes of the October 24. All that was missing on the vehicles was the Star of David.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁴ Walid Hilani, activist in the 2011 revolution. *Thawrat al-Gharīb*. Directed by Sharif Salah, produced by Al-Jazeera, 2011.

Chapter 7. Whose Imagined Community?

7.1 Introduction

Ihna al-sha`b, Ihna al-sha`b!	We the people,
Wiktharnak min qalb al-sha`b	Have chosen you from the heart of
Ihna al-sha`b!	the people
	We the people!

'Abd al-Halim Hafiz, *Ihna al-sha`b* (We the people) 1953²⁴⁵

The 1952 Revolution was one that spoke and sung in the name of a people. Nasser framed a Revolution that had taken place 'on behalf' of a people or in the name of the *umma* (nation), and justified his policies as having been for the people, and his having been 'of' the people. Sherif Younis (2012) referred to this as *dictatoriyyat al-sha`b* – a dictatorship in the name of the people (Younis 2012, 645).

Throughout this thesis, on the other hand, I have explored how people actively believed in and contributed to the Revolution, and how they chose to 're-present' themselves, their politics and experiences of the period differently.

This chapter complements chapter 2, which looked at the 'constructions' of the *sha`b* in the state's revolutionary rhetoric propagated through songs, speeches, educational curricula, culturally productive institutions and the re-writing of history. Based on empirical findings, here I explore how communities constructed themselves as a 'people,' particularly through their own songs, poetry, idioms and other intimate forms of language.

In the different communities examined throughout the thesis, there are a few common themes or constructs of this peoplehood. Through these themes, I look at the communities as they were imagined in the contexts of my interviews. The *fida'yyin* of Port Said and Suez, the builders of the High Dam, and the migrated Nubians all defined

²⁴⁵ Lyrics by Salah Jahin, composed by Baligh Hamdi.

their immediate, physical communities, as well as larger national and regional Arab communities. Through this analysis, it becomes clear that the 'imagined community' propagated by Nasser was not one that was 'consumed' uncritically, rather it was re-articulated, negotiated, contributed to and partially internalised.

These communities are based on constructs such as honour and courage and the tropes of masculinity associated with both the tasks of resistance and nation-building, and the militarisation of discourse and their identities (justifying deaths, heroism and a degree of loyalty to the state). I also explore how they express their own politics and nationalisms in relation or opposition to the Nasserist imaginary.

Finally, I look at how the people perceived Nasser – how they related themselves to him and how they related their own revolutions to him, questioning the extent to which their belonging to the 'imagined communities' was really mobilised by him. I thus 'unpack' the notion of a charismatic leader whose ideas may have been hegemonic, but whose ability to mobilise or completely silence, suppress and oppress, I suggest through my analysis, have been largely overestimated.

All these 'constructs' have been explored through the intimate languages that became the languages of the Revolution in the different communities. This includes the songs sung in Nubia during the period of the Revolution that featured much Arabic revolutionary rhetoric, as well as elements of an Egyptian or Arab identity that was new to such forms of popular culture. It also encompasses *kalām al-sadd* (the language of the Dam) comprised of idioms and phrases that were related to the Dam and were an amalgam of *sa'īdī* (upper Egyptian), *fallahī*, and Nubian terms and dialects. These languages form an intimate language, specific to the communities and their shared experiences of a particular point in time, and a shared public language unifying the rhetoric through which the events are recalled, and the communities defined.

I start this chapter with the constructs of al-sha'b through constructions of gender and communal identity, followed by the politics of these imagined communities explored throughout this thesis, and their relation to Nasser.

7.2 Constructs of a Peoplehood

Benedict Anderson describes communities as 'imagined' when, "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 1983, 6).²⁴⁶ The realms of that community were crafted by Nasserist discourse by describing an overall revolutionary community or nation that people desired to be a part of, and encouraging forms cultural production (songs, but also education, history and theatre) that animated them. The Nasserist regime also policed the boundaries of that community by cracking down on those who were opposed to it or dared to 'imagine otherwise.'²⁴⁷

Nasserist ideology thus became an imaginative framework, "of languages, concepts, categories, imagery of thought and systems of representation, which....make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works" (Hall 2005, 469). It was a framework embodied in 'language', 'common sense' and forms of 'folklore', such as artistic practices (Gramsci 1971, 323). However, as this study indicates, while people may have believed in this imagined community and made sacrifices for it, they were not merely figments of this imaginary, nor its passive consumers. They contributed to the imagined community and its world-view both with their actions and their own logic. Furthermore, they maintained their own 'common sense' when that of the Revolution faltered. And from 1967 onwards, they upheld values of this imaginary, continuing with them, independently of Nasser.

Ziad Fahmy's (2011) work on Egypt looks at how an imagined community was forged and a sense of nationalism created through songs, poetry theatre and oral forms of cultural production between 1870 and 1919. He takes Anderson's ideas further by moving away from the novel and the newspaper. He explores how these forms of culture were directed at the masses, educating them culturally and politically and creating a unified nationalist

²⁴⁶ Anderson looks at the novel and the newspaper and how "they provided the technical means for 're-presenting' the kind of imagined community that is the nation"(Anderson 1983,25). His focus was on print capitalism and its effect on language, national consciousness and administrative vernaculars that defined the state

²⁴⁷ Such as the treatment of communist intellectuals and some feminists that opposed the politics of the state.

consciousness that fueled the movements his work traces. In contrast, in this thesis art is not a 'tool' of the intellectual nor is the imaginary fed to and consumed by the 'masses;' rather popular culture emerges as the means through which people chose to represent themselves.

Partha Chatterjee (1993) also departed from Anderson's notion of 'imagined communities,' exploring how in India, the imagining of a community, may take place beyond the realms and control of the nation state. He looks at how forms of nationalism are propagated and reinforced through drama, language, spirituality and family, referring to these instead as 'anti-colonial nationalisms' or what I would describe as 'anti-colonial ways of imagining.'

In this section I look at particular constructs of the 'imagined community' as they were repeated throughout the interviews. Some of these notions drew directly on the Nasserist imaginary, others re-articulated it, whilst other constructs developed independently of these realms.

7.2.1 *Constructions of the Revolutionary Man/Woman*

A significant trope of the revolutionary identity, or aspect of the 'imagined community,' were the codes of honour and courage that Nasser emphasised in most of his speeches. Honour and courage were invoked to mobilise against an imperialist enemy and build the Dam despite the lack of funding. These very tropes were also common amongst respondent narratives, especially when relating their sacrifices for the Revolution – whether building the High Dam in harsh conditions, being migrated on account of the construction, or civilian resistance during the wars of 1956 and 1967.

These values of *al-sharaf* (honour) and *al-damm al-hāmī* (hot bloodedness) called upon during events of war, migration and physical exertion were expressed in a way that was highly gendered. While these 'traits' of the community were continuously emphasised by Nasser during his speeches, they also resonated with the valuation and understanding of

traits already highly valued in society. They were manifested in the 'new man',²⁴⁸ the independent socialist Egyptian, unafraid of defying imperialism, who fought or dug or built, persevering for his own freedom.

On the High Dam, the 'new man' was free of imperialism, having challenged the world and built the Dam despite meagre resources; he was the worker who overcame his inhibitions and fear of the Nile as a peasant, and educated himself, overcoming ignorance. Reflections on the 'man of the High Dam' were characterised by notions of primordial strength, and herculean efforts reflected in both their use of machinery, and the impossible feat of 'conquering the mountain' and the Nile.

The only woman who worked onsite, in the chemistry lab, Dr. Kawthar al-Subki²⁴⁹ did not face problems working with her peers (she had been hired with direct orders from above). However, they all opted to call her 'Kawthar, bayh' (Kawthar, Sir). They acknowledged and accepted that she was a female, but it was as if her overstepping the gender boundaries by working on the Dam was somehow eased if she was addressed as a man.

These notions of masculinity were explicitly present in how workers from Aswan wished to be remembered, and were also particularly strong in Suez, where I was repeatedly reminded that wars were no place for women. In both places, I was often gently chastised by male respondents about how I addressed them, given that the 'Upper Egyptian man' demanded a certain level of respect, one that required a stricter posture and phrasing of language on my part when addressing them. This did not affect my ability to meet people, or the extent to which correspondents were willing to share stories, but was rather a

²⁴⁸ Nasser's constructions seemed close, to the 'new man' - a Soviet (social and cultural) construct central to Bolshevik project, surrounding the notion that it was possible to create a new type of person, fully committed to the socialist cause and willing to put the interests of society above his or her personal desires and interests. See (Attwood 1999, 1) and (Attwood 1990, 32-66). Although the term 'new man' was not centrally used by respondents in Aswan, there was a constant reference to the 'modern man' the 'industrial man' and the re-making of a 'new free man' in a new society. "The new Woman" on the other hand is a construction of the modern Egyptian woman that champion of the feminist movement, Qassim Amin, considers in his book "Al Mar'a al-Jadida" first published in 1900 (Amin 1989). According to Hoda ElSadda (2007) although there was much discussion of the new woman in the early 20th century, there was little coining of who the counterpart of the 'new man' would be.

²⁴⁹ See Appendix 2 for all interviewee biographies

reflection of how they wished to be represented before me, and further represented through my work.²⁵⁰

The masculinist aspects of Nasserist discourse could be understood in the wider context of a project Laura Bier (2011) calls 'state feminism,' which was another important aspect of Nasserist ideology. A state sponsored project that framed and encouraged women's roles and place in serving the state, whilst still somehow encouraging a degree of patriarchy.

She explains this 'state feminism' as a project that,

entailed the recognition of women as enfranchised citizens and the explicit commitment by the Nasser regime to liberate women in order to guarantee their inclusion and participation in the post-revolutionary nation on an equal footing with man (Bier 2011, 13).

The construction of the 'revolutionary man' was thus strongly tied to the construction of the 'revolutionary woman'. More spaces were created where women could contribute to politics, where in 1953, women were made members of the national guard, and in 1956 the state granted women the right to vote and hold public office, abolished gender discrimination in hiring, established social protection for working women and guaranteed equal access to higher education. In the 1961 charter feminism (along with socialism) formally became planks of Nasserist ideology (Bier 2011, 54).

Feminists, however, who were critical of the state were dealt with harshly. Durriya Shafiq, for instance, a feminist since before the Revolution was opposed to a single-party state was incarcerated with the abolishing of the multiparty system in 1954.

Thus the state policies that were emancipatory with regard to women, were pursued insofar as 'feminism' and 'womanhood' furthered the revolutionary imaginary of a modern society where women contributed to the nationalist state. It is with this in mind

²⁵⁰ This was in contrast to my experience in Nubia and Port Said where gender issues, roles and spaces were much more relaxed whether in representations of history or the present

that the way in which Zaynab Kafrawi was remembered makes sense: the story that is told is of her smuggling weapons in her nephew's pushchair and calling him 'Abdel Nasser to spite the British. Not only does this story tie resistance explicitly with the state and its leader, but more than that Zaynab was playing her role in nation-building, by putting accessories of her own gendered role to new roles (armed struggle) in service of the state.

Bier explains this support of an institutional feminism that meant more women like Dr. Kawthar could hold positions at the Dam, and more *fida'yyīn* like Zaynab recognised, while feminist pioneers like Duriyya Shafiq repressed. She argues that, "women's emancipation was somehow conditional on their support of and contribution to the revolution, in the way that they would become both 'symbols and beneficiaries' of a new and vibrant revolutionary culture (Bier 2011, 5)."

This practice of facilitating 'feminism' in so far as it contributed to the state in the image framed by Nasserism, echoes very strongly with cultural policies and others where certain forms of Art and artists were encouraged so long as their art contributed to the revolutionary imaginary. Feminists and Feminist institutions however, that were in contradiction to the state, were to be abolished.

Bier identifies these contradictory policies as having created a 'patriarchy of the state' where the feminist movement had become dependant on the state's policies. Furthermore, she claims that these oppressive practices were 'normalized' through the discourse on modernity.

She looks at modernity as an imagined status, which she compares to the nation as 'an imagined community' to which a single version of the 'revolutionary woman' should not only contribute, but adhere and conform to.

This explains how a state that sponsored a feminist project may have provided more fertile grounds for a culture of patriarchy especially in association with revolutionary tasks. Women such as Zaynab al-Kafrawi, and Kawthar al-Subki and others, were only remembered in their contribution (and association) with nationalist projects within the

realms of their gender roles. Whereas others were not only forgotten in relation to the state, but also drowned in the patriarchal attitudes that prevailed in areas where women did not have access to the benefits of 'state feminism.'

My findings thus support Bier's claims in how this state sponsored 'feminism' framed women's roles and contributions to the Revolution. Furthermore, her indications on the failures of state feminism, in fueling a culture of patriarchy and failing to support movements outside these realms is useful in both understanding how the revolutionary man *and* woman were constructed. Still the question of whether or not these opportunities even reached women who weren't working or educated, prevails. The feminist movement sponsored or otherwise, had barely reached the nation's peripheries which I explored.

It could thus be argued that the new revolutionary man or woman, as framed within Nasserism, suggests an idea of a modern Egyptian man or woman who despite being familiar with the newest forms of technology and industry, could still be modern in an authentically Egyptian way – as a *fallah*, *sa'idi* or *'ibn balad*. To do this however, Nasser feuled patriarchal notions of masculinity existing in the societies he addressed. In mobilizing existing notions of masculinity Nasserism encouraged an idea of the revolutionary community that the 'truly hot-blooded Egyptian man' should contribute to, however supporting a form of patriarchy that was not at all conducive to the place of the 'revolutionary woman' in society. Particularly if the revolutionary woman saw her role as revolutionizing the Revolution, rather than simply operating within its realms, as was the case with Durriya Shafiq.

7.2.2 *The People as an Army, Builders of the Nation*

These traits of honour and 'hot-bloodedness' were also related to people's conscious, physical efforts at 'nation-building.' In the context of the High Dam, they were building the nation with their own hands. It was a Dam, in the words of technician Abulmajd Abulwafa, that was to provide water and electricity, boosting the economy and funding the production of tanks that would face Israel. This 'building' of the nation was thus not

an abstract notion at all, but one projected onto a physical and concrete task on the Nation's modernity, economy and sovereignty.

Furthermore, they were building a nation in which they would fit better. This 'revolutionary community' promised a nation where the class and background (peasants, workers, feudalists and so on) would be redefined and opportunities for mobility would prevail. This belief that they would have a place in the nation they were building is apparent in the repeated mention of how through working on the Dam they were no longer *fallāhīn*. It also comes through stories such as Hassan Aswanli's being chosen to be sent to Russia for a course, over his father's landlord's son. These were all examples of how the new class was being created. Although in Elizabeth Bishop's (1997) work, this formation of a 'new class' represented the formation of a new middle class that was loyal to the regime and Nasser, the way this new class was perceived by people was quite different. It was the possibility of a new nation they could better fit in, one they were building a day at a time.

This nation-building also became associated with fighting wars, not only in the sense of fighting in those wars and battles that demarcated the Nasserist era, but also the building of the Dam was itself perceived as war. The workers were, as I discuss in detail in chapter 4, fighting a 'war' against nature, against their own natures as *fallāhīn*, and against a feudal order, which their education and 'industrialisation' enabled them to challenge. Finally, it was a war against imperialism.

In the memories of the Nubians, working on the Dam was considered an act of war, but being drafted for the 1967 war and War of Attrition were also central topics in their songs in particular. As discussed in chapter 5 justifying the need to go to war and the necessities for sacrifices indicated a reluctance or a doubt in the worthiness of the cause or the relevance of the national project.

In the cases of the *fida'yyīn* in both Port Said and Suez, as part of the 'popular army' they were not only fighting a war against imperialism, but doing so with an unofficial status. This is constantly emphasised in Suez, where people fought for the sustenance of their communities. The lack of the army's presence at critical points, leaving the city to the

defence of its citizens created a sense that they had to mobilise as their own army in protection of their homes.

This discourse of being an army or military waging wars, at once related them to the state, while differentiating the 'kind' of army they were, particularly when the official military forces were not dependable. For instance, members of the resistance in Suez joined UN peacekeeping troops to make sure demarcations made between Suez and Israeli forces were to their benefit. Ahmad 'Utaifi, a member of the resistance, mentions how they dared do this, knowing fully well the risks they took being 'unofficial,' but that they could not depend on 'official' forces to protect their rights anymore.

This military discourse however implied many other things about their relationship with the state. In particular, being part of an army and a war justified deaths in a way that meant there was a silence around casualties. In interviews with workers of the High Dam for instance, the insistence that a 25 percent loss of army personnel in a war is to be expected justified the amount of deaths in the building of the Dam. Within this military imaginary, not only should casualties be inevitable, but these deaths are framed as sacrifices for the country.

The sacrifices made by Nubians during migration were justified in a similar way. They were sacrifices for a bigger cause, and the state was rarely held responsible in popular discourse (save by later generations). Finally, in both Port Said and Suez, the state's silences with regard to deaths, and in some cases entire battles, were not necessarily overlooked, even if they were forgiven.

