

Research Paper

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## Heritage in real life: between appreciation and contempt: why are modern Egyptians continuously losing their heritage?

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### Abstract

Since UNESCO adopted the task of preserving the world's tangible and intangible heritage, the term "cultural heritage" has become known worldwide. However, there seems to be a gap between cultural heritage as a construct made by academic scholars and adopted by UNESCO on one side, and the popular perception of heritage and its significance in daily life on the other side.

This phenomenon could not be seen clearer than in the case of Egypt: for while the UNESCO initiative is achieving positive results in Europe and the developed world, and while more heritage assets are being added to the world heritage list every year, Egypt is facing a continuous decline in its tangible cultural heritage (Hanna, 2013), as "less appreciated" or "undesired" historical sites are continually being demolished by the government or private owners to make way for other functions (Middle East Eye, 2023) & (Zakaria, 2019), and other heritage sites are looted in search of treasures to be sold on the black market (Hanna, 2013).

On the official level, the Egyptian authorities express their keen interest in the preservation of "monuments and antiquities", and many projects are being implemented by the government in that direction (Ikram, 2010). Yet many heritage assets are being disregarded and lost, sometimes because of negligence, and sometimes because of intended destruction. This research is trying to investigate this case of double standards in dealing with heritage, assuming that it is caused by problems and misconceptions in the collective mindset of Egyptian society, specifically in the aspects of perception and understanding of the value and use of heritage and of history in general.

To achieve that goal, I have been researching literary and academic resources in the fields of Heritage studies and national identity for the roots of these misconceptions, and trying to connect them with the everyday life of society. Being a part of the community myself and through direct contact with the people, I detected and extracted aspects of the Egyptian mindset on the grassroots level that played a significant role in the problem of heritage.

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*Architectural heritage; Egyptian history; Cultural identity; Monument preservation; collective memory*

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### 1. Introduction.

In 1881, Khedive Tawfik founded the first committee for the conservation of monuments in Cairo. This committee was dominated by European scholars from its founding till its dissolution in 1952 (Rabbat 2016), and it played a crucial role in defining the meaning of heritage and the scope of preservation of monuments for most of the 20th century. The committee that was mostly under the influence of French romanticism prioritised the stylistic restoration approach for monuments to be displayed for western visitors (Reid, 2002), hence monumentalising heritage objects

and separating them from their surroundings (Sanders, 2008). This approach to heritage preservation is still dominant to this day, and the schism between people and their heritage is growing wider.

In order to analyze the problem of the continuous loss of heritage in Egypt, this research aims to investigate the political, social, and economic conditions specific to the Egyptian case. The proposed hypothesis is that there are specific paradigms or beliefs particular to Egypt's collective persona that have affected the mindset of Egyptians and their behavior towards their cultural heritage. According to the analysis of academic resources and case studies These paradigms are: the concept of value; the religious view of culture; the economics of building activities; the geo-historic uniqueness of the land; and the political manipulation of history.

This research will explore these. Paradigms step by step, and detect their effect on the perception of history and heritage in Egypt, in order to clarify the deeply embedded problems and bring them to light in the hope that a good diagnosis of the illness will be the first step towards remedy. The goal is not to propose strategies or policies to curb the trend of continuous loss of value and heritage, but to expose the implicit reasons of this trend, and to begin the process of self-reflection, revision, and reconsideration of the negative attitude towards heritage. This process should be the first step towards reaching a practical, comprehensive plan of heritage preservation in Egypt.

## 2. Research methodology

This research is based on the theoretical background that suggests that the colonial roots of the emergence of Egyptology have, till this day, affected the perspective of native Egyptians towards their history (Reid, 2002), as well as the religious factor pointed out by other researchers (Meskell, 2006), and also tries to explore the hypothesis proposed by Dr. Gamal Hemdan that Egypt has a special "persona" that was carved by its historical and geographical unique conditions (Osman, 2023). The modern definitions of heritage and their evolution from objective to environmental and social constructs (Konsa, 2013) are also considered as a base of analysis. The research also references several Egyptian literary figures who have pointed out certain qualities in the Egyptian case in dealing with their material legacy, including Naguib Mahfouz and Ahmad K. Tawfik. Case studies reporting the loss or destruction of certain heritage assets are also utilized to measure the severity of the problem, and statistical data was collected from specialist publications to contextualise important factors such as economy and education.

