

Egypt 2060: Reflection on the Project

Nissmah Roshdy

To cite this article: Nissmah Roshdy (2014) Egypt 2060: Reflection on the Project, Design Philosophy Papers, 12:2, 161-167

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2752/144871314X14159818597630>



Published online: 29 Apr 2015.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 14



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Egypt 2060

Reflection on the Project

Nissmah Roshdy

Nissmah Roshdy graduated with high honors from the Faculty of Applied Sciences and Arts, German University in Cairo, in 2014 with a major in Media Design. Her bachelor film project has gone to several film festivals, and she is currently working on the script for an animated feature film. techno_lime28@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT This article is a personal reflection on a group project in which final-year design students were asked to create scenarios and design responses for Egypt in 2060. It discusses the challenges raised by the brief, the processes of negotiating them, and the end result – which was not what was expected.

KEYWORDS: Egypt, future, 2060, Nile River, swamp, dystopian, design

Predicting the future is a huge challenge, whether you are a child being asked to imagine the future and draw a picture, or an analyst studying history and drawing conclusions. When I was introduced to this project of imagining Egypt in 2060, the load of its context intimidated me. Based on my previous knowledge, I know that anyone who attempts to propose some predictions for the future has to study and analyze not just the present situation but the past as well, and the different marks in history. Therefore, I perceived the project as too advanced and very irrelevant to our studies

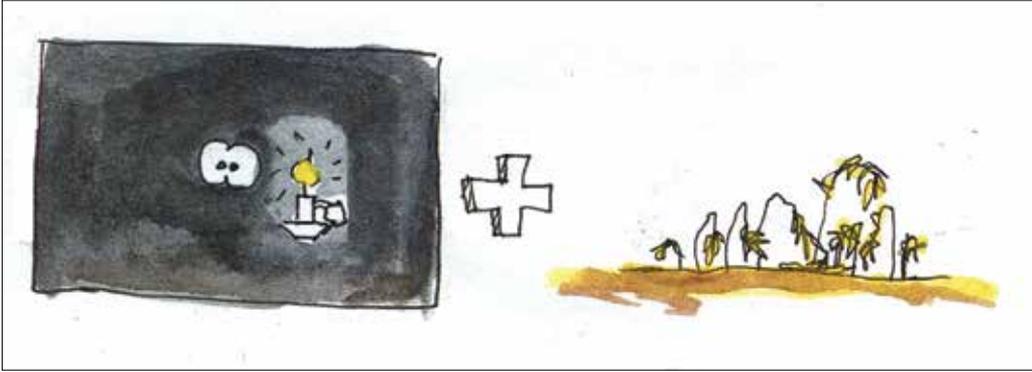


Figure 1

A lack of water would cause the land to dry out and compromise the production of electricity from the Aswan Dam. Courtesy Sarah Mossallam.

as designers. However, when I started working on it with my team and after hearing the lectures of the course, my perspective was turned around and I realized that designers do have a pivotal role in shaping the future.

First Approach

During the first couple of weeks, I was lost. I had told myself I had to have some imaginative scenario laid in my head before I opened the Google page or brainstormed with my group, but I couldn't think of



Figure 2

Egypt could end up fighting other African nations for the Nile River. Courtesy Sarah Mossallam.

any scenario. Since we have become so consumed by the political situation in Egypt nowadays, it was hard to overlook it, let alone think fifty years ahead. So I went about asking different people, and family and friends, what they imagined the future would be like. One of the most interesting answers I had was that it wouldn't be that much different; some people actually thought that, apart from technology, Egypt has not really changed over these past fifty years: we're still going through the same struggles, the same social issues, and the same human concerns.

