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# REVOLTING ARTS OR SPATIAL DEMOCRACY?

## Performances of popular arts during the Egyptian Revolution

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### Abstract

*This paper investigates how spatial practices of Public art performance had transformed public space from being a congested traffic hub into an active and animated space for resistance that was equally accessible to different factions, social strata, media outlets and urban society, determined by popular culture and social responsibility. Tahrir Square was reproduced, in a process of "space adaptation" using Henri Lefebvre's term, to accommodate forms of social organization and administration.<sup>1</sup> Among the spatial patterns of activities detected and analyzed this paper focus on particular forms of mass practices of art and freedom of expression that succeeded to transform Tahrir square into performative space and commemorate its spatial events. It attempts to interrogate how the power of artistic interventions has recalled socio-cultural memory through spatial forms that have negotiated middle grounds between deeply segregated political and social groups in moments of utopian democracy. Through analytical surveys and decoding of media recordings of the events, direct interviews with involved actors and witnesses, this paper offers insight into the ways protesters lent their artistry capacity to the performance of resistance to become an act of spatial festivity or commemoration of events. The paper presents series of analytical maps tracing how the role of art has shifted significantly from traditional freedom of expression modes as narrative of resistance into more sophisticated spatial performative ones that take on a new spatial vibrancy and purpose.*

### 1.0 Introduction: Art and the Dejection of Authority

Egyptian government has long deployed visual art as part of their authoritative and ruling ideology. The Ministry of culture controlled cultural spaces and allowed abuses of authority to continue in such a way that left its imprint on all aspects of arts and culture<sup>2</sup>. Only intellectuals who are loyal to the regime were allowed space in public media, cultural venues through security permissions. Dissident artist used to be demoralized over national media and loyal private outlets. Visual arts, literature, music, art performances in recent decades were indicator of repressed energy that presented political revolt and social protest. Only with the appearance of independent poets and singers in the few years preceding 2011, such as Hisham AlGagh, whose poets were chiefly political, arts started to take front stage in communicating messages of dissatisfaction with socio-political atmosphere. Actors, artists and poets started to take part in Kifaya movement and largely joined the National Movement for Change, under the leadership of Mohammed ElBradie during much of 2010, adding much publicity to the call for democratic change. As significant as these sporadic demonstrations were the works of visual artists. Although they were not combating

spatially in public space, yet they marked a remarkable shift in communicating political messages to the ordinary people.

Themba Lewis, an independent photographer, asserted in her blog that "*Before January 25th 2011, political street art in Cairo was all but completely absent, and artists were under constant threat from agents of the Mubarak regime.*"<sup>3</sup> Although many diverse challenges prevented art performance and development of art in Egypt's street, the challenges also provided collection of independent opportunities which embodied the aspirations for freedom from state repression. This was reflected in the presence of alternative cultural spaces as 'Sakiat el Sawi' culture wheel or Darb 1718, etc..., for hosting protest street art that took different forms such as art practices, musical performances, independent theater and visual street art that focused on ingenuity and talents with independent voices. This network of entities for 'parallel art' aimed to provide physical and cultural spaces that support artistic performances and training programs regardless of constant harassment and regime repression.<sup>4</sup> It would be no exaggeration therefore to say that art had played a role in changing the relationship between ruler and subject, and between public and public space in ways that came so spectacularly in Tahrir square during the 18 days of uprisings.

Cairo is subject to a series of logics, one of which is the authoritative control over public space that eliminate the possibility of public gatherings for political purposes through using physical objects and barriers that divide those spaces into divided territories that are easy to control. The long implemented Egyptian Emergency Law rules large group gathering as threat to the national security. Under emergency law — established since 1981— a gathering of a few adults in a public square would constitute cause for arrest.<sup>5</sup> Open spaces were purposefully designed to minimize social gatherings and were always monitored by secret police. Under these conditions, public spaces in the city were seen redundant by local authorities and when rarely exist, they should be fenced off, such as AL-Azhar Park, Orman Park and the central island of Tahrir Square.<sup>6</sup> For example, in mid-1980s, under Mubarak, 'Tahrir square' park was transformed into a large parking lot for tourist buses visiting the Museum, surrounded by masses of police personnel, wither in formal uniforms of undercover. As a third logic, Egyptian Government has long recognized the power of art, through the use of visual arts and media power to reinforce their grip on power and public space.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, before the 2011 uprising, art was rarely to be seen on the Egyptian streets. Under Hosni Mubarak, public spaces were tightly controlled and decorated largely by posters and pamphlets endorsing the government and its leader.<sup>8</sup> The relation between art performances and public space is not novel feature for Egyptian culture. Particular celebrations include Mulids, which are traditional festivals taking place in the public streets of Cairo, celebrating culture and traditions.<sup>9</sup> Despite these and other festivities displaying cultural folklore, the middle and upper class regard them as chaos representing a distorted image, as they are commonly led by lower class citizens.<sup>10</sup> Existing social conflicts have forced to push these art performance practices away from significant spaces since they were not accepted by the elite population, who eventually separated themselves in a sphere away from the public. The logics of social disjunction, and the way public art and freedom of expression have largely shaped interventions during which the ordinary citizens celebrated their interest in the arts and practice their freedom of expression in Tahrir square.

During 25 January 2011 revolution, political dynamics in Egypt has severely changed giving street art as new role as a key form of expression, used for a variety of purposes: political demands; criticizing the regime; memorializing the martyrs; targeting oppressors; expressing solidarity with other Arab revolutions; and commenting on current affairs.<sup>11</sup> The power of street art in a democratic society has been debated by social theorists, on whether or not they were main drivers to urban

unrest and subsequent change of power. Deutsche introduced Public art and architecture act as an intermediating agency in visual culture and hence as a powerful yet elusive player in spatial politics.<sup>12</sup> Over the past few years many scholarly works (Abaza, 2012; Klaus, 2014; Findlay, 2012) have aimed particularly to illustrate how the uprisings brought up to public space these artistic interventions, focusing especially on Graffiti and murals.<sup>13</sup> Others like Nancy Demerdash analyzed the ethics and art of the Arab Spring deals with graffiti on the streets of Cairo in order to grasp how these artists and their works are received by different audiences through this artistic consumption.<sup>14</sup> Art practices being considered as a remarkable product in urban space during the Arab Spring and its immediate aftermath, John Lennon points out the ways revolutionary desire was articulated and interpreted through graffiti in Cairo.<sup>15</sup> How art became part of the every practices in the post experience of the 18 day in Egypt has been discussed by Elisa Ravazzoli.<sup>16</sup> An additional function of contemporary Egyptian graffiti is underlined by sociologist Mona Abaza, that of creating a "memorial space."<sup>17</sup> Highlighting significance for the visual and artistic narration of the revolution was considered by Luke Dickens as an "attempt to directly engage with urban audiences through using critical, intriguing and often humorous graphics in order to challenge their visual understandings and appreciations of the city."<sup>18</sup> Introducing Art practices as means of communication (Dickens, 2009; Tripp, 2012), Charles Tripp focused on the notion of aesthetic communication. He explains how artistic interventions have drawn attention to the power of artistic resistance as social memory as well.<sup>19</sup>

The 18 days of the revolution offered an unprecedented chance to an influx of art performance to converge towards new ways of imagining and practicing democratic advocacy. In this context, art practices can be seen as having the potential for offering powerful catalysts for transformative forms of politics, providing new sets of resources for urban and spatial thinking<sup>20</sup>. Art and freedom of expression can be considered as spatial modes of resistance against the city as system. In this regards and according to Cauter and De Roo, art was commended as a mode of critical exploration that may contribute to re-imaginings of urban geographies, edges are pushed, imagination is freed, and a new language emerges- trying to impede, promote or direct change.<sup>21</sup> When applying this approach then to sit-in in Tahrir square and critically engaged art practices, these should not be construed simply as a reaction to or a means to fix a ready-made urban space, but should be seen as performative modes integral to creating, analyzing and understanding space spatiality. As Harvie states, art practices does more than merely demonstrate urban process, it may also produce urban meaning.<sup>22</sup>

## 2.0 Textual arts from the political to the sacred in Tahrir Square

Holding home-made placards and hand-made signboard was the principal mode for expressing one's opinion towards the state and regime since January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Only in Tahrir square during the first few days of the revolution, this right was granted and protected without reservation, allowing individuals, regardless of their class, gender or education to be creative in doing so. According to one activist; "We defaced posters and banners of Egyptian presidents Hosni Mubarak from all approaches and inside Tahrir square." (Int42, Pro12) Having been allowed this right for the first time, protesters looked at Tahrir Square as a land of liberty with intrinsic political position that is tolerant towards contrasting viewpoints; a formal civic space turned outright political arena. Art practices had become essentially political in a contest to existing power systems that had changed the social realities of a place. It was an act of iconoclasm and of defacement that has been deployed to signal a new order and, the entry of a new actor onto Tahrir square and political sphere as well.

