<u>I'm Egyptian, I'm Muslim, but I'm also Cosmopolitan: The Unlikely Young Cosmopolitans of Cairo.</u>

Introduction

> As I come out of my modest house and walk towards the metro station to catch the underground into central Cairo, I just have to look up and I see a completely different world to my own. People my age looking chic and wearing the latest fashions step out of modern villas and hop into expensive cars, while their personal chauffeur drives them to their destination. Although our worlds are mutually exclusive, all that separates us is a wall. I'm not jealous, however, but I'm content, as I know God must have done this for a reason, and my religious faith is very strong. What upsets me the most is that although we are forced to look at such people everyday and be reminded of our own inadequacies, they hardly realize that we exist (21-year-old lower middle class female).

Cairo, a divided city home to many numerous worlds within, is part of the global condition which characterizes cities of the developing South. While a new network of 'global spaces' (Oncu & Weyland, 1997: 1) occupied by five-star hotels, multinational companies and world-class shopping malls has invaded its metropolitan life, beyond the sleek facade of Cairo's urban skylines, an altogether different story subsists. Although its modern 'global spaces' have become zones of "first world" sophistication and global belonging for some, for the vast majority, they are unattainable zones of exclusion and segregation which bar them from taking part in these acts of belonging. Thus, Cairo looked at from 'below' reveals a gloomier yet increasingly more dynamic and unpredictable narrative of struggle: a daily struggle for space, identity and recognition. Such juxtapositions and inconsistencies, characteristic of contemporary cosmopolitan cities, have become a backdrop against which fresh possibilities for new and unusual forms of imagination and belonging are constantly being created and re-created. By understanding cosmopolitanism not as westernization, but as a form of *internal heterogeneity*, where through personal strategies and performance we incorporate the global into our own local repertoires, this paper is arguing that it is lower middle class Egyptian youth who are more deserving of the cosmopolitan label owing to their ability to undergo a careful and inclusive negotiation between alternative cultural repertoires. It is important to note that in the Egyptian context, the lower middle class have many characteristics that the west would associate with the working class. Most of

my participants in this category come from families where the parents work in badly paid government institutions, and have an average family income of $290 per month. Although they place a strong emphasis on university education, they tend to end up in some of the lowest paid jobs due to their lack of language and global cultural skills. Nevertheless, through an intricate integration of Islamic discourse and Islamic media into their daily social practices, members of the lower middle class are engaged in the production of dynamic cosmopolitan imaginations that draw from both a global and local cultural stockpile. This is a contrast to upper middle class youth who are forging for themselves more exclusive identities based solely on what they perceive to be "first-world" superiority and western modernity, while distancing themselves from what they regard as the vulgarity and tastelessness of the local.

Although attention has been paid to how neo-liberal policies and global cultural influences have affected global cities of the South, few studies have used ethnographic practices to examine the intimate everyday negotiations of such transformations (De Koning, 2009: 534). One of the most important practices which has become an influential part of the fabric of everyday life in non-western contexts, and indeed across the globe, is media consumption. Martin-Barbero (1993) uses the concept *mediations* to suggest how the media are an ever-present part of everyday life and influence it even when they are not directly being consumed. He believes that in a development context, we should move beyond a focus on the imperialism of the mass media and their role in homogenizing the cultures of non-western societies, and instead, explore the intense variety of modes of media use in the daily lives of citizens in these places and the ways audiences resist, appropriate and undermine media messages. Similarly, Canclini (1995: xv) suggests that communications technologies cannot be blamed for replacing traditions or homogenizing them, as they should be regarded as altering the conditions for obtaining and renewing knowledge. Media consumption should be regarded as a part of the hybridity which is an ongoing condition of all human cultures. Such cultures contain no zones of purity as they constantly undergo processes of transculturation- a two-way borrowing and lending between each other. The usefulness of Martin-Barbero and Canclini comes in the fact that they overcome the binary opposition that many globalization theories erect between the local and the global in mass-mediated culture. Instead, they propose a more grounded and context-specific dual examination of both everyday life and transnational media with a focus on the hybridity at their intersection. In a similar light, my research focuses on how cosmopolitan imaginations are created and sustained through everyday experiences of exclusion and belonging within different spaces of the city, and through media practice. Thus rather than looking at how the global is impacting upon the local, this study is an examination of locality in its daily cultural complexity and the importance that media and communication practices

have in its constitution (Kraidy, 2002: 187).

My project is based on nine months of intense ethnographic research in Cairo, with participant/non-participant observation and focus groups being the main qualitative methods I use. Additionally, however, I employ the technique of triangulation, using a survey which enables me to collect more specific and widespread information about the media consumption practices of 100 lower middle class youth. The depth and profundity which ethnography accords, makes it the most suitable method for the study of the complex areas of identity, the everyday and media consumption. It provides me with the opportunity of immersing myself into Egyptian culture, and developing an in-depth understanding of the experiences, sensations and events which Egyptian youth commonly experience on a daily basis. Although the original project on which this paper is based involves a comparison between Egyptian youth of three different class backgrounds, to report all their experiences is beyond the scope of this paper. Thus, the present analysis offers a specific focus on the lower middle class, although references will be made to the experiences of the other classes for reasons of comparison

Where are we Inside the Onion? - Cosmopolitanism as Internal Heterogeneity

What is the relationship of an onion to such vital theoretical concerns? Interestingly, Beck and Sznaider (2006) use it as a very vivid, visual metaphor to help distinguish between the terms cosmopolitanism and globalisation. They suggest that rather than seeing globalization as the primary mechanism which invades and impacts upon people's intimate spaces, cosmopolitanism allows us to shift the emphasis to internal developmental processes within the social world. While globalization refers to something taking place out there, cosmopolitanism happens "within". Globalization presupposes, but cosmopolitanism dissolves the 'onion model' of the world where the local and the national form the core and inner layer, and the international and the global form the outer layers (Beck and Sznaider, 2006: 5). By adopting a cosmopolitan outlook, therefore, I attempt to overcome the basic dualisms such as domestic/foreign or national/international which globalization theories tend to presuppose. It is essential to rework the assumption that humanity is naturally divided into a limited number of nation-states, organized around set territorial boundaries. This is not suggesting that the nation-state has become obsolete or irrelevant, but that it can no longer be regarded as the sole or primary reference point for a global citizenry.

