

Performing the Forbidden Public Space:

the Case of the New Clock Tower Square in Homs, Syria

by
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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

Public spaces in Syria have been controlled and militarized for a long time, even before the revolution of 2011. In the city of Homs, however, during the revolution's early days, thousands of people poured into the New Clock Tower Square for the largest anti-regime protest in the history of the ruling Ba'ath Party. In this sense, two different performances have been happening in the same square: the performance of the Syrian state to control and oppress the protest and the performance of the people to revolt and resist the state and its regime. This research spatially investigates and documents how the square suddenly shifted from a controlled space to a space of protest and expression, particularly on the 17th and 18th of April 2011.

In the city of Homs, the Syrian state used architecture and the urban fabric to perform controlling measures on the people, such as acts of destruction, neglect, renovation, and state-led developments. These acts also meant to instate political homogeneity that aligned with the regime's sect, the Alawite sect, which also served their economic interests. These acts started before the revolution and were one of its triggers, putting the building market and the historic city center in the hand of the Syrian regime and those affiliated with it from the Alawi sect. Therefore, occupying the New Clock Tower Square in the city center by the people is considered a statement to challenge the state, reclaim the square, and assert their right to the city.

In this thesis, I investigate the duality of performance in the New Clock Tower Square using architecture and urbanism. Building on Judith Butler's seminal theory of performativity and through mapping, morphological analysis, and archival research, the thesis attributes the conflict of performance to the square's importance as a physical and symbolic space. The thesis argues that the connectivity and centrality of the square and its collective memory, starting from resisting the French Mandate in 1920 until this day, prompted the state to act in one way and the people to act in another. In the context of this complex socio-political, spatial, and national juxtaposition, the thesis highlights the role of architecture in meaning and identity politics in being an agent for change.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Syria is a country that has been struggling with the use of public space for a long time (figure 1.1).¹ Even before the Syrian revolution started in 2011, public spaces in Syria had been militarized.² The Arab Socialists Ba'ath Party, advocating the formation of a single Arab socialist nation, came into power to rule the country via a military coup in 1963 and controlled public space to develop civil society in Syria.³ Over the years, the military regime built a sophisticated institution of security called Al-Mukhabarat, which translates to 'intelligence,' to be wary of the public and public spaces for being theaters of potential rebellious movements.⁴

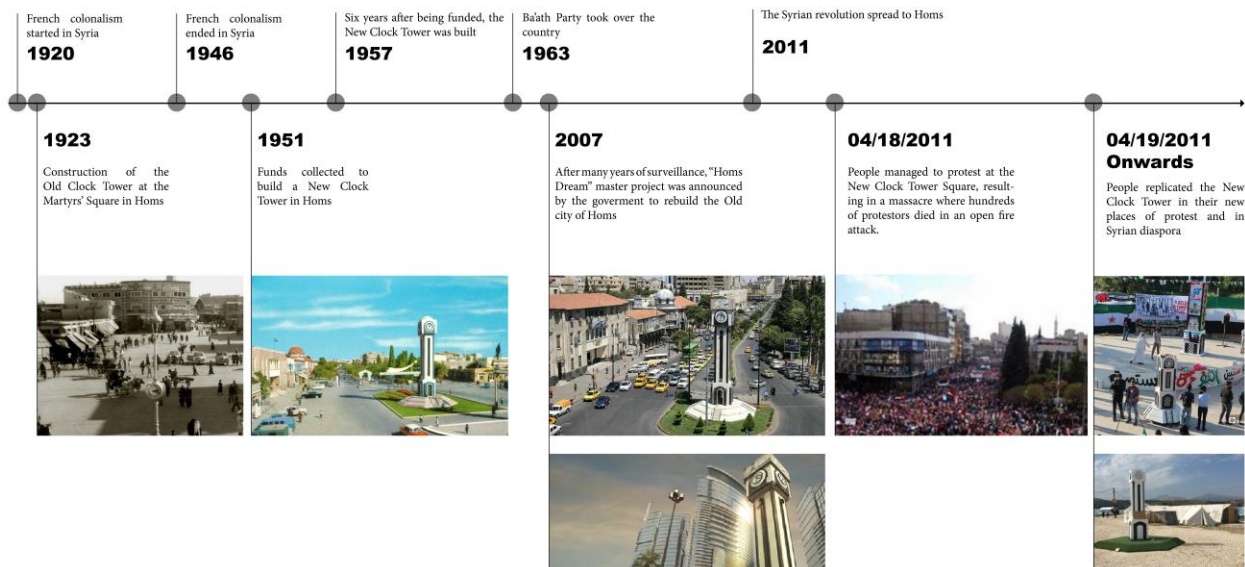


Figure 1.1: Timeline of the New Clock Tower Square in Homs, Syria [author]

Syria's intelligence services were initially established by the French Mandatory authority for internal security and counter-espionage purposes.⁵ In 1970 when Hafez Al-Assad (the father president) took over the Ba'ath Party via another military coup, the security services expanded to dominate all other political

¹ Mehrunisa Qayyum, "Syrian Diaspora: Cultivating a New Public Space Consciousness," *Middle East Institute*, 2011, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/syrian-diaspora-cultivating-new-public-space-consciousness>.

² Nasser Rabbat, "The Arab Revolution Takes Back the Public Space," *Critical Inquiry* 39, no. 1 (2012): 198–208, <https://doi.org/10.1086/668055>.

³ Qayyum, "Syrian Diaspora: Cultivating a New Public Space Consciousness."

⁴ Rabbat, "The Arab Revolution Takes Back the Public Space."

⁵ Andrew Rathmell, "Syria's Intelligence Services: Origins and Development1," *Journal of Conflict Studies*, November 1, 1996, <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/JCS/article/view/11815>.

and military institutions, including the state itself.⁶ They became in charge of the making and execution of Syrian domestic and foreign policies. In his report to the Middle East Watch, James A. Paul conducts that the Assad regime, through his intelligence institutions, is responsible for censorship, repression, torture, and state-sanctioned murder of tens of thousands of Syrian people who are suspected of having different political views.⁷ As a government institution that practices constant surveillance of its citizens, the authorities used architecture to control the crowds by establishing a spatial control system of limiting the number of public spaces and setting up checkpoints over the country. Al- Mukhabarat not only separates people from each other and creates divisions among them due to a lack of trust, the fear of arrest, and the risk of forcible disappearance,⁸ but it also erases public life by moving it to private places.⁹ Instead of meeting in a public space to discuss a social or political manner, people choose to meet at their homes. Even inside homes, dwellers live by the principle that “the walls have ears,” a concept of constant surveillance, causing those living in the same house to be cautious of what they say, fearing that someone may hear and report them.

Traces of the struggle for controlled and surveilled public spaces in the country could also be seen during the colonization period of the French Mandate (1920 – 1946). French colonizers considered the urban fabric of Syria unmodernized and started reshaping the cities under the pretext of ‘developments’ and ‘modernization.’¹⁰ They transformed city streets into wide boulevards, relocated monuments, and introduced squares, plazas, and parks. These amenities were added as an existing foreign design template, lacking local attachments and cultural bonds that would have endowed them with meaning. It was the beginning of a long and gradual replacement of traditional Arab Islamic architecture in medieval city centers, such as the Mosque’s *Sahas* (plazas) and *Souqs* (an Arab market or marketplace; a bazaar).¹¹ This transformation produced a striking contrast between the public social life of the traditional Syrian city and this architecture that was altered to control the crowds by connecting straight boulevards to the public squares and shaping them to maximize military movement and the surveillance of their occupants by the colonizer.¹²

Although plazas and squares were alien to the local culture, they eventually gained civic meanings during national and local events and when social movements took place in them against the colonials. The squares were soon declared sacred when the demands for freedom in them turned into bloodshed. For example, the Marjeh Square in Damascus was the area for executions by the French during their Colonialism in Syria (figure 1.2). People defied the fear message of the colonizer by taking up the role of the courageous who embraced the Square and considered it a podium to show off their martyred heroes.

⁶ Rathmell. Also see: Assad's legions: The Syrian intelligence services by CARL ANTHONY WEGE. Carl Anthony Wege (1990) Assad's legions: The Syrian intelligence services, International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence, 4:1, 91-100, DOI:10.1080/08850609008435130

⁷ Daniel E. Spector, “Syria Unmasked: The Suppression of Human Rights by The Asad Regime: Middle East Watch: New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 215 Pp., Publication Date: October 1991,” *History: Reviews of New Books* 21, no. 2 (January 1993): 81–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03612759.1993.9948587>.

⁸ A report that sheds light on the thousands of ‘disappearances’ during al-Assad's 30-year rule is “Robert Fisk: Ghosts from the past: Syria's 30 years of fear” <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/fisk/robert-fisk-ghosts-from-the-past-syria-s-30-years-of-fear-2008757.html>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Rabbat, “The Arab Revolution Takes Back the Public Space.”

¹¹ Rabbat.

¹² Rabbat, “The Arab Revolution Takes Back the Public Space.”

They even invented a folk song about this space that has been passed down for generations.¹³ Thus, many squares in Syria, including Al-Marjeh Square, were named Sahat Al-Shuhada (Martyrs' Square) to commemorate the martyrs of independence.

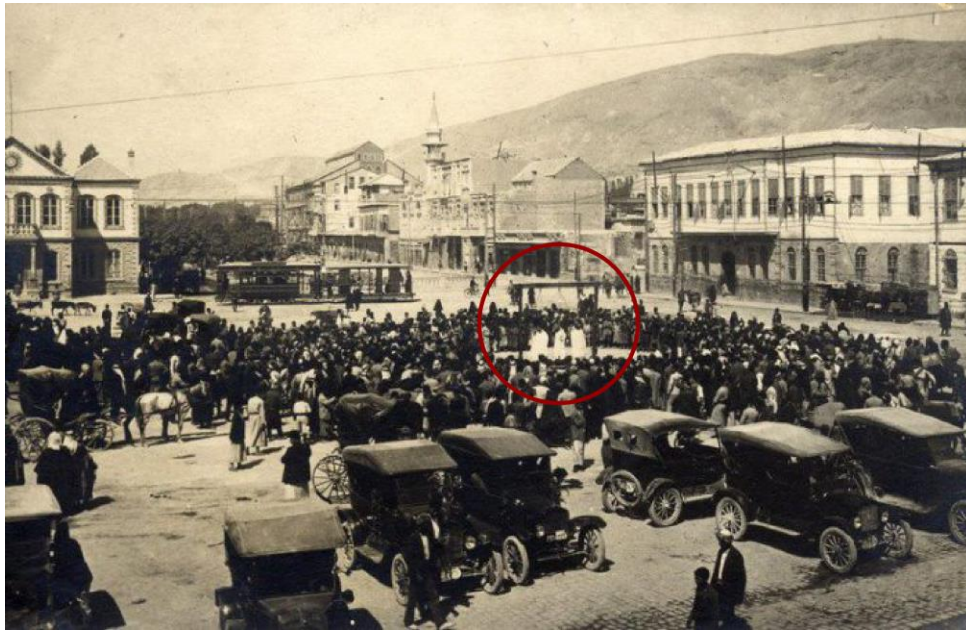


Figure 1.2: An execution event by French Colonials in 1962 in Marjah Square, Damascus [syrmh.com]

Once again, the country lost the civic meaning of its public squares when they became the stage for the presidents to give speeches. The current president Bashar Al-Assad, and his father, the previous president, Hafez Al-Assad, dominated the country's public squares with giant statues of themselves to ensure a permanent presence in the everyday lives of people (figure 1.3).

¹³ The opening of the folk song is: "Decorate Al Marjeh, for Marjeh is ours, our Damascus is a scene while it's decorated." (meaning decorated with martyrs)



Figure 1.3: Statue of Hafez al-Assad in Arnous Public Square in Damascus [ultrasawt.com]

However, just like the other countries where the Arab Spring spread in the 2010s,¹⁴ mainly Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, and Egypt, the peaceful demonstrations in Syria brought back the forgotten public spaces of squares and streets, such as the New Clock Tower Square in Homs, when hundreds of thousands of protestors started gathering in them.¹⁵ People inhabited the streets and squares chanting for freedom and dignity. Syrians had no hope for repairs and social justice under the regulations of a regime with such a long history of violence.¹⁶ Therefore, their demand was unified and clear: to overthrow the regime.

Consequently, the peaceful protesters were met with violence and oppression. During the Syrian revolution of 2011, large parts of Syria were destroyed, turning the city into what has been called “hell on earth.”¹⁷ Violent damage, including bombarding, besieging, and eviction, made no distinction between rebels and civilians. As a result, hundreds of thousands of people have died, and millions have been forcibly displaced across Syria. According to the Higher Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of July 2021, up to 13.5 million Syrians are displaced internally and externally—this number is more than half of the country’s total population. Over 500,000 citizens have been killed,¹⁸ and at least 150,000 people are in prisons or have forcibly disappeared.¹⁹ The violence that reached the built environment created a

¹⁴ The Arab Spring was a wave of pro-democracy uprisings and anti-government protests that took place in the Middle East and North Africa beginning in 2010 and 2011. It began in Tunisia in response to corruption and economic stagnation then spread to five other countries: Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria and Bahrain.

¹⁵ Abdul Hameed, "الساعة الثانية إلا عشر دقائق" [Ten To Two]."

¹⁶ Especially after the event of the extermination of the Muslim Brotherhood in Hama in the 1980s. For more about this see: “The Patterns of Syrian Uprising: Comparing Hama in 1980–1982 and Homs in 2011” by Dara Conduit. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2016.1182421>

¹⁷ Sheena McKenzie, “How Seven Years of War Turned Syria’s Cities into ‘Hell on Earth,’” CNN, March 15, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/15/middleeast/syria-then-now-satellite-intl/index.html>.

¹⁸ "Total Death Toll | Over 606,000 People Killed Across Syria Since The Beginning Of The “Syrian Revolution”, Including 495,000 Documented By SOHR."

¹⁹ "Syria - United States Department Of State."

phenomenon known as *urbicide*: the killing of cities, or urbanity, and the deliberate destruction of its social, cultural, and spatial fabrics.²⁰

1.2 Country Context: Alawites and the State

Syria is an authoritarian state of Sunni majority ruled by the Assad family of Alawi-minority since 1970.²¹ Alawites have historically kept their beliefs secret from non-initiated Alawites.²² Therefore, many of their concepts are unknown to the outside world. However, accounts of their beliefs tend to be partisan.²³ While the major divide in Islam is between Shiite and Sunni Muslims, who initially split over who was supposed to succeed prophet Muhammad, Alawites carried over the divinity of Ali, the cousin, and son-in-law of Muhammad, whom Shiite honor but do not believe he was divine.²⁴ Alawites are also a sect that does not accept converts.

After a long history of lacking any form of power—perhaps due to the ambiguous nature of the sect as received by the authorities—the Alawites began to be particularly noticeable during the French Mandate of Syria.²⁵ The French colonial officials filled government positions with minorities such as the Alawites, who made their way later to the Syrian military.²⁶ This move prepared the ground for Hafez al-Assad to take power through the 1970 Corrective Movement.²⁷ Since then, the government has been dominated by a political elite led by the Alawite Assad family until this day.²⁸

Under Assad’s rule, Syria has been a secular nationalistic state with a decisive political superiority of Assad’s minority Alawite sect that enacts power over other sects. The government managed to make other minorities and the urban Sunni majority docile by investing in the business elite in major cities such as Damascus, Aleppo, and Homs. Along with this strategy, Syrians experienced severe oppression, violence, and torture against any form of dissent.²⁹

In March 2011, in the footsteps of the Arab Spring, which resulted from predatory capitalism and central authorities’ misrule in the region, peaceful protests began in the southern city of Daraa (figure 1.4) and quickly spread across the country. People revolted against the Assad government, its intrusions into the lives of citizens, economic mismanagement, and the widespread expropriation of lands. The regime met the peaceful protests calling for various reforms with violent crackdowns. This began forcing citizens to

²⁰ Coward, *Urbicide*.

²¹ Neil Quilliam, “Hands of Power: The Rise of Syria’s Assad Family,” Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank, November 4, 2015, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2015/11/hands-power-rise-syrias-assad-family>.

²² “What Does It Mean to Be Alawite, and Why Does It Matter in Syria?,” Los Angeles Times, February 8, 2012, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/blogs/world-now/story/2012-02-07/what-does-it-mean-to-be-alawite-and-why-does-it-matter-in-syria>.

²³ Daniel Pipes, “The Alawi Capture of Power in Syria,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 25, no. 4 (1989): 429–50.

²⁴ “What Does It Mean to Be Alawite, and Why Does It Matter in Syria?”

²⁵ “What Does It Mean to Be Alawite, and Why Does It Matter in Syria?”

²⁶ “What Does It Mean to Be Alawite, and Why Does It Matter in Syria?”

²⁷ Al-Assad led a military coup under the pretext of correcting the Ba’ath Party core ideology: the formation of a single Arab socialist nation.

²⁸ Quilliam, “Hands of Power.”

²⁹ “No Return to Homs – PAX Protection of Civilians,” *The Syria Institute (TSI) & PAX*, 2017, <https://protectionofcivilians.org/report/no-return-to-homs/>.

organize an armed defence that was headed by some military defectors which later developed into an offense against the Assad government.³⁰

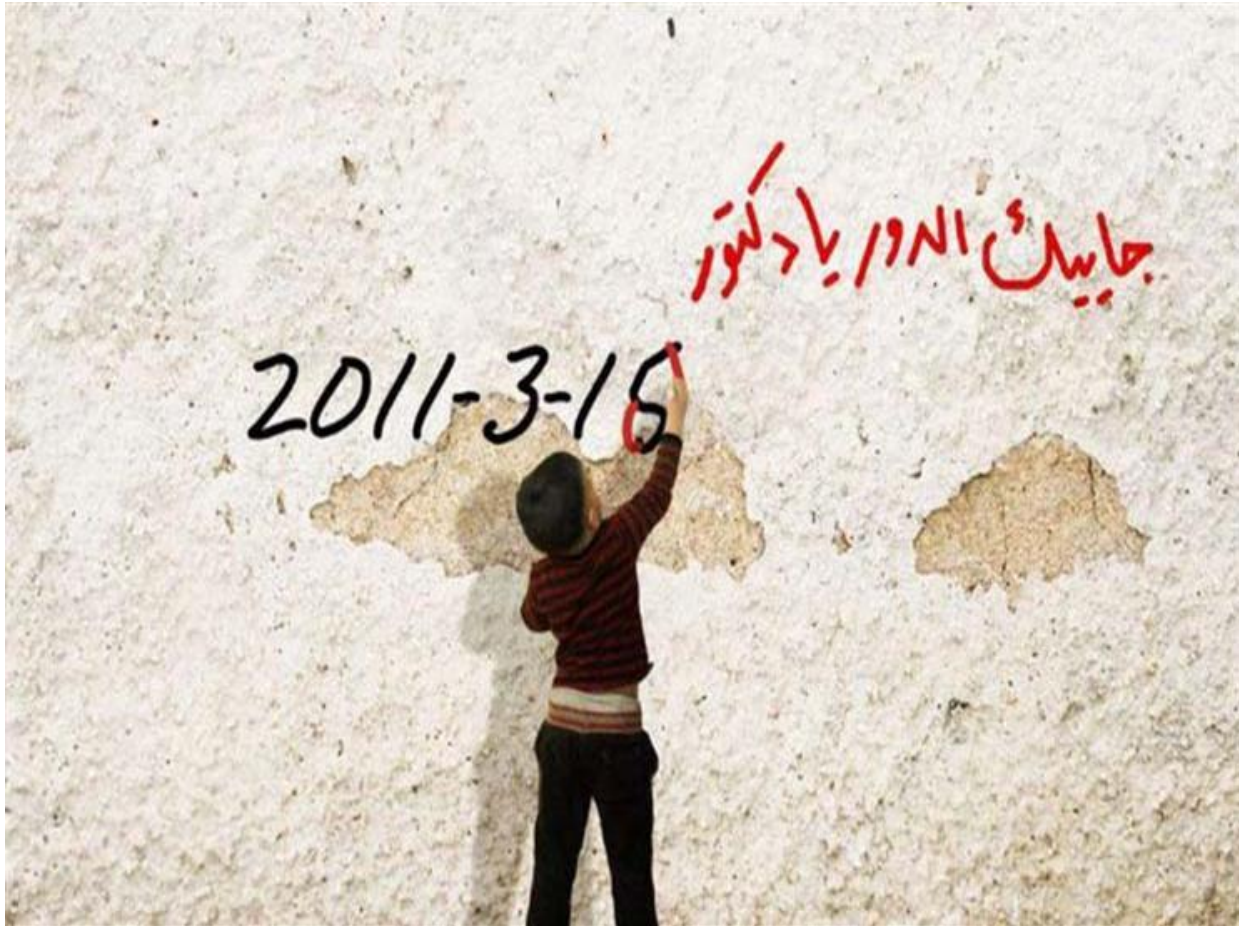


Figure 1.4: An image representing the beginning of the peaceful revolution in Syria. A group of young men and adolescents in the city of Daraa wrote on the walls of schools and buildings, "It is your turn, Doctor," referring to their president, Bashar al-Assad [thefreedomfirst.com]

Today, it is still a debate whether the Syrian revolution has come to an end or if it is still ongoing. While some countries are normalizing new relations with the Syrian regime, others still do not recognize the Assad regime's legitimacy, such as European Union and the United States.³¹ With regards to the Syrian people, they argue that the revolution is still ongoing even with no protesting. This is due to the unstable living conditions of Syria, including hardships such as the absence of gas while enduring daily cut offs from electricity and water use.

1.3 City Context

³⁰ "No Return to Homs – PAX Protection of Civilians."

³¹ Steven Heydemann, "Assad's Normalization and the Politics of Erasure in Syria," *Brookings* (blog), January 13, 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2022/01/13/assads-normalization-and-the-politics-of-erasure-in-syria/>.

Homs is the third-largest city in Syria. It is located in the middle between the capital city, Damascus, and Aleppo, Syria’s second-largest city (figure 1.5). It hosts significant industrial hubs and economic developments such as oil refineries, fertilizer plants, power plants, and gas storage facilities. Its strategic location is concerned with controlling and accessing the coastal Alawite heartland (figure 1.6).³² Many Syrian military agencies and institutions are located in Homs for these reasons.³³



Figure 1.5: Homs location in the middle between Damascus, and Aleppo [author]

³² “No Return to Homs – PAX Protection of Civilians.”

³³ “No Return to Homs – PAX Protection of Civilians.”



Figure 1.6: Homs as a gateway to the coastal Alawite-majority heartland [author]

The population of Homs is a Sunni majority, with two significant minorities; Alawite and Christian. This diversity is associated with the migration of Alawite from nearby cities and towns in the late 1900s. These newcomers concentrated in the southeastern parts of the city, whereas Christians reside in various parts with a clear presence in the Hamidia neighborhood close to the city center.

In the city center, there is a place known among people as the “New Clock Tower Square” (figure 1.7) which is in reference to the built in Clock Tower, although it is registered in the municipality as “Gamal Abdel Nasser Square.” It is located at the end of Shoukri Al-Quwatli Street, which starts at the beginning of another Square called the Old Clock Tower Square (figure 1.8). The Old Clock Tower Square refers to an Old Clock built in 1923 during French Colonialism. Hence, “new” and “old” are used to distinguish between the two clock squares.³⁴

³⁴ “الثانية-إلا-عشر-دقائق” [It’s ten minutes to two],” *aljumhuriya.net*, April 23, 2020, <https://aljumhuriya.net/ar/2020/04/23/الثانية-إلا-عشر-دقائق/>.



Figure 1.7: A satellite imagery of Homs showing the two clock tower squares in the city center, major highways, and landmarks [Google Earth, author]



Figure 1.8: An image of the Old Clock Tower Square taken in the 1930s during French colonialism [delcampe.net]

The Clock Tower Square is a large and busy traffic circle. It is the meeting point of seven main streets in the city and has five lanes of cars around it (figure 1.9). It is surrounded by buildings ranging in height between one-storey, low-rise, and mid-rise. From the West side, an island extends from the Square and continues along Shoukri Al-Qoutli Street to the Old Clock Tower Square. The Square is regular and humble in shape. It extends 60 meters from the gated garden of the Government House on the south, to the Teacher's Syndicate Complex on the North, while also extending 100 meters from the Plaza building on the East, to the Al-Dababeer gated garden on the West. This square covers a total area of 6,300 square meters (figure 1.10).



Figure 1.9: The New Clock Tower Square as a large and busy traffic circle in Homs [Tour in Syria]

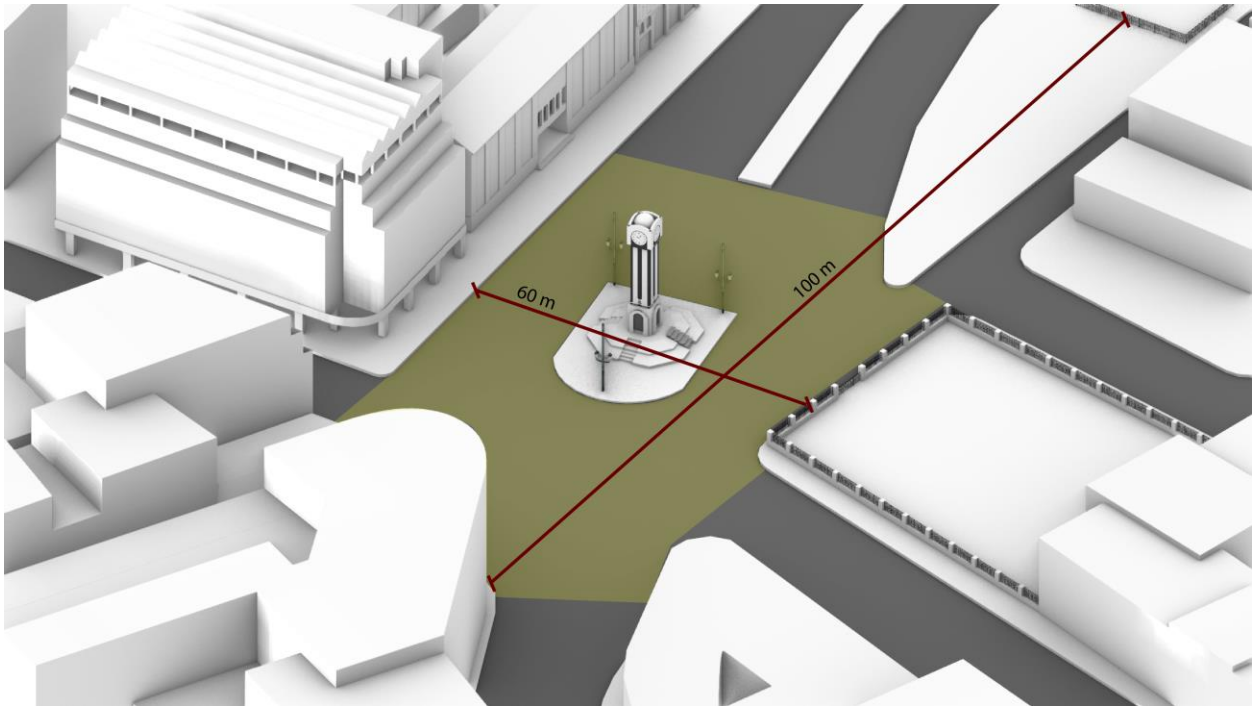


Figure 1.10: The physical dimensions and area of the New Clock Tower Square [author]

With a height of twelve meters, the New Clock Tower was once the tallest among its surroundings and the city's landmark (figure 1.11). The tower rises from a semi-circular base with a small staircase that leads to a white stone base in the form of a rectangular parallelepiped. Each of the four faces of the base has a

door and a frame in the form of a black marble arch (figure 1.12). On top of that base sits the New Clock Tower consisting of white limestone decorated with black marble to simulate the art of Ablaq architecture—the alternation of urbanization between black basalt stone and white stone—which spread in the old houses of Homs.³⁵



Figure 1.11: The New Clock Tower Square in 1962 [delcampe.net]

³⁵ عبد الحميد.



Figure 1.12: A close up image showing the New Clock Tower architectural details [aljumhuriya.net]

1.3.1 Why Homs (Not Damascus)

The New Clock Tower Square of Homs was the first site to witness mass demonstrations and experience intense violence in 2011 when the revolution started in Syria. Among many factors pushing toward the conflict in Syria, including the long accumulation of social oppression and suffering history in the country by the Ba'ath party, one additional factor that stands out in Homs is the "Homs Dream."³⁶

³⁶ نجاتي طيارة, نجاتي طيارة يروي للذاكرة تفاصيل اعتصام الساعة في حمص 2011 | الذاكرة السورية [Najati Tayara recounts to memory the details of the 2011 sit-in in Homs | Syrian memory], interview by Syria TV, April 18, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qP6at0qg4E0>.

This project was driven by the governor of Homs and was launched in 2007 to expel historic city center residents and rebuild it with neoliberal modernizing projects (figure 1.13). The project started to move people out from the heavily populated downtown and southwest neighborhoods (including Bab Amr, Jobar, and Kafr Aya) in 2009 to build skyscrapers, shopping malls, and luxurious villas that ordinary people can not afford.



Figure 1.13: A screenshot from the Homs Dream marketing project [syrian-investment.com]

Not only displacing people, but the ‘Homs Nightmare,’ as people call it, is also associated with arbitrary land and property confiscation and demolition. The fact that this spatial distribution plan did not include the Alawite areas indicates gentrification and changing the city’s racial composition.³⁷ Homs exceeded other Syrian cities, including the capital city of Damascus, in witnessing significant patterns of urban development that eased the settlement of the Alawi communities on the expanse of Sunni lands, perhaps because of its importance in Syria as an economic center and the bridge between coastal and non-coastal regions in the country.

People of Homs tried to refuse the project, expressed disagreement, and even filed some complaints to the city, all before the revolution. Nevertheless, it was not until 2011 that people were encouraged by the Arab Uprisings to take the streets and squares by rejecting the project and removing Mayor Iyad Ghazal loudly and cooperatively. Thus, New Clock Tower Square in Homs became the first urban environment in Syria to regain its civic meaning in the public eye.

1.4 Research Approach

This research is interested in understanding the 24-hour protest that happened in the New Clock Tower Square in Homs between the 17th and 18th of April, 2011. In particular, through urban and architectural

³⁷ Heiko Wimmen, “Syria’s Path From Civic Uprising to Civil War,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, accessed February 23, 2023, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/11/22/syria-s-path-from-civic-uprising-to-civil-war-pub-66171>.

analyses and investigation, it aims to understand the significance of the New Clock Tower Square in Homs in its political, social, and national contexts. It is a public place that has been prohibited from public expression, particularly that against the Ba'ath state, for 40 years, and, at the same time, it is the first public Square where peaceful demonstrations took place during the Syrian revolution of 2011. Several series of vital questions begin to arise, such as why did the people of Homs choose this Square to reclaim and gather in, as well as what was its architectural role as an urban space before, during, and after the revolution of 2011?

To answer these questions, the research uses the seminal theory of performativity by Judith Butler through an architectural lens as a theoretical framework. This theory is essential in the discussion of the transformative power, produced effects, and ability to change and to be changed of a subject or—in this case—a space. In this sense, performativity in architecture refers to a performance with transformative power and the ability to leave spatial and social changes. This definition will help investigate the architectural performance that had been going on in the Square for decades before the revolution and led to the moment of the revolution. It will also be evident that the New Clock Tower Square and its spatiality were performative and prompted people to gather and act.

In this way, what seemed to be a simple question of 'why this space?' begins to suggest more critical questions. For instance, what architectural acts had the state been performing before the revolution? What spatial and non-spatial qualities made the Square a focal point for the revolution? What acts in the city did the Square's spatiality stimulate in the people of Homs? In this sense, the research will investigate the ways in which the Syrian state used architecture as a performative act to control people, erase their collective memory, and establish socio-political and economic goals. Also, the physical qualities and symbolic meanings of the Square will be analyzed to understand the vital role that the Square played as a revolutionary hub and how it provoked different actions for different people. Using the theory of performativity and David Harvey's theory of the right to the city becomes essential in investigating how the protestors—during a short time—registered their "right to the city" by being on the Square. They performed acts of expression, praying, social media use, and encampment. Overall, the research deals with performativity in architecture and city development as it relates to collective memory and resistance.

