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Appropriating Modernism in The Egyptian Urban and Architectural Context During The First Half of The 20th Century – A Critical Investigation

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ABSTRACT

Appropriation was undertaken for the imported architectural styles related to the Modern Movement when it was applied in its new urban Egyptian context. The mid 1920's saw the rise of international Modern ideals, whereby the Pre-Modern period developed into full-flush Modernism, and lasted up till the 1960's. Modernism, when introduced to the Egyptian context, was remodeled and appropriated to create a new identity. This paper aims at comparing Egyptian Modern pioneering examples to their Western counterpart, in order to define and point out local efforts to interpret and apply the Egyptian Modern early-examples, and to assess whether it was appropriation or otherwise. In order to attain these objectives, the paper firstly reviews at a glance the international Modern Movement; followed by the analysis of the Egyptian Modernism, displaying how local and global currents intersect. The case study in Egypt is formulated into two parts: on the urban level, by discussing the Nasr City historical development as the first urban decentralization attempt; second on the architectural level by studying the opposing polarity between local and global aspects of the Modernism development, and analysis of selected Modern Egyptian buildings. Upon examining Egyptian Modern architecture and its applications in its homeland, many differences and hence appropriation(s) could be traced and pointed out on a local level. Those could be due to the difference between the Western and Egyptian setting in terms of local and available materials, construction methods and skills, climatic conditions, culture pressures and needs.

KEYWORDS

Modernism, Egypt, urban, architecture, heritage, style

توفيق "الحدّاءة"، في السياق المعماري المعماري والعمراني المصري، خلال النصف الأول من القرن العشرين – تحقيق ناقد

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ملخص البحث

تم توفيق الأساليب المعمارية الاجنبية المتعلقة بحركة الحدّاءة بتطبيقها في سياقها الحضري المصري الجديد. شهدت فترة العشرينيات في القرن العشرين صعود المثل العالمية الحديثة، حيث تطورت فترة ما قبل الحدّاءة إلى حدّاءة صريحة، والتي استمرت حتى الستينيات. وعندما تم تقديم الحدّاءة إلى السياق المصري، تم إعادة تشكيلها وصياغتها لخلق هوية جديدة. يهدف هذا البحث إلى مقارنة الأمثلة المصرية الحديثة الرائدة مع نظيرتها الغربية، من أجل تحديد والإشارة إلى الجهود المحلية لتفسير وتطبيق الأمثلة المصرية الحديثة المبكرة، وتقييم ما إذا كان ذلك توفيق أم غير ذلك. ومن أجل تحقيق هذه الأهداف، يستعرض البحث أولاً لمحة سريعة عن الحركة العالمية الحديثة؛ يليه تحليل الحدّاءة المصرية، موضحاً كيفية تناخل التيارات المحلية والعالمية. تنقسم دراسة الحالة المصرية إلى قسمين: على المستوى الحضري، من خلال مناقشة

التطور التاريخي لمدينة نصر كأول محاولة لتحقيق اللامركزية الحضرية؛ والثاني على المستوى المعماري من خلال دراسة التناقض بين الجوانب المحلية والعالمية لتطور الحداثة، وتحليل مباني مصرية حديثة مختارة. عند دراسة العمارة المصرية الحديثة وتطبيقاتها في وطنها، يمكن تتبع العديد من الاختلافات وبالتالي التخصيصات والإشارة إليها على المستوى المحلي. وقد يكون ذلك بسبب الاختلاف بين البيئة الغربية والمصرية من حيث المواد المحلية والمتاحة، وطرق ومهارات البناء، والظروف المناخية، والضغوط الثقافية والاحتياجات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الحداثة، مصر، العمران، العمارة، التراث، الطراز.

INTRODUCTION

Egypt is a land of polarities, and unique character shaped by a long timeline of consecutive historical styles: Pharaonic, Greaco-Roman, Coptic, Islamic, Turkish, and European. For the Modern Egyptian architecture and urbanism, the polarities and paradoxes accumulate. The purpose of this paper is to point up how the reasonings for one site's heritage listing by UNESCO or international monitors as worthy of conservation and development control are almost the same basis for excluding others, in particular Egyptian contributions to modernist architecture during the 20th century. Equally significant is to call attention to the institutional negligence of Egypt's national heritage to recognize and protect its early-modern urban and architecture as a prime part of the country's modern history.

Currently, Modern design is widely popular and marketable, and becomes a prevalent style preference among the upper/middle classes and the business elite, who are building their new private or public buildings including residences, villas, commercial centres, and offices following Modern style. The Modernism is the 20th century architectural movement that thought to reject all historic links and styles with the past (Curl, 1999). Although the Modern Egyptian architect may have had a ready home-grown base and tradition from which to work, he was nonetheless faced with certain dilemmas which he had to resolve if his work was to have both local-national and a wider international meaning or message.

Consequently, this paper discusses these dilemmas while offering an interpretative survey of Modern Egyptian architecture from 1930's to 1960's. This study is considered as an analytical case study of Modern Egyptian heritage, comprising a combined method approach, which applies a quantitative methodology, sustained by a historical interpretation approach. The first part of this paper forms a brief overview on the theoretical background of Modern Movement on the international level illustrating prototypic examples. The second part represents a critical review of the Modern Egyptian experience during the early 20th century. It discusses, analyses and delineates many examples of Modern Egyptian urbanism and architecture, in order to trace aspects of Egyptian appropriation of Modern Movement. Due to the scope of the paper, it is impossible to carry out this analysis quantitatively; as the building stock during this period surpassed thousands of buildings.

