

**AL-ARABI PLAYED TO RESIST AND CHEERS TO
REMEMBER: FOOTBALL AND POLITICS OF IDENTITIES,
MEMORIES AND SPACE IN POST-COLONIAL PORT SAID**

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Abstract

Keywords: Football, Identity politics, Social memory, Space, Post-Colonialism, Port Said, Suez Canal, Egyptian nationalism.

Based on ethnographic and archival research, this thesis examines the significance of the Al-Masry club in understanding the politics of identities, memories, and space in (post) colonial Port Said, Egypt. My research studied Port Said from the moment the city was built as a strategic port on the Mediterranean Sea and Suez Canal and then navigated through the city's turbulent history until 2011. To approach my question, first, I situated the case of Al-Masry among football politics literature and showed how the club catalyzed the Egyptian nationalism among Port-Saidians to resist their colonial subjectivity and challenge the status of being segregated in their divided city and isolated from the rest of Egypt.

By moving to the post-colonial time, I show how the club contributed to the development of Port-Saidians distinct group identity among other Egyptians and how Al-Masry stadium became a site of belonging to Port Said. I display how the stadium's (lived) space was reproduced in response to the historical context of the 1956 war and turned into a stage for official war commemorations. Then, by examining Al-Masry fans' memories of the stadium and reading 1956's pride memories both during Nasser's era and afterwards, I showed how Port Said stadium was a space where the memories are recalled as tensions between the lieu and milieu. Namely, memory and space are reciprocally constructed and reproduced. First, collective memories of the war commemorations reproduced the stadium's social space. Second, the stadium's space was also a medium for constructing new memories between a father and his son or when the newer generation actively remembered the anti-colonial memories and organized commemoration ceremonies by themselves in the absence of state institutions.

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	II
ACKNOWLEDGMENT.....	III
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	IV
LIST OF FIGURES	V
INTRODUCTION	1
METHODOLOGIES.....	6
LITERATURE REVIEW	10
SPORT AS A PRACTICE	10
SPORT AND SOCIAL IDENTITIES	11
SPORT AND MEMORY.....	13
CHAPTER 1 <i>OUR FLAG IS GREEN: THE BIRTH OF A CLUB IN AN ARENA OF CONTESTED IDENTITIES AND INEQUALITIES</i>	18
1.1 PORT SAID AS THE GIFT OF THE SUEZ CANAL	18
1.2 FOUNDING A CLUB FOR THE EGYPTIANS OF PORT SAID	22
1.3 PORT SAID'S PARADOX: A "MARGIN" AT THE CENTER OF THE WORLD	28
CONCLUSION	31
CHAPTER 2 <i>THE VALIANT CITY PORT SAID, AFTER THE WAR OF 1956</i>	32
2.1 RE-MAKING PORT SAID AFTER THE WAR	33
2.2: REMEMBER THE 23 RD OF DECEMBER	39
2.3 ALL ROAD LEAD TO PORT SAID!	42
CONCLUSION	44
CHAPTER 3 "THEY MUST KNOW THAT WE ARE THE DESCENDANTS OF 56" THE STADIUM AS A SITE OF BELONGING	46
INTRODUCTION.....	46
3.1: THE ROAD TO THE STADIUM: TAKING AN ITINERARY THROUGH GEOGRAPHIES OF MEMORY	47
3.2: AT THE STADIUM'S GATE: LIKE FATHER LIKE SON	50
3.3: ENTERING THE STADIUM: A POPULAR GAME IN A PUBLIC SPACE FOR ALL CLASSES ..	51
3.4: SITTING IN THE STADIUM: MEMORY EMBODIMENT AND BODILY PRACTICES	52
3.5: A RE-DIRECTION OF THE POLITICAL USE OF 1956'S MEMORY: MOVING FROM AL-BAHARI TO AL-GHARBI	54
CONCLUSION	56
CONCLUSION	58
BIBLIOGRAPHY	61
LIST OF NOTES	67

List of Figures

Figure 1: taken by the author in February 2022	1
Figure 2: A section from a map shows the location of Al-Masry's playground (highlighted in green) in The Arab quarter in April 1934, from the archive of the Egyptian general survey authority.	24
Figure 3: The SCC playground in Port Fouad in October 1940, from the archive of the Egyptian general survey authority.	26
Figure 4: A photo of an advertisement of a maritime traveling company about their schedule of the trips from Alexandria and Port Said to Marseille and Beirut, Al-Ahram June 2, 1923, p 3.	29
Figure 5: A painting glorifying the war of 1956 on the wall of a club in front of the Suez Canal shore in Port Said, taken by the author in February 2022.....	32
Figure 6: A colored photo of Port Said in December 1956 from Khalid Abdel Rahman's personal collection, shows the mass destruction of the Al-Manakh neighborhood, and Port Said's Stadium appears in the North-Western part of the district on the Mediterranean.	34
Figure 7: An article from Al-Ahram newspaper with a headline written above in bold saying building a new international stadium in Port Said, Al-Ahram, December 29, 1956, page 5.	36
Figure 8: A photo of the UN forces attending the Christmas Mass in the Stadium in December 1956, from Khalid Abdel Rahman's personal collection.....	38
Figure 9: A comic was published in Al-Ahram's newspaper on December 21, 1965. It describes the Victory's feast (written above), and a man symbolizes Port Said's people (written) hugging Nasser's and saying Welcome! Hero (written down).	40
Figure 10: A recent map from Google Earth shows a section of Port Said. The European quarter (Al-Afrang) is marked by red, Al-Arab by blue, Al-Manakh by yellow, and the stadium by green.	48
Figure 11 and 12: show groups watching Al-Masry's matches at Al-Arab cafes taken by me in February 2022.	57

Introduction



Figure 1: taken by the author in February 2022

It was often said that football is that popular because it is a dramatic game that gives the fans all feelings; joy, happiness, euphoria, anticipation, anger, and sorrow. I started to attend football games in the stadium when I was a kid. Like many football fans, my father took me there and brought me a flag to support our city's team. The stadium was a gate that opened to me another world outside my personal sphere; the city, the state, the governor, the security, and "we and they" are all words that I heard a lot in the stadium's stands. In an authoritarian state, organizing or participating in a political protest was something that happened rarely, and football matches were a substitute for this; a place where an identity developed with chanting and loud voices of a distinctive group, feeling that you belong to these masses who

became "my people" for me. Going to the stadium regularly for years, I fell in love with my home city.

However, as football gave me the feeling of joy and love and introduced me to politics in its broader sense, on the 1st of February 2012, it gave me the feelings of shock and guilt. On that black day, Port Said Stadium's tragedy happened; 72 of Al-Ahly, Cairo-based Egypt's most famous club, away fans died after thousands of Al-Masry's fans stormed on the pitch to attack their rivals. The disaster had catastrophic consequences for the city as the Al-Masry club and Port-Saidians, in general, were stigmatized as killers and thugs.

Traveling to Cairo or elsewhere in Egypt, I avoided mentioning that I am from Port Said or speaking the local accent to avoid any hate speech. The mass stigmatization converted the collective guilt feeling into one of anger. Furthermore, on the 26th of January 2013, another catastrophe happened. On that day, the Egyptian criminal court sentenced twenty Al-Masry fans to the death penalty, convicting them of killing Al-Ahly fans. The verdict was followed by a massacre in which 43 persons were killed as the police dispersed protests against the verdict. The following day, I witnessed a mass funeral of tens of thousands carrying the dead bodies to the cemeteries. It was not just a funeral but a mass protest against police violence, stigmatization, and exclusion.

Moreover, for two months, the city witnessed unprecedented civil unrest and mass strikes that included governmental offices, the seaport, and demonstrators who closed down the city's entries and halted railway movement. The protests had unfamiliar scenes when demonstrators replaced the red in the Egyptian flag with the green of Al-Masry's club flag. The irony is that in Arabic, Al-Masry means "the Egyptian" and that the Port-Saidians founded the club in the colonial time to represent their Egyptian identity. However, the protests brought also the city's anti-colonial history carrying banners and slogans saying "we are Port Said, the city that

once before protected the nation and resisted colonialism in 1956" to claim their national significance and pride.

What happened in 2012 and 2013 pushed me to read and research what is Port Said and what is Al-Masry club. I participated in and co-organized many cultural events and workshops about Port Said's history, wrote magazine articles, and researched extensively about the history and politics of football in Egypt and elsewhere. In fact, in this thesis, the research started years before I went into the field as a research student. The main objective stimulating my research project is to understand the significance of football in understanding the identity and memory politics in the Post-colonial city of Port Said?

Nevertheless, in the middle of doing this master's program, another significant event happened as the Egyptian government decided to demolish Port Said stadium, claiming that it had structural issues and must be demolished and then rebuilt. Demolishing the stadium at that moment was a source of controversy as the stadium was closed for six years after 2012's tragedy but then reopened again in 2018 and hosted some matches for Al-Masry in the African competitions for clubs at almost total capacity. I was doing my fieldwork while the Bulldozers demolished the stadium's stands. I had an intense feeling of loss as well as did my interlocutors. In many of the interviews, the fans talked vividly about their memories of the stadium in detail and with pain and sorrow. The stadium's loss distorted the memories of 2012 and 2013 and stimulated older memories about the general significance of the space in their lives.

During the fieldwork, in February 2022, I participated in a fans' traveling trip to attend a game of Al-Masry in Borg Al-Arab stadium in Alexandria, the place assigned by the security to host all Al-Masry's matches. While I was on the 350km road from Port Said to that stadium, I observed a scene that is the point of departure for my thesis analysis. After one and half

hours, the buses stopped by a shop on the roadside, allowing the fans to get some drinks and snacks. For almost 20 minutes, the fans got off the buses and started cheering, taking group pictures and live videos. At some point, most mobile cameras were directed at the four kids. (Figure 1). A group of the supporters decorated the photo; directed the children to stand in that way, and put on their backs the white scarf in which the words "Heroes, *Feda'yeen*, descendants of 56 (1956's war)" were visibly written between two of the Al-Masry's green emblem, a Horus falcon inspired from the old Egyptian civilization. After finishing the photo session, the supporters praised the fathers of the children for bringing them on that trip in which they will acquire the sense of "*Al-Intima'* the belonging". For the supporters, bringing the kids to the matches is essential to teach them "to belong to Port Said".

In this thesis, based on ethnographic and archival research, I approach the question of the significance of the Al-Masry club to the politics of identities, memories, and space in Post-Colonial Port Said. I conduct my research by studying the club's history and the stadium's entanglement with the city's history. At the same time, I read history through the lens of the present's complexities and was guided by the interlocutors' given memories accounts. I focus only on particular historical moments that I believe contribute significantly to understanding the current picture in this research.

However, the significance of this thesis is not just to contribute to understanding the social and political context of Port Said as a post-colonial city. Instead, it introduces the specific case study of Al-Masry to add up to the growing literature on football politics. In this study, I introduce the football fans' memories as socially framed and constantly changing with the current political, economic and social realm. In this sense, the stadium is a space of memory tensions and, to a larger extent, a social space reproduced by the qualities and attributes of the historical context in a given society. By reading football within that sociological framework, I argue that football enforces the collective identities by providing a medium for consolidating

collective memories. Football catalyzes collective identities by mechanisms of othering and categorizing "we and they", but these identities are dynamic and related to the social memories of the given group. Moreover, the thesis demonstrates that football is remarkably a valuable lens to reveal the political and social tensions in a particular locality when football is a popular game there.

Therefore, I study Port Said in the colonial era in the first chapter. I elaborate on how the city was founded at a particular global conjuncture along with the construction of the Suez Canal. This specific locality made the city a site of contestation among the Suez Canal Company, the European powers, and the Egyptian state. The power's struggle has shaped the ethnically segregated city's urban space. Then, I explore how the Egyptians in Port-Said founded the Al-Masry club to represent themselves and overcome the colonial and European hierarchy in their city as well as compete with other teams in Egypt, challenging the city's relative marginal position inside the Egyptian nation.

