On The Balcony, Beyond “Balconearing”; Perception of Cairene Women, Behind The Curtains.

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On the balcony, beyond “balconearing”;
Perception of Cairene women, behind the curtains...

A Thesis Submitted by
Rowida Magdy Al-Gebeily

To the
Architectural Engineering Masters Program

09-2022
Under the Supervision of
Dr. Ahmed Sherif, Department of Architecture
Dr. Ramy Aly, Department of Sociology & Anthropology

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Architecture
Declaration of Authorship

I, Rowida Al-Gebeily, declare that this thesis titled, “On the balcony, beyond balconearing; perception of Cairene women, behind the curtains” and the work presented in it are my own. I confirm that:

- This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University.

- Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated.

- Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed.

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- I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Abstract

This study sheds light on the significance and role of threshold spaces as means of accomplishing sociocultural needs, restoration and wellbeing in the residential environment. Understanding the function and uses of these spaces allows us to appreciate their benefits that are often neglected. The research particularly focuses on the social dimension of one fundamental threshold space; the Cairene balcony. It is an integral space that provides a valuable connection to the outside, and its importance in the development of urban living is widely recognized. If carefully designed to meet the residents’ needs and demands, they can promote a better quality of life in the residential environment. Nonetheless, as of today, balconies are eliminated from house designs and when present, they are usually small or inconvenient for the occupants. Accordingly, this study targets the ‘everydayness’ of space use in Egyptian culture and the role played by balconies in Cairene homes. The study examines the performance and perception of balconies and the variables affecting the frequency/ intensity of their usage. It proceeds with the core question; ‘What is the role of the balcony in the Egyptian context, as perceived by local women?’ A qualitative anthropological approach was adopted in this research where non-participatory observation was conducted across three local contexts in Egypt, and was followed by in depth interviews (n = 46) with female residents. The selected contexts represent an informal urban neighborhood, old urban neighborhood and a new planned neighborhood, where women came from the middle and low income groups. Key questions addressed the day to day uses of the balconies, the various modifications conducted to satisfy personal needs, and the capacity of the balcony space to accommodate for the various uses. Results disclosed what kind of features, contextual characteristics/exposure (main street, side street, etc.) promote or inhibit balcony usage. Irrespective of the income group, sociocultural background and context, dominating factors influencing women’s perception on the role of the Cairene balcony were commonly present. These included issues of; privacy and control, safety and security, wellbeing and restoration, functional and communicative purposes and the phenomenon of personalization and identity. Overall, as perceived by local women, the balcony contributes to significant ‘safety, restorative, functional, festive, and adaptive roles’. The majority of women stressed on the significance of the balcony as a prominent source of prospect and an impermissible part of the residential environment.

Keywords: public realm, private realm, threshold spaces, Cairene balcony, social/cultural role, local women, residential environment, Egyptian culture, ethnography.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

"Your emergence makes holes in the walls of my house" (Peperzak 1993, p. 66)

The story of balconies, windows, doors, terraces, entrances and rooftops empower essential architectural features that constitute part of our homes, but also extend into the public domain providing us with visibility, and connection counter to the indoors (Bassetti, 2020). They establish places where the privatized and communal realms of the city ‘touch’ one another and create opportunities for ‘potential’ meetings. Often functioning as connectors, these features are built to channel access for people, artifacts, sight, wind, and light between the two counter domains (Aronis, 2020). In Western and Mediterranean areas, where in-between features are prevailing communicative sites, many people occupy their balconies/windows/terraces to get a sense of the ‘other’, to become part of a bigger picture, to observe the outside social scene and reflect, or to simply enjoy a place that signifies connection without enforcing one to connect. These are undefined spaces (Maric, 2011) with no clear prescription, where erratic instances take place, strangers show up, and performative practices are enticed (Aronis, 2020).

For instance, Lefebvre (1992/2004) occupied the window and balcony to situate himself afar from the street while still being immersed in it to capture the ‘dailiness of urban life’ (Latham & McCormack, 2007, p. 25). He commends the “marvelous invention of the balcony” as the space where one can best grip the “fleeting rhythms of urban life” (Lefebvre, 1992). Mourani (2009) depicts her stand on the balcony in Beirut, as the safe haven that allows observing of the Israeli attack on the city and the agitated experience of the street yet from a safe, secured distance. Probyn (1996) exhibits how the balconies in Montréal allure a sense of connection among neighbors and strangers, and perform the convergence of race, gender, and cultures. In several narratives of Cairene local communities, the balcony has especially been cited as a significant social, cultural, and economic element in the everyday lives of people (Opoko 1998; Ghannam 2002; Shehayeb & Eid, 2007; Ahmed 2012; ElGabalawy 2016; Khalil & Eissa 2021; ElZein & ElSemary 2022). Egyptians use balconies to escape and to take advantage of the outdoors, especially in cities where there is a scarcity of outdoor space (Abdou, 2022). In the book ‘Egypt from Balconies’, Adel Abu Zaid ingeniously spoke about different forms of joy, the source of which is the balcony where he pointed out its manifold role as a stage for singing, a place for leisure and entertainment in free time playing backgammon and domino, an arena for chit chat and gossip with old friends, and possibly a witness to beginnings of love stories. Additionally, in recent times, balconies, worldwide, have particularly gained so much importance than ever as they served a new breadth of activities in lockdown (Bassetti, 2020; Aydin & Sayar, 2020; Zacka 2020; Peter and Hallerans, 2020). During the quarantine period,
videos across the globe and international media observations (BBC, CNN, & Newyork Times) showed that balconies of various types opened people in confinement to a “common world of events and experiences” (Zacka, 2020). This cantilevered stretch capturing the ‘in-between realm’ was a desirable terrain for restoring the physical and social wellbeing during quarantine (Grigoriadou, 2020). As argued by Peter and Hallerans (2020), balconies are crucial to post COVID-19 apartment housing, and people's preference for year-long functional balconies should be prioritized. Their present day significance calls for consideration and design of ‘usable balconies’.

1.1 Problem Statement

In the context of Egypt, there isn't enough dedicated information available about balcony use prior to and following the pandemic (ElZein & ElSemary, 2022). ElZein & ElSemary (2022) and Khalil & Eissa (2021) conducted the most recent studies on the change of patterns of balcony use during the COVID-19 period in Cairo. Nonetheless, beyond the usage patterns that sparked during the specific, restricted time of quarantine, and irrespective of Covid-19, further studies are needed to gain deeper insights on the banal ‘everyday use’ and the role played by the balcony in typical Egyptian households. In spite of a considerable amount of literature discussing how balconies improve indoor air quality, there is little focus or any recent, devoted studies on the ‘social benefits’ of balconies (Volz & Peng, 2021). As recommended by ElZein & ElSemary (2022), further studies are needed on Egyptians’ daily lifestyles and their effect on the role and perception of the residential environment, accordingly, to understand the specific local needs and conditions. As contended by Essam Abdel Magid (2020), from analyzing the current situation of residential balconies in contemporary Egyptian architecture, there is an urgent need to address the present issues of residential balconies as they are gradually losing their main function in the domestic setting. In this regard, this research documents the everyday, present utilization patterns (behavioral mapping) and situation of balconies (physical mapping) across three local contexts in Egypt to understand how balconies are used and the issues impeding some people from using them. Since previous local literature, in Egyptian culture, recurrently manifested the woman as the main user of the household and the one in charge of the everyday household needs (Fakhouri 1985; Opoko 1998; Ghannam 2002; Kipper et al., 2009; Fikry 2019), this study focuses on the perception of women in regards to balcony usage and everyday activities.

What is the role of the balcony in the Egyptian context, as perceived by local women? This question marks the starting point of the present study. It is thoroughly examined through exploring how ‘Cairene balconies’ are inhabited, and to what extent they contribute to accomplishing the sociocultural needs, restoration and wellbeing for Egyptian women in the residential environment. The aim of the research is to question the functional and behavioral performance of the “balcony” of the everyday life of local Cairene women. Correspondingly, following this interrogation, the information and analysis offered in this study should provide a useful guide on ‘usable balconies’ that are sensitive to Egyptian social and cultural issues.
1.2 Research Questions
A. What is the role of the residential balcony in the Egyptian context, as perceived by local women?
B. How do women inhabit Cairene residential balconies?
C. What are the spatial qualities of the balcony space and related or built environment that inhibit or promote its use by Egyptian women?
D. To what extent does the residential balcony contribute to accomplishing the sociocultural needs, restoration and wellbeing for Egyptian women?
E. Do balcony use patterns change in different social / economic contexts?

1.3 Research Objectives
A. **Identify** the current usage patterns of Balconies.
   a. **Behavioral mapping** for activities in relation to balconies.
B. **Document** the **spatial changes** and **modifications** conducted on balconies across the selected local contexts.
   a. **Physical mapping** for Facade Vocabulary.
C. **Understand** the “why”; what makes the space “work” /not work..
   a. Exploring the **spatial qualities** and **characteristics** of the **built environment** that ‘promote’ or ‘inhibit’ the balcony use.
D. **Evaluate** the effect of social /cultural backgrounds on balcony use patterns.

1.4 Research Hypotheses
A. Balconies make essential elements in Egyptian residential homes.
B. The balcony plays a crucial role in accomplishing sociocultural needs, restoration and wellbeing for women in the residential environment.
C. The built environment contributes positively to the activation of the balcony space, as a social and cultural device.
D. The balcony usage needs are dependent on the social / economic setting.

1.5 Research Aim & Scope
Since public and private spaces are generally considered to be the fundamental building blocks for residential settings, this study draws attention to the need to consider and detail threshold spaces as one of the key aspects for accomplishing sociocultural needs, restoration, and wellbeing in the residential environment. Understanding the **function** and **uses** of these spaces allows us to appreciate their benefits that are often neglected. According to Ana Luz (2006), we may encounter the in-between within the urban fabric of the city; in the *voids between buildings* or at the *liminal places of transition and passage* (Hajer, Reijndorp 2001, p.128). For the scope of this research, the qualitative study focuses on an ‘architectural scope’ and thereby the smaller, tangible scale of the in-between. As expressed by Massoud (2020), smaller scale patterns are more tangible and relevant to human beings in comparison to larger scale patterns which are less tangible and more difficult to understand. Therefore, this
investigation process works with a more humanized breadth, focusing on the social dimension of one fundamental example of threshold patterns; the Cairene balcony.

The choice of the balcony is a convenient and safe option for admitting into the field as it is part of the already existing ‘outside’ as much as it is part of the personal ‘inside’. In regards to Otrishkeno (2019), the balcony is positioned on the borderline of ‘inside-outside’ (Crowley 2002: 183), therefore it may be conceived as a “threshold space”. In this regard, looking at the balcony’s daily functions and uses may disclose so much about both, the ‘private homes’ and ‘public realities’. The balcony performs as a ‘stage’ for everyday, mundane practices and also a ‘material object’ that may be appropriated in response to certain social and cultural needs (Otrishchenko, 2019). Thus, it is featured by its ‘own physicality’ and the various ‘appropriations’ that customize/transform it. The study particularly targets the perception and use of the local Cairene women who represent the figure responsible for the home in ordinary Egyptian households.

1.6 Research Methodology

The investigation process of this qualitative study starts with an extensive literature review of the phenomenon of the in-between to highlight the different types of existent threshold patterns and the limitations and gaps in previous studies on this topic. Correspondingly, one prevailing threshold pattern was selected as the focus of the present, local study. The functional and behavioral performance of the residential balcony across the three case studies were fundamentally examined through an Ethnographic approach that incorporated fieldwork observations (physical and behavioral mapping), photo documentation, Interviews, and extended conversations with residents conducted by the researcher. Beyond the performance parameters, the qualities of the balcony space and the surrounding environment were also obtained from the narratives of the respondents. The transcriptions were coded and analyzed through manual thematic analysis and the various sociocultural themes that emerged from the observations and collected stories were discussed in regards to the literature review framework, overarching research question, and the aforementioned hypotheses.

1.7 Research Structure

The dissertation layout begins with the literature review chapter to first understand and dissect the ‘public’-‘private’ dichotomy and unravel existing literature on the concept of the ‘in-between’/threshold space. The focus then shifts - from the global down to the local lens, to the situation of the fundamental threshold condition; the Cairene balcony. This is followed by a review of the sociocultural issues that emerged during the fieldwork process, which sets the framework for the research and guides the case study analysis. The following chapter details the methodological approach, analytical method, and tactics conducted by the researcher. Succeedingly, chapter 4 documents the disclosed utilization patterns (behavioral mapping) and situation of balconies (physical mapping) across the three local contexts. Findings from the various data collection methods and the results of the different study areas are overlaid and discussed in Chapter 5. Finally, study limitations, the overall fieldwork experience,
conclusion, recommendations, and suggestions for further studies are presented.

1.8 Research Significance

The balcony constitutes a prominent room at home (Aydin & Sayar, 2020) and its significance in the history of urban living is well acknowledged (Smektala & Narożny, 2022). It is a valuable space that offers a useful connection with the outside. Nonetheless, balconies are currently neglected and/or eliminated from new house designs. When existing they are either small or not designed to respond to the needs and wants of the users. Architects need to better understand how they work and the socio-cultural needs of the local residents to produce successful, convenient designs. As noted by Smektala & Narożny, 2022, they can promote a better quality of life if carefully designed to fit certain spatial and normative contexts. The fact that little research has been conducted to examine the everyday use of the balcony and its effect on users, and women, in particular, makes this ‘dedicated’ research piece a valuable addition. As expressed by Bernardo Zacka (2020);

“It offers company without the demands of intimacy, and we should never take it for granted.”
**Figure 1:** Flow diagram for research process.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

“[P]repare to knit the inside of the building to the outside, by treating the edge between the two as a place in its own right, and making human details there...” (Alexander, p.789)

A conventional city structure could be simplified to three preliminary levels; the exterior ‘outside’, the interior ‘inside’ and the physical boundary ‘skin’ holding both realms apart (Bixby, 2009). The summation of these boundaries (building skin) form the foundations for our visual understanding of the city. In this sense, the city we perceive and interpret is basically a disclosure of a series of spatial boundaries, namely Architecture (Marić, 2011). The inside and outside realms represent a constant state of dynamism, while the conventional facade delineates the static, demarcation object - inhibiting any flow between the two spatial levels. In the words of Marija Marić (2011), the question then becomes: “What would happen if one replaces a wall with a space that can be used, changed, and exposed? What would happen if the liminal field between interior and exterior becomes dynamic?” Departing from the conventional thinking of the urban city structure, featuring a clear distinction between inside and outside (Atmodiwirjo & Yatmo, 2019), one potential answer is, ‘in between spaces’. The demolition of the solid wall and formation of a space generates a spatial typology, whose liminal position categorizes it as an in-between space delineating a liminal state of architecture (Marić, 2011). The transition from the secure and safe interior of the domestic sphere to the vulnerability of public exposure in the urban void realm is one of the primary means of articulating and experiencing this liminal state.

Nonetheless, in contemporary architecture, the activation and functioning of this edge/threshold state has been mostly disregarded (Brisbin, 2014). Despite the fact that scholars, poets, philosophers, and artists commonly use ‘liminal architectural features’ as metaphors or means for seeing the world from a divergent perspective, these spaces are not typically studied (Aronis, 2020). In this respect, this chapter aims to unravel existing literature on the concept of the ‘in-between’/threshold. Where? Why? How? and What? will be questions that trigger the theoretical framework of the discussion; Where can a designer find this In-between, where is that potential place of difference? What role does it play? Why is it important? How is it enacted? And What are the Architectural Typologies that delineate this in between, in both the Global and local sense? In particular, the chapter focuses on one fundamental ‘edge condition’ (Brisbin, 2014) or ‘between architecture’ (Mugerauer, 1993), namely ‘the balcony’, speculating upon its role throughout time and history and its condition in Contemporary Egyptian architecture. The final section in the chapter discusses various social and cultural issues that emerged in the exploratory fieldwork on the local Cairene balcony; The dichotomy between the
‘private’ and the ‘public’, safety and security in the residential environment, wellbeing and psychological restoration, territoriality and the phenomenon of personalization. This review sets the foundation for the research approach and framework for exploring the role of the balcony in the Egyptian context. Thus feeding the eventual objective of reviving its ‘social and utilitarian benefits’ (Khalil & Eissa, 2021) in the everyday life of people.

2.2 Architectural Typologies of In-Between spaces

2.2.1 In-Between space

“...what does it mean to reflect upon a position, a relation, a place related to other places but with no place of its own – a position in-between?”
- Elizabeth Grosz (2001: 90.)

“For me this space of radical openness is a margin – a profound edge.”
- bell hooks (1990: 149.)

Due to the significant impact of the notion of the inbetween on spatial formation and spatiality of a building facade, there have been several scholarly attempts at defining and conceptualizing this term (Khan 1986; Anderson 1991; Gehl 1996; Stevens 2007; Farhady & Nam, 2009). They describe the term “in-between space” in a myriad of ways, notably as ‘an interface, a public/private divide, a buffer zone, a threshold, a soft edge, a liminal space, and as a smooth or striated region’ (Can & Health, 2016). Martin Buber articulates that “[t]he fundamental condition of being human is man with his fellow man. It is rooted in the fact that a being considers another as an ‘other’, so as to be able to communicate with him in a sphere which is common to both and which transcends the individual spheres of both... I call the sphere of the in-between. It is a primary category of human reality. It will be the starting point for the real third” (Klee, 1925). Louis Kahn describes the inside-outside connection as, “...the closed door in-between rooms... showing the possibility of communication” (Khan, 1986). Herman Hertsberger uses the term “threshold” to describe the transition of space. He explains that “[t]he threshold provides the key to the transition and connection between areas with divergent territorial claims and, as a place in its own right, it constitutes, essentially, the special condition for the meeting and dialogue between areas of different orders” (Hertsberger, 1991).

On a different note, Yoshinobu Ashihara adopts two expressions to delineate space; “positive space”, or “P-space”, and “negative space”, or “N-space”. He disputes that the differentiation of these produces, what he calls, a “PN-space”.

Boettger (2014) points out that the space in-between inside and outside can be characterized by ambivalence, belonging to neither domain nor another third position (Can & Health, 2016), therefore raising the question of where the boundary between interior and exterior is defined (Atmodiwirjo & Yatmo, 2019); “where does the interior end and the exterior begin?” (Weinthal, 2011, p.576). As characterized by Henri Bergson (1944), it is a ‘space of being and movement’. Based on Plato's work, Groz (2001, pp.90–93) asserts that it is a peculiar location that is “choric”. Thus, it is a mediator zone absent of any inherent space, shape, or character. Instead, it is a
location where identities are rearranged and counter side relations are adjusted. In this way, because they are typically characterized from both sides and lack their own borders, in-between areas are shaped and defined by other entities (Can & Health, 2016). This can be simplified as the differentiation between external and internal level skin membranes reflecting a transitory process that encompasses a practical extension of the inside, with an influence by the character and disposition of the outside in a reversible equation where the exterior aesthetic similarly changes through interior alteration (Maric, 2011).

To Lefebvre and Soja, the in-between realm is the existence of an ‘other reality’ - a different alternative or ‘third instance’ that reconstitutes and extends from the original opposition, simultaneously (Soja 2000, p.20). Thus, one may consider such an ‘ambiguous’ space between public and private domains as a ‘real’ space that is both public and private (usually prefixed by the term semi-private or semi-public, again implying an inter-situation that is in the middle). Ana Luz (2006) suggests that the notion of in-betweenness can be conceptualized as a state of inter-form, a dialectical interplay between things (subject, object and space). It is not simply a melting pot of ‘two in one’, but rather a more trialectic dialogue between two divert phenomena establishing new possibilities and potentials. ’Crossing that line between’ (Luz, 2006) gives corpiorality to the transitional ‘edge condition’ (Brisbin, 2014). Within that instant, when the boundary line is crossed, prevailed, and experienced, the in-between comes to presence. Nevertheless, Where? Why? How? and What? will be questions that trigger the theoretical framework of the present section; Where can a designer find this In-between, where is that potential place of difference? What role does it play? Why is it important? How is it enacted? And What are the Architectural Typologies that delineate this in between, in the Global and local sense?

2.2.2 ‘Where’: Locations of The In-between

We can encounter and experience the in-between at the ‘liminal places of transition and passage’ (Hajer, Reijndorp 2001, p.128). They form the borders between two hostile spheres, for example, indoors and outdoors, private and public, or domestic and societal, performing a transitory Betwixt function. In this sense, the location of the threshold is certainly the clearest illustration of an in-between situation. These boundary places constituting ‘portals, passageways, entries, and exit points’, are generally characterized by ‘border’ components like “doors, windows, gates, fences, walls, steps, doorsteps, and many other guardrails” (Dilini & Coorey, 2014). In other words, threshold spaces are composed of thresholds and formulating space components (Massoud, 2020). The various combinations of these components and their position and materiality can create different architectural expressions and spatial perceptions needed to exhibit a certain performance; the threshold as a transitional space, a territorial demarcation, or a symbolic representation depicting the identity of the building and the journey to follow (Bhonsle, 2010). These places play important roles and offer potential for social and cultural development, allowing various virtualities and prospective opportunities to materialize (Can & Health, 2016). The temporal and adaptable qualities of these spaces facilitate diverse possibilities for encounter, personalization, and socialization (Abu-Ghazzehe, 2000).
2.2.3 ‘Why’: Role of The In-Between

Meiss (1991) outlines three key roles for a threshold space: a utilitarian role, a protective role, and a semantic role. When a threshold space acts as a transitional zone, it signifies a utilitarian role. In line with Meiss (1991), the fundamental role of threshold spaces is to serve as a transitional zone between two distinct phenomena. When a threshold dissects spaces, exhibiting a statement of territoriality or delimitation, it proclaims a protective role. Threshold spaces can act as a territory considering that the spatial structure of the threshold regulates people’s activities and behaviors to a certain degree. Consequently, it is essential to learn the various architectural elements constituting threshold spaces to achieve the desired degree of privacy and territoriality. Altman (1975) has discussed three essential forms of territory: primary, secondary, and public territory, following the period of occupancy, the level of ownership, and the magnitude of personalization. As an in-between, a threshold space governs the degree of separation and territoriality of a building in response to the magnitude of social interactions and interconnections in the social neighborhood. Accordingly, the architectural physicality of thresholds to endure a certain level of territoriality differs from building to building (Meiss, 1991). Therefore, threshold spaces provide a major contribution in sustaining communities by hosting various opportunities to carry out essential activities which vary according to building type. On the other hand, when a threshold space depicts the symbolic identity of the building, it signals a semantic role. As stated by Meiss (1991) and Bhonsle (2010), threshold spaces not only exhibit a transitional, and territorial articulation, but also a symbolic identity of the building and the consecutive experiential journey that follows.

2.2.4 ‘How’: Opportunities for the In-between

“At this point, the last [question] emerge[s]: ... how can we experience or achieve a fulfilling pause in these momentary spaced-places?” (Luz, 2006)

Architect Jan Gehl (2011), who explores the opportunities for connection in ‘life between buildings’, determines that the design of the ‘border zone’ (p. 113) between the public domain and home is fundamentally significant. He asserts that [s]harply demarcated borders’ where one is either occupying the public or private, are less apt to entice communication. It is the in-between medium, or “PN-space” (Ashihara, 1981) that secures communication. As asserted by Alexander et. al (1977):

Make sure that you treat the edge of the building as a "thing," a "place," a zone with volume to it, not a line or interface which has no thickness. Crenelate the edge of buildings with places that invite people to stop. Make places that have depth and a covering, places to sit, lean, and walk, especially at those points along the perimeter which look onto interesting outdoor life (Alexander et al., 1977, p.755).

He further elaborates that this could be done through articulating the building edge with ‘arcades, gallery surround, balconies, terraces, sunny place, outdoor rooms, and connection to
earth'; and an add-on of seats, street windows, or front door bench can further endorse the feeling of connection. Gehl (2011) demonstrates that occasions inhabiting communication are constituted in what he calls ‘soft edges’, user-friendly areas that are positioned on the outer membrane of buildings and have easy access to them. For instance, a seating space at the front porch, open for people to relax or work – and which is both; public and approachable, yet also apart from the street and personal – is a site that secures promising connections with the outside and others (Ghel, 2011; Aronis 2020).

2.2.5 ‘What’: Typologies of The In-Between

2.2.5.1 The In-Between In Global Context

A few instances for typologies of the In-between were briefly mentioned in the previous section, yet a more thorough investigation will be helpful to arrive at a practical definition for such spaces. There are a myriad of possibilities that may be employed as examples of in-between typologies. Arcades are one example. They are widespread in many cities, especially in those where pedestrians need to be secured from frequent rain or extremely high temperatures (Kray et al., 2013). It is often the case that buildings are far more unfriendly than they should be. They do not secure possibilities for connection with the exterior public domain, or attract the public in; they function as a private territory for the people inside. Therefore, there becomes no clear connection between the private world within the building and the world outside. No realms separating these two forms of spaces, taking from both, the inside territory, and the world at large, simultaneously. The conventional treatment to this situation is the arcade: arcades form an ambiguous territory between the exterior public and the interior private domains and therefore create more friendly buildings for the users (Alexander et al., 1977). Typically, they are protected with some roof and bordered with walls on some sides, but they are commonly maintained open to the outdoor surroundings. They could feature similar pavement as surrounding streets or footpaths, and people can readily leave them at any time to access indoor or outdoor spaces. Arcades are frequently owned by the public and are accessible to everybody at all times, much like tunnels or underpasses (Kray et al., 2013). Rudofsky (1969) asserts that such space "takes the place of the ancient forum".

Another example is ‘street windows’, which offer a special kind of connection between street life and the inside (Alexander et al., 1977). When we are contained inside, windows allow us to connect with and see the outside (Carr and Zhang, 2004). Through the exchange of odors and noise, they provide us with an opportunity to interact with the street or square (Massoud, 2020). In the old city of Jeddah street windows, locally named Roshan, are mainly used for air ventilation, indirect light penetration into the house, and to secure privacy for women as they sit inside and watch over the outer world ensuring that they do not get exposed to strangers from the outside (Massoud, 2020). As expressed by Abudoad (2017), it was the most important sitting space and the center of many social activities, among Jeddah’s old homes; “[t]hey were used for various social activities, including chatting, sipping tea or coffee, smoking shisha, watching the world go by down in the streets as well as sleeping” (Khan, 1981). In a similar vein, Peruvian culture strongly ingrains observing the street from upper floor protruding windows taking the
form of the **mirado**, a captivating ornate gallery that dominates many colonial buildings in Lima. It's especially popular for Peruvian girls to watch the street if they aren't too visible. The **mirado** secures this place of ‘passive observation’. They can always withdraw into the window if somebody peeks over (Alexander et al., 1987). According to Chan-fai (2004), **windows** may be conceived as the descendants of **doors**. While they both introduce openings into the walls, there is an apparent difference in their roles. Whereas the door demarcates the public (outside) from the private (inside), the window secures ‘connection’ after the exhibited ‘separation’: peeking out through the window, the individual is once again reconnected to the external world. Therefore, Simmel (1997) asserts that the fundamental role of the window is for the inside to have an exclusively one-sided direction to the outside world; “it is there for looking out, not for looking in” (Simmel 1997, p.68).

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**Figure 2**: local street window, ‘Roshan’ used for women’s privacy in Jeddah, source: (Massoud, 2020).

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“...we continue to fill out the Building edge”
- Christopher Alexander et al. (1977)

“...It is precisely in these empty spaces that we find the usefulness of the room.”
- Tao-te-ching (1993)

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The previous Inbetween typologies; **building edge** and **arcades**, build an **outside view perspective** to the issue of connection. These patterns perceive the problem from the lens of the people outside the building. In this example, the same issue is revisited, yet from the perspective of the people inside. According to Alexander, Ishikwa, and Silverstein (1977), buildings must have at least one place, or ideally multiple spaces, where people may remain inside while at the same time stay in contact with the outside world simultaneously. This need for an ‘Inside-Outside’ connection has been supported extensively in many research studies (Wallace, 1952; Car & Cheung, 2004). Despite its virtues, the pattern of **street windows** is not sufficient to fulfill this need. They take up a small part of the inside, and can only be inhabited while the person is standing at the periphery of the space. Nonetheless, the desired condition is far more prosperous and compelling. Ideally, the upper stories of buildings need spaces where one may
spend hours in touch with the outside; playing cards, working on the terrace, eating, folding the wash, sculpting clay, or playing with children (Alexander et al., 1977). Concisely, the everyday human situations can be engrossed by the condition and constitution of the ‘gallery surround’. This In-between pattern, as proposed by Christopher Alexander in his book, ‘A pattern language’, is fundamental for every building periphery. Van Eyck (1950) said “frame our desire to tarry, make places where we can do so”. One specific advocate of this need incorporates a further example of ‘between architecture’ (Mugerauer, 1993); the balcony (Zacka, 2020).

Figure 3: Variants for the between pattern of ‘gallery surround’, source: (Alexander et al., 1987, p. 779).

2.2.5.1.1 The Balcony: meaning and significance

“If people cannot walk out from the building onto balconies and terraces which look toward the outdoor space around the building, then neither they themselves nor the people outside have any medium which helps them feel the building and the larger public world are intertwined.” (Alexander et al., 1977, p.882)

A balcony is an architectural feature that can imply different roles in terms of appearance, qualities, and use (Emekçi, 2021). It may be referred to as “a platform on the outside of a building, enclosed by walls or balustrades, supported by columns or console brackets” (Kisnarini et al., 2018). It can also be described as the transition zone between the inside and outside, occasionally used for ventilation (Emekçi, 2021). Considering the word’s etymology, “Balcone” coming from “balco,” that in old Italian signifies “scaffold,” and “one,” an augmentative prefix, indicates ‘large scaffold’ (Charitonidou, 2020). It signifies a “platform projecting from a wall of a building surrounded by a wall or railing” (Etymology Dictionary, 2021). A balcony differs from a terrace or other viewing platforms in that it is cantilevered from buildings (Charitonidou, 2020). In general, the balcony serves as an extension to the living space and activities that are feasible in a residence with no garden (Britannica, 2011). Bernardo Zacka (2020) describes them as, “the domain of the nightgown and the undershirt: items too revealing for the street, yet modest enough to be worn at a distance.” In the words of Sheila Crane, what constitutes a big part of our common awe of balconies lies in their exceptional stand as gateways (between inside and outside). “Balconies act as liminal spaces that bridge public and private life”, she elaborates, referring to words of the French sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1992) in his book Rhythmanalysis, where he commends the “marvelous invention of the balcony” as the space where one can best grip the “fleeting rhythms of urban life”.

