

Women are from Africa and men are from Europe

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This chapter is an experiment to analyze colonialism and patriarchy in the field of Egyptian archaeology and how they interact with the interpretation of the past as well as the management of Egyptian heritage today. Given the focus of this companion on Black women's cultural histories, a chapter exploring the Western imperialist and male-dominated origins of a field of study that has severed Egypt from its African context raises crucial issues on the cultural meanings of ancient Egypt. It further invites critical interventions that can bring such studies toward more inclusive, inter-African frameworks.

After the Napoleonic expedition to Egypt at the end of the eighteenth century, the Western obsession with ancient Egypt was revamped. The expedition was composed of soldiers as well as the famous savants, or "scholars." Fascination with ancient Egypt continued throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Egyptomania inspired the West, which was in a phase of identity creation, to appropriate ancient Egypt into its new selfhood through the physical import of thousands of ancient Egyptian objects for its museums and the usurpation and inclusion of the ancient Egyptian past into its own historical narrative (Breger 2005, 206).

Imperialism and colonialism (Trigger 1984, 365) also went hand in hand with androcentrism (Nelson 2004, 152) in the interpretation of archaeological data and the construction of the ancient Egyptian past, which was in turn used in Western identity formation. Not only did ancient Egypt affect colonialism and imperialism, but as suggested by Michel Foucault, it still holds a strong connection to postcolonial ideology (Foucault and Sheridan 1972, Breger 2005, 136–7). Imperialism, colonialism, postcolonialism, and androcentrism thus worked to create a discontinuity pretext between modern Egyptians and their past. The result of this schism is that the white Western man, as opposed to a modern Egyptian woman from Upper Egypt, was thought to resemble the ancient Egyptian. Gender claims have been at the heart of the cultural discontinuity pretext, on the one hand, and of cultural appropriation, on the other hand. Egyptian objects in museums of North America and Europe help to construct their identities through the "otherness" of cultures (Breger 2005, 137). Ancient Egypt was first completely interpreted by imperialist white men while they willfully ignored the social history of modern Egyptians and how they engaged with their past.

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As a trained indigenous Egyptologist, I attempt in this chapter to analyze how colonialism and androcentrism together affected the way we experience ancient Egypt in the twenty-first

century in relation to Eurocentrism and Afrocentrism. This I will carry out through an interdisciplinary approach, relating philosophical and social concepts of embodiment such as those of Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty 1962) and Foucault (Foucault 2012, Foucault and Sheridan 1972) and the feminist theories of Butler (Butler and Trouble 1990) and Gatens (1991). My analysis of past colonialism is based on the works of Said (Gbazoul 2007, Said 1995, 1989), Trigger (1984), and Reid (2002, 2003, 1985, 1992, 2015). The research design is an integration of action research, constructivism, and critical discourse analysis.

Imperialism, colonialism, postcolonialism, and androcentrism

In 1932, a journalist wrote in the newspaper *al-Balagh*: “It is indeed a matter of deep regret that the monuments should be ours and the history should be ours, but that those who write books on [the] history of ancient Egypt should not be Egyptians” (Reid 2003, 1). During the French expedition to Egypt, military occupation by soldiers was coupled with cultural imperialism by the savants who found the Rosetta Stone. It was later deciphered by Jean-Francois Champollion through the copies that were made by the French; they had lost the war to the British, who had confiscated the stone as a spoil of war. However, most scholars attribute to Champollion the discovery of ancient Egypt and the birth of the field of Egyptology.

That Egyptology was born in Europe has led to a continuous Western hegemony over Egypt’s past, which continued as cultural colonialism even after Egypt declared independence in 1922 and even after the regime change in 1952. Egypt was exploited by European imperialism, and at the heart of such exploitation was Egypt’s heritage. Mohamed Ali (1805–49), the first de facto independent ruler of Egypt – he himself was not Egyptian – did not really appreciate the value of ancient monuments. Much of Egypt’s heritage was ransacked by nineteenth-century European explorers/treasure hunters who joined a race between countries to own the best objects in their museums (Fagan 2009, 65). For example, the Louvre Museum in Paris used dynamite in the temple of Dendera to remove the Zodiac, which is now, ironically, in a dark side-room of the museum (Waxman 2008, 74). Consuls and diplomatic missions in the nineteenth century focused on bringing back home the best objects they could find without any regard for the rights of the Egyptian people or their relations with their past. The relationship between the West and the East has been one of control, dominance, and cultural appropriation (Said 1995, 11).

