

Remembering Cairo

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Abstract

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Cairo or 'Al-Qahira' means the victorious. Throughout its history, there have been many attempts by both internal and external forces to reshape Cairo into a controlled metropolis. However, the city always prevails. Eight years ago, at the height of the Arab Spring, millions of Egyptian youth took to the streets of Cairo all heading towards Tahrir (Liberty) Square chanting: "Aish, Horreya, Adala Egtema'eya" - bread, freedom, social justice. They marched against corruption, police brutality, and the evident deterioration and neglect of basic infrastructure and services all over Egypt. This thesis offers a series of potential future narratives set after a speculative revolution takes place in 2021, 10 years after the Arab Spring. In the absence of the previous socio-political framework, what is the identity of the newly revived Cairo? What kinds of spaces and activities can take place? How does Cairo prevail once again? The following narratives explore how abandoned, vacant, and contested spaces can be reclaimed and transformed to revive public life and create opportunities for self expression, cohesion and daily revolution.

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Acknowledgements

To my father, who inspired this project through his infinite kindness and love for our country.

To my family, thank you for your endless love and support.
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القاهرة لسحبها

REMEMBERING CAIRO

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Prologue

Mother of the World - As Egyptians fondly called their Capital - in all her shambolic grandeur and operatic despair. The city seduced me. Her depth seemed limitless, whether by the measure of time or the fortunes of her people or the mysteries of their ways. Layers overlapped effortlessly: the ancient and the new, the foreign and the native, the rich and the poor. Worlds mingled... The streets, where the barefoot incense man swirled his censer from shop to shop, collecting a shillin or bariza from their keepers in exchange for a blessing. Brandy sipping leftists at the Cafe Riche spun tall plots to tease eavesdropping hookah-puffing secret police. On the weathered marble floor of a fourteenth century mosque, under the coffered and gilded ceiling, a turbaned sheikh dozed over his holy book. Young couples cooed at the chipped tables of the venerable Groppi Tea rooms. They ignored their neighbors and the painted old birds in laddered stockings who had lost the will to migrate back to Salonica or Trieste or wherever it was they had come from.

-Cairo: The City Victorious¹

"Everyone from Shukri the ironing man to Ahmad the tailor to Dr. Sabri the dentist felt it, and moaned about it. The weather had never been humid like this, they agreed. The streets had never looked so scuffy. The Cairene character itself had altered. Those who could were simply leaving."

-Cairo: The City Victorious¹

Author, Max Rodenbeck addresses the rapid changes and evolution of Cairo, from a diverse cosmopolitan city to a segregated global city, in his book "Cairo The City Victorious". This thesis highlights some of the events that have led to the current living experience of Cairo.



Figure 1. Concept collage

Chapter I Introduction

“Egypt is the gift of the Nile”

An ancient saying² that along with the Nile itself has been forgotten.

In January 2011, at the height of the Arab Spring, millions of Egyptian youths took to the streets of Cairo all heading towards Tahrir (Liberty) Square chanting: “Aish, Horreya, Adala Egtema'eya” - bread, freedom, social justice. They marched against corruption, police brutality, and the evident deterioration and neglect of basic infrastructure and services all over Egypt. Particularly in Cairo, ex-President Mubarak and his party had turned their backs on the Nile and were deeply engaged in a desert expansion dream that left the remainder of the city underserved with outdated infrastructure and rising inequities. This thesis analyzes a variety of past events to speculate a revolution that takes place in 2021, 10 years after the Arab Spring.

Cairo's modern history shows a wide range of multiplicities that have shaped its fabric and produced a hybridized culture: a product of colonization and Western influence fused with hyper-nationalism. These multiplicities are evident not only in the culture but are also embodied within formal and informal architectural enclaves throughout Cairo. The city itself is an assemblage of these incoherent histories and cultures. It is a city where different socioeconomic groups have always co-existed despite prolific economic and cultural gaps. It is quite common to find a street of affluent residences and shops adjacent to poor informal neighborhoods. These juxtapositions have grown to shape the identity of Cairo and its people. The new desert developments are hailed as Cairo's saviors through the promise of economic revitalization and relief from the otherwise unsolvable over-congestion of the city. While the desert expansion have provided Cairenes with little more than false hopes of prosperity, they have also changed the social structure of the city through the social and physical segregation which in turn diminished, or rather dissolved, the diverse public urban spaces that have historically characterized Cairo.

These desert expansion projects are realized in the form of luxurious gated communities with names like “Dreamland”, “Beverly Hills”, and “Swan Lake” where wealthy Egyptians can



Figure 2. Cairo

escape to live a modern westernized life in what the government dubbed a utopian New Cairo. Currently, around 20 years after its inception, New Cairo is a ghost town, occupied mainly by the rich minority that can afford it. New Cairo is only one example of the many attempts to decentralize Cairo in the interest of private development.

After the military coup in 2013, all hopes of a dignified life in Cairo disappeared with the brutal crackdown on religious gatherings and social groups like activists, artists, and LGBT communities. In 2015 the state announced their plan to abandon the existing city all together for a new capital, unimaginatively called: The New Capital, with a newly constructed river located 45 km outside Cairo.

The New Capital is planned to be a controlled version of Cairo, leaving no room for the informalities and interactions that the Cairene culture depends on and no room for protests or self expression that had become common perpetual occurrences throughout the 2011 revolution. Some say the New Capital is simply a form of desert reclamation and capitalist colonialism by the newly-emerging wealthy nations such as the UAE and China, both of which have invested heavily in the construction of the New Capital. Supporters of President Sisi justify the ambitious project as an attempt to escape from dealing with the multitude of complexities facing Cairo. Others believe it is an intentional move by Sisi's government to maintain social and political control through erasing the spaces that have previously supported the calls for freedom and self-expression. Regardless of the real reason behind this planned exodus, all sides agree that this move will have a heavy social, environmental and economic toll on the country.

The conjectural narrative begins with the exodus and abandonment of Cairo in late 2020. This thesis speculates that this event, along with its burdensome impact, will instigate the break out of mass demonstrations to break out once again. By 2021, the abandoned Cairo is finally taken over by its residents. In the absence of the previous socio-political framework, what is the identity of the newly revived Cairo? What types of spaces and activities can take place? How does the city look back towards the Nile River? Using theoretical ideas and themes of public space and its relationship to social awakening, this thesis will use future narratives as a tool to explore how existing infrastructure, vacant sites, and contested spaces can be reclaimed and transformed to revive public life in the city and create nodes of self expression, cohesion and daily revolution.

Chapter II

Narrative of Cairo



Following a broad overview of Egypt, this chapter provides a narrative of significant past events and existing social issues that have shaped the urban fabric of modern Cairo leading up to an alternative future that takes place in 2021, when the abandoned city is reclaimed by its residents.

Overview of Egypt

Throughout history, Egypt's location on the northeast corner of Africa, connecting Africa and Asia with the Sinai Peninsula as a landbridge, with waterfronts on both the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, has left it prone to occupation: Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, French, and finally British. The capital of Egypt has always been located within a few kilometers of the Nile, with civilization dating back to CE 969. This capital has been given many different names by its occupants: Memphis, Heliopolis, Babylon in Egypt, and Al-Fustat. Today it is called Cairo or 'Al-Qahira', meaning the victorious.

The Nile River flows over 6,600 kilometers (4,100 miles) until it empties out into the Mediterranean Sea. The soil along the river delta is rich in nutrients due to the large amount of silt the Nile's flooding deposits. Ancient Egyptians believed the Nile to be a god³ that has blessed the people with goods and offerings. The Nile was always believed to be a source of life that is used for drinking, bathing, recreation, and transportation. Today, the symbolic significance of the Nile has been forgotten and it is only used as a resource for irrigation and hydroelectric power. Specifically in Cairo, the Nile banks either stand abandoned or occupied by hotels tailoring to tourists.

Greater Cairo has 20.5 million residents and is the largest city in the Middle East and Africa. Its density is around 50,196 residents per square mile; more than five times the density of Seattle which has 8,900 residents per square mile. It is a young city, 75% of the population are under the age of 30 and 3% over the age of 65. This reality makes Cairo a city with a tremendous potential workforce⁴. Nevertheless, 25.7% of the population remains jobless despite the fact that 38.3% of this group hold university degrees. Egypt has an illiteracy rate

Figure 3. Map of Egypt



of 29.2%, which is further broken down to 13.5% of males and 18.5% of females⁵. The rate of illiteracy is expected to increase as more children are dropping out of school to support their families. Although Arabic is the official language of Egypt, educated Cairenes can speak English, French or both. Cairo has little ethnic diversity but a wide spectrum of sociocultural groups with a multitude of identities influenced by both foreign and local culture. The city is currently facing an abundance of issues and complexities ranging from over-congested streets to depleting water sources, but the analysis to follow will focus primarily on the extreme inequitable allocation of resources.

Figure 4. Cairo Neighborhoods



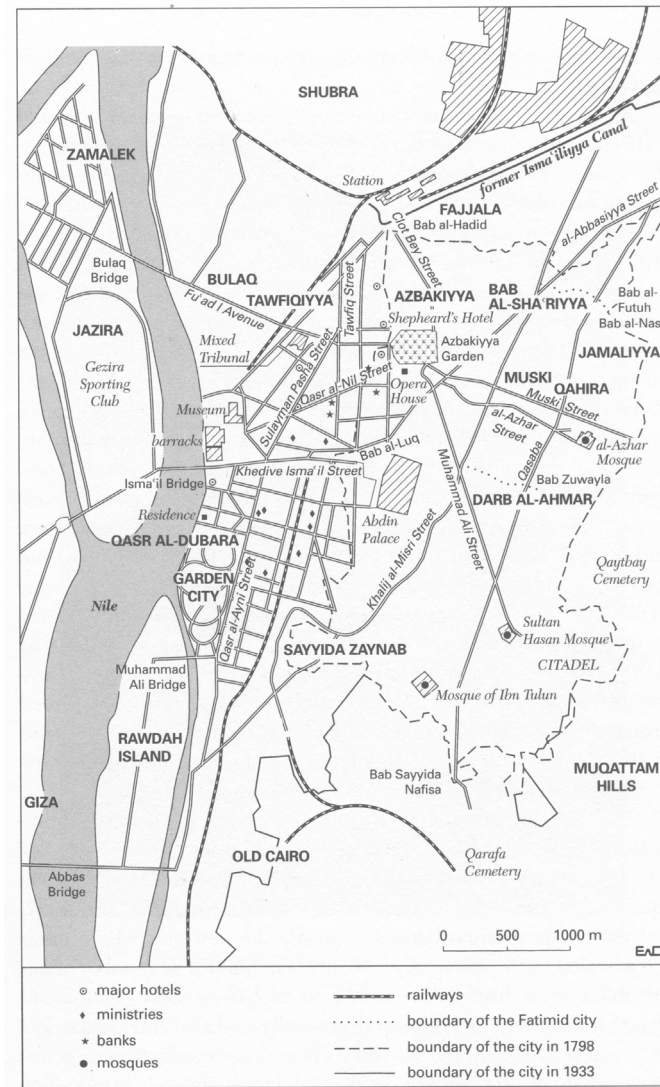
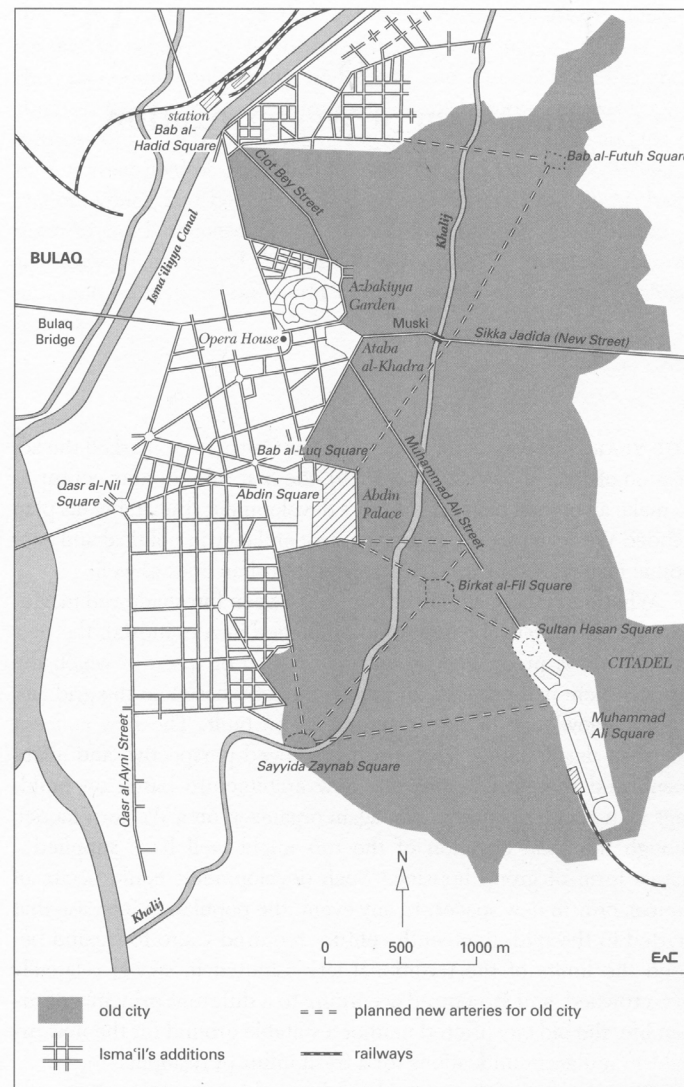
Figure 5. Medieval 'Islamic' Cairo
 Figure 6. Paris on the Nile

Past Narrative

French Colonization and Modernization

In 1798, during the French colonization, rapid developments took place westward outside the walls of the medieval city of Cairo. The French had ambitious plans to build roads on the previously agricultural Nile banks and connect them to bridges that cross the Nile. As the French occupation only lasted 3 years, their urban plan for Cairo was not fully realized.

In the 1860s, a French company began the excavation of the Suez Canal to connect the Mediterranean and the Red Sea and a British Company constructed a railway to connect the three major cities in Egypt, Cairo, Alexandria and Suez. In Cairo, Khedive Ismail⁶, the Albanian Ottoman ruler, continued the development and 'modernization' west of the old city all the way to the Nile bank to create what he envisioned as "Paris on the Nile". Inspired by Baron Haussmann's Paris, the plan was to beautify Cairo through wide axial boulevards connecting nodes of important buildings and public squares. This area was named 'Ismailia', after Khedive Ismail, and is now known as Downtown Cairo, with Ismailia Square at the center of this new development.



British Occupation

By the 1880s, the Khedive's large scale projects left the country bankrupt and the British Empire decided to 'temporarily' intervene. This temporary intervention led to a 60 year British occupation of Egypt that left significant marks on the country. Among the major projects of the British rule in Egypt was the expansion of the railway system. Cairo's population boomed as it became a major hub connecting tourists, foreign residents and locals. The area along the Nile bank continued to develop and by the 1900s, there were many luxury villas on the east bank. In 1902, the Egyptian Antiquity Museum was constructed on Ismailia Square, to host some of the many artifacts the British were excavating in Upper Egypt. The Square however, was cut off from the Nile by the British army's extensive barracks, which kept a military presence throughout Cairo to assert its control and dominance. By the 1920s, Egypt was declared a British protectorate, and the monarch, King Farouk, was installed under the control of Britain. At that point, a third of Cairo's population was foreign-born and the British continued to build experimental communities that suffocated the old districts where the locals lived. An example of such a community is the 'Garden City' neighborhood developed south of Ismailia which followed the picturesque British model: curved streets and residences along gardens. Further east was another neighborhood called Heliopolis, which was connected to downtown Cairo by tram and was divided into two zones: luxury residences for Europeans, and working class housing for the natives. This division within the city set off the trend of experimental segregated communities.

Figure 7. Expansion under British administration
Ismail's Cairo, 1870 (left) British Cairo, 1933 (right)



Figure 8. The free officers of the military (top left)

Figure 9. Coup D'etat (top right)

Figure 10. Tahrir Square 'Liberation Square' 1940s (bottom left)

Figure 11. Cairo Tower, 1961 (bottom right)

Egyptian Independence and Nationalism

In the 1950s, the severe inequities between the locals and foreigners lead to a rise in nationalism and the formation of "Al-Hizb Al-Watani" or the patriotic faction, later known as the Nationalist Party. On January 25th 1952, riots of unprecedented scale took place in Ismailia Square, and many British buildings were burned down. By July 23rd 1952, the coup d'etat lead by the free officers of the Egyptian army removed the monarch from power and declared Egypt an independent Arab nation. Ismailia Square was changed to 'Tahrir Square' meaning "Liberation Square", to commemorate the liberation from British Administration.

