The Myth of Nubia, Egypt: A Vivid Potential or Desert Mirage

Shetawy A.[1] and El-Shafie M.[2]

[1] Ain Shams University, Department of Planning and Urban Design
1 El-Sarayat Street, Abbassia, Cairo 11517, Egypt
e-mail: ashetawy@yahoo.com

[2]Ain Shams University, Department of Planning and Urban Design
1 El-Sarayat Street, Abbassia, Cairo 11517, Egypt
e-mail: arch_mshafie@yahoo.com

Abstract: In an era known for its openness, new ideas and values, and fierce competitions, access to knowledge and various cultures, globalisation has vivid marks on the identity and perception of traditional communities. Traditional communities continued through time via like-minded posterity constructed through generations far older than any of their living members. The strength of their culture and identity is determined by the capacity to preserve the communal traditions of their individuals whom use to have common interests within specific physical boundaries. Within such context of global and national changes, traditional communities are abstracted into groups having local interests rather than distinctive cultures.

The Egyptian Nubian communities are one of the oldest traditional communities in Egypt. They are resettled in Kom Ombo, north of Aswan, after successive waves of displacements since the construction of Aswan Reservoir in 1902. After being isolated for a long period of time, they were exposed to various cultures and social structures. After the 25 January 2011 Revolution, there have been calls on successive governments to adopt development policies targeting such specific communities after a long period of neglect since the first displacement in 1902. Nonetheless, Nubian communities no longer exist in the traditional sense and consequently successive government faced the dilemma of determining their local public interest to target. Nubian communities are no longer bound to their lands, traditions, economic base, social and political habits, and even to their built and natural environment.

This paper argues that the Egyptian Nubian communities not only have lost their distinctive culture but also have been forced to adopt new socio-economic and socio-political structures alien to their traditions through successive displacements. It aims to highlight via field evidence the fact that the Egyptian Nubian culture becomes no more than a myth loosing almost all of its development potentials.

Keywords: Traditional Communities, Local Culture, Displacement, Resettlement, Nubia, Egypt

The Myth of Nubia, Egypt: A Vivid Potential or Desert Mirage
Shetawy A. and El-Shafie. M.

1. INTRODUCTION

> "Globalization is the process of making, transformation of some things or phenomena into Global ones. It can be described as a process by which the people of the world are unified into a single society and function together"
>
> (Croucher, 2004)

Duru-Ford (2002), points out that local cultures are likely to be victim to global ''consumer'' culture. Nowadays, global entertainment companies are changing the understandings and dreams of citizens wherever they are located. For instance, Coca Cola, Disney and McDonald along with Samsung, Shell oil and Apple symbolize the process of influencing consumer's behaviour all around the globe. Simply, they are creating new rules, new business process, new ways to eat and drink, new hopes and dreams, and consequently new cultures. Adding, the case that deserve studying, the (I-mania) that invaded the globe in the last five years, it is considered technology creating the possibility and even the likelihood of global culture. The technical sense in defining globalization is directed towards people's needs and concerns; this process is a combination of economic, technological, socio-cultural and political forces.

> "Globalization brings opportunities as well as problems, both most clearly seen in cities. Also cities as they reflect the problems associated with globalization, they hold the potential for solving these problems. Their challenge is to function not only as engines of economic growth but also as agents of social justice"   (UNCHS, 2001)

As all academic terms and concepts, there are supporters and critics who have contradicting views about Globalization. As for supporters, they like the idea of the global village linked together via the internet and IT; and the benefits of capital flow and free markets. On the other hand, critics see globalisation as the main reason of destructing local natural and built environment and challenging local culture and consequently threatening the human existence (Podobnik, 2004). Many scholars around the world believe that globalizing of traditional local cultures will help to create a more peaceful world. (Berger, 1997), in his paper "the four faces of Global culture", opines that global culture might have a negative side attached to it that is called a "World Wide Airport Culture" in which the traditional local societies face the forces of losing their local identity to vulgarized, homogenized and rich diversity of human civilizations. One of those vivid forces is the so called "Mc World" where traditional local cultures became under the westernization wave effect. Young people around the world are affected by such culture; as the western music, wear American jeans and T-shirts with phrases, social and political behaviour, economic systems, family and social relations . . . etc.