In essence, by shedding light on the physical dimension of the New Clock Tower Square in relation to the symbolic through the theory of performativity, this thesis attempts to understand how the architecture and urban setting of the Square pushed the two different architectural performances (by the state and by the people) to happen in the same space.

1.4.1 Methodology

This research uses several methods: case study analysis, where relevant cases will be studied to build a theoretical framework for the research and to see how the theory of performativity is put into practice in the subjects of unrest and state-building through architecture and urbanism. These case studies will prepare the ground for the following chapters to claim that building and unbuilding were performative acts of the Syrian state. Also, cases of Arab cities like Cairo that experienced revolutions in central public spaces will be studied to understand the role of urban spaces in times of revolt.

The research starts by using exploratory and explanatory methods to gain a general understanding of the subject. The exploratory method is usually used when limited information is available, which is true for the Syrian case. It helps increase the understanding of a given topic, by ascertaining how or why a

particular phenomenon occurs, and potentially predict future occurrences.³⁸ On the other hand, the explanatory approach acknowledges research questions that have not been studied in depth, identifies the extent and nature of cause-and-effect relationships, and assesses the impacts of specific changes on existing norms.³⁹ In effect by using these two methods, this research aims to explore the acts of the Syrian state and the people in Homs to derive the physical and symbolic aspects of the New Clock Tower Square.

Then the research adopts interpretive research methodology to collect information from different sources to synthesize them. The synthesis builds up an argument that the Ba'ath Party was in power only until the New Clock Tower Square's transformation on April 17th and 18th 2011. Eventually, this research method examines how the architecture of the Square provoked different actions in different actors.

Testimonies from local architects and images of Homs' old city and buildings will be used to investigate how the Syrian state used architecture as a performative act to control people and establish socio-political and economic goals in Homs. The research also explores the Square's physicality and symbolism in an attempt to understand its architecture's role throughout history. The main tools in this approach are morphological analysis and archival research, including satellite imagery, antique postcards, and historical images.

Due to the inability to interview people because of their fear of the security apparatus, the research uses existing and published interviews (taken from social media, recorded videos, and personal narratives) of citizens, political activists, and previous protestors. This data is helpful in collecting the urban acts of people in the Square and explaining why their acts were performative and powerful. The acts are then classified into acts of expression, praying, social media use, and encampment and developed into drawings through mapping and 3D modeling.

1.4.2 A Note on Positionality and Reflexivity

As a child of parents who could not visit the country for having different political opinions from the regime, I was exposed to terms like Al-Mukhabarat, Al-Assad, and Alawite from an early age. This background has helped me in this research to explain the Syrian situation to non-Syrian and Western readers. It was like a prerequisite to approaching the Syrian dilemma.

Another key aspect that helped me conduct the research is fluency in Arabic. I was able to access Arabic resources, related stories on social media, and documentaries. Being a Syrian researcher with relatives in Syria helped me gather information and access sources. For example, a relative of mine got me Homs' master plan from the municipality, which I used to produce the drawings and maps in this research. This aspect became especially helpful as I did not visit the city for this research due to travel restrictions imposed by COVID-19 and the ongoing war in Syria. In interpretive research, the reflexivity of the researcher becomes essential. Reflexivity refers to how I conduct trustworthy research and how my sense-making may affect the research.⁴⁰ Being Syrian has also allowed me to reach out to friends and family in

³⁸ "Exploratory Research - Research-Methodology," accessed March 4, 2023, <https://research-methodology.net/research-methodology/research-design/exploratory-research/>.

³⁹ "Causal Research (Explanatory Research)," *Research-Methodology* (blog), accessed March 4, 2023, <https://research-methodology.net/causal-research/>.

⁴⁰ Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow, "Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes," *Routledge & CRC Press*, June 17, 2013, <https://www.routledge.com/Interpretive-Research-Design-Concepts-and-Processes/Schwartz-Shea-Yanow/p/book/9780415878081>.

Syria and ask for their input on the research. In this context, speaking to people I know in Syria was useful as I conducted the research because it made me pause, reflect, and think.

1.5 Thesis Outline

After the introductory chapter, chapter two comes to conduct the literature review of the thesis. First, it introduces Judith Butler's influential theory of performativity and how other scholars have used it in the architecture course. Throughout this presentation, the chapter extracts and defines some characteristics of performativity, performative acts, and performative architecture. The primary sources used in this part are: 'Architecture's Unscripted Performance' by David Leatherbarrow and 'Rehearsing a Performative Theory for Architecture' by Ayman Kassem. The mentioned examples are: 'A Queer Analysis of Eileen Gray's E.1027' by Katarina Bonnevier, 'Diversity in Architectural Process: Identity and the Performance of Place' by Lisa Henry Benham, and 'Performative Approaches to 'Reclaiming Public Spaces' in Amman' by Amro Yaghi. In this chapter, the research gets more specific by studying performance-related cases in architecture and urbanism. The examined performances are building a state in the case study of the Palestinian Authority, Urban Violence in Beirut, and Performativity in the city through the case study of Tahrir Square, which is supported by David Harvey's concept of the right to the city. These performance studies set the scene for claiming that certain acts by the Syrian state and the people of Homs are performative, a concept the following chapters will build on.

Chapter three presents an investigation of how the Syrian state used architecture before the revolution of 2011 as a performative act to control people in the city of Homs through building and unbuilding. The building acts are urban development patterns, including sectarian urban planning and heritage neglect. Also, the building act includes the Homs Dream project, a neo-liberal master plan pre-dating the conflict. Finally, the chapter examines the act of deconstruction during the revolution revealing that destruction in Homs was not limited to places that hosted the rebellious movements.

Chapter four is divided into two parts focusing on the New Clock Tower Square. The first part studies its physicality and symbolism. Inspired by Henri Lefebvre, the chapter sheds light on the Square's physical and symbolic crucial roles in reordering power during the revolution. The second part studies the moment and early days of the revolution in the Square. It examines the urban acts in the New Clock Tower Square as performed by the people of Homs that resulted in reclaiming the Square and asserting their right to the city. These acts include expression, praying, social media use, and encampment.

Chapter five is the concluding chapter, it addresses the research questions and literature review and briefly summarizes the findings. The conclusion emphasizes how the transformation of a space's architecture, in its two dimensions, may contribute to the broader transformation of the existing political identity. Additionally, the chapter sheds light on the brutal reaction of the Syrian regime once they took over the Square during the protest camp. On the same note, it enlightens the people of Homs' reaction when they were taken out of their Square, drawing evidence from the replication of the Clock Tower as small models in Syrian diaspora.

2 Performativity in Architecture and Urbanism

2.1 Introduction

The Arab Spring spread across the Middle East during 2011 has been a powerful reminder of the absent public spaces and showed that the mobilized public recognizes the importance of public spaces in shaping and governing the political order.⁴¹ The occupation of public spaces one after another during these times of revolt has revealed how resistance counters the strategic performance of the state. During the Syrian revolution's early days in Homs, this duality of performance (by the people and the state) manifested in its New Clock Tower Square. Therefore, it becomes helpful to analyze the duality between the urban performance of liberated spaces and state's performance which led to the moment of protest.

To analyze this duality, the seminal work of performativity by Judith Butler is used to analyze these dual states, which discusses the continuous reproduction of identities through performance. The chapter first looks at how the theory has been explored in the architectural context and interpreted by various scholars. It then theorizes performativity in architecture and the city as they relate to collective memory and resistance. In doing so, the chapter examines three cases in the Middle East: In Palestine, Lebanon, and Egypt. In Palestine, the Palestinian Authority used architecture in favor of the state through performative acts of state building. In Lebanon, Beirut's case study discusses how acts of deconstruction and reconstruction by the state are used to achieve socio-political goals. On the other hand, Egypt's Tahrir Square will be examined to understand the urban performance in public squares through acts of spatial movement and occupation.

This theoretical framework of performativity is integrated with other supplementary theories to cover the scope and delimitations of the research. The right to the city concept by David Harvey brings urbanism and the collective actions and imagination of the people under one context, that of architecture in times of unrest. Henri Lefebvre and Charles Tripp's interpretation of space are implemented to shed light on the importance of the physical space and the recognition of its form, function, and links in embracing the acts of resistance or, in Lefebvre's words, "the process of space adaption and divergence."⁴²

The analysis of performativity in these examples will help us understand what performativity is in architecture and urbanism, specifically in unrest and conflicts. Some of these case studies look at performative architecture on the scale of the buildings, while others will focus on the city scale, urbanism, and everyday life. The two scales of performativity happened consecutively, the first by the state and the other by the people who resisted the state.

2.2 Performativity – Butler in the abstract sense

In the philosophy of language there are specific theories about speech act which is when the act of speaking can become performative through sentences that denote and inspire action; this idea was

⁴¹ Charles Tripp, "Performing the Public: Theatres of Power in the Middle East: Performing the Public," *Constellations* 20, no. 2 (June 2013): 203–16, <https://doi.org/10.1111/cons.12030>.

⁴² Henri Lefebvre and Donald Nicholson-Smith, *The Production of Space*, 33. print (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2013).

developed by J.L. Austin.⁴³ Therefore, performatives are sentences that “do not only describe a given reality but also change the social reality they are describing.”⁴⁴ Judith Butler uses this theory to explore the repetitive relations of gender and their symbolic meaning. Butler’s idea of gender is based on a linguistic account challenging previously recognized standards about gender and sexuality. The repetition and imitation criteria for the interpretation of gender rethink the sequence of how gender is socially constructed.⁴⁵ Her discussion of performativity in the context of gender suggests that gender identity is not an internal essence expressed through behavior but results from repeated behaviors that imitate gender norms.⁴⁶ According to Butler, “there is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; that identity is performativity constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results.”⁴⁷ This analysis brings Butler to the claim that a (repetitive) act is considered “performative” if it produces a series of effects.⁴⁸ In other words, gender is now regarded as a process and an action continually reformed through each utterance; it is the success of this performance over time that achieves identification regardless of any previous declaration or facts.

Even though Butler’s theory of gender performativity has been inspirational in feminism, queer, culture, and philosophy, it still receives critiques from some scholars and socialists. In his paper “The politics of performativity: A critique of Judith Butler,” Geoff Boucher draws attention to a methodological individualism issue in Butler’s work. He maintains that the inconsistency of this theoretical approach is problematic due to the limitations of an individualistic account of subject formation framed in exclusively cultural terms.⁴⁹

2.3 Performativity in Architecture

The extension of Butler’s idea in the architecture discourse is done by thinking about how a subject materializes, i.e., how the ‘self’ is always entangled within everyday life interactions and how societal and bodily practices shape it.⁵⁰ The temporal and transformative dimensions of the theory has inspired scholars to use her argument in the architectural discourse.⁵¹ “In the scope of performative architecture, the aim is to focus on what a building does rather than what it is and the fact that architecture should be adaptable to the changing time, conditions and environment.”⁵² In general, performativity was employed

⁴³ John Langshaw Austin was a British philosopher of language and leading proponent of ordinary language philosophy.

⁴⁴ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2d ed, The William James Lectures 1955 (Oxford [Eng.]: Clarendon Press, 1975).

⁴⁵ Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1988): 519–31.

⁴⁶ Butler.

⁴⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

⁴⁸ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

⁴⁹ Geoff Boucher, “The Politics of Performativity: A Critique of Judith Butler,” *Parrhesia* 1 (2006): 112–41.

⁵⁰ Ayman Kassem, “Rehearsing a Performative Theory for Architecture,” in *Creating Through Mind and Emotions*, first (London: CRC Press, 2022).

⁵¹ Jan Smitheram, “Spatial Performativity/Spatial Performance,” *Architectural Theory Review*, 16, no. 1 (2011): 55–69, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13264826.2011.560387>.

⁵² Kassem, “Rehearsing a Performative Theory for Architecture.”

in architecture to explore its transformative power and ability to change and to be changed. To gain a deeper understanding, examining how the notion of performativity has been used is essential in various scales and types of spaces. In what follows, this chapter provides examples of how performativity was incorporated into architecture differently.

Katarina Bonnevier, in her chapter 'A Queer Analysis of Eileen Gray's E.1027', borrows Butler's words of "performativity as the regulated repetition of norms, where repetition is never complete"⁵³ to support her queer argument in architecture. She explains the concept behind E.1027 house being multi-functionality where the same device is used for different purposes. For instance, the bed is the main furniture in the living room, the dividing walls are sliding, windows can flip out and connect the inside with the outside, and tables are foldable, extendable, and attachable (figure 2.1). This theme of "multi-functionality" is described as an "inexact repetition."⁵⁴ Thus, the inexact repetition of the architectural elements is seen as architecture that performs.



Figure 2.1: Living room with its bed, E.1027 [Dezeen]

Lisa Henry Benham uses Butler's idea of performativity to investigate whether architecture impacts the construction of the norms while analyzing to what extent it is involved in this process. Her paper titled 'Diversity in Architectural Process: Identity and the Performance of Place' draws a connection between performativity and space. Henry Benham deploys performativity to change the stereotypical idea of

⁵³ Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory."

⁵⁴ Katarina Bonnevier, "A Queer Analysis of Eileen Gray's E.1027," in *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture*, ed. Hildo Heynen and Baydar Güllü (New York, 2005), 162–80.

architecture as a physical object and instead considers it a process where identities are formed within the space.⁵⁵

Henry Benham also utilizes Michel De Certeau's saying, "The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language," —in his book 'The Practice of Everyday Life,'⁵⁶ — as a way to validate Butler's theory of gender performativity. De Certeau illustrates that by walking, people depart from the norms of a geometrical space creating and performing a different language of space. While walking in the city, pedestrians give new meanings to places and streets that are not the same as those initially assigned. De Certeau's linkage of the speech act theory and walking in the city is similar to Henry Benham claims that Butler can relate the speech act theory to a body acting within space and time.

Another case where Butler's theory of performativity is applied is Abdali Boulevard in Amman, Jordan. Scholar Amro Yaghi prepared practice-led research inspired by the performativity theory to provoke people to re-perform dialogues about Pseudo-public spaces in Amman.⁵⁷ These spaces in Amman appear to be public because of their large squares, parks, and thoroughfares, but they are, in fact, owned and controlled by private developers and neoliberal corporations. This re-performance includes sharing narratives and stories about visitors' experiences in neoliberal public spaces. This performative methodology allows people to question and reflect upon the accessibility, social exclusion and inclusion, and inequality of public space. Therefore, they reclaim and reproduce an alternative public space by performing a dialogue.

Performativity has thus gained much attention in architecture as a discipline. It has been used in different ways: such as in Queer analysis, urban practice, diversity studies, and public interventions, to argue that architecture performs by prompting us to act. The term performative then refers to a gesture, a quality, a potential, and an attitude.⁵⁸ While performative architecture, according to David Leatherbarrow, reflects a shift of orientation in architectural theory and practice from what the building 'is' (meaning, symbolism, function) to what it 'does' (its performance, its performativity).⁵⁹ Therefore, architecture in this context is an intervention, a performance, and an event with a transformative power capable of leaving spatial and social changes. This definition allows us also to use architecture as an analytical tool to understand how power relations structure and are embodied and performed in architecture. In the following sections, I will use the notion of performativity in architecture to study how architecture can provoke different groups to act in certain ways.

2.3.1 State Building as Performative Act – the Case of PA

⁵⁵ Lisa C Henry Benham, "Diversity in Architectural Process: Identity and the Performance of Place," in *20 on 20/20 Vision: Perspectives on Diversity and Design*, ed. Linda Kiisk (Boston: AIA Diversity Committee and Boston Society of Architects, 2003), 90–97.

⁵⁶ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

⁵⁷ Amro Yaghi, "Performative Approaches to 'Reclaiming Public Spaces' in Amman," in *Reclaiming Public Space through Intercultural Dialogue* (LIT, 2020).

⁵⁸ Kassem, "Rehearsing a Performative Theory for Architecture."

⁵⁹ David Leatherbarrow, "Architecture's Unscripted Performance," in *Performative Architecture*, ed. Branko Kolarevic and Ali Malkawi, 1st Edition (New York: Routledge, 2004), 7.

An example of where the theory of performativity by the state is traced is the Palestinian Authority (PA) architecture in the West Bank. Michelle Pace and Somdeep Sen (2019) developed their work using Butler's theory to show how the Palestinian authority's performative acts affect and shape people's lives.⁶⁰ They used Butler's theory to uncover the struggle of the Palestinian experience under the Israeli occupation while simultaneously seeking national liberation. While a Palestinian state does not officially exist, the Palestinian government, as represented by the PA, suggested a state-building program in 2009 and acted, according to the authors, as a functioning state. The authors conclude that it is an experience of absolute theatrical statehood performed by the Palestinian Authority, the NGOs, and the international community.⁶¹ Spatially, the authors detail how the Palestinian state is populated by the stateless and how the PA is reclaiming a state by building specific buildings or using a particular space. Hence using architecture as a performing act to make a state and perform what they term 'state theatrics.' Regardless of the Israeli occupation, PA institutions and national and international organizations are acting as machinery for an actual Palestinian state through performative acts through architecture and urbanism.

The fact that the PA is the only platform that represents the Palestinian case internationally and the only body acknowledged by the UN to be eligible to receive funds from international communities results in it having a significant material presence in the everyday lives of ordinary Palestinians.⁶² Salaried employees are paid to perform as representatives of an absent Palestinian state in purpose-built government buildings.⁶³ Although the state is still in-the-making, some Palestinians still perform these theatrics because –at least- hypothetically, it brings them closer to the arrival of a Palestinian state.

The most significant impact and what allowed the PA to exist today still as a 'simulated entity' is the maintenance of the performative acts. In Butler's words, performativity encompasses repetitive and ritual performative acts. In the PA case, these performative acts are administrative through bureaucratic procedures, physical through the built environment, and financial through salaried PA functionaries. For example, the offices of PA officials are luxurious and well-decorated, with pictures hung everywhere of their president shaking hands with foreign and well-known politicians (figure 2.2). These performances are meant to invoke that the PA officials are important figures with sovereign authority nationally and internationally.⁶⁴ According to the authors, performing this state with its defined scripts while being aware that it does not exist outside the stage engenders frustration, anger, and stress for all the actors.

⁶⁰ Michelle Pace and Somdeep Sen, *The Palestinian Authority in the West Bank*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2019).

⁶¹ The statehood performance by the PA started after the Oslo Accords in 1993. Noteworthy, the Oslo agreement is a declaration of limited interim self-government arrangements (PA) and was never meant to help establish an independent state of Palestine by any means.

⁶² Pace and Sen, *The Palestinian Authority in the West Bank*.

⁶³ Pace and Sen.

⁶⁴ Pace and Sen.



Figure 2.2: Palestinian Authority Civil Affairs Minister speaking to The Media Line in his office in Ramallah Showing pictures hung behind him of president Mahmoud Abbas shaking hands with other politicians [The Media Line]

In her Ph.D. entitled ‘The Paradox of Ramallah: An Investigation into Palestine’s Political and National Architecture and Urban Topography Since 1995’, Anwar Jaber investigates the purpose-built PA institutions in Ramallah city. She uncovers how the PA is paving the way for Ramallah to perform as a capital city by concentrating governmental institutions in the north and south of the city and connecting them with central squares. This alternative capital is refused and resisted by Palestinians, who still consider Jerusalem their historical capital.

Jaber also analyzes the scale and monumentality of these institutions, like the Ministerial Complex and the Muqata’a (figures 2.3 and 2.4). These are large-scale buildings with extensive massing that are out-of-balance with the surrounding buildings – making a statement that the PA’s existence is noticeable. Moreover, the symmetrical façade of these buildings implies “a sense of order and control to the Palestinian society.”⁶⁵ One of the critical findings of Jaber’s research is that the city’s architectural and urban investigation of government institutions exposes a political-national topography in Ramallah. A topography that, through the analysis of the numbers, spatial organization, function, and character of the PA buildings, reveals the intent behind it, which is to allow the city to exist as an entity that is reminiscent of a state.

⁶⁵ Anwar Jaber, *The Paradox of Ramallah: An Investigation into Palestine’s Political and National Architecture and Urban Topography Since 1995* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2019).



Figure 2.3: Ministerial Complex including large-scale buildings [Google Maps, author]

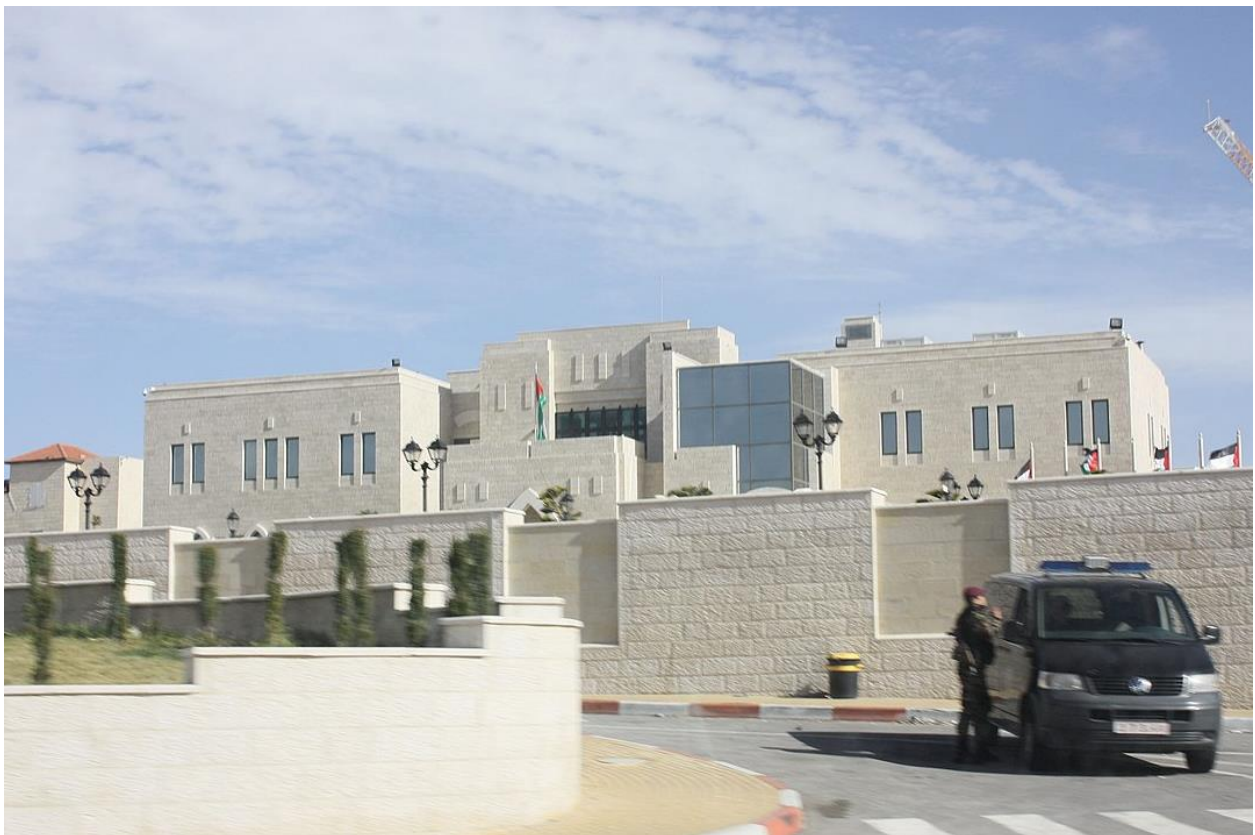


Figure 2.4: The headquarter and administrative center of Palestine, also known as al Muqata'a [Tumblr.com]

2.3.2 Urban Violence (Destruction and Reconstruction) as a Performative Act – the Case of Beirut

Another architectural performance by the state is what potentially could be called urban violence acts. These acts, relate to conflicted times and contested cities, could be constructive or destructive. Sara Fregonese cut it close to the notion of performativity when she argues that Beirut's architecture was "the product and the tool of the re-territorialization of the city."⁶⁶ Her study shows that the urban environment of Beirut during the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) has become transformative through acts of destruction and assault.

The influx of Palestinian refugees upon establishing the state of Israel (1948-1967) ushered in significant changes in the demographic balance of the Muslim population in Beirut, the capital of Lebanon.⁶⁷ The city experienced escalating tension between Christian and Muslim paramilitaries, Palestinian groups, as well as Israeli and Syrian armies. Finally, violent religious conflicts increased to cause a civil war (1975-1989) which resulted in significant destruction in the city.

From an analytical perspective, the destruction was not limited to being a side effect of the war. Instead, it was a tool to target specific buildings that reflected the identity of particular groups. According to Hiba Bou Akar, this performative destruction of the built environment has resulted in segregated residential geographies and ethno-religious boards that still exist today (figure 2.5). Fregonese also agrees in her book 'War and the City: Urban Geopolitics in Lebanon' that Beirut's destruction was to "divide communities and destroy civic values that embody the urban experience."⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Sara Fregonese, *War and the City: Urban Geopolitics in Lebanon*, 1st ed. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2020), <https://books.google.ca/books?id=pHl2zQEACAAJ>.

⁶⁷ Hiba Bou Akar, *For the War Yet to Come: Planning Beirut's Frontiers*, first (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), <http://www.sup.org/books/title/?id=25764>.

⁶⁸ Fregonese, *War and the City: Urban Geopolitics in Lebanon*.

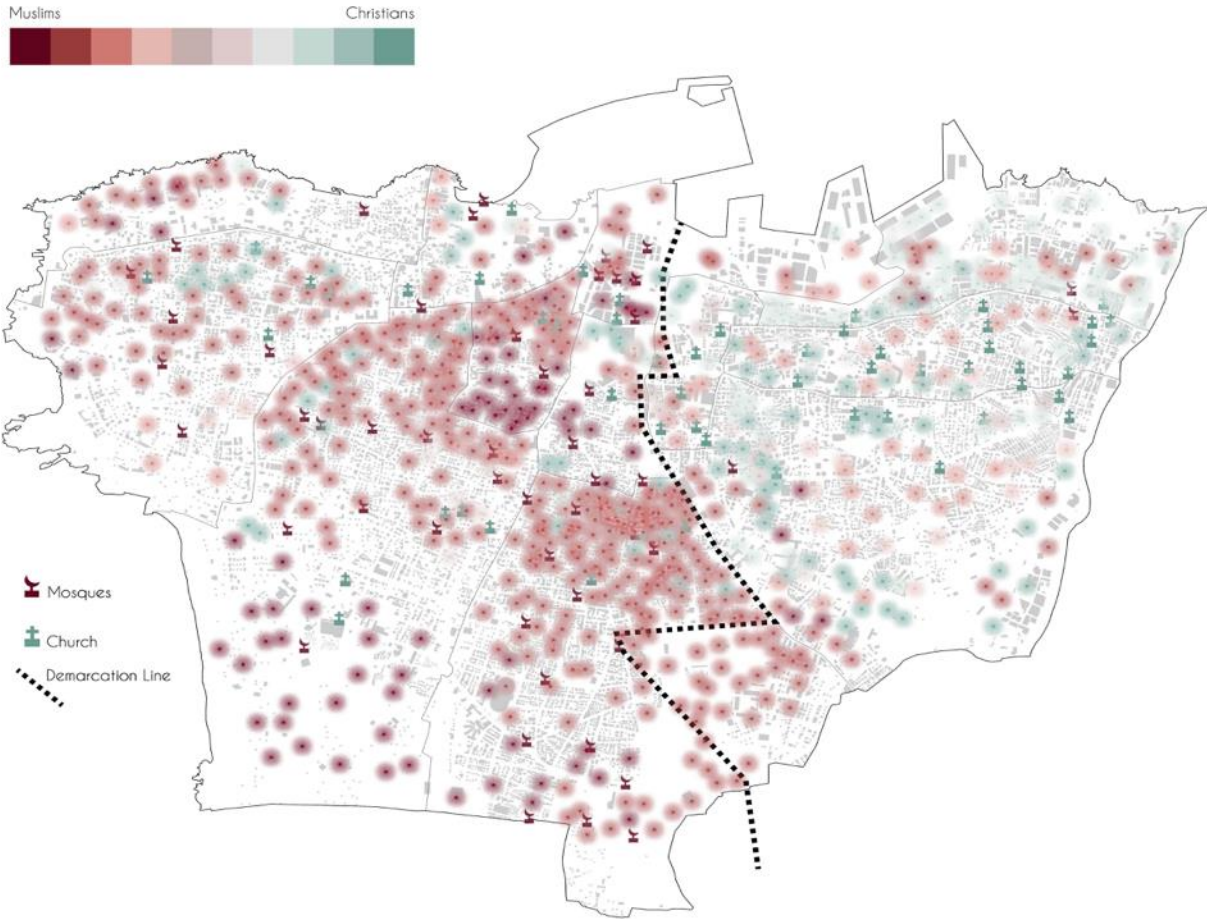


Figure 2.5: Map showing the religious distribution of Beirut communities between the East and West [RASHASUKKARIEH]

An incident of this act of performative destruction in Beirut is what Fregonese calls the ‘battle of the hotels.’ This battle was over Beirut’s landmark luxurious hotels, performed by multiple political parties in 1975 and 1976. For example, the Holiday Inn hotel was fought over by the left-wing Murabitun (Muslim) militia and the right-wing Lebanese Forces (figure 2.6). This destructive performance by the Murabitun conveyed that this was a victory of pan-Arabism over Lebanonist particularism and an assault by the poor on a luxury enclave.⁶⁹ It was also a place of interest to the Murabitun and other parties due to its strategic location in the city center and its strategic function of providing visibility over the city.

⁶⁹ Fregonese.



Figure 2.6: Holiday Inn Hotel as a battleground again Lebanon Civil War [Wiki Commons]

The conflict at the center of Beirut ended in 1990 and resulted in a divided city between the west and the east. In this context of urban conflict and the war in the city, Gruia Bădescu and Freonese label the destruction of the urban environment of Beirut as an Urbicide—the violence against the city. Martin’s Crowd defines urbicide as the deliberate destruction of shared spaces to eradicate socio-political heterogeneity. In Deen Sharp’s explanation, urbicide is intended to control complex urban arrangements and their social relations. These definitions suggest that urbicide is a performative act with powerful outcomes in its aftermath.

According to Sultan Barakat, reconstruction is similar to destruction, as it is a symbolic act and a temporal political process. Its functional performance is determined by the positionality of the subjects, their understanding of the past, and their desire to influence the future.⁷⁰ Bădescu and Fregonese even link the urban violence (urbicide) to the reconstruction process in Beirut. The politics behind the reconstruction in Beirut following Al-Ta’if Agreement⁷¹ was “to move on by silencing the past.”⁷² Thus, the capital city’s

⁷⁰ Sultan Barakat, ed., *After the Conflict: Reconstruction and Development in the Aftermath of War*, International Library of War Studies 1 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005).

⁷¹ The Ta’if Agreement was signed in Saudi Arabia in 1989, the product of negotiations mediated by Saudi Arabia and the USA, with Syria and other Arab states in the background, with the intent of ending the war, and reintegrating Lebanon in the Arab world and reasserting its Arab identity.

⁷² Oren Barak, “‘Don’t Mention the War?’ The Politics of Remembrance and Forgetfulness in Postwar Lebanon,” *Middle East Journal* 61, no. 1 (2007): 49–70.

architecture was reconstructed to perform an undivided city and a single state, ignoring existing territorial segregation between neighborhoods.

In addition to performing a seeming unity, the reconstruction of Beirut sought to present the city as a symbol of one of the strongest economies in the Middle East with its entrepreneurial Lebanese nation. Consequently, the 'Solidere'⁷³ project was launched in 1994 to reshape Beirut's city center. Some national laws were formulated in line with the Solidere project, such as the National Law 117 of 1991, which regulates Lebanese real estate companies aiming to reconstruct war-damaged areas. The project was legalized to expropriate city center property, compensating pre-war owners with company shares.⁷⁴ An urban masterplan was developed to demolish many existing buildings to reconstruct a high-standard-designed city center with immaculate public spaces and a homogeneous look (figure 2.7).⁷⁵ Moreover, the limits of the Solidere project for the reconstruction of central Beirut and its marketing target a particular strata which has resulted in an additional division —this time physically— between the upper class and the rest of the city (figure 2.8). It is worth mentioning that the people heavily criticized these governmental strategies of reconstruction for their opacity, treatment of owners, destruction of heritage buildings that are in good shape, and the project neglect of other areas in the city.⁷⁶



Figure 2.7: The main Square in Beirut downtown Najma Square, demonstrating a high-standard designed city center with immaculate public spaces and a homogeneous look [Solidere]

⁷³ Solidere refers to the Development and Reconstruction of the Beirut Central District, it is a joint-stock company established in 1994.

