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► **To cite this version:**

Mona Abaza. Memory Expurgation? Cairo: A Comment on Photographs. Media Theory, 2018, Geospatial Memory, 2 (1), pp.181-203. hal-01870460

**HAL Id: hal-01870460**

**<https://hal.science/hal-01870460>**

Submitted on 7 Sep 2018

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## Memory Expurgation? Cairo: A Comment on Photographs

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*Media Theory*  
Vol. 2 | No. 1 | 181-203  
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### Abstract

This short piece is a commentary on photographs taken in Cairo between 2011 and 2013. The country is currently experiencing a pervasive moment of erasure on the collective level, going hand in hand with a hard counter-revolutionary momentum. In this context, gazing at photographs might be an exercise in an ‘inner exilic’ form of remembrance. This article attempts to evoke snapshots of the performative street, while trying to reflect on the nostalgic sentiment that is omnipresent among various opposing camps to a degree that has not been seen before.

### Keywords

photography, *lieu de mémoire*, nostalgia, inner exile, the performative street

### Opening

If someone were to ask me how it feels to experience a counter-revolutionary moment on a daily basis, I would say, perhaps, that it is all about countering the herculean efforts from the powers-that-be, and committing intensively to resisting the powerful, dominant collective amnesia. Then, if someone asked me what it really means to live under a military dictatorship, I would say that we obviously knew that we had to renounce political rights and dreams of changing the world for a better future, in exchange for an illusory so-called stability.

Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya have already fallen into an abysmal state, which is why the argument that there is no alternative to either the military or the Islamists – those paradigmatic mirror images – worked so well for Egypt; it has been repeatedly

embraced by the powers-that-be. Apparently, through the constant repetition of this statement and turning it into a kind of indoctrination, the state propaganda has succeeded in training the subservient ‘honorable citizen’<sup>1</sup> to be prepared for any forthcoming draconian ‘shock’, as Naomi Klein puts it (Klein, 2007), from the same powers-that-be. This is because we are constantly told through the state propaganda and its controlled media that the future can certainly be much worse than the present. This belief generates a constant fear of the uncertain future, encouraging people to silently endure the present. Another factor may be the collective state of precariousness in all spheres; it has never been easier to fire employees and workers than it is today.

Neoliberal policies, already at work for several decades, have succeeded triumphantly in dismantling the few social welfare benefits instituted during the Nasserite period for the middle classes. The flotation of the Egyptian pound in October 2016 under the orders of the World Bank nearly led to its collapse, and was followed by vertiginously soaring prices. The massive evictions and attempted clearing of the slums by the state, under the excuse that they are an encroachment on state land, are taking place primarily in the popular quarters, such as the islands of Qursaya and al-Warraq in July 2017, causing one death.<sup>2</sup> These actions have instigated not only an immediate panic, but a mounting and alarming popular resentment, leading many to wonder what will happen when – not if – the coming explosion is triggered. Corruption was never as widespread and visible as it is today. It is as if the government is deliberately amplifying the very policies and pitfalls that led to the collapse of the Mubarak regime.

### **Nostalgias: Toolkit for the Tough Present**

Still, the present is tough enough, which explains why there is such a pervasive, collective nostalgic mood about an imagined beautified past. This is a logical consequence of the dreams of utopias instigated by the revolutionary momentum. Svetlana Boym (2007: 7-8) reminds us that the twentieth century began with utopia and terminated with nostalgia. She furthermore asserts that nostalgia in the seventeenth century was perceived as a disease that could be cured with opium and

wandering in the Alps. Her fascinating reading of nostalgia conveys the idea that the desire for the lost place can be translated into a longing for a slower past time; i.e., the time of childhood. As she says:

The nostalgic desires to turn history into private or collective mythology, to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition. Hence the past of nostalgia, to paraphrase William Faulkner, is not even past. It could be merely better time, or slower time – time out of time, not encumbered by appointment books (Boym, 2007: 8).