Art and freedom of expression were one of spatial means as other dynamics of inclusion that allowed protesters to participate as fully fledged subject in urban life. According to Lynch in 'Image of the City', "We need an environment which is not simply well organized, but poetic and symbolic as well. It should speak of the individuals and their complex society, of their aspirations and their historical tradition, of the natural setting and of the complicated functions and movements of the city world."<sup>23</sup> In this context, art and freedom of expression tackled the responsibility of spatial reconfiguration and production of people's space. (Act5) recalled Graffiti as initial traditional mode; "Since first day, Graffiti dominated by anti-Mubarak messages on walls mainly public buildings and military tanks who weren't allowed to access sit-in terrain without being marked with down Mubarak." Facades of shops, offices, and residential buildings were covered with graffiti that were spatially meaningful. The activist added "Concrete fences of Egyptian museum were decorated with graffiti "No to Stealing," "Overthrow Mubarak," "No to terrorizing the country." While Graffiti adorned Kentucky Fried Chicken faced with "No to Mubarak the US Client and burned military cars." (Int4, Act5)

The liberation of Tahrir Square from the State apparatus allowed art to take on a new spatial vibrancy that is full of spots for banners' preparation with donated tools appeared on edges of several groups-zones. (Int3, Act3) If preparation was in groups, display of the banners were spatially planned with protesters carrying banners were more concentrated in the centre and as a human chain around the roundabout addressing the crowd and flying helicopters with loud chants 'Leave.'" (Int5, Act6) similarly around the Army tanks where loud chants "*the army and the people are one hand, and peaceful! Peaceful! Tahrir Square,*" emerged as an act of affirmation and support of people demands by the Army. Meanwhile banners were developing in ideas, contents, size and compositions depending on time (stage of revolution) and space (location). It appeared as an unregulated potential for aesthetic creation and communication that was spatially available. Following the first speech of the Mubarak and the early sign of accumulating pressure, the demands for his ouster became dominant to encourage larger banners that started to grasp media attention; "*Big banners with monumental scale were prepared collectively to fit the proportion of urban surrounding*" (Int32, Pro2) , with some claimed the Spatial festive moods and rituals were associated with the process of production of big banners: running and chanting around the roundabout in big procession while raising big banners after being finished and before being hanged." (Int3, Act3) According to one protester, "*On February 1st, the roundabout was still the main spot for hosting different types and sizes of banners, inside and around its periphery, while Omar Makram Statue was secondary vital spots for hanging smaller banners.*" (Int42, Pro12)

As Lyman G. Chaffee noted that, "*Street art, in essence connotes a decentralized, democratic form in which there is universal access, and the real control over messages comes from the social producers. It is a barometer that registers the spectrum of thinking, especially during democratic openings.*"<sup>24</sup> Some of the objects involved in such surrial display of messages, and texting used burned police vehicles, army tanks as a background to communicate your message and embedding creative mentality. Spatially, Tahrir square with its vast urban space facilitated further connections with surrounding buildings, which started to see "*more big banners started to unfurl from some balconies on the eastern side of the square with a great cry goes up from the square "Irhal! Irhal!" (Leave! Leave!)*" (Int40, Pro10) Banner's monumental size was perfect for displaying people's demands with high visibility and for gazing media's attention; A symbolized gesture for reclaiming the *sphere of power*. The concentration of protesters with banners around roundabout and military tanks has spatially reconfigured, with Lines of protesters chanting and standing with banners

emerged in front Kasr el Nile approach welcoming visitors." (Int36, Pro6) This spontaneous act was later on transformed into a welcome parade at each entrance of the Square.



While February 6th 'Sunday of the Martyrs', banners and posters tackled new responsibility inside sit-in, in commemorating spatial events with '*Banners with names of the over 300 people killed during the uprising were raised near the makeshift screen and main stage and in other visible location.*' (Int42, Pro12) According to Tech1, "A shrine was erected near the roundabout with framed photos of martyrs in the middle of the street and it was surrounded by barriers; 'a wall of martyrs' that soon turned, according to a Makeshift hospital doctor into 'a small gallery and introductory for preparing visitors to what they are going to experience inside'; a ritual procession to become a member of community. (Int22, Dr3) The performative pattern associated with banners, posters, martyr's walls and photos in shrines were act of commemoration and consolidating as collective society memory that rendered Tahrir Square as a sacred space for liberation and democracy.

#### ***a. Musical circles: means of democratic performance***

Musical performances were arguably the most decorated and democratic none-hierarchical acts during mass protests. In mass protests that endure long hours of stands that extent to 12-18 hours, such entertaining performance is what turns the urban spaces into an enjoyable festival of live performance. It offered rooms for the unprofessional, non-celebrity individuals to express their talents in an friendly manner with sometimes wide audience. They were informal, spontaneous and people were joining with some playing music and chanting, while others dancing. (Int8, Act9) one activist observed that, "*On 31st January and 1st February while Helicopters were flying over Tahrir square, protesters were sitting on the floor writing with their bodies "Down Mubarak" and continued to sing and dance.*" (Int6, Act7) According to one Artist1, circles of musical performance sent their message through a variety of collective performance such as group singing that intensified during nighttime and it was appreciated by lots of sit-in's residents. (Int18, Art1; Int42, Pro12) The informal pattern of these performances allowed spatial disposition to adapt to frequent changes in spatial order, in response to political situation without causing disruption. being democratic, these groups of protesters were from diverse social sectors, who were always told not to debate or talk about future plan, but only focus on one demand '*Mubarak to leave.*' (Int5, Act6)

At advanced stage of control over the Square, improvised stage occurred. It was built by protesters to be used to calm protesters and announcement of plans of action of revolt." (Int4, Act5) another wooden stage on the southern side of the square, in front Mogamaa was erected. (Int18, Art1) according to one of the leading artist-protester "*It was the first time to perform on stage after some days singing between circles of people or singing on the edge of roundabout.*" Popular chants, slogans and poetry took more formal pattern on stages. He recalled that it was a venue for many protesters to come up to express their views especially representatives from groups arriving from other cities. (Int18, Art1) In addition, Fabricated platform with green fence, microphone next to the white screen for projecting Al Jazeera was installed to display the news channel, to deliver speeches by sme intellectuals, youth activists and ordinary citizens. Fabricated from its poor technicalities, and primitive method of erections that these stage platforms aimed to provide a venue of appearance and management, which later emerged as an artist-performance venues and performance prayers by different religious groups. (Int4, Act5) the spatial consequence of these stage platforms was spatially sound at later stage of the revolution and more profoundly following the ouster of Mubarak. Each stage started to become dominated by their sponsor, whatever religious Islamists or liberals.

