Identities at Crossroads: Young Muslim Women in Post-Revolutionary Egypt

How female students from Cairo's upper middle class experience and navigate the contradictions in an increasingly globalised and divided society

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I – Introduction

"We're living in such a contradictory society!"[1] – With this statement, Yasmine[2], a 23-year-old female student at Cairo's American University and brand-new Egyptian revolutionary[3], expressed exactly my own feelings about life in Egypt's capital. Ever since I had first been to Cairo in 2008, I have been wondering how Egyptians could reconcile the blatant contradictions and striking divisions running through their lives. How could my young Egyptian friends position themselves within all the opposing forces pulling in different directions? How did the young generation get along with all the restrictions placed on them by parents and elders? And how could they and their families bear the suffocating atmosphere that had gripped the whole country?

The latter question was answered on January 25, 2011 on the streets of Cairo, Suez, Alexandria, Mansoura, Marhalla and many other cities: they could not. For years, if not decades, experts of Egypt had been predicting that the day on which the lid would blow off was approaching. Still, when it came, no one was expecting it. Some time in the future historians will provide us with a narration that puts events, motives, coincidences, and people of the Egyptian uprising in a plausible sequence of cause and effect. While many aspects of the actual events in spring 2011 remain in the dark (and will so for a while, in particular if the Egyptian army reconsolidates its power), the ground on which the seed of revolution came to grow had been prepared for decades. In order to explain and not to impose standard templates on the current situation, we need to understand the society that produces these events, and the people who make them happen. This study is a small contribution to the understanding of the Egyptian society. To be more specific: the Egyptian society as perceived by young Egyptians of the upper middle class, who saw themselves

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[1] Originally, I had annotated each quote from the interview transcripts, with an exact reference such as (IE 15 I, 289-290). This indicated the code number of the interview, and the number of the paragraph in the coding software Atlas.ti, which I used to process the transcript. Yet, two problems arose. First, given that I used interview quotes frequently, the exact references where quite disturbing when reading the text. Second, the paragraph numbers were only visible in Atlas.ti, not in the corresponding word document of the transcript, and above that, they continuously changed, if I altered the transcript or added newly transcribed passages.

[2] For reasons of anonymity, all names of my interview partners have been changed.

[3] In the remainder of this text, the reader will come across expressions that might strike her as slightly colloquial. She is advised to take them with a pinch of salt. Whenever I employ such a 'direct' style of writing as I would call it, I do so on purpose. Whenever the reader is wondering whether an expression projects some irony, the answer is : yes. Irony and humour are important tools for scientific narration as much as for everyday storytelling. Qualitative research and post-structuralism require us to develop critical distance to the very principles we are relying on in our research – I do not see how we can present research without some humour once we have realised our own involvement and the relativity of our standpoint. Above that, my style of writing attempts to at least alleviate a problem of qualitative research: "how are we supposed to be reflexive without boring the reader?" (I freely translated here a statement by Jörg Caließ, uttered in the context of a German Association for Peace and Conflict Studies (AFK) workshop in Augsburg in July 2010). This text tries to find an answer, I hope it succeeds in parts.

as the vanguard of the January 25th demonstrations.

Since Napoleon's short adventure in Egypt in 1789, the country has been inserted into global flows of ideas and cultures, into the currents of what we call economic and cultural globalisation. As for other former colonies and non-Western[4] countries, the terms of this insertion are not dictated by Egypt or its people. No wonder that it provokes strong feelings and counter-reactions – yet, it unfolds a strong appeal at the same time. This relationship, however, is not unidirectional. Global developments do play out in the lives of individuals – but these actors respond with practices of appropriation and localisation. Eventually, it is real people who *do* globalisation. And it is real people who have to navigate their own lives in the conflicting influences of a globalising world, and who have to make sense of the forces that shape their material and social surroundings, providing them with construction material for their individual and collective identity.

For women, this task is often particularly challenging, mostly because they are invested with symbolic importance for the entire community and its self-image in many societies. In the confrontational relationship between the coloniser and the colony, in this case the West and the Muslim countries in the Middle East, (images of) women have played a pivotal role. This 'tradition'[5] finds its continuation in contemporary debates about Muslim immigrants in European countries and discourses on international development and security policies. This is in stark contrast to the academic debate: Muslim women are one of the least studied subjects in social sciences today (Duval 1998: 45).

The central role that women and gender issues[6] play in debates and discourses on (Political) Islam,

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[4] The "Western" countries or the "West" comprises the industrialised countries. This distinction reflects a historic and present power dis-balance: 'the nations of the three non-Western continents (Africa, Asia, Latin America) are largely in a subordination to Europe and North America, and in a position of economic inequality" (Young 2003: 4). Beyond this geographic location however, the "West" also refers to a concept, an idea, a set of values, which cannot be pinned down in a definition. The exact meaning of the "West" depends on the context, the speaker and the addressee.

[5] A short note on punctuation: whenever I want to *emphasise* that a term refers to a specific concept or school of thought, or has to be understood as a technical term, it appears in "quotation marks". Foreign language terms, and highlights are set in italics. Terms which are not meant literally, or which I would like to distance myself from are set in 'single quotation marks'. All quotes, from literature or interviews are set in "quotation marks", if longer than three lines, they are indented. Within the interview quotes, the interviewee's emphasis is *in italics*, mine is underlined.

[6] The mentioning of both "women" and "gender issues" is an expression of my insecurity. The appropriate usage of the term "gender" is the subject of much controversy in the social sciences. Wartenpfuhl dedicates an entire book to this conceptual debate (Wartenpfuhl 2000). It is beyond the scope of this work to engage with the respective controversies. I will therefore use the terms sex and gender in their most simple meanings: sex is biological, gender is social. Of course, I am aware that the essential character of "sex" and the respective binary structure of male/female has long been doubted and de-constructed by Judith Butler and others. In light of the Egyptian 'reality' though, I am inclined to assume that focusing on the deconstruction of "sex" would miss the point. My interviewees (alike most Egyptians I know) project an essential understanding of men and women. It appears that in the Egyptian society, not even "gender" as a social category has yet permeated the common sense idea of men

has rendered it a standard topic of introductory publications in the field: most would dedicate a chapter to "Women and Islam" or "Women in the Middle East", some even dare to go to the depth of addressing the issue of veiling in a separate chapter.[7] Seldom does their discussion transcend the level of anecdotal evidence or the statement of platitudes. It is quite probable that the article either asserts the oppression of women in Islam and/or the Middle East – or rebuts it. Which side is taken seems to depend rather on the standpoint or political agenda of the author than on their empirical observations. This general lack of researchers' in-depth attention notwithstanding, some inspiring work on Middle Eastern Muslim women has been done in recent years, mainly by female scholars from the disciplines of both anthropology and political science. These include studies of women's life, survival and informal politics among Egypt's urban poor (Ismail 2003; Harders 1999), of the re-discovered (political) practice of veiling (Macleod 1992) and of women who are engaged in formal politics (Harders 1995). A popular topic are female Islamists and women who actively participate in the Piety Movement[8], fostering the re-Islamisation of Egyptian society (Mahmood 2005, Hafez 2003). I would like to locate myself in this line of research (to speak of a tradition might be far fetched). In contrast to the aforementioned, I intend to shift the focus away from Islamists and lower classes to young female students from the upper echelons of Egyptian society in order to enhance my understanding of local appropriations and reformulations of globalisation.

Research on young Egyptian upper middle class students did not take me to an isolated island whose inhabitants have been untouched by the wild currents of globalisation. Rather, the opposite is true: of all Egyptians, the young upper class women are most similar to what I would consider my milieu of origin. Yet, this seeming similarity must not misguide us: there is much reason to question and rethink the concepts and theories usually brought into position vis-a-vis Muslim women of the Middle East. The challenge is to put critical post-colonial feminist demands into academic practice and capture the variety of female lives. To be true to this intention and to match my epistemological standpoint, I opted for a qualitative research approach using biographical

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and women.

[7] See for example chapter 2 in Ayubi (1991), chapter 4 in Ernst (2004), chapter 4 in Eickelman and Piscatori (1996.)

[8] The term "Piety Movement" refers to one strand " of the larger Islamic Revival or Islamic Awakening (al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya) that has swept the Muslim world, including Egypt, since at least the 1970s" (Mahmood 2005: 3). According to Mahmood the "three important strands that comprise the Islamic Revival [are]: state-oriented political groups and parties, militant Islamists (whose presence has declined during the 1990s), and a network of socio-religious non-profit organizations that provide charitable services to the poor and perform the work of proselytization" (Mahmood 2005: 3). Her term "piety movement" or "Darwen movement" refers to the latter.

interviewing and interpretative text-analysis aimed at reconstructing "narrative identity"[9], which gave ample space to the individual's perspective. During my field research in Cairo I conducted twelve intense biographical interviews with female students at the American University in Cairo. The women's life stories and my two-month research stay in Egypt, provided me with fascinating insights into the self-understanding of these young women. The analysis of one case study allowed me to dig deep into one person's life story to understand the complexities of an individual's narrative self-construction. Following the frame of relevancy[10] set by my specific case, the question of agency and the identity concept within the life story will be elaborated in detail. The creative confrontation of the individual case with perspectives from the other interviews, helped me to contextualise the case study, to reconstruct some potential social worlds of my interview partners and to open the perspective for alternative visions. The tension of the "Americanised society" and the "Egyptian conservative world" proved to be most salient to the experience of my interviewees. It is at the backdrop of this confrontation where restrictive gender norms and intolerance of the Egyptian society are (re)negotiated and behaviour is formed. Class belonging constitutes an additional dimension, which intersects with the contrast between the Americanised society and the Egyptian conservative world, the gender norms and religious practices, and the people's strategies in a complex way. The result off this reconstructive interpretation is a colourful picture of the social worlds of young Egyptian upper class women, providing an insight into potential ways of thinking, conflict lines and alternative visions that these young women formulate for themselves.

This study is also an attempt at consequently implementing a standpoint which takes the individual interviewee and the principles of a qualitative, constructivist and interactionist methodology, seriously. Throughout the research process, I made an effort to adjust the method, to make it *appropriate to the subject* under investigation. By strictly adhering to the guidelines of openness, reflexivity, and transparency, not only in the interviews but also in this presentation of the research results, I hope to do justice to the idea of qualitative research – and to the women whose stories I

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9   Whenever I refer to "narrative identity" without further specification, the term refers to the concept as defined by Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann (2002). See chapter II 2.2 for a detailed explanation. If Narrative Identity is spelt with capital letters or abbreviated as NID, it refers to the entire method developed by Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann, that centres around narrative identity reconstruction.

10 This is the attempt to translate the German term *Relevanzrahmen*. It is sometimes translated as "frame", yet some important connotations get lost then. However, frankly speaking: the German term is a very odd construct anyway, rarely defined, often used interchangeably with the frame of orientation (*Orientierungsrahmen*). It seems to mix those things that are of relevance to a person, and those patterns (or more general construction material) she draws on for making sense of things.

am re-telling here.

The structure of this text reflects the two interests, the methodological and the subject-related one. In the remainder of the introduction, I will first outline my personal motivation for and way to this research topic (I 1). Then, I argue why the topic of this research project is of relevance also beyond my personal interest. I show, how the biographies and experiences of young Egyptian Muslim upper middle class students are linked to discourses and processes on a larger scale. Research in this field with the respective method is of relevance to political discourses and adds to an existing body of knowledge (I 2). The latter is presented in the following chapter (I 3). Of course this state of the research has to be selective, as my research topic reaches into a variety of academic disciplines and touches upon a plethora of themes. I decided to restrict myself to portraying the most relevant research results pertaining to the impact of 'Western' globalisation (I 3.1) and re-Islamisation (I 3.2) in Egypt, to the American University in Cairo (I 3.3) and the family in Middle Eastern Societies (I 3.4). Lastly I also address some concepts that try to explain the specificities of self-formation in the Middle East and of youth, drawing on anthropology and psychology. The first four chapters provide important information on the life worlds and societal background of the interviewees. Most of it will seem very plausible to anyone familiar with Egypt. The issue of self-formation is discussed in order to get a more holistic idea of potential approaches to the research topic.

In the chapter on methodology (II), I start with explaining the methodological foundations of my research approach. I elaborate on its epistemological and ontological premises (II 1.1), outline the basic principles of qualitative research (II 1.2), discuss the necessity of being aware of my own standpoint in research (II 1.3). Then I argue why I chose qualitative interviewing and interpretative text analysis in order to translate the principles into practice (II 1.4) and ponder the character and potential difficulties of intercultural qualitative research (II.5). After this theoretical introduction, the concrete research design is addressed (II 2). This includes the target group and sampling strategy (II 2.1), the theories and concepts of narration and narrative identity (II 2.2), and a reflection on my way of dealing with "sensitzing concepts" and inductive/deductive categories, and context knowledge (II 2.3). In the last chapter on methodology (II 3) finally, I turn to the practical experience of my research. In order to establish transparency and inter-subjectivity, I share with the reader my field experience (II 3.1) and the problems and obstacles in encountered in the first data structuring phase (II 3.2). The specificities of my subject and the flaws in my research design compelled me to adapt the design considerably. The reasons for switching to a case study with

subsequent 'comparison' of the interview's central motives, are explained in detail here, as well. Afterwards, I shortly introduce some basic aspects of the interpretive text analysis, reflect on my experience therewith, and discuss some supplements to the method of Narrative Identity by Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann.

In chapter III, I present the reader with the results of the narrative identity reconstruction of my interviewee Yasmine. In order to familiarise the reader with the case study, I first recapitulate the most important aspects of the interview encounter (III 1), before I retell Yasmine's story, by outlining the plot and shortly describing her way of presentation (III 2). The personae (i.e. characters) in her lifestory offer an entry point into her lifestory, and are thus reconstructed in a separate chapter. Then, Yasmine's notion of identity formation and her application of drama terminology are discussed (III 1.4). The Egyptian revolution provides Yasmine's life story with a dramatic turning point, which can be captured if we look to Yasmine's changing agency (III 1.5).

Chapter IV is dedicated to those central motives of Yasmine's narrative identity construction that evidently transcend the individual case. These are then interpreted by help of relevant context information and the insights other interviewees provide on the respective issues. First, I contrast the two social worlds of Yasmine, the Americanised society and Egyptian conservative world. After Yasmine's "Americanised society" is reconstructed (IV 1.1), I complement this picture with other interviewees' take on the Americanised society (IV 1.2), of which the American University Cairo is a symbol and prime location. The reconstruction of the Egyptian counterpart[11] focuses on four interrelated topics: the role of women (IV 1.3.1 to 1.3.3), surveillance (IIV 1.3.4), religion (IV 1.4) and veiling (IV 1.5). Another world beneath the two is reconstructed, that of the 'normal', lower class Egyptians, which draws our attention to the highly divided character of the Egyptian society (IV 2). In chapter (IV 2.1), I extend look beyond the confinements of the upper class "bubble" (IV 2.1); we see a society strongly divided along socio-economic cleavages (IV 2.2), whose divisions find their expression in spatial manifestations of class divides in Cairo and in Yasmine's story (IV 2.3). In order to understand the position of Yasmine's upper middle class, we reconstruct the mutual perception of upper class and lower classes (IV 2.4). The middle class' efforts to navigate these contradictions, puts a heavy burden on women in particular, as is visible in Yasmine's life story as well (IV 2.5).

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[11]   For the text interpretation, it proved very helpful to work with contrasts. Thus, also the presentation of the main themes will draw on this principle to illustrate the findings. Comparing the Americanised society to the Egyptian conservative world is not to say that they are entirely separate, rather, it is an analytical move to sharpen the contours of the description.

In the concluding chapter (V), I attempt to point to overarching and connecting themes in this reconstruction. First I summarise the interviewees' problems, strategies and visions as they appeared in the reconstruction of the three worlds (V 1 to V 4). Moreover, I highlight the effect of different conceptual perspectives, showing that a focus on women, class, *barra*, or youth emphasises different aspects, yields different results and leads to alternative questions for further research (V 6 to V 7). Finally, I critically evaluate the method and the research process and bracket this text with a short version of an autoethnographic account, giving an insight into my personal lessons from this research endeavour.

1 The very subjective story of this research – or: how I got here

> "Making the researcher's stance explicit and understanding the researcher's social location, personal experiences, and subjectivity will help the reader to understand where the voice of the researcher exists in the narrative. After all, it is the researcher who inserts, edits out, or overlooks certain features of the narrative. It is being suggested, then, that reporting narratives should more commonly include a report of an autoethnographic nature where the researcher provides an account of his or her own voice, stance, assumptions, and analytic lens so that the reader is abundantly clear on whose story is whose." (Connolly 2007: 453)

When you think of Egypt, what comes to mind? Pyramids? Camels? Fish in the Read Sea? Islam and religion? Veiled women? Oppressed women? At least, these seem to be on the mind of travel guide authors, when pondering which topics would make the reader buy the book after a first glance at the table of contents and the pictures[12]. The common idea of Egypt is dominated by images of its pharaonic past and Islamic presence, the stereotypes of hospitality and misogyny[13], and pictures of colourful markets and veiled women. The latter aspect links it to vague but powerful notions of women's rights in developing countries and of Islam, and also to concepts of tradition and modernity, civilisation and savagery. It was no different for me when I first travelled to Egypt in 2008. Since then, I have had various encounters with the country and its people. My understanding has become deeper, my concepts more sophisticated, my involvement more intense, and my ambivalence stronger.

From February to August 2008 and from May to September 2009, I had the opportunity to spend more than 9 months in Cairo. During this period I had ample chance to convince myself of the importance that Islam (whether as a religion, a culture, or a discursive formation) plays for Egyptians of any age and socio-economic origin. I also came to realize that most people do not reveal an instrumental relationship to religion: young people would often go through considerable struggles when searching for their individual 'arrangement' with Islam and its norms. The latter's

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[12] *Insight Guide Cairo* for example provides features on bureaucracy, poverty, the people of Cairo, and the three chapters "It's a man's world", "Women, work and the veil", "Religion". As illustration it carries photos of minarets on the front, pictures of a pharaonic statue and a carpet weaver on the back cover (Rodenbeck: 2002). The *Footprint Travel Guide* features a sailing boat on the Nile, a pharaonic face, and in the table of contents many pyramids (Badawi and McLachlan 2004). A random picture search with Google produces almost exclusively pictures of the pyramids and camels.

[13] The *Insight Guide Cairo* is again a beautiful illustration: In the chapter "It's a Man's World" we learn "That the masculine sex is superior and should be specially privileged is automatically assumed by all men, acceded to by nearly all women (...) A good Egyptian wife certainly has no right to complain when – after the fourth or fifth child that such men seem to require to advertise their potency – she has grown fat, wrinkled, and dull and her hubby introduces a younger, sexier woman into his happy household" (Rodenbeck: 2002: 5).

articulation is – generally speaking – more the result of a particular reading of Islam, than of any scriptural essence. The generation and enforcement of a specific idea of 'Islamic' norms is then often a matter of family surveillance. In addition, through the acquaintance with many Egyptians of my age, my attention was drawn to the relationships young adults maintain with their families, being quite distinct from what I had known from my own experience and that of my German peers. Moreover, I encountered interpretations and justifications of gender roles that had never before even crossed my mind. At the same time I was confronted with attributions of responsibility, powerlessness and fate that contradicted my own interpretations of human agency. In the end, my preconceived notions of independence, responsibility, family, the relationship between men and women, conflicts, need and wishes did not render me good service. My system of categorising did not work in Egypt. My concepts and (often implicit!) propositions were not very helpful in making sense of what I observed and experienced. To put it in constructivist terms: my preconceived knowledge was not "*viable* in the sense that it [did not] fit into the experiential world of [mine]" (Flick 2008: 90).

Intrigued by this experience of inadequacy, I focused on the Middle East and Political Islam in my further studies. Preparing an essay on "The Paradox of female Islamists", I came across Saba Mahmood's study "The Politics of Piety", in 2009. It instantly struck me how much her descriptions and interpretations provided me with a framework to explain, in hindsight, some of the experiences I had had in Egypt. Similar to Sherine Hafez (2003) in her study of female Islamists in Egypt, Saba Mahmood (2005) starts of from a seeming paradox: Why would women either tacitly or actively support the reproduction of an order and system of morality (namely the Islamic one paired with patriarchy) that relegates them to an inferior status and curtails their rights vis-a-vis men? After extensive field research in Cairo, both scholars concluded that the understanding of female Islamists' activity and motives requires the re-conceptualisation of agency "as a capacity for action that specific relations of subordination create and enable" (Mahmood 2001: 210). Moreover, the implicit assumption of a universal self (as constructed by liberal theories) is questioned and contrasted with Joseph's idea of a Middle Eastern female self. The loss of a universal self and the inadequacy of a priori defined and deductive concepts of agency also put into doubt the applicability of empowerment as defined by Western liberal discourses. I will address the questions of a Middle Eastern self and agency later on in the section on the state of research (I 3.5) in more detail. For now, it shall suffice to define the baseline of the respective academic viewpoint: there is need for research which a) is sensitive to the origin and normative

ballast of categories, b) considers and values cultural differences, and c) thus attempts the reconstruction of indigenous (emic) concepts within specific contexts rather than the conclusion of broad generalisations. These insights also guided my later academic interest. Together with other influences, they made me a staunch supporter of the qualitative research paradigm[14] and substantiated my sympathy for a social constructivist epistemology and ontology.[15]

My experience with Egyptian women and men taught me that most of the Western assumptions about the Middle Eastern, Arab, and Muslim woman are inappropriate. These women do have a voice – sometimes a pretty loud one in fact. They are not oppressed (in the sense of silenced) or submissive (in the sense of without their own will). Egyptian society is neither uncivilised, nor entirely backward, nor dangerous. Across the Middle East, the West and its projection of military and economic power – via development aid, structural adjustment programmes and bombs – it is seen as highly critical. Egyptians are insulted by the way they are looked at and treated when they travel to Europe or the United States. And even more so, they are offended by the way their religion is looked upon and spoken about in European media. They seem to be pushed into a defensive position, forced to defend their dignity, to assert their equal rights as human beings (of no less worth than Israelis or Americans), and to protect their religion. The point here is not, to argue whether this reaction and the underlying definition of the situation is 'viable' or helpful. Rather, I want to claim that experiencing these sentiments shaped my view of the West, its policies and its discourses. I became interested in the concepts of Orientalism and post-colonialism (if the latter deserves to be called a concept at all) because of my experience in a former colony. For sure, there was a certain amount of romanticising involved: Egypt and its people, men and women alike (rulers excluded), seemed to me like the innocent victims of global power relations and discourses that served the Western self-assertion. This picture itself is skewed for it ignores the collaborative nature of colonial relations. The insertion of colonies into global relations was a collaborative endeavour,[16] and today, global forces meet local appropriations (see I 3.1). Foremost – and this was the more problematic blind spot – this perspective led me to ignore the crass injustices, socio-

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[14] In a sense I reversed the motion that Jan Kruse depicts in his elaborations on qualitative research and intercultural communication: coming from a tradition of qualitative research, Kruse shows how the processes of understanding the other (*Fremdverstehen*) in intercultural communication are similar if not equal to those of qualitative research. In my academic development, I had started from the point of intercultural communication. Once I encountered the qualitative research paradigm, I was instantly convinced of the idea that the basic operation (and problem) of research is *Fremdverstehen*.

[15] The consequences of adapting a constructivist epistemology are much more far reaching than those of a constructivist ontology (see II1).

[16] See Bayart's theory of extraversion for an elaborate conceptualisation of these mechanisms (Bayart 2000).

economic cleavages, and gender inequalities which mark Egyptian society. This idealisation lasted until I began my field research in Egypt during the heydays of the revolution[17]. This study, the field research and the analysis of the interviews transformed my perspective on Egyptian society entirely. I could not say I was grateful for that; to me it is a paradise lost. But at least I can say I have stuck to the basic rule of qualitative research: I had obviously maintained the ability to be surprised.

My deep involvement with the topic and the winding path that over time led me to the research question suggested an intense and critical confrontation with issues of qualitative research. Thorough reflection on the problem of context knowledge (*Kontextwissen*), of any knowledge prior to data collection and analysis, and the demand for reflexivity seemed required. The way that led me to writing this thesis, is clearly indicative of the 'messy' character of qualitative research, and of the connectedness and inter-dependence of daily knowledge and scientific knowledge; of daily life and academic life.

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[17] Even though the Egyptian uprising might not meet a Political Scientist's or Historian's definition of a revolution (yet), I decided to follow the terminology employed by my interviewees and most participants of the Egyptian public debate and speak of a revolution.

2 The larger political and theoretical context – or: why this question matters

> "One might think that in this era of the 'information revolution', Arab Muslim women would be presented in the light of objective and accessible knowledge. However, they tend to be one of the least understood social groups, subjected to speculation, generalization and stereotyping. Analysts inside as well as outside the region tend to regard Muslim women as the most severely oppressed group in present-day society." (Duval 1998: 45)

Not only are Arab Muslim women rarely studied and little understood as indicated by Duval's quote, Western images of the Arab Muslim world are still deeply impregnated by Orientalist perceptions. This is particularly true for the Arab woman, whom already the colonial powers have put at the centre of the discursive war between Orient and Occident. The lasting power of the Western image of the Arab woman – oppressed, submissive and clearly marked by the veil (Ernst 2004: 142–143; Amir-Moazami 2010: 195; Schneiders 2009; Sullivan 1999: 111) – became apparent in the justification of the war in Afghanistan (Hirschkind and Mahmood 2002). Building on a campaign of the Feminist Majority, this war could successfully be disguised as a fight to liberate Afghan women. Not only the oppression of women was portrayed as obvious, but also those responsible for their lack of freedom were easily identified: the Taliban, or Islamic fundamentalism in general (Hirschkind and Mahmood 2002). In this case, liberal feminism struck an alliance with the American government's liberal project of new interventionism. This is not to say that the Taliban were defenders of women's rights, nor that the freeing of Afghan women was not a good reason for international concern. The argument that I would like to make is much more humble: the stereotypical image of the veiled, oppressed Muslim woman lends itself easily to the legitimisation of a war. This illustrates that images and concepts *do* matter for political practice and can wield significant power. Theory (even if it is skewed theory) is always for someone and for some purpose, as Robert Cox put it poignantly (Cox 1981: 128).

Already in the 1980s, feminist scholars had brought up the idea that the silence of Arab Muslim women might be a construct of Western academic debates and media, whose narratives did not allow them to perceive the women of Middle Eastern societies as active agents. Yet, since then, little has changed: the idea that Arab women need saving does not only come up at critical moments such as the war on Afghanistan, but is also permeating the German public discourse on Islam and Muslim Immigrants. In Western popular media,[18] Islam is readily portrayed as a misogynist religion,[19] in varying contexts. In Germany these contexts are, for example, the

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[18]   See for example Mahmood (2005: 7) and Burgat (2003: 140).

[19]   Another common theme of stereotypes on Islam is the supposed intertwined character of religion and politics in

"headscarf question", honour-killings and forced marriage (see Schneiders 2009 for an overview of the German debates). More often than not, the supposed role of women (or gender) in Islam serves as an argument to doubt the integrative potential (and willingness) of Muslim immigrants *in general.* In reference to young Muslim women in France and Germany, Amir-Moazami observes that their "cultivation of modesty" is even in parts a reaction to "images commonly projected within the French or German public spheres of the unequal and oppressive character of veiling for women. The counterimage is that of the exploited and obsessively sexualised 'Occidental' women" (Amir-Moazami 2010: 195).

In this whole debate, little attention is paid to the perception of Muslim women themselves, unless they voice extreme standpoints such as Necla Kelek and Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Muslim women who are not located in the Western centre of politics and science but rather in the Middle East are not heard at all in the West, and thus are marginalised merely by their location. Yet, as shown above, they (and their bodies) serve as a battlefield in the discursive war of the West against the (inner!) rest. The attempt to understand young Egyptian upper class women's self-concepts and notions of agency is thus a counter-hegemonic project in several ways: it gives voice to Egyptian women who live in a society that is characterized by patriarchy; and it gives voice to the younger generation in an academic discourse that rarely addresses this group; it gives voice to the 'Arab Muslim woman' that figures so prominently in Western efforts to define modernity in exclusive ways. I want to sensitize for the variety of (female) experiences; I intend to reconstruct one of many possible 'inside' perspectives and aspire to understand and show the trajectory of one of many possible lives. The attempt to reconstruct young Egyptian students' narrative identity[20] is grounded in the refutation of earlier feminist notions of a universal position and need of women. Instead, it emphasises the intersectionality of each individual's location which better captures the actual position of a woman by assuming that the subject is positioned and constituted by various structural categories, such as gender, class or religious identity (see Ismail 2008 for the application in a concrete context). This study is a contribution to countering "uni-dimensional accounts" and "stereotypes and generalisations which dominate the public discourses on women and Islam" by providing "empirically grounded multi-dimensional perspectives" (Spiegel 2010: 19). Portraying variety aims to break up unifying perceptions, and thus impedes (or at least complicates)

Islam. Never mind the content and direction of these stereotypes, it is surprising that even Germans of high reflective and cognitive capabilities readily accept an essentialisation of Islam that in regards to Christianity would never cross their mind.

[20] Narrative identity is understood as in Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann's concept and method of narrative identity (II 2.2) .

exclusionary practices in political and academic discourses.

3 The state of research: what can we know about Egyptian women at this specific juncture?

In her elaborations on narrative inquiry, Andrews emphasises the need to gather knowledge about the community prior to the data collection. It is historical events and narratives that form the backdrop of the individual's biography (Andrews 2007: 499). If we ask what we know about these young women from Egypt's upper class at this specific moment in time (or what can we know), a myriad of perspectives are possible; research that deals with the 'larger picture' (i.e. the macro level of society, politics, culture) could be as relevant as knowledge about the institutions (education, family) in which the women are embedded. A perspective that focuses on the individual and her self-understanding, brings different areas of knowledge into focus (e.g. construction of the non-Western self). A gender perspective leads us down a different path, than an inquiry into the literature about "youth"[21] would.

In order to get an overview of the contemporary academic discussion on Egypt, we need to touch upon a large variety of academic fields. From an International Relations' perspective, Egypt is considered mostly in reference to the Middle Eastern region and conflict. Besides that, the insertion of Egypt into the global economy has been addressed by scholars from various disciplines (e.g. Owen in Hakimian and Moshaver 2001; Ismail 2006; Abaza 2006). In Comparative Political Science (e.g. various publications by Hinnebusch; Ibrahim 2002d), Egypt draws (or rather drew) scholar's attention as an autocratic system that fitted the pattern of Middle Eastern Authoritarianism, had traits of a neopatriarchal and a rentier system, comparable to those of some Sub-Sahara African and Gulf regimes, shared a socialist past with several other Arab countries, and provided an example for the specifics of state formation and maintenance in the Middle East (e.g. Ayubi 2001). If sociological concepts like "Social Movement" and "Civil Society" are applied, other topics come into focus: the role of political opposition and civil society in an authoritarian system (Abdelrahman 2004; Lust-Okar 2005) and the influence of Islamist movements and the Islamic resurgence on state and society (Sullivan, Abed-Kotob and Kotob 1999; Ismail 2003; Zubaida 2009). Another research topic that touches upon Egyptian realities, is the origin and effect of Islamisation and Political Islam, in particular its impact on democratisation (cf. various publications by Frederic Volpi; Baker 2003; Bayat 2007; Ayoob 2008; Esposito and Voll 1996). Political Islam was negotiated as part of a global trend, the so called "Resurgence of Religion" (Thomas 2005), as one articulation

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[21] Youth is defined differently in different disciplines and contexts. For a sociological definition applied in the context of Middle Eastern youth, see Bayat (2010: 27-32).

of re-Islamisation or as a specificity of developing countries and former colonies. It was also conceptualised as the third wave of decolonisation, as the struggle for *cultural* decolonisation (Burgat 2003, Thomas 2003: 22) and a reaction to the cultural hegemony of the Western world, namely current Anglo-American culture (Europe in colonial times). Much of the research on women in Egypt links the study of females to the above topics.[22] The bulk of research on women's issues in Egypt, enquires into Egyptian women's relation to feminism and/or Islamism,[23] often in an endeavour to explore the reality of the supposed oppression. The veil – perceived as a symbol of male oppression whose return contradicted assumptions about increasing modernisation and secularisation – provides a popular starting point for this kind of research. As early as in the 1980s, Macleod (a political scientist herself) undertook a study to understand this re-emerging practice of veiling (Macleod 1992). The literature with a feminist orientation (Al-Hassan Golley and Nawar 2004) portrays existing tendencies of resistance against male supremacy, and often breeds hope about the potential of a more 'modern' understanding of gender roles. The veil, and female participation in the re-Islamisation is then understood as a symbol of (political) resistance. It becomes a symbol of the post-colonial struggle for cultural independence (Al-Hassan Golley and Nawar 2004; Duval 1998). The other line of research on women writes against the universal assumptions of liberal feminism. Anthropologists and ethnographers (such as Hafez and Mahmood) attempt to develop a more nuanced understanding of Muslim women and Islamist activity in Egypt. These approaches give an idea of how global societal trends such as the re-Islamisation play out on a local level. The same can at parts be said of the research that enquires into the effect of economic globalisation on women's lives (Bibars 2001; Ismail 2006; Harders 1999).

I had to chose and limit my research, prior to doing field research and unfortunately also afterwards. I thus allowed myself to be guided by my previous personal experience 'in the field' and by my existing knowledge about academic debates. Consequently I focused on 1) globalisation and the impact of Westernisation in Egypt, 2) re-Islamisation in Egypt and 3) the role of the family in Middle Eastern societies. In an attempt to also conceptualise the "individual" side of my research interest, I looked at 4) existing theories of the Middle eastern "connected self" and the psychological theory of developmental phases and cross-cultural self-concepts.

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[22] See for example Botman's study on women's role in the political development of Egypt in the 20th century (Botman 1999).

[23] See for example Ahmed (1992); Abu-Lughod (1998); Karam (2005); Al-Hassan Golley and Nawar (2004); Duval (1998); Moghadam (1993); Ismail (2003).

As indicated, most of the existing research on Egyptian women focuses on women and Islam. There is also a good number of publications that address the problem of women and identity politics. I did not attribute much explanatory force to research from the latter camp as it tends to take a macro perspective which is very much concerned with the *political discourse* on women. The research on women and Islam on the other hand will be referred to where it adopts an anthropological perspective. I am not specifically concerned with the theoretical stance of women in scriptural Islam, specific variants of practised Islam or the academic and public debate of these issues.

Throughout this study I would like to render the research process transparent and make visible, how the research topic and the relevant fields of knowledge were transformed in this process. Consequently, I will give an overview of the state of the research as I understood it prior to collecting data in the field. The data analysis later made it necessary to spiral back into literature – with a different focus. The results of this second confrontation with (another) state of research will then be woven into the analysis of the case study (III) and the contrasting of the interviews (IV).

3.1 "History is a collage[24]" – globalisation and the impact of "Westernisation" in Egypt

Globalisation describes the "multiple structures and processes connecting people, groups and societies that are geographically and culturally distinct" (Saalmann, Schirmer and Kessler 2006: 9). Though it is commonly done, globalisation cannot be simply equated exclusively with the changes that took place in the last decades.[25] Rather, globalisation is a phenomenon whose origins (if there is something as an 'origin' or starting point at all) reaches much further back in time: "the world has been a congeries of large-scale interaction for many centuries" (Appadurai 1996: 27).[26] Originally, these interactions were limited to the exchange of commodities, religious conversion and warfare, thus only affecting and promoted by a small number of people, namely "merchants, pilgrims and conquerors" (Appadurai 1996: 28). Already with colonialism, the revolution in print media, and the construction of the famous imagined national communities, globalisation was experiencing one of its heydays. Yet, these "were only modest precursors to the world we live in

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[24] Nederveen Pietersee (2006: 21)

[25] The following elaborations will mainly draw on Appadurai's book on cultural globalisation, "Modernity at large" (1996), which has acquired the status of a standard text of post-colonial globalisation and cultural studies, and been "highly influential in anthropological studies" (de Koning 2009: 162).

[26] In the case of Egypt, Ibrahim defines as the "starting point" of its insertion into modern globalisation the adventure of Napoleon. From his perspective, it was Napoleon who in 1789 reminded Egypt of the existence of another world, which had been forgotten since the encounter with the crusaders. It was after the short encounter with Napoleon that Muhammad Ali began modernising Egypt. His attempts were followed by many more, and can be seen as ongoing (Ibrahim 2002a: 94–95).

now" (Appadurai 1996: 27-28). Globalisation has taken up new forms and a different scale, and has deepened and accelerated with the revolution in transport and communication technologies, the latter occuring in the last decades of the 20th century (Appadurai 1996: 27–28; Saalmann, Schirmer and Kessler 2006: 9; Nederveen Pietersee 2006: 21; Blum, Gowan and Haney 2001: 43). The effect of global forces on local conditions and formations, however, is only one aspect of globalisation as described and analysed by Appadurai (1996). Another remarkable development is the de-territorialisation of (imagined) communities (Appadurai 1996: 29).

As Saalmann et al. highlight poignantly, globalisation tends to be equated with Westernisation[27]: "According to a tacit understanding, it is the West influencing the East or the industrialised countries influencing the developing and the newly industrialising countries. So, globalisation and modernisation are usually equated with the Westernisation or Americanisation of the world, i.e. popular cultures, capitalism, democracy, organisation of institutions, academia, law etc." (Saalmann, Schirmer and Kessler 2006: 4). Such a take on globalisation neglects the influences that run South-South, South-North, or East-West – the direction that Saalmann et al. and the contributors of their collection on "hybridity" engage with (Schirmer 2006).[28] In the next chapter (I.3.2) we will address one specific current of the East-West influence, the Islamic Revivalism.

Yet, even if we conceptualise globalisation as a multi-directional process, we still fall short of capturing the whole picture, unless we also address the multi-*dimensional* character of globalisation: the interaction of the *local*[29] and the *global*. A perspective that focuses solely on the "force of globalisation" (Spiegel 2010: 18) misses out on the other half of the picture, the "*doing globalisation*" (Spiegel 2010: 18). A framework for researching globalisation needs to give space to both the global trends and the local specificities. In her study on "women's organisations in increasingly Islamised Malaysia", Spiegel conceptualises such a twofold perspective. Drawing on the theoretical work of Appadurai, Spiegel "sets out to counter [the] lack of thick description of globalisation processes" (2010: 17). In her own words, "[t]he main subject of this study is thus women's organisations in Malaysia and their negotiations of global concepts such as women's rights, gender equality, violence against women, empowerment, and development" (Spiegel 2010: 18). The researcher further explains her study as an attempt to capture both, the "force of

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27 Under the label "McDonaldisation", the assumption is that we are observing an increasing homogenisation and uniformisation of cultures and practices across the globe – all following the Western model (Nederveen Pietersee 2006: 22)

28 See Nederveen Pietersee (2006) for an overview of East-West influences pre-dating the present time.

29 Saalmann et al. (2006) equate the local with the 'non-Western'. Even though they want to overcome the equation of globalisation with Westernisation, they reproduce this understanding in their terminology. I consider it useful to draw on Appadurai's (1996) concept of the local and the global instead.

globalisation" which is experienced by the local actors, and also the "*doing globalisation*" (Spiegel 2010: 18), which focuses on the agency of the local actors. These actors can respond to the "force of globalisation" in welcoming or distancing ways – they can engage with the ideas, reject them, and embrace and transform them (Saalmann, Schirmer and Kessler 2006: 18). In Bayart's terminology, these local actors engage in "appropriation"; for Saalmann et al. it is an act of taking possession: "cultures take possession of techniques, habits and ideas to make something of their own (...) 'copying' always means changing – whether desired or not" (Saalmann, Schirmer and Kessler 2006: 4). While Saalmann et al. are primarily concerned with hybridity, Spiegel's study can be understood as the attempt to strike a balance between structure and agency (in reality the balance is there already, we are just searching for a balance in our concepts, theories and analyses). Surprisingly, Spiegel does not mention another potential argument supportive of her approach:[30] In a social constructivist understanding, such a focus on the individual and the interaction of human beings as actors seems consequential because they are the 'meaning makers' that produce and reify social facts (Spiegel 2010: 17–18).[31]

If we look at Egyptian society today, we can detect the traces of current globalisation in the privatisation and internationalisation of the educational sector. Another instance is the most recent "Facebook Revolution"[32] that lead to the ousting of long-term president Hosni Mubarak, and referred to Western cultural productions like the movie "V for Vendetta" (Herrera 2011b, see Khoury 2011 and Herrera 2011a for more general reflections on the role of social media in the Arab Spring). Globalisation is visible in the appropriation of Western dresses and styles by the Egyptian upper class, and in its imitation by lower classes. It shows in the consumption preferences, adverts and leisure activities of young and old Egyptians (Bayat 2007: 165). Globalisation results in the "intensified transnational communication in form of Western products and the corresponding narratives and imagery streaming into Egypt" (Werner 1996: 7).[33] This, however, is only one side of the economic and cultural globalisation.[34] Also the Islamic revival (see I

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[30] Even though the argument already seems to be implied in her frequent references to the social constructivism of Berger and Luckman.

[31] Even in a discourse perspective, it is the interpretation and re-production and guiding function for behaviour that matters, the subject is still the end of the whole discourse where it matters.

[32] For the use of this term in the media, see for example Smith (2011), Hauslohner (2011), and Hofmann (2011).

[33] My own translation; Werner gives as example the spreading popularity of Western TV shows and movies, the increasing importance of foreign languages and the (reciprocal) exchange of tourists (Werner 1996: 7).

[34] Accordingly, Werner distinguishes between two conflicting orientations "Turning East" and "Turning West"(Werner 1996).

3.2) which strengthened a conservative version of Islam in Egypt and other Arab, Middle Eastern, North African and South Asian countries is not primarily a local phenomenon. It reaches a global scale, by affecting the Muslim diaspora in Europe and the US.[35]

In addition to these current effects of globalisation, Egyptian society still bears the marks of previous phases of globalisation. The country's colonial past can be seen and felt today: Cairo's architecture reveals its French and British models; the intense fear of foreign influence dominates public debate (in particular in times of revolution and upheaval); and the Egyptian class system still reflects previous power relations. Egypt's enmeshment in global power struggles and ideological confrontations during the Cold War brought it a peace treaty and formally peaceful relations with its neighbour Israel which the larger part of the population still rejects. Insertion into the global economy along the lines of Western development ideals yielded an increasing division between rich and poor known from many developing countries that followed the International Monetary Fund's advice (or orders) on privatisation and liberalisation. According to Werner this economic and cultural globalisation creates new (normative and geographic) spaces for young adults outside of the confines of the familial home (Werner 1996).

3.2 The resurgence of religion: Islamic Revivalism in Egypt

Another aspect of globalisation in Egypt, which Werner labelled "turning East" (Werner 1996: 6), has drawn much more attention: the re-Islamisation. Werner calls it an "Indigenisierungstrend mit dem Selbstverständnis eines religiösen Revivalismus" (Werner 1996: 4). Even though indigenisation and religious revivalism go hand in hand in Egypt, we can draw a conceptual distinction between a) general religiosity, b) an assertion of Islamic culture (associated with traditional culture, traditional lifestyles, rural people, affection for Islamic Cairo, see Ibrahim (1987)) and c) the re-Islamisation in its neo-conservative expression in the 1990s.

Egyptians have always been religious (Bayat 2007: 147–148). Egypt can be considered a "sacred society, a society in which religious ideas and values are applied to every aspect of life" (Schneider and Silverman 2006: 195). Islam constitutes a system of ethics and guidance for daily behaviour. As a culture and a way of living, it transcends the boundaries of a common Western notion of "religion", it permeates all aspects of life and society (Duval 1998: 60; Schneider and Silverman 2006: 195)[36]. Religion is omnipresent and belief in God (whether the Christian or Muslim one) is

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[35]   The rise and spread of Political Islam, which is not limited to Middle Eastern communities but finds articulations also in the Muslim communities in the geographical West, is a famous example.

[36]   Indeed, the concept of "religion" is itself historical and tied to the historic development of the Christian religion in Europe (Ernst 2004: 38–46).

considered and dealt with as a matter of course (Bayat 2007: 147), as Weiß' anecdotal account of her experiences in Egypt illustrates (Weiß 2010: 20-21).

Being Muslim in Egypt is not a matter of choice but one of birth: "family (…) constitutes the dominant social institution through which persons and groups inherit their religious, class, and cultural affiliations" (Barakat 1993: 98, quoted in Singerman 2009: 122). The offspring of a Muslim family is Muslim, the offspring of a Christian family is Christian. The parting line of the two religions in Egypt is not a theoretical one, in *practice* Christians and Muslims from Egypt's upper classes live in separate communities. This separation is not a matter of dispute. The inter-relations, on the other hand, are. Accordingly, I have observed many debates about the relation between Muslims and Christians. A comparable discussion on the issue of inter-faith marriage[37] or the question of conversion, however, does not seem to exist. The political turmoil every conversion made public causes, is indicative of how sensitive this area is – but the instances are rare. The attention that conversions draw can hardly be explained by reference to Islam and Christianity as religion or belief alone – it shows the enmeshment with population policies, identity and cultural politics, minority issues, power struggles, questions of inheritance and the like.

Even though there is a clear division of Christian and Muslim communities, Islam constitutes an overarching *cultural* system. "There are many tensions and controversies in Egyptian society, but they are debated almost entirely within the context of an Islamic belief system" (Schneider and Silverman 2006: 241). The articulation of Islam, however, has transformed in the last decades. The global "return of religion" has not spared Egypt: As Egyptians have always been religious the re-Islamisation or Islamic Revivalism must not be equated with a *spreading of Islam.* Instead, it is the reassertion of a specific variant of Islam that represents a "neoconservative social trend" (Bayat 2007: 147–148) and can be termed "pietistic Islam" (Bayat 2007: 152). It makes itself felt, for example, by increasing mosque attendance and the increasing popularity of the veil also among upper class women (Bayat 2007: 1479).

In Egypt, religiosity and increased piety are not only a characteristic of the lower social strata. On the contrary, the resurgence of religion, observed since the end of the last century (Thomas 2003), is particularly well-received and fostered by the upper middle and upper classes (Mahmood 2005:

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[37] As Joseph points out the restrictions on women are tighter than those on men: "[b]ecause it has been assumed that women will change their religion to that of their husbands and that children will follow the religion of their fathers, religious communities have policed the marriages of their women more than those of men, Muslim women have not been allowed to marry non-Muslims in most Middle Eastern countries, giving Muslim men more marriage choices than women" (Joseph 2000: 14).

2; Bayat 2007). In Egypt, the Islamic Revival is a class-less movement, yet it finds different articulations in the various layers of society (Bayat 2007; Duval 1998; Mahmood 2001, Mahmood 2005). Men and women of any age embrace, and actively participate in the Islamic revival, a movement[38] that makes use of the most modern technology and practices to spread its word. Star preachers like Amr Khalid[39] rely on popular media and modern phenomena like Facebook (Bayat 2007; Schneider and Silverman 2003: 195) to reach out to their preferred clientèle: "The star preachers of the late 1990s and early 2000s (...) were the likes of necktied and clean-shaven 'Umar 'Abd al-Kafi, Khalid al-Jindi, and 'Amr Khalid, whose sermons attracted massive crowds of youth and women from elite families" (Bayat 2007: 149). The re-Islamisation of society, however, is not restricted to those who actively follow or promote the Islamic revival. Its transformative effects can be felt and seen all over the country[40] on a daily basis throughout all layers of society (Mahmood 2005: 3-4). The veiling of 80% of Cairene women is probably the most visible effect (Bayat 2007: 147).[41] Islam has been established as the hegemonic discourse[42] that constitutes the dominant frame of reference for identity construction.

This success of the re-Islamisation is also a result of the specific political conditions. The Egyptian authoritarian state has made an effort to co-opt the societal trend. With its top-down Islamisation, the Egyptian state has reinforced this neo-conservative tendency. Above that, the state responded to the challenge of violent Islamism with a policy of 'the iron fist'. This policy contributed to the Islamists' refocusing on morality and society (Ismail 2003: 165). The description of Egypt as a "mostly secular military dictatorship" (Schneider and Silverman 2006: 236) is thus slightly outdated (if it had ever been accurate at all).[43] Above that, the puritanist tendencies of Egyptian Islam also

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[38]   Saba Mahmood calls it the "public piety movement".
[39]   Amr Khalid is "Egypt's most popular young lay preacher, who, since the late 1990s, spoke about piety and the moralities of everyday life" (Bayat 2010: 46).
[40]   To be more precise, I should write "throughout Cairo", as none of the sources I am referring to gives any information on developments and experiences outside Cairo. Yet, by saying "country" and meaning the capital only, I am exactly doing as the Egyptians do, who tend to use the term "masr" (Egypt) when referring to Cairo. Thus saying "I am not in Egypt" when one is spending a day in Alexandria makes total sense.
[41]   In 1971 Janet Abu-Lughod had remarked in a description of societal developments in Cairo that "[a]lmost no women are veiled" (Abu-Lughod 1971: 239). Contrary to widely held (modernist) expectations this trend towards adoption of Western un-Islamic styles and habits did not persist.
[42]   The notion of Islam as a "hegemonic discourse" or of the "Islamic hegemony" has among a certain strand of scholars assumed characteristics of a "common sense" argument. It is often taken for granted. Up to now it is unclear to me 1) in how far Bayat, Mahmood, Hafez actually understand hegemonic discourse in the sense that Gramsci, Laclau and Mouffe, or Butler do; 2) whether the experience of the women I study actually perceive Islam as hegemonic in a strict sense.
[43]   Schneider and Singerman see Egypt as a "mostly secular military dictatorship" (Schneider and Silverman 2006: 236) which is under fire from Islamists to make it an Islamic state based on *sharia*. This notion is not accurate, as Egyptian law has nominally (and practically) always shown references to *sharia*. The Egyptian constitution from 1971 names *sharia* as one of the sources of law in article 2 (The Egyptian People 1971): "Art.2: Islam is the Religion

strengthen societal control and thus have an import on power relations (Ismail 2003: 165). The notion that fights for power would circle around institutions, is rendered obsolete. Particularly in systems like Egypt, where the political institutions and thus 'classical' political power are out of reach, other spheres of society become battlefields. One such battleground in Egypt are *morals and ethics*, inseparably intertwined with religion. One of the issues at stake here is the highly contested role of women and of the family. Islam has an important role in defining women's 'right' place and role within family and society (Hijab 1998: 47). Yet, the concrete articulation of religion in (everyday) practice on the one hand, and the accompanying forms of Muslim identity on the other hand, are as diverse as the believers. Contradictory interpretations of Islamic texts cause heated debates, tradition is reinvented and structures of religious authority are renegotiated on a daily basis (Bayat 2007; Ismail 2009). The "family" and "women" are made the centre of these ideational and normative clashes. Consequently the strengthening of patriarchal family models – whose impact on young women can hardly be overestimated – is another aspect of this "turning east" (Werner 1996: 8–9). The reaffirmation of patriarchy as a *traditional* order of gender- and age-relations, points to another reading of the re-Islamisation: it can also be understood as a *social and cultural* movement rather than a purely religious one. It represents the third wave of decolonisation, the fight against Western cultural hegemony and dominance, the "battle for the mind" (Bell-Vilada 193: 19 quoted in Nelson 1991: 141). From that angle, the emphasis on the (invented) tradition acquires a new meaning. Reaffirming the own cultural background, the own (constructed) tradition of Islamic patriarchy that respects and maintains the value of family, takes care of (elder) women and upholds overarching egalitarian values, is then not primarily motivated by belief in Islam. It has to be located within the context of larger struggles of cultural and identity policies (Bayat 2007: 157). Nelson summarises poignantly the complex position of women within the intersecting battle lines:

> "Nowhere is this battle [for the mind] more ferociously waged than in the Middle East. And no issue in this cleansing process is more heatedly debated than that of women's status. And no religious symbol personifies this debate more than 'the veil'. This linkage of women's status and religion in a culture where the spheres of religion and politics are not fully separate make the 'women's question' a political one in the real sense of the term" (Nelson 1991: 141).

