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## *Chapter One: An Introduction and Review of Literature*

### **Introduction**

In the lead up to the 2014 Egyptian elections, presidential hopefuls Hamdeen Sabahi and Abdel-Fatah el-Sisi hit the campaign trail with policy platforms hinging on economic reform, social justice, and security. As the candidates outlined their vision for a new Egypt, they singled out development as the primary tool for implementing this vision. Desert development, or the development of Egypt's vast desert landscape forming the country's western and southern borders, was a recurrent theme. During a live television interview in May, Sabahi announced that, according to his own estimates, "three million feddans of [Egypt's] desert could be made inhabitable."<sup>1</sup> In a separate interview that same month, Sisi outlined a broad development plan for the governorates, singling out the upper-Egyptian city of Sohag as having "more than one million acres of agricultural land" fit for development.<sup>2</sup>

A few days before the election, Sisi's campaign website published a color-coded "Map of the Future" detailing the soon-to-be-president's strategy for encouraging investment and reviving Egypt's struggling economy.<sup>3</sup> At the center of this strategy was the construction of new desert cities, which would expand Egypt's inhabitable land from the current six percent to a whopping one hundred percent. According to the campaign, these "new administrative and investment maps for the provinces" would "clear the way" for Sisi's "vision ... to achieve unprecedented

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<sup>1</sup> "Sabbahi in TV interview: The Armed Forces are the People's Property," *Mada Masr*, 9 May 2014, <http://www.madamasr.com/content/sabbahi-tv-interview-armed-forces-are-peoples-property>.

<sup>2</sup> Mada Masr, Twitter post, 18 May 2014, 8:41 PM, <https://twitter.com/MadaMasr/status/468099133115736066>

<sup>3</sup> The campaign website (<http://www.sisi2014.net/index.php>) is now defunct, and the map was taken down soon before the elections."Sisi Campaign Posts Brief Program on New Website, *Mada Masr*, 21 May, 2014.

"<http://www.madamasr.com/content/sisi-campaign-posts-brief-program-new-website>

rates of development and effect a quantum leap in the Egyptian economy.”<sup>4</sup> Included were details for forty-eight new cities, eight airports, new fish farms, and several renewable energy projects, at an estimated cost of 140 billion US dollars.

As Sisi explained during the launch of his electoral program, “the key to my vision is decisions and approaches that open the doors to modernization, labor, development, and diligence before all Egyptians equally.” His vision for Egypt’s future was, Sisi explained, “the first of its kind.”<sup>5</sup> However, the history of development schemes under past Egyptian presidents, including Gamal Abdel-Nasser, Anwar Sadat, and Hosni Mubarak, tells a different story. These presidents also launched large-scale development schemes targeting Egypt’s desert, and the rhetoric around these projects shared similar promises of economic prosperity and modernization through technological planning. For these presidents, Sisi included, the solution to Egypt’s pressing social, political, and economic problems was human intervention in the geographic landscape under a framework of massive development projects.

Thus Sisi’s desert development project is one of many in a region that has been an object of development for both national and international actors alike. While Nasser’s Aswan High Dam or Mubarak’s New Valley Toshka scheme are more well-known examples, countless small development projects have invested in “making the desert bloom,” with varying degrees of success. There is a substantial amount of literature that seeks to measure the success of such projects and ascertain the prospects for future desert development. This research takes a different approach, looking instead at the history of these projects and how they contribute to a larger

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<sup>4</sup> Stephen Kalin, “Sisi’s Economic Vision for Egypt: Back to the Future,” *Reuters*, May 22, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/22/us-egypt-sisi-economy-idUSBREA4L0KL20140522>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

story of modern state formation, global power politics, and, ultimately, social and political dispossession.

In April 2014, one month before his interview on Egyptian TV, Sisi received a delegation of Nubian leaders in order to “showcase his vision for the development of Upper Egypt.”<sup>6</sup> Sitting in a lavish garden, Sisi explained his plans to develop “Nubia,” and entertained suggestions from the delegates in this regard. In order to examine the history of development in Egypt’s south and west desert, it is important to highlight the experiences of those whom this development has most directly affected. As the record of Egypt’s development shows, it is not just “undeveloped” land that is an object of development, but also the very people who live on it. In the case of Egypt’s south and west desert regions, those people include the Nubians, a linguistically and tribally diverse group of people who used to inhabit parts of this land. From the Aswan dams of the early twentieth century to the Mubarak-era “Toshka” project, Egyptian Nubians have watched their land transform under the rubrics of progress, modernization, and development for over one hundred years. The planners behind these mega-projects position them as necessary for the greater Egyptian good. However, their tangible effect on the ground is less clear. For Nubians who lost their homes, lands, and traditional livelihood due to compulsory resettlement, the price of development is high. Their experience poses important questions about the value of these schemes in Egypt and beyond. This research offers a critical history of development in Egypt’s south and west desert regions through the lens of the Nubians, longstanding recipients of the imperative to “develop” land and people.

### **Who are the Nubians?**

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<sup>6</sup> Gamal Abu el-Dahab and Ashraf Omran. “El-Sisi Welcomes Delegation from Nubia and Presents his Vision for the Development of Upper Egypt,” *Al-Ahram*, April 1, 2014, <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/474168.aspx>

There is no simple answer to the question “who are the Nubians.” Historically speaking, the term “Nubian” denotes those people who settled south of the Nile’s first cataract, from Aswan to Dongola, in what is now Egypt and Sudan. “Nubia” (which, for the purposes of this research denotes a dynamic and constantly-shifting space of land below Aswan) long predates territorial notions of Egypt and Sudan. It was on these lands that the ancient Kingdom of Kush reigned intermittently from before the third millennium B.C. until 350 A.D. At first glance, it may seem odd to describe a contemporary group of people by a civilization that existed several thousand years ago. Much as discussions of contemporary Egyptians often begins with references to Egypt’s Pharonic history, so too do many people (Nubians included) inextricably link the notion of “Nubians” and “Nubia” to an ancient past. This referent includes both national mythologies and international conversation efforts.

Needless to say, referring to Nubians today as descendants of an ancient people does little to elucidate on the vast diversity of this group. For starters, there are native Nubian populations in Egypt, as well as in Sudan.<sup>7</sup> This work focuses on Nubians in Egypt. These Nubians distinguish among themselves in a number of ways. There are well over fifty different Nubian villages, each with their own histories. There are two different languages that Nubians speak, Kenzi and Fadicca. A Kenzi speaker will not understand Fadicca, and vice-versa. Because of the compulsory relocations that Nubians faced since the early twentieth century due to the construction of dams near Aswan, very few Nubian villages remain in their original locations. The original villages that do still exist are located near Aswan city and West Aswan. There are many Nubians living outside of Egypt in the Gulf, Europe, and the United States. There are also

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<sup>7</sup> In addition to the native Nubians in Egypt and Sudan, there is a sizable community in Kenya, which arrived during the 1890s as soldiers in the British army. See Duncan, Rachuonyo. “Nubians in Kenya: A People Denied.” *Think Africa Press*. 22 February 2013. <http://thinkafricapress.com/kenya/people-denied-nubians-kibera>

Nubians who settled in cities across Egypt, such as Cairo and Alexandria. There is a young generation of Nubians who have never even visited “Old Nubia,” which refers here to the land between the Nile’s first cataract and the Egyptian border with Sudan, a rough approximation of the region where Nubians in Egypt used to live. Some Nubians may not even self-describe as Nubian, but rather as Egyptian, Egyptian-Nubian, African, Islamist, or Socialist, or any number of labels of self-identification.

When this research refers to “Nubians,” it is with the understanding that this includes a very large number of people. This thesis focuses on Nubians who were forced to relocate due to the construction of dams in Aswan, and it features input from Nubians who are still living in Egypt today. This input comes from Nubian news publications, Nubian groups on social networking websites, as well as from a small number of interviews I conducted in both Aswan and Cairo in June 2014. However, I cannot claim to provide a comprehensive account of this diverse group of people who have dynamic and contenting perspectives on resettlement, development, and the future of their former lands.

## **Historical Background**

The exploration and development of Nubian lands, namely in the diversion of the Nile’s waters for irrigation purposes, did not begin in the twentieth century. However, this research begins with the Nasser period because it represents an important juncture for Egypt’s emergence as a modern nation. In 1952, Mohamed Naguib and Gamal Abdel Nasser led the Free Officers coup, forcing the abdication of the Egyptian King Farouk and bringing an end to the Mohammad ‘Ali dynasty in Egypt. After the brief presidency of Mohamed Naguib, Gamal Abdel Nasser became, as the popular saying goes, “the first Egyptian to rule Egypt since Cleopatra.” Although

the formation of a “modern” state in Egypt was arguably underway since the nineteenth century, this was a decisive moment for the articulation of an Egyptian state both by and for Egyptians.<sup>8</sup> With the withdrawal of King Farouk and the demolition of an important channel for continued British influence, Nasser attempted to break the yoke of foreign elements in Egypt. Nasser’s Egypt would go on to assert itself as a dominant force in the Arab world. By nationalizing the Suez Canal in 1956 in order to fund the construction of the High Dam at Aswan, Nasser proclaimed Egypt’s “new” sovereignty. The High Dam at Aswan highlighted the notion of development as the cornerstone of Nasser’s vision for sovereignty. Not only would the Aswan Dam allow for the cultivation of new lands, but it would also contribute to Egypt’s rapid industrialization through the electricity that hydropower made possible.

The overthrow of the monarchy also had important implications for Egypt’s relationship with Sudan. Since 1821, Egypt had held intermittent control over Sudanese territory. While the Mahdist revolt of 1884 briefly removed Egypt’s hold over Khartoum, a British-led campaign in 1898 re-annexed the Mahdi territories to Egypt. Because the British had informally occupied Egypt since 1882 (following the ‘Urabi revolution), the administration of Sudan, as that of Egypt, would remain under tight British supervision for the next decades.<sup>9</sup> After Nasser seized power in Egypt, Sudan voted for independence and became an autonomous country in January 1956. The 1959 Nile Waters Agreement between the two nations granted Egypt the right to construct the Aswan High Dam, which would create the largest man-made lake in the world, flooding the border region on both sides. The issue of borders is a contentious one, especially for those people settled in said zones of contention. The states governing Egypt and Sudan’s new

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<sup>8</sup> The slogan “*Misr lel Misriyeen*” was popular among Egyptian nationalists, and it featured prominently in earlier uprisings against foreign influence such as the ‘Urabi revolution at the turn of the nineteenth century.

<sup>9</sup> Eve Trout Powell, *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Mastery of the Sudan* (Berkeley: U of California, 2003), 5.



borders now had the power to absorb and account for these people. In the case of Egypt and Sudan, these were the so-called “Nubians,” a linguistically and tribally diverse group straddling the newly-affirmed border between the two countries. After centuries of living on the land, Nubian homes and historical monuments faced submersion at the hands of the High Dam’s lake. As preparations for the dam went underway, Egypt and Sudan prepared to relocate the Nubians to make way for the flood. With that, Nubia’s population of roughly 100,000 was divided into two. The Egyptian government began the process of absorbing 50,000<sup>10</sup> newly-declared “Egyptian” Nubians into its citizenry. The 50,000 Nubians on the Sudanese side would embark on a parallel, but also very different, journey to citizenship.

As mentioned above, the Aswan High Dam was not the first technological feat to disrupt Egypt’s border to the south. Khedive Abbas II, with the guidance of British administrators in Egypt, constructed the first dam at Aswan in 1902 as part of a larger British initiative to regularize the Nile’s water and increase irrigation. The dam was subsequently raised two times, in 1912 and 1933. While this dam did not create a standing lake, it did require the periodic flooding of Nubia, as well as resettlement for those affected Nubians. The 1963-1964 Nubian relocation scheme was much larger in scale, involving the resettlement of most Nubian communities. Unlike the previous relocations, this experience was coupled with the Egyptian state’s increasing intervention into Nubians lives at unprecedented levels.

The 1963-1964 resettlement, and the construction of the High Dam at Aswan, brings to light several important features of the post-colonial state-building projects that occurred across Arab nations. After sixty years of informal British occupation (not to mention centuries of Ottoman

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<sup>10</sup> Alia Mossallam, “*Hikayat Sha’b*—Stories of Peoplehood: Nasserim, Popular Politics and Songs in Egypt 1956-1973” (PhD diss., the London School of Economics and Political Science, 2012). 179. All accounts of the Nubian relocation state that the Egyptian government relocated 50,000 Nubians during the relocation process; it is not a disputed figure.

administration that preceded it), the question of sovereignty was at stake. Linked to the consolidation of the state's authority to govern itself was an investment in development, demography, industry, and economy. The Aswan Dam required knowledge of land and water resources. It also necessitated the manipulation of this land and its translation into new sources of hydropower to increase agricultural and industrial capacity. To realize this broad constellation of concerns, technology and expertise became crucial objectives for the Nasserist state. The state's drive for knowledge also implicated Nubians, a formerly peripheral population existing largely outside Egyptian government administration. The 50,000 new Nubian citizens had to be brought into the mainstream Egyptian fold, both administratively and culturally. This imperative required establishing a baseline understanding of who these people were, including their numbers, demographic characteristics, cultivation habits, and their cultural practices. The collection of knowledge on Egypt's Nubians and the new services and institutions that the Egyptian government introduced all occurred under a particular discourse of development.

### **Approaches to Development Theory**

This research looks at development practices in Egypt through the lens of Egypt's Nubians. While that may seem like a fittingly narrow statement of purpose, in reality it is quite broad. "Development," as Wolfgang Sachs suggests in the introduction to *The Development Dictionary*, "has become an amoebalike concept, shapeless but ineradicable. Its contours are so blurred that it denotes nothing—while it spreads everywhere because it connotes the best of intentions."<sup>11</sup> Development, in other words, means many different things to many different people. In order to say that this research examines Nubians and development, it is important to clarify what is meant by development and the particular theoretical approach to development that this research takes.

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<sup>11</sup> Wolfgang Sachs, *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*, 2nd ed. (London: Zed, 2010).

Perhaps it is best to begin with the approaches to development theory that this research will not be taking. The field of development studies is theoretically and programmatically diverse. A standard development approach, then, would measure the economic or social development of Egypt's Nubians since the Nasser period. When "development" entered common usage in the 1950s, its guiding theory was framed in terms of economic growth.<sup>12</sup> These early proponents measured development through the growth of income per person.<sup>13</sup> Development theorists call this the classic liberal development theory, which emphasized economic growth through capital accumulation. The "historical stages" approach to this classic liberal theory (popularized by theorists such as W.W. Rostow), and the closely-related modernization theory, envisioned a linear history of all societies, with a similarly uniform development process.<sup>14</sup> Popular among sociologists in the 1950s and 1960s, this theory articulated certain "ideal social structures and institutions for sustained development," emphasizing the need for an overhaul of "underdeveloped" peoples' values and norms and "the flow of foreign aid, trade, investment, technical assistance" and large-scale infrastructure projects to achieve development.<sup>15</sup> Another popular current of development thought emerging in the 1950s was the Structuralist/Institutionalist school, which saw the failure of the price system as the source of economic problems for the underdeveloped. Popularized by theorists such as Raul Prebisch, this theory advocated "inward-looking development based on state protected and direct import substituting industrialization (ISI)."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Gustavo Esteva, "Development" in *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*, ed. Wolfgang Sachs (London: Zed, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ron Ayres, "Schools of Development Thought" in *Development Studies: An Introduction through Selected Readings*, ed. Ron Ayres (Dartford: Greenwich UP, 1995), 98.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 99.

However, over time, it became clear to development theorists that measuring development through economic growth alone was not enough. The idea of “social” development emerged. International bodies such as the United Nations perceived this notion as a counter-part to the discrete sphere of “economic” development. In 1963, the UN established the UN Research Institute for Social Development, with the aim of “integrated” development linking both economic and social growth.<sup>17</sup> The resulting social theories of development focus on the role of “human capital” in development, and emphasize health and education as the key to economic growth. The neo-classical approach to development, which gained speed in the late 1970s and early 1980s, identified the state’s centrality as the culprit of the field’s failures. According to this model, “distorted development” occurred because governments intervened to set prices or direct economic activity. To compensate for these past interferences, the theory suggests, governments should “roll back the frontiers of the state, liberalize all markets and pursue privatization” in order to achieve economic growth.<sup>18</sup> This “pronounced and highly public” shift to liberal development policy, Michael Carter argues, was “part and parcel” of the “ultramodernist” critiques of post-World War II development economics. Eschewing statist policies focused on public investment and planning, this critique “roots itself in the singular validity and universal applicability of the basic theorems of neoclassic economics.”<sup>19</sup>

This research does not seek to measure the development of Nubians by any of these standard theories of development. Indeed, it does not seek to measure the development of Nubians at all. Rather, this research engages with the work of a more recent wave of historians that situates development as both a product and a defining component of modernity. Instead of

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<sup>17</sup> Esteva, “Development”

<sup>18</sup> Ayres, “Schools of Development Thought,” 97.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Carter, “Intellectual Openings and Policy Closures: Disequilibria in Contemporary Development Economics,” in *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard (Berkeley: California UP, 1997), 120.

engaging in the conversation over “what development is, or is not, or how it can be more accurately defined, better ‘theorized,’ or sustainably practiced,” this research frames development as discourse, an “interwoven set of languages and practices,” to understand how these texts “write and represent” the world.<sup>20</sup> Development, from this perspective, is not a neutral act of improvement but rather “a modernist regime of knowledge and disciplinary power.”<sup>21</sup> Works from this tradition, which gained traction in the 1990s, include the 1992 *Development Dictionary* (ed. Wolfgang Sachs), Arturo Escobar’s 1995 *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, the 1995 reader *Power of Development* (ed. Jonathon Crush, quoted above), and M.P Cowen and R. W Shenton’s 1996 *Doctrines of Development*, among many others.<sup>22</sup>

### **Development: A Historical Perspective**

By approaching development as a “modernist regime of knowledge and disciplinary power,” this research casts the intersection of Nubians and development in a new light. It critiques the very idea of assessment by highlighting development’s role in building a modern Egyptian state, and the violence and exclusions such a process required. A historical approach to development understands the field of development theory, and all of its accompanying vocabulary such as “basic needs,” “population,” the “social” and the “economic,” as emerging out of specific historical contexts of empire and control. While “development,” and its counterpart “underdevelopment” entered common usage in 1949,<sup>23</sup> the ideas behind it have a longer

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<sup>20</sup> Jonathon Crush, “Introduction: Imagining Development,” in *Power of Development*, ed. Jonathon Crush (London: Routledge, 1995), 5.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> See Majid Rahnema and Victoria Bawtree’s 1997 *The Post-Development Reader*, as well as Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash’s 1998 *Grassroots Post-Modernism: Remaking the Soil of Cultures*.

<sup>23</sup> It was Harry Truman who initiated the contemporary understanding of development when he took office on 20 January 1949 and announced “We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific

genealogy, rooted in the colonial experience. Many scholars have looked at the colonial period as an important moment when western nations were reformulating their identities and practicing new modes of modernity based on their experiences in the colonies. This scholarship argues that although modernity is associated with the West, it was not a creation of the West but rather “of the interaction between West and non-West.”<sup>24</sup> Ann Stoler describes the process of modernity as a “mobile process of rupture and reinscription” by which themes and categories emerging in one historical context are displaced and reformulated once employed elsewhere.<sup>25</sup> This idea might be similarly applied to development, and the related ideas of welfare and productivity, themselves emerging as new modes of rule during the colonial period.

In his study of French and British colonial rule, Frederick Cooper provides some of this colonial context for development. According to Cooper, “colonial governments in the 1940s thought of development as an idea which would reinvigorate colonialism... [they] believed that their development initiatives would make colonies simultaneously more productive and more ideologically stable in the tumult of the postwar years.”<sup>26</sup> Situating the development initiative within the imperial crisis of the 1940s, Cooper finds an “implicit social theory behind economic policy.”<sup>27</sup> In the 1920s, the prevailing theory of “colonial self-sufficiency” assumed that development would “disrupt” colonial societies, and that state resources should target the metropole instead. However, a series of labor strikes, beginning in the mid 1930s in Trinidad and

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advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas.... What we envisage is a program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair dealing”

<sup>24</sup> Timothy Mitchell, “Introduction” in *Questions of Modernity*, ed. Timothy Mitchell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 2.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Frederick Cooper, “Modernizing Bureaucrats, Backward Africans, and the Development Concept,” in *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard (Berkeley: U of California, 1997), 64.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 64

Jamaica and soon becoming widespread, caused authorities to reformulate this imperative.<sup>28</sup> The 1940 Colonial Development and Welfare Act directed funds mainly at services, especially for urban workers, such as water, health, facilities, housing, and education. The theory was not, Cooper argues, to create a more efficient and productive colony to exploit, but rather it viewed “welfare – social services in the short run and a higher standard of living in the long” as the “antidote to disorder.”<sup>29</sup> With that, “a ‘dual mandate’ started to be sketched: the conqueror should be capable of economically developing the conquered region and at the same time accepting the responsibility for caring for the well-being of the natives.”<sup>30</sup>

When labor strikes continued, colonial governments created labor bureaucracies “alongside its growing development bureaucracy” and worked with African trade unionists in the hope of developing a framework for channeling workers’ protest, like those found in the metropole.<sup>31</sup> In 1944, the “productionist side of the development-welfare nexus” emerged more clearly. Funding increased for the Colonial Development and Welfare Act, and metropole resources were now allocated for social services, so long as they contributed to a colonial production that would eventually pay for such services itself.<sup>32</sup> In this post-war backdrop, the concept of “development” evolved in tandem with the ideological context of “self-determination,” the new catch-phrase of international politics.<sup>33</sup> Imperial powers needed a “progressive” reason for continuing colonial rule, while also capitalizing on whatever untapped resources the colonies could offer in desperate post-war financial times.<sup>34</sup> The emphasis was now

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 65-66

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 67

<sup>30</sup> Esteva, “Development”

<sup>31</sup> Cooper, “Modernizing Bureaucrats,” 68.

<sup>32</sup> Cooper, “Modernizing Bureaucrats,” 68.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 70

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 70

squarely on production, with an abstract end stage of “developed” for the colonies.<sup>35</sup> Another wave of strikes in the late 1940s and 1950s pushed labor concerns to the forefront once again. British and French officials decided that “the solution to the social problem lay in European knowledge of how to manage a working class,” in which trade unions could not only “mold grievances into defined categories to which employers could respond,” but also “provide institutions through which workers would feel socially rooted in the city.”<sup>36</sup> However, by the 1950s, Cooper argues, it became clear that the concept of economic development could not bear the “enormous amount of political and economic weight” it was asked to carry. Colonial projects were too “top-heavy” and required enormous amounts of funding, planning, and expertise.<sup>37</sup> Increasingly unable to argue that development might solve the colonies’ political and economic problems, Cooper suggests, colonial powers directed their focus at forming “cooperative postcolonial relationships” rather than sustaining colonial rule.<sup>38</sup>

### **Development and the Post-Colonial State**

Nasser’s Egypt provides an exemplary case of development’s role in nation-building in the post-colonial context.<sup>39</sup> Egypt was a nation emerging from a long history of foreign exploitation. The colonial experience in Egypt was not typical. Britain began its unofficial occupation in 1882, and during the World War I it declared Egypt a protectorate. Following the 1919 revolution, Britain dissolved the protectorate and granted Egypt independence, though it would continue to unofficially administer the country until 1952. A number of different agents – Ottoman, British,

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 71-72

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 74

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 76-77

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 79

<sup>39</sup> As Timothy Mitchell clarifies in his introduction to *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity*, “post-colonial” here does not refer to “the period after the end of colonialism” but rather to “forms of critical practice that address the significance of colonialism in the formation and practice of social theory.”



and Egyptian – established the first institutions for welfare services and state interference in productivity long before the 1952 Revolution. Timothy Mitchell, in *Colonising Egypt*, identifies the rule of Ottoman commander Mohamed Ali as laying the foundations for the modern Egyptian state. However, as noted above, Nasser initiated a period of modern state building that was unprecedented in its scope and scale. If Mohamed Ali established the modern state in Egypt, Mitchell suggests, it was Nasser who inaugurated Egypt as a modern *national* state.<sup>40</sup> The idea of sovereignty and freedom from foreign interference was a central tenant of the new Egyptian nation under Nasser. However, as with the case of many countries emerging from decades of colonial administration, assertions of sovereignty were true more in rhetoric than in practice. Cooper uses the example of Kwame Nkrumah who, alongside the British, guided the Gold Coast to independence in 1957 “with development as their shared goal.” Unlike his predecessors, Nkrumah was able to “out-flank and contain the labor movement” using the kind of “co-optation and repression” impossible under the British.<sup>41</sup> Just as the colonizers thought development could carry the burden of political and social unrest, so too did post-colonial regimes engage with this framework to usher in a new period of prosperity for the nation.

Post-colonial states did not only use development as a means to obscure brewing social and political issues. Rather, as in Nasser’s Egypt, these new states constituted their very identity by way of development. As Sugata Bose demonstrates in his discussion of national development and the post-colonial state in India, an “insufficiently decolonized, centralized state structure seized upon national development as a primary source of its own self-justification. Instead of the state being used as an instrument of development, development became an instrument of the

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<sup>40</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: California UP, 2002), 12-13.

<sup>41</sup> Cooper, “Modernizing Bureaucrats,” 80

state's legitimacy."<sup>42</sup> Development, as Bose argues, was an important means for emerging modern states to cultivate their identity and centralize power. With clear parallels to Egypt under Nasser, Bose states that the centralizing modern state often resorts to "reductionist mega-science to buttress itself, to homogenizing development to legitimize itself and to anesthetizing rationality to transcend the "irrational" arena of politics."<sup>43</sup> "If postcolonial modernity is defined by the centrality of development," Akhil Gupta suggests, "then populism, especially agrarian populism, is its most important feature."<sup>44</sup>

As Toby Jones shows in his study of Saudi Arabia, state power over land and resources, and the ability to manipulate those resources at will, goes "hand in hand with the power to determine, govern, and police the territoriality of the nation-state, and thus the sovereignty of the state itself."<sup>45</sup> For Egyptian president Nasser, constructing the Aswan High Dam allowed not only for the control of water and electricity, but also for a bold display of sovereignty in the wake of ongoing British intervention. Development provided the promise of change. Its neutral language, focused on the need to modernize and alter what were essentially geographic issues, served to obscure the real political and social problems at hand.

Increasing state control of land and resources also translated into increased control of people. Emerging fields of global knowledge and international expertise, that institutions such as the Ford Foundation disseminated internationally, provided the tools and the demand to

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<sup>42</sup> Sugata Bose, "Instruments and Idioms of Colonial and National Development: India's Historical Experience in Comparative Perspective," in *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Randall M. Packard (Berkeley: U of California, 1997), 53.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 57

<sup>44</sup> Akhil Gupta, "Agrarian Populism in the Development of a Modern Nation (India)," in *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard (Berkeley: U of California, 1997), 320

<sup>45</sup> Toby Craig Jones, *Desert Kingdom: How Oil and Water Forged Modern Saudi Arabia* (Harvard University Press, 2010)

modernize land, resources, and people. As Mitchell writes, “from the opening of the twentieth century to its close, the politics of national development and economic growth was a politics of techno-science, which claimed to bring the expertise of modern engineering, technology, and social science to improve the defects of nature, to transform peasant agriculture, to repair the ills of society, and to fix the economy.”<sup>46</sup> The calculation of people and an understanding of demography became increasingly important as the Egyptian state committed itself to an extensive set of welfare services, much like the British and French colonial administrations. Egypt acted as a welfare state not along the model of industrialized countries of Western Europe, but rather in its provision of public goods such as free education, health benefits, and government employment. The state also assumed responsibility for the entire welfare of the relocating Nubians, including housing, food, education, and community services. This was a heavy weight for the state to carry and required a concurrent rise in productivity to sustain the costs.<sup>47</sup> It is within this context that Nubians (alongside numerous other “peripheral populations”) became citizens of the Egyptian state.