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According to Carlotta and Matteo Origoni (2020), the balcony is that privileged space that allows us to keep in touch with the outside, while staying safe inside, precisely because of its liminal position on the borderline of two counter conditions (the inside and outside). They make part of our homes yet extend to the public realm offering visibility that contrasts with the inside. They may be captured as the porous (Benjamin & Lacis, 1963) boundary of our home colony (Cavan, 1963) that are “private yet public; exposed yet secluded” (Zacka, 2020, p.12). This ambivalence is a key trait that characterizes balconies (Volz & Peng, 2021). Essentially, the power of the experience lies in its “ongoing in-betweenness” (Probyn, 1996), that is, in its ability to combine the private and public; interior and exterior simultaneously and variantly across diverse cultures (Charitonidou, 2020). Moreover, recent research has established balconies to have positive environmental impacts and acknowledged their contribution to the conduct of buildings in terms of both thermal efficiency and a healthy urban ecosystem (Khalil & Eissa, 2021). They serve as an “environmental filter,” offering planting areas and sun shade for facades, which minimizes the need for ventilators (Mohammadi et al., 2010). According to Mladenovic et al. (2017), green balconies may be regarded as the “lungs of the city”, helping to slow down climate change. balconies with screening mechanisms significantly improve the temperature conditions of the interior space (Kisnarini et al., 2018b). Besides, they mitigate air pollution and traffic noise, especially in the densely populated areas (Griffiths, 1999; Wing Chau et al., 2004). The numerous benefits encountered through balconies support Tower’s assertion that every apartment should own a balcony, terrace, or a garden (Towers, 2005).

2.2.5.2 The Vibrant Nature of The In-Between; from a global lens

Apart from serving as technical support in regards to the climate, weather, and amount of sunlight penetrating our living rooms (McAlester, 2015), ‘balconies, porches, windows, doors, entrances to houses, and fire escapes’ are regularly used in urban environments as connective sites hosting communication and interaction with the outside (Aronis, 2020). In the twentieth century period, Jewish Israeli mothers occasionally used their balconies to call out for their kids for lunch (Guri 1967; Aronis 2016), and often spent their Friday nights singing and chatting across their balconies (Rabau 1973). On the other hand, American kids spent their time on their porches enjoying ice cream, attending family gatherings and inviting neighbors to come over (Sonia 2006; Stephen 2006; Robinson G. 2019); In festive occasions, people often approached their balconies and porches to celebrate with the wider public, watching parades pass by and interacting with people in the street (Aronis, 2009), also at war times, balconies were the safe haven from which one can observe the streets to learn what's happening outside while staying safe inside (Mourani 2009; Aronis 2016). In dense cities, balconies and windows are often used as communicative sites to shout a reminder, throw forgotten keys or call for a friend to come over (Author 2009, Frank 2010).

In many instances, liminal space patterns are turned to stages or areas for exchanging messages with the exterior public without the physical presence of people within these spaces: suspending banners, and hanging signs and symbols on the railing (Aronis, 2020). During quarantine, Berliners were captured to alter their balcony platforms into art exhibits. Artists
took advantage of the ‘border-line’, balcony platforms and window openings in order to showcase their work in an in-between, common realm, accessible from both, the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’, to keep the city’s art scene intact (Afp, 2020). From displaying artwork, to hanging Christmas lights and wreaths, to flying flags on national occasions, these messages project a sense of identity and entice a sense of community and belonging (Better Homes & Gardens 2019; Aronis 2020). Disclosing the residents’ culture, Muslims will usually cover up their windows with curtains for privacy and religious reasons, Jewish people will put a mezuzah on the right corner of the door case, meanwhile, during the time of Christmas, Christians will put on their decorations and Christmas tree by the window side. Emekci (2021) explains, as standard communication venues throughout Western and Mediterranean living countries, liminal architectural features are used for interaction, community building, civic engagement, and identity conservation. Succinctly, as expressed by Carolin Aronis (2020), these architectural patterns symbolize connection, and forge the social life in the urban environment (Aronis 2020). In her concluding remarks she elaborated, “[t]hese architectural features (i.e balconies, porches, doors, windows, fire escapes, and entrances) are prevalent also in other parts of the world, but those are beyond the scope of this [research]. I would like to encourage other scholars to study other places, urban or rural, in the world...” (Aronis, 2020). In this regard, the following section explores typologies for the in-between in the local Cairene context; focusing on existing literature on the role and significance of the Cairene balcony.

Figure 4: Balcony platforms used to showcase artwork in Berlin during quarantine, source: (Smith, 2020).

2.2.5.3 The In-Between in Local Context; Case studies based in Cairo

“Man’s relation to locales, and through locales to spaces, inheres in his dwelling. relationship between man and space is none other than dwelling, thought essentially” - Martin Heidegger

In an ethnographic survey of a small Cairene neighborhood, the Darb el-Ahmar district, gathered information revealed that residents' cognitive views and spatial perceptions of the public space are still affected by medieval cultural attributes which still impact their social and cultural norms, and spatial practices (Fakhouri, 1985). These customs and traditional practices
retain an enduring connection with the past (Abdelmonem, 2012). While street patterns and the handling of public space might seem very chaotic to westerners, the residents of the area share certain cultural attitudes reflecting their perceptions of the public space which is typically recognized in terms of clear cut dichotomies between the ‘private sphere’ for women and the ‘public sphere’ for men (Al-Kodmany 1999; Mazumdar & Mazumdar 2001; Ghannam 2002). As described by Evelyn Early (1993) on the social sphere of a family living in one of the jammed quarters in Cairo- Bulaq Abu 'Ala, the woman took charge of the household perceiving it as her own castle where she “spends free time with her women neighbors, and feels content, not neglected,” while on the other hand, the husband “comes home only to eat and change his clothes”. The alley is where men usually gather, socialize, and occasionally eat together. They spend much of their time in public areas (Abdelmonem, 2012), while the women who are the daily users of the dwelling place, are the ones in charge of the household everyday needs (Ghannam, 2002).

One example of a male in-Between pattern where men often gather is the coffeeshop. In Egypt and Middle Eastern societies, coffee shops (ahwa) have long been a male dominant place where men find refuge (Shehayeb & Yaldiz, 2007). It still serves as the traditional gathering place for adult males in the neighborhood where they spend most of their free time chatting and socializing with others. The coffee shop secures a focal point for fostering daily social interaction for the males of the neighborhood (Fakhouri, 1985). Nonetheless, while the coffee shop, and most of the wider streets are usually occupied by the men of the area, the female residents are not at liberty to navigate the alleyways and various spaces in the neighborhood (Fakhouri, 1985). Several local narratives illustrate men’s efforts to control women’s movement since they are said to get negatively influenced by going outside, working, and traveling abroad (Ghannam, 2002). The husbands, in general, enforce a set of rules that restrict the wife’s socialization practices with her neighbors. The socialization and neighbor-to-neighbor visits usually take place among the women in the hara. However, if they ever plan to visit a friend beyond their neighborhood they would need to have the husband’s permission first (Fakhouri, 1985). Therefore, women and their children are usually observed occupying the secured near-home spaces (Shehayeb & Eid, 2007) at the interface of buildings, amplifying yet another set of local female in-between typologies; the staircase, hosh area (courtyard), rooftops, balconies, and other spaces used to raise domestic animals (Fakhouri 1985; Opoko 1998; Ghannam 2002; Kipper et al., 2009; Fikry 2019).

In an ethnographic description of the relocated group living in Al-Zaweya El-Hamra, Farha Ghannam (2002) narrated the role of the staircase in accommodating women’s everyday activities and practices. While on some days, a woman may feel comfortable sitting by the window side on a warm sunny evening to sort the rice, and peel the garlic, on other occasions she may occupy the staircase with her neighbors to hollow out and shove eggplants. Moreover, she shared other observations that captured locals turning the lower part of the staircase into shops providing various services such as; selling groceries, candy, ironing, etc. Aside from women, children also occupied the stair landings and building entrances to play games (Shehayeb & Eid, 2007). In another ethnographic description of a local Cairene neighborhood; the Darb el-ahmar district, Hani Fakhouri (1985) discussed the role of the hosh area (courtyard
in-between buildings) where the tap water is shared among residents of the ground floor. The *hosh* (another example for the in-between) is utilized by housewives for washing, cooking, and socializing in the morning while their men are at work. It secures a safe gathering area for the women to hang out and fulfill their everyday household needs.

Another commonly discussed example is *rooftops*; an active node of multispecies relationships (Fikry, 2019). In a case study of Sayedia Zenab district, Cairo, Opoko (1998) shared the utilization patterns of rooftops for storage, collecting water, and raising domestic animals. In Egypt, *rooftops* are predominantly viewed as the pulsating points of multispecies interaction that have been witnessed and lived over many generations. Besides humans - who sporadically venture to rooftops - there is usually an impeccable variety of non-human animals as well, including goats, chickens, turkeys, and sheep (Kipper et al., 2009; Fikry, 2019). Despite it being time consuming, the practice of keeping livestock is conceived as “*tasliyah*” (entertainment). Um Khalid expressed “It is nice to raise chickens and ducks on the roof and sit under the sun while watching the poultry,” (Ghannam 2002, p.76). Ghannam (2002) elaborated that spaces used for raising domestic animals not only provide economic investments but also conserve important sites for interrelationships and socialization between local women. Other spaces used to raise domestic animals vary from *areas beneath the bed*, *balconies*, *added-on sheds* on the ground floor apartments, and *supplementary balconies* that get attached mainly for this function (Ghannam 2002; Ahmed 2012). This brings us to one of the most significant examples of local in-between typologies, and the focus of this study; the *balcony*.

2.2.5.3.1 The Cairene Balcony: a local description

“*Would you like an apartment with a balcony?’ She answered, ‘yes’*” (Ghannam 2002, p.56).

In several narratives of Cairene local communities, the balcony has often been revealed as a significant social, cultural, and economic element in the everyday lives of people (Opoko 1998; Ghannam 2002; Shehayeb & Eid, 2007; Ahmed 2012; ElGabalawy 2016; Khalil & Eissa 2021; ElZein & ElSemary 2022). Several attempts at balcony alterations and a wide variety of functions have been disclosed in different ethnographic studies carried in and around Old Cairo. According to Goffman (1959), the balcony serves as a public "stage" where we communicate with others and present ourselves to the outside community. In this regard, Ghannam (2002) narrated the social role of balconies in the daily life of women living in al-Zawiya al-Hamra. Women are known to read the news of other families by scrutinizing the objects and clothes visible on the laundry ropes of other balconies, which may include the birth of a new child or the return of some family member from overseas. On the balcony platform, couples may often secretly exchange love messages, use body language, whistle, and communicate verbally to organize meetings. The balcony also serves as a stage where neighbors may offend and insult each other when on bad terms. In this sense, we may see the role of the balcony platform in channeling the communication of women’s desires and anger (Ghannam, 2002). As for the *kitchen balcony*, if present, it reflects the social level of people in the house; the middle class usually store garlic and onions, which is a typical Egyptian imprint, beside which small bunches
of dried okra are hanged. As the balcony attests, before hanging the bunches of okra, the eldest daughter is observed with the mother threading the okra in a long string, using a sharp sewing needle (Madkour, 2010).

On a different note, Sarah Eldefrawi (2013) shared the role of dwelling balconies in offering a stimulating theatrical experience where elderly individuals attended events in the street from above. As explained by Shehayeb and Eid (2007), “*even the smallest balcony is valuable to residents of the neighborhood, provided it offers the opportunity to see, hear, and talk to people; it allows for companionship*”. Nivine Mossad (2022) discussed the festive role that balconies play in Eid and Ramadan; the colorful lights dangling from the balcony railing attracting every passerby, the Ramadan crescents fixed on the balcony walls, and the hanging lanterns that were commonly captured in vibrant scenes of children in the streets, now found its new host on balconies. In short, balconies have become the boxes of joy that open up widely on festive occasions, she elaborated. In the book ‘*Egypt from Balconies*’, Adel Abu Zaid ingeniously spoke about other forms of joy, the source of which is the balcony where he pointed out its manifold role as a stage for singing, a place for leisure and entertainment in free time playing backgammon and domino, an arena for chit chat and gossip with old friends, and possibly a witness to beginnings of love stories. As expressed by Mona Madkour (2010), regardless of the role of balconies, it has a very special presence in our daily lives; a presence that features our conscience. It is deposited in popular sayings like ‘عشرة طاولة في التراسينا’, which basically means playing backgammon on the balcony for leisure and entertainment. This pastime is inherent in Alexandrian summering on the beach, especially in popular neighborhoods like karmoz, kom el dikka and others. Another popular quote is ‘ارخي ستارة التراسينا لحسن جبرانا يشوفونا’, which is a metaphor for privacy.

### 2.3 The Role of The Balcony Throughout Time:

#### 2.3.1 A Brief Description of the Drastic Changes in Function & Meaning of Balconies Through Time & History
Over the centuries, the role of balconies has evolved along with local cultures and customs proving to be a humble (Zacka, 2020) and resilient architectural element (Khalil & Eissa 2021). These ancient ‘living’ platforms have long been used to stimulate, flourish and unify the masses (Traverso, 2020). As suggested by Mary Shepperson (2017), urban archaeologist, in the book ‘Sunlight and Shade in the First Cities’, balconies date long back in time to 3000 BC in Iran, when ancient Mesopotamians constructed overhanging parapets to shade the street from the blistering sun rays. However, by 1400 BC, many historians supposed that the Myceneans had started building balconies in what is today Greece for the counter purpose: to capture more natural light and secure better air ventilation. In Ancient Egypt, archaeologist Barry Kemp shared the role of balconies as theatrical elements used by kings to communicate with their subjects down below (ElZein & ElSemary 2022). In fact, this scene has been pictured several times throughout history (Traverso, 2020). Over time, the balcony and its so-called sibling, the terrace, picked up various distinctive roles and functions (Origoni & Origoni, 2020).

In ancient Rome, “the maenianum”, denoted an open-air platform that mainly served for recreational purposes. It was a place where emperors and senators could watch over gladiators while still being seen by the public (Kemp, 2018). With time, as balconies flourished, more elaborate designs emerged and thrived (Traverso, 2020). Many countries in the Arab world built
elaborate latticed covered balconies during the Middle Ages as a means of allowing residents to breathe while also conforming with Islamic privacy laws (Jehan, 2015). This enclosed in-between space, bordered with a framework of filigree, ensured a cool breeze of fresh air to the inside of the beyt (Traverso, 2020). The notion of privacy was key to Islam and therefore *Mashrabiya* were widely spread especially during the ottoman era (Alothman, 2017). Later on, its use expanded across the Arab world embellishing the streets with an artistic layer (Maspero 1974). During the Renaissance, balustrade balconies turned into ‘status symbols’ rather than functional platforms (Origoni & Origoni, 2020). They predominantly served an aesthetic function rather than a utilitarian role. Later, in the Baroque period, the balcony turned into a fundamental element of noble facades (ElZein & ElSemary 2022); the use of especially complex and decorated iron balustrades became increasingly common (Origoni & Origoni, 2020). Eventually, colonization dragged balconies all across the globe (Traverso, 2020).

![Figure 6: Mashrabiya balconies were erected throughout the Arab world to abide with privacy laws.](image)

Apart from the cultural and geographical significance, the balcony has always been important in our lives (Emekci, 2021). After all, It was on a balcony platform in Cape Town where a recently freed Nelson Mandela assured his people a new chapter in South African history; and it was from a balcony in the Vatican where the Pope baptized millions of followers and adherents every Sunday (Traverso, 2020); it was also from a palace balcony that Hitler exhibited his announcements (ElZein & ElSemary 2022); and finally it was on a balcony platform that one of the most well known and romantic scenes in Western literature took place, Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, where Juliet graciously awaited her love, Romeo (Traverso, 2020). *Women and balconies* have been closely associated throughout history, as women have been restricted to the
home for centuries, leaving them with very limited options to observe the world outside. In this regard, balconies contributed to an important role in fostering freedom and connection for women (ElZein & ElSemary 2022). Throughout history balconies, which secure access to the outdoors, have been captured under different names, in various civilizations and distinctive weather conditions. In some cases, they served military purposes, in others, as a mode of direct communication with the masses. There were times when it appeared as a source of inspiration in literature or artwork, and other times when it was used to adapt to conditions of the climate where people lived. It was not only limited to residences, as it is today, but equally present in public buildings and palaces (Emekci, 2021).

2.3.2 The Balcony In Contemporary Egypt

Over the centuries, balconies have contributed to a crucial role across social, political, artistic and our everyday life events (Emekci, 2021). Nevertheless, as of today, residential balconies in contemporary Egypt are slowly losing their primary objective across a large percentage of residential buildings, predominantly in areas with a high population density or those overlooking relatively narrow streets (Abdel Magid, 2020). ElZein & ElSemary (2022) argue that, at present time, the utilization patterns of balconies in Egypt is contingent upon socio-economic determinants. There are limitations on balcony design in high income areas in order to protect the aesthetics of the neighborhood. On the other hand, Low and middle income areas, depicting the majority of Egypt, do not impose any rules and regulations on the design and employment of the balcony. In this sense, according to Emekci (2021), the number of residential balconies that lost its original fundamental role, which is to facilitate interactions with the outside, is rather high as they are getting misused by the public. Present utilization patterns range from storing unused household material, fitting internal drying racks, setting up air conditioner units and fixing dishes on the balcony. Some integrate the balcony space to the house interior in order to increase the limited area of the residential unit (ElZein & ElSemary 2022).

Moreover, Khaled Ahmed (2012) and Farha Ghannam (2002) shared other balcony transformations including; closing off parapets for privacy reasons, adding wooden shutters, closing up the balcony space to expand the living room, installing glass shutters, or adding a small shack on the ground floor to raise domestic animals or store household material. He elaborates most of the transformations in public housing projects were exhibited and captured in balcony modifications. According to Tipple (1991), Wilkinson and Kardash (1992), and Salama (1998), while the subsequent environment might be less controlled and organized, it surely matches people’s needs more efficiently than that which was initially designed. Common causes of these different occupations and changes include a need for privacy, unfavorable climate conditions, high traffic noise, and a lack of safety. Additionally, balconies in high population regions are too narrow to accommodate seating or additional furniture. While the modest size of residential units shift people's priorities from preserving the balcony space to expanding inside areas (Abdelmageed 2020).
In short, as asserted by Essam Abdel Magid (2020), from analyzing the current situation of residential balconies in contemporary Egyptian architecture, there is an urgent need to address the current issue in order to attain ‘successful’ residential balconies in terms of functionality and general appearance. The most recent ‘dedicated’ studies on balcony usage, conducted by ElZein & ElSemary (2022) and Khalil & Eissa (2021), examined the usage patterns during the period of lockdown and were mainly concerned with the time of Covid-19. However, in the context of Egypt, there is little committed studies that particularly focus on the social/cultural role of the balcony ‘beyond’ the pandemic period (ElZein & ElSemary, 2022). As shared above, it is often addressed indirectly as part of mapping environmental changes and adaptations corresponding to residential dissatisfaction in public housing projects yet was never the central focus of the study where its everyday use and role is examined in local communities. As recommended by ElZein & ElSemary (2022), further studies are needed on Egyptians’ daily lifestyles and their effect on the role and perception of the residential environment, accordingly, to understand the specific local needs and conditions. Doha Eissa and Marwa Khalil (2021) stressed on the importance of outdoor private spaces in residential complexes and advocate balconies as crucial elements of future dwelling designs considering the numerous benefits they offer. Moreover, Al-Kodmany (1999) posits that in order to meet the demands of cities’ inhabitants, urban designers need to understand and accommodate the core cultural values of whom they are designing for. Previous research works on threshold spaces discussed certain roles and sociocultural issues. These however were filtered in parallel to the conducted fieldwork process on the Cairene balcony and predominantly incorporated; Residential visual privacy, Safety and Security, WellBeing and Psychological Restoration, and Territoriality and the Phenomenon of Personalization. Other issues were also raised in previous works however did not seem to be important to the context of this study and thus were disregarded. Accordingly, the following section discusses the issues that were paralleled in the field (in the local Egyptian context).

2.4 The Dichotomy Between The ‘Private’ and The ‘Public’

“For the Arab, there is no such thing as an intrusion in public. Public means public.” - Edward Hall, The Hidden Dimension

Middle Eastern culture has often been viewed as a dichotomy between a woman's private world and a man's public world, where men occupy the public sphere, while women, viewed as powerless and subordinate, are consigned and restricted to the private sphere (Al-Kodmany 1999; Ghannam 2002). Men’s sense of honor has frequently been associated with segregation of women, and seclusion has been viewed as a way to control women’s sexuality, which is conceived to be potent and potentially destructive to society (Mernissi 1987; MacLeod 1991; Hessini 1994). The demarcation between the private and the public spheres has been conceived as a divide between “two different worlds” (Abu-Lughod 1986; Mernissi 1987). As argued by Mernissi (1987), for example, “space boundaries divide Muslim society into subuniverses: the universe of men (the umma, the world of religion and power) and the universe of women, the domestic world of sexuality and the family” (138). In order to overstep the set barriers between public and private domains, women must put on their veil to protect themselves and prevent
social disorder or (fitna). According to Toulan (1983), Moughtin and Shalaby (1986), the design of spaces in Islamic communities is dependent on two fundamental variables. These entail the social need of **domestic privacy** for women and, at the other end of the spectrum, the need of **freedom and connection** for men.

### 2.4.1 Domestic Privacy In The Arab Culture

In the majority of societies, privacy is conceived as a fundamental social need (Touman & Al-Ajmi, 2017). Traditionally, primitive societies limited nonresidents’ access to their houses, and established governing rules to manage the outsider’s behavior once inside (Westin, 1970). There are significant disparities in how privacy is defined in each community due to the influence and variance in cultural and religious beliefs (Bahammam, 1987). According to Alan Westin, Professor of Public Law and Government at Columbia University, in the book, *Privacy and Freedom*, privacy may be defined as: “...the claim of individuals, groups, or institutions to determine for themselves when, how, and to what extent information about them is communicated to others. Viewed in terms of the relation of the individual to social participation, privacy is the voluntary and temporary withdrawal of a person from the general society through physical or psychological means”. In the book, *Environment and Design in Housing*, Lois Gottlieb expresses: “The most basic function of a dwelling is to create shelter and privacy”. Touman & Al-Ajmi (2017) demonstrate the importance of privacy to the whole Arab society, and particularly to the Egyptians. To protect and preserve dwelling privacy in any society, culture and religion must establish clear and explicit rules (Bahammam, 1987).

Privacy in the Arab-Islamic world is strongly influenced by the concept of sanctity, known as *hurma*, in Arabic. Hurma simultaneously denotes a wife or a woman, the sanctity of holy places, and the sanctity of the household. All three of which are conceived as sacred places that need protection (El Guindi, 1999). A frequently repeated saying in the Arab-Islamic world is, “every house has its sanctity (hurma)” (El Guindi, 1999) which refers to the inviolable and sacred nature Arab-Muslims give to their houses and implies restrictions on access to this sacred space (Campo, 1991). Traditional Muslim homes strictly follow the Quran, sunnahs, and hadiths to secure the privacy of its residents and their families and give them space to unwind from the daily outside demands and pressures (Shabani et al., 2011; Mortada, 2011; Omer, 2010). In Islam, home privacy is critical to maintaining a peaceful and functional family life (Omer, 2010). Home in Arabic is given the name *sakan*, derived from the word *sakina*, meaning peace and tranquility. Islam emphasizes the importance of preserving the need of privacy for both males and females to maintain a sense of peace and safety within the boundaries of home; the sacred place of the family (Campo, 1991; Al-Tarrah, 2007; Sobh and Belk, 2010, 2011). The influence of religious teachings and beliefs in any society is thus tremendous. However, privacy, as one of the fundamental individual needs in Egyptian culture, is also affected by ‘sociological customs and habits’ (inheritable patterns) and ‘sociological traditions’. Traditions constantly introduce regulations and widely recognized behavioral patterns that, to a certain extent, govern a particular culture. These rules and regulations receive their authority and strength from society as a whole. On the other hand, customs and habits can be said to constitute any nation's law, expressed through ‘codes, roles, organizations, and legislation’. In many ways, they have been
and will continue to be behavioral models for generations to come. Nonetheless, despite the fact that privacy is conceived to be a fundamental social and religious value, inherited custom and living tradition, the absence of privacy is a general shared value in Arabic housing (Touman & Al-Ajmi, 2017).

2.4.2 ‘Visual Privacy’ as The Object of Arab City Planning

Traditional settlements satisfied these needs through hierarchical spatial arrangements that allowed gradual transitions from the very private (domestic) to the very public (community) (Moughtin and Shalaby, 1986). According to Abu-Lughod (1993), the key objective of urban planning in the old Islamic city was to preserve visual privacy. She elaborates, the most significant contribution Islam made to the city’s structure was the establishment of male and female turf. It is crucial to keep in mind, however, that the purpose of the turf regulations was not merely to create physically distinct territories, but also—and perhaps more importantly—to create visually disconnected regions. Aside from protecting physical privacy, the key objective was to preserve visual privacy. Urban planning focused more on line-of-sight distance rather than actual distance (p.25). Al-Hathloul (1975) described "visual peeking" as an invasion to the privacy of the home. Measures were always taken to eliminate such invasive visual corridors as they were deemed to be a violation of the parties' karamah, or dignity (Al-Kodmany, 2018). Abu-Lughod (1993) explains that Islamic law regulated design and architecture, including the height of adjacent buildings, and guided social relationships to preserve visual privacy in neighborhoods. Ancient Egyptian housing demonstrated a similar desire for privacy. The dwellings featured three separated segments: the foyer, the living room, and the bedroom (Figure 6). In order to achieve the family’s determination to exclude strangers, these functional areas were compartmentalized (Mohammed, 1988). The doors and windows of the various spaces faced the center of the home, while the entry and windows in the outside walls of the house were arranged such that they never faced the openings of the neighboring house (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Ancient Egyptian housing plan divisions (Touman, & Al-Ajmi, 2017)
In this sense, Arab house design is mostly inward-looking. The standard interior courtyard; the home’s most private feature, is concealed behind plain exterior facades (Sobh & Belk, 2011). The courtyard house is engulfed with high walls and the inner courtyard or family spaces are not easily accessible from the front door. This stark separation between public and private areas embodies the need to prevent the public sphere from invading or intruding on the family’s privacy and intimate life (Sobh and Belk, 2010, 2011). To ensure a one-way view, whereby women could look outside while strangers, especially men, could not see inside, windows that face the street were erected higher than street-pedestrian level and were frequently accompanied by mashrabiya screens (Al-Kodmany 1999; Daneshpour 2011; Mortada 2011). To secure visual privacy, Al-Kodmany (1996), Hakim (1986), and Al-Hathloul (1981) illustrated specific urban design principles that dictated the height of residences and the location of openings, including doors and windows. They also described examples of incidents that highlighted the problem of visual privacy in various Islamic cities across various periods in history. For instance, a minaret was knocked down because the muezzin (the man who calls people for prayers) could see into neighbors’ homes as he ascended it. As reported by Al-Kawakibee (1995) and Ameela (1995) on the views of other architects and sociologists, conventional ideas toward domestic privacy are still prevalent in Middle Eastern culture. Nonetheless, most modern architectural solutions don’t address people’s demands or, specifically, the Egyptian social environment. Correspondingly, people have experimented with a variety of techniques to achieve the desired degree of privacy in their homes (Touman & Al-Ajmi, 2017). According to Othmann, Aird, and Buys (2014), achieving the optimum degree of privacy at home promotes security for the family members, and in particular safety for the female residents.

2.5 ‘Safety’ and ‘Security’ in the Residential Environment

In its simplest form, security means being safe, being invulnerable, and feeling at peace with oneself (Moeen, 1996). As defined by the Oxford Dictionary security means, “being free from danger or threat, preventive proceedings to ensure security of a country, person, or value issues”, and safety means, “being safe, situation free from danger, and ability to protect health” (Oxford, 1998-1999). In the Holy Quran, security is referenced as one of the objectives of God’s rule and righteous succession (Surah Noor, The Light). Another verse presents the secure city as a utopia
In meaning, security refers to preventive measures that ensure safety, but there is no significant difference between the two Latin words (Daroudi & Sami, 2017). John E. Moores defined security as a state of relative freedom against potentially harmful threats (Buzan, 1999). Vulnerabilities to both objective values like human life, and subjective values like identity are possible. Accordingly, security comprises two subjective and objective dimensions; in subjective aspect, security means lack of fear of harmed values; in objective aspect, security means lack of threat for attained values. Threat and opportunity are the two fundamental components of these two dimensions, and security is dependent on being relatively free from risks and taking advantage of potentialities (Abbasi Varki, 2008). In Buzan's view, security is acquired if confrontation facilities outnumber threatening facilities. Nonetheless, if threats are more intensive than confrontation facilities, insecurity will culminate (Buzan, 2000).

2.5.1 The Different Levels of Security

The concept of security can be perceived on various levels, starting with the individual, extending to the family, society, and nation at large. Increasing social security will increase a sense of personal security, while national security determines the degree of personal and social security (Khabir 1999, p.10). Personal security ensures individuals can assert their rights through legal action if they are threatened or oppressed. In the context of the entire society or certain segments of it, social security refers to a public defense against threats or unlawful actions by a person, group, or government (Yazdanfar & Nazari, 2015). From the perspective of intellectuals and researchers, security is currently regarded as one of the most crucial human needs in cities and societies (Daroudi & Sami, 2017). According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, security is the second-most significant level of needs, after physiological needs. As part of a hierarchy that incorporates physiological needs, security, dependence, self-esteem, self-actualization, and aesthetics, Jon Lang’s model of human needs places security on the second degree of importance. Security becomes fundamental upon satisfying the physiological needs (Ibrahim, 2019).

The concept of security stretches across micro and macro scales, thus incorporating urban and residential environment security. Urban security is defined as ease, tranquility, and safety in the city, which constitutes one of the new urbanization paradigms known as “safe cities”. Security is also seen as a form of inner tranquility and comfort in urban settings, which are qualities of life satisfaction (Cozen, 2007). One of the benefits of modern urban residential environments is the provision of residents' security and the prevention of social harm (Daroudi & Sami, 2017). People ultimately choose to live in places that can satisfy their needs for comfort; otherwise, residential dissatisfaction prompts people to leave their homes and move to a more pleasant environment. According to Julius, crime rate in residential areas and security level are important factors influencing the selection of a residential area (Oktay & Orcunoglu, 2007). Rifwater makes the assumption that low-income and impoverished households are constantly worried about theft and violence against their privacy in residential units and thus one of the most important housing criteria for them is security (Armitage & Monchuk, 2011). Therefore, it is crucial to consider the elements that contribute to people’ sense of safety and security in their homes.
(Daroudi & Sami, 2017). As asserted by Ibrahim (2019), every human being strives to have access to this need.

2.6 External Views in the Residential Environment

Another significant housing criterion influencing the selection of a residential unit is the ‘quality of view to the exterior’ (Peters & Halleran, 2020). As stated by Appleton (1975), in the prospect-refuge theory, people are naturally drawn to varied environments where they can observe activity while remaining in an environment where they will not be easily ‘watched over’. Views of city streets or green spaces from windows act as sources of prospect for its occupants (Hwang and Lee, 2018). An environment that fosters refuge can be attained within spaces in the home that secure a sense of protection and retreat (Peters & Halleran, 2020).

