

Kajbar and Nubian Lands: History, Case for Culture and Struggle

*Resistance and such stubbornness
Thwart the most glorious success
Till in the end, to one's disgust
One soon grows tired of being just
Goethe's Faust*

Contents:

- *A land of Ancient Culture*
- *The Business of Dams: Scavengers on the Move*
- *Popular Participation: A Matter of Perspective*
- *The First Dam on Sudanese Nile: Second Mistake*
- *Kajbar Dam: Skeletons in the Closet*
- *Hydropower Dams: The Fallacy of Development*
- *Making an Omelet: Why is it always the same few eggs!*
- *Lessons Learned: Let's Do it Again!*
- *Man without History is Not a Man: the Argument for Cultural Conservation*
- *Revisiting Kajbar: The Canary in the Mine*

The sun was setting over Nubia that cold December 4th, 1964. The trains that were chartered to transport the villagers out of Nubia and into their new homes in the Eastern part of the country have been loading for the past three days. Now the trains were ready to leave. As the siren announced the eventful departure of the train, a woman slipped out of her cabin, hurried down the stairs and was seen running back towards her village. There was a big commotion, as passengers beckoned the train operator to stop. The train came to a halt. Time passed by while concerned family and neighbors leaned out the windows in expectations. Just as some family members decided to follow her, the woman was seen, making her way back to the train, dragging her feet as her black Jarjar; the Nubian dress, tailed behind erasing her foot marks from the soft sands. When asked as to her whereabouts, she answered: "I forgot to lock my door; I never left my house without locking the door". "It seems that for the first time", so my father says, "we realized the gravity of the situation". There was nothing else to do, but sob.

A land of Ancient Culture

If there is a mention of a great Pharaoh in Ancient Egypt then he must have been the one who invaded the southern borders and enslaved the Nubians. He must have been the one on whose grave and every corner stone that he built, are Nubians in chains, exaggerated or not as to his might and prowess. Since the Fourth Dynasty and ancient Egyptians have devised all methods to conquer Nubia. They tried to beat the cataracts and defeat the Taiseti or people of the bow, by any means they mustered. Nubia was the land that produced barley, wheat and a plethora of spices. Animal hides, ostrich feathers and eggs, Ivory, gold, copper and other metals together with resins, gums, myrrh; the green gold, and

frankincense all precious to the divinities and all the norms of Egypt. The relationship between both ancient Egypt and that of Nubia was an intricate one. In fact the Oriental Institute alludes that “the cemetery at Qustul leads directly to the first great royal monuments of Egypt in a progression”. The suggestion that Nubia could well have been the seat of Egypt’s founding dynasty is not refuted to this day. Still throughout the ages peace and harmony prevailed where Egyptian temples, Gods like Amun and Goddesses; Isis and Nut, were adopted by Nubians. They added all of these to their local Gods, most important Meroitic addition was the Lion God, Apedemek. The ruins of the Lion Temple at Musawwarat are still visible to this day. Then came periods of war and humiliation between Egypt and Nubia, where every year Nubia had to furnish a quota of slaves and staples to the double crown at Memphis.

As Egypt grew and expanded, Nubia followed. As Egypt impacted the whole world, it was equally affected by the world it touched. From Hyksos or West Asians, to Greeks, Romans and Arabs, Egypt continued to restructure and reform, while Nubia; not entirely immune to such changes, retained much of its conformity and its identity throughout the ages. They kept their languages, practice their unique traditions, and enjoy their songs and dances. Nubia remained a fortress of power, commerce and trade. History recalls, that the 25th. Dynasty was that of pure Nubians. Taharga/ Piye led his people to Memphis, succeeded by his brother and nephews after him, and sported the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt for almost 70 years.