1. INTERNATIONAL BRIEF OF THE MODERN MOVEMENT

The early 20th century Modernist movement, including constructivism and futurism, embraced machinery technology, industrial power, and the search for a Machine Aesthetic. Within the movement, various groups as De Stijl advocated for abstractions

and purity of form; yet they all agreed on the need for rational responses to contemporary use of modern materials and construction methods. Functionalism was considered fundamental, but conflicts arose in the pursuit of an unrestrained architecture that balanced aesthetics and function. Modernism also captured the attention of avant-garde architects and artists globally, shaping the direction of modern design (Gelernter, 1995). The “International Style” emerged as the dominant approach, emphasizing functional, rational, and economical building methods.

In 1927, the International Style reached its peak with Le Corbusier's rectilinear white buildings and ribbon windows, representing the epitome of modern architecture. Modernism sought to move away from traditional styles, leading to the development of new theories and pedagogic institutes like the Bauhaus and CIAM (1928), which embraced a constant, rational, and inevitable progression of Modernism. Architects who didn't conform to this “history” were disregarded. After World War II, Modernism gained recognition as the paradigm of urbanism and architectural education, with prestigious commissions given to the new generation of modern architects. Le Corbusier shocked the world with his design for the Notre-Dame du Haut church in 1954, which exhibited a concrete curvilinear form and deviated from previous modern rules. This expressionism was further exemplified in Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum and Eero Saarinen's TWA Terminal. Modern style persisted until the 1960's, transitioning into Late-Modernism and eventually paving the way for Post-Modernism.

The Unité d'Habitation, designed by Le Corbusier, revolutionized high-density housing by creating a “city within a city”. This residential complex featured Modulor proportions, internal streets, and pilotis, reimagining a vertical garden city. It prioritized community living and private spaces for residents while incorporating amenities like a garden roof terrace with a kindergarten, jogging track, club, gym, and shallow pool. The complex also included shops, clinics, and a small hotel (Figure 1). Le Corbusier's Plan Voisin, proposed in 1925, aimed to replace dense areas of Paris with 18 glass towers arranged on an urban grid, surrounded by green space. The plan integrated highways, train and metro lines, and an airport, envisioning a central hub (World Heritage Encyclopedia, 2015). However, the plan faced strong opposition from the public, who cherished the historical quarters of Paris. Despite its utopian nature, the Plan Voisin remained unrealized (Figure 2). Overall, this summary highlights the key aspects of Modernism, its influence on architecture and urban planning, and the pivotal works of Le Corbusier during the 1930's to the 1960's.



Figure (1): Unité d'Habitation, Marseilles, Le Corbusier, 1952, a “city within a city”
Source: Kroll, 2023; Smith, 1997

Figure (2): Plan Voisin town-planning project, Paris, Le Corbusier, 1922-1925
Source: Architectuul, 2023

2. MODERN MOVEMENT IN EGYPT: HOW LOCAL AND GLOBAL CURRENTS INTERSECT

Soon after the French Expedition to Egypt in 1798, the concepts of both European aesthetics and of a world of nation-states were installed in the Egyptian identity urban context. It took more than a century for Egyptians to adapt these ideas to fit their own interests. Needless to say, the Modern state founded and nurtured by the *Muhammad Ali* dynasty in Egypt provided much of the impetus and momentum for the interaction between European culture and local/native cultural forms, between modernity – however defined – and tradition. It was not only the work of European archaeologists and scholars that awakened Egyptians to the glories of their past. The patronage of the ruling house and the sensitivity of the first modern elite of educated Egyptians to these discoveries, as well as to their newly-acquired knowledge of European culture, were equally important stimuli to the development of Modern Egyptian architecture (Karnouk, 1988). Therefore, it was not accidentally that the Modern and Nationalist Movements coincided in Egypt during the 1920's.

Still primarily renowned for its Pharaonic and Islamic monuments; yet, Cairo is also an eclectic Modern city, including turn of the century revivalism, and Expressionist concrete architecture. After the 1919 Revolution, Cairo's Modernism reflected the dream of the new society through the Modernist urban master plans, and residential/public typologies as an expression of new social class identity and ideology. During the national development of Modern architecture, both architects and politicians complied with the identity change generated when the concept of belonging to autonomy and ethnicity evolved into that of nationality: a united Egyptian nation. The chief historical factor in such identity is the fact that for almost hundreds of years, Egypt was uninterruptedly under occupation. A country without being a nation, a land where civilisations flourished and influenced other nations, while the Egyptians remained under the power of a succession of foreign invaders.

In 1932, the same year of MoMA's "Modern Architecture: International Exhibition", the French-educated Egyptian architect Charles Ayrout designed a distinguished modern villa *Kamel Bek Abdel Halim* in Heliopolis. Simultaneously, when Le Corbusier designed *Unité d'Habitation*, the Egyptian Revolution in Cairo launched a state-sponsored foundation of urban and architectural projects. During Frank Lloyd Wright visit to Cairo in 1957, Egyptian architects were working on practical designs as schools and apartments, following functional modern spirit design. Wright was disappointed from Cairo's rapid expansion in terms that recall his timeless critical and descriptive quote of Manhattan: "cheap and pedestrian ... architecture for profit". However, Elshahed argues that Cairo's modern urban pattern reflects a society struggle to liberate itself from colonial compulsion (Elshahed, 2020).

