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Egypt With or Without Islam: The Work Behind Glossy Tourism Advertisements

1 Introduction

In 2009, the Egyptian Tourism Authority (ETA) released two campaign videos. But except for the slogan “Egypt – where it all begins,” the ads had little in common. One showcased empty landscapes, sun-kissed ancient monuments, and blue water, emphasising relaxation and awe. The other video highlighted busy street culture and vibrant street life spiced up with oriental pop music and *Arabian Nights* aesthetics. It was easy to get the impression that two different destinations were put on display. This split-destination image was, however, far from a mistake, but the outcome of an ambitious production process.

Starting from this observation, this chapter explores the processes, decisions, and local contexts underpinning the production of Egypt’s official marketing material in the 2000s. Scholarship on tourist advertisements in the Middle East has emphasised the uneasy relationship between marketing content and orientalist stereotypes and has explored the mismatch between representation and reality.¹ My research demonstrates that highly romantic and orientalist tourist ads emerge not out of ignorance, but as a result of informed decisions. To understand *how* and *why* particular enticing images reoccur, we need to ask: whom are the ads meant to entice, and how do marketing professionals know their customers? What is the complex history behind the ads’ affective affordances that explains why the two video ads turned out so differently?

Egypt is one of Africa’s most important tourist destinations, and the sector is a key source of income for the state and a tenth of the population. Despite being a major industry in the country, tourism is associated with tensions in the predominantly Muslim society. The core of the dilemma is that the key *attraction* among Arab tourists – Islam and Muslim culture – is simultaneously the key *deterrent* among tourists unfamiliar with Islam. Using the two campaign ads as a departure point, this chapter investigates how marketing professionals and tourism experts have navigated this complex tourism landscape and diverging understandings of Islam and Muslim culture when designing promotions.

1 Cf. Al-Mahadin and Burns, 2006; Bryce, 2007; Henderson, 2008; El Jilil, 2009.

The text is divided into three sections. Section one takes the two video ads as a starting point for exploring the work that goes into producing Egypt's tourism campaigns. It analyses a particular logic of destination marketing that, in addition to the ordinary marketing of a product (in this case the destination), must co-produce that very end product in dialogue with the potential consumer. The next section outlines Egypt's major tourist groups and their tourism practices, to contextualise why it made sense to brand Egypt as two different destinations. To provide deeper insight into this design choice, the last section turns to some of the political challenges associated with tourism in Egypt, and how these issues are addressed in the campaigns through silences and absences.

This piece draws on long-term doctoral fieldwork in Egypt in 2011–2013, with cultural mediators who convey the image of Egypt to the outside world through journalism, tourism promotion, or personal interactions. I build on interviews and conversations with a dozen tourism bureaucrats, experts, and marketing professionals involved in the production of the official tourism promotion of Egypt in the 1990s and 2000s.² In addition, I have conducted analyses of official tourist marketing material and numerous reports about tourist flows and statistics.

2 Two Destinations

In 2009, Egypt's new slogan "Egypt – where it all begins," was about to be launched. It was the result of a collaboration between the ETA and two international marketing bureaus, J. Walter Thompson (JWT) and MindShare. As part of the launch, a range of still- and moving-image marketing material had been produced. Two colourful one-minute video ads, both ending with the new slogan either in English or Arabic, were soon circulated widely through international channels. Apart from a shared format and slogan, however, the videos' imagery has little in common. For someone unfamiliar with both Arabic and English language, it could have come as a surprise that they were the outcome of the same production process and campaign team. They had been produced for Egypt's two main source markets,

² Throughout the 2000s, the Egyptian tourism industry experienced massive growth beyond expectations and goals, turning it into a main pillar of the economy. The 2011 popular uprisings put an end to this era. Tourism flows plummeted and the industry entered a deep crisis from which it has still to recover. Since then, the politics of revolution, novel representations of Egyptians in news media coverage, and domestic violence have influenced most marketing efforts. This article is interested in understanding promotional activities under less exceptional conditions, because it allows for an analysis of more general rationales and patterns.

which the profession refers to as the “Arab market” and the “international market.”



Fig. 1: Screenshots from the international version of “Egypt – where it all begins”
Source: Experience Egypt, 2010a.