The geographical location of Nubia made of it; to the marauding north, the Corridor to Africa (Adams, 1977). It is acknowledged that if Nubians of the seventh Century have not stopped Abdullah Ibn Abi Al Sarh, Islam would have ended then, in South Africa. Nubia by 500 AD was dominantly Christian. The Monophysites carried their doctrine to the Nubian kingdoms of Noba, its capital at Faras and that of Makurra with its capital at Old Dongola and formed their Coptic church, a church that was expelled from the official Christian Church.. Noba and Makurra, in fact became a haven and bastion for persecuted Copts in the North. Letters of protests and rebuke as to the treatment of Christians in Egypt have been sent from the Nubian Patriarch to the rulers of Egypt. Contrary to Egypt that embraced Islam almost immediately after the Fatimid invasions, Nubians embraced Islam over a longer period of time. For Nubia to take on the faith and become fully Islamized seven more centuries had to pass. Christianity and Islam came with a layer of symbols and signs over the long and ancient indigenous spirituality that Nubians never abandoned. Endurance... is what humanity searches for. The chimes, amulets, chants and incense that evoked Gods and Goddesses could be seen in each and every Nubian house. Ali Osman Mohammed Salih from the Geography Department at the University of Khartoum recalls of an excavation site where a “Wali”, holy man was buried. Nubians came for blessings and offerings. This is where a group of boys will have their *Koky*; a pony-tail like, is shaved and soon circumcised. “We did not find a Wali, but we did find a well preserved mummy!” he continues “we covered it up, said nothing more about it.”

Nubians weathered the Egyptian conquests, the Roman invasions at Qasr Brim and the Religious reforms of both Christians and Moslems. They endured through defunct economies that came after overexploitation of iron mines at Merowe and diversion of trade routes to Axum. The Nubians lived through environmental and ecological plight

from drought to floods but continued to build one civilization after another. The most challenging period that the Nubians lived is that of today, where dams and the policies undertaken around their buildings threaten not only their culture and traditions but their very existence.

The Business of Dams: Scavengers on the Move

The Government of Sudan (GoS) considers the building of Dal, Kajabar and Merowe dams a done deal, and as such merits no further discussion or consultation with the local population. Bauman in his 1989 article eloquently describes the attitude and perspective of governments as that of El Bashir's "Development-induced resettlement is, in many ways, the ultimate expression of a state with its monopoly on the management of violence and its ambitious engineering projects, freed from all other non-political power or institutions of social self-management, and able to exert ultimate control over the location of people and things within its territory". There is a dire need to reverse this trend at the dawn of the twenty first century.

The business of Dams is a big business, where the attribution of funds are all legal and legitimate on paper, but in reality they are all construed figures, easily manipulate and extremely bendable. Lori Potttinger of IRN puts it simply as "Whatever the government had to hide about the project was considered as business-as-usual to the industry representatives". The whole process of funding, dispersing of those funds can escape the keenest auditors.

The search and endowment to the appropriate contractors from moving tonnage of earth all the way to the proverbial screwing of a light bulb can be elusive. The fact of the matter is that tenders are attributed at whim and bearing at heart the best interest of investee' and not investors. Dams, like that of Kajabar, become a heaven for fat cats hovering over these open-ended deals. Alsotom, the French company contracted for turbine installation, known to have declared its bankruptcy, suddenly came to live with its Kajabar contract. It still has many court battles to fight and money to pay for defaulting on its contracts. Yet, the GoS still decided to allocate the lion's share of the funds to the company. They are also the ones considered to install the turbines at Kajabar.

Popular Participation: A Matter of Perspective

Aswan came into being at an important and difficult turn in the history of the region. With Nasser at the helm, the euphoria that flared the nation and touched the whole region was powerful. Nasser, a young lieutenant in the Egyptian army, defies the whole western world and its institutions to usher in a new age full with hope and fulfillment of a dream. His paradigm resided on heavy investment in emerging technologies and scientific advancement. Indeed, the region was in dire need for a new leader and a new vision. The fact that Nasser who gave the directives for the construction of the Dam, made it extremely difficult for Nubians on both sides of the borders to muster a critical mass to oppose the construction of Aswan dam. The presence of such a giant in the scene made it difficult for some Nubians to refuse negotiations of resettlement. Nubians with political

affiliations; in Khartoum and there was a good number of them, they realized that they were in facing a *fait accompli*. They settled for the second best; the pursuit of just and sustainable settlement for their people. They deplored the whole affair but ardently believed; as Daoud Abdel Latif; a well respected veteran official and a great mind, puts it “(that) your sacrifices for the betterment of the country will be acknowledged by the whole of the nation”. The Nubians in Egypt did not fair as well as their counterparts on the Sudanese borders. They were resettled in a harsh and foreboding arid land, decimated by drought they had to be relocated again.

