

## REBRANDING THE NATION: IN THE CONTINGENCIES OF ARCHITECTURE AND NATIONAL CELEBRATIONS

التسويق للوطن: تزامنية العمارة والاحتفالات القومية

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper suggests a tripartite association of architecture, national celebrations, and nation's branding conveying narratives to national and international levels. This paper focuses on the three periods of Khedive Ismail, Nasser, and Sadat—as three influential periods that epitomized imperial and anti-imperial discursivity. It utilizes scholarly research and coincident discourses, underpinning George Mosse's the Nationalization of the Masses (1975) and Simon Anholt's Competitive Identity (2007). It argues that the contingencies of architecture and 'liturgy' of celebrations convey a national brand that creates a unified identity and enables global competencies. Although the role of architecture is different for different national celebrations, both architecture and celebrations are essentially coherent—for example, cosmopolitanism brand was conveyed in the Khedival era. Further, while Nasser's regime conveyed modern socialist brand, Sadat bestowed the militarism brand. This study is thus a timely instance of architectural encounters, given the contemporary endeavor for reviving the heydays of Egypt through the splendid celebrations by the current state.*

### KEYWORDS

National Celebrations; Architecture; Brand; Nasser; Sadat

### المخلص

تقترح الورقة الرابطة الثلاثية للهندسة المعمارية، والاحتفالات الوطنية، وتسويق الأمم لأنها تنقل روايات تاريخية هامة إلى المستويين الوطني والدولي. ستركز الورقة على الثلاث فترات المؤثرة في تاريخ مصر المعاصر: الخديوي إسماعيل والسادات وعبد الناصر - وهي الفترات التي جسدت تعقيدات الإمبريالية والكفاح ضدها. وستقوم الورقة برصد عناصر العمارة والخطاب الإعلامي المتزامن لهذه المناسبات، من خلال إقامة ربط كتابي: حشد الشعوب لجورج موس (1975) والهوية التنافسية لسيمون أنهولت (2007). تجادل الورقة بأن تزامن العمارة والاحتفالات يعزز الشعور القومي ويمكن الأمة من المنافسة العالمية. وبالرغم من أن دور العمارة اختلف بكل سياق لكن طقوس الاحتفالات كانت متناسقة مع الطراز المعماري المتزامن معها. ففي عصر إسماعيل، انعكست الكوزموبوليتانية كماركة مميزة للاحتفالات والعمارة. أيضا بينما عبد الناصر أضفي ماركة الحدائثة الاشتراكية، منح السادات الطابع العسكري لمصر وكلاهما انعكس على الاحتفالات والعمارة على حد سواء. إن دراسة تزامنية الاحتفالات الوطنية والعمارة بعد في غاية الأهمية لتسويق الأمة والقومية هذا يتضح في سعي الدولة في هذه الفترة لعمل احتفالات لإحياء فترات القوة في مصر.

### الكلمات المفتاحية

الاحتفالات القومية؛ العمارة؛ التسويق؛ ناصر؛ السادات

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Architecture throughout the successive regimes that ruled Egypt played a significant role in creating moments of commemoration that constitute the lexicon of the national memory. This paper aims to highlight that architecture is a tangible powerful instrument within national celebrations that inscribes a coherent identity within the society and exhibits it to the world (Tanović, 2020). Although many events take place in the history of the nation, the paper argues that events that are associated with buildings are strongly carved within the nation's memory and intensify emotional experience (Pennebaker, et al, 1997). The occurrence of “incomprehensible events” necessitates “coherent and flattering narratives” which are constructed “to preserve our identities” (Pennebaker, et al, 1997, p.x). In order for these narratives to perpetuate it should be dramatized and connected with emotional and visual experience. Since emotions are strongly remembered, as confirmed by many scholars, such as (Kensinger and Schacter, 2008; and Kensinger 2009), architecture as this paper argues incites strong emotions that contribute to the perpetuation of national celebrations and national narratives.

