Understanding Everyday Homes of Urban Communities: The Case of Local Streets (Hawari) of Old Cairo

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Abstract: This paper aims at investigating architectural and urban heritage from the socio-cultural point of view, which stands on the human asset of traditional sites such as the hawari of old Cairo. It analyzes the social practice of everyday life in one of the oldest Cairene *hawari*, Haret al-Darb al-Asfar. The focus is on architectural and spatial organization of outdoor and indoor spaces that coordinate the spatial practices of local community. A daily monitoring of people's activities and interviews was conducted in an investigation of how local people perceive their built environment between the house's interior and the outdoor shared space. It emerges that people construct their own field of private spheres according to complex patterns of daily activities that are not in line with the classical segregation between private and public in Islamic cities. This paper reports that the harah is basically a construct of social spheres that are organized spatially by the flexible development of individual buildings over time and in response to changes in individuals' needs and capabilities. In order to achieve sustainability in old urban quarters, the paper concludes, the focus should be directed towards the local organization of activities and a comprehensive upgrading of deteriorating buildings to match the changing needs of current population.

Key words: Urban Community, traditional culture, spatial practice, social sphere, urban heritage.

1. Forward

The hawari (single harah) of Cairo are narrow non-straight alleyways (mostly dead end) that represent basic urban units that have formed the medieval city since its foundation back in 969 AD. They constituted the Primary urban divisions of Cairo until early in the 20th century (Ali Pasha Mubarak had listed 188 harahs (*Arabic plural Hawari*) in 1888 AD, which had represented the majority of urban area of Cairo at that time). They covered an area of of 3.87 sq. Km. with a population of 310,500 people in 1986 (Latest available statistics for the old City were compiled during 1986 via the Rehabilitation of Historic Cairo Project funded by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) published in December 1997). They are defensible territories, powerful institutions, and social systems that no one can afford to be excluded from. The *harah*

provides an outstanding example of the medieval urban structure and built fabric for projects aiming at the conservation of Islamic urban landscape in Egypt. However, despite the fact that the hawari of old Cairo are inclusive of many Islamic monuments and historical structures, their principal value that helped them to survive for long time lies in being homes to many local Cairene communities. The association between built fabric and social practices was successful in responding to changing needs of its residents through different eras.

The harah, which was inclusive of members from almost all society's social classes in medieval times, has currently become dominated by lower class population. The medieval urban maze, of extremely short, broken, zigzag streets with innumerable dead ends [1], is becoming busy with commercial traffic and relatively tall apartment buildings. The exclusive and predominantly residential environment of the many hawari has apparently changed under the pressure of modern economical needs. The harah today becomes a

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site of paradox, a contest between the medievality of its domestic environment and the modernity of its busy and noisy commercial and industrial life. The spatial order of each harah (buildings and spaces) is a socially and culturally distinct entity that is informed by intrinsic but implicit mechanisms, of everyday needs and activities.

The goal of this paper is to study the architecture of the Cairene harah as an organization of interconnected spaces that responds to local social patterns and everyday activities. The inclusive nature of the harah compromised the traditional preconception of separation between private and public spaces. Rather, this paper looks at the Cairene harah as one inclusive home of its residents' private and public activities. The notion of the harah as a home was defined based on field investigation, observation, and interviews with individual members. Thus, when this notion was detected during the past two centuries, it proved as valid proposition to study this particular context.

To study the practice of home, this paper started by drawing connections between the idea of home and the notion of social spheres as domains of activities. It, hence, detects how did local residents of haret al-Darb al-Asfar used to practice the idea of home within their indoor and outdoor spaces. This included a social re-reading of the Bayt al-Suhaimy through the investigation of some historical accounts of early 19th century everyday life. Some recent examples are

recognized in light of contemporary social practice of daily life. The focus in both situations, however, is on the organization of spaces and the nature of social activities taking place within it. By the end, the paper reports the significant impact the integration between private and public spaces has on the survival of its socio-spatial settings, through continuous adaptation to changing situations and needs.

2. The Cairene Harah and the Practice of Home

Between the old city and the house, the Cairene *harah* resembles the intermediate organization of home that works effectively to link a group of people to their place and location with a sense of belonging and control over their private domains. The harah's organization is understood as a collective setting that stimulates the organization of homes. While the harah maintains strong boundary with the outside world, it eases internal boundaries between houses. The harah's boundaries with the outside world are composed of thick masses of back-to-back buildings and tight and controlled access points (gates) (Fig. 1). Similarly, house boundaries with other houses are emphasized by solid shared walls and a single entry front door. The old city, on the other hand, bound itself within surrounding fortified walls with tight urban routes and fenced gates, with internal boundaries having less fortification.

Fig. 1 Similarity between three threshold borders in Old Cairo; the city, the harah, and the house.

The mechanism of activity, the practice of privacy and protection are similar at these different levels of old Cairo. The organization of internal-external boundaries imposes a series of rituals on those who cross the thresholds of each sphere (house, harah, and city). The experience of labyrinth is, as such, an essential element of the spatial order of the home. The rituals of crossing the borders with the experience of long but broken pathways with indifferent facades on both sides, add to the confusion of the stranger/visitor. Such situation weakens the visitor's position while communicating with the relatively powerful residents. The *harah* as a concept, hence, mediates these experiences and is an appropriate manifestation of the idea of home as a built-in identity and spatial organization whose architectural form and character (internally or externally) are meaningful elements to everyone.

