

Homogenisation of Cairo's Urban Horizons

Cultural Identity, Lived Experience, and Contemporary Urban Practice

Abstract

This dissertation investigates how the growing homogenisation of the contemporary built environment of Cairo impacts its own architectural identity. Through a mix of different methods like a literature review, analytical urban drawings, critical observation, and semi structured interviews with practicing architects in Egypt, this research examines how homogenisation rises across multiple urban scales and how architects and communities deal with these pressures in practice.

The study is structured by three theoretical perspectives. First the perspective on globalisation and the Generic City through the lens' of Koolhaas, Sassen and King, followed by critical regionalism through Frampton, and finishing off with phenomenology of place with Norberg Schulz, Pallasmaa and Zumthor. Together this establishes an analytical lens that is used to assess Cairo's evolving urban state. The case studies included are the New Administrative Capital of Cairo and different scaled districts within central Cairo to compare between large scale development plans, historical urban identity, and neighbourhoods that gradually changed through everyday life. Simultaneously revealing alternative approaches rooted in adaptive reuse, context specific responsiveness, and focused strategies. The research sheds light on ways to resist homogenisation and negotiate terms that reinforce Cairo's character.

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01 Introduction

We live in an age defined by speed. Architecture today is shaped by efficiency, refinement, and visual simplicity with sleek façades, smooth surfaces, and quick construction methods that prioritise functionality and time efficiency. Buildings rise quickly, cities expand even quicker, and design begins to respond to convenience rather than continuity now more than ever. Contemporary architecture embraces clean modernism, technological advancement, and global unity. Yet in this pursuit of progress, something quieter has begun to fade.

There was a time when architecture was crafted slowly and deliberately. There was a purpose. Corners were engraved, materials were layered, and façades had the work of a lifetime. Stone was carved through generations, details told stories, and buildings were made with intricate detailing, focus and patience rather than speed and profit turnover. Inconvenience was not avoided but embraced. The thick walls to control climate, the courtyards for social interactions, and the architectural detail for cultural values. Architecture was not just built, it was embraced and taken care of.

Today, skylines all over Dubai, London, New York, and even Cairo, are beginning to look the same. Glass towers, muted palettes, and generic masterplans take over these cities, cities that are often seen as references of modernity and progress. As they become the benchmarks of finance, culture, and development, they become reference points for what contemporary architecture *should* look like, acting as a muse and model for emerging cities. This creates environments that feel generic no matter the place, this is homogenisation.

Cairo today exists between two realities. One side, shaped by centuries of history, climate responsive architecture, and social life. On the other side lies New Cairo with spaces that are defined by large scale masterplans, gated communities, and modern developments that are meant to symbolize Cairo as a city of progress, modernisation, and goals. Egypt is an emerging global destination, especially since the opening of the Grand Egyptian Museum

and tourism rates have gone up. Architecture has become a visible tool for projecting their advancements as a country to the world. The country feels the need to be seen as contemporary, efficient, and internationally up to date to prove their growth.

Cairo's new developments continue to take from modern aesthetic languages, mainly within New Cairo and the New Administrative Capital. There the aesthetics are inspired from those big cities, symbols of global ideals while it often overlooks the site specific design like climate, social behaviour, and history as it is not specific to Cairo. As architecture becomes more separated from culture questions rise, where is individuality? Where did architecture's ability to tell stories go? And what happens to identity when different cities all begin to look the same?

Historically, Cairo's architecture was shaped by climate, social life, and natural changes. In the past few decades, this has leaned toward real estate driven developments and large scale planning that prioritise quick construction, aesthetic appeal, and commercial return, often producing spaces that are disconnected from Cairo's history. The research puts homogenisation under the light as not just a phenomenon, but as a social and spatial concept that is controlled by economic pressures, government decisions, and developers' ideals.

Using Cairo as the main focus, the selected case studies being researched are the New Administrative Capital, a central district called Zamalek, and another called West el Balad and finally the informal neighbourhoods called Ashwa'iyat. The research looks at theories of globalisation, critical regionalism, and phenomenology of place. Through literature review, urban analysis, analytical drawings, and interviews with architects, it explores how homogenisation is accomplished. The dissertation dives into whether or not the future of Cairo's architectural identity is at risk and how it depends on balancing contemporary development with culture and context responsive design as well as understanding architecture's role as a story teller of history.

02 Positionality

This research is informed by my position as an Egyptian British architecture student who has lived between Cairo and London. Experiencing both worlds has made me understand questions of architectural identity, cultural unity, and globalised development. Growing up in Cairo allowed for firsthand experience of historic urban architecture in Zamalek and West el Balad as well as the Ashwa'iyat. While studying in the UK I got insight into the planning designs and contemporary architectural practices of the West. These experiences eventually influence my perception of architecture and my interest in homogenisation as well as becoming visually aware of its impact.

I am aware that this background may push me to value culture over homogenisation. To limit this personal bias, this dissertation adopts a comparative and evidence based methodology, combining architectural theories, urban analysis, analytical drawings, and semi structured interviews with practicing architects. Rather than presenting homogenisation as a negative aspect, the research approaches it as a social and contextual process controlled by economic pressure, government decisions, and practices.

By gaining information through semi structured interviews, researched case studies, and analytical drawings by urban observation, the research is balanced and subjective with critical analysis. This reflective approach allows architectural identity to be examined not as something set, but as something constantly changing by both global influence and local practice.