Rather than demand recognition, in all of the above cases, people chose to remember their own versions of their roles in the battles reinforcing their own political and communal identities. They committed their sacrifices, deaths and losses to memory where the state did not. Respondents' perceptions of themselves as part of *al-gaysh al-sha'bī* (the popular army) as coined by Nasser, or *gaysh ta'mīr masr* (the Egyptian construction army) as the builders of the Dam referred to themselves warranted significant allegiance to the state. This allegiance justified sacrifices and deaths such that people did not challenge the state's silences. Rather than completely silence the sacrifices

to history however, people developed 'oppositional memories,' explored in this thesis through song, stories and language, and at times a separate nationalist consciousness.

In an interview with Sayyid Kaburya, a singer from Suez and member of *al-difa' al-sha'bi* (popular defence) during the War of Attrition, he explained that the 2011 revolution finally enabled them to view the 1952 Revolution more critically than before. Though they always demanded the state held leadership figures of the military accountable for the 1967 defeat, they never held the military state accountable for the failures of the Revolution as a whole. For, in his own words, "to criticise the military as an establishment, would be to cancel ourselves out of history...the military was the Revolution, and so we were the military!"

In the sections to come, I explore the politics of a people that extended beyond the nation defined by Nasser's imagined community, and beyond the politics of the state and 1952 Revolution.

7.3 Politics of a Peoplehood

A recurrent theme throughout my research was people's affirmation of their own politics, particularly if their politics were different from those propagated by the state. There is also a repeated emphasis, as exemplified in the songs, on how their political commitment ranged far longer than the existence of the state or the timeline of the Revolution.

In this section, I will look at how songs that emphasise the historical continuity of sacrifice and political activism are common across Upper Egypt and the Canal. This political community had an understanding of socialism as a culture rather than political doctrine, which I will also explore before turning to the wider political community people projected themselves as part of. This community was one that entailed a wider nationalism, extending beyond the boundaries of the state.

7.3.1 Revolutionaries Beyond the Revolution

In Port Said, Suez and Nubia the notion that they were a 'sacrificing' or 'political' people since long before the Revolution is repeatedly invoked. The songs of Port Said for instance started with the call I mention in Chapter 3, where the singer calls the audience's

attention with “*Dumyat biladī!*” (Damietta is my country), to which an audience, ready to receive the song, replies with “*wal habash manzālī!*” (And Ethiopia is my home). This starts any song with a reminder that the origin of this singing tradition was with the digging of the Canal, a struggle that brought together people of Damietta with the people of Ethiopia and beyond.

Songs in both Suez and Port Said continue to draw on the sacrifices, battles and resistance operations that preceded the Revolution. They sang about these sacrifices as they struggled to make the British imperialist forces ‘uncomfortable’ in their stay, when a political will could not be mobilised to fight imperialism. In this reminder that their anti-imperialist politics pre-dated the Revolution, they sought the will to continue that fight even in the absence of state-support.

In Nubia, the songs about the migration, and particularly those that encouraged people to take courage in the new move were songs that reminded them of migrations dating back to 1902, 1912 and 1933 with the building and heightening of the first water reservoir. They had persevered and prevailed before, and so they could again in spite of the new migration and the building of the Dam.

The songs forge these communities, not just at one point in time, but historically across generations. As such, in singing of past battles and sacrifices they reinforce that they are part of a struggling community, one that has sacrificed, persevered and prevailed.

In Suez, this ‘continuum’ persists beyond the Revolution, so that when Nasser dies, they continue to fight for the politics they deem their own in the face of Sadat. They continue the fight for an Arab cause, and against an Israeli imperialism. Thus the anti-imperialist politics in particular, alongside the willing sacrifices for their communities, and the perseverance of their communities, is constantly emphasised throughout songs that conjure a past very similar to their present.

Another aspect of the politics of these songs that might be read as the politics of the Revolution was socialist ideology. These songs emphasised, however that Nasser’s socialist politics was their own, since before the Revolution. Just as Nasser’s ‘Arab

Socialism' is continuously articulated through songs as an honourable way of life, at times even devoid of politics;²⁵¹ in my interviews, socialism is described as a way of life in most contexts, that preceded the Revolution as well.

My host in Nubia, Hajj 'Izz al-Din, explained that the Nubians were 'socialist, long before the term socialism was coined'. He went on to describe, as did many other respondents, how socialism reflected a communality and loyalty to the larger community. It reflected values such as integrity, collectivity and honour that the Nubians had always upheld. What they appreciated about Nasser and the Revolution therefore, seemed to be that the Revolution's ideology was very much like their own culture, and not vice versa.

Similarly in Aswan, Suez and Port Said, the values of socialism were those reflected in everyday life. The understanding of socialism invoked until today is embedded in this everyday lived experience, rather than the dogmatic values propagated in the curricula of the socialist youth organisations operating there at the time.

In Aswan, for instance, socialism was very much tied to work ethic. The Russians were admired as 'socialists,' doing all forms of odd jobs on the site despite their higher positions. Socialism also meant being able to become workers – the opportunity to grow and modernise – without having had a particular level of education. Most workers ended up being promoted one way or another until they became technicians, and for them this was a large part of what socialism meant.

The struggle to keep the *simsimiyya* pure of commercial influences in Port Said was also a struggle against capitalism with the onset of Sadat's *infitah* (open door) policies, which turned the city into a duty-free zone. This in turn changed the cultural fabric of Port Said, pushing the *simsimiyya* into commercial circles. The struggle to maintain socialist values was manifested in the efforts to keep the *simsimiyya* an '*āla* *'ishtirakiyya* (socialist instrument) 'as it had always been.'

²⁵¹ Discussed at length in Chapter 2.

The *simsimiyya* was not only socialist because it sang for justice, beyond the realms of commerce and income generation, but also because it was sung to collectively. The *simsimiyya's* songs were written collectively and not attributed to one person or another. Those songs that continued to be sung reflected the will and aspirations of a wider populace who continued to sing them.

Socialism thus became a collective and communal way of existence that entailed sacrifices for a larger whole. The way that people reiterated their commitment to socialism and their having been politically committed to anti-imperialism, from well before the Revolution, could be read as an attempt to define themselves as communities in relation to existing hegemonic ideas. However, the fact that many of these ideas and ideals hold strong today when the ideology no longer prevails, and the fact that they had been let down by a state and military that did not acknowledge their sacrifices or were careless with them does not indicate blind loyalty. Rather, it suggests that their sacrifices and revolutionary politics extended well beyond the state.

We saw in Chapter 2 that Nasser's policies were in important ways shaped by people's movements, initiatives and reactions to them. As such, it may be worth looking at Nasserism as an articulation of all those existing movements, the willingness to sacrifice, and the struggle of a people that stretched beyond his rule. This is particularly clear in his surprise to see the people of Ismailiyya armed and ready to engage in civilian resistance in 1956 at a time when the army was not, and other instances where he capitalised on popular movements and mobilised them, rather than enforcing his own ideas. The constructs of the imagined community he propagated also drew on existing revered societal traits, as well as the collective desires for freedom and historical popular struggles for it. Indeed, it was not until 1961 that the Revolution's policies and ideologies were finally articulated clearly, whilst much of this politics existed on a popular level before then.

7.3.2 *Nationalism Beyond the Nation*

Just as Arab nationalism was central to Nasserism as constantly propagated by Nasser and the songs associated with the Revolution (see chapter 2), a sense of belonging to a larger

Arab struggle (and other struggles beyond the Egyptian nation) was another common theme that ran through interviews. A sense of belonging that transcended the boundaries of the 'nation' was expressed in Port Said, Suez, Nubia and Aswan in their ability to relate to a struggle on the scale of a community larger than their immediate one, and whose borders were not delineated by nation-states.

In Port Said and Suez, the obvious relation was to the Palestinian cause. Most performances in public street events until this day involve singing about Palestine or against Israeli imperialism and Zionism for at least half the night. The relation to Palestine is partially the *'ahd* (pledge) associated with the 1952 Revolution to liberate Palestinian territories after the 1948 and 1967 wars. More than that, however, it is the struggle against Israeli forces during the six years of war. Their relation to Palestine is thus embedded less in a 'sense' of Arab nationalism than a situation where the cause is unified and the enemy is one.

While I was conducting interviews in Suez in the summer of 2011, during protests around the Israeli embassy in Cairo a protestor scaled the building where the embassy was hosted, bringing down the Israeli flag. He was immediately dubbed 'flag man.' In the words of 'Abd al-Mun'im Qinnawi, former member of the resistance in Suez, "Flag man is proof of how this revolution is bringing back the popular priorities to the political front...this generation is making it clear to Israel, as we have always done, that it won't take any more of its butchery silently." The 2011 revolution was perceived as a continuation of Suez's struggle, that had been separated from the rest of the country after Sadat *'khān al-'ahd'* (betrayed the pledge) as it is repeatedly said. Both Suez and Port Said felt that they were marginalised economically by the regimes of Sadat and Mubarak in an attempt to marginalise their political priorities as well.

Meanwhile, in Nubia, the larger community to which they related or expressed a belonging is that of the Nubians in Wadi Halfa and beyond in Sudan. In Chapter 5 where I explore the Nubian displacement during the building of the Dam, I make reference to the song *Nuba Nut* (circa 1964) sung by the internationally renowned Hamza 'Alaa' al-Din, prior to his fame. Hamza's song called upon Nubians to refuse the migration to the north,

consider moving to the south, thereby staying by the Nile in the only explicit call to oppose the migrations of 1964.

In the village of Tinjar where I stayed during my research, people boasted of having relations in the 'Nubia of Sudan,' and spoke of how the best marriage prospects for their daughters would be Nubians of the south. The yearning for that community comes from the way that the Nubians of Sudan maintained their villages by the Nile, but also were seen to be less marginalised socially and economically than the Nubians of Egypt. The Nubians of Sudan are also perceived to have maintained their culture and to have made few compromises to the state, unlike in Egypt.²⁵²

For the workers of the High Dam on the other hand, this sense of belonging to a 'larger community' was less intense. Loyalty was most often expressed, in recounted memories, as loyalty to the High Dam itself, '*al-sadd baladī*' (The Dam is my country) was the saying I explored in chapter 4. Unlike the case in Port Said and Nubia, where the belonging to a wider community also meant a relation to people beyond the borders of the nation-state, the commonality in Aswan was based on an existing shared space. Through joint struggle in this space, the workers of Aswan formed close relationships with the Russians. There were many touching stories of friendships between Russians and Egyptian builders that were meant to indicate the bread and butter shared in the name of common struggle. The community of the Dam was one characterised by the reciprocity of relations, whether between Egyptians and Russians or across positions and hierarchy.

Crucially however, the notion of the larger 'imagined community' that was propagated by the Dam's project – that of a community where the barriers of class were to be redefined (through opportunities for education and social mobility) and a new community created of Egyptians from all over Egypt – was itself very fragile.

²⁵² On leaving Tinjar, I was presented with numerous gifts, most of which were food and cosmetics coming from Sudan, a profoundly generous gesture.

Unlike the Nubians, and people of the Canal, the builders were the one 'community' I explored that was forged through the Revolution and not a community related to a space with its own history. Despite an invocation of that community for instance through the repeated emphasis on the 'language of the Dam,' existing fissures between the different groups were never fully dealt with.

Upper Egyptians, for instance always expressed a certain shock that I would stay with Nubians in their simple household arrangements when I could have stayed with Upper Egyptians. Nubians, meanwhile, had a range of idioms and sayings expressing their mistrust of *fallāhīn*, such as '*Yakhudha timsāh wala nigawizha fallāh*,' (Rather she be eaten by a crocodile than we marry her to a *fallāh*). The Nubian host family I stayed with, always worried upon my visits to the 'capital' (Aswan), and particularly when I had long interviews with Upper Egyptians whom they deemed untrustworthy.

Particularly significant with regard to the fragility of the Dam's 'imagined community' is the vast discrepancy between the builders' compounds that I visited while conducting interviews. Although workers and technicians preferred to be referred to as 'builders' of the Dam, thus indicating this status where all were enjoyed equal worth and opportunity despite background, the housing situation indicated quite the opposite. Workers who had started working on the Dam site, before its inauguration stayed in camps and worked for years in conditions that did not allow for the accompaniment of spouses or family. With time the compound of *Al-Sadd Sharq* was built, but the accommodation was clearly suitable only for the ten years dedicated to the building of the Dam, and not built to survive five decades more. The situation in this compound is thus that of disintegrating homes with minimal maintenance of water and electricity. In fact some areas in the compound, given the generations of workers' children that continue to occupy the small homes, are comparable to run down informal settlement areas in Cairo.

A compound such as *Sahari*, on the other hand, that once housed the Russian specialists, and now hosts technicians, offers quite different living conditions. The buildings are in far better shape, with greenery surrounding them, alongside sports centres that were once only accessible to the Russians. Whether the technicians lived there while building the

Dam, or in more modest circumstances until the Russians moved out, the difference between these homes and neighborhoods and those of compounds to the east and west of the Dam, indicated a significant class discrepancy amongst the community of 'builders.' Dr. Kawthar who worked in the chemistry lab and whose husband was an engineer working on the Dam, described how working on site was compensated for with air-conditioned housing and transportation arrangements. Her world was a far cry from that of Umm Mirvat and her family. Umm Mirvat, whose father had been a worker on the railway built around the Dam site and whose husband was a nurse in the builders' hospital, now lives in the disintegrating house in which she married her husband and faces the possibility of eviction.

Although many of the workers complained about their living conditions, they blame the situation on the same thing – the fact that since the age of Nasser elapsed, they became mere 'workers' having lost their prestige as 'builders.' That the Dam was a national project relevant at a particular point in time – and with it their positions and futures – all lapsed with the death of Nasser and the policies of Sadat.

The imagined community propagated by Nasser was fragile as class differences were never abolished, although it decried these inequities. This is not to say that there was no social mobility; nationalisation projects made institutions such as education more accessible and land reform led to more equitable property distribution.²⁵³ In places such as Aswan where people believed in the imaginary, they contributed to it with great sacrifices that they made consciously.

It remains that the nationalism manifested in people's sense of belonging to larger communities that they may have not necessarily met, is based on their relating to the people of those communities, and their common struggle. This was the basis of

²⁵³The actual effects of land reform are highly contested however. "Great beneficiaries of land reform were the poor peasants owning less than five fedans who increased ownings from 35.4% in 1952 to 54.8% in 1964. Structure of re-appropriation of land was great. But what was the effect - little. (Winckler and Podeh 2004, 121)"

belonging, the common or shared struggle, rather than merely the realms of a nation demarcated by special or temporal boundaries.

7.4 Nasser as Articulated in the Popular Imaginary

In this section I will briefly highlight how people wrote Nasser into their causes and struggles whether mythically or otherwise, and explore through various testimonies why and how they may have put him on a pedestal at times, while keeping a critical view of him as president at others. Overall, from their perception of Nasser, to the construction of their communities and rationalization of their sacrifices, it is clear that, for my respondents at least, he symbolised the Revolution in his embodying the values of a struggle and a nation they aspired to become part of. The Revolution however meant far more than just his person.

7.4.1 Nasser as Idol

Stories of moments of excitement and euphoria experienced upon seeing Nasser or hearing his speeches were common amongst respondents. This was especially the case in Aswan and on the Dam's site, which he frequented periodically, as well as Port Said and Suez and Nubia where people celebrated his speeches and political declarations on the streets.

Some respondents claimed that it was not Nasser himself that lay behind the euphoria, but the project he embodied, and the values of dignity, self-sufficiency, freedom and prosperity, that he not only represented, but held the promise of. A common explanation would be that "...he taught us our value as Egyptians/human beings" and, "he taught us our rights."

Nasser first and foremost was credited with having provided his community with a *makānna* – a distinguished place amongst citizens and societies of the world. He made of them a people that were defiant and successful, by taking stances that honoured them, ones they were willing and ready to defend. His stances and vision for their future lifted collective morale. His was a face that represented them before the rest of the world, and did so honourably, whether this was through his position on the funding of the High Dam,

his decision to build the Dam, his refusal to surrender in 1967 or even his involvement in Bandung. Nasser was an unlikely hero who made fighters of them, and a hero that could have been any of them.

Nasser's policies also had a direct impact on people's lives. Workers on the High Dam who were promoted to technicians, and technicians who became managers attributed these distinct changes in their lives to him. This is not to mention the exposure and access to educational institutions that would have otherwise not been attainable before the Revolution. This is true for people who were able to study at school, but also workers and technicians on the Dam who were given the opportunity to pursue university degrees as they worked, an opportunity they insist would not have been available were it not for him.

Even Nubians who were migrated claimed that the enticement behind migration was the possibility of prosperity and modernity associated with integrating. This sentiment was mainly expressed by those who pursued an education in Aswan and Cairo following their migration, however.

Although I did not personally interview beneficiaries of land reform policies, there was a commonly-expressed idea amongst respondents that land and wealth were being redistributed.²⁵⁴ This provided not only the promise of social mobility, but also the confidence that the president was partial to ordinary people, giving them an overall sense of security, acknowledgement and recognition.