2.1 The Harah: In Language, Meaning and Urban Hierarchy

The *Harah,* as a term, refers originally to local streets branching off from Share'i (street with open access from both sides) [2]. Linguistically, it is derived from the word (حيرة-حير) (*hayyara-heirah*), which means confusion between a lot of people and houses in tight spaces. Therefore, *Ibn Manzur* states that every group of houses that are adjacent to each other composes a Harah [3]. The term Harah(s) was later developed to refer to quarters of particular group/community characteristics or identity, (handicrafts, trade, religion, or ethnic origin); such as, *Haret al-Nahhaseen* (copper workers), *al-Yahoud* (Jews), *al-Rum* (Greeks), with the harah having a smaller branch of lanes called Darb [4].

The Idea of the *harah* was developed from the earlier *Khitat* (singular *Khitta*, means plan) (Akbar, ibid) at the time of Cairo's foundation, when the city was divided into equal sized *khittas* (empty plots) which were assigned to different groups of the triumphant Fatimit Army in 969AD [1, 5]. These needs were extended by

Naser Rabat to include the social and economic activities that require the participation of the local community in the public sphere of the city in general [6]. Despite the fact that initial subsections of city were of equal size, the hawari's flexible nature as a social and cultural domain allowed it to expand or shrink in size and population.

As an urban unit, the Cairene harah has a complex nature: where interrelated spatial and social elements in the absence of formal organization or authoritarian control added a certain mystery to the medieval urban structure of Islamic cities, especially in the Arab world [7, 8]. The harah is recognized according to three aspects: socially, as a group of people unified by ethnic or occupational characteristics and segregated from other groups in the city; politically, it is a unit of administration and control; while physically, it is a subsection of the city, with limited access and a street terminating in open space, with gates which could be closed at night and walls which were barricaded during confrontations [1]. It is not a rigid setting; rather it has changed some of its elements, modified activities, functions and structures to adapt to changing situations and historical eras.

The urban hierarchy of medieval Cairo led to recognition of the harah in terms of a solid mass of buildings surrounding, usually, dead-end lanes that branched off the main thoroughfare called *Qasabat al-Muizz Ledin Ellah* (Qasabat means: inclined and broken tight street with many bends. Al-Muizz Ledin Ellah is the founder of Cairo. In general the street is named after its founder.). The street network included, in addition to the harah, secondary streets (perpendicular to the thoroughfare), *Durub* (local *streets* sing. *Darb*), and *Utuuf* (small dead-end turns, sing. Atfa) (Fig. 2). In Arabic terms there are five levels of road hierarchy, four of which are applicable inside the city (*Share'i, Harah, Darb, and Zuqaq/Sikkah/Ataffa*t), and one is for transportation access between cities (*Tareeq*).

Fig. 2   Street network and hierarchy in old Cairo (After: Al-Sioufi, 1981).

*2.2 The Cairene Harah as a Social and Spatial Unit of
Home*

Spatially, the harah has been defined differently
between the formal administrative purposes and
informal daily practices of the locality.
Administratively, old Cairo was divided into quarters,
and each quarter was divided into smaller units. Most
of the contemporary hawari are part of a unit
(subsection of a quarter). Each is defined by boundaries
that are aligned with surrounding streets/alleyways,
such as Haret al-Darb al-Asfar. However, in practice,
the harah's boundaries are based on its spatial
organization of the shared public sphere: the alleyway,
with defined entrances/gates, surrounding house
buildings, social structure, distinct cultural identity and
local security. People recognize their fellow harah's
neighbours according to whether or not the harah
alleyway is the access to their houses (Fig. 3).

Nasser Rabat emphasized the importance of the
harah as a cultural and social unit that is "the cities"
best unit to reflect the Islamic Shari'a's (law) principles
of privacy, sight barrier and sex segregation' [6]. He
explained how the *harah* reflects a place to which the
occupants belong and it is the place and space they
protect and defend. For its local population, *harah* was
a local defensible sphere which included lifestyle, inner
spaces, houses and outer space as public property for
them. In addition, *harah* becomes a reference for
identity (Most of Cairo's historians (e.g. Al-Maqrizi,
1250; Ali Mubarak, 1883) defined the character of
Cairo as a set of hawari (harats) listing them in terms of
their recognized identity, which was based on an
occupation, religious, or even vicinal ties.).

The harah therefore represents the residential quarter
of Aldo Rossi that is "a group of elements that connect
and integrate and develop within the city instead of
imposed on it from external forces, whatever
administrative of political, in order to form a
distinguished unit physically and socially" [9]. It is in
that sense a community that is "a powerful everyday
notion in terms of which people organise their lives and
understand the places and settlement in which they live
and the quality of their relationship" [10]. It is about
responding to the humans' fundamental needs in
everyday reality. It is a "collectivity" that is more than
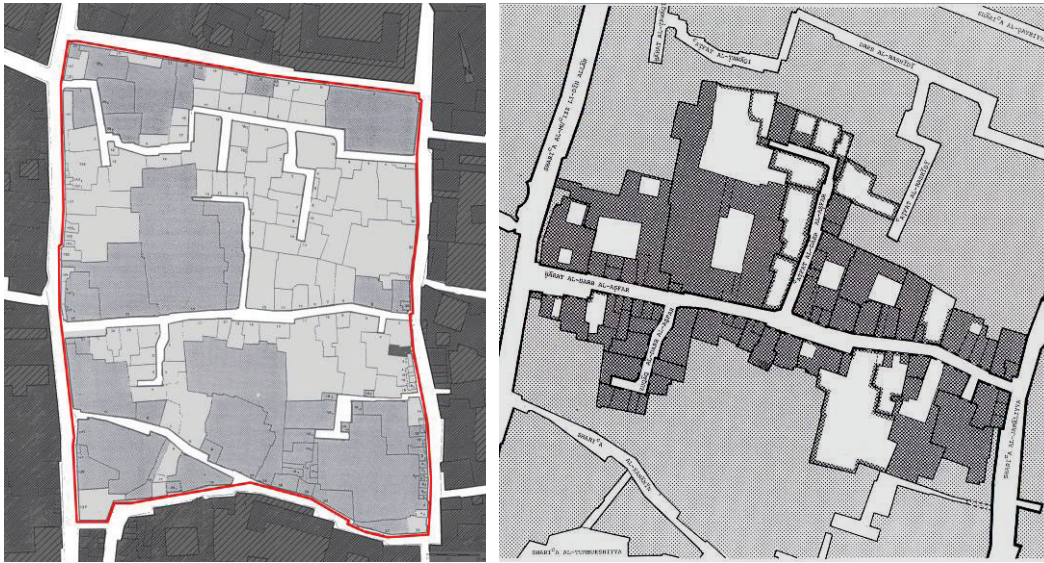"the sum of its individuals" [10].