In the second chapter, I move to Post-Colonial Port Said by engaging with the moment of the 1956 war, globally known as the Suez War. Nevertheless, I do not examine the war itself but its remarkable impact on the city. I focus on how the city gained its national significance after the war and became an icon of anti-colonial resistance for Egyptians. I show that by examining the national commemorative ceremonies and the stadium's central position in the commemoration process. In the third chapter, by a careful analysis of the memory work I collected from my interlocutors, I elaborate on how the stadium became a site of belonging in which the anti-colonial memories occupy significant space. Lastly, I analyze the politics of these memories through reading how they relate to the contemporary surrounding social and economic context.

Methodologies

My thesis is based on ethnographic fieldwork and archival research. I did ethnographic research in Port Said for two months between January and March 2022. I stayed at my home in Al-Manakh district and went daily for a walk around the city and met the participants in research mainly on cafes in the Al-Manakh district but also in Al-Arab, Al-Zohour, Al-Sharq districts, and Port Fuad town on the Eastern Side of the Suez Canal. However, my central place for the interviews where a café in Al-Manakh's district that belongs to one of my family members. That café was a suitable place for two reasons. First, it is a popular café for the club's supporters to meet, gather and watch matches. Second, its affiliation with a person from my family made me and my interlocutors feel more comfortable and secure.

I had a special positionality while doing the research as a community member that I was studying. For the community, I was a doctor, born and raised in Port Said, a passionate supporter of the city's local club, and now a student in Austria who came back just to research the Al-Masry club. In other words, I was perceived as "a loyal son to the city", and my project was welcomed with much respect. Moreover, when I arrived in Port Said, I met with Mr. Farouk, the head of the club's media center and a professor of media at Port Said's University. Due to his rich historical knowledge, I interviewed him before while I did earlier research about the club, and since then, we have been acquainted. I started my fieldwork by meeting him and talking about my research, and during the meeting, I mentioned to him my visit to Budapest last summer, where I took a photo with a statue of the Hungarian Legend player Puskas with Al-Masry's cheering scarf. Puskas trained the Al-Masry club in the 80s of the last century, and Al-Masry's supporters, including Mr. Farouk and my father, for whom I took the photo, still remember and narrate memories of Puskas. Mr. Farouk asked me to send him the photo to publish it on the club's official Facebook with the caption "*one of our loyal*

supporters with our Legend trainer Puskas Statue in Budapest". The photo went viral with hundreds of comments praising me as a loyal supporter of the club, and many of my friends supporting the club tagged me in comments and contacted me before I actually intended to talk to them throughout my fieldwork. This occasion made it easier for me to enter the field, and therefore, finding interlocutors for my research was not a difficult mission. Except that I was not able to have interviews with females. This is because males in Port Said still dominate the field of football. However, I approached two females, who were more suspicious about the research and canceled the meeting.

Nevertheless, the same reasons that made it easy made the process challenging for me as well. The challenge was to select whom to conduct the interview with and what could be the criteria I should choose accordingly. To overcome this challenge, in the beginning, before traveling to the field, I made a list of about 20 possible candidates from the club's supporters whom I know in one way or another. In the list, next to the names, I added some personal data such as age, work, how could I reach him, and which kind of supporters are they; ultras, non-ultras, players, officials, and based on that, I had a section about what sort of information I expect from that person. The written list's draft worked for me as a mind map in which I started to organize the possible variant candidates dividing them into groups and developing a plan to reach a certain number of fans representing these groups of my research interest. The groups were divided based on many variants; the expertise, the age, and the type of supporters. The expert group consisted of those persons who have a distinguished knowledge of the club's history besides some iconic retired club players. I also wanted to have candidates from different age groups examine the generational transmission of memories and the development of the ways of supporting the club in retrospect. Lastly, with my prior knowledge of the different patterns of supporters sitting in different stadium sections, I wanted to include participants representing those different sections. Keeping in mind the

categories, I was able when I couldn't reach a particular candidate to search for another one following the same criteria.

Overall, I conducted 20 semi-structured interviews. The interviews with three experts on the club's history lasted between one to three hours. As for the other 17 interviews, they lasted 45-60 minutes. Five of these interviews were with old players and one with a retired referee. 7 out of the 17 interviews were with young people aged in their 20s and 30s. The semi-structured interviews were based on the general questions I had for everyone and certain questions for each group (e.g. details about specific historical moments they lived in). For security reasons and my interlocutor's choice, I could only record five interviews. For the other interviews, I used to take notes and transcribe them on the same day.

Along with the long personal interviews, I did a participant observation by attending football matches in cafes and taking a fan's field trip to Alexandria to attend a game of the club there. In January, I devoted most of my time to the interviews since the domestic league was suspended due to the national team's participation in the African Confederation Cup. In February, once the club competitions resumed, I was regularly going to watch the Al-Masry's matches in the popular cafes in Al-Arab and Al-Manakh quarters. Additionally, since the club is banned from playing in Port Said and its stadium is demolished, I needed to travel to Alexandria to attend a match in a stadium. The participant observation was significant for my research in two senses; the first was to hear conversations and opinions that persons do not share in official interviews out of political fear, and the second is to attend and observe the modes and dynamics of group cheering either at a café or in the stadium.

My second research methodology was doing archival research for a month after I finished the fieldwork. The archival research primarily included the digital archive of the Al-Ahram newspaper and secondarily, reports, news articles, books, maps, pictures, and personal

collections. Al-Ahram is one of the oldest and most well-established newspapers in the whole Arab World, and it had significance for my research for two reasons. First, it was a rich source for its regular coverage of sports affairs in Egypt since the beginning of the last century. Second, it was a source for the official (State) narrative about historical events and was useful to compare and analyze the vernacular memory along with it. However, the archival research had limitations in terms of depending mainly on Al-Ahram as my resource that has a certain ideology and is Cairo-based, while I focus on Port Said.

Literature Review

Sport as a practice

Sport as a cultural practice has been generally perceived by orthodox Marxist theorists as a deflection of the proletariat that distracts them from revolution. For them, sport provides a false sense of escape and contributes to the retarded development of class-consciousness among the proletariat (Cantelon and Gruneau 1989; Ingham 2004). The Marxist literature was reductionist and overlooked the various potentials of sports. Pierre Bourdieu provided a significant contribution to the sociology of football with his thesis that sports are cultural products shaped by those who practice them rather than the more deterministic Marxist views that ignored the actors' agency within sports (Clement 1994; Ranchan 2008). Bourdieu argued that sporting practices should be situated within the space of sport, and this space must be related to the social space. In other words, sporting practices occupy a relatively autonomous space, but this space is not isolated from the social forces arising in the context of the sporting field.

Nevertheless, the literature on sport in the colonial context gave a rich account of how the sport is used as a medium to challenge the colonial subjectivity and the hierarchical power of colonialism (James 1993; Fair 1997; Darby 2002; Domingos 2007; Njororai 2009; Lopez 2009; Halder 2015; Appadurai 2015). Two studies originated from cultural and leisure studies and highlighted the resistive notion of sport in the colonial context. Firstly, in his study of Cricket in Trinidad, James displayed how games were a site of power and conflict and in which Trinidadian Cricketers played and were able to reflect a nation's value and sense of self (James 1993; Stoddart 2004; Ranchan 2008). Secondly, in her study of football in Zanzibar, Laura Fair (1997) proposed that while soccer was introduced by the British order to force Africans to be disciplined, it constituted an important arena in which "poor and working-class

men challenged the colonial hegemony by trouncing superiors before thousands of spectators". For her, football provided a space where African men could escape the indignities of colonialism, develop their confidence, and enjoy. Building on the latter cases, sport does not deflect people from politics as claimed by the Marxist thesis; instead, it plays a pivotal role in political awareness and consciousness. I would not argue that sport is always about resisting hierarchies and power; however, sport is always political and a field of struggle. Besides, alongside these abovementioned cases from colonial literature, I argue that sport provides a distinct arena for challenging hierarchies, indifferent othering, and developing political consciousness.

Sport and social identities

Many scholarly works addressed the role of sport in the social construction of identities. For many scholars, sport is mobilized to advance representations of the nation, which consequently catalyze the construction of national identities (MacClancy 1996,2; Coelho 1998; Giulianotti 1999; Maguire 1999; Shobe 2008). For instance, they portrayed sport as a "vehicle of identity" that provides the people with a sense of difference and classifying themselves and others. In the post-colonial context, the question of nationalism and sport is more problematized when the other is the previous colonizer. Most of the newly formed nation-states continued to practice sports inherited from their formal colonial masters, and by doing so, they implied European signified civilized (Amara 2012). Therefore, Symanski and Zimbalist (2005) displayed the significance of sporting victories over the former colonizers for new nations in the Americas.

Also, some scholars argued that sporting competition provided the primary expression of Anderson's "imagined communities" and that the nation becomes more tangible in sport (Maguire and Tuck 2005; Duke and Crolley 1996, 4). In a similar vein, Eric Hobsbawm

argues that sport is a uniquely effective medium for inculcating national feelings because even the least political individuals can identify with the nation symbolically in the soccer stadia where an imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named players (Hobsbawm 1992). Also, Billig (1995), in his thesis on banal nationalism, displayed the active role of sport in the mundane unconscious daily activities to normalize a particular construction of national identity.

Other scholars extended the scope of sport and nationalism to include the impact of the national sporting competitions on the national identity (Brentin and Cooley 2015). For example, highlighting the power of the *Tour de France* as a vehicle for French national identity, Thompson (2006) claimed that the tour, through its annual itineraries, stressed the shared experiences of the French nation. Cardoza (2010, 357) gave a similar account in the Italian context in his study of the cycling tour *Giro d'Italia*. For him, the tour familiarized the fans with the geography and the history of their nation-state.

While I agree with the abovementioned scholarship on the role of sport in catalyzing the national identity, in classifying "we" and othering "they", in familiarizing the fans with the geographies and histories of a nation, it is problematic here to always take the nation-state as the only unit of analysis, and that national identity as the only collective social identity. This tendency in the sociology of sport, on the one hand, ignores the debates about the concepts of the nation-state, national identity, and nationalism (Bairner 2015, 375-6; Brentin and Cooley 2015). On the other hand, I argue that sport, with the exact mechanisms it catalyzes the "national" identities, can reinforce other political, religious, regional, and ethnic identities even within the same "nation-state". The latter point is manifested in many cases, for instance, in football clubs' rivalries worldwide. For example, football reinforced and reflected the ethnic and regional tensions in many nations, such as the relatively well-known case of Catalan identity in Barcelona (Ranchan 2008; Shobe 2008), and manifested extensively in the

post-colonial context in Africa, such as the cases of Igbo nationalism in Nigeria (Onwumechili and Akindes 2014) and the Ashanti nationalism in Ghana (Darby 2017), and many other cases in the continent. Beyond the ethnic and national lens, football rivalries in several countries are arenas of struggle that reflect and precipitate the tensions between political, regional, and cultural confrontations.

Sport and memory

Although identity scholarship was central in numerous scholarly works about sport and the intersection between memory and identity literature, there is a scarcity in scholarship work that connects sport or football to social memory studies. The philosopher Simon Critchley displayed the centrality of history and memories for any football fan by proposing that football is about historicity. For him, "To be a fan is to live for a history of moments, to live with and through a history of moments". To be a fan is not just by creation and possession of such a history but to the ability to share and recount these moments with other fans, and sharing these moments among other fans is what allows the possibility of togetherness among these fans and what binds them to be a collective community, and a deeply felt form of association (Critchley 2017, 138). Critchley offered a noteworthy philosophical account highlighting the significance of memories on both the individual supporter and their contribution to the collective bonding between the fans as a group. Critchley's thesis offers an interesting point of departure to read the intersection between football and memory sociologically. Building on Bourdieu, sport is not a distinct object but significantly a social field, a wide realm, and a space constituted by different actors (Bourdieu 1978; 820). Furthermore, along with Rommel's thesis on the context of football in Sweden, stadia are not exclusively liminal spaces that are amputated from the surrounding social context, but there is a strong continuity with the social life outside the arena (Rommel 2011; 853; Perasovic and Mustapic 2013; Brentin 2016). Hence, I propose here that the memories of the fans could be

studied in the framework of social memory literature, and a football stadium is more or less a memory site in the sense that both the fans' memories and football arenas are entangled with their surrounding social and political realm, which is constantly reshaped with local, national and global dynamics.

