From the Instructor

I designed WR 150: 1968/2011 to teach research skills in the first half of the course and then allow students to use those skills to learn more about a topic of their choice in the second half. Earlier in the semester we had examined a number of academic essays and found most to be written in a three-part structure: first, authors discuss what has already been written about a given topic; they follow this up with a problem or question that hasn't been addressed in that body of discourse; and finally, authors pose a solution to that problem by introducing their take or position. Paper 3 had to be structured in this way.

Lisa Lau knew early on that she wanted to examine the role of history during the Arab Spring in Egypt in 2011. She had done research on how state museums in various countries shape the national historical narrative and she wanted to examine how the burning down and total loss of the Institute d'Egypte museum of ancient Egyptian history during the Arab Spring might affect the historical narrative of the Egyptians. What she found fascinating was that at the moment of this tremendous loss, most Egyptians had never set foot inside the museum and knew practically nothing about the history it told. How much was Egyptian historical consciousness actually affected then?

The murals of Mohammad Mahmoud Street near Tahrir Square, in contrast, offer a narrative of history that is constantly being "written," edited, erased, and "rewritten," presenting a visual narrative of events that is accessible to all Egyptians. Thus "The Murals of Mohammad Mahmoud Street: Reclaiming Narratives of Living History for the Egyptian People" was born. Lisa's first draft was exhaustive in its research, however it took on too many topics. I made some suggestions on theoretical background sources on history, nation, narrative, and the museum and provided some guidelines for cutting and focusing. I hope Lisa will continue to work on this project and eventually publish it as a scholarly monograph.

— Jura Avizienis

WR 150: 1968/2011

From the Writer

 This capstone paper for Jura Avizienis's WR 150 course "1968/2011" gave me the opportunity to examine two smaller-scale events within the Egyptian Revolution, with the result that I came to see the Revolution itself entirely differently.

 Having examined the Egyptian Revolution in class from different angles, I decided to take a different route: street art. I chose the murals of Mohammad Mahmoud Street because I felt that their messages needed to be heard but had not been in the West, and I began to see this neglect as part of a systemic issue in Western thinking about Egypt. The murals are the expression of an Egypt that perhaps for too long has been waiting to assert itself to the world. From this paper I hope that people can gain a better understanding and appreciation of these ongoing protests and the spirit that continues to drive them.

 I have to thank Professor Avizienis for all her help, advice, and encouragement both on this paper and throughout last semester. I also have to thank the Egyptian people, who have revolutionized my life and captivated my heart since 2011. Without their inspiration I never would have written this paper.

— Lisa Lau

Lisa Lau

The Murals of Mohammad Mahmoud Street: Reclaiming Narratives of Living History for the Egyptian People

Many of the murals of Mohammad Mahmoud Street near Tahrir Square, created to commemorate the martyrs of the 2011 Revolution, can be observed to make remarkable use of symbols and motifs of ancient Egyptian art. At the same time, the continuing protests in Egypt have largely been divorced in Western academic discourse from any discussion of ancient Egyptian history. This pattern of disassociating modern Egypt from its ancient past has been prominent in Western thinking ever since colonizers first began to collect ancient Egyptian artifacts and documents in their own private institutions. When one of these institutions, the Institute d'Egypte, burned down in December 2011 together with many of its important historical documents, some in the West began asking questions about the Egyptians' irreverence toward their own history. In fact, however, history as cultural and social memory could not be more alive in the Egyptian Revolution and its aftermath. The Revolution has reinvigorated history on the street in a way that has the capacity to produce change in society. The most tangible evidence of this is in the street murals of Mohammad Mahmoud Street, which incorporate Egyptian art in a way that endows both ancient and modern history with new meanings and that invites participation from the street, empowering Egyptians on both the individual and societal level, and legitimizing the presence of the people at a time when the state has oppressed their very existence.

Egyptian artists began painting the murals of Mohammad Mahmoud Street in the latter part of 2011 and into 2012, a time of intense fighting between protestors and the military in Mohammad Mahmoud Street and the surrounding area (Abaza, "Emerging Memorial Space";

"Walls" 129). The murals depicted the martyrs and the wounded, employing powerful elements of ancient Egyptian art (Abaza, "Walls" 130–31; Durham, "Tomb of Tahrir"). The very act of painting was a political act, part of the very same struggle against the army that it was depicting (Hussain; Mousa). As this project was ongoing, the Institute d'Egypte burned down during clashes between the army and protestors in December 2011 ("Cairo Institute"). Neither event was associated with the other. Juxtaposing these two events, however, their effects and the reactions they evoke, reveals that the murals constitute a narrative of living history directly challenging the notion that modern-day Egypt and the Revolution are disconnected from, or even detrimental to, their own history. This essay will first seek to examine and refute conventional Western thinking about modern Egypt, as evident in recent media and popular discourse, and then move on to understand the significance of the historically aware messages produced in the murals.

A mural mourning the deaths of over 70 people during a riot at a soccer match, February 2012. Artist—Alaa Awad/Photographer—Ali Khaled

The Institute d'Egypte was historically part of the French mission to dominate Egypt through gaining a monopoly over its wealth of cultural artifacts and ancient history. The Institute d'Egypte was built during Napoleon's invasion of Egypt and housed several documents

carefully recording Egypt's ancient history ("Cairo Institute"). Among these documents was the *Description d'Egypte*, a renowned twenty-four volume compilation of Egyptian history that is the basis for much of current knowledge of ancient Egypt ("Cairo Institute"). In "The Agency of Art and the Study of Modern Arab Identity," Kirsten Scheid, assistant professor of anthropology at the American University of Beirut, situates the *Description d'Egypte* as an "analogue," or a similar representation in another medium, of the nineteenth-century French paintings of Napoleon's invasion (Scheid n.p.). These paintings not only distorted historical events in favor of the French but also were agents of inscribing "cultural boundaries" between France and Egypt and establishing racial hierarchies that served as "proof of the wisdom and justice" of French colonization and exploitation of other countries (Scheid n.p.).

