

THE ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL LIVES
OF THE GIZA NECROPOLIS

A Thesis Article

Presented to

The Honors Tutorial College

Ohio University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for Graduation

from the Honors Tutorial College

with the degree of

Bachelor of Science in Anthropology

by

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April 2024

Abstract

This article explores the various socio-cultural relationships between workers and residents who live and work in Egypt near the Giza Necropolis, the pyramids, and the Necropolis itself. The Pyramids of Giza get around 13-14 million visitors per year, making it one of the world's most popular tourist attractions. This however raises the questions: How does this mass tourism affect the local Egyptians living in the Giza area and how do the residents feel about these historical landmarks? This study analyzes how people interact with ancient sites and if the people have a personal or cultural connection to these sites. The study considers if the people of Egypt also articulate a sense of national identity in relation to the Pyramids and ancient Egyptian culture. More specifically, this article aims to provide new insights into this relationship of the pyramids and local community through the broader themes of the lingering effects of colonialism, nationalism, and the lenses of tourism as a source of economic development. This project explores the complex factors that play a part in the relationship between the communities in Giza and the Giza Necropolis. More broadly, the article shows how cultural heritage sites can influence ideas of nationalism and economy through tourism development. Through ethnographic research, this study suggests that (a) residents in Giza are content with the income and economic development driven by tourism, despite potentially leading to their own dislocation; (b) there is a correlation between the Giza Necropolis and the national identity in the Giza community; and (c) there is a co-dependent relationship between past colonialism and modern tourism, leading to a general rejection of the return of looted artifacts in the form of reparations.

Introduction

“I love Giza but the rapid development due to the tourism of the pyramids has changed the city so much that sometimes I feel like a tourist now.”¹

Ali, a waiter at the Turquoise Hotel who participated in my study, said this as we were passing a hotel in central Giza. We were packed in a minivan that served as public transportation in this part of Giza and had to quickly look at what he was pointing at. He explained how this hotel is new and was built for the influx of tourism that Giza had been receiving in the last few years. He told me that the changes are good, as they bring in more revenue and income for those in Giza, but he misses the less touristic Giza that he grew up in. Indeed, the tourism of the pyramids is slowly starting to affect some parts of central Giza. Central Giza consists of local clothing shops, small business centers, shopping centers, and large apartment complexes where many people who worked in the Necropolis lived. This comment made by Ali made me wonder how the lives of residents in this area are affected by the tourism of the Giza Necropolis, as the lives of the communities closest to large tourist destinations are often overlooked. My research at the Giza Necropolis explored the following questions: What are the economic development effects of tourism in Giza? What are the implications of living near such a famous historical landmark? How do residents and workers articulate, if at all, their national identity in relation to the Giza necropolis? How does tourism affect both those working in the tourism industry in Giza and the overall development of the Giza region? These are important questions to consider to properly understand communities that live near historical landmarks and tourist destinations.

¹ Interview with author, Giza, January 7, 2024

This article centers around the notion of tourism seen from an anthropological perspective. By analyzing the different ways that the tourism of the Giza Necropolis operates, one can better understand the lives of the Giza community. Tourism can be both a means of destructive force and, potentially, one of great benefit to the communities that it affects. My hypothesis is that, in Giza, tourism is seen with a more positive attitude, as it provides a source of income for most of the informants that I interviewed. It is also a source of cultural exchange that some in the community like to use for their own benefit.

This article builds on the broader anthropological themes of nationalism, colonialism, and tourism and adds to the already existing literature in the field. This study provides more information and ethnographic context on Egypt, more specifically, the Giza region. The ethnographic study is on a community that is somewhat overlooked, despite living at such a popular attraction. This will then help further the narrative of the anthropology of colonialism, nationalism, and tourism. The article is split into five sections. A background section, providing a general context of the history of the Giza Necropolis and a contemporary understanding of the site. A theoretical framework section explaining the anthropological notions of tourism, nationalism, and colonialism. A methods section explaining how the interview process was conducted. As well as a findings and conclusion sections that lists and discusses the results of the fieldwork in Egypt.

Background

The Giza Necropolis is a massive burial complex created to house pharaohs from the fourth dynasty of the Old Kingdom period of Egypt (Figure 1). The Giza Necropolis began its construction around 2600 BCE with the construction of Pharaoh Khufu's tomb. At its completion, the Pyramid of Khufu stood at 449 feet and was the tallest building in the world for 3800 years. Later, the Pyramid of Khafre, the Sphinx, and the Pyramid of Menkaure were

Figure 1. Map of Giza Necropolis- Reisner, George A. (1942). *A History of the Giza Necropolis*
1. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, map 1

The Giza Necropolis today is a short fifteen-minute walk into the desert and borders Al Haram Road. On one of my first visits to the site, I noticed how busy it really was. Entering from the main entrance to the Giza Necropolis, the one closest to the shops, hotels, and restaurants, I noticed that the sand was swirling around due to all the buses and minivans full of tourists both entering and exiting at a quick pace. Many local horse and camel drivers take tourists up the long road from the Sphinx to the Pyramid of Khafre. Multiple guides coming up asking if tourists wanted a tour and trying to bargain prices for being their personal guide for the day. Over on the left side of the Sphinx, there are a line of vendors selling various ancient Egyptian souvenirs. Vendors sold everything from books to porcelain scarab beetles to replica mummification urns.

