



Speaking in Silence. Wall Writing and the Urban Memory in Cairo

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Abstract

Writing on walls is a worldwide phenomenon. In Cairo, one can find statements such as “no parking”, “A loves R”, “M was Hier” and “For an Immortal Memory”. This article aims to investigate the meaning of wall writing in three different areas in Cairo. The three areas were chosen to explore the impact of historic, sociocultural and economic diversity. The study questions whether street writing contributes to placemaking and storytelling. If one considers that art is an aesthetic, imaginative method of communication, then certain forms of wall writing and colouring fall under it. Writing on a wall in Cairo implies a claim of relevance, importance, and reality. It is a public tool for self-identification, expression, and bridging the financial gap created by wealthy corporations. It depicts stories of silenced groups, their hopes, emotions and cultural diversity.

Subject Areas

Urban Studies, Art, Culture

Keywords

Linguistic Landscape, Street Art, Wall Writing, Murals, Placemaking, Urban Memory

1. Introduction

We constantly hear about the liveable city; what does it mean? In Australia, for example, liveable cities have been conceptualised in countless indices, including safety, attractiveness, social cohesion and inclusion, public open space, cultural opportunities, and walking infrastructure [1]. Nonetheless, there are some considerations to note. Some liveability indices are designed to assess the attractiveness of cities for investors or expatriates [2]. Another consideration is whether cities are delivering liveability for all ([3]: p. 2). However, these considerations

must be grounded in local sociocultural, economic and political contexts. This can be done through multidisciplinary methods including observing the citizens' behaviour and listening to urban language. Cities require more listening; from city to place; and from past to present. The stories of the city deserve to be heard. They should be unveiled and collected. Those stories are found in street patterns, architecture, the urban and linguistic landscapes, and street art. By "street art," the author generally refers to elements such as murals, which serve beautification, communication, and commemoration. Street art does not create spaces; it reflects groups, authorities, or individual self-expression and visualisation [4]. Despite that, murals in volatile cities like Belfast serve as tools for both the physical and symbolic partitioning of space ([5]: p. 2). Accordingly, the ability to recode visual information means that memory representations can shift from spatially dependent formats to place-dependent ones, becoming less reliant on precise spatial information [6].

Walls host a wide spectrum of written communication. The strength of this communication lies not in its public presence but in what the messages reveal about the writers' intended motivations. Small reminders and memories of the past linger in footsteps, walking patterns, bodily movements, and memories shared along a streetscape that may no longer hold those physical reminders ([7]: p. 216). Graffiti and texts are defined as writing or drawings on publicly accessible surfaces or murals ([8]: p. 49). Mural art in Cairo is spread across the city, and in many cases, it is challenging to classify an artwork as graffiti or writing. Wall writing might be seen as a form of graffiti, a calligraphic graffiti. What is most certain is that wall writing requires language skills; the observer must be literate and must master the language [4]. Although mural art can be official, our attention is drawn to wall writings created by ordinary people.

Whoever has something to say in Cairo can write it on a wall: "private garage", "no parking"; see Figure 1. Even the authorities use the wall for saying something; see Figure 2. Wall writing is a production that appeals to the visibility and readability of the text both from the procedures of its manufacture and from the places where the text is exposed.



Figure 1. Writing on a garage door; "no parking," "a private garage", Matareia, 2024. The author.



Figure 2. Official writing on the Obelisk pedestal at Tahrir Square, Cairo, 2026. The author.

Writing on walls is as old as writing itself, which has a long history. The use of walls in public spaces as a form of urban notice board is a long-standing tradition in South Asia ([5]: p. 1). Writing on the landscape, and “signing the land,” is not an unusual phenomenon. In China, such “cliff-carvings” are a well-documented genre of formal texts. In the Himalayan foothills of China’s Yunnan province, on the eastern slopes of the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain, a Chinese inscription is carved into the limestone cliff face. This is the municipality of Lijiang’s most prominent cliff inscription. The main part of the inscription, engraved in large characters, reads “Jade Pillar that upholds the sky.” In smaller characters, the inscription also bears the name of Lijiang’s first magistrate, Yang Bi. The inscription can be read as a metaphor for the mountain, a pillar of jade that reaches into the firmament, but it could equally be read as a metaphor for a statesman who upholds the weight of the nation ([9]: pp. 1-2).