The scientific-colonialist endeavors of archaeology and Egyptology (which Scheid describes as a "public symbol of French national genius") allowed Western countries to lay claim to Egyptian heritage as part of their own history by virtue of their supposed superior knowledge of it, far excelling that of the Egyptians themselves (Meskell 150; Scheid n.p.).[1] Meskell, professor of anthropology at Columbia University, cites Dirks as she discusses how science aided imperialist countries in conquering new territories (149). The subjugation of natural resources to scientific disciplines allowed imperialist countries to control these resources and use them to better suit their own ends (Meskell 149–150). Just as colonialism aimed to take over the "raw materials and resources" of its conquered territories, it likewise aimed to lay claim to heritage through a process that Meskell calls "intellectual colonialism" (Meskell 150). The *Description d'Egypte,* which was a monumental achievement of these disciplines, can be seen as a victory for the West in staking their claim to the Egyptian past.

Although the *Description d'Egypte* was mourned at the time of its burning by both Egyptians and people around the world, as a loss in some sense of the greatness of Egypt's history and of the record of its monumental achievements, the origins of this document must lead us to question what choices might have been made as it was being recorded. Although I do not have the space or the resources to question the *Description d'Egypte*'s contents, which by all accounts were meticulously recorded,

scholars such as Scheid, who situate it amongst the nineteenth-century French paintings that made the viewer see a "developing" "French identity" in depictions of colonized landscapes and that thrusted France into its "political destiny" to pursue imperialism, seem to question whether the *Description d'Egypte* reflected a French cultural vision for their new empire more than it did ancient Egypt itself. (Scheid n.p.). One of course must be open to the fact that, as Jacobs (cited in Meskell 155) suggests, history as a discourse is inherently political, and the historical narrative that survived may have at the expense of other narratives which were discarded as they were deemed undesirable (in this case, to the empire appropriating the history of its subjects as its own history).

Even assuming that the *Description d'Egypte*'s contents were meticulously recorded and faithful to unbiased methodology, the real question is to what purpose these facts were intended to be so meticulously recorded and compiled into a twenty-four volume set, that is, to what purpose this historical knowledge was being put. Installed in a beautiful institute near Tahrir Square, a space enclosed and sheltered from the public, this airtight gem has not only been isolated from the people who were exploited as this history was being recorded but also has been kept away from them (Meskell 148–49, 151–59). Meskell argues that archaeologists have "excuse[d]" themselves from sharing their findings with local people and getting them involved in their work by claiming that present-day Egyptians, as Muslims, have no interest in Pharaonic history" (149, 151). Here the phenomena that results from their exclusion, namely that Egyptian people are viewed as estranged from their history, is used as justification for it. Rather, the fields of archaeology and Egyptology as they are carried out in practice have systematically excluded Egyptian people from having access to knowledge of their own history and have likewise excluded the possibility that the Egyptian people themselves retain any knowledge or cultural remnants of their past societies that may be useful in archaeologists' research, or as Meskell puts it, that archaeologists could not only teach but learn from the Egyptian people (162).

The burning of the Institute d'Egypte in Cairo near Tahrir Square in December 2011 reinvigorated debates about the need to protect Egyptian heritage from its own people, reviving colonialist discourses on Egypt's cultural patrimony. The attitudes of archaeologists in Egypt

towards Egyptian people that Meskell discusses are also evident in the responses of some non-Egyptian commentators on the burning of the Institute d'Egypt concerning Egypt's ability to manage and understand the significance of their own historical artifacts and records as cultural assets. In "The Islamists' Fires: When Will the West Wake Up?" journalist Michael Walsh describes in a primordial, barbaric way the "horde of Muslim rioters" who "annihilated a piece of history," committing "cultural jihad *against the West*" [my emphasis]. Harnessing the argument that "the planet's cultural patrimony belongs to everyone," Walsh claims that the burning of the Institute d'Egypt shows that "European cultural institutions" are threatened. The melding of this document of Egyptian history, albeit French-created, with Western history, is evidence of continued colonialist thinking that appropriates the ancient Egyptian heritage as precisely Western heritage under the guise of a concern for "global" heritage sites (Meskell 150).[2] Again his main concern is with the death of this "piece of history" (Walsh), which suddenly spurs his reaction following several months of violence that have killed and injured many Egyptians themselves. This is reminiscent of Meskell's observation that archaeologists generally treat Egyptian people as secondary to the cultural preservation of their history (147). Although Walsh states that "not all of the Islamic world is antithetical to civilization" (and here he equates civilization with Western institutions), his description of the protestors as a "horde of Muslim rioters" (Walsh) uses historically potent imagery of backwardness to inscribe the dichotomy between these people, barbaric religious fanatics, and their nobler, more enlightened ancestors. Interestingly, he calls for the UN to use force to protect heritage sites, citing this event as proof that clearly Egyptians need more heavy-handed guidance in the management of their cultural resources (Walsh).