Densification of the urban environment reduces opportunities for contact with the outside world in the developing cities all over the world. This also applies to restrictions on what occupants can view out of their home's window. Natural views of the sky and other attributes may aid in psychological recovery, preserving one's health and wellbeing (R. Kaplan, 2001). Nonetheless, obscuring the sky and other natural elements with higher building heights and the various measures of densification may lessen the restorative nature of views (Masoudinejad & Hartig, 2020). In order to satisfy the demands of daily living, physical, psychological, and/or social resources that have been depleted must be replenished. In this sense, restoration is the replenishment of the depleted resources (Hartig, 2017). Among various environments supporting restoration, one's home stands out as a fundamental domain that people rely on for restoration (Masoudinejad & Hartig, 2020). In this respect, it is important to consider homes as spaces that may enhance our health, comfort and wellbeing (Peters & Halleran, 2020).

Expectations of a residence’s restorative role are frequently traced in decisions about its location, surroundings, design, and furnishings (Hartig, 2012). For more restorative apartment housing, more attention should be paid to window placement, quality of views, and connection with nature (Peters & Halleran, 2020). Access to outdoors and daylight have proved to enhance health and well-being of residents in several research studies (Veitch and Galasiu, 2012).

2.6.1 Window Views, Restorative Benefits and Mechanisms

People can engage with surrounding natural features and enjoy restorative benefits without having to be outside (Masoudinejad & Hartig, 2020). Tang and Brown (2006) examined the cardiovascular results of older women in nursing homes as they observed windowless rooms, views of buildings, or views of natural outdoors. Compared to the viewless room, both ‘outside’ views reduced blood pressure and heart rate, but the natural view had a greater impact. In this respect, designing a restorative setting could have a dual purpose of relieving stress and fostering wellbeing (Peters & Halleran, 2020). It is not known precisely how these benefits are achieved (Hartig, 2008). Attention Restoration Theory (ART) is one potential hypothesis suggesting that natural environments such as sky, vegetation, and other elements (Masoudinejad & Hartig, 2020) inspire exploration rather than focused attention, giving time for attention demanding abilities time to recharge (Berman, Jonides, & Kaplan, 1995, 2001, 2008). Therefore, a crucial aspect of the healing experience, as defined in ART, is the effortless
engagement of attention by the surroundings (Masoudinejad & Hartig, 2020), or “soft fascination” (Kaplan, 1995). It takes effort to focus one’s attention. It may require some level of dedication to fulfill a certain task. Moreover, distractions and interruptions may excerpt even further effort to focus (Kaplan, 2001). According to Simon (1978), attention is a limited resource in modern society, especially directed attention in which the extracted efforts cause mental exhaustion. Kaplan (2001) proposed that environments that do not demand a lot of directed attention are more likely to support the recovery or restoration process. Different kinds of attention are directed to surroundings or environments that are intrinsically appealing. In such situations, because of fascination, little effort is needed. Natural settings have been found to be prominent in the qualities that advocate mental restoration, albeit they are not the only contexts that promote such effortless attention (Herzog, Black, Fountaine, & Knotts, 1997).

2.6.2 View Content, Environmental Preferences and Micro-restorative Experiences

According to previous studies, taking frequent breaks to look outside during the day can give those within their homes access to the restorative attributes of nature, thus providing regular micro-restorative experiences (Kaplan, 2001). In an investigation of view content in the context of university students’ dormitories, Tennessen and Cimprich (1995) discovered, through the use of both performance and self-report metrics, that participants with natural surroundings exhibit higher levels of attentional ability. Nonetheless, Immediate access to nature may not be feasible in urban apartment buildings. Instead studies have evidenced that an unobstructed sky view can also provide a restorative experience (Masoudinejad and Hartig, 2020). Moreover, aspects of efficient performance and neighborhood satisfaction were exceptionally affected by observing exterior outdoor activities (Kaplan, 2001). According to Lindal and Hartig (2013), urban residential streetscapes that are well-designed, as well as the surrounding built environment, may encourage restoration. For instance, it was discovered that aggregate architectural variation’s effect on restoration likelihood was favorable. Entropy’s effects on assessments of the prospect of restoration were substantially moderated by being away and fascination. Further, results from an investigation on perceptions of neighborhood satisfaction indicate that ‘openness’, referred to as unrestricted, open spaces, is the most crucial element for overall residential satisfaction (Hur et al., 2010). From indoor and outdoor viewpoints, people prefer views that evoke feelings of depth and openness rather than views that provoke feelings of confinement (Kaya & Erkip, 2001; Stamps & Smith, 2002; Stamps, 2005; Ozdemir, 2010; Masoudinejad and Hartig, 2020).

In apartment buildings, city views into neighboring buildings are frequently the norm. However, we must take into account that when all potential views are blocked by surrounding buildings, residents are less likely to experience restoration, satisfaction, well-being, comfort, and soft fascination. According to Appleton (1975), prospect implies an “unimpeded opportunity to see” (p. 73). In both the physical and cognitive contexts, looking into the distance is intriguing (Kaplan, 2001). In this respect, it is substantial to take into account the views and surroundings of apartment dwelling throughout the planning phase. As expressed by Peters & Halleran (2020), It will become increasingly important to have windows that offer both prospect and...
refuge conditions through *balcony spaces, shading devices, operable louveres, automatic blinds, and vertical screens*, as they will affect residents’ judgment of the habitability of cities. For a myriad of reasons, and in order to enhance resident health, wellbeing, and restoration, designers need to optimize exterior views and spatial variety throughout the design process (Peters & Halleran, 2020).

While it is obvious that not every residential building can offer a view into natural surroundings, and that not every building can secure an appealing view (whether natural or not), when these opportunities are accessible, site-specific decisions about window location and size may disclose views that could improve the quality of life for its occupants (Veitch and Galasiu, 2012). Another viewpoint on the subject was offered by Evans and McCoy (1998), who noted that being under-stimulated can also be distressing, resulting in fatigue or, downright, sensory deprivation. Thus, environments that lack a view to the outside, regardless of their content, whether natural or built surroundings, may be unpleasant. Even if it is not primarily a natural outlook, looking out into the world brings variety in the shifting light, as well as diurnal and annual variations of color and patterns, and the less predictable weather fluctuations (Veitch and Galasiu, 2012). In this context, inspecting the function of the view from residence is far from a minor issue. Many individuals do not have the opportunity to hold extended restorative experiences. On the contrary, they may be rare and infrequent for many people. However, the view from home may enable micro-restorative experiences to be far more accessible. Even in the absence of anything particularly interesting to observe, the simple act of gazing outside beyond the glass is pleasing to the eyes and encourages the mind to wander. Simply put, there are numerous ways that the outlook to the outside can be mentally stimulating and thereby offer opportunities for respite (Kaplan, 2001).

### 2.7 Territoriality and The Phenomenon of Personalization

#### 2.7.1 Territoriality: definition and empirical description

The concept of territoriality usually refers to the process of registering space, establishing some rules of behavior in it, and controlling it. A person's home, workplace, hospital bed, etc. are all examples of fixed territories (Heidmets, 1994). Altman (1975, p.105) examined multiple definitions given for territoriality and accordingly refined some general characteristics among them. For one, Territoriality is always focused on a particular location, a region, or a set of physical structures; a specific location serves a particular purpose for its owner (for recreation, employment, etc.); it is clearly identified; place ownership may be both individual and collective; and the owner controls how others should behave in relation to a specific area. In light of these characteristics, Altman provides the following summary definition for territoriality:

*Territoriality is a mechanism for regulating the boundaries between oneself and others; it involves personalization and designation of a specific place or an object and informing others that it is "under the control" of a particular person or group. Personalization and control are intended to regulate social interaction and satisfy various social and physical*
needs. Violation by others of the boundaries of a personalized territory may elicit defense reactions from the owner. (Altman, 1975. P. 107)

In this regard, Territory can be defined as the “assignment” of a particular place to a particular subject, regarding which specific behavioral norms, attitudes, and other factors ensue. A subject is not required to have a property relationship to such a space; other examples of such “assigned” locations include one’s desk at school, or the personal ward at the hospital, etc. This type of environmental organization is prevalent, and it is from this perspective that one should really look at a city's spatial organization, where the specific "social structure of an urban physical environment" is made up of spaces allotted to various subjects; people, organizations, and agencies (Heidmets, 1994).

It has been demonstrated by several investigators (Altman, 1975; Taylor & Stough, 1978) that there are three basic types of territories; primary, secondary and public territories. Primary territories are those controlled by a single entity for an extended period of time. It is integral to the essence of being and is perceived as an indispensable part of oneself. The residential unit is the most prevalent depiction of a primary territory. Secondary territories represent locations that are conceived as less important to a certain individual. Public territories, on the other hand, are areas where everyone shares equivalent rights and which are not “allocated” to one particular subject, such as parks, streets, squares, etc. According to Proshansky and colleagues’ conception (Proshansky, Itelson & Rivlin, 1970, p.175), “Man strives in all situations to organize his physical surroundings so as to maximize his freedom of choice”. In regards to this viewpoint, the boundaries and divisioning of a certain territory is a way to pursue ‘freedom of choice’; when a territory is closer to the individual, he can act ‘freely’ within its boundaries. In short, control and freedom are the driving motives behind human interactions with space (Esquer & Eugenia, 1957).

2.7.2 Personalization: definition and empirical description

Altman's definition of personalization incorporates the concept of territoriality where personalization falls under the umbrella of territoriality. According to Summer (1974), “Personalization is a way to leave one's own imprint on one's environment ...” (p.19). Becker (1974) elaborates, “[p]ersonalization is the use of the environment to represent one's own values, status, self-determination, preferences, and actions” (p.442). Bartholomew (1974) articulates that "[p]ersonalization can be defined as a way of changing the environment to transform it into something individual and one's own"(p.6). Fitzhugh & Anderson (1980, p.12) perceive and measure personalization through changes exhibited in the surrounding environment. Finally, Gills (1981) asserts that the effort to personalize the environment may represent an endeavor to give it a specific significance. While territoriality views the environment as an object that can be governed, personalization considers the environment as a way to ‘materialize’ and display one's individuality and distinctiveness (Heidmets, 1994). It entails a set of actions taken to develop a space that matches with the cultural, social, and psychological needs of its inhabitants (Esquer & Eugenia, 1957). In his definition of personalization, Altman (1980) goes into more detail expressing, "[w]hen a person personalizes
the environment, he leaves his own individual imprint on it; he informs others where his place begins and ends, and where he presents to the world his values and beliefs" (p.137). The construction, conservation, and presentation of identity of oneself is the primary objective of personalization. It helps a person distinguish himself from others; it forms the basis of experiencing distinctiveness and identity, Altman elaborates (p.128).

Empirical studies undertaken under this subject can be categorized into two streams; the first focuses on different means for personalizing the environment, while the second examines the effects that these circumstances have on the individual. As noted by several scholars, man struggles to leave a unique “imprint” on places that he regularly uses; personalize work space to distinguish it from others, arrange personal rooms as desired, individualize private zones at the hospital or office space etc. (Summer, 1974; Zeisel, 1975; Fitzhugh & Anderson, 1980; Millard & Smith, 1981; Heidmets, 1994). As per a survey conducted by Hansen and Altman (1976, p. 495), there are six fundamental ways to personalize an environment. One may express a love or admiration bond through hanging photographs of family members or beloved ones; present personal beliefs and values through placing icons or statues; show aesthetic taste through fixing paintings or pictures etc.; feature a certain event through pinning calendars and newspaper cutouts etc.; indicate penchant through displaying certain objects; represent personal interests through hanging celebrity posters or athletic star banners, etc.

The majority of studies on the issue of unpersonalized environments were mainly conducted in institutional settings such as hospitals and administrative establishments. It has been concluded that most of these places lack adequate means for personalization, thus alienating the individual from the environment, fostering a neglectful attitude towards it, and depersonalizing him/her from it (Lawton, 1970. p.61; Vail, 1966. p.77; Gill, 1984; and others). On a similar note, as discussed by Edney (1976), public housing contributes to a number of issues, one of which is the restriction of social manipulation of space. In low-income housing projects, residents live in “pigeon boxes” designed according to a monotonous pattern that constantly repeats itself throughout the design layout, obstructing the expression of identity that usually sets for a community its “geographic distinctiveness” (Edney, 1976). This precarious living situation exacerbates the need for social use of space: the inhabitants instantly begin to alter the interior and exterior of their homes, adjusting their spatial demands to fulfill their social needs – often stressing their limited financial means. In respect of Gill’s reviews of previous studies on the purposes and role of environmental personalization, a person gains a sense of ‘assurance and safety’ and a sensation that the environment is “his own” through the act of personalization; the projection of the ‘self’ into the surroundings. Permanence and connection with an individual’s past, troop, and society, comprises the hallmarks of personalization. Moreover, the capacity to bring part of the “old world” into the “new world” (a hospital, a new city, etc.) makes it easier to adapt to the new world. Thus, personalization is also a key factor that contributes to adjusting to a new setting.
2.8 Conclusion

Over the centuries, balconies have contributed to a significant role across social, political, artistic and our everyday life events (Emekci, 2021). As expressed by Poon (2020) and many other scholars, balconies provide a myriad of benefits from the aspects of livability, lovability, psychological well being, and satisfaction with the living conditions in urban contexts. Nonetheless, as of today, residential balconies in contemporary Egypt are gradually losing their main function in a significant number of residential buildings, primarily in locations with a high population density or those facing relatively narrow streets (Abdel Magid, 2020). Farha Ghannam (2002), Khaled Ahmed (2012), Essam AbdelMaged (2020), ElZein & ElSemary (2022) and others captured some of the transformations conducted on Cairene balconies in public housing projects and local contexts. Common causes of the different occupations and exhibited modifications incorporate a need for privacy, unfavorable climate conditions, high traffic noise, and a lack of safety (ElZein & ElSemary, 2022). In short, as contended by Essam Abdel Magid (2020), from analyzing the current situation of residential balconies in contemporary Egyptian architecture, there is an urgent need to address the present issue in order to attain ‘successful’ residential balconies in terms of performance and general appearance. In this regard, the next chapter discusses the research design to conduct the fieldwork on Cairene balconies.
Chapter 3

Methodology

“Urban [in-between] architecture cannot be studied in city plans or architectural plans or from a bird’s eye view - but only through positioning oneself in the street and in the house, around or within these architectural features” (Aronis 2020, p. 10)

3.1 Research Design

In the investigation of ‘the porch as a between’, Mugerauer (1993) quests on a comprehensive phenomenology that probes the character of all patterns of betweenness. In respect of time limitations, this research uses a ‘focused ethnography’ (see Fuller 2017, Knoblauch 2005) as the key approach in examining one prevalent pattern of in-between; ‘the balcony’, as unfolded in the introduction and literature review chapters. In reference to Irigaray’s viewpoint on architecture, and Hansen’s notion of the ‘active negative’ suggesting “leaving a margin for evoking one’s own latent essence” (2014, p.8), the concentration is not solely on architecture, but rather on contingency in the design and use of it (spatial modifications and appropriations), accounting for the ‘active user’ in the environmental context (Rawes 2007, p.75). Similar to Probyn (1996), who views architecture as a multifold process rather than a ‘static material object’, this study seeks to interpret architecture in progress, in its occupancy and use, with humans, other beings, and the compelling happening through, within, and due to the architecture, and explicitly the in-between pattern of the balcony. The focus is on disclosing parallels, shared lived experiences and key characteristics of this in-between across various locale settings, leading to a flexible understanding of how they operate and essentially how this pattern is ‘perceived’, and how it ‘works’ in Egyptian context. This entails; capturing the social function and behavioral practices in the ‘associated spaces’, grasping the ‘everydayness’ of space production (Otrishchenko, 2019), and exploring the materiality of architecture and built environment in the various local settings.

To achieve the research objectives and examine the role and perception of the balcony space in local context, two main research methods were conducted; non-participatory observations and semi-structured interviews with residents. Data collection was completed between late January and early June 2022. Non-participatory systematic observations were conducted first, on two selected sample streets per study area, to examine and document the prevalent facade features and vocabulary in every neighborhood before proceeding with the interview process with residents. Walks around the neighborhood and windshield tours were undertaken to document behavioral activities and any patterns of balcony use in relation to the study setting and surrounding environment. This was followed by interviews with residents carried out to provide a deeper understanding of the various observations and assumptions and probe for
details of activity patterns in relation to the balcony. The research relies on primary data elicited from extensive fieldwork. The collected data will be in the form of fieldnotes, sketches, photographs and transcriptions.

3.1.1 Study Areas

In regards to the study areas, the research worked on three different neighborhoods that represent three of the most common types of residential environments available to the majority of the Egyptian population; an informal urban setting (El Qanater El Khayreya), an old urban setting (Daher), and a new planned environment in 15 May city. The various neighborhoods were predominantly selected based on ‘accessibility’. This variety may highlight for us the role and present situation of ‘balconies’ in Egypt and if parallels may come across. It pulls a flexible understanding to look at the different phases, different occupations and uses, different spatial appropriations and modifications, different ‘modes of ownership’ and learn ‘how’, over time, the different design visions were appropriated by the different living strategies to match with people’s needs. What kind of sociocultural values have been overlooked because of the way things are designed from a ‘top-down’ perspective. This ‘flexible comparison’ between the three different settings (the informal, the old and the new planned environment), despite slight variations in the social and environmental conditions, can provide a good potential to trace a more comprehensive picture for the values and significance of balconies in Egypt and pull parallels for the sociocultural issues that we need to consider to promote their use in local Egyptian context.

The first study area, El Qanater El Khayreya (informal urban neighborhood), dating back to 1868 and 1939 AD (Samakie), is one of the main cities in the governorate of Al Qalyubia, located north of Cairo, where the Nile divides to the Damietta and Rosetta (or Rashid) Branches, representing the start of the Nile Delta. It is around 22 kilometers from Cairo and is bounded by a variety of gardens, parks, and agricultural land. The Mohamed Ali Dam, which was built in 1840 with the intention of conserving water and safeguarding the Delta from severe floods, is where the city’s name, which translates to “The Dams of Welfare,” comes from. It is about 8,400 miles long, and has a water area of 100,000 square miles. It took about 20 years to get built (“El Qanater El Khayreya”). The total population, as of today, is 60,725, of whom 30678 are males and 30047 are females (Ar.zhujiworld.com). The average age of the resident living in the neighborhood is around 25 years old (Ar.zhujiworld.com). The area’s urban structure traces from early subdivisions of the agricultural land predominating long and narrow residential blocks along extended, confined residential streets. The plots are also more linear, with smaller widths and a full, compacted built-up area, making it the densest neighborhood among the three study settings. Two sample streets are selected for a closer examination; street 14, one of the most well known lively streets in the neighborhood and Gamal Al-Din Al-Afghany street, an ordinary banal internal alleyway (see figure below).
The second study area, Al-Zaher (old urban neighborhood) is one of the neighborhoods of old Cairo dating back to the 13th century and named after Baibars al-Bunduqdari, a ‘Mamluk’ Sultan of Egypt and Syria. The total area of the neighborhood is around 2 km² and its population is 72,278 inhabitants (“Al-Zaher”). It is regarded as one of the unique areas among Cairo’s neighborhoods that embodied the idea of a full-fledged “religious complex”; the Muslims lived next to their brothers, the Copts and the Jews, each of whom worshiped his Lord in his own shrine and temple (Matea, 2021). The view of Al-Zaher neighborhood from Ramses street or from the top of the 6th of October bridge, captures the old neighborhood with its many Christian facilities and churches. In recent times, the people who live there, especially the older generations, representing a large percentage of the population, express a clear deterioration in the area. One of the elderly residents, who was born and raised in Al-Zaher, described it as a “luxury” neighborhood in the past, yet today may be conceived as a “popular” neighborhood, or even a “slum” area. Residents commonly expressed “It was the Foreigners’ Quarter...it was more prestigious than Heliopolis,”, usually describing the place using ‘past tense’. Another source of distress is apartment buildings dating back to the 19th and 20th centuries. Many of those buildings that are still standing and inhabited are in dire need of maintenance. Meanwhile, uninhabited buildings are increasingly vulnerable to demolition. While old buildings are structurally deteriorating, and new ones are rising without identity, the urban fabric of the area is changing dramatically (“Al-Zaher”). In this sense, there is also a notable variation in building heights where the old buildings mostly constituted: a ground floor + two to three floors while the newly built residential buildings went up to 10 stories, and often more, above the ground floor. Sample streets of Ismail Al-Falaky, perpendicular to Ramses main street, and Youssef Pasha Suliman, perpendicular to El-Daher street were selected for a closer examination of facade transformations. Most of the streets in Daher had a similar width, form and proportion to the selected street samples.
Figure 10: The boundaries and Key landmarks of Al-Daher neighborhood, source: Tadamon, 2017.

Figure 11: Study area of Al-Daher neighborhood and selected street samples.

The third and last study area is the 15th of May City (new planned neighborhood), which is one of the first generation cities that was established in 1978. It is the main link between the cities of upper Egypt and greater Cairo, located southeast of Helwan, 31 km from Cairo. It is bordered by the main ‘Heliopolis-Helwan’ highway on the west side, the lands of the state and armed forces on the east, the Upper Egypt-Cairo Al-Kuraimat road on the south and military lands 6.5 kilometers east of the Nile River on the north. The total area of the city is 18331.27 acres, of...
which 4715 thousand acres constitute urban blocks; residential areas, commercial and service areas, industrial areas, roads and green areas. The total of green areas constitutes 7% of urban built up area. The city consists of 7 phases, each divided into residential neighborhoods [مجزرات], composing a total of 48 (source: New urban communities authority). In terms of social standard, the city, hosting a population of 250 thousand residents, is divided into three levels; luxury housing located in neighborhoods 7, 8, and 9, average and below average housing found in neighborhoods 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and a third and final level, the popular sector found in neighborhoods 25 to 30 (Soroor, 2010). In the context of this research, the study focuses on the average and below average housing in Megawras 10 and 12 to fulfill the third neighborhood type in the study; low income planned environment. The urban pattern is a typical dispersed formal urban pattern, where buildings are self-sustained, arranged in large blocks and isolated from the surrounding streets. The free-standing buildings share a common height constituting; a ground floor + three floors as shown in the figure below. Sample streets of Mohamed Farid and Abbas Al-Akad were selected for a closer examination of facade vocabulary and modifications. The majority of streets in this neighborhood were wide and spacious ranging between 25-35 meters as per distance from facade to facade.

3.1.2 Data Collection

3.1.2.1 Non-Participatory Observation

The first objective of the research was to document the spatial changes and modifications conducted on balcony spaces across the three selected local contexts. Physical mapping for facade vocabulary was undertaken for the two selected sample streets within the study zone boundaries of every study area. The street selection in every context was guided by interlocutors (contacts on the site) and included one popular, representative lively street and one internal ordinary street. Photographs were recorded from street level, for street-long building facades and were later analyzed for instances of various physical modifications and balcony
transformations (e.g. addition of curtains, roofs, etc.) The gathered visual data turned into key evidence in relation to the extent of user participation implying certain unfulfilled needs (which were later probed in the interviews). It disclosed the role of the ‘active user’ (Hansen, 2014), and the extent of participation in modifying space (spatial appropriations) for various purposes. A limitation for this method was concerned with ‘covered’ or higher floor balconies on narrow streets which may have introduced some biases in the results.

The second objective was concerned with patterns and categories of balcony usage. To capture the everyday utilization patterns, a closer examination documenting everyday, mundane experiences was needed. To record a wider range of activities, and avoid suspicious waitings in specific spots, windshield tours were undertaken on a weekly basis during the months of February, March, April, May, and early June 2022. Sometimes 2-3 visits were conducted a week, lasting 2-3 hours each. The dynamic observation encompassed residents’ activities taking place on balconies or any objects introduced onto the balcony that indicated their usability (i.e. tables, chairs, cupboards, hanged carpet, clothes, etc.). The gathered data at this phase included photographs, field notes, and sketches. Towards the end of this data collection stage, the prevalent facade features and paper documented activities were revised and the interview protocol was started. Every context was given around a month and two weeks (sometimes they overlapped), and the interviewing process began towards the end of every month designated to each study area.

3.1.2.2 Sampling and Interviews with Residents

To go beyond visual data, and numbers of various observed treatments, a total of 46 stories and conversations were collected across the three study areas; 18 in El-Qanater, 16 in El-Daher, and 12 in the 15 May neighborhood. Very few interviews were managed to be face-to-face at residents’ homes (2 in El-Qanater and 1 in Daher). Instead, to maintain the respondent’s privacy, interviews were conducted through phone calls. This was easier and less intimidating for respondents. All of the interviewees were female respondents and were recruited through a snowball sampling process. As a female researcher, women, young adults, and teenage girls were more accessible than holding conversations with local men. Moreover, they were assumed to give a better perspective since, as deduced from literature, they are the ‘home-makers’ and the figure responsible for the household in local Egyptian homes. To start off, I had a few contacts on every site and thus managed to approach their friends, neighbors, mothers, sisters, etc. Interviewing time ranged from 20-40 minutes and the response rate was quite high; 92%. Only 4 respondents (2 in Qanater and 2 in Mayo) were intimidated to give any information about their homes and were not pleased to proceed with the interview. One of them suggested that I conduct the interview with her husband instead. The populations in El-Qanater neighborhood and 15 May City were comparable in regards to socio-economic status (literacy – occupation – income level) with the ordinary combination of middle to low-income sub-cultural groups. On the other hand, Daher, which is the oldest neighborhood among the three, while also comprising a similar mix, constituted more middle-income, educated groups.

The residents in different settings, with varied balcony features and surrounding environment
(refer to tables below) were asked about the activities conducted on the balcony, change in utilization patterns across different seasons/festive occasions/time of the day, characteristics of the balcony space or surrounding environment that make it undesirable or unlikely to be used, the various modifications conducted to fulfill everyday needs or express personal identity, and finally the capacity of their balcony space to accommodate or serve for their needs. The questions were developed and modified in parallel with the fieldwork process. Since many of the balconies on the field were strictly covered in curtains, it was important to use the opportunity of the interviews to probe for details of the ‘unseen’ activity patterns that take place ‘behind the curtains’, at different seasons, times of the day, and various festive occasions. Sometimes the residents were asked to send out pictures of their balconies at the end of the interview. This was found to be quite interesting and beneficial for it often helped grasp a better picture of these women’s perceptions and what issues they conceive to be most important. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded using manual thematic analysis. During the coding process, common patterns emerged across the three study areas highlighting certain sociocultural needs and desires in respect to Egyptian culture. In this regard, it was beneficial to select three different neighborhoods to overlay the narratives and findings and elicit prevalent commonalities and conclusions.

To ensure that all human rights are guarded, an IRB training course was completed for the social and behavioral research curriculum group under requirements set by The American University in Cairo. The research title, aim, purpose, scope, duration, interview questions, format, setup and consent form were all submitted and revised by Heba Kotb, chair of IRB at AUC, to ensure confidentiality and the needed extent of privacy for all interlocutors. Since the majority of the interviews were conducted through phone, the consent form was read out to the interlocutors and the topic was explained before recording. Some of the Interviewee names were changed, upon request, to maintain confidentiality, and wherever possible, faces of people in the photo documentation process were masked since they were not asked for consent during fieldwork observations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewees (Residents in El-Qanater)</th>
<th>Balcony Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name</strong></td>
<td><strong>Age (years)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somaya (Q.1)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hind (Q.2)</td>
<td>Late 40’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asmaa (Q.3)</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Om Ahmed (Q.4)</td>
<td>Mid-70’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batool (Q.5)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basma (Q.6)</td>
<td>Mid-60’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahlam (Q.7)</td>
<td>40’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanan (Q.8)</td>
<td>40’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samira (Hanan’s daughter, Q.9)</td>
<td>20’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zainab (Q.10)</td>
<td>30’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safaa (Q.11)</td>
<td>Late 40’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalia (Q.12)</td>
<td>Late 20’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hana (Q.13)</td>
<td>Late 30’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noura (Q.14)</td>
<td>Late 30’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eman (Q.15)</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noha (Eman’s daughter, Q.16)</td>
<td>Mid-20’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dina (Q.17)</td>
<td>Mid-40’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Om Youssef (Q.18)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1:** Interlocutors and the balcony characteristics in El-Qanater neighborhood.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewees (Residents in El-Daher)</th>
<th>Balcony Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name</strong></td>
<td><strong>Age (years)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Om Amr (D.1)</td>
<td>Early 50's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salwa (Om Amr's neighbor, D.2)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sana (D.3)</td>
<td>Mid-50's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margo Adly (D.4)</td>
<td>Mid-50's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dona (D.5)</td>
<td>20's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gigi (D.6)</td>
<td>50's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martina Adly (D.7)</td>
<td>30's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evol Mossad (D.8)</td>
<td>60's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Om Kareem (D.9)</td>
<td>Mid-50's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen (D.10)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marina (Karen's neighbor, D.11)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margo Magdy (D.12)</td>
<td>20's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martina Gergis (D.13)</td>
<td>20's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merit, (Martina's sister, D.14)</td>
<td>20's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marianne (D.15)</td>
<td>20's</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2:** Interlocutors and the balcony characteristics in El-Daher neighborhood.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewees (Residents in 15 May City)</th>
<th>Balcony Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name</strong></td>
<td><strong>Age (years)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Om Momen (M.1)</td>
<td>Late 40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Om Hussein (M.2)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Om Tuqa (M.3)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samya (M.4)</td>
<td>Mid-30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Om Abdullah (M.5)</td>
<td>Mid-30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadine Abbas (M.6)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aya Nasser (M.7)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asmaa (M.8)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Om Mohamed (M.9)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sameeha (M.10)</td>
<td>30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noura (M.11)</td>
<td>Late 20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghada (M.12)</td>
<td>Late 20s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3:** Interlocutors and the balcony characteristics in 15 May City.
Chapter 4

Results and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

As mentioned earlier, this chapter documents the current situation of balconies (physical mapping) and a description of the utilization patterns (behavioral mapping) across three local contexts in Egypt (El-Qanater El-Khayreya, El-Daher, and 15 May city). The rationale behind the selection of the various contexts was discussed in the methodology chapter. To start with, the three study areas are thoroughly analyzed in terms of the physical and behavioral observations from extensive fieldwork. Observation results are further elaborated through Interview findings with residents discussed in section 4.5 to fundamentally understand the perception of women on the role of the balcony and examine the issues impeding them from using balconies for the purpose they were originally designed for. The overlaying of the two data sources were intended to inform and compliment one another and thus build a more comprehensive understanding.

