

# Remaking Home After Displacement: A Case Study From Egyptian Nubia

Amany Abdelsadeq

For more than fifteen centuries, Nubians lived in the Nile Valley between the First Cataract at Aswan in southern Egypt and the Fourth Cataract upstream from Dongola in Sudan. The cataract at Aswan, and the barren deserts on either side of the valley isolated Nubians from other neighboring groups, enabling them to retain their cohesiveness as an ethno-linguistic group with distinguishing cultural traditions. Much of the Nubian region consisted of rocky shoreline. The limited arable lands in Nubia were not enough encouraging for permanent colonization by the empires of ancient and medieval times (ancient Egyptian, Roman, and Islamic). However, Nubia was perceived as “The Corridor to Africa” by these same empires. This unique situation permitted the partial independence of Nubia while under the political influence of these empires,<sup>1</sup> enabling the Nubians to creatively adopt the belief systems of neighboring empires. These systems became entangled with long-standing Nubian traditions.<sup>2</sup>

After the construction of the Aswan Dam in 1902, and its subsequent heightening in 1912 and 1933, Northern Nubian (Arabic: *Kunūz*) villages, were submerged under the Nile waters. This submersion forced the *Kunūz* Nubians to rebuild their houses at higher levels each time. Also, most of the agricultural land in *Kunūz* villages became inundated for most of the year. Cultivation was only possible along a narrow strip of the plain for two months during the summer. This impoverishment forced Nubian men to migrate to Egyptian cities in search for work, while women and children were left behind in Nubia. In Egypt, Nubian men learned to speak Arabic

1 Scudder, *Aswan High Dam Resettlement of Egyptian Nubians*.

2 Smith, “Colonial Entanglements.”

and were partially acculturated by the Egyptian culture. Thus, the isolation of Nubians that had lasted for centuries gradually changed.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the heightening of the Aswan Dam, the effects of the Nile flooding were devastating along the Valley and the Delta villages causing much loss in life and property. Therefore, the new Egyptian regime in 1954 decided to build the High Dam, a new dam in Aswan higher than the already existing one. This meant that the entirety of Nubia was to be submerged under the High Dam reservoir. So, it was decided to relocate the Nubians to the Kom Ombo area, 50 km north of Aswan City. This resettlement plan compacted Egyptian Nubia from 39 villages along 320 kilometers of the Nile into 33 villages occupying a 60-kilometer-long crescent away from the Nile in the desert.<sup>4</sup> Several studies discussed the challenges of the resettlement of Nubians after their displacement. These studies focused on “home-building” issues and the wide dissatisfaction among the Nubians towards their new houses, but they say little on “home-remaking” efforts in the aftermath of their displacement.<sup>5</sup> The term “home-remaking” implies the material and social practices for turning a meaningless space into a place that embodies the state of being-at-home with its particular emotions; control, safety, comfort, privacy, familiarity, and the expression of personal identity and the social norms of the community.<sup>6</sup> These practices were undertaken to overcome feelings of alienation by expressing one’s preferences not only in his/her new house, but also the larger environment in the new village.<sup>7</sup>

In this research, I explore how the people of Abu Hor, a Kunūz Nubian village, could remake their homes and homeland in the aftermath of their displacement in December 1964. I am drawing on the scholarship on home-making practices in diverse contexts of displacement, as well as auto-ethnographic research based on narratives from elderly people with whom I talked in order to understand the techniques they had developed to deal with the new home life in resettlement, a life that was far from the life they had already experienced. The research begins with an explanation of the built environment of old Abu Hor and the socio-cultural values that

3 Hopkins and Mehanna, “The Nubian Ethnological Survey”; Fernea and Rouchdy, “Nubian Culture and Ethnicity.”

4 Hopkins and Mehanna, “The Nubian Ethnological Survey: History and Methods”; Scudder, *Aswan High Dam Resettlement of Egyptian Nubians*.

5 Fernea and Kennedy, “Initial Adaptations to a New Life for Egyptian Nubians”; Fahim, “Community Health Aspects of Nubian Resettlement in Egypt”; Kassem, *The Failure of Vernacular Housing Policy and Design in Egypt: The Case of Nubia*.

6 Boccagni, Pérez Murcia, and Belloni, *Thinking Home on the Move: A Conversation across Disciplines*; Werner, Altman, and Oxley, “Temporal Aspects of Homes: A Transactional Perspective;” Dossa and Golubovic, “Reimagining Home in the Wake of Displacement;” Ilcan and Squire, “Syrian Experiences of Remaking Home.”

7 Guetemme, “Collecting: The Migrant’s Method for Home-Making;” Boccagni, Pérez Murcia, and Belloni, *Thinking Home on the Move*.

created and ordered this environment. Then, the research focuses on the different material and social practices that they used to create a sense of home in new Abu Hor. Finally, the research ends with an analysis of the home-making process based on the framework set by Perez Murcia,<sup>8</sup> who proposed that home can be remade in terms of four aspects: material place, familiar landscape, social world, and emotional space. The conclusion of the research underscores the main outcomes of the home-making process with its challenges, resolutions, as well as cultural continuity and change.

