

The London School of Economics and Political Science

*A Tale of Three Cities? Mediated Imagination, Class and
the Many Young Cosmopolitans of Cairo*

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Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis has explored the ways in which young Egyptians construct different classed versions of a cosmopolitan imagination while located in the megacity of Cairo. In an intense ethnographic study, I have examined the ways in which young men and women shape their identities at the juxtaposition of a social reality, which is rigidly structured around classed and gendered divides on the one hand, and a diverse and fluid system of media representations of the *self* and *others*, on the other hand. Focusing on everyday life in Cairo has allowed me to examine the contradictory social and cultural experiences associated with being young in a megacity of the global south. Whilst the daily urban lives of these young Cairenes are located within embedded structures that place firm limits on their social and physical mobilities, the city is also a more creative terrain where these highly structured limits on the self are negotiated. As young people move physically in the city, yet shift imaginatively between different systems of representation available to them in the rich mediascapes they have access to, their sense of identity expands. Specifically, this cosmopolitanism takes the form of a dynamic subjective space and a category of imagination from within which identities, drawing heavily on globally circulating media products, are reflexively understood and interpreted. Thus, operating from within repressive, socially fragmented, yet highly mediated everyday contexts, I explore how young Egyptians construct three different versions of a cosmopolitan imagination: *closed cosmopolitanism* as imagined by the upper middle class, *critical cosmopolitanism* relating to the experiences of the lower middle class, and for the working class, an *implicit cosmopolitan imagination*.

Communication technologies can function as disembedding mechanisms, powerfully enabling individuals (and sometimes whole families or communities) to escape, at least imaginatively, from their geographical locations. When people's situation is particularly constrained, such escape becomes all the more important.....

(Morley, 2006: 149-150)

Imagine that for 24 years you don't ever have hope of things getting better. Mubarak is ruling Egypt with an iron fist, while the people are captured in a cycle of paralysing fear and hopeless apathy. We are kept from even daring to imagine a different reality from the poverty, inequity, government corruption and indignity we know. The only hope for a fresh graduate like me will be to look for chances elsewhere

(El Ghayesh, 2011: 84)

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1 Introduction

A Cosmopolitan Imagination in Cairo: Between State Repression, Global Inequalities and Mediated Alternatives

The first indications that political emancipation and thus social change would ever come about in Egypt began in the summer of 2004. The *Kefaya* movement, literally translated as 'enough', was an important grassroots coalition and platform for civilian outcry and protest against dictator Hosny Mubarak's plans for a fifth six-year term. Taking political protest to the streets of Cairo, *Kefaya* contested the alarming prospect that hereditary rule would be implemented, leading to the possible succession of Mubarak's son, Gamal (Singerman & Amar, 2006). Although *Kefaya* made important headway in partly dissolving Egyptian citizens' fear of political activism and dissent, Mubarak still won the 2005 presidential race by over 88% of the votes in what was publicly acknowledged to be a rigged showcase election. *Kefaya's* unprecedented yet 'explicit cosmopolitan claims on the government' (ibid.:7) were an early warning of what was eventually to come in January 2011. In what appeared to be a new era in Egypt's political and social history, the aftermath of *Kefaya's* establishment in 2004, witnessed Egyptian protestors from all walks of life confidently asserting their demand for 'accountability, legality, and respect for human rights' (ibid.: 7).

Despite these landmark political and social developments in Egypt, an overwhelming mood of disillusionment and nihilism was still palpable amongst the inhabitants of Cairo. Whether speaking to shopkeepers, students, lecturers or labourers, it was not hard to detect the sense of pessimism that these Cairenes held towards any prospect of real change. 'People come out onto the streets to oppose and protest and whatever, but what actually happens as a result? They are usually thrown into jail and life for us goes on as normal' one 23-year-old student told me in 2007. Little did anyone know that four years later, the 25th of January 2011 to be precise, would mark a permanent and unprecedented change in Egypt's history. As the recent revolution broke out in Cairo and mass protests took to the streets, Egyptians old and young, rich and poor, male and female were united in Tahrir Square demanding their right to 'bread, freedom and social equality'. This time it was mass dissent and the angry, unwavering voices of Egyptian citizens that prevailed triumphantly, and after much

resistance, Mubarak's regime was humiliatingly toppled following thirty years of dictatorial rule.

My research, exploring the construction of cosmopolitan identities amongst Egyptians aged between 18 and 25, took place over a year from December 2008 to December 2009. This marked an important period between the 2005 civilian unrest and the 2011 revolution. Following the establishment of the *Kefaya* movement, the public claims it made to human rights and legality meant that a narrow unparalleled hope for a better quality of life and a democratic agenda permeated the minds of Egyptians. Nevertheless, as Singerman and Amar argue, the political challenges in 2005 also exposed 'the violent, repressive nature of what has come to be accepted as globalization and liberalism in the Middle East' (2006:9). Indeed, despite recent political advancements, Cairo remains a visibly divided city, housing within it a plurality of highly unequal and disconnected socio-cultural worlds. Thus, Egypt's capital city captures the contradictions and unequal developments characteristic of everyday realities in a megapolis of the developing south.

Statistics from the International Monetary Fund point to the fact that since 2004, coinciding with its political instability, the Egyptian economy has witnessed an escalation of 7%, making it one of the Middle East's fastest growing economies (Enders, 2008). A regionally recognized and well-functioning economy has been the fundamental bedrock encouraging the proliferation of numerous state-led and private sector cultural and social projects, but also attracting grand business ventures by foreign investors, both Arab and western. The Egyptian government, since President Sadat's era in the 1970s, has forcefully relocated poor urban populations from central Cairo, demolishing their humble living quarters, replacing them with more 'presentable' and 'modern' infrastructure (Ghannam, 2002) as befitting a globalizing capital city; rich businessmen from the Arab Gulf have recently led ambitious projects introducing glamorous shopping malls and expensive designer fashion houses into Egypt's urban texture (Abaza, 2006); wealthy Egyptian investors have embarked upon similar initiatives, building expensive private and foreign language educational establishments that have multiplied significantly in recent years (Arvizu, 2009; Schaub, 2000). Despite these private sector and government induced initiatives to 'modernize', however, to what extent do Cairo's inhabitants – living in the world's

eleventh most populated city (Demographia, 2011) – benefit equally from such ambitious plans? Indeed, beneath Cairo's sleek façade of tall skyscrapers and glamorous shopping malls, the 'belly of the city' (Carpentier, 2008) reflects an underlying reality of stark contradictions and visible inequalities. In an environment where almost 30% of further and higher education graduates face unemployment (IDSC, 2009); 10% and 27% of the urban male and female populations respectively remain illiterate (EAEA, 2008); and the continuing existence of 75 slum areas in Cairo alone (IDSC, 2009), illustrate that the government has embarked upon parochial cosmetic changes, channelling resources solely into the private sector and the building of modern cultural establishments.

Debilitating socio-economic and gender inequalities continue to underwrite the everyday experiences of a polarized city and socially divided way of life. In this context, the concerns and tribulations facing normal Cairenes remain yet to be addressed by the government's grand plans for building a 'global metropolis that would meet the demands of tourists and foreign investors' (Ghannam, 2002: 2). Hence, although Cairo's skyline may tell the story of a city embedded in global networks of social and cultural development and progress, 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. It is through an intense ethnographic examination of Cairo and Cairenes from below, that I have come to witness how repression and inequality most definitely shape lives, yet never completely dominate them. In particular, representing daily cultural windows, and in most cases, young Egyptians' only 'passport' (literally) exposing them to a world beyond their own, the media, and especially television, provide important cultural resources and thus opportunities for the articulation and negotiation of fresh possibilities for novel and often unusual forms of imagination and belonging.

My long-term interest and deep passion for this research project developed from my own particular experiences and observations of Cairo that are consistent with the unusual urban juxtapositions outlined above. Indeed, through my frequent travels to Cairo at different stages of my life since childhood, I have acquired a vast store of memories of this wonderful city I consider home. Although I have been raised and educated in the UK, throughout my life, my parents insisted that as a family we

spend the long summer break enjoying Cairo's blistering heat. For my mother and father, these trips became an important annual ritual through which my older brother and I would both become acquainted with our extended family, and familiarise ourselves with the cultural ways and traditions of our 'homeland'. Nevertheless, what began as compulsory family supervised trips, eventually transformed into a personal desire to investigate and discover the innards of a fascinating city that to me, remained highly enigmatic. Rather than returning for a couple of weeks during the annual family holiday, I began to spend extended periods of time in Cairo, without my family, which became an important opportunity to establish an extensive web of friends and social contacts. Although traveling to Cairo alone was not a problem, my parents insisted that I stay with my grandmother. I was told that it would be socially unacceptable in Egypt for a young, single woman to rent a flat and live on her own.

My grandmother's flat is located in the upper middle class district of Maadi, home to many of Cairo's embassies, diplomatic residences, multinational firms and expats' homes. Initially, my holidays in Maadi gave me a very particular, very sheltered experience of everyday life in Cairo. The fact that I did not have an Egyptian driver's license, meant my physical mobility was limited as I had to depend on the safe option of a chauffeur driven car, insisted on by my mother (this is normal amongst the upper middle class in Egypt). Wishing to welcome me in Egypt and display their limitless generosity and hospitality, friends and family in Maadi would take me to sample the newly opened Italian restaurant, or try the most popular sushi bar or salad bar in the area. Although I was deeply grateful to my acquaintances who made the effort to introduce me to this extensive menu of international cuisine, I was not very comfortable being treated as a 'foreigner' who they wanted to impress by proving that their palates are just as cosmopolitan and culturally sophisticated as my friends back in London.

This Cairo I was being forced to experience through my stay in Maadi, existed in stark contrast to the image of Egypt being constantly portrayed in the media and in human development reports as riddled with poverty, unemployment and lack of human rights. I realised that if I was to ever experience the 'real' Egypt, and walk in the shoes of the average Egyptian, I would need to come out of my highly sheltered urban comfort zone that centred around chauffeurs, fancy cafes and internationally-inspired menus. In a bid to mingle with more humble Egyptians, I began to regularly

take the underground metro and taxis. To appease my parents, however, I would be accompanied by my brother or male cousin to avoid verbal or sexual harassment, regularly experienced by Egyptian women in public transport. Keen to embark upon an urban exploration of an undiscovered Cairo, my expensive Italian and American lunches by the Nile in Maadi became replaced by cheap Kofta (mince-meat skewers) and falafel sandwiches in the traditional working class districts of El Hussein, Embaba and Sayeda Zeinab. Obviously, my old friends remained central to my trips to Egypt. Nevertheless, the more I began to widen my circle of acquaintances to include young girls I met on the metro, men who served me in the traditional sandwich shops, and taxi drivers who I trusted enough to regularly accompany me on my Cairo explorations, I slowly realised how this city truly does exist of hidden worlds within worlds. Behind the urban façade of modernity and cosmopolitan lifestyles, I witnessed first-hand how poverty, despair and indignity remain a tangible everyday reality for the vast majority of Cairo's population.

While roaming in some of the wealthiest streets and districts of Cairo, one only has to take a wrong turning into a side street to experience a completely different world, separated merely by a brick wall. I was truly astounded at how contemporary architecture in the form of skyscrapers and glitzy hotels cleverly concealed the dim reality of the adjacent overcrowded, badly sanitized, under resourced slum settlements. Thus, more shocking than the physical separation, is the vast socio-cultural and economic expanse that keeps such diverse urban zones poles apart. These stark contradictions in lifestyle, intrinsic to Cairo's urban texture and experiences, raised several questions that drove me to conduct this research project. I was intrigued as to how poverty and extreme wealth, the symbols of liberal western modernity and a strong Islamic resurgence could be juxtaposed so starkly in a single city, yet hardly maintain any contact. Additionally, as a student of media-studies, I was amazed at how the presence of satellite dishes and the over-concentration of television antennas in these very different worlds, was almost the single thread of similarity uniting them. I wondered, does television act as a further force for division by giving them access to very different programmes and thus cultural worlds? Or, on the contrary, is television an important virtual space where they are brought together through shared consumption and enjoyment of the same cultural products on screen?

Coming to life as a result of the experiences and reflections unfolding above, this thesis explores the ways in which young Egyptians move physically in the city, yet symbolically move between different systems of televised representation.

Conducting my research with a balanced number of men and women equally spread across the upper middle, lower middle and working class, I examined this research question: to what extent are these young Egyptians from different backgrounds engaged in the construction of different versions of a cosmopolitan imagination? I addressed this through three sub-questions:

i) To what extent does class play a central role in how young Egyptians articulate their different forms of cosmopolitan imagination?

ii) What is the importance of television in exposing these young men and women to a world beyond their reach?

iii) What role does the city, as the main site of their everyday lives, play within the cosmopolitan aspirations of young Egyptians? Is Cairo a static geographical location, simply a container in which cosmopolitanism is an everyday lived reality? Or is Cairo a dynamic urban terrain, itself being negotiated and reinterpreted in new ways through cosmopolitan imagination?

1.1 The Multilayered Onion and Other Reasons for a Cosmopolitan Perspective

Cosmopolitanism, although an ancient term, has recently been re-awakened within the social-sciences. Nevertheless, entering or re-entering disciplines that are already filled to maximum capacity with conceptual terms that describe the state of our modern world, this raises the question of what cosmopolitanism adds in the way of analytical value that is new and distinct, particularly in relation to globalization. The answer, according to Beck and Sznaider (2006), lies in the onion. The authors use this pungent vegetable as a very vivid and visual metaphor for distinguishing 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 in a one-way process of influence, cosmopolitanism allows us to shift the emphasis to internal developmental processes within the social world. While globalization may refer to an abstract process taking place somewhere *out there*, cosmopolitanism happens from within. Globalization presupposes, yet 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).

In light of the above, I use the term *internal heterogeneity* (Elsayed, 2010) to describe the process through which cosmopolitanism is exercised on a daily basis. I use this in reference to how, through personal strategies and performance (De Koning, 2009), individuals and groups embedded within specific localities coalesce the local and the global in unique ways that lead to new avenues for self understanding. In this context, global culture should not be regarded as a homogenous or standardized entity that remains located within the west and the upper classes. It is from within the daily practices taking place through the prism of particular localities that the global is experienced and thus acquires multiple meanings (Massey, 2007). A cosmopolitan perspective, in this light, may allow us to invert, or adopt a decentred approach to understanding the everyday impact of cultural globalization, where its analysis avoids departing from a macro perspective that may automatically assume the unwavering centrality and thus homogenizing potentials of global culture. Such an approach may encourage us to examine global cultural exchange through a linear Jihad VS McWorld (Barber, 2003) model, which presupposes that there can only be a complete assimilation to, or rejection of global culture. Cosmopolitanism or *inner globalization* (Beck, 2002:19) begins its analysis from within a particular locality in all its diversity and complex specificity, examining how individuals and groups within these places articulate multiple networks and complex cultural connections that often surpass the limits of local boundaries.

According to some early theorizations within globalization studies, cosmopolitanism (Hannerz, 1996) was perceived to be an activity of educated high-status professionals, with an ability to acquire the economic and cultural capital allowing them to physically mingle with different cultures through patterns of travel and mobility. Nevertheless, whereas such theories base a cosmopolitan experience solely on physical movement between cultures, in more contemporary times, we are no longer required to go out to the world in order to engage with it. The world now 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. Indeed, as Morley (2000) argues, for the majority of people, their lives continue to be shaped by their experiences in a particular locality, meaning geographical place, whether manifested in domestic space, neighbourhood or nation, remains central as a sense of 'home' in an increasingly globalised world. In this context, I subscribe to Appiah's (1997:618) 'rooted cosmopolitanism' where one can entertain patriotic sentiments, be attached to a home and nation with its own cultural particularities, but also take pleasure 'from the presence of other, different places that are home to other, different people'. Indeed, according to the most recent World Values Survey (UNDP, 2010), 85% of young Egyptians asked, expressed national belonging and a readiness to go to war in defence of their country. These statistics reflect findings from my own research where a cosmopolitan openness to the world, articulated predominantly through television, does not transcend the nation or challenge local forms of belonging, but often provides new resources for thinking about and re-imagining the local.

Following on from the above, while the media may expand our cultural horizons and experiences beyond the immediate and the familiar, they do not erase the everyday significance and importance of place and localized forms of belonging. Using the term 'empty space', Giddens (1990) argues that locales are now being shaped in terms of social influences that may occur many miles away, uninhibited by space and time. Such an approach suggests that place and locality have not disappeared, but remain central nodes of experience, although their 'natural substance and boundedness are increasingly challenged as permanent characteristics' (Georgiou, 2006: 5). Hence, as they are increasingly shaped through disembedded cultural exchanges and mediated influences, places become spatial contexts that carry social meanings, thus 'drawing geographical and symbolic boundaries of we-ness and other-ness, for experiencing, remembering, imagining' (ibid.). In this context, Couldry and McCarthy propose the need for 'geographically informed' and 'spatially sensitive' (2004: 4) analyses of media influence. Such analyses must recognize that the construction of social space through the media takes place in relation to the grounded specificities of cultural setting and geographical infrastructure.

Within debates on the changing form and intensity of cultural exchange, particularly in the developing south, the 'west' has often been positioned as the instigator of all

forms of cultural influence, modernity and progress. Morley argues that within the conventional narrative of development, 'all the key events which are taken to symbolize modernity are then ascribed to an imagined cartographic area called 'the West' ' (2007:157). Nevertheless, according to Janet Abu-Lughod, although in contemporary times the west may indeed be the seat of progress and development, we must realize that this is a contingent phenomenon arising at a specific point in history, as a result of particular economic and geo-political circumstances. Thus, the prominent position of the west today is not an '*inherent historical necessity*' (J. Abu-Lughod, 1989:12 emphasis in original). Abu-Lughod's (1989) own historical mapping of the 13th and 14th centuries reveals that in fact, it was the 'Old World', consisting of China, Persia, India and Egypt, that maintained hegemony throughout this period through its 'increased economic integration and cultural efflorescence' (1989:4). Contrary to popular narratives of development, Abu-Lughod contends, Europe seriously lagged behind the 'east', entering the fray only much later on. Importantly, however, Morley argues that even if we dispel or refute the notion that there has always been a single imperial centre and point of power, 'the position of the West- and that of other imperial centres- within that system remains a critical question' (2007:165). Indeed, patterns of global media production and distribution, the universal spread of a hegemonic consumerist culture and relations of global politics and influence, point to the overwhelming power that countries of the western liberal hemisphere maintain over global relations in the context of contemporary globalization.

My research reveals that even on a micro level analysis of everyday life, the west, or a mediated representation of the west, continues to be a cultural reference of great importance in the daily experiences of young Egyptians. Nevertheless, my long-term ethnographic engagement with participants has also revealed the everyday significance of religion that filters and negotiates their relationship to western culture. Indeed, for the lower middle class, their exposure to, and admiration of some of the ideological values they associate with western culture, has become a way of negotiating for themselves an identity as cosmopolitan, yet pious Muslims in touch with modern cultural developments as well as Islamic practice. Thus, following Morley's (2007) thesis, I move away from research designs that attempt to formulate linear understandings of audiences outside the west, homogenizing their diverse

experiences through singular or restricted categories of analysis. As Saldanha argues, the only way we can understand how young people are constructing their sense of place is by interpreting *their* images of the west, and not by reducing it to how *we* have been 'naming and experiencing modernity as a purely Western condition' (2002:346). In this context, I explore how it is that young Egyptians *themselves* are producing their own complex cartographies of the world, and their own unique cosmopolitan imagination where local, religious and global realities intersect.

1.2 A Third-Order Framework for Cosmopolitanism in Cairo

This project proposes that a very particular type of cosmopolitanism takes place in Cairo specifically, although it is of relevance to other urban contexts outside the west. What this study shows is that a *third-order* cosmopolitanism operates in between two established structures of power, which highly regulate the everyday experiences and life chances of young Egyptians. The first structure of power operates from within the nation-state and centres around i) debilitating class divides that place firm limits on young Egyptians' access to systems of power, education, cultural capital and urban space, ii) unequal gender relations that particularly disadvantage women, highly regulating their urban physical mobilities, public dress choice and even marital opportunities, and iii) a repressive government that quashes civil liberties and provides no opportunities for political participation or avenues for social dissent. The second structure of power operates from outside the nation-state, and involves the way unequal relations of global financial power and political influence have accorded Egypt a particular place within a highly polarized world order. This is particularly related to i) the global spread of a western capitalist order and a hegemonic culture, manifested most evidently in the universal and unmatched spread of western media products (Schiller, 1991; Boyd-Barrett, 1977); ii) colonial relations of western dominance that continue to shape the consciousness of young Arabs and Egyptians (Sabry, 2005, 2007; Abaza, 2006); iii) lastly the support of western superpowers for Egypt's corrupt regime headed by Mubarak, contributing to a political stasis and the unchallenged continuation of everyday government repression (Abaza, 2003).

Such a framework for cosmopolitanism allows my analysis to be sensitive to the unequal relations of power that shape, regulate and constrain the daily lives of young Egyptians, thus avoiding any romanticized or 'easy celebration of hybridity' (Morley, 2000:232) in my analysis. As Hall (2008) argues, we are never faced with a benign cosmopolitanism, but cosmopolitanism is deeply conditioned by transnational inequalities, conflicts and contradictory processes associated with globalisation's uneven development. Although cosmopolitanism in Cairo does not transcend the two rigid divides I have documented above, it becomes a third space of imagination that, drawing heavily on the media, provides opportunities for resistance, allowing structured limits imposed upon the self to be negotiated in relation to what is observed in distant ways of life. Indeed, whilst the daily urban lives of young Cairenes are located within embedded structures that place firm limits on their social and physical mobilities, these young men and women shift imaginatively between the alternative systems of representation available to them in the mediascapes they have access to. This allows their sense of identity to be challenged, re-imagined and negotiated in new ways.

1.2.1 Cosmopolitanism in Cairo as a Complex Apparatus

As young cosmopolitans, the participants in my study operate in a highly restrictive milieu, characterized by severe socio-cultural and economic limitations as I have documented above. Thus, articulated predominantly through an everyday mediated engagement with the world, cosmopolitanism in Cairo cannot be approached through categories of analysis often used in western liberal contexts. In a situation where their own realities are so dismal, characterized by poverty and state repression, young Egyptians' cosmopolitanism is not about an ethical concern for a distant other (Silverstone, 2007; Chouliaraki, 2008). In a context where the majority of participants I worked with did not have passports and have never travelled outside of Egypt, cosmopolitanism is not about physical mobility, patterns of global travel and first hand experience of the world (Hannerz, 1996). Furthermore, the centrality of the nation to their daily experiences means cosmopolitanism in Cairo is not about a rootless form of identification with a 'universal' common humanity, attributed mainly to Kant and his Enlightenment ideologies (Kant, 2010; Nussbaum, 1994). I subscribe to Beck's notion that cosmopolitanism cannot be approached through any singular

category, but must be recognized as a complex and multifarious 'multidimensional process' (2004:136), manifested in numerous modes and involving multiple loyalties.

Cosmopolitanism as an everyday lived reality for young Egyptians involves various forms and multiple modes of cosmopolitan expression. It involves a comprehensive cultural, moral and economic apparatus; a multi-pronged process comprising both a subjective as well as physical and embodied dimension. Young Egyptians' unique articulations of cosmopolitanism involve an aspiration towards a more privileged life as they see represented on television; a desire for egalitarian values and political ideologies they associate with the west; a desire for novel forms of cultural expression embodied within consumer practices; and the forging of transnational urban networks – both global and Islamic – that surpass the boundaries of national space. Thus, at the heart of a cosmopolitan imagination in Cairo is a sense of global interdependence (Hall, 2008). In particular, this means the reality of a world where social actors have become increasingly interconnected and aware of the presence of the other, especially within media space, allowing even those with the least means to be included within this reality of (virtual) interconnection. As Beck (2004:153) observes, cosmopolitanism involves the imaginative crossing of boundaries; including both the 'location of one's own lifestyle within the horizon of other possibilities, and the ability to see oneself from the viewpoint of those who are culturally other'.

Although the word 'cosmopolitanism' (or its Arabic equivalent *kosmopolitaneya*) was never directly used by my participants, other terms and expressions within their narratives strongly indicated a desire to feel part of a transcending social, cultural and political context that surpasses the limits of direct experience. Indeed, discussing their city, nation or own subjective identities, comparisons with and references to *donia* (world), *el 'alam* (universe), *barra* (outside/foreign) or *aganeb* (foreigners) were used confidently and in abundance. Furthermore, a reflexive awareness by young Egyptians of the inequalities of global hierarchical divides, and their location in the underdeveloped global south, meant a cosmopolitan desire to be part of the world was as much a desire to 'be modern' and to reap the benefits of being affiliated with global cultural circuits of modernity. They may not be able to control that they live in the 'third-world,' but as active and media-savvy men and women, they are at

least able to ensure that they are not excluded from processes of modernness, manifested particularly in the dynamic cultural practices of modern youth cultures. Thus, by placing the self at the centre of a broader interconnected world, cosmopolitanism in Cairo has become a complex system by which young Egyptians organize and understand their position in their immediate locality, but also a less immediate world beyond their reach.

1.2.2 Cosmopolitanism as Imagination: A Breathing Space in a Repressive Reality

In the context of a world that has become increasingly characterized by interdependent cultural relations, particularly through the global circulation of popular media products, Hall argues that the question of identity has become a central one. As he ponders, 'how do you make sense of your self, and your life, if this movement between places, cultures, religions, languages, civilizations, histories, times, becomes your lived reality'? (2008:347) Hall has argued elsewhere how identities are socially constructed in nature. According to Hall, although identities may have origins in a historical past, they mainly involve the dynamic ways in which the resources of history, language and culture are dialectically involved in a process of 'becoming rather than being' (1996:4). In this context, identities are never eternally fixed, but are more adequately regarded by Hall as being in a constant state of development and flux. Tomlinson (2000:269) also argues that in the era of globalization and mediated communications, identities have become fluid entities in accordance with rapid-scale changes to our experiences of time, distance and geography. The impact of the changing nature of relations of distance and proximity on the construction of identities is captured in Bauman's theorisation of the fluid era of *liquid modernity* he proposes we now inhabit. Characterised by an overturning of tradition, fluid modernity involves rapid change and disposability where stability ceases to exist, and where familiar borders are becoming increasingly porous and fluid. In this context, Bauman argues, people are choosing to engage in 'networks of identity' over hard and fast bonds, as they make connecting and disconnecting easier (Bauman, 2004:69). Nevertheless, as incorporated within my framework for third-order cosmopolitanism, identities are not solely about free choices, and an

association with a modern world of unregulated cultural flexibility and mobility, but remain constrained within dominant relations of power in society (Du Gay, Evans and Redman, 2000; Butler, 1990).

In my ethnographic investigation of the construction of cosmopolitan identities in Cairo, the concept of imagination is particularly central. The use of imagination within my analysis must not be mistaken for the celebration of the end of identity, or a subscription to the post-modern assertion that individuals are free to reflexively imagine and construct their lives as they wish, unrestricted by the confines of traditional collectivities (Giddens, 1998; Beck, 1994). My research documents the continuing importance of class, gender and the nation as bounded identity positions informing the everyday lives of young Egyptians. Despite this, my ethnographic analysis also illustrates how mediated communications means the process of identity formation often surpasses the limits of bounded forms of belonging conditioned by an 'immediate physical presence established by the body' (Gilroy, 1997: 314). Thus, as the cultural repertoires informing the construction of modern identities have become increasingly mediated, imagination provides a lens for examining how the self is not only defined by the immediacy of first hand experience, but very often is understood in relation to the distant and the unfamiliar. In this context, as the media become important cultural resources allowing those embedded in specific restrictive localities to negotiate and often challenge imposed social structures, I argue that a cosmopolitan imagination and a sense of being connected to a broader world are particularly significant in less privileged locations outside the west.

Hall (2008) observes that cosmopolitanism is not always about the promise of a luxurious global life as a reward for status, privilege or wealth. Focusing specifically on the forced uprooting of diasporic locations with no choice but to become mobile cosmopolitans, Hall (2008) argues that cosmopolitanism for these groups is a mandatory condition of survival. Furthermore, I argue that even for those rooted in geographical place with no opportunities for travel, cosmopolitan aspirations that recognize and make a distant other part of one's everyday experiences, is also a form of survival. For young Egyptians in my study, cosmopolitanism allows them to negotiate and re-imagine their own disadvantaged and highly embedded realities in relation to what takes place elsewhere in the world. Findings from the World Values

Survey (UNDP, 2010) conducted amongst 3050 young Egyptians reveal that although national allegiance was strongest amongst the young Egyptian respondents, in terms of identification with a world culture, Egypt ranked seventh out of 19 countries, overtaking developed nations such as Sweden and the USA. Thus, in contexts such as Egypt, the imaginative capabilities and opportunities for (subjective) mobility enabled by the media have become important 'spaces of hope' (Harvey, 2000b) against a repressive reality confined within the immediacy of everyday life. For the privileged westerner the sense of a cosmopolitan connection to distant life-worlds may be taken for granted as just 'another' option or lifestyle choice provided by contemporary globalization. For those with limited opportunities for social and often physical mobility, however, embedded within constraining geographical locations from which they cannot escape, a cosmopolitan imagination enabled by the media takes on a renewed importance.

1.3 The Contradictory Experiences of Being Young in Africa's Biggest City

Although my research is based on young Egyptian men and women between the ages of 18 to 25, my understanding of, and approach to 'youth', is not as a biologically determined or fixed category. As previous research has shown, members of this age-cohort tend to share specific cultural and social attributes that although vary across space and time, distinguish youth from other generations and age-groups. According to Georgiou (2006), for instance, modern technology-literate generations enjoy a social and cultural flexibility, which allows them to shift easily between different cultural repertoires and influences. Whereas older people may be more attached to tradition and prone to that which is more 'familiar,' research on young people appears to indicate that, particularly through their frequent use of different types of media, they eagerly seek to transport themselves between a diversity of social and cultural contexts. Georgiou confirms this point suggesting:

younger generations enjoy most of the spatial, communicational and cultural mobility and flexibility. For the young technology-literate generations a playful mobility in and out of their ethnicity and between diasporic and non-diasporic mediascapes and virtual scapes is a daily experience (2006: 77).

McRobbie's (1996) examination of the culture of ragga girls in 1990s Britain is an important demonstration of the way in which these young black girls use music to negotiate their multi-racial identities. McRobbie analyses how ragga music imported from Jamaica consists in its original form of sexist lyrics and overt homophobia. This is challenged, however, by these young black girls 'in their highly enthusiastic embracing of ragga as well as their distinctive "calls and responses" to it through dance' (McRobbie, 1996: 35). Importantly, this embracing of ragga has taken place against a wider British culture of racial tension, and a media constructed moral panic regarding the perceived obscene and sexually explicit nature of black youth culture. Against this backdrop, McRobbie believes that by combining transnationally imported ragga music with their own forms of dancing, and by changing the lyrics, black teenage girls add their own unique dimension of meaning not visible in the music and the lyrics alone. This analysis of ragga girls demonstrates the complex cultural dynamism of youth cultures, where transnational musical forms have been imported, redefined and embedded within local ideological structures resulting in the creation of dynamic spaces of self-understanding. Such findings, according to Wulff (1995), illustrate that when exploring the formation of transnational connections or as everyday consequences of cultural globalization, youth cultures should be at the forefront of theoretical interest. In particular, 'youth, their ideas and commodities move easily across national borders, shaping and being shaped by all kinds of structures and meanings' (Wulff, 1995: 10). Nilan and Feixa make a similar point when they contend that in the wake of globalization and spread of information technologies which have brought previously distinct cultures closer together, there is a renewed interest and indeed, importance, in analysing youth activities. As they note, 'we do assume that as a generation, all youth are caught up to some extent in the 'network society' (Castells 1996, 1997). The young people studied here obtain their information, often their inspiration, from global sources' (Nilan and Feixa, 2006: 6).

In particular, the economic impact of globalization and the widespread implementation of neo-liberal policies in different national contexts have had a major impact on the lifestyle choices and opportunities of global youth. They have become dedicated consumers of global cultural industry products and services. Miles (2000) notes how global changes in economy and culture greatly impact upon the

construction of young people's identities, and particularly important is their relationship to consumerism. As Miles argues, 'in effect then, consumerism provides a flexible enough arena for the construction of what are inevitably flexible post-modern identities.... Young people's lifestyles provide the arena within which consumer identities are apparently forged' (2000: 52). Nilan demonstrates the importance of consumer activities with her in-depth research on Indonesian youth, whose culture involves an intimate negotiation between both religious law and global popular consumer trends. Young Indonesians in the study are able to religiously tailor their consumer activities, and select products to consume that conform to, and respect the most important aspects of their Islamic faith. For instance, they purchase halal cosmetic products, Islamic clothing that conforms to the latest western fashion trends, and mobile phones and iPods containing Islamic iconography and Koranic verses. In this context, Islamic youth culture in Indonesia constitutes a distinct 'third space' not shared by other groups such as non-Muslim Indonesian youth, westerners or adults. As Nilan notes:

they establish themselves as a morally superior category of modern young Indonesians, in solidarity with the globally-distributed discourse of progressive Islam. This hybridity challenges the assumption that cultural meeting points must always signify relations of domination (2006, 94).

In light of the above, Nayak (2003) argues that new spaces have emerged within the local-global nexus, allowing young people to take up different subject positions in response to global change. Thus, young people, according to Nayak (2003:167), are not 'passive recipients of social transformations' but are responding to global change in a multitude of ways that 'draw upon the signs, symbols and motifs made available at local, national and international scales'. Nayak (*ibid.*:19) uses the term 'youthscapes', therefore, to indicate the diversity and dynamism of youth cultures that 'orbit around a moving constellation of signs, symbols, practices and motifs.' Furthermore, an important point Nilan and Feixa (2006) make is that whereas from an outsider perspective it may appear that youth are caught between two or more contradicting cultural repertoires, the youth concerned do not necessarily regard it as such. They see themselves as inhabiting only one highly complex world, although drawing on a range of diverse sources in their local creative practices. Thus, according to Miles (2000), in order to gain a clearer understanding of youth cultures, we must examine how young people in different spaces and micro cultures

differentially interact with, and negotiate the multiple social worlds in which they locate themselves and their everyday lives.

Following on from the above, Nayak (2003:28) argues how much literature on youth cultures has suffered from an *aspatial* approach that underplays or dismisses the significance of 'place and spatial variation at different scales and in multiple sites'. In this context, we should never approach 'being young' as a unanimous and homogenous experience, as this fails to examine the context-bound and thoroughly situated ways that youth in different places inhabit and experience their age-group. Thus, despite the young sharing age-specific characteristics centred around cultural flexibility and a desire for change and experimentation, McRobbie (1996:31) uses the term 'different, youthful, subjectivities' as a reminder that there is no one single or unanimous experience of being young. According to McRobbie, there are multiple youth encounters that take on varying forms depending upon the specific socio-economic, cultural and ideological contexts in which different young people are embedded. In this sense, we cannot fully comprehend the dynamic impact of global changes on youth cultures, without engrossing ourselves in an analysis of local micro-cultures and practices. Another problem with the literature on youth cultures, according to Wulff (1995), is that it takes an ethno-centric approach, focusing specifically on young, urban, white males. Thus, many of the assumptions made on youth cultures, are based on research conducted on the limited experiences of white, western youth. As Wulff (1995:15-16) argues:

'youth culture does not only consist of resistance and delinquency on the part of white teenage boys in Western cities. Youth culture is what young people are concerned with...It is time for anthropologists to make a more substantial contribution to the study of youth culture, to view young people as cultural agents and to illuminate their perspectives towards a wide range of general themes in social life: gender, class, ethnicity, race, globalization.

By moving outside the west, it may be possible to uncover the inequalities and uneven relations of power that shape the construction of global youth cultures. Youth cultures are not only about sustaining new transnational connections through the globally-shared consumption of the same music, food and fashion trends, but also about patterns of exclusion and marginalization for those not always able to partake in such activities. Focusing on the experiences of Nepali youth, Liechty

(1995) recognizes the inequalities of power and control that dominate the landscape of global-local youth culture. Liechty focuses particularly on the story of the young Nepali boy Ramesh, and argues that the way he negotiates and subjectively perceives his identity is greatly influenced by the American films he regularly enjoys consuming. The mediated images of success, freedom and liberty imbued in the movie narratives he engages with on a daily basis, are constant reminders of a world he so desperately wishes to inhabit; yet an even greater reminder of a world faraway he will probably never experience. These lost, unattainable dreams, translated into feelings of bitterness, mean that Ramesh denotes his immediate locale in very distancing terms; Nepal is constantly referred to as 'out here.' This 'self-peripheralizing' mentality, characteristic of youth growing up in developing nations, according to Liechty (1995:186), is in large part due to the mass media which 'are like windows on to modern places that are distant in both time and space. But if the video screen is like a window, it is one with bars that keep viewers like Ramesh outside, 'out here' looking in'. Hence, young people in Ramesh's situation often consider themselves to be no more than 'distant voyeurs' on an exciting youth scene happening elsewhere in the world, yet excluding them (Osgerby, 2004: 162). Following on from the above, and as Massey reminds us, youth culture is not a closed system of social relations, but a 'particular articulation of contacts and influences drawn from a variety of places scattered according to power relations, fashion and habit, across many different parts of the globe' (Massey; 1998, 124). Thus, these youthful cultural formations are not neutral connections, but are highly charged entities, which, structured along class, gender and ethnic lines, result in multiple narratives of inclusion and exclusion. What is needed are spatially sensitive analyses that take into consideration the economic, social and political specificities which shape youth cultures in different places.

The latest Egypt Human Development Report (UNDP, 2010) indicates that Egypt's demography is now shaped by a massive bulge in its youth population, who comprise a quarter of the total national population. As Abaza (2006) observes, the public visibility of youth and youth cultures in Egypt has become an increasingly evident phenomenon which is in need of in-depth research. Karam captures the paradoxes and inequalities associated with being young in the Arab world when he argues that although demographically they represent the largest and most important cohort, the

experiences of the young are at the forefront of a disadvantaged social reality 'because of their position in a strongly traditional and patriarchal system' (2010:302). According to the Egypt Human Development Report (UNDP, 2010), the life-chances of young Egyptians are severely constricted through a lack of democracy and respect for human rights, political corruption, lack of civic engagement, decreasing income levels, unequal job opportunities and poor educational standards. Nevertheless, despite the weak social status of young people in the Arab world as a result of the social, political and economic challenges they face (Karam, 2010), findings from my research confirm that in occupying a lively media world, young Egyptians are exposed to new potentials for expanding the limits of their imagination and hybridity associated with global youth cultures.

In an interesting study, Al-Tawila, Ibrahim and Wassef (2003) document how both advances in education and an increased exposure to the media by young people in Egypt have encouraged them to develop aspirations and desires that starkly distinguish them from their parents' generation. The authors begin by confirming that the family is a central unit of society in Egypt and across the Arab world. Within the family setting, young people are required to balance and conform to two roles simultaneously, 'that of conveying valued societal norms into the future, but also of opening the family to social change and new ideas from the outside' (Al-Tawila, Ibrahim and Wassef, 2003: 215). In this context, young people in Egypt are rarely able to function independently of their parents: they depend on them for social, economic and emotional support. Nevertheless, with access to higher levels of education becoming common place and more widespread, and with a variety of media outlets functioning as important cultural platforms in the daily lives of these young men and women, they have come to formulate their own unique dreams and imaginations and thus occupy and experience a youth that is quite different from that of their parents. Although it ran across the whole sample, women, in particular, within Al-Tawila, Ibrahim and Wassef's study, held attitudes that showed a significant level of divergence from their parents' generation. These young women particularly aspired to:

marriage arrangements not typically present in their parents' generation...emphasize equal education attainment among spouses,

undermine female circumcision and consanguineous marriages, stress sharing, and express a higher degree of rejection of violence towards wives (2003: 232).

Importantly, the above study paves the way for understanding how the media function as significant platforms through which young Egyptians dynamically negotiate their subjectivities. Nevertheless, the multifarious ways in which young people interact with, and negotiate the highly complex social and cultural worlds they appropriate through the media, remains to be significantly documented within Arab cultural studies. According to Sabry (2007), there is a poverty of research documenting, through empirical methods, the ways in which Arab audiences interact with the media and incorporate them into their everyday experiences. Dismissed by many Arab intellectuals as being 'profane, unconscious, irrelevant and consequently unworthy of study,' (Sabry, 2007: 159) the everyday relevance of Arabic popular culture, particularly the media, remains underdeveloped. The notable studies that have been conducted on Arab youths' appropriations of the media, which I will refer to throughout this thesis (for example: Sabry, 2005, 2010; Kraidy, 1999, 2007, 2009), demonstrate that although the daily lives of young Arabs are captured within contexts replete with government repression and severe social and economic inequalities, they are not excluded from the dynamic hybrid cultural exchanges associated with global youth cultures. Using ethnographic methods that have allowed me to engage with young Egyptians in the urban spaces of their everyday life, I believe my research provides an important and timely contribution to the gap within Arab cultural studies, which have done little to address the everyday relevance of media practice within Arab societies (Sabry, 2007).

Recently, media studies research has become orientated towards the increased use and popularity of new media, particularly the Internet. According to Livingstone (2008), the online realm is adopted enthusiastically by teenagers as it represents 'their' own private space, 'visible to the peer group more than to adult surveillance, an exciting yet relatively safe opportunity to conduct the social psychological task of adolescence' (Livingstone, 2008: 396). Thus, by forging out exclusive online spaces not accessed by their parents, these young people are able to connect with their friends, maintain social relations, share their private experiences, 'to create spaces of intimacy, to be themselves in and through their connection with their friends' (Livingstone, 2008: 406). Although much of this recent research has focused

particularly on western youths' experiences of the Internet, the 2011 Arab Spring has significantly reawakened interest in how the online world, and particularly social media websites, have allowed revolutionaries in non-western dictatorships to gather support in order to challenge and overthrow their repressive regimes. In an interesting personal editorial, Shahine (2011) compares his own generation brought up in 1980s Egypt, with today's generation of engaged 'Internet youth' who were at the forefront of the recent revolution. According to Shahine, when he was in his 20s in the 1980s, Egypt was going through a period of relative stability, and the opportunities facing the young (middle class) seemed abundant and limitless: they were guaranteed a decent education and a job in one of the many multinational corporations that were springing up across Egypt. For today's youth, however, high rates of unemployment, growing religious fundamentalism, state brutality and debilitating social class divides mean they have no real prospects for a dignified future. These socio-economic and political constraints placed upon young Egyptians, coupled with their technological skills and knowledge, eventually erupted in an angry revolution that managed to bring down the government; an achievement that previous generations could only dream of. As Shahine (2011:2) notes, 'online they took part in a world that was very different from the one they (previous generation) were living in' and thus by connecting with other global activists through Facebook and Twitter, 'Egyptian youth came to understand what it might mean to be a citizen in a proper sense'.

In light of the above arguments, the recent uprising across the Middle East and the well documented role that the Internet and social media websites played (Khamis and Vaughn: 2011; Karolak, 2011), may lead some to question why a study on television should be of interest at present. Is television not outdated in the face of new media technologies that provide more decentred, less government controlled means of communication? Statistics continue to show the overwhelming penetration and popularity of television in Egypt. According to The Egypt Report (Oxford Business Group, 2010) television is by far the most popular medium for news and entertainment in the country. The report illustrates that with 200 sets for every 1000 people, Egypt boasts one of the highest numbers of television per capita in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Furthermore, the latest Egypt Human Development Report (UNDP, 2010) confirms this point, indicating that there is a

94.7% penetration rate of television in Cairo. Karam's (2010) recent comparative research between four Arab countries including Egypt, records how television is not only a source of entertainment, but a significant and comprehensive tool for education and personal development. In this context, television goes beyond mere pleasure and forms of escapism 'and into the realm of self-learning and the acquisition of values, behaviour and lifestyles' (Karam, 2010: 313).

Statistics on Internet usage demonstrate that although there is a considerable annual growth rate in Internet penetration, it still continues to be far lower in comparison to television. When I began my fieldwork in 2008, there was only a 12.9% penetration rate of the Internet in Egypt (Internet World Stats, 2010). Nevertheless, ICT indicators published recently by the Egyptian government (Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, 2011), indicate there is a penetration rate of 30.05%, with an annual growth rate of 8.14%. Although this points to more than a two-fold increase in Internet usage in Egypt over the past three years, statistics on television penetration continue to illustrate that this in no way challenges nor parallels the universal spread, popularity or relevance of television to Egyptians. Indeed, as it requires financial capital in order to afford the technological infrastructure needed for an Internet connection, and the cultural capital to use a computer, the Internet is not a viable option readily available to all Egyptians. The Egypt Report (Oxford Business Group, 2010: 184) confirms that Internet use in Egypt continues to be associated with the 'upper and upper middle class, which is young, educated and well traveled'. In this context, as my study involves an exploration of three different classes with a variation in access to systems of cultural, educational and financial capital, it was necessary to base my analysis on a medium readily available across class.

1.4 The City: Cultural Fluidity and Class Polarization

In order to understand and examine cosmopolitanism as a daily pervasive reality, it is important to approach it in the actual spaces it is articulated and expressed, namely the city (Latham, 2006; Beck, 2002; Stevenson, 2003). Ghannam (2002:17) argues that an examination of everyday life in Cairo reveals how its inhabitants articulate

'local values, national policies, and global forces in their daily struggles'. This cultural fluidity and plurality associated with modern cities is captured in Sassen's (2000) conceptualization of urban place, which she considers to be one of the most strategic spaces for the formation of transnational identities and communities. According to Sassen (2000), the city is localised, embedded in particular and strategic sites, yet is also transterritorial, connecting other sites which are not geographically proximate, yet intensely connected to each other. Importantly, although my research highlights the primacy of television as a daily cultural framework through which cosmopolitan imagination is predominantly articulated, an analysis of everyday life through the city allows me to locate my work against any form of media-determinism. I subscribe to Georgiou's (2006:22) thesis that media users are shaped by complex forms of 'multilayered belonging' where the relevance of the media only makes sense as they are juxtaposed alongside the immediate and non-mediated discourses. The importance of ethnography as my chosen methodological framework in this context is indisputable, as by positioning my analysis in the everyday spaces of the city, I have been able to situate my understanding of young Egyptians within a broader socio-cultural and economic context that transcends the immediate moment of media consumption alone. I have been able to approach young Egyptians in all their social complexity, and as their daily urban lives are shaped through media practice, class inequalities, state repression, family relations and religion.

As well as being a space that has provided young Egyptians with opportunities for new cultural possibilities, I also approach Cairo as a highly unequal terrain that starkly brings to the fore the inequalities and paradoxes associated with globalization in developing-world contexts. Indeed, almost 94% of Cairo's land is uninhabitable, meaning that an urban population of approximately 17 million (Demographia, 2011) is forced to live on 6.2% of the capital's available land (IDSC, 2009). Thus, in a situation where there is an over concentration of bodies in a limited geographical space, forced proximity requires Egyptians to negotiate the intense juxtapositions of difference as part of their everyday urban experiences. In particular, I focus on the ways social class disparity, which results in highly visible contradictions in lifestyle, has become central to everyday experiences of the city. Thus, the intense coming together of class difference leads to a performance of 'boundary maintenance'

(Morley, 2000: 214) where young Egyptians, particularly from the upper middle class, close themselves off in homogenous urban enclaves that exclude the lower classes who display alternative levels of cultural and financial capital (Kuppinger, 2004; Denis, 2006; De Koning, 2009).

An analysis of everyday life in Cairo confirms the continuing importance of class, which profoundly shapes Egyptian citizens' access to power, cultural practices, lifestyles, and even relations of reproduction (Moghadam cf. Inhorn, 1996: 34). Nevertheless, according to Inhorn (1996), despite the recent profusion of studies in the Middle East and Egypt, clear, representative, class-based analyses are yet to be achieved, as certain segments of the population – namely the upper-classes – are usually over-represented in research. By focusing on three different classes that display varying degrees of access to cultural and financial capital, my research records and documents the multiple different experiences and life stories of young Egyptians. Giddens (1998) and Beck (1994) argue that we inhabit an age of reflexive modernity where the individual emerges as the most important social unit of everyday life. Through this 'individualization' thesis, the authors propose that, freed from the confines of traditional collectivities and social structures such as class and religion, the individual becomes a reflexive and consciously alert being, able to think and make their own decisions. Nevertheless, according to Skeggs, Thumim and Wood (2008), Beck and Giddens' claims are backed up by little empirical research to illustrate how processes of individualization actually take shape in the real world, and thus, how they may negate the importance of class. In fact, recent research documents the continuing importance of class in shaping identities. Studies have revealed that although individuals may not explicitly recognize, or verbally acknowledge themselves as belonging to traditional class collectivities, class remains a major feature of their subjectivities, shaping and informing daily struggles over resources and ways of being (Skeggs, 1997; Savage, 2000b). With these concepts in mind, my research is sensitive to the ways in which class disparities in Egypt regulate everyday lives in Cairo, leading to vast inequalities in accesses to resources and systems of power.

Sreberny argues how 'inequality of resources and access, especially in the digital arena, do remain vitally important issues, but more is happening that is creative and

empowering and worthy of attention' (2005:14). Indeed, my research findings reveal how universal access to cultural representations on television, represents a common space of enjoyment through which the everyday classed and disconnected experiences of young Egyptians often come together. This indicates that the experiences of disadvantaged groups do not always proceed according to predictable narratives of exclusion or marginalization, as the media can often bridge class gaps, functioning as a common association to entertainment and culture more broadly. Nevertheless, my ethnographic findings also reveal that although the widespread availability of translated media products has contributed to a democratization of access across different classed groups, the constraints of socio-economic status are never completely overcome. As Martin-Barbero (1993b) importantly reminds us, cultural competencies shaping different classes impact upon television use, informing the different understandings groups make of the media. For instance, in his cross-national comparative analysis, Harindranath (2009) explores the importance of higher education in influencing how audiences in the UK and India interpret documentaries. The author discovers that Indian audiences with a background of higher education use the same interpretive frames as British audiences with similar educational credentials, than other audiences in the same Indian national context without a higher education. My research, however, is not preoccupied with the question of how young Egyptians decode or interpret specific media texts in relation to their class or gender identities. In contrast to this 'cognitive' and 'rational' (Morley, 2006: 109) approach to audience-text relations usually associated with reception theories, my ethnographic study explores how the media have become important cultural resources, used within the broader context of everyday life, allowing young Egyptians to construct and negotiate these very identities. Thus, although television provides young Egyptians with spaces to come together in their access of the same media, and thus enjoyment of the same culture, an ethnographic examination of these young men and women in all their classed, gendered and urban nuances, unearths the diverging ways the media are used and made sense of by different audiences as resources for everyday living.

1.5 Thesis Outline

Before I proceed to the next chapter, I would now like to briefly describe the shape that this thesis will take through mapping the chapter outlines. Chapter Two performs a contextualizing function by introducing some of the most prominent social, cultural and political factors that have moulded Egypt's contemporary history. I discuss how a specific discourse of 'modernity' heavily drawing on a European model has taken shape in Egypt, linked particularly to a long colonial history. I also chart the development of electronic media in Egypt, examining how mediated platforms have become catalysts used both by the government and citizens to negotiate different understandings and interpretations of a 'modern' national identity. In Chapters Three and Four I outline my theoretical discussion. Chapter Three develops my specific conceptual framework for understanding cosmopolitanism in Egypt, which I propose can only be approached through concepts other than the ones used by research focusing on western liberal democracies. I discuss my rationale for using the term imagination as a lens for understanding the construction of identities in the contemporary mediated world. Although I approach imagination as being articulated through relations of distance and proximity as negotiated by the media, I also argue in this chapter that imagination is not an ahistorical product of the moment, but is partly formulated through a changing historical and political context, particularly colonialism.

In Chapter Four I focus more specifically on the city whose urban terrain has become an important space for observing and examining cosmopolitanism as an everyday lived reality. I argue how cities outside the west cannot be approached through an analysis of economic and financial industries alone, as the polarized city underwritten by severe class divides has become a factor of central importance in the study of urban contexts in the developing south. Nevertheless, I argue that the city is not only a static backdrop for the articulation of cosmopolitan identities, but using Lefebvre's (1991) theory of the Production of Space, I propose that the city is a creative urban terrain, itself being negotiated, constructed and imagined by citizens through everyday media practice. In the methodology discussion in Chapter Five, I outline my choice for using ethnography as a main methodological framework, where triangulation was employed and data was collected through the combined use

of a television consumption survey, participant/non-participant observation and focus groups. I argue how my long term and intense examination of young Egyptians and their everyday media culture gathered through first hand observation of 'natural' behaviour, self-reported data and verbal reports has allowed me to develop an in-depth understanding of my key concepts of analysis.

Chapters Six, Seven and Eight present my empirical discussion where I argue that as an overarching cosmopolitan imagination in Cairo intersects with the specificities of everyday experience, especially in relation to class inequalities and unequal gender relations, it takes on three different forms. In this context, I argue how a closed, implicit and critical cosmopolitan imagination, articulated predominantly through television, is expressed in relation to three factors: attitudes towards the nation, consumer practices and urban mobilities. Chapter Nine, the conclusions, will then bring the different theoretical, empirical and methodological strands of this thesis together, critically assessing what this project has contributed in relation to our understandings of cosmopolitanism, media consumption, class and identity construction. I will also discuss what I believe to be some of the limitations inherent in this study, and give recommendations for future research.

This thesis explores how cosmopolitanism is not an association limited to the west and the upper classes only, but a sense of global interdependence and a desire to reach out across cultural differences remains a pervasive reality both outside the west, and for those with limited economic means. Articulated predominantly through the media, cosmopolitanism as I have observed it in Egypt, remains in dialogue with local loyalties; it is an overarching system of organizing everyday lives where national sentiments, religious identities and global realities intersect. Nevertheless, an ethnographic examination of cosmopolitan imagination in all its classed, gendered and urban nuances, reveals how cosmopolitanism does not exist in any unitary structure, but is an evolving form, highly imbued within unequal relations of power and influence both at the national and transnational levels.

2 Egypt at a Crossroads: Postcolonial History, Global Modernness and Media Development

2.1 Introduction

I clearly remember a summer's day in July 2009 when I was sitting with a group of lower middle class men and women in Beanos Café as we were drinking our mango juices and sipping our mint teas. While talking animatedly amongst ourselves, Mariam, a 20-year-old student of Education, suddenly turned with a hushed whisper and told us to 'look quickly' as she gestured with her eyes towards a young veiled woman who had just entered the café. Our five pairs of eyes keenly followed the woman who seemed to be familiar with the waiters and waitresses, greeting them and distributing kisses as she proceeded towards the staff changing room. 'Just wait and keep looking' Mariam told us with a defiant smirk on her face. Indeed, around six minutes later, the woman walked out, although I was certain she had spent the last few minutes in some sort of magician's room. The veiled woman in a conservative dress who entered the room, exited as a transformed lady: she became a long blond-haired (obviously dyed: the signature 'western' look in Egypt) waitress clad in a knee-length skirt and Beanos' customary orange T-shirt. As I stared at her in disbelief while she happily and obliviously went about taking orders from customers, Mariam giggled at my reaction. Mariam told me: 'the management here doesn't allow girls to work in their veil. The waitress once told me that the veil ruins the "modern" image that the café is trying to maintain, so she has been asked to remove it before beginning her daily shift.

The above encounter took my memory back to how Egyptian state elites have embarked upon massive urban renewal projects, physically demolishing and relocating whole communities within Cairo, replacing their humble neighbourhoods with 'modern' cosmopolitan living spaces (Ghannam, 2002). The forced removal of this 'underclass' and their popular rundown quarters from their location in central Cairo, was typical of the state's attempts to impose their own officially conceived image of a *global* capital city and a *modern* national identity. What these two incidents demonstrate is how a 'modern' identity in Egypt has often become a contested discourse, both commercialized (in the case of the café incident) and

constructed according to state policy (in relation to the example of urban planning) imposed upon the nation, rather than being constructed from within it. Thus, official discourses of 'being modern' in Egypt position it as a secular project associated with the aristocracy of culture and drawing heavily upon western ideals of sophistication (Armbrust, 1996). Nevertheless, as I embark upon an ethnographic project exploring the lives of young Egyptians, I ask to what extent can there be spaces of dialogue or even resistance between the official and the everyday where a bottom up version of 'being modern' can be envisioned? Cairo's recent revolution provides a timely example of how identity is primarily a transitional project; a contingent structure that never reaches any final destination, but is a unique product of a particular moment. Identities provide an important mediating space that balance imposed discourse alongside lived practice. Moments of rupture, as the revolution illustrated, can tilt this delicate balance, allowing people to become constructors of their own destiny rather than being resigned to a prescribed life. The 25th of January 2011 involved a re-writing of what it means to be Egyptian; the nation was no longer subject to a prearranged vision of identity as imposed by the state, but the nation found its voice and turned against the state (Sreberny, 2011).

This thesis examines how young Egyptians are constructing different classed versions of a cosmopolitan imagination at the intersection of a highly fragmented, highly mediated everyday urban life. Central to the vision of cosmopolitanism is an openness and orientation towards the wider world and a sense of connection to a distant 'other' that transcends the specificities of immediate locality and social experience. Where inter-cultural dialogue has become a permanent feature of our increasingly interconnected world, the question of what it means 'to be modern' has taken a central position, specifically in contexts outside of the west (Sabry, 2010; Deeb, 2006; Ghannam, 2002). Thus, this chapter addresses how understandings of a 'modern' Egyptian nation have been shaped, both historically and in contemporary times, both by ordinary Egyptians and often through official state discourse. The first section of this chapter explores how understandings of 'being modern' in Egypt have been strongly linked to the development of the nation-state, specifically in relation to its colonial past. I then move onto a discussion of how the desire to be modern is essentially a performance and is thus embodied, lived and physically asserted. I look specifically at class and gender as two important categories around which

contemporary Egyptian culture and performances of modernness are located and articulated on a daily basis. The final section examines the dual role the media have played in shaping how questions of being modern and being Egyptian have developed. They have been used both as official state tools of control disseminating a very specific version of modernity and national development, and also from below, as tools of everyday resistance in the hands of citizens.

Before proceeding with the first section of this chapter, I would like to briefly outline some important demographic characteristics in relation to Egypt's urban-rural development and distribution of resources. Egypt is divided into 29 governorates, only six of which are considered to be totally urban (Zohry, 2009). Five of the 29 governorates comprise the Greater Cairo Region (Cairo, Giza, Qalyoubia, Helwan, 6th October) (El Kouedi and Madbouly, 2007). According to the latest 2006 census (CAPMAS, 2006), the population of the Greater Cairo Region is approximately 18.4 million, representing approximately 22% of the total population of Egypt (El Kouedi and Madbouly, 2007). Nevertheless, despite accommodating just over a quarter of Egypt's total population, Cairo accounts for over 50% of the national GDP and 40% of manufacturing outputs. Additionally, Cairo is home to 55% of Egypt's higher education institutions, 46% of the total number of hospital beds, 40% of pharmacies, 43% of the total job employment opportunities in the public sector, and 40% in the private sector (El Koueidi and Madbouly, 2007).

Regarding telecommunications infrastructure, 20.7% (just over two million) of the total number of fixed phone lines in Egypt are located in Cairo, compared to 9.5% in Alexandria, the second biggest city (CAPMAS, 2009). Furthermore, 35.6% of Cairo's inhabitants have access to a phone line, compared to 18.4% of Egypt's total population, again illustrating the concentration of social resources and technological infrastructure within the capital in relation to whole country (IDSC, 2009).

Regarding this over-concentration of social, economic and technological resources in Cairo, Zohry (2009) comments on how this has contributed to a very stark and visible disparity between the development of rural and urban areas in Egypt. As a result, Zohry argues, there has been a growing wave of internal migration within Egypt, heading particularly towards Cairo and Alexandria. According to the CAPMAS census of 2006, about 7% of the population of Cairo were internal

migrants, who left the Upper Egypt and the Delta regions in search of better work opportunities in the two main cities of Cairo and Alexandria. Zohry (2009) refers to this as *survival* migration where the overwhelming reasons for internal migration are economic. A new life in the major cities represents the only chance for survival and the dream of a better life for rural youth.

2.2 Are we Egyptians, Muslims or are we Modern? The Shifting Understandings of Modernness in Egypt

'Being' modern, aspiring to 'become' modern or 'resisting' the forces of modernization are all claims that we have become accustomed to hearing as part of the commentary on globalization. Nevertheless, such claims may often raise more questions about the realities of our cultural relations than they can possibly answer. Indeed, what is modernization? Who is considered to be modern and who is not? Furthermore, who decides what and who conforms (or not) to a specific discourse of 'being modern'? In relation to Egypt, these critical questions seem particularly pressing in the context of a nation that has a long colonial history, and which is economically, culturally and politically open to contemporary globalization flows (De Koning, 2009; Amin, 2004). Simultaneously Egypt has been defined by a transnational Islamic resurgence in recent years (MacLeod, 1992, Abaza, 2001), often expressed as resistance to globalization and its very constricted, western-driven project of modernity (for an example see Abdelrahman, 2006 who explores the increasing popularity of Islamic consumer items as an alternative to western consumer products). In the context of these multifarious and often contradictory cultural and religious orientations, how are discourses of modernity – that appear to naturally accompany the globalization phenomenon – received and understood by ordinary Egyptians? King (2003) rightly questions conventional theories of social development by asking: whose explanation is being foisted upon the world and whose understanding of modernity is being privileged? 'If modern means "now," "of the present," we need to know whose "now" and whose "where" is being privileged' (King, 2003:266). Exploring the dynamic historical development of the Arab region that has witnessed multiple diverse cultural encounters, Sabry (2010) concludes that there cannot be one homogenous understanding of what being modern entails. Sabry, therefore, uses the term *modernness* as opposed to modernization or modernity as a more grounded,

contextualised approach to how 'being' modern can evolve in multiple ways and in diverse forms. Thus, with a bottom-up focus on the specificities of everydayness and structures of thought, Sabry develops a purely ontological interest in how modernness is articulated and communicated in various different forms in relation to the daily context of Arab lived experience. Following Sabry, I will also use the term modernness throughout this chapter when referring to the experiences of Egyptians. However, when referring to governments or officially disseminated versions of 'being modern,' I may still use the term modernity or modernization.

A point of importance raised by Deeb (2006) is that the ways in which individuals and groups articulate specific understandings of modernness in the world is a highly *relational* process: a person, object or place can only be perceived as modern in *relation* to something else that may have existed elsewhere or at a different point in history. For instance, Deeb discusses how the Lebanese women on which her study is based, consider themselves to be *modern* Muslims as they experience an 'authenticated Islam' (2006:21) based on piety and understanding, as well as an appreciation and enjoyment of global culture. These women were comparing themselves with older generations of Muslims whose actions were largely about an unreflexive and almost blind conformity to religious tradition and heritage. Using this same relational stance, I argue that the way young Egyptians formulate particular understandings of modernness is not a static or ahistorical product of the present moment, but involves complex processes which have developed, and continue to develop within the dynamic intersections of history, politics and culture. According to Denis' (2006) analysis of contemporary Egyptian culture, for instance, everyday perceptions of sophistication, beauty and modernness continue to be influenced by Egypt's historical period of colonial British rule, which is routinely compared with other stages in Egypt's national development. As Denis (2006) notes, anything associated with the west is an example of the elegance, grace and sophistication of the colonial era, compared to the period of Arab reform and socialism from the 1950s. This period of pan-Arab influence is perceived by many Egyptians as a stagnant era of social decay and corrosion (Denis, 2006). According to this example, the different ways Egyptians position themselves regarding how progressive or modern they perceive themselves (or the nation) to be, is articulated in relation to the multiple narratives of development that have shaped their nation at different points in

history. In order to elaborate on this point, the next section will undertake a brief analysis of some of the most important political and economic moments that have shaped Egypt's cultural and national development in its recent history.