4.2 El Qanater El Khayreya: Informal Urban Neighborhood

4.2.1 Physical Balcony Observations: Facade Vocabulary & Treatments

For differing purposes and needs, the informal neighborhood of El-Qanater El-khayreya captured a variety of facade iterations and balcony modifications. The materials used varied from aluminum, bricks, curtains, wood, gypsum, steel and often a combination of these together depending on the needs and financial capabilities of every family. The various treatments highlighted certain issues including; privacy and control, safety and security, climate control, functional purposes, personalization and identity, and others. Treatments for privacy varied from; ‘partial blockage’ of the area fronting the balcony door shish to keep the inside of the house secured when the balcony door is open; ‘front blockage’ and side opening to keep the air flow inside the house intact while maintaining visual privacy from the opposite building; ‘side blockage’ and front opening to maintain privacy from the adjacent neighbors, and ‘full blockage’ using tucked in striped curtains that fully covered the balcony space from all sides. This treatment was the most common manifestation for privacy and often took a different form where curtains were thrown out over the drying ropes and fixed to the wash line steel rods on both sides, to allow women to observe the street without being seen by others. It is also done to ensure that the hanging clothes are kept clean, yet its main function is to provide a ‘one-way’ view to the outside.
Treatments in regards to **security** incorporated straight-up or convex shaped steel add-ons over the balcony and sometimes over windows too. This treatment was mostly enacted on the first and last floors to protect the house from thieves that may jump inside from the streets or the rooftops. Glass windows are usually kept open and the shish closed, especially during summer time, so it's easy for anyone to open up the shish lock from the outside. Side steel additions were also used for protection from the stairwell shaft. Sometimes, balconies were completely canceled out for **functional purposes**. They were closed off in red bricks, aluminum shutters, or wood to extend the children’s bedroom or living space area. Other functional iterations included the addition of horizontal aluminum shades to protect the hanging clothes from the upper neighbor’s drippings, addition of roofs or fixing of pigeon cages to raise chickens/pigeons. Ground floors, which were mostly turned into shops in the neighborhood, often added aluminum shades to make sure the hanging clothes’ drippings do not fall on customers as they enter their place. Therefore, these aluminum shades were common across all floors except the last floor, when there were no neighbors above. As for **climate control**, people used shading canopies over balconies and windows for protection from heat, and used flyers or posters over balcony doors and window shish to protect the inside from dust. The women would finish the day’s cleaning and then staple the shish with some plastic material, flyers or posters on the outside so they don't have to reclean all over.
Some of the treatment tools, like the shading canopies, served multiple roles including maintaining privacy, providing protection from rain, and covering hanging clothes to keep them clean. The various treatments were either enacted alone or combined together with other treatments to fulfill more than one purpose. For instance, steel add-ons were often combined with aluminum shutters to fulfill the needs of privacy and security; curtains or shading canopies were added over closed off aluminum balconies to serve for privacy/climate control and functional purposes. Balconies that were bigger in size were often divided into two halves where half was closed up to extend the interior space of the house and the other half kept open or covered in curtains for hanging clothes. Moreover, various techniques were adopted to manifest personalization on balconies, the most common of which was using color, art work on walls and ceilings, a play with texture and brick patterns, upgrading railings, cornice, or adding lights, decorations (especially common during Eid and Ramadan), and flower pots. Sometimes when people are back from ‘hajj’, they paint the kaaba on their balcony walls indicating that they have performed the hajj pilgrimage and all the neighbors visit to congratulate them.

The most substantive transformations were concerned with privacy and personalization. For instance, In sample street A, street 14 (12 meters wide as per distance from facade to facade), 33% of the documented balconies were modified with the addition of curtains and 12% with the addition of curtain rails (implying that curtains were once present or indicating an intention to
add one). On the other hand, 44% of the balconies exhibited various manifestations of personalization, bearing in mind that the covered balconies may have also exhibited some works of personalization, yet these were not accessible for public view. The adopted techniques were mainly color, light decorations, railing and ceiling works. As for functional purposes, 10% of balconies were modified by either closing off half or the full balcony space. Small balconies were completely closed off while the bigger and longer balconies were divided into two halves; half closed off and half kept open. Concerning climatic purposes, not much was done; only 6% of the documented balconies were modified by the addition of shading canopies. Overall 77% of the documented balconies were subjected to modifications and in turn, only 23% were left unmodified.

Figure 15: Street sample A, street 14 [شارع 14] (left) and street perspective view (right).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modifications</th>
<th>Instances Observed (n)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addition of Curtains</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition of Curtain Rails (empty rails)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blocking Balcony Sides</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete or Half Closed balconies</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition of Shading Canopies</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition of Aluminum Shade</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition of Roof</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalization Treatments (Color, texture, etc.)</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Modifications</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Number of Balconies:</strong></td>
<td><strong>234</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Balcony modifications and observed instances for sample street A, street 14 [شارع 14].

On a similar note, in the narrower, internal street sample, Gamal Al-Din Al-Afghany Street (4 meters wide as per distance from facade to facade), the most common treatment enacted on the documented balconies was concerned with **privacy, functional purposes, and personalization**. For example, 36% of balconies were modified with the addition of curtains, 6% with the addition of curtain rails and 6% with blocking balcony sides in red bricks or steel and aluminum...
sheets. Blocking the sides emphasized both privacy and security from the adjacent, neighboring balconies. Concerning functional purposes, 17% of the documented balconies were modified by half or completely closing off the balcony space, and 33% were modified using various personalization techniques. The most common personalization adjustments were using color, textures and wall patterns. Some balconies documented more than one treatment. Overall, 64% of the documented balconies were subjected to modifications for various reasons, using different tools and materials. These observations and numbers may give suggestions over the extent of participation of the residents in transforming the planned environment.

Figure 16: Street sample B, Gamal Al-Din Al-Afghany street (left) and street perspective view (right).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modifications</th>
<th>Instances Observed (n)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addition of Curtains</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition of Curtain Rails (empty rails)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blocking Balcony Sides</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete or Half Closed balconies</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition of Aluminum Shade</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalization Treatments (Color, texture, etc.)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Modifications</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Balcony modifications & observed instances for sample street B, Gamal Al-Din Al-Afghany street.

4.2.2 Physical Balcony Observations: Usage Patterns and Categories

Moving beyond numbers, fieldnotes were used to provide a general understanding of the utilization patterns and activities related to balconies. This is also further elaborated in the Interviews section with the residents (section 4.5). Activities conducted on balconies were identified through objects or the active presence of users on the balcony. Recorded objects were also indicators of activities, even when the residents themselves were not present. As documented from the windshield tours and walks around the neighborhood, examples for object categories included; furniture, domestic artifacts, storage, laundry, decorations, plants,
cleaning equipment, and mess. The most omnipresent of all object categories were storage cupboards and shelves. As for the active presence of users, on-site observed activities were divided into two groups; short term and long term activities. The short term activities included; men smoking cigarettes, women hanging clothes, calling out on their children, dropping down the basket, short-term observations, and short conversation with neighbors. On the other hand, long term observed activities included; phone calls, children’s play, sitting and relaxing, eating and drinking, smoking shisha and long observations.

Figure 17: Observations for short-term activities in relation to balconies, captured at El-Qanater.
The most common captured behavior was ‘passive observation’ rather than active interaction or communication with neighbors and people in the street. People were commonly captured watching the street in a ‘passive, protective mode’. This behavior was especially common on balconies overlooking main streets where there was some sort of activity and movement outside, as for instance the old mosque street [شّارع الجامع القديم], which is one of the widest two-way streets in El-Qanater capturing heavy pedestrian traffic and car movement all through the day. One of the well-known residents on this street, called ‘Bolbol’ by his neighbors, suffers from an intellectual disability. He spends his full day sitting on the balcony to watch the people and wave at them and only goes back inside to sleep. The balcony secures him the day’s ‘positive distraction’. On a similar note, there was ‘LaLa’ (as named by his neighbors), another well known 60 year old man with an intellectual disability occupying a first floor balcony in street 14 [شّارع 14], one of the lively internal streets in the neighborhood. Lala uses his balcony to hunt his needed portion of everyday sweets. He spends the day calling out on people to put sweets in his descending basket or ask for a pound to buy sweets for himself from the supermarket below. “I want some sweets” [عمر أبليه, اعى حاجة حلوة], he calls out to every passerby whether a stranger or a relative. Both cases of Bolbol and Lala, difficult to not pass across while strolling the neighborhood of Al-Qanater, represented exceptional examples of extended long-term activities on the balcony because they were never able to leave their homes. Bolbol did not leave his house for 40 years now
because he feared the streets and was always afraid of getting lost while Lala was not allowed to go outside for safety reasons. Thus, the balcony was their only way to connect with the outside when the street was no longer an option. They came out to the balcony, the last part on the boundaries of their homes, that is outside yet more safe, sheltered and private than the street.

Figure 19: ‘BolBol’ on his balcony (left) and ‘Lala’ descending the basket to strangers for sweets (right).

Balconies can also take up an important functional role for the elderly women as documented in the story of Om Ahmed, an old widow in her 70’s, living alone in a big house with 7 balconies. She is a former biology teacher who has lived in the house since 1980 and used to be a very active person spending the day between school and household activities. However, since her husband’s pass away a couple of years ago she stopped going out and could hardly handle going down the stairs. Therefore, the balcony became of significant importance to conduct her everyday ‘household shopping’. Interestingly, she does not really need to call out on anyone, all the shopkeepers are regularly found sitting outside in front of their shops and run under her balcony as soon as she comes out. They know her daily needs for breakfast (one foul and one tameya sandwiches) and weekly supermarket necessities. The cucumbers and tomatoes are easily bought from Om Mohamed who sells groceries right below her at the building entrance everyday from 8am to 5pm (until maghrib time). She descends the basket with the money and loads the fresh vegetables watching Om Mohamed from behind the ‘half-open’ shish to make
sure she doesn't cheat her while weighing the vegetables or 'quraish cheese'. While the living room balcony fulfilled all the functional purposes of the day, Om Ahmed conceived the 'bedroom balcony' as the most important balcony in the house (among all 7). She told me that it secured her feelings of comfort and safety. During summer time, the hara never sleeps. Children play in the street till almost till fajr time and she falls asleep over the 'voice' of their plays, screams and laughter ['بَنِانُ عَلَى حَسْبِهِم']. They make her feel safe and less lonely ['وَنَسٍ'].

Furthermore, other functions and activities related to balconies were noted during the fieldwork period in Ramadan. While in the normal days there were generally very few captured instances, if any, of interactions between neighbors across balconies, the first day of Ramadan hosted lots of greetings between people on balconies and with people on the streets. As captured from one of the interlocutors' balconies, people were out before iftar time watching the street, chatting with their neighbors and passing on their greetings (See figure below). One family was also observed setting the ifar table outside and waiting for the adan. The hour before iftar time (from around 5-6pm) was the peak hour of activity on balconies during the whole period of Ramadan, capturing mainly men and children rather than women (assuming they were busy preparing the ifar table). Strolling the streets after iftar captured greater activity on the streets rather than balconies. The children, who were the most active users, occupied the balconies to play with their neighbors as they anxiously awaited the 'iftar cannon' [مدفع الإفطار]; one of Ramadan's special rituals. It resembled an exciting moment for them that was attended everyday. After Iftar, they would run into the streets to play and the women may start to appear on the balconies, yet only for short term periods, to look out for their children or for some short term observation. But the general activity on balconies reclined at night, and was replaced with a lively street scene, enriched with decorations,

![Figure 20: From Om Ahmed’s Balcony (L) & Om Mohamed selling vegetables at the building entrance (R).](image-url)
lanterns and dangling lights on balconies, facades and between buildings.

**Figure 21:** A stroll through the neighborhood before iftar capturing fathers with their children on the balcony.

**Figure 22:** Observations from an interlocutor’s balcony before iftar (from 5-6pm) on the first day of Ramadan.
4.2 El Daher: Old Urban Neighborhood

4.2.1 Physical Balcony Observations: Facade Vocabulary & Treatments

As mentioned earlier in chapter 3, this neighborhood exhibits a variety of old 2-3 story classic buildings along with newly built 8-10 story buildings. The newer buildings seemed to face a greater extent of facade iterations and balcony modifications in comparison to the old buildings, a few of which are no longer inhabited and exposed to demolition. The most common treatment enacted on the old buildings was covering up the balcony railing for privacy purposes. On the other hand, a myriad of spatial changes were exhibited on the newer buildings highlighting other issues beside privacy; safety and security, climate control, noise control, functional purposes, and personalization and identity. To fulfill the needs for privacy, balcony modifications ranged from ‘partial coverage’ to ‘full coverage’ through the addition of curtains, completely or partially enclosing the railings, and often both treatments together. Sometimes the full railing was covered and sometimes only the part in front of the balcony door to make sure people who are sitting inside do not get exposed if they are wearing something short while the door is open. Similarly, sometimes curtains fully covered the balcony space and sometimes they were only installed over the area in front of the balcony door securing a partial coverage. Moreover, Curtains were sometimes fixed over the drying ropes to give space for women to watch the outside without getting exposed to strangers.
Treatments regarding security varied from ‘side protection’ to ‘full protection’ using straight-up steel add-ons over first floor balconies. Sometimes only the exposed side was covered in steel. Concerning climatic control, the most common approach was using shading canopies. These were applied to windows as much as balconies and were common across all floors. As for noise control, especially for those fronting heavy traffic and occupying the lower floors that are closer to the street, aluminum was used to shield the balcony space from street and congestion noise. This treatment, often accompanied by privacy modifications, was especially common if the apartment balcony was facing a coffee shop [ahwa], mechanics or
sanitary ware shops below. Sometimes, balconies were fully canceled out to extend the inside space and serve **functional purposes**. When balconies were big enough, only half was canceled out to save the other half for hanging clothes. Other physical balcony observations documented various enactments of **personalization and identity**. These entailed using color, patterns, textures, adding plant pots and animal cages, hanging signs and identity symbols. While Christians hanged portraits for Mary or posters for Jesus, Muslim houses hanged Quranic wall art, ramadan lanterns and light decorations on their balcony walls, drying ropes and railings. The balconies in Daher worked as a symbol or reflection of the residents’ religion, identity and interests.

![Techniques used to exhibit personalization & Identity captured at El-Daher neighborhood.](image)

**Figure 26:** Techniques used to exhibit personalization & Identity captured at El-Daher neighborhood.

The most substantive transformations were concerned with **privacy**, followed by **functional purposes** and **personalization and identity**. For instance, In sample street A, Ismail Al-Falaky Street (12 meter wide on average as per distance from facade to facade), perpendicular to Ramses street, 37% of the documented balconies were modified with the addition of curtains, 3% with the addition of curtain rails (implying that curtains were once present or indicating an intention to install one), and 9% were modified with partial or full coverage of balcony railing. These modifications mainly reflected the needs for privacy. For functional purposes, 20% of balconies were completely or half closed off using varying materials like redbricks, aluminum and wood. Moreover, 13% of balconies were modified with the addition of shading
canopies reflecting needs for climate control and 14% were modified using various personalization treatments (color, texture, etc.) mirroring the needs for exhibiting territoriality and personalization. Regarding safety and security, only 4% of the documented balconies were modified by the addition of steel protection. Overall, 74% of the documented balconies along sample street A exhibited various spatial changes reflecting differing needs and purposes.

Figure 27: Street A, Ismail Al-Falaky street, perpendicular to Ramses street (L), and street perspective (R)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>El-Daher; Street Sample A, Ismail Al-Falaky Street</th>
<th>Instances Observed (n)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addition of curtains</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition of curtain rails (empty rails)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enclosing railing</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete or Half Closed balconies</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition of shading canopies</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition of steel for protection</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalization Treatments (Color, texture, etc.)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Modifications</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Number of Balconies:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Balcony modifications and observed instances for sample street A, Ismail Al-Falaky street.

On a similar note, in the internal street sample B, branching from El-Zaher street, Youssef Pasha Suliman (10 meters wide as per distance from facade to facade), the most common treatments enacted on the documented balconies were concerned with privacy, followed by functional purposes, and personalization. For instance, 43% of the documented balconies were modified with the addition of curtains, 5% had empty rails, and 4% were modified with partial or full coverage of balcony railing. Concerning functional purposes, 13% of the documented balconies were modified by completely or partially closing off the balcony space using red bricks, aluminum, or wood, and 17% reflected modifications in regards to personalization. Overall, equivalent to the noted percentage in sample street A, 74% of the
balconies along sample street B exhibited various spatial changes to fulfill different purposes, in turn displaying the substantial breadth of people’s participation in changing the planned environment as per their needs. This systematic visual study, conducted on the two representative street samples (one internal branch from El-Zaher street and one branch from Ramses street), grasps the formulated facade vocabulary improvised by the people.

**Figure 28:** Street B, youssef pasha suliman, perpendicular to El-Zaher street (L) & street perspective (R)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modifications</th>
<th>Instances Observed (n)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addition of Curtains</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition of Curtain Rails (empty rails)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enclosing railing</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete or Half Closed balconies</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition of Shading Canopies</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition of Roof</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalization Treatments (Color, texture, etc.)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Modifications</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Number of Balconies:</strong></td>
<td><strong>167</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 7:** Balcony modifications and observed instances for sample street B, youssef pasha suliman street.

### 4.2.2 Physical Balcony Observations: Usage Patterns and Categories

Coming to the behavioral aspect and activities in relation to balconies, El-Daher neighborhood captures a unique essence as it still holds a few behavioral traces of the past; the good old days [‘اїام الزمن الجميل’], as often called and remembered by the people today. Although the neighborhood hosts a newer generation; people from various social backgrounds that recently moved into Daher, a large percentage of the population is still occupied by the older generation, those that still listen to Oum kalthoum at 5pm, drink their tea or coffee on the balcony and enjoy taking care of flowers and plants. This nostalgic mood was especially captured on Sundays, not any other day in the week, when all the shops were closed and the streets were relatively quiet and empty. The older ones were observed sitting
outside during the period from Asr to Maghrib, listening to some classic music that echoed through the bare streets. When the streets were inhibited, the balconies were inhabited by people sitting, relaxing, drinking, eating and contemplating.

On the other hand, during other days of the week, activities related to balconies were more of short term activities. For instance, descending the basket to buy some groceries, hanging clothes (internally or externally), calling out to the supermarket guy below to throw up something, talking to a neighbor in the street, smoking a cigarette, or standing on the balcony for some short-term observation. When the shops were open; supermarkets, bakeries, vegetable markets, dairy products and sweet shops, the balcony took up a more functional and communicative role over an entertaining and relaxing function. This is also because the mechanics, sanitary ware shops and coffee shops (ahlwa) that densely occupied the streets were too noisy and irritating for anyone to sit outside on regular work days. As observed from one of the interlocutor’s first floor balcony on a Friday afternoon, the mechanics often spread their work across the full street width notably intruding onto the lower floors. They sit, smoking cigarettes accompanied with tea and coffee served by the closeby ahwa boy, all through the day. Actually, at some point I was advised not to sit on the balcony for long periods because the street was busy and the men sitting below were too close and may look over or listen to our conversations. “They are sitting with us...on our laps”, she expressed (refer to the field note below). In this regard, unsurprisingly it was difficult to capture people sitting
on the balcony, unless in the very early morning.

Figure 30: Observations for short-term activities in relation to balconies, captured at El-Daher.

Fieldnotes, June 3rd, 2022.

Completely lost in the street, looking up and around, I finally coincided with Margo’s hand waves coming from her grandmother’s first-floor balcony. I waved back with excitement and approached the correspondent building entrance. Knowing my research topic from our previous chat over the phone, I was automatically directed to sit on the balcony in the living room. The coffee and basbousa (a sweet Egyptian dessert) were essential before any conversation could take place. The initial set-up on the balcony included one blue chair on the right hand side upon entering from the door shish and a cold 7-Up can placed on the railing sill where the grandmother was sitting before me to pass on the Friday early morning greetings to her old neighbor on the opposite corner balcony. The left hand side was occupied for storage purposes and of course, goes without saying, hanging the garlic on the balcony wall nail. We re-arranged the setting and added two more chairs for Margo, Simon (her husband), and myself to sit and have a chat; one at the storage end and one at the balcony door because the balcony width could only fit two chairs facing each other. When all was set, chairs arranged, basbousa on the laps and drinks on the railing sill, Margo started narrating in a nostalgic and sorrowful tonation about all her memories with the neighborhood and how everything has changed today with the influx of new people from different social backgrounds coming in and excessively spreading in the neighborhood, leaving no ‘comfort
space’ for the older ones who have been in Daher for decades (her grandmother being one of them). The social level is no longer the same and the younger ones who moved are from lower social backgrounds. They are affected by what they have seen (at their ‘balad’) and thus their behaviors and overall general taste are different. She very simply pointed out to the mechanic and his group of friends sitting below as a ‘live’ example of what she was trying to tell me. Their voices were so loud, the ahwa guy would scream the ‘order’ (ahwa torki or chai koshari) to know who asked for it and the smell of cigarettes was intense, continuous, and extremely irritating. Actually, we weren’t able to sit comfortably when Simon went back inside for his work. At some point, I was warned by Margo “they are sitting with us, on our laps…” and here we cut the conversation and decided to go back inside the living room, especially because it got a bit too warm with the hot coffee…

Figure 31: Pictures from Margo’s grandmother balcony on the Friday afternoon visit to El-Daher.

During the night time, many balconies spread their curtains to secure some privacy, especially the ones on lower floors that were closer to the street or fronting an ahwa. The neighborhood gets especially busy and noisy at night and the streets vastly condensed with people and beeping cars. With hardly any movement, the beeps get more intense and frequent in hopes to trigger any motion. In parallel, the shops exhibit loud music, each playing its own, composing an overall aroused environment. In this setting, it was not surprising having captured the majority of balconies vacant. Observations for balcony usage at night were distinguished under the ‘passive’ category. This was understood as documenting signs of activity, yet without the actual presence of people at the instant moment of scrutiny. For example, open balcony doors, hanging clothes and carpets on the railing were documented. Traffic noise, crowdedness and congestion seemed to deter ‘active’ night activities. A few instances registered balconies with switched on lights and closed curtains, which indicated some sort of activity yet was not accessible from street view, otherwise the majority of balconies were unoccupied. In this inactive environment, the only thing that distinguished one balcony from the other was the dangling lights and decorations on walls, ceiling and railings.
4.3 15th of May City: New Planned Neighborhood

4.3.1 Physical Balcony Observations: Facade Vocabulary & Treatments

In contrast to the two previous study areas (El-Qanater El-Khayreyya and El-Daher), this neighborhood represents a planned environment where buildings are arranged in large blocks and the distances are spacious. The free-standing building blocks vary in height between a ground + three floors or ground + four floors. The most notable modification enacted on the facades in this neighborhood was closing up the balcony space to extend the interior housing unit. A wide range of materials and colors were incorporated for this purpose. This ranged from using aluminum, redbricks, cement, wood and steel. Sometimes, more than one material was used simultaneously; one to enclose the railings, one for the balcony sides and one for the rest of balcony space. For example, some of the documented balconies were modified by enclosing the sides using redbricks, the railing using either cement or different patterns of red bricks and the rest of the balcony in aluminum, or wood shish. Other spatial changes were also documented highlighting other issues beside functional purposes; privacy, safety and security, climate control, and personalization and identity. To fulfill the needs for privacy, balconies were modified with the addition of curtains over the balcony space, the addition of curtains over the balcony door, covering the railings with fabric, wood plank, cardboard or aluminum sheets or completely enclosing the railings with cement or redbricks. Sometimes, steel railings were detached and fixed upside down to the balcony ceiling and alternatively red bricks were used to enclose the railing. Internal curtains were also installed to cover stored objects on the balcony (see figure below).
Treatments regarding **security** were mainly noted on the ground floor balconies that were modified with the addition of steel. Shading canopies were installed in pairs to serve the full balcony width in regards to **climate control**. Other notable physical balcony observations documented various enactments of **personalization and identity**. When conducted, personalization treatments in this neighborhood were quite bold and meticulous. This was especially extensive on balconies overlooking the main street; Omar Ibn Al Khatab street, down the way from al Otostrad upon entering 15 May city. For instance, 52% of the documented balconies along Omar Ibn Al Khatab street were modified using various personalization techniques. A variety of colors, textures, wall patterns, upgraded railings, addition of design columns, lights, decorations, signs and symbols were used; painting of Mohamed Salah, zamalek flag, the helal emblem, etc. Moreover, the apartments that were turned into salons or used for other commercial purposes, hung posters and flyers on the drying ropes and balcony walls for advertisement. Even the closed off balconies of the residential units exhibited a distinctive appearance using different colors for the shish, aluminum frames and redbricks highlighting unique patterns.
Nonetheless, in the internal streets the most prevailing transformations were mainly concerned with functional purposes and privacy, which was clear across street samples A & B. This was followed by treatments concerned with personalization. For instance, in sample street A, Mohamed Farid street (30 meter wide as per distance from facade to facade), 50% of balconies were modified by closing up the balcony space for functional purposes. Those balconies also exhibited unique colors and a play of patterns using red bricks yet were mainly counted as instances under the category of ‘functional modifications’. In regards to privacy, 30% of the documented balconies were modified with the addition of curtains, 8% with the addition of curtain rails, and 19% with covering or enclosing balcony railing. Thus a total of 57% of the documented balconies were modified with various treatments to fulfill privacy needs. As to personalization interventions on the ‘open’ balconies (that were not closed up or covered in curtains), 24% were modified using various personalization techniques mentioned earlier. On the other hand, security and climatic concerns were not prevalent; 5% of the documented balconies were modified with the addition of shading canopies and only 3% with the addition of steel. Overall, a total of 93% were subjected to spatial changes and transformations while only 7% of the 300 documented balconies were left unchanged.

**Figure 35:** The various techniques used to exhibit personalization & Identity captured at 15 May city.
On a similar vein, in sample street B, Abbas Al-Akad street (30 meter wide on average as per distance from facade to facade), 45% of balconies were modified by closing up the balcony space for functional purposes, and 27% were modified by the addition of curtains. On the other hand, concerns about security, climate control and personalization did not appear to exhibit great significance. For example, only 4% of the documented balconies were modified with the addition of steel, 3% with the addition of shading canopies, and 5% with the addition of various personalization treatments. Although personalization techniques were pronounced in this neighborhood, there was still an overriding inclination to extend the balconies to the interior space as manifested in both street samples A & B. Overall, a total of 96% of the documented balconies were subjected to spatial changes and transformations leaving a 4% without any modifications. There was an assertive, clear improvisation conducted by the people over the building facades, across both street samples, reflecting variant purposes and needs. These numbers are further studied and grounded through interviews with residents in section 4.5.

### Table 8: Balcony modifications & observed instances for street A, Mohamed Farid street, 15 May city.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modifications</th>
<th>Instances Observed (n)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addition of Curtains</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition of Curtain Rails (empty rails)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enclosing or covering railing</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete or Half Closed balconies</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition of Shading Canopies</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition of Steel</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition of Aluminum Shade</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalization Treatments (Color, texture, etc.)</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Modifications</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Number of Balconies:</strong></td>
<td><strong>300</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3.2 Physical Balcony Observations: Usage Patterns and Categories

Moving beyond the physical language and spatial changes manifested on facades, this neighborhood captured interesting behavioral patterns and activities in relation to balconies. Generally speaking, the area held a very quiet atmosphere, calm streets, plenty of garden views and spacious distances between the building blocks. Therefore, there seemed to be more space for people to actually come out and conduct some activities outside without feeling too exposed or seen by everyone, especially that it was common to have a line of trees along walkways in between blocks screening the building from opposite neighbors. This spaciousness, quiet streets and attempts to secure a more private and appealing environment engaged a good variety of activities. As documented in the fieldnotes, on-site observations were divided into two groups; short term and long term activities. The short term activities ranged from; men smoking cigarettes, spraying water in front of the house, women hanging clothes, watching over their children’s school bus arrive, watering plants, conducting short term observations, or young ones arranging an outing with friends. A woman was captured on a first floor balcony along with her

Table 9: Balcony modifications & observed instances for street B, Abbas Al-Akad street, 15 May city.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modifications</th>
<th>Instances Observed (n)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addition of Curtains</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition of Curtain Rails (empty rails)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enclosing or covering railing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete or Half Closed balconies</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition of Shading Canopies</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition of Steel</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition of Aluminum Shade</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalization Treatments (Color, texture, etc.)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Modifications</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Balconies:</td>
<td>247</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
children using the hose to water plants in the garden below them. Moreover, those occupying a ground floor were occasionally captured on the balcony conducting the traditional habit of sprinkling water in front of the house to clean the building entrance and increase humidity when it's too warm outside.

**Figure 38**: Observations for short-term activities in relation to balconies, captured at 15 May city.
On the other hand, **long term activities** ranged from; phone calls, children’s play, sitting and relaxing, conversing with a neighbor, preparing rice and vegetables for cooking, long observations, and most importantly watching over and taking care of the chickens. Strolling the neighborhood of 15 May, one cannot but notice the quacy chicken that jammed the area in front of ground floor balconies. Sometimes, the garden space in front of the balcony was fenced using steel or wood planks to raise the chickens inside and take good care of them. But this was not always the case. For instance, Abo Ahmed, an old man occupying a ground floor apartment in megawra 12, did not need to put any fences for his chickens and never had to go out in search of them. They each knew their place, even when they mixed with the neighbor’s chickens. He usually got them from the ballad and knew each one by heart, often spending long periods of time watching, feeding and taking care of them. They were given the remains of food and watered from the garden. During the night time, he would take them all inside to sleep with him. Aside from the story of abo Ahmed, there was an overpowering dominance of chickens in front of ground floor balconies to the extent that I actually had a difficult time strolling fearlessly in the walkways between blocks. Moreover, other meticulous, extended activities conducted on the balcony were concerned with household work. As noted in the field notes, various instances of women were seen preparing for the day’s cook on the balcony accompanied by their little kids or daughters. For example, a woman was observed cleaning the rice with the help of her
little daughter both sitting on the balcony floor giving their backs to the walkway and another woman was observed cutting okra. In this sense, when balconies were not closed up, as prevalent in the physical observations, they served as a good potential to conduct the various activities and grab some of the household work outside.

**Figure 40:** Abo Ahmed watching his chickens (L) & fenced area infront of Gf balconies to raise chickens(R)
4.5 Interview Results (with residents)

After undertaking physical and behavioral observations (outside-inside perspective), participatory photography and interviews with residents (inside-outside perspective) were conducted to provide a deeper understanding of the quantitative and qualitative non-participatory observation results across the three study areas. It was essential to conduct semi-structured interviews with ‘female residents’ to hunt for the ‘why’s’ of the observed modifications, spatial changes and behaviors and understand the perception of women in regards to the role of the Cairene balcony; what is it used for (details of activity patterns), how do the utilization patterns change across different seasons/festive occasions/time of the day, what characteristics of the balcony space or surrounding environment make it undesirable or unlikely to be used and what modifications were conducted to fulfill everyday needs/express personal identity? In total 46 interviews were conducted across all three study areas; 18 in Al-Qanater Al-khaireya, 16 in El-Daher, and 12 in 15 May city. All of the interviewees were females and were recruited through snowball sampling. As detailed in the research methodology, the interviews were recorded by audio, transcribed, and coded using manual thematic analysis. During the coding process, some patterns began to emerge across the three study settings highlighting the role of the balcony (from the perception of women) in relation to five key themes that set the framework of this research; privacy and control, safety and security, wellbeing and psychological restoration, functional and communicative purposes and identity and personalization. The fieldwork observations, field notes and the collected stories from interviews helped in the synthesis of data, where the assumptions were corroborated based on different means of data gathering.

