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Photo by:

[Dalia Rabie](#)

Rabea al-Adaweya Mosque construction
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The day after

Brotherhood sit-in sites are getting full makeovers, as history gets erased

[Dalia Rabie](#) An ambiguous architectural form has been erected in the center of Rabea al-Adaweya

By: Square, which housed a sit-in held by supporters of deposed President Mohamed Morsi for six weeks before it was violently dispersed.

On August 14, at least 600 protesters died in a 12-hour long battle with security forces. Over a thousand were injured. But the trauma of loss is reserved for only one portion of the population — those supportive of the Muslim Brotherhood. For others, a monument is what will remain of that day.

When complete, this monument will represent “the unity of the army, the police and the people,” Brigadier Tarek Mohamed Sayed tells Mada Masr.

Workers in yellow vests and helmets are scattered across the square, some digging along the sidewalks, some manning tractors and others taking a break under the Cairo University obelisk, their legs dangling over graffiti that reads, “We will not be ruled by a puppet.”



“The army, the police and the people are one hand,” it is meant to say.

A few workers lounge around a sign in the center of the work site that reads, “The restoration and beautification of Rabea Square project.”

Traffic flows on Tayaran Street, imposing a sense of normalcy on what was a battlefield a little over a month ago. “We only close the roads off when we hear about a [Muslim Brotherhood] march coming,” explains Sayed, who works with the Engineering Authority of the Armed Forces.

The day after the sit-in was cleared, the Armed Forces pushed to turn over a new leaf. Armed Forces commander Colonel General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi announced that the military would pay for the restoration of the Rabea al-Adaweya Mosque and oversee the work.

Construction began on August 15, Sayed says.

He explains that the first phase of the renovation process was removing the protesters’ refuse from the mosque and the surrounding area.

The strong anti-army sentiments that were sprayed across the walls are now painted over.

“But that wasn’t revolutionary graffiti,” Sayed asserts. “It was against the army. It said, ‘Sisi is a murderer’ and that kind of thing.”

In some cases, the erasure of the graffiti was only limited to the word “Sisi,” leaving the walls with some obscured relics of violence, such as the lone word “murderer.”

Questions still loom over the torching of the mosque during the dispersal. Some blame the security forces, while others reported that the protesters set the mosque on fire themselves as they were pushed out of the square.

Either way, a new fire detector system has been installed inside the mosque.

Any evidence of the fire on the mosque’s exterior has been covered up with fresh paint. Its interior is still a maze of scaffolds, sand and cement.

Over 700 workers are toiling around the clock to meet an early October deadline. Sayed estimates the work will be completed around the first week of next month. The mosque is undergoing a complete overhaul, with new features such as wheelchair ramps, an air-conditioning system and an umbrella that would expand its capacity to hold more than 2,500 people.



“We were keen on maintaining its original characteristics, but added new features,” Sayed says.

But the budget is still negotiable, since the work is not done yet, he adds.

According to Sayed, area residents — who had grown increasingly disgruntled with the sit-in — are very impressed with the renovations so far.

On the other side of town, Nahda Square — where the other pro-Morsi camp was held — is also getting a makeover.

Renovations are underway at Nahda, erasing any traces of a political struggle. The adjacent

Orman Park is also being refurbished, “after it was subjected to terrorism,” claims the “Youth in Love with Egypt” Facebook page.

The square, which saw sporadic scenes of violence with security forces and residents until the sit-in there was dispersed on August 14, now resembles an excavation site.

It seems the sit-in dispersal was used as an opportunity to begin much-needed renovations in the area, taken on by the Arab Contractors.

According to an engineer with the company, who asked to remain anonymous, the initiative would entail paving new lanes and parking lots, in addition to the general remodeling and beautification of the square and the surrounding gardens.

Over 1,500 workers began the restoration process on August 28, working “48 hours a day” even through the curfew, the engineer says.

“The Arab Contractors don’t sleep,” he adds.

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For Omar Nagati, an urban planner and architect, the makeovers could have functioned as “a gesture of reconciliation as opposed to exclusion.”

“This was also a chance for the city to wake up and use the restructuring to address older issues, such as traffic and garbage waste,” he says, criticizing these projects as a missed opportunity.

Instead, he thinks these makeovers have a political function, using the landscape to rewrite history.

Nagati highlights a similar incident of rewriting history through the regeneration of landscape in Tahrir following the 2011 revolution, when the army planted trees and flowers in the middle of the square;

but “when that didn’t work, they deployed soldiers.”

“The army is writing its own narrative,” the architect asserts. “History is written by the victorious.”

That said, Nagati still trusts the people’s power to subvert monumental impositions.

“You can put walls and monuments — people protest on their feet,” he says, adding that everyday acts of resistance are the people’s way to face the city over time.

“Resistance politics doesn’t necessarily mean protests. It can be a slow, silent and long-term form of resistance,” he says.

Attempts to inscribe a certain narrative will not last very long, Nagati concludes.

“Unless the planning process is democratic and representative of the majority, it will fail.”