2.2.1 Egypt's National History: Between the 'Pre-Modern' and the 'Modern'

Mitchell (2002:13) explores the way discourses of modernness taking shape in the Egyptian context have been closely linked to the development of the nation. As he writes: 'the nation is an identity that must be continually remade' and this construction of the nation requires a performance of the past which involves 'questions of the relationship of Cairo's political elites to the West, and at the same time their relationship to their own wider society'. A brief examination of Egypt's recent national development uncovers the extent to which it involves a very diverse, constantly shifting multilayered history. As this chapter is exploring the way Egyptians, as national subjects, are formulating particular understandings of modernness, the last two centuries in Egypt's history are particularly important.

It was the penultimate year of the eighteenth century which signalled the fall of the Ottoman empire, witnessed Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt, and thus moulded Egypt's modern culture towards its present form (Piterberg, 1997). Both institutionally, at the level of state politics, and subjectively, at the level of the ordinary citizen, Egypt was transformed from a 'pre-modern' to a 'modern' nation that re-directed its interests away from its long established Turkish influences, looking to Europe as a 'model for modernization' (Schaub, 2000: 226). Indeed, Piterberg (1997) writes how the year 1798 became a turning point in the development of Egyptian history as it erected a symbolic barrier between what was often perceived to be the period of the primordial and backward Ottoman rule, and nineteenth century western-led state modernism. Modernism, therefore, according to Piterberg (1997), came to be synonymous with the west and the superiority of western culture. This became a notable reality particularly during the period of British colonialism (1882-1952) when the signs of British cultural influence were making inroads all over Egypt.

Schaub (2000) explores how the state of foreign languages in Egypt dramatically changed after the British occupation, as the teaching of English made significant

gains in public schools. Simultaneously, there were attempts by the colonial powers to relegate native Arabic to a secondary position due to its perceived 'inferior' status. Abaza (2006:8) has similarly commented on how colonialism created new cosmopolitan lifestyles that produced 'different notions of leisure time such as horse riding, racing, polo and cricket'. Cairo's infrastructure was also physically altered as new schools such as Victoria College and the American College were established, alongside bars, hotels such as The Mena House and department stores like Gattengo grand magasin (Abaza, 2006). In relation to these new colonial influences that became strongly desired and incorporated into the cultural practices of Egyptians, Mitchell's (1991) exploration of how British imperialist rule was able to extend its power and authority over Egyptians (until this day) provides a very important contribution. According to Mitchell, the colonizers maintained command over Egyptians by controlling both *body* and *mind*. While the former more obviously refers to physical forms of supervision and control, the latter is a more discrete form of indirect power related to an ability to manipulate subjectivities. Colonial ideological discourses, rules and moral codes were made to appear as impressive and desirable as the contemporary European-style infrastructure that began dominating Cairo's streets. The enforcement of colonial power, therefore, became a naturalized process, not forcibly imposed, but effortlessly and often desirably spread throughout national institutions and social and cultural processes (Mitchell, 1991).

From the 1930s to the 1970s, however, there was a strong shift away from cultures of the west (Gershoni and Jankowski, 1995). In particular, the 1952 military coup ended British occupation and overthrew the Egyptian monarchy. A new republican order was established under the presidency of Gamal Abdel Nasser, who sustained strong links with the Soviet Union and promoted a regionally popular pan-Arab national allegiance. Furthermore, the 1967 Arab defeat by Israel was the start of a steady decline of pan-Arabism, and the beginning of an Islamic resurgence (Nafi, 2008). Thus far in Egypt's history, the nation had acquired multiple and diverse meanings at different points of its development. As Gershoni and Jankowski argue, all the diverse 'traditions' of Egyptian nationalism were 'subjective mental constructs created at a specific point in time through a selective reading of the multi-layered Egyptian heritage' (1995:14). This resembles the position of the theorists of the *modernization school* (Smith, 1999; Gellner, 2006) who have observed how nations are not natural

timeless phenomena, but are socially constructed artifacts, products of particular events and developments at a specific time in history. Furthermore, national development is not a process based exclusively on internal politics and the singular impulsive decisions of power holders. As Winter has suggested, how a national culture is shaped should be 'associated less with culture, ideology and moral superiority than with power, historical sequence and the international hierarchy of nations' (Winter, 2007: 498).

According to Winter's theory, external relations of power and dominance, and issues of global hierarchy have a prime role to play in influencing how nations internally develop, and how nations are constructed and take shape vis-à-vis the other. Indeed, this is clear in the analysis of Egypt's contemporary history above in the way the nation tried to assimilate itself with western inspired forms of state modernization, and even when it tried to engage with pan-Arab or transnational forms of religious identity, this was primarily a reaction against western influences. As a further illustration of Winter's relational argument of national development, it was probably the post 1970s era that contributed towards some of the most important economic and political changes that have shaped Egyptian culture to this day. In an attempt to solve Egypt's economic and financial problems, President Anwar El Sadat , who came to office in 1970, suspended relations with the Soviet Union initially formulated by Abdel Nasser, and directed his efforts towards the USA.

In 1974, Sadat declared the *infitah* or economic 'open-door policy,' reversing president Abdel Nasser's Egyptianization and nationalization of all large industrial firms, banks and companies. With the spread of economic liberalization, therefore, Egypt opened up to foreign investment with new relaxed laws granting access to foreign investors (Amin, 2004: 129), while the increased presence of multinational companies brought about a rapid growth in the world of consumption. This greatly extended the impact of globalization into the everyday lives of ordinary people in Egypt (Ghannam, 1997). Importantly, this (re)newed orientation to the west was not approached as a completely new chapter in Egypt's cultural and economic history, but as a continuation and (re)awakening of a fascination with the west developed during colonial times (Amin, 2005). Patterns of economic liberalization initiated under Sadat's rule, continued into, and were further capitalized upon during the reign

of now ousted Prime Minister Hosny Mubarak (1981-2011). Indeed, Mubarak enthusiastically embarked upon an intense program of liberal economic reform. Although it may have cosmetically raised Egypt's profile on global economic reports, Mubarak's economic vision failed to address the underlying problems confronting ordinary Egyptians such as poverty and lack of access to basic resources. This has created tension between a state national project that combines a sanitized version of modernity that is well ordered and up to global standards on the surface, with an everyday social infrastructure of political corruptness, debilitating class polarization and the absence of individual liberties. According to Mitchell (2002), for instance, despite frenzied claims that the economic open door policies of the 1970s brought about widespread changes and social benefits to all Egyptians, in reality, it bettered the lives of about 5% of the population. These fundamental class inequalities that have remained unaddressed by successive Egyptian leaders have continued to divide and polarize the everyday cultural realities of an entire nation. I turn to this in the next section when I explore the importance of both class and gender as discourses around which everyday experiences of the city and nation are forged.

2.3 One City, Different Stories: Class, Gender and a Divided Everyday Life

2.3.1 Class

At the initial stages of my research, I decided that I would conduct an ethnographic study on the middle-class and the working-class in Egypt. However, after consulting relevant literature and conversing with several Egyptian anthropologists and sociologists, I realized there was no homogenous or singular middle-class. Recent changes that have befallen Egypt's social, cultural and economic fabric, have meant that the idea of a single identifiable middle-class has become increasingly invalid (Abdel Mo'ti, 2006; De Koning, 2009; Amin, 2000). Indeed, De Koning (2009) has commented on how the middle-class in Egypt has been increasingly destabilized as a result of the country's most important economic developments. As De Koning notes, in the years following the 1952 revolution against the monarchy, the Egyptian state led by President Abdel Nasser's communist government came to play a central role in the formation of the national economy. Through the democratization of public education and the provision of government jobs to all graduates, a large urban middle class rapidly came into existence (Abaza, 2006; Ibrahim, 1982). Nevertheless,

political change came about as Anwar El Sadat took over power in 1971 and introduced new liberal economic reforms. From 1974, there was a withdrawal of the state as a primary agent of national development, and the integration of Egypt within global economic networks that had a great impact upon the cultural ambitions and thus structure of the middle class.

A large section of the middle class was no longer complacent with a public education or a secure government job characteristic of Abdel Nasser's previous communist political orientation, but developed an ambition of keeping up with new 'global' standards of modernity established by Sadat's policies. This involved gaining a private language based education and working in the increasingly burgeoning private sector (De Koning, 2009; Amin, 2000). Abdel Mo'ti (2006) notes how the government's financial investment into the private sector increased by 30% in 1986, even though the total workforce in this sector represented only 9% of the whole Egyptian workforce. Thus, those who were able to participate in these new cosmopolitan lifestyles made possible by the government's new economic changes, enjoyed a relatively easy ride up the social ladder, while a large chunk were forced down. The middle class therefore became progressively de-stabilized and increasingly divided 'between professionals whose more localized qualifications have lost much of their previous value and others whose formal and informal cosmopolitan qualifications allow them to compete for relatively lucrative jobs in Egypt's upscale workspaces' (De Koning, 2009: 6). I decided, therefore, that my research would need to involve a comparison between three different classes in order to account for the social, cultural and economic changes that have befallen and thus altered the structure of the middle class in Egypt (for a more detailed discussion on the changes that have shaped the middle class in Egypt see Abdel Mo'ti, 2006; Amin, 2000). Firstly, the *upper-middle class* who represent the faction of the middle-class able to sustain new standards of cultural and economic capital associated with global modernity as initiated by President Sadat's 'open door' policies; the *lower-middle class* who are unable to keep up with these cultural and economic standards and thus remain affiliated with more localized forms of belonging; and lastly the *working class*. In contrast to the two middle class groups who are more likely to acquire a higher education degree and take up skilled, professional occupations, I define the working class as a group who usually leave mainstream education at the age of 15 to

undertake secondary vocational education, receiving a specialized industrial, agricultural or business diploma. Following two years of vocational education, students then either search directly for a job opportunity (usually unskilled labour) or complete three further years in an intermediate vocational institute.

In light of the above discussion that has documented some of the factors that have shaped class identities in Egypt, I approach class as a category defined through both cultural, as well as economic capital. This focus on cultural capital is especially relevant in relation to the upper and lower middle class, whose standards of living and cultural aspirations are starkly divergent, despite both belonging to the middle class strata. I particularly follow Ibrahim's (1982) model of classification based on Cairo, as according to Inhorn (1996), although there have been several attempts, Ibrahim provides the most useful description of class divisions in urban Egypt. Realizing the difficulty involved in defining what constitutes 'class,' and even more so, establishing the number of classes in a complex society such as Egypt, Ibrahim (1982) draws on several indicators of socio-economic status. Particularly relevant to my research are income, education, occupation (occupation of parents in the case of my study) and lifestyle. Together, these indicators form a person's cultural and economic capital, thus contributing to the construction of a particular class *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1984).

As Ibrahim's system of classification was formulated almost 30 years ago, however, I believe the way he defines some of his class indicators, particularly education and lifestyle, need to be accorded a more contemporary approach that is up-to-date with recent cultural and economic changes. For instance, *lifestyle* for Ibrahim connotes the acquisition of durable goods and the size of residence. Nevertheless, in contemporary Cairo, 'lifestyle' cannot be approached as a static type that revolves around what you own or where you are physically located. I believe that such an understanding of 'lifestyle' that defines it as a materialistic category articulated purely through the acquisition of certain essential objects such as a fridge or car, needs to be supplanted by an understanding of 'lifestyle' as an everyday cultural performance, centred around particular lifestyles and consumer practices (Abaza, 2006; De Koning, 2009). Again, I discuss this in more detail in Chapter Four in relation to how consumer products are no longer defined solely through their use/functional value, but

increasingly through a more elusive symbolic value where they communicate specific cultural meanings.

Furthermore, Ibrahim uses 'education' as an indicator of socio-economic status, and this is particularly relevant to my research as my participants are at an age (18-25) where they are either still in further/higher education, or have recently completed their studies. Nevertheless, I wish to deconstruct Ibrahim's understanding of education, where he primarily defines it as being involved in a relationship of positive correlation to income. Thus, once again, similar to his conceptualization of 'lifestyle,' Ibrahim approaches education through a narrow economic lens, which in the context of contemporary Egypt, fails to reflect the full reality of education as sustaining a socio-cultural, as well as economic function. Today, the abundance of higher education outlets in Egypt, both private foreign language and public Arabic institutions (Schaub, 2000), means that *type* of education, as well as *level*, are important indicators and preservers of cultural capital and class habitus. Private language universities have rapidly increased in Egypt over the last two decades, with five times as many institutions available today compared to 1990 (Arvizu, 2009). Whereas in western societies entry into particular institutions is predominantly associated with performance and merit, in Egypt, entry is often based upon socio-linguistic and economic capital, which makes educational spaces exclusively available for some, and denied to others. Furthermore, the *type* of educational institution entered in Egypt ultimately determines an individual's position in society, their access to resources and systems of power. Private language universities that conduct most of their teaching in English and often give their students an opportunity to spend a year in Germany, the USA or the UK, produce a particular caliber of students highly sought after by top paying multinational firms. Along with the prestigious faculty of Economic and Political Sciences at Cairo University, Gamal El Din (1995) refers to these private language institutions as 'first tier'. This is in contrast to graduates of particular faculties within public universities, such as History and Education, which Gamal El Din (1995) refers to as 'second tier'.

Graduates of 'second tier' faculties who lack the internationally orientated cultural and language skills in comparison to graduates of private institutions, often end up working for less financially rewarding government institutions and local firms

(Gamal El Din, 1995). In this respect, education is another cog that feeds into, and sustains the highly fragmented and hierarchical class system in Egypt. Thus, the different educational institutions I engaged with during the course of my research provided an important point of entry into the culturally polarized classed worlds of young Egyptians (Gamal El Din, 1995; Arvizu, 2009). In light of these complex realities, I selected three educational institutions to represent the very different socially and economically fragmented lives of young Egyptians: *The American University in Cairo* (first tier institution- upper middle class), and *The Faculty of Education: Ain Shams University* (second tier institution-lower middle class) and *Madina Institute* (working class) that awards intermediate diplomas in computing. Although *level* and *type* of education provided an initial point of access to the three classes, I did not rely upon education as my only form of class categorization. Through the survey I distributed in the three institutions, I was able to build a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse lives of the three groups by asking them a range of cultural and financial related questions, including: family income, occupation of parents, area of residence, destination of travels and number of cars owned (see appendix, fig.1).

2.3.2 Gender

According to Abu Lughod (1998:3), it is particularly in the postcolonial world that women become 'potent symbols of identity' who function as important indicators of how 'modern' a particular national context is considered to be. Nevertheless, feminist discussions regarding the position of women have, according to Abu Lughod, been framed in terms of cultures that are posited in stark opposition to each other: the 'proper' role of women is seen in light either of a western (liberal) or eastern Islamic (traditional) model. By avoiding being dragged into an east versus west binary opposition, however, we can be more sensitive to and 'particularize, and to ground in place, class, and time the experiences of women and the dynamics of gender' (Abu Lughod, 1998: 22). For instance, Mernissi (1982) discusses how Mediterranean societies are very much patriarchal cultures where women are expected to be subordinate and under the control of men. In this light, women, whose destiny it is to await marriage and the responsibilities it entails, are required to protect their family honour by sustaining a virginal modesty: they are expected to constantly portray a righteousness and virtuous innocence (Mernissi, 1982). Mensch, Ibrahim, Lee, *et al.*

(2000) examine how this is often achieved in Egyptian society through controlling women's physical mobility. By the onset of puberty it is expected, according to the authors, that women withdraw from public space and display increasing forms of modesty. Following on from these theories, although concerns over women's 'honour' and 'respectability' remain central values that dominate the rules of Arabic and Islamic cultural practices, to what extent does such a simplified and stereotyped narrative of complete female subordination continue to ring true in these societies? As Abu Lughod (1998) notes above, feminist discussions should not fall prey to simplified binary oppositions that fail to reflect the complex and multifarious realities of women operating in particular contexts and at a particular time.

Contrary to the above assertions of female immobility, it has been noted by various scholars that the selective visibility of women in public spaces is in fact a requirement of globalising cities claiming their place within discourses of urban modernity (Phadke, 2007; De Koning, 2009). Nevertheless, even though the complete exclusion of women from public space falls short of everyday realities in the Arab world and conservative societies in general, their visibility remains a highly conditional one. Examining the Indian city of Mumbai, Phadke (2007:1512) for instance, discusses how women's public presence is shaped by a need to maintain 'sexual safety' where the female body is required to police its own virtue and honour. Thus, in order for this aura of sexual safety not to be penetrated, these women are obliged to conform to a 'manufacture of respectability' (ibid.) where they carry the burden of guarding the reputation of themselves and, more indirectly, their family and neighbourhood community. Nevertheless, as well as ensuring that their own sexual safety is protected, these women, according to Phadke (2007), are also expected to conform to established ideals of femininity where they publicly market themselves as attractive and desirable 'marriage material'. Similarly, discussing experiences specific to Morocco, Newcomb explores how women are forced to balance 'rules' that avoid them being perceived as 'sexually promiscuous' (2006:297) while out in the city, alongside a need to 'dress stylishly, wear make-up, and be visible to attract potential husbands' (ibid.:298). Thus, a need to maintain an untainted sexual reputation is underpinned by an ideological gendered morality which dictates that women ultimately need to 'save' themselves for a marital relationship which they are constantly on the lookout to secure. This delicate balance

between policing reputation, while asserting feminine potentials can only take place in certain 'privatized' public spaces where exclusive entry policies control who is and who is not granted access (Phadke, 2007). Focusing particularly on the importance of cafés for Egyptian women, De Koning refers to them as 'own spaces' (2009:552) that allow women to engage in a 'safe' physical presence in public, while conforming to a socially agreed sexual correctness.

As well as policing their physical behaviour while out in the public sphere, another strategy by which the 'virtuous' conduct of women is maintained is through their embodied appearance. The veil has become an important device in this context. It has allowed women to shift between different public spaces while maintaining the socially and religiously constructed norms of modesty and honour (Hoodfar, 1991). Macleod (1992), for instance, discusses how the widespread appearance of the veil in Islamic societies has often been perceived as the ultimate symbol of female oppression and subordination. Nevertheless, through her close examination of lower middle class women in Egypt, she explores how these women confidently assert their own multiple and complex reasonings for why *they* choose to adopt the veil as an everyday embodied expression. According to Macleod, this revolves around 'accommodating protest' (1992:534) as women often choose to wear the veil as a statement of modesty and a 'protest' against public perceptions that the working woman who is out on the streets is loose or morally corrupt. At the same time, however, Macleod believes that women simultaneously 'accommodate' by altering their dress to fit in with dominant ideological norms that women represent sexual temptations without questioning or seeking to challenge these values.

Writing from a feminist point of view, Kandiyoti (1988:283) explores how, in response to patriarchal dominance, women have discovered strategies and coping mechanisms, which have allowed them to put up a kind of 'passive resistance' to male forms of domination and control. She uses the term *patriarchal bargain* in relation to the way women are not completely disempowered, but are constantly on the lookout for ways in which they can take part in this exchange of benefits. As we have seen in the above studies, by guarding their 'honour' through controlling their conduct and physical appearance, women are securing a kind of indirect bargain

where they guarantee for themselves at least a selective and conditioned presence in the public sphere.

2.4 Television, State Control and National Development in Egypt

In the first section of this chapter I discussed how discourses of modernness within Egypt have been closely linked to the nation's development throughout its history. More importantly, however, how have particular ideologies of the nation formulated by elites and those in power been disseminated to citizens? How have ordinary people been included in the project of national development? In contemporary history, the media have been one of the most important tools of development used by states as joint platforms that help to maintain national solidity amongst citizens. This is particularly true in the Egyptian context where high rates of illiteracy along with the declining prices of television sets make television an important everyday transporter of information, entertainment and cultural messages, to which the majority of Egyptians today have access (Guaaybess, 2001). Since its introduction in 1960 under the Presidency of Abdel Nasser, Egyptian television, modelled on a public service ideology, has been a highly centralized absolute monopoly, and thus, has always been a strong vehicle for mobilizing citizens and maintaining nationalism and unity (Amin and Napoli, 2000). Radio and television in Egypt are run by the government through the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU) formed in 1971, which operates according to an established Code of Ethics (Napoli, *et al.*, 2005 cf. Hassan, 1996). This code of ethics includes the prohibition of broadcasting negative statements about religious beliefs and religious groups. It also prohibits criticizing the regime or state officials in radio or television programmes (Hassan, 1996).

According to Abu Lughod (2005), television is a 'key institution' used by Egyptian state elites 'for the production of national culture' where the receiver has been addressed predominantly as a citizen, rather than as a consumer. Indeed, as confirmed by Aly (2011), the Egyptian elite have been carefully involved in constructing a very narrow notion of *al-shakhsiyya al-masriyya*, or the (quintessential) Egyptian character. This represents a 'kind of biologically deterministic approach to Egyptian society, whereby certain types of women and

men are produced through fixed notions of citizenship, belonging, gender, class, religion and social stratification' (Aly, 2011: 3). This is an important illustration of how governments invest socially and economically to transform the nation into a political project that is moulded and truncated to fit their constricted vision of what the nation *ought to be*. Anderson (1983) has explored how the nation is *imagined* as all its members can never know each other or see each other face-to-face, yet through the joint consumption of print media, these citizens are able to imagine themselves as being part of this collectively shared national community. Nevertheless, Anderson's phenomenological approach to the nation neglects the ontological question of how an imagined community envisioned by state elites and disseminated through the media is actually received and decoded by ordinary citizens. Valentine (1996:158), for instance, argues that there can never be one unitary or joint conception of national culture. Valentine explores how the different experiences of Tamils from different backgrounds mean the nation becomes 'available' or 'unavailable' to these groups in multiple ways. For instance, for Tamils of a lower socio-economic status, Valentine explores how their disadvantaged condition means they develop feelings that the nation is 'unavailable' to them, deferred instead to a ruling elite who benefit from all the potential comforts and privileges that the nation can offer.

According to the above, therefore, how viable are government attempts to use media outlets as platforms disseminating a single joint imagination of the nation, if this very idea of the nation is interpreted by citizens in different ways according to their everyday socio-cultural life experiences? Abu-Lughod (2005) explored this question through a focus on the reception of what she names domestic-dramas amongst different groups of urban and rural marginalized women. The author argues that through the technique of 'heightened emotionalism' (Abu-Lughod, 2005, 113), these melodramas have become effective instruments of social development and platforms disseminating a particular state narrative of modernization. Nevertheless, Abu-Lughod recognizes that these television productions, although constructed to fit a particular dominant elite vision of development, are received in particular local contexts in complex ways by a variety of different television audiences. Thus, using the single life-stories of underprivileged Egyptian women, Abu Lughod explores how they can form their own subjective counter-hegemonic interpretations that were not necessarily intended at the production stage. With reference to the case of the

poor domestic servant Amira, for instance, Abu Lughod demonstrates how the importance of religious Islamic practices to her everyday life mediates how she interacts with these television serials. Amira integrates herself within a religious community, and not only a national community 'to which individual citizens are, according to television writers, supposed to relate themselves' (2005:130). Thus, we are warned by Abu-Lughod against telling any linear stories of 'personhood and the coming to modernity' (ibid.:113) that do not take into consideration the complex, multiplying axes of everyday life important to the personal lives of television viewers. Following on from the above, it may be easy to understand how governments can benefit from citizens conforming to an officially disseminated version of national belonging. At the bottom-up level of citizens, however, as Abu-Lughod (2005) and Valentine (1996) illustrate, does not an imposed national vision simplistically gloss over socially and culturally complex and divided societies?

2.4.1 Satellite Television, Media Convergence and Citizen Power in the Arab World

Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) may be a viable explanation of what takes place in an era where a limited number of (terrestrial) televisual outlets are in the direct hands of governments. Nevertheless, can state attempts to foster a joint national understanding still be sustained where state-led media platforms have given way to multiple decentralized outlets? Indeed, a two-step process of television liberalisation began in Egypt from 1974 under President Sadat's rule and continued into Hosny Mubarak's reign from 1981. Initially, taking place on a domestic scale, the first step involved the liberalization of national markets where the content of Egyptian television began an orientation towards the USA. As Sadat reinitiated Egypt's relations with the west after the 1973 war with Israel, television was forced to adapt itself to this new global economic milieu based on western models, and thus a big proportion of content was imported from the USA (Amin and Napoli, 2000). As a consequence of this new unprecedented change in Egyptian media where television screens transported the average Egyptian living room to foreign lands and alternative lifestyles, content became subjected to tough government censorship. The first law of censorship was introduced in 1975 where censors were given the freedom

to remove scenes conflicting with religion and national security, social ethics and traditional norms (Amin and Fikri, 2002).

The second stage of television liberalization in Egypt went beyond the immediate domestic level and involved the liberalization of regional and international economic markets. Coupled with developments in media technology – namely the satellite dish – this process of liberalisation began a rapid decentralisation of media ownership and control in Egypt. The first Egyptian Satellite Channel (ESC) was aired in 1990, although the major landmark in Egypt's satellite history came as Egypt launched its first satellite, Nilesat 101, in 1998. This allowed the broadcasting of several specialized television channels, such as Nile Sport, Nile Drama and Nile News – all still owned by the Egyptian government. Nilesat 102 shortly followed in 2000 and witnessed the launching of the first private Egyptian satellite channels in 2002 including Dream 1, Dream 2 and Al-Mihwar TV (Hassan, 1996). Providing a platform for the transmission of nearly 230 digital channels, both Nilesat 101 and 102 combined 'allowed private broadcasters, both Egyptian and foreign, to operate exclusively by satellite from a designated free zone' (Sakr, 2007: 7).

Following on from the above, the introduction of Direct Broadcast Satellite (DBS) in Egypt's highly controlled and censored communications environment of the 1990s was a landmark development in its television and communications history. This added to previous fears of the cultural threat represented by an increasingly open television landscape initiated during the first stage of media liberalization. Following the development of DBS, it seemed that another type of political 'threat' was also imminent. The rapid rise of a regional Arab geo-cultural satellite market meant television content was able to bypass government broadcast institutions and reach Arab homes directly. The Arab Media Outlook report (Dubai Press Club, 2009:73) has documented how satellite television 'accounts for the large majority of pan-Arab regional advertising spend, accounting for 88% of total media spend'. This points to the increasing importance and popularity of regional Arabic television broadcasting across the Arab world. More specifically, according to Sakr (2001), the development of an Arab geocultural market for satellite television in a region where state censorship strongly prevails, proved a threat to the status quo which became highly

advantageous to viewers. Thus, were Arab governments facing a new political 'threat' that challenged their ability to gain absolute control?

In contrast to the highly controlled and censored nature of national terrestrial outlets, Lynch (2005) examines how pan-Arab satellite channels have shifted the balance of power on the ground contributing enormously 'to building the underpinnings of a more pluralist political culture, one which welcomes and thrives on open and contentious political debate' (p.150). Nevertheless, Lynch brings these optimistic visions back to reality by reminding us that Arab viewers have no institutional avenues for translating these new found political engagements into practical reality. 'The new Arab media could build enthusiasm, but could not translate its excitement into political outcomes' (Lynch, 2005: 152). Sakr (2005) similarly counters the general optimism that some commentators attach to the potential of Arabic satellite broadcasting by describing how these outlets are either state institutions themselves, or are closely affiliated with state actors. For instance, Sakr (2005) illustrates how Egypt's Dream TV was directly linked to the government through a government shareholding in the company, which often resulted in certain outspoken presenters who dared to engage in anti-government protest being taken off air. Campagna (2005) also comments on the extent to which local Arab governments are still capable of exerting influence on the news coverage of satellite channels by disrupting the normal activity of local news bureaus through restrictive press laws and arrests. Furthermore, through an empirical analysis of a range of programming offered by Arabic satellite broadcasting, Karam (2007) similarly refutes the idea that Arab satellite broadcasting represents a catalyst for facilitating greater democratic potential in the region. Instead, he argues satellite's real importance falls in its acting as an essential 'breathing space ' (Karam, 2007: 81) for young people whereby they can virtually escape their everyday burdens and realities through the plethora of engaging cultural entertainment programmes on offer.

If the democratizing potential of satellite television remained questionable, then the development of the Internet and new media across the Arab world since the 1990s certainly pushed the debate towards acknowledging a freer media space. New media have altered control over media telecommunications and have become increasingly more decentralized, moving away from the complete control of autocratic

governments. Nevertheless, it is not the Internet or new media alone which single-handedly paved the way for a democratic media space, but as new media converged with television, established structures of power within the Arab media landscape were significantly reconfigured (Ward, 2009). Kraidy (2007:139) documents the rise of what he names a 'pan Arab hypermedia space' combining the impact of entertainment satellite television and small media such as mobile phones. The initial impact of this media convergence was demonstrated in the 'democracy like' (ibid.:143) activities it permitted viewers of the reality television show *Star Academy*, who were able to vote for and campaign for their favourite candidates by sending text messages to be aired on music television channels. Importantly, Kraidy argues that these democratic acts of campaigning and voting were not only visible within the realms of televised forms of light entertainment, but significantly contributed to changes in Arab governance. 'Arab activists have drawn lessons from the reality television phenomenon' (Kraidy, 2007: 154) transforming themselves into 'citizen-correspondents' (ibid.:151) within political demonstrations, using mobile phones, digital cameras and the Internet to get their voice out to the world.

The recent Arab spring initially sparked in Tunisia in late 2010, is a testament to the true democratic promise of the Internet and media convergence in general. The Egyptian government itself underestimated the potential of alternative media. It dug its own grave through its quite laughable false television reporting where state-supported counter-narratives chose to ignore the uprising at first, focusing their cameras on the calm areas of Cairo as evidence that it was another normal day in Egypt (Peterson, 2011). While the Ministry of Information in control of the media was in panic-mode, selecting which movie to broadcast on its state-run channels in the hope viewers would forget about mass protests taking place only metres away, media-savvy and well informed citizens were selecting and constructing their own platforms of information. Social media became a very important agent of change and a platform for social and political protest.

According to Khamis and Vaughn (2011:1) social media websites during the Egyptian revolution allowed for an effective form of 'citizen-journalism' where ordinary citizens were allocated digital forums through which they were able to 'document the protests; to spread the word about ongoing activities; to provide

evidence of governmental brutality...'. As I discussed in relation to satellite television, one criticism levelled against these regional television channels is the gap that exists between their role as spaces for dissent and opposition, and the existence of democratic avenues through which these rebellious voices could translate this into real political action. A very important point raised by Khamis and Vaughn (2011), however, is the way social media during Egypt's revolution helped to bridge this gap as mediated platforms of resistance supported and worked hand-in-hand with grassroots political activism on the ground.

It would be a naïve overstatement to suggest that the Internet caused the revolution in Egypt. What is certain, however, is that social media contributed to the formation of a very specific kind of revolution where the world was witness to what was happening minute by minute; where on-ground action was effectively rallied; and where global support was rapidly gathered. In the wake of such a complex media scene, who controls the media? *Is it governments?* The media blackout imposed by the Egyptian government on the 28th January reminds us that states still maintain control over media infrastructure and thus still have the power to shutdown a nation's connection to the world. It could be, however, that at long last, Arab governments have come to realize that the media are not only effective platforms of control from above, but also powerful tools of resistance towards these very forms of control from below. What the Arab Spring and the uses of media and communications by its activists demonstrates, is that the media reinforce spaces of dissent and action. Furthermore, it appears that the Egyptian government has jumped on the bandwagon of social media power themselves. In an ironic twist of fate, the Internet that was shut down by authorities to prevent young Egyptians from getting their version of reality out to the world during the revolution, has now become the official platform of connection between the ruling Military Council and these young men and women. Indeed, the Facebook page of the Egyptian Military Council, their favoured location for releasing their latest statements, has now become one of the most popular Facebook pages in Egypt.

After watching what can happen when power is transformed into the hands of media-savvy citizens, could it be that *ordinary individuals now control the media?* As the controversial 'Gay Girl in Damascus' scandal demonstrated, as the media are

becoming increasingly decentralized, new concerns over content validity and authenticity can often arise. A Syrian lesbian blogger named Amina who, much to the amazement and interest of Internet users across the globe, began documenting her lesbian sexual adventures and brutal encounters with Syrian police, turned out to be a hoaxer. Amina was in fact a middle aged male American PhD student living in Scotland, who was able to con the world into believing and following his story for a number of years (Addley, 2011). What we can certainly glean from the events of the past few months is that media power has moved away from a hierarchical top-down structure, located solely in the hands of an elite few, and has become much more horizontal in its distribution and influence.

2.5 Conclusion

I began this chapter with the argument that identity is constructed at the intersection between lived practice and structured relations of power. Indeed, throughout this chapter it has emerged that the everyday in Egypt is a space of tension, positioned between top-down assertions of government control and moments of active bottom-up negotiation and often resistance. As the discussion gradually unfolds throughout the coming chapters, this everyday space will be located specifically within the city and studied in its classed, gendered, religious and urban nuances. What happens to the individual in the midst of these complex and contradicting cultural and religious flows and shifting lines of power? What becomes of agency and the ability of Egyptians to form their own reflexive understandings and interpretations of the world and their position within it? As Singerman and Amar (2006:10) write in relation to Cairo: 'operations of the authoritarian state, city administration, social control agencies and national identities are contingent, internally contested, often fragmented, and pregnant with multiple possibilities'. If state domination and repressive control have continued to physically constrain everyday lives in Egypt, this has not managed to curb completely moments of creative agency, especially at the level of imagination. Societies such as Egypt are rigidly structured around classed and gendered identities that afford little room for manoeuvre within or beyond them. However, cosmopolitan imagination, I propose, offers increased opportunities for symbolic, and sometimes physical mobility, cultural openness and reflexivity. I turn to this in the next chapter as I argue my case for a very specific type of

cosmopolitanism that takes place in Egypt, specifically, and in contexts outside the western-liberal world, more generally.

3 Cosmopolitan Imagination: Between Postcolonial History and a Mediated Globality

3.1 Introduction

Khaled Said was a 28 year old Egyptian man whose images of his bruised, battered and badly beaten corpse made his story one of the most talked about in Egypt and across the world. Said was dragged from an Internet café by two policemen and openly beaten to death in the streets of Alexandria on 6th June 2010. According to initial police reports, he died choking on a packet of drugs that he hastily swallowed in a bid to remove any evidence that he was dealing in drugs. However, as harrowing images of his dead body went viral on the Internet, an entirely different story soon began to emerge. As the investigation into Said's death proceeded, it became clear that earlier on in the year he had posted a video on his online blog showing two policemen 'sharing the spoils of a drug bust' (BBC News Middle East, 2010). This sparked speculations, which indeed were eventually confirmed, that his murder was a cruel act of revenge and a way for Egyptian authorities to flex their muscles and demonstrate what could happen if you dared defy them. In such a context where basic human rights are disrespected and where democratic values are non-existent, is there a space where a cosmopolitan vision can ever become a reality? I argue in this chapter that it can.

If a Kantian tradition of cosmopolitanism is followed, where the world is purported to be one large transcending common humanity threaded together by basic humanitarian ideals (Kant, 2010), then where does this vision leave a large swathe of countries outside the west where such ideals can only be dreamed about? I propose that such countries do not stand outside the experience of cosmopolitanism, but that a very specific type of cosmopolitanism comes into existence operating from within the closed socio-political cultures and tyrannical regimes of such places. Khaled Said's case was a cruel and visible demonstration of the extent to which the humanitarian values we have long associated with cosmopolitanism are often far removed from the constricted political visions of dictators and repressive governments. Ironically, however, it was the legacy of Said and the worldwide support gathered for his cause that also proved the extent to which these ideals

remain central to the everyday imaginations of Egyptians, no matter how much governments try to suppress them. Indeed, the *'We Are All Khaled Said'* campaign was one of the main factors that triggered the 2011 revolution in Egypt.

A series of revolutions was sparked from Cairo, to Ben Ghazi to Damascus to Bahrain, which represented a true implementation of cosmopolitan ideals. A sense of connection to the wider world was no longer formulated through the latest burger released by McDonalds or what dress was worn by whom at the Oscars, but through the recognition that we are all humans connected by a natural desire for the values of freedom, dignity and justice. Divisions between east and west were (temporarily?) relegated to the background: it was no longer a 'third-world' searching for cheap counterfeits of western consumer items as points of entry into a desired 'first-world' imagination, but it was the west that became inspired by the braveness of the Arab people to shape their own destiny. Workers in Wisconsin held up banners reading 'fight like an Egyptian' while in Barcelona, protestors promised to stage another 'Tahrir Square'. This proves that when an adequate set of circumstances permits, especially in the most repressive of contexts, values we associate with cosmopolitanism such as freedom and democracy are not just abstract ideals, but really are the essence of a dignified existence that many will risk their lives to achieve. Nevertheless, I ask, what happens when, in a pre-revolutionary context, these adequate circumstances are not permitted and when all avenues for the implementation of such humanitarian ideals are blocked? Are such societies excluded from ever experiencing cosmopolitanism?

I locate my investigation of cosmopolitanism in Cairo within wider debates of class identity, television consumption and everyday life in the city. It is at their intersection that these factors frame and give meaning to daily experiences in the largest city in Africa and the Middle East. Thus, with pre-revolutionary Cairo as my main focus, this chapter introduces my argument for a very specific type of cosmopolitanism that could be applied to other national contexts outside the west with similar socio-cultural and political circumstances to Egypt. I propose a framework for understanding cosmopolitanism that transcends the vantage point of western liberal democracies from which many studies and conceptualisations of cosmopolitanism have begun (Silverstone, 2007; Chouliaraki, 2008; Kant, 2010). I

approach cosmopolitanism as largely a subjective prospect; an *imagination* through which young Egyptians are able to emigrate mentally (Sabry, 2005:195) beyond national borders, particularly towards the west as their chosen destination. Importantly, the west as a symbolic geography imagined by young Egyptians not only represents a pleasurable repertoire of lifestyle choices and consumption, but also the dream of an alternative, more hopeful life: an emancipatory symbol of freedom, liberty and justice. Thus, a cosmopolitan imagination in Cairo is predominantly associated with a mediated openness to the world, and the way a connection with the distant other becomes an important means through which the self is negotiated and understood.

I start this chapter with a discussion of how cosmopolitanism can be understood as an everyday lived reality, particularly in contexts outside of the west. The next section then explores how I propose to use the term cosmopolitan *imagination* as a lens through which the construction and negotiation of identities can be understood in the context of a highly mediated, pluralized everyday life. Section 3.3 argues that cosmopolitan imagination is not an ahistorical or static product of the present moment, but is negotiated within the changing repertoires of socio-cultural reality as it has emerged through history, especially colonialism. The final section then questions the extent to which the media have been a continuation of western imperial projects, leading to a homogenization of cultures outside the west, or whether they have provided more dynamic hybrid spaces of global interaction and participation.

3.2 Cosmopolitanism and Everyday Life: What Does it Actually Mean to be a Cosmopolitan?

The merits of cosmopolitanism as a conceptual framework have been established in the Introduction. Yet, cosmopolitanism remains sociologically meaningless unless it is examined as an everyday reality and tangible practice. If we were to deconstruct this conceptual term into its basic raw components, what would it consist of?

According to Skrbis, Kendall and Woodward (2004), cosmopolitanism faces a crisis of meaning and definition: what cosmopolitanism actually consists of, and who can be considered cosmopolitan are all questions that have not been clearly operationalized. My interest in cosmopolitanism is inspired by Ong (2009) who

approaches it not as an idealistic vision we should strive to reach, but as an identity that is lived, performed and embodied in everyday life from within multiple localized spaces. Thus, Ong (2009) believes that research should not be making assumptions about what cosmopolitanism ideally *should be*, but through bottom-up empirical work, we need to explore lived experience, and hence what cosmopolitanism *actually is* for different people. As Ong argues, in the search for cosmopolitanism within the fabric of everyday life, 'it is crucial to think of the expressions of cosmopolitanism as always-already plural'. In this context, it is important to be sensitive to the 'extravagant array of possibilities' that shape the articulation of different cosmopolitan identities (Ong, 2009:453).

If we were to strip cosmopolitanism down to its barest form, its core would comprise the reality of an increasingly interconnected common humanity shaped by 'an attendant concern to our relationship with the Other' (Ong, 2009:463). Exactly how this relationship takes place and the reasons that may drive people to form connections with the 'other' and, indeed, who this distant 'other' represents to different groups, are all subject to the core of cosmopolitanism as an experience and set of values. Thus, cosmopolitanism needs to be approached ontologically as a 'contextual, fragile identity' (Ong, 2009:463) which is articulated in a range of different expressional forms. As Beck (2004:134) writes, cosmopolitanism existing in the real world is not an idealistic vision associated with a 'glittering moral authority' (ibid.:135) as often argued by theorists of the enlightenment period. It is a *deformed* identity that organically takes shape in different forms in a world that 'includes both the location of one's own lifestyle within the horizon of other possibilities, and the ability to see oneself from the viewpoint of those who are culturally other' (Beck, 2004:153).

To appreciate the specific attributes that cosmopolitanism as an analytical concept brings to the social sciences, it is important to reflect on its Kantian origins. Kant, discussing his cosmopolitan vision in the early 18th century, proposed the need for a 'civil society which can administer justice universally' (Kant, 2010:20). According to Kant, cosmopolitanism represented a transcending and universal humanitarian community with an important ethical and moral dimension that world citizens were to relate to as equal individuals. These individuals were to be guaranteed basic rights

established through common cosmopolitan laws (Kant, 2010). Kant's theorisation provides an attractive proposition for an egalitarian interconnected world underpinned by universal moral values. Nevertheless, how is this to be translated into an everyday social reality for individuals and groups embedded within multiply dispersed and distinct localities? Significantly, Kant's analysis is based on a western and North European experience and political culture, and thus to what extent can his vision for cosmopolitanism be applied to other socio-cultural and political contexts outside the west? In particular, Kant downplays the importance of the nation in people's experience and ideologies. Although he recognizes the state as an important political container, albeit one that fails to preserve and guarantee the basic rights of its citizens, the role of the nation as an everyday cultural reference that provides a sense of stability, security and importantly, identity, is not sufficiently addressed. Appiah (1997:618), on the other hand, has argued for a 'rooted cosmopolitanism' or a 'cosmopolitan patriotism' in which individuals can remain embedded in their own local particularities, while also developing cosmopolitan desires to be part of a wider world. Appiah maintains that the nation must occupy a central role in theorizations of cosmopolitanism, precisely because it continues to matter and be desired *by people* 'whose autonomous desires we ought to acknowledge and take account of' (1997:624).

According to Fine (2003a;2003b), by downplaying the importance of the nation, Kant could be writing about an idealistic cosmopolitan vision as it *ought to be*, or as he envisaged it in his mind, rather than a complex, grounded reality as it actually exists. Thus, Fine (2003a) argues that in order to go beyond the abstraction of a Kantian approach to cosmopolitanism, which often remains imprisoned at the level of intellectual thought, there is a need to reconcile *universal* beliefs with *particular* identities and interests. Furthermore, Harvey (2000a) asserts that just as we are in need of a cosmopolitan mode of thinking that pays increased attention to specific places and localized ways of life, so we are in need of a new geographical knowledge that is inspired by a wider cosmopolitan vision. Harvey argues how cosmopolitanism and geographical particularities do not exist as mutually exclusive categories, but are involved in a dialectical relationship where one is central to, and constantly informs the other. Perhaps the value of Harvey's conceptualization of cosmopolitanism becomes more apparent if we contrast it with Nussbaum's (1994) more constricted

approach. Nussbaum (1994) develops a particular understanding of cosmopolitanism which she conceives to be incompatible with nationalism and local loyalties.

Patriotic sentiments, according to Nussbaum, closed and parochial as they are, exist in opposition to a true cosmopolitan essence based on universal laws and moral values.

Returning to Harvey, rather than using the term 'local' which may seem to point to an essentialist, closed form of particular belonging as theorized by Nussbaum, Harvey refers to *geography*. He defines geography as the way 'places and localized ways of life are relationally constructed by a variety of intersecting sociological processes occurring at quite different spatiotemporal scales' (Harvey, 2000a: 542). Thus, just as cosmopolitanism is informed and mediated by localized ways of life, so it is a two-way process of influence where the local has become increasingly cosmopolitanised. The local is not a static product of the present moment, according to Harvey, but a dynamic social space constructed at the intersection of the immediate and the global. In this context, Harvey (2000b:16) calls for a 'relational dialectics' where the universal and the particular are not counterposed, but always 'internalized and implicated in the other'. This brings me back to the concept of internal heterogeneity I mentioned in the Introduction, and the way the global is not an entity that exists externally to us or outside of our localities and everyday experiences, but we are increasingly involved in the construction of more creative spaces where the local and the global are dialectically interlinked. In this context, cosmopolitanism is not about prioritizing the global over the local or vice versa, but is about a 'mutual affording of space' where 'regulation might occur of culturo-symbolical treatments of both 'own and 'other' ' (Rapport, 2007:231). As Massey (2005) argues, we should avoid making the distinction between place as a local entity that is concrete and bounded, and space as being global and abstract. Massey proposes that both space and place have become increasingly interrelated as space is increasingly a product of multiple interrelations between local, global and national processes.

Following on from the above, what I am trying to do is slowly deconstruct the term 'cosmopolitanism,' de-linking it from some of the conceptual baggage that has become common to the way we understand it. Thus far I have established that at the core of cosmopolitanism is an interconnection to a wider world that exists beyond

national borders. Nevertheless, what is the nature of this *interconnection*, and how is it sustained in modern times? The media have become our main platforms of connection to a larger world beyond immediate frontiers, meaning that we often connect symbolically rather than physically to what occurs across distance. Silverstone (2007) and Chouliaraki (2008) both provide key references for furthering our understanding of the importance of the media in sustaining and constructing (or not) cosmopolitan identities. Silverstone (2007) discusses the media's contemporary importance as primary frames for people's understanding of the world. He coins the term *mediapolis* in reference to the media as a moral space that redefines distance and a public space where the 'other' is represented. Nevertheless, Silverstone is critically sensitive to the shortcomings of the media in living up to the responsibility of fair representation that sustains the truly moral dimension of the cosmopolitan logic. According to Silverstone, cosmopolitanism

implies and requires, therefore, both reflexivity and toleration. In political terms it demands justice and liberty. In social terms, hospitality. And in media terms it requires.....an obligation to listen, an obligation which I will suggest is a version of hospitality (2007:14).

The media achieve a sense of cosmopolitan connection to the wider world through their constant performance of 'boundary work' (ibid.:19), which importantly, involves immense power and an immense responsibility; a responsibility that the media fail to acknowledge through their selective and culturally biased modes of reporting that often demonize the 'other'.

Chouliaraki's (2008) research into the role of news media in sustaining a cosmopolitan logic and sense of ethical connection to distant suffering has also provided useful insights. Specifically, Chouliaraki questions the extent to which the media not only expose people to distant suffering, but '*simultaneously expose them to specific dispositions to feel, think, and act toward each instance of suffering*' (2008:372, emphasis in original). The author argues that a cosmopolitan logic is sustained only through one genre of news out of the three she studied: emergency news. This genre of news presents a dramatic story about the misfortunes of a distant other, and then engages the spectator by calling upon them to take part in emergency action to relieve this misfortune in some way. Significantly, what both of the above

studies so accurately demonstrate is the gap that distinguishes an ideal form of cosmopolitanism that we may perhaps strive to achieve (as one of hospitality and an ethical concern for the distant other), and a 'deformed' (Beck, 2004: 134) cosmopolitanism that actually exists in the context of a highly mediated everyday life. Both the above conceptualisations illustrate how cosmopolitanism should not be celebrated as a taken for granted 'given,' a natural side effect of a world that has become increasingly interconnected. As a fragile and highly contextualized identity, a range of circumstances need to be provided and sustained before people are propelled to begin thinking and feeling like cosmopolitans. For Silverstone (2007) this involves a responsible media space where cultural representations need to be fairly controlled through laws and media regulations. For Chouliaraki (2008), the way news stories are framed, and the methods of reporting such as the use of personalized stories, determines the extent to which news spectators begin to elicit a sense of ethical sympathy towards the distant other.

A point of immense significance to my own research, is the fact that both of these authors are writing from a purely western perspective. They both examine cosmopolitanism as a set of sentiments that travels from the west to the rest. For instance, Chouliaraki (2008) explores the way emergency news reports on western European channels are able to sustain cosmopolitan sympathies amongst the western spectator toward African sufferers or a Nigerian woman convicted to death by stoning. Such discussions, limited within western discourse and western political culture, leave open the question of how those outside the west and outside its liberal political experiences, can ever become cosmopolitan. What happens, I ask, when those usually on the receiving end of western cosmopolitan sympathies, seek to become the main protagonists of cosmopolitanism themselves? In a highly repressive context such as Egypt where individual liberties are quashed, and where there are no avenues through which ethical values central to cosmopolitanism such as freedom, democracy and justice can be expressed or exercised, where does this leave the type of cosmopolitanism theorized by Kant (2010), Chouliaraki (2008) and Silverstone (2007)? Would it be fair, realistic even, to suggest that individuals living in such dismal social conditions and autocratic political contexts, engage in cosmopolitan sentiments that display an ethical concern towards instances of distant suffering? Focusing on pre-revolutionary Cairo, I wish to move the debate away

from the vantage point of western liberal democracies that have provided the contextual backdrop for many theories of cosmopolitanism. Instead, I seek to question the extent to which those outside the west (outside it physically, yet also socio-politically in relation to being very distant from its practices and ideals of justice and human liberty) can engage in the construction of a cosmopolitan identity. I explore this in the next section when I analyse how the concept of cosmopolitanism has recently made an advance within Middle East studies.

3.2.1 Cosmopolitanism within Middle East Studies: Moving Beyond the Nostalgic and the Elitist

Although many of the notable theoretical contributions to cosmopolitanism within the social sciences have been approached through a western lens, there is an existing and growing body of cosmopolitan research within Middle Eastern academia. Although this research may have suffered extensive critique, it importantly demythologises the notion that cosmopolitanism is essentially a western cultural product. Indeed, the Arab world has long been regarded as a centre and setting for cross-cultural and cosmopolitan interaction. In particular, Calhoun (2002:872) writes that the Ottoman Empire (1301-1922) with its diplomatic relations, established trade routes and thus multinational, multilingual nature, was a ‘high point of cosmopolitanism’. Nevertheless, despite cosmopolitan cultural relations being intrinsic to the history of the Arab region, the concept of cosmopolitanism has been starkly impoverished and underdeveloped within Middle East scholarship. As Hanley (2008:1348) notes, within the historiography of the Middle East, cosmopolitanism is a ‘particular, European, literate, bourgeois perspective’. More specifically, Hanley argues, cosmopolitanism according to such a perspective is both *exclusive*, being reserved for European educated Arab elites, and adopts the tone of grieving *nostalgia* – a yearning for an historically imagined utopia of intense social mixing that once existed.

Zubaida’s (2002) exploration of the historical experiences of cosmopolitanism in the Middle East provides an important illustration of such an elitist and nostalgic contribution. According to Zubaida’s (2002:33) analysis of the Ottoman Empire, any evidence of cosmopolitan milieu that existed until the nineteenth century, was confined to ‘the higher echelons of Istanbul society...of patrician merchants,

diplomats and courtiers'. Such culturally diverse milieux, Zubaida argues, sat uncomfortably with local religio-communal boundaries, and so were able to flourish only through the deracination from caste community and religion. Thus, drawing heavily on European models and influences, this type of cosmopolitanism advocated by Zubaida functioned through an exclusion of the poor and those with more nativist ambitions who had a strong sense of connection to religious and national culture. In this sense, to be a cosmopolitan, one had to live a cosmopolitan 'lifestyle,' such as Jamaledin al-Afghani, described by Zubaida (2002:35) as a 'remarkable cosmopolitan'. Al-Afghani was a member of Masonic lodges, frequented cafes and clubs, regularly drank alcohol and was thought to have illicit sexual encounters.

According to the above account, cosmopolitanism is conditioned by secularism and wealth, 'both of which are signalled (in the context of Islam) by consumption of alcohol' (Hanley, 2008: 1350). Nevertheless, detailed accounts and observations of some of the most important cosmopolitan centres in the Arab world, particularly Alexandria –Egypt's second largest city – illustrate the active role played by the lower classes in sustaining cosmopolitan networks. Fahmy (2004:281), for instance, rightly argues how the celebrated cosmopolitanism of Alexandria is 'essentially predicated on ignoring and silencing the city's Arabic-speaking population'.

According to the author, however, it is possible to develop a 'quotidian, non-elitist dimension' (ibid.:282) to understanding the everyday relevance of cosmopolitanism, through an examination of the mundane micro-practices of everyday city life. Such an examination reveals that, in fact, lower class Egyptians played an important role in the development of 'cosmopolitan' Alexandria, and thus deserve to be recognized as 'the true founders' (ibid.:289) of the modern city.

Fahmy (2004) gives a detailed and interesting account of how non-elite Egyptians interacted with the diverse foreign communities of Alexandria on a daily basis in a peaceful manner. These intense cross-cultural interactions saw people from different religious and national backgrounds trade with each other, exchange currencies, eat, drink and have sex with one another. In a similar vein, Aciman's (2006) intriguing memoir of life as a Sephardic Jew in mid twentieth century Alexandria, finely captures the important presence of working class Egyptians in sustaining the cosmopolitan networks and activities that characterised the city at that time. His biographic account vividly documents how Egyptian servants, cooks, maids and even

butchers – accustomed to interacting with European residents of the city – learned new languages and diverse culinary skills through their daily domestic labour and work in organizing inter-cultural parties in foreign consulates.

What the above studies illustrate is that there are different forms and varieties of cosmopolitanism that do not necessarily negate or exclude poverty, national allegiances and religion as argued by Zubaida (2002). As Hanley writes (2008), Middle East studies should move beyond the elitist and restricted approach that has long been followed, accepting that multiple cosmopolitanisms exist. Thus, through empirical work and ethnographic research, it is possible to shift the emphasis away from cosmopolitanism as a static or fixed criteria, and be willing to investigate it as a practiced and lived identity. Indeed, this approach has been adopted by the New Cairo School of Urban Studies, which has lately published a comprehensive volume, compiling a large number of research projects documenting the diverse cosmopolitan networks and identities expressed across Cairo (Singerman and Amar, 2006). Puig (2006), for instance, has explored the highly cosmopolitan nature of the famed Muhammad Ali Street located in one of Cairo's most popular working class districts. Renowned for its famous street musicians, Puig notes how the musical activities of the street, up until the 1970s, were an important hub for bringing together a broad range of musical styles, instruments and influences that have culminated throughout Egypt's long multi-layered, multicultural history. The cosmopolitan ambiance of the street, infusing Turkish, local Arab and European musical cultures, became a focal point for aspiring musicians from Egypt, but also more widely from across the Arab region. Puig even describes how the introduction of global forms of technology – particularly cassette tapes – to these more traditional forms of folklore music, allowed Muhammed Ali Street musicians to achieve huge financial success by breaking into the mass market. In the same volume, De Koning (2006:228) provides an interesting analysis of how up-market cafés in Cairo allow the young upper middle class to engage in imagined cosmopolitan spaces that are 'local, Cairene, and Egyptian, yet part of wider First-World circuits and publics'. Such chic urban spots, that keep the poor out, allow upper class men and women to consolidate their elite status by displaying their global connections, sophisticated cross-cultural tastes and cosmopolitan elegance. Nevertheless, although functioning as spaces of first-world belonging and sophistication, these cafes are also protected urban niches where

appropriate forms of cross-gender mixing and low key flirting as acceptable in the Egyptian context can take place.

Such important empirical explorations outlined above are a reminder of how cosmopolitanism in the Arab world is not a utopic fantasy of times past that we should mourn and continue to yearn. Cosmopolitanism is an intrinsic reality of the present that we need to discover and explore in its many different evolving forms. Furthermore, according to Zubaida (2002:39), contemporary media are incapable of sustaining the sophisticated cosmopolitan networks that once existed as they fail to 'breach communal and particularistic boundaries and spaces'. Nevertheless, by sweepingly overlooking the centrality of the media, Zubaida marginalizes the cosmopolitan aspirations that could be open to a large group of people who remain socially and physically immobile. An important question for Middle East studies, Hanley (2008) argues, is whether cosmopolitanism is a material or mental condition. According to Zubaida's analysis, old cosmopolitan milieux could be measured through exclusive lifestyle practices that placed people within particular elite circles and western cultural networks. Nevertheless, by giving prominence to the role of the media, my research explores how modern cosmopolitan identities in Cairo are not necessarily dependent upon access to resources and wealth, but are sustained by the power of imagination. Cosmopolitanism is about a subjective desire and willingness to be included; to partake in and contribute to a global cultural youth scene, even when financial resources and cultural capital are extremely limited. Thus, I explore the importance of television in broadening young Egyptians' interpretive horizons and cultural knowledge beyond their immediate, familiar framework. Nevertheless, as local affiliations and the particularities of geographical space remain central to their identities, I demonstrate how religious beliefs and national sentiment are not antithetic to cosmopolitanism. Indeed, the media allow these young men and women to form multiple allegiances to God, the nation and global culture simultaneously.

3.2.2 Cosmopolitanism in Cairo as a Third-Order Framework

Based on the above discussion, I propose that a very particular type of cosmopolitanism is taking place in Egypt. Specifically, I argue how there are alternative ways to feel part of a common humanity that do not conform completely to a Kantian understanding of cosmopolitanism, nor are always able to draw directly from values of western liberalism. As Ong (2009) notes, media studies have for too

long approached cosmopolitanism as the relationship between media consumption and the formulation of a moral consciousness. Although this rests 'atop of the moral hierarchy, it is also an expression that leaves out many other ways by which individuals in a globalizing world relate with difference' (Ong, 2009:463). Specifically, I argue that what we observe among young people in Cairo is a *third-order cosmopolitanism*. The everyday lives of young Egyptians are positioned between two established structures of power, one of which operates from within the nation, and another on a broader transnational scale. I draw here on Martin-Barbero's (1993a) framework for understanding change and hegemony. In his analysis of how native Indian identities have taken shape in contemporary Latin America, Martin-Barbero (1993a) argues that native cultures cannot be conceived of as pure, autonomous and authentic, but must be regarded as integrated within, and thus partly transformed by wider transnational structures, particularly capitalism. By drawing on Garcia Canclini's work and focusing on how the production of Indian crafts has developed and changed in the context of globalization, Martin-Barbero charts change and hegemony as operating both through *outside pressures* and *internal mediations*. Whereas the former refers to the external influence of capitalism and a changing tourist industry, the latter pertains to changes that have taken place internally, particularly how relations of production have altered within the local Indian craft community.

Drawing on Martin-Barbero's framework, which proposes that hegemony operates both internally and externally, I argue through my third-order framework for cosmopolitanism that hegemony in Egypt operates on two levels: both from within the nation-state, but also from the outside, taking place on a broader transnational scale. I have discussed the following factors in more detail in Chapter Two, although I will review them here briefly. At a sub-national scale, the daily lives of young Egyptians are rigidly structured around the categories of class and gender. Socio-economic background in Egypt determines relations of power and access to resources (Moghadam cf. Inhorn, 1996), public space (De Koning, 2009; Abaza, 2006) and education (Gamal El Din, 1995). Gender is also an important determinant of one's everyday experiences in the Egyptian context, particularly shaping women's visibility in public spaces (De Koning, 2009; Mensch, Ibrahim, Lee, *et al.*, 2000) and embodied appearance (Macleod, 1992; Hoodfar, 1991). Furthermore, at the level of

government policy, the autocratic Egyptian regime headed by Hosny Mubarak (1981-2011) has quashed civil liberties and citizen rights, providing no opportunities for democratic rights, political participation, or avenues through which to voice dissent. In this context, Egypt has experienced a social and political stalemate over the past 30 years.

Regarding outside pressures, global hierarchical divides that shape relations *between* nations have accorded Egypt a very specific place on a global ranking of power. Firstly, a long history of British colonial rule has been instrumental in influencing the imaginations of Egyptians in relation to the west as a 'superior' imperial centre (Abaza, 2006; Amin, 2005). Secondly, there is the universal spread of a global capitalist order and the hegemonic consumer culture it has brought in its wake, often raising concerns in Egypt regarding western forms of cultural imperialism (Amin & Napoli, 2000). Thirdly, is the strong support that western superpowers have exercised towards the corrupt political regime in Egypt, allowing Mubarak to maintain an unchallenged position of power for over 30 years. As the revolution in Egypt broke out on 25th of January 2011, US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, completely disregarded the opportunity of hope the revolution represented for Egyptians. She urged them to back down, claiming Mubarak's regime was 'stable' and 'looking for ways to meet the Egyptian people's aspirations' (Reuters Africa, 2011). This 'political stability' celebrated by Clinton may have been pivotal to American political interests in the region, but seemed to willingly overlook appalling human rights abuses, a lack of democratic rights of expression, and the political corruption that shaped Mubarak's regime for over three decades.

Where does cosmopolitanism, as experienced in Cairo, fit in within these two established structures of power? I argue that cosmopolitanism, involving a complex interplay between national identities, consumer practices and urban mobilities, becomes a third space of imagination that provides opportunities for resistance, allowing structured limits imposed upon the self to be negotiated. As Stevenson (2003:36) argues, cosmopolitanism should be 'concerned with questions of imagination, identity, recognition and belonging as it has more traditionally been with entitlements and obligations'. The media, particularly television, represents a space for potential reflection and interpretation where young Egyptians are exposed to alternative forms of governance and different cultural influences, meaning the self

and nation are constantly compared to, and perceived in the light of distant others. In this context, as the possibilities of other worlds and the existence of distant ways of life become central to young Egyptians' subjective experiences, the limitations and constraints placed upon the self become increasingly exposed. Thus, as a complex 'multidimensional process' (Beck, 2004:136) sustaining a range of national, religious and global affiliations, cosmopolitanism in Egypt translates into a sense of imagination that aspires to be part of the world, seeking to engage with a 'wider array of paths, possibilities, styles and aims "out there"' (Schielke, 2007:3). In its most basic form, therefore, a cosmopolitan imagination in Cairo is about the dream of a better life at home, yet one that draws heavily on the possibilities and promises enabled through a vision that locates one's experiences at the centre of a wider world. In the next section I explore how I conceptualise 'imagination' within the context of my third-order cosmopolitan framework.

3.3 Cosmopolitanism as Imagination: A Different Lens in Examining Identity Construction

Although the daily lives of young Cairenes are located within embedded structures that place firm limits on their social and physical mobilities, television provides a space from within which highly structured limits on the self are negotiated. Thus, as these men and women's imagination shifts between different systems of representation available to them in the rich mediascapes they have access to, horizons of their identity also expand. In this context, I argue how cosmopolitanism takes the form of a dynamic subjective space and becomes a horizon for imagining the self and others in a broader cultural and political context that surpasses direct experience. Imagination, therefore, is not intended as a replacement of the concept of identity, but becomes a way to understand how identity is shaped and how media representation can challenge boundaries of rigid social structures. My choice to use imagination draws from, and is based on wider established debates that approach contemporary identities as socially constructed. My research proposes that within the process of identity construction, however, the imagination of the limits of self and others, particularly in relation to televised representation, is crucial. In this context, imagination becomes a lens allowing me to examine how young Egyptians are shaping their identities at the juxtaposition of a social reality, which is rigidly

structured around classed and gendered divides and unequal relations of global power and influence, on the one hand, yet a diverse and fluid system of media representations of self and others, on the other hand.

