Participatory Remembrance:

Ordinary Practices as Counter-Narratives in Downtown Cairo, Egypt

by
Alia Abdelghaffar

A thesis
presented to the University of Waterloo
in fulfillment of the
thesis requirement for the degree of
Master of Architecture

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2026
© Alia Abdelghaffar 2026

Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners. I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

This thesis examines how urban narratives are constructed through dominant institutional frameworks and how these processes produce selective forms of memory. Focusing on Downtown Cairo, it situates these processes within the legacy of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century period, when the district was planned and shaped under European influence. It critiques how museums and heritage practices privilege monumental and elite histories, often reinforcing a romanticized image of this past while overlooking the everyday practices through which the city functioned as a space of political, cultural, and intellectual life.

In response, the thesis advances a counter-narrative of Downtown Cairo during the same period under British colonial rule. While this is one of many possible narratives, it is used here as a lens to understand the period differently. This narrative foregrounds resistance not only in its visible forms, but also in its more subtle manifestations embedded within everyday life. By focusing on small, repetitive practices situated in social space, the research examines how ordinary actions enabled cultural and intellectual forms of resistance, and how such practices can inform ways of challenging dominant narratives and memory in the present.

This is examined through Madbuli Bookshop, Café Riche, and Kasr el Nil Theatre and Cinema, where acts of reading, gathering, and circulation sustained forms of resistance beyond formal recognition. These sites shift the focus from preserving objects to preserving use, positioning Downtown Cairo as a living archive produced through spatial practice.

Building on this framework, the thesis proposes participatory remembrance as an alternative model of preservation. It understands memory as something activated through engagement rather than curated as a static narrative, and repositions users as active participants in the production and transmission of memory. Through site-specific design interventions, the research translates everyday practices into spatial strategies that facilitate ongoing use and reinterpretation, enabling counter-narratives to emerge and persist alongside official accounts of the city.

الملخص

Arabic translation of the Abstract

تفحص هذه الرسالة كيف تتشكّل روايات المدينة من خلال مؤسسات ذات نفوذ، وكيف تنتج هذه العمليات أشكالًا محددة من الذاكرة. يركّز البحث على وسط البلد في القاهرة، مع التركيز على أواخر القرن التاسع عشر وبدايات القرن العشرين لتحليل هذه العمليات، حين جرى تخطيط المنطقة وتشكيلها تحت تأثير أوروبي. كما تنتقد الكيفية التي تمنح بها المتاحف وممارسات حفظ التراث أولوية للتاريخ المسيطر، مما يعزز صورة رومانسية عن الماضي، في مقابل تهميش الممارسات اليومية التي شكّلت المدينة كفضاء سياسي وثقافي وفكري حي.

في المقابل، تقدّم الرسالة رواية بديلة لوسط البلد خلال الفترة نفسها تحت الحكم البريطاني، وهي إحدى الروايات العديدة لوسط البلد، لكن هدفها هو فهم هذه الفترة بطريقة مختلفة. تركّز هذه الرواية على المقاومة، ليس فقط في أشكالها الواضحة، بل أيضًا في صورها اليومية البسيطة. ومن خلال التركيز على ممارسات صغيرة ومتكررة داخل الفضاء الاجتماعي، تبحث الدراسة كيف ساهمت الأفعال العادية في إنتاج أشكال من المقاومة الثقافية والفكرية، وكيف يمكن أن توفّر هذه الممارسات مدخلًا لإعادة التفكير في الروايات السائدة اليوم.

وتتناول الدراسة هذه الفكرة من خلال ثلاثة مواقع في وسط البلد: مكتبة مدبولي، ومقهى ريش، ومسرح وسينما قصر النيل، حيث ساهمت ممارسات مثل القراءة، والتجمّع، وتداول الأفكار في استمرار أشكال من المقاومة خارج الإطار الرسمي. وتحوّل هذه المواقع فهم أهمية الحفظ من الأماكن والأشياء إلى الاستخدام، بحيث تُفهم وسط البلد كأرشيف حي يتشكّل عبر الممارسة.

ومن هنا، تقترح الرسالة مفهوم "الذاكرة بالمشاركة" كبديل لأساليب الحفظ التقليدية. فهي ترى أن الذاكرة ليست مادة ثابتة تُعرض، بل عملية تتفعّل من خلال الاستخدام والتفاعل. كما تعيد طرح دور المستخدمين باعتبارهم عناصر فاعلة في إنتاج الذاكرة ونقلها. ومن خلال تدخلات تصميمية مرتبطة بالموقع وتاريخه، تترجم الدراسة الممارسات اليومية إلى استراتيجيات مكانية تدعم الاستخدام المستمر وإعادة التفسير، بما يتيح ظهور روايات بديلة واستمرارها إلى جانب الروايات الرسمية للمدينة.

Acknowledgments

I acknowledge that the University of Waterloo and the School of Architecture in Cambridge are situated on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron (Neutral), Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee Peoples, within the Haldimand Tract granted to the Haudenosaunee of the Six Nations of the Grand River.

I am sincerely grateful to my supervisor, David Fortin, for his unwavering support and commitment throughout this project. His guidance brought clarity at every stage, and his questions continually pushed the research to look closer, question more carefully, and remain precise in both argument and design.

I am also deeply thankful to my committee member, Anwar Jaber, for her insight, critical perspective, and encouragement. Her reminders to be bold in pursuing ideas gave this work the confidence to explore its questions without hesitation.

My sincere thanks also go to Lola Sheppard, my TRD1 instructor, who helped shape this topic in its earliest stages. Her curiosity and enthusiasm encouraged the development of this project during moments when its direction was still uncertain.

I would also like to thank Noheir Elgendy, my external reader for her valuable insight. Her knowledge and thoughtful engagement offered thoughtful reflections that helped strengthen the final work.

Beyond academic guidance, I owe my deepest gratitude to my family. My parents have been the foundation behind everything I have pursued. Their constant encouragement, patience, and belief in the value of education shaped not only this thesis but the person I have become. My brothers have been my backbone throughout this journey, bringing support, humor, and a grounding presence during the most demanding moments. I am also profoundly grateful to my grandparents for their unconditional love, warmth, and prayers, which remained a continuous source of comfort and strength.

I am equally thankful to my friends, whose presence brought joy to the process and reminded me to maintain balance when the work became consuming.

Finally, this thesis would not have taken its current form without those who walked through Downtown Cairo with me. Wandering its streets, sitting in cafés, browsing bookshops, and tracing hidden passageways together shaped my understanding of the district. Their conversations and reflections continually expanded the thinking behind this work, reinforcing the idea that memory is never singular.

Table of contents

iii Author's Declaration
iv Abstract
v الملخص Arabic Translation of the Abstract
vii Acknowledgments
x List of Figures

1 **00| Introduction**
2 Experiencing Downtown Cairo
3 Making Cairo Modern
17 Resisting Colonization
19 Research Approach
22 On Methodology

27 **01| Memory, Heritage, and the Making of Urban Narratives**
27 1.1 The Politics of Memory and Forgetting
29 1.2 From Mnemonic Architecture to Institutional Memory
35 1.3 Downtown Cairo's Heritage Discourse
41 1.4 Current Approaches to Preservation in Downtown Cairo
43 1.5 Case Studies
43 1.5.1 Al Ismaelia's Radio Passage and Spatial Strategies
49 1.5.2 CLUSTER and Alternative Urban Narratives

55 **02| Downtown Cairo through the Lens of Ordinary Life**
55 2.1 Ordinary Life as Intangible Heritage
57 2.2 The Politics of the Ordinary
60 2.3 Resistance and Erasure
71 2.4 Spatial Typologies of Ordinary Resistance
75 2.5 Site Selection

77 **03| Narratives of Ordinary Resistance**
78 3.1 Circulation of Thought: Resistance in the Bookshop
89 3.2 Oral Threshold: Resistance in the Cafe
101 3.3 Colloquial Stages: Resistance in Performing Spaces

121 **04| Participatory Remembrance: Memory as Living Practice**

127 **05| Design Intervention: A Network of Ordinary Mnemonic Practices**
127 5.1 Design Intent and Principles
133 5.2 Design Interventions
133 5.2.1 Corridor of Reading: A Mobile Threshold at Madbuli
143 5.2.2 Threshold of Dialogue: Occupying the Café's Edge
157 5.2.3 Passage of Screens: Performance in the Everyday

173 **Conclusion**

175 **Bibliography**

List of Figures

00| INTRODUCTION

1 **Fig 0.1** Building in Downtown Cairo.
Photographer Unknown, June 22, 2015, Source: https://londoney-ablog.wordpress.com/2015/06/22/exploring-Downtown-cairo/

5 **Fig 0.2** Timeline of Political Rule and Foreign Control in Egypt (1798-1956).
Drawing by author. Adapted from:
2.1 Old Cairo, photograph by Berthold Werner, November 4, 2010, Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kairo_Sabil_Kuttab_of_Katkhuda_BW_1.jpg
2.2 "Napoleon Bonaparte," History.com, https://www.history.com/articles/6-things-you-should-know-about-napoleon
2.3 Institute d'Égypte Building, Ellen Harvey, 2021, oil and acrylic on gessoboard; photograph by Etienne Frossard, https://disappointedtourist.org/institut-degypte/
2.4 Muhammad Ali of Egypt, portrait by Auguste Couder, 1840, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_Ali_of_Egypt
2.5 Muhammad Ali Mosque, photographer unknown, Travel to Egypt, https://www.travelto-egypt.net/discover-egypt/cairo-attractions/mohamed-ali-mosque
2.6 Khedive Ismail, Library of Congress, https://loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3c04847/
2.7 Khedivial Opera House, 1869, Ahram Online, https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/114382.aspx
2.8 Downtown Cairo, Egyptian Geographic, https://egyptiangeographic.com/en/news/show/472
2.9 Evelyn Baring, 1st Earl of Cromer, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evelyn_Baring,_1st_Earl_of_Cromer#/media/File:LordCromer.jpg
2.10 "1919 Revolution," CairoScene, https://cairoscene.com/artsandculture/the-revolution-ary-history-of-tahrir-square
2.11 Gamal Abdel Nasser in Belgrade, photograph by Stevan Kragujević, 1962, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gamal_Abdel_Nasser#/media/File:Stevan_Kragujevic,_Gamal_Abdel_Naser_u_Beogradu,_1962.jpg
2.12 The Mogamma Building, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Mogamma
2.13 Cairo Tower, photographer unknown, Ask Aladdin, https://www.ask-aladdin.com/all-destinations/egypt/category/egypt-site-guide/page/cairo-tower

7 **Fig 0.3** Sultan Hassan and Al-Rifai Mosques in the Citadel district, Cairo.
Photograph by Carl Troll, 1933. Source: https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1067513425403125&set=pb.100064334335455.-2207520000

8 **Fig 0.4** The Grand Savoy Hotel, at Soliman Pacha Square, Downtown Cairo
Photograph by Lilywhite Ltd., UK. 1919. Source: https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=3605423196137504&set=pb.100064334335455.-2207520000

9 **Fig 0.5** Streets of Old Cairo.
American Colony, Photo Department, photograph, Cairo, Egypt, ca. 1900–1920. Source: https://www.loc.gov/item/2019692959/.

10 **Fig 0.6** Streets of Modern Cairo.
Photographer unknown, 1920s. Source: https://www.messynessychic.com/2019/03/15/paris-or-egypt-100-yeas-ago-it-was-hard-to-tell-the-difference/

11 **Fig 0.7** Planning of Ismailiya under Khedive Ismail in 1867.
Source: Janet Abu-Lughod, "Tale of Two Cities: The Origins of Modern Cairo," Comparative Studies in Society and History 7, no. 4 (1965): 20

12 **Fig 0.8** Map of Downtown Cairo under British Rule (1914-1915).
YMCA map, reproduced on Great War Forum; scan posted by Jeff Pickerd. Source: Great War Forum, https://www.greatwarforum.org/topic/303214-ymca-cairo-map/

13 **Fig 0.9** Map of Cairo 1940 after British developments.
Guide Plan of Cairo and District, published by the Department of Survey and Mines. Source: American Geographical Society Library Digital Map Collection, https://collections.lib.uwm.edu/digital/collection/agdm/id/26295/

15 **Fig. 0.10** Demonstrators on Kamel Street, Opera Square, Cairo, during the 1919 Revolution in Egypt.
Photographer unknown. Source: Facebook image post, https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1101290588692075&set=pb.100064334335455.-2207520000

17 **Fig 0.11** Cafe in Cairo, 1935.
Photographer unknown. Source: Reddit, https://www.reddit.com/r/Egypt/comments/giougl/cafe_in_cairo_1935/

01| MEMORY, HERITAGE AND THE MAKING OF URBAN NARRATIVES

25 **Fig 1.1** Downtown Cairo's Tahrir Square and Egyptian Museum.
Fieldwork Photograph by my friend Nada Samir while walking in Downtown Cairo.

30 **Fig 1.2** Camillo's Memory Theatre.
Source: Socks Studio, https://socks-studio.com/2019/03/03/spatializing-knowledge-giulio-camillos-theatre-of-memory-1519-1544/

32 **Fig 1.3** Museum showcasing Ancient Egyptian Artifacts.
Fieldwork Photograph by author.

32 **Fig 1.4** Map locating Egyptian Museum.
Drawing by author. Base map adapted from OpenStreetMap.

33 **Fig 1.5** The Egyptian Museum.
Fieldwork Photograph by my friend Nada Samir while walking in Downtown Cairo.

37 **Fig 1.6** Architectural transformation in Egypt after the 1952 revolution.
Vintage postcard showing Tahrir Square, the Nile Hilton, and the headquarters of the Arab League, Cairo, ca. 1960. Source: Artforum, https://www.artforum.com/features/circling-the-square-architecture-and-revolution-in-cairo-197121/

40 **Fig 1.7** Omar Effendi department store (formerly Orsodi-Back).
Photograph by Cynthia Mynti, Source: *Paris along the Nile : Architecture in Cairo from the Belle Epoque. American University in Cairo Press*, 1999.

43 **Fig 1.8** Radio Lane Way-finding Map.
Fieldwork Photograph by author.

44 **Fig 1.9** Photograph of Cinema Radio Entrance.
Source: Al Ismaelia, https://al-ismaelia.com/landmark/cinema-radio/

45 **Fig 1.10** Wall of Fame.
Fieldwork Photograph by author.

45 **Fig 1.11** Red Arches in Passage.
Fieldwork Photograph by author.

46 **Fig 1.12** Enclosed Passage with lighting and sound.
Fieldwork Photograph by author.

46 **Fig 1.13** Wayfinding Arrow.
Fieldwork Photograph by author.

47 **Fig 1.14** Outdoor Intervention.
Fieldwork Photograph by author.

51 **Fig 1.15** Downtown Cairo Passageways Mapping by CLUSTER.
Source: CLUSTER Mapping Initiative, https://passageways.cluster-mappinginitiative.org/en/about/cairo-downtown-passageways-0

52 **Fig 1.16** Philips Passageway Project: Introducing screening.
Source: CLUSTER Cairo, https://clustercairo.org/2015/05/03/philips_passageway/

53 **Fig 1.17** Downtown Tours by CLUSTER.
Source: CLUSTER Mapping Initiative, https://passageways.cluster-mappinginitiative.org/en/tour/re-framing-downtown-cairo-down-town-tours

02| DOWNTOWN CAIRO THROUGH THE LENS OF ORDINARY LIFE

56 **Fig 2.1** Interpretation of Mass Capitalism by Ziad Fahmy.
Diagram by author.

57 **Fig 2.2** Bounds Map of Cairo, 1946. Credit: ©The British Library Board.
Credit: ©The British Library Board. Source: Jadaliyya, https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/33940

61 **Fig 2.3** A crowd marches towards Shepherd Hotel in Cairo, Egypt on Jan. 25, 1952.
Photographer unknown. Source: http://denverpost.slideshowpro.com/albums/001/496/album-402292/cache/egypt-revolution-history-070913-014.sJPG_950_2000_0_7

61 **Fig 2.4** Civil Security Scheme 1942 Map.
Credit:©The British Library Board. Source: Jadaliyya, https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/33940

64 **Fig 2.5** Map Locating Tahrir Square.
Drawing by author.

64 **Fig 2.6** Tahrir Square Physical Transformations.
Drawing by author, adapted from:
Fig. 2.6.1 Memorial service of King George V, Kasr el-Nil Barracks, Cairo, 1936. Wellcome Library, Army Medical Services Museum, RAMC/801/22/23/26.
Fig. 2.6.2 Tahrir Square, with the Egyptian Museum on left, ca. 1940s. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tahrir_Square#/media/File:Tahrir_Square_in_1941.jpg
Fig. 2.6.3 "The Revolutionary History of Tahrir Square." CairoScene. https://cairoscene.com/artsandculture/the-revolutionary-history-of-tahrir-square
Fig. 2.6.4 "Arts & Culture in Downtown Cairo: Your Guide to AUC Tahrir CultureFest." CairoScene. https://cairoscene.com/ArtsAndCulture/Arts-Culture-in-Downtown-Cairo-Your-Guide-to-AUC-Tahrir-CultureFest
Fig. 2.6.5 "The Cairo Fire on 26 January 1952." Ahram Online. https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/257110/Egypt/Politics-/-years-later-The-%E2%80%98Cairo-Fire%E2%80%99-of--revisited.aspx
Fig. 2.6.6 Tahrir Square, October 1952. Memory of Modern Egypt Collection, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, reproduced in Jadaliyya. https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/31939
Fig. 2.6.7 "Tahrir Square before It Was Iconic Worldwide." Ahram Online. https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentPrint/32/0/92373/Folk/0/Tahrir-Square-before-it-was-iconic-worldwide.aspx
Fig. 2.6.8 Egyptians occupying Tahrir Square during anti-government demonstrations, February 11, 2011 (AFP/Pedro Ugarte). Middle East Eye. https://www.middleeasteye.net/features/barricading-revolution-when-city-planning-suppresses-people
Fig. 2.6.9 "Towering Gates at Cairo Tahrir Square Draw Criticism." Voice of America. https://www.voanews.com/a/reu-towering-gates-at-cairo-tahrir-square-draw-criticism/1850963.html
Fig. 2.6.10 "Iconic Tahrir Square to Be Turned into Egyptian Tourist Site." CairoScene. https://cairoscene.com/buzz/iconic-tahrir-square-to-be-turned-into-egyptian-tourist-site
Fig. 2.6.11 Obelisk at the centre of Tahrir Square in Cairo, photograph by Khaled Elfiqi/EPA. Irish Times. https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/africa/in-cairo-s-tahrir-square-the-sounds-of-revolt-give-way-to-thrum-of-traffic-1.4466704
Fig. 2.6.12 1967 protest. CairoScene. https://cairoscene.com/artsandculture/the-revolutionary-history-of-tahrir-square
Fig. 2.6.13 1972 student movement. CairoScene. https://cairoscene.com/artsandculture/the-revolutionary-history-of-tahrir-square
Fig. 2.6.14 Tahrir Square, June 1967: Spontaneous and/or Organized Marches after the Military Defeat. Memory of Modern Egypt Collection, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, reproduced in Jadaliyya. https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/31939
Fig. 2.6.15 1977 Bread Intifada. CairoScene. https://cairoscene.com/artsandculture/the-revolutionary-history-of-tahrir-square
Fig. 2.6.16 Protesters assembled in Tahrir Square on March 20, 2003, photograph by Randa Shaath. https://journals-sagepub-com.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/doi/10.1177/0268580914551306
Fig. 2.6.17 Anti-Morsi protesters during a mass demonstration in Cairo's Tahrir Square, June 2013 (Amr Abdallah/Reuters). Egyptian Streets. https://egyptianstreets.com/2019/10/04/how-tahrir-square-turned-from-a-symbol-of-colonization-to-liberation/

65 **Fig 2.7** Tahrir Square Today.
Fieldwork Photograph by my friend Nada Samir while walking in Downtown Cairo.

69 **Fig 2.8** Map showing original buildings and redeveloped buildings after 1952.
Source: Ali Essam El-Shazly, "The Prospects of the 'European Quarter' in Cairo," Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering 2, no. 1: 175–82, 180. https://doi.org/10.3130/jaabe.2.175.

70 **Fig 2.9** Destruction after the 1952 Cairo Fire.
Photographer unknown. Source: http://www.marefa.org/index.php/%D9%85%D9%84%D9%81:Egypt-revolution-history-070913-019.sJPG_950_2000_0_75_0_50_50.sJPG.jpg

72 **Fig 2.10** Diagram theorizing Ordinary Resistance.
Diagram by author.

73 **Fig 2.11** Mapping Downtown Cairo through sites of resistance.
Drawing by author. Base map adapted from OpenStreetMap and Google Earth. Adapted from:
Fig. 2.11.1 NDP Building on Fire, 2011. Failed Architecture. https://failedarchitecture.com/erasing-the-remnants-of-a-revolution/
Fig. 2.11.2 Groppi's Tea Garden, Cairo, Egypt, 1943. Photograph by Major Wilfred Herbert James Sale. National Army Museum. https://collection.nam.ac.uk/detail.php?acc=1975-03-63-11-197
Fig. 2.11.3 National Theatre. Ahram archives. Ahram Online. https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsAFCON/2021/114505.aspx
Fig. 2.11.4 Cinema Radio. https://cairobserver.com/post/35982679960/cinema-radio-comes-back-to-life
Fig. 2.11.5 Abdeen Square. Creator unknown. https://www.britishempire.co.uk/maproom/abdeenpalace.htm
Fig. 2.11.6 Horreya Cafe. Photograph by Thomas Pinn. Scoop Empire. https://scoopempire.com/the-unique-unusual-and-just-plain-beautiful-egyptian-cafes-you-have-to-go-to/
Fig. 2.11.7 Bayt al-Umma, 1928. Protest by Wafd loyalists in response to the suspension of parliament. Memory of Modern Egypt Collection, Bibliotheca Alexandrina. https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/31939.
Fig. 2.11.8 Institut d'Égypte on Fire. https://archhistdaily.wordpress.com/2016/11/19/november-19-212-years-of-the-institut-degypte/
Fig. 2.11.9 Qasr el-Nil Bridge. Egypt Today. https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/4/116567/Qasr-al-Nil-bridge-a-reflection-of-Egypt%E2%80%99s-golden-era

Fig. 2.11.10 Tahrir Square, June 1967: Spontaneous and/or Organized Marches after the Military Defeat. Memory of Modern Egypt Collection, Bibliotheca Alexandrina.
Fig. 2.11.11 "The 1919 Egyptian Revolution." OpenLearn. https://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/history/after-the-first-world-war-the-1919-egyptian-revolution
Note: Sources for images cited separately elsewhere in the thesis are not repeated here.

76 **Fig 2.12** Map Locating Sites of Ordinary Resistance.
Drawing by author.

77 **Fig 3.1** Madbuli's kiosk in Downtown Cairo.
Snapshot from Hajj Madbouli, "A Special Visit with the Late Hajj Madbouli, Owner of Madbouli Bookstore." Interview by Sami Kleib, Al Jazeera, 2006. YouTube video, 49:50. Posted January 31, 2022, by Khalid Muhammad. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S5ox67A1CWo

03| NARRATIVES OF ORDINARY RESISTANCE

79 **Fig 3.2** Examples of Censored, Controversial and Banned Books.
Collage by author. Adapted from:
Fig. 3.2.1 Al-Katib al-Masry by Taha Hussein, 1945. https://sismo.inha.fr/s/fr/journal/262453
Fig. 3.2.2 al-Muadhdhabun fi al-Ard by Taha Hussein, 1947. https://rowayat.org/el-kateb-el-masry-taha-husseins-literary-journal/
Fig. 3.2.3 (Aoudat al-Ruh / Return of the Spirit) by Tawfiq al-Hakim, 1933. https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/6610145

80 **Fig 3.3** Hajj Madbuli standing in the print storage space of Bookshop.
Photographer unknown, 2010. Source: Cairo Book Lore, https://cairo-booklore.blogspot.com/2015/10/madbouli-bookshop.html

81 **Fig 3.4** Hajj Madbuli speaking with a customer outside the Bookshop.
Photograph by Brodieland, July 18, 2007. Source: Flickr, https://www.flickr.com/photos/9791767@N02/870513553/

83 **Fig 3.5** A cartoon from the May 30, 1879, Issue of *Abou Naddara*.
Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abu_Naddara

85 **Fig 3.6** Photograph showing books displayed on the ground.
Photograph by Larisa Epatko. Source: UNESCO, https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-alarmed-news-mass-destruction-books-mosul

86 **Fig 3.7** Archival photograph of Madbuli Bookshop (est. 1951).
Source: Middle East Eye, https://www.middleeasteye.net/discover/egypt-oldest-bookshops-cairo-treasure-trove

87 **Fig 3.8** Madbuli Bookshop exterior today.
Fieldwork Photograph by author.

88 **Fig 3.9** Madbuli Bookshop interior today.
Fieldwork Photograph by author.

90 **Fig 3.10** Someone reading in Café Riche.
Photographer unknown. Creative Commons via Wikimedia Commons. Source: Al Majalla, https://en.majalla.com/node/248286/culturecairo%E2%80%99s-social-landmark-where-time-has-stood-still

91 **Fig 3.11** Writers Naguib Mahfouz and Gamal El-Ghitany at Café Riche.
Photographer unknown. Source: Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=175847532621887&set=pb.100063512576390.-2207520000&type=3

94 **Fig 3.12** Café Riche outdoor seating extending into the street.
Photographer unknown. Source: Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=177395879133719&set=pb.100063512576390.-2207520000&type=3

96 **Fig 3.13** Revolutionary poster found inside Café Riche.
Fieldwork Photograph by author.

97 **Fig 3.14** Café Riche memory room lined with photographs and objects.
Photograph by Michele Fossi. Source: https://michelefossi.com/2008/08/17/cafe-richie-aegyptian-history-in-a-literary-cafe/

99 **Fig 3.15** Cafe Riche, today.
Fieldwork Photograph by author.

102 **Fig 3.16** Collective presence inside the cinema.
Photographer unknown. Source: https://www.staff.universiteitleiden.nl/events/2025/10/whats-new---ifdal-el-saket-16-october-2025

103 **Fig 3.17** Al Hakawati (The storyteller)
Photograph by Dima Al Sharif, July 26, 2013. Source: https://www.dimasharif.com/al-hakawati-the-storyteller/

104 **Fig 3.18** Sunduq al-dunya (Box of the world)
Photograph. The Official Website of King Farouk I – Farouk of Egypt, Facebook, February 15, 2019. Source: Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/king.farouk.faroukmisr/posts/pfbid02DckqwqYjRFQc3DWjrZsBWCLu9LVjU6XN7R7VuhFvxUbTriS6wnE48RmBgviCHaxTl

105 **Fig 3.19** The Pianola (Barrel Organ) player in the streets of Cairo, Egypt, 1942.
Photographer unknown. Source: Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1101290588692075&set=pb.100064334335455.-2207520000

109 **Fig 3.20** Collage of anti-colonial cultural productions.
Collage by Author, adapted from:
Fig. 3.20.1 https://aswatonline.com/2021/03/10/%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%85-1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A8-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B-3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/
Fig. 3.20.2 https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0275209/
Fig. 3.20.3 https://dhliz.com/film/yasqot_al_este3mar/
Fig. 3.20.4 https://m.imdb.com/title/tt0342039/mediaviewer/rm1822596097/Image
Fig. 3.20.5 https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0342637/
Fig. 3.20.6 https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/4/13504/July-revolution-in-the-eyes-of-Egyptian-cinema
Fig. 3.20.7 https://www.imdb.com/fr-ca/title/tt0051390/mediaviewer/rm1966701312/?ref_=tt_ov_i
Fig. 3.20.8 https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0366442/mediaviewer/rm930817536/?ref_=tt_ov_i
Fig. 3.20.9 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Return_of_the_Spirit_%28miniseries%29

111 **Fig 3.21** Collage of censored, and banned productions.
Collage by Author, adapted from:
Fig. 3.21.1 https://www.hindawi.org/books/20416902/
Fig. 3.21.2 https://www.arabworldbooks.com/ar/books/%D9%86%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B0%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%87%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A9
Fig. 3.21.3 https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0264788/
Fig. 3.21.4 https://letterboxd.com/film/lasheen/
Fig. 3.21.5 https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0970427/

113 **Fig 3.22** Cinema Rivoli in Downtown Cairo in flames.
Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cairo_Fire#mediaviewer/File:-Cairo_Fire_1952_Revoli_Cinema

114 **Fig 3.23** Newspaper announcement of the inauguration of Kasr el-Nil Theatre.
Source: Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1436888191135191&set=a.143530945817645

115 **Fig 3.24** Um Kulthum Performing at Kasr el-Nil
Source: https://www.johnstephenhoey.com/project-15-kasr-el-nile-theatre-renovations

117 **Fig 3.25** Exterior view of Kasr el-Nil Theatre and Cinema prior to renovation. Photograph by John Stephen Hoey. Source: https://www.johnstephenhoey.com/project-15-kasr-el-nile-theatre-renovations

118 **Fig 3.26** Interior of Kasr el-Nil Theatre and Cinema before renovation. Source: https://scenenow.com/Home/Downtown-Cairo-The-Stories-and-the-Stories-Within

119 **Fig 3.27** Kasr el-Nil Theatre and Cinema today, closed and undergoing renovation. Fieldwork Photograph by author.

04| PARTICIPATORY REMEMBRANCE: MEMORY AS LIVING PRACTICE

125 **Fig 4.1** Diagram illustrating the framework of Participatory Remembrance. Diagram by author

05| DESIGN INTERVENTION: A NETWORK OF ORDINARY MNEMONIC PRACTICES

127 **Fig 5.1** Green elements in Downtown Cairo. Fieldwork Photograph by author.

129 **Fig 5.2** CLUSTER Cairo's Downtown Passageways digital mapping platform. Source: Cluster Mapping Initiative, https://passageways.clustermappinginitiative.org/en#

131 **Fig 5.3** A Network of Ordinary Mnemonic Practices Interactive Wayfinding Map. Drawing by author.

134 **Fig 5.4** Madbuli Bookshop Design Catalogue. Drawing by author.

135 **Fig 5.5** Madbuli Bookshop Intervention Plan Drawings. Drawing by author.

137 **Fig 5.6** Madbuli Bookshop Intervention Axonometric Drawings. Drawing by author

139 **Fig 5.7** Madbuli Bookshop prior to intervention. Fieldwork Photograph by author.

140 **Fig 5.8** Rendering of Madbuli Bookshop after the intervention. Architectural rendering by author, with character and lighting enhancements generated via Gemini 2.5 (Nano Banana) in Adobe Photoshop.

141 **Fig 5.9** Rendering showing the threshold created by the intervention. Architectural rendering by author, with character and lighting enhancements generated via Gemini 2.5 (Nano Banana) in Adobe Photoshop.

144 **Fig 5.10** Cafe Riche Design Catalogue. Drawing by author.

145 **Fig 5.11** CLUSTER Cairo's Downtown Passageways digital mapping. Source: https://passageways.clustermappinginitiative.org/en/passageways/b12-al-bustan-al-saidi-passageway

147 **Fig 5.12** Café Riche passage intervention plan drawing. Drawing by author. Adapted from: Al-Bustan al-Sa'idi Passagewa,y Cluster Mapping Initiative, https://passageways.clustermappinginitiative.org/en/passageways/b12-al-bustan-al-saidi-passageway

148 **Fig 5.13** Elevation drawing of the Café Riche intervention. Drawing by author.

150 **Fig 5.14** Side elevation drawing of the Café Riche intervention. Drawing by author.

151 **Fig 5.15** Passage prior to intervention. Photograph by author.

152 **Fig 5.16** Rendering of the café passage after the intervention. Architectural rendering by author, with character and lighting enhancements generated via Gemini 2.5 (Nano Banana) in Adobe Photoshop.

153 **Fig 5.17** Rendering of the Café Riche passage intervention. Architectural rendering by author, with character and lighting enhancements generated via Gemini 2.5 (Nano Banana) in Adobe Photoshop.

155 **Fig 5.18** Rendering showing the stair element of the intervention. Architectural rendering by author, with character and lighting enhancements generated via Gemini 2.5 (Nano Banana) in Adobe Photoshop.

156 **Fig 5.19** Rendering showing the stair activated through use. Architectural rendering by author, with character and lighting enhancements generated via Gemini 2.5 (Nano Banana) in Adobe Photoshop.

157 **Fig 5.20** Street elevation of Kasr el-Nil Theatre and Cinema. Drawing by author.

160 **Fig 5.21** Kasr el-Nil Design Catalogue. Drawing by author.

161 **Fig 5.22** CLUSTER Cairo's Downtown Passageways digital mapping platform. Source: Cluster Mapping Initiative, https://passageways.clustermappinginitiative.org/en/passageways/c2-le-grillon-passageway

163 **Fig 5.23** Plan drawing of Kasr el-Nil Theatre and Cinema. Drawing by author. Adapted from: Le Grillion Passageway, Cluster Mapping Initiative, https://passageways.clustermappinginitiative.org/en/passageways/c2-le-grillon-passageway

164 **Fig 5.24** A collection of photographs documenting the walk through the passage. Fieldwork Photographs by author.

165 **Fig 5.25** Section moving through the passage. Drawing by author.

167 **Fig 5.26** Axonometric drawing showing an overview of the wayfinding devices. Drawing by author.

169 **Fig 5.27** Passage prior to intervention. Fieldwork Photograph by author.

170 **Fig 5.28** Rendering of the passage after the intervention. Architectural rendering by author, with character and lighting enhancements generated via Gemini 2.5 (Nano Banana) in Adobe Photoshop.

