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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Emotional Capital and Other Ontologies of the Architect

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This article presents a narrative of placemaking and architecture that posits the emotional as a foundational framework for spatial production. Written from within an African episteme, it tells the story of Nubian displacement villages in Egypt and their environments through the lens of oral testimonies about three Nubian women who are members of my family, and who partook in the process of rebuilding their settlement villages between the 1960s and 1980s. What does it mean to build beyond common Western understandings, especially in the context of Nubian society where there is societal appreciation of emotional contributions to spatial production? And how does this affect common, and gendered, notions of the figure of the architect? The conceptual framework of this paper registers the emotional as a potent factor in placemaking by engaging recent feminist scholarship which has reconceptualised Pierre Bourdieu's notion of capitals to include 'emotional capital'. It uncovers 'invisible' — or rather actively invisibilised — actors in placemaking, and, by doing so, credits another kind of placemaker, thus expanding our understanding of the architect. This leads to an 'other' ontology of placemaking and placemakers — one that expands the possibilities of attribution, involvement, and performance in contemporary practice, and recognises the emotional labourer as an architect.

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## Introduction

The *emotional* in placemaking is not an unfamiliar issue to scholars of the built environment. It is a factor that appears in the study of usability, safety, post-occupancy, and many other avenues of enquiry. In this text, however, I propose the use of the emotional as a framework for spatial production, not only as a symbolic gesture or a post-occupancy reaction, but in the realisation, materialisation, and operation of the built environment. However, the case I am making here calls for an explicit pronouncement of my (re)positioning as Nubian, woman, and architect. Unavoidably, this text approaches the identity of the architect. I wonder what the recognition of the emotional as a method of spatial production would mean for contemporary perceptions of the profession of the architect, whose identity as a labourer has lately suffered a loss of awareness (Deamer 2016).

The gendered practice of architecture is another unavoidable issue; however, I depart from the valid question of women architects in professional practice and the imbalance between men and women in architecture schools. Numerous studies have examined the disparity in the number of licensed architects depending on gender, and shed light on the difficulties that women practitioners continue to face (Adams and Tancred 2000; Fowler and Wilson 2004; Hughes 1998). Rather, this text looks at how practice becomes gendered by exploring how our perception of emotion as the foundation for building

actively and retroactively affects our understanding of the architect's gender.

I pursue two theoretical ambitions in this text. First, I seek to shed light on 'invisible' actors — or rather, actors who have been actively made invisible — involved in placemaking, and, by doing so, credit another kind of placemaker, thus expanding our understanding of the architect. Second, I develop a conceptual framework that allows for recognizing emotional work as a potent factor in placemaking, in particular, by evoking the term 'emotional capital' (Reay 2000), an extension of the idea of 'cultural capital' explored by Pierre Bourdieu (2011 [1964]). I will put this term to analytical work within an empirical context — Nubian building culture after displacement — in order to understand how emotional resources operate within the surrounding economy. Combining these two approaches, I want to answer questions such as, What does it mean to build? What are the different resources that contribute to a building? And what is an architect?

For me, seeing and recognising the emotional as a placemaking regimen was only possible through a Nubian indigenous lens. Nubian land was blighted by large development projects in the 20th century. Nubians are a historically matripotent<sup>1</sup> society, and we remain matrilineal, outside state records, to this day. This article focuses on Nubian displacement villages and their environments, in which I was born, grew up, and conducted several years of scholarly research.

Neither my academic research in the village site nor my scholarly mapping were enough to allow recognition of the emotional in the built environment. Instead, I could register these emotional operations in the built environment only after I switched from being a scholar

back to being a Nubian woman, when my interview subjects stopped being mere objects of study and again became my kin; as Donna Haraway says, when you have kin, the kin has you (Paulsen 2019). Consequently, I draw epistemic contrasts between the perspectives of being situated in the Nubian/indigenous/African culture of knowing, on the one hand, and of my Western academic training, on the other. The former in particular provided the lens through which I was able to revisit the stories of three Nubian women in Nubian displacement villages to trace how emotion was utilised in building, and how these women's emotional contribution was recognised by their community. Thus, the insertion of an emotional lens allowed me to produce an ontological perspective on both placemaking and placemakers.<sup>2</sup>

African philosophy has long recognised emotion as a framework. For instance, Léopold Sédar Senghor (1962), in his theory of *negritude*, posits the notion of emotion as a function of knowledge and postulates a distinctive African mode of apprehension. He articulates that '*Emotion is African, as Reason is Hellenic*'. Reason, however, has been the cornerstone of Western epistemology since the Enlightenment. Moreover, Western philosophical debates have critically treated and problematised the historical postulations of reason as male (Lloyd 1993) and reduced the woman and her emotion into a reactionary biological entity (Held 1990).

However, I do not assert deterministic bipolarities when discussing Europe and Africa, and neither do I contrast the emotional indigenous/African against the rational Western/European. Emotion and rational thinking cannot be separated; for example, emotions are considered a way of reasoning (Ahmed 2014). Rather, I am attempting to rely on, join, and serve a pan-African epistemic project in which the production of knowledge from and for an Afro-oriented political interest is an effort towards healing and decolonisation. I engage with resistance, in both Western theory that transcends the hegemony of patriarchal morality and with African theory that is re-emerging against the hegemony of epistemic dispossession.