According to Stevenson (2003:42), cosmopolitanism needs to be 'discursively and emotionally imagined' in order for people to begin thinking and feeling like cosmopolitans. Additionally, by establishing imagination as crucial to the articulation of cosmopolitan affiliations, Delanty argues how cosmopolitanism offers 'opportunities for new kinds of connectivity through which the social is constituted beyond the limits of national societies' (2005:416). In the context of a transnational European affiliation, Delanty contends that this cosmopolitan Europeanization does not unfold in opposition to global and national forces. Through processes of imagination, however, both old and new identities come together in transformative ways resulting in multiple cosmopolitan possibilities. Hence, for cosmopolitanism to have any meaning, Delanty (2005; 2006) theorizes it as an 'imagining' which is cognitively experienced, resulting in the dynamic and reflexive (re)construction and (re)interpretation of bounded identities.

Following on from the above discussion, crucial to imagination is the way subjective forms of mobility enabled by the media have provided space for the revaluation and reflexive interpretation of concrete identities and particular experience. Focusing exclusively on this cognitive and reflexive aspect as the main determinant of the construction of subjectivities in the modern world, several theorists have made a bold argument against identity altogether. Cohen (1994) observes that in order to understand the self, we must attempt to grasp processes of self consciousness – to elicit and describe the thoughts of individuals that are often glossed over when we talk about 'identities' and generalised collective social categories. Thus, Cohen argues that we cannot talk of a collectivity sharing a single national or religious identity as there can never be one agreed unanimous definition across a diverse group of what this identity involves or represents. With a specific focus on the media as vehicles for the construction of modern subjectivities, Aksoy and Robins (2003) also provide a key reference in the debate against identity. According to their study of Turkish speaking communities in London, mediated transnational experiences are associated with novel kinds of mental and imaginative processes that transcend the specificity

of cultural space. Using the concept of identity, Aksoy and Robins argue, makes no room for human consciousness, awareness and reflexivity. Whereas identity may connote something that is stable, continuous and unchanging, imagination, for Aksoy and Robins, better captures socially constructed experiences that are contextualised, discontinuous and constantly shifting.

Although I agree with Aksoy and Robins', and Cohen's focus on subjective consciousness as a useful indicator of the nature of contemporary identity formations, I do not subscribe to the idea that identity has academically expired or has become irrelevant in the context of social research. Evidence from my study illustrates that social categories and identity positions, particularly class, gender and the nation, continue to inform and shape the everyday experiences of young Egyptians, often limiting their mobilities and even determining their life chances. Nevertheless, as much as these bonds of identity can constrain and highly structure their daily lives, so imagination, drawing heavily on media representations, provides opportunities to challenge the limits of social order and hegemonic values associated with it. In this context, and as the media allow young Egyptians to expand the repertoires of their cultural references, they display greater forms of self-scrutiny and reflexivity towards established identity positions, rather than abandoning identity altogether or engaging in the construction of supra-national identity networks (Delanty 2005;2006). Indeed, in their discussion of 'reimagined solidarities', Morley and Robins (1995:41) argue how solidarities and collectivities have not disappeared in contemporary times, although they increasingly develop aspirations directed beyond immediate and local experience. The crucial question, according to the authors, should be about positions and positionings in local and global space: how bodies are located in a particular place, although a subjective existence is increasingly shaped by a less bounded mediated space. These new forms of mobility 'make local attachment not a matter of ascribed and determined identity but increasingly a question of choice, decision and variability' (Morley and Robins, 1995:41).

In light of the above discussion, I follow Delanty's stance and mobilise the notion of cosmopolitan imagination as one that is not at tension with, or above national identity or any other type of identity, but represents an overarching imagination and

system of organisation through which established or traditional identity positions can be understood and negotiated in new ways. As Appiah argues in defence of national patriotic sentiments within cosmopolitanism: 'even when we are constructing new and counternormative identities, it is the old and the normative that provide the language and the background' (1997:625). Thus, by centring imagination as the primary lens through which I approach the (re)construction of identities in Cairo, I display a sensitivity to the ways in which agency is often accorded a space to operate from within – yet never overcoming – established systems of structure, providing opportunities for young Egyptians to interpret and negotiate their identities in new ways.

It is, however, important not to over-romanticise the capacity for human agency within the process of imagination. Although imagination can provide young Egyptians with opportunities for reflexive kinds of interpretation, evidence from my research suggests that they still remain bound by the expectations of established structures of the class and gender they are affiliated with. In his analysis of Indian television, Kumar (2006) displays an important sensitivity to everyday structures of capitalist discourse that highly regulate everyday imaginations of the Indian nation. Contemporary forms of mediated imagination, Kumar argues, have increasingly become a collective property involving the 'collective agency of viewers who are free to be at home with their television sets, even as they are regulated by the ideological constraints of electronic capitalism' (Kumar, 2006:18 emphasis mine). Hence, according to Kumar's analysis, Indian television audiences are accorded a degree of freedom in their ability to access transnational channels and thus diverse mediated representations that expand their national imagination. Simultaneously, however, they are embedded within capitalist ideological networks and collective social positions that regulate – usually unconsciously – the boundaries within which their everyday imagination is articulated. Thus, it cannot be denied that we are conscious and creative beings with some ability to form our own reflexive understandings of the world. Inevitably, however, how we come to form these understandings is framed by dominant structures of power, such as those associated with class and gender. These systems, from which it is impossible to completely escape, continue to regulate lived traditions and practices (Hall, 1980).

Appadurai (1996) provides a key reference in the debate on imagination and power, as he theorizes imagination as a social practice undertaken by historically situated groups and people. Imagination, according to Appadurai, is not a mythical enclave through which individual fantasies can be played out, but is a lived practice that emerges from within the daily experiences of ordinary people and importantly, social groups:

It is the imagination, in its collective forms, that creates ideas of neighbourhood and nationhood, of moral economies and unjust rule, of higher wages and foreign labor prospects. The imagination is today a staging ground for action, and not only for escape (Appadurai, 1996:7).

Imagination, according to Appadurai, is not driven by individual whims and aspirations, but is firmly located within grounded everyday practices, and takes its meanings through processes of joint collectivity. In light of this observation, although I approach cosmopolitan imagination as a mediated openness to the world that offers diverse cultural possibilities and opportunities, I also recognize it to be a highly unequal and stratified process. Hence, as cosmopolitan imagination in Cairo intersects with the specificities of everyday experience, especially in relation to class inequalities and unequal gender relations, it takes on three very different forms. Chapters Six, Seven and Eight explore how three different classed versions of a cosmopolitan imagination emerge in Cairo at the juxtaposition of age, gender relations and everyday life in the city.

Furthermore, I argue that cosmopolitan imagination in Egypt is not an ahistorical product of the present moment. Imagination is not only constructed within the intersection of proximity and difference, especially as this is negotiated in mediated communication, but also within the changing historical context, especially as associated with colonialism. As Ang and Morley have argued in relation to the potency of the west as a symbol of cultural superiority and power, '(the west) is not just a geographical site, it is also an idea: an idea inextricably linked with the myth of Western civilization, and its implications not only of culture but also of colonialism' (Ang & Morley, 1989:133). Furthermore, as Appadurai (1996:2) usefully reminds us: 'all major social forces have precursors, precedents, analogs and sources in the past'.

Thus Appadurai warns us against 'the legacies of grand western social science' (Appadurai, 1996:2) that theorize the present as a single, steady moment articulated solely within the realms of the immediate and the familiar. Imagination, therefore, is constructed within socio-cultural and political contexts where colonial power continues to influence and inform the aspirations, memories and dreams of young Egyptians. As Mitchell (1991) argues, the British imperial rule in Egypt not only controlled the bodies of Egyptians, but more importantly, captured their minds, and continued to do so even decades after it ended.

3.4 Postcolonialism and Egyptian Imagination Across Time

Talking to any middle class Egyptian brought up in 1940s and 1950s Cairo, I have become accustomed to hearing reminiscent sighs of how 'Egypt used to be a piece of Europe'. Indeed, the era of British colonial rule in Egypt is often perceived to be the most elegant, modern and advanced period in its history (Abaza, 2006; Denis, 2006; Kuppinger, 2004). Walking round the streets of Cairo today, especially downtown and the elite districts of Maadi, Zamalek and Garden City (themselves products of British colonial rule), the physical reminders, or the 'shreds and patches' (Appadurai, 1996:89) of the colonial heritage remain visibly present within Cairo's urban landscape. It is marked in the boulevards of the downtown area, and the wide open spaces and modern European architectural designs not characteristic of the rest of Cairo. It is also seen in the multi-storey shopping complexes of Cicurel, Sednaoui and Chemla grand magasins that displayed expensive European goods, catering to Cairo's rich and elite. Still very much functioning and highly popular in Cairo today are the social and sports clubs, especially El-Maadi and El-Gezeira, built originally for colonial administrators (Abaza, 2006) yet today catering to Cairo's middle class. It seems, therefore, that although colonialism may have ended politically as a form of imposed territorial rule, the lasting influences and physical symbols of the colonial heritage remain very much intertwined in the culture of modern day Egypt and its capital city.

As Richard Werbner (1996:4) argues, the post in postcolonial is a 'marker of dynamic complexity': does it refer to what takes place after colonialism, because of it, or in opposition to it? I propose that the subjective influences including memories and cultural desires associated with Egypt's colonial past have not completely

eroded, yet continue to shape the everyday imagination of young Egyptians. Said, (1995) in his seminal *Orientalism*, argues that the legacy of western colonialism continues to have a lasting ideological influence in our modern world. In the wake of colonialism, regulated systems of producing knowledge have created a naturalized vision of the world divided between a weak, irrational orient (east) and the powerful occident (west). Indeed, as Fanon observed in relation to this lasting form of ideological control, hegemonic cultures not only colonize lands, but, often to greater effect, 'colonize the mind' (cf. Harootunian, 2002:167) In relation to the experiences of the Arab world, Sabry argues:

Even though most Arab societies are postcolonial societies, the postcolonial question is seldom posed in the Arab world today in relation to the identity and structures of feelings of Arabs. It is as if the aftermath of colonialism had washed away completely (2007:165).

If colonialism, as Sabry contends, has created a particular 'structure of feeling' that continues to shape identities in the modern Arab world, how exactly can we theorise and understand this very particular subjective interpretation of the world created as a result of colonial experience?

Fanon's (1967) work has provided a key reference in developing modern day understandings of how colonialism has shaped the subjectivities of the colonial person. Focusing specifically on the experiences of Black West Indians living under the French colonial rule, Fanon (1967) describes how an awareness by blacks that they were being assessed through white eyes, created a feeling of inferiority that led them to symbolically distinguish themselves from the African-Negro race inhabiting Africa. Thus, although West Indians shared the same cultural heritage as Africans, the latter could not compete with Black West Indians, who, assimilated to the 'modern' metropolis, spoke French, liked rum and danced the beguine (Fanon, 1967). Thus, by symbolically 'wearing' a white mask they associated with colonial superiority, the black West Indian, according to Fanon, was distinguished from the black African. DuBois (1998) also provides a seminal analysis of how colonialism shaped the subjective experiences of the black diaspora, although focusing his analysis specifically on early twentieth century America. According to DuBois, it was as a result of their race and African descent that Afro-Americans developed a

double-consciousness. The black self, constantly perceived through the eyes of white America, developed a self-perception as being an inferior second class citizen (DuBois, 1998). Fanon and DuBois' examinations of colonial subjectivities illustrate how colonial power was not only exercised in the form of seized lands and political control imposed from above. Rather, power occurred in a less forceful way as the colonized subjects themselves internalized racialised discourses of colonial superiority and inferiority. As I discussed in Chapter Two, a similar process took place in Egypt where not only the bodies, but the 'experiences and consciousness' (Gilroy, 2000:15) of Egyptians were captured by an imperial colonial power shaping their everyday cultural perceptions, desires and understandings of the world.

Drawing heavily on the work of Fanon and DuBois, Gilroy (2000) explores the ways in which slavery and colonialism have employed 'race' as a rigid category of hierarchisation. Individuals enclosed within this system, Gilroy argues, were accorded a particular status within the colonial nation on the basis of cultural heritage. Gilroy finds Fanon's phenomenological analysis of racial identity particularly useful in disclosing how orders of power and differentiation were exercised in relation to skin colour or epidermalization. As Gilroy writes:

It (epidermalization) refers to a historically specific system for making bodies meaningful by endowing them with qualities of "color." It suggests a perceptual regime in which the racialised body is bounded and protected by its enclosing skin (2000:46).

Although Gilroy gives much precedence to Fanon and DuBois' conceptualisations of 'race' as a category for maintaining political control within established relations of colonial power, he also argues that a closer micro-analysis of the everyday experiences of the colonized black diaspora, reveals spaces where structured categories of race were often challenged and overcome.

The notion of physical movement is central to Gilroy's analysis, which draws heavily on DuBois' concept of double consciousness. By coining the term Black Atlantic, Gilroy explores how the movement of black people across the Atlantic towards Europe, the Caribbean and America, resulted in new and dynamic forms of identity construction. He seeks to move away from dominant modes of thinking about race,

based on a 'bitter dualistic coding' (Gilroy, 1996: 21) where a singular, traditional and pure black identity is juxtaposed against modern, western ways of being. Gilroy argues that through their patterns of transatlantic mobility, black people have been actively involved in constructing a hybrid, dynamic form of black culture. Slavery and colonialism are not regarded by Gilroy to be solely about loss or a sense of mourning, but themselves to be pivotal moments in the way black people have been able to construct their own forms of modernity. Significantly, what Gilroy's analysis of the black enslaved diaspora illustrates, is that colonialism should not always be approached as a one-way process of complete domination. There have been spaces from within the dominant discourses of colonialism where new identities and forms of cultural connection have been envisioned by the colonized. Diouf (2000), for example, exploring the biography of a rural Senegalese Muslim brotherhood network, explores how their Islamic faith allowed the brotherhood to organize a unique cosmopolitanism that consisted of participation in, and not assimilation with the colonial administration. Thus, they engaged creatively with a governing colonial order in ways that corresponded to, and benefited their Islamic identity.

According to Bhabha (1994), such moments of dynamic interaction between colonizer and colonized, would be theorized as 'in between space' (1994:2) resulting in the articulation of new cultural hybrid identities. Nevertheless, despite being a central figure of influence within postcolonial studies, Bhabha's work has often been criticized for its abstraction and lack of empirical grounding. As Sabry writes:

The concept of 'hybridity' as a 'third space' has no empirical foundation to support it, for how does one purport to understand a hybrid state of consciousness if the structure of the latter has not been put to the empirical test? (2007:167).

Harootunian (2002) also criticizes Bhabha, particularly in relation to the way he bases his theoretical insights of the colonial experience solely on the single and limited colonial encounter between Britain and Bengal. Despite its contextual limitations, Bhabha's theory has, according to Harootunian, been made into a 'muscular trope promising to stand in for the relationship between colonizer and colonized everywhere' (Harootunian, 2002:169). The main logic behind Harootunian's criticism is very important. According to the author, through the easy

circulation of reductionist binary terms that undermine the complexity of the colonial experience in different contexts, postcolonial theory has often fallen into the trap of being 'blind to the temporal and spatial differences lived and experienced by those voiceless, excluded, marginalized peoples it seeks to redeem' (Harootunian, 2002:172). As Harootunian argues, it is important to acknowledge that the experiences of colonial domination differ vastly in different contexts. Thus, there is a pressing need for particularity within postcolonial research and to display more sensitivity to the specific political and economic histories of colonized countries. This way we can avoid the 'essentialisms' and 'exceptionalisms' often attributed to postcolonial theory (Harootunian, 2002:172).

Furthermore, an essential point raised by Ahmad (1992) is that colonized citizens do not experience imperialism in the form of a foreign body of power imposed from the outside, but rather, imperialism exercises its power from within nation-states. In this context, according to Ahmad, the question of class within the context of colonialism becomes one of central importance. In relation to Egypt, for instance Abaza (2006) documents how the new forms of leisure, culture and education created by the British imperialist rule, were accessible to, and thus experienced almost exclusively by a small middle and upper class elite. Furthermore, in a critique of Fanon, Peterson (2007) argues that rather than speaking on behalf of the black colonized diaspora en masse, Fanon basis his analysis on an elite minority for whom an engagement with colonial powers was an everyday reality. The majority of colonized black people, according to Peterson, had no direct contact with the colonial rule and thus speaking French or drinking rum, as Fanon theorises to have been normal practice, was only experienced by a small privileged minority. In this context, Ahmad argues that the process of decolonization gave power to a national bourgeoisie that became the main recipient and benefactor of colonial culture. For instance, using the example of the English language in postcolonial India, Ahmad explores the continued use of this 'instrument' by the 'professional petty bourgeoisie' (1992:75) for 'dominant systems of administration, education and communication' (ibid.:74). He argues the dominant use of English amongst India's elite and professionals is a profound illustration of the organic cultural link maintained – on the basis of class – between an imperialist colonial power that continues to maintain its cultural presence and influence vis-à-vis the postcolonial bourgeois state.

In light of the above, a focus on Egypt as a postcolonial nation-state is not an attempt to sustain global hierarchical divides that may relegate it to the position of a third-world colonized country. Rather, by exploring the historical relations of power specifically embodied in colonialism, I suggest it is possible to make greater sense of the present. As Shome and Hegde write, for cosmopolitan theories to provide academically and socially responsible research, they must be sensitive to, and question the histories and geographies of our modern day cultural relations (2002: 265). Thus, history continues to matter, and precisely as Ahmad (1992) has shown, by being sensitive to transnational hierarchical divides that have historically taken place between nations, we can understand how these shape modern day divides – specifically in relation to class – within nations. Furthermore, Sabry (2007) and Harootunian's (2002) arguments are also an important reminder that when studying colonial histories, we cannot talk of 'A' or 'The' postcolonial experience. Research needs to document and be sensitive to the everyday material encounters and diverse socio-economic and political contexts that have shaped unique colonial experiences in different places. I believe that my study offers a much needed contribution in this respect, as through my empirical work with young Egyptians, I document how a colonial past, as it intersects with modern day urban experiences, socio-economic inequalities and television consumption practices, may continue to influence their identities and thus shape their cosmopolitan imagination. As Catherine Hall (1996) writes, memories from the past are intertwined in our construction of modern identities. Thus, experiences of a colonial past do not necessarily remain buried in the past, but decolonization involves the complex ways certain aspects of a shared historical past continue to frame our modern understandings of the world.

Ahmad argues we can better understand the way a colonial past continues to influence the present by focusing on how traditional forms of colonial imperialism have taken on a new guise in our contemporary world. In particular, this is related to a modern-day 'global triumph of imperialism' (Ahmad, 1992: 21) associated with a hegemonic capitalist order disseminated mainly from the United States. Harootunian (2002) makes a similar point when suggesting how an approach to postcoloniality as an act of memoration needs to be incorporated within the larger

framework of capitalist modernity and its transformations. Such a study might redirect our attention to the role played by capitalism throughout the globe and to the relationship between the experience of everydayness and the relentless regime of the commodity form (2002:173).

Indeed, the emergence of this new form of imperialism, a globally circulating 'cultural imperialism' (Tomlinson, 1991) has raised fears about the extent to which the universal spread of western – particularly American-style – liberal consumer culture has reaffirmed western power, leaving former colonies in a further state of dependency on the west. In a recorded interview with Sut Jhally, Said (Media Education Foundation, 1998) has distinguished between old colonial European, and more modern forms of (mediated) American orientalism. Whereas the former maintained control through direct territorial occupation, the latter is able to preserve a more politicized form of influence, boosted through the universal spread of western media systems. Following Said's (Media Education Foundation, 1998) thesis, to what extent have global media ensured the continuing and interrupted power of western nations since colonial times? Conversely, in what ways have the media provided important platforms reaffirming and strengthening local or more hybrid forms of identity? I address these questions in the next section.

3.5 Transnational Media: Between Fears of Imperialism and Audiences'

Hybridity

Fears of media imperialism, or a one-way flow of media production from the west to the rest (Boyd-Barrett, 1977), has often raised concerns of western powers using these media outlets to transmit their cultural and economic values to the developing world, thus destroying indigenous cultures (Chadha & Kavoori, 2000). A proponent of dependency theory, Schiller (1991) argues that although the global political and economic stranglehold of the United States may be diminishing, US power is transferred to 'transnational corporate cultural domination' (Schiller, 1991: 15). In this context, media-cultural imperialism, according to Schiller, is not just embodied in television, but is a whole cultural apparatus that involves the universal spread of

the English language, shopping malls, international music and western news channels. Thus, the unprecedented increase of American dominated media-cultural systems, according to this approach, has left nations and peoples in the developing world, more vulnerable than ever to American forms of influence and domination (Schiller, 1991).

Concerns over cultural imperialism have been especially rife in Egypt and across the Arab world. The popularity of both western media products and consumer culture has raised fears among writers and intellectuals over the dilution of local ways of life and the destruction of indigenous and religious values. Amin and Napoli (2000:183), for instance, argue that Egyptian society, and more widely, Islamic society, are 'culturally defensive'. The Egyptian individual, according to the authors, 'identifies himself or herself first with the family and second with the religious community' (Amin and Napoli, 2000: 183) and thus increasing exposure to western media has intensified these cultural/religious defences. Abaza (2006) has also commented on how many Arab intellectuals have associated consumer practices with notions of 'foreign intrusion, "cultural invasion" the destruction of indigenous values and modes of living, and of Americanisation' (Abaza, 2006:46).

Sabry (2007) has criticized uniform approaches that make generalized claims without really testing empirically, how it is in reality, that assertions of cultural uniformity or homogenization take place in an everyday context. Indeed, Amin and Napoli's broad assertion that all Egyptians identify themselves first with the family and second with religion represents a naïve generalization reducing the vast complexities inherent in a nation comprised of multiple complex differences and internal heterogeneity. The universal spread and popularity of western media is undeniable. Yet, if we move beyond a political economy approach such as Schiller's (1991), and pay more attention to micro-practices at the receiving end of media consumption, then serious questions are raised. As Tomlinson (1991:42) writes: 'the key question is, does this presence represent cultural imperialism? Clearly the sheer presence alone does not'. Tomlinson (1991:61) argues how it is helpful to think of the media as 'the dominant representational aspects of modern culture', although the 'lived experience' of culture also means that other factors such as family relationships, work and education may shape and influence how the media are interpreted. Indeed, in Chapter Four I explore

the importance of class and gender to how audiences are able to construct diverse and multiple readings of media texts. Thus, the media should not be seen as determining, but rather *mediating* complex cultural experiences associated more broadly with other practices and socio-cultural and economic contexts that fall beyond the media (Tomlinson, 1991). Tomlinson's argument complements Martin-Barbero's (1993b) influential approach to communications that does not begin from the assumption of absolute media power, but explores the creative and dynamic ways in which social movements in Latin America have used media products. Focusing particularly on telenovelas, music and the radio, Martin-Barbero explores how audiences interpret and appropriate them in ways not always intended by a dominant hegemonic ideology at the time of production.

Martin-Barbero calls for a focus on *mediation* that places culture at the core of a complex process of communication, thus allowing us to acknowledge the resistances and the varied ways in which audiences use the media. Thus, discrediting the idea that the media are capable of forcing Latin American audiences to automatically conform to dominant ideologies, Martin-Barbero (1993b) has focused more on a complex process of *cultural negotiation* that takes place through the media. More specifically, the author has highlighted how subaltern classes have selectively adopted and critically adapted media messages contributing to the formation of new social identities. Martin-Barbero's approach that explores the creative appropriations and uses that audiences make of the media, is captured in Arvizu's (2009) research on linguistic capital and the creation of youth publics in Cairo that defy and subvert government censorship. Focusing on the distribution and consumption of youth magazines, Arvizu investigates how the use of 'Arabized English and the use of Arabic words in English type' (2009:395) has expanded the readership of these magazines beyond the middle classes, to include those with less financial and cultural capital not fluent in English. Thus, rather than homogenizing the cultural identities of young Egyptians, English language publications, through the use of creative socio-linguistic techniques, have allowed young Egyptians from different backgrounds to collectively maintain a critical civic public that operates despite government censorship.

By continuously adapting new communication techniques to avoid raising the suspicion of government officials who have a poor command of the English language, youth publics in Cairo 'seek to democratize the current media structure by creating their own forms of expression' (Arvizu, 2009:404). Findings from Arvizu's study correspond more generally to research conducted on Arab youth cultures, where the media have contributed not to a homogenization or unification of their practices, but have provided spaces for the negotiation of more dynamic hybrid youth identities. Kraidy's (1999) research on the media consumption practices of young Christian Maronites in Lebanon, provides a much needed illustration of how young Arabs construct their identities at the intersection of local particularities and global realities. Kraidy explores how these young men and women articulate their hybrid identities between two competing cultural discourses as framed predominantly through the media: *modernity* (west) and *tradition* (Arab). Media programs became important 'dialogical counterpoints' (Kraidy, 1999: 471) for these young Maronites, allowing them to set their own rules of inclusion and exclusion to both an 'Arab' and 'western' culture, and thus to 'construct, preserve, and defend hybrid identities' (ibid.:471).

The cultural/media imperialism thesis can only be sustained on the assumption that audiences outside the west are naturally choosing to consume western media over the diverse other media they may have access to. Nevertheless, through his theory of *cultural proximity*, Straubhaar (1991:39) argues otherwise. Confirming that relations within international media production continue to be highly unequal, Straubhaar (1991:43) uses the term 'asymmetrical interdependence' which recognizes the limits placed on many nations' media systems, yet also gives precedence to the unique dynamics of each nation's media industry development. Within such a framework that moves beyond a simple assumption of western media domination, Straubhaar argues that audiences display a preference for local, national or regional media content that is more proximate to their everyday concerns and cultural specificities. Furthermore, urging us not to view audiences, even within the same nation, as an undifferentiated mass, Straubhaar claims that desires for cultural proximity differ in relation to class and cultural capital, with the less educated preferring culturally proximate genres, in contrast to the better educated who display a preference for global and western programming.

Following a similar line of argument as Straubhaar, yet focusing particularly on the Asian case, Chadha and Kavoori (2000:428) maintain that there is little evidence to support 'the wholesale destruction of its (Asia's) indigenous cultural subjectivities' as a result of the circulation of western media. National television ratings in India point to the continuing popularity of local media productions, particularly Hindi films and the hugely popular religious and mythological serials that attract substantial audience ratings (Chadha and Kavoori, 2000). Mankekar (1999), for instance, focused on how religion, particularly through the televised broadcasting of the serialized Hindu epic *The Ramayan*, became integral to the construction of a unique 'modern' Indian national vision. This vision roused the consciousness of Indians towards their religion, and equated national Indian culture with Hindu culture. In light of this, Mankekar emphasises: '...everyday religiosity and faith are not "things" to be discarded as we march toward modernity, but rather are part of the multiple genealogies of modernity' (1999:220). Theories of media development, therefore, should avoid linear assumptions of homogenization or domination that subsume nations and groups on one linear timeline that begins with tradition and ends at a western inspired modernity.

As Rajagopal (2000) argues, to understand the role of television within the developing world, it is important to take into consideration the specific national context of particular localities, thus avoiding any generalized or abstract theorizations that approach the 'non-western' experience as in anyway linear or unitary. In national contexts outside the west, characterized by highly unequal and contradictory rates of development, 'modernity', Rajagopal argues, should not be held in any constant or standardized notion as a fundamentally western value. Television for Indian citizens was not associated with the fear of cultural homogenization through the imposition of 'modern' western values. Modernity for Indians and the search for national development, Rajagopal argues, articulated partly through television, involved the search for a mythical past and the discovery of religious identities.

The above studies provide an important contribution that counter theories of media/cultural imperialism and illustrate the dynamic preferences of media audiences

often driven by desires of proximity to local and national cultural values. Nevertheless, my ethnographic engagement with young Egyptians has revealed that they display a more intricate set of preferences towards the diverse media they have access to, which does not always fall neatly within a linear cultural proximity framework. Young Egyptians' media preferences centre around the content and values represented by particular genres and programmes, rather than being based solely on the cultural origins of the media. Indeed, in a more recent reworking of the cultural proximity theory, Straubhaar and La Pastina maintain that although audience desires predominantly conform to cultural proximity, media preferences must be recognized as more complex, taking place at multiple levels:

People have multilayered, complex cultural identities. Aspects of them are geographic or spatial... Other aspects are purely cultural or linguistic... Other aspects might be religious, as when Catholic or Islamic messages or cultural products appeal across geographical and cultural boundaries (2005: 274).

Indeed, through empirical research conducted on Brazilian television audiences, Straubhaar and La Pastina (2005) illustrate how Mexican telenovelas, although produced in an alien cultural context and media market, were more proximate to these Brazilian audiences. By not challenging traditional gender roles and relationships as some national productions may do, the ideological content of Mexican telenovelas provide a 'cathartic space' (Straubhaar and La Pastina, 2005: 283) that does not question, but reaffirms their values and beliefs. This example points to the fact that audiences are not passive receivers of homogenous or standardized media messages, but are media savvy users able to select and interpret from the diverse repertoire of media outlets they have access to. Furthermore, rather than assessing programmes solely on the basis of their national origin, audiences interact more critically with the values represented in specific genres in relation to their multiple sets of cultural and religious proximities formulated along local, regional and sometimes global lines. Kraidy's (2009) analysis of the reality TV programme *Star Academy* and its reception in the ultraconservative environment of Saudi Arabia, captures the ways in which transnational media and particular genres are not only important in reaffirming pre-established values, but often in providing alternatives to local cultural beliefs deemed to be undesirable. According to Kraidy (2009:347), although an Arabic production aired on the regional LBC channel (partly

owned by Saudi businessmen), Star Academy's broadcast in Saudi triggered 'a controversy shriller than previous outcries about "foreign" programs'. Nevertheless, although stirring up a controversial storm amongst intellectual circles, royals, clerics and some journalists, the genre proved to be immensely popular with female viewers, promoting an alternative social reality characterized by more liberal forms of women's agency.

The above discussion illustrates the centrality of transnational media in opening up spaces for a potentially cosmopolitan imagination. As the media broaden the cultural references of audiences and expand the repertoires of their imagination beyond their immediate world, 'transnational narratives have the potential to motivate strong processes of identification' (Straubhaar and La Pastina, 2005:285) thus allowing the self to be negotiated and interpreted in relation to distant others. As audiences approach the screen embedded in a complex set of proximities and preferences shaped by their plural cultural and religious affiliations, it is often mediated representations produced in alien cultural contexts and media markets that provide the important raw materials which reaffirm or challenge audience identities in desirable ways. As increased opportunities for mediated connection have promoted a diversity in the cultural tastes and preferences of audiences, Garcia Canclini's (2005) analysis of the complex and multifarious process of hybridization shaping Latin American countries is relevant here. Refusing to see the world in binary terms and simple oppositions that distinguish between tradition and a western inspired modernity, Garcia Canclini argues that an ongoing process of hybridization is the reality of a world shaped through a plurality of spatio-temporal scales. According to the author, the modern and the traditional have both become transformed in the Latin American context, in a complex process and interweaving of 'indigenous traditions....of Catholic hispanism, and of modern political, educational and communicational actions' (Garcia Canclini, 2005:46).

However, Garcia Canclini (2005) warns us against adopting any romanticized or overly optimistic attitude to hybridity's reality or potential. Regarding the media as modern day protagonists of cultural exchange and interaction, Garcia Canclini (2005) makes the case for a *heteronomous hybridization* that 'concentrates combinatorial initiatives in a small number of transnational headquarters for the generation of

goods and messages, for the publication and administration of social meaning' (2005:x1). Thus, while always acknowledging unequal power relations, this intense mediated intermixing of different cultural origins and temporalities, makes one wonder how accurate is Beck's (2004) conceptualization of cosmopolitanism as a 'side effect' of our globalised world. According to this approach, cosmopolitanism is no longer something we have to search for or make an effort to realize. As our world has increasingly become interconnected in an intense process beyond the control of individuals, and in ways we are not always fully conscious of, 'my body, my 'own life' become part of another world, of foreign cultures, regions and histories and global interdependence risks' (Beck, 2004:134).

4 Communication in and Through the City: Grounded Cosmopolitanism and Mediated Everyday Life

4.1 Introduction

In 2008, for the first time in history, more than half of the world's population were estimated to be living in urban towns and cities (UNFPA, 2007). The biggest and fastest growing of these cities were located mainly in the global south (Massey, 2007). By 2030, the number of urban inhabitants is expected to reach almost 5 billion people, with the biggest concentration being in Africa and Asia (UNFPA, 2007). These statistics, that point to an ever growing urbanization trend across the globe, illustrate the importance of the city as the privileged site of the everyday for a big proportion of the world's inhabitants. In this context, a point of criticism often levelled against theories of cosmopolitanism, is that they make claims and assumptions while failing to investigate the actual spaces in which cosmopolitanism is articulated and expressed as an everyday reality (Latham, 2006; Beck, 2002; Stevenson, 2003). If, for most people, the city is the specific arena of everyday life where cosmopolitan imagination is formulated, what exactly does the city represent? What are the most important characteristics of cities that make them such exciting, unpredictable and dynamic places to live, brimming with an over concentration of bodies drawn in from diverse locations both from within, but also beyond the nation? My focus in this chapter is on the city as a site of communication, or the 'communicative city' as it has often been termed (Gumpert and Drucker, 2008; Georgiou, 2008). Here I refer to communication as a multidimensional process (technological and non-technological) existing in diverse forms, in its most glamorous institutional guises, but also at its most banal as articulated face-to-face by urban citizens in an everyday context.

It is usually cities that host the impressive skyscrapers, grand satellite transmitters and media corporations where the main media related decisions are undertaken by rich businessmen and media moguls (Georgiou, 2008). Nevertheless, beyond the glamour of expensive technology and large scale corporations, the city is also home to a vast number of media users who appropriate media and communications technologies for diverse purposes, including entertainment, information or even

engaging in networks of belonging and participation beyond national boundaries. The stark and abundant visibility of satellite dishes and television antennae on the sides and rooftops of apartment blocks, five star hotels, but also more humble shacks and houses, is probably one of the few common physical symbols that unite the poor and privileged areas of the city. Carpentier (2008) explores the less glamorous, usually overlooked, yet much important 'belly of the city' that hosts alternative communicative cultures serving the needs of urban communities. Carpentier particularly focuses on the way Belgian WI-FI activists have used the cultures of radio amateur broadcasting to develop their own participatory networks that transcend the local, connecting them to other Belgian cities.

Furthermore, the city is also host to forms of interpersonal face-to-face communication that are not always dependent upon technology, yet are of no less importance in functioning as symbolic carriers of meaning and interpretation. In particular, the city is an intense meeting space for 'unexpected juxtapositions' where, especially in Egypt, the rich and poor areas exist 'cheek by jowl' (Amin and Thrift, 2002: 40). This forced geographical proximity often provokes the self to retreat into homogenous urban enclaves that exclude difference (Szerzynski and Urry, 2002; Denis, 2006). In such a situation where distance and proximity between citizens are negotiated in the daily spaces of the city, difference and sameness, particularly in relation to social class, are used as public markers of distinction (Bourdieu, 1984) and belonging. Consumption, which I discuss in section 4.3.1, becomes an important strategy and a form of symbolic communication (Featherstone, 1991; Miller, 1998); a performance through which urban inhabitants manage the complexities and diversities of urban experience.

The city, however, is more than just a medium for hosting communications infrastructure, media consumers and interpersonal forms of non-technological communication. According to Burd (2008:210), the city is a *whole* 'process of communications networks rather than a geographical place'. Thus, the city is not only a location where communication takes place, but itself a *product* of the diverse appropriations of media and communications technologies adopted by its citizens (Gumpert and Drucker, 2008). In this respect, as theorized by Lefebvre (1991), the city is not a passive backdrop or a space already existing, but is a creative urban

terrain that I suggest is shaped by, and emerges through everyday media practice. Using the term *communication space*, Lie (2003) argues that through everyday lived experience and mediated communication, places as bounded and static are negotiated and are transformed into communication spaces of intense interpretation and symbolic meaning. Bull (2004), for instance, has explored how new mobile and aural technologies have altered the relationship between the public and the private in the city, and thus the ways in which users of these technologies 'inhabit' urban public space (Bull, 2004:275). Specifically, Bull investigates how the privatized sound-worlds created by mobile technologies allow users to reconfigure spaces of experience, and through the power of sound, to make the urban world around them more 'intimate, known and possessed' (Bull, 2004:283). Georgiou (2008) has similarly explored how the use of communications technologies by marginalized citizens in certain global cities allows them to transform the urban into a space of meaning and inclusivity. Whereas political and cultural life in the nation excludes the socially and economically underprivileged, media spaces provide opportunities for identification and representation (Georgiou, 2008).

The city, with all of its diverse opportunities for mediated connection, has become a location where cosmopolitan imagination can find expression in its territory. The city is a space of difference, connecting people across boundaries as they seek to forge moments of belonging and identity through face-to-face and mediated systems of communication. Thus, as Stevenson (2003:59) argues, cities are able to retain their cultural prominence and importance precisely because in the context of intense diversity and difference, they provide spaces for citizens to 'experiment with their identities' in ways that imaginatively connect with a distant world. This chapter is primarily about the city: about the way the city facilitates and hosts diverse forms of communication, both directly dependent on, but also independent of technology, yet alternatively, how the city is itself a creative urban terrain shaped through communication practices. In order to tackle this objective, I have broken the discussion down into five sections. The first part of this chapter explores how cities have been theorized in research, usually approached through a dual framework that positions them as either a 'global city' or a 'third-world' city. Nevertheless, I argue that such reductionist terms do not do justice to the complex reality of cities outside the west, which cannot be understood through economic and financial development

(or lack of) alone. Section 4.3 explores the intense juxtaposition of difference and diversity that characterizes everyday urban experiences in the cities of the global south, particularly in relation to class, leading urban inhabitants to develop tactics of communicating their differences from each other. This leads onto section 4.3.1, which looks specifically at how consumption has become a daily practice, enabling urban citizens to communicate socio-economic differences.

The remaining sections of the chapter then explore how the city is not only a medium or container for different forms of communication, but is itself shaped in multiple ways through communications practices, particularly televised representation. Section 4.4 examines the importance of television in shaping everyday life, specifically in its construction of class and gender identities. The final section of the chapter, 4.5, focusing particularly on Lefebvre's (1991) *Production of Urban Space*, explores the different ways in which Cairo is shaped from below through the television consumption practices of its inhabitants.

4.2 Communicating an Urban Identity: Global City or Third World City?

According to Burd (2008:211), a 'city's form, structure and skeleton distinctly 'announces' its identity in space and place and introduces itself '. In this context, urban infrastructure, Burd argues, is not comprised of lifeless artifacts or inert buildings. Inscribed onto the physical and urban topography of cities are stories, histories and memories of colonial conquests, invasions and empires, but also more contemporary symbols of globalization and visual indicators of transnational cosmopolitan connections. In this context, buildings, streets and landscapes, but also traditions, customs and heritages continually communicate the particular story of a 'global city', a 'multicultural cosmopolitan city', a 'megacity' or even a 'third world city'. According to Garcia Canclini (2005), one of the most important factors that shape the contemporary identities of cities, is the intense amalgamation of difference and diversity. How is it, Garcia Canclini wonders, that such diverse spatio-temporal influences get mixed together so seamlessly in our urban everyday worlds? Specifically, the city attempts to:

reconcile everything that arrives and proliferates, and tries to contain all the disorder- the peasant's exchange with the transnational corporation, the traffic jams in front of protest demonstrations, the expansion of consumption together with the demands of the unemployed (Garcia Canclini, 2005:4).

As a meeting point juxtaposing the modern alongside the old, it is within cities that remnants of a colonial past remain inscribed onto the cultural products of cities, landscapes and buildings (King, 2003; Triulzi, 1996; Yeoh, 2001). Nevertheless, as well as being a locus where imagining a historical past may remain relevant, cities are also places of 'now' and of future projections. They are important nodes that occupy centre position in modern transnational flows of capital, people, information and media images. According to Yeoh (2001) strivings for new identities do not make a colonial past redundant, but the defining feature of cities is that they represent prime locations of a 'postcolonial present' (ibid.:459) where the old and the new remain dialectically interlinked. Beck (2002) argues that the city should be explored as a space for the production of the global, which often engages the global directly and bypasses the national. Massey (2007) reminds us, nevertheless, how the city is not only characterized by an external geography of global flows, but also an internal one. While the *internal* geography relates to the specificities of cities that remain rooted in geographical place, the *external* pertains to the multiple lines that run out from cities, particularly in relation to 'trade routes, investments, political and cultural influences the outward connections of the internal multiplicity itself' (Massey, 2007:7).

According to Massey's urban theory, what we are in need of is a 'politics of place *beyond* place (2007:15 emphasis in original) that is sensitive to the dialectical relationship linking the global with the local. Robins (2001:87) argues that the openness and fluidity associated with urban space means we should think through the city, rather than through the nation, as this provides the opportunities for 'some alternative cultural and political possibilities' other than a national one. Although I acknowledge the diverse cultural possibilities enabled by an urban perspective, I do not subscribe to Robins' (2001) argument that a focus on the city means we automatically need to think against the nation. In fact, I suggest that it is from within the city that the nation is lived and experienced as a daily reality. In particular, political authority and global commodity networks are realized and rooted in urban

space, thus transforming the city into an important sub-national node for 'plugging the nation' (Bunnell, 2002: 290) into wider globalization networks. As Sandercock (2003) argues, it is actually through the city that we can begin to understand the nation, as the imagination of national space is in fact embodied in the local spaces of streets, neighbourhoods and the city in general. This can be linked to Morley's (2000) thesis that it is through micro-processes embodied in smaller units (*heim*) that larger communities and collectivities (*heimat*) are themselves embedded and constituted.

The vast human concentration, cultural diversity and rapid economic and financial development characterizing big cities, particularly in the west, has led to a body of research investigating 'global cities'. According to Sassen (2000), we are presently occupying a *new geography of centrality*, one which has given rise to new urban spaces and the formation of new claims by transnational actors. Within this new geography, we are witnessing an interconnection of *global cities* where control and management of global financial networks and industries has become concentrated in a few leading financial centres, particularly New York, London and Tokyo (Sassen, 2000). Furthermore, using the term 'informational city,' Castells (2000:409) argues that we are currently in the midst of an informational and global economy organized around urban 'command and control centers'. These advanced urban nodes are 'information-based, value-production complexes', where global corporations and financial firms find both the 'suppliers and the highly skilled, specialized labor they require' (Castells, 2000: 415). This leads to a rigid hierarchical structure shaping different urban centres, where the biggest concentration of financial power and skill is located in a limited number of major cities, usually outside the west.

A point of criticism targeted at literature focusing exclusively on the financial industries of major global cities, is that it narrates a 'very western story' (Massey, 1999: 171), failing to recognize that cities within developing countries of the global south may in fact have very different stories to tell. According to King (2003), recent urban research, predominantly stemming from western academia, has undertaken its analysis through concepts such as 'world city' and 'global city,' meaning that the attention of urban scholars has focused on a limited number of cities that fall solely within these economic categories and western histories of urban development. Cities

that do not conform to these constricted categories, have usually escaped the urban studies' spotlight. Castells' urban theory, for instance, uses terms such as 'black holes of marginality,' 'back offices' and 'less developed regions' (2000: 410-416) to describe the less financially developed urban areas outside the west. Hence, although Castells does recognize the existence of these less powerful 'megacities' (2000: 436), they are still perceived in relation to a dominant western prototype of economic superiority, thus reducing them to inferior shadows of powerful financial urban centres. Commenting on the economic determinism of the 'global cities' paradigm, King (2003:267) argues that to imagine such limited economically driven concepts as being in any way universally applicable to cities in general, 'is an illusion'. Such concepts do not give enough insight into the 'many different meanings of particular places, or can, without reference to the particular histories, politics, memories or subjectivities, capture the highly diverse identities which exist in particular cities' (ibid.).

Conceptualisations of the (western) city, such as those formulated by Sassen (2000) and Castells (2000), recognize urban inequalities only in relation to global financial power, and only as they occur *between* cities in different national contexts. What kind of urban picture develops, however, if we transfer our focus to the disparities, inequalities and unequal patterns of development that fall *within* particular named cities? By turning to an analysis of non-western cities, particularly Egypt in this study, I focus on the way socio-economic deprivation and class segregation, resulting in highly fragmented lifestyles and the ability to access (or not) urban space, have become central to everyday urban experiences. As Gugler argues, the increased integration of 'third-world' cities in the global economy has exposed populations of these cities to 'sudden reversals of fortune that are not cushioned by public systems of support such as may be found in rich countries' (2004: 3). Following a similar line of argument, Chakravorty (2000:57) also contends that a global cities paradigm cannot be directly applied to cities in the global south, which encompass 'a great diversity of development levels, political-economic structures and histories, and levels of integration into the global economy'.

As a response to the above mentioned drawbacks associated predominantly with a western-centric focus on the city, another body of literature has attempted to

document the progression and expansion of developing cities in what they have termed the 'third world' (Drakakis-Smith, 2000; Potter and Salau, 1990). Robinson (2002), however, heavily criticizes this geographical division that has long dominated urban studies. On the one hand, are theories placing cities on a hierarchical rank according to economic power (Sassen, 2001, 1994; Castells, 2000), while on the other hand, is a school stemming from development studies reducing 'other' cities to *third world* status. There is a danger that by looking upon non-western cities as stuck on a linear path of development, located within a deprived third world, yet naturally striving to become labelled as global, we are obscuring significant aspects of city life such as popular culture and the 'creative construction of diverse forms of urbanism' (Robinson, 2002: 544).

Parker (2004) calls for a replacement of the term 'third-world' city with 'majority urban world'. The latter term, according to the author, is more sensitive to the hugely complex and diverse nature of cities outside the west, which need to be understood in terms other than geographic (non-western) or economic (poor). Instead, according to Robinson (2002), cities need to be researched in their own right as *ordinary cities* that are diverse, creative and distinctive. It is important to note, however, that although the specific particularities that characterize different cities must be taken into consideration, they can never be fully divorced from the context of global cultural and economic flows in which they are inevitably embedded. As Robertson (1992) has argued, the central dynamic of globalization involves a twofold process: the particularization of the universal, and the universalization of the particular. Thus, the universal and the particular have become increasingly interpenetrated and united in terms of both the universality of experience and the expectation of particularity.

4.3 Class and Urban Experiences Outside the West

Everyday life in the city involves coming into close contact with a vast range of diverse others. In such a situation, urban inhabitants develop tactics through which to manage and deal with diversity and difference as an everyday proximate reality (Georgiou, 2008). Communicative strategies particularly non-technological, symbolic and interpersonal ones are used amongst city dwellers to negotiate difference and assert similarity as a means of consolidating belonging and identity.

The next section will explore the importance of consumer objects as symbolic carriers of meaning through which individuals are able to communicate and articulate networks of belonging in the city. Before this, however, I wish to briefly explore the complex nuances and juxtapositions of difference that are unique to everyday urban experiences, most particularly in the context of the developing south.

Benjamin's urban theory provides a key reference in capturing the contradictory character and distinctive nature of the contemporary city. Similar to modern ethnographic projects, Benjamin was interested in a micro-analysis of the banal and mundane structures of everyday city life: the unique character of urban experience articulated in the architecture, public spaces, streets, the circulation of inhabitants and daily routines (Gilloch, 1996). Benjamin developed a dialectical perspective on the city where he perceived it to be a seat of the modern – particularly the development of the money economy, technology and new impersonal social relationships – but also a location for the antique. Cultural treasures and historical artifacts, listed buildings and ancient heritage exist in stark proximity to modern skyscrapers, contemporary architecture and busy urban life (Savage, 2000a). Therefore, urban experience, according to Benjamin, is articulated at the intersection of memory (personal and collective), history and the built environment. Thus it is not just a matter of analyzing the city as an amalgamation of buildings and physical infrastructure, but the key question remains of how the city is perceived, understood and deciphered by its inhabitants (Savage, 2000a). In this context, there is no single grand narrative that characterizes urban experience, but the city is encountered in multiple discontinuous and fragmented ways by its subjects.

Central to Benjamin's understanding of the modern city, and particularly relevant to my own research, is the 'shock experience' (Gilloch, 1996) he associated with modern encounters of the urban environment. The intense juxtaposition of difference, the stark positioning of the old alongside the new, the fast paced tempo of the streets and the noisy urban crowd have all contributed to an experience of shock, excitement and distraction, commonplace to life in big cities. Indeed, in a city like Cairo, inhabited by almost 18 million people (Demographia, 2011) in quite a limited geographical space who are forced to negotiate horrendous traffic, extensive pollution, unavoidable crowds and ongoing noise, Benjamin's notion of the shock

experience most definitely captures the realities of everyday life for the average Cairene. Savage (2000a:49) has directly linked Benjamin's thesis of the 'shock' experience to the contemporary and widespread trend of 'manicured postmodern urban spaces (that) cocoon visitors in safe spaces' thus reducing the impact of shock experience associated with the modern city. Such urban cocoons, particularly gated communities, have become a notable trend in Cairo, functioning particularly as exclusive spaces allowing the elite to distance themselves from the lower classes and thus to maintain social class hierarchies.

Denis (2006:50) argues how exclusive gated communities in Cairo offer their elite inhabitants protection against the 'ill effects' of the wider city including pollution, crime and poverty, associated primarily with the vulgar lifestyles of uneducated, working class city dwellers. Kuppinger (2004) similarly explores how these very exclusive housing arrangements located on the fringes of the capital city, offer material comforts as well as a much desired distance from the crowd and uncivilized behaviour of the lower classes. 'Most obviously, however, they address the fine distinctions of class and wealth, and a certain positioning on a global map' (Kuppinger, 2004: 46). Interestingly, Kuppinger focuses on the names of these private housing complexes in Cairo, and with choices like *Belle Ville*, *Queen Elizabeth* and *Queen Victoria*, the author questions whether they are 'consciously situated on a historical continuum from the colonial era, harboring the unspoken dream, that Egypt's colonial/royal era was a time of superior comforts and lifestyles?' (Kuppinger, 2004:48). These examples demonstrate the extent to which the intensity and proximity of different others in the city forces inhabitants to deal with this situation. They often resort to closing themselves off in manageable enclaves with clear boundaries asserting who is excluded as much as who is included.

The containment of urban inhabitants within familiar walled off enclaves, may be analysed in the light of Simmel's (2004) notion of *reserve* that emerges as a result of the hectic and rapid pace of life in the city. Similar to Benjamin's notion of the 'shock' experience, Simmel writes about an '*intensification of nervous simulation*' (2004:13 emphasis in original) resulting from the intense, rapidly changing sensory perceptions associated with city life. In particular, theorising the city as the prime seat of the money economy, Simmel (2004) argues that a concern with financial

matters has objectified and thus eclipsed the importance of personal and emotional relationships. In this context, city inhabitants have developed a 'blasé attitude' (Simmel, 2004:15) towards fellow urban dwellers, leading to a form of self-preservation and reserve against the presence of (different) others. As a result, urban inhabitants often come to form very limited personal relationships based on a restricted social circle requiring the establishment of rigid boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Thus, although the intense concentration of inhabitants in the city seems to indicate 'bodily proximity', Simmel (2004:17) describes how reserve and self-preservation point to a reality of social and 'mental distance'. In this context, Allen (2000) explores how Simmel's figure of the *stranger* captures 'the contradictory experience of what it means to interact socially with someone who is both near in a spatial sense, yet remote in a social sense' (Allen, 2000:57). Hence, although city dwellers may be forced into close proximity dictated by the boundaries of the limited geographical space they jointly inhabit, few points of social or cultural commonality, mean urban inhabitants may often find it necessary to communicate their differences from each other. Thus, deterred by those existing nearby, city dwellers may search for new forms of stimulation, and for spaces of belonging, identity and inclusivity in distant places that transcend immediate frontiers. This makes the city one of the most fruitful locations for the construction of transnational identities and formations (Sassen, 2000; Eade, 1994). Specifically, a cosmopolitan imagination becomes relevant in this respect, allowing for a discovery of cultural plurality and a negotiation of the self in relation to distant others.

4.3.1 The City as a Locus for Consumer Distinction

Consumer objects are not always 'odourless products' stripped of meaning or context as Iwabuchi (2002) once argued, but are very often statements in themselves; vehicles rife with symbolic and cultural interpretation. Featherstone (1995) explores how consumer products represent important *cultural messages*. Using the example of the burger, Featherstone argues that it is not only a material substance physically consumed to satisfy one's hunger pangs, but is consumed culturally as a form of symbolic affiliation to a particular way of life. By eating a burger from McDonald's, one is aware, according to Featherstone, that this provides an important point of entry to the 'transposable themes which are central to consumer culture, such as youth,

fitness, beauty, luxury, romance, freedom' (Featherstone, 1995). In this context, in emphasizing the symbolic aspect of consumer products, Featherstone (1991) highlights how consumption should not be understood as a material utility or the consumption of use-values, but argues the original or functional 'use' value of products often become eclipsed as we deal with *commodity signs*.

According to the above, commodity products or signs can be attributed with particular cultural and symbolic meanings. Indeed, through the multiple anthropological portraits he conducted of household consumption patterns in a single London street, Miller (2008) shows how, very often, the ability of 'things' or objects to communicate particular meanings is more powerful than discourse. Consumer objects, according to Miller, represent a prevailing form of outward expression that, if examined closely, may reveal fascinating insights or a new sense of depth to a person or household. Nevertheless, an engagement in consumption is not simply a matter of individual expression, but the relevance of consumption as a form of social communication often emerges in its collectivity, and as members of a particular group jointly partake in the experience of consumption. Urry emphasizes the communal and communitarian value of consumption when arguing:

satisfaction is derived not from the individual act of consumption but from the fact that all sorts of other people are also consumers of the service and these people are deemed appropriate to the particular consumption in question (1995: 131).

When engaging in consumer practices, therefore, individuals are often driven by a desire to share in, and be a part of the same experiences of a specific wider collectivity, that may then distinguish them from other social groups. According to Bourdieu (1984), social *distinction* is a central dimension of social life. Furthermore, 'defined by the distribution of economic and cultural capital among its members,' (Bourdieu, 1984:260) Bourdieu argues how a person's social taste, or specifically *habitus*, is defined. Thus, habitus is a social presupposition that becomes our common sense interpretation of the world; the end product of practices and performances that we consciously and subconsciously develop to fulfil our desire to be accepted in society. Bourdieu's concept of distinction becomes relevant to our understanding of the social function of consumption, as habitus (the end product of

distinction), is not only a subjective mode of thinking, but is expressed in a physical and embodied form, often through the acquisition of specific consumer items. Thus, our habitus becomes a performance inscribed onto our bodies and informs how we present our homes, while also influencing conscious bodily actions related to dress, speech, posture and ways of eating (Featherstone, 1991). As Featherstone argues in relation to habitus, 'the body is a materialization of class taste: class taste is *embodied*. Each group, class and class fraction has a different habitus, hence the set of differences' (1991:90). Importantly, therefore, habitus for Bourdieu is not a product of individual freedom of thought, but is regulated by, and takes its meaning from within the dominant class structures we belong to.

In Chapter Two I discuss in detail my own approach and conceptualization of class, and thus the process by which I was able to split members of my sample into three class groups. Bourdieu's (1984) notion of habitus, which claims that access to differential amounts of both *cultural* and *economic* capital form two important elements of class formation, was particularly relevant. This approach has helped illuminate how access and resources help create class hierarchies, leading to the consolidation of particular 'social positions and positions in knowledge' (Skeggs, 1997:9). As Savage (2000b:107) argues, Bourdieu's seminal thesis allows us to understand class as 'implicit, as encoded in people's sense of self-worth and in their attitudes to and awareness of others'. Thus, Bourdieu's analysis allowed me to manage and engage with some of the complexities of class, by functioning as a useful framework that provided a basis through which I divided members of my sample into the upper middle, lower middle and working class. Nevertheless, although access to 'capital' has widely been acknowledged as a powerful contributor to social classification, Bourdieu's model has not come without critique.

Although Savage (2000b) and Skeggs (1997) draw heavily on Bourdieu, they both claim his work can be highly problematic if applied mechanistically. According to the authors, it is important to avoid the assumption that class factions are rigid social groupings, underpinned by a linear relationship between habitus, access to capital, and thus behavior or social practice. As Savage (2000b:110) argues, 'there is movement between cultural practices, with the result that social and cultural boundaries are porous'. Additionally, Skeggs (1997:10) makes the claim that if

applied religiously, Bourdieu can be accused of coding behavior 'in a cold and mechanical classificatory manner'. Instead, through detailed ethnographic approaches that engage directly with the subjective experiences and micro-practices of 'classed' individuals, we need to explore and record the dynamic 'pleasures and pain associated with gender, class and sexuality' (ibid.). Thus, in a context replete with vast social divides, and where people's ordinary life chances are dictated almost solely by their socio-economic status, I continue to proclaim for the importance of class as a framing category for everyday experiences in Egypt. Nevertheless, my empirical narrative illustrates that although differences *between* classes are profound, the fluidity, disagreements and contradictions in participants' responses *within* particular class categories, are testament that classes are not homogenous social categories. For this reason, it is important to engage with people not as classed dupes, but as 'rationally acting individuals' (Bottero, 2004: 988) who are unescapably part of the inequalities of the class system. I discuss these points in more detail in the conclusion.

Returning to the discussion on consumption, consumer activities can often help to consolidate forms of classed belonging or exclusion 'through symbolic means, cultural differentiations and the management of codes and information' (Clammer, 2003: 407). Furthermore, inequality of access through socio-economic disparities means that the ambitious promise of consumerism so flagrantly displayed in cities, whether on television screens, billboards or urban spaces of leisure, leaves a vast swathe of urban populations unable to fulfill consumer desires. Miles (1998) argues how consumption plays a paradoxical role, as although it is *enabling* in that it gives individuals a perceived sense that they can willingly express themselves through their chosen objects, it simultaneously plays a more discrete role in actually imposing forms of *control* upon those unable to acquire the symbols of consumerism. Thus, as Miles (1998:1007) writes, the personal meanings attached to consumer products cannot be divorced from the 'power relations within which they are constructed'. Thus, consumer activities, underpinned by unequal relations of access leading to the distinction between 'haves' and 'have nots,' inclusion and exclusion, feed into the divisions of socially fragmented cities. Oncu (2002:187) similarly argues how consumerism has contributed to the creation of 'multiple divisions of city life which are constructed in and through consumption processes'. For urban groups with the

least cultural or economic capital, consumer products often remain desirable and highly visible, yet unattainable and unfulfilled promises of a better life, largely affiliated with urban spaces to which they have no access.

That an engagement in consumer practices requires economic capital, is an undisputable fact. Nevertheless, empirical research has continued to document how consumption should not be regarded as an occupation limited solely to those with abundant levels of financial and cultural capital. Often, groups from a disadvantaged socio-economic position are able to negotiate their own points of entry into a consumer world. Werbner's (1999) research on 'working class cosmopolitans' provides some very interesting insights into how consumer goods have allowed Pakistani labour migrants living in the UK to form their own unique cosmopolitan networks. Werbner particularly focuses on the global pathways established by these labour migrants, which carry flows of goods and patterns of gifting and consumption, and thus have become an important way of making places travel, and bringing distant places closer to home. This traffic of 'objects-places-sentiment' (Werbner, 1999: 26), according to Werbner, points to the fact that labour migrants cannot be labelled as an isolated group, encapsulated and doomed by their economic limitations, but must be recognised as inhabiting their own cosmopolitan worlds and capable of constructing their own global pathways that carry goods, ideas and people.

Similar to Werbner (1999), Ghannam's (2006) investigation of Egyptian working class labour migrants who travel to Arab Gulf countries to make a living, provides interesting insights. Through her ethnographic analysis of the experiences of one young man *Magdi*, Ghannam explores how he used his newly made money to buy appliances from Kuwait to furnish an apartment he bought back in his home town in Egypt. Significantly, the style in which Magdi chose to furnish his apartment was a reflection of his time spent outside of Egypt: the water filters, kitchen fan and vacuum cleaner he purchased in Kuwait were not common in the area of Cairo he was from. As Ghannam notes, therefore, 'for many people, his unit became a signifier of the modern, the new, the beautiful, and the desired' (2006: 263). As the above two examples demonstrate, consumer objects represent loaded symbols that can be used in diverse ways by different groups to communicate particular lifestyle choices, and often to enable a desire for social mobility.

Bringing in the importance of the media to processes of consumption, Schein (1999) charts how electronic media are allowing China's most socially and physically immobile to engage in a globally imagined cosmopolitanism that transcends national boundaries. Unable to acquire the abundant store of consumer goods so flagrantly displayed on screen, Schein argues that for China's most poor and disadvantaged, it is mediated representations of a consumer world that become consumed, rather than the actual goods themselves, which are far beyond their limited socio-economic means. Thus, through television, these Chinese media consumers are able to *imagine* themselves to be 'cosmopolitan participants in global commodity culture' (Schein, 1999:345), which they would be unable to access otherwise. This offers an important counter-argument to Binnie, Holloway and Millington's (2006) assertion that the construction of cosmopolitan identities is necessitated by direct experience of the world, by cultural capital and a particular level of education. According to the authors, 'being worldly, being able to navigate between and within different cultures, requires confidence, skill and money' (2006:8). On the contrary, the past studies are an important illustration of how, in the absence of an abundance of cultural or financial capital, individuals and groups are still capable of constructing their own cosmopolitan formations that are often heavily dependent upon the media as cultural transporters.

By providing spaces of global inclusion even for the most physically immobile, therefore, a focus on communication practices that take place in 'banal manners and in humble locations' (Georgiou, 2008:234) may allow us to transcend the conventional focus on the more glamorous and predictable outcomes of globalization, often associated with elite 'global hoppers'. Thus, by making the link between cosmopolitanism and imagination, and examining its intersection with the everyday stratified but highly mediated life in the city, a classed based analysis becomes relevant to our understandings of the diversity of urban cosmopolitan identities. Such a framework that is sensitive to the disparate socio-economic realities that characterize different groups in the city, may ensure that research avoids homogenising all the different possible constructions of cosmopolitanism within one elite framework. Such an elitist approach would risk discounting the associations between working classes and an imagination of the self within humanity enabled by

the media in ways that fall beyond the specificity of their locale and first hand experience alone.

The chapter thus far has approached the city as a strategic location for communication. I have focused particularly on the city as a site for the intense juxtaposition of difference and diversity, looking specifically at the importance of consumption as a symbolic form of communication. I have explored how consumption allows urban inhabitants to manage and control difference, particularly in relation to class. Nevertheless, I propose that the city is not only a medium or container for communication, but is itself a creative urban terrain that is shaped through communications practices and the diverse appropriation of media technologies by urban inhabitants. To understand this point more clearly, I would like to return to Benjamin and specifically, his key figure of the *flaneur*: the urban wanderer who took pleasure in aimlessly strolling through the glass arcades of modern Paris, encountering the crowd and experiencing the city at a relaxed pace. In a more recent reworking of Benjamin's classic concept, Featherstone (1998) suggests that inhabitants of cities today are not only lonely strollers as defined by Benjamin's 'flaneur', but urban dwellers have become skilled *readers* of the city. Furthermore, Featherstone argues that whereas the flaneur was conceptualized by Benjamin to be an individual who experienced the city in a slow and linear manner, a modern process of 'flaneurie,' according to Featherstone (1998), involves inhabitants engaging in mediated urban encounters.