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of the State. Arabic is its official language, and the principal source of legislation is Islamic Jurisprudence (Sharia)." After heated public debate in spring 2011, this article remained unchanged in the Constitutional Declaration issued by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, the SCAF, currently ruling Egypt (SCAF 2011). It is therefore not accurate to consider Egypt a secular state.

Paradoxically, the colonizer's obsession with the Arab woman and the veil is thereby reproduced in the anti-colonial struggle. The paradoxes of the post-colonial era do not stop there. The increasing privatisation and internationalisation of Egypt's educational system is a case in point: the new *infitah* policies in the field of education allowed the American University, suspected of being a repository of corrupting Western values, to rise to unprecedented importance. We will take a closer look at this contested institution of higher education now.

3.3 The American University – repository of neocolonialism or microcosm of Egypt?

The American University Cairo (AUC), Egypt's leading academic institution, is of interest to this study for various reasons: AUC represents the university of choice for those Egyptians who adhere to Western, cosmopolitan lifestyles. For others, however, it represents unwanted and illegitimate Western influence and dominance. At the same time it is a "microcosm" (Mehrez 2008: 96) of Egyptian society. Its diverse student body reflects both the re-Islamisation and the west orientation, "public piety among staff and students" has been growing (Bayat 2007: 147). Moreover, AUC's rising importance reflects the widening gap between public and private educational institutions that has transformed Egypt's educational system since the *infitah.*[44]

Since its inception, the AUC had competed for the formation of the Egyptian (secular) elite against the other secular institution of higher education, the Cairo University (1908). Then, as "the national universities continued to sink into conservatism and self-preservation [after *infitah*] AUC rose to unprecedented visibility, attracting a new class of Egyptian nouveau riches for whom this American institution represented a window to the global future" (Mehrez 2008: 95). Today AUC is "at the centre of the elite education market" (Mehrez 2008: 95). It has become "*the* institution responsible for forming the affluent Egyptian elite, both male and female" (Mehrez 2008: 95). Not surprisingly, public controversies have surrounded this influential institution of higher education, which had always been perceived as "repositor[y] (...) of colonial influence and domination" (Mehrez 2008: 94) by some.[45] In another sense, AUC mirrors the cleavages and debates of the Egyptian society: "(...) it has indeed come to represent not just a microcosm of the contradictory and colliding values of the post-*infitah* social and economic Egyptian elite of Sadat's Open Door policies but the equally contradictory educational policies in Egypt as a whole" (Mehrez 2008: 96).

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[44] *Infitah*, is the Egyptian term for the policies of economic opening, also known as the "Open Door Policy", introduced under president Sadat. In essence, the *infitah* was a programme of economic liberalisation and privatisation similar to those IMF-policies that became later known as "Washington Consensus".

[45] It is interesting to note that Mehrez' account (Chp.5 and also Chp.6 of her book) shows how nationalism is still an issue in the Egyptian debates, respectively that there is a nationalist standpoint from which things can be judged, meaning that AUC can be criticised for being not nationalistic (enough).

The greater[46] variety of students (concerning educational and family backgrounds) leads to even more contradictions (Mehrez 2008: 96).[47]

As for its ideological orientation, the AUC has always been following a "dual mission: one was a commitment to propagating American educational principles of liberal arts and the other was to teach the language and heritage of the Arab world within this new liberal context" (Mehrez 2008: 93). Consequently, AUC also demands this "dual commitment to liberal arts and Arabic language and culture from its students" (Mehrez 2008: 93). Still, today, the university also reveals its intentions at "'modernizing' Egyptian subjects" (Mehrez 2008: 97). How deep this transformation might go is illustrated by a popular movie called "Saidi fi il gamia il amrikiyya".[48] The movie shows the experiences of Khalaf, a boy from the provincial countryside of Upper Egypt who starts to attend university in Cairo: "[a]t AUC, not only is Khalaf's identity reconstructed but his very language is equally changed" (Mehrez 2008: 97).

In recent years, the "gradual collapse" (Mehrez 2008: 101) of Egypt's educational system provided the grounds and reasons for foreign intervention in the country's educational sector (for more on the general decline of the public education sector see also Ibrahim (2002a: 106), Handoussa (2010: 46)). When it comes to reshaping the education system, one of the top priorities of the donors is the socialisation of the younger generations into the norms of the global community (Mehrez 2008: 101). Similar to colonial times, the institutions of education become the main channel for the diffusion of 'Western' and 'modern'[49] ideas and ideals. The national education on the other hand is characterised by the "drive to install loyalty, obedience, and support for the regime" (Mehrez 2008: 101). With the increasing privatisation of the education system international (primary and secondary) schools (generally termed "foreign language schools") have been mushrooming all over Cairo. There is little state regulation and no obligation for the core curriculum to include Arabic language and culture. Some foreign language schools offer both, the national Arabic curriculum or an international curriculum, the latter being more expensive (Mehrez 2008: 103). Foreign languages are seen by many as "a vehicle for economic and professional capital

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[46] Other than in its founding years, today's AUC student body is made up of Christians and Muslims, foreigners and Egyptians, girls and boys (the majority of students used to be female preceding the official recognition of AUC degrees by the Egyptian state in 1974 (Mehrez 2008: 95).

[47] These contradictions erupted for example in the "niqab affaire" in 1999, which resulted in AUC's 2001 formal ban on the *niqab*. According to Mehrez' estimations at AUC the "female students are today almost equally split between veiled and unveiled women" and thus everything but homogeneous in regards to attitudes and practices of religion (Mehrez 2008: 96).

[48] To be translated as approximately "A boy from Upper Egypt at the American University".

[49] Given the constructed, or invented if you wish, character of tradition and modernity, and the regions West and East, I find it hard not to put these terms into quotation marks.

and mobility" (Mehrez 2008: 103). Thus, the educational career of Egyptian upper class children often starts already at the British, American, French or International kindergarten (Barsoum 2004; Hamzawy in Harders 2001: 50). A degree from some of the foreign secondary schools (such as the Deutsche Evangelische Oberschule, DEO) even offers the opportunity to enter a university in Europe or the USA straight away. The costs of private universities in Egypt amount to 90 000 Egyptian pounds per year (which is more than 10,000 euros) (Hamzawy 2001: 50).

This transformation of Egypt's educational system bears considerable consequences for the AUC and its students as well. Mehrez sees the university at the "receiving end" of a veritable "pot-pourri" (2008: 104). The curricula of foreign language schools "pay lip service to the Arabic language (and culture) almost across the board, producing more than one generation of linguistically, and therefore culturally, alienated youth within the Egyptian elite" (Mehrez 2008: 103). At AUC this "culturally alienated" group mixes with those students who had been socialized in private Islamic secondary schools, which try to convey a mix of values and skills (Mehrez 2008: 103). As a result of this "pot-pourri", students at AUC are confronted, through the contact with their peers and the "dual mission of the university", with the full spectrum of cultural, religious, and social values, ideas and interpretations that coexist in Egyptian society – no matter what their family background is. More than other members of Egyptian society, many AUC students are confronted with "Western" influences through their education at university and through their (corresponding) lifestyles, which are shaped by the imagery of television, internet, music, journals, the contact with exchange students, and the hangouts in Western-style or even real geniune Western coffee shops (such as Starbucks, Costa and McDonald's). An example of such a "Western" idea would be what Thornton calls developmental idealism: According to her, mass education and mass media are the main channels for the diffusion of an idea that ties the "modern" family to the "modern society" (Thornton 2001: 460, Thornton 2001: 459). Due to the "pot-pourri" of educational histories at AUC and the ideational developments of the Egyptian society at large, the students also confront conservative, religious ideals of family, gender roles and life perspectives. Patriarchal norms and notions of the complementarity of men and women, for example, are reasserted with the Islamic Revival and supported in the teaching of Islamic Schools. The neoconservative trend also makes itself felt on campus: "[e]ven Egypt's most liberal institution, the American University in Cairo, saw a slow but steady growth of public piety among staff and students." (Bayat 2007: 147)

The ideals (whether 'Western' or 'traditional', 'modern' or 'conservative') that a student confronts at university often differ markedly from the lived examples in the student's family. Especially for women the assumption is that education will put them at odds with traditional roles and attitudes and might even alienate them from their families. The factors considered in this respect are: the ideational influence of education (exposure to different ideas, norms, role models, sources of socialisation), the practical change of behaviour and opportunities that physical attendance of school constitutes (vis-a-vis non-attendance and confinement to the house or neighbourhood), and the economic empowerment which results in financial independence (Tawila, Ibrahim and Wassef 2001: 216–217; Thornton 2001: 459). According to this modernist line of argumentation, the female students at AUC are likely to articulate some tension between the values held by older generations and their own aspirations and gender concepts. Yet, existing research raises doubts about the linear causal relation between modernisation, of which expansion of women's education is a central part, and 'modern' (i.e. liberal secular individualist egalitarian?) understandings of gender and family (Thornton 2001). Drawing on a study by Jones, Cuno illustrates how ideational and cultural factors can cause development to take different shapes and trajectories in local contexts – or in specific families (Cuno 2008: 204–205). For example Saba Mahmood tells the story of the Egyptian woman Saba who voluntarily turned to more conservative interpretations of Islam, and adopted stricter practices of religious observance which put her into conflict with her liberal husband Jamal (Mahmood 20005: 175-180). In theory, a situation, where female AUC students come to embrace more conservative values and ways of living than their parents because of the encounter with a variety of values and perspectives at AUC, is conceivable. How such a conflict would then play out in the familial setting is conditioned by the specificities of Egyptian family structures.

3.4 The Egyptian family: kin-based patriarchy and the consequences for women

The "family" is at the heart of Egyptian society (Singerman 2009: 117-118; 122; 128; Tawila et al. 2001; Eickelman/Piscatori 2004: 99). "[T]he extent of familial, kin-based solidarity and authority is (...) obvious to all who have even a passing familiarity with Egyptian society (even if some might argue that kin solidarity is not as strong as it used to be)" (Singerman 2009: 117–118). The centrality of the family and kin constitutes an *empirical* condition of any Egyptian individual (Tawila et al. 2001; Singerman 2009: 119, 122). Moreover, the specific *concept* of family itself disciplines and constitutes the selves and the behaviour of Egyptian men *and* women (Joseph 2008, Tawila et

al. 2001).

 Singerman's research shows how this plays out in daily life in Egypt:

> "families are intimately and extensively involved in almost all realms of social, political, moral, and economic life, such as educating children, childrearing, securing employment, negotiating the bureaucracy and the political elite, establishing and maintaining businesses, saving money, promoting morality and status, distributing resources and information, securing credit, organizing migration, policing sexuality (...)" (Singerman 2009: 118).

The centrality of the Arab family is also engrained in its constitutional status as "the basic unit of society" (Joseph 2008: 27). The "kin-contract" as an (ideal) model guides social relationships in Arab societies. In Arab patriarchies family membership qualifies for citizenship (Joseph 2008: 28). Kin-based relationships form networks that permeate all aspects of life and society. Thus, they transcend the boundaries of social spheres and render distinctions between public and private obsolete. The ideal of the "kin-contract assumes that subjects are gendered and aged and that all (male and female) subjects are familial subjects who commit to *complementary[50]* rights and responsibilities in the kin group" (Joseph 2008: 28). A relational concept of rights and responsibilities regulates the expectations vis-a-vis all collectives or individuals. It "(...) grounds a person's sense of rights and responsibilities in reciprocal relations with specific significant others (...)" (Joseph 2008: 30). In family practice this means that "[b]rothers and sisters, for example, can claim specific rights and responsibilities between each other because of their relationships as sibling." (Joseph 2008: 30).

Kin-based patriarchy and the corresponding notions of family and subjectivity have a tremendous effect on *all* the individuals:

> "[k]in are central to a person's social, political, and religious identity; economic and political security; and emotional stability in much of the Arab world. (...) kin care for each other, provide for each other, protect each other and love each other. In return, members of the kin group are expected to privilege family and social relationships above the self, and embrace the authority of males and seniors"(Joseph 2008: 30).

Yet, it is *young* and *female* persons that hold the lowest status in Egypt's kin-based patriarchal order: "(...) young women experience the double discriminatory burden of sexism and ageism" (Joseph 2008: 33).

As family is involved in all aspects of life and society, even marriage is seen as a 'family endeavour'. Yet, the patriarchal family cannot preclude itself from the influences of cultural globalisation and changing conditions in Egypt. The ideal of the "modern family" is an example for a 'travelling

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[50] Here we see a clear linkage to the Islamic notion of the complementary characteristics and roles of the sexes.

concept' that was appropriated in the Egyptian context (Thornton 2001: 457–458; Cuno 2008: 207): marriages are still arranged – nonetheless, the parents no longer focus on the daughter's financial security alone. Today, in accordance with the ideal of the Western family, the parent's want to secure *compatibility* of the couple to guarantee a stable marriage. Yet, according to (Cuno 2008: 208) it is often marriage with other members of the family, that shall ensure this compatibility. Kin-endogamy is thus widespread. Besides the supposed compatibility kin-marriages allow for close family surveillance and support in case problems arise and endanger the familial peace. Another change can be observed: the younger generations increasingly have the allowance – or capability – to have a say in the negotiation of their own marriage (Cuno 2008: 203-207). In this context, the expanding education among younger generations seems to have an impact on the "aged" distribution of authority in families (Tawila et al. 2001: 216–217). Yet, these changes play out as a *transformation* of kin-patriarchy and the corresponding gendered/aged structures of power. They do not result in the complete trumping of the given patriarchal relations. The privileging of "the initiative of males and elders in directing the live of others" (Joseph 2000: 24) remains unchallenged.[51] The continuing dependence of young people is also an outcome of the specific politico-economic conditions: the Egyptian state fails to provide basic provisions for its citizens and adequate jobs with adequate wages are lacking. As a consequence, most young people are economically dependent on their families even after graduation from university[52], and often even when already employed. Tawila et al. paint a dramatic picture: "[y]oung people are rarely able to live and function independently. They need the social, economic and emotional support of the family and their parents (...)" (Tawila et al. 2001: 215). From another perspective, we could use a formulation different from "(in)dependent": young (and old) direct their d*emands* towards the family rather than the state, and similarly have r*esponsibilities* towards their kin. Framing aside, this specific socio-economic condition renders transgression of family norms for Egyptian young adults very risky, in a quite material sense (Joseph 2008: 31). From this inter-dependence, Tawila et al. conclude that "conflict is then intensified at the family level, since expectations of support and solidarity are high, as are norms of social control" (Tawila et al. 2001: 215). On the other hand, a self-understanding as connected or relational might mediate the articulation of inter-generational conflict to a large extent.

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[51] Another limitation on young people's marriage choices pervades: as religion is passed on to children in a patrilineal system from the father to the children, religious communities in the Middle East have restricted women's choices for marriage. Effectively, a Muslim girl in Egypt would not be allowed to marry a Coptic Egyptian (Joseph 2000: 30).

[52] More than 3 millions of university graduates are unemployed (Hamzawy in Harders 2010: 50).

3.5 Middle Eastern selves and dependent self-construction: perspectives from anthropology and psychology

Like in every other place at a certain point in time, various notions of self exist in Egyptian society. Through modern mass media and (neo)colonialism – in particular through the colonial educational system – the "Western idea of the self" (or "liberal self") has spread throughout the Middle East (Joseph 2008: 29). In a similar way the modern family ideal and imagery of heterosexual partnerships (Thornton 2001: 459; Werner 1996: 9) had 'travelled'. Yet, notions of the self as connected remain predominant in Middle Eastern societies (Joseph 2008: 29; Joseph 2000: 23). Egyptians tend to define themselves in terms of relations (Tawila et al. 2001: 215). Joseph coined the term "the connective self" and characterized connectivity as a notion of self in which a person's boundaries are relatively fluid so that persons feel they are part of significant others. Connective persons do not experience boundary, autonomy or separateness as their primary defining features. Rather, they focus on relatedness. Maturity is signalled in part by the successful enactment of a myriad of relationships."(Joseph 2000, S. 24) This fluidity of the self is produced by "cultural constructs and structural relations in which persons invite, require, and initiate involvement with others in shaping the self"(Joseph 2000, S. 24). This involvement extends to the formation of emotions, needs, attitudes and identities (Hafez 2003: 84). Such a perspective corresponds to Mahmood's postulation that "all forms of desire are socially constructed" (Mahmood 2001: 108).

Mahmood argues that the liberal notion of self rested on the

> "belief that all human beings have an innate desire for freedom, that we all somehow seek to assert our autonomy when allowed to do so, that human agency primarily consists of acts that challenge social norms and not those that uphold them" (Mahmood 2005: 5).

Yet, instead of assuming that agency is always performed *in contrast* to norms, we need to take into account circumstances and conditions, which have both restrictive and constitutional functions. The point is to look at "circumstances by which possibilities are patterned and re-shaped, which constrict action or its potential" (Talal Asad in Hafez 2003: 84). With its fluid boundaries, the non-autonomous, connected self, corresponds to Foucault's and Butler's understanding of subjectivity. At the same time, power subjugates and produces the subject. As power acquires productive character, the individual self is not existent before power (Hafez 2003: 89-90). In post-structuralist interpretations, the subject is constructed/constituted by the "historically and culturally specific disciplines" (Mahmood 2001: 210). Yet, (unless Butler and

Foucault have Eastern roots of which I am not aware), this similarity suggest that the world might not fall neatly into two camps of opponent self-notions. Contrasting the "Western idea of the self" with a supposedly Middle Eastern self, is problematic. It essentialises and reifies the constructed boundaries of the "West" and the region "Middle East" (for the 'rethinking' of geographical regions, see Bilgin 2005). Both the Middle Eastern and the liberal self are ideal types. They have the most impact on individuals by serving as a role model for identity formation. However, neither a person's self-description nor her expressed behaviour allow for the *empirical* reconstruction of *either* a "liberal" *or* a "connected" self. Abstract self-concepts or ideal types such as these often provide arguments in "cultural wars" and in the fight over *collective* (e.g. national) identity. Their function in these debates can be analysed in media and discourses. This, however does not say much about *individual appropriation* of these socio-cultural templates for identity formation. Such an approach focuses on *publicly produced* and commonly shared potential self-concepts.

Different than Hafez and Mahmood, Joseph dissected the concept of the "connected" 'non-liberal' self: the complex nets of expectations and responsibilities towards family members, for example, is one element in the constitution of the connected self. To analyse these types of relations, however, we need a specific sort of data and method of data collection. Participant observation over an extended period of time (as done by Macleod 1992 for example) allows for the tracking of a person's different connections, liabilities and loyalties. It provides an insight into family interaction, and allows for a better distinction between "attitude" and "behaviour", or "norms" and "actions". In a similar way, other separate sub-aspects of Jospeh's self-concept could be empirically explored. The studies and theoretical reflections by Joseph, Mahmood, Hafez (and others) reveal considerable empirical knowledge, and they are theoretically intriguing and inspiring in their critique of liberal feminist universalism.[53] Unfortunately, they remain slightly non-transparent and under-specified as to their method and methodology. Furthermore, the way, Joseph and Hafez apply "notion of self" or "self", keeps the *concept* behind the term rather opaque [54]. The same is

[53] The strength of Mahmood and Hafez' work lies in their culturally-sensitive approach of reconstructing categories from an indigenous, contextual understanding. By doing so, the researchers are living up to post-colonial demands for de-centering and avoiding orientalist and eurocentrist traps. In addition, their interpretations of Egyptian female Islamists, portraying Egyptian (or more general Arab or Muslim) women as not oppressed corresponds much more to the experiences I gathered during my stay in the Middle East – and I reckon (but so far this stays mere speculation) that this view also corresponds better to the self-perception of Egyptian women. A third achievement of Mahmood and Hafez is to provide a counter argument to a powerful (if not hegemonic, at least dominant) discourse: the demonization of Islam in Western media and the ensuing necessity of saving Arab/Muslim women. Especially the latter claim led to a rather unholy alliance of the US government and feminist activists and scholars in the justification of the war on Afghanistan.

[54] Originally I had written "operationalisation" here, yet I would prefer to distance myself from this expression as in my opinion it does not fit well with a qualitative research project that centres around reconstructive analysis. By

true for Mahmood: her concept of agency[55] opens up an important perspective for *critique.* Yet, it seems to be located at a highly abstract theoretical level – which renders empirical analysis difficult. In the end, the "liberal self" seems to be primarily a useful sparring partner: it helps sharpen the contours of the (similarly constructed) connected self. These ideal types, can provide a useful starting point for critique, though. They highlight specifically the flaws of theories and fields of practice that rely on an extreme, ideal type concept of self. Among these are (besides the already criticised liberal feminism) some theories of development and economics, as well as programmes for economic reform and empowerment. The "homo oeconomicus" is clearly a close relative of the liberal self.

Another academic discipline, genuinely occupied with the "self" and "notions of self" is psychology. It distinguishes itself via detailed conceptualisation and methodological rigidity – paired with naive realism and lack of cultural sensitivity.[56] This insensitivity often crosses the line into outright ethnocentrism with claims of universal applicability of its concepts.[57] One could assume that personality psychology, developmental psychology, or social psychology, were able to contribute to a study on female identity construction in Egypt. Unfortunately, most studies that address cultural particularities of identity and self construction, focus on the difference between Western and (East)Asian societies. Thus, they are of limited relevance to my research. Nonetheless, it is worth noting a meta study by Markus and Kitayama (1991): they propose to distinguish between an independent and an interdependent construal of the self (Markus and Kitayama 1991: 224), which is comparable to the connective versus the autonomous self. Research conducted by Oerter in several Asian and Western countries claims to confirm the theory of culturally specific identity constructions (Oerter and Oerter 1995: 171). They find differences on five interrelated dimensions: 1) autonomy, 2) goal/interest definition, 3) conflict behaviour, 4) self-control/maturity and 5) notions of control (i.e. agency). Non-European participants, conceptualise autonomy as the ability to behave according to social expectations without external help. This implies a mastering of the

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"conceptualising" I try to strike a balance between the demand for openness and the demand for presenting a clearly circumscribed research question before I enter the field.

[55] Mahmood develops a veritable history of agency-concepts in "Politics of Piety", and eventually argues for an understanding of agency as "capacity for action that specific relations of subordination create and enable" (Mahmood 2001: 210; 2005: 18).

[56] Of course this is a somewhat generalising statement. Kagitcibasi (2005), for example, offers a very good critique of culturally insensitive notions of autonomy, agency, and development in young adulthood.

[57] To be more precise: psychology is often not only insensitive to culture but to many other structural categories such as class, race, gender as well. Only consider that historically the majority of empirical studies in psychology has been conducted with (male) university students only.

own psychic structure in a way, that allows for the satisfaction of societal demands without causing unhappiness (Oerter 1999: 185–198)[58]. Separation from the parents/family in order to gain personal independence did not figure prominently in their concept of autonomy or maturity (Oerter 1999: 185–198). Rather, the participants connect maturity with self-control. To them, it means the ability to control one's emotions and temper. The setting of goals is understood not as an individual process conducted in confrontation with the environment but as a process of adjustment and coordination, whose desirable end-point is harmony between the own goals and the goals of the environment (Oerter and Oerter 1995: 168). Accordingly, (family) conflicts are dealt with in a non-confrontational way: one attempts to foresee and prevent conflicts rather than carry them out (Oerter 1999: 194).

The *topics* of these cross-cultural studies correspond to a certain degree with those of the anthropological research introduced earlier. These similarities notwithstanding, the psychological research on the self rests on entirely different epistemological foundations and makes use of entirely different methods. Concepts, such as "autonomy" or "conflict behaviour", are highly operationalised. Researchers test hypotheses about these concepts in standardised procedures with standardised tools (e.g. scales) on a representative sample of the study population.[59] Social psychology – the sub-discipline of psychology that is concerned with the conceptual equivalent to "agency", called the "locus of control" and "attribution style" – works preferably with *experimental* settings. Even most of personality psychology adopts a nomothetic approach[60] which we cannot easily reconcile with the methodology of an individual case-study approach. Often, psychology uses concepts far distant from experienced reality. This makes it difficult to link the insights from psychology to those of other relevant disciplines such as sociology, anthropology or cultural studies. Nonetheless, reflection on psychological concepts and their research topics can sensitize for certain phenomena, and provide material for the involvement with other research.

Similarly, the knowledge of development psychology, needs to be approached with lowered expectations: theories on the phases of development[61], and on the respective tasks of each phase[62]

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58 This process of internalisation of (religious) duties is also described by Mahmood (2005).
59 The latter only in theory though, in practice the sample tends to consist of male university students who are easily accessible.
60 For an example of the cross-cultural study of personality traits, the so called "Big Five", see Schmitt et al. (2007).
61 See McAdams and Adler (2006) for an overview in reference to personality development.
62 Developmental psychology knows different models of development, one of the most influential ones was coined by Eric H. Erikson, also relevant to concepts of identity and personality psychology. As the main developmental tasks of the period of late adolescence we can assume 1) development of the self-concept, 2) reshaping of relations to family and peers, 3) development of a vision for the own future and 4) locating oneself within society and state (Wenzler-Cremer 2005: 64).

were developed largely in a European and American context. Moreover, they also follow a nomothetic perspective. Given what we know about self-formation, we can plausibly assume that young Egyptian women articulate the 'themes' of young adulthood in a specific way, conditioned by their living conditions and socio-cultural influences. Egyptian students might not perceive the developmental task of reshaping the relations to family and peers as such. Wenzler-Cremer subsumes the aspect "confrontation with religion" (*Auseinandersetzung mit Religion*) under the larger task "developing a vision for the own future" (Wenzler-Cremer 2005: 64). In the context of a "sacred society", where religion is taken for granted, the confrontation with religion might be of primary importance to the subjects[63] – or not require much effort at all, given the unquestioned position of religion. These assumptions and hypotheses, however, rest on an entirely horizontal perspective. If the themes of a life phase are of interest, it is the commonality between people that matters. The average articulation – not the specific perspective – matters. The rationale of developmental psychology is thus distinct from that of individual biographical interviews as well. Surveys like those conducted for the Egyptian Human Development Report with a focus on youth, are much more apt to enquire into the average priorities of Egyptian youth (Handoussa 2010).[64] Nonetheless, psychological concepts of young adulthood can form another repository of "sensitizing concepts".[65] They add to the larger body of knowledge and experience which guides me as a researcher.

The abundance of identity concepts and notions of the self extends across the disciplines of psychology, and anthropology, to those of sociology, pedagogy, philosophy, literature, and cultural studies, to name but a few. Even a much more narrow concept, like that of narrative identity (II 2.2), comes in various interpretations (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 53–55). The various theories are located at very different levels of abstraction and build on conflicting methodological foundations. In light of this diversity, I decided not to problematise the question of identity and self formation/concept itself in my research. In this study I will draw mainly on the approach of Narrative Identity presented by Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann[66]. I will thus treat this as a

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[63] This hypothesis is supported by the research design of Oerter (Oerter and Oerter 1995: 160) who ask young adults about the role adults should take in various social spheres: in Indonesia the usual set of family, job, and politics is extended to include "religion".

[64] According to them, for youth, "the order of interests (...) are the family by 97%, religion by 96%, work by 60%, friends by 47%, leisure by 14%, and finally, politics which ranks sixth and last in the order of key areas in youth's life by not more than 7%" (Handoussa 2010).

[65] See chapter II 2.3 for a definition.

[66] Meike Schwabe's review of the workbook (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002), published in FQS Vol.4 No.3 Art.5, Sep 2003, offers a very positive account that is by no means exaggerated. It was this article that first draw my attention to the work of Lucius-Hoene.

methodological question, which will be addressed in the next chapter at length.

There are studies which portray the lives and perspectives of Egyptian women from distinct angles. Of these, I have already mentioned frequently Mahmood (2005) and Hafez (2003), two rather recent publications on the subject. One of the earlier influential studies must not be forgotten though: published for the first time in 1991, Macleod's study "Accommodating Protest – Working Women, the New Veiling and Change in Cairo", remains up to this day an authoritative reference point for scholarship on Egyptian woman, and on the politics and practice of veiling. Macleod wants to address a seeming conundrum: in the 1980s, at the very historic moment that the group of lower class women is joining the work force, they also turn to the revival (or reinvention) of a traditional, supposedly subordinating practice. They adopt the veil. The researcher, a political scientist in training, sets out to explore the context and the motivation of this paradoxical move (Macleod 1992: xiii). In her field work, she finds that "women's symbolic action of veiling is (...) not reactionary behavior, but part of an ambiguous political struggle that I have called 'accommodating protest'" (Macleod 1992: xiv). Macleod's study has given important impulses to the scholarship on the veil and was able to provide "results suggestive for understanding women's contradictory role in relations of power else-where as well" (Macleod 1992: xiiv). Nonetheless, her study remains limited in two regards. First it focuses exclusively on women from the lower middle class in Cairo, and second it gives precedence to veiling as a *political* symbol over its power as *religious* and *cultural* marker. Both should not be seen as shortcomings. They were reasonable and plausible restrictions at the time and in the context of Macleod's field research. In the 1980s the trend that we today call "Islamic revivalism" or "re-Islamisation" was only taking off. Even though the practice of veiling was already beginning to transform the public sphere, it remained limited to the lower classes. Not before the 1990s did the *upper* middle class women in particular become one of the driving forces of re-Islamisation. They practised what Bayat terms "public piety", and thus fully "transform(ed) Egypt's urban public space" (Bayat 2007: 154) by donning the veil. These upper middle class women had entirely different reasons for adopting the veil than earlier generations. In that sense, Macleod correctly emphasised, "the importance of locating women's struggles in the specific interactions of gender, class, and global" influences (Macleod 1992: xiiv)[67]. I would like to add *the specific moment in time and the geographical space* to this complex of interacting forces.

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[67]   In essence that describes what is today captured by the hyped concept "intersectionality".

MacLeod herself decries that much of the scholarship on the Middle East focused on the lower classes (often following the motion to give voice to the oppressed and "subaltern"), and on state politics or the state-society relation (Harders 1999 and Ismail 2003 are recent examples). MacLeod's attention to the middle class is owed to her assumption that "the middle class is a very important group, exemplifying the contradictions of modernizing life, and embodying the interesting tensions of transitional figures in the complicated movements on change" (Mac Leod 1992: xv). Different than her, I decided to focus on the upper middle class which "shades off into the upper class" (Schneider and Silverman 2006: 228). This group of Egyptian society is of interest to me, as it constitutes what Flyvbjerg terms an "extreme case" (Flyvbjerg 2004: 425–428): given the current Egyptian class structure, the according variety in lifestyles and the exposure to different trends, I assume that the youth of the upper middle class[68] best exemplifies "the contradictions of modernizing life" in Cairo at this specific moment. In contrast to Hafez and Mahmood, I shifted the focus away from Islamists,[69] focusing instead on young women from the upper echelons of Egyptian society in order to enhance my understanding of local appropriations and reformulations of globalisation[70].

As a specific subgroup, I selected female students of the American University in Cairo. Given the nature of the American University as a "microcosm" of Egyptian society (I 3.3), I assumed that at the current historic juncture the students' exposure to the "interesting tensions of transitional figures in the complicated movements on change" would be biggest.[71] In this study, I reconstruct these young women's narrative identity in order to contribute to countering "uni-dimensional accounts" and "stereotypes and generalisations which dominate the public discourses on women and Islam" by providing "empirically grounded multi-dimensional perspectives" (Spiegel 2010: 19). Different than Spiegel in her ethnographic study on "women's organisations in an increasingly Islamised Malaysia" (Spiegel 2010, back cover), I did not focus on the translation and appropriation

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[68] The lower middle class is today often grouped among the "lower classes".

[69] Just as the occupation with lower classes reflects the mission to give voice to the subaltern, the focus on Islamists might be owed to the intention to vindicate that group which often draws the West's suspicion, and it most prone to be accused of "false consciousness" or "oppression of women".

[70] Thereby, I am defying the anthropological inclination to choose the 'case' most distant and different from myself on various dimensions: the young women are approximately the same age as me, they live at parts a similar lifestyle, share certain reference points of cosmopolitan culture with me, match my educational/occupational status as a student. Yet, only because these women are located in similar spots on some dimensions, that does not mean that they find themselves at the same intersections as I do. What might look similar at a superficial level might have very different consequences in a specific case, ergo they might seem similar, but that similarity must not necessarily find its reflection on a deeper level.

[71] This assumption is substantiated by the role of education, and by my observations in Cairo.

of "travelling" concepts in political or social work[72]. I was not concerned with the "global everyday" of activists or social movements (Spiegel 2010: 17), but rather with the "global everyday" of young women from a certain class. I deemed them to be most exposed to "the force of global change" (Spiegel 2010: 17) and the traces that globalisation has left on Egyptian society. I was interested in observing, how the individual integrates various cultural and societal trends, influences and identity offers in her daily life. I chose the self understanding/identity construction, as the point where individual and society meet, as the entrance point for my research. Other methods and types of "data" would offer interesting insights into the same subject. With participant observation, for example, the researcher would produce more information about the actual observable behaviour and interaction in groups. The focus then shifts to the daily practices and the social field, the milieu of the research subjects. In her great study "Global dreams. Class, gender, and public space in cosmopolitan Cairo" (2009), de Koning did exactly this, providing an ethnographic account of the Cairene middle class' young professionals. These young professionals are in a different phase of their life than my research subjects. This notwithstanding, de Koning's study of the cosmopolitan upper middle class milieu provides some valuable information on the consumption and leisure patterns of upper middle class youth.

In the previous chapters (I.1. and I.2) I laid out the 'political' intention of this study. This chapter on the state of the research was meant to make transparent where I locate myself in the academic field. Also it should be visible by now, how I would like to add to existing research. Besides that, I am pursuing another goal: I want to achieve congruency between my epistemological standpoint, the methodological principles of my research and the text production, i.e. the presentation of my research results. For me that means taking the individual interviewee seriously, and also the principles of a qualitative, constructivist and interactionist methodology. By strictly sticking to the commandment of reflexivity, openness and transparency I hope to keep the methodological promise of matching method to the subject under investigation. Also, in a qualitative, reconstructive approach, the state of the research acquires a specific role: the state of the research as presented here, defines the sample for the interviews and provides indications for the interview preparation. Different than in a "theory-before-research model" (Berg 2007: 23), however, I do not generate hypotheses based on the previous research. Rather, existing knowledge needs to be understood as sensitizing concepts. The meaning of this statement will be explained in detail in

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[72] Spiegel frames her work as follows: "[t]he main subject of this study is thus women's organisations in Malaysia and their negotiations of global concepts such as women's rights, gender equality, violence against women, empowerment, and development" (Spiegel 2010: 18).

chapter II. In order to understand the structure of this text, it is important to be aware of this third purpose of the study.

II – Methodology

In the chapter on methodology I want to familiarize the reader with the methodological foundations and the practical development of my research project. We need to first look at the theoretical positions underpinning the research process and at its inherent rationale. Afterwards, I will explain the decisions and adjustments made during the research process. The purpose is to enhance inter-subjective understanding. This chapter is divided in three parts:

(1) the theoretical foundations of the research design

(2) the theoretical research design developed prior to the field research

(3) the adjustments of the research design which became necessary during the phase of data collection and of data analysis

This structure might seem unnecessarily complicated at first, yet it has the strong advantage of rendering the research process transparent. If I presented *either* the original research design *or* the eventual research design, I would conceal the dynamic and 'spiralling' character of qualitative research and also project an unrealistic picture.[73] The inter-subjective understanding should transcend mere theoretical elaborations. It is necessary to render the *subjective* process of the research transparent and understandable. Consequently, I will dedicate much space to those aspects of the research that mattered to me personally in these three chapters. Two things gained importance: the experience of field work (3.1), and the idea of a constant interaction between theory and experience, and between empirical data and theoretical concepts. This interplay finds its expression in the spiralling research process (1.4) and the treatment of sensitizing concepts (2.3).

At the beginning of every research project, several assumptions about the nature of the world and of knowledge are made, and also about the question, what constitutes possible and valuable research. Thus, the basic principles of qualitative research are lined out in the first chapter (1). I discuss issues of epistemology (1.1 to 1.3) and dedicate considerable (if not unusual) attention and space to the basic principles of the research process in general (1.2 to 1.4). The different research phases (interview/field work; ordering of data/text; interpretation of text) are addressed

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[73] To a large extent I am motivated by my dissatisfaction with many other qualitative studies: too often the researcher pays only lip service to the principles of transparency and reflexivity. The research process and interpretation remains a black box, and there's a remarkable discrepancy between ambition and reality. Inadequacies of methods – often the mere impossibility to minutely or even roughly implement in practice all the time consuming steps prescribed by the method in theory – are thus concealed and students left with considerable irritation on "how research really works in practice".

separately in chapter 1.4. In another chapter, I will also debate the special case of qualitative research that involves intercultural communication (1.5). The reasoning behind this extensive occupation with methodology: qualitative research demands that the method is adequate to the subject under investigation. The process of adjusting and matching, however, does not stop once the researcher enters the field. On the contrary: throughout the whole research process, we see the constant interplay and exchange of empirical data, the researcher's perspective, theoretical knowledge, and methods. It is in part this dynamic relationship which causes the "messy character" of qualitative research. In order not to get lost, but still do justice to the aforementioned principle, I decided to make methodological rigour a point, while remaining flexible when it comes to method. It took me considerable time to get a good grasp of the diverse methods of interviewing and text interpretation. Thanks to the effort I put into *understanding* the rationale of the various approaches, I discovered many commonalities. The difference often enough lies merely in labelling. Strategies of fostering academic careers might often be an incentive for researchers to brand their own methods. After developing a deep understanding of the abstract general principles that the different approaches share, I was able (or forced?) to feel much less bound by one specific method. Thus, methodological rigour for me meant that whenever I decided to adjust the method (of text interpretation or of interviewing), I paid considerable attention to do so in line with the basic principles (of qualitative research, interviewing and text interpretation).

Let me present you with a short example to make things more clear: one of the basic purposes of text interpretation is to 'unlock' the text while preventing heady conclusions based only on deductive categories (Kruse 2007). The method of Narrative Identity (NID)[74] provides various tools to do so. Some of them have a structuring function, others serve to inspire interpretation and help develop alternative readings. When I reconstructed Yasmine's narrative identity with these tools, however, the case remained colourless – it did not seem to be adequately represented. Thus, I stepped back from NID and returned to the basic principles and purpose of text interpretation (which are laid out in II 2.1). In this special case, other tools and concepts seemed better able to unlock the text. Thus, it made sense to integrate concepts like the theatre metaphor and explanatory systems (II 3.3.2) as additional guide posts for the analysis. This way, articulating the basic principles that underpin the various research phases allows us to be freer in adjusting the

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[74] Below I will refer to the method as NID or Narrative Identity (with capitals), while narrative identity refers to the narrator's identity construction in the text or the concept narrative identity.

method and the 'looking glasses' that we use.

In the second part of this chapter I address the specific research design I had developed prior to field research. At that point the research design resulted from five interconnected factors: the principles of qualitative research, the state of the research, the research interest, the research question and the resource constraints. At the centre of the research design stands NID as developed by Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann, which provides a concept and a method for interpretation. The original research design thus consisted of basically four elements:

- biographic narrative interviewing – a method for interviewing, which reflects the basic principles of Qualitative Research and the need of NID
- a sample strategy and definition of target group resulting from the research interest, research question and my knowledge of the state of the research (II 2.1)
- a concept of (narrative) identity, drawing on a constructivist understanding of identity formation (II 2.2)
- and a method of interpretative text analysis, as laid out in II 2.2.

Of course the experience in the field and with the data resulted in considerable modifications of the original research design. I will explain these experiences and the ensuing adaptations in chapter 3. Reflexivity is one of the criteria for the quality of qualitative research (Schorn 2000: 9 [20]). I will therefore give sufficient space to reflect on the critical choices I made during the research process. Evidently, these decisions and adjustments considerably influenced the remainder of the process and eventually the results of the research overall. Also, the field research and the intense work with the text had quite an impact on me and my perspective. I thus need to share some of this experience with the reader in order to establish inter-subjectivity. In chapter II 3.1 I trace my experience in the field, point out how the revolution in Egypt affected my research in spring 2011 (II 3.1.1) and explain changes in the composition of my sample (II 3.1.2). After discussing the consequences of adjusting the sample, I give some insights into modifications of my interview style that were necessitated by the specific cultural context and my standpoint (II 3.1.3). The further steps of the research are addressed in chapter II 3.2 'In the data', and II 3.3 'In the text'. In my structure, I treat them as separate phases, in reality they are intertwined. Together they constitute the hermeneutic field of *data analysis* (Schorn 2000: 9 [20]). This field is theoretically and logically separate from the phase of *data collection*, even if the phases criss-cross in the practical research process. Due to major failures and misconceptions in my research design, I saw myself confronted with serious problems, once I started working with the data I had collected

in the field. In chapter II 3.2 I will discuss these problems in detail (II 3.2.1) and pay considerable attention to the critical decisions I made in this phase of my research (II 3.2.2). The purpose is to render the further proceeding and changes in the research design plausible to the reader. In essence, I decided to focus on one case study after I had undertaken a preliminary formulating interpretation of my interview material. The tentative results of this first step of analysis influenced the selection of my case study, therefore I'll summarise the insights from the formulating interpretation in chapter II 3.2.2. In the same chapter, I also share the criteria that defined the selection of my case study. In the following chapter (II 3.3), I address the process of in-depth text interpretation (or reflecting interpretation). Also in this phase of (micro)text interpretation, some adjustments seemed required. The decision to adjust the method of NID by integrating two complementing sensitizing concepts (theatre analogy and explanatory systems) for the analysis, is explained in chapter II.3.3.2. As mentioned above, all adjustments rely on the basic principles of qualitative research and text analysis. Here the previous comprehensive discussion of these principles gains practical significance.

1 The methodological foundations of my qualitative, reconstructive research approach

This chapter discusses the basic principles of qualitative research. Some foundational thoughts on constructivism and interactionism, and the distinction of two research approaches within the qualitative paradigm help to locate myself in the larger methodological field. I discuss issues of epistemology, ontology and methodology and dedicate considerable (if not unusual) attention and space to the basic principles of the research process in general (II 1.1 to 1.3) and the various research phases (interview/field work; ordering of data/text; interpretation of text) in particular (II 1.4). In a separate chapter I will also debate the special case of qualitative research that involves intercultural communication (II 1.5)

1.1 Interactionism, social constructivism and two types of qualitative research

My own understanding of human nature and action was influenced by psychological social-cognitive theories of personality which integrate the insights from the cognitive turn in psychology with more classical theories of personality such as Freud's, Kelly's and the behaviourist ones. Thus on an individual level "to construct" refers to the cognitive processes that allow individuals to perceive their environment and their self and to make sense of it. At the same time this intertwines with my stance on a major debate that has been going on in Political Science/IR for a while: What are the primary drivers of human action? Interests, norms and values or cognition? (Mayntz 2009: 30). This study is based on the constructivist assumption that a) the world[75] and b) knowledge about and of the world are (socially) constructed. I see myself and this research project in the tradition of social constructivism.[76] Furthermore, I draw strongly on the interactionist paradigm of social sciences. Its basic assumption can be stated as follows: meaning is constructed and constantly renegotiated in social interaction (see Denzin (2008: 82) for a more elaborate list of the basic assumptions).[77] A short overview of the conceptual history of social constructivism and

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[75] Constructivism according to Ulbert rests on four further assumptions: 1) structure and agency are seen as mutually constitutive (Ulbert 2005: 13). 2) The transmission between structure and agency happens through norms and rules. Norms and rules constitute space for action, these actions within the structure however produce patterns that are constitutive for the structure (Ulbert 2003: 410). 3) Language plays a decisive role in the reciprocal process: "Sprache und Kommunikation sind in diesem Prozess als zentrale soziale *Handlungen* zu verstehen, mittels derer gemeinsam geteilte Bedeutungsinhalte erschaffen werden" (Ulbert 2003: 410). 4) Ideas, norms, identities and interests – and their transformation and change in particular – are of interest to constructivist analysis (Ulbert 2003: 394).

[76] It should be clear, that the social constructivism I am referring to here, is not the purely ontological social constructivism that in IR has been propagated most prominently by Alexander Wendt. Rather I am referring to an ontological and epistemological social constructivism as developed by Berger and Luckmann (1966) in their foundational publication "The social construction of reality".

[77] This is also true for identity, which consequently is understood as narrative identity as situationally constructed in

social interactionism highlights the commonalities of the two approaches. As social constructivism, social interactionism constructs structure and agency (in the form of society and individual) as mutually constitutive: "Der Grundgedanke in den Arbeiten Mead's und anderer Interaktionisten ist, dass 'Gesellschaft' und 'Individuum' in einer Beziehung der wechselseitigen Konstitution zueinander stehen (...)" (Rosenthal 2005: 33). These ideas had considerable import to the understanding of identity and Mead's theory of identity has also been developed further by Strauss and Goffman.[78] Strauss and Glaser are the founding fathers of grounded theory, which stands in the tradition of the interactionist Chicago (not Iowa) school.[79] Berger and Luckmann then reconciled various (so far contradictory) sociological concepts and theoretical constructions in their ground breaking text "The Social Construction of Reality" which appeared first in 1966. While symbolic interactionism had focused on the making of meaning through interaction, Berger and Luckmann focused on the interplay and relation of (inter-)subjective meaning (making) and the objective facticity of social reality (Rosenthal 2005: 34). In other disciplines of the Social Sciences, such as IR, this relation has not been discussed as the connection between individual and society but as that between "structure" and "agency". (Eventually also Goffman's ideas about the functioning of frames and framing, as portrayed by Rosenthal (2005: 42) deal with the relation between structure and agency, stability and change, determination and freedom of action.) Epistemological standpoint and further considerations on methodologists can hardly be separated. The aforementioned orientations provide the theoretical basis for the principles of qualitative research.

The number of textbooks on qualitative methods has jumped considerably in recent years (Seale et al. 2004: 1), the variety of qualitative approaches is huge and hard to survey (Rosenthal 2005: 13). The field of qualitative research is marked by diversity to such a degree that according to Rosenthal any attempt to clearly answer the question of what qualitative research in the social sciences meant was bound to fail (Rosenthal 2005: 13). In my opinion a lack of coherence in the application of the various terms and labels is at least in parts to blame for this situation. This problem notwithstanding I will try to lay out the methodological foundations for my research endeavour. At first we will follow the distinction of *two research orientations* within the qualitative paradigm, as

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interaction with the researcher.

[78] According to Rosenthal, Goffman provided much less than his fellows a "cookbook" for research, his studies were oriented more towards portraying his own field research.

[79] Later Strauss - together with Corbin - promoted a development/modification of grounded theory consisting of a coding procedure (which according to Rosenthal is close to content analysis methods (Rosenthal 2005: 33)). This grounded theory method (or script for data analysis) must not be confounded with grounded theory as a methodological approach to social science research.

it is put forward among others by Berg, Andrews, and Rosenthal. From this categorisation of research models I deduce certain principles which unite various approaches and methods across the qualitative spectrum and represent the criteria for assessing the quality of a qualitative social science research project.

In contemporary qualitative social science, two models of research, or two basic orientations (Berg 2007) prevail. What Berg calls the "theory-before-research model" (2007: 23) is also termed "hypothetico-deductive model" (Spiegel 2010: 33). This approach aims at testing existing theories and hypotheses and strives for standardisation of its methodical tools. The underlying rationale remains close to that of quantitative research, which has numeric generalisation as its goal (Rosenthal 2005: 13). A typical guideline for the researcher would sound like 'work through the state of the research, formulate hypotheses to test and operationalise each variable – if you are working cross-culturally formulate clear one-sentence questions' (cf. Andrews 2007: 491). Adequate operationalisation of the concepts that inform the hypotheses is then often considered the guarantee for the quality of a qualitative research endeavour. Even if the researcher might locate herself within the constructivist paradigm, she is likely to aim at uncovering universal principles and producing generalizable results.