This brings Boym to her next point, that the imaginaries of the past time, fostered by nostalgia, can be decisive with respect to the desires of the present. I find Boym's explication of nostalgia quite timely in deciphering the current, overwhelming, post-traumatic, counter-revolutionary momentum in Egypt that seeks to cope with an unbearable present. It equally explains why various competing, if not clashing, camps are resurfacing with diverse nostalgic visions. The first of these visions is the fresh and extreme nostalgia of those supporting the 2011 revolution, who experienced the unique moment of the 18 magical days and the two years of turbulent, effervescent, performative street politics that followed, triggering dreams of the possibility for improving life – dreams which were then harshly crushed. The second vision is maintained by the pervasive counter-revolutionary forces. Paradoxically, I would include here the supporters of the Sisi regime together with the opposing camp, the Muslim Brotherhood, who were victims of military killings in Rabe'a al-'Adawiyya Square in summer 2013. Over the past three years, Sisi's military regime has adopted a nationalist tone,<sup>3</sup> while borrowing symbols of socialist realism that contradict the obvious state of the globalized region. Meanwhile, the Islamist camp seems to be fixated on a golden period of the early years of Islam. The complex ideology of the counter-revolutionary camp encompasses both of these *doppelgänger*s, as the two share the elective affinity towards authoritarianism. Both camps have worked hard against the forces of civil society, which advocates the reinstating of human rights, workers' rights, social justice, and a renewed sense of citizenship. Ironically, the two forces are entrapped as mirror images of each other in perpetrating authoritarian and anti-democratic practices, as well as in their obsession with public morality.

The third vision is that of the Nasserite camp, which glorifies the past post-colonial military regime of Nasser at the expense of a complete denial of its non-democratic rule. Nostalgia is spilled on the golden times of Nasser with the celebration of independence movements, nationalism, the times of the Bandung conference and the non-aligned movement, the era of socialism with its grandiose projects like the High Dam, and the democratization of education that opened opportunities to millions.

The fourth vision, in direct opposition to the third, is held by the supporters of an imagined, over-glorified, pre-1952 colonial-royal elite, which denied the flagrant social inequalities existing at the time and the economic deprivation for the majority that led to yet another revolution. A nostalgic trend persists among those who continue to lament the disappearance of colonial times in Egypt, together with the glorious times of the former, ousted royal family. All four visions, however, express multiple understandings of nostalgia, through a prevailing, overwhelming sentiment of defeat.

‘The Beautiful Times’, *‘al-Zaman al-gamiil’*, is a Facebook page that posts symbols of the lost and glorious past: images from Egyptian films of the forties, fifties, and sixties; concerts of diva singers like Om Kalthum, Fairuz, and Warda; performances by Abdel Halim Hafez and other famous Middle Eastern oldies stars; and other vintage artifacts and photographs. These are displayed in opposition to our supposedly miserable and tasteless present. ‘The Beautiful Times’ has also become a popular expression in Egypt that refers to a specific image of past relics and landmarks that have now disappeared. For the minds in this camp, these ‘beautiful times’ represent an idealized, simplistic, imaginary Cairo, when stunning, European-dressed Egyptian women could wear bikinis without being harassed by the ‘vulgar’ masses; when the streets of Cairo and Alexandria were clean (free of beggars and street children) and underpopulated; and when the center of Downtown Cairo looked like a replica of a European city. More precisely, it is a way to mourn the lost “Paris along the Nile”<sup>4</sup> city. No bearded Islamists or women wearing hijabs existed (at least in the photographs). No poor street vendors were seen in the European part of the city – although that certainly does not mean that they did not exist.

In today's discourses of denial about the 'beautiful old times', the fact is often overlooked that the Belle Époque city, including its prominent Jewish-owned *grands magasins*, its apartment buildings, and its residents, who consisted mostly of the foreign communities, was strongly associated with the so-called 'ordered', colonial, European-dominant space, in contradistinction to the 'disordered', 'oriental' part of the city with its mushrooming minarets, chaotic bazaars, and labyrinths. Timothy Mitchell provides a Foucauldian reading of the colonial mechanisms of power that were in effect at that time (Mitchell, 1991).

