ABSTRACT The critical theory of the Frankfurt School reached Egypt in 1955, when the Arabic translation of Erich Fromm’s *The Sane Society* (New York, 1955) was published in Cairo. Later, Herbert Marcuse’s *Soviet Marxism* (1958) was translated into Arabic in Beirut in 1965, and with the rise of student protests in France, Germany, and the United States, much attention was given to Marcuse; almost all his writings were translated into Arabic between 1969 and 1973. This article explores the nature of individual “receptions” of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School at Egyptian universities. To this end, it briefly introduces the early generation of the Frankfurt School, as well as the reasons of interest in its fate in Egyptian universities. Though master’s theses and doctoral dissertations do not represent a university’s orientation to critical theory, and at best represent the perspective of their individual authors, this article shows that key individual theses and dissertations testify to an early rejection of the Frankfurt School and to the late adoption of it as a critical paradigm of the transformations in Egyptian society.

**KEYWORDS** Frankfurt School, critical theory, Enlightenment, Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno

INTRODUCTION

The Frankfurt School is associated with the establishment of the Institute of Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1923, thanks to a donation provided by the Jewish businessman Hermann Weil (1868–1927). The first director of the institute was the Marxist philosopher Carl Grünberg (1861–1940). Theodor Adorno (1903–69) joined the institute in 1928; Max Horkheimer (1895–1973) joined as its director in 1930; Erich Fromm (1900–80) joined in 1930; and Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979) joined in 1932. In 1934, the institute moved to New York City, and it was affiliated with Columbia University. In 1947, Adorno and Horkheimer published

Though it is almost impossible to characterize the Frankfurt School as a coherent and unified whole, it is still possible to discuss the “conceptual foundations” and the “fundamental and distinctive features” of the early generation of the school. Critical theory is humanistic Marxism that goes beyond reductionist materialism and the classical terminologies of class struggle and the revolutionary role of the proletariat. It is still materialist in the sense that it seeks to “reclaim aspects of rationalist idealism, and especially German idealism from Kant to Hegel, in order to free materialism from its reductive tendencies” (Rush 2004, 12).

The critical theory of the Frankfurt School is not a cohesive and homogeneous whole, but a critical strategy that builds on a wide range of disciplines, including, among many others, philosophy, social theory, psychoanalysis, and aesthetics. Critical theory, as the Polish-born British sociologist Zygmunt Bauman rightly argues,

> is not an ethical system, an ideology, a philosophy of human nature, or a platform for political action. Instead it is a program of serious study of society. It does not intend to offer advice as to the substance of decisions the actors of history ought to take.

(Bauman 1991, 149–50)

Rather, critical theory is a permanent questioning of the grounds of all ethical systems, ideologies, philosophies of human nature, and platforms for political action. It does not reproduce existing reality, but strives to transform it. It can be argued that the critical theory of the Frankfurt School is defined by pointing to what it is not like. Unlike traditional theory, critical theory does not privilege positivism, natural science, the mathematical model, and “scientific Marxism.” On the contrary, it is skeptical about the dominance of Reason, the promises of industrialization and militarization, exclusivist nationalism, and Karl Marx’s belief in the proletariat as the liberating force that will defy falsified reality and the incongruities of an oppressed world (152).

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), Horkheimer and Adorno criticized the reign of the mathematical mind, instrumental reason, the turning of enlightenment into mystification and oppression, the turning of culture industries into mass deception, and the use of rationality as instrument of domination of both nature and human beings in the name of progress.
“Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity” (Horkheimer and Adorno 1947/2002, 1).