171 **Fig 5.29** Rendering showing people looking into peephole-like devices. Architectural rendering by author, with character and lighting enhancements generated via Gemini 2.5 (Nano Banana) in Adobe Photoshop.

00| INTRODUCTION



Fig 0.1 Photograph of Building in Downtown Cairo.

Experiencing Downtown Cairo

Walking through the streets of Downtown Cairo, I have always felt a sense of contradiction. It felt different from any other part of the city, its layers of history visible, yet not entirely understood. The grand Parisian facades, though neglected and altered over the years, remain photographed and romanticized, upheld as symbols of modernity and progress, shaping how Downtown Cairo is seen, remembered and represented. Encounters with the area, particularly through tourism, often direct visitors to the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir, presenting history through a carefully curated and controlled narrative. In this framing, the history of the area appears distant and contained, something to be observed rather than explored.

What has constantly drawn my attention, however, is not the monumental structures, but the spaces in between: the hidden bookstores, historic cafes, and decaying cinema halls. In these places, history was not staged but lived. People gathered, spoke, read, and returned over decades. Despite changes, neglect, and urban transformations, many of these spaces have endured, carrying traces of continuity. These forgotten spaces suggest a different way of understanding and experiencing Downtown Cairo, one rooted in social life and everyday practice. They hint at histories that unfold gradually through conversation, informal exchange, and performance, rather than through official and dominant narratives.

Making Cairo Modern

Cairo, Egypt's capital and one of the world's oldest cities, is a place of contrasts. Many scholars have observed that in numerous non-Western countries, capital cities are often structured as dual cities, a division that typically stems from their colonial legacies.[1] Cairo is no exception. To the eastern part of the city lay the old quarter, defined by narrow, unpaved streets known as *harat*, while the western side is known for its straight boulevards, wide sidewalks, building setbacks, and large roundabouts, or *mayadeen*.[2] These two areas of the city were often described in contrasting terms such as the historic and the modern, the native and the colonial, the Egyptian and the European. The modernization of Cairo is often attributed by scholars to either the French Expedition (1798-1801), Mohamed Ali Pasha's administration (1805-49), or his grandson's reign, Khedive Ismail (1863-79).[3]

The French invasion had a lasting impact on how Egypt was studied, represented, and controlled by European powers. Artists, scholars, and scientists were tasked with exploring and documenting Egypt. Their findings were compiled in the 23-volume *Description de l'Égypte*, a detailed account of the country that sparked Europe's growing fascination with Pharaonic Egypt.[4] This work played a key role in shaping how Egypt was perceived and studied in the West, marking the beginning of European efforts to control the narrative of Egypt's history. Ultimately, the French occupation ended with the defeat of the French Army, and power was restored to the Ottomans.[5]

Under the Ottoman rule of Muhammad Ali's and his first three successors, reformation plans included military, economic, educational, and cultural institutions, in addition to the country's infrastructure, aiming to situate Egypt as a regional power. One major initiative was the construction of a railroad between Alexandria and Cairo, completed in 1854. This project significantly reduced travel time from four days to just a few hours.[6] This transformation not only improved connectivity within Egypt but also drastically altered Cairo's access to the world and the world's access to Cairo.

1. Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Cairo: 1001 Years of the City Victorious* (Princeton University Press, 1971), 98, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb02308.0001.001.
2. Janet Abu-Lughod, "A Tale of Two Cities: The Origins of Modern Cairo." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 7, no. 4 (1965): 430-31, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417500003819.
3. Mounira Soliman, "Artistic interpretations of Downtown Cairo." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47, no. 4 (2011), 391- 403, DOI: 10.1080/17449855.2011.590312.
4. Arthur Goldschmidt, *Modern Egypt : The Formation of a Nation-State* (Westview Press, 2004), 16-17.
5. Goldschmidt, *Modern Egypt*, 16-17.
6. Abu-Lughod, "A Tale of Two Cities," 432-33.

As Janet Abu Lughod argues, Cairo's modern facade is a result of Khedive Ismail's attempt to make the city a part of Europe, a "Paris along the Nile." Looking to the west as a model for modernization, this led to Ismail turning his back on parts of the city that were deemed old and traditional. Inspired by Haussmann's Paris, his visit to the *Exposition Universelle* (1867) reinforced his vision for a modern Cairo. With the Suez Canal inauguration in 1869 approaching, he sought to impress European rulers but found Old Cairo inadequate. Instead, he commissioned Ismailiya, a district with wide streets, boulevards, and European-style architecture. Though only partially completed before the canal's opening, its urban framework laid the foundation for British colonial expansion.[7] There is much controversy about whether Khedive Ismail, or his predecessor Mohamed Ali, intended to separate the old, Fatimid Cairo, from the new, modern region, or if it was due to the British rule and their desire to construct an exclusive micro-colonial city within Cairo.[8]

Another phase of transformation took place under the British colonization of Egypt (1882-1956). The British administration reinforced the spatial and social divisions that had already begun under Ismail, prioritizing the expansion and modernization of the European district while largely neglecting Egyptian neighbourhoods. What was originally known as Ismailiya gradually came to be referred to as Downtown Cairo, *Wust El-Balad*, as it transitioned from a Khedival vision of modernity to the heart of British colonial administration.[9] The district became the political, commercial, and social center of British rule, featuring government offices, banks, luxury hotels, and exclusive clubs catering to Europeans and the Egyptian elite, while excluding the average Egyptian.[10]

7. Abu-Lughod, "A Tale of Two Cities," 439-43.
8. Soliman, "Artistic interpretations of Downtown Cairo," 394.
9. Mohamed Elshahed, "Facades of Modernity: Image, Performance, and Transformation in the Egyptian Metropolis," (Master's Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007), 20, https://dspace.mit.edu/bitstream/handle/1721.1/39305/173260608-MIT.pdf;sequence=2.
10. Soliman, "Artistic interpretations of Downtown Cairo," 394.

Fig 0.2 Timeline of Political Rule and Foreign Control in Egypt (1798-1956)





Fig 0.3 Sultan Hassan and Al-Rifai Mosques in the Qalaa district, Cairo in 1933. Photo by Carl Troll.



Fig 0.4 The Grand Savoy Hotel, at Soliman Pacha Square, Downtown Cairo in 1919. Photograph by Lilywhite Ltd., UK.

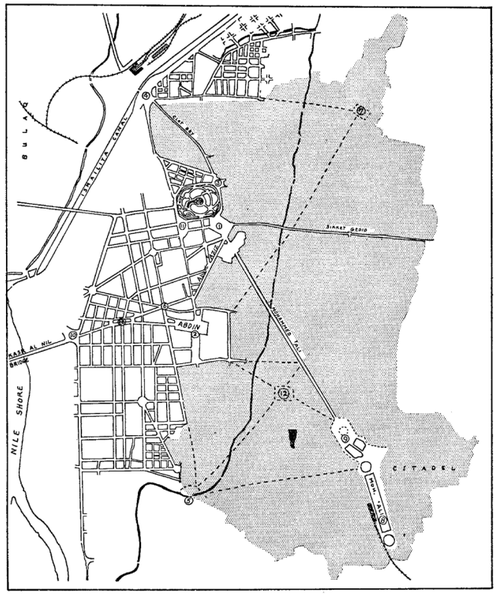


Fig 0.5 Streets of Old Cairo



Fig 0.6 Streets of Modern Cairo 1920s

Fig 0.7 Planning of Ismailiya under Khedive Ismail in 1867.



Map 1. City of Cairo showing existing settlement (grey) and new additions and changes planned by Ismā'īl c. 1867.

Much of the architecture in this area was built after the reign of Ismail when the city was occupied by the British. The district was laid out in wide streets and sidewalks with few buildings actually built and blocks remaining mostly vacant awaiting development.[11] The district was mostly built during the building boom in the period between 1897 and 1907 due to a major increase in the European population in Cairo.[12] This phase transformed the already planned Ismailiya district to become a contained colonial city.[13]

Beyond urban planning, British control extended into all aspects of governance, the economy, and public services. European nationals monopolized major government positions.[14] Foreign-run companies dominated utilities such as water, gas, and transportation, further reinforcing European economic interests in the city. Cairo's legal framework also reflected colonial priorities, with foreign nationals benefiting from the Capitulations system, which exempted them from Egyptian laws and placed them under the jurisdiction of their own consulates. Over time, these policies deepened economic and social inequalities, fueling resentment among Egyptians, particularly within the growing nationalist movement, which sought to reclaim control over the city.[15]

11. Elshahed, "Facades of Modernity," 29-31.
12. Ali Essam El-Shazly, "The Prospects of the 'European Quarter' in Cairo," *Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering* 2, no. 1 (2018): 179, DOI: 10.3130/jaabe.2.175.
13. Abu-loghod, *Cairo: 1001 Years of the City Victorious*, 114.
14. Abu-Lughod, "A Tale of Two Cities," 431.
15. Goldschmidt, *Modern Egypt*, 54-65.



Fig 0.8 Map of Downtown Cairo under British Rule (1914-1915)

Fig 0.9 Map of Cairo 1940, after British developments.

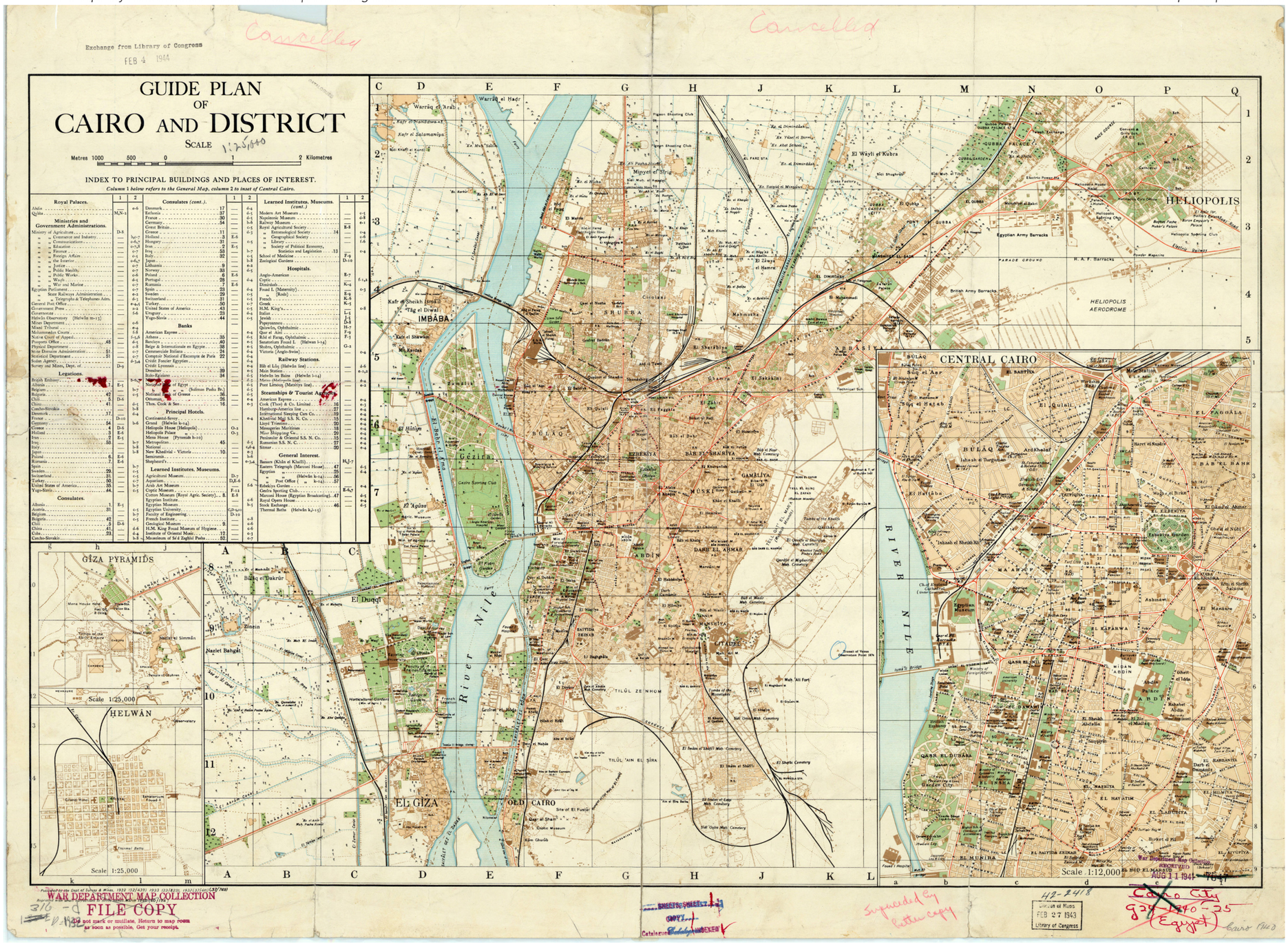


Fig. 0.10 Demonstrators on Kamel Street, Opera Square, Cairo, during the 1919 Revolution in Egypt.



Fig 0.11 Cafe in Cairo, 1935

Resisting Colonization

Resistance took place in different forms. It was deeply intertwined with visible acts of rebellion, protest, and destruction, shaping the city's urban and architectural identity. Major events including the Urabi Rebellion (1881–1882), the 1919 Revolution, the 1952 Revolution, and the Cairo Fire were moments of resistance that visibly challenged colonial rule and socio-political inequalities.[16] Although Egypt gained formal independence in 1922, British troops remained stationed in the country and continued to exert significant economical, political, and military influences until the 1952 Revolution.[17]

Resistance also manifested within everyday urban space, beyond visible confrontations. Bookshops, cafes, and performance venues enabled forms of cultural and intellectual exchange that challenged colonial authority without directly confronting it. They allowed ideas to circulate, relationships to form, and alternative narratives to persist. These spaces were intertwined with power structures, functioning within conditions of censorship, class hierarchy, and surveillance. Through these social exchanges, mass culture served as a vehicle for hidden resistance and critique of colonial and elite authority. Their significance lies in their capacity to sustain participation, dialogue, and collective awareness across social boundaries.[18]

This thesis does not seek to romanticize resistance. As Lila Abu-Loghod cautions, resistance should not be read as merely heroic acts of opposition, but as a lens through which the structures, norms and hierarchies that shape everyday life can be examined.[19] By turning attention to ordinary practices such as reading, listening, gathering, and performing, this thesis examines how resistance endured not through confrontation, but through continuity and repetition within everyday life. Architecturally, this frames space as an enabler for these practices to occur, persist and be remembered. As Henri Lefebvre suggests, social space operates as a space of thought and action, one that conceals more than it reveals, allowing both visible public expression and more covert, clandestine forms of action to unfold within it.[20]

16. Yasser Elsheshtawy, "Urban Transformations: The Great Cairo Fire and the Founding of a Modern Capital, 1952-1970," *Built Environment* 40, no. 3 (2014): 413, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43296905.
17. Sayyid-Marsot and Afaf Lutfi, *A Short History of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 82.
18. Ziad Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation through Popular Culture* (Stanford University Press, 2011), 1-2.
19. Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women," *American Ethnologist* 17, no. 1 (1990): 41-42, https://www.jstor.org/stable/645251.
20. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Blackwell, 1991), 26, 32-33.

Research Approach

In order to dissect how spatial experience is framed by temporal narratives, it is necessary to better comprehend the role that the heritage discourse plays in curating the built environment. Today, heritage preservation efforts in Downtown Cairo have largely focused on stabilizing buildings and restoring facades associated with the city's late nineteenth and early twentieth century development, driven by a nostalgic desire to remember an idealized past.[21] These interventions are frequently associated with tourism, real estate value, and cultural branding. While these efforts have succeeded in rescuing portions of the built fabric, they have also produced a selective narrative that privileges aesthetic value, monumental form, and elite architectural histories while sidelining the everyday practices through which Downtown Cairo historically functioned as a space of political, cultural, and intellectual life.[22] This mode of preservation reproduces an exclusivity that indirectly echoes the social divisions of the colonial period itself, when Downtown Cairo was designed, regulated, and symbolically claimed to serve foreign, upper-class, and elite society.

This thesis contends that the heritage of Downtown Cairo does not lie in the monumental alone, but encompasses the ordinary spaces and practices that sustained cultural circulation, political awareness, and collective memory amid conditions of colonial domination and state control. Practices such as reading, overhearing, gathering, storytelling, and performance did not always take spectacular or monumental form. Instead, they unfolded within bookshops, cafes, and performance venues integrated in daily urban life. Their political significance was not solely derived from visibility, rather, it was rooted in continuity, repetition, and participation. It is through these ordinary practices that broader segments of the population were able to engage with the district despite its social and spatial exclusivity.

This position aligns with critical heritage studies that challenge such top down approaches such as Laurajane Smith's critique of the Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD). The AHD treats heritage as a fixed object managed by experts and presented to the public for passive consumption. Within this model, memory is stabilized, curated, and often aestheticized, while social practices, informal uses, and non-expert forms of remembering are sidelined. Smith redefines heritage as a cultural process constituted through practices of engagement, negotiation,and meaning-making in the present.[23]

21. Elshahed, "Facades of Modernity," 50-51.
22. Mohamed Elshahed,"The prospects of gentrification in downtown Cairo: artists, private investment and the neglectful state," in *Global Gentrifications*, 1st ed, eds. Loretta Lees et al., (Policy Press, 2015), 129, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1t894bt.13.
23. Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, (Routledge, 2007).

Urban theory further supports this shift from object to practice. *The Practice of Everyday Life* conceptualizes everyday space as something actively produced through use. Michel de Certeau's distinction between institutional strategies and everyday tactics reveals how ordinary users appropriate, reinterpret, and rewrite space through routine acts.[24] This framework is crucial for understanding downtown Cairo not as a static urban form, but as a lived space continuously shaped by ordinary routines that often operate beyond institutional control. By foregrounding everyday life as an analytical lens, the research reframes resistance as an ongoing condition embedded in social space. This reading challenges dominant heritage narratives that present Downtown Cairo as an aestheticized district and instead positions it as a living archive shaped by use, encounter, and informal cultural infrastructures.

Ziad Fahmy's *Ordinary Egyptians* offers a historical lens through which everyday practices can be traced in Downtown Cairo. Fahmy foregrounds popular culture and mass communication as the primary infrastructure of political life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Egypt. His concept of media capitalism describes an integrated system in which print, orality, and audiovisual media worked together to circulate ideas beyond the confines of literacy, class, or formal education.[25] Within this system, Downtown Cairo emerged as a dense social fabric where spatial typologies such as bookshops, cafes, and performance venues enabled ordinary Egyptians to participate in cultural and intellectual life through everyday practices.

Asef Bayat extends this analysis by theorizing how ordinary practices acquired political force. His concepts of "social nonmovements" and "passive networks" describe forms of collective action that emerge not through formal organization or overt protest, but through the accumulation of ordinary acts carried out by large numbers of people. These practices became politically significant through repetition and scale. In urban contexts marked by surveillance and repression, political life often migrates into everyday routines.[26]

24. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press, 1988), 34-39.
25. Ziad Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians*.
26. Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Standford University Press, 2013).

Building on this theoretical foundation, this thesis proposes the concept of participatory remembrance as an alternative model of preservation. Rather than treating heritage as a fixed object to be curated by experts, participatory remembrance understands memory as something activated through use, negotiation, and collective experience. Architectural intervention, in this framework, does not monumentalize resistance but creates conditions for the reactivation of its memory within everyday life, allowing the participation of users from different backgrounds, educational levels, and social class in narrating and remembering the history of Downtown Cairo through their use in the present.

This thesis is guided by the following questions:

- How is the memory of Downtown Cairo produced and maintained through dominant modes of representation, and what histories are excluded or neutralized in this process?

- How have everyday spaces in Downtown Cairo historically produced collective memory and counter-narratives through ordinary use?

- How can architectural interventions engage ordinary use—rather than monumental representation—as a method for preserving and reactivating contested urban heritage and memory in Downtown Cairo?

On Methodology

This thesis adopts a methodological approach that combines architectural, historical, and cultural research with spatial analysis and design-based inquiry. By integrating analytical and interpretive methods, the research establishes a framework capable of addressing memory, heritage and resistance as lived and spatially embedded practices in everyday life.

literature review and theoretical framework

The research begins with an extensive literature review and theoretical framework drawing from critical heritage studies, urban theory, and Middle Eastern cultural history. This thesis builds on critical scholarship that challenges monument-centered understandings of heritage, resistance, and political life by foregrounding everyday practice as a primary site of memory and meaning.

historical research

Historical research forms another layer, situating Downtown Cairo within its broader political, social and cultural transformations. Archive materials, including historical maps, photographs, newspapers, and written accounts, are used to reconstruct the evolution of the urban fabric and its cultural infrastructures beyond official narratives. In addition, oral accounts, documentaries and recorded testimonies are incorporated to foreground lived experience and memory, introducing perspectives that are often deemed unimportant.

fieldwork and lived observation

Fieldwork is conducted through repeated visits to Downtown Cairo, moving through the district along multiple routes rather than fixed paths. Walking was employed as a primary method of inquiry, allowing attention to rhythms of everyday life, informal gathering, thresholds, and patterns of circulation that are often absent from official plans and representations. Informal conversations with shopkeepers, cafe workers, and passersby are treated as situated exchanges, offering insight into how spaces are remembered, used, and understood in the present. Photography and on-site documentation recorded spatial conditions, everyday practices, and recent preservation and redevelopment interventions, enabling a critical reading of how heritage narratives are currently produced on the ground and how certain practices are displaced, concealed, or rendered illegible through new regulations.

This fieldwork is intrinsically linked to my positionality. Growing up in Cairo, I bring a personal familiarity with the city's cultural, social, and linguistic contexts, informed by lived experience. As a native Arabic speaker, I can read archival material, follow oral histories, and engage in everyday conversations directly. This allows a clearer reading of how space is used and understood.

At the same time, I did not grow up in Downtown Cairo itself. My early encounters with the area were often mediated through museums, touristic routes, and officially curated narratives, positioning me at times as both insider and visitor. This distance is significant, as it mirrors the very mechanisms of selective memory and heritage framing that this thesis interrogates. Recognizing this shaped the direction of the research, pushing it away from official accounts and toward everyday routes, informal encounters, and ordinary uses that are often overlooked.

Researching resistance adds another layer of complexity. It is not a neutral topic, and in many cases it remains sensitive and difficult to access or discuss openly. For this reason, the thesis focuses on the period of British colonial rule as a historical entry point. This allows resistance to be examined at a temporal distance, where its forms can be studied more openly, while still offering insight into how similar dynamics operate in less visible ways today.

researcher positionality

The research therefore adopts a reflexive approach. My perspective is not treated as neutral, but as situated, shaped by my experiences, assumptions, and access.[27] Cairo itself is a city formed through layered histories of colonization, migration, and exchange, and any single viewpoint remains partial. Rather than attempting to remove this subjectivity, the research works through it, using it as a way to question, interpret, and connect different sources.

Mapping is employed as a critical and generative method. Drawing on James Corner, the map is treated as an operative surface, a staging ground where information can be collected, connected, marked, masked, and tested rather than simply displayed.[28] This applies both to the production of new maps and to the reading of existing ones. Historical and military maps are approached as active instruments that reveal how power, surveillance, and control were spatialized, and how everyday spaces were rendered visible or erased. Mapping therefore

27. Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow, *Interpretive Research Design : Concepts and Processes*. 1st edition. (Routledge, 2012), 91-104, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203854907.
28. James Corner, 2011. "The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention," in *The Map Reader: Theories of Mapping Practice and Cartographic Representation*, eds. Martin Dodge et al., 89-91, https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470979587.

mapping as critical method

functions as a means of uncovering relationships between lived practice, historical events, and spatial regulation, allowing Downtown Cairo to be read as a layered field of memory rather than a fixed urban form. Additionally, Corner's distinction between tracing and mapping allows the research to avoid reproducing what is already known and instead use mapping to uncover overlooked sites, informal networks, and layers of memory associated with resistance.

These analytical methods culminate in a design-based inquiry that translates research findings into spatial propositions. The proposed interventions do not aim to monumentalize resistance. Instead, they function as spatial devices that enable participation, encounter, and use, allowing memory to be reactivated in the present. Through this approach, architecture becomes a facilitator of participatory remembrance, supporting the preservation of heritage as a living, negotiated process.

design as spatial practice

Chapter 1 establishes the theoretical framework of the thesis by examining how memory and heritage are produced, institutionalized, and controlled, and how these processes have shaped heritage discourse and preservation practices in Downtown Cairo, revealing the limits of top-down approaches. **Chapter 2** shifts the lens from institutions to everyday life, offering a bottom-up reading of Downtown Cairo through the experiences and practices of ordinary Egyptians during the colonial period, and framing ordinary resistance through circulation, participation, and collective identity formation. **Chapter 3** focuses on three spatial typologies: the bookshop, the cafe, and spaces of performance. They are interpreted as sites of ordinary resistance, tracing through the case studies of Madbuli Bookshop, Café Riche, and Kasr el-Nil Theatre and Cinema how print, orality, and audiovisual media formed an interconnected network through which ideas circulated and memory was sustained in everyday urban space. **Chapter 4** introduces participatory remembrance as an alternative model of heritage preservation, reframing memory as a living, negotiated practice activated through use, encounter, and participation, and positioning architectural space as a facilitator rather than a container of memory. **Chapter 5** translates this framework into design interventions in Downtown Cairo, proposing site-specific spatial strategies that reactivate ordinary practices by enabling everyday use, dialogue, and movement to preserve memory as a lived, collective experience.

thesis structure

Fig 1.1 Downtown Cairo's Tahrir Square and Egyptian Museum.

01| MEMORY, HERITAGE, AND THE MAKING OF URBAN NARRATIVES

1.1 The Politics of Memory and Forgetting

memory is shaped through the politics of memory and forgetting

The memory of Downtown Cairo isn't confined solely to its facades or what is displayed in a museum; it's a collection of stories, interactions, and conflicts that have accumulated over time. Yet what is remembered and what is forgotten is formed not only by individual experience, but also by the politics of memory and forgetting. This includes the stories that are repeated and institutionalized versus those that are silenced or allowed to fade, and through the episodes that are romanticized and repeatedly revived, while others remain absent.

As Anita Bakshi notes, "representations of the past are often distorted, exaggerating certain moments in history and concealing others; selected historical periods are remembered and others are relegated to oblivion."[1] This selectivity is especially apparent in cities characterized by conflict and uneven power relations.[2] During British rule, the concentration of aristocrats and the growth of foreign communities in Downtown Cairo widened social inequalities within the Cairene society.[3] This division and historical struggle can be understood as laying the foundation for a contested urban memory, shaping how Downtown Cairo is remembered and interpreted today.

the impact of conflict on memory representation

Michel Foucault's examination of the relationship between power and knowledge further elucidates how this selectivity is generated. Foucault explains how memory is shaped through regimes of power that authorize certain narratives while rendering others illegible through the concept of "regime of truth."[4] This notion explains how truth is not discovered, but produced through institutional procedures.[5] In Downtown Cairo, ministries, planning authorities, heritage bodies, developers and academic experts participate in defining what is worthy of preservation and public display, producing a particular "truth" about the district.

power/knowledge structures

1. Anita Bakshi, "Urban Form and Memory Discourses: Spatial Practices in Contested Cities," *Journal of Urban Design* 19, no. 2 (2014): 190, https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2013.854696.
2. Bakshi, "Urban Form and Memory Discourses," 193.
3. Soheir Hawas, "Khedivial Cairo: The Genesis of the Modern City and the Prospects of its Downtown," in *Routledge Handbook on Cairo: Histories, Representations and Discourses*, ed. Nezar AlSayyad, (Routledge, 2022), 124.
4. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977, ed.* Colin Gordon (Pantheon Books, 1980), 109-133.
5. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 109-133.

forgetting as a structured process

Accordingly, the act of forgetting can be understood as a deliberate process. It is integrated within the methods of archiving, narrating, and spatializing histories. However, what is excluded from official memory is not entirely erased, but rather displaced into what remains unrecognized. Understanding memory as a political and spatial phenomenon reveals the constraints of reading Downtown Cairo's past as a coherent or complete narrative. It is crucial to not only question whether an account is accurate or distorted, but also understand whose histories dominate, whose are forgotten, and through which mechanisms remembrance is organized. These questions are necessary for examining how museums, heritage discourse and preservation practices structure memory in Downtown Cairo.

Architecture has long played a central role in how societies remember and

1.2 From Mnemonic Architecture to Institutional Memory

architecture as a mnemonic device

forget. Long before preservation laws, archives or museums, built forms served as mnemonic devices, structures that organized memory spatially. Frances Yates traces the historical link between memory and architecture, revealing how the built environment was once key to systems of recollection. This relationship originates in classical rhetoric, where orators developed what became known as the method of loci.[6] The orator would imagine a familiar architectural setting such as a colonnade or a temple, and mentally place striking images within specific locations. By walking through this space in sequence, the orator could retrieve each part of particularly long speeches in order.[7] The act of remembering thus became a spatial practice, relying on constructing and navigating an internal architecture of meaning.

from mnemonic to institutional

Over time, this mnemonic function evolved into an institutionalized and formal system. The architectural ordering of knowledge that once operated within the mind developed into an external framework. What began as a technique for personal recollection evolved into a tool for classifying, displaying and controlling the past. In this way, architecture played a role in dictating memory, determining what forms of memory were preserved, how they were organized, and which narratives were forgotten.

early architectural manifestations for spatializing memory

One of the early architectural manifestations of this shift can be found in Giulio Camillo's memory theatre, developed in the early sixteenth century. The theatre sought to contain and organize human knowledge through a carefully structured spatial order and symbolic imagery.[8] Its logic reversed that of conventional theatre: the rising tiers of seats became the stage, while the observer stood in the place of the traditional stage. The semi-circular structure was divided into zones, each associated with mythological figures, a scheme for organizing and remembering knowledge.[9] The modern museum can be read as inheriting this logic, transforming mnemonic architecture into a physical apparatus for display and categorization. Both the memory theatre and the museum rely on the same architectural principle: that knowledge can be spatially constructed, and that memory can be governed through design.

6. Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (University of Chicago Press, 1966), 1-8.
7. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, 1-8.
8. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, 129-159.
9. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, 129-159.

acknowledging museums' colonial histories

While museums have historically operated through colonial logics of classification, extraction, and authority, these structures are increasingly being challenged within the field itself. The International Council of Museums (ICOM), as the leading global organization for museum professionals, formally acknowledged museums' colonial histories and the importance of addressing their ongoing impacts.[10] Museums must now consider the right to memory and serve as tools for diverse groups to reclaim their place in history.[11] ICOM discussed integrating cultural policies and socio-economic strategies to promote holistic and inclusive development through community engagement, participatory governance, and practices that empower local and marginalized groups to actively shape museum narratives.[12]

participatory approaches beyond the museum

While these initiatives mark an important shift toward more inclusive and dialogic forms of institutional memory, they nonetheless remain largely situated within museum structures. This raises a broader question central to this thesis: how participatory approaches to memory might extend beyond institutional boundaries and into the everyday urban spaces where memory is lived, negotiated, and continually reactivated.

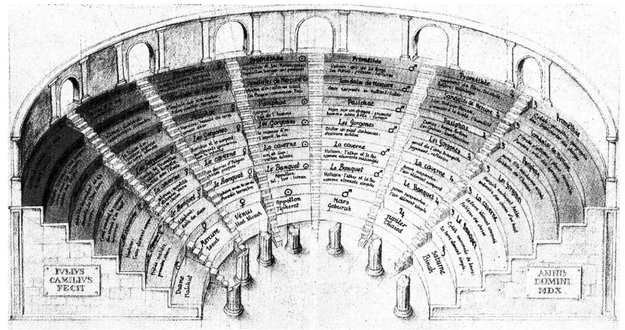


Fig 1.2 Camillo's Memory Theatre.