The burning of the Institute d'Egypt clearly evoked still-extant colonialist thinking on how "global" cultural heritage should be controlled (Meskell 150). In an interesting online blog conversation, even among commenters who did not prescribe the use of force and acknowledged that Egypt must manage their own affairs, colonialism and colonialist thinking were still buttressed and even justified (Auster).[3] Thus not only is the Institute d'Egypte, and the *Description d'Egypte* which it housed, connected to the colonialist development of scientific disciplines that continue

to subjugate cultural knowledge to imperialist control, but the attitudes surrounding the burning of the Institute d'Egypte and the loss of one of the original copies of the *Description d'Egypte* shows that colonialist thinking still informs the Western public sphere (as opposed to certain specialized groups) as they make sense of Egypt's present day people and their relationship to their ancient heritage.

This is not to say that Egyptians do not value the history that was housed in the Institute d'Egypte; in fact, that is what I am arguing against. I am arguing precisely that Egyptian people in the present day actively engage with their history in their daily lives and communities, and that the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 was not violent chaos carried out by a "horde of Muslim[s]" but rather a moment when floodgates of creativity were opened and ancient Egyptian history was revived on Cairo's streets as a source of strength and national renewal (Walsh).[4] In fact, many Egyptians tried to save the historical papers housed in the Institute ("Cairo Institute"). What is really tragic about this event is not so much the valuable documents that were lost, but rather that these documents never reached the wider public. That is, the people who arguably had the right to claim and to be empowered by this rich recording of their own history, society, and culture, were ironically and tragically the one people who never had the chance to discover it, explore it, and use it for their own benefit. Although the cause of the fire was not necessarily intentional, nor explicitly anti-French or anti-Western, though it might have been, what this event does show is that historical heritage as colonialist institutions have rendered it, as artifacts and records in airtight preservation, controlled and subjugated, a form of history that in its scientific and colonial entrapments has been strangled from the living society, is not durable. Neither this history nor the institutions that house it can survive in their physical presence. Living history, in this case the people who are carrying out their revolution in this moment of time, naturally overtakes and reclaims the spaces that the ancient Egyptians once lived in themselves. The continually evolving nature of living history defies every act of preservation on the part of any scientific enterprise. Colonial empires in the past and the institutions which continue their practices in the present have been obsessed with recording history in order to materialize its existence and control it, and likewise with creating elaborate museums around it in order to impose a

physical claim on its territory. However, living history overtakes that which was physically present before, and history endures most strongly not necessarily in artifacts and records but rather in social and cultural memory that is both retained and remolded with each generation.

Releasing history from the determinism of a dominant narrative pretending to be the only one and returning it to living society, to the imagination that reinterprets and re-enfolds history into daily life and the community, can lead to empowerment. When asking the questions, "What is history?" "Where does it come from?" and "Why is it history?," we have already established above that history as a discourse is political and subject to existing power relations, and that as a preserved object history is not durable. I would argue that history, as a tool that shapes and informs society, resides most powerfully in the imagination. What is history, anyway, except an imagined national narrative? Rappaport, professor of psychology at the University of Illinois, discusses a "community narrative" (as opposed to an individual story) as a "story that is common among a group of people…A group of people with a shared narrative may constitute a community" (803).[5] Benedict Anderson expresses his idea of communities in a related but different manner in his discussion of the political community of the nation, which he describes as an "imagined community" (6). This imagined nation is based on nationalism, a "cultural artifact" whose "meanings have changed over time," an evolving narrative of national identity that evokes at times extreme emotions (Anderson 4, 6, 141). Jacobs (cited in Meskell 158) interestingly links "national imaginings" to "sanctioned heritage," suggesting that a common historical narrative at the national level supports the nation as an imagined community.

While Anderson's nation consists of individuals who may never have had face-to-face contact, Rappaport's narrative suggests a smaller group that does have face to face contact (Anderson 6; Rappaport 803). Although in Egypt's case the narrative of living history being discussed is one that concerns an entire nation and is shared by people who may not know each other, and in this sense is more of an "imagined" narrative than a strictly communal one, Rappaport's research is still relevant to this case. We can extend Rappaport's "communal narrative" as a resource for empowerment to Benedict's scale of an "imagined" national narrative, imagined in this case meaning that it stretches over a temporal and not

just geographical span. The collective Egyptian imagination renews a sense of national identity by creatively reviving historical narratives of social and cultural memory in the present.

Rappaport's research ties together this discussion of historical narratives as a "cultural resource," marginalized narratives of social and cultural memory, and the relation between having access to collective narratives and empowerment (Meskell 150).[6] Rappaport uses the general definition of empowerment given by the Cornell Empowerment Group: "an intentional, ongoing process centered in the local community…through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources" (802). Rappaport explicitly states that "The ability to tell one's story, and to have access to and influence over collective stories, is a powerful resource"; thus he identifies narratives as a "valued resourc[e]" which empowerment helps people to "gain access to and control over" (802). Elsewhere he states that "helping people to identify, create, and tell their own stories, individually and collectively, is an endeavor consistent with the development of empowerment" (Rappaport 802). This is precisely what the Mohammad Mahmoud murals do, in the sense that they tell the stories of individuals in a way that translates to the rest of society by drawing on social and cultural memory as a framework for interpretation, creating a new collective narrative in which people can identify their own stories. According to Rappaport, "it is very clear that stories…have a powerful effect on human behavior. They tell us not only who we are but who we have been and who we can be. There is a great deal of evidence, from many different disciplines, to show that narratives create meaning, emotion, memory, and identity" (796). The meanings and emotions expressed in the murals of Mohammad Mahmoud evoke social and cultural memory and a sense of identity. This memory attaches meaning and emotion to a narrative of identity or origins that doesn't have a fixed but rather evolving meaning.

