

## Entangled Modernity Multiple Architectural Expressions of Global Phenomena: the Late Ottoman Example

STEFAN WEBER

The artistic and architectural expressions of a society are mainly received in terms of its cultural background. In order to interpret them, it is necessary to ask about the context of cultural production. But discussing the cultural setting of artistic production is quite problematic. In many cases observers apply conceptions of culture and history that are based on exclusive and essentialist models. Individuals and societies often have constructed other cultures ex negativo as a foil to their self-image. Along these lines we generally assume that different cultures have different historical experiences and that the material cultural manifestations are monuments to otherness. Sure, the Taj Mahal, the Cathedral of Cologne, Versailles and the Süleimaniye Mosque are congenial constructions of cultures of differing geographical settings and historical experiences. But in our need for the other we lose sight of joint features and parallel developments occurring in different cultures or common experiences. Even through cross-cultural interaction and identities are the reality in most urban settings, Samuel P. Huntington's self-fulfilling prophecy has developed an enormous identification power for our day's societies. While thinking of the past, of concepts of cultures and its heritages we often apply essentialist views on self and other, similar to Huntington's reading, and we are inclined to subscribe to well confined, distinctive cultural units – a tendency which tourist industry uses successfully for marketing strategies. This article follows a revisionist trend of historiography and argues for a shared but multiple heritage of an "entangled modernity".

### Entangled Modernity and its theoretical background

Historiography has made its contribution to penetrate the above sketched mental borders. Already Fernand Braudel's view of the Mediterranean had introduced new perspectives on intra-regional interactions and gave cultural exchange and hybrid cultures new importance.<sup>1</sup> The concept of *histoire croisée* or entangled history, of multilayered, interconnected transnational developments, became important, and not only for economic historians,<sup>2</sup> and postcolonial studies allowed new views from and on peripheries.<sup>3</sup> Recent discussions of an

<sup>1</sup> Cf. as well: Hodgson, Marshall, *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam and World History*, Edited with an Introduction and Conclusion, by Edmund Burke, Cambridge (1993).

<sup>2</sup> Werner, Michael/Zimmermann, Bénédicte: "Vergleich, Transfer, Verflechtung, Der Ansatz der *Histoire croisée* und die Herausforderung des Transnationalen", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 28 (2002), pp. 607-636.

<sup>3</sup> See among others Nalbantoglu, G. B. and Wong, C. T. (eds.), *Postcolonial Space(s)*, New Haven 1997.

"Islamic Enlightenment" go even a step further to claim parallel historical processes on both sides of the Mediterranean.<sup>4</sup> Contested but not entirely rejected, R. Schulze's approach is based on phenomena that are often different in expression but close in time, motivation, and to a certain extent, character. Parallel processes can be explained by intellectual exchange or similar historical experiences, based on a configuring *zeitgeist*, a *genius saeculi*. If we neglect pure synchronism, and look for causality we encounter difficulties in the search for contact zones and we are not yet well informed about intellectual and cultural exchange in the early modern Mediterranean. How should a *zeitgeist* exist or be shared in settings of limited trans-regional interaction?

The picture becomes more complex when we account for the differential experience of modernity. Certainly the age of colonialism, the Industrial Revolution and intensifying globalisation, with the steamboat, trains and telegraph, contact zones became even denser and the flow of ideas followed in an increasing rhythm. For historians of the 19<sup>th</sup> century these contact zones are much easier to identify due to newspaper and print media which assumed an important role in the experience of the common modern time.<sup>5</sup> But even this, what now appears to be obvious, took a long time to find its way into scholarly debates. Still many historians of the West continue to see modernity in the non-west as derivative from "modernity proper". Modernity was subjected to the teleology of a linear concept of history. The experience that different pre-modern societies did not follow a single developmental template, i.e. western model of modernity, but many forms of it, had confused numerous development theorists. For many decades the notion – modernity as a result of technological modernisation – had been an article of faith and an essential part of a sense of western superiority and non-western alienation.<sup>6</sup>

Today, debates offer a number of challenges that move beyond the logic of presences and absences of markers of modernity, as industrialisation, urbanisation, secularisation, rationalisation, individualisation, etc., inherent in such thinking. They were very important phenomena but not the only and exclusive way how modernity was expressed or developed in different contexts. One line of argument is that the assumption of European uniqueness has overlooked the extra-European cultural borrowings and developments that enabled modernity or negated alternative forms and expressions. Recent economic and social developments in East Asian for example have forced modernisation traditional theorists to