With Marcuse, the Frankfurt School became best known for its critique of both capitalist and communist societies as “totalitarian,” both systems underlining the rationalized joint rule of economic and political bureaucracies, the coordination of people through the mass media of communication, the entertainment industry, and education (Marcuse 1958, 81). In *Reason and Revolution* (1941), Marcuse argued that the eighteenth-century positivist method lost its revolutionary character and became conservative. It is true that positivism mitigated religious and metaphysical conceptions, promoted the march of free thought, and thus defended the right of man to change the social and political forms of life accorded with the nature and progress of reason, yet its appeal to the certainty of facts “amounts to giving up the real potentialities of mankind for a false and alien world” (Marcuse 1941, 113). Critical theory is thus interested in “negating” the existing order, and in uncovering the contradictions of progress in both capitalist and communist systems. In fact, the “deification of progress into an independent natural law was completed in Comte’s positive philosophy,” whereas Marx was concerned with upsetting natural laws and changing the existing order (332).

Among the major reasons of interest in the fate of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School at Egyptian universities is that the Egyptian elitist cultural discourse, at least since the times of Taha Husayn (1889–1973) at the newly established Egyptian University in the early 1920s, has been dominated by the so-called *tanwir* discourse (Enlightenment discourse). This discourse tends to the polemical in establishing the binary oppositions of progress and backwardness, science and superstition, rationality and irrationality, objectivism and subjectivism so as to legitimize the ambitions of science, the nation/state, and modern modes of governance, administration and education as opposed to traditional ways of thinking and living.

It is true that Reason was embraced by the intellectuals of Enlightenment in order to promote human emancipation and eliminate prejudice, ignorance, superstition, and dogmatism. The saddest irony, however, is that it has led, in the final analysis, to “a new bondage,” “terror,” and “monopolistic knowledge” (Bauman 1976, 70–74). The “game of emancipation” was the “game of domination,” since emancipation was not a call for diversity, cultural exchange, cultural diffusion, or pluralism but one for uniformity, homogeneity, and
comprehensive unification of the population. This orientation led to a growing atmosphere of “intolerance to difference” (Bauman 1991, 71).

The celebration of Reason has been exploited in Egypt to launch cultural wars against critiques of reason and conservative critiques of liberalism, against not only religiously oriented discourses and movements but also progressive trends that present a form of resistance to the dominant regime. This discourse goes back to Husayn’s well-known *The Future of Culture in Egypt* (1938), which stressed that Egyptians must follow the colonial West in all domains of life, including governance, economy, and administration, without any attempt to provide an alternative paradigm to the Western worldview in a post-colonial moment. At that time, the Frankfurt School had been introducing a self-critical discourse of the West itself, underlining the grave consequences of modernity, the eclipse of Reason, and the manipulation of state capitalism and authoritarianism.

**EARLY EGYPTIAN FEAR OF HERBERT MARCUSE’S CRITICAL THEORY**

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Cairo-based monthly periodical *Al Fekr Al Moasser* gave some space to the ideas of the Frankfurt School and its most prominent figure at that time, namely, Marcuse. Marcuse’s critical theory represented a challenge to this Egyptian periodical, whose editors were major proponents of positivistic philosophy, one which was harshly criticized by Marcuse. Critical theory, unlike positivism, does not accept reality as it is, but negates the existing reality and uncovers its contradictions. Several prominent Egyptian intellectuals feared Marcuse’s critical theory for different reasons as they belonged to different philosophical backgrounds. Among them were the Egyptian secularist/positivist Fouad Zakariya (1927–2010), who was then editor-in-chief of *Al Fekr Al Moasser*; and the communist/Arab nationalist Mahmoud Amin Al Alem (1922–2009). The latter wrote the first book on Marcuse, criticizing his equation of both capitalism and Soviet Marxism as equally totalitarian and oppressive systems (Al Alem 1972, 175–97).

It can be argued that individual secularist and communist intellectuals in Egypt initially rejected the ideas of Marcuse for three main reasons: first, the critique of positivistic science (lest such a critique might open the door to “irrational trends” in Egyptian/Arab society); second, equating socialism with capitalism (representing both of them as oppressive, totalitarian, and mechanistic systems that would lead to the alienation of man in the factory of production and the market of consumption; and therefore both call for
protest, revolt, and negation); and third, the Jewish background of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, particularly Marcuse’s sympathy with colonial Israel and the Jewish Question (Al Alem 1972, 175–97).