### **Who has the “Right to Develop”?**

To this day, scholars continue to debate about whether or not the Aswan High Dam has effectively ensured water security for Egypt. To be sure, the dam saved Egypt from famine during two major droughts in the early seventies and eighties. In Ethiopia, where the main source of the Nile’s waters is found, an estimated one million died from 1984 to 1985. At the same time,

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<sup>46</sup> Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 15

<sup>47</sup> The 2005 Egypt Human Development Report, a document joint-produced by the Egyptian government and the United Nations Development Programme, shows that Egypt’s welfare commitments continue to be a source of great concern for policy planners today. Calling Egypt a “welfare nation,” the report argues that “the cost burden of a universal welfare regime in Egypt is fiscally unsustainable without private sector participation in investment.” (United Nations Development Programme and the Institute of National Planning, “Egypt Human Development Report,” (Cairo: UNDP, 2005), 3.)

scientists critique the dam for its larger environmental impact in Egypt. Lake Nasser's entrapment of sediment that used to naturally fertilize Egypt's soil meant that farmers increasingly had to rely on chemical fertilizers. The Nile's changing water flow also affected the salinity of Egypt's coastal waters, decimating sardine fisheries located near the mouth of Nile tributaries to the Mediterranean.<sup>48</sup> However, regardless of the dam's larger contribution to Egypt's development, it also negatively affected Nubian life in very concrete ways. While the dam helped develop greater Egypt, it also contributed to what many Nubians would call the "de-development" of their own communities. This poses an important question that the thesis addresses throughout: Who has the "right to develop"? The so-called development of Nubians and their land did not end with the construction of the Aswan High Dam. Since then, large-scale national development schemes such as Mubarak's Toshka project have occurred on former Nubian lands without Nubian cooperation or consent. While Mubarak framed the Toshka project as the start of a new era for all Egyptians, it ultimately became a symbol of corruption and government over-expenditure during the Mubarak era. The largest landholders in Toshka are private companies, such as Saudia Arabian Prince Al Waleed bin Talal's Kingdom Agricultural Development Company. As Egypt becomes the world's largest importer of wheat, private companies in Toshka have contracts that permit the export of high-value crops to foreign markets. While land that was once barren has now been developed to support agriculture, the benefits of this development have not been felt by the average Egyptians or Nubian alike.

While all Egyptians lose in poorly-executed development schemes such as Toshka, it can be argued that Nubians stand to lose the most. It is perhaps surprising then that many Nubians actively call for development from the state. As Nubians fight for the "right to return" to their

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<sup>48</sup> Scot Smith, "General Impacts of Aswan High Dam," *Journal of Water Resources Planning and Management* 112, (1986), 557.

former homes before the resettlement, this battle often merges with a larger Nubian claim to the “right to develop” their former homeland. Cooper argues that in the context of French and British colonial rule, development, which colonial administrators initially employed to quell dissent, also provided a language of resistance for the colonized. The “universalism of development discourse,” Cooper contends, allowed for the “firm assertion of people of all races to participate in global politics and lay claim to a globally defined standard of living.”<sup>49</sup> Nubians were not passive recipients of development, and since the relocation they have vocally claimed their “right to develop” from the state. Looking at various Nubian-led development initiatives, this thesis argues that development discourses have been an important source of leverage for Nubians as they advocate for their rights. However, at the same time that Nubians call for the development of their former lands, development projects on those lands, such as Toshka, exclude Nubians from participation. Thus, this research argues that not everyone is given equal access to development despite the universalism of its creed.

### **Dominant Paradigms in Nubian Studies and Departures**

The literature available on Nubians today is vast and multidisciplinary in scope.<sup>50</sup> Archeologists and Egyptologists have long been interested in studying the historical artifacts located in former Nubian lands. From the nineteenth century onwards, numerous western institutions sent archeological missions to excavate and document monuments in Egypt’s south.<sup>51</sup> This trend intensified after Nasser’s announcement to build the High Dam, when the United Nations

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<sup>49</sup> Cooper, “Modernizing Bureaucrats,” 84.

<sup>50</sup> For one extensive bibliography on Nubia, see the UNESCO’s “Nubian Bibliography up to 2000” <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001501/150176e.pdf>

<sup>51</sup> To name just one of many examples, from 1905-1907 American archeologist James Henry Breasted (who would later found the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago), completed two “reconnaissance trips to Nubia.” Accompanied by his wife, an American engineer, and a German photographer, Breasted recorded inscriptions from a number of Nubian sites in Egypt and Sudan, including the Abu Simbel temples. <https://oi.uchicago.edu/collections/photographic-archives/breasted-expeditions/introduction>

Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) inaugurated the “International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia (1960-80)” in order to excavate and record the historical artifacts south of Aswan before the flood. The International Conference on Nubians Studies, which began in 1966, gathers every four years to present archeological findings in Nubia (from both Egypt and Sudan).

Alongside the campaign to document Nubian monuments before the flood was a concurrent campaign to document Nubian culture, language, and daily life. Although countless anthropologists have taken an interest in Nubians, one important example is the “Nubian Ethnological Survey,” which the Social Research Center at the American University in Cairo carried out from 1961-1963. The SRC team in Nubia included both American and Egyptian anthropologists. The work they produced formed the foundation of contemporary Nubian anthropological studies. These works, which many Nubians and non-Nubians alike reference to this day, include the Robert Fernea-edited *Contemporary Egyptian Nubian* (1966), Colin Callender’s *Life-Crisis Rituals among the Kenuz* (1971), Hussein Fahim’s *Egyptian Nubians: Resettlement and Years of Coping* (1983), Peter Geiser’s *The Egyptian Nubian* (1987), and John G. Kennedy’s *Nubian Ceremonial Life* (1978), among many others.

Contemporary anthropological studies of Nubia acknowledge its debt to these early scholars. However, this generation emphasizes the anthropological frameworks that guided research on Nubians in the sixties. The SRC researchers relied on the notion of “salvage anthropology,” which saw the Nubians as a traditional, tribal group on the brink of change and whose identity needed documentation lest it be lost forever. The treatment of Nubians as a group separate from mainstream Egyptians informs many past and contemporary studies. This research takes a different approach, building off the work of Elizabeth Smith. In her 2005 dissertation

“Tributaries in the Stream of Civilization,” Smith examines “the significance of Nubians in the national context and their role in shaping contemporary national identity.” Instead of looking at Nubians as a separate, isolated population, she reframes the conversation by viewing Nubians as part of Egyptian social life as a whole, showing how “Nubian and non-Nubian Egyptians together co-construct ideas about Egyptianness in their everyday interactions.”<sup>52</sup>

Like Smith’s work, this research looks at Nubians not as a discrete population, but rather as an integral component in shaping the identity of the Egyptian state. Smith has already laid the groundwork for examining the significance of Nubians as a minority, peripheral, traditional “other” against which mainstream Egypt has formed its identity from the Nasser period until today. Using critical, historicized theories on development, this research examines how the Egyptian government, since the sixties, has implicated Nubians in national development schemes. It argues that the “development” of Nubians and their land was an integral component in the construction of Egypt as a modern state. By looking at the continuous effect of development on Nubians today, this research explores the significance of this continuing phenomena and what it says about the interactions between the Egyptian state and its citizenry. Unlike many contemporary studies,<sup>53</sup> which are “oriented toward assessing the degree of “culture and change” between Old and New Nubia, with a focus on economic change and agriculture,”<sup>54</sup> this research does not ask “how have Nubians adapted to the modern world?” but rather “how does Egypt define ‘modernity’ through development, and how does this definition affect Nubians in Egypt?”

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<sup>52</sup> Elizabeth Smith, “Tributaries on the Stream of Civilization: Race, Ethnicity, and National Belonging among Nubians in Egypt” (PhD diss., New York University, 2005), 41, ProQuest (3222006).

<sup>53</sup> One such example is Anne Jennings’s 1995 *The Nubians of West Aswan: Village Women in the Midst of Change*, which was published as part of a series on “Women & Change in the Developing World.”

<sup>54</sup> Smith, “Tributaries on the Stream of Civilization,” 40-41

## Chapter Summaries

Chapter One, “Nubians, Development, and the Post-Colonial State,” explores how Egyptian president Gamel Abdel Nasser used development as a tool for consolidating power in the early years of his rule. This chapter argues that Egypt’s Nubians became citizens at a particular moment of modern state consolidation in Egypt, which had important implications for social integration. The Aswan High Dam, which would force the relocation of some 50,000 Nubians, was a defining symbol of Nasser’s state. This chapter highlights how Nasser conceptualized Egypt’s modernity based on notions of industrialization, technology, and grand development schemes. Development and modernization would define the climate within which Nubians became citizens. Using the archives of the AUC Social Research Center’s “Nubian Ethnological Survey,” this chapter also documents increasing state intervention into Nubian life at the time of the 1963-64 relocation. This intervention occurred not only through the counting, documenting, and recording of the Nubians, but also through the introduction of new state services. This chapter also looks at Nasser’s enduring, and often quite positive, legacy among the Nubians, offering commentary on the effectiveness of development as a tool for containing social and political dissent.

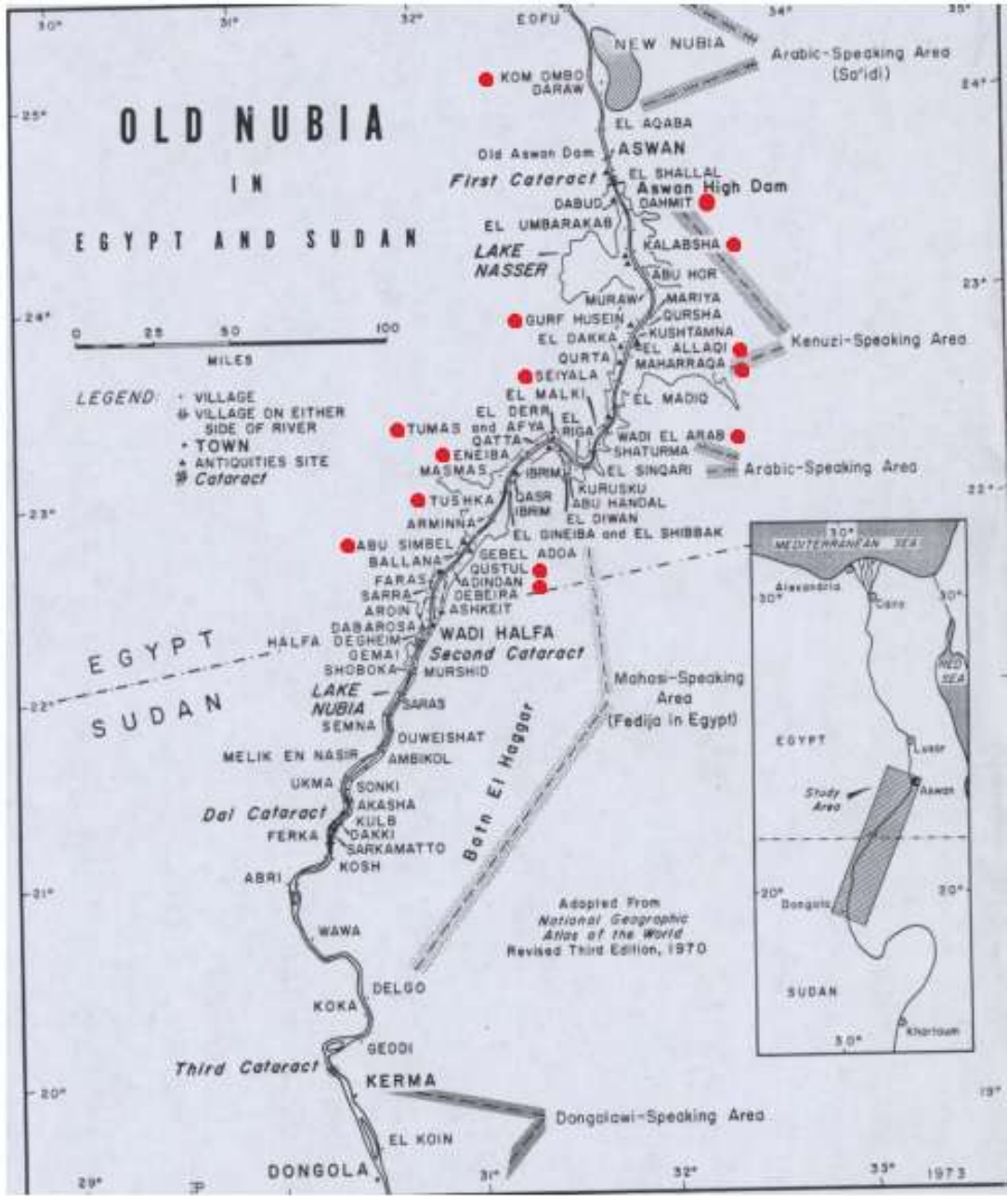
Chapter Two, “International Development in Nubia,” focuses on international development organizations in Egypt, showing how these non-state players collaborate with national actors in order to achieve mutual development goals. From the 1963-64 relocation until today, international developers have had a continuing presence on former Nubian lands, playing a considerable role in dictating the Nubians’ relationship to their land. By examining the role of the Ford Foundation in the SRC’s “Nubian Ethnological Survey,” this chapter explores how developers – both national and international alike – envisioned Nubians as traditional, backwards



“objects” fit for development. The chapter then extends this argument to the land on which Nubians lived. It examines how Nubian land has become an “object” of development, justifying technological interventions for problems that national and international actors alike frame as fundamentally geographic in scope.

Chapter Three, “Nubians: Right to Return, Right to Develop,” looks at how Nubians have mobilized development discourses in order to achieve an important goal: the “right to return” to their former homes before the 1963-64 relocation. Since the High Dam’s construction, Nubians have made many attempts to create new homes along the shores of the newly-formed Lake Nasser. The Nubians have never fully realized this feat. However, lake-side development, and other desert reclamation schemes on former Nubian lands, continues to occur at the hands of national and international developers. This chapter highlights the various areas to which Nubians would like to “return,” arguing that these areas represent important points of contestation in the debate over who has the “right to develop.





## *Chapter Two: Nubians, Development, and the Post-Colonial State:*

*1960-1975*

### **Introduction**

This chapter explores development as a tool for consolidating power in Nasser's Egypt. Faced with the enormous feat of establishing a sovereign Egypt free from foreign interference, Nasser conceptualized Egypt's new modernity based on notions of industrialization, technology, and grand development schemes, namely the Aswan Dam. This chapter argues that Nubians in Egypt became "Egyptian" at a very specific moment of modern state consolidation, which had important implications for their integration into Egyptian society. Using the AUC Social Research Center "Nubian Ethnological Survey" archives, this chapter documents the increasing government intervention into Nubian life at this time, in particular the number of welfare and service projects the state enacted during the 1963-64 relocation. It provides a glimpse of the particular context in which Nubians became Egyptian citizens. It also examines the effectiveness of development discourses in the consolidation of the modern state. As this chapter will show, many Nubians supported and continue to support Nasser during the construction of the High Dam, feeling that they sacrificed their old homes for the "greater Egyptian good." Thus, this chapter will offer commentary on the effectiveness of development discourse as a tool for containing social and political dissent.

### **The High Dam at Aswan: A New Era of Development**

Some forty years after his death, Gamel Abdel Nasser still commands an enduring legacy in Egypt. Of that legacy – controversial and diverse as it may be – the High Dam at Aswan remains

significant. The High Dam was Egypt's ticket to modernity, symbolizing Egyptian independence, technical know-how, and a new age of industrialization and agricultural reform. However, while the High Dam commands so much meaning in Egypt, especially with regards to Nasser's legacy, it was, in many ways, a wholly average feature of emerging modern states across the globe. In the 1950s, the Central African Federation built the Kariba dam, between what is now Zambia and Zimbabwe. Leading the Gold Coast's transition from British occupation to independence, President Nkrumah built Ghana's Volta Dam in the 1960s. In these examples, the symbolism of the dam for the respective countries and their leaders was just as important as its tangible benefits. As Thayer Scudder notes, in each of these cases, "no less a person than the president of the country pushed the project forward." President Nkrumah, for instance, saw the Volta Dam "not just as a pilot project for the industrialization of Ghana, but as a symbol of that industrialization."<sup>55</sup> In this sense, a charismatic leader and an accompanying big dam were simply components of a larger formula of modernity, industrialization, and development. As Martha Finnemore writes, before 1968 "being "developed" meant having dams, bridges, and a (relatively) high GNP per capita."<sup>56</sup>

This was certainly a formula that Nasser employed. In an early speech about the impending dam, Nasser proudly declared: "in antiquity we built pyramids for the dead. Now we build new pyramids for living."<sup>57</sup> While the proposal to build the Aswan High Dam predated the 1952 Free Officers Coup,<sup>58</sup> its logic was much in line with the revolution's goals, providing an

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<sup>55</sup> Thayer Scudder, *The Future of Large Dams: Dealing with Social, Environmental, Institutional, and Political Costs* (London: Earthscan, 2005), 5.

<sup>56</sup> Martha Finnemore, "Redefining Development at the World Bank," in *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge*, eds. Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard (Berkeley: U of California, 1997), 5.

<sup>57</sup> Scudder, *The Future of Large Dams*, 5

<sup>58</sup> Ahmed Shokr, "Hydropolitics, Economy, and the Aswan High Dam in Mid-Century Egypt," *Arab Studies Journal* 17, no. 2 (2009): 12.

apt symbol for the newly emergent Egypt. On the level of rhetoric, the construction of the dam was tightly bound up with the idea of a sovereign Egypt free from foreign intervention. This is evident in a speech in which Nasser celebrated the laying of the first stone of the dam on 9 January 1960. The construction of the Aswan Dam was the fruit of the labor of those who “warred” to “establish the independent will which they forcibly wrested from the clutches of tyranny, occupation, despotism, and domination.” Indeed, Nasser continued, “the greatest of all the values of the Dam is that it symbolizes the determination, the will and the resolution of the Arab people, who, having known their path, determined that they would forge ahead with dignity and honor, leaving no place for weakness, retreat or submission.”<sup>59</sup>

While this rhetoric imbues the dam’s construction with a deeply charged and nationalist meaning, what is more interesting is the way in which the state’s potential for development became a measuring stick for the revolution’s success. The Dam was not only a symbol of “determination,” “will,” and “resolution,” it was also “a symbol of the whole Arab nation’s determination to carry out its self-imposed task of building up the greater liberated homeland.”<sup>60</sup> Nasser equated a “liberated” Egypt with a new era of “building” and development. Importantly, Nasser identified the land that the dam would bring into cultivation (now wrested “from the clutches of the desert”) as well as the “ten million K.W.H of electricity” it would produce by way of hydropower. This speaks to two major goals of the 1952 Revolution: land reform and industrialization. By “adding new arable lands, increasing the output of existing cultivated lands, and generating the electric power that would promote the advanced level of industrialization

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<sup>59</sup> Gamal Abdel-Nasser, “Address Celebrating the Commencement of Building of the High Dam” (speech, Aswan, Egypt, January 9, 1960), Library of Alexandria, <http://nasser.bibalex.org/Speeches/browser.aspx?SID=805&lang=en>

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

Egypt had long striven to achieve,”<sup>61</sup> the High Dam was an ideal symbol of progress. That development in both agricultural output and industry were the ways to measure this “progress” is important, for it prioritized these objectives in the new era of state-building.

When Nasser spoke of “building up” the liberated homeland, he was implicitly talking about development. The literal term “to develop” appears only two times in this 1960 speech, although rather than using the term *tanmiyya*, Nasser adopts the similar term of *tatweer*. When describing the sacrifices Egyptians took to reach the construction of the High Dam, Nasser states “Today, we can take pride in the fact that we were able...to proceed in the development in our country.”<sup>62</sup> In the speech’s conclusion, Nasser declares “today we face a new stage in the history of humanity and of the world at large ...we have established a lofty principle...that the small powers proceed on their path and work for the development of the economy.”<sup>63</sup> Nasser uses the term *dawla*, or state, five times, but only in reference to the Soviet Union and in general to speak of the resistance of “small states.” To refer to Egypt, he uses both the terms *balad*, or country, and *watan*, or nation six times each. Nasser used the word *balad* to describe “our country” or, when addressing the audience “your country.” *Watan*, in contrast, appears largely in reference to the “national economy.”<sup>64</sup> Nasser uses *qawmi*, or national, four times, but only in reference to the “national economy” or “Arab nationalism.”<sup>65</sup>

A 1968 English-language bulletin on the High Dam’s progress echoes Nasser’s sentiments in his 1960 address. In its introduction, then-minister of electric power and the High

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<sup>61</sup> Hussein Fahim, *Egyptian Nubians: Resettlement and Years of Coping* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1983), 27.

<sup>62</sup> Gamal Abdel-Nasser, “Address Celebrating the Commencement of Building of the High Dam.” In Arabic the sentence reads: ثم استطعنا أيضاً أن نسير في طريقنا لنطور بلدنا

<sup>63</sup> In Arabic: وهو أن الدول الصغرى ستعمل من أجل تطوير اقتصادها

<sup>64</sup> For example: الإقتصاد الوطنى القومى العربى المتحرر and بأن يكون اقتصادنا اقتصاداً حراً، وطنياً قومياً

<sup>65</sup> For example: وانطلاقة القومية العربية لتحقيق دورها التاريخى

Dam, Mohamed Sidky Soliman drew a direct link between dams, development, agriculture and industry, and human benefit. He writes that “the value of dams and the great part they play in the development of a country through water supply projects for irrigation and power is directly related to the growth of the population.” Calling the High Dam a “mammoth wonder of civil engineering,” whose design was “backed up by the most powerful scientific and engineering discoveries and achievements of our modern time,” Soliman placed Egypt at the forefront of modern innovation. The dam, Soliman writes, would “admirably meet the increasing demands for Egypt’s fast growing population” while also contributing to Egypt’s industrial development.<sup>66</sup> Across government channels, the new Egypt was to be modern, and this meant being industrialized, technologically advanced, and sovereign.

### **Nubians Become Citizens of the New Egyptian State**

This kind of prioritization had obvious implications for the Nubians living on the land to be submerged by the High Dam’s artificially-created lake. Nubians, in this sense, became Egyptian citizens in a very specific context of development. Not only was their relocation necessary for the sake of Egypt’s modern development, but also they were to become active, integrated citizens contributing to a wider state project. The Egyptian government would use global knowledge and expertise to achieve modernity through development and to administer populations most effectively. To do this, a number of new and evolving post-Revolution ministries rushed to Nubia to collect a baseline of information on this formerly peripheral group. As they built new infrastructure, offered new services, and increasingly regulated Nubian daily life, these ministries brought Nubians closer into the folds of the state in entirely new ways.

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<sup>66</sup> United Arab Republic High Aswan Dam Construction Authority. *Materials for Final Engineering Report on the High Aswan Dam Project* (Aswan, Egypt: Suez Canal Authority, 1968), 3.



In order to distinguish the Nasser period as a distinctly moment of modern state emergence in Egypt, it is important to outline where Nubians stood vis-à-vis the Egyptian state before this period. Mohamed Ali, the Ottoman leader credited as the father of Egypt's modern state, passed through Nubia during an 1820-1822 expansionist expedition to Sudan. Flanked by European cartographers, Ali ordered for extensive gathering and documentation of the region's zoological and geographic information.<sup>67</sup> Before 1882, there was no official figure on the number of people living in Nubia. Egypt's first census was taken in 1882, and it recorded Nubia's population at 45,708 people.<sup>68</sup> In 1899, the border between Egypt and the Sudan was established at the twenty-second parallel.<sup>69</sup> Due to their smaller numbers, physical isolation, and distance from administrative centers in Cairo, Nubian communities were administratively semi-independent before the resettlement. There were few government activities in the region, as well as limited administrative supervision. The closest government administrators were stationed in Eneba, and could only reach Old Nubia by boat or donkey because there were no roads.<sup>70</sup> "Nubia," at this time, does not appear to be a cohesive unit with which the Egyptian government dealt. Rather, the government had relationships in different parts of the region inhabited by Nubians. For example, a 1902 government decree granted Nubian farmers in Adindan, a district near the border with Sudan, ownership of the land they cultivated, to be administrated under Muslim laws of inheritance. A following government decree appointed Egyptian government administrators to collect taxes from the area, forcing from power a group of exiled Turkish soldiers who ruled over

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<sup>67</sup> Eve Trout Powell, *Different Shade of Colonialism*, 42

<sup>68</sup> Hussein Fahim, "Basic Information on the Newly Settled Nubian Community in Kom Ombo, Upper Egypt: Report Prepared for the Egyptian General Organization for Land Reclamation (EGOLR)," (Cairo, Egypt: Social Research Center at the American University in Cairo, 1974), 21.

<sup>69</sup> Nicholas Hopkins and Sohair Mehanna, eds. *Nubian Encounters: The Story of the Nubian Ethnological Survey, 1961-1964*, (Cairo: American U in Cairo, 2010), 7.

<sup>70</sup> Hussein Fahim, "Nubian Settlers and Government Administrators: A Preliminary Analysis of a Cross Cultural Setting," Draft Paper for Seminar on Development Administration in Egypt, (Cairo: 1972), 5.

the land during the nineteenth century.<sup>71</sup> In this way, some Nubians interacted with the Egyptian government in a spatial sense, rather than on the ethnic terms that Nasser initiated. At the turn of the twentieth century, Nubians identified themselves based on “regionally-based ethnic sub groups” and “did not regard themselves as being members of one ethnic category.”<sup>72</sup> Nasser was the first person to refer to this group as the “Nubians” when discussing the relocation process with Egyptian media.<sup>73</sup> Apart from these individual circumstances, many of the early Nubian interactions with the state occurred in the context of dam building. The state provided compensation for the first relocations in 1902, 1912, and 1933. King Fouad offered to resettle the Nubians in Kom Ombo – where they were eventually relocated in 1963-1963 – but they refused this offer, preferring instead to move increasingly up river.<sup>74</sup> Aside from monetary compensations, the government also carried out various irrigation projects to compensate for arable land in Old Nubia flooded due to the first Aswan dam. The Agricultural Census of 1950 documents these irrigation projects and the new land they brought under cultivation.<sup>75</sup> These projects were carried out in the early 1950s, resulting in an increase of nearly 811 feddans of arable land in a ten-year period; however the government halted them when they began considerations of the High Dam at Aswan.<sup>76</sup> Of course, Nubians in Egypt were located not only in and below Aswan. A long-established pattern of male migration to the cities, such as Cairo and Alexandria, meant that Nubians had a large presence in these areas and consequently many interactions with the Egyptian government. Many Nubians served in the pre-Nasser governments

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<sup>71</sup> El Zein, Abdul Hamid, “Socioeconomic Implications of the Waterwheel in Adindan, Nubia.” in *Nubian Encounters: The Story of the Nubian Ethnological Survey, 1961-1964*, eds. Nicholas Hopkins and Sohair Mehanna, (Cairo: American U in Cairo, 2010), 134.