03 Literature Review

3.1 Architectural Homogenisation and the Generic City

Architectural homogenisation is the increase of visual and spatial similarity of cities across the world. Different demographics all driven by the same forces. Koolhaas best captures this through his work, the “Generic City,” describing urban environments that become detached from history, identity, and site specific context over time (Koolhaas). Within the Generic City, architecture prioritises efficiency, flexibility, and scale, creating landscapes that would be overtaken by glass towers, neutral palettes, and repetitive masterplans (Koolhaas).

Koolhaas argues that this comes from processes of globalisation and capital flow, allowing urban forms to be replicated across the world with little to no change (Koolhaas). As cities compete for global recognition, architecture becomes repetitive. This is due to the fact that it is no longer influenced and driven by culture but more by efficiency and market demands. This makes environments that feel as though they don’t belong anywhere, lost in the world with no identity and no need for change.

These patterns are becoming more visible in Cairo because of the increase in gated communities and large scale developments like the New Administrative Capital. Such projects often use international design languages that focus on how to make things look modern while ignoring climate, social experience, and history. Koolhaas’s framework furthermore gives a perspective for understanding how Cairo’s contemporary development adds to a wider range of global trends toward homogenisation (Koolhaas).

3.2 Globalisation, Capital, and Urban Production

Building on Koolhaas’s philosophy, Sassen, the theorist of ‘Global City’, stresses how the global economic networks shape modern cities. They identify global cities as strategic nodes in international financial systems where architecture is used to attract investment, tourists, and business (Sassen). Urban form is becoming more and more influenced by market logic, creating landmark projects and business districts to show that the city is competing to this ideal of constant renovation (Sassen).

Anthony D. King explains that architectural modernity is usually adopted from dominant global cities, to developing areas, hence creating this inconsistent power dynamic in spatial design (King). Architectural models created in Western contexts are replicated elsewhere, usually without any amending to local culture or climate. Yet again contributing to homogenisation by embracing the universal aesthetic symbolized by success and development (King).

In upcoming cities like Cairo, globalization comes around with goals like economic growth and international recognition. In order to show modern identity they opt for large scale developments especially in times of increased tourism and cultural investment (Sassen). However, this focus on attracting tourists and being recognized worldwide often leads to pushing away from the existing history that lives in the day to day designs. Over time this will replace the local identity causing Cairo to adopt another generic design (King). Furthermore, homogenisation is not just style, but an outcome of chasing capital and urban production.

3.3 Critical Regionalism and Contextual Design

Responding to the homogenising effects of global modernism, Frampton presents 'Critical Regionalism' as an architectural approach that blends both universal civilisation and local culture (Frampton). Frampton does not go against modernity, but supports it in a different light. He believes in architecture that focuses on climate, topography, materiality, and cultural context. He says the way in which to fight homogenization is through feel, social awareness, and spatial orientation. (Frampton).

This theory shows that architecture should come from site specific context instead of copying styles. Critical regionalism has a theory of how to reject generic styles. Doing this by sourcing local materials, design climate specific approaches, and really focus on cultural design, (Frampton).

The shaded streets, courtyards and thick walls in Cairo are all historical architectural examples of traditions that answer to the climate and social life there. Contemporary

designs that choose these strategies show that context and site specific design are still important. Frampton's work acts as a lens for analyzing if recent developments in Cairo respond purposefully with place or just adopt generic global design(Frampton).

3.4 Phenomenology of Place and Lived Experience

Critical regionalism pays attention to architectural form and environment, phenomenon theorists put their attention towards lived and sensory experience. Norberg Schulz says that architecture's role is to create meaningful connections between people and place to encourage human engagements. This is believed to be done through introducing the concept of 'Genius Loci', or the spirit of place (Norberg Schulz). Architecture is special by being able to create an experience inside a place (Norberg Schulz).

Similarly, Pallasmaa believes in multisensory design and that architecture must have touch, feel, memory, and atmosphere (Pallasmaa). Zumthor shares that thought when he stressed the importance of material presence and emotional impact, saying that architecture must have meaning through sense and experience (Zumthor).

Phenomenology changes the meaning of homogenisation, it is an experience of how spaces are felt, occupied, and remembered (Norberg Schulz, Pallasmaa, Zumthor). This new meaning of it lets architectural identity be seen in a different light, as a phenomenon that is constantly changing, never fixed or still.

3.5 Egyptian Perspectives on Architecture Identity

Egyptian architecture philosophies further elaborate on these global theories. Hassan Fathy speaks for climate responsive and community led architecture. While he stresses the importance of cultural knowledge, local materials, and socially embedded design, his work shows how architectural identity in Egypt historically changed (Fathy). These changes are because of needs, environment, and community life rather than to keep up with the global trends (Fathy).

A more recent architect, Walid Arafa, continues this theory by combining contemporary design with culture. This shows how modern architecture can remain in place while still meeting today's needs (Arafa). These perspectives stress on the importance that architectural identity in Egypt is another factor that is always changing. Whether it is through adaptation, reuse, or lived experiences, it is never fixed.

These local perspectives support the argument that Cairo's architectural identity has changed through community, climate response, and history. However, today's developments prioritize speed and marketability. By putting both perspectives together, this dissertation places Cairo in a broader discussion on homogenisation while analyzing its cultural and historical conditions.

04 Methodology

4.1 Research Approach and Case Study Selection

The research is a comparative urban analysis across different scales, analysing both large scale developments and small everyday neighbourhoods. Three key case studies are the New Administrative Capital, representing large scale state and developer decision driven expansion, central Cairo districts Zamalek and West El Balad, reflecting historic urban memory with bits of contemporary pressure, and Ashwa'iyat (informal neighbourhoods), which demonstrate adaptation and community driven spatial design that organically grown from the lower class.