### **Before displacement**

My family originated from a small Kunūz Nubian village called Abu Hor. The old Abu Hor was located about sixty kilometers south of the city of Aswan, near Kalabsha village and its famous temple. The post steamboat was the only means of transportation linking Nubian villages to Egypt, starting from the village of Al-Shalal in Aswan to Wadi Halfa on the Egyptian Sudanese border, passing through all the Egyptian Nubian villages. This steamboat used to pass by our village on Wednesdays coming from Aswan and on Mondays returning from Wadi Halfa. It carried passengers, goods, letters, and money orders from migrating men to their families in the village.

The topography of the old Abu Hor was rough; the Nile banks comprised of high rock plateaus overlooking the river, leaving small plain pockets on few locations. Kawthar Abd El-Rasoul and Mohamed Riad visited the village in 1962 and described it. Their description is worth quoting at length:

This was the first time we saw Abu Hor on a summer morning, and the view was beautiful, (...) , the Nile had dropped below its winter level by about twenty meters or a little less, and we were (...) raising our eyes to a rock wall more than fifty meters high, and at the foot of the rock wall, there was a green strip no more than fifty meters wide, and on top of the rocks were scattered high houses, and due to the height, we could only see the edges of their decorated walls for long distances.....

After about half an hour, the rock wall of Abu Hor retreated in a large arc, and opened up into a small agricultural basin whose depth did not exceed one hundred and fifty meters inward. The cultivated areas in this small plain did not exceed several narrow strips, while green grass covered the remaining areas. Numbers

8 Perez Murcia, "Remaking a Place Called Home Following Displacement."

Figure 1.  
 Photograph of old  
 Abu-Hor in 1962.  
 (Riad and Abd  
 el-Rasoul, *Rihla fi  
 Zaman al-Nuba:*  
 p.293/b).



of camels, perhaps more than twenty-five camels, and numbers of goats and sheep spread throughout the area.....<sup>9</sup>

A little before four o'clock we reached the hamlets of Abu Hor. The Nile is much narrower, the eastern plateau is high and continuous for kilometers, the western bank is less high and continuous and consists of groups of unconnected hills.<sup>10</sup>

Abu Hor extended for ten kilometers and included 23 hamlets built on the rugged lands at the eastern and western fringes of the valley, leaving the narrow plain for agriculture. These hamlets extended thinly along the Nile and were separated from each other by topographic features like *khōr*<sup>11</sup> and steep hills. In winter, the water of the Aswan Dam reservoir used to fill the valley and back up into the *khōrs*, making hamlets' sites like peninsulas, and small felucca sailboats were ferrying the people across hamlets. During the summer, as the water level of the Nile used to recede, *khōr* lands became visible and people often moved between the hamlets by donkey or on foot.

Since most social relations were associated with hamlets, the village lacked the real structure of a social unit. Even so, the village had a role of cohesiveness. It served as an administrative unit under the supervision of a governmentally appointed mayor (Arabic: *'umda*) whose guesthouse was the place where the people of Abu Hor gathered to make crucial decisions that concerned the entire village. The old village had three primary schools, a telegraph office, and a health center. These facilities were distributed among the dif-

<sup>9</sup> Riad and Abd el-Rasoul. *Rihla fi Zaman al-Nuba*, p. 68.

<sup>10</sup> Riad and Abd el-Rasoul. *Rihla fi Zaman al-Nuba*, p. 132.

<sup>11</sup> *Khōr*: an Arabic word that stands for a natural swale cutting through the desert plateau at right angles to the Nile.

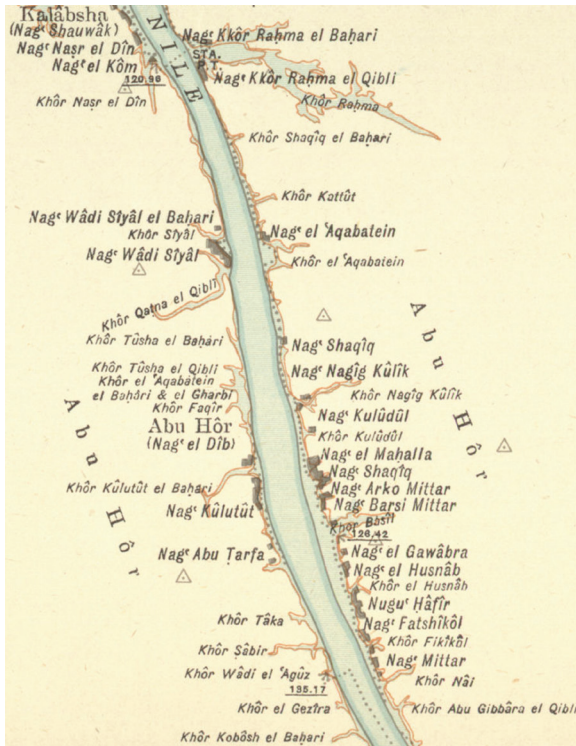


Figure 2. Map of the hamlets of old Abu Hor in 1937. Source: <https://archives.ungeneva.org/kalabsha-4>.

ferent hamlets, and served not only the people of Abu Hor, but also the adjacent villages.

The people of Abu Hor belonged to seven tribes, or maximal lineages, which were divided among major lineages distributed over hamlets. Each hamlet (Arabic: *naja*<sup>c</sup>)<sup>12</sup> consisted of minor lineages forming a patrilineal descent group that had lived in the hamlet for generations and shared kinship ties. The *naja*<sup>c</sup> created a sense of belonging, as people used to refer to themselves by their hamlet and particular descent group, which were believed to express pride and distinctive personalities.