My thesis follows and engages with two recently scholarly works highlighting the intersection between football and remembrance in this direction. Firstly, in the context of Croatian football, Brentin interpreted the social field of football as "an arena where mnemonic practices are saliently portrayed through a ritualized experience" (Brentin 2016). Secondly, in the case study of Jordanian-Palestinian football, Tuastad (2020) analyzed how football matches, with their symbolic and physical confrontations, were an informal form of collective memory that enforced the Palestinian identity for the refugees through their support of their representing club of Al-Wihdat.

Thinking of memory in a sociological way dates back to Durkheim's student Halbwachs who studied the social framework of memory beyond the disciplines of philosophy and psychology. He situated memory in society when he explained that "it is in society that people normally acquire memories and it is also in society that they recall, recognize and localize their memories" (Halbwachs 1992, 38). Halbwachs asserted that collective memory is the community's shared representations of the past that shape its collective identity (Halbwachs 1950). Although that Halbwachs's thesis is still fundamental in memory literature, many sociologists criticize it for generalization and that it does not clarify the acts of memory transfer. For instance, Olick, while agreeing with Halbwachs that the social framework defines memory, criticized his thesis for being too general and differentiated between two types and approaches of collective memories that Halbwachs's thesis includes. One is socially framed individual memories, aggregated individual memories of a group's members, and he called it collected memory. Second is Durkheim's based collective memory, which is

collective commemorative representations and mnemonic traces (Olick 1999). Olick's differentiation helps to have a more critical understanding of the collective memory concept.

On the one hand, the collected memory approach provided a more dynamic understanding of collective memory because there are many collective memories produced in the same society. This opened an avenue to speak of proliferated distinctions such as official and vernacular memory (Schudson 1992; Bodnar 1992). Drawing on Olick's understanding, the identity and memory relationship is not one-directional in the sense that there is a collective identity of a group, and the members of that group remember collectively based on their collective identity of belonging to the group. However, if memory is collected as the aggregation of individual memories of a group, it means that a particular group in the society, like fans of a club, or dwellers of a particular city or a region, can have their collective identity based on the collected memories of the members of the groups. This is accordingly challenged Halbwachs static reading of collective identity as if there is only one collective identity and one collective memory. Also, this echoes the outcome of Meriam N. Belli's study of the historical utterances of the anti-colonial ritual of Lemby's festival in Egypt, in which she concluded the dissonances between the regional and national experiences of a certain historical era (Belli 2013). This dissonance reflects that different groups in the same nation-state have different collective memories, even for the same historical era.

On the other hand, the collective memory approach illuminated that groups and collectives have memories and that groups act more extremely than individuals. Moreover, by the latter approach, Olick developed Zerubavel's thesis on mnemonic communities to speak of mnemonic practices to explain how memories are conveyed. Also, in his seminal thesis about how societies remember, Connerton (1989) also criticized Halbwach's thesis because it does not precisely clarify the acts of transfer that make remembering possible. He explained that Halbwachs was concerned with particular cases of memory as it works within kinship groups,

religious groups, or classes but had not seen how the recollected knowledge of the past is conveyed and sustained. Therefore, he proposed his thesis that focused on the pivotal role of the commemorative ceremonies and bodily practices as acts of transfer. In his work, Connerton highlighted the importance of bodily social memory, and that performativity is a must for commemoration. Connerton's thesis is used extensively in understanding the national commemorative rituals and memorial practices, but besides that, I see it as relevant to understanding the bodily social memory in the performativity context of football fans.

Analyzing a stadium as a memory site, it is imperative to engage with the memory and space literature. Halbwachs was also a pioneer in giving an account of the spatial framework of memory. He showed that collective memory does not exist without a reference to a socially specific spatial framework (Halbwachs 1980). For him, we conserve our recollections of the past by referring them to the material milieu. Nevertheless, Nora's concept of lieux de memoire dominated the scholarship on memory and space. Nora's main thesis is that the genuine forms of memory have essentially vanished, and human societies in modern times have had to invent or produce artificial forms of collective memory due to the lack of natural forms of remembering (Nora 1989). Thus, he proposed the concept of lieux de memoire, sites of memory, instead of milieu de memoire, the real environment of memory. Although Nora's site of memory is used significantly in academia, it was also notably criticized. For instance, Gershoni and Jankowski (2004, 4) criticized Nora's concept of being so broad and that his dichotomy between traditional environments of memory and modern sites of memory is to a large extent, ahistorical and not sensitive to the persistence of the past in the present and the possibility of manufacturing modern memory.

In my thesis, I would disagree with criticizing the "sites of memory" term for being too broad, and basically, I add a Stadium to museums, monuments, and other cultural artifacts that the concept included. However, I agree with Gershoni and Jankowski in criticizing Nora's

dichotomy, and contrary to his influential thesis, I follow Nikro and Hegasy's (2017) argument that memory practices are taking place as tensions between lieu and milieu, and memory is no longer restricted to the panoramic lieu of official history but comes to take place as a political and social practice. The de facto is that memory and history are both political, and I argue that we remember the past through the lens of the current political and social context. This goes along with Olick's thesis that the past meanings are malleable to varying degrees, and present circumstances exploit these potentials more or less (Olick 1999, 381). This also agrees with Belli that historical utterances are constantly reshaped by political, social, economic, and emotional factors (Belli 2013).

The memories of football fans are social memories, and I argue as well that the stadium is a social space. Drawing on Lefebvre, the stadium's space is produced by a dialectical relationship between the representation of the space, the spatial practice, and the lived space. The representation of a stadium's (conceived) space would be its capacity, how its stands are built and look like, if it has seats or just rows of steel, and where are its gates. The spatial practice (perceived) space is how the stadium is interpreted socially by the fans, the dwellers of the city, or visitor fans, and how they engage with that space in their everyday life. The (lived) space is the everyday use of the stadium's space not informed by the representations of the space, which includes the collective memories of the fans, the political meanings of the symbols and banners they use as well as the artistic and creative ways of cheering and the interpretation of the stadium's stands (Lefebvre 1992, 38-42). These three spatial states are relational to one another and together contribute to the production of the stadium's social space according to their qualities and attributes, the given society, and the historical period (Lefebvre 1992, 46).

Chapter 1

Our flag is green: The Birth of a club in an arena of contested identities and inequalities

"When the Al-Masry was founded, and you need only to read the name to know the secret behind it, it introduced the Egyptianism of a club in an area full of foreigners. This name was enough to stimulate the national effervescence among Port-Saidians who gave the club their best care until it stood up well. Al-Masry, Al-Masry, Al-Masry, a chant and hope that supporters kept recalling it for a long time" (Al-Ahram August 14, 1934).

1.1 Port Said as the gift of the Suez Canal

"If we say Egypt is the Nile's gift¹, Port Said is the gift of the Suez Canal. Here, before digging the Suez Canal, there was nothing, a desert". A quote was said by Mr. El-Shemy, one of my interlocutors. Port Said *Bur Sa'id* is a relatively new city founded with the Canal's construction in 1859. The city was a new port-town named after the ruler *Wāli* of Egypt and Sudan, *Sa'id* Pasha, who gave Lesseps the franchise to build the Canal. The Suez Canal was essentially a project to serve the interests of the European Empires and, after all, an advanced engineering project that materialized the European civilization's supremacy. The Canal Company disseminated the idea that the project unifies the globe. Nevertheless, Huber clarifies that the claimed unification could mean either the Europeanization of the world or the merging of east and west at this particular locality (Huber 2013, 39).

In his well-known work *Orientalism*, Edward Said displayed the Canal as the concluding project of Orientalism. For Said,

¹ A famous quote for the Greek historian Herodotus.

"De Lesseps and his Canal finally destroyed the Orient's distance, its cloistered intimacy away from the west, its perdurable exoticism. Just as a land barrier could be transmuted into a liquid artery, so too the Orient was transubstantiated from resistant hostility into obliging, and submissive, partnership. After de Lesseps no one could speak of the Orient as belonging to another world, strictly speaking. There was only "our" world, "one" world bound together because the Suez Canal had frustrated those last provincials who still believed in the difference between worlds" (Said 1979, 101).

In fact, Said's reading of the Canal's project noticeably clarifies how Port Said was built. Basically, it was built in a European style for "Europeans" on that specific land conjugating Africa and Asia. According to the Suez Canal franchise agreement, the Suez Canal Company SCC owned most of the lands in Port Said and the entire Canal region (El-Shenawi 2010). Thus, the SCC planned and constructed houses with tropical wooden verandas on the Western shore of the Canal, creating what will be the European quarter (Piaton 2017). On the other hand, without the SCC's intervention, the Egyptian laborers participating in the Canal's construction created almost a slum in the Western part of the city close to Manzala Lake, which would eventually become the Arab's quarter (Ibid). This area naming carries Orientalist's othering essence since its inhabitants were workers from different Egyptian towns. Interestingly, the two quarters grew separately, and a distance land barrier was kept between them (Nejm 1987, 36).

Nevertheless, the Europeanization of the Canal's space was not just the interest of the SCC but also the rulers of Egypt at that time. For instance, in 1869, during the globally celebrated Canal's opening ceremonies, Khedive Ismail said, "my country is no longer part of Africa; I have made it part of Europe" (Huber 2013, 39). In the years following the inauguration, the Egyptian government intervened with the SCC in managing the city. In 1885, in the years

following the inauguration, the Egyptian government intervened with the SCC in managing the city. In 1888, the Egyptian administration imposed Haussmannian arcades on the main streets of Egyptian cities, including Port Said (Piaton 2017). Accordingly, the European quarter had a mixed architecture between verandas and arcades reflecting the co-governing mode of the city, though both the SCC and the government aimed for a European-style city.

The SCC also cooperated with the local authorities to rebuild the Al-Arab quarter after a fire destroyed large parts of the slum in 1884. The Company sold the land to the inhabitants (mainly workers) in microscopic lots to settle down the workforce and control the building alignment (Piaton 2017). This process produced the Al-Arab neighborhood as piled houses made of wood and bricks, divided by narrow streets and lanes. The way of building Al-Arab was different from most colonial towns where a sanitary claim was used to control neighborhoods by widening their streets and numbering houses (Mitchel 1990). Building Al-Arab in that way contributed to a pattern of strong bonds among its inhabitants that continued to characterize the neighborhood later in its history.

As Port Said grew, it became an in-between global space that confused its visitors of whether it was European, African, or Asian. Many described it as an ethnological museum (Huber 2013). However, the city located at the center of the globe was a space of extreme inequalities and contested identities. In 1890, the Anglo-Indian novelist Rudyard Kipling said, "There is iniquity in many parts of the world, and vice in all, but the concentrated essence of all the inequities and all the vices in all the continents finds itself at Port Said" (Kipling 1890). Kipling, who was famous for his quote "the East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet", described Port Said again in 1922 as the "Canal Company garden that marks a certain dreadful and exact division between East and West" (Modeleski 2000, 51-52). It is not proven, but reading the three quotes together, Port Said probably was what made him have that famous deterministic quote about "the East and the West". The most prominent

feature of the inequities in the city was the unevenness of the infrastructural services provided by the SCC. The gaslighting of streets, squares, and shops arrived in the European quarter sooner than in the Arab one. Also, the distribution of drinking water through pipes, day, and night, reached the shops and some houses of the European quarter when the Arab one saw its provision decrease (Najm 1987, 95–96; Carminati 2020). Moreover, the European side had spacious public squares, parks, pedestrians' sidewalks, and recreational clubs compared to the Arab one, which lacked public spaces (Modeleski 2000; Elkerdany 2017).