<sup>72</sup> Poeschke, “Nubians in Egypt and Sudan: Constraints and Coping Strategies,” 27.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>74</sup> Hopkins, *Nubian Encounters*, 7

<sup>75</sup> Hussein Fahim, “Basic Information on the Newly Settled Nubian Community in Kom Ombo, Upper Egypt: Report Prepared for the Egyptian Authority for the Cultivation and Development of Reclaimed Lands (EACDRL),” (Cairo, Egypt: Social Research Center at the American University in Cairo, 1974), 37.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 37

and state institutions. For example, the Nubian Major General Abdullah El-Najoumy Pasha was the commander of the Egyptian royal guard until Nasser's coup in 1952, as well as a member of the Board of Directors of Fouad I's Institute for Desert Research.<sup>77</sup>

The piecemeal nature of the Nubians' relationship to the Egyptian government necessarily ended when Nasser announced the High Dam's construction and began preparations to relocate the 50,000 Nubians living in Egypt.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, as stated above, before this moment no one had even used the term "Nubians" to describe this group of people. While in the past the Egyptian government had largely dealt with the Nubians on an individual basis, it now viewed them as a large and monolithic whole, an entire "problem of resettlement" that needed solving. In order to tackle this enormous task, a vast number of government agencies got involved in the resettlement, claiming a stake in aspects of Nubian life that had never before faced such comprehensive state regulation. While many state agencies involved in the 1963-1964 Nubian relocation had existed before the Nasser period, it is worth noting the sheer extent of government intervention in the process. Upon Nasser's announcement of the impending High Dam project, the Ministry of Social Affairs assumed the responsibility of resettling Nubians. In 1960, the ministry conducted a survey among Nubians, focusing largely on statistical data and general population notes, in order to develop a relocation plan. The Committee for the Investigation of Nubian demands was formed in 1960 to seek input from Nubian leaders regarding resettlement preferences. In 1961 officials from several Egyptian ministries (spearheaded by the Ministry of Social Affairs) formed the Joint Committee for Nubian Migration to organize Nubian

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<sup>77</sup>"Wall Photos," Nubian Knights Community Page, Facebook, [https://www.facebook.com/nubianknightsteam/photos/a.399093790150391.90723.399081666818270/716838278375939/?type=1&relevant\\_count=1](https://www.facebook.com/nubianknightsteam/photos/a.399093790150391.90723.399081666818270/716838278375939/?type=1&relevant_count=1)

<sup>78</sup> The Sudanese government would embark on a separate program to relocate the 50,000 Nubians on Sudanese territory.

resettlement.<sup>79</sup> The Ministry of Land Reform was tasked with irrigating the land in the new settlement (with the goal of reclaiming 20,000 feddans in Kom Ombo before 1964<sup>80</sup>), as well as dividing it up among the new residents.<sup>81</sup> In 1966, following the relocation process, the Ministry of Social Affairs handed responsibility for the New Nubia settlements and their inhabitants over to the Ministry of Land Reform. Shortly after, Nasser established the Egyptian Authority for the Utilization and Development of Reclaimed Land (EAUDRL), whose main task was to “boost soil fertility and productivity levels in reclaimed areas, and to provide settlers with a number of community services to improve social conditions and raise living standards for farmers.”<sup>82</sup>

Other state ministries participated in the resettlement process on a smaller scale. From the Ministry of Interior to the Higher Sports Council, these institutions addressed every aspect of Nubian daily life. In 1962, the Research Institute for Animal Husbandry conducted a study in Old Nubia documenting the ways in which Nubians used animals.<sup>83</sup> The Ministry of Public Transportation established a bus line in New Nubia. The Ministry of Supply took over the task of providing consumer goods and food materials to the new communities. The Central Agency for Mobilization and Statistics was one of many bodies on the national and regional level collecting population statistics and projections in Nubia. Over a short period of time, Nubians acquired not only a new communal identity of the “Nubian” but also a new relationship to an Egyptian government that interacted with Nubians as a unit. These institutions and their work counting, documenting, and absorbing the Nubians into the Egyptian citizenry is explored below.

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<sup>79</sup> Hopkins, *Nubian Encounters*, 8.

<sup>80</sup> Fahim, “EGOLR”, 62. They fell very short of this goal. By 1966 (already two years late), only 5,863 feddans of the proposed 20,000 were suitable for cultivation.

<sup>81</sup> Helmi Tadros, “The Study and Evaluation of the Rehabilitation Process in the Newly-Settled Communities in Land Reclamation Areas: Final Report Part One the Nile Delta,” (Cairo, Egypt: Social Research Center at the American University in Cairo, 1975), 18

<sup>82</sup> Hopkins, *Nubian Encounters*, 9

<sup>83</sup> Fahim, “EGOLR,” 61

## **The Social Research Center “Nubian Ethnological Study” and Follow-Up**

From 1961 until 1964, anthropologists from the Social Research Center at the American University in Cairo conducted an extensive study on Egypt’s Nubians titled the “Nubian Ethnological Survey” (NES). Guided by the field of “salvage anthropology,” the NES examined the Nubians as a bounded, remote community on the brink of extinction in modern times. The threat of ‘cultural extinction’ was clear: once the High Dam was constructed, forty-four Nubian villages would be submerged under the dam’s lake, taking with them the Nubians’ traditional culture and civilization. Following Nasser’s announcement to build the High Dam, the SRC rushed to document a culture they thought would soon be lost.

The 1961-1964 NES was largely anthropological in scope. It was the SRC anthropologists who first proposed the idea for the project, and they held considerable sway in determining the study’s main focuses. Those focuses included documenting and describing Nubian ceremonial life and religious practices, methods of water irrigation, and the role of women. As such, the works resulting from this study are important records of an increasing surveillance of Nubian lives during this formative period. While the 1961-1964 NES provides a rich source of material for study, this chapter focuses instead on a follow-up survey that the SRC conducted after the relocation, from 1971 to 1975. Unlike the 1961-64 NES, the 1971-75 “Study and Evaluation of the Rehabilitation Process in the Newly Settled Communities in Land Reclamation Areas” was more focused in scope, looking primarily at the effect of relocation on Nubian lives. With an emphasis on government policy in the Nubian relocation villages of Kom Ombo, the 1971-75 study presents a more concerted collaboration between social scientists and state policy-makers. While the SRC remained largely in control of the follow-up survey, it worked in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Affairs, and it also produced policy-oriented

documents that went directly to state administrators. Thus, the SRC research represents one of the most significant instances of data-collection on Egypt's Nubians before and immediately following the relocation period.

In particular, this chapter looks at a two-part final report that the SRC, in collaboration with the EGOLCD, produced following the four years of post-relocation research. Alongside the final reports, this chapter examines two draft reports which, although largely similar to the polished final reports, were circulated internally within the Ministry of Land Reclamation (one draft was prepared for the EGOLR, and another for the EACDRL) and meant for state consumption. These documents are not only more policy-oriented than the 1961-1964 research, but also show a concern for mapping out the more “practical” aspects of Nubian daily life. This included, for example, the Nubians’ political organization, agricultural practices, and use of space in their new homes. The following discussion will examine these three documents in three different ways. First, it will look at how the 1971-75 reports speak to broader contemporary development literature. Second, it will examine how these reports elucidate the various anxieties facing modern welfare states, including issues of productivity, quantifying and managing populations, and national unity. Finally, the reports help in tracing a record of increasing state intervention into Nubian life, elaborating in particular on the number of welfare and service projects that were enacted during the relocation. All together, these documents reveal the specific moment of modern-state building – in the shadow of the High Dam – within which Nubians became Egyptian citizens.

### **The Nubian “Rehabilitation”: Unleashing “Human Potentialities”**

While there are many different frameworks with which one might narrate the difficult relocation Nubians faced as a result of the High Dam, the SRC/EGOLCD reports tell this story from a decidedly developmental standpoint. It begins from the very title of the report: “The Study and Evaluation of the Rehabilitation Process in the Newly Settled Communities in Land Reclamation Areas.” The word “rehabilitation” is a loaded one, implying a restoration from abnormal to normal and firmly grounded in development terms. The “rehabilitation process,” the report defines, refers to any changes that meet the goals of the “economic, social, and political advancement of the newly settled communities” as well as those which encourage settlers to “plan and execute local development projects.”<sup>84</sup> The goal of the study, the report states, is to “evaluate the rehabilitation process in relation to the economic and social development.”<sup>85</sup>

Other development jargon sprinkles the reports, including concepts such as “male absenteeism,” the “crime rate,” and the “crowdedness rate.” The government provides services to the Nubians, the reports suggest, in an effort to “raise their standard of living.”<sup>86</sup> The reports articulate the planners’ concern to help Nubians maintain both “their self-identity” and their “self-sufficiency,” in the most time-efficient fashion.<sup>87</sup> It calls the pattern of Nubian labor migration a coping mechanism for their “indigenous economic hardships” due to the Nubians’ agricultural lifestyle. The report notes that the Nubians’ subsequent tendency toward domestic service in the cities has become “an institutional pattern affecting their community structure, human potentialities, and values.”<sup>88</sup> In a comparison of the agricultural resources available in Old Nubia versus those in the new settlement, the EACDRL report laments that “statistics and quantitative data [on agriculture in Old Nubia] are not abundant and where they do exist they are

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<sup>84</sup> T adros, “Final Report Part One,” 12.

<sup>85</sup> Fahim, “Final Report Part Two,” 10.

<sup>86</sup> Fahim, “EGOLR,” 85.

<sup>87</sup> Fahim, “Final Report Part Two,” 1.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

contradictory or imprecise.”<sup>89</sup> The absence of this data is especially significant, the report suggests, because “the problem of the land use is of major importance not only because it is the principle economic resource of that society, but also because it is deeply linked to its social structure and development.”<sup>90</sup>

The reports qualify the needs of resettled Nubians in the larger picture of national development aims. For example, one report makes the distinction between fulfilling the “felt needs” of the community and ensuring “national development as a whole.” One of the “basic principles of community development work,” the report states, is “defining and implementing the ‘felt needs’ of the people.” “Felt needs,” however, “must always be interpreted within the limits of national policy” so that they “correspond to the kinds of programs and long range goals of the nation.”<sup>91</sup> The report frames government compensation for the Nubian relocation in similar terms. “In appreciation for the Nubians’ compliance with the national interests implied in the dam’s nation-wide economic benefits,” the report states, “the government committed itself to compensate in cash for their loss of property and in kind by establishing for them a new community provided with far better living facilities and public services than the Nubians had ever had before.”<sup>92</sup> While the report recognizes the “traumatic experience” of relocation and the “multidimensional stress” it entails, it situates that trauma as a generalizable trait demonstrated in other “African dam resettlement schemes.”<sup>93</sup>

The reports engage with the social sciences of their times in other ways. While the purpose of the study was mainly to assess the rehabilitation process, it was also concerned with the

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<sup>89</sup> Fahim, “EACDRL,” 36.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>91</sup> Tados, “Final Report Part One,” 18.

<sup>92</sup> Fahim, “Final Report Part Two,” 1.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 1



“theoretical and practical implications” of Nubian resettlement. The reports were particularly interested in the “social change theoretical propositions for the interpretation of continuity and change,” and hoped to apply the data against the “recently developed predictive model” based on relocation adaptation experiences connected to other African dam relocation schemes.<sup>94</sup> The reports mention that some Nubians had become over the course of years disillusioned with the many studies they viewed as “meaningless” and resentment began to build. At that point, the research team “sought information from only dependable informants” using “the ordinary anthropological technique of data collection.”<sup>95</sup>

### **Counting, Registering, and Employing the Nubians**

In addition to describing the Nubians according to a very particular vocabulary of social science, these reports also feature important examples of counting, registration, and collection of data. “There are probably few features more characteristic of modernity than the notion that we can know ourselves through numbers,” Jacqueline Urla begins in her study of identity formation among the Basque. “Statistics, averages, and probabilities permeate our ways of talking about ourselves and the social world we inhabit, particularly when it comes to describing the modern nation-state and its citizenry: whether the subject is per capita income, industrial productivity, literacy rates, divorce, or military might, statistics have become a routine way of measuring the health and wealth of the nation.”<sup>96</sup> As previously noted, the first Egyptian census of 1882 recorded some 45,708 Nubians. From 1960-66, that is, before and after the relocation, Nubians faced a series of population counts from a number of different state bodies. According to the reports, in March 1960, the Ministry of Social Affairs took a population count “as part of the

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 5

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 8

<sup>96</sup> Jacqueline Urla, “Cultural Politics in an Age of Statistics: Numbers, Nations, and the Making of Basque Identity,” *American Ethnologist* 20, no.4 (1993): 818.

survey of the affected land and its resources in order to provide up-to-date quantitative information necessary for resettlement plans.”<sup>97</sup> In this count, the ministry documented 48,000 people living in “Nubia.” In September of the same year, the nation-wide census was taken, recording some 44,108 people in Nubia. Following the resettlement, the inhabitants of New Nubia were counted once again, in June 1964, this time by the Aswan Center for Regional Planning, which tallied them at 55,395 individuals.<sup>98</sup> In 1966, once again as part of the nation-wide census, New Nubia inhabitants were counted at 58,353.<sup>99</sup> The reports take interest in Nubia’s numerical ebbs and flows, devoting much space to contextualizing these variations in population size to the nation as a whole, including several breakdowns of the figures such as comparisons between Nubia’s three ethnic groups.<sup>100</sup> The reports ultimately conclude that the population fluctuations are “transitional” and “not stable enough for population projection and policy making.”<sup>101</sup> While the treatment of demography and population studies as issues of public policy may seem wholly unremarkable today, it is important to note that this record of Egypt’s Nubians matches a larger “process of institutionalizing population studies and codifying demographic knowledge” on global scale beginning in the 1950s. What John Sharpless calls a “world wide network of ‘population experts’” began, during this time, to codify “a set of assumptions about how population dynamics worked, how the phenomenon was to be studied, and, most important, the terms under which intervention was appropriate.” What emerged in the

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<sup>97</sup> Fahim, “EGOLR,” 22.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

institutionalization of this field of knowledge was a “consistency in methodology, analysis, and language” that is evident in the SRC Nubia writings.<sup>102</sup>

The reports’ discussion on Nubia’s demography reveals an intersection between the Egyptian government’s compulsion to register its inhabitants, and the related desire of citizens to register with the state in exchange for aid and other services. As noted above, while the March 1960 Ministry of Social Affairs census counted some 48,000 people in Nubia, only six months later the national census tallied this population at 44,108. This difference was largely due, the report notes, to “the rush of urban Nubians to the region in March 1960” so that they could register themselves for compensation of lost property.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, the discussion of population breakdown between Nubia’s ethnic groups reveals how Nubians worked with state technologies of quantification to receive services. The report points out that the varying population sizes of the Nubian sub-groups have “had significant social and economic consequences.” It notes that the “Arabs,” who formerly made up only ten percent of the total population of Old Nubia, were increasingly able to influence relations in local elections and other community affairs due to their increasing size. The report states that each group registered to vote as many of their female members as possible in order “to maintain the balance of power in the new setting.”<sup>104</sup> Thus, registering in local elections allowed Nubians to gain power while also reaffirming the states’ legitimacy to do this quantification.

The reports reflect the modern welfare states’ concern for productivity, revealing how community services were explicitly offered in an attempt to increase said productivity. For

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<sup>102</sup> John Sharpless, “Population Science, Private Foundations, and Development Aid: The Transformation of Demographic Knowledge in the United States, 1945-1965,” in *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge*, eds. Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard (Berkeley: U of California, 1997), 184

<sup>103</sup> Fahim, “EGOLR,” 22

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 25

example, the report argues that landownership is an important right, because if tenants do not own their land, “it discourages the tenant from developing his land and increasing his production.”<sup>105</sup> The long-standing trend of Nubian labor migration, noted above, was a clear point of contention for government administrators concerned with developing Upper Egypt into a productive force in its own right. Although government planners expected Nubian labor migration to cease after the relocation, the delay in land distribution and cultivation meant that Nubians could not settle down and profit from the new land as planners initially conceived.<sup>106</sup> While economic opportunities through farming was one strategy government officials hoped to use to retain the workforce necessary to develop Upper Egypt, the report also emphasizes the role of community services in this aim. According to the 1971 study, the introduction of services such as education, medical care, and youth welfare had helped “[reduce] the desire” of young men to leave New Nubia.<sup>107</sup> The final report underlines this point more explicitly, stating that the government attempted to incentivize “this back-home movement” with community services that could provide “education facilities and/or better chances for work.”<sup>108</sup>

In another strategy to build a male workforce in New Nubia, the Egyptian government made a “special arrangement” to dispense all savings and social security allowances in cash to those Nubians who agreed to return and work on the land.<sup>109</sup> The report laments, however, that the majority of those who took up the offer were older men and younger children taking advantage of state-subsidized living before returning to the cities to work,<sup>110</sup> and not the working-age, male target group. In order to maintain access to government services and cash subsidies, Nubians

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<sup>105</sup> Tadros, “Final Report Part One,” xix.

<sup>106</sup> Fahim, “EGOLR,” 26.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 26

<sup>108</sup> Fahim, “Final Report Part Two,” 18.

<sup>109</sup> Fahim, “EGOLR,” 26.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-27.

would neglect to report their “absenteeism” from New Nubia to the state. However, government officials, according to the report, maintained hope that the looming issue of “male absenteeism” would decline as soon as Nubians adapted to their new setting and took up farming (although this apparently had not yet happened, some seven years after the resettlement).<sup>111</sup> The Ministry of Land Reclamation was keeping a close watch on the issue of “male absenteeism,” reporting levels up to fifty percent in some Nubian villages at a 1970 workshop on settlement issues in Cairo.

The reports also detail how Nubians were brought into state-managed land cultivation plans, namely in the cultivation of sugar cane. Although Nubians had not participated in wide-scale cultivation of sugar cane in Old Nubia, each beneficiary of reclaimed land in New Nubia was required to plant forty percent of that land with the crop, so long as the soil was not sandy.<sup>112</sup> This, the report states, was in order to integrate the Nubian economy into the regional sugar cane production.<sup>113</sup> The EACDRL assumed the role of marketing sugar cane, as well as providing technical and administrative assistance. Compulsory sugar cane cultivation reveals how government ministries sought to include the Nubians as producers in the state-controlled agricultural projects and thus as active citizens in Egypt’s development-led modernization project. It also provides an interesting example of the ways in which the Nubians attempted to define the boundaries of their Egyptian citizenship. Nubians argued to state administrators that “they can make their living in a way that provides for the cultivation of land but does not require that the owners themselves do the job.”<sup>114</sup> Calling the government’s agricultural policy an

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 27

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 28

<sup>113</sup> Fahim, “Final Report Part Two,” 12.

<sup>114</sup> Fahim, “EACDRL,” 78.

“imposition” and an “inappropriate intervention into their personal business,”<sup>115</sup> Nubians both protested state-managed agricultural policies while also acknowledging that the requirements set by the state had to be fulfilled (just not by their own hands).

The Egyptian government’s anxiety about population growth also clearly informs the SRC studies. This reflected a contemporary global trend in population studies: as Simon Szreter notes, during the 1950s “an intellectual orthodoxy” solidified amongst “social scientists, economic planners, and political leaders in the West” who linked “national economic development” to population growth.<sup>116</sup> The dominant theory informing this orthodoxy was that “relatively rapid population growth [could] obstruct the potential for economic growth in less developed countries.”<sup>117</sup> The SRC reports, like other contemporary social science documents, explicitly link population anxieties to social and economic development goals. The final report asserts that “the link” between population growth rates and the realization of “social and economic goals...does not need stressing.” In particular, it is an increasing population that has the most potential to inflict damage on Egypt’s development. Referring to Egypt’s population “problem,” the report states that “rapid rates of population growth are a serious handicap to Egypt’s economic and social development.” The report adds that with improved healthcare and declining death rates, Egypt’s population has “increase[ed] at an unprecedented rate constituting a serious threat to all its development plans.”<sup>118</sup>

The reports pay specific attention to Nubian birth rates and fertility patterns, revealing how government officials incorporated Nubians into national family planning schemes. The reports

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>116</sup> Simon Szreter, “The Idea of Demographic Transition and the Study of Fertility Change: A Critical Intellectual History,” *Population and Development Review* 19, no. 4 (1993): 659.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 659.

<sup>118</sup> Tadros, “Final Report Part One,” 61.

cite a publication titled “Population Trends in the UAR,” published by the Central Statistics Committee in 1969, to show the relative population growth rates in Nubia compared to the rest of Egypt using census data from 1882 to 1966. According to Egyptian census figures, Nubia’s population (it does not distinguish which Nubians are taken into account) increased by an average of 5.6 percent annually in the years between 1960 (pre-relocation) and 1966 (post-relocation), compared to 2.5 percent for the rest of Egypt.<sup>119</sup> The reports argue that these percentages are not reliable for population projections for the purpose of policy-making, noting that “economic and social conditions” have influenced the “post-resettlement demographic picture,” requiring an urgent “comprehensive demographic survey of Nubia.”<sup>120</sup> However, the report notes that the government took these numbers at face value, which ultimately led it to believe it should “control” the “fertility pattern” in Nubia.<sup>121</sup> In line with government policy in other rural areas in Upper Egypt, the government established family planning clinics alongside health centers in New Nubia, which offered birth control pills for free.<sup>122</sup> Based on the reports, it appears that Nubians did not share the same population anxieties as the Egyptian government, refusing participation in the family planning program and preferring instead to bolster their numbers in the face of their new, more numerous, non-Nubian neighbors.<sup>123</sup>

### **From Dirt Roads to Bus Stops: Expanding State Services for Nubians**

Government intervention into Nubian life by way of new services was “greater in both quantity and quality” than before resettlement.<sup>124</sup> Agricultural cooperative societies, supervised by the EGOLCD, are one example of the new state institutions. In Old Nubia, the only

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<sup>119</sup> Fahim, “EGOLR,” 37

<sup>120</sup> Fahim, “EGOLR,” 36.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>124</sup> Fahim, “Final Report Part Two,” 19.

government services provided to farmers were irrigation projects for the cultivation of new lands, in order to compensate for land loss due to the old Aswan dam. New Nubia, in contrast, had twenty-one cooperatives that supervised the land distributed among fifty-nine percent of the families in Kom Ombo.<sup>125</sup> While Old Nubia's lone agricultural society merely distributed household supplies, the new cooperatives provided agricultural and marketing services.<sup>126</sup> By law, all land owners in Egypt had to take part in government-supervised cooperative societies, which, according to the final report, served as a "liaison between the farmers and the administrations in regard to agricultural management and services."<sup>127</sup> Although Nubians were members of each cooperative's board of directors, they made up only 53.4 percent of the overall proportion of those working in the cooperative societies.<sup>128</sup> Alongside the agriculture cooperative societies, the government set up new agricultural units consisting of a slaughter-house, a veterinarian and artificial insemination unit, and a unit for eliminating insects and diseases affecting crops.<sup>129</sup> Throughout New Nubia, the government established veterinarian stations, with veterinarians making periodic visits from the administrative center in Nasser City.

The Egyptian government also introduced transportation and communication services to the resettled villages. Comparing the services in New Nubia to those in Old Nubia, the report juxtaposes images of a "modern" versus "traditional" life. In New Nubia, the government built roads connecting the villages, a new railway line, twenty-four post offices, and new telegraph and telephone services. "Convenient services" were not possible in Old Nubia, where "the desert, and other harsh physical conditions of Old Nubia, made surface transportation available only by

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<sup>125</sup> Fahim, EGOLR, 71.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>127</sup> Fahim, "Final Report Part Two," 13.

<sup>128</sup> Fahim, EGOLR, 75.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 73.



donkeys.”<sup>130</sup> The report celebrates the bus line established by the Ministry of Public Transportation as a distinctly modern achievement, “thus replacing the small boats and donkeys which had been used for short journeys” in Old Nubia.<sup>131</sup> While Old Nubia has little access to electricity, “in New Nubia, all streets and government buildings are electrically lighted.”<sup>132</sup> Seemingly missing the irony in the following statement, the report details “a network of 200 units for drinking water [which] has been installed in the new villages...in this way the dependence of the Nubians on the Nile as the main source of drinking water has ended.”<sup>133</sup> The report similarly describes food supply and medical services as a stark contrast between “traditional” and “modern.” In Old Nubia, residents purchased their food from peddlers or merchants, often on credit, until they received cash remittances from relatives working in Cairo or Alexandria.<sup>134</sup> In New Nubia, the Ministry of Supply established nine wholesale consumer cooperative societies, four household cooperative societies, and some thirty-three markets in order to provide consumer goods, food, and other related services such as butchers, carpenters, and plumbers.<sup>135</sup> Despite these efforts to centralize trade, the report also documents how Nubians established an informal marketplace, sometimes operating out of a converted bedroom, to offer an alternative to the supply ministry goods.<sup>136</sup> Although the Ministry of Supply provided wheat flour and bread for the new settlements, establishing a grain mill and seventeen merchandized bakeries, by the time of the SRC report thirteen bakeries had closed due to lack of business as Nubians preferred to bake bread in their own homes according to custom.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Fahim, “Final Report Part Two,” 19.

<sup>131</sup> Fahim, “EGOLR,” 86.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 86. According to the report, this was part of a larger, “nationwide project of electrifying all of rural Egypt.”

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 90.

State medical services were “very limited” in Old Nubia. In contrast, New Nubia had four health units, ten clinics for outpatient treatment, and a public hospital.<sup>138</sup> The government kept official records on the “security” level in Old Nubia, and the report states that “security was well established,” especially when compared to Upper Egypt, where “the incidence of crime is the highest in the country.” However, in Old Nubia there was only one police station in the region, and village leaders were entrusted to resolve security matters.<sup>139</sup> In New Nubia, due to the “maladjustment and psychological instability” resulting from resettlement, “the Ministry of Interior has been concerned to make security services widely available,” establishing a police station in Nasser City as well as four additional outposts.<sup>140</sup> With that, a state police presence replaced a formerly autonomous system of community regulation, for in New Nubia, “security measures are now found to be more accessible than before.”<sup>141</sup> In Old Nubia, children depended on “the village *kuttub* or Qur’an at the hands of the village shaykh” for their education. In New Nubia, Nubians could defend against the wayward instruction of local leaders by accessing education at nineteen government primary schools.<sup>142</sup> Importantly, these new schools were concerned with vocational education and training in areas such as carpentry, carpet weaving, household management, and, for girls, in needlework and the weaving of palm trees. The report describes this kind of state education as being “in keeping with the agricultural and industrial conditions in which they are serving,”<sup>143</sup> further emphasizing the government’s aspirations to incorporate Nubians in state-led agriculture and industry initiatives.

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>141</sup> Fahim, “Final Report Part Two,” 20.

<sup>142</sup> Fahim, “EGOLR,” 98.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 98

While social services never reached the remote Old Nubia (there was only one social service agency per region), New Nubia boasted six social agencies tasked with “[taking] care of social welfare problems” and four additional agencies devoted to education, health, and social welfare.<sup>144</sup> A UNICEF-sponsored program worked with those agencies to teach Nubian children “nursery care, cottage-craft education, and house management.”<sup>145</sup> In order to encourage Nubians to participate in their own “community development,” the report states, the government established thirty-five community development centers supervised by social workers from government bodies such as the Higher Sports Council in order to sponsor youth activities, hold parties, and facilitate “cultural discussions.”<sup>146</sup>

### **Main Insights from the SRC’s “Study and Evaluation” of Nubian Resettlement**

Based on the above discussion, it is clear that Nubians in Egypt became Egyptian citizens in a unique moment of modern state-building in Egypt. If the Aswan Dam and national development schemes were to dictate where the Nubians would live, it would also define their relationship to the state. As the government rushed to count and document this new citizenry of 50,000 people, involved ministries came to understand and quantify the Nubians in terms of “crowdedness rates” and “male absenteeism.” The Ministry of Land Reclamation decided where and what the Nubians would cultivate, tying their daily lives into the national development plans. This once hard-to-access group was now very easy to access, and the Nubians encountered a whole web of new state services and ministries with which they would regularly interact. It is important to note that Nubians were not the only “peripheral” group facing integration on terms of development during this time. Indeed, part one of the SRC report was dedicated exclusively to examining

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<sup>144</sup> Fahim, “Final Report Part Two,” 21.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>146</sup> Fahim, “EGOLR,” 101.

resettlement schemes in the Nile Delta of semi-nomadic groups in Upper Egypt. Like such groups, Nubian integration occurred through the lens of development and in the shadow of the High Dam.