2. CULTURAL AND GLOBALIZATION

According to various academics, scholars and practitioners affiliated to different academic disciplines and professions, culture has been a buzz term defined differently. Culture is a complex envelope environment which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as member of the society. Moreover, learning a culture is a lifelong process from birth of death considering that what is learnt from society to society and from one stage to another through time of every society (Kasongo, 2010). Characterized by being dynamic and holding its own personality and identity, culture gives communities a sense of dignity, continuity, security that binds society together. As the fact that we are human does not mean we are the same, culture transformations always grow, develop and/or diminish gradually not suddenly (Obiora, 1996).

© SB13-Cairo 2013

The Myth of Nubia, Egypt: A Vivid Potential or Desert Mirage
Shetawy A. and El-Shafie. M.

Globalization is the process of harmonizing different cultures and beliefs through minimizing differences in various cultures. It recklessly produces a seamless global system of unified culture and economic values due to the advancement in communication. Countries around the World are increasingly being forced to plug into such system and adopt its attached values (David, 2002). Globalization involves opening up traditional economic systems, information and knowledge freely and widely to the global market and its forces. Consequently, all countries must pursue a common set of economic policies as permitting free and discriminate operation of transnational corporation in their economies, additionally, opening of their economies freely and indiscriminately to import and concentrate on exporting what they are supposed to be specialised in and good at (Velde, 2009).

Hence Globalization puts Governments under extreme pressure to make radical changes in their economic policies to preserve their economy to make benefits from and face the negative impact of capital flows, foreign investments, trade and migration. Thus, different governance approaches, reform policies, development projects and economic and social policy measures were carried out by governments especially those of developing countries. The effect of globalisation on developing countries was most felt, noted and documented due to the dominance of the economic modes and financial practices of the global economic leaders, most particularly in the G8 countries and specially the USA (Oputa, 1996).

> "Despite the globalization of the world's economy, the reality of each individual city remains unique and complex. There can be no urban model of reference, only case studies. Any city's future must be anchored in its individual identity. Its 'urban heritage' must be the starting point for the development of urban policy. This heritage and its accumulation –the history of a city, its neighbourhoods and its residents- must be studied, recorded and told"
> (UNESCO, 1996)

Since globalization is an economic based concept, it forces countries to Market its heritage as a product according to the demands of consumers, mainly tourists resulted in the commercialization of heritage over conservation values. In other words, under the pressure of globalization countries tends to transform their local culture with its built heritage into a product for tourist consumption. Such shift accompanied the emergence of a greater number of destinations competing for unique tourist experiences, traditional communities undergoing a state of redefinition and reinterpretation of their cultural heritage in order to compete and attract tourists. Following, in his paper "Globalization, Urban Heritage, and the 21st century Economy" (Rypkema, 2005) stresses that many of the variables that will influence a city's economic opportunity will be qualitative and place-based rather than quantitative and location-based referring to the Five Senses of Competitive Cities which accordingly have considerable impact on both economy and culture heritage of cities.

As traditional cultures tend to compete, they must enjoy senses of place, identity, evolution, ownership and finally, community. In other words, land and people still the main drivers in competing among globalized world. This is to emphasise that cultural heritage is not only a production of traditional communities but also about of distinctive places where such communities live within. This has always been evident in the shift of habits, dialects, language, customs etc of the very same traditional community living in different places (e.g. Nubian clans in Egypt and Sudan).

Over the coming sections, a diagnosis of the current situation and susceptibility to globalization in Nubia, Egypt, with specific reference to the socio-cultural and socio-economic shifts is presented. In order to provide a valid and reliable analysis a research methodology has been

© **SB13-Cairo 2013**

The Myth of Nubia, Egypt: A Vivid Potential or Desert Mirage
Shetawy A. and El-Shafie. M.

designed. It targets efficient primary data collection based on the safety and security environment in Egypt and the limited time and resources attached to the field trip.

3. Research Methodology

As a first step in the exploration, analysis and documentation of the current context of once a unique culture, the authors divided the study population involved in the conservation of the site into five distinct groups: Government officials (i.e. Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Tourism, Aswan Governorate, Local Public Council, and Village Council), Residents including community leaders, residents of the old and displacement settlements, owners and workers of tourism activities (i.e. hotels, bazaars, boatels, museums and monuments), tourist guides of various nationalities and tourists of various ages, gender and nationalities. The fieldwork was carried out in the settlements of *Qustol*, West and East *Tushka*, *Tomas and Afea, Abu Simble*, West *suhayl* (*Gharb Suhayl*) as an example for the resettlement villages and *Elfantin* as a traditional village