This cultural appropriation has mostly been male dominated and presented a white male-perceived idea of ancient Egypt. Egyptology evolved to be a “scientific” study of ancient Egypt, whose practice is only for the well-educated; consequently, many Western academics take it as a justification for the “guardianship” of the field as well as the numerous objects sequestered by imperialism (Sedra 2004, 249). Furthermore, Egyptology was deemed at its conception to be a subdiscipline of the classics; this was best explained in Bernal’s *Black Athena* – despite the legitimate criticism it drew in general – on how Western academic circles focused on marginalizing the contributions of ancient Egypt to the Greco-Roman culture, rationalizing that Africans were not capable of producing culture of such sophistication (Bernal 1991, 241–66). Most Western Egyptologists never learned Arabic; in fact, the Egyptological languages are English, French, German, and Italian. Interaction with indigenous communities was considered a nuisance by some, and from several experiences working with archaeological missions, the situation remained like this until the post-2011 political uprising.

This male-driven Western hegemonical attitude can be found, for example, in the writings of Gustave Flaubert, especially when he describes the courtesan Kuchuk Hanem from Esna, a region in the south of Egypt, and plays on the stereotype of the “oriental” woman (Said 1995,

11). Kuchuk Hanem was exploited physically by Flaubert but never had the chance to have her voice written as part of the history (Said 1995, 11). The narrative of their encounter is only from his point of view as the white wealthy man who spoke on her behalf to feed the stereotype of the oriental woman, a recurrent image in the exchange between the Orient and the Occident (Said 1995, 11): erotic and highly sexualized. Similarly, the esteemed Egyptologist Jan Assmann (1996, 68) describes Queen Nefertiti as a “love-poem in stone” and reiterates how her “very refined sensuousness and almost erotic grace and radiance” are embedded in the masterpieces of Egyptian art during the Amarna Period (1350 BCE). Both descriptions of Egyptian women show how the male-dominated ideology of Western stereotypes of the Orient has continuously been propagated uncritically.

AU: please check spelling change to 'Kuchuk Hanem' in the sentence 'Kuchuk Hanem was exploited physically by Flaubert ...'

The reception of an androcentric Egypt

The Western stereotypes of Egyptian women proliferated through the scholarship of mainly Western male academics as well as some Egyptians until very recently. Despite the fact that archaeology and anthropology, as part of humanities and social sciences, started to evolve based on the feminist critique, Egyptology took years to realize the changes in social theory around it due to its weaker theoretical foundation. Postmodernist archaeology focused more on the reconstruction of historical landscapes and the analysis of technology, industry, and economies, shifting to a new type of inferential archaeology (Hamilakis, Pluciennik, and Tarlow 2012, 4–5). This shift marked in archaeology a more representational analysis of how the body in the past experienced different norms of life and resulted in the publication of several studies by feminist scholars interested in gender analysis of the past through the different experiences of embodiment (Meskell 1998, Joyce 2004, Joyce and Meskell 2014).

The West has created a disembodied meaning of the past through its masculine theory of knowledge, which does not incorporate a female perception that is embodied and multisensory (Edwards, Gosden, and Phillips 2006, 7). Egyptology, like other disciplines of archaeology, cultural anthropology, and history, placed the man in the middle of cultural evolution and production and confined women to a marginal position, so that men's activities represented the whole society (Nelson and Rosen-Ayalon 2001, 30). This awareness of the marginalization of women led in the 1970s to the first discussions of the role of women in archaeology, history, and their related disciplines. Women in ancient Egypt were mostly studied when they were powerful, such as Merneith, Ahhotep, Ahmose-Nefertari, Hatshepsut, Nefertiti, and Cleopatra. More recent is the case of the God's Wives of Amun, such as Shepenwepet and Amenirdis (Ayad 2009), because primarily, in Western ideology, power is gendered male (Nelson and Rosen-Ayalon 2001, 30, Sweely 2012, 187).

