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## Contemporary Architecture of Cairo (1990 – 2020): Mutational Plurality of ‘Isms’, Decolonialism, and Cosmopolitanism

### Abstract

**Purpose:** The purpose of this paper is to develop an analytical account on the contemporary architecture of Cairo with emphasis on the last three decades, from the early nineties to the present. The paper critically analyses narratives of the plurality of ‘isms’, within architectural vocabulary and discourse, that resulted from the contextual particularities that shaped it.

**Design/methodology/approach:** Three lines of inquiry are envisioned as overarching aspects of architecture: the chronological, the interventional, and the representational. These discussions are underpinned by the discourse of decolonialisation and cosmopolitanism, posited sequentially by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), and Ulrich Beck in *The Cosmopolitan Vision* (2004). The analysis expands to interrogate these two notions as prelude for reflecting on representations of selected projects: The Smart Village (2001); the Great Egyptian Museum (2002), Al-Azhar Park (2005), American University in Cairo New Campus (2008/09), and the New Administrative Capital (2018).

**Findings:** The investigation on the interventional and the representational levels via aspects of discursivity and contradictions, highlights that decolonisation and cosmopolitanism are two inseparable facets in the architectural practice in Egypt’s twenty-first century. These indivisible notions are based on idiosyncratic core to human experience, which emerged from concurrent overturning historical and secular everyday life striving to suppress ideological supremacy.

**Limitations:** Further detailed examples can be developed to offer discerning elucidations relevant to both notions of cosmopolitanism and decolonialisation.

**Originality/Value:** The paper offers novel theoretical analysis of Cairo’s most recent architecture. The reflection on the notions of decolonialisation and cosmopolitanism is a timely example of the complex cultural encounters that have shaped the Egyptian architecture, given the recent interventions by the “Modern State” that legitimised such notions.

**Keywords:** Cairo, architecture, decolonialisation, cosmopolitanism, Egypt.

**Paper type:** Research paper

### Historical Contextualisation: Roots of Pluralism

Egypt is a country with a multi-layered history because of the geographic and political multi-imperial contexts. This resulted in both continuous cultural reorganisation with ‘overturning cosmopolitan categories’ (Beck, 2006: p. 76) and decolonisation aspirations. By decolonisation, Fanon meant the liberation struggle, or process of replacing power systems and its reciprocal cultural conceptions. On the geographic level, Egypt’s location on the intersection of three continents bestowed the country with two intriguing layers: the ‘Mediterraneanism’, and the ‘Middle-Easternism’. Within Mediterraneanism attitudes are divided between refusing or accepting Huntington’s ‘clash of civilisations’ (Huntington, 1996). Yet, within Middle-Easternism positions are fluctuating between Arabism and Islamism (Salama, 2012).

On the political level, the multifaceted imperial history of Egypt resulted in its multi-layered character. The Islamic character continued to shape the city in various vocabularies as of its foundation by the Arabs in 642 throughout the Ayyubids (1171-1250), the Mamluk (1250-1517), and the Ottomans (1517-1798), until the advent of the French (1798-1801) (Moreh, 2003). The French followed by Muhammed ‘Ali’s monarchy (1805–1953), especially the reign of khedive Ismail (r. 1863-1879), was aspired to bring Paris along the Nile. Therefore, historians tend to identify three major cultural influences: “the Arab-Islamic conquest”; “the non-Arab Islamic

conquests” (AlSayyad,1991) (comprising Kurds, Turks and Ottomans); and “the European encroachments” (Vatikiotis, 1991, p.10). Europeanism and/or Mediterraneanism, however, took the lead through the monarchy’s aspiration that was manifested in most of their palaces and buildings, along with some conservative Mamluk-inspired compositions.

The Mediterranean influence, on the one hand, is palpable in the Gezira Palace’s details of its cast-iron slender portico by the German architect Carl Wilhelm von Diebitsch (Fig 1, left), inspired by the Nasrid Palaces of Alhambra. On the other hand, the Mamluk vocabulary appeared in the Awqāf [endowment] administration building (1898-1912) (Volait, 2006), which was built when the administration was under complete British control. Mamluk vocabulary is materialised in the pure adoption of Mamluk style with its stalactites ornamentations, richly carved stonework, the two-tones red and white bandings (**Error! Reference source not found.**, right). As such, Mamluk revival during that period represented domestication of the oriental perceptions.



*Fig 1. Left: Gezira Palace: Cairo, 1863. (source: Archnet, by Christian A. Hedrick.). Right: Main façade of the Awqaf (source: Archnet, by Nasser Rabbat).*

This domestication of colonial perspectives was one phase of decolonization, which continued to evolve through the reorganisation of the self’s perceptions along the history. The reorganisation process, as part of the decolonisation mechanism, as Fanon suggests, results in, ‘the creation of new men’ (Fanon, 1962: p.2), or new *self*. This new self is liberated from inherited orientalism representations that continue to prevail the colonised societies, through the mechanism of globalisation, as an outside presupposed process (Beck and Sznaider, 2010: p.389), which, arguably, has not departed from colonialism representations. The liberation from colonialism’s perceptions is based on both the ‘throw away’ of ‘old imperial spectacles’ (Craggs and Wintle, 2016: p.1), and the engagement with plural categories and values. Egypt’s history of pluralism unintentionally negotiated identity while entrenching the concept of cosmopolitanism and highlighting decolonisation and liberation overtures to negate the one-way Western influence.

