

A stand against deculturation: How everything is kitsch and Egypt will lead the way

Paper by : Sakran

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My papers will always look at the phenomena I am interested in from different perspectives, in an attempt to indicate that there is always a universal approach. Adopting such a universal approach would, from my point of view, allow us to understand and resolve the possible issues that arise.

This paper aims to demonstrate how due to globalization, kitsch has become the new aesthetic for deculturation around the world (Bornstein, 2019). It will then turn its focus on Egypt and how social classes has aided in deculturation within the country.

Furthermore, this paper will also aim to have a balanced approach between a diagnosis and a prognosis – an analysis and a solution. I shall attempt to do this by showing the positive impact if all social classes join forces into seeing that kitsch is not an exclusive product of the uneducated masses but, is in fact today's global aesthetic.

Also, I believe that by developing a “balanced” culture of individuality (so that it doesn't turn into narcissism (Twenge , 2013) could we then truly have a positive global influence. This is due to the fact that deculturation in Egypt did not occur solely from globalization or it's globalized institutions (Bornstein, 2019) but, by its own institution of condition that lacks any support in regards to the aspect of individuality (Fromm, 1941).

How “everything is kitsch” in today's world

Let us look at how “everything is kitsch” (Bornstein, 2019) in today's world. It seems that every paper and individual find it hard to define what “Kitsch” exactly is. This is also due to the fact that it needs a physiological, sociological, historical and/or anthropological analysis rather than an aesthetic one (Kulka, 2010).

According to Bornstein (2019) Kitsch could be defined as, *“a tasteless copy of an existing style or as the systematic display of bad taste/artistic deficiency.”*

In the past, kitsch used to be the aesthetic for the uneducated masses, who were attracted to the consumer culture by an emergent capitalism. Uneducated masses produce these kitsch

designs due to their overall lack of education in regards to culture, design or any form of institution that would allow them to understand how to produce something purposely driven. Yet, in his book, Bornstein argues that today everything is Kitsch. He stated:

“Why is there so much kitsch? one reason is that we are living at the age of hyperbole. There is simply too much of everything; extreme sports, doping, eating, contests, hyper-skinny models, mass shooting, addictions, etc. However, kitsch is determined by a deeper pattern, which is the patten of deculturation. Humans need truths to believe in, but in the past, those truths tended to be transmitted through cultures, in the neoliberal world, truth is increasingly produced instantaneously without cultural mediation. Kitsch employs this mechanism in the realm of aesthetics, and the sudden explosion of kitsch “

Today, there is too much of everything and not just one clear institution to guide us anymore. In his book “The laws of Human Nature” Greene even stated that we have *“been born into times of great change and chaos. The old support system of the past – religions, universal causes to believe in, social cohesion-have mostly disappeared, at least in the western world; disappearing also are the elaborate conventions, rules and taboos that once channeled behavior.”*

Borstein argues that in the past there used to be certain systems like colonialisation that resulted in deculturation of a country. Those systems always provided culture capital for people to use and integrate it in their own culture. (Authors note: for example, all legal documents in Egypt were adopted originally from the French justice system and written in French). Borstein states that today globalisation is causing deculturation and its aesthetic is kitsch. He later defines globalization as an expansion of a system that has generic modified norms, which rely on themselves. He states that globalization is in fact not a culture, but the absence of it:

“Globalization decultures and decontextualizes, detaches things, isolates them and throws them in the global marketplace where they float and reassemble, often in a random way and connect with other elements in the most unlikely fashion,” resulting in the global kitsch phenomena.

Globalization could be best described as John Tomlinson (1991) stated, “*economically and technologically strong but culturally weak.*” Globalisation did not offer any aesthetic that individuals could rely on in their work. Hence, it has led them to produce artistically deficient designs that are kitsch! Then what does kitsch rely on? Narcissism (Bornstein, 2019).

Globalization has led to an increase in competitiveness between global markets, this has affected individuals on a psychological level as well; It has led them to appeal more to their self-interest and to view lust for power and hostility as the main driving forces of man (Hobbes, 2019). There are even several research papers that showcase a general global increase of narcissism (Tweng, 2016).

I have alluded above the relationship between kitsch and narcissism. I shall address this relationship in future papers. In this paper I am going to focus more on how deculturation has occurred in Egypt and how Egyptian kitsch designs could be the solution for counterbalancing this deculturation.

Social class in Egypt and its effect on deculturation

Different class fractions have different combinations of economic, social and cultural capital. Economic capital is any form of wealth than can be turned into money. Social capital is defined as connections of family, place and neighborhood, it is often inherited from class membership (families social class). Cultural capital is a person’s knowledge, skills and credentials (Knox, 2010).

In his book, Knox (2010) stated that the upper class had fairly high amounts of each capital, the working class had low amount of each capital and the nouveau riche has high economic capital but low in social and cultural capital. He also stated that each class has their own “habitus” which is, a set of structured beliefs that allows each class to have a specific type of lifestyle and aesthetic. Combinations of different levels of capital results to different habitus for each class.