Thus Rappaport's narratives are similar to Anderson's nationalism in their ability to stimulate emotion and a sense of identity, but Rappaport is concerned with marginalized, not dominant narratives, and people's ability to access communal narratives and collectively control and use them. That is, he doesn't take for granted that all individuals have the opportunity to express themselves through collective narratives, and he focuses on this

access to communal narratives as the pivotal point through which to understand how narratives can affect society and human behavior (Rappaport 796, 799, 804). This will be important to understand just how the Mohammad Mahmoud Street murals, as marginalized narratives seeking to become national ones, were able to bring about actual social and political effects. Finally, his research is focused not necessarily on nation-building so much as empowering the voices of a community, which allows us to view the expressions of living history on Mohammad Mahmoud Street as not only having a nationalistic intent but rather one closer to the heart of the Egyptian, that is to uplift every individual's story to create a narrative that both individually and collectively empowers.

Rappaport in his research discusses the importance of communal narratives for personal and collective empowerment, specifically in the context of sustaining life changes: "People who seek either personal or community change often find that it is very difficult to sustain change without the support of a collectivity that provides a communal narrative around which they can sustain changes in their own personal story" (796). The narratives on these walls are at once collective and personal; that is, they intertwine collective narratives with personal stories (i.e. faces and names of the martyrs), raising the individual and empowering and sustaining collective changes in the nation. At the personal level, the Revolution caused many changes in Egyptians' lives – positive or negative, and often overwhelming. In one case a young man described how watching his friend die in the Revolution had a powerful and lasting effect on his life: "When he was alive I would see him every day in the Square, but after he died I would see him in my mind everywhere" (Hussain). At the time the piece was written in May 2012 he was still not able to walk through the Square, "the memories…being too much for him to bear" (Hussain). The murals of Muhammad Mahmoud commemorating the martyrs not only offer solace and healing, but also sustain the changes in the lives of people like this young man by providing a narrative that can help them to ascribe some meaning to these difficult experiences in order to take the first steps towards envisioning a future ("Visualizing Revolution").[7]

Many material artifacts and records remain on Egyptian history to which all Egyptians have a right as a collective and cultural resource, yet not only for this reason does the irrevocable loss of the Institute and the

documents it housed not mean that all is hopeless. Not only is this present moment particularly an important time for history to be recovered from cultural and social memory, but also an important moment in which history can be restored to the people as living history ("Visualizing Revolution"). Egyptians are the living form of their history, and as such they have more potential to influence society for their own good than that history which was locked away in the Institute ever did. Although the fire led to a grievous loss, perhaps even more catastrophic for Egyptians than it was for the rest of the world, what matters for Egypt's future is the history that the public gains access to, whether it resides in cultural and social memory or in material artifact, and how they manage to use it. Certainly this is a moment for Egyptians to reassert themselves as the vanguard of their own history.

Many observers consider the Egyptian Revolution to be a fresh start for Egypt, a new era of Egyptian history that seeks to disconnect itself from the past. And yet there is evidence to suggest that post-Revolution Egypt (that is, post-Mubarak Egypt) is in fact rediscovering its history, in both recorded historical knowledge and in what resides in the imagination. In the aftermath of the (ongoing) Egyptian Revolution that began in 2011, as Egyptians begin to rebuild their society, the Egyptian people have invested in reclaiming their connection to their various histories (Islamic, Coptic, and Pharaonic), particularly through some astounding street art murals on Mohammad Mahmoud Street near Tahrir Square (Abaza, "Walls" 131; Durham, "Tomb of Tahrir"; Mousa). Mohammad Mahmoud Street was the site of violent clashes from November 2011 to February 2012, and many protestors were killed or seriously injured (Abaza "Emerging Memorial Space"; "Walls" 129). A few Egyptian fine arts professors from Luxor, Ammar Abu Bakr and Alaa Awad, along with other Egyptian artists, went to Mohammad Mahmoud Street and began painting murals on the walls of the buildings lining the street (Hussein, "The Epic Murals").

The creation of this art is part of the creation of living history on the street. These murals were not recordings of protests in isolation from the protests themselves: Abu Bakr and others created the murals during the protests, alternating between throwing rocks and painting (Suzeeinthecity, "Madness"). Thus these murals are historical narratives created

by the energy in the street in the moment that history itself was still being defined. The purpose that they came to serve in the context of their creation is that of a continually evolving historical narrative. This mural reclaims history for the living imagination, and through its special location on this street which is also an active protest site, it literally re-situates history as a context for daily life, political action, and social transformation. An intra-painting reading of Abu Bakr and Alaa Awad's murals reveal how social and cultural memory have the power to create a historical narrative that reconnects people meaningfully with their past, a rich resource from which they can draw inspiration and dignity. This historical narrative likewise restores people with a sense of their own agency as living history. This the mural accomplishes by inviting participation from the street, empowering individuals, and legitimizing their existence in the face of state structures that often neglect or persecute individuals with very little power to resist and whose only crime is their existence.

