
THE INSIDER

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● AUC's Independent Paper ●

Special Issue



Editor's Note

14 years ago, a fellow student at the German University in Cairo decided that he had had enough of suppression and wanted freedom of expression. That's why he founded The Insider – the first and largest independent student newspaper in Egypt and the broader Middle East. The paper published its first issue in May 2011, shortly after revolutionary zeal took our country by storm, and quickly gained traction across other university campuses. At its height, it had more than 250 student journalists on staff and 120,000 monthly readers. Our branch at the American University of Cairo was founded then as well, to much enthusiasm and anticipation.

Yet after publishing the eleventh issue, The Insider ceased to be a formidable voice of student expression and disappeared into the shadows of history. The shuttering of what once was Egypt's most notable student achievement happened due to the military government's crackdown on academic freedom and the increasing fear of reporters to approach touchy subjects. Staffers tried to revive the publication in 2021 and 2022 to no avail as they were hit by the Covid-19 pandemic.

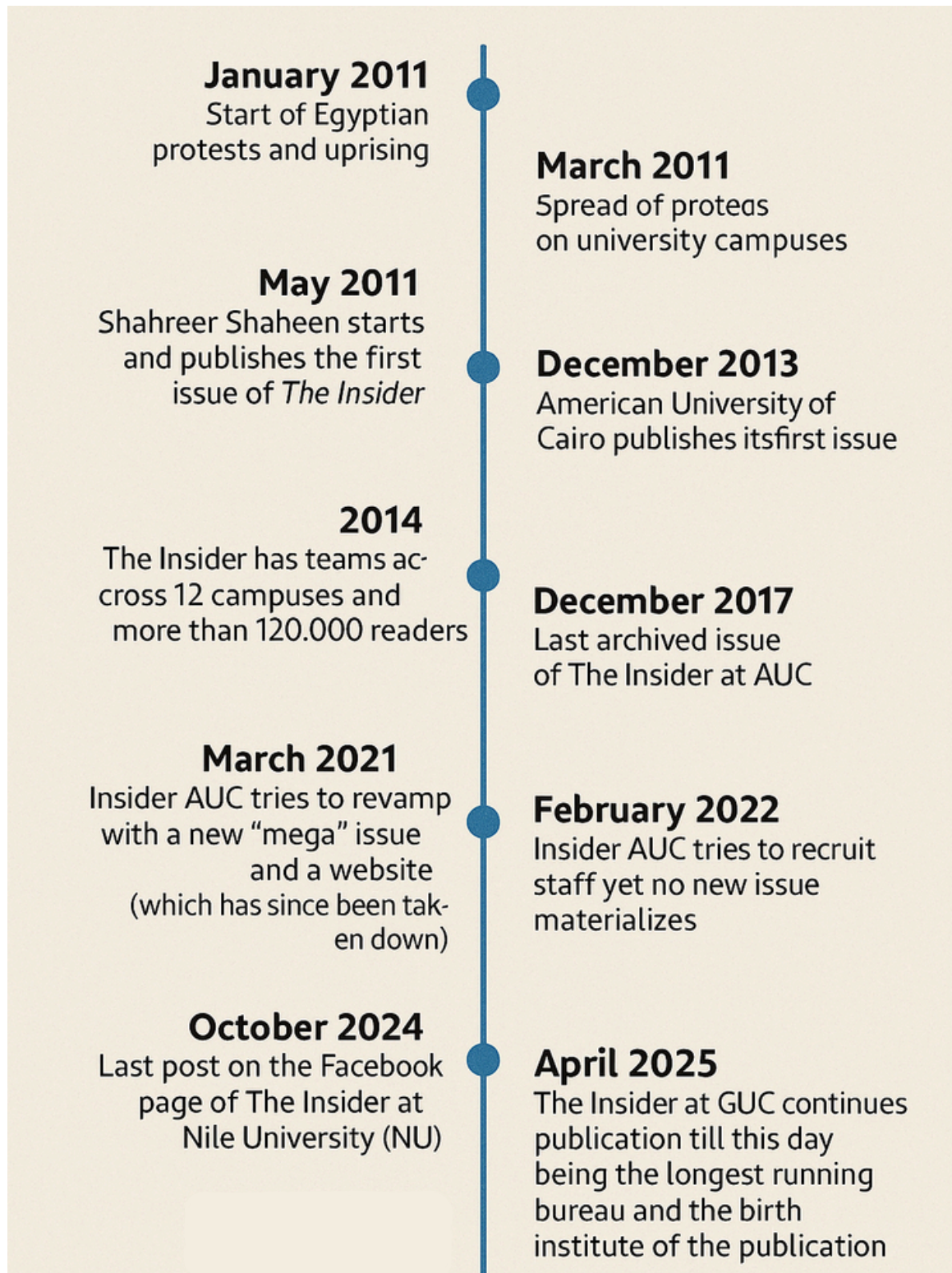
Since The Insider's departure from center stage, it has only become harder to be a university student in Egypt, much less a student journalist. We at American University of Cairo watch as our peers in the United States get expelled and arrested for speaking up about Palestine, we also watch as funding and scholarships get rescinded from us, all the while living in an authoritarian regime where every journalist walks on eggshells with trepidation.

