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The American University in Cairo
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**The Graffiti of Mohamed Mahmoud and the Politics of Transition
in Egypt:
The Transformation of Space, Sociality and Identities**

A Thesis Submitted to

The Department of Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology and Egyptology

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

In Sociology-Anthropology

By **Nouran Al-Anwar El-Hawary**

Under the supervision of Dr. **Mark Westmoreland**

September/2014

“The autonomy of the reader depend on a transformation of the social relationships that overdetermine his relation to texts. This transformation is a necessary task. This revolution would be no more than another totalitarianism on the part of an elite claiming for itself the right to conceal different modes of conduct, and substituting a new normative education for the previous one, were it not that we can count on the fact that already exist, though it surreptitious or even repressed, an experience other than of passivity. A politics of reading must be articulated on an analysis that, describing practices that have long been in effect, makes them politicizable”

(de Certeau 1984; 174)

Acknowledgement

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Abstract

This study is concerned with the spatial transformations taking place in *Mohamed Mahmoud* that branches from *Midan el-Tahrir*; the official site of the Egyptian January 25 Revolution. Since the revolution, this street has witnessed a great deal of violence during several bloody clashes between protesters and security forces. It has also become famous for the dissenting graffiti murals wrapping the walls of its entrance. By conducting ethnography of this block of *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street, my study focuses on the residents and shop owners in the area, who I frame as the graffiti's 'unintended audience,' to understand how these spatial and political transformations have affected this space, the residents' experience, social relations and sense of belonging. I argue that these new spatial transformations brought by the revolution have introduced an alternative public space, inviting a peculiar array of incidents and distinctive social interactions in which people deploy the mode of speaking in their subversion of many ambivalences in the course of troubled political transition.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction:

Cairo's *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street, the main artery leading to the square of the revolution, *Midan el-Tahrir* (Tahrir Square), had witnessed the most brutal clashes between protesters and police forces since the January 25 uprising. The strategic importance of this street lies in the fact that *Mohamed Mahmoud* is the shortest route from *Tahrir* to the Interior Ministry. Today, this street is most likely known for its dissenting political graffiti that wraps around the walls of the old AUC campus, the AUC library building and the *Lycée* School. The emergence of graffiti in the space of *Mohamed Mahmoud* has transformed many of the street's features, associating it with the revolution.

The immense production of graffiti in the space of *Mohamed Mahmoud* has attracted many journalists, observers and analysts who are interested in documenting the revolution and analyzing the emergence of political art. Given the utilization of graffiti by young activists and revolutionaries in the course of opposing the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) that ran the country after Mubarak stepped down until presidential elections brought Mohamed Morsi to power, then in opposing Morsi and his group (the Muslim Brotherhood), graffiti is considered a successful medium of political expression, marked as a "creative dissent" among other attributes.

Noteworthy, the graffiti on *Mohamed Mahmoud* is usually done in the middle of the day, implying a significant shift in utilizing the urban space where new practices and cultural expressions are taking place. This makes the practice on *Mohamed Mahmoud* unique, separate from how graffiti is typically conducted more covertly as an illegal practice. This live public enactment of practicing graffiti in front of people on the street does not occur without incident.

Rather, it usually triggers debates, if not verbal fights, between the graffitiists and the street audience and also within the crowd itself.

In March 2012, a graffiti campaign named “No Walls” was launched to oppose SCAF’s rule and most importantly the erection of walls in the space of *Mohamed Mahmoud* to secure the surrounding of the Ministry of Interior and People’s Assembly from protesters; after the famous incident of Port Said Stadium riots, February 2012. During this time, *Mohamed Mahmoud* was bustling with different groups of graffiti artists who were painting and repainting each corner of the street. Each time, the graffiti painting involves an engaged crowd of bystanders and their reactions vary, from approval to opposition. Some accuse those young activists of being troublemakers who are part of a disrespectful generation and *sia’* (good at nothing). The young artists often see those people as having been seriously influenced by state propaganda intended to keep “honored citizens” at home and end protests in the name of public interest and stability. Here, people’s agreements and disagreements are not only confined to the wall subject matter, but also tackle the Egyptian political situation in general that has been changed by the advent of the revolution. Remarkably, such fights are political in nature and get expression in an ever-changing set of collective identities keep emerging amid revolutionary context; revolutionaries, *feloul* (the remnant of Mubarak’s regime) , honored citizen, *baltagy* (thug), injuries of the revolution, just to list a few. This scene reflects Egypt’s uneasy transition, in which people’s reservation on graffiti/graffiti artists reflects larger issues of the revolution.

The point is that the controversies around graffiti brings and highlights a wide range of submerged social tensions that are presented on political, social, spatial and subjectivity levels into the floor. This incidents of graffiti is an “occasion” that uncover the nexus between everyday practices and larger rhetoric (de Certeau 1984; 90). Graffiti is not only a visual object, rather it is

a manifestation of a political transformation that shows how the revolution transformed space and social life of such public space. Therefore in this project, I attempt to account this incident of graffiti in *Mohamed Mahmoud* from a vantage point of urban studies by examining how graffiti and the revolution have transformed the space of that street. The study of public space is not an end in itself, but it is a part of a broader endeavor to compare and reflect upon human experiences and activities in space and time.

Given the quintessential nature of *Tahrir* Square as the cradle of the January 25 Revolution, the plenty of political graffiti and other protest-related activities on Tahrir and *Mohamed Mahmoud* are motivated by the fact that “this type of graffiti addresses the general public, thus having a wider ‘intended audience’” (Nicoiarea 2012, 264). As graffiti painting occurs without taking the residents of this site into consideration, the revolution has become an enforced, concrete social reality imposed on many people who did not choose to live with it in their backyards. By conducting an ethnography of this block of *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street, my thesis intends to take into account the residents and shop owners in the area, who I frame as the graffiti’s “unintended audience” to explore the broader set of social relations involved in the spatial and socio-political transformations of this public space. In this sense, studying *Mohamed Mahmoud* acts as a micro-scale example to elucidate and transcend the various ways in which the revolution is transforming space, society, identities and politics during this critical transition through examining people’s narratives of their everyday lives.

Research Questions:

The central questions that this project attempts to answer are:

- ❖ In what ways has the political transformation initiated by the revolution in Egypt been socially, spatially and subjectively expressed on the streets of Cairo?
- ❖ Looking specifically at the central role of *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street, how has the commemorative role of graffiti transformed the social space of this street?
- ❖ By taking a long view of the revolution, what other transformative effects of the revolution have expressed themselves on *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street?
- ❖ And what type of political subjectivities have emerged within this context?
- ❖ While acknowledging the importance of street politics in this context, how do the ordinary residents of this street experience and make sense of these radically transformative processes?
- ❖ What do the experiences and perceptions of these residents tell us about the way these transformations have shaped their social relationships and sense of belonging during the revolution?

In this regard, I argue that the “public performance” of graffiti (Abaza July 2014) invites a peculiar array of incidents and distinctive social interactions, indicating how the revolution transformed the space and social life, turning by that *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street into an alternative public space of contestation in which ordinary people deploy the mode of speaking in their subversion of many ambivalences in the course of troubled political transition. It shows how the novel ways of political expressions and conducts have transformed city spatiality where people’s subjectivities, social relations and sense of belonging have dramatically altered.

Background:

The 25 January Revolution remarks a crucial turn in Egypt’s politics and publics. On that day, thousands of people took to downtown Cairo's main streets, protesting police brutality and

demanding "bread, freedom and social equality" for eighteen consecutive days until former President Hosni Mubarak stepped down from power. The popular uprising that led to the end of the thirty-year regime not only transformed the way people in Egypt express their frustration, discontent and anger, but it also represented an unprecedented usage of central public spaces, like *Tahrir Square*; the most renowned square in Cairo. *Tahrir* was transformed from a congested traffic circle guarded by the state apparatus to a people-ruled territory, remaking the space into what is called "Tahrir Republic." Since then, Tahrir Square has served as a symbolic space for memorializing the revolution and its utopian eighteen days. This space has turned into a central open-air platform. Throughout the three years following Mubarak's ouster, *Midan el-Tahrir* has symbolized political agency and power for many disparate stakeholders. Occupying this space became an effective strategy to pressure the government and gain visibility; even after Mubarak fell, many million-man protests marching to the square continued to be held under different names, most often on Fridays (Abaza 2011, September 11). Establishing control over Tahrir became an essential technique to acquire legitimacy for rival political players. It is the place where people not only gathered to express and negotiate their demands and political consciousness, but also a crucial place to project their messages to the government and the whole world. Hence, the revolution has always been about the re-purposing of public space, as public spaces and streets have become crucial sights of political contestations, reflecting the uniqueness of doing politics, outside the normative of official politics.

The unprecedented openness of the public space due to police withdrawing from the streets and sporadic bursts of neo-national sentiments, allowed various "revolutionary" activities to emerge in everyday life within the physical space of downtown Cairo and *Tahrir Square*. In this context, graffiti and street art have appeared as spectacular activities recently introduced to Egypt,

which has attracted the attention of the press and academia, giving these artists political value as activists. Its emergence has been about capturing the spirit of the revolution and promoting its principles and demands, during the 18 days and after mass. This was the case until graffiti has soared as an effective form of political expression, often opposing many of SCAF's violations, including illegal detentions, excessive use of violence against protesters and military trials of civilians, for year and half. In response, the authorities repeatedly attempted to wipe it away. The erasing of graffiti by the authorities and its immediate reappearance on the street was especially intense on *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street, becoming a symbolic area for the graffiti scene in Cairo (Nicoiara 2012; 129). This street branches out of Tahrir Square and leads to the Ministry of Interior on Lazoughly Street, where many major bloody clashes between police forces and protesters took place, during November 2011 and Port Said Stadium riots February 2012. After these clashes, the authorities had erected many thick cement barricades blocking the alleys around *Mohamed Mahmoud* in what Abaza refers to as the militarization of the downtown area and zoning, "in which walls are meant to cordoning the protesters off inside limited spaces of war ... while normalizing the rest of the city" (Abaza, September 2011).

Because of that and its high visibility, *Mohamed Mahmoud* quickly became an iconic place for graffiti artists to set up their works, which are mostly concerned with commemorating and defending the revolution and the martyrs, ultimately becoming known as *sharei' uyuun al-huriyyah* (the street of the eyes of freedom) (Abaza 2012). The ongoing process of whitening out and quickly repainting the walls on this street has created what Mona Abaza calls, "a large gang of professional bloggers-photographers-journalists-graffiti hunters, whose daily sport is to record the latest graffiti in city" (Abaza 2012). Graffiti artists have emerged in force alongside the revolution, utilizing its hegemonic discourse to incorporate their socio-cultural critique of many mainstream social issues,

such as sexual harassment, inflation, the gas crisis and so on. Since graffiti is quintessentially a rebellious form of art, it was given a boost by the constant outpouring of dissent since 2011. In many other ways, graffiti has become trendy practice among different activists, political fractions and young generations.

The Site of Mohamed Mahmoud:

Around the eastern part of downtown Cairo, *Mohamed Mahmoud* branches out from *Tahrir* Square, the epicenter of the 2011 Egyptian revolution. One of the capital's most famous squares, *Tahrir* is a crucial hub for the city due to its centrality and accessibility from other neighborhoods.

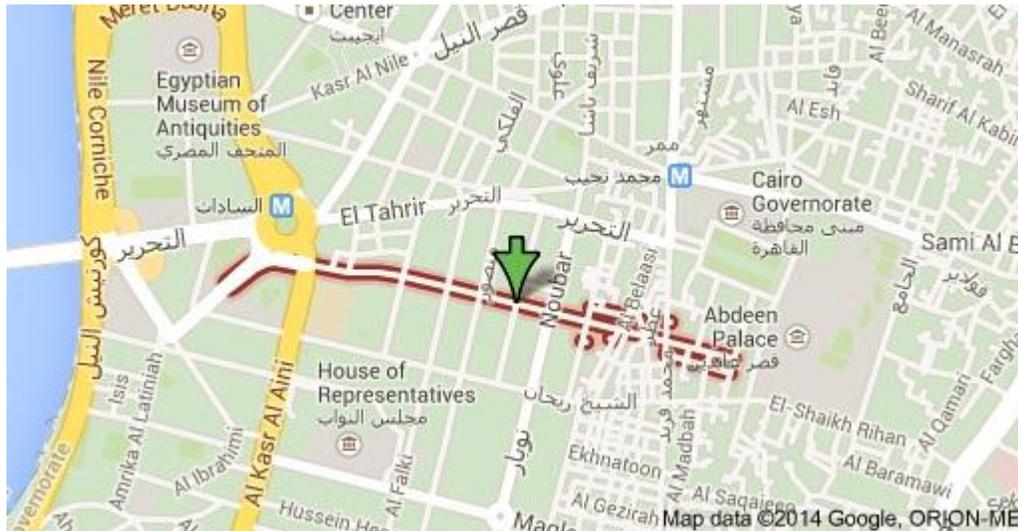


Figure 1 The map of Mohamed Mahmoud Street

Situated in the heart of downtown, *Mohamed Mahmoud* inherits the same rich urban culture of the city's core; the site of Cairo's "Belle Époque" architectural heritage.

On the way to *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street, one cannot help but notice the dramatic shift that is deeply inscribed on the areas' features, with two major streets around the square cordoned off along the boulevard of *Mohamed Mahmoud* from the right side, leaving *Mohamed Mahmoud* one of few streets open to traffic from the square. *Mohamed Mahmoud* used to be known with the existence of old campus of the American University in Cairo. Now, the street feels in ruins.

Walking down the street, the scars of fights and clashes are engraved in the space. Barbed wire, iron fences, nine-foot long concrete barricades, torn up pavement, battlefield detritus, and graffiti murals, blocked streets and detours are all recent phenomena on the street. At the entrance of the street, the buildings that comprise the campus have become full of graffiti murals and slogans against President Hosni Mubarak's regime, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) and the Muslim Brotherhood, totally altering the general character of the street. AUC main campus that overlooks the square, has erected a gigantic iron gates and many buildings around had blocked their windows with bricks.

The surrounding area is full of cafes, restaurants, local coffee shops, tiny kiosks in the corners and car mechanics' workshops. The pace of life here has slowed dramatically over the last six months before conducting my fieldwork in June 2013, after the move of oppositional protest into the area of presidential palace. This area has also been badly affected, in the wake of intense bouts of violence that have taken place here, since the revolution. After passing the AUC campus and the French school, *Lycée Horryia*, I completed my tour through *Mohamed Mahmoud* to find that the horizontal streets of *Youssef el-Gendy*, and then *Falaki*, *Mansour*, and finally *Abdel Maguid al-Ramly* are completely blocked by nine-foot-long cement barricades to protect the Ministry of Interior from attack.

Mohamed Mahmoud is a long avenue that cuts through two definable neighborhoods: *Bab el-Luq* and *Abdeen*. *Bab el-Luq* is at the end with the transection of *Nubar Pasha* Street that follows *Abdel Maguid al-Ramly*, being a first Street without blocks. In this intersection, there is a higher density of people and more activities that make it particularly crowded during peak traffic times on weekdays. As *Bab el-Luq* ends and *Abdeen* begins toward the end of the street, the activity level diminishes and the area evokes a typical low-income urban neighborhood.

Bab el-Luq is a residential area, but many of those working in *Bab el-Luq* do not reside here. Most of the workers live in neighborhoods such as *Imbaba*, *Manshyat Nasr*, Old Cairo, *Giza*, *Faisal*, *Saida Zaynab* and *Zawiya al-Hamra*. This quarter is known for its late nineteenth and early twentieth century cosmopolitanism that is inscribed not only in its demographic composition, but also in its glorious architecture. Many foreign entities used to settle in this area in the past, including Greeks, Roman Catholics, Armenians, etc., giving the place an affluent and vibrant character.

The *Bab el-Luq* area is also home to numerous schools, including German, French, national and technical education institutes. But most importantly, *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street provides easy access, through *el-Falaki*, to a concentration of governmental institutions, including the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Justice, the central laboratories and the Ministry of Social Affairs, all of which are either located on, or accessed through *el-Falaki* Street. Hence, the economy of *Bab el-Luq* is characterized by service activities. Nevertheless, today much of Egypt's economic activity has shifted to multinational companies housed in swanky towers outside of the city center. Downtown is no longer as relevant as it was back in its heyday; however, it remains a bustling and thriving place for small and medium-sized businesses and shops. There are many tiny kiosks that sell all sorts of wares: cigarettes, newspapers, candies, biscuits, mobile recharge cards, cold beverages and fruits. In addition, most of the small and medium-sized businesses and shops in the area are car workshops, stationary stores and food outlets.

Mohamed Mahmoud Street has a considerable number of workshops that deal in spare car parts and related items. Even *Beano's* and *Cilantro* café used to be workshops in the past. *Beano's*, for instance, was a workshop owned by a Greek man. This fact does not make *Mohamed Mahmoud* a preferable destination for downtown's leisure-goers. In this sense, it is unlike the nearby *Talaat*

Harb, a hot spot for shopping and hanging out. It is a vibrant street and central place for leisure and social interaction. It is also a bustling commercial center, housing several important buildings, such as the Yacoubian building, the Egyptian Diplomatic club, Café Riche and Groppi café. Because of the numerous shops and cafés that *Talaat Harb* has always been famous for, it is still a dynamic place for night life and entertainment, even with the economic stagnation that hit Egypt in general, and downtown in particular.

Downtown is a pedestrian area, unlike the new desert cities like the one I live in, where there are few walkable urban spaces. Instead, we rely on cars. The dense urban fabric of *Mohamed Mahmoud Street* allows for a degree of intimacy between members of the community that is not found in other areas. Here, there are no malls. The food outlets and cafés in the quarter of *Bab el-Luq* are so diverse that you have many options between local food, international fast-food chains and Italian-style cafés. However, the exteriors of *ahwai* (street coffee shops) and local restaurants are gaudier and less upscale. Chain restaurants and Italian cafés, on the other hand, are extremely popular and serve as gathering places. This co-existing of two different types of social worlds in the same place makes this part of *Bab al-Luq* more heterogeneous. It is busier and more diverse than *Abdeen*, which seems more homogenous; here, people are more closely bounded to each other. The shop owners and workers all belong to the same area. In other words, there is a sense of community and unity where everyone knows each other, evoking the sentiment of a typical “*sha’abi*”, neighborhood. This interconnectedness of *Abdeen* creates what Antony Giddens calls an “environment of trust,” as a place-based local community (Giddens 1990).

There is no local municipality to control anything in this part of downtown. There are some vendors on the corners where *Mohamed Mahmoud Street* intersects with the square; this area is also a popular site for beggars. The presence of both vendors and beggars increased rapidly after

the revolution. Their prevalence can be explained by the absence of local authorities to organize the space. On Mohamed Mahmoud itself, the existing stands are authorized and observed by the local government long time ago, paying it taxes.

Walking along *Mohamed Mahmoud* and the other main streets around *Tahrir*, one cannot help but notice the strong presence of graffiti that covers the walls, and the relative absence of its producers. Scrawled over shops facades and building entrances, graffiti is inscribed on every inch of the street. Its forms vary between murals, stencil paintings and kitsch spray painted scratches. Graffiti aggressively marks each street corner.

Hitting the Field:

I conducted my field work on *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street during a crucial turning point in post-revolution's trajectory, a month before June 30 protest place. It was a time when *Tahrir* Square lost much of its psychological and political power as a prime protesting space. Its vibrancy and mandate started to gradually fade away. Instead, protests and sit-ins moved to other spaces around Cairo. With the rise of opposition against the performance and decisions of the first elect president after the revolution, the protests moved to the area of the *Ettehadia* Presidential Palace in *Heliopolis*. Meanwhile, the Muslim Brotherhood and their supporters designated *Nahda* Square in Giza and *Rabaa al-Adaweya* Square in *Nasr* City as their protest camps, modeled on the same concept of *Tahrir* Square. The emergence of these scattered protest places are inscribed with specific ideological motifs which, in turn, reinforced the identity of *Tahrir* and *Mohamed Mahmoud* as the platform of the January 25 revolution. This ongoing process of re-appropriating space has taken on an active role in politicizing and demarcating urban areas. It was a crucial time in which political disputes were intensively taken onto streets as official channels were deemed ineffective or irrelevant.