Fig. 3   Haret al-Darb al-Asfar between formal administration (left) and the reality of practice (right).

The connection between the social and spatial characteristics of the Cairene harah was best described by Stephen Kern as a "path" that is "closed by masonry". This perception negates the form of the community in turning the outdoor open path into a closed interior space.

The Egyptians conceived of space as a narrow path down which the individual soul moves to arrive at the end before ancestral judges. Their most distinctive constructions are not buildings but paths enclosed by masonry [11].

The path is a space which is closed and protected in a similar way to homes. It is the actual home which represents the harah's social phenomena spatially.

3. The Notion of Social Spheres and Practice of Privacy

3.1 The Notion of the Social Sphere

Due to the complexity and interconnectedness of the harah and its social and spatial elements, the concept of space is very limited in terms of analysis when it comes to the way people manage their daily practice of home. Instead, the social sphere is thought to represent the inclusive nature of such domestic environments and to include activities taking place in enclosed as well as open space. Social sphere is a notion that has been extensively, but implicitly, used to describe human activities, habitual practices and rituals: especially when they take place in groups. They create their own range of social spheres which control their behaviour and the way they act. Public sphere has been recognized as a non-state arena for communicative interaction, a central space for exposure to the mass public [12]. Private sphere, on the contrary, has connotations of domestic environment as a private domain that includes different social situations whose limitations and nature change continuously [13]. Jurgen Habermas found that the division of the social spheres is due to the intrinsic nature of both domains: "We call events and occasions "public" when they are open to all, in contrast to closed or exclusive affairs-as when we speak of public places or public houses…. the private sphere evolved into a sphere of private autonomy to the degree to which it became emancipated from mercantilist regulation." [14] He sees the two-fold social sphere, "public and private", as a result of the separation between the state and the society (In this context the social sphere is reduced to its political meaning which defines two institutions of human life to be controlled: the public (outside homes), where state and media are in charge, and the private (inside homes), where the family is in charge) [12].

In everyday life and activities, neither term is bound by the physical boundaries of houses. They are used, in extended contexts to describe different types of human activities, everyday situations; the open and shared against the exclusive and intimate. The private could appear outdoors and the public could be inside the house. Richard Sennett's "The Fall of the Public Man" differentiates between the private and the public lives. In public life, people act collectively without being the same, while they tend to carve a sense of familiarity in their private life [15]. As a result of the dominance of a predominant public pattern of the modern world, individuals tend to act out of psychology of privacy. Such emergence of private within the political and public life affects both perception and the organization of the social space in general [16].

At the centre of understanding of the public and the private is the social nature of interaction. Despite the extensive use of both the terms, private and public, and their social significance, we rarely hear the term "social sphere": the basic structure upon which the distinction between public and private is constructed. Some scholars have claimed that "public" and "private" are useless terms or even dangerous categories that should be avoided, combined or replaced [17].

In contrast with this view, Antony Giddens's notion of "locale" links the interaction to the setting in all situations. He sees social interaction as partially constituted by its spatial setting-location is part of the explanation of why and how things happen in the way they do [18]. Gidden's notion of "locale" works in line with Henri Lefebvre's understanding of a social space which covers all types of spaces from a single room to a marketplace:

"Everyone knows what is meant when we speak of a 'room' in an apartment, the 'corner of the street, a marketplace, a shopping or cultural centre, a public space, and so on. These terms of everyday discourse serve to distinguish, but not to isolate, particular spaces, and in general describe a social space. They correspond to a specific use of that space, and hence to a spatial practice that they express and constitute." [19].

Moreover, Henri Lefebvre argued that the space could be read as a "social space" that he sees as a social product, which "incorporates social actions, the actions of subjects both individual and collective who are born and who die, who suffer and who act" [19]. To depict the complexity of the social situation that governs people's way of interaction and behaviour within the Cairene harah, I shall use the term "social sphere" which is "a relational domain that reads social interaction, within particular spatial settings during particular moments in time" (Fig. 4)

3.2 Social Sphere or Social Space

Social sphere in this discourse does not contradict the radical idea of space; rather, it draws the real-life essence of space into the equation. It actually resolves the discrepancy resulting from defining the home in terms of its spatial organization or physical limitations. Recognizing home as a site for personal and familial production, many see it as a physical location, structure, and routine of social reproduction (eating, sleeping, sex, cleansing, and child-rearing), which are based in the home domain. Discrepancy appears in every attempt to limit the home physically. For example, while Neil Smith states that "the borders of the home may be sharply defined, as in the walls of a structure of the markers of private property that include other private space such as garden or courtyard", he appears to question this statement by saying "or they may be more fluidly defined as the space of the home fades in community space" [20]. He realized that the home is a contested zone (internally and externally) based on struggle of authority (gender relations; men/women) and dominance (power relations: culture/ethnic) [20].