On the Sudanese side, President Ibrahim Abboud’s plane touched Wadi Halfa’s Airport on December 6th. 1959. Few minutes later he was addressing thousands of Nubians who came to see him and listen to what he had to say about their evacuation from their lands. He was touched by the welcome and renowned Nubian hospitality. Nubians watched in equal emotions as he chocked on his own words, as tears rolled down his cheeks and as with difficulty could he bring decorum to the end of his speech. Dr. Mohamed Ahmed Ali, his Minister of Health a child of Nubia himself, came to his aid and rescue by addressing the crowd in their own language. The fact that the head of state himself showed up to explain, did not soften the opposition to relocation. Still his gesture was much appreciated. Forty years, El Bashir never met with the Nubians at Kajabar, nor the relocated Amri, Manasir and/ Hamadab. All that we saw of his negotiations are security harassment, confinement, tear gas, bullets and more tears after his security forces folded.

The First Dam on Sudanese Nile: Second Mistake

The \$1.2 billion hydropower Merowe Dam, also known as Hamadab Dam is in full swing and should be officially inaugurated coming year 2009. It is built at the level of the fourth cataract of the Nile. The region is inhabited by the major Manasir, Amri and Hamadab Arabs. They all share the same culture and related to each other. The dam with a height of 67 meters; will create a reservoir with a length of 174 kilometers and a surface area of 476 square kilometers. The expanse of such a lake, like that of Kajabar, will rob about 900 families or in total about 50,000 people from their ancestral home. The Hamadab were literally pushed 45 km into the desert in an effort to relocate them. Many ended in shanty towns around the capital city; Khartoum, fleeing the scorching climate and the impoverished conditions. Time and again the Hamadab complained to the authority, but their grievances fell but on deaf ears.

Ali Askouri of the Leadership Office of the Hamadab Affected People (LOHAP) wrote “the government maintains strict censorship on any news about local resistance to the project”. He adds further “The affected population has offered to negotiate over the years, but the government has categorically refused to meet with their representatives. Instead, the government opted to appoint its own agent to represent the affected people”. (Sudan Bullitin, 2004). In solidarity, Peter Bosshard, of International Rivers and Nicholas Hildyard from the Corner House, a British advocacy group, visited the more than 800 families that were in the Multaga Settlement. Peter writes “The situation at El Multaga is in stark contrast to the official pronouncements. The soil is so poor that even with

irrigation; the farmers can't sell their produce on the markets. On the other hand, they have to pay for fertilizer and electricity to power the irrigation pumps – services that the annual floods of the Nile provided for free at their previous homes” (Bosshard, 2005). There are no surprises there, as the Merowe Dam Project authority can not be trusted. All that could be said to this last statement: *Deja vue*.

Finally, a quote from Eawag's 2006 review, a Swiss federal aquatic research institute, on Lahmeyer's environmental impact assessment (EIA) report might shed some light on the absurdity of the situation:

“(The EIA report) was far from meeting European or international standards. No serious attempt was made to use “the vast scientific knowledge base on the effects of large dams”. It concluded that the dam would draw sediment and that it was likely to lose more than 30 per cent of its capacity over the next 50 year”.

Kajabar Dam: Skeletons in the Closet

The \$1.5 billion hydropower Kajabar Dam is expected to produce 200 megawatts of power. It will be 221 meters high, higher than Merowe Dam. The reservoir is expected to stretch 140 km behind the dam, with an anticipated storage capacity of 1.8 billion gallons of water. Government estimates show that only nine villages that will be flooded, but since no precise figure on the span of the lake, information on the ground indicate that at least 100 villages are threatened by the floods. As in Merowe, to date there are no Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) carried out and only arbitrary and non convincing feasibility studies produced by the Kajabar Dam Project Authority. Since, as mentioned above, the GoS never consulted with the local population nor has the process been permeated by transparency, or to public scrutiny, little is known as to what are the actual environmental, social, archeological, etc. studies that has been conducted so far. The central government has little to show for, which leads to the only conclusion that the Government of Sudan has not conducted these studies, nor do they consider that they are important to be carried out.