Despite winning a free election, a year after Mohamed Morsi took office much opposition was being raised to the so-called Brotherhood-ization of the state; referring to the exclusion of other parties in the political life of Egypt. Drafting and passing a new constitution in 2012 was seen as a sign of the new government's autocracy. The drafting committee failed to reach consensus, causing the withdrawal of one member after another. The government's decision to ratify the document despite controversy raised public ire and dissent, which those in power viewed as an attempt to destabilize the state. Meanwhile, the first anniversary of *Mohamed Mahmoud* took place with renewed violence between protesters and security forces in November 2012.

The preparation of a mass protest against Morsi to mark his first year in office on June 30, 2013, was led by a popular group called *Tamarod* (Rebel) that led a petition drive to show the president had lost public confidence. During that time, contentious debates reached the level of physical violence and mass killings after June 30, 2013. Bringing all these activities to the street has changed its nature and people's experience of the city in their everyday lives. The space has become fraught, burdened with contested political labels.

June 30 marks an important shift in which the scope of protests has significantly expanded. This time, the protests were not confined to a specific social spectrum, which in the past typically consisted of a majority of activists and male protesters. Rather, these protests were highly diverse and huge in number. Time and again, the Armed Forces has positioned themselves as the main sponsor of the people's will, supporting their legitimate right to protest and respecting their demands. It is a peculiar situation, since the Armed Forces are accused of backing the old regime, committing many blunders during the first transitional period and polarizing the democratic movement in Egypt. This fact also triggers many questions regarding the genuineness of June 30; was it a truly revolution, or did it serve the remnants of Mubarak's regime? Was everyone who

participated in these protests a righteous revolutionary, or not? The Muslim Brotherhood's opponents were a mix of revolutionaries and other groups representing different interest groups. This brings to the fore another hotly contested issue—was this a revolution, or a coup? Who gets the credit for removing the Brotherhood from power—the military, or the people?

Methodology and Sources:

In order to trace how *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street has been transformed since the advent of the revolution, I focused on the relations between the social uses of this space in the course of everyday life. The primary focus of this study is the residents of *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street themselves, whose space has been drastically transformed by subsequent clashes and graffiti activities, as well as their relations with other social groups—revolutionaries, activists and graffitiists. My research objectives are to describe the transformations of the social space of *Mohamed Mahmoud* and how these changes are being experienced by its residents, that is, by the people who have long-term relationships with this place. To explore the ramifications of these socio-political transformations on the re-appropriation of this space and its consequences on social relations, I followed these qualitative ethnographic approaches: observation and narrative inquiry. Field research helped me to explain the everyday practices employed by people as they attempt to navigate the particular ways in which *Mohamed Mahmoud* has been transformed. Indeed, academics' and journalists' failure to account for ordinary people's experience of the latest developments that their area has endured since the revolution makes it imperative to closely study this social space. Given the fact that little attention has been paid to this issue in media and public discourse—even as the issue of art and a so-called cultural revolution has been widely discussed—a close analysis of the new social relationships that these novel transformations foster in this area is now required. In other words, an ethnographic approach to this area of Mohamed Mahmoud

provided an opportunity to understand a host of issues impacting urban space and the production of social space, away from the mainstream discourses of Western and local media.

In order to examine these issues, I collected and analyzed three principle types of data: data that illustrates new forms of spatial reconfiguration, data that shows novel forms of social relations, and data that explores the various attitudes and identities of the diverse actors that inhabit the social space of *Mohamed Mahmoud*. First, I looked for the new ways in which the space of *Mohamed Mahmoud* has been appropriated. In this regard, I was trying to gather how the people of *Mohamed Mahmoud* experienced the transformations of their site. Through daily observations of this area, I was searching for the tactics employed by different actors as they attempted to claim this space. Secondly, I analyzed how this reconfiguration of space altered the social relations in this area. I was looking for a new sort of sociality, in which the transformation of space fostered contestations and social interactions. Thirdly, I engaged in extensive personal interactions with the residents through oral histories, interviews and observations in order to comprehend more intimate perspectives and sensibilities.

In order to understand how graffiti has transformed the lived experience of *Mohamed Mahmoud Street*, I first employed an observatory method to see the daily spatial activities that occur in this area. These observations helped me to tentatively describe the physical settings, daily routines and various spatial activities that characterize this area, and how different groups occupy and negotiate this space. This illuminated the patterns of daily actions and social interactions of people, thus facilitating the description of the attitudes of different actors. My observations followed a systematic plan, in which I tried to observe this particular block of *Mohamed Mahmoud Street* at different times of the day, in an attempt to map a routine of the daily activities occurring there (Low 1999). In the same manner, I also intended to chart the various activities occurring on

the different corners of *Mohamed Mahmoud*. During my systematic observations of this street, I had the opportunity to build rapport with the people in this area, and to get involved in the area's everyday life.

The participation pool consisted of the street's residents, including shop owners, employees, inhabitants and workers. Asking for interviews from the start, however, was not the right way to gain access to the residents who were the target of this project. *Mohamed Mahmoud* is a vast space of different sorts of activities; it is a hyper-space. Therefore, I acted as a consumer in its different spaces and stores. It was a perfect method to mingle with people. I used this technique in kiosks, street cafés, stores and other such establishments. During these various transactions, I was able to engage different stakeholders in discussion, intervene in their debates and overhear their conversations. Sometimes, they willingly volunteered to talk, even without my invitation. Furthermore, the slowed pace of market activities may also have contributed to creating an expanded space and time for people to talk with me. However, asking people directly for interviews was not easily understood; many individuals did not feel comfortable with the formal setting of an interview, particularly in regards to being recorded. Only a few individuals consented to interviews. I employed a narrative inquiry method, by which I was able to gain an insider's view of how these people's daily lives have been affected by the latest developments, and how it reshaped their experiences of their street. As Susan E. Chase points out, "A second approach [of narrative inquiry] has been developed by sociologists who highlight the identity work that people engage in as they construct selves within specific institutional, organizational, discursive and local cultural contexts. [...] these researchers often treat narrative as lived experience" (Chase 2005, 658). In my case, I based my inquiry on intensive interviews about specific aspects of people's lives, including their spatial daily experience within the sphere of *Mohamed Mahmoud*. During

the interviews, I privileged the subjects' personal experiences of the transformations happened since the revolution, including the emergence of graffiti, and how they understand it, with particular attention to the language and framing of their narratives in relation to the general political discourse in post-revolution Egypt. In order to invite those people to talk, I asked a few open-ended questions, such as: Can you compare the present situation with that of two years ago? What are the most acute problems you are experiencing today? Through the residents' narratives, I was able to see how people make sense of these socio-cultural changes brought about as a result of the revolutionary movement.

Researcher in the Field:

At the beginning, I faced many challenges as a female researcher. Many people were apprehensive, believing that I was a journalist. Despite the habitual presence of media, foreign correspondents and cameras in this area, people are still not open to foreign elements approaching them. In fact, most people are sick and tired of the presence of television and newspaper reporters. But over time, people became accustomed to my presence; I also felt that being a veiled female student at the American University in Cairo also upgraded my value in some individuals' eyes. Sometimes, this same fact made others suspicious of me, believing I might be a spy since I was studying at AUC. Yet for some people who mostly dealt with AUC community, AUC does not necessarily evoke suspicions of espionage. For those workers who had a good relationship with the AUC community before the campus moved, the institution held positive connotations of a sort of "golden age" they witnessed during its long existence downtown.

Later on, I intended to share my life story and my identity with my interview subjects—who I am, what I am doing in my life, my parental background and my future plans. Indeed, my own subjectivity has affected my own positioning and experience in this field of inquiry.

Sometimes, I shared my own complaints about the difficult conditions we now face that engender insecurity and economic hardship. This sharing process created what I call a process of “normalization,” which helped to dissolve social and psychological barriers. Sharing my family’s non-Cairene origins proved to be important. My father’s family is from *Sharqiya*, a governorate in the east Delta. Since many sellers and workers on *Mohamed Mahmoud Street* are themselves of Upper Egyptian origin, I realized that revealing this part of my identity helped my interview subjects feel they could more easily relate to me. Therefore, the fact that my family’s origin descended from *Sharqiya* was something many people felt comfortable with, due to the popular belief that “*il sa’ida uilad ‘am il shraiwa*” (the Upper Egyptians are the cousins of the eastern Delta people). This virtual sense of kinship was an important factor in my field work. Miller’s analysis of Upper Egyptian regional networks reveals that traditional regional-based communal networks are crossing their original neighborhoods, and in doing so, adopt a new “ethnic twist” (Miller 2006, 376). Due to people’s mobility, the long-standing notion of regional clustering has begun to dissolve. In this context, Miller observes the emergence of “more symbolic networks” that allow people living in changing conditions and to build their own vision of “urban life.” The *Sai’di* (Upper Egyptian) ethos is, thus, a “manifestation of modernity” that draws on strong local cultures absorbing old sub-regional divisions.

Furthermore, the fact that I was engaged also became important as I conducted research in the field, particularly as a female researcher navigating a potentially dangerous area. In recent years, women’s presence in *Tahrir* and the surrounding areas has become questioned, as many voice doubts regarding these women’s morality and chastity. Women are more likely to get harassed and blamed for that harassment, with justifications by some that a respectable woman would not come to such a place. As a female researcher, I was vulnerable to that same mindset.

But being engaged gave me more room to socialize and talk to men without eliciting potential misunderstandings, and while also closing the door to any possible admiration. It was as if my engagement ring made a clear statement of my purpose: I was only here to conduct my thesis field work.

My appearance and the way I dress also became a vital aspect of negotiating my field site. Being a Muslim, veiled, modestly-dressed young woman affected the way many people on *Mohamed Mahmoud* reacted to me. Some could not stifle their surprise that I was an AUC student, and was able to remain modest and even veiled. Others were not reluctant to reveal their true reason of why they opened up to me. For Mousa, *ahwa* waiter, I look truly Egyptian, which made him feel comfortable talking with me; he added that before, he had refused to talk to many people, because they were mostly “spies” that I discuss in chapter five. In another incident, Sherif, the owner of a tiny restaurant that serves sandwiches, warned me against sitting with a specific people on the *ahwa*, because I am a respectable girl and those people are *sheemal* (a word that literally means “left,” but refers to a socially deviant character). Sherif justified his action by saying that I look very respectable, and that is why he cares. He went on to compare me to another girl who was sitting with us, and explained to me that he did not give her the same warning, although they were both residents of the *Imbaba* neighborhood, because she was dressed in a tight outfit. When I wondered at his claim, adding that it is not always right to judge a person by his or her appearance, Sherif told me she comes to the café every day with a different man, and stays there until late at night, “whereas no one sees you after the sunset (*il maghreb*).” I realized then I was being observed as much as I was observing, and my outward appearance and behavior affected my interview subjects’ response to me. This symbolic dominance over public morality significantly affects women’s negotiation of different publics and spaces in Cairo. Niful Gole suggests that “women

function as a pivotal sign/site in the making and representing of public sphere” (Gole 2002, 173). The incident I described above illustrates a social continuity where gender plays a crucial part in the process of controlling and remaking public space, through an emphasis on the iconic roles to be performed by Muslim women. The borders and limits of public space are accordingly ruled by the politics of language, dress codes and spatial practices associated with Islam. Wearing a head scarf and covering the female body are part of the strategies that women employ daily in order to ease their mobility in Cairo’s streets (Cinar 2008, 903).

Contribution:

This research seeks to contribute to the literature of urban studies, and shift the discussion beyond the larger categorical framework of "the Egyptian revolution," in which many of these debates are situated to a specific social space. This case study of the graffiti of *Mohamed Mahmoud* seeks to add to this literature by grounding the debates around art and the Arab Spring in a particular social and historical moment. The space of *Mohamed Mahmoud* represents a micro-society that mirrors the rhythms, events and activities of society at large. This project seeks to explore the effects of the revolution on the space, and how those events impacted people. But this street does not exist in a vacuum. Rather, it is inhabited by people who are important to re-engage in the political discourse. What stories could they tell? What sort of experience do they have? And how does a cultural text like graffiti operate in such a social context?

Thesis Overview:

In chapter two, I lay out my thesis argument along with the literature review and the conceptual frame work on how graffiti is being tackled in this study.

Chapter three explains the many physical and social transformations attached to the space of *Mohamed Mahmoud*. How graffiti practices re-appropriated the space of *Mohamed Mahmoud*? It answers the questions: in what are transformative effects of the revolution have expressed themselves on *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street? This chapter is mainly descriptive, outlining the recent transformations inscribed on the physical features of the street, showing how graffiti played a role in making *Mohamed Mahmoud* an alternative public sphere.

In **chapter four**, I elaborate on the various emergent subjectivities as indications of the social and spatial transformations happened to *Mohamed Mahmoud*. Then, it turns out to tracing the various experiences and the stories told by the residents of *Mohamed Mahmoud* in an attempt to answer the question of how the people experience their street's rapid transformation.

Chapter five investigates how spatial transformations, together with the political transition, are shaping people's understanding of the present. It examines how people's views and narratives on the recent transformations of their space shape their social relationships and sense of belonging and identity. I attempt to transcend a traditional narrative form and allow for a multiplicity of voices and identities.

Chapter six offers my conclusions

Chapter Two: Graffiti as Public Space

Introduction:

Given the omnipresent nature of the revolution, the emergence of graffiti tends to be viewed as a mode of resistance to the state logic of space. This marks a significant process of reclaiming the city space by people's will and desire (Sanders IV 2011) (Fahmi 2009, 2011). "The right to the space" is originally an international movement that struggles against the exclusionary process of globalization and commodification of urban spaces. It was originated with Paris riots in 1968, inspired by the French sociologist Henry Lefebvre who suggested it as a call to break from a cycle of urban poverty. However, in this argument, people are thought of as an absolute term; a unified entity without internal conflicts. By the same token, Alison Brown (2011) argues that "the content of a right to the city remains elusive and its implication fraught with challenges. Critical problems of interpretation remain regarding what rights and for whom and how can they be implemented in apparent opposition to the powerful, global, economic paradigm" (12). The problematic point about such a normative premise is that it assumes a common understanding of concepts coupled with inadequate critique of the political, economic and cultural context of urban growth (ibid).

The intrinsic public enactment of graffiti, in *Mohamed Mahmoud* that tends to provoke a wide range of reactions from different types of street audiences, necessitates the significance of reconsidering the graffiti phenomenon of Egypt outside the theoretical paradigm of urban resistance. First, graffiti painting does not take place without drawing considerable gathering of people. Both the novelty of such practice and the curiosity prompt them to look on until they can see the art completed. During this time, they whisper, comment and debate, conversations which can turn into fierce verbal fights, depending on how offensive the content is perceived to be or how it is interpreted.

Here, graffiti is not only a means of resistance rather ephemerality of graffiti itself, the public performance of it and its high visibility act as an extension for the public space, creating a public sphere for subversion and reflection on the current transition where people can express what they see of uncertainty, deteriorating conditions, disappointment, discontent, fear, fatigue, nostalgia, and distrust. More precisely, the emergence of graffiti practices have introduced a new kind of public, which in turn offers new practices and modes for social relations to be negotiated and for political concerns to be presented and discussed. In a way, these initial graffiti practices during and immediately after the uprisings designated *Mohamed Mahmoud* as an alternative political space, that have actually facilitated the conditions for new forms of political discourse to be expressed in a public context. This is the key for more nuanced understanding of “transformation” of *Mohamed Mahmoud* due to the way revolution and related practices- like graffiti- have converted the space conceptually into a site of participatory politics. These changes fostered new ideas about political subjectivity, which ultimately transforms the relationships residents have with their street and thus their sense of belonging. In order to examine these evolving

social interactions taking place on *Mohamed Mahmoud*, I depends on investigating graffiti as sort of a consumed public space in everyday day life.

Conceptual Framework:

More generally, graffiti and street art are considered a type of urban cultural movement that contributes to an image of the "contested city" (Low 1999, 10). In this regard, I depends on the work, *The Practice of Everyday* (1984) by Michael de Certeau in which he counts cultural phenomenon through examining the praxis of usage or consumption. De Certeau identifies "consumption" as an active process; or more precisely a secondary form of production in which people use urban space, televised images or commodities on their own way (1984: 41). The investigation of everyday life is second-order implied through reflection on language, narrative and reading. These ways are the medium in which people subvert, evade and redefine the dominant culture. Reading, talking, dwelling etc. are all significant modes of consumption deployed by people in their everyday lives.

Assessing the consumption of any representation or image is a key to examine a socio economic advancement or transformation. Both activities of reading and speaking are significant to extend the analyses of everyday practice in redefining and subverting dominant culture by ordinary people. On one hand, reading is a mutable process that transmit power from the writer to the reader, increasing possibilities of moving about (177). On the other hand, the act of speaking offers an array of analysis of everyday ways of acting, thinking and operating. "In the space of language, a society makes more explicit the formal rules of action and the operations that differentiate them" ((xxi)). By that, ordinary language of everyday life defines what de Certeaus calls "historicity" (11).

The analyses can be extended in multiple ways to those who consume graffiti, on *Mohamed Mahmoud* in which they deploy reading and speaking to express their reservations on the current situation in which they would be able to engage with the political and subvert the imposed established order. Initially, graffiti articulates conflicts, as it involves a tension between the assertive claims of graffiti artists and the often unwilling compulsion of some readers who have no choice but to take in the texts that scratch across communal spaces. Such statements can be read not simply as the invasion or vandalism of public space, but as a gesture of appropriation that serves to alienate other users' everyday spaces. Writing graffiti becomes political sites that enact a sort of disruption (Tonkiss 2005; 140). In this sense, people's reading and utterances around graffiti resembles a new sort of subversion towards these imposed images and wall discourses. Therefore, delving into everyday language is instructive, as it constitutes "a reserve of distinctions and connections accumulated by historical experience and stored up in everyday speech" (de Certeau 1984; 13). Similarly, Asef Bayat argues that "public opinions of ordinary people in their day-to-day utterances and practices which are expressed broadly and causally in urban space" convey a collective sentiments and shared feelings that I discuss in chapter four (2009).

Since dissidence is everywhere, coloring all aspects of life since the January 25 Revolution, I depend on Asef Bayat's concept of "street politics" that is concerned with everyday modes of resistance deployed by city subalterns. Street politics denotes "scorn modes of struggles and expressions ... that are more extensive and effective". More precisely, the concept of street politics allows an examination of "the dynamics of free-form activism, to describe the politics of informal people and the dis-enfranchised" (1977, 55&56). The everyday quiet practice by ordinary people tends to make public space even more contentious. In other words, certain forms of street politics allow us to examine people's unique ways of resistance beyond the spectacle of massive protests,

sit-ins, marches etc., through delving into their everyday lives. Despite the outpouring of dissidence, the concept of street politics is still viable, especially with the disbelief of some people in the effectiveness of protests to raise their demands and to be heard, after experiencing a three years troubled transition. Rather, those disenfranchised groups “carry out their activities not as conscious political acts,” but “they are driven by force of necessity — the necessity to survive and live a dignified life” (57). The struggles of these ordinary people are a silent repertoire of individual direct action rather than collective demand-making protest.

I also draw on Farah Ghannam's work, *Remaking the Modern: Space relocation, and the politics of identity in a global Cairo* (2002), in which she examines how modern discourses are articulated in the production of urban space through studying the relocation case of *Bulaq to El-Zawyia el-Hamra*. She makes a compelling argument for how transitions, acts, politics, processes, images and discourses are transformed in a way that hinders or expands our understanding of space as well as sociality. Likewise, I am interested in how discourses on revolution are articulated in the public space of *Mohamed Mahmoud* and people's identities and expressions. Building on Mandana E. Limbert's insights, the arguments in her book *In the Time of Oil: Piety, memory and social life in an Omani town* (2010) open a major field of the social analysis of everyday understanding and the experience of dramatic changes and transformed worlds due to the sudden socio-economic prosperity due to the eruption of oil boom. Limbert has examined the different implications of this major structural transformation on the everyday life of an Omani village, where "almost every aspect of everyday life was affected by this temporal consciousness and the material conditions". She correlates the creation of a new spatial order with patterns of social relations and with the continuous shifting of assumptions of sociality, morality and belongingness, as she cites

accounts of personal social conduct that take place between old frames of reference and their new re-negotiations.

As far graffiti is considered, having a brief glance through its history and practice in modern time is necessary to illuminate many aspects of its development as well as its emergence in Egypt.