4.5.1 ‘Privacy’ and ‘Control’

This represents the first and most important theme emphasized through all the conversations, and also prominently documented in the physical mapping across all three study areas, the issue of privacy and control. Interview responses exhibited great emphasis on the need to secure privacy from neighbors. There was an overriding preference to face the main street over an internal alleyway or a side street where ‘the balconies are too close’ (Dalia, Al Qanatir Al-Khaireya. Code: Q.12) and ‘the neighbors are right in front of you’ (Hind, Q.2). The main street was considered as a more convenient option because the distances were more spacious and there were no buildings on the opposite side or exposing neighbors. ‘When overlooking the main street everyone is moving, you’re not exposed and no one is watching over.’ (Hanan, Q.8). Hind and Hanan, both in their late 40’s, are house helpers and have lived in El-Qanater for years, since birth. Hanan was especially sensitive about the issue of internal streets and close proximity to neighbors as she is a divorced woman raising four young girls all by herself. She particularly suffered from her neighbor in the old house (also in El-Qanater) who was always invading their privacy as he creepily watched them (mother and daughters) from behind the
opposite balcony curtains. Dalia, Evol Mossad and Asmaa had similar emphasized preferences for fronting a main street where there are no neighbors in close proximity.

“A main street is wider and cleaner in contrast to standing on a balcony on a narrow street where people are looking at you. At the back where the masaken is, there are people standing on their balconies but on the front side there is no one; it’s facing the club and some shops. So it’s better if there is no one exposing you from the balcony.” (Dalia, a young woman in her late 20’s living by sour al naadi with her mother and father, Q.12)

“In side streets, the distances are usually rather small, while the main street is wider so no one exposes you.” (Evol Mossad, a retired woman in the early 60’s living with her 70 year old husband while their only son works in the gulf, El-Daher. Code: D.8)

“Of course I prefer facing the main street. I have both options in my house but if we compare between them, the front balcony is a much better option because there is no one on the opposite side exposing me if I want to stand outside without my hijab or anything, but on the other side anyone can see me.” (Asmaa, 25 year old woman working for the vodafone company, 15 May city. Code: M.8)

Correspondingly, balconies on internal alleyways that are facing the neighbors were generally covered, left unused, or closed up to extend the residential unit; meanwhile, those overlooking the main street were furnished and taken good care of. It was unfavorable to sit or conduct any activity on an exposed balcony where people are watching over. Therefore side balconies or those exposed to opposite/adjacent buildings were essentially deserted and the activities were shifted to main street balconies instead.

“I closed it off (the backside balcony) because when you sat or stood on it, the backside was too exposed to the opposite building so people would see you… The front balcony overlooks a wide street that is not as exposed so I put plant pots on it and added sockets for my radio and little television to sit and relax on it at night.” (Basma, a former museum director in the mid 60’s living in the same building with her divorced daughter and grandchildren, Q.6)

“The big balcony is exposed to the opposing buildings and the street so it’s difficult to go out on it to hang clothes while everyone is seeing you.” (Somaya, a 28 year old Syrian with 4 children who moved to El-Qanater 9 years ago, Q.1)

“The balcony on the neighbors side is not really used at all because it is closer to the neighbors than the other balcony overlooking the main street…What kind of entertainment can you have? As long as the balconies are exposed, you won’t really be able to sit on them.” (Martina, a busy young woman in the early 30’s who works in the advertising sector, has one little daughter and is currently living with her mother in Daher, D.7)

“The balcony definitely makes a difference in the house but for some people, when the distance from their neighbors is 3-4 meters, it becomes very difficult to sit on it and have people watching
over you. But when it’s on a main street or the distance from the opposite neighbor is a bit wider, you get to use it.” (Om Kareem, a housewife in the mid-50’s, D.9)

In this regard, a convenient, functional balcony is conceived as that which secures a good, spacious distance from neighbors. In areas where the spaces between buildings are tight or the neighbors are directly facing each other, the balcony becomes of inconvenient use to the occupants and no longer considered as a favorable option in the apartment.

“What is considered as convenient for me is definitely not a first floor balcony, not looking over an internal narrow street where I can see the whole life of the neighbors fronting us and vice versa, because then I would have to close off the balcony space in reflective glass and will not be able to go outside. It would turn into an inconvenient space for me.” (Margo Magdy, a young newly married bride who recently moved from Daher to Muattam after marriage but still visits Daher every Friday for breakfast with her grandmother and parents, D.12)

“Because we don’t have neighbors on the opposite side that expose us, the balcony is utilized very well. The key factors are the ‘neighbors’ and the ‘exposure to neighbors’. I had another apartment, also in Daher (at the Sakkakiny end), that was too close to the neighbors and thereby too exposed. I had to cover every single balcony in every room and was never able to stand on them. This is the difference. In my current apartment there are no neighbors so the balcony doesn’t get exposed and I can actually use it.” (Gigi, a housewife in the early 50’s, D.6)

“In my current case, I’m on a side street and the fronting building is lower so it’s not bothering me. But if I was on a side street and the opposite building was of the same height, I wouldn’t have been as satisfied as I am now.” (Martina Girgis, also called ‘toota’, a young woman in the late 20’s living in the same building as Margo’s parents, in Ismail Al Falaky street, D.13)

“In areas where the distances between buildings is very small, people tend to cover up their balconies. The balcony space becomes very inconvenient because the distance from your opposite neighbor is merely an arm’s stretch away from you, [الجار الي قادامي هيمد (إيدا هيجي عندي)]. People living in these areas will never favor balconies because they are too close to each other.” (Om Momen, a housewife in the late 40’s, originally from Matareya, M.1)

Sometimes curtains are fixed over the drying ropes ‘to sit inside and observe the street yet without being seen by others’ (Hind, Q.2). In other words ‘seeing without being seen’ (Hind, Q.2). The most convenient setting for women is to have the potential to observe the streets and the outside world without being exposed to strangers. Besides, it is important for them to ensure privacy while conducting everyday household needs inside the house.

“I wish it (the balcony) was part of the inside space, like the old mashrabiya [زنا نظام المشربية]; one can hang the clothes without being seen and at the same time have a bigger space inside.” (Om Abdullah, a housewife in the mid-30’s, M.5)
“Of course I have curtains! There is a building in front of us. It is far away from me, yes, but still to sit comfortably we add curtains. But when we sit on it on a Sunday (off day), we may open it.” (Margo Adly, a 52 year old housewife, D.4)

“I put curtains so that when I get out to hang clothes on the balcony, no one would see me from the neighbors. I throw the curtains over the drying ropes while I’m hanging clothes and then tuck them back inside when I’m done. as long as I’m out on the balcony hanging clothes or doing something I keep it over the drying ropes to make sure I’m not exposed to neighbors and people outside.” (Om Abdullah, M.5)

“I get really bothered if the curtains get blown by wind and expose me to a neighbor at the opposite end. There is an opposite balcony across the street and two adjacent balconies on my sides that are exposing me.” (Zainab, a married woman in the early 30’s, Q.10)

Figure 41: picture captured and shared by Zainab for her covered balcony.

Aside from women, it was also important to secure privacy for children when they are out on the balcony for playing. Curtains were spread to cover the balcony space while the children were sitting outside to make sure no one saw them.

“I added curtains for the sake of my children. I often let them play on the balcony to keep an eye on them, so I put curtains to make sure no one sees them while they’re playing.” (Samya, a housewife in the mid-30’s, M.4)
“I had a big aluminum swing that I made for my children in the old house but I couldn’t get it with me when I moved here because the size (of the balcony) is small and because of the neighbors, [اخاف عليهم].” (Sana, a woman in the mid-50’s, D.3)

Interviewees, specifically in the El-Daher neighborhood, highlighted their common discomfort and concerns about the gaze of neighbors and the general attitude of the people inhabiting the area today. ‘As the famous saying says: It was there but is now gone, [لما يكون في جيران رحمة عاززة تحي مناجرها في بيوت الناس]’ (Om Kareem, D.9), expressed one of the interlocutors concerning how the relationship and communication between neighbors evolved. The negative behaviors conducted by residents, voiced by many of the interviewees, were conceived as factors substantially impeding the potential of any outdoor activity on the balcony. Interviewees repeatedly expressed that the people are not the same anymore and ‘the social level has changed’ (Om Amr, a woman in the early 50’s, D.1). While neighbors used to greet each other every morning and converse across their balconies, today they only come out to ‘criticize you’ (Sana, D.3). This is why it became quite difficult to sit comfortably and peacefully on the balcony. ‘The overall atmosphere and surroundings are not suitable for someone to sit outside because of the ‘crowdedness’ and the ‘people’...' (Sana, D.3) Sana, Om Kareem, Om Amr, and others had quite similar remarks about the present attitude of neighbors in El-Daher today and were quite disappointed.

“Before, whether it was summer or winter, I used to enjoy standing or sitting on the balcony at nighttime, in the good weather, however now that I saw how neighbors expose you, how this and that look at you [مستوى الجيران] is not the same anymore... Actually, when I need to clean the balcony or anything I go out late at night, by 12/1am, so that no one would be standing to watch me. I wouldn’t stand in summer with tank tops, our clothes are all conservative, with long sleeves and so, we are ‘saidah’ [حائطة]. We would wear a T-shirt and long pants, not short ones, but still, they watch over…” (Sana, D.3)

“[The key characteristic in the surrounding environment that make the balcony space undesirable or unlikely to be used is] when you have annoying neighbors that like to invade your privacy [لما يكون في جيران رحمة عاززة تحي مناجرها في بيوت الناس] I have a mentally retarded opposite neighbor, both mother and son, who may actually count your hanged pieces on the drying rope...” (Evol, D.8)

“We are a nosy population by nature [أحنا شعب حشرى قوى] and would never bother the notion of ‘privacy’. We are not from ‘tagamoaa’, we are from ‘Daher’, you cannot just place a swing and enjoy sitting out on the balcony in peace.” (Karen, fresh university graduate, D.10)

“You won’t be able to do any sort of activity unless everyone is watching you [مصر كلها ينتفرج]. If you sit out to eat, someone will watch over, if you sit to play someone will look at you, so you better just sit inside the house! I have chairs on my balcony but I actually sit on the floor so that no one would see me.” (Nadine, 25 year old Architect who lives with her grandfather in Mayo and in the same megawra as Asmaa (M.8), her childhood best friend, M.6)
In this regard, there was an overriding preference for higher level balconies over ground or lower floor balconies. When sitting on a lower floor balcony, residents repeatedly expressed the feeling of being in the street, overheard and exposed to strangers’ gaze. ‘If a passerby just turns his head towards the balcony, he can very easily see whoever is sitting inside’ (Gig, D.6), which was considered to be very uncomfortable for women and young girls.

“Higher floors in balconies are good. On first or second floor balconies, you’ll find yourself very close to the street, people, noise, and gossip” (Om Abdullah, M.5).

“For me as a girl, I would not be having my freedom or privacy so upper floors are definitely more comfortable.” (Asmaa, M.8)

“A higher floor balcony would be better. Lower floors are noisy, and you feel that people are all with you on the balcony, all ‘seeing’ and ‘hearing’ you (intrusion of visual and sound privacy)! Imagine if you’re sitting on the first floor balcony, talking over the phone and a passerby hears the whole conversation without your notice! Also imagine if you have a coffee shop down below you… Now this is a whole different story [و يAscii Characters] يسلام بفي لو تحتك فهوة... حكاية]. It would be better to sell the balcony then or you might as well rent it to the ahwa.” (Martina, D.7)

Salwa (a 52 year old widow living in yousef pasha street in the same building as Om Amr, D.2) shared a picture of her balcony during a late night stroll (see figure below), captured from a street view showing the scene of young men gathering on the ahwa which clearly intrudes onto the first floor balconies, including her own.
Interlocutors regularly expressed the expectation to have freedom on the balcony and feel at home, describing a place that is not open for public view but rather a private space where you can go out freely in your house dress and would not need to cover your hair, wear long sleeves and conservative clothes.

“You don't need to sit on the balcony with all the surrounding people with you! [وانتي قائعة متباقٍ]... You do not have to dress formally in your own house to sit on the balcony!” (Martina, D.7)

“The main thing that makes me unable to use the balcony is that I need to dress up appropriately because you can very easily be seen by others. There is no privacy. So if I am getting out on the balcony then I'm automatically not dressed in shorts, house pajamas, or a night shirt…” (Margo Magdy, D.12)

It was considered inappropriate or may trigger a bad ‘image’ for women or young girls to appear on the balcony when there are men gathered in the street. Therefore, in cases where the balcony was fronting a mosque or had an ahwa below, it was difficult to find women using the
balcony for any sort of activity. This was particularly manifested by Hanan and Om Abdullah. While Hanan may often lay some material and sit on the balcony floor to avoid getting exposed to the men praying outside, Om Abdullah usually preferred to stay indoors and only came out in her husband and daughter’s company.

“I’m fronting a mosque so there are people praying all the time; tarawih, isha and so on. They lay their mats and sit in front of the mosque; this is why no one really stands or sits on the balcony... What might be bothering is if you’re standing out on the balcony and some men are chatting or greeting each other down below. It wouldn’t really be the best “image” if you are standing out while men are socializing down together; [منظور من البيت هوة]. Excuse me but we are ‘saidah’.” (Om Abdullah, M.5)

“...we don’t stand on it because it’s facing the street and the mosque. We wouldn’t stand outside while people are here to pray [نادن داخليين يصلوا فش معقوله هتفك قدامهم]!” (Hanan, Q.8)

4.5.2 ‘Safety’ and ‘Security’

The second theme represents the issue of safety and security and is mainly concerned with mothers and children. In the coding process, this theme was notably present in the conversations with the younger women that have little kids or daughters. Unlike the overriding preference to overlook a main street to secure privacy from opposite neighbors, some of the younger interviewees expressed their preference to face an internal alleyway or a side street because they are safer for the children. Besides, they like to ‘watch over the children if they go down’ (Hind, Q.2 & Om Mohamed, M.9).

“I’m one of the people who do not like main, public streets because it’s unsafe for my kids when they like to go downstairs to play or so. The inside alleyways are safer.” (Asma, a woman in the late 30’s working as a secretary at Hassan Abu Bakr experimental school, Q.3)

“The other balcony is small [...] so it’s not used as much. But it’s still important because it overlooks the street (internal street) so I can watch my daughter if she goes to the supermarket or downstairs to buy anything; keep an eye on her. So the balcony overlooking an internal alleyway is also important because some of the shops or supermarkets are usually found in the inside streets so the balcony helps you follow up and observe the children [تفضل عينك عليه]” (Somaya, Q.1)

“During the night time all the people get out on their balconies…the children play in the gardens while their mothers watch over them from their balconies…” (Nadine, M.6)

“No one really stands on the balcony in the morning because it’s usually hot but I may often use it to watch over my children if I send them to get something from downstairs. I may stand on the balcony and wait for them until they are back home. Sometimes if I need to go down to buy something, they would also stand on the balcony and wait for me. My younger child starts crying when I leave the house so I put him on the balcony with his elder sister. He gets distracted by the coming and going cars (positive distraction) and I keep looking at them from down below.” (Samya, M.4)
However there were also acknowledged benefits of facing a main street ‘since you can always see more, observe the coming and going, have more control’ (Om youssef, Q.18) and ‘keep an eye on everything’ (Dona, a young woman in her mid-20’s, D.5). The internal streets on the other hand do not provide this expanded opportunity for surveillance. Besides, the school buses and street sellers mainly pass from the main street ‘so you can easily observe and call them when needed’ (Om youssef, Q.18). Other interlocutors; Om Tuqa from Mayo, Martina from Daher and Basma from Qanater, shared complementary opportunities secured by facing a main street.

“However, still, on a main street if you have a car parked down below or shops across the street, it would be more suitable (to overlook a main street); you can get out anytime and keep an eye on everything.” (Om Tuqa, M.3)

“It is quite indifferent but a main street would be better if you want to watch over your car, check whether your daughter’s bus has arrived or not or inspect if the shops down below have opened up or are still closed. This is the importance of overlooking a main street.” (Martina, D.7)

“Of course a main street would be better so that I can see the school bus of my grandchildren as it comes and watch the children as they ride onto the bus. But in an internal alleyway how would I see the bus. Any young woman with children would want a balcony overlooking the main street to ensure whether her kids caught the school bus or not. Internal alleyways are suffocating.” (Basma, Q.6)

While the majority of the Interviewees expressed their preference for higher floor balconies, again, younger women with little children conveyed their preference for lower floors because ‘the higher floors are not safe for the children’ (Om Mohamed, M.9). Besides, on lower floors they feel closer to the street while watching their children play below and thus feel that it’s safer.

“Some people prefer upper floor balconies to avoid ‘street noise’ however, I would personally favor a lower floor. I fear upper floors because I have children. Also, on lower floors I feel closer to the street; it would be easier if I need to go down, or if my children are playing I can keep an eye on them.” (Om Hussein, M.2)

“Third and Fourth floors are the optimum; higher floors are not very safe if you have children.” (Ghada, a newly married young woman with a little daughter who moved to Haram a year and a half ago, M.12)

Moreover, the railing height is most often extended ‘for safety purposes unless there is aluminum’ (Ghada, M.12). ‘Some people close off their balconies in aluminum for children’s safety’ (Samya, M.4) or carry out some modifications to the railings to ensure safety for the kids while they sit outside and play.

“The red brick level (of the balcony railing) is extended to ensure safety for the kids when the balcony is uncovered in the morning for them to sit in the sun and play… The kids in the area usually play on the staircase landing or in the street but I don’t let my kids play in the street.
When the weather is good, they play on the balcony and read stories. It's safer for them because they are still very young.” (Somaya, Q.1)

“I do not have kids but I remember back in Syria in order to keep children safe on the balconies they often added half a meter of steel over the 1 meter brick railing so that even if the child climbs on anything, there would be an extended steel addition that is still perforated so air can pass through and the elder ones can see through them while making sure its all safe for the kids.” (Batool, a 28 year old Syrian who moved and settled in Egypt, with Somaya, 9 years ago, Q.5)

Beyond safety for children, respondents occupying ground or lower floors commonly expressed the feelings of insecurity and the need to conduct spatial modifications on the balcony space to ensure security for the occupants.

“The second, third and fourth floors are the most preferred…On the other hand, on the ground floor balconies you feel so exposed, [إي حد رجله في النفق]. You feel insecure so there has to be steel protection. 15 Mayo is generally quiet and people are mostly at work in the morning, so if something happens you don’t really find a lot of people like in shaabi areas where everyone knows the other and is familiar with all the neighbors’ houses. In Mayo everyone lives in an apartment so if you call out for help, no one would ever hear you, especially during the morning time. This is why it is particularly important to have steel protection on the ground and first floor balconies.” (Om Mohamed, M.9)

“My neighbors have steel addons to protect the house from thieves jumping onto their balconies. They put the steel in for security purposes because the area is still deserted.” (Om Tuqa, M.3)

“I have steel and curtains covering the balcony because I’m on the first floor and the ground floor shop slabs make my balcony too exposed and easily reachable [منطق بالنسبة لي].” (Salwa, D.2)

When the balconies, especially those on the ground floor, are well secured and protected, people become more comfortable with using them for various functional purposes.

“Since it’s closedoff in steel and silk I find it safe to be used for storage…” (Hind, Q.2)

4.5.3 ‘Leisure’, ‘Relaxation’ and ‘Connection’ with the Outside

Another significant theme disclosed in the interview’s coding process was the role of the balcony space in relation to leisure, relaxation and feelings of connection with the outside. When asked the question about the preference of overlooking a main street or fronting an internal alleyway, most of the responses exhibited a clear inclination for the main street. The main argument was that internal streets are simply empty and have ‘nothing appealing to watch over’, as particularly described by Om Kareem (D.9), Marina (D.11), living on port said main street in Daher, and others below across the two other neighborhoods. People enjoy watching other people in motion. Interlocutors showed aspiration for a lively street scene rather than a still, frozen view. Therefore, ‘a side street with shops and the like is considered as the least favored option’ (Aya, M.7) because ‘everything shuts down very early’ (Zainab, Q.10) and ‘you don’t see anyone’ (Ahlam, Q.7).
“I favor a main street because you get to see some ‘movement’ and ‘change’, there is something changing in front of you, rather than the same exact building that is facing you in a side street. On a main street, there are people coming and going, cars passing by, and people visiting us would easily find the way.” (Om Momen, M.1)

“Most people would prefer a main street, including myself because we (the Egyptian population) prefer liveliness, and it is more lively on a main street.” (Sameeha, a busy young and passionate Architect, M.10)

“Yes, of course a balcony overlooking a main street would be better because it would be more lively, you get to connect with the outside world. You watch the street, see people walking, and see the street sellers.” (Sawwa, D.2)

“If it was overlooking a main street, I would like to sit on it, otherwise in an internal alleyway what would I look at? The neighbors in front of me? It is not reasonable!...Some people have very nice balconies overlooking a good view, a big street or a main public street with people coming and going…” (Hind, Q.2)

Interviewees repeatedly expressed the desire for spaciousness, expansive distances and unobstructed views. Buildings in internal streets, ‘all lined up next to each other’ (Zainab, Q.10), ‘facade against facade’ (Ahlam, Q.7) are found to be very confining and unappealing to apartment residents because it does not secure their desired, ‘uninterrupted free space’.

“I prefer a spacious street where I can see something aside from neighbors because I feel like I get out on the balcony to see ‘spaciousness’, not something confining to the eyes. I want to look over something more open.” (Margo Magdy, D.12)

“On a main street the view is ‘spacious’ and you can watch comfortably. Besides, there are no neighbors fronting you so everyone’s privacy is maintained. But on an internal street, your view is ‘limited’ and the area is confined.” (Noura, a young lady in the late 20’s, M.11)

In this sense, when asked about the reason for the overriding preference for higher floor balconies, aside from the formerly mentioned desire to maintain privacy from the streets, some of the respondents also explained their preference for higher floors to guarantee a better view, more comfortable distances and achieve the intended ‘spaciousness’.

“One on higher floors you get the opportunity to engage with a better view.” (Sameeha, M.10)

“I like upper floors. I like to look at things from the very top; the view is wide-ranging.” (Aya, M.7)

When ‘confined between surrounding apartments’ (Safaa, Q.11), the balcony space becomes of inconvenient use to the residents. In this sense, it is either turned into a storage mess, left unused or closed off for functional purposes.
“In my apartment, also in Daher, I closed off the balconies because they are not overlooking a main street; there is no view, so it’s an inconvenient space for me.” (Martina, D.7)

In this regard, the key determining factors for the role of the balcony in relation to leisure and relaxation activities incorporate issues of ‘view’ & ‘privacy’. ‘More activities take place on balconies that face the main street because the space in front of them is larger’ (Margo, M.12).

When there are no buildings exposing you on the opposite side, the surrounding environment is peaceful and quiet, and there is a good, appealing view (sea, garden, sky), the balcony becomes a convenient place to sit, relax and contemplate.

“If I wanted to sit for leisure, I always approached the front balcony where there is empty space in front of you; you feel it's more comfortable, attractive to the eyes, and the view of the gardens is more appealing.” (Margo, M.12)

“On a main street you sit, open the radio and you’re not facing that many neighbors that would be looking at you. You may even lay a carpet and sit on the balcony floor.” (Om Kareem, D.9)

“The best thing is that we are facing a garden so you can sit and contemplate everything that allah has created and admire the sky. It is generally very tranquil in Mayo; there are no factories, no toktoks, and congestion. It is very quiet around so you can have the space to relax and drink tea, nescafe, or coffee out on the balcony.” (Asmaa, M.8)

“The use of the balcony largely depends on the area/neighborhood you live in. In my parents’ house for instance, the balcony overlooked the Nile, there were no neighbors or anything on the opposite side. It was very quiet at night time and the Nile was right in front of you so I enjoyed sitting on it with a cup of tea to relax...” (Basma, Q.6)

“All my usage is concentrated on the big balcony (overlooking a main street)... I have plant pots on it and enjoy sitting there to have my coffee and look at the sky during summer time or to observe the streets and watch people pass by...I enjoy sitting there for relaxation.” (Somaya, Q.1)

Another issue disclosed in the interviews was the issue of ‘size’. ‘The balcony activities are also dependent on the size of the balcony’ (Martina, D.7). Interviewees expressed the desire to have bigger balconies where they can fit a table and chairs, otherwise the ‘half meter wide balconies’ were turned into storage, mess or were simply unused. This was explicitly mentioned by Nawal (D.16), Basma (Q.6) and Om Momen (M.1). Nawal was concerned about the factor of size because her husband Wagdy (Salwa’s brother) was especially fond of balconies. “He can actually spend the whole day sitting on the balcony and invite all his friends over to sit with him in summer”, she expressed.

“One of the balconies is around 1.5m x 1.5m so it’s not used for anything. In the big one we put a cupboard for storage and the whole summer time is usually spent on it... The balcony overlooking
the school is around 1.5 x 0.7m so it's very small and is only used for hanging clothes.” (Naval, D.16)

“If I had enough money I would’ve bought a bigger apartment with a bigger balcony like my friend. A bigger balcony is better. In bigger balconies you could add tables, nice looking plastic chairs, and invite your friends over to sit with you on it. My current balcony is merely enough for me and my small family. You can only put small weave chairs on it but in my friend’s house she’s lucky to have a big balcony that fits white plastic chairs and a round table where she can receive friends to sit and drink tea together. But mine is small, corresponding to my financial capabilities...” (Basma, Q.6)

“With balconies, the bigger it is, the better it would be.” (Om Momen, M.1)

Moreover, leisure activities on the balcony were highly dependent on the season. ‘The summer use is opposite to the winter use’ (Basma, Q.6). Unsurprisingly, balconies were found to be much more active during the summer period, especially at night time or during maghreb when the sun sets, to sit in good weather. On the other hand, winter usage is basic. The balcony may only be used in the morning to capture some sun or ‘if you need to hang clothes or clean the balcony’ (Salwa, D.2).

“The balcony is a real pleasure, especially during the summer months. You can sit on it at Asr time [most favored period]. My daughters may often go outside to study. I lay them some material on the floor and they can sit and play, or get their friends over. Also, if you’re preparing something and you’re bored of sitting inside, you may get out on the balcony. It is a pleasure [متعة], with the air flow, the weather, and ‘watching people’ come and go. It is a completely different feeling... I do not think that anyone can give up on the balcony during the summer period... However, in winter we do not go out on the balcony at all.” (Om Tuqa, M.3)

“Sitting on the balcony for tea is one of the summertime essentials, especially for the old women. My grandmother used to spend the whole night out on the balcony. It was an indispensable ritual to get out on the balcony every Thursday night with her little radio, to sit and enjoy listening to Om Khalthoum. Sometimes when Khalto was there too, we would sit all together, open nogoum FM and stay up till very late at night.” (Ghada, M.12)

“During summer, I can put on chairs and a table and have dinner on the balcony. Meanwhile in winter, you would like to sit on the balcony when there is sun. When we invite people over, we often sit together on the balcony.” (Om Kareem, D.9)

Furthermore, Leisure activities in relation to balconies were also concerned with the time of the day. Interlocutors expressed the pleasure of sitting on the balcony when the shops or coffee shops (ahwa) were closed, streets were bare and all quiet late at night, ‘so one can sit comfortably’ (Evol, D.8). Noisy streets, congestion, loud shops and crowdedness were conceived to be very irritating for the occupants hindering any outdoor activity. Therefore, when the streets were more peaceful, people came out to their balconies, sometimes with their children, to enjoy the serene weather at night.
“During the night time when the shops are closed and the streets are quiet, when there is no traffic and noise in the streets, one may sit on the balcony and enjoy the sky. Otherwise it may be in the early morning, not really mid-day.” (Martina, D.7)

“You know when you try to spare some time for your mum and yourself away from anyone. This literally always took place on the balcony during the period from Asr to Maghrib when it was quiet around and the sun was setting.” (Sameeha, M.10)

“The curtains are usually closed in the morning and opened up at night time for fresh air, to drink a cup of tea, or sit outside. My husband and I may often stay up till late at night on the balcony together with our children to enjoy the serene wind flow... We often sit with the kids and watch people and cars as they come and go. It is good leisure time for the children. They enjoy watching the red car flashes and gossiping about them.” (Samya, M.4)

Children, often accompanied by their parents or mothers, were especially fond of getting out on the balcony for play. The movement in the streets was found to be fascinating for them. They enjoyed looking outside at colors, decorations, movement or any sort of activity happening in the street and often tried to engage through waving, screaming or wailing. The view to the outside served as a positive means of distraction for children.

“My younger child starts crying when I leave the house so I put him on the balcony with his elder sister. He gets distracted by the coming and going cars and I keep looking at them from down below.” (Samya, M.4)

“My little daughter likes to stand outside and look at the decorated balconies.” (Om Abdullah, M.5)

“When we are out on the balcony, my kids love to wave at the newly married bride occupying the opposite apartment.” (Asmaa, Q.3)

Moreover, when probing for details concerning activities conducted on the balcony, Interlocutors recounted the significant role played by the balcony in hosting various entertainment activities for the elderly ones, families and during various special occasions.

“At our house, the balcony is mainly used for Friday breakfasts because this is the only time where we, as a family, all gather... The balcony is especially convenient for gatherings and birthdays. The younger ones sit outside (on the balcony) while the elders are inside.” (Margo, D.12)

“There are lots of different uses to the balcony. At my childrens’ aunt’s house, also in Daher, we often get ice cream, pulp (ـلوس), and peanuts and gather to sit together on the balcony and watch TV.” (Om Kareem, D.9)

“When my friends come for a sleepover we enjoy hanging out on the balcony, it’s our favorite place. We like to sit on the balcony to chat and play cards... My father also spends time on the balcony every day. If my aunt’s husband was there, they would sit together and play tawla, you
know the typical leisure time of old men, or he likes to sit, and sometimes we sit with him, not necessarily with lights on, and listen to Om Kalthoum or Warda, depending on his mood.” (Martina, D.13)

“We may often put a table and chairs, prepare milk tea or have cold drinks out on the balcony. We can sometimes put the laptop and watch something together. Whether for the young or old, it is a leisure space in the apartment. Actually, it may be considered as the only leisure space in the house.” (Om Momen, M.1)

The younger ones mainly referred to the significant role of the balcony during the period of quarantine. While at regular times balconies did not undergo much care and maintenance, except by the household wives who are the main users, during the quarantine period, they were cleaned, creatively decorated and taken good care of. When they became the only facility to escape from the suffocating indoors, the role of the balcony was reactivated. Karen and Marina, occupying the 8th and 9th floors in the same building on Port Said main street in Daher, shared their experiences in creating new set ups on the balcony during quarantine and playing games while exchanging messages and things in the basket.