### **The Power of Development: An Effective Strategy?**

If development was the imperative that drove Nubian integration in the emerging Egyptian modern state, how successful was that imperative in achieving integration? As Cooper shows in his discussion of French and British colonial rule, colonial administrators first began offering welfare services and new institutions in the colonies as a tactic to stave off political and social dissent. The same strategy applied to the post-colonial context, and the implementation of state services and development schemes under Nasser. The mass resettlement of over 50,000 people was certainly ripe for social and political dissent on a large scale. Nubians lost their homes, much of their personal belongings, their farmland, and their prized date palms to the High Dam. And yet, even during the relocation a large number of Nubians supported the Nasserist project and saw themselves as contributing to the greater Egyptian good. In her study of workers' songs during Nasser period, Alia Mossallam argues that "the Nasserist hegemony was one the Nubians embraced, personalized and contributed to, rather than simply donned."<sup>147</sup> During her fieldwork with Nubians in Aswan, she found a common narrative of "unified idioms and sayings that were used to describe, account for, and quite often justify, their migration."<sup>148</sup> By examining Nubian songs that addressed the Dam, Mossallam reveals a strong support for Nasser's project. In one ode to the Nile, Nubian singer Sidqi Ahmad Silim crooned "You have always triumphed us [Nubians]/ And provided a great source of life for us;/ Be the same power to Nasser as you have

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<sup>147</sup> Mossallam, "*Hikayat Sha'b*," 174.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

been to us, don't let him down.”<sup>149</sup> Another Sidqi song included lyrics such as “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.”<sup>150</sup>

In this regard, one might argue that development was an exceptionally useful strategy for quelling social and political dissent. Nasser's framing of the relocation as a neutral one of development, and the additional provision of new, modern services, was very persuasive. A Nubian professor at Aswan's South Valley University, who lives in the relocated village of Dahmeit in New Nubia, encapsulates this idea well. He states:

Nasser was an eloquent speaker. He visited the area in the sixties, before the High Dam was built, and he convinced the people that what he was doing was for the good of the people, for the welfare of the people. He told them: ‘you will find paradise, you will find everything very nice at that location.’ And people believed him. They came here, and found that they were away from their expectations...Of course, Nasser was a patriotic leader, a charismatic leader. Nubians were infatuated with him, and believed that he would unit Arab countries; that he would destroy Israel, all the stuff that people believed in...They believed that their life would be better here than it was in that area, before they moved. They didn't know.<sup>151</sup>

As this statement suggests, Nasser was a charismatic leader whose populist rhetoric created widespread appeal. He promised the Nubians development and a new life that would be “paradise” compared to the old. Nasser told Nubians that they were sacrificing for their own welfare and for the welfare of all Egypt. It is a testament to Nasser's public appeal that even when Nubians did not find “paradise,” many still believed they were serving a greater good. Future Egyptian leaders would not have this advantage, and it would become increasingly clear for younger generations of Nubians that this “paradise” would not come from the state alone.

### **“Development Refugees” and the Consequences of Development**

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>151</sup> Interview by author, Dahmiet village of Kom Ombo (New Nubia, Egypt), June 11, 2014.

In light of the resounding praise that Nasser still garners from many Nubians (although most certainly not all), it would appear that the Nubian development scheme was a dramatic success. However, in comparing the state narrative of relocation to that of the Nubians, the story appears more complicated. On one hand, there is a story of Nasser's government saving Nubians from the desert, developing them, and providing them with modern services while celebrating their contribution to building an entire nation. On the other hand, there is a story of the "desertification" of Nubians, who, relocated to a new land away from the Nile, lost their way of life and embarked on years of "de-development" as a result. These underlying tensions come to light in small ways throughout the SRC/EGOLCD reports.

The problems that Nubians faced in their new home of Kom Ombo are extensive and well-documented.<sup>152</sup> Throughout the 1971-975 reports, the SRC directly and indirectly brings some of these problems to light. The reports' assessment of agriculture and arable land in Nubia before the relocation, for example, offers a taste at the kind of contradictions at hand. In Old Nubia, arable land was "limited to a few scattered areas in a land strip... no more than a few hundred meters at its widest point."<sup>153</sup> Nubian crops, the report states, were "subsistence" crops, the surplus of which was sold to merchants arriving from Aswan.<sup>154</sup> However, examining these perceived weaknesses in Nubian agriculture before the resettlement, the report notes that the cause was not traditional agriculture practices and poorly manipulated land, but rather damage wrought by the first Aswan dam of 1902. The report states that Nubia's limited arable land was due "not only to the natural aridity of the Nubian valley" but also to the land damage incurred by the construction of the Aswan reservoir in 1902, its initial heightening in 1912, and its second

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<sup>152</sup> See, for example, Poeschke's "Nubians in Egypt and Sudan: Constraints and Coping Strategies" (1996) or Fahim's "Egyptian Nubians: Resettlement and Years of Coping" (1983).

<sup>153</sup> Fahim, "EACDRL," 36.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

heightening in 1933.<sup>155</sup> While Nubians, as the report states, largely farmed “subsistence crops” following the construction of the first dam, the report also details how the dam’s waters permanently submerged large areas of Nubian date palms. The report details a transition from the cultivation of date palms to an increased dependence on cereal and vegetable cultivation, making “the Nubian agricultural economy . . . less diversified than it had been in the past.”<sup>156157</sup> In this example, the relocation of Nubians to a new area is justified because the old area only permits “subsistence” farming. However, this reality contains an important caveat: Nubian agriculture used to be diverse, but following the government’s manipulation of the Nile that diversity was no longer possible. Although the SRC reports do not spell out this connection, it would seem relevant given the fact that a similar, but far larger diversion of the Nile for the sake of agriculture was soon to occur.

Indeed, with each raising of the old Aswan dam, cultivatable area in Old Nubia drastically decreased (as a reminder, the dam was completed in 1902, and raised twice in 1912 and 1933). In 1929, three years before the second heightening of the dam, there were 18,935 feddans of cultivated land in Old Nubia. Some 9,597 feddans were still cultivable, but were left fallow as a result of the Nile’s expanding waters. By 1939, after the second raising, cultivated land had fallen to 14,289 feddans, down by almost twenty-five percent. Fallow land increased by almost 150 percent, to 24,026 feddans.<sup>158</sup> In 1939, crop acreage was forty-seven percent less than it had

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>157</sup> The direct link between the first dam and declining productivity is explicitly stated in other works. In one 1960 book about Nubia published by the Ministry of Culture, the text states clearly that “the diminution of cultivable land in Lower Nubia is above all the result of the building and two raisings of the Aswan Dam.” Describing the agriculture-based economy in Old Nubia, which was “completed by a very active trade with Egypt and the Sudan,” the book adds: “Today, the Aswan Dam has upset this economy. There is scarcely any cultivation except in dates” (numbering at almost a quarter of a million in the beginning of the century, and in 1960 reduced by almost a quarter due to the first dam alone).

<sup>158</sup> Fahim, “EACDRL,” 37.

been in 1929, despite the fact that the government had initiated irrigation projects to increase crop area.<sup>159</sup> Government irrigation projects to compensate for this lost land brought the total amount of cultivated land to 15,146 feddans by 1950, and official estimates record 15,957 feddans of arable land in the period immediately before resettlement.<sup>160</sup> In sum, despite government efforts to recoup cultivatable land, the second raising of the dam resulted in the loss of roughly 3,000 feddans of arable land in Old Nubia.

In Kom Ombo, the site of the Nubian relocation villages, the Ministry of Land Reform aimed to reclaim some 20,000 feddans of land for state-mandated cultivation between 1963 and 1964. If successful, Nubians would have 4,000 more feddans of arable land in New Nubia than were available before relocation. By 1966, however, only 5,863 feddans of land were suitable for cultivation. Because of this drastic reduction of cultivable land on which Nubians might farm (15,957 feddans before the relocation, down to 5,863 afterwards), the state had to carefully distribute the land among the Nubians. Each Nubian family received one feddan of land, which the government called a “subsistence feddan.” The size of these plots was sometimes half of that. Because it was impossible to generate an income on this amount of land, the Ministry of Social Affairs issued monthly cash and food allowances, “in consideration of the fact that the resettlement operation had placed [the Nubians] in new economic circumstances which affected their incomes.”<sup>161</sup>

The “basic needs” approach to development emerged following the 1976 World Employment Conference, which argued that “the satisfaction of basic needs” should be the “overriding

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>161</sup> Fahim, “EGOLR,” 62.



objective of national and international development policy.”<sup>162</sup> With a focus on poverty eradication, this approach remains a prominent developmental framework to ensure a basic level of human “well-being.” Although the Nubian relocation predates this theory, ideas such as the “subsistence feddan” speak to its fundamental premise. Egyptian government administrators knew that they had to provide a certain amount of land for Nubians to simply “subsist.” However, the administrators also knew that the “new economic circumstances” wrought by the relocation meant that Nubians would starve without monthly cash and food allowances. In this sense, High Dam development created new conditions for the Nubians that put them close to not even meeting their “basic needs” to survive. When discussing the concept of “basic needs,” Gustavo Esteva argues that the creators of this approach “explicitly recognized that development would not eliminate hunger and misery, and that, on the contrary, it would surely worsen the level of ‘absolute poverty’ of a fifth, and probably of two-fifths, of the population.”<sup>163</sup> This might be a useful framework for assessing the High Dam at Aswan. There is no doubt that the Aswan Dam increased cultivatable land across Egypt for many farmers. However, there is also no doubt that the same was not true for the Nubians. After the relocation, the conditions for Nubians became much worse, with each family struggling to survive on a “subsistence feddan” and extensive state subsidies. In 1969, only 6,000 feddans had been distributed, and by the time of the report’s publication in 1975, 8,859 families were farming 15,477 feddans of land (amounting to about 1.7 feddans per family).<sup>164</sup> While the Egyptian government developed a formula for distributing reclaimed land to Nubians based on previous ownership in Old Nubia, there were significant delays in distribution to some families. In an Aswan Center for Regional Planning

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<sup>162</sup> Dharam Ghai, “Building Knowledge Organizations: Achieving Excellence,” unpublished manuscript, 1999, [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/genericdocument/wcms\\_193047.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/genericdocument/wcms_193047.pdf)

<sup>163</sup> Esteva, “Development.”

<sup>164</sup> Fahim, “EGOLR,” 62.

Study conducted after the relocation, a new category of “destitute” families emerged to mark those families who owned no land in the new settlement. In that same study, the number of “destitute” families was as high as four times to number of families who had received land compensation in New Nubia.<sup>165</sup> Just as development created new categories of the “developed” versus the “undeveloped,” so did it create new hierarchies by which to measure people along that scale.

In addition, the SRC reports show that by 1971, ninety-six percent of Nubians entitled to housing in the first stage of resettlement (those who were living in Old Nubia at time of relocation) had received homes, while only two percent of urban Nubians had received housing in accordance with the planned second-stage of resettlement. This was due, the report states to “the high cost of house construction and the lack of space for additional buildings.”<sup>166</sup> For the Nubians who did receive housing, the report details a “crowdedness rate” of 1.6 persons per room in contrast to 0.7 in Old Nubia that the 1960 census documented.<sup>167</sup> The SRC final report would later contextualize this within the scope of other Egyptian settlements, noting that the Nubians rate was “low” compared to those settlements, but that the real occurrences were higher than figures suggested due to smaller rooms and increasing family size.<sup>168</sup> By dividing families into housing blocks according to family size, the divorced and elderly, who had formerly lived with their relatives, were housed in one-room blocks that were often out of walking distance from their families, causing community fragmentation.<sup>169</sup> Although state engineers who constructed the homes in New Nubia categorized them as “ideal,” the report details several Nubian complaints regarding housing. Not only were the homes aesthetically unsuitable for the

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<sup>165</sup> Fahim, “EGOLR,” 62.

<sup>166</sup> Fahim, “EACDRL,” 9.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>168</sup> Fahim, “Final Report Part Two,” 9.

<sup>169</sup> Fahim, “EACDRL,” 11.

Nubians, but they also contained very serious structural concerns.<sup>170</sup> For example, architectural defects in the house foundation and construction resulted in “severe wall or roof cracks,” meaning, in some cases, that homes had to be deserted. The report notes the significance of the High Dam’s construction in these structural failures, for the “dam engineering timetable” required a “rushed relocation schedule” and the necessarily “hasty construction of the new houses.”<sup>171</sup> Similarly, the report notes that administrators did not sufficiently coordinate the housing and agricultural schemes, meaning that some villages faced flooding from water drainage of adjacent fields, which also formed swamps that made ideal habitats for mosquitoes.<sup>172</sup> The SRC reports detail how the agricultural schemes themselves were quite flawed, with inadequate drainage systems for the new irrigation canals that were themselves constructed behind schedule. By the time of the report, failure to drain the canals had “led to deterioration of the fertility of these lands,” with some Nubians subverting the system altogether by filling up the canals to make space for additional crops.<sup>173</sup> Although the government established drinking water units throughout the new villages, they lacked proper maintenance, creating waterlogged areas from the leakage. Sharing a power source with one of the villages, the water units were subject to inadequate electricity supply, meaning that the water supply was cut off “very often.”<sup>174</sup> Although the government gave Nubians new sources of water in exchange for access to the Nile, this water source was limited and not reliable.

In addition, the land was not ready to farm at the time of Nubian relocation, meaning it became a government imperative to deliver “basic food necessities for both man and animal” to

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>174</sup> Fahim, “EACDRL,” 64.

the new settlements.<sup>175</sup> Nubians, “uncertain with the economic prospects of their new homeland,” left in substantial numbers during the early years to return to their former employment or other jobs outside the resettlement area.<sup>176</sup> The final report, which conceivably had a wider audience among the studies’ benefactors, caveats this with a statement that labor migration was not as high as prior to resettlement, due to job opportunities in New Nubia and new industrial plantations in Aswan absorbing a “great deal of the Nubian labor force.”<sup>177</sup> However, this statement is not found in the draft copy reports circulated internally.

As mentioned above, the SRC reports note that animal care facilities in Old Nubia were “practically nonexistent,” with no veterinarians, animal husbandry centers, or dairies.<sup>178</sup> Despite this absence, Nubians raised a significant amount of livestock, which was an important source of income before the resettlement (mainly sheep and goats, in addition to donkeys, camels, and poultry). The successful raising of livestock was possible, the reports note, because Nubian homes were large and animals were given ample paddock space, “an important factor contributing to the animals’ growth and development as well as allowing room for them to increase their number.”<sup>179</sup> While the government endowed New Nubia with a whole range of veterinary services, within one year almost all of the 3,000 cows that made the relocation trip from Old Nubia had contracted diseases due to crowded conditions and acclimation to new territory. As a result, most of the cattle were slaughtered or sold to nearby markets.<sup>180</sup> Although,

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<sup>175</sup> Fahim, “Final Report Part Two,” 14.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 18

<sup>178</sup> Fahim, “EGOLR,” 61.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-70.

as detailed before, a central veterinary unit was available in the main administrative town, it was not easily accessible for people in the more distant villages.<sup>181</sup>

The irony of Nubians being relocated for the sake of development, only to find their lives in many ways less developed, is hardly unique. In his study of the Kariba dam, and its forced displacement of some 57,000 Tonga people in the 1950s, Thayer Scudder uses the term “development refugees” to describe the Tonga community. Writing in 1993, Scudder stated of the Tonga: “Today, most are still ‘development refugees.’ Many live in less-productive, problem-prone areas, some of which have been so seriously degraded within the last generation that they resemble lands on the edge of the Sahara Desert.”<sup>182</sup> The Egyptian government justified the relocation of the Nubians partially on the basis that the lands they used to occupy were barren desert wastelands. As the comparison of arable land in the hands of Nubians before and after the relocation shows, the new land they received was not very different from the old, and conceivably even much worse. This much is clear in the SRC report, which states that Old Nubia was “an arid, rainless region in which agriculture depended entirely on Nile water,”<sup>183</sup> whereas New Nubia’s “hot, dry climate... does not differ much from that of Old Nubia. New Nubia lies in an arid, rainless zone and depends for irrigation upon water transported from the Nile.”<sup>184</sup> The Egyptian government, in saving Nubians from the “desert,” essentially relocated them to a desert even further away from the Nile.

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<sup>181</sup> Fahim, “EACDRL,” 48.

<sup>182</sup> Thayer Scudder, “Pipe Dreams: Can the Zambezi River Supply the Region's Water Needs?” *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (1993), <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/south-africa/pipe-dreams-can-zambezi-river-supply-regions-w>.

<sup>183</sup> Fahim, “EACDRL,” 38.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

The Nubian retelling of the relocation today also defies the image of a new period of prosperity ushered in by resettlement. One Nubian living in Aswan told me of an elderly woman who experienced the relocation and now lives in the resettlement villages of Kom Ombo some sixty kilometers north of Aswan. This woman, he said, has traveled by boat or road to Aswan at least four times a week since the relocation, ostensibly to sell goods and make a living but also to be near the water, which she cannot access from her new home.<sup>185</sup> While the promise of new economic opportunities and improved quality of life was the basis of the government's narrative, many Nubians to this day have yet to see such promises fulfilled. A 2010 petition by the Egyptian Center for Housing Rights, for example, laments "the lack of development projects that Nubians can benefit from," which has led to "poor economic conditions for them."<sup>186</sup> In a 2013 documentary titled "Erki," a young Nubian born in Cairo travels to Aswan to visit his ancestors' home. When in Kom Ombo, the Nubian resettlement village, the narrator interjects to say that Nubians refer to this area as the "Valley of the Devil," or the "Valley of the Dead."<sup>187</sup> Describing the relocation, he states "we experienced 'desertification' on a large scale. I can't even describe it – people who used to live on the Nile, now in the desert."<sup>188</sup> During a 2014 visit to Aswan, many Nubians repeated to me this idea of banishment to the desert. "When Nasser moved the Nubians," one Nubian told me, "he moved them to the desert, made villages far away from the

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<sup>185</sup> Interview by author, Aswan, Egypt, 6 June, 2014. This act is likely more symbolic than factual, as the Nubian relocation villages in Kom Ombo that are furthest away from the Nile are about 20 km away, meaning that a trip to the Nile from within these villages is undoubtedly shorter than travelling all the way down to Aswan to see the water.

<sup>186</sup> Egyptian Center for Housing Rights, "Individual NGO Submission to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Occasion of the Seventh Session of the Universal Periodic Review," (Cairo, Egypt, 2010), [http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session7/EG/ECHR\\_UPR\\_EGY\\_S07\\_2010\\_EgyptianCenterforHousingRights.pdf](http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session7/EG/ECHR_UPR_EGY_S07_2010_EgyptianCenterforHousingRights.pdf).

<sup>187</sup> *Erki*, Wail Gzoly, 2013.

<sup>188</sup> It is interesting to note that despite its intense criticism of the relocation, "Erki" closes with a song whose lyrics read: "Nubia you were a victim and drowned/ but it was for the nation so we don't even care."

water....they used to live by the water, green, and they went to the desert instead.”<sup>189</sup> “Nubians suffered a lot,” another Nubian living in the resettlement villages told me. “The place which you see now was not like this when they came. There were a lot of scorpions, a lot of snakes. Insects everywhere. They suffered a lot. Being away from the Nile, [there were] a lot of deaths in the first year.”<sup>190</sup> This small glimpse of Nubian life after relocation highlights the discord between the government’s narrative on resettlement and that of the Nubians.

## **Conclusion**

The High Dam at Aswan carries a lot of meaning in Egyptian history. It was a means to develop the country by increasing industrial and agricultural output. However, as Nasser’s speeches show, the High Dam was about a lot more than development. The dam also became the very symbol of Egypt’s sovereignty; a sovereignty that Nasser based on notions of modernity and technological prowess. Its construction marked a defining moment for a newly-reconstituting nation that had witnessed decades of external control. Likewise, when 50,000 Nubians became Egyptian citizens, a developmental framework guided their integration into Egyptian society. The Egyptian government assumed the total welfare of the Nubians, and it deployed a multitude of state activities and services into the relocation process. This brought Nubians closer to the Egyptian state than ever before. The government expected the Nubians to contribute the national development goals as well. In the shadow of the High Dam, these development goals carried a certain urgency and anti-intervention flavor that was unique to this formative period. However, like the High Dam, there was a more complicated story behind the state’s development of the Nubians. Development for Nubians was not simply a process of taking one way of life and

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<sup>189</sup> Interview by author, Aswan, Egypt., 14 June, 2014.

<sup>190</sup> Interview by author, Dahmiet village of Kom Ombo (New Nubia, Egypt), 11 June 2014

making it “better.” Rather, there were larger issues at stake. The mass relocation of 50,000 people from their historic homes without their consent or consultation lays bare the social and political dispossession that Nubians faced under the Nasser regime. The discourse of development helped to cover these issues bubbling under the surface for the benefit of the “greater good.” Many Nubians accepted the relocation as a sacrifice they were making for the nation. Far fewer Nubians would say that the state’s “development” made their lives “better” than before. The state narrative argued that Egypt’s government was rescuing Nubians from the desert and giving them a direct ticket to modernity through new facilities and services. Nubians, in contrast, argue that they faced widespread “desertification” as a community and embarked on years of “de-development” as a result. These conflicting narratives reveal an important tension in the history of development for Nubians. Nubians suffered the most directly due to the High Dam’s construction, while the rest of Egypt received the most benefits from this development. The High Dam may have contributed to Egypt’s development, but it had the opposite effect for many Nubians. For Nubians, development during Nasser’s period created the conditions that made them no longer capable of assuring that their “basic needs” were met without government assistance.



## *Chapter Three: International Development in Nubia*

### **Introduction**

Although the Aswan High Dam was a symbol of national development and sovereignty, Egypt was not the only country with a stake in the project. As soon as Nasser announced plans to build the High Dam, a number of international actors rushed to the scene in order to participate in some aspect of this transformative moment in history. The historical artifacts in the former Nubian lands were a major focal point of these interventions. In 1960, for example, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) launched an “International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia.” The thirty-year campaign resulted in hundreds of excavations of historical sites, as well as the impressive relocation of several temples above the new water levels wrought by the dam.

International intervention in Nubia was not limited to cultural preservation. Others took interest in the resettlement and “rehabilitation” process of the Nubians, hoping to extract from it generalizable theories that might be applied to resettlement across the world. Some focused on developing former Nubians lands. This chapter focuses on international development efforts in Egypt’s southern and western desert, showing how non-state players collaborate with national actors in order to achieve mutual development goals. First, this chapter examines the role of the Ford Foundation in the SRC’s “Nubian Ethnological Survey” to understand how developers – both national and international alike – envisioned Nubians as traditional, backwards “objects” fit for development. This chapter then looks at how developers applied the same logic to Nubian lands, justifying interventions that continue to this day. By introducing one contemporary example of development on former Nubian lands, the Toshka Project, this chapter highlights

how international developers hold a continuing presence on former Nubian lands, playing a considerable role in dictating the Nubians' relationship to their land.

### **The Ford Foundation: Removing Nubians from the “Path of Progress”**

As the Egyptian government made plans to resettle the Nubians, it also launched a wave of studies and documentation campaigns in order to learn more about this once-distant group of people. Chapter Two examined the documents resulting from one such campaign, the “Nubian Ethnological Survey” (NES), which the Social Research Center at the American University in Cairo carried out in conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation.

Although the NES was loosely affiliated with various government ministries, its participants and funding was largely external. Backing the project financially was the Ford Foundation, an America-based non-profit organization founded in the mid-twentieth century. The Foundation provides an exemplary case of international development organizations involved in the Nubian relocation and development scheme. With its globally-oriented outreach and emphasis on data-production, the Foundation's participation in the Nubian relocation was hardly unique. This section provides a historical context for the Foundation's work, emphasizing the larger global policy trends that subjected Nubians to additional development goals. In addition, this section examines inter-office memorandum between Ford Foundation staff to identify some of the issues at stake for the organization and their implications for Egypt's Nubians.

Edsel Ford, the son of Ford Motor Company founder Henry Ford, established the Ford Foundation in 1936 with the broad aim “to administer funds for scientific, educational, and charitable purposes” and serve “the public welfare.”<sup>191</sup> Following a 1949 restructuring of the

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<sup>191</sup> “Our History,” The Ford Foundation, last modified 2014. <http://www.fordfoundation.org/about-us/history>

Foundation's operations, these broad aims became more specific, and more globally-oriented. In lieu of "the public welfare," the Foundation's new focus was "to advance human welfare." The Foundation defined "human welfare" through a list of essential conditions. This included: "human dignity" ("a belief in the inherent worth of the individual"), "personal and political freedom and rights," and "social responsibility and duty of service" ("that every person recognize a moral obligation to use his capabilities...to contribute positively to the welfare of society"). Closely related to the Foundation's concept of human welfare was the "ideals of democratic peoples." The reformulated Ford Foundation of 1949 stated that "while our ultimate concern is with the individual, it is clear that only in society can his full development take place. Modern man cannot forsake society in search of freedom; freedom, for him, exists only within and by means of the social order." Thus, the Foundation's new mandate emphasized its role in building the "complex modern world large-scale and complicated arrangements...necessary to provide the social and economic conditions under which freedom can be assured."<sup>192</sup>

The Foundation's particular definitions of human welfare and democracy, in addition to its visions for the ideal society, helped shape multitudes of Foundation-supported activities throughout the non-Western world. While the Ford Foundation is not explicitly a development organization, it clearly has a stake in international development, as the 1949 mandate makes clear with its emphasis on the "full development" of modern man and his society. The Ford Foundation was not the only American non-profit acting towards these global development aims; other prominent actors included the older Rockefeller and Carnegie foundations. These private foundations did not act in isolation from one another, but rather collaborated on shared development goals. These organizations helped develop a global consensus around leading social

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<sup>192</sup> "Report of the Study for the Ford Foundation on Policy and Program." Detroit, Michigan: The Ford Foundation, 1949.

theories on issues such as a population control and economic growth.<sup>193</sup> The social theories that organizations such as the Ford Foundation helped codify allowed for “radical shifts in development policy” after World War II.<sup>194</sup> As Sharpless states, “the philanthropic subsidy of demographic research in the immediate postwar years was not simply an exercise in pure science but was specifically aimed at policy.”<sup>195</sup> Foundations such as Ford thus helped institutionalize new spheres of knowledge from which governments could develop policies on broad range of issues. They also helped define what those issues were. As Timothy Mitchell notes, the Ford Foundation played an instrumental role in the formation of the market-practices of the nineteenth century, “[transforming] economics into a global form of knowledge” by which every country in the world could be “measured and understood.”<sup>196</sup>

The Ford Foundation’s involvement in the Nubian relocation provides a glimpse of the policy issues with which the Foundation was most concerned during its early years. In cooperation with the AUC Social Research Center and the Egyptian government, the Ford Foundation funded the 1961-1964 Nubian Ethnological Survey, as well as the post-resettlement surveys from 1971-1975. The foundation paid \$100,000 for the initial NES survey, and another \$65,000 for the dissemination of information and training of anthropologists, including graduate fellowships for three Egyptians to attend American universities.<sup>197</sup> Although the SRC was interested in the study for its potential benefits to anthropological theory and practice, the Ford Foundation approached the project from a more practical, policy-oriented angle. AUC anthropologists developed the project concept, and they were the ones who brought it to John Hilliard, the Ford Foundation’s representative in Cairo at the time. Hilliard passed the idea along

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 182

<sup>194</sup> Sharpless, “Population Science, Private Foundations, and Development Aid,” 176.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>196</sup> Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 7.