10. Interntational Countil on Museums,"Advancing Decolonisation in Museums,"*ICOM*, June 25, 2024, https://icom.museum/en/news/advancing-decolonisation-in-museums/.
11. International Council of Museums, "ICOM & G20: Social Museology Informing Cultural Policies," *ICOM*, December 22, 2025, https://icom.museum/en/news/icom-g20-social-museology-informing-cultural-policies/.
12. International Council of Museums, "ICOM & G20."

egypt's museum history

In Egypt, the origins of Museums goes back to the nineteenth century. An interest in Egyptian antiquity and museology arose from the French expedition, which drew attention to ancient Egyptian heritage and opened Western markets for Egyptian antiques.[13] The Egyptian Museum in Tahrir, built in 1902, was the first purpose built national museum in the Middle East. Designed by the French architect Marcel Dourgnon, whose proposal won an international design competition, the building represented a significant shift as the region's first museum specifically constructed to house antiquities.[14]

Nevertheless, the building's Beaux-Arts, Neoclassical design is striking. Its facade features images of Egyptian goddesses, but they are depicted in a late classical Greek style.[15] The marble panels carry inscriptions in Latin, a language most Egyptians could not read. Although the Egyptian Museum became a cornerstone of Egyptology worldwide, housing over 120,000 artifacts and drawing 6500 visitors per day during peak season before 2011.[16] However, it remained oddly disconnected from the urban and social histories surrounding it. Located at the heart of Downtown Cairo, the museum is spatially and ideologically isolated from its immediate surroundings. It tells the story of ancient Egypt, but not of modern Cairo.

disconnection of the museum

While other museums in the area, such as the Museum of Arab Art, focus on different historical periods, it has never been in direct competition with the Tahrir Museum, which costed four times as much to build in 1902 and attracts six times as many visitors.[17] However, the opening of the Grand Egyptian Museum has further impacted its position. With key artifacts relocated and tourist traffic redirected, the future role of the Tahrir museum remains uncertain.[18] This shift raises questions about whom the institution serves.

the uncertain future of the Egyptian Museum

13. Donald M. Reid, "Indigenous Egyptology: The Decolonization of a Profession?" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105, no. 2 (1985), 234, https://doi.org/10.2307/601703.
14. Christina Riggs, "Colonial Visions: Egyptian Antiquities and Contested Histories in the Cairo Museum." *Museum Worlds* 1, no. 1 (2013): 70, https://doi.org/10.3167/armw.2013.010105.
15. Riggs, "Colonial Visions," 70.
16. Wendy Doyon, "The Poetics of the Egyptian Museum Practice," *British Museum Studies in Ancient Egypt and Sudan* 10, (2008), 9. https://britishmuseum.iro.bl.uk/concern/generic_works/e758e21b-0c02-44b5-9e82-c9eeb3c81a2f?locale=en%29..
17. Donald M. Reid, *Whose Pharaohs? Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I*, 1st ed, (University of California Press, 2002), 239, https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520930797.
18. Hamza Hendawi, "Can Cairo's Egyptian Museum (the one without the Grand in its title) preserve its place on the tourist trail?" *The National News*, Nov 28, 2025, https://www.thenationalnews.com/news/mena/2025/11/28/can-cairos-egyptian-museum-the-one-without-the-grand-in-its-title-preserve-its-place-on-the-tourist-trail/

a critique of egyptian museum systems

Mohamed Gamal Rashed critiques the Egyptian museum system for its exclusionary narratives and policies. He argues that Egyptian museums often fail to engage the local population, serving the expectations of global tourists and foreign scholars instead.[19] He advocates for a new museological approach that facilitates dialogue, promotes social inclusion, and responds to the needs of contemporary Egyptian society, where visitors participate and learn by doing. [20] One way of breaking down barriers is to move beyond the museum and explore sites, as Egypt has sites with rich heritage almost everywhere.[21] He explains that "sites are more thrilling and easier to access," moving beyond displays that offer limited interpretation. [22]





Fig 1.3 Museum showcasing Ancient Egyptian Artifacts.

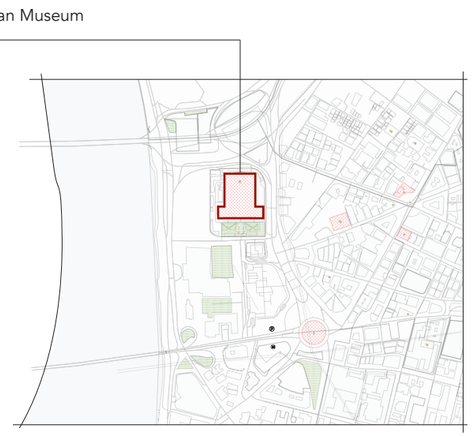


Fig 1.4 Map locating Egyptian Museum.

19. Mohamed Gamal Rashed, "The Museums of Egypt Speak for Whom," *CIPEG Journal*, no.1 (2017): 3-5, https://doi.org/10.11588/cipeg.2017.1.40324.
20. Rashed, "The Museums of Egypt Speak for Whom", 8.
21. Rashed, "The Museums of Egypt Speak for Whom", 7.
22. Rashed, "The Museums of Egypt Speak for Whom", 8.

Fig 1.5 The Egyptian Museum.

1.3 Downtown Cairo's Heritage Discourse

Heritage discourse as a mechanism of selective memory

The previous section traced the process by which memory became institutionalized within museums, fixed, categorized, and separated from everyday life. A parallel process unfolds in the city through heritage discourse. The past is curated, where certain narratives are protected, while others omitted.[23] Downtown Cairo's current form is therefore also a result of the particular nuances of heritage discourses, marked by its colonial history and postcolonial responses.

State-led reshaping of historical narrative after British rule

The politics of memory in Downtown Cairo became visible after the British rule ended. Under Gamal Abdel Nasser, former Egyptian president (1954-1970), the historical narrative was reshaped to serve national identity. The official publication by the Ministry of Culture, *Cairo 969-1969,* illustrates this selective framing. The text offers a detailed history of the city, tracing Pharaonic, Coptic, and Islamic periods until the 16th century, while largely excluding the Ottoman and colonial eras.[24] The transformations under Mohamed Ali, Khedive Ismail, and the British are almost entirely erased.[25]

re-writing memory through the urban fabric

In addition, the restructuring of memory extended into the urban fabric itself. It is through the power of naming, placing, or destroying that civic memory, identities and stories of the past are shaped. [26] Post-independence interventions included renaming streets and squares—most notably Ismailiya Square becoming Tahrir (liberation) Square.[27] Colonial military structures such as Kasr el-Nil barracks were demolished, architectural language shifted away from the *Belle Époque*[28] aesthetic (see Fig 1.6), and property confiscations and the displacement of foreign residents altered the social composition of the district.[29] Downtown was reframed and entered a period of prolonged neglect.

23. Bakshi, "Urban Form and Memory Discourses," 190.
24. Mohamed Elshahed, "Facades of Modernity: Image, Performance, and Transformation in the Egyptian Metropolis," (Master's Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007), 46.
25. Elshahed, "Facades of Modernity," 46.
26. Sally Morgan, "Memory and the Merchants: Commemoration and Civic Identity," *International Journal of Heritage Studies IJHS* 4, no. 2 (1998): 103–104, https://doio-rg/10.1080/13527259808722225.
27. Elshahed, "Facades of Modernity," 42-43.
28. *Belle Époque* architecture refers to European inspired buildings in Downtown Cairo constructed between 1860s and 1940s.
29. Elshahed, "Facades of Modernity," 42-43.

The 1992 earthquake and the rise of nostalgia

The 1992 earthquake, however, marked a significant turning point. The destruction of *Belle Époque* architecture triggered public nostalgia and renewed attention to the district's architectural value.[30] Photographic surveys aimed to capture memories of the former atmosphere by documenting ornamental details, fading wall letterings, and neglected spaces. Building data was collected and architectural drawings recorded what was left of the district's facades.[31] What was once dismissed as inauthentic began to be reconsidered as valuable. Galila El Kadi explains how this recognition occurred through the press, television, photographs, and literature, which ignited a sense of nostalgia and public awareness for the need to protect these buildings.[32]

Institutional designation of Downtown as heritage

In 2010, Downtown Cairo was officially designated a heritage district by the National Organization for Urban Harmony (NOUH).[33] Earlier measures, including listing laws and facade restoration programs, had already begun regulating the area, such as Law No 44 titled "Restoration of Khedivial Cairo's Civil Image."[34] Nevertheless, these initiatives mainly focused on monumental architectural rather than on comprehensive policy or social integration. Preservation emerged through regulation and visual repair, while deeper questions about the district's layered history remained unresolved.

30. Galila El Kadi, "Modern Heritage in Cairo: History and Current Outlooks," *Museum International* 57, no. 1–2 (2005): 132, https://doi.org/10.51952/9781447313496.ch007.
31. Vittoria Capresi and Barbara Pampe, *Discovering Downtown Cairo : Architecture ... and Stories* (Jovis, 2015), 6-8.
32. El Kadi, "Modern Heritage in Cairo," 132.
33. NOUH, "The National Organization of Urban Harmony", established in 2001 according to a presidential decree no. 37. See El Kadi, "Modern Heritage in Cairo."
34. Hawas,"Khedivial Cairo", 137.



Fig 1.6 Architectural transformation in Egypt after the 1952 revolution under Gamal Abdel Nasser, marked by state-driven socialist modernism that replaced colonial urban aesthetics.

the authorized heritage discourse

As heritage became part of formal policy frameworks, the memory of Downtown Cairo was increasingly shaped through professional and regulatory systems. In this context, Laurajane Smith's concept of the Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD) becomes critical. The AHD is reliant on power/knowledge claims, privileging expert interpretation, aesthetic value and grand monumentality, thus promoting a specific Western elite cultural value system.[35] In Downtown Cairo, this framework contributed to a preservation model that is monumental, elitist, and commercially inspired.

challenging downtown cairo's official narrative

Mohamed Elshahed elaborates on how this discourse constructs a narrative that Downtown Cairo is merely a colonial product. Instead, he contends that its development was part of a deliberate modernization process. He examines how state neglect and real estate speculation have led to the district's degradation, with private developers now attempting to repackage this heritage for elite consumption and tourism.[36] However, both El Kadi and Elshahed highlight that Downtown Cairo is not just a site of historical nostalgia but a space of ongoing social and cultural production.

35. Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (Routledge, 2007), 11.
36. Mohamed Elshahed, "The Prospects of Gentrification in Downtown Cairo: Artists, Private Investment and the Neglectful State," *in Global Gentrifications*, eds. Ernesto López-Morales, Loretta Lees, and Hyun Bang Shin (Global Gentrifications, 2015), 121–42.



Fig 1.7 Omar Effendi department store (formerly Orsodi-Back) in downtown Cairo was built in Neo-Baroque style in 1909 by French architect Raoul Brandon.

1.4 Current Approaches to Preservation in Downtown Cairo

the impact of discourse on preservation

The way the heritage narrative of Downtown Cairo has been constructed continues to shape how preservation is approached today. Walking through the district, it is evident that Downtown is in the process of being rescripted through selective restoration, branding, and curated programming. The district is treated as an archive, where certain images, periods, and atmospheres are stabilized while others are excluded.[37]

the intersection of heritage discourse and real estate logic

Heritage theory reminds us that preservation is never neutral. Decisions about what to restore, how to restore it, and for whom inevitably reflect political, economic, and cultural priorities.[38] In contemporary Downtown Cairo, preservation operates at the intersection of heritage discourse and real estate logic, where architectural value is often mobilized to support investment, tourism, and image-making.[39] The boundedness of the discourse causes broader social, political, and cultural tensions embedded in the urban fabric to be displaced or neutralized.[40]

private-led revitalization

Recent preservation efforts are largely led by private initiatives, most notably Al Ismaelia for Real Estate Investment, alongside government-led restoration programs.[41] These initiatives have undeniably succeeded in rescuing many historic buildings from decay and renewed public attention to Downtown's architectural value. Boutique hotels, cultural venues, and co-working spaces have introduced new forms of activity, demonstrating how preservation can coexist with contemporary use. However, this model of heritage revival, while effective in conserving the physical fabric, also reshapes the social one. Memory is increasingly reframed and relocated indoors, behind restored facades, curated interiors, and programmed cultural experiences, subtly detaching it from the open, informal life of the street.

37. Bakshi, "Urban Form and Memory Discourses," 191.
38. Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 32.
39. Elshahed, "The Prospects of Gentrification in Downtown Cairo," 135-37.
40. Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 30-31.
41. Elshahed, "The Prospects of Gentrification in Downtown Cairo", 135-37.

market-driven conservation and heritage as economic productivity

Al Ismaelia, founded in 2008, explicitly frames its mission as "honoring Downtown Cairo's historic grandeur while unlocking its modern potential."[42] To date, the company has acquired more than twenty-five buildings in the area, transforming many into boutique hotels, serviced apartments, and curated cultural destinations. As its managing director Karim El-Shafei explains, economic return is treated as a prerequisite for conservation: vacant apartments are renovated and monetized to ensure their continued productivity.[43] This logic reveals how heritage is increasingly justified through market viability, aligning preservation with profitability.

reduction of memory to visual consumption

The selectivity of this approach becomes legible through design decisions. Restored facades, standardized signage, and carefully curated narratives produce an image of Downtown as it is meant to be remembered, often emphasizing elegance, cosmopolitanism, and nostalgia.[44] In this model, users are conceived as transient consumers rather than inhabiting or contributing to the memory of a place. Acts of remembrance are reduced to observation, and engagement is flattened into visual consumption. They neglect to account for the forms of memory that circulate outside curated displays and expert interpretations, memories that are lived, overheard, performed, and practiced within everyday urban life.

emerging experiments

Yet within this context, there are interventions that experiment with alternative modes of engaging space. These projects do not fully escape institutional or economic frameworks, but they offer strategies that begin to move toward lived experience.

42. "Our Story", *Al Ismaelia*, accessed June 10, 2025, https://al-ismaelia.com/our-story/.
43. "Downtown Cairo battles to keep cosmopolitan heritage alive", *The Arab Weekly*, Dec 27, 2019, https://thearabweekly.com/Downtown-cairo-battles-keep-cosmopolitan-heritage-alive.
44. Elshahed, "The Prospects of Gentrification in Downtown Cairo," 135-37.

1.5 Case Studies

1.5.1 Al Ismaelia's Radio Passage and Spatial Strategies

Within Downtown Cairo, certain interventions experiment with alternative modes of engaging with space, revealing possibilities that move toward lived experience. Among recent initiatives, Al Ismaelia's "Radio Lane" intervention stands out for its attempt to reposition a historic cultural site within Downtown Cairo's contemporary urban life. The project connects Cinema Radio, built in the 1930s and part of the golden age of Egyptian cinema,[45] to the street. Alongside renovating Cinema Radio's exterior and interior, the project creates a passage that activates the street as a curated heritage environment, organizing a spatial experience at the urban scale. Using graphic signage, repeated arches, lighting strategies, directional markers, and a monochromatic palette, the project creates a sequence of movement that guides users.

The passage evolves into an experiential space that reconnects the user to urban life. In that sense, the project succeeds in breaking the enclosure typical of many heritage interventions. Additionally, it demonstrates how wayfinding devices, spatial cues and visual language can choreograph movement. However, the narrative dimension of the project remains largely commercial leading to a fashion and retail hub. The passage is activated through movement, but the storytelling aligns with branding, curated identity, and market-driven revitalization.

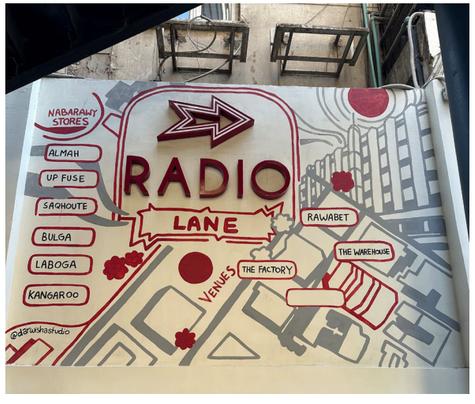


Fig 1.8 Radio Lane Way-finding Map.

45. Elshahed, "The Prospects of Gentrification in Downtown Cairo," 136.



Fig 1.9 Photograph of Cinema Radio Entrance.



Fig 1.10 Wall of Fame

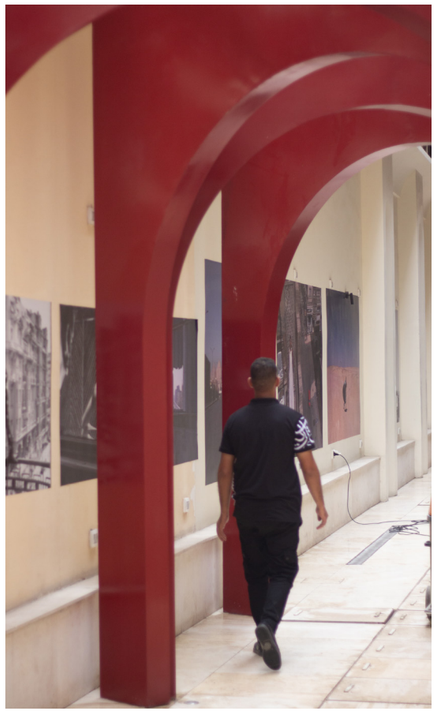


Fig 1.11 Red Arches in Passage



Fig 1.12 Enclosed Passage with lighting and sound



Fig 1.13 Wayfinding Arrow

Fig 1.14 Passage leads to a fashion and retail hub.

1.5.2 CLUSTER and Alternative Urban Narratives

While projects such as the Radio Lane demonstrate how heritage can be reactivated through spatial sequencing and design control, other initiatives in Downtown Cairo explore memory with a different approach. Among the most significant of these is the work of the Cairo Lab for Urban Studies, Training and Environmental Research, known as CLUSTER. Their work seeks to reframe how the district can be experienced and understood, engaging with the city as a space of layered histories.

Founded in 2011, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring Revolution, CLUSTER emerged during a period of intensified debate around public space, urban rights, and politics of representation. Its work operates at the intersection of critical discourse and professional practice, with an emphasis on participatory design processes.[46] Central to its methodology is the negotiation between formal/institutional and everyday urban informalities, that are often excluded from official development frameworks.[47] CLUSTER approaches informality not as a problem, but as a spatial and social condition that reveal alternative narratives.

One of CLUSTER's most significant contributions to Downtown Cairo is its research on informal passageways. Through an online mapping platform, the initiative cataloged and analyzed this overlooked network. These passageways function as a parallel spatial system. They host small businesses, workshops, cafes, informal gathering points, and different forms of circulation that operate outside visibility. They sit between public and private, formal and informal, and offer alternative ways of inhabiting and claiming the city.[48] By mapping these passageways and making them navigable, CLUSTER shifts attention away from monumental axes and toward the in-between spaces where everyday life unfolds. This reframing works toward destabilizing the dominant image of Downtown Cairo.

Beyond mapping, CLUSTER has organized alternative cultural tours of Downtown Cairo that seek to unravel histories absent from official narratives. These tours include explorations of sites featured in Egyptian cinema and literature, modernist architecture designed by pioneering Egyptian architects, and experiential routes

46. "About Cluster", *Cluster*, accessed June 15, 2025, https://clustercairo.org/about-cluster/.
47. "About Cluster"
48. "Cairo Downtown Passageways," *Cluster Mapping Initiative*, accessed June 15, 2025, https://passageways.clustermappinginitiative.org/en/about/cairo-downtown-passageways-0.

through back alleys and side streets.[49] Unlike conventional heritage tours that center monumental buildings and historical sites, these tours situate memory within lived space and embodied experience.

One limitation of these tours however is that they depend on a guide, hence the experience remains curated to an extent. The alternative narrative is still framed and delivered by an expert. Yet the strength of this approach lies in its redirection of attention, positioning the user from a passive observer of monumental heritage to an active participant in navigating layered urban realities. Memory here is encountered through movement and proximity rather than through vitrines and plaques.

In addition to its alternative tours and mapping initiatives, CLUSTER has undertaken a number of pilot projects aimed at improving Downtown's informal passageways. These interventions focus on enhancing accessibility, safety, and visibility through improved lighting and spatial organization, expanded the passageway's potential uses, and supporting diverse and layered forms of activity.

The previous analysis of the Radio Passage demonstrates how design can guide experience, providing a spatial methodology. Additionally, the work of CLUSTER demonstrates how narrative can be expanded beyond institutional and commercial frameworks. This thesis builds on lessons learned from both, aiming to offer new ways of experiencing and understanding Downtown Cairo. It proposes a model in which narrative is embedded within spatial design itself, allowing the experience to be self-guided. Meaning is not delivered through a traditional tour, but encountered through movement and use. In this approach, narrative and design are inseparable. Architectural intervention becomes a medium through which users construct their own readings of the city.

To begin this process, the thesis focuses on uncovering an alternative narrative among the many that constitute Downtown Cairo: the memory of resistance. The following chapter turns to the spatial practices and everyday acts through which

49. "Re-framing Downtown Cairo: Downtown Tours," *Cluster Mapping Initiative*, accessed June 15, 2025, https://passageways.clustermappinginitiative.org/en/tour/re-framing-downtown-cairo-downtown-tours.

resistance to colonization has endured in Downtown Cairo. By shifting attention from institutions to lived space, from display to practice, and from heritage objects to social relations, the thesis moves toward a reading of resistance not as an exceptional event, but as an ordinary, ongoing condition embedded in the city's fabric.

As Michel de Certeau claims, "the practice of everyday life" is the domain through which the elements excluded can be permitted to enter the discourse, where users which are commonly assumed to be passive operate beyond the established rules.[50] This direction establishes everyday life as a critical lens through which Downtown Cairo's past can be reread, understood, and reactivated beyond authorized narratives. This research establishes the historical and spatial foundations required to later translate memory into design, ensuring that intervention emerges from these narratives.

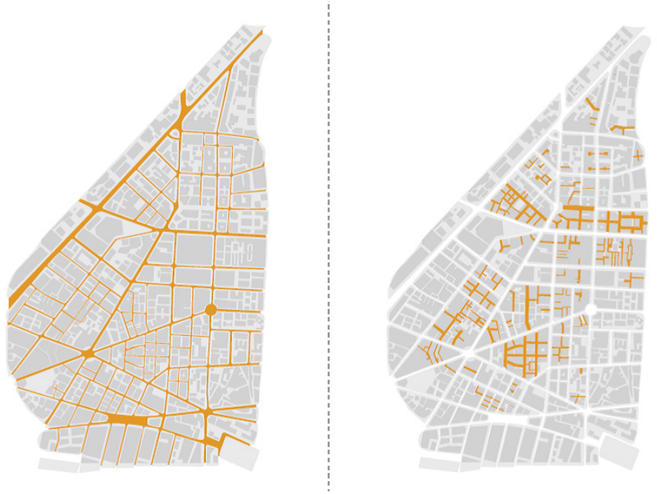


Fig 1.15 Downtown Cairo Passageways Mapping by CLUSTER.

50. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press, 1988), xi-xxiv.

Fig 1.16 Philips Passageway Project. Introducing screening.





Fig 1.17 Downtown Tours by CLUSTER.

02| DOWNTOWN CAIRO THROUGH THE LENS OF ORDINARY LIFE

2.1 Ordinary Life as Intangible Heritage

reading Downtown through ordinary life

Instead of approaching Downtown Cairo through top-down forms of memory, this chapter interprets the district through the experiences and practices of ordinary Egyptians during the period of colonial domination. These practices align with Egyptian popular culture, enabling the inclusion of the widest possible audience, drawn from different backgrounds, social classes, and levels of education.[1] The goal is to reframe how Downtown Cairo is remembered and understood beyond official accounts.

media capitalism and everyday participation

Ziad Fahmy's *Ordinary Egyptians* becomes central, offering a methodological lens through which to interpret this everyday dimension of Downtown Cairo. Focusing on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Fahmy traces how popular culture structured daily life and enabled broad participation in cultural and intellectual exchange. He demonstrates how songs, satire, newspapers, theatre, and cinema were woven into everyday routines, making cultural engagement familiar.[2] He refers to this system as media capitalism, countering Benedict Anderson's model of print capitalism. Unlike print capitalism, which privileges literacy, media capitalism encompasses various communication, textual, oral, and audiovisual modes that allow for greater public participation.[3] The use of colloquial Egyptian Arabic, *al-lugha al-'ammiyya* (the common people's language), as a unifying medium was vital, especially given a literacy rate of 6.8% in 1917, cultural life could not rely on print alone. It also permitted "hidden transcripts" of resistance and critiques of colonial and elite authority to emerge quietly.[4] Downtown Cairo, as a dense social and cultural center, served as a space where these diverse forms intersected.

identity reproduced through the mundane

Contemporary heritage narratives frequently frame the monumental, the rare, or the aesthetically impressive as symbols of national identity.[5] Nevertheless, it is often the everyday routines, familiar gestures, and common activities that repeatedly reinforce collective identity.[6] National belonging is often sustained through repeated, unnoticed practices embedded in daily life. This perspective offers a different view of Downtown, one that may oppose dominant narratives. As Paul Connerton emphasizes, writing oppositional history "preserves the memory of social groups whose voice would otherwise have been silenced."[7]

1. Ziad Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation through Popular Culture* (Stanford University Press, 2011), 4.
2. Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians,* 4.
3. Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians*, 15-16.
4. Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians*, 2- 6.
5. Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (Routledge, 2007), 2-5.
6. Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (Sage, 1995), 15-16.
7. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 15.

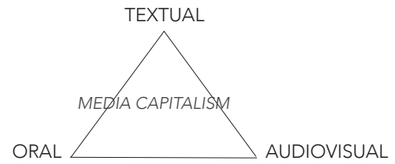


Fig 2.1 Interpretation of Mass Capitalism by Ziad Fahmy.

intangible heritage as living practice

This shift aligns with an understanding of heritage as intangible, rather than treating heritage as a fixed object or a preserved artifact. Smith emphasizes that "there is no such thing as heritage" and that all heritage is intangible, highlighting instead its role as an act of communication and meaning-making, an experience.[8] Heritage is a cultural and social process involving acts of remembering that help us understand and engage with the present. It serves to construct, reconstruct, and negotiate identities and social values, embodying acts of remembrance and communication. Additionally, heritage can be a resource for challenging and redefining established values. While institutional frameworks such as UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage acknowledge the importance of practices, expressions, and knowledge, they often risk freezing cultural forms in time, detaching them from the social conditions that give them meaning.[9] The true value of intangible heritage is its ability to remain dynamic and embedded in daily life. This thesis aims to develop ways to remember intangible heritage that retain its dynamism.

heritage as mutual and participatory benefit

In the Egyptian context, May al-Ibrashy advances a similar perspective. Working in Historic Islamic Cairo, she defines heritage as accumulated knowledge about how communities inhabit space, manage resources, and sustain social life over time.[10] Her projects demonstrate this through collaborative urban interventions such as street art, mapping, and signage produced with local street artists.[11] These initiatives improve the visual environment, but also redistribute agency and value. Visitors benefit from clearer navigation and deeper engagement with place, while local artists gain economic opportunity, visibility, and a role in shaping their own urban context, where participation becomes productive and heritage becomes a shared process that generates mutual benefit. Downtown Cairo remains largely governed by economic and tourism driven approaches to heritage, becoming a critical field for rethinking heritage as a lived practice.

8. Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 13-14.
9. Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 106-10.
10. May al-Ibrashy, "Heritage is the foundation for resilience in cities", *Citiestobe*, May 2023, https://citiestobe.com/story/heritage-is-the-foundation-for-resilience-in-cities/.
11. "Urban Interventions", *Atharlina*, accessed Aug 4, 2025, https://atharlina.com/about/.

Fig 2.2 Bounds Map of Cairo, 1946. Credit: ©The British Library Board.

2.2 The Politics of the Ordinary

politics embedded in everyday life

To understand ordinary life as intangible heritage in Downtown Cairo is also to recognize its political force. While Fahmy reveals how political ideas circulated culturally, Asef Bayat provides a framework for understanding how everyday life gains political significance. Bayat's concept of "social nonmovements" refers to forms of collective action performed by noncollective actors that are rarely guided or organized.[12] Although fragmented, they acquire power through the cumulative effect of these ordinary practices. These actions are often oriented toward dignity, survival, or fairness rather than ideological confrontation, yet over time they reshape norms, expectations, and political awareness.[13]

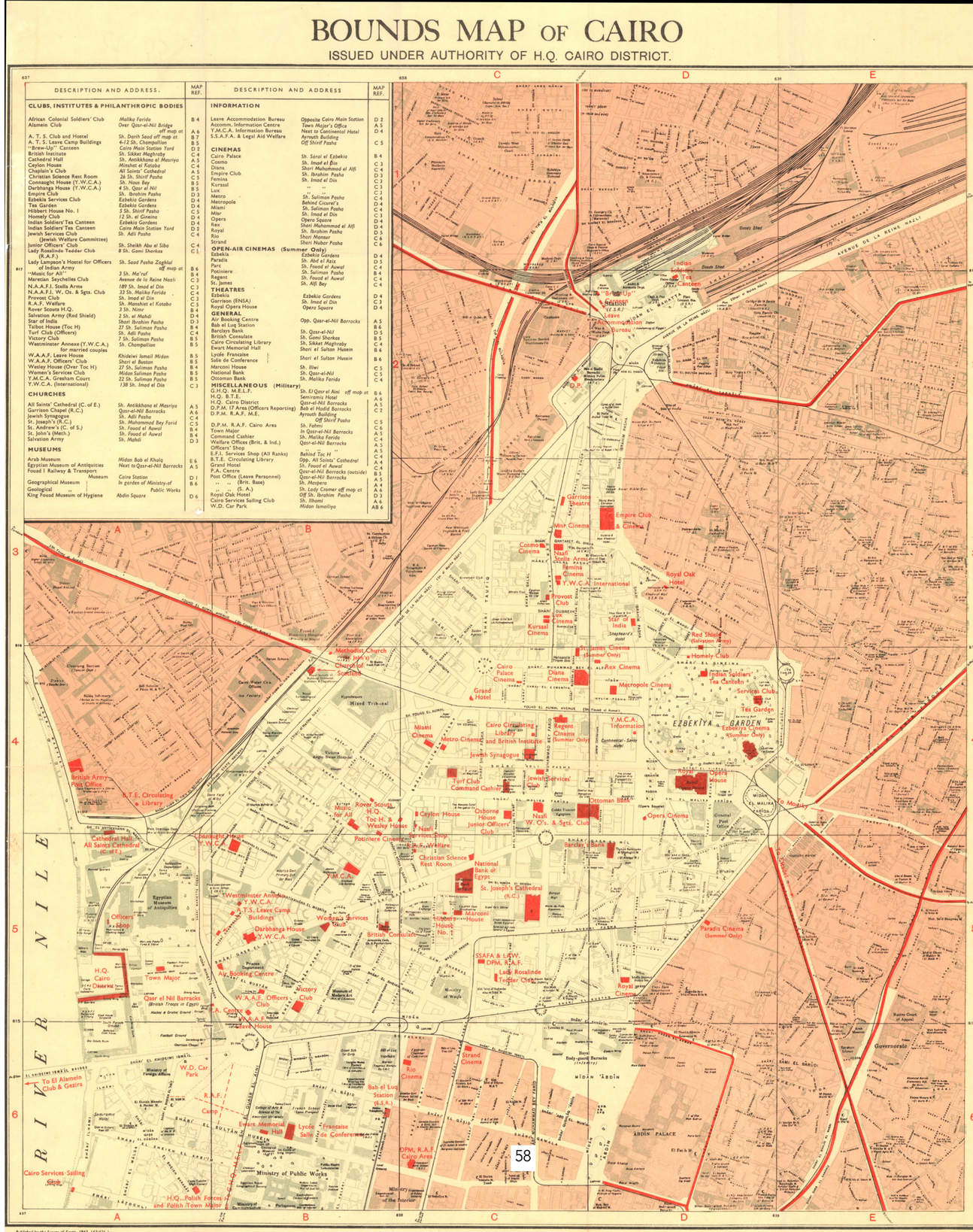
colonial mapping and ordinary space

In colonial military maps of Downtown Cairo, the political significance of everyday space is made explicit. A map titled "The Bounds of Cairo," produced by the British Ministry of Defense in 1946 and overlaid onto a 1943 survey map of the city, was produced amid escalating anti-colonial unrest following protests in Ismailiya Square (now Tahrir Square).[14] Instead of highlighting monuments or administrative boundaries, the map categorizes areas according to perceived security risk. Neighborhoods shaded in pink were designated "out of bounds" for British troops, where movement was discouraged or prohibited.[15]

ordinary districts as threat

What stands out is that these restricted zones were not sites of organized combat or formal protest. They were ordinary urban districts embedded in everyday life. The map depicts a colonial understanding of resistance as widespread, social, and spatially embedded. Streets, cafes, markets, and residential areas became perceived as threatening because of the dense social interaction and collective presence. The key question is how resistance in everyday life persisted within the highly controlled and surveilled area like Downtown Cairo.

12. Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Standford University Press, 2013), 15.
13. Bayat, *Life as Politics*, 15.
14. Hazem Ziada, "Of Bounds and Coffers," *Jadaliyya*, January 20, 2017, https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/33940.
15. Hazem Ziada, "Of Bounds and Coffers."



"the power of big numbers"

Bayat's notion of the "quiet encroachment of the ordinary" clarifies how these small, dispersed practices accumulate political power over time.[16] It is through repetition and scale, what Bayat refers to as the "power of big numbers." He explains how mundane behaviors acquire collective meaning and gradually reshape norms and expectations.[17] In Downtown Cairo, this slow, ordinary accumulation of practice sustained political engagement beneath the surface of control.

Furthermore, de Certeau's distinction between strategies and tactics offers valuable insight for understanding how power and resistance operate spatially. Strategies belong to institutions such as planners, developers, state authorities, who organize space from above to regulate movement, behavior, and visibility. Tactics, by contrast, are practiced from below. They are impulsive, hidden, and transitory acts that users engage in to appropriate space for personal objectives.[18]

reclaiming space through tactics

Taking a shortcut, lingering where one is not meant to stop, or informally reinterpreting signage are not explicit acts of defiance, yet they subtly undermine imposed spatial orders by altering them through use.

This tactical approach is particularly critical in situations of increased surveillance and repression. James Scott describes "everyday forms of resistance" as "a stratagem deployed by a weaker party in thwarting the claims of an institutional or class opponent who dominates the public exercise of power."[19] In Downtown Cairo, such strategies emerged under British occupation and within the sharp social divide that structured the district. Similarly, Davis argues, that when visibility becomes too costly or strategically ineffective, political action withdraws from monumental spaces into more ordinary and concealed settings, often referred to as"clandestine venues."[20] In response, resistance shifts into everyday settings where exposure can be managed. In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Downtown Cairo, resistance did not depend solely on spectacular uprisings but also persisted through various dispersed cultural practices embedded in daily urban life.

clandestine venues as resistance sites

16. Bayat, *Life as Politics*, 15-16.
17. Bayat, *Life as Politics*, 21.
18. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press, 1988), xvii-xx, 35-38.
19. James C. Scott, "Everyday Forms of Resistance," *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies* 4, no.1 (1989): 52, https://doi.org/10.22439/cjas.v4i1.1765.
20. Diane E. Davis, "Urban Protest and the Built Environmental Foundations of Insurgency and Citizenship" In *Ethics of the Urban : The City and the Spaces of the Political*, ed. Mohsen Mostafavi (Harvard University, 2017), 166-67.