Besides the urban hierarchical divisions into European and Arab towns, neither the Europeans nor the Egyptians inhabiting the Al-Arab were unified groups, but ironically, various ethnic, national, and local groups competed over the city's urban space. Several European nationalities, Greek, Italians, Hapsburgs, Maltese, French and British, resided in the European quarter and used to openly express their national identities in everyday life (Najm 1987). For instance, many European flags were fluttered in front of some establishments and private residences and signified their owners' nationality (Carminati 2020). Also, each community celebrated its national days regularly. For example, the French community organized racing boat competitions in their clubs, celebrating the French national day every July (Modeleksi 2000). The European predomination was manifested in the city's main street overlooking the Canal. The street was named after Hapsburg's Emperor Franz Joseph and had two monuments; one for the Canal's French entrepreneur Lesseps and the other one for the British queen Victoria (Elgezy 2021). On the other hand, the "Arab" quarter was quite like "little Egypt", and its narrow streets carried the names of the Egyptian cities, and its lanes signified the smaller Egyptian towns, representing the various local origins of the workers inhabiting the quarter (Abdel-Salam 1903).

1.2 Founding a club for the Egyptians of Port Said

In March 1920, a group of Egyptian figures in Port Said, such as Ahmed Hosni², Lutfi shabara³, and Mohamed Musa,⁴ founded *Al-Masry*, which means the Egyptian club. The official narrative shared on the club's media outlets displayed that the club was founded to represent the Egyptians in Port Said and resist the hegemony of European communities over the city. The narrative repeated in almost every interview I conducted with the club's supporters was quite similar. Everyone said, "there were many foreign clubs; Italian, Greek, Maltese, and others. Thus, we founded our club. That is why it is called the Egyptian club".

Many scholars have discussed the link between sport and football specifically and how the sport was a medium for resisting the colonial subjectivity (Lopez 2009; Domingos 2007; Njororai 2009; Appadurai 2015). In her study of football in Zanzibar, Laura Fair proposed that while soccer was introduced by the British order to force Africans to be disciplined, it constituted an important arena in which "poor and working-class men challenged the colonial hegemony by trouncing superiors before thousands of spectators" (Fair 1997). For her, football provided a space where African men could escape the indignities of colonialism, develop their confidence, and enjoy (Ibid).

For instance, the political use of football to challenge hierarchies and colonial subjectivities also happened in Port Said. *Al-Masry* was the first club for Egyptians in the Suez Canal region and among the oldest Egyptian clubs. The club joined the movement of founding Egyptian clubs in Cairo and Alexandria, such as *Al-Ahly*, [the national], founded in Cairo in 1907, and *Al-Ittihad*, [the union], founded in Alexandria in 1914. The common element between founding these clubs was to use football, a game introduced to Egyptians by the

² Ahmed Hosni, was a manager of the clerk's club and member of the city's council

³ Abdulrahman Lutfi shabara, a bourgeoisie and head of *Al-Ahly*'s club in Port Said

⁴ Mohamed Musa, a head of the Nubian association in Port Said

British colonizer, to challenge the colonial subjectivity and enforce the Egyptian identity against European communities, similar to other cases in the colonized nations.

Nevertheless, the case of Al-Masry had two specific features related to both the temporality of its foundation and the club's location. The club's foundation was in a moment of evolution of the Egyptian national consciousness. In 1919, the Egyptian revolution against colonialism was a mass revolution that included almost every city and village in Egypt. In 1920, the Egyptian economist Talaat Harb founded *Banque Misr*, Bank of Egypt, to enforce the national economy. In 1922, Egypt got its independence from Britain, and a year later, the newly independent nation had its first modern codified constitution. Remarkably, in the independence year, the archaeologist Carter discovered the Tutankhamun's tomb. This event launched a global interest in the Egyptian civilization, and more significantly, many leaders of the Egyptian nationalist movement relied on the Pharaonic legacy to justify Egypt's right to be a modern independent nation.

The Suez Canal region remained an in-between global locality that was not included in the independence agreement and stayed under the control of the British military and the SCC. Moreover, urban segregation remained prominent in Port Said. In the 1919's revolution, when groups of Egyptians in the city joined the national wave of protests, the British forces dispersed a mass protest once it left the Arab district and reached the European, and six persons were killed (Fahmy 1987, 161). However, the rising Egyptian national sentiments were consolidated in the arena of football.



Figure 2: A section from a map shows the location of Al-Masry's playground (highlighted in green) in The Arab quarter in April 1934, from the archive of the Egyptian general survey authority.

Unsurprisingly, Al-Masry was built in the Arab quarter and had its playground on the Northern Side of the district outside the residential complex (Figure 2). Al-Masry was the only club in the Arab quarter, and besides Saad Pasha's park, to the south of the club, there were the only public spaces in the district. In my ethnography, I had an interview with Mr. Abdelaal⁵, 78 years old, whose childhood memories about the playground gave a sense of how the playground was. Mr. Abdelaal was a resident of Al-Arish lane in the Arab quarter and used to walk to the playground to see the matches. *"It was just a wall surrounding the green playground, there was only a small space with chairs for figures, and the crowd stands around the playground, it was the only gate for both fans and players"*, he described the ground.

Al-Masry chose the green and white colors as its jerseys to reminiscence the Egyptian national flag in a city where various national flags were raised in the streets and private

⁵ Mr. Mohamed Abdelaal is a professor at the faculty of applied arts, Helwan University.

houses. However, Al-Masry had no emblem until 1980, when Mr. Abdelaal, who was a child supporting the club, became one of the main actors in Al-Masry's history by designing its emblem. He returned to the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb to make a green Horus falcon on a white background to be the club's emblem. While explaining his philosophy behind the emblem, Mr. Abdelaal used a Pharaonic icon to reflect the Egyptian identity and, at the same time, represent the true Port-Saidian in his imagination *"This falcon is chaste and refuses restriction. If you caught a falcon, it would prefer being killed than being imprisoned. The original Port-Saidian is like that; he would do every possible thing to resist injustice and get his rights back,"* he explained. Either amid its foundation or its late rebranding, the club was portrayed as a symbol of collective identity.

To examine the club's history and the soccer scene in Port Said in that colonial era, I depended mainly on the digital archive of Al-Ahram's [the pyramids] Egyptian newspaper. The Cairo-based Al-Ahram was one of the leading newspapers in Egypt to provide regular coverage of sports news in the first half of the Twentieth century (Lopez 2009). Since the twentieth of the last century, the Al-Ahram has included regularly a one-page section for sports news called the *Al-Al'ab Al-Ryadiyya* [Sports games]. Like many Egyptian newspapers during the interwar period, Al-Ahram has covered sports news with an apparent nationalistic discourse in its published news. One of the examples was the Al-Ahram's coverage of the news of the Egyptian national soccer team participating in the Olympic Games in Paris in 1924. With this happening at the stake of Egypt's national struggle, the Al-Ahram portrayed the Egyptian team matches as military battles (Lopez 2009). Also, as Egypt was the first African nation to participate in such a global competition, the Al-Ahram linked the soccer team's performance and results with the questions of modernity and the ability to compete with other civilized nations (Ibid).

In Port Said, the football scene represented the various communities and included clubs, such as the SCC club called *Scarabee*, the Italian club of *Virtus*, the Greek club of *Hesperia*, and the Maltese club of *Ibis*, and all of them had their playgrounds in the European quarter.

Besides, the teams of the British army units were located in the city. Nevertheless, the SCC had the most well-established playground that included stands with seats in Port Fouad town, built on the Eastern side of the Canal's shore (Figure 3). Al-Masry and those teams played friendly matches and participated in local and national tournaments.

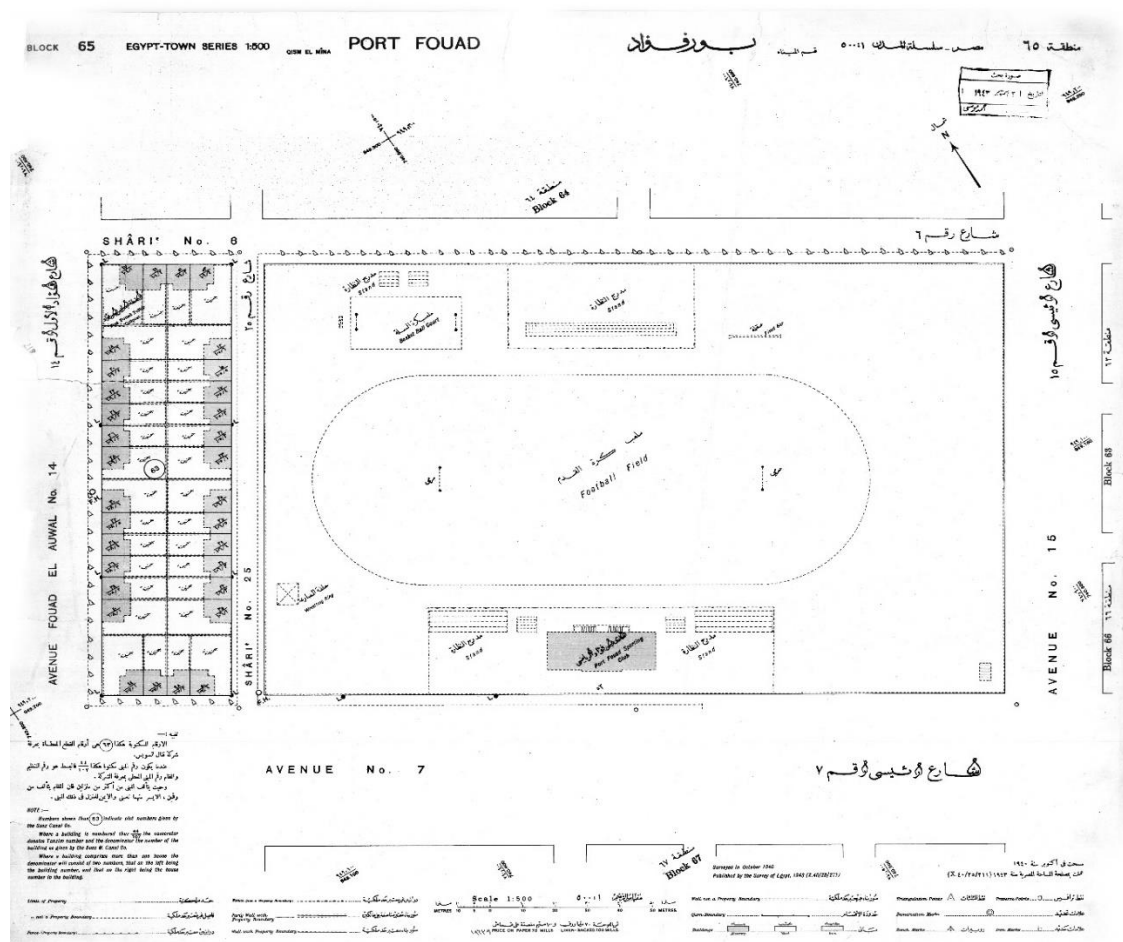


Figure 3: The SCC playground in Port Fouad in October 1940 (the oldest map I found) from the archive of the Egyptian general survey authority.

In 1928, The Egyptian governor of the Canal region Rufat launched an annual soccer tournament under his auspices for the region's local clubs, which became the most significant

tournament in the region. *Rufat*, assigned by the central government in Cairo, wanted to impose the tournament to encourage soccer development in his region (Al-Ahram September 28, 1928). Rufat remarkably supported Al-Masry as if it was the Egyptian national team in the region. For instance, after the defeat of Al-Masry against the Italian team, Rufat attended the team's training after the match and gave a talk to the players to encourage them to win the next matches (Al-Ahram November 3, 1935). Three weeks later, the governor witnessed Al-Masry's victory over the Italian team in the away match and celebrated the victory with the players after the match (Al-Ahram November 21, 1935).