<sup>197</sup> Hopkins, *Nubian Encounters*, 64.

to F.C. “Champ” Ward, the program director for the Near East and North Africa, arguing that the project would contribute to a better understanding of social development in Egypt.<sup>198</sup> The Foundation approved the SRC’s original proposal and authorized a supplementary grant to fund the SRC’s follow-up study after resettlement. In 1974, Harvey Hall, a program associate at the Foundation in New York, completed a “terminal review and evaluation” of the SRC Nubia program. A series of intra-office correspondences, in which Foundation employees discuss the SRC Nubia project and its final report, offers insight into how the organization looked at Egypt’s development. The correspondences also illuminate on where the Nubians themselves stood – or did not stand – in the Foundation’s vision for an ideal Egyptian policy.

A recurrent theme in the 1974 Ford Foundation correspondences is the question of expertise. As Timothy Mitchell explains in *Rule of Experts*, the twentieth-century politics of national development and economic growth was “a politics of techno-science, which claimed to bring the expertise of modern engineering, technology, and social science to improve the defects of nature, to transform peasant agriculture, to repair the ills of society, and to fix the economy.”<sup>199</sup> This politics was constituted through a proliferation of new fields of social sciences, arranging the chaos of nature through the rationality of modern expertise. As concepts such as “the society” and “the economy” became increasingly discrete, professionals staked out new niches of specialized knowledges in areas such as statistics, economics, public health, peasant studies, and criminal justice. This was certainly a trend that the Ford Foundation encouraged. Of their many regrets regarding the NES, the lack of diverse experts in areas other than anthropology was near the top. According to employee Terry Prothro, the overarching problem with the study was simply that there were not enough experts involved. A problem of

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>199</sup> Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 15.

this scope, Prothro suggested, required a “multi-disciplinary approach.” Were the Foundation to do it over again, they might have included “someone from policy sciences (development administration, maybe?), an agricultural economist, an ecologist and maybe someone from the new field of “ekistics” (the generalized version of city planning).” In addition, Prothro suggests, a “qualified Egyptian social worker” and perhaps an additional “political anthropologist” would have rounded out the cultural anthropologist-heavy research team. Throughout the memorandums, other Foundation employees support this claim, noting especially their regret that anthropologists devised the project and presented it to the Foundation and not the other way around.

In the Foundation letters, there is also an emphasis that social science research, such as that conducted by SRC anthropologists, must be practical and have a tangible outcome. In Harvey Hall’s assessment of the SRC projects, he asserts that “the Foundation’s predominant concern with the applied aspect of research was emphasized from the start.”<sup>200</sup> In a letter between Foundation employees Courtney Nelson and Robert Edwards, Nelson champions the project as a “neat model of Foundation efforts to enlist social research to serve development.”<sup>201</sup> Citing Champ Ward, she mentions the study’s “limited generality” as a major flaw.<sup>202</sup> If the Nubians’ experience with resettlement could not be extrapolated into larger policy plans regarding development, then it was of limited use. Indeed, as Nelson prescribes later, the Foundation faced an important and urgent task of “codify[ing] what we have learned from the many attempts we have made to relate the social sciences to the development process.”<sup>203</sup> Champ

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<sup>200</sup> Harvey Hall, “Terminal Review and Evaluation of the Nubian Resettlement Survey,” (New York: The Ford Foundation, 1974), Archives of the Nubian Ethnological Survey at the American University in Cairo.

<sup>201</sup> Courtney Nelson. “Ford Foundation Inter-Office Memorandum to Mr. Robert H. Edwards.” August 8, 1974. Archives of the Nubian Ethnological Survey at the American University in Cairo.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

Ward, writing to John Hilliard, was concerned from the project's onset that the research was most useful "in terms of social sciences experience for those taking part in it" rather than "in terms of general utility for a developing country." He expressed concern that the "general settlement problem in Egypt" would not be "illuminated" by this research on a "rather special group in a rather special set of circumstances." He wondered if the "lessons to be learned" from this small group were really "capable of generalization."<sup>204</sup> In this sense, the employees assess the project as a missed opportunity to influence policy. Harvey Hall, for his part, seems to chalk up this misstep to "the restrictive definition of overseas development that the Foundation subscribed to at that time." By that "restrictive" definition of development, the Foundation accepted the SRC's insistence that "a much more complete understanding of the Nubian people and their culture was necessary" in order to "successfully" carry out their resettlement. Thus, Hall argued that resettlement might have gone more smoothly if policy planners ignored Nubian cultural and social particularities and instead followed a generalizable framework derived from past experiences of mass resettlement.

For F.F. Hill, the Vice President for Overseas Development, applying research findings to policy decisions and operations was of primary concern. He was less interested, he wrote in a letter to Ward, in "coordinating committees consisting of everyone and his brother who might have some conceivable interest in the proposed Nubian research project and its application."<sup>205</sup> Instead, he wanted assurances that all involved parties would get the resulting findings into the hands "and heads" of the state decision-makers.<sup>206</sup> The Foundation correspondences repeatedly express doubt that the study held sway in this regard. Framing the issue with a diplomatic flair,

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Hall, "Terminal Review and Evaluation"

<sup>206</sup><sup>206</sup> Ibid.

Hall remarks that “it is difficult to assess what impact the Nubian research had on the plans for resettlement at Kom Ombo.”<sup>207</sup> Nelson, responding to the question “Was it [the project] worth doing?” was able to muster a “yes” because of the publications resulting from the research and the training of three Egyptian Ph.Ds. However, she makes the similarly ambiguous statement that “it is less clear that the project had a greatly beneficial impact on the Nubians or on the behavior of government officials.”<sup>208</sup> From Cairo in January 1962, Frank Sutton remarked that there were good “personal links” between the SRC and the Ministry of Social Affairs, however “he did not have the impression that there was a strong and continuing influence directing the AUC researchers toward supplying data that might be needed for practical planning of the Nubian resettlement.”<sup>209</sup>

This Foundation exchange provides a glimpse of the newly codifying fields of expertise building modern nations at this time. From the correspondences, however, it is clear that the Foundation viewed Egypt, and the Nubians in particular, as anything but modern. If linear concepts of development, such as those proposed by the modernization theory, were losing steam in the 1970s among social scientists, they still appear well-rooted in the offices of the Ford Foundation. As the modernization theory suggests, fundamental value changes are necessary for a society to become “developed.” This appears to be the Foundation’s assumption regarding Egypt’s Nubians. Nelson asserts that the Nubians, with “few elementary school products among their numbers,” posed serious communication issues with the highly-educated researchers, arising from fundamental “differences of world view.”<sup>210</sup> Indeed, the lack of education among Nubians was a perfect illustration, she writes, of the “kinds of obstacles we need to overcome to

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Nelson, “Ford Foundation Inter-Office Memorandum to Mr. Robert H. Edwards”

<sup>209</sup> Hall, “Terminal Review and Evaluation”

<sup>210</sup> Nelson, “Ford Foundation Inter-Office Memorandum to Mr. Robert H. Edwards.”



integrate the social sciences into developing societies.” In contrast to those “developing” societies, projects such as the SRC NES, if conducted in the “developed world,” would involve “a greater community of interest and experience among the actors involved than was the case in the Nubian resettlement.” If only the Nubians were more developed, the correspondences suggest, and better read in the “terminological” language of social sciences, they might have been “better able to articulate [their] needs and preferences.”<sup>211</sup>

The theme of Nubians as a primitive, backwards “object” of development is a recurrent one throughout the Foundation’s inter-office memorandums. One of the main obstacles holding back the study’s success, Nelson writes, was simply the “practical difficulty of resettling this rather primitive tribal group into new surroundings.”<sup>212</sup> Later, in her letter to Robert Edwards, she mentions Champ Ward, who “expressed doubt about the value of helping to maintain the integrity of a rather minor traditional culture as opposed to speeding their integration into a larger policy.”<sup>213</sup> Maybe, Prothro suggests, the reason this “problem” was defined as an “ethnographic one” (and not a “problem of resettlement call[ing] for... an interdisciplinary team”) was because “interesting African tribes were involved.”<sup>214</sup> That the “traditional” Nubians were eager for development on Western terms also appears self-evident. Besides the uncertainty he had with the generalizability of the project, Ward’s second major “qualm” was, in his rendering, a “rather metaphysical question” of whether

The integrity of traditional groups and their cultures must, at all costs, be sustained, or whether they should not go off and seek their fortunes in an age when traditional cultures are breaking up everywhere, rather than suffer the special ministrations of Western social

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid., The sentence reads “the population to be resettled might be better able to articulate its needs and preferences.”

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Terry Prothro, “Ford Foundation Inter-Office Memorandum to Courtney Nelson,” August 8, 1974, Archives of the Nubian Ethnological Survey at the American University in Cairo.

scientists and solicitous governments. I seem to remember that we were told that a previous group had dispersed, and I keep wondering whether this is deplorable or simply enterprising on its part<sup>215</sup>

In this rendition of the SRC project, Ward posits that the researchers and government officials were so accommodating to Nubian “culture” that it was even, perhaps, to the Nubians own detriment. Why force the Nubians to stay traditional for the benefit of Western academics and “solicitous governments,” when all they wanted was to be “enterprising” and seek monetary fortunes?

Nelson, for her part, accepts that Nubian wishes for the resettlement process might be more complex than Ward suggests. Summarizing the various parties’ stakes in the project, Nelson imagines that the “Nubians, presumably, had both short and long run concerns.<sup>216</sup>” She suggests that the Nubians “presumably wished to get beyond the inevitable resettlement with as little change in their way of life as was necessary.” However, she is much more certain about what the Egyptian government and the SRC researchers hoped to gain in the experience. In Nelson’s recounting, the government’s main goal was “to remove the Nubian population from the path of progress with the minimum necessary fuss and expense.” The social scientists, in turn, wanted to record a traditional culture before it “vanish[ed].”<sup>217</sup> While Nelson has a less narrow view of Nubian preferences, it is her “presumptions” about Nubians that form the basis of those preferences. She later writes that Nubians “probably” had few people educated beyond elementary school.<sup>218</sup> Given the earlier contention that Nubians were inefficiently equipped to articulate their own “needs and preferences,” it would appear that the Foundation employees did not go out of their way to figure out exactly what those “needs and preferences” were.

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<sup>215</sup> Hall, “Terminal Review”

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Nelson, “Ford Foundation Inter-Office Memorandum to Mr. Robert H. Edwards.”

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

As the previous paragraphs suggest, the Ford Foundation was deeply concerned with building a relationship with the Egyptian government, which the employees cite as one of the foremost goals of the project. In an attempt to indicate success in this regard, the letters mention a conversation between Hilliard and Sayed Marei, the then-Central Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, who expressed an early interest in the project. The letters suggest that, like the Foundation, Marei saw the project as an opportunity to theorize on land reclamation and resettlement, using social science to quantify large-scale economic and social change. According to Hilliard's account, Marei supported the project because "world experience" in land reclamation and resettlement indicated that "the greatest single cause of failure" was the "inadequate consideration of the human element." In Hilliard's words, Marei called the project "a pilot effort to test and demonstrate the application of social science techniques to the problem of social and economic change on a large scale."

Whether or not Marei expressed those sentiments in those words is unknown – Nicolas Hopkins, in his chronicle of the SRC project, suggests that Hilliard may have exaggerated Marei's claims as a government official in order to bolster the Foundation's interest in the project.<sup>219</sup> However, the choice to include Marei in these letters emphasizes how international actors such as the Ford Foundation do not act in isolation, but actively work to complement state projects on the national level. In the letters, a few instances of direct quotations from Marei indicate that Egyptian government actors shared in the Foundation's rhetoric regarding the project. According to Hilliard, Marei, for example, "was no more interested than the Foundation in 'dropping these people back into the same rut where they have lived for centuries.'" However, he was also concerned about ascertaining the "limits of tolerance" of social change within which

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<sup>219</sup> Hopkins, "Nubian Encounters"

resettlement might contribute to progress but beyond which social and economic disintegration might take place.<sup>220</sup> According to Hilliard, Marei underlined his concern for social and economic disintegration “by noting that rioting was already going on in Sudanese Nubia over the issue of dispossession.”<sup>221</sup>

This exchange brings to light several important elements about the relationship between international development organizations, the states with which they partner, and the “objects” of their development. Like the Ford Foundation, Marei was keen to describe Egypt’s Nubians as a “traditional” group that had not changed “in centuries.” Both the Foundation and Marei imply that if they do not intervene with development measures, Nubians will continue along in their same “rut,” to the great detriment of the group. But Marei’s comments also tease out an important tension underlying these conversations that neither the Foundation nor the government explicitly address. That, of course, is the implicit social and political risks at hand with a project as traumatic as relocating 50,000 people from their homes. As Hall notes in his terminal review, SRC researcher Robert Fernea was “fully alive” to the risks of being a foreigner offering input “on an internal matter that was in danger of becoming politically sensitive” due to rising costs of resettlement and lack of follow-through on early government promises.<sup>222</sup> As Marei and the Foundation dance around these underlying issues, they couch them in broader social science terms – such as their concern for “considering the human element” – that obscure the larger political issues at stake.

Although these exchanges are simple memos between Foundation employees working in and with the New York offices, they speak to larger issues with regards to international

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<sup>220</sup> Hall, “Terminal Review.”

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

development agendas and the Nubians. For one, the Foundation's clear overall target is to influence Egyptian policy-makers. Although the project they funded directly concerned the Nubians, the Nubians are almost an after-thought in the Foundation's discussions. Clearly, building connections and new avenues of influence with national policymakers was central to the Foundation's global vision for "advancing human welfare." However, the Foundation employees do not merely disregard the Nubians in the correspondences; they also frame them as backwards, un-educated, and unable to "articulate their preferences" concerning their relocation. This provides an apt justification for intervention on both the national and international level. By presenting the Nubians as ripe "objects" for development, the Foundation not only validates their involvement in the relocation but also sees itself as one of the forces improving life for the Nubians. However, the Foundation measures such improvement on its own terms. For the Foundation employees, they cannot conceive of any goals for the Nubians other than to become "modern" and rich. It is important to note that Egyptian government actors shared many of the Foundations sentiments, which this chapter explores below. The Foundation's work was less about coercing the Egyptian government on policy issues than encouraging consensus about what they believed to be the most effective social theories for governance.

These assumptions had important implications for Egypt's Nubians. When the Foundation envisioned for the Nubians a linear path to development, along which they might amass fortunes and become modern according to Western measurements, they helped disallow "peoples of different culture...the opportunity to define the forms of their social life."<sup>223</sup> For the Ford Foundation to label the Nubians as ripe for development "require[d] first the perception of

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<sup>223</sup> Esteva, "Development"

themselves as underdeveloped, with the whole burden of connotations that this carries.”<sup>224</sup> Both national and international actors told – and continue to tell – Nubians that they are underdeveloped, and Nubians continue to fight that label to this day. Comparing the Foundation’s description of the Nubians against the Nubians description of themselves during this time provides two different stories. Take, for example, the question of education among the Nubians. Nelson asserts in her writings that the Nubians “probably” had few among them educated past primary school, calling the Nubians a “rather primitive tribal group.” Nubians themselves, however, recount this history differently. According to one Nubian scholar living in the resettlement villages of Kom Ombo,

When Nubians came to this village, most of them were educated. They established schools: prep schools, primary schools, and so on. They came with their educated teachers, and the Nubians were more educated than the villagers they found here. The non-Nubian villagers in this area had to study in our schools. They had no schools at all. Therefore they [the Nubians] did not only teach in their schools, but also in the schools of non-Nubians. This is an established fact from the beginning.<sup>225</sup>

As Foundation employees speculated on the Nubians’ education level from their offices in New York, Nubians who relocated during the 1963-64 move presented an entirely different conception of the Nubian community. While the Foundation saw the Nubians as un-educated and “rather primitive” during the time of relocation, Nubians recall that they were so educated that even non-Nubians traveled to attend the schools established in their new homes. While the Foundation argued that due to the Nubians’ low education levels, they were not sufficiently able to “articulate their preferences” for resettlement, Nubians might recall instead Soleiman Ageeb, a Nubian lawyer from the 1940s and 1950s who was part of Egypt’s Wafd Party. According to the Egyptian-Nubian Lawyers Association in Cairo, Ageeb was a skilled lawyer who demanded and

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Interview by author, Dahmiet village of Kom Ombo (New Nubia, Egypt), June 11, 2014.

received an office for handling Nubian issues in King Farouk's administration.<sup>226</sup> This example shows the large disconnect between an international development organization and the group of people upon which they implemented their projects. Nubians, as subject to both national and international development agendas, had little voice in these agendas that dictated their lives.

### **Saving the 'Comely Maidens' of Nubia**

The Ford Foundation correspondences underscore the many justifications that development actors gave for acting on Nubians as an "object" for development. Nubians, according to these justifications, were traditional, backwards, uneducated, and wholly incapable of breaking the "rut" of a thousands-year long culture on their own. Developing the Nubians, according to the Ford Foundation, was the only way to wrest them from their traditionality and introduce them to the modern world. It is important to emphasize that international developers were not alone in engaging in this sort of rhetoric about the Nubians. As the Ford Foundation correspondences show, the Foundation was, above all else, interested in building ties with Egyptian government officials. By funding the SRC research, the Foundation was thinking about the bigger picture: integrating this government into their global vision of "human welfare." As this section demonstrates, the Foundation conception of the Nubians as a traditional object for development closely mirrored the Egyptian government's own narratives of the Nubians and their history. A 1960 book *Nubia*, which the Ministry of Culture published after Nasser's announcement to build the High Dam, evidences that the state's official narrative was not very different from the Foundation's.

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<sup>226</sup> According to the Egyptian-Nubian Lawyers Association in Cairo, Ageeb was placed under house arrest after problems arose between the Wafd Party and King Farouk.

In 1960 the Egyptian Ministry of Culture sent a delegation of artists to Nubia in order to “capture” and portray the land and its people before the High Dam’s flood. Published in the same year, the resulting work from this trip featured of photographs, sketches, and historical text on the Nubians. The ministry released three translations of *Nubia*, in French, English, and Arabic, and copies of the book are still found in many Egyptian libraries, suggesting it was widely disseminated. One of the most pervasive assertions in *Nubia* is that Egypt’s Nubians had not changed or evolved since Pharonic times. Throughout, the book claims that Nubians represent a distant ancestor to modern-day Egyptians, frozen and unchanging since ancient times. The book opens with preface by Sarwat Okasha, the then-Minister of Culture and Natural Guidance, who poses a tribute to the “everlasting sanctuaries of quiet distant Nubia.” “Established as they are by destiny,” Okasha writes, “we should have preferred to keep them intact as witnesses of a longsince vanished world, but human needs have made it imperative to construct a dam that will preserve the land of the Nile.” From the very opening sentence of the book, Okasha lays out a number of dichotomies classifying the Nubians versus other Egyptians. While Nubia is a vestige, a “vanished world” that is worth keeping only as a reminder of the past, it could not last in the face of a modern Egypt and its tangible “human needs.” The High Dam is a “vital necessity” and the answer to “a demographic, social and economic problem” that subsumes any other claims to preserving Nubians culture. However, while Nubia must be regrettably tossed away, “we cannot allow a whole country to disappear without seeking to discover what remains for us to learn of our distant ancestors.” Although Nubia is not regarded as composing demographic, social, or economic human needs, it does provide a useful reminder of ancient Egypt.

That is not to say that at some point, Nubians were not at the forefront of innovation. Indeed, the “earliest inhabitants of Nubia” (those who emerged during the upper Paleolithic time)



possessed all of the “fundamental elements of civilization”: agriculture, domesticated animals, and sedentary living. Based on monuments and skeletons dating to this period, the book suggests “Nubians then enjoyed the same degree of civilization as the contemporary Egyptians,” and were of the same race. The book cites additional archeological studies to show that the early inhabitants of Nubian (i.e. “at least since 5000 BC”) “possessed the same level of culture as the pre-historic Nubians.”<sup>227</sup> However, *Nubia* explains that Nubians were ultimately unable to keep pace with Egypt’s 3000-year modernization process. Indeed, “whereas Egyptian civilization made rapid progress as from 3200 B.C., that of the Nubians remained at the level it had attained in predynastic times.”<sup>228</sup> Once Egypt was united by Menes, a “splendid Pharaonic civilization” rose in the North. However, “contrary to what would be expected from their constant contact with the rising and progressive culture of their northern compatriots, the Nubians remained primitive and backward.”<sup>229</sup>

According to *Nubia*, the disparity between Nubians and the rest of Egyptians had only grown over time. Indeed, the Nubians of the 1900s were essentially unchanged from their “primitive and backwards” ancestors of 3200 BC. Nubians, “make pottery vessels in the same way as did their prehistoric and pharaonic ancestors.”<sup>230</sup> Although the Nubians “are very peaceful, honest, and good-tempered folk,” they “still observe many of their ancient customs.”<sup>231</sup> According to the Ministry of Culture, it is Nubian women in particular who preserve Nubian traditionality. “They dress their hair,” the book explains, “especially the women, in precisely the same fashion as the ancient Egyptians.”<sup>232</sup> A captioned photo in the book reads: “Here is a

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<sup>227</sup> Ministry of Culture and National Guidance, *Nubia*, (Egypt: 1960), 34.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

comely maiden of Nubia, whose hair is braided and falls on her shoulders in the exactly the same fashion as the hair of the lovely musician of Amenhotep II.”<sup>233</sup> While the men have sought work outside of Nubia, “it is the clever women of Nubia who carry on practicing the old industries which they have inherited from their forebearers.”<sup>234</sup> Their cooking vessels, baskets, beds, hair combs and hair pins, throwing sticks, shepherds crooks and other daily items, have “analogies in Ancient Egypt,” down to the form, decoration, materials and method of making.<sup>235</sup> In summary, “the Nubians are, of all the people of modern Egypt, those who bear the closest resemblance to the Ancient Egyptians.”<sup>236</sup> With the relocation of the Nubians to new homes and environments, “with them will disappear a unique chance to study and record at first hand the last living vestige of the glorious civilization of Ancient Egypt.”<sup>237</sup>

Clearly, the Ford Foundation was not the only actor justifying the “development” of Nubians based on their allegedly traditional, if not endearing, culture and lifestyle. By depicting the Nubians as relics of an ancient past, works such as the culture ministry’s *Nubia* argued that Nubians could not modernize on their own. By highlighting geography as the most significant determinant of Nubian “backwardness,” *Nubia* justified technological intervention into these lands. It is important to note that Nubians were hardly the only group facing this rhetoric in Egypt. Pervasive narratives on Egypt’s peasantry throughout modern Egyptian history cast this group as a similarly unchanging mass facing the rude awakening of modernity. Numerous actors from both inside and outside Egypt helped shape this narrative. As Samah Selim’s 2004 work *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt, 1880-1985* shows, Egypt’s “peripheral” rural population was a subject of great interest to urban Egyptian writers. Timothy Mitchell uses the

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 76.

example of Richard Critchfield's 1978 work *Shahhat: An Egyptian* to show how "scholarly imaginings of the post-colonial peasant" both borrowed from and contributed to the solidification of Egypt's *fellah* as the homogenous and backwards "masses" of Egypt.<sup>238</sup> *Shahhat's* introduction for example, argued that Egypt's peasant had "never changed their way of life" in more than 6,000 years. The book significantly claims to represent "people found in the rural Third World today."<sup>239</sup> *Shahhat's* claim speaks to the pervasiveness of this narrative and its seemingly universal applicability across social groups and national borders. As Mitchell argues, this depiction did not emerge out of some inherent truth about the peasantry but rather out of evolving "political processes" regarding rural unrest.<sup>240</sup> It certainly found a home among both national and international actors with regards to the Nubians and was undoubtedly influential in shaping the Nubians as a fair "object" of development.

### **"Shut in Between River and Desert": Environmental Justifications for Development on Nubians and their Land**

While the first part of this chapter focused on the Nubians as an "object" of development, this section turns the focus to former Nubians lands as "object." It highlights how the framing of Nubian land as a dry, barren desert, untouched by modernity not only justified development on that land, but also on the Nubians who needed to be "rescued" from it. Like the Nubians, the land that Nubians once called home remains the object of national and international development to this day.

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<sup>238</sup> Critchfield wrote *Shahhat* based on research that was funded with a grant by the Ford Foundation; Mitchell, "The Invention and Reinvention of the Egyptian Peasant," 146.

<sup>239</sup> Timothy Mitchell, "The Invention and Reinvention of the Egyptian Peasant," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 22, no. 2 (May, 1990), 132.

<sup>240</sup> Mitchell, "The Invention and Reinvention of the Egyptian Peasant," 131

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is just one of many development actors who have maintained a continuing presence in former Nubian lands since the 1963-1964 relocation. Following the High Dam's completion, from 1971 to 1975, the UNDP in conjunction with the EGOLCD carried out a project for the "Integrated Development and Settlement of New Lands Irrigated by the High Dam Waters." The project's main objective was to help the Egyptian government establish "economically viable and socially integrated communities."<sup>241</sup> Some twenty years later, in 1997, the UNDP and GOE formulated a "Strategic Plan for the Development of Human Settlements in New Valley, South of Egypt." Collaborating with the Ministry of Planning (MOP), the UNDP produced a "Comprehensive Development Plan for Aswan and Lake Nasser" in 2002/3, which included "economic and social planning for spatial development."<sup>242</sup> More recently, in 2002, The UNDP and General Organization for Physical Planning (GOPP) launched the "Strategic Development Plan of Southern Valley (New Egypt)," which is still active today and is estimated to end in 2017. The project focuses on institution building, and aims to "[strengthen] local administrations and [build] capacities in planning for sustainable human settlements, especially in strategic planning and community-based planning."<sup>243</sup>

These projects, which span across a period of forty years, share a familiar combination of elements. All call broadly for social and economic development. All target the creation of "sustainable human settlements" as their goal. The current Southern Valley project describes its vision for sustainable development in general terms: a "program to change the process of

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<sup>241</sup> Tadros, Final Report Part One," 1.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>243</sup> "Strategic Development Plan of Southern Egypt (New Valley)." United Nations Development Programme Egypt. Last modified 2012.

[http://www.eg.undp.org/content/egypt/en/home/operations/projects/democratic\\_governance/StrategicPlanSouthernEgyptNewValley.html](http://www.eg.undp.org/content/egypt/en/home/operations/projects/democratic_governance/StrategicPlanSouthernEgyptNewValley.html)

economic development so that it ensures a basic quality of life for the people, and protects the ecosystems and community systems that make life possible and worthwhile.”<sup>244</sup> What is unclear, however, is how exactly these projects differ. The UNDP office in Cairo does not have much of an answer to this question. According to the UNDP’s Egypt media representative, documents from earlier UNDP projects in Nubia did not make the move when the national office changed locations last year. The representative had never heard of the projects from the 1970s – indeed, they were “so old” that she had not even been born yet. Even the 2003 project was too dated; the representative did not think there was anyone in the current staff who had worked at the UNDP’s Egypt office for that long. When pressed for any additional information about UNDP projects in Aswan, she mentioned that the UNDP may have an upcoming project “in Nubia” that is still in the very preliminary stages.<sup>245</sup>

The material available on UNDP projects in former Nubian lands leaves an impression of vagueness and redundancy. They are vague in that there are forty years of projects which all target sustainable economic and social development as their goal. They are redundant in that none of these seemingly persistent problems have yet been resolved over a period of half a century. The fact that the current UNDP staff members may know little, if anything, of past projects their offices conducted on the same land they work on today poses serious questions about the cumulative effects of such work.