2.3 Resistance and Erasure

spectrum of resistance primary and secondary

Resistance exists on a spectrum that shifts between visibility and concealment, action and endurance, rupture and continuity. Edward Said distinguishes between primary resistance, the immediate and visible struggle against colonial domination through uprisings, revolts, and protests, and secondary resistance, which emerges more subtly through culture, literature, and the rearticulation of memory.[21] In this way, resistance does not only erupt in dramatic moments of confrontation but also endures in quieter, less visible forms that carry equal political weight. Resistance and erasure are entangled in a cycle, where resistance seeks to dismantle dominant systems, while those systems respond by attempting to erase the traces and sites of resistance.

resistance through uprisings

In Downtown Cairo, primary resistance is most legible through large-scale uprisings such as the Urabi Rebellion (1881–1882), the 1919 Revolution, the workers' protest of 1946, and the 1952 Revolution, which culminated in the end of British presence.[22] These events unfolded in highly visible urban spaces and were met with equally visible countermeasures. British intelligence reports from the 1940s explicitly identified "potential centers of disturbances," mapping, monitoring, and attempting to control sites of political activity.[23] Visibility, while necessary for mobilization, also made these spaces vulnerable to repression and spatial restructuring.

21. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (Vintage, 1994), 209-20.
22. Yasser Elsheshtawy, "Urban Transformations: The Great Cairo Fire and the Founding of a Modern Capital, 1952-1970," *Built Environment* 40, no. 3 (2014): 413, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43296905.
23. Hazem Ziada, "Of Bounds and Coffers."



Fig 2.3 A crowd marches towards Shepherd Hotel in Cairo, Egypt on Jan. 25, 1952.

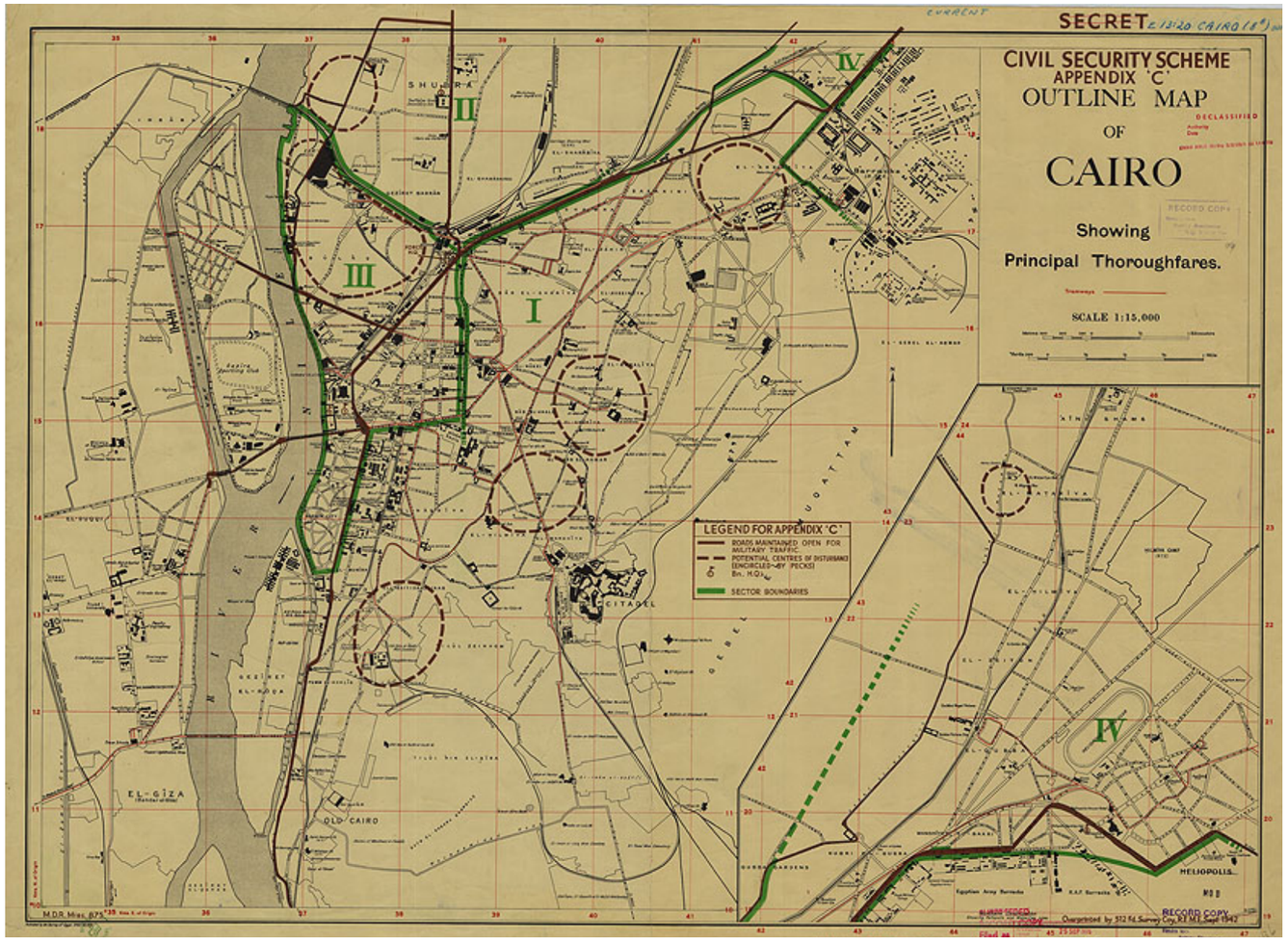


Fig 2.4 Civil Security Scheme 1942, prepared for the General Headquarters Middle East Forces, the British central command for WWII allies. The map outlines distinct security zones in green, and demarcates sources of unrest in dashed circles (or "pecks").
Credit:©The British Library Board.

visibility as vulnerability

This vulnerability is exemplified by Tahrir Square. As one of Cairo's most politically charged spaces, it has persistently functioned as a stage for mass protest and political visibility. Its central location, openness, and proximity to institutions enable large scale occupation and ensures that political action is witnessed.[24] However, the same visibility renders the square highly vulnerable. Through surveillance, police presence, spatial reconfiguration, and heritage framing, the square has been repeatedly reshaped to suppress the forms of occupation that once defined it, neutralizing its political charge.

erasing the memory of resistance

The square continued to witness revolutions after independence such as the 1977 Egyptian Bread Riots, 2003 Anti–Iraq War demonstrations, 2011 Egyptian Revolution, and the June 30 Protest in 2013.[25] After the 2013 military coup, the square underwent visible transformation under state-led "beautification" efforts: security barriers were installed, CCTV cameras placed, palm trees planted, and most strikingly, a Pharaonic obelisk and sphinxes erected at the center.[26] This imposition of ancient iconography sought to anchor the square in a sanitized narrative, displacing its revolutionary memory.

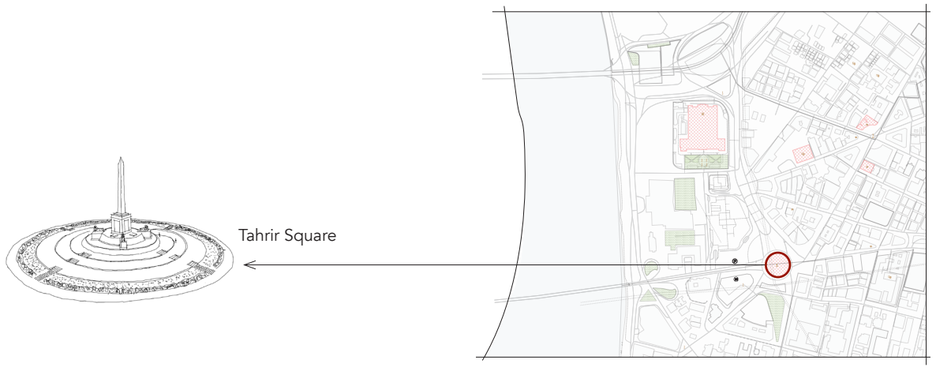


Fig 2.5 Map Locating Tahrir Square.

24. Mariam Abdelazim, "Tahrir square: The Roundabout and the History of Modern Cairo" in *Routledge Handbook on Cairo: Histories, Representations and Discourses*, ed. Nezar AlSayyad, (Routledge, 2022), 142.
25. Hazem Ziada, "What Brings them There? Reflections on the Persisting Symbolism of Tahrir Square," *Jadaliyya*, Apr 2, 2015, https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/31939
26. Abdelazim, "Tahrir square," 152-54.

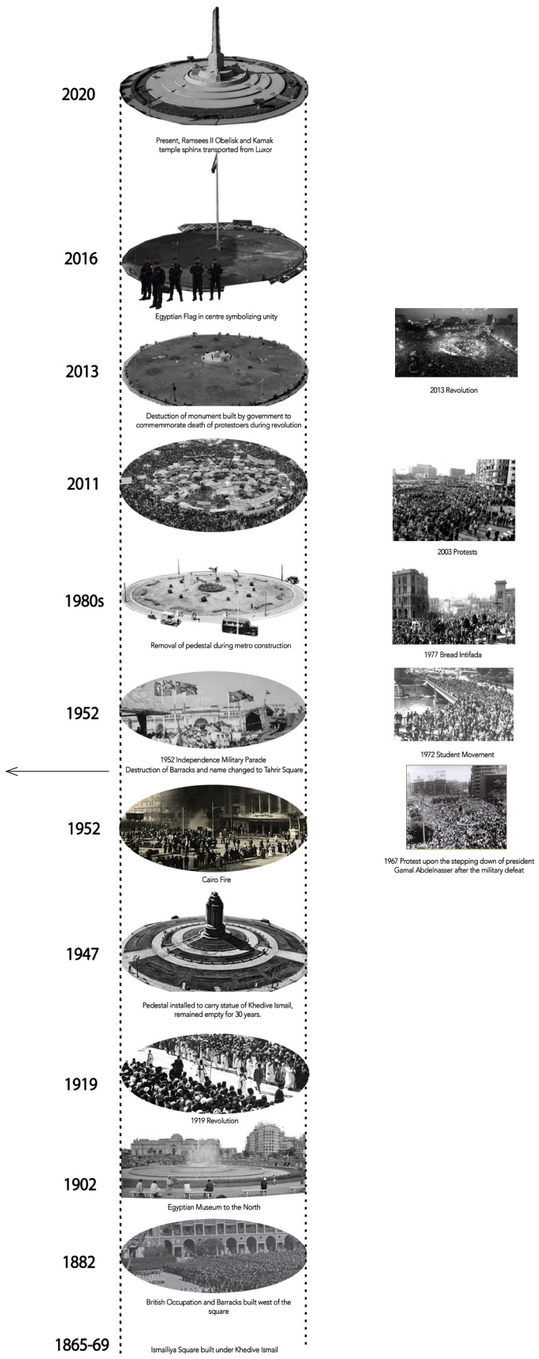


Fig 2.6 Tahrir Square Physical Transformations.

Fig 2.7 Tahrir Square Today.



Resistance has also operated through destruction. The Cairo Fire of 1952, often referred to as Black Saturday, burned nearly four hundred buildings in Downtown Cairo.[27] Frantz Fanon describes violence as a means for the colonized to regain agency, stating that "to destroy the colonial world means nothing less than demolishing the colonist sector."[28] While the facades of Downtown Cairo symbolized modernity, wealth, and prestige they also represented an oppressive ruling class, colonial affiliation and a strong social divide. The fire was a spatial expression of anger and resentment.[29] After the fire, the state emphasized that reconstruction would restore the area to the way that it was before.[30] However, to assert control over the public spaces, fifteen of Cairo's squares and streets were renamed. For example, Ibrahim Pasha street, taking its name after khedive Ibrahim changed to Gumhuriya (Republic) street. Ismailiya square was renamed *Tahrir* (Liberation) Square.[31] This functioned as a politics of memory, preserving the colonial urban framework while reinscribing it with a new national narrative that muted the memory of how violently it had been contested. Nevertheless, this process also produced long-term neglect, contributing to the later romanticization of Downtown's *Belle Époque* remnants as detached aesthetic objects.

resistance through destruction

27. James Aldridge, *Cairo* (Macmillan, 1970), 234-46.
28. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* trans. Richard Philcox (Grove Press, 2004), 6.
29. Elsheshtawy, "Urban Transformations", 416.
30. Nancy Reynolds, *A City Consumed : Urban Commerce, the Cairo Fire, and the Politics of Decolonization in Egypt* (Stanford University Press, 2012), 198, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aucegypt/detail.action?docID=914775.
31. Elsheshtawy, "Urban Transformations," 419.

While resistance through uprisings, protests, and acts of destruction marked visible opposition in Downtown Cairo, other forms of resistance operated less visibly. Secondary or everyday resistance persisted through dispersion rather than concentration. Embedded in routine practices such as reading, listening, gathering, and circulating, these forms of resistance are harder to isolate and erase because they remain hidden within urban life, appearing apolitical while sustaining political activity. A square can be emptied, renamed, or redesigned, but the habits that animate the everyday continue to endure. It is this capacity to resist erasure by remaining ordinary, distributed, and embedded, that makes everyday space critical to understanding how resistance is remembered and sustained in Downtown Cairo.

resistance through everyday practices

However, the memory of everyday resistance faces a different challenge in the contemporary city. The informal circuits that once sustained passive networks have increasingly been displaced by digital platforms. Social media has replaced many forms of face-to-face exchange, overhearing, and embodied gathering that previously anchored political awareness in physical space.[32] As a result, the sites that once carried these memories risk becoming politically neutral and disconnected from the forms of social interaction that gave them meaning. This shift intensifies the urgency of spatial interventions that can reactivate memory in the city, preserving not only sites, but the conditions of encounter, circulation, and participation that once sustained them.

digital platforms replacing everyday communication

32. Asef Bayat, *Revolutionary Life: The Everyday of the Arab Spring* (Harvard University Press, 2021), 31-32.

Fig 2.8 Map showing original buildings and redeveloped buildings after 1952.

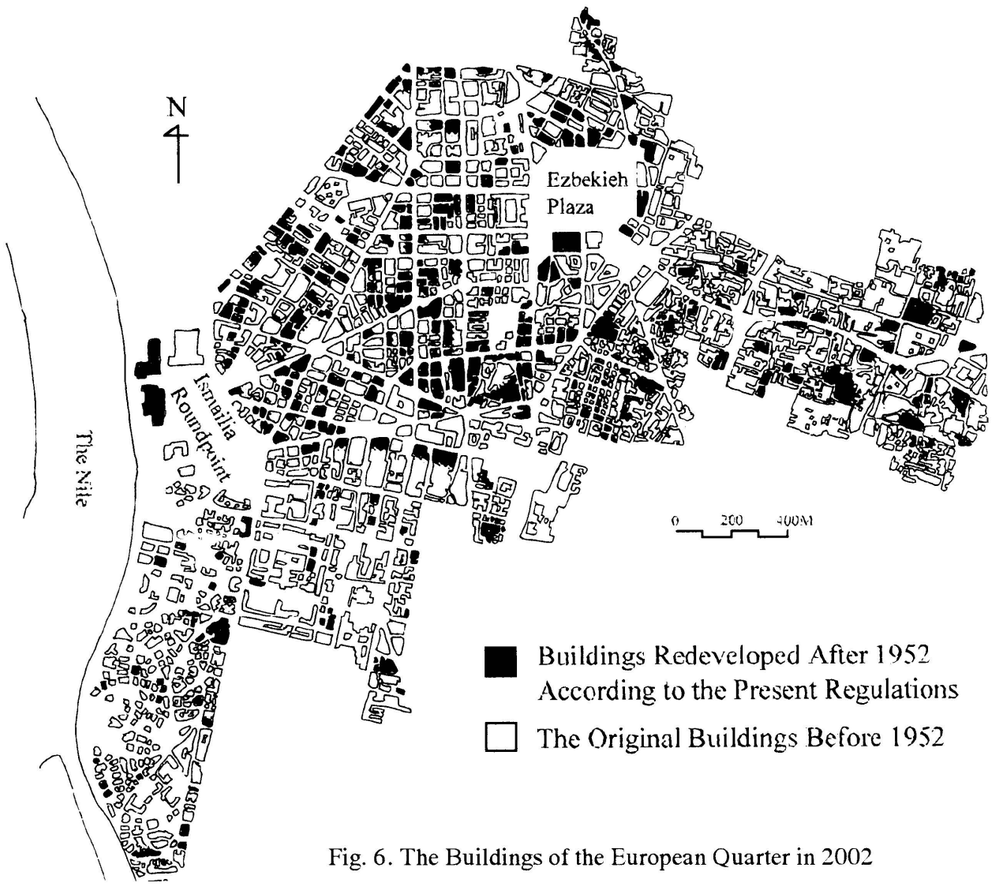


Fig. 6. The Buildings of the European Quarter in 2002



Fig 2.9 Destruction after the 1952 Cairo Fire. In the centre is part of the famous Shepheards Hotel, in Cairo, Egypt, Jan. 27, 1952, after it was burned the previous day by rioters. In the foreground are the wrecked offices of Trans World Airlines.

2.4 Spatial Typologies of Ordinary Resistance

To understand how everyday resistance endures, it is necessary to examine the spatial networks that sustain it. In Downtown Cairo, resistance was not only social but spatially embedded. These networks emerged through everyday typologies that enabled people to encounter one another, share information, and develop collective awareness through routine interactions. This condition can be understood through Bayat's concept of "passive networks." These networks are essential to the formation of "social nonmovements," where individuals are able to acknowledge, recognize, and see one another, forming imaginary solidarities.[33] They operate through overhearing a conversation, sharing space, or even through instantaneous communication, a glance, a remark, a shared reaction.

While termed "passive," these networks are activated through use. They come into being through repeated occupation, presence, and interaction, relying on everyday practices to sustain recognition and connection. Their power lies precisely in this activation without organization: a network continuously produced through ordinary acts that appear incidental, yet cumulatively generate political awareness and collective potential.[34] Drawing on Lefebvre's "social space is socially produced," this thesis interprets space as bearing the marks of what has happened in it, from historical events to everyday practices and their consequences, leaving visible and invisible traces.[35] While we encounter space in the present, it is filled with past events, meanings and connections.

33. Bayat, *Life as Politics*, 23-24.
34. Bayat, *Life as Politics*, 23-24.
35. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Blackwell, 1991), 26-29.

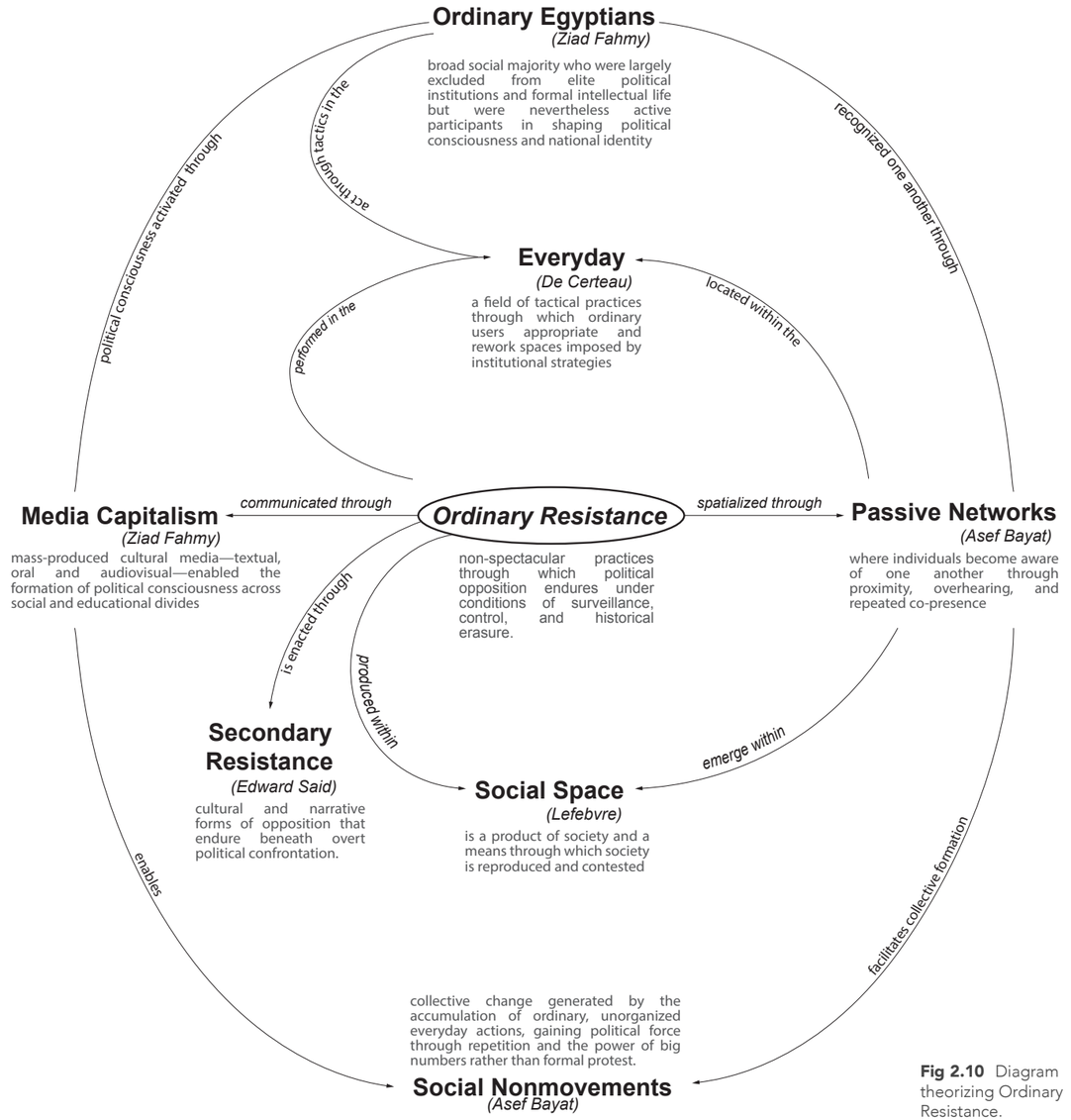


Fig 2.10 Diagram theorizing Ordinary Resistance.

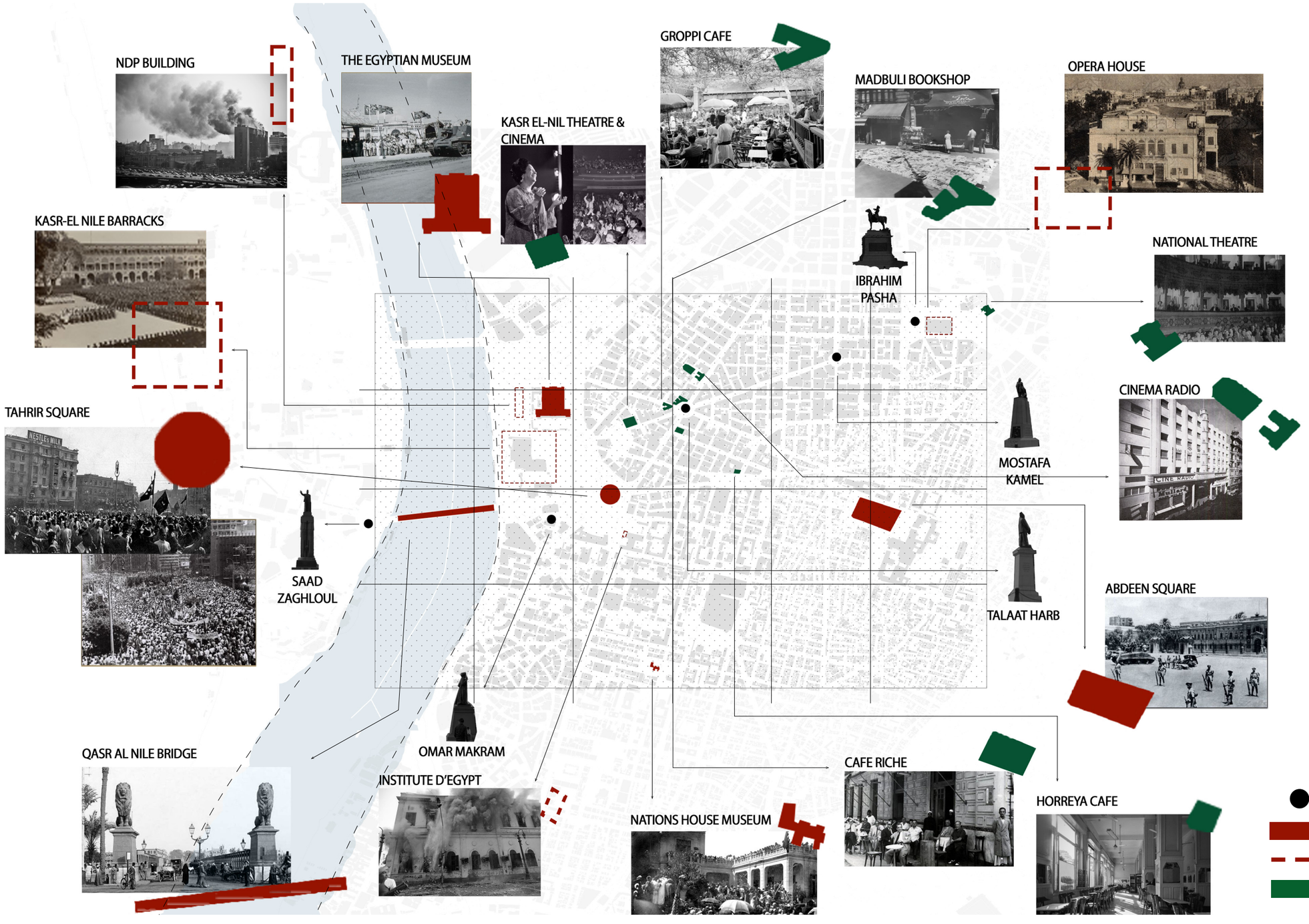


Fig 2.11 Mapping Downtown Cairo through sites of resistance, tracing uprisings, moments of destruction, and everyday practices alongside state commemoration marked through statues.

2.5 Site Selection

This thesis draws on Bayat's concepts of passive networks and Fahmy's analysis on media capitalism to understand resistance as both spatial and communicative. It is shaped by where people gather and how ideas move between bodies. These frameworks are translated into a set of spatial typologies that played a crucial role in sustaining cultural circulation and social connection. The bookshop, the cafe, and performance space emerge not simply as cultural venues, but as infrastructures of ordinary life through which political ideas were articulated, translated, and shared. The bookshop anchored political discourse in print, preserving and circulating texts that articulated emerging ideas. The cafe transformed these texts into oral exchange, enabling discussion, debate, and overhearing across social boundaries. The theatre and cinema extended this process further, translating political and cultural narratives into audiovisual forms accessible to broad publics through colloquial language and collective observation. These spaces did not operate independently; they depended on one another, forming a network through which ideas expanded from restricted articulation to shared experience.

resistance through circulation of ideas across everyday spaces

The following chapter builds on this reading through three case studies: Madbuli Bookshop, Café Riche, and Kasr el-Nil Theatre and Cinema. Located in close proximity to one another, they establish resistance as a condition embedded in the everyday fabric of Downtown Cairo. These sites formed a dense network in which ideas, texts, performances, and people circulated across spaces. Studying them in parallel allows for an understanding of how cultural and intellectual infrastructures operate beneath the surface of visible events, ensuring that resistance persists even when public space is controlled or erased.

sites of ordinary resistance

heritage as practice, memory activated through use

Crucially, the heritage value of these sites does not reside in their physical form, but in the practices, interactions, and uses that unfolded within them. Building on Smith's understanding of heritage as a cultural practice, this thesis reads these sites as sites of intangible heritage, where memory can be produced through use rather than preservation alone.[36] By uncovering what happened in these spaces and how they were inhabited, the thesis identifies forms of interaction that remain contested in the city and argues for their reactivation through spatial interventions.



Fig 2.12 Map Locating Sites of Ordinary Resistance.

36. Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 46-47.

03| NARRATIVES OF ORDINARY RESISTANCE



Fig 3.1 Madbuli's kiosk in Downtown Cairo, marking his early presence on the street before the establishment of Madbuli Bookshop.

3.1 Circulation of Thought: Resistance in the Bookshop

print as infrastructure of collective consciousness

Cairo has historically served as a center of reading, writing and knowledge exchange. With the introduction of modern printing technologies during the French occupation (1978-1801) and the establishment of Egypt's first printing press in Bulaq under Muhammad Ali Pasha (1820-1822), the city entered a new period of textual circulation. This infrastructure was enhanced through translation, publication and the birth of new literary forms.[1] The power of print lies in its capacity to generate shared political consciousness by allowing dispersed readers to imagine themselves as part of a collective.[2] In Downtown Cairo, this potential depended on the everyday spaces that made print accessible.

a quiet persistence in public space

It is within this context that the bookshop emerges as an essential mediator between texts and the public. The bookshop didn't serve elite readers alone, but allowed literature to enter daily life. Madbuli Bookshop exemplifies this role. Its history begins not inside a formal storefront, but on the street. Hajj Madbuli started selling newspapers alongside his father at a young age, gradually expanding to novels and stories, and responding directly to the requests and needs of his customers. In 1951, Madbuli and his brother established a small kiosk on the sidewalk adjacent to Talaat Harb Square, operating twenty four hours a day, storing books in public view and sleeping beside them to keep the books safe.[3] The persistence of the Kiosk, despite attempts by the authorities to remove it,[4] demonstrates what Bayat describes as the "art of presence," the agency of the subaltern to assert their rights to the public.[5]

1. Stephen Winkler, "Cairo:City of Books," in *Discovering Downtown Cairo : Architecture ... and Stories*, ed. Vittoria Capresi and Barbara Pampe (Jovis, 2015), 82-83.
2. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 2016), 46.
3. Ibrahim Al-Najjar, "Madbouli Library: Biography and Career," *Al Watan Voice*. June 27, 2006, https://pulpit.alwatanvoice.com/content/print/49044.html
4. Hajj Madbouli, "A special visit with the late Hajj Madbouli, owner of Madbouli Bookstore," Interview by Sami Kleib, *AlJazeera*, 2006, Youtube Video, 49:50, posted Jan 31, 2022, uploaded by Khalid Muhammad, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S5ox67A1CWo.
5. Asef Bayat, "Politics in the City-Inside-Out," *City & Society* 24, no. 2 (2012): 20, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-744X.2012.01071.x.

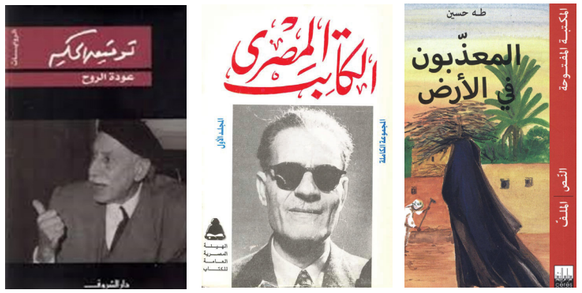


Fig 3.2
Examples of Censored, Controversial and Banned Books. *Aoudat al-Ruh* by Tawfiq al-Hakim (1933), *Al-Katib al-Masry* by Taha Hussein (1945), *al-Mu'adhdhabun fi al Ard* by Taha Hussein (1947).

the bookshop as platform for access and voice

Madbuli further established the role of the bookshop as an educational institution. During a period of high illiteracy rates and the domination of foreign inaccessible texts in Downtown Cairo serving the elite or foreign population, the shop supported the accessibility of texts to a wider circle. Madbuli translated imported works into Arabic, making it accessible to the local community. As a publisher, he used his position to create space for what was missing from the existing bookshelf. In addition, he gave voice to young, unknown authors offering them a chance to share their work, enabling many writers to start their careers through his printing press.[6]

informal education beyond institutions

Furthermore, the shop operated a borrowing system that allowed readers, especially students, to access books when they couldn't afford it. One reader recalled "we learned in Madbuli's library just as we learned at Cairo University. Sometimes we would borrow a book or a novel, and even borrow some money from Madbuli until we received remittances from our families."[7] For many, the shop operated as a parallel university, emphasizing how education circulated through everyday non-institutional means in Downtown Cairo. Madbuli himself grew up with no access to formal education, teaching himself to read and write. He always described his work as a message of education to his people, a way of making available to others what he had not been given.

literature as counter-discourse

The bookshop not only provided access, but also helped sustain political counter-discourse. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said explains how literature operates as a platform for both reinforcing and challenging imperial narratives, literature becomes a site of resistance.[8] Madbuli actively participated in this contestation by publishing works on minority rights, border disputes, regional conflicts, and socio-economic inequality, often publishing titles that were controversial, censored elsewhere, or absent from official narratives. Here, literature becomes a "parallel street" during times when political activism is suppressed.[9] Madbuli paid a personal price for this role, risking his life in the service of the public, facing lawsuits and suspended prison sentences, yet surviving through the collective support of readers and writers who stood with him and ultimately kept him from being silenced.[10]

6. Al-Najjar, "Madbouli Library."
7. Al-Najjar, "Madbouli Library."
8. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (Vintage, 1994), 216.
9. Samia Mehrez, *The Literary Life of Cairo : One Hundred Years in the Heart of the City* (The American University in Cairo Press, 2016), 11.
10. Rania Al Malky, "Egypt loses a publishing icon," *Daily News Egypt*, Aug 7, 2015, https://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2008/12/12/editorial-egypt-loses-a-publishing-icon/.