In southern Egypt, near the city of Aswan, stands a granite boulder by a bank of the Nile. The Hieroglyphic inscription carved on the boulder warns travellers (or enemies) that they are entering Egyptian territory, which is protected by the gods and their representative on Earth, the Pharaoh. The ancient Egyptians used to engrave texts recounting their heroic stories and chronicles on their temples for posterity. Their texts depended on symbols organised in vertical composition. The beauty of the overall composition was not primarily related to the art form of the symbols, but rather to the ensemble and painted or engraved figures; see **Figure 3**.

Murals are not a historic phenomenon; in Northern Ireland, they feature a wide range of subjects, styles, and locations. It is not rare to find murals ([10]: p. 42). A “necessary condition for its use to be effective is that exposed writing needs to be sufficiently large, and to present the message it carries in an evident and clear (verbal and/or visual) way” ([11]: p. 58). Furthermore, one can find wall writings in various cities around the world. **Figure 4** depicts sprayed text on a shop shutter in Istanbul, Türkiye. It is strategically located in a historic shopping area in the heart of old Istanbul; however, it is visible only when the shop is closed.



Figure 3. Hieroglyphic text on a temple façade, Aswan, Egypt, 2017. The author.



Figure 4. Wall writing on a shop shutter, old Istanbul, Türkiye, 2026. The author.

Writing in Cairo faces two challenges. First, the observer must know the language; second, it must attract attention. Unless the writers use more comprehensive words, the wall writing takes longer to read. Lovers, for example, adopt the heart sign to express love. It is clear, but the question remains open as to who loves whom and whether it is culturally acceptable to expose the names. This dilemma is usually addressed by writing the first letter of each name; see **Figure 5**. This method makes the mural readable to the public but is mostly comprehensible to the two lovers.



Figure 5. An emotional wall writing, Heliopolis, Cairo, 2018. The author.

In popular media and policy reports, wall writers are often stereotyped as vandals whose writings could and should be erased [12]. However, Van Loon presents a different view of mural writers' behaviour, suggesting that they do much more than "just writing a name" ([13]: p. 1). For example, wall-chalkings in the context of Pakistan are "a particular type of graffiti and an alternate means of communication that is patronised by various local agencies" ([5]: p. 2). Because of the notion of vandalism, the informal microeconomy is denied access to city resources. Moreover, since cultural diversity is a keystone of the liveable city, denying citizens their right to expression is unjust.

As wall writing affects the consistency and "visual order" of the urban form, urban designers see it as "out of order" and a meaningless action. However, the "Urban Order" URO team took upon themselves the responsibility to demonstrate that urban order signifies a dynamic relationship between social life in the city and its physical environment. This challenges the regularity and visual order that have emerged with overall regulation, control, or use of force. The aim of URO is to develop new transdisciplinary methods for harnessing the potentials of existing urban orders as a basis for creating more liveable and democratic cities ([14]: p. 4).

The city is in motion; it is complex, and accepting that complexity is crucial to understanding its liveability [15]. This statement raises a question: whether wall writing is a form of subculture or a product of cultural diversity and a lack of municipal control? Cairo's complexity stems from its dynamic and static components. Because Cairo is ever-changing and complex, listening to the characteristics and typology of its static components, such as streets and buildings, freezes the city within an enframed picture. On the other hand, mural art is better suited to the city's dynamic reality. It is open to reshaping and offers multiple interpretations.

The author argues that different groups of wall writers develop distinct memories that may relate to a sense of place. Their intentions go beyond vandalism to storytelling. Moreover, the author argues that wall writing is the product of cultural diversity and an informal microeconomic tool for affordable access to city resources. Meanwhile, wall writing is an excellent source of urban stories and memories.

To pinpoint the cultural and economic importance of wall writing, it is understood as stories that both affect and are affected by urban memory. Based on insights from the case studies, our aim is to harness the potential of the different types and meanings of wall writings. To answer the study question, we first need to synthesise the fragmented literature by describing the elements of wall writing and their hidden meanings. Memory does not offer straightforward explanatory power. It is meaningful only when connected to historical questions and problems. Via methods and theories, memory is illuminating. At the centre of this study is an investigation into how writing on walls can articulate the connections among culture, society, and memory.