“Most of its use was during the quarantine period because you were too frustrated from staying indoors, you really needed to go out somewhere for a change. I put bean bags and watched movies during fajr, called my friends over to sit with me and so on.” (Karen, D.10)

“During the period of quarantine we cleaned and arranged a seating there (on the balcony). We used to enjoy sitting on it but now we spend most of the day away from home. We got too busy. I don’t really get the time to sit on it but I may go outside to look at something or stand for some time when bored.” (Marina, D.11)

Among various discussed factors impeding balcony use, the younger interlocutors shared some of the pull forces that take people away from the balcony today. Some of these forces incorporate more busy lifestyles with extended working hours, longer commuting time, and indoor lifestyles driven by air conditioning systems, play stations, televisions and the internet. Today the youth have busy lifestyles and hardly spend any time at home, and even when they do, ‘they sit in the living room in front of the TV with their phones’ (Martina, D.7). Martina, Margo (D.4), and Sameeha (M.10) typically represent the working Egyptian women who are trying to balance or cope - if you will, with extensive working hours, long tedious daily commuting, and household needs. Sameeha, despite being one of the people who find their comfort on the balcony, hardly finds the time to sit at home or spare it for her mum and herself. Her every day strictly revolves around taking the kids to school in the morning, going to work, picking up the kids after work, and rushing to conduct all the household chores at night, only to rerun the same routine the next day.

“We don’t really spend that much time at home anymore and when we’re home, we’re usually busy finishing off some work on the phone or laptop.” (Martina, D.7)
“It is mostly my husband and I sitting on the balcony. My children are always at work or outside with friends so they barely sit at home.” (Margo, D.4)

“I’m one of the people that find their comfort on the balcony but today we all have busy lifestyles. So this is another issue. The working hours have increased so much and the internet has definitely reduced the time you may spend on the balcony.” (Sameeha, M.10)

“I’m from the older generation so I enjoy sitting on the balcony. The younger ones today are usually busy. They may get out on the balcony to have their phone calls or just stand for some time if the weather is good and there is some fresh air outside. But we are older people, we may sit, drink coffee and tea, eat something, enjoy the radio, and listen to some good songs.” (Om Kareem, D.9)

Nevertheless, regardless of the various factors dragging people away from balcony use, respondents repeatedly expressed acknowledgement for the importance of having balconies in their residence. It is conceived as the ‘free-outing’ where you may get the opportunity to change your mood in some good weather without having to pay the expenses of commuting; It is an indispensable connection with the outside world and an immediate source of ‘free leisure’.

“If you want to change your mood without going out, where would you sit? On the balcony.. If you’d like to drink a cup of coffee or nescafe or just relax alone where would you sit? Bedroom or balcony? Of course on the balcony…” (Batool, Q.5)

“If you are going to read a book, do some knitting, or work on a crochet piece, you would find yourself out on the balcony, relaxed and unaware of the passing time as you accomplish whatever work you’re doing.” (Om Tuqa, M.3)

“Because of the everyday busy schedules we have nowadays, no one really gets an opportunity to go out as much; merely every now and then. So if you need a breath of fresh air, where would you go? Of course the balcony; it’s the only outlet [ المنفس الوحيد ] in the house. So you put flowers, a table, chairs, cassette, take your phone and sit alone in peace for some time [ تقدعي تروفي بالك شوية ].” (Noura, M.11)

“The balcony is freetime for the ‘self’,[ فراغ أو جو لنفسو ]. If you don’t even go out, at least you can go out on the balcony.” (Zainab, Q.10)

“A balcony, with a fan, possibly a TV and a radio can make up for an outing!” (Om Kareem, D.9)

4.5.4 ‘Functional’ and ‘Communicative’ purposes

This theme predominantly reveals the mundane household chores conducted by the housewives on a daily basis; ‘cleaning, ventilating the house, hanging clothes, laying the pillows, blankets and carpets in the early morning sun’ (Ahlam, Q.7; Hanan, Q.8; Om Hussein M.2), ‘preparing for the day’s cook, drying mint, Mulukhiyah, hanging garlic’ (Basma, Q.6), and storing other kitchen excesses on the balcony; ‘onion basket, fridge, deep freezer, dryer,
etc.’(Salwa, D.2). Accordingly, the main user of the balcony space in regards to the functional purposes is predominantly revealed to be the housewife.

“I am the main user as I do all the washing, hanging clothes, following up with the children and keeping an eye on them when they’re out on the balcony for playing. As you know all men are mainly concerned with their ‘phone calls’ and sitting for their pleasure.” (Samya, M.4)

Another significant role expressed by housewives was the communicative function of the balcony space. Respondents commonly expressed the role of ‘balconies for communication if someone called them from the street, throwing the keys if someone rang the bell (Hind, Q.2), or buying vegetables or something if needed’ (Om youssef, Q.18). ‘The most important thing was accomplishing all the household shopping without needing to go all the way down the street’ (Om Mohamed, M.9). When there are supermarkets and pharmacies below, the guy is called over to put whatever is needed in the basket. Thus, in this sense, the optimal balcony location was conceived as the one overlooking the main street since you get to have big supermarkets below and ‘sellers always pass by main streets so you can observe and call them when needed’ (Om youssef, Q.18).

“It is good when a balcony faces a main street. The side streets are not very practical. If you need anything from down below and a street seller passes by; you may drop down your basket, someone may put you something, but in ‘side streets’ you only have residents, you don’t have a big supermarket or street sellers.” (Om Abdullah, M.5)

“I may call out on any of the street sellers, drop the basket and get some household needs. The windows are usually too small for this,” (Om Momen, M.1)

“I often stand on the balcony to watch the street, hang clothes, talk to my neighbors, throw down the basket if anyone needs anything from downstairs, or buy things if someone’s selling something in the street.” (Zainab, Q.10)

“I use it to throw the basket if I buy any household needs, watch the street if someone’s passing by or if I’m expecting a visitor at home.” (Salwa, D.2)

Aside from the prevalent communicative role of the balcony, shared by the household wives, the younger female interviewees shared other functional uses for the balcony space. It is found to be very convenient for studying, working, or conducting private phone calls where there is good signal, fresh air and no crowd. For instance, Nadine shared the crucial role of the balcony for her late-night stay-ups over projects. This was especially common and regular during her university years in Architecture school. Because her parents work in Saudi Arabia, Nadine lives with her grandparents in Mayo. As much as this was convenient for her parents, it was quite difficult for Nadine as a student because her aunts, uncles, and cousins frequently visited amid her submissions. Correspondingly, because Mayo is luckily a very quiet neighborhood, the balcony was her only escape to sit and work with focus. All her brainstorming, sketching, and drawings were conducted outside. Other interlocutors; Martina and Om Momen’s children shared similar functions for the balcony.
“I mainly used the balcony to escape the crowd at my grandparents’ house. Gedo has a couch on the balcony so I often sat on it to study, draw, or call someone because the house used to get so crowded when my aunts and cousins gathered.” (Nadine, M.6)

“I use the balcony most among my family members, but my children may join when they’re free or have the time. When they were young, they used to study out on the balcony for a change. I put a table outside, make them nescafe and sandwiches while they’re working. The weather is better outside so they are usually more active studying out in the open air.” (Om Momen, M.1)

“My whole life is on the balcony [عندتي كلها في الالكونة]; all my studying in sanaweya ama was on the balcony, Literally. I’m not the kind of person who studies on a desk so all my study was held on the balcony, even during university years.” (Martina, D.13)

“I often used the backside balcony if my mother and siblings were up and I needed to have a private phone call. My mother put the washing machine outside so I used to sit on it to make my calls. It was a bit isolated from the rest of the apartment so they wouldn’t overhear me.” (Ghada, M.12)

The usage of the balcony space for various functions was highly dependent on the balcony location (front or backside). Similar to the previous theme of leisure and relaxation, this theme was also affected by issues of ‘privacy’. For instance, ‘exposed balconies’ (backside balconies or balconies facing an internal street) were either closed up in redbricks to extend the interior space or were turned into a storage area. Correspondingly, while front balconies, with good views and spacious distances were used for leisure and relaxation purposes, back side balconies fronting neighbors were adjusted for the mundane functional purposes.

“Two of my balconies are overlooking a side street (two side balconies, one big and one small) and one balcony is overlooking a main street (one front balcony)...I mainly use the ‘side street balconies’ for hanging clothes while on the ‘main street balcony’ I may often stand, put chairs, drink tea, have breakfast and so on...I mainly use my side balcony, that is facing the neighbors, for hanging clothes or storing things; a ladder, chair, water bottles or any of the house’s crowd. It is very difficult to stand or sit on it because it’s too close to the neighbors.” (Om Kareem, D.9)

“The backside balcony (adjacent to the kitchen and facing neighbors) is used for washing the utensils. Teita also put an oven on it, and a cupboard to store the pots and pans. So it’s basically an extension of the kitchen space because the kitchen is very small.” (Nadine, M.6)

In this regard, some of the functional modifications were influenced by issues of privacy. Backside balconies or balconies facing neighbors on narrow internal streets were often modified for functional or storage purposes to ensure ‘external or internal privacy’.

“I personally don’t have any (spatial changes) but my sister closed off the two balcony sides in redbricks and wood for storage purposes. She has one big balcony too and closed off its two sides, right and left, that are facing the neighbors; one is turned into a storage space and the other a shoe rack.” (Zainab, Q.10)
“I closed it off (backside kitchen balcony) because when you sat or stood on it, the back facade was too exposed to the opposite building so people would see you. At the same time it overlooked shafts where people throw their garbage. I would not have been able to use it for anything so I closed it off to be part of the kitchen so I can fit in my fridge instead of placing it in the corridor; so all kitchen material would be in one place [المطابخ على بعضو].” (Basma, Q.6)

“A common issue in the apartments in Mayo is that whoever is sitting in the reception outside exposes the person standing in the Kitchen, unless there are internal curtains, so people often close off the service balcony in red bricks and move the kitchen sink and utensils inside the kitchen balcony, to make sure the visitors do not expose them while they’re cooking, serving juice or anything.” (Ghada, M.12)

4.5.5 ‘Identity’ and ‘Personalization’

Finally the last theme was concerned with a prevailing phenomenon that was documented in the physical fieldwork observations (noted in previous sections), the issue of Identity and personalization. Various changes are conducted to fulfill everyday needs and express the personal identity of occupants. Interviews disclosed the use of different treatments to express the personal identity and affections of users, depending on the financial capabilities of every family. In most cases, the balcony space was conceived as part of the ‘inside’ rather than the ‘public outside’, and thus painted in accordance with the interior space color and design.

“Our exterior is plain white, just like the inside.” (Margo, D.12)

“Our balcony is painted in blue to match the columns inside the house. The walls inside are all white and the columns are painted in some shade of blue so we also painted the balcony in the same shade of blue to match with something from the house.” (Martina, D.13)
Interviews revealed that the most commonly used and favored objects on balconies were flowers and plant pots, as they were easy to add, portable and diffused a restoring smell. The interviewees in 15 Mayo added that plants are used because they are portable objects and may easily be eliminated in cases of fine. Other residents, owning pets (most commonly birds and dogs), put their pet cage on the balcony to keep the inside clean and ensure they capture good sunlight.

“I have plant pots there (on the balcony) because this is the thing we cannot give up on, having plants at home, especially the smell of ‘queen of the night’ plant [ Musk الليل]. It refreshes the heart. I have two from the basil plant and queen of the night [ ريحان،’ العطرة،’ مسك الليل]; everything that has a smell.” (Batool, Q.5)

“My father loves to put birds on the balcony. We also have lots of plants and a chair if you want to get out and sit for some time in the sun.” (Marina, D.11)

“I personally put plants on the balcony, flowers, decorations, anything that is portable really, so they can easily be removed if there is a fine or if anyone from the inspection comes over. People in the new extension of 15 Mayo [الإسكان الاجتماعي], unlike those in the old region, fear making any changes.” (Om Tuqa, M.3)
Moreover, interviews disclosed the differing role and manifestations exhibited on balconies during special occasions, especially over the holy month of Ramadan when the balconies take up a more active, ‘festive role’. ‘The neighborhoods generally become much more lively in Eid and Ramadan’ (Noura, M.11), which mainly gets reflected in the lit-up facades. ‘Most of the people put lights and decorations on their balconies’ (Om Amr, D.1), and neighbors often contribute to adding decorations across the full facade’ (Nadine, M.6). For instance, Sameeha’s father was one of the people who were especially fond of decorating the balcony in Ramadan and the budget saved for this special occasion increased by the year. But this was not only to them, it stretched to all the kids and neighbors in the area and similarly traced across the other neighborhoods.

“We, the Egyptian population, have very special rituals in Ramadan which are rendered visible in the balconies and facade decorations… All our neighbors add at least some Led lights on the Balcony handrails… No one cares if this is a front or a back facade, what they care about is that ‘my balcony would look good next to the other balconies’…” (Sameeha, M.10)

“In Ramadan, people start decorating their balconies with led lights and lanterns. Since the distance between buildings is wide, it is difficult to decorate in-between them. Instead, people like to illuminate their balconies.” (Ghada, M.12)
Figure 45: Decorated balcony railing with lights and a Ramadan lantern (shared by Hana, Q.13)

While the original facade holds a uniform color and form, people install various additions, modifications and spatial changes corresponding to their needs and desires. ‘When people settle in a place for a long time, they consider the place their own property, and thus start to conduct various changes’ (Om Tuqa, M.3), expressing their taste, character and identity. For instance, ‘some people paint their balconies and put plants and flowers, it depends on everyone’s character’ (Om Mohamed, M.9).

“Everyone has their own taste and paints their balconies accordingly. Sometimes they do it to stand out [عالی بیفی متمیز]; ‘they all painted in gray so I will paint a different color’ or ‘I am bored of this color so I will change, I want something new’.” (Noura, M.11)

“Originally, the facades were all the same form and color yet later, with time, everyone started to change; whether they got bored, disinterested, or it stopped looking appealing and they wanted to change the color. So everyone started to paint their balconies in their own taste. Some change the decoration completely like my mother who went for ceramic tiles, some close off the space in aluminum, some go for painting, etc.” (Ghada, M.12)

“Daher is a very old area with lots of old buildings so we don’t really have the strict rules exhibited like the newly built compounds of today. Most of the people have been in the place for a long time so everyone is comfortable to do whatever they want; whatever environment he/she wants to create for him/herself. You know how everything before was much less complicated.
There were no confining rules and restrictions; everyone followed their own mind, mood and personality, ‘your apartment, live in it in the way you wish’. It is part of your house, your character…” (Martina, D.13)

Some of the respondents linked the phenomenon of personalization with struggles of ‘relocation’ and adaptation. Respondents unhappily expressed the changes in social class and the present mix of populations that are common today. With people coming from different backgrounds and social levels settling together in the same area, it becomes difficult to conform to one language and a single, cooperative identity. Accordingly, it is this heterogeneity that is projected onto the facades.

“I do not want to be offensive but Daher today is occupied by either old people from the higher social background or younger ones who moved in from lower social backgrounds. They are affected by what they have seen (at their ‘balad’) and their general taste is different… This is basically what is reflected on the facade; it all really boils down to the background everyone comes from.” (Margo, D.12)

“It is the human behavior that overrides the building facade and expression because you are basically relocating people with various behaviors and memories who move into a new place and try to ‘re-recreate’ the same environment for themselves; the same vernacular environment. You are not just relocating a human being, you are not relocating a single soul, but rather a whole environment where everyone wants to get his original ‘home’ with him. Besides, you are moving a 90 year old man; a 90 year old will not care about having a good building foundation or a garden down below, but rather would be more concerned about something called companionship, my neighbor, my house [ﺣﺎﺟﺔ اسماها عشرة, جارتي, بيتي…]. Everyone wants to recreate his old home, this is why everyone exhibits a different alteration to the exterior facade. The facades in Mayo are supposedly copies of each other; what defines my facade from my neighbor’s is the behaviors of people that override the original design.” (Sameeha, M.10)

“In short, everyone brings along what he saw [كل واحد ببنقل اللي شافه].” (Sameeha, M.10)

4.5.6 Conclusive Insights

“The balcony is the ‘soul’ of the house” (Om Ahmed, Q.4; Dalia, Q.12; Om Amr, D.1; Salwa, D.2; Sana, D.3; Evol, D.8; Om Momen, M.1; Om Tuqa, M.3; Om Mohamed, M.9) emphasized the different respondents when interrogating about their perception regarding the significance of the balcony space in the house. When asked the last question at the end of every dialogue; If you were to choose, would you prefer a bigger living space without a balcony in the apartment or a smaller living space with a balcony? 91% of the respondents chose a smaller living space with a balcony over a larger living or reception area without a balcony. Regardless of the various factors discussed above impeding or limiting balcony activities, the majority of the respondents showed appreciation and desire for balconies describing it as a source of ‘comfort’ (Om Kareem, D.9) and a ‘breath to the apartment’ (Batool, Q.5; Gigi, D.6; Marina, D.11; Om Hussein, M.2; Om Tuqa, M.3). Correspondingly, Interviewees repeatedly expressed the feelings of suffocation in apartments without a balcony space interchangeably using words like
‘trapped’ (Zainab, Q.10; Martina, D.7; Om Tuqa, M.3), ‘imprisoned’ (Safaa, Q.11), ‘suffocated’ (Safaa, Q.11; Om Momen, M.1; Om Tuqa, M.3), or ‘repressed’ (Samya, M.4), to describe their feelings, thus accentuating the vital need for an ‘outlet’ (Sameeha, M.10; Noura, M.11) or some outside space in the house beyond the everyday ‘building enclosures’ (Basma, Q.6).

While the majority of the respondents emphasized the need for a balcony in the apartment, respondents that did not own one at home further stretched their sufferings with the enclosed apartments. Safaa (Q.11) and Ghada (M.12) especially expressed their discontent with the closed-off balconies in their new houses. Safaa currently lives in the new residential housing that constitutes ‘out-looking’ or ‘inside-looking’ residential units. Unfortunately, due to limited financial capabilities, Safaa was forced to move to one of the inside-looking apartments facing a lightwell, and no facade overlooking the street. The lightwell was occasionally used by the neighbors to throw in the garbage so it always induced a bad smell in the house.

Correspondingly, the majority of balconies in the inside-looking residential units were closed up. Safaa’s children were quite disappointed with the new apartment and were always nostalgic about their old house with three big balconies where they used to sit, play and fill the night with giggles. Similarly, Ghada, who moved to Haram after marriage, shared related sufferings in the new apartment, especially that at her parents’ house in Mayo, there were two balconies, both overlooking a garden view.

“My children are very bored that there is no balcony watching the street. They feel like they are imprisoned. They say ‘we feel suffocated, like we’re trapped in a place with no openings’ [اکتنا محبوبسین في مكان مفهوش اي خارج].” (Safaa, Q.11)

“I moved to Haram a year and a half ago, after marriage, and I truly suffer from the lack of balconies in my new apartment. Everything is closed off in aluminum so I get really bored. Back in Mayo, I used to enjoy studying on the balcony or going outside and sitting for some time when I felt bored or suffocated; you literally forget the world [يتنسي الدنيا حرفيًا واني قاعد في الблокونة].” (Ghada, M.12)

Other Interlocutors; Om Tuqa, Martina, Evol, Batool, and others, also shared their perceptions about the significance and meaning of the balcony space in the house. Batool was especially sentimental as she recalled her old house in Syria. Even though it’s been 9 years since she moved to Qanater, she was still unable to settle in and adapt to her new apartment. Both Somaya and Batool were unable to accommodate because in Syria their homes were all open to the sky. They were never used to living in apartments in the first place so now “it feels like someone is choking you”, as voiced by Batool. Thus here comes the reason for the importance they grant for balconies as the only available source of “breath” in the house. In the everyday building enclosures, the balcony works as a fundamental source of prospect.

“For me, if an apartment does not have a balcony I would feel suffocated [شعقة من غير بلكونة احس اننا اخذت الخفقت]. Yes it would be spacious, but where would the ‘soul’ of the apartment be [وسيعة اه وجميلة اه, اطلب فن يفي الروح بساعها]! You would feel like you’re trapped in a cage, no matter how spacious it is.
I feel like the balcony is the ‘soul’ of the apartment, if you eliminate it, you’ll only be left with the ‘material looks’ [شکل بس].” (Om Tuqa, M.3)

“I don’t have a garden or a roof, so if I don’t get to have a balcony as well I would feel trapped!” (Martina, D.7)

“As the saying says: ‘an apartment without a balcony is a locked space’ [الشقة التي من غير بلكونة شقة حبيس].” (Evol, D.8)

“Everyone has his own opinion but I personally prefer to breathe...” (Batool, Q.5)
Chapter 5

Discussion

This study is set out to address the role and function of the balcony space and the extent to which it contributes to accomplishing the sociocultural needs, restoration and wellbeing in the residential environment. In particular, the study focuses on women’s perspective; how they inhabit Cairene balconies, factors impeding or promoting balcony usage and the characteristics of a ‘usable’ balcony. Findings highlight the role of cultural issues in relation to the role of the Cairene balcony. The analysis of the fieldwork observations and Interviews with female residents disclose five fundamental themes in relation to the role of the balcony; privacy and control, safety and security, restoration, wellbeing and connection with the outside, functional and communicative purposes, and personalization and identity. Accordingly, this chapter discusses the individual themes in relation to the literature review and the fundamental research question on the role of the balcony in the Egyptian context. The study analyzes the extent to which women’s needs and wants are satisfied in relation to the five fundamental themes and discusses ways in which women modify their homes to compensate for the lack of the various needs.

5.1 The Role of the Balcony in relation to ‘Privacy’ and ‘Control’

As expressed by Rapoport (1983), the right to privacy is still conceived to be very important in Middle Eastern culture. Touman & Al-Ajmi (2017) have demonstrated the importance of privacy to the whole Arab society, and particularly to the Egyptians. El-Rafey (1992) provided evidence from his research in Cairo that privacy continues to be highly valued in Egyptian culture. This was also highlighted in the findings of this study. In general, fieldwork results disclosed that in order to fulfill the needs for residential visual privacy, women across the various local contexts were burdened with taking measures to alter the original design of the residential unit. Frequently, there was disparity between the proposed design and the expected levels of visual privacy. In this regard, residents were obliged to alter the original design, regulate their behavior or give up the balcony space due to the lack of privacy. This was found to be irrespective of street width. For example, in El-Qanater neighborhood, 47% of the documented balconies in street sample A (12 meters wide as per distance from facade to facade) were modified with various privacy treatments (i.e addition of curtains, covering railing, blocking sides, etc.), and also 47% of the documented balconies in the narrower street sample B (6 meters wide as per distance from facade to facade) were modified with various privacy treatments. Irrespective of street width, the total % of modifications in relation to privacy were equivalent across both street samples. In the 15 May neighborhood, where both street samples were 30 meters wide on average (as per distance from facade to facade), street sample A exhibited a total of 57% of treatments in relation to privacy while street B exhibited a total of 31%. Both examples show that street width is irrelevant to the extent of modifications conducted to secure privacy.
Moreover, despite differences in the neighborhood layouts, the average % of privacy treatments (combined) across street samples A & B in the three neighborhoods displayed mere differences. For example, 47% of the total documented balconies in Al-Qanater were modified with the addition of various privacy treatments, in comparison to 51% at El-Daher and 44% at 15 May city, which again confirms the assumption that street width merely contributes to the participation in transforming the planned environment. In other words, irrespective of the neighborhood layout, the distances between building blocks or street widths, many of the residents across all three contexts did not use the balcony space as intended or assumed, and were forced to conduct additional measures to fulfill the desired level of visual privacy to sit comfortably while at home.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Area</th>
<th>Sample Street A</th>
<th>Sample Street B</th>
<th>Average % (A&amp;B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Al-Qanater Al-Khaireya</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El-Daher</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 May city</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: Average % of privacy treatments in relation to the three study areas.

In the Interview conversations, women have reacted quite negatively to the use of balconies that are exposed to opposite neighbors or stranger’s gaze in the street. Interestingly, while the assumption was to tackle less of privacy issues in El-Daher neighborhood in contrast to the other two contexts, bearing in mind that El-Daher hosts a Christian community and less hijabi women, Interlocutors’ responses were identical to those in El-Qanater and the 15 May neighborhood repeating expressions like; “We are saidah” [اًﺣﻨﺎ ﺻﻌﺎﯾﺪة], “it’s inappropriate” [مColour| inspector], “it’s a bad image” [منظر ﻣﺶ ﺛﻲ ﻫﻮه], especially when the residence was fronting a coffee shop (ahwa), or places where men gather. As similarly stated in Dina Shehayeb’s study (2007), occupants do not favor fronting a café that visually exposes their balconies and windows and intersects with women’s routes. Further, words like “exposed” [مجوﺮحة] and “not comfortable” [مسنﺪة] were used when unprotected from neighboring balconies while conducting the daily household chores or ventilating the house. Sometimes women postponed the cleaning, hanging clothes and other activities late at night, to around 12/1 am, to make sure everyone was asleep and there was no one standing to watch over while they're doing the work. Women repeatedly shared the conservative ‘dress code’ needed when out on the balcony; ‘covered hair, long sleeves, long pants, no shorts, no house dresses…’ because these are “privates” [عور], as voiced by several interviewees. These findings correspond with a frequently repeated saying in the Arab world, “every house has its sanctity (hurma)” (El Guindi, 1999) that refers to the inviolable and sacred nature Arabs give to their houses and implies restrictions on access to this sacred space from outsiders or strangers’ gaze, especially that of men (Campo, 1991).

Correspondingly, the physical mapping discussed in the previous chapter identified several measures conducted by women to make up for the lack of privacy in their home designs. The instantaneous reaction of women is to exhibit privacy control devices or “physical privacy regulating mechanisms” in Altman's (1975) terms, to obstruct any outsiders’ intrusion into their
homes (e.g. addition of curtains, covering railings, blocking balcony sides, etc.). Women re-invented the ‘mashrabiya setting’ (see figure below) using modern day affordable material (curtains) to secure them the view to the outside world without being seen by others. Curtains are thrown out over the drying ropes and fixed to the wash line steel rods on both sides, imitating the sloped opening of the mashrabiya that allows women to observe street life without getting exposed to strangers. This confirms the viewpoint that balconies are modern derivatives of mashrabiyas from Islamic Architecture in Egypt. In a similar way to the mashrabiya, the balcony serves as a potential gateway to the outside world (ElZein & ElSemary, 2022), yet undergoes additional iterations to also secure privacy (like the mashrabiya) in parallel to offering outside exposure. As expressed by Ali Bahbaham (1987), “A balcony, when used, should have an above eye level, perforated wall, or a lattice screen to maintain privacy.” In this regard, women were always keen to manifest this ‘outside to inside’ screen and secure a ‘one-way’ view to the outside. Women’s behavior in the absence of privacy and the various physical mechanisms conducted accordingly may advocate Archea’s (1977, p. 121) thesis on privacy: “the arrangement of the physical environment regulates the distribution of the information upon which all interpersonal behavior depends”.

Figure 46: The Mashrabiya Analogy; old mashrabiya setting (Germana et al., 2015), new manifested behavior using curtains (middle) and direction of old mashrabiya opening and view to street life (right).

Cultural values certainly play a role in this discussion of women’s privacy preferences. As categorized by Rapoport (1983), cultural values are of two types: core and peripheral. The continuity and cohesion of culture and society significantly depends on core values. They cannot be easily abandoned because they are crucial to what a society believes and understands of itself and how others see it. Any change or disruption in core values may disrupt the equilibrium of a society and undermine its overall integrity. On the other hand, peripheral values are subject to change and development. Changes in these principles may be viewed positively, and regarded as healthy and advancing by a society. For instance, a society might promote “foreign” music with little controversy or interruption (Al-Kodmany, 1999). In this sense, in light of Rapoport’s theoretical framework, this study’s findings, manifesting substantial desires for residential visual privacy among Cairene women proposes that it might be a fundamental aspect, and one of the core values in Egyptian society. Therefore, more
extensive investigation is required to determine how modern architecture could maintain visual privacy in the domestic setting.

5.2 The Role of the Cairene Balcony in relation to ‘Safety’ and ‘Security’

From the perspective of intellectuals and researchers, security is currently regarded as one of the most crucial human needs in cities and societies (Daroudi & Sami, 2017), assisting to strengthen and stabilize the human (Ibrahim, 2019). As part of a hierarchy that incorporates physiological needs, security, dependence, self-esteem, self-actualization, and aesthetics, Jon Lang’s model of human needs places security on the second degree of importance. There are various environmental design strategies to ensure a sense of safety and security in the residential environment. The most important strategies include: *territorality, surveillance, target hardening, access control, space hierarchy, providing a program, lighting design and more* (Ibrahim, 2019). As far as balconies are concerned, women referred to two prevailing strategies in the interviews that are adopted to secure a sense of safety and security inside homes; these incorporate ‘surveillance’ and ‘access control’. According to Wible (2007), surveillance, defined as the increased sight of people, vehicles, and various nearby activities taking place around the building, can be attained through ‘natural’ or ‘formal surveillance’. In the context of this study, balconies served as an important platform for ‘natural surveillance’, especially in regards to women and their children.

Women across all three neighborhoods commonly referred to the important role of the balcony in watching over their children and keeping a constant eye on them while playing in the streets (see figure below). Sometimes, balconies facing internal streets were perceived as more convenient for young mothers with little children as internal streets were considered to be safer and helped mothers observe and follow up with their children if they go down to the supermarket or shop to buy something. Nevertheless, there were also acknowledged benefits for facing main streets since they offered a more expansive window for surveillance of the outside (i.e. cars, shops, people, etc.), thus more control and an increased sense of safety. As expressed by Newman (1972) and others, ‘safe environments’ are conceived as those which are constantly overlooked by residents for the mere purpose of sustaining an ‘observing eye’ that scrutinizes events taking place in public spaces. Hence, Jacob’s (1961) argument that there must always be “eyes on the street” as a fundamental attribute for safety and security in public spaces (Abou Aly et al., 2018). The important issue then becomes how to sustain and secure that ‘observing eye’ (Shehayeb & Eid, 2007). In regards to this study’s findings, the balcony seems to take up a significant role in hosting ‘natural eyes’ on the street, where women are the key players, and thus must be considered when planning physical layouts. While the assumption, based on discussions of other issues and themes, was that ‘a backside balcony’ facing internal streets and the mundane view of neighbors is perceived as impractical and inconvenient for occupants, findings in this section reveal its significant role in securing safety for children. Accordingly, whenever possible, it would be useful to have both, access to a front side balcony facing a main street for a more ‘comprehensive surveillance’ and a backside balcony facing an internal street.
for a more ‘local surveillance’ in parallel. This may arouse an overall safer environment for residents in the area.

