

The Dynamic Influence of Symbolism and Meaning in Urban Design, the Case of Tahrir Square, Cairo, Egypt

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Introduction

Tahrir (Liberation) Square, one of Egypt's capital most important squares, lies in the centre of the city, has been the traditional site for numerous major protests and demonstrations over the years, including the 1977 Egyptian Bread Riots, and the March 2003 protest against the War in Iraq, it became the nation's destination to deliver their protesting voices. Tahrir Square was the focal point of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution against former president Hosni Mubarak and his regime, The square became a symbol for the ongoing Egyptian democracy demonstrations, and in this time protesters did not leave their places after a couple of hours as they usually did, on the contrary, they remained in the square for 18 continuous days until their pressures removed Mubarak from power on Friday 11 February 2011, when the president officially stepped down from office and passed all authority to the Council of the Armed Forces, Tahrir Square erupted in a night-long celebration after the twilight announcement, with shouts such as "*Lift your head up high, you're Egyptian*", The next day – amazingly- Egyptian Cairen women and men came to clean up the square, they came and cleaned up after their revolution in a symbol for how civilized was this revolution and protesters.

No one denies that the immediate trigger for the outbreak of protests in Egypt was the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia in mid-January -several days before the Egyptian white revolution- which demonstrated that sustained and broad-based popular mobilization can lead to political change, even in a police state such as Tunisia. But other factors had long been at work in Egyptian politics and society.

Tahrir Square, after the revolution hosted many celebrations and visits from foreign dignitaries, continues to be a symbol of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. British Prime Minister David Cameron, Catherine Ashton, the high representative for foreign affairs and security policy of the European union, Hillary Clinton, secretary of state of the united states and others visited Tahrir Square after Revolution, the square was added to the tourist attraction sites map not only for Cairo but for Egypt as well.

1. Symbolism and Meaning

A "symbol" is an object, action, or idea that represents something other than itself, often of a more abstract nature, while Symbolism is the practice of representing things by symbols, or of investing things with a symbolic meaning or character (Wikipedia, 2012)

Rapport (1990) identifies three levels of meaning in built environments; the first is *high-level meaning* which describes cosmological and supernatural symbolism that may be encoded in buildings and city layouts, the second is *middle-level meaning* which refers to deliberate messages about identity and status communicated by the designers and constructors of buildings and cities, and the third is *low-level meaning* describes the ways in which the built environment channels and interacts recursively with behavior and movement.

The form of cities is a symbolic representation of the historical contiguity between social relations and spatial structures, while all human action is infused with meaning, so the

spaces we inhabit are also replete with symbolic values, collective memory, association, celebration and conflict (Cuthbert, 2006).

In his definition to place Lineu Castello (2006) states:

"The traditional concept of place is a theoretical construct that implies on a created environmental form, imbued with symbolic significance to its users. There is a common acceptance, though, that a place is layered with the symbolic attributes that evoke the role this place played in some of the most significant times the city has experienced"

We affect the environment and are affected by it. For this interaction to happen, perception is achieved by sight, sound, smell and/or touch, which offer clues about the world around. Perception involves the gathering, organizing and making sense of information about the environment.

All urban environments contain symbols, meanings and values. The study of 'signs' and their meanings is known as semiology or semiotics. As Eco (1968) explains, semiotics studies all cultural phenomena as if they were systems of signs, while the process of creating meaning is called signification. As society changes, so does signification, meanings attached to the built environment become modified as social values evolve in response to changing patterns of socio- economic organization and lifestyles.

Spaces have functions, in many cases they are multi-functional, Eco shows that the secondary function can be of more important than the primary one, for example, a chair denotes the function of being able to sit down, if it is a throne, however, it should be sat on with a certain dignity.

Carmona et al (2003) argue that commodities consist of more than their material qualities, and that we also consume the 'idea' of them and what they will allow us to become. The idea can become more important than the commodity itself - rather than selling houses, for example, developers sell images of desirable lifestyles, and this was the case of Tahrir square where people had a dream or an idea and the square was the dreamland for the protestors.

As most concepts of 'place' emphasize on the importance of a sense of 'belonging', of emotional attachment to place, and as Jacobs (1961) argues that successful places typically have animation and vitality, these successful places are characterized by the presence of people, in a self-reinforcing process.