### Repositioning My Feminist Lens

'Your grandmother built that'. One of my aunts said this in a phone conversation with me as part of my preparation for fieldwork in 2016 in my village, Qustul. The image of women doing physical labour – in Rosie the Riveter fashion – burst into my imagination at her words, ideas of my grandmother in her youth, with her fellow strong Nubian women, standing over roofs and building their place after their displacement. These women had a history of investing their physical (bodily) resources into placemaking. However, when conducting further research and collecting testimonies regarding my aunt's statement, I found that, although people credited my grandmother with 'building', she had neither contributed physical labour nor drawn the blueprints. Rather, she conducted a number of emotional exercises to initiate the process of building, acquire funds, and decide on the social composition of the home.

Anthropologist Ann Jennings (1998) noted similar practices in the village of West Aswan (Gharb Aswan) in the 1990s, where men funded and often decided on the composition of the house, yet women sometimes joined the building efforts, most often with plastering work, and are credited with 'building' the house. Thus, a Nubian woman can contribute to the physical building and the decision-making through the spatial composition (design), yet the credit of building is given to her for her emotional contribution in a process so innate that my grandmother's contributions are recognised even by the most misogynistic individuals interviewed in the course of this research.

It was at this point that I discovered my own epistemic displacement; not only did I exist in several epistemic paradigms, but often one of these paradigms was used to assert hegemony over others. It was apparent that what it means to 'build' in the Nubian context did not correspond to what I learned in school in Cairo or at university in Europe. The term 'epistemic displacement' comes from postcolonial, Afro-feminist, and African-American studies. Morris describes it as the 'displaced one, whose Being and cultural yearning is caught in the dominant epistemes, is also trapped, constantly, above, beyond and outside the frequencies of his actual quotidian anthropology' (2010: 101).

This requires a sober and responsible positioning of my work in feminist theory, as well as a positioning of myself as a Nubian feminist. Therefore, this research becomes an ontological exercise in locating the self amid displacement while actively and beneficially engaging with Western feminism. Chandra Talpade Mohanty proposes, in her essay 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses' (1988), two simultaneous mechanisms essential for conducting research as a 'third world feminist'. First is an internal critique of hegemonic feminism. In my case, that entails understanding that what 'woman' means to my Nubian self is different from the intended meaning in Western feminist literature. The second is to formulate geographically, historically, and culturally grounded feminist concerns and strategies, which means I must formulate my understanding of 'women' from my position as a Nubian. In the goal of this research, Mohanty's first mechanism will allow me to see the particulars of the other meanings of building while the second will reveal the ways in which the performance of Nubian womanhood makes a place.

A woman coming from an Afro-feminist perspective will have a different 'mode of being' than a man, as is the case for the French feminists Luce Irigaray (1985a; 1985b) and Hélène Cixous (1983), or a different voice that is culturally distinct from a man, as noted in Anglo-American feminist works by Carol Gilligan (1982) and Mary Field Belenky et al. (1986). The Nubian woman, like her African sisters, seeks to be restored to her place in the scheme of things as a caregiver, both to human beings and to the surrounding environment (Ibanga 2018). Nubian women fulfil a gender role, not as an oppressed non-agent or an essentialised identity, but as a participant in the writing of the gender contract. At the same time, Nubian women consciously

contribute to the ever-fluctuating definition of their essence; their performance of womanhood is a beneficial political act that garners both social honour and material prosperity, as it is beneficial to her community, in which she performs her care.

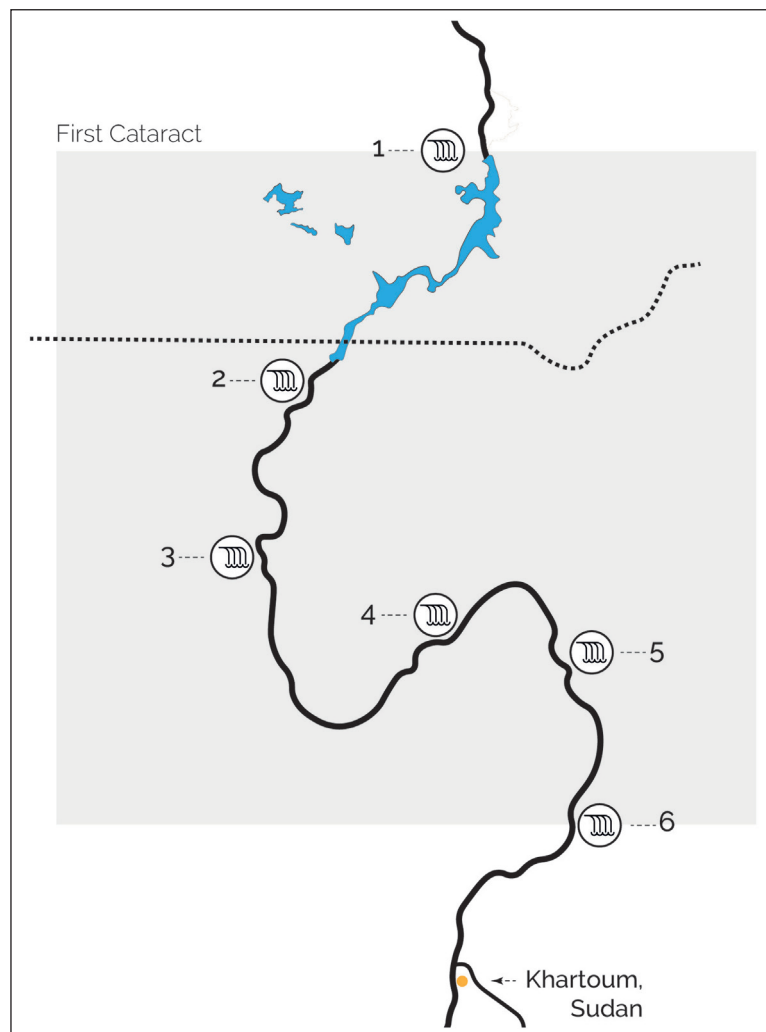
### Nubians and the Building of a New Qustul