The cosmopolitan character of Egypt is widely acknowledged by many scholars who primarily focused on the eighteenth and nineteenth-century, such as Sami Zubaida, Maya Jasanoff, and Robert Ilbert. In the twentieth century, few studies focused on the architectural cosmopolitanism in Egypt, such as Singerman and Amer’s *Cairo Cosmopolitan* (2011). They discussed Cairo’s cosmopolitanism as a result of the juxtapositions of economic privatization, without delving into the representational level of discourse. Additionally, Volait’s study of global architecture between (1914-2014), although did not discuss cosmopolitanism per se, encapsulated the city’s various encounters with other cultures (2014). Cosmopolitanism in general, as has argued, is ‘the development of ways of living and thinking, styles of life which are deracinated from communities and cultures of origin’ and discursively developed into a culturally new life (Zubaida, 1999: p.15). This development includes appropriating values through either acceptance or renunciation. Similarly, decolonisation is ‘a nuanced process,’ that combines both the denial of the ‘retained imperial characteristics’ and the engagement with the ‘ambivalent agendas.’ (Craggs and Wintle, 201: p.2) These diverse ideas align with Fanon’s decolonisation in *The Wretched of*

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3 *the Earth*, which went beyond the obsession with Europe's affectations. In this way, the  
4 decolonised refutes any fixed universal category or culture.  
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6 This liberation from fixed terrains was further strengthened by the rise of international  
7 architecture. Between the two World Wars, architects started experimenting with concepts  
8 of international architecture. This period coincided with the rise of technocratic industrial  
9 bourgeoisie strata whose tastes and needs aligned with the modern style (Goldschmidt, et al.  
10 2005). In Egypt, this was materialised in the architectural discourse of *al-Imarah* [*The*  
11 *Architecture*] (Volait, 1987), and how distinctly it propagated modernity as an apparatus of  
12 problem solving 'through a structure of attitude and reference that controls inclusions and  
13 exclusions' (El-Ashmouni, 2013). At this period, the decolonisation strive was through  
14 reconceptualising and altering modernity's norms (Appadurai, 1996); by distinguishing between  
15 'what is necessary/unavoidable and what is optional/avoidable within the project of modernity  
16 (Gaonkar, 2001: p.9).  
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18  
19 The Egyptian architects' conceptualisation of modernity varied between Islamic and pharaonic  
20 revivalism, and modernist re-articulation of Art Deco vocabulary. Revivalism vocabulary (**Error!**  
21 **Reference source not found.**, left) was mastered in public buildings by the first generation of  
22 Egyptian architects, although Western educated, such as Mustafa Fahmy (1886-1972), an Ecole  
23 des Beaux Arts' graduate (1912),<sup>1</sup> and 'Ali Labib Gabr (1898-1966), a Liverpool graduate (1924).  
24 They also represented modernist vocabulary in private buildings such as Waqf Raafat Bey Block  
25 and villa Om Kalthoum by Gabr (Haikal, 1973). Foreign architects also played a major role in  
26 reconceptualising the modernist vocabulary in the Egyptian context for affluent clients, such as the  
27 French architect Max Edri, in the first skyscraper in Egypt; the Immobilia in 1940 (**Error!**  
28 **Reference source not found.**, right) (Volait, 2001).  
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48 **Fig 2. Left:** *The Society of Egyptian Engineers* (source: by author); **Right:** *The Immobilia*  
49 *Building* (source: URL 1, 2012: by Tulipe Noire).  
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51 Moreover, the end of the two World Wars in 1945, motivated a step further in the decolonisation  
52 process. On the global level, the French demographer Alfred Sauvy, bounded the newly  
53 independent nations within a monolithic identity of the 'Third World'. Imposed from the coloniser,  
54 this monolithic identity agitated the need for the reorganisation of the newly 'imagined  
55 communities'. Departing from this monolithic perspective and the colonizer's impositions,  
56 intercultural affairs and cosmopolitanism was urged. Russian connections were established in  
57 1949, and hence, inspired buildings such as the Mugamma emerged. Also, American investors  
58 permeated the scene through the Hilton Hotel (1959). These alliances manifest both Beck's  
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overturning categories of cosmopolitanism and Fanon's affirmation that during the decolonisation process the intercultural affair becomes the quantum of political and cultural liberation.

Notably, the impact of the British and French never ceased as the educational missions were directed to Liverpool and the Beaux-Arts in Paris. The influence of the American school started in the late 1940s with architects like Salah Zeytun who graduated from IIT, Illinois in 1947. Within Egypt, the flow of ideas and pluralism has been emulated, and subsequently materialised in juxtaposed representations of: tradition/modernity or Western/Islamic. This juxtaposition, in turn, challenges the two oppositional and discursive forces of influence and resistance—not the simple inside/outside dipole that Frampton articulates (1985)—that are immediately discernible within the discourse.

Here, the 'techno-economic power' of the state was materialised in its aptitude to 'rearrange the natural and social environment' (Mitchell, 2002: p.22). Moreover, independence forges creative socio-cultural re-conceptions (Said, 1993: p. 218), such as socialism which was materialised in the design of the Socialist Union building (1959), as an emblem of Nasser's era (AlSayyad, 2011: p.231), Misr Insurance Building (1950), and the Arab League building (1955) by Mahmoud Riad (Fig 3). This socialist policy was also evident in the governmental economic and social housing projects. During post war, various voices vied for dominance fulfilling individual aspirations through nationalistic, ideological, development programs (Citino, 2006) which were further articulated in the following decades.



*Fig 3. The building of the Arab League, (source: URL 2, 1955: Riad Architecture).*

## Unpacking Cosmopolitanism and Decolonialism

The complex geo-political context that characterised the architectural scene was further accentuated during twentieth and throughout the twentieth-first centuries. By the 1990s, globalisation studies reconceptualised the postmodern context, which highlighted the emergence of cosmopolitanism framework. Moreover, by the end of the Cold War, Francis Fukuyama's famous claim of the 'end of history', announced the arrival of post-ideological struggles and the victory of Western democracy. This claim while manifested the history of decolonialisation, it represented an impetus towards a new phase of decolonialism: 'the reclamation of culture' (Fanon, 1968: p.223). Challenging values and nuancing constants of dominant ideology was encapsulated, on the global level, by the surge of deconstruction in architecture. Although deconstruction was not influential on the local level, it represents the world status quo that was characterised by the revolutionary needs that could not be achieved without inconsistent deconstruction of inherited coherence (Cornell, et al. 1992: p. 26).