⁷⁴ Nabil Rached, Public Relations and Communication Responsible, Solidere, 2009.

⁷⁵ Aseel Sawalha, *Reconstructing Beirut: Memory and Space in a Postwar Arab City*, 1st ed, Jamal and Rania Daniel Series in Contemporary History, Politics, Culture, and Religion of the Levant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).

⁷⁶ Tarek Saad Ragab, "The Crisis of Cultural Identity in Rehabilitating Historic Beirut-Downtown," *Cities* 28, no. 1 (February 1, 2011): 107–14, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2010.04.001>.

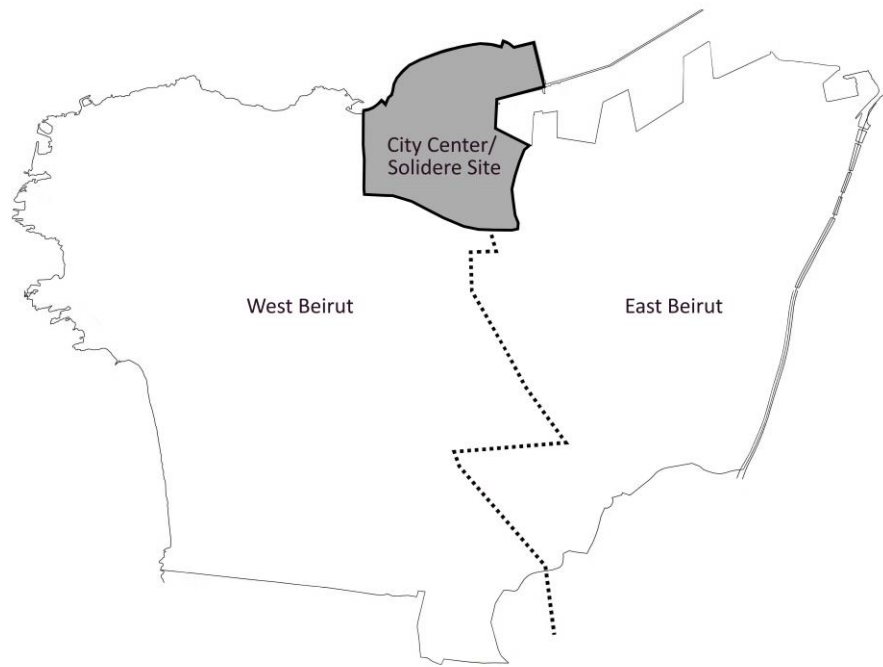


Figure 2.8: Map of Beirut showing both division in the city; between West and East, and between upper class of Solidere and the rest of the city [author]

Therefore, deconstruction and reconstruction are seen as performative acts of urban violence with operational processes and outcomes. It becomes clear how destruction and urbicide have served as a tool for the re-territorialization of the city. It also uncovers how reconstruction has served as a collective way of erasing the pasts, as a symbol of a new Lebanon that could take back its place in the region's economic and geopolitical system, and as a tool of land acquisitions and gentrification of the city center.

2.4 Performativity in the city – The case of Tahrir

Observing the experience of how urban settings and mass demonstrations undermine the political order has attracted the attention of researchers over the past two decades. Consequently, terms like 'the protest route' —by Jessica Heizelman⁷⁷— and 'the protest camp' —by Judith Butler, Anna Feigenbaum, Fabian Frenzel, and Patrick McCurdy— began appearing in an attempt to conceptualize the event of accessing and occupying public spaces, their spatial qualities, and their outcomes. In these urban studies, the theories the right to the city by Harvey, space production by Lefebvre, and performing the public by Tripp provide a critical framework for understanding how urban spaces of the city are produced and claimed during revolutions.

⁷⁷ Jessica Heizelman in 2011 won the Tufts GIS Poster Expo by identifying strategic protest routes for civil resistance, an analysis of optimal approaches of Tahrir Square in Cairo.

The occupation and spatial movements of ordinary city citizens are performed to encounter the regime's failing system.⁷⁸ However, these acts of civil resistance are to be performed and demand physical arenas. Therefore, hundreds of thousands of protestors took to the streets and appropriated public key squares in organized spatial tactics and movements that attracted attention worldwide. It was as if the mobilized public occupied a space that long made sense to them, but that could now be used to face down the overweening power of the regime.⁷⁹

In the following sections, I will analyze the two acts of resistance, the act of spatial movement and the act of occupation, by examining Tahrir Square in Cairo through the lens of performativity. By doing so, Tahrir Square will be used as a vehicle to understand and analyze the events that occurred in Homs. As Tahrir's events happened before the uprising in Homs, and their impacts have already been observed and analyzed.

2.4.1 Spatial Qualities and Movements as Performative Acts

Demonstrations of the Arab Spring, such as Tunis, Cairo, Alexandria, Benghazi, Manama, and Homs, have common spatial qualities regarding their movements and locations. Small protests gathered at neighborhood Mosques and then marched as mobilized crowds to the main public space. In other words, urban spaces in cities have been treated as the stage of the performative acts by protesters stemming from urban and rural areas. This spatial movement was mostly repeated on Fridays following the congregational prayer.⁸⁰ Protesters converge on vital public spaces of the city to occupy a long-term state controlled space. Although the regime's forces immediately prevent the demonstration from arriving at critical public spaces, protestors confront the military which leads to some successful cases of gathering in such pivotal spaces.

Charles Tripp stresses the essential role of the urban public space in the Arab Uprising. He states that "whether in Tunis, in the cities of Egypt, Syria, or Libya, it was urban public space that became the most meaningful setting for action."⁸¹ Therefore, upon closer inspection of some revolutionary spaces, such as the demonstrations of the Avenue Bourguiba in Tunis, Tahrir Square in Cairo, Benghazi Square in Libya, and the Pearl Roundabout in Bahrain, this spatial importance becomes more apparent. Avenue Bourguiba is near the interior ministry, Benghazi square is close to North Benghazi law court, and the Pearl Roundabout is at the heart of Manama, the capital of Bahrain (figures 2.9 to 2.11). The Pearl apartment towers and the Bahrain Central Markets surround the latter. During the uprising in Bahrain, the government forces exploded the statues linked to the collective memory of historic protests in the country (figure 2.12). The common aspect of all the chosen places for the protests in the previous examples include symbols that convey the public's justice—such as, law courts, parliaments, and housing. These symbolic buildings convey powerful messages about their potential for resistance and the power relations that they produce.⁸²

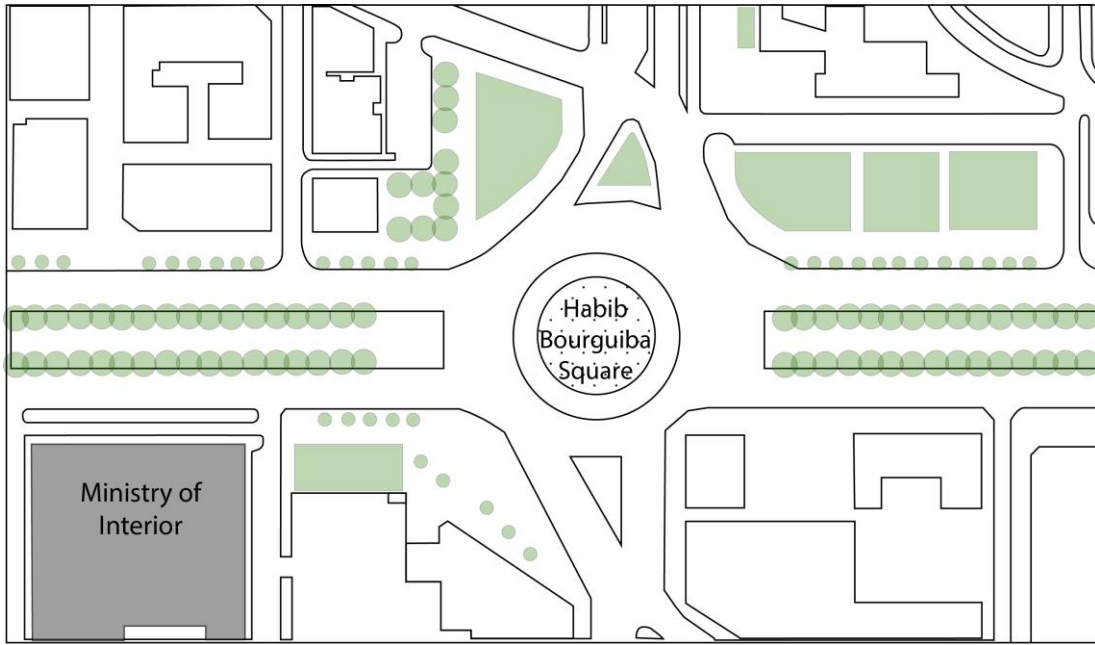
⁷⁸ Judith Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street," *EIPCP European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies*, 2011, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/1011/butler/en>.

⁷⁹ Tripp, "Performing the Public."

⁸⁰ Congregational prayer (Salat Al-Juma'a) is at around Noon time of Fridays. It is a social and religious activity where Muslims come together to gather, pray, and socialize.

⁸¹ Tripp, "Performing the Public."

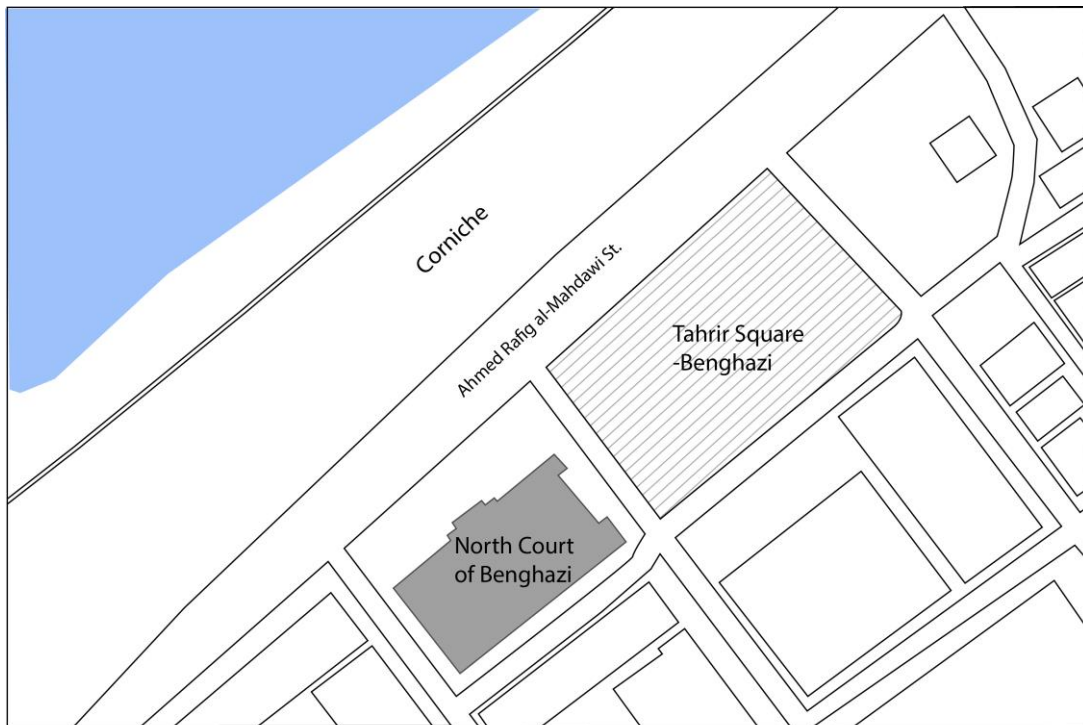
⁸² Tripp.



75m.

⌚

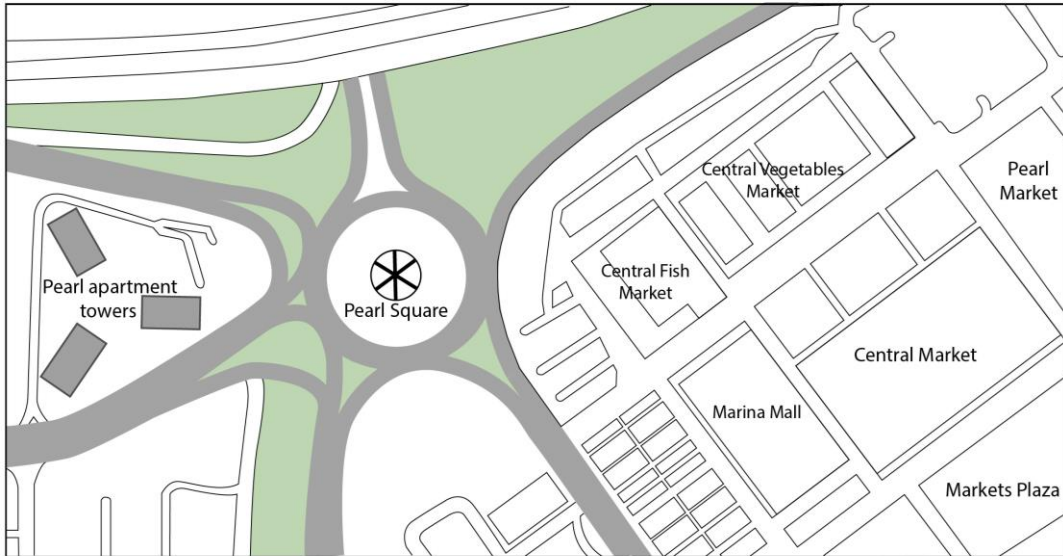
Figure 2.9: Avenue Habib Bourguiba in Tunis, showing proximity to the interior ministry [author]



20m.

⌚

Figure 2.10: Benghazi Square in Libya, also known as Tahrir, next to North Court of Benghazi [author]



— 100m.



Figure 2.11: Pearl Roundabout is at the heart of Manama close to the Pearl apartment towers and the Bahrain Central Markets [author]

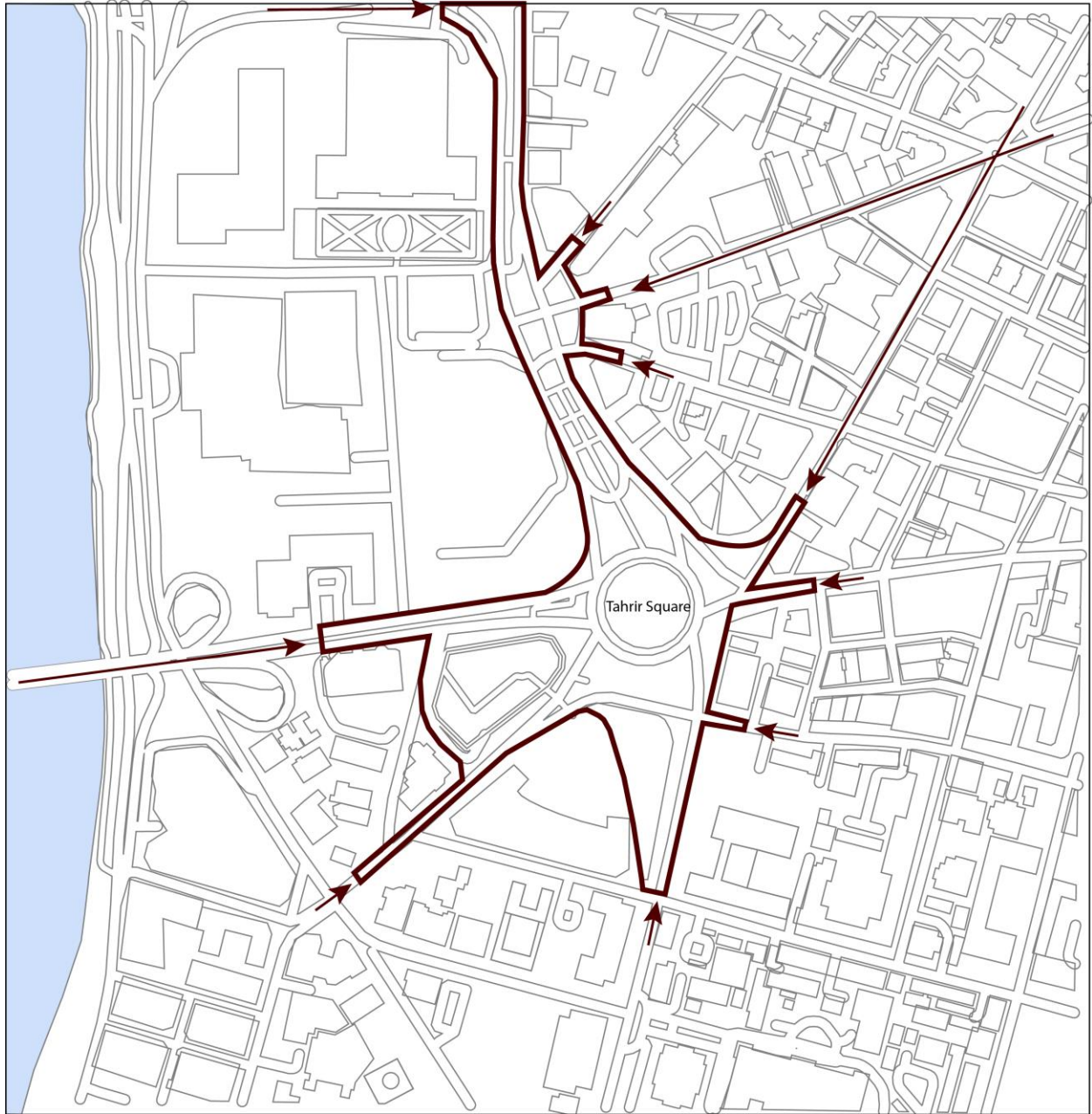


Figure 2.12: Demolishing of the Statue at Pearl Roundabout, Site of Anti-Government Protest in Bahrain [jadaliyya.com]

Tahrir Square will be analyzed more deeply through this spatial quality and the movement lens to further understand how space could be performative during times of revolt. The Square is the primary public town square in Cairo, Egypt. It was located west of the colonial district in the late 1800s, close to the Nile and downtown. This large and irregularly shaped Square is a busy traffic circle in the city with 10 access

points (figure 2.13). The Square has been at the heart of the political transformations since Cairo accessed the status of a modern capital.⁸³ There is a sense of enclosure created by the surrounding tall buildings. It is also surrounded by important government buildings and monuments like the Egyptian museum, the Arab League Headquarter, the NDP headquarters building, the old American University Campus, the Nile Hotel, and —the largest governmental headquarter in Egypt— the Mogamaa (figure 2.14.). Using Salama’s words, this Mogamaa, at the southern edge of the Square, has an iconic curved design that creates a dramatic backstage directing sight toward its front plaza. Moreover, Al-Azhar, the city’s first mosque, is near this governmental building.

⁸³ Hussam Hussein Salama, “Tahrir Square a Narrative of a Public Space,” *International Journal of Architectural Research Archnet-IJAR* 7, no. 1 (2013): 128–38, <https://doi.org/10.26687/archnet-ijar.v7i1.130>.



— 200m.



Figure 2.13: Irregular form of Tahrir Square and its access points [author]

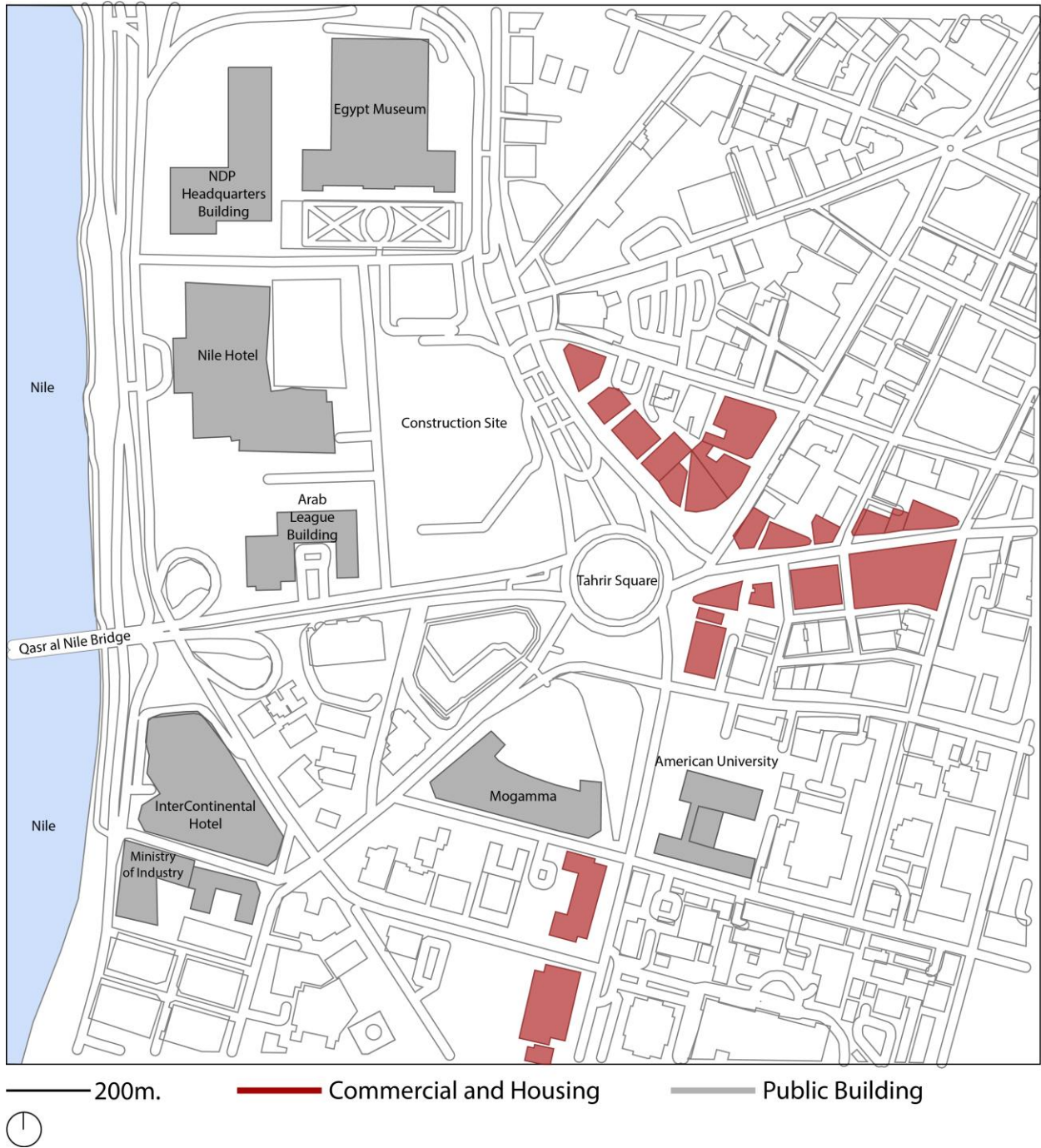


Figure 2.14: Land use around Tahrir Square [author]

This location also has historical importance and a collective memory that used to invoke resistance during the Egyptian revolution of 2011. Firstly, it had been a site of protest and congregation since the British colonial era. Secondly, in 1946-1947 and before the British troops' withdrawal from Qasr al-Nil and the handover of the barracks to the Egyptian authorities, it was the site where thirty protesters at Qasr al-Nil

were murdered.⁸⁴ Such transformative events granted the Square its everlasting symbolic meaning of gatherings and protests. Lefebvre argues that the urban setting is shaped by active and complex intersecting networks that are in constant change according to those holding and exercising power in the society.⁸⁵ When this power is integrated into the urban fabric, the fabric will in return, exert constraints that offer unforeseen outcomes.⁸⁶ Evidently, this means that Tahrir Square is made of its social relations and those that exert power.

Because of the spatial and historical importance of the Square, armed forces were brutally attacking protesters and preventing them from reaching it, as if it was a threat to the government's power. On the battlefield of Tahrir Square, there was a mutual feeling between the regime and the protesters that whoever lost access to Tahrir would lose the fight.⁸⁷ Eventually, protesters could cross from Qasr el Nile Bridge and reach Tahrir Square after multiple clashes with the security forces. They did so by planning a route for their protest to prevent the regime forces from hindering the mass demonstrations (figure 2.15). Their plan required the protestors to meet at Mosques, then gather in alleys and side streets and gradually converge on major roads while heading to their destination until they formed a massive crowd at the point of Tahrir.⁸⁸ For several days, the Square and its surrounding buildings were used differently. This new dynamic and change in the circulation around the Square inspired Heizlman to identify critical strategic elements for a successful protest route using spatial information and GIS data. These elements are gathering points, types of routes, and convergence points (figure 1.16). Her research stresses spatial mapping narratives to understand the mechanisms of these liberated public spaces. In this sense, reclaiming Tahrir Square was attributed to the temporal and spatial qualities of the Square that invoked collective memories and performative acts of organized spatial movements.



Figure 2.15: How to demonstrate intelligently Manual [anonymous pamphlet, Cairo, 2011]

⁸⁴ Mohamed Elshahed, "Facades of Modernity : Image, Performance, and Transformation in the Egyptian Metropolis," October 22, 2007.

⁸⁵ Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith, *The Production of Space*.

⁸⁶ Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith.

⁸⁷ According to Farha Ghannam, an anthropology professor at Swarthmore College.

⁸⁸ Jessica Heizelman, "Identifying Strategic Protest Routes for Civil Resistance An Analysis of Optimal Approaches to Tahrir Square in Cairo, Egypt," Tufts GIS Poster Expo, 2011, <http://sites.tufts.edu/gis/files/2013/02/CairoPoster.pdf>.

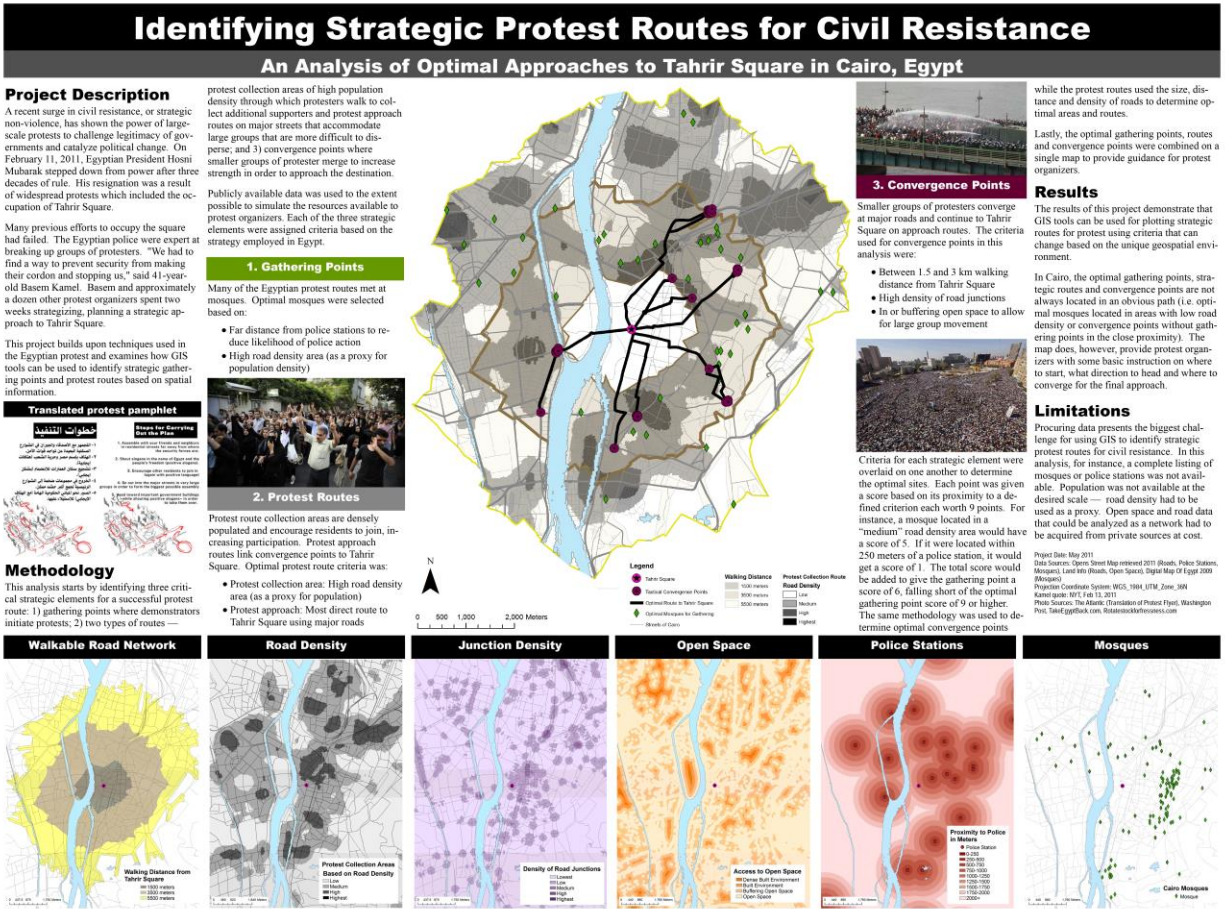


Figure 2.16: How to demonstrate intelligently [anonymous pamphlet, Cairo, 2011]

2.4.2 Occupying the Space: Social-Political Movements as Performative Acts

The recent wave of public space occupation, during the revolt times of North Africa, the Middle East, the United States, and Europe, brought into being a mobilized public, a collective force, and a new political order.⁸⁹ This successful strategy of the protest camp has been used to express opposition against dictatorships in the Middle East and global governmental policies like capitalism and neoliberalism. Again, the act of occupying a public space spread across Tunisia, Libya, Bahrain, Egypt, and Syria to protest against the hereditary family rule and their brutal security system and to reclaim the public space (figures 2.17 to 2.20). The camp was also articulated in Zuccotti Park in New York by Occupy Wall Movement to show opposition against government policies, neoliberalism, and capitalism (figure 2.21). Throughout history, the protest camp occurred in several instances, such as the student protest of the 1960s, the anti-nuclear activists at Greenham Common, Brian Haw's long anti-war encampment in Parliament Square, London, and the protests camp that filled central Beirut for months from 2005 to 2007.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street."

⁹⁰ Adam Ramadan, "From Tahrir to the World: The Camp as a Political Public Space," *European Urban and Regional Studies* 20, no. 1 (2013): 145–49, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0969776412459863>.



Figure 2.17: Protesters march on Avenue Habib Bourguiba in Tunis [voanews.com]



Figure 2.18: Demonstrators at Pearl Roundabout, Bahrain [WordPress.com]



Figure 2.19: Protest Camp at Tahrir Square, Cairo [The Egyptian Liberal]



Figure 2.20: Demonstration in Homs against the Syrian Government [aljazeera.com]



Figure 2.21: Zuccotti Park in New York is occupied by Occupy Wall Street protesters in 2011 [The New York Times]

Butler put this performance of occupying space in direct reference to Tahrir, stating, “The collective actions of the crowd collect the space itself, gather the pavement, and animate and organize the architecture.”⁹¹ In the same reference to Tahrir, Henry argues that people collective actions registered onto the square their “right to the city”—the right to manifest the collective imagination and desire through the built environment.⁹² To occupy Tahrir Square, people had to camp and form a spatial foundation of opposition and resistance by creating a continuing persistence for political change.⁹³ These persistence techniques will be referred to in this thesis as socio-political performances. They emerge from public squares, such as Tahrir Square, making these squares a miniature version of a city where social and political acts are performed by people in order to resist the state. The socio-political performances that emerged from Tahrir Square, according to Bassma Abou El Fadl maps in her Ph.D.—titled ‘A Performative Space: Socio-Spatial Practices in Tahrir Square during the Egyptian Revolution of 2011.’—include acts of hospitalization, praying, art expression, media coverage, camping, and meeting needs (figures 2.22 to 2.26). Moreover, a virtual Tahrir Square was established on Facebook to be an information hub and to provide a platform for those who could not physically be present to perform in the Square.

⁹¹ Butler, “Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street.”

⁹² David Harvey, “The Right to the City,” *New Left Review*, no. 53 (October 1, 2008): 23–40.

⁹³ Butler, “Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street.”