Further blurring the meaning of the term, Egyptian architects have equated 'Belle Époque', as a label for the modern European architecture of nineteenth-century Downtown Cairo, with '*al-Zaman al-gamiil*'. This leads to further overlap between a nostalgic vision of the glorious past that produced such flourishing arts – albeit under colonial rule – with an obvious denial of the rigid and unequal spatial and class structure that led to the 1952 revolution/military coup (depending on one's political affiliations).

The imagined old (and 'beautiful' yet colonial) Cairo cannot conceal the fact that in our present times, vulgarity and greed prevail. In fact, this nostalgic feeling coexists with a form of conscious destruction on the part of the powers-that-be. Although they cannot annihilate the histories of the major cities like Alexandria, Mansura, and Cairo, they do nothing to stop the organized mafias who have gotten hold of large amounts of real estate and monopolize the construction sector. In Alexandria, for instance, and all along the Mediterranean coast, no one is concerned about the aesthetics of the ugly, crowded, nightmarish towers. Instead, the worry is that these towers have started to collapse like houses of cards, and thousands may die under the rubble in the decades to come. Indeed, it needs little intelligence to conclude that these buildings defy any logical architectural laws.

In the current case, the unbridled nostalgia for Tahrir has been submerged in a traumatic sentiment of depression after the ephemeral, euphoric moment of the military takeover. Has the revolution failed when the country has never witnessed such violations of human rights, and such clampdowns on activists, journalists, and intellectuals, as under the Sisi regime?

Strangely enough, it can be argued that accepting the state of collective amnesia might not be the worst part of the situation. Many Egyptians have turned into apolitical beings after the last six years of turmoil. Many have already withdrawn into an ‘inner migration’, a kind of forced ‘internal exile’ that has transformed us into obedient but self-absorbed beings. On the other hand, a sense of desolation and angst has grown among many of us, as colleagues leave the country with no intention of returning and friends seize any opportunity to find a job overseas and disappear for good. If they can’t make it to the US or Europe, then hopefully Dubai, Bahrain, or Qatar will turn out to be their next lifebuoy.

But above all, it is the feeling of absolute exhaustion, accompanied by a perpetual ‘*mal de vivre*’, that overwhelms our daily lives. Simply walking out of one’s apartment door sets off a ‘war of all against all’. This coincides with the constant erasure of the memory as an involuntary self-defense against the targeted and conscious erasures of landscapes, of public expressions, of the art, the music, the graffiti, the signs and symbols experienced since 2011, of the nature we moved in for decades, of the trees and the architecture that surrounded us. Simply stated, greed, corruption, and money, working superbly in concert, have consciously managed to destroy the urban texture of Cairo, and even more so of Alexandria. One might think that the counter-revolutionary forces blame the 2011 revolution for causing a massive eradication of the city’s landmarks, of its rich Coptic, Islamic, and European patrimony, of its wonderful old villas and colonial buildings that continue to disappear at a dizzying speed. This has been accompanied by the explosion of informal construction on agrarian land all over the countryside. Soon the entire country will look like a huge conglomerate of ugly, frightening, red cement-brick towers sticking to each other. The population explosion, together with the degradation of the agricultural sector, leaves no option for the rural poor but to convert agrarian land into dwellings that keep on growing vertically. The sole exception will be the isolated gated communities and compounds that have so little to do with the reality of the old center of Cairo.

It is true that the erasure of the city’s landmarks has been going on for decades, since well before 2011. However, it is as if the powers-that-be now excel in destroying the

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little beauty that remained, as if anything that might look ancient has to be erased. The cities of Cairo and Alexandria have broken aesthetic records in ugliness and incoherence. It is no coincidence that the rich heritage in Mamluk Cairo threatens to disappear due to organized, collective theft since 2011, as architects have been warning.<sup>5</sup> The pillage of antiquities has reached an unprecedented scale, prompting alarmed Egyptian architects and historians to lead relentless campaigns to track down the countless valuable pieces that too often turn up in Sotheby's and Christie's auctions.