This study is conducted between January 2025 and March 2026 in three areas in Cairo. The first is a primary street in the Khalifa district, a historic area that evolved especially from the 18th to the 20th centuries. The second area is Mataraia, a low- to middle-income housing developed during the 20th century, and the third is Heliopolis, a middle- to high-income housing that evolved during the 20th century. Choosing these three areas investigates the impact of historic, cultural and socioeconomic aspects on wall writing. Petrucci proposed a series of key aspects for understanding wall writing: the social function of writing, the social use of writing, monumental writing, graphic space and writing space, the domain of graphic space, and the programme of graphic exhibition. This is especially true when the functions performed by different materials do not depend on whether they are handwritten or printed (cf. [11]: p. 58).

The author followed Evan and Jones's suggestion concerning walking go-along observation and interviews [16]. The walking go-along methodology helps reveal the complex connections among people's hidden or unnoticed habitual relationships with place and the murals. Through walking go-along observation, the author explores wall writing and its hidden stories. To investigate how ordinary people receive writing, stories, and information. However, because this carries the risk of bias stemming from the author's academic experience, spontaneous interviews were included. Those interviews took the form of social communications rather than formal questioning. This methodology helped the author explore how walking through the city without a predesigned scheme introduced spatial stories that reveal residues of conflict and allow for mobile memorialization.

2. Religious Wall Writing

Official calligraphy and wall writing in Cairo began with the city's founding in the late 10th century. The Fatimid established the city, and one of their iconic mosques is named after the Calif Al-Ḥākim. Today, it is in the heart of Islamic Cairo, standing at its northern gate. Al-Ḥākim significantly enhanced the use of officially sponsored writing in urban social networks. He used calligraphy to assert his authority as Imām and to express his power to all who beheld him. His mosque features bands of calligraphy on the minarets and the monumental portal. Dignitaries visiting the palace in the royal complex passed by this mosque because they customarily entered Cairo through the northern gate, Bāb al-Futūḥ. Passing by al-

Hākim Mosque, observers see officially sponsored writing displayed in an innovative assemblage. From the pedestrian's viewpoint, the Hākim Mosque represented the new dynasty's public image [17]. The author cannot help but speculate that the mosque was intended as a facelift for the new, mighty dynasty for non-Fatimid travellers, with its powerful representation and detailed calligraphy. For centuries, the practice of engraving Qur'anic verses on mosque façades has been a tradition in official religious architecture.

This concept was introduced to public memory through written bands cited from the Qur'an and inscriptions on or around the entrance and on the façade. Calligraphy was employed on indoor and outdoor walls to convey verbal communication to observers walking along the street and interacting with the mosque's façade; see **Figure 6**. Countless mosques from the Ayyubid, Mamluk and Ottoman eras promoted calligraphy writing on their façades. The engraved text, however, evolved rapidly with different styles from the 11th to the 17th centuries.



Figure 6. A calligraphic band on Bybars al-Jashankir Mosque dated to the 14th century. Islamic Cairo, taken in 2024. The author.

In modern times, texts cited from the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad are widely used in the Khalifa and Matareia. What is remarkable in those texts is that they are drawn with much care. Educated and well-trained Calligraphers were commissioned for such a significant task; see **Figure 7** and **Figure 8**. However, one can notice religious texts in Heliopolis, written by children or young individuals using chalk or simple tools; see **Figure 9** and **Figure 10**. Religious wall writing is widely used in shops, residential buildings, and at entrances, as well as during religious events. It is considered a form of blessing, protection from others' envy (*Hassad*), and recognition of the source of sustenance, God. The author speculates that the shift from engraved calligraphy in historic religious architecture to painted or written text in contemporary residential and commercial contexts is due to financial and cultural constraints. Remarkably, religious texts occupy the focal point at the building entrance and on the shop façade and are visible from the pedestrian level; see **Figure 11** and **Figure 12**.