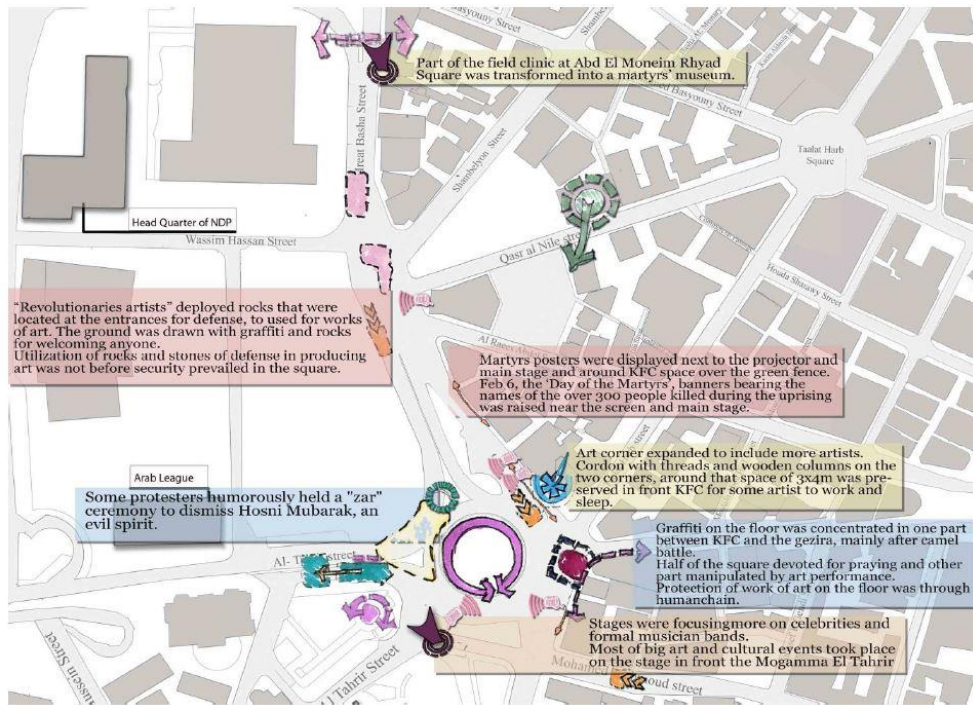


Figure 2.22: Mapping art spatial practice in Tahrir Square [Bassma Abou El Fadl]

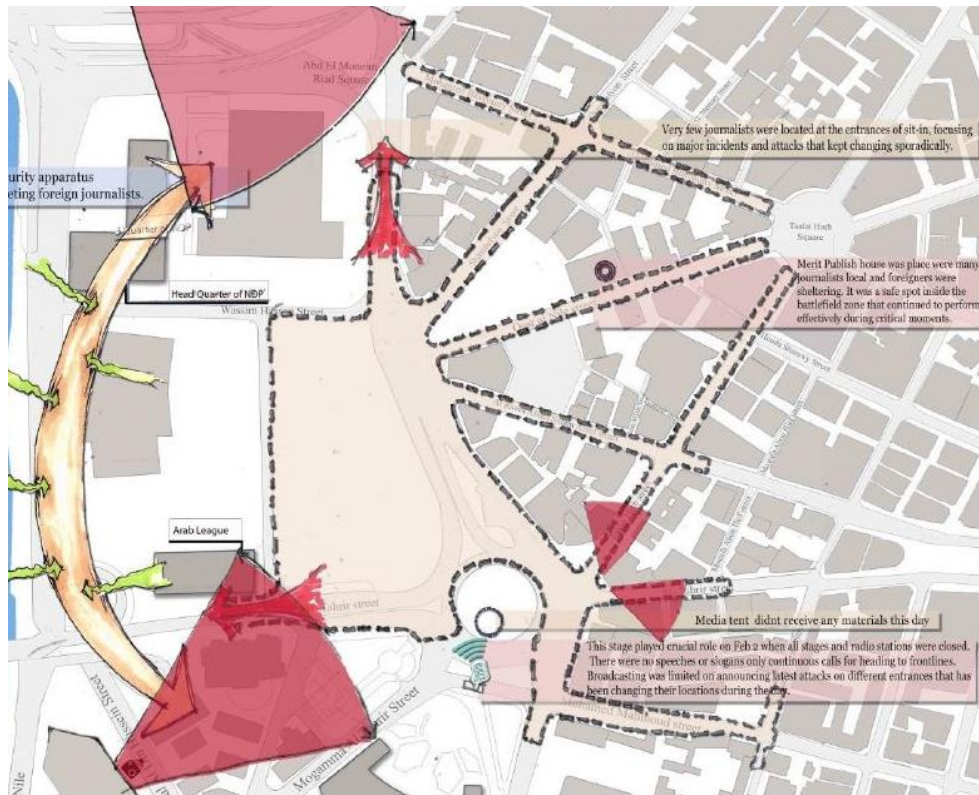


Figure 2.23: Mapping Media and News display spatial practices in Tahrir Square [Bassma Abou El Fadl]

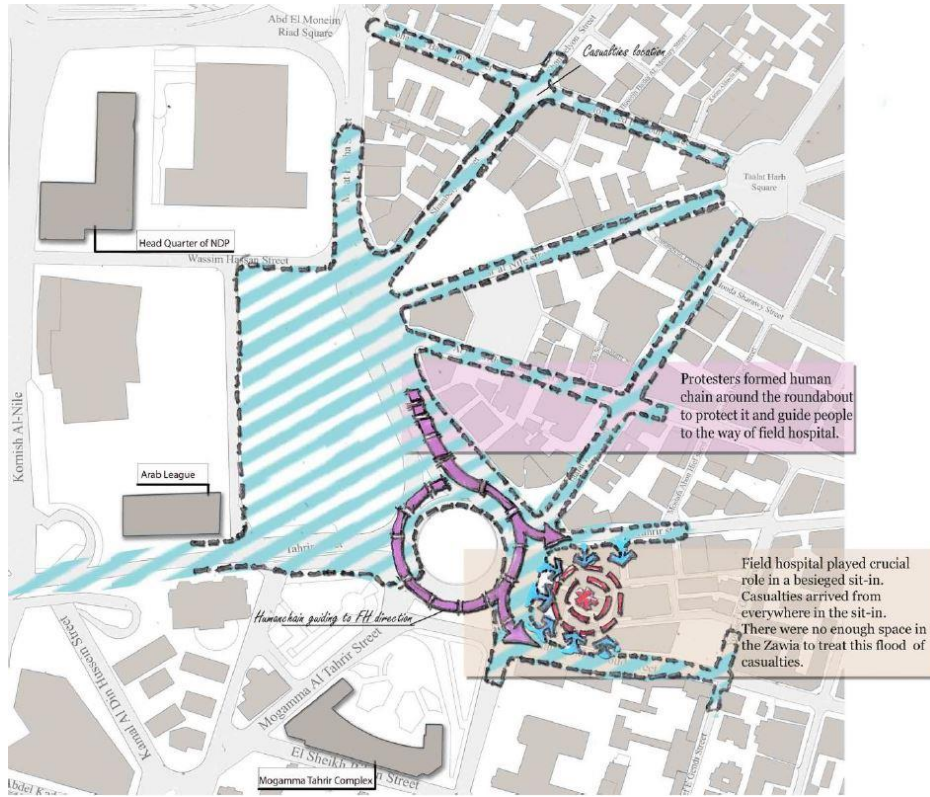


Figure 2.24: Hospitalization and emergency supports in Tahrir Square [Bassma Abou El Fadl]

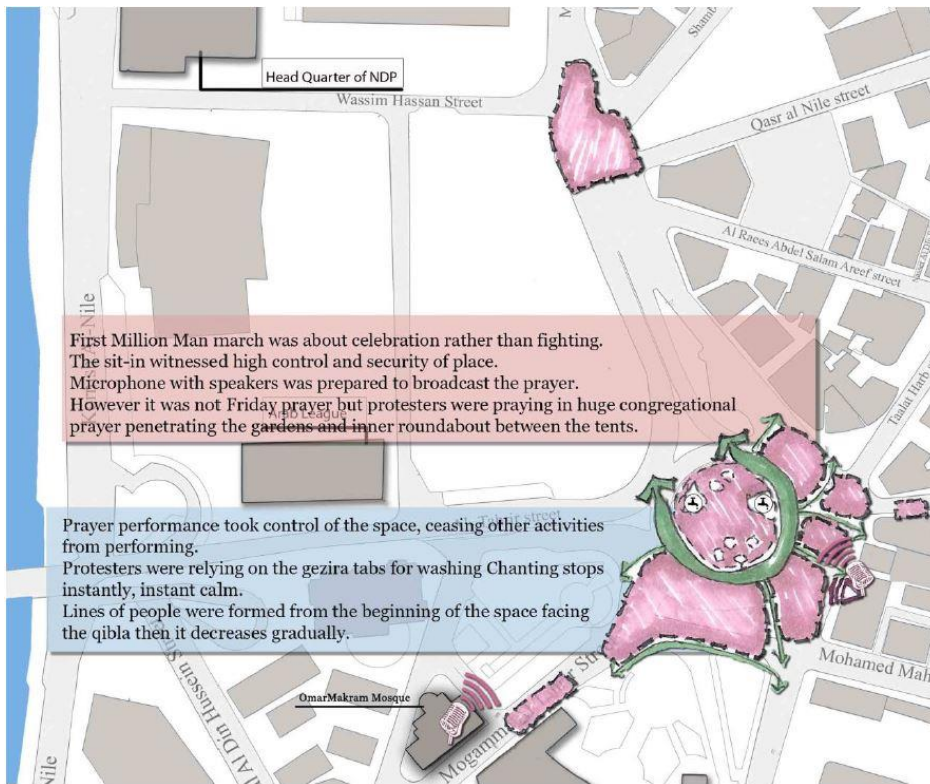


Figure 2.25: Prayers and ritual practices in Tahrir Square [Bassma Abou El Fadl]

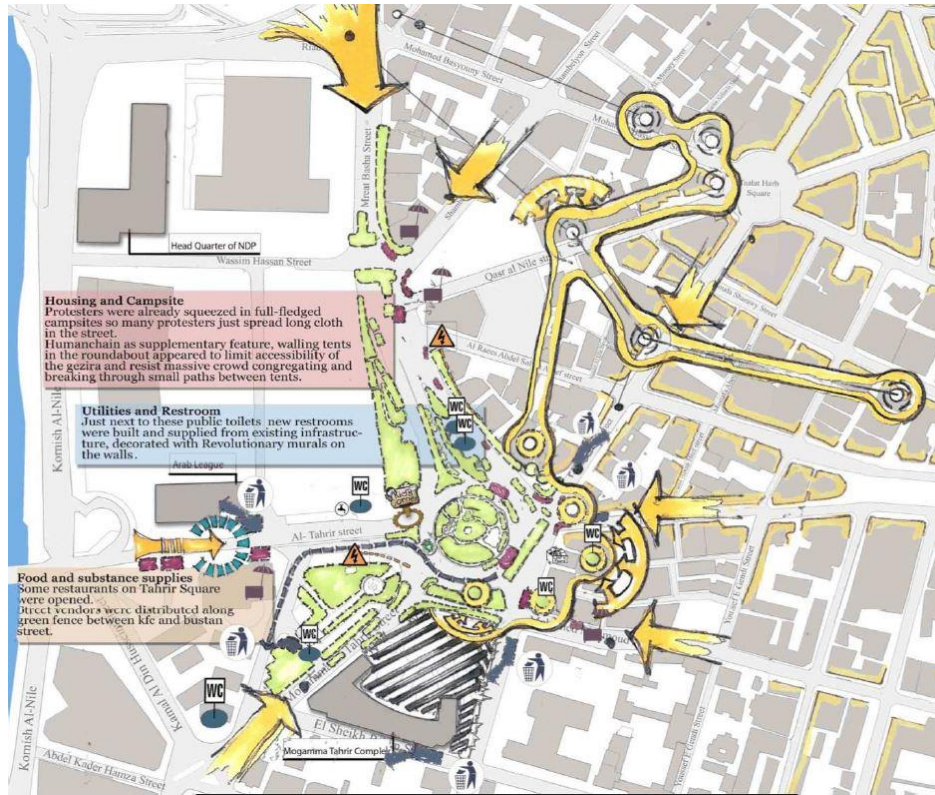


Figure 2.26: Living and life Needs as spatial practices in Tahrir Square [Bassma Abou El Fadl]

This inseparable relationship between the act and the Square invokes a similar perspective of thinking about Squares, what Ramadan refers to as the notion of encampment or space-in-process. Ramadan claims that Tahrir Square was a new politics of space, implying that it is at once a space and an act: a space-in-process.⁹⁴ Therefore, Tahrir Square became the political space where new claims were invented, represented, and translated into political actions. The space was no longer perceived as the space of authority, but rather a space of the people. The camp at Tahrir Square was a temporary performance of territoriality, by controlling and ordering the space. The socio-political performative acts of doing and making an alternative political order undermined the state’s ruling that sought to suppress it and claimed the public Square back to its people.

Finally, Tahrir Square became a place and a symbol of all the meanings it has now acquired and became the theater of the interplay between political and social performances. These performative acts helped reclaim the Square by the people who consider it a public symbol. The performance of two million people, finally succeeding in reaching the Square on Feb 1st, 2011. After many previous attempts, they transformed the Square into a symbol of the revolution. People were performing the autonomous and celebrating its national unity whereby people of diverse languages, cultures, religions, and socio-political and economic systems are brought together to have a common goal.

During the Arab Spring, Tahrir Square in Egypt was utilized to show resistance and oppression against regimes. For instance, Pearl Roundabout in Manama, the capital of Bahrain, Manama, witnessed a protest

⁹⁴ Ramadan, “From Tahrir to the World: The Camp as a Political Public Space.”

camp that was named “Tahrir.” The same name was used for the Clock Square in Benghazi and the New Clock Tower Square in Homs. Even internationally, the symbolic name was given to the place de la Bastille, Tiananmen Square in Beijing, and Azadi Square in Tehran. In addition, the Indignados movement in Spain and the protestors of Occupy Wall Street were referring directly to the spirit of Tahrir Square and its legacy.⁹⁵

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter uses Butler’s seminal work, derived from the philosophy of language, which claims that performative acts produce relations and rules that regulate these relations. Importantly, however, the produced relations are always subject to change whenever the act that produced them changes. This relation indicates that performative acts are repeated and diverse, and in being so, they open the space to new relationships and meanings.

Projecting this understanding of performativity to architecture and the production of architectural space suggests that architecture has the agency to do what it says. This chapter touched upon events that happened in urban spaces from different parts of the world that challenged the political and social frames established in them. The chapter shows that these events result from a certain performative agency of architecture that allows architecture to re-establish its preliminary political nature.

The previously mentioned case studies of PA, Beirut, and Tahrir Square help us understand how the performativity of the state could be different from the performativity of people, especially in the context of architecture and urbanism. It became clear that the PA is not an actual state. Nevertheless, it tries to demonstrate that its buildings, officers, and procedures are genuine functionaries of a legit state through acts that fall under performativity. Beirut is a divided city with an unstable economy; however, through performative acts, it demonstrates a strong economy of a united city. On the other hand, these state acts are confronted with resistance acts from the public in an attempt to have their voices heard and their rights to the city claimed, just as in the case of Tahrir Square.

To investigate these forms of performativity, researchers of each case study used different analyzing criteria. Pace and Sen looked at the physical qualities and the spatial experience of the spaces and buildings of the PA, and Jaber inspected the scale of the PA Buildings and their urban relationship in the city of Ramallah. Fregonese and Bou Akar traced where destruction is and what had been destroyed to conclude that Beirut has become a divided city that experienced urbicide. They also traced what is being constructed to realize that neoliberal projects are taking place in the city and demonstrating false economic situations. Heizelman and Abou El Fadl recorded and mapped spatial movements and socio-political performances to explore the dynamics of the revolutions and occupation of Tahrir Square during the 18 days of the revolution. Their strategies are to understand how these acts of resistance transform public Squares into an immensely vibrant and energetic space of activism, a spectacle space performing a political message through its utopian society.

⁹⁵ Bassma Abou El Fadl, “A Performative Space: Socio-Spatial Practices in Tahrir Square during the Egyptian Revolution of 2011,” Electronic Thesis or Dissertation (IMT Alti Studi Lucca, December 2014), <http://e-theses.imtlucca.it/152/>.

3 Using Architecture as a Performative Act by the State in Homs

3.1 Introduction

On May 9, 2011, during the Syrian revolution, the Syrian army besieged the city of Homs. It invaded it with tanks, starting military operations similar to those that were taking place in other Syrian towns like Daraa and Baniyas. These processes and the random arrests to suppress the protest movement led to several deaths and destroyed the city's urban fabric. Homs became an urban battlefield, and its old quarters were severely damaged, leaving the city in ruins that epitomized the brutality of Syria's war.

However, it is only partially true that Homs has been experiencing massive and comprehensive architectural violence since 2011. The fact is that, upon a thorough examination of the city's contemporary history, a more protracted war of architecture appears to be going on in the city during "peace" times. In this case, bombs, tanks, and aircraft were not the weapons of war. Instead, the city's development and interventions that Homs and its people encountered had been slowly and silently destroying its collective memory since the Ba'ath party took control of the country.

This chapter makes use of Butler's theory of performativity to explore how the Syrian state used architecture as a performative act to control people and steer them out of the city center of Homs to enable the enrichment of developers who are intimately connected with the government.⁹⁶ Also, it uses architecture to control people's activities and erases their collective memory of the space all before the revolution. It argues that this architectural performance is through construction and deconstruction, or building and un-building. The former act of building includes allowing specific projects like the 'Homs Dream,' a neo-liberal master plan pre-dating the conflict, to happen in the city. The latter includes various acts ranging in scale and obviousness from neglecting the city's urban fabric before the war to clear destruction and uricide during the war.

The city's urban mismanagement and neglect are national patterns that happened elsewhere in Syria as well. This occurrence means that the Syrian state and city work together to hinder the possibility of a community public space, and therefore, the occurrence of a different political order.

3.2 City Development: Sectarian Urban Planning and Heritage Neglect

Urban development patterns in Homs suggest a performance of sectarian urban planning and heritage neglect. Homs had the chance to be a world tourism destination with its religious and cultural architectural dating back to before Roman times. However, the old city instead suffered from long neglect. The debate about preserving the old city did not exceed the discussion phase and non-serious study. Instead, the state had been tampering with the future of the ancient city and obliterating its identity without looking at its past and what it possesses in terms of aesthetics and architecture.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ "Syria: A Real-Estate Led Destructive Engineering In Damascus and Homs," THE FUNAMBULIST MAGAZINE, May 4, 2017, <https://thefunambulist.net/magazine/11-designed-destructions/syria-real-estate-led-destructive-engineering-damascus-homs-lynda-zein>.

⁹⁷ محمد غازي حسين آغا، مدينة حمص وأوائل المهندسين في ظل الخلافة العثمانية [The City of Homs and the Early Engineers under the Ottoman Caliphate], (2022، سوريا، حمص) الثانية.

Moreover, according to scholar Kevin Mazur, there was discrimination in the urban planning of Homs created by the government through intolerant restrictions in zoning rules for the Sunni residents' and flexible tolerant rules for the Alawite community.⁹⁸ This gap in zoning laws dates back to Homs' fast and unbalanced urban expansion of 1980 when the city reached a 150% increase in population (figure 3.1). The expansion was in conjunction with the growth of the bureaucracy and public sector industry that drew people from the Alawi sect from the countryside to cities due to cultural attractions, employment opportunities, and public services that the Ba'ath party started providing them when it ruled the country in 1963. In keeping with its corporatist, Arab Socialist approach to industrialization, the Syrian state took upon itself the responsibility of providing housing for new urban residents. Hence, laws issued in the 1970s and early 1980s made the state and state-affiliated cooperatives the only legal developers in the country.⁹⁹

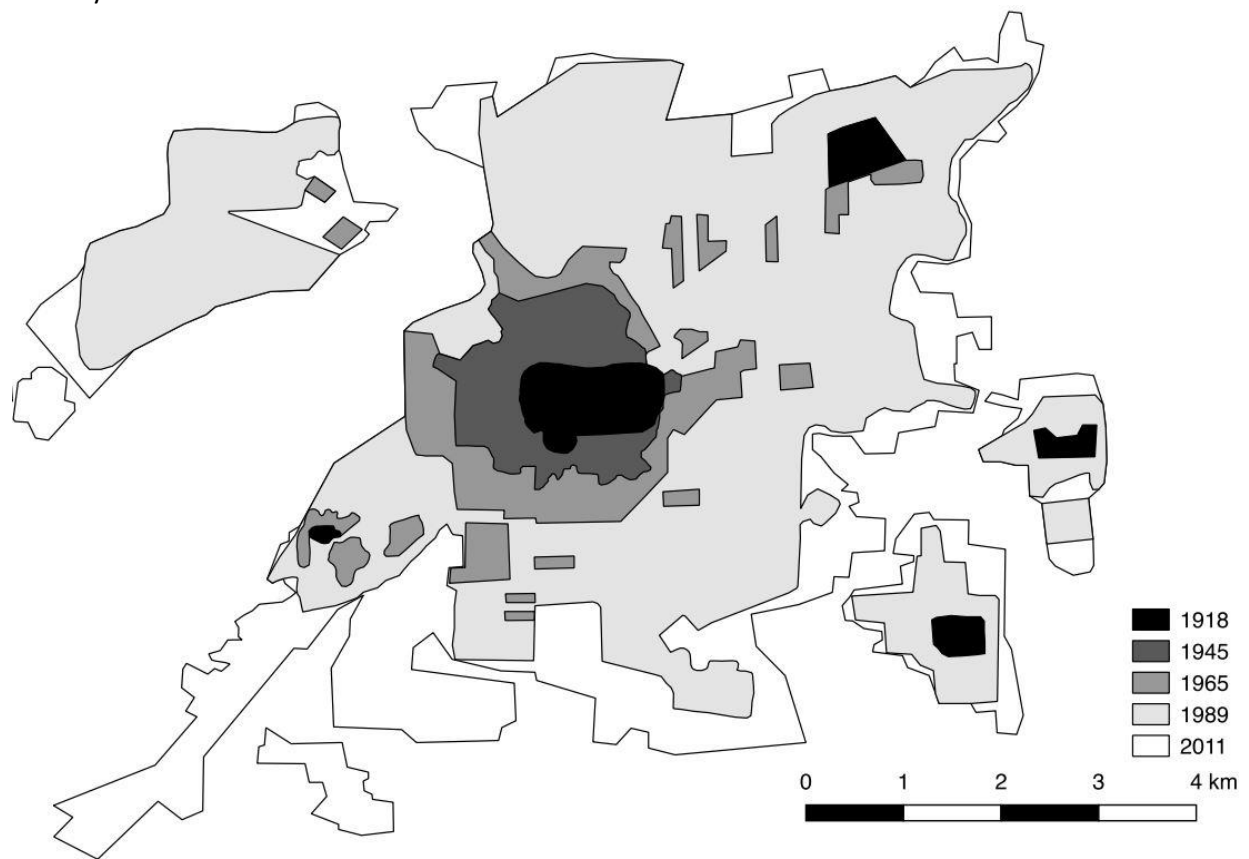


Figure 3.1: Spatial Expansion of Homs, 1918-2010 [hypotheses.org]

3.2.1 Urban Planning

The Syrian state of the Alawi minority allowed exceptions in formal urban planning which played into the hands of the Alawite community. Patterns of informal settlement started to appear due to building on the

⁹⁸ Kevin Mazur, "Not Just Neo-Liberalism: Spontaneous Settlement and Violent Conflict in Homs, Syria," Blog for Transregional Research, *TRAFO* (blog), 2019, <https://trafo.hypotheses.org/19572>.

⁹⁹ Mazur.

city's periphery lands in an unplanned manner and regardless of their zoning, i.e., agricultural.¹⁰⁰ This resulted in dense, closed networks of villages and old urban quarters near one another.¹⁰¹ These networks—who share the same Alawi identity as the regime- enjoyed privileged access to state resources and power and tended to have far greater access than the city's generational or recent Sunni residents.

The urban development and expansion that the city experienced during the Baath rule affected the local Ablaqi architecture of Homs—this is represented by the integration of black basalt stones and white calcareous stones. The ancient city's history has been demolished for many years in replacement of new developments. For example, in the early 1980s, the regime destroyed the northwest section of the city's historic wall to build high-rise complexes called Al-Arbaeen (figure 3.2). What remains from the historic wall today is only a few arches of black stone and a landmark Mosque with its minaret that used to be a defensive tower when it was constructed in 1600 BC (figure 3.3-3.4).



Figure 3.2: Historical Jami' al-Arbein Site before and after the Ba'ath regime [aljumhuriya.net]

¹⁰⁰ Syrian Echoes, "Urban Housing and the Question of Property Rights in Syria," 2017, https://www.academia.edu/36454365/Urban_Housing_and_the_Question_of_Property_Rights_in_Syria.

¹⁰¹ Mazur, "Not Just Neo-Liberalism: Spontaneous Settlement and Violent Conflict in Homs, Syria."



Figure 3.3: Contemporary image of Historical Jami' al-Arbaeen Site [Facebook.com/boiouthomsalkadema, modified by author]

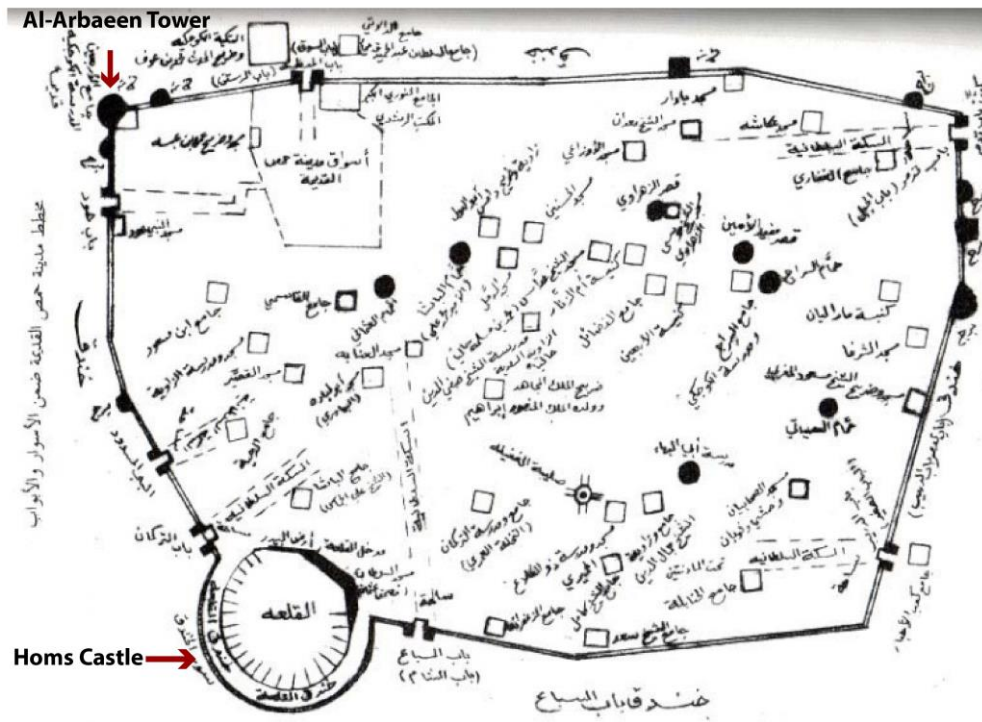


Figure 3.4: Historical map of Homs showing the 'Arbaeen Mosque and minaret in the left top corner [Homslife.com]

On the same note, hundreds of trees were removed during the city expansion, some of which are 200 years old. In 2006, the local architect Farah Joukhadar and the Syrian journalist Suad Gross appealed to stop trees uprooting in Homs. They described these acts of urban violence as “assassination” and “massacre” to reflect the society’s grief on these spatial changes.¹⁰² In an interview with Jokhadar, she criticized the architectural acts that have been transformative to the heritage and history of Homs. Subhi Shuaib Center is another case where Jokhadar stressed its social importance when it was threatened by demolition by the Ba’ath government (figure 3.5).¹⁰³ The voices of Jokhadar and Gross were significant in resisting the violence affecting Homs and its people.



Figure 3.5: Subhi Shua'ib Center of Art [Ba'ath University]

The destruction of the memory of Homs was carried out through various sites in it. According to Ammar Azouz and Wael Rihani, urban construction was taking over the lands of the people of Homs one after another. In 1994 in West Homs, 460,000 square meters of land were expropriated from its owners under the pretext of establishing a public park called “Hadeqt al-Sha’ab,” meaning the People’s Park (figure 3.6).

¹⁰² شبكة فولتير, “«كليب» حمصي : سعاد جروسالكفاح العربي,” شبكة فولتير, July 12, 2006, <https://www.voltairenet.org/article141874.html>.

¹⁰³ صحيفة العروبة (blog), [The Subhi Shuaib Center full of art], “مركز صبي شعيب يعبق برائحة فنه” 2019, <https://ouruba.alwehda.gov.sy/?p=6340>.

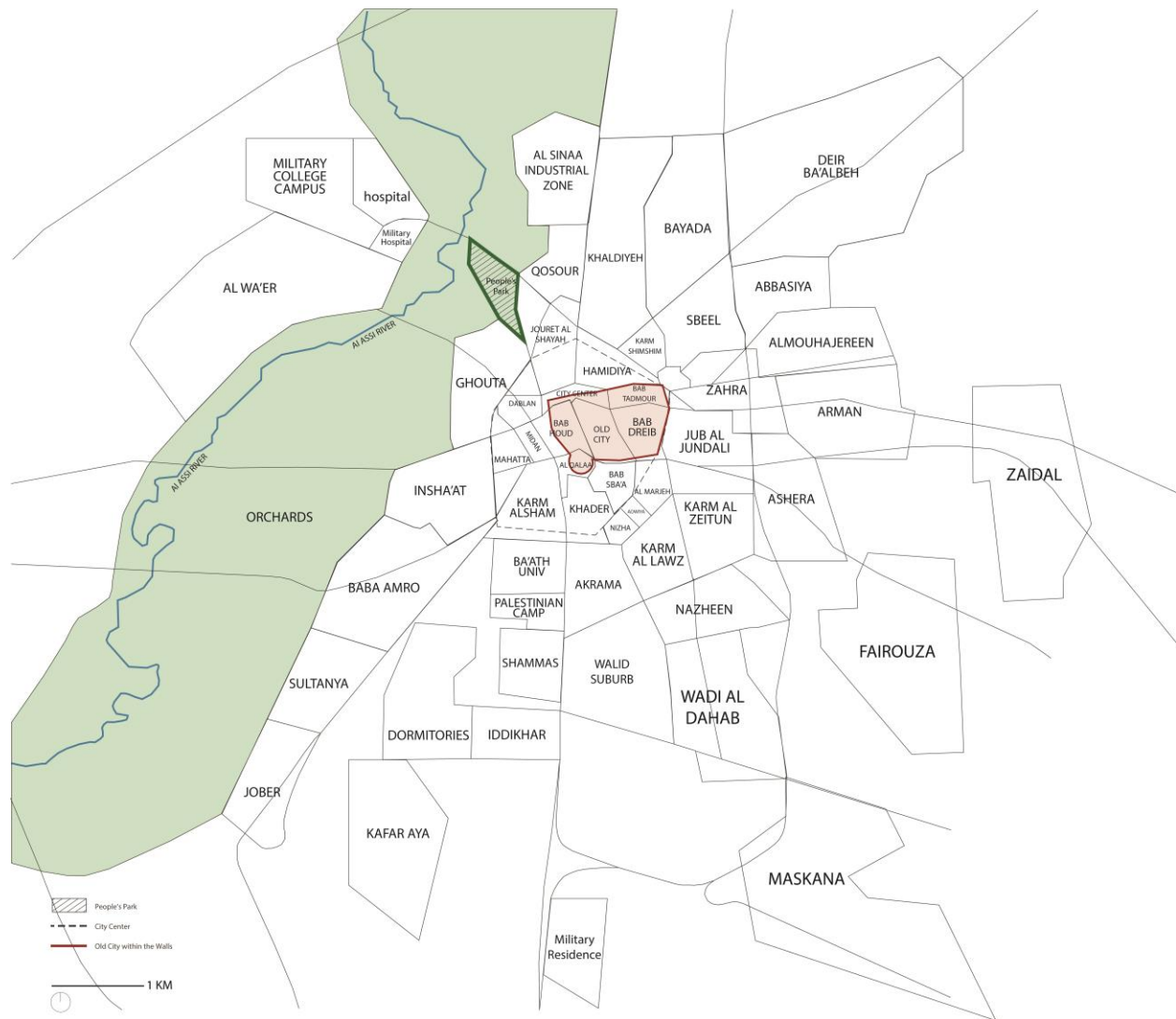


Figure 3.6: Map of Homs showing People's Park area [Author]

Most of these lands were orchards and were the source of income and living for 1,500 people who used to grow vegetables and fruits in them. The residents of these orchards were compensated with average-size apartments of 50 square meters and a compulsory down payment paid by the residents. People tried to object and regain their rights. However, they had no more hope when the new governor of Homs, Muhammad Iyad Ghazal, planned new roads throughout these lands in 2006 (figure 3.7). The public park remains an abandoned piece of land with no residents till today.