Following the aftermath of camel battle, the pivotal turning moment during the revolution, the art scene developed a lot qualitatively, quantitatively and spatially, with many observing a shift towards more confident control of space and hence enhancing its facilities to enable more formal performances of art. (Int35, Pro5) Spatial reconfiguration of power relations between stages occurred then. Act5 recalled that, "The 'National force' stage at Hardees corner as they called was considered main tribune while others were secondary stages for speeches." However, in fact, the stage was not that inclusive to art performances throughout. At certain stages, singing was undesirable or even banned at the main stage, leading it to become another exclusive voice of certain political groups and not a venue for liberal art performance. "They were totally dismissive to people in sit-in. it was not for whole sit-in society any more. Instead it was attractive for conservative religious protesters." (Int4, Act5; Int36, Pro6) "It wasn't declared that main stage was controlled by the Muslim Brotherhood, but was evident through their control over what to display on the main stage." (Int8, Act9) Spatial reconfiguration of main stage was a clear sign for the existence of internal political power between diverse arrays of society. This internal power was reinforced, according to Pro7, "It was location where all local and international media camera were focusing on crowds." (Int37, Pro7)

While one stage controlled by religious groups was politically motivated in its rejection to art performance, the other one at Mogamaa Tahrir, was an opportunity for all art performances to take place in more tolerant manner. "Since February 4th stages were so crowded and stage near Mogamaa was focusing more on celebrities and formal musician bands." (Int27, Dr7) Big art performance and cultural events took place engaging with most of sit-in crowds without segregation. other stages appeared during the final week of the protests on the edge of Tahrir Square to serve sit-in groups dispersed towards Abd el Moneim Rhyad. (Int13, Act14) It was an act to solve spatial discrimination and internal dictatorship emerged during earlier stages. The appearance of multiple stages inside sit-in allowed these diverse social arrays of society to express freely on same space. A clear spatial distribution of these performances emerged, according to their types, at different points in space to serve different purposes, yet helping the same demand. Pub1 explained that, "On February 8th Culture Resource center "AlMawred AlThaqafy" put up a stage in front Omar Makram garden, with good sound system for cultural performance, debates, and popular folk groups as El Tanbura from Port Said." (Int44, Pub1) More stages were erected; one next to original Mogamaa stage, another next to the radio station at KFC and a third next to Hardees stage." Int3 observed that, "A stage erected in front the construction site was mainly hosting people from other provinces who didn't have chance to express on other stages." (Int30, Int3) Notable difference in social groups had their own spaces and stages as well - arts crowd, the Muslim Brotherhood corner, and the Salafi crowd, with individuals and groups are free to tours them in a carnival-like displays.

Act14 described that, "Some intellectuals, poets and writers from Merit publishing house -calling themselves "Writers and Artists for Change"- took the initiative to erect their own stage away from the roundabout crowds, after failing to perform on existing stages." (Int13, Act14) It was a sign for internal political power reflected on social control over stages by organized groups. Act14 added that, "In the last days, main stage was trying to take control of other stages' performances, either by banning national music and motivational chants by leftist activists or spatially by erecting small stage with loud speakers presenting religious speeches, facing newly erected ones. As happened at Shambelyoun Street," (Int13, Act14) Main stage emerged as an internal dictator through its spatial practices and trials to control sit-in terrain. This formal pattern of art and expression performances from stages wasn't appreciated by campsite inhabitants. Act1 explained that, "It wasn't nice that someone is talking to us from upper ground while we are asking for democracy." (Int1, Act1) Act7

explained that, "It was very disturbing and especially while sleeping since inhabitants weren't all sleeping during the night." (Int6, Act7) When stages were widely spread activity in sit-in, it was considered violation and a nuisance. It started to disturb even one another, Pro5 recalled that, "It was difficult to recognize from which stage is coming the voice."

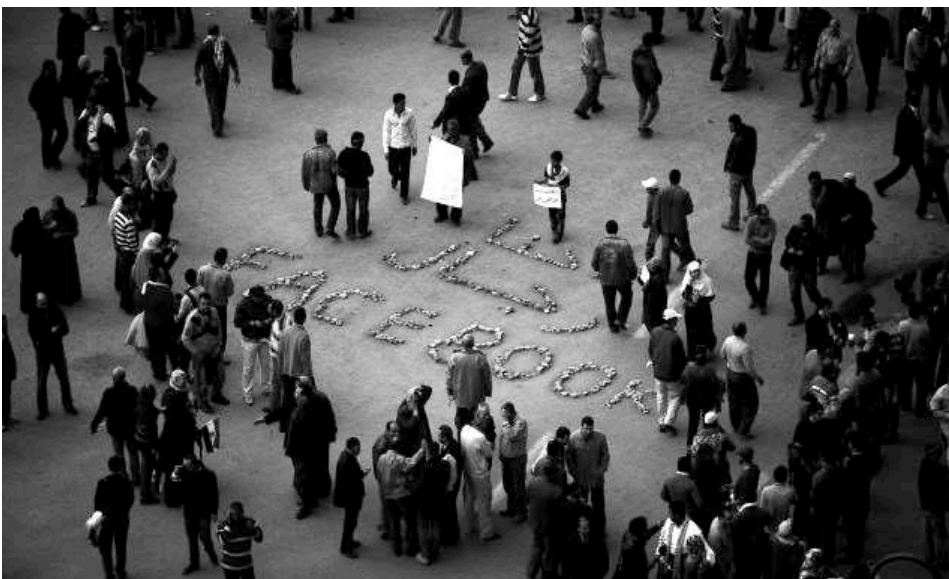
### ***b. Art Corner as Organized Spatial Pattern***

Art corner for art practices, production and display appeared with the establishment of Revolutionary Artist's Union. The initial group composed of artist, Calligrapher, poet and painter took place at KFC pavement in front the roundabout." (Int19, Art2) He explained that, "Spontaneously a wall of visual art emerged from a selection of works were plastered on the outdoor glass wall of a KFC." Due to limited tools and resources in first day, Art2 described that, "We relied on gathering used plastic tea cups, bottles and boxes from garbage spots in order to; create works of art, as if Mubarak's flight is taking off; and write on the floor "leave." These works of art were produced and displayed on the street level between the roundabout and KFC." According to Act2, "Local resources from recycled materials until rocks have been deployed for producing works of art." (Int19, Art2) Spatial production of visual art represented a process of resistance and creative adaptation of available materials.

The development of these groups witnessed expansion in size and space was cordoned and preserved for artists to work and sleep. The original zone for art corner was occupied by 20 artists. Art2 described that, "On February 8th new extension of art corner was assigned for artists near Omar Makram mosque with huge white tent fitted 200 persons. It was devoted for art production and training, while art display remained in original art corner spot. They taught protesters how to express their words and feelings through brush as well." (Int19, Art2) Art corner, like rest of sit-in parts was influenced by spatial events that included section for martyrs' profiles with artists started to draw their martyred friends or martyrs they knew." This expanded to become training workshops and entertained for children. "In the final week, many families arrived with their kids and due to the festive mood, art corner witnessed special section devoted for kids." (Int19, Art2) It was clear how art corner was like the rest of spatial patterns, highly affected by the general mood of sit-in and spatially transformed to recall and commemorate most recent events.



The "Revolutionaries' Artists" were another group that deployed rocks -located at sit-in entrances for defense, to spatially narrate the camel battle events through works of art. Dr7 remarked that, "Utilization of rocks for defense in producing art was not before security prevailed in sit-in terrain." (Int27, Dr7) It was an act of commemoration and representation of events spatially through effectively using battlefield space and battle's remains and rocks that rained down over the square. This time art production was spatially dynamic and artists were forced to produce their art work on the grounds of sit-in approaches that were drawn with graffiti and rocks. Arm1 observed that, "Since February 8th, works of art with rocks extended outside sit-in from Abd el Moneim Rhyad side. It was a tool for narrating past events and allowing visitors to follow up the story while moving in the battlefield." (Int17, Arm1) By the end of 18 days all approaches hosted works of art made from rocks and posters for martyrs. They revealed control and high extent of security of sit-in while spatially recalling events that remained in their memory.