The dominant class always has access to new goods and aesthetics that allows them to continuously develop their habitus. Hence, producing their own signs and symbols. Other classes that have lower levels of capital also seek to continuously develop their habitus to differentiate themselves from other classes. However, since they do not have access to any goods like the dominant classes, they tend to take what was produced by them (dominant class) and adjust it to their own habitus, which initiates the kitsch phenomena.

Egypt started to increase its social mobility (movement of individuals from one social class to another) in the 1950's when president Gamal Abdel Nasser took office (Amin, 2000). In his book "Whatever happened to the Egyptians?" Amin states:

"In trying to justify his 'socialist' measures of the 1960's, the late Egyptian president, Gamal Abd-al-Nasser frequently described Egyptian society on the eve of 1952 revolution as "the half percent society", meaning that proportion of the Egyptian population that controlled most of Egypt's resources as well as its political life did not exceed that tiny percentage. The statement also hinted at a very small middle class and it's relatively weak economic and political position"

His laws and legislations led to various individuals from the working class to rise to the nouveau riche class in the 1960's. At that time, Egypt seemed to have most of its population in the working class segment following, the upper class segment then lastly the nouveau riche segment which, still contained a very small percentage of the population.

The dominant class at that time (upper-class) were the ones who had accessibility to goods and knowledge that allowed them to continuously develop new styles, taste and identity. They continuously perused refinement and originality (knox, 2010) as their culture capital was high, their designs were enriched with cultural heritage. In the 1960's Egypt was still considered in its "golden age of cinema" indicating that it was still producing authentic work that had a global impact.

However, in the 1970's things started to take a turn when president Anwar El Sadat took office. This change has become known as the 'infatih' meaning "reaching upwards and outwards" (Monson, 1984) in which, is globalization but was aimed towards the United States of America. The term we could also then use is the 'Americanisation' of Egypt. This

meant opening up Egypt's economy to direct private investments that would then lead to modernizing Egypt and allowing it to face its poor economy. Monson (1984) stated that one of the main reasons that led to President Sadat into taking such action was the population explosion that Egypt was facing. At that time, a new baby was born every 20 seconds and the population has reached a peak of 46 million (Monson,1984) . This made it understandable for President Sadat to seek foreign investment and aid. Another reason is Sadat's vision of Egypt becoming the leading financial center of the Middle East (which was held by Lebanon at that time) (McLaughlin, 1978).

Even though the *Infitah* allowed Egypt to prosper, it caused a major shift and imbalance of social classes. Based on Chris Monson (1984) he highlights that the main attributes regarding why the *Infitah* did not work as President Sadat hoped so, was due to lack of clear authority, skills and the inability to adapt to modern manufacturing. Even worse, when globalisation (*Infitah*) occurred in Egypt, the Egyptian government had a lack of vision in regards to how Egypt's cultural revival would develop with it (Amin, 2000). Thus, as Fincher (1983) described "*Sadat not only set the moral example of Infitah in his own person but in those he admitted to the inner circles of power. To the improvised multitudes, this tiny minority were known as 'fat cats' and Sadat's magic formula of 'peace and Infitah equal prosperity' seemed designed to make them fatter*"

Individuals in the *nouveau-riche* class seemed to get more richer thus, this has forced a large percentage of the *upper-class* to shift to a new class called the *middle-class* which; has lower levels of economic and social capital than of the *upper-class* and *nouveau-riche* individuals. This then has led to the number of individuals who are in the *upper-class* to decrease immensely and losing its status as the 'dominant class'. Lastly, even though the main social class that should've benefited from the *Infitah* was the *working-class* (by having their salaries increase) some individuals weren't able to grasp any of those benefits hence, (Author note: readers can check Chris Monson's 1984 article to know more in regards to why they weren't able to grasp any of those opportunities) forcing them to either maintain in this class or shift to another class called the *lower-class* which, has even lower levels of both capitals than all classes.

Then what happened to the cultural capital of each classes? They dropped...immensely.

As the *Infitah* started providing funds for private sectors to develop, it started to create a huge pay gap between it and the public sector. This encouraged elite university graduates to work in private sectors that interact with foreign goods and services rather than in the public sector that aid Egyptian citizens. They were now left stuck with an increasing marginalization, stagnancy and low wages (Alaa and Fuller, 2014).

This is what led to a general decrease in the level of education and cultural capital of each classes throughout time in Egypt. Elite Individuals who were highly educated and could've aided Egypt by integrating their knowledge with public entities that have the capabilities to support and improve the living standards of Egyptian citizens, chose to work in private sectors that sell fizzy drinks and chips due to monetary incentives. Rather than educating the community with what they've learned in order to let them develop culturally with time, they chose to rather exploit it for their own benefits. Even worse, this has set an example to the generations that have followed, that this way of operating is in fact...OK!