The site of my three stories is our village of Qustul, one of the settlements built for Nubians displaced by the High Dam. The Nubian culture had populated the Nile River valley for millennia between the first and fifth Nile cataracts (Adams 1977) (**Figure 1**), but lost their ancestral land to the Egyptian state's ambitions for 'development' in the 1960s, when the government embarked on the High Dam project. The High Dam was Egypt's first postcolonial national project, aided by technical assistance from the Soviet Union (Strzepek et al. 2008). It was Egypt's gate to modernity and industrialisation, as envisioned by its then-president, Gamal Abdel Nasser.

The High Dam was the last of a series of hydropower projects on the River Nile that had all resulted in shrinking Nubian land along the Nile banks. The Aswan Low

Dam caused the first dispossession of Nubians by dams, which were first constructed on the First Cataract by British colonialists in 1902 (Cookson-Hills 2013). The Low Dam was heightened twice, in 1912 and 1933 (Waterbury 1979). Every time a barrier rose across the Nile, Nubians lost part of their land to rising water levels. After the 1933 heightening of the Low Dam, Nubians had to rebuild the majority of their villages on higher ground. Their efforts were commended by Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy for their ability to reproduce almost all of their built environment in a short period of time – twelve months – with very little state support (El-Hakim 1993).

Sadly, their reconstruction efforts were soon to be followed by further destruction and displacement, as the High Dam reservoir swallowed all remaining Nubian land in Egypt and parts of Sudan over the course of the 1960s (Dafalla 1975). An estimated 113,000 Nubians were displaced by the Egyptian government because of the High Dam project (Mitchell 2002: 313) and resettled in a state-built project in the Kom Ombo valley, tens of kilometres away from their ancestral roots along the Nile. The state-built project was unfinished at the time of resettlement



**Figure 1:** A map of the area between modern-day Egypt and Sudan shows Nubian land between the five cataracts; the blue area is the land flooded due to the dam and its reservoir. Map by Menna Agha.

(Serag 2013), and the finished units were seen by both Nubians and experts as unsatisfactory and unimaginative (Serageldin 1982), prompting calls to produce a built environment that could accommodate the needs of the Nubians. Nubians have been actively building and rebuilding their houses for a century, until now, to build and adjust to their resettlement housing units, as they crack and require rebuilding every seven to ten years due to the nature of the soil in the displacement settlements, a cycle that affects Nubian household economy to this day.

An emotional engagement in the production of the built environment after resettlement was evident during the surge of home-making after displacement. Looking closely at this building boom reveals emotional acts that directly impacted the material development of resettlement villages. Qustul, one of the state-planned settlements, is part of a larger project consisting of 42 settlements constructed for resettling displaced Nubians, which the state called New Nubia but which we call Tahgeer ('the place of displacement'), a word that has become the commonly used name for the project, as well as a signifier of pain and loss.

Like other Nubian settlements, Qustul witnessed a surge in placemaking activities during the early years of displacement. The main focus of the early building activity was to fulfil the urgent need for residences. In a 2013 interview, the mayor of Qustul stated that only one-fifth<sup>3</sup> of residential needs were met at the time of resettlement in the 1960s; most of the houses were not built and many of the built dwelling units lacked doors and roofs. This required the community to rally together and accommodate one another while investing all available resources in making acceptable houses. The houses produced within this surge commonly have Nubian typologies rather than the state-offered dwelling typologies.

The dwelling units provided by the state were significantly smaller than traditional Nubian houses. The surface area of a Nubian house before resettlement ranged between 500 and 2,000 m<sup>2</sup> (El-Hakim 1993). The large areas were used to accommodate social, political, and economic functions. The state dwellings, on the other hand, offered surface areas of between 100 and 260 m<sup>2</sup> (Serageldin 1982), a fraction of the old Nubian house, whose social, political, and economic functions are replaced by a state-built facility of modernist utilitarian design. Nubian women, like their sisters in other African contexts, lost their place of power in the house to capitalism-oriented industrialisation (Ibanga 2018).

The Nubian culture is traditionally a matrilineal one (Kneller 1993), with a history of a matriarchal rule and an oral history populated by stories that glorify women. Although the Nubian matrilineal heritage witnessed dissolution of this matriarchal heritage, Nubians still maintain several practices linking to that history. For Nubians, a person's name is always attached to and followed by their mother's name, unlike the formal system that is patrilineal. Meanwhile, most Egyptian cultures consider the mother's name dishonourable,<sup>4</sup> and the attachment of her name to a child signifies that that child is illegitimate, born out of wedlock. For me, though, in travelling

between these paradigms, I feel it is an extension of my heritage when my village and people attach my name to my daughter's name.