The GoS seems to be in no bind, the least ethically, to present any of those critical reports. I have mentioned a number of issues related to Kajabar (Gamal, 1998). Maybe one of the most damning reports is that of Engineer Ibrahim Suliman. In a memorandum circulated by The National Committee for the Rescue of Nubia, he illustrates a direct relation between the architecture of Kajabar Dam and inundation of 99 villages; not nine, in the Mahas region. The Project Authority did not refute the report nor comment on its validity.

Hydropower Dams: The Fallacy of Development

Much as Aswan Dam was hailed as the fourth Egyptian pyramid and savior of Egypt from its energy crises, it became part of the problem and not the solution. At the time Aswan dam furnished about half the energy requirement for Egypt. Today with population explosion and industrial growth there is a steady increase in demand for

energy in Egypt. The dam provides a meager 13% of the total energy requirements in the country. It is projected that by 2010, the supply would dwindle even more. The fact that huge dams around the world are a band-aid solution and not a sustainable one, is but a fact that makes prudent policy makers and planners in continuous pursuit for viable alternatives. In the US; where it was a trend to build dams during the last century, many dams are being torn down setting the rivers free.

Much ink has been spilt on the problems of Aswan Dam. Architects outlined at least fourteen flaws to the main structure of the dam, others wrote on the adverse environmental impact of the reservoir on the geophysical and ecological regions that span from tropical diseases to adverse affects on the fauna and flora. With silt accumulating behind the dam, the fertility of a soil that sustained Egyptians for thousands of years has been severely compromised. Beside the economic toll exerted by the introduction of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, health hazards and pollution remains the theme of the day. If it weren't for the resilience of the Egyptian *fellah*, that strip on the Nile would have been a barren, scorched and empty land. There is an on-going research as to the ecological and social impact on fisheries in the Delta and the Mediterranean coastal regions. These are heavy consequences that we can not afford to pay.

Making an Omelet: Why is it always the same few eggs!

It seems that the economic approach is one and the only one that the government of El Bashir is advocating with regards to building of Kajabar. The fact that we have an infallible proves in our own backyard that dams and resettlement do not contribute to sound economies, were never considered. It seems that the rage occasioned by opposition to dams and relocation makes the authority further dig in their heels and refuse to budge from their initial stance. The blight of Nubian migration has been well documented in Daffalla's; The Nubian Exodus (1975) and El Hassan (1998); The Story of the Drowning of the Most Beautiful Sudanese Town. Both authors are non-Nubian natives and more stories are imminent. The story that needs to be told is that of Nubian after 1964 in their new home: Khashim El Girba.

It is now almost half a century since the Nubians were resettled in the Eastern part of Sudan: Khashim El Girba. The Khashim El Girba Project was constructed under the blue print of El Gezira, El Managil Extension, El Rosaries, El Rahad, and other parastatal agricultural projects. Basically cotton is planted for cash, some food and fodder crop to complete the agricultural cycle and make it sustainable. The Atbara River, tributary of the great Nile, fed the canals for the project. The idea was to make of that region an economic *tour de force* and an example for progress and development. Sad Reading! The system did not last long. The canals started to break, the cotton and wheat unmarketable, the Onion Factory at Kassala; that was built to process onions from the project became bankrupt and had to close down by the mid-eighties and soon the canals were full with malaria-vector mosquito larvae and Bilharzias snails.

The health facilities substandard in their performance were not able to deal with the endemic tropical diseases during the late eighties and up to the nineties. They called all of

the symptoms “Homiyat” or fevers, as they meshed and mixed together that no one could discern a culpable pathogen. Disease, through history of humanity is great motivator for people to migrate. Nubians, like their forbearers, had to seek refuge in and around the capital city Khartoum. There is not one Nubian today who doesn’t have a family member in El Sahfa, Al Kalakla(at) and/ even El Thora(at). All of these towns are in the suburb of the triangular capital city Khartoum. We, as Nubians in the urban settings, were very proud in Khartoum when bus loads of Nubians came from the village to join in wedding festivities or share our sorrow during death ceremonies. Now the buses are appreciably fewer, far and in between, not only that, they are more frequent the reverse way; from Khartoum to El Girba

Lessons Learned: Let’s Do it Again!