<sup>4</sup> Most prominent is the discussion among German scholars. Cf. as its main protagonist: Schulze, Reinhard: "Das islamische 18. Jahrhundert, Versuch einer historiographischen Kritik", *Die Welt des Islams* XXX (1990), pp. 140-159; and "Was ist die islamische Aufklärung?", *Die Welt des Islams* 36 (1996), pp. 276-325. See also more recently Rouayeb, Khaled, "Opening the Gate of Verification: The Forgotten Arab-Islamic Florescence of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century", *LIMES* (2006), pp. 261-281.

<sup>5</sup> Anderson, Benedict R.: *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London 1983, 22 f. For some of its material consequences in Damascus see: Weber, Stefan, "Images of Imagined Worlds, Self-image and Worldview in Late Ottoman Wall Paintings". In: Harissen, J./Philipp, Th./Weber, St.: *The Empire in the City: Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire*, BTS 88, Beirut (2002) 145-171.

<sup>6</sup> For a common, unique and homogenised modernity cf. for example: Smith, David H., *Becoming modern. Individual change in six developing countries*, Cambridge/Mass. 1974.

revise previous concepts.<sup>7</sup> Postcolonial theorists have also opened the gate for a rethinking of the experience of modernity of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries outside Europe and North America. They have argued that the experience of colonialism have affected not only the peripheries but played a decisive role in shaping metropolitan modernity.<sup>8</sup> But much more than a horizontal reciprocal relationship, global modernity can be seen as a cultural fertilisation across multiple layers of interacting, opposing or negotiating dynamics amidst unequal power relations between the West and the non-West.<sup>9</sup> Even if Europe plays a dominant role, it is not necessarily normative. There are many more forces in this interdependent net of local forms of modernity.<sup>10</sup>

Many names, like multiple, local, or even alternative modernities were given for vernacular experiences or expressions of modernity, but it is important to bear in mind that they are not isolated but synchronic, or more precisely *interlinked*, developments and different manifestations of global phenomena. Some might be in opposition to hegemonic patterns, looking for alternative models, some might be vernacular or locally very specific – it is the communication and interaction, the dependence and simultaneous deviation from the other which makes this development an “entangled modernity”. Modernity is by definition global and has affected nearly every society – it is a shared heritage with multiple but not independent manifestations.<sup>11</sup> We need to distinguish between the process and expression of historical developments. The expressions might look different; ways of resistance, integration, imitation, adoption, inspiration and creation of new cultural patterns *ex novo* are quite diverse as the case may be – active forces, concepts of time and space, and motivations are often similar. To understand how far these elements have influenced and changed the pre-modern organisation of a given society, the expression of cultural change, architecture and urban design, for example, need to be analysed in their specific contexts.

## The Ottoman case

This study follows the epistemological critiques of autobiographical accounts of western modernity. At the same time, it will reconstruct empirically the dynamics of different local societies focussing on the example of architectural expressions of vernacular modernity in the late Ottoman Empire. For our purpose the Ottoman case is a stimulating example: it was

<sup>7</sup> Shmuel Eisenstadt, for example, one of the leading scholars, revised his theories. Cf.: Eisenstadt, Shmuel N.: “The Basic Characteristics of Modernisation”, in: Eisenstadt, Shmuel N., *Modernisation, protest and change*, Eaglewood Cliffs 1966, pp. 1-19, Eisenstadt, Shmuel N. (ed.), *Multiple modernities*, New Brunswick 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. among others: Chakrabarty, Dipesh, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies*, with a foreword by Homi K. Bhabha, Chicago 2002; Gaonkar, Dilip Parameshwar (ed.), *Alternative modernities*, Durham 2001. This directly influenced concepts of diverse experiences of modernity inside Europe and North America regarding urban and rural societies or different social strata.