In 1956, Gamal Abdel-Nasser, one of the free officers of the coup d'etat, was declared president marking the beginning of the modern era of Cairo. Nasser's era catalyzed a shift in Cairo's social urban values. Two of the most important policy changes by Nasser were: the initiation of the Arab Socialist Union⁷, based on the Soviet Union model, and the nationalization of private property to create a state ownership economy. This allowed the economy to flourish and resulted in mass migration from rural Egypt into Cairo, leading to a population and urbanization boom. A variety of buildings were constructed or reclaimed to symbolize nationalist control and Nasser's authoritarian rule especially around Tahrir Square, which remained a stage for high profile political events. The most significant of these projects were the Government Administrative Center known as The Complex or 'Mogamaa' to the south of the Square, the Arab League Building to the south west, the Nile Hilton Hotel to the west, and the Arab Socialist Union building northwest of Tahrir Square. While there are obvious stylistic differences between the four buildings, their modernist style and austere monotonous facades were designed to make a proud statement of what it means to be Egyptian after recovering from years of European colonization. Slowly however, they became symbols for the bureaucracy and power of the Egyptian state over its citizens.

Other landmarks of nationalism constructed around Cairo include: the Cairo tower which was built in 1961 in Zamalek Island - originally an aristocratic neighborhood that was home to the foreign elite and inaccessible to locals but changed to accommodate the emerging middle class. Nadi Al Gezira, which was founded in 1882 as an exclusive social space for Europeans living in Cairo was nationalized and transformed into a public space to



meet the needs of middle and lower class Cairenes.

Many satellite cities were developed to accommodate the new population of immigrants. The west bank of the Nile which had up until that point been agricultural land, was urbanized into public housing forming the 'Mohandeseen'⁸ neighborhood. Hundreds of public housing projects were built as an ideological tool for socialism and modeled after the Soviet Union's modernist typology: "socialism has guided the architecture style that combines both solid massing and efficient standardization to achieve social justice" (Al Sayyad, 269). Early on, Egypt was trading cotton and textiles with the Soviet Union in exchange for prefabricated building components from Russian and Eastern European factories to be used in the public housing projects. The social housing projects constructed during the Nasser era initially stood out against the organic fabric of the remainder of the city but are now considered part of formal Cairo, including Helwan to the south, Shubra Al Khayma to the north, and Imbaba and Giza to the west of Downtown Cairo. The 40 kilometer long Nile Corniche Street was constructed along the east bank of the Nile, connecting the suburbs to the north and south of Downtown. Alsayyad⁹ describes this street as an expression of urban vitality through businesses and commercial activities and a promenade for Cairo's middle class. However, the urbanization of the Nile bank meant the loss of thousands of acres of farm lands.

Nasser's policies of social provision attempted to close the socioeconomic gaps between the aristocracy and ordinary Egyptians. Nasser was therefore loved by many, especially the middle and lower classes. Unfortunately, his authoritarian rule set the long lasting political standard in Egypt which suppresses and eliminates any groups that speak up against state power. In 1962, Nasser established the Arab Socialist Union (ASU) modeled after the Soviet Politburo. The ASU was the only legal political party in Egypt while all other political organizations were abolished and their leaders detained. Any media platforms that showed support to opposing parties or expressed criticism of the existing government was shutdown.

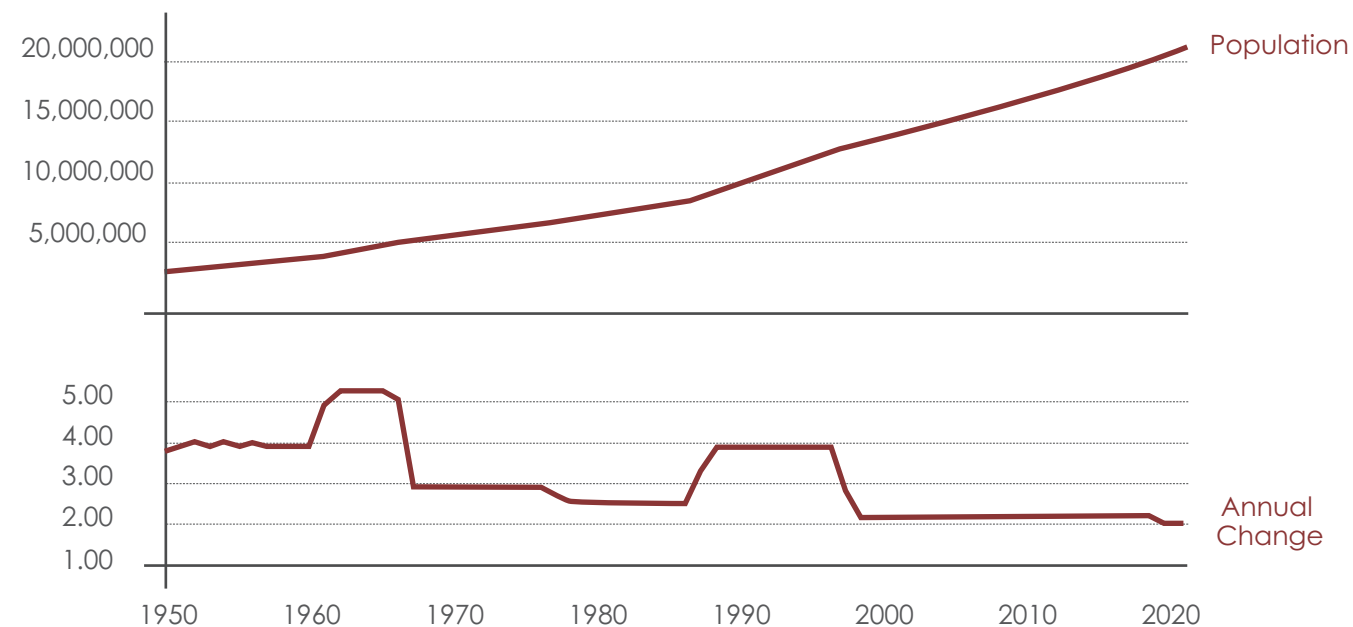


Figure 12. Housing built by President Nasser
 Figure 13. Population growth in Cairo

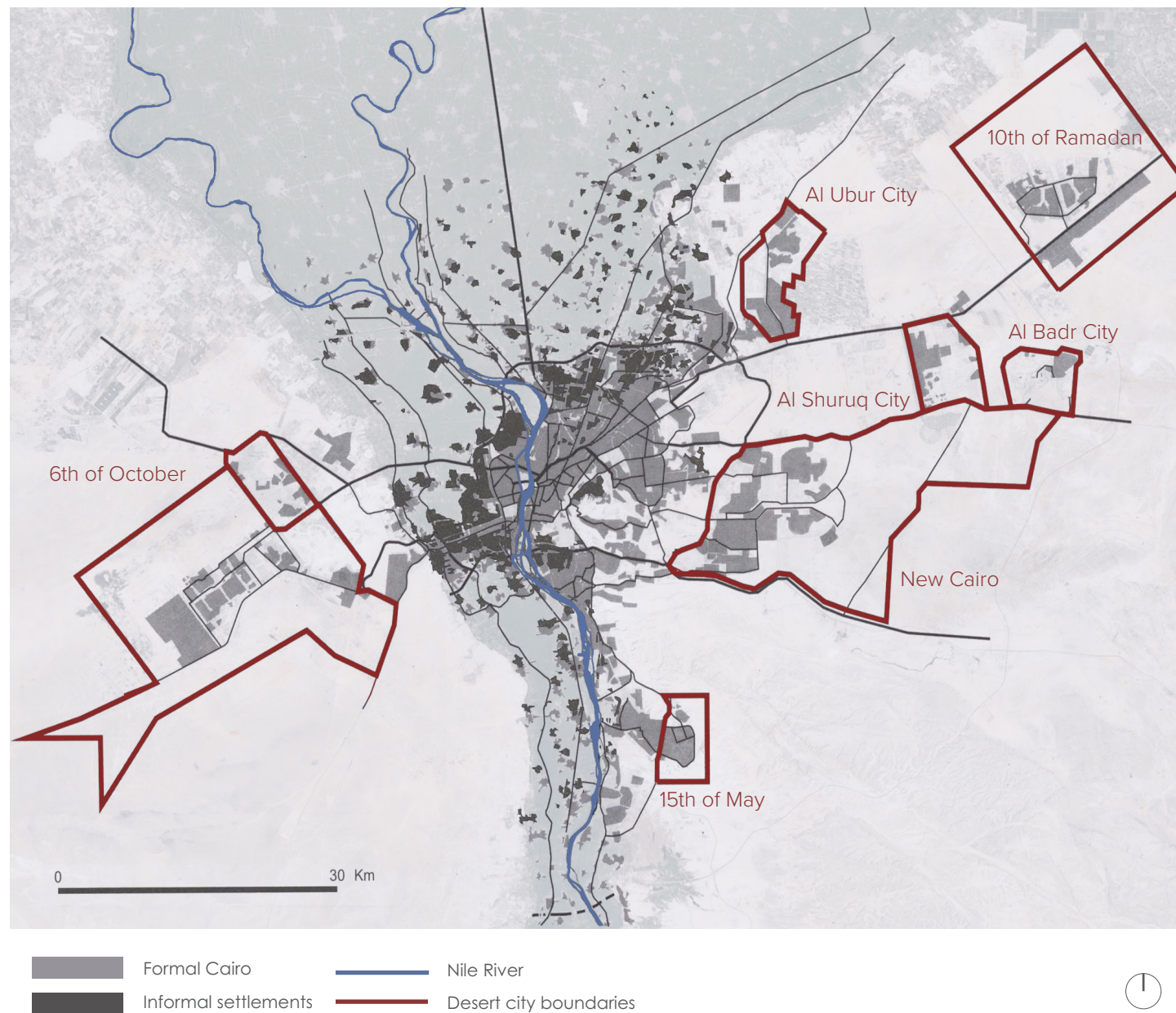


Figure 14. Map of formal Cairo, desert cities, and informal settlements

Capitalism and Neo-Liberalism

In 1967, Nasser was succeeded by Anwar Al Sadat. Following the previous socialist era, President Sadat implemented a shift in the opposite direction. His Open Door policy or 'Infitah' in 1970 brought back foreign investment and privatized capital. This created a boom in capitalism, international relations and tourism. The New Urban Communities Authority (NUCA) had the most visible efforts to conquer desert with new urban centers that were planned to be stand-alone cities completely independent from Cairo but failed to attract the targeted population, estimated to be around 500,000 residents¹⁰.

Building new cities became the go-to strategy for popular support of the Egyptian government and continued during the Neoliberal reign of ex-president Hosni Mubarak. The formal developments in Cairo were centered around tourism: hotels and malls funded by private enterprise and foreign investment. The rent control policies implemented by Nasser were abolished and land value in Cairo significantly increased. Housing developments continued to be built but remained vacant due to the inflation the city was facing. Many small scale local businesses were replaced by foreign businesses and chains. Driven by capitalism, Cairo was turning into a global city where the rich and poor occupied separate spaces. The Mubarak regime continued to push for the expansion away from the Nile valley and believed that these desert cities, as they became known, are the only way to deal with the urban complexities of Cairo. As many of the immigrants from rural Egypt could not afford the prices of the city, informal settlements also expanded and filled any gaps left in the dense city including cemeteries and along highways leading towards the desert cities. So while the government focused its resources on the development of desert cities that are unaffordable to the majority of Egyptians, 63% of Cairo's population, approximately 11 million people¹¹, resorted to living in informal settlements. The result became a concrete jungle of intertwined formal, informal, modern, and ancient localities.



Figure 15. Gated residential communities in New Cairo
 Figure 16. Informal settlements

Desert Cities: New Cairo

Although the previously built cities remained mostly vacant, by the 1990s the concept of new towns was reinvigorated under the increased power of private real-estate developers. Huge plots of land were given away by the government to foreign and local developers below market price for the purpose of constructing high-end gated communities and compounds with golf courses, resorts and other amenities offered to residents and with a steep fee for outsiders. These compounds have names like "Beverly Hills" "Dreamland" "Hyde Park" and "Swanlake". Located in the desert land to the east of Cairo, New Cairo was planned to accommodate all these private gated communities in a manner that separates different land uses such as commercial, business and residential. The city lacked any industrial zones and consisted mostly of luxurious gated residential communities and large malls that serve as the only form of "public space". The public transportation system is yet to connect to New Cairo, leaving it inaccessible and unaffordable for the majority of Cairenes. Almost three decades after its inception, New Cairo still remains a ghost town.

"For over five decades, desert schemes have consumed massive public funds and private investment and continue to do so. Yet the Egyptian desert is virtually littered with still born, anemic and failed projects. Most cities and settlements remain ghost towns or playgrounds for the rich, and most industrial areas remain sand-blown empty lots."

-David Sims¹²

Alsayyad clearly summarizes the evolution of modern Cairo: "was 'liberated' from its rich landlords during Nasser's era and handed over to its poor. The city was later 'liberalized' under Sadat and opened its gates to foreign capital. Half a century later, under Mubarak's government, it has been returned to the wealthy and its new elite"¹³ With an ever growing gap between the elite and the poor and the disappearance of the middle class, Cairo stands divided with two opposite types of growth: the informal and the luxurious.



Figure 17. Tahrir Square, January 2011

Figure 18. Tear gas used against protestors

In 1981, after the assassination of President Sadat, an Emergency Law¹⁴ was implemented, extending police power to restrict political activity and any form of expression and assembly that opposes the state. This law continued to be extended every three years until 2010. The government claimed that it was only aimed at terrorist and drug suspects but continued to limit free speech and association in all areas of the public life. It also led to the imprisonment of activists and civilians without trial, media and artist crackdowns, and regulating gatherings of more than 5 people even in mosques and other religious venues. Tensions in Cairo continued to escalate.

2011: Arab Spring and Aftermath

In response to rising corruption, police brutality, and inequalities, on Jan 25th 2011¹⁵, millions of Egyptian youth marched from all over Cairo towards Tahrir Square. The chants echoed in the streets: "Aish, Horreya, Adala Egtema'eya" - bread, freedom, and social justice. The police and Central Security Forces (CSF) responded to the peaceful protests with full force using tear gas, rubber bullets, and threats of incarceration. On the third day of protests known as "The Day of Rage" the ruling political party's headquarters¹⁶ was set on fire and the building was left in ruin. The marches, protests and sit-ins continued for 18 days until ex-president Mubarak finally stepped down. These 18 days marked a euphoric time where, despite their differences, diverse socio-economic groups gathered in support of one another to discuss their common goals, in a bold display of the power and resilience of Egyptians as they come together. These events were not foreign to Tahrir Square, which was the site of the coup d'etat that brought an end to the British colonisation of Egypt in 1952. In the 60 years between the two revolutions, the Square was functioning as nothing more than a busy traffic circle blocked off with barricades for metro construction. During the rallies, protestors removed the construction barricades to use as shields against police attacks, and were surprised to discover that there was no construction taking place and that the barricades were simply placed to stop gatherings in the Square, which was reliving its days of glory.

The immediate aftermath of these events filled the streets of Cairo with hope and unyielding determination. Many streets were used as a canvas to express the hopes and demands of the people in the form of graffiti, protests, song and dance performances, and speeches. Police no longer harassed the vendors who roamed the streets or set up in open spaces. These activities became a dominant feature of street life in Cairo, taken over by vendors selling everything from grilled sweet potatoes or candy floss to fake leather jackets.



Figure 19. First Egyptian Election

Many groups that had previously been silenced were finally expressing their identities and rights. Tahrir Square embodied and encompassed the true essence of a true public square; a place where citizens meet, mingle, promenade, gather, protest, perform and share ideas— a physical manifestation of the freedom the people of Cairo were striving to achieve.

The First Egyptian Election

The ousting of ex-president Mubarak was greeted by Egyptians with mass celebrations that lasted till the break of dawn on 11 February 2011 and followed by the initiation of the first ever democratic presidential election in the history of the nation. Enthusiastic and hopeful Egyptians, including the youth who made this election a reality, lined the streets of Egypt outside polling stations on 16 & 17 June of 2012 casting their votes for the first time ever to choose their leader into the new era of self-determination, equality and just rule.

In a surprise turn of events, President Mohamed Morsi, was elected. Morsi was a senior member of the Muslim Brotherhood¹⁷, a party that gained widespread support in Egypt and across the Arab world since its inception. The brotherhood began as a social movement but was soon politicised, creating room for an armed branch that was linked to various acts of violence and assassinations. Over the years, there have been many tensions between the Brotherhood and the Egyptian government, especially following an assassination attempt against President Nasser in 1954, which led to years of imprisonment and execution of various key members of the group.