As Werbner (2008) suggests, cosmopolitan theories need to examine the way individuals and collective actors engage with each other and with cosmopolitan ideas and movements beyond their immediate

locales. Theories need to accept that while rooted in the national, individuals may choose to become involved in other cultural imaginings and modes of belonging. Latham (2006), for instance, discusses the everyday presence of cosmopolitanism in New Zealand. He follows the daily footsteps of three adults and explores how, although they hardly travel and are deeply rooted in the city of Auckland, their lives disclose a range of remarkably cosmopolitan attributes. At first glance they may not appear to be obvious cosmopolites, but through a very local and grounded analysis, Latham explores how their patterns of socialization and consumption, and engagement with particular spaces of the city, reveals how their everyday lives are defined by connection to things that are not local to it.

Taking the above into consideration, although my research aims to engage seriously with the literature on globalization, I attempt to maintain a critical stance by going beyond the often restrictive molds of globalization theories, which tend to reduce global exchanges to a one-way western influence on countries of the periphery. Instead, I try to broaden my analysis and to approach my research with a more cosmopolitan framework in mind. I believe this opens up further opportunities for exploration of cultural imagination in a less western-centric orientation, and allows me to investigate how individuals and groups in a specific locality are able to (or not) engage and negotiate with the 'other', or indeed, with each other in their daily lives. I use the term *internal heterogeneity* to demonstrate how cosmopolitanism is not some alien global force which takes place 'out there' and then seeps down to us, but the very construction of cosmopolitanism takes place from within; from the immediacy and intimacy of the local. In this context, we should not understand the local as a victim of malicious global influences, but the local itself is naturally a heterogeneous force; a catalyst in the production and maintenance of the global. Thus, we should no longer be concerned with concrete identities or with territory, but with how new relations between self, other and world are formulated in moments of openness between the local and global (Delanty, 2006: 2). This is clear with my young lower middle class informants whose identity is constructed at the intersection between local and global influences as they refuse and are unwilling to exclusively belong to one or the other worldviews. As one twenty three year old male says:

> Yes I'm Egyptian, I'm a Muslim, but I'm also part of a global culture. They all require each other and are dependent on one another. For instance, being a good Egyptian means being a good pious Muslim. To be a good Muslim, one must be able to embrace modernity and progress, and be aware of global changes and developments, as Islam requires its followers to be well educated and well informed. At the same time, in order to engage with globalization, one must have a good religious background which acts as a solid basis from which they can decide what is acceptable to engage with and what must be left behind.

Culture here is perceived, not as embodied in a predetermined and exclusive way of life, but as part of an on-going process of formation and construction. Thus, a cosmopolitan conception of modernity is based on the notion of *multiple modernities:* instead of the global context being the primary reality and everything else a reaction to it, cosmopolitanism suggests we need to see civilizations as internally plural, based on frameworks of interpretation which can be appropriated in different ways by different social actors (Delanty, 2006: 5).

The polarization between the local and the global is based on the assumption that throughout history they have remained separate realms, only to become connected recently through the mass media. This, however, glosses over years of 'cultural osmosis' (Kraidy, 2002: 190) that has taken place between different national and cultural entities through years of war, migration and imperialism. Egypt's relationship to the west, for instance, is nothing new and dates back over 200 years to when it was occupied firstly by the French and then by the British in the late nineteenth century. This foreign imperial culture brought new notions of time and leisure such as horse-riding, polo and cricket. It also produced new elite public spaces such as clubs, bars, department stores and foreign schools such as Victoria College, the Franciscan schools and the American University, accessible only to a minority of privileged Egyptians (Abaza, 2006). In this context, some older and more traditional theories (Hannerz, 1990) perceive cosmopolitanism to be an activity of educated high-status professionals who have the economic and cultural capital to mingle with different cultures. It is through patterns of travel and mobility that these elites come into contact with the world. Nevertheless, whereas such theories base an engagement with cosmopolitanism solely on physical mobility, in more contemporary times - when the consumption of global media has become an important component of our daily schedules - exposure to different cultures now takes place in local, ordinary and mundane spaces. Thus, we no longer have to go out to the world, but the world comes to us via our computer and television screens, and is therefore sensed and shaped in everyday spaces and in the midst of our own locality and particular experiences.

With a particular focus on the media, Szerszynski and Urry (2006) highlight the contemporary importance of *visuality* and *mobility*: cosmopolitan citizenship today involves a transformation of vision that relies on the removal of the more mobile self from immediate everyday engagement in the world. Imaginative travel, for example, involves the way television has played a central role in transferring our worlds without the need to move outside our homes. It exposes us daily to other cultures and places, and creates an awareness of the way other people are living their lives (Szerszynski and Urry, 2006). Schien (1999) has similarly discussed how collectively, beyond national borders,

individuals across the globe have come to imagine themselves as cosmopolitan participants in a global communications culture. An intense desire for the foreign, through an increased exposure to a large range of exotic and different cultures via the television screen, can be fulfilled by engaging with the spaces of the shopping street and urban sites of consumption. This allows global consumers to surmount the spatial constraint of their locality and to engage in an 'imagined cosmopolitanism' (Schien, 1999). Any theory of cosmopolitanism, therefore, must expand its analysis to focus on the media as one of the most important contemporary vehicles for the spreading of global cultural values and lifestyles.