The Pyramid of Khufu, or Great Pyramid, is surrounded by three smaller queen pyramids, a boat dock, and the worker's tomb. This Pyramid is the closest one to the side entrance where large bus tours enter. This pyramid has camel stables and the main security office nearby as well. The vendors here do not have booths like the ones near the Sphinx. These vendors either sell by hand walking around the Pyramid and set up a portable shop on a blanket on the left side of the pyramid that is the closest to the boat dock and workers tombs. The most popular item sold here are keffiyeh or كُوفِيَّة in Arabic. This is a head scarf worn to keep the sun and sand off your face. These individuals are more likely to approach tourists and insist on giving tours or showing tourists the best photo locations for tips. I would have missed seeing the worker's tomb, if I did not accept the invitation of one guide who approached me and offered to take me to the tombs that most people miss.

The smallest and most remote pyramid is the Pyramid of Menkaure. This pyramid also has three queen pyramids, located on the right side. This is the closest pyramid to the photo panorama spot that provides the best view of all three pyramids. This location has more vendors selling items and provides long camel rides into the desert. There are much fewer tourists due to being so far from the other two pyramids and the Sphinx.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical and historical framework of this thesis builds on broader anthropological literature on tourism and development, nationalism, Egyptology, orientalism, and the legacy of colonialism on cultural heritage management.

Tourism and Development

Tourism is a large and diverse industry that operates in various ways, depending on the circumstances (Greenwood 1989, 171-72). This means that it can have a vast range of different impacts on the local community. Tourism can encourage a cosmopolitan environment that allows the transfer of various ideas, customs, and goods between different cultures. A tourist who visits a new country will learn more about that country's culture and then bring back what they learn to their own country. Tourists also can share their own customs with those of the host country. This then begins a process of cultural exchange. It also can provide the opportunity of selling goods and services to foreigners, which is beneficial to the local economy (Nunez 1963, 352).

However, there are consequences to the local community due to tourism as well. "In the tourist area the consequences of tourism derive from the introduction from outside of a new socio-cultural reality. This reality, to which the native people and their social system must adapt, amounts to a transiently populated, externally based leisure class and its accompanying goals or expectations" (Smith 1997, 47). There is then a development of jobs designed to serve and assist foreign tourists, which can create an unjust power scale between these locals and tourists. The

local community then would have to adapt to this to maintain their economy. Changes to these communities can arise to better suit the incoming tourists. This results in mass development and urbanization that can be either damaging or beneficial to the local community. There is also the threat of possible gentrification due to tourism, which forces residents to leave their residence in order to create more hotels and businesses designed to increase tourism (Tesfahuney 2016). The anthropological study of tourism focuses on two topics, among others. The first is the study of tourists and the nature of tourism itself. The second is the study of the social, economic, and cultural impact of tourism on host populations and societies, including the nature of the host-tourist relationship (Hermans 1985, 10). The second theme reflects my study on the relationship between the Necropolis and the socio-economic lives of those working in the area.

Tourism is one of the four pillar industries of Egypt and has large impacts on the economic and social environments of the region (Haiying 2020, 20). Tourism creates more jobs and helps to exchange currency and boost the economy. Tourism also causes the modernization, urbanization, and the development of a touristic area (Nunez 1963, 352). The development of the Giza area can be seen as an example of this.

“Historically they have little to do with the contemporary town of Giza and of course predate it. But they remain known as the ‘Pyramids of Giza’, not ‘of Cairo.’ This linguistic detail in itself is not very relevant, yet it has left traces in the making of modern Giza, and continues to influence the construction and negotiation of Giza spaces. Cairo's rapid expansion over the last 150 years and the gravitational pull of the Pyramids are central to the history of modern Giza” (Singerman 2006, 314).

This desire of foreigners to see the Giza Necropolis allowed Presidents Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak to increase the economy through the rapid renovation of Giza to bring in even more

tourism. President Nasser began the process of turning the Pyramids into a global tourist destination by starting the first sound and light show at the Sphinx, drawing in more tourists. Starting in the 1970s, the development of new hotels and shops began in the Giza community. These developments were made to globalize Egypt's economy and further expand the tourist sector (Singerman 2006, 327). Then, more hotels along Alexandria Desert Road opened to welcome the new influx of tourists and tour groups. Now, Egypt posted an increase of 85.4% in tourist activity in the first half of 2022, with 4.9 million tourists visiting the country. However, this raises the question of how those living in these areas feel about the rapid developments happening around them due to tourism, will be discussed later in the article.