2.1 Opposing Polarity Between Modern Local and Global Aspects Development

Egypt's modern architectural experience spanned from the mid-1930's till the 1960's. Cairo is well stocked of exceptional modern architectural examples, many landmark buildings hidden in plain sight. Cairo Modern works by Egyptian modern architects, semicentury of plentiful architectural output that makes our conception of international modernism more complicated. However, there has been a disregard by western scholars

to investigate Egyptian modern heritage. Similarly, this architectural resources and practices have been omitted within Egyptian heritage.

In spite of that, from October 2021 till March 2022, Cairo Modern Exhibition at the Center for Architecture – a major urban, architectural, and cultural venue in New York – introduces key Egyptian architects from the Modernism period, besides selected samples of their works. It promotes 20 Cairene demolished and remaining projects, and scheme designs dating from the 1930's to the 1970's (Shapiro, 2021). Moreover, the exhibition coincided with the publication of the book “Cairo Since 1900: An Architectural Guide” by the critic and architectural historian Mohamed Elshahed, which surveys the city's modern production built from 1900 to the present, and raises the alarm about the potential risk of Egypt's Modern heritage.

The exhibition also features designs for the proposed Egyptian Pavilion for the 1939 New York World's Fair (Figure 3); and covers of *Majallat al- 'Imārah* (1939-59) as the first Arabic-language magazine recording and documenting the contemporary modern local architecture during the Mid Century Modern period. It was founded by the architect, planner, and writer Sayed Karim, to publish and promote modern projects in Egypt and abroad, and more importantly, to convey the message of International modernism to the Middle East. The magazine facilitated the spread of the Modern Movement ideas, the discussion of general interest issues on planning, architecture, standardization, fine arts, materials, ... etc., and introducing international projects to the Arabic-speaking professionals (Volait, 2006). Karim excitedly argued in favour of the development of an international Egyptian modernism, against the efforts to define a national style based on the revival of historical local character.

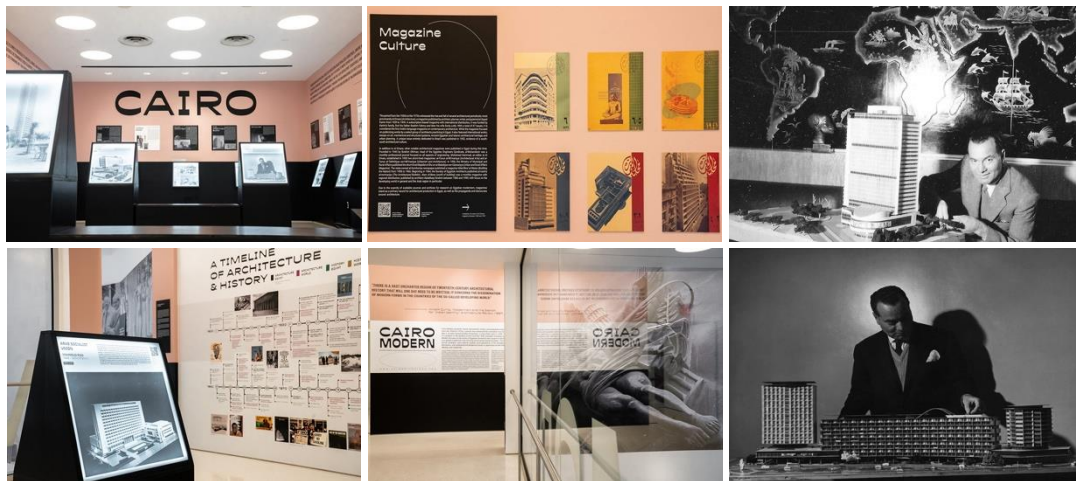


Figure (3): Cairo Modern Exhibition at the Center for Architecture in New York, introducing key Egyptian Modernist architects, besides selected samples of their works.
Source: Center for Architecture, New York, 2022

Elshahed notes that Cairo became a metropolis after the World War I, because the international and regional exodus combined with the rise of the middle class and which stimulated exponential growth (Elshahed, 2020). Consequently, architecture and urban planning experimentations increased. Meanwhile, these local modern but not expressively Egyptian projects have been screened by the vernacular architecture of Hassan Fathy, which criticized the international modernism, and provided intellectual screen for rejecting Egyptian modernity as well. Furthermore, Ali Labib

Gabr and Mahmud Ryad, were more involved in planning and housing issues. In 1946, Gabr designed one of the early large scale housing units for industrial workers at *al-Mahalla al-Kubra*, besides several hotels, hospitals, factories, and institutional buildings. In 1948, the layout of the new residential district in Cairo: *al-Muhandisin* was created. In 1954, Ryad elaborated prototypes of low-density economic housing units (2-storey row houses) that were used in major schemes in Cairo (Volait, 2006). During the 1950's till the 1960's, The Government's projects in workers' housing and schools following the minimal modern style features (Elshahed & Makar, 2019).

After 1952, almost no European architects were still working in Egypt; yet, the architectural profession had grown in the country, and a major paradigm shift was synchronously occurring: American Modernism was prevailing. Salah Zeitoun and Mostafa Shawqi – both studied at Illinois School of Architecture – designed the old Cairo International Airport in 1961. Moreover, Zeitoun spent with Frank Lloyd Wright almost a year in close contact, which had a deep impact on his works (Volait, 2006).