A research-before-theory approach implies a different orientation: the underlying rationale is one of "discovery", the (highest) goal would be the generation of theories from the in-depth analysis of empirical data (Rosenthal 2005: 13). This 'grounding in empirical data' and the focus on concrete cases, does by no means mean that existing knowledge and theories are ignored. However, it establishes a different (bottom-up, interpretative[80]) logic in the research process. The more one moves towards this end of the qualitative paradigm, the less one defines concepts in advance because we "seek to discover naturally arising meanings among members of study populations" (Berg 2007: 37) – these "naturally arising meanings" are otherwise also called "emic" concepts. Often the terminology discloses the orientation of the researcher: talk of "members of study populations" already gives us a hint as to Berg's methodological standpoint. His further elaborations clearly characterise Berg as having, at most, a very 'flat' understanding of the claims that inform the interpretative paradigm. This notwithstanding, he argues for a spiralling research approach, which would combine the two models (Berg 2007: 27). On the very interpretative end of the spectrum we find researchers like Molly Andrews, who locates herself in the tradition of Geertz and Rosaldo. Andrews works primarily with narrative interviewing, and considers research as an

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[80]   Apparently the terms interpretive and interpretative are used interchangeably.

open-ended *process*: "(...) where I want to go: some place that I have not been before and where I may well not know what questions might be relevant until I am well on my journey" (Andrews 2007: 492). While such an understanding might well be extreme, it does capture the basic idea of openness.

While ethnographic research is located at one end of the spectrum, much of qualitative research oscillates between the research-before-theory and the theory-before-research points. In their methodological considerations, their research designs and their empirical research, many adherents of the qualitative paradigm try to find the (subject-specific) adequate "balance between the theoretical 'armchair' and the empirical 'field'" (Silverman 2008: 5). Even grounded theory – for a long time (mistakenly) notorious for demanding that the researcher enters the field with his mind being a blank slate – tries to strike a balance. The matter of balancing the two orientations of research is debated under the label "context knowledge" or "sensitizing concepts versus categories". A certain dynamic and oscillation in the field not withstanding, researchers who see themselves in the tradition of symbolic interactionism, a phenomenological approach to the Sociology of Science and Ethnomethodology, have come to distinguish themselves (Rosenthal 2005: 14). They apply labels such as "reconstructive", "interpretative" and "social science hermeneutics" (Rosenthal 2005: 14). These scholars see "understanding" as the purpose of social science and are located close to the "research-before-theory"pole. According to Rosenthal, the label "interpretative" draws on the social constructivist understanding of social reality (Rosenthal 2005: 15). Human beings are considered as agents that construct the social reality in interaction, as had been put forward so prominently by Berger and Luckmann (1966).

1. 2 The basic principles: openness, reflexivity, transparency and a reconstructive stance

Seale et al (2008) emphasise that it lies within the logic of qualitative research that – rather than perfectly following drawn out rules – the concrete research practice needs to be in the focus. Nonetheless, based on the above characterisation of the interpretative paradigm as research orientation and on the ideas of its theoretical ancestors, certain guiding principles can be formulated. Distilled from various textbooks, introductions and empirical studies I understand them as follows: interpretative research needs to be *open*, *reconstructive* and *data-based*, *reflexive* and *transparent*. Other than many researchers I am not convinced that mere *mentioning* of these principles is self-explaining and thus sufficient to establish the methodological groundings of this study. Rather I try to distil a more refined understanding of these principles, deduced from a range

of introductions and text books of interpretative research (among others Rosenthal 2005, Berg 2007, Kruse 2007, Bohnsack 2000, Clandini 2007, Seale 2004).

Open and date based

The demand for *openness* is important for three aspects of the research. On a very general level, it influences the way we treat concepts and categories (see also chapter 2.3). It defines our choice of method. "Openness" also demands a certain structure to the research design, and necessitates a spiralling research process. Concepts and categories are not set prior to the field research or data analysis, instead they emerge "bottom-up" from the empirical data. This way, by not imposing theory and highly specific concepts on the subjects and data, more space is given to the perspective of the subject. The researcher and her theoretical knowledge do not structure the object of the study beforehand, rather the structuring is done by the subjects themselves (Rosenthal 2005: 29). Consequently, the demand for openness does not allow for the formulation of a detailed research question at the outset (Rosenthal 2005: 15–26). Rather, a 'research problem' can be articulated. This way the subject matter of interest, the preliminary focus of attention, and the method to approach this research problem are defined (Rosenthal 2005: 15–26). The method is chosen in order to give the subject room to construct and display her frame of orientation and to express her individual relevancies. Among the method of qualitative interviewing for example, the narrative or biographical interview gives most space to the interviewee. A feminist or collaborative style of interviewing can enhance the interviewee's authority over the character of the interaction with the researcher. If the empirical data consists of anything other than biographical interview data,[81] openness can be enhanced by methods such as grounded theory. The approach formulated by Glaser and Strauss, and also Corbin, emphasises "'a great need to stick to the data, be in the field, and generate theory that respects and reveals the perspective of the subjects in the substantive area under study' (Glaser 1992: 17 quoted in Spiegel 2010: 33).

Put in simple terms, referring directly to the experience of the researcher, being "open" also means "being prepared to be surprised by the data". The state of openness shall enable the researcher to be touched by the "foreign" and to be irritated by the data and observations (Kruse 2007: 18). As far as I understand, it is important to capture "openness" as an *attitude* that needs to be *continuously cultivated* during the ongoing research process. It is not enough to implement "openness" in the choice of method or in the first step of the text analysis only. Instead, the

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[81] See below for the importance of sequentiality for biographical interview analysis.

researcher needs to constantly remind herself of the challenge not to cling to an interpretation but remain continuously open to revising previous interpretations.

Reconstructive and reflexive

The demand for a reconstructive approach is related to that of openness (and is often even defined in similar terms). A reconstructive approach wants to capture the language and concepts of the interview subjects, and intends to reconstruct their frame of reference/orientation and relevances.[82] The subject's system of symbols and communicative rules are central to the interpretation process, and the (textual, situational, and lifeworld) context of an utterance are taken serious. In a reconstructive approach, the issue of double hermeneutics needs to be considered. This means there are everyday constructions of first order (*Alltagsweltliche Konstruktionen* – just as there is *alltagsweltliches Verstehen)* and of second order, the academic observations and constructions. In the social sciences the subjects themselves observe, create meaning and construct reality (Rosenthal 2005: 39) – it is this 'everyday' construction of the subjects that we need to re-construct in the method and terminology of scientific construction (Bohnsack 2000: 21–24; Esser 1999: 211–213). The way we arrive at scientific construction is *not essentially* different from that of daily construction. It is the structured, systematic proceeding and the *reflexivity* that distinguish the process of scientific construction. Similarly, *Alltagsverstehen* (everyday understanding) cannot be distinguished from scientific understanding by the *practice* of understanding or observing, but merely by its reflexivity (Schlücker 2008: 55). The same holds true for the everyday practice of story telling/narrating and the practice of scientific description (Matt 2001: 100–107). Even the *Erzählzwänge*, the specific mechanisms that apply in a narration, have a similar influence on the scientific operation of "narrating" i.e. presenting the research results.

In scientific practice, the demand for reflexivity can, according to Kruse (Kruse 2007: 18), be translated into several instructions. First, the researcher needs to get some distance to her own system of relevance in order not to impose her relevances on the subjects and the data. This does not mean she should aspire to achieve (an impossible) state of tabula rasa, but rather try to *lessen the immediate influence* of her own preconceived notions on the subject under investigation and the interpretation. Second, it is essential, to make these preconceived notions explicit and thereby greatly enhance the transparency of the analysis. (The claim for openness is by Kruse also subsumed under "reflexivity" (Kruse 2009: 18)). Reflection on the role of *a priori* concepts and

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[82] I decided to substitute the term "system of relevance" by "relevances" to make its application less cumbersome.

presuppositions (sometimes called "intuitive hypotheses") and the attempt to make visible one's own theoretical sensitivity is another element of reflexivity (Kruse 2007: 18).

For Berg on the other hand reflexivity basically means that one must understand oneself as part of the social world (Berg 2007: 178). In order to do reflective research one should also have a special look at or attitude towards the knowledge and data created. This implies to "make use of an internal dialogue that repeatedly examines *what the researcher knows* and *how the researcher came to know it..* To be reflexive is to have an ongoing conversation with yourself." (Berg 2007: 179). Yet, good qualitative research does not end with these *internal* reflections. The insight into the own embeddedness and own construction and observation actions needs also be shared with the reader, thus making the research process transparent and inter-subjectively understandable. "Reflections of this kind [on the research process] are of utmost significance for the validity of qualitative sociological research, because they enable the reader to reconstruct the conditions under which the knowledge presented here was generated" (Flick 1998: 243; see also Steinke 1998: 324; Spiegel 2010: 33). One of the practical implementations can be employing the first person in writing up one's research. From his personal perspective Berg contributes that he started using the first person, "I", and came to appreciate it because it renders accounts less cumbersome and leads the researcher to "take both ownership and responsibility for what is stated" (Berg 2007: 181). Similarly, I consider writing in the first person as a reflection of the fact that this research is always bound by my individual standpoint.

1.3 The inevitability of a standpoint: destroying the myth of neutrality

The supposed neutrality which often dictates the scholar's style of writing, is nothing more than a façade, but one with serious consequences: "[m]aintaining the façade of neutrality prevents a researcher from ever examining his or her own cultural assumptions (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) or personal experiences" (Berg 2007: 181). Understanding oneself as part of the social world has consequences: it points to the embeddedness and conditioned character of our thinking and doing, thus highlighting the subjective quality of knowledge. Beyond that, the researcher's actions have consequences for the social world he belongs to. There is a complex link between knowledge and power. Feminist standpoint theory tries to come to terms with both: the subjectivity of knowledge and the real consequences of knowledge construction. In Schindler's interpretation of standpoint theory, the challenge lies in standing up to the confrontation with countless knowledges and experiences that *are all* similarly *legitimate,* and to develop a productive

understanding of the researcher's responsibility (Schindler 2005: 121). In the end my research is only able to contribute *another partial* perspective (Schindler 2005: 117, in reference to Haraway 1995) to the academic debate and the political discourses. Yet, it needs to be questioned how much separation is possible as also science is permeated by power. Scientific knowledge is distinguished from *Alltagswissen* (everyday knowledge) merely by convention; the scientific community (unconsciously? Schindler 2005: 120) produces collective agreements on what counts as scientific knowledge.[83] Knowledge then is political; power produces certain knowledge and is reproduced by knowledge. If that perspective is applied, theory is inseparably linked to societal development – something so eloquently stated by Robert Cox: "Theory is always for someone and for some purpose". By reconstructing the identity construction of young Egyptian women, I attempt to paint a picture of diversity with the purpose of countering stereotypical construction of the "Arab woman" or the "Muslim woman" (see I.1 and I.2). Also, many of my research subjects wanted their contribution to be put to a specific purpose (see II 3.2.2). I am adding another perspective on the female self to existing ones, but I am not claiming that my reconstruction was capturing something eternal or universal – my knowledge (as any knowledge) remains partial and particular, it is bound by the interview partners, by myself, by the time and place and the intersection of these. The data and results of this research are situated in a very specific context, even constituted by this context, produced in my interaction with the research subjects and entangled with societal processes – and potentially of political power (Schindler 2005: 121-126).

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[83] As depicted above, the contemporary consensus in qualitative research of the interpretative approach sets "structured proceeding" and "reflexivity" as markers of distinction for scientific knowledge production.

1.4 Translating the principles into practice: qualitative interviewing and interpretative text analysis

The above mentioned principles of qualitative research underpin the entire research process, and they result in distinct guidelines for the various phases of the research, as laid out by Seale et al (Seale et al. 2004: 8–9). The universe of qualitative methodology is vast and diverse. It is inhabited by numerous social scientists who have all branded at least one method-complex. Yet, the longer I moved within this universe, the more I realized that the *basic skeleton* of the research process remains the same. Usually, four phases are distinguished – in theory there is 1) the phase of designing the research, 2) the data collection phase, 3) the data selection and processing phase and 4) the write up phase. In a spiralling research process, the two empirical phases (2 and 3) can not be neatly separated. Instead of being chronologically separate, they become overlapping and intersecting 'practices' or 'operations' of research[84] – each phase demanding different actions from the researcher. Nonetheless a theoretical distinction between two hermeneutic fields (Schorn 2000: 9 [20]) might be helpful: the phase of collecting data (hermeneutic field I) is theoretically and logically separate from the phase of data analysis (hermeneutic field II). In this chapter I show, how the general principles outlined in the previous chapter can be translated in the two hermeneutic fields. In order not to remain entirely abstract, I refer to my own concrete research interest and design. Obviously, it constitutes only *one of many* potential ways of translating the general demands into concrete research practice. Nonetheless, it is helpful to illustrate the practical implementation of the qualitative research principles. Additionally, this chapter addresses further criteria of qualitative research that pertain specifically to the phase of data collection and data analysis.

Hermeneutic field I: the data collection phase – qualitative interview method

My research interest, the principles of qualitative research and resource constraints defined my choice of method for data collection: my aim was to gain in-depth insights into the perspective, self- and world-construction of the individual persons that are the focus of the research. I never intended to reconstruct social reality 'as it is' but instead to capture the individual's perception[85] of her conditions and circumstances. This corresponds to (a constructive version of) the interpretative

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[84] Rapley (2004: 27) goes so far to speak of analytic *"moments"* only.
[85] Although these circumstances and conditions are at parts mere social constructions, they might confront her as objective reality.

paradigm where scientific knowledge production means the "Rekonstruktion der Wirklichkeit [der Wahrnehmenden] durch kontrolliertes Fremdverstehen" (Lamnek 2005: 312). Considering the constructivist starting point of this research and my research interest, the focus on the construction, perception and sense-making of *individuals* 'dictates the research approach: "Particularly when investigators are interested in understanding the perceptions of participants or learning how participants come to attach certain meanings to phenomena or events, interviewing provides a useful means of access" (Berg 2007: 97). Qualitative interviews were thus the method of choice. However, we need to be aware that an inclination for interview research[86] as it has been visible in much of qualitative social science recently (Silverman 2008: 37-43; Rapley 2004: 15), is culturally bound (Andrews 2007: 493-495): an interview clearly positions the interviewee as an individual. It implies the expectation that the subject should be able to identify herself as a separate entity, able to speak for and about herself. Even more, the choice of the autobiographical/life story interview reflects the socialisation in an individualist culture (Andrews 2007: 493-495). While observation is in certain aspects superior to interviewing as a method of qualitative research (cf. (Rapley 2004: 29; Silverman 2008: 37-60), interviewing is a more "economical means, in the sense of time and money, of getting access to an 'issue'"(Rapley 2004: 29). In clear opposition to Silverman's position, Matt considers the narrative interview a prime resource for the analysis of social reality, as narrations draw on cultural resources and inter-subjectively establish shared interpretations of the world (Matt 2001: 94–95). Baddeley also points out that "(...) narrative research is an ideal vehicle for illustrating the inherent tension between self and society that Erikson and later McAdams understood to be the essence of identity" (Baddeley and Singer 2007: 178).

The focus on individual perception and meaning-making actions also provides an argument for research with individual case studies rather than a large number of people. The first attempts to make the individual case the linchpin of social science studies date back to the early days of the interactionist Chicago school in the 1920's (Rosenthal 2005: 35). In every individual case, perspective, and story we can find information that is also relevant *beyond the individual*. Rosenthal references Robert E. Park, who called upon sociologists "to get inside the actor's perspective" and did so himself by conducting case studies. Some of them were biographical case studies that served to develop an understanding of the perspectives of individuals in various

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[86] Silverman even speaks of "Qualitative researchers' almost Pavlovian tendency to identify research design with interviews" (Silverman 2008: 42).

milieus (Rosenthal 2005: 37).

Although I had assembled a considerable amount of theoretical knowledge and entered the field with several assumptions about potential phenomena, this prior knowledge was treated as sensitizing concepts. My goal was to understand the subjective interpretations and perceptions of the individual woman within her frame of relevance. I thus was in need of a method which allowed the interviewee to define the themes. Instead of imposing my categories (as gender, family, Islam, agency, identity development) – I wanted the whole research process (an the researcher's mind!) to remain "open"[87] to the emergence of indigenous categories and concepts, unexpected meanings and surprising findings. This called for the use of unstructured, open forms of interviewing. After reviewing several types of interviews I concluded that a narrative, unstructured, biographical interview would leave the most room for the interviewee to define the course of the interview. Drawing on symbolic interactionism, the interview situation must also be understood as an interactive process of meaning making. "[I]nterview interactions are inherently spaces in which both speakers are constantly 'doing analysis' – both speakers are engaged (and collaborating in) 'making meaning' and 'producing knowledge'"(Rapley 2004: 27). This interactive dimension needs to be reflected in the method. A postscript[88] of interviews is supposed to record observations from this interaction, and once again, enhance reflexivity and transparency.

> "Unmittelbar nach dem Interview wird ein Postskriptum erstellt, in dem erste Eindrücke festgehalten werden. Hierzu gehören sowohl Einfälle und Gefühle, die sich auf die Person des Interviewpartners beziehen als auch solche, die den Interviewer selbst betreffen. Von besonderem Interesse ist aber auch das, was gewissermaßen 'zwischen' den Akteuren stattfand (ihre Interaktion, die Gesprächsatmosphäre/-dynamik, spezifische 'Szenen' usw.)" (Schorn 2000: 3-4 [9])

Moreover, the interactive dimension of the narration is considered by the method of text interpretation (see II 2.2). In addition, a specific strategy of sampling can greatly enhance the flexibility in the field. Working with theoretical sampling allowed me too adjust the sample as the

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[87] I am well aware that there will always be a considerable tension between the demand for "openness" in the qualitative/interpretative paradigm and the inevitability of presuppositions. This notwithstanding, or rather: for this reason it is of considerable importance to 1) be aware of this tension, 2) reflect it in the choice of method and design of research, 3) address explicitly the (changing) relation of theoretical in advance knowledge and empirical findings during the gathering of data and interpretation. So far I have the impression that this is best realized in Witzel's problem-oriented research approach (Lamnek 2005: 365). Yet I decided to use the "Narrative Interview" as outlined in detail by Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann (2002) for various reasons. Regarding the analysis afterwards, I still considered to make use of Witzel's mixture of deductive and inductive categories for the organisation and "scanning" of text material (Witzel 2000).

[88] Taking notes/records of the establishment of contact, of the interview encounter, and of the the life-world (Lebenswelt) of the interviewee as observed by the researcher already constitutes a type of observation. This is indicative of how blurred the borders between different types of method can become in the reality of the field (Rosenthal 2005: 17).

field research moved along. By accompanying the whole research process with regularly produced memos, I intended to foster self-monitoring and reflexivity.

Hermeneutic field II: working with the data

In addition to the principles of qualitative research lined out above, there are certain methodological assumptions and principles that mainly impact on the process of data organisation and text analysis (understood as a hermeneutic field separate from that of field work and data collection). Most approaches to text analysis contain elements of both coding (a reductionist step) and micro, in-depth or hermeneutic text analysis (an explicative step). As a general practice (not as in grounded theory) coding can be understood as the process of allocating a label to a phenomenon in the text, on either structural or thematic grounds. Even Rosenthal who seems to dismiss "coding" as done in grounded theory as too shallow an approach, employs the practice of reductionist labelling to *order* the data and select text passages. In essence, the various approaches of data analysis differ only as to *how* they combine these distinct practices based on different rationales.

In a rather uncritical way, Berg for example understands coding merely as a useful tool for ordering and sorting data – as such it necessarily constitutes an element of any research. Bohnsack splits the phase of analysis in a formulating phase, including a moment of coding (as reductionist labelling), and a reflecting phase of interpretation (Bohnsack 2000: 150–155). For the evaluation of theme-centred interviews, Schorn proposes to first generate a thematic overview of each interview (Schorn 2000). She then selects segments for detailed text analysis and orders the segments according to summarising themes. Only in the next step does she part ways with the "coding approach" and focuses on the in-depth hermeneutic interpretation (*tiefenhermeneutische Interpretation*) (Schorn 2000, S. 5 [12]) of these text passages. Even though an element of microanalysis is included, Schorn's research procedure effectively relies mostly on the logic of coding for defining empirical data for the text interpretation. Another example is Wenzler-Cremer's study on identity formation of Indonesian migrant women: she first applies coding along the lines of grounded theory, then combines it with micro analysis and eventually shifts almost entirely to micro analysis as the coding seemed to limit her openness (Wenzler-Cremer 2005: 96–100). Wenzler-Cremer is not alone in combining various elements from grounded theory, various interview types, conversational techniques and interpretative analytical tools and methods. Also in the phase of text analysis itself, mixing of theories and methods is common: Lucius-Hoene and

Deppermann's text analysis is itself a combination of hermeneutics, conversational analysis and narrative theory (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 96). Jan Kruse's (2007) integrative method of text-hermeneutics includes tools, heuristics for analysis (*Analyseheuristiken*), and empirical manifestations from all kinds of theories and methods. He integrates them along four dimensions of analysis into one (more or less coherent approach) whose elements can be rebalanced in accordance with the subject matter and the research interest.[89] Within all this flexibility, Schlücker (Schlücker 2008) identifies the basic general process for text analysis as follows: in a "technical"[90] step, the researcher tries to identify a narration within the text, she attempts to define some structure and prominent elements of the text. These elements are – in reference to Goffman's theatre analogy – those components which are central to the plot, the personae[91], the stage area and items of stage design and the repertoire of actions which are at the disposal of the personae (Schlücker 2008: 291). Just as in Bohnsack's phase of formulating interpretation, the scope of interpretation (i.e. attributing meaning) remains limited. This step mainly serves to identify the core elements of the narrative and its framing (Schlücker 2008: 293). Obviously, research in practice arranges the elements of coding and micro interpretation of text in various ways. The different rationale of coding and micro analysis can best be explained if we relate them to the different questions that are brought to the text. These questions direct the researcher's attention to various levels of content in the data (Schorn 2000: 7 [18]). Schorn (Schorn 2000: 7 [18]) differentiates between four levels of meaning: On the first level, the researcher asks "What is said? What is spoken about?". The aim is to understand the "factual content" and enhance the logical understanding of the material/case. This level of meaning provides the basis for ordering the data in the coding step.[92] The next two questions rather belong to the more detailed analysis of data,

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[89] Similarly, Helfferich, in her manual for qualitative interviewing (2005) locates different interview types on a continuum and advies to match various elements of interviews to find the most adequate balance for one's research project.

[90] It seems essential to relativise the term "technical" by applying quotation marks here. What is meant is not "technical" in the sense of "objective" or "defined by mere logic and necessity". As any other step of research this one implies decision making and involvement of the researcher who observes. What makes this phase deserve the label "technical" is probably the lack of creativity. While Schlücker does not refer to this distinction one could argue that this step relies heavily on the application of formal container categories (which are a priori deduced), while the next phase gives more freedom to the researcher to interpret freely, associate and approach the material from different perspectives. In that sense the phase of detailed text analysis is as inductive as it gets, given that the researcher's brain and observation tools can never function on a blank slate.

[91] This term can refer to both the "the characters in a dramatic or literary work" and "the role that one assumes or displays in public or society; one's public image or personality, as distinguished from the inner self" (http://www.thefreedictionary.com/personae, 04.09.2011). In our context, it refers to the characters of the life story.

[92] Here Schorn's take on the levels of meaning (and with hers also my own stance) are in discord with Kleemann's understanding of "Deutendes Verstehen von Sinnstrukturen". According to his definition what the speaker or author wants to say is of little relevance for the interpretation, instead a statement's information about the societal

the micro text analysis: "How is interacted?" aims at exploring the "relational content", and thus enhances the psychological understanding. "In what way, how is spoken about what?" focuses on the way of speaking and establishes a scenic understanding. One last question is pertinent to the phase of micro analysis: "Why is spoken in that way?" aims at the latent, sub-conscious, unintentional meaning (Schorn 2000: 7 [18]), which could also be called deep-hermeneutic understanding. According to Schorn the latter kind of analysis attempts to understand not only the manifest but also the latent meaning of text. "It intends to tap imagination and fantasy" and to uncover the latent meaning which is *"excluded* from explicit language", "the psycho-social structures and mechanisms that move the speaking in its underworld" (Schorn 2000: 5 [12]) (translation by me). This is also the distinction drawn by Rosenthal (2008: 18), who differentiates between methods that aim at the latent content of a text from those which content themselves with analysing the manifest content (e.g. grounded theory).

The ordering of data, structuring and segmenting of text, and the selection of text passages for micro analysis can be based on three kinds of criteria: [93] language related formal criteria largely derived from linguistics (semantic, or internal structure),[94] structural criteria (external to the local sequence, i.e. in the context of the whole text) or content-related, thematic criteria (which in the case of reconstructive research relate to sensitizing concepts or container categories). Bohnsack for example speaks of metaphorical density as a semantic criterion (corresponds to "density of

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position of the speaker needs to be extracted. The goal is to focus socially coined structures of meaning (Kleemann 2009: 203). Indeed, the social structures of meaning underlying an individual utterance are of interest as any self-description is a product of the social context and of the individual's accumulated experience and learning within this context. Yet, this is equally valid for the "subjective meaning", for the intention with which the person speaks or writes. Understood that way, utterances (in my opinion) have to be considered as expressions of the social structures *and* in their literal sense, spoken with a certain intention.

[93] One could add "emotional" as a fourth criterion (Schorn 2000: 6 [15-16]). Yet, I would argue that an emotional reaction such as irritation of the researcher often coincides with one of the other criteria, because our emotional reaction is conditioned by the cognitive processing of the data. For the latter though, the linguistic, thematic, structural criteria shape our glasses and thus mostly provide the cause for irritation.

[94] The attentive reader might already have noticed that here qualitative researchers chose a way out of their epistemological quagmire which again is problematic: applying categories deduced from their own theories (be they from Sociology, Political Science, Anthropology/Ethnology) is criticised for imposing a priori knowledge on the text thus not leaving space for induction and abduction but falling in the trap of a merely deductionist reductionist research rationale. Instead the text is then approached with "formal" categories deduced from linguistic theories. Let's look at that sentence again in a slightly different way: the text is then approached with "formal" *categories* which are *deduced* from linguistic *theories.* The burden of proof has simply been outsourced to a different academic discipline. This works well not only with linguistics but also with psychology, probably because these disciplines can much better still project an idea of *objective knowledge*. Yet, it is crystal clear that this claim would not stand an examination from the perspective of Sociology of scientific knowledge. Thus from a theoretical point of view, the least to be asked from a social scientist drawing on linguistics in his qualitative methods is to make clear his underlying assumptions about the connection of language, cognition and culture, for example as part of his epistemological standpoint. Yet, from a practical perspective, this would overtax many researchers and also exceed the scope of many projects. Nonetheless it is important to be attentive to the import, the significance, and the consequences that the application of terms such as "formal" (compare to "technical") has.

interaction" in focus groups). Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann attribute a particular importance to scenic narrations (internal structure of a sequence) and key narrations (external structure, in the larger context). The main purpose of such a segmenting and organisation of the data is not merely to render it "manageable", but also to force the observer to take a closer, more thorough look. It coerces the researcher to observe with greater minuteness, and helps to pry open the text and to estrange the observer (Schlücker 2008: 292). An important effect is also to *slow down* the researcher's interpretative operations and thereby counter her eagerness for instant understanding (Kruse 2007: 90-91). This function can be capture with the metaphor of a roadblock. The tools of analysis mainly serve the purpose of roadblocks, or bumps in the road which slow down the pace of interpretation and prevent heady judgement.

Sequentiality as a distinctive assumption and principle

The next phase, the detailed analysis of text segments, also serves this purpose.[95] Once more, a neat separation of the structuring phase and the (micro) text analysis is not possible. The results of micro analysis of segments also informs the understanding of the text structure at large. Thus, the constant refinement or even correction of previous structuring attempts is necessary. Yet, there is a theoretical argument behind the principal order of structural analysis first, detailed analysis second. The assumption is that sequence matters. The order of themes and language is not arbitrary. We can infer logical relations from the sequencing of phrases. Thus, every statement has to be understood first in terms of its concrete "local" context, second in terms of the information/talk/text that preceded it, lastly in terms of the larger context, i.e. the entire text and the text-exmanent context. Sequentiality pays attention to contextuality and process dependence (Prozessualität) (Wenzler-Cremer 2005: 76). The temporal structure and sequential shape of the text is the foundation of the interpretation (Rosenthal 2005: 18). Following Soeffner, Rosenthal considers this the strength of sequential analysis: the ability to reconstruct the *process* of selecting among potential interpretations and alternative continuations (Rosenthal 2005: 43). In practice "'Sequential' (...) means an approach where the text or small text units are interpreted according to their sequential gestalt, the sequence of their creation." (Rosenthal 2004: 53)

How strict this principle of sequence is adhered to varies. Other than in problem-centred interviews (Witzel 2000), or theme-centred interviews (Schorn 2000), sequentiality *across segments* plays a large role in the interpretation of narrative and even more so biographical

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[95] As second element of the structuring state of text analysis.

interviews. The first phase of a narrative, biographical interview aims at generating a biographic narration. The entry stimulus attempts to trigger a biographic monologue, without much further influence from the researcher. Why should we not make use of the unity, self-contained and rounded-off character of this monologue? If the data consists of biographical narrations, it also seems counter-intuitive to work with the *method* of grounded theory[96], which requires the fragmenting of the text. While according to Schlücker coding enhances standardisation and inter-subjectivity, it dissolves the context (Schlücker 2008: 293). It is remarkable that the common understanding of grounded theory's version of coding largely defies the principle of sequentiality. Sequentiality has, on the other hand, become the cornerstone of many methods of text analysis such as objective hermeneutics, narrative analysis and documentary method (for more on sequentiality see Rosenthal 2008: 71–77). Other principles shared by interpretative approaches are the text based character of interpretation, resulting from data transcription, and largely all of the principles we have discussed comprehensively above in chapters II 1.1. to II 1.3 (Kleemann et al. 2009: 189-206). Kleemann et al state the overall primary goal is to produce interpretations that are *inter-subjectively understandable* and rest on a *systematic practice* (Kleemann et al. 2009: 189–206). Both characteristics refer us back to the demands for reflexivity and transparency. The detailed look at the rationale and principal process of data analysis was done to a) show that various approaches by different researchers share the basic features but combine them in different ways, b) highlight that the ordering and analysis of data draws on previous knowledge about the topic and the form of data co-produced, and c) to lay out the basic principles which underpin my preliminary research design *and its later adaptations*. Before we take a detailed look at the research design and the method of NID around which it is built, a note on intercultural communication and its relation to qualitative research is in order.

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[96] This notwithstanding, I share a lot of the epistemological and methodological foundations of grounded theory, and have variously drawn on its principles to guide my research.

1.5 Intercultural communication and qualitative research – a special case?

My research is intercultural[97] in the sense that people from different cultures interact in the production of the empirical data. This constellation is not the norm for interpretative research and thus requires some reflection. Both qualitative research and (research of) intercultural communication (ICC) focus on the issues of *Indexikalität* (indexicality) and *Fremdverstehen*. The process of *Fremdverstehen* can be described as the attempt to decipher another person's indexicality. It can be considered the strength of qualitative research, and qualitative interviewing in particular, that problems of indexicality, the major issue in ICC, are made a subject of discussion and reflection from the start on.

> "Since the exploration, reconstruction, and translation of the "semantic other" and our own relations to the "other" can be regarded as the very essence of intercultural communication, a close kinship with the epistemological roots of qualitative social research is fairly clear." (Otten et al. 2009: 9)

Kruse develops an interesting argument: First he draws on Bohnsack who distinguishes two levels of meaning, a "denotative" and "connotative" one. According to Kruse, Mannheim emphasises how the connotative meaning varies between generations or collectives (as a community of meaning) and thus also varies between individuals dependent on their belonging to such a community (which could be culture or milieu). Kruse himself on the other hand sees the connotative level as the outcome of an individual's very specific experience and history. The connotative meaning, then, is the "individualbiographische Erfahrungsaufschichtung eines Sprechers/einer Sprecherin, die sich in einem Begriff systematisch verdichten kann". In qualitative social research we are thus dealing with "*idiosynkratische[r]* Indexikalität" (Kruse 2009: 5–7) (emphasise added). If the connotative meaning is understood to be specific for each individual, then the process of *Fremdverstehen* remains the same irrespective of the collective the other belongs to. If the individual is understood as a self-contained cultural system, then basically every interaction is an instance of inter-cultural communication and has to cross the the cultural and individual borders between the interlocutors. Seen from that angle, every qualitative research endeavour has at its core an element of deciphering another (personal) culture's individuality. If understood that way, intercultural communication becomes the "kommunikative(...) Paradigma qualitativer Interviewforschung" (Kruse 2009: 19).

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[97] "Intercultural" is to be distinguished from "cross-cultural" research where participants and researchers from only one culture may be involved but an aspect's or question's features in two or more different cultures is compared (Otten et al. 2009: 4).

The idea to understand each individual as a cultural system whose communication requires operations of interpretation is appealing. It provides the opportunity to understand every communication as *intercultural* to a certain degree*.* The point here is not to redefine "culture" but to point out that *every understanding* in inter-personal communication rests on the operation of *Fremdverstehen* (and as already mentioned above, the operation of understanding in everyday practice is not fundamentally different from scientific understanding). We need to interpret what alter says, yet: alter and her frame of relevance and orientation remains external and alien to ourselves. We consequently fall back on the operation of "*Selbst-Verstehen*" as we can interpret alter's utterance only in the context of our own relevances (Kruse 2009: 15–17). Communication across cultures then is interpreted as an extreme case of *Fremdverstehen*. In such an extreme case the implementation of the aforementioned principles of qualitative research might even be easier, as the "*Fremdheitsannahme*" is not only *implied* in the communicative situation but *evident* to its participants. Irritation might be more likely, the different frames of reference are more blatant.[98]

Even if inter-cultural qualitative research is in theory a very plausible project, practical problems may arise, caused by an essentially culturally bound methodology. In her data collection phase, Wenzler-Cremer ran into remarkable problems with her method of choice, the narrative biographical interview. The interview encounters were characterised by the failure to generate autobiographical narrations. Wenzler-Cremer states

> "(...) dass in den meisten Interviewsituationen nur punktuell erzählt wurde, Ansätze zur Selbstreflexion und Autoexplikation als Charakteristika autobiografischen Erzählens nur ansatzweise zu finden sind und die Interviewpartnerinnen teilweise explizit um Fragen gebeten haben. In keinem der Interviews kam es zu einem erzählerischen Entwurf der eigenen Persönlichkeitsentwicklung" (Wenzler-Cremer 2005: 83).

This failure could have a variety of reasons, yet cultural specificities is among the most plausible ones: members of less individualistic cultures might not be inclined to frame their experience as an *individual*'s life story. Also the narrative pattern "life story" or "biography", called a powerful "cultural script" (Baddeley and Singer 2007: 182) might not be as prevalent as in Western societies. Furthermore, there is the potential that the interview-form in itself is not as entrenched as in our "interview society" (Silverman 2008: 43) and thus does not trigger the expected narrations.

> "We are currently part of an 'interview society in which interviews seem central to the

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[98] Several times throughout the interpretation phase, I realized I had already become *too familiar* with Egypt, so that at the time of my research this natural degree of 'alienation' was partially lost. To give two examples: it no longer struck me as unusual that my interviewees paid much attention to the judgement of other people, or that religion was hardly brought up as a topic, while often constituting some kind of 'background noise'. Other academics I spoke to, who where less familiar with Egypt considered this remarkable, even surprising.

making sense of our lives'. The interview – seen in various forms – as news interviews, talk shows and documentaries, alongside research interviews – pervades and produces our contemporary cultural experiences and knowledges of authentic personal, private selves. The face-to-face interview is presented as enabling a 'special insight' into subjectivity, voice and lived experience (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997)" (Rapley 2004: 15).

As we can learn from Andrews' experience with Eastern Germany, even the ethical guidelines are culturally-bound: In her research, participants refuted the signing of the consent form and demanded that their accounts would not be anonymised. The interviewees wanted their accounts to be identified with their real names, which rendered publication of the study impossible in the US. Naturally, this made Andrews ask "Whom are these guidelines supposed to protect if not the interviewee?" Yet, these ethical guidelines stem from a particular cultural context and their universality has to be put into doubt (Andrews 2007: 496–497). Even though these kinds of practical problems might arise in intercultural research, this does not run counter to the idea of intercultural research in principle. Instead, one should opt to factor in "cultural specificities" as an additional aspect that needs consideration and reflection in designing and conducting qualitative research.

A different, though related issue arises in inter-cultural qualitative research and appears to be much more problematic: the question of *language*. Of course language and frames of reference (or even more: concepts) cannot be neatly separated – but let us assume for a second they could be, and thus deal with the issue of language as a separate problem. There are variations of social science research where the problem of language can (again, assuming that language and concepts are separate matters) be reduced to a problem of translation. Structured interviews and questionnaires, which tend to be employed by researchers of the "theory-before-research" pole of qualitative social science, are a good example here. Structured interviews and questionnaires, which are in tendency rather employed by researchers of the "theory-before-research" pole of qualitative social science, are a good example here. Interpretative research however will run into considerable problems especially if it comes to the phase of data analysis. As I have explained in detail above, linguistic criteria matter for both the structuring/coding and the text analysis. Especially if a researcher is concerned with the psychological (How..?) and the hermeneutic (Why...?) level of meaning, language and in particular its minute details and micro-phenomena are essential to the analysis. Let us look at an example from Linde (1993) to clarify this point: Linde cites one of her interviewees saying "How can one feel when one's husband leaves one?" and then

elaborates on the distancing effect the use of "one" has, especially as it is not frequent and conveys a highly formal stance when used in American English (Linde 1993: 188). Obviously, these are specificities that get lost if the interviewer and interviewee do not speak the same language. In cases where a third language (in the case of my interviews, this was English, the native tongue of neither the interviewer nor the interviewees) is employed, this is true in a double sense: I, the researcher, am not aware of these kinds of conventions in English (excluding the very obvious ones). Yet this hardly matters, as my interview partners won't have integrated them anyway, because just being aware of them does not make a person capable of *applying* such specificities. The interviewee's way of speaking remains a mixture of her own language's thinking patterns, conventions etc. and those of the English she was taught to apply in school (Linde 1993: 188). Still, choosing a third language as a "middle ground" has several advantages compared to working with the native tongue of either the researcher or the interviewee. First, it renders the otherwise latent language insecurities manifest – both participants are speaking in a foreign language, and are thus aware of the *fragile* relation of language and meaning. If the interview was conducted in the researcher's native tongue, it would be much easier for her to jump to interpretations and ignore vagueness and undefined relations. Moreover, a third language establishes what linguists might call "a third space." And in addition to this third space created by intercultural communication, any dis-balance (of power, security etc.) is reduced by choosing a veritable 'middle ground'.

In addition, with the NID by Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann, I have also selected a method of analysis which works on various levels of the text. This means that even though my analysis remained clearly limited when it comes to the deep "hermeneutic" level of understanding, there were various alternative levels of meaning to look at, tools to apply and questions to ask. The lack of hermeneutic depth might be the reason why the reconstruction of narrative identity remained shallow and colourless until I integrated the "drama metaphor" and "explanatory systems" into my toolbox for analysis (see chapter II 3.3). Such adaptations notwithstanding my research remained unsatisfactory in this regards. However, once sensitised for the problems of inter-cultural and inter-language research, it struck me how little attention is given to this issue in interpretative social science. In research practice, difficulties that might arise from different cultural backgrounds or languages of researcher and subject are sometimes not even addressed: take the plethora of studies on migration (one of the favourite topics of qualitative, biographical, narrative, post-colonial and globalisation research) which rarely addresses this issue. Although researcher and subjects often do not share one culture or command the language of interaction to the same

degree, migrants are treated as members of the cultural community in which the research is located. While a politically confirmatory move, it remains academically questionable. Also on methodological grounds, sensitivity towards intercultural issues is lacking.[99] Take Ivonne Küster's book "Narrative Interviews" as an example: The author, a trained sociologist and specialist on narrative inquiry dedicates a whole chapter to "Internationalität und Kulturabhängigkeit des Verfahrens". Yet, the understanding of the implications of interculturality, the discussion of intercultural applicability of narrative interviewing and thus the concept of narrative identity remains limited: already the fact that narrative interviewing has been successfully applied and received *outside of Germany* in other Western countries is highlighted as a remarkable achievement in the cross-cultural applicability of this method/concept (Küsters 2009: 187–188).

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[99]   A potential explanation could lie in Sociology's "national" orientation.

2 The research design and research question prior to data collection

In this chapter I will demonstrate the specific research design I had developed prior to field research. As previously indicated, the research design resulted from five interconnected factors: the principles of qualitative research, the state of the research, the research interest, the research question and the resource constraints. This original research design consisted of basically four elements: the interview method, the sample strategy, the concept of narrative identity and the method of interpretative text analysis. Some of the basics of qualitative interviewing have been described in detail in a previous chapter (II 1.4). Besides that, my interview method largely followed the guidelines and recommendations for biographical and narrative interviews of Rosenthal (Rosenthal 2005) and Helfferich (Helfferich 2005). I did not perceive much contention or insecurity in regards to interviewing. As a consequence, I do not address this element of the research design in a separate chapter but move straight to the sample strategy and definition of a target group (II 2.1). In the second step, I give a detailed account of Narrative Identity, both as a concept and a method of text interpretation (II 2.2.). As previously mentioned, my attention was caught by the idea of a constant interplay of theory and experience. In chapter II 2.3, I will thus add some reflections on the influence of sensitizing concepts, categories and previous knowledge.

As the research question is a good summary of the research design, it serves as an entry point for the presentation of the research design. Yet, as explained, I wanted to follow the principles of qualitative, interpretative research and not a hypothetico-deductive model. Thus, the the research question that I developed prior to my field research had a limited purpose. It did not constitute a question which should be answered at the end of the research process, rather it was a "problem statement" (Berg 2007: 34). As such it was a) a means to communicate and discuss the idea of my research in an academic context and b) the guide that led me into the field. It is therefore also helpful to structure the description of my research design. The research question was formulated as, "How do young Egyptian female Muslim upper class students at cultural and biographical intersections[100] construct their narrative identity in interaction with the researcher in regards to the essential themes of the particular phase of their life?". The "research problem" I was concerned with has already been laid out in detail in the introduction. In a nutshell, I was

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[100] I chose the term "intersection" not *despite* but *because* of its vagueness. Above that "intersections" mirrors beautifully the notion of intersectionality and hybridity that have come to constitute core concepts of post-colonial studies. Intersectionality refers to the notion that subjects are positioned by several cross-cutting structural categories (such as race, gender, religion, class) at a time. Hybridity refers to the creation of "third spaces" at the contact zones of cultures (as produced by colonialism) and to the fluid and multifaceted, mixed character of individual identities (as they are in particular created by and found in migrant biographies).

interested in the way individuals navigate the various societal trends in Egypt. I wanted to understand the individual actor's side of the contradictory macro phenomena like globalisation and Islamisation. Similarly, my understanding of human nature and my epistemological and ontological standpoints should have become clear by now (1). The research question reflects these in the terms "to construct" and "in interaction with the researcher". I will therefore not elaborate on these aspects here. As already indicated above, the constructivist and interactionist assumptions made me turn to the individual as the focus of my research. It also made me opt for an open form of qualitative interviewing.

"Narrative identity" in the research question refers to the method I had chosen: The narrative biographical interview as the primary method of data collection and a method of text analysis that would respect the principle of sequentiality seemed adequate translations of the qualitative research principles into method. In the narrative identity approach outlined by Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann I had found a comprehensive application of narrative interviewing that was firmly grounded in the constructivist and interactionist paradigm and opened a way to identity reconstruction[101]. In their work on narrative identity they combine "the theoretical concept of narrative identity" with a detailed conceptualisation. Furthermore they link it to the empirical manifestations of narrative identity and the according method of text interpretation (called simply *Textanalyse)*. The concept and method of Narrative Identity will be described in detail in II 2.2. I will include some remarks on the role of narration and the concept of identity that substantiate the conceptual basis. Before that, I want to explain the choice of my target group. In the research question, it was defined as "young Egyptian female Muslim upper class students at cultural and biographical intersections". This definition was based on the state of the research and my previous knowledge, as I will show in II 2.1. Also the (theoretical idea of my) strategy of sampling and the entry to the field will be explained. One part of the research question is still missing, though. I have completely dropped the reference to "the essential themes of the particular phase of life". It was originally inspired by theories from developmental theories. In the course of my research I became aware that the implied nomothetic logic is not reconcilable with the rest of my research approach (see I 3.5).

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[101] Meike Schwabe's review of the workbook, published in FQS Vol.4 No.3 Art.5, Sep 2003, offers a very positive account that is by no means exaggerated. It was this article that first drew my attention to the work of Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann.

2.1 The target group, strategic sampling and the entry to the field

"(...) young Egyptian female Muslim upper class students at cultural and biographical intersections"

In order to actually find, what I was looking for, I defined the target group as young Egyptian female Muslim upper(-middle) class[102] students. The rationale behind this was simple: after all I had learned about Egyptian society, I assumed that *upper(-middle) class* members were more exposed to conflicting trends and identity offers, than for example, the lower classes. To put it in different words: I assumed that upper (-middle) class youth were located at the very cultural intersection I was interested in. The trends in focus here are those described in chapters I 3.1 and I 3.2: on the one hand, "turning East", with the re-Islamisation of Egyptian society, and on the other hand, an orientation towards the West, its lifestyles and (cultural) consumption practices. This inner-Egyptian "clash of cultures" is reflected in the separation of the educational system into public, private Islamic and private foreign institutions (see I 3.3). Furthermore the high degree of education and material wealth rules out some standard arguments: other than with lower class research subjects, counter-intuitive decision making and identity construction cannot be easily reduced to issues of "false consciousness" or the lack of education. Selecting AUC students exclusively seemed reasonable because of Mehrez' (2008) description of AUC as a veritable microcosm of Egyptian society, where all the contradictions and cleavages become highlighted[103]. Moreover, by focusing on AUC students, I was sure to find interview partners that spoke English fluently. Most of them had been learning the language since early childhood in international/language schools, and felt at ease communicating in this (not-so) foreign language. Furthermore – based on the level of tuition fees charged by the university – I assumed that all AUC students stem from an upper(-middle) class family. Otherwise they would not be able to afford the tuition.[104] In addition, I was interested in reducing the heterogeneity of my target group. For this reason, I limited my sample to students at the American University rather than to all foreign universities in Cairo. The members of the German University Cairo, I assumed, would for example be less wealthy. In addition, they would be less exposed to contradictory trends, as the GUC

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[102] In contemporary Egypt, the upper middle class is closer to the upper class, than to the lower middle class. It therefore makes sense to speak of upper classes, comprising both the upper middle and the upper class. I did not differentiate between the two in my original research design.

[103] This is another simplifying assumption, because most class-cleavages are purposefully excluded from AUC.

[104] In hindsight this is a ridiculously simplifying assumption, but at that point of time it seemed very plausible to me. Now that I know better, I of course remember the attempts by my supervisor and experienced colleagues to question and doubt this supposition. Unfortunately I had too quickly brushed aside their warnings with a good amount of self-assertiveness.

campus provides quite a different environment and student mix than AUC. Lastly, also the restriction to "Muslim" women was due to the wish to make my sample less heterogeneous. I assumed that young women from Christian families[105] would confront quite different conditions than Muslim women. It might not even be the religious denomination per se that makes up for such a difference, but I assumed that the difference between minority and majority status in Egyptian society would matter.[106]

The selection of the age group and the biographical intersection follows a different rationale. A very basic supposition is that age matters. People of different ages and generations are different and do things differently.[107] This is first of all a common sense argument, but it can also be substantiated by research in various academic disciplines: Drawing on developmental psychology I distinguished between different phases of life, each having specific "developmental tasks".[108] Between 18 and 25 years of age, the women I interview, are in the phase of "early adulthood" (ranging from 18-30 years)" (Wenzler-Cremer 2005, S. 63). Even though modern concepts of identity consider identity formation a life-long process, early adulthood remains a developmental phase of considerable importance to an individual's self-construction. Moreover, the patriarchal construction (*not* nature!) of Egyptian society makes "age" one of the decisive everyday "lay" categories, that define an individual's positions and conditions. Furthermore, sociologists concerned with the Middle East are beginning to discover "youth" as a useful analytical category

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[105] According to official statistics Copts constitute around 10 % of the Egyptian population, up to 20 % according to other estimates.

[106] It might be worth to come back to that point later in the text. When I discussed this issue with young Egyptians they said I could well have included Christian AUC girls in my study as this would make no difference in lifestyle, degrees of freedom or thinking. Unfortunately I did not record these annotations carefully – only later did I become aware that such a statement might tell more about the speaker's position than about the life of Coptic girls. If uttered by someone who is not part of AUC or considers herself a minority, an alien within the AUC, the statement might be an expression of the idea "all AUCians are the same" – uttered not without contempt. If said by a Muslim girl inside AUC for example, it might be an attempt to deny differences and cleavages between the two communities.

[107] Shi-xu offers an interesting perspective of this difference between generations and the developmental tasks of life-phases. For him, the difference lies in divergent stories. He describes different cultures as rooted in the different stories they tell. As an example of a culture clash, he refers the emerging discrepancy of culture/norms of adolescents and their parents. Processes of emancipation and separation (Ablösungsprozesse) are conceptualised as a culture clash. The clashing parties, however, are unaware that the story of young adults fighting for increasing independence, is itself a culturally-bound story (Shi-xu 2002: 192). This does not only reconnect well to our focus on narration in self-construction, but also defines "culture" in a way that is relevant for the issue of inter-cultural research.

[108] While I have dropped the idea of "developmental tasks" as a useful sensitizing concept for the text interpretation, the theory of developmental phases still provides a useful means to distinguish young adults from elders and babies. A distinction that would never be questioned in daily life – unless our lay categories become non-viable in a specific situation. Child soldiers, under-age criminal offenders and mentally disabled people are three extreme cases that highlight the problematic aspects of "fixed" life phases.

(Bayat 2010: 28–30). Academia provides arguments about the distinction of various life phases and gives hints at the potential effects, eventually, however, it was my personal interest and position that made me opt for "youth" and not a different phase. Obviously it was the high degree of empathy that I have for this (i.e. my!) age group and the inclination to compare myself to them, which made me chose them for my study. The revolution now provided me also with a more general justification: the Egyptian revolution was in Egypt largely perceived as a "youth revolution". As Bayat had foreseen (Bayat 2010: 28-29), the youth played a decisive role in the Arab Spring, proving that "the youth movements have great transformative and democratizing promise" (Bayat 2010: 28-29).