Figure 3.7: Roads cutting through People's Park Lands [Google Earth, author]

Thereby, the people of Homs observed the change in the urban environment happening slowly in the city during the “peaceful” time before the revolution. A situation described by Azouz and Rihani as “Slow violence,” which is a term initiated by Rob Nixon in his book “Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor.” Nixon states that this type of urban violence, which is practiced gradually, has a delayed destructive force and is dispersed over a wide temporal and spatial scale. This debilitating violence for the victims may not instantly be evident that it is a form of urban violence.

3.2.2 Heritage Neglect and Assaultive Reconstruction

Just like the Lebanese state (see section 2.3.2), the Syrian government did not use to treat the old city of Homs as heritage cities needed to be. Downtown Homs, even before the revolution, was experiencing neglect and poor urban planning. According to Azouz and Rihani (2021), “Homs was suffering from neglect and was in dire need of restoration projects for its existing heritage. However, instead of protecting this urban heritage, work was done to distort the city and change its urban and social identity year after year, so many of its old houses were replaced with new commercial buildings, administrative departments, and parking garages.”¹⁰⁴ The lack of renovation in downtown Homs and the neglect of its urban fabric has transformed the city of once rich and powerful inherent value into a city of chaos. In this sense, neglect is considered a performance of urban violence.

¹⁰⁴ Ammar Azzouz and Wael Rihani, “تدمير ذاكرة حمص [Destroying Homs Memory],” *Aljumhuriya.Net*, 2021, <https://aljumhuriya.net/ar/2021/11/16/%d8%aa%d8%af%d9%85%d9%8a%d8%b1-%d8%b0%d8%a7%d9%83%d8%b1%d8%a9-%d8%ad%d9%85%d8%b5/>.

In her book 'The Battle for Home,' Marwa Al-Sabouni suggests that these acts of neglect are to encourage residents to "let go of this dysfunctional environment." Neglect is seen in the old abandoned buildings instead of repaired, never fixed street holes and electricity wires that were untidy and messy. Also, due to poor urban planning, there was a lack of space, parking lots, ability to move efficiently within the city. Although this neglect phenomenon is common in Syrian cities and regions, the spatial and temporal context of neglect in Homs is complicated by lack of honouring the heritage center of the city preceding before and after the Homs Dream project. This indicates that the state is using the city's architecture to generate certain actions, by enforcing the old city residents to give up their obsolete places and poor urban environment to the state.

Among the many ancient but neglected buildings that the downtown inhabits is the Old Souq (an Arab market or marketplace; a bazaar) of Homs. This Ottoman-style covered market with huge windows sits on top was the commercial hub for the people of Homs. It consists of thirteen Souqs nestled to one another with a total of 890 stores (figure 3.8). The Souq is the focal point of everyday life in the city, yet this fundamental urban structure is neglected and in poor condition (figure 3.9).¹⁰⁵

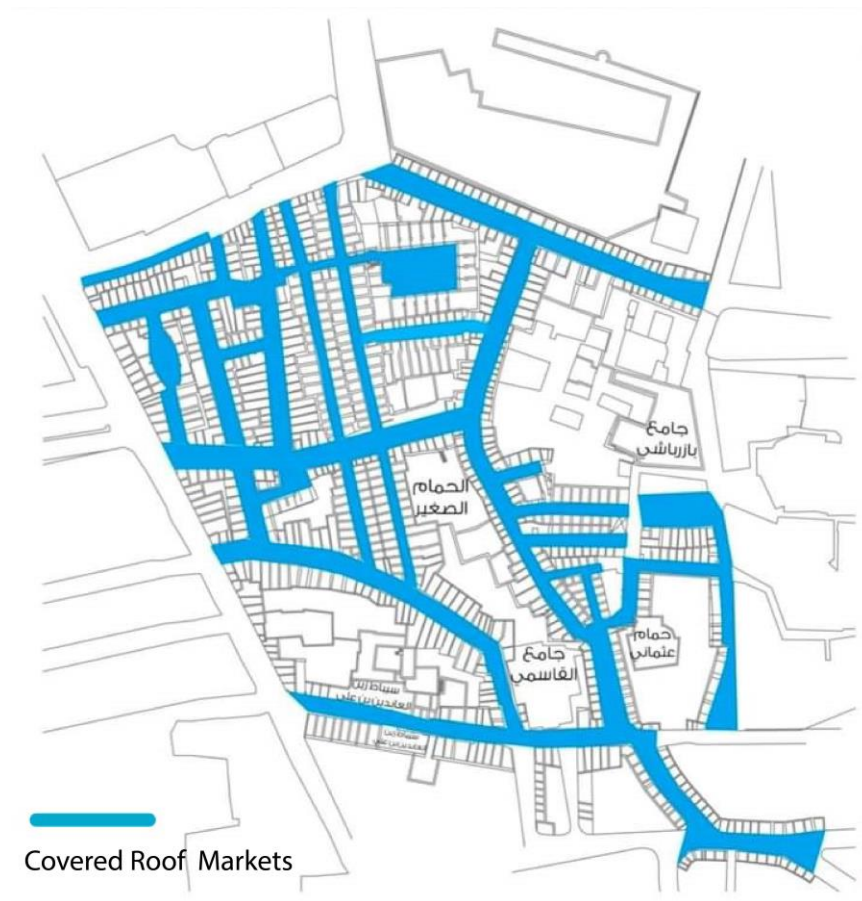


Figure 3.8: Map of the covered Souqs of Homs [sensyria.com]

¹⁰⁵ Marwa al-Sabouni, *The Battle for Home: The Vision of a Young Architect in Syria*, 1st ed. (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2016).

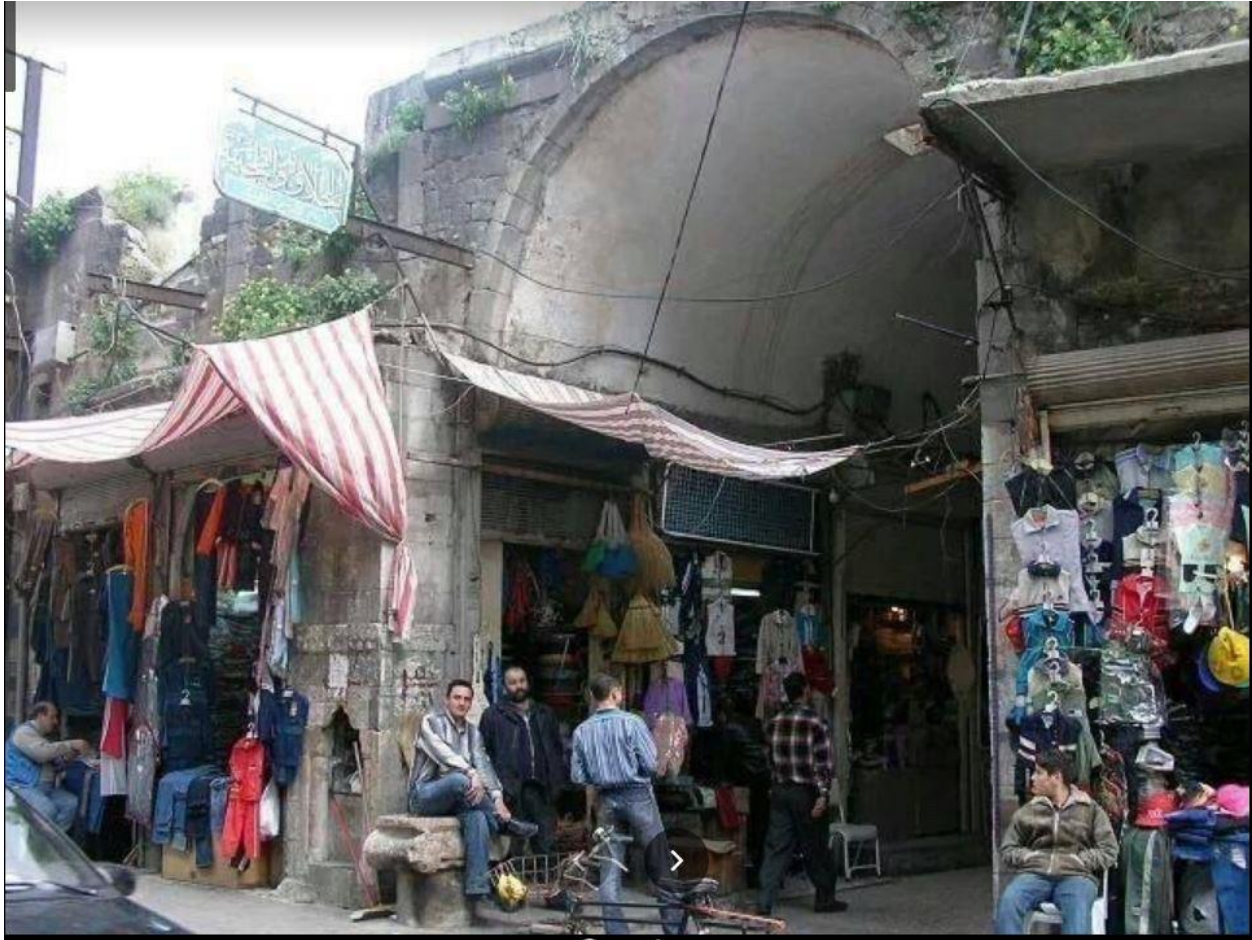


Figure 3.9: The Neglect Condition of the Old Souq of Homs [Getty]

Even contemporary buildings constructed by the state in old Homs would be left unfinished, and a dangerous eye rose.¹⁰⁶ For example, the Syrian Engineers Syndicate is a massive building of about 9000 square meters. It was built by the government nearby the Souq and was only partially occupied by at most 20% of its total area. The rest of the building is abandoned and in poor condition (figure 3.10).¹⁰⁷ These buildings were planned and executed by the military construction company, the main contractor for public projects in Syria.¹⁰⁸ That said, although its downtown is neglected, the old city is still the most liveable neighborhood and the city's identity because it is where people of Homs have continuously resided and owned properties and jobs.

¹⁰⁶ al-Sabouni.

¹⁰⁷ al-Sabouni.

¹⁰⁸ Since the emblem of the Baath Party in Syria is socialism, the state has the largest share in construction projects in the country. The construction process is carried out through several government institutions and ministries such as the Ministry of Housing, the Military Housing Corporation, the Military Construction Corporation and the Municipalities. For more information visit: Echoes, "Urban Housing and the Question of Property Rights in Syria."

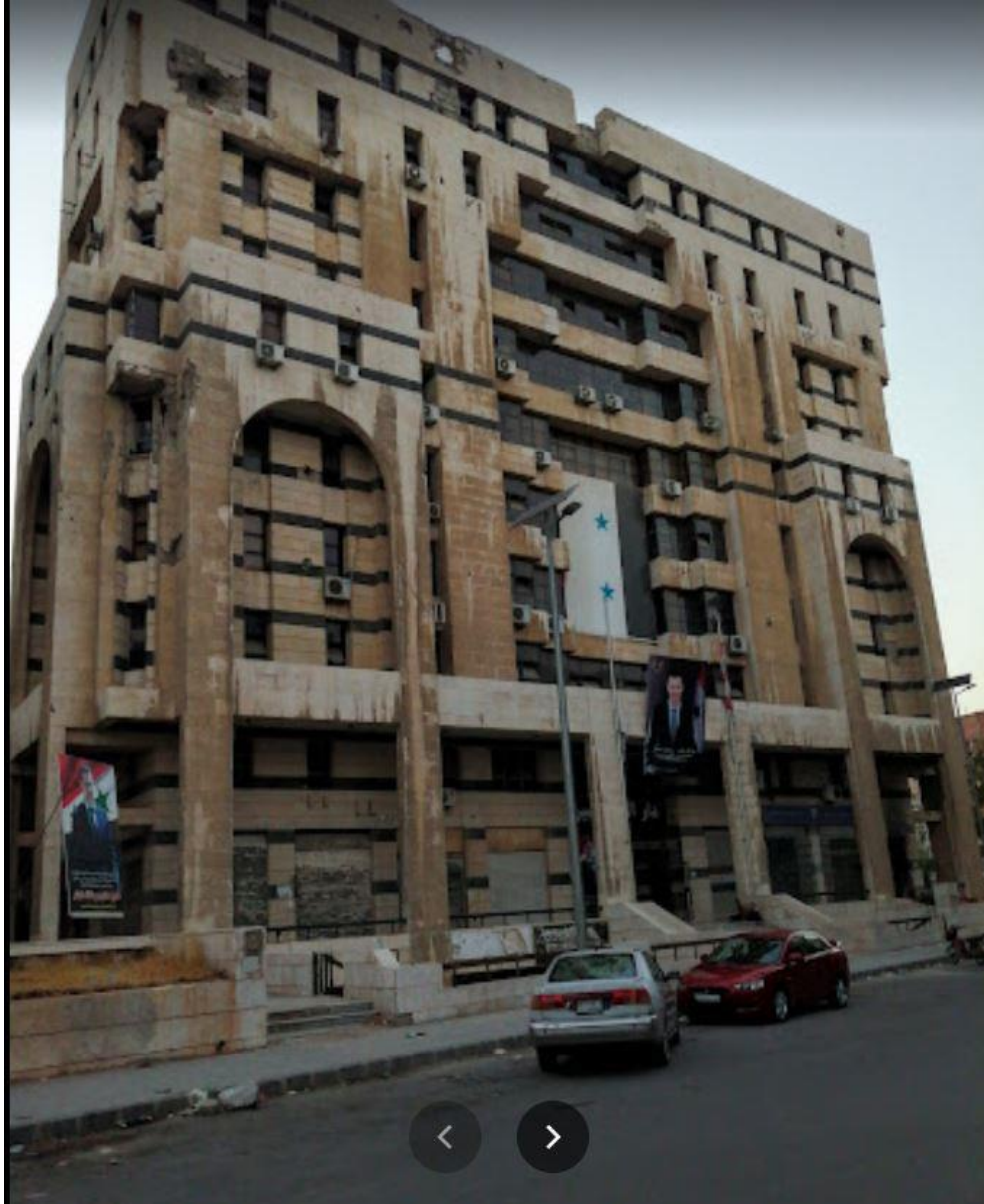


Figure 3.10: Syrian Engineers Syndicate - Homs Branch [Google Maps Street View]

Reconstruction projects are other state-led interventions in the urban space of Homs that stand in-between repair and humiliation. An instance of a preservation project is the Al-Zahrawi Palace in Old Homs. The Syrian government ran this archaeologically significant project in 1976. The palace represents many chapters of civilization history in the city.¹⁰⁹ Three façades of the palace reflect the Mamluks era, whereas the fourth façade represents the Ottoman Empire and the influence of Persian, Omayyad, Abbasid, and Mamluks architecture. The two lower storeys date back to the early Christian era and reflect the Byzantine style. Despite this archaeological importance and as a restoration technique, the restoring officials painted over the black and white stoned walls. Not only was painting over the black and white stoned walls criticized, but the color choices of the paint used were assaultive. For example, the kids'

¹⁰⁹ al-Sabouni, *The Battle for Home: The Vision of a Young Architect in Syria*.

room (originally) was painted in pale purple, and the Iwan (hall open to the courtyard) was painted in bright yellow, blue, and snow white (figure 3.11).¹¹⁰



Figure 3.11: Assaultive renovation of al-Zahrawi Palace [alalamsyria.ir]

Therefore, the collaboration between the city of Homs' mayors and governors made no building of significance display its importance or make an identity claim. On the contrary, the renovation of these buildings was assaultive and humiliating. This indicates that the Syrian state pursued acts of neglect and reconstruction to erase the collective memory and drive the original people out of the city center.

3.3 Building

The issuance of Law 26 (2000), allowed municipalities to deal with zoning ordinances for spontaneous settlement areas. The governor of Homs started pursuing plans to demolish hundreds of informal houses on the eastern side of the city to set the stage for strategic infrastructure projects.¹¹¹ Finally, in 2007, the Governorate of Homs promoted a grand development scheme called the Homs Dream. The project was promoted as a “beautiful dream that would achieve the aspirations, needs, and dreams of all Homs’ people.”¹¹²

3.3.1 Homs Dream

Homs Dream is a vast neoliberal development project led by the governor of the municipality of Homs, Iyad Al-ghazal, who, due to his prevailing corruption and strong connections to the regime, was able to

¹¹⁰ al-Sabouni.

¹¹¹ Echoes, “Urban Housing and the Question of Property Rights in Syria.”

¹¹² “حلم حمص التفاصيل الكاملة مع الصور” [Homs dream full details with pictures], accessed February 23, 2023, <https://www.zamanalwsl.net/news/article/2612>.

take control over the whole building process in Homs.¹¹³ The project aims to eliminate informal settlements in the city and transform the historic downtown into a swathe of modern glass skyscrapers and shopping malls (figure 3.12-13). More than nineteen local communities were worried about the project because of its underlying premise to give the state new powers to develop public-private partnership projects in the real estate market throughout the province.¹¹⁴ Many residents felt threatened when they realized these “development” initiatives only occurred in Sunni neighborhoods (figure 3.14).



Figure 3.12: Screenshot from *Homs Dream* film, organizing an informal neighborhood [Homsdream.syr]



Figure 3.13: Screenshot from *Homs Dream* short film of downtown Homs [Homsdream.syr]

¹¹³ al-Sabouni, *The Battle for Home: The Vision of a Young Architect in Syria*.

¹¹⁴ Echoes, “Urban Housing and the Question of Property Rights in Syria.”

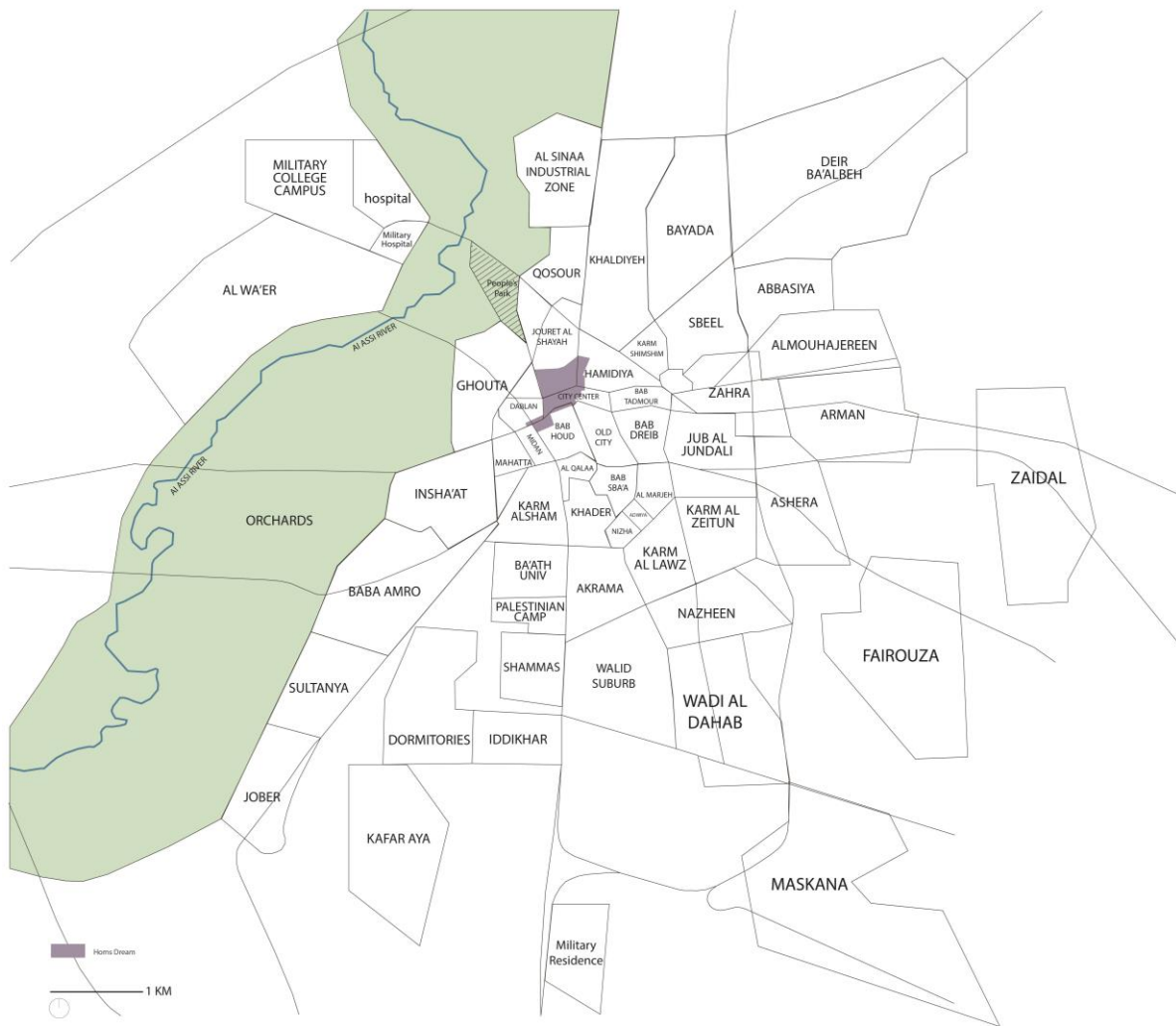


Figure 3.15: Homs Dream city center in relation to the city as a whole [author]



Figure 3.16: Homs Dream in relation to the Old City. [Homs City Council, modified by the author]

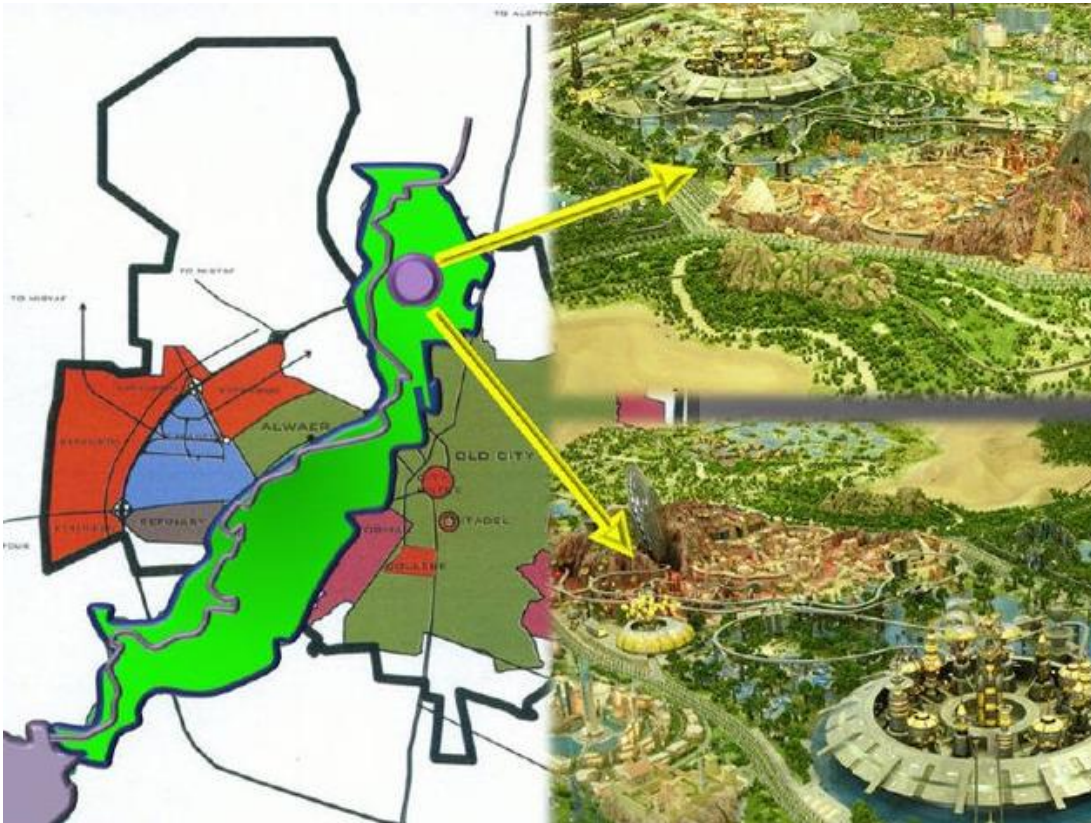


Figure 3.17: Homs Paradise in the city's orchids [Homsdream.syr]

Also, Homs Dream includes constructing the Gardenia Towers, the only project that started before the revolution (figure 3.18). This project consists of two towers built on a vast area of green lands of 90,000 square meters, despite government assurances that Homs Dream will preserve these green lands and limit building on them. One of the two towers is a 28 storey hotel called Gardenia Rotana while the other is a 21 storey luxury-residential apartment. They are the highest in Homs, and their strategic location close to the city center makes them overlook ample space of Homs. Ironically, the structure of the two unfinished towers has been transformed, during the revolution and after people went out to the streets, into one of the most significant snipers' nests, precisely like the Holiday Inn in Beirut (review section 2.3.2). They were later called "Death Towers." People also called the project "Solidere," referring to the Solidere of Beirut that changed its downtown after the civil war in Lebanon (see section 2.3.2).



Figure 3.18: Gardenia Towers in Homs [Homs Lens]

In short, the idea of the Homs Dream urban project —which was renamed the “Homs Nightmare”—is “to demolish the city center, the Old Souq, and the surrounding neighborhoods.” By rebuilding “everything” into divided zones separated with the towers and “the whole thing [is] to be carried out without reference to aesthetic values.”¹¹⁵ This architectural performance results in a demographic change in the city by displacing its people and expropriating their properties.¹¹⁶ In this respect, the performance of the building

¹¹⁵ al-Sabouni, *The Battle for Home: The Vision of a Young Architect in Syria*.

¹¹⁶ Wimmen, “Syria’s Path From Civic Uprising to Civil War.”

in Homs revealed the hidden purpose of changing the demographic makeup in the Sunni-majority city.¹¹⁷ Hence, one can conclude that the Syrian state has used construction projects in Homs as a performative act of gentrification.

3.4 Destruction during the War: Urbicide

As with other Syrian cities, destruction in Homs was not limited to places that hosted the rebellious movements. What seemed to be random shelling and bombing did not take long to be plain to see that destruction was used as a deliberate act and a weapon of war. Homs is a case that combines two drivers of destruction, one is seeking to achieve socio-political hierarchy while the second is seeking to achieve economic objectives. Leila Vignal (2021) argues that the scale, spatial distribution, and targets of the regime's destruction strategy suggest that "destruction is not simply collateral damage. Rather, it is an instrument of warfare". She further argues that the destruction of mainly residential areas and vital service structures was meant to "eradicate the population of opposition areas and to give lessons to the groups of regime-held areas."¹¹⁸ This performance could be considered as an act of urbicide when mapping where destruction happened in the city with demographic plans of Homs. Alawite neighbourhoods had not been affected, whereas neighborhoods of mostly Sunni and especially the Sunni rebels were razed to the ground (figure 3.19-3.21).¹¹⁹ Sawsan Abou Zainedin and Hani Fakhani, in their paper 'Syria's Urbicide: The Built Environment as a Means to Consolidate Homogeneity' argues that the regime has manipulated destruction in Syrian cities like Homs during the conflict to enforce political homogeneity that would further consolidate the regime's power in the post-conflict phase.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ "No Return to Homs – PAX Protection of Civilians."

¹¹⁸ Leila Vignal, *War-Torn: The Unmaking of Syria, 2011–2021* (Hurst Publishers, 2021).

¹¹⁹ More information about the state-led demographic reengineering of former Sunni-Muslim neighborhoods can be found in reports such as PAX's "No Return To Homs" (February 2017), Name Shaam's "Silent Sectarian Cleansing" (May 2015), and The Day After's "Local Truces and Forced Demographic Change in Syria" (January 2017).

¹²⁰ Hani Fakhani and Sawsan Abou Zainedin, "Syria's Urbicide: The Built Environment as a Means to Consolidate Homogeneity," January 1, 2019, https://www.academia.edu/40391893/Syrias_Urbicide_The_Built_Environment_as_a_Means_to_Consolidate_Homogeneity.