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3 This revolutionary need marked the upsurge of decolonialism and interplayed the ‘overturning  
4 categories’ of cosmopolitanism through non-hierarchical pluralism. Both notions of decolonisation  
5 and cosmopolitanism reached their peak by the tumble of old dictatorial regimes in the 2011  
6 upheaval that crystallised the struggle to transcend the political and cultural impact of imperialism.  
7 Decolonisation is a ‘change...that it is willed, called for, demanded’ (Fanon, 1968: p.34). It ‘is a  
8 historical process’, that is manifested in the effort to establish new path in defining the self and its  
9 cultural relations. Therefore, decolonisation ‘never takes place unnoticed, for it influences  
10 individuals and modifies them fundamentally’ (Fanon, 1968: p.34). While ‘the colonial context is  
11 characterised by the dichotomy which it imposes upon the whole people’, the ‘decolonisation  
12 unifies’ (Fanon, 1968: p.44).

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15 This unification within the configuration of decolonisation underpins the definition of  
16 cosmopolitanism. It is through a cosmopolitan outlook that we can make sense of global,  
17 interconnected and continuously blurring realities of the modern era. Beck identifies three  
18 categories of cosmopolitanism: a) ‘normative’ or philosophical cosmopolitanism; b) the  
19 ‘cosmopolitan outlook’ or ‘analytical-empirical cosmopolitanism’; and c) ‘really existing  
20 cosmopolitanism’ or ‘the cosmopolitanisation of reality’ (Beck, 2006: p.18). The first is a generic  
21 perspective about harmonisation beyond national boundaries; the second is ‘a descriptive-  
22 perspective in the social sciences which is liberated from national categories’; the third is  
23 unintentional that results as ‘a *side effect* [original emphasis] of actions’ (Beck, 2006: p.18).  
24 The unintentional cosmopolitanism, that takes place in everyday social life, produces global  
25 discussions, that is ‘concerned with transnational conflicts’, and develops “institutionalised  
26 cosmopolitanism”. This unintentional cosmopolitanism is an ‘action rather than idea’ and a  
27 ‘practice rather than proposition’ (Pollock, 2002: p.17). This ‘cosmopolitanism of realism,’ as  
28 Beck posits, recognises difference in a *non-hierarchical* way [added emphasis]; a principle of  
29 ‘both/and’ (Beck, 2006: p.57).

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32 The ‘cosmopolitanism of realism’ is a ‘synthesis’ between ‘universalism, relativism, nationalism,  
33 and ethnicism’ (Beck, 2006: p.57), unlike postmodernism, that connotes some nationalistic  
34 references in many cases. Although both postmodernism and cosmopolitanism refute pure form,  
35 both notions are different in their time reference. While postmodernism rejects extremes of  
36 modernism, the cosmopolitanism phenomenon, in Beck’s terms, is the defining feature of reflexive  
37 modernity (Beck, 2006: p.2). Postmodernism is inspired by historical lines, while cosmopolitanism  
38 cannot be fixed by the lines inscribed by modern subjectivities. Postmodernism uses ‘the past as  
39 referent’ that is ‘not bracketed or effaced’. It is reinvigorated with new ‘life and meaning’, to  
40 communicate with its locality, while making ‘ironic commentary upon its own language’ (Kolb,  
41 1990: p. 89).

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44 The postmodernism of the seventies provided a transitional terrain for elaborating strategies for  
45 constructing identities, that was followed by more hybrid cosmopolitanism in the nineties. These  
46 strategies for constructing selfhood—singular or communal—based on innovative intersected  
47 tempo-cultural sites in the act of defining liberated cosmopolitan identities. Rejection of traditional  
48 hierarchical relations facilitates navigation between cultures and grants ‘a sense of mastery’, or  
49 decolonisation, that enables the feeling that ‘a little more of the world is somehow under control’  
50 (Hannerz, 1996: p.103). However, this navigation between cultures is unintentionally shaped by  
51 discursive influence and resistance attitudes.

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53 In essence, cosmopolitanism is a growing prominent area in the social science. Hannerz  
54 differentiated between globalisation and cosmopolitanism by highlighting that globalisation is a  
55 mere boundary crossing while cosmopolitanism is the engagement with the Other (Hannerz, 1996:  
56 p.103). Also, G. Kendall, et al. established conceptual links between otherness, mobility, and  
57 global cosmopolitan utopia from sociological and political perspectives (Kendall, et al, 2009).  
58 Similarly, Chris Hann analyses the displacements of a global world and involves moral, economic,  
59 and political transformations in third world countries (Hann, 2008).

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3 Surmounting the two-folded binary between imperial cosmopolitanism and the subaltern stance,  
4 decolonisation scholars have conceived cosmopolitanism as a decolonial project. Mignolo, for  
5 example, highlights that cosmopolitanism yields ‘diversity... in which everyone participates  
6 instead of “being participated”’ (Mignolo, 2000: p. 744). This dialogical cosmopolitanism aligns  
7 with the decolonial notion of the discourses introduced by the authors in this context. Both  
8 cosmopolitanism and decolonisation strive to bring the world together by asymmetrical  
9 juxtaposition, which was hierarchically structured in empires in the first place. Although  
10 imperialism forcibly crossed boundaries, it brought populations together, ‘with enduring effects’  
11 (Jasanoff, 2005: p.396), that one of its great ‘achievements’ was bringing ‘the world closer  
12 together’ (Said, 1994: p. xxi) Therefore, decolonisation is an ‘encounter between two congenitally  
13 antagonistic forces,’ both of them ‘owe their singularity’ to the ‘the colonial situation’ (Fanon,  
14 1962: p.2).  
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17 The notion of decolonisation and architecture was recently underscored by Craggs & Wintle who  
18 examine several case studies around the world, but do not expose to the Egyptian context. In this  
19 respect, they affirm that analysing ‘the performative capacity’ of architecture ‘unpack the  
20 relationship between decolonisation, transculturation and globalisation.’ (Craggs and Wintle, 2016:  
21 p.197) Although the cosmopolitan nature of Cairo and other cities in Egypt is acknowledged by  
22 many studies, connecting decolonisation and cosmopolitanism with architectural representations of  
23 twentieth-first century in Egypt has not been deeply studied yet.  
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## 25 **Towards, Into, and Through the 1990s: Architecture of *Isms* and** 26 **Attitudes of References**