![Figure 47: Watching over children in internal streets(L), more expansive views for surveillance on main streets(R).](image)

Interviewees, mainly in the 15 May neighborhood, had concerns about the overall deserted environment. There were no physical streets with practical conveniences, such as groceries, candy stores, repair shops, and other places to go to for social practices and one had to use transportation to get to the market and buy the household needs, which exacerbated the residents’ problems. As Jane Jacobs (1961) suggested in ‘The Death and Life of Great American Cities’, it would be safer if the streets were zoned to serve a complex intermingle of functions. This variety of uses and activities kept the area active for longer periods of time during the day and night, increased the sense of safety on the streets during all times of the day, reduced monotony, and enhanced public interaction (Shehayeb & Eid, 2007). In fact, much of the low-income housing architecture encourages social isolation where the interaction with the street is deprived by the free-standing, widely spaced out residential blocks, as in the case of 15 May neighborhood. As one woman expressed “15 Mayo is generally quiet and people are mostly at work in the morning, so if something happens you don’t really find a lot of people like in shaabi areas where everyone knows the other and is familiar with all the neighbors’ houses. In Mayo everyone lives in an apartment so if you call out for help, no one would ever hear you, especially during the morning time. This is why it is particularly important to have steel protection on the ground and first floor balconies.” In this regard, besides the natural surveillance strategies conducted on both front and backside balconies, women exhibited ‘access control’ strategies on lower and ground floor balconies using steel protection to increase the sense of safety and security inside their homes. This modification was observed across all three neighborhoods yet was more commonly captured
and noted in the 15 May neighborhood. Women were especially concerned about ground floor balconies and were forced to conduct the additional measures to fulfill their needs for security.

5.3 The Role of the Balcony in relation to ‘Well-being’ and ‘Restoration’

To cater to the needs of daily living, depleting physical, psychological, and/or social resources must be replenished (Hartig, 2017). While places differ in the extent to which they foster restoration, the residential environment stands out as a place that individuals heavily rely on for restoration. Expectations of a residence’s contribution to restoration are frequently reflected in decisions about its location, outdoor spaces, layout, and furnishing (Hartig, 2012). The present section especially focuses on the role of the balcony in contributing to restoration and well-being in the residential context. In regards to Lefebvre, balconies claim an in-between position, offering an inside-outside perspective of the world/street beyond the walls of a home. As discussed in the study by Ragavan (2021), balconies in urban middle-class areas provide women with a sense of relief from indoor life by giving them a glimpse of the outside world and allowing them to engage with neighbors. To the extent that the balcony is a space, it provides a sense of relief for women, who are the main household users usually occupying the indoors (Ragavan, 2021). Thus, in addition to being a place for human connection, it also has a gendered dimension. On a similar note, the findings of this study reveal the importance of the balcony space for women, as a means of comfort and connection to the outside street life. This need for an ‘Inside-Outside’ connection has been supported extensively in many research studies (Wallace, 1952).

As expressed by Ragavan (2021), balcony spaces provide mobile experiences; static in construction, but mobile in the sense that they facilitate observation from above. The most common behavior documented during fieldwork was ‘passive observation’ rather than active interaction or communication with neighbors. Women in interviews commonly shared the pleasure of watching ‘movement’ in the streets; people passing by, cars moving, shops opening and closing, etc. This corresponds with Hisham Aslan’s (2013) remark that ‘uninhabited city voids are not amusing’. ‘I can’t stand watching a still view for long periods of time’, he expressed. In a similar sense, women showed aspiration for a lively street scene rather than a still, frozen view. While the assumption was that still views of calm streets would be more appealing and relaxing to occupants, findings of this section reveal that people in the Egyptian context aspire for liveliness and activity. Hence their overriding preference for main streets where there are people and cars in motion rather than the mundane view of neighbors, ‘window against window’ (Smektala & Narozny, 2022), found on internal streets. As one of the interviewees expressed “I often stand with my husband, eat pulp and watch over people in the streets; walking, fighting, laughing…”. “The window would be too small for us to line up and watch over the people in the streets”, she further elaborated. This corresponds with Alexander, Ishikwa, and Silverstein’s (1977) assertion that the pattern of street windows, despite its virtues, is not sufficient to fulfill the need of ‘connection with the outside’. They take up a small part of the inside, and can only be inhabited while the person is standing at the room boundary (Alexander et al., 1987). Nonetheless, the desired condition is far more prosperous and compelling. Findings of this
study reveal the balcony space as one advocate of this need where a myriad of activities may be hosted including; ‘having breakfast with family, watching shows on the TV, listening to Om Kalthoum on the radio at night in good weather, and contemplating the sky, etc’.

Nonetheless, these activities were exhibited under certain circumstances ensuring privacy for one, and certain environmental conditions. Aside from the prevalent tensions with the issue of privacy, previously discussed in section 5.1, interviewees expressed various ‘environmental preferences’ for convenient balcony use in relation to leisure, and relaxation activities and thus, ‘restorative experiences’ at home. As assumed by Purcell, Peron, & Berto (2001), people’s environmental preferences are often influenced by the likelihood of restoration, especially when its a need (Staats, Kieviet, & Hartig, 2003; Staats & Hartig, 2004; Staats, van Gemerden, & Hartig, 2010; Staats et al., 2016). Interviewees repeatedly expressed the desire for spaciousness, expansive distances and unobstructed views; “I go out on the balcony to see ‘spaciousness’, not something confining to the eyes”, “I want to look over something more open”, “on an internal street, your view is ‘limited’ and the area is confined”. These responses may align with Stamps’s (2005) findings in his study of responses to outdoor urban scenes where the percentage of visually impermeable area—for example, image area covered by walls as more common in internal streets—correlated significantly and positively with the sense of enclosure and confinement, whereas ‘depth of view’ negatively correlated with feelings of enclosure. According to a meta-analysis of ratings for indoor and outdoor settings, the horizontal area visible throughout the scene correlated strongly with spaciousness (Stamps, 2011). Views engendering stronger perceptions of ‘spaciousness’ and ‘depth of view’ are more commonly preferred, whereas views bringing on stronger perceptions of enclosure are not appealing (e.g., Kaya & Erkip, 2001; Stamps & Smith, 2002; Stamps, 2005; Ozdemir, 2010). This assumption is confirmed by findings of this study. It is also supported by some of the women’s responses for their preference of higher floor balconies; “I like to look at things from the very top [حجب المسافات اوسع]; the view is wide-ranging”, “On higher floors you get the opportunity to engage with a better view”. In regards to Appleton (1975), the concept of prospect implies an “unimpeded opportunity to see” (p. 73). It is common for people to seek out tall buildings for their ability to offer such prospects. Both in the physical environment and conceptual paradigm, ‘looking into the distance’ is intriguing (Kaplan, 2001). As expressed by Peters and Halleran (2020), obstructed views by surrounding buildings make views less conducive to restoration, satisfaction and well-being of occupants.

Moreover, in regards to the physical attribute of ‘street width’, while it did not seem to have major influence on the theme of privacy, it manifested a significant contribution in the role of the balcony in regards to restoration. Beside middle and higher floor preferences women also expressed their preference towards wider streets over the narrow, suffocating internal streets that are facing neighbors. The wider streets secured them some “space to relax [ 마련 بحر المسافات من نفسك]” and “watch comfortably”. According to Masoudinejad & Hartig (2020), wider streets are anticipated to enhance perceptions of restorative quality, and in turn, evaluations of the possibility of restoration. The rationale for this is fairly similar to that of relative floor level. A wider street should give the observer a richer experience of "openness" and "spaciousness" (or less feelings of enclosure), which are highly associated with environmental preferences (Stamps
& Smith, 2002; Stamps, 2005; Ozdemir, 2010), and assessments of 'fascination' and/or 'being away' (Galindo & Hidalgo, 2005; Lindal & Hartig, 2013). Additionally, research shows that "openness," defined as unrestricted open areas, is the most important element in neighborhood satisfaction (Peters and Halleran, 2020). An expanded street width also permits viewers to see more of the facades and/or rooftops of the surrounding buildings, increasing visual complexity and keeping viewers attention by offering engaging content (Lindal & Hartig, 2013, 2015).

Moreover, the season was another factor influencing leisure and relaxation activities on the balcony and thus affecting its restorative role. Interviewees commonly explained the more active use of the balconies during summer time over the winter period; "[t]he balcony is a real pleasure, especially during the summer months.", "sitting on the balcony for tea is one of the summertime essentials", and "in winter, you would like to sit on the balcony when there is sun". It is a prevalent perception that sunny climates elevate the mood and cloudy weather reduces it (Masoudinejad & Hartig, 2020). Correspondingly, whether in summer or winter, many of the interviewees especially valued the two hours in the early morning. The balcony was also described to be quite active during the late night or Maghreb period when the sun sets, the weather is good and it gets quiet outside. This becomes a very convenient atmosphere for women to go out and have some free time for themselves. In the everyday busy schedules, stressful lifestyles, demanding household needs, and expensive living, women regarded the balcony space as the only ‘free leisure spot’ in the house. "The only outlet" and "free time for the self" as two interviewees expressed. Many participants described their balcony as a “breath to the apartment” where they get the chance to escape from daily inside tensions and stress that are growing ever more frequent. This may be attributed to the view of Mladenovic et al. (2017) in regards to balconies, especially those in dense cities, that they constitute a vital element of the “lungs of the city” (Mladenovic et al., 2017, p. 39).

In the interviews that were conducted with women that did not have balconies in their residences, there were repeated expressions of suffocation and discomfort; “we feel suffocated like we’re trapped in a place with no openings", and “I truly suffer from the lack of balconies in my new apartment”, “[a]s the saying says: ‘an apartment without a balcony is a locked space’”. These comments may correspond with Sartre’s No Exit description that ‘a sealed room without a door and window is a metaphor of hell’. The epistemological capacity of transcending oneself to the outside is what distinguishes humankind. Thereby, “a sealed room is no human room at all” (Carr & Cheung, 2004, p.260). Wall openings are but manifestations of Dasein’s transcendence (Carr & Cheung, 2004). In this regard, as asserted by Veitch and Galasiu (2012), it is important to preserve connection with the sky and the outside world. A glimpse of outdoor life can improve mood and contribute to wellbeing, especially if it’s a natural scene or an appealing view. Another perception on the subject was offered by Evans and McCoy (1998), who noted that being under-stimulated can also be stressful, resulting in fatigue or, downright, sensory deprivation. Accordingly, regardless of quality, places without a view of life outside may be unpleasant and distressing for this particular reason. The importance of the view from the residence should not be underestimated. Extensive restorative moments could be infrequent and irregular for many people (Kaplan, 2001). However, the view from a home may render
micro-restorative experiences far more attainable. “If you don't even go out, at least you can go out on the balcony.”, “[a] balcony, with a fan, possibly a TV and a radio can make up for an outing!”, as two of the interviewees expressed. While it is evident that not every apartment building can have a natural view, or possibly even an appealing view (whether natural or not), nonetheless, site-specific considerations about balcony location and size could potentially disclose views, as far as available, that may improve the quality of life for the occupants.

5.4 The Role of the Balcony in relation to ‘Communication with the Outside’

As an embodiment of the materiality of communication, Carolin Aronis (2020) argues that 'liminal architecture' contributes to the values of 'the communicative city' as a means of transmitting and sharing information. Within the typical everyday city life, liminality drives and enframes communication acts, which offer special opportunities for exchange and connection between the two domains. The materiality of the architecture accomplishes the conventions of transmitting and sharing. Buildings with openings and passages, and the material, spatial, and physical experiences form the medium for this communication, fostering community and rituals while transmitting, transitioning, and developing people, identities, and interactions (Aronis, 2020). In addition to their role in accommodating the home environment in terms of climate, weather, and amount of sunlight penetrating the rooms (McAlester, 2015), 'balconies, porches, windows, doors, entrances to houses, and fire escapes' are frequently used in urban environments as connective sites hosting communication and interaction with the general public (Aronis, 2020). The present section especially focuses on the role of the Cairene balcony in contributing to communication with the outside in the residential environment, particularly in regards to Egyptian women in the locale context.

As documented during the fieldwork observations and Interviews, there were two main types of communication exhibited on balconies; passive and active communication. The active communication was mainly concerned with the role of the balcony to cater for women’s daily household needs. The balcony space was predominantly revealed to be of significant importance in relation to women’s daily household chores, i.e; ‘cleaning, ventilating the house, hanging clothes, laying the pillows, blankets and carpets in the early morning sun, preparing for the day’s cook, drying mint, Mulukhiyah, hanging garlic, etc.’ However, the most significant function expressed by the housewives was the active communicative role of the balcony that helped them accomplish all the ‘household shopping needs’ without having to go all the way down to the streets. A woman would simply call out on the supermarket guy, descend the basket from the balcony and get all her essentials. The communicative role of the balcony, as described by the respondents, was more of a functional role over an interactive and social use. It was rare (captured only a few times during field observations) to watch instances where women communicated with their neighbors across balconies. Instead, the balcony was used to throw the keys, check the street if someone called or rang a bell, call over children when it's lunch or dinner time or buy vegetables and other things from street sellers. One interviewee also expressed the importance of the balcony when she locked her little kids alone in the house; “if anything happens they may call out from the balcony to ask for help”, as she trained them.
On the other hand, reading the story of threshold spaces from previous research works in the local context, the fundamental prevailing role of in-between spaces was regularly recounted as ‘neighborly relations and communication’; women cooking together in the hosh area, washing utensils, hollowing eggplants on the stairwell, conversing with neighbors across balconies, socializing at rooftops while feeding chickens, etc. Nonetheless, there were merely any of these instances observed or narrated by the local women. While there were expectations to deal with strong neighborly relations, communal ties and personal human contact, this presumption was not found in the studied contexts. As explained to me by Hind, “people who used to do that passed away”. Now everyone wants to mind his own business and the role of ‘communication’ was limited to ‘functional’ rather than ‘interactive connection’ with others and the outside, as discussed above.

Moreover, the balcony catered for another kind of communication; the non-physical, passive communication. This use was mainly concerned with exhibiting messages on the balcony space without necessarily an active presence of people outside. For instance; hanging posters and banners, fixing some religious portraits, painting on balcony walls or dangling something from the ceiling, drying ropes or handrails during festive occasions. As expressed by Aronis (2020) and others, through these messages, tenants are able to express their identity, reveal their culture, and feel a sense of belonging (Freed 2017, Graham 2018, Pedregal 2018, Better Homes & Gardens 2019, Aronis 2020). This tackles the next and last section disclosed in the fieldwork observations and interviews with residents across the three neighborhoods; the role of the balcony in relation to the phenomenon of personalization and identity.

5.5 The Role of the Balcony in relation to ‘Personalization and Identity’

In respect to Proshansky and others’ conception (Proshansky, Itelson, & Rivlin, 1970. P. 175), “Man strives in all situations to organize his physical surroundings so as to maximize his freedom of choice.” From this perspective, the designation of territory is a way to attain freedom of choice; the closer the territory, the more freedom there is to operate within it. This section examines the territory of the balcony space at one’s home. Altman’s definition of personalization incorporates the concept of territoriality where personalization falls under the umbrella of territoriality. While territoriality views the environment as an object that can be governed, personalization perceives the environment as a means to ‘materialize’ and display one’s individuality and distinctiveness (Heidmets, 1994). This was especially visible in the neighborhood of El-Qanater El-Khaireya, on the newer buildings in El-Daher and the old megawras of 15 May city. As explained by the respondents, when people settle in a place for a long time, they consider the place their own property, and thus start to conduct various changes expressing their taste, character and identity; “some people paint their balconies and put plants and flowers, it depends on everyone’s character…”, “your apartment, live in it in the way you wish. It is part of your house, your character…” As noted by several scholars, man struggles to leave a unique “imprint” on places that he regularly uses. This was especially highlighted across all three neighborhoods during the period of Ramdan where lights, decorations and lanterns occupied many of the areas’ balconies. As voiced by one of the respondents, “No one cares if this is a front or a back facade, what they care
about is that ‘my balcony would look good next to the other balconies’...’ Ramadan holds very special rituals which are rendered visible on balconies and facades. “The budget spared for this special month increases by the year”, one interviewee commented. People make sure to add at the very least some led lights on the handrails or drying ropes. As discussed by Nivine Mossad (2022), and noted in the findings of this study, balconies are among the few remaining features that seem to host and celebrate religious occasions. In fact, recent years have witnessed a boom in Ramadan decoration supplies that have loaded balconies at prices far exceeding the capabilities of the average citizen. Nonetheless, despite all, this prevalent festive role was never examined or appraised in any of the rich literature pieces on balconies (Mossad, 2022).

Moreover, beyond contribution in festive occasions, some of the respondents associated the phenomenon of personalization with efforts of ‘relocation’ and ‘adaptation’. This was especially voiced in the interviews with residents from El-Daher and the 15 of May neighborhood. Daher today is occupied by either old people from higher social backgrounds or younger ones who moved in more recently coming from lower social backgrounds. They were either originally from sharabia and wanted to upgrade their lives by moving to Daher, or a trader who had money and shops in Attaba and Bab Sheria or a portier who saved up money over the years to buy an apartment in the building he served in the past. Thus when the newer occupants moved in, they started conducting various modifications, which were more significantly reflected on the newer building facades in Daher, to adapt and settle in the area; “They are affected by what they have seen (at their ‘balad’) and their general taste is different... This is basically what is reflected in the facade; it all really boils down to the background everyone comes from”.

On a similar note, respondents from the 15 may neighborhood reported complementary responses in regards to the expression of character, taste and identity on the supposedly identical facades. Every family brings along what they have seen from their old homes at the ‘balad’ (place of origin) to help them fit in the new place; “Everyone wants to recreate his old home, this is why everyone exhibits a different alteration to the exterior facade. The facades in Mayo are supposedly copies of each other; what defines my facade from my neighbor’s is the behaviors of people that override the original design.”, as one interviewee noted. This corresponds with Gill’s reviews of previous studies on the purposes and role of environmental personalization. Permanence and connection with an individual’s past and community, outline one of the key features of personalization. Moreover, personalization has a role in acquainting with a new setting. The capacity to take from the “old world” to the “new world” (a new place, a different neighborhood, etc.) makes it easier to adapt to that “new world”. In turn, this explains the inconsistency in form, color and language exhibited on the facades in the neighborhood. As discussed by Edney (1976), low-income housing projects adopt a monotonous pattern that constantly repeats itself throughout the design layout, obstructing any space for expression of identity. Correspondingly, the residents immediately start to make changes to their homes’ interiors and exteriors, altering space to satisfy their social needs—often stressing their restricted financial resources. In this sense, personalization, which is mainly reflected on a very small element; the balcony (as far as observed and documented from street view during fieldwork), is a key factor that contributes to accommodating to a new place/environment and
fulfilling social needs. While the original assumption for the various personalization works was to present the ‘self’ to the outside, the intended modifications were revealed to hold a more ‘personal need’ to transform the ‘house’ into a ‘home’ for occupants. The ‘home figure’ was projected from where they originally came from; parents/grandparents’ homes (the descending generation); what was seen there is what was needed to settle in the new place that is to be the ‘new home’ for them.

Overall despite some variations in the extent of treatments of various issues, parallels in regards to local needs & conditions were confirmed across all three neighborhoods, particularly the issues of privacy (which was almost equivalent across all 3 neighborhoods), personalization & functional purposes. However, in regards to closing up the balcony space for functional purposes, it is important to take into consideration the size of the residential unit. The 15 of May neighborhood is a newly planned environment and the size of the apartment is quite small compared to the size of the residence in El-Daher for instance. Accordingly, this may reflect the reason for the greater participation of occupants in canceling up the balcony space at the 15 May neighborhood to extend the interior space. Overall however, there were clear assertive improvisations asserted by the people reflecting the common needs in local households.

![Figure 48: Pie charts for the spatial changes observed at El-Qanater, Daher & 15 May respectively.](image-url)
Chapter 6

Conclusion

This study sheds light on the significance and role of threshold spaces as means of accomplishing sociocultural needs, restoration and wellbeing in the residential environment. The research focuses on the social dimension of one fundamental threshold space; the Cairene balcony, whose importance has recently been intensified especially post the pandemic period (Smektała & Naroz’ny, 2022). It proceeds with the core question; ‘What is the role of the balcony in the Egyptian context, as perceived by local women?’ This is thoroughly examined through subsequent followup questions; ‘How do women inhabit Cairene balconies? What are the spatial qualities of the balcony space and related or built environment that inhibit or promote its use by Egyptian women? What characteristics and environmental preferences influence its role? And to what extent does the residential balcony contribute to accomplishing the sociocultural needs, restoration and wellbeing for Egyptian women?’ Correspondingly, ‘What are the characteristics of a ‘successful balcony’? And finally does this change/depend on different social /economic contexts?’ In this regard, a physical survey for spatial changes and modifications was conducted, behavioral documentation for activities in relation to balconies and an exploration of the spatial qualities of the built environment that ‘promote’ or ‘inhibit’ the balcony use. Non-participatory observations and interviews with residents across various study areas presented the data for this research situated in a local Egyptian context.

As disclosed from extensive fieldwork and Interview results, women across all three neighborhoods share common needs and demands. Accordingly, irrespective of the context, the social and cultural needs prevail. The dominating factors influencing women’s perception on the role of the Cairene balcony include issues of; privacy and control, safety and security, wellbeing and restoration, functional and communicative purposes and the phenomenon of personalization and identity. Providing a sense of privacy to a balcony is an essential component of increasing its functionality. Women strive for an outdoor space that does not expose them to opposite neighbors, and overlooks a spacious main street rather than a narrow internal alleyway where balconies are too close to each other and the neighbors are right across. Small, backside balconies or those too exposed to the street (on lower floors) are closed up or less frequently used than those fronting a main street, or some appealing view. Women are keen to manifest ‘outside-to-inside’ restrictions to secure a ‘one-way’ view to the outside. The physical facade survey and Interview results identified several measures conducted by women to make up for the lack of privacy in their home designs and secure this need. The most common overriding modification was the addition of curtains, fixed over empty drying ropes to allow for a secured view to the outside without exposure to strangers.

Sense of safety and security also contributed to the role of the balcony in the local context. Balconies served as an important platform for ‘natural surveillance’, especially in regards to
women and their children. Backside balconies overlooking internal streets were perceived as important for younger mothers since they served as an important ‘surveillance’ platform where they can regularly watch over and check on their children while playing in the streets or buying something from the supermarket. On the other hand, main street balconies were also perceived as significant for providing a more expansive view to the outside (parked cars, shops, people, etc.) and thus an increased sense of safety. Additionally, balconies on ground or lower floors, especially where there were no physical streets with practical conveniences and a deserted environment (as in the case of the 15 May neighborhood), were conceived as unsafe for the residents and thus physical ‘access control’ measures were conducted. Accordingly, balcony location, in terms of ‘front or backside position’ and ‘relative floor level’, played an important role in regards to safety and security needs for women inside their homes.

Moreover, findings of this study revealed the importance of the balcony space for women, as a means of comfort, free leisure time and connection with the outside world. Women were observed to delve in passive street observation for extended periods of time. Interviews disclosed the commonly shared pleasure of watching movement, people and cars as they come and go in the streets. While the window may also offer this view to the outside, it was perceived as insufficient to fulfill the desired experience. Women showed aspiration for the balcony space as the only chance to escape from daily indoor tensions and stress. Various ‘environmental preferences’ contributed to convenient balcony use in relation to leisure, relaxation and ‘restorative experiences’ on the balcony. These included; a view of spaciousness, expansive distances, wide streets, and unobstructed views. Accordingly, higher floor balconies overlooking a main street were more preferred. The use of the balcony as a place for sitting, eating, drinking, listening to music and gossiping was also dependent on other factors including season, time of the day, climate, position (on a Northern facade) and size of the balcony. Balcony activities were more effective during late night summer periods when everything shuts down, the weather is good and the surroundings are quiet. The size of the balcony also affects its use and functionality. For convenient use, balconies need to be large enough to fit in a table, chairs, and flower pots or some storage items.

Moreover, beyond leisure activities, unlike might be assumed, the balcony contributes to many of the household activities, in respect to women, children and the younger teenagers. In regards to women, the balcony significantly contributes to the everyday household chores; hanging clothes, cleaning, ventilating the house, laying pillows, blankets and carpets in the sun, drying mint, Mulukhiyah, raising chickens, watering plants, hanging garlic, and most importantly, conducting the ‘household shopping needs’. Younger children, mainly the girls, often play on the balcony floor mat, because the streets are not safe for them. They sit on the balcony to play or read while closely followed up by their mothers. In regards to the teenagers or adults, many of the younger interviewees noted the importance of the balcony space for extended private phone calls and studying outside, to escape the indoor crowd and distractions, and enjoy the fresh air. As confirmed by respondents, the ability of an apartment to accommodate different uses and address various needs is significantly improved by having a well-designed private
outdoor space. They provide a feasible substitute for a range of activities (for part of the year). Beyond the significant restorative and functional benefits shared by female respondents, the balcony also contributed to a compelling festive role, voiced and observed in interviews and fieldwork. During the period of Ramadan, lights, decorations and lanterns occupied many of the balcony handrails, walls, ceilings, and drying ropes. At the very least, people added some led lights on the railings. As noted in the findings of this study, balconies are among the few remaining features that still seem to host and celebrate religious occasions. Moreover, beyond participation in festive events, the balcony also contributed to an ‘adaptive role’ for ‘relocated groups’. As new occupants move in, they start conducting various modifications in hopes to ‘recreate their old homes’. In this sense, the balcony hosting various ‘carried on habits’ (i.e hanging garlic and storing onions) and different physical transformations (personalization treatments), contributes to accommodating to a new place/environment and fulfilling the social needs of occupants.

Overall, as perceived by women in the local Egyptian context, the balcony contributes to significant safety, restorative, functional, festive, and adaptive roles. Despite prevalent, emphasized concerns on issues of privacy, proximity of neighbors and various impeding factors, the balcony space was conceived as an impermissible part of the residential environment as expressed by 91% of the female respondents across all three neighborhoods. The majority of women particularly emphasized the importance of the balcony space in the residential unit. Accordingly, canceling it from new homes is not advisable. When asked the last question; If you were to choose, would you prefer a bigger living space without a balcony in the apartment or a smaller living space with a balcony?, one of the interviewees beautifully wrapped up; “Everyone has his own opinion but I personally prefer to breathe…” In their concluding remarks, Ek et al. (2020) expressed, to cover a balcony or design it as a humble decorative ornament signifies a full loss of Mediterranean genius. As Enis Batur voiced for occupants covering up their balconies:

“They became happy with gaining square-meters while integrating it into the guest room, bedroom, or living room, but did not realize that, in this way, a room for dreams was excluded from each home.”
6.1 Challenges, Limitations and the Fieldwork Experience

Since this study was purely based on qualitative research (fieldwork observations and interviews), the most obvious and expected challenge was accessibility, and constantly holding an ‘outsider’ status. This was the main reason why it was difficult to initiate casual conversations with people in the streets and conduct participatory observation. In fact, the common people, sitting in front of the shops or cafes, occasionally stopped me while collecting visual data to ask what I was doing in their neighborhood and why. Sometimes I was even called out by women on balconies when spotted capturing pictures for them because residents in the different neighborhoods were not asked for consent while taking those pictures. Correspondingly, it was difficult to conduct fixed on-site observations for activities taking place on the balcony in a set place for a long time. Luckily, roaming around the neighborhood in the car turned out to be safer, and easier and actually helped capture a wider range of activities on the balcony.

In regards to the systematic observation that was first conducted in each neighborhood (documenting the facades of two sample streets), a limitation of this method was the opaque balustrades, covered up or higher position balconies (fourth floor and above) which were not clearly visible from street level and thus may have affected the overall count in regards to the
paper-documented spatial changes, personalization works, and modifications introduced onto balconies. Correspondingly, this may have produced some biases in the results. Sometimes observation was also limited by the narrow distances between buildings. Nonetheless, it was decided to keep observation spots from street level to avoid further intrusion into the private life of people, especially since it was already found to be quite difficult to access one or two balconies in interviewees' houses. As discussed in the methodology, it was considered a useful opportunity to be in direct contact with the subject of the study (the balcony), and 'experience the experience yourself' in every context. While it successfully worked twice in El-Qanater and once in Daher, it was rejected by all the interviewees in the 15 May neighborhood.

People in 15 May City were especially sensitive about personal information and were also triggered suspicious when questioned about the modifications they conducted or any spatial changes they have made in their houses or on balconies. They were concerned about state fines and thus were less open in the interviews. In this regard, building trust with the interviewees was another faced challenge. Oftentimes, I tried to turn the semi-structured interviews into casual conversations while injecting the questions in between the talk instead of pursuing a formal interview narrative. I had all the questions in mind before conducting a normal discussion. The transcribing process was more hectic and took longer then, but it pulled more out of women having them comfortable with the chat. Distancing out of the formal one-to-one question-answer format turned out to be much more fruitful.

Undoubtedly, language was another important factor. To the extent possible, I tried to make the most accurate translation of the dialogues from Arabic to English however, sometimes, the strength of the meaning of certain 'local expressions' was diluted in the translation process. This was especially common with responses at the very end of every interview when asked ‘If you were to choose, would you prefer a bigger living space without a balcony in the apartment or a smaller living space with a balcony?’. The most expressive insights came out at the end of the discussions when women tried to express how they perceive the balcony space at their homes. Accordingly, sometimes I had to put the Arabic expressions between two square brackets right after the translated sentence to try and keep the original depth of the expression intact.

Regardless of the methodological limitations, most importantly, and in regards to my personal experience, the most prominent challenge of this research was releasing oneself into fieldwork and allowing oneself to be comfortable with the ‘unknown’. There is no fixed recipe for an ethnographic approach. You need to work with an open mindset of regular adaptations and modifications. While you may make some deductions from literature, a few hypotheses and assumptions, the field may disclose new surprises and trigger you to ask new questions. My own approach incorporated a flexible research design process leaving space for upgrade and adaptation. Interview questions were not pre-developed, but rather designed in parallel to the fieldwork observations. New visits disclosed new questions, and new responses from interlocutors opened doors for new fields of vision and further questions to ask other locales. Accordingly, my personal method entailed a constant back and forth adjustment process in response to the field to avoid imposing any biases or projecting pre-made assumptions. The key
was to walk with the flow and allow a process of flexible understanding. Overall though, adopting a qualitative journey was enriching in every sense of the word. Documenting physical traces, observations and quantitative data exhibited some solid numbers, tackling and defining ‘the what’, upon which qualitative data, stories and narratives were collected to delve into ‘the why’. The two methods (quantitative and qualitative) fed each other in a way where one highlighted the problem based on which questions were developed and answers were sought. As expressed by Nooraddin (1996), important meanings and perceptions are disclosed when in direct contact with the target group/subject/environment.

6.2 Recommendations

The recommendations offered in this section are based on extensive literature review and findings of this research. It predominantly aims to support occupants’ wellness and improve the residential quality to fit the local conditions and needs of Cairene women in ordinary Egyptian households.

- The ‘prospect–refuge’ condition offered by the balcony space within the residential apartment is essential.

- Securing a sense of privacy constitutes a crucial component of increasing balcony usefulness and functionality. In order to provide privacy, balconies must be developed with screens, an adjustment in orientation, or other features that allow for physical separation and spacious proximity from neighboring balconies.

- Balconies should be far from the outlook of a coffee shop (ahwa), a mosque, or other places where men gather to avoid exposure and maintain privacy for women inside their homes.

- Whenever possible, access to both, a frontside balcony facing the main street for ‘comprehensive surveillance’ and a backside balcony facing an internal street for ‘local surveillance’ in parallel is useful for safety and security purposes.

- If considering two options, then, to the extent available, views of spaciousness, expansive distances, wide streets, and unobstructed views should be given more priority over confining internal street views that are directly facing the mundane view of neighbors.