Graffiti as a Form of Resistance, Power and Identity:

Graffiti is considered an effective expressive mechanism in political contestations by many social scientists that has shifted the nature of politics and political activism. In disputed areas, graffiti resembles a ubiquitous tool of resistance employed by the powerless, the subaltern and the silenced. For instance, writing on the wall has become a necessity for Palestinians, as other channels of communications are closed to them (Oliver and Steinberg 1990). It has been described as another form of “Palestinian resistance” against the brutality of the Israeli occupation (Peteet 1996, 139).

Similarly, the rise of graffiti in Egypt amid revolutionary context is mostly seen as a prominent and innovative form of resistance. The striking breakthrough of political graffiti in the streets of Cairo has invited different theoretical speculations and trends of analysis. In a sense, graffiti has been conceived in relation to social movements and facilitation of protest (Nicoiara 2014). Discursively, the peculiar humor and aesthetics combined in political graffiti made it an “art of protest.” Meanwhile the transformations of public space through this mode of wall writing have been considered an attempt to reclaim space from the state’s control, while opening the street into a new set of associated spatial uses; photography, visibility of street children and vender, street cafes etc. (Abaza 2011, 2012). The predominance of political graffiti with high concentration in Mohamed Mahmoud denoted graffiti as a dynamic self-expression of public opinion, creating

space of remembrance and subversion (Abaza 2011, 2012). And finally, the frequent and often renewable graffiti murals of Mohamed Mahmoud with every development in the revolution's life history, reflected its high relevance to political current, marked as "public archives" (Nicoarea, 2014).

Before the revolution, the Ultras (hardline groups of soccer fans) were the primary groups to utilize graffiti to claim territory, promote their clubs and oppose the Ministry of Interior, which often detained their members. Still, graffiti is seen as a key attribute of the revolution's "cultural awakening." The deployment of Pharaonic legacy in transcending the revolutionary scene by some artists like Alaa Awad was marked as a strategy of claiming the right to practice graffiti (Abaza 2012). It is claim of righteous ownership to such practice that the ancient Egyptians used to utilize in recording the events of their time. This claim of antiquity acts as a self-justification for artists (Nicoarea 2014), and a disclaimer of being an imported practice.

Graffiti of *Mohamed Mahmoud* is often discursively characterized as an "open-air museum of the revolution and its goals," as it tends to depict revolution's trajectory ("Gutsy graffiti recounts" 2013; Trew 2012; "Defending graffiti of" 2012). Graffiti's rising value and significance is tied to the notion of freedom of expression, whereas its erasure by authorities is seen by most media sources an indication of the lack of democracy and the persistence of a deep state dictatorship. In the news, graffiti became a nationwide concern, as witnessed in the famous incident that occurred in September, 2012, when the whitewashing of graffiti on the walls of Mohamed Mahmoud Street created an overwhelming stir in news and social media channels. This incident resounded so strongly throughout the country that then-Prime Minister Hisham Qandil was compelled to personally negate the regime's responsibility in the matter, and in fact

condemned it. He said the whitewashing "stands against efforts to keep the revolution's memory alive," and called for Egypt's artists to beautify Tahrir Square in an effort to transform it into platform for free expression and a memorial to the martyrs of the 2011 revolution (Reuters 2012).

In the previous incident, one can clearly imply how, "the media, both local and international has outlined the proliferation of this practice," "which furthermore supplied the performers with encouragement" (Nicoarea 2014, 255). On the contrary, Global and Western media's excessive interest in covering and analyzing the emergence of graffiti in many Arab countries as a mode of resistance and means of change has invoked the criticism of some academics, such as Kirsten Schied and Ted Swedenburg. The discourse employed by these Western sources to discuss graffiti was considered as a renewed form of cultural imperialism, these critics argue. A notion like a "cultural awakening" is a source of concern for Schied, who thinks it denies the pre-existence of an Arab cultural field. In particular, Schied criticizes the tone of the Western media, which she argues is a revival of oriental despotism. Meanwhile, Swedenburg accuses the vast majority of media coverage of overestimating the importance of rap and graffiti for the opposition. Most importantly, he thinks that these cultural forms are receiving undue attention from global media due to "its adaptability to an American culture" (Swedenburg 2012). In addition, Swedenburg contends that the social origins of Arab hip-hop culture are not simply "ghetto," like in US; rather, they have not been well studied. Hence, these skeptical perspectives on graffiti and its proliferation in the Arab world with the wave of Arab uprisings is haunted by the idea of what it actually means, and how it fits with Arab national cultures, seeing it as an alien element to the Arab cultural realm.

Yet, the undue interest of international media and the international art market triggers another concern about how these dynamics may or may not affect the practice of graffiti and in which ways. Abaza says that the commercialization and commodification of graffiti of the uprisings is unavoidable (2014). Nancy el-Demrdash argues that these processes of exhibiting graffiti have created a sort of ambivalence; whether is it sort of revolution or “contrived” (2012: 13).

Arguably, most of the studies tackling graffiti in Egypt have utilized the mode of resistance to analyze its unprecedented prevalence. Celebrating this new cultural phenomenon has diverted a good deal of attention toward decoding the visual motifs and exploring its producers. In addition, tackling graffiti as a recent cultural phenomenon was captured by the constant contestation between graffiti practitioners on one side, and the authorities on the other. That has actually reinforced the framework of resistance. At the same time, the spectacular visual aspect of graffiti has resulted in many works documenting its emergence and sprawl as well as major themes underlining its content (Boraie 2012) (Helmi 2013) (Grondahl 2013). All these efforts have illuminated the aspects and dynamics of graffiti production. Nevertheless these attempts focused on the aspects of production, overlooking by that the aspects of circulation to the audience. Thus, graffiti's consumption by viewers which is essential to analyzing street art as a cultural phenomenon- has not been adequately examined. "Despite the fact that the messaging and content of the street art is mostly easily accessible to ordinary viewers, these works seem to be by and for an audience of globalized youth and cosmopolitan urbanites comfortable with irony, and they often include text in English" (Cavalluzzo, 75). This is especially evident in *Mohamed Mahmoud Street* where many people were not able to de-codify the Pharonic paintings by Alaa Awad. Also, the political content of Mohamed Mahmoud graffiti allows a room for an alternative physical public

space of contestations that are important to examine (Ismail 2013). This is essential, because it negates the prevalent perception of graffiti as a mere mode of resistance employed by the marginalized to voice their demands. Instead, the contrasts in people's reactions toward graffiti actually challenge this premise.

Perception of graffiti practices as an effective mode of resistance has a long tradition and resonance in studies of Cairo. Excavating the literature on the city of Cairo is imperative in order to obtain a good understanding of the space and the socio-historical context of *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street. In the following section, I attempt to situate the political, social and economic transformations that preceded the revolution to give context to the special politics within the literature done on the city of Cairo.

Cairo: The Modern, the Global and the Contested City:

This section outlines the different modes of literature that look at the making and transformation of space in the city of Cairo. There is an extensive body of literature from different disciplines that documents and assesses the city's social and physical development, from the era of Arab conquerors to the time of Mubarak's regime (Abu Lughod 1971, Rodenbeck 1999, Raymond 2000). The existing studies tend to insist on a tight correlation between changes in political power and the reconfiguration of space, by which the political visions of different rulers were imprinted on the city's physical and socio-cultural features. Egypt's European encounter and embracement of modernity with the Ottoman ruler Mohamed Ali is a key landmark that inaugurated the instituting of modern practices across all fields, including the military, medicine, press, industrialization, commerce, agriculture and education. This historic transition drastically altered the Egyptians' customs and daily life, shifting the country's gaze towards modernity.

However, the scholarship done on Cairo in the last three decades is more relevant to this discussion. This scholarship was concerned with tracing the implications of market economy-led policies on the livelihood of people and the re-utilization of spaces. The transition to an open market economy under former President Anwar al-Sadat marks the end of the socialist system that shaped Egyptian's socio-economic lives since 1952. The studies focused on globalization and the impact of Egypt's adoption of neoliberal policies on the physical boundaries of the city, and how that in turn impacted people's socialites and identities. Most of this literature is interested in exploring how globalization was enacted locally in narratives, bodies and discourses. It also investigates different modes of resistance to and maneuvers around neoliberal policies that people generated in their daily practices. Generally, the social production of Cairo's urban space was seen either as a direct response to the state's policy, or people's attempts to subvert this power.

Some of the most ambitious studies on Cairo in recent times have been compiled in two volumes: *Cairo Contested* (2009) and *Cairo Cosmopolitan* (2009), co-edited by Diane Singerman and Paul Amar. Their depiction of the city of Cairo is particularly noteworthy, as they and other contributors provide an assessment of how the manifestation and utilization of urban space takes place within a complex interplay of the government's vision, strategy, public discourses and pervasive cosmopolitanism, as well as political and economic processes. The intrusion of global modernity into Egyptian public culture constituted a major dynamic that significantly influenced the perception of space in Cairo. During Sadat's time, the government was aspiring to catch up with the global market, which necessitated the modernization of Cairo by encouraging the establishment of business centers and luxurious hotels signifying the city's engagement in the global spectrum, and indicating its readiness to enter the global economy.

However, governmental policies did not stop at that level. Rather, they also tried to modernize the city's image by renewing its districts. Cairo's inner-city residents, especially those of lower class background, have been viewed as the problem blocking Egypt from moving forward. Ghannam discusses the displacement of the population of the downtown-adjacent *Boulaq* neighborhood, who were discursively characterized as being backward, and how the state attempted to relocate and "civilize" them (Ghannam 2002). Their relocation to state housing was part of an effort to refurbish the area, improve the city's image and utilize it in mega economic projects. However, the state's decision to relocate this community did not take those people's lives and desires in consideration. For most of them, it was a difficult and disastrous change that led to the loss of their economic and social capital.

The way this particular historical moment was recorded also highlights a number of curious moments of silence in media and public culture that virtually erased people's memory of this relocation. Media was overrun with reports of the people's gratefulness to Sadat, and the massive significance of this project in improving their lives and providing a better future. Nevertheless, Ghannam notices during her observations of the re-appropriation of the concept of the "modern," that looking at people's everyday life and use of space reveals how people started to aspire to and internalize the notion of a modern life style that they saw in images and on television. It becomes clear that power, according to Foucault, does not only repress, exclude and censor. It also produces effects at the level of desire and at the level of knowledge (39).

The previous paragraph demonstrates how the city's space and image were contested between the visions of state officials, dominant discourses, desires for modernity and the socio-cultural capacity of ordinary people. Samuli Schielke discusses another case in his ethnography on

mulids (saints' festivals) in Cairo, in which space is contested due to the creation and preservation of a modern imaginary. Examining the different ways these spectacles were policed reveals their relation to the perception of, and motives behind, organizing urban space more generally. He suggests that public *mulids* are perceived negatively because they tarnish the image of the modern city. Therefore, there was an increasingly intense desire on the part of the state to repress *mulids* altogether. More precisely, these practices were also disputed in public discourses that viewed them as backward and superstitious. The importance of this prevalent public culture is in its creation of what Singerman calls "the internal other" (Singerman 2009). In other words, the embedding of modernism in both formal and informal politics played out in the ways urban space was perceived and defined, and sparked a new sort of discriminatory and negative stereotyping of certain demographics based on spatial lines.

A study of the government's neoliberal policies was of considerable interest for many scholars attempting to understand and assess the ongoing complexities that emerged in Egyptian society in recent decades. The implementations of the Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs), in 90s, implemented harsh cuts on public goods and services that led to a qualitative and quantitative shift in governmental performance. In turn, the state started giving up its welfare responsibilities. Meanwhile, the Egyptian economy has become more integrated into global market activities. As a result, new forms of negotiating and contesting social structures have been appearing (Singerman 2009). Neoliberal policies have been criticized for worsening conditions for the poor, and stripping them of their property in an attempt to engage them in the world financial system (Alychar 2009). In addition, it sparked a savage inequality within Egyptian society that was most clearly manifested in the emergence of gated communities (Denis 2006, Kuppinger 2004), exclusive malls (Abaza 2009) and informal housing (Asef and Denis 2000).

Cairo continues to contain co-existing paradoxes; while it is a major globalized city in the region, it is also well-known for being a chaotic, crowded, congested, unmanageable, overpopulated and polluted city. A major collection of studies tried to deepen our understanding of the complex realities that make up this city, aside from the conventional notion of public space. Singerman says, "This meta-narrative of Cairo's chaos is, however, the flip side of a meta-narrative of modernity" (Singerman 2009, 17). Meanwhile, as the state continues to blame the people for the city's deterioration, this new scholarship opened up new possibilities to examine the people's tactics for coping with inefficient governance and the lack of resources. It also accounts for the active and interactive agency of the city's residents. David Sims' ground-breaking work *Understanding Cairo: The logic of a city out of control* (2010) reveals the people's social internal organizational ability to deal with this complex reality. He demonstrates how the uncontrolled development of informalities functions so well.

In a similar manner, Bayat dedicated his book *Life as Politics: How ordinary people change the Middle East* (2009) to what he calls "social non-movement," denoting the unconventional forms of interactive agency and activism in the Middle East. Most importantly, Bayat turns his attention to the politics of the street by focusing on the socio-political features that make the street a political site where contestations between local actors and the authorities occur, and networks are formed among people that can lead to mobilization. The significance of this work lies in its novel conceptualization of "politics" that negates the mainstream concept of the term, as it highlights the particularity of the city as a site of power relations. It also accounts for the complexities of the dynamics of change in the Middle East, at a time when mainstream approaches to Middle East studies depended on liberal Western theories and top-bottom approaches to understanding the social realities of these societies (Game III 2011).

Unlike mainstream studies on Middle Eastern politics and society, all these works seem to have predicted the enthralling blast of the Egyptian revolution, in particular, and the Arab Spring in general. Indeed, this new stream of studies has become a popular lens for interpreting the ongoing uprisings. As many political and economic changes brought about by neoliberalism and globalization have profoundly inscribed socio-cultural practices and public life, the emergence of new classes, cultural practices and spaces (Koning 2009) also resulted in generating new political subjects (Mehrez 2009). Nezar Alsayyad anticipated that these latest changes "demonstrate that there is indeed a project of active citizenship in Cairo and that Cairenes are articulating outside of the traditional institutional arenas, a unique modernity of global transitional current" (Alsayyad 2009, 541). These articulations have arguably intersected in the formation of a new political culture, and spatial manifestations that are beyond "the slogans of traditionalism, religious revivalism and anti-modernity" (Alsayyad 2009, 541). This novel political process demonstrates a new dynamic intersection between the state, the people, the emerging institutions of civil society, the agencies of international development and the forces of the global capital (Alsayyad 2009, 541).

The previous mode of scholarship is still utilized in elucidating the eighteen days of protests and their aftermath (Ghannam 2011, Tripp 2012). However, they still consider the various revolutionary activities as modes of resistance, which is still inadequate for explaining the complex shifting realities and social transformations that *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street has endured since the revolution. This approach depended on the existence of a state that completely dominated socio-political life; since the revolution that is no longer the case, and this adds a complex dimension in comprehending the current situation. In this regard, for instance, graffiti is viewed as a mode of resistance to the state's logic of space that constitutes a significant process of reclaiming urban

space by the people's will and desire (Sanders IV). Here, people are thought of an absolute term—as one, unified entity without internal conflicts. On the contrary, we can no longer discuss the Egyptian street in absolute terms of resistance. These “revolutionary activities” can no longer be understood in the same way that they used to be, as many different political factions now lay claim to the revolution itself. The issue at hand is how to count resistance in a time when it has become the dominant culture.

However, scrutinizing the contending subjectivities that appear in the graffiti painting and in the debates around graffiti live painting is theoretically instructive in illuminating the complex social relations enacted at the place. In the next section, I attempt to layout the body of literature on subjectivities related to the nexus of spatial transformation and socio-political changes.

Space, Transition and Becoming:

Susan Strong argues that “the political use of graffiti takes the surface of the city as a space in which demands might be advanced, identities inscribed and challenges issued” (148). This is strongly evident in the space of *Mohamed Mahmoud* in which using and exchanging new labels after the revolution, such as “protesters,” “revolutionaries,” the “martyrs” that are the opposite of “*feloul*” and “thugs” have become a major social and spatial transformation brought by the revolution, inscribed in the graffiti murals of *Mohamed Mahmoud*, reflecting the change happened in the social lives of ordinary people that in turn have altered their social relations. Other newly coined adjectives constantly flow forth every day. It has become a basis of reference in people's casual chats and conversations on politics. This also goes back to the intense intrusion of politics into the heart of the social lives of many Egyptians after the eruption of the revolution. In the realm of anthropology and postmodern studies, this active identity work is referred to as “subjectivity.”

Of course, a theoretical sense of subjectivity in relation to temporality and spatiality is invaluable in understanding such contexts and relations.

In social and cultural anthropology, subjectivity refers to the “experimental basis” of one's identity due to the change in the context of social transformation (Kleinman, Biehal and Good 2007). Subjectivity primarily denotes a specific cultural and historical consciousness (Ortner 2006). The formation of one's subjectivity is based on his or her experience, which reflects not only social change, but also the subject's intrinsic ability to develop certain practices, negations and contestations with others (Kleinman, Biehal and Good 2007). Emerging subjectivities reveal certain kinds of social and cultural symbols, interactions, re-configurations and re-patterning. At the same time, subjectivity refers to one's ability to re-interpret changing social realities (Kleinman, Biehal and Good 2007). Furthermore, the formation of subjectivity is affected by the configuration of the space in which the subject's experience is shaped. The particular social spaces that people negotiate in their everyday lives are related to inevitably shifting practical activities within those spaces (Kleinman, Biehal and Good 2007). In this sense, the way people negotiate their everyday lives is marked by the strategies that their subjectivities employ. Here, strategies are driven by an array of variables, such as morality, desire, style and so on. Most importantly, engaging with the local social world charges the experience with "moral character," in which people share a common understanding of a certain way of being, whether a national identity or a collective memory of suffering (Kleinman, Biehal and Good 2007). In short, subjectivity is a social product of intertwined processes of constant change in external social structures, and the individual's inner ability to deal with those external factors and reconcile them with his or her own interests and understanding.

Modern Egyptian identity has attracted several researchers from various disciplines—anthropologists, historians, literary critics and political scientists—who produced a wide spectrum of literature. It shows the substantial transformation of societal subjectivities in Egypt due to the interplay of politics, society and spatiality. Egyptian identity has been studied as an outcome of these particular modes of early nationalism, anti-colonialism, modernity, post-colonialism and finally neoliberalism, as well as spectacular cosmopolitanism. There is a body of literature relevant to the interests of this thesis that focuses on redefining the dimensions of modern Egyptian identity through the lens of space in which traversing and consuming public space serves as asset that forges collective sentiments. In *Power of Representation: Publics, peasants and Islam in Egypt* (2008), Michael Gasper attempts to account for the compromising process of identity formation in which the enactment of collective subjectivity coalesced around “urban” and “rural” spatial registers. This development marked a shift in logic, by which Egypt could be defined as a long “physical boundary between city and town” (Gasper 2008). Most importantly, Gasper asserts that new spaces of urban sociability articulated a number of different identities. Similarly, Nancy Reynolds offers a revised history in her work, *A City Consumed; Urban commerce, the Cairo fire and the politics of decolonization in Egypt* (2012), by looking at the decades preceding the great Cairo fire, and analyzing how the lines between foreign and native were inscribed in urban space. Controlling space was an integral tactic in anti-colonial agendas and the formation of national Egyptian identity. Spaces and modes of consumption informally played a significant role in fighting colonization and forming a nationhood through the collaborations of “customers from below.” For Peterson and de Koning, modern spaces and cosmopolitan forms of social capital and transitional consumption created class identities in a time of economic liberalization. Meanwhile, Ghannam shows how the relocation of the people of *Bulaq* to *al-Zawayia al-Hamra* had a major

role in redefining people's identities, and Singerman shows how people's class identification is affected by spatiality in the city of Cairo. In *Urban Space in Contemporary Egyptian Literature: Portraits of Cairo* (2011), Mara Naaman utilizes the urban space of downtown Cairo as an alternative theoretical framework for understanding and mapping "the postcolonial subject," thus addressing the inadequacies in postcolonial scholarship by contextualizing many recent Arab novels in relation to this specific space of downtown Cairo.