In the Egyptian context, the importance of the media comes in democratizing the process of cosmopolitanism, removing it from the hands of an exclusive minority of local elites, and making it accessible to many more people. This process began in the last quarter of the twentieth century with a major reversal of Egypt's socialist economic and political orientation. In 1974 President Anwar El-Sadat declared a policy of economic *infitah* ('open door policy) stepping away from the previous president's policies based on the Egyptianization and nationalization of large industrial firms, banks and insurance companies, and a great number of trade and service establishments. Consequently, with the spread of economic liberalization, Egypt was opened up to foreign investment, and new laws were passed to grant much greater concessions to foreign investors (Amin, 2004: 129). The increased presence of multinational companies brought about a rapid growth in the world of consumption, which extended the impact of globalization into the everyday lives of people in Egypt. The media, in particular, felt the brunt of this and witnessed a growth in foreign and especially American material that was commonly dubbed or subtitled in Arabic for local consumption. Programs such as *I Love Lucy* and *The Fugitive* hooked Egyptian viewers two or three times a week. Perhaps for the first time, therefore, more modest Egyptians became entrenched in an exciting world of global cultural consumerism. Billboard images and TV screens used rap-music to sell Coca-Cola, while film stars were used to capture female consumers for competing brands of laundry detergent manufactured by Unilever and Proctor and Gamble (Abu-Lughod, 2005).

Thus, television, one of the most obvious and immediately noticeable aspects of people's daily lives in Egypt, has a powerful hold over them, providing entertainment, information and culture. I believe, therefore, that as an object of research, television allows me to gain new insights into perspectives which are not limited to the boundaries of the television screen. By using television as a focal point of the analysis, it permits me to situate the immediate local context within a boarder network of the structures of power, politics, and the cultural imagination at the national, transnational and global levels

(Seymour, 1999: 12). As television is such an important part of people's daily lives in Cairo, it provides an excellent opportunity to investigate the ways televisual images bring similar minded people together through interpersonal communication, or split them apart along the division of class and gender lines (ibid.).

Just as the city, through its inclusion and exclusion of individuals from different urban spaces, helps to consolidate specific identities, so do the media create boundaries that connect as much as they divide on either side of that boundary. This will become clear further below, as although lower middle class youth may be disconnected from more 'elite' English-language media networks, they are choosing to engage and connect themselves in transnational Islamic networks where individuals are accorded entry on the basis of their religious piety and knowledge, not on the basis of their economic or cultural capital. This supports Aksoy and Robins' (2000) idea that transnational television flows, which expose audiences to a diverse range of channels and programs, involve audiences in difficult negotiations between spatially and historically different cultures and life worlds allowing them the experience of *thinking across space.* This opens up the possibilities of thinking beyond the restricted and immediate world of the national and the local (Aksoy and Robins, 2000: 358). According to the authors, 'thinking beyond space' allows for a more liberating analysis that shifts the discussion away from rigid national identities and towards an analysis of more dynamic cultural possibilities and tangible experiences. In light of this idea, we must question what the relationship is between the concepts of 'space' and 'place', often presented in research as existing on opposite ends on the spectrum of experience.

Whereas place is predominantly seen to represent a real location; one which is physical and bounded, space is thought to exist outside the borders of place; a more symbolic and imaginative arena, defined by meanings and interpretations rather than location. Auge (1995), for instance, refers to how the development of advanced and sophisticated communications technologies such as satellites and computers, has allowed individuals to become witnesses to events that are happening on the other side of the planet, all from the comfort of their own living rooms. Auge argues that this has led to the development of spaces which he terms non-places, or 'places of memory' in which no organic social life is possible. What such theories often point towards is that place is becoming increasingly irrelevant, as through the constant development of new forms of technology, we are becoming more and more enclosed in 'non-places' or spaces of imagination. Nevertheless, I believe we need to avoid thinking about space and place as somehow mutually exclusive, and should begin to think more about how they are interrelated; moreover, how one gives rise to the other. It could be helpful to use Lie's (2003) idea that space is lived place; through (inter)action and mediated communication, places transform into

spaces and become *communication spaces*. According to such a definition, space and place are not contradictory; rather, they often overlap as the way we experience place dictates the types of imaginative spaces we construct and choose to become involved in. If we relate this back to the city, for instance, then we will notice how urban experience is simultaneously a site of both space and place. It is a real physical location, and so is bounded by tangible forms of restriction such as police and security measures, while at the same time it is also a more illusive and imaginary space of exclusion and inclusion.

As we will see in more detail below, the way young Egyptians interact with the city plays an important role in shaping the types of cultural spaces they construct and become a part of. For instance, for the lower middle class, feeling that the city has become an immoral place where foreign values are taking precedence, they turn to Islamic media, which offer them spaces that they perceive to be more relevant to them and their everyday experiences. From this example, it appears that the media create spaces where places of the city do not offer them. Whereas metropolitan place often sustains exclusion and marginalization, mediated spaces can offer representation, meaning and inclusivity. In this context, Lie (2003) refers to television as an important space of intercultural communication that acts as a meeting zone for global and local repertoires. It is a space where the local and the global can be transformed in interaction. It seems, therefore, that space and place are not mutually exclusive entities, but the relationship between the two is much more dynamic, as an individual's direct experience of their immediate locale plays an important role in dictating the types of spaces they choose to engage in. Space, therefore, which is not restricted by the enclosed boundaries of place, can often be a liberating experience, as it offers more flexible cultural possibilities and imaginations. This will become clear in the next subsection when I discuss how exclusion and segregation have become a normal and everyday occurrence in Cairo's urban spaces, which have often pushed the lower classes towards finding alternative cultural spaces of meaning and relevance.