The unstated main issue is the bargaining over reality. Official sources seek to erase what has really happened during the past six years: the fact that numerous protesters were killed, others tortured, many disappearing, blinded, or disfigured, while no official has been held accountable for these crimes. The denial of commemorating the martyrs of the revolution, the regime's denial that the violation of human rights is what triggered the events of 2011, and that injustices continue in an even harsher mode, is what makes obsessive urban dystopias so pervasive. The erasure can take many shapes.

Cairo experienced unique turbulent and euphoric moments, violent and frightening moments, for three consecutive years (2011–2013). These were paired with highly sardonic reversals and perplexing public performances, together with a mesmerizing explosion of artistic expressions, which millions will always remember. The uniqueness of these magical but ephemeral Bakhtinian moments evokes Richard Sennett's observations on the cities of Paris and London during the eighteenth century, when street life was experienced as a theatre, where stage and real life intermixed and the body was transformed into a 'mannequin' in public (Sennett, 1992: 64). In Sennett's work, we can find analogies with the protesters displaying themselves on the streets, slogans drawn with markers on their bodies, wearing masks, walking with signs, or drawing on walls. This moment, in which the 'believable on stage and the believable in street life' (Sennett, 1992: 65) meet, produced new kinds of sociability and interaction in the streets. These interactions took the forms of solidarity, of spontaneous conversations among strangers, of new friendships and alliances. Zygmunt Bauman recently tagged the "square people" (Tabet, 2017: 140) as leaderless movements, lacking a hierarchical structure. The fact



that these movements could function without the leadership of parties, might, according to him again, have offered further maneuvering possibilities. However, the act of taking to the streets without the presence of parties, above all, shouting and manifesting strong anti-establishment emotions in public have, according to Bauman, been instrumental in triggering a collective sentiment, which he defines as taking the form of “explosive carnival solidarity” (Tabet, 2017: 144). But then again, this ephemeral sentiment of togetherness, if not of oneness, has failed to challenge the harsh daily life, the alienating more than ever working conditions, the escalating ruthless competitiveness on a global scale and, mostly, the pervasive present-day condition of a general solitude, which all support Bauman’s much celebrated fluid modernity. My disagreement with Bauman is precisely about his relenting criticism of the whole movement of the ‘Square people’, as if these were a monolithic phenomenon. Bauman concludes that these people who go to the squares, shout slogans and express themselves emotively through taking to the streets as a short-term, appeasing psychological outlet as well as a form of solidarity, are the same people who end up to being subservient to the system, since they have only let out their fury in the particular carnivalesque moment. These ephemeral but intensive moments remain unconnected from the routine of their daily lives. However, these modern manifestations of the carnival, according to once again Bauman, differ from the traditional ones because solidarity seems to precede freedom.

If one were to compare the aftermath of the Occupy movements in the US and Europe with the rebellions of the numerous Arab Squares, one would quickly conclude that this is an absurd exercise. First, the level of street violence resulting in killings and the violation of freedoms, the civil wars and state collapse that followed in numerous Arab countries, the displacement of entire populations resulting in the most dramatic refugee crisis in the modern history of humanity, all of which followed the 2011 Arab revolutions, testify to an incomparable parallel. A common denominator in the Middle East has been the further militarization of urban and political life, the “war on terror” and the rise of Islamic terrorism, which were instrumental in terminating the Arab insurrections.

Today we are left with an endlessly growing sense of loss and desolation. Tahrir has been reduced to a nostalgic and utopian memory among those who experienced it. Seven years have elapsed since the memorable spark on 25 January 2011. No-one could have predicted the pervasiveness, continuity, and strength of the counter-revolutionary forces, in the form of both the Islamists and the subsequent Sisi government.