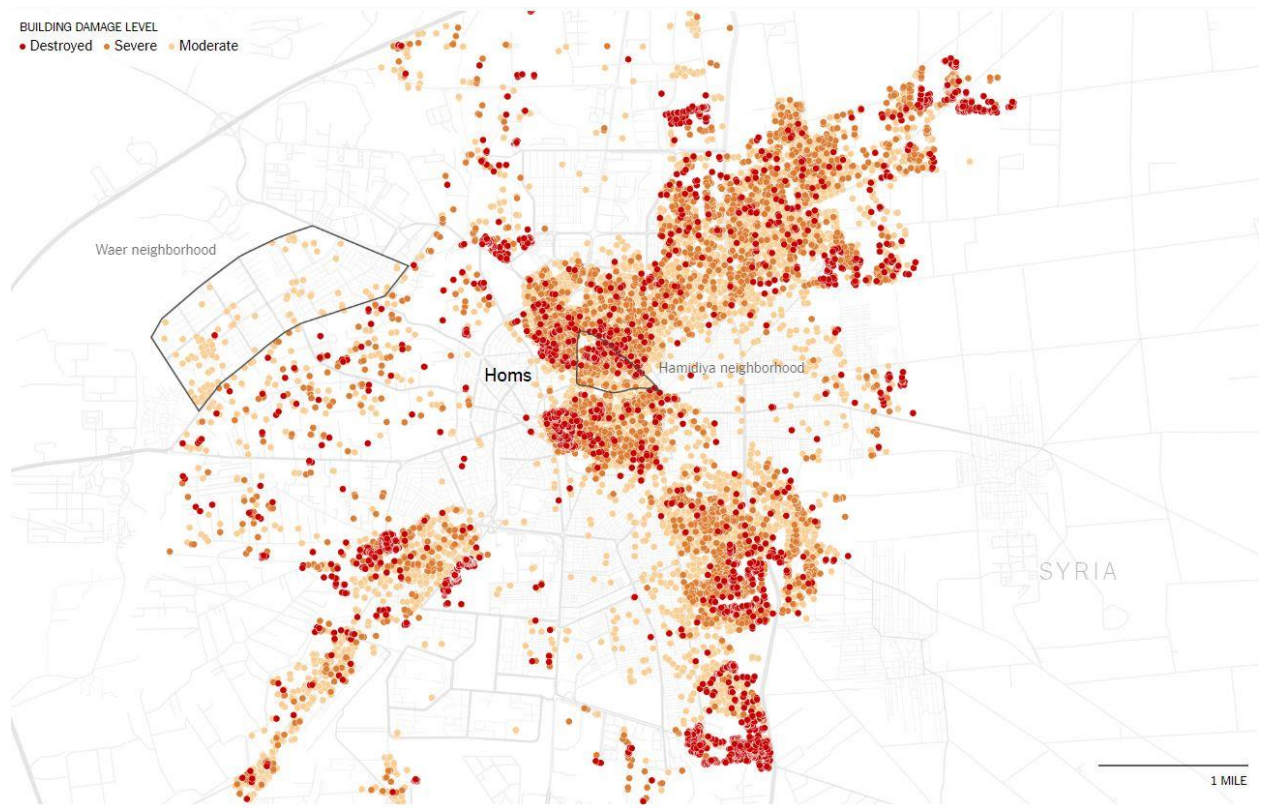


Figure 3.19: Destruction map of Homs during the war [REACH]

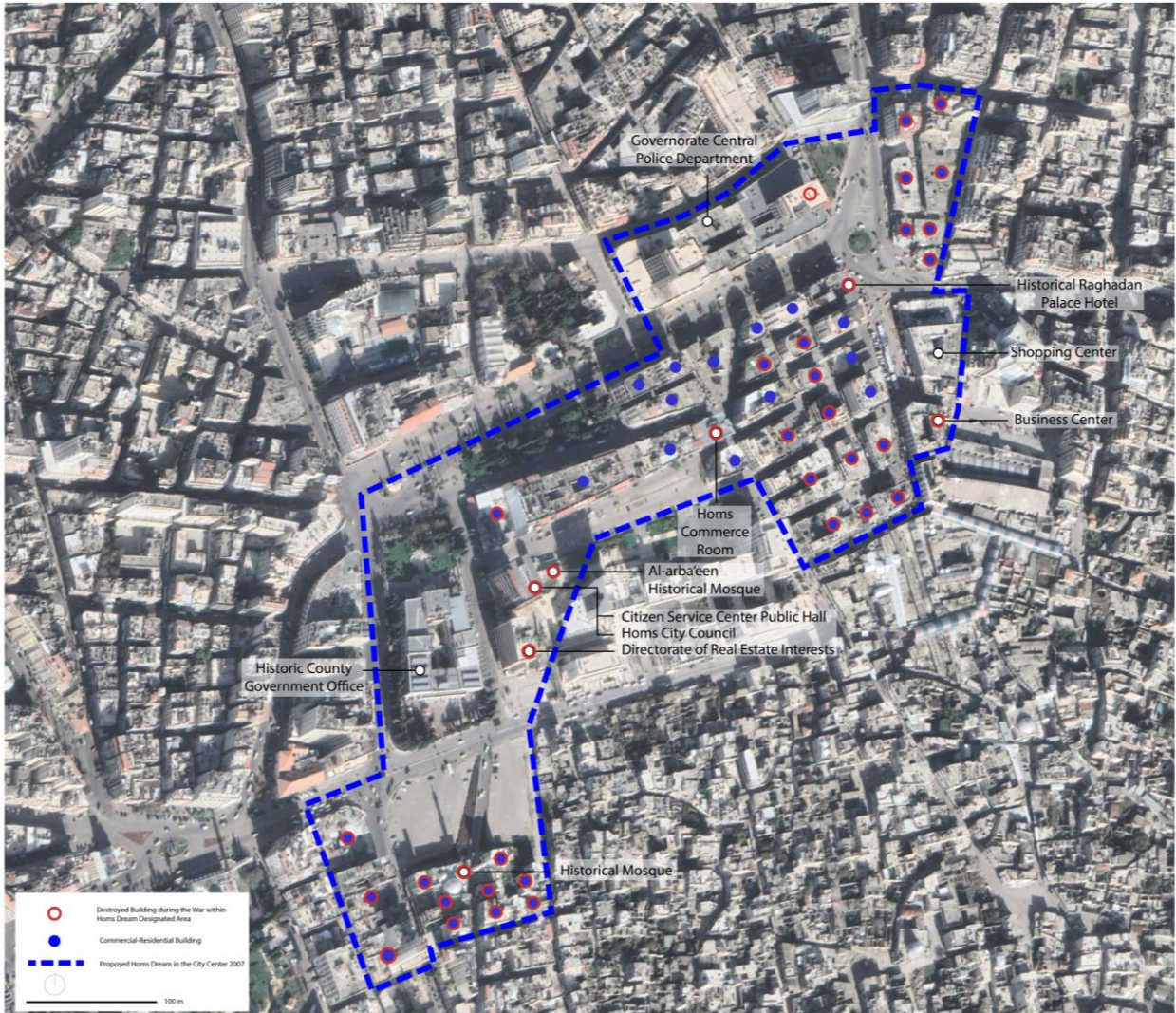


Figure 3.22: Mapping Homs Dream in relation to destruction in Hom's downtown [author based on UNOSAT damage assessment]

Destruction has also been used to destroy the people of Homs' collective memory, thereby facilitating their expulsion from the city center. Some examples of ancient monuments partially destroyed despite being fundamental to Homs in terms of their symbolic religious presence in the Sunni-majority city include the holy church of St Mary and Khalid Ibn Al Walid mosque (figure 3.23-24).



Figure 3.23: Um al-Zinnar historic church [Flicker]



Figure 3.24: Homs landmark of Khalid Ibn Al-Walid Mosque [<https://syrmh.com>]

St Mary of the Holy Belt (Um al-Zinnar) cathedral was named after the relic of the belt of the Virgin Mary that it retains. The church's site and foundations date back to 59 AD when it was a secret Christian worship and a shelter from Roman persecution.¹²³ Khaled bin Al-Walid mosque, a symbol of the city through the shape of its domes and minarets, was built in 1266 at the request of Baybers and then reconstructed by the Ottomans in 1895. The mosque's name itself is valuable, being named after an Islamic historical figure, and the same name sometimes refers to the city due to the presence of the Mosque in it. During the revolution of 2011, both buildings were exposed to the destruction caused by the bombing of the regime (figure 3.25-26).¹²⁴



Figure 3.25: Um al-Zinnar historic church in ruins during the war [Flicker]

¹²³ Ross Burns (2009). *Monuments of Syria: A Guide*. p. 171. ISBN 9780857714893.

¹²⁴ Recently, the government began to restore the ancient mosque, but it changed a lot of the aesthetic appearance, architecture, and building materials. Scholar Hossam El Din El Hazouri questions the renovation process of the mosque and the real purpose behind all of these changes. He implies that these acts by the state are to distort the history of Homs and the collective memory of its original people. For more visit:

حرية برس Horrya press, November 19, 2018, <https://horrya.net/archives/81978>.



Figure 3.26: Khalid Ibn Al Walid mosque in ruins during the war [zamanalwsl.net]

3.5 Conclusion

Since the Ba'ath Party took over the country in 1963, it started performing violent urban planning countrywide. Through examining both constructive and destructive acts in the urban environment of Homs, it becomes clear how the state has been slowly and silently destroying the city's identity. In Homs, the state allowed informal settlements for a particular ethnic group while seizing lands and displacing their people to redevelop informal areas affiliated with Sunni groups. Neglect and assaultive reconstruction of the city's urban fabric and historic buildings are other performative acts that the state used to weaken the original residents' attachment to their city and erase their collective memory. The assaultive renovation of ancient architectural layers stacked one above the other since before the Roman time of a building as ancient as the Zahrawi Palace served to highlight the campaign against the urban fabric of Homs and how the people of Homs lost much of their city before the revolution broke out in 2011. However, the state's tampering with the built environment of Homs seeks to achieve more than social gains. It is also driven by economic goals represented by the neo-liberal master project "Homs Dream." This plan, born in 2007, allegedly entailed arbitrary land and property confiscation and demolition.

During the war, the carpet-like razing of entire neighborhoods and converging evidence suggest that the destruction in Syria has been used as urbicide. By mapping places where destruction took place and comparing them with places where the 'Homs Dream' was planned, it became evident that destruction

and reconstruction are but urban planning tools and a performative act of urbicide to ease informal clearance and redevelopment projects planned pre-war. This urban planning strategy expelled large parts of the population and enriched developers intimately connected with the government. Homs is a case where urbicide included destructive and constructive acts.

The chapter concludes that the various architectural performances of reconstruction and deconstruction against Homs' built environment attempt to control people by eradicating the populations of opposition areas and instating political homogeneity. It further serves economic interests, as it puts the building market in the hand of the Syrian regime and those affiliated with it from the Alawi sect.

Finally, the fact that these violent urban performances—destructive and constructive— are running along sectarian lines of predominantly Sunni-majority residential communities, —to build and sustain Syria's socio-economic and political hierarchies— truly makes it unsurprising that these threatened zones inspired the first performance of resistance to reclaim their rights to the city.

4 Configurations of Urban Performance in New Clock Tower Square

4.1 Introduction

The urban acts at the New Clock Tower Square and other public squares during the Arab Spring have revealed new layers of complex resistance and space reclaiming. During state domination, these public spaces appeared as if they only existed in favor of the established power and hierarchy. In this context, their occupation challenged the regime and refused the failing system. This performance of challenging the regime throughout public squares also reclaimed people's rights to their cities and the public realm.¹²⁵

In the same way, the urban performance by the people of Homs was to resist the Syrian state's acts of controlling people throughout the built environment (see Chapter 3). Thousands of people marched to the New Clock Tower Square in the city center without prior planning (figure 4.1). They occupied the Square and practiced new socio-political relations, changing its master plan to an interactive one and challenging the state and its orders. This chapter examines the urban acts in the New Clock Tower Square as performed by the people of Homs that led to reclaiming the Square and asserting their right to the city. The chapter also aims to understand the role of the New Clock Tower Square in Homs and its spatiality during the Syrian Revolution of 2011. It does so by explicating the physical and symbolic importance of the Square and then analyzing people's acts of resistance during the revolution's early days, i.e., the 17th and 18th of April 2011.



Figure 4.1: *Protesting at New Clock Tower Square in the city center of Homs on April 18th 2011 [horrya.net]*

¹²⁵ Tripp, "Performing the Public."

According to Lefebvre, the squares' physical qualities and urban history could empower that space to reimagine a new order for the existing structural relations.¹²⁶ From this standpoint, this chapter argues that the New Clock Tower Square's physical qualities, such as its urban morphology and location in the city, have prepared the Square to transform from a roundabout to an active urban space for resistance. In other words, the Square's physical characteristics and morphological relations were crucial in reordering power during the revolt.

Additionally, the New Clock Tower Square and its surrounding buildings have acquired an important place in the people of Homs' collective memory, demonstrated throughout history as the primary site of assemblage from the Syrian independence of 1946 until the Ba'ath Party ruling in 1964. Despite the existence of other older squares in the city (i.e., Khalid Ibn Al-Waleed Mosque Court and the Old New Clock Tower)(figure 4.2), the revolution of 2011 showed that the New Clock Tower Square sits at the top of public urban spaces in Homs.



Figure 4.2: Key public spaces in Homs, the Saha of Khalid Ibn al-Walid Mosque, the Old Clock Tower Square, and the New Clock Tower Square [author]

Examining the physical and symbolic qualities of the New Clock Tower Square provides an opportunity to understand how the spatiality of the Square has prompted the people of Homs to perform urban acts in it. These apparent and transformative acts during the moment of the revolution include the act of expression, praying, social media use, and encampment. As will be explained further in detail, these strategic urban acts allowed the people of Homs to reclaim and reappropriate their Square.

¹²⁶ Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith, *The Production of Space*, 41.

4.2 The New Clock Tower Square: a Physical and Symbolic Space

It seems at first glance that the choice of the New Clock Tower Square to gather in and demand rights in Homs during the Syrian Revolution of 2011 is an arbitrary act. However, upon a closer look, some clues from the Square's physical qualities and symbolic meanings reveal that this particular Square has a latent potential to provoke rebellious performance and urban acts of resistance. Therefore, this chapter investigates what the people of Homs might have imagined while occupying the Square. Furthermore, the chapter tracks how the New Clock Tower Square gained physical superiority and symbolic meanings throughout history.

4.2.1 Physical Space

Homs experienced a significant urban expansion when the Ottoman Empire turned its attention to the Ottoman states' architecture in the 1860s, unifying the modern architectural style and reflecting the culture and civilization of the empire.¹²⁷ Homs expanded beyond the ancient city's walls based on thoughtful planning, modern architecture, and aesthetics in construction (figure 4.3).¹²⁸ Streets and sidewalks were established and paved with black stones, while public buildings, palaces, markets, and retail stores were constructed using stones and bricks, and the street vendors were present day and night. Moreover, these public facilities motivated groups and individuals to use these places for picnics and recreation due to their linkage to the city.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ حسين آغا, مدينة حمص و أوائل المهندسين في ظل الخلافة العثمانية [The City of Homs and the Early Engineers under the Ottoman Caliphate].

¹²⁸ حسين آغا.

¹²⁹ حسين آغا.

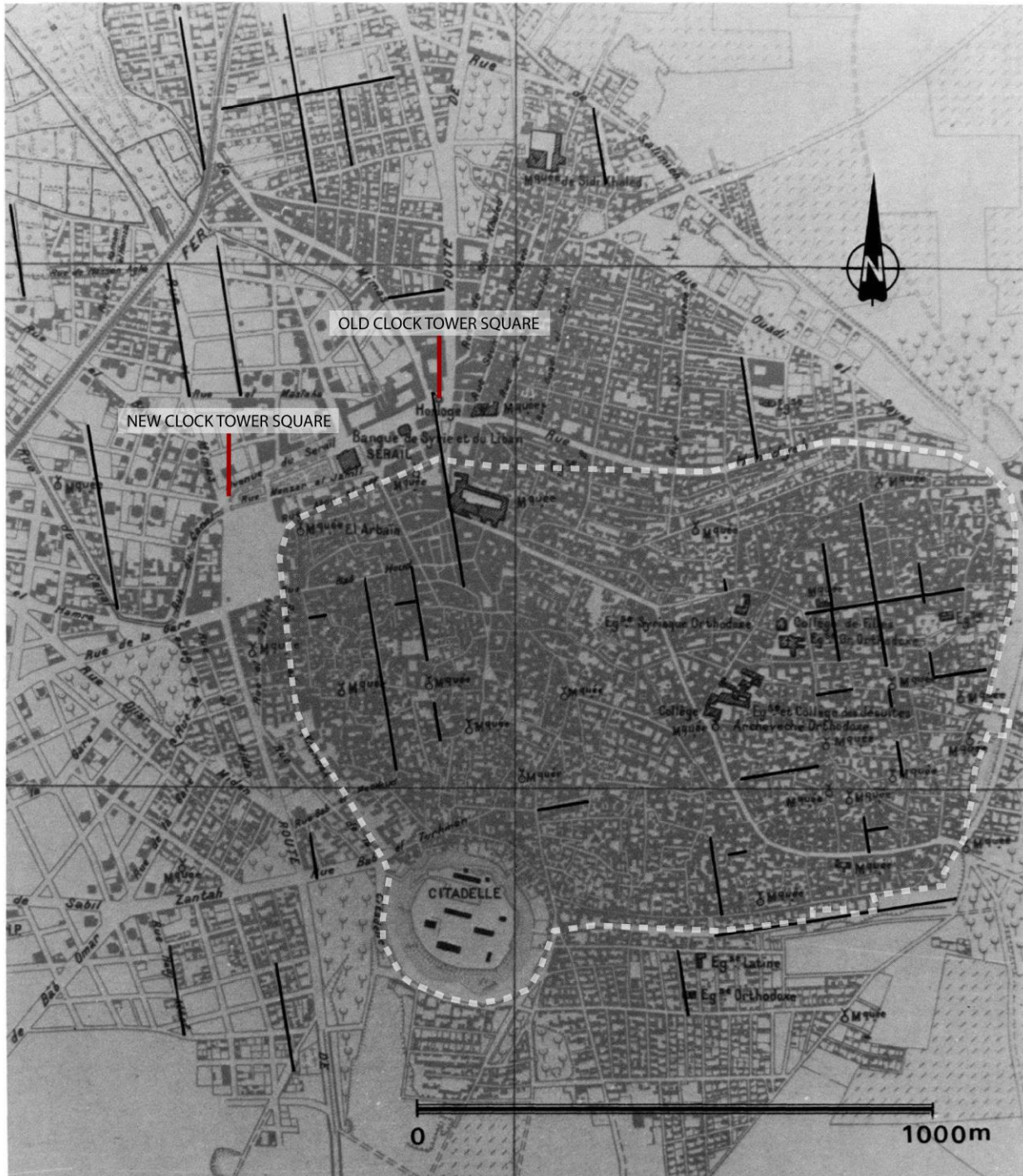


Figure 4.3: Expansion beyond the ancient city's walls during 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s [syrmh.com]

The Saraya Road —currently named Shoukri Qoutli— has two connected squares from each side and was the first street to be constructed and inhabited, upon the urban expansion (figure 4.4). Its architecture combined modernity with traditional oriental characteristics. In the middle of this street there are pavements, trees, vast squares, and gardens with modern organization, while also being the main outlet

and picnic space for the people in the city (figure 4.5). Consequently, Saraya Street gradually acquired an increasingly central position in the city with its two linked Squares.

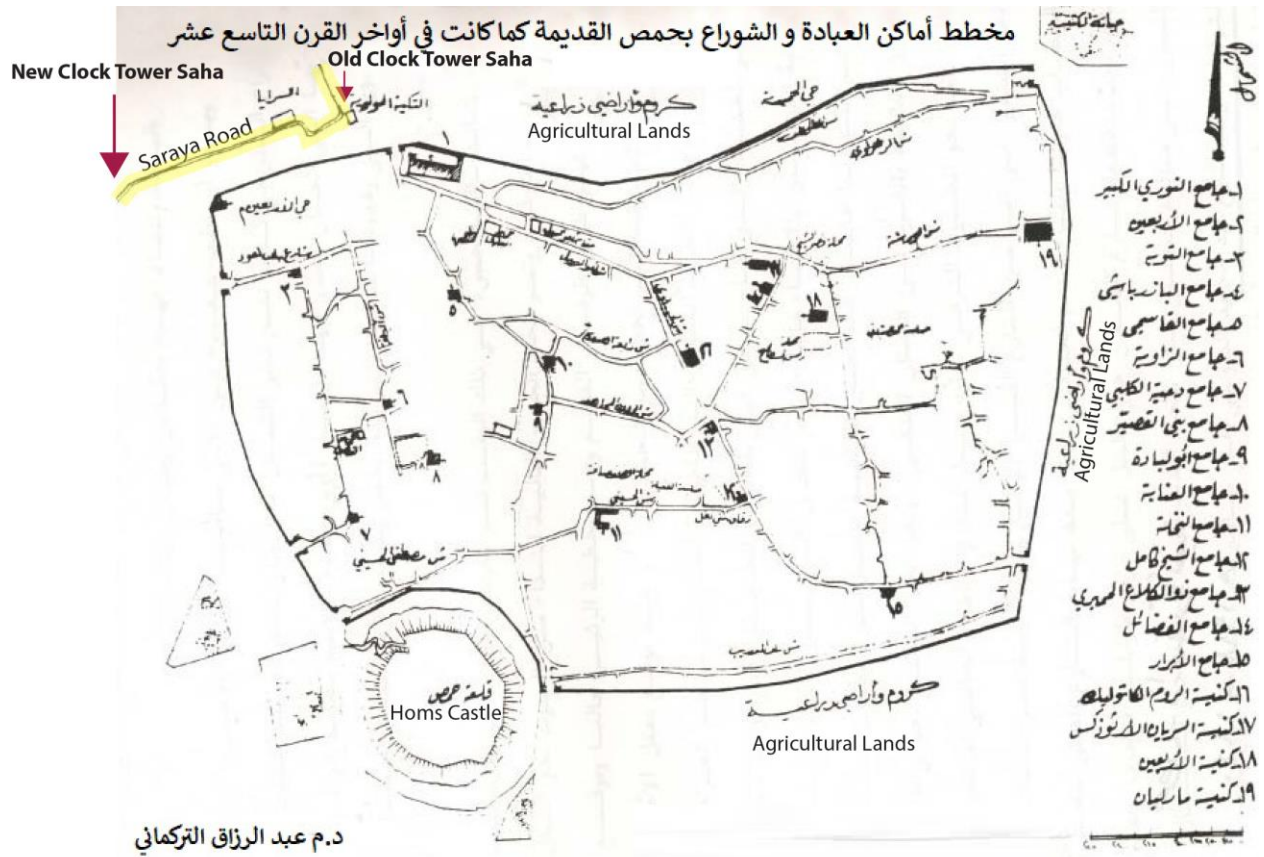


Figure 4.4: Saraya road, on the left top corner, is one of the first expansions beyond the ancient city walls in the 1860s. The map also shows the beginning of the Old Saha formation and the place of the future New Saha [edited by author]

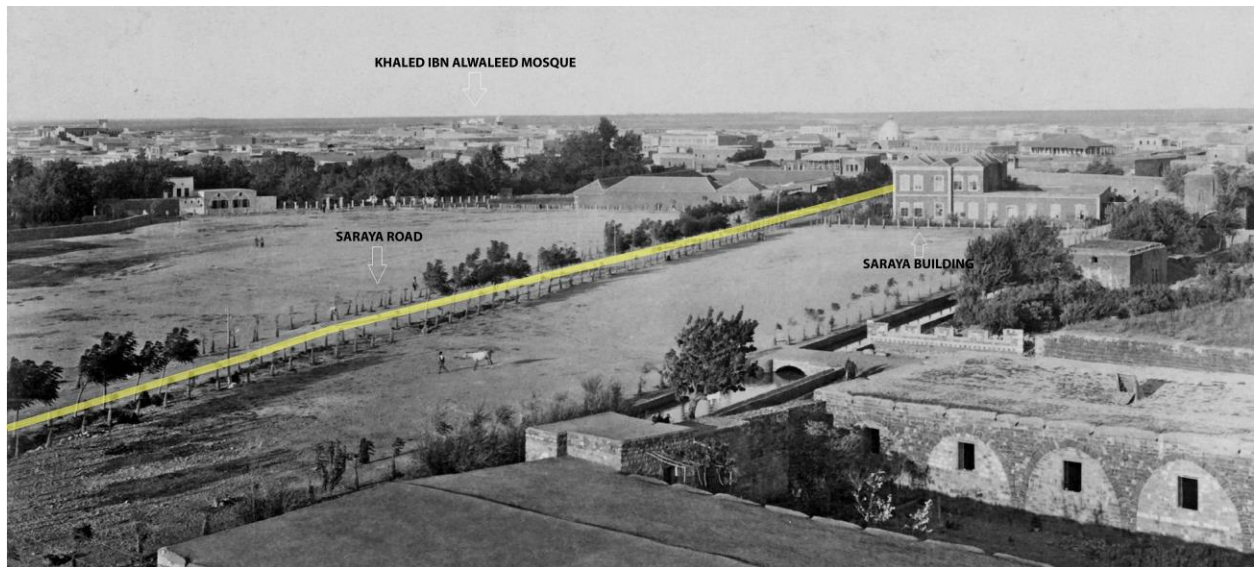


Figure 4.5: Saraya road in 1899 was the main outlet for the people of the city and a place for their picnics [delcampe.net, edited by author]

During the urban expansion (1860s-1920s), the New Clock Tower Square gained more spatial importance over the Old New Clock Tower Square when it became surrounded by political and military buildings, as well as the meeting point of the main roads in the city which branched out to adjoining neighborhoods (figure 4.6). Today, the New Clock Tower Square is the central Square in Homs. This central and busy traffic circle is an important location in the city center connecting Homs from East to West via Shoukri Qoutli and Dabalan Streets and from South to North via Riyadh, Droubi, and Hisham Atasi Streets (figure 4.7). It is also the meeting point for major highways connecting Homs to the capital city, Hama, and Aleppo—Syria’s second-largest city.

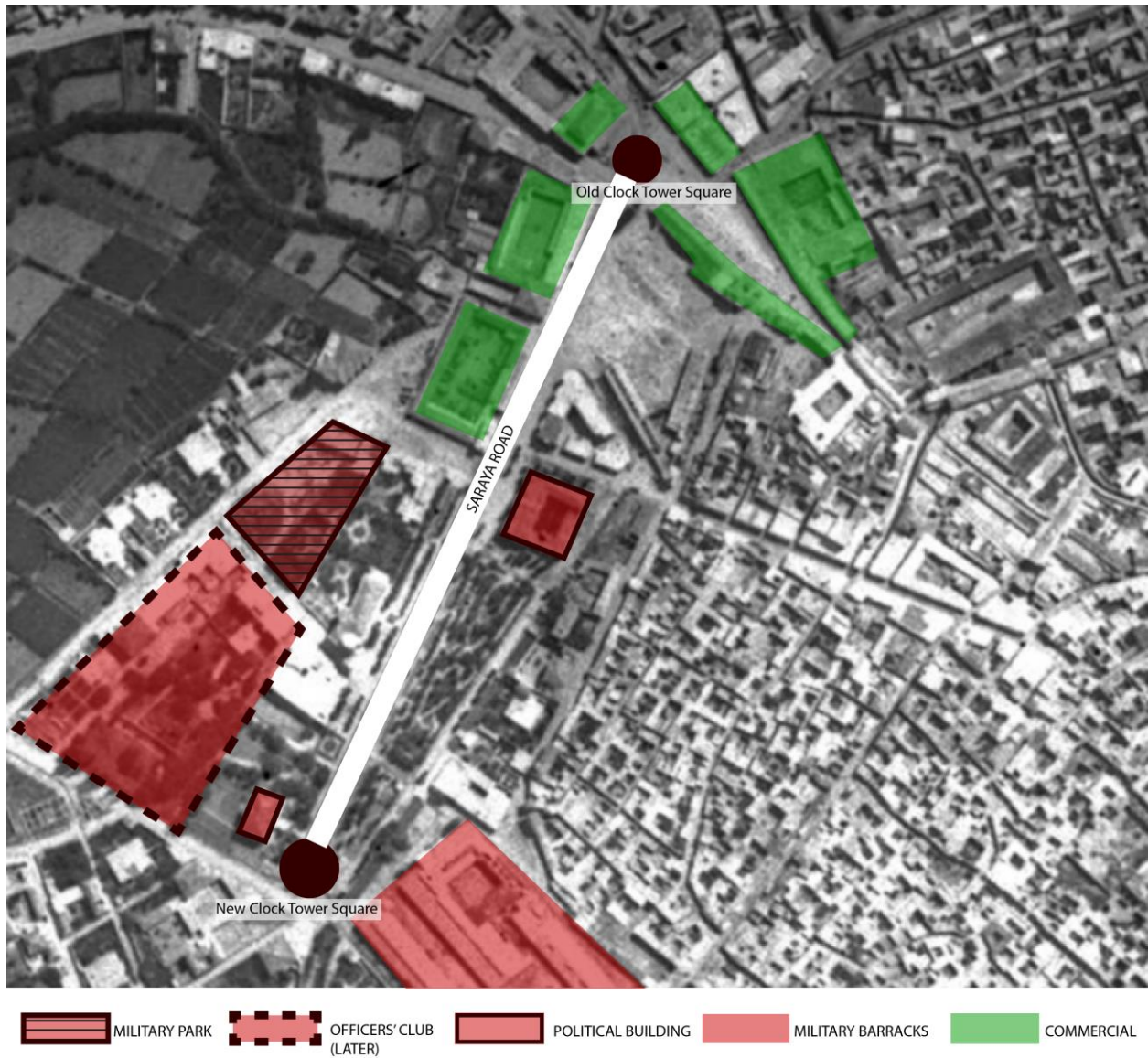


Figure 4.6: Comparison between the buildings typology surrounding the the Old Clock Tower Square and the New Clock Tower Square [French archive, author]



Figure 4.7: The New Clock Tower Square is a major and busy traffic circle is an important location in the city center connecting Homs from East to West via Shoukri Qoutli and Dabalan Streets and from South to North via Riyadh, Droubi, and Hisham Atasi streets. [Google Earth, author]

This connectivity is particularly significant when reflecting on accessing the Square during the revolution of 2011. It eased accessing the Square for protestors from all around the city. Moreover, as a square with such a high level of connectivity and transportation—as people would travel through their everyday—it can halt the transportation system when blockage, either by protestors or regime forces. In sum, the Square’s enduring centrality during the city’s urban expansions gives it a superior physical quality in times of conflict.

Another layer of centrality evident through the morphological research is that throughout history, the Square has always been surrounded directly and relatively by institutions of power and key cultural buildings (figure 4.8). The Ottoman Saraya, also known as the House of the Government, served as the administrative headquarters during the Ottoman Empire. It was constructed as a public building during 1886 in the middle of Saraya Street and 200 meters away from the New Clock Tower Square (figure 4.9). It was demolished in 1951 after constructing the current government building at the New Clock Tower Square (figure 4.10). This building is located on a historical site of a large barracks that dates back to 1835. It was used to store the French army ammunition depot while also serving as their headquarters during colonialism (figure 4.11).



Figure 4.8: Morphological analysis of the Square and its surroundings [author]



Figure 4.9: The Ottoman Saraya, the House of the Government that served as the administrative headquarters during the Ottoman Empire [Facebook.com/Museum of Old Pictures of Homs City]



Figure 4.10: New Government House constructed in 1951 [Facebook.com/Museum of Old Pictures of Homs City]



Figure 4.11: Historical large barracks that dates back to 1835, used to store the French army ammunition depot, and was their headquarters during Colonialism [Facebook.com/Museum of Old Pictures of Homs City]

Another critical building that used to be around the Square is the Royal Charitable Office, constructed by the Ottomans in 1870 (figure 4.12). It was a residence of international students coming to the city which provided them with everyday needs. Furthermore, it also housed the Department of Education and the school administration. The French colonizer turned it into a headquarters for military interest. Finally, in 2002 under the Ba'ath rule, it was demolished, and the Officers' Club and its accessory facilities were built in its place (figure 4.13). To the South of the same site, the Ottoman headquarters building (figure 4.14), constructed in 1915, was demolished in 1985 to build a concrete high-rise to host the teachers' union and central bank (figure 4.15). The original building used to be the state's most influential institution in people's lives.



Figure 4.12: The Royal Charitable Office, constructed by the Ottomans in 1870 [Facebook.com/Museum of Old Pictures of Homs City]



Figure 4.13: The Officers' Club and its accessory facilities built in 2002 [SANA]

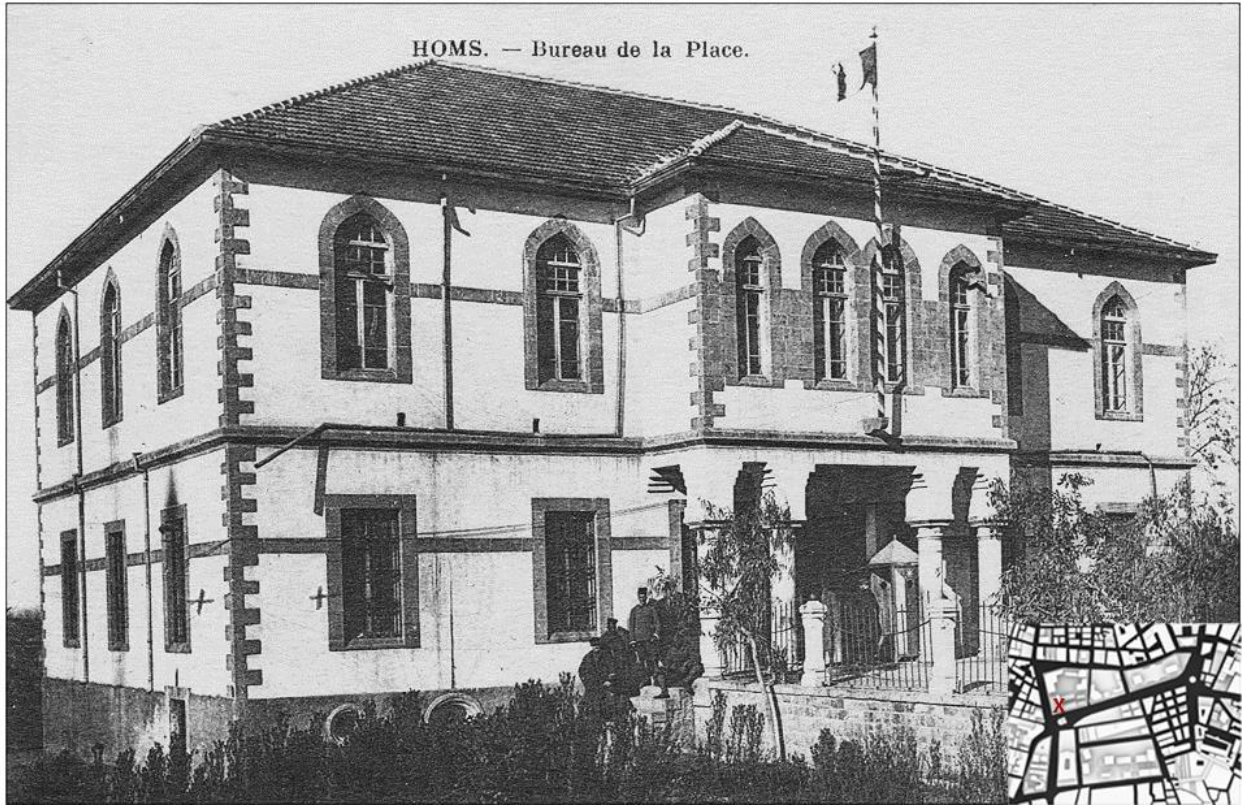


Figure 4.14: The Ottoman headquarters building constructed in 1915 [delcampe.net]



Figure 4.15: Teachers' union and Syrian real estate bank building [google maps street view]

The palace of the mayor of Homs, Pasha Al-Droubi, is at the forefront of buildings and palaces that were a landmark of modern and local architecture in Homs. People admired it for its unique architectural model

in terms of the art of building, decoration, and choosing a beautiful location between nature and wide streets (figure 4.16). This archaeological palace built in 1877 was removed in the eighties of the last century, and a concrete commercial plaza was established instead (figure 4.17).