Figure 7. Religious wall writing by a professional calligrapher, Khalifa, Cairo, 2026. The author.



Figure 8. A carefully designed religious wall writing, Matareia, Cairo, 2025. The author.

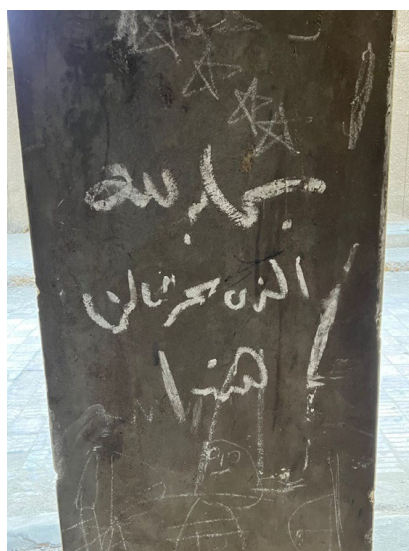


Figure 9. A chalk writing on a concrete column by a toddler (Spelling mistakes and slang), Heliopolis, Cairo, 2023. The author.



Figure 10. A religious wall writing (Painting) by a non-professional individual, Khalifa, Cairo, 2026. The author.



Figure 11. A religious writing above a residential entrance, Khalifa, Cairo, 2026. The author.



Figure 12. A religious text in a residential balcony, Matareia, Cairo, 2025. The author.

As religious texts are written on private property and were mostly commissioned or accepted by the owners, they break no geographical morality of the sort (for more details on the geographic morality, see [18]). This means that the artist takes time to produce the work, as there is less fear of reprisal from state authorities and the piece itself enjoys a greater degree of permanence. In addition to religious writings, religious stickers were found on lampposts, at entrances, and on shop doors. This is because the medium requires a spot on which the sticker can be affixed properly; see **Figure 13**.



Figure 13. Religious stickers on metal doors, Matareia, Cairo, 2025. The author.

3. Commercial Wall Writing

Commercial writing fills Cairo's public spaces with continuous information. It is spray-painted on the wall, written spontaneously with chalk or jumbo markers, rendered in vivid colour, or printed on paper and affixed to the wall. A common feature of Cairo's commercial writing is primarily an advertisement for a particular service or product; see **Figure 14**.



Figure 14. Commercial wall writing, Heliopolis, Cairo, 2024. The author.

Commercial murals in Cairo are mostly created by individuals, whose work ranges from professional to amateur. They are continually adjusted, added to, crossed out, or removed. While commercial advertisements are informative, they are short-lived, and erasures, alterations, and overwriting make them not only intertextual but often also illegible [19]. As writings appear and disappear rapidly, they render the walls of ongoing, unfinished layers of information. **Figure 14** demonstrates such rendering, layering and additions. Adding more information in the place makes the wall richer. A crucial rule is that a writer should not paint over existing graffiti [20]. Hence, a mural is inherently linked to respect and territoriality [21]. On the other hand, there is a sense of competition among writers. This competition can create an information-overloaded wall, depending on the wall's location (see **Figure 8** and **Figure 14**).

This is because, along with content, the choice of location is a critical part of the messaging ([5]: p. 4). Plumbers, electricians, and marriage arrangers, among others, vie for the most visible walls on which to announce their services and attempt to mark certain areas as "theirs". This is particularly practised on walls surrounding vacant building lots in Heliopolis (see **Figure 14**), on residential walls, and on public installations such as electrical rooms or flyovers in Khalifa and Matareia.

4. Visual Perception, Experience and Memory

Memory cannot be isolated from place, since it is an exploration of a shared identity that unites a social group ([22]: p. 1389). Since people's perception of space is crucial to information collection, it is important to understand and measure it. Perception and comprehension may differ among individuals. Various factors affect visual perception, including the individual's interests and experience ([23]: p. 135), the meaning of the observed subject, and its location [24]-[26]. Furthermore, how the writing is presented, its story, its relationship to other contextual writings, and its colours are also crucial (see **Figure 8**). Moreover, the wall writing will be effective if it creates lasting memories.