The social space, in Henri Lefevbre's perspective, contains a diversity of objects, both natural and social, including the networks and pathways which facilitate the exchange of materials, things and information.
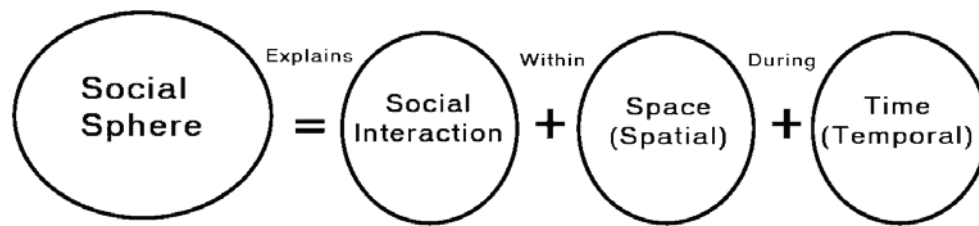
Fig. 4   The notion of social sphere.

There is no single space to be defined in isolation from its contexts: as no space disappears in the course of growth and development. Local appears in the public and the worldwide does not abolish the local. '*The intertwinement of social spaces is a law*', which is devoid of any definition of a particular space in isolation from others. Considered or defined in isolation, such spaces are mere abstractions, not real phenomena [19].

While space is a leading criterion for design of a house, sphere, reflecting the domestic social environment, is, I argue, the appropriate tool. Spaces are becoming limited in their scope as primary components of the home. Accordingly, conserving historical contexts requires understanding of this interconnected environment (people, spaces and buildings) and its mechanisms of action/activity in everyday life. The hawari of old Cairo, the site of many Islamic monuments in Cairo, is in principle a home for hundreds of distinguished communities, each of which maintains their norm of activities and practice of home in daily socio-spatial interaction. In that sense, the harah space is part of the harah as a social sphere, which includes as well, types of activities, the social settings and temporal flexibility that tolerate change over short as well as long periods of time. Social sphere could extend over few spaces, indoors or outdoors, depending on the context, rationale and the needs of its residents.

3.3 Public and Private Spheres: The Myth of Separation

"Binary categorization of urban space as public or private ignores transitional spaces which may be influential in the formation of patterns of sociation" [21].

Social practices and rituals are a collective set of individual situations that are regular and repetitive or occasional and accidental but defined by the socio-cultural codes of practice. Our lives take place in two realms, the intimate and closed, and the open and shared (Cox stated that "We exist in two realms, the private on the one hand, and the public on the other. The realms are distinguishable not only theoretically but because different behavioural codes and communications cues obtain in the two".) [22]. They complete each other in every single action and their meaning is realized in relation to the other. However, those two realms are not rigid; they are flexible interconnected and dynamic. Some of the intimate relations in ancient cultures have become public today and what is private in the evening could be public in the morning [13].

People are more sociable the more they have some tangible barriers between them; and in the same way they need open public places whose sole purpose is to bring them together [15]. Such barriers help them to construct subdivisions of their habitual environment, which consequently, facilitate the mental process of organizing a hierarchy of social contexts. This hierarchy does not mean a discrete separation between the subdivisions (e.g., private, public, semi-private… etc.); rather, it helps the individual to situate his/her reaction and feeling into an intelligible order.

People in the Cairene harah are not conscious of the tags given to particular space, whether private or public, closed or open. They manage their activities within suitable spatial contexts that facilitate this activity. For example, they eat their breakfast in groups in the harah,

in moments when they perceive it as a private sphere. The same space is different when they are at their shops or negotiating with a customer over their products. The intimacy of the alley in early morning turns into formality when business takes over. Interviewed people dismiss any concern about being in public or in private in the harah. It is their home, and therefore, it adjusts to certain settings whenever necessary.

Accordingly, in the hawari of old Cairo, the separation between the public and private has recently seemed problematic: as it does not stand up in practical investigation (Rapoport provided us with different categories such as semi-private, and semi-public spaces when he studied homes in the cross cultural analysis of his thesis of "non-verbal communication" and its implications in Architecture.) [23]. Saunders and Williams argued that any home has both public and private spheres: "the specific use of rooms, allowing dwelling occupants to be together and separate, also enhances the regionalization of the dwelling in terms of relatively public and private spheres-the front and back regions. In that regard, the home, like the nation state itself, may act as an essential constitutive and reproductive element in conceptions of the public and private." [18] When the public sphere (activities and rituals) extends to the home's representational spaces, other thresholds and boundaries will be required inside the home (between the private and the public) as well. (Fig. 5)

4. Homes of Haret Al-Darb al-Asfar

Haret al-Darb al-Asfar is an old Cairene hawari of predominantly residential nature that dates back to the foundation of the city. It represents a significant historical site in al-Gammliyyah quarter, with houses dating back to the 17th century. The harah sustained a stable social structure supported by a distinct spatial organization: which incorporates both private as well as public sphere in interconnected patterns of activities. Currently, the harah includes three typologies of houses, built in continuity over a period of 300 years

within the confines of its boundaries. The well documented *Bayt al-Suhaimy* (1648, 1699, 1796) and *Bayt Mustafa Gaafar* (1713) are the oldest houses from before and during the 18th century; *Bayt al-Kharazati* (1881) and the rest of the houses (apartment buildings) were built, chiefly, during the first half of the twentieth century. Those houses along with the central alleyway (al-Darb al-Asfar) and its two branches (Zuqaq and Atfa) compose what is perceived by local inhabitants to be the territory of their home.