## 3. The concept of VALUE

First of all, the term cultural heritage needs to be clearly defined. UNESCO defines it as follows: Cultural heritage includes artefacts, monuments, a group of buildings and sites, museums **that have a diversity of values** including symbolic, historic, artistic, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological, scientific and social significance. It includes tangible heritage (movable, immobile, and underwater), intangible cultural heritage (ICH) embedded in cultural and natural heritage artefacts, sites, or monuments.<sup>1</sup>

This definition draws a direct correlation between cultural heritage and the values embedded in the artifacts or monuments, which puts forward an important question regarding the concept of "value" and how it could be calculated or evaluated.

The definition introduces historic, artistic, and scientific values as abstract or constant values, while in actuality, value is a concept relative to the society and is a function of place and time. Meaning that the value system of a given society with a certain historical and geographical background is unique, and also changes and evolves over time, and accumulation of historical and anthropological factors. This is where Heritage becomes a blurred concept in the subconscious perception of Egyptians. The definition of "Value" is a historical philosophical argument: Karl Marx pointed out that, beginning from the industrial revolution, nothing can have value without being an object of utility (Marx, 1887), and that seems to be the dominant paradigm in our modern industrialized world including developing countries like Egypt: value is associated with "usage". If something cannot be used, then it has no value. Especially in the case of architectural heritage, old structures that are no use are regarded as a waste of valuable assets. Only if

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2009 UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics, p25

it attracts visitors or tourists it is regarded as valuable; otherwise, it should be demolished to clear the way for apartment buildings or roads, or other usable functions.

Reducing the value of architectural heritage to a tourist attraction only shifts the focus from the importance of heritage to the national identity, to its capability to attract attention, especially foreign attention, and alienates the rightful descendants from the legacy of their predecessors (Rabbat, 2016). This could be seen in the difference in the treatment of foreigners and Egyptians in touristic sites. For instance, there are geographically separate entrances for both groups to the Giza plateau. This was justified by the site manager, alleging that Egyptians behaved disrespectfully toward their ancient heritage (Shenker, 2016). Most of the heritage sites in Luxor had, until very recently, only English description texts. (Hanna, 2013)

Adopting the objective point of view towards heritage assets isolates them from their environment and disregards their socio-cultural role as parts of the collective identity of the nation (Konsa, 2013).

#### **4. Heritage as a burden!**

As a result of this trend of touristification or Musealization, which is a term describing the current obsession with the tourism industry and the culture of the museum, another hostile trend towards less popular or less touristic sites develops.

In the last few years, for example, the Egyptian government launched a massive infrastructure program in Cairo, Egypt's capital and largest city, in order to reorganize the traffic flow in the huge metropolis and its surrounding areas. The newly constructed network of highways necessitated the removal of some of the "old" areas of the city, especially a vast necropolis at the foot of the Mokkattam hill. This necropolis was, until recently, a burial site for scholars, cultural figures, and members of Egypt's royal and elite families dating back to the Mameluk era around the late middle ages (15th-16th century), which is known to represent the peak of Islamic Art and Architecture, the impressive array of historic mausoleums and cemeteries contained irreplaceable pieces of Islamic calligraphy and carving, as well as decorative mosaic work and ceramics, all in atrium-style buildings usually topped by brick domes supported by decorative squinche formations, which made the whole complex a showcase of Islamic Medieval architecture.

Nevertheless, construction plans did not consider the preservation of these treasures, nor the sanctity of the dead, or their historical or cultural value. Everything was demolished under the general argument that the past must not be prioritized over the present. This example is not a unique case of dealing with Egypt's heritage. This policy of demolishing the old to make way for the new is deeply ingrained in the shared cultural DNA of Egyptians., especially because of a distorted definition of heritage itself.