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29 Egypt, during Sadat’s era (1970-1979), turning away from the Russian, the *infitah*, or the  
30 ‘openness,’ that opened the opportunities for private sector investors, turned Cairo into a  
31 globalised capital city. Hotels (Fig 4 **Error! Reference source not found.**), skyscrapers, shopping  
32 malls, and fast food franchises, that hold pure modernised vocabulary and owe nothing to its  
33 locale, surrounded the Nile. This ‘openness’ can be considered as another phase of the  
34 decolonisation and reorganisation of the society motivated by the aspiration for a modern  
35 American lifestyle. This phase reflects what Fanon highlighted as the: ‘unqualified assimilation to  
36 the colonial system including its beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours’ (Fanon, 1962: p. 223).  
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53 *Fig 4. Intercontinental Hotel (source: by author).*

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55 The decolonisation from the inherited oriental identity bestowed on the Middle East and the  
56 realisation of new identity was of great priority. Sadat’s influence with the American culture was  
57 manifested in his aspiration for Americanised villa housing the Egyptians as stated in his book  
58 (Sadat, 1978: p. 12). This aspiration resulted in a great change in the urban settings and the  
59 establishment of eighteen new cities in the Egyptian deserts. However, Cairo’s plural history made  
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it impossible for a singular identity to dominate the scene. By the eighties, some architects' call for a 'return' to Islamic identity operated to resist the Americanisation dream, enabling what Said termed as 'structure of attitude and reference' (Said, 1994: p. xxiii).

This structure, as Said affirms, empowers an 'authoritative centrality', that is intrinsic to any literary work (Said, 1994: p. 239). This paper affirms that this structure extends to architecture through resistance or influence, and it reached its apex during the eighties. On the global level, this coincided with the Philip Johnson's announcement of postmodernism that allowed for the historic and symbolic deployment which was an indispensable solution for the Egyptian plural context. Ideologically, postmodernism allowed for heterogeneous attitudes because of its 'sensibility of inclusion' (Canizaro, 2007: p.16). Therefore, postmodernism was used in the implicated resistance attitude of some revivalism designs such as, the design of the memorial of the Unknown Soldier (

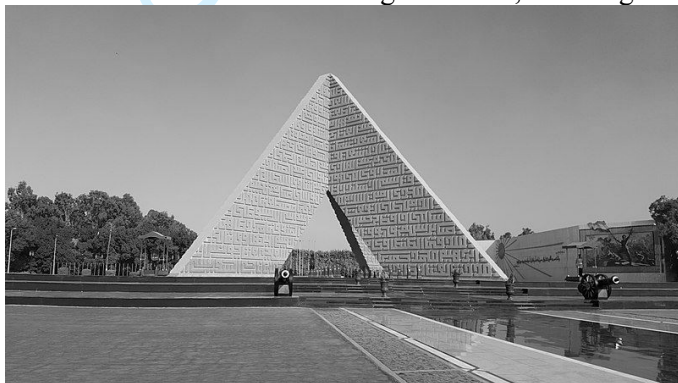
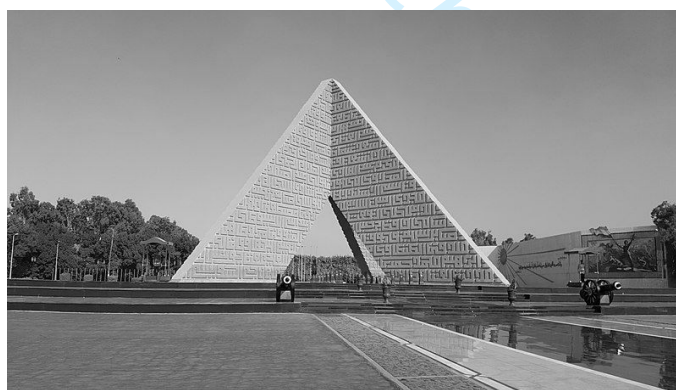


Fig 5Error! Reference source not found.) which combines overtook the pyramid shape while adopting modern sleek mass. Towards the eighties, revivalism took many forms, including a revolt against western materialism which resulted from the influences of modernisation (Curtis, 1987: p. 365). This led to the 'obsession with cultural representation' (Curtis, 1987: p. 365). In this respect, ideological formations, through contradictions of *both* resistance to *and* influence by the Western vocabulary, shaped the attitude of reference of the twentieth century which was manifested in two levels: the interventional level, and the representational level.



*Fig 5. The Memorial of the Unknown Soldier (source: URL 3, 2017: by Ovedc).*

On the representational level, the resistance attitude reached its peak at the culmination of the twentieth century by the call of, the Liverpool-educated (PhD 1959) architect and academic, 'Abdelbaqi Ibrahim for 'a return' to the 'spring of our Islamic heritage' on his national architectural magazine of '*Alam al-Benaa* [World of Building] (1980-2000). Hassan Fathy, as an enthusiast of such resistance attitude, used to lecture in the Centre of Planning and Architectural Studies (CPAS), the publishing centre of the magazine, and one of Ibrahim's designs that manifests his resistance attitude. Fathy's collaboration reinforced the magazine's intended path over the next twenty years. One of its editorial board members is the architect 'Abdelhalim 'Abelhalim, whose