Although the Brotherhood was banned in Egypt, they reappeared, endorsed, and joined in the 2011 protests against the failing and corrupt leadership of the Mubarak regime. This paved the way for their win in the 2012 elections, to the surprise of the whole world and the dismay of many Cairenes and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) which have ruled Egypt since the 1952 revolution.

Morsi's rule was mired from the beginning by the contentious history of his party, his lack of political savvy and the active undermining by SCAF which held full control over all media outlets in the country. While some longed for peace and stability, many continued to protest and challenge the authoritarianism of the ruling party. Strong analogies were drawn between the Mubarak Party and the Muslim Brotherhood. Eventually, Morsi was ousted by his Minister of Defense, General Abdel Fattah El-Sisi in July 2013 - a little over a year from his election.

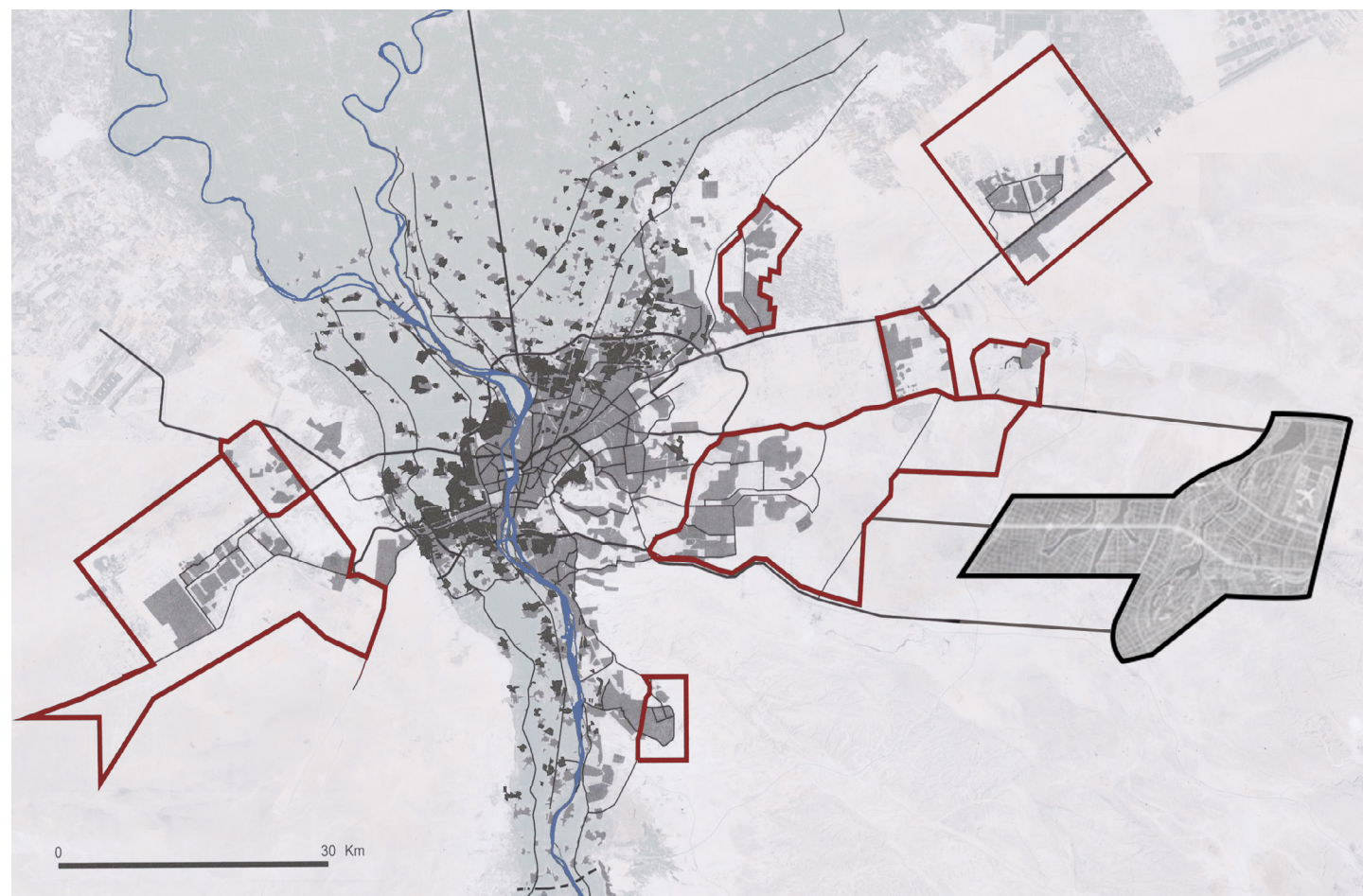


2013: Military Coup

In 2013, the military coup that brought down President Morsi brought with it extreme violence between the opposing sides. The coup was led by the military general, now president, Abdel Fattah El-Sisi. While the 2011 revolution set out to overturn the top-down corruption which impacted the social fabric of the city, the military regime's return led to a new more tangible disintegration of the social character of Cairo. El-Sisi realized that public spaces, such as Tahrir Square, are symbols of the Egyptian revolution and the Arab Spring which can empower diverse communities to stand together. The emergency law returned once again, although this time the state claimed to use it as a tool to return peace and safety to the streets of Cairo. Tahrir Square was barricaded off and Mohammed Mahmoud street, the main avenue leading towards Tahrir Square, was surrounded by concrete barriers and checkpoints, cutting the square off from the main streets of Cairo. To further crackdown on public expression, authorities forbade demonstrations, shut down street theater and outdoor concerts, erased graffiti, raided cafes, locked off pocket parks, and harassed cultural venues such as art galleries and publishing houses. All places that served as a place for gathering for activists, artists and journalists- the troublemakers who are viewed as the instigators of the chaos and demonstrations- were shut down and opponents of the reinstated military regime were either arrested or fled the country. This policy extended to anywhere people might congregate. Many of the street-side cafés favored by young people were shut and a gathering of even a few adults constituted a cause for police questioning or arrest. The ruins of the National Party building were torn down, erasing the last remaining physical memories of the 2011 revolution. The shouting on the streets stopped, Cairenes lowered their voices when discussing politics in public- if they even dared to discuss it at all. Aside from the obvious police brutality, the state continued to deploy urban planning as a means of discouraging democracy and suppressing public spaces that can inspire diverse communities to congregate potentially causing another uprising.

Figure 20. Military coup

Figure 21. Concrete barricades to block access to Tahrir Square



Formal Cairo
 Informal settlements
 Nile River
 Desert city boundaries
 The New Capital



Figure 22. The New Capital, 45 km outside of Cairo

The New Capital

In 2015 President El-Sisi announced a new mega project 45 km further east of Greater Cairo. Instead of learning from the mistakes of his predecessors, desert reclamation continued to be the ongoing strategy. With a \$45 billion budget, Sisi's new capital is funded by developers from the UAE and China. The city is planned around an artificial river bordered by parklands leading to new government center buildings. When completed, the New Capital is planned to include: 700 hospitals and clinics, 1,200 mosques and churches, 40,000 hotel rooms, 2,000 schools, luxury skyscrapers and a man made river¹⁸. Similar to New Cairo and other desert cities, the New Capital has been designed with no room for the informal activities and small businesses that most Egyptians rely on. The New Capital is zoned by function: educational district, courthouses/government district, commercial district, and so on. The plan calls for abundant green spaces and total reliance on private vehicles. It is the exact opposite of Cairo which is compact, dense, mixed use, built to maximize transportation links, social contacts and small informal businesses and opportunities.

“One of the city's great charms was the impromptu creation of small congenial spaces. A row of plastic chairs on a bridge became a café with an extraordinary view. Families picnicked in the traffic median late at night.”

-David Sims¹⁹



None of these activities can exist in the satellite communities or the New Capital. While it is being hailed as Cairo's savior through the promise of economic revitalization and relief from the over-congestion of the city, this propaganda hides within its folds an attempt by Egypt's authoritarian government to further segregate Cairo making it more difficult for protesters to surround state buildings and carry out another 2011-style popular revolution. By creating a new capital that has a strict structure, completely different from Cairo's, and separating government officials and buildings geographically and protecting them by inaccessible greenery, El-Sisi is erasing the history and identity of Cairo. He is creating a generic space that lacks the informalities and chaos that has allowed Cairo to function.

In the face of this private development and political suppression that took place in the last two decades, public spaces in Cairo have been rapidly losing their importance. This has contributed to the loss of breathing spaces within very dense urban areas marked by a growing population. Formal social spaces in Cairo have become more and more privatized spaces that are exclusive to a certain class of society. Nadi El Gezira and many other facilities that were made public in the 60s are now only accessible to the elite families with a steep annual membership fee. Mega-malls and luxurious lounges have taken over the social scene. The extreme class based urban segregation has become very apparent and has led to a polarization of the urban fabric.

Figure 23. Visions of the New Capital



Figure 24. Tuk-tuks in Cairo

Figure 25. Downtown Cairo streetscape

The state continues to actively implement laws and campaigns to dominate the street life, a tactic that has always existed but has become much more apparent between 2011 and 2013. In 2014, the “informal sector” constituted 30% of the economy and employed 40% of the workforce²⁰. Nevertheless, a campaign to “clean up” downtown Cairo was initiated and the government began removing street vendors, erasing graffiti and repainting the facades of buildings in key public places, including Tahrir Square which was landscaped with grass and a towering 20-meter pillar that flies the Egyptian flag. Tuk-tuks, a motorized three-wheeled vehicles that served as icons of working-class transportation means, were banned in Cairo without offering their users an alternative to this cheap and fast means for movement. These and various other urban changes are an illustration of the reassertion of state power and an attempt to create a ‘revolution-free’ downtown through removal of anything the state considers a threat to its modern image. By shutting down these voices of hope and resilience, the new regime rewrites the past, insisting that the Arab Spring was a conspiracy hatched by collaboration between the West and Islamists.

These events lead up to 2020, the year the Egyptian government plans to evacuate Cairo for its dream capital. Based on past events highlighted in this analysis, it is evident that despite many attempts to control the city through top-down master plans, the city and its people have always manage to survive against suppression. This thesis explores a conjectural narrative set in 2021, ten years after the Arab spring, when protests once again break throughout Cairo. The government's plan to erase the memories of 2011 will fail. Their exodus becomes not the doom of Cairo but an opportunity to reimagine and reshape its future.

Chapter III

Key Themes and Ideas

This chapter covers key urban theories of public space and global cities by various theorists. Post Arab Spring Tahrir Square is analyzed using these theories and themes. Finally the chapter analyzes local case studies in Cairo that are useful in understanding the potential of public spaces as a form of empowerment.

Public Space - An Embodiment of Democracy

Roslyn Deutsche defines public space as: "A set of institutions where citizens and foreigners engage in debates, the space where rights and identity of society are both constituted and questioned."²² Two important points to note in this definition is that public spaces are not only open spaces like parks and squares but any space where a diverse group of people can meet and engage in new ideas. Deutsche advocates for expanding different types of public spaces to displace the boundary between public and private and therefore, enlarge the space of politics.

The second important point is an extension of the first where public spaces become entangled with the meaning of democracy and the rights of citizens through the expansion of the sphere of politics - a symbiotic relationship which will inevitably create ample space for people to question and debate their identities and societies. This thought process can be directly applied to Tahrir Square, which has continually transforms between a busy traffic circle to a contested space of congregation, debate, and protest. With the crackdown on public spaces in Cairo, the state both suppressed self-expression and cohesion within society and effectively tightening its grip over dissent and basic freedoms. This thesis explores the return of these rights through multiple acts of protest and types of public spaces in central Cairo that serve as spaces of daily revolution and empowerment for Cairenes. These spaces vary from cultural and art centers representative of the various socio-cultural groups, memorials to commemorate past revolutions, publishing houses and co-working spaces to share ideas, and support centers that can allow those marginalized to have a voice.



The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights

- David Harvey, *The Right to the City*²¹

Figure 26. Graffiti in Cairo



Figure 27. Informalities in Cairo

Globalization in the Middle East

Globalization is defined as the process by which the world is becoming a single economic entity characterized by information exchange, interconnected modes of production, and flows of labor and capital within a predominantly capitalist world system. In his analysis of urban issues in the Middle East, Yasser ElShishtawy equates colonialism, capitalism and globalization as different sides of the same coin²³. According to El-Shishtawy, a combination of the three has resulted in the production of urban fantasies and polarization/ segregation in many Middle Eastern cities. In the case of Cairo, this manifested in the form of gated residential communities such as "Dreamland" all the way through to the conception of the New Capital resulting in the disappearance of local production and markets, as well as the local identity, in the face of the global market.

In his article "The Informal Turn," ElShishtawy describes informality and temporality not only as the means of survival for the less fortunate through creation of their own spaces in the face of the many economic, bureaucratic and societal obstacles set up against them, but also as the solution to changing the narrative of loss of identity and locality that these cities are constantly facing.

Residents negotiate urban spaces in their daily lives, in the process both reconstituting and reappropriating physical spaces. Through this they impose an alternative order, one that overcomes the limitations and constraints proposed by the built environment. Marketplaces, outdoor vendors, formation of gathering places in abandoned sites, informal housing and impromptu soccer games in parking lots or abandoned building sites. Bordering on illegality, such practices are barely tolerated and in some instances actively persecuted. This follows a desire to sanitize city spaces - making them more palatable to the global economy and perception of tourists.

-Yasser El-Shishtawy²⁴



"The right to the city is like a cry and a demand... a transformed and renewed right to urban life"

-Henri Lefebvre²⁵

Figure 28. 'Museum of Revolution' built by protestors

Informality, as far as it provides an outlet for self-expression and self-management, becomes the enemy of globalization and in turn of the state. El-Shishtawy advocates for bridging the gap between formal and informal by planning urban environments that allow for the unfolding of unplanned events and activities to create a more vibrant urban setting. By creating ephemeral spaces that are continually shaped and reshaped by their citizens local voices can be empowered by giving them agency over the built environment. Such informal spaces and settings allow the sacred and secular to coexist, and the perceived conflict between them can help enrich urban studies of the Middle East. To achieve such spaces, this thesis aims to revive and dignify the makers and the craftsmen that have been looked down on and eliminated by the global forces at play in Cairo through creating maker spaces and schools for metal work, fabrics, weaving, pottery and other traditional Egyptian skills. The site of those spaces is paramount to their empowerment and their success. Transforming abandoned spaces along the banks of the Nile, Cairo's giver of life, should offer these proposed skills shops and schools an air of dignity and resonate with their users and visitors alike by inspiring a sense of deference for both its sanctified purpose and location.

Social Space and Societal Changes

Henri Lefebvre defines space as a politically contested field; not simply a container to be filled but a conductor of social relationships and societal change that can only be achieved if the spaces society occupies allows them the freedom to shape, create, and appropriate. In this sense, space becomes an ephemeral concept that elevates the role of chance encounters and the exposure to new, unfamiliar or risky ideas. Street art is the most simple but effective way this has been achieved in Cairo. In 2021, with the absence of the previous utilitarian regime, street art and performances are revived and allow previously silenced groups to represent themselves and their ideas for the future of Cairo. Actions and energies that took place in Tahrir Square after the 2011 revolution will be the inspiration for writing the new narrative of Cairo. According to Lefebvre, the right to the city is the right to urban life through everyday social interactions that shape its inhabitants and allows them the right to shape the spaces they occupy. It is a struggle for the ability to appropriate urban social spaces to allow a kind of ownership and control through use and reuse. Lefebvre sees the neo-liberal city as made up, controlled and unchanging privatized spaces that do not support the ever-changing and re-invented activities that can take place in public spaces.