#### **5. Public perception of HERITAGE:**

For a country with more than 5000 years of recorded history, most people understand the definition of "history" only as ancient history, which means that "history", for modern Egyptians, is a very far place in the mysteries of the past. As a result, people have no real connection with their ancient ancestors (Meskell, 2006); they do not know which period to connect their roots to, and what value does it represent. Even the government authority responsible for heritage is called the Ministry of "Antiquities", not heritage as a part of national identity, only antiquities, as in material left-overs or treasures from the past.

The whole science of Egyptology, which is concerned with studying ancient Egypt, was almost entirely developed by Western "Treasure hunters". Beginning from the French invasion in 1798 until the mid-20th century, all Egyptological knowledge was produced by foreigners, many of whom were merely interested in selling precious artifacts stolen or extracted from Egypt (Langer, 2017). Egyptians were not included in archaeological expeditions, and the "true/old Egypt" became a field of European interest, while Islamic/modern Egypt was left to its people (Riggs, 2013).

One way of measuring the perception of heritage of a nation is to look at its listed monumental sites on the UNESCO list, since entries to this list must be suggested by the country first before approval. In the case of Egypt, there are

only six cultural heritage sites, which is a shockingly small number, especially for the country with the longest continual civilisation on earth. This small number expresses a lack of enthusiasm for heritage acknowledgement and preservation. In fact, the Egyptian government has asked UNESCO officials during its conference in September 2023 to minimize the area of the heritage site of Historic Cairo listed by the international organization!! (Middle East Eye, 2023).

Religion is an important constituent of the national identity and plays an important role in the perception of history as a whole. Despite religious zeal playing an important role in protecting valuable spiritual monuments, some Islamic ideologies regard the revered status of some monuments, especially the Mausoleums of Sultans and shrines of holy people, as a deviation from the righteous worship practices that should be devoted to God alone. These extremist (Salafi) ideologies do not represent mainstream Islam, but have slowly proliferated into the culture, resulting in a negative view towards monuments from the ancient Egyptian period, which is regarded as a pagan civilization, which justifies using them as assets but with no real respect.

A religious leader in Egypt has issued a ruling on Islamic law, a *fatwa*, saying that any person who finds gold or treasure on his land has the right to keep it, so long as he gives a tithe of the value to charity (Fitz-Gibbon, 2017). However, this ruling has less to do with religion than with the Egyptian understanding of “Heritage”: it is, more or less, something that is left to this generation from its predecessors, and therefore one has the right to use it to their benefit.

In an interview with some school students about the validity of learning ancient Egyptian history, many expressed their dissatisfaction, considering the Ancient Egyptian belief system less morally and ethically evolved than monotheistic religions (Abdou, 2018).

Religious extremism is therefore blocking the connection with most of Egyptian history and dismisses it as the atheistic dark ages (*Jahiliya*).

## 6. Loopholes in the legal framework

A look at the legal framework of heritage preservation in Egypt sheds more light on the previously discussed concerns of value and perception.. Up until the 1950s, monument preservation was supervised by a committee of scientists, which was mainly composed of foreign orientalist occupied with the ancient Egyptian (Pharaonic) legacy (Rababat, 2016). In the constitution of 1971, cultural heritage is defined simply as “the historical heritage of the people”. In the 2013 constitution, the definition has been further clarified to encompass “all types of cultural heritage from the Pharaonic, Islamic, Coptic, and modern periods”. This language reflects the attitude of the state towards heritage as it privileges Pharaonic, Islamic, and Coptic monuments over other Greco-Roman, medieval, and modern monuments. In practice, the state has directed the vast majority of its resources towards preserving and promoting artifacts and monuments that fall under these three categories (Tadamun, 2019).