The succeeding generation gave rise to more absolute modernists. Sayed Karim was the archetype, and his work includes some of Cairo's early high-rises and structures in an open brutalism theme. In fact, Brutalism, more than any other Modernist style, was welcomed by newly formed states across the region for new building. Brutalism in the Middle East became the style for governments to exhibit their commitment to socio-economic progress and the image of “the common good.” Brutalism for many Middle Eastern governments, including Egypt was also an expression of scientific progress and an embodiment of new technology. The architectural critic Michael J. Lewis notes that the Arab World Brutalism was not necessarily “the vernacular expression of the welfare state, but rather an expression of national independence, autonomy, and progress” (Mashayekhi & Efrat, 2012). Zeitoun played equally an important role in developing the urban and architecture style of Egypt. By that time, Americanization spreading was channeled to the Egyptian context through higher education; and companies. An illustrative landmark was the Nile Hilton (1957-59) (currently the Nile Ritz Carlton Hotel), designed by Welton Beckett, collaborating with Ali Nour El Din Nassar. The project symbolically replaced the British barracks, evacuated in 1947 (Figure 4). In 1954, the Nasser regime decided to construct three new establishments instead: The Arab League, the hotel, and the Cairo Municipality.



Figure (4): The British Barracks in 1947. In 1957, the Nasser regime decided to construct the Nile Hilton instead

Source: La Fabrique du Caire Moderne, 2019; Ayers, 2020

Likewise, the Modernism principles as universal, rational, liberating of history and conservative values, innovation and experimentation with form, were symbolically promoted by many of the local architects, and political elite across the region. Yet, the state's modernization projects required an architectural character that could express the new era of progress and prosperity. Despite their enthusiasm, the expression of the

national identity remained the serious challenge, or rather how to use an architecture that simultaneously represents national independence, and still incorporates the approach of international Modernism of the West? As a typical example representing this devoted effort to unify the national and international aspects, Sayed Karim, in his design of the high-rise housing blocks for Nasr City, each façade is aesthetically inspired by the traditional *mashrabiya* by using claustra, and at the same time by the Brutalist architecture. Accordingly, this opposing polarity between local and global became a fundamental aspect of the governmental development in the second half of the 20th century. In the following decades Egypt and the Middle East turned into a serious design workshop for new urban and architectural exploration and innovation, where the integration of the modern theme and past heritage was a vital inspirational source for local architects.

2.2 Nasr City New Capital: First Urban Decentralization Attempts

As a consequence of the 1952 *Coup d'état*, the Government approved the master plan as a tool of urban planning development. Thereafter, the construction of two new residential districts: *Madinet Nasr* (Victory) City to the east (south of Heliopolis), and *Madinet al-Mohandessin* on the western part of the Nile, both designed to accommodate the new bourgeoisie, the revolutionary council and professional syndicates members. The State authorities encouraged this movement indeed to modernise and expand Cairo, as it had the upper hand on these two operational projects, and then by all measures: reduced charges for costs of services and subsidies for equipment and construction materials, housing cooperatives, and rent control (El Kadi, 2012). These two massive planning proposals: Nasr City with high-rises buildings and large residential apartments overlooking green spaces, and *al-Mohandessin* with villas and small flat blocks along spacious roads, responded perfectly to the city image of this new class.

Paradoxically, this new exodus of affluent classes from the city centre to its margins notably corresponds to the one from the traditional city to the 'modern' Downtown at the beginning of the 19th century. Actually, this was due to the engagement of a new improved system, and the inclination to be part of the stylish modernity. Nevertheless, Downtown Cairo's Haussmannian planning, and its Europeanized architectural styles no longer reflected the model city targeted by the upper middle classes. They aspired to the dominant international paradigm, inspired more or less by the modern urban and architectural principles, and designed by Egyptian architects during the 1940's.

The newly established Madinet Nasr Foundation (recently the Nasr City Company) aimed to provide a new urban proposal in order to relieve central Cairo's housing dilemma and overpopulation; to found new government headquarters; to afford housing units for government employees; to provide serviced rental and ownership residential properties; to extend infrastructure into desert areas to be marketed at a reasonable amount for private development; and to link Heliopolis district to the Downtown Cairo through new roads and public modes of transport .

Despite the fact that currently Nasr City turns into one of Cairo's outdated districts, it was originally planned to be the newly developed Egypt's capital city on Cairo's periphery. In the early 1950's, the project urban planning and architectural design when been presented by Sayed Karim to the local government and varied ministries, was

rejected because they believed his proposed Cairo's expansion was disagreeing with the goals of socialism. According to Elshahed, Anwar el-Sadat was excited by the urban and architectural proposal of the city, then Gamal Abdel Nasser gave a presidential decree for its foundation. In 1958, Karim presented the plan not as a residential expansion of Cairo, but as a new capital with government offices, a stadium, and a conference center (Elshahed, 2015). It was declared by the military regime as "City of the Revolution", which sought to initiate its legitimacy through planning and urban development projects all over the country (Figure 5). Karim framed it as "A Capital inside a Capital", and proposed a slum removal after relocating residents to the new "City of Tomorrow". The project's brochure was written in English, and designed to entice intellectual upper and middle class prospective citizens, whom it reassured that the new capital city would be "planned according to the modernistic theoretical city planning trends" (Elshahed, 2016).