Figure 4.16: The palace of the mayor of Homs, Pasha Al-Droubi built in 1877 [syrmh.com]



Figure 4.17: The "Plaza" complex was built in the 1980s [google maps street view]

The Old Clock Tower was built in 1923 during the early years of French Colonialism (figure 4.18). Upon Syrian independence from the French, the people of Homs needed a new Clock Tower that presented

their culture better, away from the colonial influence.¹³⁰ For this reason, the New Clock Tower was established in 1958 in the city center Square using Ablaqi's native architecture of Homs (figure 4.19), funded by a lady visiting her hometown, Homs.¹³¹ After that, the New Clock Tower Square became a place for demonstrations by residents and political movements in the 1950s.¹³²



Figure 4.18: The Old Clock Tower was built in 1923 during the early years of French Colonialism [Facebook.com/Museum of Old Pictures of Homs City]

¹³⁰ محمد فيصل شيخاني, حمص عبر التاريخ: معالم و أعلام [Homs throughout History: Landmarks and Figures], ed. هشام سعيد الحلاق (منشورات الهيئة العامة السورية للكتاب - وزارة الثقافة, 2011).

¹³¹ فيصل شيخاني.

¹³² فيصل شيخاني.



Figure 4.19: The New Clock Tower was established in 1958 in the city center Square using Ablaqi's native architecture of Homs [syrmh.com]

The City Hall 1922, Ottoman Municipality 1882, Al-Farah Café 1870s, the military park 1902, and many other political and national buildings were built nearby the Square (figure 4.8). This architectural morphology draws memories of a once powerful and culturally rich city during the Ottoman era while also igniting memories of resistance, fighting, and independence during and after French colonialism.

Today, the Square still serves as a significant space in the city. Various key buildings surround it, including military, economic, religious, and historical. These buildings are the Officers' Hotel and Club, Farah historical cafe, the Real Estate Bank of Syria, the Commercial Bank of Syria, the County government house, Homs' city council, the social insurance center, and commercial plazas (figure 4.20). Some of the earliest-built mosques and churches in the city are within walking distance from the Square (figure 4.21). Moreover, the New Clock Tower Square is 400m away from the Old Clock Tower Square which creates a visual and physical connection between the two squares, linking both to their long histories of resistance, (figure 4.22).

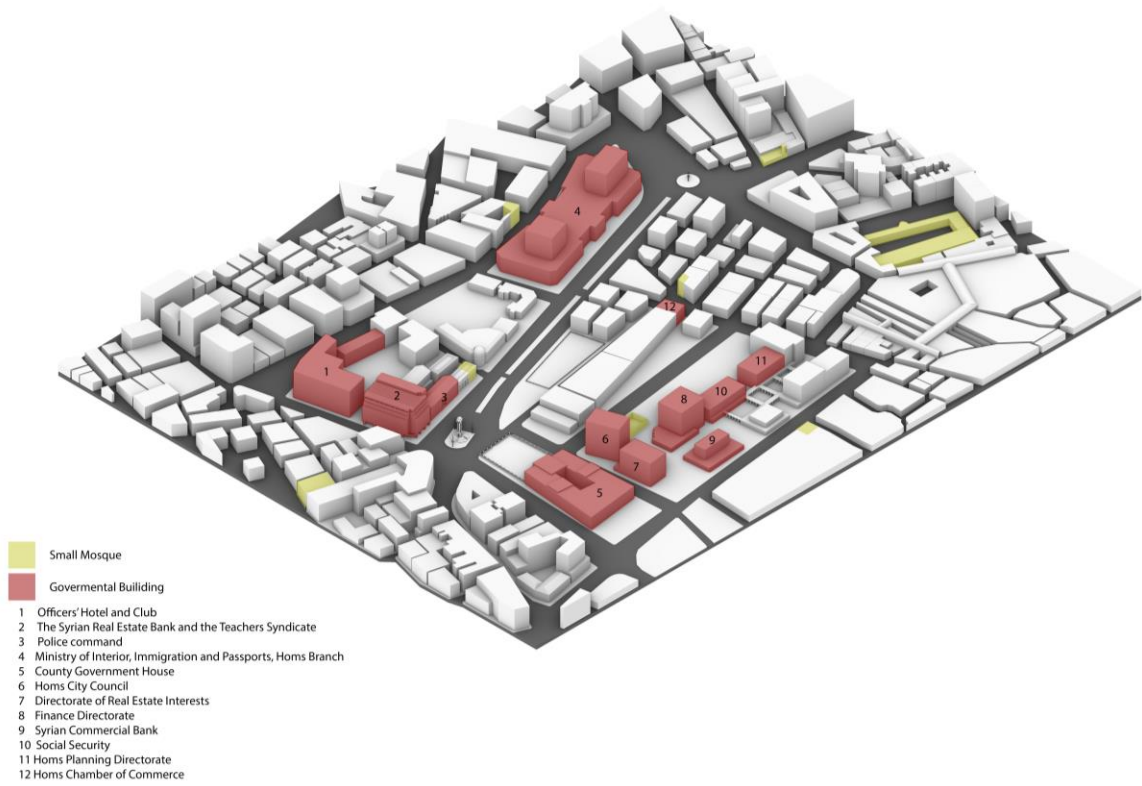


Figure 4.20: Key buildings surrounding the New Clock Tower Square as of 2011 [author]

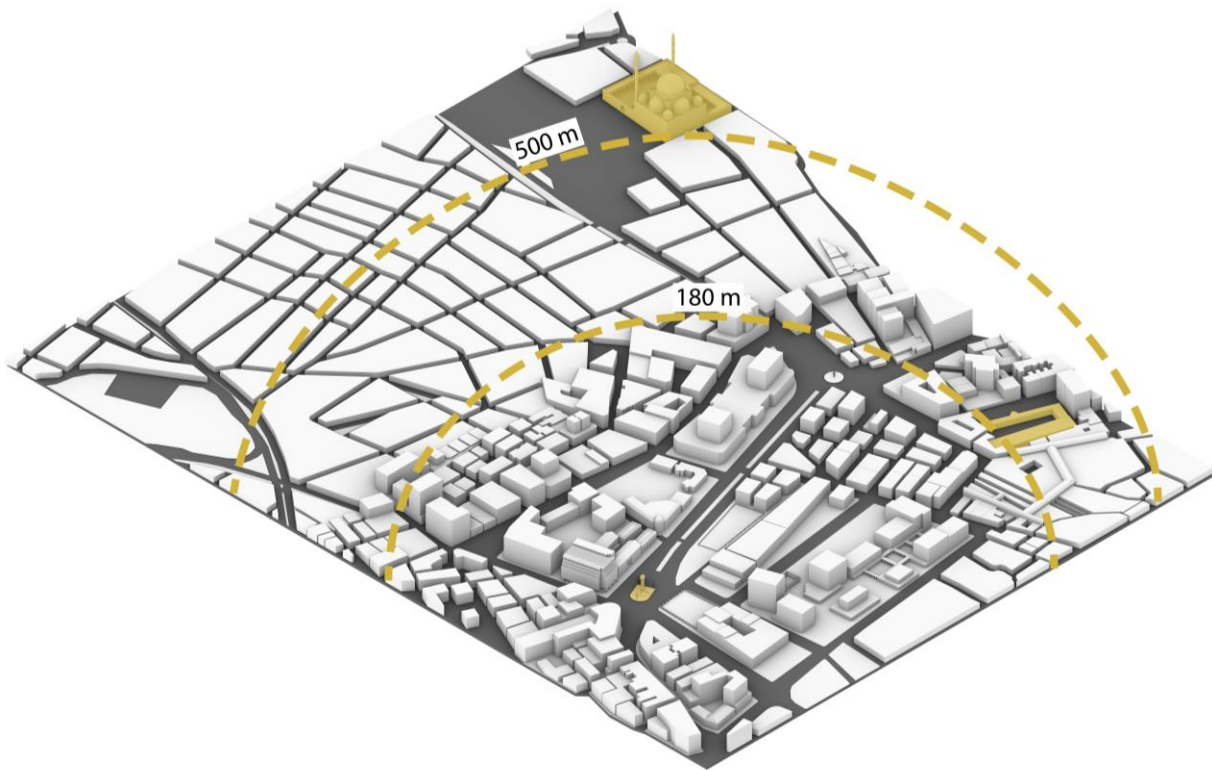


Figure 4.21: The earliest-built mosques in the city are within walking distance from the Square [author]

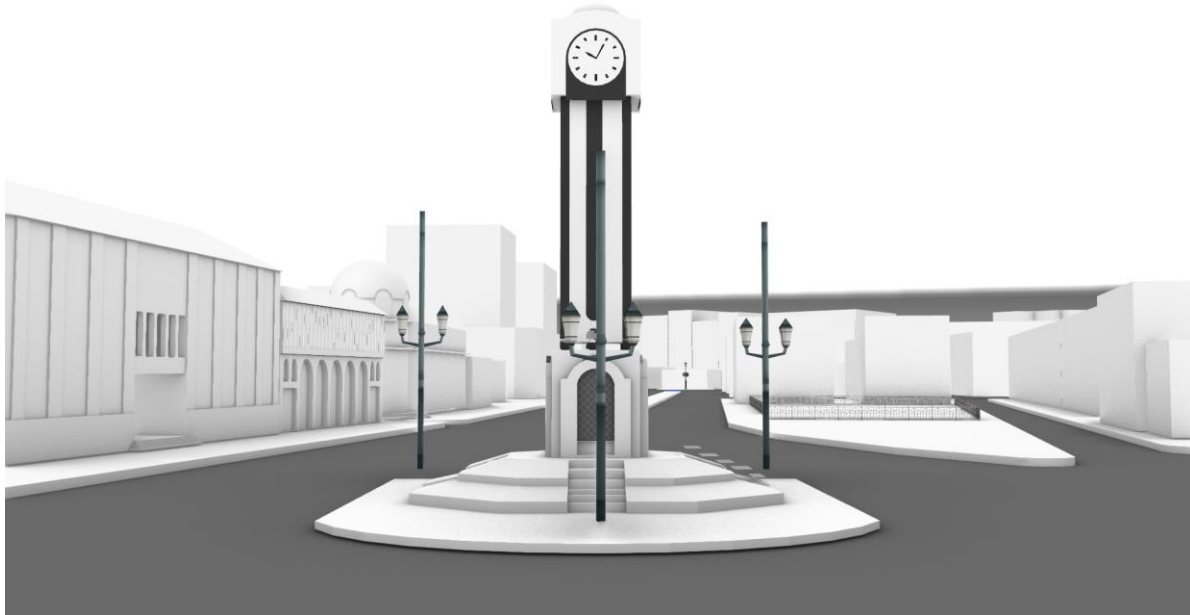


Figure 4.22: Visual and physical connection between the two squares [author]

Importantly, however, these different surrounding buildings and institutions sit around an equal distance from the Square, not dominating it by one institution over the other. Creating a situation where the Square stands at the heart of power relations yet is still untied to a firm order or a specific social group. This characterization of a flexible order enables the Square to be used as a social and a public square by different groups and identities.

For these reasons, New Clock Tower Square has been the primary choice to gather and demonstrate throughout history, specifically in the 1950s (before the current Ba'ath party control and after French colonialism). The New Clock Tower Square became the most meaningful setting and was the stage for action during the Syrian revolution of 2011. Security forces have taken over this urban space to become a space during the revolution for the intentional humiliation of ordinary people. Hence, by taking charge of the city's most essential part and taking it out of the grip of the existing regime, the protesters reclaim and assert their rights to this space (see section 2.4.2).¹³³

4.2.2 Symbolic Space: Collective memory

Most of the earliest street action archival photography of the New Clock Tower Square (location) dates back to the 1920s when French Colonialism started in Syria (figure 4.23). Since then, the Square has been at the heart of the political transformations in Homs. In fact, the Square itself had been turned into a French military outpost. Regular French military parades and shows used to happen at The New Clock Tower Square, Saraya Street, and the Old Clock Tower Square (figure 4.24-25).¹³⁴

¹³³ Tripp, "Performing the Public."

¹³⁴ حسين آغا, مدينة حمص و أوائل المهندسين في ظل الخلافة العثمانية [The City of Homs and the Early Engineers under the Ottoman Caliphate].



Figure 4.23: French Soliders arriving to Homs and entering the New Clock Tower from Pasha Al-Droubi steet in 1920 [facebook.com/Museum of Old Pictures of Homs City]



Figure 4.24: Flag exchange between two officers of the French occupation army, during a military parade in Saraya Street [delcampe.net]

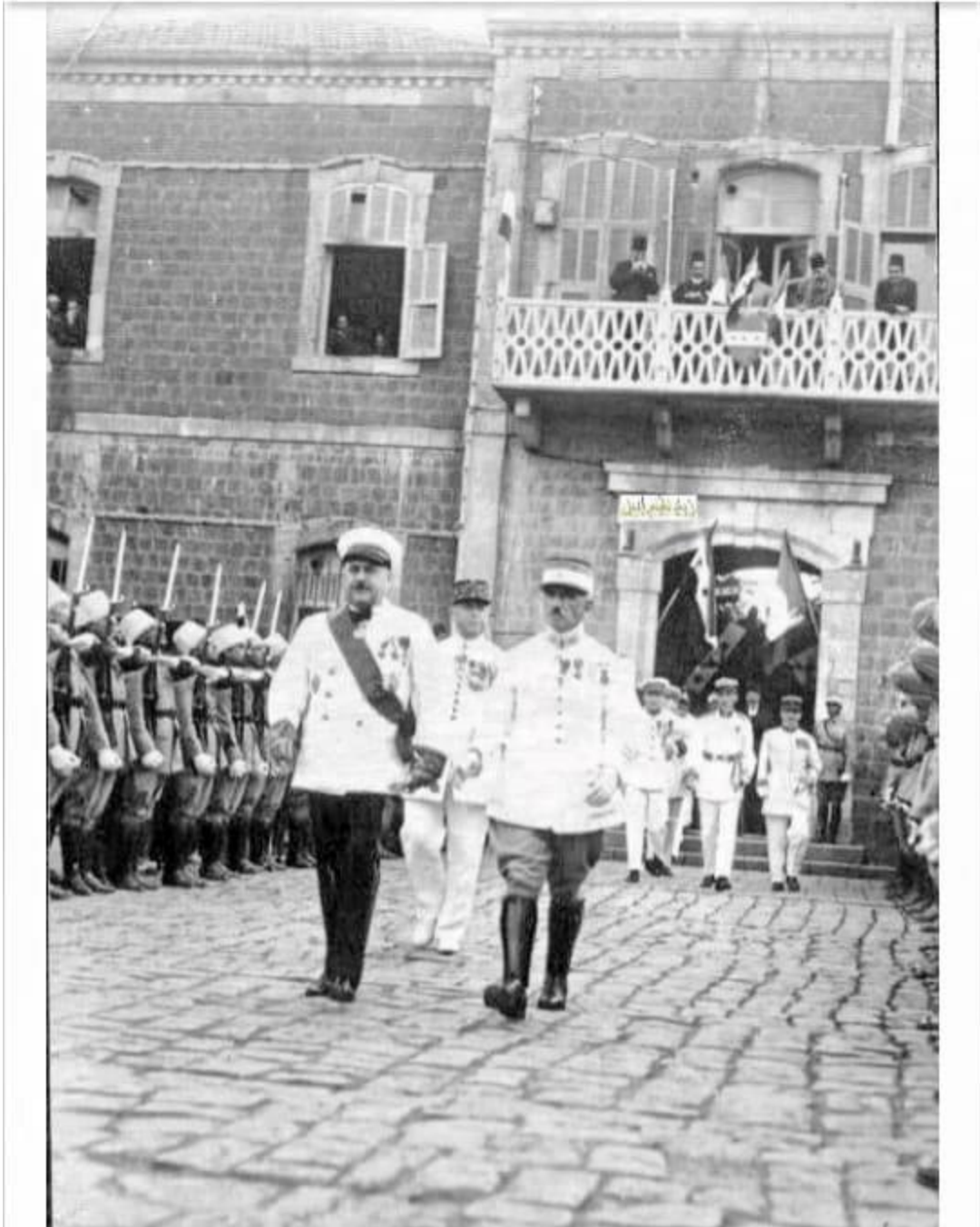


Figure 4.25: The Serail building at the New Clock Tower Square in the city of Homs during the French Mandate [delcampe.net]

On the other hand, resistance has also been happening in and around the Square. For example, in Al-Farah Café, rebels met to plan and discuss how to resist French Colonialism (figure 4.26).¹³⁵ Another example is the Old Clock Tower neighboring Square, which is referred to sometimes as the Martyrs Square due to the executions by the French that used to happen there. In 1946, after many years of resistance, the Syrian army declared independence from the French at the New Clock Tower Square. Finally, the presence of the mosques close to the sites allowed people to draw memories of the premier public space in the Islamic city. It is in the mosque's flat non-hierarchical courtyard where people used to gather for praying, communal congregation, learning, and practicing democracy and decision-making.¹³⁶ Hence, the New Clock Tower Square acquired a central symbolic place in the people of Homs' collective memory because of the symbolism embedded in its surroundings.



Figure 4.26: A picture of resistant against the French occupation immortalized in the Al-Farah Café [zamanalwasl.net]

¹³⁵ Caption under the figure: A hanged image in Al-Farah Café of a fighter and revolutionary martyr called "Nazir Al-Nishiwati" who used to meet in this café with his revolutionary friends to plan how to resist the French occupier.

¹³⁶ Another historical example that further demonstrate the a government acting on a selected square as its stage, is when the French executed the opposers during their colonialism in the Marjeh Square in Syria in 1920. Syrians defied the message by taking up the role of the courageous who embraced the square and considered it as a podium to show off their martyred heroes. They even invented a folk songabout this "stage" that has been passed down for generations. It is evident -as in the clock tower square- how the actors are constantly trying to define their role and be in charge of the play's plot.

Other state and city national events and celebrations associated with the Square and its surroundings include the annual celebration of the anniversary of Jerusalem’s liberation of 1187 at the New Clock Tower Square;¹³⁷ a speech given at the Square by charismatic president Jamal Abd Al-Nasser, during the union of Egypt and Syria (1958-1961)(figure 4.27);¹³⁸ and a vast crowd of people gathered at the Square in 1960 at the funeral of the Syrian President Shoukri Qoutli—whom the street is named after him (figure 4.28).¹³⁹ It was the arena where the people of Homs gathered, as they waited for their expatriate families and friends to arrive in the city (figure 4.29).



Figure 4.27: The charismatic president Jamal Abd Al-Nasser giving a speech given at the New Clock Tower Square in 1958 [syrmh.com]

¹³⁷ فيصل شيخاني, حمص عبر التاريخ: معالم و أعلام [Homs throughout History: Landmarks and Figures].

¹³⁸ فيصل شيخاني.

¹³⁹ فيصل شيخاني.



Figure 4.28: A side of the funeral of the late venerable President Hashem Bey Al-Atassi in the early sixties in Al-Qawatli Street, while the mourners were heading to Khaled bin Al-Walid Mosque [delcampe.net]



Figure 4.29: The people of Homs in the New Clock Tower Square welcoming the expatriates and celebrating them [syrmh.com]

Using Lefebvre, we can see how such historical symbolic elements and memories allow the space to be lived and experienced.¹⁴⁰ They also empower that space to reimagine a new order for the existing structural relations.¹⁴¹ In the same way, the New Clock Tower square was able to impose a new order in the old city of Homs during the unique moment of the revolution. Despite that, during the Ba'ath ruling (1963-2011), the Square lost its public and political dimensions; in 2011, it was used as a gathering space and the center of iconic protests. Borrowing from Harvey's, people of Homs registered their right to the city into the New Clock Tower Square when they practiced the right of projecting their collective imaginations and memories onto the city's fabric.¹⁴² The New Clock Tower Square became the political space where people invented and practiced new political actions. Since then, Homs has been called the "Capital of Revolution." The preference for this space as a convenient meeting point for all protests belongs to the Square's significant physical and symbolic qualities.

4.3 Urban Performance

Urban performance refers to the acts that reclaimed and reappropriated an urban public space during conflict times (see section 2.4). In this sense, reclaiming New Clock Tower Square as a public space took an evolutionary approach to spatial experience. New functions of the Square were adopted based on people's acts in the space during the Syrian revolution of 2011. These performative acts were conducted in the space, such as acts of expression, praying, social media use, and encampment.

4.3.1 Act of Expression

During the revolution's early days, New Clock Tower Square protestors showed unprecedented revolutionary acts and vivid actions. For the first time in 48 years, people were in charge of their Square, and they performed acts of organization and administration. Groups were formed to take turns serving and regulating the Square and ensuring no armed protestors joined (figure 4.30). People avoided performances that might develop violent acts of expression. Tens of thousands verbally declared themselves a single body of Syrian citizens in the New Clock Tower Square by chanting, "One! One! Syrian people are one!" Since the earliest days of the revolution, the people had been stressing two expressions in the uprising, as being, peaceful and a national public identity (figure 4.31).

¹⁴⁰ Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith, *The Production of Space*.

¹⁴¹ Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith.

¹⁴² Harvey, "The Right to the City."

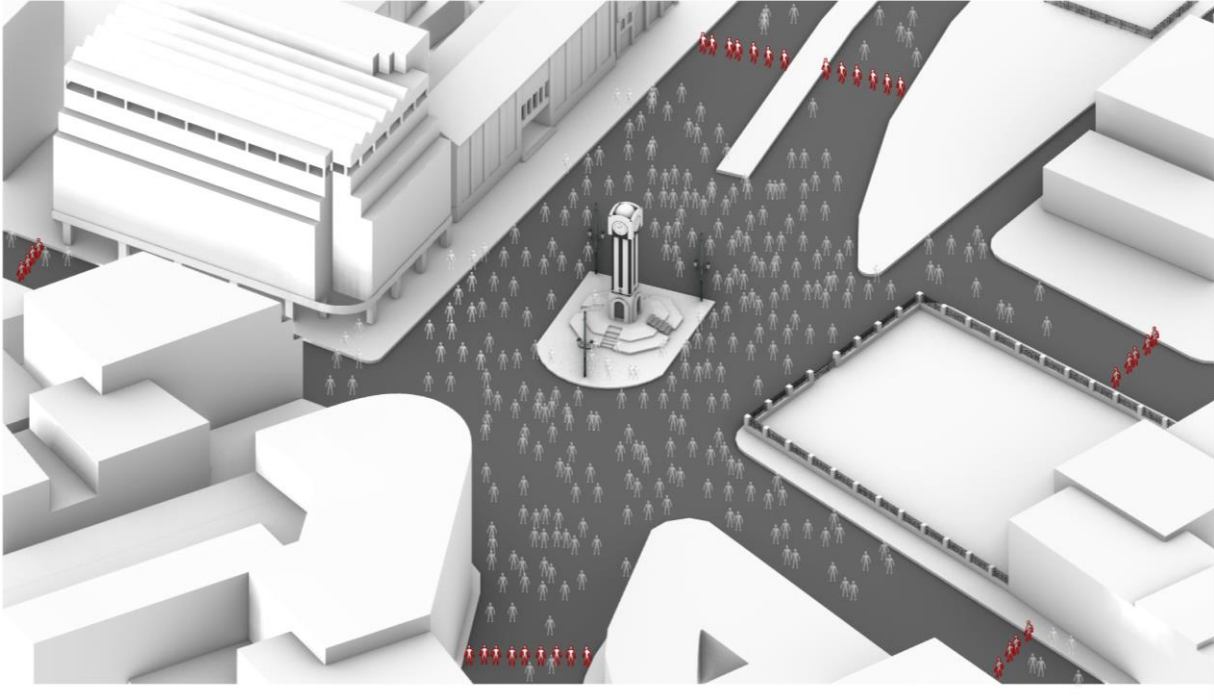


Figure 4.30: Groups were formed to take turns serving and regulating the Square and ensuring no armed protestors were joining [author]



Figure 4.31: Huge sign emphasizing the peaceful intention of the protest [syacd.org/]

Another instance of exposure to inclusive socio-political discourses presenting Homs as a diverse but united society is when Al-Hamidiyeh Street residents of the Christian majority sprinkled rice and water to show their support and empathy to the protestors during their journey. Protestors traveled from the mosque to the cemetery to bury martyrs from the previous day of demonstrations. (figure 4.32)



Figure 4.32: Al-Hamedieyh Street residents of the Christian majority sprinkled rice and water to show their support and empathy to the protestors when they were marching through the street.

Demonstrations also featured space adaption through social and political performances through the banners. Protesters held signboards as a mode of expression without censorship and regardless of class, race, or gender (figure 4.33). They also expressed their refusal of the regime by tearing down the big-scale images of the president filling up the Square (figure 4.34). This experience of having the opportunity to exercise rights in the city without fear and participate equally in the decision-making was new to Homs. By preparing the banners, people expressed their political demands, regime criticism, martyrs memorialization, and cherishing the Arab Spring. These social and political acts have become transformative for a space that has not witnessed collective decision-making and unified representation for decades. In this sense, the New Clock Tower Square was transformed from a profane space owned by the state to a sacred space owned by the people.



Figure 4.33: Protesters holding signboards as a mode of expression [zamanalwasl.net]



Figure 4.34: Tearing up the big-scale images of presidents Hafez and Bashar Al-Assad at the New Clock Tower Square [zamanalwasl.net]

The expressive performance at the Square had various shapes and kinds, including the repetitive chanting, the expressive revolutionary signboards, and the coordination of people's actions in perfect synchrony, the crowds' movement in harmony, and the different geometry they formed in the square (figure 4.35). These configurations and patterns of change reflected the imagined public Square in the mind of the people of Homs.

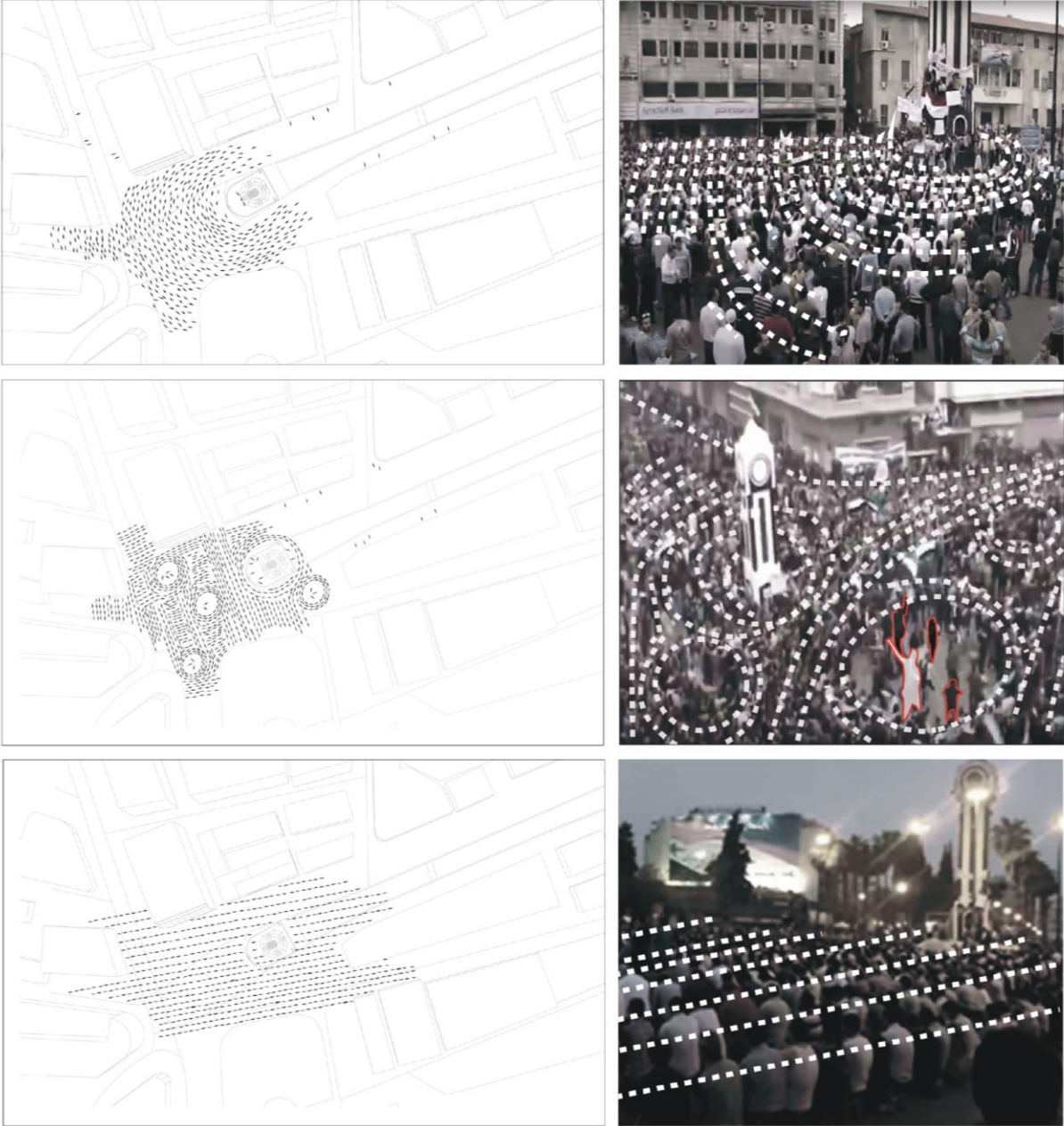


Figure 4.35: Geometric traces of the crowds' movement on the scale of the Square. Top illustration is while protesting as one group, middle illustration is while protesting in smaller groups, and bottom illustration is while praying [author]

4.3.2 Praying

The Mosque is the most critical institution in Islamic communities. It is the place that gives the feeling of belonging and reflects the Islamic identity. Throughout Islamic history, the Mosque has played fundamental roles besides being the place of performing prayer. Sometimes it is referred to as the “Madrassa” -meaning the school- when it hosts larger learning circles and study groups. This mixed-use building is also a place for rest, shelter for the homeless, a source of water, social gatherings, political discussions, marriage and funeral rituals, and many more.¹⁴³ In short, the mosque was the premier public space in the Islamic city. It is the equivalent of the agora in the ancient Greek city and the Public Square in the medieval Western city.¹⁴⁴ All five prayers are encouraged to be performed in the Mosque. However, for men, the Friday prayer is obligatory to be prayed congregationally in the Mosque. These incentives for people to visit the Mosque assured continuous flow of people in the space while endorsing connection. Thus, the Mosques were the community center where news was shared and political life was discussed.

The Syrian regime recognized the political power of the Mosques and their capacity to provoke democracy and socio-political discourses. Therefore, politics were spatially segregated from the mosque (not allowed in it) during the Ba’ath rule. Moreover, to tighten its grip on mosques, the secret police of Al-Mukhabarat spread across every mosque in the city. Any form of gathering, whether one-to-one meetings or bigger groups, were suspicious and may pose one subject to liability.¹⁴⁵ The state also controlled mosques by selecting the Imams (who preach and lead the prayers) based on their obedience and loyalty to the regime. They imposed united sermon¹⁴⁶ topics in all the country’s mosques which focused on defending the regime to coercively assert political support.¹⁴⁷

In this respect, it is possible to illustrate the Mosque’s fundamental role when reclaimed during the Syrian revolution. Firstly, the Mosques in Homs were transformed spatially into places for organization and mobilization, to assemble and protest against the regime. The congregational prayer at the Mosque, followed by a sermon, was an incentive to mobilize and protest. Secondly, the role of the mosque can also be seen through the people’s recognition of the symbolic link between the political act of protesting and the religious act of praying. Therefore, protestors would plan their massive demonstrations following the prayers, knowing that it is more convenient to mobilize and participate in the protests when people are gathered to pray. This linkage was evident in Homs when we trace the protest routes and gathering points that the mosques are where people initiated protests. The final destination for protesting would be New Clock Tower Square (4.36). Thirdly, by praying in the Square and performing spatial resistance, people are mimicking the qualities of the mosque being a socio-political hub of democracy.