Colonialism and Foreign Influence

Modern day fascination with the Giza Necropolis began with the Napoleon expeditions in 1798 (Bratton 1968). Napoleon brought over several scholars from France to document and record the natural and cultural landscapes of Egypt. In doing so, they created some of the earliest documentation of the Giza Necropolis. This could be found in the 23-volume *Description de l'Égypte* that was created based on this expedition. This started several years of colonialism and excavation done by foreign countries in Egypt. The most important of these excavations happened in 1903 when the site was divided up into three sections to be excavated by three different countries (Harvard University, n.d). These excavations were led by George Reisner from the United States who received the northernmost cemetery sector and Menkaure Pyramid. Georg Steindorff from Germany who received the middle section and the Khafre Pyramid and the Central Field, area behind the Sphinx. And Ernesto Schiaparelli from Italy who received the southernmost section. This contained the Khufu Pyramid and the Eastern Cemetery. Excavations at Giza were led by foreign countries from 1790 up to 1929 (Harvard University, n.d). In 1929, Selim Hassan became the first Egyptian scholar to lead an excavation at Giza. Many of these

foreign archaeologists rarely acknowledged the local and global ramifications of their field work (Meskell 2001, 148). This resulted in the looting and loss of multiple artifacts in Egypt.

These excavations then sparked an overall fascination with Egypt as the “other,” introducing the notion of orientalism in Egypt. Orientalism is the west’s need for cultural domination over those in the East (Said 1978, 3). Colonialism made it easier for foreign powers such as the French and British to get access to Egyptian Artifacts and transfer them to their own countries. This ranged from archaeologists taking the artifacts they found to illegal looting organized by government officials who “forgot” to record artifacts during transfer, for them to be sold on the black market (France 1991). As more excavations went underway, the rise in public interest and tourism grew. This colonialism and public interest created a sense of “Egyptomania” and cultural consumption among Europeans who were fascinated with ancient Egyptian culture (Harter 2021). Even when Egypt declared independence in 1922, British Egyptologists were allowed to play a big role in excavations. This was because Egyptians did not have the same support and education and did not pursue Egyptology as much (Graves 2022). The colonialism and foreign interest of Egypt in the past led to both the removal of multiple ancient Egyptian artifacts, as well as the development of modern Egyptomania and cultural consumption that brings tourists into Egypt today. The interviews and analysis of this article aim to better understand the effects of past colonialism looting and cultural consumption on the Giza community. As well as provide a general understanding of their position on reparations.

Nationalism

Egypt was eventually able to use this interest in its ancient ruins and pyramids to their own advantage as foreign interference diminished and colonialism ended. Interest in the pyramids grew, providing Egypt with the opportunity to monetize this tourism. Alexandra Harter states how cultural consumption evolved from a place of colonialism and cultural appropriation

to a place of Egyptian pride and nationalism. “Over time, as Egyptology became more established, modern Egyptians began to use this field for their own nationalist purposes. The very field that had been a means of cultural consumption on the part of the Europeans allowed for modern Egyptians to re-discover their own ancient past, which had previously been deemed unworthy of study due to the pagan perceptions of ancient Egypt within the Islamic worldview” (Harter, 2021). This cultural consumption originated from a European obsession of Egyptian culture which led to claiming real artifacts and history as “souvenirs.” Egyptians then over time used Egyptology to build their own nationalism and cultural pride of their ancient past and fight back against colonial presence and claim back their archaeology. For example, when Dr. Hawass, an Egyptian archaeologist, took control of the Egyptian Antiquities Service; he started to increase Egyptian control and leadership over excavations in Egypt (Smith 2014, 7).

This relationship between past colonialism and archaeology is complex and still relevant in the modern day. There are still consequences, such as national identity, of colonialism that have different effects on cultures and regions around the world (Lyons 2002, 2). In the Middle East, there has also been a push for past colonizing powers to return stolen artifacts to their countries of origin. These artifacts are also part of these countries’ national identity and a part of what makes them who they are as a nation. For example, Magnus Bernhardsson in his book *Reclaiming A Plundered Past* discusses how Iraq uses its archaeological past to create a sense of nationalism. “Archaeology has been a useful tool in the construction of national identity in Iraq, promulgating not only a sense of belonging to a particular history, but also proprietorship over specific artifacts” (Bernhardsson 2005, 219). Bernhardsson uses the looting and plundering of artifacts during the Iraq war to analyze the relationship between imperialism, nationalism and politics. This can create conflict between western influence and Iraq. Those living in Iraq are using archaeology to form a connection with themselves and the Mesopotamian/archaeological

heritage of the past. El-Haj performs a similar study to criticize both archaeology and nationalism and how they both have influence from a colonial past that had a strong desire to find biblical proof in the Israel and Palestine region. Archaeology and national identity can influence each other and that is currently shaping both the territory of Israel and their identity (El-Haj 2001). This article explores if the people of Egypt have a similar connection when it comes to the Pyramids and ancient Egyptian culture.

Methodology

My research for this project involved two trips to Egypt: the first involved several fieldwork expeditions to Giza during an exchange program based in Cairo during August 2022 - December 2022. I visited the Giza Necropolis site 5 times when living in Cairo. This preliminary research was done to map out and plan my research. I could make connections that I used to find participants to conduct interviews. This also allowed me to build my skills in Arabic even further. This made it easier to communicate and perceive my surroundings when I returned to complete my research due to both my two years of Arabic experience, one year of colloquial Arabic focused on the Egyptian dialect, and the high amount of English language in the area due to it being a tourist area.