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3 Aga Khan Awarded design (1992) of Children's Cultural Park in al-Sayeda Zeinab district (**Error! Reference source not found.**), on the representational level,  
4 **Reference source not found.**), on the representational level,  
5 manifests such resistance attitude via a reinterpretation of Islamic vocabulary and indigenous  
6 construction technology. Ibrahim's search for identity was first introduced in his article in *al-*  
7 *Ahram newspaper* in 1963, followed by a research paper in 1967 in UIA, Paris, then by his book  
8 *al-Toraath al-Hadary le al-Madinah al-'Arabyah al-Mu'aserah [Urban Heritage of the*  
9 *Contemporary Arab City]* (Kuwait, 1968).  
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11 Another architectural magazine that also emphasised the resistance attitude was *al-M'imaryah*  
12 (1982-1989) [Arabic for *The Architectural*], a professional quarterly magazine published by the  
13 Society of Egyptian Architects. In *al-M'imaryah*, architect 'Aly Bassuny criticised the designs of  
14 foreign firms, particularly Hilton Ramsees 'the prison on the Nile' (similarly criticised in '*Alam al-*  
15 *Bena*'). He called for careful importation, when necessary. The attitude of resistance was  
16 manifested in three articles in *al-M'imaryah* that have reinforced the bipolarity between the West  
17 and the East.  
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20 On the other hand, the influence attitude on the interventional level came to the fore as early as the  
21 Infitah policy of Sadat during the seventies, which still stands at the heart of present-day events. It  
22 was visible in foreign-commissioned projects such as Cairo Plaza, and Al-Salam Hospital. The 39-  
23 storey twin tower of Cairo Plaza, designed by Associated Continental Architects (Gulf) for the  
24 MISR Abu Dhabi Property Development Co, was appraised for the technological 'momentum,'  
25 that would 'pierce the Nile-side skyline' (Casati, 1979). Also, As-Salam hospital is considered the  
26 first phase in the modernisation process of Cairo's waterfront, implemented by Sadat. These  
27 modernist initiatives were viewed as 'a collision between its civilisation as it has been and its  
28 civilisation as it is becoming' (Abercrombie, 1978). The foreign-commissioned projects continued  
29 to provide technological and architectural shifts for example: World Trade Centre (1988) by  
30 Skidmore, Owings & Merrill's London office with 'Ali Nour El-Din Nassar; and Grand Nile Hotel  
31 (1974-2000) by the William B. Tabler Architects. These and other similar joint ventures celebrated  
32 Cairo's entrance to 'the 21st century with a fast-changing morphology' (Volait, 2004: p.203).  
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35 During Mubarak's era (1980 – 2011), particularly during the nineties, the newly emerged urban  
36 phenomenon of the gated communities aspired for a western-influenced lifestyle started to spread  
37 within the new cities surrounding Greater Cairo, which were mainly planned during the seventies  
38 to accommodate the middle class. Gated communities, villas and mansions, lavish green spaces,  
39 and fashionable recreational and social amenities, were constructed in 6th of October City, El-  
40 Sheikh Zayed (Fig 6**Error! Reference source not found.**), New Cairo, El-'Obur and El-Shoruq  
41 cities. Residential designs evocative of 'Beverly Hills' on the desert, which is both 'surreal and  
42 familiar' (Ivy, 2004: p.206). The heterogeneous attitudes in these communities, whether  
43 Mediterranean or Islamic, manifest the refusal of framing the Egyptian culture in a singular entity.  
44 This attitude of resisting the framing of a specific "ism" and the architectural pluralism of the  
45 nineties, this article argues, is the process of the decolonisation through which the colonised  
46 simultaneously regain their lands and dignity. Generally, the hybridity, as seen by Fanon, is  
47 regarded as an opposition to hegemonic colonial perceptions, and a non-assimilationist way of  
48 building connections across cultures (Fanon, 1965).  
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**Fig 6.** Beverly Hills Gated Community (1996-2001) (source: URL 4, 2013: by Hussein Mahran).

The continuous emergence of new typologies is also palpable in the phenomenon of shopping malls which started at the nineties in Cairo and continued to spread in the country symbolising the alliance between foreign and Egyptian capitalists (Abaza, 2010: p.205). Nasr City is one of the suburbs which witnessed an explosion in these centres, such as Tiba Mall (1995), Geneina Mall (1998), and al-Sirag Mall (1999). The architectural vocabulary of such facilities is remarkably heterogeneous and contain pastiche of various cultures; while Geneina Mall was inspired by the Far Eastern Malls of Singapore and Jakarta, the Wonderland Mall is closer to Hollywood themes (Fig 7). Yet, conceivably, al-Horriya Mall (1995), by Farouk Al-Gohary, and Tiba Malls appear to manifest the creative inner impulses of the architect where avoiding contextual referencing is visible. These designs were acting as if they are legitimizing cosmopolitanism, where societies are engaged in cultural 'overturning categories' (Beck, 2006), as well as decolonisation, where new decolonized society will be 'reorganized' (Fanon, 1965).



**Fig 7.** Left: Geneina Mall; Right: Wonderland Mall (source: both by author).

In this way, we contend that towards the eighties the decolonisation aspirations provoked ideological stances of resistance and influence attitudes. This is an early phase of decolonisation that Fanon described as 'unqualified assimilation to the colonial system including its beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours' (Fanon, 1968: p.223). At the culmination of the twentieth century, ideological attitudes of the decolonisation process started to fade; moving towards homogenous co-existence of *Self* and *Other*, and resulting in cosmopolitanism. This was manifested, on the representational level, in *Medina [City]* (1998-2002), a short-lived architectural bilingual and bi-monthly magazine.<sup>2</sup> Similar to the previous magazines, the rhetoric of resistance continues to control the inception of the magazine but in more tranquil tendency. *Medina* aims to both develop an 'understanding of 'self,' and an 'understanding of others' and highlight that Egypt should contribute 'its share to the international scene, on the conceptual level if not the technological one' ('Abdel-Kawi, 1997). This discursive resistance voice allowed broadened the scope to

heterogeneous influence attitudes and encounters, which highlighted cosmopolitanism on the interventional level.

A collection of non-developed trends, on the interventional level, in the nineties have been categorised into three trends: a) Designs that simulate history, manifested in Ahmad Mito's Pharaonic design of The Supreme Court of Egypt, Farouk al-Gohary's design of Oriental Weavers' Heliopolis Headquarters, Ashraf Salah Abu-Seif's residential building, and Faisal Bank (Fig 8), which 'reinterpret[s] the past,'; b) Designs that are based on creative personal thrusts, represented in Farouk al-Gohary's design of the Ministry of Finance and Tax Department (Fig 8), and Magd Masarra's design of the Integrated Care Society; and c) Designs that reconceptualise cultural and environmental essence including reintroducing traditional techniques and restoration and conservation efforts (Salama, 2001: p.34). In this regard, the authors maintain that these trends exhibit the heterogeneity of the architecture in the twentieth century and the notion of decolonisation of any dominant style that is inherited or imposed by the colonial past.