The first displaced generation, those who were the last to see Old Nubia, were responsible for the construction efforts that started the moment they arrived in their new settlement. These shortcomings were apparently due to the hasty nature of the resettlement project and the shortage of materials and labour (Hopkins and Mehanna 2010: 251). The development of the Nubian space, as well as the use of existing space with a Nubian agency, did not stop with the following generations, who remembered and summoned their old land and old villages in their new constructions.

Two American anthropologists, Robert Fernea and John Kennedy, were responsible for the ethnographic survey in Nubia during and after the displacement in the 1960s. They noted the vast construction efforts in Nubian displacement villages:

There is scarcely a neighbourhood in New Nubia in which some houses have not been radically altered through the mounting of china plates above the doors, as in Old Nubia, and by plastering the exterior with mud to create a facade upon which traditional Nubian designs may be painted. (Fernea and Kennedy 1966: 351)

The creation of the house in the 'Nubian way' was crucial to Nubians; therefore, they often paid for an expensive remodelling of the new settlement: 'Some house-owners have spent as much as 300 EGP in their efforts to bring the new homes into conformity with traditional Nubian standards' (Fernea and Kennedy 1966: 351). Importantly, in 1960, Egyptian per capita income was 52.4 EGP per year, despite the dire economic situations Nubians endured during their displacement.

But Fernea, and other scholars who studied Nubia, projected a definition of the builder/designer that is far different from the one I postulate here. Fernea wrote, 'Frequently; one man sets a standard soon emulated by owners of other homes along the same street' (1963: 122), which is contrary to what local histories imply. Hearing stories with a Nubian ear contradicts some of these narratives, because Nubian women as well as Nubian men are credited for their built environment. A multitude of builders are also mentioned in everyday life, conveyed in the way in which people, to this day, label different houses with the name of their makers. Among these labels, women's names are in use as much as men's.

In the literature about Nubians and Nubian displacement, which is almost always written through the lens of an outside observer, references to the act of building are almost always, both implicitly and explicitly, associated with men. Evidently, scholars who studied the displacement in the 1960s and 70s have only interacted with men, perhaps because most Nubian women spoke only Nubian at that time. Thus, the bulk of existing scholarship was built on male narratives. There were some exceptions, especially in the work of female researchers like

the German – and honorary Nubian<sup>5</sup> – anthropologist Armgard Goo-Grauer (2019), who lived there for years during their displacement and studied women's house decorations.

Moreover, the general tendency by formal institutions (e.g., state and research institutions) was to consider men 'the head of the house', which in itself has disenfranchised Nubian women from many services and helped to move the Nubian social fabric further into patriarchy. The problem that created the contrasting narratives in my assessment is not only the blindness of researchers to women and their role in building, but also, and more fundamentally, that the researchers saw only the act of building and what it means through their own epistemic lens and not through a Nubian one.

### Storytelling

To reveal how emotion contributes to building, I map narratives about three generations of matriarchs in my family and their credited projects in the built environment. By juxtaposing the oral history of a displaced family with the material evidence – the buildings that remain in use – I find that my foremothers, like other women in Qustul, have often contributed to the building of Qustul since the 1960s. I find a regimen of spatial production that relies primarily on emotional resources, even though these settlements are suffering the economic decay found in similar cases around the world. Such emotional regimes are gradually losing their pertinence and potency.

These stories occurred between the mid-'60s and the mid-'80s, when Nubians were trying to make sense of their new environment, survive the loss of their ancestral land, and address the shortcomings in their displacement settlements. These stories are of my people in Qustul, but they are also recurrent stories of a building regimen and in no way an exception to the norm during the early years of displacement. There are stories similar to these in all Nubian villages where the emotional resource was a primary one, used by both women and men.

Methodologically, this oral history enquiry comes with a certain complexity, as the stories are formulated through overlapping autoethnographic notes and an interview process that took place between 2016 and 2018 in Qustul

and Cairo, with Nubian men and women in my family who are from Qustul. All these stories were either present in the 'storyscape' of my entire life, so I knew about them, or repeated to me intentionally, time and time again. Nevertheless, dealing with them in this particular study required my reseeing them and retelling them to myself. Retelling stories is an effective diagnostic tool (Morrow 1988) that induces a reassessment of the teller's position and returns the story so its context can be recognised.

The three stories in this article convey a different type of contribution to the making of the built environment in Qustul, other than physical labour, one that shapes material culture; it is the emotional investment by these women that counts as an added value to the built environment. The stories of my people were told by my kin, a term that includes a more expansive network and a larger number of people than is common in a Western context. I do not use the real names of those who are with us. However, I use the names of the matriarchs about whom we tell these stories but whose existence is no longer in this world, and in saying their names, I honour them (**Figure 2**).

### *Emotional Drivers of a Building: The Story of Sakina Abaya*

'Who built this house?', I asked my uncle. 'My grandmother Sakina Abaya, my hands are witnesses', answered my second uncle Zaki, who continued to jokingly tell me about his grandmother's tyranny. She was a matriarch of a large family, mother to five children, grandmother to 19, and a great-grandmother to many more, of whom I am one. While sipping his tea, Zaki nostalgically recalled how she used to wake him and his cousins at dawn and 'drag them half-asleep' to go build his uncle's house. 'We were around 15 or 16 years old', he said. 'We just wanted to sleep there, but we went with her anyways'. When I asked why, he said, 'It's my grandmother, we loved her'. Zaki told me the story in Qustul, while sitting on a Mastaba, a masonry bench adjacent to Nubian houses common in displacement villages (Zaki 2016).