The laws particularly outfitted towards protecting Egypt’s built heritage (Laws No. 117/1983 & No. 178/1961 & No.144/2006) do not function properly due to ambiguous legal jargon. Antiquities in general are protected by Law No. 117 of 1983, which classifies buildings as “historic” if they can be attributed to one of Egypt’s essential cultural influences (Greek, Christian, Islamic, or Ancient Egyptian), and buildings of architectural value and historical importance are protected by Law No. 178 of 1961. On the other hand, Law No. 144 of 2006 regulates demolition licenses and is concerned with protecting buildings of recognized architectural value. Only here “heritage” classification is much more ambiguous, and it defines no ministry or state institution explicitly responsible for the official classification or protection of heritage buildings. Because of this loophole, property owners who aim to demolish a heritage building need only to request consent from a heritage committee consisting of specialists and representatives from the governorate and the Ministry of Housing. These rulings essentially remove all legal barriers that protect these buildings from demolition and leave them in danger of corrupt officials (Tadamun, 2019).

The bureaucratic mentality adds to the problem of corruption another factor, which is neglect; many heritage buildings are under the supervision of local authorities that do not want a lot of pressure coming from conservation experts or real estate developers, and try to get rid of the problem by procrastination and delaying till time takes care of it.

Here, once again, objectifying heritage assets rather than looking at them as indivisible parts of an ecosystem leaves many pieces, especially from the relatively modern eras, isolated and vulnerable to exploitation.

## **7. Economics of building activities:**

The detachment between modern Egyptians and their heritage has an economic aspect as well. Egypt has been a nation of builders since the dawn of history; it comes with the nature of agricultural societies as well as the specific conditions of the Nile River that floods its valley every year. Egyptians had to build temporary accommodations that would get flooded each year and be rebuilt again. In modern times, buildings have come to be considered as prime economic assets, and a storage of value that can endure high inflation rates. Recently, construction became one of the leading economic activities in Egypt. This is mainly because of two reasons:

First, the urgent need for housing facilities to accommodate the high-speed growth of population (World Bank, 2024), where about 1.5 million people are added to its population annually. The construction industry recently comprises 14% of the national GDP of Egypt (Mordor Intelligence, 2024), which is the largest sector in the nation's economy. The second reason is related to the lack of regulations- or at least applied regulations- that can control the construction activities and urban expansion into agricultural land. Since the 2011 revolution, nearly 85,000 acres of farmland have been lost to illegal construction, according to data from the Ministry of Agriculture (Dijwi, 2018). Most of these unlicensed structures were carried out by local contractors, not major construction companies, which has become a driving force for local economies and the low-income workforce.

However, this highly energized construction activity proved to be dangerous for heritage buildings (Rabbat, 2016). Heritage conservation requires different sets of expertise than regular construction. As an example of this potentially destructive construction frenzy, the Ministry of Antiquities proposed a project in 2024 to apply granite cladding to the 5000-year-old Menkaure pyramid (Jankowitz & Makhoul, 2024), thinking it would restore its past glory! Many monuments lost their authentic value in what were meant to be "renovation projects", such as the beautiful parks of Heliopolis Neighborhood, featured in several 1950s romantic movies, that were stripped of their trees to provide a car parking lot (Ahram online, 2015).

In Alexandria, the second largest city in Egypt, which takes pride in having a cosmopolitan history and architectural marvels, there has been an increase in the demolition of the city's historic villas. Many attribute this to the activity of Alexandria's real estate mafia, a complex network of landlords, corrupt officials, and developers that has collectively contributed to the erasure of most of the city's built cultural heritage. The mafia is known to "pay off residents or intimidate them into leaving their heritage homes, tear out doors and windows and flood entire buildings with water" so that the state will declare them fit for demolition. In their place, developers erect high apartment blocks. However, rarely do these developers face any legal repercussions. As a result, the residents of Alexandria are being slowly stripped of their right to their city's cultural heritage (Tadamun, 2019). It is estimated that 70% of the city's Neo-classical architecture was lost during the past two decades (Zenobia, 2014).

Villa Ambron was one of the fulcrums of Alexandria's cultural life. Built and owned by architect Aldo Ambron. The house has been home to dignitaries, including Italy's exiled king Vittorio Emanuele III, and leading Egyptian painters Saad el-Khadim and Effat Nagui. After fleeing Nazi-occupied Greece, Lawrence Durrell, the British author twice shortlisted for the Nobel prize for literature, lived on the villa's top floor for much of the Second World War with his wife. Durrell left Egypt after the war, and the Ambron family sold the house in 1996 to a local developer, who had already built two apartment blocks in the villa's garden. Although the house was legally protected by the 2006 protection order, the real-estate developer, after neglecting it for years to turn it into unrecognizable ruins, finally demolished the Villa in September 2017 (Shalabi, 2017).