<sup>9</sup> Mitchell, Timothy, “The Stage of Modernity,” in *The Question of Modernity* edited by Timothy Mitchell, Minneapolis/London 1999, 1-34.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Bayly, C.A., *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914. Global Connections and Comparisons*, Oxford 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Nederveen Pieterse, Jan: *Globalisation and Culture, Global Mélange*, Littlefield 2004.

one of the very few areas in the Muslim World not formally colonised, and its last significant world power. During the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and especially after the 1830s the Ottoman Empire became a playground of European trade. The powers, which deeply affected societies by their centralist policies and colonialism, military and economic expansions, and the revolution in transport and communication, mass production and consumption patterns, set the pace and directions of supra-regional realities. Counter – and corrective movements, sometimes as violent as the experiences which had occasioned them, were very much part of the process. This generated naturally different experiences in the peripheries (in periphery of the colonised world and of Europe) than those in production centres of discourses of modernity (European metropolises and to a certain extend Istanbul). Actors divided vertically by socio-economical strata or horizontally by cultural-geographic setting within the different centre-peripheral relationships adopted and developed phenomena according and fitting to their circumstances. Middle-class ladies or gentlemen in London, Istanbul or Cairo were living quite different daily lives in 1850, but the reasons and dynamics that led to change were very much interconnected or even the same. To do justice to a social agent or a society it is important to understand how modernity became or was already an ontological reality that was in process in the local contexts. The negotiation and redefinition of existing patterns of organisation as a search for ways to cope with the new dynamics happened from within. For a long time the research literature on this period assumed that the reforms in the Ottoman Empire were an entirely top-down affair, somewhat reluctantly imposed without any voluntary dimension. The initiatives from Istanbul were, in turn, assumed an unwelcome derivative from Europe. Only in the last three decades has academic opinion come to see that numerous high-ranking civil servants promoted internal renewal of the Empire. Any popular autochthonous dynamics in society towards a change of patterns of live along current supra-regional developments had previously been discounted – since modernity was still understood as a certain set of defining criteria which was absent in the Ottoman context (like industrialisation) or had simply taken another form and expression. Recently several studies on the provincial centres of the Empire have shown much more in detail how local societies negotiated, accommodated and redefined modernity in their contexts.<sup>12</sup> Some examples of urban design and architecture of late Ottoman Damascus illustrate this.

<sup>12</sup> On Beirut: Hanssen, Jens, *Fin de Siècle Beirut, The Making of an Ottoman Provincial Capital*, Oxford 2005; Bodenstein, Ralph, *Domestizierter Wandel. Wohnhaus und bürgerliche Wohnkultur in Beirut zwischen Osmanisierung, Europäisierung und sozialem Wandel, 1860-1930*, unpublished dissertation thesis TU Berlin 2007; on Aleppo: Watenpaugh, Keith David, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class*, Princeton 2006 and Weber, Stefan, *Damascus 1900: Urban Transformation, Architectural Innovation and Cultural Change in a Late Ottoman City (1808-1918)*. In: *Proceedings of the Danish Institute Damascus* (in preparation, 2008); for the German version see: *Zeugnisse kulturellen Wandels; Stadt, Architektur und Gesellschaft des spätoomanischen Damaskus im Umbruch (1808-1918)* EJOS IX (2006), No. 1, I-XI + I-1014 (<http://www2.let.uu.nl/Solis/anpt/ejos/EJOS-IX.0.htm>). An interdisciplinary project of how modernity is expressed in different fields of daily life in diverse strata of an urban society is recently started in the city of Tripoli by Juren Meister, Karla Bömer, Christian Sassmannshausen and myself, working on a micro historical level.

## The Architecture of late Ottoman Damascus

Damascus, one of the major provincial capitals of the Ottoman Empire, experienced during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century profound transformations. Along the establishment of a new administrative system a new public centre, the Marja-Square, with its administration buildings was founded in the 1860s. Nearly all the markets (suqs) were remodelled in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many public buildings were set up, including some 70 schools, 8 hospitals and sanatoriums, 2 municipal parks, 3 railway-stations, electric lights, a tramway-system and dozens of streets. New forms of public spheres came into being: not only the venues, such as parks, coffee houses and theatres, but ways of practices as well. Election campaigns, party meetings, public welfare gatherings or manifestations with political speeches had not been known before, even though some of the pertinent spaces, praxis and institutions were exclusive and, depending on their function, highly sexually or socially regulated.