The events of this story occurred in the early 1970s, a few years after the move from Old Nubia when there was a surge in construction by displaced Nubians. Four of Sakina Abaya's children were in Qustul during the state-operated



**Figure 2:** A map of Qustul showing the sites of the buildings in the three stories. Map by Menna Agha.

census prior to the resettlement, but the fifth was studying in Khartoum with his family and, therefore, he was not issued a house. The construction of this son's house began when 'she had commissioned a master mason with the foundation work, as we did not understand the soil of this [new settlement]' (Figure 3). Zaki continued, 'She sat there, at a close distance under the shade while we started working with the master mason. She brought food and a tea-making kit every day, she woke us up, came with us, and left with us'. Then I asked, 'Who decided [on] the division of the house?' He replied, 'She did, she would tell us to get this wall to end here, or leave a place for windows here ... She was the boss, she understood building and was never fooled by commissioned workers; in fact, they all respected her because she gave them food and made them tea whenever they wanted'.

Sakina Abaya initiated the building process by invoking her grandchildren's love and respect for her that she had earned over years of her caring for them. She sustained the construction process from beginning to end by continuing the practice of care as she sat there with the workers all day making tea, and she choreographed the social characteristics of the house from her position. Sakina Abaya acted as their architect by being their caregiver (Figure 4).

Sakina Abaya died when I was around nine years old. She was surrounded by stories of her numerous skills,

through which she generated social, emotional, and material capital. With the same method, she built three houses for her family, farmed their land, and planted numerous palm trees, which we still eat from to this day.

#### ***Trust and the Emotional Product: The Story of Fato Sakina***

Fato is a Nubian variation of the Arabic name Fatima, and Sakina is her mother,<sup>6</sup> Sakina Abaya, a naming sequence that represents the matrilineality that is reproduced to this day among Nubians. Fato was Sakina's eldest daughter and my grandmother, and she moved from the old village to the new settlement in her early thirties. She is credited with building one of the three *madyafa* buildings in Qustul in the 1980s. When preparing for my research, my aunt told me about this accomplishment of her mother, not to assist with data for this research, but for me to understand the accolades I heard about my late grandmother whenever I visited Qustul and to gain honour from them.

A *madyafa* is a common house that acts as a community centre in modern Nubian villages. The *madyafa* hosts events such as weddings, conflict resolution councils, community meetings, and many other events that require a large area (Figure 5). These community houses were post-displacement inventions; before displacement, such community events took place inside a Nubian house,



**Figure 3:** The house originally built by Sakina Abaya for her son in the early 1970s. It is now occupied by her grandchild. Photo by Menna Agha.



**Figure 4:** A scene, not unique in Nubia during construction, based upon memories of Sakina Abaya about the construction of her house in the early 1990s. She sits next to a tray of tea and oversees the workers. Digital rendering by Menna Agha.



**Figure 5:** A reconstructed image of Fato Sakina's *madyafa*, opposite her house in Qustul. Her *madyafa* has been demolished and will be rebuilt using reinforced concrete. Photo and digital rendering by Menna Agha.

which had functions far beyond the domestic. The initiation of construction of a *madyafa* requires intricate community relations and an awareness of the genealogies in the surrounding zone. Fato Sakina possessed these skills; she had served and helped people, and like other Nubian women, she was an expert on ancestries and familial lineages. I had no doubt that she ran the *madyafa*, as she carried its key even after she lost her eyesight. But these tasks did not translate to me as 'building'.

'So, if she didn't build with her hands, what did she do?', I asked my aunt (Saida 2016). She explained, 'She collected money step by step, and she sat on the hand of the builders every day ... She decided the borders that will be served by this *madyafa* ... She bought all the pots and plates, the ones you used in all our weddings, she made us write the *western madyafa* of every plate'. Fato Sakina started a fundraiser amongst the people who lived in the zone of the *madyafa* by capitalising on the years of trust she had earned by helping and caring for her neighbours. She thought of a

system of care in which this *madyafa* would function, and the mere thought of building a *madyafa* arose from Fato Sakina's sense of care towards her community.

Such care was not exclusive to women; other similar efforts to build *madyafa* in Qustul were made by men, whom the community credits for their emotional investment. However, unlike the typology of the house, which comes with female ownership within the Nubian gendered contract, the *madyafa* does not. This meant that I could easily find other *madyafa* stories in which the emotional work was conducted by a man, such as the Central Madyafa in Qustul and the *madyafa* called Karre'Noog in Qatta.

#### ***When Emotion Completes the Physical: The Story of Sanaa***

In displacement villages, the average Nubian family rebuilds part or all of their house every seven to ten years, because the poor quality of the soil causes cracks in the

walls. This means that a Nubian settlement is in a constant state of (re)building. Sanaa, one of Sakina Abaya's grandchildren, told me stories about her 'building' with commissioned workers to fix her cracked walls: 'We stood with them on our feet all day, and we made tea repeatedly. You know, we went to sleep as tired as they were'. I asked her, 'Who was with you?' She started telling me the names of female relatives and neighbour women, whom I knew very well, to acknowledge their help, saying, 'We always stand with each other' (Sanaa 2016).