When it comes to Tahrir square, it proves that it over time have rooted a very deep meaningful image that is grooved in the minds and hearts of Egyptians, it is a full of life space, where the feeling of "sense of place" and "belongingness" are very high, it simply symbolizes the nations pride.

Why is It Important to Study and Understand Symbolism and Meaning in Urban Planning and Design

Rapport (1990) argues that understanding symbolic meaning is valuable to designers and planners because this abstract link communicates user needs in the built environment. He also claims that without symbolic meaning, users cannot anchor and connect themselves in settings that are part of their everyday lives. Thus it's vital for urban designers to build a holistic understanding of symbolic meanings, as it may lead to project's success or failure. An example for this crucial understanding comes from Al-Qorna housing community in Luxor, Egypt, which was designed by the internationally famous architect Hassan Fathey who developed a very nice dome and vaults Islamic character community, however, it was

aborted and people refused to dwell it, their cause was the symbolism of domes in their culture, as it was used to recognize the graves of ritual people, thus domes were always correlated with death in these people's perception.

Understanding symbolism and meaning is an essential aspect in urban design as it enables a person to understand the untold hidden dimensions that influence the success of any development, and therefore construct the best strategies and plans to adopt.

2. Tahrir Square, a Space that Has Finally Earned Its Name

History of the Space

Tahrir (liberation) Square is one of Cairo's most important squares. Originally part of the Nile river bed, the site was firstly urbanized in the 19th century and became a working class neighborhood named el Louq. During the Sultanate of Al-Nasser Mohamed Ibn Qalawun, at that it became one of the richest and most luxuriant gardens in Cairo, within few decades, the area return to decay, leaving a mosaic of gardens and wetlands. It remained like that until the period of Ismail Pascià, the Khedive (1863-1879), who had his own dream as he promoted an overall project to develop the city of Cairo into the "Paris of the Middle East" transforming the neighborhood then called Ismailia into today's Downtown. At the time, the area, inhabited by princes, nobles and renowned personalities, was the site of the most important government buildings and services, it was the golden era of the neighborhood which the square lies in.

After 1952 revolution, Nasser completed the road system in the city center and the squares, including Ismailia Square, at the time renamed Midan el Tahrir (Liberation Square) metaphorically expressing liberation from British rule – and ironically witnessed both the revolution against and liberation from rulers of the same party of soldiers after only 6 decades. After the confiscation of property of foreign residents in the name of the revolution, Downtown lost its cosmopolitan population. Consequently, thousands of wealthy Egyptian families began their mass departure from the neighbourhood, moving to luxurious areas like Zamalek or newly built suburbs like Nasr City.

When development in the urban core halted, downtown became increasingly down market and began to take on today's physiognomy as a lower middle class, densely populated area with congested traffic and fast-paced and varied commercial activities. In the late 1970's, the square was a huge traffic circle around which were located government buildings like the Mogamma, luxury hotels like the Nile Hilton, and major cultural institutions like the historic campus of American University in Cairo and the Egyptian Museum. Next to the museum was a large garden used by many as a recreational area, figure (1). In the mid-1980s, under Mubarak's visionless regime, the garden was transformed into a large parking lot for tourist buses visiting the Museum, thus removing the vital public green space. The garden's closure to the public was part of Mubarak policy that sought to discourage public gatherings. At this point, Tahrir housed the central symbols of power and was also the symbol of a government stance totally unaware to the quality of life of its citizens.



Figure 1: Tahrir square in the 1960s (left), Google map of the square (right)

A Symbolic Square

It is no coincidence that the revolution began in that place on January 25, 2011, subsequently, the square was, more than once, transformed into a "city within a city". During the first 18 days of occupation, thousands not only of Cairo residents, but from other governorates as well, strangers to each other, worked peacefully in the square to create a well-organized "village".