In light of this situation, we have decided to step out and speak up again with a special issue of The Insider at AUC. Our goal is simple: to reflect on the impactful pieces that we have penned in the past and to continue this legacy through hard-hitting student journalism that doesn't shy away from sensitive issues but rather tackles them head on.

Quoting our founder Shaheer Shaheen: "When we selected The Insider name we had two things in mind. First to symbolize credibility, since information taken from an insider is known to be a source of direct and useful guidance. An insider has firsthand, material knowledge and insider information may be thought of as more accurate and valuable than expert opinion."

We are the insiders of Egyptian universities. Not only that, we are insiders to Egyptian society, able to navigate different social situations and norms, even transgressing them at times. We are the insiders of our culture, who hold the promise of tomorrow but also the peril of the future. We are the youth of the Middle East.

Timeline of The Insider



US Foreign Aid Freeze Threatens AUC Scholarships



Students at the American University in Cairo (AUC) are left scrambling in fear following the Trump administration’s decision to suspend foreign aid to Egypt, including funds allocated to scholarships administered through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The freeze has led AUC to suspend new scholarship admissions for the coming academic year, impacting dozens of current and prospective students.

According to a university statement released on January 29, AUC has “paused recruitment” for several U.S.-funded scholarship programs and is “working closely with partners to determine next steps.” The scholarships in question include the USAID-funded U.S.-Egypt Higher Education Initiative, which has supported hundreds of students from underrepresented governorates and underserved backgrounds.

In response to the aid freeze, the Egyptian government has called on local universities to cover the cost of tuition for students already enrolled under U.S.-funded scholarships. A statement by the Ministry of Higher Education emphasized the importance of ensuring educational continuity despite political developments.

“AUC remains committed to supporting all students currently receiving U.S. government funding,” the university said in a public statement. “We are actively engaged in discussions with all relevant stakeholders to explore viable solutions.”

For many students, however, the uncertainty has already begun to affect academic and financial planning. “I was expecting to apply for the USAID scholarship this year,” said a high school senior from Upper Egypt, who asked to remain anonymous. “Now, I don’t know if I’ll be able to afford university at all.”

According to the university’s latest publicly available data, roughly 15 percent of AUC’s student body benefits from USAID scholarships or related financial assistance. The suspension could therefore impact hundreds of students either directly or through shifting institutional resources.

The aid cut comes amid broader tensions in U.S.-Egypt relations. The Trump administration cited strategic and fiscal realignment in its foreign aid policy, though critics argue the cuts disproportionately affect educational and civil society initiatives.

On campus, the freeze has rekindled student activism. While a protest in April 2024 focused on AUC's investments in corporations linked to the Israeli occupation, some of the same student groups have begun organizing to demand institutional action on the funding crisis.