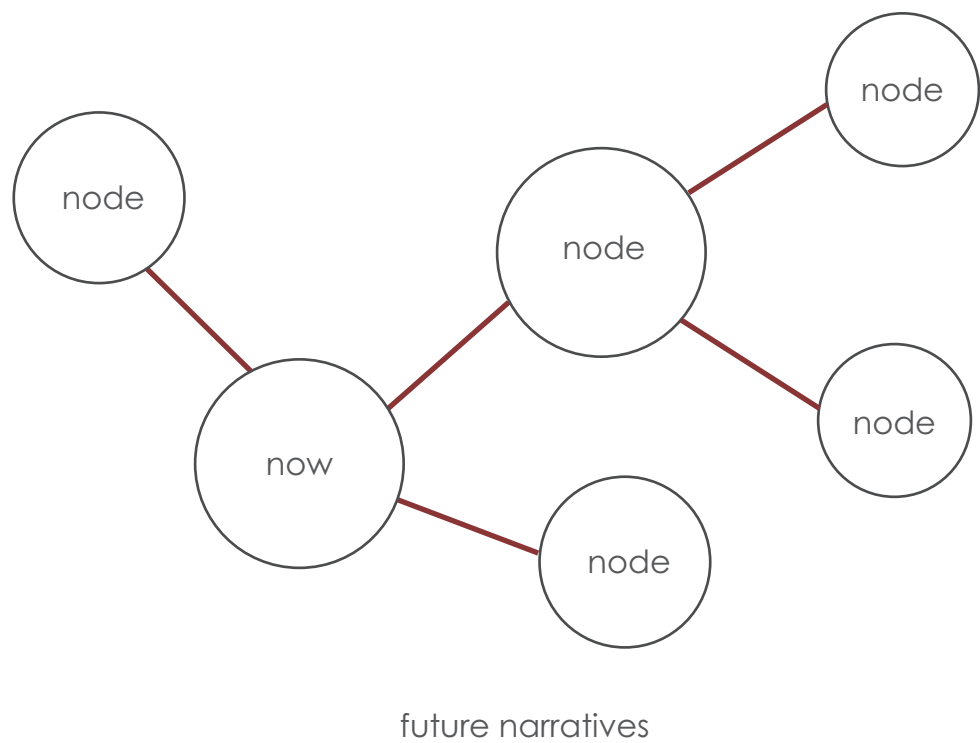


Figure 29. Past narrative (top) vs. future narratives (bottom)

Narratives: Past and Future

Surely, any imposition of a pre-fabricated narrative is bound to limit and ultimately eliminate the openness of any future scenario and... a multiplicity of pre-fabricated narratives will only cause noise and confusion. Any such narratives can only be projections of Past Narratives upon the future — and invariably they eliminate what is essential about the future... Narratives that preserve the openness, uncertainty, and contingency of the future should not come pre-fabricated at all... Narrative is not something that has to be added... Narrative is something that follows from the concrete running of a series of nodes"

-Bode & Dietrich²⁶

Christoph Bode simply defines narrative as "the linguistic and mental linking of events."²⁷ Narratives are what add meaning to events. Bode highlights two types of narratives: past and future narratives. Past narratives are concerned with events of the past; for example, the events highlighted throughout chapter 2 of this thesis are the past narrative of Cairo. Future narratives, on the other hand, deal with nodes rather than events, allowing future narratives to have more than one possible outcome²⁸. In the context of this thesis, future narratives will be used to explore potential becomings for several sites, or nodes, throughout Cairo. Future narratives allow the reconstitution of the meaning of spaces within the city - a meaning that is derived from new and old public rituals deeply rooted within the culture. This is done through Bode's understanding of narrative as a device for creating meaning and applying that to Cairo using cultural rituals tied in traditions.



Figure 30. Cairo streets as a canvas for the people

Post Revolution Cairo

In her article "Post January Revolution Cairo" the Egyptian sociologist Mona Abaza, covers many of the methods employed and struggles faced by Cairenes as they reclaimed and reshaped Tahrir Square after the 2011 revolution²⁹. During the revolution, concrete walls were built as barricades to stop people from accessing the Square. In response, more walls were built by protestors to protect themselves from brutal police forces. These walls delineated the sites of clashes at the height of the resistance, but post revolution, were used as a canvas for artistic self expression and slogans that symbolize the revolution. Grassroots and bottom up actions changed both the character and understanding of post-victory Tahrir Square. What had for the last 30 years functioned as a traffic circle was transformed into a place of contestation, communication, artistic expression and free interaction. Marches for different causes continued to happen and everyday street performers, poetry recitals and vendors of goods and food set up in the space. The signs held during protests were reused to create memorials for fallen protestors and a makeshift museum was promptly erected on site to commemorate the pains and joys of the 2011 revolution. Artists used every surface in the city as a canvas to express concerns, demands, and hope for the future. The layers of all these activities produced a vibrant public space in the sense explained by Deutsche, Harvey and Lefebvre - an uncontained, undefined, raw and dynamic space of creativity, discourse and forethought. Although the various groups fighting for a place in Tahrir clashed, this strengthened the contestation of space and substantiated its political and democratic character. Novel ways of occupying and claiming space were dominated by those groups previously under-represented and marginalized. Tahrir Square became a node that people marched towards from all corners of the city, attracted to the incandescence of freedom and hope. Today, all graffiti, art and even access to the Square has been erased in an effort to cleanse Cairo from the effects of the revolution.

El-Sisi has recently cultivated the figure of the 'strong' man, comparable to anti-colonial iconic nationalist Nasser. The rhetorical investment in nostalgic nationalist sentiments seems to be going hand-in-hand with mounting chauvinism. The above themes will be utilized as a tool to re-imagine how Cairo can transform and what kinds of spaces can exist to counteract the segregation that has happened due to globalization and the suppression of rights and expression



Case study: Zabaleen Neighborhood, Cairo

The 'Garbage Dreams' documentary by Mai Iskander is used as a case study to highlight one of many communities in Cairo that survived using self-made economies and how the continual globalization of Cairo has negatively affected those communities. The film is about the 'Zabaleen' or 'garbage people' who live in an informal settlement on the outskirts of Cairo known as the Garbage District. This marginalized community saw garbage waste as a tremendous economic opportunity and used it as a means for self-sufficiency and empowerment.

The film covers the everyday process of the Zabaleen who collect 4,000 tons of garbage a day from all around Cairo and recycle and reallocate 80% of what they collect. Their process is completely sustainable, low-tech, and cost effective. In 2003, as an attempt to modernize the city, the government signed a multimillion dollar contract with a European corporation to pick up the city's garbage. This foreign company gained a monopoly on Cairo's trash but were only obligated to recycle 20% of it, leaving the rest to accumulate in landfills. This agreement with the government cut off the lifeline of the entire community of Zabaleen whose only source of income came from selling the materials they recycle locally. The Zabaleen community tried to modernize their own practice to compete with the foreign company with no luck. The film is not only eye opening to the extreme discrimination against this and many other informal communities in Cairo but is an example of the displacement of local informal businesses due to the constant longing for westernization. The Zabaleen community is a significant case study for this project as it is one of many examples of bottom up economies in Cairo.

Figure 31. Zabaleen neighborhood, Cairo
Figure 32. Garbage as lifeline and economy

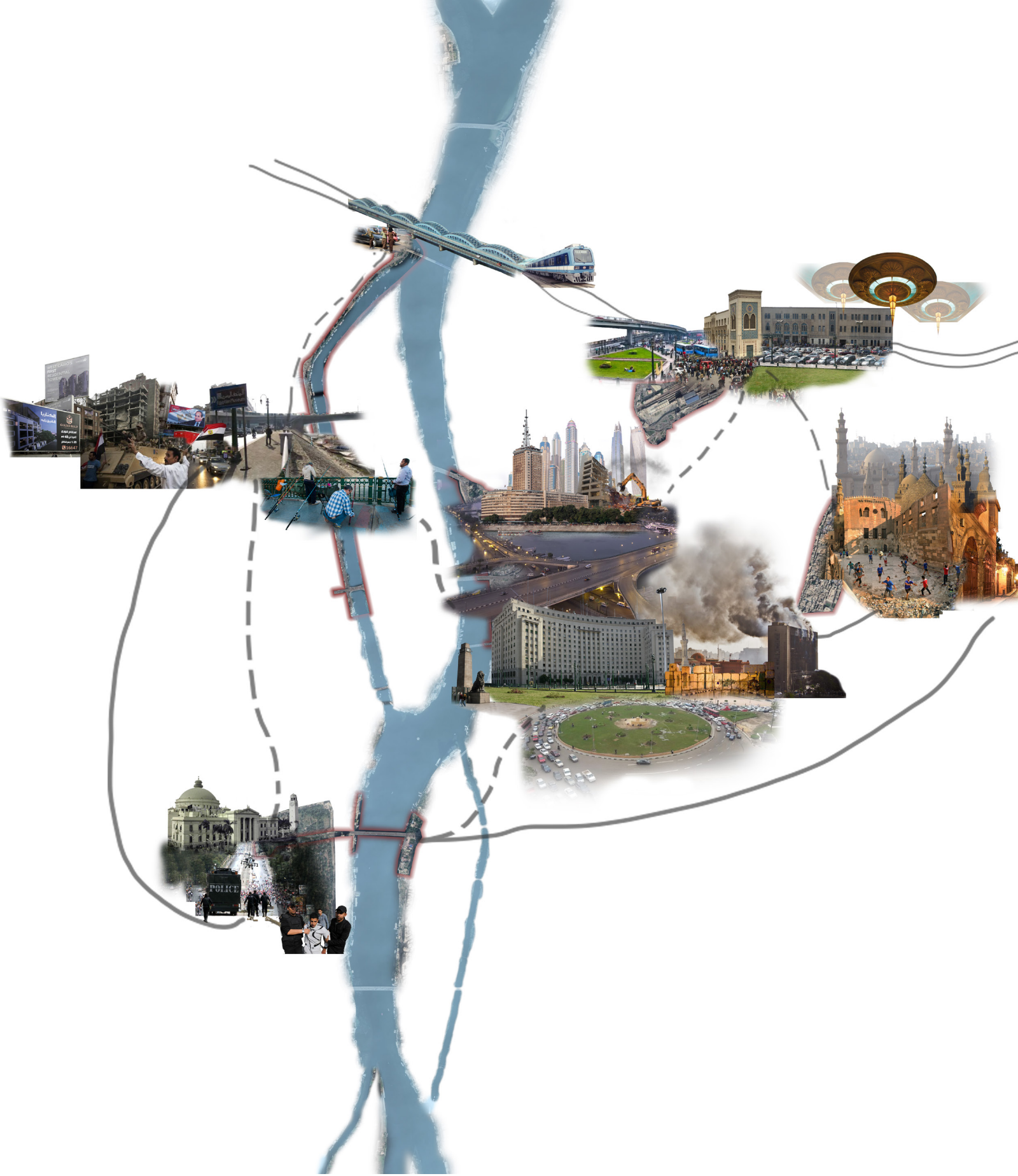


Figure 33. Mind Map

Chapter IV Methodology and Site Analysis

In the wake of the government exodus to the New Capital, how does the city that has been abandoned by the state get reclaimed by its people? What would the city look like in the absence of the corrupt political and economic framework that has been set up for decades? This chapter focuses on identifying potential sites across central Cairo that could be transformed in various ways and scales to create a network of places to revive public life and encourage daily revolutions through social diversity, possibility and congregation.

In 2020 when the government abandons Cairo to occupy its new dream capital, mass demonstrations break out throughout the city. By January 2021, exactly ten years after the Arab spring, the central city is taken over by those who were discarded and excluded from the New Capital; a sizeable group of people who have always been marginalized, suppressed, and inequitably treated. With this vacuum of state authority the inequitable framework that has previously marginalized many "divergent" groups of people, is finally abolished. This thesis will further explore what kinds of spaces exist and activities unfold once this is achieved. These explorations will be based on the short lived realities that became apparent in the time following the 2011 revolution as well as the themes and ideas of public spaces and their relationship to social awakening and global cities.

Public spaces have played a crucial role in the last two revolutions that took place in Cairo. What becomes of these spaces in the envisioned post-freedom Cairo? How can these spaces continue to evolve with the city and allow Cairenes to fight to maintain their identity and rights? How can these spaces provide a platform for groups that vary in gender, culture, identity, and religions? What kinds of activities could these spaces stimulate and inspire to maintain this intersection and mitigate between these diverse groups to allow for a more inclusive Cairo to exist? These are some questions this thesis will explore by transforming abandoned, empty, and leftover spaces in pursuit of a more vibrant public life. The methodology of this thesis is to use future narratives as a form of bottom-up approach to counteract the urban segregation that currently exists and produce places that Cairenes actively participate in shaping.

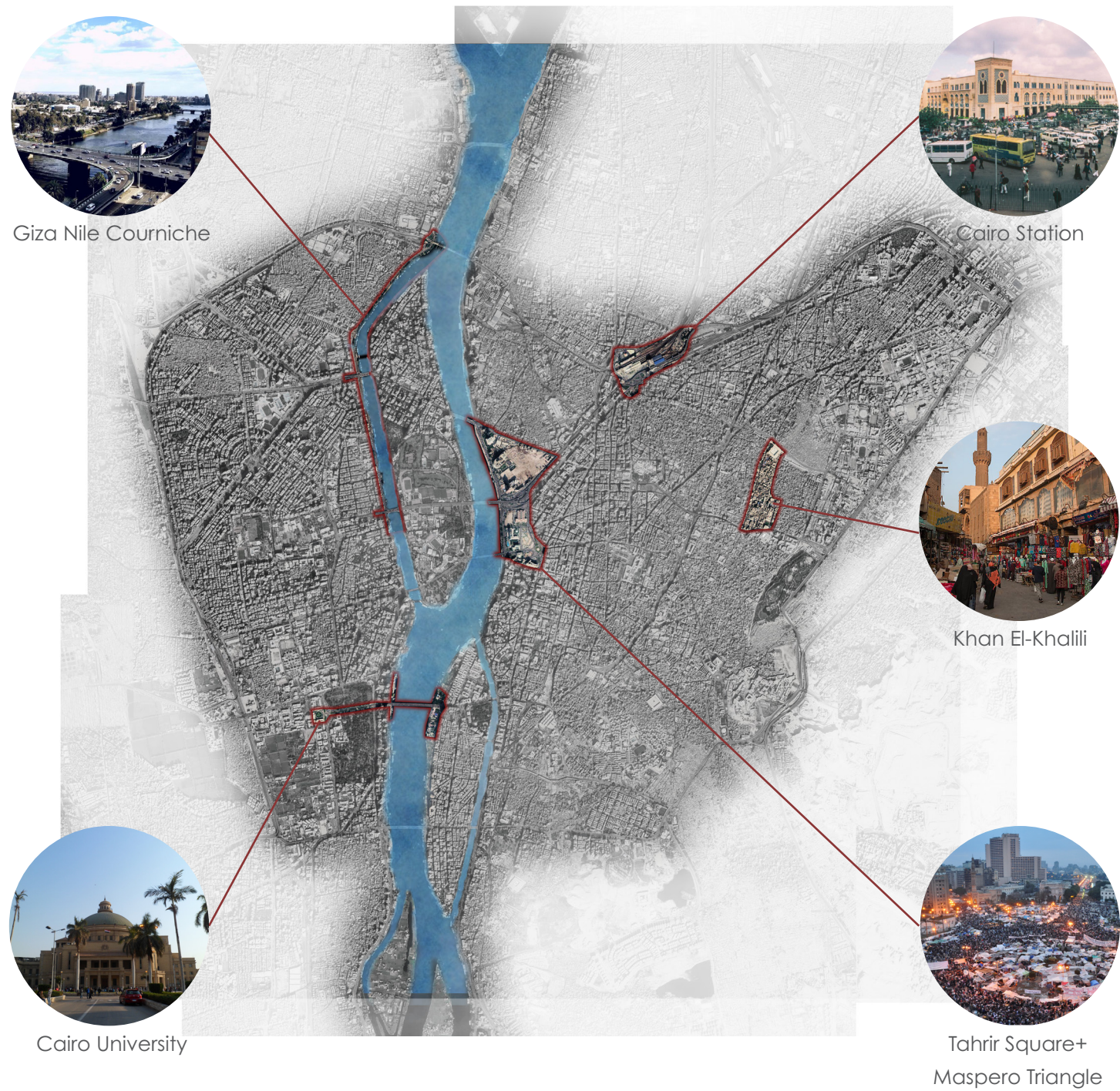


Figure 34. Selected sites in central Cairo

Through actions that capture the energies expressed in 2011 and 2012, five sites in Central Cairo are identified to host the many narratives that unfold throughout the city. These sites fall under two typologies; the first is city infrastructure that is currently informally serving an alternative social function and are forgotten or overlooked spaces of the city. The second typology is civic spaces that have a history of uprising, protest or police brutality. All of these spaces are reappropriated and transformed into markets, art spaces, or spaces for protest. Each of the sites will be further analyzed to understand its history, scale, context, current condition and community.