The fear of the exploitation of Marcuse’s ideas by reactionary forces in Egypt can be understood as a part of the antagonistic relations between leftists and Islamists during that period. This antagonism is based on polemical binary oppositions of science and superstition, objectivity and subjectivity, progress and backwardness. Even secularist/positivistic Egyptian intellectuals made use of the same binary oppositions to justify their rejection of Marcuse’s philosophy (Zakariya 1971, 2–13).

Moreover, leftist/communist intellectuals could not admit the crisis of the socialist model until 1990, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in a collection of articles in Qadayah Fekiyyah, a Cairo-based cultural magazine supervised by Mahmoud Amin Alem, on Marxism and the crisis/future of socialism (Al Alem 1990, 5–14). While the Frankfurt School went beyond ideological frameworks, Egyptian leftists did not dare to work without a frame through which to view Russian Egyptian ties and the Nasserist socialist project, which was dealt a very strong blow in the aftermath of the Arab defeat by Israel in 1967. During the Egyptian transition to socialism and Nasser’s alliance with Egyptian leftists (1964–69), Nasser offered leftist Egyptian intellectuals leadership positions in the state’s cultural institutions. That is why Egyptian leftists were conservative and unable to change themselves, their perception, and their worldview, while aspiring to change the whole world through a proletarian revolution. They could admit that they were an elitist and isolated group of intellectuals only after the fall of the Soviet Union. In fact, they represented the traditional Left, their ideology, and their belief in the working class as the major revolutionary force, all of which Marcuse rejected in his revision of Marxism and his analysis of the development in advanced industrial societies. The New Left advocated by Marcuse “includes neo-anarchist tendencies, and it is characterized by a deep mistrust of the old leftist parties and their ideology” (Marcuse 1967/2005, 57).

Even the rejection of Marcuse’s philosophy on the account that he sympathized with Israel and Zionism at the expense of the Arabs was ungrounded, since Marcuse’s opinions on the question of Palestine were very complex and could not be reduced to the idea of sympathy with Israel and Zionism. Marcuse rejected religious Zionism and the idea of the Chosen People, and he set several principles for the coexistence of Arabs and Jews.
as citizens of equal rights and liberties, but no Arab intellectual at that time focused on these principles (Marcuse 1977/2005, 179–82).

Clearly, there are two important variables that put Arab intellectuals in constant anxiety and confusion when dealing with Marcuse’s writings. These variables were mentioned by Fouad Zakariya in an early book on Marcuse: (1) Marcuse’s work at the University of Brandeis, which is seen as a bastion of Jewish culture in the United States; and (2) his work at the US Intelligence Research Office (Zakariya 1972, 243–53). However, these variables cannot explain Marcuse’s critiques of both Western capitalism and Soviet Marxism as totalitarian and oppressive. It is true that Brandeis University was established as a Jewish-sponsored university, but it was also established as a secular and liberal university. More importantly, Marcuse’s radical answers to the contradictions of both Western capitalism and Soviet Marxism can been seen as being inconsistent with Judaism itself, and could not be accepted even by Fromm, who is also a key founding member of the Frankfurt School.

**STATUS OF THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL AT EGYPTIAN UNIVERSITIES**

The present article limits itself to the dissertations that do not confine themselves to descriptive and analytical approaches. Rather, it underlines the dissertations in which students attempt to relate themselves to the school and its relevance to their own society.

The survey shows that thirty-five dissertations, including fifteen doctorates and twenty masters, engage in aspects of the Frankfurt School. Most of the dissertations are submitted to the departments of philosophy, sociology, and comparative literature. Of thirty-five dissertations, seven were written by non-Egyptians, one by an Iraqi student, one by a Palestinian, and five by Syrians. The survey shows that student interest in the Frankfurt School at Egyptian universities tended to focus on a single representative of the school: seven dissertations on Marcuse, five on Fromm, six on Jürgen Habermas, and three on Adorno. The interest in Adorno, in these three dissertations, does not, however, underline his major work, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), but mainly his aesthetic theory. It is also surprising that no dissertation was written on Horkheimer and his work *The Eclipse of Reason* (1947).