Fig. 1: Marja Square, town hall, hackney cabs and streetcar, around 1910. (courtesy of: W.-D. Lemke)



Fig. 2: Public holiday at Boulevard Jamal Basha/ Nasr Street, about 1918. (courtesy of: W.-D. Lemke)

A new urban institution, the municipality, was introduced in Damascus in the 1860s, and had a great effect on the urban developments during the last five decades of Ottoman Damascus: On the basis of a new corpus of engineering and building codes, this new municipality, a council of yearly elected city residents, had control over many private construction activities and launched an extensive programme of public building, including development in infrastructure, commercial, health and education. Not everything that was planned was realised, however. Mismangement and corruption was addressed in local newspapers. The new office of engineers at the municipality conducted and overlooked public building activities, mainly new streets and street enlargements, and made sure that they were in compliance with the new building codes. Private investment in commercial or residential architecture was registered, too, and partially oversseen by the municipal engineers. The private sector played an important role during this process of reshaping an Ottoman provincial capital. Apart from rebuilding thousands of residential houses following new models of design, several huge trade buildings were constructed by local individuals. Especially privately founded "modern" schools evinced a new understanding of state, city, society and the self. But private houses were by far the biggest undertaking in the period of Ottoman reform. Household organisation and established systems of social order were being transformed (expressed as well in clothing fashions such as the *fez/tarbush*). These cannot be explained by official decrees and government-sponsored building programmes. The city was not yet subject to direct colonialism and counted very few Europeans among its residents. Rather, we have here an urban society engaging in the developments of the epoch and interpreting them in its own way within the local context – even if many of these trends did not originate in the Ottoman world.

Despite the many changes in the city no European visitor or author of research literature would describe Damascus as a modern city. Quite the opposite, Damascus was often taken as a model of a *typically Oriental city*. There were no real signs of industrialisation or of an emerging labour movement, which were typical of modernity in other places. Not a single street would remind one of Haussmann's Paris and cultural production was not as innovative as fin de siècle Vienna. But the conception of Damascus as a city that had "refused" or was forgotten by modernity – based on the absence of "markers of modernity" – is wrong and caused by a misunderstanding or ignorance of the vernacular cultural expressions of modernity. Modernity developed into other forms and most of the observers were not trained, not able or not willing to read them.

### **Two examples for vernacular expressions of a global phenomenon**

Traditional dwellings in Damascus, like many cities of the Middle East, were courtyard houses. Rooms were distributed around a central courtyard, a feature that remained stable in spite of heavy changes in interior decoration and room layout throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During the last decades of Ottoman rule, however, houses became more and more reduced in size. Smaller courtyard houses, small single apartment houses (mainly in traditional techniques as an adoption of a recent development in Istanbul) and terraced courtyard houses appeared. Terraced courtyard houses were a synthetic transformation of an old building type occasioned

by new planning models (municipality and building codes) and changing dwelling patterns. Based on a 1907 census we know that core families were not rare but did not always live in their own private houses. In most cases they formed house communities with other families. In 43.8 % of the houses there lived core families and extended core families even though these made up only 34.1 % of the recorded persons.<sup>13</sup> The numbers of core families were growing but the much faster growing amount of terraced courtyard houses, smaller courtyard houses in the old city and smaller apartment houses mainly reflect a growing wish for privacy, a typical 19<sup>th</sup> century trend. Looking for new and more private forms of dwelling the smaller apartment houses came into view as a model that was available in the region. The terraced courtyard houses, on the other hand, adapted a local building tradition to new needs.