These case studies were chosen to embody the contrasting natures of urban designs in Egypt. The planned versus nature, formal versus informal, international versus local design. Side by side, comparing and contrasting, they provide a comprehensive research which through that homogenisation can be seen as a spatial, social, and cultural concept.

4.2 Analytical Urban Drawings and Observation

Analytical urban drawings create a main factor of the research that serves as tools for significant and individual interpretation rather than representational and generic imagery. Mapping, sectional studies, and diagrammatic analysis were used to examine urban forms, shapes and structures as well as circulation patterns, material presence, and significant relationships across the selected case study areas. These drawings were curated by direct observation and photographic documentation.

The urban observation part focused on street life, transitions between public and private space, climatic response and structure detailings. Particular attention was given to the detailings and intricate work done which revealed contrasts between highly controlled developments and organically evolved neighbourhoods. Attention to how people moved and viewed the developments were also analyzed. This visual and use of space methodology allows homogenisation to be understood not only through form, but through function.

4.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi structured interviews were conducted with well known practising architects working within the Cairo context. The architects practice in different fields allowing for more depth to be covered. This method was selected to allow for the discussion to be structured while still having free flowing expansion on professional experiences and personal perspectives. Interview questions focused on perceptions of architectural homogenisation, the loss of identity (if there was), and ways to bring it back through contextual and socially focused practice.

The interviews were transcribed and analysed to identify the root issue of homogenisation. Also used to depict any underlying patterns relating to market and development, any focus on climate responsiveness architecture, adaptive reuse, public life, and informal urban architecture. These professional insights complement the urban analysis by revealing the realities shaping Cairo's built environment.

4.4 Limitations of the Study

The research is limited by the number of interviews conducted. The translation of Arabic to English is also a limitation as the depth and meaning of some of the words may not be as dramatic, intense or accurate when translated to another language. Another limitation would be the emailed interview with Leithy, a face to face conversation wasn't conducted but a simple paragraph answer to each question, no discussion to understand the thought process. While the selected case studies provide depth, they do not represent all urban conditions within Greater Cairo. Time issues also limited the extent of on site observations, meaning more could have been made. Nevertheless, analytical drawings, interviews, and literature strengthens the reliability of the findings by allowing multiple different methods of evidence to advise the analysis.

4.5 Ethics

This research was conducted in line with the University of Reading's ethical guidelines. Semi structured interviews were carried out with practicing architects who gave their informed consent, ensuring that the participants were made aware of the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time. Interview data has an optional choice to be made anonymous however the architects interviewed claimed to be happy with sharing their name. Audio recordings and written materials were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher.

ChatGPT was used as an assistance tool checking translation and content of the recorded interviews into transcripts. As well as assisting the selection of relevant architectural theories for the literature review from a premade selection list. All theoretical material and references were independently sourced.

Nothing else was involved in the study. The observational and analytical drawings made were solely focused on public environments and architecture, avoiding including any individuals in the drawings. The research aimed to represent the places and communities accurately while ensuring that it is presented in an appropriate manner.

05 Urban Analysis - Case Study

This urban analysis looks at how architectural homogenisation shows up in different urban conditions throughout Cairo. The four main studies previously mentioned, the New Administrative Capital, Zamalek, West El Balad, and Ashwa'iyat. They are a contrasting range of areas. Using analytical urban drawings, site observation, and photographic documentation, this explores spatial, material, social, and climate responsiveness. This shows modern developments' relationship with history and informal urban practices.

5.1 The New Administrative Capital

The New Administrative Capital represents the most accurate representation of state led and developer driven growth in Cairo. Its goal was to be a symbol of progress, growth and modernisation, publicized by its large scale, wide boulevards, and government areas. Analytical drawings demonstrate a spatial logic behind it through the isolated buildings and how it prioritizes vehicle movement over pedestrians, visual symmetry over social environments, and spatial organization over human engagement.