If the real estate construction activities remain unorganized and unregulated, the architectural heritage will always be under threat of exploitation unless its socio-cultural importance is acknowledged and respected.

## **8. Cycles of life and death**

The geography of the Nile valley also plays its role in the collective Egyptian mentality and its connection with the past. In his book "The Character of Egypt: A Study in the Genius of Place", the Egyptian Geologist Gamal Hamdan

points out a specific characteristic of life along the Nile River, which is the continuous cycles of death and rebirth that go on from the ancient pharaonic past till this day. Just as the river floods and retreats every year, and in its excess destroys the villages on its bank, only to be rebuilt again when it retreats to its original position, so have the cities along the Nile valley; they have gone through several cycles of construction and destruction throughout their history. It is a well-known fact in the villages of Upper Egypt that if anyone digs deep enough under his house, one might find ancient relics or treasures from the village's past lives. There is actually a large underground trade market for relics and historic artifacts found in this specific way: simply "dig under your house!"

The Egyptian interior ministry has reported 8,960 cases of illegal digging in several provinces in the south of Egypt from March to the end of November in 2020, against 4,115 in the previous year," (Xinhuanet, 2020). This fact signifies a rooted tradition of "destroying the old to build the new" mentality in Egypt. There is a famous proverb that seems to give the moral justification for that process, it translates "the living is more important than the dead."

Tawfiq, who is a famous writer and novelist, describes this phenomenon as an addiction: "We love to destroy what we built so that we can rebuild it once again" (Tawfiq, 2014)

Egyptians believed in death and resurrection since the dawn of time; they learned the lesson by observing the cycles of nature. Building over the ruins of past lives is deeply ingrained in their cultural DNA, but as ancient Egyptians separated between the daily and the eternal, their predecessors must resolve what can be destroyed and what should be preserved.

## **9. The effects of disruption**

Also, worth noting that this long thread of life cycles is not a homogeneous continuum; major disruptive conditions have occurred that affected the people's collective memory. During the last 200 years alone, there have been some major political and societal disruptions. Every transitional condition that occurred during that period has tried to change the perception of the past state of affairs, which left the nation's collective memory shredded and its sense of identity distorted.

In the event of a major break or disruption in the history of a nation, one that separates the past order of events from the new one, a certain pause should occur to absorb the consequences of these events, people should be able to look back and evaluate the past and arrive to conclusions regarding it, or lessons to be learned and digested from their history. In short, the past should be put to rest before embracing the future. In Egyptian modern history, this has never happened properly: one of the most powerful and disruptive events in recent years, which is the 2011 revolution, is still to this day lacking proper understanding and evaluation in the collective memory of the society. Was it justified or not? Was it a revolution or chaos? Was it planned or spontaneous? And many other questions are left unanswered and unapproached because the current government does not want to face them. Similarly, many other major events or major disruptions were left undigested or incomprehensible. A major step towards reconciling Egyptians with their heritage would be to achieve a comprehensive understanding of history.

## **10. Treasure hunter mentality:**

A direct result of not understanding a nation's history is a broken sense of identity and objectification of heritage. The result could be seen clearly in the organized criminal web of looting archaeological sites and smuggling their artifacts to be sold in auctions abroad. In the Om Al-Dabadeb area of the Kharga Oasis in the western desert, there is an ancient Roman village located on 60,000 acres of land. This remote archaeological site is completely ruined: the ancient Coptic church that was built on the eastern side of the fortress was destroyed and buried under the sand in 1998 when thieves dug for treasures, using a crane and a forklift. Later, the main temple of the village was also destroyed in the same way in 2004 (Almasry, 2015).