From the outset the artists were motivated by the idea of both reviving and renewing the past in the present using the collective imagination and of using narratives of living history as a resource for empowerment. A spokesperson at a panel discussion of the artists who initiated the mural project said that they hoped that from their murals "conversations about the future of Egypt will be creatively reengaged to overcome the disappointments [of the Revolution] that settled in late last year" ("Visualizing Revolution"). The artists' stated intentions were to create something like a tomb space on Mohammad Mahmoud Street where friends and families of the martyred could come and pray and remember their loved ones ("The Epic Murals"). Abu Bakr and Alaa Awad painted a mural with the martyrs' faces, amidst pharaonic funeral scenes inspired by those on real tombs in Luxor (Durham "Khawaga"; "Tomb of Tahrir"; Hussein). However, these images are not intended to simply re-create the street as a tomb space. According to Egyptologist Mariam Ayad, "It's not…a superimposition of the content. There's really a full integration and internalization of the content, so…they have this added layer of meaning to them" (Durham; "Tomb of Tahrir"). She also notes that the murals are "more relevant and emotionally engaging than…the walls of the tombs of Luxor" (Durham "Tomb of Tahrir").

The use of pharaonic art lends the Revolution old, familiar tools to build a new narrative, just as the Revolution gives the pharaonic symbols and motifs used in the murals a fresh relevance and urgency. Abu Bakr in particular denied that the murals served any aesthetic purpose at all, claiming that they were entirely political, designed to portray the concerns of the people on the street at the moment, which calls on us to read the art seriously for its political messages and not simply as aesthetic decoration (Durham, "Tomb of Tahrir," "The Epic Murals"; Mousa). In one narrative sequence, first there is an apparently courtly scene where a rat-like king receives the people as an offering from a cat while slaves (representing the then newly-elected parliament) bow down in front of him (Durham, "Khawaga"; "Visualizing Revolution"). This perhaps is suggestive of the bloated and fake power of Egypt's past and present leaders, in addition to the corrupt dynamics of Egypt's past and present governments. Towards the left of this scene is what looks like a confused battle scene (Abaza, "Emerging Memorial"). Further on are ancient Egyptian women protestors, and on their left a different scene of warriors climbing a wall supposedly to storm a fortress (Abaza, "Emerging Memorial"; Durham, "Khawaga"; "Gallery"). This scene is reminiscent of the walls that the Egyptian army had erected on several streets around Tahrir Square which the people eventually broke down (Abaza "Walls," 128). The bodies of the protesting women are noticeably completely turned away from the rat-king court and they are gesturing towards and looking up to the warriors climbing the wall. This suggests that the Revolution is not over even now that a new parliament is elected, and that the revolutionaries don't see parliament as their true leaders. Compared to the slaves in parliament, the revolutionaries are stronger and more dignified. One of the warriors also looks back in the direction of the women as he climbs the wall. The women appear strong and determined, walking in even rows and holding what looks like sticks or weapons. The outstretched hand of one of the protesting women overlaps with and reaches into the fortress-storming scene, suggesting the women and the men are engaged in a shared, understood resistance. The hand of the woman points the reader of this narrative towards the warriors, as they become the climax of this sequence from court, to battle, to the protesting women, and finally to the warriors who storm the fortress of power, this fortress possibly protecting the same court depicted at the beginning of the sequence (Abaza, "Emerging Memorial").

Though Abu Bakr and Alaa Awad made use of tomb art that was meant to be eternal, when they incorporate it into street art it becomes ephemeral (though in fact, it has resisted erasure because of the "curse of the Pharaohs") (Durham "Tomb of Tahrir"; Abaza "Emerging Memorial Space"). Nevertheless, its ephemerality as street art changes its nature and the way we think about these paintings on the street compared to in the tomb. On the street these tomb paintings transform from static testaments of the past to part of the living, changing history of Egypt. The ephemerality of these paintings points to the central role of social and cultural memory in passing down history from generation to generation. Although someday Egyptians will no longer be able to see or may even forget the paintings that existed on these walls, the internalization of these narratives in social and cultural memory will allow the Revolution to remain alive in the Egyptian national imagination long after records and artifacts of the Revolution have disappeared.

What makes these murals different from the historical documents housed in the Institute d'Egypt is that the rich cultural legacies and symbolic narratives left behind by ancient Egyptians are rendered here as belonging to present day Egyptians to use as a common resource and draw upon for inspiration. The murals were created intentionally to do so. As one of the mural artists Hanaa Degham said, "When you walk into an Ancient Egyptian tomb, it is a place where you would feel relief . . . And you would feel it was as if that was the real home of the Ancient Egyptian" (Durham, "Tomb of Tahrir"; "Visualizing Revolution"). Thus tombs are a place where Egyptians can feel their ancestors and connect with them on an emotional level. Bringing this tomb into the street, the latter being the "home" of the present day Egyptian, has the effect of blurring the lines between the home of the Ancient Egyptian and the present day Egyptian. This was achieved by the artists' creative use of pharaonic symbols and motifs. The symbols and motifs used in the pharaonic scenes have their own meanings in ancient Egyptian art, but in the murals they both elevate recent history and are elevated by their associations with recent history to new meanings ("Visualizing Revolution"). In the mural described above the warriors from ancient Egyptian history are recast as the protestors from the Revolution, and the rat king is similar to either a Mubarak or a

Tantawi, and thus these scenes and the narratives surrounding them gain potency as a narrative of the present, living, breathing Egypt.

In these murals there is stark evidence of the interweaving of Islamic and ancient Egyptian, as well as peasant, art, an alliance that would baffle Meskell's archaeologists or self-proclaimed experts such as Walsh. Above Alaa Awad's protesting women Abu Bakr painted a Buraq, an Islamic mythological creature, symbolizing both freedom and a state of in-between, in the style of the rural peasants (Abaza, "Buraqs"). In another scene in this mural, martyrs from Port Said ascending to heaven on angels' wings are interspersed with mourning ancient Egyptian women sending a soul in a sarcophagus up to heaven (Abaza, "Emerging Memorial"; "Walls" 131–32). The merging of ancient Egyptian and monotheistic (whether Islamic or Christian) religions in Egyptian art is not by any means new but is actually quite common, though often ignored by outside observers (Meskell 147, 162–64). In the particular situational location of this art, out on the street in modern-day Muslim Egypt, there is an even more powerful merging of ancient Egyptian religion with a living street informed by Islamic sensibilities. These murals were prayed in front of and defended by the people on the street (El Deeb; Hussain; "Visualizing Revolution"). Where are Meskell's archaeologists now to claim that modern-day Egyptian Muslims are disinterested in ancient Egyptian art? Where is Walsh's "horde of Muslim[s]," supposedly bent on destroying culture that isn't Islamic?