Figure (5): Nasr City New Capital: First Urban Decentralization Attempts
Source: Elshahed, 2015; Walycenter, 2018

The location of Nasr City master plan was chosen on the east side of *Abbasiya* district, and south of Heliopolis. The project total planned area was 1200 km² as only stage one of a greater scope of expansion, considering that most of the land was military possession. The L-shaped orthogonal master plan includes two districts, one for governmental structures, and the second was for housing. There was a road web on the periphery to serve the industrial zone and dirty waste functions. The apartment buildings are assembled around a common open public space and gardens, which were well arranged in the new housing master plan. Karim presented variations in the housing units within three design models: first, low-rise subdivision with limited private property, having a share in public green spaces, services, and infrastructure with the district; second, five storeys cooperative residential buildings with shared facilities; and third, high-rise super blocks containing high-priced apartments that government rented to its employees (El-Husseiny, 2015). At the heart of Nasr City, Karim also designed a stadium, and a public space garden at the core of the area. Two university campuses were also planned the Ain Shams University, and Al-Azhar University. Moreover, a series of new administrative buildings were designed – just few were built – to accommodate new ministries, and to transfer other ones from Cairo's Downtown (Elshahed, 2015).

Displaying respected discipline and expressing power were crucial aspects in the of governmental quarter design mood. The main roads network emphasized grandiosity with a regular military parade on the entire width of the boulevards (Elshahed, 2016).

The design, implementation and management of Nasr City was a typical ultramodern development desert expansion project that was built on behalf of the community as just receivers of state-sanctioned modernism. This was intended to be a modern city which reflects the headway of the new socio-political regime.

Nevertheless, Nasr City was regarded as a new neighbourhood rather than a new capital. Its urban development was relied on its alliance to the existing traditional city. While some governmental offices moved to Nasr City; yet, the major state power buildings as the parliament remained in Cairo business centre. In 1966, seven years after the presidential order for the foundation of Nasr City, it was still reviewed in the press as a design scheme rather than as a physical existence, as regards its construction was behind schedule. By the mid-1970's, the work was still proceeding in a continuous construction action and low habitation rates. Additionally, people were reluctant to relocate cause of its faraway spot from the downtown, besides the unavailability of effective transport means (Elshahed, 2015).

2.3 Egyptian Modern Architecture – Selected Modern Buildings

This section presents a stylistic historical review of a selected number of Modern buildings designed by various Egyptian architects during the period 1930's to 1960's. It should be noted that this chronological analytical review is followed by an analysis to the common characteristic architectural features in order to generalize the dominant principles used to appropriate Modernism Movement within the Egyptian context. One deep analytical example will be elaborated, the rest to prove the consistency of the findings.

2.3.1 Ingi Zada Building, Ghamra, Antoine Selim Nahas, 1937

Being of Lebanese native, most of Nahas' clients in Egypt were from the Syro-Lebanese circle. Halfway between the Downtown Cairo and Heliopolis, the twelve-story commercial residential building, designed by Antoine Selim Nahas, is a white slender streamlined form on a triangular corner plot plan. The building's architectural style is Art Deco that coincides with Modern architectural theme. The characteristics of the exterior minimal design are its neat order, soft corners and its round bathroom openings. The building consists of a garage and retail stores on ground level, with mezzanine floor including studio apartments followed by nine floors with a typical floor plan been composed of two apartments. The top two floors are recessed, while the penthouse includes a roof garden (Figure 6).

2.3.2 The Immobiliya Building, Downtown Cairo, Max Edrie and Gaston Rossi, 1937-1940

Cairo's first skyscraper, is located at the intersection of Qasr al-Nil and Sherif Streets. The two architects Max Edrie and Gaston Rossi won the competition over 13 other architects to design the building for its original owners, the General Real Estate Society (Immobiliya), headed by Ismail Sidqi Pasha (Gabr, 1998). The building consists of two blocks separated by a grand pedestrian walkway, a 16 floors northern block, and a southern one of 18 floors. Functionally, there is a basement garage, a ground floor for shops, offices on the mezzanine, and 10-12 residential floors, with the top three floors as penthouses and roof gardens. Even in its existing state, the mass of the Immobiliya

remains its most striking feature. It has a characteristic monolithic appearance. Edrie and Rossi designed the façades so that the perforation of the façade with windows and balconies do not diminish from the integrity or sense of the mass, a common practice in the architecture of the 40's and 50's. Perhaps it is this feature and quality and not its "monument status" that enables the edifice to conquer time, style, and fashion. Indeed, the Immobilya embodies the very quality of timelessness in architecture, a quality that ensures a certain respect and dignity despite its contextual abuse (Figure 7).

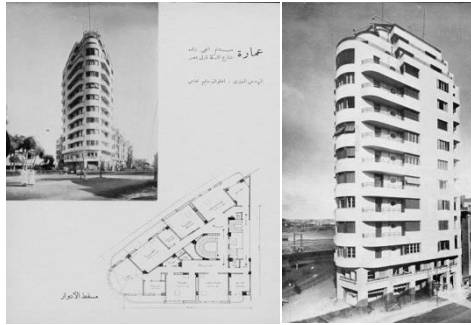


Figure (6): Ingi Zada Building, Ghamra, Antoine Selim Nahas, 1937
Source: Harvard University. (n.d.).



Figure (7): The Immobilya Building, Downtown Cairo, Max Edrie and Gaston Rossi, 1937-1940
Source: Harvard University. (n.d.); Noire, T. (n.d.).

2.3.3 Misr Insurance Building, Lazoughly Square, Mahmoud Riad, 1947

The design of Misr Insurance Company Building is directed towards placing the part reserved for offices on the side of the square, while the residential part is overlooking Nubar Street; the ground floor is commercial trade stores, with a garage in the basement (Hamad, 1963). The building has a very strong morphological form, an impact of scale and curved form with soft round corners with openings. A podium is acting as the building base, marked by a horizontal continuous balcony throughout the building perforation. Balconies and balustrades are horizontal and simplified of any ornamentation (Figure 8).