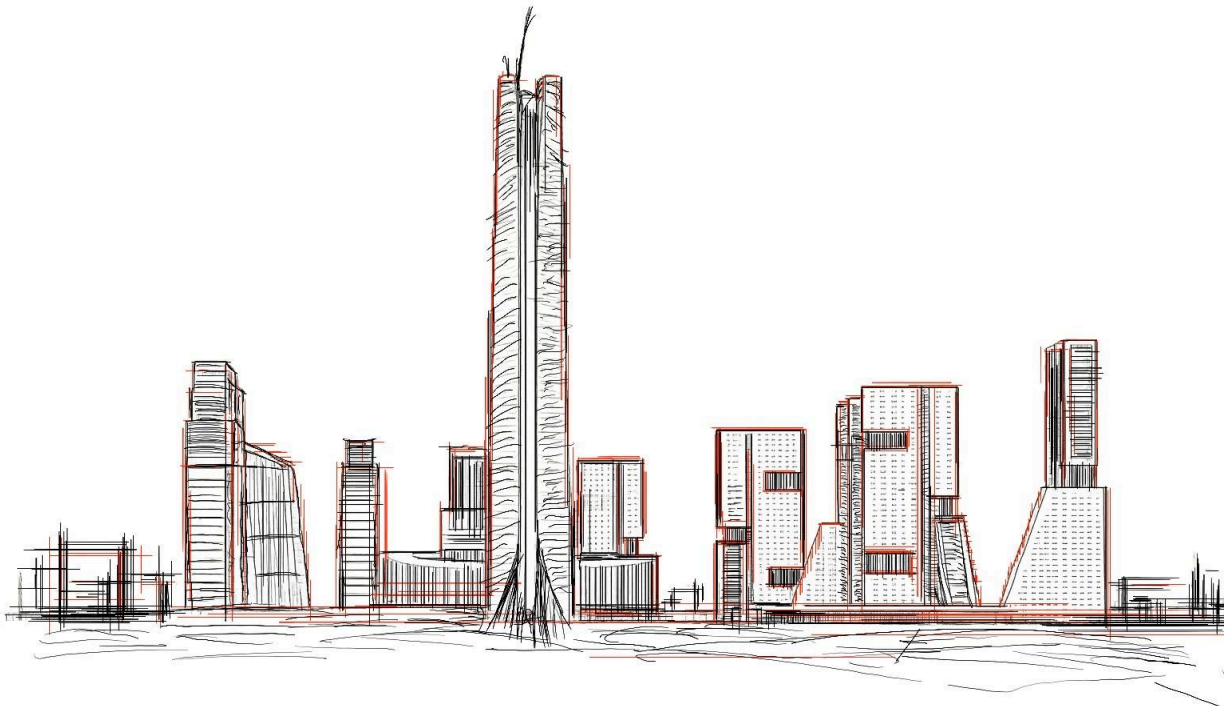


Figure 1, the Skyline of The New Administrative Capital

Most buildings within the New Capital are identical, more or less. The glass façades, neutral material schemes, and generic office and residential blocks. These parts look similar to global districts found in larger cities like London, Dubai, and New York, adding to this global urban design language. However, this adopted style isn't made for the climate condition of Cairo, relying too much on mechanical cooling, instead of adopting things like shading, courtyards, and thick walls that are usually done in Egyptian architecture.

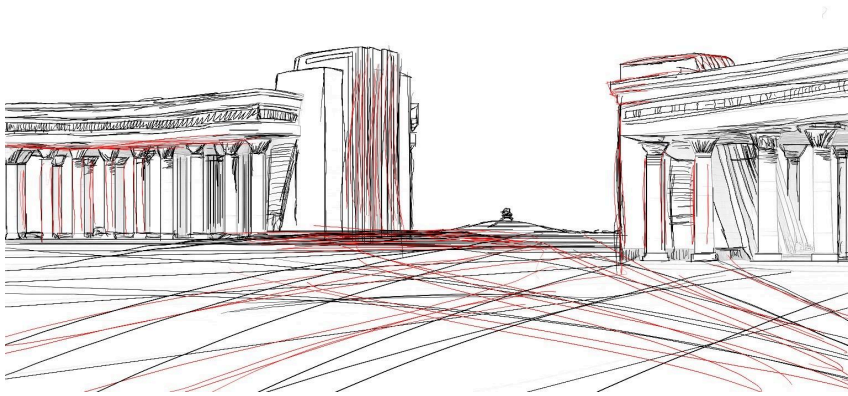


Figure 2, The Grand Entrance of the New Administrative Capital

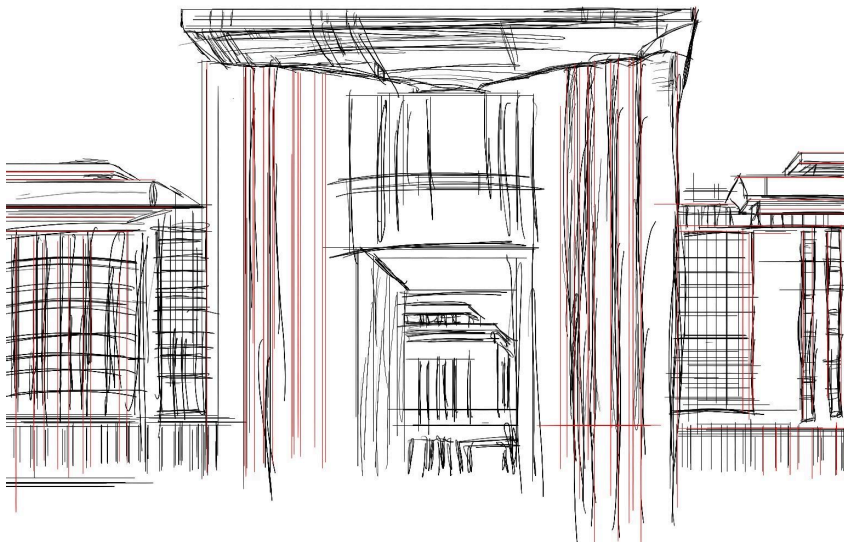


Figure 3, The Building Shape and Size Outline

Urban observation shows a lack of consideration for everyday street life. This is shown through the little to no public space, mainly there for show rather than an actual social environment. This is unlike real Cairo where street life is always busy. Similar to the architect's focus on developer led designs that prioritize image and efficiency over spatial logic and culture. The New Administrative Capital is a core example of Koolhaas's Generic City, identity there is replaced by bigger and modern designs while their architecture becomes detached from site specificity.

5.2 Zamalek and West El Balad



Figure 4, Façade of Typical Building in West el Balad

Zamalek and West El Balad are historical areas of Cairo, loved by their depth of architectural significance, the dense busy streets, mixed use areas, the detailings on the façade and characteristics that have been shaped by the everyday social interactions.