*Fig 8. Faisal Bank Tower (source: by author).*

By and large, these trends deconstruct the legitimacy of fixed form of identity, and manifest that 'ethnic conflicts are ... primitive tribal feuds' that will diminish as 'modernisation progresses' (Beck, 2006: p.76). In essence, it is argued that such a plurality manifests the multiplicity of cultural encounters that those architects come across in everyday life. Following Beck's notion of cosmopolitanism, the authors avow that the non-integrative nature of such categories manifests the contribution of every individual in the cosmopolitan society; every individual is engaged in endless processes of 'overturning categories' (Beck, 2006: p.76), around which the society is reorganised and, hence, decolonised.

### **Twentieth First Century's Cosmopolitanism within Decolonialism**

In Cairo, one of the most important projects to launch the twentieth-first century was The Smart Village (2001), (Sisgov.eg, 2020) located near the great pyramids of Giza, on the Cairo-Alexandria Desert Road. As a business and commercial park, it includes: multinational and local companies; governmental and financial organisations; educational institutions; and research centres. It also accommodates communication centres, business service centres, conference centres, a library, and a centre for electronic printing and publishing, as well as technological incubators that house small businesses in the field of technology. These buildings were arranged in un-thematic organic clusters within lavish green spaces, waterfalls and a lake. Focusing on attracting international and Egyptian corporations, the design concept was mainly focused on highlighting modern style glass

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3 facades and strong, geometric or sculptural shapes. In addition to the Mediterranean whims appear  
4 in the white wash colour, pyramidal form and classical symmetric entrances bring heritage into the  
5 scene and materialise the overturning cosmopolitanism categories announcing the notion of  
6 decolonialism (Fig 9).  
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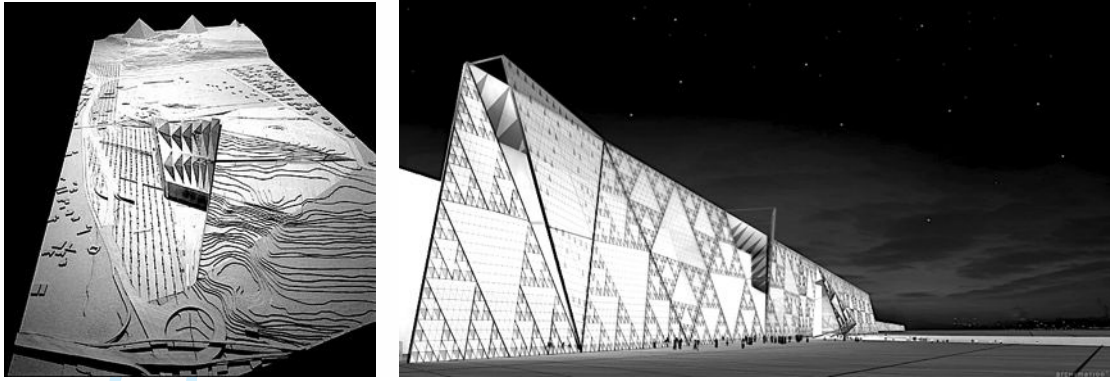
20 **Fig 9. Left: Telecom Egypt** (source: URL 5, 2014: by Mohamed Ouda); **Right: CULTNAT**  
21 **building** (source: URL 6, 2010).  
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24 Another mega project that was designed at the start of the twentieth first century is the Grand  
25 Egyptian Museum (GEM). Housing 150,000 artefacts in an area 500,000 square meters, the aim is  
26 to be a major Egyptology centre in the world. The site's main building will house the museum and  
27 a conference centre, connected by a large shaded courtyard, exhibition space, and an 800-seat  
28 auditorium. The design of the multinational corporate of Heneghan Peng Architects (Ireland),  
29 headed by the Chinese master architect Shih-Fu Peng, were selected in 2003 from 1,557 designs  
30 from 63 countries in an international architectural competition that was held under the patronage  
31 of UNESCO and the UIA (URL 7, 2018).  
32

33 The GEM complex is located at the edge of the first desert plateau between the pyramids and  
34 Cairo's megapolis. This position is distinct for its fifty-meter level difference, carved by the Nile's  
35 ancient path through the desert to the Mediterranean (URL 8, 2003). This position required a  
36 careful setting of the building on the difference in level to create a structure that doesn't emerge  
37 above the plateau. The entrance to the grand structure is also designed to prepare the visitor to the  
38 opulence of the artefacts in the gallery and the glimpse of the great pyramids, through a grand  
39 staircase and a series of layers comprising a forecourt. The grand staircase is about 64m-long,  
40 24m-high, 85m-wide at the bottom and 117m-wide at the top (URL 9, 2012). The position is also  
41 distinguished by extended visual axis towards the three pyramids (Fig 10).  
42

43 Emphasizing the juxtaposition of past with present, the design concept aimed to preserve the purity  
44 of local heritage by resembling the pyramid form. However, the pyramid form is abstracted into  
45 modernised triangle shapes that was also accentuated in the latticework of stone triangles. The  
46 façade chasms are clad in faience tiles (Fig 10) that gives the effect of valuable blue-green  
47 stones which gleams with light as 'a metaphor for life and eternity' (Smout, et al.,2007: p.14). In  
48 this way, the design is meant 'to be a connecting element between the ancient Egyptian past and  
49 the modern age' (Smout, et al, 2007: p.14). The use of 'the latest technology' (Paganini, 2010: p.  
50 190) goes in parallel to the heritage preservation, a co-existence stance that manifested the  
51 cosmopolitanism of *both/and*: *both* traditions *and* modern are liberated from colonial binaries.  
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**Fig 10.** *Grand Museum master plan, façade, and entrance (URL 10, 2003).*

Similarly, Al-Azhar Park (2005) is located in a distinct position in the historic district of Islamic Cairo between the Fatimid city and the Mamluk city. The hilly site of the park is surrounded by important historic monuments such as the Sultan Hassan Mosque and the Ayyubid Citadel. Under the auspices of The Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), in 1994 a complex urban redevelopment process that spanned 20 years began, and included social and economic community regeneration, historic restoration, and the provision of recreational facilities. Following the traditional Islamic gardens, the park is arranged around a central water channel axis that acts as a spine accompanied with alleyways and series of formal grades clipped by the hilltop restaurant and lakeside cafe. The entrance to the Park is made through a traditional Mediterranean pointed arched portico, holding Alhambra influence (Fig 11). Also, there are many water fountains and pools that lead ultimately to an organic free form. This skilful integration between formal and informal landscape formations, as well as between *both* the richness of history *and* the dynamicity of the present, is a manifestation of cosmopolitanism and decolonisation notions that refuse monopoly of singular category.