**EARLY REJECTION OF THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL**

Early dissertations at Egyptian universities on the Frankfurt School were very much influenced by ideological positions, which went beyond the translation
of books, essays, and dialogues to authorship of essays and books. These dissertations adopted a rationalistic position, dismissing the “irrational implications” of Marcuse, and stressing that countries in the Arab world are still backward, and it is extremely dangerous to criticize reason, and to equate capitalism and socialism as oppressive systems.

The first dissertation was completed in 1977 at Cairo University by the Iraqi student Qais Hadi under the supervision of the then rationalist/secularist intellectual Yahya Huwaidi. Hadi is now an emeritus professor at Baghdad University. He was very much influenced by the negative positions taken by Egyptian intellectuals Zakariya and Al Alem. It is not surprising then that Hadi undermined the relevance of the philosophy of Marcuse to the Arab world, stressing that Marcuse builds on different philosophies and sciences, and his work included “irrational elements” such as imagination rather than reason and objective scientific knowledge (Hadi 1977, 277).

The Arab world, according to Hadi, did not have the luxury of consumption in Western societies, and, therefore, problems of consumerism were not applicable to backward societies of the Third World, which did not enjoy the minimum satisfaction of basic needs. Hadi stressed that Third World countries were societies closer to “irrational myth,” “striving to save themselves from hunger, disease and ignorance”; as for the gratification of love and beauty, “it could be delayed.” Even if this expected universal revolution erupted, “its fruits would be concrete in the West where people would be living in the paradise of love, beauty and peace whereas the biggest part of the world would be still struggling for survival/earning their living.” In short, the Third World, in Hadi’s view, was confronting “problems of backwardness rather than problems of progress” (Hadi 1977, 250–55).

Hadi also rejected Marcuse’s sympathy with Israel, seeing such sympathy as contradicting a genuine leftist stance against imperialism. Though the dialogues cited by Hadi about Marcuse’s views on the Arab–Israeli conflict show that Marcuse enumerates the injustices committed by Israel and the need to look for a solution that takes into consideration the suffering of the Jews themselves and the reality of the existence of the state of Israel itself, the researcher condemns Marcuse’s over-sympathy with Israel, and his inconsistency in condemning Nazism and its aggression while calling one to deal pragmatically with the reality of Israel. The Jewish problem, in Hadi’s view, is not to be solved by its transfer and escape from different national settings, but by conscious social struggle in Western countries (260–64). Hadi thought that Marcuse’s inconsistency as a philosopher who turned his back
on justice means that the fame he gained so quickly in the West would wilt and disappear (267).

Another dissertation on the philosophy of Marcuse was submitted to the Department of Philosophy at Zagazig University by Hasan Hammad in 1989. It was supervised by rationalist/secularist intellectual Salah Qonsowa. Hammad rejected Marcuse’s philosophy as an attack on Marxism and objective materialism, and even on science itself, opening the door to what he conceived of as “irrational and metaphysical trends” (Hammad 1989, 213). This rejection was rendered in rhetorical and Manichean discourse:

We, as a developing country, are in a dire need of critique, one which exposes stagnation and backwardness. We believe that critique, based on reason, is one of the weapons required now to confront these dark trends which use religion as a pretext to hide its fascistic face. These irrational trends in our opinion are among the biggest inner dangers confronting contemporary Egyptian society... They constitute a call for oppression of human reason and will; they are therefore a call against civilization, against human development and progress.