### ***c. Revolutionary Museums as an Act for Spatial Commemoration***

Representation of events through spatially exhibition initiated since February 3rd. According to Pro5 "Protesters collected the remains of Camel battle from horse saddle and some weapons, and exhibited them on corner at the traffic light in front the roundabout." (Int35, Pro5) A flux number of exhibitions and galleries for memorializing spatial events was momentous in last week. Dr7 explained that, "On February 6th part of field clinic -in front Franciscan school- in Abd El Moneim Rhyad square was transformed into a martyrs' museum. It included some of bloody clothes of protesters who were killed in the clashes and doctor's coat. It developed day by day including new collections donated or found -for other martyrs elements, newspapers with martyrs photos or notes for martyrs memorial and glorification." (Int27, Dr7) It was clear spatial evoking for events this field clinic witnessed in particular. Pro12 observed that, "There were many museum of the battle collections as one called museum of the revolution that exhibited police officer's helmet, a martyr's jacket and a police baton. Another one was for older banners and handmade posters represented diverse factors and political actions influencing these expressions." (Int42, Pro12) Spatial patterns of festivity or commemorating through art and freedom of expression modes have spread through all sit-in terrain and adaptively reused its component. Elaborate murals memorializing martyrs or charging the military with infidelity, performative art practices and creative visual art on the ground, showed a substantial shift in the way people were interacting with their dwelling space. It presented sit-in as a battle field reclaimed by its society and representing its events in their memories through spatial practices. All surfaces and every physical elements inside sit-in has been an opportunity for art and freedom of expression modes to tackle its mission for commemorating events.

### **3.0 Analysis**

Tracing how the role of art has shifted significantly from traditional freedom of expression modes as narrative of resistance into more sophisticated spatial performative ones, this research highlights, why and how protesters persisted spatially in their use of public space through their diverse modes even in the face of extensive violence and grief. Specifically, the research will argue that the effective deployment of physical environments through art performances and freedom of expression practices can be outlined by utilizing four dimensions: social production of lived space: social memory impact: internal dictatorship imposes social control: and discursive construction through symbolic representations and Mulid pattern as symbolic capital. Lefebvre's<sup>25</sup> theories of space production provide a theoretical lens through which this phenomenon can be examined critically.

The paper argues that the behavior of art and freedom of expression can be seen as an illustration of Henri Lefebvre's notion of spatial practice and lived space, the physical activities that shape and reshape material space, because art and freedom of expression combines performance, competence and society, and thus constructs both a material space and a representational space in protesters' minds. In Lefebvre's conceptualization of space as produced by, rather than as a container for; social life, "human practice and space are integrated."<sup>26</sup> Yet space, as sit-in must be emphasized, is more than a mere residual of social action, with no independent influence of its own. According to Massey, "There is more to it than that. Spatial distributions and geographical differentiation may be the result of social processes, but they also affect how those processes work."<sup>27</sup> Through Lefebvre's notions of space help clarify the relationships between social life and spatiality. Space is

socially produced and constituted as it, in turn, dialectically constitutes social production and reproduction.<sup>28</sup> It underlies Lefebvre's understanding of argument: Sociopolitical contradictions are realized spatially. Spatial contradictions 'express' conflicts between sociopolitical interests and forces; it is only in space that such conflicts come effectively into play, and in doing so they become contradictions of space.<sup>29</sup>

Yet, Lefebvre's complex view of socially produced space as it recognizes the material spatial dimensions of social life, the symbolic meanings of space, and the imposition of, and resistance to, dominant socio-spatial orders, can significantly enhance the understanding of the dynamics of art and freedom of expression in Tahrir square. Tracing the nature of Tahrir Square during 18 days using Lefebvre's dimensional conceptualization which examines the space of representation "lived space" <sup>30</sup> offers an analytical approach to analyzing the transformation process of Tahrir square, through which they claim their autonomy and right to the city. Art and freedom of expression spatial experience in Tahrir was a part of model of space production that featured surprising forms of social coherence, public organization and administration. Lived space refers to the ways that space is experienced directly, bodily and outside of verbal systems of representation<sup>31</sup>. Protesters in sit-in terrain as lived space were able to break down a variety of everyday spatial barriers and bold new connections across space. They were able to do so because of their ability to physically and communicatively link unconnected social sectors. So, for protestors Tahrir Square turned to be a place of collective performance, social discourse and freedom of expression. It became the symbol of democracy, justice and liberation. Tahrir square was representational space with a construct of collective imaginaries and "space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols."<sup>32</sup> As, Rob Shields (1999, pp. 119–20) suggests that lived space subverts both everyday spatial practices and representations of space and that an understanding of it, can lead to an engagement with the multidimensional social reality of space.<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, attending to lived space allows us to identify the moments when agreements of deploying spatial tactics through or knowing space were disrupted and new spatial practices and experiences of space became possible.

### ***Social Production of Lived Space***

Art and freedom of expression was an aesthetic product of resistance. It was a way of reclaiming and re-appropriating space, and providing a new understanding of the terrain as rightfully belonging to the people. Art and freedom of expression practices being part of everyday practices of sit-in, such spatial practices lead to new implicit set of norms in relationships between sit-in terrain that was experienced as entirely separate from the surrounding area. Its architecture and urban elements were consumed precisely for this. In Gibson's theories of ecological psychology, affordances are what the environment offers, provides, and furnishes.<sup>34</sup> Protesters perceived sit-in threshold, center, surfaces, and edges quite different. Accordingly new spatial practices generated the occupied sit-in space that involved new use, meaning and morphologies. Social groups in sit-in challenged and thus altered the way in which spaces were consumed. In fact, their use of the space contradicted the projected representations. they loosen up the fixed character of the physical environment by traversing the boundaries of built architecture, pathways controlled by green fences, adding new values to streets and green area, and privileging mundane urban furniture. And even reusing rocks of pavements and other urban furniture -that were extracted for defense- in production of art work. It provided wide range of freedom and creativity for protesters to produce. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects.<sup>35</sup> As the space of actually lived material and symbolic experience, it can be "terrain for the generation of 'counter-spaces,' spaces of resistance to the

dominant order..." 36, where alternative orders of material and symbolic space are imagined and struggled over. Sit-in terrain in this case was space, which is broken up into a series of independent elements and then reconstructed into new mental schema of spatial orientation.<sup>37</sup> Therefore protesters create a material space that fits in their unique uses and memories. This material space became a lived space inscribed by protesters' aspirations and demands.

In protesters mental map, sit-in terrain made up of a space for art and freedom of expression production and decorating, with series of facades for displaying and tagging their demands and experiences in their memories: formal and informal art performances spots, and memorial and exhibiting remains of previous events : defined this terrain instead of existing widely known landmarks. The existing built environment with several governmental buildings was already embedded with symbolic meanings. This made the addition of any art product or freedom of expression pattern inside the terrain a clear statement of challenging state domination; reclamation of public space by people. The suspension of monumental banners with collective demands on buildings within the public space replaced and imitated commercial advertisement billboards that intervene the skyline of Downtown Cairo. Protesters deployed similar tactics, they dotted the facades of Downtown Cairo as an outer enclosure and they dotted their own skyline on tents and new surfaces, through suspended banners. Moreover, different Landmarks emerged such as main stage, art corner at KFC store, martyr's shrine, and big banner at round about "The people demand removal of the regime." Therefore, pattern of occupation featured production of new landmarks that has been emerging in lived space production. Clearly, a spontaneous spatial arrangement evolved through art and freedom of expression practices that was part of a collective action in perceived domain. This indeed clarifies how art and freedom of expression practices during 18 days highlights a wide transition in the accessibility of public political expression as well. Lyman Chaffee noted: "street art is essence connotes a decentralized, democratic form in which there is universal access, and the real control over messages comes from the social producers. It is a barometer that registers the spectrum of thinking, especially during democratic openings."<sup>38</sup> Therefore art and freedom of expression practices are process of political, spatial, and aesthetic transformation in people's reality. It is the active involvement of protesters, to participate in the production of space, and claim of these new meanings. In this case "a site at which a discursive formation intersects with material practices."<sup>39</sup>

The uprising unleashed an endless array of banners and signs, many of which were long, elaborate, and constantly changing. This awakening of individual and collective spirit was rebirth of public consciousness that was reflected on countless production of banners. In general traditional role of the protester's sign and banner is to articulate demands of the individual holding it. However, the ways in which protesters in sit-in also used this tool as a collective mean of responding to actions and dominant narratives, relating to one another and galvanizing support, reflected conscious participation in a specific culture of resistance.<sup>40</sup> It appeared as collective responsibility emerged with highest social interaction during its all process: brainstorming, preparation, providing supplies, transferring, hanging and representing to media. The significance and importance of banners in Tahrir were interpreted through diverse size and composition in multiple spots, influenced by cultural factors and social memory, which shaped the political moment. Accordingly banners and signs functioned as organizational tool. They played a role in preserving internal social coherence of the lived space, as well as allowing for diverse, individual interests to be expressed collectively. It achieved several aspects first; signs were wholly about self-expression, collective demands and an outpouring of emotion. On the other hand, they functioned as a communication tool within sit-in, outside sit-in and to the outside world, as well as means of

motivation within the mass media. Visual art was a tool for imposing social control by protesters on the army. Army Since No army tank was allowed to access sit-in without being labeled with Down with Mubarak!", "No to Mubarak", "Step down, you tyrant" graffiti.

