

# The Plight of the Merowe Dam-Affected People: Stories from the Manasir

Zoom Webinar – Thursday 23 September 2021, 3:00pm UK/London BST (GMT+1)

Registration essential: [ZOOM registration link](#)  
Organised by The Sudanese Programme  
in collaboration with the University of East Anglia (UEA), UK

Join us for an evening of film and discussion with Dr Valerie Hänsch, anthropologist and director of the highly acclaimed short documentary film “Manasirland - Development Refugees (2006)”, and Azza Dirar, a PhD candidate who has studied the adaptations of life among the Manasir who resettled themselves along the banks of the Merowe dam’s reservoir.



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**Webinar Chair: Dr Ahmed Al-Shahi**  
**Q&A Moderator: Dr Richard Barltrop**

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The impacts of large-scale infrastructural projects undertaken in developing countries under the banner of “development” and “modernization” are often imbalanced in terms of costs and benefits. Local communities often suffer the brunt of the costs, commonly in the form of displacement and resettlement. In response, emerging resistance from local people manifests in different ways and is met with different counter-responses from the authorities. The aim of this event is to examine and discuss this dynamic as it has been emerging in the case of the Merowe Dam in Sudan.

The Merowe Dam, constructed between 2003-2009 on the fourth cataract of the Nile river, resulted in the displacement of over 60,000 people from three different communities (Hamdab, Amri and Manasir peoples). In order to encourage them to leave their ancestral homeland, the government promised them a higher standard of living with modern housing settlements and large-scale irrigation development.

However, the Manasir wished to remain in their homeland on the edge of the future water reservoir. Then in the summer of 2008, without considering counterproposals and before the community could be moved to new settlements, the Nile was dammed. A total of 80% of the villages and irrigation farming was destroyed by flooding.

#### **PROGRAMME:**

**3.00pm** Short introduction by Dr Ahmed Al-Shahi

**3.15pm** Film “Manasirland – Development Refugees” (2006) (23minutes)

This short film explores the disruptive impacts of the Merowe dam on the Manasir peoples. On the one hand it depicts the everyday life of the Manasir along the banks of the Nile and the centrality of the river’s water which runs through their lives. On the other hand it explores the problems of dam-construction, state coercion and the fear of displacement and the destruction of their way of life.

**3.35pm** Presentations by 2 guest speakers

***Dr Valerie Hänsch, Director of the film:*** Dr Hänsch’s doctoral thesis titled *Der Versuch zu bleiben. Dammbau und Krise im sudanischen Niltal* ["Trying to stay. Dam Construction and Crisis in Sudan's Nile Valley"] addressed the fate of the Manasir, an ethnic group with a population of around 50,000 that was displaced by the Merowe dam. Based on over 14 months of field research and subsequent research visits, her thesis explored how the Manasir experienced this radical and violent change to their living conditions and tried to carry on despite so much uncertainty when their sense of the world seemed to be falling apart.

***Azza Dirar, Phd Candidate:*** Azza Dirar conducted ethnographic research among the Manasir at the tail-end of the reservoir to discern the changing dynamics of land tenure in the new post-flooding local settlements along the shores of the dam’s reservoir. Based on over 9 months of field research among the Manasir in Kabna al Fougara, her research highlights an interesting case of continuity and change in the local customary land tenure system as well as the emerging dynamics of ‘law-in-the-making’.

**Q&A** After the presentations there will be an opportunity to ask questions through the ZOOM Q&A facility: You are welcome to type in your questions at any point during the ZOOM webinar; Dr Richard Barltrop will collate the questions and field to the appropriate guest speaker.