

# I'M EGYPTIAN, I'M MUSLIM, BUT I'M ALSO COSMOPOLITAN: THE UNLIKELY YOUNG COSMOPOLITANS OF CAIRO

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**Overview:** This research is based on a nine month ethnographic study involving a large scale media consumption survey, participant/non participant observation and focus groups. By discussing cosmopolitanism as a form of internal heterogeneity, this research is reworking the prevalent idea that cosmopolitanism is an activity of the upper social classes by arguing that it is lower middle class Egyptian youth who are more deserving of the cosmopolitan label.

## Worlds Apart: Which group would you consider more Cosmopolitan?

Group 1: Upper middle class (monthly income £2000)



Group 2: Lower middle class (monthly income £190)



## How they See themselves as Cosmopolitan: in their own words.

Group 1: Upper middle class

- I attend an American University*  
Ahmed 19 years old
- I speak fluent English and French*  
Laila 19 years old
- I am always up to date with global fashion trends*  
Karim 21 years old
- I travel to a western country every year and buy most of my clothes there*  
May 20 years old
- I dine in international restaurants and am always up for trying different cuisines*  
Farida 21 years old

Group 2: Lower middle class

- I make sure that I am aware of important global political events*  
Walid 23 years old
- I try to improve myself as an Egyptian by taking important values from the West that we don't have here*  
Sameh 23 years old
- Islam requires that we integrate with other cultures and learn from them what can allow us to become better Muslims*  
Asmaa 18 years old
- The west are not evil or damaging, on the contrary, there is so much we can learn from them as well as give them*  
Mahmoud 22 years old

### What is Cosmopolitanism: The theory

Ability of individuals to negotiate with the 'other' in their daily lives

This supports a dialogic imagination (Beck 2002) which corresponds to the 'coexistence of rival ways of thinking in the individual experience'.

This cosmopolitanism happens "within"; the very construction of cosmopolitanism takes place from the immediacy and intimacy of the local.

### Szerszynski and Urry (2006):

Visuality and mobility of the mass media have allowed people to engage in imaginative travel.

### Schein (1999):

This has allowed individuals across the globe to imagine themselves as belonging collectively, beyond national borders, to a global communications culture.

This takes place through the MEDIA which have become contemporary global windows connecting people to faraway cultures

In contemporary times, even when the physical mobility of some groups is severely restricted, a global citizenry have become easily transported amongst different cultures from the comfort of their own living rooms.

### Case Study of Sarah:

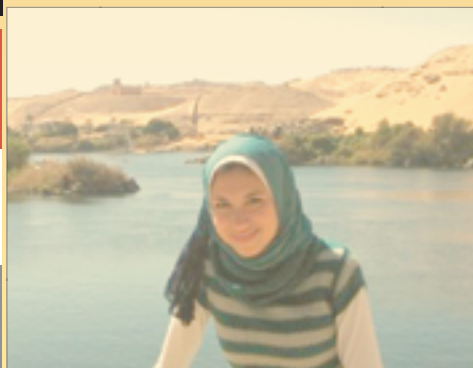
An unlikely young cosmopolitan of Cairo

Earns: Less than £60 a month

Languages: Speaks only Arabic

Travel: Never travelled outside of Egypt

Media: Watches four hours of television per day- mainly American films and serials. Also follows global news.



religion →

local ↓

I'M MUSLIM

- I go to the Mosque
- I pray everyday
- I fast

I'M EGYPTIAN

- I support my country's football team
- I want to see Egypt improve
- I like to learn from different cultures

BUT I'M ALSO COSMOPOLITAN

- I want to learn a new language
- I respect other religions
- I watch global news events

Global incorporated into Religion and Local = COSMOPOLITAN

• This case demonstrates the lower middle class to be a group with high cosmopolitan orientations •

## Cosmopolitanism as INTERNAL HETEROGENEITY

Not Westernization but the reflexive orientation of individuals to incorporate the global in to their own local repertoires.

(This makes cosmopolitanism an) EMOTIONAL and very INDIVIDUAL PROJECT (that takes place through)

### MEDIA

As they are important 'windows onto the world' that expose individuals across space to a global culture. This allows, even those with minimum cultural and financial resources, to feel a part of activities and events that are occurring many miles away. An intense desire for the global has been created through an increased exposure to a large range of exotic and different cultures via the television screen, and has been realised by engaging with spaces of the shopping street and urban sites of consumption, which have allowed global consumers to surmount the spatial constraint of their locality and engage in an 'imagined cosmopolitanism'.

Personal strategies and performance (especially the)