The paper will utilize scholarly research, and the mass media discourse about specific national Egyptian events that occurred in the three periods of Khedive Ismail, Nasser, and Sadat—as influential periods that epitomized by imperial ambitious and anti-imperial struggle. This analysis will be implemented in light of Mosse's *the Nationalization of the Masses* (1975) and Anholt's *Competitive Identities* (2007). In order to motivate national senses and achieve social unity a new political style emerges to form—what he defined as “a secularized religion” (Mosse, 1975: p.2). The pillars of this secularized religion, in Mosse views, are national myths, symbols, and “liturgy”—that is manifested in national narratives, architecture, and celebrations rituals. Anholt, on the other hand, argues that nations nowadays compete on economic and political levels to produce and manage images/brand that propagate positive reputation as part of their policies (Anholt, 2007). Anholt asserts that this branding is a complex multilayered process that should be integrated within all the country's developmental aspects as well as communication networks—which are studied here in this paper with the focus on architecture as a visual communicative apparatus.

In connecting Mosse's and Anholt's arguments, this paper adds that architecture, as a significant vehicle for cultural identification, can produce both the “secularized religion” and a “competitive identity” that unifies the society's identity while competing on the global level. In this way, the paper analyzes architectural contingencies with national celebrations along Egypt's history while highlighting the contribution of architecture in enhancing the national sense and promoting a unique world image. Here, it is worth highlighting that the role of architecture in the national celebrations can be manifested through many buildings along the history of Egypt and until the most recent celebrations of the current regime—which provides a rich material for future studies. However, in light of the limited space of this study the paper will focus on some of the most significant buildings of the period under examination.

### 1.1 Literature Review: Trilogy of Architecture, National Celebrations, and Branding

The contribution of the architectural contingencies with national celebrations in the nation's rebranding in Egypt has never been theoretically analyzed. While this paper analyzes the role of architecture along Egypt's history to publicize a socio-cultural and political image to both the society and the world through national ceremonies, it touches bases of several debates in relation to the identity, collective memory and socio-cultural aspects. This analysis of national celebrations "offers a unique prism through which important insights can be obtained", in relation to ruling mechanisms and the socio-cultural conceptions (Podeh, 2011: p.8). Consequently, this paper highlights that branding as the visualization of the ideology is based on the political power that creates the communicative and influential tool, such as the national ceremonies and parades combined with architectural milestones.

One of the most important studies, in the Egyptian context, that tackles issues of nineteenth century political practices of exhibiting a cultural perspective is done by Timothy Mitchell's *The World as Exhibition* (1989). World's fairs were also thoroughly discussed in *Displaying the Orient: Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth-century World's Fairs* by Zeynep Çelik (Çelik, 1992). Most recent study about practices of festivals and architecture is entitled: *Architecture, Festival and the City* (2019) by Jemma Browne, Christian Frost, Ray Lucas. This volume responds to the fluctuations in the modern urban and attempts to investigate the enduring revolution of the relationship between city and citizen through analyzing festivals.

The conceptual debate of the branding of the nation was initiated in the nineties under the subject of *Place Marketing* by Kotler, Rein & Haider (1993). Then the term Place Branding emerged due to Simon Anholt who asserts that the country's reputation or brand has great effect on its relations on the global scale (Anholt, 2007). One of the recent studies offering a practical experience on the concept is the edited volume by Volcic and Andrejevic which explored the association of state's marketing, tension of globalization, and branding strategies. They asserted that the media in various states around the world embraces "the logic of commerce" and attempts to find "ways to blend it with mobilization and exploitation of nationalist sentiment" (Volcic & Andrejevic, 2015: p.2). Generally speaking, theoretical debates of nations branding are based on critical studies of cultural domination and public expression, such as (e.g., Mosco, 1996; Schiller, 1976, 1989). Nations' branding can also be perceived from the lens of globalization and mobility in (Beck, 2000; Sassen, 1998).