In the U.S., student-led protests in support of Palestine continue to spread across major American universities. Demonstrations at institutions like Columbia University, NYU, and Yale have drawn national attention, with students calling for their universities to divest from companies tied to the Israeli military and occupation being expelled, arrested or even deported.

For many at AUC, the sight of U.S. students occupying campuses and facing arrests has stirred both solidarity and questions about the global dimensions of student activism, academic freedom, and the role of universities in political conflict.

A petition circulated online last week calls on the university to reallocate funds from its endowment to cover scholarship shortfalls, at least temporarily. "We believe AUC has both a moral and institutional responsibility to protect its most vulnerable students," the petition states.

Faculty members have also expressed concern. "This situation underscores the importance of financial autonomy for universities like ours," said a professor in the Department of Political Science, speaking off the record. "We need to be able to support our students regardless of the shifting winds of international politics."

As of mid-February, no long-term solution has been announced. University officials say they are in close contact with USAID and Egyptian authorities and will provide updates as discussions progress.

Meanwhile, affected students continue to wait. Some are exploring alternative funding, while others face the possibility of delaying or ending their studies. For many, the stakes go beyond tuition.

"This isn't just about school," said a second-year engineering student. "It's about opportunity, mobility, and what kind of future we can hope for."



The following article made waves around the university when it was first published. Tackling the sensitive topic of public displays of affection on campus, it discusses social expectations and standards of acceptable behavior as well as gender norms among youth. We bring you an edited version of it as a throwback.

On-Campus Public Display of Affection How Far is Too Far?

“PLEASE do NOT make out in the library or anywhere on campus, including study rooms (they have glass walls). It’s seriously very disturbing. I urge anyone who sees something to tell the security, especially if it’s not in a hidden place, like on a first floor library couch “ a recent highly discussed Facebook post read.

Public Display of Affection, also known as PDA, has been under discussion lately within the AUC community. The topic has been revived early this semester when Aya Afify, a Senior Architecture Engineering Student, posted on “Rate AUC Professors” Facebook group asking students not to make out in public. She also urged students to report any similar action to the security. But what is PDA? It is certainly a very general term. The same act that is considered absolute PDA by someone is totally appropriate and acceptable by another one. So when could an action be considered as PDA? Do students get penalized for PDA? Do students have the right to report fellow colleagues for improper how they define PDA and how they perceive it and whether they find it in any way disturbing to them?

“Public display of affection” is a very broad and vague term. It can range from handholding and hugging to prolonged kissing and inappropriate touching.

“I’m not a judge of what is and is not appropriate behavior, but I shouldn’t feel uncomfortable in an environment I should be learning in,” said student Ayla Afify who disapproves of public displays of affection.

“Also, expression of physical intimacy toward others is a personal concern between two individuals and should not be to others surrounding them on campus. I would notify the nearest security guard and leave him to take the appropriate action.” Afify stated.

While some students find it inappropriate, there are others that believe in the freedom of action.

“I am looking at people who are being affectionate towards each other, so how could that possibly be harmful? It only even makes me happy to see people making each other happy,” said Sarah Sherif.



When asked about whether she would report students committing PDA, Sarah Sherif replied, “I would do nothing unless they asked me my opinion, in which case I would say that I really couldn’t care less and that they should do what ‘they’ feel is right.”

“I would do nothing unless they asked me my opinion, in which case I would say the amount of harassment we have, the double-standards, the portrayal of women in society, disgusting animal abuse, the food industry as a whole. There’s so much more to worry about and yet some people find the time to report a couple kissing in a corner, when in the other corner there’s a security guard being paid peanuts and barely making enough to feed his family,” added Sherif.