2.3.4 Akhbar al-Youm Building, *El-Galaa* Street, Sayed Karim, 1948

Akhbar al-Youm Building at Cairo is a press house for newspapers and other commercial items. The press is on the first three floors, while offices occupy the upper floors. A cylindrical shaped building tied up with horizontal architectural features and elements to emphasize the horizontality of the openings. A raised podium with vertical louvers and columns is a prototypic modern feature. The last floors openings are wider, acting as a cornice, to emphasize the end treatment for the building (Figure 9).



Figure (8): Misr Insurance Building, Lazoughly Square, Mahmoud Riad, 1947

Source: Harvard University. (n.d.).

Figure (9): Akhbar al-Youm Building, *El-Galaa* Street, Sayed Karim, 1948

Source: Tarek Waly Center Architecture and Heritage, 2018

2.3.5 Alexandria Insurance Co Building, Downtown Cairo, Sayed Karim, 1949-1951

Located at Shari‘ Qasr al-Nil, owned to Alexandria Insurance Company, it consists of a basement garage; trade stores; the first floor is reserved for offices, while the upper storey contains offices and two-storey private villas (Hamad, 1963). A bulky rounded corner with exaggerated horizontal openings. Staggering for the last four floors is a unique feature as the building sets back incrementally as a simplified treatment for the building (Figure 10).

2.3.6 Ouzonian building, Talaat Harb Street, Sayed Karim, 1950

The building is located on the previously Soliman Pasha Street, directly is flanked by the Art Deco Cinema Metro building, and a 19th century Ne-Baroque commercial residential block. Over the same period, this building is one of assorted Downtown Cairo’s buildings designed by Sayed Karim holding many common characteristic features, as the end treatment recessing, besides the visual contrast effect between wide horizontal patterns of the beneath floors, and vertical projecting lines of the last three floors. The basal nine floors have the same height of the 6th floors of the lateral neo-classical building, but from the 9th floor upwards the building setbacks gradually until it reaches a 270 m² floor area on the 7th floor. The building’s mixed use program is an ideal example of Sayed Karim’s designs. The basement includes a garage, storage and mechanical spaces, as well as a laundrette. The ground level consists of retail stores fronting the main street. The building also comprises various sized office spaces, a serviced apartments hotel complex, a rooftop terrace with a restaurant, as well as common lounge spaces used for the whole building, and at the end the owner’s villa on roof with panoramic views over Cairo City. Furthermore, The main façade is consisted of repetitive rhythm concrete *brise-soleil* louvers that functionally deflects sunlight, and separates the lower offices and hotel floors from the upper apartments and the villa floors. Nowadays, most of the block is mainly occupied by offices, and just few apartments are still inhabited (Figure 11).

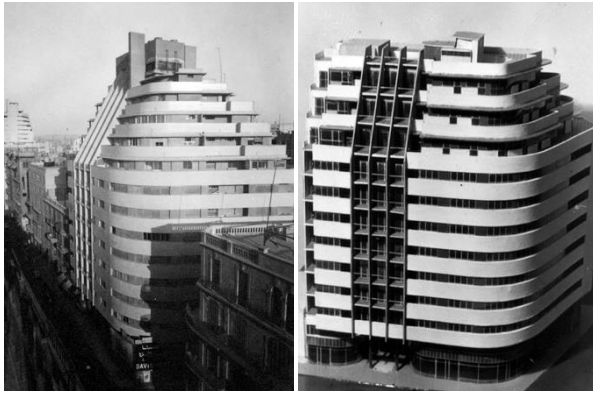


Figure (10): Alexandria Insurance Co Building, Downtown Cairo, Sayed Karim, 1949-1951
Source: Harvard University. (n.d.).



Figure (11): Ouzonian building, Talaat Harb Street, Sayed Karim, 1950
Source: Harvard University. (n.d.).

2.3.7 The Nile Hilton Hotel, Wilton Becket and Ali Nour El Din Nassar, 1953

Aesthetically located, the hotel is overlooking both the Nile Cornice and al-Tahrir Square. It is a freestanding immense building designed according to the modern principles. It is an impressive straight horizontal building with slightly bent morphological form. Repetitive balconies and opening are always horizontal. A big solid block forms the podium acting as a solid and strong base for the hotel. The end treatment, with coloured mosaics ornamentation, formed by a big solid block and a terrace is also distinct. The hotel also features luxurious interior decoration and furniture modelled after the Pharaonic style (Figure 12).

2.3.8 Al-Zamalek Tower, Sayed Karim, 1956

Located at 26 Yuliya Street at *al-Zamalek*, with 20 storey-height, rising to a height of 64 meters. The ground floor is commercial (shops and showrooms) while the upper floors consist of two-storey private villas and 28 flats high-rise effect. It is characterized by its façade's vertical openings and louvers, beside a solid corner with an Art Deco mural bas-relief is the main feature of the building (Figure 13).



Figure (12): The Nile Hilton Hotel, Wilton Becket and Ali Nour El Din Nassar, 1953
Source: JH Postcards. (n.d.).



Figure (13): Al-Zamalek Tower, Sayed Karim, 1956
Source: Harvard University. (n.d.).

2.3.9 National Research Centre, Dokki, Aly Labib Gabr, 1956

The building was designed for responding to the research needs of the United Arab Republic, particularly those relating to the natural science, chemistry and refractory materials, and is considered the biggest of its kind in the Middle East. A strong full long slim horizontal façade with repetitive horizontal openings is distinct. The Pre-Modern ornamentation is cut to the minimum. A linear cornice, cutted by few poles for flags, end the building (Fig. 14).