Of great relevance to the notion of branding is the studies that connects political events and collective memory, such as *Collective Memory of Political Events: Social Psychological Perspectives*, edited by Pennebaker et al (1997). The term collective memory was first coined by Maurice Halbwachs (1992). He asserted that memories in general needs a structured context, which as this paper argues, can be created through contingencies of architecture and national celebrations (Halbwachs, 1992). Karl Mannheim, similarly, conceptualized the 'thought style' that can be formed through a socially constructed sentiments whose origins are associated with a specific group and are aimed to influence the public construal of reality (Mannheim 1955, p.147). For the

relation between architecture and memory, Tanović also highlighted the role of “architects as creators of order” and main players in the politics of remembering in his study *Designing Memory* (2020). Most connected to the Egyptian context, although in Post Mubarak era, is *Judy Barsalou’s* scientific article entitled “Post-Mubarak Egypt: History, Collective Memory, and Memorialization”. It addresses techniques of using historical narratives and memorialization in promoting specific socio-cultural and political agenda (Barsalou, 2012).

Other studies connected the production of memory with identity such as *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, edited by J. R. Gillis (2018), and *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* by Richard Terdima (1994). While Gillis highlighted the association of collective memory and national identity, Terdima investigates the continuity of the past within the present—both relates to the notion of the branding of the nation (Terdima, 1994). This notion of nations branding, most importantly, resonates with the discourse of national identity. In General, the term of Identity was first popularized by Erik Erickson in the late 1950s in connection with individual sense of self (Gleason, 1983). The term was largely developed and became “the purest of clichés” (Gillis, 2018: p. 3) by several theorists, most significantly by Stuart Hall, “The Question of Cultural identity” (Hall, 1992). The identity discourse was broadly discussed from different perspectives, such as: through semiotic regulation of public communication (Graan, 2016); and through urban branding (Muratovski, 2013).

The uniqueness of the nation, in this boundaryless age, depends “upon cultivating a favorable and competitive identity” (Browning & Oliveira, 2017: p.482). The paper here argues that this competitiveness between identities requires branding which occurs through socio-cultural and political signifiers. Therefore, these signifiers, to powerfully affect people, should be inclusive of variant aspects that juxtapose socio-cultural and political ‘liturgy’ with architectural and space production. Undoubtedly, politics as an “art of warped deductions and mixed identities” (Rancière, 1999: p.139), presents disputed objects with other common substances to be homogeneously identified. In Mosse's view, political organizations attract masses through “a wide range of cultural creations: festivals, myths, monuments, art, novels, music, and theater” (Drescher, et al, 1982). Mosse identifies that any new political style “consisted of the use of national myths and symbols and the creation of a “liturgy” that permitted the people to participate directly in national worship (Mosse, 1975: p.85).

Focusing on the German context, Mosse, in his analysis of the ideological struggle, highlights that the myth-making in Germany was based on the aesthetic notion as the unifying element in society that could alleviate and glorify national life in a biased, pluralistic, and changing world. Moreover, Smith contends that founding a national identity involves instrumental use of symbols and ceremonies which “are the most potent and durable aspects of nationalism” (Smith, 1991: p.77). These ceremonies with its “flags, anthems, parades, coinage, folk costumes, war memorials, ceremonies and celebrations—what Mosse called “the liturgical cult of nationalism”, express “nationalism and love of the fatherland” (Mosse, 1976: p.40). Mosse also highlights that while the leaders strive to capture symbolic compliance, people reify myths to emphasize a unique identity (Drescher, et al, 1982). Ceremonies and rituals rely on “cultural artifacts” and have always been

used in the pre-state period. Podeh’s study explored celebrations initiated and controlled by the state, “even though the whole nation does not necessarily identify with or take part in them, particularly if they serve and advance a certain regime, minority group or ideology” (Podeh, 2011: p.4). Examples of these celebrations that are related to particular regimes and are associated with architectural reminders existed along the Egyptian history.