Protestors created temporary camps in certain areas, as well as toilets, garbage collection, recycling and management systems, food and water distribution points, clinics, public areas for reading newspapers, art and musical corners, works of art and graffiti even a child care service (allowing mothers to remain in the square with their children) and much more. One old highly educated protestor (57 years old, Engineer) commented by saying:

"These young protestors have succeeded in what the whole government of Mubarak have failed in, if it was for me I will give these young amazing youth to govern and run the country"

During and after the revolution and along the last year and half, Egyptian artists and demonstrators expressed their thoughts, fears and points of view on the grounds and walls of the space. The square seems to be an open museum of the Egyptian minds and thoughts, not only it narrates all the important events in the last year and half but also it immortalizes the martyrs (people who were killed) for the sake of freedom. People visit the space to pay their due respect for those who sacrificed their lives for the sake of a better life for all Egyptians, they were asking only for freedom, respect and social justice.

There is no doubt that the design, location, street network, routes and function of buildings can reinforce the identity and character of the spaces they serve, Tahrir square is one example of this statement as it is considered one of the most important squares on Cairo's street network, however these are not the only factors that identifies urban space, as activities, incidents and events that occur in the space sometimes bestow the space with an added value like the case of Tahrir square

The square has witnessed many events and played different symbolic meanings, as in the first days of the revolution the clashes between the protesters and the internal security were very violent, it was only when the national army interfered and stood halfway between the two parties securing the square and protesters, that people began to rest and leaned their backs and slept under the chained wheels of the army tanks in tranquility, fearing nothing in a symbol of an endless trust in the army, figure (2).



Figure 2: Protestors trust in the army (left), clashes with the internal security forces (right)

Another sort of symbolism is drawn by those who were injured, especially those who lost their eyes in the clashes with police forces in the square, as they were targeted by the gunshooters and snipers. Its estimated that thousands were shoot in the eye during the different clashes, one of them who is Dr. Ahmed Harara, an Egyptian young dentist who was among the protestors, he lost the first eye (right eye) in the 28th of January which is called the Bloody Friday or the Friday of anger – most life loses and injuries was recorded in that day, while he lost the second one (left eye) in another brutal clash with the police on 19th November, he became a symbol for the demonstrators sacrifices and their heroic actions on one hand, and a life evidence on the brutality of the internal security forces and police against the peaceful demonstrators, figure (3).



Figure 3: Dr. Ahmed Harara, who lost both of his eyes in the square, a symbol for heroic sacrifice

Another sort of symbolism was the square role as an inspirer to the Libyan, Syrian and Yemen revolutions, and it hosted many gatherings supporting the Arab spring revolutions, where the flags of these countries arose in the square as a symbol of support and sympathy, figure (4). Until now there is many demonstrations screams from the square to save Syria from the brutal and inhuman repression they are facing under the Asad's regime.

In an interview in the square with a young protesting lady she said *"Tahrir square is a symbol of Egypt's leadership in the region, thus you need to see all the Arab brothers here among their Egyptian brothers protesting to earn their legitimate rights of a better life"*.



Figure 4: Syrian, Libyan and Tunisian flags in the square, that inspired other nations

A fourth sort of symbolism came when the elected president Dr. Mohammed Morsi -who was arrested just after the first spark of the revolution- knowing the symbolism of Tahrir square and its great meaning went to the square and read the oath of office in Tahrir Square a day before reading it officially, sending an assuring message for all Egyptians and saying that he fears no one while he is among his people in the square and showing that he is not wearing a bulletproof jacket in front of thousands of hundreds in the square, figure (5).

The square's symbolism reached the peak to be selected to witness a president giving the oath publicly to his people, and to witness the people saying that they will return to the square in case of their disappointment of the new president performance,.



Figure 5: The elected president Morsi showing that he is not wearing a bulletproof jacket, in Tahrir square in front of hundreds of thousands while giving his symbolic oath to the nation

Religion, Culture and Women in the Square

It might be thought that the Egyptian community is diversified Muslims and Christians, Nubians, Bedouins and Arabs, higher Egypt citizens and delta citizens, but in the end they all mix together in one homogeneous community, where all are similar and all are suffering the same problems, as for example, when it comes to unclean drinking water, carcinogenic vegetables and fruits, polluted air, lack of health care, brutality of police and many other factors, all the boundaries of religion, color, gender and/or race melts down, as all the Egyptians along the whole spectrum of diversification suffer the same troubles and face the same problems.