Table 1: Study population, methods and sampling techniques

Study Population		Methods	Sampling technique
Government Officials	Ministry of Culture Ministry of Tourism Aswan Governorate Local Public Council Village Council	Semi-structured interviews	Purposeful then snow-balling
Residents	Community Leaders Residents of original and displacement settlements	Semi-structured interviews Direct observation Group discussions	Purposeful Stratified random sampling then snow-balling
Workers and owners of tourism activities	Hotels, bazaars, museums, boatels, monuments	Semi-structured interviews Direct observation Group discussions	Stratified random sampling then snow-balling
Tourist Guides	Various nationalities	Semi-structured interviews	Purposeful then snowballing
Tourists	Males (various age groups) Females (various age groups) Various nationalities	Semi-structured interviews Direct observation Group discussion	Stratified random sampling then snowballing

© **SB13-Cairo 2013**

The Myth of Nubia, Egypt: A Vivid Potential or Desert Mirage
Shetawy A. and El-Shafie. M.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect primary qualitative data to a sample selected through different sampling techniques (see Table 1). Semi-structured interviews were judged more appropriate than structured interviews due to security and other resource limitations (i.e. time and funding), as well as the type of data required. Briefly, a total of 63 interviewees of all groups were interviewed. This was in addition to direct observation and group discussions over a total period of 3 weeks (January 2013). The researchers have also made use of several secondary data sources, mainly documentation and archival records, while seeking to triangulate data to confirm the validity and reliability of both primary and secondary data collected.

4. NUBIA, EGYPT

The old Nubia is the area impeded between the Aswan in Egypt at the first cataract at north latitude 24° and at Khartoum in Sudan at the 6th cataract at latitude 19°. The name "Nubia" was derived from the "*Noba*" people who settled in the region of southern Egypt and Northern Sudan in the 4th century. Nubia was divided into two regions as shown in figure (1): Lower Nubia, Upper Nubia, according to the flow of the Nile to the north towards the Mediterranean Sea.
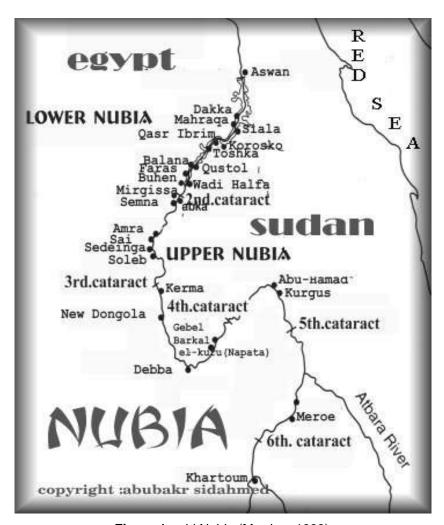

Figure 1: old Nubia (Merdan, 1999)

Lower Nubia located in southern Egypt between the First and Second Cataract and included three ethnic groups: *Kenuz*, Arabs and *Fedija* located from north to south respectively. The *Kenuz* groups (i.e. *Matouki*) inhibited the north region near Aswan, along 150km beside the Nile. They used to speak *Matouki* which was familiar to the people of *Dangola*; and inhabited 17 settlements: *1- Dabood, 2- Dahmeet, 3- El Ambercab, 4- kalabsha, 5- Abo Hoor, 6- Maewao, 7- Marea, 8- Garf Husien, 9- Gursha, 10- East Kashtemna, 11- West kashtemna, 12- El Deka, 13- El Allaqui, 14- korta, 15- El Mahraka, 16- Sayala, 17- El Madeek.*

The *Fadija* groups (i.e. *Mahas*) inhabited the southern region, along 130km of the Nile valley. They used to speak *Mahasi*, an oral not written language. They inhabited 17 settlements as well: *1- Koresko and Raeka, 2- Abou Handal, 3- EL DewN, 4- Derr and tonkala, 5- Tomas and Afia, 6- Keta, 7- Ebreem and Gezera, 8- El Genena and Shebak, 9- Aneba, 10- Masmas, 11- East Toshka, 12- West Tushka, 13- Armena, 14- Abu Simple, 15- Qustol, 16- Balana, 17- Adendan.*

The Arabs groups (i.e. *Aliqat*) are settled between the two previous groups. They speak Arabic and lived in 5 settlements at 40 km along the Nile valley: *1- El soboo, 2- Wadi El Arab, 3- Shaterma, 4- El Senquary, 5- El malkey.*

