



Cosmopolitanism and its Others: Social Distinction in Egypt in the aftermath of the Revolution of 2011

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Abstract

As a contribution to the diverse field of cosmopolitan scholarship, engaging with 'cultural cosmopolitanism' often understood in a vernacular sense as the capacity to meditate between different cultures, religions and ways of life, the thesis locates and analyses cosmopolitan discourses and cosmopolitan material practices within the cultural and socio-political conditions in which they were uttered in the Muslim majority context of Egypt. While issues concerning religion have been at the crux of contemporary Middle East scholarship, less often addressed are discursive and material spaces in which other types of imaginaries can prosper. As an interdisciplinary study, informed by ethnographic inquiry, the thesis engages in analyzing a cosmopolitan social imaginary as well as expressions of differing aspirations - that were framed in cosmopolitan terms - during the period between the Egyptian revolution in January 2011 and the military coup d'état in summer 2013. Witnessing profound political changes with new actors such as the Muslim Brotherhood entering the political arena, the period constitutes a historically significant moment for the analysis of discourses and practices with a cosmopolitan reference. The research grounds cosmopolitan theories in space and time and reflects on the appropriation of the cosmopolitan concept. Consequently, it casts a critical look at how there was a materialization of cosmopolitan notions of self-reflexivity and detachment – the ability to see the world from the viewpoint of one's cultural 'others'. On the one hand, the study discusses how nostalgia for the past, framed in cosmopolitan terms, relates to the present, and on the other, how contemporary cosmopolitan discourses and practices, enabled through global market forces, materialized in the Egyptian context in the aftermath of the Egyptian revolution of 2011. Within the political setting of post-2011 revolution Egypt, this research observes how social distinction can be enacted through cosmopolitan references. Viewed in relation to the socio-political realities of the location under study, it points to social hierarchies, which the differentiation 'global' and 'local' helps to create, and to appropriations of the contextual distinctiveness and specificity of the cosmopolitan imaginary. While discussing social distinction through an analysis of cosmopolitan imaginaries, the thesis contributes to the fields of both elite scholarship and cosmopolitan scholarship.



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