**Fig 11.** *Left: Al-Azhar Park Central Promenade; Right: the Citadel View Restaurant (source: both by author).*

Another design that materialises the both/and cosmopolitanism while showing decolonialism from fixed isms is the American University New Campus. Inspired by Al-Muizz street, the different schools and campus facilities are arranged around a central open space, and an axis that unite the project. Praising the desert landscape and providing ‘texture’, the facilities surround a formal quadrangle grove that is defined by a series of formal gardens, small courtyards, and stands of palm trees. While the arcades join and support campus buildings, and the Mashrabiya windows, are rooted in Islamic architecture, the façade treatment of the library is a modern interpretation of that traditional Mashrabiya. Being designed by different architects from different origins— Boston Design Collaborative, the American Sasaki Associates, and the Egyptian Abdel-Halim Community Development Collaborative, and the Mexican architect Ricardo Legorreta—supported the



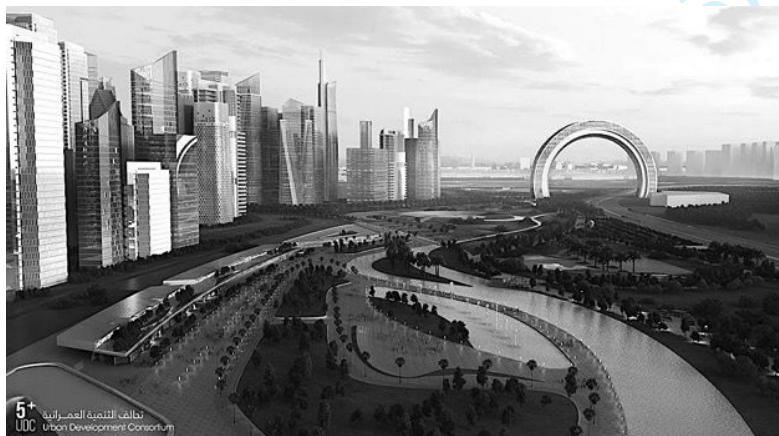
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3 cosmopolitan notion. As a cosmopolitan feature the porticoes of the portal is a Mediterranean  
4 inspiration of the Great Mosque of Córdoba in Spain. Moreover, the Mexican influence appears in  
5 Legoretta's design of the 'boldly coloured' student residences and campus centre (Fig 12) (URL  
6 11, 2019). Both decolonialism and cosmopolitanism notions resulted from pluralism of design  
7 trends that became more visible in the design of the New Administrative Capital of Egypt.  
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25  
26 **Fig 12.** Entrance to Conference Hall showing the integration between traditional and modern  
27 vocabulary, (URL 12, 2009: by Barry Iverson).  
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29  
30 The New Administrative Capital of Egypt, the new megalopolis, is motivated by nationalistic  
31 urges that aspire to make Cairo a global smart city. The main objective is to provide a myriad of  
32 economic opportunities and better quality of life, which clearly manifests the decolonisation  
33 struggle. The aspired green city represents a break with the inherited thinking of singular Islamic  
34 pastiche.

35  
36 The will of creating a green city is represented in the creation of twelve valleys and natural oasis,  
37 branching from the Green River that links between a series of smart neighbourhoods and planned  
38 to be one of the most distinctive gardens in the Middle East and the world. The Green River  
39 extends for ten kilometres (URL 13, 2019) long through the rectangular CBD (Central Business  
40 District, Fig 13) and is topped with a rounded gate abstracting the sunrise and representing a  
41 shared feature of Egyptian identity between past and future. Manifesting cosmopolitanism, the  
42 park of the River is divided from east to west into three homogeneous linked areas, each area has  
43 its distinctive cultural and urban characteristic. While the first area contains Islamic Garden, the  
44 second area contains open areas for hiking and an Arts Garden, and the third area includes a  
45 children's educational park, an open library, gardens for reading, and a sports club (URL 13,  
46 2019).  
47



**Fig 13.** *The green river (URL 14, 2019).*

The valleys branching from the Green River are linked by green axes while considering the topography of the site, streams and torrents of rain to take advantages of the storm water drains, by converting it into entertainment hubs. Each valley is located within a residential neighbourhood that contains all services of green, recreational areas, commercial schools, and therapeutic units. The capital is a green, Egyptian modern international city that reflects its character through the Egyptian context by bridging past and future. This bridging is constituted through the *reorganisation* of the society and materialisation of their ambitions and aspirations for decent living and quality of life, through the modern ways and modern infrastructure. Furthermore, the city will house key ministries, government agencies, and the president's office. The design concepts of some of these buildings enforce the idea of decolonialism and resulting in cosmopolitanism overtures, such as the conference, the exhibition centres, and the new headquarters of the parliament building (Fig 14). The renaissance style is visible in the dome of the new parliament building which resembles the Vatican, announcing a cosmopolitanism that brings the world together in non-hierarchical way and manifests decolonisation from the inherited rhetoric of urban and architectural colonial 'accomplished expression' (Behdad, 1994: p.7).



**Fig 14.** *The conference and the parliament headquarters (URL 15, 2020).*

## Conclusion

Taken as a whole, while the main battle in imperialism is over land, the power of cultural narrative is of significance and is manifested through architectural artefacts, and that in Cairo is shaped by a discursive ideological structure of attitude and reference. This structure before the nineties worked through either influence by or resistance to a specific *ism*. After the nineties, the resistance attitude became less visible due to the integration of such *isms* through the vibrant inclusion wider range of cultures within one design, enabling uninterrupted overturning cosmopolitanism. This was evoked by aspiration to eradicate world colonial hierarchies through the simultaneous representation of national and exotic cultures.

Cairene architecture is continuously transposing itself with different attitudes of expression and visual qualities, within the framework of the 'Modern State', the dominant discourse of past and current regimes, as well as the professionals and intellectuals who represent them and voice their opinions. Therefore, debates always suggest a spectrum of attitudes that include the recycling of traditional vocabulary as a way of perpetrating character and charm upon the city as well as absorbing and reacting in different ways to the international trends and more recently to the tidal wave of globalisation.