Upper Nubia located in northern Sudan between the Second and Sixth Cataracts of the Nile River. This region included 5 clans*: Batn el hajar, the Abri delgo reach, the dengola reach, the Abu hamid reach* and *the Ahendi* reach representing three ethnic groups (i.e. *Sukkot, Mahasi* and *Dongolawi*) from the north to south respectively.
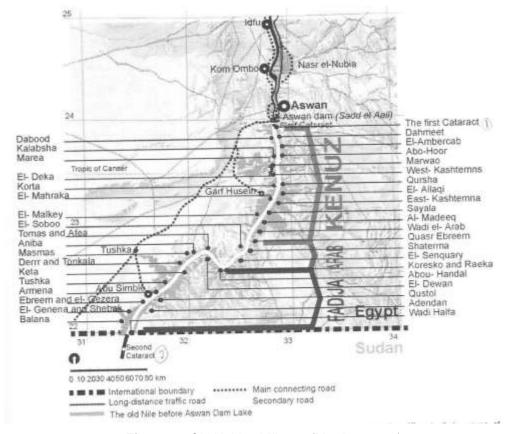

Figure 2: Old Nubian Villages (Merdan, 1999)

For centuries, Nubian People lived in their isolated communities till the end of the British colonialism and the establishment of the Republic of Egypt in 1952 and the secession of the Republic of Sudan in 1956, when Nubia was divided between Egypt and Sudan. While both Sudan and Egypt under the military rule of Great Britain, Aswan reservoir was built across the river Nile caused the flooding of the north Nubia and its monuments in 1902. The reservoir was later on vertically extended twice in 1912 then 1933.

After the 1912 and 1933 vertical extensions of the reservoir, majority of floods affected Nubian villages and communities moved their settlements on higher grounds at the very same locations. The Egyptian government at the time financially compensated communities shown in figure (2). In 1960s, Egyptian Nubians were forcibly resettled due to the revolutionary project of the High Dam and the formation of Lake Nasser. This time the Nubian villages were not given a chance to decide their future plans, they were forcibly moved to *Kom Ombo,* the north of Aswan on the west bank of the Nile and on Elephantine Island. Many Nubians today live in large cities such as Cairo after they chose to leave their region.

4.1 The Period Before Displacement (Before 1902)

According to Merdan (1999), The Nile, the desert and the date palm trees formed the Nubian people culture who lived in isolated villages located far from each other. As the Nile was the centre of life in old Nubia, the Nubian people use to plant palm trees as an income generating resource and for making houses roofs, day to day tools, furniture, windows, doors etc.. This is evident in the words of one of Nubian elders called Um-Faisal as follows:

> "Palm trees income was shared between date merchants who did not own the land but wants to plant date palm, land owners and finally villages' women who had the responsibility of irrigating the trees. Income shares are finally divided equally among the three and afterwards are inherited to their sons and grandsons"   (Fieldwork interview, 2012)

Figure 3: Nubian Communities (Fieldwork Interviews, 2012)

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect primary qualitative data to a sample selected through different sampling techniques (see Table 1). Semi-structured interviews were judged more appropriate than structured interviews due to security and other resource limitations (i.e. time and funding), as well as the type of data required. Briefly, a total of 63 interviewees of all groups were interviewed. This was in addition to direct observation and group discussions over a total period of 3 weeks (January 2013). The researchers have also made use of several secondary data sources, mainly documentation and archival records, while seeking to triangulate data to confirm the validity and reliability of both primary and secondary data collected.

Nubians used to be attached to their lands and the shared ownerships were never sold or traded. Shared ownership of all community assets went beyond being merely economic benefits to be of social importance in favour of maintaining the relationship between new and older generations. Women in Nubian communities used to have major role in bonding the Nubian families together while struggling to survive in the absence of their men regularly travelling to other populated regions seeking financial resources. They used to be responsible of farming, decorating their houses and being communities' narrators who tell stories and transfer the traditions to the future generation.

Money value, savings and working abroad were the two main issues affecting social order as well as community relationships in Nubian communities. Nubians used to purchase on credit among community members and between other Nubian communities until remittances were received or crops sold. They usually invest their savings in land property and goods.

Settlements were built as far as possible from the Nile to make use of the flat river banks in agriculture. The construction of houses, paintings and decorations, reflects the community spirit. The construction and decoration of new houses were considered as major festival social events. Nevertheless, Nubians had three major ceremonies: *Mawlids (i.e.* spiritual and religious events), Birth and Death, and Marriage. Marriage ceremony is one of the most important public events. It was extremely rare to find a wedding between two different ethnic groups especially at *Kenuz clan*. The wedding lasts for a minimum of two weeks where all group dancing used to be performed in front of the bride's family house. Couples must stay for 40 days at the bride's family and then they were excused go to their own house.