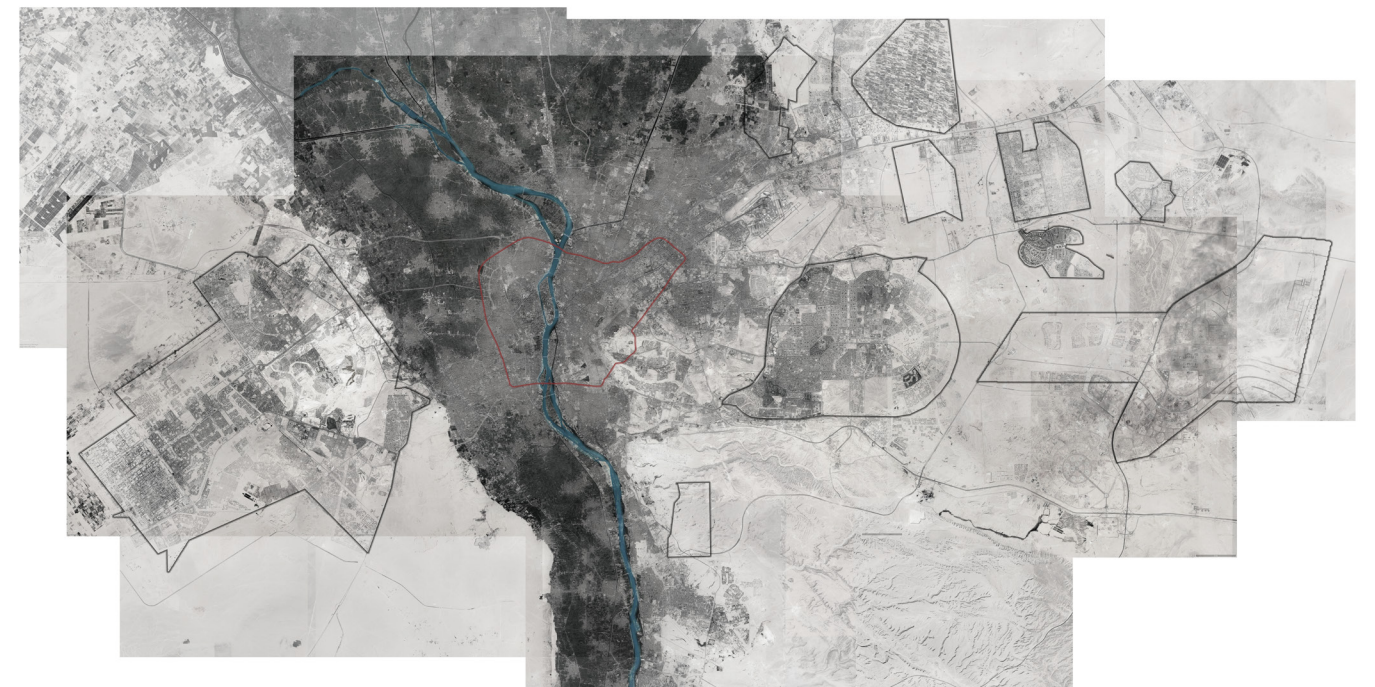


Figure 35. Outline of borders of central Cairo within greater city context



1 | Cairo Station

The chaotic Cairo Station and its vicinity have served as the site of different displays of power, social movements, and rallies. It has been rendered as the microcosm heart of Cairo in many different media. Cairo Station was originally known as 'Bab El-Hadid' meaning iron gate as it was built on the site of one of the demolished gates to the medieval city. The station was built by the British administration in 1892 to symbolize the modernity of the railway system in Egypt. Post-independence, in 1954 Nasser installed a statue of Ramses II, a pharaonic king, in the square outside the station to celebrate the second anniversary of the 1952 coup d'etat. This statue was a symbol of his own power over the abolished monarchy.

In the movie 'Cairo Station' by Youssef Chahine, the station is portrayed as an eclectic and chaotic public place for the meeting and mingling of varying sociocultural groups. Many subplots of the movie point out the station as the site of social change; a feminist rally outside a railway car and organizations by workers union. In 1923, the station was the site of a monumental event in the history of Egyptian feminism; activist Huda Shaarawi stood in the center of the station and publicly removed her hijab in rejection of the harem system and gender biases. Today Cairo station is the transportation hub that connects trains, metro, city buses, microbuses, and taxis. The square outside is an example of an ephemeral space where markets and vendors sporadically appear but are constantly policed and shut down.

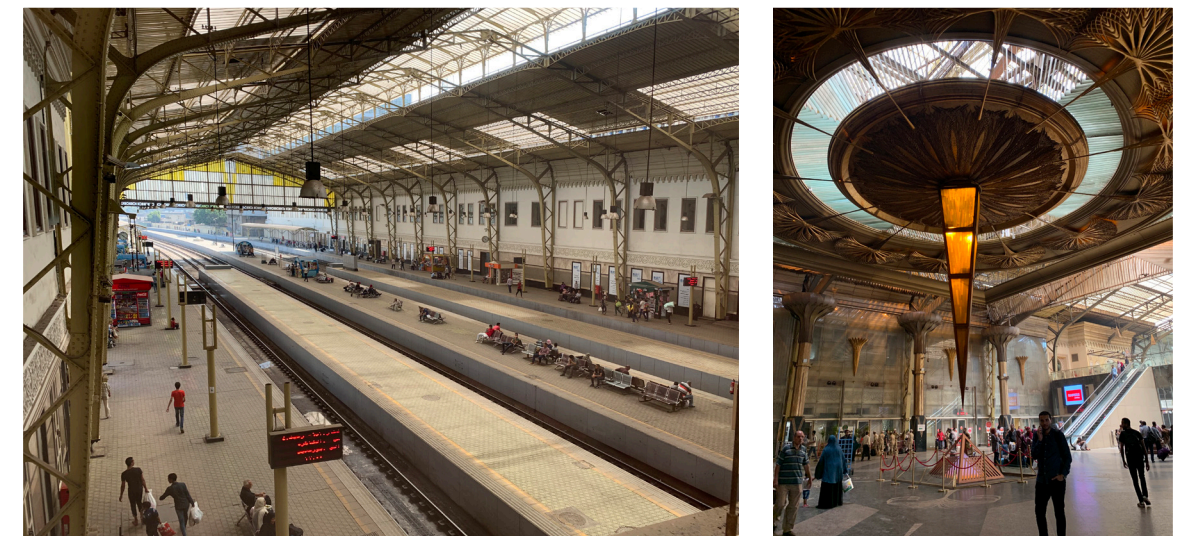
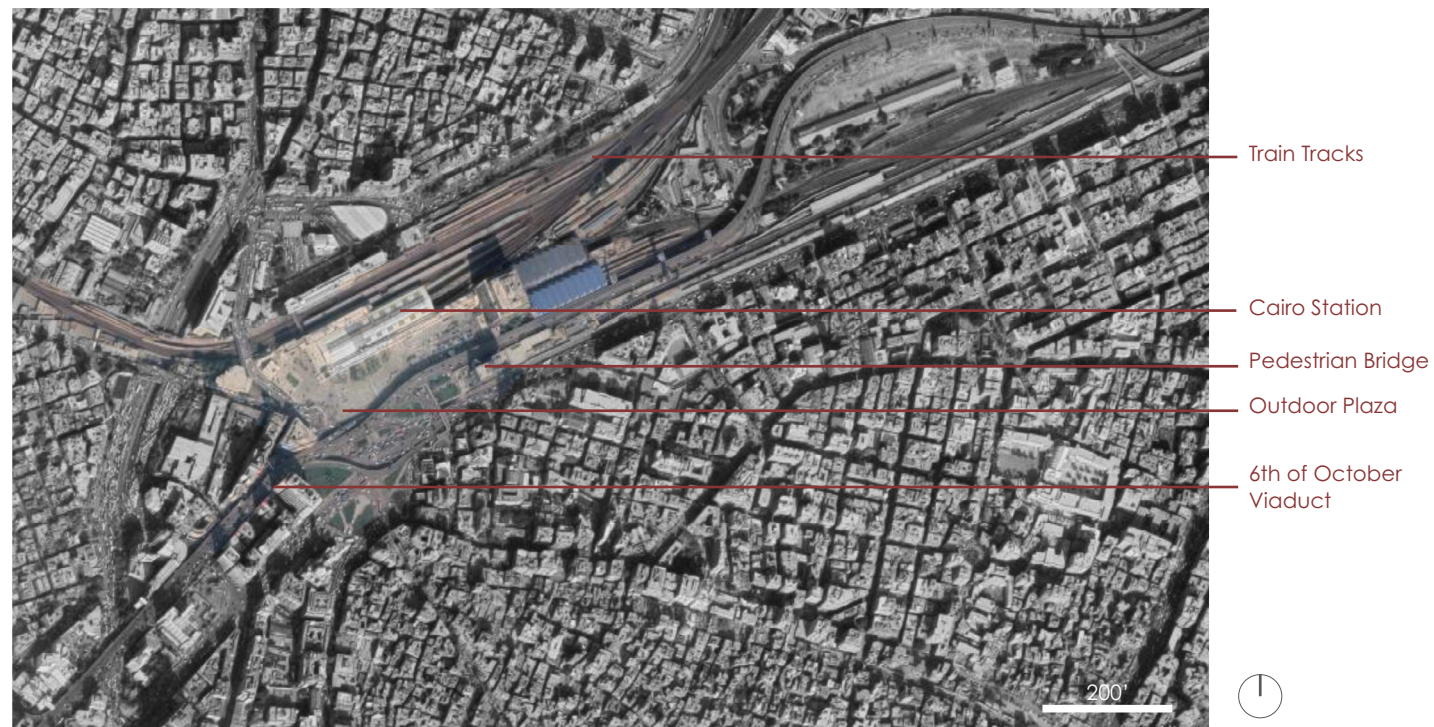
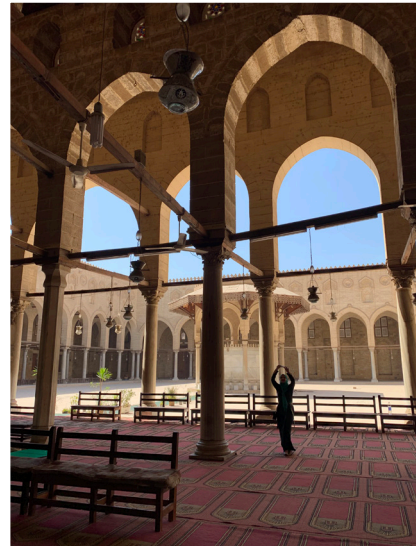


Figure 36. Plaza outside station

Figure 37. Cairo Station within city context

Figure 38. Interior of Cairo Station



2 | Khan El Khalili

Khan El Khalili is an ancient souk located in the medieval city known by many as Islamic Cairo. Medieval Cairo is the site of the first Mosque in Africa and is home to Al-Azhar- the head of the Islamic institute in Egypt. Although Old Cairo is a UNESCO world heritage site, it still suffers from neglect and is one of the most over-crowded areas of Cairo.

Khan El Khalili was originally a burial ground for members of one of the earliest Arab dynasties in Egypt; the Fatimid Dynasty. When the next dynasty, Mamluk, took over the mausoleum and cemeteries were torn down to make room to house the merchants of the city and their goods. This eventually became Cairo's most important commercial zone and resulted in a market that runs along the entire north-south axis of the medieval city. The market is a labyrinth of narrow alleys and consists of small local shops for gold, copper, spices, fabrics and textiles as well as souvenirs. The market has also always been home to many traditional coffee houses for socializing, performances and poetry recitals. Today, the market remains a site of economics and commerce run by local merchants and is one of the largest tourist attractions in Cairo. In the wake of the globalization that took place in Cairo, many of the malls have a portion that replicates the famous stores and cafes in Khan El Khalili. This is simply a pastiche as the stores are chains that sell imported goods for higher prices. These replications are preferred by some of the upper class Cairenes as opposed to visiting the bustling market.

Port Said St. Zuwayla Gate Khan El-Khalili Al-Azhar Mosque Al-Azhar Gardens



Figure 39. Khan El Khalili, Old Cairo

Figure 40. Khan El Khalili within city context



3| Cairo University

Cairo University was founded in 1925 as a European-inspired public university; a secular version of the existing religious university of Al Azhar Mosque. The University was initially named King Fuad University in honor of its founder. After the coup d'etat the university's name was 'Egyptionized' and changed to Cairo University. The campus grounds have witnessed various demonstrations and specially during the Arab spring when the University bridge that connects campus to downtown was shut down by students and used to march to Tahrir Square.

In the wake of the 2013 military coup, student groups from four public universities had organized massive protests that consisted of Muslim Brotherhood supporters, liberals and leftist students that opposed the new authority. In response, the state employed private security companies to patrol the university campus and pushed their administrations to enforce harsh penalties against students who speak up against the state. Eventually, President Sisi abolished elections for university posts and gave the government the power to appoint university presidents and faculty deans. The university began expelling students for obstructing the education process and participating in the protests on campus.



Figure 41. Cairo University and security forces

Figure 42. Cairo University within city context

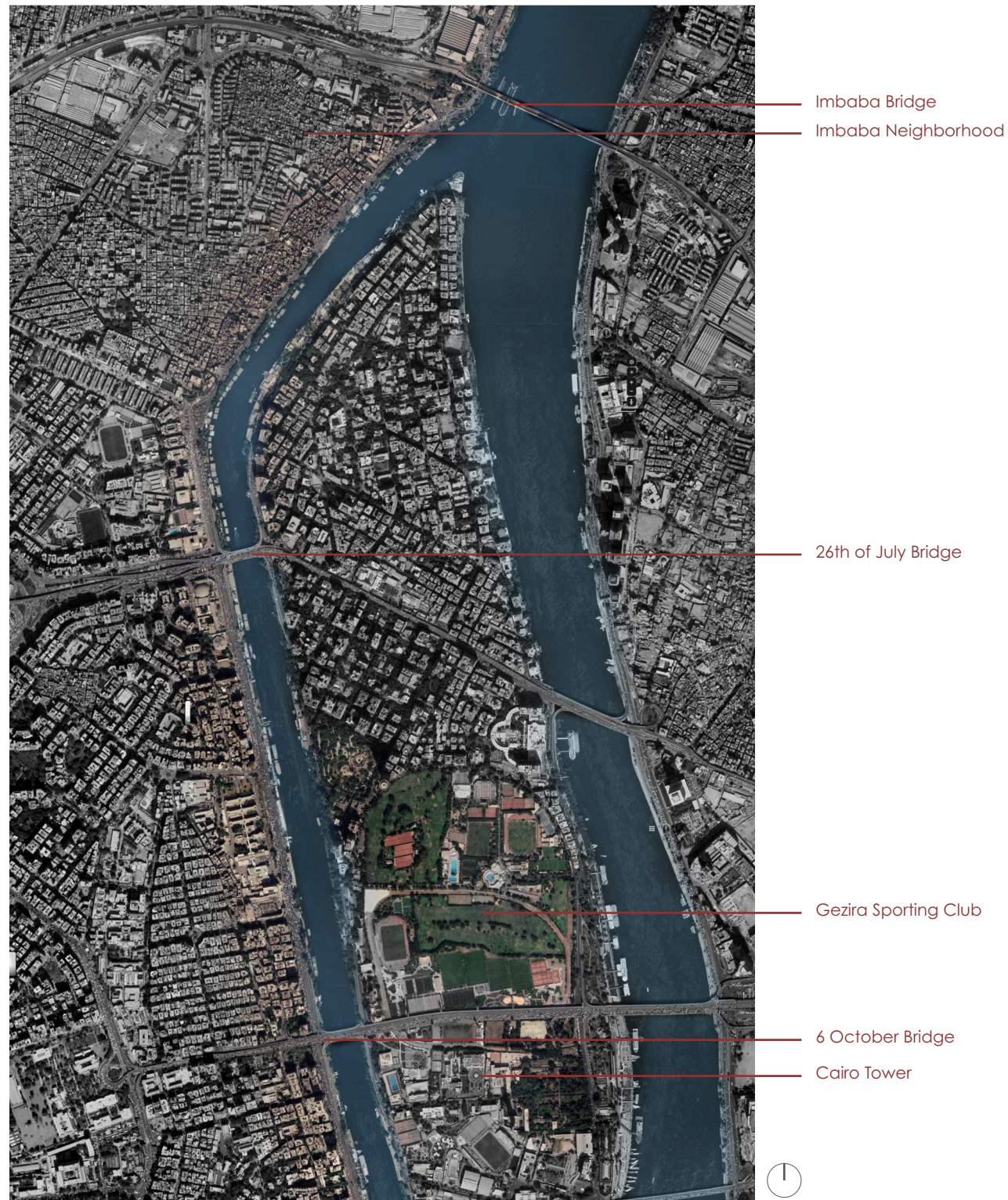


Figure 43. Giza Nile Corniche with bounding bridges

4 | Giza Nile Corniche

“Masr hebat Al Nile” meaning “Egypt is the gift of the Nile” is a common saying amongst Egyptians.

The Nile has always played a crucial role in the life and culture of Egypt. Throughout time, there have been many festivals in Egypt to show gratitude to the Nile. The most famous of these festivals is ‘Wafaa El Nile’ which began in ancient times. Egyptians would gather at the banks of the Nile with food, colorful costumes and celebratory chants. Sailboats known as “Felluca” would fill up the Nile river and layout rose petals and flowers as a form of gratitude. Today, this festival is no longer celebrated as Cairo has over the years turned its back towards the river. With the extreme east and west expansions into the desert, the New Capital went as far as to create a new man made Nile river.