The selection of a specific cohort of students also followed a rationale: I addressed students who were currently doing the last year of their bachelor course. This way I hoped to tap into the heightened need for identity-reconstruction caused by a biographical intersection. At the end of their studies for a first degree, the women find themselves at crossroads in their personal development. The end of their studies is a point at which they are facing important and tough decisions that (might) define the course of their lives. They can opt to get a job, to get married and start a family, or to continue their studies either at home or abroad.

By defining my target group this way, I undertook what Rosenthal (following Strauss) calls "selective sampling" (Rosenthal 2008: 86-87). I defined dimensions that were of interest to me (gender, age, class), based on the state of the research and my research interest. I selected a group of people who occupy certain (sometimes extreme) positions on these dimensions (female, young, upper (middle) class). I suspected that there I would find what I was looking for – conflicts, contradictions, and tensions. Yet, we could also understand this as a step of "theoretical sampling": "young female Muslim upper class students" merely defines a milieu or the setting of my research problem. I did not define the exact sample within this milieu beforehand (Rosenthal 2005: 86/87). To see it as an instance of theoretical sampling also fits better with the remainder of the sampling process: the sample evolved in the wake of the field research. I selected future interview partners on the basis of previous interview experiences and due to chance. The image that comes to my mind is that of "organic growth". Also in another sense my sampling strategy was identical to the two-step procedure of sampling Rosenthal proposed (Rosenthal 2005: 86/87). Her modification of Glaser's theoretical sampling claims to be more appropriate for interview research, and for research that underlies certain resource constraints. In the process, two samples are produced. First, a large theoretical sample of all interviews (12 in my case, all drawn from the milieu of the

target group). From this large sample, we draw a smaller sample of interviews, that are transcribed and analysed in-depth (Rosenthal 2005: 89). The smaller sample is selected on the basis of the *Globalanalysen* which are produced for each conducted interview (Rosenthal 2005: 92). Such a *Globalanalyse* is based on the field notes, on the observations regarding the individual (starting with the initial contact) and the postscript of the interview. The postscript itself is a short recapitulation of the interview. It gives an overview of the main issues that had been addressed in the interview. Also it helps to get (and keep!) a first impression of the central themes and anchoring points for interpretation and for the further sampling (Schorn 2000, S. 5 [14]). Once *Globalanalysen* have been generated, a first interview should be selected and transcribed. After the (preliminary) interpretation of this interview, a second interview is chosen, on basis of the global analyses that exist for all the interviewees. The principle of selection can be that of minimal or maximal contrast (Rosenthal 2005: 96): the researcher chooses either an interview (or "case") that on a superficial level is most similar to the first interview. Then the in-depth analysis shall reveal the supposed underlying mechanisms. Or, in a maximum-contrast setting, the researcher chooses the interview which is superficially most distinct. The micro analysis then looks at the underlying commonalities. Other than Rosenthal, I do not aim at the (re)construction of types. Rather, the use of the contrastive principle for the theoretical sampling, serves to inspire some creative reflections on the interviews.) As explained, I had defined my target group according to a semi-selective rationale. Nonetheless, I intended to follow Rosenthal's two-step theoretical sampling in the remainder of the project. I planned to interview ten persons and later select three interviews for in-depth analysis. Whether my sampling strategy should thus be called "selective" or "theoretical", is a matter of perspective. It depends on where we draw the line between a problem definition and sampling.

For gaining access to the field and approaching my larger sample of interview partners, I relied on my existing networks in Cairo. In particular three different families that I had come to know in previous stays should serve as a starting point for snowballing. I was optimistic that several of my friends could help me find interview partners, who then again would approach their friends and acquaintances for further interviews and so on.[109]

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[109] Rosenthal recommends two appointments (minimum) for biographical interviews, first in order to get feedback on how the first interview affected the interviewee and her surroundings. Second to have the opportunity to close gaps that showed in the first interview. Third, to build trust that allows for a more relaxed atmosphere in the second interview (Rosenthal 2005: 92). There might indeed be considerable advantages to a second encounter – yet it also might cause additional difficulties. Although I was tempted by the benefits of a second interview session I did not want to adopt this strategy unless I had these questions regarding potential difficulties convincingly resolved.

2.2 Narration and narrative identity – manifestations of narrative identity and text analysis

"(...) construct their identity in interaction with the researcher(...)"

I do not consider the autobiographical accounts from my interviewees as "monological narratives drawn from autobiographical memory" (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2000: 199). This study rests on a constructivist and interactionist (or communicative) understanding of narration, narrative interviewing and biography (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2000: 199). In an interactionist perspective story is as much a product of a situation as of the interacting participants (Freeman 2007: 139). Research on narrative identity has come to put "emphasis on cognitive models of autobiographical memory" (Baddeley and Singer 2007: 178), meaning that narrations are never pure memory retrievals. Rather, narrations themselves already constitute interpretations. To put it differently, within the terminology of double hermeneutics: narrations are already first order constructions (Matt 2001: 100–107)[110]. This perspective draws our attention to several features of narration-construction (Matt 2001: 100–107), the first one being that the narration is adapted to the current listener and the prospective or imagined audience (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2000: 214–215). That also means the specific dynamics (*Erzählzwänge*, a term going back to Schütze) which apply in the interview, are mediated by the concrete interaction (Matt 2001: 95). How detailed a story is told, for example, depends on the positioning and relationship of narrator and listener, as well as on social expectations. Plus, the need to contextualise varies with the interviewee's image of the researcher (Göymen-Steck 2009: 149). The narration is adapted to the listener, but more than that, the whole interaction is directed to the audience. The narrator has an interactive goal. She could, for example, try to present herself as a good, knowledgeable interviewee whose narration is helpful to the researcher. She could also be motivated by the wish to entertain the listener with her own story. Regardless of the exact goal of the impression management, the narrator never wants to merely portray things "as they were". She also wants to make an argument, why these stories in specific are of relevance. In addition, narrations are always constructed with a reference to the present and the future: the social past is not fixed, but it changes with the social future (van Lagenhove and Harré 1999: 15).

> "First as we have already seen the interpretation and writing of the personal past, far from being a dispassionate process of reproducing what was, is instead a product of the present and the interests, needs, and wishes that attend it. This present, however – along with the

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[110] Matt emphasises that there was no fundamental difference between daily narrating and scientific narrating – a perspective shared in much qualitative research (Matt 2001: 100–107).

self whose present it is – is itself transformed in and through the process at hand. Indeed, in a distinct sense, a new self is fashioned via this very process (...)" (Freeman 2007: 137–138).

Thus in a constructivist understanding, the idea of distinguishing between 1) things as they happened, 2) things as they were experienced, and 3) things as they are told, is not a useful distinction. This forces us to abandon Schütze's understanding of narrations as the "more authentic" form of talk. In this rationale (Fuchs-Heinritz 2009: 198–200), narration is, in comparison to the other text sorts, description, and argumentation, the most authentic. It is closest to "the things as they happened in reality", and thus, most valuable for research. Consequently the researcher-interviewer tries to elicit narrations in the interview and gives preference to them in the analysis. The other sorts of text are treated as a "deviation" from the real story. They are seen as an evasive strategy, and thus taken as an indication of the interviewee's unwillingness to speak about the topic at stake in that specific moment of the interview (Fuchs-Heinritz 2009: 198–200). A constructivist must deny these standards of authenticity. Eventually, she even foregoes the idea that narrative interviews could bring the researcher close to 'experiences in the past'. A constructivist understanding of narration therefore also has considerable importance for our understanding of biographical accounts. If we imagine the field of biographical research, we see two poles: at one pole biographical narrations are treated as a pure effect of the present situation (constructionist position). At the other pole, where the 'biographical realists' reside, biographical narrations are taken as the truthful representation of factual events that happened in a persons life (realist position). This study is clearly much closer to the constructionist end of the spectrum. Spiegel, in her study on female activism for women's rights in Malaysia, tries to balance those two methodological positions.[111] Even though her realist tendency might be unintended, her language reveals what kind of concept of memory and remembering she believes in: "The narrator *activates* the perspectives that she had immediately after the event (...)" (Spiegel 2010: 56). In a constructivist understanding (no matter whether in terms of sociological or psychological constructivism) this – is simply speaking – not possible.[112] In psychology there is ample evidence that the production of memory depends on the present. Consensus in psychology's scientific community is moving towards a model of brain function, in which 'remembering' is not based on the *retrieval* or *activation*[113] of information but on its *reconstruction*

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[111] In my opinion, she ends up way too far on the 'realists' side.

[112] To be fair to Spiegel: she kind of revokes that perspective again, emphasizing how the evaluation of an experience is shaped by everything that happened after, reflecting the sedimented character of experience and identity – yet, she remains with the formulation "activate" memory/experience/knowledge.

[113] There isn't much to 'activate' besides neurons.

– meaning that recalling an event basically means reconstructing it. Spiegel's 'terminological slip' is interesting insofar, as it seems to shed light on the subjective and embedded character of the researcher. There is an irresolvable tension between academic (post-modern and constructivist) constructions of identity, and our self-perception as a unitary person. The very function of identity, is to bestow us as human beings with a sense of coherence and continuity. The feeling of being real as one person across time and places (see below) is essential to our self-understanding. The idea that none of this is reliable, or 'real' can be scary (Spiegel 2010: 56). It is in this context that Wortham warns "we should not trade psychological essentialism for social essentialism. (...) Simple constructivist accounts cannot explain the sense of individual continuity and agency captured by the traditional psychological concept of self" (Wortham 1999: 97). In his elaborations on identity and positioning, Wortham tries to bridge this gap, an aspiration also shared by Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann who strongly draw on Wortham's work. The constructed nature of memory and narration notwithstanding, authenticity is relevant for the work with narrative interviews in general, and biographical accounts in particular. The interviewees respond to the frame of the situation,[114] by applying various communicative strategies, to enhance the conveyed authenticity of their account (Göymen-Steck 2009: 150) (see III 1.2 for a practical example).

Narration is interactive, not only in reference to the role one takes in the interaction, but also as act of meaning production. Narration is also a way of establishing a shared interpretation of experience and of the world. In its performative dimension, it is even a way of world-making. In her narration, the individual presents reality as experienced by herself, and thereby tries to share her subjective reality ("Erfahrbarmachen von subjektiver Wirklichkeit" (Matt 2001: 94)). If the production of a shared interpretation is successful, inter-subjectivity is established, and the subjective experience is socially accepted and confirmed (Matt 2001: 95)[115]. The narrative construction not only aims to establish socially shared meanings, it also relies on social and cultural repertoires for the construction. The interpretations, attributions of meaning, and causality conveyed in a narration, are not arbitrary, but rather derived from the narrator's social context (Matt 2001: 96). Narrative construction also draws on cultural narrative patterns (Matt 2001: 103–106) or genres (Andrews et al. 2004: 116–118). For Matt, this location of narrations at the intersection of society and individual experience, and their world-constituting function, make

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[114] Göymen-Steck speaks of the "Zumutung (...) sich authentisch darstellen zu müssen, gleichzeitig ganz besonders und für ein virtuelles Publikum zumindest noch so vertraut zu sein, dass die erzählte Identität nachvollziehbar bleibt" (Thomas Göymen-Steck: 150).

[115] Note that this description also applies to the establishment of inter-subjectivity in the communication of research results.

narrations (and the narrative interview) a prime resource for analysing social reality:

> "Die Eigenschaft erzählter Geschichten, vergemeinschaftend und u.U. gar kulturstiftend zu sein, soziale Wirklichkeit zu repräsentieren, Sinnzusammenhänge zum Ausdruck zu bringen, kulturelle Traditionen lebendig zu halten (Gergen 1998), erweist sie (und infolgedessen das 'narrative' Interview) als besonders geeignet als Analyseressource sozialer Wirklichkeit in ethnographisch orientierten Verfahren. Auf diese Weise kann ein Zugang zur Wirklichkeit der Interviewten gefunden werden, durch aktives Zuhören die Relevanz der Geschichten eingeschätzt und nachvollzogen werden" (Matt 2001: 94–95).

Narrative inquiry is thus not only concerned with subjective perspectives but with their role as part of a 'larger' context. Research on narrative identity shares a "commitment to studying sociocultural factors in identity formation" (Baddeley and Singer 2007: 178). In Baddeley's understanding, "(...) narratives at each phase of the life cycle reflect a narrator's unique personal concerns but never in isolation from interpersonal and sociocultural contexts" (Baddeley and Singer 2007: 178). In the analysis, these sociocultural contexts point beyond the individual's narration. As a result, Andrews gives the researcher the advice to gather knowledge about the interviewee's community prior to data collection. Historical events and narratives form the backdrop of the individual's biography (Andrews 2007: 499):

> "But if one is conducting research outside of one's own community (...) it is imperative to obtain a sense of what the larger narratives are that guide the self-understanding, and therefore self-presentation, of that group" (Andrews 2007: 506).

The concept of narrative identity

In her critical essay on identity, Brubaker and Cooper (2000) provide a concise overview of the concept's development. This quick review of the history of identity in social sciences brings up the same figures we have already encountered in the context of the epistemological foundations and the history of qualitative research. They summarise the early history of identity as follows:

> "The introduction of 'identity' into social analysis and its initial diffusion in the social sciences and public discourse occurred in the United States in the 1960s (with some anticipations in the second half of the 1950s). The most important and best-known trajectory involved the appropriation and popularization of the work of Erik Erikson (who was responsible, among other things, for coining the term 'identity crisis'). (...) Symbolic interactionist sociology, concerned from the outset with 'the self', came increasingly to speak of 'identity,' in part through the influence of Anselm Strauss. More influential in popularizing the notion of identity, however, were Erving Goffman, working on the periphery of the symbolic interactionist tradition, and Peter Berger, working in social constructionist and phenomenological traditions" (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 2-3).[116]

Brubaker and Cooper further elaborate on the basic traits of a constructivist take on identity:

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[116] For the later development of the identity discussion in the German context, see Wenzler-Cremer (2005: 67 FN 55).

> "[The] researchers working from a social constructivist stance reject any 'natural' account of the self but retain the idea of self as a social creation. This viewpoint assumes a self capable of generating meaning, but these meanings are necessarily conveyed through structures (logical, syntactical) that are social in nature. In brief, the narrator (and the narrative) cannot be separated from the social context. This stance blurs the traditional disciplinary boundaries among psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists. These researchers view the narrator as self-reflective within a social context. In an interview analysis then it is possible to interpret relations between external (social) contingencies and internal (individual and self-reflective) experience. Often this includes an examination not only of the participant's social experience but also of multiple truths and shifting identity positions" (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 3).

In their concept of narrative identity,[117] Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann draw on these modern identity theories of interactionist and social-constructivist origin. They do not consider identity as a fixed entity, produced during adolescence. Instead, identity-construction is seen as an ongoing, never ending, open process[118] (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 49). Rather, than a fixed entity, identity is a *multifaceted*, *situationally* constructed and dynamic structure that needs to be constantly reproduced and reconstructed throughout *the course of our lives.* Identity is socially constituted in several ways: It is an *interactive* and *social* process, insofar as identity claims need to be affirmed by the social environment of a person. The shape identity construction takes, depends on the concrete social interaction (i.e. situation and people) in which it is constructed. Above that, the means and nature of identity construction are conditioned by the socio-cultural-historical setting (and our social location therein) and the respective identity offers.[119] In modern societies, plural and complex individuals find "vielfältige Definitionsräume und identitätskonstruktive Möglichkeiten" (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 50), which are to a large extent produced by the media. It is a characteristic of modernity that today, individuals move and act within changing social contexts, and thus have various separate fields for (inter)action and identity construction. Culture provides a source of potential identities, and identity-relevant images. Socio-structural categories such as age, gender, nationality, and religion offer identity-relevant attributes. Institutions (like schools, universities, and sports clubs) provide models and set limitations (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 49–50). Identity construction is shaped and restricted by relations of power, dependent on the cultural models[120] and conditioned by the (language, cognitive,

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[117] For an overview of the various concepts and theoretical constructions that have been developed around narrative identity, see Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann (2002: 53–55).

[118] Erikson, the pioneer of personality psychology, who propagated the term "identity" was one of the first who "understood that the construction of a coherent purposeful self-concept, or what he called identity, is a psychosocial process" (Baddeley and Singer 2007: 177).

[119] As forms of social influences Baddeley mentions: intimate and personal relations, community, institutions, political pressures. Everyone is struggling for a unique self but still "drawing on social influences that provide much of its raw material and often play a sculpting hand in its expression" (Baddeley and Singer 2007: 178).

[120] The cultural and "social scripts and templates" are normative for identity formation (Baddeley and Singer 2007:

instrumental, material) resources available to the individual person (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 49–51). Seen from that angle, the post-modern Western society produces the fractured identities that are the subject of the burgeoning literature on identity (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 48–49).[121] In the case of Egypt, "turning east" and "turning west" offers concurrent cultural models for identity construction. Education enhances the individual's communicative resources but also results in conflicting identity offers. For young Egyptian women, specific identity claims provoke different social reactions in different contexts (e.g. peer versus family). Patriarchal structures of power further limit the 'choice' of identity.

The medium of interactive identity work (as ongoing obligation) is language. Through language, we present ourselves, re-design our identity, communicate it to others and negotiate it in interpersonal encounters. Others reject and confirm our identity construction through language. Also through language we make use of the meaning-making-frames that our culture offers (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 49). Narration, a specific form of language-based communication, is supposed to have a constitutive function for the self.[122]

> "Dabei kommt der Sprache eine besondere Bedeutung zu, denn sie ist das Medium, mit dem wir uns selbst anderen gegenüber darstellen und unsere Identität immer wieder neu erschaffen. In der sozialen Interaktion präsentieren sich Individuen auf eine bestimmte Weise, bestätigen das Bild, das sich andere oder sie selbst von sich machen oder sie weisen bestimmte Zuschreibungen zurück. Eine besondere Form der Kommunikation ist das Erzählen, das identitätsstiftende Kraft hat. Die narrative Psychologie hebt die große Bedeutung von Erzählungen, besonders der autobiografischen, hervor für die Bedeutungszuschreibung und Sinngebung in den Lebensentwürfen Einzelner. Die narrative Identität erlaubt einen empirischen Zugang zur alltäglichen Identitätsarbeit, denn die verwendeten sprachlichen Muster, die Abfolge von Inhalten und Argumenten können textanalytisch ausgewertet werden und erlauben es, Hypothesen zur Identitätskonstruktion einer Person zu formulieren" (Wenzler-Cremer 2005: 68–69).

The function of narrative identity

Even though (post)modern concepts of identity emphasise its character as a work in progress, and also its un-fixedness, the major task of an individual's identity work remains to establish a sense of

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198). They define "the ways we live our lives, but also the ways that we remember and feel about our pasts" (Baddeley and Singer 2007: 182). One of the strongest norm for biography construction is that of temporal coherence: there is a normative sequence of life events, constituting a powerful cultural script (Baddeley and Singer 2007: 182).

[121] Argumentatively we run here into the problem that encumbers most post-modern theories: if the perception of fractured identities is conditioned by the contemporary Western society (its discourses and structures if you want), so is the concept of a socially-and temporally bound identity per se. I will not delve any more on that issue in order to avoid the usual post-modern headache.

[122] Most prominent in this respect has become McAdams' term of the "storied self".

continuity and *coherence.*[123] Continuity is the integration of identity over time, the temporal unity. Coherence points to the unity across fields of life, the integration of divergent demands of roles, tasks, positions, relations, needs, motives etc. (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 48–49) (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002, S. 48–49). Identity has a guiding and orienting function for our actions, and our self-interpretation, and also serves a *communicative* purpose in interaction with others.[124] It is thus communicative in a double (if not double-double) sense: narrative identity is established through communication and with a communicative purpose The communicative purpose refers to both the social environment and the self. In narrative identity, the two core functions of identity, integration and communication, have to be realised across three different dimensions: the temporal, the social and the self-related/self-referential dimension of narrative identity.

Narrating identity also allows the subject to 'test' various elements and attributions of identity in an interactive, social setting. It provides the opportunity "'zur Unterscheidung des Selbst von andren als taugliche empfundene Kategorien zu identifizieren und sie auf ihre sprachliche Anschlussfähigkeit hin zu erproben' (Nassehi and Saake 2002: 74)" (quoted in Göymen-Steck 2009: 150). While Göymen-Steck sees the purpose here primarily in testing whether identity elements are interactionally functional, one could also pick up Reddy's concept of "emotives" (Reddy 2001). This means, the speaker is also undertaking a *self-referential test*, checking whether an identity attribute 'feels right'. Emotional expression – or in our case – identity expression, is hence (Reddy 2001) considered a type of speech act with performative character. This notion is similar to what Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann term the self-referential character of narration, or the tentative aspect of self-narrations (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2000: 214). Biographical interviewing is always a process of both displaying and producing identity. The text produced in a narrative biographical interview is thus a record of the presentation and the production of a situational

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[123] Coherence comes in various forms. Ontological coherence as a quality of a person's identity is of importance to the self-understanding of an individual but cannot be the matter at stake in the analysis of a narrative self-presentation. In this concrete case coherence can be defined as a) local coherence, that is the internal coherence of a text segment, b) coherence across various text segments and c) coherence of the case as a whole (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 286–287). Supposed incoherence on either of these levels provides an entrance point for analysis. The researcher can use this as an incentive to question the type of coherence, ask where it is produced in what way, where it is lacking, whether there is a unifying principle or argument at a different level that could produce a sense of coherence again (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 286–287).

[124] A slightly different conceptualisation is provided by Wortham (2001). He distinguishes representative and interactional function. Both can constitute a means of constructing identity in a certain way (e.g. if a person presents herself as cowardish she can by this become this cowardish person, this is then performative and representative); the interactional aspect refers to positioning in the given moment and *enacting* a particular identity in the conversation (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 55–56).

identity.

Manifestation and text analysis

According to the concept of Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann the three levels of identity work are the entrance point to the empirical analysis of narrative identity (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 51). In the concrete interview situation with the researcher, the narrator undertakes identity work on three dimensions. The manifestations of this (communicative and integrative) identity work are empirically accessible to the researcher: "[u]m Identität empirisch zu erforschen, müssen wir sie in ihren konkreten Manifestationen in der Art und Weise aufsuchen, wie eine Person die Verständigungs- und Integrationsleistungen auf diesen drei Ebenen vollzieht" (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 51). According to them, self-narrations are specifically apt to trigger and show identity work. Biographic narrations do not only show the process of presenting and producing identity, they are also a presentation of the (social and material) life-world and conditions of the interviewee. Yet, every concrete narration can always only constitute a part of "the totality of narrative identity [which] is to be conceived of as the virtual potential of different stories a person might tell about him- or herself at different times and in different circumstances" (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2000: 200–201). Other than "small stories" which are produced in a variety of daily and scientific contexts, life stories treat a large variety of topics, "claim to represent a person's identity as such" (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2000: 201), and are designed accordingly. They are thus as close as a researcher can get to the totality of narrative identity.

Once the interviews are conducted, we have – in the form of the recordings and the transcripts – the data material for "a systematic empirical case-based inquiry" (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2000: 216) into the local and interactive construction of narrative identity. The data analysis follows a certain chronology and combines various elements. First, the global structure of the biographical narration is analysed before the researcher turns to text segments in the micro text analysis. Ideally the text analysis

> "is done by a sequential word-for-word analysis that respects and reconstructs the temporal process of the emerging narrative. This sequential approach inspired by conversation analysis (...) is to be complemented by a hermeneuti-cal approach that connects parts and the whole of the narrative with what is known about the background of the interview" (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2000: 216).

All the context knowledge about the previous interaction, the person of the interviewee, the wider circumstances must "not be used deductively to yield interpretations. Rather, they function as

sensitizing, potentially relevant knowledge, while its actual relevance has to be displayed in accordance with the transcript." (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2000: 217). Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann offer various tools that open the way to recognizing "empirical traces" of identity construction in the transcript. The construction process is traced across the three dimensions of narrative identity:

1. The **temporal dimension** is manifest in the narrated events and experiences. It is of relevance how these elements are linked and how they are explained or justified (as indicated by terms such as "because" or "in order to") (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 56-57). Moreover, various narrative models of time perception can be employed by the narrator, and different concepts of agency and space for action constructed (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 59-60). Eventually, it is of interest to see how the development or transformation from an earlier self to the present self is represented, and constructed in the interview (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 60).

2. The **social dimension** of identity is interactively produced in the interview situation by positioning. "Positioning" is one of the tools that refers to all levels of identity work: the narrator positions the past self of the story (vis-a-vis the present self, among others), the other actors in the story, the actual self, and also the interviewer in the present (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 61–63). Furthermore, the narrative presents the interviewer with the narrator's individual perception of her social and material world. This world-construction serves as the background for her story (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 63–65). Another important empirical manifestation of identity work is the integration of "cultural plots". Roles and linguistic or communicative conventions are examples (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 66–67).

3. On the **self-related dimension** there are three entry points for the reconstruction of narrative identity (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 55–74): self-referential statements, other auto-epistemic processes, and the construction of relations between the various levels (e.g. how is an earlier self integrated, if at all? How are tensions dealt with?). An example of this dimension is the self-attribution of various social identities, roles, or characteristics. Another is the explanation of the own actions with reference to "theories" about the functioning of the self (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 67–70). An empirical trace of such auto-epistemic processes is 'linguistic chaos'. Unfinished sentences, grammar mistakes, or argumentative insertions indicate that the interviewee is currently searching for, or rather *working on*, the development of new perspectives and explanations (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 72). As already mentioned, certain specific mechanisms (*Erzählzwänge*) are responsible for the potential of narrative interviewing to

'uncover' implicit knowledge, inner conflicts and ambivalences of the interviewee. These mechanisms function on the various levels. An example for the self-referential dimension shall suffice here: The presence of the interviewer forces the interviewee to transcend self-reflection and put the own identity construction under 'social' scrutiny. This way, an active (auto-epistemic) process is initiated, which leads to new emerging aspects of identity.

The identity work across these dimensions is reconstructed in an analysis that constantly oscillates between the global structure of the biographical narration and the local segments used for the microanalysis. In order to grasp the text in its totality, Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann propagate a first step of analysis that focuses primarily on the structural features of the text (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 109–176). The sequence of events and biographical stations are distilled from the text - or, to put it differently, they are *retold*. The sequence of text sorts is identified, and the interrelation of passages in the overall structure is reconstructed. This phase of structuring the text according to biographical phases and textual features (such as text sorts) corresponds to what I called 'coding' in (I.1.4). After summarising the overall structure, the work with "time" and "perspectives", and the topics addressed, the researcher selects text segments for the micro analysis – on grounds of linguistic and thematic specificities.

In the sequential microanalysis step (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 177–288), the usual questions (What? How? Why?) are brought on the text. Well-established tools such as variation analysis, context analysis, and the analysis of expectations are proposed to facilitate the interpretation. The positioning analysis, a rather unique tool for micro analysis, is made one of the core elements of the approach. In addition, the analysis of communicative strategies (drawing strongly on research on linguistics and argumentation) is added to the tools of text analysis. The pure amount and variety of tools offered here by Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann, suggest that the authors are providing more of a toolbox, rather than a stringent guide to text analysis. In this sense, their approach resembles the publications of Jan Kruse. He makes it a point to provide the student of interpretative social science with a toolbox whose elements have to be mixed and matched in accordance with the individual subject under investigation (2007).

While many elements of the toolbox are known from other approaches to interpretative text analysis, Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann seem to consider positioning analysis a particularly innovative element of their approach. We will thus look at positioning in more detail. (For details on the other tools and elements, see the respective chapters in Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002). The concept of positioning helps to structure and guide attention in the text analysis. In

addition, it also captures the interactive nature of identity construction, and allows to reconstruct in particular the "performance aspect of storytelling" (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2000: 202). By analysing positioning in reference to the researcher in the actual situation of the interview, the interactionist aspect can be systematically integrated into the analysis. Moreover, positioning reflects the idea that one person can appear as various selves within one (biographical) story, without this multiplicity being a mental condition. The challenge is to bring together the idea of a splintered identity with the phenomenon of a more or less coherent story.

> "Persons as speakers acquire beliefs about themselves which do not necessarily form a unified coherent whole. They shift from one to another way of thinking about themselves as the discourse shifts and as their positions within varying storylines are taken up. Each of these possible selves can be internally contradictory or contradictory with other possible selves located in different storylines. Like the flux of past events, conceptions people have about them-selves are disjointed until and unless they are located in a story" (Davies and Harré 1999: 49).

In its concrete application to the text, positioning analysis means that we direct attention to 1) how the narrator posits herself vis-a-vis the researcher in the present situation (i.e. telling self) and how the researcher (inter)reacts in the present situation, 2) how the narrator positions herself vis-a-vis the former and the present told self in the story, 3) how other persons in the story are positioned (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 61–63) and 4) what the relation between the told and the telling self's position is. Positioning can happen explicitly, for example by "characterizing self and others," and also implicitly, for example by "depicting and re-animating their actions" (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2000: 211). The narrator can do positioning directly or indirectly through the statements of figures in the story. In its more complex form, positioning can be done by the complex temporal relations in the story, or by plotting: "[t]he organization of the plot can be used as a device to position interacting figures performatively without explicitly ascribing features to persons" (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2000: 211). The indirect, implicit and complex operations of positioning have three advantages: they enhance authenticity, convey 'factuality' of the positioning and immunise the claims against critique. (See Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann (2000: 210–212) for more examples of how positioning can be achieved in storytelling.)

Further entrance points to the analysis of the autobiographic narration and the reconstruction of narrative identity based on its textual manifestations are key narrations, "well-established story elements" and "presentational crises" (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2000: 218). All of these are aspects that transcend the local interactive situation. Key narrations are stories "which account for

dominant or critical biographical experiences or decisions" (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2000: 218). Such key stories can be identified by linguistic (e.g. internal structure, scenic presentation, local indexicality) and thematic criteria. Often the narrator even draws the researcher's attention to these kind of key narrations by remarking on their importance (by use of an evaluative meta comment). Stories that function as a pivot of the narration as a whole are also remarkable. Well-established story elements are "anecdotes, metaphors and figures of speech which by their skilful and efficient presentation suggest that they already have often been retold, thus providing a stock of personal stories that are routinely used for entertainment or justification"(Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2000: 218). Such well-established elements also appear in specific forms: often justifications, argumentations and explanations from therapeutic work have found entrance into the fix repertoire of the narrator. "Presentational crises" are moments, when auto-epistemic processes become visible, as they narrator has increasing problems to continue the narration, and seems to encounter problems to maintain coherence, and consistency of the story (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2000: 218).

Altogether the various tools and conceptualisations by Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann offer the theoretical foundations and a multifaceted toolbox for the interpretation and reconstruction of narrative identity co-produced by researcher and interviewee in biographical interviews. Before we turn to my experience with the practical implementation of this approach in my research project, I would like to discuss the last part of my research question "(...) in regards to the essential themes of the particular phase of life (...)" in relation to the question of sensitizing concepts and context knowledge.

2.3 Dealing with categories and concepts

"(...) in regards to the essential themes of the particular phase of life (...)"

In order to avoid being too vague, I defined a topical focus for the research in the guiding question: "in reference to the **essential themes of the particular phase of life".** This was conceptual nonsense, but valuable as it a) expressed the researchers uneasiness with the 'vagueness' and 'messy' character of qualitative research, b) constituted an attempt to reconcile the demands of my supervisor and the principles of interpretative research and lastly c) sensitised me to the problem of prior knowledge and categories. By referring to the developmental tasks of young adulthood[125] in the research question I tried to nail down what could not be nailed down at that point. I wanted to define the potential themes that could be addressed in the interviews *in advance*. Naturally I had assumptions about topics that might arise in the interviews. These came from my previous experience, knowledge of the state of the research, and all the other random information stored in my head. Yet, they were to be treated as sensitizing concepts, not as part of the research question. As sensitizing concepts, prior knowledge and categories guided me in defining the sample, drafting and conducting the interview and doing the text analysis. That means, I was sensitive to issues of "gender", "family" and "Islam" but did not *search* for them in the text. The critical reader might be sceptical now – and rightly so. At this point we confront the inherent tension between the demand for "openness" in the qualitative, interpretative paradigm and the inevitability[126] of presuppositions[127]. Eventually it is upon the researcher to work on (or with) this seeming contradiction. For this reason it is of considerable importance to 1) be aware of this tension, 2) reflect it in the choice of method and design of research, 3) address explicitly the (changing) relation between theoretical in advance knowledge and empirical findings during the gathering of data and interpretation.[128]

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[125] The tasks of this phase are 1) developing the self-concept, 2) reshaping of relations to family and peers, 3) developing a vision for the own future and 4) locating oneself within society and state (Wenzler-Cremer 2000: 64).

[126] Already the choice of method and the research design imply the application of theoretical knowledge. Also, the choice of the subject under investigation and the interest for a certain research question are necessarily guided by knowledge and (intuitive) hypotheses of various kinds (e.g. emerging from the acquaintance with existing studies/research or from prior personal experience). In psychology, this is captured very well in the notion that schemata always guide our attention, perception, and interpretation of situations and actions.

[127] 'Presupposition' often carries a negative connotation. In its everyday meaning it is an assumption formed without prior knowledge, or at least without adequate knowledge. Yet, this is actually the opposite of what we mean in qualitative research. I am here speaking of (well-grounded) knowledge, but one that precedes research in the field within the specific research project.

[128] When searching for a method, I got the impression that these demands were best met in Witzel's problem-oriented research approach (Lamnek 2005: 365). For various reasons (among them the epistemologically

A related problem is that of context knowledge. A common distinction that Schlücker refers to is that of bad and good context knowledge. Good context knowledge is text-immanent, bad context knowledge is text-exmanent. In a sequential analysis, all knowledge that has been established in the preceding text passages is text-immanent. This distinction, however, ignores one basic supposition of understanding: *no* interpretation *at all* would be possible without social and historic context knowledge and personal experience. Therefore, to claim a *contradiction* between openness in the interpretation and the existence of prior knowledge is a misconception. Rather we should speak of certain *tensions* between the demand for openness and the need to apply context knowledge to interpret the data (Schlücker 2008). A 'tabula rasa' state or the notorious 'blank slate' of the interviewer's mind, however, is neither realistic nor desirable. Strauss asserts the value of prior knowledge for the research process: the researcher *has* to contribute her theoretical know-how and expertise, her experience with research and also her personal experiences (Strauss 1998: 36). Moreover, if we want to produce research of relevance, we have to locate our individual cases within a larger context: "[a]uch erfordert eine konsequent sozialwissenschaftliche Auswertung von Interviews die Einbettung der subjektiven Perspektiven und Wissensbestände in die jeweiligen Diskurse, in denen sie entstanden sind oder sich verändert haben" (Rosenthal 2005: 17). Consequently qualitative, reconstructive, interpretative research also requires the researcher to do theoretical research prior to entering the field. To repeat Andrews here: "(...) it is imperative to obtain a sense of what the larger narratives are that guide the self-understanding, and therefore self-presentation, of that group [under study]" (Andrews 2007: 506).

So if we are obliged to gather prior knowledge, how are we supposed to treat this knowledge in interpretative research? Silverman speaks of "theoretically-informed research" (2008: 5) that relies on "guiding principles". The degree to which guiding principles define the course of the research, though, can vary (2008: 5). The German sociologist Kruse employs the term "container categories", which I found quite imaginative (2007). The container categories inform the choice of target group and the sampling. They guide the perception and provide signposts for interpretation in the step of text analysis. Yet, the categories remain abstract and underspecified as to content and their meaning in the very particular context of the research. It is through the research and the reconstructive analysis that they 'come to life'. An example from my research could be the container category "self-characterisation" or "group affiliation": it is very reasonable to assume

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problematic stance implicit in the problem-centred interview) I nonetheless chose the narrative interview.

that in their narrative identity construction, my interview partners characterise themselves in a certain way or speak of themselves as a member of a larger collective. I thus kept my eyes (and ears) open for respective utterances in the interviews. Yet, it is by no means defined in what way the interviewees describe themselves, nor what kind of groups they feel connected with.

The most famous and helpful theoretical take on this issue, though, might be the popular concept of sensitizing concepts, first introduced in 1954 by Herbert Blumer (Blumer 1954), the founding father of symbolic interactionism, and later popularised in the context of grounded theory, by Glaser (see for example Bowen (2006)). Blumer distinguishes between definitive and sensitizing concepts:

> "I think that thoughtful study shows conclusively that the concepts of our discipline are fundamentally sensitizing instruments. Hence, I call them sensitizing concepts and put them in contrast with definitive concepts such as I have been referring to in the foregoing discussion. A definitive concept refers precisely to what is common to a class of objects, by the aid of a clear definition in terms of attributes or fixed bench marks. This definition, or the bench marks, serve as a means of clearly identifying the individual instance of the class and the make-up of that instance that is covered by the concept. A sensitizing concept lacks such specification of attributes or bench marks and consequently it does not enable the user to move directly to the instance and its relevant content. Instead, it gives the user a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances. Whereas definitive concepts provide prescriptions of what to see, sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look. The hundreds of our concepts — like culture, institutions, social structure, mores, and personality — are not definitive concepts but are sensitizing in nature. They lack precise reference and have no bench marks which allow a clean-cut identification of a specific instance and of its content. Instead, they rest on a general sense of what is relevant. There can scarcely be any dispute over this characterization" (Blumer 1954).

In qualitative social research sensitizing concepts stand at the beginning of the research process. They offer a way into the field and can be seen as the equivalent of hypotheses in theoretico-deductive research models (Bowen 2006: 3).

Usually, any researcher who wants to earn the label "interpretative" or "reconstructive" would insist that all categories were built inductively, and that prior to the reconstructive analysis nothing but sensitizing concepts were used. In reality, though, things seem to be more complex. Take for example the coding of data prior to micro analysis: the structuring is carried out on basis of sensitizing concepts such as "biographical phases", "conflict", "religion" and structural criteria such as "text sort", "self-characterisation", "metaphor". These structural criteria are essentially categories, derived from linguistics. Within the realm of linguistics, they would then constitute "definitive concepts". It is thus a question of standpoint and perspective whether a concept is definitive or sensitizing. Similarly, in the process of text analysis, categories can change their status

from inductive to deductive categories. A concept or category that I developed inductively through my analysis of text passages becomes deductive the moment I search for comparable passages in other parts of the text or in other texts.[129] The main point is: the status of a category or a concept as definitive or sensitising is not internal to the concept or category, but depends on the context.

Let us now return from the theoretical heights to the practical lows of my research project: "the particular themes of their life phase", "gender", "religion", "family", "globalisation" were sensitizing concepts that guided my way into the field, helped me define my sample, and develop a strategy for conducting my interviews. "Text forms", "metaphors", "self-referent expressions", and "positioning" were container categories that guided my text analysis. Some preliminary categories such as "geographic location", "veiled" and "real AUCian" were reconstructed inductively on the basis of the interview postscripts and acquired deductive status in the next step of analysis. Other categories or concepts such as "class" suffered again a different fate: I made use of them in the formulation of my research problem without spending much thought on their actual meaning and import. No wonder they soon came back to haunt me. My experience with the 'knowledge' (or theory, if you will) that I had gathered prior to the empirical part of the research was similar: I started off with certain knowledge that seemed to provide helpful context information. Once I began doing research, experiencing, moving in the subjects' lifeworld, and analysing my empirical data systematically, I realized that to understand the identity construction of my specific interview partners in the specific situations, other knowledge was more relevant. I had to spiral back into literature and familiarise myself with scholarship on class and space, globalisation and politics in more detail than I had previously assumed. The role of gender, family, Islam and religion indeed mattered. But now, identity construction was in particular shaped by the revolution. The political environment, the explosion of civil society and activity, issues of free speech and freedom of expression, fear and heightened emotions made themselves felt in the identity construction. Also, more long-term aspects were brought to the fore, such as the centralised character of Egypt, class and family background, the restrictive and 'closed' political, moral, cultural climate of the last years, the lack of opportunities to self-realisation and expression. These conditions for identity construction, (which can hardly be subsumed under the labels "concept" or "category") had been mostly absent from my theoretical considerations prior to entering the field. 'Finding' them and recognising their relevance thus represented first preliminary results of the research.

Throughout this study, I try to satisfy the demands formulated above: 1) be aware of this tension,

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[129] Witzel has understood this dynamic status of categories very well (Witzel 2000).

2) reflect it in the choice of method and design of research, and 3) address explicitly the (changing) relation of theoretical in advance knowledge and empirical findings during the gathering of data and interpretation. I try to show my awareness of this issue and have drafted the structure of this thesis accordingly: I share with the reader the state of the research and the research design, as I constructed them prior to doing the data collection and analysis. Then I want to guide the reader through the adjustments I made and, thereby, allow him to trace the process of understanding (*Erkenntnis*), which demanded a thorough reworking of my previous assumptions. In the next chapter, dedicated to describing the actual field work, I explain how I arrived at these preliminary results. The experience in the field and with the data analysis made – in line with the demand for adequateness of method to subject – considerable adaptations of the method necessary.

3 The research process in practice – classroom theory meets messy reality

As I had indicated previously, the experience in the field and with the data resulted in considerable modifications of the original research design. The field research and the intense work with the text also had quite an impact on me and my perspective. I thus need to share some of this experience with the reader in order to establish inter-subjectivity. In this chapter, I explain these experiences and the ensuing adaptations, and render the critical decisions taken in the research process transparent.

Before I went into the field, I had already been warned by various scholars: qualitative research involves a high degree of unstructured human interaction, it demands constant openness and flexibility of the researcher and thus would feel chaotic: "The role (s) of the researcher (s) is/are thus extremely complex" (Traha 2009: 14) and "research involving this level of human interaction and human relationship is going to feel messy!" (Connolly 2007: 453). Just *how* messy it would become I had seriously underestimated.

The Egyptian Revolution in spring 2011 crossed my path (and in parts my plans) and I was consequently also forced to adjust my sample. Moreover, first interview experiences convinced me to change my style of interviewing. Later on, once I had left the first hermeneutic field and started to work intensively with the collected data, I discovered serious flaws in my research design. First, I created inventories of the twelve interviews and practised structuring, in an attempt at getting an overview of the topics addressed. Next, I started the in-depth analysis of one case, and a little later decided to deviate from my previous plan in the further proceedings. Rather than sticking to the "three out of ten"-sampling strategy, I choose to focus on one interview. With an in-depth case study I could reconstruct the complexities of narrative identity. The comparison to the other interviews would then be limited to the key themes and motives of my central case, and not reach the same depth as the case study.

After transcribing the whole interview, I started the global analysis as described by Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann, and outlined above. Parallel to several structuring runs, I analysed the entry sequence of the biographical narration, several times together with a text-interpretation group.[130] The second and third round of structuring then helped to select further paragraphs for detailed

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[130] This collaboration with other students was of great help to me. Since the previous year we had been meeting regularly as a group of 3 to 5 students, to practice text interpretation with different methods of analysis. During my interpretation phase, I had the chance to present the group with my data material in three consequent group meetings. I am highly indebted in particular to Verena Boppel and Matthias Hummel for supporting me with their expertise and creative thinking.

interpretation. At the same time, the need to integrate alternative concepts and guidelines for interpretation became evident. I therefore decided to complement the toolbox of NID with some supplemental concepts, namely the theatre analogy and explanatory systems. This chapter will describe the experience and explain the changes made in the two hermeneutic fields of data collection (3.1) and data analysis (which consist of a phase of ordering the data 3.2 and analysing the text 3.3).

3.1 'In the field': hermeneutic field I – data collection

This chapter portrays the experiences in hermeneutic field I and the necessary adjustments to the research design herein. I trace my experience in the field, point out how the revolution in Egypt affected my research in spring 2011 (3.1.1) and explain changes in the composition of my sample (3.1.2). After discussing the consequences of adjusting the sample, I give some insights into modifications of my interview style that were necessitated by the specific cultural context and my standpoint (3.1.3).

3.1.1 The impact of real life on research: the Egyptian revolution[131]

The Egyptian Revolution turned Egypt upside down. Thus, my research took place in an unforeseen context that deviated considerably from how I (and my interview partners) had known Egypt. Going into all the details is not possible here, but the following changes had direct implications for the trajectory of my research: 1) the conducting of interviews met some practical difficulties that would not have existed otherwise, 2) the unforeseen events made me aware of certain issues that I had largely ignored previously, and 3) the revolution, and the narratives that had soon evolved thereof, provided an unexpected common reference point for the interview interaction and the construction of narrative identity.

The first aspect is easy to explain: the current events made it logistically more difficult to meet the interviewees and put considerable restraints on the time budget and freedom of movement of potential interview partners. The uprising and the accompanying events led to (the perception of) a deteriorating security situation in the area of Greater Cairo. This meant it was not considered

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[131] I would not consider the uprising that started on the 25th of January 2011 a revolution. And also within the terminology of most political scientists and historians the events would not yet qualify as such. Yet, at the moment of the interviews it still looked like a revolution, and most important: to many Egyptians it still feels like one until today – thus calling it a "revolution", as I will do in the remainder of this text, reflects much better the perspective of my interview partners at the time of our encounter in the spring of the year 2011.

safe for me to travel to the satellite cities in the desert around Cairo. Yet, it is particularly these cities in the desert that many upper(-middle) class families have chosen as their domicile. Thus, when initiating contact with potential interviewees and arranging the time and place of an interview, I was often not able to offer to visit the interviewees at their house.[132] Instead, those who lived outside of Central Cairo had to meet me either at the campus of their university (which is closed on weekends and generally closed to the public), at my own flat, or in coffee shops in central Cairo. Whatever place we eventually chose, these circumstances made me much more dependent on the goodwill of the interviewees. As if that was not enough, the security situation and the curfew meant that the potential time for meetings was very much limited.[133] This scarcity of time was even enhanced by the fact that the university schedule at AUC was much tighter this spring, than under normal circumstances. The university wanted to make up for days of teaching that had been lost in early February. While these practical limitations rendered the organisation of my research more difficult, they also provided some first insights: the discussion with the young women made clear it was not themselves, but their parents, who decided whether leaving the house at a certain time, with a certain trajectory, was safe enough. In one case, the fact that the interviewee had to come to my place triggered a conversation that revealed to me how unacceptable it was to the woman's older brother and to her mother, that she visited another person's house all by herself. (Mind you: she did so nonetheless.) While Egyptians are said to be very hospitable, I did not have the chance to meet any of my interview partners at home. Was this due to my specific request? Would a researcher not be considered an adequate guest? Maybe a researcher would not be an adequate guest unless she interviews the older, respected generations of the family living in the house? Or maybe a researcher would not be invited unless he was a male researcher? On the other hand: even before, the famous hospitality of Egyptians had rarely brought me into Egyptian homes, even on those occasions where I did not figure as researcher but as friend or acquaintance. This might be a pattern that has nothing to do with my occupation or mission. Maybe it is my position and actions: living in Cairo among Cairene, on my own, at this age, without family or husband, might estrange Egyptian potential hosts. Yet, I can only speculate on this issue.

Due to the revolutionary events in Egypt I was all of a sudden made aware of a blind spot in my

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[132] In most cases the interviewees themselves opened the "negotiations" about potential locations to meet by saying that we could not meet at their place as they lived far out in the desert.

[133] We need to factor in that sun sets early, around 7 pm in Cairo at this time of the year, and being outside after fall of the dark was not considered safe any more.

theoretical preparation. When screening existing research that could provide information about relevant societal, cultural, and familial circumstances of young women's lives in Egypt, I had completely ignored the political side. My interviewees had grown up in an authoritarian regime that was known to suffocate civil society and torture its people. The current events did not only sensitize *me* to the political conditions of individual lives. It also made political topics much more popular in Egyptian society. While especially the youth had traditionally been considered and portrayed as lethargic, politically detached and alienated (Bayat 2010: 41; Handoussa 2010: 41), many people became all of a sudden politicised. This reverberated throughout the entire public sphere. Little surprising then, that the revolution also changed the perception and identity construction of my interviewees. Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann point to several events in a person's life that can provide the occasion for a major reshaping of identity. Historic changes, experiences of illness, the encounter with new identity schemes through intercultural contact or psychotherapy can constitute such occasions (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 24-32). In my case, the empirical data (or rather: the interviewees' statements) was clear: This uprising, frequently called a "youth revolution" or a "Facebook revolution"[134] in Egypt, changed the interviewees' current perceptions, influenced their view of the past, and shaped their outlook for the future. Unfortunately I cannot compare the post-revolutionary identity construction to that in pre-revolutionary times, as all my interview encounters took place after Friday, February 11th, 2011, the day that the so-called "Pharaoh" Mubarak stepped down. Yet, from the interviews and the postscripts I conclude the revolution played a significant role in the narrative identity formation: on the one hand, it provided the interviewees, and me, with a common point of reference. It might even have contributed to me being seen as more of an insider, as I had experienced the historic days as well. (I did not make an effort to conceal the fact that I had even been to Midan Tahrir, the centre of the revolution in Cairo prior to Mubarak's resignation – I myself was too excited about the events.) Besides establishing a very current common ground for me and the interviewees, the revolution provided the young women with a new additional focal point for their identity construction. Obviously the interviews varied as to the degree of importance which was attributed to the revolution in the narrator's own life. Yet, it was brought up in all of the interviews, and constituted an anchor point for the narrations in several cases. The events and the surrounding discourse did not only constitute new possibilities for identity-construction, it also might have resulted in some impediments. Most of my interviewees felt the need to justify their

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[134] Not a revolution of the women as some German commentators might have wished, though.

(non)participation in and stance on the revolution. Moreover, I was surprised by the number of interviewees that spoke about their previous, current, and planned voluntary activities, committed to Egyptian society. There are several plausible interpretations of this observation[135], one is that given the revolutionary events, taking over responsibility for the Egyptian society had suddenly become the norm.

Whatever the exact connections, the revolution already rendered some assumptions that provided the rationale for my target group obsolete. The specific target group had been defined by the biographical and cultural intersections, assuming the interview partners had then a generally increased need for identity construction through presentation. Furthermore, I had assumed that certain topics, the challenges of young adults in particular, would become more salient at this specific point of their lives, a few months before graduation from university. By priming certain topics, the revolution likely made some less dramatic aspects fade into the background (given that we always strive for interesting, exceptional, and entertaining stories).