The *naja*<sup>c</sup> served as the main social unit that formed the Nubian society. It was the actual unit of community life that was organized through propinquity and kinship bonds and carried important social obligations, such as endogamous marriage, purchase on credit, mutual aid in times of need, and taking care of the migrating men's families. The *naja*<sup>c</sup> served as the appropriate domain for women to participate in social life. While men were more concerned with village affairs and could move freely between hamlets and villages,

12 The term *naja*<sup>c</sup> is the standard academic transliteration for "hamlet," whereas the 1937 map employs the spelling *nag*<sup>c</sup>.

Figure 3.  
A *naja*<sup>c</sup> in old  
Abu Hor. (Hasan,  
*Abu Hor Baladna*:  
p.171/a).



women were restricted to their *naja*<sup>c</sup> where they practiced social and economic activities, ranging from subsistence farming and raising livestock to participating in *naja*<sup>c</sup> events such as weddings, funerals, and religious festivals.

The *naja*<sup>c</sup> offered the pattern of co-residence that maintained the isolated and conservative life of the Nubians so that the foreigner could be identified easily. Although there was no structural plan, the *naja*<sup>c</sup> was a planned settlement, designed by its occupants according to their needs and culture. The placement of dwellings was based on family ties and the natural environment as well. It was customary for individuals to build their houses on any even tract of land adjacent to their relatives in order to have help nearby in case of need. The dwellings that made up the *naja*<sup>c</sup> followed the natural contours of the rocky fringes of the valley. The houses that overlooked the Nile were detached, or semi-detached, forming clustered terraces, while the houses that extended inland were freestanding and grouped together around an open area. Usually there were three or four houses in each of these arrangements. In the center of the *naja*<sup>c</sup>, there was a large open space where the mosque and few shops were located. The communal guesthouse (Arabic: *sabil*) which was used for the *naja*<sup>c</sup> men gatherings, entertaining and housing male guests was also placed in the central open space.<sup>13</sup> Each *naja*<sup>c</sup> also maintained a cemetery and a shrine for the local saint in its hinterland.

The traditional house in Old Nubia was not only a shelter, but it was also the center of most Nubian rites. The design of the house had a strong connection to the natural environment, especially

<sup>13</sup> El Hakim, *Nubian Architecture: The Egyptian Vernacular Experience*.

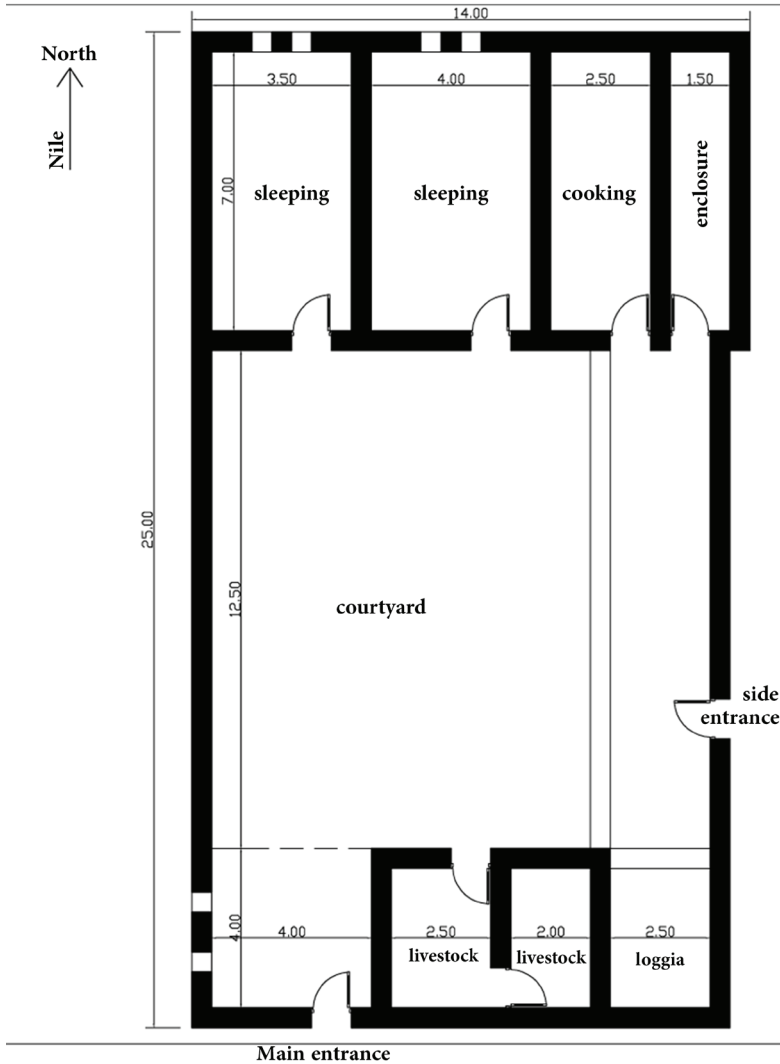


Figure 4. Plan of a house in old Abu Hor in 1964. Graphic from Jaritz ("Notes on Nubian Architecture," Fig. 21 B5B).