Other answers I received were very pessimistic. I found myself trapped inside some dystopian scenarios of Egypt and getting really dark and creative with them. For example, I imagined a dystopian scenario similar to that of the novel *1984* by George Orwell or Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*, where tyranny reaches its peak in Egypt and military powers control all matters of Egyptians' lives including food and education. Of course, it was more fictional than probable, and I couldn't impose such a dystopian idea on my group. Therefore, I convinced myself that the direction of my thoughts was different from the direction of the project as a whole, as I was focusing on social and political issues in Egypt that are very unstable and highly variant. I came to the conclusion that if I were to lay out a scenario for Egypt in fifty years' time, I had to base it on a major significant event that would change the face of the country, but I only figured out this particular event when I worked with my group.

Forming the Scenario

When I started working on the project with my group and imagining Egypt in 2060, everyone brought in their ideas and these were very fictional and cynical. I found them very similar to my original direction of thought and my first approach to the project, yet the problem remained that none of the ideas could be supported by research or verified facts, as they were our own reflections and observations of how Egyptians are today and how they might become. Furthermore, none of our ideas inspired anything design related. At that point, we decided to define different categories (education, technology, economy, environment, etc.) and divided them among ourselves so that each one of us would do some research and come up with a scenario. This was something I did not agree with: I thought that if we had one idea in common from the beginning, or one predicted significant event, it would help us in researching and save time, above all. However, I did not force the opinion since I did not have any ideas to propose.

As I predicted, researching different categories trapped us in an endless maze as we wasted time and effort, and we ended up dismissing a lot of research results and settling on one common idea and a major significant event just like I had preferred. Our predicted scenario was that the Nile River would disappear from Egypt in 2060; a purely environmental topic that touched upon some other areas. It

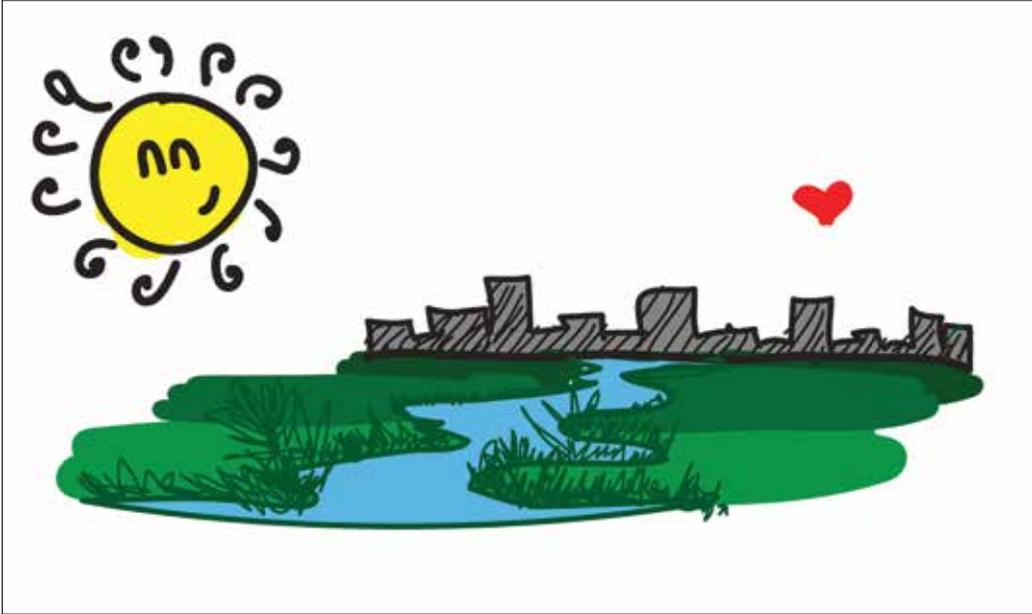


Figure 3

With the continuing presence of water, both cityscape and agriculture would survive well. Courtesy Sarah Mossallam.

wasn't exactly how I had hoped our topic would be, but at least there were a lot of sources to support that scenario. We deduced this idea of the Nile disappearing after reading several articles about the water problem in Egypt, laid down by both Egyptian and foreign experts. However, the problem was going to happen in the near future (2020), and it wasn't exactly about the Nile completely disappearing but rather about the water level decreasing.