After the workers finished their construction of the wall, they started plastering the wall using a steel trowel. This technique, however, was 'not enough' for Sanaa and her peers, who refused the plastering techniques of those conventional Egyptian builders. She and her fellow women took time off from their white-collar jobs to plaster the newly built walls with their bare hands. This is an old tradition; Fernea and Kennedy note how Nubian women plastered house-fronts in their old villages, without tools: 'Thus the unique artistic and architectural tradition of Old Nubia is reasserting itself and being superimposed upon the drab uniformity of public housing' (1966: 351).

What I understood from Sanaa is that their manual plastering of the wall is a matter of touch; a house must be touched, and its plastering colours must be brushed gently over the constructed wall, otherwise the wall is not satisfactory. To them, it is the emotional touch that gives the facade aesthetic value. It is affection and respect that they must pay to that wall, which is more than a solid object. This implies that even the processes of material manipulation in Nubian placemaking are guided by a set of emotional values and markers.

### Reading the Stories in Theory

Reading these stories from a Nubian feminist perspective reveals a pattern of added value that is emotional in nature, with a prominent perpetuation of caring activities. But how do emotions work? In her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed suggests that the performance of emotion 'is bound up with the sticky relation between signs and bodies working through signs working on bodies to materialise the surfaces and boundaries' that are lived as worlds (2014: 191). Sakina Abaya's emotions, for example, were confined to their value and significance for her grandchildren. Such relationships drove the women of my family to invest their physical resources into materialised value, which, in this case, took the form of a building, which in itself is valuable, and a body, able to carry a cycle of emotional production.

The care, in this context, is not a part of a larger moral system, but it is itself the system. Caring and mothering practices are not politically or economically driven; instead, in their application they drive politics and economics. Sakina Abaya, for example, did not care for her working grandchildren because they were building the house; rather, her caring led to the building of the house and to her authority over its composition. Their performance, and its repercussions, were only possible within an active embodiment of a care-based moral system.

This system can be understood in light of Virginia Held's theory promulgated in *The Ethics of Care*. Held theorises

care as a framework for feminist morality, or 'a distinct moral theory or approach to moral theorising' (1993: 4), instead of a supplementary aspect of human nature, as it is regarded in Kantian moral theory, utilitarian ethics, and virtue ethics. Although the ethics of care are produced within the context of Anglo-American feminism, her theory helps to explain my research. I acknowledge that a 'woman' in her text does not mean the same as 'woman' in my context. Nevertheless, it offers a philosophical frame that helps this text root its articulation of care and emotions in human bonds. Therefore, it plays an important role in sharpening the lenses through which this research views empirical evidence.

Held (2005) also provides a comprehensive critique of the utilitarian and rational moral frameworks that govern current political and social systems (Western, in her context), which discount emotional practices and their impact in adding value, and she calls for a more comprehensive dialogue on the feminist moral framework of care. In the context of Nubian culture, a systemic framework of care is already operating with a striking similarity to what Held suggests. This framework was detected, however, in Nubia at a point in history where it could not be sustained in the face of modernity, displacement, and dispossession. The Nubian culture has moved towards the patriarchal dominance of utilitarianism, while its matrilineal heritage becomes residual with less impact. Yet the framework of care can be found in documents, mapping narratives, and oral history.

In these three family stories, care is a 'practice, or cluster of practices, and a value, or cluster of values' (Held 2005: 4). In the case of Fato Sakina, care is both what she is doing in 'building' a *madyafa* and also what she is valued for. In an ethics of care, as Held explains, the focus is on 'relationships rather than on the dispositions of individuals', and thus we can understand Fato Sakina's emotional building as a promise of community, one that was lauded by her peers. Ahmed explains that 'emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities or bodily space with social space through the very intensity of their attachments' (Ahmed 2004: 119), as is the case in these three stories. The moral vehicle that carries these activities to materialisation is a relationship between Sakina Abaya and her grandchildren, between Fato Sakina and her neighbours, between Sanaa and her friends, and between Sanaa and the walls of her house.

These moral principles can be applied to spatial production by employing the processes of production that Held explores. Held (2005) criticises Marx's distinction between productive and reproductive labour, in which he recognises productive labour as yielding wealth, in contrast to reproductive labour, such as care labour, childcare, and household labour, that only supports the productive workforce. But she also argues that care labour *is* production, and she refuses to look at care as reproductive labour, or a mere biological mechanism that does not require intent and investment. Emotional labour is thus productive labour, and such care, as demonstrated in the three stories here, is able to produce spaces and places.

Sakina Abaya's contribution as well as those of Fato Sakina and Sanaa all fall under the category of emotional



labour, as they constitute an emotional means of production, according to Held's ethics of care. Although the word 'labour' describes the effort they exerted, it fails to capture the intricate and multifaceted phenomenon that occurs around these women. The sociologist Elizabeth Silva (2007) notes that terms like 'emotional labour' lack meaning when used to characterise the emotion that acts as an asset in social positioning. Instead, she argues that a concept that more accurately describes these emotional assets is 'emotional capital'. In the case of these Nubian women, the term 'emotional capital' is more potent in explicating the matter at hand because it implies the embeddedness of emotion in the lifecycles of its context, which is evident in the case of these three women.