Not only has this poor decision affected the level of education in Egypt negatively but, it is essentially what initiated this big difference between classes in regards to their style, taste and overall habitus. Furthermore, rather than respecting and appreciating their differences, it has led to more tension between them. As the level of education started to drop, ignorance started to spread within all classes and the more ignorant a person gets the harder you can convince her/him that anything out of their ordinary (habitus) is not always a threat. Hence, rather than integrating their ideas together in order to develop culturally as a nation and have a balanced resistance towards the *Infitah*, they started labelling each other "bee2a", "new money" and "ibn nas" (texts are translated below) while slowly allowing globalisation to do the job for them.

The increased emergence of kitsch in Egypt

By the 2000's under President Hosny Mubarak's regime, the continuous lack of development of cultural capital led to major deculturation in Egypt by then. As Thomas Friedman (1998) described: "*Globalization has a distinctly American face: It wears Mickey Mouse ears, it eats*

Big Macs, it drinks Coke or Pepsi and it does its computing on an IBM or Apple laptop, using Windows 98". The dominant class now (nouveau riche) were 'buying' their habitus from mostly European brands such as Fendi and Gucci, as they have low levels of cultural capital and high levels of economic capital. Thus, whatever was being worn, eaten or sold abroad was brought in Egypt for them to use as signs and symbols to indicate that they're rich and better than other classes, rather than integrating and developing Egypt's culture with it. The upper-class segment shrunk significantly, with the majority of individuals living abroad seeking better opportunities for themselves and their families. However, those who remained in the country seemed to be somewhat stuck in time, refusing to develop in any form. As this class segment has a fairly high cultural capital, they consider themselves as what Mendini (1981) would call as 'cultural guardians' of Egypt's golden era. From their perspective, nothing of greater value was produced by the community after the Golden era (same time when they were the dominant class in Egypt) and any attempt of doing so would be perceived as "disrespectful". One could agree with them to some extent that, nothing was as culturally rich was produced after the golden area. However, that does not give a convenient reason to ignore or disrespect what the consumer masses produces nowadays as then, that would mean isolating themselves from the modern world and losing any form of influence.

Middle-class individuals who were once in the upper-class segment, kept struggling financially. It forced them to either work two jobs, depend on loans while working a full time job or if they were lucky, they used what was left from their inheritance as savings in the bank in order to receive interest payments while working a full time job. However, those who had it in them and were naturally entrepreneurs, saw things 'out of the box' and how inconvenient it was; to live the rest of your life in debt even though you gave all your time and effort solely for the reason to not be in debt. Hence, those individuals started initiating mostly informal SME's (Small/Medium Enterprises) that operate in the retail sector. As their social and cultural capital was limited, their access of knowledge came from the dominant class which they took (their habitus) and as Bernstein described "reassembled it...connected it with other elements in the most unlikely fashion". This is where the kitsch phenomena of mixing pop-art with Egyptian icons began.

However, due to having limited access to proper education, middle-class individuals had a lack of understanding of the pop-art culture. Also, it's main reason for its initiation and how to truly integrate it with the Egyptian/Arab culture. This then resulted in to producing

designs that lack any purpose and to be just used as “pop- art” ornaments sold to the mass population.

To illustrate the above point, an online article written by Sophie Arni (2015) called “Warhol from Marrakech: A market and social study of Arab pop art” she analyzed critically Arab pop-artists stating *“These are brightly coloured canvases presenting daily images of local dressed men and women on computers, or listening to music. Although their bright colors and consumer culture connotations seem like these works would fit in the compound of Pop, they do not encompass all Pop Art’s concepts as Andy Warhol (1928-1987) or Richard Hamilton (1922-2011) would understand it.”* She states that Pop art for Arabs should be used to showcase the impact of western consumerism in the middle east and *“raise questions on transnationalism, globalism, capitalism and cultural ignorance”*. However, Arab pop-artists in the middle east use it to either target the western audience or appeal to the mass market in order to sell. She later states an example of an Arab Pop artist called Salam stating *“Commercial artists like Salam sole purpose is for her work to be sold. It is quite ironic for these Arab Pop artists to sell so well to a wealthy, and thus globalized, audience when their goal is to raise questions and educate the general public on Arab popular culture.”*

Today, you can’t go to any gift shop in Egypt without having to see half of the store filled with Andy Warhol inspired Pop-art themed pillows, kitchenware, clothes, prints and stationary equipment’s; that have faces of Oum Kalthoum and Abdelhalim Hafiz printed on them. Yet, they obtain no purpose or a concept behind it. This indicates that modern Arab artists who resonate in Arab countries seem to only develop its culture solely for the propose of gaining wealth (in order to advance in the social classes hierarchy and hopefully become an ‘International’ artist) and not to enrich and strengthen the culture of the country. This led to major deculturation and an increased ignorance between Arabs in regards to their Arab culture. An example of this would be how wealthy Arabs started feeling ashamed of the Arabic language due to their globalised institutions. Female TV presenters starting acting as if they can’t pronounce specific Arabic words and would always have a ‘foreign’ Arabic language accent or ‘unconsciously’ slip a few English words from time to time as they believe it indicated that you’re wealthy and educated (Amin, 2000) thus, get more sponsors and become more popular. What’s even worse is that those TV presenters were addressing the mass population who are extremely uneducated and illiterate (lower-class) which generated even more tension between the wealthy and the poor.