A second ethnographic research trip was then conducted for 2 weeks in January 2024. I conducted my study through cultural anthropology methods of survey, participant observation, tag-alongs, and semi-structured interviews. This was done to examine the complex relationships that the residents of the Giza area have with the Giza Necropolis. These methods were used in the Giza Necropolis, primarily in the area stretching from the Sphinx to the Great Pyramid. This area consists of multiple residents, vendors, guides, and restaurant workers who were the participants of my study (Figure 2). I also performed observations outside the site along Al Haram Road, right outside the Sphinx ticket entrance (Figure 3). This area consists of multiple

restaurants, shops, and hotels influenced by their location near the Pyramids. These individuals who work in and make a living through the site are the focus of my thesis.



Figure 2. Vendors near the Sphinx. Photo by Deontae Brown

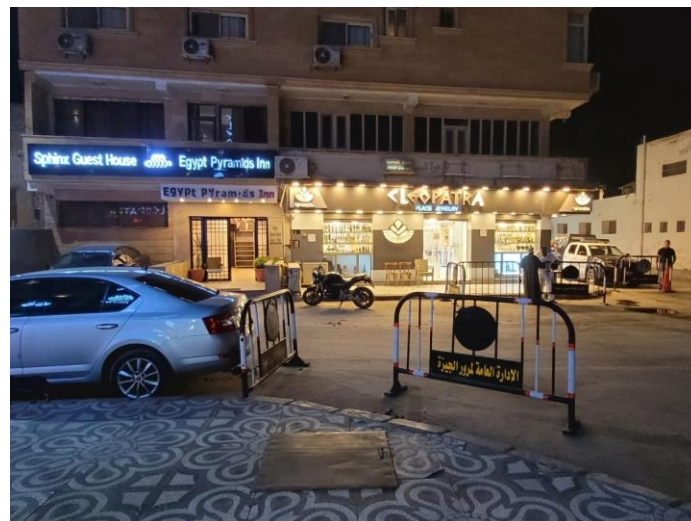


Figure 3. The end of Al Haram Road. Photo by Deontae Brown

The participant observation was done through tag-alongs, fieldwork investigations at the Giza Necropolis and along Al Haram, attending festivities at the Necropolis, and participating in touristic opportunities. The tag-alongs involved shadowing contact tour guides as they perform

their job. Tag-alongs also consisted of private tours. These tag-alongs provided the opportunity to ask questions and perform interviews about the touristic sites listed above. This also provided the opportunity to learn more about what the tour guides do and what they think about tourism's effects on the Giza community. As part of the participant observation activities, I attended festivities such as the annual light show, the Grand Egyptian Museum showing, and conferences, which allowed me to analyze how the site of Giza is used by the community.

The in-depth tag-alongs involved me shadowing contact tour guides as they performed their job. I recruited research subjects for tag-alongs by asking local tour-guides if they want to participate in the study, either from the survey or through asking guides on site. Whenever possible, the ideal order of operation for tag-alongs went as followed: I first attended a tour and then approach the tour guide to ask them if they can take the survey, then, depending on their response in the survey, I asked if they would agree to participate in the semi-structured interviews and/or the standalone tag-along. Only the guides were considered as research subjects for the study. These tag-alongs provided the opportunity to ask questions and perform interviews while on site. This provided the opportunity to learn what they do while gaining more personal information through questions about their own experiences.

For example, I was able to tag-along and shadow a guide who was taking a tourist around the Pyramid of Khufu. He first took the tour to a known photo spot, so he can “grab the top of the pyramid.” He then walked to a nearby, narrow pit and explained how this was the old boat dock used to unload these stones to build the pyramid. Then we went to the worker’s tombs nearby. This short tour is just an example of how many guides choose to go about their business when they do not have any scheduled tours that day. They find tourists on site and offer prices to show them around if they are interested for as long as they like.

Participant observations provided crucial ethnographic data of the Giza community in the Giza Necropolis and Al Haram Road. I conducted participant observation around the outdoor shops, letting vendors know about my research project and receiving their input and thoughts. At the public outdoor vendors, I observed how they conduct their business and interact with their clients, particularly how the vendors describe and interpret the artifacts that they sell in relation to the representations of the Giza Necropolis more broadly. I noted the cultural explanations and narratives that vendors and tour guides generate to accompany their products or their guide; any references to Egypt's national history and culture; how the guides talk about the colonial history of the site; how they talk about the appropriation of archaeological artifacts by colonial raids.

An initial survey was administered to interested residents, workers, and guides. The survey asked for general demographic information, how long they have worked at the site, what is their main activity, how beneficial have the sites been to the research subjects in economic and socio-cultural terms, what are some challenges/shortcomings of working at the tourist site, and whether they would be interested in participating in the tag-alongs and interviews.

Interviews were selected based on the survey results. I conducted 12 semi-structured interviews. They took place either on site, in their place of preference, or their work or shop on site. This provided a public and neutral location for interviewees for comfortability. Interviews that took place on site at the Giza Necropolis, provided in depth information on life habits, thoughts on the site and colonialism, thoughts on tourism development in Giza, thoughts on cultural consumption by the west, and thoughts on nationalism inspired by the Giza Necropolis. The interviews were semi-structured with a set of questions that could be built upon or elaborated on through additional questions or thoughts. This allowed more of a conversational dialogue to take place. These interviews only lasted about 30 minutes to an hour.