Thus mostly Nasser provided a vision for a future, and more importantly a future where people would be more in control of their fates. Liberating Egypt from British imperialism, standing up to Western powers, taking the side of the poor, and the direct impact of all these policies on the lives of citizens of Port Said, Suez, Nubia and Aswan provided a place for him in their hearts. After decades of colonial rule, Nasser presented them with an

²⁵⁴ According to Reem Saad (2002, 190) peasants referred to Land reform laws as the 'law of freedom'; regardless of whether or not they benefited from Land reform, they felt it reshaped their relations with feudalists.

image of themselves as a society that had not otherwise been attainable, an image before themselves, but also before the world. They were part of something that was growing, and something that was winning.

7.4.2 Nasser as 'Ibn Balad

Of the descriptions and traits applied to Nasser, perhaps the most common was that he was *'ibn al-balad*, a genuine son of the country. The Nubians, as we saw, believed he was like them in that he was honest, valued integrity and had a strong sense of community; he was *'rajil nubī fi tiba`uh'* – a man of Nubian traits. The Upper Egyptians understood his hard-headedness in the face of adversity and insistence on building the Dam despite the obstacles as an outcome of his *sa`idī* origins typically described as stubborn. Meanwhile for the people of Suez and Port Said, he was hot-blooded and ready for a fight, as were they.

In attributing these traits to Nasser, these various communities wrote themselves into Nasser's revolutionary community, by seeing him as one of them. He became a revolutionary 'like them', and they, 'like him'.

Fu'ad Shallal, a technician on the High Dam who, though critical of Nasser, explained when someone acts with such *fatwanna*, others are obliged to follow him regardless of where he was going.

For the Nubians, a community marginalised both before the building of the Dam and after it, they justified their allegiance to Nasser and acceptance of the move because the man was such a Nubian that you had to trust him blindly.

They gave him the highest symbols of honour first by making him 'like them', and then they gave their plights significance by writing him into them. For example in Aswan, anyone who had an admirable work ethic on the Dam was associated with Nasser. According to technician Hassan Aswanli,

'Abdel Nasser was not a president, he was a worker; he was with us all the time. This was to the extent that we called everyone who had a strong passion

for his work – Jimmy, in his own name. He inspired people with the spirit of a struggle for dignity; he built the modern Egyptian man.

Nasser had ‘made’ modern men out of them. By this Aswanli meant that rather than *fallahīn*, they were now workers who could manage machinery and control their own fates with new industrial capacities.

Another way Nasser was implicated in the people’s struggles was through a series of myths that seemed to have been generated across historical events and communities. Nasser was repeatedly sighted in the work places or battlefields, even though he probably never made it to them.

In Aswan for instance, there are an abundance of stories of Nasser showing up on the work-site. He is sometimes remembered as working in the tunnels, where conditions were the most dangerous, in a helmet and boots like the rest of the workers. In others, he was in a car near the work-site, watching the builders with Marshall Tito, and awarding those who suspiciously approached the car with a conversation. Many were the stories of Nasser appearing in different areas of the site in his undershirt, work gear or helmet, depending on the situation.

In Port Said, there were a few stories from respondents of seeing Nasser on the front lines of the civilian defence, at times disguised as a *fida’iy* and at others as a fisherman. These instances of his appearances gave significance and importance to struggles that were otherwise nationally forgotten – such as the harshness of work on the Dam or the resistance in Port Said. They also honoured him by including him and his sacrifices in the struggles that signified their communities.

Furthermore, a story I came across a few times when discussing the migration with Nubians, was their insistence that it was not forced. Rather Nasser had called for a meeting with elders of Nubian villages to describe the building of the Dam and give them the choice of being migrated north or south of the Dam. Migration north held the promise of integration and a life closer to that of the city, whilst south meant a life closer to theirs in the villages, and closer to Sudan.

Though I have not been able to verify this account, the story functions both to justify their move, and indicate that Nasser had involved them in the process. In this story, Nasser's affiliation with the Nubians is reasserted and his responsibility for the hardships of an ill-planned and executed migration excused.

These myths may be seen as their ways of justifying their sacrifices and their forgiveness of his mistakes, or even compensating for the state's silence as to the circumstances during Dam building and war in Port Said.

What is clear, however, is that the myths of his 'being there' when he clearly was not, wrote him into their struggles, and cemented the relevance and importance of the causes they sacrificed so much for. Remembering him as such however, did not mean they were not critical of their unlikely hero.

7.4.3 *Nasser's Failures*

Nasser's failures and shortcomings were particularly highlighted in Suez, and in some cases with regard to the High Dam. Prior to the obvious failures of 1967, Nasser was highly criticised by some of the Dam's builders for prioritising international stances and politics over technical decisions. This was manifested in his insistence on the completion of the Dam in the indicated timeframe – over the actual technical assessments that would have suggested this timeframe was unrealistic.

As of 1968, widespread criticism was manifested in the anger of a student movement demanding a fair (and harsher) trial of the members of the military (air force) held responsible for the defeat. In Suez, meanwhile, they sang (they claim, in his presence) of how they entrusted him with a free Egypt, which he lost.

Other songs called on Nasser, warning and reminding him of the nation's priorities, in particular to continue the war against Israel. Their refusal of Nasser's abdication did not necessarily reflect support of him as a person. Rather it is better understood in terms of their desire to ensure that the ship's captain did not abandon ship, and rather steered it based on terms and priorities previously agreed to. Opposition that rose against Nasser at the time, intended not to oust him, but to safeguard the values of the Revolution, the

pledge towards Arabism, and the attitude against anti-imperialism, that they seemed to agree defined them as a people. Pressure was to be exerted to ensure he continued with the Revolution.

Issues and acts that seemed inconsistent with the values of the Revolution, from the ousting of the first president Mohammed Nagib to the failure of the military in Port Said and Suez, were not forgotten. They were justified and explained, however, by invoking the fact that Nasser was, after all, only a human being. This was an excuse he himself used to ask to be forgiven for struggling to fairly penalise the chief of military command, his friend 'Abd al-Hakim 'Ammir after the 1967 defeat.²⁵⁵

This is to say that the workers of the High Dam, the members of resistance in 1956 and 1967, and the migrated Nubians were not oblivious to Nasser's failures. The prices they paid for these failures were valuable and high. However, it was clear that the struggle and sacrifices were not *for* Nasser, but rather for the communities they believed themselves to be a part of. These communities stretched from their own physical communities to the larger communities that extended beyond the realms of the nation, and beyond the imagined community that was the nation Nasser constructed.

People's sacrifices, and willingness to sacrifice further, alongside their adherence to the values by which they defined their communities and political priorities, ran deeper than their relationship with or expectations of Nasser. He may have embodied the values of the Revolution, and was for that highly appreciated. The way many saw it, this incredibly charismatic and successful man, looked, acted and spoke like them; he could have been any of them, and they could have been him. They had engaged politically for these struggles well before the Revolution, and continued to fight for them after its demise.

In an interview with Hisham al-Salamuni²⁵⁶, activist in the student movements in the 1970s, he explained the paradox of their relationship with Nasser in this way,

²⁵⁵ See extract from speech after abdication, June 1967 in Chapter 2.

²⁵⁶ Hisham al-Salamuni. Student activist in the 1970s. Interview by author, Cairo 2006

People think of Nasser as the father of the Revolution, and this is where they are wrong; he was the Revolution's son, born of it. For you may hold a grudge against your father, but your son, you would forgive anything.

7.5 Conclusion

Ihna al sha'b al-khatt al-'ahmar!

We the people are a red line!

Anti-military protest slogan 2011-2012

In reaction to the Supreme Council of Armed Force's (SCAF) repeated announcements that the "Egyptian military is a red line" as of April 2011– above criticism and attack by the January 2011 revolution – protesters chanted 'Down with military rule, we the people, are the red line.' This was a period of shifting attitudes, from hope to disdain, towards the military.²⁵⁷

The January 2011 revolution was accompanied by a plethora of songs from the 1950s and 1960s. In Suez and Port Said, the chants, slogans and songs were those of the resistance during that period. In Tahrir Square in Cairo, on the other hand, both the songs of the 1960s dissident duo Ahmad Fu'ad Nigm and Sheikh Imam, as well as the revolutionary songs of 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz, resounded across the square. Even though the revolution was somewhat critical of the possibility of military rule, the legacy of the struggle in that the era between 1952 and 1970, endured, inspiring the square.

Upon carrying a picture of Nasser during the 18 day sit in that started on the January 25 2011, my friend was asked by a stranger to take it down – for, "He (Nasser) may have been the symbol of dignity one day, but today, we, the people, are the symbol of dignity." In another incident, a man who stood in a crowd carrying a picture of Nasser chanting for socialism was asked to bring it down by a young man, with the explanation, "*mish 'ayzīn shakhsanna law samaht*" – (No personifications please!) as if to say that socialism should not be embodied in one personality.

²⁵⁷ Though first chanted in reaction to a communiqué after protests in April 2011 (Salim 2011), the chant did not gain momentum until after July 2011 when an anti-military sentiment became more popular – signaling the 'second wave' of the revolution



Figure 7-1: Graffiti in downtown Cairo during a period of confrontation with SCAF 2011.²⁵⁸

Although several such discussions took place during the 18 days, exploring the limitations of military rule, questioning whether or not the 1952 Revolution could in fact be called a ‘popular revolution’, it remains that the songs that blared longest on the speakers in Tahrir were the songs of ‘Abd al-Halim Hafiz. This continued to be the case even when the revolution started producing its own songs and poetry. One of the most commonly played songs was *Sūra* (A photograph), written by Salah Jahin and sung by ‘Abd al-Halim. One of its stanzas resonated in particular with the square,

Ya zaman sawarna, sawarna ya zaman!
Wi-'illy hayukhrug mil midan, wi-'illy hayukhrug mil midan,
'umruh ma haybān fil sūra!

The song pleads with ‘time’ to take a picture of the ‘happiest people under the victorious flag’ and then warns, that whoever steps out of *al-midan* (the square – also meaning battlefield) will never appear in the picture. The pertinence of these words during the Tahrir sit-in was tied with the elation of a people having come together after years of

²⁵⁸ Photograph by Author

invisible, yet building solidarity, as well as a warning that whoever left the sit-in may not be remembered in the history's picture. A picture symbolizing the revolution, and their victories.

Similarly, in the 1950s and 1960s, this '*sūra*' or 'imagined community' of a people building a new nation was one that was both eloquently weaved by Nasser and strongly desired by a populace. This picture of a nation that was liberated, modern, more economically prosperous, and in which they had a stake, was one that was collectively imagined, contributed to, and desired by many.

As I have explored in this chapter and throughout the thesis, however, this *sūra* of an 'alliance of popular forces' with gender equality and suspended class relations, as propagated by the songs and speeches was in fact very fragile. Though reflected through discourse and policies, the Revolution had failed to remedy the basis of the fissures within society. What I have also tried to demonstrate, through my findings, is that people's sacrifices were not for a picture conjured and created by Nasser, but one he had articulated out of their own values, hopes and dreams.

Indeed, the legacy of the 1952 Revolution is not one associated with a military coup, nor one necessarily associated with Nasser's achievements, but rather is most popularly associated with a struggle that was meaningful and relevant to people. The possibility of a revolution in those early days following January 25 2011 rippled with a familiarity of the borrowed memories of the struggles of the 1950s and 1960s against oppression and a world order to which the Egyptians have always been subject. These borrowed memories looked towards building a nation that fulfills the dreams and aspirations of its people.

This language of dreams, desires and possibilities was not one that was abstract, for it was developed in a period where demanding physical efforts were dedicated to change; change in the structure of politics and society, and change in people's lives. The fact that Nasser created opportunities to realise these possibilities, albeit within the limits of his own worldview, are not to be underestimated. However, recognising that people willingly contributed to this worldview in the name of their own histories of sacrifices, political stances, and struggles is essential to understanding the period.

Nasser acquired his popularity for eloquently tying these broader nationalist projects to a long history of popular struggle against imperialism; a personal struggle to a wider project. He also tied the Revolution's ideology to people's perceived culture and way of lives. He made of politics and a Revolution a very personal affair. In doing so however, he capitalized on existing sentiments, capturing the hearts and minds of a wider populace.

That is to say that Nasser as a person embodied a collective dream, in articulating it and translating it into projects that provided the opportunity for people to build (not just experience) a new Nation. However, none of these projects would have been possible, had people not believed in this imaginary and actively contributed to it. Tying their own struggles to it, making sacrifices for it, and upholding its values when the Revolution faltered.

It is that legacy, of a popular struggle, and the possibility of the building of a new Nation that continues to resound through the movements of 2011.

Chapter 8. In Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

Though it becomes difficult to 'conclude' with the findings behind stories of a past that resonate so strongly in a present, I will conclude with what these findings tell us about that past, and this present.

This study initially sought to trace practices of resistance to what I imagined was a state's tyrannical mobilisation of a society as workers built the High Dam under hazardous circumstances and civilians defended themselves against a well armed-enemy in the absence of the military. What I had imagined correctly was that people were aware of the difficulties they were subjected to during the wars and industrial feats of this Revolution on account of an inefficient military and a stratified Revolutionary Council. They were so keenly aware that they provide the details of a history buried under the reel of nationalist victories, and the achievements attributed to the rule of Nasser, and of Sadat and Mubarak after him. What I was wrong about, however, was that people were not mobilised by Nasser's person alone, nor by the repressive policies of his state.

My findings, contrary to expectations, indicated a state of mobilisation and agency during the period in question, that meant the Revolution had become more of a personal struggle within the larger national events, and less attributable to Nasser's person than is reflected in the collective nationalist imaginary of the period. To the members of resistance in Port Said and Suez, the builders of the High Dam and the Nubians who were migrated, the Revolution was a struggle of their own, a battle of their creation. It was a personal struggle, for their own livelihoods, for their homes, as well as an international one liberating themselves from imperialism. Ideas of socialism and Arab nationalism were re-articulated and appropriated so that they became features of their identities and everyday lives.

Where this study started out in search of resistance, it became an inquiry into the politics of hegemony. I look at how Nasser succeeded in articulating a world-view and social and political imaginary that drew on the elements of a population's spontaneous philosophy.

In this way, Nasserism with all it carried of Socialism and Arab nationalism became 'common sense.' It was a hegemony where, rather than a people merely buying into the rhetoric of the state, the state managed to use a rhetoric that drew on the dreams, aspirations and histories of a people. I look at how people chose to represent and identify themselves within the larger imagined community, in ways that were both tied and opposed to the dominant narrative. Moreover, the nature of this hegemony is revealed in the way that people carried through the ideals of Nasserism even when the state itself faltered.

In his study of *Magnetic Mountain in Stalinist Russia*, Stephen Kotkin argues that,

Stalinism was not just a political system, let alone the rule of an individual. It was a set of values, a social identity, a way of life. When it comes to Stalinism, what needs to be explained and subjected to detailed scrutiny are the mechanisms by which the dreams of ordinary people and those of the individuals directing the state found common ground on this Soviet version of the welfare state (Kotkin 1995, 23).

In a similar vein, in this conclusion I will explore the common grounds for that dream through the three main realms to which my findings point. Firstly, I reveal the politics of hegemony, and the contradictions of consent. I argue that the language of emotions and dreams are deeply relevant to politics, as well as a people's capacity to aspire, and their willingness to sacrifice. In that light, I explore the popular politics behind Nasser's achievements, and what they tell us about the politics of a people, and the movements that realised the achievements that shaped the era.

Secondly, my methodology, looking at 'intimate languages' of communities, is central to my thesis, and constitutes its contribution to academic literature on popular politics and popular culture. I argue that much of a people's politics, aspirations, and self-representations can be read through the intimate languages communities use to express themselves, particularly, through song. I indicate how songs become means for the collective writing of history and explore what they have signified in different periods to the communities who sing them.

Finally, I argue that the legacy of what is described as ‘Nasserism’ lies not simply in the person of Nasser or his institution, but rather in the struggle of a people that echo through the political struggles of a present. This is particularly so in the lyrics that continue to shape the imaginary of a national past, and speak to the politics of the present.

8.2 The Politics of Hegemony

Throughout the thesis, I have explored the roots of Nasser’s power, the power of his ideas and his addresses, and their effects on people. In Chapter 2, discussing the dominant discourse that was disseminated primarily through songs and speeches, I demonstrated how an eloquent and emotive language was employed of which phrases were easily turned into sayings and idioms contributing to his power or ‘prestige’ as Gramsci describes it.²⁵⁹

Part of the root of Nasser’s power thus lay in his ability to articulate the imagined community, in such a way that people could relate to and aspire to become a part of it. His eloquence accompanied the daring projects he spearheaded, from nationalising the Suez Canal to building the High Dam without resorting to imperial funding. All these actions made a *futuwwa* of him that meant, as many argued, that he had to be supported.

Nasser formulated his ideas of socialism and Arab nationalism, as ideas that were inherent to Egyptian culture, and familiar to those he addressed, turning ‘Arab socialism’ into ‘our socialism’ in people’s imaginaries. The politics he articulated became not only politics associated with policies and state actions, but aspects of people’s everyday lives, aspirations, and understandings of themselves.