Analytical drawings show more detail into the modern structure, narrower streets, and the unspoken borders between public and private, emphasizing the core belief that architecture must be felt and lived, not just seen.



However, today both these historical areas begin to feel the pressure of homogenisation. In Zamalek, residential buildings are slowly converting into commercial, while façade renovations replace original detailing with generic finishes. West El Balad also shows a loss of architectural identity through minimal storefronts and renovations done for business and capital. These changes slowly kill the history on the street and erase the urban memory.

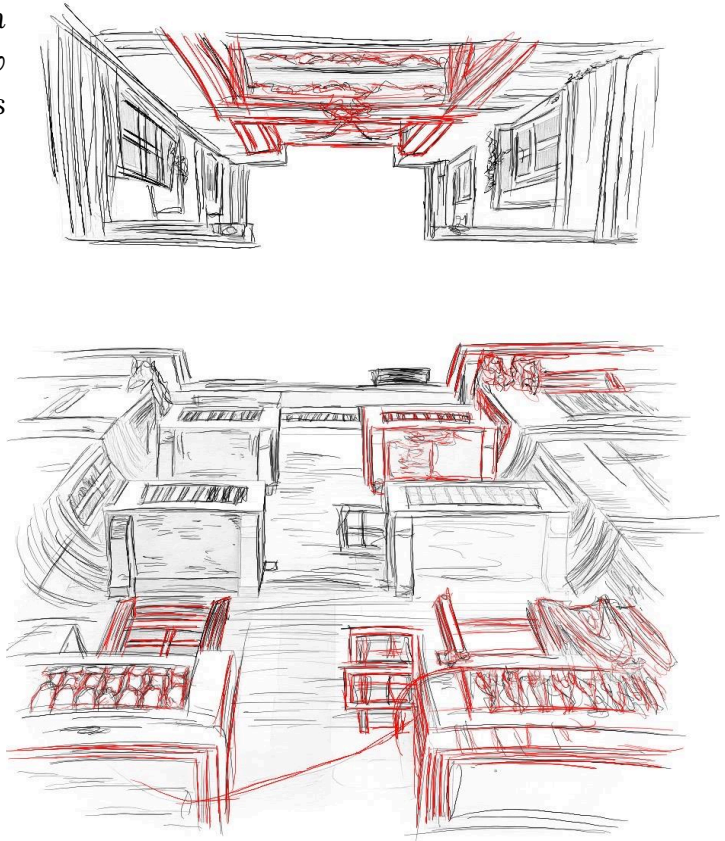
Figure 5, Emphasis on Balcony and Street Shading in West el Balad

Figure 6, Typical Exterior of Building in Zamalek



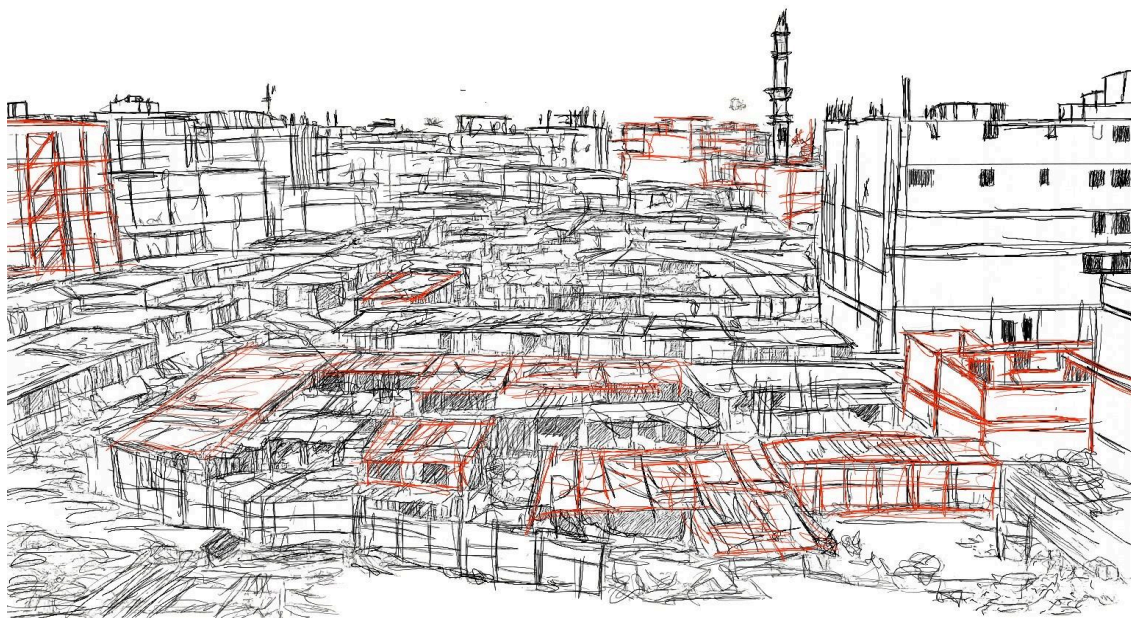
Figure 7, Balconies and Shading in Zamalek, Worm's Eye View in the Narrow Streets Between Buildings

Climate responsive architecture can still be seen through shaded sidewalks, balconies, and unspoken borders between public and private. These methods show how historic architecture focused on both the environment and social life. However modern renovations often ignore these strategies and favour sealed interiors and modern materials. As highlighted by the architects, this change reflects the market driven priorities that disregard making the architecture deep and felt in favour of quicker construction and profitability.