أهمية حفاظ اللغة العربية



You, you, you
you, you



أَنْتِ ، أَنْتِ ، أَنْتِ
أَنْتُمْ ، أَنْتُمْ

عندما أمشي في حرم الجامعة، أسمع أشياء غريبة. حديث الطلاب في الجامعة الأمريكية بالقاهرة ليس عربياً خالصاً، وليس إنجليزياً تماماً، بل هو مزيج غريب بين اللغتين. كلمات عربية تلتصق بتعابير إنجليزية، فتخرج جُمَل لا تنتمي إلى أي من اللغتين بشكل كامل. كلنا نعرف أن طلاب الجامعة الأمريكية عندهم سمعة خاصة، حيث يقال عنهم إنهم "Egyptian" وليسوا "مصريين". رغم أن الكلمتين تعنيان نفس الشيء، إلا أن استخدام "Egyptian" يحمل دلالة مختلفة. "Egyptian" تعني شخصاً يحمل الهوية المصرية في الشكل، ولكنه يتحدث ويتصرف كأجنبي. أما "مصري"، فهو الشخص الذي يتحدث العربية بطلاقة، ويتصرف بثقافة تنتمي لهذا المكان. في هذه الأيام، أسمع عبارات مثل: "عايزة الـ vacation دلوقتي"، "ممكن نروح الـ movies مع بعض؟" حتى في الإعلام وعلى وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، أصبح هذا الخليط بين الثقافات واللغات هو السائد.

في هذا الجيل الذي يعيش في زمن العولمة والانفتاح، من الطبيعي أن تظهر مظاهر التهجين الثقافي واللغوي. ولكن، كمصريين، أولاد الفراعنة، يجب أن نتوقف لنسأل أنفسنا: ما هي هويتنا؟ هل نريد لأولادنا أن يتحدثوا العربية بقواعد إنجليزية؟ هل نريد أن نرى المزيد من المقاهي الغربية بدلاً من القهاوي التقليدية؟ هل نريد أن نفقد ملامحنا، ثقافتنا، ولغتنا التي تربطنا بجذورنا؟ هذا سؤال لكم، وسأطرحه عليكم باللغة العربية: هل ستجيبونني باللغة العربية؟ أم بالإنجليزية؟ أم بمزيج من الإثنين؟ وأي إجابة ستختارونها، ستكون انعكاساً لما اخترتم أن تكونوا.

Halloween or Hell No Week?



I was having lunch with a friend in the dining when our conversation was unpleasantly interrupted by tacky Halloween music coming from the speakers. Everywhere you go on campus, you are bombarded with skeletons, witches and spiders. There is literally no escape from these sounds and images, and for religious students, this is particularly disturbing.

Coming from a conservative Islamic background, I have been taught growing up that music is haram, or not religiously permissible. Under my family's scrutiny, I have tried my best to stay away from all types of popular music, even avoiding weddings of friends and loved ones due to the presence of this scandalous element.

Coming to AUC, an American establishment in the middle of conservative Egypt, it has been very jarring for me seeing the change in culture and expectations. Music is frequently included in campus festivities and events, and with an occasion such as Halloween, it is impossible to escape the so-called spooky ambience.

For most people in the west, Halloween is a harmless fun little festival where you get to dress up and spend the night with friends. Yet for others coming from other faith backgrounds such as Islam, this night is the realm of the occult, where demons are celebrated instead of scorned and rejected. Therefore, celebrating Halloween in such an overt manner might cause discomfort for some students.

This leads to the question of to what extent should certain holidays be celebrated on campus... What "holidays" should be taken more seriously? And what should be the role of admin and student leaders in advocating for respectful lines of celebration for all? Understanding that AUC is both an American and an Egyptian institution, how should we go about these issues?

The bar needs to be the same for all religious festivals. To make campus a safe and inclusive space for all, we would like next year's Halloween festivities to be less "in your face". Stop blasting creepy music in the dining hall. Don't put up decorations with excessive gore in the hallways. Respect the host country of Egypt as a conservative society. Again, we are not saying that you cannot celebrate Halloween, but at least make it an option for those who don't to be spared from the harassment.

With all of this said, this is not an article advocating for the eradication of western practices, rather an article advocating for the transnational, educated, and respectful AUC community that we should be, one that is aware of the cultural gaps and differences, and finds ways to live with one another despite them.

Let's Grab Coffee



“Hey, that sounds very interesting, would you like to share more about it over coffee?” This is something that I’ve been hearing more and more all over campus, and I am very thankful for that.