to the topography and the climate. It also reflected Nubian social norms and the economic conditions of the proprietor. A typical house in old Abu Hor was built of fieldstone and plastered with mud and composed of a big walled courtyard with vaulted rooms built at the northern part of the courtyard, while the main entrance and the loggia were often located in the southern part and were open to the north in order to allow the best possible access to north wind. Livestock enclosures were built in the eastern or southern part of the courtyard, but with a separate entrance. Guest rooms were not com-

mon in Abu Hor houses. However, the entrance hall and the bench (Arabic: *mastaba*) built near the entrance gate served the purpose of the guest room. The entrance hall was a transitional zone between the semi-public/male domain outside, and the private/female domain inside the house. The courtyard was a vital part of the traditional Nubian house. It was not just an empty space; rather, it was the hub for all female activity such as grinding cereals, baking *dōka* bread, and raising livestock. The courtyard also served as a guest area for women to meet, especially on the occasion of weddings, funerals, and other events.

Nubian ceremonies have always been the most noticeable and distinct feature of Nubian culture reflecting its rich and intermingled history through the ages. The ceremonies were of great symbolic importance in the social life of Nubians.<sup>14</sup> They were not just diversion from the routines of everyday life but also had the function of uniting the *naja*<sup>ʿ</sup>, reinforcing ties within community, and maintaining its solidarity, as the ceremonies were occasions for reuniting migrants in different Egyptian cities with their relatives in the village. As Muslims, the Nubians celebrated the famous Islamic feasts, *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*. In these occasions, the hamlet (*naja*<sup>ʿ</sup>) was the ritual unit where all rites were performed. After performing the Eid prayer in the desert near the cemetery of the *naja*<sup>ʿ</sup>, the men used to make a procession to each house in their own hamlet to congratulate their relatives for the feast. However, the Nubians had two ceremonies that can be considered as distinctively Nubian: the wedding ceremonies, and the local Islamic celebrations *mūlid*.

Wedding rituals varied between seven and fourteen days in length. The rituals used to start right after a new marriage was arranged and announced. All the women and young females living in the *naja*<sup>ʿ</sup> were expected to assemble in the house of the bride's family to assist in grinding the wheat to make *shi*<sup>ʿ</sup>*ērīyya*,<sup>15</sup> while the men would visit the groom to congratulate him. Before marriage, the bride, dressed in her bridal gown and accompanied by an elderly female relative, had to visit all the houses around the *naja*<sup>ʿ</sup> to announce the day for starting the wedding ceremonies. In turn, the women offered gifts of *karej*<sup>16</sup> or a china plate. Then the bride would continue to visit all the major saints' shrines in the village and to *Abu Asha* shrine in the adjacent village, *Murwaw*. The groom, dressed in his bridal attire, carrying a whip, riding a camel had to visit all the guesthouses in the village to invite the men of other hamlets to his wedding.

14 Kennedy, "Introduction."

15 *Shi*<sup>ʿ</sup>*ērīyya*: a vermicelli-like food with milk and sugar which was served as breakfast to the guests and to the bride and groom after the wedding.

16 *Karej*: Nubian traditional plates weaved of brightly colored palm fiber strips.



Figure 5.  
A traditional  
wedding  
ceremony in old  
Abu Hor. (Hassan,  
*Abu Hor Baladna*:  
p. 158/b).

Wedding ceremonies were occasions for three days and nights of communal feasting and dancing in both the bride's and the groom's houses. On the morning of the wedding day (the third day of wedding ceremonies), the relatives and friends of the groom would bring his *ṣandūg jally*<sup>17</sup> and hung the *kojara*<sup>18</sup> in the bride's house. After the guests had eaten the *fatta* lunch at the groom's house, they would form a procession with the groom's family to the local shrine before going to the bride's house, passing in front of the *naja*<sup>c</sup> houses while sessions of singing and dancing were carried on accompanied by gunshots and joyful ululations of the women.

The local Saints (Arabic: *sheikh*) have an important ritual ceremony called *mūlid*, a festival day designated as the sheikh's birthday, usually on the fifteenth of the Islamic month of *Sha'bān*. The *mūlid* was both a religious and social occasion that was celebrated by men, women and children. The whole *naja*<sup>c</sup> used to combine their financial resources in order to host the ceremonies, demonstrating their generosity and prestige among other hamlets. From the early morning of the *mūlid* day, boatloads of people from neighboring villages along with the village residents used to make long processions to the square of the saint's shrine, where the men were chanting *zīkr*<sup>19</sup> and dancing the *kaff* dance,<sup>20</sup> the women were offering sacrificial sheep to be slaughtered, cooked and eaten in the communal feast afterwards, and the children were enjoying the joyful atmosphere and buying sweets and toys from travelling

17 *Ṣandūg jally*: A wooden box where the bride can store her clothes and perfumes. Its cover has a mirror on the inside, and bright-colored engravings of the groom's name, the date of the wedding, and Qur'anic verses are drawn on the box.

18 *Kojara*: A traditional Nubian curtain was hung across the room.

19 *Zīkr*: The recitation of specific supplications to God and praises of the Prophet Muhammad.

20 *Kaff*: A traditional Nubian dance performed by men to the rhythm of *tar* and *noggar*, traditional Nubian drums, and the strong clapping of the dancers.