What happens then is that those Arab artists do in fact rise in the hierarchy of social classes and become known within their community but, never on a global scale. This is due to the fact that Pop-art is globally understood to portray consumerism, capitalism and culture ignorance. Yet, all the work that was being made by local Arab Pop artists seem to just show faces of well-known icons. In her Essay, Arni gave the example of the Arab Pop artist Mohammed Kanoo (from the UAE) stating “*Kanoo could be thought of as Pop as he decontextualizes popular images, although differing in its practices. It is ‘ironic’, it stands as an ‘implicit social and cultural critique’, it deals with ‘popular imagery’, i.e the photographs of world leaders hung on an infinite number of walls across the globe, but there is nothing consumerist in his work*” making it ineffective globally. Arni then gives examples of modern Arab Pop-artists that are established and validated globally as their work does have a meaningful message in regards to Arab culture and consumerism; making it a global trend.

Hassan Hajjaj was the first Arab Pop-artist that Arni highlighted in her essay calling him the “Warhol of Marrakech” in which, she critically analysed how his work truly does have a global impact and showcases Pop art in a non-Western world (Arni, 2015). She then critically analysed one of his work called *S.U.S.A, Salam* (2008) stating “*The first tactic used by Arab Pop Artists is to associate an Arab touch to a global, often Western, pop-culture image. Think of the US flag made of blue Pepsi and red Coca-Cola cans: the epitome of the American cultural dominance. Now, think these same Pepsi and Coca-Cola cans with Arabic logos, next to an image of a veiled woman. The finished product is a social and geopolitical critique of the preponderance of Western consumerism in the Middle East. The formal appeal of the US flag shifted from a déjà-vu to a fresh, new take on Pop Art in a non-Western world.*” His work has become very known that he was chosen to do the first Vogue cover shoot for Cardi B and then for Billie Eilish (Arab news, 2020) allowing him to gain global recognition and validation.

However, the majority of Arab artists that were mentioned as truly portraying what pop-art should be in her essay, seem to have one thing in common: they all lived most of their lives in Western countries or had the opportunity to fully integrate their Arab culture capital with up-to-date global trends. In other words, their culture capital flourished in comparison to Arab artists living in Arab countries due to having accessibility to proper education, various well-known global entities within their reach and not living in conditions that would force

them to prioritise monetary incentives. Whereas in Arab countries, it seems that our ongoing stressful environment and the struggle of sharing power between classes (caused merely due to the *Infitah*), has impacted man's survival instinct to choose fame and power over enriching a community.

The working and lower classes seem to struggle even more financially and by now, were in stressful conditions that seem to be unbearable. As Khaled Ismail stated in the book *Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Egypt* (2015) "*The poor, in particular, were feeling mounting economic pressure...In entrepreneurial terms, this is called the 'pain'. Excellent entrepreneurial ideas are often rooted in a desire to solve an existing problem, or remove a pain that the end-user is suffering from*". As Egypt's culture is infused with musical traditions that are necessary to any social event, however the cost of hiring a musician became too expensive for these classes. Subsequently, innovative youth who obtain entrepreneurial spirit started creating digital soundtracks that cost less in order to accompany those street weddings and festivals in their local community. Also, Walter Armbrust (1992, 1996) argues that this connection to folklore and Egyptian culture is an essential element in the evolution of contemporary east-west fusion music that originated with the sha'abi music style in the "cassette culture" of the 1970's. As a result a new music genre known as *mahraganat* or "festival" was born (Schiemer and Hanan 2015).

Mahraganat seems to be the only thing that was initiated by Egyptians which, truly does account as a form of development in regards to Arab culture and a tool of counterculture resistance against the *Infitah* "globalisation" (Schiemer and Hanan 2015). As of today, two Dutch artists formed a DJ collective called "Cairo liberation front" and have toured across Europe and brought this type of music to the attention of the media and EDM music lovers in Europe (Schiemer and Hanan 2015). Furthermore, an Egyptian independent music label and an English radio station serving to the London EDM scene, have brought the *mahraganat* genre to the attention of the European population (Ferida Jawad, 2014). There is no doubt that the *mahraganat* music genre that was initiated by the lower classes, has enriched and developed the nations cultural capital more than any other element that was ever produced by the rest of the classes. Even more, it has now reached the global stage in which allows us as Arabs, to be able to gain some form of global influence which, we haven't had for a while in regards to arts and culture.

We could then consider Magarangat artists as necessity entrepreneurs rather than opportunity entrepreneurs as they have “no other work options and needs a source of income;” (Ismail and Yehia, 2016). They were rather pushed into being Mahraganat artists due to the high prices of hiring musicians and lack of job opportunities.

