

Peterson, Mark Allen. 2011. *Connected in Cairo. Growing up Cosmopolitan in the Modern Middle East*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 263 pp. Pb.: \$24.95. ISBN: 9780253223111.

Mark Allen Peterson offers a deeply engaging and timely analysis of the complex socio-cultural, religious and economic trajectories that have shaped young upper-class Egyptians in the decade prior to the 2011 uprising. Through a series of detailed ethnographic portraits of educational spaces, children's magazines, coffee shops and fast-food outlets, Peterson's book furthers our understanding of the many ways in which class identities – and the particular lifestyles and social expectations they harvest – are imprinted upon young people from a tender age. In particular, Peterson brings to light how education, in the Egyptian national context, is a powerful cog in a broader rigid social class system that works to crystallise and consolidate class identities. Interestingly, by maintaining a sensitive distinction of the how social practices that create class identities change between level of education (primary/higher), but also type of education (private/public/private-national/private-international), Peterson makes a unique and insightful contribution to Arab cultural studies and anthropology.

Although researchers within these subject-domains have engaged the question of class, they have often approached class as a socio-economic blueprint of behaviour and lifestyle; a rigid category that pre-exists people's agency and thus forces them to act in predictable and standardised ways. What Peterson successfully does through his in-depth ethnographic fieldwork is engage with *individuals* that can never be disassociated from the hierarchies and inequalities of the class system, yet perceive and make sense of them "selves" and their subjectivities in unique and varying ways. Such an approach makes relevant not only differences across classes, but also brings to the fore the fluidity of class boundaries and thus the internal contradictions that inevitably exist between people *within* class categories. For instance, through Peterson's engagement with Cairo's American University, we are introduced to how female students often choose to defy the liberal, Western-inspired social practices prevalent in this elite institution. They prefer to physically express their piousness and the potency of their Islamic faith by adopting the *niqab* (face veil) – even if it does challenge the dress policy put in place by the university's (largely American) faculty and administrators.

Importantly, Peterson resists subscribing to an over simplistic approach that reduces the upper-classes to westernised propagators of globalisation opposing any type of localised association. Instead, through a multi-dimensional analysis of young Egyptians' daily 'linguistic codes and registers, bodily comportments, and other practices...' (p. 12) the author thoughtfully considers the struggles these young elite face as they attempt to negotiate complex and often contradicting identities. Such identities are at once modern and cosmopolitan, yet also conform to the more rooted specificities of local religious and cultural practice. For instance, by examining class in juxtaposition with gender, the reader is made aware of how strict codes of religious morality have a significant bearing on upper class women's mobility and their presence in public space, even though they are part of Egypt's Westernised, elite class network.

Furthermore, Peterson's well-contextualised, thickly described case studies propose a framework for understanding cosmopolitanism that transcends the vantage point of Western liberal democracies from which many studies and conceptualisations of cosmopolitanism have arisen. Rather than approaching cosmopolitanism as a "fixed conception" characterised by a particular definition of what it *should* or *ought* to be, Peterson offers a bottom-up understanding of cosmopolitan as an everyday practiced identity which is lived, embodied and performed in unique ways. Such an in-depth micro-analysis of everyday cosmopolitanism in Cairo engages with the complex and multifarious ways in which the global is produced from *within*, and thus takes its meaning only *through* local religious, cultural and linguistic practices.

In addition, the case studies presented in this book engage with a very specific, almost exclusive type of cosmopolitanism preconditioned by wealth, prestige, transnational mobility and the consumption of expensive Western products. Nevertheless, Peterson makes the salient point that this should be regarded as only one *type* of cosmopolitan identity in Cairo that exists alongside others articulated on the basis of different class, gender and religious affiliations. In this way, Peterson makes sure not to define cosmopolitanism as an identity exclusive solely to privileged classes, but also not to de-value the decidedly different cosmopolitan associations and networks managed by the working class.

Although the main argumentative thread of this book in no way glosses over the complexity of young Egyptian identities, but successfully portrays how they are framed within systems of class, gender, religious and urban organisation and control, the author's use of the term "authentic identity" may be questionable. The claim that young elite Egyptians are searching for "authentic" identities almost implies that the "modern" forces of globalisation threaten these rooted authenticities. Furthermore, the concept of "authentic" identity fails to denote that identities can never be pure as by virtue of an ubiquitous cross-cultural exchange through globalisation, migration, imperialism and media communication, they are naturally comprised of a range of different cultural and temporal influences. Whether or not one agrees with Peterson's choice of terminology, however, the crux of his argument neatly captures common struggles endured by young people in the developing south as they negotiate the contour and limits of their globalisation. Indeed, in the face of a bombardment of cultural stimuli from the West, while having a reflexive awareness of their position within global hierarchies, young Egyptians are ever in search of a unique yet rooted sense of self that allows them to locate themselves in a world both immediate and faraway.

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