In the chapters on the Aswan High Dam, I look at how this hegemony translated into revolutionary truths for which people were willing to ‘suspend disbelief (Kotkin 1995).’ I

²⁵⁹ “the spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is historically caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.” (Gramsci 1971, 12)

explore how they were willing to risk their lives for an idea that resembled a ‘higher truth’ – how they believed they could restructure the nation to better accommodate them. For those working on the Dam, it was a battle against imperialism that would grant them a dignified place in the world. It was a battle that would provide the nation with the possibility of industrial advancement. On the most personal level the Dam was, for both Nubians and workers on the Dam, an opportunity for prosperity, whether in term of electricity or irrigation for agriculture or a particular kind of modernity that came with education, modern aspects of life such as electricity. It was a battle that demonstrated their pride in their Egyptian fighting nature, as *wilād al-balad*.

The focus on the Nubian experience in particular enabled an exploration of the concept of ‘contradictory consciousness’ that accompanies hegemony. Indeed, “hegemony is a process of continuous creation which is bound to be uneven in the degree of legitimacy it commands and to leave some room for antagonistic cultural expressions to develop” (Adamson 1980, 174).²⁶⁰ As such, consent involved “a complex mental state...mixing resistance and resignation” (Lears 1985, 572).

Consent on the part of the Nubians to be migrated, and the workers to work on the Dam under such dire circumstances, therefore, was not merely an acceptance of the situation. Rather it came from a desire to believe in this construction project on account of a “utopian longing” (Jameson 2007), for a more inclusive nation. The continued presence of guilt amongst Nubians for having left their homelands, a feeling that was inconsistent with the overall glorious narrative of the Dam, shows that contradictions, though at times not reconciled, are not forgotten. Their and the workers’ sense of agency towards the Dam and sense of personal advancement and learning on account of it, did not mean that they could not also critique it. Their sense that they had built the Dam, and consciously sacrificed for it, meant that they were still able to critique it, and its administration’s performance – they were thus not ‘mystified’ by the idea, but actively trying to achieve it.

²⁶⁰ Cited in (Lears 1985, 572)

This agency echoes through the experiences of the *fida'yyīn* in Port Said during the Tripartite Aggression and the six years of war in Suez. In both these situations, the clear failures of the military and the regime were compensated for by a people's struggle for their own independence and a liberated nation that may have been articulated by Nasser, but materialized through their own historical struggles.

Indeed, throughout the struggles for Port Said and Suez, the values of the Revolution were carried through despite the failures of those leaders who championed the Revolution and its ideals. In Suez, and with the slow demise of 'the Revolution,' after Nasser's death and continuing with Sadat's policies, members of the resistance, singers and poets continued to demand that the regime stay true to its values, while reprimanding politicians that strayed off the path.

Their songs continue, until the present, to remind their singers and listeners of the fight against tyranny, and the struggle for the liberation of Palestine from Israel. More importantly, in their history and politics, exists a de-legitimation of the rules of Sadat and Mubarak, whose authority as leaders stemmed in part from the false victories of the October 6 war.

Nasserism was thus hegemonic, I argue, on account of his ability to articulate the dreams and elements of a popular spontaneous philosophy, which he weaved into the period's ideology and social and political imaginary. The success of the building of the High Dam, the political success of the 1956 war, and the perseverance of civilian resistance from 1967 through 1974 can be attributed to his ability to mobilize but more so people's belief in the 'revolutionary truths' and the nation they were striving to build. They were driven by their politics and the desire to build this new nation and better futures for themselves. Though he managed to articulate the features of this nation, and at times represent the struggle for it, the popular struggle for that dream prevailed beyond Nasser's person.

8.3 On Popular Memory

In exploring the popular experiences behind revolutionary milestones, and the politics that drove those experiences, I have sought to deal with memory on two levels. I have dealt with popular memory as a source of history, that often presents an 'oppositional'

(and not merely alternative) history of events, and the details of political experiences otherwise invisible in the mainstream narratives of these events. Beyond that, I have also considered these popular memories in their present context looking at memories as an 'active restructuring process' (Popular Memory Group 1982, 213) couched in the present. Whereby in (re)defining their place in history, people are also challenging the constructs of presentation and representation practiced by the state on their behalves.

The Popular Memory Group refers to all forms of history-making as the 'social production of memory,' which they define as,

..all the ways in which a sense of the past is constructed in our society. These do not necessarily take a written or literary form. Still less do they conform to academic standards of scholarship or canons of truthfulness. Academic history has a particular place in this much larger process. We will call this 'the social production of memory.' In this collective production everyone participates, though unequally. Everyone in this sense is a historian (Popular Memory Group 1982, 207).

Popular memory is thus one way of producing history, itself a form of collective memory, informing societies of their past, as well as collectively structuring the identities of those societies. It provides a history that at times complements the mainstream and academic versions of events. At others, it provides an altogether oppositional memory, opposing state rationale, such as in the case of the Suez War. Popular memory presents a textured historical narrative that it is not only a chronology of events, but also a more 'peopled' history that is rich with the emotion behind those events. Notions such as sacrifice emerge clearly and in more meaningful way, ensuring that the past continues to resonate in an unforgettable legacy of struggle, in all that that this struggle signifies of glories and bitter disappointments. Significantly also this social production of memory is a process that is inherently unequal. As I have highlighted not everyone can contribute equally to the production of popular memory, and people often subscribe to stronger, dominant histories in attempts to ensure they are remembered.

Gyandra Pandey's work on 'the history of the fragment' in India is relevant in making sense of the place of popular memory in relation to mainstream narratives.

I should like to suggest, in opposition to the established procedure that, with all their apparent solidity and comprehensiveness, what the official sources give us is also but a fragment of history. More than that, what the historians call a “fragment” – a weaver’s diary, a collection of poems by an unknown author ... – is of central importance in challenging the state’s construction of history, in thinking other histories and marking those contested spaces through which particular unities are sought to be constituted and others broken up (Pandy 1997, 28-29).

Pandy suggests that such forms of popular memory emerging from the ‘fragment’ not only challenge the dominant construction of history (and with it, the construction of the nation and the characteristics of those who ‘belong’ to it), but also that they resist a certain normalisation or sanitisation of history that official narratives enact. This process of sanitisation entails the writing out of emotions such as ‘pain’ in historical narratives, and the over contextualisation of events in their political, social and economic circumstances that thus write out a sense of agency, and at times the unpredictability of events.

In looking at popular memory, I have thus tried to indicate the significance of remembering such events in the present, as well as highlighting different aspects and functions of popular memory. The songs in particular reveal the emotions, the sense of unpredictability, and the politics of the people behind events.

These songs, which I will discuss further in the following section, do more than remember and narrate oppositional memories. They were sung also, as part of the process of asserting a community. This, at times, even led to the portrayal of a different consciousness of the nation, one demarcated by different national (extending beyond Egypt) and temporal boundaries. In Reem Saad’s words, ideas about the past at the local level of the community,

are used to define community as such and to express a collective image of a moral and political order. Temporal concepts are used to express ideas about experienced, imagined or idealised social orders rather than being empty chronological markers or punctuation of an already patterned experience. Village boundaries and peasant identities are neither given nor taken for granted. They are continuously being created, defined and altered (Saad 2002, 184).

This question of the meaningfulness of temporal markers is particularly relevant in Suez, where people's narratives were characterised by different temporal indicators from the state's narrative. Their experience of the 1967 war was not of six days, as in state discourse, but rather continues through to the ceasefire that ended the 1973 war. Indeed, the experience of the Naksa indicated the faltering of a state, and the continuation of a revolution by a people who prevailed, partially by 1974, save for the macro-politics of Sadat's peace treaty that means their struggle continues despite state politics.

Furthermore, as we saw in chapter 7, the popular politics as defined by this popular memory indicate the boundaries of a nation that extend beyond Suez, and beyond Egypt to an Arab experience, and particularly a Palestinian one. A popular image of the nation as 'imagined community' that recurs throughout my study is one where people are bound by a common sense of struggle, whether this is across Palestine or in linking the Nubians to Sudan.

Another significant aspect of popular memory that contributes greatly to our understanding of the period is the emotion with which events were portrayed. Indeed, politics of self-representation, stem from a level deeper than the struggle over power; they come from the struggle for self-identification and the aforementioned 'yearning' to forge a community. In the absence of figures of casualties in the building of the High Dam and the wars in Port Said and Suez, it is these emotions that highlight the extent of the loss, and the drive behind the continued willingness to sacrifice. It is this drive that, albeit emotional, clarifies the politics of a period, and the actual experience of being part of that moment of time when a political reality was breached and an alternative world made possible.

My findings and analysis throughout show a new dimension of the Revolution is revealed through these emotions. More importantly, I argue that a revolutionary period cannot be understood – in all it encompasses of deaths, sacrifices and unprecedented experiences – without understanding the politics, emotions and experiences of those people that constitute the Revolution. And it is this that is mostly missing in academic literature that attempts with such vigour to explain revolutions or movements, to measure the extent of

their success, while accounting for social or economic contexts, and the politics of politicians. These studies are missing the agency and experiences behind that moment where a consciousness of the possibility of change is realised, and a sense of 'peoplehood' is strongest in the face of structures of governance.

Finally, my analysis of the popular memory of the period reveals the politics of 'silencing.' As we have seen in several chapters, the struggle over 'what really happened' and who are considered heroes, exist not only in the state's relationship to the popular, but within communities as well. A more 'authentic' version of historical events is thus not what I strive for here, but rather a better understanding of the politics of the people behind those events. It is those very politics that highlight a struggle for the authenticity of narratives. This may be manifested in people's desire for their narratives to merge with mainstream discourse, evident in incidents where people struggle to write themselves into state narratives, as if this will give their experiences more weight or credibility. At times this contestation over authenticity is linked to eloquence; whoever is best able to express an event, in a language that carries the weight of its tribulations and the glory of its successes, is more likely to win the privilege of having become its more popular historian.

This idea of the prevalence of a particular narrative or memory brings us to the importance of song to this thesis, in what it carries of memory and politic.

8.4 Songs in History, and its Present

The most significant contribution of this thesis to the literature on popular politics and culture lies in its emphasis on forms of intimate language such as song. The importance of song comes both from what they reveal of the politics of the context in which they were sung, as well as what they present as sources of history in retrospect. In song, people present themselves to themselves as communities, but also to a broader audience. In this section, I will highlight the main elements of song that I have explored throughout this study.

One of the main roles songs played in the different areas I studied was the forging of communities, and the encapsulation of the ideals and values through which they chose to

define themselves. Indeed, most of the contexts explored in this thesis involved migration, and the songs played a significant role both in terms of keeping the spirits of the original community high, but also later in navigating the relations between the migrant and host communities. In Port Said and Suez, there were the migrations between 1967 and 1974, and in Nubia there were the migrations to the lands of Komombo, north of the Dam. Meanwhile, the workers who came to build the Dam and occupied the workers' compounds (most until the present day) came from Upper Egypt, the Delta, Nubia, and, to a lesser extent, from the Suez Canal, Sudan and Palestine.

Songs, in the context of Nubia, when the situation seemed dire and the results of the move dismal, constantly justified the migration, invoking the necessity of making sacrifices for the Revolution. The songs also sang of their having been migrated before as Nubians, thus pointing to their capacity to survive the disruption of this migration.

In Port Said, the singing became important during the siege when the invaders had settled, and it was clear that the Egyptian army reinforcements would not make it to the city. In both Port Said and Suez, the songs sung of a history of resistance, as well as the current battles and heroes as a reminder of how far they had come as a people, almost independently of the state. It was important to continue with the struggle, the songs appear to say, regardless of the state's shortcomings, reflecting their principles as a people rather those of the nation as a whole.

The songs were also significant as people's 'own' versions of history. There was a repeated emphasis on the difference between the microphone and the popular song. While songs of the microphone were pre-written and recorded, popular songs were written collectively and improvised, drawing on the emotional and political elements of a particular context or situation. Songs and stories thus became more 'authentic' than the accounts of mainstream and academic historians because they captured the elements of an event, according to those who experienced it. They also captured aspects of popular history such as the elements of coincidence or luck in a successful operation, unlike the linear narratives of official history that insisted on the role of the state in directing resistance.

Not only was this popular history collectively written, but it was in a sense collectively approved of. The longer a poem or song endured, the more it indicated it was being sung or told, and thus the greater the number of people who had related to it, and the more consent it had gathered. A song that lasted was one that was more likely to be telling a 'truth,' or at least more representative of its people who chose this as the truth they wanted to tell. Singing 'to themselves' was a way to remind, a way to contribute, and a collective way of asserting who they were and wanted to be.

Furthermore, the songs, in being a collective and popular experience, were believed to serve justice in a way that the state could not. In the words of singer and *fida'iy* Sayyid Kaburya, "You wouldn't be able to do as many people justice with a degree in law as you would with a *simsimiyya*!" For the songs 'remembered those history forgot,' from the unlikely heroes, to people that would have been shunned by the state. In that sense, as well as providing historical justice, they provided scope for choosing those heroes they felt represented them. Thus songs and stories told of different heroes from those remembered by the state, as well as allowed for the remembering of feats far from nationalist associations.

Finally and importantly for this study, it is through songs, poems and idioms that 'contradictory sentiments' can be explored. In the context of the Nubian migration for instance, at times song reflected the sentiments of guilt that were suppressed in contrast to the prevailing sentiment of perseverance that was reflected in most narratives and songs. The reason behind this guilt was never narrated, rather experienced through the songs amongst a community that shared the experience and resulting sentiment. Messages through songs are thus verbally subtle, though with a powerful impact.

Similarly, idioms such as '*al-marhūm kān ghaltān*' in Aswan constituted a fissure in the consistently glorious narratives of the building of the High Dam. The idiom came up in conversations as a necessary element of *kalām al-sadd*, even while respondents refused to elaborate on its context or remain focused on its meaning. The fact that so many people died while the state refused to take responsibility for them was not forgotten, even though it seemed people would have preferred to forget, for the sake of a more consistent narrative of the experience.

These songs, poems, sayings and idioms thus became an ‘intimate language’ within every community. A single song could evoke the emotions, political stances and a resilient resolve behind every event.

During my meetings with Captain Ghazali in Suez, he would teach me how to ‘read’ the songs so I found their meaning, handing me a compilation of the most popular war poems, instructing me to read them aloud. In most cases he would refuse to tell me the context of the songs. During our interviews he told me various stories of experiences during the war, and of a longer, older struggle against the British. As I read the poems later, he suggested, I would find what I was looking for.

The songs, he explained, carried much more than could be narrated as an event or story. They carried the emotion, the fear, the anxiety, the frustration, and the agony of waiting. One song might communicate several emotions, beginning with anguish for example, and rising in its beat or motion as the words grew with conviction.

If I was unable to understand the meaning of a song after reading it, rather than explain it Captain Ghazali would suggest that I ask Sayyid Kaburya and his band to sing it. And so it was that at the end of each meeting, he would choose poems and ask me to read them, stopping to correct me often, until he felt I read them as they should be read, rising and falling at the right moments. At the end he would ask, “*Fihimtī ya ustāza?*” (Did you get it, Ustaza?)²⁶¹ Feeling flustered at having read the poems so many times, and slightly embarrassed, I would nod that I did.

On our last meeting, the last poem I read was *Fāt al-Kitīr* (Much time has passed). In a powerful and vivid stanza, the gathering and the sharpening of martyrs’ bones is described, and the getting in position to fight back. Vivid also was the desire to finally win a victory to take home, and more importantly one that would have their names on it. As I read the poem, a series of stories of the battles I had heard in Suez flashed before me. Within each of the song’s metaphors, a plethora of stories and incidents erupted in my newly constructed memory of the battles of Suez.

²⁶¹ Ustāz/a technically means teacher or professor, but is commonly used simply as a sign of respect.

By the end of this song, I was deeply moved, and overwhelmed by the images. I heard him ask, “*Fihimtī ya ustāza?*” as I finally understood how much could be told through a poem or a song that can never be told otherwise. When I looked up to affirm that I did understand, he himself was in tears.

What I had finally ‘understood’ is how each of the words of these poems, somehow triggered a series of stories, events and memories of incidents that cascaded as the lyrics or names of martyrs were read. The intimacy in this language thus, is in how it encapsulates the most painful experiences in metaphors that those who shared the experience would easily intercept, and others can sense with time.

This thesis thus offers an understanding of the power of song, in articulating collective experiences, collective politics, and a collective sense of community in the most intimate way. Songs became a form of expression, identification and representation of politics of a community in opposition to that of the dominant political structure, or in transgression of its temporal, national, or political boundaries. In that sense, these forms of popular culture, are inherently political.