(217–18)

Hammad decided to adopt a binary opposition of light and darkness, progress and backwardness, which the Frankfurt School attempted to mitigate and deconstruct in its critique of the dialectic of the Enlightenment. It can also be argued that Hammad missed the core of Marcuse’s *Reason and Revolution* (1941), which also attempted to resist social domination through dialectical thinking and a negation of the established social facts. Hammad, on the contrary, promoted his intellectual and academic career on this polemic critique of religious thought and movements, avoiding throughout his life any critique of the state monopoly of violence, culture, economy, and politics.

It is important to note that Hammad became a Professor of Philosophy at Zagazig University and later Dean of Arts. His master’s thesis on Fromm¹ and his doctoral dissertation on Marcuse are both taught at undergraduate and graduate levels. Yet, not a single thesis has been produced on the critical theory of the Frankfurt School at Zagazig University since 1989.

¹. This thesis, written in 1984, was entitled “The Problem of Alienation in the Works of Erich Fromm.” It has been published and reprinted at least twice since 2004, without any changes to the original content. It is a well-written and comprehensive summary of Fromm’s critiques of authoritarianism, Nazism, fascism, exclusivist nationalism, and contemporary consumerism. Yet, it never addressed such problems in an Egyptian context.
ADOPTION OF THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL AS A CRITICAL PARADIGM

This section focuses on the adoption of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School as a critical paradigm in four dissertations: (1) a doctoral dissertation by Zaki Abdul Majeed Zaki at Ain Shams University; (2) a master’s thesis by Nahla Ibrahim at Alexandria University; (3) a doctoral dissertation by Yasser Al-Naggar at Tanta University; and (4) a master’s thesis by Fatma Saleem at Cairo University.

Zaki’s doctoral dissertation was submitted to the Department of Sociology at Ain Shams University in 1995. It included an analysis of the major works of Horkheimer and Adorno, particularly *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947) and *Critique of Instrumental Reason* (1974), both of which were ignored in the early Arab reception of the school. According to Zaki, the ruling/dominant regime in Egypt has been engaged in a war against difference; difference is seen as a problem—more precisely, as an unnatural deviation from the natural norm conceived by the legitimate authority that sets the boundaries between rationality and irrationality, order and disorder, progress and backwardness. This war against difference was launched against all trends, whether progressive, like leftists, or conservatives, like Islamic trends. Cultural critique, in Zaki’s view, becomes one of the most important issues in the 1990s in view of state authoritarianism and control of the tools of culture and thought, and the absence of democratic accountability. The Egyptian Ministry of Culture, in Zaki’s view, does not create culture, but prevents the natural growth of culture. Political tyranny has led in the final analysis to religious extremism, culminating in the emergence of violent religious movements (Zaki 1995, 256).

Using the critiques of mass culture as presented by the Frankfurt School, Zaki argues that political leaders instrumentalize mass media and the culture industry as propaganda that maintains the status quo and preserves the ruling regime. This is applicable to modern mass media in Egypt; Egyptian peasants on the screen are not real Egyptian peasants; Egyptian women are not the Egyptian women portrayed on the screen, thus distorting the image of Egypt itself (191). Here Zaki does not hesitate to argue that it is the practices of the Arab authoritarian states since the 1950s that have given rise to several interrelated economic, social, and political phenomena, the most remarkable of which are the spread of political indifference among the oppressed masses, the spread of alienation, and the emergence of anti-state authoritarianism presented by secular trends and Islamic movements (249).

It is important to note that Zaki’s view came in the mid-1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and acknowledgement of the crisis of both the
capitalist and socialist models, as well as the rise of religious movements that constitute a resistance to authoritarian regimes, which exploited the tanwir discourse in the early 1990s in the Confrontation/Tanwir Series, published by the General Egyptian Book Organization, to demonize Islamists as terrorists and extremists who threaten the world of progress, freedom, and rationality. Zaki, unlike Hammad before him, managed to make use of the critiques of the nation/state and instrumental reason in an Egyptian context rather than establishing a polemic discourse of progress and backwardness, light, and darkness.