A Tourist Town Appraises Giza's Effect on Development and Nationalism

Tourism and Development - How Tourism Affects the Daily Lives of Giza Residents

Most of the participants of my study work from open to close at the Giza Necropolis. The hours depend on the season, but most stay from 7 am to 5 pm. The peak season for tourism in Egypt is from August to January. Those participants that I spoke to who worked a second job in the tourism industry normally only had tours or sold items in the Necropolis for about 2 hours to half the workday, then went to their second business or job. I noticed so many of the shopkeepers who I've spoken to multiple businesses related to the tourism industry. For example, the owner of a papyrus shop on Al Haram has been working in the industry since he was 15. Now he owns the papyrus shop, an essential oil factory, a hotel near the site, and his own tourism business. He organizes trips for tourists to the Giza Necropolis, Alexandria, Aswan and Luxor. He told me he owns multiple businesses to make enough money for his family. The papyrus shop owner told me, "I believe that giving private tours is the best way for tourists to see Egypt. This is because there is no rush or schedule that they must follow and can just take in and enjoy their time."² Many of those who I spoke to had a similar mindset and wanted to provide those coming into Egypt with a full and exciting experience.

As I was adding to my field notes at the Pyramid of Khufu near the camel stables, I was approached by Abdul. He was an eager camel driver looking to gain my business through a camel ride tour of the site. After some negotiation on price, he agreed to give me a short version of the tour and led me to his camels. He normally takes tourists as far as they are willing to pay and want to go. He took me around two pyramids and part way to the sphinx. He took me past the queen pyramids, and some mastabas. He explained to me the very basics of the site, for example, which pyramid is which, and how old the site was. I also asked him about his life and family and his work experience at the site. He described how he works here with his family, his

² Interview with author, Giza, January 9, 2024

father and his son, and how he has been working in the tourism industry all of his life. When he was a child, he worked with his father in the Necropolis. He has been a resident of Giza for 50 years. Being a camel driver in the Giza Necropolis is his main source of income and depends on the tips of tourists. Business is good for him and his fellow residents of Giza, typically during the winter, and he is very thankful for whatever he can get. “I work at the pyramids every day from open to close from 7 AM to 5 PM.”³ The tourism that is brought to Egypt due to the pyramids, provides him with income and helps boost the economy in Egypt.

As tourism is the main source of income for the majority of participants, they do as much as they can in the industry to make as much as they can to bring back to their families. This entices many to set up many different businesses in the industry and work long hours to provide and maintain their livelihoods. Youssef, who has been running a souvenir shop along Al Haram for eight years now, also owns his own tourism business. “After being trained in tourism at university, I started offering tours of the pyramids as well as running the shop. I set up different tour programs online and tourists can pick which one based on what they prefer to see.”⁴ Thus, many of the people who work in the tourism industry in Giza have also received an education in tourism that helps them in their profession. Many are motivated to learn more about the site itself and the history of ancient Egypt through upper education. A few people even learn bits of hieroglyphics to read (mostly names) the hieroglyphs in the inside of some of the tombs. Further, like Youssef, many of the workers in the industry work multiple jobs. How long Youssef is at the Giza Necropolis depends on how many individuals sign up for his tours. His tours last about three hours each, and then he spends about 12 hours at the shop. Youssef prefers working at the shop over giving tours since he opened the shop and is proud of it.

³ Interview with author, Giza Necropolis, January 10, 2024

⁴ Interview with author, Giza, January 9, 2024

Even those without multiple businesses still put in maximum effort to make a living. Walking around both the Giza Necropolis and Al Haram, it is normal to be stopped by street vendors, relatives of shop owners who are trying to bring you into their family shop, and individuals selling items. Those who looked like a tourist or foreigner would be approached the most. Many would try to negotiate prices with those who seemed uninterested in buying their items. Those who show interest would be brought to their shop or a relative's store to look at even more items. They are trying to do as much business as they can in a day, as tourism is their main source of income. The money made from sales or tours each day is how much they must live on.

Tourism has changed Giza, especially the area in front of the sphinx. This area consists of the sound and light show stage, main ticket area and Al Haram Road. Along Al Haram Road, the Pyramids and tourism clearly influence the development of the area. Multiple restaurants, hotels, and jewelry shops have ancient Egyptian theming or names to draw in more customers (Figure 4). Restaurants are also designed with large windows and rooftop dining to view the Giza Necropolis. This then brings more people to their restaurants so customers can enjoy the view and increase revenue. Many hotels have rooftop cafes connected to them as well to attract more business, making revenue from both the cafe and the hotel. The Turquoise Hotel, for example, is near the side entrance of the Giza Necropolis and run by those who live in Giza. This hotel has a rooftop restaurant that offers free breakfast to hotel guests, drawing in more tourists who want to stay there. The restaurant is open and provides a view of the Pyramid of Khufu. There is also a photo booth so tourists can get a “I love Giza” photo with the pyramid (Figure 5). The hotel also helps to organize tours for hotel guests through tour partners. The owning of multiple different businesses related to the tourism industry allows those in Giza to diversify their entrepreneurial activities and to maximize their profits to the best of their ability. It is a good opportunity to

create income, as there is trust that there will always be tourism and interest in visiting the Pyramids.