8.5 Endurance of a Revolutionary Legacy

*I will carve a space
in this nation,
A space that binds,
every feeling,
friend,
scent,
every breath,
and every place I’ve been through;
as if to capture every fleeting memory,
upon departure, upon arrival..*

*For I am no stranger to this new nation,
nor was I ever estranged in its memory,
I am no stranger to this new nation,
nor was I ever estranged in its memory..*

*To dream is as much a duty, as is to live,
and the new nation is a duty
just as the old nation imposes its presence..
a looming presence,*

*of remnants, of rubble
of ashes...alive,
and drenched in melancholy*

Salam Yousri²⁶², *Thawrat Qalaa* (Revolution of the mind) 2006

In the decade or so leading up to 2011, a growing cultural scene in Egypt accompanied the growing political movements.²⁶³ To begin, it was focused on regional issues relating to Palestine and Iraq, but increasingly turned its focus to life in Mubarak's Egypt. The cultural scene involved performances of songs and skits that made stages of old garages, street cafes, and often pavements and bridges. This movement sought to create new public spaces for cultural and political expression, in a country whose streets were spaces for surveillance and governance.

The songs and skits that were sung in these spaces were predominantly the songs of Sheikh Imam, Ahmad Fu'ad Nigm, and at times even Salah Jahin. They were songs that sang of resistance, of social justice, despite a hypocritical state (of the 1950/60s), and chanted that their populace would claim the streets. They were songs that were political, and mobilised an existing audience that either knew the songs by heart because they were the generation of the 1960s and 1970s, or because they belonged to a later generation that inherited the nostalgia of the struggle of the period. After all, for years, people had chosen the arts of the 1950s and 1960s as the language with which to articulate the politics of change and social justice.

There was a consciousness however, as in Salam's song mentioned above, that the contemporary political reality was one that was haunted with nostalgia of the struggle fought in an era whose politics may not be relevant to the contemporary moment. It was a consciousness that speaking in this borrowed language made it harder to mobilise in a

²⁶² Salam Yousri. Musician song-write and theatre director. Interview by author, Cairo 2009

²⁶³ For a detailed study of the cultural movement between 2000-2010, see (Mossallam 2012). All other observations indicated in this chapter are based on my own research and presence during the 2011 events.

different way and to properly experience the new tyrannies and the new movements. Most importantly, these lyrics made being critical of an older period more difficult.²⁶⁴

With the onset of the January 25 2011 revolution, and the occupation of Tahrir Square, the songs that filled the square were once again these familiar lyrics of Imam, Nigm, Jahin, as well as the political lyrics of Sayyid Darwish and Bayram al-Tunisi from an earlier period. This was despite the fact that the art movement budding in Cairo since the mid 2000s had been introducing new lyrics, whether social or political, that reflected their own realities, rather than an inherited memory of an earlier period.

Within days, and once the battles in Suez and Port Said were won, singers from Al-Tanbura band and *Gam`iyyit Muhibi al-Simsimiyya* came to the square to sing the songs of resistance of the 1950s and 1960s. The Nubians too came to chant, announcing their origins and their political stances, ensuring their own claim to the revolution.

Within days on the square, however, the songs started to change. Songs by the bands of Suez and Port Said were adapted so that the current struggles were included in the long genealogy of resistance that they chronicled. In the meantime, songs of Imam, Nigm and the others were slowly replaced by songs made up of the chants of the square. Artists emerged from Tahrir Square and created an art that articulated the popular sentiment of the moment, an art that used the chants and existing articulations of politics against the regime. Singers of ballads came from Upper Egypt, one from Menya in particular, came to sing the *sira* (epic) of Suzanne Mubarak's ancestry and her sad ending after a revolution in 2011.

As the days stretched, debates ensued as to what sort of revolution that of 2011 would be, as compared to the revolutions of 1952 and 1882. The question of an army's rule was presented and discussed, and predominantly the idea of a single representation of the revolution, as Nasser had been, was rejected. As the months wore on and the battles

²⁶⁴ Though the significance of understanding the 2011 revolution through songs is growing (Colla 2011; Saad 2012), little work has been done in understanding the movement leading up to 2011 through songs, particularly in relation to the songs of the 1950s/1960s

extended inside and outside of Cairo, against a military struggling to rule, and non-representative politics, more and more songs developed to remember the martyrs, and differentiate the revolution's people from its enemies.

Still, on the darkest moments of despair, and those moments where triumph reigned strongest, it was the dissident songs of the 1950s (and sometimes the 1920s) that emerged. Perhaps they carried a legacy that reigned stronger, and had lingered longer with a struggling populace.²⁶⁵

These were not necessarily songs that rung with nostalgia for a period; rather they were those that reminded of the pain of a struggle people had survived. They reminded that a people had struggled and somehow prevailed, and that this struggle across generations and governorates continued to bind them. For just as these songs of the 1950s continued to resound on the streets of Cairo, the chants that drew on these songs sprung up in the largest protests in Suez and Port Said in July of 2011 and February of 2012 respectively.

Thus, besides looking at Nasserist Egypt beyond the dichotomy of Nasser's charismatic successes, or his political and military failures, this study questions what the roots of his power were, and how and why he managed to mobilise so many. It sheds light on the politics, not of a regime, but the politics of a people at times intertwined with, at others existing beyond structural politics.

These songs echo with the struggle of a larger people, and that is the legacy they bring to the present. The reverberations of past struggles locate the latest revolution, such that it did not spring from a particular generation of youth alone, rather, it is that the revolution emanated from a people that had continued to struggle over different periods. This is the legacy that this thesis brings to light.

²⁶⁵ This observation was made particularly in Tahrir Square in Cairo, and thus cannot be generalised beyond this space. It is subject to further research.

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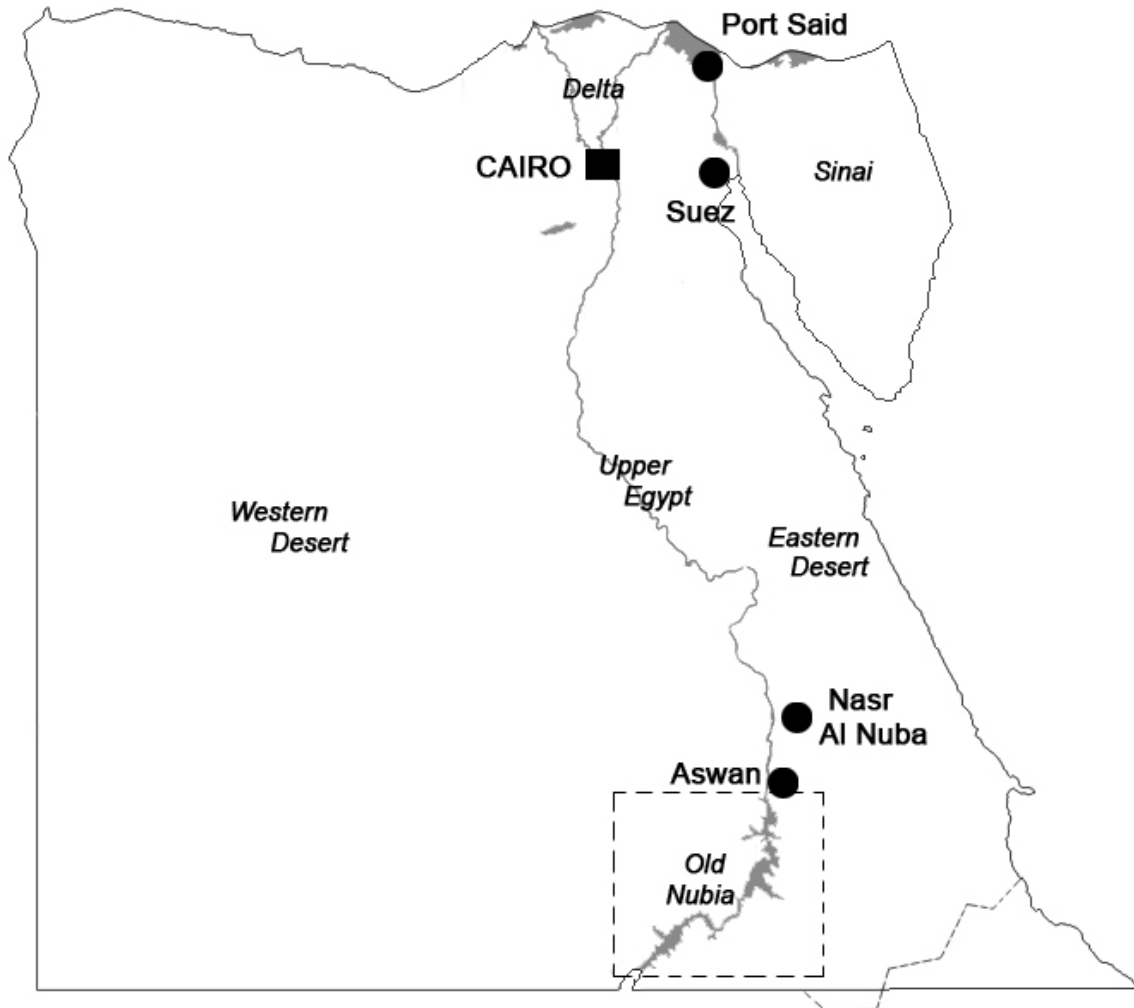
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Appendices

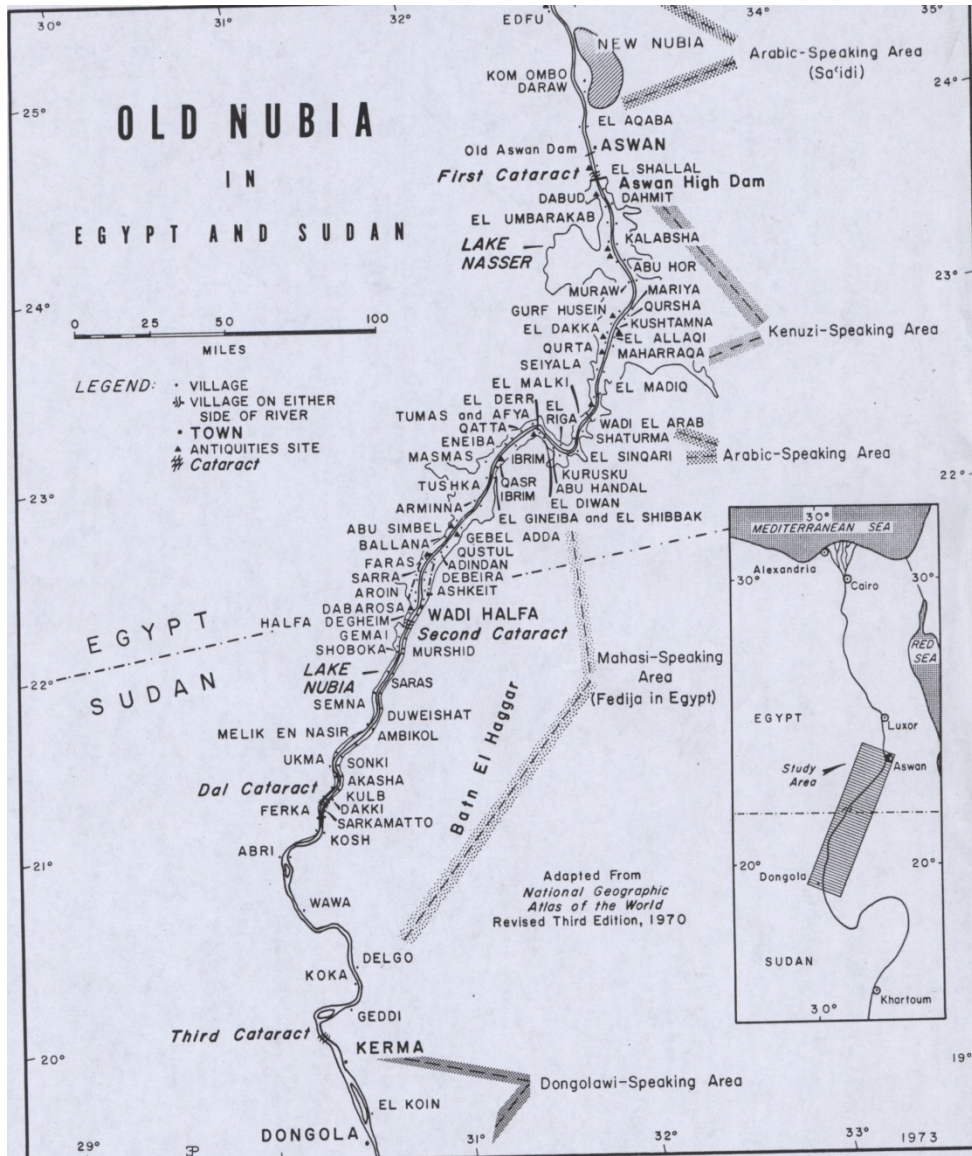
Appendix 1: Maps

Map of Egypt²⁶⁶



²⁶⁶ Map by Yahia Shawkat

Map of Old Nubia



Map of Old Nubia (before migration). From Ahmad Shawkat's private collection of Nubian maps. Access and permission provided by his family in Abu Simbel - Original Source, National Geographic

1970

Appendix 2: Biographies

Recorded Interviews

'Abd al-'Azim Mahmud. Worker in the High Dam's tunnels. 'Abd al-'Azim's father worked on the boats testing the soils before the commencement of the building of the Dam. He started work on the boats with his father, and then worked in Kima until he was hired to work in the tunnels on the High Dam. 'Abd al-'Azim is currently retired and living in the workers' compound of Al-Sadd Sharq.

Interview by author. Al-Sadd Sharq, Aswan, March 2010.

'Abd al-'Aziz 'Ezzelarab. b.1952. Student activist. 'Abd al-'Aziz was a student leader in school in the late 1960s, and a member of Munazamat al-Shabab al-'Ishtiraki (The Socialist Youth Organisation). He graduated from the American University in Cairo in the mid-1970s, and was active in student movements in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He is now a professor at the American University in Cairo.

Interview by author. Cairo, July 2006.

'Abd al-Hadi Abu Bakr Barbari Mohammed. Worker on the High Dam. 'Abd al-Hadi started work on the Dam as a worker on the boats of the research team in the late 1950s and was hired on the Dam itself in the 1960s, working there until his retirement.

Video interview by Walid Hussain and Mahmud 'Adawi (HMLC). Aswan, December 2009.²⁶⁷

'Abd al-Halim Mahmud Ahmad. b.1940. Worker on the Dam. 'Abd al-Halim worked on the Aswan reservoir in his teens, as his father had before him, and then joined the High Dam workforce in 1963 after petitioning to complain of inefficient management at the reservoir. His colleagues disappeared after posting the petition, and fearing for his life he went to work for the Dam where he would not be found. 'Abd al-Halim did not pursue any kind of education, and was a labourer for all his working life. He is currently retired and living in the workers' compound of Al-Sadd Sharq.

Interview by author. Al-Sadd Sharq, Aswan, March 2010.

'Abd al-Karim Mustafa Kamal 'Abd al-Karim. Driver on the High Dam. A crane driver from Qena, 'Abd al-Karim worked on the Dam as a driver from 1961 till retirement.

Video interview by Walid Hussain and Mahmud 'Adawi (HMLC). Aswan, December 2009.

²⁶⁷ These video interviews conducted with the support of the Hisham Mubarak Law Centre, Semat for Production and The Development Support Centre on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the building of the High Dam. The video interviews were generously provided for my use.

'Abd al-Mun'im Qinnawi. b.1945. Member of Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya. 'Abd al-Mun'im received minimal education and worked as a photographer until the 1967 defeat. He then volunteered with the Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya, a resistance group that was supported and trained by the Egyptian military intelligence. During the 1973 October war, 'Abd al-Mun'im was posted in the 'Itaqa mountains, where he was stuck until the official ceasefire in February 1974. He is now a microbus driver.

Interview by author. Suez, August 2011.

'Abd al-Radi 'Abd al-Sabur. b.1952. Mechanic on the High Dam. From the village of Adandaan of Nubia, 'Abd al-Radi started working on the Dam in 1964 when he was 12 years old. He worked with mechanics, until he became one himself.

Tape recorded interview by Yusuf Fakhuri. Aswan 2004.²⁶⁸

'Abd al-Sami' Mubarak 'Abd al-Bassit. Worker on the High Dam. 'Abd al-Sami' began as a scaffolding worker on the Dam before becoming a security guard.

Video interview by Walid Hussain and Mahmud 'Adawi (HMLC). Aswan, December 2009.

'Abd al-Shahir. b.1934. Technician on the High Dam. From Abu Simbel Tahjir, 'Abd al-Shahir was migrated in 1964. He worked on the High Dam as a technician, and is currently retired.

Interview by author. Gharb Suhail, Nubia, March 2010.

'Abdu Mahmud Yusuf. Worker in the High Dam's tunnels. Born in the upper Egyptian village of Qena to a *fallāh* family, his first work away from the land was on the Dam's tunnels in 1964, where he continued work until retirement.

Video interview by Walid Hussain and Mahmud 'Adawi (HMLC). Aswan, December 2009.

'Abir. b.1950s. Migrated villager, school teacher. Originally from Abu Simbel, 'Abir was migrated to Abu Simbel Tahjir between 1961 and 1964. She is currently a school teacher.