5.3 Ashwa'iyat and Informal Urbanism

Figure 8, Asha'iyat Landscape Overview



In contrast to formal developments, Ashwa'iyat, organically grown informal neighbourhoods, which may seem odd to analyze, but the Ashwa'iyat are a large part of Cairo's history. It reveals an alternative of urban production that solely focuses on needs, adaptation, and community. Analytical drawings show the compact building and spatial organization as well as the flexibility and accessibility to add construction overtime.

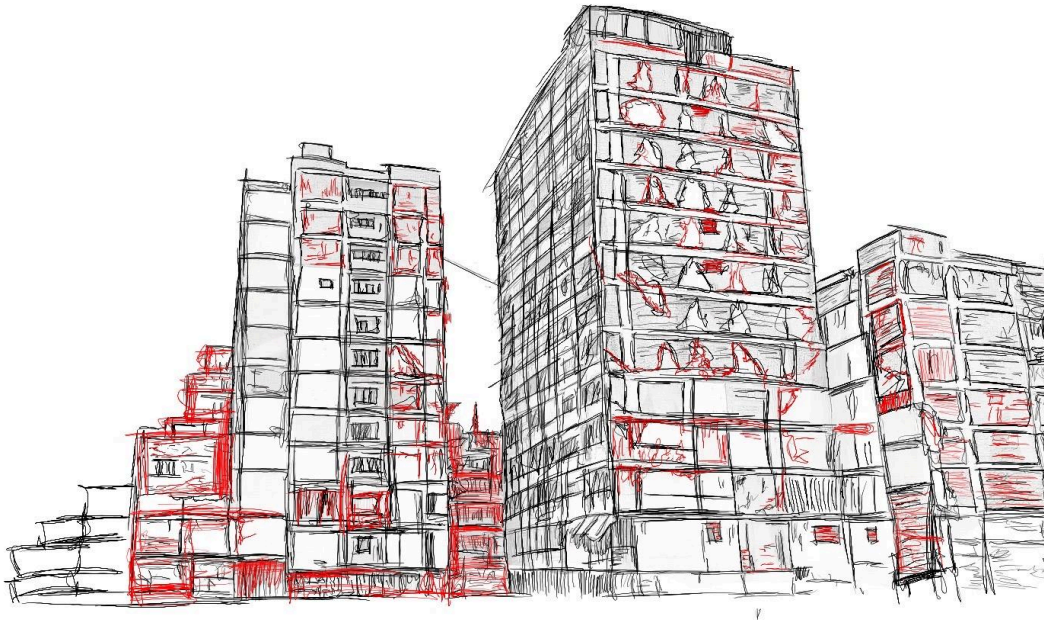


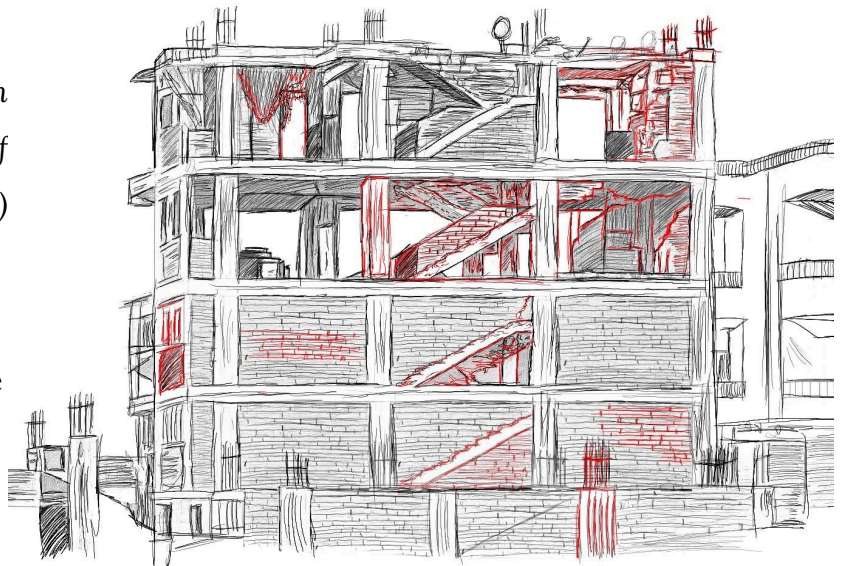
Figure 9, Street View Ashwa'iyat Façade

Unlike planned developments, Ashwa'iyat change over time, responding directly to residents' needs rather than masterplans from large developing practices. Developers always sought out Ashwa'iyat residents to take over the land to build a modern development however this would leave hundreds or thousands misplaced. Instead artists decided to make the Ashwa'iyat more memorable and create murals and façade designs on top of the existing structure (Molloy). They collectively express identity, culture and rooted memory into the urban fabric.



Figure 10, Artworks on Façade of the Ashwa'iyat seen from the Highway

Figure 11, Semi Inhabited Broken
Down Ashwaya (singular of
Ashwaiyat)



The urban observation identified the strong street life presence, spontaneous interaction, and spatial use, only emphasizing the theory of place as a lived experience even more. Ashwa'iyat are often ignored in official state planning however they represent a

strong part of Cairo and its social life as well as spatial logic that many new developments could learn from to keep identity alive. Their resistance to modernization is admirable. This shows the potential of a bottom up urban design that resists homogenisation because of the strong cultural expression that lives within them.