The formal pattern of art performance that emerged on stages witnessed protesters congregating around performers with least interaction. Instead, second alternative of performance where circles of discussions that reached high extent of appreciation and social interaction. Informal patterns resisted the imposed social control where discussion were more fruitful with individual diverse expressions and opinions being exchanged. In any setting, people prefer the environment where they can maximize their ways of using space.<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, protesters and specially sit-in inhabitant preferred circles of discussion where they all can discuss on same ground level. In this case circles were closer to the notion of spatial practice characterized by Lefebvre, as it "ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion, and this cohesion implies a guaranteed level of competence and a specific level of performance."<sup>42</sup> The continuation of these informal spatial patterns of circles for art and freedom of expression performances involving folk, traditional or rural performances was depending on protesters' interaction and extent of support that involved them physically and mentally. In this context art and freedom of expression was a significant example of how mundane people produce a lived space. Sit-in terrain was shaped exclusively by social orders and solidarity among performers resisting the conflict endured between the two patterns of performance.

Art was considered as activity through which sit-in was gazing attention as local and international media were shooting it. Specifically, journalists captured remarkable performances and disclosing main stages. It has included many cameras on top of it as well. The location of media cameras in relation to stage makes really sense, since they were able to capture the euphoric crowds addressed by speakers on stage. It was a strategic location since you don't see the stage but what appears is whoever crowds was there. There was sure some sort of syncretism between stage location and cameras locations, that you can see people's reactions as well. From videos and photographs, this imagery of protesters tends to demonstrate the power obtained to spatially order the actions and their representation .

### ***Social Memory and Art Practices in Urban Space***

Associated artistic interventions have drawn attention to the power of artistic resistance as social memory. These collective memories refer to the shared information held in memories of group that are continually being negotiated and subjected to social interaction. Social Memory theory in the work of the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs was observed, "It is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories."<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, everyone's memory is formed out of social norms. Social memory term calls attention to the social contexts in which people shape their group identities and debate their conflicting perceptions of their past experiences. People in sit-in witnessed solely, particular experiences that remained in their memories and creatively expressed through art and freedom of expression patterns in memorials, museums, events commemorating martyrs, and performances. Significantly, they developed a collective sense of opportunity through spatial practices, reminding people of what they are capable of as citizens holding power and asking for rights. Both 'personal' and 'collective' memory, therefore, are continually being negotiated as objects and subjects of social interaction; both are mutually constituting and 'intrinsically social.'<sup>44</sup> In this context, art

privileged its performers with a position where they were spatially able to recall their memories through various modes. A socially constructed symbols and signs of sit-in through commemoration and memorials reflected social memory that does not preserve the past in a way that allows for the disengagement of historical fact and later understanding and interpretation. Therefore it was a matter of a social agreement about how the past should be conceptualized and discussed. The end result was purely relative to their culture and layers of conflicting experiences.

The free expression of people's demands, hopes and aspirations was the greatest however it was controlled through formal pattern of performances and specifically at main stage. First, singing was considered as one of non-conventional uses of stage space. However the enforcement of protesters from freely express across different stages was not consistent. Social norms cultivated by this autonomous society made art and freedom of expression practices permitted either through informal patterns of performance or acceptable on other stages. Second, nonintellectual or non Islamists were those who weren't let to go on the main stage. Yet, there were stages that were solely erected for popular and people who didn't have chance to express on main stage. Dictatorship then appeared internally in form of social control and discrimination pattern. Main stage committee controlled new activities while deciding their location and being mediator for their supplies. Their interference wasn't limited on what to be displayed on main stage only while their spatial control was targeting other stages. This social control indicates that even in liberated terrain, and lack of regime control, art and freedom of expression patterns witnessed internal segregation. Main stage experienced an internal dictatorship. Democracy is about sorting out common issues without dictatorship, domination, or shooting at each other.<sup>45</sup> Popular protesters in sit-in lack a space on the main stage that suit their culture, backgrounds and knowledge. This fear and manipulation to the choice of who go on stage set up an environment of spatial order and segregation, as well as unstable form of social arrangement; thus changing the nature of freedom of expression. However this internal power was spatially limited, protesters succeeded to erect other stage in order to send their voices from.

### ***Discursive Construction through Symbolic Representations***

Tahrir square being one of the State's representational spaces, had been appropriated over the years by political authorities as places to exercise their power, demonstrate their dominance over their subjects, and enforce the discipline associated with a manufactured public that had been designed to provide mass displays of support for government initiatives.<sup>46</sup> Tahrir square being occupied was symbolically and materially crucial as it sat as the heart of state power and control. Protesters were considered as rebellious, through their spatial practices of art and freedom of expression, refusing to accept a city as it is produced. They deployed these spatial pattern of complex modes of art and freedom of expression in order to transform Tahrir square into space of resistance. In this context, the artistry of the uprisings contributed to the development and strength of these aspects while banning any themes supporting previous power to exist inside sit-in terrain. They challenge the established logic of architecture and redefine the urban space. Thus, such physical elements in built environment were stripped of their symbolic values and given new values and symbolic meanings.

The act of defacement and iconoclasm not only signaling that public space had been reclaimed through art performance, but also played a crucial role in signaling a new order and, the presence of a new actor onto the political stage, who were the public. As Dario Gamboni points out, such acts of apparent iconoclasm can be variously interpreted but have also been historically associated with

political change.<sup>47</sup> In this context, such acts of defacement were graphically and physically demonstrating the breaking of sense of fear on sit-in society.

Visual representation thus became a mirror of protesters' collective production of space and construction of resistance through high visibility. By performing art and freedom of expression by young or old, Muslim or Christian, rich or poor; protesters displayed solidarity, affirmation of peace and representation of high security. These images represented the pluralism the sit-in has witnessed, where everybody had accepted the other's difference. Art in all its forms became a mean whereby citizens sent messages to multiple audiences, and, in doing so, represented their own political preferences. This aspect remained powerful, in the aftermath of the camel battle as one of the ways artistic interventions were thus enmeshed in the commemoration of martyrs and registering for events. These interventions took many forms had articulated a culture of dissent across the space and the built environment. This was representation for unstoppable power, symbolically as well as materially. In this context, art amplified that power, commemorating martyrs and asserting the victory and pride of people who reclaimed their rights. Therefore, art and freedom of expressions symbols and representations were not just indicators of the politics of challenge; but also, they were deployed to shape the tactics of urban revolt while transforming from traditional patterns into more performative ones.

Art and freedom of expression also symbolized spatial confrontation that was taking place with Mubarak Regime and thugs. They even represented the symbolic violence of dismantling striated space, smoothing by deconstructing the pavement. To differentiate them in their functions was to discredit them entirely of their significance in the sit-in. These built environment resources were represented through their new meanings and functions by art as an evidence for the battle and its brutality. Protests shifted Tahrir Square from being part of the normative space of everyday life under the Mubarak regime into a space with built martyr's memorials and shrines which added new symbolic re- presentations and values to the existing architecture and transformed Tahrir square into more sacred space.