Figure 6.  
*Mūlid* celebration  
 in old Abu-Hor.  
 (2000: p. 157/a).



vendors. The people of Abu Hor celebrated eight *mūlids* in different hamlets in the village, and five other *mūlids* in the adjacent villages.

### After displacement

On the 27th of December 1963, the displacement of the people of Abu Hor began to their village in New Nubia. There, the new Abu Hor is one of the five villages that are under the administrative local council of Kalabsha, a main village which provides the neighboring villages with social, educational and administrative services.

The new Abu Hor was planned according to a grid pattern; the main streets were oriented north-south and secondary streets crossed at right angles. In the first phase of resettlement, the houses were significantly smaller than in Old Nubia and were arranged back-to-back in long rows based on four prototypes of houses that ranged from one to four bedrooms. These houses were distributed according to family size; however, this arrangement ignored the socio-spatial structure characteristic of the Nubian villages before displacement. Relatives and the elderly who had lived nearby in old Nubia were allocated houses far from each other. And women, who were confined to their hamlet, found themselves surrounded by strange neighbors from other hamlets. For instance, my paternal grandfather (Sayed) was assigned a three-bedroom-house away from the house of his grandfather (Ali). Thus, the new settings in resettlement disturbed the established social fabric of the village.

Moreover, many families didn't even receive a house in the first phase of resettlement, so they had to live with relatives in their new small houses. This situation was further exacerbated after the 1967 war, when the migrant families who were living in Suez, Ismailia, and Port Said had to evacuate these cities and moved back

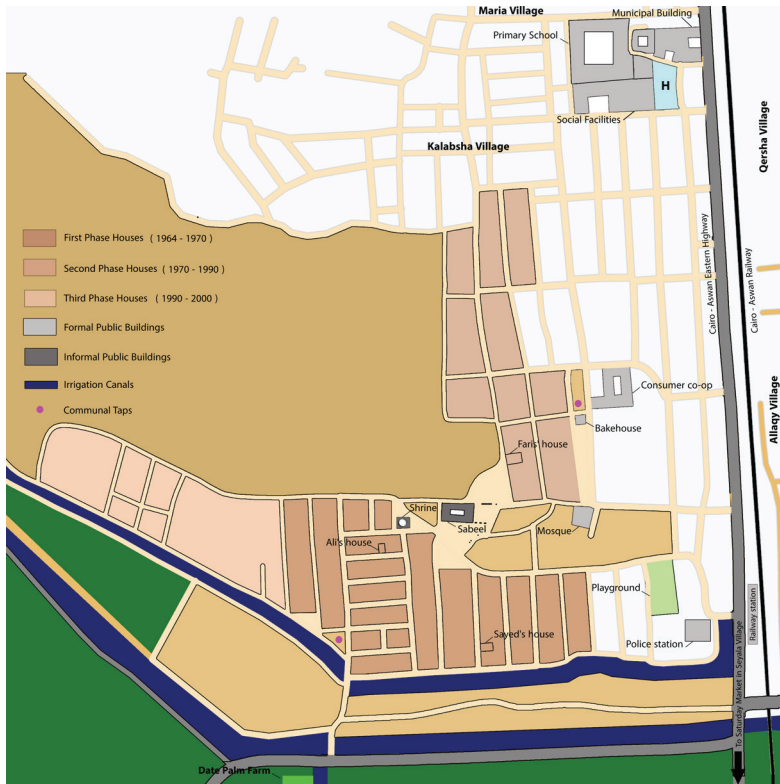
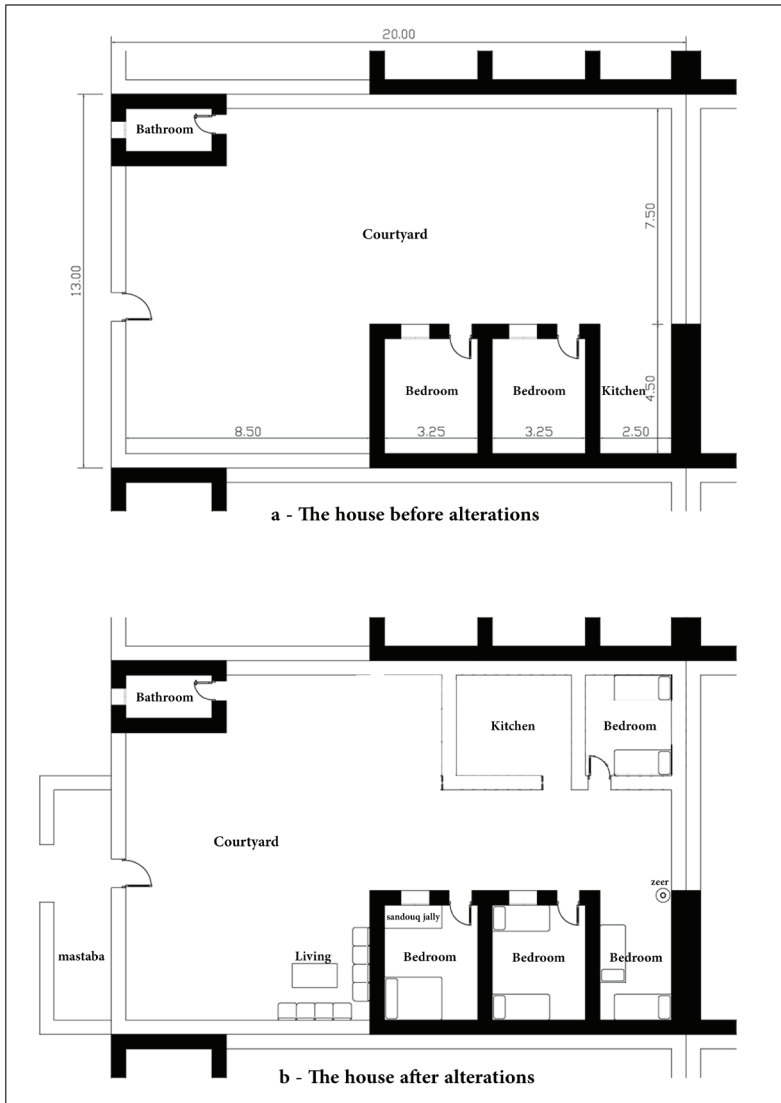