## 2. Roots of Branding in the Egyptian context

Travelling back in time, in 1867, Khedive Ismail was invited to the Exposition Universelle in Paris, in which Egypt’s Antiquity and Arabian context was displayed through a street lined with sphinxes leading to a temple like building that is used as a museum for displaying antiquities, a Selamlik (small palace), an Okel (a market), and a pavilion named the Isthme de Suez displaying models of the canal area—then under construction (Çelik, 1992: p.57). As a result, aiming to create an Egyptian image as a civilized rich country, Khedive Ismail decided to exploit the “state and private resources to impress the world” by the staged inauguration of the Suez Canal (Reid, 2003: p.129). Organized by the Khedive, de Lesseps, Mariette, and Ali Mubarak, the ceremonies “were something of an Egyptian answer to the great exhibition” (Mestyan, 2007). Perceived “as a great exhibition in Egypt”, that aimed to publicize Egypt as a cultural epicenter, many guests were “*hommes de letters* and newspaper correspondents” (Mestyan, 2007), in papers like the *Illustrated London News* or the *Le Monde Illustré*. As the ceremonies exhibited ‘objects’ were the rulers themselves (Mestyan, 2007: p.68), many royals attended the grandeur inauguration in 1869, including Crown Prince of the Netherlands, Emperor of Austria, the Crown Prince of Russia, and, most importantly, Empress Eugénie. Dedicated to the Empress Eugenie the *Voyage Pittoresque à Travers l’isthme de Suez* brought together a series of 25 watercolors painted by Edouard Riou (1833-1900), together with texts by the historian, orientalist, and secretary to Ferdinand de Lesseps, Marius Fontane (1838-1914) (Fontane, 1870).



*Figure 1, Plate from La Tribune des Souverains (Apollo-magazine : Edouard Riou and Eugène Cicéri, 1869)*

Ismail's pageantry took place in three pavilions on the shore: one for royal guests and the Khedive; the second for the Islamic preachers, grand Mufti, and ‘Ulama; the third one for the Church representatives. These pavilions were made of carved wood that was adorned with plants and the

national flags [Figure 1]. The mast at the four corners of each pavilion were surmounted with the gilt crescent; but the Christian pavilion was fronted with a shield bearing the cross of Jerusalem, with four small crosses arranged round the large one. The Islamic pulpit was set to face Mecca, and was surmounted by Quranic inscriptions (Pudney, 1969). The shore was lined with flagpoles that bears crosses or Muslim crescents, showing the harmony and openness of the Egyptian socio-political atmosphere.

Part of the “frantic pace of municipal improvement” (Abu-Lughod, 1971: p.105) was the contingency of laying the new town of Ismailia, on the northwest shore, while the canal was being dug. Ismailia, named in honor of the Khedive, contains the head office of the Suez Canal Authority in order to regulate naval movement in the Suez Canal. The city is of a cosmopolitan architectural and urban style character. One of the examples of Ismailia’s architecture is Ferdinand de Lesseps’ residency—with its rustic brickwork, jettied overhanging first floor, and dormer windows—bears English Tudor revival style, reflecting the opening to European culture [Figure 2]. Most important is the manifestation of the cosmopolitan encounters, that the regime strives to publicize to the world, through the Europeanization of Cairo. This process became urgently necessary before the arrival of representatives of European royal families. Through an architectural set, Khedive Ismail wanted to showcase Cairo as another "Paris" along the Nile. Part of publicizing modernity and rebranding the country was to afford modern palaces to indulge the foreign diplomats and state guests, such as the Prince and Princess of Wales and Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria-Hungary.



*Figure 2, De Lesseps residency. (Wikipedia commons: Pierre cb, 2010)*

One of the most important guests was Empress Eugenie who embarked the yacht *L’Aigle* from Venice. Upon her arrival to Cairo, she got her accommodation set in al-Gezira Palace. To impress Empress Eugenie, during the Canal’s spectacular opening, Gezira Palace (1869) was designed to include exact replicas of Eugenie’s Tuileries palace (Jackson, 2013). The Palace is located on an

island, of the same name, manifests a unique mixture of Oriental splendor with European luxury. The design of the Palace was supervised by the Austrian architect Julius Franz and the German architect Carl Wilhelm von Diebitsch (Singerman, 2006: p. 362). The significantly imposing details of the cast-iron slender porticoes [Figure 3] that were inspired by Alhambra were the responsibility of Diebitsch (Johnston, 2006). The plans of the Palace took a U-shape that was divided into three wings (Delchevalerie, 1899). The first was reserved for the Imperial couple—Eugénie and Napoleon III—and included a throne room; the second was the garden wing for Khedive Ismail; and the third was the Louis XV wing. The palace gardens, designed by Jean-Pierre Barillet-Deschamps, are of finest landscape and rare flora and fauna. It could be argued that the design’s cosmopolitan encounters and “negotiation” between “routes and roots” was meant to convey Egypt’s cosmopolitanism and openness to bring the world together (El-Ashmouni, 2016).