Similarly, the public, performative, emancipatory, and artistic manifestations that followed the occupation of Tahrir Square in 2011 seem to be over too – perhaps only momentarily, since the consequences of the revolution are far from finished. The overwhelming counter-revolutionary forces, which never really departed from the political and public domain, have increasingly curtailed freedoms. The further clampdown on activists, feminists, and human rights workers, and the massive jailing of opponents of the regime, is evidence of that. In this counter-revolutionary moment, one is confronted with the burning necessity of recording the history of the past seven years, challenged by a pervasive official discourse that is mostly obsessed with the erasure of memory, or rather with the lived memory and past experiences of Tahrir Square and the continuing political protests. This leads us to reconsider the question of the *longue durée* processes that revolutions bring into being, and which imply fluctuations and volatile emotions.

This nostalgic moment translates naturally into a constant struggle to retain, if not freeze, memory, even if it is painful and sad, since it is coupled with an eagerness to record and archive the unfolding events of the past seven years, as many have been hopelessly attempting to do. That might also explain why there is an urge to recall, invent, and reinvent the *lieux de mémoire* (Nora, 1989: 7-24) of the past six years' turmoil. This effort is coming to be seen almost as a calling, with the goal of stopping the withering away of a vivid memory.

Such is the fate of counter-revolutionary moments. Once again, we have been royally overpowered. This translates into depressive and pessimistic, if not bleak, sentiments. But the present consists of a hard, counter-revolutionary, ruthless moment. The *ancien régime*, with its octopus-like, corrupt mechanisms, seems to be impossible to undo. The wounded counter-revolutionary powers-that-be have learned the lesson:

Tahrir is not repeatable and our present is not quite exactly identical to time. It is certainly much worse.

This effort at erasure explains why there is a relentless urge among many to consolidate memories in archives. Ariella Azoulay (2016) points to the crucial significance of constructing ‘alternative’ archives, which privilege the voices of the oppressed, the colonized, and the invisible; archives which are in tension in struggling with the dialectics of deletions and additions; archives that counter the deletions and omissions of the formal, dominant, state ideology as a tool to allow us to maintain the ‘past incomplete’ (Azoulay, 2016). The process of selecting and reflecting upon photography becomes one way of negotiating the abysmal reality one is confronted with.

It is in this state of mind that I wish to comment on some photos that I have taken during the past six years as a modest personal way of recording certain moments. These could be read today as snapshots of ephemeral moments, perhaps as an exercise in retaining memory. Having said that, I am well aware that if there is a success story to be drawn from the Arab revolutions, it is precisely that it triggered a vital interest in photography and the arts,<sup>6</sup> as well the mesmerizing impact of endlessly circulating photographs on a global scale. The memorable pictures of the violent confrontations between the protesters and the police forces, of young men throwing gas canisters back at the police forces, the millions filling the Square, the kilometer-long flags extending from the top floor of a building to the Square, the photograph of a lower-class woman kissing a soldier behind an army tank, the aerial view of the masses of protesters on the first day of the revolution on the Kasr al-Nil bridge confronting the water sprays of the police forces, the protesters praying in the Square, the Coptic priests and Muslim sheikhs in Tahrir holding hands. For example, see the website [egyptianstreets.com](http://egyptianstreets.com). It goes without saying that all these by now iconic photographs gained international recognition. They will remain anchored in the memory of millions for a long time. If there is a positive consequence to be attributed to the January revolution, it is that it elevated the status of photography, democratized it, and gave an international public visibility to a new generation of gifted young Egyptian photographers.<sup>7</sup> This resulted in a myriad of traveling photo

exhibitions that won recognition locally and overseas. In the same way, the ease of use of mobile phones opened new perspectives and fields for research and investigation into the endless possibilities of uploading short films to YouTube via mobiles. More recently, the heroic endeavors of the Syrian activists have raised worldwide consciousness on the atrocities of the Assad regime by instantly filming in the streets.