Figure 7.  
Layout of new  
Abu-Hor.  
Graphic: Amany  
Abdelsadeq.

to new Abu Hor to live with their relatives. This crowding had even worsened the living conditions in the new village.

In 1970, my mother's family received their house (Faris' house in Figure 8) as one of the second phase typical houses; a thirteen-by-twenty-meter house that consisted of a courtyard, two small bedrooms, a kitchen, and a bathroom. The walls were made of limestone cut from nearby quarries, with 0.40m thickness and 3-meter height, while the flat roof was made of reinforced concrete to allow the building of a second storey using the bearing walls technique. However, this house form disregarded the climatic and social considerations characteristic of the traditional Nubian house. The kitchen was so small that there was no space to store food and supplies. The rooms were also much smaller than their house in old Abu Hor. The placement of the rooms along the southern side of the house allowed the heat to penetrate into them, in addition to the heat that came in from the uninsulated roof. Surrounded by other houses on three sides, the northern winds could not reach the house, making the living conditions intolerable during the summer months.

Figure 8.  
My grandparents' house before and after alterations.  
Graphic: Amany Abdelsadeq.



They had to make alterations in the house in order to suit their way of life. A larger kitchen was built to be spacious enough for cooking and storing dried food and supplies, while the former kitchen had become a bedroom, in addition to building a new room for the children. As in Old Nubia, the façade was plastered with mud and whitewashed, and the low clay bench *mastaba* was built in front of the house, adding more space for hospitality and neighbors' gatherings. Occasionally, they were spending their afternoons on their orchard, where they planted palm trees and a Roselle shrub.

The people of Abu Hor tried to recreate the sense of community in their new village through undertaking several cooperative projects. Every row of houses cooperated in cleaning the street and planting trees. The whole village collected money to build a communal guesthouse (*sabil*) not only for accommodating visitors, but also as a gathering place where men can meet in the evening, hold public meetings, and gather in communal feasts in weddings and Eid al-Adha. Moreover, an elderly woman, who was a custodian of a saint's shrine in old Abu Hor, built a shrine in the new village.

Nubian ceremonies maintained their importance in the social life of the Nubians after displacement, but they have been adjusted to conform to the new place. For instance, the people of Abu Hor used to celebrate eight *mūlids* in different hamlets in the old village, and the other five *mūlids* in the adjacent villages. After displacement, they celebrated only one, the "Five Domes" *mūlid* in Murwaw village, which was celebrated on the fifteen of Sha'bān by tens of *Kunūz* men, women, and children by chanting *zīkr*, dancing *kaff*, and communal feasting as in Old Nubia. Rather than *mūlids*, the famous Islamic feasts; *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha* gained a growing importance in Nubian social life after displacement. In these occasions, the men perform the Eid prayer in the open space near the mosque, then they make a procession to each house in the village to congratulate for the feast. Also, wedding customs were adapted for increased participation by all the village residents, friends from nearby villages, and migrant relatives in Egyptian cities. While the bride celebrated in her family's house with her friends and the women of the village, the groom held a wedding party for the men in the open space in front of the guesthouse (*sabil*).

## Discussion

Over centuries, Nubians lived in their hamlets and villages, enjoying their beautiful Nubia, being interrelated by their distinctive culture which grew out of time and place. They shaped their local environment around them by interacting with the landscape and leaving traces in it. Even after building the Aswan Dam in 1902 and the migration of Nubian men to work in Egyptian cities, they insisted to rebuild their villages at higher levels in the same locations. However, the Nubian social life with its infinite rhythm faced a sudden and dramatic transformation after the construction of the High Dam in 1964. The resettlement policies that relocated the Nubians placed them in a very different natural and physical environment: planned villages in the desert removed from the Nile. Displacement, as experienced by Nubians driven from their homes and from their home-

land, overturned the Nubian social organization. Such transformations in domestic space had an indelible effect on their culture.