Figure 4. Turquoise Hotel Ancient Egyptian Theming. Photo by Deontae Brown



Figure 5. Turquoise Hotel Rooftop View. Photo by Deontae Brown

Despite the apparent increases in development and in tourism in the area, there are very few signs of discontent towards tourism in Giza. Few participants were against the changes that come with tourism in the area. In fact, many would not list any negative aspects of the current tourism situation in Giza. Only two out of the twelve interviews brought forth any concerns or issues with the current way touristic development is being approached there. Many of the interviewees only saw tourism as a positive and beneficial aspect of their lives. When asked about the negatives of tourism, similar responses were all given. Most went along the lines of that there is nothing wrong with tourism as it provides income as well as their fellow residents of Giza. Many also mentioned how people are naturally good and that there is no reason to look upon tourists in a negative light or viewpoint. This more positive outlook on tourism, economic opportunity, and people in general is mostly likely due to Islamic teachings. About ninety percent of those in Egypt are Muslim and practice the Islam religion. Islam teachings promotes a more optimistic view on life and others. Islam also promotes Muslims to have faith in the blessings and plans of Allah, which is a factor in why many of those who were interviewed stated that they were satisfied with their current working situations and how much they earn each day.

However, Rami brought forth some discontent with the industry. Rami is a vendor in the Giza Necropolis near the Sphinx. He has been working at his shop for about 45 years and comes to work every day, normally from 7 am to 5 pm, depending on the season. He makes a living from his tourism business. “I only feel an economic benefit and connection to the pyramids, as tourism provides my main source of income.”⁵ However, he does not like how much control the

⁵ Interview with author, Giza Necropolis, January 10, 2024

government has over his work due to working in a touristic area. “The government controls too much of my business because I work inside the site. The government also takes a small percentage of my earnings as well.”⁶ The Giza Necropolis is under the regulation of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities has strict regulations on who can work, conduct archaeological research, and the overall conservational management at the Giza Necropolis. I encountered several barriers in my interviews on site, even after going through the proper channels, so for those working on site, it can be frustrating to follow so many regulations to make a living.

However, this overall positive outlook on tourism may change with the Giza 2030 plan. The Giza 2030 plan is a goal set by the Egyptian government to remodel and improve the area around the Giza Necropolis to increase tourism and general livelihood in Giza. The plan is to create several new parks, rebuild areas with deteriorating housing, become more eco-friendly, improve transportation, and improve education in Giza. This plan may appear to look great and beneficial to society, but it could end up hurting those who live in Giza in the long run. The plan aims to limit the slums and restructure the less developed neighborhoods of Giza. As seen in other similar contexts, such as Barcelona and New York, this development could cause mass displacement and gentrification (Richardson 2022). As Giza is improved and invested in, more wealthier people could move in and the value of the neighborhood increases. This will cause those who cannot afford the increases in rent and cost of living to be forced to move out of Giza. Also, Egypt is already facing an economic crisis now as of now due to the construction of its new Administrative Capital, inflation, and foreign debt. The country is facing massive increases in general goods, taxes, and education tuition. The government would not be able to handle a massive reconstruction plan such as the Giza 2030 or compensate those who live in these poorer

⁶ Interview with author, Giza Necropolis, January 10, 2024

neighborhoods and would need to be relocated due to redevelopment. The plan also emphasizes wanting to highlight Giza's touristic features and make massive changes to promote tourism. This would most likely force out even more residents to create even more hotels, parks, and restaurants to make Giza more attractive to tourists. The planned construction is close to the main site and could end up damaging the Giza Necropolis as well. As ambitious and nice as the Giza 2030 plan sounds, it would cause more harm than benefit to the current residents of Giza.

Taking Pride in Nationalism in Tourism

The Giza Necropolis holds great importance to those in the Giza community. This can be heard from those interviewed and seen throughout the various events hosted in the community. Mohammed, who has been a resident of Giza for twenty-five years owns the Misr Papyrus Institute shop along Al Haram Road, says this, "The pyramids are not just important to Egyptian culture but are important to everyone. They contain knowledge that brings all sorts of people to Egypt. The pyramids have brought everything from war to modern day tourism to Egypt."⁷ He feels a cultural connection to the pyramids, a connection that he aims to share with others Mohammed said that "The pyramids give me pride in my country and my own business."⁸ He wants to share this pride with everyone, since we are all human and deserve to benefit from the pyramids. Many individuals felt a similar way when discussing their own thoughts on the Giza Necropolis. A common theme brought up in the interviews was that even though the Pyramids were not built by those of Arabic descent, many still have a sense of nationalism and pride when reflecting on the Giza Necropolis. Jabari, who works with his family in the bookstore across from the main ticketing office, sees the Giza Necropolis as an important cultural icon for those in Giza; an icon that he and his fellow residents can be proud of, "I feel connected to the pyramids