Cairo Cosmopolitan: New (Class) Connections in Urban Space

As I have argued above, there is an absence of research that documents how the global is incorporated and encountered in people's everyday realities. More studies are needed to investigate and document how individuals in non-western locales experience global flows and repertoires in the immediate spaces of their daily lives, and how such practices impact upon processes of identity formation. In an attempt to overcome such shortcomings in research, scholars have recently turned to an analysis of the

experiences of those living within *cities*, whose urban cosmopolitan spaces are a compelling site for research, as they contain the contradictions and juxtapositions of the world at large. The city, therefore, has come to represent one of the most important contemporary spaces that is characteristic of Massey's (2007) concept of *'local internationalism'* due to its intricate amalgamation of the local and the global. It is a place located within specific geographical territory, while at the same time, its cultural, political and economic links extend beyond the local. Sassen (2000) similarly confirms how the city has become a strategic space for the formation of transnational identities and communities. As a space it is place-centered, being embedded in particular and strategic sites, while it is also transterritorial as it connects other sites which are not geographically proximate although they are intensely connected to each other. The cultural effects of this dual axis of the city which is simultaneously local and transnational, can be seen in Eade's (1994) investigation of how young British-Bangladeshi Muslims are constantly engaged in highly versatile individual deliberations over their identity. Although these youth live in the city of London, and thus strongly identify with a British national allegiance, they are also moving imaginatively between alternative visions of identity which are shifting their loyalties beyond the immediate frontiers of the city where they live. They are strongly engaged in supranational loyalties which allow them to engage with a wider regional Asian identity and transnational Islamic networks.

An important drawback with much of the literature on the city, nevertheless, is that its story is a very western one which fails to recognize that cities within the developing countries of the global south may in fact have very different stories to tell. Much of the literature on western cities focuses on the issue of financial and service factors, multiculturalism and the need to live alongside the 'other'. If we turn to non-western cities, however, then I believe the issues of poverty and economic deprivation, which produce strong contradictions in lifestyles and access (or lack of access) to urban space, should become one of the main focal points of research. Cairo, for instance, a city of over 20 million inhabitants (EGYMEDICA.com, 2008) embodies stark contradictions in living standards. It is estimated that almost 50 per cent of the population are living in poverty (Bayat cf. Abo-Lughoud: 2004, 144), while a significant proportion of Cairenes are living in luxury gated communities, eating in international restaurants and participating in global travel. As we will see in the analysis below, the socio-cultural and spatial segregation of this divided city has resulted in tensions that have accompanied class configurations and their expressions in the urban landscape.

Simmel (Allen, 2000) coins the concept *stranger* to capture the contradictory experiences of urban life where individuals may be spatially close, yet socially very distant. Although people may feel that they belong to the city, they also feel it necessary to state their differences from each other. Denis (2006), for

instance, has referred to how gated communities have become an increasingly popular feature of Cairo's suburbs, which protect the elites that live in them from the city's pollution and overcrowding. Such gated enclaves with their potable water, private security and quality 'five star' services, are an effective response to a Cairo which has become a complex of 'unsustainable nuisances against which nothing more can be done, except to escape or to protect oneself' (p.50). Thus, the Egyptian elite are attempting to escape the 'mental life' of urban Cairo; its noise, litter, toxic fumes and the vulgar behavior of the less educated by maintaining *social reserve*. They close themselves off from strangers, choosing to engage in smaller, more familiar circles (Allen, 2000). The lower middle class are well aware of their exclusion from Cairo's elite networks, and as one twenty four year old female tells me:

> It's like my class has come to define me. People see me not as a female or a university graduate or an Egyptian, but as a lower class being. Therefore my mobility within Cairo has become greatly restricted because of this. The way I talk, look and act doesn't fit in with this sophisticated image that the elite are trying to build for themselves, and so they keep me out. However I feel sorry for these people, as they are the ones who have missed the most important point. Being modern isn't about being as Westernized as possible, but about having the ability to engage with different cultures and respecting them, while all the time not forgetting who you really are. Most of all, its about respecting our Islamic faith which is what primarily defines us, not the superficial things they look to such as the type of handbag I'm holding. They are the ones who have a really serious identity crisis.

Hence, by including the upper middle class in a backwardness which involves a lack of attachment to cultural values and a disregard for religiosity, the lower middle class are able to reverse the elite perception of them as being stagnant and unprogressive. Nevertheless, this does not detract from the fact that in the Egyptian context, where an individual's social status is chiefly determined by their cultural and financial capital, class is a concept of central importance, although one of great complexity. A person's perceived social positioning in Egyptian society profoundly shapes their access to power, cultural practices, lifestyles, and even relations of reproduction (Moghadam 1993 cf. Inhorn, 1996: 34). Nevertheless, accurate class analysis has been severely lacking from decades of contemporary Egyptian research. According to Inhorn (1996), despite the recent profusion of studies in the Middle East and Egypt, clear, representative class-based analysis is much called for as certain segments of the population- namely the upper classes- are usually overrepresented in research. As De Koning (2009) writes, it was the years following the 1952 Revolution that really defined and shaped Egypt's social class pyramid. During this period, the Egyptian state lead by President Nasser's socialist government came to play a central role in the national economy. Through the democratization of public education and the provision of government jobs to all graduates, a large urban middle class was

fostered.

From the 1970s, however, with the withdrawal of the state as a primary agent of national development, and the integration of Egypt within global economic networks, the professional middle class was first to feel the brunt of this change. The aim was no longer to have a decent public education or to secure a respectable government job, but became keeping up with global standards of modernity; gaining a private language based education and working in the growing private sector. Not all members of the middle class, however, were able to adapt to these changes. Those who did and were able to participate in increasingly conspicuous cosmopolitan lifestyles, enjoyed a relatively easy ride up the social ladder. A large chunk, however, which my lower middle class informants belong to, were forced down. Indeed, the analysis of my survey reveals that although all the lower middle class youth I question are university educated, they end up in some of the lowest paid government jobs, thus securing a dismal family income of approximately $290 a month.