### ***Mulid Pattern as Symbolic Capital***

Despite the ongoing violence, Tahrir has become a familiar space for art and freedom of expression practices that redefined its role, meaning and morphology. In this context, the newly emerged community around sit-in has redefined its social structure. This was significant in the diverse categories of art and freedom of expression performers and their competence in order to present the most creative they can. Sit-in appeared to be a cultural field as Bourdieu calls as the field of power<sup>48</sup> where various cultural fields and artistic fields emerged. Art performances were considered a tool to glorify and signify everyone's culture, tradition and lifestyle. Through traditional, popular and ritual art performance from diverse cultures in sit-in, protesters represented their diversity in their origins. They imported performances from diverse cities, rural and traditional places. Art and freedom of expression theme was a sign of optimism of sit-in community and pride of their identity. This cultural production developed a dynamic autonomy; by an effect of diverse people from different cities and rural places engendering further concentration and unique art performances.

The particularities of sit-in society through performative art and freedom of expression practices turned Tahrir square into space of festivity and destination of pilgrimage with its own rituals and practices. A notable general order and pattern of performers brought some of the Mulid festivity

performances and sensations. Mulid is a popular form of festive that has been celebrated in Egypt for hundreds of years and rituals, similarly enacted by a mass phenomenon where carnival meets pilgrimage through: trance dance, followers perform the zikr, chanting the name of God at an ever increasing tempo and some achieve a trance-like state: spiritual focus: and sense of togetherness where social classes mix, removing all the usual boundaries of class and wealth.<sup>49</sup> Mix of all these performers, practices, material and imaginary resources and even more were arranged and spontaneously politicized during sitting-in to sustain cultural production process and transform the motivation and impact of revolt into a productive side of everyday routines. Once sit-in was completely secured and protesters achieved a critical mass with the reclaimed Square, it needed to be sustained over an extended period of time; the experience and spirit of the Mulid in Egyptian culture became very noticeable and efficient one.

The Mulid like festivities in sit-in terrain was instrumental in attracting thousands of families with kids. Accordingly, the Mulid spectacle in liberated sit-in became not just mobilizing cause but also a revolutionary one. Anna Madouef emphasizes that these celebratory Mulid spaces are "characterized not only through dialog and contact, but also through the remixing of categories, social types, spatial codes, and norms."<sup>50</sup> Exclusively, festivities in sit-in included members of different religious communities: Muslims, Christian and Jewish: people of different classes, and genders attended celebrations. This unique diversity was one of the main modes for displaying national identity and the unified concept of citizenship. Mulids continued to shape the revolutionary imagination to inspire aesthetic and creative production. During the time, Mulid pattern continued elaborating while more protesters were arriving from different regions and rural areas carrying their own traditions for festivity.

In the aftermath of the camel battle, Tahrir square witnessed martyrs and clashes that acquired sit-in new signs, meanings and additional rituals to Mulid festivities. Shrines and memorials for martyrs were part of pilgrimage destinations in the sit-in spatial rituals. Mulids normally celebrated around the site of the venerated person's body, relic, or shrine. the populare mulid then is thoroughly grounded in a particular symbolic and significant space and place that becomes the focal point for its energy.<sup>51</sup> Instead, Tahrir square obtained dual particularities where shrines were located and performances were grounded, that re-signified it. Similarly in sit-in, participants mixed freely between the spiritual and the earthly, simultaneously partaking in this unusual performance. Through the diverse activities, moods and emotion that constitute the mulid thus creating an atmosphere of chaos and disorder that was found in the sit-in, disrupting and redefining public order as well. Mulid effectively attained a space of significance where space was physically and symbolically re-conceptualized. While Mulid rituals were developing, sit-in was undergoing profound socials, political, and cultural transformations that influenced its practices as well. The act for resistance through this ongoing celebration, commemoration, performance, solidarity, and festivity was believed to be sustained until political change is achieved and people's demands must be met. Tahrir Square and the events associated with it certainly gained new significant meanings. Tahrir Square offered itself through art and freedom of expression practices as an image of the ideal city. It represented sentiments for a unified community that is not fragmented by any class, religious, gender or age differences.

Deploying creative rituals of familiar popular cultural practices like the zaffa -wedding march or Mulid procession, protesters revived these popular practices within a revolutionary context. They emerged through new meanings. Every mulid, wedding celebration are preceded by a zaffa, a procession leading through the area where the mulid or wedding takes place. Similarly, in the

aftermath of the camel battle, sit-in approaches have witnessed zaffa; for the incoming and departing visitors, where they would be received by a welcome makeshift group with chants such as "welcome, welcome the revolutionaries." The zaffa as functional necessity in Islamic tradition for public announcement of the event, similarly, the zaffa of sit-in were spatially performed for same function within a radically different context.

These general manifestation of the dynamics of mulid informed the way art and freedom of expression practices proceeded during sit-in. Certainly the appearance of performative festivities of mulid and its symbolic representations in the re-signified public space – Tahrir square was a familiar dynamic force that imposed what started to be referred to as the urban Utopia, the epicenter, the independent republic with similar complexity, chaos, informality, festivity. Sit-in continued to acquires new signs and practices day after day that exploit more familiar rituals of mulid. During the 18 days the appearance of mulid in Tahrir square was a translation of profound spatial transformation the square was undergoing entailing political changes. However it was clear that for this transformation to be sustained, for the sit-in to continue in critical mass, for revolutionary demands to be met, and for millions to be mobilized daily, Tahrir square would have to host a mulid pattern, be a platform for celebration, commemoration, protest, solidarity, and festivity.

#### 4.0 Conclusion

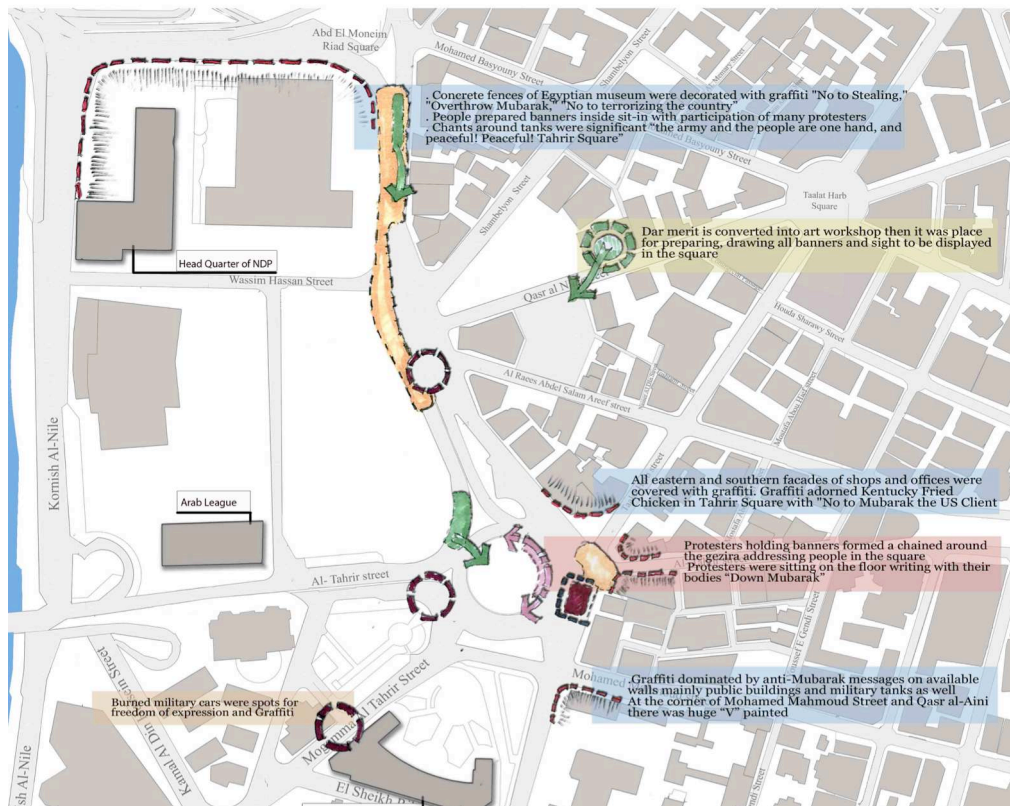
Art practices indicate how lived space provided unpredictable opportunities to collectively act with some power. These social interactions showed how participants bodily were involved in producing lived space and making it 'comes into being.'<sup>52</sup> Art performances were tool to recall all events and actions witnessed within the space. This unique instant performative representation highlighted a wide spatial transition in the accessibility of public political expression. Such lived experiences of social space constitute clear defiance of the dominant representations of space. This process occurs through the dissolution of old spatial relations and the generation of new ones. Lefebvre calls this 'differentiated space.'<sup>53</sup> Producing art was dependent on security situation and events witnessed by sit-in terrain. Modes of freedom of expression have developed significantly from traditional disconnected and media-led engagement into more directly engaging spatial performance and creative modes of expression: from banners and political chants into expressive, narrative, creative, produced works of arts from spatial elements, memorials , cultural, and Folklore art performance, and museums for spatial festivity and commemoration. These patterns imposed spatial disorders and chaos that were found in Mulid. The general disposition of complex pattern bore many traces of the mulid celebration, a popular form of carnivalesque festivities that has been celebrated in Egypt for centuries and rituals, enacted by protesters, politicized, and revolutionized during the last week to sustain the acts for resistance and the momentum of revolt.