In central Cairo, portions of the Nile front are occupied by privatized spaces owned by hotels or social clubs that come with a fee that contradicts the income level of many Cairenes. The remainder is in a bad state but Cairenes still find creative ways to occupy it. It is crucial for the revived city to rethink its relationship with its source of life.

A second portion of the Nile Corniche is chosen to serve as the fifth site. The Giza neighborhood is an upper-middle class area that has in more recent years began to lose its charm due to lack of maintenance. With cars speeding by, the Corniche Street is a major arterial of the city and has become a physical barrier that blocks off pedestrians from crossing and leaving the street inaccessible or unsafe for activities. Although wide sidewalks exist along the Nile front, they are not fully exploited for public use as no seating or shade exist, instead overgrown greenery and built concrete walls separate the river from the sidewalk and limit access to the water. The Nile front in this area was once vibrant with social informalities; people fishing, enjoying grilled corn on the cob, lovers on dates. The Nile itself is also full of activities. Felucca, the small sailboats that move through the Nile remain a popular activity for both locals and tourists. On slower more pedestrian friendly streets, cafe seating flood on to the sidewalks and the streets, allowing their users to enjoy the Nile. These cafes have become a definitive character for the social life in Central Cairo.



The two bridges that define the site are the Imbaba bridge to the north and 6 October bridge to the South. Imbaba bridge was constructed between 1913-1925 and is the only railway bridge that crosses the Nile in Cairo. The bridge is a beautiful structure that consists of six fixed spans and one swing span, and its total length is 1,608 feet with two lanes for vehicles, two lanes for pedestrians and two lanes for railroad tracks. In the 1930s, the Imbaba Corniche, was famous for its house-boats and bars which played an important role in the social life in Cairo. Today, this area is run-down and the bridge has become unsafe and unused by pedestrians. The 6th of October viaduct plays a crucial role in the city as it connects neighborhoods to the west of the Nile directly to Tahrir Square and in the 2000s it was extended all the way to New Cairo. During the Arab Spring protests, this bridge was the conduit that brought protestors from all over the city to Tahrir Square.

Figure 44. Various Nile bank conditions in focus area



Figure 45. Downtown Cairo 'Wist El Balad'

3 | Wist El Balad

'Wist El Balad' means City Center and is also known as Downtown Cairo. This site consists of a variety of heavily contested locations along the east bank of the Nile. This is bounded by a viaduct 27 of July bridge to the north and Kasr El Nile bridge to the south. It is intersected by the 6th of October Viaduct, a five lane highway that connects the city center all the way to New Cairo; dividing the site into a northern portion and a southern portion. North of the viaduct is the Maspero Tower which was constructed by President Nasser in 1958 as the headquarters of the Egyptian Radio and Television Union. The tower has become a key institution of the previous state and was strongly protected by the military during the rallies in January 2011. In October 2011, riots took place outside of Maspero and the protestors were violently attacked by the military resulting in 24 civilian deaths. Behind the Maspero building is a vacant 77 acre plot of land known as the Maspero Triangle. This area is part of the Bulaq neighborhood, a once thriving area formed in 17th century then became an industrial district in the 19th century. Today it is the poorest neighborhood in Cairo. The site was previously occupied by a very old mixed-use neighborhood that was home to many small local businesses but had been facing urban decay. In 2018, the state forcefully evicted 18,000 residents and shutdown all businesses to make room for a new financial hub with luxury hotels, malls, and market rate housing. Although the residents and business owners were promised reparations, most of these promises were not fulfilled and only a small portion of the previous residents will be supposedly be compensated with affordable housing in this new complex. Maspero Triangle is one of the many historic sites facing extreme gentrification by global forces.

South of the 6th of October Viaduct is the Tahrir Square area surrounded by multiple government buildings and landmarks This analysis will only cover the few that are vital to this project. Along the Nile Corniche street stands an empty site surrounded by a ten foot concrete wall. In 1940s, this site was occupied by British Army barricades. Years after the British forces vacated, Nasser commissioned the modernist Egyptian Architect Mahmoud Riad, to construct the headquarters for the Arab Socialist Union (ASU), which was the only legal political party at the time. Once the ASU party was abolished, the building was taken over by The National Democratic Party (NDP). On the third day of protests in January 2011 known as 'day of rage' the building, which symbolized 30 years of oppression by President Mubarak's Party, was set on fire by protestors and lit up the evening stars, leaving the building as a ruin.



Figure 46. Maspero Triangle destruction

Figure 47. Maspero Triangle, 2019

Figure 48. Maspero Triangle vision

Impossible to ignore because of its strategic location, the charred concrete building remained as a memorial of the revolution. There were many adaptive reuse proposals for the building structure varying from a museum of revolution, a hotel, or a research center. Disregarding the many public opinions on the future of the site, President Sisi's administration decided to demolish the building in 2015 to erase the site's recent history. Prior to demolition, the NDP building was covered in a banner promoting Sisi's New Capital. Ten years after the revolution, the site remains vacant.

East of the vacant site is the Egyptian Antiquity Museum, a neoclassical building constructed by the British administration in 1902 to house the many ancient Egyptian artifacts that were being found in their excavations in upper Egypt. A new museum is currently underway in Giza with close proximity to the pyramids. It is unclear what the future of this building entails.

To the south is Tahrir Square, the symbolic site of resistance and revolution throughout the modern history of Cairo. Originally called "Ismalia Square" after Khedive Ismael who built it as part of his vision to develop the marshy land on the east bank of the Nile to create a "Paris on the Nile". As previously mentioned, its name was changed to mean Liberty Square after the 1952 independence revolution. The square was a political focal point many times but most importantly it was the site of the 2011 revolution when it was occupied by thousands of protestors for 18 days. Tahrir square is a transformative space. It has been a truly public square during times of revolution and a busy traffic circle during times of repression. On the Northwest corner of Tahrir Square is an empty paved plaza with no source of shade. Underneath this plaza lies a 4 story underground parking garage serving the many government buildings in the area. This garage was only constructed after the 2011 revolution, Prior to that the area was fenced off and labeled as "under construction." During the protests, civilians were removing the fences to use them as a shield from attacks and discovered that no construction was actually taking place there. On the southwest corner of Tahrir Square is the 'Mogamma' meaning The Complex; this is the main administrative governmental building in Cairo. The Tahrir complex is another Nasser commissioned building; a crude 14 story building intended to be a symbol of modernity, nationalism and good administration. Unfortunately, these goals were never realized as the building is a symbol of the bureaucracy. The current plan is to convert the Mogammaa building into a hotel once the government leaves to the New Capital in 2020.



Figure 49. Tahrir Square, 1958
 Figure 50. Tahrir Square, 2011
 Figure 51. Tahrir Square, 2015

Figure 52. National Party headquarters on fire, 2011
 Figure 53. Egyptian Antiquity Museum
 Figure 54. Tahrir Complex 'Mogamaa Al-Tahrir'

Figure 55. Aerial view of 6th of October bridge (top left)
 Figure 56. Appropriation of space along the Nile banks (bottom left)
 Figure 57. Existing Conditions along Nile and 6th of October bridge (right)



Figure 58. Public space in Cairo

Design Intervention

This project is not a beautification of public space, but instead uses a combination of reappropriations or reconstitutions to revive these sites. The program of these new public spaces will consist of localized interventions that stem from the narratives focused on activities that the sites can host as well as public rituals that support the cultural identity of these sites. The goal is to avoid a prescribed function but to instead create spaces that are ephemeral and give agency to the users, a multitude of potential possibilities. Such spaces can begin to stimulate spontaneous events and cohesions and sponsor future forms of self expression and protests. These spaces will be inclusive to groups of different genders, cultures and representations. These spaces will dignify local and small businesses and crafts. The sites with connections to the Nile will reevaluate Cairo's relationship with the river as not only a commodified resource but a spiritual source of life in the city

In conclusion, this thesis aims to channel the energies that were present during the revolution and activities that allowed Cairenes to claim Tahrir Square and many other spaces around Cairo as they came together to fight for their rights. How can the new architecture and spaces support such a lifestyle in a city that has been abandoned and neglected?

Chapter V

Future Narratives

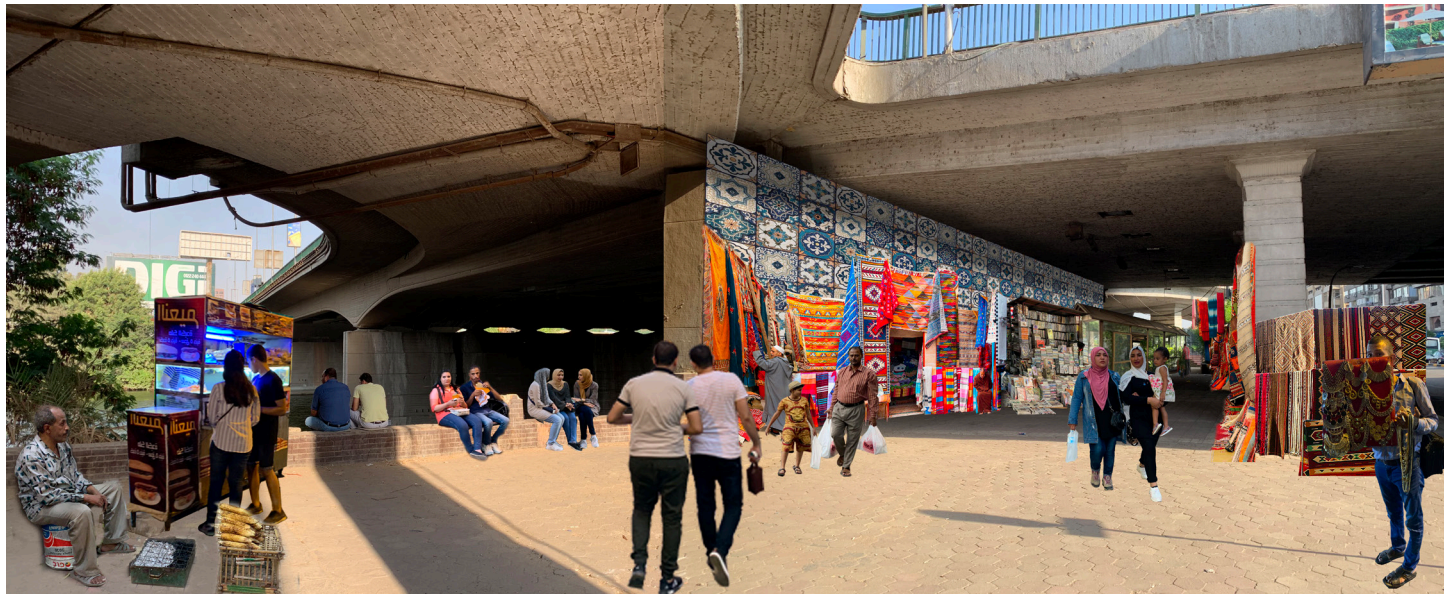


Figure 59. A potential future narrative

Following the previous site analysis, various possible future narratives are used to envision actions that capture the energies expressed in 2011 and can once again take place in these reclaimed nodes throughout the city. Narratives allows the use of the idea of "always becoming" to conceptualize and illustrate how urban space can contain various simultaneous and shifting meanings. Narrative also allows the focus to be on the user, or member, and how they create their relationship to the space they occupy and those around them on a more personal level. Tahrir Square was further developed due to its history, symbolic significance and direct relationship to the Nile. This significant area's revival is also explored through multiple potential narratives but as sectional interventions and a framework for the members of the city to continue to shape and build upon.

1 | Cairo Station

For Eid-Al Adha, she was taking her daughter to Alexandria where the rest of their family lives. While they wait for their train, she finds a bench to sit down as she watches her daughter play in the plaza outside the station. The plaza was a large playground with swings and slides, bikers whizzing through, pedestrians rushing to catch their trains and buses. For the holiday season, the plaza was decorated with beautiful lanterns and hung lights. As she sat there, she heard many different languages from groups of people passing her. A man randomly strikes up a conversation with her. She learns that he is an American who has previously visited Egypt years ago but is back again and is about to visit Alexandria for the first time. They bond over stories they have experienced in Cairo and how incredible the fresh pita bread from the stand around the corner is. He uses the words "organized chaos" to describe the city and she could not possibly agree more. As they chat away, a woman with a box of souvenirs for sale walks over to show them her merchandise. "La Shokran" - no thank you, they both said multiple times. She would often get mistaken for a tourist because of her uncovered long brown hair and outfits. They hear the boarding call for their train and walk towards the platform.

2 | Khan El Khalili

In the early mornings, it's a quiet labyrinth of a neighborhood with narrow winding streets. By mid-afternoon, after Duhr prayer, the shops begin to appear as garage doors are drawn up and windows of various sizes open up on the ground floor of the 2-4 story apartment buildings. The streets are completely transformed into a busy market for the remainder of the night. The hustle and bustle of the shops, cafes and speakeasies continues until 2 or sometimes 3 in the morning. You can often hear men and women laughing, singing and clinking glasses. Down a street that is so narrow that sunlight barely makes it to the ground is a small shop with colorful tapestries of all sizes hanging on every inch of every surface. Currently run by a man and his wife, the shop has been owned by the same family for years. The man's father owned it before him and taught him the art of Khayameya when he was 12. Their store is one of the few that still exist in their original location. Many others either shut down during the economic recession or replaced their local goods with cheap souvenirs made abroad in China. The owner has tried to pass on the skill to his three children but the older two have been focused on their own careers. His youngest son on the other hand has really valued learning from his parents. As the owner and his wife have gotten older they only manage the sales while their son manages all of the design, production, and displays. He also volunteers to teach Khayameya at a workshop in Downtown Cairo. The parents often wonder how their son manages to do it all.

3 | Cairo University

Growing up, she never thought she would end up in college. She spent her childhood going from home to home with her mother, a housekeeper, where she would wait in the servants quarters while her mom finished cleaning. She never learned to read or write as her plan was always to one day join her mother in cleaning homes. When she was 8, her parents joined a program that required her and her brother to attend school. At first, this was very difficult, but here she was, it was her first day of classes at Cairo University. She was so excited that she almost trotted down the campus vista towards the grand domed building where all incoming students were expected to start orientation. The Provost begins orientation with the same lecture every year, explaining the history of the university and the many struggles that both students and faculty had to face to shape it into what it is today. Today, the campus is free of the security forces that had previously taken it over. Today, the school takes no political or religious sides, on the contrary, the students are encouraged to explore their own ideologies and lifestyles without fear of punishment. The Students can now use the beautiful campus grounds as a social space to rest and meet friends between classes but they can also use it to safely protest to express their needs and demands.

4 | Giza Nile Corniche

There were times when the street was packed with people from all walks of life. The rawr of the crowds would echo. Sometimes there would even be a few cars in the crowd moving slowly and loudly honking but there was no boundary between sidewalk and car lane. Above the street the viaducts were also packed with celebrations heading to join the many others in Tahrir Square. The celebrations continued for days and sometimes they will sporadically reappear. The corniche has always been in constant transformation. From protests, to army marches, to first aid stands, to vendors setting up in the shade or roaming between cars and eventually being shut down by police. Today, however, was a quiet day. The only disturbance was timed perfectly every 15 minutes when a bus would stop and let out a few passengers. There is a girl in her mid-20s sitting under the shade and writing in her note book. A couple soaking up the sun on the steps that lead from the viaduct to the Nile boardwalk. Tomorrow this will all be taken over by a busy bazaar where vendors will be selling anything from colorful hand quilted tapestries to freshly grilled corn on the cob.