At the site Abu Sir Al-Maleq, a burial ground about 70 miles from Cairo, there are piles of bones and mummy wrappings that have been hastily discarded as looters pick through on the hunt for quick cash (Smarthistory, 2018).

This Phenomenon is a direct result of objectifying heritage assets as material treasures with no sense of personal or emotional attachment, which is possibly the same "Treasure hunt" mentality that began with the beginning of

Egyptology 200 years ago, and seems to be still active. The theft network even extends beyond local Egyptians to include foreign Academic institutions and museums that benefit from researching and exhibiting the stolen goods.

Although the government has adopted a policy of demanding the retrieval of the lost historical objects, the behavior of people in authority towards these heritage assets is apparently indifferent. For example, Mamdouh al-Damaty, the Former minister of Antiquities (2012-2014), said, “that the Egyptian government’s policy is counterproductive, discouraging positive international relations and tourism,” which indicates that he doesn’t want to bear responsibility for these invaluable assets and is content to get rid of the problem altogether. (Cultural property news, 2017)

## **11. Political manipulation of history**

Foucault pointed out that power structures of modern nations are built on the concept of discipline, and that these institutions have the same principles of a prison, regulating the functions of their subordinates (Foucault, 1977), and consequently, applying boundaries between the individual and other institutions. As a result, the political leadership of a country tries to stress on a certain part of the nation’s history and romanticize it, and disregard other parts. This is usually connected to a certain character or event that fits the political agenda of the leading person or party. Mussolini, for example, tried to revive the ancient Roman legacy of Italy in order to support his imperial dreams. In China, the years before the communist revolution are considered “the dark ages”. In the Arabic world, the historical figure of “Saladin” was revived from Medieval times to encourage resistance against the Israeli invasion of Palestine.

However, this phenomenon has negative effects on the forgotten or disregarded parts of history, such as neglect of tangible heritage, such as monuments, books, or artifacts, or loss of intangible assets such as stories, songs, or indigenous languages.

In Egypt, about 700 years of Christian history are rarely mentioned or recognized in schools and universities; only Islamic history is taught, because the political compass is tuned towards belonging to the Arab and Islamic world. Even the ancient “Pharaonic” history was discarded until the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when its huge potential for attracting tourism was discovered and exploited.

The Christian minority in Egypt has repeatedly voiced its concern over the negligence of the Christian component of the Egyptian identity with little or no success (Associated Press, 2013). This highlights the danger of manipulating a nation's history for political gains: it creates cracks in the society’s sense of identity that can jeopardize social cohesion. After all, the problem of religious extremism that plagued Egypt for decades is a byproduct of glorifying one part of history without a proper understanding of its precedents, context, and background.

Since it is presumed that heritage is not a universal constant phenomenon (Kaplan, 2006), it should be acknowledged that various groups have different approaches to history. Instead of enforcing a single politically charged viewpoint, a diversity of socio-cultural approaches is to be accepted (Smith, 2006).

## **12. Passive adaptability**

Throughout its history, Egypt has been governed by different regimes and countless dynasties, mostly from foreign origins. Some of them tried to radically change the land and the people, but the majority found it more peaceful and successful to leave the land untouched and the people’s way of life unchanged. In both cases, the Egyptians managed to continue their daily life the same way their ancestors did since ancient times, regardless of the policies of the faraway king or sultan, or viceroy.

Since the Greek invasion in the 4th century BC, and for more than two thousand years, the land was under foreign government control, mostly situated outside of Egypt, in Rome or Constantinople, or Baghdad. Even when other dynasties took Cairo as their capital city, those were also foreigners who did not want to change the successful formula of peaceful coexistence with the native civilization. They saw the perfect harmony that existed for thousands of years between the land and people living on it, the delicate balance between nature and human activities, and they chose not to disturb it. Even though the modern state is governed by native Egyptians, people still keep away from government business or from meddling in politics, which is the public affairs in general. Meddling in politics is taboo in the Egyptian mindset. (Tawfiq, 2010)

Although Heritage is not a public or state affair, modern governments always try to make it so, pursuing policies that have served to physically separate monuments from their surrounding communities, developing plans to gentrify these areas for foreign tourists to generate valuable revenue. Thus, it widens the gap between urban heritage and the surrounding communities. (Tabikha, 2024)

Modern Egyptians are usually skeptical when it comes to Archaeology or monument preservation; they feel the danger of separating them from their lands or houses. Whenever relics or monuments are found in their vicinity, they fear government control and gentrification projects (Reid, 2002). Unless the whole ecosystem, including the natural environment and local community, is seen as integral parts of the monumental heritage, this negative attitude will continue.