Rufat's initiated tournament was effective in upgrading football in the Canal, which was manifested in the success of the Canal clubs in achieving the title of the Sultan's Cup⁶, the biggest competition, three consecutive times. The SCC club first achieved it in 1932 and Al-Masry in 1933 and 1934. Moreover, two players from Al-Masry represented the Egyptian national team in the FIFA World Cup 1934 in Italy. More Significantly, Al-Masry's striker Fawzi scored Egypt's only two goals in the championship.

Football, I argued, was not just a game, but establishing such a regular tournament under the supervision of the governing body in the city contributed to catalyzing the emerging Egyptian identity and mobilizing the masses, and breaking the ethnic and urban division inside Port Said. The organization of regular soccer matches in different playgrounds in the Arab and the European quarters allowed hundreds of supporters to move beyond ethnic segregation. While political mass protests of the Egyptians were severely oppressed by the colonial authorities once reaching the borders of the European neighborhood, as mentioned earlier, Egyptians

⁶ The Sultan's cup was launched in 1914 after the name of the Sultan's Hussein of Egypt and included all teams in Egypt, national and foreigners. The teams representing the British army unites won the first four competitions and in 1918, the team of Zamalek was the first Egyptian club to achieve its title. The competition lasted until 1938 and the Egyptian clubs of Al-Ahly and Al-Masry were the most titled with three cups for each of them.

were able to visit the other part of their city in mass numbers and protest their identity in a soccer match.

The perfect example of that football role was Al-Masry's road to achieving 1933's Sultan Cup. In the preliminary matches, Al-Masry defeated its local rival, the Greek club of Hesperia. Then, Al-Masry resumed its successful way by defeating Al-Ittihad of Alexandria, and in the semi-finals, it won against the British army team of King's One and reached the final game. The final match was scheduled to occur in Al-Masry's playground, and on the day before the witnessed game, both the municipality and the SCC officials held a meeting to discuss the match preparations. Excepting high attendance numbers, the meeting authorities moved the match to the SCC playground and prepared to provide extra ferries to carry the fans across the Canal (Al-Ahram March 26, 1933). The match witnessed a record attendance of supporters that was estimated at 7000 (Al-Ahram March 27, 1933).

1.3 Port Said's paradox: A "margin" at the center of the world

Glickshiller and Caglar (2009) introduced the concept of city-scale as the differential positioning of cities determined by articulating political, cultural, and economic power institutions within regions, states, and the globe. For them, the significance of this concept is that it goes beyond geographically fixed spatial relationships that cities achieve through their relative positioning within intersections of hierarchical fields of power.

Applying the authors' thesis to my case, Port Said in the colonial time had a specific position within the intersections of various powers. Port Said, I argue, was at a central position on the global scale through its central port and the SCC that attracted "migrant" skilled labor. At the same time, it was at the margin on the national scale of its location and relative isolation from the rest of the nation.

شركة المساجيري ماريتيم			
شركة للنقلات بالعقود			
اسفار سريعة بين الاسكندرية ومرسيليا وبين الاسكندرية وبورسعيد وبيروت			
بالبخريتين المفتخرتين سفنكس ولوتوس			
السفر من الاسكندرية		السفر من بورسعيد	
الى بيروت	الى مرسيليا (رأس)	الى بيروت (رأس)	الى مرسيليا (رأس)
سفنكس ٤ يونيو	سفنكس ١١ يونيو	سفنكس ٥ يونيو	اندره لي بون حوالي
لوتوس ١٨ يونيو	لوتوس ٢٥ يونيو	لوتوس ١٩ يونيو	٨ يونيو
سفرها الساعة ٤ بعد الظهر	سفرها الساعة الاولى بعد الظهر -	سفرها الساعة ١/٤ بعد الظهر	جنرال ديستسن حوالي ٩ يونيو
تسليم وشحن وتوكيل			
تخفيض الاسعار في فصل الصيف			

Figure 4: A photo of an advertisement of a maritime traveling company about their schedule of the trips from Alexandria and Port Said to Marseille and Beirut (Al-Ahram June 2, 1923).

Although Port Said had a local governor affiliated with the Egyptian state, the city was barely connected to the rest of the Egyptian land. Remarkably, the city did not have a road connecting it to other cities until 1936 (Elkerdany 2017). While, in contrast, through a maritime line, there were regular passengers' trips between Port Said and Mediterranean cities such as Marseille and Beirut (Figure 4).

The city had only a train connecting it to Cairo yet with limited capacities and timetables. For instance, in 1934, to support their team in the Sultan's Cup final match in Cairo, Al-Masry's fans convinced the authorities to provide them with a private train that carried thousands of them to Cairo (Al-Ahram May 7, 1934).

This tension between global centrality and national marginality was also manifested in football. Rivalries between Al-Masry and Cairo's clubs reflected the center-periphery tensions and stimulated the sense of marginalization from the early time. The de facto was that Cairo's

two leading clubs, Al-Ahly and Zamalek, exploited Al-Masry's from its prominent players since the twentieth of the last century. For example, Zamalek signed Fawzi, Egypt's top scorer in the World Cup, tempting him with an office job in the Ministry of Health in Cairo (Ayub 2018). Similarly, Al-Ahly signed several of Al-Masry's players, and these cases happened in an earlier time when football was not even a professional game, and players had contracts with their clubs. Instead, those players went to Cairo to find a job to get better opportunities in life.

The center and margin tension were also evident in examining the managers of the clubs in Port Said and the Capital. For instance, the same as the local elites in Port Said and local governors as Rufat supported Al-Masry, Cairo teams were managed and supported by its elites. However, those Capital's elites were Ministers and heads of national political parties (Al-Zatmah 2011).

In 1930, the first conflict between Al-Masry and Cairo's Al-Ahly happened during their match in the Semi-finals of Farouk's Cup⁷. The match took place in Port Said, ending in a draw. Afterward, the referee and Cairo's team decided to leave the ground to catch the train to Cairo, and the Al-Masry's fans and players protested and demanding for playing extra-time (Al-Ahram, May 7, 1930). The Egyptian Football Association EFA decided to repeat the match in Cairo, Al-Masry refused to play, and the Canal's regional football association threatened to withdraw from EFA's competitions (Al-Ahram, May 16, 1930). However, EFA considered Al-Ahly as a winner and resumed the Cup. The significance of the latter example is that, in reality, the conflicts and riots accompanying the matches of Al-Masry and Al-Ahly continued to happen for almost a century. While inspecting Al-Ahram's archive, I found that roughly a similar case happens every decade for a century.

⁷ Farouk Cup started in 1922 after the name of the Prince Farouk who became later the king of Egypt. Since 1952, it was named after Egypt's Cup and continued till nowadays.

In fact, in the post-colonial time, the center-periphery tension has multiplied, especially with the decay of the global significance of Port Said. While remaining economically significant, the city lost even its centrality in the Canal region to Ismailia, which has all the governmental headquarters of the region, such as the court, the university, the local television station, and the SCC head office. The colonial domination of London and Paris was replaced by Cairo's centrality. In football, it was interesting to find two pieces of news in the summer of 1980 reflecting the relationship between Cairo and Port Said. In July, Al-Ahram published news saying that President Sadat's wife was the honorary President of Cairo's Al-Ahly club (Al-Ahram, July 1, 1980). A few weeks later, the newspaper published news from Port Said mentioning that the city's local governor Sarhan would be the honorary President of Al-Masry (Al-Ahram, August 5, 1980). In reality, Sarhan is a member of Sadat's party, and the latter was who assigned him to be the governor of Port Said.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the foundation of both Port Said and the Al-Masry club. First, it showed how Port Said was a global port controlled by competing powers and how this was manifested in the city's urban fabric. Then, in response to the rising Egyptian nationalism and to challenge the European domination, Egyptians in the city founded a soccer club in their segregated neighborhood. The club allowed them not only to break the segregation and compete with other Europeans but also connected them to other Egyptians outside the city. Lastly, I referred to Port Said's paradoxical position nationally and globally in colonial times and afterwards. In the next chapter, I will move to Port Said in the post-colonial time, focusing on the city's remaking after the 1956 war and showing how Port Said acquired a central position on the national level.

Chapter 2

The valiant city

Port Said, after the War of 1956

*In patriotic Port Said, there were courageous youth
With dignity and honor, they defeated the colonial army*

*Three powers against one city; think about it, man
We have humiliated them, and they rapidly escaped
Oh men, congratulations!*

*Eden, Ben Gurion, and Molet, why did you invade us
Did you lose your mind because we nationalized the Canal?
Is this Canal in your territory? Did we capture it from you?
God protect you, Gamal!*

A section of one of the Semsemya⁸ songs is frequently played in popular concerts in Port-Said.

Introduction



Figure 5: A painting glorifying the war of 1956 on the wall of a club in front of the Suez Canal shore in Port Said, taken by the author in February 2022.

⁸ Semsemya refers to a folk music that is the Red Sea, and the Suez Canal region. Many of the semsemya music commemorated the anti-colonial resistance in its concerts colloquially known as *Dammah* the gathering.

In Today's Port Said, besides many Semsemya songs like the abovementioned one, the memories of the 1956's war exist remarkably in the city's material milieu. Moving around the city's district, I have seen many paintings and writings on the walls of public clubs, schools, private properties, cultural cafes, a non-official museum for folk music, and many memorials in public parks and squares. Most of these drawings and memorials were recent and made by both individuals and officials in the municipality. In many of my interviews with Al-Masry's supporters, the war's commemoration and Nasser's official visits to celebrate it in the city were vividly remembered and recalled even without asking about it.

The 1956's war, globally known as the Suez War, took place in October 1956, a few months after Nasser nationalized the SCC and almost two years after Egypt's full independence from British Colonialism. Tripartite aggression, consisting of Great Britain, France, and Israel, invaded Egypt. The Anglo-French aggression occurred in Port Said, which was occupied for nearly two months. The war was a significant moment in world history with the humiliating defeat of two old colonial powers, Britain and France, and the rise of the United States and the Soviet Union's domination of world politics. In Port Said, I argue that the 1956's moment is central in both the city's history and its present. 1956 was the only historical moment when Port Said was a symbolic center for the Egyptian nation.

In this chapter, I will not discuss the war itself, but I will focus on the remaking of Port Said after the war, the war commemoration, and, more significantly, how Al-Masry's Stadium occupied a central position in the commemoration ceremonies.

2.1 Re-Making Port Said after the war

Only a few days after the war, the Egyptian government founded the Ministry of Port Said's affairs and assigned it to Al-Boghdadi, who was also the Minister of Municipalities and Urban and Rural Affairs. The post-colonial state had to instantly start Port Said's

reconstruction projects to provide new homes for those who lost them in the war and fled the city. The Anglo-French invasion of the city selectively destroyed a significant part of the Al-Arab side of the divided Port Said. For instance, the Al-Manakh neighborhood, the most Western part of the city close to the Airport and Manzala Lake, was burnt to the ground. The neighborhood witnessed the most destructive battle in the war that was started by the civil resistance fighters trying to tackle the Paratroopers at the Airport and ended with the mass destruction of the neighborhood by airstrikes and the inhabitants fleeing in boats through the Lake towards the Nile Delta towns.



Figure 6: A colored photo of Port Said in December 1956 from Khalid Abdel Rahman's personal collection shows the mass destruction of the Al-Manakh neighborhood, and Port Said's Stadium appears in the North-Western part of the district on the Mediterranean.