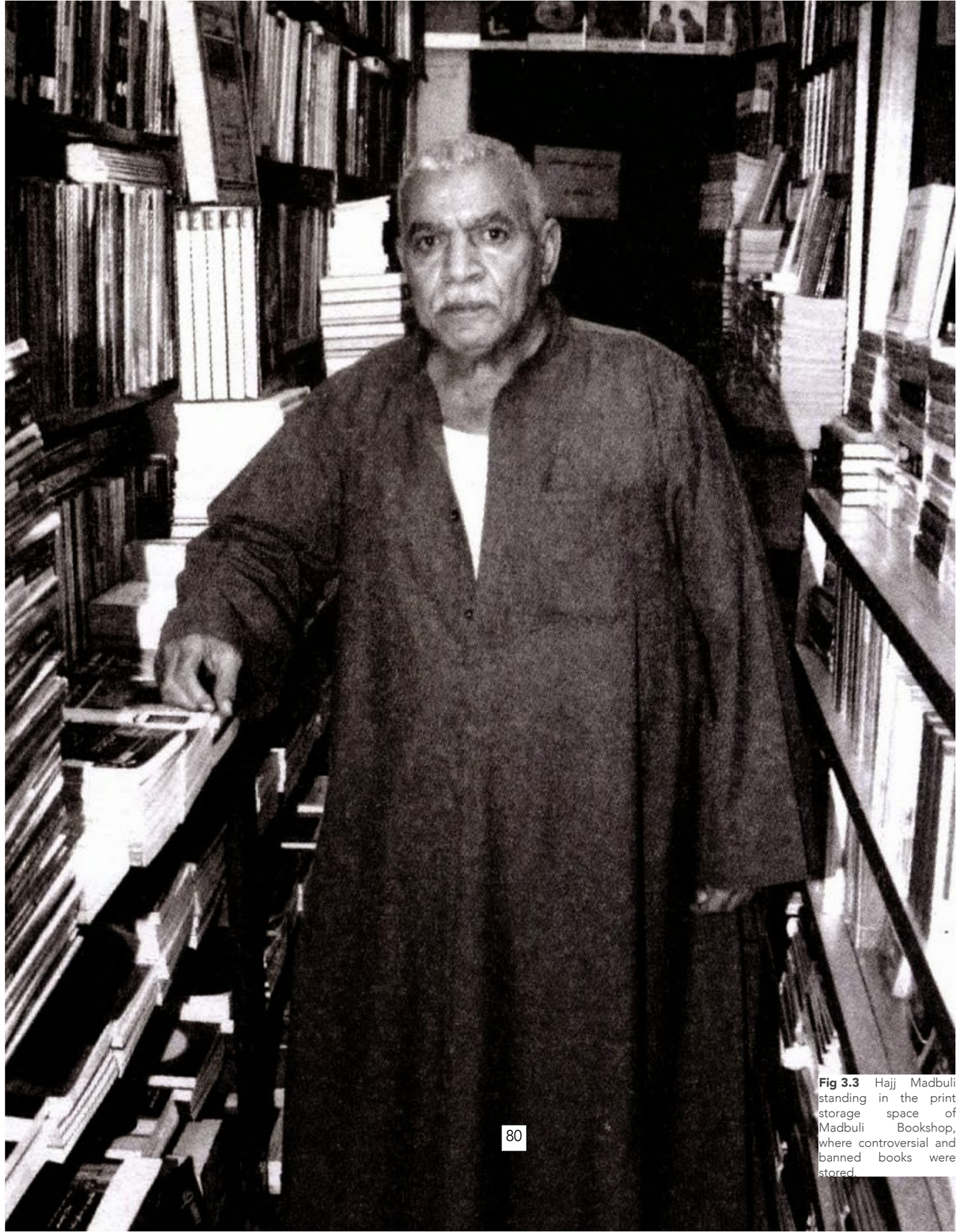


Fig 3.3 Hajj Madbuli standing in the print storage space of Madbuli Bookshop, where controversial and banned books were stored.



Fig 3.4 Hajj Madbuli speaking with a customer outside the Madbuli Bookshop storefront.



Fig 3.5 A cartoon from the May 30, 1879, issue of the newspaper Abou Naddara shows Egypt's leader auctioning off the Giza Pyramids to a crowd of foreign buyers.

newspapers and colonial censorship

In addition to books, other printed forms such as newspapers and pamphlets played a central role in shaping political consciousness in Downtown Cairo. Print culture extended beyond formal literature into daily publications that circulated widely among the public. During the colonial period, censorship was strict; any material considered anti-colonial was immediately removed. Certain Arabic newspapers, such as *al-Muqattam* and *al-Watan*, aligned themselves with pro-British positions, often condemning demonstrations and calling for a return to public order. At the same time, a parallel press emerged in opposition. Newspapers such as *Abu al-Hul* (The Sphinx), *al-Ra'd al-Misri* (The Egyptian Thunder), *al-Balabil* (The Nightingales), *al-Misri al-Hurr* (The Free Egyptian), and *al-'Istiqlal al-Tam* (Complete Independence) articulated explicitly anti-British positions. Other newspapers such as *Abou Naddara,* focused on the power of satirical press. Private presses played a major role, used clandestinely to publish prohibited material.[11]

print as political mobilization

Revolutionary pamphlets circulated alongside newspapers, some explicitly encouraging Egyptians to fight for independence, others more strategic in calling for strikes, boycotts of British goods, or announcing the times and locations of demonstrations. The 1919 pamphlet titled "A Patriotic Appeal to Boycott English Commerce" exemplifies how print functioned as direct political opposition.[12] British authorities struggled to track the constant appearance of such circulars, revealing how dispersed and difficult to suppress this printed resistance had become.

11. Ziad Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation through Popular Culture* (Stanford University Press, 2011), 149-54.
12. Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians*, 154.

Today, the legacy of the bookshop is difficult to read spatially. Following Hajj Madbuli's death in 2009, the shop continues to be run under his sons, but its visibility has diminished.[13] State-led beautification efforts and facade standardization along Talaat Harb Square has stripped away the shop's architectural distinctiveness from surrounding storefronts. While not an explicit act of censorship, this process contributes to a quieter form of erasure that preserves and protects the building while obscuring the practices that once animated it. Previously, Madbuli's Bookshop was recognized through the canopy extending over the sidewalk, the books laid directly on the ground, and the open display of texts in full view of the passerby, transforming the street into an extension of the shop. Literature was not hidden behind vitrines or confined indoors; it was exposed, browsable, and embedded in the everyday life of Downtown Cairo. The disappearance of these elements marks the loss of this form of participation of the public with the bookshop. Madbuli's case reveals how the heritage of the bookshop lies not in the site alone, but in the everyday acts of circulation, browsing, accessibility, and presence that produced it as a political space.

madbuli bookshop today



Fig 3.6 Photograph showing books displayed on the ground as a passerby bends to pick one up, illustrating the informal street-level interaction through which readers engaged with books. Photograph by Larisa Epatko.



Fig 3.7 Archival photograph of Madbuli Bookshop (est. 1951), showing books displayed on the ground and active engagement with the street.

13. Nancy Linthicum and Michele Henjum, "Madbouly," *Cairo Bookstop*, Aug 2014, https://cairo-bookstop.wordpress.com/publishing-houses/madbouly/.

Fig 3.8 Madbuli Bookshop exterior today.



Fig 3.9 Madbuli Bookshop interior today.



3.2 Oral Threshold: Resistance in the Cafe

beyond print: oral circulation

If the bookshop anchored political ideas in print, the cafe gave them a shared audible life. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Cairo, political consciousness could not rely on print alone due to the high levels of illiteracy. The cafe bridged this gap by allowing ideas to circulate through hearing, speech and collective presence. Newspapers were read aloud, literary texts discussed, and political events debated in crowded public settings. In this sense, the cafe acted as a communicator, translating written material into lived collective experience.[14] Cafes were also crucial distribution points, where revolutionary pamphlets and illicit press publications were shared.[15]

As Hamilton Fyfe observed:

"No city has a more active café life than Cairo. Even in the morning the little iron tables on the pavement are thronged. Whenever you pass a café there are numbers of *tarbushes* to be seen both outside and inside. A few people may be playing dice or Dominoes. But the mass are reading newspapers and talking politics."[16]

— Hamilton Fyfe, *The New Spirit in Egypt*

The cafe as social infrastructure and political microcosm

Cafes in Downtown Cairo became crucial sites of cultural and political life. They provided the social infrastructure through which texts were digested, debated, and reinterpreted. Writers such as nobel prize winner, Naguib Mahfouz, repeatedly depicted the Egyptian coffeehouse, known as *ahwa*, as a microcosm of the city, where different social classes intersected, and where everyday conversation blurred into politics.[17] Cafes were second homes, places of belonging and informal schools where politics accumulated through repetition, conversation and presence.[18]

14. Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians*, 13-14, 145-47.
15. Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians*, 155.
16. Hamilton Fyfe, *The New Spirit in Egypt* (W. Blackwell, 1911), 113.
17. Dalia Said Mostafa and Amina Elbendary, *The Egyptian Coffeehouse: Culture, Politics and Urban Space* (Tauris, 2020), 1-2.
18. Mostafa and Elbendary, *The Egyptian Coffeehouse*, 7.



Fig 3.10 Someone reading in Café Riche, reflecting the regular presence of print in the café where newspapers were read aloud collectively or quietly in silence.



Fig 3.11 Writers Naguib Mahfouz and Gamal El-Ghitany at Café Riche, reflecting the café's role as a gathering place for intellectual exchange and the formation of literary and political ideas.

Café Riche as an informal school of political and cultural exchange

Café Riche, established in the heart of Downtown Cairo in 1914, exemplifies this typology. At the cafe, published material took an oral life of its own. The cafe also functioned as a gathering place for writers, journalists, lawyers and students. Well known figures such as Taha Hussein and Mahfouz frequented the cafe, holding regular discussions. Knowledge circulated through presence and overhearing.[19] Felfel, a longtime waiter at the Cafe, recalls how Mahfouz would give informal lectures every Friday evening. He explains how the intellectuals who often visited the cafe were his indirect mentors, observing their manners and speech from afar.[20] The sessions at the cafe were not enclosed or exclusive, discussions unfolded openly, debates spilled, and learning occurred through simple presence.[21] Students often positioned themselves nearby to listen. Ahmed Shawky, a journalism student, recounts how he would sit among other students, around these figures, absorbing political and cultural debates without necessarily direct participation.[22] The cafe thus operated as an informal school through these everyday social interactions.

19. Peggy Bieber-Roberts and Elisa Pierandrei. "Café Riche: Memory in the formation of Egyptian national identity," (The American University in Cairo, 2002), 6.
20. Lamia Hassan, "A Living Legend," *A Voice from Cairo*, May 27, 2011, https://avoicefromcairo.wordpress.com/tag/cafe-riche/.
21. Bieber-Roberts and Pierandrei, "Café Riche," 6.
22. Bieber-Roberts and Pierandrei, "Café Riche," 9.

extending presence into the street

The presence of the cafe extended into the street, where tables and chairs once spilled into the public realm, an act that gained political symbolism through reinforcing presence.[23] Previously, when the building was freestanding, Café Riche extended outward into Talaat Harb Square through its garden and outdoor seating, breaking the boundary between interior discussion and public life. This exterior area housed the "Café Riche Theatre," where live orchestras performed, including early appearances by Umm Kulthum, a famous Egyptian singer.[24] Regular customer Ahmed Ismail recalls that the cafe's appeal lay in the ability to sit openly, "virtually in the streets of Downtown Cairo."[25] This outward occupation of the street, similar to Madbuli Bookshop, exemplifies the art of presence: where political force is generated through sustained, ordinary occupation of space.[26] By extending seating, conversation and performance into Talaat Harb Square, Café Riche asserted the presence of people, allowing them to be constantly seen, heard, and felt. It did not announce dissent, but normalized it through repeated ordinary acts, transforming the street into a shared social space.

23. Mostafa and Elbendary. *The Egyptian Coffeehouse* ,14.
24. Karim El Sayed, "Tawakul Building (aka Café Riche Building)" in *Discovering Downtown Cairo: Architecture ... and Stories*, eds. Vittoria Capresi and Barbara Pampe (Jovis, 2015) 32-37.
25. El Sayed, "Tawakul Building," 36-37.
26. Bayat, "Politics in the City-Inside-Out," 125.



Fig 3.12 Café Riche outdoor seating extending into the street, illustrating the café's public presence and its interface with everyday urban life in Downtown Cairo.

café Riche as a space of hidden resistance

The cafe setting was never fully public nor private, operating as a threshold space, where it was open enough to allow encounter and exchange, yet private enough to prevent control. As Charles Trip observes, resistance often emerges precisely at this intersection between openness and restriction, where the possibility of assembly coexists with the threat of surveillance.[27] In Café Riche, resistance extended from initially being passive to becoming active. The Cafe's basement contained a printing press used to produce and distribute anti-colonial pamphlets during British rule, particularly leading up to the 1919 revolution.[28] Some historians also suggested that meetings in the same basement took place related to the 1952 revolution,[29] further underscoring the cafe's long standing political significance. This hidden infrastructure was discovered during renovations following the 1992 earthquake, revealing how resistance in the cafe operated across through concealed political activity below, in the clandestine. [30]

visibility as vulnerability

At the same time, the cafe's openness rendered it vulnerable. While, it offered openness, sociability, and visibility, this presence attracted attention. British intelligence documents from 1919 include daily reports under the heading "Native Opinion in Cafes and Bars," demonstrating how authorities monitored political activity by observing conversation in these spaces.[31] Cafes were saturated with spies and informers known as *mukhbireen*, whose reports were used by the authorities to silence opposition. In his book *Cairo from Edge to Edge*, Sonallah Ibrahim humorously refers to a group of cafes and restaurants in Downtown Cairo—Zahret al-Bostan, Le Grillon, Café Riche, and the Odeon bar—as forming a "triangle of horror."[32] This expression evokes the intensity of debate and the risks attached with surveillance and the threat of arrest.

27. Charles Tripp, *The Power and the People: Paths of Resistance in the Middle East* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 74, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139028721.
28. Mostafa and Elbendary. *The Egyptian Coffeehouse*, 88.
29. Michele Fossi, "Café Richie: A Egyptian History In A Literary Café," *Michele Fossi*, August 17, 2008, https://michelefossi.com/2008/08/17/cafe-richie-aegyptian-history-in-a-literary-cafe/
30. Mostafa and Elbendary, *The Egyptian Coffeehouse*, 88-89.
31. "Dissertation on Early 20th-century Cairo Coffeehouses Leads Penn Ph.D. Student to Egyptian and British Spy Reports," *Penn Today*, June 19, 2017, https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news/dissertation-early-20th-century-cairo-coffeehouses-leads-penn-phd-student-egyptian-and-british.
32. Sonallah Ibrahim and Jean-Pierre Ribière, *Cairo from Edge to Edge* (The American University in Cairo Press, 1998) 15-16.



Fig 3.13 Revolutionary poster found inside Café Riche recalling the political activity historically associated with the café.



Fig 3.14 Café Riche memory room lined with photographs and objects commemorating prominent figures who frequented the café.

Café Riche, today

Today, much of this spatial and social openness has disappeared. Outdoor areas have been fenced and the cafe increasingly functions as a touristic image rather than a lived space of exchange. What remains of this memory are photographs of writers, artists, and political figures who once animated the space, lining the interior walls of a room separate from the main dining space.[33] These images preserve the memory at the level of representation, however the practices that produced that memory such as overhearing, debating, lingering, occupying the threshold between street and interior, have become increasingly difficult to sustain. The Cafe's memory also endures in literature such as Naguib Mahfouz's novel, *Karnak Cafe* (1974) inspired by Cafe Riche[34], and more recently in the film, *Kira & El Gin* (2022), demonstrating its lasting importance in Egypt's political and cultural imagination. It's memory demonstrates how its heritage resides beyond the physical, in the ordinary practices that once animated it. These practices were repetitive and embedded in daily life, sustaining communication across different social classes, backgrounds and even generations, offering a mode of participation through which resistance was lived and shared in Downtown Cairo.

33. Bieber-Roberts and Pierandrei, "Café Riche," 3.
34. Mostafa and Elbendary, *The Egyptian Coffeehouse,"* 89.

Fig 3.15
Café Riche Today.

3.3 Colloquial Stages: Resistance in Performing Spaces

audioviual, the most accessible medium of communication

The final mode of communication operated through performance spaces, which constituted the most accessible medium of all. While the bookshop relied on literacy and the cafe depended on proximity and conversation, theatre and cinema addressed audiences through sound, image, and collective presence. It permitted the semi-literate and illiterate public to absorb, digest and participate in mass culture.[35] Audiovisual media became a primary mode through which ordinary Egyptians encountered shared narratives. Fahmy's analysis of Egyptian popular culture situates this typology within an integrated media system in which print, orality and performance operated together rather than independently.[36] Performance translated ideas circulating in print and oral into embodied colloquial forms that could be heard, seen, and felt collectively.

traditional storytelling practices in the everyday

Storytelling and performance have been a vital aspect of Egyptian cultural life. The oral traditions of the *hakawati* (the storyteller),[37] *sunduq al-dunya* (box of the world),[38] pianola performances,[39] and popular puppet theatre[40] were all performative acts of telling and retelling that unfolded in the streets. Narratives were embedded in everyday urban life, performed in cafes, markets, and public squares. It was less constrained by formal systems of censorship. With the shift towards performance inside enclosed space, performance became more visible to authority. Institutional spaces brought infrastructure and new technologies, but they also introduced regulation, surveillance, and tighter control.

35. Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians*, 37.
36. Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians*, 37.
37.See, for example, Dima Al-Sharif, "Al Hakawati - The Storyteller Tradition," *Dima Al Sharif*, July 26, 2023, https://www.dimasharif.com/al-hakawati-the-storyteller/.
38. See, for example, "The Story of Sunduq al-dunya," Youtube video, posted by [The history of Egypt in 150 years], 22 May 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DbBcsZzTYRA.
39. See, for example, "Folklore Tales | The Pianola," *Dar el Hilal*, Aug 12, 2021,https://darelhilal.com/News/910685.aspx.
40. See, for example, Joseph Fahim, "Roots in the Sand: A Timeline of Egyptian Theatre," *American Theatre*, May 10, 2024, https://www.americantheatre.org/2014/05/10/roots-in-the-sand-a-timeline-of-egyptian-theatre.



Fig 3.16 Collective presence inside the cinema, where audiences assembled in a shared space and experienced the same images and emotions simultaneously.



Fig 3.17 Al Hakawati (The storyteller)



Fig 3.18 Sunduq al-dunya (Box of the world)

Fig 3.19 The Pianola (Barrel Organ) player in the streets of Cairo, Egypt, 1942.

modern theatre as a too of westernization and elite control

Modern theatre in Cairo emerged in the late nineteenth century as part of Khedive Ismail's project of westernization. Opera houses and European-style theaters were initially designed for elite consumption, aligning cultural production with colonial aesthetics and aristocratic taste.[41] Imported American movies dominated Egyptian screens and production was largely controlled by Europeans.[42]

from elite stages to colloquial resistance

Yet from early on, this model was challenged, both directly and indirectly. Yaqub Sanu adapted Western theatrical forms by infusing them with Egyptian performance traditions such as shadow puppetry, satire, and colloquial humor. His plays, including *al-'Amira al-'Iskandaraniyya* (The Alexandrian princess) and *al-Duratayn* (The co-wives), indirectly criticized the regime.[43] These performances however only lasted for a brief period. In 1872, Sanu's plays were banned from being performed publicly, depicting how this medium was quickly recognized as politically dangerous. Sanu shifted his work into colloquial press, only to be exiled in 1878. Nevertheless, his work continued to be printed, smuggled and distributed quietly.[44]

the rise of mass egyptian cinema

By the 1920s, local filmakers started reshaping a market previously dominated by imports. Comedic theatre and musical performance in colloquial Arabic intensified through figures such as Najib al-Rihani, Ali al-Kassar, Tawfiq al Hakim and Sayed Darwish. Egypt entered its cinematic "golden age," and became known as "Hollywood of the Arab East"[45] or "Hollywood of the Orient."[46] These performances shifted the stage away from elite exclusivity toward mass accessibility as they were comprehensible regardless of class or education, allowing ordinary Egyptians to recognize themselves in the stories, accents, and struggles being represented, bridging social divides.

41. Ella Schochat, "Egypt: Cinema and Revolution," *Critical Arts* 2, no. 4 (1983): 23, https://doi.org/10.1080/02560048308537565.
42. Andrew Flibbert, "State and Cinema in Pre-Revolutionary Egypt, 1927-52" in *Re-Envisioning Egypt 1919-1952, eds. Arthur Goldschmidt et al. (American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 448.*
43. Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians*, 45-46.
44. Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians*, 48.
45. Flibbert, "State and Cinema in Pre-Revolutionary Egypt," 451.
46. Schochat, "Egypt: Cinema and Revolution," 23.

accessibility as a threat to authority

Accessibility, however, intensified control. The first censorship law in Egypt appeared in 1914, framed around maintaining public order and social standards. As Egyptian cinema grew and expanded, colonial authorities in neighboring countries also sought to regulate its influence.[47]

indirect resistance through allegory

Under these constraints, critique often took indirect form. Tawfiq al-Hakim's play *An Unwelcome Guest (*1918–19), an allegory of British occupation, illustrates how theatre articulated dissent through narrative displacement.[48] Later, filmmakers increasingly focused on addressing social inequality and state violence through representations of everyday life, bringing the street onto the screen without direct confrontation.

collective singing and performing in the street

Musical theatre also played a vital role in revolutionizing performance. Sayed Darwish, the revolutionary composer, popularized musical theatre in colloquial Arabic, making the stage accessible to wider audiences. His songs gave voice to collective longing for freedom and mobilized nationalist sentiment against British occupation. During the 1919 revolution, the British suspended all theatrical plays temporarily. In response, actors and musicians took the streets as their stage, singing national songs and participating in protests.[49] The enduring resonance of Darwish's work is evident in how his song *Um Ya Masri* (Rise, Egyptian), was sung both in the 1919 revolution and again in the 2011 revolution in Tahrir square. Theatre, in this sense, bridged historical moments of resistance, from one generation to the other. [50]

قوم يا مصري، مصر دائما بتناديك
خد بنصري نصري دين واجب عليك

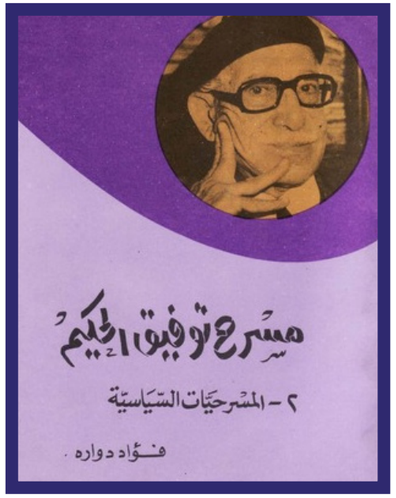
[Rise up o Egyptian, Egypt always calls for you
Lead me [Egypt] to victory, My triumph is a debt you must repay]

—Sayed Darwish "Um ya Masri"; translation by Ziad Fahmy[51]

47. Schochat, "Egypt: Cinema and Revolution,"22.
48. Abdel-Aziz Hammouda, "Modern Egyptian Theatre: Three Major Dramatists," *World Literature Today* 53, no. 4 (1979): 601.
49. Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians*, 160.
50. Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians*, 159.
51. Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians*, 161.

Anti-Colonial Productions :

Pre-Revolution



Al Dhaif Al Thaqeel (1919)
Translation: An Unwelcome Guest
It referred to the unwanted guests on Egyptian land that established themselves without an invitation from the native.



El Azima (1939-40)
Translation: Determination
A young local Egyptian, Mohamed, rebels against traditional education and decides to build his own business during when business was dominated by foreigners.

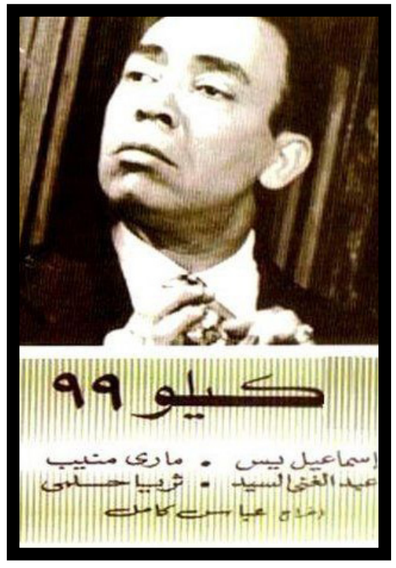
Post-Revolution



Yasqut el Istamar (1953)
Translation: Down with Imperialism
A man gets martyred while fetching a doctor for his wife in a demonstration against the British. The son is raised to hate the occupation.



Allah Maana (1954-55)
Translation: God is With Us
Celebrates the Egyptian Revolution and chronicles the Egyptian role in the Palestine War of 1948.



Kilo Tisaa wa Tissaine (1955)
Translation: Kilometre 99
A man who works two jobs, truck driver by day and nightclub singer by night, gets arrested by British Occupation forces. A cafe worker witnesses the events and decides to help him escape.



Rudda Qalbi (1958)
Translation: Give Me My Heart Back
Describes hard life of Egyptian peasant before the revolution and the importance of the revolution in bringing reform, distributing land, granting opportunity and justice to the masses.



Bab al Hadeed (1954-55)
Translation: Cairo Station
Depicting Everyday Lives of Egyptians, showing the harsh realities and struggles between traditional and modern society.



Fi Baitouna Ragoul (1961)
Translation: A Man in Our House
Based in Egypt under the British occupation, a member of a resistance movement seeks refuge in a house of a politically passive family after killing the prime minister for his acts of treason.

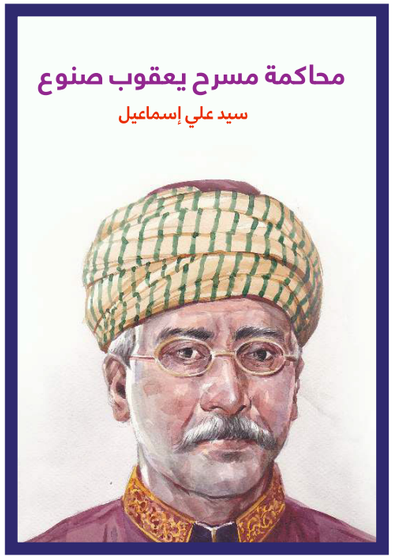


Awdet al-Ruh (1961)
Translation: The Soul Regained
Adapted from literature. The novel portrayed the Egyptian identity as humiliated by British domination and suggested it could be redeemed through the struggle of all classess against the colonialists.

Fig 3.20 Collage of anti-colonial cultural productions before and after the 1952 Revolution, illustrating the constraints of British censorship and the subsequent transformation of cinematic expression in the post-revolutionary period. Information based on Ella Schochat, "Egypt: Cinema and Revolution."

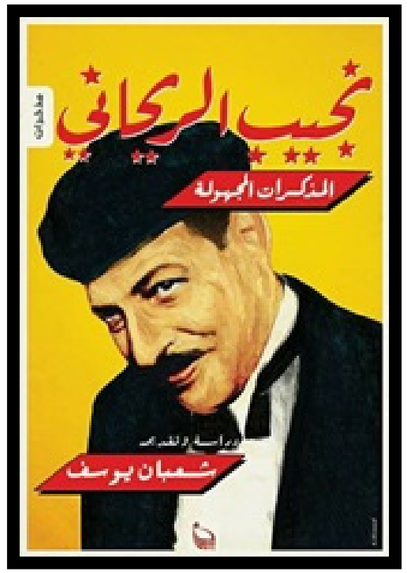
Censored and Banned Productions:

Pre-Revolution



Plays by Yaqub Sanu (1872)

His plays challenged the political authority of Khedive Ismail and the emerging elite order in late 19th-century Egypt using satire and colloquial Egyptian.



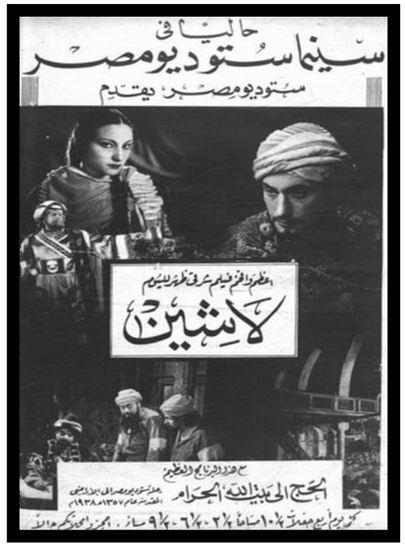
Najib al-Rihani's 'Ululuh (1919)
Translation: Tell him

Play was banned by British authorities due to its explicit political nature and sharp critique of the British occupation.



Lila Bint al-Sahara (1937)
Translation: Lila, Daughter of the Desert

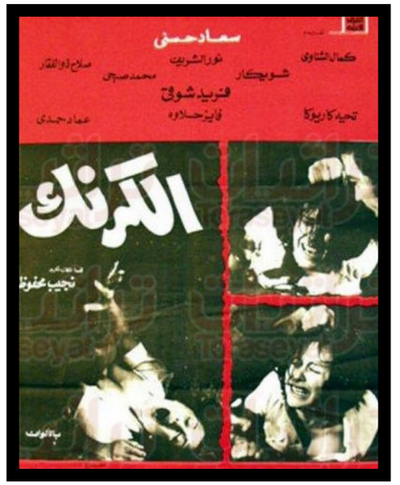
The film dealt with the successful Arab struggle against the Persians and their brutal anti-Arab Ruler.



Lasheen (1938-39)
Translation: Lasheen

Suppressed due to representing an oppressive medieval tyrant. Censorship did not tolerate any criticism of state authority in the past or present.

Post-Revolution



Karnak Cafe (1975)

Banned due to its explicit portrayal of political repression, torture, and sexual violence within Egyptian intelligence services during the era of President Gamal Abdel Nasser.

Fig 3.21 Collage of censored, and banned productions, demonstrating that censorship persisted both before and after independence, shifting according to the ruling power. Information based on Ella Schochat, "Egypt: Cinema and Revolution" and Ziad Fahmy, "Ordinary Egyptians."

the cairo fire: destruction of colonial urban symbols

Despite the rise of colloquial and local productions, theaters and cinemas still retained a colonial association. During the Cairo Fire of 1952, cinemas and theaters were deliberately attacked because of their link to colonial cosmopolitan and elite entertainment.[52] Many performance spaces, including Cinema Rivoli, Metro, Radio, Miami, and Diana, were destroyed.[53] Their destruction marked an attempt to erase both symbolic and physical infrastructure that represented an oppressive power structure which morally, politically, and economically violated local culture.



Fig 3.22 Cinema Rivoli in Downtown Cairo in flames, representing moments of destruction tied to anti-colonial unrest and its association with British colonial presence.

52. Nancy Y Reynolds, *A City Consumed: Urban Commerce, the Cairo Fire, and the Politics of Decolonization in Egypt*, 1st ed (Stanford University Press, 2012), 211-12, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804782661.
53. Reynolds, *A City Consumed*, 211-12.


« الاخبار » ٢٨/١٢/٩٥٤ - ٥

أخبار المجتمع

الرئيس جمال عبد الناصر يفتتح سينما قصر النيل

احتفلت العاصمة أمس الاول بافتتاح دار سينما قصر النيل التابعة لشركة اخوان جعفر .
وقد اقيمت بهذه المناسبة حفلة خاصة حضرها السيد الرئيس جمال عبدالناصر وبعض اعضاء مجلس قيادة الثورة والوزراء ورجال السلك السياسى العربى والاجنبى والمشتغلين بالسينما والمسرح والفن والصحافة والأدب وقد شاهد الجميع فى هذه الحفلة الخاصة فيلم حفلة الرعب بالسينما سكوب ، وهو الفيلم العالمى الذى يعرض الآن .
والصورة للسيد الرئيس والى يساره الصاغ صلاح سالم فاليكباشى زكريا محيى الدين فالاستاذ محمد جعفر أحد صاحبى شركة اخوان جعفر والى يسار الرئيس جلس اللواء عبد الحكيم عامر فاليوزباشى عبد اللطيف الجيار .
هذا وقد توجه الاستاذ محمد جعفر الى دار الرياسة أمس حيث قدم شكره وشكر شركة اخوان جعفر للسيد الرئيس وصحبه على حضورهم حفل افتتاح السينما .

Fig 3.23 Newspaper announcement of the inauguration of Kasr el-Nil Theatre and Cinema during the presidency of Gamal Abdel Nasser, marking the period of nationalization in Egypt.



Fig 3.24 Um Kulthum Performing at Kasr el-Nil

Kasr el-Nil Theatre and Cinema emerged in the aftermath of this rupture. Inaugurated in 1954, it belongs to the period after the formal end of British rule.[54] The 1952 revolution significantly influenced the gradual de-westernization of Egyptian cinema, focusing on producing a self-aware national film industry.[55] Cinema and theatre were increasingly mobilized as instruments of nation building, producing narratives of unity, progress, and collective identity. Under Gamal

54. Hind El Shenawy, "The rise and fall of downtown cinemas: history, stories, and detailed information," *Mantiqti*, January 23, 2017, https://tinyurl.com/59xupuse.
55. Schochat, "Egypt: Cinema and Revolution," 22.

post-1952 cinema as an instrument of nation-building

Abdel Nasser, cinema was nationalized and brought under near total state control. While this shift reduced Western dominance and foregrounded Egyptian stories and voices, it also introduced a new regime of censorship in which the state itself became largely exempt from critique. Productions mainly focused on celebrating the revolution and deeply critiqued the occupation.[56] However, the current regime did not permit any productions to criticize it.

kasr el-nil as a stage of collective assembly

Within this context, Kasr el-Nil functioned as a space of performative assembly. Like many others, it gathered audiences from different social backgrounds into a shared environment of sound, image, and collective attention, producing a shared affect and a sense of collective presence.[57] The theatre is known for Egypt's most iconic performers, most notably Umm Kulthum, whose concerts on its stage drew crowds of both elites and ordinary Egyptians. Her music, infused with nationalist undertones and collective longing, blurred the line between cultural production and political expression. The theatre also hosted Abdel Halim Hafez, Warda al-Jazairia, Mohamed Abdel Wahab, and other legendary figures.[58]

stages shaped by censorship and authority

Cinema and theatre in Downtown Cairo operated under a persistent double condition. On the one hand, they were historically associated with elite culture and foreign influence. They were spaces where imported films, Western aesthetics, and upper-class social life were displayed. On the other hand, they became powerful tools for nationalist expression, popular address, and anti-colonial sentiment. These two meanings show how there is a strong correlation between performance and power and how it is shaped by strict censorship. Performance spaces were sites where films and plays were banned, altered, or tightly regulated, revealing how seriously authorities regarded their capacity to shape public consciousness and collective memory as the most accessible medium to the wider population. Under conditions of censorship and regulation, performance spaces often shifted away from explicit critique, yet through the use of colloquial language, satire and humor, they were able to inscribe hidden messages.