As for Ibrahim at Alexandria University, she used Fromm’s concept of social character and attempted in her master’s thesis to understand the transformation of Egyptian society from the 1970s to the 1990s. The study was poor in terms of theorization and a deep reading, let alone understanding, of Fromm’s key works, whether in their original language or in their available Arabic translations. Much empirical work, including interviews with Egyptians, was used to theorize the Egyptian character, and it would have been more fruitful if Ibrahim focused on Fromm’s concepts and their development.

The social transformation of Egyptian society is the main topic, and the thesis is important in its dialectic approach to the concept of social character. The use of this particular period (1970s–1990s) was meant to underline the impact of the Open Door Policy, the spread of materialistic and consumerist values in Egypt, as well as the various types of corruption on the social, political, and economic levels. “The Egyptian character” was analysed in four dimensions: religiosity, patience, indifference/passivity, and sense of humor.

Ibrahim argued that religiosity provided the Egyptian poor classes with protection from collapse and alienation, a metaphysical acceptance of fate, and a submission to the ruling authority. It also pointed young people to direct confrontation, and even to armed confrontation, with state authority. As for patience, it has led to voluntary indifference and passivity, and an indulgence in religiosity. Regarding sense of humor, it has been used as a form of passive resistance to injustice, exposing the dialectic of submission and revolution, and thus going beyond national stereotypes and non-dialectic thinking. Ibrahim stressed that passive resistance did not prevent the future eruption of revolution, underlining different cultures that could lead to revolutions:

While the Frankfurt School attributes the impossibility of a revolution to the domination of machines, dumping markets with products for all, bridging the gap between labour force and capitalists, and the domination of mass media which lead to the reification of man and his alienation in
Western societies, the nature and specificity of Egyptian society are different. The contradictions in Egypt are frightening; the more consumerism increases . . . the more class distinctions are reinforced, and the more the poor and suffering classes reject the contradictory economic and social conditions, especially the spread the values of nepotism, bribing, passive resistance, acceptance of minimum level of living. 

(Ibrahim 1996, 374)

Here Ibrahim concludes her dissertation with very strong statements, which can be seen as a self-fulfilling prophecy: consumerism, class discrimination, corruption, and the continuation of such conditions in Egypt will inevitably lead to a devastating revolution that will turn everything upside down (375).

As for Al-Naggar, he aspired to identify the most important social challenges that stand as barriers to the development of critical university education. He rejects the claim that the educational system is a neutral system. Instead, it is plagued with contradictions that serve the dominant political and economic forces within society. These forces reinforce the existing social conditions. Although Al-Naggar describes his dissertation as a descriptive study rather than as a critical one, he insists on the relevance of the Frankfurt School for a better understanding of Egyptian education:

Classes ruling over an oppressed society use various tools to maintain the status quo; they resort to ideological mobilization (through mass media) to convince the masses of this status quo; they use force (the police, army and law) if the masses attempt to revolt against them; they always use education as a tool of oppression and its sustainability.

(Al-Naggar 2011, 82)

Education is Egypt was used by the state in the early 1950s as a mobilizing tool for the new ideology and attracting the low and middle classes. From the mid-1950s to the early 1960s, education was connected to development planning as a human investment to meet economic expansion through technocratic expertise. Education was then used as a tool for the ruling regime in the form of nationalization and labor supply. Higher education became free in 1962, and this was seen as being consistent with social justice. Several challenges faced higher education in Egypt during the Open Door Policy. One example is the emigration of faculty members to Gulf countries, as at least sixty percent of highly qualified faculty members left Egypt. Another example is the phenomenon of private tutoring, which spread among the teaching faculty members who could not travel to the Gulf countries. This
phenomenon spread first among the children of wealthy business elites who benefited from the Open Door Policy, and later among lower classes, leading to the commodification of higher education (90–95).

Al-Naggar also criticized the lack of a philosophy for higher education and the lack of all types of academic freedoms: freedom of faculty members (social and economic security, election for administrative and leading positions, freedom of dialogue and discussion); student academic freedom (equal opportunities, choice of specialization, academic gathering, student union); and financial, administrative, and cultural independence of the university. Such freedoms are expected to guarantee the achievement of these tasks assigned to a university, namely, education, scientific research, and community service (98).