2.3.10 Mobil Oil Building, Garden City, Abu Bakr Khairat, 1958

Mobil Oil Building is located at Garden City, and designed for the company's head offices. The main façade is a curved form, in line with the square, and part of the offices is overlooking the Nile River. An impressive curved form with horizontal windows intersected with vertical louvers. The building is simple and clear of animates or detail; only for the block that acts as the end treatment to hold the company's emblem (Fig. 15).

Although these selected samples are designed by Egyptian architects; however, their works represent the pluralism of the international Modernism Movement; yet they took into consideration the cultural character of the context such as Downtown Cairo examples. On top of that, none of the European or American counterparts represent such a combination of the modern style architecture, nor are they at the same grade.



Figure (14): National Research Centre, Dokki, Aly Labib Gabr, 1956
Source: Tarek Waly Center Architecture and Heritage, 2014



Figure (15): Mobil Oil Building, Garden City, Abu Bakr Khairat, 1958
Source: Tarek Waly Center Architecture and Heritage, 2014

4. CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF EGYPTIAN APPROPRIATION OF MODERN ARCHITECTURE

Cairo's city specifically is a prominent valuable synthesis of the different architecture and physical planning trends of the Modern Movement during the first half of the 20th century. Such impacts were appropriated to the character and cultural condition of the context, as well as being merged with it. The Modern heritage in Egypt reflects influences, and is identified by the Modern theme application into the local context. For instance, the wide curtain walls surfaces of European counterpart are minimized to

proportional strip slot openings; many buildings have pilotis; others include *brise-soleil* to deflect sunlight; the use of recessed balconies to serve as shading device; a characteristic aspect is the use of round corners and balconies; also the flat roofs in some cases were covered with tiles to be used for social purposes. Since 1912, the most used building material was reinforced concrete, other materials were also introduced, like metal, and tile cladding for the outdoor surfaces. Moreover, there was some use of geometric decorative plasters, even though ornament became a matter of strictly detailed functional elements, such as balcony balustrades and cornices.

Consequently, from the above analysis of a selected number of Egyptian Modern buildings during the first half of the 20th century, and in order to generalize the set of concluding remarks of each building, this part tries to sum up prototypic features, and found in other similar buildings of the same period; unique features that appear in these chosen buildings; building morphology that comprises the analysis of the building form itself and its relation to the external façade (including its massing, bays, projections, recesses, ...); as well as the architectural elements (such as arcades, porch, windows, balconies, balustrades, ... etc.) of such buildings (Figure 16).

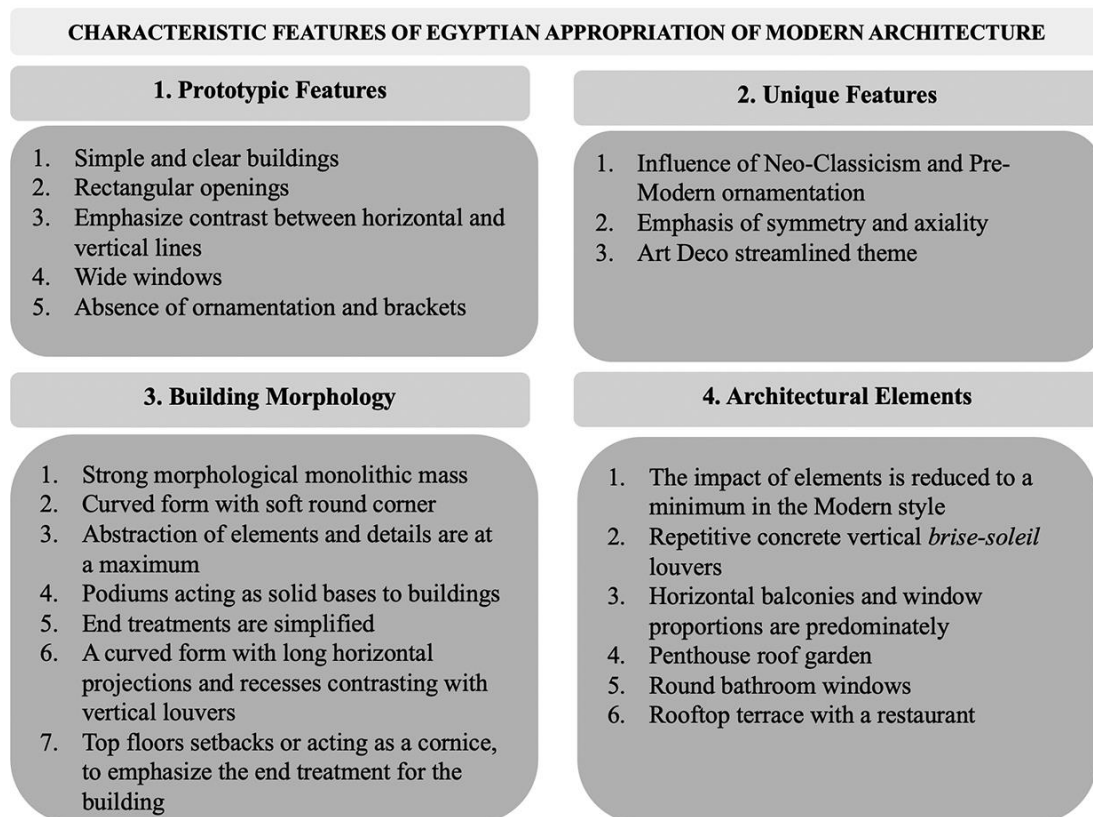


Figure (16): Prototypic and unique characteristic features of Egyptian Appropriation of Modern Architecture

Source: Author, 2023

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It would seem that Egyptian Modern architecture produced during the first half of the 20th century was basically appropriated, which creates individuality, unique character, and personal identity. In contrast with Europe, where Modernism arose of rapid

technological advancement, Egyptian Modernism was adopted as a symbolic prompting to socio-cultural and political shift. It is in the context of these two diversified situations that Egyptian Modernism developed as an integral part of the country's national revival, and its longstanding contacts with Europe; in fact, its potential subordination to Europe for nearly a century. However, a country with over five thousand years of history, and steady geographical, ethnic and social continuity could hardly receive the European imprint in any placid or straightforward manner.