Decentralized art performance and freedom of expression actions completion entailed active unconnected networks for initiating. These creative tactics intertwining social, cultural and psychological factors demonstrated how protesters resisted in their sit-in regardless clashes, political changes, martyrs, internal segregation and manipulation by some groups. Protesters deployment of public space demonstrated some tactics about their social production of space that comprised protesters' unique demands, creativity, and social relation in a space which embodied perceptions and lived experiences. Even in face of high degree of grief on martyrs and social control from internal groups, social discrimination and internal dictatorship, protesters resisted to

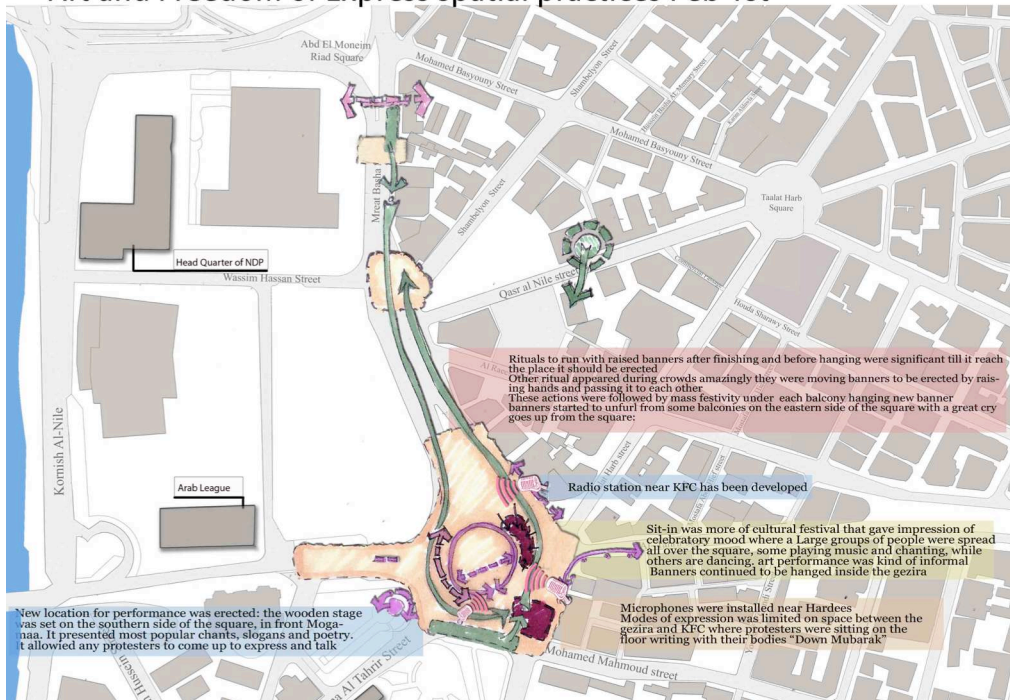
deploy stages and walls and spaces for collective-representation, self-representation and cultural expression. Moreover, the power of artistic interventions recalled socio-cultural memory that was influenced by present incidents and recent memory; "the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts."<sup>54</sup> Art was an act of spatial commemoration and memorial for contextual events through diverse modes.

Art allowed gaining insight into the ways in which experiences had been visualized and represented. It brings us closer to understanding the vital imaginative aspects of power and resistance. The originality and particularity of these artistic interventions, through performances and representations within space and time have helped in producing and defining a stage for the public protests to emerge and develop a repertoire of challenge, identity, rights, and liberation. Revolting arts had to be reinforced by the discursive practices of the media and international pressures within spaces of democracy. Mass-media images of art and freedom of expression practices all confirmed a sense of emerging utopianism. Sit-in terrain appeared as though it was free of any ideology, as if transformed into a model society in its ideal architecture that had discarded all hierarchies and forms of discrimination based on class and religion. It was as if a new reality had suddenly been discovered by protesters and superimposed on an old one. It symbolically represented the pluralism the sit-in has witnessed, where everybody had accepted the other difference. By performing art and freedom of expression, protesters effectively appropriated such through the symbolic projection of qualities in public discourse and in public space.

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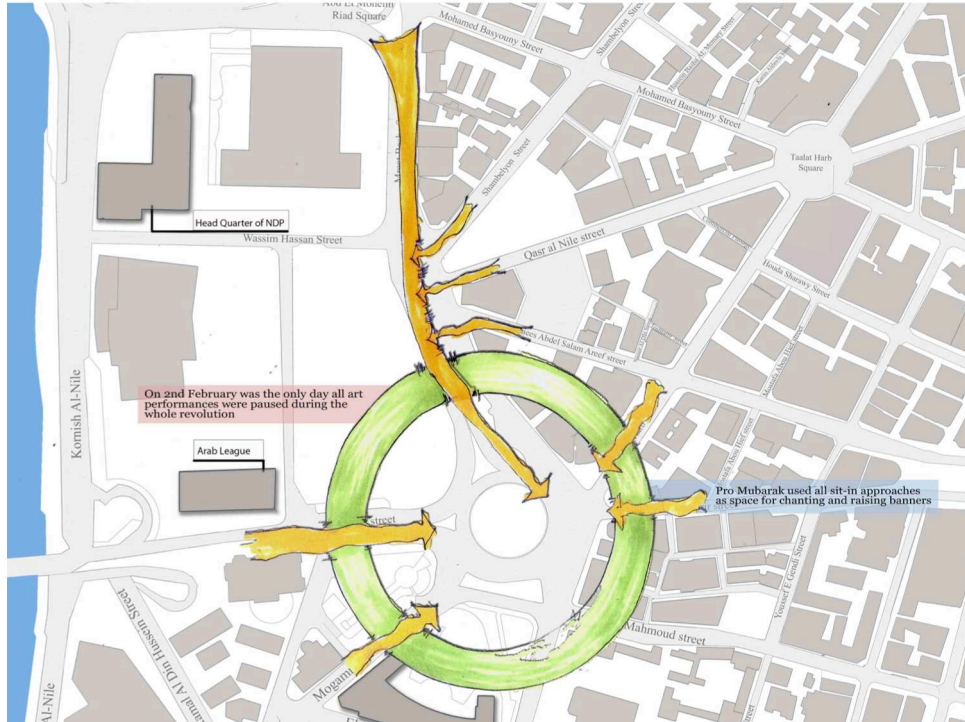