*Figure 3, Gezira Palace. (MIT archives: Christian A. Hedrick, 2008)*

Another remarkable architecture and celebrations contingency in the Khedival era, publicizing Egypt’s openness to variant cultures, is the inauguration of Cairo Opera House. The opening, attended by Empress Eugenie upon her arrival to the Canal’s festivities, *per se*, produced another historical impetus for the birth of a new socio-cultural milieu. The inauguration (November 1869) was also attended by the Crown Prince of Prussia and other imperial subjects and statesmen. Pietro Avoscani, the Italian architect, was entrusted to design and decorate the Opera House. The building is located in the edge of the Ezbekiya Gardens and at the borderline quarter of Ismailiya. Although the Italian style building was built mainly out of wood, it was gilded with gold and fine woodwork and royal boxes for the royal harem (Sadgrove, 1996).

The Khedive used to accompany the statesmen to the Opera. Moreover, to publicize a civilized European image to the society, the Khedive ensured paid seats for the editors of the then contemporary journal of *Wadi al-Nil* [*The Nile Valley*]. The director of the Opera was Draneht Bey, who regularly advertised the opera in *Wadi al-Nil* (Sadgrove, 1996). Moreover, for the December 1871 world premiere at Cairo Opera, August Mariette—the French archeologist, who wrote a plot in *Aida*’s premiere —painted watercolor backgrounds inspired by “events from Rameses III’s reign and patterning costumes after scenes from the pharaoh’s tomb” (Reid, 2003: p.129). For reasons of Franco-Prussian war, costumes of *Aida* could not arrive by the time of the first night, therefore, Verdi’s *Rigoletto* was played instead, by the finest Italian singers (Douin,

1934). Ismail truly had “turned his namesake into an elaborate sage setting of Eastern splendor” (Burchell, 2016). The sense of pride that was urged by the Canal’s and the Opera’s celebrations, was inscribed in the nation’s memory by the contiguity of cosmopolitan architectural encounters that branded Cairo as a cosmopolitan nation. Here, the carefully chosen architectural details and celebrations’ rituals provided a visual framework that fulfill the Khedive’s aspirations to brand his country as a Euro-Arabian. Although the architecture, in the Khedival era, were meant to serve the celebrations, it was the celebrated cause in the modern chapter of Egypt’s history.

### 3. Branding in Modern Egypt

During Nasser’s period, the regime strove to achieve a social contract and promised rapid economic development, social justice, and national independence in return for political allegiance and a suspension of political rights and freedoms. Striving to brand his nation, Nasser in 1961, in Eid el-‘Ilm [Festival of Science], highlighted his perceptions that shaped his political style that shaped the upcoming events for his period: “We must have cultural revolution which aims at [letting] the people know their rights, their [true] gains, their hopes”(Anis, 1967: p.5). These words were again emphasized in the National Chartist six months later (Crabbs, 1975: p.387). Nasser aimed to urge “The good of the people, rather than the individual”. Therefore, “Egyptians were called upon to act” according to the interests defined by the state (Crabbs, 1975: p.387). Unifying the society under the nationalism and Arabism slogans was reflected in the variety of articles published in the daily newspaper *al-Hilal*, such as the then guidance minister Fathy Radwan’s “Al-Thaqafa al-Qawmya Khat al-Difa‘a al-‘Awal,” [National Culture is the first defense line] (January, 1959); and Abdel-Rahman al-Rafei, “al-Thaqafa al-Qawmya Tazdad Qwatan wa Rsokhan fi Wagh al-Ist‘emaar,” [National Culture’s strength increased in the face of Imperialism] (November, 1961).