¹⁴³ Ahmed Radwan, “The Mosque as a Public Space in the Islamic City -an Analytical Study of Architectural & Urban Design of Contemporary Examples,” January 5, 2021.

¹⁴⁴ Grabar Oleg, “The Architecture of the Middle Eastern City from Past to Present: The Case of the Mosque,” in *Middle Eastern Cities*, ed. Ira M. Lapidus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 26–46.

¹⁴⁵ Rabbat, “The Arab Revolution Takes Back the Public Space.”

¹⁴⁶ The Friday sermon is the formal occasion for public preaching in which the preacher addresses not only religious topics, but also current political discourse, and gives interpretations of current events.

¹⁴⁷ The regime selective process of Imams is to insure no revolutionary or objectifying sermons are performed. Instead, preaching has been working on silencing the people and making them accept their unfortunate circumstances and reality under the pretext of religion. Recalling here Karl’s Max theory that sometimes religion can be “the opium of the people.”

Collective praying in the New Clock Tower Square was performed as a religious expression during the political opposition. It provoked a stronger sense of purpose and, therefore, of space ownership. By tracing the aerial imageries of the Square during prayer time, a certain repetitive geometry appears in the Square, indicating unity in the performance (figure 4.36). This geometry is formed by the coordination of people’s actions in perfect synchrony and their formation of straight lines of prayer in a short time. In this sense, religious practice was fundamental to achieving social unity in the Square. Praying together was a statement of solidarity in confronting the regime. The rows of protestors formed during the prayers revealed its significance in the space it occupied, the time it endured, and the meanings and symbols it performed.

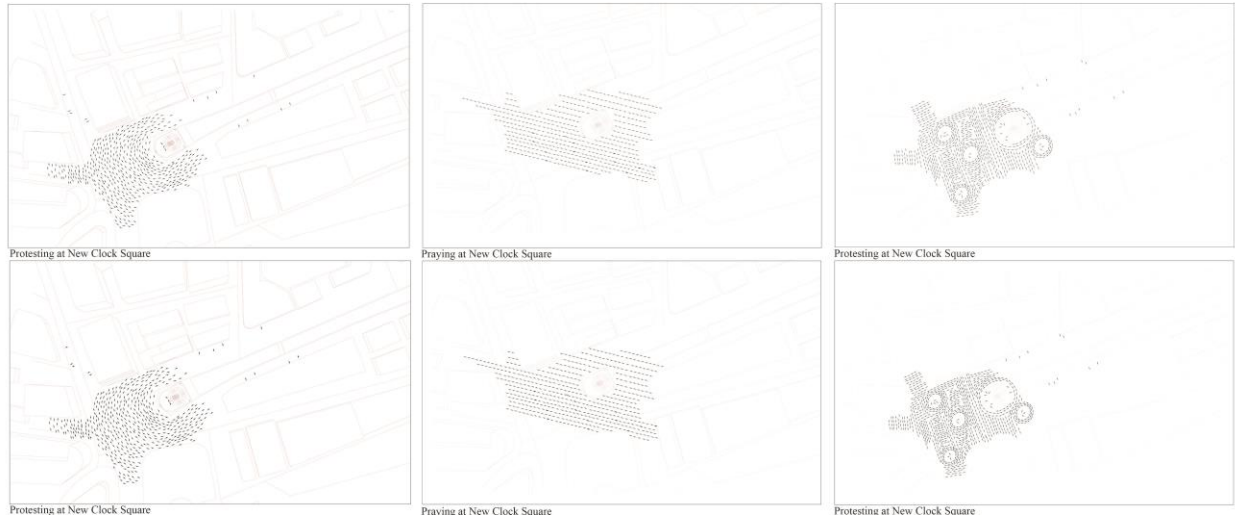


Figure 4.36: Repetitive geometry of protesting and praying appears in the New Clock Tower Square [author]

The New Clock Tower Square crowds comprised various religious communities, as the Sunnis and Christians were all a part of the Syrian revolution of 2011. This diversity of the mobilized crowds conveyed to the international community that the revolution was going beyond merely being a religious slogan driven by a particular religious movement. The different ideologies and religious profiles played a major role in rendering the space sacred. This is particularly important in a country of various sectors like Syria, where people come together to defeat the regime regardless of their sector or religion. This unifying performance occurred in the vital location of the New Clock Tower Square in Homs.

4.3.3 Social Media Use

Social media use and coverage are other performative acts analyzed while investigating how the New Clock Tower Square was reclaimed during the Syrian revolution. Many scholars have associated social media's power with mass protest power upon the recent wave of uprisings. Butler associates the activation of Tahrir Square in Egypt with the interaction of the crowds physically through their bodies' presence and virtually through digital media.¹⁴⁸ Nezar AlSayyed has explored the geography of urban uprising during the Arab Spring, focusing on the relationship between the virtual and physical dimensions. To do so, he analyzed the relationship between social media, traditional media, and the urban spaces

¹⁴⁸ Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street."

where the uprisings took place.¹⁴⁹ He argues that “social media successfully transformed the traditional forms of protest and claim-making among people and increasingly led to the direct political involvement of ordinary political citizens in countries where such involvement had rarely existed.”¹⁵⁰ AlSayyad concludes that social media has become a subversive apparatus in articulating politics and reappropriating urban space.¹⁵¹

In Syria, the Syrian regime also put media ownership and content under surveillance. They were state-owned and used to spread fabricated public opinion campaigns. However, during the revolution’s early days, an influx of photos, videos, posts, and tweets was circulating through social media, describing conditions and events and creating a new form of activism. Social media was the New Clock Tower Square’s primary source of event coverage. Hence, using social media to organize and communicate political messages, albeit by anonymous nicknames, was a performative act of resistance and encountering the state’s control over media. In addition to delivering the protest news, social media was used to direct the crowds in the physical space. For example, Twitter was most convenient for tweeting about rapid changes and collective decision-making (figure 4.37-38), whereas the Facebook platform was used to create events, plan for the demonstration, and create weekly online polls to choose the name of the demonstrations (figure 4.39). On the other hand, YouTube was a tool to document and mainstream the protest to the global audience.

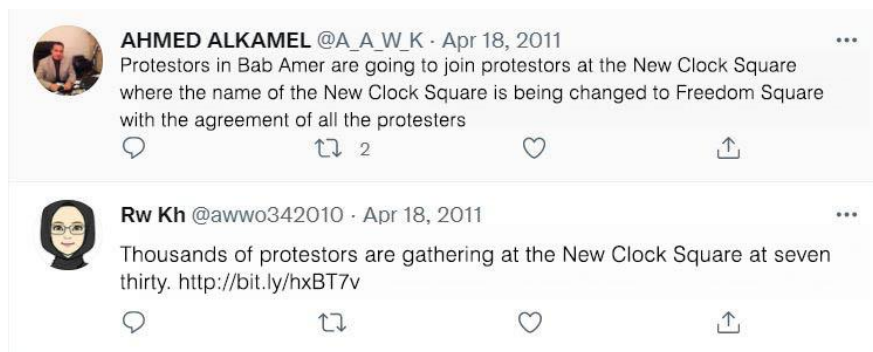


Figure 4.37: Evident screenshots from Twitter showing the use of the platform to share instant movement updates [twitter]



Figure 4.38: Evident screenshots from Twitter showing the use of the platform to make a collective decision-making [twitter]

¹⁴⁹ Nezar AlSayyad and Muna Guvenc, “Virtual Uprisings: On the Interaction of New Social Media, Traditional Media Coverage and Urban Space during the ‘Arab Spring,’” *Urban Studies* 52, no. 11 (2015): 2018–34.

¹⁵⁰ AlSayyad and Guvenc.

¹⁵¹ AlSayyad and Guvenc.



Figure 4.39: Screenshot from Facebook showing the use of the platform to create the protesting event and choosing its name [facebook.com]

4.3.4 Encampment

The inseparable relationship between protesting and public squares invokes a new perspective of thinking about the Squares, for instance the notion of encampment—a terminology that combines an act and a space (see section 2.4.2). Similar to how the Egyptians demonstrated the formation of an alternative political order, the people of Homs also occupied the urban space to undermine its power and authority. This occupation act is known as the protest camp (see section 2.4.2).

To camp is to live temporarily in the outdoors,¹⁵² whether for 18 days like in Tahrir Square, or a day like the New Clock Tower Square. Consequently, it is argued that similar to how the camp at Tahrir Square was a “temporary and tactical practice of territoriality, controlling and ordering space,”¹⁵³ the New Clock Tower Square’s temporality lasted for only 24 hours, yet it was enough to control and reorder the space. Given that relative to the brutal oppression and killing of civilians, the courage and effect of the people’s camping in the New Clock Tower square were comparable to that of other places where the camps lasted longer. In other words, although the time frame of the New Clock Tower Square camp was shorter, the Syrian state’s response in attacking, killing, and dismantling was equivalent to -and even surpassed- the

¹⁵² 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/camp>.

¹⁵³ Ramadan, “From Tahrir to the World: The Camp as a Political Public Space.”

brutality of the Egyptian regime forces. The Square during that day was no longer a space for suppression but a public space for transformative political order.

Although Tahrir Square showed the most dramatic political change, both camps were standalone orders surrounded by a crowd of people, politics, and technologies independent from their environment and had their own systems. Despite being enslaved in the surrounding state, both camps successfully penetrated the regime's grasp and continued to spread out. The union of bodies, media, and the camp is what drove the people to political change and new order in this, using Ramadan's words, space-in-process.

Relatively to the notion of the space-in-process, and borrowing from Hanna Arendt,¹⁵⁴ Butler reconsiders the space of appearance as a space that cannot simply be separated from the public body -and its acts- that brought it into being.¹⁵⁵ The presence of bodies in New Clock Tower square not only asserted to ordinary people their denied rights but, most significantly, allowed the performance of new spatiality through which people decisively took hold of an already established space permeated by existing power.¹⁵⁶ In this wresting match of power control, the Square becomes a space-in-process or a space-in-becoming, to create lasted for only 24 hours, yet it was enough a new space.

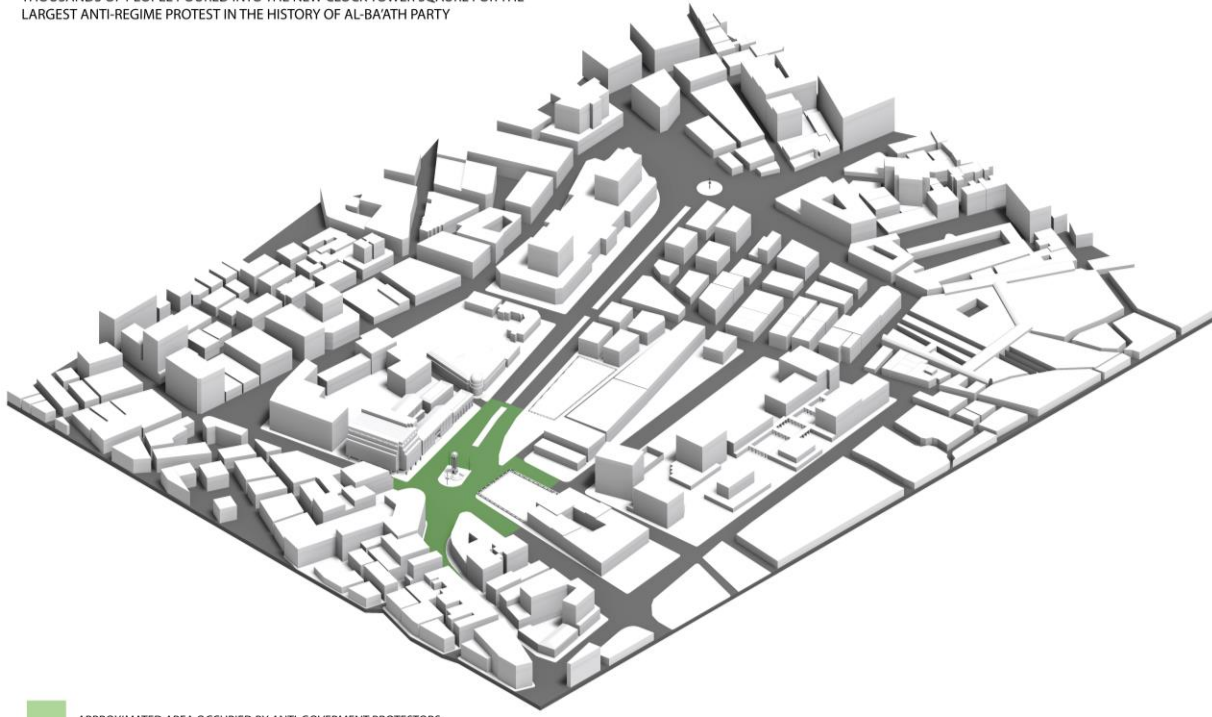
In the Syrian context, the regime was determined not to allow the protest camp in any part of Syria, including Homs. Therefore, on April 18, 2011, the New Clock Tower Square camp was cleared violently (figure 4.40-43). A massacre was made in it, and hundreds of people were killed in less than an hour. People of Homs lost access to their Square, checkpoints were set along roads leading to it, and the space was militarized again until today.

¹⁵⁴ Hannah Arendt's critical idea regarding political action is called the 'space of appearance.' Arendt argues that the space of appearance must be continually recreated by action; its existence is secured whenever actors gather to discuss and deliberate about matters of public concern, and it disappears when these activities stop. Full discussion available at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/arendt/>

¹⁵⁵ Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street."

¹⁵⁶ Butler.

THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE Poured INTO THE NEW CLOCK TOWER SQUARE FOR THE LARGEST ANTI-REGIME PROTEST IN THE HISTORY OF AL-BA'ATH PARTY



APPROXIMATED AREA OCCUPIED BY ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTESTORS

Figure 4.40: Thousands of people poured into the New Clock Tower Square for the largest anti-regime protest in the history of Al-Ba'ath Party [author]

REGIME FORCES STARTED TO APPEAR IN THE OLD CLOCK TOWER SQUARE



Figure 4.41: Regime forces starting to appear in the Old Clock Tower Square [author]

REGIME FORCES ATTACKED THE PROTESTORS AT THE NEW CLOCK TOWER SQUARE

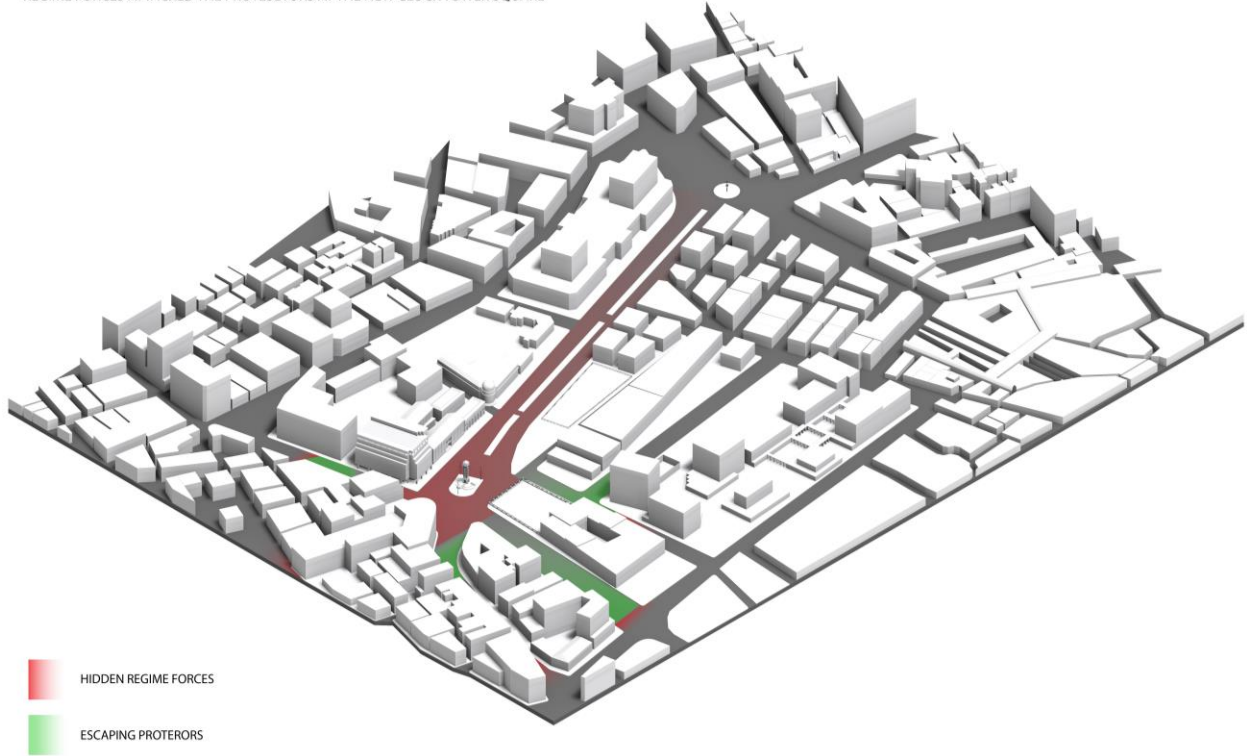


Figure 4.42: Regime forces attacked the protestors at the New Clock Tower Square [author]

REGIME FORCES OCCUPIED THE NEW CLOCK TOWER SQUARE

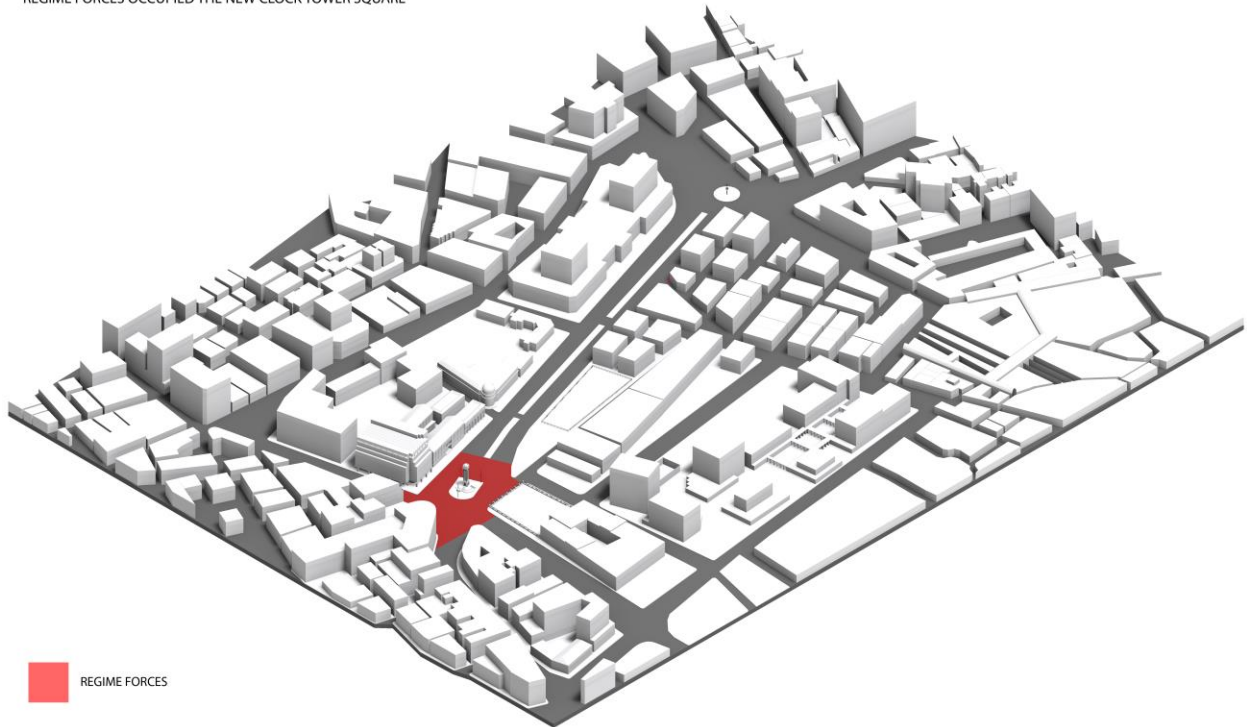


Figure 4.43: Regime forces occupied the New Clock Tower Square [author]

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter provided a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics and performative acts in the New Clock Tower Square during the early days of the Syrian revolution of 2011 (figure 4.44). Through its physicality and symbolism analysis, it became clear that the New Clock Tower Square encourages certain acts and interactions. Borrowing from Lefebvre, the New Clock Tower Square was able to impose a new order in the old city of Homs during the unique moment of the revolution due to its critical physical qualities and symbolic meanings. New Clock Tower Square, through these elements, acquired a revolutionary potential to perform acts of resistance and reimagine existing structural relations.



Figure 4.44: The dynamics and performative acts in the New Clock Tower Square during the early days of the Syrian revolution of 2011 [author]

Performing resistance became the manner of making a change and bringing a new order through appropriating spaces where people long struggled to practice collective power and decision-making. In this sense, protestors challenged the existing regime through performative acts in the New Clock Tower Square, such as the act of expression, the act of praying, the act of media coverage, and the act of encampment. In doing so, they introduced new orders and functions to the space, impacting its form and usage, leading to the eventually reclaiming of it.

The act of expression represented in chanting, singing, dancing, and carrying anti-government banners indicated new order in the Square and the beginning of the end for the existing regime. Whereas the act of praying added equality and solidarity attributes to the Square through performing unified acts as a collective body. Most importantly, the spatial requirements of praying, such as facing Al-Qibla, require necessary spatial organization in the space and impose spatial definition within the protest camp borders. People temporarily take control of the Square by performing spatial arrangement, praying simultaneously, and performing at the same tempo. This religious symbolism led to the transformation of the Square into a sacred space. The act of social media use produced new spatial modes to protest. New Clock Tower square was functioning physically as a stage for performative acts and virtually through digital media. It was the first time in the history of Homs that the crowds could interact collectively through the physical space, cyberspace, and social media sphere. Butler states that this association of the physical and digital

dimensions is what reactivates public squares during conflict times. The act of encampment is seen as a temporary built environment that reflected the imagined public space in the minds of Syrians. The lived experience during the Square protest camp was apparent in the social unity, and the political discourses triggered between various religious groups. The protesters' urban acts are not simply an appropriation and reclamation of a physical space that they used to mobilize in. They are interventions that reproduce a new spatiality with different social and political orders.

Furthermore, urban performance embraces the New Clock Tower Square's physical and symbolic significance and fulfills its capacity to imagine an alternative order. Urban performance has also transformed the Square into an inclusive space, with equal access regardless of social grouping. Despite the regime's brutality, the mobilization of the public in the Square generated a feeling of collectivity among people. People felt strong enough to encounter and resist the Syrian regime.

As previously mentioned, in the early months of 2011, protesters were determined to persist in their revolution non-violently against the regime. Their performative acts of resistance were peaceful, engaging all groups of society. However, the protest camp in the New Clock Tower Square ended forcibly with a massacre, and hundreds of people died within an hour. Nevertheless, people still managed to gather and protest in other neighborhoods in Homs, while the Square and its New Clock Tower remained the primary public space and the symbol of gatherings and protests. People used to replicate the clock tower of the Sieged Square in their demonstrations as an act of resistance. The recreation of the New Clock tower in other neighborhoods in Homs while also spreading to other Syrian cities and the diaspora was bound to become an icon of the savagery and tragedy of the April 18, 2011 massacre. The New Clock Tower is now a symbol of resistance and liberation.

5 Conclusion

In Syria, the legacy of the intelligence service of Al-Mukhabarat severely impacted public spaces. The fact that these spaces were so often controlled resulted in losing the sense of urban space in the country. The New Clock Tower Square in Homs had been patrolled by the secret police of Al-Mukhabarat, and was even close to being destroyed for “modernization.” It was not until the beginning of the Syrian revolution of 2011 that the New Clock Tower Square was functioning again in the service of civil resistance.

This research aimed to understand why, during the revolution's early days, the people of Homs used the New Clock Tower Square as a space to gather, where they stood united to confront the government and claim their right to the city. In doing so, the thesis started by exploring the New Clock Tower space of Homs, both as a civic space and, within the context of Syria, as a public space that the government controls through its intelligence, Al-Mukhabarat. In this sense, the New Clock Tower Square was spatially analyzed throughout this research to investigate the mechanisms, motives, and reasons that caused such a change.

The theory of performativity by Butler was used in this research to expand on the spatial agency of the New Clock Tower Square in Homs. Performativity here inevitably exposes the transformative power of architecture and the ability to change and to be changed. In this context, performative architecture, as Leatherbarrow reminds us, represents the transition from what the building ‘is’ to what it ‘does.’¹⁵⁷ The Syrian state performed architectural acts of building and unbuilding to gain control of the Square. In return, the urban acts were performed by the people to reclaim and re-appropriate their Square.

State control started when the Ba’ath Party took power following a military coup in 1963. Homs has been transformed from a city with a defined character, pleasant settlement, and attractive religious and cultural destination to a neglected city. The construction and deconstruction projects in Syrian urban areas are implemented as part of a state-led master plan to slowly and silently change the demographic composition of Homs. Explicitly, there was Homs Dream, the neo-liberal master project purposing rebuilding the heritage city center, whereas implicitly, there were acts of sectarian urban planning, heritage neglect, and urbicide. As discussed in Chapter 3, these acts have been enforced in Homs to control people, consolidate the state’s authoritarian power, and eradicate socio-political diversity.

In reaction to the long years of the Syrian state performance, in 2011, the people of Homs used the New Clock Tower Square to protest and challenge the regime. While protesting, people performed many acts of resistance in the square space. They include acts of expression, praying, social media use, and encampment. These acts are performatives in the sense that they produced a series of effects, impacted the construction of the norms, and produced new identities as well as spatiality with different social and political orders.

Consequently, at 1:50 in the morning on April 18, 2011, the protest camp was forcibly and violently ended with live bullets for half an hour. The regime’s goal was to terrify and intimidate the people by the roar of warplanes breaking the sound barrier over the city’s neighborhoods and the roar of cars firing random bullets in all the streets of Homs. The following day, Homs announced its first civil disobedience and closed all its shops, announcing its mourning for the martyrs whose number was unknown then and remains unknown until today. In other words, what happened in the Square transcended the whole city of Homs.

¹⁵⁷ Leatherbarrow, “Architecture’s Unscripted Performance.”

The research also revealed two architectural dimensions of the New Clock Tower Square role in the moment of the revolution, the physical and the symbolic. The physical dimension includes the New Clock Tower itself and encompasses the unique urban configurations of the Square that were part of its role during the revolution. The Square has a high level of connectivity and centrality in the city, converging hundreds of thousands of people as part of their everyday lives. It has also been constantly surrounded by institutions of power from the Ottoman era to French Colonialism and, finally, the Ba'ath Party. Another clue of the New Clock Tower Square's architectural role is its spatial relevance to the Mosque which means an opportunity for mass mobilization in the Square.

The second dimension is symbolic, which interacts with the associated collective memory of the Square. It addressed the symbolic evolution of the Square from its first status to the moment of revolution when it was named Houriyya Square — translated as Liberation Square in Arabic— in reference to Tahrir Square in Cairo. Memories of the Square are conceived and carried exclusively in people's memories as they move through it, even with no remaining material trace (see section 4.2.2). They are memories of a once powerful and culturally rich city during the Ottoman era and of resistance and fighting during French Colonialism. However, when the Ba'ath Party came to power in 1963, the case was not much different from what it was during the French Colonial. The Syrian regime was dealing with the built environment in the same way the French colonials dealt with it. The Square, again, became under threat physically and symbolically due to the state's institutions of security and its overall approach to control and surveillance of public spaces.

One of the research's key findings is that the interrelation between these two dimensions allowed the New Clock Tower Square to prompt people to act in one way and the state in another. The Square's architecture, through its form, urban configuration, symbolism, and meaning, pushed different groups to think and act differently. In other words, the physical and symbolic dimensions were factors and parameters that created the atmosphere for action. They prompted certain acts in the city of Homs by the state to control and by the people to resist.

The significance of this research lies particularly in acquiring a new symbolic meaning to the New Clock Tower Square in relation to the state itself. Hence, when the people of Homs were banned from protesting at the New Clock Tower Square after the 18th of April, 2011, they tried to reconstruct it in other places. The square then carried a symbolism of resistance to the state itself. They replicated the New Clock Tower in other residential neighborhoods like Bab Houd and Al-Khaldyieh (figure 5.1-2). Not only that, but during the revolution, the Clock Tower started to appear in smaller protests in other cities like Aleppo, Derr Ezzour, and Idlib (figure 5.3-5). Tutorial videos on creating the Clock Tower model were quickly articulated through Youtube (figure 5.6). Soon, the New Clock Tower was replicated by all Syrians in memory of a space that has become public by the shared will of the people. Furthermore, when the people of Homs were displaced, models of the New Clock Tower started to appear in refugee camps like the Syrian refugee camp in Greece and other places in the diaspora (figure 5.7-8).



Figure 5.1: Replica of the New Clock Tower in Al-Khaldiyyeh neighborhood, Homs [enabbaladi.net]



Figure 5.2: Replica of the New Clock Tower in Bab Houd, Homs [enabbaladi.net]



مجسم ساعة حمص _ دوار الحلوانية بـ حلب _ تصوير شامل الأحمـد

Figure 5.3: Replica of the New Clock Tower at Al-Halwanyeh roundabout in Aleppo, Syria [Shamel Al-Ahmad]



Figure 5.4: Replica of the New Clock Tower in Derr Ezzour, Syria [screenshot from YouTube]



Figure 5.5: Celebrating the anniversary of the protest camp of April 18th in Homs by replicating the New Clock Tower in Idlib, Syria [EnabBaladi]



Figure 5.6: Replica of the New Clock Tower in Derr Ezzour, Syria [Screenshot from YouTube]



Figure 5.7: A replica of the Clock Tower in Homs, which became the city's most famous gathering point during anti-regime demonstrations in 2011, built in the Katsikas refugee camp, in Greece's Epirus region [opendemocracy.net]



Figure 5.8: The New Clock Tower in Greece Camp indicating a public space [opendemocracy.net]

Since public life in Syria has always been absent and forbidden under the rule of the Ba'ath party, when the New Clock Tower, as a physical object, acquired a new meaning of resistance, it became a national symbol. The clock tower was recreated inside and outside the country, mimicking liberation, resistance, and freedom (figure 5.9). From an architectural perspective, the New Clock Tower started with being part of the Square as the urban setting, then transformed into a symbolic object regardless of where it was put. It transcended and became a symbolic and cultural space for the people to voice their opinions.



Figure 5.9: The outspread of the New Clock Tower to other Syrian cities and other countries as a national symbol of resistance and liberation [author]

The analysis of the New Clock Tower Square's duality of performance during the early days of the revolution highlighted the role of architecture in converting the meaning of the Square from a space controlled by the state to a space owned by the people. Another finding of the thesis emerges when reading the socio-political and national contexts through architecture and urban forms, revealing that architecture and the urban form embed and reflect those political, national, and social conditions (the Alaweti dilemma, neoliberal economy, division in society, Al-Mukhabarat control, oppression, democracy, etc.).

My investigation was to affirm that the choice to protest at the New Clock Tower Square was not random; rather, there are specific reasons that materialized through architecture and urban settings. For the people, the urban setting of where the Square is located and its nearby architecture provoked resistance performances and democratic acts, whereas, for the state, it provoked acts of control and dominance. Therefore, architecture and the built environment, in general, are not simply a 'background' or a 'given stage' for actors; instead, they embody and are agents for change.

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Glossary

Ba'ath Party (n): the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party was a political party founded in 1964 in Syria. The party espoused Ba'athism, which is an ideology mixing Arab nationalist, pan-Arabism, Arab socialist, and anti-imperialist interests.

Mukhabarat (n): Arabic term for intelligence, as used by an intelligence agency. In most of the Middle East, the term is colloquially used in reference to secret police agents who spy on civilians.

Saha (n): an area of open land.

Souk (n): an Arab market or marketplace; a bazaar.

Alawites (n): an ethnoreligious group that lives primarily in the Levant and follows Alawism, a sect of Islam that originated from Shia Islam.

Performance (n): the act of performing.

Performativity (n): the ability to create and build something out of the act of performing.

Performative (adj.): an act that produces a series of effects.

Performative architecture (adj.): an intervention, performance, or event with transformative power and ability to leave spatial and social changes.