The rebuilding of the destroyed Al-Manakh was more than an emergent project to resettle the displaced dwellers. However, it was an important part of the national mass projects to integrate Port Said into the Egyptian land. In fact, after almost a century of Port Said's foundation, the project of rebuilding Al-Manakh was the first grand project that the Egyptian state implemented in the city (Elshahed 2012). It was the first time that the state constructed a social housing project for Egyptians in Port Said and designed a whole neighborhood. The district reflected the socialist ideology of Nasser's State in terms of its urban design along with the names of its squares and streets. For instance, the district has consisted of eight identical blocks that have the same color and apartments of the same size. Furthermore, the main square was named after Stalingrad, the main street was called Damascus, and many small streets carried names such as the people, the nationalization, nationalism, Arabism, etc. (Elgezy 2017). The government even demolished the remaining undestroyed houses, replacing them with newer, healthier, and more appropriate ones as a part of the whole reconstruction project.

Port Said's Ministry launched many development projects in 1957. Besides the grand project of building the New Al-Manakh district, there were projects such as re-fixing schools and hospitals, building new factories, workshops, and hotels, and developing the city's port and the naval arsenal. Interestingly, one of the main projects was to build a new stadium in Port Said.



Figure 7: An article from Al-Ahram newspaper with a headline written above in bold saying building a new international stadium in Port Said, (Al-Ahram, December 29, 1956).

On the 29th of December 1956, five days after the city's liberation, the Al-Ahram published a headline titled "An international sports Stadium in Port Said". The article referred to an official meeting that was held the day before between ministers of Port Said's affairs, Social Affairs, Education, and the head and secretary of the youth care council. It was decided at the meeting that a new international sports stadium be built on the seacoast in Al-Manakh, which includes grounds for football, basketball, and other sports (Figure 7).

The governmental interest in building a stadium in Port Said as a central element of the city's rebuilding plans evoked two questions. Firstly, why did the media talk about building the Port

Said stadium while the stadium already existed a year before the beginning of the war? Secondly, what was the significance of claiming the building of a new stadium at such a critical moment for both Port Said and Egypt? In order to answer them, we need to go back a couple of years. According to Mr. Elshemy, a previous media director at the club and local historian⁹, the story of building the stadium dates back to 1948 when the club's president Mr. Lotfi Shabara a local businessman, demanded land allocation from the municipality to build it to host Al-Masry's club matches in the newly launched Egyptian football league. Shabara led a public donation campaign to finance the project in which he provided the biggest share, along with donations from the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Suez Canal Company also participated. Therefore, in October 1955, exactly a year before the war, the same Minister of Social Affairs (after the war) Hussein El-Shafey opened the Al-Masry club Stadium on the same land (Al-Ahram, October 15, 1955). Moreover, although the stadium was located in the Al-Manakh district, it was intact by the end of the war, and the UN forces used its space to organize the Christmas mass (Figure 8).

⁹ Mr. Ebrahim Elshemy is an accountant who was the head of the Al-Masry's club media center till 2013 and launched the club's first official website. At the website, he displayed the club's history based on an extensive oral history research he implemented in which he had interviews with families and relatives of the club's historical icon players and presidents, and interpreted their family and personal archives.



Figure 8: A photo of the UN forces attending the Christmas Mass in the Stadium in December 1956, from Khalid Abdel Rahman's personal collection.

After the war, however, the government decided to take the land that was allocated to the Al-Masry club and two other sporting clubs and give it back to the municipality to create one sports complex affiliated with the municipality (Al-Ahram, August 14, 1957). In reality, the building of the new stadium was an expropriation of the existing one from Al-Masry club by the Egyptian state. The government provided eighty thousand EGP for the project to be implemented in 5 months, and Port Said's municipality financed the starting phase with fifteen thousand EGP (Al-Ahram, January 1, 1956).

The state's interest in Port Said Stadium was connected to Nasser's regime's interest in sports for both nation-building and Africa's leadership ambitions. Nationally, since 1955, the Egyptian government, via the High Council of Sports, had a plan to build and renovate many stadiums and youth centers in the provinces, among them the stadiums of Zagazig and Damanhour in the Nile Delta were built in 1955 and 1961 respectively (Ayub 2019). On a

continental level, in 1958, the Egyptian state started the construction of Africa's and Egypt's biggest Stadium in Cairo, naming it Nasser's Stadium. However, the Port Said Stadium which was built even before Cairo's had a distinct function apart from the usual function of a stadium. Port Said's Stadium, located in the symbolic capital of Nasser's project, was a theatre for celebrating Port Said's heroism and national pride in defeating colonialism and enforcing the regime's socialist, pan-Arabism, and pan-Africanism ideologies.

2.2: Remember the 23rd of December

Drawing on Connerton (1989), my argument here is that the commemoration's ceremonies turned the war narratives from a story to an enacted cult. The narratives became rites fixed and performed every year, converting it from a story told in the past tense to the metaphysically present tense.

The 1956's "symbolic" victory was the main source of popularity and legitimacy for Nasser that extended to the whole Arab world, Africa, and all colonized nations. Thus, Nasser's regime memorialized the war by marking its end date, December 23, as Egypt's national day, called *Eid Al-Nasr*, the victory's feast.

For almost a decade, the war commemoration happened in two intertwined processes. Firstly, the Egyptian government constructed the sites of memory *Le Lieux de Memoire*; a broad term coined by Pierre Nora to refer to any significant material or non-material entity that is made official by governments for homogenizing varied local memories (Nora 1989). For example, it built a large memorial of the war's martyrs in the form of a substantial Pharaonic obelisk in martyrs square, as the first Egyptian monument in the city's history (Al-Ahram, December 24, 1958). Located in a central location at the border between what were the European and Arab quarters, the symbol of Egyptian civilization became visible in most of what were the "European" quarter streets. Moreover, Nasser opened a military museum in Port Said to

narrate the 1956 war and created a flag for Port Said, a golden shield on a red background, referring to the blood and sacrifices made by the city's martyrs.

Secondly, the commemorative ceremonies organized by the government were held on every anniversary of the war until 1966. Every year there was a national celebration that took place in Port Said in terms of performances and mass speeches. The celebration program included Nasser's visiting the city, giving a speech in front of the masses, and military and sports performances. Remarkably, the stadium was a central stage for the commemoration's ceremonies, hosting Nasser's speeches, sporting enactments performed by students and athletes, as well as military shows.



Figure 9: A comic was published in Al-Ahram's newspaper on December 21, 1965. It describes the Victory's feast (written above), and a man symbolizes Port Said's people (written) hugging Nasser's and saying Welcome! Hero (written down).

Many of my interlocutors perceived Nasser's annual visits to celebrate the city's victory as proof of both an intimate relationship between Nasser and the city as well as of Port Said's both national and global significance. In that historical moment, compared to the colonial time, Port Said was not just a globally significant port city but also a national icon of resistance.

In an interview with Mr. Mustafa, 60 years old driver, in a café in Al-Manakh district, he mentioned, "We had a mutual love with Nasser" in an assertive way. He regularly visited us and walked among the masses greeting him; here in Al-Manakh district, he added. In another meeting with Mr. Elsayed, a 62-year engineer, he spoke enthusiastically about Nasser "*You know Nasser loved Port Said and why not it is the city that made him that popular at the end of the day*". Remarkably, Nasser's regular visits were usually compared to Mubarak's neglect to celebrate the city's day and perceived that he never liked the city and its people. Namely, the presidential visits are used by Port-Saidians as a standard to measure the city's significance for the state and its leaders.

As a sign of the collectively remembered intimate relationship with Nasser as well as the extreme passion of Al-Masry's fans of their club, Mr. Farouk, the club's media director, and sports historian, narrated to me a story from Nasser's visit in 1964. "In his regular visit to celebrate our day... the gathered masses were cheering" *Al-Lewy! President!... At the war memorial, they cheered it, and when he arrived at the stadium they continued to cheer loudly with the same words... Nasser was confused what this Al-Lewy is... and asked his assistants to investigate about it... Al-Lewy was a nickname of a popular athlete at Al-Masry and was permanently suspended by the football association after a fight between him and another player from Tersana FC in an earlier League match, and the fans were demanding a pardon for him... And you know Nasser ordered to give him a pardon, and he played with the team in*

the match against the Al-Sawahil team on 28th of December, a few days after the victory's feast!"

2.3 All road lead to Port Said!

The era after 1956 was the only historical moment when Port Said was symbolically the center of the Egyptian nation. The annual celebration of December 23 was the only time when temporarily all roads in Egypt were leading to Port Said, not Cairo. In the preceding week of the day, the supreme council of the youth care organized the victory's flame festival all around Egypt (Al-Ahram, December 15, 1956). The festival starts by lightening flams in different geographical positions; one in Luxor in the South of the Nile Valley, one in Alexandria in the West, one in Damietta in the East, and another in Gaza at the Egyptian Eastern borders. The flames carried by the youth of each city circulated from one city to another in the direction of Port Said. On the victory day, the participating youth from all Egyptian provinces gathered in Port Said, where they lighted the main victory flame in the stadium and gave a celebrating letter from each province to Port Said.

During such victory days, Port Said was a popular destination for visitors on both the national and the global levels. In December 1957, the city's hotels were fully booked, and it was a hard mission for the Canal's governor to provide residency to the unprecedented number of visitors (Al-Ahram, December 22, 1957). Nasser used to attend the celebrations with the military leaders, officials, and political leaders delegates from Africa and Asia. In his speeches in Port Said, Nasser praised the heroism of Port Said's people calling the city "*Bur Sa'id Al-basilah*"¹⁰ the valiant/courageous Port Said that protected Egypt and the whole Arab world. Moreover, he used the city's space and stadium as a stage to give his political cause a global aspect and

¹⁰ In addition to mention the name in the speeches, a popular Egyptian movie carried the same name, and talked about the war in Port Said, was directed in 1957 by Farid Shawky.

target the whole world. In front of thousands in the stadium on the first anniversary, Nasser gave his emotional and populist speech.

"....We speak from Port Said to the whole world and demand that every colonized state be given its independence to govern itself by itself. We demand the abolition of racial discrimination in Africa and that the people of Africa have equal rights to all the inhabitants of their country. Today from Port Said, we look from Port Said to the whole world and say that although the aggression plagued us and even though the major countries attacked us, our goal was peace...and our goal today is peace..", a part of Nasser's speech in Port Said's Stadium (Al-Ahram, December 1957).

Drawing on Lefebvre, making the stadium a theatre for Nasser's political speeches and the commemorating performances reproduced the stadium's social space. In a just liberated city's historical and social context, the stadium's lived space included memories of the war and was charged with political meanings and symbols. The stadium's (conceived) space, the stands, and the ground, and its (perceived) space, the practice of cheering and playing football, were converted and used for different political purposes.

The annual ceremonies of the victory feast and Nasser's visits to Port Said lasted for almost a decade (1957-1966). Every 23rd of December, Nasser used the memories of 1956's glory, the source of his legitimacy, to defend his local and regional politics in his speeches in the city generally and the stadium specifically. For instance, in December 1963, after the controversial participation of the Egyptian forces in the Yemeni civil war, Nasser honored the soldiers who participated in the war in a ceremony in the stadium. In this sense, Nasser used to make 1956's moment and Port-Said his standing point and portrayed all his politics as continuity to that glorious moment. Also, in 1965 to strengthen the Egyptian and Soviet friendship, the

stadium hosted a friendly match between Al-Masry and Volgograd's club, asserting Port Said's symbolism as a valiant city and defining it as the Egyptian Stalingrad.

In Mossallam's study of the memories of 1956's war in Port Said, through visiting the Semsemya's anti-colonial songs, she showed how the Nasserian Regime dominated the narration of the war; selectively silenced or memorized the war events (Mossallam 2013). Along with Mossallam's thesis, the war was commemorated as a victory for Nasser's politics more than glorifying the people's struggle. In fact, this explains well how the nationwide celebrations of 1956 stopped after 1967's humiliating defeat and Nasser's death in 1970. Afterwards, the war on the 6th of October, when Egypt started its war to liberate Sinai in 1973, became Egypt's new national day. Namely, President Sadat and his successor Mubarak who participated in the 1973 war, wanted to promote their political legitimacy by selectively commemorating and celebrating the military achievement in 1973.