Consequently, this resistive cultural revolution through strictly modern details was the national branding that shaped Nasser’s celebrations and subsequently his architectural language. Nasser’s socialist style and aspirations to mobilize the people’s participation in this cultural revolution made from speeches the “liturgy” of the national celebrations—which were mainly on the memory of July’s Revolution and other cultural events such as the Festive of Science. This formality in celebrations were reflected on the strictly socialist and modern buildings that were built to witness the realization of the promised progress. Therefore, it is the state’s will to let some modernist architects, who started their practice in the 1930s-40s, continue their modern designs and disseminate it “in an unprecedented scale” (Elshahed, 2012). Three main buildings can represent the cultural branding of a nation through Nasser’s era: The Radio Television headquarter, Cairo Tower, and Aswan High Dam and the Aswan Symbol of Friendship.

In 1956, using Roosevelt’s covert bribe paid as a donation to persuade Nasser not to support Algeria’s war of independence (Copland, 1969), Nasser decided to construct a tower that announces the nation’s dignity and great history while symbolizing “modern Egypt” (El-Shorbagy, 2019). Overlooking the Nile, located in Gezira Island with a height of 187 meters, Cairo tower was constructed between (1959-1961). Throughout the past 50 years, the Cairo Tower, built by the help of the Soviet (Jacobs, 2011: p.134), has been the tallest structure in Egypt and Northern

Africa towering. The lotus topped cylinder design was considered a revolution in concrete technology in Egypt’s construction history at the time [Figure 5]. It was designed by the Lebanese architect Naoum Shebib (b.1915-85). The base of the tower was built by Aswan Granite, and below its top spire, at its fourteenth floor, a revolving restaurant offering a panoramic view of the capital. The tower’s body “is covered with concrete mesh-shaped diamond patterns that stretch up, giving the impression of an upward movement as the gaze is drawn towards the sky” (Naoum Shebib website).

The inauguration ceremony was a formal one, that was attended by Kamal Eddin Hussein, the representative of President Gamal Abd El Nasser, the prime minister, the minister of culture, Cairo and Giza governors, and the tourism manager who gave a speech about the significant of the Tower to the tourism in Egypt. A speech was also delivered by the architect Shebib. The speech started by showing the uniqueness of such tower and ended by highlighting the distinctiveness of the Egyptian workforce, persistence, and “ability to work at such heights despite their exposure to inclement weather” (Naoum Shebib website). *Al-Ahram* daily newspaper announced the inauguration and commented “If Paris is proud of its Eifel Tower ...and Roma proud of its Piza Inclined Tower..., Cairo will be proud from now on with its Tower, whose main purpose is to become a tourist landmark in the capital. It is designed to be the first of its kind in the Middle East...” (*Al-Ahram*, 1961). This affirms that the Tower “was meant to impress the world” and brand the nation as well as “Nasserite achievement” (Rafaat, 1997) [Figure 4].



*Figure 4, Nasser and Tito. (Bibliotheca Alexandrina:1960)*



*Figure 5, Cairo Tower. (Wikipedia commons: Blueshade, 2004)*

Announcing the nation’s modernity and advance, Nasser also gave orders for establishing the Arab Radio and Television Union in 1959 [Figure 6]. The construction was meant to end on the 21<sup>st</sup> of July, 1960 to coincide with the eighth July Revolution. Later, honoring the chairman of the Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale (1880), Gaston Maspero (b.1846-1916), the new Headquarter was named after him. The celebration was in the Council of the Nation. It started by Quranic recitation followed by the national operetta titled [*Watani al-Akbar—My Greatest Nation*], then Nasser’s speech (El-Tony, 2019). This formal austere celebration was casted through television

screens in the public squares, around which the public gathered to watch such technological advent. With this monolithic curved façade base, topped with the tower like building overlooking the Nile bank, Nasser decided to brand the nation as an openly modern and developed country. On an area of 12,000 square meters, the thirty floors concrete building was constructed in one year—which was exceptional at the time. The building was designed by Galal Moemen, head of architecture department, Helwan University, along with his two brothers, Fahmy and Mostafa Moemen (b.1935-77) (El-Shorbagy, 2019).

One of the most important projects that were utilized in the nation’s branding is Aswan High Dam. The Dam symbolizes Nasser’s modern branding and his strive to mobilize the people’s participation in the modernization of their country. The massive size of the dam is “3,600 meters long, 111 meters height, and around 1000 meters wide at its base”, it is indeed, “a pyramid for living” (AlSayyad, 2019: p.229). As stated in *al-Hilal*, the monthly Arabic magazine, the enormous Dam as part of “Nasser’s astute policy contributed to the internal reform and the construction of vital agricultural, electrical projects, ...that aims with its services to the wellness of all citizens” (Al-Tanahy, 1960).