However, something extra arose in the square, when you find a Christian lady pouring water for a long bearded Islamic fundamentalist to make ablution before his prayers, when you find Muslims are performing their prayers in the protection of their Christian brothers, this what

they all called "the square spirit", this is true Egyptians characteristics, the square succeeded in the 18 days to rediscover the best characteristics of the Egyptian personality. Not even one theft was reported among hundred of thousands, not even a single sexual harassment was reported with girls and ladies who sleep over night in the square.

The space was a melting pot that broke all the boundaries of gender, culture, religion and ethnic backgrounds, people were alike, all were identified as Egyptians and nothing more, all were gathered under the same slogan of seeking a better life, which guarantees "freedom, respect and social justice"

Among the most symbolic features that the square succeeded in, was the women's vital role in the revolution, especially the compactness of both Muslim and Christian girls and ladies, figure (6).

It is worth mentioning that the Christian martyr Mina Daniel, the most famous Christian protestor in the square, who was killed months after the revolution in Maspéro's clashes, asked that his funeral starts from Tahrir square, thousands of Egyptians walked in the funeral most of them were Muslims.

As the elected president Morsi assures in most of his speeches that: *"The Square united us back together as Egyptians"*.



Figure 6: protesting girls in the square played a vital role (left photo),
A Christian and a Muslim ladies standing together with a sign saying "Ahmed (the most famous Muslim male name) and Mina (the most famous Christian male name) are one hand" (right photo)

Arts. Graffiti Symbolisms in the Square

There is no doubt that public Art such as sculptures, murals, reliefs, and art objects can transform the character of a place from an ordinary place to a more special one. Public art may beautify a site, evoke emotion, create a memorable place, acknowledge community history, or be abstract and symbolic. Different scale, large or small, art pieces can stimulate the imagination and encourage people to explore them. As previously mentioned Tahrir square is a considerably poor space in terms of art work and sculptures, even many described it as one of the most dull spaces in the city.

However every thing changed during and after the revolution, as Egyptians are among the first to depict their arts on the temple walls, narrating their daily life, and introducing one of the most honorable civilizations, the ancestors are following the steps of their grandfathers in Tahrir square art work and graffiti, the artistic works introduced in the space were very symbolic and meaningful, artists choose graffiti as its larger in size and easier to be perceived. One of the most symbolic and inspiring graffiti works was the realistic graffiti created on the large concrete boulders, brought by the army to stop the clashes between the

internal security on one side and the protesters in the square in the other side, the creative Egyptian artists who felt as a prisoner in the square draw a huge mural called "Open the way", in which they created their perception for an opened way, in one of the most optimistic approaches in a very hard time, figure (7).



Figure 7: "Open the way" mural, Tahrir square.

Another way of expressing noble meanings in the square, was the immortalizing graffiti of the revolution martyrs, many of the killed youth's picture was depicted on the walls of the square, in a symbolic act saying "we will never forget you", figure (8), most of the squares visitors paid tributes in front of these touching murals, putting flowers, praying and wishing they rest in peace.



Figure 8: Immortalizing the martyrs of revolution on Tahrir's walls, a remembrance graffiti

3. Factors that Lead to the Revolution

Cuthbert (2006) argues that the physicality of urban space and its configurations are not seen as products of social processes, political strategy and economic policy, instead come about as a result of utopian wish fulfillment, normative spatial concepts, professional influence or a series of somewhat random and arbitrary aesthetic choices, a dilemma that ends in wasting resources and retardation of communities quality of life.

It is hard to imagine that material necessities of life can be created solely by individuals, as it needs to be created by the collaboration of formal institutions, private suppliers and many other bodies under the supervision and monitoring of the governmental agencies. The absence of such basic amenities is very dangerous; especially when speaking about lack of personal safety, deterioration of the health services, lack of essential consumer goods and

commodities, all these deficiencies are threatening and usually introduces to eruption and revolution of communities. That scenario is exactly what happened in the Egyptian context, people kept boiling and suffering under a tyrannical regime that left them no hope and killed each and every dream the people had either for them or their children, therefore, and as a logical reaction people had no choice except to say "Enough".

The following section drops the shed on the actual reasons behind the eruption of the revolution.