- Similarly, based on availability, if selecting between two vistas, then a lively street scene with some change and motion should lead over a still, frozen view.

- For convenient use, balconies need to be large enough to fit in a table, chairs, flower pots, and some storage items.

- Designers must take into account the various needs of local residents that can be satisfied and meet their expectations by establishing a convenient, practical balcony that enables multiple uses and resident modifications.
• New buildings should be designed with ‘the active user’ in mind, making suggestions and leaving space to enable occupants to modify the facade, i.e exhibiting various treatments and appropriations to balconies, etc.

6.3 Final Remarks and Future Studies

The topic of “thresholds” and “in-between spaces” was limited both in time and space. While there were many interesting potential patterns in the local Egyptian context (the rooftop, the stairwell, the hosh area (between buildings), the building entrance etc.), this study focused on one prevalent pattern; the Cairene balcony, recently reappearing as an important space and a fundamental part of the residential environment. Balconies have always served as a significant threshold between indoors and outdoors, and private and public life, in the history of housing. However, this is only part of the story. It would be interesting to conduct this research on other types of local ‘threshold spaces’ and reflect on their impact on the wider architectural and urban setting and the role they collectively play in shaping life and the physical context, “… something that has never been explored in detail, and constitutes a clear gap in the knowledge”, as expressed by Basma Massoud (2021) in her PhD study of ‘patterns of threshold spaces in the historical city of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia’.

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Appendix A: A Visual Exploration Across Egypt

“At Titi’s Balcony” | Photo Credit: Yasmina Benari

Egypt | Photo Credit: Ahmed Adel
Egypt | Photo Credit: Ahmed Adel
Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. Which floor do you occupy?
2. Do you have a balcony in your apartment? How many?
   a. Which one is more important in the house, and why?
3. How wide is it? (approximately)
   a. Is this sufficient area for your needs?
4. What is it overlooking (Main street or Internal alleyway)?
   a. What do you prefer the balcony to face; overlooking a main street or an internal alleyway? Why?
5. Is the balcony covered up? Why/Why not?
   a. How often do you draw the curtains shut?
   b. When are they tied/untied, and why?
   c. What about the railings and flooring?
   d. Do most neighbors cover up the balconies around you?
   e. Probe for details of field observations.
6. What do you use the balcony for? (Probing for details of activity patterns)
   a. Do you communicate with your neighbors through the balcony?
      i. How is your relationship with your neighbors?
   b. Do you sit and ‘observe’ people in the streets?
      i. If yes, during what time of the day do you often do that?
      ii. Does your husband often join along?
         1. What does your husband and kids often use the balcony for?
         2. Where do your children play, and why?
   c. Do you use your balcony for storage? Why/Why not?
      i. If yes, which balcony location/balcony features is used for storage?
   d. What objects do you put on your balcony?
7. How do the activity patterns change from summer to winter?/Morning to night?
8. How do the activity patterns change on festive occasions; Ramadan/Eid, etc.?
9. What characteristics of the balcony space or surrounding environment make it undesirable or unlikely to be used? (push forces; size/neighbors/noise/streets)?
   a. Would you prefer a balcony on the lower floors or higher floors, and why?
10. Why is it that the facade color and form are never consistent throughout a whole building?
11. What changes have been made in the house to fulfill the everyday needs (if any)?
   a. What characteristics have been modified to express your ‘personal identity’ (if any)? Why?
12. Would you prefer a bigger living space without a balcony in the apartment or a smaller living space with a balcony?
Appendix C: Sample Transcriptions

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**Interlocutor ‘Q.10’: Zainab; Married and has a little daughter**

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**Which floor do you occupy?**
Third, last floor.

**How many balconies do you have?**
One big ‘corner balcony’ connected to two rooms; the children’s bedroom and the salon.

**How big is it?**
It is narrow, around 4m long, 0.5 meters wide. But it is good for hanging clothes.

**What is it overlooking, a main street or an internal alleyway?**
On my right hand side I can see the public street with cars coming and going, but down below me is an internal street with buildings facing each other, but the street is still accessible by cars.

**Do you prefer the balcony to overlook a main street or an internal alleyway, and Why?**
A main street, so you can get to see the world at least, [تبقى شايفا الدنيا حتى], in internal streets everything shuts down very early.

**Is your balcony covered up?**
It is covered in curtains because my balcony is exposed to my neighbors on the opposite side and windows on adjacent sides.

**Some cover their balconies with a shading tent, why is that?**
It is used for privacy, rain, and to protect the hanging clothes. My opposite neighbor has one..

**What about covering up the shish?**
I put stickers to block the dust and to keep dim lighting in the room. If you don't cover the shish, light passes through but the covering keeps the room very dark. But people add the shish covering mainly to block the dust.

**What do you often use the balcony for?**
I often stand on it to watch the street, hang clothes, talk to my neighbors, throw down the basket if anyone needs anything from downstairs, or buy things if someone’s selling something in the street.

**Do you often use it for storage?**
I store garlic, and at some point in the past I grew chicks on my balcony. Now I have birds at home and I often put them on the balcony to capture some sun during the day, [تنتمس ودخلها نام].

**Does your husband or kids use the balcony any differently?**
My husband smokes on the balcony and drinks his tea while my daughter often stands with me on the balcony to watch the passersby in the street, [تنفرج كدا علي رايز واني جاي].

**Does anything change in its usage from summer to winter/morning to night?**
The two hours of the morning are very important. Whether it's summer or winter, there is sun in the morning. It's good if you sit for some time in the morning sun. And it is also very good during the night in summer.

What characteristics of the balcony space or surrounding environment make it undesirable or unlikely to be used? What may bother you? (push forces; size/neighbors/noise/streets)?
I get really bothered if the curtains get blown by wind and expose me to a neighbor at the opposite end. There is an opposite balcony across the street and two adjacent balconies on my sides that are exposing me. All the buildings are lined up next to each other, [بيوت اهلاني].

Do you hear your neighbors when you sit on the balcony/do they hear you?
If someone’s very loud or is talking to someone from the balcony, otherwise if I have a phone call for instance no one would hear me but if I’m talking to my opposite neighbor, yes they would listen.

Where does your daughter often play?
I can sometimes place a mat on the balcony floor and we sit and play together otherwise she may sit in her bedroom.

What changes have been made in the house to fulfill the everyday needs (if any)?
I personally don't have any but my sister closed off the two balcony sides in redbricks and wood for storage purposes. She has one big balcony too and closed off its two sides, right and left, that are facing the neighbors; one is turned into a storage space and the other a shoe rack.

If you were to choose, would you prefer a bigger living space without a balcony in the apartment or a smaller living space with a balcony?
No, the balcony is nice in the house, [بتلك الواحد شوية], but if I extended the reception instead, I would be trapping myself for life [هبي حبيست نفسي على طول]. The balcony is freetime for the ‘self’, [أفراغ أو حو لنفسو]. If you don't even go outside, at least you can go out on the balcony...

Interlocutor ‘D.6’: Gigi, late 50’s

Which floor?
Third floor.

How many balconies do you have in the apartment?
There are three balconies.

Which one is most important?
The big one overlooking the outside street is the most important balcony.

What does each balcony overlook?
There are two balconies overlooking a main street, one big and one small, and one small side balcony overlooking a side street.

Do you prefer the balcony to overlook a main street or an internal alleyway? Why?
Of course a main street. I sit on it, it's entertaining, and brings me fresh air to the house.

Are the balconies covered up?
Only one of them is covered up, but it's not always closed with the curtains.

Which one of the balconies is covered in curtains, and why?
The big balcony, but the curtains are not always spread. Sometimes you’d want to sit in the open air, especially when you sit on it at night time. The main street fronting us is generally quiet so it’s nice to sit on the balcony.

When do you tie/untie the curtains?
Maybe when I want to open the window for some fresh air but it's too hot and sunny outside I spread the curtains (cover the balcony). But during night time when the weather is good, I like to sit on the balcony in the fresh air so I tie them back (uncover the balcony). Sitting on the balcony is beautiful on summer nights. The street is wide and we are fronting a church, not residential buildings that would ‘expose you’. So you get to sit on the balcony comfortably in summer, and we are on the third floor so the weather is usually good.

What about the small balcony overlooking the side street, is that one covered?
No it's not covered, it is not exposed either.

Do the neighbors generally cover up their balconies?
Not everyone covers their balconies because the buildings are relatively far apart so no one will expose the other.

What do you generally use the balcony for, especially the big one, the one you use most?
In the early morning, I like to drink my tea on the balcony. The main street at our place is quiet, the balcony is on the Northern side, and there is no one exposing you, so I like to make my morning cup of tea and drink it out on the balcony. During night time, especially in Summer, we may sit and have dinner on it, drink milk tea and so on.

Do you use any of the other balconies for storage or any other purpose?
I use the small kitchen balcony for hanging clothes, but it's still empty and you can stand on it. And I use the middle balcony (the other small sized balcony overlooking the main street) for placing the children’s bicycles.

What characteristics of the balcony space or surrounding environment make it undesirable or unlikely to be used? (push forces; size/neighbors/noise/streets)?
Because we don't have neighbors on the opposite side that expose us, the balcony is utilized very well. The key factors are the ‘neighbors’ and the ‘exposure to neighbors’. I had another apartment, also in Daher [ناحية السكاكينى], that was too close to the neighbors and thereby too exposed [موجرة اتوي]. I had to cover every single balcony in every room. I was never able to stand on them. This is the difference. In my current apartment there are no neighbors so the balcony doesn't get exposed and I can use it.

Would you prefer a balcony on the lower floors or higher floors, and why?
A higher floor balcony. On the lower floors, you feel that you’re very close to people in the street. Meanwhile on upper floors; you don’t hear any noise, you’re not close to people on the street and the ventilation is usually better.

Do people use the balconies any differently during Ramdan?
Unfortunately because we’re on a very quiet street, there is not really a difference.

Would you prefer a bigger living space without a balcony in the apartment or a smaller living space with a balcony?
I would prefer a smaller living space with a balcony, so you can at least go out for a change of mood [عスタン حتى تخرجى تغييرى جو]. Whether the living space is big or small you are going to need air...
conditioning anyway. At least when there is a balcony and the weather is good you can go out on it, but if there is no balcony, what would be your outlet/escape [؟!؟!؟]?

Interlocutor ‘D.7’: Martina Adly; Late 20s, has one little daughter, currently living at her mother’s house in Daher.

Which floor?
Fourth floor.

How many balconies do you have in the apartment?
There are two balconies.

Approximately how big is each balcony?
One of the balconies is an L-shaped 4x4 (length) corner balcony, and the other one is almost 3 meters (length). They would both fit chairs but we do not put any because I have a little daughter so it's not safe.

What is each balcony overlooking?
One balcony overlooks a main street while the corner balcony overlooks both a main and a side street.

Do you prefer the balcony to overlook a main street or a side street, and Why?
It is quite indifferent but a main street would be better if you want to watch over your car, check whether your daughter’s bus has arrived or not or inspect if the shops down below have opened up or are still closed. This is the importance of overlooking a main street.

Are the balconies covered?
No, none of the balconies are covered.

Wouldn't you get exposed then?
We were not used to closing balconies, so it was just left open.
In my apartment -in Daher too- I closed off the balconies because they are not overlooking a main street; there is no view, so it's an inconvenient space for me.

What do you use each balcony for?
The balcony on the neighbors side is not really used at all because it is closer to the neighbors than the other balcony overlooking the main street.

Do you often sit on the main street balcony, what do you often use it for?
We don't really sit on the balcony but if the weather is good at night we may stand on it for some time or watch over something down below; some shop or if someone is coming [لزم الالوان في الليلة], but now what would you sit and do on the balcony? When you’re home, you sit in the living room in front of the TV with your phone. What kind of entertainment can you have? As long as the balconies are exposed, you won't really be able to sit on them. Besides, we don't really spend that much time at home anymore and when we’re home, we’re usually busy finishing off some work on the phone or laptop. The balcony activities are also dependant on the size of the balcony; the view, position (on Northern side), and privacy; ظاهريتي فعندما أعمل منزلي، أنا أقوم بأعمال في المكتب. لا يوجد منظر أو خصوصية في الغرفة. يمكنك الاستمتاع بالطبيعة من منزلي من خلال البalcony! في بعض الأحيان، قد نستيقظ من الصباح ونستريح على البalcony. ومع ذلك، نقضي معظم시간نا في المنزل الآن. قبل ذلك، كان لدينا وقت больше في المنزل، ونستريح هناك. البalcony تعتمد أيضاً على حجم البalcony، وموقعه (في الجانب الشمالي)، وخصوصيته. في منزلي، لا يوجد منظر أو خصوصية في البalcony! ومع ذلك، نقضي معظمنقطة في المنزل الآن. قبل ذلك، كان لدينا وقت أكثر في المنزل، ونستريح هناك. البalcony تعتمد أيضاً على حجم البalcony، وموقعه (في الجانب الشمالي)، وخصوصيته. في منزلي، لا يوجد منظر أو خصوصية في البalcony! ومع ذلك، نقضي معظمنقطة في المنزل الآن. قبل ذلك، كان لدينا وقت أكثر في المنزل، ونستريح هناك. البalcony تعتمد أيضاً على حجم البalcony، وموقعه (في الجانب الشمالي)، وخصوصيته. في منزلي، لا يوجد منظر أو خصوصية في البalcony! ومع ذلك، نقضي معظمنقطة في المنزل الآن. قبل ذلك، كان لدينا وقت أكثر في المنزل، ونستريح هناك. البalcony تعتمد أيضاً على حجم البalcony، وموقعه (في الجانب الشمالي)، وخصوصية...
What characteristics of the balcony space or surrounding environment make it undesirable or unlikely to be used? (push forces; size/neighbors/noise/streets)?

Mainly the street congestion and noise, especially during the rush hour at the end of the school day.

Would you prefer a balcony on the lower floors or higher floors, and why?

A higher floor balcony would be better. Lower floors are noisy, and you feel that people are all with you on the balcony, all 'seeing' and 'hearing' you (visual and sound privacy)! Imagine if you’re sitting on the first floor balcony, talking over the phone and a passerby hears the whole conversation without your notice! It would be better to sell the balcony then or you might as well rent it to the ahwa.

What are the peak hours for the usage of the balcony?

During the night time when the shops are closed and the streets are quiet. When there is no traffic and noise in the streets, one may sit on the balcony and enjoy the sky. Otherwise it may be in the early morning, not really mid-day.

Would you prefer a bigger living space without a balcony in the apartment or a smaller living space with a balcony?

If the living space area is not so small then why not have a balcony. It is important to have a source of light. I don't have a garden or a roof, so if I don't get to have a balcony as well I would feel trapped!

Interlocutor #12: Margo Magdy

Which floor?
Second floor.

How many balconies do you have in the apartment?
There is one big balcony adjacent to both a reception and bedroom.

Approximately how wide is the balcony?
It can fit 5 chairs (sideways) looking over the street.

What is the balcony overlooking; main street or a side street?
We do not have lots of main streets in Daher. It is considered to be a side street, parallel to Ramses street, but the opposite buildings are not directly facing us.

Do you prefer the balcony to overlook a main or a side street, and Why?

I prefer a spacious street where I can see something aside from neighbors because I feel like I get out on the balcony to see 'spaciousness', not something confining to the eyes. I want to look over something more open.

Is the balcony covered up?
No, our balcony is kept open and there is a separator between our balcony and the neighbors’ balcony. In our case, the opposite building was emptied because there were plans to construct a new building so we are comfortable about not having curtains on.

What do you often use the balcony for, do you often sit on it?
At our house, the balcony is mainly used for Friday breakfasts because this is the only time where we, as a family, all gather. Besides, we have a really bad network everywhere aside from the balcony so it's the tower of calls at our place; we carry out our phone calls camping there. Besides, my father loves plants so we put flowers on the balcony and my father waters them regularly. The balcony is especially convenient for gatherings and birthdays. The younger ones sit outside (on the balcony) while the elders are inside.

How do the activity patterns change from summer to winter?/Morning to night?
In winter it may be used all day long while in summer you may only get out at certain times; when the sun sets and it's not very hot outside.

What characteristics of the balcony space or surrounding environment make it undesirable or unlikely to be used? (push forces; size/neighbors/noise/streets)?
The main thing that makes me unable to use the balcony is that I need to dress up appropriately because you can very easily be seen by others. There is no privacy. So if I am getting out on the balcony then I'm automatically not dressed in shorts, house pajamas, or a night shirt...

Would you prefer a balcony on the lower floors or higher floors, and why?
A higher floor. I felt this especially more when I moved to Muattam after marriage. In my apartment in Daher, I was able to spend much more time on the balcony.

What characteristics have been modified to express your ‘personal identity’ (if any)?
Our exterior is plain white, just like the inside. From our perspective, painting the balcony in bold colors is not so elegant.

Why is it that the facade color and form is never consistent throughout a whole building?
I do not want to be offensive but Daher today is occupied by either old people from the higher social background or younger ones who moved in from lower social backgrounds. They are affected by what they have seen (at their ‘balad’) and their general taste is different. They think the modifications they make to the exterior are ‘chic’ and often do it in a budget friendly manner. The history of the area is very deep and truly affects the people in the locale. This is why there are lots of old people living there and the younger ones are not usually from the best social background. They were either originally from sharabia and wanted to upgrade their lives by moving to Daher, or it could be a trader who had money and shops in Attaba and Bab Sheria or a portier who saved up money over the years to buy an apartment in the building he served for years. This is basically what is reflected in the facade; it all really boils down to the background everyone comes from.

Would you prefer a bigger living space without a balcony in the apartment or a smaller living space with a balcony?
It depends on whether the balcony can have a convenient use.

What is considered as convenient to you?
What is considered as convenient for me is definitely not a first floor, not looking over an internal narrow street where I can see the whole life of the neighbors fronting us and vice versa, because then I would have to close off the balcony in reflective glass and will not be able to go outside. It would become an inconvenient space for me. If the location, floor and view are convenient then of course I would favor an apartment with a balcony.
**Interlocutor ‘M.1’: Om Momen**

**Which floor?**
Third balcony.

**How many balconies do you have in the apartment?**
There is one balcony.

**Is the size sufficient for your needs?**
It is fine but with balconies, the bigger it is, the better it would be.

**What is it overlooking, a main or a side street?**
It is overlooking a side street.

**Do you prefer the balcony to overlook a main or a side street, and Why?**
It depends on every person. I would personally prefer a main street. But some people favor side streets as they are usually quieter than outside, as is the case with my current place. I favor a main street because you get to see some ‘movement’ and ‘change’, there is something changing in front of you, rather than the same exact building that is facing you in a side street. On a main street, there are people coming and going, cars passing by, and people visiting us would easily find the way. In this sense, the balcony is very convenient if I'm waiting for visitors, waiting for my children to be back home from school or university or if I'm suffocated and would like to change my mood. Sometimes when bored, my children too get out on the balcony to study. We may often put a table and chairs, prepare milk tea or have cold drinks out on the balcony. We can sometimes put the laptop and watch something together. Whether for the young or old, it is a leisure space in the apartment. Actually, it may be considered as the only leisure space in the house. I would love to have a balcony in every single room. It is important for ventilation or if one wishes to sit outside for some time, [ﬁبِّي فِي] [حركة كده].

**Is your balcony covered up?**
Even though the distance across from neighbors is a bit far, I still have curtains on. If there is anyone on the opposite side, I throw the curtains over the drying ropes so we can sit inside comfortably.

**When do you tie/untie the curtains? Are they closed most of the time?**
No, only when there is someone on the opposite side or if it's too sunny like today, otherwise I would leave it open because I like to get out on the balcony quite often.

**Do most people around you cover their balconies?**
No, not really. Only a few people cover their balconies unless they need to utilize the space for other purposes so they would close it off. But for us, ‘the balcony is the soul of the house’ [اللكلونة]. In areas where the spacing between buildings is very small, people tend to cover up their balconies. The balcony space becomes very inconvenient because the distance from your opposite neighbor is merely an arm's stretch away from you, [إِلَّا أَنَّ الْقَرَآمِي هِيْدَةٌ حَيَاةٌ عَنْدِي]. People living in these areas will never favor balconies because they are too close to each other. On the other hand, the distances between buildings in new modern housing projects range from
15-20 meters so the balcony, in this context, becomes useful and user-friendly. At our current place, the distance between buildings is good and I can often leave the balcony open.

What are the peak hours of your balcony usage?
Possibly in the morning and after maghrib.

What do you mainly use the balcony for? Does anyone else use it any differently?
I use the balcony most among my family members, but my children may join when they’re free or have the time. When they were young, they used to study out on the balcony for a change. I put a table outside, make them nescafe and sandwiches while they’re working. The weather is better outside so they were usually more active studying outside in the open air.

Do you store anything on the balcony?
No, I store everything in my kitchen.

Do you communicate with your neighbors through the balcony?
I may call out on any of the street sellers, drop the basket and get some household needs. The windows are usually too small for this.

Is there any difference in the usage patterns during Ramadan?
Not really, very few. In our old neighborhood in matareya (informal area), you would find everything; people hanging ramadan lanterns, lighting and all..

What characteristics of the balcony space or surrounding environment make it undesirable or unlikely to be used? (push forces; size/neighbors/noise/streets)?
Something that would really bother me is this new design trend where the top floor balcony (fourth balcony) is smaller in size than the lower ones so people on the upper floor would basically be living ‘inside’ the lower floor balcony. In this sense, people on that lower floor would never be able to use the balcony, sit on it, store anything or even talk on there because the people above them are ironically ‘inside’ their balcony space. If they sit on it they will be ‘watched over’ and exposed.

In your current place is there anything that is bothering you in your surrounding environment?
There is nothing bothering me here. It is good and quiet around.

Would you prefer a balcony on the lower floors or higher floors, and why?
Middle floors are usually better than ground and last floor balconies. On the ground floor, you feel like you’re in the street, while on the last floor you get too exposed to the sun, dust, rain and hot climate, especially that top floor balconies do not usually have a ceiling.

Would you prefer a bigger living space without a balcony in the apartment or a smaller living space with a balcony?
To me, the balcony is a must. An apartment without a balcony would be very suffocating.

Interlocutor ‘M.3’: Om Tuqa

Which floor?
Second balcony.

How many balconies do you have in the apartment?
There are two balconies, one in the reception and one for the services.
How wide is each balcony?
The one overlooking the street, the main balcony, is big (3x1), while the small service balcony is 1x1.

What is it overlooking, a main or a side street?
The building constitutes two sides; front and back. The front side overlooks main streets while the back side overlooks back streets. The main balcony in my apartment looks onto a ‘backside’ main street.

Do you prefer the balcony to overlook a main street or a side street, and Why?
It depends on the neighborhood and where the building is. A side street would be good if it's wide, shaded, has a garden view, and you can ‘watch something’. The main street may be too crowded and noisy so it really depends on where the building is. In my case it’s good because خلفي is on the Northern side. It won't be exposed to the harsh summer sun all day long. However, still, on a main street if you have a car parked down below or shops across the street, it would be more suitable; you can get out anytime and keep an eye on everything.

Are the balconies covered?
I have curtains on both balconies to avoid getting exposed and to protect the house from any insects. The small balcony is facing all the neighbors so I installed curtains to move around comfortably inside the house without getting exposed. My neighbors have steel addons to protect the house from thieves jumping onto their balconies. They put the steel in for security purposes because the area is still deserted.

What do you use the main balcony for?
The balcony is a ‘breath’ to the apartement. You can get out and sit on it or hang clothes. In the small balcony, I store the washing machine, so the small balconies may be utilized for storage purposes.

Do you often sit on the big balcony, and does anyone in the house use it any differently?
The balcony is a real pleasure, especially during the summer months. You can sit on it at Asr time. My daughters may often go outside to study. I lay them some material on the floor and they can sit and play, or get their friends over. Also, if you’re preparing something and you’re bored of sitting inside, you may get out on the balcony. It is a pleasure with the air flow, the weather, and ‘watching people’ come and go. It is a completely different feeling. No matter what the features of the apartment are, it is enclosed on you, but the balcony is the ‘soul’; the balcony is the ‘soul’ of the apartment.

How do the activity patterns change from summer to winter? Morning to night?
I do not think that anyone can give up on the balcony during the summer period. If you were not able to get out on the balcony, you would feel like you’re suffocated. If you are going to read a book, do some knitting, or work on a crochet piece, you would find yourself out on the balcony, relaxed and unaware of the passing time as you accomplish whatever work you’re doing. However, in winter we do not get out on the balcony at all.

What characteristics of the balcony space or surrounding environment make it undesirable or unlikely to be used? (push forces; size/neighbors/noise/streets)?
There are no services, no shops underneath you. You need to use transportation to get to the market and buy your household needs. Otherwise the areas are spacious, the layout is very good, the places and views are good, and it's quiet around. We do not like noise. I personally do not like to interact with people or have people interact with me. I like to mind my own business, be in my apartment with my daughters and close the door on us.

**How is the relationship between the neighbors?**
It is generally good and everything is calm here. When there is an issue in the building everyone takes common action for the good of all.

**Would you prefer a balcony on the lower floors or higher floors, and why?**
I favor the middle floors; not the lower balconies because I fear insects and street noise nor the top floor balconies because it would be tougher for my daughters and myself to climb the stairs everyday.

**What characteristics have been modified to express your ‘personal identity’ (if any)?**
I did not change anything because they say there would be a penalty for this. There is a fine for changing the color of the building facade. You can do whatever changes you want to the inside but you are not allowed to alter the outside to maintain a harmonious look. I personally put plants on the balcony, flowers, decorations [anything that is portable really..] so they can easily be removed if there is a fine or if anyone from the inspection comes over. People in the new extension of 15 Mayo, unlike those in the old region, fear making any changes. In the old region, people have settled in the place a long time ago so they consider the place their own property, and thus can do whatever changes they wish. No one will be able to ask them anything. But here [in the new extension], everyone respects the rules that are made.

**Would you prefer a bigger living space without a balcony in the apartment or a smaller living space with a balcony?**
I would personally favor an average reception space with a balcony. For me, if an apartment does not have a balcony I would feel suffocated. Yes it would be spacious, but where would the ‘soul’ of the apartment be? You would feel like you’re trapped in a cage, no matter how spacious it is. I feel like the balcony is the ‘soul’ of the apartment, if you remove it you’re only left with the ‘material looks’.

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**Interlocutor ‘M.10’: Sameeha; young Architect, late 20’s**

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**Which floor?**
Fifth + Ground floor.

**How many balconies do you have in the apartment?**
There is one balcony (3x1.5) overlooking a garden.

**Is the balcony covered?**
Yes, it is covered in curtains. The balconies are usually closed off in red bricks for two reasons; either I’m exposed to the opposite neighbor or to extend the inside space. We, as a population are not very disciplined and do not usually abide by the rules. For instance, the building facade is supposedly designed to be a mix of beige for the walls and green for the windows, and we
actually signed that we cannot change the facade colors. However, after a long stay in the area, people have started to change the default color; any leftover paint from the house interior is also painted on the exterior balconies. It is the human behavior that overrides the building facade and expression because you are basically relocating people with various behaviors and memories who move into a new place and try to ‘re-recreate’ the same environment for themselves; the same vernacular environment. You are not just relocating a human being, you are not relocating a single soul, but rather a whole environment where everyone wants to get his original ‘home’ with him. Besides, you are moving a 90 year old man; a 90 year old will not care about having a good building foundation or a garden down below, but rather would be more concerned about [حاجة اسمها عشرة، جارتي ببني...]. Everyone wants to recreate his old home, this is why everyone exhibits a different alteration to the exterior facade. The facades in Mayo are supposedly copies of each other; what defines my facade from my neighbor’s is the behaviors of people that override the original design.

Do you prefer the balcony to overlook a main street or a side street, and Why?

Most people would prefer a main street, including myself because we (the Egyptian population) prefer liveliness [يحب الهيبة], and it is more lively on a main street.

What kind of activities do you often use the balcony for?

[أنا كيتي بتعشق الكلوبة]; my mother and I enjoy sitting on the balcony. You know when you try to spare some time for your mum and yourself away from anyone. This literally always took place on the balcony during the period from Asr to Maghrib when it was quiet around and the sun was setting. This is the peak hour because in the morning I'm usually at work and my kids are at school and during the night I may go outside somewhere. Im one of the people that finds their comfort in the balcony but today we all have busy lifestyles. So this is another issue. The working hours have increased so much and the internet has definitely reduced the time you may spend on the balcony.

Is there any difference in the use of the balcony during festive seasons?

We, the Egyptian population, have very special rituals in Ramadan which are rendered visible in the balconies and facade decorations. My father, for instance, is very obsessed with every year’s Ramadan Led lights and lanterns. The budget spared for this special month increases by the year. And this is not only us. All our neighbors add at least some Led lighting on the Balcony handrails. The kids especially enjoy the Ramadan decorations so the overall environment is different in Ramdan. No one cares if this is a front or a back facade. What they care about is that ‘my balcony would look good next to the other balconies’. You also find decorations on side facades; psychologically you are celebrating a season that you love. The Egyptian people are spiritual people. As expressed by Napoleon Bonaparte, when he tried to get closer to the local Egyptian population, he approached them through religion. We like to say that we are religious, in words not action [قال يقول وليس بالفعل] so I want to express that I am religious. How would I do that? through the decorations and Led lights on my balconies and windows. I want to express my happiness with this holy occasion through a little element (led lights) added to the balcony or window.

Do you store anything on the Balcony?
There are standard things stored on our balcony because these are ‘carried on’ habits from my grandmother’s house before moving here. For instance, there are specific kinds of vegetables that need to be stored on the balcony, like onions and garlic. My mother did not invent this habit; she saw it from her mother and carried it on to her new house. On the other hand, my father stores his car kit on the balcony as he saw from his own father (my grandfather); everyone brings along what he saw.

Would you prefer a balcony on the lower floors or higher floors, and why?
A higher floor. On higher floors you get the opportunity to engage with a better view.

Would you prefer a bigger living space without a balcony in the apartment or a smaller living space with a balcony?
I was offered an apartment before with a big, closed off reception space and I actually rejected it. To me, I like to have some ‘outlet’ or outside space.
Appendix D: Pilot Fieldnotes

**The Pole of the Second Floor Balcony**

On Saturday, April 30th, 2001, we observed the second floor balcony at the "end" of the house, which appeared to be a common area.

The purpose of the balcony is to create an "outside" space on the second floor, rather than using the balcony as an "outside" area.

In the photograph, we observed several people sitting and conversing on the balcony. The balcony is furnished with chairs and tables, and has a small garden area.

**Women Socializing in Front of Building Entrance**

Women and children are often seen sitting in front of the building entrance, enjoying each other's company.

**Ground Floor Window Shutter**

The window shutters are often closed, but can be opened to allow natural light into the rooms. The shutters are made of wood and are painted in various colors.

**Children Playing**

Children are often seen playing in front of the building entrance, using the balcony as a play area.

**Fence**

The fence is made of wood and is painted in different colors. The fence is designed to provide safety and security for the residents.