The remainder of this paper presents the results from my research, and discusses how lower middle class Egyptians are engaging in cosmopolitan imaginations in light of everyday urban experiences and media consumption.

Lower Middle Class Youth: Between Urban Exclusion and Islamic Inclusion

When these youth are prompted to discuss their feelings towards the national, a very strong sense of nihilism and self criticism emerges, which reflects a lack of pride in their own cultural identity. Indeed, the informants often point out how there is a general lack of regard or esteem for anything Egyptian. As Amany, a twenty two year old female suggests:

> I think the problem is that the youth of Egypt don't feel pride towards anything that we have here; neither the language, nor the dress, nor the cultural codes. In a way, they can't be blamed as our culture doesn't have anything positive really to look up to. What has Egypt achieved in the past 50 years? Absolutely nothing - nothing politically, economically or culturally. We are followers not leaders .What I think is very alarming, however, is the way the Arabic language is being completely dismissed - this is the language of the Holy Quran. If we are unique in anything, then it is in our religion, but unfortunately, there is a disregard for Islam in general which I think is shameful.

In response to such feelings, which I discover to be shared by the three different classes I originally worked with, there has been a widespread mimicking of western popular culture in Egypt which serves

to symbolically fill in this perceived cultural void (Kraidy, 2002). As I am frequently told by them, lower middle class youth are choosing to adopt western fashion trends, include English words in their sentences and aspire towards western values of democracy, freedom and respect for all. Before I expand on this further, it is essential to clarify what these young people mean when they talk of 'el gharb' or the 'west'. Importantly, this is not a reference to some specific geographical location such as France, England or the United states. In popular culture and everyday talk it has become a more general allusion to a wider and rather elusive cultural imagining which embodies the scientific, technological, cultural and economic progress characteristic of prosperous 'first world' nations. For instance, as twenty two year old Reem, a lower middle class woman says:

> The west is the centre of the globe- where all the latest developments stem from. All the newest innovations in technology, science or the economy happen there. They are the leaders and we are the followers.

> Me: where do you perceive the west to be exactly?

> Europe, America……the rich countries that are scientifically and technologically advanced. They are countries of the first world really aren't they?

Following Egypt's invasion by British imperialist forces during the early twentieth century, Egyptians became greatly impressed with westerners and their progressive, technologically advanced way of life. A powerful belief followed that Egypt needs to emulate the west in order to become recognised as a 'modern' society. Modernization, therefore, became synonymous with westernization. It is clear how Egypt's history as a colonized country has played a very important role in the way modern Egyptian popular imagination has developed with a strong belief that modernity or cultural progress is encapsulated within a 'western' way of life. Thus, although I am aware that there is no singular 'west', I will use this term sparingly in reference to a progressive and superior cultural entity (that predominantly stems from America and Europe) that the young participants refer to.

Thus, believing that they have no affirmative cultural reference points in their own locality, these young lower middle class Egyptians feel forced to search elsewhere for a more positive cultural model. As twenty three year old Ahmed comments:

> One will only look to the outside and mimic when they know that they're weak and insignificant. We all know there is a cultural vacuum in Egypt, and so rather than blaming youth for mimicking the outside, we need to cure the root cause, which affects us all.

The way Egyptian youth are engaging with western cultural repertoires, however, dramatically differs according to class. For the upper middle class, they are overcoming this cultural void by disconnecting from the local as much as possible, instead simulating and engrossing themselves in western cultural repertoires to the furthest extent. For them, westernization is an end in itself. For the lower middle classes, on the other hand, the story is quite different as the west has become an important cultural reference point from which they have been able to re-work their identity as Egyptians in a way that makes it more acceptable to them. Thus, a western modernity has become a means of negotiating a more gratifying identity. In this light, particular local communities may draw on a highly stylized and often idealized view of a global culture, not necessarily out of a desire to imitate it, but to extend the range of possibilities of their own identity (Latham, 2006: 102). We need, therefore, to avoid setting up a priori hierarchies between local, national and the global, and begin to think more about how heterogeneity is incorporated into already existing social forms, or rejected (Latham, 2006).

As the first participant quotation above suggests, an important way this heterogeneity is achieved with lower middle class Egyptians is through the daily integration of Islam into their social practices. When asked about their identity, they always reply by stating that they are first and foremost Muslim. Indeed, it seems that Islam plays a central role in their everyday lives; it influences embodied appearance, discourse, the places they choose to socialize in and eventual partner choice. Previous research on the role that Islam plays in people's lives, has often regarded it as a strategy for resisting western modernity. Barber (2003), for instance, has commented on how fundamentalist Jihad has arisen in opposition to a global western culture which he terms McWorld. Nevertheless, through a grounded ethnographic assessment of everyday life, I believe it is necessary to uncover how individuals themselves understand and approach the question of being modern and of being Muslim in their daily lives, and thus how they draw on different discourses and assessments about modernness in various ways (Deeb, 2006: 16). In the case of lower class Egyptians, forced to deal with global influences that surround them in their everyday lives, it appears that Islam acts as an important filter which allows them not to resist these global influences, but to negotiate and more smoothly integrate them within their everyday lives. This delicate integration of Islamic discourse into everyday social practices is witnessed on two important levels: everyday mobility within the city and media consumption. I will talk about each one in turn.