The history that resides in the imagination has the power to transform how an individual sees him or herself and how a society sees itself. Abu Bakr sees the very act of making these street murals as a defense of the identity, of the people's claim to all their heritages, Islamic, Coptic, and Ancient Egyptian (Mousa; "The Epic Murals"). Closeness to one's identity grounds a person with a sense of his or her own legitimacy and thus social agency. On a societal level, these murals surround the suffering of society with an aura of reverence in a context in which Egyptians for so long have been deprived of any sense of respect, dignity, independence, and agency. Morayef in her blog, *Suzeeinthecity,* draws connections between the whitewashing of the murals and the lack of justice both for the martyrs of the 2011 January-February Revolution and for those of Port Said ("Art of Movement"). She says, "what we have lost was a beautiful work of art;

what we have gained is fresh fury and ignited debate" (Suzeeinthecity, "Art of Movement"). Thus by suggestion the murals have the capacity to re-instill Egyptians with a sense of their dignity and their right to seek justice. Specific examples of how this occurs in the murals include a funeral scene of mourning ancient Egyptian women, who are artistically and culturally revered both in Egypt and globally, passing their dignity onto their descendants as they raise the Revolution's martyrs to heaven. Ancient Egyptian women in particular use their influential collective "voice" to express sympathy and support for the mothers of the martyrs, whose images Abu Bakr later layered on top of this same mural, a commentary on the respect that present-day Egyptian women deserve (Hussain; Suzee-inthecity "Presidential Elections"). From the warriors climbing the wall to the women walking determinedly ahead, these images from ancient Egyptian art recast present day Egyptians as people who belong to the noble history of Egypt. A powerful message in this mural to an Egyptian is: you're part of this narrative and these ancient rituals are for you because you deserve to claim your heritage as part of your cultural and social memory and to be remembered with the same dignity as your ancestors.

Rappaport notes that narratives offered by collective support groups are only part of the process of empowerment (804). What makes these narratives powerful is that they allow people to use them to "sustain change" on the individual and community level, for example by offering "role opportunities, new identities, and possible selves" (796, 804). Lord and Hutchison, professors who have researched extensively how to make communities more inclusive of the vulnerable and disabled, state this even more directly, citing Wolfensberger: "The literature supports this idea that in order for people to become empowered, they not only need access to valued social resources, but also to valued social roles" (16). Therefore the ability of the Mohammad Mahmoud murals to empower the people also depends on their ability to offer individuals avenues for meaningful participation that makes them believe in their own potential.

The purpose of the murals was also to portray inspiring messages and narratives that would provoke the national imagination and spur the people to political action (Mousa; "The Epic Murals"; "Visualizing Revolution"). A spokesperson for the artists, who initiated the mural project, reflected that "public art provokes debate, reflection, and a new threshold

of imagination among the public as much as the artists" ("Visualizing the Revolution"). The murals as they were being created invited participation from the street. The bright colors and fantastic drawings invited people to stop, think, and comment on the drawings and to follow the narrative sequences and the symbols with their potent meanings ("The Epic Murals"). And yet the street also became a place that stimulated political discussion. People gathered around and talked with strangers about the Revolution and politics and "overwhelm[ed]" the artists with questions about the political meanings of their works (Abaza "Emerging Memorial"; Mousa; "The Epic Murals"; "Visualizing the Revolution"). People also participated in the painting that was recreating narratives of their social and cultural memory by volunteering to paint and bringing supplies (Durham, "Khawaga Walk"; Hussain; Nguyen).

The murals provided people with ways to participate in ways that both empowered them and sustained the changes that had been brought about in their lives during the Revolution by inspiring them to return to the streets in defense of the murals and all that they stood for (Mousa; "The Epic Murals"). In other words, these murals were narratives that brought about empowerment in the sense of Rappaport's description of narratives as a resource for "sustain[ing] change" and Lord and Hutchinson's description of empowerment as requiring "valued social roles" (Rappaport 796; Lord and Hutchinson 16). The people were instrumental to halting the whitewashing of the Mohammad Mahmoud Street murals ordered by the interim SCAF government and were the ones who repainted the walls, sometimes even as the army screamed at them and while the police took photos of them for possible later arrests (Hussain; Suzeeinthecity, "Art of Movement"). The people experienced these images not necessarily as imposed upon them, but rather as created and destroyed in time, works that were in themselves "acts of protest" (Mousa). Furthermore, art itself inspired protest (Mousa; Suzeeinthecity, "Art of Movement"). After the whitewashing of the walls of Mohammad Mahmoud Street in fall 2012, two thousand protestors returned to repaint the walls (Mousa). Thus the people felt ownership of their walls and the drawings which they created and provided the inspiration for with their own blood, sweat, and tears ("Visualizing Revolution"). The narratives of the people displayed in these murals gave people a cause to fight for, and

this outpouring of protest helped sustain the Revolution. Both the narratives themselves and the acts of creating and defending them gave people a sense of who they were and who they could become.