The “international” campaign (see Fig. 1) displays a mother and daughter on a white horse in awe at the sight of the pyramids in a vast desert landscape. A solitary tourist walks around the impressive columns in the Karnak Temple complex. Scenes of magnificent monuments and empty landscapes in the golden hour are interspersed with images of beaches and turquoise water presented in a calm tonality. Traditional oriental music and atmospheric flute tones create the effect of mystery and serenity. In interviews, I learned that the concept of “storytelling” underpinned the ads: as a tourist, “you always leave Egypt with a story.”³ The campaign furthered this concept by mixing the landscape views with close-ups of faces expressing amazement or fun. Emphasising the individual experience, the protagonists in the videos take photos and selfies. In the next scene, the same photos are displayed as memories in albums, underscoring the idea of leaving Egypt with a story.⁴

³ Interview with El Hout, 2012.

⁴ This ad displays a few scenes from busy Cairo traffic, the historic bazar, and a rooftop bar, which marks a break with previous international campaigns’ systematic omission of local culture.

In the second video (Fig. 2), which targets the “Arab market,” adventure and mystery is the central theme. A smartly dressed male tourist arrives in a luxury hotel with his family. Scenes of busy street life, oriental restaurants, and nightlife pass by to the beat of oriental pop music. Soon, the protagonists are surrounded by jumping servers and female dancers, colourfully dressed as *Arabian Nights* figures in Aladdin-style costumes. Rich colours convey animated street life, energy, and mystery. Like the other campaign, the scenes are filmed from the point of view of the tourist, sometimes a bit shaky, as though to highlight the individual experience. The idea of storytelling comes across more easily in the Arabic slogan, *maṣr bidāyit al-ḥikāya*, literally: “Egypt – the beginning of the story.”



Fig. 2: Screenshots from the Arab version of “Egypt – where it all begins”
Source: Experience Egypt, 2010b.

Far from representing ordinary life in Egypt, the two campaigns show how selective and romantic marketing materials seamlessly conjure up two destinations imbued with different affordances and expectations. To this end, different orientalist versions of Egypt are employed: the Western gaze of an unpopulated Pharaonic Egypt in the tranquil desert, and the exoticising and eroticising oriental gaze of Egypt used in the Arab ad.⁵ What a content analysis misses is that these imageries were actively chosen and calibrated to appeal to the different target groups. While campaign designers were conversant with the complex history and meaning of the tropes employed in the campaigns, they explained that the ob-

5 Much has been said about the legacy and power of these stereotypes, beginning with Said, 1978.

jective of the campaigns was to sell Egyptian tourist products to non-Egyptian travellers, not to portray contemporary Egypt. From that professional perspective, it was irrelevant if their campaigns corresponded to life in the country or to how Egyptians, including themselves, felt about the material.⁶

This disregard for “accurate representation” might appear crude, but it stems from a particular logic of consumption inherent in modern tourism, which puts images and marketing at the centre of the business. Promotion of a destination must do several things at once. It needs to convince a potential consumer to buy a trip, but it also needs to plant the idea of what the product actually is because the tourist product – a trip – is not solely made up of tangible elements, such as hotels, weather, and interactions with locals. At its core, tourism is also about experience, and experience is structured by broader imaginaries of the place as well as the tourists’ individual fantasies and expectations.⁷ This latter aspect also explains why the marketing professionals I interviewed described their job not as branding, but as promotion. If destination *branding* aims at indexing one coherent and recognisable idea or image of a place, destination *marketing* alludes to multiple but still legible imaginaries and travel possibilities to resonate with as many tourists as possible. From this view, Egypt’s image could be branded in terms of the quality of the product, but the job of marketing material was to animate and activate potential customers’ dream factories and to speak to their “tourism imaginaries.”⁸

This image-centric logic is reflected in the extensive investments in the marketing of Egypt in the 2000s. Funded by public and private actors, the marketing effort was structured by time-limited contracts between the ETA and the marketing agency that offered the best creative concepts. Worth 40–60 million USD in the 2000s, it was the largest contract awarded at the time by a public institution in Egypt to a market agency. Hence, the competition was fierce. The practice of contracting agencies was initiated in 1993 after a series of terror attacks against tourists were framed as an “image problem” that needed to be restored by improved and systematised marketing.⁹ Since then, global marketing agencies and the ETA

6 Several marketing experts wanted to insert images from the Revolution in the campaigns after the 2011 uprisings, but these attempts were abandoned because tourists associated them with danger and insecurity, not joy and excitement; cf. interviews with Altaranissi, 2012, and Loesch, 2012. Cf. also Ahlberg, 2017: ch. 3.