Comprehensive quality assurance in higher education is applicable to an environment of safety and dialogue, which are absent at Egyptian universities. “Spoon feeding,” memorization, bureaucracy, centralization of administration, and even privatization of higher education are seen as other problems on the way to quality assurance. The emergence of private universities in Egypt since the 1990s in new Egyptian cities had its negative sides. In 2010, there were twelve private universities and seventeen public universities. The financial returns of private universities attract faculty members, students are treated as consumers and customers, and education is turned into a commodity for better job opportunities. Research itself becomes a commodity: a tool for getting a degree, a job, a promotion, or an administrative position (117).

It is interesting to contrast the aspirations of the tanwir discourse in Husayn’s The Future of Culture in Egypt (1938; repr. 1993) with Al-Naggar’s findings. The aspiration of creating a unified national identity under the authority of the nation/state and independent higher education at the Egyptian University has ended up with the commodification of education and the suppression of academic freedom in the service of the dominant classes.

It is quite surprising that the only critical and engaged study on the Frankfurt School at Cairo University did not emerge from the Departments of the Humanities and Social Sciences, but from the Department of Architecture in the Faculty of Engineering. In an interview with Ali al Sawi, the supervisor of Saleem’s master’s thesis on modern alienation and architecture, he mentioned that he himself was a student of Abdelhalim Ibrahim, who famously underlined the crisis of modernity in architecture or even the failure of modern architecture. Al Sawi’s thesis was on intellectual transformation of Kedhive Ismail Cairo, whereas his doctoral dissertation was on popular
architecture, underlining the influence of Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy and his notion of the architecture of the poor, which constitutes a revision of a worldview amidst modernity producing authentic buildings. In an interview, Al Sawi claims that when he was a student, Fathy’s name was forbidden to be mentioned in the Architecture Department at Cairo University.

The master’s thesis submitted by Saleem is entitled “Alienation and Architecture: A Critical Study with an Application on the Egyptian Experiment.” Here the Frankfurt School/Critical Theory was deliberately unmentioned in the title, lest the supervisor and the student confront problems in getting a formal approval for the proposal.

At last, an Egyptian/Arab student can have access to the Arabic translation of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), which was translated directly from the German into Arabic by George Katturah (Adorno 1947/2006). The thesis also makes use of critiques of the Enlightenment as introduced in the works of the Egyptian intellectual Abdelwahab Elmessiri (1938–2008), a former leftist who was greatly influenced by the Frankfurt School and the works of Bauman, particularly *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989). The rationalist and materialist philosophies of the Enlightenment are held responsible for the ills of the twentieth century, not only for the Holocaust but also for the alienation of man in the urban space in which he/she lives, and here critical theory is seen as a salvific form of knowledge.

Reference is made to major figures who contributed to the idea of critical urban theory and the right to the city, particularly the rejection of instrumental architecture which is market oriented under the supervision of bureaucratic authorities. Among them are the French Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre, who advocated the right to the city and the radical liberation from bureaucratically administered public space; and Peter Marcuse, Marcuse’s son, who underlined that critical theory should follow three steps so as to regain the rights of individuals and deprived social classes to the city: exposing, proposing, and politicizing. It is a revival of the role of individuals in the decision-making process regarding social space that has been monopolized by the ruling class, mass media, and capitalists. With the spirit of the January 25 Egyptian Revolution in 2011, Egyptians started to chant not only “The People want to Overthrow the Regime” but also “The People Want Their Own City,” as was the case in Save Alexandria. This movement was occasioned by the creation of a moral sense rather than a legal procedure. The right to the city is a right to a worldview of the entire society, reviving the idea of *Gemeinschaft* rather than *Gesellschaft*. 
Critical theory of the Frankfurt School also intersects with the notion of critical regionalism and the architecture of resistance. It attempts to revive ancient civilizations to be a part of a modern universal civilization, rather than reviving primitive or folklore architecture. Critical regionalism cares for local specificity that respects conditions of location, climate, and culture of society, resisting capitalism and consumerism. It is not a romantic association with the past, but an active and dialectic engagement with existing reality. It is defined by several major and distinctive features: an open and critical approach to modernist situations regarding technical and technological tools; an awareness and understanding of the surroundings; an interest in tectonic facts; an emphasis on local features and climatic conditions; an approach to architecture as a complete experiment addressing all senses including the sense of touch; and a rejection of superficial imitation (Saleem 2013, 107–10).