Nevertheless, what is different between each image? Draschkow, Nobre and van Ede [27] provide robust evidence that spatial organisation is critical for visual working memory. Increasing the spatial separation between visual objects reduces their competitive effect. Pertzov and Husain [28] found that the less the objects are separated in space, the more they compete for limited processing resources, leading to interference and increasing the likelihood of feature swapping. The competitive effect between texts is heightened by their intensity; see **Figure 15**. Their high intensity creates an information conflict that requires significant time to be encoded. Some texts are expected to be forgotten; others might be confused with competing texts; others may be remembered (compare **Figure 12** with **Figure 14** and **Figure 15**). This notion is not limited to texts; it also applies to symbols and abstracts. Our visual working memory is flexible and can store abstract representations of visual information in formats relevant to future behaviour ([29]:

pp. 16-22). Nonetheless, if the writer wishes to indicate a particular place with signs, using similar signs elsewhere confuses visual working memory. This is the case with Ezbet Hamada's street art; similar signs were adopted throughout the area, creating a negative impact on local place diversity by constructing a collective identity [4]. This might explain why, in countless cases, emotional wall writing was presented on blank walls (Figure 5). The author never found competitive emotional writings within three areas.



Figure 15. A high-intensity commercial mural, Mataraia Square, Cairo, 2025. The author.

As encoding in visual working memory is related to the text, location, and relationships with other writings, there is a notion of existing rules among mural writers ([13]: p. 5). The rule of “not going over” is broadly agreed upon. This rule prohibits putting graffiti on monuments, religious buildings, private homes and statues [30]. Although this rule seems to be respected in Cairo, there are examples in which it was not respected, either in Cairo or in Istanbul; see Figure 16.



Figure 16. A “going over” wall writing in Khalifa, Cairo, 2026. The author.

Memory is a fundamental aspect of human cognition, essential for everyday functioning and the acquisition of knowledge ([31]: p. 1), [32]. Everything is a memory and memory is everything ([22]: p. 1388), but how does it work? Visual perception of public space reflects cognitive processes and the progressive com-

parison between the past and present [33]. This creates visual working memory, which relies on the brain's ability to construct temporary representations of place. Visual working memory processes are divided into three distinct phases: encoding, maintenance, and recollection (remembering). Although these phases are well established, the precise mechanisms by which spatial and temporal information contribute to each phase remain poorly understood ([29]: p. 13). Encoding in visual working memory is related to experience, the way information is presented, and its value to the reader. The more valuable the information, the stronger its maintenance will become. Remembering the experience (recollection) is easy when the memory is maintained [34]-[37].

5. Meanings of Wall Writing in Cairo

To be encoded, wall writing must be useful to the observer. A contemporary example of the usefulness of wall writing is the study conducted by the Centre for Student Success Office at a Midwestern University in the United States. It started the Conversation Wall project in summer 2015. The physical wall platform was chosen because the study wanted to create a space on campus where students can freely express themselves. Hoping that the wall would attract students whose expressions and interactions are often restricted in face-to-face classroom settings ([8]: p. 48). The usefulness of wall writing is not limited to brainstorming as in this example; it must have other importance, otherwise it would not be practised publicly. For commercial use, wall writing in Cairo is an affordable and effective way to advertise merchandise or services. It crosses over the formal, expensive, and big-corporation-controlled advertisement medium. Emotional, self-expression and religious wall writings, however, have no economic or financial usefulness. So why are they practised? To answer such a question, we need to distinguish between the writer's intentions and the reader's interests. Recording one's own experience becomes a testimony of a person and their life; "the gesture of testimony emerges as a possible action in the present" ([38]: p. 139); "I live here", "or I was here"; see **Figure 17**. While the writer's intentions vary between self-expression, religious grounds, identifying a place or saving a memory, those intentions might not be of interest to the reader. The reader might encode and remember specific information and neglect others. However, if the text says something of interest to the reader, it can be better maintained.