Therefore, In entrepreneurial terms (since Maharaganat artists are considered as one), it was ‘pain’ that was used as a form of intrinsic motivation that allowed individuals from the lower class to produce something of value. It is the internalization of problems to be solved and the relevance of them that motivates an entrepreneur, not the extrinsic motivation of reward for doing well (Pink, 2011). Various *Mahraganat* artists have now risen to international recognition in return, received financial rewards and a successful career. It seems that the lower classes naturally obtain entrepreneurial characteristics without even having to read a book or even attend one of those ‘disruptive’ thinking workshops in order to succeed. Why is that?

Individuality

To fully understand why, we need to translate this entrepreneurial definition into a psychological one that will allow us to see how different this ‘pain’ is in comparison to the rest of the social classes, allowing them to succeed and formulate a genuine counterculture phenomena. In his book *Escape From Freedom* (1941) Erich Fromm seems to translate this phenomena by stating that any society must domesticate man, while allowing some direct satisfaction gained from those domesticated systems that will fulfil their natural impulses. This creates ineradicable (cannot be controlled) drives such as gaining more power, money and influence. However, the society will always refine and check these drives in order to make sure they are within a certain limit thus, supressing those natural impulses for some individuals. He later states:

“In consequence of this suppression of natural impulses by society something miraculous happens: the suppressed drives turn into strivings that are culturally valuable and thus become the human basis for culture...There is a reverse relation between satisfaction of

man's drives and culture: the more suppression, the more culture (and the more danger of neurotic disturbances)."

In psychological terms it is due to the 'suppression' of man's drive to gain some form of power and influence that would then lead them to start striving for something else that is culturally valuable. The more suppression the lower classes received from the system, the more some individuals started to generate culturally rich music that influenced other cultures globally. Furthermore, we need to ask ourselves, if man's drive is no longer to gain power and influence due to excess suppression from the system, then what do they start striving for (unconsciously) in order to fight this suppression? Individuality.

Individuality could be defined as "A habit of thinking and acting in one's own distinctive manner and as one believes appropriate, not being heavily influenced by the opinions of others; -- of people." (Definitions, 2020). This allows the person to be distinguished from a group as they have their own unique way of operating/interacting with people which, makes them stand out.

In psychology, suppression means the act of stopping someone from thinking or feeling something. Regarding Egypt's stressful economic and social environment that it has reached due to not handling the *Infitah* effectively, the lower-classes seem to receive nothing but suppression by the system it's operating in and the individuals that they got to interact with from other classes. This overall suppression translated to them that they simply do not exist and even worse, should not exist. Since these external forces portray to those individuals that they are of no value, the only force that would allow them to fight back are the internal forces "within" them that would allow them to see their worth. They get to see their calling in life and build their individuality bit by bit against these forces. This internal force within an individual, forces people to see that "I EXIST" and that "I will create my world in hopes that some will relate since I am not accepted in any of the ones that are currently available". It is with no question that this strong internal force does eventually generate an external influence just like what the singers of *Mahraganat* did.

We can now conclude that to some extent, individuality naturally creates more successful entrepreneurs than any other factor and beyond that, it can allow a nation to fight back against globalisation.

Lack of individuality in Egypt

To further illustrate my point, when President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi took office in 2014 he clearly understood the damage that globalisation “*Infitah*” has caused within the nation. Hence, a new system had to be applied in order to balance the influence caused by globalisation and to obviously fix the damage that has led to people eventually revolting on the 25th of January 2011. As unemployment rates rose to 12.7% in 2012, making it the highest rate in the decade (Lazzeretti and Vecco, 2018); President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and his government knew that the only solution to this crisis could now be found “within” the nation, by viewing the opportunities it can provide In order to formulate an advantage against global industries. In Business terms this is called Core Competencies. In the case of a country, it would be called “differentiation”.

The government then saw the various opportunities the country provided in order to combine them and formulate a skill that would allow them to compete effectively. In Egypt, there is a high abundance of unemployed well-educated youth and an established leading supply of ICT back office operation and services for multinational enterprises. The government then saw the opportunity to shifting the sector to become a producer and exporter of higher value-added software & ICT service (Lazzeretti and Vecco, 2018). This then led to the explosion of supporting and domesticating ICT entrepreneurship and encouraging individuals to start their own business in Egypt. As Lazzeretti and Vecco described in their book “Creative Industries and Entrepreneurship: Paradigms in Transition from a Global Perspective” (2018):

“Following the 25 January Revolution, the start-up scene has been exploding in Egypt over the past six years. Many young, talented and often tech-savvy Egyptians have been increasingly turning to entrepreneurship to build their futures. According to Global Entrepreneurship monitor (GEM) in Egypt, the number of individuals engaged in starting a new business has doubled during the period between 2010 and 2015.”

Within those years, high percentage of individuals within the nation started to adopt an entrepreneurial mind set, as the government started encouraging individuals to start their own businesses. From improving investment laws to attract foreign investment for start-ups (Udoh, 2020) to establishing private and public incubators for the IT sector and even

initiating a campaign encouraging the youth to start their business in secondary sectors. The American University in Egypt even then initiated the Centre of Entrepreneurship in 2015 and published a book called “Entrepreneurship and innovation in Egypt” (2015) aiming to provide information in regards to the obstacles that the entrepreneurship scene is facing and possible ways to handle these issues.