Bayt al-Suhaimy, for example, represents the structure of both the home and behaviour of a large and rich family. It was built on the northern side of the main *alley* with an area of 2250.50 sq.m distributed over five different levels, where the ground and first levels were the main inhabited floors (This information was recorded in the official survey of the building in 1931 upon the formal ownership transfer from the private owner to the Egyptian council of antiquity (Formal report for Monument no.339). The house is seen as four different interlocking wings distributed along its four sides around a central courtyard. At ground level, it had four large reception halls, each known as *al-Mandharah* (literary means the scenery space), several service quarters, two open courtyards and stairs to upper floors. The four *Mandharas* were distributed along the four sides of the courtyard. The first level included the *harem* wings, each of which was accessible though a hierarchy of spaces while being guarded by slaves and eunuchs. Upper levels were vertical extensions to a few wings: providing some extra inner spaces rather than complete floors (Fig. 6).

This house form and space organization is reflected very well by Edward William Lane's accounts of Egyptian habits and lifestyle as early as the beginning of 19th century. Both were very instrumental to inform us of the way its inhabitants used to conduct their lives in public or private arrangements. Houses of that time enjoyed a great many shared activities within the private sphere, which included public and semi-public spaces within the house. Public activities took place in
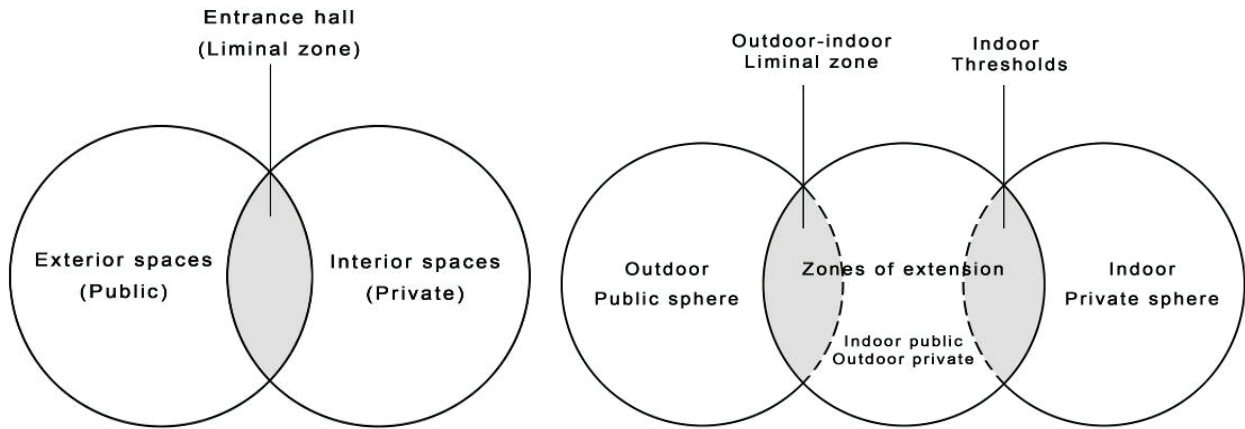
Fig. 5   Traditional and proposed models of social spheres.

Fig. 5   *Bayt al-Suhaimy*'s Floor plans and a section showing the ground floor public sphere.

Al-mandharah, the main reception space and *al-takhtabush*, the open sitting area overlooking the courtyard. All of these were at ground level, which allowed the expansion of activities towards the courtyard, forming a large ground floor semi-public sphere. *Al-mandharah* was socially active and a gathering space for the *harah*'s notables and family members, with certain social and hierarchical order of seats (Figs. 7-8).

The harem, on the other hand, was a venue for some public but female activities as well. It used to host guest and visitors as well as traders, singers and sheikhs for Quran recitations [24]. Private activities were, however, temporal and spatial arrangements of those public venues, whether in the harem or in *al-mandharah*.
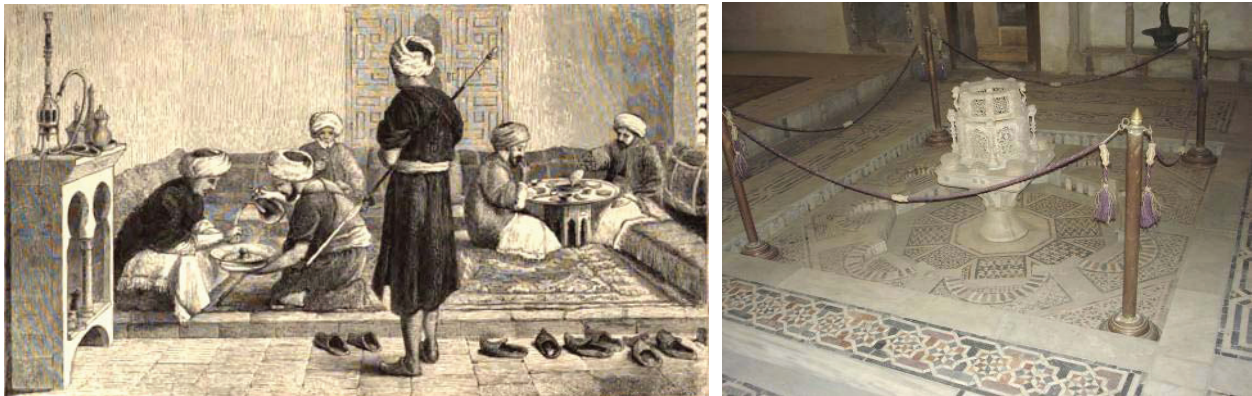