However, as Angela Harutyunyan has argued, the paradoxical effect of the representation of Tahrir as “an image, as symbol, and an icon” from its early days led to a much-contested visual saturation of images that quickly turned into a cliché, and accordingly drained the signifiers of their meaning (Harutyunyan, 2012: 11). Numerous observers commented on the fact that the Egyptian revolution, with the central focus on Tahrir Square, was one of the most covered revolutions by international media in history, raising questions about the effect of the continuous overflow of images on memory. That said, of all these images, the best-remembered remains the panorama of the square filled with masses of people; an image which reduced the complexity of the story.

And yet, one more reversal in the role of photography can be identified. The effect of the overabundant flow of the millions of photographs and videos, producing what W. J. T. Mitchell called a ‘tsunami of material’ (Mitchell, 2012: 14), has evidently enhanced the further commodification and iconizing of ‘revolution photographs’. This phenomenon is quite similar to the invasion of paraphernalia, in concert with the disproportionate proliferation of the icon of the Egyptian flag and its pervasive commercialization, resulting in a banalization of its symbolism. The circulation of the bird’s-eye shot of the Square,<sup>8</sup> the most emblematic photograph of the revolution, produced this reversal, which served the counter-revolution more than anyone else. In 2013, vertical filming was appropriated by the military to good effect, using highly sophisticated aerial shots from helicopters of the mass demonstrations on 30 June 2013, just before the ousting of former president, Morsi.<sup>9</sup> Certainly, the diffusion of these professional videos and photographs worldwide, displaying a much larger number of protesters in the street than in January 2011, were crucial in speeding Morsi’s departure, enhancing at that moment the popularity of the military.

I realize that the photographs in this text are neither iconic, nor emblematic, nor subversive, nor were they taken during direct violent confrontations. Instead, they could be classified in the genre of the ‘vernacular videos’ described by Mark Westmoreland (2016) that gained prominence in the Arab revolutions. ‘Vernacular videos’ were shots from mobile phones, either by protesting citizens or from balconies, taken by ‘vernacular revolutionaries’. Most importantly, these videos and photographs were taken from non-professional citizens and participants in the streets (Westmoreland, 2017: 245).

In contradistinction to Westmoreland, I will stress the ‘vernacular’ while perhaps leaving aside the expression ‘revolutionary’. I would tag myself as neither a revolutionary nor an activist, but I was caught up to some extent in the fever of recording, as a participant/watcher of the Cairo street between 2011 and 2013.<sup>10</sup> The spontaneous photographs taken in the streets, becoming an addiction for millions of marchers, triggered in many, including me, an interest in certain aspects of mundane daily life in Tahrir, such as street vendors, including children. Particular moments of the power of the collectivity and the performative in marches were evidently mesmerizing. Reflecting upon these photos of the performative street some four years after the event might suggest alternative types of political action (Azoulay, 2008: 22). The short moment of 2011–2013 proved effective, with powerful visual impressions, yet it remained precarious, as performativity always is.

However, these photographs might highlight certain details that can convey the particularity of exceptional moments, the wit and resistance and specificity of the performative theatrical street. Even though I have written a long diatribe on the function of nostalgia, the desire to record and evoke the past is certainly bound up with a sense of loss. Nostalgia remains unavoidable, but if writing and evoking history can assist in appeasing the bitterness of the present, then let it be.

### **Remembrance [or] The Performative Street**

1. Taken Friday 23 November 2012 in the neighborhood of Mohandessin. This is a march that started from the Mustafa Mahmud

Mosque in Mohandessin and ended in Tahrir Square. This itinerary took on a repetitive character. The protesters decided in the early days of the revolution to launch marches starting from the Mustafa Mahmud Mosque and reaching the Square, following a specific itinerary. These continued until June 2013. Throughout 2011–2013, as the ‘million-person marches’ multiplied, the protesters excelled in transforming them into a fascinating performative spectacle that drew increasing attention from the residents watching from balconies, as well as from the international media.