The construction of the Dam took eleven years from 1960 to 1971. The initiation of the Dam’s construction was done during a unique ceremony held in Upper Egypt. It was attended by four presidents: President Nasser of Egypt; President Arif of Iraq; President Sallal of Yemen; and the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev. The four presidents together pushed a button to explode a huge sand barrage and deter the old path of the Nile to allow the beginning of the next stage of the Dam. In the ceremony, many Arabic national songs were exclusively performed. These songs as a new “liturgy”, such as Hekayet Sha’ab [People’s story] by the famous popular singer ‘Abdelhalim, were mainly inspired by the Dam’s achievement and were meant to mobilize people (Al-Qaeid, 2021). After the completion of the Dam another inauguration ceremony was done, that was three months after Nasser’s death. The inauguration was celebrated by many media publishers, such as *LIFE Magazine* Feb. 12, 1971, in which Claire Sterling stated, despite highlighting some negative effects, “Superdams are monuments to modern technology, the Great Pyramids of our time” (Sterling, 1971). Also, *New York Times* on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July 1970 published an article titled: “Egypt Completes the Construction of the High Dam”. This article stated that “A ceremony, in which the Western were excluded, the Egyptians and the Soviet celebrated the start of twelve turbines in the High Dam” (*New York Times*, 1970). The magazine highlighted the greatness of the Dam and compared it to the greatness of the Pyramids (Khairy, 2020).

The Dam lies 700 kilometers south of Cairo and symbolizes the technological advancement as well as political socialists’ associations—The Soviet-Egyptian friendship [Figure 7]. This friendship was also manifested by a sand stone five-leaved lotus flower connected with a ring at its top. The stonewashed yellow leaves reach seventy-two meters height and the ring, that can be reached by an escalator, functions as an observation platform to the surrounding. The lotus petals, from inside the structure, are inscribed with Arabic and Russian texts beside photos of the presidents of both countries. This memorial building was constructed following the completion of the Dam to witness the strength of Russian relations and to emphasize the non-alignment policy

of the state. Aswan Symbol of Friendship is one of the most important tourist attractions in the basic tourist programs, as it provides a breathtaking panoramic view in the whole area surrounding the High Dam—the most heralded achievement of its time.



Figure 6, Maspero Radio, Television Headquarter Building. (Wikipedia: Olaf Tausch, 2009)



Figure 7, Aswan Symbol of Friendship (Wikimedia commons: Lienyuan lee, 2004)

While Nasser aimed to mobilize “middle-lower class support coalition”, via introducing modernized style, Sadat strived to “open to the free rise of elites” (Hinnebusch, 1981: p.443). This transformation in the socio-cultural structure was accompanied by a global openness *Infitah*, which urged pluralization and controlled liberalization. This political style formed a specific ‘liturgy’ in national celebrations which were shifted dramatically, during Sadat’s era, and in turn was reflected in the signified architectural language. At Sadat’s era, the victory of October War 1973 became the new “liturgy” of the national celebrations, in which he needed to appear in his military uniform. The most significant celebration that epitomized Sadat’s era was the reopening of the building of the Suez Canal Authority, and the reopening of the Canal’s waterway for navigation, after eight years of closure, during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

The state strove to brand Egypt as a victorious military nation. Therefore, Sadat surprised the world (Tanner, 1975), and decided to turn the date of the 5<sup>th</sup> of June, 1975, into a victorious patriotic ceremony (Fahmy, 2013). Amid the echoes of a 21-gun salute (Arndt, 1975), a sixteenth century naval tradition, were meant to exhibit Egypt’s military and naval capacities. During the ceremony fleet of ships steamed through the canal waters to Ismailia. Symbolically, the reopening ceremonies started in front of Port Said’s ornate Canal Authority building overlooking the waterway [Figure 8]. The three floors building was erected during the 19th century, adopted an Islamic style with Renaissance spirit. Topped with three turquoise ceramic glazed domes, whose central dome is bulbous one topped with cupola, the symmetric three floor building has a mix of Islamic and Italian Renaissance spirit. The façades are a series of repeated arches and the interior decoration of the ceilings, walls, the lanterns as well as decorations of the windows from the inside convey same messages of Euro-Islamic vibes that dominated the nineteenth century. By signing a