Their way of life was simple, self-regulated and self-governed. The Nubian communities were capable of solving their own problems and conflicts internally and peacefully. They use to limit any outside knowledge that might affect their distinctive identity, culture and social order where seeking outside help to solve internal community conflicts was considered as a community failure.

To sum up, Nubians were paying a lot of attention towards conserving their distinctive identity, culture and way of life. They used to transfer their social values, their identity, symbols and tools to the next generations. Their customs, traditions and their language were considered the main guardians of the Nubian culture (i.e. a mean of conveying knowledge and believe).

4.2 The period of Displacements (1902 – June 1964)

The Displacement story started in 1902 when the Egyptian government started to build the Aswan Reservoir. Consequently, 10 Nubian settlements were flooded and were forced to move towards the eastern and western desert on higher grounds. In 1912, another 8 villages were forced to move to higher grounds after being flooded as a result of the first vertical extension of the Aswan Reservoir. For the third time, the Aswan Reservoir was vertically extended again in

1932 forcing 11 Nubian villages to act the same as the other villages of the first two displacements.

Although Law no. 6 of 1933 expropriated private Nubia land and assessed the compensation of disasters years 1902 and 1912 and 1932, the law was unfair to the Nubian people. The government at the time did not care about Nubia or the Nubian villages while it focused on conserving the Nile water. Compensation was estimated to be 3,600,000 Egyptian pounds, while the government assigned affected Nubian Communities 1, 700,000 and later on about half a million Egyptian pounds were deducted for no apparent reason. Nubian environment dramatically changed as a result of successive increase in water level of the River Nile which led to the spread of epidemics such as typhoid fever, diphtheria and malaria.

In Brief, the first three displacements (i.e. of 1902, 1912 and 1933) resulted in, Firstly, the loss of the agriculture land, or in other words the shortening of the River Nile banks due to flooding. Secondly, it resulted in the immigration of some of the Nubians to other Egyptian regions. This was coupled with major shift of change in language, customs and traditions. Thirdly, the change of location resulted in extreme negative impact on community relations via economic and social system change (e.g. shared ownership, scarcity of resources as a result of crop-based economy collapse, change of marina locations and consequent transportation routes, exposure to other local communities, customs cultures and habits, etc).
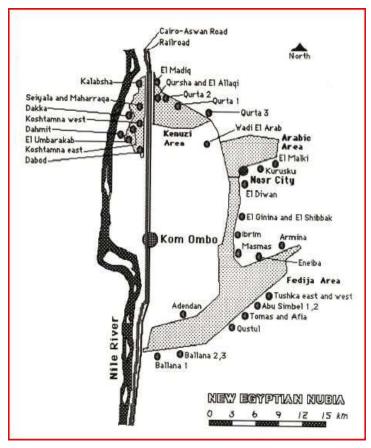

Figure 5: Nubian resettlement Villages at *Kom Ombo* (Merdan, 1999)

In 1957, President Nasser declared the construction of the High Dam project. At first, the project was thought to be under the supervision of the USA, as they made the original designs.

© SB13-Cairo 2013

The Myth of Nubia, Egypt: A Vivid Potential or Desert Mirage
Shetawy A. and El-Shafie. M.

Originally, 5 lakes were planned instead of Lake Nasser taking into account the flooding risk of Nubian villages. However, due to escalating conflicts with the World Bank and the USA, Nasser decided to alley with the Russians to construct the High Dam with a completely different design and layout plan.

The government at the time considered the High Dam Project as a matter of national security. Consequently, Nubians were forbidden from the government to play any role in its implementation. They were suspected to have strong ties with the Sudanese government due cross border relations with the upper Nubian communities. Hence it was decided to impose displacement of Nubian communities and villages (i.e. 39 Nubian villages) to *Kom Ombo* area, 50 km north of Aswan. It has been decided compact the area of the Egyptian Nubian communities from 39 settlements along the Nile of 320 km, into 33 settlements occupying an area of 60 km long and 20 km width shown in figure (5).

The displacement took place in the period of October 1963 till June 1964 without taking in consideration the Nubian communities perception and/or the impact on Nubian identity and culture. Attempts to discuss project's drawbacks were taken as an act of national treason. This can be noted in the words of President Nasser in 1960 as follows:

> "The prosperity which shall cover Nubians is enormous because it shall bring all the children of Nubia together on a correct foundation to build a strong healthy society".

Both Mahgoub (1990) and Merdan (1999) acknowledge the resettlement project as the starting point of the transformation of traditional Nubian Urbanity accompanied with a change in Nubian Culture.