However, the rates of business discontinuation almost doubled within these years (Lazzeretti and Vecco, 2018). Even looking through the start-ups that were chosen for the incubation process in the AUC Venture Lab 2015, none of the “eleven start-ups from diverse sectors” seem to have continued with their businesses as they all are either nowhere to be found online or have a websites that haven’t been updated in a while. It seems that all the efforts that have been exerted by both the government and private sectors to provide solutions and incentives for the entrepreneurship scene did not lead to the desired end result of having a global influence and reducing the damage the *Infitah* has done. This is simply because the majority of these entrepreneurs lacked any form of individuality and were rather governed by external forces of gaining fame, wealth and power due to the stressful economic conditions of the country caused by the *Infitah*. When you are governed by external forces rather than internal ones that define who you are...you’re not really going to go anywhere.

Putting it in to a different perspective in order to showcase this phenomena, has anyone seen or heard of a current Egyptian firm or individual that is now recognised and depended upon globally? Just like we depend on firms such as Apple, Chanel and McDonalds to be used in our daily lives and individuals such as Jimmy Fallon to entertain us? Yes, only one.

Mohamed Salah.

How did Mohamed Salah gain that influence? Due to his individuality that he was able to develop from all the suppression he received from Egyptian football officials! As Mohamed Salah belonged to the Egyptian working-class prior to his success, he personally experienced suppression from the upper classes trying to make him feel that he was of no value as a football player. In return, this forced him to develop his individuality in order to realise his true potential and fight back against this suppression. He strengthened his internal forces to re-assure him of who he is and thus, motivated him to see that those people are for sure wrong! To prove my point further, an article written by (Laurence, 2019) and was published on the website of The Guardian called “Is Mohamed Salah’s individualism hurting

Liverpool? Far from it” it states that *“Salah is undoubtedly more individualistic in his play than his teammates.. he is better at picking up positions not only for himself but pick out a teammate to do the same”* showcasing how his individuality is the essence of his character and that it’s the reason for his global success and influence.

Even if people bring up examples of successful Egyptian start-ups that gained global influence, they would find that the person behind it time and time again only belonged to a certain social class group that had high economic, social capital and not due to being a “successful entrepreneur” who had to take the risk, fight back against doubters and prove his idea as everyone thinks. For example, SysDSoft was an Egyptian firm that focuses on the design of wireless communication system modems and later got acquired by Intel Mobile Communication (Lazzeretti and Vecco, 2018). However, it’s founder was Mr. Khaled Ismail who is a globally successful Arabic engineer and as Lazzeretti and Vecco stated:

“This case illustrates how the international CV of the founder and his high profile gave a big push to the Egyptian ICT sector. His activity as advisor for both local and US companies allowed him to build a strong network, which was at the basis of the establishment of KI Angels...Consequently, the Success of SysDSoft is related more to a strongly networked founder than the presence of an efficient entrepreneurship ecosystem”

An efficient entrepreneurship ecosystem can only occur if all social classes join force in regards to encouraging more of an individualistic culture and then helping out each other (through investments and connecting these individuals to the global market) to showcase this potential to the world and have a global influence thus, generating multinational companies and brands. Other than that, what will occur is exactly what this paper showcases, the poor will use their individuality not to support others to do the same but, to fight back suppression and eventually leave the country. Whereas, the educated rich will try to find any outside connections to sell their business and call it a “success”. When in fact, what they don’t realise is that Egypt again, loses its influence in the global market because it is no longer an Egyptian company but probably a European one.

Generating an individualistic culture by joining forces? Yes, because by joining forces we would then balance out the narcissism that may be generated due to supporting this type of culture. As mentioned earlier, a research was done on younger generations in developed

countries (USA, China and Australia) where cultural individualism is highly supported as they realised (ages ago) that it is the basis of generating a developed civilisation. What they found was even though it did generate positive impact in regards to greater gender equality (Tweng et al, 2012) they also found that rising of narcissism goes far beyond college students. In a nationally representative sample of 35,000 people, 3 times as many American in their 20's (compared to those in their 60's) experienced narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) (Stinson et al, 2008). The paper concluded that the main reason for this phenomena is not only due to social media (which increased the level of narcissism globally and not only in developed countries) but also because of "*education, media, technology, credit systems and other cultural influences*". But, what the paper doesn't realise it that all of those influences were highly automated meaning, it was carried out mostly by machines and computers with little human capital leading to an increase in the level of individualism and narcissism . However, we don't have these highly automated systems implied! Why not use it to our advantage and rather integrate human capital skills to encourage others to increase their individuality? With that we have an holistic approach between an individualistic and a collectivist culture.