Living history and its binding thread of social and cultural memory resists all attempts at its erasure because of its flexibility that incorporates all violence inflicted on it back into its narrative, refreshing or creating variations on older symbols to instill them with current significance ("Visualizing the Revolution"). Whitewashing was widely seen as an effort to make the people "forget what happened," or in other words to erase a narrative of history that the army found threatening to its power and to allow for a more "official" narrative of history to replace living history in the public consciousness (El Deeb; El-Din; Hussain; Suzeeinthecity "Art of Movement").[8] Thus the act of erasing the people's narrative of living history prompted participation through resistance and the recreation of new narratives on the whitened walls, narratives that could be seen as reformulations of the narratives of before, but whose meanings evolved with every new painting as they were integrated into the current political situation on the street ("Visualizing the Revolution"). (See, for example, Suzeeandthecity's "The Revolution Continues" and "Art of Movement," for the returning symbols of Khaled Said and Mubarak, and see also Hussain).

The ability of Egyptian people to give voice to their own narratives and to use their history as a tool for empowerment is central to the cause of the Revolution itself, a breaking-free from colonialism and neocolonialism as well as from Egypt's oppressive rulers. Rappaport states that "who controls that resource [narratives], that is who gives stories social value, is at the heart of a tension between freedom and social control, oppression and liberation, and empowerment versus disenfranchisement" (805). This reminds us of the previous discussion of how the monopoly of historical artifacts and claims of expertise in Egyptian history allowed colonizing powers to subjugate the Egyptian people, and of how the Western-controlled narrative of ancient Egypt was designed to isolate and deny Egyptian people's narratives of social and cultural memory. And yet the murals-as-narrative fights against the state's narrative that has delegitimized and disenfranchised the Revolution and many of Egypt's most vulnerable people. Particularly, the presence of pharaonic art on the street serves to counter the oppressiveness of the state. When people

hired by the state came and white-washed the walls, they left untouched the pharaonic scenes out of fear and respect for the powerful beliefs that present day Egyptians still retain regarding the pharaohs (Abaza, "Emerging Memorial Space"). Pharaonic art serves to counter the efforts of the state to delegitimize the protest movement, but also in a larger sense renders legitimate the various people from all swathes of Egyptian society whose existence has been either explicitly rendered illegitimate or ignored, marginalized, and oppressed to the point that existence is nearly impossible. Nawal Mahmoud Hassan's study from the late seventies documents the plight of people whose housing either collapsed or was demolished and who were forced to move into nearby historical monuments (Hassan 134–35). When the government decided to refurbish these monuments for tourism purposes, they forcibly evicted the residents and only gave some of them makeshift places to live, ignoring the fact that many more families were now on the streets (Hassan 135, 139). A more recent case of extreme marginalization is that of the Zabaleen, whose livelihood is based on a sustainable garbage recycling system that benefits the city, and yet the state for many years has been planning to evict them in order to pursue development (Fahmi 24–5, 36–7). During the Mohammad Mahmoud Street clashes of 2011, the army erected barriers throughout downtown Cairo in order to create violent zones that contained and isolated the protestors and made it easier for the army to inflict injuries on them, and in addition made daily life nearly impossible for the residents (Abaza, "Walls" 126–28). In this brief glimpse of the way the state often oppresses the people to the point that their right to exist is threatened, the murals, which are made for the people and created for the purpose of giving them a voice, are an assertion of the right of the people to collectively have a presence on the street, and to be recognized by the state as having the right to exist ("Visualizing Revolution"). A people's claim to ownership of its heritage is necessary to claim the land of their ancestors, and therefore the mural's assertion that the public are the descendants and heirs of their ancestors, ancient Egyptians, in the most public of places, is a powerful reclaiming of the people's right to exist in their land.

Abu Bakr and Alaa Awad, well studied in the art of ancient Egypt, bring this art and this history to the streets, free-handedly painting pharaonic art scenes that are remarkably similar to their originals on the walls of

ancient Egyptian tombs (Hussein). Not only have they been steeped in the study of ancient Egyptian art, but they have internalized its spirit, imparting that spirit to the passersby on the street through their murals. The free-handed aspect of Abu Bakr and Alaa Awad's pharaonic paintings and the internalization of the spirit of their ancestors' art speaks to the power of living history that goes beyond the mere ability to collect, catalogue, and preserve, but rather allows that history to be carried on into the present and to become ever richer with meaning as it is constantly reinvoked in everyday life. The interweaving of past and present, mourning ancient Egyptian women with veiled mothers mourning their martyred sons, is a testament to the fact that the spirit of ancient Egypt still lives among present day Egyptians. These murals attest to the fact that the society of Walsh's "horde of Muslim rioters" contains deep echoes of and can attach relevance to the supposedly "annihilated piece of history" that lives on not only as a cultural resource that can shed meaning on the present day, but also as the very thing that binds and drives Egyptian society through the tumultuous waves of its history.

Notes

1.   Winegar in her study "Cultural Sovereignty in a Global Art Economy: Egyptian Cultural Policy and the New Western Interest in Art in the Middle East," discusses artistic and curatorial expertise and what constitutes it as an area of contestation between Western-educated and Egyptian state curators (186). Many Western curators visit Egypt with little respect for the "local construction[s] of [artistic and curatorial] expertise" (based on age and institution, for example), and assume that without a Western education in contemporary art, Egyptian officials in the Ministry of Culture do not know how to run a museum or a gallery (188-89). Winegar explicitly states that American professors and curators who visit Egypt have reminded not just local officials but also Egyptian students of "colonial administrators" (189).