Fig. 7   al-Mandharah of the 19th century: Left, activities [25]; right, highly decorated water fountain.
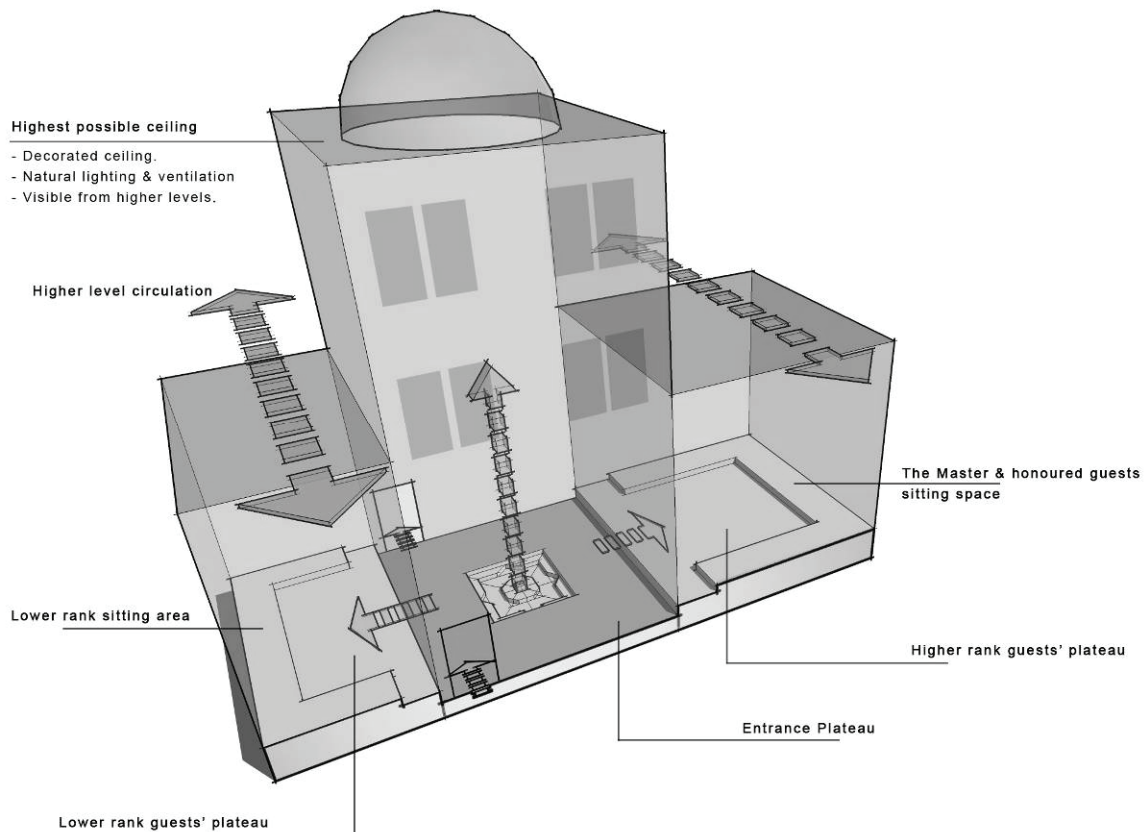

Fig. 8   Spatial order of Bayt al-Suhaimy's principal Mandharah.

In the 19th century, the houses started to be squeezed in size and their organization got simpler and less decorated and complex. *Bay al-Khazarati* resembles an important transition from medieval houses to the contemporary apartment buildings in Haret al-Darb al-Asfar. They retained the medieval planning order of central courtyard and surrounding spaces; however, they were regular spaces of rectangular spaces. The *mashrabbiya* disappeared in its traditional form and simpler wooden patterned windows came to the forefront of the new modular façade design.

Contemporary houses, on the other hand, have become, typically, apartment buildings: some of which were transformed and extended from a traditional extended family house, while others were purpose built during the mid-twentieth century. The typical buildings of this period include ground floor shops/stores and floors (mainly one apartment per floor) of limited size. The emergence of this type was marked by the change in affordability for the social classes and local inhabitants at the turn of 20th century, when most rich and high-calibre tradesmen had left the harah for the

modern Ismailia quarters (downtown Cairo today). This type, despite its simple and unattractive features, represents a continuation of the consistency of the harah's urban history and structure. The traditional *mashrabiyya* could be seen in much simpler and more affordable forms in the wooden *sheish* dominating all facade openings (Fig. 9).