The loss of a home due to displacement is such a socially disorienting, disempowering, and disruptive process that remaking one involves a lengthy effort with no obvious start or end point. The process of remaking a home entails more than building a physical place of shelter and finding a source of livelihood. It requires inhabitants to establish a feeling of being at home. This process of feeling at home involves four dimensions: a material place, a familiar landscape, a social world, and an emotional and existential place.<sup>21</sup>

The home is not only a place where individuals can satisfy their basic needs and protect themselves from harm threatening otherness (weather conditions, animals, or people).<sup>22</sup> It is also a place where dwellers can take control of their own boundaries and express their personal and social identities within them. Thus, people enact identification, ornamentation, and personalization processes to transform a house into a home.<sup>23</sup> According to Bourdieu, domestic space is appropriated by the resident according to a system of customs that are generated by past residential experience which he called "habitus." Thus, the acts of appropriation from past experience, like building a maṣṭaba and whitewashing the house, not only connect the inhabitants spatially with the places in which they dwell but also connect them with the past and the future.<sup>24</sup>

Regaining the sense of being at home was also achieved through familiarization with the new milieu, including its natural and physical features.<sup>25</sup> This is a process whereby strange places and people become familiar.<sup>26</sup> This process involved different scales of place, from the specific home to the whole village. The meaningless house is transformed into a home through daily practices and repetitive behavior in everyday life events. The actions create familiarity and therefore a sense of home.<sup>27</sup> Not only the house, but the streets, the mosque, the communal taps, the orchards all take on a sense of familiarity that makes one feel at home. Familiarity was created when people possessed a maximal spatial knowledge of the new village and its features became familiar through daily movement along the same paths.<sup>28</sup>

21 Perez Murcia, "Remaking a Place Called Home Following Displacement."

22 Perez Murcia, "Remaking a Place Called Home Following Displacement."

23 Korosec-Serfaty, "Experience and Use of the Dwelling."

24 Lawrence, "A More Humane History of Homes."

25 Perez Murcia, "Remaking a Place Called Home Following Displacement."

26 Somerville, "The Social Construction of Home."

27 Perez Murcia, "Remaking a Place Called Home Following Displacement."

28 Perez Murcia, "Remaking a Place Called Home Following Displacement."

As Korac stresses, “emplacement does not take place in a social vacuum; rather it occurs within the context of intra—and inter-group relations.”<sup>29</sup> Creating a sense of home in new Abu Hor required reconstructing a social world in the new village based on shared traditions and values after centuries of belonging to *naja*<sup>c</sup> kin groups. Reconstructing this social world aimed at regaining a sense of belonging to a community, where “one recognizes people as ‘one’s own’ and where one feels recognized by them as such.”<sup>30</sup> Through everyday social practices, visiting and chatting with neighbors on *maṣṭabas*, the people of Abu Hor could create new social attachments within the place of resettlement, thus, creating a sense of home. Building the village guesthouse (*sabīl*) was another way the people of Abu Hor could reconstruct their social world.

Displacement involved separating from a place that Nubians described as “homely,” a place where they had felt emotionally embedded. Displacement was an experience full of emotional distress; whether grief for the place left behind, the struggle of living in the present or worrying for the future. This emotional distress of being displaced remained until people were able to remake emotional attachments in the new village. However, the reconstruction of the emotional feeling of being at home did not happen automatically; for a long time, people continued to reflect on differences between the old Abu Hor and the new village.

The people of Abu Hor could reconstruct the emotional feeling of being at home by replicating their social and cultural traditions of Old Nubia in the new village, such as life-cycle rituals and celebrating religious ceremonies. Although the new setting lacked the geographical features in which these traditions were practiced—the Nile, hills, old shrines, and so on—creativity and imagination helped them to reproduce cultural traditions by evoking the landscape that they were forced to abandon. As Obeid explains “what seems like a yearning for the past can contribute very much to the creation of the present and the future.”<sup>31</sup>

## Conclusion

For more than fifteen centuries, Egyptian Nubians had lived in isolated villages on the banks of the Nile, surviving the harsh environment and the competing empires, and had slowly developed a distinctive culture that successfully responded to numerous crises. However, the building of the Aswan High Dam and the subsequent resettlement of Nubians in a desert habitat has been the greatest

29 Korac, *Remaking Home*, p. 42.

30 Perez Murcia, “Remaking a Place Called Home Following Displacement,” p. 470.

31 As quoted in Perez Murcia, “Remaking a Place Called Home Following Displacement,” p.473.

shock to their culture that has been characterized by continuity and change. Yet, Nubian culture did not collapse by the backwaters of the High Dam, the vitality and flexibility of the Nubians helped them to adjust to the different natural and social milieu while retaining a strong sense of their historical and cultural identity. This research illustrated the varied strategies undertaken by Nubians to regain their sense of being-at-home in new settlements. These strategies included house alterations, symbolic recreation of places depicting places in Old Nubia such as the shrine and the community guesthouse, practicing Nubian rituals, and celebrating religious and social ceremonies. All these strategies were significant in transforming the unfamiliar resettlement place into a home.

Indeed, this research does not aim to romanticize nor to underestimate the precarious circumstances of Nubian displacement. Instead, the intention of this research is to acknowledge the significance of the contributions by Nubians to produce alternative meanings despite the modularization of their new top—built environment. Rather than associating the Nubian displacement merely with loss and passivity, this research discussed the resiliency and the spatial practices through which Nubians could contribute to processes of homemaking and (re)territorialization on different spatial scales.