The term 'emotional capital' is a feminist expansion of Bourdieu's theory of capital. The first use of the term was in Helga Nowotny's article 'Women in Public Life in Austria' (1981), in which she debates the concept of the 'political family' that allows the transfer of emotional capital from the private to the public sphere. For Nowotny, emotional capital constitutes 'knowledge, contracts, and relations as well as access to emotionally valued skills and assets, which hold within any social network characterised at least partly by affective ties' (1981: 148). The term is also used in fields such as management and economic research to describe the ways in which an optimum exploitation of human labour is possible through emotional management (Gendron 2004); however, such usage 'is precisely the opposite of what Bourdieu's analysis attempted to develop' (Zembylas 2007: 456), and so this essay on three Nubian women departs from such a reading of the term.

In Bourdieu's theory, different types of capital account for an individual's insertion, inclusion, and participation in a social system. Social capital refers to being in a social network (of supporters, retainers, family members); economic capital refers to the ownership of material wealth, shares, and monetary rewards; and cultural capital refers to intellectual or educational qualifications and distinctions within the fields of art and science. The social effect of capital is tied to social determinants, derived from an individual's position within the social field, the amount of social, cultural, and economic capital that they possess, and the personal trajectory they therefore experience.

Despite alluding to some emotional attributes, such as the practical and symbolic labour that generates devotion, generosity, and solidarity, Bourdieu claims that 'this [emotional] work falls more particularly to women, who are responsible for maintaining relationships' (1998: 68). Bourdieu did not include emotion in his taxonomy of capital, and I consider his disregard of the emotional in the theorisation of capital an indictment of epistemic and social regimes, in which emotion is confined to labour that is 'given' (e.g. caregiving), for most emotional work does not entail a return to its giver. This contradicts the concept of capital, in which one form of capital can be transformed into another.

Feminist theorists mended this gap in Bourdieu's theory of capital by theorising that emotional capital refers to a capacity to connect, and requires acts, intentions, and sentiments, thereby rendering its existence in an individualistic context impossible; emotional capital depends on the

identification of the self in relation to others. Emotional capital broaches moral considerations about personal connections and intimate life related to the self and others. It is an essential ingredient for a reflexive self (Silva 2007). Therefore, the term 'emotional capital' is highly theorised in fields like education research (Reay 2000; Reay 2004; Zembylas 2007), where empirical evidence emphasises the added value of care practices between, for example, mothers' involvement and children's academic advancement.

Emotional capital can be mapped in my stories in the emotional assets that are converted into other forms of capital and returned in the form of recognition. Fato Sakina's emotional capital was invested in the lifelong care of her community, which was then translated into trust, another form of emotional capital, then into funds and the initiation of building (economic capital). This economic capital then benefits her community, who, in return, honour her, which is social capital. I, her grandchild, can inherit this social capital, and it can be converted into assistance for me when I visit Qustul. Here we see the formation of such capital, capital that is, in the Marxist understanding of the term, growing out of the process of circulation.

The gendered manner in which this term is theorised, researched, and manifested is undeniable. Unfortunately, the discussion about gender is often seen as an discussion exclusively about women. This is counterproductive, first because of 'the primarily political interests which create the social phenomena of gender itself' (Butler 1988), and, second, because women and womanhood (as well as men and manhood) are performative acts that vary greatly from one context to another. For Nubian women invest emotional capital, though it is not exclusively their domain, as part of gender performance within an established gendered contract, just as is the case in building a house, where that emotional investment is socially recognised and economically cyclic.

### What Happens to the Architect?

What does it mean then to be an architect? And what if that meaning is subject to change? Emotional capital, as well as many other emotional considerations, are pervasive in feminist literature, as 'women' in 'cultural feminist' terms seek recognition of their contribution to the making of society. As the three stories show, in a matrilineal context, women's (and men's) emotional capital plays a large role in the overall circulation of capital in Nubian society. Women's contribution to architecture is thus acknowledged in its emotional capacity and is integrated into the socio-normative system. So what does a similar recognition and locating of emotional capital do to our contemporary understanding of the 'architect'?

The architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner, who attempts to define the architect in his paper 'The Term "Architect" in the Middle Ages' (1942), writes that the term holds a wider significance than might be expected if it were a problem of mere semantics. The terminology surrounding 'architect' has a long history, and it has passed through vicissitudes of meaning, revealing that the definition of the architect in a certain society is often a reflection of the value system operating in that society

at a particular moment in time. In Mamluk Cairo (1250–1517), the architect (*mohandes*) arose from the builders' class, and refers predominantly to a male mason who has grown in his profession to be a master mason (*mu'allim*) and then is tasked with making decisions (Behrens-Abouseif 1995), meaning the architect was valued for his bodily resources; his hands, his skill in cutting stone, his capacity to perform physical labour. An aspiring architect in thirteenth-century Europe first served an apprenticeship in construction, with the goal of becoming a master builder, who was referred to as the architect. The architect created basic architectural drawings and supervised construction (Woods 1999). In his *Treatise*, Vitruvius defines an architect as having *ratiocination*, skills like reasoning and theoretical knowledge, which were as important as technical ones (1914). His definition has affected what it means to be an architect, especially because his work was a foundation for architecture during the Enlightenment. The Western architect thereafter became an amalgamation of the builder and the thinker, with an emphasis on drawing. Since the 20th century, the architect has become predominantly an intellectual worker – especially when thinking of architects, because they, in most contemporary cases, do not invest bodily energy in the material manipulations of a designed building but instead contribute their mental faculties.

All the aforementioned contexts acknowledge the material or intellectual resources of a architect, rendering the term 'to build' to mean either manual manipulation of materials or the cerebral form-invention. Even in a modernist understanding, the architect is an intellectual labourer, one who creates specialised social meaning and then commissions builders for the process of realisation. People who are thus labelled 'architect' remain intellectual labourers.

