Architecture in Egypt 1954–2000
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The Misr textile group, a holding created in 1927 to encourage Egyptian industry, started building large company towns during World War Two, at Mahalla al-Kubra (in two phases, 1941–47, and 1946–51, the latter on designs by Ali Labib Gabr) and Kafr al-Dawwar (near Alexandria, 1943–44, Mahmoud Riad, arch.). Considered as "outstanding examples of housing for industrial workers" and the "last word of modernity," these self-contained schemes included all modern amenities: central restaurants and hospitals, markets and coffee shops, an open-air cinema, welfare centers, sporting fields, bathhouses, and automated laundry facilities. (It is no accident that unionism grew stronger in such communities, ultimately contributing decades later to the 2011 revolution). By 1950, twenty two other enterprises had erected dwellings for their employees.

As social reformers raised their voices louder in the 1930s, slum clearance and the provision of healthy dwellings in urban and rural areas came to the forefront. The largest share of the population (75 percent in 1927) lived in the countryside in appalling conditions. A number of initiatives were developed to provide sanitization for the Egyptian village. Regulations were passed in 1933 and model villages were built by progressive landowners and model designs were disseminated through publications and industrial fairs. A Ministry of Social Affairs was established in 1939, with a department devoted to the Peasant (*fellah*) and embarked upon model village construction. It was in this context that Hassan Fathy started experimenting with what would go on to make him internationally acclaimed: mud brick architecture for a model village at Bahtim (1940), following the idea that adobe was commonly used for construction in Arizona and California, two regions with climates resembling that of Egypt. After trial and error, essays in mud for roofing, using Nubian techniques, proved successful, and Fathy started building New Gourna, a self-sufficient pilot community (1947–1953) in Upper Egypt, his most iconic achievement. In 1949, reformer Ahmed Husayn and architect Mahmoud Riad were entrusted with the task of designing a scheme to provide housing for groups with limited income (*Machru' li-tawfir al-sakan lil-tabaqat al-mahdudat al-dakhl fi misr*). A number of measures followed, including the creation in 1950 of a department of Popular Housing at the Ministry of Social Affairs with Riad at its head. In 1951 the Parliament passed a law on subsidized housing, drafted after consulting German and American experts, and adopted an ambitious Social Housing scheme that started to be implemented in 1953 with the building of four thousand units in suburban Cairo. Experiments with new materials and techniques, both resulting from wartime research in Europe, were conducted in parallel: foam concrete construction was carried out in 1951 using "Betocel," a porous cement-type material invented in 1944 by French engineer René Fays; pilot projects in standardized housing were conducted by a German specialist, architect Hans Spiegel, in 1951–1953.

These early attempts at coping with poverty and housing shortages show that many projects commonly associated with the new regime of the Free Officers that came to power in 1952 – including the monumental Mugamma' on Midan al-Tahrir – had in fact started much earlier, and were deeply rooted in the reforming and progressive ethos of Egypt's early steps towards independence.

The 1950s in Egypt are often defined by the 1952 *coup d'état*, which was preceded by mass protests and calls for revolution from the end of the 1940s. In fact, when it comes to the history of Egyptian architecture during the 20th century, a great deal of emphasis is placed on key political events as having direct impact on styles, aesthetics, and the processes of shaping the built environment. Although partly true, there are other factors that defined the architectural production of the period, namely architects' attempts to continue to gain commissions, despite immense political transformations.

A suitable starting point for discussing post-1952 architecture – if we are to accept this as a major turning point in Egyptian design practice – would be to return to 1945 and the end of World War Two. After years of uncertainty, the end of the war was a time for projects already planned before the war, and halted due to lack of resources and materials, to be resumed. For others, perhaps more imaginative and visionary architects, such as Sayed Karim, the end of the war was a time to start anew. In an article he published in 1945 in the popular magazine *al-Hilal*, Karim lamented Cairo's survival during the war and wished for its destruction. The staunch modernist sought a tabula rasa to map onto it his vision for a future Egyptian city. Karim's tabula rasa was not desired as a way to reject the past or tradition. Rather, it was the architect's way to reflect on the poor urban condition of greater Cairo, which had resulted from the lack of an overall master plan. Cairo, he wrote, using a biological metaphor, was an infected city.

The relation between modernism and tradition in Karim's discourse was not oppositional. Karim, as well as others, such as Tawfiq Abdel Gawad and Muhammad Hammad, who both worked with him closely in his office and in *al-'Imara*, Egypt's premier architectural journal (1939–59), presented Egyptian modernism as a modest evolution of accumulated traditions. Karim and his colleagues were not iconoclasts; they did not claim to have produced architecture devoid of a historical point of reference. Architects working in Egypt at the time, mostly graduates of Cairo University, saw their work in conversation with international professional developments as well as local socio-political transformations. For them, the architecture that defined the middle decades of the 20th century in Egypt was not merely derivative from European originals nor was it aesthetically referential via a fixed notion of tradition. Karim did not see the history of architecture as a progression of styles; rather, he viewed architectural development primarily through a materialist reading of history, in which available technologies and materials, along with social and economic constraints, determine building design. For Egypt's modernists, there was not a fixed design idiom, a manifesto, or what could be called a movement. There were, however, multiple aesthetic practices, the most dominant of which, during the 1950s and 1960s, was what could be categorized as the International Style.

Sayed Karim's Ouzonian Building and Zamalek Tower were designed and built on the eve of the 1952 coup/revolution. Both are monolithic concrete blocks with *brise soleil* as a prominent façade feature. The Zamalek Tower consists of duplexes topped by a penthouse with a roof garden, while the multi-use Ouzonian Building has offices, apartments, a hotel, and duplexes. Visually, these buildings belong to an already global architectural moment, when similar structures were built by local professionals in places as varied as Latin America, Africa, and Asia. In Egypt, Sayed Karim's international style was partly inspired by a global zeitgeist, but was also inspired by local politics and culture. Both the Zamalek Tower and the Ouzonian Building are located in districts dominated by the architecture of foreign architects from an earlier generation. The seemingly international style of Karim's generation of buildings was less determined by fixed stylistic maneuvers and more by the expression of national modernism without reverting to pastiche. Beyond their aesthetics however, modernist designs were still relatively elite structures for the privileged; modernist design did not necessarily signify doing away with class hierarchy.

Perhaps the best example of the emphasis on materiality for the expression of modernism is the work of Naoum Chebib, an architect and structural engineer responsible for Nasserist Cairo's most prominent landmark, the Cairo Tower. Chebib also designed Cairo's first and second residential high-rises in 1954 and 1958. His buildings were expressions of concrete versatility. Ornamental patterns cast in concrete are common features in these buildings. The Cairo Tower structure recalls the lotus flower, while the first tall residential tower, in downtown Cairo, features precast screens/*brise soleil* reminiscent of the *mashrabiyya*, a wooden screen structure found in historic Cairo.

These individual building commissions represent the minority of the built environment. However, the role of the state as patron was rapidly growing, and several building programs were underway as part of a developmental vision, paralleled in many newly independent or