## References

- Appadurai, A. "The Production of Locality." In *Counterworks: Managing the Diversity of Knowledge*, edited by Richard Fardon, pp. 208 — 28. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Dossa, P., and J. Golubovic. "Reimagining Home in the Wake of Displacement." *Studies in Social Justice* 13/1 (2019): pp. 171 — 86.
- El Hakim, O. *Nubian Architecture: The Egyptian Vernacular Experience*. Cairo: Palm Press, 1993.
- Fahim, H.M. "Community Health Aspects of Nubian Resettlement in Egypt." In *Nubian Encounters: The Story of the Nubian Ethnological Survey 1961-1964*, edited by Nicholas Hopkins and Sohair Mehanna, pp. 265-79. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2010.
- Fernea, R.A. "The Blessed Land." *The UNESCO Courier*, February/March 1980 (1980): pp. 66 — 9.
- Fernea, R.A., and A. Rouchdy. "Nubian Culture and Ethnicity." In *Nubian Encounters: The Story of the Nubian Ethnological Survey 1961-1964*, edited by Nicholas Hopkins and Sohair Mehanna, pp. 289-300. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2010.
- Fernea, R.A., and J.G. Kennedy. "Initial Adaptations to a New Life for Egyptian Nubians." In *Nubian Encounters: The Story of the Nubian Ethnological Survey 1961-1964*, edited by Nicholas Hopkins and Sohair Mehanna, pp. 247 — 64. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2010.
- Guetemme, G. "Collecting: The Migrant's Method for Home-Making." In *Migration, Culture and Identity. Politics of Citizenship and Migration Series*, edited by Yasmine Shamma, Suzan Ilcan, Vicki Squire, and Helen Underhill, pp. 101 — 22. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-031-12085-5\_6
- Hassan, A.M., and M.M. Hassan. *Abu Hor Baladna* [Abu-Hor Our Homeland]. Khartoum: The Nubian Studies and Documentation Center, 2000.
- Hopkins, N.S., and S.R. Mehanna. "The Nubian Ethnological Survey: History and Methods." In *Nubian Encounters: The Story of the Nubian Ethnological Survey 1961-1964*, edited by Nicholas Hopkins and Sohair Mehanna, pp. 3 — 17. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2010.
- Ilcan, S., and V. Squire. "Syrian Experiences of Remaking Home: Migratory Journeys, State Refugee Policies, and Negotiated Belonging." In *Migration, Culture and Identity. Politics of Citizenship and Migration*, edited by Yasmine Shamma, Suzan Ilcan, Vicki Squire, and Helen Underhill, pp. 123 — 46. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-031-12085-5\_7

- Jaritz, H. "Notes on Nubian Architecture." In *Nubians in Egypt: Peaceful People*, edited by Robert A. Fernea. Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1973: pp. 49 — 60.
- Kassem, M.M. *The Failure of Vernacular Housing Policy and Design in Egypt: The Case of Nubia*. University of Strathclyde: PhD thesis, 1988.
- Kennedy, J.G. "Introduction." In *Nubia Ceremonial Life: Studies in Islamic Syncretism and Cultural Change*, edited by John G. Kennedy, pp. xiv-xxx. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2005. DOI: 10.5743/cairo/9789774249556.002.0008
- Kennedy, J.G. "Nubia: History and Religious Background." In *Nubia Ceremonial Life: Studies in Islamic Syncretism and Cultural Change*, edited by John G. Kennedy, pp. 1-18. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2005. DOI: 10.5743/cairo/9789774249556.003.0001
- Korac, M. *Remaking Home: Reconstructing Life, Place and Identity in Rome and Amsterdam*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009.
- Korosec-Serfaty, P. "Experience and Use of the Dwelling." In *Home Environments. Human Behavior and Environment: Advances in Theory and Research, volume 8*, edited by Irwin Altman and Carol M. Werner, pp. 65 — 86. Boston, MA: Springer, 1985. DOI: 10.1007/978-1-4899-2266-3\_3
- Lawrence, R.J. "A More Humane History of Homes." In *Home Environments. Human Behavior and Environment (volume 8)*, edited by Irwin Altman and Carol M. Werner, pp. 113 — 32. Boston, MA: Springer, 1985. DOI: 10.1007/978-1-4899-2266-3\_5
- Perez Murcia, L.E. "Remaking a Place Called Home Following Displacement." In *The Routledge Handbook of Place*, edited by Tim Edensor, Ares Kalandides, and Uma Kothari, pp. 468 — 76. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2020.
- Riad, M., and K. Abd el-Rasoul. *Rihla fi Zaman al-Nuba* [A journey in the time of Nubia]. Windsor: Hindawi Foundation, 2014.
- Scudder, T. *Aswan High Dam Resettlement of Egyptian Nubians*. Singapore: Springer, 2016. DOI: 10.1007/978-981-10-1935-7
- Smith, S.T. "Colonial Entanglements: Imperial Dictates and Intercultural Interaction in Nubia." In *Archaeologies of Empire: Local Participants and Imperial Trajectories*, edited by Anna L. Boozer, B.S. Düring, and B.J. Parker, pp. 21 — 56. Santa Fe, NM: SAR & UNM Press, 2020.
- Somerville, P. "The Social Construction of Home." *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 14/3 (1997): pp. 226 — 45.
- Werner, C.M., I. Altman, and D. Oxley. "Temporal Aspects of Homes: A Transactional Perspective." In *Home Environments: Human Behavior and Environment (volume 8)*, edited by Irwin Altman

and Carol M. Werner, pp. 1 — 32. Boston, MA: Springer, 1985. DOI:  
10.1007/978-1-4899-2266-3\_1