But the post-revolutionary environment presents a new challenge. Since the revolution erupted, politics have reverberated through many realms of social life and restructured them, as it has been intensively inserted as a pivotal issue in people's talks and concerns, more than any time before. The rapidly changing social and political landscape has fostered this intense political mode in the everyday lives of Egyptians. The turbulent status of Egyptian politics further heightens people's consciousness and intensifies the process of negotiating identity. Ordinary people, after being left with few choices and a stagnate political autocracy, have gradually found themselves perplexed in the midst of a highly contested atmosphere. All these factors have become essential components in shaping their consciousness and personalities. In addition, these issues of revolution and politics have started to take on various conceptions among people, depending on their own experience. As time goes on and events unfold, many terms that had been taken for granted have shifted in meaning, further complicating the lived experience of this moment. Investigating new emerging subjectivities sheds light on the complex variables that dictate street dynamics, power and social relations. The newly activated subjectivities contest social space in an unprecedented way that requires further investigation, as streets and public spaces still function as key political playgrounds due to the incapability of official institutions to contain this agitated political transition. Examining these identities and their relations with the ongoing socio-political transition

and transformation of space elucidates modes of symbolic violence, social impotence, national contention and new forms of publics.

Conclusion:

Graffiti is a significant embodiment and implication of the predominance of the revolution in the public culture of Egypt, remarking a new sort of contestation that cannot merely be understood as resistance in its true sense. It signifies a contestation over an ongoing troubled socio-political transition taking place within shifting identities and spatial order. Here, the graffiti of *Mohamed Mahmoud* can not only be signified as a text or medium of resistance. Rather, its public practice and visual striking presence turned graffiti into a part of public space in which a street audience on Mohamed Mahmoud, through their deployment of seeing and speaking, develops a new level of subversion for many ambivalences accompanying the current phase.

Chapter Three: The Spatial Transformations of Mohamed Mahmoud

Introduction:

The recurrence of clashes between protesters and security forces, accompanied by rigorous graffiti campaigns, has reworked the logic of space and in *Mohamed Mahmoud*, resulted in unfolding novel spatial uses. These new spatial uses have re-appropriated the street of *Mohamed Mahmoud* into an alternative public space of several peculiar interactions and contestations. This chapter examines these spatial transformations more closely. Whereas the thrilling eruption of the revolution, followed by the emergence of graffiti was considered a victory over the state oppression of regulating public space, the absence of police from the streets after the revolution is equally problematic and has created a peculiar “security vacuum.” In the second part of this chapter, I examine the different implications of the insecurity and violence that have characterized this transitional phase, deeply affecting people’s everyday lives. This analysis is crucial as it shows how the issue of security signifies an indispensable part of the politics of transition. This lack of security is usually attributed to the existence of so-called “thuggery.”

Mohamed Mahmoud: the Site of Graffiti and Revolution

The intensive production of revolution-aligned graffiti has transformed the subjectivity of *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street itself into what Mona Abaza calls, “memorial space” (2012). The city space, here, appears not simply as the background to events in a life, but as an agent of memory and a store of meanings (Benjamin 1986: 16). In this sense, *Mohamed Mahmoud* has become a spatial embodiment of the memory of many bloody confrontation between police forces and armless protesters. During the months of February-March 2012 then September 2012, graffiti turned into an alternative space of fierce political contestations between major political poles; the

revolutionary groupings and the ruling authorities. The graffiti of *Mohamed Mahmoud* was instrumental in highlighting political disputes in the urban space of the city. First it opposed the military. Then, it played a central role in the first presidential elections in demonizing some candidates who are thought to be affiliates of Mubarak's regime. Finally, Muslim Brotherhood did not flee the wall nasty critique, despite their rigorous participation in the January 25 revolution. Opposing the subsequent regimes through graffiti murals of *Mohamed Mahmoud* acted an alternative political platform and media, deployed by revolutionaries and activists. Thus, the novel centrality of *Mohamed Mahmoud* has become this of graffiti among other things; Day of Rage (January 28, 2011) *Mohamed Mahmoud* clashes (November 2011) and Port Said Stadium riots (February 2012). This very subjectivity of *Mohamed Mahmoud* as a spectator to many bloody clashes where people lost their eyes and their lives, has even affected the content of wall writing itself, which mostly reflect this mandate of honoring the spirits of martyrs and assuring the continuity of the revolution. In short, the graffiti of *Mohamed Mahmoud* has become an indispensable spatial feature and visual repertoire of the revolution.

The ephemerality and ongoing production of graffiti in *Mohamed Mahmoud* has turned this space into a "symbolic area of graffiti scene in Cairo" (Nicoarea 2014, 254), attracting the pulse of many observers interested in documenting the cultural aspects of the Egyptian uprising. These different practices denotes the space of *Mohamed Mahmoud* as "heterotopia" (Foucault 1986). Michael Foucault coined the term "heterotopia" to signify the status of spatial otherness for unusual places that operate on their own terms. The presence and ephemerality of graffiti have subjected *Mohamed Mahmoud* to a new set of uses and spatial activities, one of which is photography of the graffiti itself. It has become a trendy practice for many young groups to take pictures against the wall and foreign visitors also photograph the wall as a tribute of the revolution.

Precisely, the ongoing process of quickly repainting the walls has created what Mona Abaza calls, "a large gang of professional bloggers-photographers-journalists-graffiti hunters, whose daily sport is to record the latest graffiti in city" (Abaza 2012).

Another feature of *Mohamed Mahmoud's* heterotopia is the way the wall itself is being regulated. Many artists with whom I have spoken say they are not free to paint anything that does not primarily relate back to martyrs and revolution on the walls of this particular space. This implicit commitment is driven by the deaths of many protesters in this particular area. Martyrs' names and pictures of different incidents are covering the larger share of *Mohamed Mahmoud's* walls. With each new clash, new martyrs appear on *Mohamed Mahmoud's* wall with the name and date of death, a commemoration and reminder of those who have lost their lives for the sake of revolution. In this regard, the content of the walls is mostly weaved around revolutionary collectivity that is evident not only in martyrs' portraits but also the sorts of topic that graffiti provokes. Freedom, social justice, Egyptian media fabrication, anti-sexual harassment campaigns, police brutality, women of the revolution, campaigns against the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces have all been topics that have taken a turn gracing the walls.

The Changed Quality of Visitors:

The transformed space of *Mohamed Mahmoud* has opened the street to new sorts of users. For the most of the permanent residents of *Mohamed Mahmoud*, this is an unpleasant change. According to them, the changing demographic of the street's visitors and the socio-economic characteristics of its consumers is a remarkable transformation. This fact causes a concern for them, because this directly impacts their market liquidity. For Alaa, the era of elite people (*al-nas 'l-nidifa*) has ended, and now it is the time of the riffraff. AUC's move is, of course, a major reason behind this considerable shift. The altered character of *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street was also

emphasized by Said, a waiter in Beano's café, who told me, "Yes, there has been a great transformation happened to this street, turning from an important touristic [site] to a more of local *Shaabi*" (meaning popular, or low class). In most cases, they are referring to those people who live in *ashwayat*.

However, this is not the first time that downtown has experienced such social and demographical transformations. Many scholars have studied these socio-economic and spatial transformations of downtown with deep concern. The years preceding the 1952 revolution are usually described as having a negative impact on the urban fabric of downtown, causing it to lose the elitism and cosmopolitanism of its Belle Époque period (Elkadi and El-Kerdany 2006). In diverse public spheres, we often hear nostalgia for the golden era of downtown, and accusations levied against the Nasser era as the main cause of its deterioration. The elite classes who inhabited downtown during the Belle Époque period gradually left downtown for the suburbs. The change after 1952, the spaces of downtown were opened up for the middle class. In the 1970s, with the open door policy, rich people started to sell and leave their apartments. They were transformed into offices, hotels and shops (Armbrust 2009).

Starting in the 1990s, downtown continued to be "mythologized as one of the last remaining public spheres and a unique space of middle class mixing" (Naaman 2011). Walter Armbrust agrees with Mara Naaman that downtown was re-appropriated from a center for many cultural and intellectual activities to a quasi-bohemian district (Armbrust 2006). Naaman suggests, "the flourishing of a neo-bohemian culture in *Wust el-Balad* [downtown] points to the desire on the behalf of a younger generation of Egyptian to preserve the role of the downtown as a space rich with cultural capital and as an active public sphere" (Naaman 2011). This is strongly evident in the area of *Tahrir* and *Mohamed Mahmoud*, in which the revolution has fostered this

phenomenon of re-appropriating the space of downtown into a social and culture space for younger generations.

In the course of the revolution, *Mohamed Mahmoud* became a virtual headquarters and a social hub for young revolutionaries and artists, who flocked to the area for socializing and leisure. The graffiti murals covering the entrance of *Mohamed Mahmoud* act as significant territory markers for this category of street users. In this sense, graffiti acts as a mechanism of reclaiming communal rights to the street. Kenny Cupers, asserts that certain “unwritten rules within the ephemeral communities of graffiti artists prove that these expressions signify the existence of alternative public spheres [...] for the affirmation of overlapping traces of identity in urban space,” (Cupers 2005, 731). Graffiti, here, is a mere strategy of space where those revolutionaries try not only to keep a memory of revolution and those who died for it alive, but also to keep this area of revolution’s righteous platform ((Tonkiss 2005; 141). “These gestures of purification imagine that boundaries can be secured, separation can be total and real presences can be written over” Tonkiss adds. The graffiti murals usually do not extend beyond of the intersection with *Youssef el-Gendy* Street, with the end of large walls that can contain big murals.

Markaz al-Balad, the bookstore associated with *Al Mahrousa* Press, is another significant place on the street. Located in a shop above the Cilantro café, the bookstore faces the old entrance to the AUC campus, and is frequented by young revolutionaries and activists. The bookstore is an apartment with high windows, in a vintage, European-style building. There is a reception desk and cashier at the entrance. *Markaz al-Balad* has nice corners with sophisticated, exotic oriental interiors beside the bookshelves. The different rooms contain several round tables and chairs. The music is always low in the background. The bookstore is now almost five years old, and hosts many cultural and book signing events besides public lectures. It provides a clean, nicely set space

while still maintaining an Egyptian cultural authenticity. Its affordability makes it a perfect meeting point for many middle and lower-middle class youngsters, activists and foreigners. I usually find many political youth gatherings being held there. Many people who come to this place are not necessarily there to read or buy books; the cool ambiance of the place makes it a great choice for its loyal visitors. It is a place that lies in between the conventional local *ahawi*, and the Italian-style cafes.

Over time all these ongoing processes of space-making — like graffiti, clashes, protesting — have challenged the authority and the state’s grip on the organization of such central public space, which has been almost totally ceded to the people. However, since summer 2011, security has become a central concern and rumors were running wild. Things were said to be and often felt unsafe. Such discourses on lack of security and safety have been given an expression in what is commonly known as “thuggery” (*baltaga*). During the time of my field work, these discourses were still heavily deployed in describing the current state of the area of *Tahrir* and *Mohamed Mahmoud* and I heard many warnings about the threat of “thugs”. ‘Am Nabil (a real estate manager) and Madam Hoda (receptionist at Makraz el-Balad) both fear leaving their children to walk to private lessons unaccompanied because of the lack of security and prevalence of *baltaga*. The aggressiveness of the female parking attendee, *Om Heba* in *Mohamed Mahmoud* is seen as *baltaga* by some car owners. For Mousa, he is in a better situation following the revolution as he got rid of *baltaga* of police. A graffiti mural on Mohamed Mahmoud reads; *el-dakhliyya* (police) *baltagiya*, and *el-suwwar mesh baltagiya* (revolutionaries are not thugs). *Baltaga* and *baltagiya* is thus a crosscutting theme in describing different sets of social interactions. Farah Ghannam finds that people’s perception of the violence and attacks as “*baltaga*” has brought “to the foreground a set of association between the past and present” (February 2012). This correlation, accordingly, shows

how the events of the revolution are related to broader socio-cultural meanings. The subsequent section focuses on the socio-cultural phenomenon of thuggery as practice, history and conception. It describes how thuggery has been contextualized in the current phase since the revolution. Then, I try to trace the conceptualization and evolution of thuggery in different cultural texts and its implications.

“Who are Egypt’s Thugs?”

On Al-Ahram online, Salma Shukrallah wrote an article entitled *Who are Egypt’s Thugs?* (July 2011), investigating how this term has become widely used since the revolution, and delineating the boundaries of its meaning in the context of the transitional post-revolution period, a time in which the differentiations between the criminal and the innocent became blurred and confused. Since the police’s violations of human rights, corruption and brutality were some of the prime reasons that people took to the streets on January 25, their continued presence in social and political life after Mubarak’s fall has been questioned, and their public perception altered. The surrender of the police before the masses of protesters on January 28 2011, remembered as the “Friday of Rage,” left a problematic security vacuum on the streets, even as a huge number of prisoners were released on the same day. People broke the barrier of fear. Life was turned upside down; fear, killing, looting and violence spread like fire. After that day, the police faced a huge predicament in resuming its role, and was not able to restore order. The security institution is no longer feared.

The lack of security is, hence, one of the most notable aspects of this transitional phase in Egypt’s history. Security issues come to the fore of discussion, as they touch on people’s everyday lives; most Egyptians complain of persistent feelings of insecurity and fear, and not being able to navigate the streets freely at any time without worry, as they could before. Cairo, in particular,

used to be known for being awake twenty-four hours; it truly was the city that never sleeps. At the same time, the violence that the streets witnessed during the different clashes has undermined this omnipresent quality of Egyptian streets. All that has altered, and people's mobility and negotiations of the city have become limited and modified, especially in Cairo's downtown where most of the clashes used to take place. Given this extreme importance of security element in people's everyday life, security was set as the priority, among many other, in Morsi's presidential program in which he promised to retain peace in his 100-day program that eventually failed to fulfill. With the increase of violence among the opponents and supporters of presidents Morsi, this issue grew worse, especially after June 30, 2013, when the Armed Forces imposed a curfew after the dispersal of Rabaa sit-in, in August 14. The curfew shrank the day for Egyptians, locking them in their homes in the early hours of the night. Fridays in particular were consumed by protests in the morning until 7 pm, and then consumed by curfew afterwards until 6 am of the next day.

Discussions about the security vacuum and violence typically go hand-in-hand with discussions of the prevalence of what is commonly known as "thuggery" (*baltaga*), and "thugs" (*baltagiya*, single; *baltagy*). Many people have expressed the feeling that thuggery went wild after the revolution. This term has a distinctive history and meaning, rooted in specific actions and practices. Before the January 25 uprising, thugs were deployed in political conflicts. For instance, in the parliamentary elections of 2005 and 2010, a large share of the campaigns' budget went to recruiting thugs (Windfuhr and Steirvorth 2011). Those thugs were typically seasonal workers, often poor and illiterate, living in the slums areas around Cairo. Also, the physical appearance of thug -such as bodily scars of previous injuries, poor looking, is the most visible characterization of social construction of thug-ness. They were cheap and desperate, and typically dressed in plain clothes (Windfuhr and Steirvorth 2011). During the eighteen days of the revolution, Mubarak's

regime was accused of hiring thugs to commit acts of violence against the protesters (Sukrallah July 2011).

Now, however, the term is widely used in a different way, and has almost completely lost its particularity. For Adel Iskander, *baltageya* now gives expression to anonymous and masked actors — “the hidden hands” (May 2011). Yet the confusion in its meaning coincides with the increase in its use. “The sheer negativity of the term in colloquial Egyptian made it a useful instrument to discredit ‘the other’,” Iskander avers. For him, *baltagiya* became what linguistics call a “‘floating signifier’ that does not point to an actual or agreed upon meaning.” (ibid) Since the term itself undermines any other identity as it does not communicate any meaning, it makes “the term most dangerous.” Given the absence of any referential meaning, anyone can accuse his opponents of being *baltagiya*. Now, it is not uncommon for activists or police to be labelled *baltageya* (Al-Ahram Online July 2011). When the Muslim Brotherhood was in power, its leaders called the young people protesting against their rule “thugs” paid by organized groups with possible connections to the leaders of the dismantled National Democratic Party (NDP; the former ruling party from which Mubarak hailed), and businessmen who had strong affiliation to Mubarak’s regime. It is common for mutual accusations of thuggery to be exchanged between main political players (Khanfar December 2012, Al-Ahram Online April 2013, Egypt Independent 2013). However, this was the case prior July 3, as thuggery and violence started to take expression as “terrorism,” and the state is fighting terrorism of *Ikhwan* (Soueif August 2013)

Nonetheless, *baltaga*, in a broader sense, denotes the abuse of power, and is also colored with a sense of coercion, as well as being associated with the absence of the rule of law. At the same time, it resembles a distinctive form of a social contract, and is associated with the sprawling slums where the presence of government and police is poor, or almost nonexistent. People are

willing to submit to this form of power in exchange for security. So here, *baltaga* is a part of the system in which the state and police forces are compelled to build a mutual relationship with thugs to guarantee security and stability, because they become a difficult matter to deal with, perpetuating the structure of state corruption and a lack of professionalism on the part of the police. The famous case of Sabry Nakhnoukh (Tarek August 2012, El-Dabh August 2012), a gang boss from Alexandria, is a key example of how thuggery used to be a part of politics in Egypt, to the extent that someone like Nakhnoukh used to enjoy political protection and power. It is also important to note the hierarchy within the world of thuggery, which is composed of several levels, from big tycoons to low-level personnel, who serve different purposes.

The term *baltageya* was also used to refer to those arrested for stealing or other petty crimes after the revolution. After SCAF issued the “thuggery law” in March 2011, the term has used referring to any third party (*taraf taleet*) aside from the peaceful protesters and the police. When clashes take place, *baltageya* get the blame. This law is applied to anyone who “shows off strength, or that of a third party to threaten or conduct violence against a victim or victim’s spouse or relative with the intention to scare or harm physically or financially, or with the purpose of influencing the victim’s decision or action. A thug is also that who shows off strength, or that of a third party to threaten or conduct violence with the purpose of hindering the application of laws or resisting authorities or disturbing national security, or harming a victim’s peace of mind, or to cause a damage to a property” (qtd. Sukrallah July 2011). The punishment for being accused of thuggery ranges from one year in jail to a death sentence (Sukrallah July 2011). Many human rights advocates criticized this law for being too vague, thus potentially opening the door for the regime to suppress the people’s mobility and activism. Many activists opposed the usage of term *baltagiya* to condemn anyone protesting against the regime; they chanted slogans and raised signs that said,

“revolutionaries are not thugs” (*il suwwar mish baltagiya*). They also worked at challenging the social perception of the urban poor, who are often accused of being *baltagiya* based on their appearance.

These discussions of “thugs” are also borne out of a popular imagination constructed out of media, literature, cinema, press and other materials. It represents a societal phenomenon known in sociology as “social panic,” “suggestibility” and “roamer” (Giddens 1991). Given the wide use of the term *baltagiya* in media, not all people who talk about thuggery are necessarily fully aware of what the term actually implies. Rather, this has become an elusive term that people often use to spread social fear. Over the last decade, Egyptian cinema has been influenced by a new trend of movies that attempted to reflect the growing social inequality in Egyptian society, and show how poverty manifests itself in anti-social criminal communities in the city’s peripheries (Shafik 2007, Tabishat 2012). It reflects the dualism of urban and socio-economic development in Egypt due to the state’s corruption, the failing of neoliberal policies and the polarization of rich and poor (Iskander 2011). The movies directed by Khaled Youssef, one of the best known directors and screen writers working in Egypt today, attempted to represent the phenomena of growing slums and the social lives of their inhabitants in his film, *Haina Maysara* (2006). His movie, however, provoked heated controversy about its credibility. Critics were more concerned with whether his depiction of life in the informal settlements was meant to be a realistic portrayal of the social world of these communities, or an exaggerated reflection of bourgeois fears that continue to rise as these communities gain growing visibility in the cityscape (Shafik 2007). The word *baltageya* has become associated with those who dwell in the *ashwayat* (slums). Given the extremity of social disparities between the classes in Egypt, people have long feared the uprising of those people from *ashwayet*, commonly named “*thawret il giyaa*” (the revolution of the hungry).