Growing up, spaces like the traditional Egyptian ‘ahawi have always been male-dominated. I would see my fathers and uncles spending extended hours there, drinking coffee and smoking shisha while talking about what had been going on in their lives or watching a football game. My mother always told me that women didn’t belong there, that it was *3eeb*. And being the little girl who did not want to cause any scandals for transgressing social boundaries, I stay put.

Coming to university, that was when I discovered modern western coffee shops — Cilantro, Beano’s, Starbucks — which completely flipped the script. They are gender-mixed spaces that not only allow for but normalize women's presence. The western design, international branding, and association with cosmopolitanism serve as a kind of translocal bubble: a space grounded in Cairo, yet at the same time judged by ideals from the west.

When you buy a coffee from Beano’s, you’re not just buying a caramel macchiato. You are buying an entire brand, with its bright architecture and neatly stamped cups – you are buying the modern cultural values that it stands for.

For many young women, especially those from more conservative families, these spaces become rare zones of autonomy. A western coffee shop is a place where a woman can sit alone, open a laptop, read a novel, or chat with male friends without drawing suspicion. That kind of casual independence is still hard to come by in other parts of Cairo’s public life.

Even as students of the American University, we are still subject to local customs and expectations. I still cannot waltz into an ‘ahawi and expect to be accepted, nor wear the hijab loosely in front of my conservative uncles.

Like AUC, coffee shops represent a translocal space of possibilities. For me, they represent an extension of campus where I can freely mingle with my classmates regardless of their gender. However, I also acknowledge these spaces are segregated by class and that they are only accessible to me as a middle class, educated young woman who can afford AUC tuition. Ultimately, our country is still one that is ever evolving, with lots of spaces of expression that we can tap into as youth.

Breaking Barriers: In Conversation with Bayan from *Takki*



The up-and-coming Saudi media star Bayan has been making waves all over the Arab world for her daring speech and actions in the reality web series *Takki*. We managed to sit down with her over Zoom to understand more about who is behind the daring young student who subverted cultural norms when she got into the car with a strange man.

Interviewer: Bayan, thank you for speaking with us today. As a woman in Saudi Arabia who dreams of working in the media, what drew you to that field in the first place?

Bayan: Thank you. Honestly, it started with watching the news as a teenager. I was always captivated by the way journalists asked difficult questions and told stories that mattered. But I also noticed how rare it was to see Saudi women doing that. I remember thinking: why not me? I love storytelling—and I believe Saudi women have stories that deserve to be told by us, not just about us.

Interviewer: You've faced a lot of resistance from your family in the series, especially your father. Do you think their reaction reflects a wider generational gap in Saudi society?

Bayan: Definitely. I think our parents' generation still sees certain jobs, especially in media or entertainment, as somehow inappropriate for women. It's not always about religion or values—it's about reputation.

There's this fear that being visible, being outspoken, will bring shame or gossip. For my father, it wasn't even about me specifically—it was about what people would say about our family because of my job or how I was presenting myself in the public.

Interviewer: You were very bold when you got into the back of Malek's car. What was going through your mind at that time?

Bayan: It was an honest mistake. I knew that I shouldn't have done that at the back of my head, but with those men harassing me and my mother's car nowhere to be seen, I knew I had to get out of there. Plus, I was already late for class. I honestly didn't want to make a big deal out of it and I'm sure you saw that nothing happened in the car. I just wanted to get to campus quickly. But my friend Fatima saw me getting out of his car and word of that soon spread like wildfire. That's the thing about Saudi society – there are no secrets. Once you do anything that transgresses social or religious boundaries, you're done for.

Interviewer: The boundaries between genders are still tightly guarded in many spaces. How do you navigate that, especially in such a public profession?

Bayan: It's a balancing act. I'm careful about how I present myself—not just what I wear, but how I speak, how I interact. There's a lot of pressure to always seem “respectable.” But at the same time, I'm tired of pretending that professionalism has a gender. I can be confident and still be decent. The problem is that when a man speaks up, he's assertive; when a woman does, she's “bold,” and that's not always a compliment.