Figure 60. Endless narrative possibilities

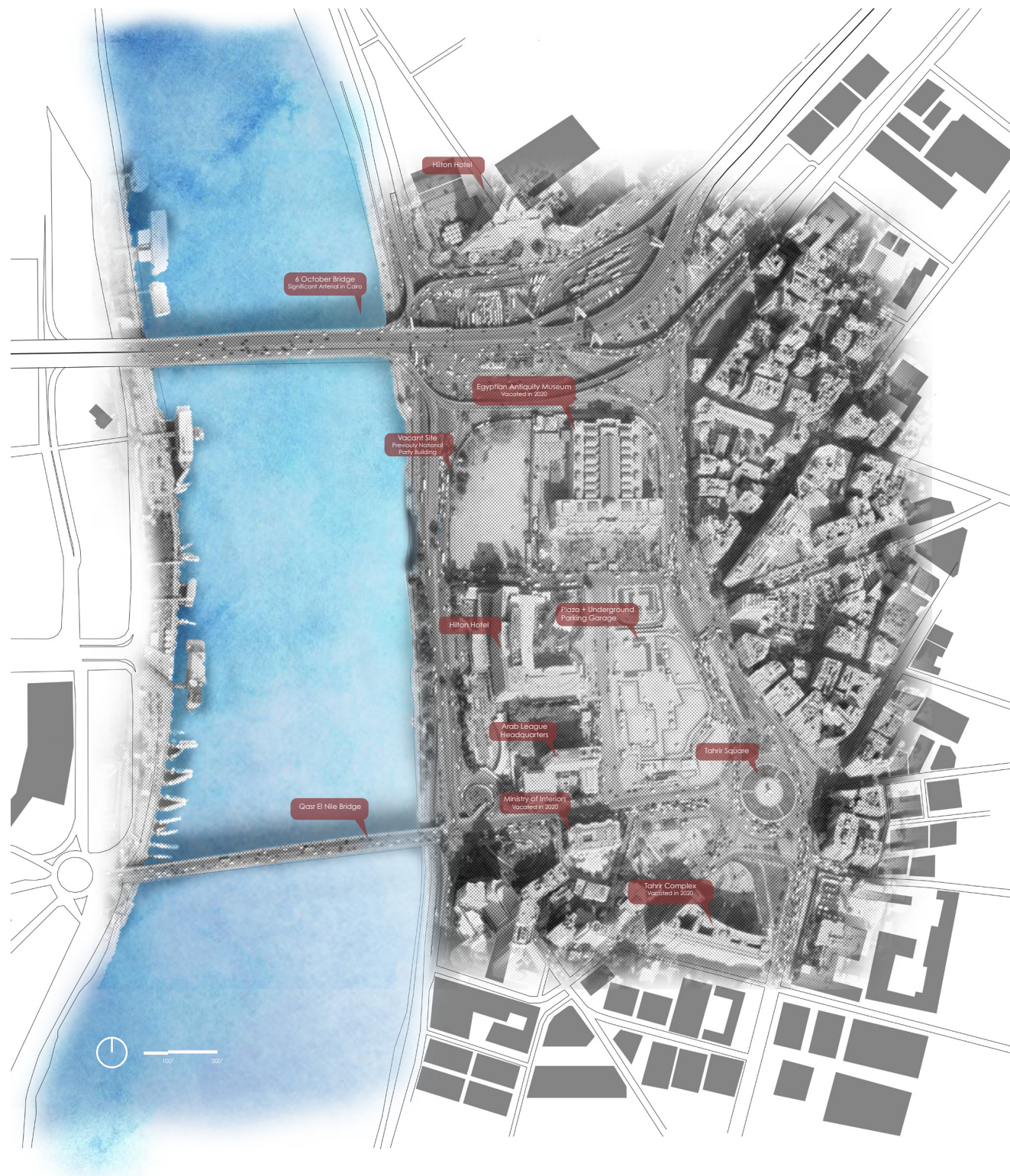


Figure 61. Tahrir Square area - existing site plan

Chapter VI

Tahrir Square: Future Narratives + Possible Becomings

The last and final site, Tahrir Square, was further developed due to its history, symbolic significance and direct relationship to the Nile. This newly revived relationship with the Nile and significant spaces is explored through three nodes and their potential future narratives. Combined together, these nodes and narratives address how different sites can transform to reflect the social goals of this thesis.

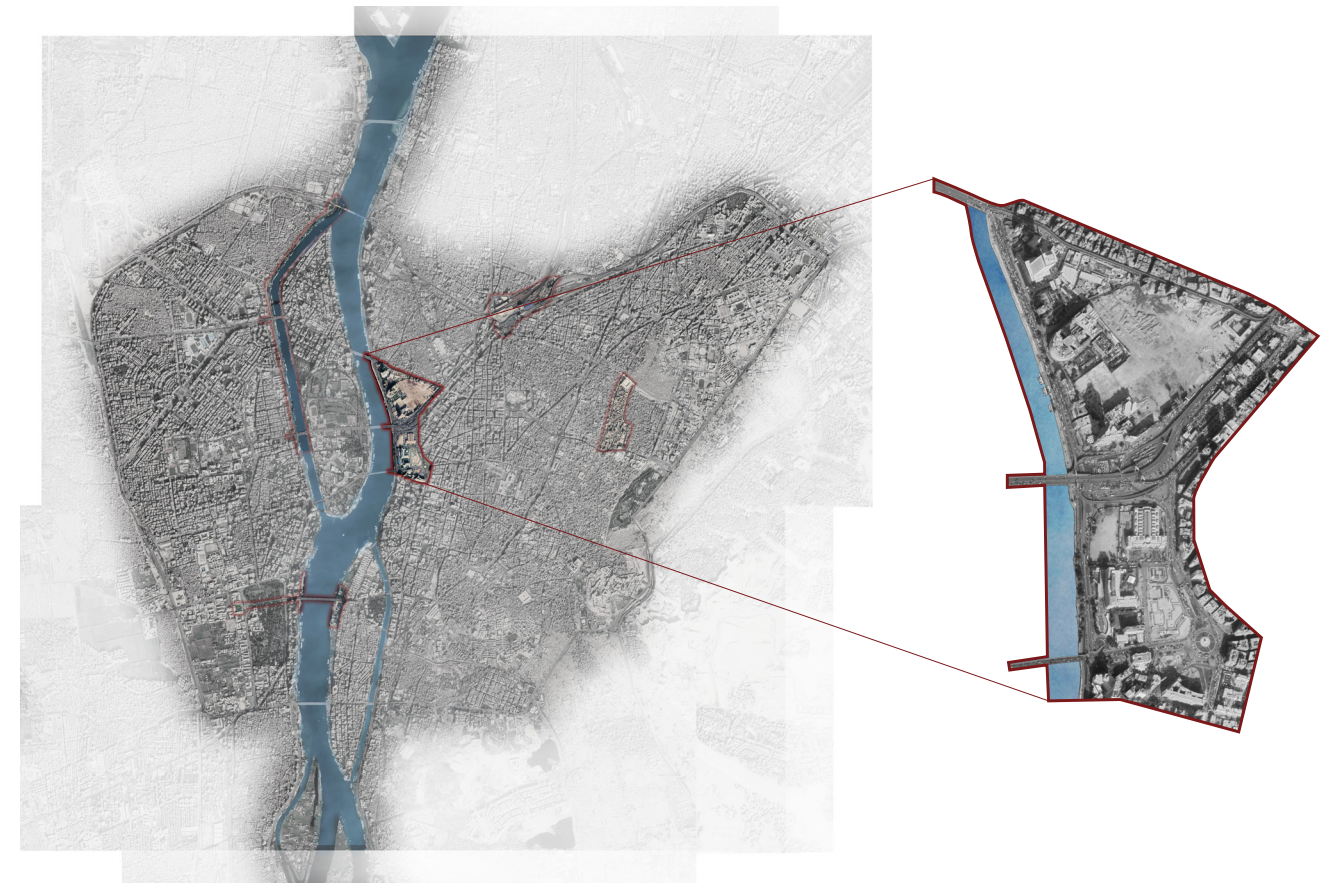


Figure 62. Site Distillation

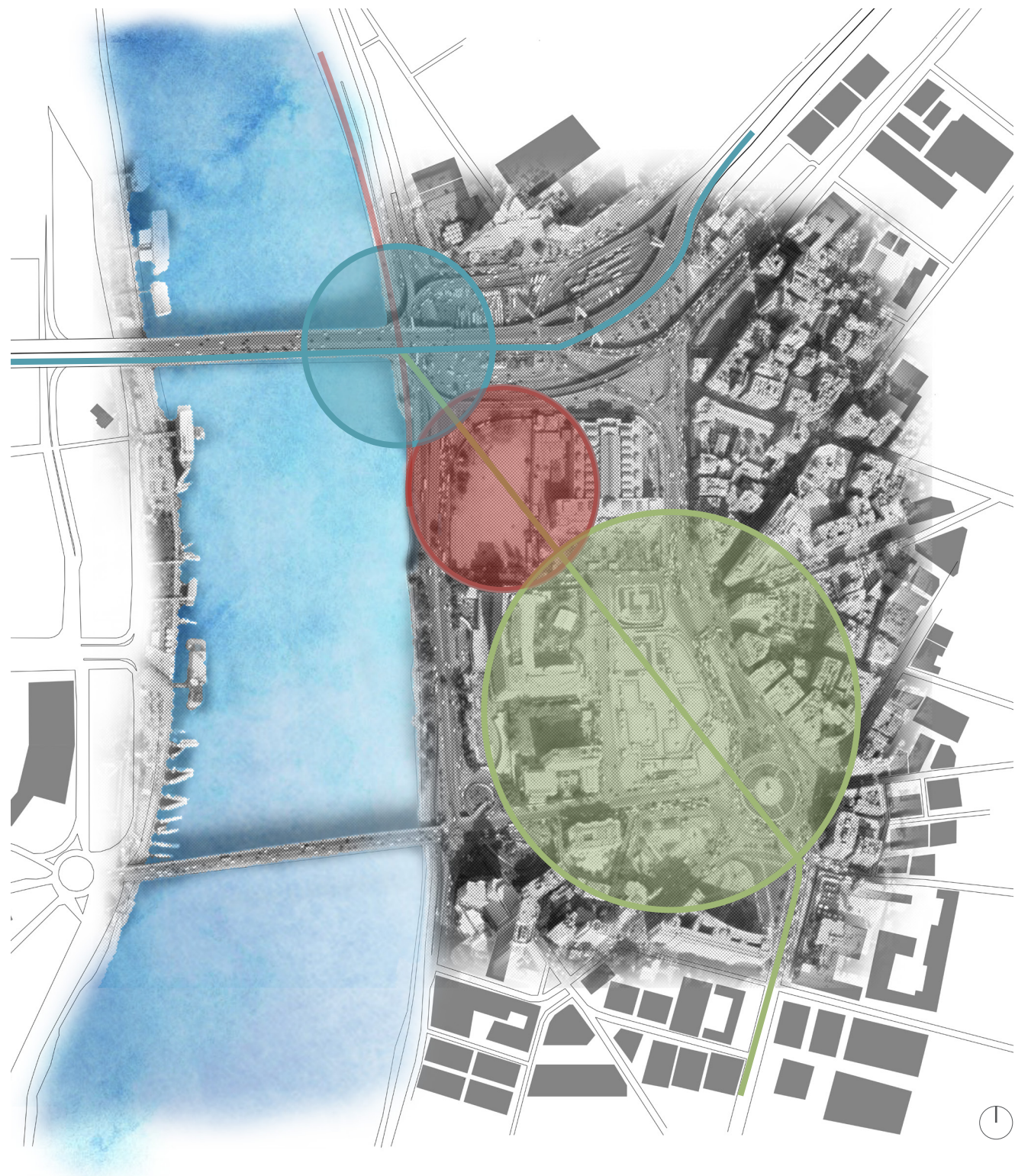


Figure 63. Three nodes

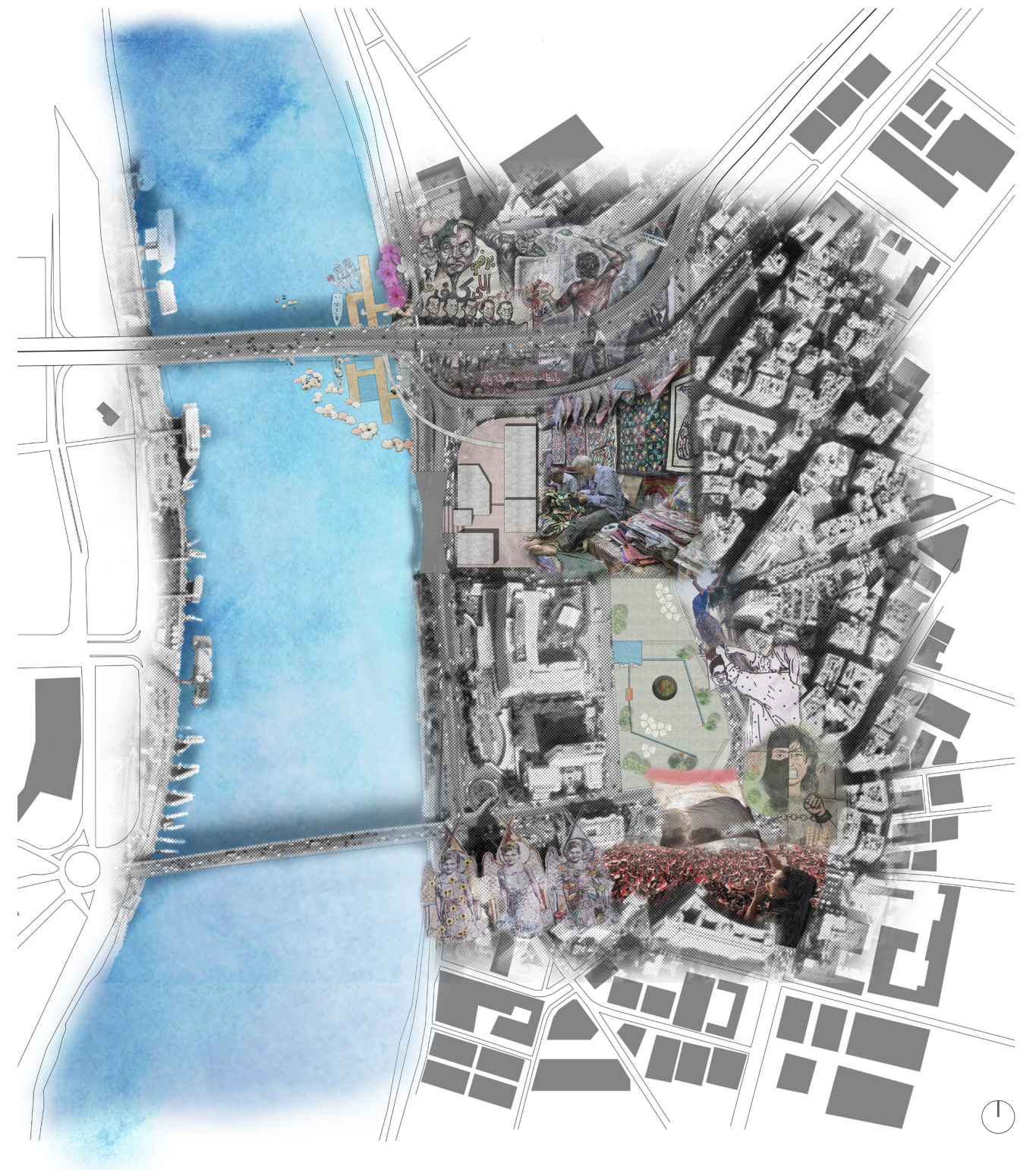


Figure 64. Proposed Site Plan



Figure 65. Node section: 6th of October bridge

1 | Loyalty to the Nile 'Wafaa Al Nile'

It was an unusually quiet day on the docks. He casts his line and watches the wave lightly tap the rocks. As he waits for a bite, he remembers a time when the street was packed with people from every part of the city. The chants would echo.

A few cars were honking along with the chants of the crowd. Above the street, the viaduct was also packed with parades of celebration all heading to join the many others in Tahrir Square. The Balconies were also an extension of the streets; packed with families that were cheering and holding out flags. Amongst the celebrations, some were holding up photos of the many who had who lost their lives for freedom. The celebrations continued for days and sometimes they will sporadically reappear.

The Nile Corniche has hosted everything from protests and army marches to informal vendors setting up in the shade or roaming between cars selling anything from hand quilted tapestries to freshly grilled corn on the cob, or couples standing on the bridge to get the best Nile views in town..

Tomorrow is another celebration: it is the first day of Wafaa Al Nile Ritual: The annual honoring of the Nile river at the end of the flood season. With traces back to ancient times, this ritual has finally been revived after being obsolete for decades.

The Nile will once again turn into a sea of colorful flowers as people from all over Egypt gather in Faluka's or Sailboats singing chants and showing gratitude and loyalty to the Nile, the eternal source of life in the city.



Figure 66. Wafaa Al-Nile, ancient Egypt



Figure 67. Wafaa Al-Nile



Figure 68. Node section: Qawim

2 | Resilience 'Qawim'

After his son and daughter head off to school, he walks down the eastern Nile banks towards his studio at Qawim. 'Qawim' is a non-government volunteer run organization that transformed the site previously occupied by the National Party building into maker spaces. He had spent years between low paying jobs. And eventually ended up working as a private driver for a wealthy family living in New Cairo. Since his own education didn't serve him, he decided to take his kids out of school so they too can help bring some income. The family continued with this lifestyle until five years ago when he heard about this program.