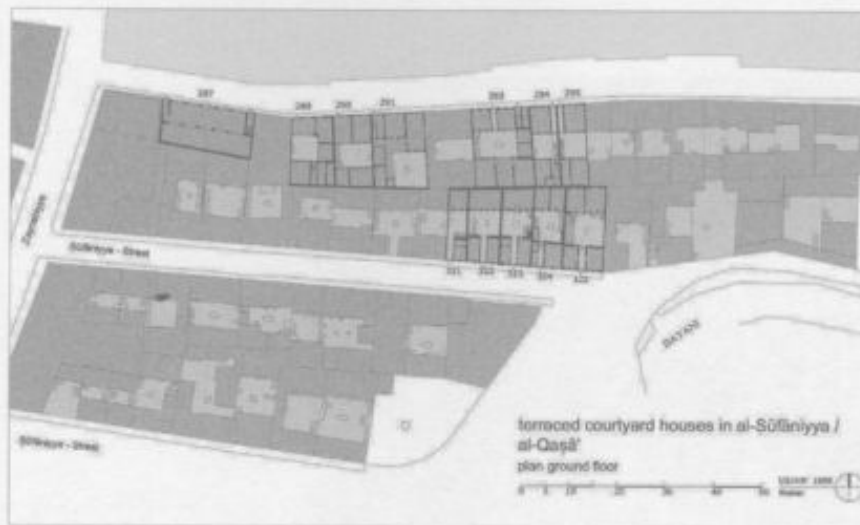


Fig. 3: Terraced courtyard houses in al-Sufaniyya (Weber 1999).

The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the appearance of bazaars which were quite different from their predecessors. With their modern designs, regular façades à la mode on two floors, large shops with glassed showcases, stylish barrel-vaulted metal roofing and new construction materials such as steel girders, they corresponded more to modern arcades than to the old narrow and dark bazaars. The Suq al-Hamidiyya, erected between 1884 and 1894 thanks to the municipality and private investment, is the best example of this new style of commercial building. In this almost straight bazaar street, nearly 450 m long, the distance between the two rows of shops (8.70 m to 9.90 m) is much wider than in a conventional *suq*. The structure of the façades is almost regular for hundreds of meters. The shops were much more spacious than before, when they were not meant to be entered, the customer being served while standing outside. Now the window displays and showcases of glass tempted the client to come in. Several shops had a second floor storeroom while others were open on two floors. The traditional, mainly plain or gabled wooden roofing was replaced by huge barrel-vaulted wooden, and later metal, constructions.

<sup>13</sup> Cf.: Okawara, Tomoki: *Size and Structure of Damascene Households in the Late Ottoman Period as Compared with Istanbul Households*. In: Doumani, Beshara (ed.), *Family History in the Middle East: Household, Property, and Gender*, New York (2003) 56 ff.

The Suq al-Hamidiyya had an enormous impact on the city and its new layout and became the model for other suqs. In this context it is a curiosity of cultural – and architectural history that arcades, namely the Passage du Caire, came to Europe with Napoleon as a reception of Middle Eastern market streets and then became in vogue all over Europe. However, in this context it is important to notice that the Suq al-Hamidiyya had always been received as a suq and an authentic part of the cityscape, both local and competitive with modern Europe. The celebrated journalist and intellectual Khalil Sarkis highlights this during the visit of the German Kaiser Wilhelm II to Damascus in 1898:

- "The suqs of Damascus are famous for their spaciousness and beauty so that even some European dignitaries said that they did not have any architecture to rival some of the suqs in Damascus".<sup>14</sup>



Fig. 4: Suq al-Hamidiyya about 1890.  
(courtesy of: W.-D. Lemke)

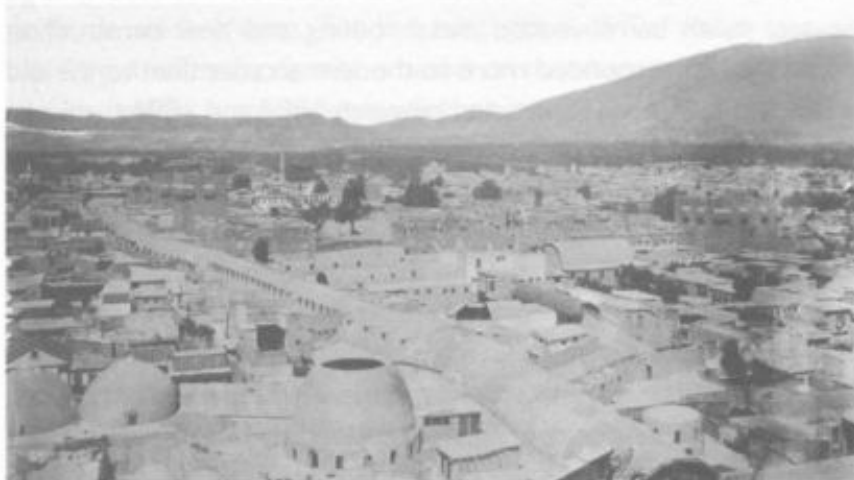


Fig. 5: Suq al-Hamidiyya about 1905.  
(courtesy of: Library of Congress)

<sup>14</sup> Sarkis, Khalil, *al-Sham qabl mi'at 'am, Rihlat al-Imbiratur Ghiliyum al-Thani, Imbiratur Almaniyya wa-Qarinatuha ila Filistin wa-Suriyya*, 'am 1316 h./1898m. First edition 1898, reprint published by Hasan al-Samahy Suwayran, Damascus 1997, p. 114, 122.