Electronic flows of a networked world, according to Featherstone, provide instantaneous connections and perceptions of the city that render physical and spatial distances irrelevant. Thus, the city is no longer approached or understood in a linear manner argues Featherstone, restricted by what is geographically proximate or what is available 'now,' but is increasingly determined by that to which we have electronic access (Featherstone, 1998), lying outside the immediate boundaries of space and time. Donald (2003:47) confirms this point with his assertion that there is one 'real city', as there are multiple urban experiences articulated through 'the immaterial city of word, image and myth'. It is through the media, according to Donald (2003), that we learn not only to see cities, but also how to live in them'. My research focuses specifically on television, and the ways in which televised representations young

Egyptians are exposed to, play an important role in shaping the different experiences of everyday life in Cairo. As Georgiou (2008: 226) argues in relation to daily uses of media technology in the city, not enough attention is paid to urban denizens tactics of 'surviving the city, of making the city one's own and of finding spaces of representation outside the exclusive or excluding politics of national and commercial interests'. Before I embark upon the discussion of how the city itself has become a creative urban terrain shaped in multiple ways through everyday media practice in the final section, I precede this with a contextualizing discussion of television's significance within everyday life.

4.4 Television and the Everyday: Mediated Consumption and the Construction of Class and Gender Identities

Television occupies such an omnipresent existence in our lives that it has become deeply entrenched in our subjective perceptions and interpretations of the everyday. Williams and Williams (1990) contend that television has become an important shaper of our 'structure of feeling', regulating the ways in which we articulate particular understandings and feelings about the world around us. Departing from a similar understanding of television's everyday relevance, Silverstone asks: 'how is it that such a technology and medium has found its way so profoundly and intimately into the fabric of our daily lives? How is it that it stays there?' (1994:2). According to Silverstone, television is particularly important in sustaining our sense of *ontological security* as it is deeply involved in extending our sense of confidence and sanctuary in an increasingly unsure world replete with risks and dangers. In this sense, Silverstone understands ontological security as a cognitive state; a way of being in the world where individuals seek a stable and ongoing continuity of everyday life while avoiding chaos and anxiety.

As our everyday lives are intensely saturated with televised images, we are being constantly bombarded with information about potential global health, social and ecological risks that may often increase our sense of confusion and chaos about the world (Silverstone, 1994). Paradoxically, despite being the medium through which these tensions are initially communicated to audiences, Silverstone (1994) argues how television performs a parallel function of controlling these anxieties. Television

has become the main frame through which order is maintained, while distance and risk are managed and brought under control. Silverstone comments on this dual role of television, writing:

Its (television) emotional significance, both as disturber and comforter; its cognitive significance, both as an informer and a misinformer; its spatial and temporal significance, ingrained as it is into the routines of daily life...is both complete and fundamental (1994: 3).

Although Silverstone's thesis offers an important insight into the relevance of television in sustaining a sense of security and order within our contemporary mediated times, his analysis is attached to a period where audiences were predominantly faced with a limited number of television channels that framed their mediated experiences and knowledge of the world. Nevertheless, how does this change when in the age of advanced satellite technology, with its propensity for narrowcasting and disseminating niche specialized channels, audiences can no longer be addressed under a unified media environment? Can television continue to fill this anxiety-reducing role as Silverstone predicted? Gillespie's (2007) more recent empirical analysis of young British Muslim audiences' consumption of transnational television news provides an important challenge. Gillespie explores how threats regarding securitization are shaped through everyday transnational media cultures, leading especially to the marginalization of British Muslims. Using techniques such as breaking news stories, rolling 24 hour news broadcasts, split screens and rapid cuts, a 24/7 televised media industry, according to Gillespie, is able to intensify a sense of immediate threat and risk, thus always keeping public fears alive and vigilant. This has particular repercussions on how British Muslims have become implicated within this process, as 'the media are seen as systematically demonizing Muslims, associating Islam with violence and terrorism, and representing Muslims as the 'enemy within' ' (2007:283). Consequently, for these racialised Muslim minorities, negative self-perceptions constructed through demonizing media representations have provoked them to question whether the prospect for peaceful multicultural coexistence is realizable.

Gillespie's study provides an insightful illustration of the complexities involved when audiences are accorded access to both national and transnational media outlets. This

no doubt has its advantages in terms of providing an instantly accessible source of diverse information and knowledge of distant ways of life. Nevertheless, as Gillespie's research with young Muslim audiences demonstrates, the exposure to negative self-representations in the diverse media they have access to, can compound feelings of anxiety and a sense that the world has become a less secure place. Gillespie, nevertheless, locates her work against a deterministic approach which dictates that media consumers interpret the media in any unified way. Although her research findings predominantly suggest that television can conjure up negative feelings of demonization and disappointment, Gillespie recognizes that the multiple transnational news outlets available to British Muslims help these minority audiences 'seek out and use alternative sources of news and information, displaying highly flexible modes of reasoning...' (Gillespie, 2007:281). Thus the unique uses and interpretations that media consumers display towards the diverse media they are exposed to cannot be generalized or narrated in any predictable fashion as they are multifarious, critical and often unpredictable.

The desire for audiences to access diverse transnational media outlets is especially prevalent in the Arab world in the context of a highly popular regional geo-cultural television market. Matar (2007) has argued how, against the highly censored and controlled media environments of terrestrial national outlets, transnational satellite broadcasting has provided important alternatives; proving to be a much needed 'breathing space' (Karam, 2007:81). In particular, Matar focuses on the rise of niche channels such as *Heya TV* that have contributed to the 'empowerment of women' (2007:513) across the Arab world. By nurturing a feminist agenda and thus openly discussing topics rarely approached publicly in Arab and Islamic public spheres such as cohabitation and homosexuality, Matar argues that *Heya TV* displays strong potential towards becoming a feminist counterpublic and a communicative space 'for women to articulate their own voices, their concerns about their position in society' (2007:522). Furthermore, Kraidy (2009) documents the interesting and overwhelmingly positive reception that the reality TV programme *Star Academy* received in Saudi Arabia following its airing on the *Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation* (LBC) channel. Kraidy argues how, making an appearance in the ultra conservative, highly patriarchal cultural environment of Saudi Arabia, the reality programme offered an 'alternative social reality imbued with women's agency'

(2009:358). The public visibility of female contestants dancing on screen, touching men physically and sharing the same living spaces was strongly condemned by religious clerics and the conservative Saudi government. Nevertheless, it offered more liberal viewers, particularly women, a fleeting vision of 'a more participatory and inclusive society, one with less clerical influence and a wider margin of individual autonomy' (Kraidy, 2009:362).

Kraidy's (2009) study demonstrates the ability of female Saudi audiences, operating from within a complex social reality underpinned by rigid hegemonic gender relations, to interact with *Star Academy* in a way that countered and challenged everyday experiences of dominant religious doctrine within the nation. Thus, the complex ways in which audiences interpret the media is dependent upon and filtered through 'their multiple everyday experiences within other social contexts and different social structures' (Parameswaran, 1999:101) beyond the media text. This is an important indicator of the complex process of *intercontextuality* that characterizes the dialectical multilayered relationship shaping the media and audiences (Parameswaran, 1999; Bird, 1992). For example, in Gillespie's (2007) study, young Muslims' experiences of transnational media is dictated by their ethnic identity and their encounters with racial tensions in Britain. In relation to Kraidy (2009) and Matar's (2007) empirical findings, transnational Arab television is often negotiated in relation to everyday experiences of conservative gender norms prevalent in the Arab world.

Intercontextuality is an important reminder of how television audiences, embedded in complex everyday lives that fall beyond the immediate moment of consumption, approach the screen already positioned within structures of power along class, ethnic and gender lines. Morley's (1980) pathbreaking study of class and textual interpretation provided one of the earliest critical reception studies of how media messages make sense primarily from within cultural formations and practices. Exploring specifically the reception of *The Nationwide* programme amongst four groups from different occupational backgrounds, Morley studied how multiple classed readings of the text were made across the different groups. He concluded that although different subcultural formations existed within each class, these differences remained guided and framed by social class position, which often permitted access to

a broad repertoire of available cultural codes, while at other times, allowing only restricted access to a narrower range of codes (Morley, 1980). Despite the importance of socio-economic status in shaping everyday interactions with the media as indicated early on by Morley's study, Skeggs, Thumim and Wood (2008) argue that media and communications research has largely abandoned class since the 1980s and the 1990s. Although there have been notable exceptions to this trend as I discuss below, these have remained only a few. This is especially so in relation to Arab audiences, where Arab cultural studies in general suffer from a poverty of in-depth empirical research documenting the multiple ways in which audiences interact with the media on an everyday basis (Sabry, 2007).

Perhaps one of the main reasons why class has been downplayed so much within media and communications research is due to the increased interest in gender, particularly in women. Nevertheless, even though the spotlight of media research has concentrated on gender, I believe understandings of gender will remain partial as long as it is explored as unconnected to class. As Ang (1996:115) argues in relation to research on female audiences, 'class makes a difference'. Avoiding such an artificial divide within my own research that disconnects the different socio-cultural positions that shape media audiences, I explore how class, age and gender, within an urban everyday context, are very often in dialogue with each other, revealing their relevance often at their points of intersection. Press' (1991) comparative study of the diverse interpretations working and middle class American women made of the soap opera *Dynasty*, is a key point of reference in making the link between class and gender. Press discovered that middle class women adopted a highly critical attitude towards the soap opera, particularly criticizing narratives that portrayed weak women with a lack of power in the family and in society. In contrast, working class women, articulating their interpretations of the serial in relation to their own experiences of being imprisoned within a patriarchal society and rigid gender-based divisions, focused more on the portrayal of day-to-day survival issues.

In a more recent analysis, Skeggs, Thumim and Wood (2008) have explored the ways in which working class and middle class British women differentially receive, and form multiple interpretations of reality television. Working class women, the authors discovered, were more likely to perceive reality television in ways that

corresponded to their own everyday struggles and constricted economic experiences. In this context, the working class often sympathized and related with reality television participants, regarding these types of programmes as a legitimate way for ordinary disadvantaged people to experience rapid social and financial mobility. Middle class women, on the other hand, were more interested in demonstrating to the researchers their cultural capital and ability to semiotically read and decode such 'exploitative genres' for what they really are. Thus, they displayed less empathy and identification with the protagonists on screen, condemning them for their greedy desire to 'get something for nothing' (Skeggs, Thumim and Wood, 2008: 18-19).

A long-standing concern of feminist research has not only been the way gender influences the interpretation and negotiation of media texts, but how gender itself, particularly the subjective conceptions of 'femininity', is negotiated *within* the process of media consumption. This has often been examined through drama genres, particularly soap operas. Although such research has offered important insights into the way gendered identities are partly shaped in media consumption, it has departed from a feminist framework of analysis, thus focusing on women and their feminine desires for the possibilities of imagination and fantasy enabled through melodrama. Men have usually been excluded from these worlds (La Pastina, 2004), which means the question of how men position themselves in relation to mediated drama, and use them to construct their identities, remains yet to be addressed.

Ang (1996) uses the term *melodramatic imagination* in relation to the pleasures female viewers derive from imaginary identifications with soap operas. 'Being' a woman is never definitive, Ang argues, but involves an ongoing process of identity construction, and thus the fantasy and fiction aspect of soap operas becomes a reassuring private space in which these women can be excessively melodramatic, exploring other, more desirable situations and identities not available to them in their everyday lives. Abu-Lughod's (1995) ethnographic analysis of working class Egyptian women's consumption of the drama serial *Hilmiyya Nights*, captures how female viewers actively negotiate drama texts in ways that correspond to their everyday particularities. Although produced originally to fit an elite vision of national unity and patriotism, Abu-Lughod explores how media-savvy female viewers of the serial interpret it in ways that challenge the message intended by

producers. Working as domestic servants in Cairo, Abu-Lughod's poor female participants find pleasure in the character of *Nazik Hanem*; 'the aristocratic, conniving, magnificently dressed femme fatale who plays the leading female role' (Abu-Lughod, 1995: 200). They admire Nazik Hanem's strong character and her remorseless defiance of a moral system that usually keeps women such as themselves silenced.

The above discussion illustrates how television viewing is a highly selective activity where viewers accept and enjoy storylines that correspond to their own life-worlds, personal ambitions or interests. As Van Zoonen (1994) reminds us, we should never assume gender to precede cultural practices, but gender requires continuous work as it is part of an ongoing process within which subjects are dialectically constituted. Thus, gender is constructed in the context of everyday life where media consumption is one of the most important daily practices (Van Zoonen, 1994). The same applies to class where class identities are not pre-established or static conceptions, but people are involved in an ongoing process of developing new ways of thinking about and expressing their class status, often through the media. In their content analysis of reality television programmes, Wood and Skeggs (2008) explore how such genres provide highly classed representations of everyday life, underpinned by a drive to universalize middle class lifestyles and rules of etiquette in terms of taste, behaviour and embodied appearance. Thus, through a promotion of strategies for 'behaviour modification' (Wood & Skeggs, 2008:189), working class contestants (and viewers) are 'taught' how to develop what the programme makers define as taste, style and a beautiful life drawn from a middle class model.

What can be gleaned from the above studies is that the importance of television to its viewers is not necessarily in providing an escapist depiction of an idealistic life as they wish it to be, but as a cultural space in which mediated representations allow them to reflect back upon and renegotiate the self in new ways. This links to Hall's (1994) theory of the media as *representational systems* that do not simply function as mirrors reflecting ready-made identities that exist independently of mediated representation. According to Hall (1994), it was specifically through cinematic representation consumed in the 1970s that peoples of the Caribbean were collectively

able to discover the African component to their identities, which were previously based on a heavy European and American influence.

In light of the above studies and concepts, it appears that television may enable the articulation of a cosmopolitan imagination. The more people are exposed to different media, the more the limits of their identities are expanded and the rigidity of everyday social experiences may be challenged as they come to see different representations of gender roles, of diverse cultural realities and alternative understandings of class. Thus, the diverse media representations that people consume have resulted in the articulation of imagination, which becomes a window leading out of the rigidity of immediate social experience, allowing for a reflection upon the self in relation to distant others. This is particularly relevant in the context of Egypt, where identities could not be more unequal in relation to deep-seated social divides. As television expands the repertoires of people's cultural references, therefore, the self and the everyday increasingly only make sense in relation to events and others who exist in places beyond their reach. In a similar vein, I return to my discussion of the city and propose that as the privileged site of the everyday where class identities, gender roles and cultural realities are realized and rooted, we experience and negotiate the city through a mediated exposure to what takes place beyond its borders in places never physically experienced (Featherstone, 1998). In this context, television is not only a receiving frame whose images and representations allow us to make sense of an external world existing beyond us, but it is often from within television that the everyday is actually constructed. As Silverstone argues, 'the media are both contained by, and are the container of, the everyday' (2007:20). Thus, as the media come to alter our everyday socio-spatial perceptions of urban space, the city becomes transformed into a creative urban terrain rife with possibilities for imagination, allowing inhabitants to 'experiment with their identities and participate in a more disorderly existence' (Stevenson, 2003:59). I turn to this in the next and final section of the chapter where I argue that there is no one shared perception of a single 'real' city. Using Lefebvre's (1991) theory of the *Production of Space*, I propose that multiple urban narratives as informed by the media are emerging.

4.5 Romance on Cairo's Bridge: Lefebvre's Theory of Space and Imagining the City

That Cairo is a space of inequalities, of debilitating social divides and unequal access to systems of power, is undeniable. Yet, at the same time, does this necessarily mean that everyday experiences of the city for young Cairenes are pre-determined, unfolding in predictable ways on the basis of static and homogenous social experiences within set social formations? More specifically, are Cairo's inhabitants – particularly the economically and socially marginalized – afforded no room for manoeuvre and no space from within which to shape their own urban experiences? According to Beazley's (2000) research on the spatially marginalized street subcultures of Indonesia, street children are not entirely passive victims, but have managed to develop particular urban survival strategies. Such tactics allow them to appropriate selected spaces within the city for their own use where they can 'form a collective identity in opposition to oppression' (Beazley, 2000:481). This complements Moyer's (2004) ethnographic findings which reveal that young Tanzanian street workers do not surrender completely to classed mechanisms of urban exclusion. Instead, these young people have developed an intelligent sense of space that allows them to control such moments of demarcation to meet their own ends. For instance, Moyer examines how the prestigious area surrounding the Sheraton hotel, frequented mainly by Tanzania's rich and elite, is of benefit to street workers who establish their own informal businesses there.

With the media as a framing category, I build upon Moyer's (2004) and Beazley's (2000) approach that the city is a creative terrain which urban occupants of different backgrounds make their own, constantly searching within to locate spaces of representation and inclusivity (Georgiou, 2008). Lefebvre's (1991) influential theory of the *Production of Space* that conceives the city not as an 'epistemological starting position' (Schmid, 2008:28) simply existing, but as a dynamic social space constantly in a state of production, provides my main conceptual framework. Specifically, Lefebvre's triadic model for the production of urban space that draws on material, symbolic and imaginary dimensions, allows us to bring together the media and the city as two important cultural systems, and to understand how, at their intersection, they provide an important space for the production of everyday life. Furthermore,

Lefebvre's sensitivity to how everyday spatial practices are strongly underpinned by relations of power and hegemony (Savage, 2000a) is a point of significance in relation to my research. It is important not to over-romanticise the opportunities for spatial and cultural openness provided by the city, and the imaginative capabilities of its inhabitants. The city remains a place of restriction, of control, of authority and government repression. With Cairo as their focus, Singerman and Amar (2006) capture the contradictory nature of the city, both as a space of creativity and opportunity, but also as a continuing terrain of repression and regulation. The authors argue how Cairenes have become skilled at resisting dominant state institutions and articulating forms of subjectivity and agency, yet always 'under conditions not of their own choosing, and within relations of power that can radically dehumanize and militarize daily existence' (2006:10).

Lefebvre approaches the city not as a passive or dead surface where activity is carried out, but as a space that is 'organic and fluid and alive; it has a pulse, it palpates, it flows and collides with other spaces' (Merrifield, 2000: 171). Lefebvre proceeds from a relational concept of space and time where they are perceived not to exist universally, but 'can only be understood in the context of a specific society. In this sense, space and time are not only relational but fundamentally historical' (Schmid, 2008:29). Thus, as a social space, the city is a contextualized entity that is actively produced within the specific repertoires of history, time and culture. More specifically, Lefebvre highlights three interlinked dialectical dimensions that underpin the production of urban space. Firstly there is *perceived space*: this involves the obvious perceivable elements that can be grasped by the senses and thus directly relates to the material and physical dimensions that constitute urban space. Secondly, *conceived space*: this refers to the dimension of space produced and planned to fit the vision of the dominant elites. Space here is constructed by professionals and technocrats, and thus is intimately tied to ideology, power and knowledge. Lastly there is *lived space*: this is the space of everyday experience as it is lived and directly perceived by urban inhabitants (Schmid, 2008). According to Harvey (2004), this final aspect of Lefebvre's analysis is essential in its recognition that people are not material atoms inhabiting a material world, but that we 'also have imaginations, fears, emotions, psychologies and dreams. These spaces of representation are part and parcel of the way we live in the world' (Harvey, 2004:8). Thus, Lefebvre's triadic

model illustrates how everyday experiences of the city are not simply based on bodies physically circulating within an urban material infrastructure. Our perception and understanding of urban space is a multidimensional process shaped by relations of hegemonic power and emerging at the intersection of the physical, imaginary and the symbolic.

Focusing specifically on women's urban experiences in Cairo, Ghannam (2002) discusses how many studies have approached the city as a 'mere container for the practices of its residents', yet we 'rarely read about how these practices shape the city and the specificity of urban life in producing and shaping the activities and relationships forged by women' (Ghannam, 2002: 16-17). Thus, in Lefebvre's terms, Ghannam argues that studies have overly focused on the *perceived* and *conceived* aspects of urban space where the city is reduced to a grounded material infrastructure, constructed to fit the hegemonic vision of intellectuals and political figures. Nevertheless, what is missing is a more in-depth examination of the *lived* dimension of Cairo's urban spaces: how social agents themselves play an active role in producing and reproducing their everyday urban lives by articulating 'local values, national policies, and global forces in their daily struggles' (Ghannam, 2002: 17). Although Ghannam gives precedence to the everyday spatial practices of ordinary inhabitants, she continues to protest for the significance of the *conceived* aspect of space linked to the production of hegemonic knowledge. Indeed, it is often the policies and laws established by the state that set the agenda and establish a dominant framework from *within* which social actors develop strategies to deal with, resist and incorporate these discourses into their daily lives. Hence, as an everyday system of cultural organization, our experiences of the city operate at multiple levels. Both bottom-up strategies of resistance and struggle continue to be juxtaposed alongside top-down dimensions of power including state control, financial, social and cultural capital, which together, lead to the construction of multiple urban experiences.

De Certeau's (1984) thesis is central in this analysis as he emphasizes the need to focus on the 'everyday practices' of ordinary people who experience the city from below (1984: xii). Distinguishing between the concepts *strategies* and *tactics*, De Certeau maintains that ordinary practitioners of the city do not have the ability to reject or alter structures of power associated with dominant institutions and the

powerful elite (strategies). Although the everyday lives of urban inhabitants must operate from within, and thus remain framed by these discourses, they are often able to manipulate, resist or transform these structures of power to meet their own ends (tactics). Hence, everyday life in the city is mainly produced through the strategic practices of the powerful, yet is simultaneously re-produced from below through the daily practices of ordinary consumers (De Certeau, 1984). Thus, the city as bounded place includes a concrete (controlled and governed) materiality, but this materiality is sociologically meaningless unless we focus on the subjective thoughts and the lived experiences that imbue them with particular symbolic meanings and imaginations.

As important cultural windows and everyday resources for connecting to a wider world, the media are considered to be 'representational registers' (Jansson, 2009: 309) through which our imaginations are formed and filtered, thus allowing 'built environments and infrastructures (to) become communicative, that is, socially and culturally meaningful' (ibid.:309). Concentrating particularly on the importance of mediated communication in contemporary experiences of modern urban space, Jansson (2009) praises Lefebvre for focusing on everyday experiences of the city from below, overcoming the usual division between material, symbolic, and imaginary spaces. Thus, as the media broaden our repertoire of cultural references and expand our knowledge of the world beyond the immediate, the familiar and the present, they increasingly shape how we interpret and negotiate our urban experiences (Georgiou, 2008; Featherstone, 1998; Jansson, 2009).

The city in its multiple guises, contradictory facets and paradoxes that allow moments of tyranny and repression to be juxtaposed alongside spaces of agency and resistance, cannot be manifested more clearly than in Cairo. As Al-Sayyad (2006:539) asks: 'which Cairo do we talk about and in whose name?' Indeed, findings from my ethnographic research demonstrate how multiple *Cairos* constructed and imagined by young Egyptians exist in close proximity, yet rarely maintain contact. A global Cairo, Islamic Cairo, Cairo as London of the Middle East, Cairo as a third world city and Cairo as oppression and lack of opportunity, are just some of the descriptions my young sample have used in reference to life in their capital city. Indeed, as everyday life in Cairo intersects with gendered and classed realities on the one hand, and mediated representations of a broader world on the other, Cairo has

become a cultural vessel permeated with different meanings and different interpretations. Sabry's (2010) ethnographic analysis of the Qassr Nile bridge in central Cairo illustrates how young Egyptians imbue their own mediated understandings and imaginative interpretations onto this urban space. Built by the British colonizers in the 1930s, this is described by Sabry (2010) as an attempt to 'modernize' Cairo's image and to promote a sophisticated physical infrastructure befitting Egypt's capital city. Nevertheless, with its location at the heart of modern Cairo, connecting the bustling Tahrir Square with the elite Zamalek district, the creative uses that Cairo's inhabitants today make of the bridge have somewhat defied the original intentions of the British colonizers.

Interestingly, Sabry examines how the bridge has become a refuge where young Egyptian couples of less privileged backgrounds meet for secret romantic encounters. Standing in close romantic proximity beyond the disapproving gazes of their family and neighbourhood community, backs are turned towards passing cars as couples find it acceptable to undertake acts of physical affection while positioned on this very public space. What Sabry (2010) finds most interesting is the way such bold shows of intimacy outside marriage, considered completely immoral and inappropriate in the Egyptian cultural context if performed anywhere else, are normalized and in no way rebuked when performed on this bridge. Furthermore, Sabry argues how these public acts of romance are both ontological and natural expressions of love, but also performances of modernness that draw heavily on institutionalized media images. It would be inaccurate to say that before the exposure of these young people to the media they did not engage in secret acts of love defying discourses of religious morality as imposed by families and wider community expectations. Nevertheless, it could be that as the prime modern transporters of cultural meaning and influence, televised representations frame these actions and accord them particular connotations associated with the 'normal' everyday practices of global youth cultures.

As televised representations of a distant world increasingly converge with cultural norms and religious rules in Cairo, 'they create a third space, which, perhaps only the lovers can articulate' (Sabry, 2010: 74). Sabry poses the important question of how an urban space such as Qassr Nile bridge should be perceived: 'could it be a different kind of public space, a private-public space, an in-between space or even a hyper-real

space?' (2010: 69). Baudrillard (1994) argues how the implosion of media images into our everyday lives means we are increasingly facing a hyperreality or a simulation of reality. Mediated representations and messages have come to precede our actual lives and lose their connection to reality. The extent to which the media create simulations that evade any sense of reality is a long debate I will not undertake here. Nevertheless, what is certain is that the media expose these young Egyptians to a broad range of cultural influences that allow them to broaden their 'interpretive horizons' (Jansson, 2009: 310), thus reformulating how they come to perceive and experience the urban world around them. In this context, as the urban becomes a space where the televised and the physical come into dialogue, new opportunities for the formation of cosmopolitan imagination come into being, transforming the city, to borrow Lefebvre's term, into a creative and dynamic *lived space* uniting the physical the imaginary and the symbolic.

The case of *Qassr Nile* bridge in Cairo links back to the discussion of modernity that was the main theme discussed in Chapter Two. I explored how 'being' modern is a subjective category that takes shape in multiple ways as it is located within the specific and evolving repertoires of class, place and history. State conceived top-down versions of modernity are constantly in conflict with more creative, bottom-up articulations of how citizens themselves perceive and understand the need (or not) to be modern. As argued in this chapter, it is the city, as the main locus of everyday life that represents this mediatory space of creativity between lived practice and official discourse. In relation to the bridge in Cairo, while state elites intended this architectural artifact to stand for Egypt's new physical resemblance to the 'modern' west, young Cairenes also use it to avow their modernness, albeit through forbidden acts of love that defy religious rules and societal norms. Do these stolen romantic encounters, drawing predominantly on transnational media images, position these young men and women on a cosmopolitan map? Perhaps not within a Kantian analytical framework. What is certain, however, is that these young Egyptians, operating from within very specific spatio-temporal contexts, are articulating a definite cosmopolitan moment from which they assert their presence and belonging to a world where national, regional and global realities intersect.

5 Methodology

5.1 Introduction: Triangulation and Cairo's Worlds within Worlds

I always knew what to expect when I walked into the gates of the American University in Cairo. I was never surprised to see large groups of women walking around with their Gucci handbags and Ray Ban sunglasses, men clad in Vans trainers and Levi jeans eating Big Macs from the McDonalds canteen, or 'hippies' sipping their lattes and strumming their guitars. All this seemed quite normal to me. I once stopped in surprise, however, upon seeing a couple openly kiss in the middle of the campus, only to be pushed away by my giggling friend and told: 'You're in the American University- everything happens here!' For me, however, the real surprise came the first time I entered the predominantly working class Madina Institute. In a space almost twenty times smaller than the American University, I was always greeted by a sea of veiled heads and enthusiastically gelled hair. Standing at the main gates, I remember being overwhelmed by swarms of students flocking into the institute in overcrowded minibuses or walking from the nearby metro station. With popular Egyptian music blasting out of a wooden shack just next to the entrance – which I later came to realise was the canteen – I also saw Vans trainers (written Vanz), Levi jeans and even Dolce and Gabbana T-shirts (written Gapana) all obvious counterfeits, made locally in Egypt. Walking around the highly neglected, almost derelict buildings of the campus, I could not help but wonder how this could be a productive and fruitful environment for anyone to learn in.

Later, watching a documentary on the state of poverty and education in Egypt, I reflected on the two very diverse milieux I witnessed earlier that week and realised my naivety. Seeing beyond the preconceptions and assumptions which had previously clouded my vision of Egyptian society, only then did I begin to comprehend the huge methodological challenges facing me. I was wrong to have been complacent by what I saw at the American University, or indeed, surprised by what I saw at the institute. How could I have been surprised by such differences that characterise groups whose socio-economic and cultural position is worlds apart in Egyptian society? As I began to subjectively transcend the 'cultural cocoon' from within which I had narrowly experienced Egyptian society previously, I gradually began to acknowledge that in a country where poverty and deprivation prevail,

students of the American university are a true minority. What this early encounter taught me was the need to approach the research scene with the ability to reflect upon all my taken for granted inhibitions, thoughts and preconceptions. It may be assumed that a familiarity with the research scene is naturally an advantage as one is acquainted with the main cultural codes, while access to participants becomes less of a hindrance. On the contrary, this prior familiarity with the context under study often brings in its wake problems of a unique kind.

Being accustomed to the research scene and positioned within particular socio-cultural networks that dictated for me a specific experience of Egyptian society, meant I often took it as a given that young Egyptians act in a particular way or naturally dress in a specific fashion, without ever questioning the reasons behind it. Wearing the 'cap' of the researcher, however, I realised the importance of adopting a critical approach whereby I could probe the deeper motives and intentions behind everyday acts. My main concern, therefore, was that I needed a combination of methods that would allow me to go beyond assumptions associated with first-level appearances and trends. My research was an urban study based in Cairo, and involved a daily ethnographic engagement with young Egyptian men and women between the ages of 18-25 years as they negotiated daily spaces of leisure and education in the city. Three educational institutions, in particular, provided an initial point of entry into the different classed worlds of my young Egyptian sample: The American University in Cairo (upper middle class), The Faculty of Education, Ain Shams University (lower middle class) and Madina Institute (working class). The aim of my ethnographic research was to undertake an in-depth micro analysis of the construction of three different classed versions of a cosmopolitan imagination that intersects with a highly fragmented, yet mediated everyday urban life. In order to approach and dissect the phenomenological articulations of cosmopolitan imagination, I needed to delve deep into the daily urban lives of young Egyptians, engaging with them as they went about their everyday cultural practices in order to unearth their thoughts, contradictions and everyday meaning-making processes.

In light of the above initial concerns, I adopted an ethnographic approach to my study spending nine months in Cairo conducting intensive research, which allowed me to participate and observe, talk and listen to young Egyptians from within an

everyday urban context. I predominantly required a combination of methods that would enable me to take a holistic approach, drawing connections between the media and the larger cultural framework in order to contextualise processes of media negotiation and interpretation as they take place in everyday life. Observation (participant and non-participant) and focus groups were the main qualitative methods I adopted, although in conjunction with these, I used a survey as a supporting method that allowed me to record media consumption trends. The statistics informed my ethnographic narrative, providing useful information about patterns and choices associated with daily television consumption amongst young Egyptians.

As Flick (2006: 37) argues, processes of triangulation can prove very fruitful as 'different methodological perspectives complement each other in the study of an issue, and this is conceived as the complementary compensation of the weaknesses and blind spots of each single method'. Belton (2000: 642) confirms this when she discusses how, in relation to television research, a multi-pronged approach is needed that will take on board the 'individual, everyday, embedded reality of the viewing experience'. A multi-method approach is necessary in that each method contributes something new and unique to the researcher's understanding of the concepts under study. Similarly, Bird (2003) makes an interesting contribution when she notes how all methodological approaches, no matter how academically sound they may claim to be, will always be characterized by constraints. The key to overcoming this is to be flexible; to tailor one's ethnographic encounter to a particular context, and be aware of the impact of such methodological choices. Thus, the researcher must be 'creative' and 'reflective' (Bird, 2003: 16), realising that it is not about selecting the methods which are hailed in text books as being the best ethnographically. It is about the ability of the researcher to display sensitivity to the particularities of the culture under study, and consequently, choose a combination of methods that both address the main research questions, and importantly, suit the cultural experiences of those being researched.

The survey represented the first step in the research process which was followed by focus groups. The participant/non-participant observation sessions took place simultaneously alongside the other methods. The first part of this chapter is dedicated to a discussion of the reasons why I have selected ethnography as my main

methodological framework, as well as reviewing my sample recruitment process. In the following section I then explore issues of researcher identity and reflexivity by investigating how my own position as a young middle class woman and academic may have influenced the research process. Finally, I proceed on to a more specific discussion of my three chosen methods: survey, focus group interviews and participant/non-participant observation.

5.2 Why Ethnography?

Ethnography allowed me to immerse myself into Egyptian culture, and to develop an in-depth and first-hand understanding of the experiences, sensations and events that young Egyptians commonly experience on a daily basis. As Gillespie (1995) argues, traditional models of research have unsuccessfully examined the lived experiences of media consumers, and have failed to capture the insights surrounding the complexities of television and its audiences who are enveloped in wider social, political and economic formations. As Ang (1996) also writes, there is a need for *radical contextualism* in research, where the media should not be studied in isolation, but as embedded within an everyday technical and consumer culture which is simultaneously domestic, national and global. Ethnography permits this 'methodological situationalism' by uncovering the thoroughly situated, context-bound ways in which 'people encounter, use, interpret, enjoy, think and talk about television' in everyday life' (Ang, 1996: 70). Thus ethnography, which seeks to understand audiences in their full sociological complexity, offers significant insights into the broader complex social and cultural worlds of media audiences.

As Machin (2002) has discussed, the way the social world is constructed and the way people relate to the media is a very arbitrary and highly subjective process that depends upon each group's *cultural tool kit*, or cultural framework for understanding the wider world. The importance of ethnographic research comes in disassembling social interaction and social behaviour from the flow of everyday life in order to come closer to understanding the unique *cultural tool kits* associated with different groups. This disassembling process uncovers behaviours and thoughts that occur at the immediate moment of research, although to give these actions a broader contextualisation, the ethnographer then needs to reintegrate these practices back into the broader flow and context of everyday life (Machin, 2002). Moreover, according

to Radway (1988), in order to truly understand the way the media are integrated and implicated within everyday life, research needs to cover a multitude of sites such as the world of daily work, education and multiple leisure worlds. In the light of Radway's arguments, it is clear that human behaviour cannot be understood through a narrow observation of any one single moment, but must be examined in different times and under different contexts. I embraced this idea within my own research, realising that young Egyptians can never be fully constrained by one place, but are located within, and influenced by multiple discourses of leisure, education and domestic/community spaces. For this reason, I adopted a multi-sited approach to my research (Bird, 2003), engaging with young Egyptians in their prime sites of everyday leisure and education.

As ethnography is a dynamic method, very much shaped in the process of interaction with the informants themselves, I was faced with a continual refinement of the research design based upon the continually incoming data. Willis (1980) notes that the very nature of ethnographic research involves being 'surprised at certain moments' (cf. Gillespie, 1995: 61). Indeed, on numerous occasions I encountered unexpected events and attitudes which forced me to alter my research plans. For instance, I faced a difficulty with working class men at first in relation to participant observation, as they informed me it would be highly unsuitable for a woman like myself to socialise with them alone. Thus, in the first few months, I was forced to substitute this with increased sessions of non-participant observation. However, after much persuasion and as my relationship with them grew stronger, they eventually suggested that I could arrange for a male companion to accompany me on the participant observation sessions, which would be far more 'respectable' than me simply meeting them alone. As they constantly made clear to me, a woman should never socialise with a group of unfamiliar men without a chaperone. Furthermore, as the male chaperone I brought along was my relative, I was faced with the problem of power imbalance. The participants quickly came to realise that he was university educated and working in a multinational company. Although I did instruct him to keep as low a profile as possible during the discussions, they intriguingly asked him several questions about himself and thus there was no escaping the fact that feelings of inadequacy and incompetence may have arisen as a result of his presence. Phrases such as, 'well, we probably don't know as much as your friend here,' or 'we may not

be as highly educated as your relative but we do know what is going on in the world,' were sometimes voiced. Instances such as these were unfortunate problems that I could not plan for or avoid. Nevertheless, I was aware from the start, that with a laborious methodological process such as ethnography that requires much human contact and unique personal encounters, I would frequently be faced with such issues that would need to be swiftly dealt with and resolved as they arose.

I recorded my data as field notes, complemented by a fieldwork diary, and I used a recording device that enabled me to tape what my participants were saying, while giving me the opportunity to concentrate on the discussion taking place. I always informed the groups I would be recording the sessions, and thus gained their consent. My field notes consisted of a notebook that I kept with me during the non-participant observation sessions and focus group discussions. I made notes of events and practices I was seeing, hearing and taking part in as they were happening. I attempted to relay as much intense detail as I could, including accurate quotations, as I needed to capture the most precise snapshot of the way young Egyptians were acting, performing, dressing and talking. Regarding the participant observation sessions, in order to avoid making my presence as a researcher too obvious and to fully blend in with the group, (while always being cautious of not 'going native') I relied upon my memory to complete my notes. I usually kept the notebook in my bag and at the first opportunity that I was alone, I would record the latest encounters. I also kept a daily fieldwork diary that was a very important tool for personal reflection, as I recorded my feelings and worries, the attitudes of my participants, problems I encountered in gaining access to particular areas, and how I dealt with these issues. It is important to note that all the focus group and observation sessions were conducted in Arabic, which I then translated myself into English as I was transcribing them.

5.2.1 Participant Recruitment

My sample consisted of young Egyptians between the ages of 18-25, divided equally between women and men and students from the three different educational institutions. This section will predominantly explore the more technical side involved in my participant recruitment process, although section 5.4 onwards reflects upon the numerical details of sample size at each stage of the research. My research largely

adopted a snowballing technique where I relied on my own personal networks to instigate and maintain research momentum. The reasons for this were two-fold, the first of which related to the broader aims and objectives of my research. I was undergoing a qualitative, ethnographic project where there was no intention of unearthing results that would be statistically representative of my wider target population. As Davidson and Layder (2001:173) write: 'qualitative research is concerned with smaller number of cases but with more intensive analyses' and thus the logic behind selecting informants for this kind of qualitative endeavour is 'to concentrate on an intensive analysis of a limited number of cases which represent, or are in some way tailored to, the central objectives of the research'. In this context, snowballing represented a quick, cheap and convenient form of *strategic sampling* (Davies, 2007) through which I gathered a limited number of people who were primarily important in allowing me to explore my research questions. As a result of my sampling method, therefore, my sample remained both non-random and unrepresentative.

The second reason I relied on snowballing related to the unique nature of the research setting. Egypt is a country that is socially and politically closed, and where there is usually little opportunity for people to speak openly, or honestly express their views. In this context, and as I learned from the pilot study, randomly approaching people I did not know, and asking them to take part in a study they knew nothing about, where they would be expected to open up about their everyday lives, would not have yielded many positive responses. Indeed, I was often asked by wary or suspicious participants if I was a government agent or foreign journalist trying to expose them to the world. Conducting my research in a culture saturated with such levels of fear and paranoia, therefore, meant I was forced to approach informants through a network of established social contacts. This meant potential participants could easily enquire about my research, and thus be assured of my identity and purposes for talking to them (Denscombe, 2003). Furthermore, I was granted entry into the three institutions on the basis that I would be cooperating with a limited number of named lecturers/professors, and so it was only through them, as initial contacts, that I was able to further access participants.

Through snowballing I began with a small number of participants at each of the three

educational institutions, which gradually expanded through successive waves, where I encouraged students to recruit their peers. This continued until the desired number of participants for each stage of the research was reached in relation to size and an equal distribution of men, women and students from the three different institutions. I maintained the momentum of these waves through a dual-incentive system (an approach used mainly by respondent-driven sampling techniques. See Heckathorn, 1997). Lecturers at the American University and Faculty of Education agreed to award separate educational incentives including coursework points and extra marks in exams for students who took part in the questionnaire themselves and recruited a friend. Obviously, as it was only a limited number of professors and lecturers that agreed to implement this system of incentives, I had to ask participants to only recruit their friends that attended these specific classes. As the later phases of the research (focus groups and participant observation) were conducted in locations away from the educational institutions, educational incentives could not be applied here. The only exception was with the lower middle class, as I conducted almost all the focus groups within the university campus and thus lecturers agreed to offer another coursework/exam point for those who took part in the focus group sessions. Nevertheless, with the upper middle class, I had to rely on the fact that beyond the survey, people who took part in the research did so out of a general willingness and personal interest to do so.

Matters were quite different in the institute where lecturers were not willing to support this system of incentives. I overcame this by replacing it with financial incentives. I offered them a financial reward for their time (survey) and for travel expenses (to take part in the focus group sessions), and in the instances where the focus groups and observation sessions were conducted in a café, I paid for their food and drink. Conscious of always approaching the research scene with ethical considerations towards all my participants, I made an effort not to implement these incentives in any way that could harm, insult or disadvantage them. For instance, I was assured that this culture of receiving 'extra marks' in exams and coursework was normal in Egyptian institutions. Students could often guarantee extra points to boost their final mark by undergoing specific research tasks for their lecturers. Thus, receiving an incentive for completing my questionnaire did not benefit some students at the expense of others, but provided one of many established means of gaining

extra class marks. Furthermore, when I rewarded the working class participants financially, I was conscious not to personally distribute the money to each participant myself, and especially whilst in public. I felt this could harm their feelings and sense of dignity. This was especially so for men where the idea of a woman openly displaying financial control is highly disregarded in the patriarchal culture of working class Egyptians. I handed the money over to the person I had the closest relationship to in the group and made it their responsibility to distribute it at a time they considered most suitable.

5.3 Identity and Reflexivity: Between Insider and Outsider Status

The extent to which my own personal identity was central to the research process became clear to me almost as soon as I started. The multiple identities within me, conjured up important issues relating to power and positionality. The fact I am of Egyptian origin and so visit Egypt several times a year and have a large circle of friends and family there, meant I was able to depend on this social circle to introduce me to, and bring to my attention the required number of participants I needed for the research. Thus, from a practical point of view, access to participants posed no notable problem and it became much easier to enter the world of Egyptian youth culture and establish a positive relationship with them. Before conducting the study, I was initially worried that my position as an educated upper-middle class woman might intimidate, and thus deter the working class and lower middle class groups from opening up to the research questions. Indeed, the group that did prove to be most challenging during the initial stages of the research was the working class men. They found it difficult at first to acknowledge the power imbalance that existed between myself as an academic, thus naturally in a position of authority, and between themselves as informants. The fact I was a woman, made it all the more awkward for them to uncover their thoughts and feelings to me at first. However, as the research progressed, and they began to realise that I was not there to judge them, and that in fact, I was very much aware of, and sympathetic to their hardship, they began to relax and to speak freely with less inhibition.

According to Parameswaran (2001: 93), rather than experiencing neatly categorized states of insiders and outsiders, the researcher will be involved in constant negotiations between insider/outsider and self/other positions 'depending on the

dialogical and interactive process of identity construction in the field'. Indeed, I was never confined to one single subject positioning but moments of interaction with different participants, particularly in relation to my class status and gender identity, meant I was constantly alternating between a position as an insider and outsider. I developed very unique relationships with the different class participants, which shaped the path and direction each research encounter took. With the upper middle class, my education in a 'foreign' university and upbringing in the west positioned me as an 'equal' in relation to class identity, and thus meant I was instantly accepted into their social groups, quickly becoming an *insider*. This in itself presented a challenge as they often considered me to be a friend more than a researcher, and in many instances, I found myself having to steer conversations away from personal stories and questions about my life, and more towards the set research objectives. It was a hard balance to maintain a friendly and open manner alongside the more formal conduct of a professional researcher who had a list of prompts and questions they needed to get through in a limited time frame. I was conscious to avoid inducing the sense that I was too conceited or overly proud of my academic status (despite our very similar ages) not to engage with them in friendly dialogue.

As Seiter, Borchers, Kreutzner, *et al.* (1989) found in their research on women and soap opera viewing, the interviewers' identification as academics meant that a social hierarchy was instantly imposed between them and their participants. Nevertheless, despite their status as academics which placed them in the category of 'other,' the researchers' identity as women allowed them to develop relationships of closeness with their female informants. They were able to draw on common 'female issues' such as fashion, housework and heterosexual relationships. Thus, gender provided an important position of 'sameness' in relation to the informants (Seiter, Borchers, Kreutzner, *et al.* 1989). I adopted this idea of 'sameness' in my own research in order to try and develop a relationship of trust, and to establish a rapport between myself and my participants. For the working and lower middle classes, our joint identities as Muslims established a link of similarity from the outset. Being veiled (a phenomenon associated more with the lower classes in Egypt) and not conforming to what they perceived to be the typical image of an academic in Egypt (usually middle-aged and authoritative) made them feel at ease, and thus my position as an upper middle class academic was temporarily relegated to the background. Nevertheless, as I noted

previously, this acceptance took more time with the working class men. As the research came to an end, some of the informants revealed that when they were first informed of the research, and that a British educated 'Doctor' – as they referred to me – would be conducting the sessions, they were rather wary. They presumed I would be dressed inappropriately as a 'foreigner', and attempt to act as westernized as possible, not knowing anything about the experiences of the lower classes, thus treating them as laboratory mice. As 21-year-old Amany told me:

(Laughing) I thought you would walk in wearing a short sleeved top and jeans, and have your hair dyed blonde, and of course pretend to know nothing of what's happening in Egypt. I was quite surprised when you walked in and you were veiled, had good knowledge of Islam, and even spoke Arabic properly – even though you have lived in a western country for a big part of your life. I really respected that and respected that you are interested in doing your studies on Egyptian culture and Egyptian people – it would have been much easier for you to just do it in London. I almost instantly felt like you were one of us.

Thus some of my informants like Amany were 'proud' that I lived in the west, yet was able to maintain my religious identity. From their perspective I had achieved the success of going to the UK, while overcoming what they regarded as the corrupting influences of western culture. This instant identification with me as a fellow Muslim was a factor of importance for the two lower classes that made them feel at ease opening up to me. For the upper middle class, I was able to easily slot into their group gatherings, which usually took part in western inspired cafes, and to effortlessly engage in their conversations, usually conducted in a dynamic mix of Arabic and English. Similar to the two other groups, my Islamic head cover was very often a point of intrigue for the upper middle class. They seemed particularly interested in, and regularly commented on how I was able to combine my *higab* (headscarf) with a very modern appearance and the latest western fashion trends.

As the above demonstrates, the headscarf became an important religious symbol that allowed me to navigate and form different relationships with the three groups. I will discuss this in more detail in the next section.

5.3.1 The Islamic Headscarf as a Mediator

As Coffey (1999:59) argues, ‘fieldwork is necessarily an embodied activity’ as the bodies of the researcher and researched become central to the accomplishment of fieldwork. Ethnographers, according to the author, are constantly engaged in ‘body work’ (ibid.:62) as they actively produce a physical body image that is suitable to the particularities of the research setting. Thus, in responding to the norms and rules of this setting, ethnographers are often forced to engage in bodily performance where physical appearance and body image are necessarily crafted for successful completion of the fieldwork. As Coffey (1999:68) further notes, ‘what our body looks like, how it is perceived and used can impact upon access, field roles and field relationships’. Indeed, my own bodily image and appearance as a researcher, especially in relation to the Islamic headscarf, became central to the fieldwork process and the relationships I formulated with my different groups.

Modesty and covering of the body is an obligation for Muslim women, where only their hands and face can be revealed. Although attire is required to be loose-fitting and non-transparent, there is no particular requirement within Islamic texts that dictates exactly what women should wear or how they should cover their bodies. For this reason there are a plethora of styles and modes of dress – across class and culture – that allow Muslim women to practice their religious commitment. For instance, walking down a typical street in Cairo, one can see women wearing the *isdal*: a large headscarf that extends down to cover the arms and chest area; the *niqab*: a full face veil and large black cloak that covers the entire body; and most commonly, the *higab*: a small headscarf that covers the hair and neck, usually fused with modern forms of dress. I conform to the third style of covering, where my headscarf is combined with typical western fashion trends such as jeans, tunics, trainers and cardigans. Nevertheless, I was aware from the beginning that my chosen method of wearing the *higab* was only one out of many different versions that are common in Cairo. Thus, for my three groups, both men and women, the *higab* conjured multiple meanings and thus shaped my relationship with them and their perception of me in different ways.

I had contact with several hundred participants who had their own unique philosophies and understandings regarding why and how the *higab* should be worn,

that often conflicted with my own. Interestingly, Mulderig (2011) found similar results with her research amongst Moroccan women. As a western convert to Islam, Mulderig felt that amongst her Moroccan female informants, she was elevated to the status of an 'ideal' Muslim woman. Thus, her embodied appearance in the field as a 'new' Muslim, and particularly the way she wore her headscarf, was – for her informants – the biggest indicator of this foreign woman's piousness and seriousness in joining the Islamic Umma. For this reason, her Moroccan participants often grabbed at her face and head, wrapping and rewrapping her higab to demonstrate how she 'should' wear it properly. Thus, Mulderig notes how she often felt vulnerable as the women were almost trying to prove that they were good Muslims themselves by trying to constantly 'make' her look a 'better' Muslim.

While conducting my fieldwork, I had a similar experience as Mulderig regarding my Islamic attire and appearance. Wearing the higab was not a random or haphazard choice made whimsically, but the outcome of a conscious decision which became an element of reference and self-reference in each research encounter. For the two lower classes, my headscarf became an important symbol that confirmed my identity as a devout Muslim, which, for them, overshadowed my status as an upper middle class woman. For lower middle class men in particular, although it took time initially, the headscarf came to represent a symbol of trust that facilitated the gradual building of rapport. They often told me that the fact I was a 'respectable' veiled Muslim woman slowly encouraged them to confide in me and reveal aspects of their private selves without fear. My embodied religiosity seemed to reassure them that I could never betray them by spreading rumours in relation to what they told me in confidence. Furthermore, as a Muslim, yet a Muslim living in the west, they felt that more than anyone, I would understand the difficulties involved in trying to be a pious and practicing Muslim in the modern world. I would sympathise with and understand the difficulty of their situation and how the temptations they regularly face – particularly through the unregulated media they have access to – means they find it difficult to always adhere to the strict practices of their religion.

Regarding the female participants, it was not just the fact that I wore the veil, but the method in which I wore it that became central to my interaction with women from these the lower middle and working class. When I began my fieldwork in 2008, a new trend of wearing the higab by tying it loosely at the back of the neck instead of

wrapping it around the front of the neck became fashionable. I experimented with this style myself during the first few months of fieldwork, although it appeared to be very unpopular with members of the two lower classes. For them, this way of wearing the headscarf was an embodiment of how the upper classes in Egypt have ‘westernized’ Islamic symbols, transforming them into fashionable items, and thus emptying them of their religious value. During focus group and participant observation sessions, women from the lower middle and working class would take the opportunity to ‘teach’ me how the higab ‘should’ be worn in ways that were more conforming to the Islamic requirements of modesty. Indeed, they would often warn me that a stray hair is showing or that part of my shoulder is bare. Furthermore, on several occasions, they even bought me gifts in the shape of coloured headscarves and fancy pins and would show me how to wrap them around my hair and neck properly so as to be appropriately covered, while conforming to the latest colours and styles in the world of higab fashion.

I was often lectured on how my top was too short and that although it covered my *derriere*, ideally, it should be knee-length. Additionally, my skinny jeans were regularly a topic of conversation as I was told how baggy trousers should be worn, or preferably a long skirt. My embodied appearance and preferred method of wearing the headscarf was perceived by them to be an influence of the infiltration of western culture through the media, adopted and imitated mainly by the upper classes. Despite this, I was spared their wrath as they almost gave me an ‘excuse’ for the way I dressed; I lived in a non-Muslim country. Thus, from their point of view, the fact I was born and bred in the west, yet *chose* to wear the headscarf, meant I should be praised and congratulated. Nevertheless, almost considering me to be a ‘novice’ Muslim due to my distance from the Islamic world, they felt obliged to advice and guide me as to the correct practices of our religion. I felt this gave them almost a sense of superiority over me. Although academically and in terms of class status I was in an elevated position, when it came to religious knowledge – particularly in relation to proper modes of Islamic dress – they were the ones endowing me with their expertise and wisdom. As a result of the above, I attempted to tweak and adapt my appearance in a way that allowed me to still maintain my own identity and feel comfortable, yet while blending in with the group as much as possible in order to facilitate rapport. As not to portray the image of an elite woman whose religion is

being employed almost as a fashion statement – thus reaffirming social class differences – I tried to conform to more simpler and traditional methods of wearing the headscarf. I also avoided wearing excessive jewellery (especially gold) and branded clothes or handbags that could once again reaffirm class status.

In Egypt, the higher up the class system one goes, the less likely it is that women (and men) conform to traditional forms of Islamic dress. In this context, I was a minority in the upper middle class sessions, in the sense that women who did not wear the headscarf, far outnumbered those who did. Nevertheless, my identity as a veiled woman was still an important part of the fieldwork process and of researcher-participant interaction. In relation to upper middle class men, it appeared that the headscarf created the automatic assumption that I was religious and thus must always conform to the rules of Islamic practice. On several occasions, for instance, I sensed that they attempted to avoid or would reluctantly reveal more liberal aspects of their behaviour such as drinking alcohol or having open relationships outside wedlock. It was almost as if they believed that a veiled Muslim woman would surely not comprehend or approve of such behaviour. Nevertheless, as the research progressed over time and as they learned more about the details of my life in the UK and my wide circle of non-Muslim friends, they seemed much more willing to speak about particular aspects of their behaviour. Again, our similar class status was an advantage here as they realised that even if these types of behaviour did not necessarily conform to my own preferred lifestyle choices, I was both accustomed to and accepting of them as a result of my life in the UK.

With the upper middle class women, a rapport was established almost instantaneously as a result of our gender, which became an important thread of similarity, particularly in relation to fashion interests. Although wearing the headscarf meant I was a minority in these sessions, my embodied appearance was more a point of intrigue, rather than unease as it was with male members of this class. I regularly received compliments from upper middle class women regarding how I was able to give my hígab a 'modern' and fashionable twist. They liked how I combined the headscarf with garments conforming to Islamic requirements, yet purchased from what they perceived to be highly fashionable western outlets they enjoyed shopping in themselves – whilst abroad – such as *Gap*, *Zara* and *French Connection* (at the time of research they were all unavailable in Egypt, although the

latter two now have several branches across Cairo). According to these women, the higab is associated with negative connotations amongst the higher classes, as it is generally perceived to be *bee'a* (tacky, common). One woman, for instance, told me how she wanted to wear the headscarf after going through a religious phase. She was deterred from doing so by her parents, however, who told her that veiling is a practice associated primarily with the lower classes, and thus could ruin her chances of finding a 'suitable' suitor from a good, wealthy family. Thus, it seemed as if these women almost had a sense of respect for me as I was able to wear the higab (especially while living in a western country), yet keep it highly fashionable and funky, thus making it more of a desirable possibility for upper class females. Indeed, I often felt like I was a mannequin that displayed to them the latest designs hot from the London high street, which had not yet reached Cairo; they would regularly ask me about the details and product numbers of items of clothing I was wearing. As I discussed above, with the lower class women, my identity as a veiled woman overshadowed my class status, as they felt that *they* were the ones with the religious knowledge able to educate *me* on how the headscarf should be properly worn. With upper middle class women, quite the opposite was true. My fashion choices and embodied appearance in fact confirmed our similar class status, yet created a sense of intrigue and interest in a phenomenon (veiling) usually associated with the lower classes.

The above discussion illustrates how my identity as a veiled woman conjured up multiple meanings and thus shaped my relationship with the groups in different ways. As Chacko (2004:53) argues regarding ethnographic research, 'even for those studying their own community, assuming a researcher's position and gaze can throw into stark relief positions that were dormant for both scholar and subject until fieldwork began'. Indeed, when I first instigated the fieldwork, I was not fully conscious of how I wore the headscarf, although as the research progressed, my identity as a veiled woman, and more importantly, how I wore the higab, became central to the research process. Thus, Chacko (2004:55) writes how there is a need for 'self-reflexive contemplation' in the field. As particular differences become blurred while others achieve prominence, the researcher needs to build upon common ground and shared experiences, thus 'fostering mutually rewarding relationships' (ibid.:61). It appears that the headscarf, therefore, interpreted both as a

physical embodiment of religious piety, yet also a mediator between conservative Islamic practice and western fashion trends, became a visible socio-religious symbol that allowed me to foster links of commonality and thus to navigate across the three classes.

Following on from the above, subjects do not always approach the research scene with ready-made views and opinions, but these opinions are often formulated in instances of openness between researcher and participants. In this context, it is necessary for researchers to be sensitive to the dynamics of power between themselves and their participants, and thus to carve out shared spaces that will allow them to build relationships of trust and rapport. In this way, researchers can ensure that 'moments of openness' during fieldwork encounters are as fruitful and as worthwhile as possible. Importantly, my sensitivity to the power dynamics that existed between my own position as a researcher and between my participants, also strongly informed the analytical process of the write-up phase. Whereas during interactions with participants I ensured as much as possible that my identity as an upper-middle class woman and doctoral student in no way imposed any feelings of disempowerment upon them, I tried to maintain a power balance during the write-up process. Thinking constantly of my participants as the ones leading the research, rather than 'subjects' upon which the research is based, I always tried to ensure that I gave them a fair presence and a voice, particularly through the use of direct and extensive quotes that allowed them, to some extent, 'to speak for themselves'.

5.3.2 Researcher-Participant Interaction: Fears of 'Going Native'

Although being of the same ethnic and religious background as participants brings its advantages in terms of access, and an awareness of important cultural codes and conventions, it can also prove debilitating to the research process. Fears of 'going native' means a researcher may entirely submerge themselves in the culture under study to the extent that they identify with it completely, and thus are unable to maintain the essential objective eye of the researcher. Gillespie discusses how prior familiarity with a research site can often mean that habitual modes of perception, presuppositions and assumptions can build up into forms of 'common-sense' and 'taken-for-granted' categories and understandings that may cloud a researcher's analysis of data (1995: 67). In response to such concerns, Abu Lughod (1991: 137)

coins the term *halfies* in reference to people whose 'national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage'. By simultaneously being a part of both global and local repertoires, halfies are the most suitably situated, according to Abu Lughod, to comprehend the hybridity inherent at their intersection. As a person of Egyptian origin with relevant lived knowledge of the scene under study, but also, with familiarity of global discourses through my residence in the UK and training in a foreign university, I myself probably qualify as a 'halfie' and thus *native ethnographer* (Kraidy, 1999).

Kraidy advocates *native ethnography* (not to be confused with the concept 'going native' I discussed above) as an important methodological technique for understanding hybridity. As Kraidy suggests: 'rather than resorting to dubious claims of authenticity, the 'native' ethnographic project must then be an appropriation of voice by a subject whose speaking position is located on the borderline between two worldviews ' (Kraidy, 1999: 461). In my case, the fact I was very much acquainted with, and a part of both British and Egyptian cultural repertoires, meant I was able to position myself, in Kraidy's terms, as a native ethnographer and translator between two different world views. Indeed, being raised and brought up in a different cultural context to the participants meant I was able to maintain a critical distance and a position of external reflection, thus approaching my research with a much needed reflexive attitude. Furthermore, the fact I conducted my fieldwork in two phases, the first from December 2008-July 2009 and the second from October 2009-December 2009 was also a great advantage. I travelled back to the UK in the three month period in between, which proved to be a very important transition that, away from the research scene, allowed me to maintain detachment and to critically reflect on the everyday occurrences I had become a part of in Cairo.

Nevertheless, it is essential not to over-romanticise the ability of research to erase subjective influences altogether. Although a reflexive assessment by the researcher of their own influence over the research process and subsequent findings can help them take these limitations into account, it will not necessarily allow the researcher to escape them. Any research account will inevitably be partial because the observer or commentator is a social subject located within pre-existing networks and value systems (Salzman, 2002). For this reason, Mauthner and Doucet (2003) warn against

believing that we, as researchers, have the ability to capture the 'true' voices of our subjects or that what a person has said in an interview has given us direct access to their subjectivity and lived experiences. Thus, ethnographic research 'permits the telling of a particular story, or a discursive version of the interviewee's experience' (Cloke, Cooke and Cursons, 2000: 137). We must realise that in another time, geographical place or with a different subject, the same story will not necessarily be replicated, which is evidence of the unique nature of each ethnographic encounter. For this reason, Mauthner and Doucet believe it is useful to talk about 'degrees of reflexivity' (2003: 425) where some influences are easier to identify and deal with at the time of the research, while others often 'take time, distance and detachment from the research' (ibid.). Furthermore, Salzman (2002) believes that rather than researchers making themselves subjects of their accounts, ethnographic research can be improved through the solitary researcher being replaced with a collaborative research team where the perspectives and insights of each researcher can be challenged and tested by the other.

5.4 Research Conduct and Ethical Considerations

A pilot study conducted in January 2008, provided a valuable opportunity to test my chosen methods without the pressure of time which I would be constrained by during the actual implementation process. Generally, I spent this period in casual conversations with young Egyptians who would later become my target population. I was seeking to gain a general feel for the sorts of issues of importance to their everyday experiences that I would later need to focus on. By informally spending time with members of my target group, I was then able to approach the actual research with a clearer vision of some of the most important issues and matters that would need to be discussed. Significantly, the language in which the questionnaire was to be distributed became an issue central to the piloting process. It was recommended by lecturers in the American University that I distribute questionnaires to students there in English, which is the language they are most articulate in as a result of their long-term education in private language institutions. Indeed, when I talked to the students themselves during the pilot study, they told me, much to my surprise, that they would find it easier to understand a questionnaire if it was written in English. Thus, although the format of the questionnaire remained the same across

class, I decided, on the basis of this information, to distribute an Arabic version to the lower middle and working class and an English version to the upper middle class. The other main advantage of the pilot study related again to the survey. Using the feedback I received, I was able to modify, revise and re-word the questions to make them more understandable. I often found that questions were worded awkwardly, the structure confusing, or that the questionnaire was simply too long. I modified the questionnaire several times, according to this feedback, until I reached a format which both the participants and I found satisfying.

As the majority of my methods involved sustained contact with human beings, I needed to ensure that I was approaching my participants with a number of ethical considerations in mind. Primarily, I did my utmost to 'avoid harming (participants) in the process by respecting and taking into account their needs and interests' (Flick, 2006:45). Specifically, Christians (2005) notes how, since the 1980s, a code of ethics has been laid down by major scholarly associations, with a number of aims. I attempted to implement the main aspects of this code within my own research practice. Firstly, *informed consent*: I initially approached participants through their universities. I asked lecturers and seminar leaders to allow me to introduce the study myself to students, where I informed them of my name, institutional affiliation and position as a PhD student conducting research on media consumption amongst young Egyptians. I felt that by introducing the research myself independent of the lecturers, I was in no way coercing students into taking part or making them feel as if it was obligatory to their performance in their course. I made it clear that they would have the full right to withdraw from taking part in any stage of the research at any time. Secondly, *privacy and confidentiality*: I ensured participants that their responses would be guaranteed full anonymity. I did inform them, however, that later stages of the research would involve direct contact with me through focus group and observation sessions, where their identity would obviously be central to the process. Nevertheless, when it comes to publishing the results in my thesis or academic papers, I guaranteed them full confidentiality as I would use pseudonyms and no specific identifying details such as addresses, minute details of appearance, or dates would be used where identities could be disclosed. Finally, *accuracy*: I made sure to report my findings as accurately as possible as directly observed or narrated to me by the participants, while avoiding using the data that could in any way potentially harm

them, physically or psychologically.

In terms of non-participant observation, I was formally granted entry into the three institutions, and as they were public spaces where an 'expectation of privacy' (Wimmer and Dominick, 2006:75) could never really be guaranteed, I felt that I was in no way infringing upon the rights of the students by observing their general behaviour. Furthermore, as Guillemin and Gillam (2004) note, it is not just about dealing with independent instances during the research whenever ethical concerns may arise, but it is about adopting a specific attitude towards the whole research process from the start that constantly centres around an ethical reflexivity and sensitivity towards research participants. As Morley (2007) comments on both the pragmatic and obvious dimensions to ethical responsibilities within ethnographic research, the central issue is how the researcher chooses to behave towards participants at the mundane human level. 'You could have the best theoretical methodology in the world, but if you walk into someone's house and behave like a prat, you're going to get nowhere' (Morley, 2007:72).