Critical regionalism is a self-reflection of the times of high-tech architecture and the desire for local specificity that respects the circumstances of site, climate, and the culture of society. The metaphysical transcendence of the Pharaonic temple, Coptic monastery, mosque, Islamic city, Old Cairo, and al barah are missing worldviews in contemporary architecture, which no longer stands for communication among relatives, work mates, or for a social space for individuals as citizens and active members. Foreign architects monopolized the map of modern cities, influencing the cultural structure of all society.

The socialist experiment in Egypt, according to Saleem, is an implicit embrace of Western secularism and its materialistic conceptions. It was associated with military decrees to build standardized worker houses, dropping individuality and individuals, and appreciating economic efficiency as imagined by state institutions. As for the Open Door Policy, an emphasis on was placed on more production and consumption, market policies, turning everything into a commodity, and the law of supply and demand. Skyscrapers and luxurious high-rise buildings dominated the scene, demolishing old buildings and buying cheaper land, agricultural in most cases. The state has also embarked on accommodation projects away from Cairo in new cities such as 6th October and Madinat Al Sadat, which were plagued with functional and ugly buildings for the poor and luxurious villas for the rich. This lack of social urban planning led to the alienation of individuals from their environment, the absence of social engagement, and the dominant presence of iron walls, monotonous models, and uniform structures (165–72).
Saleem, however, ends her thesis with an optimistic chapter, citing examples that embraced the concept of social engagement and the right to the city in the Egyptian experiment. An emphasis is placed on social space that connects individuals in their activities, stressing the role of culture which gives life to social environment and keeps its identity, as well as the significance of rituals and building celebrations which translates the symbolic dimension in concrete reality through communal systems that connect conceptions of the environment and its material reality. These projects, despite their disadvantages, are seen as closer to urban critical theory, a return to the advocacy of the right to the city, giving the chance to residents to be stakeholders who can modify the design in an interactive atmosphere (177–80).

CONCLUSIONS

Early dissertations at Egyptian universities on the Frankfurt School were very much influenced by dominant ideological positions. These dissertations adopted a rationalistic position, dismissing the critique of reason, and the equation of capitalism and socialism as oppressive systems. They were very much influenced by the negative positions taken by Egyptian intellectuals, Zakariya and Al Alem, undermining the relevance of Marcuse’s critical theory to the Arab world. They missed the core of Marcuse’s \textit{Reason and Revolution} (1941), promoting instead polemic critique of religious thought and movements, and avoiding critique of the state monopoly of violence, culture, economy, and politics.

Later individual master’s and doctoral theses on the Frankfurt School included an analysis of the major works of Horkheimer and Adorno, particularly \textit{Dialectic of Enlightenment} (1947) and \textit{Critique of Instrumental Reason} (1974), both of which were ignored in the early Arab reception of the school. They made use of the critiques of the nation/state and instrumental reason in an Egyptian context rather than establishing a polemic discourse of progress and backwardness, light, and darkness.

The Frankfurt School inspired an Egyptian cultural critique of state authoritarianism, the control of the tools of culture and thought, and the absence of democratic accountability. The ideas of the school were called upon to underline the spread of materialistic and consumerist values in Egypt, the various types of corruption, the commodification of education, the suppression of academic freedom, and the call for local specificity that respects the conditions of time, space, and culture.
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