Nefertiti, whose famed bust was unethically smuggled to Berlin by Ludwig Borchardt, has also been the object of a political imperialist fantasy through her metonymic appropriation, which helped with the construction of modern Western identity (Breger 2006, 283). Women who were outside the realm of power were probably thought to have taken their stereotypical roles of childbearing and household upkeep, which was fostered by the imagery of Isis suckling Horus that later filtered into Classical and Christian art (Koloski-Ostrow, Lyons, and Kampen 2003, 562). It was not until recent years that archaeologists started looking at gendered goods in the Predynastic Period as a way to relate and understand women's roles in the formation of the Egyptian state around 3200 BCE (Wrobel 2004, 170–92).

The archaeological discoveries at Deir el-Medina by Ernesto Schiaparelli at the beginning of the twentieth century, shedding light on the lives of common women, prompted gender studies to relate to women in ancient Egypt (Sweeney 2009, 154, Matić 2016, 181). More studies

targeted women's gender roles through understanding the architectural design of the houses of Deir el-Medina or their less rich burial equipment (Meskell 1991, 221–6), while others argued that women contributed more to the family income than men because of their weaving activities (Sweeney 2009, 5, 2011, 5). The narrative about Egypt, as with many other colonized countries, has been *feminized* (Baron 2005) as submissive and inferior; on the other hand, colonizing Europe was *masculinized* as assertive and advanced (Ströbeck 2016, 334).

With British imperialism in Egypt, the image of modern Egyptian women was quite negative and unrealistic (Youngkin 2016, 16). Early British female writers did not want to engage with modern Egyptian women and instead wrote about the ancient Egyptian goddesses by assimilation to Greek goddesses. They also saw the effects of Islamic and Arabic culture as a threat (Youngkin 2016, 16–18). This idealization and romanticism of ancient Egypt has skewed the image of ancient Egypt in the Western world and created a schism between modern Egypt and ancient Egypt. The West wanted ancient Egypt to be completely detached in order to keep the modern Egypt under their control. After all, they believed that if it had not been for Champollion, the rest of the world would never have known anything about ancient Egypt, ignoring all the Arabic historians – whom they could generally not read in their original language – who have described ancient Egypt and written about it extensively (El Daly 2005). Imperialism and androcentrism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries went hand in hand and have affected how Egyptians view their own culture today and the discipline of Egyptology as a whole.

Androcentrism, Afrocentrism, and Eurocentrism

With the advent of the movement in the 1980s of Afrocentrism, particularly the “Nile-Valley Afrocentrism,” ideological relations shifted in identification with ancient Egypt. In the construct generated by Eurocentrism, what is “Black” in Africa is the area of sub-Saharan Africa that directly contradicts the European self-image and identity (Mudimbe 1988). In this view, Egypt, while being located geographically in Africa, was more closely related to the Mediterranean and Near Eastern culture that later interacted with the Classical world, which is interpreted as creating Western culture. Africa is important because it helped identify what Europe was not in relation to the level of civil complexity and development (O'Connor and Reid 2003). There are, however, several sociological and anthropological factors involved in understanding the reactions modern Africans have toward ancient Egypt (O'Connor and Reid 2003, 2).

Similarly to the appropriation of ancient Egypt by the West in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Afrocentric ideology in the 1980s has also attempted to create direct links with the Nile Valley; there was no material evidence for either appropriation, but rather, a strong ideological foundation. Ideology can be seen in the creation of new meanings, dialogues, and identifications that have a different power structure. It was important for Europeans to place ancient Egypt as more Mediterranean and Near Eastern, as opposed to African, while it was equally important for Afrocentric thought to place Egypt well into the African continent, in both cases to define one's power relationship with the other (O'Connor and Reid 2003, 4–6). The heritage of Africa was ignored by imperialist European ideology and reduced to ancient Egypt, or sometimes other cultures, such as the Axumite or the Zimbabwe, were acknowledged while discrediting many contributions by African people (Rowlands 2003, 39).