Accordingly, the disparity between European and Egyptian modern design concept, development, and applications is distinct. The European modern development was firmly concerned to issues as socialism, economical, revolution and worker housing. Meanwhile, the Egyptian modern interest was paired with spacious apartments, aristocratic villas, and the clients were the rich capitalists and elites. Hence, the modern design type presented in Egypt was integrated with exceptional standards of luxury and comfort, at a time of Egyptian relative economic prosperity, while Europe was undergoing economic crisis and hardship situation.

The modernist architect in Egypt had to resolve a double bind. The first is to become an architect in the European original sense, yet risk losing a link to the national identity and its tradition, or oriented to the historical arts revival, and the possibility of remaining insignificant to the Universal style. The second dilemma is the necessity to elucidate the existence of historical value systems coexisting within the two national levels: the Islamic, and the Pharaonic. In fact, the successes of Egyptian Modernism have occurred since Egyptian architects stepped forward the duality, contradictions and paradoxes of their condition, and by mastering fundamental means of expression, improve greater individual freedom and confidence in reacting to the history. The search for a balance between loyalty to the traditional past, and the effort to self-liberate from its burden, is the key to Modern Egyptian design.

Ultimately, appropriation was undertaken for the imported architectural styles related to the Modern Movement when it was applied in its new habitat and development setting in Egypt. However, the Modern style, when introduced to the Egyptian context, was adapted and remodeled to create a new identity. Upon examining Egyptian Modern architecture and its applications in its homeland, many differences and hence appropriation(s) could be traced and pointed out on a local level. Those could be due to the difference between the Western and Egyptian setting in terms of local and available materials, construction methods and skills, climatic conditions, culture pressures and needs.

Many researchers and theoreticians declare that the architectural modernism of the 20th century was just an exported European and later American scheme that was imitated in other countries. Some Egyptians have also followed this portrayal perspective, disregarding the investigation of the Egyptian modern urban and architectural heritage experience. The main argument is that this modern aesthetic was not a genuine Egyptian physical character, and that it was just a copy. Ironically, similar debate have been argued about the 19th century urban and architectural European replicas; however, the entire world besides Egyptian public and private sectors are interested in the conservation of such "Egyptian" heritage. So, the architectural authenticity, and the integrity of the context are persuasive argument and solid reasons for world heritage list. With its ongoing stature, the context can now impose determined conservation

attempts to maintain its 20th century explicit modernity, along with the increase of its property merit, besides its maintenance along rigid regulations to guarantee the preservation of this international heritage.

In reality, the Egyptian state fully supported modern design as a physical expression of national progress during the 1950's and 60's. Architecture and urbanism became modes of glorification of state and national power, with monumental buildings and urban infrastructures symbolizing the ideology of progress and independence. This was an ambition for almost every ruler starting from Gamal Abdel Nasser. However, by the 1970's, Modernism had collapsed, the postmodernism arose, and Egyptian modern heritage was not seen as eligible for protection, and its abundance made it dull and obsolete. Unfortunately, Egypt lost much of its modern heritage during el-Sadat and Mubarak eras, that increased over this past forty years.

Although Egypt owned a considerable, locally designed and well appropriated outcome of modern heritage, what lasts is the nostalgic archival black and white images from miscellaneous private collections, and used books and magazines. The demolition of Cairo's Modern buildings started during the 1970's, increased successively in the 1990's, and brutally during the 2010's. In fact, the 20th century Egypt's modern architecture, is typically considered as pseudo-Modern or pseudo-Egyptian; while it deserves more awareness. Furthermore, it becomes hard to investigate Cairo's modernist heritage in the absence of conservation institutes and accessible archival records, especially for the now-demolished buildings, where documentary photos are their exclusive remaining evidence.

From the 1930's modernist design was considered as a nationalist reaction to the last three decades of the Beaux-Arts classical revival architectural movement introduced by European architects during the 19th century. The Arab World, particularly Egypt, Lebanon and Morocco had extensive practices in the grasp of modern design outcomes. The Egyptian Modernism was the upshot of the reconceptualization of the nationalism as reinterpreted by local architects. Regardless many architects being educated abroad, all returned to Egypt, and designed following an approach that emphasized the contextualization of a modernist design with references to various schools of international movement. Therefore, Egypt's prototype is distinctive.

Although the Modern architecture manifested in Cairo is not essentially Egyptian; however, it could be considered as a crucial part of the modern history, generated in a colonial and postcolonial development zone. And the modernity that this paper aims to record is more than the documentation of the lost buildings; it's yet the bygone modernity of the global metropolis where architecture belongs to everyone. Also to prove that Cairo's modern heritage was and still remarkable and phenomenal; yet, it needs serious investigation. Moreover, to consider the danger of the erasure of Cairo's modern aspect, as it sustains the misconception that the 20th century modernism was exclusively European.

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