Interview by author. Abu Simbel Tahjir, Nasr al-Nuba²⁶⁹, March 2010.

Abu 'Abdu. b.circa 1930. Porter and *fida'iy* in 1956. Abu 'Abdu was involved in the resistance in 1956.

Interview by author. Port Said, March 2011.

²⁶⁸ Interviews conducted, recorded and transcribed by communist writer Yusuf Fakhuri for the purpose of a book he never wrote, were generously provided for my use.

²⁶⁹ Official name for new Nubia (migrated lands) – in Komombo

Abu Dayf. b.1935. Worker on the High Dam. Born in a Delta village, Abu Dayf was a drilling worker during the building of the tunnels, and then the reinforcement of the Dam. He is currently retired living in the compound of Al-Sadd Sharq.

Interview by author. Al-Sadd Sharq, Aswan, February 2010.

Abul 'Arabi al-Masri. b.circa 1946. Musician and *fida'iy*. Abul 'Arabi was a member of the band Al-Nidal (The Struggle), joined the popular defence, and still sings with Sayyid Kaburya in Gam'iyyat Muhibi al-Simsimiyya (The Organisation for Simsimiyya Lovers), an NGO that they founded together.

Interview by author. Suez, August 2011.

Abulmajd Abulwafa. b.1938. Electrician on the High Dam. From the Abadi tribe around Aswan, Abulmajd started as a worker on the Dam in 1961 and worked his way up to the position of electrician, despite having barely completed his primary education. He is currently retired, living near the compound of Sahari.

Interview by author. Sahari, Aswan, February 2010.

Abulmajd Sharq. b.1938. Worker on the High Dam. Born in Qena, Abulmajd started work on the Dam in 1962 as a labourer, before working in the mechanics workshop, then as a crane driver, and finally as a supervisor of drivers. Abulmajd holds a literacy certificate but no formal education. He is currently retired living in the workers' compound Al-Sadd Sharq.

Interview by author. Al-Sadd Sharq, Aswan, March 2010.

'Adnan. b.1970s. Tourist guide. From Tinjar, 'Adnan currently works as a tourist guide on boat tours. He showed me the sites of inundated Nubian village behind the Dam.

Interview by author. Lake Nasser, Aswan, January 2010.

Ahmad al-'Alfi. b.1947. Engineer on the High Dam. Educated with a university degree in Mansoura, al-'Alfi worked as an engineer on the Dam from 1971 till retirement in 2007.

Video interview by Walid Hussain and Mahmud 'Adawi (HMLC). Aswan, December 2009.

Ahmad al-Nubi. b.1955. Civil servant. Originally from Luxor, Al-Nubi's father was a worker on the Dam and later became a technician. Al-Nubi is currently a civil servant at the Dam's Electrical Authority, and still lives in Al-Sadd Sharq compound.

Interview by author. Al-Sadd Sharq, Aswan, February, March 2010.

Ahmad Badawi. Engineer on the High Dam. A mechanical engineer from Alexandria, Badawi worked on the High Dam from 1962 until retirement.

Tape recorded interview Yusuf Fakhuri. Cairo 2004.

Ahmad Fu'ad Nigm. b.1929. Renowned dissident poet and activist. Nigm has written prose and poetry critiquing the Nasser regime and those regimes that came after, playing a critical role in the opposition over many decades. In particular, he played a crucial role in boosting and vocalising the student movement in the 1970s.

Interview by author. Cairo, July 2006.

Ahmad Migahid. b.1936. Housepainter and singer since the 1950s. 'Am Migahid was part of a band that performed on the frontlines in 1967 in Port Said, Suez and Ismailiyya to boost morale.

Interview by author. Port Said, April and May 2011.

'Ahmed Rashwan. b.1969. Director and filmmaker. Amongst Rashwan's works are a film about the War of 101 days in Suez, *Al-Suways, al-Dhakirra al-Mansiyya* (Suez, the Forgotten Memory), and another on Captain Ghazali and his songs, *Ibn al-ard* (Son of the Land).

Interview by author. Cairo, April 2012

Ahmad 'Utaifi. b.1945. Member of Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya. From Suez, at the time of the *Naksa*, 'Utaifi was away at university studying engineering. He returned to Suez, joined the popular defence, and applied to Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya, an armed resistance group supported by the Egyptian intelligence in 1968. He was in Suez and part of the armed resistance during the War of 101 days.

Interview by author. Cairo, September 2011.

'Ali 'Auf. b.1967/1968. Founding member, singer and dancer in Al-Tanbura group.

Interview by author. Port Said and Cairo, March and April 2011.

'Ali Sabri 'Abdallah. 'Ali was a researcher and member of The Higher committee for the Study of the High Dam in the mid to late 1950s.

Tape recorded interview by Yusuf Fakhuri. Cairo 2004.

'Am 'Adli. b. circa 1940. Car mechanic on the High Dam. Now a driver in Sahari compound, 'Am 'Adli was a car mechanic on the Dam from 1963 until retirement.

Interview by author. Sahari, Aswan, January, February 2010.

Amina Shafiq. b.1936. Journalist and fighter in 1956. During the Tripartite Aggression, Amina was smuggled into Port Said from Cairo on a fishing boat, and joined a group of left-wing activists in creating the magazine *Al-'Intisar* (The Victory). It helped mobilise resistance, but also spread news of international support and solidarity in the rest of Egypt, when morale was low and the city was under siege.

Interview by author. Cairo, June 2011.

'Am 'Izbi. b.circa 1930s. Popular singer. A retired tour guide, 'Am 'Izbi is known as a source of cultural memory and encyclopaedia of songs in nearby villages.

Interview by author. Gharb Suhail, Nubia, January, February 2010.

'Am Sanusi. b.1940s. Technician on the High Dam. Sanusi started working on the Dam as a technician in 1963 and was active in the *Munazamat al-Shabab al-'Ishtiraki* (Socialist Youth Organizations) as a student, and then as a member and trainer when he obtained his technical diploma. This institution was an ideological education institution set up for well performing students to attend, as well as children of *fallāhīn* and workers. Sanusi is currently retired living in Aswan.

Interview by author. Kima, Aswan, February 2010.

'Anis Hanna Mu'awad. b.1933. Engineer on the High Dam. Born in Cairo, Anis started working in the Dam's tunnels as a civil engineer in 1962.

Interview by Kamal Al-Qalsh, Sun'allah Ibrahim and Ra'uf Mus'ad. Aswan 1965.²⁷⁰

'Anwar Hamza. b.1945. Technician on the High Dam. From Aswan, 'Anwar worked as a technician on the High Dam.

Interview by Kamal Al-Qalsh, Sun'allah Ibrahim and Ra'uf Mus'ad. Aswan 1965.

'Arabi Abu 'Abdallah. Originally from Luxor, 'Arabi worked on the Dam from 1961 until his retirement, under the Arab Contractors company, 'Othman Ahmad 'Othman.

Tape recorded interview by Yusuf Fakhuri. Aswan 2004.

'Atif Assal. b.1936. Doctor in the High Dam Hospital.

Interview by Kamal Al-Qalsh, Sun'allah Ibrahim and Ra'uf Mus'ad. Aswan 1965.

'Atteyat al-Abnudi. b.1939. Renowned filmmaker. 'Atteyat has made a number of documentaries exploring national events through people's stories. *Al-Ahlam al-Mumkina* (Permissible Dreams) tells the story of a middle-aged peasant from a village in Suez and her experience of the War of Attrition.

Interview by author. Cairo, March 2012.

'Azaam. b.1970. Mechanic. 'Azaam is often hosts the singers in his garage, particular.

Interview by author. Port Fuad, Greater Port Said, March 2011.

²⁷⁰ Interviews conducted by Kamal Al-Qalsh, Sun'allah Ibrahim and Ra'uf Mus'ad were conducted in Aswan, June-September 1965, and published in 'Insan al-Sadd al-'Ali (The Human High Dam 1967) page 39 onwards.

'Aziz Sidqi. Politician. 'Aziz Sidqi was the minister of industry (1956-1970) when he supervised the industrialisation program funded by the USSR, after which he became deputy prime minister in 1970 and prime minister from 1972 to 1973.

Tape recorded interview by Yusuf Fakhuri. Cairo 2004.

Badawi al-Shazli. b.1939. Bulldozer driver on the Dam.

Interview by Kamal Al-Qalsh, Sun'allah Ibrahim and Ra'uf Mus'ad. Aswan 1965.

Bahr Siyam. b.1932. Electrician on the High Dam. Born in Aswan, Bahr started working as an electrician operating dynamite in the Dam's tunnels in 1961.

Interview by Kamal Al-Qalsh, Sun'allah Ibrahim and Ra'uf Mus'ad. Aswan 1965.

Diaa' Al-Din Al Qadi. b.1944. Historian. A member of the Union of Arab Historians, Diaa' is a member of the Secretariat of History and Heritage and the Naming of Unnamed Streets in the Supreme Council of Culture in Port Said.

Interview by author. Port Said, April, May and August 2011.

Dina Hamza. b.1979. Filmmaker. Dina Hamza is a filmmaker who is currently (2011) working on a film on activism in Suez during the January 2011 revolution. She explores the extent to which activists have received support and guidance from the October 1973 generation.

Interview by author. Cairo, November 2011

Faruq al-Sayyid Ahmad. Worker on the High Dam. Faruq started working in the tunnels in the Dam in 1963 and later operated compressors.

Video interview by Walid Hussain and Mahmud 'Adawi (HMLC). Aswan, December 2009.

Fawzi Yusuf. Bureaucrat. Head of the Cultural Authority (subsidiary of the ministry of Culture) in Aswan (at the time of the interview).

Tape recorded interview by Yusuf Fakhuri. Cairo 2004.

Fu'ad Shallal. b.1932. Architect on the High Dam. Originally from Aswan, Fu'ad worked in Cairo after obtaining a university degree in architecture in 1952. He returned to work on the High Dam after his graduation, a decision he continues to regret. He is currently retired living in the compound of Sahari.

Interview by author. Sahari, Awan, March 2010.

Gamal 'Abbas Mohammed. Worker on the High Dam. Gamal worked on the Dam since 1963. He started by serving tea, then became a car greaser, and later a mechanic in the Dam's garage.

Video interview by Walid Hussain and Mahmud 'Adawi (HMLC). Aswan, December 2009.

Madame Gizelle. b.1923. Employee at the Suez Shipping Company. Madame Gizelle received a high school education in the 1930s, and worked as a secretary and office manager in the Suez Shipping Company, as well as in banks. She is the daughter of Syrian and Lebanese immigrants to Port Said and has lived there her whole life. She was in Port Said during the aggression and worked under General Wheeler on the UN mission to clear the Canal after the war. Gizelle kept a diary during the aggression, which she was generous enough to allow me to read.

Interview by author. Port Said, April and August 2011.

Gum'a Mukhtar. Mechanic with Electrical Authority of Aswan. Gum'a worked as a mechanic from 1965 until retirement, with the Electrical Authority of Aswan.

Tape recorded interview by Yusuf Fakhuri. Aswan 2004.

Mohammed Haddad. b.1940s. Civil servant, poet and member of the Abu Simbel club in Cairo. Haddad moved to Cairo shortly after being migrated from Abu Simbel.

Interview by author. Cairo, May 2010.

Hajjaj Aduul. b.1944. Renowned novelist and activist for Nubian rights. Born in Alexandria, Hajjaj became a renowned Nubian novelist, writer, political activist and champion of the call for the 'right of return' to Nubian lands. He also worked on the High Dam from 1963-1967.

Interview by author. Alexandria, April 2012.

Hajj 'Izz al-Din. b.1940s. Cargo boat skipper. Born in Abu Simbel, Hajj 'Izz al-Din married and moved to Tinjar (just west of the Dam) before migration. He is a retired cargo boat skipper and was the head of my host family during my stay in Nubia.

Interview by author. Tinjar, Nubia, January-March 2010.

Hakim. b.1978. Hotel animation staff. Hakim works in the tourism industry in his village of Gharb Suhail.

Interview by author. Gharb Suhail, Nubia, January 2010.

Hamada. b.1967/1968. Fisherman. Hamada is a fan of *simsimiyya*, and a friend of musicians and performers.

Interview by author. Port Fuad, Greater Port Said, April 2011.

Hamdi Mitwali. b.1940s. Volunteer engineer on the High Dam. Born in Banha, Hamdi was an engineer who worked on the High Dam as a volunteer.

Interview by Kamal Al-Qalsh, Sun'allah Ibrahim and Ra'uf Mus'ad. Aswan 1965.

Hamdi Tawfiq. b.1932. Worker in the High Dam's tunnels. Originally from Qena, Hamdi started working on the Dam's tunnels in 1961.

Interview by Kamal Al-Qalsh, Sun'allah Ibrahim and Ra'uf Mus'ad. Aswan 1965.

Hani 'Anan. b.circa 1950. Student activist. Hani was a medical student in Cairo University, enrolling in 1968, and was a prominent figure in the student movement until the 1970s. He was also a member of the Munazamat al-Shabab al-'Ishtiraki during his years in high-school. Hani was a founding member of Kefaya (2003-2010) and a patron of a number of independent publishing houses and theatre spaces established by youth between 2005-2010. He runs his own business.

Interview by author. Cairo, July 2006.

Hania Hamdi. b.1954. Suez resident, migrated during the war. Originally from Cairo, Hania was born in Port Said. Her father worked in the Suez Company since the 1952 Revolution. During the nationalisation of the Canal he became one of '*al-murshidīn al-ahrār*' (the free navigators) who helped run the company when the British and French managers were asked to leave. They were in Suez in 1967, and evacuated once the army retreated to Suez on June 9.

Interview by author. Cairo, March 2012.

Hassan. b.1992. Student and disciple of Hafiz Salama. Hassan earned his entire education up to high-school in the schools sponsored by Hafiz Salama in Suez. On account of his high grades, Salama offered Hassan a scholarship to take him through university in Cairo. He is a member of the Network of Popular Committees in Defence of the January 2011 Revolution. He is considered a disciple of Hafiz Salama, although his politics currently veer more left than Salafist.

Interview by author. Suez, August 2011.

Hassan Al-Gereitly. b.1948. Director of independent theatre troupe. Hassan was enrolled in the Munazamat al-Shabab al-'Ishtiraki in the early 1960s, but left soon after, feeling he was being 'indoctrinated' into a particular political attitude (namely having no option but to cheer Russian representatives, and being prepared in troupes to welcome them). Hassan founded one of the first independent theatre troupes in Egypt in the 1980s, currently the renowned Al-Warsha Troupe, and continues to be its director.

Interview by author. Cairo, November 2010.

Hassan 'Aswanli. b.1945. Technician on the High Dam. Originally from Komombo, Hassan started work on the Dam as a technician in 1965. He was sent to Russia for training a number of times, and was anticipating teaching at the workers' university that was to be set up, a project that was cancelled after Nasser's death. He currently holds a technical diploma and is retired living in the compound of Sahari.

Interview by author. Sahari, Aswan, February, March 2010.

Hassan Tawfiq. b.1943. Technician on the High Dam. Hassan started working as a technician on the Dam in 1961, after graduating from Cairo University in fine arts.

Interview by Kamal Al-Qalsh, Sun`allah Ibrahim and Ra`uf Mus`ad. Aswan 1965.

Hassanain Rabi`. b.1942. Suez resident, migrated during the war, electrical engineer on the High Dam. Hassanain Rabi` was born in Suez where his father worked in the Shell Company. He was evacuated with his family immediately after the *Naksa*. Later, he continued his work as an electrical engineer on the High Dam, and then in Cairo and outside of Egypt.

Interview by author. Cairo April 2010.

Hilmi Sa`id. Politician. Hilmi was the former minister of electricity and minister of the High Dam after Sidqi Sulaiman.

Tape recorded interview by Yusuf Fakhuri. Cairo 2004.

Hisham al-Salamuni. b.circa 1950. Activist, writer, artist. Hisham was a medical student in Cairo University from 1968 until 1976. A member of Munazamat al-Shabab al-`Ishtiraki through his high school years, he remained a member until 1976. He was involved in Kefaya, an oppositional movement (2003-2010) and is a writer and artist by profession.

Interview by author. Cairo 2006.

Ibrahim al-Banna. b.1945. Playwright and choreographer. As part of his work as a playwright and founder of the Port Said Troupe for Popular Arts, Ibrahim has choreographed many dances and performances using 1956 songs in particular. He also conducted a number of performances on the frontlines during 1967. However, he refused to talk about any of the songs and performances except those of 1956. When I asked why, he explained, "Well, naturally, I don't ever want to remember..."

Interview by author. Port Said, May 2011.

Ibrahim Mohammed Hamid Mohammed. Worker on the High Dam. Originally a nurse from Ja`farah, Ibrahim worked with the Misr Cement Company on the Dam from 1963 till retirement.

Video interview by Walid Hussain and Mahmud `Adawi (HMLC). Aswan, December 2009.

Ibrahim Zaki. Politician. Ibrahim Zaki was vice minister of the ministry of the Dam, and worked on the project since its research and inception phase in 1953.