At this point, we decided to make use of two other facts, which are Egyptians' high dependency on the Nile and the rise in our population. We used these facts to push the fictional side of the scenario and imagine that if the Nile actually disappeared or became a swamp by 2020, how the Egyptians would cope with it in the years leading up to 2060.

Imagining the consequences was the most creative and interesting part. It was basically an opportunity to let our imaginations go



Figure 4

If the Nile River dried up due to water evaporation, the landscape would turn to desert. Courtesy Sarah Mossallam.

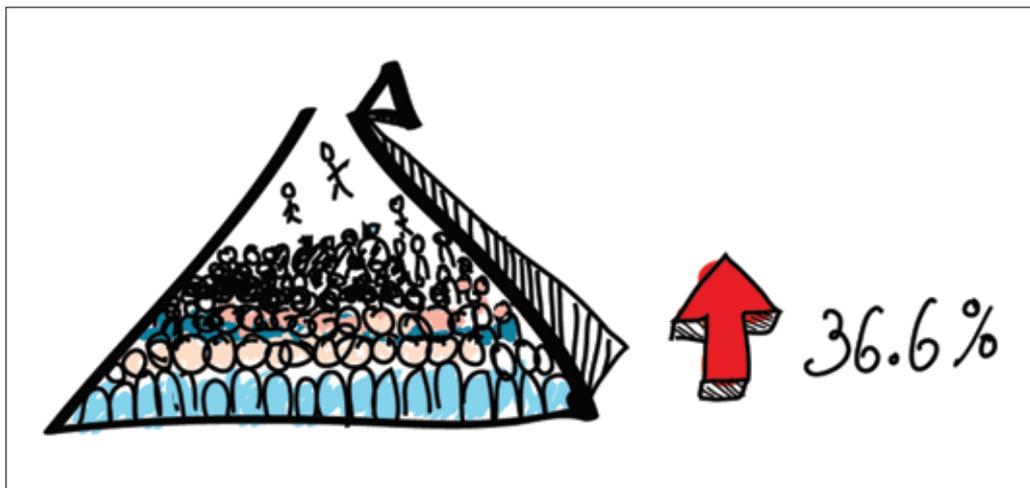


Figure 5

The population is increasing inexorably. Courtesy Sarah Mossallam.

wild, but we managed to remain realistic as well. After coming up with the worst dystopian scenario that could happen in Egypt after the Nile had died out, we began thinking of how we could change this scenario, but we didn't take the role of designers right away. We laid out different solutions that were not necessarily related to design, and then started to direct our solutions to become more design oriented. All in all, our solutions and interventions were not going to save the Nile, but rather raise awareness of the issue and advise people to save water long enough to delay the inevitable, or at least until an alternative source of water is invented in Egypt.

Working with the Group

Working on this project in a group was an interesting experience. We called ourselves the Giraffes, a species that a couple of us were very fond of while the rest couldn't care less. When I first met my team, I was glad to find that one of them was a close friend of mine, and three of them were good, proactive students. Being a person who reluctantly takes the role of the leader in almost every group project she gets involved in, I was relieved to find that I wasn't going to be the only responsible proactive person in the group, and that there were other potential leaders with me. Yet despite that, I was still accounted as the representative of the group and stepped into the same role. Eventually, I didn't get overloaded and was working with the proactive members more than I did with my close friend; I did, however, carry the responsibility of encouraging people to work and recharging them with passion when everyone, including me, had lost interest in the project.

The main challenge about working with a group was in knowing when I should conform to others' ideas or propose and explain my own. I had to conform to the ideas of my teammates as the majority

Figure 6

Global warming continues.
Courtesy Sarah Mossallam.