In terms of mobility within the city, young Egyptians are faced with making daily decisions about the

types of places that are suitable for them to socialize in. For the upper middle class it is important that the venues they choose maintain standards of "first world" superiority through modern settings and sophisticated designs, while also sustaining social closure by keeping members of the lower class out. This is achieved through the employment of particular strategies like the introduction of unreasonably high minimum charges, having rules about certain prohibited dress and employing security guards who eject individuals who do not have the 'right' appearance. For the lower middle class, on the other hand, it is more important that the places they choose are zones of what they perceive to be "respectability" and "good reputation". As twenty-four year old Fatma comments:

> I don't see any problem in going to cafés. I actually enjoy going there with my girlfriends for a chat and something to drink. You just need to choose the right sort of café to go to. There are many posh and expensive cafés sprouting up all across Cairo - but all sorts of things go on in there such as girls and guys being intimate, girls wearing really revealing clothing and talking in loud voices. However, such acts clearly violate the boundaries of what's acceptable in our religion as it is not respectable for girls to act this way. My friends and I, therefore, want to avoid being associated with such behavior- as Muslim girls it's our responsibility to act respectfully in order to maintain a good reputation at all times. My reputation is my family's.

This quotation demonstrates the extent to which Islamic discourses are intricately negotiated in everyday social practices. In reference to Billig's (1995) concept of 'banal nationalism,' I suggest that my lower middle class informants are experiencing a form of *banal Islam* where religious discourses are unconsciously embedded in the routines, decisions and assumptions of everyday life. Being well aware that they are excluded from the upscale venues and spaces of Cairo, the lower middle class youth have become involved in their own socialization networks that allow them, to an agreeable extent, to experience sophistication and affiliation with western cultural repertoires, while all the time, maintaining an important Islamic reference point. For example, during one focus group session, a group of lower middle class women proudly tell me how they go to cafés with English names such as Green Village (although they cannot pronounce these names, that are usually spelt incorrectly anyway) but find such cafés to maintain high standards of "respectability" as there is a security guard roaming around to exclude any overtly intimate behavior and flirting between the sexes.

Thus, although these young people do not refuse sitting in cafés, they select ones which allow them to maintain respectability, which they highlight as an important part of the reputation of any good Muslim. It appears, therefore, that everyday decisions about where to socialise are placed within an Islamic framework, yet underpinned by a desire for engagement with western inspired forms of

comfort and entertainment. For instance, the young lower middle class crave their chosen cafés to maintain a hygienic, relatively classy and well ordered atmosphere - similar to cafés in any western metropolis. As twenty two year old Ahmed suggests:

> I think the introduction of such cafés in to Egyptian culture is important as it gives the decent youth who just want to chat and grab a bite to eat, somewhere reputable and acceptable to socialize. They are also different to the ahwa balady (traditional Egyptian coffee shops) which collect the vulgar unemployed men who have nothing better to do than sip tea, play backgammon and talk about other people. The modern cafés, however, have a clean and protected atmosphere which is more sophisticated than the traditional ones. You know, as the Prophet said, cleanliness is a part of faith, so it's a responsibility to choose a clean and healthy atmosphere to socialize in. The places you sit in reflect on you as a person.

According to the above quotation, therefore, it appears that lower middle class youth are using Islamic discourses to position themselves somewhere in between the perceived downfalls of the two other classes. They wish to distance themselves from both from the vulgarity and crudeness of the unsophisticated working class, but also from the looseness and moral corruptness they associate with the higher classes. Thus, it appears that the relationship of lower middle class youth to the city is an ambivalent one: although they need to move around the metropolis to reach work, home and their accepted leisure spaces, the city is also a site of increasingly lax values. This is demonstrated by what they perceive to be the openly promiscuous relationships between males and females in public spaces, the revealing and inappropriate fashions that some girls choose to wear, and the way the call to prayer is ignored by most youth in the street. However, through the employment of personal strategies, lower middle class youth are able to keep the moral laxity associated with the capital at bay. One of these, which has already been discussed, is the way men and women choose spaces to socialize in which allow them to maintain "respectability" and a "good reputation". Another strategy, more exclusive to females, is engagement in an 'embodied piety' (Deeb, 2006: 103). This involves the way the body becomes a canvas on which personal piety is transformed into a subtle public demonstration of faith. One of the most important public demonstration of faith is the wearing of the hijab.

A number of these young women comment on how they are able to maintain a comfortable urban mobility by wearing the hijab, as they feel protected and thus able to move around the city in a more liberated manner. Of the 100 lower middle class youth I ask, 36 per cent use the underground system for transport, 25 percent use minibuses, and 32 percent use more than one means of public transport. In this context, where the seclusion of a private car is not affordable, Islamic dress plays a significant

role as it acts as a banner which signals that this particular female is a pious Muslim, and thus is not interested in any form of flirting or male attention. In this way, the hijab becomes a protecting socio-spatial practice undertaken by females in light of their experiences of city life. Indeed, during the group discussions, many of the lower middle class women comment that due to the hijab, they feel better able to move around the city with much more confidence. If they receive any unwanted male attention or verbal harassment, I am told, they cannot be blamed for it. As twenty two year old Dina suggests:

> Even while wearing the hijab, I do still receive attention from males in the street. However, it's now their problem, not mine. I've covered my body and made sure that I don't look overly attractive, so there's nothing more I can do. Therefore I have the right to walk in the streets proudly knowing that I'm not doing anything to provoke negative attention.

The way young lower middle class Egyptians interact with the media also plays a central role in how they are involved in the daily formulation of cosmopolitan imaginings, which allow them to undergo a negotiation between local particularity, religious attitudes and a global articulation of culture. Firstly, it is important to highlight the centrality of television to these informants. A hundred per cent of the sample I question own a television set at home, with 91 percent having access to satellite channels in the household. Additionally, television is an intrinsic part of their everyday schedules: 99 per cent of the youth watch television every day, 40 per cent watch for two hours a day, while 22 per cent watch for more than three hours daily. For the lower middle class, the media are important cultural resources that give them access to a world other than their own. A large proportion of the upper class youth have first-hand experience of the west through patterns of regular travel, where as only two per cent of the lower middle class youth I ask have traveled outside of Egypt. Thus, through the consumption of western media products, particularly movies and sitcoms, the west becomes a familiar part of their everyday cultural repertoires, which they draw upon in the formation of cosmopolitan identities. As twenty-five year old Sameh suggests:

> I love watching American movies and not just for the entertainment value. I like to lose myself in the narratives; in the clean streets, the well organized work spaces, the respectable people and the plethora of personal freedoms. These are all things we are lacking in Egypt, although if we implement them here, it will be a much better place to live. People constantly criticize the West for its excessive freedom and moral corruption, but fail to look at all the positive ideologies and values we can learn from them. Egypt does have many rich resources and thus the potential to be a great country. We just need to focus more on increasing personal freedom and respect.