That also goes hand in hand with Segel's work, *The New Criminal Being* (1998), in which he accounts for new emerging types of criminality and justifications for killing during Suharto's time in Indonesia, nurtured by unfounded fears and irrational suggestibility circulated in national newspapers. The study documents an acute social transformation in the transitional period after Indonesian independence from the Dutch, where the identification of a criminal being normalized mass killing among Indonesians with the justification of fighting "imaginary enemies." It also underlines a "time when the division between the classes has become increasingly marked by disparities in material conditions, while the explicit definition of those who have and those who have not are suppressed" (Segel 1998, 4). Likewise, "the greatest danger posed by *baltageya* is not that they instill a state of uncertainty, fear and paranoia,' rather "they create a culture of fear" (Iskander May 2011).

Conclusion:

The iteration of a renewed graffiti scene in *Mohamed Mahmoud*, with each major turn in the post-revolution transition has increasingly turned the area into an alternative public space that invites a range of different novel spatial uses, interactions and appropriations. Graffiti is effectively deployed as a spatial marker by younger generations, activists and graffiti amateurs to assert themselves and extend their audience, turning it into a major social hub for them. Yet the absence of police and lack of security from the area of Tahrir and *Mohamed Mahmoud* is a distinguishing feature of these times. In turn, the prevalence and usage of the term "baltaga" to signify a wide range of different social interactions, define a curious socio-cultural appropriation for violence. While insecurity resembles a major issue in people's everyday life and their experience in the streets of Cairo after the Revolution, still security issues hold strong political implications.

Chapter Four; Emergent Subjectivities and Mohamed Mahmoud Space as a Lived Experience

Introduction:

The intensive utilization of public spaces in political mobilization since the January 25 revolution has been an integral process in the formation of several entities, remarkably “the revolutionaries” in which the memory of participation in several protests, marches and clashes has created an internal rapport and a group solidarity. Hence, the emergence of revolutionaries has been an indication of the major social and spatial transformations taking place since the revolution. Similarly, the unfolding set of several other subjectivities — like; *feloul*, *dakhliya* (police entity), *askar* (referring to the military — that keep emerging in a revolutionary context uncover the many

social and spatial changes that are explicitly inscribed in the current political contention and the graffiti murals of *Mohamed Mahmoud*.

In this chapter, I attempt to tackle each one of these subjectivities in detail in relation to the experience of the residents of *Mohamed Mahmoud* who make up “graffiti’s unintended audience.” In addition, this chapter delves into the narratives of the people on *Mohamed Mahmoud* to illuminate their experiences and sentiments toward the many transformations that have happened to the street. Their narratives denote *Mohamed Mahmoud* as a “lived space”, showing the value attached to social spaces by their residents (Low 2003). The way the people of *Mohamed Mahmoud* talked about their situation and about the street, I shall argue, implies what Michelle de Certeau calls “ a socio-economic space organized by immemorial struggles”, in which “this type of ordinary language deployed in the everyday life is a chance to recognize infamous struggles” (1986; 17). That, in turn, provides a parallel reality different from the popular imagination of *Mohamed Mahmoud* as a revolution’s battlefield and an open-air graffiti exhibition.

25 January Revolution; the Revolutionaries and the Others:

“Youth Revolution” is another synonym for the 25 January uprising as it was driven by a handful of non-ideologically affiliated youth and political activists. The relative suddenness of the revolution, its leaderless quality and its thrilling success in toppling a long-persistent regime have given the revolution irreversible authority in appropriating public discourse and dominating the public culture in multiple ways. Prior to the January 25 revolution, public protest was rare and the culture of activism was limited to specific groups of social and youth movements such as opposition movements like *Kefaya*, which had emerged in the space of last six years of Mubarak’s regime. With the revolution, these groups have enjoyed an enlarged space in the political sphere of Egypt. In fact, both the revolution and the revolutionaries have assumed power, authority and

legitimacy in the public space and culture of Egypt. This is still viable even if the revolution is deemed a failure, on the level of official politics, with the resurgence of military and the Muslim Brotherhood's short-lived rise to power.

The group of people who first called for and joined the protest are believed to be well-educated middle class youth who are skillful Internet users. Some of them have been active in the public life. Others have not necessarily participated in any political protests before, or been a member of any political parties/groups. More precisely, the 25 January revolution has been a significant rupture and turning point in doing and thinking of politics in Egypt. Some of those different activists have counted as equally significant political actors, performing through alternative channels and platforms of public space and social media. International and local media have shown immense interest that has further accentuated these emerging groups and individuals, namely known as "revolutionaries" (*suwwaar*). The unfolding events and subsequent *Tahrir* gatherings together with the visual images, songs and posters of protest have created an affective repertoire, associated with the Egyptian revolution and neo-patriotic sentiment, bringing about a new sort of adherence to this formation of national practice and belonging. The physical space of protests and virtual blogging on the revolution have created new sociality for this enthusiastic group of protesters, turning the revolution into a political and social entity in itself (AlSayed & Guvenc 2013).

It is difficult to lay out a precise description of who constitutes a revolutionary. Generally speaking, revolutionaries are a wide spectrum of people who affiliate themselves with January 25, 2011, either due to their personal participation in the continuous 18 days of protest or their full-hearted alignment with the initial revolutionary ideals. The thrilling events of the revolution have signaled a remarkable shift in the political realm, in which the revolution has formed a dominant

public culture, coloring all aspects of life. On the level of high politics, the fact that it was a leaderless revolution has contributed to its appeal to many political factions and social groupings, which have tried to develop various claims to it. Adhering and being associated with the January 25 revolution infuses legitimacy and credibility. In other words, the revolution has (re)produced several and diverse subjectivities to which they genuinely belong to, added at and resulted from. On the contrary, adhering to the revolution was for some — like former Mubarak supporters, public figures and different senior political actors — a pragmatic utilization to guarantee an inclusion in a new post-Mubarak Egypt. The revolution has been characterized by political and psychological power due to its purity in comparison to notorious autocratic regime of Mubarak. Even the army's removal of Morsi on July 3, 2013 was framed as being a move to put revolution back on track (Adly, March 2014).

However, many people who I met in *Mohamed Mahmoud* who identify themselves as revolutionaries have been motivated by their subjective experiences of injustice, societal violence and marginalization in pre-revolution. Belonging to this new cause and realm has been a process of self-actualization for many of them who believe in its mission and hope to materialize its ideals. It is not necessary that all of them are on a high level of political awareness and intellectuality, but they have been motivated by several reasons and ends, depending on what they have been living through. Mousa's participation in the revolution and many subsequent incidents was a part of his retaliation against the mistreatment, harassment and unfairness he experienced at the hands of police, which led to his imprisonment for a year and a half. "After the revolution, I feel alive again," Mousa asserts, "before life felt black, now I am relieved, now no one of them (police) dare to touch me." Similarly, Sarah, a graduate student at the Helwan University history department who is a passionate politically-oriented revolutionary veteran, is partially motivated by two

reasons. First, she has been actively interested in politics and fully engaged in political gatherings and protests because she has a strong belief in the revolution for justice to prevail. Second, she herself has experienced injustice when the faculty of her former university denied her the right to be assigned as academic staff, though she was with the highest GPA, because of what she says was corruption and nepotism. Yet other stories suggest the revolution offered the opportunity for those who wanted to exert themselves in a meaningful action they found missing in their lives. This can be seen in the cases of Tuta and Om Wael. Tuta is a street peddler and semi-homeless, she camps around the area of Mohamed Mahmoud and the square. She is well known and has a close relationship with the graffiti artists, street children, and some revolutionaries. She sees her participation as a holy duty. Om Wael (an informal alias) is neither married nor has any children, but she is concerned with the revolution regarding enhancing the lives of her nieces. Also, the revolution has opened up different possibilities and venues for many disenchanting high school students who want to exert themselves in something meaningful. *Mohamed Mahmoud* and downtown in this regard have become an important meeting point to foster their relation to this new doctrine and to develop their consciousness. In short, to a great extent the revolution has opened new possibilities and alternatives for socialities for many people.

The rise of graffitists with the revolution depicts another significant manifestation of a revolutionary being. The graffiti of *Mohamed Mahmoud* in particular resembles an activism closely associated with the revolution. The textuality of graffiti itself is a significant representation of other subjectivities enacted in the space of *Mohamed Mahmoud* itself. Martyrs of the revolution, who are often the subject matter of graffiti murals on *Mohamed Mahmoud*, are another subjectivity associated with the revolution. They are considered the absent heroes who gave a considerable push and incentive for the protest in the beginning to continue until they successfully unseated an

entrenched president and deconstructed his mystical political power (Armbrust 2012). The immediate viral dissemination online of the faces of young people killed by the police in excessive use of violence agitated an affective sympathy with the revolution across wide strata (Halverson April 2013). The dissemination of young people killed during peaceful protest has been a strong condemnation for Mubarak's regime. The January 25 was, at its inception, a protest to condemn police corruption and brutality as symbolized by the killing of Khaled Said in Alexandria in 2010. The picture of his brutally smashed face following police arrest and interrogation sparked massive public outcry. His photos are still present as major images of the revolution's iconic martyrs. In this sense, "martyrs represent symbolic capital away of assigning blame, affirming narrative and unifying people" (Gibbon, January 2014). This issue of martyrdom is very central to the revolution-related practices; slogans, wall writing and even demands. By painting the pictures and names of martyrs on the walls of Mohamed Mahmoud, graffiti has contributed to the creation of revolutionary popular icons (Nicoarea 2012).

Even after the removal of Mubarak from office, the record of martyrs went on and on, with more deaths in various violent incidents. The losses increased solidarity surrounding the revolution, and many have attempted to capitalize on the cause of "returning the rights of martyrs" as a rallying cry for their agendas, including political aspirants not necessarily associated with the revolution who want to increase their mass appeal. It illustrates the various ways in which martyrs have been used by political groups and the state to reconstruct events in the popular imagination as part of the contestation over power (Gibbon, January 2014). Like any thing else during this time, the martyrs get categorized as *Ikhwani* and non-*Ikhwani* martyrs, causing a contestations over the eligibility of martyrdom.

As the public space of *Tahrir* and *Mohamed Mahmoud* have been central to the manifestation of the revolutionary being, the physical confrontations, protest, graffiti and clashes have been equally significant in inverting a state of otherness. Here, I do not suggest the initial meaning of otherness that a term might evoke. Instead, otherness, in this case, refers to a different set of binaries in which both sides drive their meanings from the reflection of each other, without suggesting a hierarchal categorization. These other emergent subjectivities are indispensable counter partners in the current socio-political contestation.

Police, or *dakhlyyia*, as it is referred to in Arabic, constitutes a major part of the current dispute. *Dakhlyyia* in this case means both the police as an institution and individuals. The fact that much of the anger displayed by the protesters during the revolution was originally directed against the police force and its oppressive practices and corruption, makes police a conspicuous rival to both the revolution and revolutionaries. In other words, *dakhlyyia* is a resemblance of state oppression and autocracy. When a group of people started to organize a protest on Facebook they chose national Police Day (January 25) for its symbolism. Police practices of coercion and corruption have subjected Egyptians to humiliation and oppression (Ismail 2006). On the walls of *Mohamed Mahmoud*, the resentment against police is obviously depicted as one of major themes of revolution. ACAB — All Cops Are Bastards — is a prevalent wall slogan. Other police items like soldiers foot wear forms a remarkable art objects on the walls, remarking on the violent treatment of protesters. Reforming the police institution was, thus, one of the primary demands of the revolution that is still overlooked by subsequent rulers. The position, authority and budget of security forces are still precarious, as political leaders have not made it a priority since the revolution. Police presence, as mentioned earlier, is nearly non-existent in the area surrounding *Mohamed Mahmoud*, especially around the part that is connected with the square, resembling a

noteworthy transformation brought by the intensive enactment of the post-revolution contestations and the predominance of the revolution on the place, re-appropriating it as form of state-free zone.

Despite the widespread will to remove Mubarak's deteriorating regime, Egyptians failed to reach a consensus, defining several precarious mode of ruptures. Unlike revolutionaries, the label *feloul* was employed not only to refer to the remnants of Mubarak's regime in a strict sense, but was also expanded to include anyone who did not fully agree with the revolutionaries, and anyone who was either nostalgic for or supportive of the Mubarak regime. On the same line of giving up on the revolution, a new label was defined, *hezb el kanabaa* (couch party) to signify the passive and silent majority who follow the clashes from their TV screens, designating the revolutionaries/activists as a minority. This silent majority is not fundamentally anti-revolution but they are not accustomed to the idea of mass protests unless they are not directly hurt. Instead, Asef Bayat's "quiet encroachment" of the ordinary people seems relevant as it signifies peculiar ways of resistance related to and inserted in their everyday life. Their mode of resistance is not ideological in nature, and is not concerned with undermining political authority. Instead, their activities are driven by the necessity to survive and live a dignified life. Those ordinary people's activism is not confined to the conventional models of resistance of protests and strikes. However, during the protests of June 30, Egypt has witnessed a new turn in public protest that for some was equally as thrilling as the January 25, 2011 uprising. The multitude of protest had noticeably extended. More people, families, elders and women ventured into places around Cairo, estimated at 14 million. Noteworthy, people hold signs and posters reads, "*ihna hezb el kanabaa*" (here is the couch part).

Most of the graffitists who I met at *Mohamed Mahmoud* belong to the Artists of the Revolution Association that was formed during the initial uprising of January 25, while others are

independent. However, the increasing public and media interest in graffiti has phenomenally impacted the practice that has been extending in remarkable ways. This dynamic has affected both the way graffiti is being performed and practiced on *Mohamed Mahmoud* (Abaza October 2014). Abaza states, “Some of the painters looked like they were performing to be photographed by media.” This fact creates a contestation among graffitiists about the vanguards of graffiti who started this practice during the dangerous incidents of November 2011 and those who came afterward (ibid). I personally witnessed this internal contestation, on September 19, 2012, when municipalities erased graffiti under Morsi’s regime. More skillful artists were annoyed by the meddlesome people who were painting with them, perhaps in order to gain visibility and media attention. By the time of my field work in June 2013, the graffiti production had remarkably slowed down, as everything had been on the street. Media presence had diminished. Witnessing a live graffiti painting was rare, only watched by a street audience, and then photographed later by curious passersby or graffiti bloggers. The area of *Tahrir* has been deemed to have a minor role in the ongoing political dispute between the Muslim Brotherhood, and multiple oppositions, as protests moved to the *Ettehadia* presidential palace in Heliopolis, where the hardcore events were taking place.

This fact has negatively affected the overall situation in *Tahrir*. Many people felt that *Tahrir* had gotten mangled (*baaz*), talking about the predominance of thugs and criminal activity such as drug dealing, looting and mugging. The dominance of street vendors and peddlers over the plaza and Tala’t Harb Street were seen as thuggery. Here, thuggery (*baltaga*) and thug (*baltagy*) has become a renewed and reconstituted political subject. *Baltagy* is someone who uses violence and force to impose his own will on others (Ghannam, February 2012). As mentioned in chapter three, this predominance of the issue of thuggery has been an expression of the absence of security,

and prevalence of violence, in the streets. At the same time, the illusory concept has lost its particularity as many try to appropriate the term to vilify their opponents or unidentified groups of protesters.

The permanent residents and shop owners of *Mohamed Mahmoud* make up the city subaltern, who, by virtue of their situation, are at the heart of the events. The immense interest developed toward revolutionaries has silenced them in mainstream narration on the revolution. Those permanent residents differ from the iconic image of the young, defiant protester in Tahrir and *Mohamed Mahmoud*. This brings up a significant question; how those residents of *Mohamed Mahmoud* have experienced this transitional phase characterized with unprecedented violence, much of which they witnessed on their street? Those people mostly had a negative experience and memories with the revolution. Some blame protesters for disturbing their access to work, threatening their safety and destabilizing the country, describing them as trouble-makers. In fact, the revolution has negatively affected their area and their economic wellbeing. These latest transformations have had several ramifications on the spatial aspects and the everyday life in the street.

Negligence and Lack of Security:

In interviews with the street's older residents, the years after 2011 are remembered as negative and devastating times. Likewise, 'Am Sherif, the owner of a mechanic workshop next to Cilantro coffee shop, recalls "after the [2011] revolution, it has not been a revolution. Everyone who participates wants to plunder, even the small candy kiosks were looted." He objects to this idealistic picture of *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street, arguing that the clashes that occurred there post-2011 were not fighting for revolutionary goals, but were chaos created for theft and other crimes. The latest major events this street bore witness to in the aftermath of popular protests that gave it

its revolutionary character seem to be disapproved by its most permanent residents, who have had traumatic experiences of devastation, fear, isolation and the destruction of their livelihoods. People's experiences are closely related to the changeability of their economic capital. The transformation of *Mohamed Mahmoud* has had a devastating effect on almost all the local shops and businesses, whether due to the clashes, the lack of security or walls that have been erected by security forces.

The violent acts witnessed on Mohamed Mahmoud Street are still traced on its features. Maybe I feel this particularly strongly because I spent nearly two years there as a student in my first days at AUC, before the campus moved to *Kattameya* (New Cairo) in September, 2008. Today, when you first arrive to this street, you might feel that it is in ruins because of the lingering damage from fires, cracked windows, torn-up sidewalks and the lack of street lamps at night. The street's landmarks have drastically changed due to the latest developments. AUC has erected a gigantic iron gate to guard its main campus building, and heightened its walls in order to deter potential protesters or looters. The *Lycée* School has blocked its windows and entrance gate with bricks because of the frequent looting incidents the school endured during the clashes. Most of the schools in this area have transformed their entrances, to be behind the cement walls on *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street, only accessed via *Qasr al-'Aini* Street. The clashes left deep scars and signs of fires on the historic buildings that downtown is most famous for due to its mesmerizing architecture. In addition, many stores and restaurants on the street were forced to shut down, such as Pottery Café, the Kanary restaurant, Bon Appetite and Al Kady stationary store due to the heavy losses they incurred. Others coped with the situation by adjusting their working hours, such as Cilantro café, which now only stays open until 7 pm, working for one shift only.

As a response to these clashes, the Ministry of Interior erected many thick cement walls to protect its surroundings from more violations. These walls have blocked four streets that intersect with *Mohamed Mahmoud: Nubar, Abdel Magied al-Ramly, Mansour, Falaki* and *Youssef al-Gendy* streets, imposing a real sense of isolation. Furthermore, the entrances to *Sheikh Rihan Street* and *Qasr al-‘Aini Street*, avenues that run parallel to *Mohamed Mahmoud*, are totally cordoned off. These barriers have been one of the main struggles for the area’s permanent residents, workers and commuters, drastically changing their daily routines. And for the workers and the shop owners of *Mohamed Mahmoud*, these walls have decreased foot traffic in the area, and consequently their market activities have dramatically declined. Commuters to the street, especially those who come to complete documents and official papers at governmental institutions, are forced to take long detours, and usually must travel by foot because of these walls—it has become harder and harder to complete governmental procedures in this area. Alaa, the owner of a mobile accessories kiosk near *Falaki Street*, explained the effect the barriers have had on the street: “These walls have been clogging life and tantalizing people, forcing them to go around from *Abdel Aziz Gawish*, instead of *Falaki* directly. The stores themselves have been affected by these walls. This grocery shop used to deliver to four buildings behind this cement wall.”



Figure 2: blocked streets being utilized as parking areas

At the same time, some people have negotiated the walls by creating a new function for the blocked streets: perfectly situated parking lots. Cars now park along the entire breadth of the blocked streets. This new transformation pleases people who suffer from the lack of available parking. And it is a surplus value for the *souays* (*sais*, singular; those individuals who help people park their cars). They are considered some of the main protagonists in this vital space, especially in the *Bab al-Luq* area at the end of *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street. This sort of job represents a form of informal, invisible employment. These self-employed parking attendants show a high degree of organization in marking their territories, deciding among themselves which area is the responsibility of whom, and in coordinating their working hours. Moreover, they succeeded in

positioning themselves as an imperative necessity, especially in the context of downtown, where finding parking has been always an ordeal.