7 Cf. Mitchell, 2002: 199–200; Jenkins, 2003; West, 2016. This logic explains why tourism marketing and destination branding and promotion are huge industries; cf. Aronczyk, 2013; Kant, 2009.

8 Tourism imaginaries is a concept explored in depth by Salazar, 2012. Cf. also interviews with El Ezaby, 2013, and El Hout, 2012.

9 Cf. interview with Omar, 2012; Wahab, 1996.

have produced promotional strategies and content based on sophisticated knowledge of the market and the target groups. Insights into the target groups' imaginaries of Egypt and travel incentives are produced through the agencies' global networks and multifocal research. This combines detailed digital surveillance of individual travellers' opinions and focus group dialogue with big data analysis of larger travel patterns and research on the newest travelling trends. Another focus is Egypt's appearance in new media and public debates, which marketing agencies track closely in order to understand the larger political picture in different markets.¹⁰ The advertisement materials, such as the videos analysed here, constitute the tip of the iceberg in the agencies' quest to know, meet, or possibly alter a potential traveller's attitudes. So, who travels to Egypt and with what expectations?

3 Knowing Your Markets

Egypt is one of the oldest tourist destinations. In fact, *tour-ism* as a concept and practice first emerged in Egypt in the mid-19th century as part of Thomas Cook's package tours to the country and the Holy Land.¹¹ The ancient heritage was for generations the backbone of the industry – "Everyone wants to see the pyramids before they die"¹² – but today, there are many types of tourism on offer: heritage, beach, urban, medical, religious, spiritual, diving, golf, marriage celebration, "summering" (see below), backpacking, the Arabic language, and more. Overriding this multitude, however, is the categorisation of the ten to fifteen million annual visitors as "Arab visitors" or "international tourists." Reflected in the video ads above, this division is understood as apolitical and simply the reality of the business.¹³ What insights into these two groups' desires and travel habits motivate the promotion of Egypt as two separate destinations?

Inter-Arab travel in the shape of trade or for religious pilgrimage and education has long been a defining feature in the Muslim world. With the expansion of modern tourism, new groups of Arab visitors travelled to Egypt for summer vacation and urban enjoyment. Since the founding of the Ministry of Tourism in 1966 and the establishment of official tourism statistics, Arab visitors have consistently constituted at least a third of incoming tourists. The wealthier countries in the Gulf

¹⁰ This is something that all interviewees spoke about.

¹¹ Cf. Hunter, 2004.

¹² Interview with Dera, 2012; cf. Wynnes-Huges, 2013.

¹³ The two groups' different interests and practices are the topic of Wynn's monograph, 2007, in which she also accounts for the broader contexts behind these differences, such as historical narratives, global power relations, and cultural exchanges.

have since been attractive incoming markets. These visitors typically go to Cairo, Alexandria, or adjacent coastal resorts for relaxation and urban life in a place “almost like home.”¹⁴ Engaging in the practice of summering (*istiyāf*), they return as summer guests or owners of second homes. On average, they spend more nights in Egypt than “international” tourists do.¹⁵ “Sightseeing” is an alien concept to this tourist group, which wants to experience vibrant street life and local culture. These tourist practices explain why ordinary Egyptians often do not see Arab guests as “tourists,” a label they reserve for Western travellers. An Arab guest is called a “visitor” (*zayir*) or just a “Gulfie” (*khalīḡī*).

Islam is a key factor in why Gulf tourists prefer Egypt to other destinations. For Muslim tourists adhering to conservative practices of Islam, it can be challenging to travel to non-Muslim countries where it can be difficult to adhere to prayer times, locate the correct prayer direction, or find *ḥalāl* food. Diverging views on dress codes, moral behaviour, and gender mixing further complicate the experiences of these travellers.¹⁶ These hazards are assumed to disappear in a Muslim destination. The food will automatically be *ḥalāl*, prayer places will be easy to find, and the local population is assumed to share the same primary Muslim values.¹⁷ But this type of “Islamness” is only half of the reason why Egypt is an attractive destination to Gulf Arabs in particular. Many of these visitors prefer Egypt because it has more *liberal* religious attitudes and legislation than their home countries.¹⁸ As reflected in the video ad, Arab tourists dream of travelling to Egypt to enjoy gender-mixed places, nightlife, cinemas, and even belly dancing.