5.1. Silent Stories of the Urban Wall in Cairo

For as long as we can say, it has been a common human practice to tell stories and sing songs. While stories and songs appear to be shared features of human societies, the crafting of stories and the composition of poems are always contested ([39]: p. 15). Ancient Egyptians and the officials of Islamic Cairo did not advertise merchandise or commercial services by writing on temple or mosque walls. They were saying something; registering information, selling stories or decorating the wall. Ancient Egyptians were selling stories about life and death, costumes, daily



Figure 17. Identifying a residential entrance by writing the owner's name, Khalifa, Cairo, 2026. The author.

life, agricultural and hunting activities, and the afterlife. Historic Muslim mosques in Cairo were decorated with Quranic citations, transforming the text from just an information source into a source of beauty and livability. The story about the “Jade Pillar that holds the sky” or the story about the magistrate Yang Bi who ‘holds the weight of the nation’ are told by writing (review the introduction). So what stories do religious, sociocultural, or emotional writing in Cairo tell? The need to say something; a story, a moral suggestion, information, or hopes and dreams are motivations for non-commercial writing in Cairo. As many types of texts provoke stories, they become a communication strategy that emphasises the power of narrative to convey values, meanings, and identities [40]. It is a key learning resource for humans. Moreno argued that people think narratively rather than argumentatively ([41]: pp. 2-3). Feelings and sensations are articulated through storytelling more than through other sciences or fields [42]. Stories are not simple. To create emotional links between the storyteller and the audience, or the observer (for urban narratives), it is necessary to build an atmosphere. Cities emerge as spaces of storytelling [43]. In other words, a medium for silent storytelling. The mode of storytelling and murals, movement and the body are articulations of a narrative process. As we move through the urban environment, we become enmeshed in a process of narrating ourselves, our memories and the city's stories. In our study, the place is the atmosphere, and the wall is the silent storyteller. The place carries some simple and recognisable ideas and images that are projected to offer an identity for those coming from the outside. On the other hand, the wall is the sign, story or memory carrier.

Marshall McLuhan's famous phrase “The medium is the message” (cf. [34]: p. 139) provokes the question: is the medium the story, or is it a story carrier? In other words, does the wall carry the story, is it part of the story, or is it the story?

In our case studies, and according to the individuals interviewed, the wall is a carrier that becomes part of the story. For example, in the Matareia, describing **Figure 15** can only be done by describing the flyover and the place. The place or the wall has an active role in creating experiences. The place is the context in which the observer moves or rests. It is part of their experience and memory. This might create a conflict between the story, the wall and the individual experience from the context. For example, the context of Tahrir's Oblique (see **Figure 2**) conflicts with the historic value of the artefact. While conflict is the beating heart of every story, the place operates as an interface, where social practices negotiate meaning with collective memory and visual aesthetics. This is because the narrative paradigm enables the reconstruction of relations among space, memory, everyday practices, and communicative infrastructures ([43]: pp. 61-62). Wall stories can start by explaining "who lives where", "who was here", "what happened when I visited someone", "how to describe my visit", "how a particular place articulates", or "what I saw on a specific wall"; see **Figure 18**. Religious wall writing tells the story of those individuals who express the importance of religion in their lives. It also tells stories about shop owners who express their honesty or protect their business from envy; see **Figure 19**. Reading and remembering wall stories require knowing why they are written. For example, Hajj wall writing tells the story of an individual whose financial means covered the cost of the ritual (see **Figure 18**). "A. loves R." in **Figure 5** tells the story of the boy who is trying to impress a girl; he might have succeeded or failed. Such uncertainty leads to variations in how the story ends. Urban narratives come in countless forms; they create a hierarchical structure. Hierarchical narratives give way to relational maps of meaning, and uniform messages transform into layered stories ([43]: p. 62) interwoven with the movement in place. This is obvious if we relate each wall writing to its context and the overall visit.



Figure 18. A wall writing around an entrance; celebrating the owner's Hajji, Shobra, Cairo, 2026. The author.



Figure 19. A wall writing over a shop, citing: “whoever depends on God must not fear poverty”, Matareia, Cairo, 2025. The author.