Possibly the longest shopping "arcade" in the world at the turn of the century, it is an impressive example of the modification of a classical urban institution to new planning modules and patterns of consumption.<sup>15</sup>

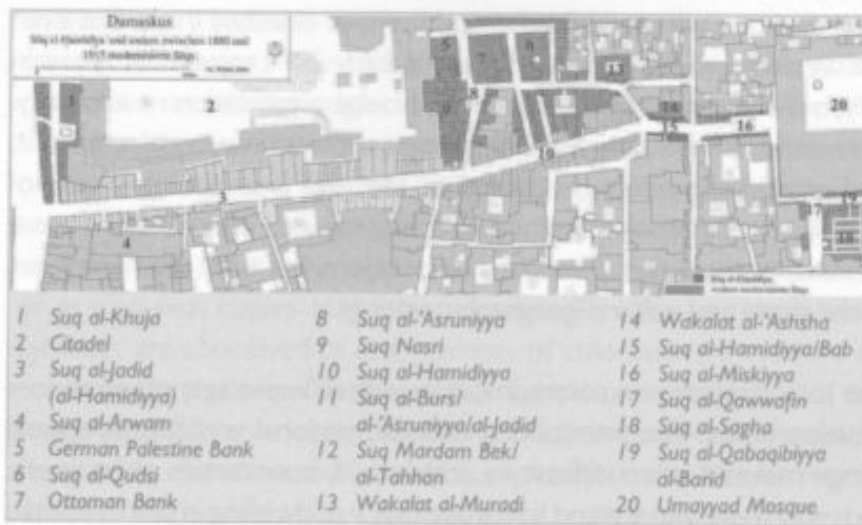


Fig. 6: Suq al-Hamidiyya and surroundings (Weber 2005).

## Conclusion

Both examples from Damascus, the new form of housing and the suqs, are the direct outcome of local experiences of modernity. They differ from residential architecture or markets in Cairo, Rome, Paris, New York or London. To understand dimensions of modernity in different geographical settings, it makes little sense to create a binding set of criteria of modernity based on a limited number of models. The degree of cultural change needs to be first understood in its proper local context. This should not result in an equalising relativism and should not obstruct, but sharpen, our view on the similarities and diversities of the experience of modernity. Analysing vernacular expressions of entangled modernity one needs to follow the strings of connection, to find the engine and to identify the agents of change – elements of a very complex and multilayer process.

In a dense net of interaction and communication, ideas originating at one point, spread fast and became common good. An interacting world was experienced in many ways, one may recall only the visual revolution of photography. Many elements became part of the intellectual horizon as soon they appear. The telegraph was not invented in Damascus, but people took and used it as a matter of course and wired their complaints to Istanbul. Thoughts being transmitted internationally in word and picture became rapidly proper local reality.

<sup>15</sup> The 450m long Suq al-Hamidiyya is noticeably longer than any arcade in Europe. The famous "Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II" in Milano (1865-1877) amounts to a total length of 301.72m (longitudinal axis 196.62m, transversal axis 105.10m) The "Passage du Caire" in Paris (1799), the largest one in the city, consists of three branches that run up to a total length of 370m. The "Passage Brady" in London (1828) had a total length of 216m. See for these arcades and others: Geist, J. F., *Passagen, ein Bautyp des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Munich (1969) 228 f., 261, 284.

Social agents in late Ottoman Syria often referred to European centres that they saw as a model and measured their own expressions of modernity by the model. Some models were stronger than others and as part of the experience of modernity people referred to hegemonic patterns – often parallel to power relations or inspired by innovative centres. They embraced them, or copied them, or adopted and changed them or rejected them. But even the conscious rejection of western models expressed it self in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Damascus in a political society (*al-jam'iyya al-muhammadiyya*), a form of societal organisation new for city. The rejection was in communication to supra-regional changes and was very much part of it. The proposed concept of entangled modernity is based on inclusive phenomena, a web of many strings: they were different, but connected and referring to each other. Actors were moving in this net, thus it is not the question *if* people were modern, but how modernity was expressed in different social strata and cultural-geographic settings.