The other main source market is “international tourists” – basically non-Arab tourists – who make up the other two thirds of incoming travellers. Driven by the fascination with ancient Egyptian culture, a primary interest among this group is Pharaonic sightseeing along the Nile. A recurring detail in tourism ads, but also in museum exhibitions, popular culture, and school textbooks depicting ancient Egyptian monuments, is the absence of ordinary people. This has created an impression of a civilisation without inhabitants.¹⁹ Since the time of Thomas Cook, travellers’ imaginaries of empty ancient landscapes have served to separate heritage tourists from ordinary life. Indeed, most international travellers lack knowledge of and interest in Cairo’s rich Islamic heritage and contemporary culture. Cutting out these aspects, pre-packaged sightseeing tours shuttle tourists directly from

¹⁴ This is something all interviewed experts touched upon.

¹⁵ Cf. Cole and Altorki, 1998, for an account of tourism development along the north coast.

¹⁶ Cf. Jafari and Scott, 2014; Battour and Ismail, 2016.

¹⁷ Cf. Interview with Loesch, 2012.

¹⁸ This was something all experts touched upon; cf. Wynn, 2009, and Steiner, 2010.

¹⁹ Cf. Gregory, 1998; MacDonald and Rice, 2003.

their hotels to famous ancient sites and then back to their hotels. To achieve the empty-landscape effect and deliver the expected experience of Pharaonic Egypt, heritage sites have been encircled with fences and local villages have been demolished.²⁰ That the international video ad has placed the protagonists alone in the famous sites flirts with this fantasy.

But heritage tourism is no longer the core activity for international tourists visiting Egypt. From the 1990s onwards, the development of beach resorts along the Red Sea coasts massively boosted tourist flows.²¹ In 2010, 70 per cent of international visitors were sun-and-sea tourists.²² Beach tourists share their quest for pleasure and relaxation with Arab visitors, and their lack of interest in local culture with heritage tourists. But while the latter group travels to Egypt to experience its *unique* heritage, for beach tourists, geographical location matters less. Beach destinations do not compete through difference, but sameness – offering the generic concept of “sun and sea” – making price and accessibility the competitive factors.²³ This logic is evident in the Red Sea resorts. Far away from the populous Nile, these “offshore places” sell “a glamorous image in conformity with transnational archetypes (architecture, leisure, consumption and lifestyle).”²⁴ In the absence of local history or organic culture, many resorts have been designed from scratch to correspond to tourist dreams of a holiday paradise. This fantasy is strikingly detached both from Egyptian local culture and from ancient heritage sites.²⁵

While the markedly diverging tourist interests highlight several market segments, cultural and linguistic proximity to Egypt acts as the decisive factor for the two-market separation: Arab tourists want to experience local culture and exciting nightlife in a Muslim setting envisioned as almost-home. International tourists, on the other hand, have little interest in contemporary life, but come either for pharaohs or for faraway beaches. As discussed in the previous section, marketing materials are not produced with the intention to correspond to ordinary life in Egypt, but this overview of tourist habits and expectations reveals that the ads do correspond to a reality of sorts, since each campaign reflects and draws on the

20 Mitchell, 2002: 197–200, highlights how Luxor heritage sites were designed to minimise “unregulated contact with the tourists and increase their physical separation from the local community” following complaints from tourists. On the physical separation and enclave tourism in the region, cf. Meskell, 2005, and Hazbun, 2008.

21 Cf. Richter and Steiner, 2008; Vignal, 2010.

22 Cf. interviews with Dera, 2012, and El Ezaby, 2013.

23 Cf. interview with Omar, 2012.

24 Vignal, 2010: 70.

25 Cf. Daher, 2006; Hazbun, 2008.

dreams and preferences of the different market segments. To ensure that marketing material does its job, it is tested on focus groups and adjusted in accordance with the feedback received. In the campaign targeting the international market, the imagery had to be centred on the iconic Pharaonic symbols and empty beaches, so as not to confuse the target group, which normally displays “a limited understanding of what Egypt is.”²⁶ My interviewees also explained that eroticised or exoticified stereotypes are consciously inserted in the ads to entice consumers, but the Arab ad frames the evocative female dancers as a natural part of the scenery, not as objects of male entertainment as they are commonly known.

Ironically, while the production of the campaigns builds on meticulous research into customers’ fantasies of the destination, these imaginaries in themselves are far from being fact-checked or challenged. Instead, they are returned to the customers reproduced and repackaged more attractively – the mystery of ancient monuments, desert landscapes, bustling street life, and entertainment.²⁷ But as we have seen, this image-centric logic of tourism – this almost closed loop – is not only found at a representational or hermeneutic level,²⁸ it is engraved in tourism sites and reflected in design of landscape. The tourist experience – framed by imaginations, marketing images, and the product as presented and imagined – unfolds in places that ultimately carry other histories and stories that not only fall outside the tourist fantasy, but also threaten to quell it. This leads us to a third aspect of tourist marketing: the art of dealing with negative associations.