As a nation, by viewing what the lower classes produce due to their suppression as valuable; they would then start generating bold new ideas (*culture*) that will inspire the upper classes to do the same thing. This will then encourage the upper-classes to start learning from the lower-classes to see how they come up with these original bold ideas which, they will realise it is due to their high individuality. They will then start wanting to develop theirs as well. This phenomena of the lower-class educating and inspiring the upper-class will embrace what was mentioned above, a holistic approach between an individualistic and a collectivist culture, leading to a decrease in the level of narcissism that may be generated from the process. What will happen then is that without realising it, the whole nation will be working alone (or in groups if they realise they have the same call in life) side by side generating original ideas and then reaching out to each other (mostly to the upper-classes) in order to showcase it to the world. This is the only means we could start having a global influence...and a better economy.

Gaining global influence through kitsch and minimising the deculturation process

As previously mentioned, throughout the years the lower-classes in Egypt have continuously developed their habitus by taking what the dominant class produces and reassembling it in their own way which, creates “kitsch” designs. Since more than half of the population belongs to the lower-classes, Egypt is filled with kitsch designs like no other country. “*Cairo is like a kitsch art museum*” says Abdel Razek, a 33-year-old Egyptian-American artist who returned to Cairo after the January uprising and got interviewed by Egypt Independent. He stated, “*I could search for days throughout thrift shops in [Brooklyn] for ironic T-shirts or stickers and items to make collages, but nothing compares to the obscure peculiarity of things you pick up from a simple stroll in Cairo.*” (Viney, 2011).

Queer combinations of colours, patterns and textures from the lower classes habitus seem to have a ubiquitous influence that is felt by any individual who comes from abroad, allowing them to feel that they can get infinite inspiration from the country. However, local citizens (the upper/ nouvelle riche and middle class) seem to rather categorise it as tawdry and any association to “their” style (lower class) would translate to being inconsequential.

How ironic it is, that individuals who come from developed countries, view these kitsch designs as a form of inspiration which gets translated to designer clothes that gets sold for hundreds of dollars. What’s even more funny, is that all of a sudden the upper-class(es) in Egypt and Arab countries view them as “luxurious” and “unique” when in fact, it’s core essence is developed from these kitsch designs that were discredited by them.

For example, take a look at the below images:

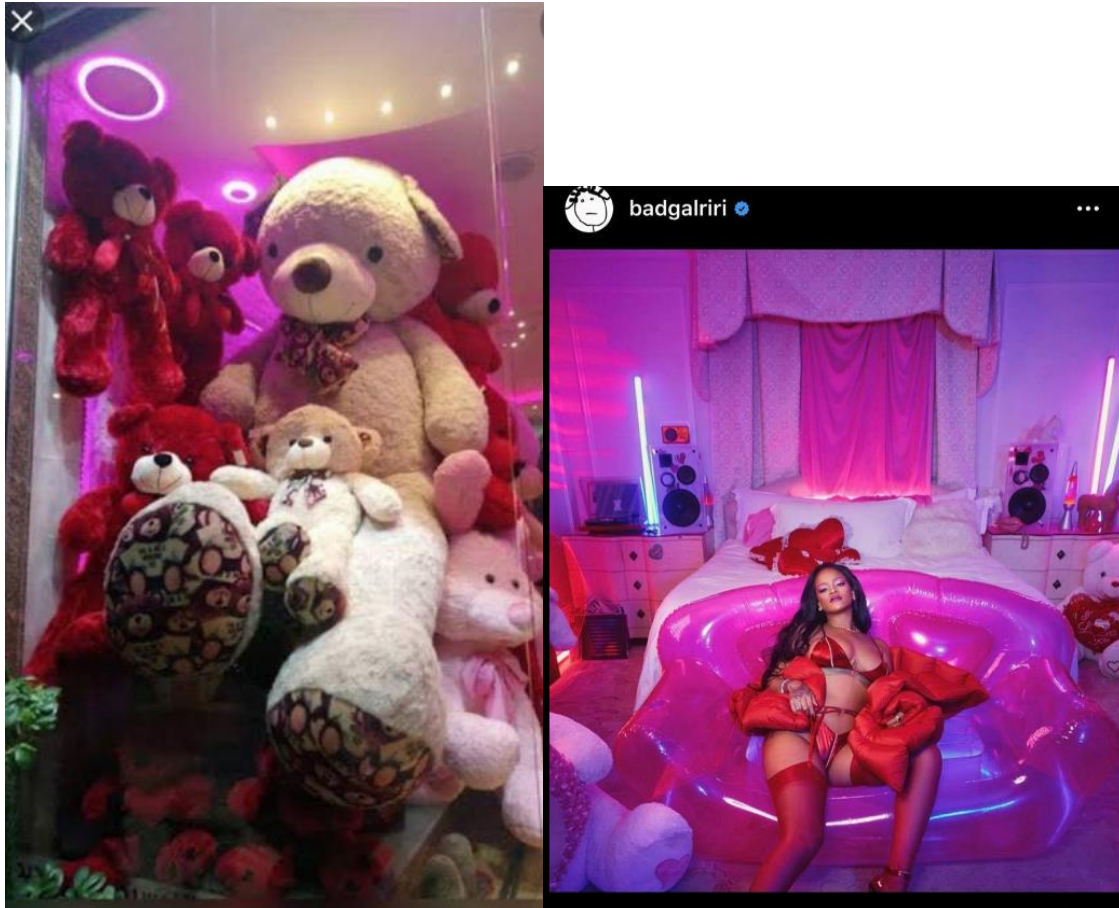


Right hand side is a picture of a women being interviewed in a Egyptian local TV show. Her bold choice of tiger print could be viewed by the elite nouve-riche class as “bee2a”.