Inheritance of Power

Most of the Egyptians consider that the inheritance of power in Egypt was the issue that accelerated the fall of the Mubarak regime. Gamal Mubarak, the younger of Mubarak's two sons, began to be groomed to succeed his father as the next president of Egypt. Gamal started receiving considerable attention in the Egyptian media, as there were no other apparent heirs to the presidency. Looking to the neighboring country of Syria in 2000, Bashar al-Assad's rising to power just hours after Hafez al-Assad's death, sparked a heated debate in the Egyptian press regarding the prospects for a similar scenario occurring in Cairo.

Many observers – from the authors highly ranked friends in the army – confirms that the main reason for the army to support the revolution from the first second, after being faithful to the oath to protect the Egyptian lands and people, was taking the chance to throw Mubarak - the higher commander of the armed forces – in order not to give Gamal the opportunity to be their commander, especially he had a famous bad reputation, which many of the armed forces leaders considered a scandal and a situation that with no means can be accepted.

Sobelman (2008) states that in the years after Mubarak's 2005 reelection many political groups (most in Egypt are unofficial), on both the left and the right, announced their sharp opposition to the inheritance of power. Political change and a fair election with more than one candidate was their main demands. While Brownlee (2001) stated that with Mubarak's health declining and the leader refusing to appoint a vice-president, Gamal was considered by some to be Egypt's de-facto president

Police Brutality

It was not an accident that the protestors choose the 25th of January (National Police Day) to demonstrate and march towards Tahrir (Liberation) square protesting against the police brutality and abuses, they firstly protested in front of the Ministry of Interior, then their demands expanded to include the resignation of the Minister of Interior, an end to State corruption, the end of Egyptian emergency law, and term limits for the president.

According to the 2009 Human Rights Report by the U.S. State Department, "Domestic and international human rights groups reported that the Ministry of Interior (MOI) State Security Investigative Service (SSIS), police, and other government entities continued to employ torture to extract information or force confessions. The Egyptian Organization for Human Rights documented 30 cases of torture during the year 2009. In numerous trials defendants alleged that police tortured them during questioning. During the year activists and observers circulated some amateur cellphone videos documenting the alleged abuse of citizens by security officials. According to a report from the U.S. Embassy in Egypt, police brutality has been common and widespread in Egypt. In the five years prior to the revolution, the Mubarak regime denied the existence of torture or abuse carried out by the police. However, many claims by domestic and international groups provided evidence through cellphone videos or first-hand accounts of hundreds of cases of police abuse.

The police forces constantly quashed democratic uprisings with brutal force and corrupt tactics. On 6 June 2010 Khaled Saeed, an Alexandrian young activist, died under disputed circumstances while being arrested for no reason. Multiple witnesses testified that Saeed

was beaten to death by the police. A Facebook page called "We are all Khaled Said" helped bring nationwide attention to the case. Khaled is believed to be the first spark of the revolution, he became a symbol and his photos was carried during the 18 days, some people calls Khaled the Egyptian BouAzizi. Mohamed ElBaradei, former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, led a rally in 2010 in Alexandria against alleged abuses by the police and visited Saeed's family to offer condolences.

Another face for the endless powers of police was the emergency law (Law No. 162 of 1958) was enacted, under the law, police powers are extended, constitutional rights suspended and the government may imprison individuals indefinitely and without reason. The law sharply limits any non-governmental political activity, including street demonstrations, non-approved political organizations, and unregistered financial donations. The Mubarak government has cited the threat of terrorism in order to extend the emergency law, This has led to the imprisonment of activists without trials, illegal undocumented hidden detention facilities, and rejecting university, mosque, and newspaper staff members based on their political inclination. Human rights organizations estimate that in 2010 between 5,000 and 10,000 people were in long-term detention without charge or trial.

Restrictions on Free Speech and the Press

The government under the Mubarak regime repeatedly sanctioned home raids, torture, arrests, and fining of bloggers and reporters that criticize the government in any way. Under the current state of emergency laws, the government can censor anything if it is considered a threat to "public safety and national security", which is a very wide statement that any and every issue can be considered if wanted- within its catchment. If any reporter or blogger violates this law by criticizing the government, they could be legally penalized with a fine of 20,000 pounds (\$3,650) and up to five years in prison. The Egyptian government owns stock in the three largest daily newspapers. The government controls the licensing and distribution of all papers in Egypt. The Egyptian government shut down the Internet and cut down the cell-phone service for most of the country (Cairo and other cities that had had demonstrations) in order to limit communication between protest groups.