5.2. Silent Stories and Place Identity

As wall writing becomes a landmark, it functions as an element in place identity (see **Figure 17** and **Figure 18**). The identity of a place does not arise naturally; it is a socially constructed process that is constantly negotiated [44]. Wall stories contribute to place contestation and negotiation, which are parts of intangible place identity [45]-[47]. If writers respected the rule of “not going over”, then the negotiation process succeeded. Otherwise, contestation arises from competing writers and from disrespecting the unspoken rules of wall writing (see **Figure 16**). Urban narratives reinforce the place identity by offering frameworks that are emotionally or culturally understood and collectively remembered. This is because stories are expressed through cultural and emotional writings, and provide symbolic resources that articulate urban identity [48]. Reading a love wall writing, for example, tells the story of the boy, because a girl in Egypt would not publicly express her love in a text. As such, the letter “A” in **Figure 5** represents the boy’s name. Urban narratives can foster emotional bonds with local places while simultaneously strengthening their distinctiveness at both local and global levels ([49]: p. 3). Various forms of wall writing create or evoke memories of topics or local issues. Through their works, writers frequently examine the traits that shape social and place identities. This is because identity helps define who they are as people, as a culture, or as a nation ([10]: pp. 40-41).

Each of the three cases introduced various identities. Khalifa presented a religious identity, and Matareia presented a mixed religious and commercial identity. The third case, Heliopolis, featured marginal commercial wall writing and a stronger official advertisement, both mixed with English and bilingual language

(English/Arabic). However, such classification might create the impression of a geographic or socioeconomic distribution of diverse communities. This impression, nevertheless, is unsound, as it conflicts with the economic and cultural aspects of the way of life and with cultural colonialism in Heliopolis [46] [50] [51].

In Heliopolis, there is a long history of cultural westernisation. English became the language of superiority and prosperity [52]-[54]. This created deeply rooted westernised cultural memories and way of life. The memory of the past and its making became a shared, collective memory across successive generations through “vehicles of memory” or memory carriers such as books, films, museums, commemorations, and others ([22]: p. 1386). These vehicles introduced English as the language of high-quality society among Cairo’s cultural elites. As writing served as a space for collective thought in Heliopolis, it became natural to name places or shops in English and to abandon the rural (*Baladi*) custom of religious wall writing. An interviewer said, “Faith is in the heart, not the wall”; another interviewer said, “Faith does not need wall writing to be presented; it is a private relationship with God”.

6. Conclusions

Within the premise of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

Among the different types of wall writings, religious and commercial texts are significant. Alongside professionally trained calligraphers, unprofessional writing and stickers are found. Other spontaneous writing expresses emotion and general ideas, or cheers for a football team, and is practised by individuals. Generally, non-professional writers use slang and are rife with grammatical and spelling mistakes. Writing on walls is the ordinary people’s means of storytelling. It tells stories about their emotions, cultural values and interests. It goes beyond the official and elite narratives to create narratives that shape the collective place identity.

Religious wall writing goes beyond Qur’anic citations to include the registration of memories of the writing event, style, and emotions. It is practised by professionals. Although, along with history, religious wall writing transformed from the engraved form to the sprayed, painted, or written forms, it seems to have respected the rule of “not going over”. Religious wall writing introduces the observer to an emotional religious place identity of blessing and protection from evil. It creates a richer environment full of stories at different hierarchical levels, as it occupies the focal point of the wall, place or space.

While the religious wall writing respected the rule of density in visual perception, commercial wall writing did not. Writers used every blank space on the wall to display advertisements, especially within traffic nodes such as Mataraia, and it is commissioned or written by the owner. Commercial writing presents a different form of place memory and depicts the memory of commercial services and merchandise. Memories of very dense wall writing; walls full of painting, writing, colours and stickers. Commercial wall writing comes to overcome wealthy corporations’ barriers, using public facilities such as flyovers and electric rooms signifi-

cantly. Among the three case studies, Heliopolis presented limited commercial and religious wall writings.

Given the plurality of wall writing's manifestations and the interplay between messages and places, wall writing contributes to Cairo's cultural diversity. Nevertheless, even the ensemble of wall writing and place identity tells stories about the layers of history and cultural diversity.

As wall writing in Cairo depicts memories, hope and emotions of those who are not allowed to express themselves, it contributes to the city's liveability. Nonetheless, such a liveability is not designed to be assessed by the degree of attractiveness for investors or expatriates.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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