5.4 Summary of Findings

Across all four studies, homogenisation comes out as a complex process. It is controlled by economic ambition, developer control, and foreign architectural styles. The New Administrative Capital reflects large scale generic modernization that only prioritizes visual modernity over human experience. Zamalek and West El Balad reflect how historic neighborhoods slowly lose their character through profit driven renovation. Ashwa'iyat, however, reveals different ways of thinking spatially, socially and fluidly.

These case studies demonstrate that architectural identity in Cairo is not vanishing overtime, but is being renovated bit by bit. While formal developments adopt globalised aesthetics thinking they are improving the city, informal neighbourhoods and adaptive historic concepts continue to defend their culturally rich environment.

06 Architects Perspective on Homogenisation in Cairo

The purpose of the interviews with the architects was to understand how practicing architects perceive the rise of architectural homogenisation in their city. The purpose was also to understand the driving forces as well as the interference it has with cultural identity and experience. The following analysis will integrate the recurring statements and specific quotes from the architects and place them within debates on globalisation, urban memory, and design practice discovered from previous theories and philosophies researched.

After the interviews were recorded there were five recurring themes that all architects touched base on. First the developer led design and logical thinking for the market, second, division of architectural identity and the rise of social life, third, environmental disregard

and loss of climate responsive architecture, fourth, resistance of adaptive reuse and context responsive design, and lastly informal practices as carriers of urban identity. These themes reveal not only shared concerns but also a variety of priorities based on the architects' professional experiences and design philosophies.

6.1 Developer Led Urbanism and Logical Thinking

The most dominant theme across all interviews was the perception that market centered logic and developer control were central drivers of homogenisation in Cairo. According to Salem Mostafa, current development models prioritise visual appeal, branding, and financial efficiency over climatic responsive design, cultural continuity, and contextual design: "Architectural decisions are often driven by financial efficiency and visual appeal rather than spatial quality or cultural unity." (*Mostafa*)

Similar to this, Hisham Ghorab said that there was a priority of commercial return over protecting architecture in historic neighbourhoods. Examples are West El Balad and Zamalek, where renovations are made in favour of generic global styles: "Many streets have lost their specificity, replaced by generic storefronts and repetitive alterations aimed at fast commercial return rather than cultural continuity." (*Ghorab*)

These statements reflect broader academic observations about globalisation's influence on architectural production. This world is economically dependent, the commercial return often overrides identity embedded design (Sassen and King). The architects strongly stood on the fact that the developers (often the ones paying the architects) priorities not just aesthetics but also space orientation which leads the environments to resemble one another on both the inside and the outside across different sites and cities.

6.2 Breaking Apart Architectural Identity

Architects also stated that homogenisation in Cairo is not only superficial style and goes into the social life and real life experiences. Salem Mostafa highlighted how there is a decline of public space and street life, arguing that it is due to private compounds and

gated developments that caused a divide in the social unity: “Public space is steadily diminishing... reducing opportunities for spontaneous social interaction.”(Mostafa) This aligns with Leithy’s opinion of contemporary urbanisation, where historical presence has been replaced by broken up and disconnected developments: “Architecture has shifted toward speed, density, and surface-level modernity ... weakening the urban character that once defined Cairo.” (Leithy)

For Nehal Lehta, architectural identity is not carried in just preserved façades but is experienced through everyday life. She believed that West El Balad’s ongoing renovations should prioritise and embrace the social life and architecture rather than be like a museum and keep them as is in preservation: “Identity is not just heritage façades but the daily life they contain.” (Lehta) These inputs almost copy or mimic Norberg Schulz’s philosophy that true architecture is in the human interaction with space and place (Norberg Schulz), once again stressing that identity loss cannot be measured just by viewing the architecture but must truly experience the social terms of it.

6.3 Loss of Environmental and Climate Responsiveness

Several architects saw another aspect of homogenisation, how the detachment of contemporary architecture from environmental thinking and climate response was increasing. Salem Mostafa said the usage of sealed glass buildings disregard traditional simple solutions like shading, courtyards, and local material: “New projects rarely draw from traditional principles such as shaded circulation, passive cooling strategies, or locally rooted material use.” (Mostafa)

Leithy emphasised that Cairo’s historical architecture, that integrated climate responsive design through form and material, has been ignored by designs that prioritise visual modernity over environmental logic: “Elements such as minarets, courtyards, arcades shared climate intelligence across eras. Today, this dialogue has fractured.” (Leithy)

This opinion goes along the same focus of Frampton, architecture’s responsibility to respond to the local environment (Frampton). The neglect of climate responsive

architecture proves that this universal homogenous language often ignores site specific design.

6.4 Resisting Homogenisation through Adaptive Reuse and Context Specificity

Yes there is a widespread concern about homogenisation across the interviews however the architects also claimed that there are design strategies that resist this by focusing solely on contextualism, adaptive reuse, and human focused spatial design. Hisham Ghorab spoke on projects like *Emaret Kodak* and *Consulya*, where historic exteriors are preserved while interiors are adapted to contemporary use: “Façades, proportions, and historic details must stay... interiors can adapt to modern needs.” (Ghorab) This approach shows just how heritage structures can be renovated without completely erasing their identity. Showing that preservation and modern adaptation are not incompatible and can in fact co-exist.

Salem Mostafa also similarly described how his own practice is driven by site conditions, climatic response, and human behaviour. This just emphasises his careful attention to circulation, transitions between indoor and outdoor spaces, and spatial experience: “I try to design spaces that encourage movement, interaction, and a sense of belonging.” (Mostafa)

All these factors and strategies align with Critical Regionalism, which prioritize the use of local materials, environmental integration, and site specific design as a way to fend off homogenisation in contemporary architecture (Frampton).