Prior to the revolution, parking attendants merely helped drivers find parking, but after the revolution, given the utter absence of police, these individuals have taken on a new sort of authority in ordering public space. Initially, the streets were owned by the public and subjected to the authority of the state, which grants all people equal access to them. But today, the *souays*' fees — which typically amount to LE5 or LE10 — have become an obligatory payment for anyone parking his or her car in such places. It is an obligation, regardless you want to pay the fee or not, and whether you need that individual's services or not. For some people on the street, this action itself is a sort of thuggery; the car attendants act as if they own this space, bestow the right to use it on others, and at times intimidate people into paying them. I recall an incident when a taxi had to wait me for five minutes. When we were about to move, one of these informal attendants popped up in front of the car, asking for money; when the taxi driver refused, the man told him with disapproval that this was his area and the driver stopped there, so he had to pay, literally saying “we are making living” (*ihna bnaakul 'ish*), in a way that gave me the feeling that he owned the street. The taxi driver was outraged and refused to pay, not because he was committed to the idea of the street as a free and public space, but rather because he felt the attendant was trying to impersonate authority when he claimed “I am paying the government.”

However, for some people on *Mohamed Mahmoud* this profession does not evoke “thuggery.” Rather, it is another way to earn one's daily bread (*biyaklo 'aish*). The *souyas* often enjoy a good and mutually beneficial relationship with the permanent residents in the street, especially the workers and the shop owners, as they do not charge them for parking their cars. For Bayat, these spatial outlawed practices are “natural and moral responses to the urgency of survival

and the desire for a dignified life, however, defined” (62). This notion of the necessity of maintaining the living bread underlines “the poor people’s sense of justice” in which “the poor often justify their act of transgression.”

Most of the stores on *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street no longer seem economically viable, but persist somehow on the street like the living dead. The shop owners are all aware of this fact, attributing their difficulties to the revolution, but also to AUC’s historic move out of downtown in 2008, which contributed to the area’s economic decline. Ahmed, the co-owner of a kiosk with his brother near the intersection of *Mohamed Mahmoud* and *Falaki* Street, told me that “this street has been killed twice, once when AUC left and the second with the revolution.” Similarly, Haytham, the owner of the print station and stationary store that faces the old AUC campus, estimates that his profits declined by 70 percent after AUC moved, and then declined by an additional 20 percent in the aftermath of the revolution. In addition, his store’s marble façade had been torn down and vandalized during clashes on the street. He was forced to close his store for nearly a year and half in total over the past three years.

However, the degree of the impact of AUC’s move varies according to the nature of the service itself. ‘Am Sayed, the newspaper seller near MacDonalD’s, says he wasn’t affected by the loss of AUC, but only by the revolution. Am Sayed claims to have been working selling newspapers for forty years, since he was ten years old, and he said what happened to his business after the revolution was akin to someone building a house and seeing it suddenly destroyed. Am Sayed is known as one of the few newspapers sellers downtown who offers foreign publications and other hard to find items.

Everyone on *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street complains about the turbulent political situation and pervasive economic slump that has been inscribed so deeply on their street, to the extent that they are starting to joke about it in an attempt to trivialize its severity. The permanent residents of *Mohamed Mahmoud* believe that their street was hit the hardest during and after the revolution. Due to the huge number of martyrs who died during the clashes in the past three years on *Mohamed Mahmoud*, some have dubbed this street “the eyes of freedom”; but the workers and the owners of the small business on this street have jokingly given it a different name, one that reflects their distinct experience: *shari’ aumima lil ‘l’mal ‘Inaima halian, Mohamed Mahmud saabiqa*n (Now Omima’s street of sleeping businesses, previously *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street). They gave the street this comic name to make fun of the economic depression, which of course is a part of the general economic deterioration currently experienced across the country. Egypt’s economic performance wasn’t exactly flourishing before the revolution. Neoliberal state policies caused a high inflation rate, an accumulation of wealth in a small segment of society and economic dispossession (Alychtar 2009). But economic deterioration has recently escalated due to the ongoing political contestations and lack of security. During this time, the country had faced an unprecedented severe shortage of fuels, frequent electricity cuts, blocked roads and other infrastructural problems. These factors have an intensely felt impact on the daily lives of most Egyptians.

Due to the strategic significance and centrality of *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street, prior to the revolution it was a highly organized and well-ordered street. And despite the downtown area’s economic decline, for a while, even before January 2011, Mohamed Mahmoud was a popular night life location for different social groups (Armbrust 2006). After the revolution, however, the street was entirely neglected. There was an absolute absence of police, especially in the area stretching

from *Tahrir* Square to *Nubar* Street; it was terrifying. Many informants mentioned to me that two weeks before I began my field work, people set fire to a police car and the officer was burned to death in front of the MacDonald's facing the old AUC campus.

However, police forces have recently returned to the area after Armed Forces commander-in-chief Colonel General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi called on the people to support the interim government in its fight against so-called "terrorism", on July 14, 2013. Police started to fill the streets again, and to organize the flow of traffic in *Tahrir*. But the longstanding absence of security had a significant impact on the street, making the area chaotic and vulnerable to acts of thuggery. Breaking the rules of traffic has almost become banal. You can find cars parked anywhere around the main square, whether the area is designated as a parking lot or not. There are also still lingering sentiments of insecurity that make people fear this place. Mugging by motorbikes has become such a prevalent phenomenon, people on this street are used to it. Drive-by robberies are a convenient form of thievery, allowing the robber to surprise the victim and make a fast and easy escape. These robbers typically snatch mobile phones or bags or purses as they drive by on their motorcycles, usually targeting women. These incidents provide a dark counter-narrative to the heroic tale of the *Mohamed Mahmoud* clashes, when those riding on motorbikes were praised in the media as life savers. But some witnesses say those who were carrying the injured to safety on their motor bikes were also robbing them, and pretending the victims had lost their possessions in the clashes.

This lack of security has strained women's accessibility to this public space even further, although this space is meant to be open to all people from all walks of life. Women are discouraged from frequenting this area, especially late at night. After the second anniversary of the revolution, on January 25, 2013, several brutal sexual harassment cases and public rapes were reported. These incidents appeared to be organized, and were characterized by an unprecedented level of violence.

During this time, harassment has moved from being a societal problem to a political technique that deters female activists and protesters from participating in public gatherings and demonstrations. But even with this knowledge, for the general public this area has turned into a frightening place to be avoided, a hub for thugs, criminal acts, drug dealing, robbery and organized muggings. This new reality has tarnished the image of the square of the revolution, making it gloomy and terrifying.

For me, this issue of sexual harassment in our streets was real, but I thought it was a bit exaggerated in the media. However, over the few days I spent on each corner of *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street, I could assert that everything reported about harassment was true. According to a recent report published by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 99.3 percent of Egyptian women have experienced some form of sexual harassment (June 2013). As a woman occupying local spaces, I feel I am a weak actor who must adjust her actions and dress to be able to safely negotiate such areas (Ilahy 2009). Women feel they must be cautious and guard against multiple sources of danger that hover around them when they ventures into public (Ghannam 2002). Women are forced into a defensive position all the time against attackers and harassers. Surprisingly, this is not what usually I feel when I enter other sorts of local spaces, such as large malls where females are highly secured, and where space is considered to be a very important element in shaping consumers' experience (de Koning 2009). In this hybrid private-public arena, space is more censored, organized, and disciplined to guarantee equal access to both genders. Similarly, it was safer for me to sit in cosmopolitan spaces on *Mohamed Mahmoud* like Cilantro and Beano's, rather than local spaces such as *ahawi*. I was warned by many informants not to stay too late in this street; Am Reda, one of the parking attendants, was always advising me not to stroll around the area because "the situation is worrying" (*l gaw alaa*), and to

go to the AUC campus, which would be safer for me. However, these precautions are not all new. The questioning of women's right to exist in the Tahrir area might be a new phenomenon, but the issue of women's mobility in public space in Cairo highlights Egyptian society's dominant pattern of gender relations, in which "men occupy public space" (Armbrust 2006, 420).

The disturbance of the flow of traffic due to the absence of police has introduced another problem to the area. Drivers do not adhere to the one-way flow of traffic, and streets suddenly have traffic going in both directions. These traffic problems have directly affected many people and businesses on *Mohamed Mahmoud*, such as mechanic workshops, for which access to the street is essential to their business. Mahmoud, who works as a mechanic apprentice under *Abdel Maged al-Ramly*, affirms that "this traffic disorder does not allow us to work in peace, as the cars we work on often get hit." This disturbance in traffic also causes many incidents during the day and impedes the movement of pedestrians. The lack of order leads to extreme traffic congestion, especially around the intersection of Nubar Street, during all days of the week except Fridays and Saturdays, and is at its worst in the hours from 1 pm to 3 or 4 pm. People also ignore laws that designate non-parking areas, leaving their cars in these prohibited spaces without any fear of getting fines or detentions. "There wasn't anyone that dared to park his car in Tahrir Square!" a taxi driver commented with much grief as he reflected on Mubarak's days as compared to the miserable conditions that now plague the area, particularly with the proliferation of street vendors.

Messiness is another notable sign of the negligence that has plagued *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street and the whole downtown area. The smell of sewage and garbage adds to the ambience. In recent years, Cairo has suffered from a lack of infrastructure to handle sanitation and garbage disposal; however, it is considered new for *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street to experience such dirt, due to its importance and centrality. The people on the street complain about the problem, comparing

the recent past with present conditions. ‘Am Yassin, one of the *souays* who works near *Youssef al-Gendy* Street, recalls, “this street used to be very clean, to the extent that it was being sprinkled with water twice a day.” Garbage is piling up, forming hills of waste in some corners along the street. *Mohamed Mahmoud* is a very suffocating place in summer with the heavy traffic and heat of the sun, making it difficult, even unpleasant, to walk through the street. Pollution is heavy, with the exception of the AUC campus, which is like an oasis in an arid desert. It is clean and its buildings are well preserved, adorned with symmetrical alleys of greenery that make one feel good. However, these dreadful physical conditions are most intensely felt by people who sit at the local coffee shops that are open to the street. There, one can feel the street dust and heat from the sun, and feel crowded by the people walking by and distracted by the cacophonous ambient noise. On the contrary, the Italian cafés and international fast-food chains outlets whose crystal-clear glass storefronts, highly decorative interiors and air-conditioned atmosphere are capable of separating the customer completely from these outdoor conditions, as if they did not exist (Abaza 2001).

Fear, Worries and a State of Preparedness :

If *Mohamed Mahmoud* has become a pillar physiognomy of the Egyptian revolution, for its people, the revolution has been a major cause of escalating misery. The frequency of violent and fatal clashes on this street that resulted in acute property damages, created a feeling of an attached sentiment of fear, and a status of preparedness before any possible gathering or protest. People have not been reluctant in expressing their anger and discontent. However, it is not simply that they are either with or against Morsi’s rule. Rather, they are not sure what the consequences of such movements will be. As Mona Atia observes, “Unlike what many commentators assert after 2011 that the fear barrier has been broken. There was a fear of another type. It is not a fear of state

oppression and imprisonment, rather it is a fear of violence and retaliation, fear of the lack of viable leader. Fear of civil war and further instability”. (June 2013).

As June 30, 2013 neared, the day Tamarod had set for mass anti-Morsi protests, people on *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street were preparing themselves for the worst-case scenario and taking precautionary measures. Many workers and shop owners were removing merchandise and setting up reinforcements for their stores. There were discussions among them about who would keep their stores open on that day. These cautionary measures precede any events that may potentially trigger violence and destruction and also happens on other dates significant to the revolution, such as January 25 and November 19, the anniversary of fatal clashes on the street itself. They are more afraid of the violence and destruction associated with many of these events. The owner of a grocery store besides Beano’s coffee shop stated his view of the planned protest on June 30, asking, “What is the wrong if everyone expresses his opinion with respect without violating the rights of others and without making trouble?” The fear from the possibility of violence and riot is a collective sentiment everyone on this street shares.

Economic Ruination (*ua’af il-haal*):

The stagnancy of the market is considered the remarkable living experience that people mostly express in the Egyptian vernacular language as “*ua’af il haal*” (the economic ruination). Since the revolution, the economy has suffered from a severe downturn. The government faces numerous challenges to restore growth and market confidence. During this time, economic growth remains weak, with a high fiscal deficit and gross public debt (World Bank, July 2013). Accordingly, the low growth rate poses a danger to mounting social frustrations (ibid). The unrest has devastated the Egyptian economy, 60 percent of which depends on exports, and the dollar has reached its highest level against the Egyptian pound in 10 years, lowering the purchasing power

of the local currency. Hence, the Revolution has plunged an already struggling population into greater poverty.

The owners of small businesses are particularly vulnerable to these conditions. They bear the expenses of fixing their damaged properties after each major incident. All businesses on Mohamed Mahmoud, without exception, had a dramatic shift in their turnover. The Egyptian government has promised compensation for people whose properties and stores were damaged during the revolution, but has yet to make any payments. Only the big stores were able to be sustained because they had insurance. 'Am Khalaf narrated to me how he has been trying to receive his compensation, shuffling among many governmental institutions, without any result. He has not lost hope that life on this street will return to normal and continues to repair his stand each time the protesters overturn it to use it as a barricade during clashes. He spent a lot of money on these reparations that exceeds his financial capacity. His endless attempts to fix his stand speak to the fact that it is his only way to earn a living. Many people like 'Am Khalaf have been doing the same, hoping for a more stable future. The past violent events formed a heavy burden on those people to the extent, it threatens them with hunger because it directly affected their modest and tiniest economic capital. Past violence and the threat of continued unrest along with the lack of compensation deepens these sense of absence of state because people do not know who is responsible for getting their rights back and protecting them. It is the state's existence represented in restoring security. Farah Ghannam writes, "Touring Cairo's streets and alleys, one can feel both the presence and the absence of the government." (2002; 26) It is the presence resembled in the heavy existence of police and security, and the absence lived in the government's dysfunction in managing the urban development of the city. The sudden entrance and absolute presence of the

insecurity element has formed a huge challenge for local residents who were accustomed to negotiating their needs in a creative way without depending on the state.

An important point to note is that most of the people who work in the Mohamed Mahmoud area do not have fixed incomes and their earnings are highly dependent on day to day conditions. They call themselves *a'rzou'ya* (earners); the day they do not work, they do not bring in money. They are not necessarily low-paid, but their fortunes are very directly impacted by changes in daily living conditions and economic fluctuations in the country. This is the way many like Alaa in the street define themselves, asserting on the importance of the public space and security to proceed and go after their living bread. For those non-contractual labor, the revolution and aftermath events have resulted in “exasperation” contributing to them waiting it to end- whatever the outcome (Winegar 2012). In most cases, these experiences have led some of them oppose the revolution.

Given the long relationship that most of the residents have with the street, it yields in counter-claims of space ownership that they intensively deploy in their talks to express their right to the space and existence.

The Violation of a Street's Sanctity:

Another enduring sentiment felt by the people of *Mohamed Mahmoud* is their non-ownership of the street since the revolution. They precisely feel that their street's sanctity is being violated by outsiders as if the street does not have owners. They have a feeling of losing mandate over the social dynamics and spatial mobility of their street, unable to control its variability. On the side of *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street that connects to *Tahrir* Square, people do not have adequate social capital or organizational ability to defend their street against chaos or intruders. This is primarily due to the fact that most of the workers and shop owners do not reside in the area and

the actual inhabitants are mostly elderly. There is also a class factor that make it less likely for the inhabitants and the shop owners to mingle. For many shop owners, those inhabitants are much well off (*miertaheen*), having more than one real estate around the city, so they have a privilege of other alternatives and to move around in times of contingencies. Most of the buildings' apartments are not lived in, but converted into offices and clinics.

In more residential districts like *Abdeen* people are more capable of protecting their area and property by force, assisted by a strong social network and attachment to the space that is a very crucial capital for them all. In *Abdeen*, people's shops did not get harmed as much the shops and businesses in the former area did. This has also created a network of connectedness among people, especially among street's male youth and adult who primarily take the social responsibility of protecting their territory. On the contrary, because the workers have certain working hours, then they leave the street, getting back home, their social ability to network in time of risk is less likely to be existent.

The residents' feeling of non-ownership over a street stirs a contestation over the meaning of the public space and the right to that space. Protesters and graffiti artists feel full authority over the space of Mohamed Mahmoud, relying on the legitimacy of the Revolution and the battles where many martyrs fall. In this sense, the graffiti writing tends to remark a strategy that alters space visually and thus disrupts spatial meanings that unsettle claims to the ownership of space (Tonkiss 2005; 143). This basically triggers a pivotal issue between those users and the permanent residents, who have a longer relationship with the place. It indicates an ongoing fierce process of appropriating the social attribute of this street and the resistance by its residents in preserving its old quality. On the other hand, the efforts by younger generations to demarcate the space continue in attempt to preserve the earliest stages of the revolution, when people's demands were similar

and there was more unity of purpose. It is an attempt to remind people of the origins of the movement before it diverged into many disputing streams and interests, and as such is an interesting embodiment of the January 25th revolution. The contestations over spatial appropriation of *Mohamed Mahmoud* comes in explicit fights between how comes and sit on such publics like *ahwa*, or what should be painted and said on the walls. I have witnessed several fights in which the people of *Mohamed Mahmoud* tried to restore and materialize their authority over the space by attempting to expel people who they doubt their intentions and characters. The *ahwa* is an important public space where many social interactions take place; from gazing to talking. It is a significant sphere where people mingle better as it allows a degree of social intimacy. It is also an important social hub for local residents, where their social and organizational capacity is honed. At the end of August, a bold man in his forties rushed into *ahwa*- disturbing my conversation with few people who define themselves as revolutionaries and some of acquainted street workers, accompanying a foreigner behind him, asking for someone knows a good deal of English to translate the conversation between both of them. This man sounded dubious, proclaiming that he is an organizer of revolutionaries' coalition, for many people at *ahwa*. The other man with him is a university professor in media studies, at a Japanese university who came to search for revolutionaries, wondering where they have been. The obvious pragmatism has irritated many people, led to expelling him and his guest from the place, at the end. Hence, at *ahwa*, the old residents of *Mohamed Mahmoud* are more authoritative in expelling any outsider if he does not conform to their codes of behavior.

Similarly, the process of graffiti art is another opportunity in which *Mohamed Mahmoud* inhabitants try to restore their authority by asserting what should be written. Their interventional act usually comes in form of speaking; speaking up their reservation and complains or sarcasm

and political views. Whitening the graffiti by residents is not common, due to the popular designation of *Mohamed Mahmoud* as the street of graffiti and a living museum of the revolution, the walls are continuously painted and repainted without the approval of anyone by artists themselves.

The different events of revolution and the graffiti painting that has taken place on the street with indifference to its dwellers makes them feel alienated. This alienation, coupled with insecurity and destruction have affected their daily lives and jeopardized their existence. ‘Am Khalif, the fruit vender near El-Falaki school said with disapproval, “This used to be an acclaimed area, now it is not acclaimed or anything.” When I passed by AUC security, they told me, “Such a transformation happened to this street! It has turned from the most important area in Egypt to a street where anyone can do anything; thieves can now stroll freely.” The collective sentiment of the violation of the street’s sanctity leaves many with the sense it has become an open space free of state regulation.

However, the way the past is being recalled reflects significant expression of the present. In the next section, I discuss how people on *Mohamed Mahmoud* have developed discourses of nostalgia that are not only expression of disenchanting present, but also an intriguing popular imagination.

Nostalgia:

One remarkable aspect about the days of Morsi is the prevalence of wistfulness for Mubarak’s era. This, in fact, identifies a curious moment of envisaging the past and verbalizing it in different manners. At the same time, it serves an important point of reference for the present. This positive sentiment toward Mubarak’s regime, which had been accused of massive corruption

and rights violations, was unexpected because no one imagined the country's situation could deteriorate further. Of course the rise of such collective nostalgia is disheartening for many who identify with the January 25 protests and is considered a serious indicator of the failures of the revolution. "A large portion of Mubarak-era nostalgia stems from widespread disenchantment with current situation", Mona Atia argues (June 2013).

After the initial days of the revolution as enthusiasm started to wane, coupled with economic deterioration, many people lamented the loss of Mubarak's era, and conferred upon it a newfound approval: "He was a tyrant, but we were living in security", "he was corrupt, but we were being able to live normally", said some fed up with post-Mubarak conditions. While this sentiment may diminish the popular outrage and frustration people felt over the thirty years of Mubarak's regime, it stems primarily from exhaustion and a longing for normal life. They are not able to stand a continuous state of revolution and turbulence and did not expect such a difficult transition to democracy.