56. Schochat, "Egypt: Cinema and Revolution," 27.
57. Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians*, 19.
58. El Shenawy, "The rise and fall of downtown cinemas."

kasr el-nil today

Read alongside the bookshop and the cafe, Kasr el-Nil forms part of a broader network of cultural circulation. Ideas articulated in print moved into oral discussion and were later encountered audiovisually, reinforcing one another across media. Today, the site is undergoing renovation, yet publicly available information about the project remains limited.[59] This uncertainty further underscores how the site's contemporary transformation risks prioritizing physical renewal over the articulation of the cultural memory embedded in its past uses.



Fig 3.25 Exterior view of Kasr el-Nil Theatre and Cinema prior to renovation.

59. John Hoey,"Project 15- Kasr El Nile Theatre renovations," *John Stephen Hoey*, https://www.johnstephenhoey.com/project-15-kasr-el-nile-theatre-renovations.



Fig 3.26 Interior of Kasr el-Nil Theatre and Cinema before renovation, showing the empty auditorium with rows of red seats.

Fig 3.27 Kasr el-Nil Theatre and Cinema today, closed and undergoing renovation.

04| PARTICIPATORY REMEMBRANCE: MEMORY AS LIVING PRACTICE

The preceding chapters traced how memory in Downtown Cairo is produced, managed, and constrained. Memory becomes institutionalized through museums and heritage frameworks and selectively stabilized through preservation practices that privilege architectural monumentality over lived experience. Current preservation efforts largely focus on restoring facades associated with the district's late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century development. These interventions are frequently tied to tourism, real estate value, and cultural branding. While they succeed in rescuing portions of the built fabric, they also construct a selective narrative that centers aesthetic value and elite architectural histories, sidelining the everyday practices through which Downtown Cairo functioned as a space of political, cultural, and intellectual life. In doing so, preservation risks reproducing the very social hierarchies embedded in the district's colonial formation. By foregrounding ordinary practices, this thesis advances a counter-narrative to these official framings.

participatory remembrance as alternative model

Building on this trajectory, this chapter explores how the memory of a site can be preserved without being detached from the spatial and social conditions that originally sustained it. Rather than fixing sites in time or elevating them as monuments, this thesis proposes participatory remembrance as an alternative mode of preservation. Participatory remembrance treats memory as something activated through use. Its aim is not to conserve spaces as static artifacts, but to keep their histories operative and capable of being encountered, debated, and reinterpreted in the present.

This approach draws directly on Smith's redefinition of heritage as a cultural process rather than a material object.[1] Heritage, in this view, is continuously produced through practices of inhabitation, storytelling, and engagement. Informal encounters, overheard conversations, routine gatherings become central to how memory persists beyond institutional control and the AHD. Heritage is not located in the site itself, but in what people do at, around, and through it.

The sites examined in this thesis—Madbuli Bookshop, Café Riche, and Kasr el-Nil Theatre and Cinema—can be understood as *lieux de mémoire*, or *sites of memory*, in Pierre Nora's sense: places where memory crystallizes when living environments of memory begin to disappear.[2] Their significance lies in their

1. Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (Routledge, 2007), 44-84 .
2. Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 7, https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520.

capacity to recall past practices through spatial continuity. Bakshi's distinction between archived testimony and the "unwritten testimonies" of the city further clarifies this position. While historical records are always mediated by temporal distance, unwritten testimonies are encountered in real time through spatial practice.[3] In Downtown Cairo, these persist in everyday life. Here, space itself operates as a vehicle for memory, particularly in a context where official narratives are predominant. Although these places are experienced in the present, they provide access to past practices. Yet, they also exist with tension with dominant forms of commemoration shaped by institutional power. In this sense, these everyday places studied in this thesis can be understood as "unofficial sites of memory."[4] The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience extends this logic into a global framework that is relevant to Downtown Cairo's context. These sites aim to prevent certain memories from being erased, functioning as public forums, and enabling visitors to make connections between past and present through places such as historic sites, place-based museums, or memorials. [5]

sites of unofficial memory & sites of conscience

Participatory remembrance shifts attention toward how commemoration is enacted within these sites. Jay Winter emphasizes how sites of memory become meaningful through commemorative acts that allow for their activation.[6] He describes the space between history and memory as "historical remembrance," acknowledging that commemoration always requires reference to both.[7] This perspective challenges the idea of history as a neutral narrative and memory as a vague, subjective realm. Public commemoration often attempts to choreograph remembrance through official narratives and scripted rituals, leaving little room for creativity or subversion. Yet remembrance is inherently multi-vocal, where different groups continually reinterpret and appropriate sites of memory. Recognizing this tension opens up the possibility for more bottom-up forms of commemoration, where memory is activated through everyday practices rather than imposed through official narratives.[8] When heritage is understood as experience rather than object, it allows for new memories to be formed and old ones to be renegotiated.

physical commemoration

3. Anita Bakshi, "Urban Form and Memory Discourses: Spatial Practices in Contested Cities," *Journal of Urban Design* 19, no. 2 (2014): 192, https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2013.854696.
4. Jay Winter, "Sites of Memory," in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*. eds. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (Fordham University Press, 2010), 318, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1c999bq.
5. Sarah Pharaon et al., "Sites of Conscience: Connecting Past to Present, Memory to Action," *American Alliance of Museums*, (2011), https://www.aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/5-EXH_fall11_sites-of-conscience_Pharaon_Gabriel_Sevcenko.pdf
6. Winter, "Sites of Memory," 312.
7. Winter, "Sites of Memory," 313-14.
8. Winter, "Sites of Memory," 316-17.

strategies and tactics

De Certeau's distinction between strategies and tactics provides the conceptual approach to commemoration. The model of participatory remembrance proposes interventions that are grounded in the logic of tactics, promoting improvisation, spontaneity, and multiple readings of space. However, it also carefully employs minimal strategies to invite and enable tactical use. Movement is central to the experience. Walking allows for the ordinary, the unpredictable, and the improvised rhythms of daily life to emerge.[9] The placement of urban interventions is intentionally open-ended, allowing users to make their own choices of movement and interpretation, rather than following a fixed, curated route. In this way, walkers "write" the city with their footsteps, creating meaning through their use of space, layering new narratives onto the visible city, and producing alternative forms of knowledge that resist the formal institutional narrative. However, Bakshi notes how urban design interventions alone cannot address these issues because memory discourses are complicit in the construction of urban imaginaries.[10]

images as mnemonic devices

The role of image further reinforces this activation. Yates, in *The Art of Memory*, emphasizes the relationship between image, place, and recollection. Images serve as mnemonic devices, linking memory to spatial experience.[11] Bakshi similarly stresses the importance of physical, sensory cues. In the urban context, images may take the form of murals, signs, shadows, color, projections, or subtle spatial markers.[12] Their function is mnemonic embedding cues of memory within the everyday visual field of the city.[13] In the case of this project, the use of surfaces for reading, points for listening, and digital interfaces such as screens and QR codes allow stories to move between people and places.

Finally, a set of local precedents demonstrates how participatory remembrance can be operationalized in Downtown Cairo without relying on monumentalization. CLUSTER's work, including its reframing of Downtown through passageways and narrative walking tours, shows how the city can be read through in-between spaces and everyday routes rather than through official landmarks alone. This thesis adopts that premise by positioning passageways and hidden thresholds as

9. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press, 1988), 35-38.
10. Bakshi, "Urban Form and Memory Discourses," 208.
11. Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (University of Chicago Press, 1966), 1-8.
12. Bakshi, "Urban Form and Memory Discourses," 194.
13. Bakshi, "Urban Form and Memory Discourses," 197.

learning from local precedents and possibilities for collaboration

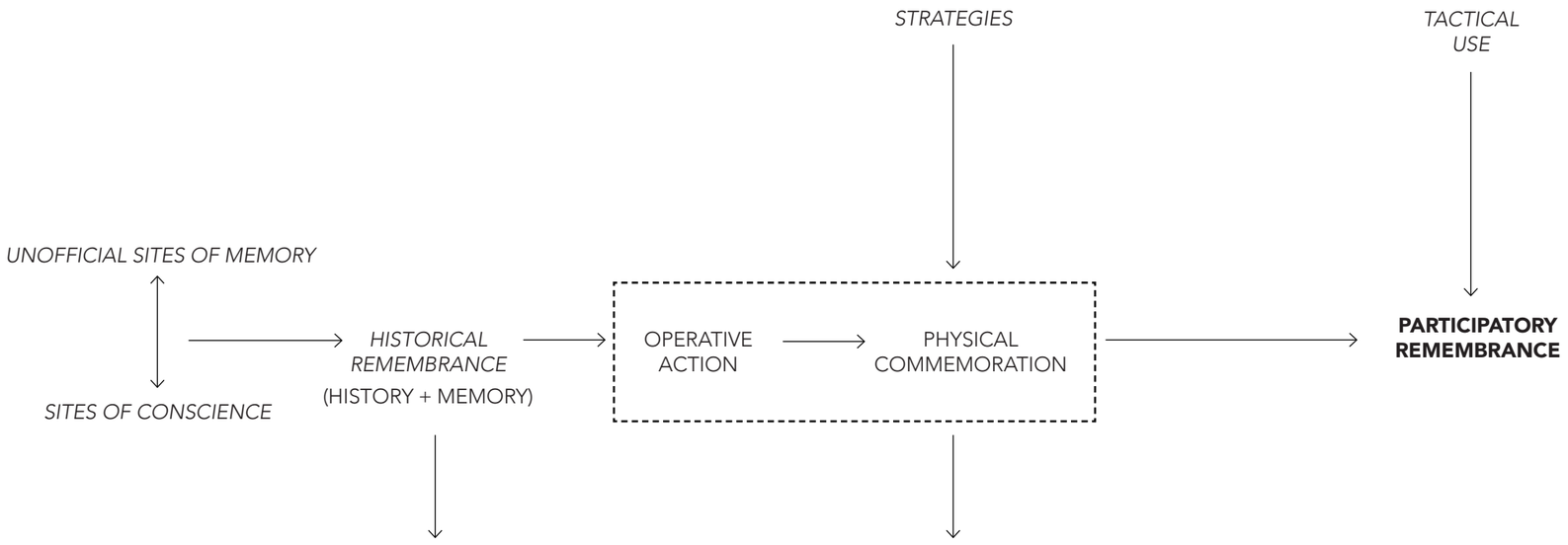
primary carriers of memory. Al Ismaelia's Radio Lane intervention further clarifies how minimal urban devices can guide attention without fixing interpretation. Monochromatic cues, repeated details, and small-scale wayfinding strategies can redirect movement, invite pause, and make overlooked spaces legible while remaining embedded in ordinary use. May al-Ibrashy's practice in Historic Cairo adds another lesson: participation is most durable when it is structured as mutual benefit. The interventions help under-recognized spaces gain exposure, attracting visitors while reinforcing local ownership. Visibility becomes an economic mechanism, where increased foot traffic supports small businesses and strengthens local networks.

catalogue: translating memory to action to design

To translate these theoretical insights into practice, this thesis develops a design catalogue. The catalogue transforms historical remembrance, meaning the histories and memories of the sites, into operative actions such as persist, overhear, assemble, translate, and conceal. These actions guide physical commemoration and are translated into design elements that shape the urban intervention at each site. The catalogue serves as a bridge between memory and intervention, ensuring that design remains grounded in the lived practices that originally sustained it.

The following chapter translates this framework into design. It applies participatory remembrance as a model of preservation to propose a network of ordinary mnemonic practices across Downtown Cairo. Through spatial interventions embedded in the everyday, the project demonstrates how memory can be sustained through movement, encounter, and collective use.

Fig 4.1 Diagram illustrating the framework of participatory remembrance



05| DESIGN INTERVENTION: A NETWORK OF ORDINARY MNEMONIC PRACTICES

5.1 Design Intent and Principles:

Participatory remembrance reframes architecture as a facilitator of memory. The focus shifts from preserving objects to preserving use, encounter, and collective engagement. Building on this premise, the design chapter translates theory into spatial practice. The project proposes a distributed network of ordinary mnemonic practices: small-scale interventions embedded in proximity to existing sites.

These interventions operate alongside official heritage sites, museums, and curated narratives, offering a parallel way of experiencing the district. Rather than presenting history as a fixed account, they reactivate the practices through which memory and awareness were historically produced, enabling reading, gathering, listening, and performing in the present. The research on resistance under British rule is used here as a lens to identify these practices, not necessarily as the content to be displayed.

Madbuli Bookshop, Café Riche, and Kasr el-Nil function as anchors in this network. Their historical roles are understood through the activities they supported, which are then translated into spatial strategies through a design catalogue. In this way, the project designs for use, allowing these practices to reemerge and create space for alternative narratives to surface over time.

Building on previous case studies, the interventions are embedded in everyday passageways and thresholds where public and private intersect. These in-between conditions allow visibility without full exposure. Intimacy, neutrality, and concealment structure the design language. The gestures are small, integrated, and deliberately ordinary. They require curiosity to discover and participation to activate. During extended walks through Downtown Cairo, the color green repeatedly appears in lighting fixtures, bollards, shutters, barriers, and canopies. The interventions adopt this existing palette as camouflage, blending into the visual field of the street and acting as a subtle wayfinding strategy, allowing interventions to guide without dominating.



Fig 5.1 Green elements in Downtown Cairo.

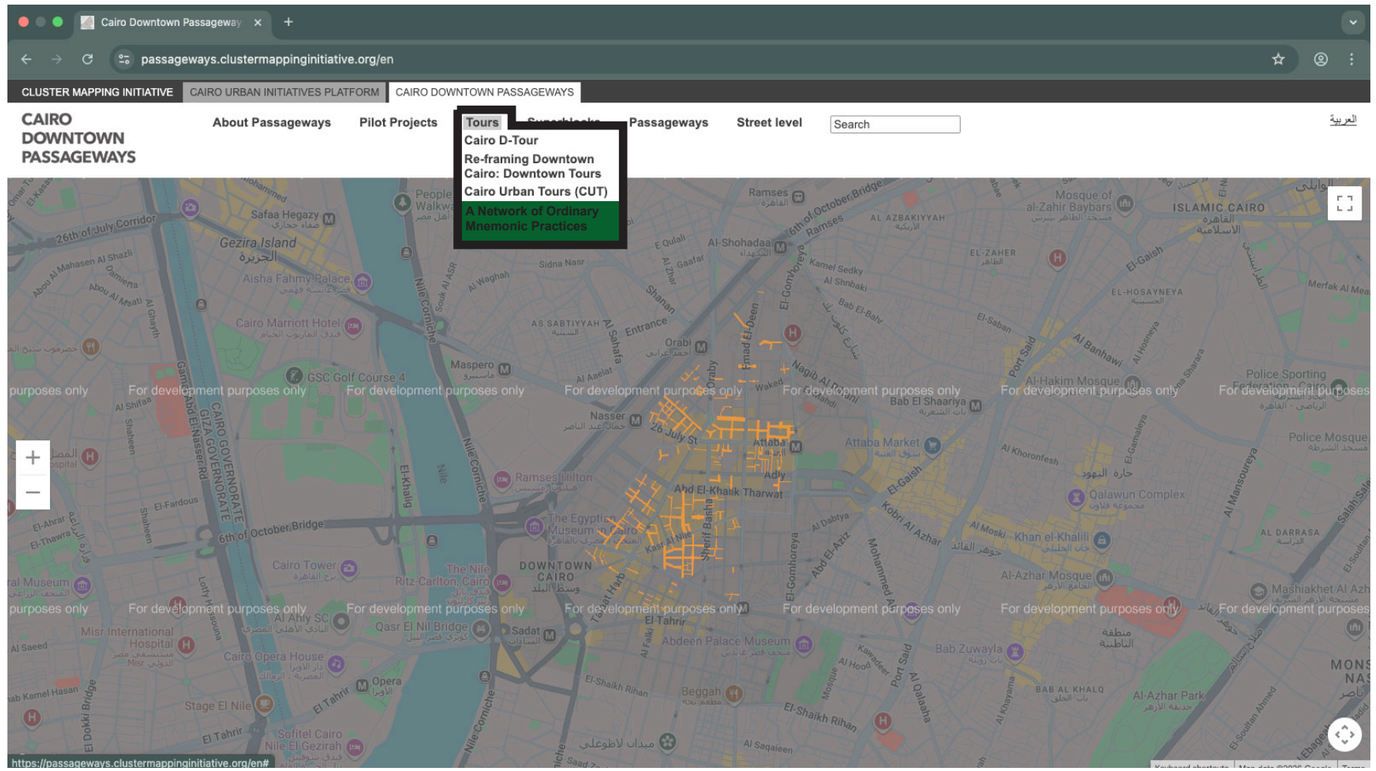


Fig 5.2 CLUSTER Cairo's Downtown Passageways digital mapping platform, illustrating the proposed integration of this intervention into the collaborative mapping interface.

This intervention seeks to align with existing initiatives that operate through similar principles, such as CLUSTER, in order to extend its reach to audiences already engaged in alternative readings of Downtown Cairo. By positioning the network as a potential layer within their broader narrative tours, the project situates itself within an ongoing discourse on urban memory. At the same time, it remains framed as a self-guided experience, allowing users to navigate independently, construct their own routes, and engage with the sites on their own terms rather than through a fixed, curated sequence.

An interactive wayfinding map has been developed to support this experience. The map does not prescribe a fixed route, but provides spatial cues, hints, and layered information that allow users to navigate the network independently. By increasing visibility and circulation through these sites, the network fosters mutual benefit: users gain alternative access to memory and participation in shaping it, while the sites themselves gain increased foot traffic, and economic potential through sustained presence.

The thesis begins to explore how such an intervention could be sustained through collaboration. CLUSTER is one example, but it is not the only possibility. Partnerships with local businesses, cultural initiatives, and community actors could all play a role. Each brings a different form of support, whether through content, maintenance, programming, or daily use. This shared involvement becomes essential to keeping the network active. Without it, the intervention risks becoming static, or detached from the everyday life it depends on.

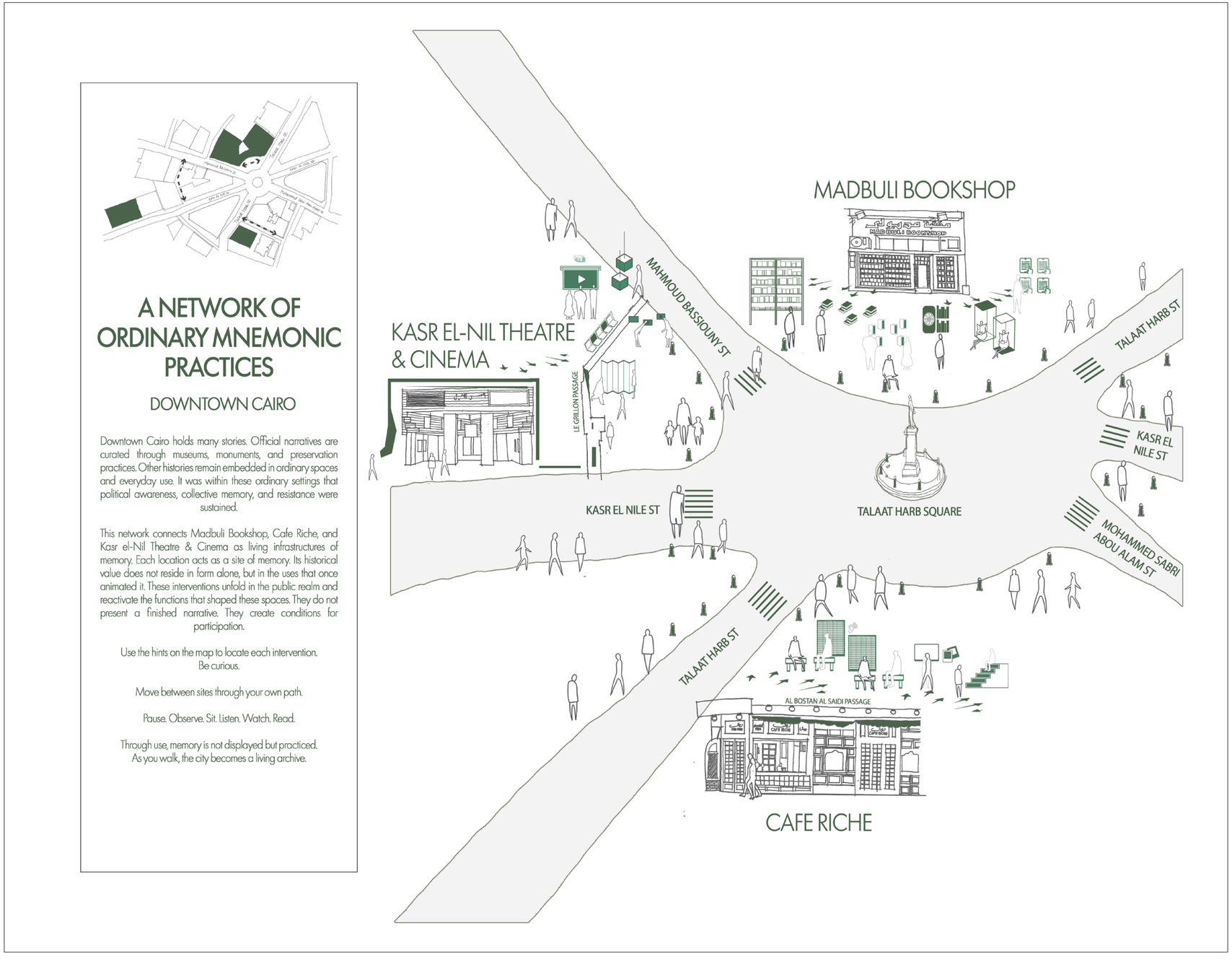


Fig 5.3 A Network of Ordinary Mnemonic Practices Interactive Wayfinding Map.

5.2 Design Interventions

5.2.1 Corridor of Reading: A Mobile Threshold at Madbuli

The intervention is located at the facade of Madbuli Bookshop, overlooking Talaat Harb Square, one of Downtown Cairo's most visible and surveilled public squares. The bookshop historically operated under conditions of scrutiny while maintaining its role as a space of intellectual circulation. Although the intervention does not occupy an existing passageway, the intervention generates its own narrow spatial corridor along the facade, creating a threshold between the square and the shop. In doing so, it produces an in-between condition within the open public realm, transforming the edge of the storefront into a passage of encounter and reflection. The intervention is structured around four operative actions: persist, print, access, and counter.

Persistence is understood as a quiet presence in the street. The design introduces a mobile vitrine aligned with the proportions of the existing storefront. From the street, it appears ordinary, functioning as a commercial display consistent with surrounding facades. Its mobility allows it to be pulled outward during the day, forming a narrow corridor and threshold between the new structure and the original facade. This temporary corridor subtly transforms the sidewalk into a space for pause and encounter while remaining visually integrated into the square. At night, it retracts, maintaining a quiet presence within the regulated urban fabric.

Printing is reintroduced as a visible act. The outer surface functions as open shelving and public display. Books are brought back into the street, recalling Madbuli's historic practice of stacking volumes on the pavement and blurring the boundary between the shop and the street. Above, canopy cutouts cast book-like shadows onto the ground, evoking the memory of informal street display without obstructing movement.

Access is spatialized through a borrowing and exchange system alongside a reading niche. Visitors are invited to take, leave, or read in place, reactivating Madbuli's legacy of widening access through informal lending and installment practices. Reading is reintroduced as a public act embedded within everyday circulation.

Counter narratives emerge through discreet digital surfaces revealing excerpts from censored texts, politically charged literature, and controversial authors historically associated with the shop. These elements remain visually neutral until engaged, operating through discovery rather than declaration.

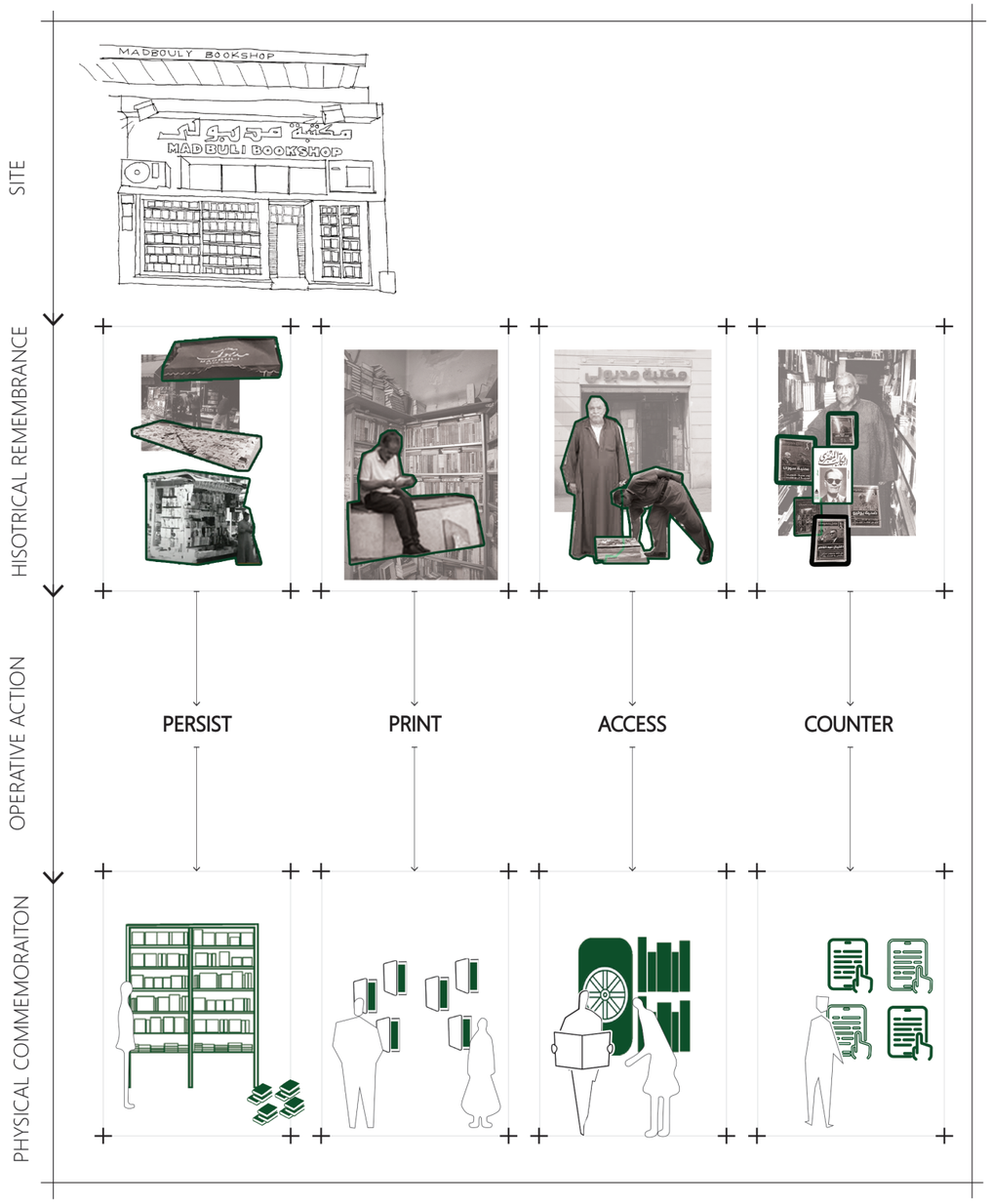
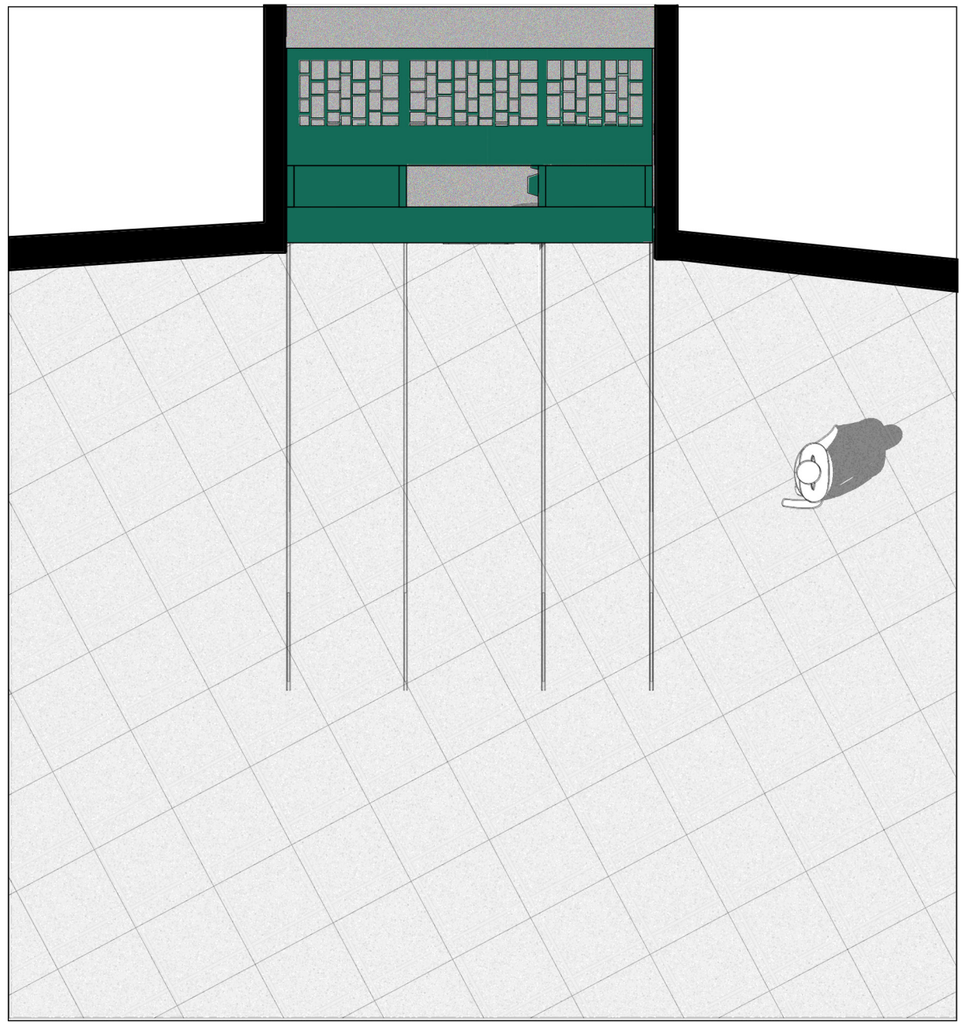
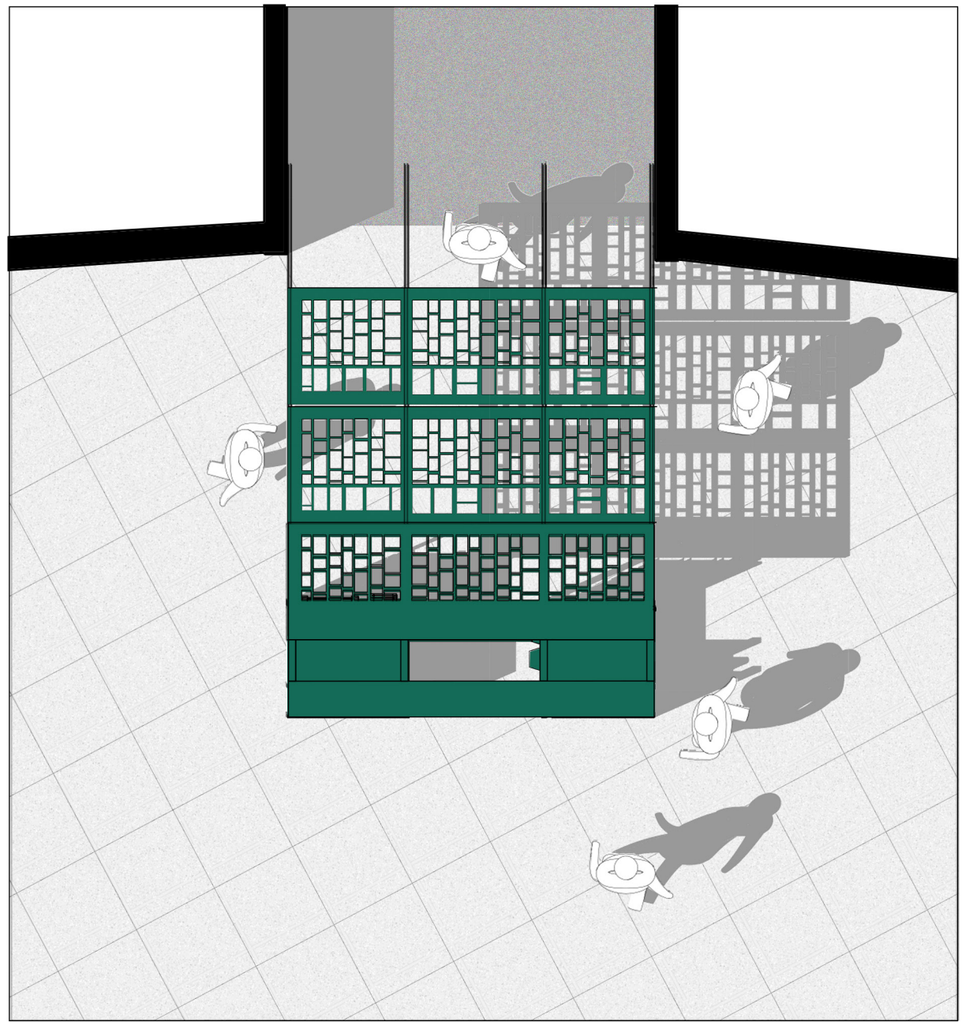


Fig 5.4 Madbuli Bookshop Design Catalogue.