Gustavo Esteva, writing in the 1990s, called the new development ethos emerging in that decade as one of “redevelopment,” that is, “to develop again what was maldeveloped or is now

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<sup>244</sup> United Nations Development Programme and Government of Egypt, “Project Budget for the Implementation Mechanism of the Strategic Development Plan of Southern Egypt” (Cairo, 2005), 5.

<sup>245</sup> Interview by author, Cairo, Egypt, 4 June, 2014.

obsolete.”<sup>246</sup> The UNDP Egypt office is certainly not the only international development organization that might fit this bill when it comes to development in former Nubian lands. Indeed, virtually every international development report on the area – from the 1960s until today – reads almost exactly the same. In the introduction of the SRC’s 1975 “Study and Evaluation Report,” for example, SRC researcher Helmy Tadros presents the problem as: “intimately connected with the economy of Egypt is its population problem. Rapid rates of population growth are a serious handicap to Egypt’s economic and social development.” Continuing on, Tadros adds: “in considering the agricultural resources in relation to this serious population explosion, we find that cultivated area is limited despite all efforts to increase it,” resulting in a “low standard of living” for the peasant.<sup>247</sup>

This particular combination of demography and geography as the “problem” causing Egypt’s woes, which Tadros demonstrates in 1971, is a recurrent refrain in Egyptian development reports today. Compare, for example, the UNDP’s current Southern Valley project. A 2005 project budget features a list of “problems to be addressed” containing all the usual suspects. Rapid population growth, limited effectiveness of government interventions, weak local administrations: all of these are “the major impediments for sustainable human settlements development in Egypt.”<sup>248</sup> Cities are overcrowded, with forty-three percent of the population living in concentrated urban areas, and agricultural areas cannot support rural populations “where fertility rates are higher” than in the urban settings.<sup>249</sup> Although these two reports discuss projects on former Nubian lands, one might easily swap them with a past or present development scheme in Egypt. The image of Egypt as a dry, desert landscape overflowing with a rapidly

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<sup>246</sup> Esteva, “Development”

<sup>247</sup> Tadros, “Final Report Part One,” 1.

<sup>248</sup> UNDP and GOE “Project Budget,” 1.

<sup>249</sup> UNDP and GOE, “Project Budget,” 2.

expanding population is a recurrent refrain in development texts on Egypt. As Timothy Mitchell shows in his critical read of these texts, the analysis of Egypt on such naturalized terms reduces the country to a one-dimensional “object” for development. By describing Egypt’s “problem” as one of simply geography, its limits become nothing more than “nature, physical space and human reproduction.”<sup>250</sup> In presenting Egypt’s limit as one of geography and demography, Mitchell argues, the reports obscure what is truly at stake: “powerlessness and social inequality,” requiring not technological and managerial solutions, but social and political ones.<sup>251</sup> In lieu of fundamental social and political reforms, these texts propose new technologies to counter what is framed as an issue of traditionality and lack of modernity. Because this system “cannot change itself,” it requires intervention to join the twentieth century.<sup>252</sup> While Egypt’s Nubians were hardly the sole recipients of this discourse, their experience brings to light some of the consequences this language carries for the “objects” of development.

This analysis speaks to the work of Frederick Cooper and others, who show how colonial regimes used development as a means to quell social and political dissent in the last years of colonial rule. The environmentalism argument worked well for colonial administrators in this regard. By conceptualizing the colonies on naturalized terms, they became a fit “object” for intervention. In his study of the development initiative during the imperial crisis of the 1940s, Coopers finds “a striking feature of imperial discourse at the most senior levels: the Africa France and Britain sought to develop was not the complex, varied, changing social field African

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<sup>250</sup> Timothy Mitchell, “The Object of Development: America’s Egypt,” in *Power of Development*, eds. Jonathon Crush (London: Routledge, 1995), 127.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

historians have now shown it to be, but a flat, unchanging, primitive landscape. Development was something to be done *to* and *for* Africa, not with it.”<sup>253</sup>

As Chapter two demonstrates, Nasser’s post-colonial regime relied on similar tactics, using development and technological mega-projects such as the Aswan High Dam to constitute a new Egypt. Much like the former colonial powers, Nasser’s government used geographical determinism to justify such interventions. Recall, for example, Nasser’s 1960 speech celebrating the start of construction on the High Dam. The dam, Nasser suggested, would help Egypt capture its arable land from the “clutches of the desert.” According to Nasser, Egypt’s struggle for sovereignty and social justice began with a battle against its own landscape. This determinism was not limited to the land on which Nubians lived, however, but also on the Nubians themselves. The image of Nubians as a traditional people bound by their limited geographic resources and unchanged since antiquity was a dominant narrative during the time of the relocation. As the SRC “Survey and Evaluation” repeatedly suggests, the Egyptian government intervened with development to Nubian lands and Nubian people in order to modernize a place and people that could not modernize on their own. Geography as a determinant for intervention is a rampant line of thought in the 1960 Ministry of Culture book *Nubia*. As the following analysis of *Nubia* will show, the argument for intervention in Nubia on geographical terms shared many similarities with the justifications to develop the Nubians themselves. By arguing that geography was the primary determinant of Nubian daily life for centuries, and by asserting that this geography could only be “saved” through modern intervention, development actors created an inextricable link between the Nubians and their land, justifying them both as fit “objects” for development.

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<sup>253</sup> Cooper, “Modernizing Bureaucrats,” 65.



In no unclear terms, *Nubia* suggests that the “harsh desert” geography of Old Nubia was responsible for forming the culture and character of Egypt’s Nubians. Throughout the book, the geography of Old Nubia is a major determinant of all aspects of Nubian life, even his “manners and customs.” Indeed, “the Nubian who abandons his native soil always hopes to return to it, so he preserves his manners and customs in the country to which he has emigrated.” These manners and customs, cultivated alongside the desert geography of Nubia, include “fidelity, directness, and precise habits,” as well as “his cleanliness, simplicity, his love for saving, his feeling for group solidarity, and his attachment to his family.” Living in a “region of limited production,” has largely dictated the terms of Nubians existence, *Nubia* implies. Like their early ancestors, *Nubia* writes, “the Nubians have struggled and are still struggling to stay alive in this arid setting.” Not only are the contemporary struggles Nubians face merely geographic, and mirror the struggles Nubians faced in 3000 BCE, “their lives have become yet harder as the result of the changes brought about in their country since the beginning of the century.” Although Nubia must change in order to address “Egypt’s own growing needs,” the process of change will also, “in the end...ensure the welfare of the Nubians themselves.” With an economy centered on agriculture, Nubians have sought work in big cities “in order to support the families who remain, shut in between river and desert, in the ancestral village.”

In fact, *Nubia* suggests that environment and geography are the direct causes of Nubia’s so-called decline. “The inhabitants of Nubia could not follow up their cultural evolution at the same tempos as those of Egypt,” *Nubia* states, because “the Nubian inhabited only narrow strips of fertile land on both banks of the Nile shut in by desert to east and west, an arid waste that had nothing to attract the valley dwellers.” As the population expanded, the book describes, it migrated northwards to Egypt or southwards to the Sudan, a process “that itself cut off the

country from the current of civilization.<sup>254</sup>” The Egyptians, in comparison, “having once established themselves in the valley as a result of the new climatic conditions” (i.e. “the dessication that came at the end of the Stone Age”), “began the struggle against the dangers of the Nile inundation and began to use the river water as a public utility in the best common interest by digging canals and constructing dikes.”<sup>255</sup> Thus, Nubia, by allowing itself to be ruled by nature, did not progress, whereas the Egyptians, with their fearless manipulation of their surroundings, modernized rapidly. Not only that, Egypt progressed faster than Nubia “by imposing order and a disciplined obedience upon all,” enabling it to “go forward in the direction of progress and civilization.”<sup>256</sup> With that, the book suggests that the Nubians, like their environment, were undisciplined and thus fit “objects” for development.

In reading this widely-disseminated Ministry of Culture book,<sup>257</sup> it is no wonder that many Egyptians may have seen developmental intervention in Nubia and to Nubians as entirely justified. According to the ministry, Nubians were unchanged since antiquity because of their harsh geographic settings, and only technology could set them on pace to modernize. Just as Egypt had beat back the tides of the desert with dikes and canals, so too might Nubia and Nubians finally join the modern world. Nubian land, the vast, isolated desert that it is, was a fair “object” for development. And because Nubian existence is inextricably formed by that geography, the Nubians were fair game as well. The Ford Foundation certainly agreed with this logic: as previously shown, the Nubians were repeatedly labeled primitive and tribal, stuck “in a rut that they had existed in for centuries” and could not break on their own. A certain environmental determinism was also present in the Foundation logic for intervention; Harvey

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<sup>254</sup> *Nubia*, 35

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 35

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 35

<sup>257</sup> It was published in three languages (English, French, Arabic) and can be found today in libraries in both Cairo and Alexandria, as well as US college libraries.

Hall, for example, described Nubians as “a long-established culture, well adapted over the centuries to a harsh and confining environment.”<sup>258</sup>

### **The Toshka Project: Releasing Egypt from the Desert’s “Captivity”**

Of course, these documents are products of their time, and one would be hard-pressed to find any development organization, international or not, using such charged labels as “primitive” or “backwards” for its target of development. However, by justifying contemporary intervention in former Nubian lands on the basis of geography and demography (external of decades of social and political change), development actors today market the same image, with all of its connotations. Take, for example, the Toshka land reclamation project, which the Egyptian government inaugurated in 1997 as part of a larger South Valley Development Project aiming to reclaim 3.4 million feddans of land over a twenty-year period that was once at least partially inhabited by Nubians. The crowning initiative of Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, the Toshka project aims to create a “parallel civilization” to the Nile by pumping excess water from Lake Nasser to adjacent land to the west. At the center of this scheme is the Toshka Depression (*wadi*), a naturally-occurring depression in Egypt’s western desert. Since 1978, the Toshka Depression had served as an overflow location for excess water in Lake Nasser. A fourteen-mile long canal initiated under Nasser’s rule channeled this excess water from the western shore of Lake Nasser to Toshka. In 1997, Mubarak’s government decided to turn Toshka from a mere water dumping ground into a forcible agricultural source in its own right. To do that, the Mubarak government enacted a spillway and pump construction project (1997-2005) that would not just guide excess water from Lake Nasser to Toshka but actively pump water from the

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<sup>258</sup> Hall, “Terminal Evaluation”

Lake.<sup>259</sup> The goals of the Toshka project were two-fold: to reclaim land from Egypt's western desert, and to relocate twenty percent of Egypt's population in order to free up the Nile.<sup>260</sup>

Although Toshka is a government initiative, it has received support from many international development bodies. In 1998, for example, the Business Studies and Analysis Center of the American Chamber of Commerce, commissioned a report (funded by USAID) celebrating the project, which was still in its nascent stage. The report begins in typical fashion. "Seeking to relieve population congestion in the Nile Valley," the introduction leads, Egypt's government has enacted a broad scheme to reclaim desert land. Egypt, according to the report, has "failed to keep pace with an alarming population explosion" over the past century.<sup>261</sup> The "congestion" caused by Egypt's population density, it adds, is "frustrating development efforts." In addition, the population rate will cause "insurmountable pressure on the available arable land resources," and the "disproportionate growth of population and cultivable land since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century indicates a potential crisis of considerable magnitude."<sup>262</sup> Due to this "impeding crisis," the GOE has had to act to increase inhabitable and cultivable land.

The American Chamber of Commerce report calls Toshka, in addition to broader government plans to increase cultivatable land from eight million to 11.4 million feddans by 2017, an "urgent and necessary condition for development." With "a huge L.E. 300 billion investment requirements, this project is the government's most ambitious development initiative yet," the report states. Calling for "flexible coordination" between the government, the private sector, and Arab and international funding agencies, the report suggests such policy coordination

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<sup>259</sup> Jeroen Warner, *Flood Planning: The Politics of Water Security* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 42

<sup>260</sup> Bradley Hope, "Egypt's New Nile Valley: Grand Plan Gone Bad," *The National World*, The National, 22 April 2012.

<sup>261</sup> Hany Youssef Genena, *The South Valley Development Project: Toshka & East Oweinat* (Cairo: The American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt, Business Studies and Analysis Center, 1998), 1

<sup>262</sup> Genena, *The South Valley Development Project*, 1

“is crucial to effectively attain the social and economic objectives of the project and assure its sustainability.” The American Chamber of Commerce is not the only development organization to place a resounding stamp of approval on the Toshka mega-project. Some seven years later, the 2005 Egyptian Human Development Report (which the UNDP in Egypt and the Ministry of Planning and Local Development issue jointly) would also proclaim that “Toshka is an example of the desired model that combines Egyptian, Arab, and foreign direct investment in agriculture.”<sup>263</sup>

The ACCE report perfectly encapsulates the sluggish development and re-development of Nubian land over the past one hundred years. The report celebrates the Egyptian governments’ initiative to stave off over-population and food scarcity by reclaiming desert land in former Nubian areas. However, it makes no references to the exact same campaign that Nasser enacted, with a debatable degree of success, in the 1960s. As this research has shown, fears of overpopulation and food scarcity were central to the Nasser administration’s framing of desert development, and the dialogue around the Toshka project shows little evolution in this conversation besides the introduction of bigger and higher-risk mega-projects.

Indeed, the similarities between the Aswan High Dam and the Toshka project are striking. From Abu Simbel, the pinnacle of heritage rescue efforts during the construction of the High Dam, Hosni Mubarak gave a speech announcing the launch of the South Valley Development Project on January 9, 1997. “This is an epoch-making day,” Mubarak began, “a day that will usher Egypt into a new era. It is time for Egypt to be released from captivity within the narrow valley to stretch out into the vast expanse of its entire territory, in pursuit of a better

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<sup>263</sup> United Nations Development Programme and the Institute of National Planning, “Egypt Human Development Report,” (Cairo: UNDP, 2005), 116.

tomorrow, gleaming with hope for all Egyptians.” Just as Nasser used the High Dam as a symbol of a “new era” in Egypt, so too did Mubarak envision the Toshka project as Egypt’s next chapter; “a super-project of construction, which represents the proper point of entry into the Twenty-First Century.” Like Nasser, Mubarak simplified the challenges facing Egypt to one of mere geography, a “narrow valley” that prevents Egypt from expanding to its full potential. Nasser said that the High Dam would help “wrest” land from the “clutches of the desert.” Mubarak described a “narrow valley” holding Egypt in “captivity.” By following an “integrated plan of intensive and all-out development covering agriculture, industry, mining, and tourism,” Mubarak suggested, Egypt would finally be “self-sufficient” in food production. Egyptians would have the chance to “move out of the contested valley that could no longer accommodate high population density.” Like Nasser, Mubarak used science and expertise to lend the project credibility. “We have never been in a hurry [to begin],” Mubarak announces, “as it was science and fact that had the final say in this project.” “Bygone is the time when projects are selected or completed for political considerations, regardless of the viewpoint of specialized experts, economic assessment, or scientific feasibility study of such projects,” he concluded. The South Valley Project, Mubarak suggested, was about raising the entire Egyptian nation to global standards of modernity. “We give absolute priority to the interest of the homeland, above all else, in serving the supreme national goals,” Mubarak decreed, and “we are facing variables of a new world, which require constant work so as to keep pace with human progress.”<sup>264</sup>

The similarities between the High Dam and Toshka do not end at the shared language that Nasser and Mubarak used to describe these projects. As Reem Saad notes in her study of the 1997 “tenancy crisis,” “it is perhaps ironic that at the same time that the government was widely

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<sup>264</sup> Naureen Tadros, “Development, State Discourse and the National Interest: Egypt's Toshka Project,” Masters Thesis, the University of Western Ontario (Canada), 1999, ProQuest (MQ42212), 98-102.

publicizing the new mega agricultural and water projects (Toshka, South of the Valley, and East Eweinat, for example), large numbers of rural dwellers were experiencing their first year of landlessness after losing access to land they have farmed securely for decades.”<sup>265</sup> Just as the Egyptian government under Mubarak was enacting sweeping land reform with enormous social implications for Egypt’s most vulnerable members of society – the very people that Toshka and South Valley claimed to address – it was championing developmental mega-projects as the solution to all of Egypt’s decidedly geographic, and hardly political, woes. Toshka was “a quick fix for all of these social problems, lack of food security, joblessness,” and it is not insignificant that the young generation targeted for this project would become the centerpiece of the 2011 Revolution that overthrew Mubarak’s rule.<sup>266</sup> In 2012, a mayor from Abu Simbel reaffirmed this idea, telling *The National* “the answer to our problems is not in big projects... It's about simple things like changing the law in our governorate to open more land for affordable housing. It's about investment that leads to jobs.”

International development bodies employed the same language that the Egyptian government used to describe this project and its potential for success. Over five decades, these two actors have continually reformulated the same tale of a vast and conquerable desert that, with the help of modern achievements, can be transformed to magically eliminate Egypt’s population “problem” and food and land scarcity. Rather than producing focused political reform that could address very tangible problems such as landlessness wrought by new tenancy laws, these actors propose instead high risk, multi-billion dollar projects to address these broad issues. Toshka certainly failed in that regard, which is evident in the fact that projects like the UNDP’s

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<sup>265</sup> Reem Saad, “Agriculture and Politics in Contemporary Egypt: The 1997 Tenancy Crisis,” *The Cairo Papers in Social Science* 22, no. 4 (1999), 22-23.

<sup>266</sup> Hope, “Egypt’s New Nile Valley: Grand Plan Gone Bad.”

Southern Valley continue to address issues such as “overpopulation” and “food scarcity” to this day. It is the icing on the cake that Toshka also became a symbol of corruption and mismanagement during Mubarak’s rule. Despite its populist rhetoric, Toshka is a private investment scheme; the main landowner, Egypt and Kingdom Holding Company, is controlled by Saudi Prince Alwaleed bin Talal. Talal bought 100,000 feddans of Toshka land in 1998 at prices well under the market value (some 300 million US dollars in total), and following the 2011 Revolution, he agreed to relinquish control of 75,000 feddans.<sup>267</sup> Talal brought in California-based Sun World to help cultivate the land; producing cotton, watermelons, grapes, citrus, strawberries, and tomatoes that, although consuming vast amounts of Egyptian water, are sold strictly for export to Europe.<sup>268</sup> Lack of transparency is also a major issue with Toshka. “Part of the confusion surrounding the [Toshka] project,” one researcher wrote in 2001, “relates to the lack of detailed plans for all aspects of development and implementation.”<sup>269</sup> In addition, the lofty land reclamation goals have been nowhere near met; one researcher estimated that by 2010, anywhere from 1,000 to 16,500 feddans had actually been irrigated in Toshka. This is a violation of Egyptian law that requires cultivation of desert land within a limited period from purchase.<sup>270</sup> In 2005, the government cancelled the second phase of the project because so many conditions of the first phase remained unmet.

Despite the public criticism of Toshka, encouraging development through costly mega-projects does not appear to be a concept that is going away anytime soon. As newly-elected Abdel Fattah el-Sisi’s political program suggests, desert development may very well become the

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<sup>267</sup> Abdel Latif Wahba and Mariam Fam, “Egypt, Kingdom Holding Sign Deal on Disputed Toshka Land,” *The Daily Star*, The Daily Star (Lebanon), 8 June 2011.

<sup>268</sup> Warner, *Flood Planning: The Politics of Water Security*, 46.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>270</sup> Andre Fecteau, “On Toshka New Valley’s Mega-Failure,” *Egypt Independent*, Al-Masry Al-Youm, 26 April 2012, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/toshka-new-valleys-mega-failure>.



cornerstone of a “new” Egyptian era. In an early August speech announcing plans for the construction of a second lane to the Suez Canal, Sisi emphasized that he also intended to finish the Toshka project.<sup>271</sup> Interviews with government employees in Aswan suggested that there are still many people on board with the idea, on the condition that one day it finally be implemented “correctly,” as one MOALR employee clarified.<sup>272</sup> When discussing potential land reclamation projects for the Aswan area, an official for the Lake Nasser Development Authority (LNDA) had many ideas for new ventures in the region: new governorates, some forty-five new settlements around Lake Nasser, tourism and development. But the LNDA official emphasized that he was “not talking about the present, but about the future, with the new President.” For now, he said, “we have plans but we don’t have the implementation.”<sup>273</sup>

## **Conclusion**

During the 1963-64 relocation, Nubians were subject not only to national development agendas but to international ones as well. Starting in the mid-twentieth century, new spheres of social science emerged to address all aspects of state administration. With organizations such as the Ford Foundation working to codify social theories that might be applied across the globe, an increasingly homogenous idea of development began to emerge. These theories, with their emphasis on issues such as population control and free-market economics, found a home with national governments looking for a manual to modernity. As national development goals merged with evolving international theories on development, the space for alternative concepts of development decreased. As the SRC involvement in the Nubian relocation shows, the line

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<sup>271</sup> “Egypt to Dig Parallel Suez Canal in One Year: El-Sisi,” *Ahram Online*, Al-Ahram, 5 August 2014, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/107762/Business/Economy/Egypt-to-dig-parallel-Suez-Canal-in-one-year-ElSis.aspx>.

<sup>272</sup> Interview by author, Aswan, Egypt, 15 June, 2014.

<sup>273</sup> Interview by author, Aswan, Egypt, 5 June, 2014.

between local and international actors in Egypt could be blurry at times. The SRC Nubian Ethnological Survey worked in collaboration with the Egyptian government and included Egyptian researchers, and it also received its funding from an international development organization. The SRC writings on Nubia reflect the dominant anthropological paradigms of the time, and its framing of the Nubian relocation on developmental terms was hardly unique. The Ford Foundation's interest in the Nubian resettlement scheme shows how these social scientists wished to synthesize mass relocation experiences across the globe into generalizable theories. The Ford Foundation of the mid-twentieth century assumed that all "undeveloped" people wished for development, and that they could measure this development through indicators such as demography or economic production. Development actors at this time did not necessarily take into account that Nubians could have different indicators and priorities. What's more, the people writing development's rules saw the Nubians and other "objects" of development as backwards, traditional, and unable to guide themselves to the twenty-first century.

This argument also extended to Nubian land. As development theories evolved, they tried to become less exclusionary of the recipients of development. Concepts such as "participatory development," whereby development occurs with the collaboration of those it seeks to develop, are widely held in the field of development studies today. The discussion of development on former Nubian lands, however, is largely consistent from the Nasser period to this day. Development texts about Egypt's desert continue to pose Egypt's growing population as an urgent crisis for which there is only a technical solution. These technical solutions manifest as mega-development projects, such as the example of Mubarak's Toshka. In the absence of concurrent social and political reform, these projects do little but exacerbate Egypt's existing

problems. The very point of these projects is to avoid facing the real changes that need to be made; much like is shown in the examples from the colonial period.

The examples of the colonial period also remind us of how truly violent this discourse can be. As the example of Palestine shows, displaying technological superiority over land can be used to justify assuming sovereignty of it. In the case of Palestine, Zionism justified the establishment of the state of Israel based on the contention that they were the most capable of developing historic Palestinian lands. By arguing that the country was “a virtually uninhabited desert – a land without a people for a people without a land,”<sup>274</sup> Zionists presented themselves as the natural inheritors of that space. Development actors in Egypt viewed former Nubian lands through a similar lens. They argued that Nubians were incapable of developing the land and thus outside intervention was required. Nubians, in the process, lost decision-making control over their former homeland. By arguing there was “nothing there” when the state arrived, this narrative erases the memory of the Nubian schools, date trees, and homes that existed before

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<sup>274</sup> Alan George, “‘Making the Desert Bloom’ A Myth Examined,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 8, no. 2 (1979), 88.

## *Chapter Four Nubians: Right to Return, Right to Develop*

### **Introduction**

The previous chapters have shown Nubians and their land as the “objects” of development, whether at the hands of the Egyptian state or in the eyes of international development organizations. It should go without saying, however, that Nubians and their land are not one-dimensional abstractions. Many Nubians, since the beginning of the 1963-64 relocation, felt that they were making an enormous sacrifice for the benefit of the nation. As such, they saw development as a right, rather than a side-effect of relocation. They were not passive recipients of development; rather, they used this language to advocate claims from the same state that was imposing development on them. This chapter looks at how Nubians appropriate development discourses to achieve a number of different aims. In particular, it explores how Nubians have mobilized development discourses in order to achieve an important goal: the right to return to their former homes before the 1963-64 relocation.

Since the High Dam’s construction, Nubians have made many attempts to create new homes along the shores of the newly-formed Lake Nasser. Nubians have never fully realized this demand. However, lake-side development, and other desert reclamation schemes on former Nubian lands, continues to occur at the hands of national and international developers. Thus, the battle over “right to return” is also a battle over the “right to develop.” This chapter highlights the various areas to which Nubians would like to return, arguing that they represent important points of contestation in the debate over who has the “right to develop.”

### **Nubian Development Organizations: Some Examples**

National and international development actors do not have a monopoly on development discourses in Egypt. Since the 1963-1964 resettlement, Nubians have formed a number of different organizations in Egypt and abroad. From the general Nubian clubs in Cairo and Alexandria, to professional organizations, to charitable societies, Nubians are active in a broad range of activities that address both Nubian solidarity and issues facing Egyptian society in general. One of those issues is development. The Egyptian Nubian Development Foundation, for example, located in Cairo's Sayeda Zeinab, is a 2013 addition to a long tradition of Nubian-led development initiatives. Led by Mosaad Herki, a former president of the general Nubian club in Cairo,<sup>275</sup> the Foundation has a close relationship to power in the Nubian Community. The organization, which holds nightly classes, focuses on a broad range of issues associated with development. Among its targets are human rights, consumer protection, organization and administration, economic development, and the environment.<sup>276</sup>

With such a broad range of activities, The Egyptian Nubian Development Foundation seems to use "development" as an umbrella term for about everything. Access to resources and power defines this brand of development. The organization's opening ceremony in 2006 featured some of the leading Nubian institutional leaders, including representatives from the Sudanese Embassy in Cairo, leaders of the Sudanese community in Egypt, Egyptian Nubian leaders, the assistant director of Cairo security, the head of the Central Agency for Reconstruction, and more.<sup>277</sup> While the organization is ostensibly about development, it has a clear policy agenda as well. In his statements at the Foundation's opening ceremony, Herki positioned Nubians as the

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<sup>275</sup> Rageb Ramadan, "President of the Egyptian Nubian Development Foundation: Imam's Initiative Will End the Civil Strife," *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, Al-Masry Al-Youm, 14 April, 2014, <http://today.almasryalyoum.com/article2.aspx?ArticleID=420977>.

<sup>276</sup> "About." The Egyptian Nubian Development Foundation. Facebook Page. <https://www.facebook.com/ENFD9074/info>.