2.   Ancient Egyptian history is often claimed with the most human intentions as "global heritage." See Walsh, mentioned later, as well as a discussion on Lawrence Auster's blog post on View From the Right (see Works Cited) in which one of the discussants, "LA", comments: "What if an Islamic Egyptian regime set about destroying . . . the ancient Egyptian

monuments? Ancient Egypt is a heritage belonging to the entire world. I think we would have to take some action to stop that."

3. See comment by "Paul T." on Lawrence Auster's blog: "we'd be wrong to prevent it [the destruction of cultural artifacts in another country]. Though if some far-seeing colonial administrator of long ago had anticipated that the country would one day be under Islamic control, and for that reason had removed every moveable artifact of the Pharaohs to the West, that would in retrospect have been best."

4. Meskell notes the endurance of ancient Egyptian history among the "living people and their traditions" but she focuses her evidence for this mainly on architectural design and monuments (162, 164, 167). I feel that since the 2011 Revolution there is much more evidence suddenly available that allows us to deepen and expand the argument for the endurance of ancient Egypt in the living history of present-day Egypt. Particularly the Revolution has given us an opportunity to examine how living history is evident not just in the urban landscape but among the people themselves who have been constantly making, changing, and interacting with the politico-historical street art produced in the city since 2011.

5. Rappaport's research pertains to community psychology and concerns using narrative theory to advance research on empowerment by including communal narratives and individual stories as data in empowerment research and thus "privileging the voices of the people studied" (801). This echoes Meskell's critique of current archaeological practice that "privileg[es] the ancient past and ignor[es] Egypt's more recent heritage" (147). Rappaport further argues that "giving respect to the stories of people's lives tends in itself to be an experience that changes the role relationship from researcher and subject to coparticipants" (801). This seems to provide the answer to one point that was missing in Meskell's article, which is what theoretical resources archaeologists can use to make their work more inclusive of the local population. When Meskell discusses possible changes that are needed in archaeological practice, such as "the inclusion of smaller voices," "engag[ing] in dialogue" with those affected by archaeological practice, and "learn[ing] from the Egyptians and their unique experience" what she is really talking about is applying narrative theory to archaeological practice in order to empower local citizens and their voices (148, 162).

6. I came across these articles during my research in an article by Hani M. Henry entitled: "Egyptian Women and Empowerment: A Cultural Perspective" that discusses the constraints Egyptian women face in the home and the actions they take to change their situation. The issue of gender in the household is a complex one in Egyptian society (see also Development, Change, and Gender in Cairo: A View from the Household, edited by Diane Singerman and Homa Hoodfar, Introduction p. xxi-xxii and Ch. 1-2) and not necessarily within the scope of this paper. However, it is important to note that empowerment occurs at all levels of society, and is not necessarily confined to the public sphere or the street alone. In addition, empowerment as it is typically thought of in the West does not transfer so easily into Egyptian society and therefore the empowerment I discuss here particularly as it relates to women adheres to Rappaport's discussion of empowerment but does not necessarily connote Western ideas of empowering or "liberating" women. Rappaport discusses how empowerment is a situation-specific phenomenon that has "several different forms" (797). He talks about how empowerment is an idea that cuts across different ideologies, and that "settings that are empowering for some people may be the ones whose values and goals we do not like" (798). This can be applied here in the sense that Westerners may dismiss the form empowerment takes in the Egyptian context as instead oppression or disempowerment simply because it conflicts with Western values and goals. Rappaport hopes that "we will also learn to listen to the voices of the people with whom we work so as to allow them to tell us what it means to be empowered in their particular context" [my emphasis] (799). I can only touch upon the common ground definition of empowerment here and how this definition supports the assertion that the Mohammad Mahmoud murals are a source of empowerment, but I like to stick to Zimmerman's idea, cited by Rappaport, of empowerment as an "open construct" that Egyptians must provide the meaning of (802).

7. Rappaport writes that people often seek mutual help organizations because they often "find that change cannot be sustained in the absence of a group that supports that change, in part through the experience of a shared community narrative" (804). These organizations provide a "new community narrative" and "people provide social and emotional support, and offer one another new ways to think and talk about themselves" (804). The informal "organization" of people who came to Mohammad

Mahmoud Street to participate in the graffiti can be thought of as an informal mutual help organization. The narratives expressed in the graffiti drawings, the connections of powerful ancient Egyptian narratives to present day revolutionary ones, helped provide a new collective narrative that renewed the meanings of cultural symbols of ancient history in social and cultural memory and brought the depth of cultural and social memory to the fresh memories and personal experiences of the revolution. In this way the graffiti offered people a grounding historical narrative to help people cope as they were still reeling from the personal and social changes that had taken place in their lives, and it offered them an activity that could bring people together for both political discussion and the sharing of memories from the revolution (Abaza, "Emerging Memorial; Mousa; "The Epic Murals").

8.   Also see Suzeeinthecity's post "In the Midst of Madness" to see her comment on the Mohammad Mahmoud murals created after the Port Said Massacre as "profound and essential" to the "society's collective consciousness." Forgetting the past is a theme used ironically by the artists themselves. During the hype of the elections in June 2012, Ammar Abu Bakr painted over his own mural to write "Forget what has passed and focus on the elections instead" amidst the portraits of mothers still grieving their martyred children (Suzeeinthecity, "Presidential Elections"). Thus the contestation for the survival of the people's narrative of living history is an explicit struggle of the revolution constantly being played out in the public sphere, and it becomes a contest over the public's consciousness.

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