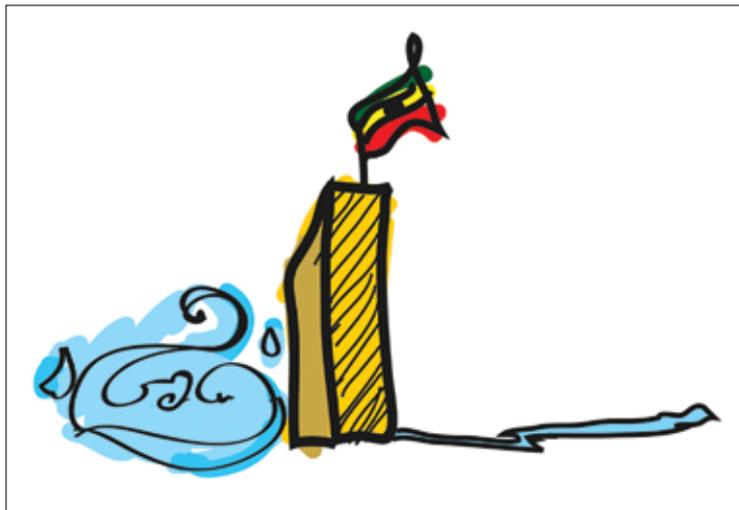


of them, at least the ones who were present and working, had a graphic and product design background, and because graphic and product designers have a different mindset and mentality when it comes to creativity, picking topics, and self-expression, as a media designer, I wasn't on the same ground as them. In fact, I was the only proactive media designer in the group, as the other media designers with me were hardly participating or always reactive, which is why my voice and ideas were not supported enough and why there were no design interventions that were related to our field – another disappointment for me.

However, the main downside perhaps of working in my team was that we were a total of eleven students, and only five or six of us were proactive and responsible enough to handle the work. There was a diffusion of responsibility; when you find yourself within a group, you feel less responsible. Several members of my team were just waiting for us to tell them what to do, and if we didn't they would just do nothing or stay absent. Accordingly, the ones who researched the idea were the ones who prepared the scenario, the same ones who created the presentation and presented at the end, and I happened to be one of them. Though it was a unanimous and safe decision to let the same members handle everything while the inactive, often absent ones would stand behind and wish them luck, it was still quite unfair and unfortunate. I tell myself that this type of thing is a perfectly normal part of the process of any group work, and that I should be thankful that at least I didn't handle all the work by myself.

Final Thoughts

Overall, I am surprised at my experience with this project. Before I got involved in it, I actually had a fear of just "thinking" about the

**Figure 7**

Dams built on southern African sources of the Nile River would block water. Courtesy Sarah Mossallam.

future. From the overpowering political perspective, since too many unfortunate things have happened in Egypt in the last two years, or even thirty years, it has become increasingly difficult to see a bright future ahead, as only naive and blind people still say that we can rise up from all this corruption. But there was a time when my generation of Egyptian youth was filled with such optimistic dreams for the future of our country: that was in the spring of 2011 after the January revolution. But since everything took a wrong turn afterward, we did not dare to have such high hopes again; we learned to stop hoping, or better yet, “thinking” about the future of this country. Accordingly, when it came to a project like this, I can speak on behalf of many of my colleagues: we reluctantly took it on with heavy hearts, because unfortunately we have come to dread working on anything related to change or the future of Egypt, but that itself brought the biggest surprise of all. Because despite my and everyone’s initial negative attitude, we still managed to practice our creativity in this project, to unleash our imaginations without fear while knowing that the future might not be promising. For that reason, I am pleased to say that this project has revolutionized the way we define the future, and the way we measure its importance and our role in it, because at last I think we all came to realize that the future of this country is our future as well.

Acknowledgments

Illustrations by Sarah Mossallam. Sarah graduated with honors from the Faculty of Applied Sciences and Arts, German University in Cairo in 2014 with a major in Graphic Design. She is currently working as a graphic designer in an award-winning advertising agency called Kairo.