During the implementation of the resettlement project, minimizing the cost was a main target, resulting in many drawbacks. The recommendation of the planning committee, surveys results and Nubian perceptions and needs were completely neglected and ignored. In March 1962, 18 months before the deadline of resettlements, the construction work of the new settlements had not started yet. Consequently, this had led to putting more pressure on the government and decision-makers to keep a blind eye on such drawbacks.

The Nubians had to live in villages close to each other and not close to its assigned agricultural land. Their Traditional construction methods and materials were replaced. Lime stone and reinforced concrete roof tops were introduced to Nubian communities in their new settlements. Allocation of new houses was according to the number of family members. In order to save construction materials and use less of the land area allocated for housing almost all design guidelines, surveys, recommendations and Nubian culture were neglected. Construction materials were to be imported from all over the country to comply with the deadline of completing the construction of the new settlements and the new houses allocation.

Additionally, agriculture lands were located far from allocated new houses and settlements. This issue was critical as the Nubians use to leave their tools and animals in their land. Money became more important as they start to see strangers – people of upper Egypt- selling them things and making some trading but not in the same way they use to have back in the old village (Credit until crops are sold). Some of the men started to move to other regions to gain more money. Views about resettlement process are expressed by the study population as follows:

> "it was like living in jail, we hate the new houses and we felt like we all want to go back in time" (community leader). " we used to farm and to eat what we farm, but el kheer (Allah blessing) was gone forever since resettlement [...]

we had unemployment problems as never experienced before" (tourism worker). "Each family had a new house and a large piece of land for farming. What do they need more? They are so lazy and just use this resettlement and culture issues in blackmailing successive governments" (government official)   (Fieldwork Interviews, 2012)

According to Merdan (1999) and confirmed by fieldwork results, there were three different responses of Nubian communities to the resettlement project and processes. First, it is called acceptance and modification. Nubians accepted the resettlement processes and looked forward to enjoy higher level of public services and new life style and social contract however, sooner than they thought, this all turned into nightmares. New settlements suffered severe lack of services, some of the houses were not complete, streets and houses were similar that they had to make marks at the beginning of each street, lack of clean water resulted in lots of young children mortality and lack of privacy as they shared the same wall with neighbours.

Moreover, the houses were given to them by proto-types according to number of family member with no social consideration. Hence, Nubians started to make modifications on their new houses in forms of paintings, decorating and/or constructing *Mastaba* to achieve the traditional form of houses. Women role became smaller as agricultural land located far from their houses (i.e. 10-20 km away). Consequently, quit farming for men and stayed home to raise kids and housework. As a result, men and their lack of knowledge about farming they started to either sell assigned land to adjacent local communities or rent land to Upper Egypt farmers (i.e. *saaida*) to cultivate on their behalf. Either ways, the Nubian communities completely lost their traditional connections to agriculture and farming.

Second, building traditional houses in the new settlements, a small number of families whom are economically better off prior to resettlement moved to the skirts of the new settlements and built large houses following the traditional way. Although, on one hand, they escaped lots of problems facing other Nubians regarding their new houses but, on the other hand, they were isolated from their community.

Third, Returning to the old location and building new settlements in traditional way, in 1973, few Nubian families decided to move back to the old villages (i.e. *elbalad elkadem)*, when a government decree was issued allowing them to return to old Nubia. They are currently located at *Abu Simble, Wadi Alaqui, Qustul and Adindan*.

To sum up, the resettlement (1963-1964) created lots of conflicts and mistrust between both the government and Nubian People. Shifts in food kind, clean water problem, lack of services and the general upheaval of social structure negatively affected the ability to protect their identity and culture. Even though, Nubian communities have tried to accept new socio-economic and socio-political context. As years passed, the new Nubian settlement failed to be a viable community that could provide a promising future and/or preserve their distinctive culture. Even when they decided to move back to *elbalad elkadem*, the mega shifts occurred to their culture, identity and needs since the relocation period make it difficult to accept the old copy of *elbalad elkadem.* These changes dramatically extended to the period after displacement and the shifts itself became more radical.

Simply, the four displacements that took place in history for the Nubian People turned out to be the bomb shell upon the Nubian Culture. Nubian communities lost their Languages, Customs, Traditions and mainly their homes and their Lands. A question need to be asked:-What Culture left for the Nubians except of some stories about *elbalad elkadem* and how life looked like back in those old days?