Gender has also had an important role in identifying the relation between Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism. It serves as a clear mirror to reflect the attempt to appropriate ancient Egypt through creating a new narrative. Eurocentrism has used the bust of Nefertiti to create new identities and assimilation to ancient Egypt (Breger 2006, Hanna Forthcoming 2020). The bust

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was renowned in Berlin as a symbol of great success for women and was even received with flowers; the bust in the 1930s in Berlin was a “Star Object” (Breger 2006, 289). Germany at that period, and particularly the Weimar Republic, which had just lost its monarch and royal status, saw in the bust of Nefertiti another royal insignia to identify with its metonymic loss of monarchy (Breger 2006, 291). Nefertiti was “Aryanized” through her presumed Asiatic links and thus, European rather than African, while her husband Akhenaten also found a place through the assumption of his Aten religion as monotheism in the European fascist discourse of that period (Breger 2006, 193, Hornung and Lorton 2001).

By contrast, the late twentieth-century Afrocentrism of famous rapper Queen Latifah draws on allusions to Nefertiti through her name, her image, and the culture of Africa in her fight against sexism and racism (Roberts 1994, 246). She also links sexism with racism (Roberts 1994, 249) through the different images she shows in the music video of her 1990 rap song “Ladies First.” Other artists, such as Beyoncé and Rihanna, have also appropriated similar imagery of Nefertiti’s bust in their twenty-first-century performances to highlight the beauty of African American women and resistance to patriarchy and racism (Painia 2014).

Such politicized performances of Afrocentrism contrast with performances of “orientalism” by white British singers like Adele, who appropriated a traditional Amazigh African tribe dress worn by women in the Siwa Oasis of Egypt with very little acknowledgment of its origin, while her fashion designer Chloé claimed that it was their own design (Masry 2016). However, when other experimentations are carried out by Europeans, such as the “Little Warsaw” artistic installation with Nefertiti, it is usually regarded as artistically and culturally appropriate (Breger 2005, 2006, Ikram 2011). The dynamics of such cultural interventions and experimentation should be analyzed through the lens of colonization versus decolonization and the accepted Europeaness of Egyptian heritage, while its Africanness is either marginalized or dismissed.

The challenges for women in indigenous Egyptology today

Despite many pioneering women in the field of Egyptology who have left their mark on the discipline, it has mostly remained a male-dominated career. The male archaeologist stereotype has also been further promoted by an “Indiana Jones” mentality (Hanna 2019); the hat, the discovery, the gold, the secrets, and the academic promotion fueled many of the archaeological projects. This model has also permeated Egyptian Egyptology in a postcolonial transfer of ideas. The discoveries have always been more important than conservation projects or site management. More and more sites were left open after discoveries without proper upkeep and preservation, just to satiate the pride and the thrill of the continuous Western-fed ideology of discovering more secrets, more gold, and more kings.

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This has also been reflected in how archaeological space is governed, in that communities (particularly of women and children) are not usually welcomed in the archaeological space. The social history of women performing fertility rituals, sometimes associated with archaeological space, has often been written off the academic record, deemed unimportant, and perhaps also looked down upon as superstition (Inhorn 1994, 500–50). Indigenous Egyptology has struggled for years to catch up with imperialist Egyptology, primarily because many Western scholars feared that Egyptians would take over (Reid 1985, Sedra 2004). Indigenous Egyptology was also heavily criticized by Western Egyptologists, from the time of its inception, as having appropriated ancient Egypt for a selfish political agenda (Sedra 2004, 250). Egyptian Egyptology has been resisted since the first school that taught Egyptology (by Henrich Brugsch) (Reid 1985, 235–6). It was not until 1952’s regime change that Egyptians took into their own hands the management of Egyptian antiquities.

The first modern Egyptian woman to finish her high school education was Nabawiyya Musa in 1908. She went on to Cairo University – back then known as the “Egyptian University” – where she further lectured on the role of women in modern and ancient Egypt (Reid 2002, 55). Afifa Iskander was allowed to follow classes in Egyptology, but not to take a degree, at the end of the 1930s (Reid 2002, 56). The first female student from the Department of Egyptian Archaeology graduated in 1941, and by 1949, three more had graduated (Fares 2017, 76).