As part of the process the local context is in communication with different sets of references and subject to larger developments. The interlocking of local, regional and supra-regional processes of cultural change makes it often difficult to understand, how certain phenomena developed in local context: why there was a trend towards privacy of dwelling in late Ottoman Damascus, similar to other places (but expressed in different architecture)? Was it caused by similar experiences of the time or by normative discussions in newspaper, stating that a modern Damascene should apply a certain set of practices? Why consumption patterns did change? Mass production and availability of discounted fabrics from Manchester does not explain the new way of shopping in Suq al-Hamidiyya. Developments in different contexts often establish elements that are typical for their time (like urbanisation, changes in the syntax of public space, rise of middle class, increasing privacy of dwelling by simultaneous upgrading of public façades etc.). Some of them are based on known forces, for other we still do not understand why they appear in quite diverse settings.

A comparison to other experiences of modernity is helpful, but to understand dynamics of a given place, it is essential to observe whether new concepts of living reformulate social and architectural spheres within a society, based on experiences of modernity in the local context, probably in connection with the relevant supra-regional developments, inspirations or hegemonic discourses. The characteristics of this process are much better observed and judged in view of the ability of societies to adopt and appropriate new meanings or new shapes adequate to their needs. It is of crucial importance that the members of a society are able to make meaning out of a changing world and to create from there *ex novo* new forms suitable for their own contexts. It is the arrangement with and of *their* modern world, being an object of it and a subject in it.<sup>16</sup> The Suq al-Hamidiyya is a very good example of how supra-regional trends were reformulated to something unique, being very much part of its place an society.

<sup>16</sup> On the experience of modernity: Berman, M., *All that is Solid Melts into Air; the Experience of Modernity*, London 1988.