Moreover, the revolution strained my (emotional) resources – what could have been a nice little research trip became an adventure, that would surely have pleased old school field researchers like Girtler (Girtler 2009).[136] Of course I cannot conceal that I was utterly excited about this. However, the events also made me often feel insecure, uncertain, and in general very much out of my comfort zone. But even if it had not been for the political turmoil, 'being in the field' would in any case have had an unexpected influence on my research. The effect was probably only increased by the revolution. Prior to my journey to Egypt I had not realized how much my trip would be an entire field-*experience* rather than only a series of individual interviews. Various experiences and insights that did not emerge primarily from the interviews changed my perspective and offered new ideas. This again had tangible effects on the interviews themselves. For instance, it made me revise the interview questions or the style or wording of questions. To give an example here: a journalist friend of mine, who had only experienced the first ten days of the uprising in Egypt, was just returning from the Eastern rebel-held part of Libya. He told me, how the people he interviewed, always wanted to "talk politics". What he decried here, was not that

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[135] On behalf of completeness: the mentioning of these civil society activities can also be interpreted as a strategy of class distinction (charity as upper class habitus), as an expression of guilt that is fed by being privileged, or as a reaction to being singled out and 'questioned' about one's achievements in the interview situation. None of these explanations is exhaustive though. Any explanation would probably need to factor in the role of Islam and the duties that derive thereof according to the individual interviewee's understanding.

[136] Whenever I come across Girtler's advice, beautifully crystallized in his "10 commandments of field research" I cannot help but picture him as a researcher-adventurer (Girtler 2010).

people got politicised but that they tended to speak about "the big picture", rather than telling him what they thought of as their personal experience. Once he had brought this phenomenon to my attention, I could also recognize this inclination to "talk politics" in my interviews. As a consequence, I slightly changed my question style. In the remainder of my interviews I asked more concretely about the interviewee's *personal involvement* in the revolution. I tried to nail the interviewees down to concrete narrations, and descriptions, with questions like "What did you do the day Mubarak left?". Not that this incidence had had a major effect on my research results. I mention it to illustrate that real life and research, context knowledge, method and empirical data are inseparable.

Coincidence also contributed to my research in many other cases. Random observations I made, discussions with friends about research or related topics, the experience of revolution and the opportunity to participate in a group discussion – whose topic I was allowed to define – all added to my research. It is notable that the revolution itself *created* many opportunities to speak to people, discuss issues and learn about Egypt. Compared to my experiences in previous years, Egypt had seen a veritable explosion in public debate, political awareness and civil society activities. By (interactively) engaging in these kinds of situations, I became part of the field I was studying. In that very limited sense, my approach to the field could be called ethnographic.

> "Ethnografisch ist der Zugang außerdem, weil er einer „Geh-Struktur" (Breuer 1996: 20) folgt. Das bedeutet, die Forscherin begibt sich zu dem Phänomen hin und wird Teil des zu untersuchenden Feldes, in dem sie sich interaktiv auf Situationen einlässt. Auf diese Weise sind bereits die kontextuellen Umstände der Kontakte (der Ort des Interviews, die Art der Begrüßung usw.) Daten." (Wenzler-Cremer 2005: 73)

Thus, the context and circumstances of the interviews, and the encounters constitute data as well. Consequently, I took notes of observations and conversations where possible. The memos I generated also served as a research diary, which allowed me to trace the interaction of experiencing, gathering empirical data, consulting the literature, and developing thoughts and ideas. Even in those cases where I was not able to record the events and their impact, the experience still transformed me and my perspective.

3.1.2 Abandoning the sample strategy: following interest instead of theory

Regarding my sample, I quickly came to abandon my previously conceived strategy. All of my interview partners were young female Muslim Egyptian AUC students. I co-produced four successful interviews with students from the upper middle class families, who at the time of the interview were in the last year of their Bachelor's. Additionally, I interviewed one upper middle class student who was currently doing her Master's, after concluding her BA one year earlier. I also interviewed a sixth girl that fitted the class criterion, but had already concluded her university education in the previous year and was now working. These two interview partners who did not fit the last-year-BA-criterion had from the start on been very positive and cooperative about meeting me. Therefore, I decided to follow-up on the contacts even after I had realized they were already more advanced in their educational career. This decision is easily explained: I had initially set the last-year-BA-criterion in order to make sure I meet interviewees at a point when important decisions are impending. I hoped the need for identity reconstruction and the salience of certain topics would be increased. This assumption was disproved, in every single interview I conducted with last-year-BA students. Nearing end of their university education constituted the dominant frame for the present or the near future for none of them. In that regards, the revolution proved to be an overwhelming experience and context definition. This is not to say my interviewees spoke exclusively about the revolution. Yet, any reflection on their current position, and on their plans in the near future, had to take into consideration the revolution as a decisive (negative or positive) factor. In most interviews, it was so prominent, and impressive, that it became the *one* decisive factor. In light of this observation from my first interviews, it felt reasonable to drop the last-year-BA-criterion.

The terminology employed here can also give us a hint as to the rationale of this last-year-BA-criterion: looked at critically, it is at least questionable as to how far this fixation on last-year-BA students is reconcilable with qualitative research principles of openness and flexibility. It was in the field that the tensions between conflicting research principles implied in my design, became evident to me. The more security I gained in interviewing, approaching subjects and doing field research, the more flexible I was: I eventually decided to follow interesting cues and ideas even though they might not fit my original programme. This is probably exactly what is meant by "openness" and "curiosity".

Above that, I also deviated from my previous sample idea in another important way: When I

realized that my first interview partner obtained a full scholarship for AUC, and thus might not necessarily be of upper(-middle) class origin, I decided to meet her nonetheless. I considered the interview a good opportunity to practice my skills in the 'real' setting. Yet, once I had spoken to her, I became really intrigued by her stories and found myself unable to ignore the ideas and perspectives she shared with me. I actually considered it much more interesting to have a larger variety in my interview partners, and thus started to follow a two-pronged strategy. On the one hand I continued to search for interview partners that fitted my original sample strategy. I had realized – thanks to producing inventories of the previous interviews – that there was no need to fear that interviewing might not work and thus some interviews could be entirely useless. (This had been my rationale for doing ten interviews rather than three from the start on.) Since all of my interview encounters produced what I considered valuable empirical material, each interview I conducted could be used. My intention then became to gather at least three interviews with the target group. I wanted to ensure I had enough material to stick to my original plan of doing in-depth studies of three cases – just to be on the safe side. At the same time, I did not decline opportunities to interview scholarship holders, simply out of interest. I wanted to make use of the chance to speak to all these interesting persons. At a later point, I considered it an option to turn my study into a comparison of the two groups. Thus, I gathered some last interviews to balance the sample.[137] So eventually, after two months of field research, I returned to my desk with the recordings and postscripts of twelve biographical interviews, each of two to three hours length. Also, I had already produced detailed inventories of about half of the interviews. In addition, I had recorded a discussion, among a group of Egyptian and German youth, all active in civil society.[138] I had set the topic as "Is there a women's issue in Egypt?". Not to forget the innumerable pages of memos and field notes. It was only then that I realized how problematic the adjustment of my sample was, and how ambiguous and unrealistic even the provisions of my original research design had been. In line with the demand for openness, I will render this process transparent: in chapter 3.2 I will discuss at length the nature of these flaws, portray the resulting challenge and explain the decision to change my research design in quite a fundamental way. Before we turn to these issues that arose in the hermeneutic field II, let me share some reflections on the interview experience

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[137] Obviously I dropped this idea, because it would have followed a completely different research logic – much closer to the qualitative one, which tries to produce generalizable numbers as research results.

[138] The occasion was an Open Space workshop, intended to bring together youth from Egypt and Germany for fruitful discussion of the revolution's aftermath. The 4-day event took place in Egypt at the beginning of spring 2011. The group discussion lasted 1,5 hours, the participants were allowed to join and leave the group at any time. Besides the general topic, there was no further restrictions.

with you.

3.1.3 Adjusting the style of interviewing to Egyptian realities

Regarding my interview experience, let me first state some things that might seem ridiculous to some of the readers. I feel obliged to mention them, however, as they have previously aroused the interest and astonishment of many people I spoke to about my research. First of all, I did not have much trouble to find interview partners, even though[139] I was looking for Egyptian Muslim women. They did not refrain from meeting me, nor from speaking to me about themselves and as representative of the collective they feel they belong to. In that sense the silence of the Arab woman is a myth. Period.

What is not a myth, however, is that time and appointments are handled differently in Egypt than in Germany. As expected, it was sometimes difficult to make an appointment (this was even worsened by the revolution). Once I could get people to agree on a specific time and place for meeting – instead of following their proposal to play it by ear – this meant by no means that we really had an appointment. Rather it implied there was a reasonable chance, that – if I reminded my interview partners in temporal proximity to the envisioned date – I would eventually get the chance to meet them, in the days surrounding the date which we had originally agreed on. If I was less lucky, my interviewees would cancel an appointment when I was already on my way to meeting them. A surprisingly frequent occurrence was that my interview partners changed the location with very short notice. It happened to me three times (out of twelve) that my interview partner sent me a text message to change the location only when I was already present at, or at least approaching the foreseen venue of the interview. While I had been prepared for the frequent rescheduling, this re-locating took me by surprise. In hindsight, I can derive a plausible explanation only from my previous experience with young Egyptians. It seems that decisions are often not made by the individual alone but rather negotiated with other people, meaning that it is hard to set a decision in stone. Much more likely, a decision will be revoked once other people's needs have changed the conditions of the agreement. Let me give you an example: One interviewee was supposed to meet me at her parents' house. When I was already on my way, she called me to say, we had to relocate the meeting to a coffeshop close by, as a lot of relatives had more or less unexpectedly shown up. Let us suppose their visit was indeed unexpected, and not only not factored in by my interview partner. In that case, it is not a matter of debate that the daughter will

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[139] This "even though" expresses the expectations of many Europeans I encountered, not my own surprise.

have to change her agreements. What is more: it is not considered a big deal – everyone is expected to be flexible anyway. In another case, the interview partner spontaneously decided it was more convenient for her to meet me at her dad's office as she had to be there later on. In a third instance, the interviewee was at a friend's place, and could not leave, since they were still working on a project together. These cases have in common two things: third persons are involved in the change of plan, and this change of plan is communicated to me with extreme ease – my interview partners took it for granted I was flexible enough to adapt.

It is impossible to make general statements about the effect of the venue on the interview interaction. Each encounter had its very specific dynamic. In all cases I let the interviewee decide between the various potential locations, hoping that they would know best what made them feel comfortable. Most public places in Egypt, are by far too noisy too retain a good quality record of the interview. Some of my interview partners living in the parental household did not feel comfortable with me visiting them at home. Above that, a large share of them lived in gated communities in the desert, parts of the city that are nearly impossible to reach without owning a car (which I did not). My own flat was chosen as the location for several interviews, only late in the series of interviews did I figure out: for many Egyptian girls (or their family) this constituted a severe transgression of the usual limits of behaviour (see IV 1.3.1 to IV 1.3.3)

Another interesting aspect was the kind of pre-interview communication: in most cases text messages via mobile phones constituted the communication of choice for my interview partners. I did not object as to me this felt like the most normal way to communicate. However, after typing down an approximate number of thirty text messages with the exact time and date of reception (to get the chronological order of message and response straight) I gave up on the attempt to record this type of pre-interview communication. Mainly for the reason that I did not know how to interpret this kind of data anyway.

As for the interviews themselves: all of the recordings took between two and three hours. Even though the three-part interview structure (narrative stimulus and monologue, immanent question part, and exmanent question part) was the same, very different interviews were produced. Other than Wenzler-Cremer, I did not encounter the problem that my research subjects were *generally* unable to give an account of their live story. The ability or willingness to respond with an extensive narration to my entry stimulus varied widely between my interview partners. All of the interviews were successful in the sense that we co-created a sustained conversation that conveyed much

information. Yet, in only four out of twelve cases, the narrative stimulus actually triggered a monological biographical account that exceeded ten minutes in length. Some of the interviewees came into a "narrative mood" later in the interview. In other interviews, my attempts at 'making the interviewees talk' was not successful and the interview remained 'scanty', being a series of short questions and answers. In all cases, the third part of the interview was of negligible size. In this section, the researcher can introduce topics and concepts that have not yet been addressed by the interviewee. Yet, by then, the majority of my interviewees had already addressed most of the topics I was interested in. The generation of a postscript provided a good opportunity to reflect on the course of the interview, and to record those aspects of the encounter that were of non-verbal nature. Various interview guides propagated the postscript should also comprise a rough overview of the topics that had been addressed in the interview. Personally, I found it impossible to generate a list of the themes based solely on my memory – even right after the closure of the interview. I was only able to get a thematic overview of the interviews by listening to the recordings again, and thereof produced an inventory (as proposed by Kruse 2007).

In order to check whether my method of data collection was successful, I took a two week break after my first four interviews. In this time, I produced the respective inventories and reviewed the gathered data. In this phase the most important insight pertained to the style of interviewing. Early on in the preparatory stage of my field research, I had ruled out the option of using a questionnaire or semi-structured interview. Apparently, however, this was not enough to prevent '*Leitfadenfaschismus*' (i.e. exaggerated adherence to the questionnaire) of a different kind: in the attempt to exert as little influence as possible, I was extremely focused on not breaking various rules, and thereby became highly inflexible and less attentive. Rather than making use of my intuition, I missed out on important hints at ambiguities and conflicts in the narration. At the same time, out of fear to generate a text that did not fit the concept and method of NID, I had stuck to an extremely monological, disbalanced style of interviewing even though some interviewees seemed to prefer a more co-communicative style, closer to a real-life conversation. Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann mention the latter as a frequent phenomenon: the interviewee tries to change the roles to and establish a more co-communicative relation, to counter the dis-balance in the interaction. For the interviewee, one means of doing so is to address the researcher directly with questions. According to Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann, part of the researcher's role is to work against this attempt (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 264). Frankly speaking, I do not agree with this strategy. I do not see, how making the interviewee feel uncomfortable is going to produce

'better' interviews. Luckily, I am not alone with this understanding: feminist researchers for example have criticised this power-imbalance in interaction of researcher and subject, asking explicitly for a more collaborative, balanced relationship. Besides ethical considerations, the relation of everyday communication and scientific communication is also of relevance here: if everyday communication and understanding are – in regards to their basic operations – not fundamentally different from scientific communication, why should the researcher relinquish her everyday communicative skills? It was my ability to conduct meaningful conversations – even with people I hardly knew – that made me confident about choosing narrative interviewing. Why should I do away with my conversation skills (such as empathy, being quick on the uptake, evoking trust, 'feeling' or intuitively understanding the deeper meaning of an expression, being sensitive to ambiguities and inner conflict) in the very moment I could need it? After this insight, I allowed myself to be less rigid in the remaining interviews. I picked up on the topics people had just mentioned, and pushed my three-phase scheme and the wish for 'narration' to the background. Instead, I focused more on *what the interviewee said*. This made it easier to remain within her frame of reference and employ her terminology and concepts when I was posing questions. In the end, it was probably more me misunderstanding the theoretical advice than anything else. This transformation of my interview style shows one thing: the attempt at higher degrees of standardisation is futile. The more interviews I had conducted, the more "professional" I got, the easier it was for me to focus. The same occurred when generating my transcripts: the more practice I had, the more secure I was in identifying intonation and the length of breaks, the more accurate the transcripts became. This is also a beautiful example of the basic way in which the researcher herself (and her skills) changes through the research.

The question how to balance the interviewees' needs with methodical rules, became relevant also in another regard: in many interviews, it proved very difficult to realize an undisturbed setting. Disturbances and interruptions had various reasons. They ranged from sudden deafening noise in the street (caused by the fruit seller or the muezzin), over ringing cell phones (usually parents, brothers or study colleagues enquiring into the whereabouts of my interview partner), to hospitable waiters, servants or hosts. While the street noise seemed to be beyond anyone's control, I intentionally refrained from interfering with my interview partners' need for cellphone communication. While it is entirely normal in Germany and other European countries to ask others to switch off their phones, I have never encountered such a request in Egypt. Also, it is nearly

impossible to demand remaining undisturbed in private homes – the corresponding concept of privacy does not seem to exist, at least it does not receive much enforcement. In practice, the situation was particularly appalling in the case of Yasmine: our interview was interrupted several times by her cellphone, the host's father, the host himself, and a stationary phone in the same room. Nonetheless, Yasmine stayed continuously focused. She also did not face any difficulties continuing right where she had halted the narration, after any break. I did not attempt at arresting the frequent interruptions – partially out of resignation. But also due to the realization: being alone and remaining undisturbed, is simple nothing Egyptians do. And eventually I was more interested in creating and supporting a setting that my interviewees felt comfortable in, than in sticking to minute research rules that originated in a different cultural context.

With the issue of privacy and silence, we have already entered the minefield of intercultural communication. So how did the impediments that might hamper inter-cultural interview research (I.1.5) turn out in my research? With my interview partners, none of the anticipated problems occurred. Other than Wenzler-Cremer I did not encounter the problem that my research subjects were *generally* unable to give an account of their live story. Considering that two of the first four interviewees had already provided me with very engaging entry narrations of 45 respectively 90 minutes, I had no reason to doubt the adequateness of the narrative interview as my method of data collection. Other than some of Wenzler-Cremer' s and Andrews' interview partners, the young women I met also did not evade the challenge to figure as individuals. Neither did they show any estrangement by the concept of "interviewing" per se. Everyone I spoke to seemed pretty familiar with the idea of an interview. Several people first mistook my research as a kind of quantitative survey, as done for marketing research, but no one was unfamiliar with the basic idea of an interview. The assumption that both individualism and interviewing, have already found entry into the cultural and social repertoire of Egypt imposes itself. If we consider the obvious convergence of Arab and Western media in terms of news, show and soap formats, as well as literary genres, this is hardly surprising. Accordingly, we could even argue that today, Silverman's "interview society" might extend well beyond the borders of the 'West'.

The common ground in terms of individual self-presentation and interview format notwithstanding, the interview constituted an inter-cultural encounter of some sort. I will thus reflect on the self-presentation and role that I took in the interviews. As long as we understand the interview encounter as an interactive situation, such a reflection would be in order even if the participants shared the same cultural background.

Me – the researcher student young woman European

Whoever has travelled outside of Europe might have noticed that the clear distinction between Germany and Italy, Poland and the UK is not as clear for people from other continents. More or less independent of the level of education (yet: not independent of travel experience and inter-cultural exposure), they tend to treat Europe as an entity, and do not have as discernible images of the individual European states and national cultures. Thus, in the context of the interview, I expected to be seen as a European, young woman, who is a student-researcher. Clearly a foreigner, but with some prior experience of Egypt. For all of these self-ascriptions I found confirmation in my interviews. To give an example: a good third of my interview partners said they participated because they wanted to help me as a student in finishing my Masters thesis. They referred at the same time to their own status of students and the potentiality of being themselves one day in need of research subjects. On the other hand, there were interview partners who saw me more in the role of a researcher (or traveller?) who will transmit a certain image of Egypt and Egyptian women to her home country. These women readily employed me as a transmitter of their personal message. The question as *how foreign* was I perceived, or as how familiar with the local conditions, is of much relevance to the way the stories are produced. As Göymen-Steck (2009: 149) points out, the exact working of the *Zugzwänge* depends on the interview constellation. If the interviewee considers the listener to have detailed knowledge of the topic and be familiar with the surroundings (social as spatial), rather than taking the researcher for a mere "foreigner", much less context information is explicated. Several of the interviewees referred to places such as specific quarters, restaurants or clubs in Cairo without giving any additional information. I wondered more than once what had made them so sure I would indeed know what places they were talking about. Eventually it must have been either my introduction mentioning previous long-term stays in Cairo, my behaviour, or the information that the doorkeepers gave them. In any way, the interviewees implied my "insider" knowledge if it came to places and venues. It might have been a sense of "commonality" which let them assume I would know their favourite bar, nightclub, low-key restaurant or traditional coffeshop. The interviewees also referred without further explanation to public figures (such as Amr Khaled, a 'star preacher' mentioned in chapter I 3.2) or phenomena (such as the spread of the veil) which would not be known to the majority of Europeans. On the other hand, none of the interviewees expected me to be familiar with the events that immediately pre-dated the revolution. This was surprising as I had told them I was a student of Political Science

and I had been present already in the last days before Mubarak's resignation.

While we shared a common age, gender and status position, the issue of material position is more complicated. In her research on informal politics and economics in Egypt, Cilja Harders ascribed to herself "material richness and sociocultural poverty" (Harders 1999: 62). The latter holds true also in my case. The foreigner will always lack a considerable amount of socio-cultural knowledge. In the case of my interview partners, I am not so sure about the former, the material richness, though. It is impossible to compare the socio-economic position of my research subjects to my own socio-economic position in Germany. If it comes to the lifestyle (constituted by consumption patterns, leisure activities, venues we frequent, dressing etc.) in Egypt, I have a lot in common with my research subjects – this previously intuitive assumption of mine was substantiated by the research subjects' outer appearance, by the leisure activities and venues they mentioned in the interviews, and by the fact that most of them turned out to be facebook friends with one or several of my upper middle class friends[140].

Other than in many instances of field work, my social dependence on the interview partners was rather low. Other than during participant observation, they did not constitute my direct social environment. Also I was not dependent on them for arranging my life in Egypt, nor for making my way around certain areas or gaining access to specific circles or venues. Yet, I was highly dependent as a researcher: only the cooperation of my interview partners, and their efforts at forwarding me to other potential interview partners allowed me to conduct my research. This dependence was enhanced by the difficulties to find adequate venues for the interviews.

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[140] Facebook and other social media will indeed open up completely new ways of studying societies, subcultures, and in particular networks. Also for my research, the continuous facebook contact with my interview partners revealed interesting starting points for additional data gathering, that I decided not to follow up on.

3.2 "In the data": hermeneutic field II – sighting and ordering the data

As mentioned before, considerable changes in my research design were in order. The purpose of this chapter is to render these changes and the further proceeding plausible to the reader. As soon as I started working with the collected data, I realized the necessity of adjusting my research design in order to correct various misconceptions (3.2.1). Far reaching changes were required to do justice to the data, and, at the same time, limit the work to a reasonable amount. In this chapter, I will pay considerable attention to the critical decisions I took in this phase of my research. The structuring and a preliminary formulating interpretation of the data provided me with some first tentative interpretations (3.2.2). Based on these results, I eventually decided to shift from a comparative analysis of three cases to an individual case study. This allows for the reconstruction of the production of narrative identity in detail, in order to understand the complexities of an individual's identity construction in contemporary Egypt. In a second step, the individual case study should provide the perspective (or 'eyeglasses') for a comparison to other interviews. The rationale for this revamped research design, and the criteria for the selection of the case study will be explained in (II 3.2.3) .

3.2.1 Adapting the research design: what to do with too much data?

As explained above, I changed the composition of my sample in the wake of data gathering (II 3.1.2). I followed a two-pronged strategy, and gathered a sample which was large enough to work with in case I wanted to maintain the original focus on upper middle class women and only use half of the interviews.

There was a fundamental misconception in this strategy, and also in the original research design: I had not understood that I would not be able to ignore data I had collected. Research by only one researcher is essentially different from research in a group, or with a stock of assistants, and the respective division of labour. If the researcher is data collector *and* analyst, every datum leaves its impression on her perspective. The rich experience of the field and the interview encounters is by no means bad. As Hoffmann points out, every interview conducted by the researcher adds some value to the research process (Hoffmann 2009: 34–38). Even if it might not contribute to the research question specifically, it can still be of value for reflecting on the method. Interviews that appear 'useless' at first sight can even point to topics more interesting and more relevant to the interviewees than the original research question (Hoffmann 2009: 34–38). By choosing the

biographical narrative interview, I gave the greatest possible space to the interviewee's own system of relevance and priorities. My purpose was to explore and discover, in a research-before-theory approach. The idea that every interview can reveal new emic topics was thus integral to my research design. Yet, I did not strictly carry this through in my research design. In addition, I did not realize that each and every interview I conducted would have an impact on my own perspective. The same is true for the whole experience of field research: the rich experience in the field, the observations, conversations, and encounters in the surroundings of the interviews can constitute a blessing. The field experience enriches the researcher's knowledge of the world the research subjects live in, and provides hints at different understandings and meanings. Yet, also *this experience needs to be integrated* to keep the research process *transparent.* If possible, every influence on my observational operations should be reflected. The moment I do an interview, I will not be able to wipe the content and the conclusions I drew from my mind. This insight (*Erkenntnis*) acquires particular importance in constructivist and interpretative research, since the researcher's *perspective* is decisive for the outcome of the research. Andrews (Andrews 2007: 489) draws attention to this issue by asking what data does to the researcher: What effect does the confrontation with complex different lives, experiences and perceptions have on the identity of the researcher? Is it possible and desired to remain unchanged? The answer is clearly – no.

In my concrete case this meant, all the interviews, the production of the inventories, and the field experience, had already found their way into my research (perspective). I thus faced the challenge of integrating a huge amount of data that clearly exceeded the scope of a diploma thesis. This was aggravated by the NID method, as it relies on the extremely time consuming in-depth text interpretation. Taking into consideration that I could already draw on very detailed inventories of all twelve interviews, it would have been easy to switch to a more superficial comparison of topics across all twelve interviews. The inventories constituted a first step of a "formulating interpretation". The focus lies on "what" is said, and the purpose is to organize the data, and gain an overview of the material. This phase then provides the themes for comparison across cases and defines the selection of text segments. It thus sets the agenda for the second phase, the "reflecting interpretation". Although it would have been the more economic option to compare one or two themes across interviews, I did not follow that path. The reason is simple: I did not want to shift to a research design that relies solely on "horizontal hermeneutics" (Schorn 2000: 5 [12]). I felt this would neither meet the demands of interpretative research nor correspond to its constructivist and interactionist foundations. In such a horizontal perspective, the interpreter leaves the context

of the individual interview, and looks at topics across interviews. This creates the understanding for commonalities, and differences, in the interviewees' perspectives (Schorn 2000: 5 [12]). However, I was not yet "deep" enough in the data to define the topics for comparison inductively. So, if I had chosen the topics for comparison on the basis of the inventories and postscripts, some of my sensitizing concepts would have become the themes for analysis. This way, I would have turned them into deductive categories and imposed my frame of relevance.[141] Consequently, I decided to stick to the in-depth analysis of NID, which corresponds to vertical hermeneutics. More than other perspectives, the vertical one can provide a deep understanding of the dynamics and complexity of the individual interview, by focusing on individual case studies. This way, I could do justice to the richness of the individual case.

At this point, it is important to understand that conducting the interviews had already transformed my take on the research topic and on the methods I applied. Or to be more precise, the method had influenced my perspective on the subject under investigation. By choosing a method of data collection that singled out the individuals, I had not only enforced an individualising perspective on the interviewees, I had also made sure that I myself encountered and perceived the interviewees as individual beings. In addition to this kind of 'interview effect', "the biographical approach privileges 'in-depth holistic accounts of individuals' experiences" (Hoskins and Stoltz 2005: 96 quoted in Spiegel 2010: 49). It is also based on the idea that before one can understand the actors' rationality, it is necessary to know her social position in order to contextualise it and explore its situatedness. Here the actor is taken as the point of articulation between structure and agency (Giddens 1984; Bourdieu 1985; 1990)" (Spiegel 20110: 49).

Given these effects of my data collection phase, it was of utter importance to me to treat the individual interviewee as a (more or less holistic) entity. Focusing on a purely horizontal perspective, on the other hand, would have led to "the disaggregation of the primary research unit, a process where the actor with her unique story is divided into units of meaning, codes, categories, and dimensions and is compared with other codes from other actors or from totally different types of data, such as documents or field notes" (Spiegel 2010: 49).

At the same time, I was aware that the totality of the twelve interviews and the field experience had contributed to my ideosyncratic frame for understanding and contextualising the individual case. Thus, in order to make both perspectives accessible to the reader and to get the most out of

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[141] As explained in II 2.3, such a transformation of the concept's status is normal, the timing is essential though. At that point, it seemed still to early, the reconstructive process had only been superficial so far.

the data, I decided to combine horizontal and vertical hermeneutics.[142] Consequently I limited the in-depth interpretation to one individual case study. I analysed this case in detail, following the programme of NID and conducting an analysis that remained in the vertical perspective. In another step, I applied a horizontal perspective to the central themes of the case study. Thus, the topics for comparison neither stem from my pre-existing categories, nor from the preliminary formulating interpretation of all the interviews. Instead, the individual case study provided the (inductively reconstructed) eyeglasses through which I looked at the totality of my interviews again. In this step, I defined the selection of text segments deductively, drawing on the logic of constant comparison, in order to draw a picture of *what* the interview partners had expressed in reference to the relevant topics. This way, the totality of my interviews could eventually be integrated as a background foil for the illustration of the main motives, as inductively reconstructed along NID lines from an individual case study. As a consequence, the comparison of the main themes *cannot* be disconnected from the case study – if I had chosen a different interview for the in-depth case study, I would have derived different themes for comparison.[143] The focus of the case study (III) and the comparison (IV) would have been a different one.

It is notable that I would have run into the problem of 'too much data' even if I had not diversified my sample. The problem seems to be inherent to the two-step sampling developed by Rosenthal, presented as a modification of the theoretical sampling by Strauss. In my case, though, it was aggravated by two things: first, the variety in my sample became much larger than originally anticipated after I included scholarship holders. Second, since I listened to all the interviews once more and produced detailed inventories, I was more familiar with all of the data (and thus more influenced by it) than if I had stuck strictly to Rosenthal's research design which relies on postscripts only for drawing the smaller sample.

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[142] Spiegel does so as well. Obviously her room for manoeuvre is much bigger, as the place where she has to reconcile the two perspectives is her PhD thesis, not a diploma thesis. Spiegel thus dedicates different parts of the publication to the perspectives: first, she portrays the individual perspectives of the activists, then she turns to the group/movement perspective in a second part. While the first rests mainly on biographical interviews, the second draws on the logic of comparison and largely excludes biographical information (Spiegel 2010). This way, Spiegel also reconciles a focus on the individual case as entity, with a 'coding' interpretation that dissects the cases.

[143] It is not a comparison in the strict sense but it still seems to be the most appropriate term.

3.2.2 The preliminary results of a formulating interpretation: the context of the case study

As said, generating the inventories constituted a step of formulating interpretation. This chapter aims to present the reader with an overview of the tentative results. In this phase of the research, I looked at an interviewee's postscript first, then listened to the whole recording again, and produced a very rough transcript of the interview. I attempted to follow the frame of orientation that the interviewee herself constructs, but I did not yet focus on the frame of orientation in itself, as advised by Bohnsack (Bohnsack 2000: 148–150). I also dedicated more time and efforts to producing the inventories than Kruse proposes (2007). As a consequence the inventories became quite detailed. Each inventory gives an overview and a rough paraphrase of the topics addressed, in chronological order. The questions asked by the researcher are noted, as well as interruptions or remarkable events. Whenever I recognized semantic or pragmatic specificities (such as intonation, stumbling, conspicuous terms, metaphors), or instantly recognized the text sort, or was intrigued by some other feature of the story (such as re-inscenating) I took note of this as well. In a second pass, I then tried to structure the material further by searching for summarising labels for the various sequences and topics addressed. Where possible, I stayed within the wording of the interview partners, using their metaphors, categories and descriptions as labels. In Bohnsack's method, the various paragraphs which are analysed in the reflecting phase, are selected on the basis of the formulating phase. In that function, the formulating phase corresponds to the *Globalanalyse* by Rosenthal (2005). Generally, it is a step of sorting and reducing the data through coding. Within my adapted research design, this phase provided the foundation for choosing the case study interview. I will now present the first preliminary results (on a "What?" level of meaning!) yielded by this formulating phase. This phase of formulating interpretation provided the background for the choice of the individual case study. The preliminary interpretation of the twelve interviews provided first cues for the interpretation of the case study, and equipped me with useful context knowledge.

At the very beginning, before going into an overview of the interviews, I want to emphasise that the first attempts at formulating interpretation did not show a "correlation" across dimensions. This means that my interviewees varied on different dimensions, some have a boyfriend, others do not. Some have been affiliated with AUC since an early age, others not. Yet, to take but on example, if half of my interviewees spent a term at a university abroad, that does not mean that it was either the scholarship or the non-scholarship holders that did so. The dimensions intersect

with each other, thus from knowing that an interviewee was a scholarship holder, we could not know anything else. Actually, the division into a group of scholarship-holders and non-scholarship-holders is not an emic distinction, but one that derives entirely from my previous research design and the target group definition. This criterion for classification became established, because being *not a scholarship holder* had originally been a condition for being included in my sample (in order to make sure that the students pay their fees and thus belong to the upper(middle) class). Thus, once I decided to skip this criterion, it nonetheless provided me with a 'perspective' for organizing my data. Unfortunately this distinction was not contradicted at first glance by my interview experiences. Thus, this operation of distinction became reinforced by my perception in the interviews, even though the dimensions were not parallel. In parts, this reinforcement was caused by the one remarkable exception: all of the girls that got a scholarship wore a headscarf. At the time of the interview, none of the non-scholarship students was veiled (two of them however told of a veiled phase earlier in their life). Of course this striking difference in outward appearance cemented a distinction in my mind, which was not justified on other grounds. Fortunately, I realised early enough that the distinction 'scholarship holder'/ 'non-scholarship holder' was artificial, so I did not follow the idea to compare the supposed groups.[144]

Besides the headscarf feature, the style of dressing within the two groups varied considerably – the internal variation in the group of veiled girls was just as strong as that among the non-veiled girls and across the headscarf-divide. In addition, the body language differed between interviewees. So did the degree of engagement; some were very enthusiastic and lively when telling their stories, others remained rather calm throughout the whole interview. The atmosphere of the interview and the style of interaction were not pre-defined by the liveliness of the interviewee: if interviewees remained calm, and seemed to restrain their emotional expression in telling their stories, this did not impede my ability to connect to them and to feel well-entertained and develop empathy. Yet, there was a certain style of interaction which severely limited my ability

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[144] At least that was, what I thought at the time. In light of the interpretation, I have to wonder whether they are indeed two more or less separate groups. Yet, the fault line is neither the veil nor the scholarship, but whether one stems from the *Cairene* upper middle class – or not. In my sample, being a scholarship-holder simply coincides with the more decisive criterion of origin and class. The assumption of two groups is substantiated by the sampling experience: I relied on the famous snowballing effect for recruiting my interview partners. I tracked the connections to the various interviewees and the 'middle-men' in a 'contact tree'. It showed that a path would either lead to scholarship-holders or non-scholarship-holders – but never to both of them. This indicates the existence of two separate groups. For sure, these groups could be located on a much lower level, though. Meaning that I was 'handed on' in a *group of friends*, *group of study colleagues*, or in one of the AUC 'subcultures' that form distinct groups on campus, as frequently described by my interview partners.

to connect and identify with the participants: in my notes I called it "spitting out information". In these interviews, I felt like an undesired intruder who is asking for information that the interviewee did not want to disclose. Instead of being presented with a story, pieces of information were thrown at my feet (at least that's how it felt at the time of the interview). In some cases this coincided with my impression that the interviewees were speaking in staccato (this, I have to admit, is a very idiosyncratic sensitivity of mine). Nonetheless, these interview partners were sharing a lot of information with me. They gave insights into their personal lives and thoughts and greatly enhanced my understanding of interactions in Egyptian society. Nonetheless, these encounters did not feel like a successful interaction. Luckily, these interview partners were a minority. The 'richest' interviews were those in which the interviewees responded to the narrative stimulus with a lengthy, monological, biographical account. The longest biographical monologue took 92 minutes, the shortest was one minute seven seconds. Five interviews had entry monologues of less than 10 minutes, three were a bit longer than 10 minutes, one lasted 20 minutes, while two accounts reached a length of around 50 minutes. The interview I chose for the case study was one of the latter ones. Out of the three long interviews, two were conducted with non-scholarship holders. The third interview with a long entry narration, and the 20-minute one were co-produced with scholarship holders. Some of the long entry narrations stemmed from the first interviews, some from a later phase of my field research. Generally speaking, I felt more at ease in those interview situations in which long entry narrations were produced. I tended to feel, again generally speaking, more comfortable in the interviews with the scholarship holders. The second of course gives plenty room for speculation: was it the inclination for the 'subaltern', influential in so many studies, that affected also my attention? Or did the Cairene upper middle class habitus irritate me? Was I more interested in the scholarship-holders because they appeared to be more different from myself than the other interviewees? Or did I enjoy the conversations more with the scholarship-holders, because they were forced to move out from home to university campus, and thus are more mature? All this remains speculation, the differences are manifold. And, given that I also felt more comfortable with interviewees who participated because of an interest in the research or in women's issues (rather than because of helping me), I am inclined to assume that we are here seeing very ideosyncratic preferences.

The interviewees' motivation to participate

An interesting point of comparison was the motivation to participate in the interview. A good third of my interview partners, namely those who were studying social sciences like me, understood their participation as a favour to me as a fellow student. "We thought if we don't help you and participate, no one will..." Others named general helpfulness as the reason for participating. Several women were motivated by the kind of research (which seemed to give space to individual perspectives rather than aim at generalizations) or the topic of the research. Yasmine, for example, said, research on women needed to be done, "in particular in these days. Because research had not been allowed all the time." Yasmine was not the only one who justified her participation in the interview with reference to women's issues. Samira told me she was participating because "I feel like if you're doing research about the Egyptian woman, you'll have a reflection about the true Egyptian woman and you will go back to your country with a new idea about what Egypt is." It was an urgency for several interviewees to share their story in order to project a certain image of women (or rather: to disprove given stereotypes). These interviewees made me a tool for disseminating their message. They saw me as someone able to transmit their perspective to the 'West', a world they perceived as impregnated with the remnants of an Orientalist discourse and sharing an image of the Arab woman as veiled, submissive and silent. Already by merely speaking to me, they could counter the latter of these stereotypes. Reem was concerned specifically with contradicting the image "of the Arab youth and in particular of women as passive and not active". One of my interview partners even introduced herself by telling me she was very active and "feminist", and thus considered herself a perfect interlocutor for me. Yet, she also made it a point that girls at AUC (even those who had a scholarship like herself), were not the norm, especially not, when compared to regions of Upper Egypt.[145]

The second insight: location of origin matters

Often, one of the first pieces of information the interviewees shared was the location of their birth and childhood. This might be interpreted as hardly surprising, as the location of origin is an important biographical datum. Yet, it struck me that primarily those born and raised outside of Cairo felt compelled to mention their hometown or governorate. The way they framed this

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[145] In Egypt, these regions are traditionally considered slightly backward, less developed and more conservative. People from Upper Egypt are often the target of jokes that are in need of an 'idiot' as protagonist. This is comparable to the jokes about Austrians in Southern Germany and those about the Friesen in the North of Germany.

information, made clear that they were speaking of a deviation from a certain norm. Telling that one was not from Cairo functioned as a marker of distinction. Accordingly, the interviewees highlighted the differences to Cairo rather than the commonalities. In some cases, this was apparently in an attempt to portray themselves as experts for an "exotic" region or way of life. In one case though, the relation to the place of origin was much more ambivalent: Reem first told me that she had grown up in another city, and how she experienced the move to Cairo as a decisive change. Then, however, she made it a point to *argue* how the other city was not as remote and backward as Cairenes thought. Indeed, she emphasised that it was very similar to Cairo and in some aspects even superior to the capital. We could read this effort to portray the other city in a good light, as an indication that the Cairene tend to feel their city is superior and to share certain presuppositions towards other areas of Egypt. This is substantiated by the way Egyptians, and mostly Cairene refer to their city: Cairo (*al-Qahira* in Arabic) is referred to as *Omm al-Dunnya* (The mother of the world) if the speaker wants to be poetic, and called *Masr* (which is the Arabic and Egyptian term for the country of "Egypt") in daily life (Ibrahim 2002: 93).[146] This equation of the name for the city and the country, is indicative of the high degree of centralisation in Egypt, and of a certain attitude.

Those women who mentioned their 'deviating origin' also tended to supply me with some background information about the areas of their childhood and youth. They would tell me for example, whether it was a rural area, how it differed from Cairo (in regards to gender segregation and double-standards, for example) or "what the people are like" there. For those unfamiliar with Egypt, it might be worth noting that there is a considerable difference between the city and the countryside also in statistical terms. Statistical data on Egypt reveal a considerable gap between rural and urban areas in terms of education, infrastructure and life expectancy (Handoussa 2010: 19–24). Anyone who has travelled to Egypt, and seen the countryside, called *al-reef* in Egyptian dialect, cannot have missed the blatant differences. Probably, they resemble the difference between a mega-city and a village, as they are found in most other developing countries, too. But even life in other urban areas, in cities like Aswan, Qena or Alexandria was described as differing from that in Greater Cairo. According to my interviewees, lifestyles in Qena are different, comparable shopping and outing opportunities are lacking completely. Segregation of men and women in public space is upheld much stricter in Upper Egyptian cities and tribal structures still

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[146] In the past, this had sometimes resulted in confusion for me: Egyptians would without any problems tell you they were "not in Egypt" when they were actually on a business trip to Alexandria or on holiday in Sinai.

constitute the locus of allegiance. In Alexandria, job opportunities are much less, according to another interviewee. Even if the infrastructure, leisure and consumption venues in other cities like Mansoura were comparable to those in the capital, many Cairenes would still think of the other cities as provincial and backward. Origin thus functions as an identity marker also in daily life, as I had observed in Egypt in varying contexts. These are first cues to the importance of space and place, that could be seen after the formulating phase. To me, it was important to be reminded that Cairo was not representative of Egypt – on the one hand. On the other, Egypt was often equated with Cairo, and many aspects of Egyptian society were highly centralised, meaning that in the people's perception, other areas were marginalized. Above all, it opened my mind to the importance of (geographical) space for people's positioning and identity construction.

About half of the interviewees lived with their parents, most of the scholarship girls however stayed in the university dorms or another arrangement which separated them from their parents. The interview partners who obtained a scholarship varied as to their self-ascribed class belonging. The scholarship they received is not need- but merit-based. This meant, that the only thing we could conclude was that all of the scholarship holders had graduated from school with good marks and passed an assessment test for the scholarship. Some of the scholarship holders considered themselves (non-Cairene) upper or upper middle class, while others described their socio-economic position as "lower middle class".

Of course, the topics that were addressed in the interviews varied widely. Nonetheless, some commonalities and differences were remarkable. Many interview partners at some point spoke about the educational system They described the difference (in quality, costs and style) of governmental and private educational institutions and also talked about the different focus and content of teaching and final exams in different types of schools. Specificities of the Egyptian educational landscape, like the widespread private lessons, were addressed, and common styles of teaching and knowledge transmission criticised. This should hardly be surprising. In Egypt, the state and reform of the Egyptian educational system is constantly a matter of public debate and it is often even treated as a matter of national identity and security (cf. Sayed 2010; Farag 2010). This heated debate not withstanding, when the students spoke about their university, the American University, their personal trajectories seemed to play a larger role than the public debates. Those, who had been affiliated with the institution from an early age on (either through summerschools or the education and employment of their parents), seemed to identify more with the AUC, and revealed less critical positions towards the institution than those who only got in touch with it

after graduating from high school. Some praised the critical thinking and the appreciation of diversity and difference that was characteristic of the atmosphere at AUC. Yet, appreciation for this AUC-tolerance did not prevent them from criticising some of the norms spread at the university. About half of the interviewees, both fellows and non-fellows, had spent a term abroad as parts of their studies. For the majority of them, their stay abroad, the absence from or the return to Egypt was portrayed as a critical (positive or negative or ambiguous, even depressing) event with considerable meaning for their personal development. In that context, my interviewees also shared their understanding of Egyptian culture with me. In the confrontation with experiences abroad, they negotiate the content and importance of their own culture, and develop a more abstract understanding of "culture".

Those who had not spent a semester abroad, mentioned their holidays or study trips to foreign countries. Often, these were conducted in the context of some kind of social or civil society activity or voluntary work. I was struck by the frequent mentioning of some kind of "activity". Most of my interviewees had been engaged in voluntary work for charity or youth organisations and for cultural events. They had participated in events such as Model United Nations, youth conferences or training trips abroad. What also took me by surprise, was the girls' accounts of their intimate relations to the other sex. Two of the girls mentioned a current or past engagement – this I had been prepared for. I was not expecting, though, that another seven girls spoke about their former boyfriends. I mention the exact numbers explicitly here because they show that two of the veiled girls from outside of Cairo had had a boyfriend. My surprise at this information, on the other hand, clearly reveals to what embarrassing degree my expectations rested on un-reflected suppositions. The point was not that I assumed scholarship holders would not have boyfriends – this seemed to be a nonsensical assumption to me. (Even though it might be reasonable to argue that scholarship holders, per definition good students, are less likely to spend their free time on boyfriends, in order to maintain their academic performance.) My implicit assumption was that *young women who wear the veil would not have a boyfriend*. We will come back to that issue later, in (IV 1.3.6). For now it suffices to mention that this very topic – the assumptions about female behaviour that come along with the veil – was also addressed prominently and explicitly by Yasmine and two other interviewees.

Frequently addressed were "drinking" and "smoking" (both cigarettes and hashish). When a girl brought up these topics, she did so to either reject these forms of drug consumption, to make clear that she refrained from trying them, or to make explicit that she was (righteously) joining in

their consumption. Those women who did not distance themselves from smoking or drinking, showed a tendency to tell a whole story of how their attitude towards their consumption had developed. I started to wonder why they did so. One potential interpretation: in a society where alcohol and cigarette consumption by women is not the norm, these practices need justification (see IV 1.3.2). Similarly, it could provide a way to distinguish oneself from the Egyptian society at large (see IV 1.2). Another conceivable option is that smoking functions to project one's maturity. It draws the line between teenagers and adults. Veiling was another topic that – if addressed – triggered stories of a transformation: in two instances, my presently unveiled interview partners told me of a previous 'veiled phase'. Also, in other interviews I learned more about potential motivations for donning the veil, and about societal and parental reaction to (un)veiling (IV 1.3.6). Across all interviews there was the tendency of the interview partners to portray a told self who is sensitive to other people's opinion. This attention to what "the people" might say or think was brought to my attention by my interpretation group. It will be addressed in the later chapters in more detail (see IV 1.3.4.) While several interview partners addressed the issue of veiling (not exclusively a religious practice!), only one of the interview partners addressed religion, or rather: spirituality, as a separate topic. She told me about her way to spirituality. It led her away from a strict focus on Islam and inspired her to find bridging elements between religions and spiritual orientations. Nonetheless she considered herself a Muslim and also spoke repeatedly about her understanding of and confrontation with Islam, which she endorsed (see IV 1.3.5 for more details on religion and religiosity). When the other interviewees referred to Islam, this was tied to concrete situations or problems. In various instances, Islam provided the framework for behaviour: after experiencing a distressing situation, one interviewee turns to reading the Qran in order to calm down (successfully); when asked about the right education one interviewee references the educational principles laid down in the Qran. In the interviews, Islam also is employed to justify certain norms, for example on homosexuality or on the appropriate behaviour in inter-sex contact. Religion is most often mentioned in its guiding function, both for daily practice and for (more abstract) moral standards. Various interview partners presented themselves as striving for personal perfection and completion – yet, it would be mistaken to assume this strive for being "good" was generally connected to religious prescriptions. The reference points and images evoked in this context varied widely.

The interviewees all described quite distinctive family constellations: the size, living arrangements, and intra-familial relations varied. I met girls who were closer to their father, whereas other

interviewees described themselves as heavily influenced by their mothers, and did not ascribe much influence to their father.[147] There was some reason to assume that the role of the mother in the young woman's life might be dependent on the mother's education and occupation. Yet, this might be a somewhat trivial common sense statement, and cannot be substantiated by this study. There is considerable variation in the strategies the interviewees employ to manage their family relations, in the behaviour of the interviewees vis-a-vis their family, as well as in their attitudes to intra-familial relations. The extended family is rarely mentioned in the interviews. If interviewees speak about family members they mostly refer to the core family.

Some other aspects (that I could not fit into any topical cluster) were brought up as well. It struck me that *several* of the interview partners mentioned Israel. If you were asked to tell your individual life story, why would you mention Israel? When I looked at the local context of these references to Israel, each individually appeared plausible. One interviewee spoke, for example, about the danger of the Egyptian army not being on guard to protect the country's borders now; another narrator took her neutral attitude towards Israelis as an example to illustrate how older generations differed from younger ones; others mentioned the Israeli people they had met on a journey abroad or within Egypt. So in each of these instances, the reference to Israel or its citizens is neither arbitrary nor insensible. Nonetheless it puzzled me. Probably, the variety of references was even more puzzling than the number: if all had referred to Israel in the same context (say, for example, the question how fast the Egyptian army should return to their barracks), we could have assumed that this was an element of the larger discourse on the issue. Yet, the interviewees attributed very different roles to Israel and its nationals in the biographical interviews. For the time being, let us take this as a hint at the importance or salience of the larger geographical, political, cultural setting.

Another thing that provoked my astonishment, was the mentioning of "accent" in two of my first interviews. One woman told me how her early contact with AUC through summer schools had completely influenced her life, because it meant she had a specific accent. [The AUC summerschool she attended since childhood had] "totally affected my life because – well, my school people say 'illifint' – not elephant. So yeah, I'm very thankful that I actually did other stuff,

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[147] The role of the father is a good example to illustrate how the choice of the case study and the overall picture are connected: the role of the father differed across interviews. Therefore, I did not have the impression I was choosing a *unique* case, Yasmine showed one constellation out of many possible ones. The interpretation of Yasmine's case made me aware of the phenomenon of 'the absent father' – the group discussion seemed to confirm that this phenomenon was not unique to my case but seemed to link to a general pattern of family relations. Having noticed that there was such a thing as 'the absent father', I looked at the other interviews with a changed perspective and realized: there are several more cases, in which the father is conspicuously absent.

so my language would help me a little ((she laughs)) so that I don't have the same accent".

I was taken aback: why would someone attribute that much importance to speaking English with an Egyptian or American accent? While Nadia thought the American accent was a blessing, Laila put forward the opposite view: she showed me that she could switch to an American accent instantly, but made it a point, *not to use* the American accent because she did not want "to lose her culture". I was seriously wondering what kind of language war I had gotten myself into here.