© SB13-Cairo 2013

The Myth of Nubia, Egypt: A Vivid Potential or Desert Mirage
Shetawy A. and El-Shafie. M.

4.3 The period after Displacement: (Since June 1964)

> "Resettlement has not only taken Nubian to a different physical environment but also has placed them in new socio-culture conditions [...] this has resulted in social change, the direction of which is as yet unidentified and unpredictable"
>
> (Fahim, 1983)

Successive displacements altered many the Nubian social and economic values and traditions; and even threaten the existence of the Nubian culture. This has been evident in the words of one of the Nubian community leader as follows:

> "Strangers taught us to steal, to lock our doors and closets and to trust no one [...] we lost the community spirit our core identity and culture [...] we dress like the strangers, watch Satellite channels, abandoned many of our traditional dishes, women are no more helping men in land, we are rapidly losing our language, our songs and our ceremonies […] we are no more traditional Nubians [...] Any culture is connected to a specific place and location and social system that follows. We lost both of them after displacement"
>
> (Fieldwork interview, 2012)

Our interviews with the Nubian elders and younger generations showed huge differences in social and community perception. Although these differences were also well documented in Mahgoub (1990), this papers stresses that such gap of perceptions has dramatically expanded. The old generations that were born in old Nubia still have these memories and hopes of returning to the "homeland", *elbald elkadem.* On the contrary, younger generations, born in displacement (*Tahjer)* villages, have different perception. They argue the issues concerning the quality of life from a completely different dimension, a practical and economic rather than emotional one. They address the need to more services, better houses or government should renew and built a concrete and brick houses able to be vertically extended. Their dream nowadays is to go to the city and have a good job. They speak Arabic much better than their native language. This has been evident from the interviews as follows:

> "our (older generation, 55 yrs upwards) dream is to go back to our old villages overlooking the Nile where we can cultivate Palm trees and enjoy the peace of true Nubian community spirit and culture. We have tried to cope but it has damaged our community and destroyed our culture […] (younger generations) just forget about those elders and this talk about returning to homeland nonsense. They have no financial and social responsibilities anymore to think about. What can we do up there?"
>
> (Fieldwork interview, 2012).

The Nubian socio-economic values have been dramatically altered as well. Successive governments played an important role in changing the socio-economic life of the Nubians. Local markets were built in the *Tahjer* villages where the Nubians met the *saidis* as merchants, speaking Arabic and using the Egyptian currency notes in selling and buying processes. Consequently, markets and currency notes replaced the credit based system as well as community support values. It also forced break the community attachment to crop cycle.

Successive governments also encourage the Nubians to quit Palm trees planting. They introduced many incentives for Nubian villages to plant Sugar cane and to sell the harvest to *Kom Ombo* Factory. This was considered easy money for Nubians who started to change the crops they used to plant to Sugar cane. Such change in the crop socio-economic system had

© SB13-Cairo 2013

The Myth of Nubia, Egypt: A Vivid Potential or Desert Mirage
Shetawy A. and El-Shafie. M.

much effect on the crop cycle and attached community support system. It also had much impact on the built environment where the core material (i.e. palm tree wood) of construction processes has been diminished. Views about such changing socio-economic context were expressed by various members of the study populations as follow**:**

> "we did not use to plant sugarcane in el balad el kadem but after resettlements we start to plant it for extra money" (Merchant). "Tourism is a better way for the Nubians to earn their living; Tourists love to see the Nubian culture" (Government Official). "We are fascinated with the Nubian culture we enjoy the way they live" (Tourist). "We need more services. It seems that the government forgot about us ever since we were resettled in these villages" (Resident). (Fieldwork interview, 2012)

As the cost of day-to-day grows higher, as Nubians quit farming and cultivation they instead run taxi and/or bus services between villages. Many young Nubians move to work in clerical jobs and the majority left their communities to work in the tourism industry where they spend summer in *Sharm El-Sheik* and *Hurghada* on the Red Sea; and Winter in *Luxor* and *Aswan*. Others went to work in Saudi Arabia and Gulf countries. This has led to daily community conflicts where some families lower in social hierarchy became wealthier than other Nubian families causing jealousy and hatred within and between Nubian communities who used to solve their problems among their community or inside the family but after displacement they used to go to the police station or to report to (*omda).*

Museumation of Nubian culture became a way of earn living. Many touristic resorts and/or villages were built to mimic the Nubian style and to sell the Nubian Culture, customs, tools, dresses, etc. nevertheless, it was striking to discover that almost all of the merchants in such villages, *Sohayl* for example, are *Saaidies* , *Aswanian* people or Nubians born in resettlements (i.e. *Tahjer)* villages. Additionally, most of the monuments and artefacts presented in the Nubian Museum of Aswan belong to the ancient Egyptians, mainly Pharaohs.