The contemporary understanding of labour as developed by Maurizio Lazzarato has moved the debate further towards the idea of 'immaterial labour' (Lazzarato 1996), a new form of labour affected by the technological and social transformation of the post-industrial era. Lazzarato, in a reading of Mikhail Bakhtin, saw this kind of labour as replacing the division between 'material labour and intellectual labour', as well as a demonstration of creativity as a social process. His point is that value in this form of labour is extracted from cognitive and affective rather than physical and material action.

Peggy Deamer (2016) uses the concept of immaterial labour to address the identity crises of the contemporary architect and architecture practice that is now becoming a social project. She especially tries to move away from the intellectual versus labourer dichotomy that has defined architecture practice for ages. Deamer writes, 'We architectural workers only need to keep throwing up alternative forms of economic and social performance' (2016: 146).

To me, the training and practice of architecture has often presented a conflict with the voices rooted in my head, and relistening to the stories of my kin, recalibrating what 'building' means, has been a way to heal my Nubian self. Now I have an emotional framework in which I can perform my indigenous self that was displaced from its episteme. My recognition of emotion in placemaking

is a chance to decolonise my practice in architecture and retrain myself, which was the purpose of my enquiry from the start.

By engaging with Deamer's call and Lazzarato's point, I see fertile ground for the articulation and theorisation of emotional frameworks in contemporary architectural practice, where emotion can be recognised as an asset in making social and material space. As frameworks that are born outside of Western traditions, they bear potential for altering practice. In the alternative I have outlined here, emotion is a necessary performance, one in which emotional assets 'can be cashed in in specific markets and linked to specific strategies of advancement' (Silva 2007: 114). As demonstrated in the stories of Qustul, the architect is recognised for these emotional assets and is able to convert these assets into other capitals.

Although women do not exclusively possess emotional assets, they recognise how they themselves can deploy such assets in making architecture and placemaking today. This retroactively helps to reveal the unseen contribution of women who have shouldered the emotional work within many active gender contracts but have suffered a lack of recognition and the absence of reward. This includes women trying to venture to the forefront of international architectural practice, mothers who make space through their emotional assets, and many more. Cases like those of mothers in migration creating spatial, social, and material value expand our understanding of making space to include such ideas as making a space one for belonging (Dyck 2018).

The impact such recognition could have on the practice of architecture would be remarkable; the singular sovereign 'architect' would no longer be applicable because emotional capital only works in relation to others (Ahmed 2014). Other modes of practice could be developed from these diverse perspectives, as placemaking is possible without a vested involvement from the people who will use the space. The 'architect' can no longer be an agent of a remote or irrelevant institution. Moreover, the recognition of emotional assets will open the door for practitioners unbound by the limits of professionalism.

### **An Alliance of Meaning**

What it means to build, from a Nubian – African – position is interwoven in an emotional framework. To understand this meaning, I had to extract myself from my epistemic displacement. I had to stand in my ancestral episteme and let the voice of my grandmothers ring in my head. Ultimately, I try to portray a story of building from a marginalised voice and speculate about the different potentials of building on emotional foundations in contemporary practice.

The core point of this article is to argue for the importance of recognising that emotion is imbued with agency in the making of the built environment; the emotional labourer is the 'architect'. The architect's investment here can be defined as emotional capital. The historical evidence found in Nubian stories provides a case of a functioning regime that recognises emotion as capital in the process of making the built environment. The three stories of Nubian women after displacement – Sakina

Abaya, her daughter Fato Sakina, and Sanaa, Fato's niece and Sakina's granddaughter – shows an emotional relationship between people and materials embedded in the process of spatial production; in return, their society acknowledges them as placemakers.

Acknowledging the emotional work of the placemaker rewards the maker with social, cultural, and economic capital. This recognition can elevate their social standing and contribute to their prosperity, just as they contribute with their emotional work to the prosperity of others. Appreciating emotional work becomes a matter of justice. Such recognition is not only possible, potent, and needed, but it is also found in historical contexts in which a moral framework of care has resulted in other ontologies of placemakers and placemaking to confront the notion of the architect.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The term 'matrilinearity' was coined by the Nigerian gender scholar Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, in her book, *What Gender Is Motherhood?* (2016), to describe social systems in which the resources of mothers are highly valued.
- <sup>2</sup> I borrow the term 'placemaking' from its widely used understanding in planning theory as a multifaceted approach to the design and management of public spaces that capitalises on a local community's assets. As the involvement of the community is built into the process of emotional production, the term seems appropriate, but in this case can be applied to all projects of spatial production and not only public space.
- <sup>3</sup> The use of these numerical markers in Nubian society often refers to a sensed value rather than an accurate statistic; even though the mayor is an agent of the state, these remarks were made in a Nubian social context.
- <sup>4</sup> Several video campaigns by Egyptian activists address this issue by asking people to mention their mother's name and break the stigma.
- <sup>5</sup> Because she lived among Nubians and spoke their language, Goograuer cultivated great affinity among Nubians, who renamed her Amgaad.
- <sup>6</sup> I recognise the grammatical need to use the past tense when talking about deceased person, but in this context identifiers (essence) of personhood does not expire with death; Sakina remains Fato's mother despite the fact that both women are no longer with us.

### Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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