document transferring the Canal from military to civilian control, President Sadat, surrounded by some 600 dignitaries, started the ceremony. At the end of the ceremony, Sadat boarded the destroyer [Figure 9], named 6<sup>th</sup> October, that would carry him to Ismailia. In *al-Akher Saah [Last Hour]*, daily newspaper, Sadat claimed, “we will open the Canal for our good and for the world good...and we are able to protect it” (1975).



Figure 8, *Decorated Headquarters of the Suez Canal*  
(Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 1975)



Figure 9, *Sadat on the destroyer heading to Ismailia*  
(Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 1975)

The association between national celebrations and architecture, during Sadat’s era, was also manifested in the Memorial of the Unknown Soldier [Figure 10], that signifies Sadat’s controlled liberal pluralized political style. Therefore, the ceremonies started to propagate the brand of a victorious nation with a rooted powerful history. In the first anniversary of October war, in 1974, Sadat gave order to construct this memorial. An architectural competition was announced by the Ministry of Housing, for which 150 entries were received.



Figure 10, *The Memorial of the Unknown Soldier*  
(, Wikipedia commons: Ovedc, 2017)

The design of the artist Samy Rafie was chosen to mark this triumphant national event. The memorial takes the form of a hollow pyramid that reaches a height of 33.64 meters. Samy Rafie affirmed that the Memorial is strongly constructed that it was meant to perpetuate. Therefore, the size of its reinforced concrete foundations is triple the size of its superstructure (El-Nady, 2013). Reflecting the union of the Egyptian people in defending their homeland, the walls bear virtual common Egyptian names from various backgrounds, such as Mohammed, Ahmed, George, Peter, and Gerges (Marie, 2019). To commemorate the bravery and martyrdom of the nation's heroes, laying a wreath at the Memorial, before the military parades, that took place on its square, became the "liturgy" of Sadat's celebrations. After the assassination of Sadat in front of the Memorial, the Unknown Soldier Monument became his tomb. The Unknown Soldier Monument then became a symbol of honoring "the memory of the fallen", therefore, the state established the October Panorama "to commemorate the "great military victory" (Geisler, 2005: p.235).

#### 4. Conclusion:

Although, throughout history, the role of architecture in national celebrations differed due to contextual fluctuation, it always meant to construct a shared belief and a unified identity. In some cases, architecture was the main reason of a celebration, such as Cairo Tower, the headquarter of the TV, and the High Dam. In different contexts, architecture is built or redressed to serve the main purpose of the celebration, such as the architecture of the Opera house and Gezira palace—built to serve the inauguration of the Canal, the headquarter of the Suez Canal Authority and the Memorial of the Unknown Soldier. It is also worth mentioning here that the role of architecture in celebrations can be extended throughout different eras of its construction, such as the accommodation of the 23rd of July celebration in 'Abdin Palace—built during Khedive Ismail's rule. Here, it important to note that Egypt's multilayered history is one of its significant assets that is being marketed during these events. This aligns with Anholt's statement that "it is far better for countries to identify where their real genius lies, and what are their unique abilities or potential that really do put them in a class of their own" (2007, p.73).

Unequivocally, architecture was employed to legitimize a unified national narrative. The narrative of a European country along the Nile, in Ismail's time, was reinforced though an international celebration attended by European royals and manifested in an architecture that brings the world together. In Nasser's era, the narrative of an independent developed country was reinforced by formalized celebrations and manifested in the brand of modernism and modern architectural vocabulary. For Sadat, the narrative of the victorious country was reflected in the military and naval celebrations and epitomized in highlighting the nation's brand as a direct antecedent of the pharaohs. In conclusion, the aim of the contingencies of architecture and ceremonies was to epitomize a certain 'brand' narrative that exhibit either a rupture or continuity in the nation's history.

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