The harah's public space, however, witnessed a slight change in the nature of activities taking place in its alleys. During the18th and 19th centuries, the harah's alleys were dominated by social activities and gatherings involving the exclusive practice of cross-family privacy, to which bachelors were denied entry (Edward Lane mentioned that hawari of a residential nature did not accept any single men/bachelor as residents) [25]. The harah's doors were closed and barricaded at night, and the public space was then privatized. However, during the second half of the 20th century and following the opening of its western side dead end to be a through alley, the harah has become an industrial and commercial destination with workshops/shops dominating ground
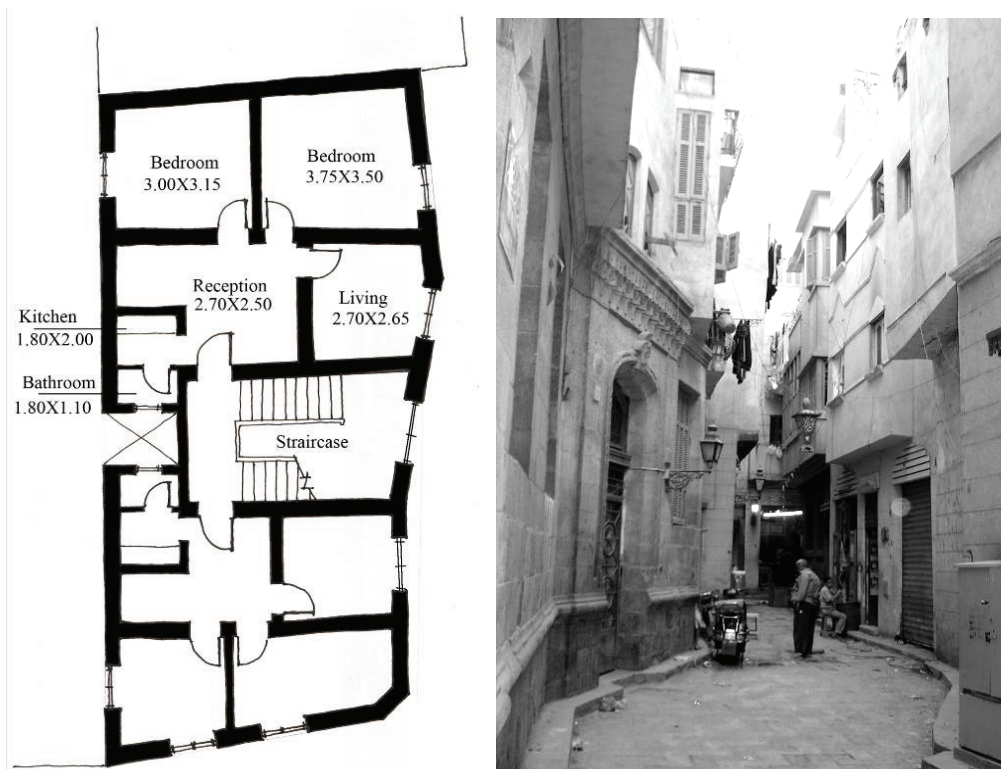

Fig. 9   Contemporary apartment buildings (typical floor plan and external facades).

floor facades. It has been more of a public venue in the morning, with the flow of workers, pedlars and products inside and outside, whilst it is privatized in the evening when the workshops are closed and real residents return from work to fill the alley. The tight space of apartment buildings on small plots was the principal reason behind the active nature of the alley at night as this is where neighbours and friends spend their nights.

5. Everyday Activities and Spatial Practices in the Cairene Harah

Max Weber, the leading social theorist, asserted that, it is in the praxis (acts, courses of action and interaction) that we can trace the essence of a community, group or a society [26]. These praxes are represented in the very activities of everyday life, which in the view of the local actors hold no significance of any sort. Michel De Certeau, on the other hand, believed in the association between the spatial practices and the quality of space [27]. By investigating those simple activities and the way the space is organized to accommodate them, we can trace the way the public space is utilized to suit basic social characteristics and the essence of the community.

Eating meals, drinking coffee and smoking *Sheisha* (smoking pipe) are typical activities performed on a daily basis in the harah. Most of the interviewees (men) take their meals, mainly breakfast and sometimes dinner, in front of their shops, workshops or houses. A movable dining/drinking table set, previously stored away, is arranged without interruption of public movements. The outdoor space emerges as a sufficient alternative to the missing indoor social spaces, which were formerly used to host such activities (sharing meals, entertaining visitors). It, therefore, holds the intrinsic qualities of the private atmosphere in the open outdoor space. All interviews with male residents were made in the *harah*'s public space. On several occasions, people volunteered to participate in both discussions and interviews without invitation. They believed in

their right of intervention, once it was taking place in their shared public space.

5.1 The Daytime Workplace: Outsiders in the Harah

In the morning, the local public sphere is overwhelmed by industrial activities and workers. Every vacant corner or relatively large unused space is used as a store yard by workshops: especially aluminium workshops. The impact is to reduce and limit the effective area for social activities in the morning. This situation demonstrates the power politics during the day, when workshop owners have the upper hand. This dominance could be comprehended through the noise and pollution of machinery, communication in front of the shops and the flow of product storage and transportation. Parallel to this group, some retired residents do spend their daytime with friends and neighbours in the main darb. The host is usually the grocer or the shop owner and they usually sit in a shaded corner to chat, drink tea or smoke the *Sheisha*. In all situations, the nearest *ahwa* delivers hot drinks to the whole harah, wherever requested, approximately every hour (Fig. 10).

Paving and transforming the harah into a path for pedestrians reduced the pedlars and vendors who used to tour the *hawari* to delivering their products to the women at home. Children took on the delivery role, purchasing the basic domestic needs from the local grocer or shops adjacent to the harah's entrances. The dominance of commercial activities, however, is broken during holidays and weekends. In particular, arrangement is made for special occasions such as marriage or funerals, for which the community is mobilized to prepare the public sphere.