Avishai Margalit describes nostalgia as a state of "idealizing the past and presenting it as a sentimental realm of innocence", creating by that a distorted memory (2011). For him, this distortion indicates what he calls "kitsch morality" that is guided by sentimentality that can easily turn into brutality. In other words, nostalgia tends to distort reality in a particular way, besides distorting the reality of time past. It is highly evident within the utterance of the people of *Mohamed Mahmoud* in which both Morsi supporters and opponents are blaming its weakness, recalling Sadat's mass imprisonment for his opponents, proclaiming that the supreme leaders are much wiser and far-sighted than their peoples. Nostalgia, in such a case, could be considered as a manifestation of moral failure that can easily be put in service of brutality.

Mostly Egyptians have developed various types of nostalgia for different periods of time; there are people who long for Sadat's time or Nasser's time. And others who recall the times of monarchy before 1952 with a great sense of loss for its belle epoch. Margalit denotes these precarious modes of collective recalling of far past a "vicarious memory". This type of collective nostalgia depends on the memories of others, instead of one's firsthand memory. For instance, the Palestinians' nostalgia for their pre-1948 life is a form of vicarious nostalgia, as most of the living have not witnessed this era. Yet this form of nostalgia forms an interesting statement in which people express their perspective of a perfect leader. Masculinity, decisiveness, power and an iron grip are characteristics viewed as required of an Egyptian leader. It reflects a widely circulated popular saying that Egyptians are the descendants of pharaohs who must be ruled by the lash of the whip. Some who still believe in this cultural myth view democracy as an end to bring in yet another iron fist ruler rather than a process in itself.

Conclusion:

The everyday life of the people of *Mohamed Mahmoud* is increasingly marked by the advent of the revolution and the revolutionaries' monopoly over the space of *Mohamed Mahmoud* that turned life upside down, without taking the original residents of the space into consideration. Because of the barrier walls, the people of *Mohamed Mahmoud* have experienced an increasing sentiment of forced isolation in which their existence and businesses became threatened. At the same time, the way graffiti is deployed is only an expressive mode on behalf of a specific group, namely "the revolutionaries." However, the intuitive mode of talking developed around graffiti allowed the space of *Mohamed Mahmoud* to become an alternative site for the street's residents in fostering shared sentiment and collective experience toward many transformations. While this mode of talking is important in shaping the experience of the people of *Mohamed Mahmoud* in

relation to their space, it is equally important in analyzing their view and perceptions on the overall socio-political transition that Egypt endures.

Chapter Five: The Transformed Social Space of Mohamed Mahmoud; the Sense of Belonging among the Unintended Audience of graffiti

Introduction:

The deep scars of the revolution, aftermath clashes and the intensified production of graffiti created a new kind of public in *Mohamed Mahmoud* that allowed for social relations to be negotiated and political concerns to be presented and discussed in people's talks and chats. The multiplicity of voices on *Mohamed Mahmoud* is powerful, and continues to shape people's identities, their social relations and their understanding of the present moment. People frequently ask how the country should be run, discuss the many problems they face and share their perceptions and memories of the revolution. These contradictory reactions present theoretical and methodological possibilities in terms of how to conceptualize the relationship between the shifting views of people on *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street, and the dominant public discourse on the post-revolution transition. People have become uncertain and increasingly skeptical, with more and more friction around the current situation. In this sense, the dominant public discourse on the Egyptian revolution and aftermath should be dismissed as mere rhetoric, characterized by empty talks about resistance. Instead, it is crucial to examining the impact of these major political changes on social space of the public center of protest, at *Mohamed Mahmoud* and how it informs people's sense of belonging. This chapter is dedicated to analysis of the off-wall discourses where people generate and get involved in casual conversations and debates that graffiti usually triggers, or due to the virtue of being a space related to the revolution.

Elucidating people's sense of belonging reveals how everyday experience is significant for "the public staging of claims to these abstract principles and their potential realization in the

aftermath of dramatic events” (Winegar 2012; 68). Farah Ghannam, argues that “to better understand revolution in Egypt, scholars need to look closely at the overlaps, redefinitions and contradictions between existing cultural forms, meanings and values” (2012). Soliciting how the residents’ experience of everyday life reveals their interpretations of significant events, shifting feeling and views. Looking at the lived space of Mohamed Mahmoud enables us to capture specific moments of political transformation and see how connections established between thoughts and formed emerging meanings. Due to the exclusive media attention to *Midan el-Tahrir* and revolutionaries, we have little knowledge of how these events have informed the thoughts and feelings of other ordinary Egyptians and their stance toward the current transition. Exploring some of the cultural concepts and meanings that informed their attempts to make sense out of the changing situations informs what Faraha Ghannam calls people’s “structure of feelings — ways of thinking, feeling, and interpreting that have been shaped by the interplay between local cultural meanings and values and broader national struggles and events” (2012). For de Certeau, the ordinary language of everyday practices is a way of “internal manipulation” of language, imposed spaces and the established order (1986; 25). He theorized this indispensable act of speaking in the everyday life as “processes of enunciation” that are problematic. In this regard, enunciation presupposes not only an appropriation of the language, but also the establishment of the present (temporality). However, this ordinary language deployed by people’s everyday life depends on the vocabularies of mainstream language (those of television, newspaper, etc.) that people subvert (35). Hence, reflecting on how existing categories and concepts regulate and structure the people of Mohamed Mahmoud’s understanding of the many transformations around them are central to the ways they relate to the post-revolution transition.

This chapter takes a hard look at people's understandings and views, with special attention paid to how they frame their views that might break from the conventional Western, canonical political science definitions of citizenship, social contract, human rights, the rule of law and so on. This presents a contrast to a master narrative that speaks to a collective Egyptian temporality. More precisely, this chapter takes an intimate look into a social space, and how the people re-appropriate the turbulent transition of their country. It defines curious moments of fluid societal perceptions, engagements, cultural forms and inter-textual ambivalences that arise out of uncanny transformations. These sorts of observations are hard to get from popular and affluent activists and bloggers. In this sense, the ways of speaking deployed by the residents of *Mohamed Mahmoud*- in which they reflect on the many uncertainties and distrust, constitutes another level of subversion and space of resistance.

The time of my field work, as I mentioned in a previous chapter, is considered a significant tipping point in the post-revolution trajectory. I began my field work a month before another huge protest aimed to topple the first elected president; he had almost completed his first year in office, and his term was still undetermined. An atmosphere of gloom, anxiety, anger, ambiguity, revulsion, discontent, fatigue and uncertainty were hovering over the city as June 30 approached. The increasing polarization of political opinions and positions, the disruptiveness of the overall situation and the news were the most distinguishable aspects of these days, and any hope in another revolutionary wave seemed to be gone. It was a time in which many previous convictions shifted. The Muslim Brotherhood went from being the companion of the square (*shourqa' al-midan*), to being labeled "criminals" (*mougrimein*) and "conspiring agents" (*oumla*). The contestation between those who were for and against Morsi was very severe.

Graffiti was strongly presented in the scene, considered to be a powerful mechanism that had challenged the political legitimacy of Muslim Brotherhood. Since the famous graffiti incident in September 2012, the criticism carried out on the walls have been redirected towards Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim Brotherhood subjects and leaders-including their president- have portrayed in sarcastic and ridiculing ways. Their slogans have been flipped to give negative connotations. Graffiti has also recorded the crimes happened in their time of killing and detaining activists. By graffiti, activists/artists have developed a communicative ways to deconstruct the psychological and political power, provoking their supporters and followers concerns. For June 30, there was more than phrases written on the wall as a reminder of the promised day saying, “*inzil 30/6*” (get down 30/6). The nation-wide preparations for the protests of June 30 had infused a peculiar moments of anticipation among the residents of *Mohamed Mahmoud* accompanied with fear, disinterest, suspicion and a feeling of inability. Of course, their traumatic experience of previous clashes have contributed to the growing fear. However, the societal sentiments of suspicions and inability were partially given sense in the suggestible feeling of espionage against Egypt in which people have a strong belief in conspiracy led by external powers. Traditional media has an intertwining role in infusing and fostering such disturbed feelings. Amid all that, religious beliefs of the sacredness of Egypt are very crucial narratives people deploy in their everyday life in (re)defining the troubled present. Finally, time and again, the positioning of Egyptian military was disputed among people; those who believed it is that last hope to retain the “Egyptian State” from the hands of The Muslim Brotherhood and those who cannot forget the army’s previous crimes, during the first interim rule.

Social Impotence, Suspicion and Anticipation:

The anticipation of the June 30 protests was spreading a general social fear and panic. The people of Mohamed Mahmoud in particular were anticipating that something worrying and frightening would occur. Ordinary people were sharing their fears, aspirations and expectations with each other. It was the main issue on people's minds, especially given the heightened possibilities of violence. Of course, there were people who intended to participate in the June 30 marches against Morsi, and those who planned to participate in the pro-Morsi demonstrations on June 21 and 28 in Rabaa and Nahda Squares. Nevertheless, there was a third category of people who were not simply pro or against; rather, they were confused between both camps. People are reminded that potential violence lurks. In part, people were worried that there would be more killing and more bloodshed, more devastation and thuggery.

First, the Muslim Brotherhood has become a center of escalating contestations among the people. Despite having rigorous supporters, the *Ikhwan* (as they are called in the Egyptian colloquial dialect) became the target of bitter criticism after they reached the presidency through the newly formed Freedom and Justice Party. In a sense, it was an unprecedented moment when their perceived value deteriorated among Egyptians; in the space of a year, they went from heroes to suspects, from revolutionaries to dictators, from idealists to pragmatics. Hence, the widespread popular anger the Brotherhood provoked has discredited many academic speculations that religious sentiment was solid and influential in shaping Egyptian politics. Over the past thirty years, the Muslim Brotherhood had been regarded as the only organized oppositional force against Mubarak's dictatorship (Nagieb 2009, El-Ghobashy 2005). In this context, a majority of the Egyptian used to have sympathy and support for them, which allowed the *Ikhwan* to win 88 seats in the 2005 parliamentary elections, despite the previous regime's intense oppression of the group

(Mahdi and Philip 2009). This led many analysts specialized in Egyptian affairs to suggest that people were motivated by a religious ethos when they made political choices, and accordingly, it would be very difficult for them to challenge an authority speaking in the name of Islam.

However, all these speculations were proven wrong. After living through the unpleasant experience of the *Ikhwan's* rule, people began to disregard them. The Brotherhood's instrumentalization of religion did not spare them from popular accountability; the people saw them as manipulators who used religion for their own interests, and not for implementing justice and *sharia* (Islamic law)—they called them *tugar dein* (region's traders). In short, their modest performance in the government provoked widespread outrage as the people's suffering increased.

As time revealed the many complexities surrounding the Brotherhood, it did the same for Egypt's other oppositional movements. The situation has become increasingly complicated. Previously, opposition parties had been perceived as an ideal, a movement that would fight for the public interest. In Egyptian popular belief, the opposition was the flip side to notoriously corrupt, oppressive ruling regimes. Now, with the rise of the opposition and an enlarged space for it in the political sphere, the complexity of the interrelated political realities has started to emerge at national, regional and international levels. Many accusations have been levied against all sorts of opposition groups as their objectives are questioned. The Egyptian people have become more critical of everything.

In my attempt to survey people's willingness to participate in the June 30 demonstrations, as an ice-breaker, many people on Mohamed Mahmoud Street were disinterested, despite their anger at Morsi and his government. They were not only skeptical regarding the potential outcome of the protest, but also about its use value. Who would benefit from this protest? Who does it

serve? This attitude is revelatory of the people's uncertainty about the effectiveness of such social mobilization. Secondly, people have started to realize that the opposition, as individuals and entities, talk and act on their behalf for different purposes that are not necessarily tied to a collective interest. This has generated a wave of suspicion and confusion that forms a fundamental dimension of the overall reality of the people on *Mohamed Mahmoud*. For many people, issues can no longer be evaluated in black and white. Instead, their thinking has been accompanied by various complicated assumptions that do not take these matters for granted, or accept them at surface value. For instance, when I asked a kiosk owner what he thought about June 30, he told me, "Those who are doing all that." When I asked him who, exactly, he responded, "All those who have interests; the National Salvation Front [...] and all those outside. All these things are backed" (*maz'u'a*). This collective sentiments of frustration and mistrust in the country's leadership and political elites are often silenced and underrepresented in media and mainstream narratives about Egypt's politics that usually take expression in an ideological division. It is a sentiment rooted in the people's sense of a profound lack of agency, an assumption there is always something hidden that could suddenly alter their reality, regardless of their needs and demands. It is a feeling of their impotence in the face of a changing, seemingly uncontrollable reality; the sense that there is always something bigger and more powerful shaping their lives.

Yet how can we elucidate this phenomenon of social impotence and the sentiment of losing agency? In the following section I attempt to explain that from the accompanied feeling of espionage.

Espionage and Vulnerability of the State:

Related to the people's sense of social impotence is their perception of the state's vulnerability. The most striking element that shapes the understanding of the current status quo is

the likely unfounded belief that there are many conspirators who are trying to destroy Egypt. I always hear this statement: “There are a lot of hands playing in the country” (*fi ayady keter btil’ab fil balad*). The public commentary of both the SCAF, then the Muslim Brotherhood, after any street clashes took place was hinting at a foreign conspiracy against Egypt, keeping the actual actor unidentified and regarding protesters as trouble makers, paid by other external powers. Mohamed Morsi had referred on many occasions in his speeches to the existing “fingers,” which he vowed to cut.

In my conversation with Alaa before June 30, he expressed his discomfort with the overall situation of the country and the upcoming demonstration, and related that to the increased number of the foreigners in the area. He linked the presence of foreigners to plots and agendas hatched by external forces to stir up the political situation in Egypt. He corroborated this suspicion with what he saw before January 25, when he noticed that the number of foreigners had been increasing before the revolution broke out. It is this same fear that led some people to be suspicious toward me and unwilling to open up. There is a widespread feeling that the Egyptian state has weakened, and thus could be vulnerable to espionage. These notions of espionage and conspiracy are key in influencing people’s perception of the turbulent, sometimes surreal socio-political scene. This is even the same sort of acquisition directed against many current Egyptian activists and movements being backed and funded by external powers.

The waiter Sa’id had a similar opinion when I mentioned to him laughingly how people were doubting my intentions as I conducted this field work, thinking I could be a spy. Surprisingly, Sa’id, too, was totally convinced that this proposition was valid. He was particularly suspicious of people taking photos in the streets, who mostly photograph public institutions, he claimed. However, this is not to suggest that Egyptians are xenophobic in the strict definition of the term.

Rather, it speaks to people's deep feelings that their country is being targeted, especially given the weakness of key governmental institutions responsible for maintaining national security, like the general intelligence and state security. According to the points of view of many people, this weakness has increased acts of espionage and foreign intelligence, which in turn threatens the Egyptian nation. It is the feeling that Egypt has plenty of enemies, according to many street workers and shop owners.

These fears of espionage and threats to national security have always existed, and were even been nurtured in the public sphere, ever since the Nasser's regime. In fact, this fear from conspiring external power (*quaa khaaregyia*), as mostly called in public, and is an indispensable element of a nationalistic discourse (Abdel Rahman 2007). The fear of the Zionist state of Israel has typically been the main object of this widespread, collective fear. This fear is transmitted in many movies and television dramas that depict warfare with Israel in 1967 and 1973. This highly suggestible fear was often utilized by regimes to normalize state violence and autocracy. In Mubarak's era, many civil society advocates and political activists were put on trial for espionage charges. During the eighteen days of the revolution, the same discourses were aggressively perpetuated by the state television channels to defame the image of the opposition protesters by claiming that the demonstrators bound on destroying the Egyptian nation.

This historical trajectory also allowed the term *Ikhwan 'oumal* (spying agents) to enter into the hegemonic discourse. Related to this are fears that the United States was somehow a partner in espionage. On June 30, one of the most popular accusations against the *Ikhwan* was their close relations with the U.S. government. Long banners were hung at the entrance of Mohamed Mahmoud that read, "Obama, the sponsor of Muslim Brotherhood terrorism." It was like a scandal, given America's notorious legacy in the whole region due to its unconditional, unfair support to

Israeli interests in the region, and the scandalous American invasion of Iraq. In this regard, “resistance against the Brotherhood protesters is thus also resistance against US domination of Egypt” (Peterson, August 2013). These aspects of espionage and conspiracy are also frequently occurring in media, a subject that I tackle in detail later in this chapter.

Given the hardcore religious basis of the Muslim Brotherhood’s ideology, issue of religion was at the forefront of the public opinion at that time. In the next section, I attempt to analyze the different patterns in which religion has shaped this period of time.

Is Religion the Opiate of the Masses?

The role of religion in shaping public culture is indispensable to my study. Religion and its appropriation in public life has become a hot topic with the rise of the *Ikhwan* to power, and the introduction of other Islamist groups into the heart of the socio-political sphere, with the revolution. People have undergone a serious reconsideration of how religion should act; what are the limits for its intrusion in public affairs, and who is responsible for representing Islam’s authority? Contrary to expectations, the majority of the people have challenged the idea of political Islam and Islamists. Nevertheless, despite the fact that people’s unpleasant experience of an Islamist regime have made them more critical and skeptical, religion still forms a fundamental element of society, influencing people’s interpretation of and judgments on the surrounding transformations. The rejection of Morsi’s government was not synonymous with a rejection of the whole idea of religion or Islam. Rather, people became keen to reclaim their religion, and to disclaim some shameful acts committed by Islamists as separate from Islam. In other words, people did not abandon religion; rather, a religious framework was essential for expressing their worries, sorrow and understanding of the ongoing societal transformations. Hence, in this part, I count for the deep-rooted role of religion in shaping public culture in Egypt, and how it affects their

understanding and engagement with the current situation. I have precisely found out that, on one hand, religion is central element in appropriating people's world views and understanding of the current transition. On the other hand, religion is very fundamental in constructing social morality that I discuss later in this chapter.

“Is there anyone dies from hunger?” “My living is from God, not from Mubarak, or Morsi,” “I depend on the almighty.” When ‘Am Sayed, the food vendor at the beginning of Mohamed Mahmoud, ends his statements with these turns of phrase, it made me wonder, is religion really “the opiate of the masses,” as Marx claimed? What does such an absolute submission to the will of God reveal about society? How should it be read? Is it an indication of passivity and weakness? Returning to the origin of the quote, I have found out that many people misuse this citation as an argument against religions. The actual quote was included in Marx's introduction in his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1844). In this text, Marx breaks with the anti-religious criticism that defines religion as a man-made construct (Marx 1844, 53). Instead, he proposes a materialistic understanding of the functionality of religion in people's lives, and refutes abstract interpretations. In this sense, Marx actually said,

“Religious suffering is at the same time an expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creatures, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of people” (1844, 54).

Marx thus describes religion as an expression of material realities, and claims it has a functional role by reducing mundane pressures on people. With all the absurdity Egypt has endured, you may often hear people concluding their statements with the expression, “*masr rabena hafezha ‘ashan mazkoura fel Quran*” (God saves Egypt because it is mentioned in Quran). This phrase denotes the shared faith and logic that many Egyptians perpetuate in an attempt to retain hope and the ability to move on. In fact, they resort to this unverified belief to escape an

incomprehensible reality. It nurtures hope. As Marx emphasizes, religion creates illusionary fantasies for the poor, providing solace for them. Therefore, Marx uses the term opiate to describe religion, as it helps to reduce the feeling of pain and suffering, though it does not cure the underlying disease.

For many of my informants, the rhythm of events has become rapid and complicated, exceeding their capacity to keep up with events and comprehend them. This compressed experience of time turned a simple and clear assessment of matters into something complex and blurred. People have been living in a state of confusion. “No one is capable to understand what is going on? Everything has turned upside down” ‘Am Sherif once said. Individuals depend on religious beliefs that Egypt will never be harmed since it is mentioned in the holy book more than once are significant expressions in reducing stress and worries. During the anticipation of June 30, ‘Am Reda and many others were closing their talks and political discussions of possible future scenarios with the convention that whatever God wants will be, and everything is in his hands: “No one can stand against the will of God, right?” Similarly, as a taxi driver unleashed his opinions, he told me, “The best thing people must do is stop doing anything, and leave it to the will of God in order for life to proceed and for Mohamed Morsi to be able to think and to manage the country.” This keeps me with many questions; is it an implication of people’s gradual disbelief in the ideas of protesting and activism, since it did not result in a tangible improvement of their everyday lives? Is it an emphasis on a feeling of uncertainty? Or, is it an indication for the confinement of the culture of social mobilization and protest to a certain demographic? These questions need a serious assessment.

