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The American University in Cairo

School of Humanities and Social Sciences (HUSS)

# **The People and Place of al-Hattaba: A Socio-Temporal Juncture**

A Thesis Submitted to

The Department of Sociology, Egyptology, Anthropology

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

The degree of Master of Arts/Science

By: Heba Mohamed El-Sawy

Under the supervision of Dr. Hanan Sabea

February 2020

*To Mama and Baba – always*

# Acknowledgments:

So here it is, my thesis for my masters in anthropology. This thesis is multiple things, but if I had to describe it in a word, I would say that this thesis is a *process*. It is part of an ongoing process of a personal intellectual project of exploring the in-between of anthropology and architecture. This process has humbled me, and although words will never be enough, I dedicate my acknowledgments to all those who showed me so much love and support, and gave me the strength to finish. This thesis could not have come into being without all of you.

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# Preface:

## Al-Hattaba

To introduce this work would mean to evoke a beginning, but how do I introduce a neighborhood and its becoming that has preceded me by over 800 years, a neighborhood whose rhythms, becomings, and histories are so intrinsically tied to each other and to greater Cairo? To evoke such a beginning, we would have to call on the multiple and complex relationships between actors' lifeworlds (Jackson, 2012) and their temporalities that are continuously intersecting. So, allow me to start with a preface that speaks to such intersecting fields that emerge in different experiences, spaces, and narrations. The first part of the preface describes an encounter which speaks to the coming together of different moments and that led to the "inception" or "beginning" that introduced me to al-Hattaba. The second part (which parallels the first) describes the currently unfolding violent events that threaten al-Hattaba's residents with eviction and al-Hattaba with demolition and erasure. I conclude the preface with a brief description of the focus of this thesis and the main questions it addresses.

I begin with an encounter where I found myself no longer in my own waters, but gradually feeling waves pushing me into the sea of al-Hattaba. It started with a conversation with one of the residents of al-Hattaba who clapped his hands to discuss the closure of the citadel gates and its repercussions on his own "lifeworld" (Jackson, 2012). The first clap (left hand to

right) was for when the new citadel door closed: this door was built in Mohamed Ali's reign, and was an entrance that was used for the citadel complex up until<sup>1</sup> the turn of the century, when the Ministry of Antiquities closed it off. The sequential clap (right hand to left) was for the event that immediately followed the closing of the gate. His father's liver sandwich cart that was placed at the Citadel gate had to close right after, as the *rizq*<sup>2</sup> of the cart was cut off with tourists no longer passing through the street. At this moment, I felt something pushing me into the lives of the people of al-Hattaba not only as an observer, but also as an engaged anthropologist and a trained architect, who has entered al-Hattaba through my association with Megawra Built Environment Collective (BEC). Megawra BEC is an NGO and a consultancy firm advocating for stopping the demolition of al-Hattaba and the eviction of its residents. In its engagement with al-Hattaba, Megawra BEC navigates many different institutional stakeholders who hold various perceptions of what al-Hattaba's future should be like; these range from the Ministry of Antiquities (M.O.A.), the Cairo Governorate (C.G.), the Informal Settlement Development Fund (I.S.D.F.), and the National Organization for Urban Harmony (N.O.U.H.). Megawra also has to navigate and work with the different interests and groups that reside in el-Hattaba, and how they envision their past, present and future, and negotiate with the different

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<sup>1</sup> I further discuss this door and its closing in Chapter 1.

<sup>2</sup> Rizq: And Arabic word that is defined as anything that brings about a goodness or blessing.

governmental entities. At Megawra, I work in the urban program, specifically on the team that works on and advocates for al-Hattaba. This thesis then reflects these multiple positions in my relationships in al-Hattaba and my attempts to explore the lives of its people. It is based on inter-subjective encounters and conversations that detail people's lives, histories, and associations much as they intersect with my own subjectivity, history, and associations.

This then brings me to the second part, which parallels the first, as it describes the delicate, volatile, and violent unfolding of events that is occurring to and in al-Hattaba, a neighborhood that is located at the citadel's wall. This is a neighborhood that houses over "500 families and about 2000 inhabitants", and is considered a buffer zone to the citadel with an urban fabric that speaks to a different time and place that has managed to survive, rupture and challenge our own perceptions of mainstream urban planning trends (Built Environment Collective – Megawra, 2018). Al-Hattaba is categorized as a level two informal settlement, which means that it is an informal settlement in need of re-planning. The repercussions of this administrative category by the Informal Settlement Development Fund<sup>3</sup> entails eviction, demolition, and removal, as has been witnessed in other neighborhoods in Cairo, such as 'Arab Yassar, and Gezirat el-Warraq. Attempts to restructure el-Hattaba from an urban planning

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<sup>3</sup> In Chapter 1 I describe the different institutions and the repercussions of their laws and legal frameworks on al-Hattaba.

perspective are not novel, but rather speak to a longer history of interventions, both directly and indirectly as I detail in Chapter One. For years, al-Hattaba residents lived through many facades of precarity, vulnerability and threat of displacement. Nonetheless, what their histories and spaces reveal are multiple ways of navigating overarching structures of power, with various possibilities for different residents, some of whom succumbing to the forces of capital and the state, others maintaining their lives even if at the risk of living in ruins, while some more move in and out of el-Hattaba in search for meaningful lives. Thus al-Hattaba has become different places and dwellings, at different moments of time, and all these transformations and relationships are interpreted differently by different actors and systems of power.

This would then lead us to ask what makes al-Hattaba different, yet at the same time mirroring certain moments found in different neighborhoods and lifeworlds? There are differences and commonalities, not just in the name, but also in the experiences and nodes that can be linked to other neighborhoods such as 'Arab Yassar, and Gezirat el-Warraq, among others. They parallel each other in that they are living in this moment of precarity and threat of removal, and they share the violence of such a moment, but the degree and experiences of violence varies from neighborhood to the other. Furthermore, there are other events and experiences they do not share, and I cannot compare nor say that they are the same, that make each of these neighborhoods different. Among other things, al-Hattaba is not only defined as a level two informal settlement, but it is also classified as a buffer zone to a historic site, the Citadel. Hence the nexus of institutions and the possibilities for challenging the demolition and

eviction are different, as I detail in chapter one. Additionally, I believe that it is through al-Hattaba's particular history, and its own becoming through time that makes for such a difference and allows for each place and people to engage the larger processes of removal and eviction in their own ways. There is something to be learnt from the experiences of el-Hattaba and its people, because the threat of removal dates back at least to the 1970's. Hence, it is since the 1970's that al-Hattaba was able to navigate through such turbulence and precarity and it is these navigations that constitute the subjects of the chapters to follow that range from the closure of communal ovens, to the demolition of houses, to the overlay of fast and slow crafts.

In this thesis, I focus on rhythms of change and the experiences of temporality in the everyday as entry points into al-Hattaba and its people. The times of al-Hattaba cannot be reduced nor contained into a linear progression of events; but rather people's experiences are temporally thick and multiplicitous, constituted in practices and relationships that traverse the past and anticipations of the future, narrated through the lived experiences of the present. Al-Hattaba and its people are thus constantly in a process of becoming (Deleuze and Guattari 1987)<sup>4</sup>. And in becoming, and navigating our everyday, and in being alive, there is a fluidity that

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<sup>4</sup> "Becoming" is a concept that Deleuze and Guttari (1987) describe in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* that is based on the idea that we are active producers in the ongoing process of our own production, and that we are an ongoing culmination of all of our current and previous engagements from our being in the world and our interactions with it

allows for possibilities that slip a reduction of time to a flat plane or linear progression. There is a process in the making of time that is constituted in our practices of time. I demonstrate how al-Hattaba reveals through an analysis of rhythms (speed, slowness, intensity) and experiences of duration (how time and its depth is experienced as long, short, near, distant, simultaneous, heterogeneous) many possibilities that can emerge and how people's practices can change, alter, or challenge plans of urban renewal or development. This is what then allows me to describe the thesis as an exploration of the complex, ordinary, yet paradoxical relationship al-Hattaba and its people have with time, and how such a multiplicitous relationship has shaped the way the residents navigate and maneuver through disruptive events (such as classifications as level two area, or the laws that prohibit the maintenance of homes as detailed in chapter one) that threaten their everyday, histories, and futures. The way in which residents navigate their lives takes on many different manifestations, but a common thread through all of these navigations is the making of their everyday through a reworking of their relationship with time, space, and the social. Their relationship with time is evident in their oral histories, architecture of their homes, crafts, ovens, photographs, the urban fabric of their streets, their relationship with the historic monuments that surround them, and the Citadel and Citadel gate. This relationship with time is also marked in their daily interactions with each other, with different governmental institutions, and with Megawra BEC as well as other places outside of al-Hattaba to which el-Hattaba residents are connected.

Throughout the writing of this thesis, my companions have included interlocutors from al-Hattaba, who have become my friends; my coworkers and friends from Megawra; and the works of Henri Lefebvre, Deleuze and Guattari, and Pierre Bourdieu, who have helped guide me in how al-Hattaba's complex relationship with time and history affects its precarity, stability, and endurance, and how people deploy time and space to create and navigate life.

I conclude this preface by asking you, the reader, what is the beginning? How does one introduce the beginning of their fieldwork in al-Hattaba? Should I begin with the historical archives which date al-Hattaba back to 800 years? Was it when my friend and interlocutor clapped his hands? When May al-Ibrashy, the director of Megawra BEC, asked me in a car ride to join a workshop on a place called al-Hattaba? When the graffiti found on the historic mausoleum named al-Shurafa smiled back at me? You tell me: What is a beginning?



I don't know where to begin with Hattaba, but let us start here. I don't know what it is about this place, its quirks, its walls, the tempo, the rhythm of walking through its fabric, the children that are curious, the relationship to the citadel, I don't know but what I am trying to say is that it has layers. Layers of ~~an~~ history from different times, and places manifested in the most peculiar way. — how the — digging & unravelling the layers of time of how this place came to be, with its people, contemporary & historic home, animals, and relationship to the citadel & citadel wall

what of time, & how unsteady Hattaba's history & relationship of people with the place, place with people, monuments, animals, all play in the becoming of the place

↳ and how angle of time, and this relationship w/ time & its fluid relationship both sides & protect this place from the threat of removal.

time is not linear  
time is fluid

- removal of sleep
- quirky graffiti on stone wall
- citadel wall
- paradoxical relationship of both protectors & endangerment to the place



# I. Introduction:

## Rhythms of Time, Method, and Rebounding

*“It is wrong to chide the novel for being fascinated by mysterious coincidences... but it is right to chide man for being blind to such coincidences in his daily life. For he thereby deprives his life a dimension of beauty.”*  
(Kundera, 1999, p. 52)

Milan Kundera (1999) in the *Unbearable Lightness of Being* describes to us the mystery of coincidences, and how in turning away from such coincidences one is depriving her life a dimension of beauty (Kundera, 1999). However, we must ask ourselves: What is a coincidence? Is it simply a concurrence of what might seem to be unrelated events? A rupture in the imposed presumption of the linearity of time? A passing metaphor in the novel of our lives? I believe it is all of those things and more, but I also believe that in ignoring coincidences one is not only depriving oneself of a dimension of beauty, but also of the poetics of living. And anthropology to me, is about being in the world, and the study of life. Life, which is not only about beauty, but also disappointments, sadness, joy, and all of those experiences compounded. In being sensitive to such coincidences, one also becomes sensitive and open to life and open to the potential enmeshments with the world.

This thesis is multiple things, it is an anthropological study on life, but more specifically on life that takes place in a neighborhood located in Historic Cairo called al-Hattaba, and the life that is unfolding there. Al-Hattaba is attached to the Citadel wall, and records show that it is over 800<sup>5</sup> years old. It is a neighborhood whose residents are constantly living with the threat of eviction and removal. As life continues to unfold in such turbulence and precarity, this thesis offers an exploration of the complex, ordinary, yet paradoxical relationship al-Hattaba has with experiences of time, and how such a multiplicitous relationship has shaped the way the residents navigate and maneuver through disruptive events that threaten their everyday, histories, and futures. Furthermore, I attempt to explore how this relationship is manifested through “rhythms”, as Henri Lefebvre (2004) describes in his book *Rhythmanalysis*, that come together to make al-Hattaba.

In this introduction, I delve into the theory that formed my conceptual framework, and then my methods of research and exploration, including thinking through paint. The theory and the method, together with my being in al-Hattaba, allowed me to explore the main research question of how al-Hattaba’s complex, paradoxical, yet ordinary relationship with time is

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<sup>5</sup> I state 800 years repeatedly throughout this paper, and it is probably even older and as old as the Cairo citadel which was first built during Salah al-Din’s reign” which is around the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century (Rabbat, 1995, p.18). However, a question that is carried throughout the thesis is: how do we give quantify the age a neighborhood that has a becoming that parallels the whole of Cairo?

manifested in practices, spaces, architecture, oral narratives, negotiations with authorities, reliving the past through objects, reworking relationships with neighbors, relatives, and friends, among others. In other words, this thesis reflects an enmeshment that occurred during the process of relating to el-Hattaba and its residents, an enmeshment with theory and method, and the encounters with life histories that were shared. In such enmeshments there were coincidental moments, that cannot simply be labeled as coincidences, but as *rebounds* that occurred from my being in the field, living life, and being exposed to all of the lifeworlds of the people of al-Hattaba. I listened also to what I call rebounds in the narrations of people about what had happened and how they make relations between happenings in the past and how they recur in the present, sometimes subtly, sometimes more clearly articulated as recurrences of that what happened before, but with the inflection of the new context. I use rebounds not only as mere coincidences of happenings of a then and a now, or a here and a there. Rebounds are different as they exude the sensibility of a recurrence, as if time has stopped and we are thrown back into a different moment, or a space, or a relationship. Rebounds condense temporality and sense of duration; they index relations that take us back time and again to particular moments, spaces, relations to signify a connection that refuses to be erased by the progression of linear chronological time. I use the rebounds or recurrences that I and others in al-Hattaba experienced to organize the narration of the stories that comprise this thesis. I conclude this introduction with the rebound experiences, and how these rebounds guided the different temporal patterns

felt in al-Hattaba, and how these temporal patterns inform the organization of different chapters of this thesis.

## Rhythms of Time and Theory//

It is not a coincidence that my exposure to theory such as Henri Lefebvre, Deleuze and Guattari, and Pierre Bourdieu went hand in hand with my enmeshment in the spaces of al-Hattaba and the lives of its people. These writers then became my companions and their teachings became part of the lens with which I experienced al-Hattaba. As Avner Segall (2001) argues in *“Critical Ethnography and the Invocation of the Voice: from the Field/in the Field - Single Exposure Double Standard”* there are multiple voices in the field, voices with people we are engaging with in the field, and also voices from theoreticians (Segall, 2001, p.579). Furthermore, this notion of voices is interesting as, there is a problematic that can occur when some voices (theoreticians for example) are given more emphasis than the voices of others (interlocutors in the field for example). However, I emphasize in this thesis that the voices of my interlocutors, of my peers, theoreticians such as Lefebvre and Bourdieu were all different voices that were part of the field, and are part of the writing process.

Pierre Bourdieu (1997) in *“Social Being, Time, and the Sense of Existence”* argues that practice is not in time, but makes time” (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 207). Thus, it is in practice, in living, in being alive, that time is made. Bourdieu emphasizes how time is an intrinsic part of our

everyday, and thus is complex, and is not something that can be flattened, distorted into a linearity, or applied universally to all of our lives. The complexity of time is also argued by Bergson, as he describes how time can be thought of in “durations,” and can be given depth in its different experiences such as slow, fast, fleeting, and/or looming (Lapoujade, 2018, p. 1). Thus, this complexity of time as demonstrated by Bergson and Bourdieu forces us to ask: How can such a complexity of time be flattened and distorted to be made to fit a linear timeline? How can such a complexity be synonymous to an ominous overarching bureaucratic unit of measure that is ticking above us?

My focus is to explore time and its relationship to space and the social fabric of al-Hattaba. The key concept here is not only that time is practiced as Bourdieu (1997) argues, but also that time is manifested and represented through space and the social context. I also reference Bruno Latour’s (2005) work in *Reassembling the Social* when I attempt to understand the complex actor network of al-Hattaba from the agency of objects, and how “objects [are] participants in the course of action” (Latour, 2005, p.70). Latour in actor network theory contends that we must explore how our networks intertwine and clash with forces of the seen and the unseen, objects and non-objects, and actors, all having their own agency in producing the social (Latour, 2005, p.63). Furthermore, as Henri Lefebvre (1991) suggests in *The Production of Space*, the social is inseparable from space, and space is the site where the social takes place. Hence time is inseparable from space, from practice, from the everyday, as it is the site on which the everyday unfolds. In engaging with time and the different concepts provided by Bourdieu,

Bergson, Lefebvre, and Latour I hope to explore the complex, ordinary, yet paradoxical relationship al-Hattaba has with time, how such relationships manifest spatially and socially, and how such complexity could lead to openings and possibilities.

In the endeavor to explore this complex relationship with time, Bourdieu (1997) provides an important entry point, as he writes: “The experience of time is engendered in the relationship between habitus and the social world... Time is really experienced only when the quasi-automatic coincidence between expectations and chances... expectations and the world which is there to fulfill them, is broken” (Bourdieu, 1997, 208). This argument can be seen in what happens in al-Hattaba, where time is felt in multitudes and magnitudes. When walking through al-Hattaba, you feel these “ruptures” that resonate from the historic architectural artifacts, you feel the urban fabric clash with the contemporary materiality of these structures, and they stop you in your tracks. For example, there is a house (that resembles many in the neighborhood) that I call “al-Hattaba layered cake,” with its ground floor made of stone from the 1920’s, while the upper layers reflect the contemporary moment in its exposed red brick, marking visually the overlaying of times both materially and sensually. The floors look like strata of time, and it is in moments like this I find myself stopping in my tracks, as there are time/space ruptures and continuities. Bourdieu illustrates that time is felt in the encounter, and made in practice. I felt how my “body [was] snatched by the forth-coming of the world” (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 208). For each disruption in any movement as one walks through al-Hattaba was a reminder that time is

anything but linear. But the question remains: what to make of this “messiness” of time that manifests into the “mess” of space and the social (Law, 2004, p.2)?

There is something about time that can be thought of through movement, and there is a problem with this freezing and thinking of time as a linearity. As David Lapoujade (2018) writes in his engagement with Bergson in *Powers of time: Versions of Bergson*, “the whole problem here comes from the fact that the thought [of time] is fixed to beings, rather than the movement of these beings” (Lapoujade, 2018, p. 15). This is because time continues to slip outside of interpretations that attempt to fix it, to contain it to a clock. As Bergson explains, “there is an emotion that derives from the passage of time, from the fact of feeling time flow in us” and such an emotion cannot be reduced or fixed (Lapoujade, 2018, p. 1). And in order to explain time, Bergson makes the interesting connections of time to duration, movement, and emotion: “duration is always the duration of movement. In the same way, there is only emotion of movement. Bergson prefers the term ‘emotion’ to ‘affect,’ because its etymology already suggests movement. Emotion is the movement by which the spirit grasps the movement of things, of beings, and of itself.” (Lapoujade, 2018, p. 14)

Thus, these movements, these durations, these ruptures, the stopping in tracks, are a way to think of time, time as it is working with us, and through our sentient being. This raises the question: What is it that creates these stops and movements? We have related time to movement, but I believe there is something more about al-Hattaba’s interactions with time that creates these emotional/affective stops, slowing, loitering, and speeding up. I believe this is the



“spirit memory” of Hattaba that is interacting with our movements. Bergson describes: “[spirit memory] is not a memory of what we perceive in the present; it is not the memory of what we have been. Rather it is the memory of what we are and what we have never stopped being, even if we have no knowledge of it. It is what provides the figure of time, which opens or closes the future.” (Lapoujade, 2018, p. 13).

Bergson answers that it is the “spirit memory” of the place that is interacting with your movement through and with the place. As your body moves through the streets’ slopes and historic steps, your mind leaps to all the people from all different times and places that moved through these steps. Al-Hattaba is a place with a complex unraveling relationship with time, and its complex mess makes you perceive time and space differently, shaking up the notion of time as something that is linear. How can we reduce a place that feels like a temporal juncture, like a collage of collective times, like a cacophonous crescendo of temporality, to a linear timeline?

Unfortunately, there are institutions that continue to view al-Hattaba in terms of this linearity and reduction. These different institutions continue to view al-Hattaba vacant of its residents, and view it in terms of a flattened two dimensional linearity. The Ministry of Antiquities for example view it in terms of its relationship to the citadel. The Informal Settlement Development Fund view it in terms of its “informal” settlements. I further discuss in Chapter 1 how such a reduction to linear notions of what a place is has caused so much precarity in al-Hattaba.

In summary, there is something that Henri Bergson is trying to teach us about duration and movement: to Bergson, this duration, this movement is essential in understanding time, and what time is. Lazzarato (2007) also reiterates this in “Machines to Crystalize Time.” He discusses how Bergson’s work “offers us a description of natural perception as a relation between flows, images, between different rhythms and ‘durations’. This relation between flows is functionally guaranteed by the body, consciousness and memory, which operates as interfaces introducing a time of indeterminacy” (Lazzarato, 2007, p. 93).

Bourdieu helps ground us in practice, and Bergson takes us to the philosophical realm that theorizes time to a concept of movement and duration. But the question remains, how do we consolidate our understanding of time as practice, and time in movement and duration? Because time also pertains to an order, its poetics have patterns, it manifests itself in peculiar coincidences, and the way we practice and make time also has rhythms.

In his book *Rhythmanalysis* Lefebvre (2004) offers us a different approach to understanding both the urban and time, and space and time, and that is through rhythms.

Lefebvre describes the *rhythmanalyst*:

“The rhythmanalyst calls on all his senses. He draws on his breathing, the circulation of blood, the beatings of his heart, and the delivery of his speech as landmarks... He thinks with his body, not in the abstract, but lived temporality... He must simultaneously catch a rhythm and perceive it within the whole, in the same way as non-analyst people perceive it.” (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 21)

He adds later:

“Rhythms, rhythms, they reveal and they hide. Much more diverse than in music, or the so-called civil code of successions, relatively simple texts in relation to the city, Rhythms: the music of the city, a scene that listens to itself, an image in the present of a discontinuous sum. Rhythm, perceived from the invisible window, pierced in the wall of the facade... But next to the other windows, it is also within a rhythm that escapes it...”

(Lefebvre, 2004, p. 36)

Lefebvre (2004) mediates between practice and philosophy by describing rhythm analysis as a tool and approach to understand space and time through the body, and by listening to the world through our sentient body. By doing so, one can pick up two types of rhythms: “cyclical” and “linear”. As Lefebvre writes:

“Cyclical repetition and the linear repetitive separate out under analysis, but in reality interfere with one another constantly. The cyclical originates in the cosmic, in nature: days, nights, seasons, the waves and tides of the sea, monthly cycles. The linear would come rather from social practice, therefore from human activity: the monotony of actions and of movements imposed structures... Time and space, the cyclical and the linear, exert a reciprocal action: they measure themselves against one another; each one makes itself and is made a measuring measure” (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 8)

Thus, the cyclical and linear rhythms are alternate ways of viewing space and time. Because rhythms entail the body and movement, they also speak to a method of tracing such movements and bodies in space and time by grounding them in the everyday. In al-Hattaba for example, the homes on this micro scale are enmeshed in architectural and temporal patterns in regards to the architectural and historical artifacts that “snatch” us as we move through al-Hattaba. On a larger scale, al-Hattaba’s urban fabric and its history of becoming is an example of historic city patterning, its story of becoming shares rhythms with other areas of Cairo and in the becoming of historic Cairo. The events of closing and opening historic doors, like the citadel door, have layers of meaning, and there are repercussions to these events because rhythms are all connected, and the daily rhythms of the different lifeworlds of the residents of al-Hattaba are affected. In summary, I believe in this viewing of time as rhythms, because as researchers we are working with a tool that combines the practical, empirical, qualitative, descriptive, poetic, and philosophical understandings of time. And it is this rhythm analysis approach that would merge and come together in my method of thinking through paint.

## Rhythm of Method and Paint//

The method of exploring with paint informed my fieldwork, and helped me navigate and understand the complex relationship that al-Hattaba has with time. Once again, this method is not separate from the theory, or the field, as they are all enmeshed in my experience and

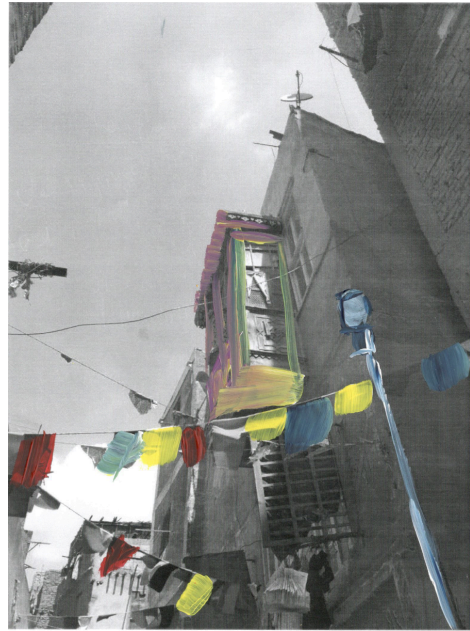
becoming in and with al-Hattaba. However, this is a method in which I not only think through theory, but also through paint and the hand, because as Martin Heidegger (1972) writes in *What is Called Thinking*:

“The hand is a peculiar thing... The hand does not only grasp and catch, or push and pull. The hand reaches and extends, receives and welcomes... The hand holds. The hand carries... Every motion of the hand in every one of its works carries itself through the element of thinking, every bearing of the hand bears itself that element. All the work of the hand is rooted in thinking. Therefore, thinking itself is man’s simplest, and for that reason hardest handiwork.” (Heidegger, 1972, p. 16-17)

There were rhythms I felt from my first visit to al-Hattaba in September 2018, during which I was also reading and exploring Lefebvre’s (2004) Rhythmanalysis. There were rhythms based in time and motion that I felt could not be reduced simply to the written word, as there was color and emotion that could not belong solely to the realm of words. Thus, I turned to my method of thinking through my hand and paint. The hand is also an actor in this method as the hand is “rooted in thinking” (Heidegger, 1968, p.16). I believe that thinking through our hands, especially in the digital age, is usually sidelined. Thinking through the hand is subtle, nuanced, patient, embedded in slowness, and filled with so much potential and unravelling.

The thinking through paint method is quite simple. As the pictures in the following page show, I first take a picture on my phone when there are certain moments in the field where I felt “snatched,” as I would feel myself slowing down and stopping altogether (Bourdieu, 1997, p.

208). There is a bending of time in this moment; and although I slow down and stop altogether to take the picture, it all occurs in a matter of seconds. I take a picture on my phone and continue along my path. Then when I return home, maybe days later, I select some of these pictures and print them out in black and white on A4 sized paper. I then take paint, and without overthinking, I just paint over the pictures, and see what my hand is drawn to, and the different colors I would feel inclined to use. Once this is done, I then take a moment to step back, and I return to the picture and try to understand what my hand has been drawn towards. I explore and ask myself the following questions: what colors did I pick, what brush strokes were made, what intensity was used, what is being highlighted, and what slips into the background. I would then take a moment to write out all of these initial feelings that washed over me as I was painting, I write it out in a free writing form. I write out manually, using my hand and a pen and paper, or sometimes just a quote on a sticky note. I put some distance between myself and the paintings, and when I return to them I would compile all these different pictures and hang them on foam boards on my wall, and I would usually scan them to digitalize them before pinning them. In the process of pinning them on boards, of putting distance between us, but still having them very much in front of me, and sometimes blending into the background - patterns and themes start to emerge, they blend with the field notes, theory and reflections that I write for myself, for papers for final classes, and even for the structure, compilation and writing of this thesis. The following page demonstrates how I have gone through the initial part of this process.



Left: Picture taken on camera phone  
Center: Picture then turned black and white  
Right: Printed on Black and White picture with layers of paint



This moment made my head feel so full,  
I cannot tell how how funny & joyful it was  
to find this mathabey a surprise on our  
walk,  
to find this mathabey, under with  
this ring of flags  
but in all seriousness, this is all what  
is saving the place, this 'temporal glitchee'  
that disrupt your imagery of 'India'!

it is not just a law  
more exact to be ~~ill~~ <sup>dogged</sup>  
it is many things and one of  
them is that it is a place or  
a complex unravelling that time,  
and here it is, it is a temporal  
man that makes you perceive time  
& space differently, it stakes up your  
notion of time, history, etc. → it does  
not fit best it is here, and there are  
people who live here & call it their  
home.

The picture that is layered with paint is then explored using free-writing

However, it must be noted that this method does not stand on its own, and can best be described as a “becoming” that Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Becoming, as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write, is concept that is based on the idea that we are active producers in the ongoing process of our own production, and that we are an ongoing culmination of all of our current and previous engagements from our being in the world and our interactions with it. Thus, this thinking through paint can best be described through becoming, as it does not stand on its own, it is a becoming that includes an engagement with my field notes, being in al-Hattaba, and in Megawra BEC, and in the



anthropology classrooms, and my training in both architecture and anthropology, affective and emotional spill overs, and of course also by the theory that has influenced me.

Furthermore, my positionality as an anthropologist and an architect greatly informed my experience and methods in al-Hattaba. With my background as an anthropologist, I entered the field with tools that included anthropological theory, literature, and methods. I mainly practiced participant observation in the field, and followed unstructured interviews with my interlocutors. Furthermore, my training in anthropology allowed me to have a more critical ear and eye when it came to meetings, readings of laws and legislations, archival work, and even discourses surrounding al-Hattaba. I also come from a background in architecture, and with this training I have a more attentive eye towards details and aspects of the built environment, and the relationship that emerges between the residents and their built environment. Furthermore, this background has also provided me with tools that involve being able to work and interact with visuals, maps, and architectural drawings. Thus, it is both these backgrounds that came together that affected my experience in al-Hattaba.

My main method in the field involved more unstructured interviews, and usually started with discussing everyday ordinary things, such as bikes, the weather, doors, and sometimes even just a simple hello would lead to the most vibrant engagements. However, it must be kept in mind that my association with Megawra (who is an active stakeholder) greatly influenced my experience in al-Hattaba. Because it is due to my association with Megawra that I am not just an observer, rather I am also an engaged anthropologist. Furthermore, it is due this association that

affected my relationship and interactions with the residents, as they are aware of my affiliation with Megawra. Also, I was in al-Hattaba due to work that I was conducting for Megawra, work that includes workshops, community meetings, collecting street stories, and detailing drawing for master plan proposals.

Thus, my background in both anthropology and architecture plays a substantial part in my thinking through paint method. A method that is all about enmeshment, visuals, color, free writing, and being sensitive to the world around you. I will now describe my method of thinking through paint I practiced it on the pictures I took while in al-Hattaba on September 9th 2018, during my physical “entrance into the field.” These pictures, I come to realize, represent moments in which time did not feel linear, but rather folding upon itself, as I felt the “spirit memory” of the place and as it “snatched” my being and forced me to slow down and take a picture (Lapoujade, 2018, p. 13; Bourdieu, 1997, p. 208). I will explain, in vignettes, my initial stepping into al-Hattaba and the different rhythms I felt.

The following vignettes are a result of my thinking through paint method, and they describe my first physical entrance into al-Hattaba. I realize that after I had practiced the method, and taken a step back, that these initial pictures were the first rhythms that I felt in al-Hattaba, and the rhythms that I later return to as *rebounds*.

#### Rhythm of Urban Fabric:

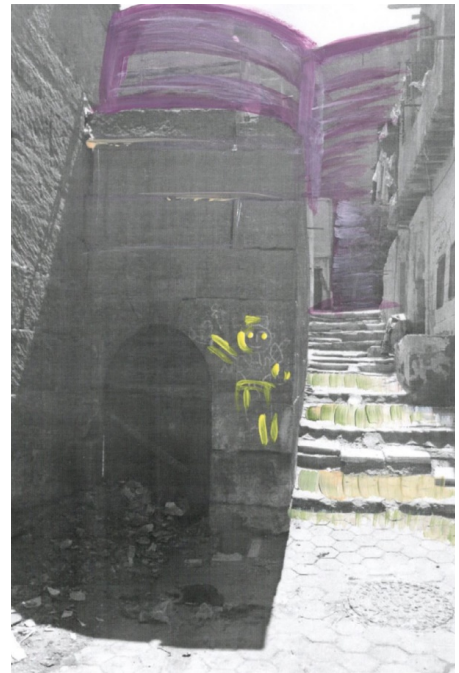
A rhythm that is felt in your being and measured in your steps. A rhythm that reminds you of all the different steps that have been taken here, at different times and spaces, crowded together, all different steps from different times from different walks of life.

Reminding us that al-Hattaba has a complex unraveling relationship with time

"You'll have to take our souls before you take a single tile from our street"

#### Rhythm of Anxiety

A rhythm that is felt in the anxiety that the residents have towards their precarity as they feel the constant threat of eviction looming,



### Rhythm of Architectural Glitches//

These rhythmic glitches that rupture what we constantly assume as the linearity of time, as a collage of time is standing before you. This mashrabeya stands next to the street scale lamp post, next to the exposed red brick, all different rhythms that come together that creates this rupture time through their temporally eclectic rhythmic becoming



"I love bikes, I love bikes more than anything."

### Rhythm of the Ordinary:

An encounter with a curious little boy, on the ledge of this street. All we spoke about were our siblings and love for bikes. This is a rhythm of the ordinary, which is extraordinary. This rhythm of the ordinary, from a child whose whole world is about his bike, a rhythm reminding you that there are lives here, ordinary people, with ordinary lives, children who love bikes, who have the right to live and be alive in their neighborhood



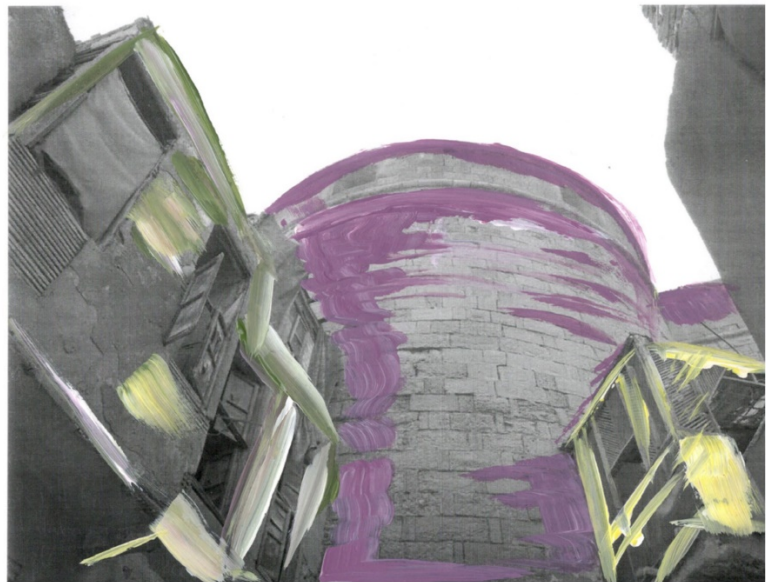
#### Rhythm of the Homes:

A Hattaba layered cake. A home like many of the homes where each floor looks like a strata of time. A layered cake of many floors that were dwelled in, the stone ground floor, a beaten down middle floor that is between the stone and concrete, and the exposed red brick of the upper floors.



#### Rhythm of the Citadel:

The citadel that looms is a paradoxical rhythm that is usually used to define al-Hattaba, a rhythm that is both a cause for its precarity and stability, as it is a rhythm that is interpreted differently by different institutions of power. A rhythm that the whole of al-Hattaba leans on



# Rebound//

I started this introduction with coincidences, which as Kundera (1999) contends should not pass us by: coincidences as a concurrence of events and of poetics of our everyday.

Coincidence also is an alternative method to understand the multiple, complex and paradoxical happenings that occur in al-Hattaba.

There was a specific type of coincidence that I came to experience in al-Hattaba, which I call “rebounds.” Rebounds are a type of coincidence, but they are different in that they feel like a recurrence. In this recurrence, one feels as though they are sent back not only to oneself, but also to a particular moment that one has already visited. In other words, being sent back to oneself occurs when one coincidentally returns to rhythms that resonate, be it through an encounter, an object, a person, a furry nonhuman friend, a home, a parallel event, or a moment of *déjà vu*. And in the sending back to oneself, one is given a different perspective: there was a certain amount of time and space between your last encounter, and in this revisiting, there is measure of difference, and this difference is a way to experience and feel time. As Bourdieu writes: “Time is really experienced only when the quasi-automatic coincidence between expectations and chances... expectations and the world which is there to fulfill them, is broken” (Bourdieu, 1997, p.208). Furthermore, in experiencing a rebound, it is an experience that feels like the assumed linearity of time is dismantled, as you feel time slowing down and time folding onto and into itself, as your body is snatched as it realizes that there is a recurrence. In

rebounding you are sent back, and there is a measure of difference felt as you compare your current self to your past self who was, but is now coincidentally revisiting rhythms and experiencing rebounds. It is in rebounding that “time is really experienced” (Bourdieu, 1997, p.208).

Rebounds, as I described earlier, are a compounding between coincidence and rhythms. Rebounds, like rhythms, can be cyclical, and have different intensities and different scales, and also, like rhythms, are based in time and motion of our “sentient beings” (Ingold, 2011,p.12) “To be sentient” as Tim Ingold (2011) writes in *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* “is to open up to a world, to yield to its embrace, and to resonate in one’s inner being to its illuminations and reverberations... the sentient body, at once both perceiver and producer, traces the paths of the world’s becoming in the very course of contributing to its ongoing renewal (Ingold, 2011, p. 12).

There were rebounds that I and the residents experienced on our own scales, and rebounds that al-Hattaba is experiencing on its neighborhood scale. Thus, I then use these different rebounds or recurrences that I experience in the field to organize this thesis. I attempt to understand these experiences in terms of rhythms. In doing so, I then extrapolate different patterns and different temporal features that describe the complex, paradoxical, yet ordinary relationship al-Hattaba and its people have with time. Once again, this relationship is not separate from space and the social, which all guide the following chapters and research questions.

The first chapter is about the legal frameworks and laws set by different institutions that contradict each other and result in al-Hattaba finding itself recurrently rebounding between the threat of removal and the hope of staying. This precarity is the context and backdrop of this work; it is the overarching rebounding that allowed me to ask: What happens to the people and place of al-Hattaba in the isolation of its multiple rhythms by different institutions' interpretations? What are the consequences of the resulting contradicting laws? This temporal order or pattern that results here is similar to a vertigo, as these different contesting and reductionist interpretations leave al-Hattaba in a precarious situation that they continue to oscillate and return to over the span of 30 years. Thus, it is essential to understand the repercussions of such legal frameworks on present day al-Hattaba. I then pick two case studies found in ovens and crafts (which I discuss in their respective chapters) that illustrate and stem from this temporal vertigo and the overarching precarious rebound.

In Chapter Two, I describe how being in al-Hattaba, there were peculiar closed doors that only later in fieldwork were revealed to be ovens. The rebounding to these doors, and recurrence of ovens, is what guides the second chapter, as ovens are a feature that the residents of al-Hattaba continue to recall when painting a distinct past or *zamaan*<sup>6</sup>. This then allows me to explore the following questions: How does the sudden (or what is described as sudden) closing

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<sup>6</sup> Zamaan: this is an Arabic word that means past



of the ovens act as a rupture and marker in the memory of what al-Hattaba is, and has become? How did such a closing affect the multiple social rhythms and communal relationships in al-Hattaba? This temporal order or pattern here is a rupture, as al-Hattaba residents recall the closing of ovens as a sudden event, and an event that marks a clear before and after.

In the third Chapter, I illustrate how al-Hattaba is a neighborhood that is also known for handicrafts and the multiple pearl inlaying workshops. I discovered in the summer of 2019 that a *mashrebeya*<sup>7</sup> masterpiece that I originally visited in September 2018 houses the son of a pioneer craftsman in pearl inlaying. His father was a controversial innovator who taught many of the current pearl inlaying craftsmen how to mass produce their product for the market. This rebound then put into perspective other encounters with craftsmen whose relationships to their crafts is not one based on the market, but rather on a slowness. Thus, the relationship with crafts is what informs the third chapter, and it is in this chapter that I ask and explore: In what ways do the rhythms of fast crafts and slow crafts of al-Hattaba differ? How do the craftsmen describe their relationships to their craft, each other, and the market? What do these differences and relations illustrate? This temporal order or pattern that is illustrated here shows how temporal rhythms can be ambiguous, fluid and negotiated. The notion of “crafts” here is

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<sup>7</sup>Mashrebeya: this is a type of projecting window that is covered with detailed wooden lattice work

based on slow and fast rhythms, which illustrates how temporal patterns can also be fluid and negotiated and defined in differences.

I conclude this thesis by returning to the main thesis question: How does al-Hattaba's complex, paradoxical, yet ordinary relationship with time manifest? What are the repercussions of the macro recurrences (laws and legislations)? I have selected three rebounds that occurred during my fieldwork, that both I and my interlocutors share. I then discuss two cases in their respective chapters (2 and 3) that result from this overarching precarity. Furthermore, I discuss the temporal patterns and relationships that emerged from these different cases and how extrapolating these patterns and relationships reveals how al-Hattaba cannot be reduced to one particular rhythm, temporal pattern, or rebound.

## II. Chapter 1: Temporal Vertigo

### The Historical Narratives and Repercussions of Laws and Jurisdictions



Picture of House number 1<sup>8</sup>: While in al-Hattaba with two of my Megawra BEC coworkers in April 2019, we discovered that this house that was demolished by its owners. The demolition took place around February 2019.

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<sup>8</sup> The numbering system used to number these homes is randomized for anonymity. The numbering is not specific to a street, but to the whole neighborhood.

[The following exchange is a translated excerpt (as are all of the excerpts in this thesis) of an exchange between myself, Heba and Farah, my coworkers from Megawra BEC, and Mohamed Abdullah, a local craftsman who runs a workshop dedicated to the final finishing stages of pearl inlay products]

*“This house was beautiful, it was beautiful, it was just here,” Heba says in disbelief. “A home was here, it was in good condition, and it was an old home made with stone.”*

*“Yes, this was my maternal aunt’s home, they demolished it themselves so they can get a home,” responds Mohamed Abdullah sharply.*

*“Why did they demolish it?”*

*“They [the municipality] won’t give them a home unless they demolish it themselves.”*

*“But this home was so beautiful” Heba and Farah say, mourning.*

*Mohamed Abdullah is perplexed and responds sharply, “Who cares? She couldn’t live here. And she got a home out of it.”*

I stared back at this house. I remember it standing only months before when I was visiting Mohamed Abdullah’s workshop. It was a strange encounter because as the three of us from Megawra BEC stood there in disbelief, in mourning of this house’s demolition and the lives and histories it housed, as we contemplated, I could not help but notice the strange way the light was hitting the house. The dust swirled around and through the light, as if creating a phantom limb to remind us of what once stood here, and how the destruction of a home that has housed

many lives, and persisted through time, does not occur without leaving a trace, or indeed ruin, behind.

Without further words with Mohamed Abdullah, the three of us walked away, staring at the ground, treading through al-Hattaba's sloped streets in silence, a shared silence based in camaraderie and absolute disbelief mixed with frustration over the occurrence of self-demolition of homes. The occurrences, although few, felt like blows, as we are here advocating for al-Hattaba, and these demolitions are a reminder of how complex this issue is. Complex, because we are aware of this exchange that the municipality is offering, and how this exchange works almost invisibly. As described by residents in al-Hattaba, and as illustrated by the exchange with Mohamed Abdullah, in order to receive an apartment from the municipality, you must guarantee that a home in al-Hattaba will not be returned to, implying that you must demolish your own home – a guarantee of no return. The three of us are aware of this layer of complexity, and the silence is broken by the gentle reminder of, "at least we have pictures of the house. We have pictures of this house back in the office, we've documented it."

In this chapter I set out to explain the context that helps illustrate this complexity of al-Hattaba's current precarious moment. The first part of this chapter provides the contextual historical background. The historical background is crucial, because it is then used as a nexus to understand the complex nuances of the past and the traces they leave in the present. The second part of this chapter deals with laws and different institutions and their different interpretations of al-Hattaba that has left al-Hattaba in its current precarity.

## Historical Narratives //



A postcard collected by Egyptologist George Darresy (Salah, 2016, July 10) while working in Egypt at the beginning of the 20th century. This photograph illustrates the Holy Carpet “Mahmal” Ceremony, which is the carrying of the Kaaba cover to Mecca. This procession took place in Sekkit El Mahgar<sup>9</sup>, which is a street that lies on the border of al-Hattaba.

*[[An encounter with an elderly man as I took photographs of the buildings on Shar‘a Bab al-Wada‘a]*

*“Ya Binty, this street used to be the Tariq al-Hajj. Know your history my dear. Ancestors passed through this street to go to Hajj. Don’t forget them – their prayers are satr<sup>10</sup>: they are what carries us all today.”*

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<sup>9</sup> Identified by the appearance of Qubbat Rajab al-Shirazi in the photograph.

<sup>10</sup> Satr: an Arabic word that literally means “hidden” or “covered,” and is word that is used in colloquial Arabic that refers to or asks for God’s protection.

I continue to use the terms “complex” and “paradoxical” when describing al-Hattaba’s relationship with time. Al-Hattaba’s proximity to the citadel is central to understanding this relationship. This proximity to the citadel has acted as a double-edged sword, as its leaning on the citadel continues to act as a reason for both its precarity and stability. It is more than just a geographical proximity; it is also a story of how the whole area and its residents interact with the citadel, as detailed in the historical sources and the oral histories and narratives of the residents. Furthermore, al-Hattaba’s relationship with the citadel is used to justify why al-Hattaba should and should not be removed, with various institutions taking opposing sides. This section unravels the historical narratives that describe al-Hattaba through time, delving through historical academic sources that at certain points intertwine with the oral histories of residents, as shared with me. In going through the historical narratives, it must be noted that it is not a straightforward story, nor for the scope of this thesis is it all an all-encompassing one that covers all the different histories and archives on al-Hattaba<sup>11</sup>. Rather, the historical narratives referenced in these chapters can be used as a nexus to understand the complex nuances of the past and the traces that they leave in the present.

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<sup>11</sup> In other words, this section on al-Hattaba’s narratives is not all-encompassing and does not attempt to review everything that has been documented or written on al-Hattaba, nor does it cover all of the oral histories and narratives of the residents.

Al-Hattaba's fate has historically been tied to the development of the citadel complex. Nasser Rabbat (1995) in his book *The Citadel of Cairo: A New Interpretation of Royal Mamluk Architecture* primarily focuses on what occurs inside the citadel complex's walls through time, and the different phases through which the citadel moves. Although Rabbat focuses on the citadel, he includes descriptions of the development around the citadel, and of events related to the citadel that have also affected al-Hattaba. The citadel complex, or what is sometimes referred to "as the *Qal'at al-Jabal* (Citadel of the Mountain), or the Qal'aa of Salah al-Din, or of Muhammad 'Ali... has changed a great deal since it was first built during Salah al-Din's reign" (Rabbat, 1995, p.18). Rabbat first describes how it has undergone many transformations with subsequent rulers. He writes:

"Subsequent patrons, especially al-Kamil (1200-38), al-Zahir Baybars (1260-76), and al-Nasir Muhammad enlarged it, divided it... and endowed it with an impressive number of places and other structures and surrounded it with other buildings... The later Mamluk sultans did not add much to it, but at the end of the fifteenth century they twice refurbished it. Under the Ottomans (1517-1798), it was divided into three semi-independent parts: the northern enclosure contained the barracks of the Janissaries (the main corps in the Ottoman army); the lower areas in the west became residence of the al-'Azab (the locally recruited troops); and the southern section of the southern enclosure was occupied by the pasha sent from Istanbul and his troops." (Rabbat, 1995, p. 18).



What is essential from Rabbat's summary is the outline of different interventions and interactions with the citadel that took place throughout time. Furthermore, as May al-Ibrashy, director of Megawra BEC, confirms in a personal interview in 2018, as different rulers used the citadel as a seat of power, the citadel became a magnet that allowed the area surrounding it to gradually become more developed and populated. Furthermore, the buildings and architecture of the area surrounding the citadel illustrate this point. There are three important buildings that developed due to the magnetic force of the citadel, and they were auxiliary to the citadel. These buildings are mentioned in Megawra Built Environment Collective (2019) *al-Shurafa Lajna Dayma Report*, and they were the Dar al-Diyafa (Palace of Reception or Hospitality), Dar al-'Adl (Palace of Justice) and Tablakhana<sup>12</sup> (Drum Tower), (Megawra – Built Environment Collective, 2019, p. 8, 15). Rabbat (1995) describes this development, which indirectly includes al-Hattaba, during al-Nasir Muhammed's (1333-41) reign: "The main thoroughfare in the district of the Darb al-Ahmar, extending south from Bab Zuwayla of the old city in a wide curve to the foot of the hill upon which the citadel stood, was lined with mosques, palaces, and commercial structures." (Rabbat, 1995, p.237). Additionally, Rabbat writes:

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<sup>12</sup> Rabbat (1995) defines Tablakhana as "drummary, a place where the military band played at specific times during the day" (Rabbat, 1995, p. 108).

“in 1312, al-Nasir Muhammed ordered the maydan [(square)] under the citadel rebuilt and enclosed, a project that introduced the general restructuring of the citadel, for it involved creating a clearly defined buffer zone between the palatial complex and the city to the west and separating the royal stables and the hippodrome from the horse market to the north” (Rabbat, 1995, p.194).

Rabbat’s descriptions of the changes that the area underwent can be traced in his map, inserted below. Al-Hattaba can be located by tracing the thoroughfare that Rabbat described occurring south of al-Darb al-Ahmar along the “wide curve to the foot of the hill,” where al-Hattaba is labeled as “horse market.”

Rabbat only discusses the horse market in passing when describing the expansion of the city:

“[The expansion of the city] was determined by topography and royal decorum. Al-Darb al-Ahmar linked the old Fatimid capital al-Qahira, which became the center of economic life, to the Citadel and formed the last stretch of the processional route used by the sultan for major ceremonies, such as his coronation day and victory parades. The sultan would ride through al-Qahira from the north through the Bab al-Nasr and come out through the Bab Zuwayla, advance along the Darb al-Ahmar to the horse market below the Citadel, and then enter the Citadel from Bab al-Silsila and proceed up to the Iwan al-Kabir” (Rabbat, 1995, p.238).

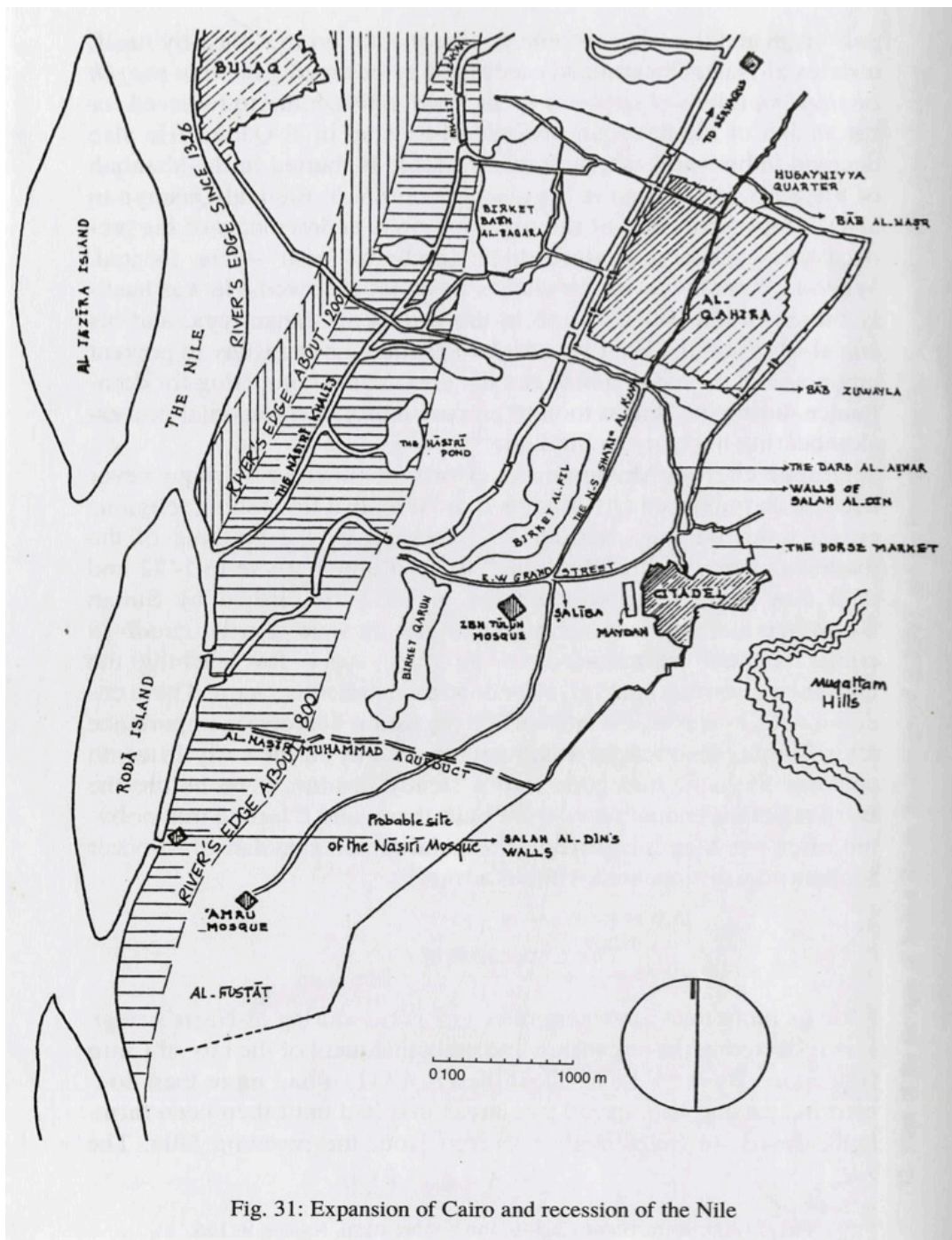


Fig. 31: Expansion of Cairo and recession of the Nile

The above image, is a map from Rabbat's book that is titled "the expansion of Cairo and Recession of the Nile," and this map labels al-Hattaba as The Horse Market (Rabbat, 1995, p. 236)

Despite this horse market not being physically present today, there are still remnants of it in the memories of the residents. A coincidental moment that can best be described as poetry occurred during one of the community meetings<sup>13</sup> held by Megawra BEC. An elderly man interjected during the presentation to state that “al-Hattaba is a place of heritage! The school down there used to be a horse market!” The space of the horse market has been overtaken by the school, yet the memory of what was left of the stables remains. Nicholas Warner (2005) describes the school as the “Madrasa of Sidi Shahin,” in his book *The Monuments of Historic Cairo: A Map and Descriptive Catalogue*:

“[A 19th century building that is] now in use as a primary school, was once a large madrasa with a symmetrical plan comprising three large transverse halls. The qibla wall is flanked by two domed tomb chambers, the tombs are the most interesting part of the complex: their ribbed plastered-brick domes are each supported by four internal marble columns” (Warner, 2005, p.186).

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<sup>13</sup> This is from the first community meeting held by Megawra BEC in January 21st 2019, following the approval of the development plan by the Ministry of Antiquity’s private council in November 2018. After this meeting, it was agreed that Megawra BEC’s community meetings should be conducted on the different streets of al-Hattaba.

Today, the Madrasa is no longer a primary school and lies derelict<sup>14</sup>. It later became clearer what the elderly man meant by horse market. As one of the present day caretakers of the school told us at Megawra that the school was where the stable master of Muhammad Ali lived.

Rabbat (1995) also discusses the Ottoman and post-Ottoman development of the citadel. These developments are critical and their impact and traces resonate in the present. They are still felt to this day, as there are certain developments that continue to intersect in the collective and personal memories of the residents (which I describe below). Rabbat (1995) writes:

“[The citadel was reconfigured] in the first half of the nineteenth century when Muhammed ‘Ali Pasha razed the few structures that were still standing there, rebuilt most of its walls, changed its interior organization... It remained the residence of his descendants and their seat of government until 1874, when Isma‘il Pasha (1836-79) moved to the newly built ‘Abdin Palace.” (Rabbat, 1995, p. 18).

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<sup>14</sup> I would pass by this school every day when conducting my fieldwork. One day I decided to go right up to the school, up to its metal grilled windows and look inside, it was dark so I pulled out my phone’s flashlight. It took me a second to be able to see beyond the darkness and dust. I then saw an eerie room that was filled with broken wooden furniture, doors, and crates all cloaked in dust. My eyes were then drawn to the very elegant decorated monolithic columns that looked like they were rising above the debris, supporting a dome on above of them. I tried taking pictures but it was too dark and too dusty for my camera to pick up anything.

“[One major reconfiguration was the creation of the new gate] Bab al-Jadid, which stands at the end of the road ascending from the maydan in front of the Bab al-Azab to the southern enclosure. The road follows the old Sikkat al-Mahjar (Passageway of the Quarry) up to the daftarkhane (archive) of Muhammad Ali (built in 1828) which is believed to occupy the site of the Mamluk dar al-diyafa (guest house)... An artificial ramp known as Shari’ al-Bab al-Jadid (Bab al-Jadid Street) and built by Mohammad Ali in 1826 for his carriage road, ends at the Bab al-Jadid.” (Rabbat, 1995, p.28).

There are multiple layers here whose traces still exist to this day. The postcard of the Holy Carpet “Mahmal” ceremony from the beginning of this section, which was collected by Egyptologist George Darresy at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, illustrates the Holy Carpet “Mahmal” Ceremony, which is the carrying of the Ka’aba cover to Mecca (Salah, 2016, July 10). The procession through Sikkat al-Mahjar<sup>15</sup>, that Rabbat discusses in the passage above, passes by al-Hattaba and was one of the roads used to reach the Hajj Road (Rabbat, 1995, p. 28; Salah, 2016, July 10). The Hajj road is one that the elderly residents continuously evoke, to not only discuss the importance of al-Hattaba and the *baraka* such an association has, but so this *baraka* and its association is not forgotten by the younger generations. The street that is associated with the Hajj Road is called *Bab al-Wada’a*, which stems from Sikkat al-Mahjar. This road leads to both

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<sup>15</sup> Identified in the postcard due to the appearance of Qubbat Rajab al-Shirazi in the photograph.

the Hajj Road and the northern cemetery of Historic Cairo. Thus, *wada‘a* here translates to “farewell”, which is associated with different types of farewell: a farewell to those embarking on pilgrimage, and a farewell to those who have departed this *dunya* or “world”. Ali Mubarak (1888) writes about this path in his *Al-Khitat al-Tawfiqiyah al-Jadidah Li-Misr al-Qāhira wa-Mudunihā wa-Bilādihā al-Qadimah wa-al-Shahīrah*<sup>16</sup> (Mubarak, 1888, p. 276, 277) The path is flanked by several water fountains or *Sabil*<sup>17</sup>, known as Sabil Katkhuda and Sabil Shaykhu.

We are reminded of water, and how water is a source of *baraka* or blessing, in Islam in both life and the hereafter: water to those living and going to Hajj, and water in the name of those who passed so that they may continue to collect good deeds even after their final farewell. The space itself and its Sabil architecture are also a testament to the past of what this road used to carry. I must evoke the captivation and enchantment I personally felt here, as a practicing Muslim, an anthropologist, and an architect, as the multiple layers of meaning in collective histories, maps, stories, and spaces came together and became illuminated by this common coincidental thread of archiving al-Hattaba’s history.

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<sup>16</sup> *Al-Khitat al-Tawfiqiyya al-Jadida* is a twenty volume works by Ali Mubarak where he gives a description of the streets and buildings of Cairo and other places.

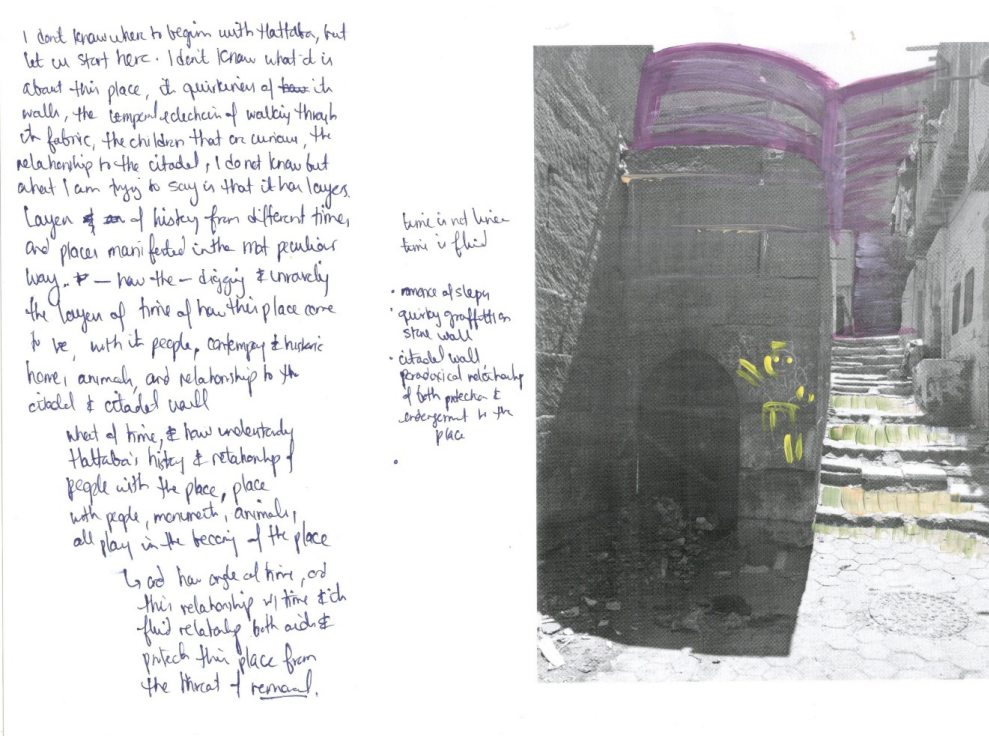
<sup>17</sup> Sabil has multiple meanings in arabic also meaning path. Path here could mean path of water, path of pilgrims, or in Islam “fi Sabil el Allah” on the path to God.

Furthermore, in going through the archives we are reminded of how historic monuments in the area have evolved through time. Ali Mubarak (1888) lists one of the monuments, that is also listed as an antiquity, and that monument is al-Shurafa (Mubarak, 1888, p. 276). Mubarak (1888) focuses on this mausoleum: “maybe this is the burial site of these *shurafa* in this maseoloeum in Darb Sahreeg Street” (Mubarak, 1888, p. 277). *Shurafa* is a word that directly translates to "honorable ones" and is a title that can be associated to those who are related to the Prophet Muhammed P.B.U.H. As I was passing by this monument one day, one of the residents of the street in which this monument was located told me how there used to be a *muwliid*<sup>18</sup> here every year. He also told me how an old lady named Om Ahmed used to reside in this house after her home collapsed. She then resided in al Shurafa and became its caretaker, and would help organize its annual *muwliid*. What he described sounded like a vibrant space, that was interacted and lived with. However, it contrasted with the contemporary reality that we saw in front of us: a closed door, a dead space that has become a dump for garbage.

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<sup>18</sup> *muwliid*: is the gathering of people together on the birth of a significant religious figure on that figure's date of birth.





As mentioned above, Rabbat discusses the building of a very significant structure, Bab al-Jadid, the New Citadel Door. This door was built by Mohamed Ali, and the ramp leading up to the door has caused the street to be called “Shari’ al-Bab al-Jadid” (Rabbat, 1995, p.28). The photograph below, taken by the renowned architectural historian K.A.C. Creswell, dates the new citadel door back to 1827 (Creswell, 1921). Still standing, it was a structure that was used by the citadel’s successive occupiers. These successive occupiers, as Rabbat (1995) writes, claimed the citadel for different purposes.

“During the British Colonial occupation (1882-1946), it became the headquarters of the British army; the troops were garrisoned in the structures of Muhammad ‘Ali had built for

his army with very few modifications until 1946, when it was turned over to the Egyptian army” (Rabbat, 1995, p. 18).

Rabbat further states that “In subsequent years, it was gradually acquired, one section at a time, by the Egyptian Antiquities Organization, with the last army personnel leaving the premises in the late 1980’s” (Rabbat, 1995, p.18-19).

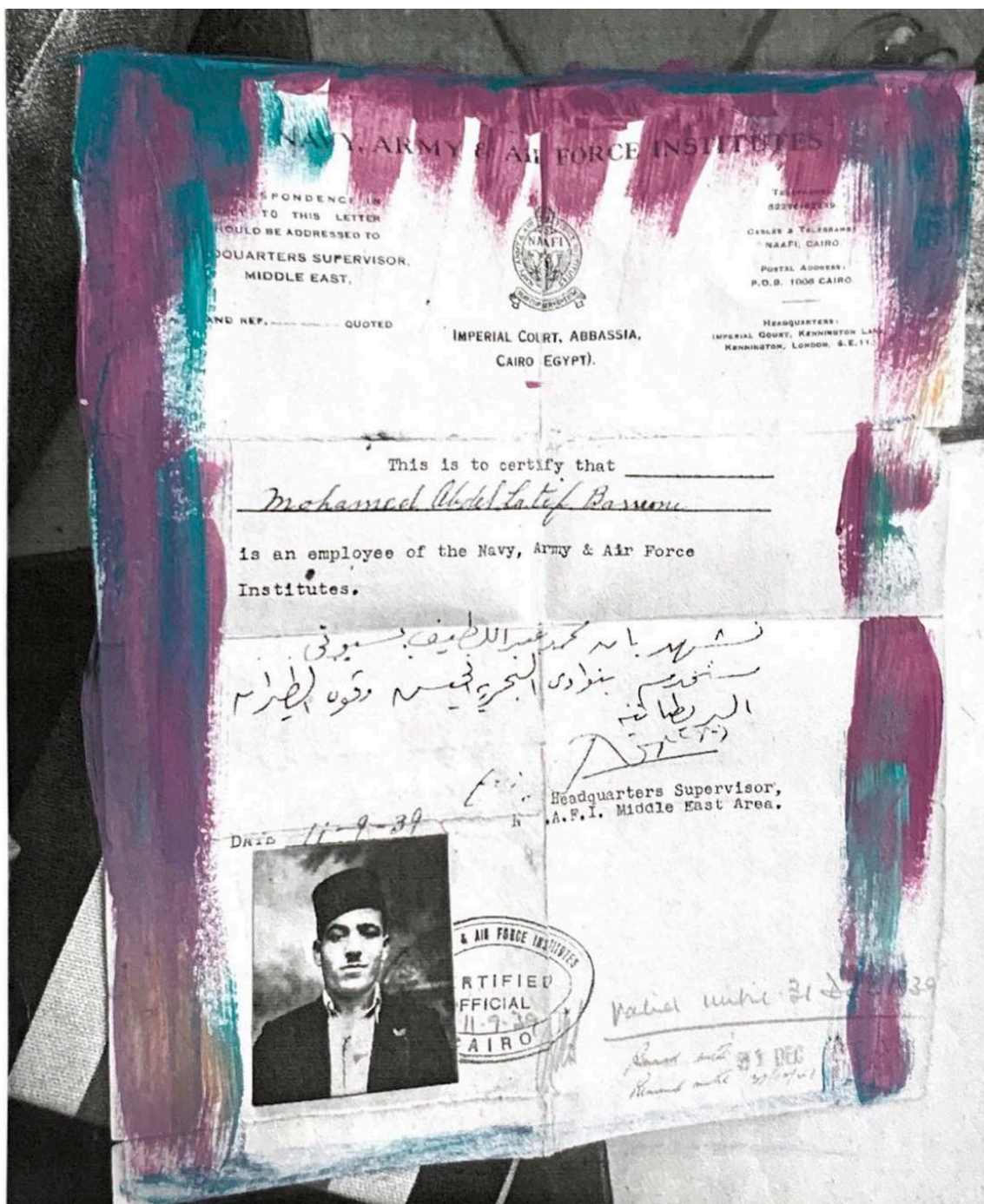


A photograph of the New Citadel Door taken by KAC Creswell between 1916-1921 (Creswell, 1921)

The turn of events of the first half of the nineteenth century is particularly significant, as this period and its associations with Muhammed Ali, the British residing in the citadel, and the

Egyptian Antiquities Organization (later Ministry of Antiquities) are frequently evoked when the residents discuss their connections to the citadel. Not only are they evoked, but these associations with the citadel are used to legitimize their stay in al-Hattaba in the face of the threat of eviction. For example, Al-Kibir, one of the elders in al-Hattaba, would defend al-Hattaba stating: “who would demolish this place? It is history. We are history. We have *huggag*! They cannot remove us. Our fathers lived and died here, our fathers also worked with the English in the citadel! Here, I’ll show you the *Huggag*!” *Huggag* translates into land deeds. Al-Kibir would then pull out a folder filled with his documents belonging to himself and others. However, he did not only use *Huggag* to refer to actual land deeds, but he would also refer to his father’s certificate of working with the British as *Huggag* or evidence that they are part of the history of the place and cannot be removed. He would hold it up saying, “Look, this is all *Huggag*, this is all history.” He legitimizes his stay by tying his own family’s history to that of the citadel, a tie that should not be undone.

The citadel door further illustrates how the history of the residents of al-Hattaba cannot be separated from the citadel. In the preface of this thesis I discussed a focal moment when I first entered al-Hattaba on September 9th, when one of the residents, my friend Khalifa, clapped his hands to discuss the closure of the citadel gates and its repercussions on his own “lifeworld” (Jackson, 2012). The first clap (left hand to right) was for when the new citadel door closed indefinitely by the Ministry of Antiquities in the early 2000’s. The sequential clap (right hand to



A certificate belonging to Al-Kibir's father, a *huggag* that is proof of service with the English Army.

left) was for the event that immediately followed the closing of the gate. His father's liver sandwich cart, which was placed on the street leading the citadel gate, had to close right after, as the *rizq*<sup>19</sup> of the cart was cut off with tourists no longer passing through the street. This cutting of *rizq* is not an isolated story: the street of "Shari' al-Bab al-Jadid" is one where many residents used to set up kiosks to sell their goods and crafts, as it was a street frequented by tourists to enter the citadel complex. It was a street that al-Hattaba, a neighborhood known for its pearl inlaying and *khiyamiyya* crafts, would rely on.

The unraveling of this place, with its multi-layered history and events, cannot be spoken of in a simplistic straightforward manner, as there were multiple important nuances that arose when several residents shared their memories of the closing of the citadel gate with me. When I was inquiring about the closing of the gate, several residents jumped into the discussions, debating "when" and "what year" the citadel door was closed. A debate suddenly erupted on the street: some said the citadel door had closed during the early 1990's, others said it had closed in the year 2000, while someone else said that it had to have closed in 2008, as they swore they had used it that year. When I asked Khalifa to ask his father, his father said it had closed 21 years ago, in the year 1998. They all legitimized their claim of a specific year by associating it with very specific personal memories; memories that included food kiosks, and the last piece of bida'aa, or

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<sup>19</sup> Rizq: And Arabic word that is defined as anything that brings about a goodness or blessing

goods, they had sold in that year. The residents also provided different reasons or, perhaps more accurately, speculations about why the door was closed, associating it with their own life events and memories: “they<sup>20</sup> closed it because they want our area to die, they want to cut off our *rizq*” and “they say they closed it for security reasons.”

‘Am Hamdy, a *khiyamiyya*<sup>21</sup> artist, spoke, strikingly, of several types of deaths that occurred due to the closing of the door: reduced tourism and *rizq* cut off by the closing of the door. There is also the symbolic and literal death of the craftsmen, as described by ‘Am Hamdy: “the craftsmen used to sell at the door, but they died because their craft died, they died of sadness.”

The histories that pour out of discussing this door is illustrative of how the citadel door is marked in personal and collective memories. The above interactions reveal different relationships with the citadel that involve its different occupants, the Egyptian Army, the Ministry of Antiquities, and even the British. It is noteworthy that the debates that spark when discussing openings, doors, and fenestrations are indicative of something. For example, why is it so difficult to agree on the exact year the citadel door was closed? And why is it important to specify the year? This bespeaks the connections people create in their historical imaginary

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<sup>20</sup> “They” could be referring to many different actors, in this case the multiple players that we will return to in the section on laws and jurisdictions

<sup>21</sup> *Khiyamiyya* is Egyptian Patchwork.

openings and closures of both fenestrations and *rizq*, and equally important a social life that was disrupted by such closures. I will return to this theme of openings and closings in chapter two and three on the ovens and crafts of al-Hattaba.

To return to Nasser Rabbat, I realize that the academic historical narratives on al-Hattaba continue to discuss al-Hattaba as “below the citadel” or “horse market”, i.e. in relation to historic monuments (Rabbat, 1995, p. 194, 238; Mubarak 1888, Warner, 2005). However, I continue to ask while conducting my research, what was happening inside of al-Hattaba, beyond it being the location of the horse market? In May al-Ibrashy’s (2005) PhD Dissertation *The History of the Southern Cemetery of Cairo from the 14th century to the Present*, al-Ibrashy discusses the zoning of al-Hattaba:

“The French invasion of Egypt in 1798, while short lived, effectively put an end to the absolute Ottoman domination over Egypt. It marked the beginning of a series of transformations that culminated in the rise of Muḥammad ‘Ali and his family” (162). She adds, “Napoleon’s invading army was accompanied by another army of scientists and researchers. Their gargantuan tome, the *Description de l’Egypte* provides us, as part of its thorough documentation of all aspects of Egyptian life, with the first measured map of Cairo. The first acts of recording, documentation and administrative reform in Cairo were in response to an urgent need to master the city through understanding it. The division of the city into eight administrative zones was for organisational purposes. Each zone

included a core district within the city proper and an outer periphery that included unbuilt areas such as gardens, orchards, or cemeteries” (al-Ibrashy, 2005, p.163).

Al-Ibrashy cites *Description de l’Egypte*, which places al-Hattaba in “Zone VIII: [which includes] the cemetery of al-Ḥaṭṭāba and Bāb al-Wazīr (called Tourab el-Hattabeh and Tourab Bab el-Ouizyr” (al-Ibrashy, 2005, p.163). These can be seen below in a section of a map from *Description de l’Egypte* (Napoleon I, Emperor of the French, Néret, G., & Gaballa, G. A, 1994).



A zoomed in image of a map of Cairo from *Description De L’Egypte* that focuses on al-Hattaba. (Napoleon I, Emperor of the French, Néret, G., & Gaballa, G. A, 1994).



There are two things that I believe are particularly noteworthy in the above map. The first is that it shows us the urban fabric with entire “squares” or blocks of built-up areas separated by streets. These blocks contain numbers that identify the location of specific buildings from a compiled index. The urban fabric has barely changed, following a similar morphology to al-Hattaba in the cadastral map below, which dates to 1946 (Egyptian General Survey Authority, 1946). We can assume from the map that the unidentified buildings within these blocks were residential and occupied. In regards to its other uses, the area continued to be used for burial as labeled in the Description map as “Tourab el-Hattabeh”. Furthermore, in the area there the historic monument of “Khanqah of Nizam al-Din” (Warner, 2005) can be found, which today appears to be look like a “ruined castle, standing high on a spur of the Muqattam Hills below the Citadel” (Warner, 2005, p.113). As shown in the map as well, the location of the Khanqah of Nizam al-Din appears to be surrounded by a fort, and this indicates how the French also used this space as a fortress (Napoleon I, Emperor of the French, Néret, G., & Gaballa, G. A, 1994).

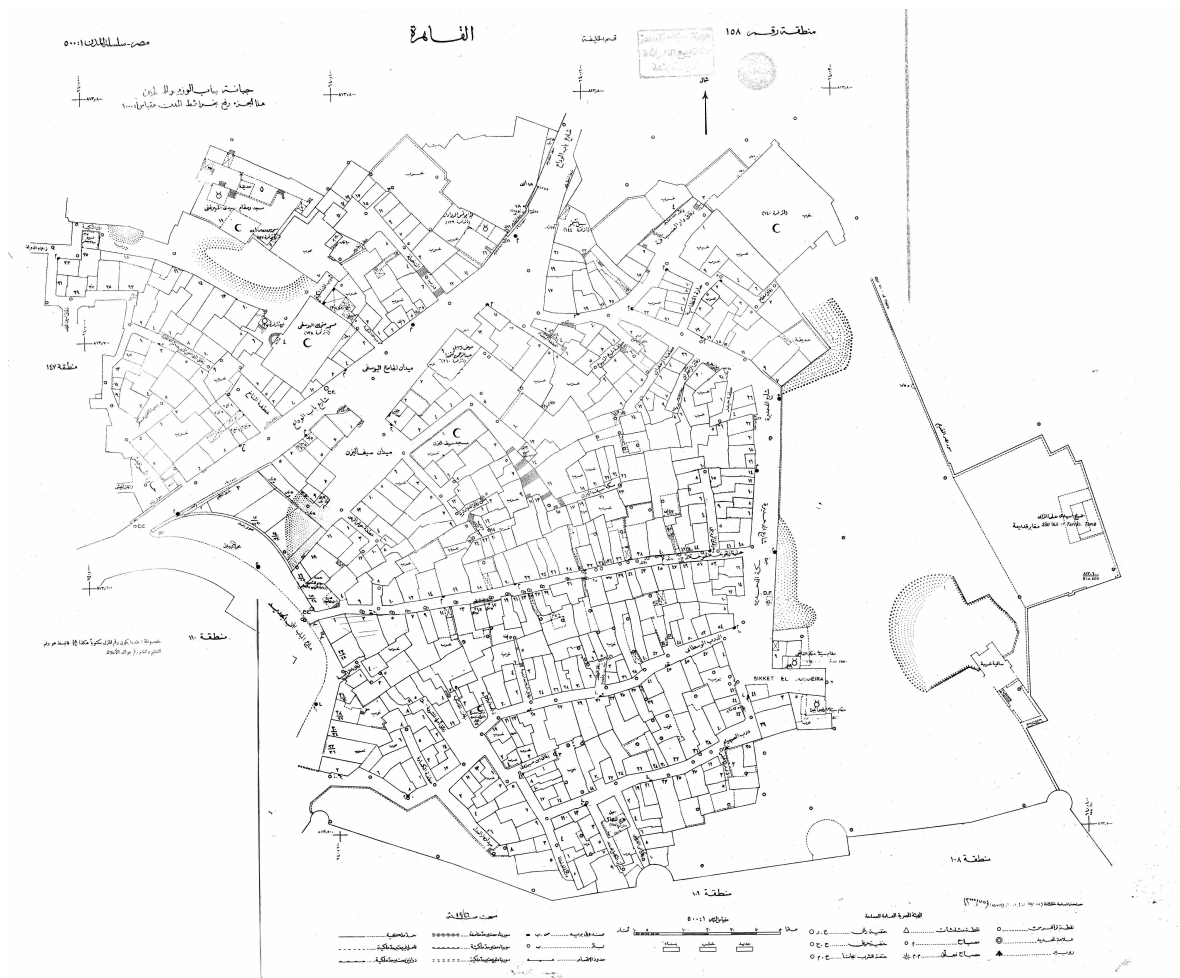
Furthermore, when I asked May al-Ibrashy of the occupants of al-Hattaba during a personal interview, she informed me that during the Ottoman period, al-Hattaba became an area for the middle class, where probably traders and merchants resided. After the Ottoman era, during Mohamed ‘Ali’s reign, it became more of a working-class area for craftsmen and workmen. This point is also aided in the Ali Mubarak (1888), as he describes in *Al-Khitat al-Tawfiqiyah al-Jadidah Li-Misr al-Qāhirah wa-Mudunihā wa-Bilādihā al-Qadimah wa-al-Shahīrah* an alley called ‘atfit kasara (Mubarak, 1888, p. 276). He describes how in this alley resides wood

cutters, or those who handle wood (Mubarak, 1888, p. 276). When I ask the residents of al-Hattaba where the name al-Hattaba comes from, they tell me how it comes from *hattab* or wood, and al-Hattaba was a point that provided wood to the citadel. Hence, this is probably where al-Hattaba got its name from, as the root of the name is *hattab*, which is Arabic word for wood, and from its residents who worked with wood and supplied it to the citadel.

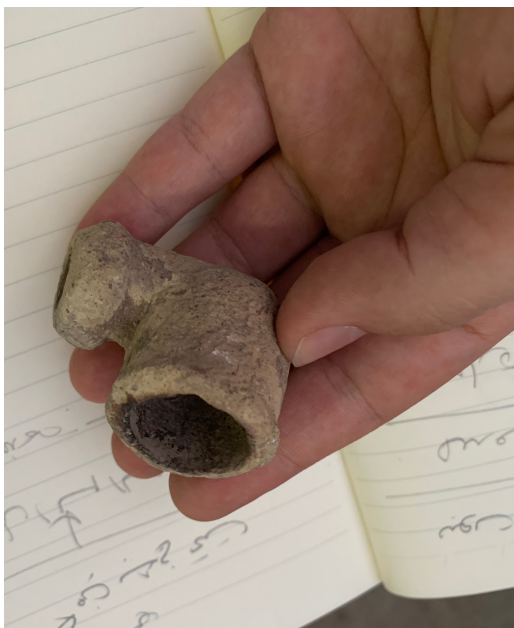
Secondly, the *Description* map labels an area as “Tourab al-Hattabeh,” the al-Hattaba cemetery in the western part of al-Hattaba (Napoleon I, Emperor of the French, Néret, G., & Gaballa, G. A, 1994). This is the location of the present day Duhdira Mountain, which the residents call “al-Gabal”. There is something peculiar about this mountain. It currently holds a soccer field, where the older boys of the area go to play, and the ruins of two historic monuments. On the other edge of this desert mountain, which opposes Duhdira street, is the contemporary Salah Salem road. However, there is something buried in this mountain that my interlocutors continue to recall. Rana, one of my interlocutors from al-Hattaba in her late 20’s, describes an incident that occurred twenty years ago; an event that is reiterated several times when I ask the residents what al-Hattaba was like in the past.

“Around 20 years ago, I was a little girl, around 6 years old. The area where the wall exists was not so high up; it was flush with the Duhdira street. The bulldozer of the Ministry of Antiquities dug it up, and they found a huge cemetery with many cenotaphs. The Ministry of Antiquities freaked out; it was a huge scene, the whole neighborhood crowded around to see. I remember being a little girl, scurrying between all their legs. It

was such a day. I remember seeing the graves with my own two eyes. They freaked out and ordered it to be *mardum* (backfilled) creating that wall that you see today.”



A cadastral map of al-Hattaba, made by the Egyptian General Survey Authority in 1946.



A piece of a smoking pipe that Alaa's kept from his childhood

One of my other interlocutors, 'Alaa', also confirms this, telling me that, as a child, he would find "strange things" uncovered from the mountain; bones, and sometimes strange little pipes that he would collect, that looked like they were also made from bones. Photographed here is one of those pipes that 'Alaa' has held on to, and he would tell me "there are layers underneath us; layers that we don't know about." And at this moment, the foremost thought that comes to mind is how this whole area and its landscapes speak of

time.

In conclusion, this section illustrates how there are remnants and traces that are evident in the history of al-Hattaba, al-Hattaba's residents, and al-Hattaba's historical development around the citadel. I would like to emphasize a pattern that has emerged in my review of academic works<sup>22</sup> that discuss al-Hattaba and its history. This pattern is best illustrated in the

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<sup>22</sup> I must add, finding references that address al-Hattaba directly has proven quite challenging, as they seem to be quite scarce

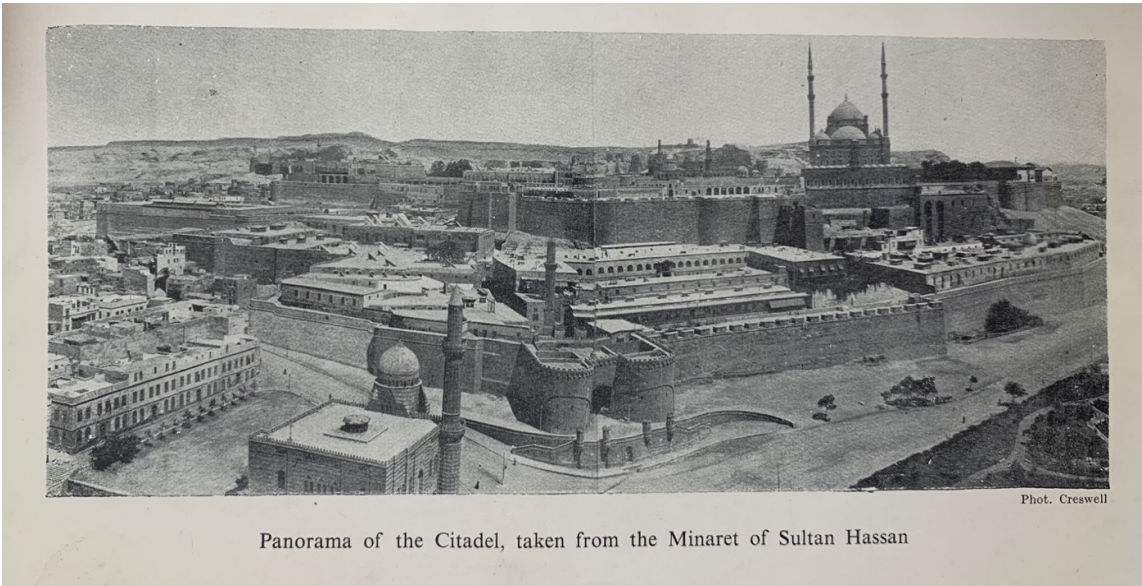
below photograph by K. A. C. Creswell, which is a picture of the citadel, with al-Hattaba cropped and on the edge (Devonshire et al, 1947). In maps, photographs, and historical recordings of al-Hattaba, I continue to notice how it is always on the sidelines, always in the shadow of the citadel, always in passing, always “below the citadel” (Rabbat, 2015, p.238). I raise the question and ask what does it entail to constantly be placed on the edge? I believe that always being left on the edge of history has lead to al-Hattaba’s Janus Faced fate. It is its being on the edge that constantly allows for limitations and possibilities, and gives it a cloak of *satr*<sup>23</sup>, as the citadel steals all of the limelight.

Furthermore, this focus on the citadel has possibly contributed to maps, photographs, narratives, and recordings of al-Hattaba by academic sources which view it in terms of zoning, or a top-down perspective, where a whole area is simply clumped together or left blank altogether. However, the neighborhood and its residents are not only left on the edge and in the shadows of the citadel, but in being tied to the citadel, they are also sidelined due to the historical significance given to the citadel complex. Al-Hattaba’s proximity to the citadel has been read differently by various institutions, which governed and administered the area and have thus translated their readings of al-Hattaba into produced laws, reports and decrees. In the following

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<sup>23</sup> *Satr*: an Arabic word that literally means “hidden” or “covered,” and is word that is used in colloquial arabic that refers to or asks for God’s protection.

section, I walk us through the main laws and jurisdictions that further shed light on al-Hattaba's precarity, particularly the threat of removal, and the dwindling economic and social life in the area in the wake of local and national transformations.



A picture of the citadel taken by K.A.C. Creswell found in *Rambles in Cairo*, with al-Hattaba found on the left hand side of the panorama, cropped, and “below the citadea” (Devonshire et al, 1947; Rabbat, 2015, p. 238)

# The Repercussions of Laws and Jurisdictions//

Johannes Fabian (1983) writes in his book *Time and the Other* that “neither political space nor political Time are natural resources. They are ideologically construed instruments of power” (Fabian, 1983, p. 144). The previous section illustrated al-Hattaba’s historical narratives, which provide an important nexus to understand the complexity and nuances of the past and the traces and impact they leave in the present. I show in this section how al-Hattaba is interpreted differently by the Ministry of Antiquities, the Informal Settlement Development Fund, the Cairo Governorate, and the National Organization for Urban Harmony. I explore how their different interpretations are consequential, as they are translated into laws and legislations that at times contradict or challenge each other, thus enveloping al-Hattaba in a resounding precarity. In this section, I analyze the four main relevant laws that have left al-Hattaba in such precarity. I argue that these perspectives interpret time and space as “dimensions, not just a measure of human activity... [which results in the] distorted and largely meaningless representation.” (Fabian, 1983, p. 24). Al-Hattaba residents are left out of the process of designing these laws and policies, and are thus rendered invisible.

The first decree that introduced a noteworthy degree of precarity to al-Hattaba was the *Administrative Decree Of Evacuation Zone of 1973*, and specifically article 28<sup>24</sup> (*Administrative Decree Of Evacuation Zone of 1973*). This decree, issued by the Cairo Governorate, labels al-Hattaba as “mantiqat ikhla’a,” or evacuation zone, which is intended for re-planning. This is the first law that labels al-Hattaba as an evacuation zone. It refers to a map that outlines a zone in Cairo in black, and al-Hattaba falls into this zone of evacuation. In labeling the area as an evacuation zone, it creates significant contradictions with successive future laws, decrees, and jurisdictions from other institutions. The threat of eviction, removal and demolition, and the state of precarity, was arguably set in motion with this 1973 decree. In terms of the justification or reasoning behind the evacuation law of 1973, it was probably related to the general trend to free listed monuments from surrounding “encroachments.” This trend was probably adopted from The Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe, and continued to be followed by subsequent antiquities authorities. The Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe, were an Egyptian institute Entity that established to conserve and protect Islamic monuments in Egypt between 1882 – 1953 (Islamic Art Network, 2002). The result of this decree was that the residents could not obtain a building permit, and could not build at all.

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<sup>24</sup> This decree was made available to Megawra by the Cairo Governorate.



The second relevant law that places al-Hattaba in precarity is the law on the protection of antiquities put forth by the Ministry of Antiquities. This is *Law no. 117 of 1983 As Amended By Law No. 3 Of 2010 Promulgating The Antiquities' Protection Law*, which was put forth by the Ministry of Culture, (which later became independent as Ministry of Antiquities in 2012). This law protects antiquities and lands adjacent to them. This law is important due to its definitions of what antiquity buffer zones mean to the Ministry of Antiquities. The antiquity buffer zones are referred to as "beautifying lines," and according to Article II of this law, "'Approved Beautifying Lines of the Antiquity' means the area surrounding the antiquity, and extends to a distance determined by the Council to ensure the aesthetic aspect of the antiquity. Said lands shall be treated as archaeological lands" (*Law no. 117 of 1983 As Amended By Law No. 3 Of 2010 Promulgating The Antiquities' Protection Law*, p. 8).

This is significant because the treatment of said "beautifying lines" (which means buffer zone) as "archaeological lands," entails that this is a land that can be potentially excavated (*Law no. 117 of 1983 As Amended By Law No. 3 Of 2010 Promulgating The Antiquities' Protection Law*, p. 8). Thus, this law than assumes that such "beautifying lines" are Egyptian archaeological sites. Furthermore, the treatment of said beautifying lines as archaeological sites is non-applicable to antiquities found in cities. For this implies that only what remains below the ground should be preserved, and consequentially that everything above ground should then be removed. Thus, the translation of such a treatment to lands that are found in the urban, that may be inhabited as

living, not dead spaces, is left ambiguous and open to interpretation. The main issue with this law is that it disregards the possibility of any form of life that does occur in such a zone.

This law also states how antiquity lands can be treated and what type of intervention can occur, and how to deal with these buffer zones. In Article 20, it states that “Implanting trees or the cutting of such or carrying rubble or taking soil or fertilizers or sand or the execution of any other work which result in changing the characteristics of said sites and lands shall be prohibited except with a license from the Council and under its supervision. (*Law no. 117 of 1983 As Amended By Law No. 3 Of 2010 Promulgating The Antiquities’ Protection Law, 2010, p.p.20*)”

This law states that any form of intervention (that maintenance, restoration, or even tree planting) cannot occur without permission from the antiquities authorities. This is important, as it is this point that is usually misinterpreted by the *taftish*, or Ministry of Antiquities inspectorate, who extrapolate that any form of intervention is not permitted. The result of this interpretation to al-Hattaba is that residents were no longer allowed to renovate their homes, or plant any trees, or conduct any structural consolidation under any circumstance at all.

Another article that is quite important from this law is Article 30, which states, “After the approval of the Competent Permanent Committee, Chairman of Council’s Board of Directors may license competent authorities and scientific missions to undertake operations of restoration and conservation under the Council’s supervision. Also specialized individuals may be given the license in writing to undertake such operations (*Law no. 117 of 1983 As Amended By Law No. 3 Of 2010 Promulgating The Antiquities’ Protection Law, p.26*).” This is an excerpt from the article,

and it is particularly significant because in gaining “approval of the Competent Permanent Committee” is an opening that Megawra worked with while advocating for al-Hattaba. It is in this article of this law that allowed for possibilities where expert advocates like Megawra BEC can intervene in such politically charged circles and dismantle such discourses in order to help precarious neighborhoods like al- Hattaba.

The third relevant piece of legislation is *Decree 179 of 2008*<sup>25</sup>, which is an administrative decree that describes the boundaries of the citadel’s buffer zone by the Ministry of Antiquities. Al-Hattaba falls under this buffer zone, and is now considered an “archaeological land,” and should be protected as such, as stated in the Law 117 of 1983 (*Law no. 117 of 1983 As Amended By Law No. 3 Of 2010 Promulgating The Antiquities’ Protection*). This decree builds on the 1983 law 117, which as I stated earlier, is misinterpreted by the Ministry of Antiquities inspectorate, who believe that no form of intervention is allowed at all. Building on this misconception, the Ministry of Antiquities’ inspectorate believe that the best treatment for a buffer zone is demolition and evacuation. Hence, this is another reason why they do not allow residents to renovate their homes, so that the homes may collapse on their own, thus allowing for gradual emptying of the area. Furthermore, these misinterpretations by the Ministry of Antiquities inspectorates show that even within the same institution there are contradictions.

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<sup>25</sup> This decree was made available to me through my work in Megawra.

The fourth important piece of legislation was put forth by the National Organization for Urban Harmony (N.O.U.H.). N.O.U.H. is a governmental institution and their mission statement according to Cairo Urban Initiative Platform states: “The Authority aims at applying the values of beauty to the exterior image of buildings, urban and monumental spaces, the bases of visual texture of cities and villages and all the civilized areas of the country including the new urban societies” (Cluster). In 2008, the *Law 119 of the Year 2008 Urban Harmony* was issued. In the first chapter of this law, under “Regulating Urban Harmony work,” article 32, it is stated, “The Organization sets up rules and conditions of conservation of areas, buildings and structures of Outstanding Value. (*Law 119 of the Year 2008 Urban Harmony*)” Furthermore, in article 33, it reads “Areas of Outstanding Values shall be defined pursuant to a recommendation from the Organization in accordance with the norms and standards that are set for their conservation” (*Law 119 of the Year 2008 Urban Harmony*). In regards to recommendations and standards, they then published a guide called *The Boundaries and Conditions of the Historic Cairo Region, Approved by the Supreme Council for Urban Planning and Development According to law no. 119 of 2008 and its Executive Regulations 2011* (National Organization for Urban Harmony, 2011). In this guide, they describe the Rules and Conditions of how areas of historic value can be treated. Furthermore, this guide is critical because it not only labels the boundaries of Historic Cairo, but it also labels it into 3 main zones: Zone A, Zone B, Zone C. There is a map showing these different zones on the last page of this document. Al-Hattaba falls in Zone A, which is an area of high importance (National Organization for Urban Harmony, 2011, p. 3).

Furthermore, in this guide they define the importance of the “urban fabric” and that the urban fabric of the area must be preserved (National Organization for Urban Harmony, 2011 p. 3). The urban fabric includes the streets, and physical composition of the homes and streets combined. Critically, Megawra BEC when advocating<sup>26</sup> for al-Hattaba builds on the point that these homes are not separate from their dwellers, the residents of al-Hattaba, and that the urban fabric in al-Hattaba is not separate from the lives of its residents.

The guide put forth by N.O.U.H. is important, because it is the first guide that provides rules and regulations with which to treat the urban fabric. It must be kept in mind that this is something that *Decree 179 of 2008*, put forth by the Ministry of Antiquities, does not take into account at all. *Law 119 of the Year 2008 Urban Harmony*, put forth by N.O.U.H., contests and creates a counterpoint to the Administrative Decree of Evacuation, as al-Hattaba is an area of significant value.

In 2013, the Informal Settlements Development Fund (ISDF) issued a report titled *Survey and Classification of Unsafe Areas in Cairo Governorate*<sup>27</sup> (Informal Settlement Development Fund, 2013). In this report, they surveyed and classified “unsafe areas” of the Cairo governorate, and al-Hattaba is classified as a Category Two informal settlement. Category Two entails that the

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<sup>26</sup> This is also Megawra’s ethos, that heritage should not be treated as space isolated from life, and that heritage is to be interacted with, and lived with.

<sup>27</sup> This report was made available to me through my work at Megawra.

area is unsafe and requires re-planning, which usually connotes demolition and evacuation. What is questionable is that the ISDF then proceeds with labeling the area as such, despite the fact that they do not in any way have any provisions or qualifications for special measures in historic Cairo. This classification does however work with the *Administrative Decree Of Evacuation Zone of 1973*. There is a complexity to this classification, because it must be kept in mind that buildings were left to decay due to the misinterpretation of the buffer zone laws of 1983 (*Law no. 117 of 1983 As Amended By Law No. 3 Of 2010 Promulgating The Antiquities' Protection Law, 2010*). This law did not allow people to structurally consolidate or renovate their homes. Furthermore, if a home collapsed, residents were not allowed to rebuild because of the *Administrative Decree Of Evacuation Zone of 1973*. Thus, as time passed, homes decayed, as residents could not structurally consolidate them. Furthermore, there were compounding events such as the 1992 earthquake, which shook Cairo greatly, and further expedited the structural decay of many of the homes in al-Hattaba. Lastly, the classification by ISDF works with the *Executive Order of 2017, Decree 5725*<sup>28</sup>, made by the Cairo Governorate (*Executive Order of 2017*). This decree specifically calls for the re-planning of al-Hattaba.

I must ask at this point – as all of these different laws and legislations throw al-Hattaba into all of this compounding precarity - a question remains: where are the residents? Where are

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<sup>28</sup> This Executive Order was made available to me through my work In Megawra.

their voices? It becomes evident that their voices are absent, as they have not been included in the decision-making processes regarding their own neighborhood, as these different institutions pass legislation that views al-Hattaba vacant of its residents and life that occurs here.

Despite their voices being absent in such legislative processes, this does not mean that the residents' lives have simply stopped; they are still active agents who continue to make their everyday. A local resident, Muhammed Khalifa's (2017) viral song "al-Hattaba 'Anwany"<sup>29</sup> demonstrates this agency to us. In his song, Khalifa illustrates the different practices of the residents in response to the different legislations against their own neighborhood.

Khalifa (2017) made this the song around the event of the Executive Order of 2017, a moment where he describes he felt like he had to do something to defend his neighborhood. I believe what makes his song quite special is that, as all of these institutions and their legislations continue to ignore the residents, this song emerged to challenge such silencing, as it echoes a shared sentiment of those in the neighborhood who refuse to leave their homes. This sentiment is best stated in the opening verse in his song, as Khalifa sings:

"I want people to know that I really am here and present

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<sup>29</sup> "Al-Hattaba 'Anwany" is the name of Muhammed Khalifa's song. The title translates into "al-Hattaba is my address." It is a song written and performed by Khalifa, who he says he came up with the song in a moment where he felt like he had to do something in regards to all of the events happening to his neighborhood.

To those who do not know me

Don't make stuff up and do not go on about it

Listen from me, don't listen of me

And then judge me

Do not say I am reckless and lost, my rights are what are lost

I want you to feel me" (Khalifa, 2017)"

In the song he paints the histories of al-Hattaba, its relationship to the citadel, its historic monuments, and he even paints the different residents that live here, in an attempt to help dismantle the derogatory perception of those who live in *'ashwaiyat*.<sup>30</sup> "Our neighbors include teachers, employees, industrial workers, and artists," they also include "sheikhs and gangs," and you'll even "find a doctor and a lawyer... and a thug and a thief." He boldly states that in al-Hattaba, as in all places and areas, "you'll find both... the righteous [and]... the corrupt (Khalifa, 2017)."

Not only does Khalifa paint the different residents, but he also reverses the gaze of the institutions that continue to view al-Hattaba vacant of its people. He does so by not only stating that he and the residents are aware of the othering that occurs to al-Hattaba due to their

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<sup>30</sup> Al-Hattaba is incorrectly labeled as *'ashwaiyat*. *'Ashwaiyat* is the term used in Egypt to describe Informal settlements. It is a word that has a derogatory connotation, and its literal meaning is "make shift."



association with categories such as heritage and *'ashwaiyat*, but he also further emphasizes the ways in which the residents continue to live their everyday despite said institutions' perceptions. He sings that "al-Hattaba is a heritage site," as both he and the residents are aware of their neighborhood's historical significance, and how they are only seen as such by the Ministry of Antiquities. However, in his painting of al-Hattaba as a lively neighborhood, he illustrates how the heritage here cannot be separated from its caretakers, the residents. He also sings that they are aware of the labels that are imposed on al-Hattaba, as "The government has made it an informal settlement." However, Khalifa, in his song, brilliantly contests the term of *'ashwaiyat* or "informal settlements" by singing:

"they [the government] pushed us to the point of having to build our own homes

Without any license or safety regulations

Understand this you "respectful" men

Its residents are not informals

It is the homes that are informal

Because those who build it were not engineers " (Khalifa, 2017)."

In this verse, he unpacks what makes a settlement informal. He states that because it is not built by engineers, but rather by the owners' own hands – owners who the Cairo Governorate has othered – is what makes a settlement informal. Furthermore, he also addresses the Ministry of Antiquities, by highlighting their negligence to the historic monuments that are

supposedly under their care and jurisdiction: “[historic] buildings belonging to the [Ministry of] Antiquities... are falling apart... [as] they irresponsibly dismissed it] (Khalifa, 2017).”

Not only does he bring to the surface the different institutions’ perspectives, he also discusses the different tactics practiced by these institutions to empty the area. He describes them sequentially, “The first plan was “do not build,” which I believe references the Antiquities’ Law no. 117 of 1983. He sings of the consequences of such laws, and how the lives of the residents are not cared for. “Your old aged home, do not repair it, it has to collapse on you and kill you.” He then describes the other tactic, which involved the closing of the citadel door: “They found a door to our livelihood and closed it off, People are no longer coming and going, No longer is there commerce, nor work, nor tourism.” He also discusses further tactics that involve disrupting everyday life in al-Hattaba; “They closed the nursery and the school<sup>31</sup>, [they even closed down the community services, and we went far to get our subsidies... They prevented infrastructure of water and plumbing (Khalifa, 2017).” However, Khalifa describes how life continues to happen in al-Hattaba, and how the residents, who chose to stay, navigate their everyday despite these different tactics, be it having to walk a longer distance “back and forth” to get their goods, or having to “[incorporate] the infrastructure de-facto” and having to “sweep [their] own alleys” (Khalifa, 2017).

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<sup>31</sup> “Madrasa of Sidi Shahin” as mentioned by Nicholas Warner (2005)

It would be arrogant to romanticize this navigation of crumbling life, as in reality it is filled with everyday struggles that strained the people and the neighborhood. As Khalifa sings, “many houses collapsed on their residents... and lots of people moved out... [Which resulted in] The number of residents decreased immensely.” Khalifa discusses how different events caused different trajectories<sup>32</sup> in al-Hattaba, and how the residents interacted with their homes.

He sings of the January 25 revolution, and the hope that it instilled in people’s hearts. “Jan 25 revolution happened, And all the citizens were ecstatic, We finally felt secure, We went ahead and built our buildings, And we were all filled with joy, And justice was served, and our people came back, Our people they came back.” He then sings of how the joy of the revolution did not last long, as “the government also came back, seven years after the revolution, They told us again, you will leave, and we told them again, we will never leave.” This is important because seven years after the 2011 revolution is around the time of the *Executive Order of 2017*, which called for the re-planning of al-Hattaba.

It was around this period in the summer of 2018 that Megawra BEC made a garden intervention in al-Hattaba. Megawra entered al-Hattaba, and transformed a strip of land that was covered in garbage into a garden. Although this was Megawra’s first intervention, it created a shift in how the residents viewed us, as it legitimized Megawra’s positionality with the

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<sup>32</sup> Different trajectories as some residents decided to stay, while others decided to leave.

residents. As this intervention materialized in a physical space, it proved that we were not just empty words and just “talk,” but “action.” In my being in al-Hattaba, I still find it perplexing, and I must ask, what is it about a garden? A piece of land that is open, green, accessible to all, that creates this reassurance? The garden was also what my coworkers and I constantly referred to when we were met with anxiety and suspicion. For the moment we evoked that we worked for Megawra BEC, who had made the garden, there was a reassurance and trust we were endowed when this connection was made.

It was in the late summer of 2018, after the garden project, that I entered Megawra BEC. In September 2018, is where I suddenly<sup>33</sup> found myself participating in a workshop for al-Hattaba. In summary, in 2018, Megawra BEC hosted a workshop with the Cairo Governorate, ISDF, and Ministry of Antiquities in order to create a development proposal that advocates towards the protection of both the people and place of al-Hattaba neighborhood. As written in Megawra’s press release *A Plan for Developing al-Hattaba Neighbourhood in Historic Cairo*:

“The proposal was developed as a result of a workshop hosted by the Built Environment Collective and attended by representatives from the Ministry of Antiquities, Cairo Governorate and the Informal Settlement Development Fund in September 2018... “The

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<sup>33</sup> Suddenly, or maybe even coincidentally, as I write in the preface, when May al-Ibrashy, the director of Megawra BEC, asked me in a car ride following a site visit to join a workshop on a place called al-Hattaba

proposal gained initial approval from the Ministry of Antiquities' Permanent Committee in October 2018, encouraging BEC to resume working on the project to serve as a comprehensive and sustainable model in dealing with neighbourhoods at the dilapidated heart of Historic Cairo" (Built Environment Collective – Megawra, 2018, November).

The proposal put forth halts any plans of eviction or demolition of al-Hattaba residents and area. It also reflects Megawra BEC's ethos, in which heritage is viewed not as dead space, but a space that is to be interacted and lived with. As the press release states, "the proposal offers the possibility of continuing tourist visits to the Citadel of Salah al-Din through a tourist route that starts from al-Bab al-Jadid and passes through al-Hattaba and its historical buildings (Built Environment Collective – Megawra, 2018, November). Furthermore, the proposal focuses on "presenting al-Hattaba as an area of traditional craft... proposed projects includes the establishment of new craft centres for the development and creation of new designs, and to attract other types of crafts, fully utilising the nature of the area, improving tourist experience and providing employment opportunities for residents of al-Hattaba to raise economic standards in the neighbourhood as a whole (Built Environment Collective – Megawra, 2018, November).

Megawra was able to find an opening in all of the different institutions' readings of al-Hattaba, and as I referenced earlier, was empowered by article 30 of *Law of 117 of 1983*. However, this approval was not the end of the work, as Megawra continues to work on refining the master plan, and conducting regular community meetings in different streets of al-Hattaba to have the residents' input and collaboration in said master plan.

I conclude this section by reflecting on this concept of the gaze under which these different institutions continue to view al-Hattaba. The Ministry of Antiquities' viewing al-Hattaba in terms of its relationship to the citadel. The Informal Settlement Development Fund's viewing it as informal settlements. The Cairo Governorate's viewing it as land that must be evacuated. This concept of the gaze is interesting, but in all of these different perspectives, there is the common thread of othering al-Hattaba, and objectifying it, and constantly viewing it vacant of its residents, and viewing it as isolated rhythms.

## A Violent Isolation of Rhythms//

In comparing and listing these different webs of laws that al-Hattaba finds itself caught in, I must return to the question of: What happens to the people and place of al-Hattaba in the isolation of its multiple rhythms by different institutions' interpretations? What are the consequences of the resulting contradicting laws?

As Lefebvre (2004) argues, a place, a space is not a set of singular rhythms, but multiple and complex rhythms all coming together to make a place, just like al-Hattaba. Al-Hattaba is the cacophony of rhythms. It is the rhythms of its residents' lives, rhythms of the ordinary, rhythms of the place, its historic monuments, its homes, and so much more; and how these rhythms come together and intersect on multiple planes is what makes al-Hattaba.

Thus, al-Hattaba is all of the above and more, and isolating any one of these rhythms or isolating to any single plane of time places the whole area in violent precarity. This is precisely what the different institutions have done. The Ministry of Antiquities' views al-Hattaba in terms of its historical rhythms, and its relationship to the citadel, and reduces it to the category of citadel buffer zone. The Informal Settlement Development Fund isolates al-Hattaba to the rhythms of its old and collapsing homes, and reduces it to the category of informal settlements. The Cairo Governorate views it as land that must be evacuated. Thus, in isolating the rhythms of al-Hattaba on different planes of time and read according to isolated rhythms, al-Hattaba is denied a generative present, and left to a rebounding precarity that it continues to oscillate between.

This reduction and isolation of rhythms by these different institutions is problematic as it reduces a whole neighborhood whose relationship to time, space, and the social is complex. As I have explained in the beginning of this chapter, it is a violent and painful act to self-demolish your own home, one that you can no longer live in, and one that is falling apart as you live in it. This is not an issue to be romanticized or illustrated as resilience or resistance. It is evident in the self-destruction of homes by their owners' hands, the mental and physical health strain that becomes a reality in living such intense violence and precarity.

Thus, the precarious rebound that al-Hattaba continues to find itself in is a violent one with consequences that are evident from the ruins left behind, in homes that are destroyed, the crafts that have died, the people who have left, and community ties that are weakened. The

isolation of all of these rhythms then paints a specific temporal feature that al-Hattaba rebounds and recurrently finds itself in, and I describe this pattern as “Temporal Vertigo,” as Daniel Knight (2016) writes in his article “Temporal Vertigo in Space Time Vortices on Greece’s Central Plane.” What happens is that areas like al-Hattaba, which are continuously exposed to rapid changes and are at the receiving end of many rapid and contradicting jurisdictional decisions, leave them feeling precarious and anxious, experiencing an existential “temporal vertigo” (Knight, 2016). That is because this anxiety that is felt in Greece, in Knight’s article, parallels what al-Hattaba residents are feeling, where “the present becomes uncanny due to the social interrogation of the ‘now’ and its unquestioned links between past, present, and future.” (Knight, 2016, p.36) As Khalifa sings in his song:

“And the government also came back, seven years after the revolution

They told us again, you will leave, and we told them again, we will never” (Khalifa, 2017).

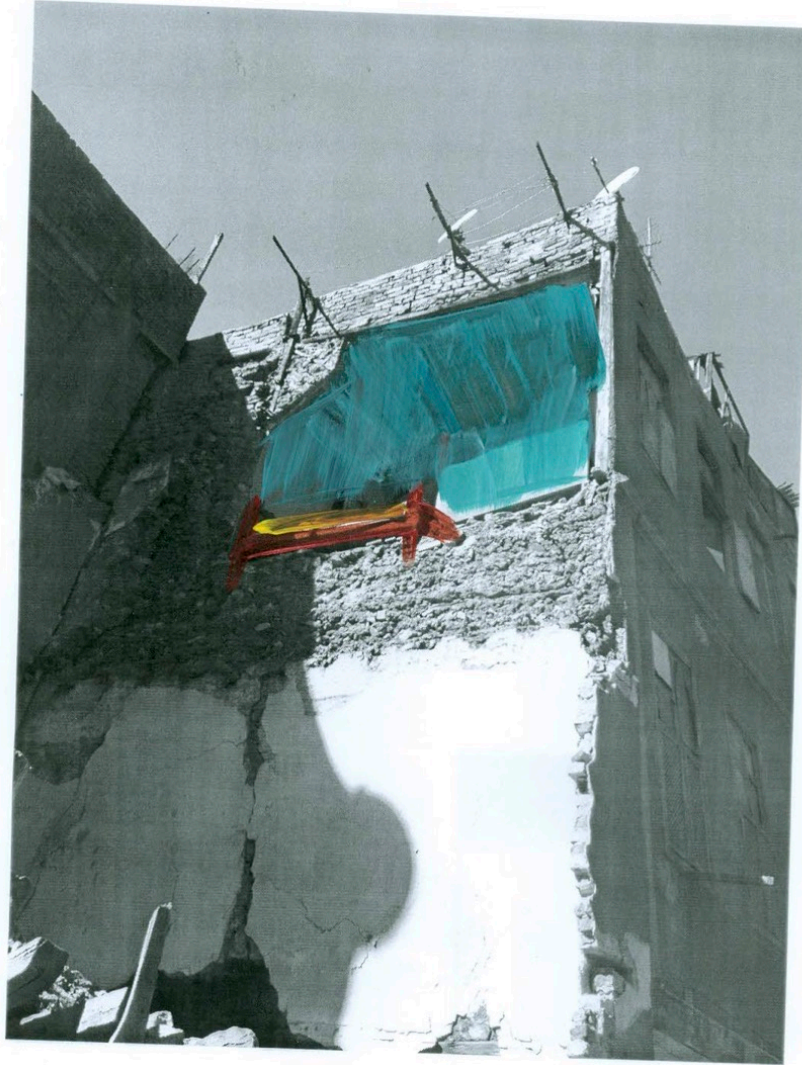
I conclude this section with another event in which another house was also demolished.

Although the reasons for this building’s demolition are rumored and ambiguous, no sooner was the house demolished than a resident from al-Hattaba had informed Megawra BEC. House Number 2 was demolished one morning on March 2019. There are many different rumors related to whether it was the municipality or the owner that destroyed the home. However, I want to pay attention to House Number 3, its neighboring home, whose wall fell apart the morning after House Number 2 was demolished.



Imagine sleeping in your own home, and waking up to realize that the wall of your bedroom is collapsing, your bed hanging on the edge of debris. To feel your bedroom wall collapse is a bizarre happening. Not only is it symbolic of what it feels like to live in al-Hattaba, it is the actuality of the reality of living in such precarity: To be asleep, in such a vulnerable state, and the shock of waking up to a collapsing bedroom. This is the overarching precarity and reality in al-Hattaba.

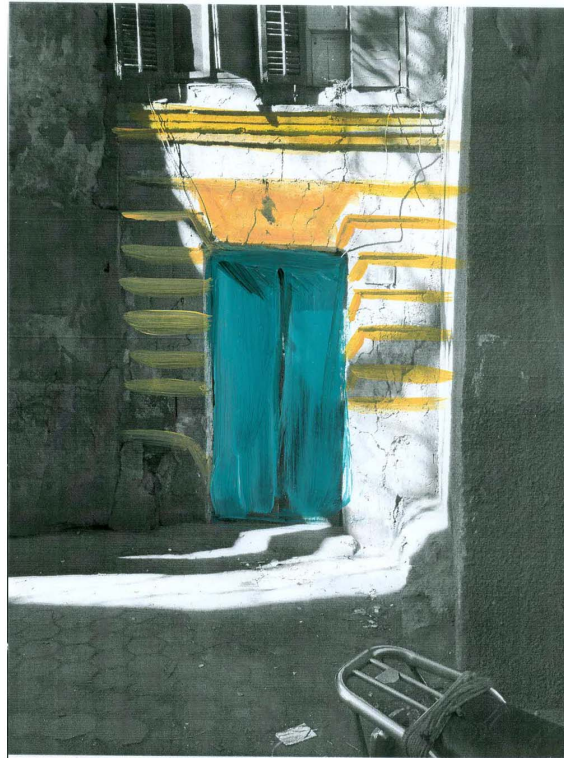
In conclusion, this chapter illustrates the historical readings that informed the contemporary laws and legislations that have placed al-Hattaba in much precarity. The following two chapters explore two particular manifestations of al-Hattaba's complex relationship with time, which cannot be fully understood without the context that this chapter has provided.



House number 2 in ruins, House number 3's bedroom wall collapses, with the bed hanging outside the bedroom, planking over a rubble of dust and ruins underneath

# III. Chapter 2: Temporal Rupture

## The Communal Ovens



Picture on left: Passing by a home, which I like to call “al-Hattaba Layered Cake,” from my initial visit on September 8, 2019

Picture on right: A rebound to ovens: On March 13, 2019, I returned to the home I passed by initially, and I realized that it had been an Oven

[An exchange between my friend Muhammed Khalifa, from al-Hattaba, and I as we move through al-Hattaba on March 13, 2019. In my recurring visits to al-Hattaba, I always return to this home that I like to call “al-Hattaba layered cake,” located in al-Khokha St<sup>34</sup>.]

*“This house is beautiful ya Khalifa. I pass by it all the time”*  
*“This isn’t just a house ya Heba! This belonged to my family! This was an oven!”*  
*“An Oven?! How many ovens are there here in al-Hattaba?”*  
*“Many! Here let me take you to another one.”*  
*And he leads us to another oven, another closed door,*

Khalifa and I then make our way to another closed door, a wooden, worn out door, barely held together at its hinges. A door that looks like it held behind it a world that belonged to a different time and place. This door appeared to be so worn, and so sadly shut; and in its shutting, I wonder what rhythms were shut and sealed off behind this door. And I ask Khalifa, sadly, “why did this oven door close?” And he then tells me “I don’t know, let’s go ask al-Hagga<sup>35</sup> sitting on the *mastaba*<sup>36</sup> in the corner of the street, and here I meet the marvelous and motherly al-Hagga Zaynab, and I politely ask if I may join her on her *mastaba*. Little did I know then that these ovens become entry points to understand the complexity and thickness and multiple pasts in al-

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<sup>34</sup> al-Khokha St. is a street located in the heart of the neighborhood and it is a spine that geographically splits the neighborhood into two.

<sup>35</sup> Al-Hagga: an Arabic word used before an elderly woman’s name

<sup>36</sup> mastaba: Arabic word for bench

Hattaba. Although these ovens were used for communal events, they were mainly bread ovens, used to make 'aysh *balady* or Egyptian Pita bread



Door of Hagg Soliman's oven, located in al-Nezameya alley

Al-Hagga Zaynab is the daughter of al-Hag Soliman. This was the oven her father ran, and that was used as a communal oven, shared by the neighborhood, located in the *Dahdoora* zone of al-Hattaba<sup>37</sup>. As soon as we begin to talk of the oven, she began to speak of *Ayam al-Forn*<sup>38</sup>, or the days of the oven and as she was about to describe it, her eyes softened and looked to the ground, a longing smile washed over her face. At that moment, I could see that she was transported somewhere, as she conjured and described to us *Ayam al-Forn*. And as she conjured the “spirit memory”<sup>39</sup> of the days of the oven, she was here, but barely (Lapoujade, 2018, p. 13). And it is in this moment that we can see time and space folding upon itself, as she rebounds to the memory of the days of the oven:

“We would make *kahk*<sup>40</sup> *el-Eid* together, everyone coming with trays filled with *kahk* to bake, and the lines around the oven would be so long, it would be so crowded, *zahma*

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<sup>37</sup> As mentioned earlier, in Megawra we conducted different community meetings in different streets in al-Hattaba. One of the reasons that we went to different streets is because we began to understand the grouping inside al-Hattaba. The grouping although of course are fluid and permeable can be felt when the residents refer to those near the peripheral Dohdaira Street as “*Dahdoora*,” and those surrounding al-Khokha street as “*Hattaba*.”

<sup>38</sup> *Ayam al-Forn*: translates from Arabic into days of the oven

<sup>39</sup> Bergson describes how “[spirit memory] is not a memory of what we perceive in the present; it is not the memory of what we have been. Rather it is the memory of what we are and what we have never stopped being, even if we have no knowledge of it. It is what provides the figure of time, which opens or closes the future.” (Lapoujade, 2018, p. 13).

<sup>40</sup> *Kahk*: seasonal cookies and pastries made during the Muslim Eid holiday

moot<sup>41</sup>. There would be lines and an order so everyone could bake, and we would not just bake *kahk*, we also would bake our macaroni with eggplant and [other meals]. The *kahk* was so delicious, it would melt in your mouth. There were beautiful memories here. There was *baraka*<sup>42</sup>, here.”

She spoke of the smell that would fill the air from the oven as it cooked and baked, her hands twirling in the air, as if she could still feel it and smell it in the very air we were breathing, as she reawakened it from her memory. Al-Hagga Zaynab described the past according not to a general category, but she expressed it rather through the days of the oven, as the oven created a clear marker between the past and the present. Furthermore, she gestures towards tangibles such as the *kahk*, and the crowds that would fill the street waiting in line for the oven as goodness and blessings. She spoke of the oven as though it was the heart of the neighborhood, and how in the production of the food, and in the eating of its food, there was an intangible glue that would bring al-Hattaba<sup>43</sup> together.

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<sup>41</sup> zahma moot: zahma is an Arabic word for crowded, the phrase zahma moot means that it is overly crowded

<sup>42</sup> baraka: an Arabic word that means blessing, and can be used to describe an inherent goodness or blessing in something

<sup>43</sup> Although there were several zones in al-Hattaba, the two main ones *Dahdoora* and *Hattaba*, the ovens were shared by the whole neighborhood and its different zones.

However, suddenly while speaking, it was as though a bubble had burst, and her composure changed as she spoke of the current status of al-Hattaba, and she said, so longingly: “Ramadan isn’t what it once was. Today, if someone even makes a morsel, they shut 30 doors on it [to keep for themselves]. The doors of the oven closed, and so did the homes to each other... We tell zamaan<sup>44</sup> to come back, but it will never come back, if only it could come back. Before when people would eat, the doors would be open to each other, the doors were made of wood, there used to be *rahma*<sup>45</sup>,”

I asked her why her father’s oven closed, and she described it as forces outside of her control: “I tried to carry it after father died, but I couldn’t do it, and the workers bewildered and overwhelmed me.” I believe this alludes to the modernization of the oven, which was once run manually. One of the residents, whose name is Rana, described the oven as losing its *baraka* as it was modernized and converted to an automatic oven.

The sudden change in al-Hagga Zaynab’s composure, I believe, illustrates and parallels the event of closing of the oven door, and how the oven door acts as a clear marker or rupture that distinguishes between past and present. There was a goodness that was shut in the closing of ovens. This closure of the oven doors mirrors the closure of the citadel door, and its link with

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<sup>44</sup> zamaan: an Arabic word meaning “the past”

<sup>45</sup> rahma: an Arabic word that means mercy



the liver cart that went out of business: there was *rizq* that was cut off in their closing. There were rhythms here that were carried by the oven; rhythms of family, rhythms of the collective memory, annual and “cyclical rhythms” of festival and feast in Ramadan and Eid, that resound and come together to contribute to what we call al-Hattaba (LeFebvre, 2004, p. 8). Also, the rite of breaking of bread and the ‘eish w malh<sup>46</sup>, bread and salt bond, made in such breakage is an intangible glue that would bring family and friends together. An intangible glue that is described in the materiality of doors and their transformation: “the wooden doors that were once open have now become iron, closed on each other.” And the closing of the oven doors shut these rhythms and locked them away; the effect is evident as, al-Hagga Zaynab describes: “the place is now empty, everyone left.” Some left al-Hattaba and other left this world altogether.

The oven, and al-Hagga Zaynab’s oven is no exception, is described as a relic from another time that could not be kept in the current moment in al-Hattaba. Al-Hagga Zaynab’s oven, in an attempt to modernize and bring it to the pace and fast rhythms of modernity, lost something, and was forced to close. The other large oven of the al-Badr family closed because as it aged, there were too many descendants that claimed their right to the oven, which could not be run by so many people. Another popular oven was al Hagga Madiha’s oven, which is over 40

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<sup>46</sup> eish w malh: an Arabic phrase which translates bread and salt, it carries the same meaning as the English saying of “breaking bread”

years old: rumors say that her husband married her so that he could inherit the oven from her and her family. Whenever I ask about why this oven was closed I get the response: “it just closed on its own.”

The three ovens of Zaynab, Madiha and the Badr family, as stated above, each had their own particular reasons for closing. However, structural forces also contributed to the closing of these ovens, and these forces are interrelated to each other. These forces include economic factors such as supply and demand, increased ingredient prices, modernization, proliferation of oven technologies, competition, and even the forces of government policy, in the form of the wheat flour quota system. For example, in speaking of ovens, such as al Hagga Zaynab’s, of being from another time, it reveals the ovens’ inability to keep up with today’s modern and fast rhythms, and the demand that is required of them. The oven, its materiality, the way it was manually run, moves in a way that is not compatible with the speed that is required in today’s contemporary rhythms.

Furthermore, the ingredients used to make bread in the oven have transformed, transformed in the sense that they have become too expensive. I was told on one of my visits when I encountered my first small oven, found inside a family’s home: “this is another time and

age young lady, *ayam zaman*<sup>47</sup>, there weren't even these pants, it was just our *galaleeb*<sup>48</sup> and that's it. Now we can barely afford oil. Today money has no baraka, everything is too expensive. Everything is too difficult." I was told that the ingredients to make and keep these ovens were too expensive, and that the ingredients themselves have lost their *baraka*. Another reason I was told was that the technology and proliferation of too many smaller ovens created too much competition for these bigger ovens to carry on baking the bread. These smaller ovens were inside the homes, serving each family individually, as Haggā Zaynab alluded the doors to homes closed and each one became more private and individual. Additionally, government subsidy kiosks started emerging and they provided subsidized bread. People in Hattaba relied on subsidized bread, although they continued to groan and complain of having to commute and use transportation outside of the neighborhood just to receive some bread.

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<sup>47</sup> Ayam Zaman: translated from Arabic it means "days of the past"

<sup>48</sup> *galaleeb*: an Arabic word for traditional Egyptian garment



The oven belonging to the al-Badr family

Additionally, along with the increased prices of other ingredients, the flour subsidies must have affected the closure of the ovens. The *Egypt Food Subsidies: Benefit Incidence and Leakages* (2010), which is a document of the World Bank, writes of “The Egyptian Food Subsidy system in the 2000s” (The World Bank, 2010, p.2). This is around the time that the ovens closed, as indicated in the narratives of several residents, who

are in their 30’s, who recall the ovens of al-Hagga Zaynab and al-Hagga Madiha from their childhood of around 20 years ago. I believe that this event of their closures coincided with the allotment of flour that occurred in the 2000’s, in which:

“Quotas of subsidized food items delivered to Egypt’s governorates continue to be determined by the central government. With respect to flour, the Central Department of Planning at MOSS determines the size of each governorate’s share by extrapolating from

past allocations using population growth in each governorate. The quotas of flour delivered to bakeries to produce baladi bread are then determined by MOSS based on the bakery's share in the total quota received by the governorate in previous years." (The World Bank, 2010, p.11)

Thus, this flour allotment illustrates how the state and its decisions affect and change people's way of life. The *Egypt Wheat Sector Review* by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, states "the government provided subsidized wheat to the bakeries, with which they were meant to produce baladi bread to be sold at a subsidized price...[resulting in multiple results such as] there was at times limited baladi bread available for sale, causing long queues and political tension. In addition, the quality of the bread was poor" (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2015, p. 73). And more specifically to al-Hattaba, it caused the closing of ovens, who could not have access to the flour, and contributed to what is now called *Ayam al Forn*. And ovens, just like houses that crumble due to different legislative precarity, cannot survive these different forces that act simultaneously, churning away at the collective that is al-Hattaba.

Thus, these ovens speak to categories of time and space, and how the social gets to be reassembled in their ruins. These are spaces of not just food, although food is central in the making of the social; they are also spaces that house a collective memory. In other words, regardless of the size of the ovens, there is a common illustration of these ovens in the collective memory of al-Hattaba: these ovens are described as relics from another time. The doors of these

ovens act as markers of temporal rupture that describe a different time, and when revisited in the collective memory of residents, they act as portals that transport us to a different time.

Portal here means both a literal and metaphorical door that is a rupture that bursts an assumed linearity of time and space, as it transports us to a past while we are very much in the present.

The ovens not only paint a past, but they also became entry points to a past that is complex and thick, and a present that is just as complex. As illustrated with al-Hagga Zaynab: “al-Hattaba is my home, this place is good, and if I go, where will I go? I am like a fish out of water then.”

To understand this complexity the ovens became entry points to a past that is equally quite complex and thick. There were multiple encounters in al-Hattaba that come together in bits and pieces and paint the *zamaan* of al-Hattaba, and the complex relationship people have to the space and place in al-Hattaba. There is a softening to the conversation that occurs when the ovens enter the conversation; there is a longing that allows for an illustration of a past that is temporally thick and multiplicitous. Although the elderly residents have a stronger association with the ovens, there are also younger generations in their mid 20's and later 30's <sup>49</sup>who also recall these ovens from their childhood.

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<sup>49</sup> The generations that are younger than their 20's do not seem to have any memories or connections with ovens or *ayam el forn*, as their closings are associated with a time that precedes them.

As I stated in the beginning of this chapter, little did I know of the complex pasts that would be illustrated by walking through the entry points that the closed oven doors provided. Mohamed Serag, a pearl inlaying craftsman in his late 30's, who was very cautious of me at first, opened up so warmly when we began to speak of the ovens. He recalls the oven of al-Hagga Madhia, and how her oven is one of the oldest in al-Hattaba, being around 40 years old. He tells me how towards the end of her life she just ran a small *koshk*<sup>50</sup> at the corner of the street. And while describing the days of the oven, it becomes evident in his narrative that the days of the oven are associated with his childhood. He tells me how he was a student of the Madrasa of Sidi Shahin School, "a 19th century building... [that] was once a large madrasa... [and contains] two domed tomb chambers" (Warner, 2005, p.186). He recalls his teacher, a stern man named Mr. Khashaba<sup>51</sup>, who had a room filled with the most peculiar wooden trinkets and toys from his travels. Mr. Khashaba has a room dedicated to these toys, and he would reward the well-behaved students with time to play with them after school. He spoke of how after school he would rent bikes from 'Am Gom'aa, and ride through the whole neighborhood with his friends: a childhood he wishes his kids could have experienced. A childhood that he describes as one

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<sup>50</sup> *koshk*: Arabic word for kiosk

<sup>51</sup> Mr. Khashaba, his name translates into piece of wood, and coincidentally he had wooden trinkets that he collected for the school children to play with



The Madrasa of Sidi Shahin historic monument which used to operate as a school that was run by Mr. Khashaba

“away from [technology’s] screens.” He even discussed his memory of the citadel door, which is located next to the Sidi Shahin school, and the buses that his friends would chase on their bikes that would carry foreigners from “all over the world.”



'Am Gom'aa the 'Agalaty<sup>52</sup>, a man in his late 80's, runs the local bike shop, which the kids of the neighborhood to this day still rent bikes from, immediately begins by describing his love for al-Hattaba:

"I was born here! These are my homes! I grew up here! Generations grew up here! My maternal Grandfather worked for the English in the citadel! He used to carry me on his shoulders, as the King Farouq would pass us by in his carriage and give us chocolates! Huge bars of chocolate the size of my arm, not like chocolate of today."

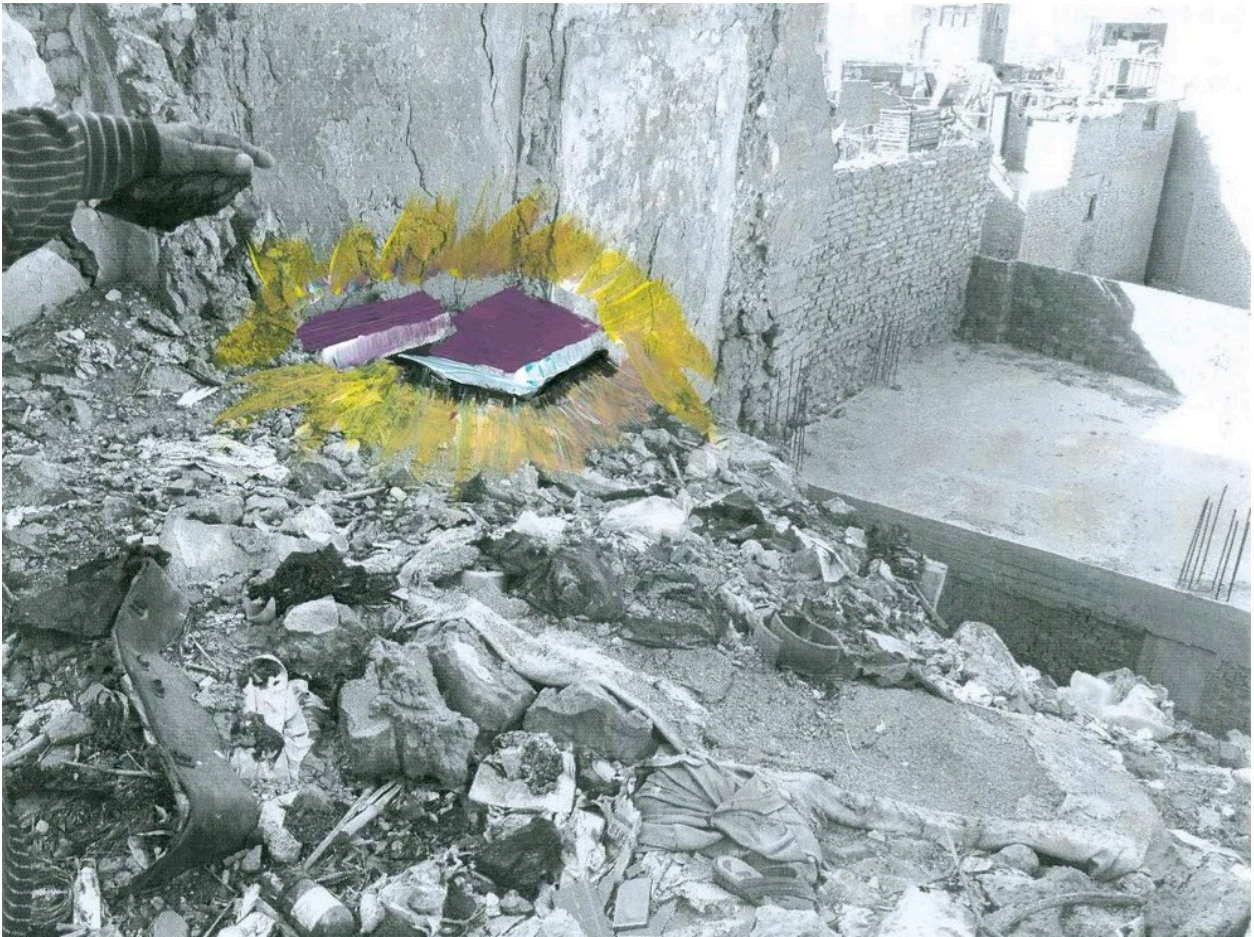
'Am Gom'aa associates the past strongly with food, and the *baraka*<sup>53</sup> that was embedded in the food, as he described: "The bread used to be huge, made with the butter of the past," he gestured with his hands to convey the size of the bread – bread that came from the ovens. And he described that it was the goodness of "akl zamaan," or food of the past, "that is carrying him, or allowing his legs to carry him." He was very eager to describe his past to me, as he walked me through the ruins of one of his old homes, which he described as one of the homes that collapsed during the 1992 earthquake, to show me a certain *mastaba* in these ruins. We climbed and made our way, and I assumed to walk diagonally, but 'Am Gom'aa walked through it as though the floor plan still existed, his "sentient being" remembering the walls and halls and

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<sup>52</sup> Agalaty: a man who runs a bike shop

<sup>53</sup> baraka: an Arabic word that describes a concept of inherent goodness, or blessing that is usually bestowed in a person, thing, place, or moment

floors (Ingold, 2011,p.12). He leads me to a corner and describes a bench, and how this bench “carries a whole family history; we would all live in this alcove and there was peace of mind here.”



This is a picture of Am Goma pointing at the “the *mastaba* that “carri[ed] a whole family history”, as we both stand on the ruins of one of his family’s homes that collapsed years ago

Another elderly man named al-Hag Adel, in his 80’s, and his daughter Nayera, in her 30’s, were a family that opened their home to me. Al-Hag Adel is a clock-smith who lives in one of the

older homes next to al-Shurafa monument, located right next to the citadel wall. As we entered the corridor that leads to their home, it zigs and zags which made it feel like it had a military design in mind, to act as a barricade, a point that Nayera confirmed. “You feel like these homes were something else, you feel the corridors, we are right next to the wall so it’s not surprising.” During the engagement, al-Hag Adel and his daughter had differing views of the past. Adel spoke of al-Hattaba as his only home, and how his father, like ‘Am Gom3a, also worked for the English in the citadel. He spoke of a past that is longed for, a past in his childhood where the door of the citadel was opened, and there were courts and trees of the citadel called “*da’n el basha*”<sup>54</sup>.” He told me how the trees had the most beautiful smell, and that he and his friends would play football next to these trees, which now no longer existed as they were cut down years ago. In speaking of the past, he described multiple pasts that were troublesome. There was a *zamaan* that he referred to during the 1992 earthquake, in which many of the homes collapsed, and due of the laws and jurisdictions (see chapter one), they were not allowed to consolidate their homes. He then made comparisons to the present, noting that things are better now, as many of them were able to consolidate their homes and reclaim them during and after the 2011 revolution. A sentiment that is also shared in Muhammed Khalifa’s song “al-Hattaba ‘Anwany”<sup>55</sup>:

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<sup>54</sup> da’n el basha: the name of the tree which translates into “beard of the Pasha”

<sup>55</sup> al-Hattaba ‘Anwany is the name of Muhammed Khalifa’s song, and it translated into “al-Hattaba is my address”, which I detailed in chapter one.

“But with the grace of God  
The Jan 25 revolution came  
And all the citizens were all ecstatic  
We finally felt secure  
We went ahead and built our buildings  
And we were all filled with joy  
And justice was served, and our people came back  
Our people they came back” (Khalifa, 2017).

Al-Hag Adel speaks of today not only in terms of the homes, but also evokes and discusses how difficult the present is, and blames it on the fastness of technology, and the smart phones that create a disconnect between him and his grandchildren.

All of these encounters illustrate that the past is not simply referred to as a generic concept, nor is it singular or linear. It is not just a past, but a “zamaan” with a thickness that is contradictory, complex, and multiple and materialized in the everyday places and things like ovens and the food of the past. In other words, the past is made and marked in the everyday, and there are certain events that rupture and become clear markers for defining the complexity of such a past. Furthermore, the past to certain individuals has different layers of meaning that lead to multiple and different understandings of the past and present. In this chapter I focused on a particular rupture which was the closing of oven doors, and I illustrated how through my specific encounters that such a closing affected the everyday rhythms of al-Hattaba, and how

these disrupted rhythms illustrate a pattern of temporal rupture and a transformation in social relationships and community life.

In conclusion, this chapter focuses on the temporal pattern of rupture. I focus on how the events of closing of oven doors creates a rupture, as it creates a distinct marker in illustrating a past that is multiple, complex, and made in the everyday in the resident's becoming. It also illustrates how time is made in practice (Bourdieu 1997, p.207). Furthermore, it illustrates multiple temporal patterns that contribute to the making of al-Hattaba, for the temporal pattern of rupture, and the temporal vertigo seep into each other.

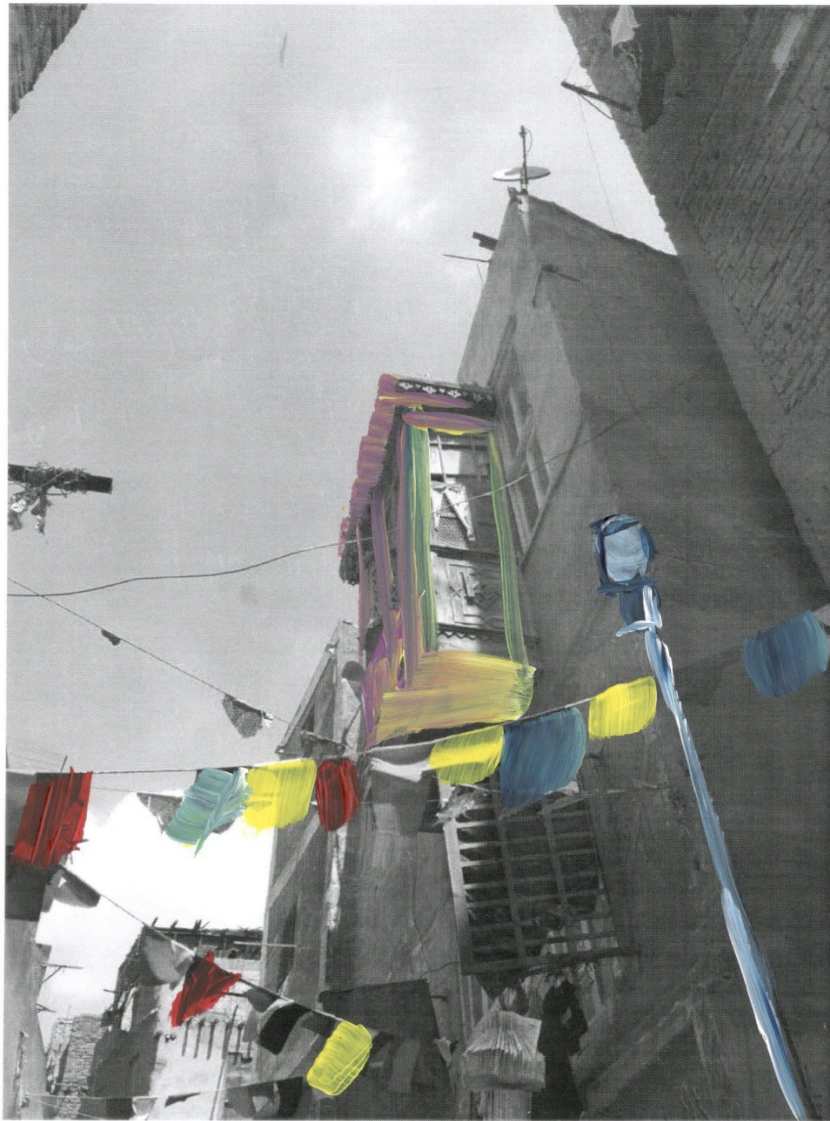
They seep into each other because as discussed in chapter 1, the temporal pattern of vertigo is the overarching precarity and backdrop of all-Hattaba. The ethnography in this chapter illustrates the results of precarity, because the pasts that were described by the residents' gesture towards a different social fabric and density than the one currently found in al-Hattaba. The different social fabric is also partially due to the unbearable precarity of living in a volatile present and preceding pasts caused by laws and legislation that drove many residents out of al-Hattaba. This affected the social rhythms and social fabric of al-Hattaba, as al Hagga Zaynab recalls: "the place is now empty, everyone left."

I conclude this chapter with an encounter that occurred in our community meetings in al-Hattaba in the summer of 2019. These are community meetings in which Megawra continues to work with al-Hattaba residents on the detailing phase of the Masterplan Proposal sent in October 2018. And in those meetings, the request of reopening the citadel door is one that is

constantly brought up, alone with the continued request to open an oven. There is connection here between the citadel and oven doors, and the *baraka* and *rizq* that they bring in their opening. It is a request and proposal that speaks multitudes, to not only reopen businesses, but to bring back the tangible and intangible *baraka* of breaking bread together, and perhaps revive a past that was lost to al-Hattaba.

## IV. Chapter 3: Temporal Fluidity

### The Rhythm of Crafts



A piece of art, a Mashrabiyya that I found on my first visit to al-Hattaba, that stopped me in my tracks, that I have returned to again and again

I find myself continuously returning to a *mashrabiyya* masterpiece. I first stumbled upon it during my first visit to al-Hattaba, and I found it once again sitting across from al-Hagga Zaynab when we were talking of ovens, and in my being in al-Hattaba I continue to pass by it, time and time again. It was finally in summer of 2019, during the sweltering heat of July, that the paths of 'Alaa, the dweller of the *Mashrabiyya* House, and I finally crossed. He was aware that I had been in the area for a while and that I was conducting fieldwork on the history of al-Hattaba.

We met at around sunset, as the sweltering heat makes sitting in the streets intolerable during these summer months. He set up two chairs, one plastic and purple for me to sit on, and another wooden stool for him to sit on, placing them a few meters down the street in front of a turquoise colored pearl-inlaying workshop.

He spoke of his father fondly, and stated that his grandfather was born on this street. His grandfather originally worked in khiyamiyya<sup>56</sup>. His father was al-Hagg Ahmed, who was a pearl inlaying craftsman and a trader, and he would travel to Morocco to sell their pearl inlaying crafts. His father opened a pearl inlaying workshop in 1986, and he explained to me that his father was an innovator, a pioneer who fast-tracked the craft; he added “the whole name of the game is in the manipulation of time.” He came up with techniques and methods that fast-tracked the making of pearl inlaying goods. And in this moment something clicked: I remembered Mohamed

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<sup>56</sup> khiyamiyya: Egyptian patchwork



Abdullah recalling “al-Hagg Ahmed, may his soul rest in peace, [who] taught them all everything.”

*Wait! Is your father THE al-Hagg Abdullah? The one Mohamed Abdullah and all the other pearl inlaying craftsman describe as al-Kibeer, the teacher who taught them all about Pearl Inlaying?*

*Yes that is my father! Oh you warm my heart, you warm my heart telling me that they speak of my father this way, he was such a good man, Allah yerhamo, may his soul rest in peace.*

As ‘Alaa’ sits and allows for this remembrance of his father to settle, I can see him holding back tears, clasping his heart in one hand, and his cigarette burning in the other. This remembrance allows him to recall a past, a past or *zamaan* that he says is no longer found here. But he does not simply call it a past, he calls it *ayam waldy*, “the days of my father.” His eyes, in this moment, like Al-Hagga Zaynab’s, look to the ground, the “spirit memory” overcomes him (Lapoujade, 2018, p. 13). With a longing in his eyes, he rebounds to the days of his father, he recalls, “my father was a good man, he would carry anyone and their responsibilities with him, he would give people workshops for nothing in return, and that is a gesture that no longer exists in this day and age.” In this moment, I recall when just a few months ago, Mohamed Abdullah and I were walking from his workshop to his storage unit, and he would sadly point to all the closed pearl inlaying workshops that had gone out of business.

He described his father as a man who would invest in the wellbeing of the people that he would train and find workshop spaces for. He said how his father al-Hagg Ahmed spoke of the

concept of a year, the concept of a year spoken as a litmus test. I ask, what is in a year? 'Alaa' then explains that the significance of a year is that it allows one to observe how they handle "the changes of different seasons," and it is in that amount of time that you can truly see how a place can grow and survive. 'Alaa tells me how his father was a pioneer in the field, teaching different techniques to different craftsmen, whom he considered his students. He taught them, but also kept some secrets of the trade to himself. His father introduced plastics, stamps, among other techniques, to fast track and produce a steady supply for the market. 'Alaa then tells me how most of these workshops went out of business, and how the present is not like *zamaan*.

To 'Alaa, his father's death acted as a rupture, a marker of past and present, a past he describes where "all the houses were one" and open to each other. I ask him what changed, what made the houses close off from each other, and he says "the cause is al-taghreeb<sup>57</sup>" he would say. Al-Taghreeb, and this connotes and implies that there is an estrangement occurring in al-Hattaba that has led to houses "closing [their doors] on each other." He speaks of technology as being the reason for this *taghreeb*, which is quite interesting, considering how his father contributed to technologies and techniques that allowed for the faster rhythms of this craft.

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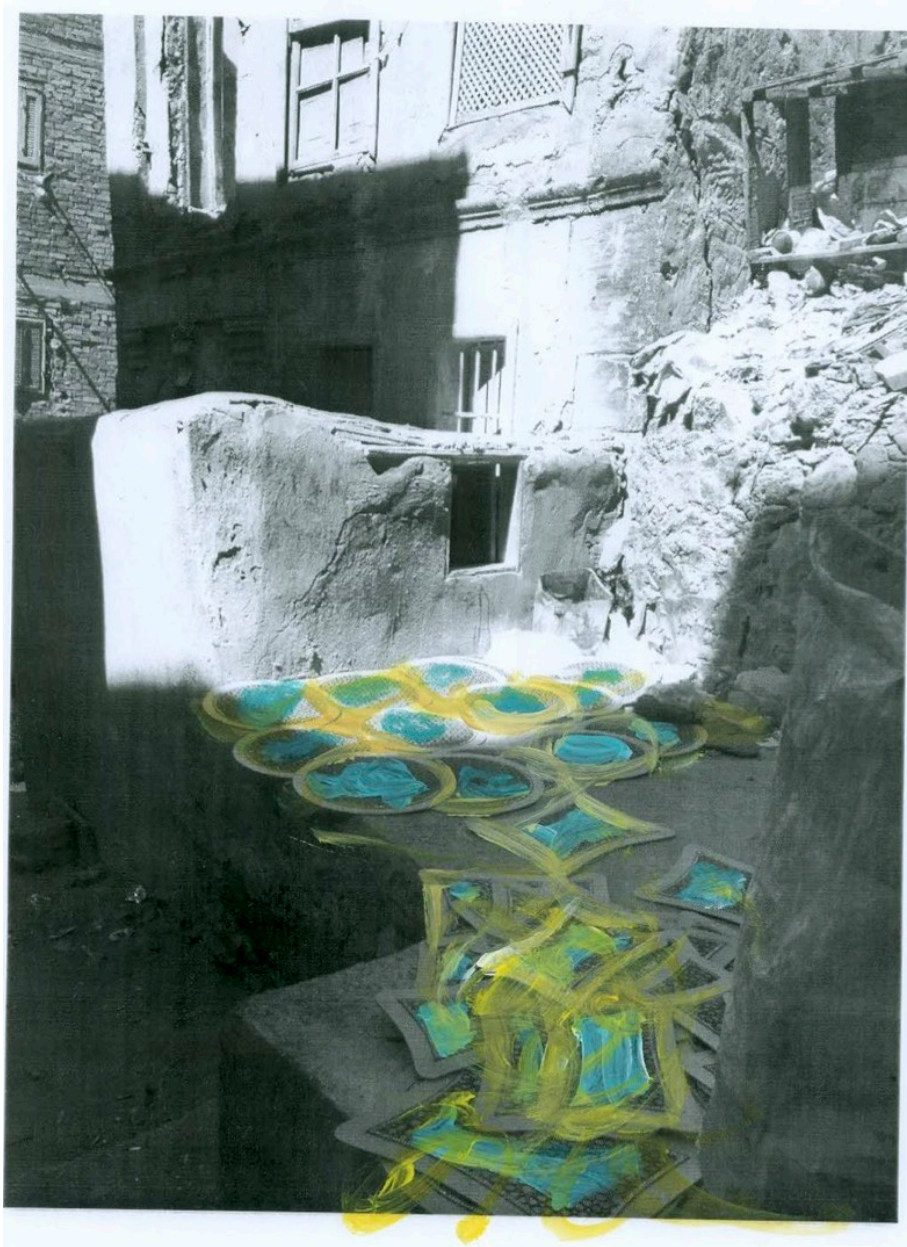
<sup>57</sup> al-taghreeb: is an Arabic word whose root *ghorb*, means strange, to make strange, to estrange

I then recall these pearl inlaying workshops, the ones that practice techniques which speed up the process of making the crafts. I recall how in these workshops the smell of bubbling black glue is so thick and repugnant. I recall the pieces that were shown to me from these workshops that all resemble the works that can be found in Khan al-Khalili<sup>58</sup>, produced in mass quantities for the market. I recall the plastic stamps, from Mohamed Serag's workshops, in quantities that spill out because their amount cannot be contained inside the workshop. I call this craft, the one defined by the market and speed, fast craft.

But there is also another type of craft found in al-Hattaba, one that does not work with the rhythms of the market. It is a rhythm of craft that is based in slowness, in an intimacy between the craftsman and their craft, and I call the rhythms of this craft slow craft. There is a chain of workshops that are connected to each other that describe their own work as "something else," describing it as "work made by an order/request from specific clients, [not] work made for the markets." There are three craftsmen whom I have met who work predominantly with wood, and I learned that they are pearl inlayers as well, and their workshops are based in al-Hattaba, but they do not live in al-Hattaba nor are they from al-Hattaba. They are all connected to each other in their labor practices, and describe each other as links in a chain.

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<sup>58</sup> Khan al-Khalili: this is a large bazaar or souq located in historic Cairo that is a known tourist attraction site



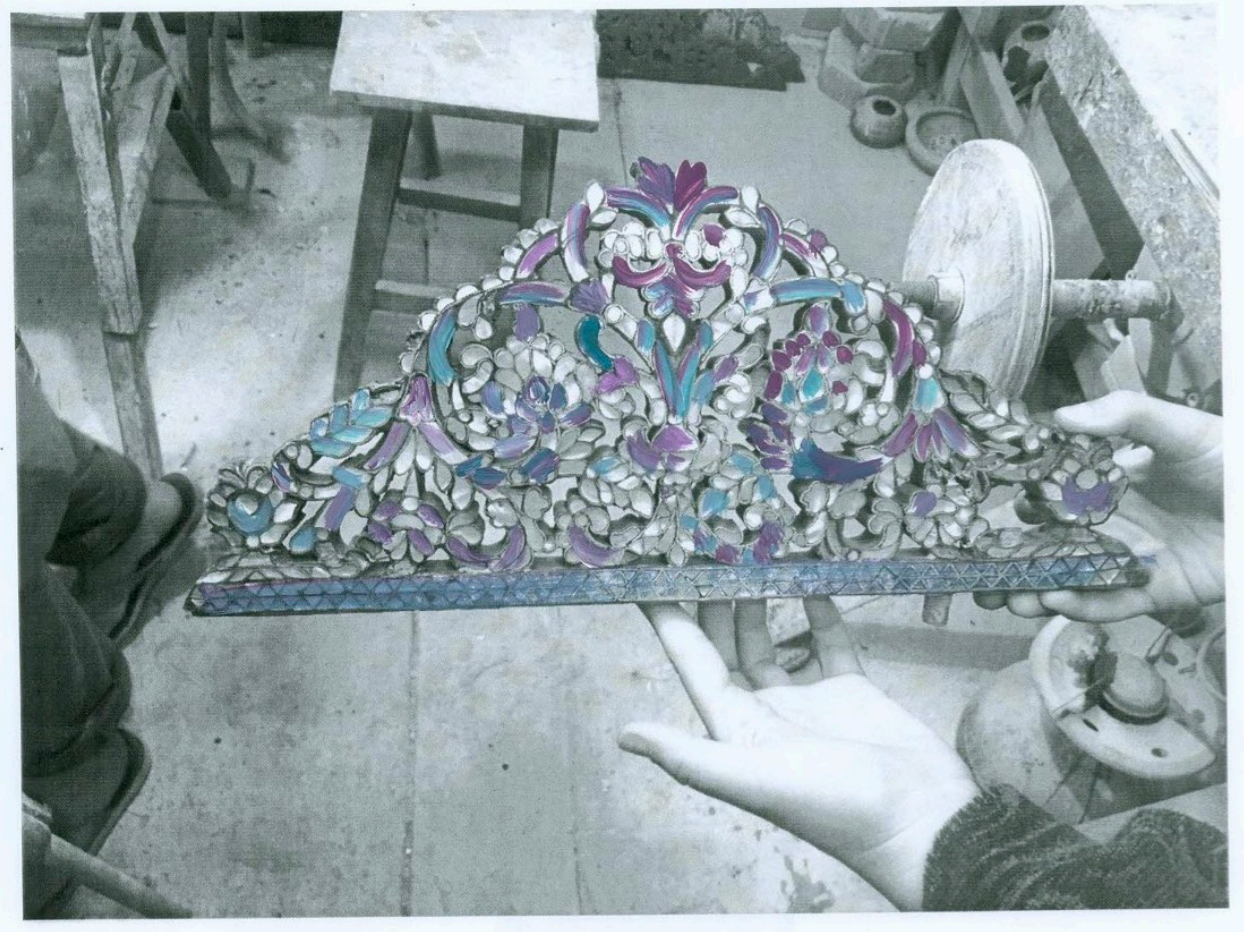
Stamps spilling over and outside of fast craft pearl inlaying workshops

‘Am Abdelrahman is the first pearl inlayer I met in al-Hattaba who follows this slow craft rhythm. When I asked him how he got into this craft, he described with a smile that his stumbling into the craft of pearl inlaying was merely *sodfa*<sup>59</sup>. He informed us that he was from al-Darb al-Ahmar, and that he and his colleagues were the “last generation of this craft.” I could not help but notice a puddle at his feet as he said this, sourcing from his feet but diverging out and drying into the concrete floor. He then led us to his friend, another pearl inlayer like him, called ‘Am Taymwr, who works with the smallest scales of pearl inlaying. He worked with his hands and thread-like saws to cut the pearls into the smallest pieces to place them into its wooden base. He, like Abdelrahman, does not live in al-Hattaba, but his workshop is located in al-Hattaba. He spoke kindly and explained to us that Abdelrahman was the one who told him about this workshop and suggested that he should work here. ‘Am Taymwr was very eager to share with us his meticulous and beautiful pieces that all felt like works of art. He spoke of his pieces as companions, and his tools as his friends, as he proudly displayed his work. When I asked him whether he created these designs, he firmly said no, for he would not allow himself to take credit for work that was not his. This then drew a comparison to the fast crafts, which all produce similar, if not the same, designs; designs whose credit is lost in their stamping, speed, and production in mass quantities. While ‘Am Taymwr held up his pieces, some in black pearl,

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<sup>59</sup> Sodfa: Arabic word for coincidence

some mixed with aluminum framed in wood, he held up each piece, brushing the dust from their etching and proudly said, “these pieces, they take time.”



A piece made by 'Am Taymwr, a “piece that takes time.”

'Am Taymwr then led us to 'Am Naguib, an older man, working on a wooden corner table/stool with so much dedication. 'Am Naguib's workshop neighbors 'Am Taymwr's, and their workshops neighbor the others in this long cave-like corridor. His workshop was blue, but

covered in so much dust and lit only by a single bulb. But there was something about this workshop, as if it was almost glowing, as the dust swirled against the single bulb and coated everything in the workshop, including 'Am Naguib himself. They first described their camaraderie in the craft, how in their line of craft, "There isn't anyone who works on their own, we all work together and complete each other, like links in a chain" as 'Am Taymwr's held up a piece that fit like a puzzle piece in 'Am Naguib's wooden stool. They both praised each other, and 'Am Naguib stated he could never work on the scale that 'Am Taymwr does, he liked working with the human scale of the stool, which he said took him at least two to three months to complete. He was a serious man, and he sounded as if he was mourning when he spoke of his craft as a dying art. "There are only three of us left here in the citadel who do the work that I do. It is because it takes time, it is not plastic." He justified his work in uniqueness that is etched in time. He then shifted and described the opaqueness of the fast craft, saying: "this work does not bring *kheir*<sup>60</sup>. They are all the same. My work is different. I work not because of the market. My work is visible, the way the money moves is transparent." This is opposed to the fast craft, which he then described as *ghamid* or opaque and ambiguous, as it moved too fast in the sense of its production and in the sense of the money it produced. Thus this fastness that led to such ambiguity was no longer considered visible/ transparent or "good." He once again justified the

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<sup>60</sup> kheir: is an Arabic word that means goodness, and is usually associated with baraka

uniqueness of his work, and how the fast crafts “are all copies of the same thing.” As ‘Am Naguib jabs, “their work is a work of plastic,” connoting a cheapness and a short life span, while the work of slow craft is “one that will last you your whole life time.”



‘Am Taymwr holding up one of his pieces that fit and “completed” ‘Am Naguib’s wooden stool.



These encounters illustrate that the “death” of the slow craft is due to multiple things. However, the main theme that contributes to this death is that the rhythm of slow crafts, like ovens, have become incompatible with the present and the speed that is required in today’s market. Also, the increasing cost of living, and the limited income that returns to the slow craft is an invisible hand that is forcing out the rhythms of the slow craft. Furthermore, this reaction from the market has its repercussions, as slow craft craftsmen discuss how they have tried to teach younger generations. They themselves admit that they cannot compete with the amount of money that the youth can make in a day driving a *tocloc*<sup>61</sup> or a *microbus*<sup>62</sup>. They also state that, “they [kids these days] do not have the patience, the patience to sit for hours working on one thing.”

The differences in rhythms of the slow and fast crafts are multiple, and they are given meaning through their differences and contrast. And these differences are apparent not only in the products used, but also in the workshops that reflect the labor, speed, and enmeshment that happen here. The fast craft pearl inlaying workshops are filled with the thick, suffocating smell of the black glue. The glue leaves its residue on the walls and floors of the workshop, and even on the fingers, nails, and clothes of the craftsman working in them. The materials in this workshop

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<sup>61</sup> *tocloc*: an informal way of transportation in the city that can carry up to 3 people (driver not included) and has three wheels

<sup>62</sup> *microbus*: an informal means of transportation in the city and is around the size of a mini van

are usually based in plastics, and though they do use wood and pearl, they mix the pearl with acrylics. In the end, the products all appear to resemble each other, and what is found in the Khan al-Khalili markets. Also, I noticed that the children of the fast craft (usually boys) were also in the workshops working with their fathers in this line of craft.

In contrast, I have noticed that what manifests in the workshops of the slow craft is dust. A type of dust that is produced in the slow etching away and carving of a material to transform it into a piece that will last a lifetime. The dust here is found settling on the walls, and floor, but stirred up as the craftsman etch away at their material, leaving remnants of dust in their hands and hair. The smell of the materials in this kind of workshop have a more natural undertone of wood mixed with sawdust. In other words, the differences of the rhythms of the slow and fast craft manifest in the tangible materials, the materials that cover the workshop in the process, and the movement and transparency of money in such crafts. However, maybe the most complex difference I found was that these craftsmen, although working together and complementing each other in the sense that they have different specializations, are working alone in their own workshop, their children are not working with them. When we asked 'Am Nasser, he replied "I would never make my kids enter this craft, this today is not profitable." I then asked him if he has ever thought of leaving the craft, and he replied with a quick and prompt "absolutely not." I asked him, once again, why, and a wide smile broke through as he looked from his wooden art piece to us, "because I love it." This "love" is the most complex

feeling that differentiates it from the fast craft, a tragic love for a craft based in the awareness that it is made with your own hands and that it is the last of its kind.

This complex feeling of love for your craft, or what many of these slow craftsmen state as “the goodness in doing what you love,” or “love it [the craft], and it will love you back”, is most illustrated when it is then followed with what the craft has become today. It is not a craft that can work at the same rhythms of the fast craft or compatible with the speed of the market. And such incompatibility was illustrated in the heartache and heart break when I asked where all of the craftsman have gone. One of the slow craftsmen who does not work in pearl inlaying, but in *khiyamiyya*, but a slow *khiyamiyya*, describes a certain death that is occurring to both the craftsmen and the crafts: “pearl [inlayers], my type of *khiyamiyya* ... most of them, they’re all gone, they have passed, they passed because of *za’al*<sup>63</sup>, they mourned the craft for what it has become, and how it can no longer support them, they died of *za’al*.” In other words, the craftsman tells me that the death of such a craft is not just the death of a craft, but has led to the death of some craftsmen, who died of heartbreak for a craft that they loved, but could no longer love them back in the speed that is required of them in this day and age.

It is worth revisiting and unpacking the dying craft discourse that surrounds the slow crafts. The dying discourse proliferates due to several reasons, but I believe that one of the

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<sup>63</sup> Za’al – an Arabic word for a deep resounding sadness

resounding reasons is the actual death of the craftsman who “passed because of za’al.” They passed because they saw their crafts die, due to its inability to meet the market’s demands, and its rizq dying off. Furthermore, with death there is rebirth, and it must be kept in mind that the faster crafts actually evolved from the slow crafts. And the main rhythms of the two are actually due to the speed required of them to appease the markets. As ‘Alaa says, “the whole name of the game is in the manipulation of time.” Thus, the slower crafts, and their inability to meet the market demands, are what actually allowed for the fast crafts to become.

Hence, the complexity, disparity, and contradiction of the fast and slow rhythms that are based in differences in the labor practices of their actors illustrates an interesting temporal pattern. It is a temporal pattern that does not fit neatly into a single category. Rather, its complexity is best understood and illustrated as a fluidity; a temporal fluidity, whose rhythms are related to multiple and different realities that are based, and made, in practice.

As the ethnography illustrates, this temporal fluidity of the slow and fast craft can be understood in terms of their overlapping and contradictory relationship to each other. Furthermore, this temporal fluidity is also illustrated in how the two crafts overlap in terms of their spatial mobility. For example, the contradictions in the fast craft can be found in the praising of the Master Teacher al Hagg Abdullah, and the good old days of al Hagg. Yet, it is masters like him who propagated the fast craft. The fast craft which consequentially had its effects on the slower crafts, as they work at a speed that the slower crafts cannot compete with. In other words, these two different rhythms of craft overlap and contribute to each other’s

development and becoming. As I stated earlier, in unpacking the dying crafts discourse, the death of one crafts gives birth to another. The fast crafts are actually based on the tweaking and development of the older crafts. This tweaking has resulted in a different type of craft that accommodates the fastness and speed that is required for market forces.

Secondly, the temporal fluidity of these crafts is also illustrated in their overlapping relationship that is illustrated in their spatial mobility. It is interesting that some of the slow craftsmen live outside of al-Hattaba, but their workshops are found in al-Hattaba. While most of the fast craftsmen are from al-Hattaba, and their workshops are also in al-Hattaba. However, the geographic locations of these workshops, and their relations to the speed of the craft, are not in direct relation to occupancy and mobility. Rather, there are cases where the two overlap. For example, one of the fast craftsmen, Mohamed Serag, who grew up in al-Hattaba, had decided to move out of al-Hattaba to live in the Moqattam area. When we ask him why he says: “it is human nature to want something better, a person can strive and be ambitious and want better things, I want my family to move out of al-Hattaba and move to the Moqattam mountains... But my workshop is here, its *rizq* is still here.”

In conclusion, there is a relationship, a pattern even, between the opening and closing of doors and the concept of *rizq*: A pattern that is found between the workshops and their doors, the ovens and their doors, and the citadel door. Furthermore, the ways in which these different patterns and their relationships overlap in many different fields illustrate how temporal fluidity is a pattern that illustrates how enmeshed and connected the different temporal patterns are with

each other. Temporal vertigo, as illustrated in Chapter 1, is an overarching pattern that illustrates the intense and violent precarity in which al-Hattaba finds itself. This temporal vertigo has repercussions that are felt in the other temporal patterns found in al-Hattaba, as illustrated in the temporal ruptures illuminated by the ovens, and even in the temporal fluidity felt in the crafts. Slow crafts and ovens are both described by residents as practices and artifacts that belong to another time. The disparate rhythms highlight how craftsmen of the slow and fast crafts choose to navigate through this precarity. These navigations are not something that is linear, but also fluid and affected by multiple factors and rhythms, such as those of the market and technology. In conclusion, it is noteworthy that (as the ethnographic material illustrates) there is a pattern and relationship between that the closing of doors<sup>64</sup>, and the consequential closing of their different rhythms, and how these closures illustrate different temporal and social patterns found in al-Hattaba.

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<sup>64</sup> Doors here entails the citadel doors, oven doors, and workshop doors

## **V. Conclusion:**

### One, Thirty, and 59 Years Later

A year later, in al-Hattaba, a year since the workshop was conducted, and a lot has happened in a year: the masterplan proposal was submitted, and then accepted. I stepped into the magical portal of the ovens, friendships and camaraderie that grew while advocating for al-Hattaba with Megawra BEC. It has now been a little over a year since I had the honor of being in al-Hattaba, and being engaged with those who have now become my friends, who have opened their homes to me and shared their life histories with me. A year later, on September 17, 2019, was my last day in Megawra BEC, before taking some time off to write this thesis. My coworker Heba and I visit al-Hattaba on this day, as one of the kids from the al-Hattaba neighborhood has invited us to his birthday party. The area is familiar and comfortable with us, and as soon as I park my car in front of 'Am Gom'a's bike shop, one of the residents, 'Am Abdullah, frantically approaches, overwhelmed:

"Have you read? Have you read what is written in the paper today?"

Heba and I are frantic, and Heba responds "No, what happened?"

"It's all there! They're removing us! They're going to remove us!"

"Who has a copy of this paper ya 'Am Abdullah?"

"'Am Fawzy does! Go read it yourself!"

And I will never forget, after this interaction, it felt like it was September 2018 again, September 2018 before the Ministry of Antiquity's Permanent Council's approval. It felt like a rebound back to September 2018, with its oscillating rhythms of precarity and anxiety. However, this is only a brief rebound from my one year in al-Hattaba. In reality, this was a rebound, a temporal vertigo, that al-Hattaba and its residents have oscillated between over the past thirty years, and continue to do so today. I told Heba I knew who 'Am Fawzy was, and that I was just with him over a month ago; he owned the oldest workshop in al-Hattaba, a carpentry workshop, located in al-Khokha street.

We made our way into the neighborhood through al-Khokha street. This is the main street that is located at the heart of al-Hattaba, and it geographically splits the area into two. 'Am Fawzy's home and workshop is located in the center of this street, and as we walked past it, the human scale of the street, its stratified homes, with their stone ground floors from the 1920's, that fluidly rise into contemporary red brick and concrete in the upper floors, never passively passed me by. We passed by al-Hattaba layered cake, as we made our way to his workshop. We finally arrived, and we knocked on his workshop's door. And in this moment here, I found myself standing again in front of a door that is from the 1930's, etched with the inscription, "Inna fatahna laka fathan mubeena," a verse from the Quran from Surat al-Fath (The Victory), and it translates to "Indeed, We have given you, [O Muhammad], a clear conquest." And it is as if I am taken back to my first encounter with 'Am Farouq a few months ago:



I recall my first time meeting these doors, which almost demand that you stop in front of them. 'Am Fawzy was not in his workshop, but he soon appeared and insisted on inviting me upstairs. We went up the flight of stairs, and I am greeted warmly by his adult daughter Layal. The three of us sat in a room/reception space with a purple bed, with the window open flooding the room in golden sunlight and wind. He did not speak much, but instead silently poured me a soft drink and insisted that I drink immediately. He then starts by saying:

“Yes, yes, I am the oldest workshop in al-Hattaba, a carpentry workshop from 1932. Yes, yes, we'll get to the warsha<sup>65</sup>, it's the oldest warsha in al-Hattaba - but let me tell you about my habibty<sup>66</sup>, Malikat Gamal Masr, former Mrs. Egypt, 59 years, 59 years we were together, that's a whole lifetime, do you know anyone today that has been married for 59 years?”

He then grabbed a picture from a shelf in the living room, a black and white picture, in a battered wooden and pearl inlayed frame, covered in dust that he wiped away with his hands, with only the lips of his habibty colored in red. It was in that moment, as the wind and sun filled the room, that I felt this conviction in my heart that this 59 years cannot be lost among the 800 years that are usually evoked when discussing the whole of al-Hattaba. His lifetime, although a

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<sup>65</sup> Warsha: Arabic word for workshop

<sup>66</sup> Habibty: Arabic word for sweetheart



'Am Fawzy's picture of him and his late wife of 59 years

temporally different duration from the 800 years, cannot be forgotten. It is a 59 years that speaks to a whole lifetime, and there are other multiple 59 years, and other lives and lifeworlds and becomings that all come together like constellations to create the whole of al-Hattaba (Benjamin, 1969, p. 263).

I remember 'Am Fawzy being so eager to share even more pictures. As we sieved through other pictures together, we found older pictures, and pictures hidden behind those pictures. These original pictures are the old black and white originals, which over time have become hidden and buried behind their colorized and enlarged copies. And that to me feels like a

metaphor for the whole of al-Hattaba, the pictures behind the pictures, the old black and white originals that carry the present colorized pictures. And like the black and white originals, we cannot understand the present al-Hattaba without understanding its becoming from the black and white originals.



The original black and white photograph, which was hidden behind its colorized and enlarged copy

I returned back to the present as Layal emerged from her balcony upstairs, and proceeded to greet Heba and I, telling us to come upstairs for some tea. We were greeted by 'Am Fawzy and Layal when we arrived upstairs. They offered us something to drink, and asked us whether we had read the paper. We told them that was why we were there, we had heard that 'Am Fawzy had a copy of the day's newspaper. They presented the paper to us and exclaimed, "See? They're going to remove us! Read it, it's all there, it's all there." And there it was written, in Al-Masry Al-Youm's<sup>67</sup> September 17, 2019 issue, it stated there on the front page that al-Hattaba was part of a plan, it was to be removed and re-planned. 'Am Fawzy and Layal both clapped their hands back and forth in disbelief, but in a way that indicated that this was not the first time they have experienced news like this. Then Layal said something that is absolutely crucial: "Let me tell you, they've been saying that they'll remove us since before I even got married. And still we are here." And as she said this, 'Am Fawzy noticed that my eyes unknowingly looked up to the picture of 59 years, and just like that the thread of anxiety was cut as he smiled and reached for the picture, "yes, my *habibty*, my 59 years, do you remember her? Here, let me bring it down again for us to see."

And it is this moment in al-Hattaba, it is in this encounter that perfectly summarizes what being in al-Hattaba has been not only for me in the past year, but for the whole neighborhood

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<sup>67</sup> Al-Masry Al-Youm: local newspaper

for the past 30 years. This thesis is about the exploration of the complex, ordinary, yet paradoxical relationship al-Hattaba has with time, and how such a multiplicitous relationship has shaped the way the residents navigate, maneuver, and make their everyday through disruptive events that threaten their everyday, histories, and futures. A history of lives that are usually sidelined and dismissed as different institutions interpret al-Hattaba according to different rhythms, leaving the residents on different planes of time, an isolation of different rhythms, as illustrated in the first chapter, where the residents and the whole of al-Hattaba finds itself rebounding a precarious rebound as they continue to face the threat of eviction. This is an overarching narrative in al-Hattaba, a temporal vertigo that leaves al-Hattaba in a violent precarity, and leaves the histories and becoming of its residents sidelined. Yet, despite all of these different forces, al-Hattaba is still here, its residents still here, navigating and making their everyday.

My encounters and becoming with al-Hattaba is in no way meant to paint a holistic picture, nor do my experiences in the field ever compare to their lifetime and becoming with the space and place. My particular and very humble encounters with people and places are brought about by those who were open to exchange their stories and histories with me. Thus, my encounters in this thesis are merely glimpses into their everyday and their histories.

Stepping into the worlds that the ovens gave me were glimpses into how the closing of such ovens created ruptures that painted multiple pasts. In attempting to explore the past, the oral histories of the resident kept returning to the ovens, the communal ovens which act as a

portal to a past and painted a past in al-Hattaba. This indicates the past is made in the everyday, and varies and has multiple iterations and meanings to each person. It also illustrates that the past is identified by specific events that are made in the everyday. The ovens and their closing was an event that acted as a rupture.

In understanding the complex rhythms of slow and fast crafts, and the relationship of these rhythms to time, it gave glimpses of the specific labor practices in al-Hattaba, and what these labor practices have become in the precarious present of al-Hattaba. And just like the pictures that 'Am Fawzy shares with me, there are histories in the crafts and the ovens, that have multiple layers, pictures behind pictures, stories behind stories, that paint the present that we now see as al-Hattaba.

It is these specific ordinary encounters of ovens and the crafts that illustrate al-Hattaba's complex relationship with time. And how these different rhythms paint different temporal patterns, such as rupture and fluidity, which show us glimpses that allow us to understand how al-Hattaba is navigating through the temporal vertigo of such precarity. And there were certain points of reflection for my being in the field that al-Hattaba has to teach us.

First, and foremost, as Layal eloquently summarized it, "they've been saying that they'll remove us since before I even got married. And yet here we still are." The threat of removal is a very real one that can be carried out at any moment. Al-Hattaba, however, shows us, that nothing really goes according to plan. Furthermore, it reveals how plans and decisions that are usually made are not always applied, and that there are openings and possibilities that can

emerge in the time being. As al-Hattaba shows us, laws since the 70's have been made, but al-Hattaba still persists, as it navigates through time, as it finds different openings in its everyday. As this thesis emphasizes, time is fluid, it is not linear, and not something any one stakeholder can monopolize. Because of its fluidity, it continues to be interpreted differently, and allows for different openings and possibilities. This then allowed for Megawra BEC to enter, and navigate through such openings to find a possibility that would advocate for al-Hattaba and its residents. There is no guarantee, but there is something in the practice of time, because as we return to practice, we understand that it is in practice that possibilities can emerge.

Another point that is worth reflecting on is the concept of the romanticization of and for the past, which is usually used to dismiss the residents whenever they evoke "zamaan." There is a romanticization that works on two levels: the first being the romanticized endurance that the people of al-Hattaba have to face in their constant precarity; the second form being the supposed romanticization of the past that residents evoke, which is usually dismissed as a past painted with the rose colored lenses of nostalgia.

The first romanticization that we must discuss is the romanticization of the reality that people have to endure in the face of such precarity. Because such a reality is one that cannot be painted as simply resilience, or resistance, because it is a reality that is consequential. Consequences that become evident in the self-destruction of homes by their owners' hands. These are consequences that have a mental and physical strain that rises in living such intense, violent, and recurring precarity. As illustrated by Mohamed Abdullah's aunt, one cannot blame

individuals who wish to leave as they can no longer bear the weight of such precarity and decide to pack their bags and leave at whatever cost.

The second romanticization that we must discuss is the supposed romanticization, when someone describes the past as “the good old days,” which is then usually dismissed as a mere romanticization, painted in nostalgia. And we must ask ourselves, is it really a romanticization when there was a past (before the wave of laws that started in the 70’s) in which living conditions may have been more stable? A specific past where the residents could structurally consolidate their homes, before the laws and jurisdictions made it almost impossible? A specific past where their homes could be engaged with, and not frozen into the category of citadel buffer zone? A specific past where there was once hope during the days of the 2011 revolution that allowed the residents of al-Hattaba the flexibility to actually interact with their homes? A specific past where the ovens brought together the whole of al-Hattaba? Do we simply dismiss such pasts, and others, as “romanticization?” Furthermore, we must dismantle this understanding, because the past is never a singular thing: there are multiple and specific pasts, or *zamaan*, that are being evoked when describing the past. And we cannot dismiss or reduce the evocation of such pasts as either “good” or bad” because, in doing so, we are also reducing them into such a singularity.

Furthermore, there is also an issue of decay that is worth considering. Decay with all of its heaviness and discomfort that is worth unpacking, as it is a topic that arises when discussing al-Hattaba. Because al-Hattaba’s precarity does not come without consequence: The result is



that homes are no longer structurally safe to be inhabited, the community ties weaken, and the fading away of artisanal crafts that exemplify the etching away of the multiple rhythms that make al-Hattaba. However, we must be aware that such decay is a result of the reduction of al-Hattaba into isolated rhythms in time. On the other hand, it must be kept in mind that in giving into such a discourse of decay, that we are propagating a discourse, rather than countering it. My question being, what have we done to counter such violence when we simply reduce a whole area into a concept of decay? Furthermore, as painful as the concept of hope is, there is still potential when people speak of the days of the oven, the past Ramadans, the love for the neighbor, the love of their craft, the readiness to come together to clean the streets, the pride in working with one's hands. There is still potential when destructive plans have been threatening to occur, but have not yet been implemented.

Lastly, and most importantly, we must keep in mind that amidst all of this precarity, life still goes on, and it does because it must. On September 17, 2019, as Heba and I finally made it to the birthday party, as we were all there on the roof, as everyone was arriving to celebrate Ahmed's birthday, I was reminded: Life does not stop happening because of plans that are stated but always on the cusp of being, or not being, implemented. Life goes on in al-Hattaba because it must.

## Abwab Rizq

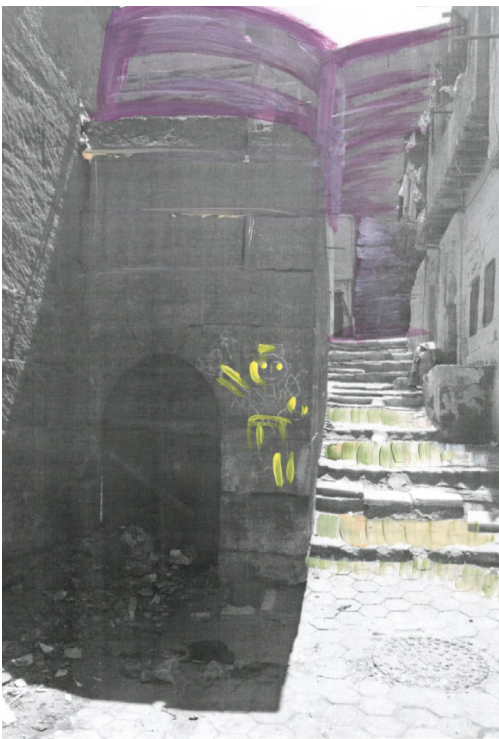
In conclusion, I hope to end this thesis by revisiting the several moments that enchanted me during this thesis endeavor. It first started with a pause in front of the al-Shurofa monument, and the moment of standing still in front of its closed door. It was then quickly followed by the peculiar debates that suddenly sparked around the citadel door, and the repercussions of its closing. The sequential doors that followed include the doors of the oven, and the doors of the workshops. It must be noted that these are all *Abwab Rizq*, or doors of *rizq*<sup>68</sup>. There was a connection that became evident in the relationship between the closing of the doors, and the consequential closing of different rhythms, such as rhythms of *rizq*, *kheir*, *baraka* and, *along with them*, the social collective. The closing of doors illustrates different temporal patterns. The citadel door helped describe the overarching precarity and the pattern of temporal vertigo, and how its closing was a closing of *Bab Rizq*<sup>69</sup>. Temporal vertigo, as described in Chapter 1, is an overarching pattern that illustrates the intense and violent precarity in which al-Hattaba finds itself. The closed oven doors, of Chapter 2, describe the temporal ruptures. While the workshop

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<sup>68</sup> *Abwab Rizq* or *Bab Rizq* is an Arabic phrase that means “doors of rizq.” *Rizq*: And Arabic word that is defined as anything that brings about a goodness or blessing. *Abwab Rizq* is a phrase meaning an opening, or a source of livelihood, goodness, a source for bread and butter even.

<sup>69</sup> *Abwab Rizq* or *Bab Rizq* is an Arabic phrase that means “doors of rizq.” *Rizq*: And Arabic word that is defined as anything that brings about a goodness or blessing. *Abwab Rizq* is a phrase meaning an opening, or a source of livelihood, goodness, a source for bread and butter even.

doors, of Chapter 3, that opened and closed due to the speed of the crafts illustrated temporal fluidity. The precarity illustrated in temporal vertigo has repercussions that are felt in the other temporal patterns found in al-Hattaba, and affected the closing of multiple doors. In other words, it is peculiar and quite noteworthy of the relationship between that the closing of doors, and the consequential closing of their different rhythms, and how these closures illustrate different temporal patterns found in al-Hattaba that all affect each other. But like all doors, they can still be opened, and the possibilities on the other side are endless; just like the door of al-Shurafa, which was once closed off, but has now just reopened.



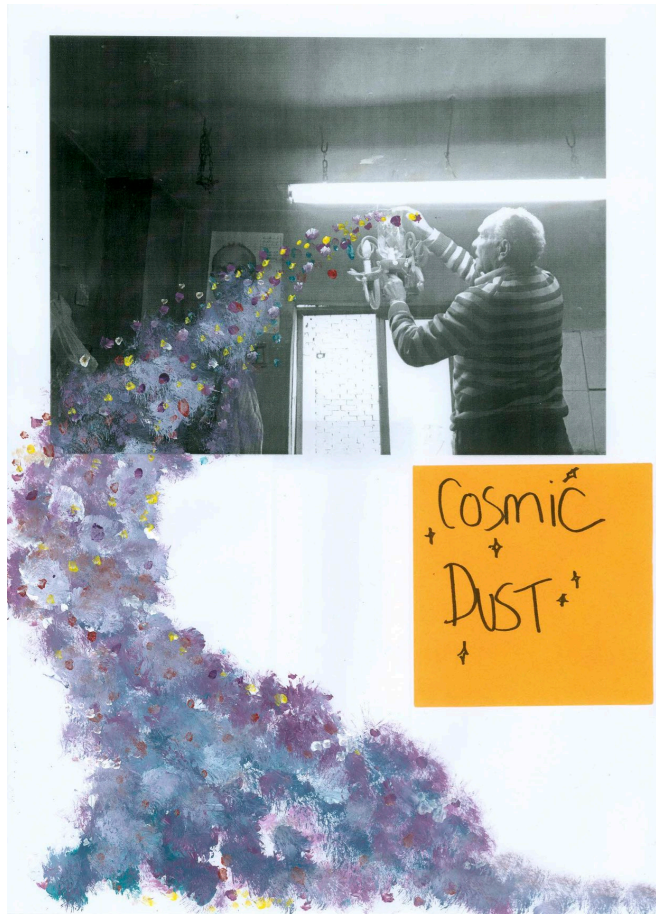
al-Shurofa on September 9, 2018



al-Shurofa on November 30th, 2019, an opening ceremony to celebrate the start of the conservation of al-Shurafa monument by Megawra BEC

# Epilogue

## Poetics of Dust



So, I hope to end this thesis the same way that I began it, by asking: what is an ending, and how do we discuss it? It is a difficult task to consolidate a year's work and to give it a finality in the form of a conclusion. As I have described, this thesis was an attempt to explain, through specific encounters, the complex relationship al-Hattaba has with time. This relationship is manifested in rhythms, and the rhythms illustrate different temporal patterns which are each complex and different, but are

woven into each other. In this thesis, I have attempted to discuss three temporal patterns, but the patterns discussed are not all-encompassing. They are simply the ones that I was able to encounter and process for this thesis. There are still other patterns, and many unseens in al-

Hattaba. And just like 'Am Fawzy's 59 years, there are stories and histories that get buried in the background of other more contemporary pictures, just like how the 59 years can be swept behind the 800 years, when in actuality it is the 59 years that come together and multiply like different "constellations" that create the temporal duration of 800 years (Benjamin, 1969, p. 263).

Thus, it is a difficult task to consolidate this thesis and to merely conclude it, to simply give it a finality. In doing so, I realize that I am doing a disservice to the endeavor that this thesis is, which is essentially about the hope that can be found in navigating and maneuvering through the fluidity of time, which is anything but linear, and anything but final.

So, I hope to finish this thesis with a metaphor that is as elusive as time; as there is something in time that slips, is elusive, is seen but unseen, but is always there. So, allow me to leave you with a common thread that is weaving all the rhythms, and patterns, together. That thread is also based in time, a time that is being made in their being alive and collective memory: in the non-tangible glue that the ovens once held together, the dying artisanship and emergence of the mass production of certain crafts, and the self-destruction of homes. And this thread, I believe, is manifested in dust, a dust that although metaphoric, is also literal, as it physically manifests itself in each of these patterns. It makes itself evident and physically felt as one moves through al-Hattaba. It is felt in the sense that dust settles when a slow, uninterrupted aging process through time is occurring, as a place settles and aging occurs, as the dust that settles behind closed oven doors. But dust also makes itself visible in a moment of transformation, as

dust is also what is created in the intimate crafts of working with hands (from sawdust to *sadaf*, or pearl inlaying shavings), as the craftsman etches away at a material to transform it. Dust also results not only in decay, or in dormant states, but also makes itself visible in transformative events, as when a home is destroyed and what remains is concrete and dust.

And in al-Hattaba, this dust speaks multitudes. It speaks of power, when a home is destroyed in the hands of its own owner, and all that remains is a phantom limb that manifests itself in dust. It speaks of decay, when certain historic monuments such as al-Shurafa, which holds strong collective memories and histories, was once interacted with regularly, but now has turned into a chamber of garbage and dust. It speaks to the dying of a craft, whose maker works alone in his workshop, working months at a time for a craft that is no longer “profitable” in the market. And in this process, he works his materials and the dust produced cover both him and his companion pieces. It speaks to the loosening of community ties, when collective spaces such as ovens have been closed off, and what once held the bread that everyone broke together, now only holds dust behind its closed doors.

The final dust, although metaphoric, and cannot be seen, is a non-tangible serendipitous dust that emerges in the poetics of the encounter. There are moments even in al-Hattaba where there were connections between the locals of the area, and the rest of greater Cairo, branching from to Imam al-Shaf’i (whose mausoleum Megawra BEC is currently restoring), to Sabil Om ‘Abbas (a historic monument right next to Megawra BEC’s new Saliba office), to el- Gamaleya. And in these encounters, where these connections were made, and cosmic dust is suddenly felt,

showing us how we really are all connected, and how these coincidences are not mere coincidences, but rather the poetry of our lives, and how wholesome it is to work with love and care.

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