Enough time to extract some valuable lessons from the emigration of Nubian from their homelands and resettlement in Khashim El Girba. The whole experience, from all point of views, has been a failure. Today, the infrastructure of the entire 33 villages is in shambles. Schools for children are in abysmal condition, they are cracked, rundown and dirty edifices that are hazards to any human use. Most of the teachers; poorly paid and appreciated, fled to Saudi Arabia and Gulf countries seeking a better life. In 1964 Serra Matu; my own village, or Village Number 4 as it was officially called by the Resettlement Authority, had 750 built-in houses. By 1985 there were 350 young men in Jeddah alone from Serra Matu, which meant that half of the village was missing a son. The village is unrecognizable by the end of eighties and seems to be one huge camp hit by a hurricane. It is heart wrenching to see once proud and independent nation to be subjected to that tremendous pressure of eking a decent living from a project badly conceived and executed. There is not enough space nor that is the purpose of this paper to write on the failure of Khashim El Girba experiment and the blight of the Nubians. There is tons of evidence that can occupy social scientists, environmentalists, anthropologists, etc. for decades to come advocating that Khashim El Girba is not to be repeated or should not ever be repeated.

The World Commission on Dams, emphasizes the importance of transparency and public participation throughout the decision-making process for water and energy projects. In their recommendations they emphasize “No dam should be built without the demonstrable acceptance of the affected people, and without the free, prior and informed consent of affected indigenous and tribal peoples” (WCD website). This was not observed in the case of Kajabar, Merowe or even Dal; of which little is known.

The fact that alternatives to hydropower Dam energy are sought across the world is a caveat to be pursued. The move toward small hydropower dams, solar, wind and other forms of energy is being developed in the whole of the African continent and Sudan. Remain an ardent investment from our countries in those emerging technologies. On the political front the Nile involves 9 other African countries, and to evade the 1908 prophesy of Winston Churchill, that “the Nile itself shall perish gloriously and never reach the sea” there must be a concerted efforts for those countries to come together.

Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and soon Tanzania, have each started their own electrical grids. Can Sudan cooperate with those neighboring countries? Our needs for energy resources are limitless, our vision of how to harness these energies should be infinite.

Man without History is Not a Man: the Argument for Cultural Conservation

The opposition to dams around the world usually centers on economy versus social aspects of the project. The argument of economy has long been refuted not only by scientists, economists, planners, politicians, human rights activists and in an era of Global Warming and Polar Ice Melt, by environmentalists. The only argument that remains to be discussed is that of the social scientists on the importance of culture and survival of cultural heritage to humans.

It should be clear that when we talk about culture and its conservation we do not mean that we are opting for *Kabida*; the Nubian bread, *versus crepes* or buns. That, as we are advocating for the preservation of Nubian culture, that it should not be understood as an eugenic concept of exclusion and not inclusion. History of Man does not belong to any one individual or a group of individuals. It is the history of mankind. Therefore, you and I alone do not possess any right to destroy our past cultural heritage (Ota, 2004).

The Nubians are all over the world today. They fanned since thousands of years to return to their roots and uphold whatever mores, traditions and ethics that they have inherited through time and process. Nubians; with a strong matrilineal bonds, have intermarried with different tribes in Sudan, Egypt and around the world. This has been a dictum of their history, their survival instinct and their inherent constitution since memorial time.

The fact that today, we are seeking, the preservation of culture, that cuts through language, geographical and the ecological boundaries. This strip of land called Nubia is the only remaining edifice of that history, culture and existence. We lost Aksha, Buhen, Kasantarti, the churches at Meinarti and Faras. Denied to all of their children the two-storied Romanesque house of the Ayoub family at Ashkeit and the beautiful large house of *nazir* Salih Isa Abdu (Salhein) at Dibeira, with its extensive verandah and multitude citrus and fig trees where the marriage of my uncle Sayyed took place in 1951. By flooding the last of the remaining Nubian lands, we, the Nubians are reduced to a group of people with no sense of memory, no past and no future to look for.

It is important to acknowledge that the fate of the people is connected to the land itself. Not Nubians alone, but human beings around the world. This fact alone makes the idea of relocation impossible to fathom. The indigenous/native Americans or Amery Indians as they are called, lost their lands. Their livelihood and psyche were rooted in the physical land. They were relocated to reservations, what became of them? With the base of their lives stolen, their Gods gone, they were lost.