Escalating Economic Challenges and Poor Living Conditions

According to the Egyptian population census agency, the population of Egypt grew from 30,083,419 in 1966 to roughly 79,000,000 by 2006. The real problem lies in that the vast majority of Egyptians live in the limited spaces near the banks of the Nile River, and its delta, in an area of about 40,000 square kilometers (15,000 sq mi), where the only arable land is found, leaving more than 95% of the country's lands deserted. In late 2010 around 40% of Egypt's population of just under 80 million lived on the fiscal income equivalent of roughly US\$2 per day, with a large part of the population relying on subsidized goods.

The centralization is a another serious problem that intensifies the problem of poor living conditions in the country, as most of the national expenditure goes to Greater Cairo, which lead to the migration form all the country to the capital, leading to the dispersion of squatters, slums and spontaneous urban sprawls, these unplanned illegal areas is helping in the suffocation of the capital's urban environment and arises the critical social problems of injustice and equity within the community.

Egypt is unemployment driven by a demographic youth bulge: with the number of new people entering the job force at about 4% a year, the irony lies in unemployment in Egypt is almost 10 times as high for college graduates as it is for people who have gone through elementary school. In spite the huge man power Egypt possess but the governmental policies failed to absorb these fresh graduates, and they the same people who were out in the streets during the revolution asking for change and seeking a better quality of life.

Another form of economic challenges was the Corruption among government officials, as it was a trade mark for the Mubarak administration in the last decade, the political corruption in

rose dramatically due to the increased level of control over the institutional system necessary to prolong the presidency. The wealth of ministers and NDP Organisation Secretary and board members was reported to be in billions each of them, the perception among Egyptians was that the only people to benefit from the nation's wealth were businessmen with ties to the National Democratic Party; "wealth fuels political power and political power buys wealth"

Mass Movements and the Public Realm

Many researchers state that Mubarak's downfall was the result of three factors: increasing corruption and economic exclusion, the alienation of the youth, and the 2010 elections and divisions among the Egyptian elite over questions of succession. When these 3 currents came together, they inspired a broad cross section of Egyptian society to achieve the unthinkable: removing Mubarak from power.

Many mass movements appeared in the last 10 years to the revolution, among these were April 6 movement which is considered among the strongest movements, because of the significantly young age of its members, starting in 2008 in solidarity with textile workers who were planning a strike for that date, in its first days the movement attracted 70,000 members on Facebook, making it the largest youth movement in Egypt at the time. Another movement is Kefaya, which has attracted youth. In 2004 and 2005, it organized a series of high-profile protests calling for the end of Mubarak's presidency and the country's emergency law.

In their supporting of Mohamed ElBaradei, the former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, who returned to Egypt in February 2010, and declared that he is against the Mubarak regime and that he is entering the president elections in front of the Mubarak family (father and son Gamal), members of both the April 6 movement and Kefaya were behind the creation of a popular Facebook group, and campaigning the youth round ElBaradei.

Activists associated with the ElBaradei campaign created a Facebook page called "We are all Khaled Said" Their page attracted more than one million supporters and became the focal point for a number of large protests against state abuses in the summer of 2010.

4. Influence of Political Changes on the Planning Process after Revolution

The squares symbolism have faced several turnovers in the last year and half, many factors influenced the people's perception of Tahrir and those who frequents the space. The beginning was with the first 18 days, in which the public began to understand that there is a revolution in the country with the square as its battlefield, protesters numbers were escalating everyday, the space at that time was the refuge and the only hope for Egyptians, especially that they all knew what will happen for them in the case of the revolution failure, people were fighting for their lives, in the same time, in 18 days not one single sexual harassment has been reported, even a single theft. The protesters hosted the homeless and street boys, feed them and gave them shelter, it's another symbolic gesture, when those protesters provide what the whole government failed to secure, as a cause of neglecting or ignorance or prejudice.