Interviewer: You often have to choose between ambition and approval, such as in your engagement with Majed. How do you reconcile those two things?

Bayan: That's the hardest part. I love my family deeply, but I also know I need to live a life that's true to me. I wanted to honor my parents and my fiancé Majed, yet at the same time I enjoy being in front of the camera. I am my truest self when I am expressive and confident on video, and I would hate to let that part of myself go. Thankfully, Majed supports me in my media endeavors, but how his mother and the rest of his family sees me is another story...

Interviewer: If you could send a message to young women watching you and seeing themselves in your story, what would you say?

Bayan: You don't have to wait for permission to believe in yourself. You may not be able to change everything overnight, but you can take the first step. Be smart, be strategic—but don't silence yourself. We need your voice, especially now.



The Ultimate AUC Student Guide to Surviving a Game with Egypt's Ultras



So you've decided to attend a local football game in Egypt. Maybe you're curious. Maybe you're bold. Maybe you're just trying to blend in. But if you're anywhere near the Ultras — Egypt's notoriously passionate, loyal, and revolutionary football fan groups — this isn't just a game. It's a full-blown emotional, political, and physical experience. And it requires preparation.

Here's your AUC survival guide to stepping into the stadium (or streets) with the Ultras:

1. Know the History: These Fans Don't Just Cheer—They Resist

Before you go, understand this: Ultras are not just football fans, they are political actors, cultural producers, and survivors of state violence. Many have been arrested, banned, and even killed for their participation in protests and clashes with the police — most notably during the 2012 Port Said massacre and the 2015 Air Defense Stadium tragedy. Don't trivialize their presence by treating the match like a music festival.

2. Dress Like You Belong—but Not Too Much

Wear your team colors, but avoid over-branding yourself if you're not sure which section you'll end up in. The third-tier "curva" sections behind the goals are home to the Ultras. These are not VIP seats—they're hot, loud, and chaotic. Do not wear rival team colors, and skip expensive gear that could be seen as showing off or make you a target for theft or suspicion.

3. Don't Try to Out-Cheer the Ultras

The choreographed chants, songs, and pyro shows are intense. The Ultras pride themselves on outlasting and outvoicing every other group in the stadium, often cheering for the entire 90 minutes without sitting down. Join in if you know the words, but don't try to lead or mock. These performances are sacred — political and poetic forms of "sensuous reason" that go far beyond sports.

4. Expect a Masculine Space—and Respect It

Ultras culture is intensely male-dominated and homosocial. Women are generally excluded — not necessarily out of hatred, but due to a paternalistic view that their presence could “distract” or make the group vulnerable to external judgment. Female AUC students should be aware of this dynamic and may want to avoid the Ultras’ sections altogether for safety and comfort.

5. If Things Get Tense—Move with the Crowd, Not Against It

The Ultras are used to confrontation—sometimes with rival fans, but more often with the police. If things escalate, don’t panic. Stay close to exits, follow the movement of the Ultras (they are highly coordinated), and avoid getting between fans and security forces. Chants like “ACAB” and “The Ministry of Interior are thugs” aren’t just lyrics—they reflect real animosity with real consequences.

6. Don’t Film Faces

Ultras often blur their faces on social media posts, especially in political contexts. State surveillance is real, and many Ultras have been arrested or “disappeared.” If you’re taking photos or videos, avoid close-ups of individuals unless you have permission.

Final Word: This Isn’t Just a Game—It’s a Movement

The Ultras are more than just fans—they’re a countercultural force. They’ve challenged authoritarianism, mourned their dead with poetry and fire, and made stadiums into battlegrounds for dignity and freedom. So whether you’re there to watch the match or to study the subculture, show up with humility, curiosity, and respect.

And remember: the day they stop cheering is the day they’re dead.

Thank you for reading!

We hope you enjoyed the special issue of AUC’s Insider. We are always looking for new writers and journalists to add to our ranks. Come join us and make young Egyptian voices heard.

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