5.4.1 Survey

The administration of the television consumption survey represented the first step in the practical stages of my research. One important finding that emerged following the pilot study was that the observation and focus group methods did not yield a substantial amount of demographic information in relation to the specificities of everyday television use. Rich data was indeed acquired through the qualitative methods regarding subjective attitudes towards the content of national/global television and the effects of television on society, while in-depth discussions were enthusiastically undertaken regarding certain programmes that were broadly popular at the time of the research. Nevertheless, as an investigation of television's influence on the construction of cosmopolitan imagination was one of the objectives of this project, it was essential to understand what young Egyptians of the three different class backgrounds were choosing to watch exactly. As Harmon (2008) confirms, getting precise figures on media audiences in the Arab world is difficult, and thus, in this context, I had no prior indication of the television consumption preferences of young Egyptians. The survey, therefore, provided a quick and convenient method of documenting more widespread and general patterns of television consumption

amongst young Egyptians from the three classes, which transcended the limited sample on which my qualitative methods were based. According to Berger (2000) a survey allows the researcher to collect a vast amount of *current* information on a given topic, in relatively little time. This was very important in my case as I was a sole researcher working alone and restrained by a limited time frame, and thus I required a relatively cheap and convenient method that would allow me to collect demographic information in relation to everyday television use. Indeed, the survey proved very successful in allowing me to collect descriptive statistics and in recording frequencies in relation to the everyday consumption patterns of young Egyptians. These statistics were then integrated within the empirical narrative and helped to support my ethnographic data of the daily relevance and consequences of television in the daily lives of the three classes.

Schensul and LeCompte (1999) call for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data in ethnography, as both are vital parts of the ethnographic research encounter. As they explain, ethnographic research involves understanding a local population in a broader socioeconomic and political context, and some aspects of this macroeconomic context often need to be conveyed quantitatively. In this light, numerical data alone is of little value within the framework of an ethnographic study unless it is supported by qualitative findings that locate it within the wider socio-cultural framework of everyday life. Indeed, I do not conceive of my qualitative and quantitative methods as two separate aspects to my research, but I believe that it is at their intersection, and as both approaches operate together as two prongs to one single ethnographic fork, that they truly add a combined value to my ethnographic aims. Pearce (2002) confirms this point when she writes how methods which vary in form and focus act as checks on one another, adding important advantages and compensatory strengths to the mix. As Pearce argues, survey data provides 'a sense of valuable information about informants. This can help in preparing for interviews by suggesting important topics to discuss, making it easier to physically locate informants, and providing a pre-established rapport with the informants' (Pearce, 2002: 112). One method, therefore, informs the other, strengthening the whole research process yielding richer, more accurate data. Indeed, as a first stage in the research, the survey represented an essential tool of preparation that allowed me to collect important biographical information about my participants as well as particular

media-related attitudes prior to focus groups and observation sessions. Thus, it performed an important preparatory function where I was able to come to subsequent stages of the research with suggested topics for conversation, probes and a wealth of background and contextual issues which I felt needed to be explored further.

The questionnaire included 18 questions, 14 of which were closed and gathered quantitative elements of media consumption such as: channels consumed, language(s) of consumption, availability of satellite channels in the home, and amount of time spent watching television daily. The remaining four questions were open, and invited participants to express brief opinions about the state of public service television in Egypt, the development of new commercial Egyptian channels and the rapid infiltration of western channels via satellite. It took approximately 15-20 minutes for the questionnaire to be filled out. My initial target was to distribute the questionnaire amongst 450 young Egyptians; 150 in each of the three institutions, split into an equal number of 75 men and 75 women. Three hundred and ninety out of my target 450 questionnaires were eventually completed, although 20 of them had to be discarded as they were not filled in correctly or accurately. This left me with a high response rate of 370 questionnaires. More specifically, 110, 122 and 138 questionnaires were completed in the working class, lower middle and upper middle class institutions respectively. Nevertheless, to allow for an accurate comparison of television's relevance and importance across class, it was essential that I had an equal number of questionnaires in the three classes.

Based on the actual number of usable questionnaires I had, I based my analysis on 300 questionnaires: 100 in each of the three different institutions, split equally between 50 men and 50 women. I do not in any way feel that this discrepancy between desired number of questionnaires and actual number received disadvantaged my research. I never intended the questionnaire, or indeed my research in general, to be representative of Cairo, or speak on the behalf of all young Egyptians. On this basis, I felt that 300 questionnaires still fulfilled my aim of providing a general picture of the main media consumption practices of a particular group of young Egyptians at a particular time. I was able to secure a high response rate (370 out of 450) primarily through my method of distribution as in the majority of instances, and where possible, I made sure I remained present while participants completed the

questionnaire. This gave them an opportunity to ask about and clarify any ambiguous issues or unclear questions. The questionnaire was distributed mainly in two ways:

- I relied on a snowball sampling technique in order to distribute my questionnaires. Participants who took part were encouraged to recruit other friends and so on as the recruiting process slowly but surely gained momentum. Nevertheless, a single chain of snowballing in each institution did not always yield the required number of participants, or they would often take too much time in recruiting their friends. As I was greatly restricted by time, I often had to begin a new chain.
- Last minute drop-outs or simply not yielding enough respondents through the snowballing chain, meant I had to often search myself for participants who would be willing to take part and fill in the survey. I would approach students during their lunch hour or in the break between lectures and ask them to fill in the survey (obviously, done in this way, I could not offer any educational incentives).

I chose to administer the questionnaire personally by hand, and although an electronic distribution would have been much easier and may have facilitated targeting a larger sample (although limited only to the upper and lower middle classes for obvious economic reasons of Internet access), it could have influenced the eventual response rate. I was conscious that people could just choose to ignore my email or might genuinely forget about it, which would have forced me to spend time chasing people up. Thus, constrained by a limited time period, I felt it was much more efficient to undertake a traditional 'pen and paper' questionnaire where I personally administered and collected them myself. As part of maintaining an ethical approach to my research, I secured anonymity for my respondents where no identifying details were requested in the questionnaire. Nevertheless, I also needed to request the names and contact details of those willing to take part in further stages of the research process. Thus, following the survey, I briefed participants on what later stages of the research involved, and for those willing to take part, I asked that they leave their contact details with the lecturers and seminar leaders with whom I cooperated. In this way, I was able to assure them that no link could be made

between their identifying details and their survey responses.

Data from the questionnaires was input into, analysed and converted into percentages through the SPSS software. This resulted in endless pages of statistics that I then converted into frequency tables – constructed according to class – which allowed for a more manageable, visual understanding of the frequencies.

5.4.2 Focus Groups

I conducted 12 focus groups altogether, each one composed of six to eight participants. The groups were devised to ensure that there was some degree of familiarity between the informants; for example, they took classes together but were not necessarily close friends. I was worried that having complete strangers might make them feel uncomfortable and thus shy away from talking freely and openly. At the same time, by avoiding very close acquaintances, I was attempting to dissolve the temptation to give socially desirable answers. I felt that in a situation where the informants were not bound by intimate relationships and friendships, it might be easier to talk openly with less inhibition as they might not want to reveal particular sensitive details and opinions in front of people they know too well. This need for *segmentation* (Morgan, 1997), or controlling of group composition, is essential in facilitating more free-flowing conversations and in setting up a suitable environment that allows participants to feel comfortable enough to generate meaningful discussions.

As I discussed in section 5.4.1, through the survey, I encouraged participants to take part in the next stage of the research: focus groups. Once I had briefed them on what the focus group was to involve, and encouraged them to bring a friend along, I made it clear that I would prefer them to bring class colleagues who they knew were opinionated and articulate, and would thus contribute to the discussion, rather than simply selecting close friends. Indeed, whenever a group of survey respondents approached me about taking part in the focus group, I would become very observant and sensitive to the group dynamics. If I felt they were a group of very close friends, I would try splitting them up into different sessions. As Lunt and Livingstone (1996) suggest, in order for focus groups to simulate a genuine public discussion where strong disagreements and contradictions are bound to happen, then representatives of

multiple positions within the group are much called for. Sometimes, however, I would not get enough participants through the survey alone who would be willing to take part in further stages of the research, or often those who had previously displayed willingness to participate, later dropped out. In this case I reverted back to my own personal social networks to fill in the gaps by introducing me to other potential participants.

My research involved three class categories- the working class, lower middle class and upper middle class- and for each class I conducted:

- Two x six-eight women
- Two x six-eight men

Initially, my desire was to conduct each group session with eight participants, which with 12 focus groups, would total 96 participants. However, I also set myself a minimum of 6 people to each session that I was not to go under to ensure that a meaningful and dynamic discussion could ensue. Eventually, the sessions were conducted with a total of 87 participants, which broke down to six groups of eight participants, three groups of seven and three groups of six. I believe this small discrepancy between desired number of participants (96) and those actually used (87) did not in any way influence the validity of my results, as I was still able to ensure that each group was composed of no less than six people which maintained a vibrant and dynamic, yet controllable discussion. Each session lasted around one hour, and I arranged two different focus group sessions with each subset of my target population in order to cross-examine validity over the nine month period. This was important to ensure that the data produced by the focus groups was an accurate reflection of the general patterns of thought and behaviour amongst this group of young Egyptians, not just simply an expression of that unique set of participants or 'the idiosyncrasies of a particular group' (Hughes and DuMont, 1993: 778).

In terms of group composition, although it may be normal for men and women to socialise in the same spaces, to have them sat together in a single discussion group and to expect them to talk openly and honestly about sensitive topics, may be quite

unusual in the Egyptian cultural context. Thus, for my research to yield the most reliable results, I believe it was necessary to follow the usual gendered social patterns by having men and women in separate groups. Pettigrew (1981) experienced a similar obstacle while studying Sikhs in the Punjab. She found that in a context where the idea of 'reputation' was central, and thus movement of women outside the home greatly restricted and always supervised, she was forced to adhere to the traditional pattern of gender separation. Throughout her research, therefore, Pettigrew conformed to this code of gender segregation herself, whilst importantly, also being careful to apply it to her research subjects. This point is confirmed by Hughes and DuMont (1993) who suggest that too much heterogeneity within a focus group can often lead to stark social status differences as lower status participants can often defer their perspectives in the face of those they perceive as higher status. In this context, it is often better to compose groups with participants who have similar characteristics, and find it easier to identify with each other's experiences. Hence, comparisons need to be made across homogenous groups rather than within heterogeneous groups (Hughes & DuMont, 1993). Indeed, in relation to my own research and especially regarding the two lower class groups where patriarchal attitudes were strongly observed, I felt that women could feel constrained and may be too intimidated to speak openly in the presence of men.

Although focus groups are usually conducted within an artificial setting and gathering that may not have taken place independent of the research, one of their most important advantages is that the dynamics between individuals in the group very much resembles the mechanism of a spontaneous conversation that occurs in an everyday context (Bloor, Frankland and Thomas, 2001). Thus the conversational style of the group sessions allowed for intense and dynamic discussions to take place. Very frequently, serendipitous points occurred, which stimulated others to pursue lines of thinking that may not have been raised in a situation involving one person (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006: 130). The strength of focus groups, therefore, comes in their ability to emphasize the social nature of communication and to forge strong links between identity, discourse and society. Meanings and identities are created not in isolation, but individuals are naturally social beings and thus are continually repositioning themselves in relation to the circulation of discourse (Lunt and Livingstone, 1996).

The focus group discussions were an important stage in my research as they allowed me to give the immediate cultural scenes I encountered during the non participant observation sessions more of a 'holistic' perspective (Fetterman, 1998: 19). Through the open-ended group discussions, I was able to question participants about the local historical, religious, political and economic situation of their country, and how they perceived its impact upon their cultural desires and ambitions. I also asked them about the effects of global trends and dynamics which are no doubt having important influences on their local cultural experiences. Attitudes towards, and preferences for, local terrestrial, regional and global television, were also popular points of conversation. Focus groups, therefore, represented an important opportunity to shed more of a focused light on the primary research questions, and probe deeper into particular issues that arose from the survey or came to my attention during the observation sessions (see appendix, fig.2 for the list of prompts).

In relation to the analysis of focus group data, I transcribed the recorded conversations and input them electronically after each session. I then printed all the transcripts and tried to develop a very visual, manual system of coding from within which I could extract a coherent ethnographic narrative. I began my research knowing that I was exploring cosmopolitanism, or more specifically, the way young Egyptians draw on mediated representations to position themselves as part of a wider world that exists beyond immediate borders. Nevertheless, I had no pre-formulated conception of how such cosmopolitan 'modes of belonging' would actually be expressed across class – this was something I would discover and extract from the research process. Thus, initially, my coding process began with an 'open' stage (Davidson and Layder, 2001) where I transcribed and analysed everything I heard as I could not judge in advance what was and what was not relevant. I read and re-read over the transcripts (a process which took several months) using written symbols, coloured pens and post-it notes to try and develop some form of categorisation and thematic analysis.

Using the unused walls of a spare room (rooms in Egypt are significantly larger than the UK), I attempted to work from within categories of class and gender to extract common themes and threads. For example, I would hang up the transcripts for the three female groups and try to make links, visually acknowledging how often a

particular theme occurred. I did the same for the male groups, then worked across categories of class. I often found it helpful to work with opposites: to position different classes or genders alongside each other and visually examine them. Differences between particular groups often helped me to more easily acknowledge instances of commonality between others. I was able to formulate a provisional set of categories at first, such as 'the importance of religion,' which was continually refined until core categories were established such as 'religion as moral conduct' or 'religion as public conformity'. Thus, as the data was transposed from pages of written text into broken-down segments of specific identifiable themes, it became a lot easier to merge this rich qualitative dialogue within the linear frame of an ethnographic narrative.

5.4.3 Observation

According to Murphy and Kraidy (2003:305), much recent research can be criticized for its 'quasi ethnographic' approach, as they have relied on in-depth interviews and discussion groups at the expense of immersion and long-term observation in the field. In order to avoid the thinness of previous field experience, I chose to conduct both participant and non-participant observation, which gave me the opportunity to spend an extended period of time in the field in contact with the persons and contexts to be studied. I observed young Egyptians from the three different classes over a period of nine months, with several weekday educational, and weekend leisurely activities observed every week:

i) **Weekdays:** non-participant observation conducted in three different educational institutions: The American University in Cairo; Ain Shams University- Faculty of Education; and Madina Institute. Where possible, I conducted at least one session per week in each institution.

ii) **Weekend:** participant observation sessions undertaken in the chosen weekend leisure spaces of the three different group categories. The number of sessions I was able to conduct was unpredictable at the initial stages of my research as it was out of my control. It depended primarily on how these young men and women organized and directed their social lives, which I attempted not to intervene in as much as possible. I did try to ensure, however, that I undertook at least one session with each

class group every 10 days.

Observational methods gave me the opportunity to immerse myself in the lives of young Egyptians and to become a part of their everyday micro-practices and socio-cultural experiences. Through non-participant observation I became a witness to the everyday behaviours, public performances and embodied fashion choices undertaken by young Egyptians, and thus how they asserted specific cultural allegiances and modes of belonging on a daily basis. Cross-gender contact was also a factor of interest as I wanted to observe the extent to which the formation of social groups was based on gender interaction or segregation. Observational methods also allowed me to determine how such patterns of cultural behaviour differed according to class category. Importantly, non-participant observation provided me with a valuable opportunity of maintaining some verbal and personal distance from the participants, observing from afar and uncovering patterns of cultural behaviour over time, as it occurred in its daily context. Whereas the focus group and participant observation sessions may have been influenced by the visible presence of the researcher, non-participant observation allowed me to study and record behaviour as it took place in its natural and everyday setting, free of researcher influence.

As Belton (2000) notes in her research on young children and the effects of television, media-influence is largely a cognitive and non-rational process, where individuals are not always fully conscious or reflective of their feelings, motivations and assumptions. In this context, methodologies that require direct questioning and thus rely on verbal reports are not always effective as it depends on those aspects of a person's identity which are conscious and easily articulated. For these reasons, Morgan (1997) suggests that methodologies such as focus groups, which rely on verbal behaviour and self-reported data alone, are not always adequate for the study of particular social roles and practices, and thus the increased naturalism of observational methods becomes necessary in this respect (Morgan, 1997: 8). Once again, therefore, it is clear how the strengths of my different methodologies only emerge at their intersection, and as each one acts as a check on the other, counterbalancing its weaknesses. As Patton (1990) confirms, qualitative research is continuously emergent and flexible. It is a recursive process made up of several component parts, where each one informs the next. For example, participant

observation sessions that represented the normal, everyday social gatherings of young Egyptians, contrasted with the more artificially arranged environment of the focus groups. Nevertheless, I was only expected to 'tag along' during the participant observation sessions, maintaining a low profile as a researcher and observer. In this context, it was the artificial environment of the focus groups that allowed me to retain control and to direct the sessions, probing participants about pre-determined questions. In terms of analysis, qualitative data from the observation sessions was transcribed in the same way as the focus groups (please see section 5.4.2 above).

During the participant observation sessions I engaged with the young people during their leisure outings and attempted to immerse myself within their social groups. I aimed to uncover how they choose to spend their free time, which spaces of the city are selected for everyday leisure practices, and how such patterns differ according to class. Additionally, I became aware of the topics that these young men and women choose to discuss in their peer groups and the extent to which the media are central to their social dialogues. Focus group discussions were an important precursor to these participant observation sessions, as the open and dynamic discussions allowed me to become vigilant about particular attitudes and opinions of significance to the young informants. Through the participant observation sessions I then attempted to casually bring up these attitudes and opinions of concern.

Many of the classic studies of television (e.g. Livingstone, 1990; Lull, 1990; Ang, 1996; Silverstone & Hirsch, 1992) have been conducted in the private sphere of the home, where it was assumed that television was mainly a domestic, family-centred technology. However, as my research uncovers, although the immediate act of watching television takes place mainly in the home, media consumption is very much influenced by, and indeed influences, social processes that take place outside the domestic sphere. Georgiou (2001) for instance argues how there is a need to surpass the domination of the domestic as the singular point of reference and research in media studies, by looking at how media consumption is implicated in wider processes of identity and community construction. Similarly, Gillespie (1995) refers to television's embeddedness in the 'here and now' due to its ability to converge the private and the public. Although viewing television is mainly conducted in the private realm, TV talk is more widely integrated into our social and leisure spaces as

we very often interweave our talk about television into our everyday social and personal discussions. Indeed, Egypt is an extensive outdoors culture with the young, in particular, spending large amounts of time outside their homes in cafés, malls and other leisurely venues, which are open until the early hours of the morning. Such locations have become noticeably populated with television screens, and although they are usually relegated to background noise, particular programmes can often act as an important impetus for media related discussions. Thus, although the television viewing patterns of young Egyptians remain predominantly positioned in the private sphere of the home, the cultural effects of mediated representation far surpass the walled boundaries of the domestic space as they influence leisure practices, fashion choices and public performances. As Morley (2007: 216) confirms, there is now a 'de-domestication of the media and the radical distribution of domesticity itself'. An investigation of public practices through observational methods, therefore, is essential in informing and furthering our understanding of how both the public and the private spheres are continually shaped and informed by the media.

5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion to this chapter, triangulation has been particularly useful in addressing my main research objectives. It has allowed me to immerse myself in Egyptian culture and to develop a close understanding of the thoughts, attitudes and sensations that young Egyptians experience on a daily basis. As I established earlier, successful ethnographic research is not about selecting techniques hailed as the most methodologically sound in ethnographic text books. It is about the ability of the researcher to display a critical sensitivity towards the research context under study, and to be familiar with their subjects in order to select the methods most socially and culturally appropriate. I was advantaged enough to have a sound knowledge of Egyptian culture, which led me to the conclusion that triangulation – combining observation, focus groups and a survey – would be the most fruitful unison for the study of my complex areas of media consumption, identity, class and everyday life within the city and nation. As Morley (2007:69) rightly comments regarding the 'pragmatic' nature of methodological choices, 'research is always a question of what you can do, in the circumstances you face, with the resources available, which is most likely to get you something like the kind of data you want.' Indeed, my nine

month research period involved several instances of deliberation where I paused, reflected upon previous judgements and assessments I had made, sometimes modifying my research plan or implementation process. Some of these changes were minor such as taking a decision not to arrive at the working class sessions in my private car or not to take my iPhone out of my handbag so not to reaffirm unequal statuses in relation to class difference. Sometimes these modifications to my methodological plans were more major, such as being forced to halt participant observation with working class men at the initial stages of my research, supplanting them with non-participant observation sessions. Thus, a successful methodology involves making informed choices in relation to desired research objectives, yet also as a researcher operating from within a specific constraining environment.

Ethnography has given me the opportunity to undertake a grounded, local analysis of everyday life as it is sensed and experienced by young Egyptians. It is important to realise, however, that this analysis represents a snapshot – albeit a very detailed and accurate one, as far as I can say – of life at a particular time in a particular place, with particular people (Bryman, 2001). Additionally, as a solitary researcher undergoing this media ethnography alone, I spent a considerable amount of time in the field in close contact with participants, which meant that my own experiences and personal identity had a very important bearing on how the research developed, particularly in relation to the male groups. Obviously, being forced to deal with these unpredictable situations in the best possible way, and with the limited resources available to me at the time, meant my research was inevitably affected and often disadvantaged. Thus, I once again subscribe to Salzman's (2002) suggestion, which is that ethnographic research can be improved through the solitary researcher being replaced with a collaborative research team where the unique biographical details of each individual researcher can contribute its own advantages (and obviously disadvantages) to the research process as a whole. Nevertheless, I end this chapter by reconfirming the strengths of ethnographic approaches that lie in their ability to record the complex, multilayered processes of identity construction, and more particularly, in the case of my research, imagining the self and the world in the context of mediation and urban life.

6 Ethnographic Findings from Cairo: A Third-Order Cosmopolitanism and Imagination in the City, Nation and World

6.1 Introduction to Empirical Discussion: Cosmopolitanism through a Triadic Matrix: National Attitudes, Consumption Practices and Urban Mobilities

I thought that black and white television was extinct, or that was until I once stopped by one of the many wooden shacks populating Cairo's streets, selling cigarettes, sweets and soft drinks. 'One can of Pepsi please' I announced to four young men who were huddled inside the shack, some on the floor and others standing as, oblivious to my presence, they had their eyes glued to the small, ancient portable black and white television set with its sprouting antenna. They were watching the much publicized football match between famous arch rivals Ahly and Zamalek intensely, and I wondered how, on such a minute screen with its terrible resolution, they could even follow where the ball was. 'We're losing the picture' one of the young men said, 'give it a good whacking so it returns. We can't miss this'.

I was often warned that if I went out onto Cairo's streets during an Ahly-Zamalek football match, I would be met with a silent abyss – quite a contrast to the usual hustle, bustle and crowded atmosphere of everyday life in Cairo. Indeed, as I walked down Street Nine in the Maadi district, there were hardly any cars in motion as most people seemed to be huddled around the television set in their homes or in public cafés, following the match. I could see groups of men gathered in a traditional café smoking shisha, the tension visible in the air as all eyes were on the old-fashioned, dusty television set propped high on an elevated shelf for all to see. Further down the street, men and women sitting in Beanos Café were hooting and cheering happily as they followed the match on the flatscreen plasma set hung on the wall while they sipped their cappuccinos and lattés. Families could also be seen on their balconies gathered around the television set, waiting for a result in this historic game. The intensity and variety of television sets to suit different environments and economic contexts was overwhelming: flat screen, plasma, black and white and portable sets

drew together Egyptians of all ages and backgrounds. Some preferred to watch the match on Egypt's terrestrial channels. Nevertheless, the abundant visibility of satellite dishes in all their diverse shapes and forms told a different story. Satellite dishes propped on top of buildings, sometimes beside them, while often resting on balcony floors, with exposed wires illegally linking televisions to transnational satellite transmissions, illustrate how Egyptians are constantly and actively seeking out alternatives and diverse outlets to fulfil their media consumption desires. As this lively scene demonstrates, the centrality of television to the everyday lives of Egyptians represents a fertile area for research.

By positioning television at the heart of young Egyptians' everyday practices, this thesis, as previously explained, examines how these young men and women are constructing a cosmopolitan imagination as they occupy a highly stratified, highly mediated everyday urban life. I explore how this cosmopolitan imagination is articulated primarily in relation to cultural and financial capital associated with class status, yet its meaning also emerges at the intersection with age, gender relations and urban experience. Specifically, through a triadic matrix of intersecting factors, I investigate how young Egyptians, physically positioned in the same city, yet socially and imaginatively occupying very different classed worlds, shape three versions of a cosmopolitan imagination. With television occupying centre position in these young people's subjective understandings of the world, both immediate and far away, Chapters Six, Seven and Eight each explores a specific dynamic through which I have witnessed young Cairenes' particular classed version of a cosmopolitan imagination.

Chapter Six examines the importance that the nation continues to represent as a stable cultural reference in the everyday lives of young Egyptians. The majority of participants in the study do not own passports and have never travelled outside of Egypt, and thus the media represent primary, and often, their only cultural windows exposing them to distant worlds beyond their own. Nevertheless, I propose that this mediated engagement with a wider world is not a way of transcending the nation or engaging in supranational identities that may undermine the significance of the nation. As the media expand the 'interpretive horizons' (Jansson, 2009: 310) of young Egyptians to incorporate trans-local forms of cultural influence, these young men and

women develop new ways of reflexively (re)imagining and (re)negotiating the nation in the context of globalization. Thus, the majority of participants across class assertively maintain that they are 'proud Egyptians'. Nevertheless, I argue that whilst subjectively shifting between different local repertoires, religious attitudes and a global articulation of culture accessed primarily through the media, each class develops a very different interpretive frame regarding what they perceive the nation to represent.

Chapter Seven explores the articulation of cosmopolitan imagination in relation to everyday patterns of consumption. As I discuss in Chapter Three, I am particularly inspired by Ong's (2009) conceptualization of cosmopolitanism, as he approaches it not as a model identity we should strive to achieve, but as a lived identity that is embodied and performed on a daily basis. In this context, I explore how three different versions of a cosmopolitan imagination in Cairo are daily expressed and physically asserted through selected embodied forms of representation and leisure practices. Finally, Chapter Eight investigates the importance of the city not only as a backdrop against which young Egyptians live their everyday lives, but in itself as central to the everyday construction of cosmopolitan performances. Cairo is a physical terrain rigidly structured around classed and gendered divides, yet it is also a symbolic space of imagination through which the circulation of media products is facilitating a reflexive negotiation of the self and everyday in relation to distant ways of life.

This proposed triadic framework for understanding cosmopolitanism with its different component parts (national attitudes, consumption practices and urban mobilities) has become an important illustration of how cosmopolitanism is a complex multidimensional process expressed in diverse forms through its bodily, discursive and urban lived articulations. I argue that the interplay between the nation, consumption and city are best understood in their relevance and consequences through a matrix of concentric circles:

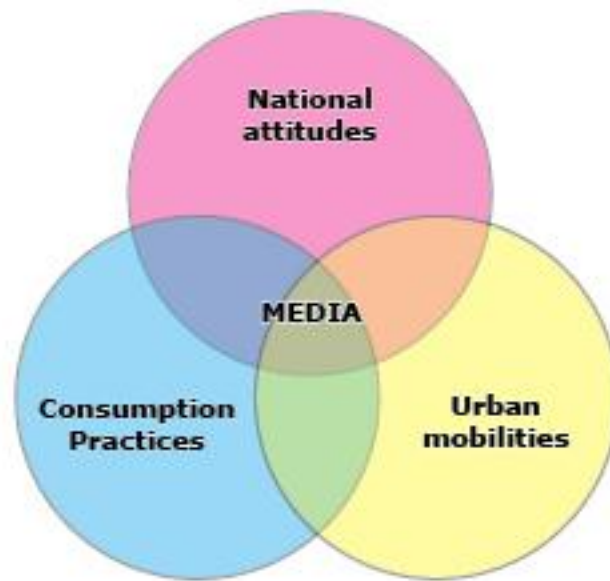


Figure 6.1- Cosmopolitan matrix: consumption practices, urban mobilities and national attitudes

As the diagram illustrates, the media are central to the formation of the three expressions of cosmopolitan imagination I have observed in Cairo. Furthermore, although representing three different cultural indicators of identity – national attitudes, consumption practices and urban mobilities – they capture in their intersection the way cosmopolitanism has come to be articulated as a form of imagination that frames understandings of the self and others. Thus, with the media at the centre of this analysis, I explore how televised representations can offer young Egyptians joint windows onto an interconnected world and a route to articulating a cosmopolitan imagination of self and others, the world close by and far away. Although the everyday realities of young Egyptians are characterised by a series of bounded classed and gendered worlds, a diverse range of transnational media offer spaces where these very exclusive realities meet in the consumption of the same representations and sets of information and cultural products available on screen. Hence, I suggest that the enjoyment and consumption of common media products across class, create frequent *points of convergence* or shared spaces of cosmopolitan connection, where young Egyptians of different backgrounds are united in their negotiation of moral aspirations, consumption desires and national imaginations.

Nevertheless, these subjective understandings and desires, formulated primarily from within the media, intersect with everyday structures of power related specifically to class inequalities and unequal gender relations. Hence, they result in numerous *points of divergence* in the daily experiences of young Egyptians that lead to the formulation of three different versions of a cosmopolitan imagination. In this context, I analyse how an overarching cosmopolitan imagination breaks down into: *closed cosmopolitanism* as imagined by the upper middle class, *critical cosmopolitanism* relating to the experiences of the lower middle class, and for the working class, an *implicit cosmopolitan* imagination. To illustrate the numerous points of contact that unite these young Egyptians, but also points of divergence which distinguish the highly polarized realities of the three classes, I construct a table that I build upon throughout each chapter to allow for a visual cross-class understanding of these points of convergence and divergence. By structuring the following chapters and the experiences of young Egyptians around these three versions of cosmopolitanism, it becomes a useful framework that illustrates how cosmopolitan identities develop from within socio-economic status. Nevertheless, I do not claim that these classed cosmopolitan identities are completely coherent or in any way dependent upon absolute unity between those who occupy them. As the empirical discussion will illustrate, the disagreements and contradictions often recorded between those in the same class, highlight the fluidity of class boundaries that cannot be regarded as homogenous social categories. As differences occur within and not only across class groupings, I approach young Egyptians as rational and reflexive *individuals*, although ones who are inevitably part of the inequalities and hierarchies of an established class system.

Before I embark upon the first empirical discussion in section 6.2, I contextualize the ethnographic analysis through reference to the most important findings from the television consumption survey conducted among 300 young men and women of the three classes I studied.

6.1.1- Television Consumption in Cairo: Findings from the Survey

The everyday centrality of television to the lives of young Egyptians is reflected in the results of the television consumption survey. All 100% of the sample responded that they own a television set in their household. Additionally, all of the upper middle class claimed to have access to satellite television, compared to 80% of the lower middle class and 94% of the working class. For purely economic reasons, I was initially surprised that a larger number in the working class group would have access to satellite in relation to the lower middle class. Inquiring about this issue during the focus group sessions, I found that the majority in the working class group tend to access satellite channels through an illegal system of communal sharing, where a single satellite dish is shared across a number of flats or even apartment blocks. Each household is then connected to the dish manually through cables in exchange for a nominal monthly fee. This makes satellite a cheap and easily accessible option, which is a contrast to the lower middle class who tend to go down the more expensive legal route of direct purchase. Furthermore, the majority of respondents in the upper middle class sample own three or more sets in their household, with one usually located in their bedroom. Indeed, 75% of respondents in the upper middle class sample claimed to watch television mainly in the private space of their bedroom. They often discussed the importance of this in facilitating solitary consumption practices, which allows them freedom to consume channels and programmes of their choice, at the times of their choice, irrelevant to its (in)convenience to other family members.

The biggest proportion in the lower middle and working class groups, 81% and 89% respectively, responded that they own only one television set, usually positioned in the family living room. This dictates that television consumption has become a more communal activity that often forces them to take into consideration the whims and desires of accompanying family members. Indeed, many participants in the two lower class groups, particularly the women, spoke of how their parents enforce forms of censorship on their consumption practices. Specifically, the free European channels they had access to, are usually encrypted, as families often fear the negative moral consequences they could have on their children, particularly the females. I was informed on numerous occasions how parents considered the presence of these

European channels to represent a 'devil' being in the home. Sixty percent of the lower middle class reported that they watch three hours or more of television per day, compared to 52% of the upper middle and 58% of the working class, the majority of whom watch one and two hours respectively daily. During the focus group discussions, the upper middle class informed me how they often choose to spend their leisure time engaged in activities beyond the domestic space such as cafés, sporting clubs and bars/restaurants, while many in the working class sample conveyed how they work alongside their education and so are accorded a limited amount of time in the day to watch television. For the lower middle class, the majority of whom do not work, yet also do not occupy the comfortable financial positions of the upper middle class, television provides a relatively cheap and accessible medium of everyday entertainment and information.

Although there are particular class specific reasons regarding the importance and relevance of television to each group that I will discuss in the following chapters, common trends across the sample did emerge. For the whole sample, 'entertainment' was selected as the most popular reason across class for why young Egyptians watch television. Seventy percent, 86% and 78% of the upper middle class, lower middle class and working class respectively, chose entertainment as a 'very important' reason for watching television. Furthermore, the survey revealed that these young men and women are predominantly turning away from local terrestrial media outlets. Less than 20% of respondents in each class selected them as channels they chose to view regularly. Through the focus groups it became clear that there was a general perception, across class, that these terrestrial channels are repetitive, unexciting and technically very poor compared to the engaging, sophisticatedly produced American productions they prefer to consume on satellite television. Indeed, the genre that by far featured as jointly popular across the three class categories was movies, with 77.3% of the whole sample selecting it as a 'very important' genre. Specifically, movies were selected by 80% of the upper middle class, 79% of the lower middle class and 73% of the working class. The popularity of movies was followed by serials, selected by 67% of the whole sample as also being a 'very important genre.' Again, this broke down to 71%, 68% and 62% of the upper middle, lower middle and working class respectively selecting serials.

It was *American* movies, in particular, more than local or regional productions, that were jointly popular across class, selected by 76% of the upper middle class, 72% of the lower middle class, and 68% of the working class. This preference for American movies spanned across both men and women in the three groups, although for the two lower groups, Arabic movies and serials were noticeably popular. Fifty-eight percent of the lower middle class and 62% of the working class also selected Arabic movies as an important genre for 'entertainment'. Arabic serials were particularly popular with women, while men did not display much interest in local drama productions. Sixty-eight percent of women in the two lower class groups (representing 34% of the whole lower middle and working class group together) chose Egyptian serials for reasons of 'entertainment'. Furthermore, Turkish serials dubbed into Arabic were of particular importance to the daily consumption schedules of lower middle class women, which I will discuss in Chapter Seven.

Interestingly, across the three classes, movies were preferred viewing on regional satellite Arabic channels with 86% and 79% of the upper middle class choosing MBC4 and MBC2 respectively as the channels they view the most, confirmed by 81% and 76% of the lower middle class again for MBC2 and MBC4 respectively. The situation was less clear-cut with the working class, where Arabic music channels proved the most popular with 64% selecting it as first choice. MBC2 and MBC4 were close behind, however, selected by 58% and 51% of the working class respectively. While MBC2 is a 24-hour movie channel broadcasting mainly Hollywood movies, MBC4 is dedicated almost entirely to American serials and light entertainment programmes. I found these statistics, especially those in relation to the upper middle class, quite surprising. I expected these elite classes, supported by their financial and cultural capital, to display a strong preference towards western channels. Nevertheless, despite having access to channels such as MTV and Showtime Movies, and having the cultural skills to interpret them as part of their familiar cultural repertoires, there was still a strong desire for regional Arabic television.

The popularity of American movies across class demonstrates how the media are often important platforms and cultural spaces which unite different groups who may usually live very classed and disconnected lives that rarely come into contact

(Arvizu, 2009). The disadvantaged socio-economic status of participants in the two lower classes meant they were often excluded from the use of some of the more expensive satellite packages accessed by the upper middle class including *Showtime* and *Orbit*, which requires an expensive monthly fee. Nevertheless, the widespread availability and popularity of western entertainment products, including translated versions on open-access regional Arabic channels, free of monthly charges, meant that young Egyptians from different class backgrounds had a common reference that became a joint daily association with entertainment and culture more broadly. The English-Arabic translations provided by the MBC channels allowed men and women from the two lower class groups, many of whom have very basic English language skills, to be able to watch American movies.

According to the survey, 76% of respondents in the upper middle class category carry out the majority of their consumption practices in English, while only 15% of the lower middle class and 25% of the working class claim to consume programmes in English. Again, I was initially puzzled as to why the working class, who have received no formal education in English, would watch more television in English compared to the lower middle class. Through the focus groups, members of this class informed me that American movies and sitcoms that they predominantly watch on the MBC channels are translated through text rather than dubbing, and they find the classical written Arabic text very difficult to follow. Nevertheless, the formulaic nature of Hollywood movies means that most of the time, they are able to rely on the standardized format of the movie itself and unfolding events on screen to interpret the storyline, independent of the translation. Indeed, statistics from the survey reveal that 60% of the working class sample watch television mainly in Arabic, with only 15% relying on written Arabic translation.

In relation to the lower middle class, 50% responded that the majority of their consumption time is dedicated to Arabic productions, in contrast to 35% who mainly prefer foreign programmes, mainly American movies and sitcoms, translated (with written text) into Arabic. In a question related specifically to the types of genre watched through translation or in English, the overwhelming response across the whole sample, 80%, pointed to movies and serials. On the other hand, there was a preference for political programmes, cultural programmes and news broadcasts to be

consumed almost exclusively as local Egyptian or regional Arabic productions. I was informed in the focus groups that although they consider the themes and storylines in American movies and serials to be universal and thus enjoyable across cultural and national boundaries, there is a desire for genres exploring political, economic and cultural realities to be reflective of the everyday concerns, aspirations and desires that the young in Egypt and the Arab region commonly face.

6.2 One Nation, Three Different Stories: Cosmopolitanism and the National Imagination

6.2.1 Introduction

'Masr dee om el donia' (*Egypt is mother of the world*: a phrase frequently circulated amongst Egyptians and Arabs pertaining to the symbolic position of importance and influence that Egypt holds in the region) 24-year-old Ahmed enthusiastically told me as we sat in a small traditional working class café, sipping sweet teas and drinking cups of Turkish coffee. Swatting the army of flies tickling my nose while discreetly pushing away with my feet the stray disease-ridden cat nibbling at a fish bone under the table, I listened to Ahmed's narration of why Egypt should be accounted such a special position not only in the Arab world, but the whole world. Ahmed told me: 'If you travel the world, you will not find a nation as kind-hearted and as funny as we are. I can guarantee it. As they say, anyone who drinks water from the Nile will always come back'. Ahmed's friend, 23-year-old Wael added:

Look at the extent of poverty in Egypt and look at how we are treated inhumanely by our government. But we get on with it, always with a smile on our faces – we are thick skinned. Put a westerner in our place and see how they will cope. They are spoilt and used to the good life. They have never been forced to adapt to the hardships that we endure.

I was suddenly startled as Ahmed casually (but very loudly) shouted out to the small humble restaurant across the narrow road to bring us four ta'meyya (falafel) sandwiches and a plate of pickles. 'Let us show you Egyptian generosity' he proudly told me, then adding 'I bet you miss that when you're in England, because the Brits are quite tight with money, right'? Finding this to be a hilarious revelation, the rest of the men laughed in acknowledgment, with 24-year-old Ayman saying: 'Are they really like we see them on television? Do the "foreigners" all pay for themselves when they go out, even the women'? Thinking of how best to answer this question, I was relieved that a sudden debacle broke out, with the café owner running hysterically to remove his tables and chairs that were spilling out of the narrow pavement and onto the street, obstructing oncoming cars.

In the distance a green Volkswagen Golf approached slowly while honking aggressively as it attempted to negotiate the very narrow road blocked with chairs,

rubbish deposited from the nearby houses and children playing obliviously. 'Aghbeya we hawash' (stupid, vulgar people) the young male driver shouted out, angrily adding 'what kind of people live like this?' Feeling embarrassed for my working class friends, I was not quite sure how to react, although feeling my discomfort, Ahmed reassured me that they are quite used to this treatment; in fact, it happens several times a day I am informed. The narrow back-road on which the café is located, leads out on to one of the main streets of the Heliopolis district of Cairo, so many cars use it as a shortcut. 'Don't worry about us, we are used to being second class citizens in Egypt' Ayman told me. 'You are lucky you live in a country where everyone is respected regardless of their background. Never take that for granted'.

What this incident, and similar ones that will be narrated in this chapter so vividly illustrate, is that the relationship of young Egyptians with the idea of the nation is at once complex and ambivalent, shifting effortlessly between moments of pride and dissatisfaction. These young men proudly see themselves as affiliated to a nation where its citizens are known for their kind-heartedness, generosity, 'funny' genes and thus ability to draw people back through one sip of its Nile water. Yet, as the car incident demonstrated, there is a stark realization that the nation is a force for cruelty as much as it is a source of pride. This is underpinned by a reality of debilitating class polarizations and inequalities where those at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum are treated as 'second class citizens'. Furthermore, the constant reference to *aganeb* (foreigners), *barra* (outside), *donia* (world), very common in my conversations with young Egyptians across class, demonstrates how the nation is not a self-enclosed entity, but through a mediated exposure to the outside world, it is constantly perceived in relation to what takes place elsewhere, specifically the west. It is through his encounters with on-screen representations on television that Ahmed reaches the conclusion that British people are economically cautious (to be polite). Furthermore, Ayman wonders how it could be that 'foreigners,' lacking the generosity of Egyptians, pay individually when socialising in groups, rather than arguing over who should foot the bill as is common practice in Egypt. Nevertheless, it is also television that brings these young men together in a realization that the west applies values of justice and respect universally across all citizens regardless of socio-economic status. A realization, of course, that causes them to critically reflect back upon their own repressive everyday realities in Egypt.

This chapter examines how a mediated connection to the world, through television, that expands the cultural horizons of young Egyptians, is allowing them to adopt a more reflexive understanding and re-imagination of the nation. Thus, as televised representations provide increased opportunities for reflection and interpretation of self and others, young Egyptians are being exposed to alternative forms of governance and cultural influence that are allowing them to expand upon the meanings of what it *can* or *should* mean to be Egyptian. An Egypt that treats its citizens justly, an Egypt that is democratic, an Egypt that has a well-planned and 'modern' urban infrastructure and an Egypt that respects its core Islamic identity, are just some of the demands that these young people are making in relation to what they see occurring in different national contexts. In a situation where the majority of these young men and women have never travelled outside Egypt, the nation as a specific geographical location and thus sense of home in the world, continues to provide an important feeling of stability and identity in their daily lives. Therefore, the cosmopolitan aspirations of these young Egyptians that symbolically position them as inhabitants of a broader interconnected world, remain in constant dialogue rather than conflict with the nation.

As Beck (2004:153) has argued, a cosmopolitan perspective opens up the possibility of a 'dialogic imagination' which involves the location of 'one's own lifestyle within the horizon of other possibilities'. With her research on India, Fernandes (2000) also argues that the focus should not be on how the nation is eradicated under the forces of globalization, but how the 'production of 'the global' occurs through the nationalist imagination' (Fernandes, 2000:611). Following on from this thesis, this chapter examines how a cosmopolitan imagination, providing a sense of worldliness and feeling of connection to a community broader than the nation, allows young Egyptians to retain local and national affiliations, whilst providing a dynamic space within which these local particularities can be 're-imagined in the context of globalization' (Fernandes, 2000: 614). Specifically, I explore how, with the media at the centre of their everyday social practices, each class develops a different interpretive frame for understanding what the nation represents.

6.3 Contradictory Understandings of the Nation across Class

Criticisms of Egypt were routinely voiced across class, harshly and often to extremes that shocked me. Yet almost paradoxically, there was always the underlying assertion that most of these young Egyptians loved their country and that any criticism they levelled against it was intended to be 'constructive'; embracing the idea that you can never improve unless you recognize your faults. As 21-year-old Mustafa, an upper middle class man told me:

In a world where cultures are being exchanged daily, what does Egypt have to offer? Unfortunately, we are passive and we are powerless. I mean watch American media, for example, and you can learn something useful and new everyday – whether it's political or cultural or even related to sports. In contrast watch our media and what do you see? We don't even have anything of quality to offer on our screens.

Later on in the focus group, however, Mustafa asserts:

Hearing all these criticisms you may think that we absolutely hate our country or that we are just waiting for a visa to flee somewhere else. That isn't true. There is so much that is positive and unique about Egypt – I could spend the whole day listing them. I would never allow anyone foreign to say anything negative about Egypt. But I am saying this with good intentions: how will we ever improve or change if we don't recognize our limitations? I come from a wealthy family you know, and it is no problem for me to pack my bags and go to Europe or the US. I don't want to vote in democratic elections in the US, however, I want to vote in Egypt. I don't want to open an American newspaper and read criticism about the government, I want to do it here, in my own country.

What Mustafa's words illustrate, is a contradictory position towards the nation where at once it is undermined as being passive and unproductive, contributing nothing on a global scale of influence, yet simultaneously, is strongly defended as a source of many positive attributes. This defensive attitude is particularly prevalent when there is a feeling that the nation is under attack from someone 'foreign', almost suggesting that as an Egyptian, Mustafa has the right to be critical of Egypt, while others are not accorded this privilege. In the same focus group, 25-year-old Ahmed agreed with Mustafa and said:

Mustafa is right, and do you know what our problem is? An authoritarian and repressive government that doesn't allow people to oppose or speak out. A government that has stolen the wealth of this country and thrown us into the dark ages. What do you expect people to

feel towards their country but contempt?! Life in Egypt frustrates me much of the time as I don't see the country ever progressing, unlike the west. I was just watching the news the other day and I heard about the MP expenses scandal in the UK – MPs being publicly shamed for claiming money for dog food?! I laughed so hard, but this was a sad laughter. I couldn't help but compare this pathetic "crime" to the atrocities committed by government officials in Egypt, who remain unpunished.

What these quotations demonstrate is a yearning by Mustafa, Ahmed and young people like them in Egypt, to be able to exercise freedom and democracy, values fundamentally cosmopolitan in nature, drawn predominantly from a mediated exposure to western culture, while positioned within their own nation. Thus, the media come to play a central framing role in how these young people are forming critical understandings and perceptions of *others* (west) and how this then reflects back upon the way the self (Egypt) is reflexively interpreted and negotiated. Furthermore, unable to divorce their understanding of the nation from its relationship to the repressive state, a sense of distrust and contempt towards the tyrannical Egyptian regime makes these young people quite skeptical that any change will ever really come about. This sentiment was particularly true for the working class, who seemed to be constantly on the receiving end of state repression and police brutality. Twenty-three-year old Kamal, for instance, a supermarket checkout operator, narrated a harrowing story of how he was once forcibly removed from the streets by Egyptian police for no apparent reason while socializing with his friends. He was thrown into jail for 13 months without any justification. Kamal told me:

I had no idea why I was jailed, and I still don't. I've learnt not to ask too many questions. It's a viscous circle you know – the policeman who decided to aggressively drag me into the police car is probably treated inhumanely by his bosses and is badly paid. But still, I would never leave Egypt, you know. You may think I'm crazy, but I don't expect you to understand. I would put up with this type of treatment in my own country, but nowhere else. I do have faith though that one day Egypt will change and be like other countries we see, learning to love and respect her children more. Why can't we be like them? *Homa El-gharb kano ahsan menena?* (A rhetorical question: are westerners fundamentally superior to us?).

Such desire for change, however, towards the creation of an open and liberal society as they perceive to be characteristic of the west, is articulated in parallel with a strong self

realisation regarding established global hierarchies, and their position within them. These men and women are aware that these global hierarchies usually relegate those located outside the west to the fringes of such advanced cultural-political worlds. As the quotations above reveal, young Egyptians realise that their identity as Egyptians and Arabs, means they are consigned to the role of passive and marginalized receivers, and not instigators of cultural messages and transnational influences. The above quotations also illustrate how it is predominantly through the media that these young Egyptians articulate a specific perception of western modernity as representing the symbolic location of freedom and progress. This allows them to develop a dynamic sense of reflexivity where they constantly compare what occurs in the west with their own repressive realities in Egypt.

This sense of admiration towards the west expressed above is an attitude that I encountered across all three classes and became particularly apparent during a participant observation session with a group of lower middle class women. Sitting with them in Chess Café one summer's evening, Amany (22) reminded me, as she always did, that there was an hour and a half to go before the 8pm curfew that she and her neighbour 24-year-old Lina had to observe. Safaa, also 24 and the only married woman in the group, declared that she would have to leave even earlier as her husband was not free to come and collect her (as he usually did), and so she would have to go home alone using the microbus. He was not pleased about this she told me, but he would make an exception this time only. We quickly ordered our coffees and mango juices as we continued the conversation that had been in progress for over half an hour. We were engaged in an intense discussion about the way rape is dealt with in Egypt. There was a common sentiment uniting most of these women: the unfortunate treatment a raped woman receives in Egypt as she is transformed from a victim into a perpetrator. According to most of the women in the group, the raped victim is usually perceived to be a source of shame and humiliation to her family. Twenty-three-year old Malak discussed how the problem in Egypt is much wider than rape and is deeply rooted in the patriarchal culture where women are treated as scapegoats, automatically blamed for any moral mishaps in society. Malak found it 'deeply shameful' that until recently, there was a law in Egypt that gave the rapist an opportunity to escape a jail sentence if he asked his victim to marry him in order to 'compensate' for the fact that sex was performed outside of marriage. Disgusted, yet hardly surprised, Malak believes this can only be expected from a government that does not regard Egyptian life as worthy or dignified.

It seemed that these women felt empowered by being given an opportunity to speak openly and critically about rape, considered to be such a taboo subject, and rarely discussed openly in Egypt. When I tried to probe them further in order to discover what had provoked such intense and critical opinions about a matter they may not have directly experienced, I discovered, to my surprise, that it was an episode of the American teen drama 90210 that most of these young women followed. Interestingly, Amany told me that although they initially began watching the serial on the regional MBC channels, she later discovered from a friend that the US broadcasts episodes which are much more recent, available over the Internet. Thus, as not all of them have an Internet connection in their home, they meet up at a friend's house once a week to catch up with the episodes online. This is an important reminder that although television may be the dominant medium in the daily lives of young Egyptians, new media are also making an important presence, often empowering these media users by expanding their range of choices and consumption opportunities. In relation to the discussion of rape, the storyline where one of the lead female characters, Naomi, was allegedly raped by a school teacher, created much interest amongst the young women. As 22-year-old Amany commented:

Look at how American society dealt with the alleged rape. As soon as the girl said she was sexually attacked, people started to comfort her and tell her not to worry, while the accused teacher was immediately suspended. Now imagine if the same incident had occurred in Egypt – what do you think would have happened? Nothing at all! The girl would have been told to stay quiet as not to lose the reputation of herself and her family. What a shame!

Safaa, 24, had quite a different view and interjected saying:

Well Naomi isn't exactly the best character to defend – I mean her dress, attitude and general character would be considered provocative by any man. I like to think that the media producers are sending out a message that such immoral conduct can lead to negative consequences such as rape. Also, maybe it is not always wise to make a big fuss and let the whole world know a girl has been raped – some families keep it quiet because they fear their daughter will be tainted forever. Even Islam tells us: "etha boleetom fastatero" (rough translation: if you have committed a sin, at least do it covertly). In any case, I agree that such issues need to be discussed more in the media, at least to raise awareness amongst young women of how they can avoid rape by guarding their own conduct.

This dialogue points to the importance of television as a daily media window that transports and subjectively shifts young Egyptians between and within different cultural worlds. Additionally, it illustrates how these young media users are forming a wide range of interpretations of the same texts in ways that conform to their own social position and agency. For Safaa, this particular episode of 90210 is a confirmation of traditional gender roles and values as dictated to her by Islamic practice. Amany, on the other hand, interprets this episode as a way that the often oppressive treatment of women in Egypt can be challenged. Furthermore, the discussion of rape demonstrates how some of the attitudes of these young women develop through a constant reference and comparison to what is occurring beyond their national borders in cultures they have never physically experienced. Although the upper middle class often travel to Europe and America as part of their annual holidays, the majority of my lower middle and working class participants have never travelled outside of Egypt. However, they still feel that western culture is a very familiar part of their daily cultural repertoires as a result of their regular television viewing.

Although television only provides these women with a selective representation of western culture – usually fictional – it still is a powerful tool allowing them to confidently engage in cross-national comparisons. Differences are often pointed out between their own tangible and everyday experiences of corruption and dishonesty in Egypt, and between scenes in a film or serial, which they perceive to point to the transparency and integrity of western culture. Indeed, for this group of lower middle class women, this particular storyline of 90210 functioned as an important impetus that brought to the fore their diverging viewpoints regarding the treatment of raped women in Egypt, as compared to the west. Some agreed, like Amany, that the victims of rape must be encouraged to speak out about their attack without feeling any sense of shame or guilt. Others followed Safaa's opinion that in order to preserve their own honour and dignity, and indeed that of their family's, women who have been raped should avoid publicising their experiences. This stimulating exchange, that was a source of fascination (although often frustration) for myself, was an important reminder of how class should never be perceived as a homogenous and uncomplicated social order. Often, those in the same class – and even same group of close-knit friends – are divided by their own personal views and experiences. Importantly, therefore, the discussion about rape demonstrates that the media can

function as central frames through which young Egyptians often develop a reflexive awareness of different sets of moralities informing social roles. Thus, in their casual consumption of television, their sense of morality and self-righteousness of dominant codes of practice in the nation come to be discussed and sometimes challenged in multiple ways.

While there is enough evidence to demonstrate that the idea of 'western' culture provides a key ideological reference point to which these young people aspire, we cannot talk of a single homogenized western culture. Western societies are fragmented and characterized by their own internal heterogeneities. Thus, can these differences be sweepingly glossed over with the single brush of 'westernization'? According to my young participants, they can. Whenever the opportunity arose, I felt compelled to ask them what they meant exactly by their constant reference to the west, or specifically, *where* they considered the west to be positioned on the map. Interestingly, a map did not seem to offer much to my understanding of this very elusive term as the 'west' appeared to refer to everywhere, yet nowhere in particular. It was the US, Britain, Australia – even Malaysia sometimes. Thus, the west seemed to represent an ideology and the idea of a particular lifestyle, more than a specific geographical setting. In popular culture and everyday talk in Egypt, the 'west' has become an imagined category; a general allusion to a very broad and symbolic cultural imagining that embodies the humanitarian, scientific and technological progress characteristic of prosperous 'first world nations'. In its most basic form, therefore, the idea of the 'west' as imagined by these young Egyptians is everything that Egypt is not, and thus represents an important symbolic point of reference through which they are able to reflect upon and reflexively negotiate their own national culture. Thus, although I am aware that there is no singular 'west,' I will use this term sparingly in reference to the representation of the west in young participants' narratives.

For my young Egyptian participants, the west was an important idea and prospect that represented the promise of a more dignified, egalitarian and modernly progressive life. This point lies at the core of the cosmopolitan vision of these men and women, representing an important point of contact bridging the diverse everyday experiences of my three classed groups. These young people are embedded within everyday identity positions that, static in nature, afford them little room for manoeuvre or mobility beyond them. I recorded this in the case of the working class man, Kamal, who was resigned to the fact that as a poor Egyptian he is not to 'ask too many questions' and to accept that it

is his fate to be unfairly thrown into jail. The discussion on rape also revealed how it is the destiny of women imprisoned in such a patriarchal society to receive marriage offers from their rapists. Nevertheless, selected media products come to represent a more flexible imagined space from within which they accumulate new cultural resources for self-understanding and reflexive interpretation. This is captured in the way Amany compares the handling of rape in America and Egypt, asking when it is that the raped woman in Egypt will cease to be treated as a perpetrator. It is also reflected in the way Ahmed, following the televised coverage of the MPs expenses scandal in the UK, wonders when government officials in Egypt will be similarly named and punished for their much more serious crimes. This makes one wonder how much the exposure to such stories on transparency and anti-corruption initiatives have influenced the demands for democracy in the recent Egyptian uprising. Thus, in a mediated world, where equal access to on-screen representations often means that class and gender divisions are relegated to the background, these young people are united in their reflexive re-interpretations of what it means to be Egyptian, or at least what *they* want it to mean. Thus, I here build the first layer of my table that illustrates a common meeting point uniting the divergent experiences of young Egyptians:

<u>Attitudes towards the nation</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distrust of the state • Highly reflexive relationship to national community • Understood through a dialectic relation with global culture/ideals
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Figure 6.2 – National attitudes: points of convergence across class

The discussion so far has explored how the nation is not a fixed category imbued with static meanings, but that everyday interpretations of the nation from below reveal it to be a vessel which takes on multiple, often contrasting and conflicting meanings. I have examined how harsh criticisms and strong attitudes of nihilism are routinely voiced, yet often interlaced with this are assertions of love and devotion towards the nation. The contradictory perceptions among young Egyptians towards their nation, became especially apparent in the most unexpected of ways: during play-offs for the 2010 world cup qualifying matches. Egypt's loss against Algeria twice fuelled an Egyptian-led media campaign of hatred against the Algerians, which almost led to a full blown political crisis

between the two countries. Accusations that Algerians attacked Egyptian fans and players after the matches led to an overly-exaggerated media battle on Egyptian state television that rather conceitedly claimed the 'leader' of the Arab world (Egypt), has been humiliated by the 'barbaric' Algerians.

The effects of this mediated campaign were strongly and immediately reflected in the streets of Cairo, where Egyptian flags were flown from balconies and car windows, while individuals wearing T-shirts bearing the words 'Proud to be Egyptian' were commonly seen. The enthusiastic national assertions that this incident provoked, which is in direct contrast to previous experiences of pessimistic and often negative national sentiment during my research, points to the power of a largely media-staged event. It has the ability to transform aggressive discourse against a nation into one of defence, and nihilism and detachment, into extreme patriotism. Additionally, this sporting incident reflects the internal tensions and struggles that are an important part of the way young Egyptians, locked within everyday constraining identity positions, yet shifting more dynamically within mediated space, are negotiating their relationship to the nation. The media often become carriers of an 'indisputable truth' and are able, at certain moments, to unite Egyptians through a generation of different frames for understanding the nation. Significantly, the way such a relatively insignificant event brought Egyptians of different backgrounds together, both symbolically in a joint assertion of pride and patriotism, and physically onto the streets in protest against Algerians, raised the debate within the media and more intimate social circles of the extent to which Egyptians are lacking a common national project that can function as a healthy outlet for positive national sentiment. In an increasingly interconnected world where a global battle to lead cultural influence has left Egyptians feeling sidelined, they may be searching for something through which to assert their presence and re-awaken national sentiment. Perhaps they found that in a football match.

What can be gleaned from the above discussion is that the conjuring up of paradoxical and inconsistent positions including pride, aggression and distrust, points towards the importance of *emotion* as a category through which everyday understandings of the nation are articulated. Such a focus on emotion allows us to formulate a more grounded consideration of how the nation can often become a highly reflexive or irrational category, taking on different meanings in relation to specific spatio-temporal contexts. What is the role of the media in this context? Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983)

offers a powerful framework for understanding the importance of the media in sustaining the sense of a joint national community. Such a thesis conceives of the nation not as a fixed entity with rigid parameters, but as a social construct with an important phenomenological dimension. Nevertheless, at the receiving end, to what extent does Anderson's claim for a joint national community sustained by the media, actually translate into reality? My research findings indicate that in an era of niche broadcasting and multiple transnational channels, audiences are no longer united by a single nationalized media outlet around which members of the nation can be jointly addressed. Thus, in the absence of a singular mediated public sphere, Scannell's (1992) conception of television as a public good, allowing the state to maintain a sense of order, stability and unity across the nation, seems increasingly inconceivable.

Furthermore, as well as the absence of a joint mediated outlet, as the next sections of this chapter will illustrate, national audiences cannot be approached as a homogenized mass, united by a singular or uniform imagination of the nation. Rajagopal (2000) argues how, particularly in the developing south characterized by highly polarized and uneven rates of development, there can never be any coherent or unitary conception of national culture that unites people. Members of a national community are diverse, characterized by different levels of religious identification, socio-economic status and cultural capital, which leads to the nation becoming 'available' or 'unavailable' (Valentine, 1996) to different groups in multiple ways. Transnational television has come to play an important role in this respect, as illustrated by my findings, allowing the limitations placed upon the self and nation to be exposed. Thus, although particular groups may often feel excluded from daily life in the nation, transnational media offer a repertoire of cultural resources from which they can at least partake in the construction and negotiation of a desired national imagination. Nevertheless, despite the growing relevance of transnational media as illustrated in the above discussion, the Egypt-Algeria football match also demonstrates that national media have not become completely irrelevant. At times of crisis or when sensing that the nation is under attack from an outside force, terrestrial channels become a joint platform around which members of the national community come together in defence or celebration of their nation.

I will now proceed to an examination of how, as everyday experiences of the nation intersect with classed realities and media consumption, three different class-based frames for understanding the nation have emerged amongst young people in Cairo.

6.4 Cairo as the London of the Middle East: The Upper Middle Class and a 'First World' Cosmopolitanism

I vividly remember a phone conversation I once had with 23-year-old Noora when she informed me that she had arranged a dinner party in a restaurant located in Cairo's elite district of Zamalek to celebrate her best friend's birthday. 'Come along but bring enough money' she laughed, 'there's quite a high minimum charge, especially as it's Friday'. As we entered the *Five Bells* restaurant, I instantly understood why such a hefty price tag was attached. The restaurant was actually an old villa, built by British colonizers, whose interior had been converted into a bar, and the garden area, where we sat, was adorned with several chic, traditionally laid out tables. Sheltered by trees and lighted only by a single candle on each table, the garden area was all low lights and romantic ambiance. The immaculately dressed waiters went about their work with a silent yet almost automated precision, asking us how we preferred our steak and constantly refilling our glasses of water. I could see champagne bottles in iced buckets on most of the tables around us – but not ours, however, as none of us drank alcohol. After engaging in numerous group and individual discussions, I came to realize that all of these women are the daughters of doctors, engineers and wealthy businessmen. Thus it was not much of a surprise that they could easily afford the minimum charge of 100LE on a single meal and outing. 'Why did you decide to come here?' I asked them, genuinely intrigued as to why they selected *Five Bells* for such a special occasion. 'We always come here on birthdays, plus we wanted to show you a different side to Egypt – this is the Egypt we know and love. But this sophisticated and elegant side to Egypt is never shown in the media', 24-year-old Aida told me. Aida, whose father is a cardiologist and whose mother works for a multinational computer firm, could not have been more insightful in her answer. *Their* Egypt was most definitely a very different one to the everyday reality that existed beyond the sheltered trees and candle lights of *Five Bells*.

The upper middle class participants imagined the nation through a very exclusive western frame. They perceived national progress and development to be encapsulated solely within a western model of development. This is reflected in the way these young men and women often choose to overcome their sense of disenchantment and dissatisfaction with the nation by disconnecting from local forms of cultural identification. They choose instead to engross themselves in cultural practices and symbols they associate exclusively with global cultural modernity. This was evident in most of my discussions with them, where this young elite referred to how Egypt, if it

wishes to develop and progress, needs to keep up with global, and particularly western standards of scientific, technological and economic progress as much as it can. As 22-year-old Karim commented:

Egypt has done reasonably well over the past few years. There has been an increase in big multinational companies, well known international restaurants, and clean, well-built shopping malls that house some of the biggest global brands such as Burberry, Valentino and Mont Blanc. Thus I think Cairo, even though it has a long way to go, is on the right path towards becoming a globally recognized city. I hope that in a few years time, we can call Cairo the 'London of the Middle East.'