The central role of accent was not reproduced in my further interviews. Nonetheless, this early encounter with the "accent theme" had made me alert to the topic, so that I took note of potential cues and explanations whenever I came across them. There is substantial evidence for reading the 'accent theme' in the context of class distinction, as I will show in (IV 2.2.4.). Furthermore, certain tropes and metaphors came up repeatedly. An example is the term "bubble" and the "Egyptian Boy". They caught my attention but remained vague and under-defined before I started reconstructing their meaning in Yasmine's interview. Repeatedly my interviewees characterised groups and people as "open", as "conservative" and "closed". Especially the latter term resonated with descriptions I had encountered in Egypt before.

The attentive reader might have noticed that this overview of the interviews was structured ((and thus framed) in parts by my sensitizing concepts such as "religion" or "family", and by container categories such as "metaphor", "unexpected information", "structure of the narration". In addition, also several topics had emerged which I had not comprehended. Some of these are (geographic) space, the relation to AUC, travelling abroad, depression, Israel and language/accent.[148]

Defining criteria for the selection of the case study and picking Yasmine

Following this first step of a formulating interpretation, I had to pick the interview for the case study. Criteria that were relevant to this choice are: the length of the entry narration, my interaction with the interviewee and reaction to her story, her skills in story telling, the structural features of the narration, the content and topics of the interview. After producing the inventories I

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[148] It is worth noting that if I had retained the original research design of 'three out of ten', this overview of the interviews (which corresponds to the *Globalanalyse* by Rosenthal (2005) would have been the basis for the selection of a second interview. I really wonder how this should have happened? Which of the many motives that appeared in Yasmine's interview after microanalysis should have provide the anchor point for comparison? Which of the structural similarities or differences should be the criterion? All the dimensions and features appear to cut across each other, so that any decision seems quite arbitrary, mainly based on my interest. Thus the selection of the second case would again draw on a mix of inductive categories (from the microanalysis of case I) and the sensitizing concepts.

was quite familiar with all of the interviews. I had a good grasp of the topics and the different structures. And moreover, I had also again "re-experienced" my own emotional reactions to the interviewees, to their way of story telling and the interaction when listening to the recordings.

The first criterion for selecting the case study then was a formal one: A positive response to the entry stimulus, resulting in a lengthy entrance narration provided a better basis for text analysis. Thus, the four interviews with 20, 45, 50 and 90 minutes-long entry narrations were most promising. Above that, there were several interviews which became 'better' in later phases. In these encounters, it seemed that the interviewee (and I) had to 'warm up' first. A second criterion that mattered to me, was my feeling about the interview. Frankly speaking, I could not picture myself working for the next months with an interview that I did not like. I do not feel entirely comfortable about admitting that this idiosyncratic sensitivity played a role – yet, it is exactly what is often asked from qualitative researchers.[149] Connolly has formulated this dilemma most poignantly:

> "For example, we must 'give permission' to researchers to confess — without fear of judgement by their peers — their own emotional reactions to the narratives that they gather, particularly when they are likely to experience role conflicts, ethical dilemmas, and their own emotional, compassionate reactions. Niggling in the back of their minds, these qualitative researchers are often haunted by that notion of clinical distance between researcher and subject that is inherent in the quantitative paradigm. When these qualitative researchers experience role conflicts, ethical dilemmas, and emotional compassion during the course of their qualitative inquiry, they question if they are maintaining enough objectivity in their research efforts. Cognitively, they understand the differences between the two research paradigms, but they still wonder if their feelings are legitimate and appropriate, even within the qualitative paradigm. These authors have come to understand, however, that research of this nature demands a stretching of roles, as knowledge is cocreated and as stories are coauthored. While this notion is often mentioned in the literature, each of the four authors above questioned whether they were acting appropriately given their degree of emotional investment and the intimate nature of the relationships that were established with their study participants" (Connolly 2007: 453).

(I quoted her at length here, as my emotional involvement will become relevant repeatedly.) Fortunately, my personal sympathy for interview(ee)s corresponded very well with the richness of the interview and the length of the entry narration. (Probably, I felt more sympathetic to those who responded positively to my search for narrations.) But let us remain with the issue of feelings and emotions for a while, but let us term it differently, let us frame it as 'the impression' that I had from the interviewee. This expression fits well with the interview as a situation, where my

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[149] So, indeed, there *are* rules for qualitative research, and they even extend to such sensitive realms as revealing one's own emotions. Yet, qualitative research principles can never be straightforwardly applied according to the book, it always involves a moment of critical reflection. And some degree of a headache.

interview partners are engaged in a specific type of "impression management" (to use Goffman's terminology (Vester 2009: 63)). Several interviewees left a very positive impression on me. They were nice young women with interesting stories, a lot of energy and dedication. Out of these, two also opened the interview with a long entry narration and thus satisfied the formal criteria for an easy analysis. And then, there was this one story whose intensity took me by complete surprise. Actually, it was the whole encounter rather than the narration alone that left a deep and very intense impression on me. The content of the story was nothing less than crazy. It was an accumulation of intense experiences, one stunning, irritating, and troubling fact followed the other, each new storyline was as captive as the previous one. It felt like a road movie, nothing less. My reaction (recorded both on tape and on my memory) was telling: Once the interviewee had ended the biographical monologue, it would have been my turn to speak again and regulate the interaction. But when the interviewee concluded by asking whether this had been the longest interview I got so far, all I could say was "ummm ... no I, I, ... that wasn't the *longest* interview, or the longest, err, narration of of, err, of of one's life story. But you've been through *a lot.* It's *really ...* I, I need ((laughs)) a second to actually process all that."[150] The interviewee herself then proposed to take a short break so I could refresh and literally gain conscience again. Maybe even more irritating than the content of the story itself, was Yasmine's way of telling it: my interview partner was continuously extremely concentrated. No matter how often we got interrupted, she could always instantly pick up the story where she had stopped. It seemed that she had a clear image of the order of stories in her mind and the stringency and tempo of her narration was amazing. I was deeply impressed. Obviously, I had met someone who knew the art of story telling. Or to get some critical distance and put it in NID terms: I had met an interviewee who positioned herself as a perfect storyteller and an impressively strong personality, vis-a-vis the dumbfounded researcher. I was not yet aware, how hard it would be to disentangle myself in the text interpretation.

To sum this up and put it in more academic terms: I was totally convinced (or should I rather say: taken in) by Yasmine's skills as a narrator. Her story was highly structured, the plotting very artistic, the tools of staging (*inszenieren*) a story in a lively way (such as scenic narration) were employed skilfully, and the interaction with her, overall, was extremely engaging. Also, if I looked at the interview from the perspective of biographical and narrative inquiry, Yasmine's interview seemed to perfectly produce the various kinds of knowledge that one should be able to derive from

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[150] The "..." indicates a break of more than a second.

biographical interviews: first, her life story showed how sedimented and accumulated experience built up to form the foundation of her current self-presentation. Yasmine herself explicitly pointed to events and circumstances that had shaped her perception of the social world and of herself for the time to follow. Similarly, mechanisms and effects of internalization, are indicated in Yasmine's struggle for identity formation and 'fitting'. Moreover, Yasmine's story clearly highlights how the account of one's life story in general, and the construction of narrative identity in particular, *is conditioned by the present*. The current political situation and the most recent dramatic experiences, provide a prism through which Yasmine looks at her life. The revolution becomes the turning point, towards which the entire life story is pointing. At the same time, the revolution serves as the point of departure for the outlook and future prospects (see also Spiegel 2010: 56, for this effect).

On the question of why I selected Yasmine's interview as case study: besides the "my personal emotion story" or the "biographical construction story", I could also tell a "target group story". The main reason for picking Yasmine would then be her fit with the original target group. Out of the four interviews with a long entry narration, Yasmine best matched the criteria of the group, she even fitted the last-year-BA-criterion. Another story, which of course plays into the hands of critics would be the "I wanted to confirm my hypothesis story". In that story, I chose Yasmine's case because it confirmed my pre-formulated hypothesis. Let me respond to such a criticism with a question: Which hypothesis exactly should that be? The assumption that there are conflicts? The assumption that women are not oppressed? The assumption that individuals appropriate and transform the forces of globalisation in their self-construction? In my opinion, none of the assumptions and theories and knowledge that I had prior to entering the field could be broken down to a hypotheses that can be confirmed (or dis-confirmed) by one case. This is simply not the logic of the kind of research and knowledge that I am working with here. And whoever remains sceptical might do well to look at the rest of this study. A look at the conclusions drawn from Yasmine's case and its confrontation with the other interviews, should be able to dispel such doubts. My intention is not to confirm or refute any simple hypothesis – besides the one assumption: it is complex.

But rather than providing more alternative justifications for picking Yasmine, I would like to locate her case within the matrix of the twelve interviews, based on the results from the formulating phase. We can undertake a first rough characterisation of Yasmine as follows:

Yasmine does not have a scholarship, her parents pay the full tuition fees for her. She counts

herself as belonging to the upper middle class of Cairo. Cairo is the city where she was born and grew up in. She travelled abroad several times but had never had the chance to do a term abroad, and has never lived outside of Egypt. Nonetheless, she attributes some importance to her trips abroad, and describes the (mostly depressing) effect of the travels and the return to Egypt on her life. She is unveiled when I meet her, but she tells me of a phase, when she wore the veil for about three years. Today, she lives with her family, in a gated community on the outskirts of Cairo. She studies in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at AUC, and attributes tremendous importance to the revolution. The only kind of social engagement she mentions is that in which she was involved in during and after the revolution. Yasmine mentions former boyfriends, and speaks about the issues of drinking and smoking. She is motivated to participate in the interview by the conviction that research on women should be done, even more so in the given situation which allows free research.

3.3 'In the text': hermeneutic field II – the idea, process and details of text analysis

In this chapter I address the process of in-depth text interpretation (or reflecting interpretation). I attempt to render transparent the proceedings of the micro analysis that was central to the reconstruction of Yasmine's narrative identity as it will be presented in chapter III. Also in this phase of (micro)text interpretation, some adjustments seemed required. First, I adapted the approach of NID slightly, in particular in regards to the re-telling of Yasmine's story. In addition, I decided to adjust the method of NID by integrating two complementing sensitizing concepts (the "theatre analogy" and "explanatory systems") for the analysis. These adaptations and complements are explained in chapter II 3.3.2. As mentioned above, all adjustments rely on the basic principles of qualitative research and text analysis. Here the previous comprehensive discussion of these principles gains practical significance.

3.3.1 The process of text analysis in the case study

After I had selected Yasmine's interview for the case study, I transcribed the entire interview with a very detailed system of transcription (an explanation of the details can be found in the appendix). After turning the spoken word into text, another phase of "formulating" interpretation had to follow, in order to structure the individual biographical interview more thoroughly. At this point, I did not rely on the inventory any more but structured the text anew. This happened in several passes with various container categories, clues and foci. Sometimes I did more than one pass with

the same "sensitizing concept" or "container category". Then I tried a different concept (e.g. text forms in pass one, semantic markers for temporal units ("then", "afterwards") in a second round, metaphors in pass three, and so on). In general, it was mostly formal, not content-related, criteria that I applied for structuring. In other passes, I asked the "What?" question, trying to figure out what my interviewee was speaking about. The "What?" question could be formulated in various ways: what does she say about herself? What is the main topic in this sequence? What happens? Depending on the question and the level of abstraction we would get different responses for one single sequence. (Depending on the question the swearword scene (see IV 1.3.1) for example could be summarised in different ways: 1) Yasmine describes how she behaved as child and how she dealt with the parental reaction; 2) disciplining female behaviour/an argument with her parents/ being beaten up for swearing/conflict/gender norms/using swearwords; 3) Yasmine says to a guest of the father a swearword she learnt from her cousin and then is punished afterwards; or 4) Yasmine explains how the idea that being sociable is inadequate for women, has influenced her.) After each structuring attempt, I compared the new structure to the previously constructed one, and tried to find commonalities, differences, and overlaps. This comparison of different potential structures was extremely helpful. It enhanced my understanding in two ways: first, I acquired a more critical understanding of the *types* of concepts and categories I had at hand. In particular, I became very sensitive to the difference between thematic and formal categories. I realized for example that many "themes" extended over several narrative segments and crossed the borders of certain biographical phases (both formal categories). In selecting the text passages for microanalysis, then, these different types of concepts played together. To give an example: I wanted to have a closer look at sequences where the "veil" constituted the main topic (or where the conspicuous term "the bubble") appeared. Yet, where the relevant sequence started and ended was decided by formal linguistic criteria (such as text sort and markers, such as a coda). Above all, I gained a good overview of the interview's topics and a deeper understanding of the construction principles.

Largely in parallel to these structuring attempts, I started with the microanalysis of certain text passages. The microanalysis provided content-related hints for the structuring and the global analysis. As common in this analysis of narrative interviews (Oevermann, Allert and Konau 1980: 43), I began the microanalysis with the entry passage of the interview[151], adhering strictly to the

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[151]   Oevermann et al. argue that the entry passage is of particular importance to the analysis, "weil der Befragte hier

principle of sequentiality. In the microanalysis of these early passages I followed the programme laid down by Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann (See chapter II 2.2). In this phase of my research my interpretation group was of great help. In three of the group meetings I had the chance to present the group with my interview as the empirical data for analysis. When I did the micro analysis all by myself, I worked with the same tools, such as variation analysis, context analysis, the analysis of expectations and positioning analysis. Yet, when alone I had to turn into writing every single thought in order to actually get a process of thinking started. (Only when I forced myself to put a thought into words, did it become clear enough to engage with it – talking to myself is not really my thing I have to admit). Both the work with the group and by myself drew my attention to certain themes and metaphors. I tried to trace these topics while I was reconstructing narrative identity, in the interview, across the dimensions defined by Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann (see II 2.2). While I proceeded to further text segments, I maintained constant interchange with the analysis of the totality of the case. This constituted a switch from the local to the global perspective in a spiralling manner. Soon, I saw the need to supplement and refine the model provided by NID in several respects (see II 3.3.2). The longer I had been working with the text, the clearer the structure of Yasmine's narrative identity indeed became. Of those themes that were reconstructed in the microanalysis, several ones appeared in other segments as well, and seemed to prove important for the case as a whole. Among these themes and tropes were "Americanised", "my society", "the bubble", "space to be", "taking off the veil", "the people".

At this stage, I decided to rely on coding to better organize my material. Through the preceding stages of analysis I had stuck to sequentiality in order to reconstructed the central motives of the case. Now I wanted to get a better overview, and wanted to understand how these central motives were linked to the structure of the case. I thus used the programme *Atlas.ti* to tag text segments with those labels that had been reconstructed in the previous phase (e.g. "travelling abroad", "taking off the veil", "space to be") or metaphors that seemed to take a central place (e.g. "bubble"). The work with *Atlas.ti* allowed me to search and find text passages on the same topics easily. In order to reconstruct the case in its totality, I spent considerable time on analysing how these central themes linked to the structure of narrative identity. In the presentation of the case study, and the discussion of the topics that emerged, the basic structure of narrative identity will

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im Bemühen der angemessenen Selbstpräsentation und der angemessenen Situierung seiner weiteren Textproduktion sich besondere Mühe gibt und seine Texte sowohl im Hinblick auf die Struktur des Selbstkonzepts als auch im Hinblick auf die rationalisierungsbedürftigen Antriebe besonders leicht auszulegen sind" (Oevermann, Allert and Konau 1980: 43).

be portrayed separately (III). The confrontation of Yasmine's themes with the other interviews shifts the focus to the larger societal context. Before we turn to these results in the chapters III and IV, I will shortly portray the changes to the method of text interpretation that were necessitated by Yasmine's self-presentation.

3.3.2 Re-organizing narrative identity, adding the theatre analogy and explanatory systems

In this chapter, I will explain to the reader in how far I deviated from Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann's programme in my interpretative work and the presentation of my results. Some minor adaptations of the method itself seemed in order. These pertained to the classification of text sorts, and the three-dimensional structure of narrative identity. Further on, I decided to complement the text analysis with the theatre analogy and the notion of explanatory systems. Both concepts helped to unlock Yasmine's text. The theatre analogy also provided the structure for presenting Yasmine's case (III).

Fritz Schütze's ongoing influence on the methodology of narrative inquiry in the German-speaking academic community cannot be emphasised enough. The method of text analysis that Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann develop, draws strongly on his legacy, too. As others did before, though, they consider his differentiation of three text sorts (narration, description, argumentation) insufficient for their purpose. Instead they argue for a more detailed sub-classification of "narration", defined as "chronicle narration", "reporting narration" and "scenic narration"[152](Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 145, my translation). My own experience with the text analysis confirmed that the different elements of a biographical narration can be better captured with a more refined system of text sort classification. Much more essential for my own analysis, however, proved to be another distinction: I started to differentiate between a segment's *text sort* and *text function*. A text segment being clearly identifiable as a *scenic narration* according to Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann's scheme could easily *function* as an argument in the text at large. While the t*ext form* is defined by the *content* and *form* of the segment itself, the *function* of the respective segment depends on the larger *context*. Obviously, both the aspects of *text function* and *text sort* can be assessed on several levels. A *scenic narration,* for example, often opens with a *description* of the setting and the protagonists, and is later concluded by a sequence of *argumentation* which attaches a certain frame to the story told (see for example the swearword scene, IV 1.3.1). According to linguist Per Aage Brandt, some even claim that *any* reasoning or

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[152] The cumbersome literal translation for the latter would be "dramatic-episodic narration."

description, is always embedded in a larger narrative context (Brandt 2004). In our case the *life story* that Yasmine tells in the setting of the biographical interview is the *overarching narration.* A subordinate scene, like the swearword scene (see IV 1.3.1) is a *narration,* too – as far as the text sort is concerned. But it is located on a "lower" level of the text within the overarching narration (it could be called a *local* narration within the *global* narration). The scene is serving an *argumentative function* in the context of Yasmine's life story, and contains itself descriptive and argumentative elements.

Integrating the theatre analogy

Although I used NID for conducting the text interpretation, I did not base the re-telling of my case (in III) on the structure of narrative identity. In part this is due to the specificities of the case, and in part it is owed to the fact that I did not find the structure of NID entirely convincing.

For the latter argument, take the "temporal dimension" of narrative identity as an example: it comprises several elements which are at odds with each other, but could as well (or even better) fit into the social or self-referent dimension. The temporal dimension includes 1) the events and their order and relation, pertaining to the way causality is portrayed and consistency constructed, 2) a model of experienced time, 3) agency and 4) the relation to the earlier self or the development from an earlier self to the present told self. The latter aspect however cannot be separated from the self-positioning, which Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann treat as an aspect of the self-referent dimension of narrative identity. In some respect though "(self-)positioning" as a tool of analysis (put on one level with for example "variation analysis") cuts across all three identity dimensions.

The basic 'facts' (i.e. What?) of a story that are responsible for the story's overall visible shape are spread across all three dimensions: events constitute the main cornerstones of the plot of a narration; they are attributed to the "temporal dimension". The people (or persons) and places of a story (which have a surprisingly minor role in the outline), however, are located in the "social dimension", which they share with culturally-produced plotting schemes. "Agency", on the other hand, is one of the main construction principles which distinguishes the life stories of different people from each other. The reconstruction of agency, however, extends over all the levels of meaning within a text, and needs minute reconstruction before its structure can be tentatively defined. Nonetheless, in NID, it is subsumed under the temporal dimension.

Surely, the structure of narrative identity is not arbitrary or without reason, yet, it mixes levels of

meaning and does not necessarily provide the right structure for *retelling* a specific story or presenting a specific case. In Yasmine's life story, the persons provide an interesting entry point into her story, and thus constitute a useful addition to the events, when we want to retell her narration. The characters in and places of a life story receive much more attention in those approaches that employ concepts and analogies from drama and literature analysis. These approaches provide a good structure for introducing *Yasmine's specific case*. It was the drama-language and -metaphors used by Yasmine herself, which made me turn to Goffman's theatre analogy in the first place. This constitutes a classical example for re-fitting the concepts and method according to the nature of the subject under investigation, in respect to the case. While Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann do refer to symbolic interactionism as one of their theoretical sources, they stop short of integrating Goffmann, who stands in the tradition of Mead (Vester 2009: 62). This is surprising as Goffman's drama metaphor can offer a useful and inspiring analytical tool for approaching the self-presentation of individuals in human interaction. According to Willems (2009a), Goffman provides us with concepts such as "role", "habitus", and "script". He upholds the methodological position that "drama" is a useful *analogy* but does not obtain ontological status in Goffman's thinking. Comparison and the construction of analogies are operations of thought that help generate insights, estrange the observer-researcher and unlock the text or data. What makes the theatre analogy a particularly apt tool is its good fit with reality (Willems 2009a). From a constructionist point of view, we need to qualify (Flick 2010: 90): the drama analogy fits well with the way the researcher observes and narrates academically, and in our case it also fits particularly well with the way the interviewee observes and presents herself and her world (see III 3.1.4.). A closer look at the drama analogy shows that "setting the scene", "preparing the stage" and "introducing the characters of the play" have a lot in common with the perspective of positioning which Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann embrace wholeheartedly. Both approaches try to capture an element of space, which could best be described as some kind of "social space". They both also capture attributes like dress, accessories, and the like. It is not hard to imagine how the director (i.e. narrator) picks the puppets, dresses them, gives them some accessories and then *positions* them on stage. Within the analogy of drama, a character's "position" would refer to the actual location. In positioning theory and positioning as a tool of analysis, the act of positioning also includes the staffage, the placing, and the actions which come to define the characters.[153]

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[153] In my further research I discovered that positioning was developed by Harré and Langenhove as a more dynamic

Another aspect of Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann's model and method became increasingly unsatisfying in the face of my data: their neglect of the role of differentiation in identity construction.[154] Positioning can partially capture the function of distinction, delimation and dissociation in identity construction. Nonetheless, in the phase of reflecting interpretation, I had the impression that I needed to give it a more prominent role if I wanted to understand my interview. Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann indeed do mention that one element of self-positioning is the self-attribution and association with groups or roles (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 67). Yet, persons (and groups or places) are not merely characterised by what they *are.* Instead it is often most relevant what they *are not*. Obviously, we are returning to the logic of comparison, which is not only a helpful principle for interpretation (i.e. second order construction) but also an element in first order construction. For text interpretation it proved very helpful to work with contrasts, and thus also the presentation of the case (III) and the main themes that were reconstructed (IV) will draw on this principle to illustrate the findings.

Integrating explanatory systems

In "explanatory systems" I found another useful supplement for my analysis toolbox. In this case though, it was not the data that had 'asked for' it. I discovered Linde's work on explanatory systems when spiralling back into the literature on narration and biographical research (Linde 1991; 1993). This return to literature became necessary when I felt that the tools of NID were not adequate to represent my case. Linde's concept was of considerable value, as it provided me with new questions to ask, for example "What are the elements which Yasmine understands as causal in her life story"? This way, a new concept opened up new perspectives on the data (Linde 1991).[155] In Linde's understanding, an "explanatory system is a system of beliefs derived from some expert system but used by someone with no corresponding expertise or credentials" (Linde 1991: 343). Psychological theories such as "Behaviourism" or "Freudian Psychoanalysis" are examples of such expert systems. The corresponding explanatory systems constitute a strongly simplified version thereof. While Linde's concept offers an intriguing perspective on the argumentation found in a life

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alternative to the drama analogy (Harré and van Lagenhove 1999). It was in parts the critique of "role" as an transcendentalist concept that constituted the superiority of "positioning", an immanent concept (Davies and Harré 1999: 34).

[154] Social psychology, in specific the research on intergroup behaviour, on stereotypes, and on prejudice, can provide some cues here. Concrete examples are the Social Identity Theory by Tajfel and Turner, and the research on prejudice and stereotype reduction in the tradition of Allport.

[155] If I was willing to, I could call this an element of 'theory triangulation', which essentially is not much more than looking at the data with different glasses or from a different conceptual and theoretical perspective.

story, her *assumption of exclusivity* is problematic. Linde observes that every person she interviewed follows *one* explanatory system. She seems to imply that various explanatory systems would in general *not coincide* in one interview. Concretely, Linde elaborates on the explanatory systems her interviewees used for explaining their choice of profession. Among others, she finds a Freudian, a behaviourist and an astrologist explanatory system. At a first glance, it seems logical to assume that the application of a Freudian theory would rule out the concurrent use of behaviourist theories. Already at a second glance, though, this assumption does not hold – or should every therapist offering both psychoanalysis *and* behavioural theory suffer from an internal contradiction of convictions?

The problematic assumption leading the supposition of the exclusionary character of belief systems is that people are not contradictory, and that a certain rationale could not be applied to a specific field or situation exclusively. In light of all we have discussed previously in regards to identity construction, we can dismiss these claims – if not as *wrong*, then at least as irreconcilable with the remainder of our epistemological and ontological assumptions. Also, it remains unclear why several explanatory systems explaining *different aspects* of causality in a life story and of the self concept should not coincide.

All these impediments notwithstanding, the explanatory systems offer a good take on the so called "naive" theories of self. Even Yasmine's application of the theatre analogy in her self-presentation could be an example, as well as her notions of identity formation. Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann draw (among others) on Linde, but they treat the "belief system" in a less strict way. They use the two expressions "belief system" and "system of coherence" interchangeably. Both designate cognitive systems that inform the argumentation within the narration and the overall *construction* of the story. Following Linde, they consider them popularised versions of expert systems. Furthermore, they point out that it is often psychotherapies which inspire people's vocabulary and patterns of belief, and thereby eventually 'colour' the entire story. This integration of therapeutic explanations into the fixed repertoire of one's life story can be observed in Yasmine's case. Yet. even though Yasmine shows certain beliefs that fit well in a Freudian belief system, she does not constantly apply Freudian explanations.

The transformation of expert systems into lay explanatory systems could also be considered from the perspective of "double hermeneutics". The distinction between expert systems, common sense and explanatory systems reminds of Schütz' distinction of "the expert, the man on the street and the well-informed citizen" (Schütz 1964: 122). Two other ideas from this context are

important, too. First, the *fundamentals* of *understanding* by the lay person and the expert do not differ. In everyday live, individuals (also the *subjects/objects* of social research) engage as much in operations of observation and meaning making as researchers do in an academic context. Hence we distinguish first order constructions (for everyday constructions, observations, narrations) and second order constructions (for scientific constructions, observations, narrations). Furthermore, the expert knowledge feeds back into the real world and the constructions of the individuals (Giddens 1986: 348-372; Esser 1999: 211–213; Bohnsack 2000: 24; Schütz 1964). Yasmine's adaptation of the theatre analogy (III 1.4) can be seen as an example.

As I have explained in detail above, the researcher's approach differs from everyday observations by being *structured* and *reflexive.* Moreover, the assumption that a neutral *objective* vantage point of the researcher does not exist, leads to the demand to integrate the role of *emotions* into research, adding another layer of reflexivity. Even though the claim to be reflexive on various dimensions has become somewhat fashionable, those calling for it were mostly at a loss for an answer to *how* this should be implemented. Advise on how to translate the demand for reflexivity into research practice has largely been lacking. The previous extensive chapter on methodology was on the one hand the attempt to find a way of meeting these demands for reflexivity and transparency. I portrayed the research process and its foundational assumptions in detail, in order to be reflexive and transparent, and provide the ground for inter-subjective understanding. On the other hand, the extensive discussion of methodological problems was necessitated by the tension between my research approach and the formal exigencies: I had decided to follow a research-before-theory approach, but was at the same time obliged to present an exposé including the theoretical state of the research and deduced hypotheses, *prior* to the field research. In hindsight, I should have either resisted the external demands or opted for a purely deductive approach. Trying to reconcile both resulted in considerable struggles which I have been portraying here. Eventually, much of the state of the research appears not of prime importance to understanding the interviewees and their frame of relevance. It provides a useful theoretical background, but does not provide the categories of analysis and interpretation. Instead, the situation of women, the stark division of Egyptian society along class cleavages, and the political current developments, became the focus in the analysis of my empirical data, due to the main motives in my case study. In the remaining chapters, I will first present the case of Yasmine (III), and then complement the main themes that were reconstructed from her narrative identity with perspectives from the other interviewees and context knowledge (IV).

III Yasmine's life story: the plot and personae, the identity concept and changing agency in the revolution

Yasmine's skills as a narrator are remarkable, and so is the content of her life story: from the first moment it's a story of conflict and of struggle. Already in her childhood Yasmine's character instigates the anger of her parents. When she goes to school and reaches puberty the confrontations get even more intense as her mother joins the rank of many Egyptian women at the turn of the century and becomes more conservative. Yasmine feels like an outsider anyway, and her mother disapproving of her Americanised friends does not make things easier. Abuse and restrictions in her family, exclusion from her peer group and self-loathing, the lack of a fatherly figure and the inability to find her "identity" turn her life into hell. The attempt to solve some of her problems by putting on the veil backfires and ends in a yearlong struggle, until she takes it off again. Living a double-life, travelling abroad and resorting to drugs can provide only temporary relief. Eventually, it is the revolution in Egypt that not only turns the country upside down, but also Yasmine's life.

By applying the method of NID we look at Yasmine's case with a microscope to get a grasp of the complexities of her individual case. The short summary already highlighted some important themes of Yasmine's narrative identity construction: the conflict with her restrictive mother, the clash with the Americanised world, the struggle with the veil, and the turning point of the revolution. Throughout her narration, Yasmine tells an inside story: rather than depicting in detail what she did,[156] the focus lies on the told self's experience, her feelings and thinking. Her struggle for self-formation can be understood as the attempt to reconcile the expression of her self and others' expectations, and the balance between these two orientations shifts considerably throughout her life story. Also, her sense of agency transforms.[157] Yasmine constructs the experiences in the revolution and the resulting empowerment as the turning point of her personal fortune. From an analytical perspective, the difference can best be conceptualised as "changing agency".

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[156] This is a major difference between various interviews. Some focus on their activities others speak at length about various things, for example their university. Also the long entry monologues differed considerable as to their main thrust. There was for example a "these are all the events and people that lead me to where I am now" monologue and a "these are thee major factors and events in my life" story.

[157] In my concept of agency I follow Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann (2002: 59; see also chp. III 1.5). Agency is not understood as a personality trait or character disposition (McAdams 1996: 282–287), nor as the "legitimierte Vertretung eines legitimierten Prinzipals" (Meyer and Jepperson 2005: 49 FN2).

In the minute reconstruction of Yasmine's identity, I was particularly sensitive to those topics and situations where identity becomes visible in its function as the pivot of the self-society-relation, and where the societal, cultural and material environment was implied or referred to. I took note when Yasmine describes 'things as they are' or 'should be' and when the characters in her story refer to "tradition" or "culture". Moreover, topics or tropes such as "bubble" or "Americanised" that I had already encountered in other interviews (see Chapter II.3.2.2) caught my attention. As discussed at large in the chapters on methodology (II), my prior knowledge was derived from the state of the research (I.3) and my experience in Egypt (I.1). The preliminary results and impressions of the field research (II 3) sensitised and guided my attention, while the structured and minute process of text analysis (II 1.4; II 3.3) helped me to hold back on my own frame of reference. During the process of analysis (II 3.3.1), I followed the method of Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann (II 2.2), with certain minor adaptations (II 3.3.2). In the presentation of Yasmine's case, these adjustments are reflected – I do not strictly follow the structure of temporal, social and self-referent dimension of NID, but combine it with the theatre analogy. This way, Yasmine's case can be presented in the way that is most adequate to her story and self-presentation.

First, I recapitulate the most important aspects of the *interview interaction* to capture this interactive dimension of the construction process (III 1.1). This step is based on the postscript of the interview. For all the following chapters of the case study, the full transcript and the recordings of the interview provide the data. In the next step, I want the reader to get acquainted with Yasmine's story, with the order of events, the setting of the stage and the "*personae*". In order to familiarise the reader with *the plot of Yasmine's life story,* I first attempt to retell the most relevant aspects of her story[158] and give an idea of the way she tells the story (III 1.2).[159] Yasmine herself stuck – throughout the 45 minutes of monologue – to a chronological order. In retelling her story, I did therefore not regroup the content of the narration but adhered to a chronological order as well. Before I introduce the personae of Yasmine's self-narration (III 1.3) and reflect on their function for Yasmine's story, I shortly delve into the first two passages of Yasmine's monologue. These two segments precede the chronological narration of her life story, and seem to function as a *prologue* and *the setting of the stage* for the events in her biographical narration. In the next,

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[158] In order to guarantee anonymity and security, I had to leave out certain events and encounters in Yasmine's life, even though they would have enhanced the understanding of her case. If the reader has the impression that – in specific in regards to the phase of the revolution and the personae's behaviour therein – some information or detail is missing, this might indeed be an accurate perception.

[159] The "plot" is largely identical with the "events" as in the temporal dimension of identity. Even though this chapter then largely responds to the question "What happens? What is told?", the re-telling, of course, is highly influenced by the results of the previous analysis.

more analytical chapter (III 1.4), I reconstruct those aspects of Yasmine's narrative identity construction that are highlighted by a drama perspective: *her own conception of identity and roles* seems to follow at parts an explanatory system close to Goffman's theatre analogy. Throughout the narration, the told self's concept of identity evolves. Also, the understanding of the inside-outside relation (one aspect of identity concepts) as it is manifest in Yasmine's self-reflections and self-theory, seems to transform within the story. After this analysis of Yasmine's identity concept, the question of *agency as an element of narrative identity* will be addressed. Since Yasmine tells an 'inside-story', both "identity concept" and " agency" are plausible foci for presenting Yasmine's case. The *themes* of Yasmine's narrative identity construction (or the central motives as Kruse (2007) calls them) are not addressed in this chapter. Instead, they provide the basis for contrasting Yasmine's experience with the accounts of my other interview partners (see chapter (IV)).

It is difficult to decide on the adequate balance of proximity to the data material and detailed reconstruction on the one side, and the necessity to reduce and proceed in a stringent, economic manner, on the other side. In that sense the very same forces that narrative inquiry builds on, the *Erzählzwänge*, come to influence me as well. I decided to tilt the balance more towards the detailed reconstruction by working with a lot of quotes and staying close to Yasmine's life story. The reasons are twofold: first, it is once more the requirements of a *Diplomarbeit* that force me to shed as much light possible on the actual process of interpretation as the foundation of analytical conclusions. The second and more important reason: considering that most of the readers will be not acquainted at all with the subject's lifeworld, I felt the need to give as much insight as possible into Yasmine's way of speaking and arguing. Most of all, it fits the logic of the methodology, specifically the demand for transparency, which is why proximity to the text wins over abstractness

1.1 The interview interaction: a captive encounter

In regards to the interview interaction, we need to distinguish between the 'actions' of the interviewee, observable in the recording and transcript, and the emotional and cognitive response of the researcher. When focusing on the latter we are engaging in what can be called "analysis of effect" (Bosse 1991: 206). The prime purpose of this chapter is to analyse the effect that Yasmine and her narration had on me in the interview interaction, and also later, during transcription and interpretation. A second purpose is to convey an impression of the setting to the reader, so she is able "to reconstruct [a specific aspect of] the conditions under which the knowledge presented here was generated" (Spiegel 2010: 33).

Twenty minutes before Yasmine was supposed to arrive at my place, she sent me a text message to ask whether we could meet at a friend's place instead. I felt I did not have much of a choice, and at least the address she gave me was not too far from my flat, so there was a good chance we could still start the interview within the next hour, regardless of the traffic. Since I had already become used to my interviewees cancelling, rescheduling, or relocating the interviews last minute, I was neither particularly annoyed, nor surprised. Rather, I felt a sense of bemusement that this kind of incidence was so recurrent. Moreover, from the previous conversation with Yasmine, I knew she was very busy – but nonetheless eager to meet and sit for an interview. When I arrived at her friend's place, the mix of light annoyance and amusement was quickly replaced by curiosity. I found myself in a rather unexpected setting: when Yasmine had told me they were still working on some kind of project at her friend's place, I had pictured the setting as an ideal work space. Clearly, this image was tied to European realities. Rather than a light flooded space defined by the needs of the working youth, it was of course a place largely defined by the parental taste and style. At least we were still in Egypt. Thus, I was led through a large flat whose interior resembled that of a museum or an antiquities store. Cramped with all kinds of statues, décor, King Farouk-style furniture, the walls were painted in turquoise and orange and the flat had an extremely colourful and chaotic appearance. The door had been opened by Yasmine and her friend Ahmed, who greeted me friendly and led me to one of the smaller rooms at the far end of the flat, since the couch in the salon – usually used for receiving guests – was already taken by the owner of the place. The room itself did not deviate much from the rest of the apartment: it was painted in an intense turquoise. The walls were covered with framed paintings of all and thick curtains blocked out any natural light. Instead, the omnipresent Egyptian neon lamp immersed the room into a cold

light which would not fit the otherwise antique and colourful style. At least it went well with the somehow out-of-place armchair, which would be expected in a doctor's office rather than one's home. My interviewee first placed herself in that armchair, only to jump out of it some seconds later, in order to sit next to me on the large couch.

Yasmine was wearing black Doc Martens, with the laces untied, complemented by an oversized grey sweater with a Canada logo on it. It was matched by tight bluejeans, with a hole over the right knee, whose torn off edges Yasmine would constantly play with during the interview. She had not put on any make-up and was wearing her hair tied in a pony tail. I was impressed by the nonchalant style that I had not often encountered in Egypt before.

When I started to engage Yasmine in a conversation after we got seated, Ahmed asked whether the recording would be published. He wondered whether he could continue working on the project in the same room, so he could take Yasmine's comment in-between. Before I could think of a polite way to reject this request, Yasmine had already made up her mind: "I am not convinced", she responded. Thus Ahmed left the room to us. Of course not without having fulfilled the host's role and having offered tea, and coffee, and whatever else you can think of.

Once we start the interview, Yasmine instantly got herself into a talking mood. Her way of presenting the story was very engaging, she seemed to make an effort, employed large gestures and it was always easy to follow. Throughout the whole story, Yasmine remains[160] remarkably focused, she is extremely alert and concentrated, although she does not refrain from answering the phone during the interview. After any interruption, she returns without much effort to precisely the point where she halted her story. She also seems eager to push her story forward and has no issues arranging the different strands of her story. It seems as if she had told the stories before, even though they are not perfectly, neatly arranged. At times Yasmine interrupts herself, searches for continuations and conclusions. She is keeping me interested but is not 'staging'[161] too much, not exaggerating; I never felt like I was watching a play – nonetheless straight after the interview I noted in my postscript: "she is an actor, but aren't we all? So the play she is enacting here: she is very aware of herself and of her surroundings, and she is telling the truth, straight away, her story. Up to now." Her training and experience might have been of considerable help.

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[160] I decided to shift to the present tense here to mark the distinction between my observations fixed only in the postscript, and those features of the interview that are also (in parts) visible in the recording and the transcript. Throughout the text, I will maintain present tense when I refer to the content of Yasmine's life story. The purpose is to maintain some critical distance, and take what was told as a *narration,* not as an account of 'things as they happened'.

[161] The German term *inszenieren* captures much better what I mean. In the English equivalent, the reference to drama and theatre is much weaker.

Definitely, her impression-management had the desired effect on me.

This strong impression reappeared when I listened to her interview again, and even when I later read the transcript. Another effect also proved to be lasting: "she also makes me worried, I am worried about her". Especially when she portrays the revolution as the solution to her problems, I was worried : isn't this just a distraction from the misery and from the search for a solution? What will happen, once these adventurous days are over, and all the excitement that has gripped Egypt recedes? Whether it was really Yasmine alone, or rather all the young and still hopeful revolutionaries that I was fearing for in these moments is a good question.

Above all, I was astonished by the strength Yasmine displayed. At various points the emotional distance she showed towards her own story was remarkable. The passages where she speaks about the sexual abuse she suffers at the hands of family members are most striking. The extent of emotional control she displays when mentioning it, could have different explanations. Maybe it is the only way to deal with the events without suffering a breakdown. Maybe she wants to keep distance to me, and thus does not allow much *actual* (not *told*!) emotion. Does she want to appear cold-blooded? Or is the ability to regulate emotions a useful skill and habit she acquired in her psycho-therapy? The latter meant that she can dissect several layers of emotion, tied to a past experience, and only touch some of the emotions linked to a traumatic experience, carefully controlling how far she lets herself slip into re-living the experience. The length of the latter explanation already indicates which one I favour. In analysing her narrative identity construction, I came across various other phenomena that can best be explained by her therapy experience. The high degree of reflexivity, and the impression that she had told her story before, could be explained thereby as well. Therapies provide the interviewee with a repertoire of stories, and with 'tested' explanations and attributions. Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann also emphasise the impact of therapy on life story narrations .

So, while *Yasmine* had learnt to handle her own story, *I* was overwhelmed. I became very engaged, and at some points felt like crying (probably at those passages which remind me of problematic aspects of my own life story). Luckily, I was caught up in the role of researcher, so I could get through without actually crying. Apart from that, however, the interview with Yasmine made me forego any rules of interview research (even the few ones I had upheld to that point) – as if my revolutionary interview partner had planted the seed of revolt against academic conventions in me. Our interview was interrupted several times – by Ahmed's father saying goodbye, by Yasmine's phone, and by my inability to continue straight after Yasmine had ended her monologue. Even

more, I did not insist on finishing the interview when Yasmine mentioned she had "to wrap up soon", but agreed to meeting her a second time, the week after, to clear up some remaining questions. As argued in chapter (II 3.1.3), I had also previously renounced enforcing my ideas of an undisturbed interview. Yet, in Yasmine's case, there was a different edge to it: I felt bad about putting any pressure, restraints or demands on her. I reacted strongly to her (perceived!) self-presentation, a victim who overcame her suffering without hedging any feelings of revenge or self-pity. It is notable that the self-presentation in the story is complemented by a second dimension. By filling the role of the narrator in such a skilful and powerful way, Yasmine engages not only in the act of presentation but also in enacting a certain type of self (Wortham 2001). Through her self-enacting and -presentation, she had not only won my respect and admiration, but also my empathy. No way could I ask her to sit with me any longer than she wanted. Instead I should be thankful for the chance to meet her! Fortunately, this impression wore off once I had returned to my desk. On the positive side, however, it helped me to be aware of this effect, so that during text analysis I could monitor carefully whether I was once again taking over Yasmine's perspective on the story without any critical distance.

The overall interaction with Yasmine was also very pleasant. I found her to be very uncomplicated and easy to connect to. Apparently, she did not feel disturbed by my entering her world. She did not give me the feeling that I was bothering her, or that I had to make an extra effort. Yasmine not only entrusted me with a deep insight into her life story, it was as if for some hours, she had opened the door to her personal life for me. I could step in for a while, and was not only allowed to listen and watch, but she even made the effort of explaining everything for me. Above all, I liked Yasmine's take on my research. She said she participated because research on women needed to be done, especially now after the revolution, as open research had not always been allowed. (This seems to be more the expression of Yasmine's tendency to explain *absolutely everything* with the revolution, rather than a well-grounded evaluation of the situation of research in Egypt.)

Yasmine apparently seemed to have confidence in my "street" knowledge of Egypt. Not only does she mention various locations without giving any additional information (such as Agouza, Six of October City, Khan el Khalili), she also thinks I am aware of "how fucked up Egypt is", and she does not see any need to explain to me why going out with an American Jew would be the best way to annoy her parents. Also, she does not explain what being "hassled" or "harassed" in the streets of Cairo means, but seems to assume I knew what she is talking about (which indeed I do). The only

time she gives contextual, Cairo-related information that I considered unnecessary is in reference to the poor district of Haram. While this acquires some plausibility if we consider that many Westerners might not frequent poor areas regularly, it might say even more about Yasmine's own distance from these poor areas.

1.2 The biographical stations of Yasmine's life story and her claim to authenticity

Before I attempt to retell Yasmine's story, I would like to familiarize the reader with the overall character of her story, to make plausible the structure I chose for retelling. When presenting me with her life story, Yasmine proceeds in strict chronological order, she even repeatedly corrects herself, indicating that there was a chronological order to stick to: "that's gonna come later in the story. There's so many stories within the story, you know? But anyway ..."[162] or "Oh, wait. No, no, there are other stories before that." If Yasmine ever deviates from the chronological order, she does so in order to express thoughts on the preceding scene, to introduce an argument, or to supply the researcher with the preferred frame for the story. Whenever she provides a prospect of further events, she moves to a meta level. It is then not the course of events itself or the personae's utterances that hint at later occurrences. Instead, Yasmine 'steps out' of the scene, appears as the storyteller and in this role, regulates the researcher's expectations. The strict maintenance of chronological order conveys a sense of authenticity: events are supposedly told 'as they happened'. The listener gets the impression that the narrator does not interfere with the 'real' order of things as they happened. The developments in the narrator's life are not grouped to represent certain issues or problems. Rather than interfering by structuring the life story, the narrator follows a seemingly *natural* chronological order. Even events that had a major impact on Yasmine's life are not singled out from the stream of events. Even when addressing the sexual abuse she suffered from, Yasmine seems to do so simply because it comes to her mind when speaking of other events of the same period. Earlier phases of her life are summed up under temporal labels, referring to whole periods, such as "when I was young" or "in middle school". In these cases, several episodes function as illustrations of the given period. The closer we get to the present, the higher the degree of resolution, and the less likely Yasmine is to use comprising labels. Her life story consists of various small stories, episodes and descriptive elements, which – not

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[162] In order to make the text more accessible to the reader, I edited all quotations from the interviews to make them easier read-able and understandable. I indicated long breaks with "...", where I left out text, I set a "(...)". Emphasis by the speaker is written "*in italics*". If a word is underlined in the quote, I want to put an emphasis here. Repetitions and fillers (such as err, umm, like and you know) are left out without indication. Were they add to the meaning of an expression (as I understood it), repetitions and fillers are kept in the text, so are grammar and semantic mistakes.

being hierarchically organised – all add up to one big picture. While her narration is colourful, she remains within the retrospective perspective of the omniscient narrator and only seldom narrates with a very high resolution of events, rarely shifting to a re-enacting[163] mode. Yet, she does use a lot of reported speech, inner monologues as well as 'real' inter-personal dialogues. This so-called "isochronic" perspective is usually understood as a means of projecting authenticity (Göymen-Steck 2009: 150; see also chapter II 2.2 on the question of authenticity). By employing narrated speech without re-enacting, Yasmine keeps considerable distance to the told self and her emotions. At the same time, she nonetheless capitalizes on two effects of reported speech: first, the 'zooming in' augments authenticity. Plus, narrated speech functions as implicit and indirect positioning. Different than direct and explicit positioning, the implicit, indirect one is often not perceived as such by the listener, and thus is immune to critique (see II 2.2). Yasmine employs various tools (on the level of semantics as well as the plot) in order to project heightened authenticity. This striving for authenticity, however, is in stark contrast to Yasmine's application of the theatre analogy as a perspective on her own life and actions (see III 1.4). Besides that, the claim to authenticity is in contrast to the interview setting. The interview constitutes a type of human interaction where the staged character could not be more obvious (see Willems 2009b: 86).

Yasmine does not tell any story twice in the first interview, but she makes frequent use of portraying occurrences as "iteration": actions that took place repeatedly are summed up in one episode. While the episode might appear in the text type of narration, its function is that of a description. The "swearword scene" is a case in point: expressions as "would"[164] imply that we are looking at a repeated action or behaviour, the episode becomes illustrative of a *principle* that applies in general, and has an effect beyond the limits of the scene or incident itself.

Due to Yasmine's strict adherence to chronological order in telling her story,[165] retelling is easiest by outlining the main biographical stations: [166]

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[163] While I translated the German term *inszenieren* as "staging", re-*inszenieren* is translated as "re-enacting".

[164] E.g. "and he would always dare me to do things, and I would just do them."

[165] Of course re-telling implies that we are dealing with *my* reproduction of Yasmine's story (Traha 2009: 23). Any such "reproduction will only ever be as the researcher heard it" (Traha 2009: 23). Consequently I am not claiming to " re-present faithfully" Yasmine's story by "simply reproduc[ing]" it (Traha 2009: 23). What I do claim, however, is that I am faithfully representing the research process and the process of constructing knowledge as I experienced it throughout the research.

[166] In retelling Yasmine's story, I am mirroring her style of narrating which can be summed as 'these are the things as they happened'. I won't shift to a meta-level unless necessary. By employing the present tense, I want, on the other hand, to emphasise the 'literary' character: this is not necessarily things as they were in the past, but these are the

At the time of our interview Yasmine is 23 years of age, she is born in the late 1980s in Cairo, where she also grows up. We do not know much about Yasmine's childhood; in her life story and the following part of the interview little attention is given to the first ten years of her life. Only three passages in the narration are dedicated to the childhood years: the first one presents a short description of herself as a young person, the second one is an episode where Yasmine's parents punish her for what they consider "wrong" and "unethical" behaviour, followed by a short segment of reasoning. I have named this the "swearword scene". Since the three-part childhood segment appears early in the biographic narration and establishes an important pattern for Yasmine's story, it will be addressed in more detail later, in the context of norms for female behaviour in Egypt ((IV 1.3.1).

The years of middle school (starting at the age of 11), on the other hand, are portrayed in more depth (or length). They constitute "a crucial time" and are associated with "puberty" for the narrator. In the explanations about middle school, Yasmine addresses first and foremost the relationship between the past "teenage" self, her mother and her peers. In these years, the family moves to an upper-class settlement in the desert. At the same time, the mother is busy with building the villa there, and becomes more conservative, in the wake of the Islamic Revivalism, inspired by the television star Amr Khalid (see I.3.2). This conservative turn leads to considerable conflicts with her daughter. Yasmine is an outsider among her peers, and she finds it hard to make friends and find acceptance. At the same time, her mother hates her friends – supposedly because Yasmine's "society", the people from her school in Ma'adi, are very "Americanised". One of the major lines of conflict, the discrepancy between the mother and Yasmine's "society" in her Ma'adi middle school, is already implied here.