<sup>277</sup> Nasser Aqeed to Nobadool message board. 9 March 2014, <http://nobadool.com/vb/showthread.php?t=49182>.

best situated to “heal any cracks” between Egypt and Sudan. He discussed security issues and challenged allegations of Nubian separatism, emphasizing the importance of relations between “Nubia” and Sudan.<sup>278</sup> Herki, in his capacity as president, comments regularly on a wide variety of issues in the Egyptian and international press. Egypt’s economic development is a common talking-point for him, and Herki often highlights how Nubian development efforts can play an integral role in shaping Egypt’s economy. To the Kuwaiti weekly *The World Today*, for example, Herki boldly declared that Egypt has the potential to become one of the world’s “economic tigers.”<sup>279</sup> The Egyptian Nubian Foundation for Development seems to be more aptly described as a personality cult formed around Herki, who is featured in basically everything they post on social media. Other skeptical Nubians have told me as much, suggesting that once Herki relinquished his leadership position in the General Nubian Club, he simply created a new body to lead. In light of the organization’s ties to power and considerable political leverage, it is, in many ways, a wholly average institution for development.

The Egyptian Nubian Development Foundation is not the only Nubian organization focused on development. In 1993, following a joint meeting between the Nubia clubs of Cairo and Alexandria, Nubians established the Nubian Company for Development and Investment.<sup>280</sup> Many other Nubian groups today also push social and economic development as part of their broader aims. The Nubian Knights group on Facebook, for example, was established in July 2012 by “Nubian youth, who have many social and development goals.”<sup>281</sup> The group provides digital archives of Nubian memory, contemporary newspaper articles, and different materials

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> “Mosaad Herki: Egypt Can Become One of the World’s ‘Economic Tigers’,” *The World Today*. The World Today Weekly.

<sup>280</sup> Roman Poeschke, *Nubians in Egypt and Sudan: Constraints and Coping Strategies*, (Saarbrücken: Verlag Für Entwicklungspolitik Saarbrücken, 1996), 151.

<sup>281</sup> “About.” Nubian Knights Community Organization. Facebook Page.  
<https://www.facebook.com/nubianknightsteam/info>

related to Nubian political demands and often advocating Nubian-led development. A recent series they published called “know your rights, *ya Noby*,” for example, listed information about Egyptian and international laws regarding the protection of minorities, the promotion of cultural identity, insurance of non-discrimination, anti-racism, and the ability to preserve language. Like the Egyptian Nubian Development Foundation’s definition of “development,” groups such as Nubian Knights use the term loosely. Unlike the Egyptian Nubian Development Foundation, the Nubian Knights are composed of younger, politically vocal Nubians with fewer connections to the Egyptian state and fewer resources. No matter how they define “development,” however, it is important to emphasize that many different Nubians engage with this concept and employ it for various aims.

### **Nubians and the Return to Lake Nasser**

Nubian calls for development also play an important role in their quest to return to their home in Old Nubia. Almost immediately since the 1963-1964 relocation, Nubians have pressed the government for the ability to resettle on the newly-formed banks of Lake Nasser. In 1977, Nubian writer Khalil Shefa published an article titled “The Return,” which argued that Nubian resettlement on the banks of Lake Nasser was a “logistical move and inevitable development.” Although the Nubians tried to cope with the “relocation crisis,” Shefa wrote, “existing living conditions in Kom Ombo are not likely to improve...returning to Old Nubia should become the reality, because living in New Nubia in the hope that things might get better is no more than a mirage.”<sup>282</sup> Already at this moment, Nubians saw that they were not living in adequate conditions for development and thus felt they a right to lay claims elsewhere.

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<sup>282</sup> Hussein Fahim, *Egyptian Nubians: Resettlement and Years of Coping* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1983), 119.

The call to return to Old Nubia continues to this day. The Egyptian Center for Housing Rights, in a 2010 statement to the UN, declared that since the 1963 migration “Nubians still struggle for their right to return to the closest point to their original lands around Nasser Lake.”<sup>283</sup> In a list describing the “special demands” for Nubians that the state must “unconditionally” accept, the Nubian Democratic Youth Union includes at the top “recognizing the right of the Nubians to return to their original homeland, and their right to have priority of the reclaimed land around Lake Nasser where there are currently new villages, as well as in the desert areas of Aswan.”<sup>284</sup>

When Nubians talk about the “right to return” to Lake Nasser, they mean, in general, the relocation of Nubian villages to their former relative locations along the Nile. If a former village was on the west bank of the Nile, 450 kilometers from the border, for example, members of that village would relocate to that same vicinity, taking into account that the Nile’s waters have expanded in places due to the dam. This, of course, is a huge endeavor: the Egyptian government relocated forty-four Nubian villages during the 1963-64 relocation, and several more during the preceding three relocations. For this reason, Nubians also articulate specific points for relocation that they view as logistically feasible for resettlement and crucial to Nubian history. While this list varies from group to group, there are several main overlaps. In general, Nubians cite Wadi Karkar (the new government-built relocation site for uncompensated Nubians), Abu Simbel (home to the famous temples), Fourqandi (nearby Abu Simbel), Toshka, Kalabsha Al-Gadid, Beshayer El-Kheir, Tomas wa Afie, Garf Hussein, Wadi Al-Amal, Wadi Seyala, Emada El-

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<sup>283</sup> Egyptian Center for Housing Rights, “Submission to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights”

<sup>284</sup> Mohamed Mounir Megahed, “The Right to Return is Not Only Palestinian,” Nubian Youth Democratic Union Website, 23 April 2012, [http://www.y4nubia.blogspot.com/2012/04/blog-post\\_23.html](http://www.y4nubia.blogspot.com/2012/04/blog-post_23.html).



Soboua, and Qoustal and Adindan. These areas are sites of contestation that bring to light some of the continuing effects of development on Nubians today.

### **Language of “Right to Return”**

While many Nubians call for the “right to return” to Old Nubia, the language behind this demand is hardly homogenous within the Nubian community. The way Nubians in Cairo, for example, speak of the right to return can differ from the way groups in Aswan do. Nubian activists engage with a number of different frameworks in order to advocate this claim. Many groups, for example, tie this claim to the Palestinian struggle to return to their land in historic Palestine. This connection is implicit in the use of the phrase “right to return,” which is associated with this Palestinian demand.<sup>285</sup> It is coincidental but not insignificant that 15 May marks important days of commemorating displacement for both groups. For Palestinians, this date marks “Nakba Day,” an annual event for Palestinian commemoration of their displacement. For Nubians, 15 May is a day for commemorating the 1963-1964 “*tahgir*” or displacement, which began on that day. Clearly, there are many connections to the Palestinian relocation that Nubians both explicit and implicitly draw in their calls for “right to return.” The Nubian Democratic Youth Union (NDYU), for example, features a post on its website entitled “The Right to Return is Not Only Palestinian.” The post responds to the claims of another article titled “The Right to Return is Palestinian and Not Nubian,” found on a website called the “Journal of Arab Consciousness” (a webpage seemingly devoted to celebrating Nasser).<sup>286</sup> The Nasserist post makes a number of arguments rejecting the use by Nubians of a “right to return” language. It argues that Nubia is not a freestanding, separate nation fighting against an occupying enemy, and that “right to return” is

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<sup>285</sup> UN resolution 194, a 1948 General Assembly resolution regarding “the situation in Palestine” “resolves that the refugees wishing to return to their homes... should be permitted to do so.”

<sup>286</sup> Mohamed Seif el-Dawla, “The Right to Return is Palestinian and not Nubian,” *Journal of Arab Consciousness* website, 30 June 2011, <http://elw3yalarabi.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=9970>.

officially associated with UN resolution 194 for Palestinian refugees.<sup>287</sup> The article contends that displacement due to the High Dam benefited Nubians as well. It warns against “Zionist” plots to divide Egypt and the rest of the Middle East into various sectarian states, which Nubians should not be co-opted into. In response, the NDYU argues that the right to return is a principle in international law, codified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). According to these protocols, the NDYU argues, anyone has the right to return and access the country of their origin, whether or not they were forcibly removed.<sup>288</sup> The Union cites the population of Suez Canal, which was displaced after the 1967 war, but then allowed to return to their homes in 1973, underscoring that the “right to return” is not just a Palestinian issue.

In the quest to realize various Nubian demands, such as the right to return to Lake Nasser, Nubians also employ a minority framework. This framework, which the Egyptian state implicitly rejects,<sup>289</sup> borrows from internationally-recognized declarations instead. The Nubian Knights group, for example, routinely cites the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National, Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 47/135 in December 1992, as justification for Nubians’ right to return as minorities in Egypt. They site, for example, Article 5, which states that planned national policies and

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<sup>287</sup> In addition, UN resolution 242 of 1967 calls for the achievement of “a just settlement of the refugee problem.”

<sup>288</sup> It is not clear exactly which article of the UDHR the NYDU is referring to as the basis of its claims for “right to return.” Article 13 of the UDHR states that “everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.” The ICCPR contain an article guaranteeing self-determination, which states “all peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development.” Neither the UDHR or the ICCPR explicitly recognizes the “right to return.” However, the point is not whether or not Nubians have to right to return under international law, the full body of which the Egyptian state may not necessarily recognize at all times. Rather, it is significant that Nubians use an international framework to advocate claims, which they believe should guarantee them certain rights as they address their grievances in Egypt.

<sup>289</sup> The 2014 constitution, like the ones before it, does not explicitly recognize minorities, even for Egypt’s sizable Christian population. However, it does denote certain special considerations for Christians as well as people of “border and underprivileged areas,” of which Nubians are a part.

programs should be carried out with the interests of minorities in mind, and that the planning and implementation of those programs should occur with consideration of minority interests.<sup>290</sup> They also cite Article 2, which states that minorities have the right to participate in decisions concerning their respective minority group and the region in which they live.<sup>291</sup> For the Nubian Knights, this means that Nubians should be able to participate in decisions involving their region, such as the selling of lands.<sup>292</sup> In order to assert Egypt's obligation to these international codes, they cite Article 93 of the 2014 constitution, which states that "The State shall be bound by the international human rights agreements, covenants and conventions ratified by Egypt, and which shall have the force of law after publication in accordance with the prescribed conditions."<sup>293</sup>

Alongside references to minority rights, some Nubians also engage with indigenous discourses when arguing for the right to return to the lake. A good example of this is a 2010 petition submitted by the Egyptian Center for Housing Rights (ECHR) to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights as they completed their periodic review of the status of human rights in Egypt. Although the ECHR, formerly based in Cairo, targeted a large range of housing issues across Egypt, its former director, Manal Al-Tibi, is a well-known Nubian activist. Currently serving on the National Council for Human Rights, established following the 30 June popularly-backed coup, Al-Tibi works closely with state institutions. As a member of the 2012 constitutional committee under former president Mohamed Morsi, she was the first of many to withdraw in protest of the constitution's content. The ECHR report cites Common Article 1 of

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<sup>290</sup> "Know Your Rights Ya Noby Number Seven," Nubian Knights Community Organization Facebook Page, 11 June 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/nubianknightsteam/posts/716255135100920>.

<sup>291</sup> United National General Assembly resolution 47/135. Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, A/RES/47/135 (18 December 1992, available from <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/47/a47r135.htm>

<sup>292</sup> "Know Your Rights Ya Noby Number Three," Nubian Knights Community Organization Facebook Page, 11 June 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/nubianknightsteam/posts/716253208434446>.

<sup>293</sup> Egypt Constitution Art XCIII, <http://www.sis.gov.eg/Newvr/Dustor-en001.pdf>.

the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in addition to ICCPR Article 27 of the ICCPR as the basis of Nubian rights claims. The report argues that Egypt's government has violated a number of Nubian rights, including the right to self determination, the right to their original land and natural resources, their collective and individual rights to adequate housing, among other rights.<sup>294</sup> The report articulates a "serious disregard" with which successive Egyptian governments have handled Nubian demands to return "to their original land," accusing the government of "favoring the logic of investment and profits over the human rights of indigenous people (Nubians) in the developmental projects constructed by the State on the banks of the lake."<sup>295</sup> The report's final recommendations demand government recognition of Nubians "as an indigenous people who are entitled to peoples' rights under international human rights law." Government recognition of Nubians as indigenous people, the report argues, is a precondition for the fulfillment of Nubian rights, such as the right to their "traditional land and natural resources and their right to restitution." This includes the return of the Nubians to their "traditional lands around the High Dam Lake," with new villages bearing the same names of their traditional villages.

### **"Right to Return" and Development**

Just as Nubians call for their "right of return" by invoking minority and indigenous discourses, so too do they mobilize development discourses to this end. The previous chapters showed how state and international bodies acting in the name of "development" have impacted Nubian lives, often without their consent. While development actors present a narrative of modernization,

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<sup>294</sup> Egyptian Center for Housing Rights, "Submission to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights"

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

progress, and prosperity, many Nubians counter that history with their own stories of unsuitable living environments, lack of economic opportunities, and stagnated growth since the relocation. In the nineties, development scholars began to recognize this reality of development. However, as some scholars began to look at development with a deep pessimism, others tried to find a balance between rejecting development all together. They produced scholarship that attempted to pinpoint what parts of the theory actually “work.” It asserted that a “more positive form of development is available,”<sup>296</sup> and that the recipients of development “want control of the development agenda rather than that they want to reject it all together.”<sup>297</sup> Critical scholars of development acknowledge this idea as well. Escobar, for example, suggests that the “fact that women in many parts of the Third World want modernization has to be taken seriously.” However, he cautions that this “modernization” often “means something quite different from what it means in the West and has been constructed and reconstructed as part of the development encounter.”<sup>298</sup>

As the example of the Egyptian Nubian Development Foundation shows, many Nubians embrace concepts such as social and economic development. Almost every Nubian organization with an online presence will list some sort of development as among their aims, however vague that word may be. In the context of “right to return,” Nubian usage of development discourses closely mirrors that of the Egyptian government and international development actors. While, as the previous section shows, Nubians engage in a broad range of language to advocate their right to relocate to the banks of Lake Nasser, they also powerfully leverage development discourses to make this claim. Just as Nasser’s government in the 1960s used the neutral, unthreatening

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<sup>296</sup> Trevor Parfitt, *The End of Development?: Modernity, Post-modernity and Development* (London: Pluto, 2002), 33.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, 33

<sup>298</sup> Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 189.

language of development to justify the Nubians' relocation, so too have Nubians used this language to justify their return.

As Cooper and others argue, the concept of development is rooted in the colonial experience, during which colonial administrations enacted new services in order to quell the political and social dissent to colonization. Cooper contends, however, that while “development” carried insidious aims with regards to the colonized, the neutral, universal language of development ultimately served as a weapon for the colonies to finally end colonial rule. As Cooper suggests, “much as one can read the universalism of development discourse as a form of European particularism imposed abroad, it can also be read... as a rejection of the fundamental premise of colonial rule, a firm assertion of people of all races to participate in global politics and lay claim to a globally defined standard of living.”<sup>299</sup> Indeed, development, with its tangible measures of success, “opened numerous points of contestation within the colonial powers’ own discourse.”<sup>300</sup> The widespread workers strikes of the 1940s and 1950s, Cooper suggests, prove that while a discourse on development emerged from the colonial leadership, it was also “to a significant extent forced upon them.” Thus, “the meanings of development reflected the engagement of local mobilization with global discourses, and of local discourses with the global structure of power.”<sup>301</sup>

Although Cooper speaks about the colonial context, Nasser also used “development” as a tool to distract from social and political issues. As previous chapters show, this language was just as effective in a post-colonial context, and indeed continues to this day. And just as the colonized used development as a tool to achieve their demands, so too can one argue that Nubians have

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<sup>299</sup> Cooper, “Modernizing Bureaucrats,” 84.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, 76

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, 85

successfully employed this language to articulate their claims from the state. In the words of Akhil Gupta, “at the same time that ‘development’ has been employed as a powerful tool of domination in the postcolonial era, and as the most important “reason of state” in the Third World, it has also been appropriated and reshaped by subaltern groups.”<sup>302</sup> Nubians, for their part, have used this strategy from the early days of the relocation. In one recounting by Hussein Fahim, the SRC anthropologist who conducted the follow-up study on Nubian relocation, Nubians turned the language of development back onto the state from a very early moment in order to achieve their demands. Writing in 1972, Fahim states

since relocation to date, the relocatees tend to function as a pressure group on local settlement administration through a sharp and wide complaint-technique with the nation’s top officials including the President. Nubians justify their attitude towards the government on the grounds that development, as a Nubian local leader once put it, is a “Nubian right rather than a government favor”<sup>303</sup>

The reports resulting from the 1971-1975 follow up survey echo this sentiment. “Because they were forced to leave their homeland,” Tadros writes,

Nubians strongly believe that development is a right and not a favor...hence, instead of showing the appreciation and gratitude expected by the administrators in return for their efforts to better the social-economic conditions of the settlers, the Nubians are employing tactics of protest and constant criticism against the administration while demanding far greater services and privileges than are given to any rural community in the country.”<sup>304</sup>

Fahim recounts the same formula of government disdain and Nubians claims to development as a right, adding “the settlers have exercised a technique consisting of pressure and protest. If the

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<sup>302</sup> Gupta, “Agrarian Populism in the Development of a Modern Nation,” 320.

<sup>303</sup> Fahim, “Nubian Settlers and Government Administrators: A Preliminary Analysis of a Cross-Cultural Setting,” 6-7.

<sup>304</sup> Tadros, “Final Report Part One,” 19.

administration fails to comply with their demands, they protest and thereby become a potential source of trouble.”<sup>305</sup>

Just as it was development that first pushed Nubians away from the Nile, so to was it development that offered the first possibility of return. In the 1970s, the Aswan Regional Planning Authority, which the government established after the dam’s construction to encourage local development, began to shift its focus towards lake-side development. The Egyptian government submitted a request for technical and financial assistance from the UNDP, and in 1975 the Food and Agricultural Agency (FAO) presented a report detailing the prospects for development on Lake Nasser. The UNDP/FAO report noted, in particular “excellent prospects” for the fishing industry, as well as agricultural potential in terms of amount of arable land and variety of potential crops. It suggested settling fishermen on the lake’s banks in order to create a mixed economy, as fishermen also had experience in agriculture.<sup>306</sup>

When resettled Nubians in Kom Ombo heard about the government’s announcement to develop Lake Nasser in line with the UNDP/FAO report, they immediately inquired about the possibility of resettling around the lake. They requested that a government authority investigate the possibility for a Nubian relocation. Nubians petitioned local authorities for the right to return based on earlier government promises and “worsening living conditions in Kom Ombo.”<sup>307</sup> What is interesting here is not that Nubians requested to be included in this project, but rather how they made that demand. As Fahim notes, Nubians first based their claims to a “right to return” on the basis of poor living conditions in Kom Ombo and former government promises. Once this rights-based claim did not prove to be “fruitful,” however, they “changed their tactics

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<sup>305</sup> Fahim, “Nubian Settlers and Government Administrators: A Preliminary Analysis of a Cross-Cultural Setting,” 9-10

<sup>306</sup> Fahim, *Egyptian Nubians: Resettlement and Years of Coping*, 120

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, 121



and began to...advocate their willingness to take part in the implementation of the lake-development plans.” Realizing that their rights claim on the basis of being a displaced people was not effective, they turned to the language of development instead. With that, the Nubians pitched themselves to the government as able developers for the lake region, offering, for example, the formation of a Nubian-funded and managed agricultural cooperative in order to settle and cultivate around the lake.<sup>308</sup>

The intersection between Nubian demands for a right to return and Nubian demands for development continues today. The 2010 ECHR report to the UN, for example, includes a special section concerning “The Economic Situation and the Right to Work.” It argues that due to a “lack of development projects” from which Nubians can benefit, Nubians face “poor economic conditions.”<sup>309</sup> As part of the report’s final recommendations, it demands “the right of Nubians to development,” including “establishing and assisting Nubians to establish development projects that can benefit them.”<sup>310</sup> In her 2013 reflections titled “Being Nubian in Egypt, and in the Constitution,” Nubian activist Fatma Emam highlights the direct link between right of return discourses and development. During the amendment of the 2012 constitution, Emam worked for the consultative office of Haggag Adoul, the prominent Nubian author who represented Nubians in the fifty-member constitution committee. During this time, Emam encountered the “complexity of the Nubian question,” learning for the first time all the different ways different Nubians frame their demands. Stating “I had naively thought that the demand for returning back to the old land was dogmatic,” Emam reveals her new perspective when she states “I learned, however, that when Nubians speak of the right of return, they mean to be granted the right to

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid., 121

<sup>309</sup> Egyptian Center for Housing Rights, “Submission to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights”

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

develop and reside in the land around the lake [Lake Nasser] – a demand that is not unrealistic or dogmatic at all.”<sup>311</sup> Here, Emam shows how the language of development is essential to some Nubians’ claims of a “right to return” to their old land. Continuing on, Emam states

Typical of all plights of return following displacement, I always wondered whether we can really do that, whether we – given the choice – would want to return, and whether there would be a decent life for our sons and daughters there. But I was amazed and humbled when I listened to the sincere voices of those looking forward to developing the land of their ancestors, to build their own history and preserve their cultural and geographic heritage. I came to realize that there are serious attempts to develop the land near the lake, some of which are extremely promising.”<sup>312</sup>

Remarking on her frustration with Sameh Ashour, who presided over the constitutional session on the Nubian question, Emam quotes Ashour’s dismissal of Nubian demands when he stated “Why do you ask for a right of return? Is there a land to return to? I thought that it has all drowned under the lake!” Emam’s retort to these “dismissive questions” was again to frame Nubian demands for right to return under a development framework. She states that “his dismissive questions only showed that he was not familiar with our cause at all. No one wants to return to the land that has drowned under the lake: Nubians want to develop the land around it – a phrase we said over and over again.”<sup>313</sup> Similarly, when listing Nubian demands in the constitution, Emam includes “the right to return to the land of Nubia (around the lake)... [and that] the population be consulted in the decision-making process for the development of their land.”<sup>314</sup> Of the constitution’s “triumphs,” Emam notes the “article pertaining to the development of remote areas of the nation like Nubia, Sinai and Matrouh, a development that should be done in consultation with the inhabitants of those areas.” While the constitution did not settle all of the

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<sup>311</sup> Fatma Emam, “Being Nubian in Egypt, and in the Constitution,” *Mada Masr*. 23 December 2013, <http://www.madamasr.com/content/being-nubian-egypt-and-constitution>.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

Nubian's demands, Emam states that "we did achieve a legal precedent, and we dared to speak of our right of return, which is unprecedented."<sup>315</sup>

### **Nubians Who Explicitly Reject a Development Framework**

As a result of the efforts of Emam and others on the Nubian committee during the constitution's drafting, the 2014 Egyptian constitution includes one article that mentions Nubians. The 2014 document marks the first time that the word "Nubia" has appeared in the Egyptian constitution. However, while the article names Nubians, it is foremost an article about development. Article 236 of the 2014 constitution states:

The State shall guarantee setting and implementing a plan for the comprehensive economic and urban development of border and underprivileged areas, including Upper Egypt, Sinai, Matrouh, and Nubia. This shall be made with the participation of the residents of these areas in these development projects, and they shall be given a priority in benefiting therefrom, taking into account the cultural and environmental patterns of the local community, within ten years from the date that this constitution comes into effect, as regulated by Law. The State shall work on setting and implementing projects to bring back the residents of Nubia to their original territories and develop such territories within ten years, as regulated by Law.<sup>316</sup>

Many Nubians see Article 236 as an important milestone, given that it marks the first time constitution-drafters in Egypt have ever included the term "Nubia." It also offers the promise of inclusive or collaborative development, a prominent model informing development agencies today. However, the article is not for Nubians alone. Rather, it applies to a full range of "underprivileged" groups, which includes such diverse groups as the North Coast's Bedouin community and Nubia's close neighbors in Upper Egypt. The article is also, importantly, just that: a stipulation of Egypt's new constitution, against which new laws may be measured and

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> Egypt Constitution, Art . CCXXXVI

implemented. It will be the law that actually regulates the content of this article, and stipulates the ways in which it might be enacted.

Many Nubians also reject the article for its emphasis on development. This underscores that development claims are not the only way to advocate rights, and indeed some Nubians reject this strategy. The Egyptian Nubian Association for Lawyers (ENAL), for example, dislikes the article explicitly for the fact that it links the Nubian right to return to nation-wide development agendas. According to ENAL, the article is written in a “complicated way” that “serves the interests of the state, and not the interests of Nubians.” As ENAL head Mounir Bashir explains, the article gives Nubians the right to return to their land by way of development projects. However, Bashir contends, Nubians should and will return to this land “because Nubians are not a ‘project’ and they have rights.” As the original land owners, Bashir argues, Nubians have the right to return – full stop. If Nubians want to return to Lake Nasser and spend their days lounging in a chair, they have the full right to do so, Bashir argues. “The Nubian right to return is a human right, and not a right based on development,” he adds.<sup>317</sup>

The ENAL has prepared two draft laws that would allow for the resettlement of Nubians around Lake Nasser on different terms. The first law details an implementation plan for the relocation of Nubians to Lake Nasser. The second calls for the establishment of a public, independent body to administer Nubian issues, in particular their resettlement around the lake and the reconstruction and development of the lake area. According to the draft law, this body would be called the High Authority for the Development of the Lake’s Shores and Old Nubia. Although it can seek input from state ministries, decision-making authority would ultimately rest

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<sup>317</sup> Interview by author, Cairo, Egypt, 19 June, 2014.

with the body, whose headquarters would be in Aswan. In addition, all land “belonging to Nubia” would fall under the body’s jurisdiction.

Unsurprisingly, the state has refused the release of this law, Bashir says, and although the group will present it to the new parliament once it is elected, “there will be problems.” “There will be a conflict when we release this law to the parliament, and there will be conflict between us and the state,” he added. “This is because [the state] has special interests, and these special obligations are to businessmen.” Already, Bashir alleges, Egypt’s security apparatus has voiced its opposition, and the Ministry of Agriculture has refused the independent body because the ministry would lose its authority “to take the land and sell it to investors.” According to Bashir, former president Mohamed Morsi had agreed to both draft laws, and ENAL was awaiting the upcoming parliamentary elections for confirmation before the military ousted Morsi.

### **National, International Development Agendas and the Nubian Right to Return**

Nubians list a number of locations to which they would like to return along the banks of Lake Nasser. Not all Nubians agree on all of these locations, but there are several overlaps. The final section of this chapter looks at some of the areas that Nubians list as viable spots for their return to the Lake. The battles over these areas, both between Nubians and the state and among Nubians, provide insight into the main issues at stake in the quest to return. In the majority of places that Nubians wish to return, an existing development project exists that excludes Nubian participation. These sites of contestation bring to light some of the issues Nubians face in calling for their “right to return,” revealing a disparity in who actually has the “right to develop.”

### **Toshka**

A number of the locations on the table for Nubian relocation are part of long-term development plan by the Egyptian government in the New Valley (Wadi Al-Gedid) Governorate. At the center of this development scheme is the Toshka project, which began in 1997 as part of former president Mubarak's plan to reclaim vast swaths of land in Egypt's western desert. The Egyptian government argues that Toshka is a national project that serves all Egyptians and does not give preference to any one group. From local newspaper articles to development reports, the vast literature available on the Toshka project rarely, if ever, mentions Nubians. The government officials I spoke to were surprised when I asked about Nubians and Toshka – not because I had hit on a controversial topic, but because they truly had no idea that this was an issue. Toshka is in every way decidedly not about Nubians. And yet, curiously, “Toshka” is a Nubian name. The original Toshka is a Fadicca-speaking Nubian village in the South, far away from the northern Toshka project of today. If you search “Toshka” on Facebook, you will not find references to Egypt's mega-project but rather to solidarity groups for Toshka-hailing Nubians in the Diaspora. While the Egyptian government may deny any Nubian stake in the Toshka project, the name is an enduring reminder that Nubians used to live in this region but now they do not.