### **13. Community engagement**

To combat the loss of tangible heritage, members of both the private and public sectors should join forces. Athar Lina, a participatory conservation initiative run by the Built Environment Collective-Megawra (Athar-lina, 2023), is an example of how things can be done differently. The initiative that focuses on the neighborhood of al-Khalifa in Historic Cairo asked the question of the relationship between heritage sites and their surroundings, and how heritage sites can become useful for communities. As opposed to the concept of “enclave tourism”, May al-Ibrashy, co-founder of Megawra, believes that while heritage sites are important, they cannot be viewed in isolation from their surroundings and the communities they’re integrated in. Athar Lina believes that in order for communities to participate in conservation efforts, cultural heritage has to be beneficial to them; heritage has to be viewed “as a resource, not a burden”. (Tadamun, 2019)

Tourism-based development projects can instigate violent reactions from the local population, especially if it is oriented mainly towards foreign markets, and even more so if these projects are implemented by foreign companies that do not include the local communities. Instead of short-term revenue-based planning, a strategy of long-term planning of heritage sites must be adopted that ensures social cohesion, simply by including the local community in the development plans of these sites, which will solidify the sense of identity and link the community to their heritage (Ashworth, 2008).

The importance of history education cannot be overestimated here, provided that it aims to raise awareness not only: In a previously mentioned survey among primary school students about the importance of studying history (Abdou, 2018), one student said: “Why do we have to learn that history? I felt no connection with it whatsoever.” and another said “those ancient people are not like us”. Because Egypt’s history (written and taught history) is mostly about kings and sultans in their wars and conquests, not about the ordinary people, our ancestors.

Perhaps this is the simplest definition of the society’s behavior towards heritage, and also the simplest, most direct solution: understanding the connection modern Egyptians have with ancient ones, understanding that they are (like us), and that by knowledge of their history, one gets to better know oneself.

### **14. Discussion and Conclusion**

The problems of Egypt’s tangible and intangible heritage are much deeper than preservation and protection policies, since the public behavior towards heritage is rooted in the skewed or distorted sense of identity and collective belief system of the society. There is no clear ideological relationship between the modern Egyptian state and its Pharaonic or Coptic past (Meskell, 2006). Rescuing the cultural heritage of Egypt needs more educational and scientific work than planning and management, and while long-term inclusive participatory planning is badly needed, the problem of national identity has to be addressed first, since the national identity affects the people’s perception of their past and, accordingly, of their heritage.

Scientific and cultural research projects should be adopted by universities and research organizations in the direction of connecting the past to the present, shedding light on the forgotten or neglected parts of Egypt’s very long history, and in many cases reconciling with past traumas. The general goal is to free the national identity from political and religious agendas, so that Egyptians can understand, forgive, and connect with their rich legacy.

Many strategies could be adopted to achieve such a prospect. For example, recontextualizing or providing a balanced understanding of the historical context of the less glorious or turbulent episodes of history (Lowenthal, 2017), as well as applying inclusive storytelling, through encouraging different perspectives from the marginalized or underrepresented groups (Hall, 2005). Most importantly, addressing the ongoing legacies that were rooted in history and still manifest in the present could help the community empathize with its predecessors and establish a connection with its heritage.

“The problem of our neighborhood is forgetting,” said Nobel prize winner Naguib Mahfouz, in his most celebrated work, “Awlad haretna.”

The danger of losing a nation's heritage equals losing one's memory; turbulence and disorientation are sure to follow, and although there are many misconceptions regarding heritage in Egypt, they are not yet beyond remedy, and although a lot is already lost, much more is still standing.

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