Fig 5.5 Madbuli Bookshop Intervention Plan Drawings, illustrating the spatial configuration in both open and closed states.

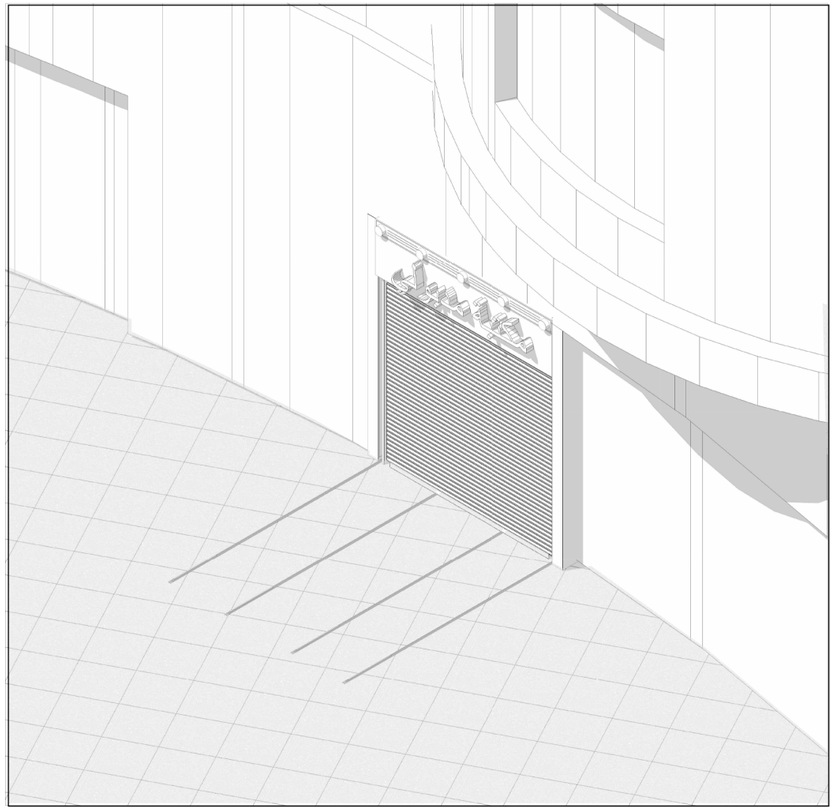




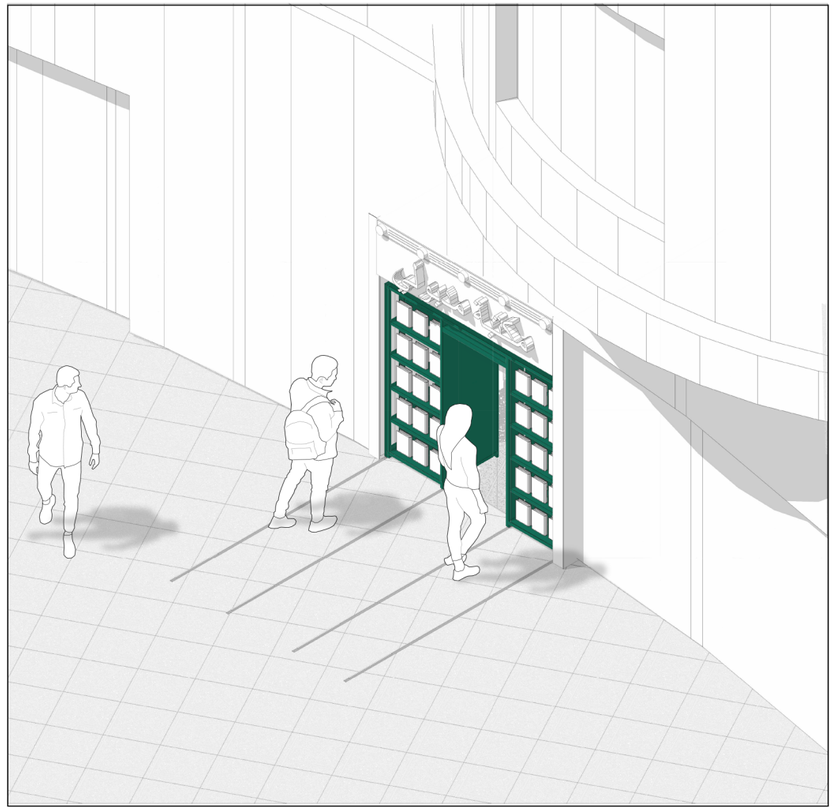
Plan showing the intervention when closed, maintaining a continuous storefront edge and concealing the reading threshold within the facade

Plan showing intervention when open, revealing the reading threshold and allowing access, interaction, and engagement at the storefront edge

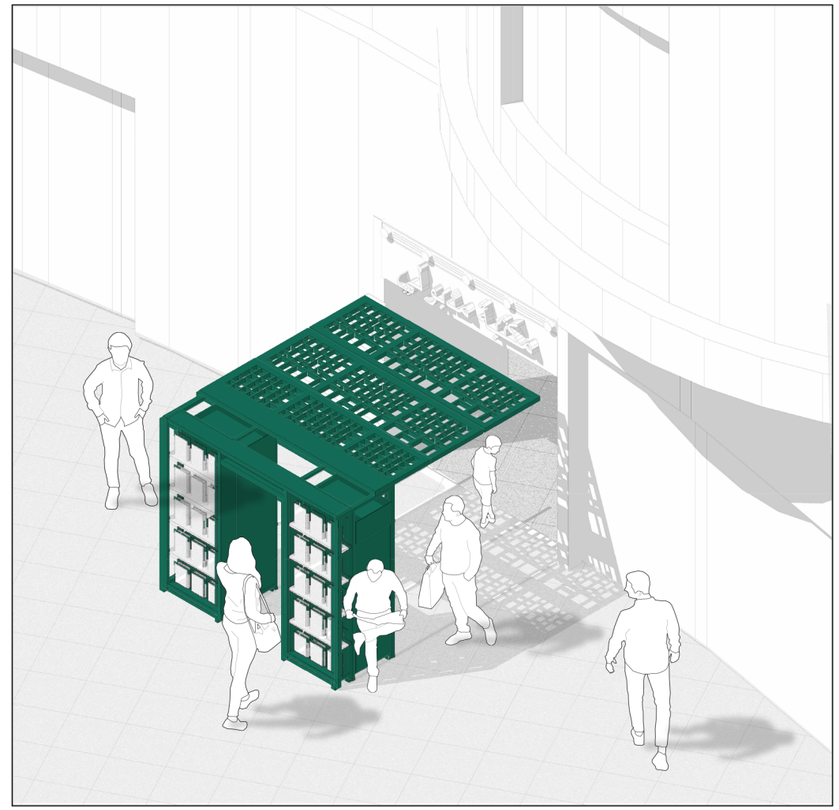
Fig 5.6 Madbuli Bookshop Intervention Axo Drawings, illustrating the spatial configuration in both open and closed states.



Bookshop closed with shutters concealing the intervention within



Bookshop open with intervention retracted, maintaining a continuous storefront edge



Bookshop open with intervention deployed, revealing the reading threshold and enabling engagement at the storefront edge



Fig 5.7 Madbuli Bookshop prior to intervention. Photograph documenting the existing spatial and street conditions before the proposed design.

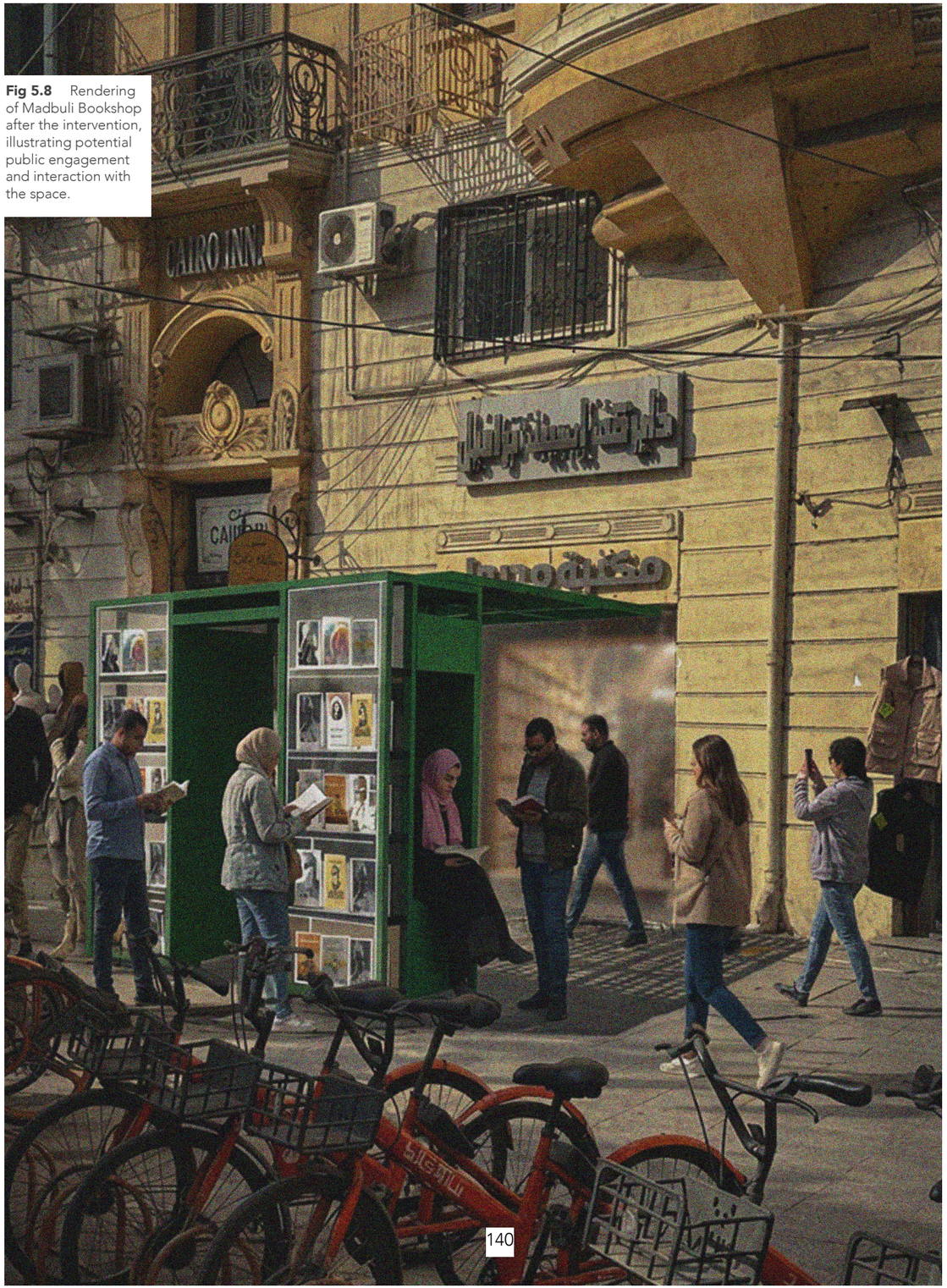


Fig 5.8 Rendering of Madbuli Bookshop after the intervention, illustrating potential public engagement and interaction with the space.



Fig 5.9
Rendering showing the threshold created by the intervention, where a narrow corridor along the facade mediates between the public square and the interior of the shop.

5.2.2 Threshold of Dialogue: Occupying the Café's Edge

The intervention is located in the passageway adjacent to Café Riche, known as al-Bustan al-Saidi Passage. Originally built in 1925, this narrow street once served as a regular side link between Talaat Harb and al-Bustan al-Saidi Street. By the 1970s, the atmosphere of the passage shifted as Café Riche and Zahret al-Bustan Cafe, located further down, began to occupy the street with tables and chairs, gradually transforming it into a semi-public social space. During renovations in the 1980s, Café Riche further enclosed its sidewalk extension, converting it into a covered dining area, marking a shift from open-air spontaneity to a more defined yet still socially active space.[1] The intervention reactivates this threshold condition through four operative actions: occupy, overhear, circulate, and uncover.

To **occupy**, seating elements extend along the linear edge of the café within a strip that is currently closed yet historically active. The arrangement encourages lingering rather than transit, restoring the passage as a place to sit within the street where presence becomes an act.

Overhearing structures the spatial language. Perforated partitions are placed between seating zones, creating porous boundaries. Conversations remain visible and partially audible without full exposure. The design recreates the conditions through which knowledge once circulated informally at Café Riche. One did not need to be invited to participate. To sit nearby was often enough.

Circulation is supported through integrated digital surfaces along the covered facade. These screens provide access to archival fragments, recorded conversations, and contextual material about the café's intellectual life. Knowledge moves between voices, tables, and devices. Reading, listening, and discussion overlap rather than occur in isolation.

The intervention culminates in an element that appears ordinary: a small staircase embedded within the passage. Upon entering, a concealed screen is revealed. This hidden chamber references the café's basement and its associations with political resistance. What was once concealed below ground resurfaces through curiosity and its memory is **uncovered**.

1. "Al-Bustan al-Sa'idi Passageway," *Cluster Mapping Initiative*, https://passageways.clustermapping-initiative.org/en/passageways/b12-al-bustan-al-saidi-passageway.

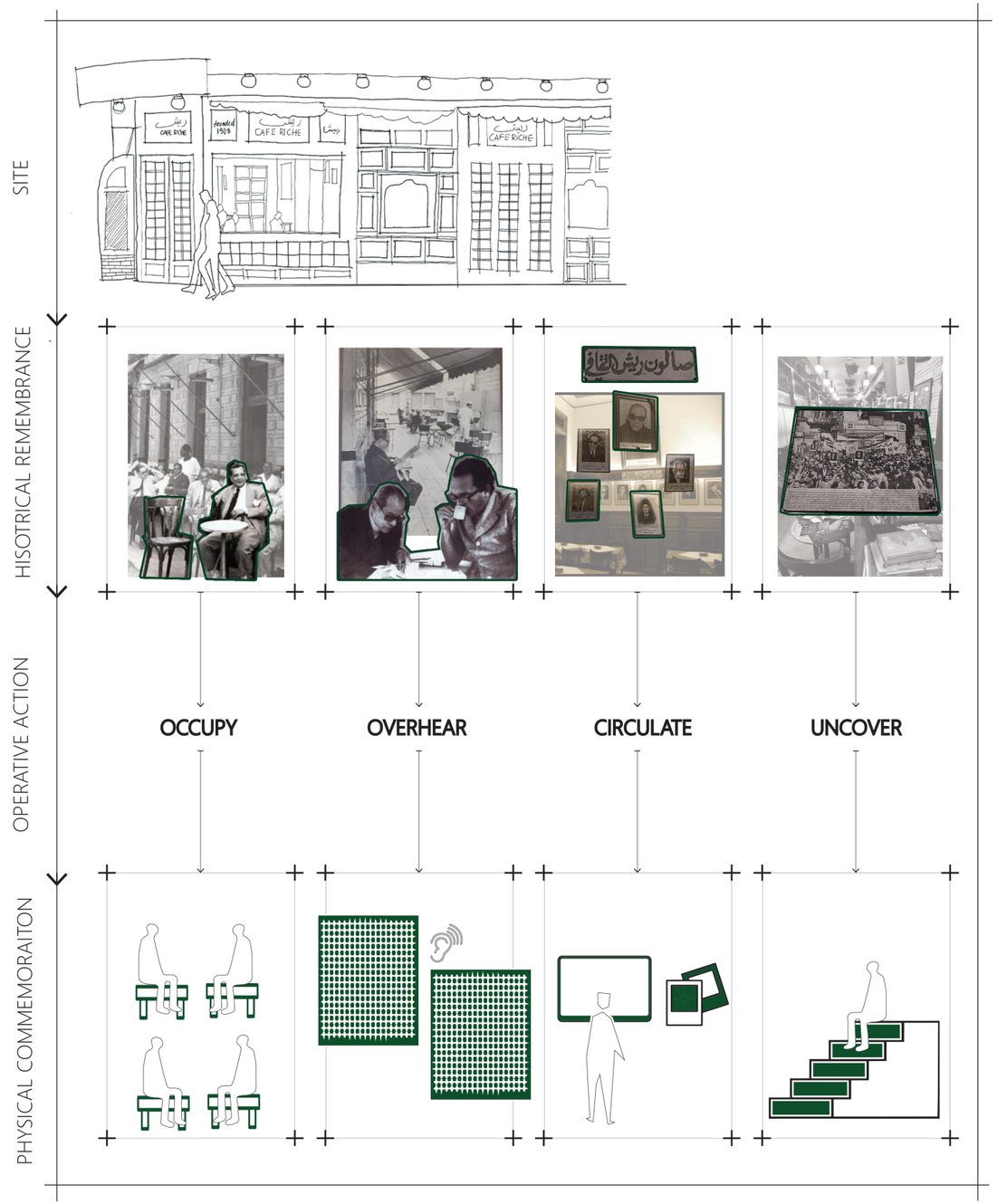


Fig 5.10 Cafe Riche Design Catalogue.

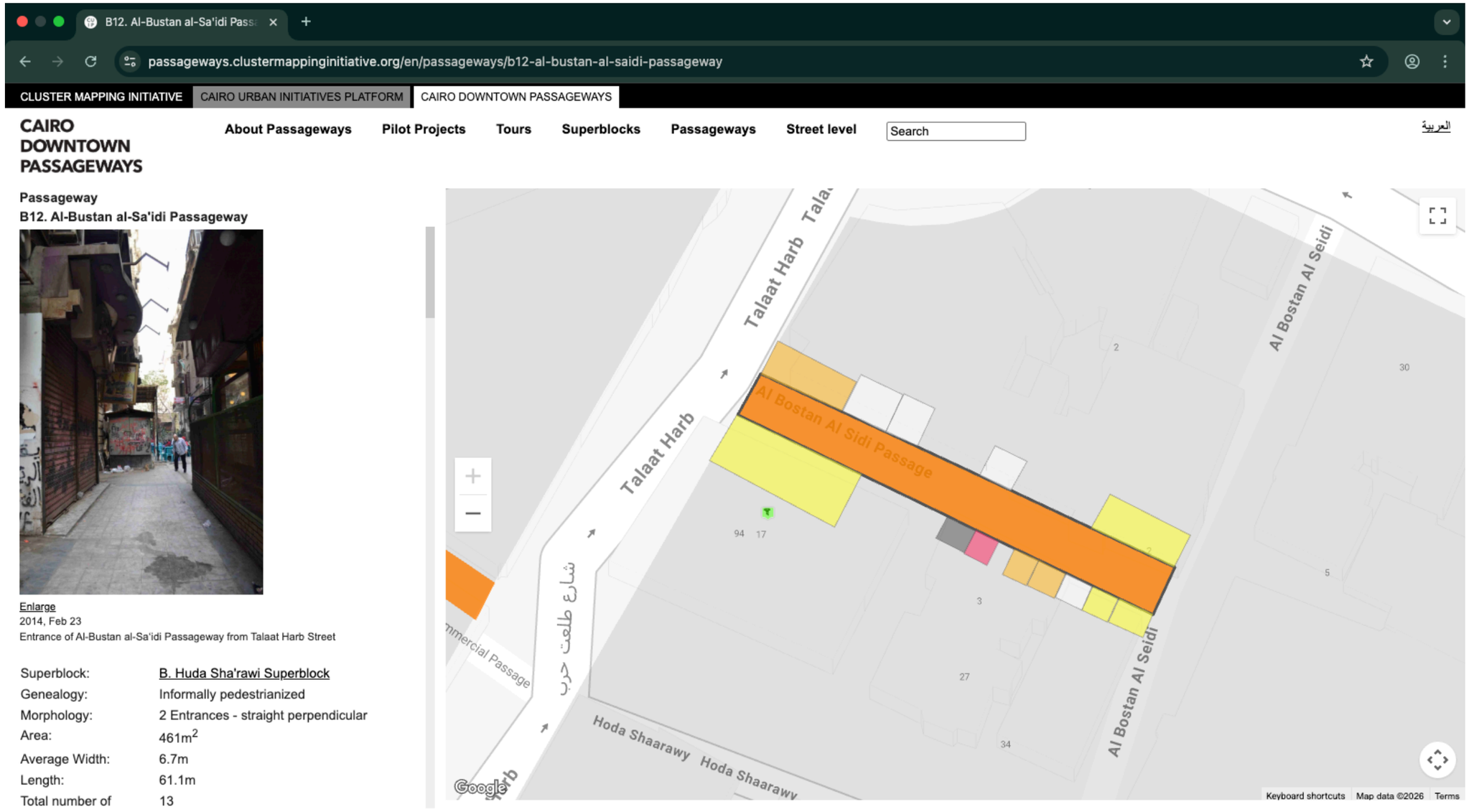
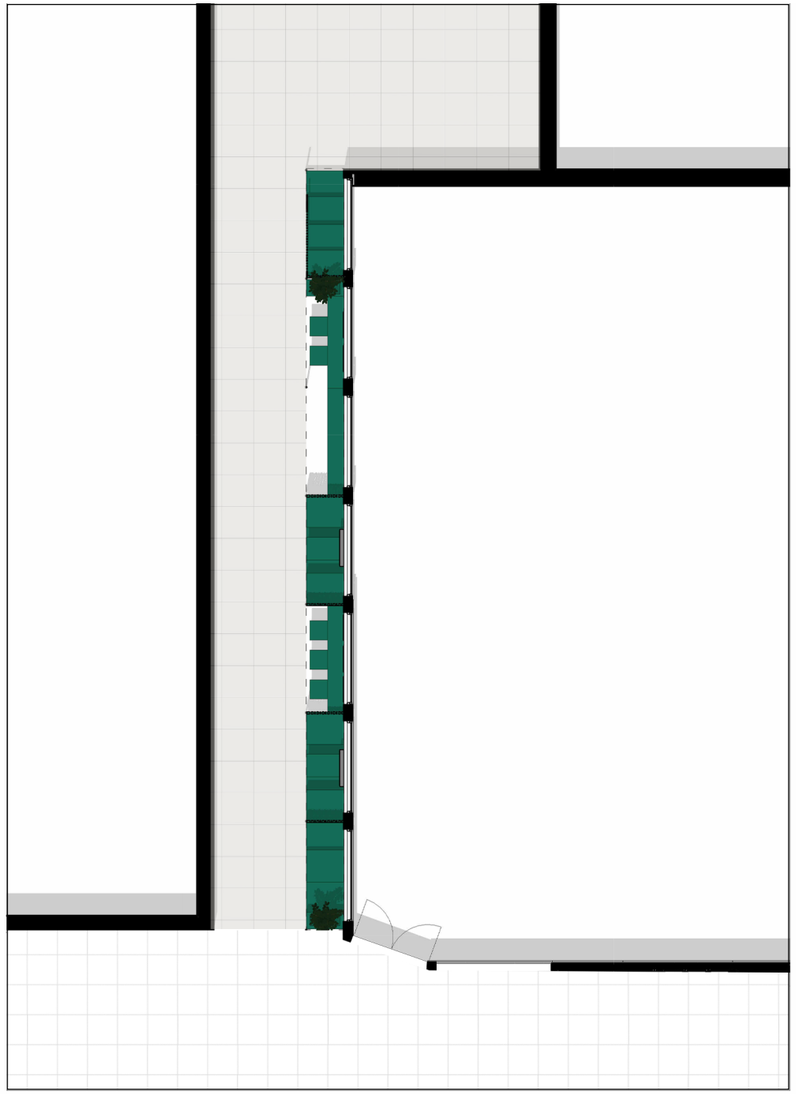
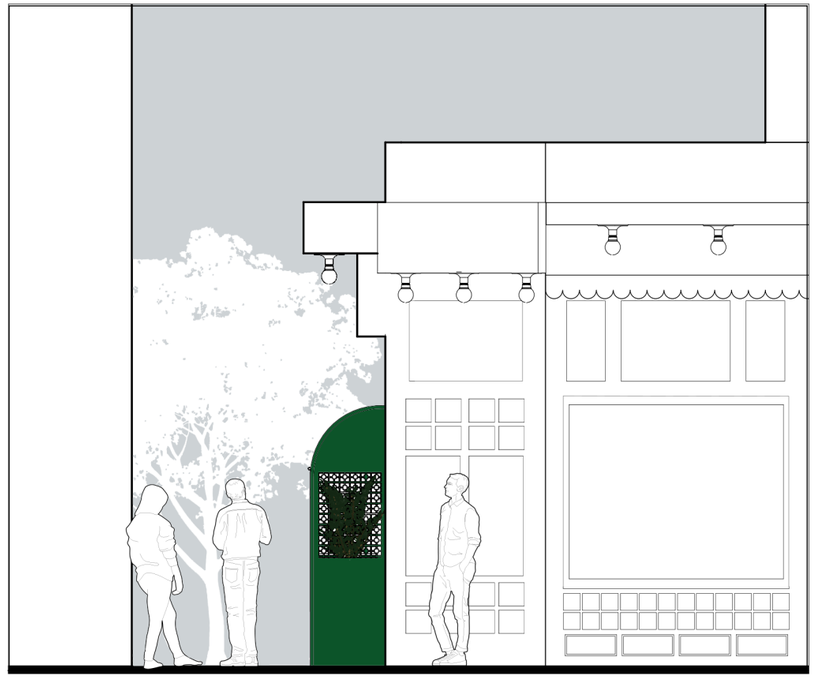


Fig 5.11 CLUSTER Cairo's Downtown Passageways digital mapping platform showing information on Al-Bustan Al-Saidi Passage.



1:100 Plan

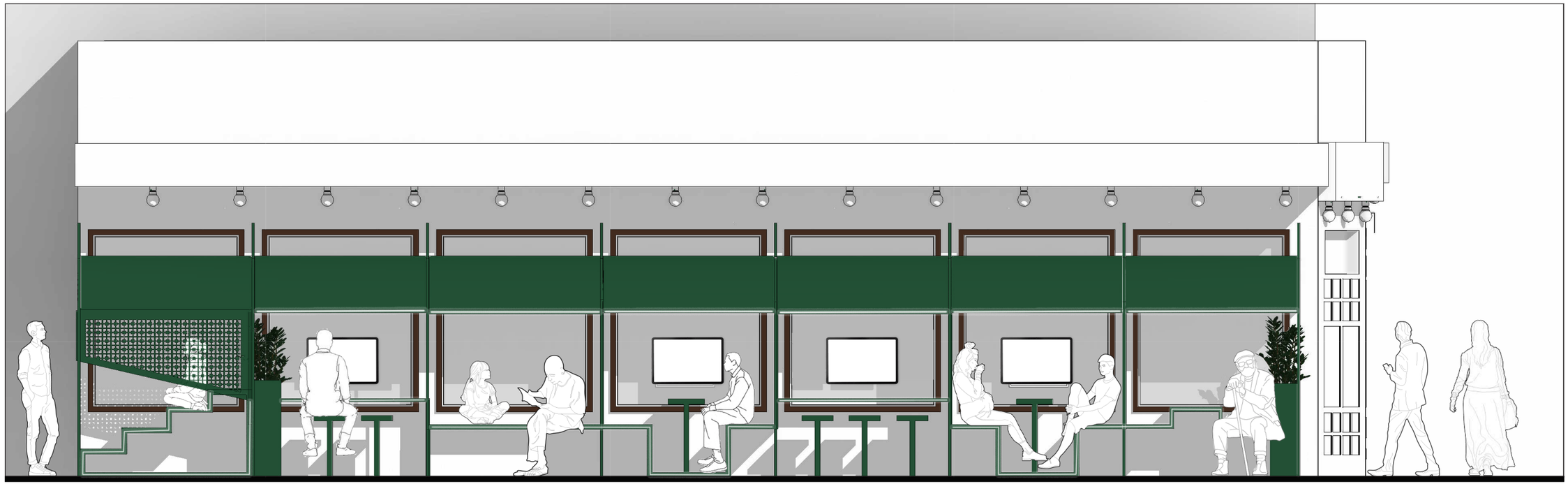
Fig 5.12 Café Riche passage intervention plan drawing, showing the linear intervention positioned along the side of the café to avoid obstructing the narrow passage.



1:50 Elevation



Fig 5.13 Elevation drawing of the Café Riche intervention showing the linear structure discreetly integrated along the side of the café to remain partially hidden within the passage.



1:50 Elevation

Fig 5.14 Side elevation drawing of the Café Riche intervention



Fig 5.15 Passage prior to intervention. Photograph documenting the existing spatial and street conditions before the proposed design.



Fig 5.16 Rendering of the café passage after the intervention, showing user engagement and the spatial transformation of the passage.



Fig 5.17 Rendering of the Café Riche passage intervention positioned along the side of the café, showing people interacting and reading within the street.



Fig 5.18 Rendering showing the stair element of the intervention appearing ordinary from the outside.

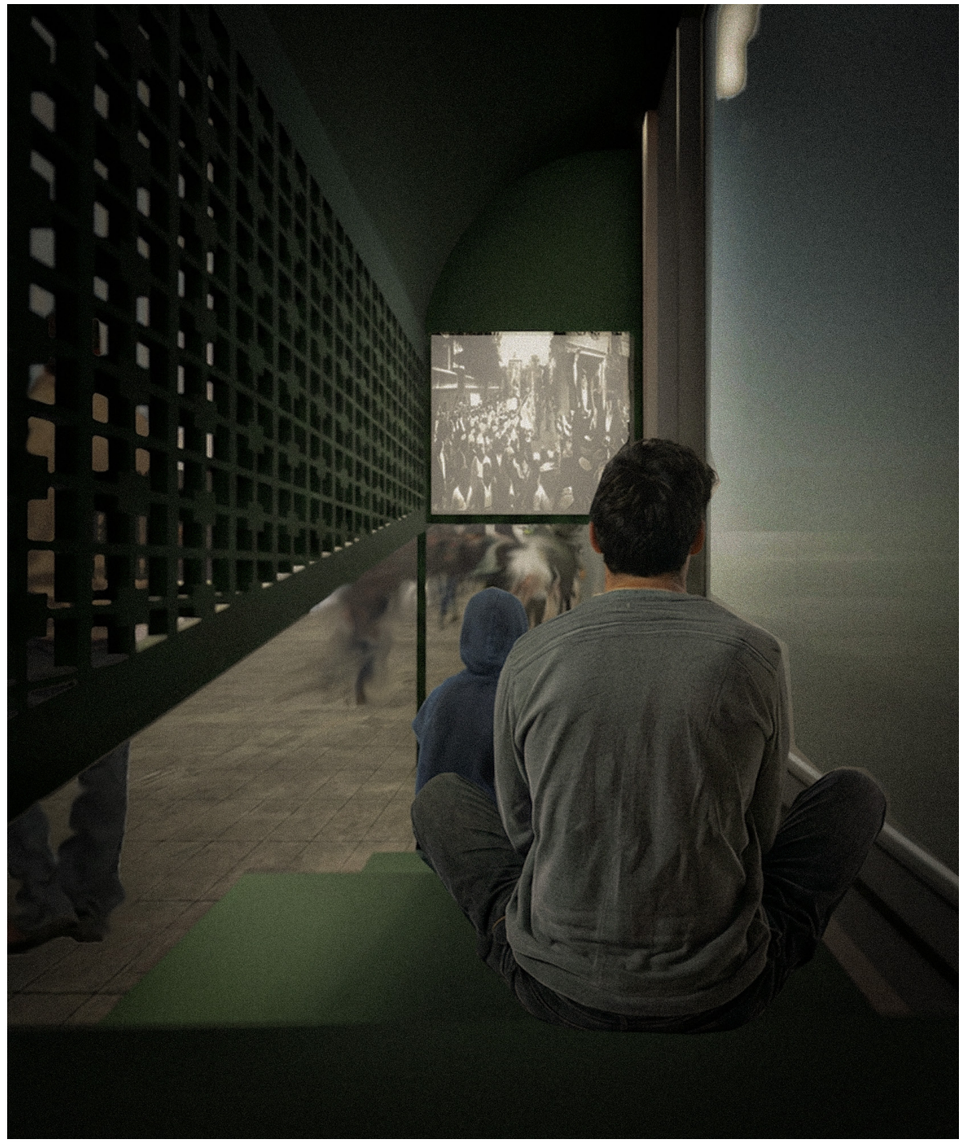
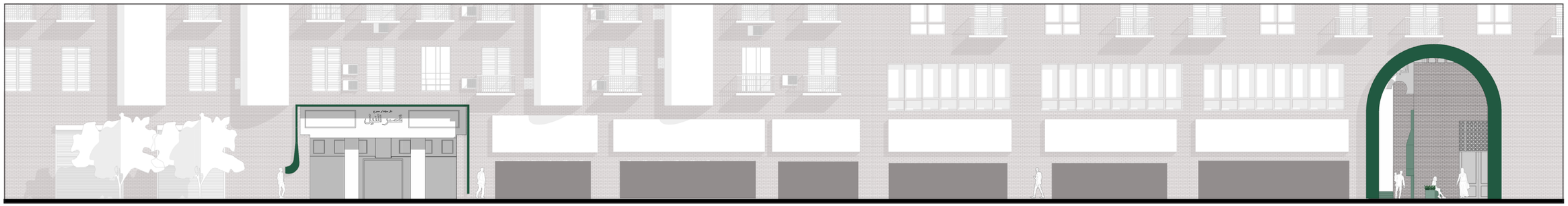


Fig 5.19 Rendering showing the stair activated through use, revealing hidden histories of resistance through engagement with the intervention.