By acting as windows that expose young lower middle class Egyptians to an array of alternative cultures and lifestyles, therefore, the media are allowing individuals to aspire towards cultural change; to remap the boundaries that maintain their sense of identity in a way they find more gratifying. Thus, rather than arguing that global media are weakening local identities, it could be more appropriate to claim that the media are offering individuals an important resource from which to define and construct their sense of identity. As participants in this study demonstrate, in a situation where Egyptian youth have a strong attitude of self criticism toward their national culture, their daily exposure to transnational television has allowed them to discover new ways and new sources for negotiating the content that compromises their identity. As mentioned previously, a desire to engage with specific western discourses is not an end in itself, but a means through which they can re-imagine the local in a way which makes it more acceptable and satisfying. This supports Martin-Barbero's (2001) mediation approach, which suggests that interaction with the mass media is not a passive process, because people are able to constantly re-elaborate, reinterpret, and transform messages they are exposed to. In the Latin American context, Martin-Barbero refers to how the mass media played a central role in allowing the masses to recognize and construct their sense of identity; the media became an important stage on which the 'nation' was formulated. The media, therefore, are intrinsic to everyday life and influence it even in the instances where they are not being directly consumed.

A very important example of the way audiences are able to constantly elaborate, reinterpret and transform messages they are exposed to in the media, is demonstrated in the increasing popularity of regional, or specifically Turkish media. Seventy per cent of females in the lower middle class groups declare that they are regular fans of Turkish serials, specifically the one named *Noor*. The plot of this serial focuses on a romantic love story, including the struggles and tribulations, between Mohannad and his independent fashion designer wife, Noor. Sami (2008) discusses the increasing importance of these Turkish serials in Egyptian homes, and refers to them as a 'social and behavioural phenomenon, worthy of study'. When I ask these females during the focus group sessions why this serial is so popular, it seems that the marital relationship between the main actor and actress is the factor of attraction. Specifically, the way the lead actor treats his wife with so much compassion, love and respect is a point of great admiration. The words of Amany, a twenty two year old female demonstrate this:

> Mohannad is just so gentle with Noor, and always takes in to consideration how she's feeling and what she wants. Even when he does upset her, he makes a great effort to apologize and show her how much he regrets it. Generally, however, he is such a gentleman with her, always buying her presents, hugging her, saying nice

things and just being really nice. They both really appreciate each other and demonstrate how marriage isn't the end of love, but that even married couples can be romantic and loving.

It appears that Turkish serials have become an important catalyst allowing these females to negotiate key gender roles that affect their everyday lives. The married females of the group tell me how such story lines have opened their eyes to aspects that they feel are missing from their own relationships such as romance and respect. Thus, they have become an important medium through which they have aspired to change and perfect these relationships. It is important to note, nevertheless, that Egypt is one of the most important and avid producers of drama serials across the Middle East. Thus, why is it that audiences have left their own successful local productions, preferring that the negotiation of everyday familial and marital relations be performed through these Turkish serials? Importantly, Egypt has a long history with Turkey, which ruled the country for almost 300 years, and so until this day, Egyptians have a cultural fondness towards the Turks. Additionally, located in Europe yet being a Muslim country, Turkey is often regarded as an important cultural mediator; one strategically positioned between West and East.

Often, the cultural and religious expanse that exists between Egypt and the west makes comparison between the lives of these young Egyptian audiences and the on-screen characters of western media unrealistic. The plots, characters and sets of western serials may be culturally alien to the everyday realities of these lower class viewers. Nevertheless, the proximity of Turkey's culture to Egypt, which is often perceived to be more Middle Eastern than European, and particularly their sharing of one religion, often makes the story lines much more accessible, and much more relevant to their own daily lives and concerns. The female respondents, for instance, often compare their husbands' appearance to the strikingly handsome character of Mohannad; if a Turkish guy can look this good, then why can't their Egyptian husbands and fiancés?

Taking this in to consideration, however, I am quite surprised when I watch this Turkish serial for myself. Drinking alcohol, extramarital relationships and on-screen kissing are common features of these serials; the same features which are usually condemned in American media. Why is that that they are accepted in a different context? The answer seems to lie once again with Islam: these characters may drink or engage in unlawful relationships, but at the end of the day, they are Muslims just like them. Frames with Quranic verses hung on the walls of the characters' homes, the frequent appearance of mosques in the streets, some of the female characters wearing the headscarf and the occasional character praying, seem to make up for some of the morally unacceptable behavior that occurs. As

twenty-two year old Amna says:

> These Turkish characters are Western in many ways: they drink and have
> relationships outside of marriage and go to nightclubs, but at the end of the day
> they are still Muslims. We all make mistakes, but eventually we return to God, and
> that does happen in this serial. For instance, whenever the characters have a major
> crisis such as someone in hospital, they turn to God, speaking to Him and praying
> that things go well. I think that's a really good morale: even if you generally forget
> God in your everyday life, you will eventually return to Him in the end!