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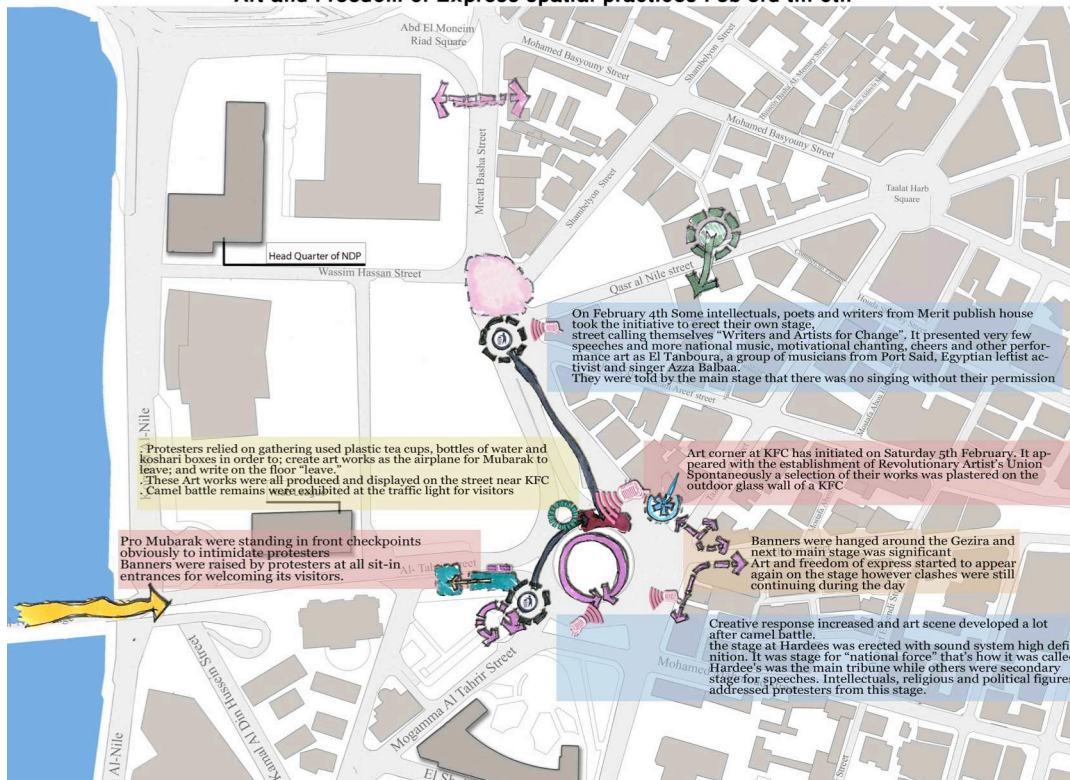


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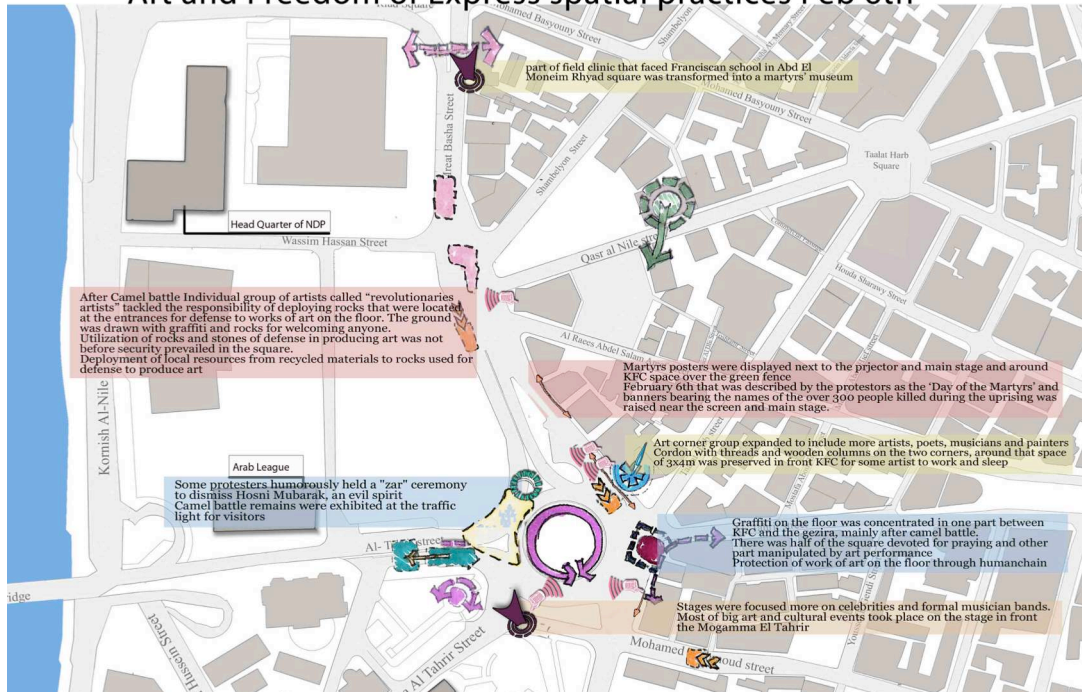
### Art and Freedom of Express spatial practices Feb 2nd



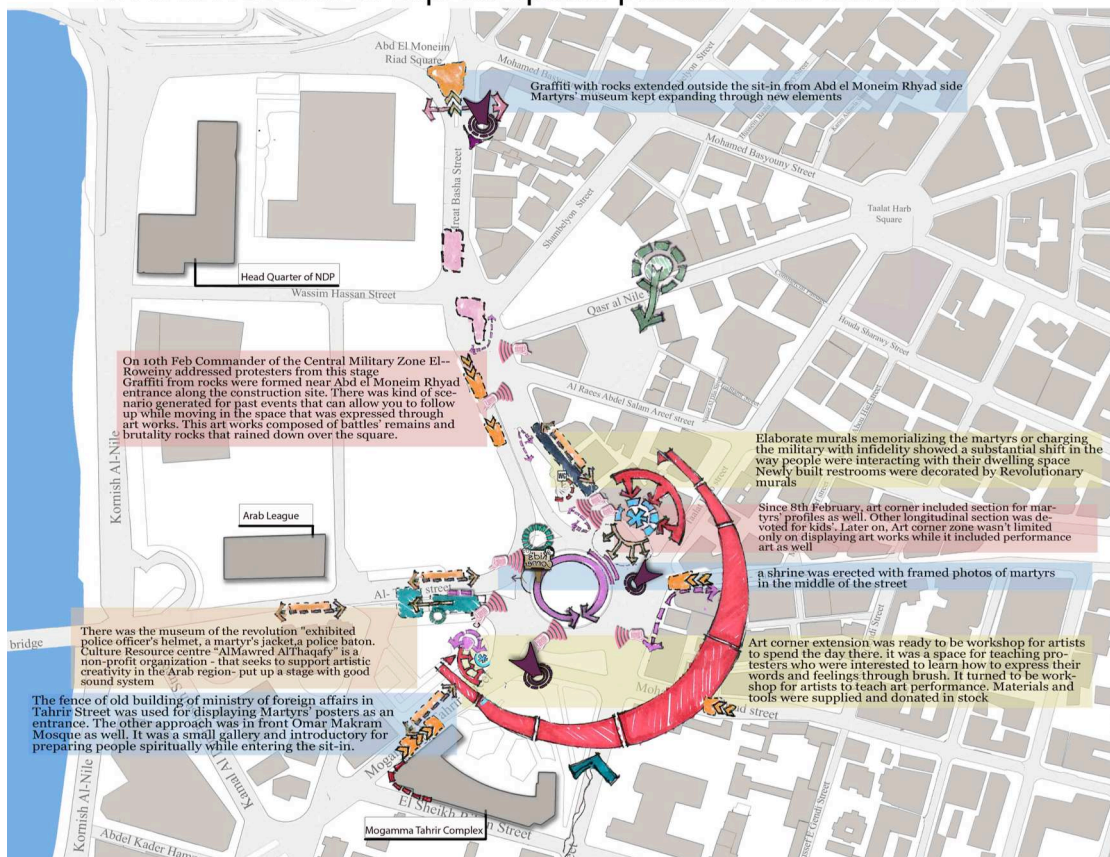
### Art and Freedom of Express spatial practices Feb 3rd till 5th



### Art and Freedom of Express spatial practices Feb 6th



### Art and Freedom of Express spatial practices Feb 8th till 11th



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