Interview by Kamal Al-Qalsh, Sun`allah Ibrahim and Ra`uf Mus`ad. Aswan 1965.

'Itsh – Ibrahim al-Mursi. b.circa 1954. Mechanic and renowned oral poet. Most renowned oral poet of Port Said, 'Itsh writes his own poetry but also knows most of the old poems and songs that date back to the digging of the Canal. He is also a repository of classical poetry. 'Itsh comes from a well-known *simsimiyya* playing and performing family; his sister, brothers, aunts and uncles are known *simsimiyya* musicians. Ibrahim is a mechanic and runs a basic coffee shop.

Interview by author. Port Said, April 2011.

'Izz 'Abd al-Salam 'Abd al-'Ati. b.1944. Worker on the High Dam. Born in 'Izbit al-'Askar, 'Izz dropped out of the sixth grade to work on the Dam in 1962 as a car oiler/greaser.

Video interview by Walid Hussain and Mahmud 'Adawi (HMLC). Aswan, December 2009.

Jum'a. b.1946. Migrated school teacher. Born in Dabud, Jum` a was migrated in 1963, at age 19. He is currently a retired secondary school teacher in Sahari.

Interview by author. Sahari, Aswan, January, February 2010.

Kamal Kamil Mustafa. b.1945. Worker on the High Dam. Born in Menya, Kamal was a worker on the Dam.

Interview by Kamal Al-Qalsh, Sun'allah Ibrahim and Ra'uf Mus'ad. Aswan 1965.

Kamil 'Id. b.1932. Renowned poet and songwriter. Kamil is famous in Suez and Port Said for writing the poetry and songs of 1967, in particular. He formed the band that included 'Am Migahid and others, and toured the frontlines in 1967 in Port Said, Suez and Ismailiyya to boost morale. He wrote his first poem in 1956 about Sa'id Hamada, a security guard at the Italian consulate during the war.

Interview by author. Port Said, April 2011.

Karam Murad. b.1960s. Musician. Born in Toshka Tahjir, Karam is the nephew of Hamza 'Alaa' al-Din, a famous Nubian singer. He is a musician himself, and currently lives in Cairo.

Interview by author. Cairo, September 2010.

Kawthar al-Subki. b.1938. Only woman working on the High Dam site. Educated (with a PhD) in Cairo, Kawthar was a university graduate at the time she started working on the Dam in 1963. She served as head of the chemistry lab (in the place of a Russian specialist) between 1963 and 1966. Her husband was an engineer and they lived in Sahari compound at the time, and are now retired in Cairo.

Interview by author. Cairo, September 2010.

Khaled Fahmy. b.1964. Academic, historian. Khaled is currently Professor and Chair of the History Department at the American University in Cairo. He is author of *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali Pasha, His Army and the Founding of Modern Egypt* (1997).

Lecture recorded by author. Cairo, November 2010.

Mabruk al-Sayyid Murgan. b.circa 1946. Musician and *fida'iy*. Mabruk was a member of the band Wilad al-*ard* during the War of Attrition and a member of the popular defence at the time. He received minimal education (less than primary) and is currently a retired worker.

Interview by author. Suez, November 2011.

Magid Mustafa. b.1946. Bulldozer driver on the High Dam. Magid was a secondary school graduate, and started working on the Dam as a bulldozer driver in 1962.

Interview by Kamal Al-Qalsh, Sun`allah Ibrahim and Ra`uf Mus`ad. Aswan, 1965.

Mahmud. b.1996. High-school student and musician. Mahmud is currently a high-school student in Suez. He performs and tours with Gam`iyyat Muhibi al-Simsimiyya.

Interview by author. Suez, August 2011.

Mahmud `Abd al-Ghafur. b.1938. Pharmacist and *fida`iy* in 1956. Mahmud was a student in the faculty of medicine in Cairo University when the 1956 war broke out. He moved back to his hometown of Port Said and joined the resistance from October.

Interview by author. Port Said, April 2011.

Mahmud al-Galaad. b.circa 1947. Volunteer in the popular resistance and army. Mahmud was in university during 1967, returning to Suez to volunteer in the popular defence under Captain Ghazali`s training, and later he volunteered in the army. He was in Ibrahim al-Rifai`s regiment (39) during the October 6 war 1973.

Interview by author. Suez, August 2011.

Mahmud Ibrahim. b.circa 1953. Truck driver and singer.

Interview by author. Port Said, April 2011.

Mamduh al-Qadi. b.circa 1976. Member of Al-Tanbura group.

Interview by author. Cairo, March 2011.

Ma`zuz `Atiyya. b.1928. Electrician on the High Dam. Born in Nag`a Hamadi, Ma`zuz started working on the Dam as an electrician in 1963.

Interview by Kamal Al-Qalsh, Sun`allah Ibrahim and Ra`uf Mus`ad. Aswan, 1965.

Mimi – Mohsin al-`Ashri. b.1967/1968. Mechanic and *simsimiyya* player. Mohsin is a singer and musician of the *simsimiyya*. His mother was also a well-known *simsimiyya* player but she plays it mainly in Zaar. Mohsin is a mechanic.

Interview by author. Port Said, March 2011.

Minna. b.1995. High-school student. Minna is currently a Suez high-school student. She performs and tours around Egypt with Gam`iyyat Muhibi al-Simsimiyya. Minna is the daughter of Madame Yasmine.

Interview by author. Suez, November 2011.

Mohammed 'Abd al-Dhahir. b.circa 1948. Employee at the High Dam administration. 'Abd al-Dhahir worked on the Dam administration since the 1960s, and is currently PR Manager at the High Dam. He lives in the compound Gharb Al-Sadd, west of the Dam.

Interview by author. Gharb Al-Sadd, Aswan, March 2010.

Mohammed al-Shinnawi. b.1951. Singer and founder of al-Suhbagiyya band in Port Said. Mohammed's band is in competition with Al-Tanbura. His interest in singing and dancing started with his peer, Zakariyya Ibrahim in the 1950s, before they split paths in the mid-1980s.

Interview by author. Port Said, May 2011.

Mohammed Basit. Technician on the High Dam. Basit worked as an explosives specialist (technician) on the Dam, from 1961 (under the Arab Contractors Company, 'Othman Ahmad 'Othman) until retirement.

Tape recorded interview by Yusuf Fakhuri. Aswan 2004.

Captain Mohammed Ghazali. b.1929. *Fida'iy* in 1948, 1956 and 1967 and renowned oral poet. Captain Ghazali was a sports instructor. He was a *fida'iy* in the war in Palestine in 1948, and in 1956 and was a leader in the civil resistance groups in 1967. Captain Ghazali was the founder of the band Al-Bataniyya (The Blanket) who joined forces with the band Al-Nidal (The Struggle) after the *Naksa* to form Wilad al-'Ard (Children of the Land). He received political training in the socialist youth organisations in Suez and taught sports in schools until the war. Captain Ghazali is renowned for his poetry, and now spends his days in a tiny shop, surrounded by his books where he reads and tells tales of the war.

Interview by author. Suez, August 2011.

Mohammed Hussain. Employee at the High Dam administration. Hussain started work as an administrator in 1960, until he became the PR manager at the High Dam, where he worked until retirement.

Tape recorded interview by Yusuf Fakhuri. Aswan 2004.

Mohammed Mahran. b.1938. *Fida'iy* in 1956 and tour guide in the Port Said military museum. Mahran was a *fida'iy* in 1956 in Port Said and lost one eye in battle. His second eye was removed when he refused to respond to interrogators after being taken captive. Mahran has been celebrated by the state as a hero, receiving awards from Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak. He works as a guide in the Port Said military museum.

Interview by author. Port Said, April 2011.

Mohammed Nagib. Mechanic on the High Dam. Originally from Qaliub, Nagib earned a diploma in mechanics, after which he started working on the Dam as a mechanic in 1962.

Interview by Kamal Al-Qalsh, Sun'allah Ibrahim and Ra'uf Mus'ad. Aswan, 1965.

Mohammed 'Uthman Mohammed Hassan. Technician and manager on the High Dam. 'Uthman earned a technical diploma and started working on the High Dam with the Arab contractors ('Othman Ahmad 'Othman) as a technician in 1962 and eventually became a general manager in the High Dam Authority.

Video interview by Walid Hussain and Mahmud 'Adawi (HMLC). Aswan, December 2009.

Mustafa 'Ali Barakat. b.1962. Employee in water stations company. Mustafa's father was a worker on the High Dam since 1960. Mustafa started working in the PR department of the water stations company in the 1970s.

Video interview by Walid Hussain and Mahmud 'Adawi (HMLC). Aswan, December 2009.

Mustafa Hassan 'Ali 'Umran. Welder on the High Dam. Mustafa worked on the Dam as a welder from 1962 until retirement.

Video interview by Walid Hussain and Mahmud 'Adawi (HMLC). Aswan, December 2009.

Mustafa Silim. b.1942. Worker on the High Dam. Mustafa worked on the Dam between 1963-2007 in the postal and communication services sector.

Interview by author. Gharb Suhail, Nubia, February 2010.

Mutawi' Mohammed al-Sayyid Isma'il. Worker on the High Dam and civil servant. Mutawi' started working on the Dam as a driller in the early 1960s and later worked as a civil servant in the High Dam Authority.

Video interview by Walid Hussain and Mahmud 'Adawi (HMLC). Aswan, December 2009.

Nafissa. b.circa 1924. Migrated housewife. Originally from Abu Simbel, Nafissa has been a housewife in Abu Simbel Tahjir since she was migrated.

Interview by the author. Abu Simbel Tahjir, Nasr al-Nuba, March 2010.

Na'im Sabri. b.1946. Student activist and writer. Na'im studied engineering at Cairo University in the 1960s, and was a member of the student movement at the time. He is now a poet and novelist, with over 15 publications.

Interview by author. Cairo, April 2009.

Nasr Allah 'Abd al-Masih. b.1945. Supervisor on the High Dam. Originally from Qena, Nasr started working on the Dam as a concrete supervisor on the Dam in 1963.

Interview by Kamal Al-Qalsh, Sun'allah Ibrahim and Ra'uf Mus'ad. Aswan 1965.

Nassir al-Haaj. b.1950s. Member of the Abu Simbel club in Cairo. Migrated from Abu Simbel and moved to Cairo.

Interview by author. Cairo, April 2010.

'Am Nijm. b.1944. Electrician on the High Dam. 'Am Nijm was born in the Nubian village of Gharb Suhail to a worker on the Dam, who died in 1961. Despite minimal education, 'Am Nijm took over working first as a worker, and later became an electrician until his retirement in 2007.

Interview by author. Gharb Suhail, Nubia, January 2010.

Nirmin. b.1995. High-school student. Nirmin is currently a Suez high-school student. She performs with Gam'iyyat Muhibi al-Simsimiyya and is the grand-daughter of Madame Yasmine.

Interview by author. Suez, November 2011.

Qa'ud Mohammed 'Abd al-Mun'im. b.1945. Electrician on the High Dam. Born in Qena, Qa'ud started working on the Dam as of 1963 as a worker, later becoming an electrician.

Interview by Kamal Al-Qalsh, Sun'allah Ibrahim and Ra'uf Mus'ad. Aswan 1965.

Rawhiyya. b.1960. Housewife. Born in Tinjar and originally from Wadi Halfa (Nubians living in Sudan), Rawhiyya is currently a housewife.

Interview by author. Tinjar, Nubia, February 2010.

Sa'd Mahmud Mohammed. Electrician on the High Dam. Born in Esna, Sa'd started working as an electrician in the Dam's tunnels in 1963.

Interview by Kamal Al-Qalsh, Sun'allah Ibrahim and Ra'uf Mus'ad. Aswan 1965.

Sa'd Nassar. Engineer on the High Dam. Born and educated in Alexandria, Sa'd graduated from the city's university with a degree in engineering in 1951. He started work on the Dam as a structural engineer in 1961, working on planning the houses and area around the Dam, then in injecting the Dam, and helped with the moving of the Nubian temples. Sa'd is now head of the Association of the Builders of the High Dam.

Interview by author. Cairo, November 2010.

Safwat Kamal Ibrahim. b.1945. Mechanic on the High Dam. Born in Menya, Safwat started working on the Dam as a mechanic in 1962.

Interview by Kamal Al-Qalsh, Sun'allah Ibrahim and Ra'uf Mus'ad. Aswan, 1965.

Safwat Shahin. Civil servant in ministry of the Dam. Safwat was appointed a ministerial secretary in the ministry of the Dam in 1962.

Interview by Kamal Al-Qalsh, Sun'allah Ibrahim and Ra'uf Mus'ad. Aswan, 1965.

Salam Yousri. b. 1986. Poet, artist and theatre director. Salam is the founder of the theatrical troupe Al Tamyeh, founded in 2002, and part of the growing independent theatre movement in Cairo since 2001.

Interview by author, Cairo 2009.

Salih Abu Jad. Technician on the High Dam. Salih received a technical diploma as an electrician, and started working on the Dam in 1965. He was promoted to head of technicians at the electricity station at the High Dam Authority.

Video interview by Walid Hussain and Mahmud 'Adawi (HMLC). Aswan, December 2009.

Sayyid Gizawi. b.1938. Well-known *simsimiyya* singer and actor. Sayyid works as an ironer (provides ironing services for a living). A well-known *simsimiyya* singer and actor since the 1950s, Sayyid is known for his dances and his animation of songs in the way that he performs them.

Interview by author. Port Said, April 2011.

Sayyid Kaburya (Salah 'Abd al-Hamid). b.1946. *Fida'iy* during the War of Attrition and renowned musician. Salah 'Abd al-Hamid (his original name) was a sailor and folk singer with primary education in Suez. He was a founding member of the band Al-Nidal (The Struggle), which sung mainly in weddings and hennas. With the onset of the war, he started to sing politically, joining forces with Al-Bataniyya (The Blanket) to form Wilad al-ard in 1967. He was also a member of *al-difa' al-sha'bi* (popular resistance) during the War of Attrition. He currently runs a car painting workshop in Suez, and with Abul 'Arabi al-Masri founded the NGO Gam'iyyat Muhibi al-Simsimiyya.

Interview by author. Suez, August, November 2011.

Sayyid Mohammed Hassanain. b. 1945. Accountant on the High Dam. Sayyid started work on the High Dam in 1964 as an accountant and was afforded the opportunity to study law while he worked there. He lives in the village of Abulrish on the outskirts of Aswan.

Interview by author. Abulrish, Aswan, March 2010.

Sha'ban. b.1952. Chef in an ecolodge. Sha'ban works as a chef in an ecolodge in his home village of Gharb Suhail. He had previously worked in the Gulf for years. Sha'ban is a nephew of renowned singer Sidqi Ahmad Silim.

Interview by author. Gharb Suhail, Nubia, January 2010.

Sherif Younis. Academic, historian. Sherif Younis is a Professor of History at the University of Helwan, Cairo. He is the author of *Nida' al-Sha'b: Tarikh Naqdi lil-'Aydyulujiyya al-Nassiriyya* (The Call of the People: A Critical History of Nasserist Ideology). (2012).

Interview by author. Cairo, July 2012.

Shu'ib. b. 1950. Fisherman. Shu'ib comes from a family of fishermen in Gharb Suhail who have worked behind the Dam since the 1960s, and this is the work Shu'ib continues to do.

Interview by author. Gharb Suhail, Nubia, February 2010.

Tadrus Kandus. b. 1940. Electrician on the High Dam. Born in Nag'a Hamadi, Tadrus started work on the Dam as an assistant electrician in 1963.

Interview by Kamal Al-Qalsh, Sun'allah Ibrahim and Ra'uf Mus'ad. Aswan 1965.

Tawfiq. b.1945. Technician on the High Dam. Tawfiq was migrated with his family in the 1960s from the Nubian village of Qustul. He worked as a technician on the Dam from 1965 and became a trainer in the onsite training centre. Tawfiq holds a technical diploma and is retired living in the compound in Sahari.

Interview by author. Sahari, Aswan, February 2010.

Thurayya Sarhan. Wife of an engineer on the High Dam. Thurayya was the wife of an engineer working on the Dam, and lived in Aswan since 1954.

Interview by Kamal Al-Qalsh, Sun'allah Ibrahim and Ra'uf Mus'ad. Aswan, 1965.

Umm Mirvat. b.1948. Housewife. Umm Mirvat was born in the Delta city of Dumyat, until her father brought the family to Aswan where he started work as a railway worker in the 1950s. She married a nurse who worked in the Dam's hospital and still lives in Al-Sadd Sharq compound with her children, in a disintegrating house that was previously her father's before she lived in it with her husband. Um Mirvat is barely literate.

Interview by author. Al-Sadd Sharq, Aswan, February 2010.

William Carlos. Banker. William was the vice president of Al-Ahly Bank in Aswan between 1969-1979

Tape recorded interview by Yusuf Fakhuri. Cairo, 2004.

William Kamil Shinuda. Geologist on the High Dam. Geologist and researcher on the Dam in the 1950s and 1960s, William became the vice president of the High Dam Authority, and after that worked in the ministry of agriculture

Tape recorded interview by Yusuf Fakhuri. Cairo, 2004.