In the same group, 20-year-old Christine enthusiastically added:

Egypt has always been the most developed country in the Arab world: we had the first railway, first airline, first television station. Even though we have fallen behind a bit today, we aren't doing too badly. More and more people are living in big houses, have expensive cars and are being educated abroad. The signs of wealth are everywhere. It's like we are living the American Dream.

Interestingly, this quotation by Christine, by no means an exception across the upper middle class, locates the idea of the American Dream purely in the acquisition of material consumer products associated with western culture. Ironically, Christine believes the visible presence of these objects is an indicator that people in Egypt are experiencing an American Dream of their own. However, she seems to have completely missed the point, as the main ethos behind the American Dream was the belief that everyone should have the opportunity to better themselves and experience some form of social mobility regardless of class background. What Christine seems to completely ignore is that while a small minority of Egyptians like herself are living luxurious lifestyles drawn from the west, the larger majority, who she seems completely oblivious to, are increasingly sinking into poverty and despair. Nevertheless, Christine's words are an important reminder of the extent to which an imagined 'western' culture is their main symbol of freedom and a primary route towards experiencing the American Dream's promise of a better life in Egypt; even if this 'better' life is understood within the framework of a parochial class-based materialism.

I discussed in Chapter Two how following Egypt's invasion by British imperialist forces during the twentieth century, Egyptians became greatly impressed with westerners and their progressive, technologically advanced way of life. A powerful belief followed that Egypt needed to emulate the west in order to become recognised as a 'modern' society

(Piterberg, 1997; Schaub, 2000). Everyday understandings of modernness, therefore, were associated with the lifestyle and cultural practices of a perceived superior imperial centre. Thus, 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 national and cultural progress is encapsulated predominantly within a 'western' way of life (Amin, 2005; Abaza, 2006). For the higher class strata of the Egyptian population, the strong association of nations such as the US or Europe with discourses of modernity is not limited only to a subjective admiration of western culture. It is strongly reflected in the privileged economic position of these Egyptian elites which ensures that they have become a daily embodiment of this exclusive, foreign inspired lifestyle. For the upper middle class, therefore, western or global culture cannot be solely defined as a pleasurable cultural reference to which they have mediated access. Frequent travels abroad, private foreign education and employment in multinational companies, means western culture has become part of their privileged upbringing, and thus is deeply entrenched in the cultural and educational systems with which they are affiliated.

Importantly for the upper middle class, a cosmopolitan openness towards the world, and the values associated with a cosmopolitan ethos, are located almost exclusively within a constricted framework of 'first world' belonging. Interestingly, despite living in Egypt, which they often acknowledged to be a 'third world' country, the upper middle class did not consider themselves to be located outside of, or on the fringes of the 'first world'. Rather, unlike other Egyptians, their privileged class status actually places them right at the centre of it (Schielke, 2007). Thus, this young elite did not find it necessary to be geographically located in Britain or the US to be part of the first world, as their access to wealth, the necessary social connections and cultural knowledge automatically places them on a par with other young people of a similar age and elite social status located in advanced nations of the 'west'. This complements Hannerz's (1996) assertion that transnational connections are becoming an increasingly evident phenomenon in our world. These transnational networks of belonging are making a claim on our senses in the way our imagination and sense of being can no longer be contained within a specific culture or locality, but is increasingly informed, often more strongly, by what occurs beyond national borders (Hannerz, 1996). In light of the above, I use the term *closed cosmopolitanism* (Ong, 2009) to describe the orientation of the upper middle class, whose cosmopolitan imagination and sense of being part of the world is associated almost entirely with securing an elite class status in society. Evidence of the extent to

which the nation is imagined exclusively through a narrow lens of western liberal discourse, articulated in relation to a parochial attitude of class elitism, is demonstrated in the words of 22-year-old Karim. He told me:

If you're asking me what I want Egypt to be like, then of course I want to see Egypt progress and develop in line with any other western country. In particular, I want to be able to say that I have voted in democratic elections once in my lifetime. But sometimes you can't help but wonder if an autocratic system is what suits Egyptians the most. I mean, there is no problem with us because we are educated and we can make informed decisions and vote fairly based on the merit of individual politicians. Unfortunately though, the majority of Egyptians are illiterate and don't have any political ambitions – they prefer to be led like sheep rather than think for themselves. If we had a democratic Egypt, then it would probably fall to pieces because all the poor would sell their vote for five pounds or a loaf of bread.

Zein, 21, capitalized upon this point and agreed with Karim saying:

Yeah you're right, but then it's easy for us to say because our class background means we've had the privilege to be well educated and to visit western countries and directly experience what freedom and democracy translate to in real life. The poor in Egypt don't know any better....they've lived in one system all their lives and I don't think they actually care to try and change. Like you said, it's easier for them to be led than to think. I believe it would be best for us all if certain laws were laid down for who can and cannot vote – it's safer for Egypt and its future at the end of the day.

Interestingly, what the above exchange demonstrates is the extent to which cosmopolitan ideals of democracy and political participation are heavily desired by these young elites. Nevertheless, these ideals are strongly associated with a very restricted class understanding that locates them exclusively within the rights of those of an elite class status and educational background. Thus, it seems that for the upper middle class, they are overcoming the sense of nihilism and dissatisfaction they feel towards the nation by imagining it exclusively through a western model of development. This attitude of almost complete immersion in western culture will become even more apparent as the coming chapters unfold. It is not only limited to a subjective attitude or way of thinking about the world, but their cosmopolitan imagination is physically asserted on a daily context, reflected in the ways in which they move in the city and acquire particular selected objects of consumption.

Although for the majority of the upper middle class I spoke to western culture was an influential source of admiration, some individuals within the group voiced their

concern that this ‘excessive’ westernization trend has cost Egypt its identity and traditional Arab heritage. Peter, 25, told me:

I agree that across the Arab world we are all fascinated by the west and in many aspects we all want to be sophisticated and advanced like them. But I think it is important to always remember that we have our own unique cultural heritage that we must be proud of too. The Ottoman Empire, for instance, is an important historical legacy as it once ruled a large part of the world – although most young Arabs do not know a thing about it. I have many American friends who love Arabic culture – the food, the music, the dancing – and they really don’t understand why we try to distance ourselves from it. Honestly, how can we ever ask anyone else to respect us if we have no sense of self-worth?

Even though a number of Peter’s friends during this participant observation session told me in a state of disinterest that there is not much really that they can feel ‘proud’ about in Egypt, 23-year-old Lina confirmed Peter’s words, saying sadly:

I guess being a watered down version of western culture is never a good way to be. You’re worthless as long as you don’t have a strong sense of self identity. Look at the Gulf countries – ever wondered why they are so influential? It is because they are the most advanced and westernized, yet also maintain their cultural and religious identity with pride. I mean, I consider myself to be very westernized in many aspects, yet I’m also a very proud and loyal Egyptian, Arab and Muslim. I never forget that this is who I really am.

Despite Peter and Lina’s viewpoints not attracting much consensus from the majority of group members, this exchange is an important indication of the confusion and contradictions that characterise young Egyptians’ perceptions of their nation, which was soon to find an outlet in the Egypt-Algeria football match. This dialogue in general, with its disagreements and discord, captures the way young Egyptians, even those with similar socio-economic experiences, are torn in their loyalties and identities between a state of pride, disillusionment and dissatisfaction towards the nation.

Daily media consumption played a very important role in formulating and sustaining the very exclusive worldviews and cultural practices often associated with the upper middle

class. Significantly, this young elite seemed to perceive themselves to *naturally* be world-citizens through their education in foreign universities and their frequent patterns of travel outside of Egypt. Indeed, engaging with these young men and women through my long term ethnographic practices, I often felt that they were no different from my colleagues and friends in London, both in terms of physical appearance and daily cultural orientations. I was frequently informed (very proudly) by my young participants how a particular item of clothing was bought from *Zara* in London or *Gap* in the US. Even more so, when they did not have the opportunity to travel abroad themselves, I was told how they set up informal purchasing networks where a group of friends agree to inform each other if someone they know is due to travel abroad, especially to Europe or the US. Twenty-three-year old Yasmine, for instance, told me how she handed her friend travelling to the UK a list of Christian Dior cosmetic products to purchase for her, totalling £200. The Internet became very important in this respect as friends could circulate webpages and electronic attachments containing images of clothing, make-up and trainers that they required from abroad, together with size, colour and product number. Even more so, numerous Facebook pages have been set up by individuals in Egypt who regularly travel abroad and bring back 'foreign stock' to sell. These products are photographed and displayed on Facebook giving others an opportunity to browse and select the specific items they want. It was very common during participant observation sessions to see some of my participants connect to Facebook through their mobile phones, often chatting to friends and often browsing through the latest range of designer goods posted on dedicated Facebook pages. These examples illustrate how the convergence of new media, particularly the Internet and mobile phones, are allowing the upper middle class to sustain their exclusive lifestyles and elite cultural networks.

Unsurprisingly, 58% of the upper middle class selected 'connecting with other people/cultures' as being 'not important' in the television consumption survey. Thus television, as a cultural resource able to link them with other cultural worlds, appeared to be taken for granted alongside other cultural systems that are a normal part of their daily lives such as education and travel. Nonetheless, following entertainment, what a considerable proportion of the upper middle class (64%) did enthusiastically view as an 'important' reason for watching television, was 'being aware of what is occurring in the world.' This could correspond with the fact that 'political programmes' were also selected as an 'important' genre by 67% of upper middle class respondents. Again, the Internet played an important role in this respect, as although the upper middle class discussed

television as an essential resource for information about what is going on in the world, they did not completely depend on it. The Internet appeared to be accessed almost daily, whether in their workplace, university or at home, and thus was very often used as a means to discover what was happening in the world, particularly through global news sites such as CNN and the BBC. Despite the popularity of regional Arabic television amongst my young participants, particularly in relation to entertainment genres, they sometimes felt that news commentaries were censored, not reporting with the same standards of integrity and accuracy observed by western news agencies.

Whereas the lower middle class see television as an important cultural resource which allows them to become aware of, and so feel a part of faraway cultures, for the upper middle class, television seems to play a more important role in personal development that is closely linked to their class consciousness. As they constantly mention throughout the discussions, feeling that they are the leading generation of Egypt, and that they carry the burden of guiding their country towards its global (which they use synonymously with western) potential, these elite Egyptians find it necessary, and almost obligatory, to educate themselves about major events occurring elsewhere in the world. Indeed, they feel they cannot be global without having a global orientation, which on a daily basis, can be reaffirmed through their engagement with repertoires of 'globality' on television.

According to the above analysis, therefore, there is almost an unreflexive identification with the west as young upper middle class Egyptians attempt to reproduce western cultural values in their daily lives. Nevertheless, by subjectively interpreting the nation in such narrow terms that relate to a classed conception of western modernity and development, it seems to be unclear where they envision the rest (the actual majority) of Egyptians for whom these exclusive cultural values are not a daily lived reality. I cannot help but wonder how true one working class man's assertion is, that 'to the upper classes we are just "thin air" '- socially irrelevant and almost physically absent. Furthermore, despite confident claims often made by the upper middle class that their class status and the privileged cultural worlds they access posit them unquestionably within a 'first world' system, in some instances, they did not always reflect this assured confidence. Although on a national level the upper class may perceive themselves to be the elite of their country – far ahead of other Egyptians in terms of cultural or economic capital – they are often still compelled by, and display a very sensitive attitude of reflexivity towards

established global hierarchies and their position within them. Their historical memory as colonial subjects, their present reality as part of what they consider to be a developing nation, and negative global media stories of Arabs and Muslims, mean they are aware of their own representations in the global scene being torn apart by suspicion, contempt and sometimes sympathy towards their deprived 'third-world' status. For this reason, some members of the upper middle class often felt they were involved in a constant struggle to prove that they are able to detach themselves from their disadvantaged local realities, and instead, position themselves as part of a more advanced, more progressive global cultural modernity. As 21-year-old Rawan interestingly told me:

Sometimes when I'm abroad and I tell people I'm Egyptian, I can just see something in their eyes. It's like they think "she's Arab" or "she's Muslim" so what does she know. People assume that when you come from this part of the world you're uneducated and ignorant, and I always want to prove them wrong. I just feel like saying "yes I'm Egyptian, but I'm just like you. I'm well educated and I know the world and I'm up-to-date with whatever is happening". It should not really be a matter of where you're from or where you're positioned. It should be about your attitude and how you think about the world.

Rawan's friend, 23-year-old Sarah, agreed saying that no matter how much Egyptians like her perceive themselves to be civilised and part of 'first-world' cultural circuits, they are still seen by westerners to fit the stereotype of 'Arabs' being unworthy, uneducated outsiders. What these words demonstrate is a reality torn between both a desire to internalize western cultural values, and alongside an awareness of negative mediated representations of the Arab world in the west. This is captured in the internal contradictions observed in the ways Egyptians like Rawan and Sarah position themselves both from within a nation they are aware is accorded a very specific place within global hierarchies, and simultaneously, outside a nation they wish to overcome in its limitations and marginality on this global (media) stage.

6.5 'I'm Egyptian, I'm Muslim, but I'm also Cosmopolitan': The Unlikely Young Cosmopolitans of Cairo

One of my most memorable experiences during the research period was being invited to the wedding of Randa, one of the female students at the Faculty of Education. I had not been to an Egyptian wedding in a long time, so I was very excited by the prospect. It took place in a very modest venue in one of Cairo's social clubs. What was immediately

noticeable, was that the wedding was a very Egyptianised, Islamised version of any typical wedding event in the west. Randa looked beautiful in a conventional white wedding dress that was designed with long sleeves and a veil to conform to Islamic requirements. She informed me before the wedding that the dress was rented as she could not afford to buy one. As Randa was walked down the aisle by her father, a popular Islamic song reciting the 99 names of God was playing loudly in the background, while instead of confetti, small coins with the traditional symbol of the blue eye were thrown on the bride to 'protect' her from the 'evil' eye (an old Egyptian tradition). Guests were served a drink of traditional sweet syrup made from rose petals, and family and friends clapped along with the catchy Islamic and traditional Egyptian wedding songs played by the DJ (literally called this in Egypt). Although Randa strongly objected to any adults dancing, young girls with scarves tied around their tiny waists were permitted to belly dance in the centre stage. As an open buffet was beyond the economic means of the bride and groom's families, small pre-packed boxes of cakes and savoury items were distributed. At 12pm the bride and groom happily left their guests behind to catch some sleep ready for their early morning two hour train ride that would begin their short modest honeymoon in Alexandria. Visiting Randa after her honeymoon to congratulate her properly (an established tradition in Egypt), I asked her if she had enjoyed her wedding party. She enthusiastically replied: 'I loved it. I always wanted a chic, modern wedding. I was able to wear the white dress which is the ultimate dream of any bride in the world. The most important thing, however, is that I did not displease Allah in any way – there was no dancing and I wore my veil. May Allah grant me and my husband peace and love in our new lives'.

What this event confirmed was the centrality of both religious discourses and cultural hybridity informing the everyday practices of lower middle class participants. Randa's Islamized version of the 'big white wedding' was deeply saturated with the symbols of global cultural modernity including confetti, her father walking her down the aisle and a DJ to keep guests entertained. Indeed, in my conversations with lower middle class men and women, their religious identity was accorded a position of central importance and became almost synonymous with, or interchangeable with their sense of national identity. I was often told that patriotic sentiments cannot be divorced from religious acts of piety and devotion. As 23-year-old Hadeel informed me:

To truly be a patriotic Egyptian, you firstly have to be a good Muslim

who is well aware of their religion and its main ethos. Islam teaches people to live together despite their socio-economic or even religious differences, to respect their leader, to protect their nation against an enemy or intruder. Islam discusses every aspect of our lives in detail and so it's almost like a guide book that, if followed, will lead to the construction of a stable and successful community, which translates into the wider nation.

Fatima, also 23, agreed to this point saying:

I see myself primarily as a Muslim, and it is from within my religious identification that I have learned to love my country. As Muslims we should constantly be looking for ways to improve our religion and be closer to Allah. Well, Allah and his Prophet have taught us to love our country and to defend it – and not just to love it figuratively, but to show that we love it by keeping it clean, by working hard to be better citizens, by raising our children to feel pride towards their country. We all know Egypt is full of problems, but it is our duty as Muslims to do whatever we can to relieve these problems.

Despite these strong religious assertions, however, that spanned the lower middle class, and as the wedding scene illustrated, these religious and local particularities are in constant dialogue with a global articulation of culture. The west was perceived as a rich cultural fountain, and thus represented an important reference, and point of comparison through which they developed a more reflexive sense of understanding towards the nation. For the lower middle class, the majority of whom have never travelled outside Egypt, they displayed almost a complete dependence on television to connect them to the outside world. It is through the daily exposure of these young lower middle class Cairenes to transnational television that they have been able to discover new ways and new resources of reflexively negotiating the self positioned within nation. I discussed in the first section of this chapter how 'entertainment' is the most popular reason across class for watching television. Equally, a 'very important' reason for watching television in relation to the lower middle class, is 'connecting with other people/cultures,' with 74% selecting it. Interestingly, this is in direct contrast to the upper middle class, where 58% reported this very same reason to be 'not important'. Nevertheless, in relation to the lower middle class, they often told me during the focus group sessions how television is an important means by which they can be connected to the world beyond their immediate locale, and to learn more about the lives and ways of faraway cultures. Furthermore, the questionnaire also reveals that under 'educational reasons' for watching television, 62% selected 'documentaries' to be an 'important' reason why they watch television. As 20-

year-old Heba, a woman studying at the Faculty of Education declared:

We don't live in the world alone, but we are part of a wider global culture, and I think it is an obligation for each one of us to try and learn about other peoples and cultures. You might hear a lot of Egyptians talking about the west as being evil and corrupt, but the truth is, we have so much to learn from them, especially in relation to human rights. We no longer need to travel or spend money to learn about other cultures, but this can be done from the comfort of our own living rooms through our remote control. There really are no excuses. As Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) said: "We have made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another".

Thus, for the lower middle class, television is an important window on the world, which allows them to feel a part of other cultures. As they frequently discuss, Egyptians can improve themselves, striving to become more rounded and well informed citizens by learning from the successes of other cultures who are more advanced than them in the political, social or economic domains. In this light, it appears that by drawing upon their daily mediated mobilities, young lower middle class Egyptians are actively positioning themselves at the centre of a larger interconnected world from which they desire to learn, yet they also wish to transform this world in ways that conform to their own religious and spiritual vision. As captured in Heba's words above, the young lower middle class often informed me how Islam is not against its followers engaging with other cultures and influences, but actually encourages Muslims to integrate with other people. As one woman asserted, Islam is a cosmopolitan religion at heart, as it does not address a particular tribe or nation. The Quraan, this woman told me, actually addresses mankind and humanity, without distinguishing between race, colour or gender.

Primarily, these young men and women were undergoing a dynamic and imaginative engagement with western culture as an attempt to negotiate for themselves a position as worldly, culturally sophisticated Egyptian Muslims. Thus, articulating their understandings of the world through the lens of religion means that although the lower middle class accepted the west as an important fountain of cultural advancement, they also perceived it as a potential source of immorality and religious laxness. The 'spiritual ignorance' of the west they often referred to, which has resulted in their excessive materialism, objectification of women and sexual promiscuity, are just some of the negative values the lower middle class often associated with western and global culture. I propose, therefore, that these young Egyptians articulate a *critical cosmopolitan*

imagination. Although wanting to absorb certain values that they perceive to be associated with global and western culture such as personal freedom, human rights and respect for individuality, their cosmopolitan imagination, in contrast to the upper middle class, avoids a ready acceptance of western culture. Thus, they are experiencing a complex, hybrid form of cosmopolitanism that blends acceptance of the west with a critical attitude. They recognize that their relationship to western culture has to be carefully negotiated, as it is a potentially damaging, as well as enlightening force. This reflexive, constantly shifting relationship is best described in the words of Islam, 22, who undertakes a critical assessment of western nations regarding their lack of concern for religious values:

The west may be at the peak of cultural progress at the moment and we all admire them, but they won't last long. These types of hedonistic societies where people just follow their own desires and pleasures without any regard for religion as an everyday moral framework, are contributing to their own demise. In a way, I'm glad I don't have much money and thus I'm not tempted to engage in this type of world. I want to walk in the streets of Egypt and feel I'm in an Islamic nation – this is our true identity. I want to look out of my window and see minarets covering the skyline and I want to wake up to the sound of the *azaan* (call to prayer emanating from the mosque).

It often becomes apparent that the lower middle class are attempting to displace these critical attitudes regarding immorality and a lack of concern for religion on to their fellow upper middle class Egyptians, who they perceive to be blind imitators of a spiritless western culture. They strive to constantly distinguish between themselves as pious, morally conscious Egyptians, and cosmopolitans who are open-minded, believe in democracy and justice, and the upper classes who seem to lack any form of respect for the sacred word of God. Discussing the attitude of the upper classes in Egypt towards those of less privileged means like herself, 24-year-old Yasmine tells me:

It's like my class has come to define me. People see me not as a woman or a university graduate or an Egyptian, but simply as a lower class being. The way I talk, look and act doesn't fit in with this sophisticated image that elite Egyptians are trying to build for themselves. However, I feel that being modern isn't about being as westernized as possible. Power comes from the belief in God, not from money or status. There is much to learn from the west, although at the same time, we have an obligation to preserve the most sacred aspects of our identities – not follow them blindly like sheep.

It seems, therefore, that by including the west, and indeed the upper middle class (as imitators of western culture), in a backwardness which involves a lack of attachment to religious values and a disregard for religiosity, lower middle class participants are able to reverse the elite perception of them as being ignorant, stagnant and unprogressive. I believe this raises an important point of comparison between the outlooks and cultural orientations of the upper and lower middle class. Whereas the cosmopolitan imagination of the former appears to be a way of elevating their elite class status and maintaining a distinctive identity as 'first world' Egyptians, for the lower middle class, an identification with cosmopolitan ideals is more about searching for ways of becoming pious Egyptians, albeit ones who are worldly and globally conscious as their religious doctrines dictate they must be. In this respect, the nation and religion are not perceived to be mutually exclusive, but the way these young people understand their position as Egyptians, is largely negotiated through their identity as Muslims. Thus, although the attitudes of the lower middle class are characterized by cultural openness and a desire for humanitarian values associated with a cosmopolitan ethos, this does not stop them from developing a highly reflexive and often critical stance towards western culture on the basis of what does and does not conform to Islamic practice. As Ong (2009) argues, cosmopolitanism is a contextual identity where we constantly weave in and out of being open or closed to difference at various times. Indeed, this is very reflective of the lower middle class as their relationship to global culture is a very dynamic and critical one, where they make a clear distinction between an ideological, cultural and moral positioning towards western and global cultural repertoires. On an *ideological* and *cultural* level there is an engagement with humanitarian ideals and selected cultural symbols associated with the west that they enjoy and perceive to be compatible with their religious beliefs. On a *moral* level, feeling that the Muslim world is far ahead of the west in the way they maintain spiritual guidance and a religious framework as part of their everyday lives, there is a need to disengage with what they regard to be the immorality of the west. Thus it seems that cosmopolitanism is not an identity that is fixed or complete, but as Chouliaraki (2008:383) writes, it is very often a 'paradoxical and fragile condition'. In order to grasp more clearly the importance of cosmopolitan imagination within everyday life, I believe it is essential to identify and understand the different contexts which define everyday moments of engagement and disengagement in relation to different groups.

6.6 'I'm Egyptian, I'm Muslim, but Can I be Cosmopolitan'? The Internal Contradictions of the Working Class.

Am I global? (hesitant pause). I don't know...actually I don't think I am. I'm a Muslim. I mean, is it possible to be both at the same time? No, you're either one or the other, and if I had to choose, I am definitely a Muslim (21-year-old Hany).

As this quotation demonstrates, similar to the lower middle class group, the working class placed great emphasis on the centrality of religion to their everyday lives; sometimes with even greater force. Both groups were also united in how their discourse reflected a desire to place the nation within a religious frame, with members of the working class often blaming the state for what they perceived to be the lack of religious attachment experienced by most Egyptians. As 19-year-old Yasmine said:

We are an Islamic nation. I mean, Egypt is the only country in the Quraan to be mentioned by name. We should see this as an honour and thus respect our religion even more. I blame the state for people's lack of concern towards Islam. They seem to be scared of Islam and of people becoming religious, so they try to put an emphasis more on being westernized. What about us, what about our religion? We are Muslim Egyptians and we must never forget that!

My initial encounters with this group led me towards a specific understanding regarding the role of religion in their daily lives, which, as the research progressed and moments of mutual rapport allowed my relationship with them to grow stronger, I began to question. Based purely on embodied appearances, where all the women without exception were veiled or wearing the isdal (a long black cloak only revealing the face), as well as the selected snippets of information they chose to tell me about themselves at first, it was very easy to make the assumption that an unquestionable commitment to religious practices was the main essence of their daily realities. The west was also seemed to be constantly distanced as representing an immoral cultural symbol. But ethnographers should not assume. Indeed, my ethnographic and long term examination of the everyday lives of young people from the working class allowed me to come to some very surprising and unexpected conclusions. By observing daily practices and listening to their everyday discourse, I have been able to go beyond self-constructed images associated with public appearances. I have been able to peel back the layers which these young people, and indeed people in general, tend to envelop themselves within in order to conform to family expectations and societal pressures. The three empirical chapters

need to be read consecutively for the reader to build an accurate understanding of the true complexities displayed by the working class. Indeed, in many instances during my research, it became apparent that the publicly performed identities of some members of the working class sample were characterized by inconsistencies, and rife with internal contradictions.

I found this group the most challenging to work with initially, as they seemed intent on telling me very little about themselves. I could almost sense that what they chose to tell me at first was not fully representing their everyday practices and that there were private, unrevealed worlds hidden beneath the publicly constructed images they conformed to. I could not shake off the feeling that the lower middle class seemed to be a lot more comfortable with, and knowledgeable of their religious identity. Religion appeared to be the topic that interested them the most, and whenever it did arise, their enthusiasm for it and knowledge about it was visibly demonstrated. With working class participants, on the other hand, there was an instant desire to always state that they are first and foremost Muslims, and importantly, devout Muslims. Beyond this verbal assertion of religious identity, however, I felt they were not comfortable with me probing too much into the details of Islamic discourse or teachings; most of the time they seemed rather unknowledgeable and did not have answers to my questions. I will return to this point below in relation to the importance of educational capital in fostering religious understanding. Furthermore, I also witnessed another contradiction with this group. Although they often discussed the positive aspects of global culture, and the fact that they greatly envied the west for its respect of basic humanitarian ideals, wishing Egypt to learn from their model, whenever the conversation turned more personal, about their own sense of identity or how they chose to personally integrate western forms of belonging into their everyday lives, they seemed to display a defensive reaction. They made it very clear that it was religion which is of primary importance to them and nothing else. I did not know what to make of this at first, but as my ethnographic endeavour to understand them progressed, I realized that the everyday realities of this group are sometimes characterized by a very visible gap between what they said and actual lived practice. The question now became: *why* is this so?

I discussed in the section on the upper middle class how they are characterized by a strong self-awareness that on a global scale of power and influence, they may be located towards the bottom end of this scale. For the working class, as well as a reflexive

awareness of these global hierarchical divides, they are also bound by more grounded, local forms of repressive power structures that involve familial and neighbourhood expectations. In light of these constricting expectations, which command that dress, behaviour and talk must correspond to the norms of Islamic acceptability, I argue that cosmopolitanism is not always about leisurely cultural choices. My analysis of the working class reveals that often, a cosmopolitan imagination provides a necessary breathing space, an essential moment of survival (although temporary) for those confined within particular repressive circumstances. My young working class participants are embedded within bounded identity positions such as class and gender that provide little opportunity for movement or mobility beyond them. Nevertheless, drawing on more fluid mediated systems of representation, these young men and women are able to engage in the construction of a more dynamic cosmopolitan imagination that allows them to feel part of a broader cultural community which transcends their more restricted immediate locality. Hence, I explore how the working class often experience an *implicit cosmopolitan imagination*, which becomes a momentary expression of resistance against instances of repression and control in their daily realities. It provides a space, not accorded to these young people in their daily family and neighbourhood community experiences, where they can draw on a wide repertoire of mediated representations of global youth cultural practices, exercising more freedom in how they wish to dress and behave.

Whenever the topic of the growing westernization trend in Egypt was raised with this working class group, they enthusiastically acknowledged that there definitely is a general trend of mimicking the west amongst young Egyptians, although they assertively maintain that this definitely does not happen with them. Unlike the lower middle class for whom the nation is seen predominantly through the frame of religion, yet informed by western ideological values, my initial discussions with many of the working class participants reflected a desire to position the nation exclusively within an Islamic frame. As 23-year-old Laila commented:

To respect your religion is to respect your nation. If I am a pious Muslim and I follow the word of God, then I will no doubt be a productive member of my nation as Islam teaches me to work hard, make a positive contribution to the place I live in and help those around me. All we ever learn from globalization are negative cultural traits that contradict our religious identities. Where is God in all of this?

Interestingly, Laila's friend, 25-year-old Nagwan, strongly disagreed saying:

Don't generalize Laila – the west can't be all bad – or else why would you wear their clothes and listen to their music? They must have some positive attributes, we are all humans and we all have our positive as well as negative traits. In the same vein, not all Muslims are good – the religion itself is of course – but how people understand and implement it is another matter.

Interestingly, Nagwan's words were an important indicator of what was to come, as well as a clear reflection of a cosmopolitan imagination that positions the self within the context of a common humanity. Her assertion that Laila dresses like the 'west' and listens to their music instantly illustrated to me that there was more to this group than they chose to initially share. Furthermore, Nagwan's words did find some resonance within the group as a few others told me how their instinctive response is always to criticise western culture, as this is what they are brought up to believe is acceptable. For instance, 23-year-old Dina informed me how her father has completely banned western television channels in the home as to him, they represent the presence of the 'devil'. Thus, working class people like Dina are socialised from a young age into believing that the west is the focal point of immorality and wrongdoing that is a barrier to one becoming a pious and religious Muslim. Although many of the working class seemed to verbally agree with their parents that excessive westernization is the main culprit behind a lack of religiosity amongst young Egyptians, others preferred the view that this is a generational difference. According to the latter opinion, their parents' generation was not really brought up with western culture being central to their daily lives, and so this lack of familiarity has made them view western culture with suspicion and as a threat to their identity. For the young generation, however, the media – especially television – means cross-cultural exchanges have become a highly enjoyable daily occurrence, without challenging the most essential aspects of their cultural and religious identity. Nevertheless, whatever their opinion, most of them seemed to agree that to avoid the wrath and disappointment of their parents, they tend to distance themselves from an 'excessive' engagement with western culture while in the presence of older generations.

In light of the above, many of the young men and women belonging to the working class group wasted no time in launching a verbal attack on the visible aspects of western culture permeating Cairo's urban spaces. Yet, an observation of their daily behaviour

through my ethnographic study, led me to often doubt whether the actual daily practices of some of these young people were always in harmony with such zealous religious discourse. Indeed, my research findings indicate that for the working class, there is a need to abide by familial expectations and social structures that impose Islamic discourse as a necessary daily moral and embodied framework. A closer look at this framework, however, reveals obvious cracks, as their everyday engagement with, and expression of, Islamic customs is often resplendent with tensions and conflicting practices. Nevertheless, as will become clear as the discussion progresses, moments of cosmopolitan openness towards the world that subjectively transport them beyond local and national boundaries, allow them to temporarily overcome the static identity positions that shape their everyday experiences of being working class, and specifically, of being working class women in Cairo.

Being a Muslim myself, I was able to comfortably talk to the working class about religious matters, and I discovered that unlike the lower middle class, their knowledge of fundamental Islamic teachings was often underdeveloped. Obviously, one's religious knowledge is associated with cultural capital and education. In a context where the majority of these young people have basic literacy and education skills, it should be no surprise that their familiarity with religious texts and their knowledge of Islamic discourse is often poor. Nevertheless, this still leaves a large gap between their assertions of how important Islam is in their daily lives, and in reality, how much they actually know about it. It is important to note here that the lower middle class are not completely free themselves of these religious hegemonic discourses that shape everyday behaviour. The difference is that their educational capital has allowed them to comfortably engage with religious texts, so that through their own efforts of increasing religious understanding and perception, they are able to make more informed and reflexive decisions regarding religious practice. Importantly, I do not aspire to make any judgments regarding which class is more religious or whose faith is more powerful. This is neither my place, nor does it fall within my research aims. What I am trying to say, however, is that while Islam is visibly central to the lives of both groups, they have developed very different understandings of how religious discourse informs and shapes different aspects of their everyday lives. For the working class, for instance, their lack of education and thus personal engagement with religious texts means that often, Islam becomes associated more with heritage and tradition, than with personal understanding and appreciation of Islamic teachings (Deeb, 2006). In this context, Islam becomes

transformed into an embodied and physical conformity to a socially constructed understanding – by family and community expectations – of what it means to be a devout Muslim. I am made aware, for instance, that few of these men and women fulfil their daily religious duties such as regular praying, while even more remarkably, a number of the women admit that they wear the veil mainly due to pressure from their families, and particularly their fathers. As 21-year-old Seham (female nurse) comments:

Most girls like me wear the scarf, but it's mainly just a custom or tradition. You don't even wait to be told to do it, you just do it yourself because you know it's expected. All the women in our family and neighbourhood are wearing it, so there's no escaping it. I know that if I didn't wear it, it would be a big argument between me and my father. I know that it mentions somewhere in the Quraan that females need to cover up, but classical Arabic is too hard for me to understand, so I just take my parents' word for it. It doesn't bother me you know – I'm used to it now and would actually feel strange without it.

Another telling statement is given, this time by 22-year-old Ahmed:

We are brought up and told that we are Muslims. We don't really know any other way to be. We are told we have to be Muslims because that is what is respectable in our community, not because that is what God wants us to be. This is the problem in Egypt as societal pressure is enormous – always dictating what we should and shouldn't do, even if we don't understand the reasoning behind it. I even do that with my sister – tell her that she has to be a pious Muslim girl if she wants to secure a good marriage opportunity. She once told me that she wants to remove her headscarf and I hit her. She's still young and she doesn't know that by doing that, she could risk ruining her reputation and losing the respect of our community.

This quotation demonstrates the extent to which Islamic morality plays a crucial role within these working class locales. It has become a vehicle for ensuring social acceptance, and as a way for women especially to maintain what their social environment dictates is a 'respectable' reputation and to hope for a decent marriage opportunity. It also confirms that the juxtaposition of class and gender frames everyday experiences for the working class. Thus, class needs to be examined in the light of other socio-cultural factors, particularly gendered hegemonic relations of power. For the working class, therefore, wider social structures and familial rules contribute to the development of a very specific interpretation of Islamic discourse that enhances patriarchal dominance and supports male forms of authority over women, often enforced using physical forms of punishment like slapping.

Unsurprisingly, as I mentioned above, not all of the working class participants were united in a complete vocal rejection of the west. On numerous occasions some of these young people acknowledged that the west may support and uphold important humanitarian values such as freedom and democracy they are lacking in Egypt. Nevertheless, it was often suggested that ideals of human respect, freedom and dignity, which for so long people have believed the west invented, were actually brought to the fore by Muslims almost 1,500 years ago. Nevertheless, they admitted that today, it is mostly the west which manages to maintain them. As 21-year-old Nadia commented:

All this talk about the west inventing human rights and democracy is just propaganda that they circulate to make Muslims look bad. In actual fact, long before the west was anything significant, the Quraan discussed all these important ideals and that society needs to be based on them. That's what a religious scholar once said in his sermon that I heard on the cassette player. Thus if we want to live in a world of true equality and respect for all, this needs to be based on Islamic teachings – we need to learn more about our own religion. All we have taken from the west really is morally corrupt and lax values that contradict the essence of our own Islamic culture.

Fawzy, 20, made a similar point when he discussed how the Quraan's engagement with scientific facts that the west have only discovered in modern times, illustrates how Islam is a 'gift' which the west, with its numerous forms of technological and cultural progress, is missing. Interestingly, as a contrast to the usual ready acceptance of the US or Europe as instigators of all forms of progress and positive evolution, these quotations are indicative of a more constructive cosmopolitan outlook that may challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about the parasitic nature of Egypt or the less developed countries. It indicates a realization that although on a global scale of social and technological progress their own nation may be lagging behind, their religion has been a propagator of important human ideals and social values well before the west claimed to support them. Nonetheless, it does also reveal an insistence to constantly justify or almost shyly defend any sense of admiration they have for western and global culture. As the above two quotations reveal, even when they do admit to respecting any ideals that are particularly associated with western culture, it is still encapsulated within an Islamic frame. Again, this is evidence of the hegemonic discourses of religious morality they are bound by, which require them to constantly 'Islamize' their discourse and public appearances.

As I will explore throughout the next two chapters in relation to the working class, although discourse reveals dominant ideologies of religious conservatism, everyday action demonstrates complex and conflicting practices. I will investigate how this insistence on placing themselves within a morally acceptable framework as defined by Islam, is relevant in particular contexts, specifically the domestic and community spaces. Nevertheless, beyond the inquisitive gaze of the family and neighbourhood, behaviour and performance in the wider city often indicate a very different story where the west can be transformed from a distanced immoral foe into an enviable friend that heavily informs everyday cultural practices. This is perhaps reflected in the television consumption practices of the working class that unearth an interest and a sense of desire to connect with global culture. I discussed in the first section of this chapter that American movies were selected as the most popular genre amongst the whole sample. Additionally, however, 'receiving information' was also selected as 'very important' by 69% of the working class participants. This could illustrate how, through television, members of this class develop an interest in what is happening in the rest of the world: a sense of being part of this world. Thus, television comes to represent a cheap, readily available and easily accessible medium of entertainment, information and connection to the wider world. More specifically, 58% reported that they watch television for 'keeping up with international cultural changes,' specifically in relation to 'international fashion trends,' while 63% selected 'Egyptian news' to be an 'important' reason why they watch television in relation to 'informational reasons'. Again, this points to the comprehensive and broad relevance of television in the everyday lives of these young men and women. Television does not perform one single role, but can be an entertainer as much as it is a window onto global culture or a vehicle for acquiring knowledge about local and regional news events.

My class-specific analysis so far has explored how three different versions of a cosmopolitan imagination have emerged in Cairo. Within each cosmopolitan imagination, articulated predominantly on the basis of class position, young Egyptians, drawing on the media, are reflexively envisioning their own unique frames for understanding the nation. This is illustrated in the table below:

	<u>Upper middle class</u>	<u>Lower middle class</u>	<u>Working class</u>
<u>Attitudes towards the nation</u>	Nation imagined exclusively through western frame	Nation imagined through religious frame, but in dialogue with western modernity	Nation imagined through religious frame, but through contradictory practices/attitudes

Figure 6.3- National attitudes: points of divergence across class

6.7 Conclusion

My interest in cosmopolitanism is not as a 'fixed conception' (Fine 2003b, 612) characterized by a particular definition of what it *should* or *ought* to be. Instead, I have taken Ong's (2009) approach that locates cosmopolitanism not as a model identity or idealistic conception, but as an everyday practiced identity and thus one which is lived, embodied and performed. Through ethnographic practices, I have attempted to understand how young Egyptians *themselves* approach and understand the need (or not) to be cosmopolitan. Indeed, as this chapter has revealed, three very different versions of a cosmopolitan imagination find expression in Cairo, articulated specifically in relation to class identity, yet also taking their meanings from within the context of age and gender relations. I have examined how, such traditional identity positions, constraining and restrictive as they are, form part of the hegemonic structures of daily life that leave young Egyptians with little room for mobility. Nevertheless, media practices are expanding the subjective interpretations of these young men and women beyond such restrictive contexts, allowing them to engage in a symbolic mobility between and within different cultural worlds unrestricted by geographical boundaries. It is at this intersection of the mediated and the real, the physically constraining and the subjectively mobile that young Egyptians are re-evaluating the meanings of the nation in new ways they find more satisfying. Thus, by expanding their 'interpretive horizons' (Jansson, 2009: 310), the media have facilitated the rise of a cosmopolitan imagination through which young Egyptians are actively asserting their presence and belonging to a wider interconnected world. This world has become a readily available repertoire of cultural resources that these young people are confidently using, critically interpreting and often resisting, in ways that allow them to reflexively reinterpret and re-imagine local and national forms of belonging. The discussion on the nation illustrates how discourses of *self*, *other* and *world* are united in complex and often contradictory ways within young Egyptians' cosmopolitan vision. Throughout the next two empirical chapters, I examine how these

three unique portraits of cosmopolitan imagination developed so far, are brought to life and physically expressed through their consumption practices and everyday mobilities within the city.

7 Consumer Desires and the Many Young Cosmopolitans of Cairo

7.1 Introduction

Although residing in London, often deemed to be one of the most important fashion capitals in the world, it was actually during my research period in Cairo that I acquired most of my knowledge about the latest fashion trends. I learnt that flat camel-coloured boots were the *hottest* fashion accessory at the time, while Louis Vuitton handbags were highly sought after. Whether it was the upper, lower middle or working class, fashion choices and consumer objects appeared as highly desirable and central to the performed identities of these young men and women. Genuine, over-priced imports and locally made counterfeits interchangeably represented young Egyptians' participation in a global consumer culture. This chapter examines how everyday patterns of consumption provide important routes of expression allowing young Egyptians to assert their presence and belonging to a wider world in ways that symbolically transcend the immediacy of national and local boundaries. Chapter Six explored how different versions of a cosmopolitan imagination are articulated in relation to national attitudes and ways in which young Egyptians have developed numerous reflexive frames for interpreting the nation. Nevertheless, as I have argued previously, cosmopolitanism is not only expressed as a subjective form of understanding about the world (both immediate and far away) and one's position within it, but is essentially a performance, and thus is embodied – physically and visibly asserting its presence in our everyday lives. According to Clammer, globalization as a daily lived reality must be approached in its micro political and cultural dimensions, since these are the dimensions 'at which globalization is most often experienced and at which it is either opposed, integrated into everyday life or negotiated.... cities are nested in different national, social and cultural contexts from which emerge different strategies for the management of or resistance to globalisation' (2003: 404). One of the most important of such modern strategies that enable us to position ourselves as citizens of an interconnected world, is the engagement in a globally circulating consumer culture, from which young Egyptians – across class – are not excluded (Abaza 2001, 2005, 2006; Abdelrahman, 2006).

The acquisition of consumer products is an important form of self expression that transforms the body into a canvas onto which specific cultural messages and

allegiances are imprinted, as discussed in Chapter Four. Featherstone (1991) argues how consumer products have lost their functional or use-value and have come to represent *commodity-signs*. Thus, the importance of acquiring consumer objects is no longer necessarily for their practical use, but more so, as vessels onto which particular cultural meanings are symbolically communicated and physically asserted. Miller's (2008) study on the everyday importance of consumer objects provides a key reference. He discusses how, very often, objects, as prevailing forms of outward expression, are able to communicate particular social meanings and cultural messages that are often more powerful than discourse. I discuss this further below in relation to the working class in the way religious attire, particularly for women, becomes a way of appeasing dominant social structures that position Islamic practice as central to everyday public performances. For lower middle class women, on the other hand, embodied religious symbols, when combined with western consumer trends, become a way of asserting a religious, yet fashion-conscious and modern cosmopolitan identity. In a similar vein, focusing on women's fashion choices in the Turkish context, Navaro-Yashin (2002) examines the importance of these embodied fashion styles as a physical expression of their affiliation with particular political ideologies. Whilst secularist women supporting the Welfare party ruled by Ataturk chose to dress in predominantly western fashion trends, Islamists semiotically defended their chosen political ideology by wearing the veil, used as a public signifier of religious commitment. Thus, the body in all these examples becomes a primary locus of consumption onto which selected cultural, political and religious modes of belonging are transformed into a highly visible daily display.

My ethnographic methods have allowed me to probe beneath the surface of first level appearances and to unearth how the consumer choices of young Egyptians are underpinned by desires to position themselves as part of a broader global youth culture, as a way of sustaining cosmopolitan aspirations. Operating from within repressive and restraining national contexts that allow them little room for social and often physical mobility, choices of how to dress and what objects to acquire become *their* (often only) way of symbolically crossing borders. An overarching theme running throughout this thesis is the role of television as a primary frame for making sense of one's world and, as offering potential for reflexive forms of interpretation within its more fluid spaces of mediated representation. Thus, the media expose

young Egyptians to distant ways of being, allowing them to engage in cosmopolitan performances where they eat, dress and live in ways that symbolize their aspirations for a better life as represented elsewhere. Nevertheless, as these consumer desires intersect with everyday grounded realities characterized by class polarization and unequal gender relations, Cairo witnesses the construction of multiple and diverse narratives of consumption that, occurring in parallel, rarely maintain dialogue or contact. Thus, these highly charged networks of consumer desire feed into and reinforce the *closed*, *implicit* and *critical* cosmopolitan imagination of my young Egyptian participants.

I explored in the last chapter how, across class and gender, there is a common perception, articulated mainly through mediated representation, that the west represents an icon of freedom where values associated with a true cosmopolitan ethos such as freedom, democracy and human rights are sustained. Thus, perceiving the west to be the main cultural model that supports such humanitarian ideals missing from their own local context, cosmopolitanism, for these young people, becomes an important space of imagination through which limits to the self are often exposed and negotiated. Furthermore, this subjective desire to connect with global culture is reflected in the sensual and physical forms of expression these young men and women engage with in everyday life. Their everyday consumer practices are an important physical and visible assertion of this desired cosmopolitan aspiration. For the upper middle class, for instance, global brand names have become a normal part of their everyday realities. By associating with such practices, they often informed me that they not only felt a part of global cultural realities, but they also (proudly) felt that Cairo has come to resemble any typical western metropolis, saturated with the symbols of a universally circulating consumer culture. Wafaa, a 21-year-old upper middle class woman confirmed this point telling me:

About ten years ago, we had to travel to really witness global culture. If we wanted to sit in chic cafés, try international foods or buy our clothes from global fashion houses, we tended to travel to France, England or the US. Now, most of what we want is available right here in Cairo, which is like a really primitive version of New York or London. I still travel abroad though, but it's usually to escape the pollution and crowd (laughing).

This same sentiment was reflected among the two lower class groups, where there was a similar desire to engage with global consumer products, although in a way suited to their economic limitations and everyday realities. This point was expressed by 21-year-old Seham, a female working class nurse:

I see this whole new exciting world on television, and I just want to be like them. Beautiful, stylish, healthy people just enjoying their lives as they don't really have any worries. Well, I can't be carefree like them, as my reality is a lot worse off than theirs, but at least I can look like them. I once saw this dress that I really liked on one of the characters in a western serial, and I just wanted it then and there. I don't know how to use the Internet because I don't have a computer at home, so it was my friend who went to the "net café" and searched until she found the image of a dress almost like it. I took it to my mother's friend who is a dressmaker and asked her to design it for me – obviously for a tenth of its original price. My parents were horrified when they saw the image of the dress at first, but then when they saw how I adapted it, wearing a long sleeved top underneath and my veil also, they said I looked chic but respectable.

Essam, a 23-year-old lower middle class male expressed a similar attitude when he said:

Being religious is not a barrier to enjoying consumer culture or wanting to be a part of it. On the contrary, I think that armed with religious knowledge, we are able to make more informed choices about what is and what isn't suitable for us to engage in. For example, if I see this guy on a magazine with long gelled hair, a cigarette in his mouth and his shirt unbuttoned revealing his chest, I'm well aware this is not a respectable image for me to try and imitate. Nevertheless, I do like dressing in jeans and T-shirts more than the traditional Islamic gallabeya (a long white dress like garment worn by men). As well as giving off a perception that this person is modern, global fashion trends are also more practical and easier to move around in. I don't see any harm in that.

The above quotations demonstrate the fervour that young Egyptians display in embracing the visible and embodied symbols of global consumer culture.

Simultaneously, it also confirms the role of television in establishing consumer culture as a central frame that informs the everyday desires and aspirations of these young people across class. Nevertheless for the working class nurse Seham, the Internet also represents an important point of entry into this world of consumption, which, through the open search function accessible by the single click of a mouse, is

not so distant anymore. However, her reliance on her friend to search for the dress due to Seham's inability to use a computer, and also its unavailability in her home, is a stark reaffirmation of the importance of television as an affordable medium for the lower classes that requires little financial capital and no prior technical skill. Furthermore, Seham's double predicament – her inability to afford the dress of her choice as well as lack of technical ability to use the Internet – is an important reminder of how both consumers and media users are located within particular socio-economic networks that constrain and dictate everyday patterns of engagement and appropriation. In relation to both the lower middle and working class, as the above quotations illustrate, their strong desire to adopt western consumer trends is combined with a need to adapt these fashion choices in ways that make them 'respectable', and thus correspond to religious rules and the values associated with Islamic practice. For Essam, the lower middle class male, consumer fashion items become especially important as a route to publicly communicating an identity as a Muslim, yet a cosmopolitan Muslim who is in touch with global cultural modernity and the latest fashion developments of global youth cultures.

As a physical assertion of cultural desires, therefore, consumption has become central to how the different versions of a cosmopolitan imagination among young Egyptians are articulated on a daily basis. For instance, I have already explored in Chapter Six how the implicit cosmopolitan imagination of the working class is expressed in complex and often contradictory attitudes. As a further continuation of their internal contradictions, selected consumer products became a route towards shifting between different social spaces and identities that observe their own rules of acceptable conduct. For instance, in domestic spaces where religious hegemonic discourse prevail, the mobile phone has become an important marker of piety through its regular vocal reminder of the call to prayer. Nevertheless, safely enclosed within more liberal educational spaces where this conformity to a religious framework is much more relaxed, the mobile phone, for the working class, often transforms into a camera that becomes a keeper of much desired private romances. These examples confirm that consumer products are not solely desired for their material utilities, but can become loaded vessels that are carriers of 'cultural content' (Chua, 1998) or reflectors of particular 'identity markers' (Zukin, 1998). Following on from the above, therefore, a joint desire for consumer products across class, fuses

the diverse experiences of young Egyptians through common points of consumer interest. I here build up another layer of my table, which illustrates the common points of contact that often unite the experiences of young Egyptians:

<p><u>Attitudes towards the nation</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distrust of the state • Highly reflexive relationship to national community • Understood through a dialectic relation with global culture/ideals
<p><u>Consumption practices</u></p>	<p>Pursuit of consumer objects as an embodied expression of cosmopolitan belonging</p>

Figure 7.1- Consumption practices: points of convergence across class

Despite fostering common points of interest, engagement with a global consumer culture also intersects with, and takes its meaning from within overbearing power structures and ideologies that define the highly unequal realities of the young in Cairo. Clammer (2003:404) makes this point when he refers to how urban consumer cultures are undoubtedly globalised, yet are subject to endless 'local reinterpretations in terms of local values, imagination and desires'. Thus, although cities, as the locus of consumption practices, are to a large extent shaped through transnational forces, these forces are mediated by the unique social, cultural and economic contexts that shape particular localities. In relation to my observations in Cairo, the way consumer activities are mediated via the semiotics of local daily life is clearly reflected in the above participants' quotations. In the second two quotations, for instance, a desire for consumption is in tension with both everyday economic realities, and wider hegemonic discourses of Islamic morality, which govern everyday rules regarding the body and its appearance in public space. Thus, an ethnographic analysis of consumer practices across class is an important reminder that although 'desire' can be universal, crossing the boundaries of classed and gendered categories, 'ability' to acquire continues to be framed through, and often limited by these social categories. This often contributes to many unfulfilled dreams and unearths moments of tension in young Cairenes' experiences of consumer culture.

As Massey (1998) reminds us, there is a need to focus on how the construction of youth cultures is a process highly imbued with unequal relations of power and uneven geographical development. This point is reminiscent of an important thread running throughout my discussion, which is that cosmopolitanism and the social practices it involves are not benign experiences, but are framed by, and thus negotiated through, wider discourses of power and hegemony. This does not mean that the experiences of those who do not enjoy abundant levels of socio-cultural and economic capital are discounted. Rather, it is *they* who often display some of the most complex, yet fascinating forms of cultural articulation. What is needed is an in-depth and long term examination of the unique strategies through which these diverse groups construct their own particular cosmopolitan routes of belonging vis-à-vis consumer practices.

The remainder of this chapter will undergo a class specific analysis of the upper, lower middle and working class in relation to their everyday consumer practices.

7.2 Elite Consumption and the Exclusive Cultural Worlds of the Upper Middle Class

Consumer practices are particularly central to the everyday performances of upper middle class participants, allowing them to envelop themselves within an exclusive cultural bubble of western modernity associated with 'first world' sophistication. Specifically, these practices are brought to life in their university campus where imagination becomes transformed into a daily physical and embodied reality, expressed in choices over fashion, cuisine and technology. The acquisition of particular consumer goods permits them to undergo a daily performance of distinction and symbolically experience a more tangible connection to global cultural realities. Indeed, I am frequently informed by members of the upper middle class sample of the importance they attach to the ownership of particular consumer products. Sahar, 23, a female student at the American University said:

I always feel I'm in a fashion show not a university. It's like we are in a constant competition to dress in a particular way and always have the "right" appearance. Girls have to be seen with the latest designer handbags and shoes, while the boys are expected to purchase the latest

technological gadgets such as the Blackberry, iPhone or iPod. I mean, to win your place in the famous *Gucci corner* each item of clothing you wear has to be an expensive designer brand- no less than Gucci obviously. It's hard and very expensive to keep up, but it's also quite exciting and I guess a privilege to feel that you are considered amongst the best dressed in Egypt

A fellow student, 21-year-old Zein also discussed this point:

People look at us and think we just have an easy life. Yes, we are financially comfortable and thus have a lot of privileges, but at the same time there are so many expectations that we have to adhere and live up to. I envy that lower class people can just wear anything and drive any car – they don't have an image to constantly maintain. It's different for us because if you're not driving one of the latest models or wearing designer clothes or are holding a slick mobile phone, you're looked down upon. This obsession with physical appearances is part of our class culture though. People wouldn't mind abstaining from food so they can spend all their money on getting their appearance "right".

Interestingly, both of these quotations reveal an underlying tension regarding the upper middle class' everyday engagement with consumer culture. As well as these consumer products representing objects that they take pleasure in attaining, it is almost as if they are sometimes perceived to be a burden which they are coerced into visibly displaying as a confirmation of, and conformity to, their elite class identity. Indeed, as I discuss below, entry into the exclusive elite world of upper middle class Egyptians requires the acquisition of particular products that become symbolic markers of a specific class status. There is no stronger indication of their closed cosmopolitan imagination than their consumer practices. They emphasize how, for the upper middle class, a need to assert their belonging to the world is expressed in the acquisition of highly priced and desirable consumer items that mark a clear boundary of class identity.

The cultural expectations that the upper middle class often feel obliged to fulfil are strikingly impressed upon their everyday university life. Their campus is transformed into an important arena through which consumer ideals are expressed, demonstrated and appropriated. I remember the first time I walked into the campus of the American University being in awe at its physical infrastructure built over a vast

space, with a large Olympic size swimming pool, football and basketball courts. During one non-participation session, as I walked across the car park towards the main gates of the campus, I did not think I had ever seen such a large concentration of expensive, chauffeured driven cars depositing students at the main campus gates. Not one public bus, taxi or microbus was in sight. Approaching the hordes of young men and women sharing morning greetings and heading to their first lectures, I instantly knew I had made the wrong choice of dress. Although I was the one who lived in the 'west,' I most definitely felt physically out of place with my tired looking jeans and worn out trainers. I decided I would have to make more of an effort next time in order to avoid appearing starkly out of place.

Fashion choices were heavily indicative of a global consumer influence as expensive designer handbags, shoes, sunglasses and jeans were the everyday norm – even expected appearance – for this young elite. In what I rather amusingly learned is called the *Gucci Corner*, were the seriously (and willing to spend) fashion-conscious students awarded the privilege of being part of this exclusive group. They visibly and consciously displayed their bodies adorned with 'Gucci' styles and other top designer brands from head to toe as they smoked, gossiped and met up with lovers between lectures. As I proceeded further across the campus, I came into contact with hippie-type students, wearing loose trendy clothing, displaying multiple facial piercings and often flaunting unusual hair colours. As I approached closer I saw two men sitting on a table strumming their guitars and singing one of Bon Jovi's best hits, while the rest of their friends, both men and women, enthusiastically sang along.

Within all these groups, physical contact between genders seemed to be normal – even expected – as the often common greeting between men and women was a kiss and a hug. Couples could be seen openly walking around displaying romantic acts of intimacy. Interestingly, such open gestures of romance would be unacceptable, even criminal anywhere else. In the public streets of Cairo, sustained physical contact of a sexual or intimate nature between men and women can result in a jail sentence. Nevertheless, enclosed within the walls of the American University, other students walked past them oblivious that anything unusual, or indeed, unacceptable, was taking place. The well-circulated idea that 'anything and everything can happen within the gates of the AUC' was not a myth, it appeared. Most of the time, however,

when not in lectures, students were lounging about sunbathing on the immaculately trimmed lawn and listening to their ipods, or sitting in the canteen, faced with an internationally varied menu of McDonalds, sushi, pizza or a coffee and dessert at Cinnabon or Ben's Cookies. Using this to my advantage, I would always take a break half way through the sessions, treating myself to a double chocolate chip cookie and latté that I would take to the benches near the AUC bookstore, positioned strategically so as to give a panoramic view of a large part of the campus. During one memorable session, biting into my cookie during my short break, I could hear the thumping echo of the American rapper 50 Cent blasting out of the stereo system located in the main communal area of the campus. Opposite me were also a couple embracing, locked in intimate kisses. In the midst of all this, a very strange incident took place, largely unconnected to its surroundings.

At the highest point of the campus, where an open walk-on bridge links two separate buildings, a young bearded man appeared out of nowhere, and in what appeared to be an all familiar routine, he performed the *azaan* or Islamic call to prayer. I looked in amazement at what to me was a very unexpected incident. Although hearing the call to prayer five times a day, everyday, blasting out of Cairo's numerous mosques is normal, I certainly found it almost at odds with the general atmosphere of the AUC. However, I seemed to be the only one amazed: the music continued to thump and the couple continued to embrace obliviously, and just as suddenly as he appeared, the unknown bearded man disappeared. His mission was complete: the call to prayer was announced. Asking about this mystery figure who I often glimpsed around the campus, I was told he was a student of Engineering who only ever appeared to perform the *azaan*. I sometimes caught him walking hastily to his lectures – gaze lowered, trousers rolled up (an Islamic tradition observed by some strict religious men where lower garments are expected to be above the ankles), displaying a visible lack of interest in the buzzing student activities going on around him. Although intrigued to understand more about this young man, I sensed he would not really appreciate talking to a woman he did not know, so I avoided approaching him.

Despite this young student and his endeavours going largely unnoticed by his colleagues, this incident illustrates that religion is not completely absent from the everyday lives of the upper middle class, thus reminding us of the tensions and

internal contradictions that exist within class. Although to many of my participants in the upper middle class religion did not appear to be a priority, for some, their faith was core to their identity. Indeed, as a person who regularly prays, the first thing I asked about when I began my sessions at the AUC, was a prayer room. I was directed to the last floor of one of the buildings, where I found two segregated prayer rooms – one for men and one for women. Although the women's room never really contained more than a handful of people who came to pray at any one time, it illustrated that religion was not completely absent from the social worlds of the upper middle class, and still informed some of the daily practices of this young elite. Whereas for the two lower classes, religion is an important and very visible marker of their class identity, for the upper middle class, religion can be seen to influence the lives of particular individuals within this class group, rather than represent a common thread of identity across the whole class. Although the veil was visible at AUC, it was much less common than in the working and lower middle class institutions. Nevertheless, religious symbols and Islamic codes of dress were no barrier to interpersonal relations at the AUC, as the veiled woman, and the woman in the short skirt or the sleeveless top socialized in the same group and were often best friends. Thus, religious symbols remained only that – symbols that were engaged with (or not) strictly as a personal choice and not expected social obligations, as was often the case with women in the two lower classes. Furthermore, I witnessed how, for the upper middle class, a religious Islamic affiliation remained independent of, and unconditioned by dress choice. It would often be the girl in the short skirt who would trek up to the prayer room, cover herself in one of the body gowns provided, and fulfil her daily prayers. What united members of this group was not a common religious identification, but their class status and the fact that veiled or unveiled, they both owned the latest Louis Vuitton handbag and were wearing the latest Ray Ban sunglasses.

The above illustration of everyday life in the AUC is indicative of the closed cosmopolitan imagination of the upper middle class that is based predominantly on securing a specific class status linked exclusively to western lifestyles. As one young student there told me:

It's like America has been picked up and transported to Cairo. The way students dress, the food choices or the university building itself. It really is like you're in a completely different world – one that is a lot more sanitized and ordered. It's a shame what you have to see once you move out of the gates though – a complete culture shock. I always dread the journey home from the university: the horrendous traffic, the heat and the stupid people – all three can be avoided in the campus. I guess it's just a more comfortable environment to be in.

Thus, these young people desire to position themselves as members of a universal elite upper middle class through consumer practices associated with global forms of cultural consumption. They want to create their own 'America in Cairo'.

Nevertheless, this desire to assert their belonging to a wider world is located very specifically within a constricted class understanding. This understanding conceives of the upper classes of Egypt as being stylish, modern and educated, compared to the ignorant and 'stupid' (lower class people as described by the student above) people of Cairo excluded from such pristine worlds.

By entering the gates of their campus, therefore, students of the American University are not only entering an educational institution, but are symbolically entering into a very specific articulation of cultural globalisation. Globalisation for them is represented and embodied in selected fashion, food and leisure practices, which are able to transform their campus into an enclave within which *being global* becomes a daily achievement. This desire and achievement has become even more apparent after the American University's relocation. Recently, in 2008, the campus moved from the hustle and bustle of Al-Tahrir, one of the busiest and most crowded districts in central Cairo, surrounded by local supermarkets, traditional food-stalls and local cafés, to the remoteness of a new desert-surrounded campus. During a discussion with one of the lecturers at the university, I was told how the embodied appearance and fashion choices of the students have changed dramatically, as the secluded location of the new campus has allowed them to experience a new found freedom in relation to more liberal forms of dress and performance. The lecturer on American studies at the university told me:

Students at the American University have always been known for their really daring, westernized forms of dress. This is especially true of the women whose appearance I sometimes find to be quite provocative. Things got worse after the campus moved to *El Tagamo' El Khames*.

It's mainly surrounded by desert and so it gives a kind of exclusivity to the campus. Thus, female students have become less conscious of the disapproving looks of more modest Egyptians who don't commend this sort of dress. It's like the barrier of shame has suddenly been removed.

Although at the start of my research the university had only just undergone its relocation, some classes still operated from the old campus. Thus, in the first month of my research, my observation sessions alternated between both campuses. I witnessed for myself how the old campus in Al-Tahrir was particularly constraining in relation to the desired public performances of women. After completing one non-participant observation session and waiting for my lift home, I came across a group of female students walking out of the safety of the campus into the crowded main street. Heads down, the women hastily walked past the garlic whiff of traditional *kushari* (an Egyptian pasta and rice based dish with a tomato sauce) cafeterias and the honking sounds of cars trapped in endless traffic jams, in order to reach their chauffeur driven vehicles.