It appears, therefore, that these Turkish serials help their viewers to push the boundaries of what is acceptable. What the viewers may find intolerable in the context of a western or American program, they hardly notice in these Turkish serials as it takes place within a more respectable Islamic framework. Yes, the behavior of the characters does not always respect the boundaries of Islamic morality, but their acceptance that they are Muslims and that their ultimate fate is in the hands of Allah, appears to compensate for this. Thus, it seems that the global has become indigenized through the regional, and this is evident in the way characters in the Turkish serial have become Arabic personalities. For instance, the serial is translated through the dubbed voices of Arabic actors, while all of the characters are given Arabic names. The identities of the real Turkish actors have become irrelevant as they are now considered to be Arab figures known by their Arabic names of 'Mohannad' and 'Noor'. Thus through such techniques, the global has been brought closer to home, and by being enveloped within local religious repertoires, it has become accepted and become a part of the cosmopolitan vision integrated into the everyday lives of these audiences.

Following on from the above, as well as the centrality of western films and Turkish serials to their media consumption schedules, Islamic television channels, unsurprisingly, attract much popularity. Eighty-two percent of the sample of 100 people I ask respond that they regularly watch the two Islamic channels Iqraa and Al-Nass, while 70 per cent of them confirm that religious channels and programs are a very important part of their media consumption schedules. In response to their exclusion from the upscale and elite networks of Cairo, lower middle class youth claim that becoming a worldly and well informed global citizen is not about disconnecting oneself form the local and being seen in particular elite places, but about the way one draws on aspects of the global to improve and rework their image as an Egyptian Muslim. In this context, through the consumption of Islamic media, they are able to re-imagine themselves as part of a transnational religious Islamic network where individuals are judged according to religious strength and piety, and not on the make of their jeans or style of their hair. Through particular programs, especially ones where a religious scholar engages in a

live discussion with a young studio audience, these young Cairenes feel connected to like-minded Islamic youth cultures across the globe. Through these types of programs they are able to gain an insight into how young Muslims are living worldwide, and how they are able to maintain a balance between their religion and global discourses on a daily basis.

During a participant observation session, a group of girls are discussing their admiration for the Islamic televangelist Amr Khaled and his ability to connect Muslims everywhere. They refer to how he always comes up with new projects and encourages people everywhere, even those living in the west, to take part in any way they can. Thus young Muslims across the globe, which the informants refer to as their 'brothers' and 'sisters' in Islam, come together with a purpose and thus feel that they are achieving something for God and for Islam. An important attribute of Khaled is that he is able to link fundamental Islamic teachings with modern processes. By maintaining a sensible balance he is able to encourage youth to combine being a pious Muslim with being a modern global citizen.

A very telling argument is given by twenty year old Amal:

> Yes we like to watch American movies and serials as they are entertaining, and also allow us to see a world of order, cleanliness and organization which is missing from our everyday reality. This type of media is an important resource as we can learn a lot from them. But Islamic media are also very important as many of us depend on them for our religious knowledge, and thus they help us form a framework for what's right and what's wrong, and they are the basis from which we make everyday choices and interact with global discourses.

According to Sassen, the uneven nature of the global grid of cities, and the socio-economic polarization which characterizes them, has led to the formation of new transnational connections which usually cut across national boundaries. Sassen (2001) believes there is an interconnection of 'global cities,' where urban centers that have achieved global city status may be more connected to each other than to other cities within the same nation. In a similar light, through their media consumption practices, lower middle class youth in Cairo are engaged in distant religious transnational connections which are surpassing immediate national and urban frontiers. As I argued at the beginning of this paper in the discussion on the dichotomy between space and place, the way individuals experience everyday life in the city can plays an important role in how they construct and chose to engage in particular cultural spaces of imagination and belonging. In this light, although these young lower middle class Egyptians feel marginalized and ejected from the more elite urban youth cultures existing adjacent to them, through the consumption of Islamic media they are able to

connect themselves to more inclusive transnational Islamic networks elsewhere. Thus, despite feeling disconnected from the city, they are able to engage in more virtual, yet symbolically meaningful connections. Thus as much as we need to focus on the divisions created by the drawing of boundaries in contemporary cities, it is also significant to recognize the development of new and often more unpredictable connections, and the role the media play in forging such connections.

Conclusion: Between Western Ideology and Islamic Morality

Within this paper, I have attempted to bring to light the micropolitics of local/global interactions within the everyday experiences of city life. With transnational media at the heart of these daily experiences, the main question underpinning this paper is not whether identities are hybrid, but about the types of local, class-based formations involved in the negotiation of hybrid cosmopolitanized identities. By understanding cosmopolitanism as a form of internal heterogeneity, as a way local and global repertoires are taken up in personal strategies and performance, I have attempted to uncover how such repertoires are signifying specific choices, allegiances and modes of belonging (De Koning, 2009) for young lower middle class Egyptians. I argued that through an ability to negotiate for themselves a highly heterogeneous cosmopolitanism dependent upon local repertoires (particularly religion), yet also drawing on global discourses, the lower middle class are more deserving of the cosmopolitan label. This is evident in the types of urban spaces they chose to socialize in and their media consumption practices. This is a contrast to the upper middle classes, who, by disconnecting themselves from the local, are imposing very rigid boundaries and thus forming exclusive identities for themselves based on what they perceive to be elite "first world" modernity and standards.

Nevertheless, the relationship of lower middle class youth to the west is an ambivalent and dynamic one. Although western modernity is regarded as an important source of progressive principles such as freedom, respect and democracy, it is simultaneously a site of moral corruption. By referring to the 'spiritual ignorance' and immorality of the west - its excessive materialism, objectification of women and sexual promiscuity – these lower middle class youth are able to include the west in a backwardness that must be left behind. Hence, they are able to invert western perceptions of the Muslim world as non-modern (Deeb, 2006). The negotiation of cosmopolitan identities, therefore, is formed on two levels: the *moral* and the *ideological*. Although the ideological level tends to be informed by global repertoires and western-inspired values such as freedom and personal respect, on the level of morality, Islam is the main reference point that dictates important social choices. This confirms an unwillingness and inability by these youth to belong exclusively to one or the other

worldviews. In reality, very dynamic, but grounded, class-based meanings are created at the intersection of local and global

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