

# GLOBALIZATION AND EXTERRITORIALITY IN METROPOLITAN CAIRO

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**ABSTRACT.** Rapid construction of new spaces like hotels, malls, private clubs, and gated communities in Greater Cairo, Egypt produces structures disconnected spatially and conceptually from most of the existing urban fabric. Their spatial concepts and practices, as well as architectural forms and expertise, are based largely on globally available models. Planning and construction are guided by the search for security in the face of real or imagined fear of the urban masses and political upheaval. Concrete walls, guarded entrances, and high-tech security technology bear witness to these fears. Analysis of the Mena House Hotel, the Grand Egyptian Museum project, and the First Mall in Giza shows how these projects globalize Cairo and localize the global. Often these globalized spaces are remade by creating local and regional ties and design features that were not anticipated by the planners. Such changes shed light on underlying dynamics and contribute to a better understanding of in situ globalization. Whereas their physical features tend to accentuate their globalized nature, these spaces do not exist in isolation from their geographical and cultural contexts. Their everyday realities tell tales of reterritorialization that are frequently overlooked in scholarly debates.  
*Keywords:* Cairo, Egypt, exterritorial spaces, Giza, globalization, reterritorialization.

The Web site of the Mena House Hotel in Giza, Egypt boasts an impressive list of awards the hotel has received. In 2002 and 2003 the Mena House, located at the foot of the Cheops Pyramid, was listed among “The Most Exclusive Hotels in the World,” “Top Ten Hotels—World’s Best Service,” and “The Best 500 Hotels in the World” (Oberoi Hotels 2005). Of the twelve awards listed, only two—“Best Landscaped Garden in Egypt” and “Highest Guest Service Standard Amongst All Hotels in Egypt”—situate and compare the hotel in its immediate geographical context; that is, Egypt. The other awards use larger, regional—Africa, Indian Ocean, and Middle East—or global references in evaluating standards and achievements of this prestigious hotel. Similarly, announcements and debates of the new Grand Egyptian Museum mention that this megaproject, which is still under construction in the vicinity of the Giza Pyramids, is “not only the largest museum of Egyptian artifacts in the world, but also one of the largest museums in the world” (Ionides 2004). Like the Mena House, the museum project uses global comparisons and points of reference to illustrate its grandeur and envisioned role in the world. Reflecting similar quests for global competition and recognition, new shopping malls and other places of leisure and consumption in Cairo compete with their peers regionally and globally for setting new records, not only in terms of size but also with regard to outlandish features, such as ice-skating rinks or even skiing facilities in the midst of desert conditions. The Mena House, the Grand Egyptian Museum, and various malls are located on Egyptian soil, but where are they on the powerful symbolic map of globalization? Where are their cultural and economic points of reference? Do they

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