In an attempt to secure their modesty, shawls were wrapped around bare shoulders, while long jackets were used to cover exposed knees. Even so, this did little to spare them from the prying gazes of harassing taxi drivers, manual workers and shop owners who, in a state of excitement, started whistling and clapping. Angered by their giddy and uncomfortable reaction, one of the women shouted out: 'ignorant people – when will you learn to act like civilized humans'. This tension seems to have been relieved in the new campus which, located in one of Cairo's new remote satellite cities, means students – surrounded only by desert – are not forced to acknowledge the perceived 'ignorance' of working class Egyptian labourers. The way upper middle class women are forced to adapt their embodied dress choices to suit different urban locations, resonates with the experiences of working class women who move between different performances and bodily appearances to suit the educational/non-educational environment as I document in section 7.4. This is evidence of the porosity of classes that are not rigid or homogenous social groupings, but allow for contradictions and overlaps between their boundaries. Despite their vastly differing class status, what unites these women is the perceived sexualisation

of the female body and thus how it needs to be controlled and covered (albeit in very different ways) while in public and particularly in the presence of men.

As I discussed in Chapter Four, in his ethnographic analysis of Cairo's Qassr Nile bridge, Sabry (2010) questions what kind of public space the bridge has come to represent. 'Could it be a different kind of public space, a private-public space, an inbetween space or even a hyper-real space?' (Sabry, 2010: 69). In the same vein, what type of space is the AUC campus? It is intended to be an institution where everyday educational knowledge is acquired. Nevertheless, its students have converted the university into a *lived space* (Lefebvre, 1991) of symbolic meaning and interpretation, to borrow Lefebvre's term. The campus represents an imagined cultural enclave where America has become 'transported to Cairo' as the young man told me above, allowing a very specific articulation of cosmopolitanism to be asserted. This is a closed cosmopolitanism that has become a strong confirmation of how, for the upper middle class, cosmopolitanism is strongly related to selected consumer practices and the expression of individual identities that locate them as members of a global transnational elite. Bonds of class, therefore, have come to transcend national boundaries and social relationships based on geographical proximity. On an everyday class-identity basis, these privileged individuals consider themselves to be more on a par with young people of a similar class status living in the west, than of fellow Egyptian nationals from a lower socio-economic background.

7.3 Divine Consumption? The Lower Middle Class between Consumer Desires and Religious Obligation

Fashion choices, in particular, are central to the consumer practices of the lower middle class, with selected objects defining embodied appearance becoming an important mode of socio-symbolic communication. I discussed in the last empirical chapter how the lower middle class are occupying a complex, hybrid critical cosmopolitanism that blends acceptance of global culture with a religiously analytical attitude. Significantly, the body emerges as central to this process where its adornment represents a highly visible route (Chua, 1998) for the combined expression of both religious and global cultural forms of belonging. A particular

strategy, especially relevant for women, through which they are able to incorporate an Islamic morality within their consumer practices, is the engagement in an 'embodied piety' (Deeb, 2006: 103). This involves the way the body becomes a canvas onto which personal and religious piety is transformed into a highly visible demonstration of faith. The adoption of the veil especially, emerges as important to the daily lives of young lower middle class women. Indeed, a large number of them commented on how they are able to maintain a comfortable urban mobility through the veil, as they feel protected from the male gaze and instances of verbal sexual harassment common in the streets of Cairo.

Of the 100 lower middle class young people I asked in the questionnaire, 36% use the underground metro system for transport, 25% use the microbus, and 32% use more than one means of public transport. In this context, where the seclusion of a private car is beyond their limited economic means, Islamic dress plays a vital role in enabling these women to move around the city with relative freedom. Specifically, the veil performs the function of a religious banner, signalling that this particular woman is a pious Muslim, thus not interested in any form of flirtation or male attention. In this way, veiling becomes a protecting socio-spatial practice undertaken by women in light of their very particular daily urban experiences in Cairo (Macleod, 1992; Hoodfar, 1991). Indeed, during the group discussions, many of the lower middle class women comment that as a result of the veil and their conservative dress choices, they feel able to negotiate the streets of Cairo with much more confidence. If they happen to be recipients of any unwanted male attention or verbal harassment, then they could not be blamed for it. As 22-year-old Dina informed me:

Even while wearing the veil, I do still receive attention from men in the streets. 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 that 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. But men, or at least Egyptian men, are still men at the end of the day and they will probably continue to look at a woman even if she covered herself with a tent.

Maysa, a 21-year-old student at the Faculty of Education also made a similar point when she declared:

I just feel more comfortable wearing the veil. I can't imagine going out without it, my head would just feel so bare. Anyway, the streets of Cairo have become a jungle full of wild animals. Obviously by wild animals I'm referring to men who just insist on flirting and teasing any girl who walks by. It makes me feel very nervous and uneasy and so I prefer the confidence and sense of freedom I get when I'm modest and covered up. However, that doesn't mean I have to be scruffy or dress in a gallabeya (traditional long dress like garment). I like to wear jeans, colourful cardigans, boots and dresses. I always make an effort to try to research the latest trends – what people are wearing in the fashionable places outside of Egypt. I might be a Muslim who dresses conservatively, yet I like to think of myself as a trendy and modern one. I think any Muslim woman is obliged to be a positive ambassador of her religion.

It seems, therefore, that as well as lower middle class women choosing to wear the veil as an expression of embodied piety and as a form of public protection, there is often a desire to merge this with global fashion trends. Indeed, this corresponds to responses collected through the television consumption survey in relation to the lower middle class, where 66% of women in this group selected keeping up-to-date with 'international cultural changes' through 'international fashion trends' as an 'important' reason for watching television. I saw for myself during the non-participant observation sessions in their university campus how branded veils emerged as central to their everyday fashion choices. Whereas shoes, handbags and their attire in general did not really reflect any particular desire for branded designs, I very commonly saw counterfeits of Burberry, Valentino and Fendi headscarves. In one instance, two women engaged my interest as they walked around the campus in their very locally made cotton Egyptian tracksuits and matching Adidas headscarves. Significantly, these consumer choices are indicative of the critical cosmopolitan imagination displayed by members of this class. Such consumer objects represent an important form of visible expression allowing these women to blend their religious identity with western symbols of global modernity. It is interesting how the veil, perhaps more than any other item of clothing, emerges as their chosen embodiment of the global brand. By wearing these branded veils, these young women are publicly demonstrating that they are devout Muslims. Yet by visibly adorning their bodies with these branded (although counterfeit) consumer objects, they are also symbolically positioning themselves beyond local and national boundaries, locating

everyday symbols of devout religiosity within wider discourses of global consumer modernity and youth identity.

Such hybridized fashion choices were not only relegated to the women, but were also highly desired by men in this group. They also seek to maintain an image of Islamic piousness, yet also to select trends which signify that these are modern, fashion-conscious individuals, up to date with global consumerism and youth identities. For instance, in one focus group discussion with lower middle class men, the renowned City Stars Mall was a topic that raised a lot of interest, as the exchange below illustrates:

Mohammed: I like going to City Stars. It's clean, spacious and well thought out. I like to have a bite at the food court with my friends and then have a walk around – especially in the summer when we can take advantage of the air conditioning.

Interviewer: Are there any shops in particular that you enjoying going to or purchasing from?

Mohammed: Well, I wouldn't really say that I go to City Stars to buy anything. It's impossible – the prices are unbelievably expensive. I mainly just go window shopping to get ideas about the latest fashion trends and to try out the latest technological gadgets. Sometimes, if there's an item of clothing I like, I search for it at my local mall that sells some similar designs but at much cheaper prices. Even the restaurants are ridiculously priced and so sometimes we bring our own sandwiches and eat them in the food court and just buy a drink. We do get stared at though by the upper classes who find our behaviour quite vulgar. I mean, for people who find no problem in splashing a considerable amount out on a single meal, I'm not surprised they find it strange that we bring our own food! But then again, it's not like we are doing anything against the law, is it?

Ayman: I agree, I mean why can't they just let us be. I hate the way I walk into a clothes shop to try something on and the assistant is just so rude and patronizing, silently implying I should leave because I wouldn't be able to afford anything. But then she's suddenly so friendly when a family from the Gulf walk in dressed in their designer clothes and diamond watches. She follows them round like a dog, all smiles. Sometimes I avoid going into shops, and just look from the outside. Anyway, even if I had the money, I wouldn't buy many of the things ridiculously expensive items sold in City Stars. Allah says in the Quraan that those who overspend are brothers of the devil.

Following on from the above, it is clear how City Stars is an important consumer outlet that allows these men to familiarize themselves with the latest fashion trends and designs, and with a global culture they desire to become a part of. It is noticeable, however, as the last quotation reflects, that desires fostered through consumer products often remain untouchable goods. Although these consumer objects flagrantly displayed in the mall, are very much desired by these men, they sometimes remain unreachable; distanced physically by shop windows in outlets they feel too intimidated to enter, and symbolically through the class prejudices of shop assistants. Thus, it seems that in City Stars, it is ideas rather than products that are consumed, which are then realized in cheaper outlets where similar, more affordable versions are widely available. This confirms Schielke's (2007:3) thesis that cosmopolitanism in Cairo, as a desire to position oneself in the world, provides at once 'for moments of hope and moments of tremendous pressure and disappointment'. Thus, cosmopolitanism, as a daily lived reality, is an experience highly imbued within unequal relations of power and takes its meanings via grounded local experience that intersects with systems of class, gender and religion. I have already explored how the fashion choices of lower middle class women are informed by a desire to engage with global trends, yet are framed by religious discourses of morality. Additionally, for both men and women in this group, socio-economic capital shapes their access to a restricted set of consumer products. Nevertheless, these limited socio-economic and religious realities do not discount the experiences of these groups or exclude them from developing cosmopolitanism aspirations. Rather, although operating from within restrictive everyday realities, these young men and women have become skilled at negotiating and discovering their own unique roots of cosmopolitan expression.

My ethnographic fieldwork also unearths how the media play a very particular and central role for lower middle class women. In the absence of an economic ability to directly engage in consumer practices, media representations themselves become products that are consumed. Thus, my analysis of young Egyptians' consumer practices, has led me to the observation that consumerism takes on two distinct forms in Cairo. Engagement in a consumer world can either take place directly through the material acquisition of consumer objects, or via the media, which themselves become consumed as primary means of symbolic connection with an unreachable, yet desired

global consumer world. Focusing on China, Schein (1999) has also argued how television can often provide a point of entry into an imagined global consumer fantasy, from which financially disadvantaged viewers would otherwise be excluded. In relation to my own research, the centrality of television to the consumer desires of lower middle class women, is demonstrated in the popularity of Turkish drama serials. Seventy four percent of women in this class category revealed through the survey that they are regular fans of Turkish serials, specifically the soap opera named *Noor*. Its plot focuses on a romantic love story – including the struggles and tribulations – between the blond haired, blue eyed stud Mohannad and his independent fashion designer wife, Noor. When I asked these women 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 main 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 22-year-old woman, demonstrate this:

Mohannad is just so gentle with Noor, and always takes into 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 as Egyptian men tend to think, but that it should be the beginning of a long romantic life.

It appears, therefore, that Turkish serials have become an important catalyst allowing these women to negotiate key gender roles that affect their everyday lives. The married women of the group informed me that such storylines have opened their eyes to aspects that they felt were missing from their own relationships such as romance and respect. Thus, these fictional storylines have become an important medium through which they have aspired to change and perfect their relationship. Taking this into consideration, however, I was quite surprised when I watched this Turkish serial for myself as drinking of alcohol, extra marital relationships and on-screen kissing were common features of these serials; the same features which are usually condemned when viewed in American media. Why is it that that they are accepted in a different context? The answer seems to lie once again with Islam: these fictional characters may drink or engage in 'unlawful' relationships, but at the end of the day,

they are Muslims just like them. Frames with Quraanic verses hung on the walls of the characters' homes, the frequent appearance of mosques in the streets, some of the female actresses wearing the headscarf, and the occasional character praying, seems to make up for the morally unacceptable behaviour that often occurs. As 22-year-old Amna said:

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! This shared moral framework makes it easier for us to identify with the characters on-screen; to immerse ourselves in the storylines and compare our own realities to what occurs in the serial.

Amna's friend, 21-year-old Noorhan also enjoys Turkish serials immensely. She told me:

Mohannad is so romantic. I mean he's better looking than his wife but still treats her like a princess. Where is this passion and romance in martial relationships in Egypt? I'm not married, but after watching this serial, I will accept nothing less than Mohammad (laughing). I also love Noor's clothes though, she is so pretty and elegant. Also the big mansion they live in which is just magnificent....and the picturesque images of Turkey.....it's beautiful, like a piece of Europe!

These Turkish serials, therefore, have encouraged their female viewers to push the boundaries of what has been previously been regarded as acceptable. What they may find intolerable in the context of a western or American programme, seems to be almost unnoticeable in these Turkish serials as it takes place within the confines of a more 'respectable' Islamic framework. These young women accept that the behaviour of the characters may not always respect the boundaries of Islamic morality, but their identity as Muslims and their realization that ultimately, their fate is in the hands of Allah, appear to compensate for this. Thus, it seems that the global has become indigenized through the regional and the Islamic, 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 the identities of

the real Turkish actors have become almost completely unknown as they are now considered to be Arab figures, recognized by their Arabic names of 'Mohannad' and 'Noor'. Once again, this is indicative of a critical cosmopolitan imagination where religious identities do not prevent lower middle class participants from developing a desire to engage with aspects of global cultural modernity, as long as they are enveloped within, and filtered through Islamic discourse. Furthermore, the above discussion demonstrates that consumption does not only take precedence in the form of material products that adorn the body. Indeed, it is not only physical products that are consumed, but immaterially, mediated dreams, aspirations and perceptions of an ideal life and romantic relationships on the screen are also consumed, allowing participants to reflect upon, and redefine the limits of their identities and imagine the self in new ways.

7.4 The 'Beckham' Hairstyle and Egyptianized Burgers: Working Class and Implicit Consumerism

Although discourse unveiled through my discussions with the working class reveals a commitment to dominant discourses of religious morality alone, direct observation and examination of their everyday lives unearth paradoxical performances. In this discussion, I explore how an everyday acquisition of consumer products has become an important route allowing the working class to sustain these performances. Selected consumer objects allow some of the young working class participants to subjectively transport themselves between different cultural worlds, and to physically alternate between different performances that conform to the requirements of both domestic and public spaces. This is strongly indicative of their implicit cosmopolitan imagination where the acquisition of consumer objects allows them a moment to claim their belonging to a broader cultural context and global youth practices that transcend the restricted boundaries of morality established by the family and nation. In this context, selected consumer objects permit the working class to articulate implicit moments that often allow them to subvert and symbolically contest the familial and religious systems of power that constrain and control their daily realities. According to Abaza (2001:117), the working class of Cairo is occupying parallel worlds, constantly negotiating different lifestyles. They are forced to adapt to the 'two worlds, the *inside/outside- the dense, highly socially controlled, poor popular*

quarters versus the modern public spheres' (emphasis in original). This duality of everyday performance in the realities of the working class of Cairo, is in need of further research, Abaza argues. In this context, by ethnographically examining a snapshot of the daily lives of working class Egyptians, I can illustrate more clearly how the balance between local particularity, religious morality and a global articulation of culture is actually implemented and maintained in an everyday context. I find their university/educational campus to be one of the most fascinating spaces to observe and understand attitudes, as being with their peers, free of the scrutinizing eyes of family and community expectations, they tend to perform youth identities that are highly globalised.

The first time I walked into Madina Institute, my ears were instantly offended by the raucous Arabic music blasting out of the small canteen. I looked around me to find men and women comfortably standing around in mixed-gendered groups laughing, gossiping and often teasingly chasing each other around. Although the vast majority of the young women were veiled, I was rather surprised at the quite daring attire that was often combined with the veil. Although Islamic discourse dictates that the veiled woman wear loose, non-revealing, non-transparent clothing, what I saw around me was often the exact opposite. Tight, figure-hugging outfits appeared to be an accepted norm. One woman walked passed me wearing a short, fitted dress, combined with silver high heeled knee boots and a matching silver sparkling veil. I also noticed that heavy make-up was acceptable. Fashion choices were also an important part of the everyday visible performance of men who were predominantly dressed in imitated copies of western designer brands such as Converse trainers, Diesel jeans and Lacoste T-shirts. One of the men I got to know during my sessions at the institute asked me what I thought of his 'Beckham' hairdo that he had changed from his previous 'zbiky' look (a spiky haircut that is heavily gelled). There appeared to be no shyness between men and women as during break times, mixed gendered groups often headed off together outside of the campus to grab a bite to eat.

During one session, a female student I had become acquainted with at the institute, insisted on buying me lunch from the canteen. I sensed she was trying to impress me when she happily declared that she would bring me (as she pronounced it)

'cabatsheeno we borgar zay el andoko barra' (cappuccino and a burger like you have "outside" i.e. in foreign countries). I was impressed, although eventually, when my lunch arrived, I discovered it to be a very Egyptian interpretation of a burger and cappuccino. The latter was a normal cup of coffee blended with a hand-held, battery-operated whisk to create a cappuccino-imitating froth on the surface. Unwrapping the 'borgar' was a bit of an anti-climax as it turned out to be a *hawawshy*. This is a well-known, locally made mince-meat sandwich cooked with onions and spices to give more bulk, thus requiring less meat, making it much more affordable. Apart from food, mobile phones represented multi-tool media both for communicating and for entertainment during lunch-time breaks and between lectures. They are referred to as *el-camera* when they want to take group pictures with friends, or *el-iPod* when they wish to use their phones as miniature stereos where, along with their friends, they listen to western and Arabic music, while walking around the campus. Furthermore, as my relationship with women from this class grew stronger, they often excitedly showed me the latest 'secret' photos of their lovers or still-to-be love interests that they kept recorded on their mobile phones. Nadia, 21, told me how the secret world of her mobile phone was the only place she could store such photos digitally as she would be too scared to keep hold of any hard copies. She was worried such pictures would be discovered by her three siblings with whom she shares a room.

Additionally, I witnessed frequently across the working class how their mobile phones were often programmed at set times to act as a vocal reminder for the Islamic call to prayer. This is a strong confirmation of the way the working class constantly move between different performances, constantly negotiating their identities as Muslims, but also as members of global youth cultural practices. The multiple uses they make of technology, as observed above, often supports this transition process.

As I discussed in Chapter Six, during the early stages of my research, young men and women in the working class sample seemed intent on constantly placing themselves almost exclusively with an Islamic framework of acceptability. The west was often vocally attacked as a source of corruption and moral laxness that needed to be distanced. Nevertheless, I was conducting my non-participant observation sessions in parallel to these early discussions, and so I was aware from the start, through an observation of their everyday behaviour, of the visible gap that existed between their discourse, and between actual daily practice. Thus, although discourse during the

early stages of my research revealed dominant ideologies of religious conservatism, everyday action, which emerged as the fieldwork progressed, demonstrated complex and often conflicting practices. As the scene from their campus demonstrates, the signs and symbols of global consumer culture are deeply entrenched in their everyday realities, and are very much enjoyed. This is reflected in the fashion choices of these young students, in their desire to listen to American rap music, and in their ability to buy a cappuccino and burger from their canteen. It is also affirmed by the multiple uses they make of their mobile phones, both as cameras and mini-stereos, as secret photo albums and prayer alarms. Members of the working class sample may have declared to me initially that they morally reject the west, choosing instead a lifestyle inspired by Islamic morality and practice. Yet, my observations of their actual daily behaviour, led me to question whether these vocal aspirations are entirely reflective of their actual desires and realities, or are about conformity to the demands of dominant social and religious expectations.

Despite an insistence on constantly placing themselves within an Islamic frame of reference by, for example, wearing the veil, can it be fair to say that other aspects of their behaviour often challenge the boundaries of Islamic acceptability? I witnessed this very visibly during one of my non-participant observation sessions after receiving a text message from my friend telling me to re-schedule my weekly visit to the campus to 9am instead of 2pm. She told me to meet her near the campus toilets. Intrigued by her request, I was there on time. As she opened the door that led to the unusually small, unhygienic toilet, I was instantly taken aback by the strong whiff of perfume, and the sight of a number of women standing opposite the mirror adjusting/changing their clothing and applying make-up. It almost looked as if they were preparing themselves for a fashion parade, with some women taking off jackets to reveal tight clothing underneath, while others removed the veil altogether. Observing their cosmetic products on the toilet counter, they were all mainly cheap counterfeits of western brands. For example, I saw J'adore mascara wands (J'adore is a perfume by Christian Dior and does not officially have a make-up range) and Kinzo perfume (packaged to look and smell like the original Kenzo). After spending about 20 minutes in the toilet watching the different faces appear and disappear smelling and looking very different, I decided I needed some fresh air. I went back to the campus courtyard with my friend and instantly asked her to explain why she

thinks this masquerade of performances and appearances happens. Anan, 21, said in response:

Well, most of these girls are not really allowed out anywhere else other than to the institute, so they take full advantage of this opportunity to dress up in ways they wouldn't normally be allowed to. I see girls every morning coming into the toilets applying make-up, taking off jackets to reveal more fashionable types of clothes. A few of them have even gone to the extent of taking the veil off altogether when they are at the institute. I know some of these girls and they often tell me how they feel very controlled in their daily lives, especially if they have strict older brothers. They just want to live these moments of freedom, feel that they have some sort of liberty to make their own decision.

I asked Anan to introduce me to these friends of hers, and although for a significant period of time during the early part of my research they were very reluctant to allow me to accompany them on their social outings, eventually, through Anan's intervention, one of them gave in. After several meetings of trying to establish rapport with Fatma, I felt she began to relax around me and Anan eventually told me in a telephone conversation that she thinks her friend would be ready to answer some of the questions that she knows I have been longing to ask. Indeed, meeting them one evening in a coffee shop near their institute, I asked 23-year-old Fatma what she thinks of the women who undergo these contradicting performances and adopt multiple appearances. She told me:

You may not understand and you may have another opinion, but when you're always told what to do in every aspect of your life, always commanded how to dress and behave, sometimes its good to feel you have a choice. I don't directly disobey my parents, I would never do that and I don't think I really disobey Allah. I mean, it's all harmless really – a bit of makeup, a nice dress, some perfume. It's not like I'm walking around naked. I want to feel I'm a *young* woman like any other – like I can dress nicely, look pretty, and have fun. Isn't all this normal, isn't that what young people my age do in the world?

Interviewer: By the 'world,' are you referring to the people of your age you see on television?

Well, I guess so. Actually, I had an argument with my mum the other day because I wanted to go to my friend's birthday party and she refused to let me go. I told her I was really bored, plus they are all

girls. She told me to just watch television if I'm bored- "Isn't that why you wanted a TV in the first place?" she said. I felt like saying that television actually makes it worse. What's the point of seeing how the world lives, how they eat and dress and have happy lives if we can't do the same. It's not just a matter of entertainment. I mean, you see how these people live and only then do you realize how bad your own situation is. It's not just television. I live very near to El Mohandeseen (a wealthy district of Cairo) and have to go through it every day to reach my institute. I see all the rich people getting in their expensive cars and eating in fancy restaurants and the worst thing is, you know you will never have half of what they do – but you have to see them every single day of your life. Can you imagine that? Sometimes I just want to shut myself off from the world and get rid of the television.

This powerful quotation demonstrates the extent to which young working class women often feel that they are repressed, afforded little room to move between or beyond the rigid social categories of class and gender that structure their daily lives. This sense is strengthened through their exposure to television representations, as in the abundant media spaces they have access to, more opportunities for reflection and interpretation are made possible where the self is constantly seen in light of both socially and geographically distant others. The above quotation is also a strong reaffirmation of the fact that television plays a paradoxical role: as much as its representations can expose these young people to the dreams of a better life they aspire to, these very same representations become mirrors that reflect the sordid reality of their own everyday lives. Furthermore, the above attitudes and expressions are indicative of the implicit cosmopolitan imagination of the working class where the engagement with selected consumer practices reflects a desire to position themselves inside the boundaries of a larger globally interconnected world. This often represents a moment of resistance and a temporary breathing space against the everyday repressive power structures they are forced to abide by in their locales.

Physically, and in terms of public performance, the discourses that shape working class identities, especially for young women, fall predominantly within the limited boundaries of the neighbourhood and family expectations. In the more private subjective spaces of interpretation fed by the media, as juxtaposed with the physical spaces of educational institutions where youth identities are performed, these established notions of identity are being challenged. In the context of a youth consumer culture, a sense of connection to a wider world is formulated where

boundaries of acceptable conduct fall far beyond the limits of established local structures and Islamic morality. This constant move between physical forms of control and subjective spaces of interpretation encourages these young women to move in and out of contradictory performances on a daily basis. It is important to mention that although these contradictory behaviours I have recorded were the prevalent norm visible in my visits to the institute, I was told that a number of students have actively distanced themselves from these practices. Twenty-two year old Huda, for instance, informed me how one of her good friends now avoids socialising on campus, as she disapproves of the activities that take place there, and is worried she will be tempted to take part in them. She also told me that a group of what are known as ‘good girls’ spend break and lunch times in one of the cafes outside the campus, as they strongly condemn the excessive integration between men and women that takes place at the institute. Additionally, although it was a rare occurrence, a few times I saw a group of bearded men try to interrupt the football match that regularly takes place in the open courtyard, insisting that this space should be prioritised for praying and not sport.

In most cases, therefore, the institute campus is an important space where strict moral codes and religious doctrines that govern everyday behaviour are often relaxed. An identification with the symbols of consumer modernity associated with the practices of global youth cultures allows members of the working class to display moments of freedom, pleasure and choice, which they often feel are missing from their everyday realities. Significantly, however, before leaving the campus to head home, I often see these young people return to their socially acceptable state of appearance and conduct for the non-educational environment. This is a reminder of how their implicit cosmopolitan imagination truly is implicit, not able to subvert dominant forms of control, but forced to operate from within them, leading to the articulation of limited assertions of cosmopolitanism encapsulated within temporally and spatially bounded contexts.

I started this chapter by exploring how the experiences of young Egyptians are united through the way the media represent platforms for formulating joint consumer desires. Nevertheless, in my class specific analysis, my discussion has revealed that mediated desires for consumption intersect with everyday hegemonic discourses of

class, religion and gender that shape daily lives in Cairo. In this context, young Egyptians have constructed three unique narratives of consumer identities and desires that reflect the diverse orientations of their cosmopolitan imagination. This is illustrated in the table below:

	<u>Upper middle class</u>	<u>Lower middle class</u>	<u>Working class</u>
<u>Attitudes towards the nation</u>	Nation imagined exclusively through western frame	Nation imagined through religious frame, but in dialogue with western modernity	Nation imagined through religious frame, but through contradictory practices/attitudes
<u>Consumption practices</u>	Exclusive engagement with western consumer products	Religion central to consumer practices	Consumer products supporting daily contradictory performances

Figure 7.2- Consumption practices: points of divergence across class

7.5- Conclusion

The above analysis has illustrated how television is central to the consumer practices of young Egyptians, framing a consumer world as part of their everyday familiar cultural desires. Nevertheless, although mediated representations can potentially offer an open-ended world of imaginative possibilities, it is important to acknowledge how mediated desires intersect with everyday realities dominated by socio-cultural divides and hegemonic discourses of power. This unearths a tension between a *desire* to have, and the *ability* to acquire. As I have discussed, there is a displayed self-awareness by the two lower class groups regarding their exclusion from the exclusive elite networks of upper middle class worlds. Thus, as well as being a catalyst through which aspirations are formulated and promises are often realized, consumer worlds can also represent a container of suppressed desires.

Despite both their unprivileged economic realities and restrictive religious discourses

that can often confine their engagement with a consumer world, the working and lower middle class participants are intelligently working from within their own repressive contexts to include themselves. They negotiate their own strategies and form their own unique cosmopolitan networks of belonging. Mignolo (2000:736) argues how 'a right' to be included or not is no longer satisfactory when talking about cosmopolitanism as a daily lived reality for different groups. As he writes: 'today, silenced and marginalized voices are bringing themselves into the conversation of cosmopolitan projects, rather than waiting to be included'. Thus, through dynamic processes of 'border thinking' (Mignolo, 2000) individuals and groups are able to actively attach themselves to their self-constructed cosmopolitan projects. This corresponds to my discussion in Chapter One of how cosmopolitanism today takes place through a process of *internal heterogeneity* where we are no longer required to go out to the world in order to engage with it, 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 particular experiences. Embedded in specific localities, therefore, people coalesce the local and the global in unique ways that lead to new avenues for imagining the self. In this context, with consumer practices representing primary routes of expression, global cultural modernity has become both internalized and appropriated.

8 A Tale of Three Cities? Cairo at the Juxtaposition of Urban Divisions and Media Practices

8.1 Introduction

The city, manifested in all Cairo's complexities, divisions and contradictions, emerges as central to the ways in which cosmopolitanism is lived and articulated in Egypt. I have discussed how a fascination with global culture as a symbol of freedom and the bearer of cosmopolitan ideals, is translated by young Egyptians into an acquisition of selected consumer symbols as an expression and embodiment of this desired cultural identification. Thus, I have approached the city so far as the main 'engine' of consumption (Zukin, 1998) where the various socio-economic groups in Cairo are often divided on the basis of different consumer driven lifestyles, representing visible markers of social difference and distinction. Nevertheless, Cairo is more than a container of consumer practices. Cairo is the location of *everyday* life for these young people. It is where they live, work, consume, negotiate its horrendous traffic, breathe in its pollution, socialise with friends, pray in the mosque, visit family, escape from family, look for love and resist authority. In a place like Cairo where endless worlds exist within one city and where appearances are deceptively never what they seem, what the city represents is an endless list of complex experiences and embodied articulations of urban identities. This chapter examines how the city as a space of imagination is shaped by, and emerges through everyday media practices. More specifically, I suggest that as increased opportunities for mediated connection define daily realities in Cairo, this leads to a redefinition of the meanings of *space* and *place* within everyday experiences of the metropolis.

Egypt is a country where the signs of repression and brutal authority are unswervingly and overtly displayed. It is seen in the way a policeman can physically assault a citizen without facing repercussions, or in the way a rich woman safely enclosed within an air conditioned brand new Mercedes, can verbally assault and mock the 10-year-old street worker for attempting to wipe the windows with his sullied cloth. Cairo is also a city of vast differences where everyday urban life is highly fragmented, and physically demarcated on the basis of classed and gendered realities. Thus, young Egyptians are not only forced to negotiate an 'other' who is

geographically distant and brought closer through the media, but an 'other' who is geographically close yet socially distant and inaccessible. According to Chin (2009:5), 'as media participants have more opportunities than resources to engage with diverse 'others', they must choose who to engage with, as well as how, when, and why to engage'. Thus, faced with increased mediated opportunities for connection, those geographically and physically proximate – perhaps sometimes too proximate – may be shunned in favour of a distant 'other'; an other who is geographically remote, yet perceived to be socially closer and more relevant to everyday experiences.

Cairo is a city of consumption, of oppression, of difference, yet also of creativity, imagination and opportunity. I discussed in Chapter Two how the *everyday* is a space of negotiation that takes place between discourse and lived practice. Thus, experiences of the *everyday* in Cairo are partly associated with the constricting city that cannot be escaped – the city underwritten by debilitating class polarization, a monopolization of state control, and unequal gender relations. Yet, there is also a more creative 'everyday' from below where a cosmopolitan imagination, drawing primarily on the more fluid systems of mediated representation, transforms the everyday into a more dynamic space of negotiation and reflexive interpretation. Importantly, this space of creativity cannot transcend structured control from above, but can allow citizens to develop new *tactics* to interpret, challenge and often resist such structured *strategies* in different ways (De Certeau, 1984).

It is Lefebvre's *Production of Space* (Lefebvre, 1991), however, that provides my main inspiration for how I understand the city, discussed also in Chapter Four. Lefebvre does not approach the city as a passive backdrop or a space already existing, but as an active surface that is constructed within the realms of everyday experience. Specifically, Lefebvre's triadic model for understanding the production of urban space allows us to bring together three unique dimensions of space: space as imbued with power and thus produced to fit the vision of dominant elites (conceived space), the physical aspect of the city grasped by the senses (perceived space) and everyday life in the city as it is experienced and subjectively understood by citizens from below (lived space). In this context, Lefebvre recognizes the city not only as a physical space with a material infrastructure, but by focusing on the subjective

understandings that people make of urban space, he emphasizes the city's symbolic and imaginary dimensions. In this respect, as cultural windows and everyday resources for connecting to a wider world, the media are considered important 'representational registers' (Jansson, 2009: 309) through which imagination is formed and filtered, thus allowing 'built environments and infrastructures (to) become communicative, that is, socially and culturally meaningful' (ibid.). In this respect, I use Lie's (2003) approach, according to which space is perceived as 'lived' place: through interaction and mediated communication, everyday experiences of bounded, territorial place transform into more boundless, imaginative *communication spaces* (Lie, 2003). Thus, as a contrast to the everyday, sometimes disillusioned realities of metropolitan *place*, often designed solely to fit the constricted vision of state elites (Lefebvre's conceived space), urban *spaces* of mediated imagination can offer inhabitants of the city representation, meaning and inclusivity (Lefebvre's lived space). The city, therefore, as a vessel for the everyday expression of cosmopolitan imagination, becomes a creative urban terrain that young Egyptians of different class backgrounds can often reclaim (or many times cannot) and negotiate in a way they find more satisfying, thus making it their own.

As subsequent sections of this chapter will illustrate, by drawing on mediated representations, young Egyptians have transformed the material topography of Cairo into multiple spaces of imagination. With reference to Freitas' (cf. Abaza, 2001) notion of *imaginaire*, I argue that young Egyptians are united in their desires to construct their own subjectively conceived 'ideal' city within the larger city. This represents an important point of contact that brings together the diverse experiences of young Egyptians. I illustrate this by building up the final layer of my table:

<u>Attitudes towards the nation</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distrust of the state • Highly reflexive relationship to national community • Understood through a dialectic relation with global culture/ideals
<u>Consumption practices</u>	Pursuit of consumer objects as an embodied expression of cosmopolitan belonging
<u>Urban mobilities</u>	City as a space of imagination and identity negotiation

Figure 8.1- Urban mobilities: points of convergence across class

As much as the joint experience of constructing mediated spaces of imagination across class represents an important point of contact for young Egyptians, it also further polarizes their already fragmented daily realities. Cairo remains an urban arena of oppression, incapacitating divisions and repressive forms of control from which these spaces of mediated imagination cannot escape, yet are forced to operate within. Hence, while physically positioned in Cairo, yet subjectively shifting between different systems of mediated representation, young Egyptians are engaging in the construction of urban spaces of imagination that take their meaning from within, and continue to be framed by structured discourses of unequal classed and gendered realities. As urban dwellers who are city-savvy, these young men and women have developed a strong self-awareness of the spaces that welcome them, yet also boundaries that they are not permitted to overstep. My class-specific analysis of the urban experiences of young Egyptians, which makes up the remainder of this chapter, reveals the realities of life in Cairo today.

8.2 'I Look at the Lower Class and Remember I'm in Egypt': The Selective Mobilities of the Upper Middle Class

The city is an important expressive arena for the upper middle class, allowing them to sustain their desired standards of 'first world' superiority and belonging by selecting very specific venues of socialization (De Koning, 2009; Abaza, 2005).

There is also a desire to support social hierarchies that exclude the presence of lower

class Egyptians. The previous empirical chapters have explored how upper middle class attitudes reflect the desire for a symbolic disconnection from local forms of identification. This involves a constant trivialization and attitude of nihilism towards these more immediate forms of belonging, although at the same time, they simultaneously display an enthusiastic engagement with global culture. By turning to an analysis of their everyday highly *selective mobilities* within the city, I explore how symbolic forms of disconnection to particular classed groups based on a constricted class-prejudice, is translated into an everyday tangible reality. As they move in the city, the upper middle class participants transform a symbolic detachment from lower class groups into a real and physical distance, leading to a further crystallization of socio-cultural hierarchies.

Cosmopolitanism, to these young elite men and women, is primarily a way of asserting their belonging to the 'first world', understood by them as a class status and not a geographical positioning (Schielke, 2007). Thus, I have used the term *closed cosmopolitanism* in relation to how their cosmopolitan orientations primarily become associated with elite status and a way of securing social distinction. In this discussion, I explore how, as a further continuation of such a constricted articulation of cosmopolitanism, the upper middle class are able to transform urban place into exclusive spaces of mediated imagination that expel the lower class *other*. These urban spaces, drawing heavily on the media, offer young Egyptian elites room for identification and subjective imagination in ways that transcend the realities of urban place, which do not always conform to their very particular standards of class elitism. For the upper middle class, therefore, *place* and *space* are positioned against each other, as by engaging in their chosen urban spaces of imagination, they attempt to transcend what they perceive to be the inelegance of local culture and city life, and instead, envelop themselves exclusively within a more sophisticated global cultural imagination. These selective patterns of urban mobility emphasize the closed cosmopolitan positions of the upper middle class. By engaging in the construction of these very particular mediated imaginative spaces, they are able to challenge the physical realities of metropolitan place, and transform them in ways that reflect idealized standards associated exclusively with a global cultural modernity.

In my conversations with these young elite Egyptians, it is clear that they are

involved in a constant performance of distinction (Bourdieu, 1984) that is grounded in their everyday urban experiences. The way young upper middle class men and women selectively choose to move within the city, stems out of a desire to secure a very specific form of habitus (ibid.). Primarily, one of the most important requirements of the spaces they choose to socialize in, is that they exclude members of the lower classes. This class segregation is achieved when the selected urban outlets they socialise in, employ particular strategies to limit who is and who is not granted access. For instance, these outlets often introduce unreasonably high minimum charges, ensuring that only those of a particular socio-economic status can afford to enter; enlist rules about certain prohibited dress, particularly targeting Islamic forms of embodied expression such the veil or beards; and employ security guards who eject individuals that do not match entry requirements in terms of 'acceptable' appearance and conduct.

Through my discussions with the upper middle class, and observation and often participation in their social outings, I became aware how they chose to socialise in a select number of cafés and restaurants around Cairo that sustain very particular characteristics associated with their constricted and classed interpretation of the world around them. In one instance, I accompanied a group of upper middle class participants on a weekend evening outing to *Sangria*, a restaurant/bar located on the Nile bank facing Cairo's elite district of Zamalek. After meeting the group outside the restaurant, 20-year-old May informed me that we would have to sit in the garden area as opposed to the inside seating space, as rules of the establishment dictate that veiled women (myself and two other women in the group) are banned from entering the inside bar. We proceeded to the garden area and crossed the long stone passage adorned with trees and flowers, where the waiter showed us to our seating place: a modern cubed style table placed in the centre of two very large white modern leather sofas.

The view of the Nile was breathtaking, the complementary appetizers tasty and the company was entertaining. Nevertheless, the 'secretive' indoor seating area from which I was banned because of my veil, dominated my thoughts. Excusing myself for a few minutes, I decided to investigate. I walked up the cobbled stairs towards the indoor seating area and peered from the outside through the window, seeing what

was basically a bar. I could immediately hear western pop music and inhale the choking whiff of cigarette smoke as women in cocktail dresses and men in smart shirts were sitting on modern high stools, some drinking juices, but many sipping glasses of wine and champagne. I caught sight of the bouncer guarding the door that led into the exclusive inside area, and asked him if I could enter. He quite patronizingly replied: 'Ya anesa (miss) how do you want to enter a bar if you're wearing a veil? This is for your own good, you know. Do you think God would approve it?' Realizing it was a useless endeavour to try and enter, I returned to the group. I was very intrigued as to why these young men and women had chosen this particular location. An interesting dialogue ensued:

May: I come here as a way of escaping the pollution and crowd of Cairo. I mean, sat up here by the Nile next to all the five star hotels, international menu and well dressed people, it's like you're not even in Egypt. I have Canadian friends who come to holiday in Egypt and say that places like Sangria are very similar to the types of cafés they socialise in back home.

Ahmed: Yeah, this is like our own *Central Perk* (the fictional café where many scenes of the sit com *Friends* is filmed) in Egypt (laughing).

Asking them whether they think it is ethical for cafés to apply minimum charges to keep certain people out, I was told:

Hassan: Yes, I think it's right. Not because I have any sense of prejudice towards them, but because we are different, and they will always feel inadequate around us. For example, when my friends and I come here, we often get really serious and discuss the latest episode of *Al Ashera Masa'an* (10pm, a popular political television programme). We generally have an interest in these issues. The lower classes though don't care about such things, they just want to be vulgar and flirt with girls. Our interests are just too different!

May: What?! And men from the middle class don't tease girls and can be vulgar too? Sexual harassment is related to our whole culture, not to a particular class. I think that's quite unfair. They should be able to make a free decision of where they would like to socialize regardless of whether we like that or not. I guess the reality is though, even if they are given the choice, they wouldn't be able to afford socializing in the places we go to.

Lina: It's not just about flirting, though. Our lifestyles are very different as well. I don't personally drink alcohol, but many of my friends do, and that's their choice isn't it? You probably respect that because you live in the west and know what freedom of choice is, and I know that too. But the lower classes don't accept that, and they find it offensive or they look at us like we are completely immoral. Also, I'm dressed in tight jeans and I might like to wear a short dress next time, again that's my choice. But they wouldn't accept that and they look at me like I'm a prostitute. At the end of the day, isn't it just easier if they socialized in places they find acceptable and leave us to do what we want to? They can wear the veil or do what they want to do – I have lots of veiled friends and have nothing against it. But I should have the right to wear what I want to as well. Isn't that what liberalism is all about?

May: Oh really Lina? So why is it becoming a big trend in Egypt to ban veiled girls from entering cafés in Cairo, like here? Is that liberalism? Stop being hypocrites guys, please. Like you said, we have veiled friends and it has become a nuisance now when we want to go out with them because there are places that restrict their entry. Why though? The strange thing is, it has become normal in Egypt, and even the veiled girls themselves have just come to accept it.

Although May's words reflected a minority opinion in this group, her bold statement seemed to create a moment of discomfort as no-one appeared to have a reply or comment. Eventually, the non-alcoholic cocktails and garlic bread that arrived took over their interests. May's words may not have rested comfortably with the rest of the group, yet they raised a point of extreme importance. It is evident with the majority of participants in this group, once, again, that values intrinsic to cosmopolitanism are very much sought, yet are interpreted in ways that narrowly locate them as part of a particular elite class category. To be elite, you have to be liberal. To be liberal, you have to be able to exercise freedom in what you wear and what you drink. Therefore, they enjoy the idea of liberalism in that it awards them certain rights. Yet doesn't a true cosmopolitan ethos dictate that there are also responsibilities to respect the choices of others? Surely, agreeing to ban women wearing Islamic attire from entering certain public spaces is antithetical to the true meaning of liberalism. It is important to note that I am not suggesting that all of the upper middle class were united in their desire to exclude veiled girls or the lower classes from engaging in the spaces they like to socialize in. What I found quite surprising, however, was the complacent outlook and passive acceptance that many of them have developed in relation to this issue. As one young man told me: 'it's no big deal really – there are

plenty of other places they can go to, aren't there'? Isn't such an attitude that disregards the liberty of others to dress how they wish, *where* they wish, a misinterpretation of the true meaning of liberalism?

The quotation by Ahmed in the exchange above supports what was said in Chapter Six about the upper classes perceiving themselves to be the leading generation of Egypt. The quotation also confirms the importance of the media in sustaining this, as chosen programmes expand their horizons regarding certain political issues that only *they* (as members of the 'educated' middle class) have a valid interest in. Thus, there is continuity between the media and urban spaces of socialization in the way they intertwine to create specific imagined performances of distinction. Again, this is strongly indicative of the closed cosmopolitan positions of these young men and women that are articulated through a very narrow lens of class elitism. As May said above, the fact the places they meet in resemble venues located in any typical western metropole, seems to increase their worth and appeal to an even greater extent. It appears that by enclosing themselves within these exclusive urban enclaves, surrounded by icons of 'first world' modernity such as five-star hotels, the wider reality of Cairo as a poor 'third-world' city is rendered abstract. Thus, just the mere presence and visibility of the local *other* is a stark physical reminder that they are not in America or in *Central Perk* as Ahmed discussed in relation to the characters of *Friends*, but in a poverty stricken city of the developing south. Unsurprisingly, not all of the upper middle class in my sample are united in an acceptance of this class exclusion, as on some occasions, voices of dissent are raised. Taking part in the above exchange, Sameh declares that this class segregation has gone too far in Egypt and needs to be challenged. May, who seemed to have a much less socially-prejudiced view from the beginning, was the only one who agreed with him. However, Sameh's argument was quickly countered, and he was jokingly referred to as 'Sameh the socialist'. Nothing more was said of it.

When it came to ordering food, I rather excitedly imagined our table to be a feast of international cuisine that would reflect the diverse menu offering almost everything from pizza to paella to crème brûlée. Instead, I was more surprised than disheartened when the waiter laid down a range of starters including: *homous*, *tabbouleh* (Lebanese salad), mozzarella sticks and *sogo'* (Egyptian sausage) – all served with

traditional, freshly baked Arabic bread. It was hardly the international feast I had imagined, as most of these dishes actually consisted of local Egyptian and Arabic cuisine. This was even more apparent when the main dishes arrived, as most of them ordered *shawerma* (traditional Arabic dish consisting of shredded meat or chicken in a wrap) or grilled *kofta* (minced meat) and chicken. The only exception to this Arabic theme was myself and Reem who both ordered sea food pasta. I was initially confused as to why they would make the effort to come all the way to Zamalek in order to socialise in a place that has a western ambiance, and then order Arabic food. I was even more surprised that they chose to socialize in Sangria that employs a minimum charge of 100LE (as an interesting point of comparison, some of my working class participants had a monthly family income of 700LE to support five people), while the local dishes they ordered could easily be eaten in any traditional Egyptian café/restaurant for a quarter of the price.

What the above incident demonstrates is that the upper middle class often continue to enjoy cultural products associated with their national and regional culture, just as long as they are packaged in a way that competes with the standards of a pristine and modern western culture with which they like to associate themselves. Homous and Arabic bread is much more desirable when eaten in the wealthy district of Zamalek, on a white leather couch, opposite the Nile and in the company of Cairo's most well-connected elite. The fact that it is almost laughably over priced, is beside the point for these young people. As Abaza (2006:172) argues, there has been a noticeable 'folklorization of culture' in Egypt where traditional symbols of local culture are being incorporated within more modern forms of western consumerism, making them a lot more attractive both to foreigners and the wealthy classes. Indeed, sitting with another group of upper middle class participants in Costa Café, 24-year-old Hany and his friend, 23-year-old Mohammed, both decided that they wanted shisha. Using a newly downloaded application on his latest iPhone, Hany searched for nearby places that served shisha, and was able to read reviews of these places left by young people like himself. Again, this demonstrates the continuity between media, and particularly in this case new media, and the city in creating at their intersection particular spaces and performances of distinction. Hany's iPhone application (available only in English and thus used predominantly by the upper classes), as well as the desires of the rest of the group, pointed them towards Sequoia, another open

air restaurant on the Nile in the elite district of Zamalek. 'There's a high minimum charge, though' Ahmed informs us all, 'is everyone ok with that?' Asking them why they don't just go to any nearby traditional café that serves shisha at reasonable prices, Hany replied: 'these places aren't exactly suitable when we are with girls – the men there aren't civilized. Plus, the cafés aren't clean'. Ahmed added:

Do you want us to end up with TB? These places know nothing about hygiene. I want to smoke shisha, but I don't want to die doing it. I also don't want to sit and hear old unemployed men gossiping and complaining. It's about the atmosphere and the ambience more than anything else. I want nice scenery, decent people and a relaxing environment.

Sequoia, with its white drapes, candle lit tables and direct Nile view, did indeed have wonderful scenery. Even the fancy, expensive and 'modern' shisha, all plastic bulbs and flashing lights, was an interesting sight to look at.

In the following sections, I will focus on how, for the working and lower middle class, religious discourses and rules are central to everyday decisions regarding cultural practices and mobility beyond the home. For instance, some working class families ban their daughters from socializing in cafés where there is unregulated mixing between genders or where shisha is smoked. Upper middle class women are not completely free of these familial forms of regulation on their mobility as hinted above in Hany's words. I am often told by upper middle class women how their families do not allow them to drive unaccompanied through certain districts and areas of Cairo they perceive to be 'dangerous'. Interestingly, this 'danger' was embodied in the figure of the working class man, and thus is related to a classed perception of how he would respond inappropriately to the presence of these young women. It is commonly believed by upper middle class families, that spaces dominated by those from a lower socio-economic strata are characterized by raucous behaviour and vulgar actions which could jeopardise the safety of their daughters. As 24-year-old Dalia said:

My mum is always wary of me driving through particular neighbourhoods or socializing in cafés in specific districts of Cairo. Obviously these are predominantly working class neighbourhoods that aren't used to women driving cars alone and wearing tight jeans or

showing their hair. I don't blame her as once my car broke down in such an area, and I was verbally harassed by a group of males who kept whistling and shouting out really offensive, sexually explicit comments.

This attitude was echoed in 22-year-old Mohammed's words:

Dalia is right as I wouldn't really be comfortable with my own sister going to these lower class areas. They are really male-dominated neighbourhoods, and they are used to girls covering up and staying home. I mean there's this really nice café that my sister likes going to, but you have to walk through this bad area to reach it. She complained of how men started to follow her and make really dirty gestures. I told her not to go there again. I don't know why they are so vulgar....why can't they just act like civilized people? I feel embarrassed that Egyptians are like this.

As we can see from these two quotations, the mobility of upper middle class women is often controlled due to concerns over their safety as a result of the unpredictable behaviour and threat posed by lower class men. This is in direct contrast to women from the two lower classes whose mobilities are also heavily restricted, yet primarily, as a result of the rules of religious morality, and women's presence in the public space within this controlled framework of moralities. This is an important illustration of the fact that class cannot be analysed outside of gender. Although occupying very different social positions and cultural worlds, what unites these women across class, is their gender identity, and thus the various ways their urban mobilities are regularly conditioned to protect their dignity, reputation or safety. Furthermore, the above quotations illustrate that the lower classes do not only symbolically 'taint' the image of western superiority that the upper middle class attempt to sustain, but they are sometimes perceived as a physical threat and danger to these pristine worlds, especially to the women. This highlights the multifaceted nature of mobility within the city, and that as different classed worlds – that usually remain segregated – intersect, power(lessness) can become employed and expressed in multiple ways. Whereas the privileged status and abundant access to resources enjoyed by upper middle class Egyptians means they may consider themselves to be the ultimate power holders, as they move within the city and come out of their urban comfort zones, these established structures of power may often become displaced in new ways. The mobility of upper middle class women exemplifies the sense of threat

often associated with the city and class.

The above discussion confirms the point made in the introduction to this chapter in relation to mediated spaces of imagination allowing young Egyptians to negotiate their 'ideal' cities within the city (Freitas cf. Abaza, 2001) while remaining in dialogue with established structures of power. This means that although an imagined city is negotiated, it remains bound by the wider city that cannot be escaped, with all its inequalities and disappointments. In relation to their closed cosmopolitan imagination, therefore, upper middle class participants are engaged in the construction of a mediated urban imagination that draws predominantly on global cultural modernity, while physically excluding the lower classes for whom these repertoires are not an everyday reality. Nevertheless, as we have seen, attempts to maintain spatial demarcation can never be fully impermeable. However much the elite may try, 'the presence of the local other could not be fully bracketed' (Saldanha, 2002: 344).

8.3 Reputation and Virtue in the Urban Mobilities of the Lower Middle Class

The experiences of the lower middle class, and indeed the working class as will be discussed in the next section, demonstrate the centrality of gender stratification as a system of restricting and organizing public mobility in Cairo. Hence, as class is constantly in dialogue with other socio-cultural formations, the next two sections examine how everyday experiences of the city, particularly for the two lower classes, often involve a highly gendered use of space. As I mentioned in Chapter Two in relation to my discussion on Egypt, assertions of complete exclusion of women from the public space fall contrary to everyday realities in the Arab world and more conservative societies in general. Women do indeed remain visible within developing cities, yet their visibility is often a highly conditional and restricted one (Phadke, 2007; De Koning, 2009). I suggest, therefore, that urban experiences for both the lower middle and working class revolve around *restricted-selective* mobilities.

Although fully aware of structures of power that control and restrict their everyday mobility, the lower middle and working class are able to negotiate their own forms of resistance. Although these moments of resistance remain encapsulated within larger

hegemonic discourses and established structures of power that constrain their movement within the city, members of these two classes are still able to articulate a limited presence and position in the city. The role of religion is examined as an important mediator that influences how the lower middle and working classes shift between different urban spaces. As I discussed in Chapter Seven, for the lower middle class, Islamic discourses are intricately incorporated within everyday social practices and decisions, and are unconsciously embedded in the routines, decisions and assumptions of everyday life. This devout commitment, shaping the orientations of both men and women, yet particularly relevant to women, influences patterns of everyday mobility within the city. Ideals of 'respectability' 'virtue' and 'reputation', articulated predominantly through their desire to ultimately fulfil the role of pious Muslim wives and daughters, influence everyday public performances and, specifically, *where* and *how* they are seen in the city.

For the lower middle class, priorities and desires are quite different to those of the upper middle class. Rather than searching for venues that solely maintain global standards of superiority and sophistication, these young men and women constantly emphasize how they need reassurance that the places they choose are 'respectable' and of 'good reputation'. When asked in the survey where they spend most of their free time, 62% of the lower middle class responded 'in the home/around local neighbourhood'. Of these, 56.4% were women. Additionally, less than 22% of women in this group responded that they visit cafés regularly compared to 54% of men. As 22-year-old Safaa declared during a focus group discussion:

I don't really socialise much outside my local neighbourhood. I prefer to stay around my familiar community, either at the homes of family and close friends or at the mosque. The mosque isn't just a place to pray and worship, but is also an important social area where people can come together and engage in activities that benefit the wider community. I teach Quraan to children in the mosque and sometimes meet my friends there.

When I asked lower middle class women whether their mobility away from the local community is restricted, I was told by 23-year-old Nadia:

My family doesn't really say that I can go to a certain café, and not another. My mum just always reminds me that we are a family with

little means, who don't have much but our reputation. We live in a close knit community where all the neighbours are friends, and we have always been known to be a respectable, religious family. Thus she wants me to always retain this good reputation and to make sure that when I'm out in public, I'm a good ambassador for my family, neighbourhood and religion. I must not shame my family or Allah in any way.

After hearing this, I then asked Nadia if she thinks the same rules and expectations are equally placed on men. She informed me:

Obviously men still have to act respectfully. If they don't, their family will be accused of not bringing them up properly, of not teaching them to be good Muslims. However, men are not under the same pressure as women. They can make mistakes and then redeem themselves later on. We are not allowed a second chance so we have to be very careful when out in public. Anything a girl says or does can immediately be taken against her.

Mustafa, 21, makes a similar point when he discusses family and societal expectations that are placed on young lower middle class men like himself:

Society is very harsh towards women. Unfortunately we live in a very judgemental, very nosey society. If a girl does something wrong then that's it – she is tainted forever. However, society is much more forgiving of men as their mistakes are almost always erased and forgotten about.

According to the above, it seems that for lower middle class women, the urban spaces they choose to become involved in are an extension of their domestic and semi-private neighbourhood places. The venues they socialise in need to be zones of 'respectability', which will not in any way taint their reputation as pious Muslim women. For instance, although I am informed that they sometimes like frequenting cafés – a relatively contemporary western inspired development in Egypt – they are very particular about the ones that are suitable and conform to their religious ideals as I will discuss below. This relates to Phadke's (2007:1512) analysis of everyday mobilities among Indian women in Mumbai. According to Phadke, these women are burdened with the requirement to maintain 'sexual safety', where the female body is demanded to police its own virtue and honour while out in public. Thus, in the case of the lower middle class, *place* and *space* mirror each other as individuals attempt to

carve out spaces within the city that serve the same requirements and expectations of 'virtue' and 'good reputation' that are values central to the local neighbourhood communities they are associated with. Nevertheless, as well as being influenced by hegemonic discourses of religious morality, the everyday urban mobilities of both men and women from this class are also shaped and articulated through their exposure to mediated representations of a global cultural modernity.

Even though the majority of these young people have never travelled outside Egypt, this does not deter them from perceiving global culture as a familiar and desirable reference informing their everyday. Their daily exposure to western media products means that decisions about where to socialise are placed within an Islamic framework, yet underpinned by a desire for engagement with a western inspired consumer culture. Thus, daily media practices can often become an important window through which these young people are able to shift imaginatively between and within different cultural worlds. During a focus group session, young lower middle class women proudly referred to how they often visit cafés – 'just like the ones on television' – with English names such as *Green Village* (although they usually cannot pronounce these names properly). Indeed, I once accompanied a group of lower middle class women on one of their outings to *Green Village*, a restaurant/café in the Maadi district of Cairo. The café was actually a large white marquee where the interior was surrounded with artificial plants and trees, thus almost imitating a jungle-like ambiance. The menu offered a wide variety of local choices including traditional kofta sandwiches, grilled chicken, and ta'ameyya (falafel), while also a range of international cuisine such as pastas and burgers. Drinks like lattés, cappuccinos and Nescafé were also available. Strangely, I could see a security guard roaming around the café rather aimlessly. Asking Laila, 23, about his unusual presence and about her reasons for coming to this café in general, she told me:

I love coming to Green Village. It's nice to sit in a place that seems really sophisticated like the ones we see *barra* (literally 'outside': foreign countries) where you can just drink cappuccinos, relax and chat with your friends. The fact there is a security guard here makes me even more comfortable, as I can be confident that no unacceptable behaviour will take place. Once, this guy was trying to flirt with me and he kept throwing bits of paper over with his number on it. I went

and complained to the security guard and he warned the guy that if he does it again, he'll be kicked out. So why shouldn't I sit in these cafés? I know the Quraan very well and nothing in its texts tells me that I can't enjoy being part of a larger world and alternative cultures, just so long as I always maintain my identity as a devout Muslim woman.

Thus, although these young women enjoy socializing in western style cafés, they make an effort to select ones which allow them to maintain what they regard as 'respectability'; an important part of the reputation of any good Muslim woman. This is an important indicator of the critical cosmopolitan imagination of the lower middle class where a desire to engage in symbols and cultural practices they associate with global culture, is interlaced with a critical and dynamic attitude. A moral positioning, as framed by their religion, filters norms and rules of what is and what is not acceptable. In relation to mobility within the city, they enjoy cafés that adopt a western inspired ambiance in relation to interior design, menu choices and music. Yet at the same time, these choices also include a moral dimension, as selected spaces are required to fulfil religious expectations of 'respectability' in relation to appropriate boundaries of interaction between men and women, and acceptable fashion choices. As 22-year-old Ahmed told me in relation to the introduction of western inspired cafés into Cairo's public spaces:

I think the introduction of such cafés into 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 socialise. 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 back-gammon and talk about other people. You know, as the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) said, cleanliness is a part of faith, so it's a responsibility to choose a clean and healthy atmosphere to socialise in. The places you sit in reflect on you as a person, and we should always be striving to show the world that Muslims are not ignorant or live in isolated caves, but that we are also modern, well informed about the world and enjoy globalization.

According to the above quotations, therefore, driven by their identity as Muslims, the lower middle class often search for particular urban venues that sustain desirable ideals such as cleanliness and sophistication, that they consider to be more visibly reflected in global leisure spaces. Additionally, the young lower middle class seek to position themselves somewhere in between the perceived shortcomings of the other two classes. They seek to constantly distance themselves both from the vulgarity and

crudeness of the 'unsophisticated' working class as Ahmed discusses in the quotation above, but also from the 'looseness' and 'moral corruptness' they associate with the upper classes. I am often told by the young lower middle class how they feel the upscale venues and spaces of Cairo, usually frequented by the upper classes, to have become zones where immoral behaviour, such as intimacy between the genders and provocative fashion choices are unquestioningly accepted. In response, lower middle class youth attempt to construct their own socialization networks, which allow them – to an agreeable extent – to experience an affiliation with global cultural modernity, while always maintaining a much needed Islamic reference point.

The above is indicative of the critical cosmopolitan imagination that young lower middle class Egyptians articulate. It demonstrates how, with the media at the heart of their everyday social practices, these young people are dynamically moving between different cultural worlds and modes of belonging where local particularity, religious attitudes and a global articulation of culture are in constant dialogue. They refuse to commit exclusively to one or the other worldviews. Interestingly, both Laila and Ahmed stress above how they perceive themselves to be citizens of a much larger interconnected world that they have the right to enjoy and take pleasure from in ways that conform to their identities as primarily devout Muslims. This is indicative of a definite cosmopolitan moment where these young lower middle class Egyptians are actively asserting themselves as members of a world that exists beyond local and national boundaries.

Furthermore, these young people have a strong class awareness of how they are purposefully excluded from urban places that are dominated by the upper middle class. Nevertheless, I am told that even if they do have the opportunity to go to these places, they would choose not to because of what they perceive to be the unacceptable behaviour that takes place there. As 24-year-old Ragaa says:

I know that people like me are unwelcome in these places; people who are veiled and don't wear the latest fashion brands or don't conform to a particular westernized image. Even if I was able to go, however, I wouldn't because I don't approve of the behaviour that goes on there. I once went past such a café and was completely shocked by what I saw through the window. Men and women are mixing freely, girls are smoking, couples holding hands, drinking alcohol. I couldn't believe I

was in Egypt! Why would I want to go to these sorts of places and be associated with this type of behaviour?

A similar point is made by 21 year-old-Wael when he says:

I see these youth (upper middle class) and I just feel like I have nothing in common with them. I mean, we live in the same country but it's like we are worlds apart. Sometimes I watch *Iqraa* (Islamic channel), and particularly this programme called *Yalla Shabab* (Lets Go Youth) where all these young Muslims from across the Arab world take part to discuss relevant Islamic issues. I actually feel I have more links and more commonalities with these young people, often from the Arab Gulf or from Yemen, than the young in my own country. These are the types of people I can connect with, as our beliefs and values, our sense of right and wrong are very similar. It means we could aid each other in worshipping Allah and being good Muslims.

Thus, as we can see from this example, the media create spaces where places of the city do not offer them. Indeed, in relation to the survey question on channel preference, Islamic channels came in at a close second behind commercial entertainment (MBC channels). Seventy percent of the lower middle class responded that they regularly watch the Islamic channel *Al-Nass*, compared to 72% who watch *Iqraa*. Sixty four percent also confirmed that religious programs are a 'very important' part of their media consumption practices. In this light, although these young lower middle class Egyptians feel marginalized and excluded from the more elite urban youth cultures existing adjacent to them in Cairo, through the consumption of Islamic media, they are able to connect themselves more inclusively to transnational Islamic networks elsewhere. Thus, despite feeling unwelcome in particular places of the city, on the basis of class identity, they are able to engage in the construction and negotiation of more spiritually meaningful mediated connections beyond the city and the nation. Thus as much as we focus on the divisions created by the drawing of boundaries in contemporary cities, it is also significant to always recognize the development of new and often unpredictable networks that transcend national boundaries, and the role the media play in forging such connections.

Significantly, the above discussion demonstrates how the construction of cosmopolitan imagination involves very dynamic negotiations of both social and

physical space. Perceptions of 'otherness' and 'sameness' are never complete, but are in a constant process of being articulated as these young people shift between different urban milieux and alternative media spaces. For instance, I have explored how, in an aesthetic or stylistic context, the west is positioned as a proximate frame of reference. Yet, in a moral and religious context, the west is often positioned as an immoral *other* that needs to be distanced and replaced by a more acceptable religious Islamic lifestyle. This is reflected in the way there is often a desire to disengage from spaces occupied by the upper middle class who are perceived to be an everyday embodiment of immoral practices extracted unreflexively from the west. In order to compensate for a geographically proximate, yet socially distant upper middle class, mediated connections are formed with a transnational Islamic youth culture, where religious bonds are closer to their everyday desires, identities and concerns.