Yasmine's first attempts to adjust herself in order to find friends are rejected by her peers. Yet, when she changes to the American diploma branch of her school, she meets her friend Fiona. Also the relation to Fiona, and the effects this has on Yasmine, displease Yasmine's parents. In the same period, Yasmine is molested at night by her older brother. When she tells her mother about it, the latter tells Yasmine "to deal with it". Yasmine turns to a teacher for help. His attempt at addressing the issue fails and leads to further complications. Discussing the issue of street harassment leads to a similar confrontation with the mother: she rebukes her daughter for not showing the expected behaviour. When Yasmine is also abused by her uncle, the issue is addressed by the uncle's wife

things as I understand them from what Yasmine told me.

but without a satisfactory result. Thus, Yasmine deals with both cases on her own behalf in her own way, by avoiding the uncle afterwards, and threatening her brother so he would stop.

Also in other regards this middle school phase is conflict-prone: Yasmine and her mother get into conflict various times. They argue about the girl's performance in school or about her degree of freedom. Mistrust guides the actions of the mother who constantly tightens the curfew and increases the restrictions on her daughter. Regarding the behaviour of Yasmine's told self, who only "wanted to be a good girl", these sanctions seem grossly exaggerated. Being grounded and living in a desert city, remote from Ma'adi has a deteriorating impact on Yasmine's social life, and also leads to the end of the relationship with her first boyfriend.

In Yasmine's biographic narration, the transition to high school is not marked as a discrete step. Yet, a new phase – and a new thread of the story – begins when Yasmine decides to don the veil at the age of 16. Inspired to undertake this step by a friend, the told self wants to revoke this move already two weeks later. Yet, her mother strongly opposes and threatens the girl with sanctions if she takes off the veil. For Yasmine, three years of struggling begin. At first she tries to transform her way of thinking, then she tries to adjust herself (or her self?) in various ways through adopting one, or rather, *several* different kinds of outward-directed behaviour. She becomes a hippie, decides to have "loads of fun", gets a piercing. The restrictions imposed by her family remain, Yasmine is tortured by a feeling of self-loathing, incessantly asking herself why she was so different. When she comes to accept the thoughts of taking off the veil, she presents her parents again with her intention to take off the veil. Again, her mother reacts negatively, beating her daughter and staging a dramatic scene. Thus intimated, Yasmine reacts with an emotional outbreak first, and then decides to life a double life. For the rest of 11th grade, she escapes the "bubble" that her parents keep her in: Yasmine skips school frequently, takes the metro to Downtown Cairo[167], and hangs out with her American Jewish boyfriend.

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[167] "Downtown", called *west el balad* in Egyptian Arabic, can in Cairo refer to one specific quarter of the city, or to that area of the city which constitutes the older core of the city. The latter includes not only the quarter Downtown but also the quarters Zamalek, Muhandisin, Dokki and Agouza to the West and Mounira, Sayyeda Zeinab and others to the South-East. Which area exactly is designated by "downtown" often depends (literally) on the stand point of the speaker: if she finds herself in Six of October City or one of the other gated communities in the deserts, "downtown" designates the city centre at large, then even Muhandisin appears as a part of "downtown". If the speaker is in Agouza and refers to downtown, it means the quarter reaching from Midan Tahrir to Midan Opera, Fallaki and so on. It is a quarter marked by its French and British colonial architecture and the specific street-layout. This different usage of the term "downtown" soon however comes to transcend the actual situation and turns into a habit: for those members of the Egyptian upper classes that live in gated communities, "downtown" in general comes to designate a far away place whose dust, dirt and noise they've left behind. In regards to Yasmine's 'escape' from school, downtown designates the quarter in the centre of the city, as she is speaking from a location

After graduation, Yasmine enjoys a good first semester at AUC, where she signed up for a double major to accommodate to both her parents' and her own preferences. While she is really busy, overwhelmed, and distracted in fall semester, depression kicks back in, worse than ever before, in spring semester. The thoughts and problems of this phase centre on the veil again. Eventually, Yasmine turns to her parents for help, her mother then takes her to several sheikhs and therapists. After Yasmine eventually takes off the veil, she also leaves the student union and focuses her activities on theatre in the following months. Yet, before a year has passed, "the aftermath of the past" follows: in a dramatic scene, the felt paradoxes and untreated sufferings that shape Yasmine's life story break open. When Yasmine wants to go to a theatre workshop at university, her brother and mother object to her going. When they argue that this restriction was there only to protect her, Yasmine "loses it". She yells at her brother and mother in an outburst of anger and breaks down, shaken by seizures, in an apparent "anger tantrum". As a consequence, she has to go through various medical checks and consults various "psychiatrists and head doctors". When she is diagnosed epileptic, she starts taking various medication, for the following nine to twelve months. During this period, Yasmine also works three jobs, which are mostly related to her studies but also earn her money. She continues to perceive the familial situation as "hell", being constantly hassled, and having arguments with her brother, for example about her boyfriend's drinking behaviour. After a major fight with her mother, they consult another therapist who is able to help Yasmine and her mother. The female therapist acknowledges Yasmine's suffering, orders her to stop taking medication, and points to various problematic factors in her parents' education. Other than her predecessors, the therapist addresses the issues in a way that opens up the opportunity for a change for the better. The therapist's ability to reach out to both Yasmine and her mother is so powerful that the mother herself attends several individual sessions and becomes aware of her mistakes. Also, the mother gets the father involved in that process of change which was kick-started by the "good therapist".

"2010 is such a good year" – not merely because of the mother's change, other factors contribute to Yasmine's evaluation as well: After getting to know the therapist, Yasmine ends a relationship which had been going on for a while but remained problematic. Instead, she finds a female friend, who is also accepted by her mother. The mother's sympathy is so great that the two young women are allowed to travel to London. At the age of 22 Yasmine travels for the first time without her parents, and for the first time comes into contact with the local realities and culture of another

in Ma'adi.

country. Different from what had been planned, she does not stay in a hostel in London but at a friend's flat. She tries hard drugs, extends her stay, and gets into a fight with her Egyptian friend. Back home in Cairo, depression returns, and leads into a suicidal phase in which Yasmine tries to continue her (illegal) drug consumption. When she consults the good therapist again, the woman refers her to a homoeopath who is responsible for helping Yasmine find a degree of stability again. A trip to Eastern Europe in autumn brings further relief. Yet, once she returns, another "crappy semester" starts. Yasmine is again caught in ruminations. Nonetheless, in winter semester 2010 she feels much better than in the previous spring. When the told self travels to England over Christmas, however, the return to Egypt ushers in a new phase of depression: "so, *again:* bed*. In bed for January, the first three weeks of January I was just in bed."

While 2010 was a thoroughly ambiguous year, with phases of depression and ruminations extending into the first weeks of 2011, January 2011 shall eventually bring the turning point for Yasmine: the Egyptian revolution does not only turn the country upside down, but also, and even more so, Yasmine's life. On the eve of the revolution, Yasmine is planning her exit from Egypt: as soon as she graduates, she will use the need for a good job as an excuse to settle down in the British capital. This way she wants to forego the step into a normal Egyptian life as someone's wife. "And then the revolution happened". And Yasmine's prospects change completely. Yasmine joins the protest, even against the will of her parents. She fights police, starts working on an online project that promotes free speech and political critique, and engages with society and the ongoing events in various ways. The revolution also affects the intra-familial relations for Yasmine. A confrontation with her brother, sparked by the girl's behaviour towards male friends in public, provokes the siblings to break off communication. Yasmine has the courage to tell her mum that she wants to move out, then negotiates the permission to move to a separate room in the parents' house. Since she had still been sharing a room with her younger sister, this seems to satisfy her need for "the space to be" for the time being. After the revolution, the entire family is proud of her, her father takes her opinion, her sister looks up to her, and so the revolution "*completely* turned my life around."

While the order of the story is clearly chronological, the focus equally clearly rests on the development of Yasmine as a personality: Yasmine does not describe to us the places that she saw in her life, nor does she introduce us to persons that she encountered, nor is it the prime purpose of the story to tell us what the told self did. Instead, she takes the audience on a walk through her

self-development and personal growth. We become observers of excessive internal struggles, learn about the told and telling self's feelings and are made witnesses to the process of identity formation throughout Yasmine's young life. This process of "finding" the own identity is portrayed as entirely problematic: a Sisyphean task. It is in particular the classical task of reconciling societal demands with individual dispositions which constitutes the biggest problem for Yasmine. By filling the space for narration in this way, Yasmine truly narrates an 'inside-story'.

The prologue of the absent father and the geographical setting

Yasmine strictly follows a chronological order in narrating her life, thus in retelling her story, I mainly followed the unfolding plot. Yet, I have been holding out on the reader that Yasmine's story *does not start* with the three-part passage on her childhood, the swearword scene. Instead, the story starting with Yasmine's birth is preceded by two passages. The first one describes her father's rise from rags to riches, and seems to function as a prologue to her story. The second is a summary of the three locations she has lived in throughout her young life, and thus reminds of a move to set the stage. At the very beginning, Yasmine starts with a meta comment, then tells us her age and venue of birth and instantly shifts to her father's story:

> "Okay, I try to be as inclusive as possible ... I'm 23 years old, I was *born* in Cairo ... my *father* was, no ... he started his own company when he was my age ... he does *not* come from the richest family he comes from a poor background and he, it was very ... abnormal for kids to work while they are studying and he didn't really go to college, he went to this diploma, he just took a diploma, he didn't take a – he doesn't have a bachelors degree. And he decided to travel to go to Holland and start washing dishes and things like that, and the he came back and became an entrepreneur."

The story of her father's business career follows the pattern of 'rising from rags to riches' as it constitutes part of the story repertoire of the American Dream. The account of his career though remains very colourless – in contrast to Yasmine's promise to "be as inclusive as possible" we are not provided with any details as to the type of business or the father's activities in Holland. Yasmine, it seems, is re-telling a story, which has become part of the family's repertoire of constitutive stories. This assumption is substantiated by the next paragraph, where Yasmine qualifies that it is her mum who gave her the information on her dad's business (accentuation by the author):

> "When I was *born* he was really ... consumed with making his business ... more and more successful, it was just as I was born <u>my mum tells me that,</u> he was very, it was actually starting to pick up. So my father was not really a part of my life most of my life just until very recently because he would just wake up at 5 in the morning and come back at like two a.m. because all

these business meetings and all these dinners and all these social things that he had to do in order to be a businessmen you know all these like PR things."

This sequence is remarkable for two features: first, its position at the very beginning of the story and second, the fact that it is a re-told story, shared with the mother or family in general. In addition, this introduction or prologue to Yasmine's life story already constitutes one of the major themes running through her story: the literal absence of her father. "So my father was not really a part of my life most of my life just until very recently". Throughout her narration, Yasmine repeats this evaluation of her father's role various times. But it is more than just one of the *themes* of her story. Rather, it provides Yasmine with a piece of explanation for the course of her entire life. We have to understand this constellation of the "absent father" as a crucial *frame* of her story, therefore the exposed position at the very beginning of the narration.

Before Yasmine as a subject and as the centre of the story appears, another passage sets the stage, characterizing the places Yasmine's family has lived in. After the "prologue of the absent father" Yasmine does not yet address her childhood ("when I was young"), but informs her audience about the spatial and geographical whereabouts of her entire life:

> "Throughout my life, I've moved into three houses. We first were living in a very poor area in *Haram* which is by the pyramids and then we moved – I think when I was five? – to a place in Muhandisin, Agouza actually, in a very nice flat a bigger flat and then ten years ago we moved to Six of October City in a big house, a villa with swimming pool and things like that".

First of all, it is notable that even in the second distinct sequence of her narration, Yasmine does not yet appear as the acting subject. She quickly shifts from the "I" in "I've moved into three houses" to the we in "we first were living", indicating that the family as a group moved and lived in one place or another. Also, the content itself deserves attention – and some explanation because only knowledge about the city of Cairo can help to grasp the entire dimension of this paragraph. Yasmine spent her early childhood in *Haram*, a living area close to the pyramids, which Yasmine herself designates as "a very poor area". The move to *Agouza* at the age of five constitutes not merely a shift in geographic location, the size of the premises also changes: the flat is bigger than the previous one, and Yasmine describes it as "very nice". The changing socio-economic conditions (and presumably societal status) of the family, probably brought about by the father's business being "more and more successful", is reflected in the size of the flat and in the status of the living area itself: *Agouza* is the more popular[168] neighbourhood in the *Muhandisin quarter*, which used to be one of the fashionable upper class districts before the higher classes moved out to the desert.

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[168] Popular here means the Egyptian term *sha'bi*, which is the adjective of *sha'b* translated as "the people".

Yasmine's family also participates in this exodus to the desert, moving to the desert settlement *Six of October City* in the East of Cairo when she is 13 years of age. We will address the issue of space, geography and class in more detail later (IV 2.2/2.3), for now it suffices to take note of the exposed position this information receives in Yasmine's narration.

Additional places which are relevant to Yasmine's story but do not obtain specific attention are her school in Ma'adi, the Downtown area of Cairo, and places outside of Egypt such as England, London in particular, and Eastern Europe. The geographical space is important because it is tied to socio-economic and socio-cultural issues of class and distinction in Egypt, and because it provides a better understanding of the spatial metaphors that Yasmine employs, such as "bubble" and "space to be". These spatial metaphors link the geographical spaces (sometimes in a paralleling, sometimes criss-crossing way) to what we can call "social spaces" or "social worlds" (see the reconstruction of Yasmine's social worlds in IV). For the reconstruction of these "social worlds", and in general the understanding of Yasmine's story, it is most enlightening to take a closer look at the people, or – to remain within the terminology of Goffman's theatre analogy – the personae of Yasmine's story.

1. 3 Family and functional friends: the personae of the story

The personae of Yasmine's story can be separated into two groups, made up of family members on the one side, and friends and other acquaintances who are primarily defined by their profession (the teacher, the bus driver, the psychiatrist) on the other. Rather than appearing as independent actors of the story, the personae become relevant mainly in their relation to the protagonist of the told and telling self.

1.3.1 The members of the core family: changing relations

Of all the personae, it is clearly the mother, the father and the brother who are positioned as the most important people in Yasmine's life, yet the mother is the only one who actually can be seen as a 'full' character.

Yasmine's mother – "completely *different*" even "kind of *reborn*"

The mother's role is very complex. She is implicitly positioned by the character's many actions and statements, and directly positioned by the evaluation and comments of the narrator and the present self. The mother is mentioned in the prologue, and then appears for the first time in Yasmine's life story in the passage on middle school. While Yasmine has become used to the father's absence, it is the mother's business and neglect which troubles her in this phase:

> "During middle school, it was the time when you realize that you like boys and puberty hits in and I just remember, it was just a very crucial time. And while my father was always not really part of my life – it was something I am kind of used to – my mum was very busy with building our house in Six of October. So all day she would be out of the house."

Moreover, the mother's conservative turn leads to increasing tensions:

> "At the same time she became very conservative, religiously because at that time there was all these neo...like Islamists coming up, saying ... they look kind of respectful like Amr Khalid. He's one of the people that really had this like wave of all these girls getting veiled and things like that. My mum was veiled anyway but she started dressing more conservatively and she started getting more and more angry with the way I dressed which was jeans and a top, and just for example if I wear a spiked belt I would be severely punished".

Strict punishment of the daughter's (mis-)behaviour becomes a frequent pattern, and the mother's distrust runs deep: Yasmine is suspected of drinking and smoking. She's grounded for not paying attention at school and for having the wish to travel via Couchsurfing. She's threatened and beaten up when she expresses her wish to take off the veil again. So "my mum was *very* negligent *very* conservative" and – as if that was not enough – "she would hate" Yasmine's friends. To Yasmine, the rejection of her friends also seems to be linked to her mum's conservatism: "She would (...) hate them <u>because</u> she thinks that they are not the ideal *friend* <u>because</u> I was in an sort of society where it was very Americanised". The mother's contempt for what she understands as "Americanisation" forms a continuous line of conflict in Yasmine's story. In the mother's eye, even the question of how to deal with sexual harassment in the street, becomes a matter of tradition versus Americanisation. When Yasmine criticises the harassment in the street, and demands resistance from her mother, the latter rejects Yasmine's claim:

> "In the streets whenever I would tell my mum, people are not supposed to hassle ... you are a woman and you're walking in the street and this is not supposed to happen. And my mum would tell me: 'No! This is normal stop with these crazy thoughts of perfection. This is not perfect. The world is not perfect this is our culture these are our traditions and you have to understand that stop being so Americanised' and she would think that this is sort of like this foreign way of thinking."

This absolute lack of support for her daughter's wish to remain free from hassling is even more shocking in the context of the familial abuse. When the told past self addresses the mother to tell her about the abuse, she responds without a iota of empathy "You know what? This happens to all of us. An' you should deal with it." Thus, while the narrator Yasmine refuses to make the abuse the central theme of her life story, the topic contributes substantially to positioning her mother.

Yasmine's relationship to her mother changes dramatically as the mother herself changes: today the mother is "completely *different*" even "kind of *reborn*". She got "bored of her religious phase",

even "laughs now about the way she used to dress". Above all, she's become "really supportive" and accepts the daughter's behaviour. "[S]he's totally cool with me having friends that are *guys* and she sees me now *hugging* them and *kissing* them on the cheek and it's fine and she understand that I can have *boy*-friends and she understands that I *drink*". So, today, the two women's relationship is as Yasmine had always imagined it in her dreams: "My mum is now my best friend". Not only is the mother more accepting towards her daughter's behaviour vis-a-vis men and her drinking behaviour, she is even proud of her. This constitutes a remarkable deviation from the previous pattern, "cause she used to be really ashamed of me". Yasmine had foreseen this change in a nearly prophetic way "one day you'll be so proud". The revolution made it come true: "My *whole* family is like *proud* of me". This holds true also for Yasmine's mother. The memory of her daughter's prophecy – or of the own contempt for Yasmine's behaviour – brings her to the verge of tears:

> "She's like 'I remember when you were eleven and you were telling me one day', no fifteen, 'and you were telling me one day you will be proud of me'. I used to tell her that cause she used to be really ashamed of me and I was like one day you'll be so proud. And to so she's, she *cries* now every time she remembers and she's 'I *am'*."

What is more: the mother does not only admire the daughter's revolutionary activity, she even joins in the protests herself: "So my mum is really really supportive she comes to like *everything* that she *can*. On Friday[169] she came with me to *protest.* It was a protest in front of the state media[170] and she was she was there". While Yasmine attributes this jokingly to "the power of positive thinking", it is an instance of the Egyptian awakening: a whole society has discovered the force of protest and the pleasure in deviance. The transformation of the mother has its roots not only in the daughter's influence and in the larger societal developments, but is attributed also to the positive influence of the good therapist, and to the mother's own initiative and stamina:
"she's someone who's like: 'I'm actually gonna find out for myself. and that *that's so* inspirational to me, someone who *clearly* gets out of their *realm* of thinking and *goes* out of the *way* in order to ... be a better person". Yasmine argues that her mother "was *never* given the *chance* of good education". It was the lack of education and a very limited horizon that forced her mum to refer to

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[169] Since January 25, 2011, the beginning of the revolution, the biggest protests have always taken place on Fridays. Friday is the Muslim weekly holiday, corresponding to the Christian Sunday and the Jewish Shabbat. On Fridays, most Egyptians are off work, shops are closed during the (first half of the) day, and people flock to the mosques for the common noon prayer. For protesters it has become a near habit to hold the Friday sermon and prayer at Midan Tahrir, the geographical and symbolic heart of the revolution in Cairo, and to call upon Egyptians to gather at the Midan after the mosque attendance.

[170] During February, March and early April 2011 the protests in Cairo repeatedly moved also to the State TV building, called "Maspero", located about 200 metres from Midan Tahrir on the Corniche el Nil.

"old black and white movies" to explain the world and derive norms for behaviour:

> "So she would [use the movie as] reference, she's like: 'You should see this *movie* you know what happens? She *goes* to him and he like manipulates her and he rapes her, and then she's not a virgin any more so this is what's gonna happen to you.'"

While it was these circumstances that prevented her mother from being a good mother, it is out of her own power that she changes, which Yasmine finds "inspirational". This also is a far cry from Yasmine's earlier feelings towards her mum:

> "I *used* to be really ashamed of the way she dresses because she used to wear this *huge* huge huge huge *gown*. Even she now laughs at the way she used to dress, like exaggerate just exaggerate as much – it's almost like a burka but not really. Its just huge"

This statement indicates to what extent the growing of respect and appreciation was a mutual process between mother and daughter (once they met the good psychologist and made it through Yasmine's puberty).

Yasmine's father – "my father was always not really part of my life"

While the mother receives considerable attention in the narration (and consequently in my introduction of the personae), the father remains completely under-defined. We do not learn much about his behaviour or his features, he rarely is the subject of reported speech or actions within the story. We do learn that he works as a businessmen, and did not enjoy university education, but travelled abroad to start his career. Originally coming from a poor background, he 'has made it', realising the stereotypical American dream, rising from rags to riches, now being able to finance his family's life in the high class community of Six of October. He thus fulfils the duty of an Egyptian husband and father: "Fathering sons and supporting a household are fundamental to manhood in Egypt" (Schneider and Silverman 2006: 243). This is as much as we know about Yasmine's father. Nonetheless, he is attributed major importance for Yasmine's life – his complete absence, as Yasmine calls it, constitutes the frame for her story. This is not only evident in the function of the prologue, the assumption that the father's absence constitutes a key to Yasmine's understanding is also substantiated by the frequent references to her father('s absence) in the remainder of her story. The good therapist provides Yasmine with an explanation:

> "This person [the good therapist] actually really made a difference. It was she, she told my mum that my dad *has* to be in my *life* because this is a big problem that I'm facing and there is no – I don't feel protected because I don't have protection from anyone and I don't have that *fatherly* figure that could, at least make me feel confident – I had zero confidence zero, just I couldn't even *speak* to anyone I just couldn't ... *really* horrible. ... So then after that there were like two good years of work on ... looking at my dad: *shit*! He's not just another stranger

he's *obviously* my dad. My *dad* to me was a stranger in the house, I could *not hug* him because I was just I would just feel: who's this strange man that's hugging me?"

But, as Yasmine said, after two good years of work, also the relationship with her father changes. And once more, the revolution adds to this development. Today, the father takes Yasmine's opinion and Yasmine tries to teach him how to be a better father:

> "My mum used to tell him: 'The therapist said you have to do *this* you have to *start* talking to her you have to start *asking* her, what her favoured colour is' – just things like that that *shows* that my father has interest in my character. He's *so bad* at being a ((laughs)) a *father.* He actually ... ok, like *my sister* was not staying with us this past weekend she was at a conference on campus. So he was like: 'I *miss* her *so much*.' And I'm like '*Dad*, call her. Like *call her*! *That* is actually *good*.' He's like 'No no no, I don't want to.' Why ... he's actually too *shy* ... I'm like: 'You're *ruining* her *life* by *not* showing her your love.' ... And that's what happened with me. He loves me so much but he doesn't show it, because he thinks that he's doing his part, when he's working all day but that's not the case.

Yasmine's siblings – "my sister looks up to me" and my brother "started being a good brother"

Yasmine has two siblings, an older brother and a younger sister, both of whom study/ied at AUC. While the brother has migrated to another Arab country to work in sales there, the sister is still living in the parental household with Yasmine and their parents. The two girls even share a room at the time of the interview. Yet I did not learn much about Yasmine's sister. Even the scarce information on the sister which I eventually received I only got when I directed the questions accordingly. In her narration, Yasmine only mentions her sister in the last paragraph, in the context of the changes that the revolution brought about: Yasmine's mentions her sister, because her demand to get her own room is only understandable through the additional information that she shares a room with her sister. Other than this, the sister does not feature in Yasmine's life story. Yet, in the question section, it becomes clear that also this relationship experienced considerable transformation in the revolution

> "So my stance in within the family has *changed*. My *sister* tweets[171] like 'Oh my god, I miss you so much!' like 'Please ...' All these things... My sister looks up to *me* and she used to like *not* do that. So just ... I think it's just, this is the *gift* ((laughs)) of life to me."

Yasmine's brother, on the other hand, is mentioned several times in her narration. As the majority of the personae, he is positioned indirectly and implicitly, only by the deeds of the character. He abuses Yasmine, he is constantly on the watch, criticising Yasmine's boyfriend for his consumption of alcohol and non-observance of prayers. Together with their mother, he seems to carry the main

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[171] Referring to the online service Twitter.

responsibility for the enforcement[172] of traditional and specific norms for Yasmine's behaviour (see also IV 1.3). Yet, also with him, things change when Yasmine and her mother find the good therapist: "My brother ... *changed* and he apologized and he ... started being a good brother around two years ago." Nonetheless, the figure of the brother, and Yasmine's stance towards him remain highly ambivalent: "There' all *these sudden* things that he does that *scares* me *all* the time". The confrontations with her brother circle around his attempts at disciplining her behaviour, and criticising her friends' and peers' deeds, in what he portrays as an attempt at protecting her.[173] He is, for example, weary of her taking drama as a subject at school because of his stereotypes of the "theatre kids": "I think my brother was like: 'No, the theatre kids, they drink all the time." Her brother also tries to discipline Yasmine's behaviour vis-a-vis persons from the other sex, in public:

> "A day before Mubarak stepped down, he saw me saying hi to a boy by kissing him on the cheek – cause I *don't* have *these* kinds of limits where like: 'Oh! Oh my god it's *so* scandalous if I say hi to a guy like that.' *But* then *he* thinks that this is disrespectful if I do that in front of him. (...) [And he] was like '*Oh* my god you're not disrespecting me!?' "

But rather than being induced by this situation in particular, the brother's criticism is continuous and pervasive: "It was *constant hassling,* all day of like '*Oh* you're gonna go hang out with *these* kids'. But I took it like that's *not* what matters. At the end I'm doing what I want but I'm getting everyday hassling everyday." It eventually is the revolution which puts an end to this pattern of interaction:

> "The *hassling* now stopped. *None* of them can speak to me in the way that they used to speak to me. *Before now* I can't *accept that* any more. Or like any indications or any ... just a *really* horrible way of dealing with me or treating me like *that* is not accepted any more."

In the case of her brother though, this "non-acceptance" results in a near total break in communication: "We're not really talking". The argument about disrespectful behaviour, one day before Mubarak left, has led to a complete breakdown of their communication "so since we don't really talk and I'm like *you* know what? This is who I am and if you think that *me* not restricting myself is disrespecting you, then – I mean *respecting* you is restricting myself – then *no,* thank you."

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[172] Other interview partners account of similar relations within their families. It seems to be a common role for an Egyptian brother, corresponding to what is said of brothers in patriarchal systems in general. An interesting constellation appears when the father is not absent, but 'weak' or 'too' liberal.

[173]   It is well worth noting that Yasmine does never ascribe her brother's behaviour and the principles he wants to reinforce and impose, to either *religion* or *culture*. She does not provide us with any frame how to understand his principles, and his conviction that he has the right to assert them vis-a-vis his younger sister. While her brother most likely derives his rules and self-understanding from *his interpretation* of Islam and tradition, Yasmine does not pick up on these attributions. Eventually, she does not seem to hold any grudge against religion and its representatives.

Besides the four members of Yasmine's core family, some other relatives are mentioned. Of them, only three have an impact on the story. There is the cousin living in the United States who is not only the bad kid in the family, but also to blame for teaching Yasmine swearwords without telling her (see IV 1.3.1). Then we encounter her aunt's husband, who sexually abuses Yasmine and beats his wife, and who therefore is "obviously a *horrible* man". When Yasmine tells the aunt about it, the woman confronts her husband. He denies the allegations. Neither of them is mentioned again in the remainder of the story.

1.3.2 Yasmine's "functional" friends: mere passers-by or staffage of two different worlds?

Like the members of the extended family, most of Yasmine's friends are mentioned only once in her narration. When she changes to the American section of her school, at approximately the age of 13, Yasmine meets Fiona. Besides Ahmed, the girl is the only character who actually is given a *name* in the story. Fiona is Christian and American, and Yasmine suspects her dad of being a secret missionary. Fiona opens the door into a new world for Yasmine: she takes her to the church, which "all the cute boys went to", and where Fiona plays in this "*really* cool rock band ", and where "they used to have this, *every* Wednesday they had this something [a gathering] in which like all the youth of the church would just hang out and just talk about stuff". It goes without mentioning that her parents get "very angry because they thought I was turning into a Christian". Yet, this only shows how remote the parents are from the living reality of their daughter: "Obviously I could not care less about religion then. All I could care about was boys". One might wonder though, what this "all I could care about was boys" is meant to say about the relationship to Fiona.

The next female friend mentioned in the narration, is the girl who "was with the Amr Khalid thing". She brings up the idea of donning the veil, when Yasmine is about 16. Later, at the age of 21, the past self encounters a girl, who becomes her best friend. The telling self is not chary of praise for the friend: she is described as "amazing", "nice", and praised for understanding Yasmine's stance on friendship ("I could die for you"). When the girl is going to an audition in London, Yasmine receives the mother's permission to accompany her. This is quite remarkable, as her mother used to ground her "for just having the thought of [travelling] the world through Couchsurfing". The girls' friendship suffers a blow when their expectations about adequate behaviour on the London trip collides. One of the five male friends mentioned in Yasmine's story also plays a role in the girls' conflict on their trip: he is an acquaintance of Yasmine that she had met years ago In Egypt. He proves helpful, offering to let the girls to stay at his apartment rather than the "horrible" hostel or

the expensive hotel. Later on, he stops Yasmine from calling back her friend to solve their argument: when her friend sends her a very tough email that expresses her anger and disappointment, Yasmine is inclined to respond or to go see her Egyptian friend instantly. The London friend, however, commands Yasmine not to respond to her friend's allegations but go with him. So instead of seeing her friend "right now" Yasmine "went and had loads of cocaine".

Another male friend introduced as persona is Ahmed. He is the only boy in the story called by his name: this might well be due primarily to the fact that he was the one whose parents' house we used for the first interview. This means that I had met him, so Yasmine was referring to a person I knew, thus constituting an extreme exception from the interview. Any attribute of this friend stems from the real world interaction between Yasmine and me. As far as his persona in the story is concerned, he has become a "close friend" less than a year before. His persona appears on the eve of the revolution and is tied to the events that unfold in the first months of the year 2011. The assumption is justified that whenever Yasmine speaks of "we" in the context of the protest and the revolution, she is referring to both herself and Ahmed.

There are also three male personae which we get to know as Yasmine's boyfriends: she goes out with boyfriend number one while she is still attending middle school. The relationship fails because Yasmine is grounded. All else we know is that he wants to kiss her, but Yasmine refuses. The introduction of his character illustrates two things: first, it shows us how being grounded damages her relationship. And second, it shows how unjustified this grounding was in the first place, as Yasmine is just a real "goodie", who refuses to kiss him because she did not see herself as "this kind of person". In this way, Yasmine positions herself as a "good girl", sticking to common norms on women's appropriate behaviour. This contradicts the parents' mistrust and fears. These appear entirely unjustified in Yasmine's perspective – nonetheless they are having a serious impact on her social relations. If we disentangle ourselves from Yasmine's position, though, and take Egyptian norms shared by the wider society as the standard, then already *having* a boyfriend (not to speak of kissing!) is itself a transgression and reason for parental worries.

Boyfriend number two, is Yasmine's "first *serious* boyfriend". He is some years older than Yasmine herself "he was a twenty one I was eighteen". Above that, and this is the clue of the character boyfriend number two, "he was American and he was Jewish". Anyone who is familiar with Egypt and has by now located Yasmine's family in an ideological and socio-economic field, instantly realises that this is the utmost provocation: being with an American Jewish boy constitutes the violation of several taboos. First, having a boyfriend is not the norm (held by parents or society at

large). Second, being with a non-Muslim is highly problematic for an Egyptian Muslim girl (Joseph 2000: 14). Third, being with a Jew and an American is coming close to treason, as both, Israel and the United States, are portrayed as powers that constantly work openly and clandestinely against Egyptian interests. Yasmine is not only aware of this, but the transgression is intentional: "So I was like: 'What would be the worst thing that I can do' and I'm like 'Okay this is it so I'm gonna do it'". This makes it sound like the boyfriend was partially chosen to annoy her parents, and others, who might judge her behaviour. Of course it is her brother who comes to mind first, but there's also the more abstract moral[174] authority, "the people". The American Jewish boyfriend is the person Yasmine hangs out with when revolting against the restrictions by living a double life in the last months of eleventh grade of middle school.

Boyfriend number three is Egyptian. Their relationship is described as rather problematic: "I was sort of on and off with that same boyfriend an' it was really like he liked another girl and it was just really tough". In the question section, though, Yasmine displays her own behaviour as primary reason for their breakup. She also makes clear that he had not done anything wrong, but she was unable to make up her mind about the relationship. She mentions that her indecisiveness also poses a problem, now that "there's a boy that I like". She does not reveal anything else about this boy, though, leaving his character as undefined as most of the personae that function as friends in the story.

There is a major difference between the role of family members and friends in this story: the relationship with the members of the core family evolves. The members of the core family remain an important aspect of Yasmine's life over time. Thus, continuous involvement with and renegotiation of the intra-familial relations is required, even unavoidable. The audience is made the observer of this development. The friends, both male and female, on the other hand, are mere passers-by, in a story about Yasmine's self-development. Most of them are only mentioned once, in the context of a concrete event or occurrence. Yet, there is also a feature common to the description of the family and friends personae. While the (non)position of Yasmine's father is extreme and thereby unique, we observe a pattern which runs through Yasmine's entire narration:

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[174] Bayat (2010) uses the term "moral authority" in an essay that compares the development of youth movements in Iran and Egypt. While he does not define the term, it tends to feature together with "the state" – so we can conclude, that for him, moral authority is not the state, neither in Egypt nor Iran. In Egypt, the highest Islamic (Sunni) authority is Al-Azhar. Its absolute distinctness from the state however has been questioned. In the case of my interview partners, moral authority seems to be exerted not by an institution. Rather, it seems to emanate from an abstract concept of public surveillance – it is "the people" who are watching and talking and reinforcing norms thereby. This is not necessarily people one knows, instead, "the people" and their surveillance seem to be defined by omnipresence, conservatism, and a judgemental attitude. See also chapter IV 1.3.4.

the personae remain colourless to the audience in terms of their individual attributes. We do not learn anything about their looks, their character features, or their way of thinking and reasoning. Instead, they appear as personae only in relation to Yasmine, defined in broad general categories.

Two potential explanations are at hand: the personae are meant to exclusively carry the plot forward, i.e. a new figure shows up in the story, has a certain function for the plot and disappears again. As mentioned before, the plot is primarily an inside story, focusing directly on the development of Yasmine as a person and her internal struggles. All we learn about most of the personae is what effect they had on the life of the told self – sometimes this 'functional approach' to people is not only an outcome of the plotting done by the narrator, but also implied in the way the told self interacts with these people. Yasmine makes it rather explicit that the told self's reasons for being with boyfriend number two were quite specific (see above). Also in the case of Fiona, Yasmine's motives for maintaining the friendship are (at least) ambiguous: all she "could think about was boys". While she tells this in order to contradict the parents' fear that their daughter would "turn into a Christian", this statement might well expand to the friendship with Fiona as a whole: what mattered, was that Fiona provided access to a wholly different world, i.e. the really cool rock band, the church's youth-hangout, the male members in the community and the casual interaction between males and females. In these two cases, the told self shows a rather functional relationship to her friends. Independent of that, the *overall arrangement* of the narrative by the telling self makes the personae (family as friends) appear as mere decoration in a play that circles entirely around Yasmine herself.

An alternative reading of the 'colourless' personae focuses on the *few* categories that indeed are used to describe a newly introduced character: Yasmine's father is a businessmen, her cousin lives in the United States and is the "bad kid" in the family, her biology teacher is a good teacher, American and an atheist, while her drama teacher is a woman and Egyptian, her friend Fiona is Christian, American and plays in a rock band and so on. Is it possible that these categories should be sufficient to define a character? The categories become more helpful if we consider the personae as members of two distinct *social world*s. These two social worlds, an Americanised society and the Egyptian conservative world, were reconstructed and are described in detail in chapter (IV). There is on the one side a world populated by Americans, other foreigners, and all those people who are "overwhelmed by American culture", who call themselves "Americanised". This is what Yasmine calls "my society". Belonging to this society means sharing in certain values, norms and a lifestyle, which is largely inspired by the (perception of) the United States. Anyone

Yasmine is friends with, belongs to this society. It is therefore plausible to assume that categorising a character in the story as "American" or only as "a friend" implies that many more of the categories and features pertaining to "her society" fit as well. On the other side, we find a world, which is populated (in large parts) by the family members, and "the people" (who are a chiffre for some kind of moral authority and a public which exerts considerable influence on Yasmine). It is a world, in which boys and girls are treated differently, and where conservative norms and identity offers reign. Chapter IV will shed more light on the exact connotations of "America" or "my society" and "Egypt" or "my family". For the argument of this chapter, it suffices to notice that the two social worlds help to substantiate the personae. Although the personae are not described in detail, most of them can be clearly positioned within one of the two worlds and thus be "coloured" by the attributes of the respective world. Even if it was then not justified to speak of a purely functional approach to the personae, it seems just to characterise Yasmine's way of describing people as rather 'economical' – it is her protagonist, the past and present told self that clearly constitutes the centre of the story and deserves the bulk of the attention. In light of this emphasis in her narration, I focus on two aspects of the self-development in the remainder of this chapter III. First, we look at Yasmine's story through a drama lens. In that regards, it is interesting to reconstruct Yasmine's notion of identity. Then, in the following chapter, her sense of agency and the dramatic changes initiated by the revolution are addressed.

1.4 Trying out roles, finding "any " identity: Yasmine's theatre analogy and identity concept

Within the methodology, the text production is understood as identity work, comprising not only the act of *displaying* identity but similarly *constructing* identity, thus adding a performative dimension to the interview process (Wortham 2001, 2000). This process of text production and self-presentation can also be 'unlocked' by using the theatre analogy as prominently introduced by Erwin Goffman. A drama metaphor provides us with a tool for analytically approaching reality (Willems 2009b: 81): the interviewee – just as much as the researcher – is seen as if acting in a play. Combined with the positioning analysis favoured by Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann we can understand the act of text production as staging a play on two levels: the interviewee outlines the background and sets the stage of the story, she positions the protagonists of her story on stage, equips them with certain physical and mental attributes and character traits, and designs the plot that the personae find themselves in. At the same time, being director (interviewee, narrator) and audience (researcher) is also an act of playing roles. To a certain extent, the power balance shifts if

we consider this larger stage for interaction: the researcher sets the scene and defines to a certain extent the plot, i.e. the course of the interaction. The researcher's tools for directing the interview-play are the information given in advance to the interview, the questions posed in the interview, and the other verbal and non-verbal communication during the interview situation. The roles Yasmine and I took in the interview-play have been discussed previously (see II 1.5 for my self-presentation; III 1.1. for Yasmine's impression-management and my reaction).

It was Yasmine's narration itself which made me turn to the theatre analogy as a tool to "unlock" her story. Yasmine' herself seems to view her life through the lens of the drama metaphor and frequently employs drama-related expressions. A short overview of the various references can clarify this: in the prologue of the absent father – one of the first sequences for micro analysis – Yasmine speaks of her father as a "businessmen", to explain his absence:

> "So my father was not really a part of my life most of my life just until very recently because he would just wake up at 5 in the morning and come back at like two a.m. because all these business meetings and all these *dinners* and all these *social* things that he had to do in order to be a businessmen you know all these like PR things."

Being a businessman seems tied to a certain repertoire of practices and behaviour: "All these business meetings and all these *dinners* and all these *social* things". The exact content of these remains vague. In addition, they are not primarily necessary in order to *do business*, but in order to *be a businessman*. In that sense, they appear as attributes of a *role.* Moreover, the position of the father's story reminds of the prologue in a drama, or the lead in a movie. In the interview, Yasmine also speaks of her love for acting, which she has already developed as a child. When after another confrontation with her mother, she decides to live a double life, that meant: "So I started skipping school for like a month and the remaining two months. So I was really working on my acting skills then, because I had to ... work very hard". In her narration this hard work pays off and she "can get away with this" because she is "also very good with acting and stuff".

Yasmine herself seems to view her life through the lens of the drama metaphor. By understanding her own life as staged and enacted (*inszeniert*), seeing herself as an actor in this play, Yasmine confirms Willem's observation that "Aspekte der Inszenierung und Performance haben (...) – auch im Weltbewusstsein der Akteure – an Relevanz gewonnen"(Willems 2009b: 81).[175] Yasmine does not only employ drama-language, she also seems to consider identity as a kind of role that one puts on – or takes off. In another passage, Yasmine tells of the conflict between her mother, and

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[175] "Aspects of staging and performance have (...) increased in relevance, also in the actor's concept of the world" (my translation, Willems 2009b: 81).

the Americanised society. She describes the problems the twelve-year-old girl has when trying to fit in, to find the right role for herself, or rather the right role for her surroundings:

> "So at this time, it was very difficult for me to *understand* what social ... what society is like because I was having difficulty even getting guys to like me, getting girls to like ... I was kind of an outsider (...) obviously I'm like a twelve-year-old who does not know how to act. Who just *want* to have any *identity*. So ... by the age of – I don't know I mean I *faced* a lot of difficulties in these three years of middle school. So then I would try to be a *Tomboy* so I can be part of the *boys* that are like causing trouble and things but then the boys weren't really accepting me in their *clique*. So I was kind of the girl that *leeches* on to them."

Yasmine is trying to fit in, to find "any identity", yet she doesn't know how to "act". Her attempt to take on the role of a Tomboy fails, the self-ascribed new identity is rejected by the others. Eventually the one role Yasmine would love to have is unavailable because of her mother's distrust and because of her difficult position between the two conflicting worlds of the Americanised society and the Egyptian conservative world: "I only just wanted to do the right thing ... I only just wanted to be a *good girl* ... honestly and truly."

Since this role is not acknowledged by her family,[176] either, she responds to her ruminations about why she had to be so different, with another attempt of finding a role: "At *that point* I really started sort of being this hippie ... really like this Rolling Stones and the Beatles and the 70s and the 60s and I thought it was like wow freedom." Yet, also "being a hippie" does not solve her problem. So far, it had seemed that for Yasmine's told self, identities were like roles that you can put on and take off again. These identities are part of a social repertoire and define how one should "act" in order to be accepted by society. Yet, as a girl of twelve, Yasmine's told self does not know how to act, and does not know how to bridge the gap between the identity repertoires of her family world and the Americanised society in Ma'adi, and thus, is left desperate in her longing for just "any identity" that makes her accepted by her social environment.

Yasmine then tries to evade the self-torturing thoughts by effectuating change on a deeper level. Rather than her outward-directed role, she now tries to change her feelings, and tries to change her behaviour in an attempt to reshape her inner self:

> "*First* there was a phase of 'These are satanic thoughts and how can I *fight* them' and 'S*hit!* how can I not have these thoughts' and just 'It's *so* bad that I'm having these thoughts' just I was so freaking lame like it's *so* unbelievable ... and then I'm like 'You know what it doesn't matter what I look like stop being so shallow just have fun.' And I started having *ridiculous* amount of fun of eating loads of cake at the same time – how can I fit 50 bananas in my mouth and just start being a really silly person and so at that time I would go round laughing

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[176] She is suspected of drinking and smoking by her mother, of becoming a Christian, and of not paying attention at school, for example.

and and things like that."

This attempt to adjust the personality and feelings has a different quality. This idea of shaping the own self, of changing perception and feelings in order to adjust one's inner workings to outside exigencies appears frequently in the interview. It follows a different logic than the 'identity as role' concept. Now, identity appears as an internal quality that is malleable and can be reshaped through self-reflections and through the reflections of outside behaviour. It reminds of the concept of embodiment that Mahmood (2005) and Hafez (2003) develop in their ethnographic accounts of female Islamists and pious women. The notion that outward appearance reflects back on the internal constitution can also be likened to an Aristotelian conception of the relation between virtues and comportment as Mahmood (2005) and Hirschkind (2001) show.[177] For Yasmine, the process of self-formation also leads to increasing insights into "what society is like". It seems to increase her capacity to handle and balance the own desires with the exigencies of the world, the society and family.

As for the balancing of internal needs with external exigencies, in Yasmine's case, this balancing does not result in her renouncing her desires. On the contrary, after the revolutionary turning point of her story, Yasmine comes to acknowledge that oppressing her desires will never work. Just like the society, she herself would always reach a "breaking point" at which she topples the rules that have been working against the fulfilment of her needs:

> "I think it's the *building up of thoughts.* Thoughts thoughts thoughts and then you just reach a breaking point. I – seriously my life is so dramatic – it's so *intense*, it's *extreme*. Like today I'm gonna go and do this or do that' and I think that I reached a certain point, I *try* to *hold* it hold it and then it just go go so I just go crazy and I just do what I r*eally* wanna do. So eventually, it's so difficult to *suppress* what I want to do. I think – I don't know if everybody *has that* – but like whenever I ... eventually, I *learnt* to handle my *desires* or anything I want to do very carefully because I *cannot stand* against something that I *want* to do like *travel* or ... I just get this *gut* feeling of I *want* to do this, I want to do this I want to do this and *shutting* it *down never* helps, it's just gonna come out anyway ... so *being* who *I am* is important. I can't *change* myself or anything like that so it's just like a breaking point you reach a breaking point."

In this sequence, the narrator actively reflects on and theorises about the development of her self and the tension between social and personal exigencies. The understanding of identity in this paragraph is no longer that of a malleable inside that has to be shaped in order to fit the outside. Rather, we see a remarkable deviation from former attempts at intentional stage-management, and a distancing from her former naive theories about the self. Now, the idea is that a deeper

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[177] Besides Aristoteles' habitus-theory and the modern "habitus" and "embodiment" concepts of Pierre Bourdieu, Mahmood also draws on Ibn Khaldun's notion of "*malaka*".

unchangeable self exists and can be *found*. How can this seeming contradiction be explained? While the younger told self was trying to adjust, the self in the post-revolutionary present has found herself. Thus, this could be portrayed as a development from an earlier self, eager to fit in, to the present self, which has understood that self-management has clear limits, and that the key for acceptance and well-being lies in the way of dealing with the tension of external exigencies and internal inclinations. Another interpretation draws a continuous line between the past self and the present self. The past self was already searching for the "real self", yet it was not before the revolution that this "real self" was found.

And, following a rather classical topos of revelation, it was God himself who sent the revolution that helped finding the real self. This aspect of "destiny" fits better with the second explanation: Yasmine's struggle for identity was always meant to lead to the point where she finally finds the self she was always meant to be. "I think that the eighteen days [of revolution] it's kind of been a training programme for Yasmine to become the character that she's supposed to be". On the other hand, Yasmine speaks and theorises extensively about how – due to her change in thinking – her agency has changed in the revolution, and already earlier with the allowance to travel. Yasmine recognizes that it is in her own hands to occupy or create the "space to be", which she had been missing before. This moment of recognition fits better with the first interpretation: she has now adopted a different identity concept, and sees the relation of inside-outside, society and self from a different perspective.

1.5 The revolutionary turning point: changing agency through self-empowerment and recognition[178]

As I had mentioned, also the plotting and arrangement of Yasmine's narration, remind of a drama. The chronological narration clearly runs towards one point in time: the turning point of the revolution. This turning point, or peripeteia, seemed to be a deus ex macchina. Within my frame of reference there was no plausible connection or even logical consequence between the previous part of the story and the turning point. I could not fathom how Yasmine's (his)story of being trapped between two contrasting worlds, suffering from parental restrictions and self-loathing, trying to find any identity that fits, is prefiguring the event of the Egyptian uprising. Yet, within Yasmine's frame of reference, there indeed seems to be a logical sequence: the revolution was

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[178] Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann (2002) add this aspect to the temporal dimension of narrative identity. In our story it clearly overlaps with the self-referent dimension, because Yasmine explicitly reflects on agency. This is in itself remarkable.

sent to her by God. "And so I *feel* sometimes that – I've been praying or just asking God *every day* in January for something to save me from this *constant* depression and I think that God sent me the revolution". She was praying for something to release her, and this turning point and the ensuing changes are the "gift of life" to her. The construction principles and structure underlying Yasmine's life story can be best understood if we look at the development of agency within the narration.

Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann treat agency as an essential aspect of NID construction (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2002: 59). Agency basically refers to the question: how much does a person perceive of and portray events in her life as something that her actions produced, or as independent of her actions? One of two extremes would be the perception that the own life is subject exclusively to contingent events and to fate, and is stirred by insurmountable outside power or ruled by mighty people. On the other extreme, we would find everything explained as the effect of autonomous decisions, actions and initiatives. The self is an acting person, the centre of events, in control (some control) and has room for decision-making. Of course, most narrations would unite elements from both poles, so that one can only ponder, which perspective is more dominant, or which sense of agency prevails in which phases or fields of life. Agency is manifest on various levels of the narration, on the semantic level (e.g. which expressions are used, passive or active verb forms) and the level of plotting (e.g. which causality is constructed by the plot). It finds expression in the self-world relation, in the self-perception as object or subject, and in the attribution of power and responsibility. As I could not discover any coherent picture on the level of semantics, I focused on the way different senses of agency appear through the plotting and reasoning. Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann group agency under the temporal dimension of narrative identity. In Yasmine's case, however, agency overlaps significantly with the narrator's self-concept and self-theory, which are elements of the self-referent NID dimension. The crucial point is that Yasmine herself *reflects* on agency. As shown above, she reflects directly on the increasing room for manoeuvre and sense of 'ownership', and how "lateral thinking" brought this development about.

Yasmine's pattern of agency is very interesting and highly complex. Agency is not only a construction principle of her narration but also an explicit topic in her stories. When Yasmine speaks about the lack of decision making power and the self-empowerment after the revolution, she tells us about her agency. Prior to the revolution, we find an irritating pattern: Yasmine is constantly *acting*, she is never *passive.* No matter what challenge she faces (rejection by peers,

being grounded by her mother, not being allowed to travel, wish to take off the veil), she always makes an effort to respond to these challenges (by adopting new identities, by focusing more on herself, by addressing the parents for support, by watching inspiring videos, by living a double life). Yet, all these actions are overshadowed by a sense of futility. Whatever Yasmine does, it seems, is to no avail or even aggravates the situation. There are two potential origins of this impression. First, Yasmine frequently uses expressions and structures that indicate repetition: "So *again, bed*. In bed for January, just the first three weeks of January" (after she returned from a trip to London); "*Again*, my dad was completely out of the picture" (describing the situation when she tried to change herself by having fun); "I *came* back and it was a really crappy semester. But I was definitely much *better* from March. And just kind of on the steady side of life and ... *but again* I was *not* feeling ...". Even more than the single expressions and parallel structures *within* stories, it is the overall content and development (or should I say stagnation?) that gives the listener the feeling of being trapped in an endless nightmare. While listening to Yasmine's story we find ourselves caught up in the very box, that Yasmine's mum tells her to get out of:

> "At that point my mum would tell me that I'm just living in a nightmare that I am *not* getting out of and I need to stop putting myself in this *box* so I used to believe her because I could didn't know better but to believe her and *again* I was very *naive* and I only just wanted to do the right thing like I only just wanted to be a *good girl*, honestly and truly."