5.2 Night-times for the Locals: Spaces for Socializing

The dominance of workers in the morning is compromised and challenged at night, when most of the local residents turn up and take control of the public space. Even though working hours for most workshops usually extend into the evening, their occupation of the

Fig. 10   industrial activities and gatherings during the day, and the social interaction and events in the evening.

space is no longer exclusive. It becomes the venue for interpersonal communications and negotiation. Male residents tend to spend much time in the public space at night. Frequently, during my interviews, I heard passers-by telling my interviewee "I will come to you after salat al-'Isha (the 'Isha prayer, which marked night-time)". Again the prayer times are used as basic temporal transitions, according to which events and meetings are organized. Young men, teenagers and children make the best use of outdoor space at night, inviting their visitors and friends to join them. The nature of these night activities is best experienced in Ramadhan, after al-Maghreb (sunset), when workshops have ceased to operate and the harah is fully lit and decorated.

Festivities, such as e'ids (feasts), marriages, funerals and Sobou'I (celebration of the seventh day after a baby's birth), are typically celebrated outdoors. Outdoor spaces are arranged accordingly to accommodate each one. Funerals and Sobou'I, in particular, require welding of the private space to the public one (It is worthy of note that transforming the main darb into a pedestrian path helped the local residents to expand their social practices into that space without the interruption of continuous vehicle movements.). Doors are left open, similar arrays of chairs are arranged in the house and in the harah in

front of the house. Microphones are employed to radiate joy (songs for weddings) or sadness (Quran for funerals). Such use of outdoor space for these events is associated with the condition of the harah as a poor area, whereas in upper-middle class segments, these events take place in specially designated but costly indoor spaces (hotels, community centres or social clubs) [28].

5.3. The Farah in the Public Sphere

The farah (wedding), is one of the most prominent activities, during which social interaction is manifested at its best. This is not limited to the wedding party itself as its rituals and occupation of the public space continue for days. The preparation of the bride's furniture, storage of materials/products takes place in the public space for a few days before the wedding. The whole alleyway becomes the central location of the continuous and consecutive ceremonies. The tight indoor space is insufficient to accommodate all guests, and does not work as a venue for the relevant rituals. Outdoor space works, therefore, as a spine of celebration that links all buildings together and merges outdoor with indoor spaces. It flips the external building façades into interior decorative panels of the stage; colourfully lit and beautifully illuminating. Live events span the time from day to evening, and the space

from inside-out, with women dominating the public as well the private space. A larger part of the open space is used for furniture arrangement.

The Bride's new furniture is prepared, partially, within the harah, which is obviously as ceremonial ritual. Ladies are singing, and young girls are dancing throughout the day, while *al-Menaggdeen* (mattress workers) is preparing the mattresses. The absence of any member may cause internal confrontation. Participation is a duty, especially for women and "duties had no social distinctions", an informant says. "Everyone should be present at any personal occasion", if someone does not show up, then "it is a big problem that should be solved" [R.1.1.08; R.3.1.07]. These rituals correspond to those were taking place in the harah during early 19th century [25].

6. Conclusion: Conserving Urban Heritage and the Role of the Architect

While the rehabilitation of historical buildings emerges to dominate the scene in old Cairo, it provides limited solutions to the conservation of its urban heritage and does not respond to the socio-spatial practice of making new homes. The absence of those localities and our limited knowledge of local patterns of daily activities would cause a negative impact on the long term. For example, Bayt al-Suhaimy was conserved as monumental building and hosts activities oriented to the tourists and elites. Such daily invasion by strangers and prioritising their needs over the locals provoked negative responses and lack of appreciation. This has, eventually, separated the building from its locality, who explicitly expressed their anger towards the governmental ignorance to their problems and needs. Planners and architects working in heritage sites need to adopt an inclusive approach to urban conservation that involves an extended team of social assistants/researchers, historians and economist in order to grasp the complex practices and potentials and be well equipped with information about current inhabitants and their needs. This interaction with local

players is seen to facilitate cooperation, and effective solutions that, in addition to conserving historical structures, would improve the quality of living and enhance local socio-spatial practices.

The organization of interconnected spaces has been essential to people residing small houses (does not exceed 30 sq.m in some cases), who have to extend their private activities outdoor. Eating meals, meeting friends, playing with children and celebrating occasions, are essential everyday activities, which have to take place in the alleyways. Placing social boundaries around historical buildings and restricting such private activities around it, does not support the targets of conservation policies nor practice. Local support and appreciation are recently becoming one of the most important assets, on which the success of conservation projects relies. This is apparently missing in governmental strategies and policies towards traditional context [29]. If we understand and deal with the harah as inclusive home that belongs to its residents, alternatives and potentials will emerge suggesting more efficient and sustainable success.

To highlight some successful examples in old Cairo, I refer to Salah Zaki Said work in rehabilitation late 19th century house buildings such as Bayt Sukkar during 1990s [30] and the currently active Al-Darb Al-Ahmar conservation project led by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture [31]. Both adopted the above approach and commenced by analysing social and cultural situations and drawing a full picture of existing practices and conditions, from which architectural and urban decisions were made. Both experiences relied on existing social assets to play important role in rehabilitation projects and helped existing people to retain their domestic spaces, albeit, in improved conditions.

Despite their remarkable success, those projects are still limited in scope and resources and need to be developed on a large scale by national organizations and governments. It is important and becoming essential to maintain progressive approach to the

conservation of urban heritage of the Islamic city, inclusive of human activities, social patterns and changing needs. This would move current practices in the hawari from the costly and un-sustainable set-pieces restoration projects.

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