In part, these popular claims have resonance in the impact that Islam exerts in adjusting the public culture in Egypt. Aside from Marxist analysis, religion performs a crucial role in shaping

and re-shaping public spheres in Egyptian society. Since the early stages of Egyptian nationalism, religion was an integral part of modern Egyptian political, social and cultural life (Gasper 2008). However, the different waves of Islamization and religious revivalism have overwhelmingly taken over the processes of spatial reproduction and identity formation for almost the last four decades. Bayat asserts that this “quiet revolution” transformed society’s social conduct and value system, influencing social world views (Bayat 2000). With the shrinking role of the state and a divorce from Nasser’s social contract, Islamist social movements and groups have enjoyed a vast space, both virtual and material, in which to expand their visions and put them to work. The late seventies and eighties marked a peak time for the proliferation of many Islamist groups, as President Sadat backed their presence in different public realms to deter the influence of leftist political factions, as he tried to build an alternative legitimacy for his rule (Ibrahim 2000). Since then, the snowballing effect of the Islamization process has not stopped surprising observers and academics. Its social confinement has exceeded the lower classes and rural areas; rather, there has been an active process of negotiating and re-negotiating Islamic identity in relation to different aspects of social life. Emphasizing practices that construct an identity that counters Western culture reinforced the basis for the Islamic identity of piety and discipline, of body dynamics and practices. This has influenced space and its making, and the regulation of sociality and spatiality.

More precisely, the permanent residents of *Mohamed Mahmoud* depend on these collective religious claims, in a time, protests were deemed dreadful and are abused by higher political interests. People’s unwillingness to participate in mass protest is a significant act and statement. It underlines disappointment in what the revolution has come to signify. After the revolution, Egypt had witnessed many sectorial protests, indicating the trickling effect of the uprising in boosting the culture of protest and civic participation. The massive participation of Egyptians in the first

voting process after the revolution, of the referendum on constitutional amendments, in March 2011, constituted an historic moment. Then, with the presidential elections people queued for hours before the electorate committees to fulfill what was seen as an important national duty. Voting was also a powerful expression of agency and collective ability in drawing their own future.

The results of the first round was not pleasant for a wide spectrum of the public who long for real change, as their choice was limited between two candidates; Ahmed Shafiq and Mohamed Morsi. The former was the last prime minister under Mubarak's tenure, hails from a military background and is alleged to be responsible for the violence that broke out on January 28, 2011, the "Friday of Rage", before the fall of the regime. The other one is representative of a long-present Islamist group, the Muslim Brotherhood. Morsi won the runoff against Shafik, becoming the first president elected in a free vote in Egypt's history, bringing renewed hope for progression and prosperity for all. This hope incrementally faded when Morsi honored the generals of the SCAF who were accused in the multiple massacres under their rule, instead of putting them on trial. Then the non-stop violent street wars that Morsi triggered with controversial and biased decisions removed any remaining hope. The clashes were heated as Morsi called on his supporters to go to the streets and support his decisions. Street protests turned into a show of power between opposing camps.

This ongoing street violence and political disappointments have left many Egyptians with few questions; when will peace be restored? Why we did a revolution for? Many are exhausted by the continual outbreaks of protest and violence, which some see as a waste of time. During the most recent presidential election in 2014 that brought Field Marshall Abdel Fatah El-Sisi to power shows disillusionment; turnout was minimal at the polls, reflecting an apathy toward official channels of political participation. In this regard, Asef Bayat argues that deploying such

dichotomies of passive/active, or win/lose hinders our understanding of the ongoing conflict of post-violence society, effacing in that the “intricate ingenuities” deployed by the city subaltern (Bayat 2012, 119). Hence, deploying these religious linguistic framings is in itself a resistance or an alternative venue the dispossessed groups use to address their exclusion. Michael De Certeau argues that the re-employment of religious miracles among rural believers in Brazil, though it does not relate to uprisings, it recognizes permanent repression by creating a site of utopia (1986; 18). This popular use of religion functions as a sort of resistance, by subverting the “fatality of the established order by using a frame of reference” (19).

Away from how people interpret their current by heavily depending on religious locus, religiosity and religious representation are powerful factor in constructing social morality and appropriating collective subjectivities.

Contested Identities, Societal Morality and Enacted Symbolic Violence:

“Do you know the dead guy called Gika, from here [Abdeen]? He had a funeral that he would not have had if he died among his people. His father also received money, and each Friday a group of young people come and chant ‘In heaven, oh Gika,’ and he was the one who tried to jump over the fence of the Ministry of Interior. Oh, if I said this, it would be a big deal (ya dahiya o’my el dahiya), they would label me as feloul.”

This was a comment made by ‘Am Sayed as he expressed his discontent with the overall situation, in which the status quo was turned upside down, and people abused freedoms bestowed by President Morsi. While he felt that it was impossible for anyone to talk during Mubarak’s time, he is also angry with the new generations who dare to attack the police, which he believes must be respected as a “guarding father.” The most striking point about Am Sayed’s statement is his full consciousness about how people would categorize him based on his political stance and views. This self-awareness is indicative of the ongoing overlapping processes of identity work, which at the same time enacts a sort of social and symbolic violence on multiple levels. By the same token,

Gika's positioning as a martyr is also contested between those who perceive him as a hero who died in his fight to uphold the revolution's principles, and others who recognize him as a "thug" who offended the public order. It shows, as stated in the earlier chapter how since the revolution, the way people identify themselves and categorize others have dramatically shifted, as social spaces of convergence and divergence have increased. This ever ongoing transformations in which people refer to themselves and others take on different meanings over time.

People's rising consciousness of their identities has enacted a source of social violence, especially during the time of mass protest. During the preparations for the protests of June 30 and afterwards, Islamists, bearded men, *nigabi* (face-veiled) women and anything evoke any relation to *Ikhwan* were targets of people's aggression, both verbally and physically, on the streets. However, the social relations on the space of *Mohamed Mahmoud* are based on a collective appropriation of social morality in which they perceive and judge several identities. Social morality is given reference in one's religiosity and public decency.

For Iris Marion Young, the construction of an identity, in urban space, depends on turning that difference into something horrible, into the enemy. "Any move to define an identity, a closed totality, always depends on excluding some elements, separating the pure from impure" (Young 1986, 236). Scrutinizing the notion of identity and its relation to space illuminates assumptions about sociality, individual piety, religiosity and morality, power and helps to explain how mixed accounts of proper personal and social conduct take place amidst contesting views (Limbert 2010). In my brief conversation with the cousins Alaa and Ahmed, they asked me about my take on *Tamaroud* (Rebel; the grassroots campaign behind the June 30 protests). Before I had the chance to explain my view, they interrupted. Alaa explained, "They are a handful of boys and girls who are *sia'* (good at nothing)," then Ahmed added, "*Tamaroud* consists of *gabhiel el inqaz* (the

National Salvation Front), and the Church; once you hear there is a pre-planned march from Shubra, you must know that the Church is the one that supports it. Similarly, when you hear about another march from Abasseya, it means the Cathedral.” Here we can clearly see how religion is fundamental in constructing social morality, as an organizing principle of exclusion and inclusion (Rabo 2005)

The sectarian question plays a heavy role in shaping people’s understanding. In the above quote, we can see what Anthony Shenoda calls the (in) visibility of Copts in the sociopolitical sphere. In this context, “Copts become a visible religious community when they are attacked” (Shenoda 2011). The Copts become an ambiguous enemy; they are treated as an outsider and not an insider, as a foreigner and not a citizen. When I was buying a Mobinil charge card, the kiosk owner looked at me in disapproval for using a Mobinil line, because the owner of the firm is Coptic. When I told him, “it is an Egyptian company,” he did not get this point, unabashedly showing pride how they [the Muslim tribes] in Upper Egypt do not allow Copts to speak up, as an indication of their full authority. However, in many anti-discourses on the June 30, the Coptics were mainly accused to be the main agitators behind this social unrest by the shrewdest Islamist figures. It was also deployed as a counter-statement to reduce the ongoing political conflict and opposition into sectarian issue. Yet, the Coptic in Egypt have experience different sort of violence, and marginality, not only politically but also socially. There are several negative connotations and labeling deployed against the Coptic in everyday life of Egypt. Mosa, the *ahwa* apprentice, used to be disgusted by Christians, to the extent that he refused to eat from their food, as his *niqabi* (fully veiled), extremely religious aunt used to describe Christians as impure.

Maybe the *Ikhwan* used to be known as the most approachable political actors for ordinary people, hence their overwhelming success at the voting polls. For their many supporters, the

Ikhwan deserve credit, as they used to effectively exist on the ground before the revolution, unlike other political players who are only just starting to emerge. Morality, as I stressed earlier, resembles a curious vocal point in which people build up their judgment against the other. For many people, the *Ikhwan* are respectable, in terms of their restrained behavior and overt religiosity. Accordingly, for Alaa and Ahmed, the opponents of the *Ikhwan*, there “are some defectors (*nas mesh mazboota*); it is a group of some Nasserists, and liberals that are anything else except Islamist; they mostly hang out at the *ahwa* called Bustan behind Café Riche. When you see girls sitting there, you can tell they are unrespectable.” Even Mosa, who not only admitted his hatred of Morsi, but also his habit smoking of *hasheesh*, has a generally positive feeling towards the *Ikhwan*. He got to know some Brothers during his participation in the eighteen days of the revolution. For him, those people are highly respectable (*muhtarmien*), do not smoke anything, and thus project an image of perfection. He likes commitment to religion and to morals, describing them as “above imagination.” Mai Telmisany clarifies, “the islamists positioned themselves as the sole guarantor of morality and the unique forces capable of protecting the square and mobilizing large numbers against the remnant of old regime” in meantime they “accused protesters of shattering the strengthen of the revolution, and moral decline, denouncing the mingling of young men and women in satins” (2014, 43)

However, “all identities are simultaneously singular, collective entities in a state of becoming” (735). Due to the prevalence of satire and profane public criticism (Iskander 2013), the *Ikhwan* as a group was transformed into a contestable character in the political sphere during its year in government. They started to be called “*khirfaan*” (sheep) in popular discourse, due to their blind obedience to the supreme guide and non-criticality. In June 26, a graffiti mural was painted to communicate this judgment by showing the natural evolution of a Muslim Brother who begins

as a fully developed human being and ends as a lamb, a satire on Darwin's diagram of the theory of evolution. On the opposite end of the spectrum from the *Ikhwan*, who are respected due to their religiosity and good mannerisms, are those who are called '*almaniein* (secularists). "Those people are against anything that has a relation with Islam," Mousa explains to me. He was talking about his cultured, secularist friend and how he ridiculed the Quran. ." By the same token, graffiti artists and activists tend to stir consternation and criticism of the people of *Mohamed Mahmoud*, to be morally deflectors. Nevertheless, Dick Hebdige argues that "young people make their presence felt by going out of bounds, by resisting through rituals, dressing strangely, striking bizarre attitudes, breaking rules" as marginal tactics point to how contest over urban space that involve tensions among different users of everyday users (1998;17-18). In another sense, Cupers asserts that "urban identities are always in the always unfinished process of multiplicity of interactions in a space [...] whose outlines are blurred" (Cupers 737).

However, there is no doubt that media discourses have a heavy hand not only in infusing the public sphere with such imaginations, but also in agitating the public opinion, creating sort of confusion and disturbance

Media, Social Confusion and Uncertainty:

Since the revolution, a new media star has burst forth in the public sphere, as many others did before him. This media persona, however, has an unprecedented success, and he ignited a huge controversy over whether he was mentally fit or insane, and whether he was serious or an asshole. This persona is Tawfik Okasha. There are a lot of question marks around him, his problematic satellite television channel and his unusual/uncanny media performances. His statements are very controversial for rational minded people, very provocative to revolutionaries but somehow reassuring for people who are commonly identified as *feloul* or *ghalabaa* (the poor and less

educated). Okasha caught people's attention not only because his accent is a mix of a rural dialects, but for his weird, comic style of talking. Even after his channel was shut down during Morsi's year as president, his statements still circulated among people who felt that he had accurately predicted the unfolding events. For many informants, everything Okasha used to warn against during the time period of the presidential election has happened. For this reason, he still has many followers.

This anecdote about Okasha is just one among many similar cases. It is a strong indicator of the profound role of the media in Egypt's political transition. It is a major cause for the deep prevalent confusion, suspicion, worries and uncertainty people endure. During this time, the new president and his group became a new focus of not only bitter criticism, but also mockery and sarcasm. The media in Egypt includes both state-run media and privately-owned companies run by various groups, affiliations and businessmen. In Egypt, media personalities enjoy a popularity and importance on the same level as politicians; their claims are influential in shaping political reality, and they are able to make a significant amount of noise. According to Mohamed al-Masry, there is a "lack of objectivity in Egyptian news, given the reality that many Egyptian journalists perceive themselves more as political activists than as watchdogs" (El-Masry 2013). In addition, much research suggests that Egyptian media suffers from an overall lack of professionalism. However, this time was distinctive in which media escalated socio-political polarization as private stations and independent newspapers divided into two distinctive camps: for and against Morsi (Iskander 2013). "In this polarized environment, journalistic professionalism went out of the window as each camp drummed up support for its side and demonized the other" (Iskander 2013). On the other hand, private Islamist networks have had their fair share of problematic coverage that demonized the opposition, as well. As media sources increase and diversify, and as social media plays an increasingly important role as a news source, the situation has become vaguer, especially

in regards to unprofessionalism and incredibility. Everyone has his or her own media sources that say what he or she desires to hear.

Media, press and talk shows are seen as the main spheres of contention and arenas for political participation, and are believed to have a major influence on Egyptian politics and society (Brown 2011). In this context, the urban spaces saturated by media are considered to be mediated public spaces in different ways (Berry, Harbord, and Moore 2013) (AlSayyad & Muna 2013). This is strongly evident on *Mohamed Mahmoud* Street, where the television set is one of key features of the indoor spaces situated along *Mohamed Mahmoud*. Television is an essential item, existing in most stores in all shapes and models. On a typical day, the television is almost always turned on, mainly tuned to news channels. During the June 30 protests, people gathered around the television screens at the *ahawi*, watching the updates of the situation in other parts of the city. Following the latest news from different media sources and online channels was a public process; they shared that collective moment in a public space.

Yet, there is a collective sentiment of the misleading and deceptive roles that media—especially this of television— plays in agitating the public disruption, and inflammatory rhetoric. Even after July 3, media continued to fuel the street contention and violence between the both camps, in remarkable ways. In this regard, fighting *Ikhwan* was expressed as national duty, signifying them as non-Egyptian “traitors.” The dispersion of Rabaa’ sitin that Ikhwan taken

The Egyptian Army—the Patriot and the Criminal:

In the dusk, while I was sipping a lemon juice at an *ahwa* called *Hamada* in the alley of *Yousif El-Guindy* street, a minor fight took place between a couple of male graffitists and an older man. The fight took place in front of the wall of AUC’s library building that overlooks Yousef el-

Gendy and revolved around who would be more likely to take over government if the June 30 protests toppled Morsi. The older man did not hide his deep desire and hope for the Egyptian military to intervene and take over. His statements were rejected not only by the graffitiists, but also by a couple of similarly aged men leaning on a nearby car. There was a lot of speculation at the time ahead of the June 30 protests about the military taking over.

The Egyptian Army has maintained a pivotal role in Egypt's new phase. The Armed Forces have been a major player in the country's socio-political struggle since the Friday of Rage on January 28, 2011, when the military deployed its security forces after an outbreak of chaos and the police withdrew from streets. Increasing violence, killing and petty crimes justified the military's presence, as they were preserving security. Unlike the police, the military has traditionally held a special status in Egyptian society, and this could be seen when the people applauded around the army tanks, chanting "*al-giesh w l-sha'b eid wahda*" (the military and the people are one hand). This was the situation until the military took the reins of the country after Mubarak's fall, and held onto power until Morsi was elected. This transitional phase was not an easy one. It designated a significant turning point within the Egyptian public culture. While the military's status used to be unquestioned and highly respected, SCAF's unsuccessful leadership during the transitional phase, and its involvement in many deadly clashes with civilians and protesters, elicited a harsh critique of the military, especially from those who are considered hardcore revolutionaries—those who witnessed the military commit brutal acts during the Cabinet clashes, the Mohamed Mahmoud clashes and the bloody crackdown on Coptic protesters at Maspero as well as the virginity test to the female protesters.

But despite these facts, there is still a wide spectrum of people who maintain a solid faith in the military as the nation's safeguard against several external dangers, primarily Israel. For those

people, the Egyptian military is irrefutably a good-doer; or more precisely, it has the absolute right in whatever decision it takes, even if that decision negates logic. Nonetheless, SCAF's intervention in political and civilian life struck a blow against its life-long, undisputable and intimidating power. It is now an institution that is contested by the people, in the same way that the revolution could be praised for its successes or slammed for its failures, and the same way that political Islam and Islamism have become highly contestable, especially with the failure of the first elected *Ikhwani* president. With Morsi's failure to rule the country or fulfil the rosy promises of his presidential campaign, the Egyptian military has, intentionally or unintentionally, once again entered the playground of the political race, and projected as a fierce competitor before June 30, especially after smoldering the Port Said's outrage in March 2013.

From June 30 to July 3, a period of rigorous protests calling for Morsi to step down, the military did not waste any time or spare any effort to appeal to the people, flying helicopters that rained Egyptian flags down on the streets. Once again, the Army has dominated the political sphere with a new leader—the relatively young Colonel General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who is also the minister of defense and the commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces. Sisi orchestrated the move into the second transitional phase, and his explicit role in articulating this dramatic transformation is what makes Morsi's removal from office look more like a coup than a popular uprising. Just after Sisi gave Morsi a two-day ultimatum to listen to the people's demands or face military intervention, posters bearing the general's picture started flooding the sit-ins at Tahrir, Qasr al-Quba and the Ettehadia Presidential Palace. They were sold for LE5. Today, Sisi was potentially poised to become the next president of Egypt, despite his vehement rejection of any intention on his part to do so. But even more importantly, the military institution is still very powerful, to the extent that its finances are not part of the general national accounts; there is not any sort of

accountability for its activities and resources. The military has a huge economic empire that encompasses many kinds of businesses, creating “an institution and community of elites” (Salem 2013). During the first transitional phase, SCAF worked to safeguard its rights in the newly written constitution. However, despite all these facts, the Army draws upon a history of anti-colonial legacy until today. The military is, for sure, an entity with political interests, yet it triggers huge controversy about its reliability within the national discourse.

Conclusion:

As has been described in this chapter, media, religion, public culture and everyday life are important principles that influence how the people of *Mohamed Mahmoud* construct and drive their understanding of the many transformations happening around them. Their intakes on the current transition are coupled with a profound sentiment of uncertainty and distrust toward many things (parties, media, politicians, protest) that are in themselves a strong protest. Still religion is largely used in weaving strains of hope for many people, besides being a basis for constituting public morality and proper conduct for individuals that is a major principle in constructing the several constituted subjectivities in Egypt’s present moment.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

The January 25, 2011 has greatly impacted me, as it did with other millions of people. It was not that I completely follow, rather I was in an unease with. I was not able to adhere to the overall zeitgeist, in a time it felt like a flood. Flood of demagogy and noise. Prior to the revolution, I considered myself revolutionary, after the revolution, it was difficult to relate to. I had many apprehensions regarding how the revolution is being practiced and embodied. What seemed a call for justice, was itself unjust, implying many complications on different levels; representations, class-ness, ideological polarization, media biases, and so forth. Then, I ended up doing something related to the revolution.

The street evolvment around graffiti in *Mohamed Mahmoud* resembled an interesting moment that uncovers the tensions and contradictions of the current transition, presented on spatial, social, political and subjectivity levels. My purpose in this thesis was to study how these political transformations have transformed the social world of *Mohamed Mahmoud*. It explored the inhabitants' experiences and perception on the present moment in relation to their street and

other transformative aspects since the revolution. By focusing on those residents who I frame as “unintended audience” of the graffiti, I intended to shed light on how the onset of the revolution is experienced differently. Those permanent residents have been in focus throughout. Yet it has not been an analysis of *Mohamed Mahmoud*, nor of the revolution or the graffiti. Rather these issues have been looked through the mode of talking with which people have been able to deploy another level of subversion.

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