4 Outside the Frame

On the ground and in marketing material, the Arab and the international markets appear as two separate routes whose roads rarely cross. Yet, in one sense, the two markets are intricately entangled. What constitutes the main selling point in the Arab market – Islam and Muslim culture – is not only *ignored* by international tourists, but even acts as a prime *deterrent*.²⁹ This tension is less prominent in the imagery of the campaigns, but it becomes discernible when the focus turns to what

²⁶ Interview with Loesch, 2012.

²⁷ Mazzarella, 2017: 108–109, argues that personalised ads based on our digital personas have given rise to a fantasy of “perfect addressability” because our digital footprints reveal who we are and what we want before we know it ourselves. In a similar way, tourist ads deliver the dream that you have not yet dreamed.

²⁸ Cf. Jenkins, 2003; Caton and Santos, 2008.

²⁹ Cf. Al-Hamarneh and Steiner, 2004; Hazbun, 2006.

has been left outside the frame and to the strategies and sensibilities that marketing professionals employ to navigate this dilemma.

International tourists' limited interest in Islam in contemporary Egyptian culture is grounded in a complex history of imbalanced relationships. The obsession with antiquities and the tendency to erase local people, ancient or contemporary, from representations to site design means that visitors' limited knowledge is rarely expanded. The legacies of orientalism and foreign domination have heightened the barriers of enclavism. In the tourism industry, international tourists are known for possessing a general fear of Muslim or Arab "others" generated by parameters such as political unrest, violent news images, prejudices about Islamic precepts, and widespread ideas about the oppression of women in Islam.³⁰ The generalised nature of this fear has meant that a crisis anywhere in the Middle East will push tourist flows down in the whole region, as evinced by the 1991 Gulf War in Iraq, which sent Egypt's tourist flows to rock bottom.³¹ In the 1990s, the association between Islam and violence directed at tourists added a new layer to this fear. In Egypt, Islamist extremists started to target heritage tourists as part of a guerrilla war against the Egyptian state.³² Hundreds of terror attacks were carried out in the Nile Valley. As mentioned, the tourist industry treated the violence primarily as an image problem. But this would change with the attack at the Hatshepsut Temple in Luxor in 1997, in which 58 tourists and four Egyptians were killed.

At the time of this horrific attack, the Red Sea resorts were about to be launched. To avoid any association with the violent scenes from the Nile Valley, the ETA decided to uncouple the resorts from the mainland completely. In the following years, the "Red Sea Riviera" was promoted as a generic beach destination, "where the sun shines 365 days a year." Not only were Islamic and Muslim symbols left out of the marketing campaigns. Typical Egyptian imagery – such as the ancient heritage and deserts – was also erased. With time, as tourism started to recover, ancient symbols were slowly reinserted into the tourist imagery. But even at the time of research, marketing professionals consciously excluded symbols of Islam in promotions targeting international markets.³³ To avoid triggering fear and anxiety, ordinary scenes of life in Egypt (women in veils, praying people) were left out of the picture.³⁴ The only Egyptians entering the tourist frames at

30 Cf. Ahlberg, 2017: ch 3; Wynn, 2006; Steiner, 2010.

31 Cf. interview with El Ezaby, 2013; Wahab, 1996; Morakabati, 2013; Ahlberg, 2017.

32 These attacks in turn were legitimated by the belief that foreign tourists were immoral *kuffār* (unbelievers); cf. Aziz, 1995.

33 Cf. interview with Dera, 2012.

34 Cf. interviews with Omar, 2012, and El Ezaby, 2013. Cf. also Wynne-Hughes, 2012.

that time were stereotypical tourist figures, such as camel drivers, *felucca* (a traditional sailing boat) sailors, or welcoming servants.