⁷ Interview with author, Giza, January 5, 2024

⁸ Interview with author, Giza, January 8, 2024

because they were made by strong Egyptians of the past and I am Egyptian now.”⁹ The fact that the Giza Necropolis was not created by Arabs is irrelevant, as both the Necropolis and the Giza community share the same land. The land is what connects modern Giza to the Pyramids and those of ancient Egypt. Ali taught me the saying ام الدنيا or um al donya, which means ‘Mother of the World’. This phrase is used to acknowledge all the history and achievements of Egypt from ancient times to modern day. The phrase highlights the historical, political, and cultural significance that Egypt has had on the rest of the world. The Giza Necropolis is a part of the rich history of the land, a history that those in both Giza and Egypt admire and symbolizes their pride in their history and nation.

Events held at the Giza Necropolis, like the light show, expresses Egyptian nationalism by highlighting the Giza Necropolis and emphasizing its importance. The light show is a historical retelling that uses music and lights to tell the story of the Giza Necropolis. The show starts off by saying that, “you have come tonight to the most fabulous and celebrated place in the world. Here on the plateau of Giza, stands forever the mightiest of human achievements. No traveler, emperor, merchant, or poet has trodden on these sands and not gasped in awe.” This Sound and Light shows how much those in both Giza and Egypt appreciate and take pride in the Giza Necropolis, as it was created to not only make a profit but to explain the history and highlight the magnificence of the Pyramids in a creative way.

The souvenirs made and sold at the Necropolis can be viewed as a way that Egyptians further the consumption of Egyptian material culture through a place of nationalist pride and to spread their culture to others. When in the field, I watched vendors and shop keepers sell items ranging from keffiyehs to stonework ancient Egyptian statues. Cultural items like keffiyeh were sold to tourists and many vendors were excited to see tourists wear them. It was not seen as a

⁹ Interview with author, Giza, January 9, 2024

form of cultural appropriation but as a sign of cultural respect and appreciation. Vendors like Rami are proud of the items they sell: “All of my items are well constructed and are all Egyptian made.”¹⁰ These items are seen to spread Egyptian history to other cultures.

The Grand Egyptian Museum is the accumulation of economic development and Egyptian nationalism in Giza. The Museum is part of the Giza 2030 plan and is the largest archaeological museum of a single civilization in the world. The museum will hold over 100,000 ancient Egypt artifacts when completed. The museum consists of a shopping and dining center, a children's museum, and both permanent and special exhibits. The museum also contains conference centers to become an international communication center between different museums and those in the field of Egyptology. The museum aims to promote education and international academic engagement when it comes to ancient Egypt and Egyptology. The inside of the museum was designed to model ancient Egyptian temples while the outside models how the pyramids were constructed. The top was designed with several windows that provide a clear view of the entire Giza Necropolis. All three main Pyramids can be seen from here. Many of those I interviewed were very proud in what the museum was starting to become as they believed it would highlight the very best of ancient Egypt and their history. The museum is still being completed and has not had its full grand opening. However, it is open to those who reserve ahead of time to see the completed exhibits so far and aims to fully open in 2024.

It was at the Grand Egyptian Museum where I met Layla, a tour guide at the Grand Egyptian Museum, who let me shadow her during her tours and interview her as well. She had been working at the Grand Egyptian Museum for four months as a guide. She studied being a touristic guide while at university and has a general desire to learn more about ancient Egypt and share what she has learned to others. She led an English tour of the entire facility that was open

¹⁰ Interview with author, Giza Necropolis, January 10, 2024

to the public and went into depth when it came to the Grand Hall and Grand Staircase. These locations had the most completed exhibits and she explained everything from their significance during ancient Egypt to how they came to the Grand Egyptian Museum today. She also took care to include some of her own theories and ideas about certain ancient Egyptian lifestyles that are still being debated in academia today. She is very passionate about her job and the influence that the Giza Necropolis and ancient Egyptian heritage has on Giza and modern Egypt.

“Of course, ancient Egyptian culture and the Giza Necropolis is important to modern day Giza and Egypt. It has been for the last 7000 years, and the pyramids have puzzled everyone. It will remain important, and it is not just for the Giza people, it is for the whole world. Egyptology should not just be for Egyptians but the entire world.”¹¹

-Layla

Those who live and work at the Giza Necropolis share a general pride and nationalism when reflecting on the site. They want to share their pride to those outside of Egypt, so others understand the significance of the Giza Necropolis and ancient Egypt as a civilization had on the rest of the world:

“Generally speaking, there is this theory in psychology that says that you are supposed to belong to something great, as this is one of the emotional needs of any human being. Any person would love to belong to something and so some start to dig into their history to find this sense of belonging. So, having the pyramids built in your country, despite not having any relation to their construction, still creates this sense of pride or belonging. We are lucky that we were born here. It gives everyone a sense of belonging.”¹²

-Layla

¹¹ Interview with author, Giza, January 6, 2024

¹² Interview with author, Giza, January 6, 2024

colonization.”¹⁴ Those in the Giza community accept that this is a part of their history and does not let it stop them from enjoying the Giza Necropolis and ancient Egyptian heritage.