Moreover, the celebrations of 1956's victory shifted from a nationwide celebration with Presidential and official participation to a local ceremony limited in Port Said without official national attendance. Once again, Port Said lost its national centrality. However, the vernacular memories continue to narrate the stories of glory and use them politically as well. For Mossallam, the Port-Saidians, through playing and singing the Semsemya songs, continue to represent their history and claim their national significance by narrating the history of colonial resistance (Ibid). Similarly, I will show in the next chapter how the memories of the anti-colonial glory persisted in the stadium's space and the act of supporting Al-Masry.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I displayed how Port Said was rebuilt and integrated into the Egyptian nation after the war of 1956. Moreover, the city acquired a central symbolic position in Egypt as the icon of resistance. Also, the city's stadium turned into a political theatre for the war

commemoration and Nasser's speeches. In the next chapter, I examine how the memories of 1956's anti-colonial glory were retained in the stadium's space and politically recalled by Al-Masry fans after the decline of the official commemorations.

Chapter 3

"They must know that we are the descendants of 56"

The stadium as a site of belonging

Oh, Port-Saidians, it is getting easier, and patience is good.

The return is inevitable, and we will return soon.

Tomorrow, we will return to the stadium

Cheering for Al-Masry, and saying it is a goal.

Oh, Master of Arts, we miss sitting in the stands.

The return is inevitable, and we will return soon.

A section of a Semsemya song composed and played in 1970 by migrant Port-Saidians in Zagazig (Eid 1998).

Introduction

This chapter displays how Al-Masry's soccer matches inside Port Said's Stadium became a space for enforcing the sense of "belonging to Port Said" that transfers from a father to a son. Also, it shows how the "belonging to Port Said" and the act of supporting the Al-Masry's club carry in their essence the memories of the anti-colonial struggle and the 1956's pride. I will do my analysis based on my ethnographic resources and through an interpretation of the memory work I got from my informants' narratives of their trips to the stadium. In this analysis, I follow people through each part of the trip: the road to the stadium, at the stadium's gate, entering the stadium, sitting in the stadium, and cheering and singing in it. Namely, I elaborate on how the memories of 1956 and the anti-colonial struggle were reproduced, kept evolving from one generation to another, and lastly, how it was reactivated in response to political and economic changes.

Although, since 1967, the stadium was no more a site for official ceremonies, the memories of 1956 continued to occupy its space and even extended to the Al-Masry fans' trips to other

stadiums. In other words, although the decay of the 1956s significance in the "official" memory and the stadium is as a *lieu de memoire*, the Port-Saidians, through vernacular memories kept remembering their city's glory in the stadium's space and brought history back to the stadium, and in their everyday activities of cheering for their soccer team. Contrary to Nora's dominant theory that memory became concentrated as lieu, I follow Nikro and Hegasy's research that memory is "taking place as tensions between lieu and milieu" (Nikro and Hegasy 2017). I argue that Port-Saidian football fans engaged with the stadium's space as both a *lieu and milieu de memoire*, and kept the social practice of recalling memories both in continuity with the pre-1967 national cult and independently from it.

After the 1967 war, the Port-Saidians and other Canal cities' dwellers were forcibly displaced to other Egyptian cities and lived as migrants inside Egypt for six years. They returned to the city and attended matches in the stadium in 1974. Therefore, the memories mentioned in this chapter are about the stadium between 1974 and 2012.

3.1: The road to the stadium: taking an itinerary through geographies of memory



Figure 10: A recent map from Google Earth shows a section of Port Said. The European quarter (Al-Afrang) is marked by red, Al-Arab by blue, Al-Manakh by yellow, and the stadium by green.

In many of the interviews I had, the interlocutors responded to my first questions about why they support the Al-Masry by saying open sentences such as *"I am from Al-Arab (district), you know"* or *"I used to live in Al-Arab"*. They follow saying it with a moment of silence, giving a sense that the sentence explains everything, or add an explanatory sentence like *"and you know, it (Al-Arab) has its own rituals, its special atmosphere"*. These short concluding sentences originate from the common perception of Al-Arab as the city's most authentic district. Mr. Elshemy gave me a short account of the Al-Arabs authenticity by saying, *"Here in Port Said we have a saying that if you have not been born and lived in Al-Arab you are not Port-Saidi, if you don't have at least roots in the district you are surely not a Port-Saidian"*.

Al-Arab's gained its symbolism from the collective memories and imaginations of the district as the stronghold of Port Said that resisted and defeated colonialism. Today's Port Said is larger than the colonial city, and many new districts have been after 1956. Nevertheless, the

oldest districts, the Arab and the European ones, are the city's central districts or what could be called *Wist Al-Balad*, the downtown. Remarkably, the impact of colonial segregation continues to manifest in today's Port Said. The city's dwellers still recalled the European quarter as the district of *El-Efrang* the franks, a word that refers to the Europeans. The district has preserved its hierarchy by being inhabited by upper classes and having a higher quality of life than the Al-Arab and the newer districts.

Al-Arab is distinguished by being the space with the old wooden framed family buildings, the narrow intersected streets, and certain cultural practices that the district hosts. For instance, the district hosts the Al-Lemby annual festival and Semsemya folk music public concerts in its streets. Moreover, Al-Arab is often linked with the rituals of supporting and attending Al-Masry matches in the district's coffee houses and the stadium, which are my main focus here.



Figures 11 and 12: show groups watching Al-Masry's matches at Al-Arab cafes taken by me in February 2022.

Mr. Fuad, 35 years old, a worker living in Al-Arab, talked passionately about Al-Arab's atmosphere when there was a match in the Stadium "*The match's day ritual starts early in the morning... you see groups of fans wearing green shirts and carrying the flags gathering at the*

corners of the Al-Arab's streets, and after a while, you see these groups move towards the stadium's direction to get the tickets from Al-Kora (the tickets kiosk), and they buy snacks or sit in the popular coffee houses such as Al-Nozha and Ras Al-Barr..".

Interestingly, many other dwellers who are not residents of Al-Arab came to the district to soak up these atmospheres, which is an essential part of the match attendance rituals. This means that going to the stadium necessarily includes a preceding trip into the city's "authentic" district. For Mr. Hassan, a 29 years old architect living in the Al-Zuhur district, "the match day must be starting in the Al-Arab district to feel the rituals". He explained further, *"With my father and brother, we used to go to my uncle's fishes oven in Adly Street in Al-Arab, where we meet our cousins and my uncle to go to the match together... In front of the oven, we used to listen to conversations about the match, meet retired players, see the groups of supporters sitting in cafes around Al-Kora.."*, and almost repeated the same description made by Mr. Fuad about the atmosphere.

3.2: At the Stadium's gate: Like father like son

Al-Kora, the colloquial name of the tickets kiosk, was located in Al-Arab's district at the intersecting point between Orabi and Al-Thalatini Streets, very close to the stadium in Al-Manakh's district. After getting the tickets, the fans used to walk slowly to the stadium where, because of the large number of people walking to the stadium, all its surrounding streets were blocked for cars by the police forces to control the crowd.

Almost all of my interlocutors have entered the stadium for the very first time with their fathers or uncles. One of the typical scenes at the entrance of the stadium was seeing a man holding his son's hand while waiting in the queue. This scene was a norm, and a man does not pay an extra ticket for his kid. Therefore, sometimes children who want to attend the match and cannot afford a ticket beg any older man to let them enter as if they are his kids.

The whole idea of supporting the team begins in the family circles when a father takes his son to attend a match and brings him a green flag and the team's jerseys, and they go to the match together. This also happens when a kid is curious to discover what is that thing his father is passionate about and sometimes crazily happy or sad because of it. Mr. Elshemy kept talking passionately for one hour about the club's significance for him, and when I interrupted him by asking, *"But when did all of this start?"* He responded by just saying, *"My father, god's mercy be upon him"* after a moment of silence, he explained, *"my father was a very decent person..you know he was talking little and never shouted at us... However, when he watched the Al-Masry matches, he was a different person... It was the first time we saw him happily screaming or getting nervous and shouting...I had the curiosity to explore that Al-Masry thing."*

When a father plants in his kid the seeds to support the club and go together to the stadium, he somehow makes new memories with his kid. These memories work in two intertwined spheres; the family sphere, where their memories together bond their relationship, and the social sphere, where the kid shares memories with the masses in the stadium and recall collective memories about the club's and the city's history. In this sense, the stadium turned from a panoramic lieu of official commemoration to a milieu where memories are actively produced.

3.3: Entering the Stadium: a popular game in a public space for all classes

The popularity of football in Port Said made the stadium usually crowded to maximum capacity in almost all matches. Until the stadium's renovation in 2009 to host some matches in the FIFA World Cup U-19, the stadium lacked seats and was merely rows of steel except for the cabin section. Numbers like twenty or thirty thousand were estimated as the stadium's capacity for hosting fans, and only in 2009, the capacity was defined as 18600 seats.

To enter the stadium, the fans used to buy the tickets on the same day from Al-Kora. Interestingly, the tickets and the stadiums were not divided by first, second, and third classes like many stadiums worldwide. Instead, there was a fixed, relatively affordable price for all stadium sections except for the cabin that was exclusive to the club's assembly members. Moreover, those who could not afford to pay the ticket used to have their techniques of negotiation, begging, or manipulating the police forces, and the latter were frequently open the gates for everyone after a while or during the half-time break.

With thousands attending every match, the game's popularity is not comparable to any other cultural activity such as going to a museum. Some of the interlocutors mentioned that they even go to the stadium to attend the team's training sessions. Mr. Fuad said, *"When we see the stadium's lights, we just go whether it is a training session or a friendly match. We adore football here"*. In her study of official and vernacular memory in the USA and South Africa, Sabine Marschal discusses that while in the USA, the occasional visit to a museum is typical in middle-class family life, in South Africa, the black majority's interest in museums and heritage sites remain marginal (Marschal 2013). In my case, the popularity of football made the stadium a rich site of memory, official and vernacular, and thousands of Port-Saidians used to go there compared to a limited interest in visiting the military museum, while Nasser's government used both to commemorate the war.

3.4: Sitting in the stadium: memory embodiment and bodily practices

As a rectangular-shaped single-story stadium, Al-Masry's Stadium consisted of four separated sections for supporters, three of them were for home fans, and the fourth was kept for the away team's fans. The stadium's sections were named after their geographical directions, not defined by the ticket's price. The longitudinal section opposite the cabin was called *Al-Bahari* the Coastal referring to its location parallel to the Mediterranean coast directly behind it. To

the left of the cabin, there was the Al-Gharbi section, the Western, and to its opposite *Al-Sharqi*, the Eastern, was the guests' section.

In his seminal thesis about commemoration, Connerton argues that performativity is the key to transmitting any non-inscribed practice through commemorative ceremonies (Connerton 1989). For him, performativity came out from habits that originate from bodily automatisms. In my case, although the end of the official ceremonies of 1956's memory, the performances, and the bodily practices continued to take place in the Stadium in Al-Masry's football matches with and without recognition of the historical roots of these practices.

One ritual performance that dated back to 1956's ceremonies and lasted in the stadium was flying pigeons at the stadium's playground just before the beginning of the match. Mr. Fuad gave me a detailed account of the ritual. He mentioned that there is a certain place for pigeons' breeding in Al-Arab, and on the match day, the owner of the place brings dozens of pigeons in a woody cage, releasing them during the opening ceremonies of a match. Once set free, the pigeons fly back to their place in Al-Arab. What was interesting for me is that although many supporters told me about the ritual, no one recognized its significance or origin. By doing archival research in Al-Ahram's newspaper coverage of 1956's memorialization, I found out the origins of the pigeon's ritual. On the second anniversary of the war, as a part of Nasser's visit program, Al-Ahram wrote that when the president arrived at the stadium to give his speech, there would be a ritual of flying pigeons to symbolize peace, and this would happen precisely at 4 pm recalling the moment when the invading armies retreated from the city in 1956. (Al-Ahram, December 22, 1958).