As we have seen above, however, Islamic symbols and Muslim culture constitute the core message to the Arab market. This emphasis, like the omission of Islamic imageries in international promotions, can be historicised in light of global events. Directly after 9/11, global tourism pundits predicted a major crisis in tourism, particularly in the Middle East. Instead, intraregional tourism boosted travel statistics as Arabs increasingly chose Muslim-friendly destinations. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks and the war on terror, Arab travellers faced tedious security clearances, a surge in Islamophobia, and even hostility in European and North American destinations.³⁵

Egyptian marketing actors were quick to mobilise these sentiments of stigmatisation and hostility directed towards Muslims and Arabs in the West. With the slogan *nawwartu maṣr*, a common welcome phrase roughly translated as “you brightened up Egypt,” campaigns in the 2000s emphasised shared cultural and religious values. At the time, Muslims reported having to hide or tone down their Muslim identities in the West. In contrast, Egyptian tourism ads openly celebrated Islamic symbols and culture. Friendly and smiling Egyptians in the ads not only underscored that Arabs were welcomed and cherished, but also employed orientalist themes to gesture towards the long history of affinities centred on Islamic culture. In the same period as campaigns to international tourists made efforts to avoid relating Egypt to Islam, then, the very same Western sentiment – Islamophobia – explains why Muslim imagery and references came to dominate campaigns directed to Arab markets.

5 Concluding Remarks: Content and Context

This chapter started with the question why Egypt was promoted as two different tourist destinations in the course of the 2000s. The analysis that moved from content to markets to context underlines how Egypt’s marketing strategies are skilfully tailored and calibrated in relation to different market segments, diverging tourism fantasies, and other competing imaginaries of the place. One insight is that marketers seek to animate travellers’ fantasies by employing positively connoted symbols, at the same time as they try to avoid activating politically charged and scary associations of the same place. Any decision to insert or cut out certain symbols, in our case representations of locals or Islamically connoted signs, is in-

35 Cf. Al-Hamarneh and Steiner, 2004; Hazbun, 2006.

formed by sophisticated research and subsequent testing of the campaign in focus groups. This means that the exotic stereotypes and simplistic representations found in glossy marketing material are a reflection not of campaign designers' ignorance, but of their professionalism and knowledge of the target groups' desires.

Hence, a focus on the voices of the campaign architects illustrates how productive analysing tourism advertisements beyond questions of marketing content and promotional strategies can be. In the context of the Middle East and Egypt, promotional material provides a mirror to the dilemmas of running tourism in a Muslim Arab country and highlights tourism's deep entanglement with global politics. In the 2000s, terror attacks on tourists, outspoken Islamophobia, and wars put a mark on the region. These wider geopolitical trends exacerbated a lasting tension in the Egyptian tourist industry, where the main attraction for potential Arab visitors – Islam and Muslim culture – became a major deterrent in the international incoming market. This tension explains why marketing actors promoted Egypt as two separate destinations at that time, as illustrated by the two video ads analysed above.

This chapter has made a case that marketing and promotion must be understood within the context of the larger tourism industry. The main issue lies far beyond the promotional material itself, the campaign architects and marketing professionals who are well aware of the material's shortcomings or limitations, and, for that matter, those who buy a trip after encountering a campaign ad. The core of the issue lies in the "reality of the tourist business." Like many countries in the Global South, Egypt's economic reliance on tourism is significant and the ambition to deliver desirable tourism products correspondently high. This explains why potential customers' imaginaries are subject to careful and minute research by marketing agencies. It is here that the irony of tourism marketing appears. The aim of their research is not to further common knowledge, but to conjure up travel dreams of the destination and then provide the corresponding tourist products to ensure that the actual trips meet the expectations that the customers (do not yet know they) have. As tourism is one of the world's biggest businesses and image producers, the world as the tourist sees it continues to be (re)produced.

But imaginaries are unstable. The 2011 uprising inserted novel representations of Egyptians into global imaginaries. Young, educated Cairenes frequently figured in news media talking about democracy and rights, a stark contrast to the camel drivers, waiters in oriental dress, and exotic dancers in tourism promotion. As a response, the 2011 campaign "We are Egypt" turned "ordinary" Egyptians into the campaign's main protagonists. In place of tourists, these Egyptians, who, in fact, represented the upper-middle-class elite, were enjoying their country and inviting foreign guests to do the same. Since then, tourism-marketing campaigns have allowed less-polished versions of the nation to be part of advertisement mes-

sages. This shift is not unique to Egypt. Due to the growing influence of social media, the claustrophobic frames imposed by established media infrastructures – news media, tourism marketing, and political branding – are losing their representational dominance. The new folksy marketing trend indexes a growing desire among travellers to experience destinations not only as exotic, sanitised, and “other,” but also as places inhabited by local people, who, like tourists, lead ordinary lives and dream of the good life.

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