6.5 Informal Practices as Carriers of Urban Identity

A unique contribution of these interviews that stood out most was the focus on informal urban practices and community led identity, the *Ashwa'iyat*. Nehal Lehta is the one architect who highlighted *Ashwa'iyat*. They are simply neighbourhoods not designed as failed attempts but as sites of organic identity where residents choose to live, central to Cairo and near the highways. Over the years the residents have been sought to be bought out by bigger developments however they choose to resist. This inspired artists collaborate

with the residents and transform the Ashwa'iyat into façades with large scale murals that reflect collective narratives: "Murals turned walls into collective art, revealing identity through colour, poetry, and context." (Lehta)

She also discussed the preservation of movements and experience beyond physical form, like the continued ritual of hospitality in *Mohamed Saghayer's* salon, which retains an architectural ethos of care, history and presence: "Keeping these core experiences alive is as important as physical preservation." (Lehta)

This perspective goes beyond just understanding architectural identity. She sheds light on how it is crucial to include everyday practices, rituals, and informal creations. Such a community driven concept is so much more impactful than any other resistance. It shows a greater resistance to homogenisation that comes from inside the community which only deepens the value of lived and experienced culture even more.

07 Discussion

This dissertation was aimed to analyze how architectural homogenisation is changing Cairo's built environment and what that means for cultural identity. Through literature reviews, urban analysis, analytical drawings, and architect interviews, homogenisation can be seen as a social and spatial concept focusing on profit, developer led decisions, and foreign aesthetics of architectural modernity.

The Urban Analysis shows homogenisation scattered in all areas around Cairo. The New Administrative Capital is the most accurate example of generic homogenisation, a large scale of repetitive isolated building prioritizing image, convenience, and what will be seen as *progress* over lived experience. It's the spatial logic that truly exposes how that the city was designed mainly for show rather than actual everyday life. This goes along with the theory of Koolhaas' 'Generic City', where architecture becomes constantly changing and disconnected from community, history, and climate.

Zamalek and West El Balad is a slower form of homogenisation, where it is fading slowly through small commercial renovations. Façade changes and repetitive designs adopted by economic return slowly weakening historical presence. Analytical drawings show how these areas keep their historic touch, however the pressures of modernisation make these qualities seem less important. Going back to the architects making observations that architectural loss often happens through market research change rather than intentional elimination.

In contrast, the Ashwa'iyat show a parallel urban setting that is based on informality, needs, and community engagement. These neighbourhoods aren't necessarily stable but still show deep meaningful social interactions and cultural presence. Architectural identity lives through them, the artwork, the constant additions in construction, and everyday routines. These settings question the common belief that informality leads to 'failure' and instead show how these cities can embrace and learn from these 'failures'.

The interviews strengthened the findings by showing the true way homogenisation works. The architects discussed how developer led designs and cost effective decisions were the key constant factors. This causes environments to focus on marketing and speed. At the same time, architects looked to methods to resist this like adaptive reuse, local material choices, and attention to experience. These methods truly show that architects can still make their independent decisions without crossing the line over into the developers requests.

The phenomenology aspect of architecture is the key for understanding what is lost through homogenisation. Beyond façades and styles, identity is born in atmosphere, rituals, and interactions. Hospitality, street life, and artistic interventions are just a few examples that highlight architectural meaning in an experience, not just a façade. When cities renovate and choose modern designs from bigger cities, they don't just risk losing the unique look and identity of their own country but also lose a deep and emotional connection. What is architecture without it?

Cairo is not just a city where global modern trends come and go, but as a city where identity is constantly changing and negotiated.

08 Conclusion

While Cairo's horizons continue to homogenise like those big cities around, the outcome may not be so tragic. Today's skylines may become tomorrow's memory, therefore creating entirely new attachments and cultural meanings. Homogenisation does change Cairo and sometimes in a repetitive manner, however through this research of the local practices and community engagement possible alternate futures for Cairo's architectural identity arose. Therefore, homogenisation is not a final outcome, but an ongoing back and forth discussion. Merely a negotiation between modernisation and memory. Cairo has the opportunity to change repetition into relevance and homogenisation into shared identity.

Homogenisation is always on the horizon, yet its impact lies on how it is transformed.

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Figure References

Figure 1 - The New Administrative Skyline drawn by Tala Hagra

Figure 2 - The Large Grandiose Entrance into The New Administrative drawn by Tala Hagra

Figure 3 - The Linear Generic Formal Building Facades of The New Administrative, drawn by Tala Hagra

Figure 4 - The Exterior Facade of a Typical Building in West el Balad, drawn by Tala Hagra

Figure 5 - Street view of Facade in West el Balad showing balconies and street shading, drawn by Tala Hagra

Figure 6 - The Exterior Facade of a Typical Building in Zamalek, drawn by Tala Hagra

Figure 7 - Worm's Eye View showing the narrow streets between building and use of shading, drawn by Tala Hagra

Figure 8 - Ashwa'iyat Landscape Overview, drawn by Tala Hagra

Figure 9 - Street View of Typical Ashwa'iyat Facade, drawn by Author

Figure 10 - Image of Mural of Ashwa'iyat seen from the Highway, captured by Seed, El. (2016) The Stunning Mural. Retrieved from:
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Figure 11 - Semi Inhabited Broken Down Ashway, drawn by Tala Hagra