The space now is the destination for any person, group, movement to protest and demonstrate, usually on Fridays (the formal weekend) Tahrir square welcomes protestors each week with something new, it became the political public parliament, from which the public rises their voices with their demands.

The political changes that happened in the Egyptian state is huge, moreover the changes that happened to the Egyptian personal is much larger. Many Egyptian protestors in the square agreed on that here is a huge change in the Egyptians life, they began to ask and

understand much more than before, for the first time since decades they tasted democracy and they understood their actual force as a nation, a common saying among Egyptians now is *"we will never be slaves again, we have discovered Tahrir square thanks to God, we can demonstrate and express our opinions"*

People can accuse each other of adopting different agendas behind their existence in the square and supporting the democratic changes in the country, but no one can deny that Tahrir square symbol as the "chain breaker" in the Egyptian contemporary life will never be forgotten and will be immortalized in history for being the theatre for the white, peaceful and civilized revolution of the Arab sprig.

There is a significant dichotomy between the negative and positive symbolic meaning that the people have attached to Tahrir square, as there are **Negative influences** such as the casualties and blood shed that will never be forgotten, the lack of security with the absence of internal security forces, the illegal expansions over agricultural lands, the invasion of street vendors, the negative impact on trading and shops in and around the square, the exhaustion of many classes in the community especially the most needy ones and many other economical and social negativities that have been rooted in the community for decades float on the surface after the revolution.

However, **Positive influences** cannot be neglected or forgotten, they might be more of a moral and abstract nature, but they essential, such as the feeling of freedom, dignity and belongingness, such morals can easily be relied upon to build nations.

One of the most important gaining was the activation of public participation as a planning process, and the true studying of people's needs and requirements, such aspects will eventually help in reforming building the new state on a different planning and design concepts, this time the citizen is in the heart of it, not apart of it, as it was before.

Tahrir square symbolizes legitimacy, people agreed with Dr. Essam Sharaf as a prime minister, because he gained his legitimacy from the square and was among the protestors all the time, the newly elected president Dr. Mohamed Morsi, gave a symbolic oath of office in the square just after his election to win the "square legitimacy", it is like having the acceptance of people, thus any responsible needs to put a careful eye on the square pulses and what do the people want and need.

5. Conclusion

When an elected president is keen to give the oath of office in a space that he admits he gained his legitimacy from, is not an ordinary space, and it is not an event to be passed without meditation and studying. When the elected president Dr. Mohamed Morsi went to the square in Friday 29th June 2012 after announcing his winning of the elections and performed the oath this was the clearest evidence of the huge influence urban spaces can achieve and the vital role they play in reforming communities.

No doubt the symbolism of the square is much more than words can say for Egyptians, people not only believe that the urban space of Tahrir square is their stream of freedom, liberation and change, but they also express their willingness to protect and preserve this hardly gained earning. Tahrir square symbolism in the contemporary daily life of Egyptians was not an easy gain, as hundreds lost their sacred lives for the noble cause of freedom and for others to live in dignity and honor, while others lost their eyes and hundreds became incapacitated

Planners, designers and policy makers need not only to be a very good listeners to the voice of such symbolic spaces, as they reflect the true voice of people and their needs, but they

ought to analyze, study and research thoroughly such needs, moreover the reasons behind people refuge to these spaces needed to be studied and taken in consideration.

Many of the interviewers and even other people asked to consider Tahrir square as the Egyptian version of the Hyde Park, a place where people can express their thoughts, fears and dreams. A place to discuss and oppose the country's matters publicly, a place to memorize the real heroes, the martyrs of liberation and freedom in the space of liberation. Many people were calling to hold an international competition for redesigning the space in order to habitat all the previously mentioned aspects. And this can easily be achieved by restoring the huge garden in front of the Egyptian museum which is a derelict land at the moment.

One more lesson to be learned from Tahrir square in how to deal with protestors, as the brutal inefficient police tactics and the cutting of internet and cellphone connections in the first couple of days of the revolution in the square led to the sympathy of the whole nation and people flooded to the square in hundreds of thousands, even when the army and the internal security put the huge concrete boulders, people defeated all. Voices arising of symbolic and inspiring spaces "house of people" ought never to be neglected.

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