5. CONCLUSIONS

There has been a common agreement between theorists, academics and practitioner that culture is much related with specific space edge, social, economic and political structures as well as the natural environment with which it lives and evolutes. It is inherited through generations and redefined through time. Consequently, communities with distinctive culture tend to lose parts or all of its culture when they change their spatial settings and related natural environment. The change in economic, social and political structures play major factors in a total change, and in many cases the lost of local cultures. The reasons behind such change might be the exposure to alien cultures on the local, national and/or the international level (i.e. globalisation of monoculture). Globalization homogenises various local cultures into one big culture with no sense of ownership and/or distinctiveness.

It has been evident from an extensive fieldwork that the Egyptian Nubian communities have lost their distinctive culture, social, economic and political structures in the face of reckless journey and series of events that starts with the construction of Aswan Reservoir in 1902 and ends with forces of globalisations through major shifts in media, information technology, national political economy, social structures and community employment trends, etc. Currently, Nubian culture is just stories and memories among younger generations who are living in settlements more like suburbs with various urban services, facilities and multi story residential buildings of concrete slabs, brick walls, and fresh water, sewage and electricity networks. They do enjoy access to

© SB13-Cairo 2013

The Myth of Nubia, Egypt: A Vivid Potential or Desert Mirage
Shetawy A. and El-Shafie. M.

the internet and satellite channels, road networks, cars ownership, mobile networks, etc. Younger generations perceive, unlike the elders, old villages as no more than history they have never seen and/or lived.

This paper presents and highlights through practical evidence and documentation that since the Egyptian Nubian communities have been forced to resettle in a completely different natural and built environment since 1902, there has been a major shift in their social structures, economic base, political orientation and governing rules and habits, day-to-day language (i.e. the use of Arabic instead of original language), exposure to other cultures as a part of Aswan suburbs. This has negatively affected the ability of Nubian communities to preserve and regulate their distinctive culture. Consequently, the paper concludes that Nubian culture is currently rather a desert mirage than a vivid development potential.

6. REFERENCES

Berger P., (1997), *Four Faces of Global Culture*, a working paper, National Interest, Fall 1997 Issue 49, pp 23-7

Croucher S., (2004), *Globalization and Belonging: The Politics of Identity a Changing World*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Duru-Ford L., (2002), *The macdonization of Hongkong Global Policy Forum.* Radio Northerland

David, F, (2002). *Why National Pride Still Has a Home in the Global Village.Global Policy Forum. New York***.** The Scotsman May 18

Fahim, H., (1983). *Egyptian Nubians: Resettlement and years of coping*, University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City

Kasongo A., (2010), *Impact of Globalization on Traditional African Religion and Cultural conflict*, Journal of Alternative perspective in the Social Sciences, Vol. 2, No 1, pp 309-22

Merdan A., (1999), *Development concepts and implementation strategies for new settlements, with spatial reference to Aswan Dam Lake region, Egypt*, Stuttgart University

Mahgoub Y., (1990). *The Nubian experience: A study of the social and cultural meanings of architecture, Doctoral Dissertation< University Michigan*

Obiora A., (1996). *Feminism, globalization and culture after Beijing* Paper presented at a Symposium Organized by Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies

Oputa N., (1996). *ChoTac-Hyon: Foreign Investment in Korea: Recent Trends and Changes to Improve the Investment Environment Economic and Financial* Review, vol. 24, No 1, pp 541 -62

Podobnik B., (2004), *Resistance to Globalization: Cycles and Evolutions in the Globalization Protest Movement*.

Rypkema D., (2005) *Globalization, Urban Heritage, and the 21st century Economy*, Global Urban Development Magazine, VOL1- Issue 1, May 2005, http://www.globalurban.org/Issue1PIMag05/Rypkema%20article.htm

© SB13-Cairo 2013

The Myth of Nubia, Egypt: A Vivid Potential or Desert Mirage
Shetawy A. and El-Shafie. M.

Velde W., (2009), *The global financial crisis and developing countries: taking stock, taking action*, Briefing Paper 54, Overseas Development Institute, London

UNCHS (2001), *Cities in a Globalizing World*, Earthscan Publications Ltd,

UNESCO, (1996), *Cities of Asia, Heritage for the future*, World heritage Centre, Jun 1, 1996, http://whc.unesco.org/en/activities/498/