5.2.3 Passage of Screens: Performance in the Everyday



Kasr el-Nil Theatre and Cinema

Le Grillon Passage

1: 100 Elevation: Moving from Kasr el-Nil into the Passage

Fig 5.20 Street elevation of Kasr el-Nil Theatre and Cinema showing the building facade and the entrance to the adjacent passageway.



The cinema intervention extends from Kasr el-Nil Theatre and Cinema into Le Grillon Passage, redirecting movement from the formal entrance of the theatre into a nearby public yet partially concealed informal passage. Historically, Kasr el-Nil contributed to a shift in Egyptian cinema toward depicting the street and the everyday lives of Egyptians. This intervention translates that visual politics back into the street itself. Through subtle wayfinding strategies inspired by Radio Lane case study in Chapter 1, a sequence of monochromatic green elements such as floor patterns, wall markers, archways, and street furniture guide visitors from the theatre toward the passage.

Le Grillon Passage is active yet overlooked. It contains a small mosque, restaurants, workshops, and aging storefronts. The first segment is wider and socially mixed, while the second becomes narrow, deteriorated, and primarily used as a shortcut. The intervention is inserted within this transitional zone, adding a new layer without displacing existing activity. By drawing movement through the passage and introducing modest improvements such as lighting and movement, the project supports existing businesses while reframing the corridor as a continuation of the cinema's cultural role.

The intervention operates through four operative actions: assemble, translate, frame, and conceal. Red cinema seats, referencing those inside Kasr el-Nil, are fixed along one wall beneath discreet projectors. Visitors sit in the exposed passage rather than a dark auditorium, **assembling** informally within the everyday environment. Short film excerpts are screened, focusing on scenes that depict Downtown Cairo. Collective viewing occurs in public space, turning the passage into an extension of the theatre.

Translation refers to the historical role of cinema in transforming political and social realities into audiovisual media accessible to broad publics. Within the passage, this process is reactivated. Images, sound, and spoken language become the primary communicators. The clips privilege everyday banter, sarcasm, and colloquial Egyptian, foregrounding the popular voice.

Framing addresses cinema's power to shape narrative. Within the first threshold, a folded wall presents two opposed visual narratives. One face displays official representations of Downtown Cairo, while the other reveals a counter archive of resistance. The geometry prevents both from being seen simultaneously, depending on one's selection and perspective. In this way, the passage becomes a site where official and counter narratives coexist.

Concealment operates through elements that appear ordinary at first glance. Suspended light pendants hang within the passage as functional lighting fixtures, yet their undersides carry film stills and archival images. The projected fragments fall onto the ground, partially visible and easily missed. As people walk through the corridor, their bodies interrupt, fragment, and recombine the images. What becomes legible depends on attention. Further concealment is embedded within peephole devices integrated into the second threshold. Referencing the *sunduq al-dunya*, these small apertures require visitors to step aside and lean in to access hidden images. Viewing shifts from a collective experience to an intimate encounter.

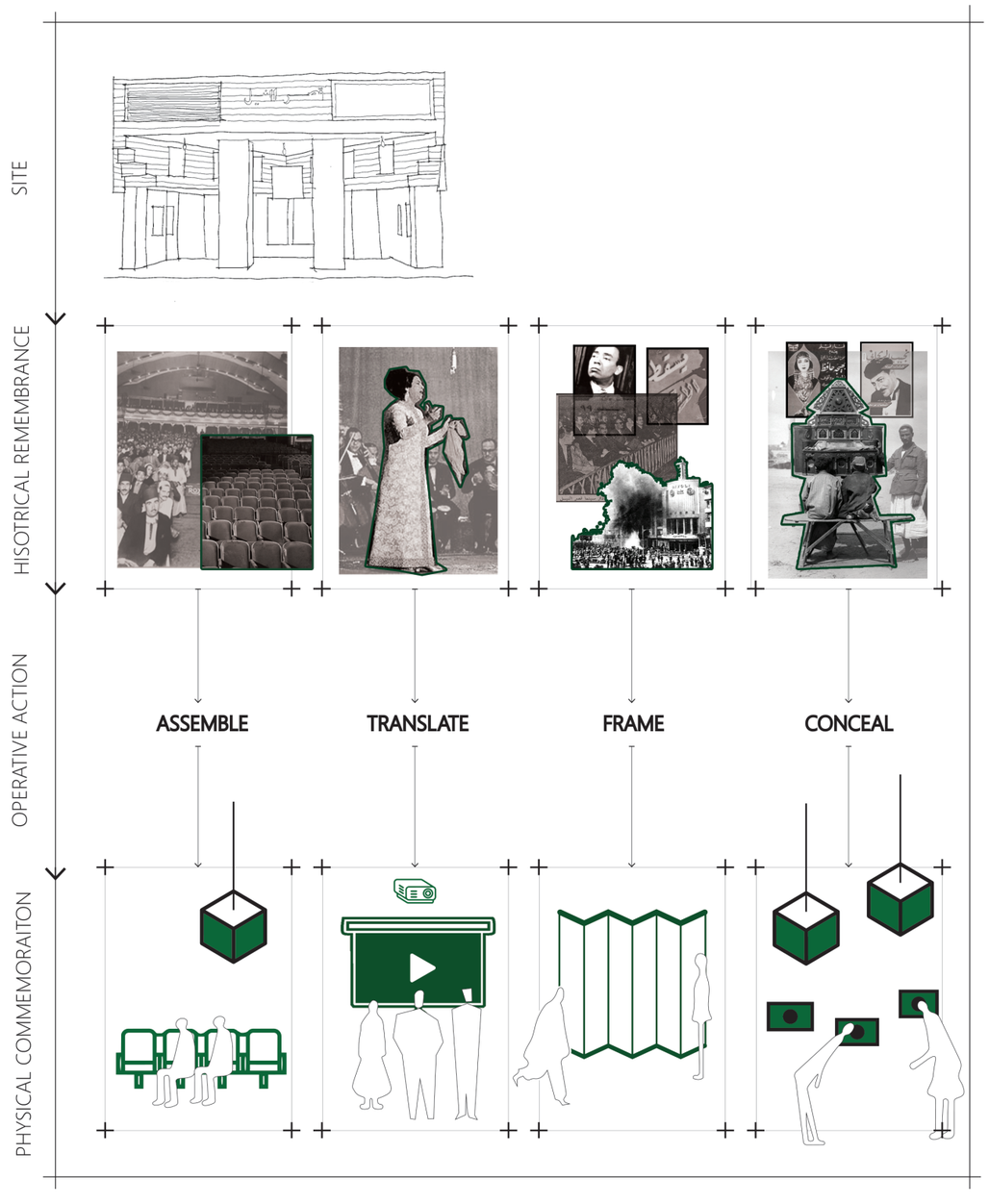


Fig 5.21 Kasr el-Nil Design Catalogue.

C2. Le Grillon Passageway | C

passageways.clustermappinginitiative.org/en/passageways/c2-le-grillon-passageway

CLUSTER MAPPING INITIATIVE | CAIRO URBAN INITIATIVES PLATFORM | CAIRO DOWNTOWN PASSAGEWAYS

CAIRO DOWNTOWN PASSAGEWAYS

About Passageways | Pilot Projects | Tours | Superblocks | Passageways | Street level | Search | العربية

Passageway

C2. Le Grillon Passageway



Enlarge

2012, Nov 06, 02:11pm

Entrance of passage overlooking Kasr El Nil Street

Prev Next 1 2

Superblock:	C. Qasr Al-Nil Superblock
Genealogy:	Setbacks
Morphology:	2 Entrances - angle
Area:	409m^2
Average Width:	2.5m
Length:	88m
Total number of premises:	12
Dominant activities:	Retail

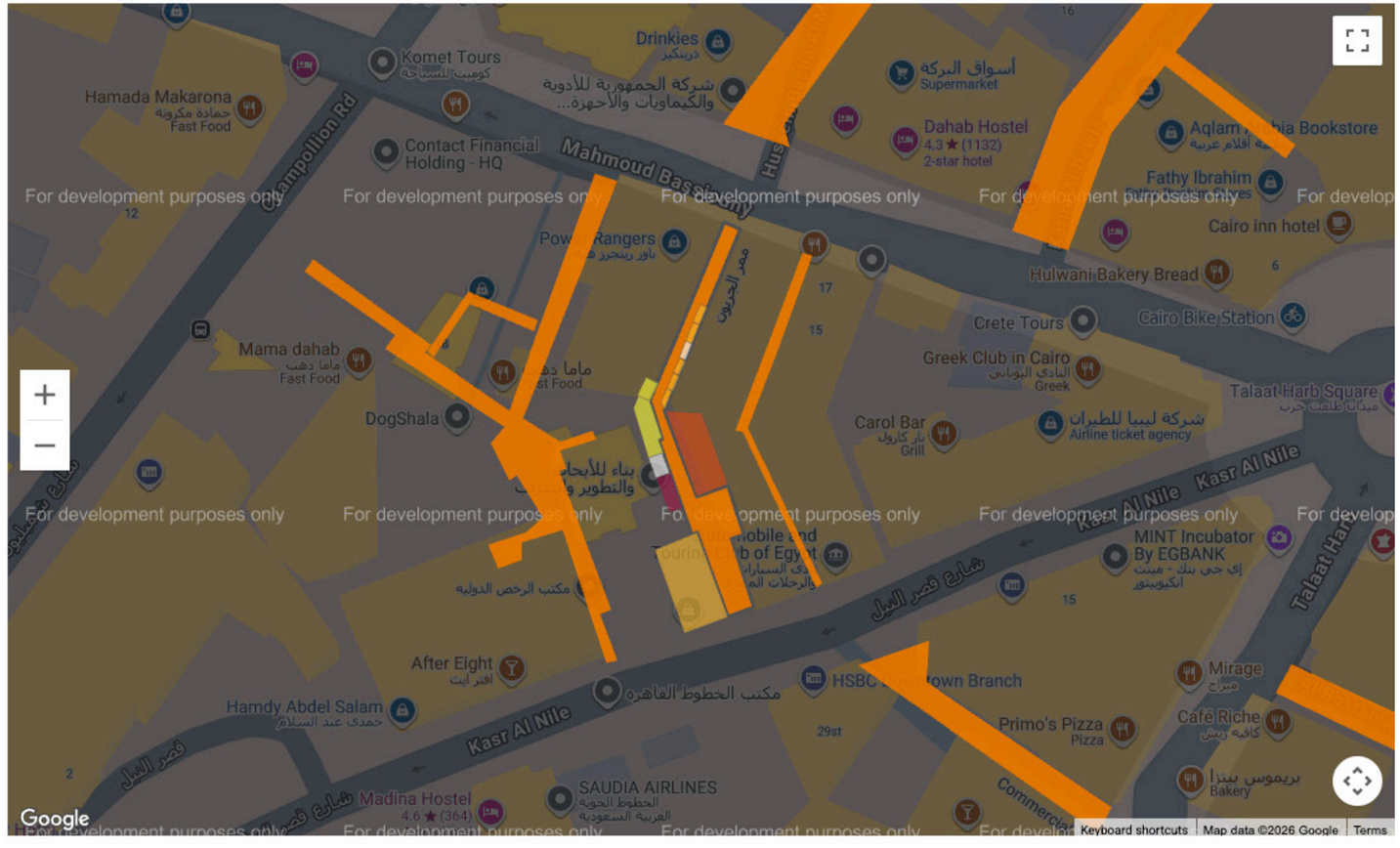


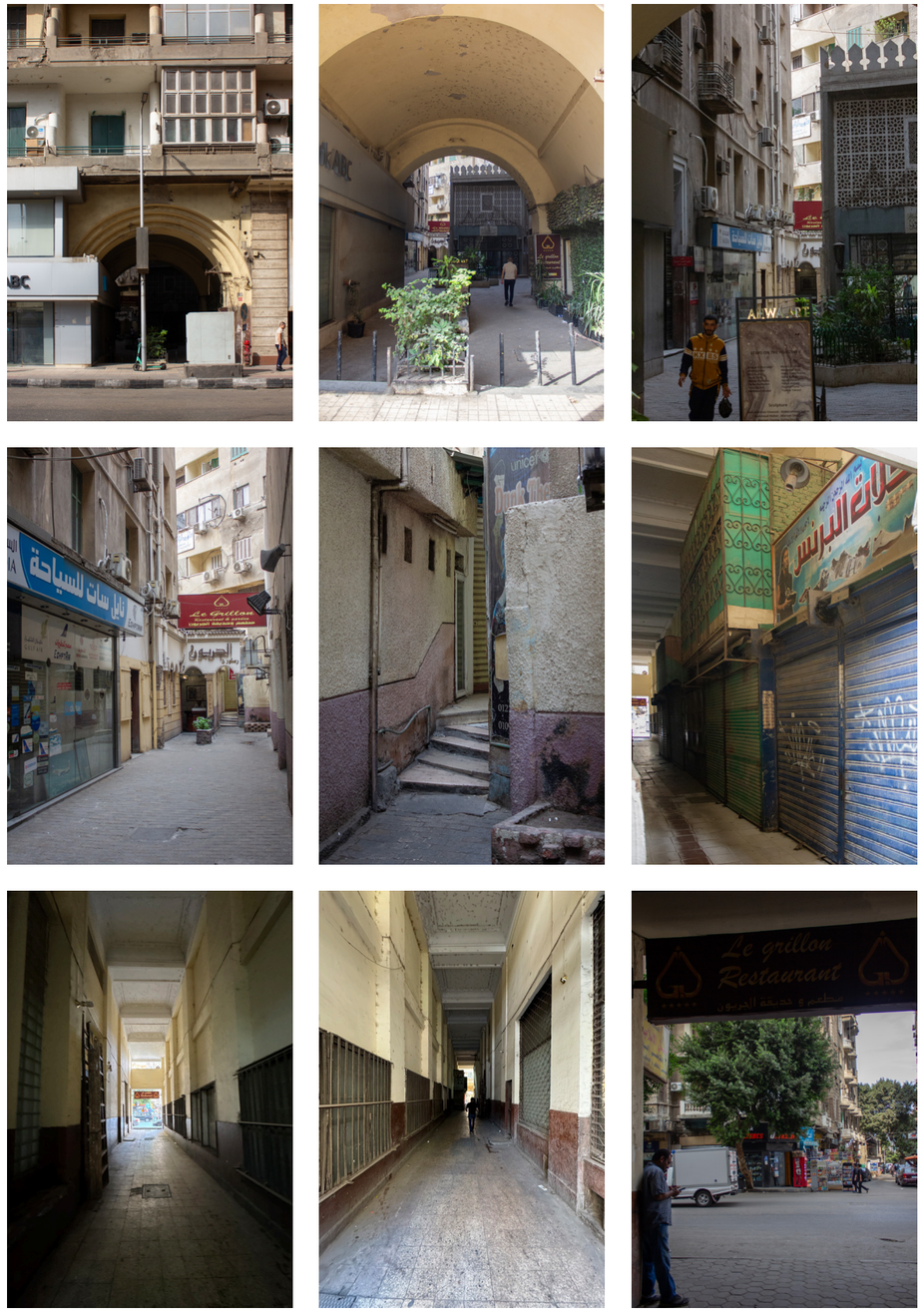
Fig 5.22 CLUSTER Cairo's Downtown Passageways digital mapping platform showing information on Le Grillon Passage.

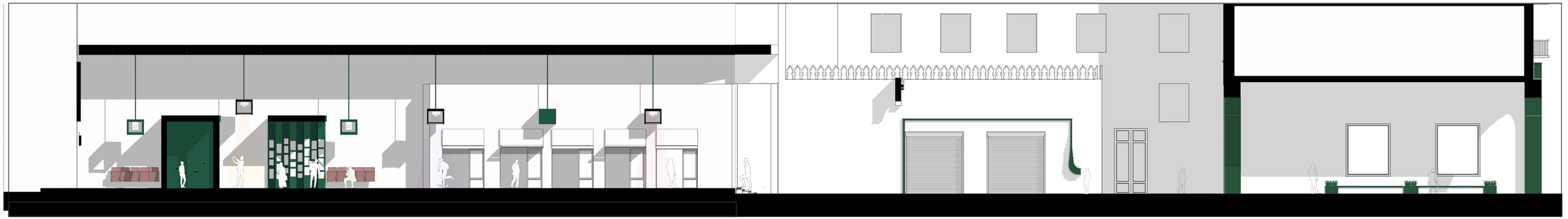


1:200 Plan Overview

Fig 5.23 Plan drawing of Kasr el-Nil Theatre and Cinema and the adjacent passageway, showing the spatial relationship between the site and the passage.

Fig 5.24 A collection of photographs documenting the walk through the passage and the sequence of spatial conditions encountered along the route.





1:100 Section: Moving through the Passage

Fig 5.25 Section moving through the passage, tracing the sequence of green wayfinding elements leading toward the main intervention.

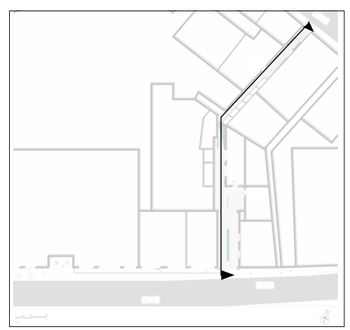


Fig 5.26 Axonometric drawing showing an overview of the wayfinding devices distributed from the site to the passage.





Fig 5.27 Passage prior to intervention. Photograph documenting the existing spatial and street conditions before the proposed design.



Fig 5.28 Rendering of the passage after the intervention, showing public engagement and everyday use of the space.



Fig 5.29 Rendering showing people looking into peephole-like devices that reveal concealed images and the hidden history.

CONCLUSION

At the start of this thesis, I did not have a clear direction. It began with an interest in heritage and preservation, but as I spent time in Downtown Cairo, that focus began to shift. Walking, observing, and returning to the same places made certain patterns harder to ignore. What I had previously understood as heritage started to feel incomplete, shaped by what is shown and what is left out.

Downtown was not a place I fully understood. My early encounters with it were often through museums, guided routes, and curated narratives. I moved through it as a visitor more than a participant. That position shaped what I noticed and what I overlooked. Writing this thesis required a different kind of attention. It meant staying longer, moving slower, and paying attention to the ordinary actions that usually pass unnoticed.

Working on resistance added another layer of complexity. It is not a subject that is easily accessible or openly discussed. There are limits to what can be said, documented, or even recognized. This is why I turned to the period under British colonial rule. It offered a way to study resistance at a distance, where its forms could be traced more clearly. This choice was about using that moment to understand how resistance can exist within everyday life, often in ways that remain quiet and unrecorded.

The thesis gradually shifted from looking at heritage as something to preserve, to understanding it as something produced through use. Memory is carried through repetition, presence, and shared experience. The proposed network of ordinary mnemonic practices focuses on sustaining these conditions. By supporting actions such as reading, gathering, overhearing, and circulating, it keeps the processes through which memory is formed, shared and negotiated active. Spatial elements such as thresholds, seating, passages, and points of exchange support these practices without fixing their meaning, allowing different narratives to emerge through use.

It is important to note that the proposed interventions do not aim to stabilize a single narrative. The period under British rule is used as an example to understand

certain practices, not as the narrative to be fixed or displayed. The interventions are based on the period under British rule as a way to understand these practices. The project provides a framework for engagement. What remains permanent is the spatial structure, including thresholds, surfaces, seating and points of gathering, informed by how these sites functioned as spaces of resistance and how they can continue to challenge dominant narratives. What remains temporary is the content, shaped by what people choose to bring, share, or contest. The space is defined through use, allowing narratives to shift over time. This reflects the central argument of the thesis that memory cannot be reduced to a single narrative.

There remain limitations to this proposal. It depends on continued use, and without it the interventions risk becoming inactive. They can be neglected, removed, or absorbed into institutional frameworks that change their role. The thesis begins to explore how collaborations with existing initiatives, local actors, and site users could support long-term use through shared maintenance and programming. It also relies on small-scale interventions that blend into the existing urban fabric, reducing visibility and limiting the risk of removal or direct opposition.

As social interaction shifts online, the spatial settings that once supported collective awareness lose some of their presence in everyday life. The thesis responds by incorporating contemporary media such as digital screens and QR codes, allowing historical narratives to circulate through new forms while remaining embedded in everyday settings.

While this thesis focuses on three sites, it understands them as part of a wider condition across Downtown Cairo. These sites act as entry points into a broader network of spaces where similar practices can be activated. The model of participatory remembrance can extend across the city, and to other cities, as a way to engage with urban narratives differently. It proposes an approach to preservation and memory shaped through action and participation. Memory remains in flux, shaped by time, use, and changing contexts. This model is one way of engaging with it, leaving space for other readings and approaches to emerge over time.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abdullatif, Karim. "Downtown Cairo: The Stories and the Stories Within." *Scene Home*. September 22, 2024. https://scenehome.com/Projects/Downtown-Cairo-The-Stories-and-the-Stories-Within.

Abu-Fadil, Magda. "Café Riche: Whither the Cultural Salon?" *Linkedin*, September 5, 2019. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/caf%C3%A9-riche-whither-cultural-salon-magda-abu-fadil/.

Abu-Lughod, Janet L. *Cairo: 1001 Years of the City Victorious* . Princeton University Press, 1971. https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb02308.0001.001.

Abu-Lughod, Janet. "Tale of Two Cities: The Origins of Modern Cairo." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 7, no. 4 (1965): 429–57. https://doi-org.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/10.1017/S0010417500003819.

Abu-Lughod, Lila. "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women." *American Ethnologist* 17, no. 1 (1990): 41-55. https://www.jstor.org/stable/645251.

"Advancing Decolonisation in Museums."*International Council on Museums*. June 25, 2024. https://icom.museum/en/news/advancing-decolonisation-in-museums/.

al-Ibrashy, May. "Heritage Is the Foundation for Resilience in Cities." *Cities to Be*. May 2023. https://citiestobe.com/story/heritage-is-the-foundation-for-resilience-in-cities/.

Al-Ismaelia for Real Estate Investment."Home." Accessed March 10, 2025. https://al-ismaelia.com.

Al Malky, Rania. "Egypt loses a publishing icon."*Daily News Egypt*. Aug 7, 2015. https://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2008/12/12/editorial-egypt-loses-a-publishing-icon/.

Al-Najjar, Ibrahim. "Madbouli Library: Biography and Career." *Al Watan Voice*. June 27, 2006. https://pulpit.alwatanvoice.com/content/print/49044.html

AlSayyad, Nezar. *Cairo : Histories of a City*. Harvard University Press, 2011.

AlSayyad, Nezar. *Routledge Handbook on Cairo: Histories, Representations and Discourses*. Routledge, 2022. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003019992

Al-Sharif, Dima. "Al Hakawati - The Storyteller Tradition." *Dima Al Sharif*, July 26, 2023. https://www.dimasharif.com/al-hakawati-the-storyteller/.

Badawi, M. M. "The Father of the Modern Egyptian Theatre: Yaqūb Sannū." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 16 (1985): 132–45. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4183122.

Bakshi, Anita. "Urban Form and Memory Discourses: Spatial Practices in Contested Cities." *Journal of Urban Design* 19, no. 2 (2014): 189–210. https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2013.854696.

Bayat, Asef. *Life as Politics : How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*. 2nd edition. Stanford University Press, 2013.

Bayat, Asef. "Politics in the City-Inside-Out." *City & Society*, 24, no. 2 (2012): 110–28. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-744X.2012.01071.x.

Bayat, Asef. *Revolutionary Life : The Everyday of the Arab Spring*. Harvard University Press, 2022.

Bieber-Roberts, Peggy, and Elisa Pierandrei. "Café Riche: Memory in the formation of Egyptian national identity." Paper, The American University in Cairo, 2002. https://www.academia.edu/69821954/Cafe_Riche_Memory_in_the_Formation_of_Egyptian_National_Identity.

Billig, Michael. *Banal Nationalism*. Sage, 1995.

Capresi, Vittoria, and Barbara Pampe. *Discovering Downtown Cairo: Architecture ... and Stories*. Jovis, 2015.

CLUSTER Cairo. "Home." Accessed March 10 2024. https://clustercairo.org.

Connerton, Paul. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Corner, James. "The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention." In The Map Reader: Theories of Mapping Practice and Cartographic Representation, edited by Martin Dodge, Rob Kitchin, and Chris Perkins. John Wiley & Sons, 2011. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470979587.

Davis, Diane E. "Urban Protest and the Built Environmental Foundations of Insurgency and Citizenship." In Ethics of the Urban: The City and the Spaces of the Political, edited by Mohsen Mostafavi, 165–194. Lars Müller Publishers, 2017.

de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. University of California Press, 1988.

"Dissertation on Early 20th-century Cairo Coffeehouses Leads Penn Ph.D. Student to Egyptian and British Spy Reports," *Penntoday*, June 19, 2017.https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news/dissertation-early-20th-century-cairo-coffeehouses-leads-penn-phd-student-egyptian-and-british

Doyon, Wendy, Vivian Davies and Julie Anderson. "The Poetics of the Egyptian Museum Practice," *British Museum Studies in Ancient Egypt and Sudan* 10, (2008), 1-25. https://britishmuseum.iro.bl.uk/concern/generic_works/e758e21b-0c02-44b5-9e82-c9eeb3c81a2f?locale=en%29.

El Kadi, Galila. "Modern Heritage in Cairo: History and Current Outlooks." *Museum International* 57, no. 1–2 (2005): 129–35. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0033.2005.00521.x.

Elshahed, Mohamed. "Facades of Modernity: Image, Performance, and Transformation in the Egyptian Metropolis." PHD Diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007. http://hdl.handle.net/1721.1/39305

Elshahed, Mohamed, Loretta Lees, Hyun Bang Shin, and Ernesto López-Morales. "The Prospects of Gentrification in Downtown Cairo: Artists, Private Investment and the Neglectful State." In *Global Gentrifications*, 1st ed. Policy Press, 2015. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1t894bt.13.

El Shenawy, Hind. "The rise and fall of downtown cinemas: history, stories, and detailed information." *Mantiqti*, January 23, 2017. https://tinyurl.com/59xupuse.

Elsheshtawy, Yasser. "Urban Transformations: The Great Cairo Fire and the Founding of a Modern Capital, 1952-1970." *Built Environment* 40, no. 3 (2014): 408–25. https://doi.org/10.2148/benv.40.3.408.

El-Shazly, Ali Essam. "The Prospects of the 'European Quarter' in Cairo." Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering 2, no. 1 (2018): 175–82. https://doi.org/10.3130/jaabe.2.175

Fahmy, Ziad. *Ordinary Egyptians : Creating the Modern Nation through Popular Culture*. Stanford University Press, 2011.

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Richard Philcox. Grove Press, 2004.

Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977. Ed.* Colin Gordon. Pantheon Books, 1980.

Goldschmidt, Arthur. *Modern Egypt : The Formation of a Nation-State*. 2nd ed. Westview Press, 2004.

Goldschmidt, Arthur, Amy J. Johnson, and Barak A. Salmoni. *Re-Envisioning Egypt 1919-1952*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2005.

Hajj Madbouli. "A Special Visit with the Late Hajj Madbouli, Owner of Madbouli Bookstore." Interview by Sami Kleib. Al Jazeera, 2006. YouTube video, 49:50. Posted January 31, 2022, by Khalid Muhammad. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S5ox67A1CWo.

Hammouda, Abdel-Aziz. "Modern Egyptian Theatre: Three Major Dramatists." *World Literature Today* 53, no. 4 (1979): 601–5. https://doi.org/10.2307/40133015.

Hassan, Lamia. "A Living Legend." *A Voice from Cairo*. May 27, 2011. https://avoicefromcairo.wordpress.com/tag/cafe-riche/.

Harrison, Rodney. *Understanding the Politics of Heritage*. Manchester University Press, 2010.

Hawas, Soheir Zaki. *Khedivian Cairo: Identification and Documentation of Urban-Architecture in Downtown Cairo*. 2002.

Hayden, Dolores. *The Power of Place : Urban Landscapes as Public History*. MIT Press, 1997.

Hoey, John. "Project 15- Kasr El Nile Theatre renovations," john Stephen Hoey. Accessed June 15, 2025. https://www.johnstephenhoey.com/project-15-kasr-el-nile-theatre-renovations

"ICOM & G20: Social Museology Informing Cultural Policies." *International Council of Museums*, December 22, 2025. https://icom.museum/en/news/icom-g20-social-museology-informing-cultural-policies/.

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Blackwell, 2005.

Linthicum, Nancy and Michele Henjum. "Madbouly." *Cairo Bookstop*. August 2014. https://cairobookstop.wordpress.com/publishing-houses/madbouly/.

Mehrez, Samia. *The Literary Atlas of Cairo : One Hundred Years on the Streets of the City*. American University in Cairo Press, 2010.

Mitchell, Timothy. *Colonising Egypt*. University of California Press, 1991.

Morgan, Sally "Memory and the Merchants: Commemoration and Civic Identity." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 4, no. 2 (1998): 103–13. https://doi.org/10.1080/13527259808722225.

Marsot, Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid. *A Short History of Modern Egypt*. Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Mostafa, Dalia Said, and Amina Elbendary. *The Egyptian Coffeehouse: Culture, Politics and Urban Space*. Tauris, 2020.

Moussa, Mohamed Hani Bahy ElDin, and Shimaa Abdel Tawab Sayed Abdel Meged. "Café Riche in Cairo: A Case Study on Public Cafes as Intangible Cultural Heritage." Journal of the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels-University of Sadat City (2024): 199–225. https://doi.org/10.21608/mfth.2025.411851

Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire." *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 7–24. https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520.

Pharaon, Helena et al., "Sites of Conscience: Connecting Past to Present, Memory to Action," *American Alliance of Museums,* 2011. https://www.aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/5-EXH_fall11_sites-of-conscience_Pharaon_abriel_Sevcenko.pdf

Raymond, Andre. *Cairo*. Harvard University Press, 2000.

Radstone, Susannah, and Bill Schwarz, eds. *Memory : Histories, Theories, Debates*. 1st ed. Fordham University Press, 2010.

Rashed, Mohamed Gamal. "The Museums of Egypt Speak for Whom." *CIPEG Journal*, no.1. 2017. https://doi.org/10.11588/cipeg.2017.1.40324.

Reid, Donald M. "Indigenous Egyptology: The Decolonization of a Profession?" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105, no. 2 (1985): 233-246. https://doi.org/10.2307/601703

Reid, D. M., *Whose Pharaohs? Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I*. 1st ed. University of California Press, 2002. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520930797.

Reynolds, Nancy Y. *A City Consumed: Urban Commerce, the Cairo Fire, and the Politics of Decolonization in Egypt*. 1st ed. Stanford University Press, 2012. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804782661.

Riggs, Christina, "Colonial Visions: Egyptian Antiquities and Contested Histories in the Cairo Museum." *Museum Worlds* 1, no. 1 (2013): 65–84. https://doi.org/10.3167/armw.2013.010105.

Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage, 1994.

Schochat, Ella. "Egypt: Cinema and Revolution." *Critical Arts* 2, no. 4 (1983): 22–32. https://doi.org/10.1080/02560048308537565.

Schwartz-Shea, Peregrine and Dvora Yanow. *Interpretive Research Design : Concepts and Processes*. Routledge, 2012. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203854907.

Scott, James C. "Everyday Forms of Resistance." *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies* 4, no.1 (1989): 33-62. https://doi.org/10.22439/cjas.v4i1.1765.

Smith, Laurajane. *Uses of Heritage*. Routledge, 2006. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203602263.

Soliman, Mounira. "Artistic interpretations of Downtown Cairo." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 47, no. 4 (2011):391-403. https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2011.590312.

Tripp, Charles. *The Power and the People: Paths of Resistance in the Middle East*. Cambridge University Press, 2013. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139028721.

Viejo-Rose, Dacia. "Cultural Heritage and Memory: Untangling the Ties That Bind." Culture & History Digital Journal 4, no. 2 (2015): e018. https://doi.org/10.3989/chdj.2015.018.

Volait, Mercedes. "The Reclaiming of 'Belle Époque' Architecture in Egypt (1989-2010): On the Power of Rhetorics in Heritage-Making." *ABE Journal* 3, no. 3 (2013). https://doi.org/10.4000/abe.371.

Yates, Frances A. *The Art of Memory*. University of Chicago Press, 1966.

Ziada, Hazem. "Of Bounds and Coffers." *Jadaliyya*, January 20, 2017. https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/33940.

Ziada, Hazem. "What Brings them There? Reflections on the Persisting Symbolism of Tahrir Square." *Jadaliyya*. Apr 2, 2015. https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/31939

Zohdi, Salma S. "Egyptian Theatre and its Impact on Society: History, Deterioration, And Path For Rehabilitaition." M.F.A. thesis, Columbia University, 2016. https://doi.org/10.7916/D87S7NTD.