The program had one rule: his kids must remain in school and in return he would be enrolled in a series of workshops to master a traditional Egyptian craft that he was drawn to. In his case this was the art of Khayamiya. The name of this craft comes from the art forms original purpose: tent fabric. Today the vibrant patterned fabrics are produced in a similar technique but used to make tapestries, quilts and cushion covers. The program was growing in popularity. Many of his neighbors had also joined, some make ceramics, some make furniture, others make clothing and fabrics. It all depended on volunteers available to teach these various skills. The program also supports these makers in selling their pieces in local Bazaars around the city.

Qawim has completely changed him and his family's life; He has been working on a tapestry for over a week now and tomorrow is his opportunity to sell his work at the Friday market. As he climbs up the carved stepwell that leads from the Nile banks; he notices that the water level has changed, leaving its mark on the eroded steps. The steps lead him to Qawim's courtyard where the activities had already begun. Some of the woodworkers were installing screens to expand their work area. Other Khayameya makers were using the screens to display their finished tapestries. Volunteers were hanging colorful fabrics for shade from the harsh morning sun. 'Salam Alaikom' he waves at one of his colleagues as he makes his way up to his Nile facing studio and makes his morning tea before getting to work.

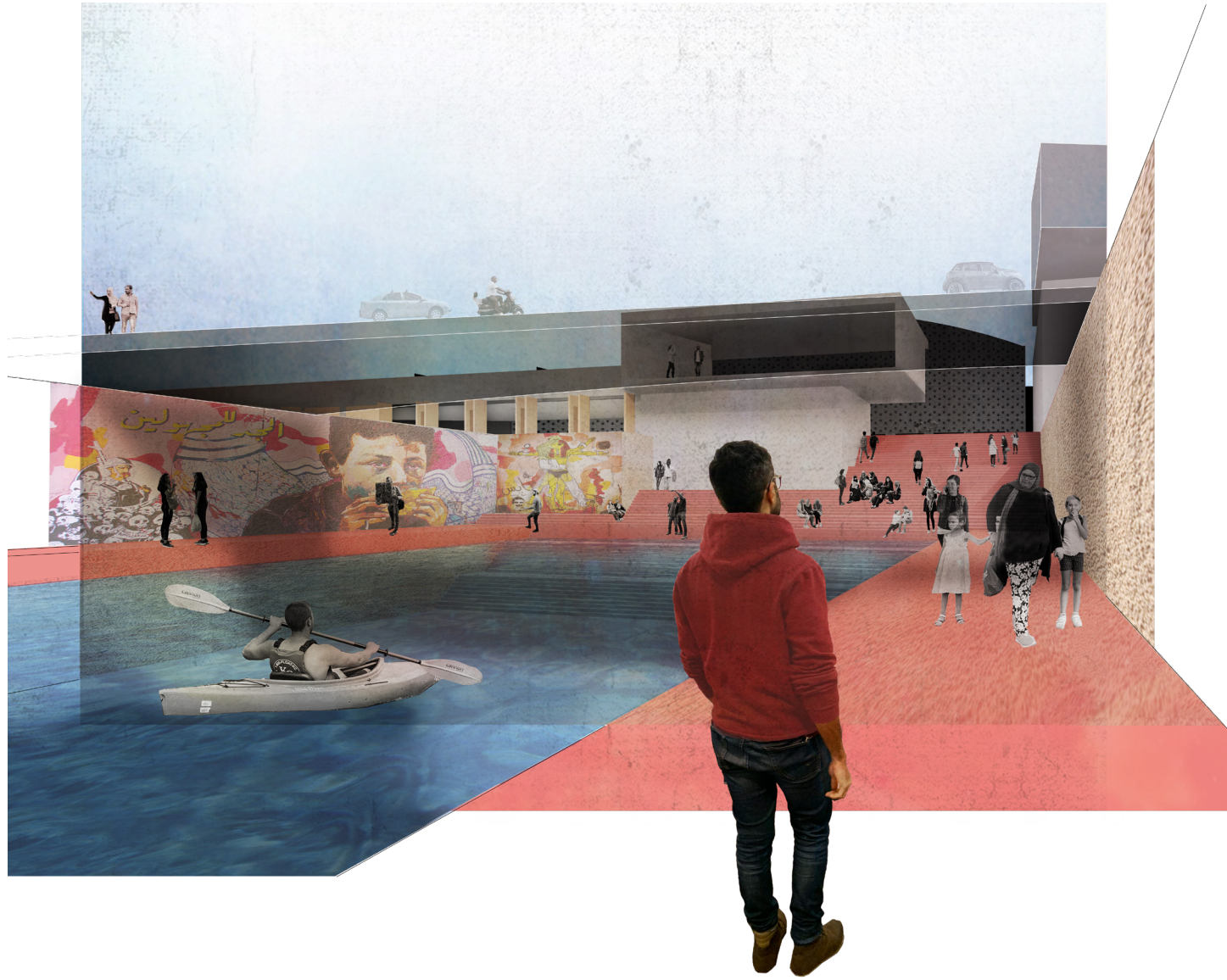


Figure 69. Qawim - stepwell from Nile

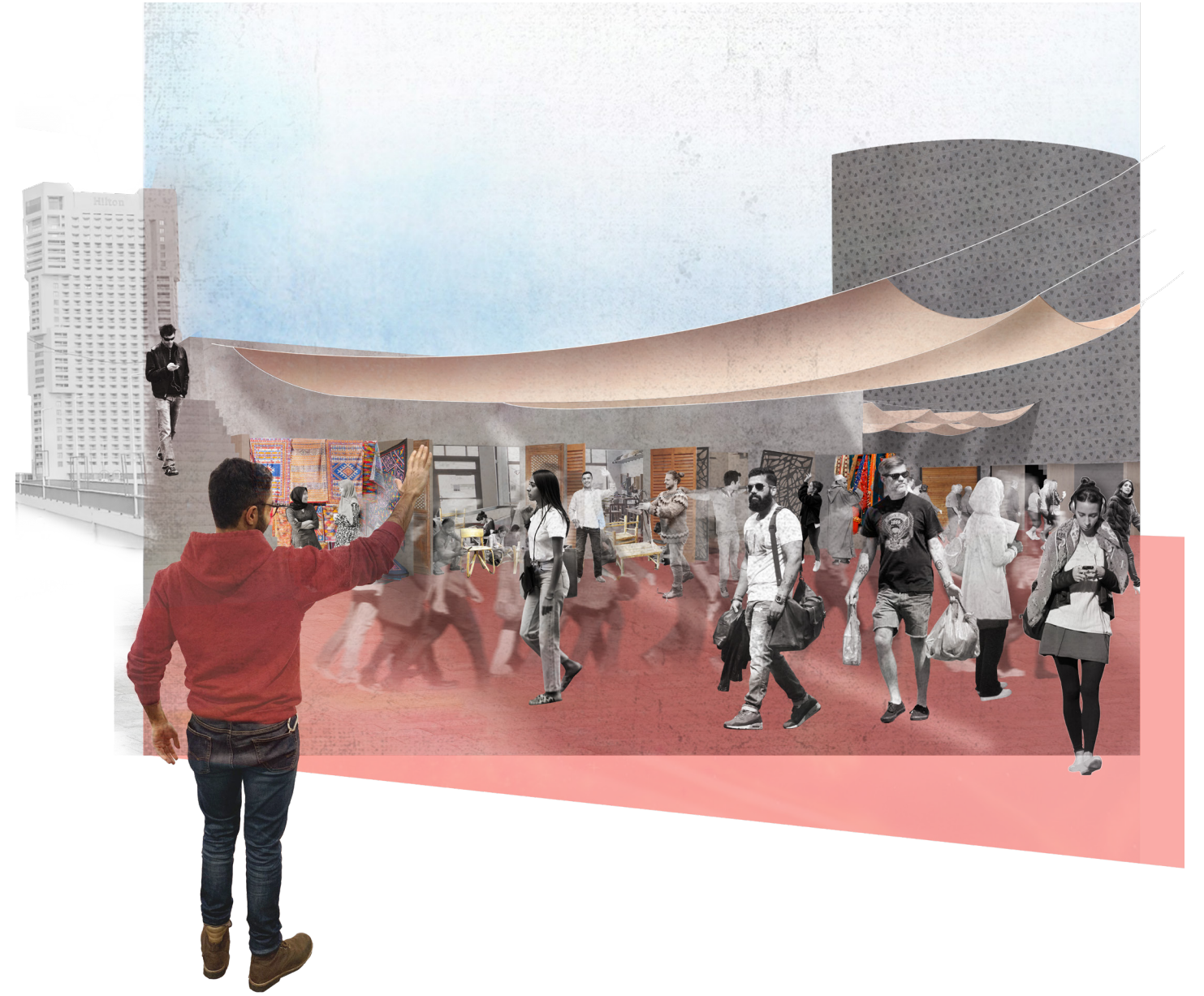


Figure 70. Qawim - courtyard



Figure 71. Node section: Tahrir Square

3 | Tahrir Square, the space of Freedom 'Al Tahrir Al Moharar'

As she steps off the underground metro car she can hear the sound of echoing water pouring through the ceramic filters. She climbs up the stairs leading to the plaza, and gets glimpses of bright blue and green light reflecting off the stained glass water cistern as the sun shines through the oculus. She grew up hearing stories from her parents about living through the Arab Spring. The stories were so vivid that it felt like she was there with them. She could imagine the rush of hope and prosperity that took over when Ex-President Mubarak announced his resignation. She could picture the short lived changes that took place in Cairo and the crushing disappointment shortly after when the military once again began arresting protestors and erasing the memories of 2011. She remembers a time when the memory of the arab spring was so tainted that most people refused to even speak about it.

In 2021, her and her brother lived up to their parent's legacy and took to the streets of Cairo along with millions of other protestors. As she stands in Tahrir Square today, she takes pride in the fact that this space has become a living memorial of the ongoing struggle for freedom. She glances around at the concrete barricades that were brought here from all over the city; a canvas that is constantly being repainted. One name in particular demands her attention..It was the name of her mother who was shot at the women's march in late 2020. She and her brother had etched her name there years after she had passed away.

She now volunteers as a carpentry instructor at Qawim where she gets to teach and meet many other makers. She takes the same route there five times a week, but her surroundings are in constant flux, some days there would be a small riot towards the center of the square surrounding the oculus down to the garage and metro. Other days it was quiet enough and she could hear the water flowing through the channels and feeding life in the plaza while people rested underneath the shade of trees. On Fridays, people set up shades and gathered for prayer after performing Wudu at the washing stations. She stops for a drink at one of the many drinking fountains and could hear a child reading some of the graffiti. "Al sha3b ureed el horeya" one of the many chants that gained popularity in the 2021 riots.



Figure 72. Tahrir Square - underneath the plaza



Figure 73. Tahrir Square - on the plaza

These three narratives are simply moments of an incremental vision for a reimagined public life in Cairo. The three nodes hosting the narratives are an ever evolving container for day to day activities and provide a platform for the members of the city to imagine their own futures through spaces rooted in public ritual. Each node is explored through a single sectional cut that features the site's reformulated relationship to the Nile River. The first node is located at a condition that is repeated at multiple instances throughout Cairo as the 6th October bridge is one of many that cross over the Nile. The narrative renders the bridge as a site of memory, connection and celebration of the Nile through reviving Wafaa Al Nile, an ancient Egyptian ritual that has been obsolete since the 1990s. The node provides various opportunities for the members of Cairo to interact with the Nile through various dock conditions and a pool of filtered Nile water. The second node is located on a site that has for the longest time been a symbol of the bureaucracy. In this potential future the site becomes a maker school called 'Qawim'. Through making as a type of protest, Qawim fosters a new industry through empowering traditional artisanal crafts. These traditional acts of making form a self-sufficient community and emphasizes the importance of education. The site itself carves down to the Nile which, today, stands 20 feet below street level. Overtime, the stepwell is marked by the

changing water levels of the river. Qawim leaves room for the students and volunteers to form their own work spaces. The building is an assemblage of pieces constantly being shaped by the students and continues to evolve along with the rest of the city. The final node is Tahrir Square. The narrative envisions the becoming of Tahrir Square into a revived public space that is activated through memory, protest and water. The center of the underground parking garage is carved out making room for traditional ceramic water filters that were historically used at a small scale to filter the Nile water but can now be used to provide public clean water for the masses. The students at Qawim built these ceramic filters and the clean water is stored in a sculptural glass cistern. Once brought to Tahrir Square, the water is used to grow vegetation, support religious and cultural rituals and provide a clean source of drinking water to cool down on hot days.

The three nodes provide a framework that can allow for the unfolding of more activities, narratives, self expression, various forms of protests and appropriations of space. The nodes are a conductor of social relationships and in the potential futures explored above, stimulate activities deeply rooted in Cairo's culture.



Figure 74. Multiple node section: multiple kinds of protest



Chapter VII

Conclusion

Throughout history, Cairo has been the subject of occupations, military control, and severe top-down master planning. An analysis of past events shows that the city and its people have continued to display a resilience that manifests in the shape of formal and informal appropriation of spaces. This project is inspired by the hope that Cairo, the city victorious, will once again prevail and overcome the silencing forces at the top. It explores bottom-up movements and situationist thinking to conjure possible spaces of self expression, empowerment and daily revolution through various acts of protest such as making, remembering, and gathering. The idea of narratives and sectional interventions is employed as a means to envision an alternative future that takes place at some of the most significant sites in the city. Public rituals and traditional culture enrich those narratives that focus around the revived concept of the Nile as the central lifeline and binder of the city.

The exploration of 'possible becomings' seeks to answer the question of how the up and coming exodus and abandonment of Cairo can be reimaged as an opportunity rather than the city's doom? How does Cairo and its members prevail once again? How does Cairo re-emerge?

Figure 75. A network of future narratives and possible becomings

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End Notes

- 1- Rodenbeck, Max Cairo: The City Victorious, page ix
- 2- Quote by Herodotus, the ancient Greek historian
- 3- Hapi was the god of the Nile in ancient Egypt. The flooding of the Nile was seen as the arrival of Hapi, who was greatly celebrated as he brought fertile soil and life to Egypt.
- 4- Boer, Rene June 2015
- 5- CEIC: Egypt Forecast 1990-2024
- 6- 'Khedive' a word is used to reference the Ottoman viceroy. Khedive Ismail is the grandson of Muhammed Ali, the viceroy of Egypt. He initiated the movement to complete the "Paris on the Nile" vision.
- 7- The Arab Socialist Union is a political party created by President Gamal Abdel Nasser and modeled after the Soviet Politburo. The Arab Socialist Union (ASU) was the only legal political party in Egypt at the time.
- 8- Mohandiseen means engineers and is one of the many work force housing neighborhoods developed around Cairo during the Nasser era.
- 9- Alsayyed, Nezar, Cairo: Histories of a City, Page 242
- 10- Sims, David. Egypt's Desert Dreams, Page 128
- 11- Sims, David. The case of Cairo, Page 4
- 12- Sims, David. Understanding Cairo, Page 71
- 13- Alsayyad, Nezar. Cairo: Histories of a City, Page 277
- 14- Washington Post
- 15- January 25th- Egypt's National Police Day – purposefully chosen to be the first day of the 2011 revolution
- 16- Ex-President Mubarak's Party – known as the National Party – was the only legal political party prior to 2011. This party took over the ASU building after the Nasser Era
- 17- The Muslim brother, is a religiopolitical organization founded in Egypt in 1928 by a teacher of Arabic and religious studies by the name of Hassan Al-Banna. The group has followers gathered under the belief that an implementation of Islamic teachings is key to maintaining a powerful society. Although stated as a social movement, the group was soon politicized and creating room for an armed branch that was linked to various acts of violence and assassinations.
- 18- Kingsley, Patrick, The Guardian, March 16, 2015.
- 19- Sims, David. Egypt's Desert Dreams, Page 41
- 20- Sims, David. Understanding Cairo: The Logic of a City Out of Control, page 90
- 21- Harvey, David. The Right to the City, Page 2
- 22- Deutsche, Roslyn. The Question of Public Space, Page 3
- 23- El-Shishtawy, Yasser. Planning Middle Eastern Cities: An Urban Kaleidoscope, Page 9
- 24- El-Shishtawy. The Informal Turn, Page 3
- 25- Lefebvre, Henri. The Production of Space, Page 158
- 26- Bode, Christoph & Dietrich, Rainer. Future Narratives Page 95.
- 27- Bode, Christoph & Dietrich, Rainer. Future Narratives Page 5.
- 28- Bode, Christoph & Dietrich, Rainer. Future Narratives Page 9.
- 29- Abaza, Mona. Post January Revolution Cairo.

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