Of the possible places for Nubian resettlement, Toshka is one of the more contentious ones. To be sure, many Nubians have lobbied intensely for their right to have priority in resettlement within this mega-project. The largest landholder in Toshka is Saudi Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, whose Kingdom Agricultural Development Company purchased some 100,000 feddans in 1998. In 2010, a number of Nubian activists and other human rights groups joined lawyer Shehata Mohamed in a lawsuit against Al-Waleed's Toshka contract, arguing that it violated Egyptian desert development laws. According to the lawsuit, Talal's contract with the Egyptian government allowed him to obtain seeds without the permission of Egyptian

authorities, hire a foreign labor force without restriction, cultivate any crops of his choosing, carry out cultivation without a set timeline, and export any and all produce outside of Egypt. The lawsuit cited Law 290 of 1990, which specifies a maximum period of three years for investors to begin cultivating desert land. Law 290 also stipulates a minimum purchase rate of forty Egyptian pounds per feddan for desert land plots without services and 100 Egyptian pounds for served areas.<sup>318</sup> At fifty Egyptian pounds per feddan, Talal bought his Toshka land well below that rate.<sup>319</sup> The Nubian activists participating in the lawsuit framed their objections to the project in nationalist terms. Because the Talal contract guarantees him two percent of Egypt's share of the Nile waters, Manal Al-Tibi argued, "the main aim is to steal Egyptian water and create a state within a state." Solieman Nour, the head of the Nubian Toshka Association, stated "we demand the annulment of this contract for the sake of Egypt" adding that Nubians had a special place in this appeal due to their "right as original inhabitants of the land in its ownership." In an interview about the case, Al-Tibi told *Daily News Egypt* that 13,000 Nubian families were expelled from Toshka in order to open the land for investors. In addition, Al-Tibi argued that general policy was in place effectively banning Nubians from owning any land there.<sup>320</sup> In addition to this case, many Nubians have argued in the Egyptian media that they were given insufficient land in this project. In April 2011, for example, Nubian activists told *Al-Masry Al-Youm* that the 3700 feddans allocated to Nubians in Toshka was "unfair," and, according to Haggag Adoul, a "continuation of the government's exclusion of Nubians."<sup>321</sup> One Nubian from Aswan city said

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<sup>318</sup> "Lawsuit Aims to Annul Saudi Prince's Toshka Land Deal", *Daily News Egypt*, 20 October, 2010.

<sup>319</sup> Kerry Dolan, "Saudi Prince Alwaleed Weighs in on Disputed Egypt Land," *Forbes*, 18 April 2011, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/kerryadolan/2011/04/18/saudi-prince-alwaleed-weighs-in-on-disputed-egypt-land/>

<sup>320</sup> "Lawsuit Aims to Annul Saudi Prince's Toshka Land Deal", *Daily News Egypt*, 20 October, 2010.

<sup>321</sup> Shaima Adel, "Nubian Activists: The Allocation of 3,700 Acres in Toshka to Us is 'Unfair,' and Adoul: A Continuation of Exclusion," *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, Al-Masry Al-Youm. 22 April 2011, <http://www.almazryalyoum.com/News/details/127214>.

that with the price Talaal paid for the land, he would have bought ten feddans for himself, if only given the chance.

Although many Nubians have publicly fought for their right to participate and live in Toshka, the reality is that life in Toshka is hard. One Nubian from Aswan, who worked in Toshka for five years as a motor-boat driver for a British company, said many Nubians were employed there to service the water pump and other electrical infrastructure. However, he said, to be a farmer you need a lot of money, because the land is sandy and requires a substantial amount of fertilizer. Nubian small farmers, without the backing of a large investor, would find it impossible to cultivate the land. Given Toshka's location and high temperatures, those who work there say that the quality of life is poor and the work exhausting. In addition to the general undesirability of living in Toshka, many Nubians reject the project simply because they do not wish to participate in private land-grabs masked as national development. When the Egyptian Nubian Association of Lawyers criticizes the Nubia article in the constitution, it is because of what they have witnessed in development projects such as Toshka. Although the article is written as though it concerns Nubian participation in development, Mounir Bashir says, what it is really talking about – and how it will actually be implemented on the ground – is the establishment of new governorates and projects such as Toshka. As Bashir notes, the creation of new governorates is a major talking point for Egypt's newly-elected President Sisi, and “this is what they're really talking about in this article, [projects like] Toshka is what is going to happen.” “Toshka is for businessmen, for foreigners” Bashir says, “not Nubians.” According to Bashir, the Egyptian state once wanted to make a law to resettle Nubians in Toshka. However, he argues that this proposed law was in the same spirit as the constitution's new article, meaning to populate the area and establish a steady workforce. As such, Bashir said, “we don't want to take part in Toshka...and



we refused that.” It is telling that Toshka is one of the six places that Egyptian Nubian Development Foundation head Herki lists as potential places for Nubian resettlement. As a prominent, powerful Nubian who regularly consults with the state and has an interest in development, which some contend is fueled by ulterior, personal business motives, it is not surprising that he might support such a project.

More than anything, it seems, the corrupt, failed Toshka scheme underscores that projects enacted in the name of the national good do not always serve this aim, and many Nubians believe that they have the most to lose in these endeavors. Even though the ENAL does not care about Toshka, and it does not call for Nubians to relocate there, the organization is upset with many elements of the scheme that may be generalized to other development projects as well. A particular point of contention is the water rights that the Egyptian government gave Talal in order to irrigate the crops in Toshka. One major justification that the state uses to prevent Nubians resettlement and cultivation around the lake is that Egypt’s water is too scarce. “The state brought water to Toshka, and when we demanded from the state that we take our land, they refused to give us water from the lake,” Bashir explained. Toshka is not the only private Saudi land reclamation scheme that takes water from Lake Nasser only to export the resulting crops abroad. The Saudi company Loha administers another project much closer to the lake than Toshka, which Bashir says has cultivated 5,000 feddans of land and also “takes a large percentage of water.” The Loha project is located next to Bechayer el-Kheir, a welfare village that the Egyptian government established with support from the World Food Programme. The physical differences between the Saudi scheme and the state welfare village are clear even from a distance. Loha, with its substantial financial and technical resources, appears much more vibrant than the Bechayer el-Kheir whose aim is to support Egypt’s poor.

## **Wadi Karkar**

When the Egyptian government forced the relocation of 50,000 Nubians in Egypt in order to build the High Dam, it relocated many of those Nubians to New Nubia in Kom Ombo, about an hour from Aswan city. However, the 1963-1964 relocation resettled only those Nubians who were physically present to register for compensation in former Nubia. Nubians living in other parts of Egypt (such as Cairo or Alexandria for work) or outside of the country at the time did not receive this initial compensation. In addition, the government measured compensation by family, rather than by individual property holdings. So if one family owned five houses in old Nubia, they only received one house in New Nubia. In order to provide compensation for those Nubians who did not receive it in the sixties – some 5,221 families, the ECHR estimates – the government has recently completed a new housing site in Wadi Karkar, about thirty-five minutes away from Aswan city (near South Valley University, on the Abu Simbel Road).

Many Nubians have vocally opposed the Nubian housing in Wadi Karkar. The 2010 ECHR report to the UN, for example, cites a lack of consultation with Nubian community leaders regarding location, design, or economic activity in the villages. The ECHR report highlights the use of cement in the buildings, which is “not culturally appropriate for Nubians.” The ECHR report states that Nubians have repeatedly voiced concerns about the method of building and the location, but the government has not accounted for those demands.<sup>322</sup> In addition, it argues that the government’s agreement to build new villages only for uncompensated Nubians does not address the “right to return” needs of many other Nubians resettled in 1963-64. The report argued that Nubian claims for “right to return” to Lake Nasser is

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<sup>322</sup> Egyptian Center for Housing Rights, “Submission to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights”

a “natural extension” of the existing resettlement scheme in Kom Ombo, “which is by no means suitable to preserve Nubian culture or to absorb the natural extension of Nubian families.”<sup>323</sup>

Wadi Karkar is another location on which Herki and the Egyptian Nubian Association for Lawyers disagree. In the ENAL’s eyes, Wadi Karkar is just another development scheme in which the government encourages settlement for ultimately national gains. When the government announced the decision to build the Nubian housing in Wadi Karkar, the Nubian Lawyers Association held a press conference against it. They argued that although the settlement was supposed to be agricultural, the rocky soil in Karkar meant that no cultivation could occur at the site. For three months, Bashir says, the government worked on an alternative site in Wadi Amal, some twenty kilometers from Wadi Karkar and only seven kilometers from Lake Nasser (Wadi Amal is a common place that Nubians list for return). With time, however, the government relocated the project back to Wadi Karkar, putting Wadi Amal back under the army’s jurisdiction and its agricultural land ultimately in the hands of businessmen. According to Bashir, the Nubians “only get desert; the land that needs work goes to the Nubians.” In order to prevent degradation, Egyptian law prevents the establishment of villages within five kilometers of the lakes shores, meaning Wadi Amal is rather close to Lake Nasser at seven kilometers in. Wadi Karkar, however, is sixteen kilometers from the lake. “Desert” is perhaps an apt term to describe the location; in fact, on the way to visit from Aswan city, I passed a film called *Desert* in the middle of shooting. Wadi Karkar is located on the Abu Simbel Road, and in order to get there you must pass a small army checkpoint. The nearby gas station is manned by army personnel, including an armored personnel carrier parked at its entrance. The road to Wadi Karkar is peppered with other army establishments, which bear signs in both English and Arabic warning

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<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

against taking pictures. In sum, Wadi Karkar is in a rather militarized zone, at the very least one that does not now seem conducive to a flexible and convenient life in and around Aswan city. Although the site is not completely finished, several stages have been completed, none of which include agricultural land. What does exist in terms of housing and public services is actually quite impressive: villages all in the same Nubian style, distinguished by paint color, each containing a large mosque, schools, markets for shopping (although no stores exist yet), in addition to an enormous and architecturally cohesive medical center. However, on my visit, I saw very few Nubians actually using the space; in general, the vast complex was still empty. According to some Nubians, those who have received compensation in Karkar have already long established lives elsewhere, and they are unlikely to forsake their homes and livelihood to move to an isolated place with no work opportunities. Apparently, many Nubians are selling their homes in Karkar to non-Nubians as soon as they get the key, meaning that Karkar may one day become a mixed or non-Nubian area altogether.

### **World Food Program Villages**

Toshka is not the only national development project from which many Nubians feel excluded. Far more than Toshka, Nubians would like to inhabit three villages that the Egyptian government established in the early 2000s for impoverished Egyptians across the country. The three villages, which are sometimes referred to as the World Food Program villages, include Kalabsha El-Gadid, Bechayer El-Kheir (and the adjacent Garf Hussein), and Tomas wa Afie. These villages are located about an hour and a half (Kalabsha El-Gadid, Beshayer El-Kheir) to three hours (Tomas wa Afie) south of Aswan city. The World Food Program's association with these villages is significant. Although both the WFP and Egyptian government officials emphasize that these are national projects, many if not most Nubians (and several misinformed development

reports) believe that the WFP has substantial influence in their administration. It is not too hard to see how people came to this conclusion; the WFP insignia is virtually everywhere throughout the villages. The Egyptian government office in Aswan that administers the villages is the Executive Agency for the Comprehensive Development Projects (EACDP), a part of the MOALR. Their offices in Aswan city are also thoroughly marked with WFP logos, and the official letterhead indicates that this office is directly tasked with administering World Food Program aid, providing an interesting insight into the creation of new bureaucracy in order to facilitate international aid.

According to the WFP's Cairo office, the WFP is no longer involved in the welfare villages' project (which the EACDP calls "Enabling Livelihoods and Asset Creation of the Rural Poor Project, High Dam Lake). Up until 2013, the WFP provided only food supply to the villages, with no direct monetary support and no voice in the administration.<sup>324</sup> All of the Nubians I spoke with, however, are convinced that this project has a more insidious history. According to them, the WFP approached the Egyptian government with the desire to build villages just for Nubians, a request that the Egyptian government rejected. Some go as far as to say that the Egyptian government attempted to deceive the WFP by naming the villages after Nubian villages: just like Toshka, Garf Hussein, Tomas w Afie, Kalabsha, and Beshayer el Khier are all names of relocated Nubian villages. Regardless of the veracity of these claims, these perceptions have serious implications for how Nubians view the project. They feel, in particular, that a severe injustice was leveraged against them in the name of national development and with international complicity. At a 2007 conference held in Cairo titled "Nubia between Resettlement and Development," Haggag Addoul bemoaned that "despite promises that the Nubians will have

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<sup>324</sup> Interview by author, Cairo, Egypt, 3 June, 2014.

priority in settling there [the Lake Nasser welfare villages], the government is bringing in peasants from all over the country.” According to Addoul, this was not a mistake, but rather a “systematic trend to eradicate Nubian culture, traditions, and language.”<sup>325</sup> This perception persists today and is linked to an experience of dispassion and marginalization.

The Egyptian government, for its part, is very clear on the fact that this project is intended for all Egyptians and not just Nubians. When the villages first opened, Suzanne Kamal, then-director of the EACDP Lake Nasser Program, told *Al-Ahram*’s French language newspaper that “the goal of this project is not just agricultural, but also social: to bring together in one place peasants who are originally from governorates all across Egypt. Here, it is forbidden to refer to a farmer by their origin (Nubian, Aswani, Eskanderani, or other).”<sup>326</sup> Government officials use the same line today. When I asked an employee of the Lake Nasser Development Authority whether or not this land in question was for Nubians, he responded with a resounding “no” (several times over). This project is for “all Egyptian people,” he clarified, “this area is for all Egyptian people.”<sup>327</sup> The current director of the EACDP’s Lake Nasser program is equally clear on the matter. The “rural poor” are the main target for this project, he said, and among the selection criteria is that applicants be unmarried, healthy (free of HIV or Hepatitis C), younger than fifty (for men, and under forty-five for women), and, importantly, without any land ownership, home ownership, or employment to their name. It is individual governorates that present possible candidates for selection, and although there are people from all over Egypt represented in the villages, preference is given to Upper Egyptian residents from places such as Luxor and Aswan. The government, he said, built the entire village infrastructure and funds all of its employees,

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<sup>325</sup> Rania Al-Malky, “Nubian Resettlement Crisis: A Question of Priorities,” *Daily News Egypt*, 16 May 2007.

<sup>326</sup> Hanaa Al-Mekkawi and Chahinaz Gheith, “A New Life in the Desert,” *Al-Ahram Hebdo*, *Al-Ahram*, 13 February, 2007.

<sup>327</sup> Interview by author, Aswan, Egypt, 5 June 2014.

from the water pump engineers to the social workers. The WFP, when it was still involved in the project, provided foodstuffs such as wheat, oil, rice, and sugar.<sup>328</sup>

While Toshka on the whole seems like an entirely unappealing place to live, it is easier to see why Nubians would like to move to these Lake Nasser villages. When I visited in June, the end of the growing season, I saw a diverse number of crops in cultivation, including lemons, peppers, basil, onions, mangos, guava, and much more. The villages boast a full range of government services, from schools to small shops. I met with the social workers who are based in the villages full-time, and they described the work they do with the residents, including regular town-hall meetings to hear demands and complaints. The large meeting room in Kalabsha Al-Gadid is adorned with WFP logos. The director of a women's outreach program in Beshayer El-Khier (herself a village resident) proudly described to me the small economic activities for women she runs, such as clothes-making, in addition to farming her own land. Having their own land was a great source of pride for the residents I spoke with. The residential areas resemble Wadi Karkar to a degree, with homes loosely based on Nubian architecture. However they are older and much less nice in appearance. Inside the homes I saw, residents had filled their rooms with personal furniture and other individual touches, but small animals and relentless flies prevailed in common areas. Piles of dirty dishes, as well as rudimentary toilets, led me to believe that household water is not abundantly available. There is also no electricity in the villages, which are run entirely on generators. As the program director explained, one of the biggest obstacles the project faces is a lack of resources. There is simply not enough money going into the project for all that it is trying to achieve. In terms of Nubian demands to return to the lake in particular, it is worth noting that Lake Nasser is not even visible from Kalabsha Al-

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<sup>328</sup> Interview by author, Aswan, Egypt, 15 June 2014.

Gadid; there is only a small offshoot canal for pumping and irrigation purposes. The view of Lake Nasser from Beshayer El-Kheir, however, is breath-taking in its vastness. Indeed, former president Sadat built a small palace nearby because he loved the area so much, though it is no longer in use. However, even this village is still at least seven kilometers from the Lake, meaning that you cannot simply walk up to the water without a fully-powered car. There are villages in New Nubia that are closer to the Nile than any of the above projects mentioned (although, to be fair, most of them are much further away). The drive to the closest village – Kalabsha Al-Gedid, some one hundred kilometers from Aswan city, takes well over an hour and is one long stretch of sand and strange circular army installations designed to detect planes. Despite these shortfalls, Nubians believe they have a right to settle this land. In light of the government’s decision to resettle Egyptians from across the country in the welfare villages, Nubians view these villages as another example of state-led marginalization and dispossession.

### **Qoustal and Adindan**

Qoustal and Adindan are two former Nubians villages close to the border with Sudan on the right bank of the Nile. Adindan has a special significance as the last Nubian village before Sudan. I was first exposed to these areas as potential spots for relocation from a film titled “Erki,” about a young Nubian from Cairo who wishes to resettle in Old Nubia. Calling the area the “Land of Gold,” the Nubian protagonist runs his fingers through the soil of Qoustal as he states “this land isn’t completely deserted as people believe it to be.” Just like the rest of “Nubia,” he says “this place needs attention and care. Like palm trees, it needs water; it needs to feel your love and in return you will feel its presence.” During the documentary, the narrator visits a man living in Qoustal and Adindan who tells him “this land has a lot of opportunities for youth, because once we start getting the trade going, we’re going to need a large labor force,” adding, “I don’t want



Nubians to just come here to work, I want them also to get married and live here.” The Nubian resident of Qoustal and Adindan concludes by stating: “some say this is impossible, but for many other who lived in Old Nubia, this is not a problem. It’s not hard to start a life here and start reconstructing the land.”<sup>329</sup>

There is a lot of different and sometimes contradictory information available on development in this region. According to an employee at the Lake Nasser Development Authority, there is a national project currently in progress in this area. A large map on the LNDA office’s wall indicated state activity in Qoustal and Adindan. Because Qoustal and Adindan are so close to the border, it may be security concerns that restrict access to information on these projects. Considering the large security presence surrounding the desert development schemes further from the border, this would not be too surprising. Karkar, for example, is on army-owned land. Indeed, when I asked the Lake Nasser Development Authority employee about state activity in this area, he immediately became suspicious of my questions and casually informed me that “Lake Nasser is a dangerous place to study.”<sup>330</sup> According to Bashir, Qoustal and Adindan is not part of a state development project but rather an attempt at a free trade zone between Egypt and Sudan, which is currently dormant “because of [Egypt’s] current relations with Sudan.” Bashir also says that there are some private companies for livestock slaughter there. Although the area does not have electricity, the butcher shops have electricity, Bashir says, “and corruption as well!”<sup>331</sup> Contributing to the confusion, an employee at the MALR in Aswan believes that there will be a 5,000-feddan agricultural project in Qoustal and Adindan, “maybe

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<sup>329</sup> *Erki*, Wail Gozly, 2013.

<sup>330</sup> Interview by author, Aswan, Egypt, 5 June, 2014.

<sup>331</sup> Interview by author, Cairo, Egypt, 19 June, 2014

soon,” exclusively for Nubians.<sup>332</sup> Bashir, in response, says this is another typical state promise whereby if a region has 10,000 feddans of land, the 5,000 feddans that are fertile will go to the state, and the 5,000 infertile ones go to Nubians, in addition to restrictions on access to water.

## **Conclusion**

Since the 1963-1964 relocation, Nubians have taken an active role in dictating their own development agendas. Nubians were not passive recipients of development, but rather saw their development as a “right” which the Egyptian state was responsible for ensuring. Nubian development preferences are diverse and represent a full range of development theory. The way Nubians from Aswan talk about development, for example, may be totally different from the ways in which Nubians in Cairo do. There are divisions within these regional distinctions as well. The Egyptian Nubian Development Foundation, for example, represents an older, well-established generation in the Nubian community. They have connections to the state as well as resources. Its leader, Mosaad Herki, has taken a picture with every Egyptian president since Mubarak’s ouster. The Nubian Knights group, and other Nubian groups that rely primarily on social media to publicize their platform, are more grassroots in their organization. These groups are younger, and can be more oppositional to the state’s policies towards Nubians. I met several Nubian Knights members, for example, at a small April sit-in outside the Journalist’s Syndicate in Cairo, where they were demanding less biased media coverage of clashes between Nubian and Arab tribes in Aswan. This was at a time (still ongoing) when many young people in Cairo feared to gather in protest, due to the state’s recently-enacted law restricting public assembly. Needless to say, there are a number of different factors and conditions influencing Nubians and their approach to development, and there is hardly a homogenous Nubian view on the subject.

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<sup>332</sup> Interview by author, Aswan, Egypt, 15 June, 2014.

The question of the Nubian “right to return” to their former lands around Lake Nasser, however, brings to light some of the limits of a rights-based discourse such as the “right to develop.” The Egyptian government based its intervention in Nubia on the premise of development, arguing that the Nubians were not developed but needed to be. However, when Nubians make claims from the state using development discourses, the conversation changes. Nubians have made many development-based arguments for their right to return. Some argue that as the original settlers on the land, Nubians are best equipped and most devoted to developing the region properly. Others argue that state policies have been inefficient in ensuring the Nubians’ development, proposing their own alternatives. However, Nubians as a community have remained unable to relocate to even one spot alongside Lake Nasser’s shores. That is not to say that development in these regions is not possible: as this chapter shows, there are several government initiatives to resettle and develop along the lake. At the three welfare villages (commonly referred to as the “WFP” villages), the Egyptian government has done exactly the kind of development Nubians would like to see on their former lands, except for the fact that Egyptians from across the country are living there instead. When Nubians produce their own proposals for development and relocation sites, the state refuses them access to the most basic necessities such as water which would allow that development to occur. At the same time, foreign investment schemes such as Toshka or the Loha project are contractually guaranteed to a significant share of the Nile’s waters. These schemes can also be called “successful” development projects in the region, but the development they entail is not for Egyptians and it is most certainly not for Nubians. Thus, these potential sites for Nubian return represent important points of contestation in the battle over who really has the “right to develop.”

## *Conclusion*

From the Aswan dams in the early 1900s to the Toshka project of today, Nubians have watched development projects transform their land for over one hundred years. When Nasser began plans to construct the Aswan High Dam in the 1960s, he relocated some 50,000 Egyptian Nubians from their historic homes in the name of development. Egypt's Nubians thus became Egyptian citizens at an important juncture in Egypt's history. After decades of informal British administration, Egypt under Nasser sought to usher in a new era of sovereignty for the country. Nasser defined this sovereignty through modernity, technological prowess, and expertise. The symbol of this sovereignty was the High Dam.

Thus, from its very inception, the High Dam was about a lot more than just development. Likewise, the Nubian relocation was not merely an act of taking an “undeveloped” people and “developing” them. Rather, Nasser's newly-sovereign state constituted its very identity through these activities. The Egyptian government expanded its influence over groups of people who had previously lived semi-autonomously, such as the Nubians. By providing services and assuming total welfare of the Nubians, the state assumed authority over these formerly peripheral people. Through population counts and voter registration, the Egyptian government found a way to quantify the Nubians and incorporate them into the state's national development goals.

Development in Nasser's Egypt also had political underpinnings. Nubians were relocated without their consent and with little consultation, leaving behind their homes, community structures, and treasured way of life along the Nile. It was a situation ripe for political dissent as Nasser established the early years of his rule. And yet, many Nubians celebrated the High Dam

at the time, as saw themselves as making a valuable sacrifice for the sake of the nation. It harkens back to the colonial period, when French and British colonial administrators employed development to quell growing social and political unrest during the waning years of their rule.

The Egyptian government was not alone in constructing Nubia's development agenda. Rather, it borrowed from increasingly globalized theories on state administration. Western organizations such as the Ford Foundation played an important role in codifying these theories, hoping to streamline state practices across the world. In the mid-twentieth century, both the Egyptian government and organizations such as the Ford Foundation saw the Nubians as traditional and backwards "objects" of development. These actors saw only one path to development, and they did not believe that the Nubians could embark on that path on their own. That argument extended to Nubian lands, which the Egyptian government and other development actors framed as a barren, empty, desert that needed "taming." They justified intervention on the basis that Nubians were not capable of developing the land themselves. By arguing that geography determined Egypt's problems, these development actors minimized the social and political reform that was actually necessary to achieve justice. This is a trend that continues to this day, not only on former Nubians lands but across Egypt.

There is also the reality that for Egypt's Nubians, years of "development" did not actually make their lives better. In fact, in many ways it made their lives considerably worse. For those who received compensation from the government, they faced years of sinking houses, cracked walls, few opportunities to make money, and little land of their own. Away from the Nile, Nubians found themselves plucked from one desert and transported to another. Others did not

receive compensation at all. For those Nubians, memories of thriving communities and secure lifestyles in Old Nubia did not match up to the government's narrative of a people struggling to survive. If the High Dam or other mega-development schemes helped develop Egypt, it did not do the same for the Nubians.

The Nubian experience with development in Egypt is hardly sufficient to discredit the entire notion of development. At the same time, I hesitate to say that if only practiced in the "right" way, development might have served the Nubians better. As the historical record of development in the colonies shows, Nasser practiced development in the way it was originally intended, and it satisfied the goals that it set out to accomplish. As Nasser consolidated his rule, the High Dam was a symbol of his power. It was a reminder that Egypt was going to get better, even if that change never came. The same was true for Mubarak's Toshka, only this time Egyptians had finally had enough of waiting for social and political reform.

At the most, this research can argue that development over the past century has failed the Nubians, if not the rest of Egypt, in many ways. If it sounds like the state leveled development as a sort of conspiracy against the Nubians, that could be because many Nubians believe that to be the case. A significant number of Nubians think that their presence at Egypt's borders with Sudan was a potential security threat, and that Nasser wanted to divide Egypt's Nubians from their Sudanese counterparts. It is a sentiment that is compounded by years of state marginalization and dispossession. As Elizabeth Smith writes, "the homogenizing impulse of nation-states constructs minority populations as both a necessary ingredient of national identity,

and a threat to national unity”<sup>333</sup> Nubians continue to fight to preserve their language within the community, and to prevent the erasure of Nubian history by putting that history in Egypt’s school curriculum. Their fears are not entirely unfounded, as even national media can reinforce those claims. A 2005 feature on the cover of Egypt’s *Ruz al-Yusuf* magazine summarized this sentiment among the Egyptian public, writing: “We’re Addressing This Issue: Is Nubia a Problem?!”<sup>334</sup>

Perhaps the most significant testimony to the positive potential of development is that many Nubians want it and ask the state to help them achieve it. Despite their negative experiences with development, Nubians still engage with the concept. They write their own terms and indicators of what development should look like and how to measure it. However, Nubian attempts to enact development on their former lands show that development is not necessarily a right that all share. As some Nubians link their “right to return” demand to a “right to develop,” they find themselves facing a battle on two fronts. Despite the 2014 constitution’s article giving Nubians the priority in benefiting from development projects in the region, clear and strong laws will be needed to protect against the current reality of development disparity.

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<sup>333</sup> Smith, Elizabeth A. "Tributaries in the Stream of Civilization: Race, Ethnicity, and National Belonging Among Nubians in Egypt." Diss. New York University, 2006. Abstract.

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## **Interviews**

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