Many more women have studied after 1952 and have had their imprint on the field of Egyptology, such as the late Prof. Soad Maher (1917–96), first female dean of the College of Archaeology in Cairo University, and then Prof. Tohafa Handoussa of Cairo University and Prof. Fayza Haikal, now Professor Emeritus at the American University in Cairo, both born in the 1930s. Today, in Egyptian academia and in the field, many women are deans, department heads, and deputies. However, the fieldwork has always been challenging for women. Women are still trying to catch up due to the lack of dedicated funding that would encourage Egyptian women to take the lead. Many times, women are victims of gender stereotypes in which it is often suggested that they would not fit in desert or “dangerous” environments. Not only are women not available in leading positions in the field, but also, many of the leading positions in the Ministry of Antiquities and Tourism have been reserved for men. Women in the field have multiple times experienced sexual harassment, gender bullying, and patriarchal attitudes. I have personally experienced all three, and many of my colleagues in different sectors have experienced them too. There is still not enough support, academically or institutionally, for women to react to such offenses.

In the post-2011 political events, it was women who took several initiatives to protect cultural heritage when the state had failed. Omniya Abdelbar created “Save Historical Cairo”; Yasmine Dorghamy and Mennatallah al-Dorri created “Soriqa: Stop the Heritage Drain”; May al-Tabbakh, along with other colleagues, created “Save Alexandria”; and Marwa al-Zeiny and I created “The Egypt’s Heritage Taskforce.” All these initiatives tried to stop heritage crimes, such as looting, illicit thefts, and the demolition of historical buildings, which were happening to the archaeological sites due to a security vacuum (Hanna 2013c, 2015, 2013b, a, Ikram and Hanna 2013). All these different teams of women were quite successful and were even invited into the 50-people committee for writing the constitution of 2013. They managed to draft together a new constitutional article that exerted better protection of Egypt’s cultural heritage:

Article 50. Egypt’s civilization and cultural heritage, whether physical or moral, including all diversities and principal milestones – namely Ancient Egyptian, Coptic, and Islamic – are a national and human wealth. The State shall preserve and maintain this heritage as well as the contemporary cultural wealth, whether architectural, literary, or artistic, with all diversities. Aggression against any of the foregoing is a crime punished by the law. The State shall pay special attention to protecting components of cultural pluralism in Egypt.

(2014)

Many of these women were accused of dissidence and attacked by radicals or by other men who simply felt threatened by their different initiatives and narratives. However, none of the attacks has managed to stop them, especially because of the public support they have received and the mutual support they have provided to each other. Indigenous Egyptologists are weighing their interest in decolonization and empowerment of communities living around archaeological sites against their situation as women in these societies, especially if they want to create research or joint projects with their neighbors for feminist archaeology (Ströbeck 2016, 339). Through their

embodied experience of heritage, these women are the most capable and experienced in carrying out groundbreaking research.

Feminism and ancient Egypt

The Western misconception that women's equal rights can only be attained in non-Islamic nations undermines the feminist movement in Egypt and shows a typical orientalist and colonialist stereotype that only asserts a Western model of democracy. Most women who come from the African continent can relate to a common symptom of oppression due to colonialism, imperialism, racism, sexism, and androcentrism (Collins 2003, 52–4). Too many Westerners still discredit the movements of women in Egypt and elsewhere (Kumawat 2019, 54) that were started at the beginning of the twentieth century by pioneers such as Nabawiyya Musa, mentioned earlier, and Huda Shaarawi (Hoodfar 1992, 11). Qassem Amin, at the turn of the twentieth century, wrote two books discussing women's right to education, the abolition of polygamy, and the place of women in the public sphere (Amin and Peterson 2000). Nabawiyya Musa also expressed her feminist reform ideas in an impressive play called *Nub Hotep*, whose characters are mostly women in leadership roles in the Egyptian society of the time, which was first printed in 1912 and recently reprinted in 2014. Unfortunately, the play has never been translated into any European language.