It is sad when Serra Matu is called, village # 3 and Deibera is # village 7 and Faras is village # 1. These numbers are convenient for Washington D.C. streets, but not to human history that span thousands of years. Read Kubara. A water canal, even if it is a major,

can never replace the Nile. All the cotton in the world and its income is no equivalent to the lost date palms. No dawns, sunsets or moon are equivalent to that of Nubia. Think about it; when we lost the Nile, three major traditions were gone: baptism, wedding and blessings. When the date palm is no more, the women; custodian of the indigenous knowledge as breeders and selectors of the trees, vanish. Women, who treat and process honey and Dakay; the sweet brew, from dates are gone. Walliab's grandmother, who was a virtual griot, had a story for every *birish*; date palm leave mats, she spun. Her knowledge and that of other warrior women of Nubia, is gone. Songs like Wardi's "Fenti tod El Margiha; Nor, Elahi il Nagiya" are gone. Children playing under a full moon are a story by itself. ErKabi, the monster, stories that my mother told us, have long perished. We are left with the story of "Snow White" told to our brown kids.

Culture is a way of life, of how we perceive ourselves, our identity and what we value most in life. In brief...it's the essence of our existence. What are we trying to say? Nubia is enduring, sublime, yet capricious. It has changed, yet remained. In a context of a changing Sudan, of a changing Africa it is this type of endurance that we seek, that teaches us, that guides and shapes our mores. What is Sudanese history without Nubia,. Most importantly, what is Sudan's future without knowledge and capacity of the past?

Indeed, Nubia is the type of milestone that represents flexibility and preservation all at once. It is a symbol and ...a treasure.

Revisiting Kajabar: The Canary in the Mine

Kajabar violates many decreed environmental guidelines and a number of undeclared social and human costs. The fact that Kajabar is born out of closed-door meetings, non neither transparent nor negotiated settlements with the communities is a slap in the face to Nubians. The government is professing that it is democratic and acting in the best interest of both the Nubians and the country, meanwhile any criticism to the project is met with an unequivocal brutality and oppression. The footage that were shown around the world of unarmed civilians, who congregated in a march to vocalize their opinion on Kajabar, were met with tear gas and rubber bullets. The pandemonium led many to the river to cool their soar eyes, but this did not stop the security forces from pursuing and firing at them. By the time the marchers got to the canyon the real killing started. Men, women and children were targeted. The butchery of "Black Friday"; June 6, 2007, will go down in history as a cowardly and despicable act of murder. Mohammed Fakir Dyab, a boy of sixteen, was shot that day amongst 11 others. It is the greatest tragedy for a parent to survive his children.

In Khartoum brave men and women were imprisoned and made to sign the rights of their lives to security forces. The opinions and views of a citizen is of no value, and we are not oblivious of the fact, but the rage of a nation and the rights of peoples can not and will not be abased. I refuse to think that we should be in a museum and talked about as an extinct species. The glory of the Nubians shall not be reduced to the exhibits of human

passage. We are here to stay. We will take our cause nation and world wide and even if we do not succeed, we would like for history to know that we at least... did try!

Arif Gamal,
UC Berkeley
Berkeley, California

References

- Adams, Williams 1977. Nubia: Corridor to Africa. Princeton
- Askouri, Ali 2004. Sudan Tribune. July 19th., 2004
- Bauman, Z 1989. Modernity and the Holocaust, Ithaca: Cornell university Press.
- Bosshard, Peter. 2005. World Rivers Review. Volume 20, Number 2/April
- Daffalla, Hassan. 1975. The Nubian Exodus. C. Hurst & Company.
- Elhassan, Mohamed Said Mohammed. 1998. The Story of the Drowning of the Most Beautiful Town in Sudan. Nadar Press. Damascus-Syria
- Gamal, Arif (1998).World Rivers Review. Volume 13, 5
- Oliver-Smith, Antony. 1996. In Mc Dowell, C. Understanding Impoverishment: The consequences of Development-Induced Displacement, Providence/Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Suliman, Ibrahim (1998). Internal memo: The Rescue Nubia National Committee.