This paper asserts that decolonisation and cosmopolitanism are two inseparable facets in the architectural practice in Egypt's twentieth first century. It is emphasised that decolonisation in

Cairo is discursively passing through two distinctive phases. The first phase was until the culmination of the twentieth century where the decolonisation process was manifested mainly through extreme representations of ‘attitude of reference’ (Said: 1994, p.48). The second phase started at the dawn of the twenty-first century where the decolonisation process achieved a high level of liberation from such ideological references. Such a decolonisation or liberation is evident through cosmopolitanism that ‘opens up new horizons by demonstrating .... border crossings’ and ‘transnational phenomena’ (Beck, 2003: p. 458), or decolonial cosmopolitanism. This is what Calhoun termed the ‘actually existing’ or ‘new’ cosmopolitanism (Calhoun, 2002), and this new cosmopolitanism, he affirms, provokes local/global interplay that appreciates *both* the local Self *and* the global Other.

Cosmopolitanism in Cairo is as complex as its history, initially stemming from two opposed attitudes—*influence* and *resistance*—resulting from the decolonialisation notion that fights the dominance of a singular *ism*. In architectural practice, modernism was the patent for progress and equality and a collective psyche, while Pharaonism, Islamism, or Arabism were, at different stages, were the symbols of glory and difference. While the coloniser strove to chart a monolithic image for the colonised, to distinguish its *Other*, after independence the colonised inherited such forms of *Otherness* to distinguish its *Self*. This decolonization notion is based on a complex idiosyncratic core to human experience, which emerged from concurrent historical and secular everyday life in an attempt to suppress ideological supremacy. Surpassing such ideology, cosmopolitanism unintentionally emerged as a side effect.

Then at the conclusion of the twentieth century, cosmopolitanism was consequently institutionalised in unique ways and ‘acquired enduring realities’ (Beck, 2006: p.22), as evidenced in the previous governmental projects. These realities were materialised in hybrid architectural schemes that must not be interpreted as arbitrary but rather as purposeful decolonial expressions that are *both* cosmopolitan *and* decolonial. The highly selective incorporation of forms and motifs of the projects discussed suggests global and ‘multiple loyalties’ (Beck, 2006: p.9)—Mediterranean, Arab, Pharaonic and non-Arab. In doing so, the buildings unintentionally speak of cosmopolitanism that sought to consolidate the power of the ‘Modern State’ which became an organising body and a legal authority that represents the will and the collective psyche of its people in an age of rapid non-natural evolution and ambiguity.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For more about Egyptian Architects, see Tarek Sakr, *Early Twentieth-Century Architecture in Cairo*, 1992; and the Arabic account of Abdel-Gawad, *Giants of Architecture in the Twentieth Century*, 148.

<sup>2</sup> Editorial board consists of: the American graduate, Amr Abdel-Kawi (chairman); Ali Gabr; Tamer El-Khorazy; Hazem El-Mestikawy; and Said Sorour. All quotes used from Medina are originally in English.

## Contemporary Architecture of Cairo (1990 – 2020): Mutational Plurality of 'Isms', Decolonialism, and Cosmopolitanism



*Fig 1. Left: Gezira Palace: Cairo, 1863. (source: Archnet, by Christian A. Hedrick.).  
Right: Main façade of the Awqaf (source: Archnet, by Nasser Rabbat).*



*Fig 2. Left: The Society of Egyptian Engineers (source: by author); Right: The Immobilia Building (source: URL 1, 2012: by Tulipe Noire).*



*Fig 3. The building of the Arab League, (source: URL 2, 1955: Riad Architecture).*



**Fig 4.** *Intercontinental Hotel (source: by author).*



**Fig 5.** *The Memorial of the Unknown Soldier (source: URL 3, 2017: by Ovedc).*



**Fig 6.** *Beverly Hills Gated Community (1996-2001) (source: URL 4, 2013: by Hussein Mahran).*





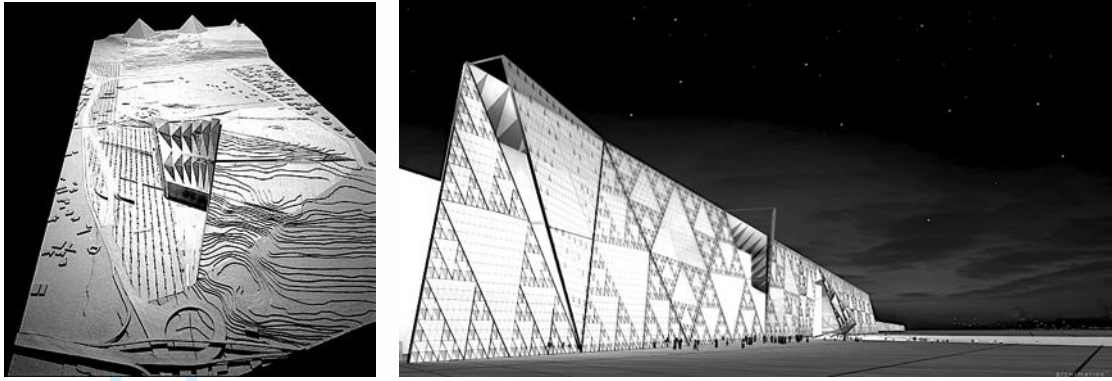
*Fig 7. Left: Geneina Mall; Right: Wonderland Mall (source: both by author).*



*Fig 8. Faisal Bank Tower (source: by author).*



*Fig 9. Left: Telecom Egypt (source: URL 5, 2014: by Mohamed Ouda); Right: CULTNAT building (source: URL 6, 2010).*



*Fig 10. Grand Museum master plan, façade, and entrance (URL 10, 2003).*



*Fig 11. Left: Al-Azhar Park Central Promenade; Right: the Citadel View Restaurant (source: both by author).*



*Fig 12. Entrance to Conference Hall showing the integration between traditional and modern vocabulary, (URL 12, 2009: by Barry Iverson).*

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**Fig 13.** *The green river (URL 14, 2019).*



**Fig 14.** *The conference and the parliament headquarters (URL 15, 2020).*