All along the itinerary there would be meeting points, where incoming groups of protesters would gather to enlarge the march. The walk from Mohandessin to the Square normally takes one hour, but as a protest march, it could last up to two or three hours, as it moved slowly with chanted slogans and drumming. Some marchers would be carrying huge flags, streamers, posters, and signs, while others held loudspeakers to repeat the slogans. Often, too, cars were positioned at the front and the rear of the march, where they could easily be covered by the media. The first march, in January 2011, turned violent and confrontational with the security forces; it became a well-documented historic moment. The march in this photograph took place after Morsi had become president. It was specifically an anti-Muslim Brotherhood demonstration. The

protesters are carrying a heavy red armchair, a symbol of rule, mocking the Muslim Brotherhood's replication of Mubarakist policies and greed for power. (In Arabic slang, *al-kursi* ('chair') refers to holding political supremacy.) On the two sides of the chair were placed photographs of iconic martyrs: Ahmed Bassiouny, killed in the first days of the revolution in January 2011; Sheikh Emad Effat, killed on 15 December 2011 during the Mohammed Mahmud violence; and Mina Daniel, killed in the Maspero massacre in October 2011, when army tanks crushed protesters. On top of the portraits of the martyrs is written: 'You have taken (or 'reached') the chair through spilling blood [...]' (the rest of the sentence is illegible). The message on the sign at the upper right says 'No to the *fuluul*', referring to the old pro-Mubarakist class. The lower sign reads: 'In the name of the holy book, we ceased to be afraid.' Notice too, the Guy Fawkes mask, which turned out to be one of the most popular items sold by street vendors during these marches. In another march that, following the identical itinerary, took place in spring 2013, I witnessed the *Tamarud* (Rebel) campaign movement, which managed to gather some 22 million signatures for a petition demanding that President Morsi step down. All along the march, the marchers could be seen distributing the petition to the passersby, and the people standing in the street added their signatures and their ID card numbers. I recall that one member of the *Tamarud* campaign gave me a pack of petitions at al-Batal Ahmed Abdel Aziz street, so that I could gather more signatures while they were marching; these were picked up later.

2. Taken 12 December 2012 on Mohammed Mahmud Street, which witnessed the bloodiest incidents in November and December 2011 and in November and December 2012.

Beginning in January 2011, the nation experienced escalating street protests leading to successive violent massacres, such as in Maspero Street (October 2011), Mohammed Mahmud Street (November–December 2011, then again in November–December 2012), and the Port

Said stadium massacre (February 2012). Mohammed Mahmud Street was nicknamed ‘Street of the Eyes of Freedom’ after many protesters lost their eyes to a sniper who deliberately and efficiently targeted them. On the wall of the American University entrance can be seen the work of graffiti artist Ammar Abu Bakr, consisting of Arabic calligraphy of verses of the Quran. Sand covered the ground instead of the uprooted pavement after the violent confrontations. Most striking is the horse carriage to be seen in the back, a slowly disappearing trade, mostly enjoyed by tourists, who had ceased to come to Egypt during that year.



3. Taken 4 December 2012. This photograph shows a march from the residential island of Zamalek into Tahrir Square. Anti-Morsi and anti-Muslim Brotherhood slogans were chanted. The Zamalek residents belong to the better-off middle and upper classes.





The year 2012 witnessed growing participation by the so-called ‘bourgeoisie’, even among former Mubarak supporters, who had often been mocked as the ‘armchair party’ but who now took to the streets in marches, public performances, and stands. The flags and signs carried the slogan ‘NO to the Constitution’, referring to the semblance of a constitution proposed by the Morsi government and the Muslim Brotherhood. This constitution gave unlimited powers to the president, overlooking the role of the judiciary. It was interpreted as an opening to a theocracy. As violations of human rights continued and violence was perpetrated against peaceful protesters during the rule of the Brotherhood, their rule was considered as a variation on the rule of the SCAF (Supreme Council of the Armed Forces) that took over immediately after Mubarak’s ousting.

4. Taken 4 December 2012 on Kasr al-Nil bridge heading toward Tahrir. Close-up of the same march that departed from Zamalek island.