8.4 'I Don't have Money, But I Can Still be Part of the "Real" Egypt': The Working Class and Open Public Space

The working class represents the group that displays the most complex and contradictory orientation. Despite their discourse through which they constantly attempt to frame themselves as being obedient to a moral framework defined solely by Islam, a close examination of everyday performances reveals alternative and often conflicting practices. This has been explored in the last chapter, particularly in relation to embodied appearance and everyday consumption patterns. Furthermore, evidence from my research reveals that these ambivalent patterns of everyday behaviour, that dynamically shift between different frameworks of morality befitting both the private and public spheres, are extended to their daily urban mobilities. I argue that the working class' everyday experiences of urban place are framed through a dual form of control and restriction: firstly at the level of the micro locale where behaviour within family and community spaces is restrained through an expected conformity to hegemonic discourses of religious morality, and secondly, in relation to their engagement with the wider city, where their mobility is constrained through classed forms of segregation and exclusion from public space. By exploring their *restricted-selective* mobilities, I explore how open spaces such as public parks become important urban spaces of imagination where, beyond the critical gaze of family and neighbourhood communities, established norms and imposed rules can

often be relaxed, replaced instead by more liberal forms of practice. Young couples, for instance, often meet for romantic strolls of intimacy where this would not be approved in the neighbourhood spaces supervised by family members.

Being well aware that they are excluded from places in the city frequented by the middle classes, urban zones negotiated by the working class become important spaces of inclusivity that allow them to often reclaim the city as their own. This further emphasizes the implicit cosmopolitan imagination of the working class where cosmopolitanism, in the form of a mediated desire to be part of the practices of global cultural modernity, becomes a temporary moment of resistance allowing them to negotiate and often challenge repressive forms of control and exclusion they face in their immediate everyday lives. In this context, I propose that spaces of urban belonging are different to place, as although these working class participants are embedded within very local neighbourhood experiences from which they cannot escape, they are also engaged in the construction of more dynamic spaces of imagination, heavily informed by the media. These spaces provide opportunities for the negotiation of, and resistance to, imposed limits placed on their everyday urban experiences in Cairo. These spaces allow them, albeit temporarily, to develop ways of resisting religiously-conceived forms of restriction and control that dictate the norms of public performance.

During my initial focus group sessions with members of this group, I frequently asked them about the types of places they enjoy socializing in. Women, in particular, usually answered that they spend most of their time at home or at the houses of family and friends due to parental restrictions. I was told that fathers and older brothers are quite authoritarian, restricting the mobility of their daughters and sisters beyond the local neighbourhood. There seems to be a general preference by families that these young women remain within the 'safe' and predictable environment of the immediate family and neighbourhood community where they can be easily monitored. As 19-year-old Sumaya told me:

I'm not really given a chance to do much, as my father and older brother always tell me that the streets are dangerous and that I shouldn't go out alone. You know, we don't have cars and have to use public transport, and that just makes them worry even more because

they hear stories about girls getting harassed or even kidnapped on the microbus. They tell me that if I want to socialise, I should visit family and friends in our local neighbourhood, or else take my younger brother with me. That way, they will be reassured I am safe, and that no-one in the community can say anything negative about me for going out alone.

Similarly, when I asked the men, they also maintained that they only really socialise in the nearby neighbourhood cafés or that they play football in the local community sports club. As 24-year-old Walid said:

I come back from work and I just want to do something different, to take my mind off the stress and strains of the day just passed. The problem is, I'm saving up to get married, and so I don't always have spare cash to go anywhere too far or too pricey. Usually, my neighbours and I just smoke shisha in the local café or play football in the free sports club.

These descriptions of daily mobility, or lack of it, make me realize the extent to which the micro-locale is of importance to this group. It is clear that the young working class participants are deeply embedded in local community networks and that women, especially must adhere and live up to their expectations. During my research period, I became quite close to Kariman, one of the female students at Madina Institute. She once insisted on inviting me to her home for dinner, telling me that her mother wanted to meet the 'Doctor' that Kariman was always telling her about. Indeed, a date was arranged and it was decided that after one of the sessions in the institute, I would go home with Kariman who lived in *Ahmed Zaki*, a well known working class street located in the wealthy district of *El Maadi*. This street is renowned for selling car parts and mobile phone accessories. Sitting on the overcrowded microbus on the way to Kariman's house, she seemed intent on preparing me for the fact that her neighbourhood was quite humble, cramped, and told me not to pay much attention if any of the men in the street tried to flirt. Approaching the apartment block where she lived, I realized why we had descended from the microbus so far away. The roads around Kariman's flat were so narrow that the microbus would not be able to drive through. The houses were in such close proximity that I could see women standing on the balconies of opposite apartment blocks having a normal face-to-face conversation. As we walked up to the apartment

entrance, women appeared from the balconies above, greeting Kariman and asking why she was home later than usual, while another intriguingly inquired about her 'new friend.'

Kariman's mum was waiting for us on the stairs and warmly embraced and kissed me, saying: 'welcome Doctor, I know the house isn't really up to standards.' Her whole family, including three siblings, fussed around me, providing me with endless cups of tea and cocka (Coke) as I sat in the cramped living room (that also functioned as a bedroom for the brother) which was separated from the kitchen by a yellow floral curtain. Standing on the tiny balcony to gain a more panoramic view of the neighbourhood in which Kariman lives her everyday life, I could see several local amenities such as a mosque, café and vegetable stall that also seemed to function as meeting points where members of the community meet up to gossip and exchange news. What I found most intriguing, was the way the whole apartment block, consisting of five floors, acted like one big family. The door to Kariman's house was never quite closed, as women from the adjacent flats knocked briefly and walked straight in, retuning empty pans they had borrowed, or bringing round food they had cooked. As Kariman and I were having dinner, her mother walked in informing us that Om-Ayman and Nada from the adjacent apartment block saw me walking in with Kariman and asked her across the balcony who I was. At 9pm I decided it was time to leave and thanking them for their welcoming hospitality, Kariman's mother insisted that Aly, her eldest sibling, walk me to the street to catch a taxi. I tried to decline as not to put them to any trouble, although she silenced me with a defiant 'that's not possible here. A girl can't walk in the streets alone at this time of night. Also, Kariman will come with you so that you're not seen with a man alone. Reputation is very important in this area'.

As the above scene illustrates, the close-knit, self-contained nature of these local communities means that the majority of families are well acquainted with each other. In this context, 'reputation' becomes a central means by which individuals in such local communities are judged, and in turn, reputation is dependent upon the public conduct of that individual within the community. As 23-year-old Sameh (man) told me:

It might be different for you, but in our poor communities, a woman isn't judged by her career, but by her reputation, respectable behaviour and the strength of her religious faith. These factors guarantee she will one day be a good wife and mother. If a woman doesn't have these traits, then she probably wouldn't get married or have much of a future here.

As the last quotation demonstrates, an adherence to Islamic discourse is very important in such local communities. The worth of a person's reputation, particularly a woman's, is judged by the perceived strength of her religious orientations and publicly observed behaviour. How a woman behaves, dresses and where she goes are all factors that influence how the community judges her, and the extent to which she is considered to be 'respectable' in their eyes. In turn, the way a young woman is perceived by her local community, and how her manners and behaviour are assessed, impact strongly on her eventual marital opportunities.

In the last section, I discussed how the idea of 'reputation' is also central to the everyday outlooks of young lower middle class women. Nevertheless, for the working class women, any discussion regarding their appearance, conduct or physical mobility was always framed solely in relation to a need to maintain a good reputation in their community. This ideal of 'reputation' is very forceful amongst the working class as the public appearances and performances of these women have an important impact on their future life opportunities. For instance, these working class women often tell me how they feel they have nothing to offer in a marriage but their honour and reputation. Most of these young women have no stable careers, as their basic levels of education only permit them to undertake unskilled work that offer meager wages. Thus, in the absence of any career and thus monetary value, these women are aware that they are assessed for marriage almost solely on the basis of their virtue and untainted reputation. One explanation for why lower middle class women are less obsessively conscious of the need to perform the role of the 'obedient' Muslim woman in relation to their family and neighbourhood community, could be their status as professional working women. Becoming university educated, most of these young women intend to embark upon professional careers, and thus they are aware that their value in the eyes of any potential suitor is partly shaped by the financial contribution they can offer to a marriage. Also, I was often informed how marriage, for the lower middle class women, was not always necessarily their

ultimate life goal. Some of them declared how they wish to establish careers and earn money before they settled down, and importantly, to settle down with a man who would be supportive of their decision to take up paid employment outside the home. This option is not always available to working class women. Very often, their families endeavoured to marry them off at a relatively early age in order to be released from the burden of having to financially support them.

Despite the centrality of the local neighbourhood to the working classes, and as the research progressed, I came to realize claims that they spend all their social time within their micro locale is not the full reality of their daily practices. As relations between participants and myself grew stronger, discussions and observations regarding their socialization activities increased in honesty. It seemed that although they may be forced to adhere to particular rules within their neighbourhood, any chance to move beyond the gaze of family members and to explore a world beyond their local community, meant rules were sometimes broken and an imposed norm often challenged. I witnessed this gap that often existed between ideal discourse and actual daily practice during my non-participant observation sessions in one of Cairo's most popular public parks: *Al-Azhar Park*. The cheap entrance fee of the park, almost 3L.E (approximately 30pence) means its open greenery is accessible to young working class men and women who mostly occupy it. Walking around, I could not help but notice the contradictions that existed between conservative religious appearance and more liberal performances. One girl was wearing the *isdal* (long black Islamic cloak only revealing the face) while holding hands with a young male companion. In another instance, a veiled girl and her boyfriend were huddled under a tree while a friend took photos of them as they posed with happy smiles; records that were to become reminiscent of stolen romantic moments.

While in the park, I often saw single gendered groups of men and women strolling around lazily yet raucously, always on the lookout for opportunities to flirt and exchange telephone numbers. After two hours of walking around the park one afternoon, I decided to sit on a bench and have some lunch. A few minutes later a young woman approached and asked if she could sit next to me. I accepted, and, while wearing the *isdal* that revealed only a shy bespectacled face, she sat down anxiously waiting for someone. About ten minutes later, a smiling young man of her

age appeared and handed her a can of coke and a pre-packed slice of cake. They seemed very familiar with each other and started to chat enthusiastically, and after noticing my presence, the man asked if I would like a piece of cake. Being the ever opportunistic researcher, I attempted to start a conversation with them. We began talking about the park and how it is progressively getting dirtier and more crowded, which eventually led me on to the question of why they come to the park in the first place. After about one hour of general talk and what I could sense was hesitation, the young woman, Sarah, finally opened up to me saying:

Actually we are very much in love and have been for two years. We really want to get married so we can be together, but my family won't accept as they have someone else in mind who they want me to marry – someone with more money. They have even banned me from talking to Emad altogether, but we come here in the weekends to meet. I know it's not right but I can't help it. If my family was a bit more flexible or understanding, then I would have met up with him under their supervision, but unfortunately I have no other choice but to meet him in parks and other public places.

As we can see from the above example, the wider city becomes an opportunity for young working class women to escape the restrictions placed on them by their families. According to Abaza (2001), an 'Islamic' label becomes a protective mechanism for the working class, which permits further mixing of the sexes, and which allows young women to be less constrained. Islamic attire, in particular, becomes a shielding urban mechanism which appeases families and neighbourhood communities, thus permitting young Egyptians to undertake more liberal practices while they are away from domestic and familial spaces. Hence, although the woman in the example above wears an Islamic dress, the extent to which her actual daily conduct corresponds to the norms of Islamic acceptability as dictated by the environment she lives in, may sometimes be questionable. Thus, it appears that pressures by families and wider social structures to conform to a particular image of respectability defined through an association with Islamic practice, create a gap between how these young people are forced to publicly perform, and between their private desires as young people to love and be loved. This point is confirmed by 19-year-old Yasmine who said:

My parents need reassurance that I look a certain way and act a certain way in my community so that they can always be seen as a good,

respectable family who have brought their kids up well. I would never do anything to change this image as it is everything my parents live for, and all that I have. But also, they have to realize that I am young. Like any other young person in the world I have my own desires and my own thoughts about what I want. I want to live like a young girl – to dress nicely, to have fun and be in love. I want to do all that – but at the same time I want to be obedient to my family and religion. Just because we are poor it doesn't mean we don't desire or have the right to engage in the activities enjoyed by young people everywhere.

This same point is emphasised by 20-year-old Noha:

The problem is that our parents come from a different generation where a girl wasn't allowed out of the house because it could ruin her reputation. Girls weren't allowed to be educated or even choose their husbands. We live in a different world now, but parents still want to impose the same rules. Women across the world are nuclear scientists and taking up positions as Prime Ministers, while my dad doesn't allow me to go to the cinema alone. What can I say to them though? Sometimes I tell my parents I have lectures until the evening and go out briefly with my girlfriends to the cinema or to a café. I'm not a bad person you know, I'm well aware of the limits of right and wrong. But it's just my family being over-cautious because they care about me.

The above quotation demonstrates the importance of the media as frames exposing these young women to a wider world beyond her own, allowing them to reflect back upon and interpret their own constraining reality in often challenging ways. Although Noha is embedded in everyday local experiences that remain bounded by very rigid customs and traditions, the media open up spaces for imagining the self through on-screen representations of empowered women across the globe. This is also reflected in the words of Yasmine who, befitting a true cosmopolitan logic, symbolically positions herself beyond local and national boundaries as a young citizen of the world who shares the legitimate and natural desires of love and romance that any other young person does. This reflects the implicit cosmopolitan imagination of the working class that allows for moments of reflection and identifications with other members of the human race across the world, which transcends constricted frameworks of morality imposed in the immediate locale.

Although for women such as Noha and Yasmine television was an important tool for imagining an alternative reality beyond the restrictions of parental and societal rules, for some in the working class, television was the main culprit behind parents losing control over their children's upbringing. For instance, 21-year-old Shaimaa told me:

Previous generations had no choice but to listen to their parents as they were their only source of information about the world. Now we are the 'generation of television' as we would rather copy what we see on television than follow what our parents tell us. Parents nowadays don't have much control over what their kids do and don't know, as there is a whole other world they are exposed to beyond the family home.

Twenty-three year old Omar had a similar point-of-view as television for him did more harm than good. Rather than young people being loyal to their parents or the word of God, they are now slaves to the latest songs, fashion trends and cultural products they are exposed to on screen. Thus, while for the majority of the working class television represented an important space for imagination, some targeted their frustration towards television for diluting religious values and weakening long established forms of parental control.

Feelings of bitterness documented above, which have arisen as a result of control over their mobility are not only limited to young working class women, but also extend to male participants. Rather than control here being associated with gender and being imposed by families, it has more to do with a classed awareness that as a working class group their everyday experiences of city life are characterized by social exclusion and marginalization. In particular, there is a perception that the upper middle class are attempting to exclude the lower classes from their urban world because they fail to fit in with a desired 'image' of sophistication and modernity that the middle classes uphold. As 24-year-old Ahmed said:

The upper classes try to create this image of themselves as being progressive and up-to-date with global standards. They try to exclude us from their worlds because we can't maintain this image, or actually, we taint it for them. They have their own cafés, malls and cinemas that they make sure we can't enter. We are the riffraff of the country that they want to keep away- it's almost as if we don't even exist.

In response to such attitudes, these young people often claim that they like to spend time in the 'real' spaces of Cairo that make them feel like they truly are part of their society. For instance, I am told in many instances how open spaces like the river banks of the Nile, public parks (such as Al-Azhar park I discussed previously), bridges and open spaces around the pyramids are all popular arenas of socialization for these young people. Firstly, these spaces are free or incur a minimal charge, which they can comfortably afford. Additionally, they often discuss how an engagement in these spaces allows them to overcome feelings of exclusion they are exposed to in their daily lives as they are able to feel that they are part of the 'authentic' Egypt. For instance, 25-year-old Emad, the male friend of Sarah who I encountered at Al Azhar Park, told me about the park:

Look at the stunning view. You can sit here during sunset and, as it's high up, look over the whole of Islamic Cairo including its lighted mosques and minarets. Isn't it just wonderful? Why would I want to sit in an air conditioned mall or between the four walls of a café when I could witness and admire the real Egypt. Plus, a lot of rich people enter the park to access the expensive international restaurants that are here. However, these expensive establishments are located on the far side of the park and you have to go through security to access them. Still, they always make sure to keep the park clean and presentable at all times as not to deter the elite from coming here, so I guess that's beneficial to us.

It seems, therefore, that the working class participants are often able to negotiate for themselves spaces on the fringes of the upper middle class worlds from which they can also benefit. Additionally, 22-year-old Samah said in relation to the upper middle class:

You know, you just watch these American movies and you see these people who have no worries. All they care about is being in love and looking good. Life is just so beautifully simple for them, The wealthy people in Egypt live like this – what troubles do they have to keep them awake at night? Even when I do meet up with my fiancé Ahmed I can never relax as I'm always worrying that someone I know will see me and tell my parents who don't usually allow us to go out alone. When I'm with Ahmed I like to forget everything else that goes on in my life, all the hardships and the things that I don't like. We stand on the bridge in the wind overlooking the Nile and I like to imagine that we are a couple like those in American movies who will be together despite anything, who won't let anyone get in the way of their love for each other. I just admire their (west) determination and strength of

character, but I can never be like them – our society is just too different – so judgmental. It's not wrong to dream though is it? I just sometimes wish I could be with Ahmed in public and with the permission of my family. But I have no other option but to sneak off like this.

In contrast to earlier assertions during my research where working class participants tried to constantly position the west as an immoral entity that needed to be distanced, this quotation illustrates another layer of their reflections and engagements with the west. Although influenced by the norms of Islamic morality they may often feel obliged to maintain their aversion to western culture, an analysis and observation of their everyday urban practices reveals a different story. The city is transformed into a space of imagination where, drawing predominantly on their media practices, the west becomes a desired symbolic reference point of freedom, romance and individual expression that these young men and women affiliate themselves with.

The above also illustrates that, armed with the media, it is often the ability of those, with the least means, to negotiate their own 'spaces of hope' (Harvey, 2000b) that become unique moments of freedom where they can regain some sort of control and impose some form of meaning over their lives. Battesti similarly investigates how the working classes in Cairo use open spaces, particularly the Giza Zoo, to construct a new kind of unique urban, recreational ambiance. 'When the popular classes are at the zoo, it belongs to them....They have partially imported, expanded upon, and reinvented the urban models of their quarter of origin' (2006:509). Thus by engaging in such spaces like the zoo and Al-Azhar Park in the example from my fieldwork above, while drawing on a mediated repertoire of desired cultural images, the working class are able to imagine themselves to be part of particular cultural experiences from which their classed and gendered realities usually exclude them. They are able to enjoy the city, engage in global youth cultural practices and perform much desired acts of love. This is indicative of their closed cosmopolitan imagination where a subjective openness towards the world, drawing primarily on the media, becomes an important breathing space and moment of resistance against everyday constrained realities.

Drawing the strands of this chapter together, it seems that that the cosmopolitan imagination of the three classed groups is united in the way the city becomes transformed, for each one of them, into a joint space of mediated imagination, allowing them to subjectively construct and negotiate their *ideal* city. As spaces of mediated imagination intersect with urban spaces of experience, the overbearing city that cannot be escaped, at particular moments, gives way to a more dynamic urban terrain. Young Egyptians of different backgrounds attempt to reclaim the city in multiple ways and shape it as their own. From this, three very diverse urban narratives emerge that feed into the three different versions of cosmopolitan imagination constructed by young Egyptians. I illustrate this as I add the final layer of my table:

	<u>Upper middle class</u>	<u>Lower middle class</u>	<u>Working class</u>
<u>Attitudes towards the nation</u>	Nation imagined exclusively through western frame	Nation imagined through religious frame, but in dialogue with western modernity	Nation imagined through religious frame, but through contradictory practices/attitudes
<u>Consumption attitudes</u>	Exclusive engagement with western consumer products	Religion central to consumer practices	Consumer products supporting daily contradictory performances
<u>Urban mobilities</u>	Creation of western inspired urban enclaves	Religion central to negotiation of urban spaces	Spaces of urban imagination as escape from locale

Figure 8.2- Urban mobilities: points of divergence across class

8.5 Conclusion

This chapter, making up the third and final part of my triadic structure for understanding cosmopolitanism amongst young Egyptians, has examined the range of classed and gendered mobilities within the city. Whereas Chapter Seven explored the city predominantly as a site for everyday consumption, this chapter has expanded further on the role of the city, investigating it as the complete arena of everyday life where young Egyptians live, move, shape their identities and come into contact with different forms of authority. Indeed, negotiating Cairo's terrain means negotiating its

multiple forms of control manifested in strict family moral frameworks, state repression and classed-forms of exclusion and marginalization. At the same time, the discussion has illustrated how Cairo is not only a city of repression, but also a dynamic urban terrain where limits to the self are creatively negotiated. As young Egyptians physically move in the city, they also move subjectively between and within the rich mediascapes they have access to. This has facilitated the rise of three different forms of cosmopolitan imagination that offer more potential for reflexive interpretation and a negotiation of the *self* and *others*.

In this context, as increased opportunities for mediated connection have become an everyday reality for young Egyptians, articulations of social space within the city have become complex and increasingly unpredictable. Social proximity is no longer based solely on the familiar and the geographically close, but often on the symbolically mediated and thus geographically distant (Saldanha, 2002; Jansson, 2009). I have examined this in the way bonds of class have allowed the young upper middle class in my sample to feel closer to the everyday experiences of young people of a similar class status living in the west. At the same time, religious bonds have also allowed the lower middle class to develop a sense of imagined belonging to transnational religious networks, especially through the consumption of regional Islamic television channels. Thus, Cairo looked at from 'below', or through the analysis of the city as *lived space* (Lefebvre, 1991) to borrow Lefebvre's term, reveals three very different urban narratives. Everyday experiences of bounded place as restricted and controlled intersect with the possibility of expression, creativity and freedom, enabled especially through mediated forms of imagining the self beyond a narrow local framework of morality. Thus, young Egyptians are united through their desire for *imaginaire* (Freitas cf. Abaza, 2006) or a need to construct their own 'ideal' cities within the larger city. Nevertheless, Cairo, with all its paradoxes, complexities and multiple forms of authority is also a city that cannot always be fully escaped. As De Certeau (1984) reminds us, urban inhabitants may be able to develop *tactics* to resist or challenge forms of authority or control, but these will always remain framed by dominant *strategies* which are only rarely subverted.

9 Conclusion

Cosmopolitan Imagination as a Reality: Egypt's Revolution and the Dream of a Better Tomorrow

The Egyptians have changed the world and the world took note

(Barack Obama, February 2011).

The world only gets better because people risk something to make it better. Thanks to the Egyptians!

(Paulo Coelho, February, 2011).

'Al Sha'ab yoreed iskat al nitham'. 'The people demand the fall of the regime'. Although it would have been hard to imagine, while conducting my fieldwork in 2008, that I would ever hear these words in the near future, as the skies of Cairo and the ground of Tahrir Square shook angrily with the loud echoes and assertive demands of millions of Egyptians in early 2011, I knew Egypt would be changed forever. As the revolution broke out, I had already completed my fieldwork and analysis, and thus I was not initially sure how my empirical findings would be positioned in relation to these new historic political events. Would they seem outdated, uninteresting, irrelevant, even? Reading back through my ethnographic analysis and participants' words, I felt that, in fact, the revolution breathed new life into my results confirming the cosmopolitan aspirations of young Egyptians, the centrality of the nation to their sense of identity, but also the significance of the media in sustaining processes of identity construction across local, national and transnational boundaries. Significantly, the revolution was a true manifestation of the cosmopolitan orientations I had detected amongst young Egyptians. The domino-effect of the Arab Spring was a reminder of how, in our increasingly interconnected world, it is not only electronic wires and Facebook friends that are linked, but as befitting a cosmopolitan logic, the fates of individuals are united through a common desire for basic humanitarian values. In a true transnational movement that connected revolutionary groups across Cairo, Damascus, Yemen, Wisconsin and Madrid, what united these cities despite their very different socio-cultural and geographical contexts, was the desire for democratic participation, social equality and the demand for a dignified life.

An intense ethnographic analysis over a period of nine months has allowed me to give space to young Egyptians, and to hopefully represent fairly the many and complex layers of their everyday life, especially as those are framed within systems of class, gender, religious and urban organization and control. A cosmopolitan framework allowed me to challenge preconceptions about the linearity of the relations between a society such as Egypt and global culture. In addition, my micro analysis of everyday life in Cairo was sensitive to the complex and multifarious ways in which the global is produced from *within*, and thus takes its meaning only *through* the local. Thus, I have avoided what Beck and Sznaider (2006:5) refer to as the 'onion model' of the world, which assumes that the local and the national form the core or inner layer, while the international and the global are relegated to the outer layers. Such a thesis, according to Beck and Sznaider (2006), which views the world through discrete and disconnected layers characterized by static levels of power, reduces the global to an external and abstract force existing 'out there,' impacting upon people's intimate spaces or localities in a one-way flow of influence. Carpentier (2008:247) maintains that the term *translocal* better captures the complex relationship between the local and the global that 'allows taking the local as the point of departure, and adding the global as a second component'. In this context, Carpentier argues, we can avoid seeing the global always as the natural starting point, and the local in a reactive position.

In the light of such a premise that evades positioning the local and global necessarily as dialogical counterpoints, I have formulated a third-order framework for cosmopolitanism. While recognizing both unequal relations of power and influence on a sub-national scale and transnational level, this framework has also brought to the fore ideologies and practices of everyday life in Cairo that construct a cosmopolitan imagination. Thus, while remaining sensitive to established hierarchies and unequal relations of power, I have explored the multiple ways in which young Egyptians from three different class backgrounds live with, and internalise distance and difference on a daily basis. Through a cosmopolitan framework, I have recognized the internal heterogeneity of the society where my study took place. I explored how, for young Egyptians, new relations between the local and the global, self and others, distance and proximity, the virtual and the immediate coalesce in the spaces of everyday life, creating alternative avenues for imagining the self. In this

context, as the taken-for-grantedness of territorial limits are increasingly challenged through intense processes of transnational mediated connections, cosmopolitanism becomes a heuristic concept that captures the ability of young Egyptians to form their own unique and complex understandings of a world close by, and one far away. The case of young Egyptians demonstrates that, although bodily existence often remains bound within a specific geographical location, as socio-spatial transformations are bolstered through television, cognitive experiences including 'structures of feeling' and 'mental geographies' (Sabry, 2005) are increasingly shaped by what occurs beyond immediate boundaries. This confirms Beck's (2004:153) notion of *dialogic imagination* which conceives of cosmopolitanism as an 'internalized otherness of others, the co-presence or coexistence of rival lifestyles, contradictory certainties within the space of individual and social experience'.

Cosmopolitanism in Cairo, as it has emerged in my study, is a comprehensive cultural, moral and economic apparatus; a multipronged process comprising both a subjective as well as physical and embodied dimension. Articulated at the intersection of a complex interplay between consumer culture, urban realities and national identities, the multiple modes of cosmopolitan expression I have witnessed amongst young Egyptians fall beyond any simplistic assumption of blind mimicry or linear westernization. To some readers, it may seem that in a study on cosmopolitanism, there is too much of a focus on 'western' culture emerging from within my empirical data. Nevertheless, as Hall (2008) observes, there is never a benign cosmopolitanism, but cosmopolitanism as an everyday lived reality is always caught up in, and only emerges from within transnational divides and unequal relations of power and influence that shape the exchange of global cultural flows. In this context, the power and universal spread of hegemonic forms of western consumer capitalism and its monopolization of transnational cultural exchange cannot be downplayed. Albeit, through ethnographic practices, I have been able to delve beneath the first level of appearances associated with the public construction of identities, from which it is often easy to make the assumption of cultural homogenization. As rich ethnographic data in the empirical discussion reveal – articulated at the intersection of national experiences, religious identities and a global articulation of culture – there is often a much deeper philosophy and critical

reasoning that drives the way young Egyptians construct their own unique cartographies of the world, and which surpasses any form of direct emulation.

Schielke (2011) argues that rather than a direct emulation of goods and ideas associated with global culture, what appears to be going on are attempts by Egyptians 'to transform their own world to make it seem valuable in the face of these powers and promises'. Recent research on cosmopolitan orientations in Cairo, has increasingly begun to document how Egyptians are choosing to emigrate to rich oil producing countries of the Arab Gulf to secure better job opportunities and a higher standard of living (Ghannam, 2006; Schielke, 2011). Representing a geographical destination that is often more culturally and physically accessible than Europe or the US, these studies document how the social and economic opportunities that life in the Gulf represents, have allowed many Egyptians to partake in consumer desires to afford a car, house and comfortable life, not always possible in their homeland. This illustrates that the privileges, dreams and comforts associated with global culture are no longer exclusive property of the west, but as they have become universalized, they are now embodied in the local and the regional. Thus, in their attempts to claim their belonging to the wider world, and as it becomes regionalized, nationalized and often Islamized, young Egyptians seek to make global cultural modernity their own.

In their narratives and discussions, these men and women often described a process of worldliness and modernization: a desire to feel part of a wider global community that surpasses the constraints and limitations of the immediate locale. They also displayed a desire to partake in global youth cultural practices, which positions these young men and women at the centre of a universal experience of being young, modern and worldly. Young Egyptians' often critical stance towards what they perceived to be the immorality and religious laxness of the west, indicates not an unreflexive articulation of western culture, but an ability to sustain different loyalties and shift between multiple associations to their nation, religion and to global culture simultaneously. I subscribe here to Gable's (2010:88) assertion that youth populations outside the west display their own unique, critical visions of how they hope to transform the world 'and influence us to join us in this transformation' (Gable, 2010: 88). Hence, similar to participants in Gable's study, young Egyptians acquire global symbols and consumer objects that on the surface make them appear

'like us,' (west) and thus we often assume that their ambition is to always 'be us,' although the world for them is a more complex shared space we all *mutually* make.

However, to suggest that no element of western cultural domination shapes young Egyptians' cosmopolitan orientations, would be a naïve assumption. A third-order framework captures how cosmopolitanism in Cairo, forced to pass through a strict filtering mechanism at the national and transnational level, was destined to take on a very limited form before it even began. A fascination with western culture is not a modern process articulated solely through the media, but has a long established past, deeply rooted and internalized in local and regional culture through colonial links. Additionally, in a highly constrained milieu such as Egypt, many of my participants were restricted by limited forms of social mobility, a lack of cultural and economic resources, and not many opportunities for travel beyond the nation-state. Furthermore, Cairo, although the most ethnically diverse of Egypt's cities, remains predominantly culturally and religiously homogenous, meaning an interaction with cultural difference is not a customary part of Cairenes' daily experiences, as it may be in many urban centres of the west. In this context, cosmopolitanism as I have documented it in Cairo is articulated mainly through television consumption, although my empirical discussion also records the daily presence and importance of new media, particularly mobile phones and the Internet in sustaining these young Egyptians' sense of connection to the world.

Despite the democratizing potentials of television in broadening the cultural repertoires of these men and women, it must be recognized that their cosmopolitan vision remains dependent upon a limited menu of media offerings, mainly American productions, preset by rich businessmen associated with transnational media empires. As Morley and Robins (1995:32) argue, such mega-corporations, where 'co-financed and co-produced products are made on a global assembly line' are almost single handedly shaping a global space of image flows. Thus, as the third-order framework illustrates, the west remains an undeniable and overwhelming reference within an established world order, no doubt strongly influencing young Egyptians' cosmopolitan aspirations. With his anthropological research in an Indian steel town, Parry (2008) argues against any form of romantic optimism that regards cosmopolitanism as entirely value-neutral, positioning all cultures as equal in their

differences without any degree of universalism. Such a hopeful 'salad bowl' mixing of cultural difference, Parry argues, is antithetical to the reality of a world society that is partly founded on the ideology of 'progress' and the idea that countries outside the west have something 'to learn from other 'more advanced' industrial nations' (Parry, 2008: 328).

9.1 Cosmopolitan Imagination through Distance and proximity

My ethnographic research with young Egyptians reveals how their everyday lives and subjectivities partly take their shape within an omnipresent media space. Television, as documented in my study, not only provides an important source of pleasure and entertainment, but representations of distant lives consumed by young Egyptians allow them to manage and often define their relation to their city, nation, religion, but also to the wider world. Thus, with television at the centre of their everyday lives, young Egyptians of different backgrounds have become active agents of a mediated globalization. They have come to imagine their selves, the social and economic limits imposed upon their immediate experiences, and the rest of the world through mediation. This illustrates the increasing levels of interdependencies (Hall, 2008) that have come to shape social and cultural relations in the age of intense mediated connections, which can no longer remain encapsulated solely within the nation's territorial limits. As documented by the case of young Egyptians, mediation of everyday life that expands the horizons of their cultural repertoires beyond national space, makes distant systems of meaning relevant to their own everyday articulations of their lives located in the city, and their religious and national identities. Indeed, the discussion in Chapter Six illustrates the importance of the nation in the Egyptian context, not as a self-enclosed or pre-determined entity, but the idea of the nation as relevant in its globality. Young Egyptians' national experiences are redefined and reevaluated in relation to mediated socio-spatial transformations that locate bounded identities in the midst of a larger world context.

The complex and often ambivalent relationship of young Egyptians to the nation complements Hannerz's (1996:5) observation that often, the biggest threat and challenge to the nation comes 'mostly from below' rather than from an external or alien global force. Indeed, as I have recorded in Chapter Six, young Egyptians' sense

of disillusionment and disappointment with the nation-state stems from the reality of a repressive government, class oppression, the lack of opportunity for dissent or opposition and the unequal distribution of economic and cultural resources. On the other hand, the global provides an important resource, not for challenging the importance of the nation, but for re-imagining and re-interpreting the nation in new ways. Young Egyptians, therefore, may routinely draw on a highly stylized and often idealized view of global culture, although this is not necessarily out of a desire to imitate it, but rather, to extend the range of cultural possibilities that may shape and inform their own national or religious identity (Latham, 2006).

The discussion on the nation within the context of my study is an important illustration of how a cosmopolitan imagination in Cairo is articulated at the intersection between distance and proximity, between a world close by and far away, especially as this is negotiated by mediation. Thus, although difference or an 'other' as represented in the media may remain geographically distant, it often becomes socially proximate; intensely relevant to a greater interpretation and understanding of the self and the worlds individuals occupy. In this context, in the articulation of their cosmopolitan imagination, young Egyptians have become skilled negotiators, moving within and between mediated and non-mediated discourses. They move physically within a bounded place that sets the conditions for bodily existence, yet shift subjectively between disembedded spaces of mediated representation, often providing the contexts for meaning and inclusivity. In light of this dialectical interplay between proximity and distance, television, in exposing young Egyptians to representations of different cultural worlds, often provides a sense of distance from the immediate, although not as a way of transcending it, but in providing a new lens and context for imagining and re-imagining proximate social experiences.

9.2 Asymmetrical Interdependencies in Transnational Media Flows

The continuing importance and relevance of the nation to young Egyptians' identities is an important indicator that a cosmopolitan orientation and sense of openness to the world can be sustained alongside local and national particularities. I discussed in Chapter Six how a seemingly inconsequential football match between Egypt and Algeria became a major event for many young Egyptians, awakening common national

sentiment and inspiring them to fill the streets in large crowds armed with flags and patriotic T-shirts. The recent revolution, particularly in the global following and appreciation of its unfolding events, also became a catalyst for Egyptians to celebrate a sense of pride and loyalty towards the nation, and an opportunity to display to the world that Egypt has achieved what the west, with all its power and leadership, never could have. Although I did not manage to travel back to Cairo after the revolution, I have been able to conduct a number of online and phone interviews. Wafaa, 24, a newly qualified doctor and participant in this study, told me:

We feel an immense sense of pride. I mean, it's not us trying to copy America or the west anymore, but for the first time, it's them glued to their television screens, watching and learning from our revolutionary practices. Maybe it was the west who built the technology and invented Facebook, but it was us who recently taught them how to really use it. Unfortunately, the youth in Egypt always looked at the world and felt left out. But at this moment, and after what we have achieved with the revolution, I have never felt prouder at being Egyptian. Actually, I want the whole world to know I am Egyptian.

I discussed above how the media are not only regarded by young Egyptians as sources of entertainment and pleasure, but their appropriation has become an important resource allowing them to negotiate their relation to the city, nation and world. Furthermore, Wafaa's words are also an indicator of the centrality of the media as tools for gaining confidence, a voice and presence in a world that usually excludes them. Social networking sites, particularly Facebook and Twitter, gave young revolutionaries in Cairo an opportunity to mobilize, assert their demands and thus directly challenge repressive state authority. Furthermore, young Egyptians' knowledge that the world was 'glued to their television screens' watching and learning from them as they demonstrated how Facebook 'should really be used', as Wafaa said, allowed them to confidently locate themselves on a global map of influence, on which they are usually relegated a bottom position, if placed at all. These words demonstrate how the media grant spaces of inclusivity and meaning – not available to young Egyptians in their everyday lives – where the social and political spheres often fuse. In this context, whereas young Egyptians are usually excluded from any form of political participation or citizen engagement within the nation-state, new media have provided important points of entry, allowing everybody in every part of the world to potentially become a player in global politics. Although the relevance of the Internet became especially prevalent

during the recent revolutions, my findings draw attention to how it is not only new media that provide these spaces of political and cultural inclusivity. As I argue below, television played an important role in the years leading up to the revolution, with representations of a distant world consumed by young Egyptians exposing the limits and restrictions placed on the self and nation. In this context, as a daily cultural transporter shifting these young men and women between different worlds, television has allowed them to partake in the construction of a cosmopolitan imagination in which the dream of a better life in Egypt is embedded in the vision of the world as represented on screen.

The quotation above supports findings presented in my empirical discussion, of the complex relations of 'asymmetrical interdependence' (Straubhaar, 1991:43) that characterize transnational media relations. Although most media technologies and television content are invented and originate in the west, they are widely distributed to, and used in different socio-cultural and political milieux, other than in the context of their origin. Indeed, if we were to adopt a macro perspective, mapping the transnational flow and exchange of the media from a largely western perspective (Boyd-Barrett, 1977; Schiller, 1991), then we may be faced with a pessimistic and highly unequal reality of terms of production, distribution and influence of global media. This inequality could lead to the assumption of a reaffirmation of western dominance through the widespread distribution of media content and technologies whose meanings are set and concentrated in a limited number of western countries and transnational corporations. Nevertheless, as the last quotation illustrates, departing from a global south perspective, the analysis of transnational media flows unearths an intricate web of media interdependencies with complex systems of meaning constantly defining levels of production and consumption.

This intricate web of media interdependencies is observed in the way Facebook and Twitter, both invented in the west for purposes of social networking, were then redefined as revolutionary technologies by young Arabs who appropriated these social networking platforms in their struggles to topple their dictatorial governments, who, ironically, were supported mainly by western regimes. This illustrates the complex nature of co-dependent relations that shape transnational media flows, and that although technologies may be packaged and defined in a particular way at their

point of origin, as they shift globally, their meanings are constantly being defined and redefined in relation to their different uses and appropriations in different contexts. For instance, in response to the needs and demands of Egyptian protestors to make their voice heard by the world during the revolution, Google and Twitter launched the 'voice-to-tweet' software. After the Egyptian government cut off access to the main Internet service providers, this new service gave Egyptian revolutionaries the ability to 'tweet' voiced live updates, without the need for an Internet connection.

In light of the above discussion, my empirical data does not support concerns about an overarching and ever present media imperialism, which assumes that the universal spread of western media is homogenizing local cultural values. Findings from my research capture a complex picture of audience tastes and preferences that although do not conform to a complete domination by, and dependence on, western media, also challenge the counter assumption that audiences are inclined to seek mainly local productions (Straubhaar, 1991). My ethnographic engagement with young Egyptians has revealed that they display a more intricate set of preferences towards the diverse media they have access to, which centres around the content and values represented and associated with particular genres, rather than being based solely on the national origin of the media. As I discussed in my empirical chapters, the majority of young men and women in my sample display a strong preference for western movies, which they argue expose them to a global culture they correlate with freedom, individuality, and the dream of a better life they do not have in Egypt. Nevertheless, it is through Turkish serials that lower middle class women prefer to negotiate the more intimate issue of marital relationships that are highly relevant to their everyday concerns and aspirations. Thus, whereas in the context of general political ideologies and humanitarian values, western media provide a relevant and desired frame of reference, in terms of moral values associated with their everyday experiences, regionally or locally proximate media are often preferred, especially by young Egyptian women. Indeed, Turkey is an Islamic country and thus the everyday realities and lifestyles of the characters on screen are closer to the moral and religious values of young lower middle class women.

In a more recent reworking of the cultural proximity theory, Straubhaar and La Pastina (2005) maintain that although audience desires still continue to fall within the

framework of cultural proximity, media preferences must be recognized to take place at multiple levels that conform to the different religious, cultural and political aspects that shape people's complex and multilayered identities. This illustrates how young Egyptians are media-savvy audiences, operating from within complex, multilayered everyday lives, and shifting between different transnational outlets, programmes and genres that often conform to, and at other times challenge different aspects of their identities. Nevertheless, as Morley (2006) emphasises, we should never conflate 'active' audiences with 'powerful' audiences. Indeed, my ethnographic findings reveal that young Egyptians are actively making informed choices from a range of diverse media available to them, yet my study also reveals that the MBC channels, most popular amongst my participants, mainly consist of a constricted diet of North American productions or Arabic productions adopting western formats. Thus, selection from what is already a restricted menu predetermined by a limited number of media moguls is in itself a 'very limited form of power' (Morley, 2006: 115). What can be gleaned from the above discussion, however, is that localized appropriation of the media never remains a process that is completely local, but is strongly linked to, and dependent upon the origins of technology, the flows of programmes from the west, and significantly, the meanings embedded in these technologies and programmes at the level of production.

9.3 Negotiating Borders in a 'Borderless' World: The Continuing Importance of Class

According to Ohmae (1994), we are now inhabiting a 'borderless world' where the flow of people, technology and information across national borders has rendered territorial boundaries as obsolete. Nevertheless, to what extent do such idealistic claims of hypermobility and transnational movement (Hannerz, 1996) across a 'borderless' world actually correlate with everyday experiences as I have documented them in this study? Perhaps it is ironic that in a world theorized to be without the constraint of predetermined borders, thus sustaining intense movement and mobility, Egyptians are more static than ever, both socially and physically. Nevertheless, as my main conceptual framework, imagination has allowed me to explore how contemporary identities are shaped in ways that fall beyond the specificity of the locale and the immediacy of everyday experience, with mediated representation often

challenging the boundaries of rigid social structures. Thus, an enlargement of young Egyptians' cultural horizons through the media, translates into a sense of imagination. This locates the self at the centre of a broader interconnected world, thus sustaining the possibility of subjective border crossing and the engagement with political, cultural and moral ideologies and movements beyond immediate national borders. In this context, the case of young Egyptians illustrates that it is not about movement in a world with no borders. On the contrary, their world is one full of borders, 'inhabited by people who try to cross them' (Schielke, 2011: 4), although a sense of imagination fed by the media provides an important resource for negotiating the multiple borders and constraints young Egyptians face in their daily lives. Thus, especially for those located away from global centres of power, with no access to global cultural institutions or influence on global political relations, the media have become particularly important, endowing them with the possibility of envisioning an alternative reality, and thus providing a sense of hope in what often seems to be a hopeless world. Some of the everyday borders young Egyptians face have been physical such as the exclusion of the working class from particular public urban spaces, or forms of family and community control, while others have been symbolic such as their own self-awareness that they are excluded from global forms of power and influence. In particular, my empirical findings indicate the continuing importance of class, functioning as a rigid border of oppression and inequality that shapes and regulates the everyday experiences of young Egyptians.

My research confirms that class in Egypt plays a central role in shaping young people's access to systems of power, education, cultural and economic capital, urban space and even marital choices. Nevertheless, my work does not ascribe to class-determinism. I recognize that class does not operate alone, but its meanings and consequences only become apparent as it intersects with a broader socio-cultural framework. This research has particularly focused on urban encounters, gender relations, Islamic identities, age and educational experiences revealed in the study of three educational institutions. Perhaps one of the limitations of my study was that it was quite an ambitious project, ethnographically examining three different classes in a limited period of time, through three separate methods, as a sole researcher. This limitation in time and resources meant that it was often difficult for me to systematically follow expressions of dissent that went against the 'norm' which was

visible and more accessible to me as a researcher. For instance, I discussed in Chapter Seven how I came across a young man in the American University who distanced himself from the normal activities and 'westernized' leisure practices associated with everyday life in the campus. Instead, he adopted what appeared to be a very Islamic appearance and inclination. Similarly, in Madina Institute, attracting working class students, I often witnessed a group of bearded men who openly prayed in the campus, and, I was told, severely reproached the behaviour of their colleagues who engaged in the contradictory performances I documented in previous empirical chapters. Such practices are evidence of the internal contradictions of the global condition, where individuals appropriate knowledge of the 'other' or of each other in multiple ways. For the lower middle class, for instance, spirituality was essential to their sense of identity, as they saw themselves as global Muslims, wanting to partake in the construction of a transnational Umma, yet an Umma in touch with global cultural and technological developments. Nevertheless, in the unconventional examples I have described above, religious identity often becomes a form of closure and a way of retreating from and distancing the omnipresent infiltration of global culture.

My identity as a female researcher was an obvious barrier in the instances I described above, as it hindered me from directly engaging with these men; I was warned that they would not welcome direct interaction with a woman. Although these instances remain exceptions that do not conform to the norm publicly visible in the two campuses, they are nevertheless part of these different classed worlds, and thus a reminder of how differences exist within, and not only across classes. A focus on these unconventional practices can further our understandings of how class is a dynamic and not static category, differentially lived and shaped on a daily basis, without assuming that people's experiences must be placed in standardized or pre-determined moulds. Indeed, as Harindranath (2009:53) argues, socio-economic position remains a fundamental marker that helps create and maintain interpretive frameworks, while transcendently 'shaping the subjects' horizons of knowledge and behaviour'. Nevertheless, even while acknowledging this, Harindranath warns, it is important to avoid subscribing to any deterministic cause-effect notion that places people into 'watertight compartments' (ibid.). Furthermore, although focusing on gender, Butler (1990) makes an important contribution that explores how the

socially constructed nature of identities has a tendency to place people's subjectivities within restrictive fixed moulds.

According to Butler (1990), as our perceptions of gender are linked to relations of power within society, we have come to think of gender through a naturalised *heterosexual matrix*; a binary frame of compulsory heterosexuality that presumes, thus reducing the many possibilities of what it *actually means* to be a woman. Rather than thinking through such 'rigid and hierarchical sexual codes' (Butler, 1990: x) that consolidate bodily categories, Butler proposes that gender is performatively produced, thus becoming a site of multiple contested meanings. Applying Butler's approach to gender to my own research, it is essential not to regard class categories as solid groupings that imprison people, banally sculpting their actions, discourse and beliefs in an inevitable linear cause-effect notion. Indeed, the examples of dissent I referred to just above, as well as the frequent disagreements and disputes between members of the same class recorded throughout the empirical discussion, illustrate that class continues to matter as a category of analysis, without requiring complete unity or coherence between its members.

My ethnographic analysis of the three classes on which this research was based is evidence of the flexibility and permeability of class boundaries, illuminated through the frequent overlaps, fluidity and contradictions between participants' responses. For example, in the upper middle class group, although many shared quite an elitist liberal standing, some members often voiced their objection to such classist attitudes that demonized the lower classes. Additionally, others were vehemently against the common sentiment expressed by members of this class that supported the eradication of embodied Islamic symbols such as the veil and beards in particular public spaces. With the working class, although a vocal rejection of the west seemed to be the prevalent norm, a few individuals demonstrated their rejection of such a homogenizing view that fails to acknowledge the many positive aspects of western culture. Furthermore, I was told that there is a sizeable body of students at Madina College who refuse to socialise on campus as they seek to distance themselves from the general behaviour that takes place there, which they strongly disapprove of. In this context, any class analysis should avoid boxing groups off into particular social categories, or examining the way behaviour unfolds in predictable or standardized ways as a result of set social formations.

According to Savage (2000b:38), class undisputedly remains a ‘major organizing feature of social life,’ and thus, rather than theoretical contributions that argue for the relevance of class, we are in need of models that help us understand *how* it is, and in *what ways* class continues to matter and shape our subjectivities. Discussing Beck and Giddens’ theory of individualization, Savage argues how it fails to capture the complex interweaving of class and individual identity. According to the authors, in an age of reflexive modernization, traditional collectivities such as class and religion have lost most of their significance and relevance. The individual, freed from the confines of these collectivities, becomes the most important unit and basis of social life. Nevertheless, in an attempt to rework this thesis, Savage (2000b) contends that society is both individualised *and* class divided. According to this approach, class remains a central feature of society not as a deterministic or mechanical collectivity, but as an important mode of differentiation whereby *individuals* within the class system make sense of their subjectivities in multiple ways, and thus distinguish themselves from other groups and people in society – both above and below them.

In light of the above, and as results from my empirical analysis demonstrate, people are not passive in the face of class as a unanimous force and category, but individuals are active inhabitants of their class status, seeking to constantly make sense of their location and position in society. Similarly, examining how class processes operate through the actions of *rational individuals* rather than homogenized social groupings, Bottero (2004) argues that the relevance of class is maintained in its daily reproduction of hierarchy and thus in the continuation of inequality. To grasp the importance of class, therefore, we need to appreciate how it is deeply embedded in daily social practice as ‘the reproduction of hierarchy is carried out every day, by us all, in the most banal and mundane of activities. The results of such activities are the continuation of inequality’ (Bottero, 2004: 995). In this context, as a contrast to the usual macro analyses that have monopolized our understandings of class, Bottero calls for more ethnographic approaches that engage directly with people, examining in detail how class is ‘lived,’ and thus how it is experienced and sustained over time and across different spaces. In light of the above discussion, in the absence of ethnographic studies that offer clear class based analyses, particularly in Egypt (Inhorn, 1996), I believe my research has opened up important avenues for recording and documenting the complex and contradictory ways class is lived and experienced

on a daily basis in Cairo. The findings unearthed in this project provide important insights, which can be further explored in more depth within future research that may focus on each class separately.

Following on from the above discussion, class is not a socio-economic blueprint of behaviour and lifestyle, but is about the way *individuals* who cannot be disassociated from the hierarchies and inequalities of the class system, perceive and make sense of them 'severely' and their subjectivities. Such an approach makes relevant not only differences across classes, but also brings to the fore the internal contradictions that inevitably exist between people *within* class categories. Indeed, as Butler (1990:14) importantly argues in relation to gender identities, the body should not be perceived as a passive medium or instrument onto which cultural meanings are inevitably inscribed. Instead, it is important to focus on a 'set of dialogic encounters by which variously positioned women articulate separate identities within the framework of an emergent coalition'. Skeggs (1997:2) makes a similar point in relation to class when she argues how women on which her research were based are not submissive 'ciphers from which subject positions can be read-off'. Thus, although subject positions such as class partly pre-exist their agency, these women actively engage in producing and reproducing the meanings of the positions they inhabit. Importantly, my ethnographic portraits have revealed how the 'fuzzy boundaries' (Skeggs, 2004: 5) of class are made and re-made, existing in a state of 'continual reproduction' (ibid.:3).

I subscribe to Skeggs' (2004) understanding of class, which she regards as being part of a dominant symbolic exchange that attributes bodies with particular levels of symbolic and moral *value*. Sometimes these ascribed forms of value become institutionalized. For instance, I have described how it is common for cafés in Cairo to exclude the working class, particularly men sporting beards or women wearing the veil, as their bodies become ascribed with a value-less and regressive Islamic working class identity, thus contradicting the 'modern' and globalised image such cafés aspire to maintain. Nevertheless, on the level of everyday micro practices, Skeggs (1997) also argues that classed groups are involved in material and symbolic struggles to create alternative systems of value and a sense of self-worth, leading to performances of 'respectability' across different spatio-temporal contexts. I have documented this in relation to the working class in the way family and

neighbourhood community spaces require public performances of class respectability that, especially for women, communicate virtue and honour as the only way of sustaining value in the context of limited everyday resources and economic means. Within peer and educational spaces, however, value, for both men and women, transcends a limited framework informed by a gendered norm of Islamic morality. Value in these spaces becomes associated with an ability of these underprivileged young people to display an awareness and appropriation of global youth practices often informed by the media. Additionally, for the upper middle class, I have shown how, within their educational spaces and exclusive urban enclaves, a sense of value and class worth is expressed in their ability to acquire expensive consumer products and to keep up with global codes of dress that pertain to a universal middle class lifestyle. Nevertheless, especially for women, when away from these protected urban niches and negotiating the public streets of Cairo, particularly in the presence of working class men, more traditional forms of public appearance and behaviour are valued and conformed to. Modesty is secured through alternative codes of conservative dress that communicate a middle class respectability (De Koning, 2009). These examples illustrate that as much as class shapes people by giving them restricted or much broader access to particular cultural codes and economic capital, people themselves also shape the daily lived meaning of class, associating it with different forms of value in different contexts (Skeggs, 2004).

My choice of methods has been especially relevant to the different ways in which class is performed. According to Skeggs, Thumim and Wood (2008), class is not something naturally *found* through research, but is *made* within each research encounter. In this context, a multilayered methodology has been an important choice in allowing me to access the different ways in which class is articulated and communicated by the three classed groups. If I had depended solely on information acquired through focus groups, then I might have discovered a very constricted understanding of class, as with such methods, people articulate their responses reflexively, meaning I would have had access only to what participants had consciously decided I *should* know. For example, through focus groups I was told by the working class that it is religious discourse which informs their identity the most, while they often chose to verbally distance the global or the west as being something evil or corrupt. Obviously, my identity as a middle class woman and

academic played an important role here, as they may have been trying to construct a respectable image of their class identity in my presence, based on a dedicated conformity to religious practice.

An ability to observe the behaviour of participants free from researcher influence through non-participant observation, and also, by gaining rapport with them and a sense of trust over time through participant observation, meant a rounder and more complex understanding of their class and gender identity began to emerge. This need for a multi-pronged methodological approach is essential to a greater understanding of the complex nature of modern identities that are formed in layers (Georgiou, 2006) and informed by multiple attachments and connections 'of different types and at different levels' (Morley, 2000:232). Thus, my combination of methods has allowed me to examine how the identities of young Egyptians are articulated at the intersection of dominant religious expectations, global youth practices, family and community rules, educational environment, state control and televised representation.

9.4 Spaces of Hope: Television as a Tool for Social and Political Change?

A focus on class confirms how socio-economic disparities continue to regulate and shape the unequal experiences of everyday life in Cairo. Writing from a Marxist perspective, Harvey (2000b) has documented that as the twentieth century drew to a close, cities were more unequal than ever: the poor were getting poorer and the rich were getting richer in what he names an 'uneven temporal and geographical development' (Harvey, 2000b:60), otherwise known as globalization. Nevertheless, Harvey takes issue with the claim that there are no alternatives or opportunities to envision a different, more equal form of existence. He refers to these as 'spaces of hope' that allow us to become 'conscious architects of our fates rather than as 'helpless puppets' ' of the worlds we are forced to inhabit. I have documented this in my analysis of Cairo's dual-face, both as a bounded place regulated through state control, government repression and class exclusion, but from below, also a creative urban terrain of imagination, cultural possibilities and a space for envisioning alternatives that provide representation, meaning and inclusivity. This illustrates how young Egyptians are simultaneously constrained, yet creative; repressed, yet constantly on the lookout for moments of emancipation that allow them to take some

sort of control over their lives. The recent revolution is also partly the product of imagination; a physical reminder of what collective dreams of an alternative life and more dignified future can eventually achieve. This confirms Appadurai's (1996) conceptualization of imagination, which he conceives of as a collective force; a staging ground for action, and not only for individual escape and fantasy.

Harvey's (2000b: 195) words on the power of imagination are haunting in relation to recent events in Egypt, as he observes how 'alternative visions, no matter how fantastic, provide the grist for shaping powerful political forces for change'. In this context, I believe the strength of my thesis lies in its exploration of the important role that television played in the years leading up to the revolution, shaping the imagination, dreams and aspirations of young Egyptians in relation to what was occurring in a broader world. To suggest that the revolution in Egypt was spur of the moment, or simply a duplication of neighbouring Tunisia's uprising, would be a drastic oversimplification. Egypt experienced a revolutionary moment underpinned by a complexity of multiple motivating factors pertaining to economic, political and socio-cultural inequalities deeply embedded in Egyptian culture. This is an important reminder of Kraidy's (2011) observation that we need to guard against any form of media-centrism when discussing the Arab Spring. The revolutions, Kraidy argues, were a host of reactions to long systems of repression and not just a single product of the moment driven by the media. With this warning in mind, the fascinating way the Internet and social networking sites were used by citizens and revolutionaries of the Arab Spring, allowing them to directly challenge their dictatorial governments, may alter the course of media and communications research for years to come.

One can only predict the array of journal papers, books and doctoral theses that will take recent political events in the Middle East as points of analyses, focusing particularly on the Internet and new media as representing 'new found' tools of citizen power and political participation. Although the importance of the Internet within the context of recent Arab political change cannot be denied, my thesis demonstrates how, on a more long-term and day-to-day basis, television has partly contributed towards laying down the foundations of dissent that have slowly contributed to demands for social and political change, eventually erupting in the recent uprising. As Morley (2006:104) observes, the impetus for political

transformation often comes from the many 'micro instances of "pre-political" attitude change' articulated through long term media consumption. In light of Morley's thesis, findings from my study illustrate that beyond the Internet's role within the immediate moment of radical revolutionary change, the less glamorous, mundane ordinariness associated with television consumption as a daily practice, should not disguise its potential as a vehicle often establishing the conditions for change. As my research findings document, through mediated representation, young Egyptians were exposed to the weaknesses of their nation-state, to a lack of liberal and democratic values in their everyday lives, to gender inequalities and lack of women's rights, and to a limited cultural presence and influence within a global cultural stage. In such a situation, one can only assume that social and political demands which drove January's revolution were being gradually composed well before 2011.

Despite my argument in support of television, the growing relevance and popularity of the Internet in the context of Egypt's recent political instability, particularly in the public claims it has made in challenging government authority and censorship, means it cannot be ignored in future research. Amusingly, an Egyptian girl was the first ever baby to be named 'Facebook' in honour of the role that the social networking site played in allowing protestors to organize and disseminate their message to the world (Hartley-Parkinson, 2011). In this context, with the revolutionary potentials of the Internet being recently discovered by many Arab citizens, how will new media shape or alter their daily media practices? Kraidy (2007:139) has documented the rise of what he names a 'pan Arab hypermedia space', combining the impact of satellite television and other types of new media. Thus, I suggest future research could investigate how the daily importance of television, documented in this study, may change along with Egypt's highly volatile social and political context. Will the Internet overtake the daily importance of television as a more trusted source of information? Or will the relevance of television and the Internet appear only in their convergence, and as each medium continues to provide a specific function in relation to particular informational, political or entertainment needs? Despite optimistic claims that the popularity of the Internet will rise as a result of recent events, I continue to maintain that the financial resources, skills and infrastructure required to fully benefit from the potentials of the Internet,

will be unlikely to pose a serious challenge to the universality and spread of television in Egypt.

This study illustrates that without the media, both old and new, imagination, and the dream of a better life in Egypt would have been very difficult to find the expression that we have recently observed. Nevertheless, in a recent television interview, an Egyptian political scientist, Saeed Sadek (Al Jazeera, 2011), commented on the tricky nature of imagination, often a double edged sword that may raise too many unrealistic expectations. Egyptians are currently in a state of disillusionment he observed, because the revolution did not bring about the social, cultural and economic promises they imagined it instantaneously would. Egyptians expected too much too soon, wanting to implement democratic and cultural models they have seen elsewhere in the world, while failing to realize that the fall of Egypt's dictator and corrupt regime alone, was not enough. Egypt was not only characterized by an authoritarian figurehead, but also by social and cultural forms of dictatorship, both amongst family relations and within the class system, which will require decades to change. Significantly, however, Sadek (Al Jazeera, 2011) asserts that without the power of imagination and without the dream of a better life that was the main driving force for change, the revolution could never have happened.

I started thinking about this study within the political instability and changes taking place in 2005, and I end it six years later in 2011. Although tremendous developments have taken place politically within this period, recent sectarian violence and the continuation of political corruption, means a sense of disenchantment and often fear about what the future holds for them, still remains visibly palpable amongst Egyptians. I write at this moment not as a researcher who has maintained objectivity or avoided 'going native' for four years, but also as a young Egyptian, who felt an overwhelming and unparalleled sense of pride and emotion as I witnessed my family, friends, and even this study's participants turn imagination into reality; risking their lives on the streets of Cairo earlier this year to shape a more promising future for us all. With them I have dreamed, and after witnessing first-hand the power of imagination, will continue to dream of a better Egypt. *Our* home in a cosmopolitan world.

APPENDIX- Figure 1: Class profiles in relation to income, occupation, education and lifestyle. Based on Ibrahim's (1982) model of socio-economic divisions in Cairo

		Working Class	L. Middle Class	U. Middle Class
<u>Income(LE)</u>	<i>Family income</i>	500- 1,500	1000-2,5000	10,000-15,000 and over 15,000
10 LE = approx.£1				
<u>Occupation</u>	<i>Parents' occupation</i>	Unskilled labour e.g. domestic servants, cooks, porters	Skilled professional, mainly public sector e.g. teachers, clerks	Skilled professional, mainly private sector e.g. doctors, lawyers, accountants
	<i>% of respondents in paid employment alongside study</i>	75% Mainly unskilled jobs e.g. assistant, cashier	30% Administrative jobs in government institutions	17% Paid training in private, multinational firms
<u>Education</u>	<i>Secondary education</i>	Secondary vocational education	Egyptian secondary high school certificate (ESHSC)	ESHSC, IGCSE, American Diploma, IB
	<i>Higher/further education</i>	Further; intermediate vocational institutes	Higher; public institutions	Higher; private institutions
<u>Lifestyle</u>	<i>Ownership of car</i>	2%	20%	96%
	<i>Num. of cars p/family</i>	1	1	3 or more
	<i>Num. of TV's in home</i>	1	1	3 or more
	<i>Ownership of summer chalet</i>	0	13%	90%
	<i>Destination of summer travel</i>	Day trips at local seaside	Weekly trips to Alexandria, Ismalia, Hurghada	Hurghada, North Coast, Europe and US
	<i>Preferred leisure spaces</i>	Mosque, public spaces, local café, home/neighborhood	Home/neighborhood café	Global café chains, bars, cinema
	<i>Use of public transport</i>	100% Microbus, metro, public bus	85% Microbus, metro, taxi	20% Taxi

APPENDIX- Figure 2: Focus group prompts.

1.Prompt relating to media consumption.

- Has anyone seen (refer to popular programme available at the time)? What do you think of it? (Use it as a point of departure to explore more deeply their general television consumption practices. Ask about preferred channels, genres and attitudes towards terrestrial broadcasting).

2.Prompt relating to identity/cosmopolitanism

- The most recent World Values Survey conducted in Egypt shows that Egyptians continue to strongly identify with a national and religious identity the most. Based on your own experiences, do you feel these findings are accurate and reflective of people's allegiances in Egypt? (Ask about opinions towards an identification with world culture. Does such a cosmopolitan orientation necessarily contradict religious and national allegiances?)

3.Prompt relating to class.

- Recent statistics suggest that over 40% of Egyptians are living in poverty, while a growing number of Egyptians are living luxury lives, similar to people in the west. What are your views on this? (What are their attitudes towards phenomena such as gated communities, minimum charges and rules that prohibit certain classes from entering public spaces? What do they conceive to be the reasons for this stark polarization in lifestyle and what could be a solution?)

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