Yahya. b.1970. Second-generation migrant, tourist worker. Yahya was born in Gharb Suhail as a second-generation migrant. His father was migrated from Dabud and moved to Gharb Suhail upon marrying Yahya's mother. Yahya currently runs a tourism business in Gharb Suhail.

Interview by author. Gharb Suhail, Nubia, January 2010.

Yahya Ahmad 'Umar 'Abd al-Mun'im. Technician on the High Dam. Yahya worked in the High Dam garage as a technician from 1962 and was promoted to treasurer.

Video interview by Walid Hussain and Mahmud 'Adawi (HMLC). Aswan, December 2009.

Madame Yasmine. b.1956. Suez resident, migrated during the war, untrained singer. Madame Yasmine was born in Suez and migrated when migration became compulsory in

1968. Her family was migrated to Bani Soueif into the camps developed in agricultural co-ops, but later moved to Marg in Cairo where they had relatives. Yasmine married there and moved back to Suez in 1973, where they were smuggled and stayed inside. Yasmine was a talented singer in her youth but never officially joined any bands, nor did she receive any form of education due to family conservatism. She enrolled both her daughters, as singers with Gam'iyyat Muhibi al-Simsimiyya.

Interview by author. Suez, November 2011.

Yusuf Fakhuri. b.1948. Communist writer and activist. Yusuf interviewed workers, technicians, engineers and ministers who worked on the High Dam for the purpose of a book he never wrote. These interviews were mostly performed in 2004 and the transcriptions were generously provided for my use. A communist writer and activist, he lives in Aswan.

Interview by author. Aswan, February 2010.

Zakariyya Ibrahim. b.1951. Founder of *simsimiyya* band Al-Tanbura. Zakariyya was a student activist while earning his technical diploma in the 1970s. He took on various jobs, the longest of which was a shoe repair-man, as he was developing a *simsimiyya* band he established in 1982. The idea of Al-Tanbura was to get *simsimiyya* veterans back to performing, in a context in which the singing tradition had deteriorated with Sadat's open door policies that commercialised Port Said. Al-Tanbura is now funded by several local and international donor organisations and tours the world.

Interview by author. Port Said, December 2010, March and April 2011.

Zaynab Kafrawi. b.1941. *Fida'iyya* in 1956 and civil servant. Zaynab was the daughter of a policeman in Port Said, who was the member of a resisting police group. She was recruited by her father to transport weapons, and later mobilised a group of her female friends to assist in the process.

Interview by author. Port Said, April and May 2011.

Zizi. b.1985. Children's tutor. As the only woman with a high-school diploma in her village of Tinjar, Zizi works as a children's tutor. Zizi is the daughter of the family who generously hosted me in Nubia, and assisted me during research interviews and in analysis thereafter.

Interview by author. Tinjar, Nubia, February, March 2010.

Live performances

Improvised performances in Port Said, March and April 2011.

Four collective discussions in cafes with 'Ali 'Auf, Sayyid Gizawi, Ahmad Migahid, Mohsin al-'Ashri, Ibrahim Mansur, Mus'ad Musa (fisherman), Gamal 'Abd al-Wahid and Al-'Arabi

al-Bayya' (truck driver). These discussions involved respondents singing in private improvised performances.

Performance in 'Arab quarters by various Port Said bands on anniversary of British withdrawal, December 2010.

Performance in Casino Al Nigma by Al-Tanbura band in Port Said, April 2011

Performances by Sayyid Kaburya and Gam'iyyat Muhibi al-Simsimiyya in Suez, August and November 2011.

Two performances were attended in Gam'iyyat Muhibi al-Simsimiyya premises, where performers included Abul 'Arabi al-Masri, Mabruk al-Sayyid Murgan, Madame Yasmine, Nirmin, Minna and Mahmud.

Various performances by bands and singers of Port Said, Suez, Nubia and Menya, in Tahrir square, Cairo, January 2011.

Various performances by 'Am 'Izbi, before small audiences in Gharb Suhail, Nubia, January and February 2010

Interviews on TV programmes and documentaries

Thawrat al-Gharib.

**Documentary directed by Sherif Salah,
produced by Al-Jazeera, 2011.**

Gihad Mohammed. b.1990s. Activist from April 6 Youth Movement.

Walid al-Hillani. b.1980s. Independent activist.

Su'ud 'Umar. b.1960s. Socialist worker and activist since the 1970s.

Sheikh Hafiz Salama. b.1925. Religious and political symbol in Suez. Sheikh Hafiz is also known to have supported the Palestinian struggle in 1948, and supported civil resistance in Suez from until 1974, by keeping the mosque open, providing religious motivation and helping bury the martyrs.

The War of Attrition.

**Ikhtiraq programme on Mehwar TV,
Egyptian Satellite television, November 23 2010.**

Ahmad Gum'a. A Bedouin of Sinai. Ahmad's father had to escape Sinai after refusing to be recruited as a spy by Israelis. He was then found and hired by Egyptian Intelligence and helped guide *fida'iyyin* through the desert.

Mohammed Taha. Member of Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya.

Mahmud 'Awaad. Member of Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya.

Ahmad al-Bahnisi. Member of Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya.

Mohammed Sarhan. Member of Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya.

Ahmad 'Utaifi. Member of Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya.

Each talked about the various operations they carried out and were involved in during the War of Attrition, up until the end of the 101 day war in 1974.

**Cairo University Lecture Panel on the October 6 War.
Personal recording by Ahmad 'Utaifi, October 6 2010.**

Sheikh Hafiz Salama. Religious and political symbol in Suez.

Al-Fariq 'Abd al-Mun'im Wassil. Lieutenant General in the army in 1973 war.

Al-liwaa' Mohammed al-Fatih. Major General in the army in 1973 war.

Ahmad 'Utaifi. Member of Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya.

'Abd al-Mun'im Qinnawi. Member of Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya.

***Al-Suways, al-Dhakirra al-Mansiyya (Suez, Forgotten Memories).*
Documentary directed by Ahmed Rashwan, *Al-Jazeera*. October 26 2005.**

Ahmad 'Utaifi. Member of Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya.

Mohammed Sarhan. Member of Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya.

Mahmud 'Awaad. Member of Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya.

'Abd al-Mun'im Qinnawi. Member of Munazamat Sina' al-'Arabiyya.

***Magmu'at al-Khamsa – Khatf Moorhouse*
(The group of five – the Moorhouse Kidnapping.)
produced by *Al-Jazeera, Al-Muahribun al-Qudama (Veterans)*, August 24 2005.**

Tahir Mus'ad, 'Ali Zangir, Ahmad Hilal, Al-'Arabi Fadl, and 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Sha'ir.

***Al-Ahlam al-Mumkina (Permissible Dreams).*
Documentary directed by 'Atteyat al-Abnudi, produced by Abnud Films, 1982.**

A documentary about the experience of Umm Sa'id who lived in Al-Sayyid Hashim village, on the outskirts of Suez, and her experience in 1967. When the village was bombed, Umm Sa'id and her family evacuated and migrated to Zaqaqiz, returning to Suez after the war.

Appendix 3: Songs

Umm Kulthum (1898-1975)

Misr Allatī Fī Khātirī (Egypt is on my Mind) 1952

Lyrics: Ahmad Rami, composition: Riyad al-Sunbati

Nashīd al-Galā' (Anthem of Freedom) 1954

Lyrics: Ahmad Rami, composition: Mohammed al-Mugi

Walla Zamān ya Silāhī (It has Been Long my Weapon) 1956

Lyrics: Salah Jahin, composition: Kamal al-Tawil

Batal al-Salām (Hero of Peace) 1958

Lyrics: Bayram al-Tunisi, composition: Riyad al-Sunbati

Ya Farhat al-Qanāl (Celebrating the Canal) 1959

Lyrics: Salah Jahin, composition: Mohammed al-Mugi

Ya Gamal, ya Mithāl al-Wataniyya (Oh Gamal, Nationalist Role model) 1963

Lyrics: Bayram al-Tunisi, composition: Riyad al-Sunbati

'Inna Fida'iyūn (We are Fighters) 1967

Lyrics: 'Abd al-Fattah Mustafa, composition: Baligh Hamdi

Rag'in Bi-Quwwit al-Silāh (We're Going Back with the Force of our Weapons!) 1967

Lyrics: Salah Jahin, composition: Riyad al-Sunbati

'Asbah 'Al'ān 'Andī Bunduqiyya (Now I Have a Rifle) 1969

Lyrics: Nizar al-Qabbani, composition: Mohammed 'Abd al-Wahab

Nashīd Misr (An Anthem to Egypt) 1969

Lyrics: Ibrahim Nagi, composition: Riyad al-Sunbati

'Abd al-Halim Hafiz (1929-1977)

Ihna al-sha'b (We the people) 1953

Lyrics: Salah Jahin, composed: Baligh Hamdi

Ya Baladna (Our Country) 1956

Lyrics: 'Anwar 'Abdallah, composition: Mohammed 'Abd al-Wahab

Hikāyat Sha'b (The Story of a People) 1960

Lyrics: Salah Jahin, composition: Kamal al-Tawil

Al-Mas'ūliyya (The Responsibility) 1963

Lyrics: Salah Jahin, composition: Kamal al-Tawil

Baladī (My Country) 1964

Lyrics: Mursi Gamil 'Aziz, composition: Kamal al-Tawil

Bustān al-'Ishtirākiyya (The Gardens of Socialism) 1964

Lyrics: Salah Jahin, composition: Mohammed al-Mugi

Ya Habāyib Bil-Salāma (Come Back Safely, our Loved Ones) 1965

Lyrics: Hussain al-Sayyid, composition: Mohammed 'Abd al-Wahab

Sūra (A Photograph) 1966

Lyrics: Salah Jahin, composition: Kamal al-Tawil

Al-Bunduqiyya 'Itkalimit (The Rifle has Spoken) 1968

Lyrics: Muhsin al-Khayyat, composition: Baligh Hamdi

Mohammed 'Abd al-Wahab (1902-1991)

Mudnak Gafahu wa Marqadahu (Victim of Your Love) circa (late) 1940s

Lyrics: Ahmad Shawky, composition: Mohammed 'Abd al-Wahab

Da'it Sā'at al-'Amal (The Hour of Work has Come) 1962

Lyrics, Hussain al-Sayyid, composition: Mohammed 'Abd al-Wahab

Tūl Ma 'Amalī M'āya (So Long as I Have [my] Hope) 1967

Lyrics: Rahbani Brothers, composition: Mohammed 'Abd al-Wahab

'Abd al-Ghani Al-Sayyid (1912-1962)

'Idatnī al-Thawra Khamas Fadādīn (The Revolution has Granted me Five Acres) circa 1950s

Lyrics: 'Abd al-'Aziz Salam, composition: Ahmad 'Abd al-Qadir

Songs from Port Said

Ya Allenby yabn Allanbuha (Allenby son of Allenbuha) circa 1920

Writer unknown

Bahar ya Wabūr (Head North, oh Train) 1956

Writer unknown

Bi-Huruf min Nur, wi Huruf min Nar (In Words of Light, in Words of Fire) 1956

Writer unknown

Bur Said al-Wataniyya (Port Said, the Patriotic) 1956

Kamil 'Id

Ghanni ya Simsimiyya (Sing, oh Simsimiyya) 1956
Sayyid al-Gizawi

Moorhouse 1956
Dimirdash `Abd al-Salam

Ya Bur Said Shabāb wa Rigāl (Oh Port Said of Youth and Men) 1956
Mohammed Abu Yusuf

Iktib ya Tarīkh (Write, oh history) 1967 & updated 1973
Ibrahim al-Mursi

Lutfi al-Barbari 2003
Ibrahim al-Mursi

Zayy al-Nahardah (On a Day Like Today) 2006
Zakariyya Ibrahim, Ibrahim al-Mursi, Mohsin al-`Ashri

Songs of Nubia

Gubaliyyun (Calling out to people on the ship) sung since 1912
Writer unknown

Sandaliyya (Migration Ship) sung since 1912/1933
Writer unknown

Ale' Ale' (Congratulations) sung since 1933
Writer unknown

Ay gi Sole (Hold on to my Galabiyya [gown]) sung since circa 1933
Writer unknown

Tay Tay (Come, Let's go Around the World) late 1950s
Sidqi Ahmad Silim

Dayman Nasribu wu Nīl (You've Always Been Triumphant, oh Nile) circa 1960
Sidqi Ahmad Silim

Nuba Nut (People of Nuba) circa 1964
Hamza `Alaa' al-Din

Bil Salamah (Nubian version of `Abd al-Halim Hafez's song *Come Back Safely*) 1965
Sidqi Ahmad Silim

Sadd Iki yih Runga (Ode to the Dam) circa 1965
Sidqi Ahmad Silim

Wu Hanīna (Oh Nostalgia) circa 1965
Sayyid Jayyir

Bawadir al-Nasr Bānit (The Signs of Victory have Started to Appear) 1967
Sidqi Ahmad Silim

Fajr al-Nasr Tal 'Aliyna (The Dawn of Victory) 1967
Sidqi Ahmad Silim

'*Ahfād 'Abdel Nasser* (The Grandchildren of Nasser) 1967
Sidqi Ahmad Silim

Ritha' (Epitaph to a Dead Soldier) 1967
Sidqi Ahmad Silim

Busta (Post-ship), sung during migration in the 1960s
Writer unknown

Gamal (Ode to Gamal) 1960s
Sidqi Ahmad Silim

Nuba Niri (Nuba means...) 1960s
Writer unknown

Ay Nal Kumli (I Have Never encountered) circa 1964
Writer unknown

Tatè Tatè (Step by Step), date unknown
Writer unknown

Lullaby to the Prince of the Lands, date unknown
Writer unknown

Songs of Suez

Al-Mithāq (The Charter) circa 1962
'Abd al-Mun'im 'Ammar

Al-Ghinwa (The Song) circa 1967
Kamil 'Id Ramadan

Fāt al-Kitīr (Much Time has Passed) 1967
Captain Ghazali

Il harb, Il harb! (To War, to War!) 1967
Collective production

'Inta al-Mas'ūl (You are Responsible for This) 1967

Collective production

Mal'ūn (To Hell) 1967

Collective production

Ya Salām 1967

Collective production

Barhum 1967/1968

Collective production

Nashīd al-Gabha (Anthem of the Battle Front), 1967/1968

Collective production

Al-Fat-ha (The Fat-ha) 1968

Collective production

'Ulna ya Bassit (A prayer) 1968

Sayyid Kaburya

Marthiyya lil-Shuhada' (Epilogue to the Martyrs), 1968/1969

Captain Ghazali

Qaylul al-'Aswad (Black September) 1970

Collective production

Shudwan 1970

Collective production

Ya Hibāb (You Scum!) 1970

Collective production

Al-'Ataba Gazāz (The doorstep is glass) 1971

Collective production

Gala Gala (The sound of a crow) 1971

Collective production

Jablik ayh ya Sabiyya? (What Has He Got You, Young Woman?) circa 1971

Short folk song/rhyme

Ya 'Am Hamza (Oh 'Am Hamza) 1972

Collective production

Khalidihum ya Baladna (Immortalise them, ya Baladna) 1973

Collective production

Khallī Balak min Zuzu (Take Care of Zuzu) 1973

Collective production

Ya Farkukah (Oh Know it all) 1973
Collective production

Appendix 4: Speeches by Gamal 'Abdel Nasser

Source: <http://Nasser.bibalex.org>²⁷¹

February 23 1953. Speech to Hay'at al-Tahrir, Shibin al-Kum Munufiyya.

August 2 1953. Speech in Port Said.

December 3 1953. Speech to Cairo University Students.

December 26 1953. Speech to Hay'at Tahrir. Misr al-Qadima.

January 25 1954. Speech to Youth Associations of different governorates.

May 1954. "The Revolution retrieves all rights and freedoms." Speech on land reform and positive neutrality.

June 24 1954. Speech to the workers of Minya.

July 23 1954. Speech commemorating the second anniversary of the Revolution, outlining economic plans and achievements.

October 26 1954. Speech on Revolution's achievements – at which there was an assassination attempt. Alexandria.

March 21 1955. Speech on Revolution's achievements.

July 26 1956. The nationalisation of the Suez Canal. Alexandria.

November 1 1956. Announcement of Tripartite Aggression.

November 2 1956. "*Sanuqātil wa lan nastaslim*" (We will fight and never surrender) speech. Al-Azhar Mosque, Cairo.

January 18 1960. Speech on the building of the High Dam in Aswan.

December 21 1961. Speech to Cairo University students on the cultural revolution.

December 28 1961. Speech honouring the prime minister of Burma.

May 21 1962. Speech on the assessment of the National Charter. Cairo University.

December 23 1962. Speech on the sixth anniversary of the 1956 war. Port Sa'id.

June 9 1967. Abdication Speech.

²⁷¹ Complete information was not available for all songs and speeches

June 1967. Speech on steps towards rebuilding the army.

March 30 1968. Announcement of the March 30 Communiqué in response to protests. broadcast in Cairo.