5. Taken on 5 June 2012 in Tahrir Square, just three weeks before Morsi's ousting. This photograph might be the least exciting, but it is most illustrative of the Square as an attraction for spectators. Chairs were set up around the Square from the entrance of Kasr al-Nil Street, so that people could watch the center of the square and the demonstrators coming in and out, as if Tahrir were the central stage of a theatre. A spontaneously opened café offered drinks, thanks to the roaming street vendors and the existing cafés around the square.



6. Taken in Tahrir Square on 25 January 2012, the first anniversary of the 25 January Revolution.



A child street vendor of sweet potatoes struggles with a cart. In the background, one more sweet potato street vendor and vendors of paraphernalia commodities – particularly flags – are visible. A year later, in February 2013, an itinerant seller of sweet potatoes in Tahrir, a 12- to 14-year old boy, was murdered with two bullets. The media reported that he had been shot by mistake, but it was discovered later that he was shot by a soldier who deliberately targeted him. The official media failed to mention that the victim was a destitute, 12-year-old street kid.

7., 8., 9. Taken on 12 December 2012.



The open-air Museum of the Revolution in Tahrir, which consisted of photographs of the martyrs and a memorial space for depositing flowers. The creators of the museum invited passersby to freely express their opinions in commentaries, wishes, criticism, poetry, or any other means.

The museum was erected during the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood under the presidency of Morsi. The countless commentaries, not all displayed on the wall, include insults, jokes, and requests for Morsi to step down and leave. The text message near the bottom of photograph 8 reads: ‘Down with the one who betrayed and sold [...] and left the Square.’





This clinic was created during the first violent Mohamed Mahmud incidents. Donations of medicine, bandages, anti-tear gas solutions, and first-aid material were displayed near the Omar Makram Mosque in Tahrir. No further comment is necessary.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The 'honorable citizen' was a slogan invented during a propaganda campaign under the rule of the armed forces after 2011. It was deployed as a way of denouncing the so-called 'troublemakers', such as the protesters. Neighbors who showed any suspicious behavior could be denounced, suggesting analogies with the German Nazi period.
- <sup>2</sup> However, due to the residents' resistance, the police forces retreated from the island after the state declared that it would postpone the evictions (*Al Jazeera*, 2017).
- <sup>3</sup> While still remaining the second-largest recipient of US aid, after Israel.
- <sup>4</sup> This is the title of Cynthia Myntti's book on Cairo's Belle Époque architecture (Myntti 1999).
- <sup>5</sup> See the presentation of Omniya Abdel Barr on the panel 'Le patrimoine des villes arabes à l'épreuve du présent', in 'La ville' (Abdel Barr, 2015). Abdel Barr is a member of the 'Save Cairo' campaign in Egypt.
- <sup>6</sup> The fields of music, film and documentary, graffiti, and public street art witnessed a remarkable, flowering explosion of fantastic, young, gifted female and male artists. Graffiti obtained the lion's

share of attention from the international media – unfortunately, at the expense of highly commercializing the field. Regarding the commercialization of graffiti, see Abaza (2017).

<sup>7</sup> However, the status of photographers was reversed by the military after the Rabe'a al-'Adawiyya massacre in July 2013 and the jailing of journalists. When the military took over, photographing in the street was criminalized, leading to numerous cases of harassment and jailing.

<sup>8</sup> On the point of the iconic image of the bird's-eye shot of the millions filling the Square becoming, so to speak, the most representative photograph of the revolution, globally going viral and producing the effect of a 'faceless' revolution, see Westmoreland (2016).

<sup>9</sup> The Islamist Mohammed Morsi was elected as president on 30 June 2012 and served until 3 July 2013. He was removed from office as a result of spectacular demonstrations against his regime, which gave the army the golden opportunity to interfere and oust him.

<sup>10</sup> Perhaps there is also an analog here with Azoulay's argument of reading photography as a 'civil act and a rehabilitation of the political' (Azoulay, 2008: 27).

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