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During the 2011 uprising, many of the images of ancient Egypt resurfaced and were mixed with modern political emblems. There was a famous graphic image of Tutankhamun with the cap of Che Guevara, which was used on stickers, graffiti, and magazines. Then, there were fantastic graffiti by Alaa Awad and Ammar Abou Bakr on Mohamed Mahmoud Street, right next to Tahrir Square, the epicenter of the popular protests in Cairo. However, what was really symbolic was how the defense of women who were sexually harassed and attacked by paid mobs in Tahrir Square (Al-Ali 2014) was expressed through the image of the iconic bust of Nefertiti.

The Nefertiti bust was modified to wear a gas mask to show support for women facing riot police violence. The use of Nefertiti's bust was not a Western imperialistic influence but rather, a call on an ancestral image of power by the indigenous communities of women and feminists (Gerlach 2016). There are numerous parallels in literature and the arts in the twentieth century that use an image of ancient Egypt to strengthen feminism, but unfortunately, these have rarely been part of the narrative of Western descriptions of the reception of ancient Egypt.

Conclusion

The construction of the modern identity of Egyptian women and Egypt as a whole is at the heart of decolonizing cultural heritage through the democratization of past discourse. The imperialist androcentric perspective of Egypt has continued in the postcolonial period, and today, the field of Egyptology is the perfect example. This is starting to shift due to the political changes in Egypt post-2011 and also due to the admission of a younger, more sensitive generation in the fields of Egyptology, Egyptian archaeology, and Egyptian heritage. Indigenous Egyptian women and their role in the past and the present in the wider context of African women are also being considered. Common ground regarding how the past plays in the present were visible in the use of ancient Egypt during the Egyptian 2011 revolution and the imagery of ancient women during the Sudanese 2019 revolution (Hanna 2020, Reily 2019). This important cultural identification gives ancient Egypt its original links to Africa in attempts to decolonize 200 years of Western appropriation. The racism and colonialism of traditional Egyptology must be challenged through inter-African networks.

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With the “me too” era, more Egyptian women are also taking historical figures as role models, and not just the queens such as Hatshepsut, the warriors such as Ahhotep, and the goddesses such as Isis; they are also looking at how women in their conventional roles throughout history managed to keep ancient Egyptian society together. Egyptian women Egyptologists such as Fayza Haikal have also looked into how ethnoarchaeology reconciles the discontinuity pretext between ancient and modern Egypt (Haikal 2003). It is through such reconciliation that the imperialistic and androcentric images of ancient Egypt can be truly challenged and remediated.

A new creation of identity through the past that is affective, intellectual, and economic changes individual reactions and their engagement with Egyptian heritage. Egypt’s past must be looked upon not as separate compartments of history in the same spatial perspective but rather, through more detailed temporality and sensoriality of the heritage. The only hope for the future sustainability of Egyptian heritage is through creating meaningful identification with the past and casting new networks of relating with this heritage. This will also not be possible if the atrocities of imperialism are not amended.

Contested objects of heritage in Western museums that have been taken under colonial rule must be open to new negotiations. When repatriation occurs in the future, it must be not only a repatriation of the objects but also a repatriation of the knowledge associated with these objects, which was constructed away from their historical contexts. Female Egyptian Egyptologists should also receive more support to conduct their own excavations and fieldwork. Networks with other women working in the field in the Middle East and Africa are also completely lacking. These would strengthen their inter-African ties and create new networks that are non-Western to support them against challenges in the field.

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State University of New York

College of Arts and Sciences

Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Department

February 24, 2020

Dear Monica Hanna:

Thank you for submitting your book chapter, "Women are from Africa, and Men are from Europe." I'm pleased to let you know I will accept it for publication in the edited collection, *The Routledge Companion to Black Women's Cultural Histories*, forthcoming in 2021.

Your expertise as an indigenous Egyptologist and your intersectional approach to postcolonial and feminist theories make your contribution an invaluable part of this edited collection, which has now forced the volume to exist within a transnational black feminist framework. Thank you again for your chapter.

Sincerely yours,

Janell C. Hobson
Professor and Chair

Department of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies