

The Production of Heterotopic Spaces Between Theory and Practice: Tahrir Square in Light of Michel Foucault's and Henri Lefebvre's Theories

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Introduction

The last few decades have witnessed an unprecedented breakthrough in the multidisciplinary study of space. Thanks to French philosophers Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Henri Lefebvre, Jacques Derrida among others, there emerged what is known as “the spatial turn” whereby spatiality had replaced temporality as a center of research. The rich outcomes of such studies have shattered the stereotypes instilled by historicists who, as Santa Arias reminds us, view space “as a given entity, inert and naturalized” (Arias 2010, 30). The rich French theory which re-institutionalized space and allowed for a multi-angled re-vision of the subject in relation to space has facilitated the investigation of the relationship between space, power, and resistance and has yielded its fruits in interpreting literary works and social phenomena. It is in this light that the germ of this study¹ sprouted. Examining Foucault's and Lefebvre's conceptualization of the utopic and heterotopic as a theoretical framework, this study attempts to show how their concepts, albeit dissimilar, help interpret the relationship between space and subject in the recent Egyptian context.

This paper is not the first to read Tahrir as a heterotopic space² (see Beckett et al. 2016, Abenante 2014, Ghannam 2016, Ardizzoni 2017). In their article “Foucault, Social Movements and Heterotopic Horizons: Rupturing the Order of Things,” AE Beckett, P. Bagguley, and T. Campbell include Tahrir square in their wide investigation of the applicability of Foucault's vision -- which they try to bring close to that of Gilles Deleuze -- on Social Movements Studies (SMS). Tahrir square protests are cited en passant as an example of what they call “contained heterotopia” – one out of five categories they classify for SMS. Similarly, Michela Ardizzoni, in her work *Matrix Activism: Global Practices of Resistance*, which focuses on the role of media in recent activist movements, presents her perception of Tahrir being a heterotopic place as an afterthought in the book's epilogue.

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Paola Abenante's article "Tahrir as Heterotopia: Spaces and Aesthetics of Egyptian Revolution" gives greater space to the heterotopic nature of Tahrir space during January 2011 Revolution. Her work, however, focuses solely on the role of artistic creations in casting upon Tahrir such heterotopic nature arguing that "heterotopia comes out most clearly in the practice of working class amateur artists" (Abenante 2014, 24). Farha Ghannam's article, on the other hand, promises to come close to the study at hand particularly in bringing both Foucault and Lefebvre's concepts to the sphere of the revolution. The main argument of her study, however, is to use "heterotopic spaces" rather than heterotopia to reflect the changeability of heterotopia, an idea which is already implicit in Foucault's theory.

Though claiming that her study is to make a dialogue between Foucault and Lefebvre, Ghannam does not give a full coverage of either Foucault or Lefebvre and surprisingly depends entirely on David Harvey's reading of Lefebvre -- being subjective itself and, hence, subject to controversy -- in deriving the definition of heterotopia in his theory. Accordingly, Ghannam's article, despite raising interesting points, fails to underline the idea of otherness integral to Lefebvre's perception of heterotopia and discards the straight link tying it to utopia and the fact that both terms are mutually informative and interdependent, elements which, I believe, are essential in giving an accurate reading of Lefebvre's concepts. The study at hand, therefore, undertakes a nuanced comparative analysis of heterotopia and utopia in both works of Foucault and Lefebvre, as well as offering a detailed analysis of Foucauldian heterotopic aspects of Tahrir and in reading Tahrir as a Lefebvrian's utopia.

This article is informed by a literary theory background -- rather than anthropology or sociology -- and is hence bent on fully investigating the theoretical concepts with a critical comparative lens before lending them to applicability upon Tahrir square. To achieve its objectives, therefore, the study is to start with a survey of heterotopia and utopia in Foucault and Lefebvre's works, with the aim of finding similarities and differences between both figures before establishing the heterotopic/utopic as a conceptual framework for the reading of Tahrir.

Heterotopia in Foucault's Discourse

Although "heterotopia" has its origins in medicine with the word referring to the presence of some tissue in an abnormal place in the human body, the word was brought to the realm of literary theory at the hands of Foucault and Lefebvre in their attempt to present new directions in the conceptualization of space. Foucault's introduction of heterotopia was in his lecture "Of Other Space,"

wherein he re-envisioned and re-positioned space in the twentieth century which, according to him, and contrary to the nineteenth century in which history predominates cultural discourse, is the age of space: “We are in the epoch of simultaneity ... the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed” (1984, 2). Foucault asserts that in the postmodern era, space is characterized by heterogeneity, which manifests itself in the existence of “sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another” (1984, 3). From this point, he proceeds to his focal argument whereby he contends that “among these irreducible sites dominant in this age, there exists two types, which though linked with all other sites contradict all of them: utopias and heterotopias” (1984,3). Endorsing the common definition of utopias as “sites with no real place ... sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of society” (1984, 3), Foucault proposes that heterotopias are “real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously *represented, contested, and inverted*” (1984, 3; italics mine).

Foucault proposes that the existence of heterotopia is governed by six principles. In the first three principles, he underlines its universality (existing in all cultures), its “power of juxtaposing in a single real place, different spaces and locations that are incompatible with each other” (1984, 6); hence the garden, the cinema, the museum and the theater and the adaptability of its function according to the culture and the society in which it is born. In his later analyses, he highlights the system of opening and closure that “isolates ... [heterotopias] and makes them penetrable” (1984, 7), then the relationship between heterotopias and other sites or what he calls “the space that remains;” and finally the tight linkage connecting them to slices of time. Elaborating on the fifth principle, Foucault argues that heterotopias “take place between two extreme poles” (1984, 8): heterotopias of illusion which “create a space of illusion that reveals how all of real space is more illusory” and others of compensation (such as the English-founded Puritan colonies in America), through which “real space, as perfect, meticulous, and well-arranged as ours is disordered, ill-conceived, and in a sketchy state” (1984, 8). Expanding on the final principle, Foucault further supports the superimposition of space over time stressing that heterotopias function through “a pure symmetry of heterochronisms” whereby men “find themselves in a sort of total breach of their traditional time” (1984, 8). A concrete example of this principle is the symmetry which “begins with that

strange heterochronism that is, for a human being, the loss of life and of that quasi-eternity in which, however, he does not cease to dissolve and be erased” (1984, 8).

As far as this study is concerned, the significance of heterotopia in Foucault’s discourse can be observed at two different levels. First, the concept of “sites” that are not irreducible to and not superimposable upon one another defies the idea of rigidity and fixity long associated with space; it casts unto space particular elasticity and vividness. Second, by insisting that -- contrary to utopias -- heterotopias are designed into the very institution of society, Foucault underlines the social factor in the constitution of space³, an element which brings his vision close to that of Henri Lefebvre. The idea that the physical place can determine its function according to socio-cultural and sometimes political mechanisms has allowed for the inclusion of various places including squares -- the central subject of this study -- as examples of heterotopic spaces.

The Heterotopic and Utopic in Henri Lefebvre’s Spatial Discourse

Henri Lefebvre’s vision of heterotopic and utopic spaces is unleashed within his broader project of what he calls “space production.” In the same Foucauldian vein and towards the selfsame effect of deconstructing the time/space hierarchy and the totalitarian perspective of space, Lefebvre sets out to propose that space is produced rather than given. Tracing the historical development of the concept of space, Lefebvre, in his much acclaimed book *The Production of Space*, ends up with the conclusion that Cartisan, Kantian, and mathematical thought have all led to the status of space as a “mental thing” or “mental place” which all leaked into modern epistemology wherein exists a proliferation of terms all uniting against the exclusion of man, i.e. of “the social,” in spatial terminology (1992, 8-9). Lefebvre, therefore, proposes a new science of space in which the various dimensions he historically traces are systematically grouped: “we are concerned with the logico-epistemological space, the space of social practice, the space occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of imagination such as projects and projections, symbols and utopias” (1992, 12). His project aims at reconciling the mental and the social with the aim of adding more fecundity to a concept that has long been torn among different intellectuals, philosophers, and scientists. Notably, in mapping out the different contours of space, Lefebvre discloses his position on heterotopia; he also refers to utopia as a significant spatial product, an idea which shows how, for him, the symbolic space is as significant as the real physical one.

Lefebvre’s conceptualization of the heterotopic/utopic can be traced in more than one place in his oeuvre. First, in his attempt to underline how the

relationship between space and people is determined by inclusion and exclusion, Lefebvre, shows how “subdivisions of space are dramatically defined in terms of the opposition between beneficent and maleficent,” how there are “places that are prohibited (holy or damned heterotopias) for various reasons, and others that are open of access, or to which access is encouraged” (1992, 294). In this way, Lefebvre’s heterotopias are informed not only by the opposition but also by function, facts which bring them close to Foucault’s conceptualization. However, the idea that heterotopias can be prohibited and inaccessible posits them against those of Foucault who underlines accessibility as one of the key principles of heterotopic sites.

At another point in his book, Lefebvre sets heterotopia against utopia in a way that further distances his stance from that of Foucault. He argues that one of the grids that may be developed to “help decipher complex spaces” (1992, 366) distinguish between the types of oppositions and contrasts in space: “*isotopies*, or analogous spaces; *heterotopias*, or mutually repellent spaces; and *utopias*, or spaces occupied by the symbolic and the imaginary — by ‘idealities’ such as nature absolute knowledge or power absolute” (1992, 366). For Lefebvre, therefore, “the most effectively appropriated spaces” which are “occupied by symbols” are utopian in nature. Hence, whereas the garden to Foucault is an example of heterotopia, to Lefebvre “[g]ardens and parks, which symbolize an absolute nature” are examples of utopia. The same applies to “religious buildings, which symbolize power and wisdom — and hence the Absolute pure and simple” (1992, 366). Accordingly, whereas Foucault considers cemeteries and museums heterotopic sites, Lefebvre sees that “monuments embody a sense of transcendence, or a sense of being *elsewhere*. They have been utopic. Through their height and depth, along a dimension that was alien to urban trajectories, they proclaimed duty, power, knowledge, joy, hope” (2003, 22).

While Foucault believes that utopias are “by their very essence fundamentally unreal,” (2003, 3) and hence seeks a palpable alternative (heterotopia), Lefebvre believes that heterotopia occupies a dialectical relationship with utopia, which can exist at the symbolic and realistic level. In one of his lectures, Lefebvre uses the two terms of “utopia” and “heterotopia” in relation to the 1968 student demonstrations in France. He maintains that for underprivileged students and inhabitants of Nanterre, Paris was a utopia aspired imaginatively and realized realistically through the events of 1968. The Latin Quartet, a symbol of the Utopian Center, was realistically and symbolically opposed to the heterotopic periphery of Nanterre. Whereas Paris was conceived as a utopic center, Nanterre was a heterotopic space, a “space of the other, simultaneously excluded and

interwoven” (2003, 128). For Lefebvre, therefore, the student movement from Nanterre to Paris, was a move from the periphery to the center, from a second class heterotopic “othered” space into the utopic center of welfare and knowledge. Hence, whereas heterotopia in this sense is informed by otherness and inferiority to an all dominating center, it is still fraught with productive possibilities of change. As David Harvey rightly contends, Lefebvre’s heterotopia, which he also perceives as “radically different from that of Foucault” (2013, xvii), delineates “liminal social spaces of possibility where something different is not only possible but fundamental for the defining of revolutionary trajectories” (2013, xvii). The demonstrations which shifted from Nanterre to Paris revealed a social, political as well as epistemological quest. It was an attempt to deconstruct the self/other binaries -- to dismantle the segregational policies which worked, through the manipulation of space, at the level of education and urban planning.

The concept of heterotopia as a peripheral other informed by opposition is also referred to, albeit en passant, when Lefebvre discloses his concept of urban society in his book *The Urban Revolution*. In his attempt to illustrate his concept of “urban society” which he proposes to substitute for the divisive concepts of city and village, Lefebvre shows how during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, “*the image of the city* came into being” (2013, 12), how it had gradually developed from being a peripheral “heterotopic other” to a magnetizing center:

Compared with the countryside, the town retained its heterotopic character, marked by its ramparts as well as the transition to suburban areas... At a given moment, these various relationships were reversed, the situation changed. The moment when this shift occurred, this reversal of heterotopy should be marked along our axis. From this moment on, the city would no longer appear as an urban island in a rural ocean, it would no longer seem a paradox, a monster, a hell or a heaven that contrast sharply with village or country life in a natural environment. (2003, 11)

Clearly, therefore, for Lefebvre, a heterotopic site -- regardless of its own value (hell or heaven) or size (the city or the countryside) -- is the one which exists on a peripheral position in relation to a dominating center. Hence, the countryside, at one moment in human history, assumed the role of the “center” in people’s spatial consciousness. When the city, thanks to industrial and capitalist expansionist enterprises, succeeded in invading people’s consciousness and snatching them away from rural life, the situation of

heterotopy was reversed. The countryside has become a heterotopic other subject to respective symbolic associations. It can be a heaven or a hell: for people who are keen on pure, simplistic and unsophisticated life, the village becomes a heterotopic heaven while for others who seek modernized speedy life, the countryside can be a heterotopic hell. This, one can argue, informs the massive emigration from village to town on the one hand and the nostalgic escape into the countryside on the other hand. Lefebvre elaborates on the concept of otherness informing the changing heterotopic nature of the city and countryside when he associates “heterotopy” with “anomie”⁴ or with the tendency of “anomic groups to construct heterotopic spaces, which are eventually redeemed by the dominant praxis” (2003, 129). He shows how after “the invasion of the country-side by the urban fabric,” some outlying areas remained strongly heterotopic. Crisscrossed by long, poorly equipped thoroughfares, ambiguous spaces, they harbored populations from different origins: car drivers and mercenaries, traders, semi-nomads forced to settle outside the city limits, often suspect and sacrificed in time of war. “After a time, the city began to merge with these outlying areas, to assume them by annexing them to its more active neighborhoods.... It was not until the rise of the bourgeois that his trend reversed. Popular elements were expelled from the center to still *rural peripheral heterotopias* which have since changed into suburbs, habitats receptacles, typified by a highly visible form of isotopy” (2003, 129, italics mine). Lefebvre’s illustration shows how his concept of heterotopia is flexible and pliable enough to allow for the inclusion of different sites across different temporal and spatial lines. Notably, Lefebvre’s position is informed by his broad spatial scheme of space production. Indeed, his concepts of utopic and heterotopic spaces carry constructive and transformative possibilities given that they can exist at both the realistic and symbolic levels, which can account for the various transformations of a certain place and the way the subject situates himself in, and orients himself with, such a place, a fact which will be crystal clear in the analysis of the spatial entity of Tahrir square during the Egyptian revolution.

Foucauldian and Lefebvrian heterotopic/utopic spaces in Practice: Tahrir Square during the Egyptian Revolution

a) The January Revolution: An Overview

Before embarking on applying Foucauldian and Lefebvrian concepts of the heterotopic/utopic on Tahrir Square during the January Revolution, it is important to shed light on the revolution mechanisms. On January 25th, 2011,

protests erupted taking the form of simultaneous demonstrations which, though spread across almost every city, were particularly concentrated in Tahrir Square in Cairo. Despite the various attempts exerted by the government to disperse the demonstrators -- who were mostly from the youth -- and take hold of the Square, thousands of people from different Cairene suburbs and even from other governorates of the country flooded to the Square demanding social and political reformations. The main slogan of the protesters was “bread, liberty, and social justice.” The anti-regime demonstrations, therefore, were launched with the aim of attaining social and political welfare and were particularly intensified on January 28th with the government adopting different tactics -- ranging from clampdowns embodied in imposed curfews, control of telecommunications, police clashes, even some pliant reformatory mechanisms including the dismissal of the government (on January 28), the appointment of a vice president (on January 29) and the televised declaration of the president that he would not run for another round of elections (February 1). Dissatisfied and keen on toppling the regime, the protestors continued to remain in the square waiting for the president to step down, a demand which was realized on February 11th, 2011 after eighteen days of waiting in Tahrir. The success of the Egyptian revolution hinged, therefore, on the manipulation of time and space. The act of waiting went hand in hand with the occupation of space, of Tahrir Square, whose very choice was intentional and strategic.

That Tahrir Square occupies a central position in the spatial map of the country long before the January Revolution cannot be underestimated. Established in the nineteenth century under Khedive Isma'il, the Square had witnessed the protests of people earlier in the well-known 1919 Egyptian Revolution and was therefore known as “Tahrir (Arabic for “Liberation”) Square,” a name which was originally registered in 1952. Ever since, the square had been the center of social and political aggregations. As Ahmad Shokr puts it, “the bustling city center has long been a favorite site for popular gatherings. Egyptians have poured into Tahrir to celebrate soccer victories, to mourn the passing of national icons and to protest injustice” (2012, 41). Although the Square had witnessed various protests and celebratory gatherings in recent decades -- including the so called “Bread Riots” in 1977 -- wherein thousands of Egyptians gathered in Tahrir to protest against the potential rise of bread prices -- as well as the protests during March 2003 opposing the war in Iraq, it was in January 2011 that such significance was crystallized. The strategic importance of the square in people’s perception is enhanced by the presence of multiple governmental bodies including various ministries, the parliament, and the Shura council, not to mention the Tahrir “Mogamma” (an all-in-one

centralized administrative building which is considered the icon of governmental bureaucracy). The urban entity of the Square, therefore, has been laden with political and social overtones that were much in line with the political and social demands of the protesters.

b) Tahrir as a Lefebvrian Utopic Center

In light of the above illustration of the utopic and heterotopic in Lefebvre's discourse, it is clear that Tahrir Square, sustained by the act of an eighteen-day waiting and the physical spatial occupation undertaken by the people, transformed into a Lefebvrian utopia. Situated at the heart of the capital, the Square had shed off its everyday urban connotations, transforming into a Lefebvrian utopic space which is as "half fictional, half real" (Johnson 2016, n. pag.). It was both fictional, in light of the temporariness of the situation, and real, based on the physical occupation of space. Tahrir Square, the place where people of different social, political, and religious backgrounds gathered with the selfsame goals -- (bread, liberty, and social equality), was a Lefebvrian utopia laden with multiple symbols primary among which are equality, unity, and determination.

Tahrir was the place wherein barriers of class, religion, and ideologies were shattered. In an unprecedented move, women were gathering along with men, kids along with old-aged, liberals along with Islamists, the rich along with the poor. Hence, instead of comfortable houses, people opted for tents as a common place of shelter. What emerged in Tahrir was a unified identity informed by "Egyptianness:" instead of multiple conflicting identities there was a common identity characterized by activism and idealization. To this effect, Sowers writes how people, recalling their days in Tahrir, "describe living in a utopia where they felt freed from their own circumscribed identities as well as fear from the regime" (2012, 5). "We were all equals, brothers and sisters," said one of the protesters, "we ate, laughed, fought and cried together, we protected each other with our lives without having ever met before I never felt so alive" (Kamel 2012, 38). This idea of a unified Egyptian identity was instrumental in making Tahrir a Lefebvrian utopia symbolic of equality and unity.

The utopic nature of the occupied square is sustained by the fact that the eighteen-day protests were distinguished by spontaneity and leaderlessness. Without having an explicit center, thousands of protesters flooded spontaneously to the Square calling for change and keen on realizing it. The fact that such demonstrations were crowned by the resignation of the president shows how Lefebvrian utopic Tahrir was an outstanding symbol of determination. Not only

were citizens able to get hold of public space and withhold the various confrontations undertaken by the police and the regime supporters, but they were also determined not to leave unless their demands were answered.

The Square also materializes as a Lefebvrian utopia at another significant level. As demonstrated above, there are two types of utopias in Lefebvre's theory: those which represent power absolute and others which embody nature absolute. As was the case with the French demonstrations in 1968, Egyptian people moved from the periphery to the center. For the underprivileged classes flooding from different suburbs of the huge city (and even from other governorates), and shouting for "bread, liberty and social justice," the Square, like Paris in 1968, was a symbol of a Lefebvrian utopian center representing power absolute, an idea particularly emphasized by the fact that the Square, as demonstrated above, is surrounded by significant governmental bodies. Given that Lefebvre's concept of heterotopy is informed by otherness -- with the margins existing in heterotopic non-privileged position to the center -- this reading is further accentuated. Lefebvre had made it clear that heterotopic spaces are primarily excluded from the political city and that those who inhabit these spaces are also excluded from politics and denied any voice (2003, 17); he defines the heterotopia itself as "the other space and the space of the other" (2003, 172).

In the Egyptian context, the demonstrators had flooded from the heterotopic margin -- whether other governorates or Cairene suburbs -- to the utopic center representing power absolute. Through the act of waiting, the demonstrators had not only tightened their grip over a for long-inaccessible utopic center but also forced their voice upon the political regime. They managed to move their subjectivities, at both a symbolic and realistic level, from a marginal position to a hegemonic one. This applies to the people belonging to lower socioeconomic strata as well as for the economically privileged others who, though possessing financial means, were either politically bracketed and marginalized or simply lacking the freedom to voice their demands and openly oppose the hegemonic regime. The flexibility of Lefebvre's concept allowed such a space, however small and limited, to assume a utopian identity, while at the same breath, transforming the whole country with all its aspects of "anomie" and otherness into a heterotopic place. It was through such Lefebvrian heterotopic peripheries -- physical and symbolic -- that both the revolution and Tahrir as utopia were born, but this is again due to the fact that heterotopic others are laden with multiple possibilities of revolutionary change.

c) Tahrir Square as a Foucauldian Heterotopia

Moving to Foucault's spatial conceptualization and linking it to Tahrir square, it is important to point out that the Square during the Revolution conforms to the generic framework of the heterotopic in Foucault's mind. As mentioned above, heterotopia for Foucault was the realistic realizable alternative to the imaginary non-existing symbolic utopia. The extraordinary swiftness with which such idealistic heterotopic space was established in Tahrir and the success that crowned the protests are in line with Foucault's belief that "heterotopias ... desiccate speech... dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences" (1970, xix). At a more profound level, the Square, bolstered up by the act of waiting, conforms to most of the principles set by Foucault.

The first principle that lends itself easily for applicability is the idea of opening and closure. Although it is quite challenging for the Square, given its fluid and open nature, to conform to such a rigid criterion, it -- thanks to the determined protestors who were keen on defending the Square against the violent attacks launched by pro-regime supporters, police forces and thugs -- was re-structured to emerge as a bordered space possessing a strictly controlled system of opening and closure. The process of accessing the heterotopic Tahrir was regulated through checkpoints established at the multiple entries of the square. People had to show their identification cards, had their handbags and belongings searched by male and female volunteer ushers before being allowed to enter the seemingly fluid non-bordered square. Such procedures, which were meant to secure the revolution and bring it to its ultimate end, were received by compliance and respect from the protestors regardless of their educational and social standards. As such, the heterotopic space of Tahrir was recognized as an epitome of security and safety. Yet as Ghannam rightly contends, the system of opening and closure was not only about security; "it also marked the boundaries between the here and there, the present and future, the real and the imagined. Enclosure helped create a sense of unity and a shared destiny and facilitated the actualization of a counter arrangement that critiqued existing systems of power, and that offered an alternative vision of the future" (n. pag.).

The following readily applicable principle is the existence of multiple sites within one heterotopic space, which betrays itself clearly in the various logistic facilities and "incompatible sites" established to meet the needs of the protestors. Hence, the space of the Square encompassed the collective spaces of tents, food-selling trucks, supermarkets, public toilets, makeshift clinics, the kids entertaining area, the recreational and broadcasting truck-stage, the arts performance studio, galleries (exemplified by the multiple paintings and graffiti

displayed by artists) and worship spaces for both Muslims and Christians; as Joseph Dana observes, Tahrir felt “like a slice of everything the city has to offer on any given day” (2016, n. pag.). In fact, as the protestors continued to wait, the Square had gradually turned into a city within a city.

The subsequent readily applicable principle is that of function. As stated above, in Foucault’s theory, the function of heterotopia is imposed by the needs of the society in which it emerges and that function can change across temporal lines. The emergence of Tahrir as a heterotopic space was propelled by some societal and political needs, which can be epitomized through the quest for Foucauldian power -- the imposition of people’s will upon the state. Similar to the state which exercises its power through its manipulation of physical space, sometimes -- as Foucault points out -- prisons, concentration camps, or even clinics, people, on the other hand, exercised their power by physically seizing and manipulating the open space of the Square in a way that had ascribed new functions to its space. Notably, upon the fulfillment of such needs, the square assumed its normal function with the protestors, in an internationally acclaimed gesture, joining hands in cleaning up and beautifying the site. The swiftness with which the Square assumed its heterotopic function and later resumed its normal urban identity points, if in an indirect way, to the elasticity with which space can be manipulated and the substantial role played by people in the establishment of heterotopic spaces.

The following principle is the linkage between heterotopias and “slices of time.” For Foucault, as stated above, heterotopias fully function “when traditional time is broken” (1984, 6) -- a major feature of the act of waiting peculiar to the eighteen-day revolution. Anthony Barnum reminds us that some heterotopic places such as camps, places of protests, or setups have starting points in time but they lack an absolutely defined end-point (2018, n. pag.). The role of waiting in such temporary heterotopias, therefore, cannot be underestimated. In fact, waiting distorts the normal temporal cycle of everyday life routines. As Harold Schweizer rightly contends, while waiting, we “enter a temporality different from that time in which ... we daily strive to accomplish our tasks ... [and] awaken to the repressed rhythms of duration and thus also to the deeper dimensions of our being” (2005, 777-78). By breaching normal time through the act of waiting in Tahrir square, one can argue, people entered into a realm of temporality free from the constraints of normal everyday life routine, a temporality that helped them realize the power of their being -- their agency as citizens capable of defying the political system, on the one hand, and changing the nature of urban space, on the other. The idea of people’s awareness of their own agency is particularly clear in the slogan “*al shaa’b yoreed*” (people

demand), which was iconic of the revolution. People's realization of their own power and agency was clear in the subsequent Tahrir demonstrations through which people and political activists imposed their demands on the SCAF and ultimately in the 2013 Revolution through which people imposed their will in ousting president Morsi and his Muslim brotherhood government.

In his final principle, Foucault shows how heterotopic spaces enjoy a specific relationship with "the space that remains" and hence emerging as either a space of illusion or one of compensation. In this respect, heterotopias appear to introduce a version of perfection unattainable in the real space. A cumulative look at Tahrir Square indicates, in light of the foregoing analysis, that it was a heterotopia of illusion that nakedly disclosed some grave shortcomings in the social and political structure of the state. The fact that the Square succeeded in breaking the rigid barriers of class, religion, and ideologies points sharply to those very divisions that tend to tear up the societal and political textures of the country. The equality worked on at the level of gender roles sharply highlights the stereotypes governing the distribution of such roles in society. The elusive communion achieved among people with different political orientations, particularly liberals and Islamists, underlines the radical rupture between the two parties, such rupture which started to resurface when Islamists later moved to power.

Conclusion

The previous analysis shows how the two French philosophers Foucault and Lefebvre introduced two different views of the utopic and heterotopic and how such views provide rich tools in analyzing the spatial transformation of Tahrir Square during the mass protests in January 2011. Through Foucauldian lens, Tahrir transformed from a potential public place to an actual tangible social heterotopic space conforming to Foucault's epistemological principles. By physically seizing the Square and manipulating the art of waiting, Egyptians succeeded in writing a new chapter in the book of heterotopia of urban common spaces. Through Foucauldian lens, Tahrir emerged as a heterotopia of illusion reflecting the social, economic, and political conflicts pervading the country. Similarly, through Lefebvrian dynamics, Tahrir Square -- with its various governmental architectural bodies -- emerged as a utopic center representing power absolute within the protestors' minds. During the Revolution, Tahrir emerged as a utopia symbolizing the multi-layered equality in a way that pointed most sharply to the multiple forms of inequality plaguing the whole country, which was then occupying a heterotopic symbolic position. Through

Foucauldian lens, Tahrir emerged as a heterotopia through which people broke away with normal time and came to a consciousness of their potential agency and power, a fact embodied in the success of toppling two regimes. Similarly, from a Lefebvrian standpoint, Tahrir was a utopia symbolizing people's determination; it represented another form of power absolute. It emerged as an appropriated utopic space whose very meaning was produced by the protestors. It was a place where the symbolic space united with the socially-produced one - - represented by the very activities performed by people during their protests to produce such Lefebvrian utopic image.

Whether a Foucauldian heterotopia or a Lefebvrian utopia, Tahrir carved its name in history and established itself as an iconic symbol of people's determination, agency, and power. In fact, Tahrir was a source of inspiration for a long list of protests that swept the world in subsequent years including the well-known Occupy Wall Street movement in the United States (September 2011), and the "Take the Square" protests in Spain (May 2011) With Tahrir's Revolution⁵ taking the lead; such movements further enhance the views of Foucault and Lefebvre on the elasticity of space and the role of the subject in casting new meanings -- heterotopic or utopic -- to the supposedly fixed space.

Endnotes

¹ This paper is based on a workshop entitled "Heterotopia Between Theory and Practice" which was conducted at the symposium "Imaginarities of the Future : Historicizing the Present" held at NewCastle University, UK, 28-30 June 2015. The project had therefore preceded most of the publications reading Tahrir as heterotopia. Below is a URL of the conference program.

<https://imaginariesofthefuture.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/lirn-programme-ncl15-06-15final.pdf>.

² The term utopia was used generically in relation to Tahrir square in various newspaper articles. Tahrir was also read as a utopian and dystopian place in May Telmissany's article's "Utopian and Dystopian functions of Tahrir Square." In no study, however, was Tahrir read as a Lefebvrian utopia.

³ Foucault's theory of heterotopia crowns his earlier intensive, albeit unobtrusive, entanglement with the question of space traceable in his explorations of the history of asylums, prisons and psychiatric clinics and also in his well-established dialectic of power/knowledge which entailed the localization of powers "in their historical and geographical specificity" (Foucault 2007 "Meshes," 156) given that "discipline is ... above all an analysis of space" (156). Elsewhere, Foucault shows how "space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile. Time on the contrary, was richness, fecundity, life, dialect" (1980, 70). In a further move, Foucault, keen on

shaking such epistemological hierarchy, also deconstructs the taken-for-granted relationship between literature and time and foregrounded the role of space in literary production in his article “The Language of Space” (2007). After showing how writing “whether or not addressing itself to the past, . . . was caught in the fundamental curve of the Homeric return. . . . To write was to return to the origin, to re-capture oneself in the primal moment” (2007 “Language,” 163), he illustrates that in the twentieth century, particularly after the works of Nietzsche and Joyce, “such kinships” were undone and that language is “or perhaps became a thing of space” (2007 “Language,” 163). In unequivocal terms he points out that “it is in space that. . . language unfurls, slips on itself, determines itself choices, draws its figures and translations. It is within space that it transports itself, that its very being “metaphorizes itself” (2007 “Language,” 163).

⁴ The word “anomie” is often defined as the state of normlessness. According to Alex Law, anomie refers to “the unhappy asocial condition generated by an absence of moral regulation Individuals become isolated and separated from the norms and rules that govern the social life of an integrated community” (2011, 14-15). The term was first used by French sociologist Emile Durkheim in his book *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893) and was later re-visited by Henri Lefebvre.

⁵ In their article “They don’t Represent Us! The Global Resonance of the Real Democracy Movement from the Indignados to Occupy,” Jérôme E. Roos and Leonidas Oikonomakis cite one of the protestors in Spain saying “Of course Egypt inspired us! The Egyptians showed us that it was possible to have a revolution without leaders. That it was possible to overthrow a regime through a non-violent occupation of a square. Of course that inspired us” (n. pag.). They also cite the Canadian magazine *Adbusters* writing during the protests of Occupy Wall Street that “America now needs its own Tahrir” (n. pag.)

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