Whereas, on the left-hand side is a recent picture of the globally known reality TV star Kourtney Kardashian in which, she’s wearing a vintage Roberto Cavalli that probably pushed the tiger print hype further into making it a global trend.

In return, all of a sudden you find the upper-class(es) in Egypt following the same trend and buying tiger printed shirts and dresses. How insane and illogical is that? To dislike how something looks and all of a sudden become obsessed with it for no apparent reason except for the fact that, the masses approves of such look right now. This proves even more how Egyptians lack any form of Individuality and would just rather follow the popular choice made by the masses.

Here’s another example:



Left hand side showcases the outside display of a gift shop in Egypt. Upper-class(es) in Egypt associate red teddy bears and hearts as “kitsch” and are used in cheesy love scenes and should not be associated with and to be only used for mocking cliché love scenes. Right hand side is a picture posted by the global artist Rihanna of herself for Savage x Fenty Valentine collection. As you can see, the set design is all inspired from these kitsch aesthetics that the lower-classes produces rather than mocking it and trying to avoid it.

It seems that due to globalisation, today's trendy aesthetics are all kitsch. It's bold, wild and it's the only tool that could be used to have your voice heard in today's intensely globalised and clustered world.

Now the following paragraph is what I aim to showcase.

Since today's main global aesthetic is kitsch and kitsch designs is the only thing that the lower-classes produce in masses in Egypt, the upper-classes for once, should take a look at their habitus and truly see it's culture richness. They should also showcase the designs (or the

individual who made it) to the world through their connections. In addition, they can learn from it in order to produce something that will influence the global market and at the same time get to show their unique and individualistic character. That ladies and gentlemen, is the only way there could ever be an Arab Chanel, Kanye west , Anna Wintor, Tom Ford and many many more figures that will be able to create Arab influence like no other.

Putting it in another way, the more and more inspiring Arab figures are born and developed within Arab borders, the more we could gain influence and let other globalised institutions to turn their interests into understanding our culture and what made these individuals' influence so powerful in which, creates some sort of a resistance against deculturation.

It's like hitting two birds with one stone.

Seeing the beauty in kitsch

A paper called "There is no kitsch, there is only design!" (Selle and Nelles, 1984) discusses an exhibition that occurred in 1983 in Berlin called "Genial Design of the 80's: Objects of Desire and Daily Use" at the IDZ (International Design Centre). The exhibition in Berlin wanted to show how beautiful everyday objects that are produced by the masses and stated that "*whoever calls it kitschy is making an absolute of a position based on educational tradition and normative interest, which would first have to be exposed to a critique of its ideology*". The paper further states "*and it is surely wrong to look down sneeringly on the anonymous creators of everyday beauties as if they were not designers at all. They are. It is necessary to learn from them...Alessandro Medina says this in plain words "why should one not make use of the intimate and mythical relation that exist in every mass society between human beings and the so-called 'ugly' object? The Italians and their German imitators lionize the everyday beauties and elevate them to new forms of individualistic artist creation"*" which is exactly what this paper discusses all along. The paper then concluded:

"For more than 80 years, every designer with self-respect has considered himself a cultural guardian of any user whatsoever. He thinks that the users have to be led out of the kitsch into the freedom of a rational use of goods specially designed for that purpose. In truth however, the relations have been reversed: the mass user has mutely but consistently developed and

implemented his own concepts and competencies, a process with still unforeseeable consequences that is stamped with confusion today by the theory and practice of design.”

Summary

In this paper, I've argued how a balanced individualistic culture across all social classes can lead to the development of any form of global influence and have a counterbalance against deculturation. I tried to show that kitsch is today's global aesthetic and how Egypt should take advantage of that as it's known to be a "kitsch art museum" (Viney, 2011). It is the lower-classes who created these kitsch designs due to the increased suppression that they received from the other social classes.

Conclusion

The real problem has nothing to do with the outside world as much as it has to with you and I on an individualistic level and how different classes engage with each other. We have been through two revolutions believing that the only problem revolves around the people who govern us however, even when this got solved it seems that Egyptians still doesn't feel the change. This is even translated through articles that discuss how even though investment has increased in Egypt, people are still struggling on a social level (The Economist, 2019).

Hence, as John Dewey said:

“The serious threat to our democracy, is not the existence of foreign totalitarian states. It is the existence within our own personal attitudes and within our own institutions of conditions which have given a victory to external authority, discipline, uniformity and dependence upon The Leader in foreign countries. “ (Shultz,1999)

Increasing individuality is the only way we could ever gain influence rather than being influenced. I hope this paper opens your mind into discovering yourself as unique individual and into seeing how kitsch Egyptian designs will lead the way to gaining global influence and act as a force against deculturation.

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