For most of the stadium's history, Al-Bahari, the oldest section that existed since Nasser's era, remained the iconic section for cheering. Namely, the same section where masses used to attend Nasser's speeches and the ceremonies continued to be the primary site for supporting

the team. On the other hand, Al-Gharbi was for spectators who preferred just to watch the game and avoid the dynamic atmosphere of Al-Bahari; thus, it was described metaphorically by the fans as "*Modarrag Al-Ma'shaat*, the stand of the old retired persons".

Al-Bahari was closer to the playground and had a way of cheering that followed the match's rhythm; the fans cheered loudly when there was a chance for a goal and stayed quiet when the game was unexciting. *Al-Bahari's* fans had some unique cheering ways linked to the city's anti-colonial heritage, like *Al-Sa'fawya Al-Bursaidiya*, the Port-Saidian clapping, a fast and rhythmic clapping. "It is hard to know the exact origin, but it is similar to the civil resistance's clapping during the war while they were singing *Simsimya*". Mr. Mustafa, a 60 years old supporter, told me. He added, "*there was also Al-Mugah the wave*", in which the whole stadium performs a sea wave; it starts with fans who are sitting at the far end of *Al-Bahari* section standing up, suddenly waving their arms and moving them from down to up while saying *haaay* loudly, and then sitting down and the group next to them doing the same, and the wave continues across the stadium's different sections.

3.5: A re-direction of the political use of 1956's memory: moving from Al-Bahari to Al-Gharbi

As I pointed out previously, Port Said lost its global significance after the colonial time and 1956 and was only central nationally in the decade after 1956. However, it remained a significant economic center thanks to Sadat's decision to turn the city into a free-customs trade zone (Law 12/1977). Nevertheless, in 2002, Mubarak imposed a presidential law that canceled Sadat's earlier law and deprived the city's from its economic privilege (Law 5/2002). Mass protests erupted in the city, challenging Mubarak's decision (Middle East online, 2002). Therefore, the government decided to postpone imposing the law, and instead, it started to withdraw from the free-trade zone gradually by decreasing the allowed quotas of free-customs imported goods in the following years (Law 1/2006, Law 5/2009).

In the last years of Mubarak's reign, the memories of 1956 returned to the stadium not just as the embodiment of practices and performances but also as incorporated by chanted songs and written on banners, shirts, and flags. In 2009, a youth group founded an Ultras group to support Al-Masry's team. They called themselves Green Eagles and had the nickname Descendants of 56. The emergence of the Ultras of Al-Masry was a response to creating the first Egyptian Ultras groups for Al-Ahly and Zamalek clubs in Cairo in 2007. The Ultras groups of Al-Masry were mainly joined by the younger generation who inherited the club's support from their fathers and used to take this trip to the stadium with them. In lengthy interviews with four youth who attended matches with the Ultras, all began attending matches in Al-Bahari before they decided to switch their location, which resulted in changing the whole dynamic of the cheering set. By creating their own space by leaving Al-Bahari and sitting in Al-Gharbi, they attracted more youth to join their section; the dynamics between the two sections were reversed, and Al-Gharbi turned from the section of the retired to the most active section of the stadium. The move to Al-Gharbi was also to follow the Italian pattern of ultras groups that preferred to sit at the curves of the stadium; *Curva Sud* or *Curva Nord*. The groups called their section *Gharbi Al-Ahfaad* Al-Gharbi of the descendants (1956).

The youth groups collectively memorized their city's glorious history and how it was nationally and globally significant, even though they had not experienced it. Moreover, the local economy deteriorated due to the imposed laws that limited the free-zone privileges. Protesting the loss of national significance was evident in their cheering songs. In one of the songs, they chanted, "*they say no one knows them, no they must know that were the descendants of 56*". Hence, the younger generation decided to form a different way of cheering, recall the anti-colonial memories and re-appropriate their significance.

Drawing on Olick, the case of these ultras groups shows that the past meanings are malleable to varying degrees, and the present circumstances exploit their potential more or less (Olick

1998; 381). This also echoes Belli's thesis that the historical utterances are constantly reshaped by political, social, economic, and emotional factors (Belli 2013). Interestingly, Belli's argument is based on her case study examining the anti-colonial ritual of burning Lemby's effigy¹¹ in Port Said as well.

Moreover, more specifically, my case study displays how the fans of Al-Masry engaged with the stadium as a *milieu de memoire*, a space where they placed their narrative and recalled the memories, used them politically, and challenged the absence of the official commemoration. By examining this way of active remembering, I argue that the stadium was a space where memories happen as tensions between *lieu* and *milieu*.

In December 2011, after Mubarak's dislodging, the fans returned 1956's commemoration to the stadium. In Al-Masry's home match against Beni-Suef in the Egyptian league, the Ultras commemorated the war in their opening ceremony¹² for the match. They wrote the word 1956 on colored stickers covering Al-Gharbi's section seats and made a huge painting of Port Said's landmark building (The Suez Canal authority building) on which these words were written, "Nationalization and War, Independence and Freedom", and launched fireworks at the minute 56 of the match.

Conclusion

This chapter followed how the memories of 1956's were retained in the stadium's space differently. Through a detailed examination of the memories of the stadium of Al-Masry fans, I showed how the rituals of going to the stadium were, in reality, a trip to celebrate and be proud of the city's history of colonial resistance. The stadium became a site of belonging by being both a *lieu* and *milieu* of memories. Memories of 1956 were kept in the bodily acts of

¹¹ Burning Lemby is an anti-colonial ritual that started in Port Said during the colonial time, and Lemby is basically the British General Edmund Allenby. The ritual took place every year in the night before Easter, and its political significance keep changing in relation to the social context.

¹² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-seF3R0J4tE>

cheering, and they were actively recalled challenging both the absence of official memories and the deteriorating economic and political position of the city on the national level.

Conclusion

This thesis is based on ethnographic and archival research to study the significance of the Al-Masry club in the politics of identities, memories and space in (post) colonial Port Said. The research studied Port Said from the moment the city was built as a strategic port on the Mediterranean Sea and Suez Canal and then navigated through the city's turbulent history until 2011.

By situating the case of Al-Masry among the football politics literature, I showed in (chapter one) how the football catalyzed the collective identities of Port-Saidians to resist their colonial subjectivity and challenge the status of being segregated in their divided city and isolated from the rest of the Egyptian nation.

By moving to the post-colonial time, in (chapter two), I pointed out how the stadium's social space was reproduced concerning the social and historical context and how it became a stage for official commemoration of the 1956 war. In (chapter three), by examining Al-Masry fans' memories of the stadium and reading 1956's pride memories both during Nasser's era and afterwards, I showed how Port Said stadium was a space where the memories are recalled as tensions between the lieu and milieu.

Namely, memory and space are reciprocally constructed and reproduced. On the one hand, collective memories of the war commemorations reproduced the stadium's social space. On the other hand, the stadium's space was also a medium for constructing new memories between a father and his son or when the newer generation actively remembered the anti-colonial memories and organized commemoration ceremonies by themselves in the absence of state institutions.

Moreover, the absence of the national commemoration of the anti-colonial pride, while the persistence of remembering these memories in the fan's group collective memories, made the stadium a site of belonging for Port Said. More precisely, the rupture between the official national memory and the vernacular memories of Port-Saidian fans made the latter group has their own collective memories and, accordingly, their distinct local identity. In this way, as the club catalyzed the Egyptian identity for Port-Saidians in the colonial time, it enforced their distinct local identity after the decay in the last decades.

Furthermore, examining football politics in Port Said, I argue, provided an efficient lens to reveal the broader social and political tensions in the city in different historical moments. I displayed how Port Said's position on both the national and global scale was dramatically changed. In the colonial era, Port Said was a significant global port-city that attracted international labour and visitors, but ironically on the periphery of the Egyptian nation. In 1956, all roads led to Port Said, and the city was central on both global and national scales. However, the city lost both its global and national centrality in the post-1967 war. Moreover, while it remained an economically privileged city as a free-trade zone, the local economy was notably challenged when the Egyptian government gradually withdrew the free-zone benefits in the late years of Mubarak's reign.

Memories of the past, precisely the anti-colonial pride, are vividly remembered in Port Said until today, reflected in the city's present. In my view, the anti-colonial pride of 1956 is remembered actively and selectively as well for two intertwined reasons. On the one hand, Port-Saidians and the football supporters specifically remember 1956 to claim their lost national and global centrality. On the other hand, they used the same arena of football to challenge colonial hierarchy and protest a recent and different form of exclusion and marginalization.

In this thesis, I focused mainly on the commemoration of the 1956 war in the stadium during Nasser's era and afterwards but briefly referred to significant periods in the city, such as the forced displacement and the free-trade zone. The moment of 1956 was a helpful nodal point for my analysis to trace the transformation of the city's national significance during the post-colonial time. However, including how the forced migration experience and the economic prosperity that accompanied the free-trade zone would have added a rich account to approach my research question. Also, in this thesis, using a single national newspaper as a primary archival resource helped me identify the contrast between the official and vernacular, national and local memories. However, using various archival resources, especially local newspapers and archives, will contribute to a more considered picture understanding.

My thesis's contribution goes beyond the specific case of Al-Masry and Port Said. At the regional level of Egypt, it encourages further research on the local histories of Port Said and many Egyptian cities and towns to challenge the limits of the scholarship about Egypt, which circulates Cairo. At a broader level, my study contributes to the developing literature on football politics by suggesting further ethnographic research about football generally and concerning the social memory scholarship specifically. Many scholarly works approach football and identities in various ways. I offer here that using the analytical framework of memory scholarship to understand fans' memories and stadium spaces contributes to a deep understanding of the dynamic process of constructing social identities.

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List of Notes

1. "Egypt is the gift of the Nile" is a famous quote for the Greek historian Herodotus.
2. Ahmed Hosni, was a manager of the clerk's club and member of the city's council.
3. Abdulrahman Lutfi shabara, was a bourgeoisie and head of Al-Masry's club for several decades.
4. Mohamed Musa was head of the Nubian association in Port Said.
5. Mr. Mohamed Abdelaal is a professor at the faculty of applied arts, Helwan University.
6. The Sultan's cup was launched in 1914 after the name of the Sultan's Hussein of Egypt and included all teams in Egypt, national and foreigners. The teams representing the British army unites won the first four competitions and in 1918, the team of Zamalek was the first Egyptian club to achieve its title. The competition lasted until 1938 and the Egyptian clubs of Al-Ahly and Al-Masry were the most titled with three cups for each of them.
7. Farouk Cup started in 1922 after the name of the Prince Farouk who became later the king of Egypt. Since 1952, it was named after Egypt's Cup and continued till nowadays.
8. Semsemya refers to a folk music that is the Red Sea, and the Suez Canal region. Many of the semsemya music commemorated the anti-colonial resistance in its concerts colloquially known as *Dammah* the gathering.
9. Mr. Ebrahim Elshemy is an accountant who was the head of the Al-Masry's club media center till 2013 and launched the club's first official website. At the website, he displayed the club's history based on an extensive oral history research he implemented in which he had interviews with families and relatives of the club's historical icon players and presidents, and interpreted their family and personal archives.
10. In addition to mention the name in the speeches, a popular Egyptian movie carried the same name (Courageous Port Said), and talked about the war in Port Said, was directed in 1957 by Farid Shawky.
11. Burning Lemby is an anti-colonial ritual that started in Port Said during the colonial time, and Lemby is basically the British General Edmund Allenby. The ritual took place every year in the night before Easter, and its political significance keep changing in relation to the social context.