When asked about the notion of reparations and the return of looted artifacts, some participants want this and hope for museums to return some items. Jabari says, “Items that were made in Egypt should be here and only here. Artifacts that were taken during colonialization should be returned and placed into the new museum.”¹⁵ However, many participants are fine with the other museums keeping looting artifacts and do not want to see them returned to Egypt. These items in other museums are seen to develop curiosity in people and a general interest for them to visit Egypt to see where these items originated from. Mohammed believes that other countries should return some artifacts in reparations, but not everything should be given back. He said that people should still get to know about Egypt and museums should keep some items to bring curious people to Egypt to learn more. Mohammed told me, “Ancient history is for everyone so if an artifact is somewhere else then more people can learn about Egypt.”¹⁶ Similarly, Layla during our interview told me that as nice as the return of artifacts would be, that it is not realistic. Despite this fact, this is not entirely a bad situation as it promotes the education of Egyptian history around the world:

“I would love to see the head of Nefertiti behind me and the Rosetta Stone, these are such lovely pieces. I would love to see the return of these artifacts happen but at the same time, the fact of having Egyptian pieces accessible around the world gives people glimpses of Egypt even though they did not actually come to Egypt. So, it gives a chance to different people from all around the world to get to know Egyptians for what they are really that's not affected by media or personal perspective. It is a bittersweet

¹⁴ Interview with author, Giza, January 5, 2024

¹⁵ Interview with author, Giza, January 9, 2024

¹⁶ Interview with author, Giza, January 5, 2024

relationship.”¹⁷

Past colonialism is acknowledged but is now seen as an opportunity to bring more tourists into Egypt. Colonialism developed an unintentional economic relationship when it comes to tourism, using artifacts as a type of “advertising” to possibly draw in more tourists to Egypt. This combined with the Giza community’s desire to spread history and culture makes it so those in Egypt can reflect on colonialism in a positive overtone.

Conclusion

The relationship of those who live and work in the Giza Necropolis and the site itself is complex due to the touristic, cultural, and historical ties that weave together in Giza. The Giza Necropolis provides the main source of income through tourism for those in the Giza community. Tourism also drives economic development in Giza, causing the creation of new commodities, such as museums, parks, and updated transportation. However, an implication of living in a developing tourist destination and a historical landmark is that it could lead to possible displacement and gentrification. The Giza 2030 plan could result in the removal of those who currently live and work in Giza, as the area becomes more focused on tourism and becomes more attractive to those with more money. The value of the Giza neighborhood would increase as those with more money move in and more economic developments are completed, forcing those who cannot afford the income to leave. The residents and workers articulate a sense of nationalism when it comes to the Giza Necropolis. The Giza Necropolis is a symbol of strength, resilience, and culture for those in the community. Those in both Egypt and the Giza community admire those who came before and built the pyramids. They strive to live a life full of achievement and be remembered like the Egyptians who built the Necropolis. Colonialism is reflected upon as something that can now be used to the advantage of those in Giza. Modern

¹⁷ Interview with author, Giza, January 6, 2024

tourism is dependent on past colonial relationships. The ancient Egyptian artifacts in other museums, sparks interest in those who sees them and creates a desire to learn more by coming to Egypt. This article creates a case study for modern Giza in Anthropology and adds to the literature of touristic development, nationalism, and colonialism. As well as aim to benefit the Giza community by highlighting the concerns, thoughts, and implications of depending on and living near a historical landmark.

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The Giza community can build this sense of unity and belonging through the Giza Necropolis and historical heritage of the area. It creates nationalism amongst the community for Egypt, as being connected to such a historical achievement through shared land is something truly unique, and something that nowhere else in the world has. Layla also stated that, for something to be that great and have such an effect on the people thousands of years after it was built, like the construction of this museum, it has such a strong effect on the people. People work because there are pyramids here, after 7000 years it still gives people jobs. She relates to the pyramids as a source of motivation to live life to the fullest of her ability and do something great in life. The pyramids and those who constructed them are something truly valued and respected in the community. The Giza Necropolis inspires those in the community to live their lives to the fullest of their abilities and strive to achieve greatness like those who came before.

Giza's Views on Colonialism and Reparations

In the Middle East and amongst the academic community, there has been a push for past colonizing powers to return stolen artifacts to their countries of origin. However, this does not seem to be the case in Egypt and the Giza community. The Giza community reflects on colonialism as something that happened and is part of Egyptian history but does not define them. Ahmed, the reservation manager of Anubis Hotel said, “past colonialism has little effect on Egypt today because so much is derived from our Arabic culture. Speech, food, and culture today all has its source from Arabic traditions.”¹³ The Giza community do not reflect on the negative and harmful aspects of colonialism but choose to take pride in the value that the nation of Egypt had on past colonizers. Mohammed said, “Coming from another and learning is important so even past colonialization can be seen in a positive light just knowing that some came to our country to gain more knowledge and learn about our history. It is meant to be like this even

¹³ Interview with author, Giza, January 4, 2024

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