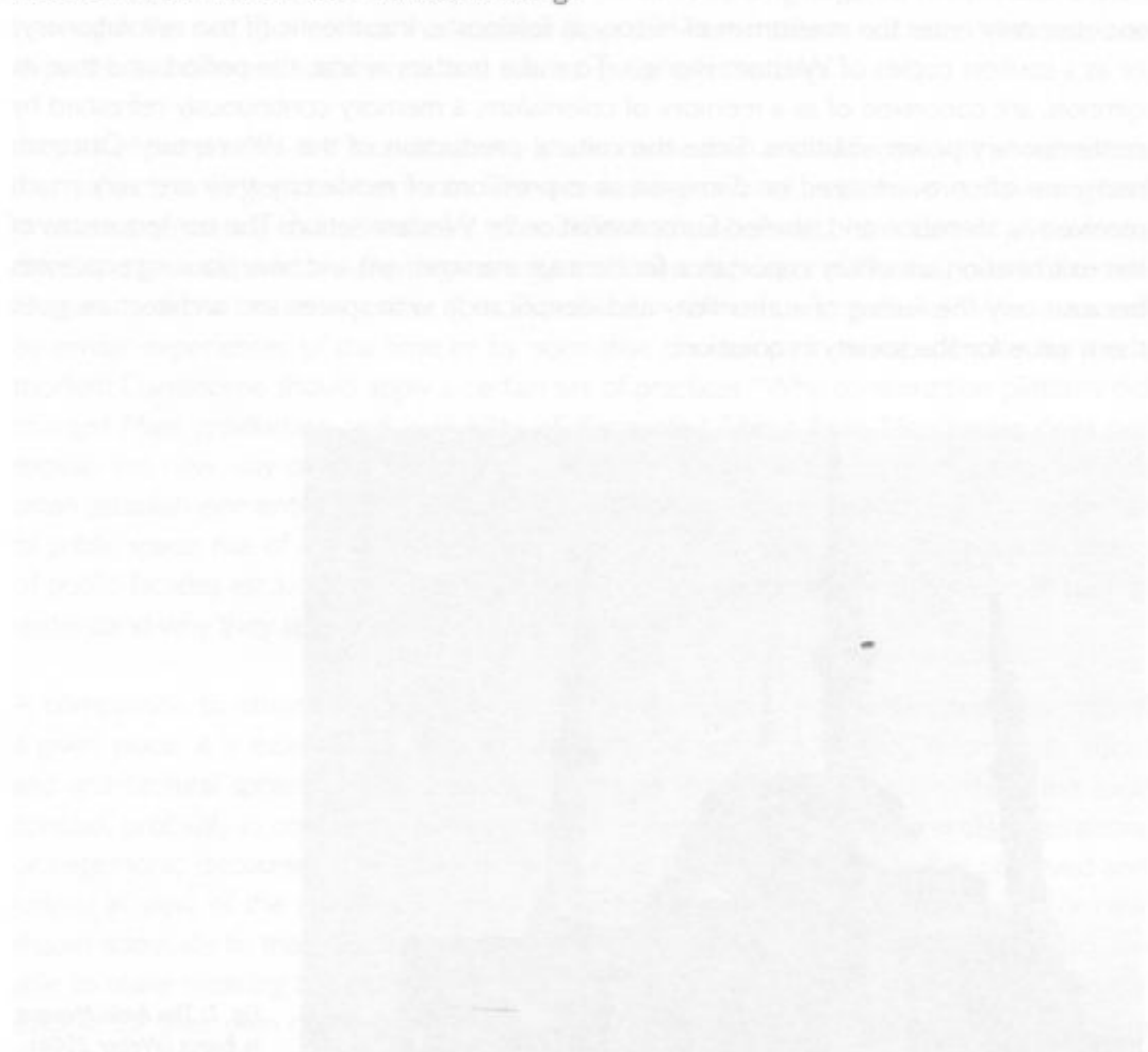
Discussing the architectural heritage of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in terms of entangled modernity stress a certain aspect of it by giving the phenomenon a new name, but is based on the scientific debates as discussed here. Thus it is surprising that many of these locally adopted or developed forms of 19<sup>th</sup> – and early 20<sup>th</sup> – century modernity are valued by contemporary societies only in the terms of the period's contribution to nation-building. The reasons of this are many and go beyond this paper, and the consequences are much more dramatic than just the neglect of heritage. Uneasiness with experiences of modernity, as it has been discussed now for several decades, and thus the little value which is given to the particular, "entangled" forms of 19<sup>th</sup> – and early 20<sup>th</sup> – century modernity is directly connected to the fact that, in a hegemonic discourse of modernity, cultural expressions of peripheral societies only enter the maelstrom of history as folkloristic, inauthentic (if too revolutionary) or as a soulless copies of Western models. To make matters worse, the period, and thus its symbols, are conceived of as a memory of colonialism, a memory continuously refreshed by contemporary power relations. Since the cultural production of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman realm are often overlooked or dismissed as expressions of modernity they are very much received as alienation and labelled Europeanisation or Westernisation. The consequences of this examination are of key importance for heritage management and new planning processes because only the feeling of authenticity and identification with spaces and architecture gives them value for the society in question.



*Fig. 7: The Amin Mosque in Beirut (Weber 2006).*

The disruption of 20<sup>th</sup> century cultural developments, the stunted feeling of self-esteem and the rejection of one's own history has led to a very complicated and disturbed relation with the past and its material heritage. Many of the responses to this have been very creative and successful, of which the archive of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture may contain the best evidence. Others tend to be less promising. In a search to redefine what can be seen as culturally authentic some paradoxically apply the orientalising concepts of the West,

accepting the Otherness that the West has ascribed to the "Orient" as their mantra.<sup>17</sup> Monumentalising often very kitschy mosques like the Amin Mosque in Beirut, the Hassan II Mosque in Casablanca or the Shaykh Zayed Mosque in Abu Dhabi are good examples of this state of affairs, reproducing or inventing out of context patterns of the classical past. Seldom are the architectural remains of the 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century received as modern heritage and the period seems to be excluded of what is defined to be authentic. The same applies to modernist architecture of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One reason why Suq al-Hamidiyya is packed with Damascenes every day, and figures as one of the main tourist attractions, is that it is received as an authentic piece of architecture: an Oriental suq and not a modern arcade. A much welcomed misunderstanding!



<sup>17</sup> Cf.: Stephen Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity*, Gainesville 2004.