This is not to say that Yasmine created the nightmare herself, as her mother seems to suggest. Rather, Yasmine's told self believed her mother, because she "didn't know better". But Yasmine's attempts to get herself outside this box constantly fail. The repeated search for a way out is going nowhere or even hits another wall. And Yasmine as a storyteller succeeds in transmitting this feeling very vividly in her narration. At one point, Yasmine even uses her position as narrator to reinforce this impression: in Yasmine's story there suddenly appears a ray of light when she meets the Egyptian girl at about the age of 21. For the first time, after numerous failed attempts to convince her mother to be less rigid, Yasmine is allowed to travel abroad: "So, at this point she was ...*finally* because she liked my friend, she allowed me to *travel* last March, to go to London with my best friend, that girl who was going for an audition." I had already been so caught up in Yasmine's narration that I felt deep relief at this moment in the interview. I thought "finally the girl of that dramatic story is *allowed to do something* and thus to break this circle we have been moving around for hours now". That moment stuck in my mind because Yasmine stepped out of the story and responded directly to my signs of relief with one of the few meta-comments she gave in the

interview: "*But* [she lowers her voice] some drama is gonna happen now" and laughs loudly. Much later in her story, the revolution will end this Sisyphus-like struggle.

So – in terms of *agency* – what do we make of this strange pattern of activity and futility? The crux of her story is that Yasmine continuously acts – but she only *reacts* to the situations other people and life in general put her in. Rather than being proactive, she is reactive. She even speaks of a "defensive state" she is put in, from where she then acts. At some point she even says that every time she spoke this only happened in the attempt to defend herself: "When I *talk* it's usually a defence mechanism". At this stage, Yasmine seems to be lacking the "capacity (...) to act upon [her] (...) world", and thus misses an important aspect of agency (Holland et al. 1998: 42 quoted in Homfeldt, Schröer and Schweppe 2008: 8).

In many instances, Yasmine's actions appear as the completely logical (and only possible) consequence of the preceding events. Through this construction of causality, Yasmine establishes a pattern of attribution that reduces her own responsibility. It is the *circumstances* that force her. The high degree of consequentiality and plausibility does not allow much doubt as to whether her actions were right or adequate – they simply were without alternative. In this way, even her resort to drugs can be portrayed as a *logical consequence* of the confinements she is subjected to. The same accounts for other aspects of her behaviour – which would be seen as nothing less than scandalous by many Egyptians: having a Jewish-American boyfriend, smoking and drinking, living a double-life, shouting at her mum in an outburst of anger, defying the parents' order not to join the demonstrations on January 25th, the failure to ask them for allowance to travel after the revolution – all these acts appear as reactions to previous developments and thus appear automatically justified.

Even though Yasmine avoids blaming her parents outright, she attributes major influence for her later development to the parental actions in her childhood and puberty. Thereby, Yasmine follows a psychological explanatory system that attributes to the parents formative influence in the early life phases: "I *think* I I mean I don't know *now* that I look back ... I *maybe* would have been a different person if my mum was different or was *not herself* then. But my mum was *very* negligent *very* conservative." The clearest indication is the swearword scene (see also IV 1.1 for the entire scene), located at the very beginning of Yasmine's life story, as it establishes a pattern:

> "So, the *idea* of doing something *wrong,* or the idea of as a *woman* feeling like you're doing
> something wrong just by being *you* or by being sociable, that has been kind of a problem that

I have been facing *within* myself just because when I was a *child* every time I would speak to someone in the street I would automatically get beat when I get home because its unethical. Girls should not talk to just anyone."

Yasmine attributes this problem that she has "been facing within herself" to the parents' influence. It is these external forces that produced her internal conflicts and thereby influenced major themes in her life. And even the revolution, the event that is going to change everything – Yasmine's scope for action, her self respect, her position within the family, her decision making power (short: her agency) – is instigated by a transcendental force. God sent her this absolute turning point. The massive impact and transformative force of the revolution is indicated by the huge distance between present self and past told self: "I feel 'me' before the revolution is a thousand years ago, because I can't recall me". The experiences in the revolution gave her confidence and made her fearless. The change of thinking that Yasmine attributes to it, empowers her in various ways.

"I'm just in my element and I don't care any more about what my parents would think about things, my *brother* ... *my brother changed* and he apologized and he started being a good brother around two years ago and but there' all *these sudden* things that he does that *scares* me *all* the time. A day before Mubarak stepped down, he saw me saying hi to a boy by kissing him on the cheek – cause I *don't* have *these* kinds of limits where like: 'Oh! oh my god it's *so* scandalous if I say hi to a guy like that.' *But* then *he* thinks that this is disrespectful if I do that in front of him. So since we don't really talk and I'm like *you* know what, this is who I am and if you think that *me* not restricting myself is disrespecting you then – I mean *respecting* you is restricting myself then, *no,* thank you ... I'm just *fearless* right now. ((laughs)) I'm *fearless* and I'm *happy.*"

Yasmine becomes "fearless" in confronting her brother: she no longer accepts her brother's way of dealing with her. She rejects his attempts at disciplining her, and refuses to accept the limits for behaviour that he considers appropriate. Also, vis-a-vis her parents, Yasmine seems to adopt an entirely new approach which she attributes to a change in her own way of thinking:

"Now I'm allowed to sleep over at my friends' places. *Before* I wasn't *allowed because now* I'm not even givin them the choice of allowing me ... I'm not giving them the choice I'm just ... *see*, I *found* that *thing* where ... I'm always like '*Wha*t's stopping you? What's stopping you?' So now I'm like '*Yea look* I'm doing *this* I'm doing *that* and just recently two weeks ago I was in England. I got *flown in* to give like a speech about Tahrir and stuff and it was just like '*Okay* guys I'm *travelling* in two weeks.' So, ... my l*ife* is just completely, it's *complete* different *level* now.

(...) it's like a *lateral* thinking, it's like a different way of thinking, it's like 'Wait a minute – they say no because I asked them – what if I don't ask them – they are not gonnna have the opportunity to say no'. So it hit me like that but before that because I gave them the *ground* and I gave them *power* to say yes or no, I gave them the power to have a say in my *life.* If I tell

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them *'You* don't have a say in my life anyway,' then they're not gonna have the opportunity but obviously I've been giving *that* or, I *snatched,* I snatched that freedom from them and gave it to myself."

Yet the change of agency that "completely changed my life" could not be accomplished solely by Yasmine's self-empowerment. It would remain incomplete without the recognition of others:

"My dad takes *my* opinion. Before anyone else's and so my stance in within the family has *changed*. My *sister* tweets like 'Oh my god, I miss you so much!' like 'Please ...' All these things... My sister looks up to *me* and she used to like *not* do that. So just ... I think it's just, this is the *gift* ((laughs)) of life to me. I hope I hope it stays this way."

Yasmine's opinion now has a certain weight in her family, even vis-a-vis her father. Her younger sister looks up to her, and her mother is proud of her (see III 1.3) just as the "*whole* family is like *proud* of me". Above all, the family seems to accept her new way of behaviour and to respect her refusal of previous patterns of interaction:

"*None* of them can speak to me in the way that they used to speak to me b*efore now* I can't *accept that* any more. Or like any indications or any ... just a *really* horrible way of dealing with me or treating me like *that* is not accepted any more. I *know* that I don't *need anyone*. To the point that I really ... 'It wasn't anyone *around* me that put me through *hell* but *you*.' *So,* I *certainly* can survive without you. I'd *love* to be with you, like my family, and I'd *love* family and I *love* community and I *love that* but I *grew* this *feeling* of ... self-*respect* that no one is going to break."

One morning, Yasmine is on her way to the protests, her mum raises objections, and Yasmine responds: "I don't think there's anything you can do right now to stop me so I'm gonna go. And then I left she's like 'Please take *care'* and then I *went.* "

Her mother does not only accept that Yasmine (in open defiance of her father's and mother's orders) joins the protests, she even participates alongside her daughter at some point. Yet, if we concentrate on Yasmine's mum, we come to realize that even though Yasmine constructs the revolution as the absolute turning point, some changes had been instigated prior to the revolution. This refers in particular to the daughter-mother relation but also to her brother's behaviour and Yasmine's freedom to travel. She dates the beginning of her brother's efforts at "being a good brother" to about two years ago. This would then be the very time at which she found "the good therapist". This encounter was also decisive for her mum's development. The mother herself attended sessions with the therapist and started to re-think her educational practices. Moreover,

Yasmine herself taught her mum "how to be a person", and how to criticise and eventually overcome preconceived notions, stereotypes, outdated norms, mistrust:

> "This [the mother's change] *happened* over the *years* and years in *my* determination. It's just every time we go through something ... she thinks that the cab is ... my mum s been *trained* as a *parent by me* I believe. My dad not so much because he hasn't spent so much time with me but my *mum* we spent *hours* and *hours* and hours *arguing* over like '*Why* do you have prejudice over this person who's Christian, because they have a different *religion*' and, it's as if I was teaching my mum like how to be a *person. I*t's so *weird* right now."

Nonetheless, the narration builds on the revolution as a decisive turning point; and in order to maintain this picture, it seems also essential to not let any doubt arise as to the sustainability and the completeness of this change. The picture of change shall be perfect. Thus, the 'fact' that the brother tried to exert control over Yasmine's behaviour in public (even post "January 25") is not considered a contradiction to the statement "he started being a good brother". We can argue that Yasmine might simply view brotherly control as an element of "being a good brother" – or at least not in contradiction to this concept.[179] Yet, when the issue of correct public behaviour and external control arises in the wake of the revolution, Yasmine vehemently rejects the brother's attempt at limiting her, suggesting that this is not part of being a good brother. The fact, however, that communication between the two siblings comes to a halt in the revolution is not reflected upon. There are two explanations for not addressing this consequence as a negative development. Maybe Yasmine does not perceive the interruption of communication as negative. Instead she might see it merely as a necessary outcome of her grown self-confidence and her fearlessness. On the other hand, it is plausible to argue that Yasmine *does* perceive the break in communication as negative, yet, she can not reflect on negative recent developments because this would taint her picture of the revolution as a purely positive event, as the turning point which lead to a bettering of *all* her life.

Also, the change in thinking Yasmine attributes decisive force to for her self-empowerment might have begun earlier. Yasmine indicates that already the first travel abroad made her realize that her parents were not actually physically stopping her. Rather, she had internalised the norm that she was supposed to follow her parents' order, and even more so, the norm that she was supposed to

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[179] This is plausible at the backdrop of the previous brother-sister relation: "being a good brother" is then a euphemism for stopping to be an abusive brother. In that sense, the relationship has been *normalised*, which by Egyptian standards can include brotherly attempts at control. Even though we always have to be critical of statistical data, a look at the EHDR can be instructive: "SYPE reports that (...) more than 70% of the young men and 40% of young women agreed that a girl must obey her brother, even if he is younger than she is" (Handoussa 2010: 95).

receive orders from them in the first place. Once she realised that she had herself collaborated in reproducing her own confinement, the spell was already broken:

> "Then after that it was *me* not accepting *not* to travel. It was just like 'This is too good' ((laughs)) so *once* you *realize* 'They couldn't, wait a minute, I don't *actually* need their approval I can *actually* do it on my own', like *physically* you can travel. You're *not,* your parents are not gonna curse you so you're not gonna freeze in time or something *no* you can actually do it' and then it's just like 'You either accept it or you don't.' so then she did ... it took a *while* but ... it's good. ((laughs))"

The impression remains that the revolution as the turning point, as the culmination of her story, is a slightly 'forced' construction. Yet, maybe the revolution indeed helped her galvanize previously unconnected stories and elements into one coherent story? Considering the way identity construction works, this can well be performative (II 2.2). Yet, following the logic of narrative identity and the need for coherence, we can assume, that under different circumstances, Yasmine would have constructed her narrative identity around another point of reference, or that she would have managed to establish coherence by different means than choosing one single anchor point (through an overarching theme or motif for example).

Another motive of empowerment arises for the first time with the revolution: Yasmine comes to assume that the mother's and brother's attitudes, their concepts of adequate behaviour, and thus their actions, needed to be understood at the backdrop of the larger societal context. Therefore, change on a large scale suddenly seems possible for Yasmine:

> "It really feels like you *found* yourself. There's *so* many things I want to do right now. It's like *wow.* I can actually – all these things that were … all these things that were bothering me about *Egypt* like these *social stupid mentality* that's been in my mum's head and my brother's *head,* I can actually change them ... it's a *huge* scale so I'm *'Okay,* well maybe can start with freedom of expression' and I started thinking about this online project and so *right now ... It's* – I am actually because of the regime, that fell it's like *it's possible.* You can actually be who you want to be and, fuck everyone else. So like that sort of gave me like the wings to ... or the *space* to be."

The connection that Yasmine draws between her family's "stupid mentality" and the wider societal and political context is remarkable. She also locates her own engagement in an online project that promotes freedom of speech in this double personal and societal context. Her motivation to contribute to Egypt's societal change is fuelled by her personal experience, and at the same time, allows her to frame her past in a new way. In Yasmine's story, the change of agency relies on three connected factors: the self-empowerment through defiance, recognition by the family, and the

vision of how change could be achieved. Together they add up to the remarkable change of agency with the revolution.

In that sense, the reconstruction of agency as an element of narrative identity already points to the next chapter. In the conceptual foundations of my research, identity is understood as pivot of self and society.[180] If we have so far focused on the "self" of Yasmine's narrative identity construction, we will now turn to the "societal" part of her identity construction. In the remainder of this text, I will analyse some of the themes which arose in Yasmine's narration. These themes make us turn to the social worlds Yasmine moves in. I chose central motives which proved to be important in the NID reconstruction *and* which are of particular interest also beyond the case of Yasmine. In many cases, these topics are connected to metaphors or terms that I also encountered in other interviews, such as "my society", "the bubble", or "space".

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[180] An accurate differentiation of self and society can, I assume, only be achieved at a conceptual level.

IV Torn between three worlds: navigating the tensions of a divided society

In this chapter we turn to the social worlds Yasmine moves in. I chose central motives which proved to be important in the NID reconstruction *and* are of particular interest also beyond Yasmine's case. The idea is to start off with a motif as it is reconstructed from Yasmine's story, then contextualise it with existing knowledge and relevant context information, and contrast it with the insights other interviewees provide on the respective issues. The purpose is not to stringently compare Yasmine's "Americanised society" with the "Americanised society" of the eleven other interview partners. The construction of the two social worlds is something specific to Yasmine, and in this depth, was only possible through the interpretative text analysis along the lines of narrative identity. Thus, a "comparison" would compare very different levels of meaning. Moreover, the foci of the interviewees differed strongly, and some might not contribute much to the topics and themes that constituted central motives in Yasmine's story.[181] Thus, the way I relate Yasmine's central motifs to the whole body of interviews is better understood as "contrasting", "contextualisation" or "confrontation". This chapter does not rely on my empirical data and its analysis only, but integrates many insights from existing research in particular on the issue of class and space. This research was not included in the state of the research at the beginning of this text as it was only the analysis that made me realise its relevance.

First, we will contrast the two social worlds of Yasmine, the Americanised society and Egyptian conservative world. After Yasmine's "Americanised society" is reconstructed (IV 1.1), I complement this picture with other interviewees' take on the Americanised society (IV 1.2), of which the AUC is a symbol and prime location. The reconstruction of the Egyptian counterpart[182] focuses on four interrelated topics: women, surveillance, religion and veiling. The position and everyday experience of women is addressed in chapters IV 1.3.1 to 1.3.3. Afterwards, I look at surveillance and social control as brought up by my interviewees (1.3.4). Then, a discussion of the role of religion in Yasmine's life story (1.3.5) and of the practice of veiling follows. In chapter IV 1.4 I show that the members of both worlds rely on exclusionary and judgemental practices, and that my interviewees occupy an uncomfortable middle position, typical of (young) women.

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[181] The fact that I am now able to make these statements shows that in the process of analysing and constructing this chapter, I did indeed work with comparison – it simply would not be of much value to present the reader with every single step of that process.

[182] For the text interpretation, it proved very helpful to work with contrasts. Thus, also the presentation of the main themes will draw on this principle to illustrate the findings. Comparing the Americanised society to the Egyptian conservative world is not to say that they are entirely separate, rather, it is an analytical move to sharpen the contours of the description.

Yet, there is another world beneath the two: this 'Third World' is located outside of the upper class "bubble" Yasmine finds herself in. Once we extend our gaze beyond the confinements of the bubble (IV 2.1), we see a society strongly divided along socio-economic cleavages (IV 2.2). This division finds its expression in the shaping of social space. We look at these spatial manifestations of class divides in Cairo and in Yasmine's story in a separate chapter (IV 2.3). In order to understand the 'uneasy' position of Yasmine's upper middle class, we reconstruct the mutual perception of upper class and lower classes (IV 2.4). The middle class' efforts to navigate these contradictions, puts considerable weight on women's shoulders – this is visible in Yasmine's interview as well (IV 2.5).

1 In-between two worlds: The Americanised society and the Egyptian conservative world

Yasmine tells a story of two 'worlds': her life appears as a continuous struggle to meet the exigencies of two opposing reference points. Yasmine has an uncomfortable position between her "Americanised society" and the Egyptian conservative world, an entirely different social space. In Yasmine's life story, the latter is represented and violently enforced by her mother. What is the nature of these worlds? The "Americanised society" seems to include a specific kind of people sharing certain norms – at the same time, the "Americanised society" is a concept that extends beyond the "material" group of people. The "Americanised society" is tied to specific locations in Egypt, but at the same time transcends geographical space by reference to the outside world and through an element of the imaginary. As such, the "social world" shares some elements with the de-territorialised imagined community (Appadurai 1997: 29) and can be compared to the "social space". Social space supersedes "society" as unit of analysis. Society is a social formation which is based on the identity of geographical and social space; the nation state was linked to a society with culture and identity distinct (Spiegel 2010: 21). The concept of social space on the other hand, reflects "the constructed nature of space and locality" (Spiegel 2010: 22). It is dynamic, relational, process-like, and subject to change since it is constituted by the practices of human actors (individual and collective). As such, social space is de-territorialised, and empirically provides the advantage of capturing multiple identities, diversity, etc. Social space can reflect overlapping groups (or social configurations, as Spiegel calls it) within one geographical space. These can be smaller or bigger than a nation, can transcend borders, and thus link to concepts, constructions and phenomena such as the region, migration, transnational networks, or discourse.

Yasmine's social worlds are very complex since they are made up of people, concepts, and role models. They are not necessarily entirely independent of physical grounding but are not identical with the geographical basis, either. They are interrelated with and dependent on matters of class, but again, not identical. The social categories of gender and youth acquire different meanings in different social spaces. What then emerges is a complex, multidimensional "scape" (a term coined by Appadurai 1996). Reconstructing these "scapes" and turning them into writing is the attempt to convert this complex fabric into language and concept, thereby, inevitably, losing some of the complexity and plasticity. What I am concerned with in the following chapter is reconstructing these social worlds as far as possible, in order to develop a sophisticated understanding of the

world(s) that Yasmine's told self lives in.

We start with the reconstruction of Yasmine's "Americanised society" in chapter (IV 1.1). In that context we also consider the "London experience", where Yasmine gets in contact with the 'real' West. Then we complement (and contrast) this picture with other interviewees' take on the Americanised society (IV 1.2), of which the AUC is a symbol and localisation. In order to gain also an understanding of its counterpart, the Egyptian conservative world (1.3), we first focus on the aforementioned swearword scene (IV 1.3.1). This scene highlights Yasmine's problems with restrictive norms for female behaviour. The confrontation with other interviews produces then a much more refined picture. The norms that come to bear on young Egyptian women can roughly be attributed to the fields of 'chastity', 'dependence' and 'marriage'. The ideal type of woman in this world is the "Egyptian Good Girl", an image reinforced by the (not so ideal and very real) "Egyptian Boy" (IV 1.3.3). A tight net of social control seems to be woven around the young women, whose usage of terms like "judgement", "the people", or "reputation" is conspicuous (IV 1.3.4). Apart from that, religion plays a role in the Egyptian conservative world – yet, it is hard to grasp which one exactly. I therefore first give an overview of the references to religion that can be seen in Yasmine's life story. In the next chapter then, I turn to the "veil" – a major theme of Yasmine's narration, and a symbol with religious connotation. The statements and stories of my other interviewees help to understand Yasmine's struggle with un-veiling. They also shed some light on the context-dependent meaning of the veil (IV 1.3.5).

1.1 Yasmine's Americanised society[183] and her London experience

Yasmine speaks of "my society, the sort of Americanised or Westernised upper middle classes". If we dissect this naive concept, we can distinguish several characteristics of this social world. What Yasmine terms "my society" has a location, in both a geographical and a socio-economic sense. It is tied to "Ma'adi", the up-scale neighbourhood south of Central Cairo,[184] where Yasmine attends an international school. Also, this society is linked to the socio-economic level of "upper(-middle) classes."[185] At the same time, it is dis-located[186] from *Egypt,* insofar as the main attribute of this society is its proximity to imagined *American,*[187] or more broadly *Western,* culture: "I mean *everyone* was overwhelmed by the American culture and they still *are,* we are so influenced by that." The "sort of Americanised or Westernised" society is further characterised by its rejection of the veil – something that clearly distinguishes it from the rest of Egyptian, or the Cairene, population (see chapter I 3.2 on the spread of the veil). Yasmine's account makes visible that the daily practices of the Americanised youth are shaped by a lifestyle of consumption and leisure: they would go shopping, hang out in the mall and bowling alley of Ma'adi, celebrate parties and enjoy outings together as a mixed-gender group.

Besides that, any attributes and norms of that "Americanised society"[188] can only be derived by

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183 This reconstruction of two worlds could also be understood as *Gegenhorizonte* (contrasting horizons) as defined by Bohnsack (Bohnsack 2000: 150–153). In any case, the contrasting of "my Americansied society" with the Egyptian conservative world as perceived by Yasmine and my other interview partners follows the logic of comparison, one of the fundamental principles not only of Bohnsack's method but of qualitative research in general. In another terminology oriented towards systems theory, we would call this 'an attempt to reconstruct the distinctions that Yasmine produces communicatively and to understand which identities she refers to and describes' (Göymen-Steck 2009: 150–151).

184 For some useful information on the shape of distinct neighbourhoods of Cairo, see IV 2.3.

185 Note that Yasmine herself introduces this label. When she speaks about the experience of being veiled in our second interview, she defines her own group as "my upper(-middle) class." Class belonging apparently is a category used in the self-presentation of my subject, an indicator for the awareness of class distinctions in the first place. Other scholars confirm that this is a general phenomenon in Egypt (see IV 2.2).

186 The relation of social worlds to their geographical locations is complex: "my society" is a specific sub-group of Egyptian society, but extends to the geographic location America, and Great Britain (or basically: outside of Egypt). This extension is imaginary, on the one hand, it rests on shared ideas, consumption of media and culture, and imitation of lifestyles. On the other hand, it is very 'real', when people travel for example. When Yasmine returns to Egypt, she is again exposed to *all* segments of the Egyptian society, i.e. the Americanised society and the Egyptian conservative world. Yet, the "experience of returning to Egypt", is shaped much more by those segments of society which are not Americanised. The previous exposure to the London society highlights Yasmine's conflicts with the Egyptian conservative world.

187 In Yasmine's language, America (and American) is clearly designating the United States of America and its citizens/proprieties as a concept linked to "the West" and American (pop)culture, not the American continent as a geographical location.

188 Yasmine does not make any effort to explain to me as the listener what it is that characterises this Americanised society. Remaining within the logic and language of Göymen-Steck, this could indicate that "Americanised" as identity is already well-established (Göymen-Steck 2009: 151).

inference from the role model America (respectively the West) as described and appropriated[189] by Yasmine. Yasmine associates America with the "American culture of partying", and – similarly stereotypical – with "the idea of freedom", a very specific kind of freedom to be more precise, "the MTV, the ideal music video freedom". Yasmine's exposure to American culture, from an early age on, consists mainly of the consumption of the late 1980s and 1990s pop-culture such as Michael Jackson, the Backstreet Boys, MTV, and Disney films. Depending on the life phase, Yasmine adopts an "Avril Lavigne[190] style" (of which a spiked belt apparently constitutes an essential accessory) or listens to the Rolling Stones and Beatles, orienting her self-construction and presentation towards the role of a "hippie". Just as the American pop culture of the 1990s and early 2000s, the hippie culture of the 1960s and 1970s for her is associated with freedom. As Yasmine grows up, the internet becomes the primary medium which allows for her immersion into American culture. She explicitly refers to YouTube channels, video blogs and TED Talks, which she considers the realisation of "freedom of speech", and which inspire her to be a better person. For Yasmine, the United States are "a pretty cool country", marked by diversity, accomplishment, and power. In a quite specific sense, diversity as an American feature is also represented in the ensemble of American personae in her story: of the three Americans mentioned explicitly, each has a different denomination. The school professor supposedly is an atheist, Fiona belongs to the Christian community, and Yasmine's first serious boyfriend is Jewish. In the encounter with Fiona and the church community, "America" is also connected to much looser regulations on the segregation of girls and boys. In Fiona's church, the gender segregation is lifted so that boys and girls are allowed to interact (under supervision). Their interaction even obtains the air of *normalcy* as the interaction takes place in a very relaxed[191] manner. The apparently very casual mixing of youths from both sexes is not likely to be found in the Egyptian society at large, or in Yasmine's Egyptian

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[189] The term "appropriated" is more precise than "imitated", as the former always already implies an element of variation – any imitation will never mirror the original to 100 %, but rather deviate slightly and thus result in "local appropriations" of supposedly global concepts.

[190] There is the rule among academics (who wish to be taken seriously and want to be accredited the status and ability of an academic) that Wikipedia is not a referable source for an academic publication. It is not my intention to debate whether this rule is useful for the construction of 'fitting' knowledge. Nonetheless, in this case it is adequate to refer Wikipedia, for the simple reason that the image of Avril Lavigne that Yasmine is inspired by, is the one transmitted by the the media and sedimented in popular knowledge as fixated in Wikipedia. Avril Lavigne is a singer-songwriter (in the genres pop rock and pop punk), born 1984 in Ontario, who "in 2002, when she was 17 years old, (...) broke onto the music scene with her debut album "Let go" *(...) [which]* made Lavigne the youngest female soloist to reach No. 1 in the UK" (Wikipedia, http: //en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avril_Lavigne, 12.July 2011).

[191] Of course, this description could also be used to avoid more detailed description in the interview. Yet, there is no further indication that there was something to 'gloss over'. Thus, I would rather understand it as the attempt to display the casual nature of this interaction.

conservative world.[192] This different way of managing the interaction of the two sexes is also a defining aspect of life in the UK as experienced by Yasmine (see below).

Another aspect of "America" is language. Yasmine mentions how American culture has influenced her language. Considering she speaks English fluently, with an American accent, employing a plethora of idiomatic expressions that show in-depth acquaintance with the language, this claim acquires instant plausibility. Yet, what Yasmine refers to is more specific. She does not mean that the exposure to the American culture helped her learning a foreign language. It helped her learn *American English* and adopt an *American accent*. In Egypt's divided society, the matter of language is meaningful in a complex sense. It functions as a marker of distinction in latent class struggles. We will address this detail again in the context of the upper middle class' distinction behaviour (IV 2.5).

Eventually, Yasmine attributes the fact she is so affected by the American culture not to its inherent appeal but primarily to the United State's powerful position. The USA's ability to project her power in "the whole world" endows the Americanisation of Yasmine's society with a sense of normalcy: *everyone* is affected. And if the French were dominant, Yasmine tells me, she would simply be affected by the French culture.[193] Yasmine's sober account of America's overwhelming cultural power does not diminish the profound influence the concept of America has on her self-construction, it is clearly identity-relevant to Yasmine. The affiliation to what she terms "Americanised society" becomes most salient and evident at the moments where it is in conflict with the mother. Yasmine's mother can be understood as a representative of the more "Egyptian conservative world" which I attempt to reconstruct in chapter IV 2.

While Yasmine does not mention any travel to the United States, she pays several visits to London and the UK, and shows herself to be extremely "fascinated by fun". She drinks and takes hard drugs. She shares in the lifestyle of her friends at the two top London universities SOAS and LSE, which means "just you go to class and then you *go* and you *party all* day *all day* all day". Also, her

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[192] The (official) Coptic Church in Egypt is extremely conservative. According to Bayat, it has even *re*produced the neoconservative social trend in Islam (Bayat 2007: 148). Nonetheless, there seems to be some scope for alternative *practice*, depending on the specific community, and its spiritual and administrative leadership. Yasmine's account of Fiona's community resembled that of a Coptic friend of mine, who grew up in Fayoum, a city south west of Cairo moulded by its rural surroundings. In essence, Fayoum is what Egyptians tend to call "a closed community". His Christian community, however, seemed to construct a rather open atmosphere: while it did not have a rock band, the church gave considerable (physical and ideational) space to youth from both sexes to interact within the sheltered (and surveyed) confines of the church.

[193] I assume that she was not aware that this statement was literally 'rubbing salt into the wounds' of 'la grande nation' whose influence on Egypt, its culture, architecture, and politics had been tremendous in the 19th and early 20th century.

first trip to London "was the first time of *freedom*" for Yasmine. One could consider this feeling, and the corresponding evaluation of life in the UK, a mere short-term effect of the particular constellation: in previous trips with her parents, she had been shoved from the airport into a cab to the hotel. These 'holidays' therefore reproduced the "bubble" that Yasmine finds herself in at home. Now, for the first time Yasmine is allowed to travel without her parents, and is able to get in touch with the local realities of another country. Yet also later, after repeated trips abroad, being out of Egypt for Yasmine equates freedom. When abroad, she feels less exposed to other people's judgement, thus being freer in the way she experiences her feelings and shapes her relationship to other people, mainly boys. Yasmine shows herself also continuously impressed by the *independence* of people – even younger than her. They live on their own, supposedly do what they want and are "having *so* much *fun"* – other than Yasmine herself, who explains "I didn't even *live* my *youth*" and "I'm not *living ...* my life to the fullest *and time* goes by so slowly when you're not living the way you want". Thus, the real-life encounters with youth in foreign countries complement the image of "the ideal MTV music video freedom" with the very real experience of independence from parental and societal supervision.

It is at the moments of direct comparison – when Yasmine returns to Egypt from her trips abroad – that the contrast of the two worlds, the Americanised society and the Egyptian conservative world, becomes the starkest. Also, the emotional consequences are then the hardest for Yasmine, the return from a journey seems to end repeatedly in another phase of depression: "Then when I *came back* from England I was *so* depressed. Cause I was just like 'man, I just this is *horrible. I can't* believe I'm not *living* my life to the fullest' *and time* goes by so slowly when you're not living the way you want so *again bed,* in bed".

1.2 The Americanised society from various perspectives

Yasmine is by far not the only interviewee that works with the term "Americanised" or "Westernised". Yet, some of the other interviewees reveal a much more ambivalent relation to the United States and to all that which for Yasmine is associated with her Americanised society. First of all, those who actually got in touch with the United States during their term abroad provide an interesting perspective. Samira tells of a common stereotype of the United States that made her fathers' friends oppose Samira's stay in the US:

"So when my father agreed that I go to study at American University [in a city in the USA] his friends said: 'Oh my God you're leaving your daughter to be alone for a whole four months in a totally different place with totally different people with totally different understanding.' You know, people in Egypt think about the Americans they are the drunk people and – no offence – but this is how they think ((laughs))".

While at this moment, Samira herself laughs about this image of Americans as "the drunk people", this seems not too far from the first-hand experience of the exchange students. Mariam, Eman and Naima attribute some importance to their confrontation with (excessive) alcohol consumption. The drinking and partying they observed is one of the first things they mention when I ask them to speak about their experience abroad. Mariam was most outspoken and detailed about how the frequent, excessive and routine consumption of alcohol irritated her. But apparently all the girls considered the topic worth mentioning, and felt forced to develop a stance on that issue that they shared with me in the interview. May's account gives one impression of how this is issue can be negotiated:

"[In the States] everyone is doing what they want. You have ... drinking parties... You have everything. The most ... important way of socialisation was *alcohol* parties. If you want to socialise with people they have every *Friday* night and there every Saturday night they have this ... *alcohol c*lub. They have a club, a whole club. And they have like headquarters for them inside the university. .... You know the feeling? You go to Friday night ... everybody is drunk and everybody .... those people who are very cute and respected, very humble and very good students – in Friday night they are *other people*. *Oh man*! For *me* that was *shocking*. ... And I have like 'Oh man, that's different'. And maybe, now I have my other Arab friends: 'Just ... you have to take it easy'. And then, by the first month, I became 'Okay, that's okay, I don't have that ...that's their culture. And I have to understand that ... yes maybe that's not my culture, I disagree with this, I don't want, I think that drinking is ... makes me I don't know, maybe, a disrespectful person. And I don't think that this is the good way to have *fun.* But *for* them it's a good way to have fun. So, okay, it's for them, yes we're different, and as long as they're not *forcing* me to drink, as long as they are not accusing me of being less modern ... because I don't drink or because I'm a religiously conservative person, and as long they're doing their stuff and I'm doing my stuff, then we can have ... there's no problem as long as they're not harming me personally.'"

 Homosexuality is another issue that captured the attention of those who spent a term in the US, and that figured prominently in their accounts of the time abroad. The way this issue was framed struck me most: both Naima and Eman introduced the topic by saying that their town was specific in that regards. Eman stated that in her host city "the number of homosexuals is really high ... they are all around you". Naima told me that her "town was known (...) for two things. It was known for *pubs* which was ((laughs)) 'Okay I'm not going anywhere there' ((laughs)) and the second thing it was for homosexuals". Also Mariam said about her stay that "gays are everywhere". Let us assume AUC does not purposefully send all its exchange students to cities which are known for

homosexuality. In this case, it is a 'funny coincidence' that several of my interviewees 'ended up' in "gay" cities. Or – and this I consider the more likely version – the perception of these cities as "gay", is less reflective of the actual numbers of homosexuals and more an indicator of the dominant role that homosexuality acquired in the interviewees' experience in, and their image of, the United States. This prominence can indicate that homosexuality is a taboo, supposedly non-existent in Egypt. Then, the irritation through and dominance of homosexuality in their accounts would result primarily from the stark *contrast*. Or we assume that homosexuality is *latently* a topic in Egypt as well. Then the topic draws so much attention and predominance due to the *latent* similarity. The reaction to this (for some much too close) encounter with gays differs: Samira appreciated that the time in the States, and the more open discussion of differences, taught her to respect homosexuals and people of other denominations, "it's how God created them". Similarly, Naima made it a point that even though homosexuality might not be approved of by her religion, being homosexual does not make that person a bad person. She had learnt to accept the difference, and not to judge because of one act alone, especially as "America is very liberal" in comparison to Egypt. Mariam does not go that far, but as we have seen from the above quote, she also made an effort to show that – after some time – she could accept this behaviour as being culturally distinct. Eman's experience, on the other hand, did not have such a relativising effect. She stuck to a strategy of avoidance rather than accepting the difference:

> "One sentence that could sum that up: for Muslims who are religious homosexuals are not something that we like nor that we recommend nor that we accept. If I see them at AUC it's just like 'I don't like you I don't know you don't like me, so we just stay away from each other and that's it.".

While she links aversion of gays to Islam in this story, her narrations of her term abroad indicate that personal negative encounters might have fuelled a subjective antipathy. When Eman asks another person about the large number of gays in the city, so she tells me, she is shocked by the response which likens her status of being from the Muslim minority to that of homosexuals: "Well, if we accept Muslims we accept homosexuals." Eman is thoroughly offended: "Like for them we are the exact same although this is a religion and this is a sexual orientation but we are *as weird*." Moreover, she has the chance (?) to accidentally attend a party at a gay club. There, she not only observes the drag queens in their unknown attire and sees how people get physical in public, she is also personally insulted by one of the drag queens, called a "bitch".[194]

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[194] Eman's response to this insult is very intense. She feels that by calling her a bitch, the dragqueen is doubting her chastity.

Eman is made aware that she as a Muslim was perceived as a member of a "weird" minority. In other interactions she also had the impression of being seen as "very different and weird". This resonates with the experience of the other interviewees. During their stay abroad, they understand themselves as a representative of their country, culture and religion, not only as an individual student. They link this idea of representing Egypt to the stereotypes that they encounter in the US.[195] Mariam told me:

> "I was the first Egyptian me and my friend. We where the first Egyptians *ever* to got to this university. So that was a new burden on us that we were representatives of our culture we're representatives of those 80 million. It was hard for so many reasons but it was also entertaining. It was hard because... you have to show those other people that you're an – you're not weird ... All those stereotypes about Arabs and terrorists and women who are oppressed because they are wearing *hijab* and you know all those stuff. So you have like to show them 'Yes, I'm an Arab, yes I'm Muslim, yes, I'm a veiled woman but I'm not oppressed and I'm not a terrorist and I can tolerate things that you think that I am not tolerating. So the most two questions I was asked about was the Pharaohs and Mubarak .... and I tried to explain all those stereotypes (...)"

Similarly, Samira feels confronted with stereotypes and prejudices due to her Arab origin, and Muslim denomination:

> "When I went to the States I had like 'Oh! A terrorist is coming' or 'She's bad' or or 'She's close minded she has a bomb in her bag' or something like that. Or 'You live in the pyramid and you don't you know nothing and how how come you speak English? How come you know more how come you get good grades?' and stuff like that. So I was like: 'We're not *that* ignorant. We're open minded we learn we have cars, we live like you, but still our country is not that proprious [sic], it's not that developed, but still we *live*. We're not living like Somalia for example.'"

Those who have not been to the United States for study abroad associate themselves with the Americanised society nonetheless (or even more?). Also for them, drinking seems to be an important aspect of the "Americanised society" in Egypt. Just as in Yasmine's account, Nadia and Rana link the behaviour of "Americanised" youth to drinking, smoking, and partying. Reem also substantiates this perception. She apparently feels the need to first emphasise and then justify her rejection of drinking and smoking:

> "I'm not the kind of girl who goes clubbing and stuff. I enjoy music but I've never smoked in my life, I've never, I never had a drink in my life. I haven't smoked as in a sense I haven't taken even a cigarette. I don't do these things at all. I've never been even ... I haven't been even *attracted* to do such a thing. Ever in my life. So for some people it was very strange at school and at university."

The latter part renders plausible the assumption that in her peer group, drinking and smoking has

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195 For reasons of completeness, though, it should be mentioned that another interviewee who spent a year abroad in an Asian country encountered similar stereotypes.

become the norm. It might therefore be primarily her previous class mates and fellow university students that this justification is meant to address. Homosexuality, on the other hand, does not seem to be a major topic in the Americanised society. 'Laxer' rules on interaction between men and women, however, are. Within the Americanised society, physical contact between males and females is not only much more frequent than in the Egyptian conservative world, it seems to constitute the norm. Nadia tells me that after taking off the headscarf, people would be more accepting (or indifferent) towards her hugging boys:

> "Now when I do it [hug boys] it's like 'Oh she's one of those Westernised girl'. People have images in their mind ... like not totally Egyptian and so on ... just like AUC you know the whole idea she's AUCian[196] and so on."

This is to say, more 'physical' ways of greeting are considered 'normal' for members of the Americanised society. It might even be a constitutive feature, meaning that if as a boy you refuse to shake a girl's hand (or vice-versa), you show you are not part of the Americanised society. This (obligatory) relaxation of norms ranges from greeting friends of both genders with a hug or a kiss on the cheek to having sexual contact with your boyfriend. Nadia explains how even the way relationships between young men and women are initiated follows the image of "American dating". After she described the process of getting to know each other, she wraps the topic up with an interesting summary:

> "The whole Westernised thing. But that's because of me that's because I'm in that culture of Egypt, that society ... where we're a bit influenced by the globalisation part and so on. Where the whole, some of us accept the idea of dating and then we accept the idea of being exclusive. And then you take some time to go through the whole 'I'm gonna meet your parents' and then the whole steps that you see in ... shows, American and other places, we're kind of accepting it more or I *am*. It's good to be organized I like everything to be organized. Even relationships".

If we consider how youth's relationships are modelled after the supposed American image, we can extend Schneider and Silverman's list of contemporary Western influence to also include, besides beauty ideals, "relationship standards" (Schneider and Silverman 2006: 242). My interview partners who consider themselves members of the Americanised society have not only appropriated the ideal of complementary partnership, they are appropriating the American dating scheme in detail. The problems they encounter, though, are (according to their own interpretation) due to *Egyptian* gender norms. And while the degree of physical contact in a premarital

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[196] Nadia's quote shows that "AUCian" and "Americanised" and "Westernised" can be used nearly interchangeably. This also becomes evident in the other interviews. A particularly interesting effect is that some of my interviewees who do not consider themselves "Americanised" would speak about the AUCians and the AUC as if she, personally, did not belong to them.

relationship within the Americanised society varies, the one limit that all of my interview partners upheld was sexual intercourse. Nadia tells me that "the whole physical part changes from one person to the other. [In] my society a lot of the people, the whole physical part, we do whatever we want but we don't have intercourse."

As shown before, my interview partners with the respective experience valued the encounter with the United States and another country for teaching them to tolerate difference and appreciate diversity. In a comparable way, the AUC is identified with teaching a more critical way of thinking. It is in particular those who are ambiguous about the AUC who nonetheless praise its achievements in this field. This positive view, however, seems not to be shared by the majority of Egyptians. According to the narrations of my interviewees, suspicion is the usual feeling towards AUC and the Americanised society. Mariam tells me how remarkable it was that her parents fully supported her move to AUC, considering how hostile her home community is vis-a-vis the American University.

> [on the question how her parents reacted to her AUC acceptance] "They actually encouraged me, which is ... in my community which is a little bit a closed, conservative community sending your *daughter* this very far away to a *very* liberal university like AUC that was really strange ... and *many* people were telling my mum 'Are you gonna let your daughter going to AUC *alone*?' We hear about AUC that they are very liberal and that they are not .... their ethics and ..."

Apparently Mariam's community goes even so far to consider those who join AUC as 'traitors'. At the same time, AUCians have a noticeable nimbus – the reasons for this ambivalent relation is evident to Mariam:

> "The Egyptian society unfortunately is a little bit xenophobic. ... In a way that AUC is a major US institution. And *anything* that's related to the US has a big question mark on it. So people inside AUC are usually looked at as traitors by the society, yet they are highly valued. like if you went any place I said I'm in AUC and you're like chapeau off, they paved the street because your dad is rich because you're coming from a very good family. Highly educated but many people at the same time this hypocrisy. Same thing is that there's suspense about them they are these American judes [sic] they love America they have some American agendas."

The relation two the US, or more general to anything *barra* (i.e. the Egyptian colloquial term for "abroad", "from abroad"; literally: "outside") is ambiguous: on the one hand, it puts a question mark on you – on the other hand, it endows you with the nimbus of power. This mixture of distrust and awe is a direct reflection of the distribution of economic, political, and military power in the international sphere. Schneider and Singerman describe the Egyptian experience in a very

placative way:

> "And now Egypt is stuck, de-pendent on foreign aid from the United States at the same time that the U.S. is Israel's biggest supporter. When they look around, Egyptians see U.S. companies and American culture gradually taking over their society. It's humiliating!" (Schneider and Singerman 2006: 244).

When Mariam describes to me how other people would react once they know you are an AUCian, another motive makes clearer, why the people from her conservative community would be so shocked by her attending AUC:

> "Some people look at you as if you're coming from another planet. ... Wow AUC. They think that we're going to the street with a *bikini* to the university some people have this 'They don't allow veiled girls' ... and like they have those very strange stereotypes. (..)"

The idea that all female AUC students run around the campus in their swimsuits might seem like a ridiculous exaggeration, but it has a very serious and real background. In Egypt, dress is the outward sign of a woman's ethics, thus wearing a bikini or being forced to take off the veil touches on the moral quality of a woman. This dress-morals-nexus is explained by Mariam:

> "We are a little bit of a conservative society where dress code determines how this person behaves. This little or close minded way of thinking where your dress code determines your ethics where 'Ah okay those are the people who are rich those rich people those who have no ethics and have no .... whatever.' We have this kind of stereotypes."

This remark refers to another dimension of the relation between the Egyptian conservative world and the Americanised society" which has already been mentioned above ("because your dad is rich"): the material status of the Americanised society members intersects with their supposed moral aloofness. Wealth becomes an indicator of immorality and unethical behaviour. We will discuss this interesting dimension of the fault lines that divide Egyptian society in detail in a later chapter (IV 2). For now, we will remain with the "immorality" that the larger community attributes to the Americanised society. In the public discourse, xenophobia and fear of immorality converge, focusing in specific on the youth, and the educational system (Bayat 2010, 2007; Sayed 2010). The discourse on youth in Egypt reveals a "prevailing moral panic over the alleged vulnerability of youths to global culture" (Bayat 2010: 43). Parents display a "deep anxiety over their 'corrupting' influence on their vulnerable children" (Bayat 2007:165). This pervasive fear that youth might become *corrupted* (Abaza 2006: 241) finds expression in media debates and even specific conferences (Bayat 2007: 165).

Even the Egyptian state joined the fear mongering which was traditionally the role of Islamist currents: "The(...) [youths] protection from political and moral ills had become a matter of

'national security'" (Bayat 2010: 42). The state invested money and efforts to prevent youth from being too influenced by Western cultural influences or home-grown political Islam (Bayat 2010: 42). Just like the regime's efforts to fuel xenophobia, the Egyptian state's efforts in policing youth could be interpreted as an attempt to divert attention from the real corruption that ruins the country. With the backdrop of this public discourse of youth corruption, it is plausible for Mariam to portray her family as an exception. She thereby indicates it was possible and maybe even expected from a family to forbid her daughter's accession to AUC on moral grounds: "My dad, I was brought up like 'My girl, I trust her and I'm sure that she's gonna be fine' (...) and they let me go and they let me travel to the US so I think I'm a little bit lucky to have such a family."

Mariam only *portrays* the preconceived notions of AUC, common at her community of origin. Eman, on the other hand, speaks at length about the way some male and female students interact at campus. She thereby allows us to get an idea of how the *observable reality* at AUC might be condemned by the "conservative communities". Her remarks also show that – from the standpoint of a conservative, who values conservative normation of sexual behaviour – American influence might indeed have a corrupting effect :

> "Kissing for us is *weird*. It's not only weird it's *bad.* It's bad as *hell*. Just greeting and kissing is *no way!* No way I would do it no way many who are veiled or not veiled would do it but in AUC you see this a *lot.* Really *a lot.* (...) Especially inside AUC they do a lot of things that they do want. *Though* we do have rule of conduct in here and we do have the public display of affection ... *rule*. It's a very very famous thing, we do even have abbreviation for it PDA – public display of affection. Oh yes! ((laughs)) but it's not really applied because we are in the *American* University and Americans can do what *they want!* They don't have to go strict by our rules (...) but it [she refers to pre-marital sexual intercourse here] happens it happens a lot. But for those people they don't care if she's not a virgin they don't care. If she is even having a baby or they are getting married I once heard a story of this sort they don't care. There are of course these surgeries to get your virginity back and such a things maybe they do it I don't know. But a lot of rules for them are like very lenient it's cool everything is cool for them ... somehow. "

The West as an open and liberal society is constructed in contrast to the "closed communities", which many of my interview partners grew up in, and still to a certain extent locate themselves and their families in. Eman's above comment has already hinted at the norms that prevail within these communities. We will now contrast the picture of the "Americanised society" with a detailed reconstruction of the "Egyptian conservative world" as it features in Yasmine's story and in the other interviews.

1.3 The Egyptian conservative[197] world: gender norms, social control and the veil

What is it that defines the Egyptian world, the world Yasmine returns to after travelling abroad? Which is the contrast that she repeatedly responds to with another phase of depression? The other side of the "contradictory society", that part of her upper middle class which is not Americanised, is marked by a high degree of social control. Egyptian society is portrayed as judgemental, intolerant, invasive into private life – reputation is of utter importance, in every step Yasmine takes, she already factors in "the people's" potential reaction. In that sense, Yasmine's perspective shares a lot with that of the other women I interviewed. In the interviewees' narrations, these negative traits of Egyptian society were clearly tied to them being women. They spoke about restrictions they face because they are women, about the double standards vis-a-vis girls and boys in education and criticised the construction of women as "weak" and "a precious jewellery". Issues of Islam or religion on the other hand, were not problematised. Following the interviewees' relevances, the description of the Egyptian conservative world will thus focus on the role of women in Egypt (IV 1.3.1 – 1.3.). First, Yasmine's perspective is reconstructed from the swearword scene (IV 1.3.1). The other women's narrations help to understand that the norms for female behaviour can be clustered under the three labels 'chastity', 'dependence', and 'marriage' (IV 1.3.2). In the category[198] of the "Egyptian Good Girl", all these converge (IV 1.3.3). The "Egyptian Boy" (IV 1.3.3) along with "the people" from the Egyptian conservative world enforces this ideal. Tight social surveillance limits the young women (IV 1.3.4).

Besides the women issue, I decided to address the theme of religion (from Yasmine's perspective) in a separate chapter (IV 1.3.5). The idea here is to gain an understanding of how the deep permeation of Egyptian culture by Islam and the major trend of re-Islamisation can play out in an individual's self-construction. The topic of veiling is closely connected to both religion and female norms. Thus, the decision to become (un)veiled constituted a central motive in Yasmine's narration, and also figured prominently in Nadia's story. Referring to their experience in detail, I try to highlight how the issue of veiling, female roles, religion, public surveillance and judgement intersect in the specific cases of two young women of Cairo's upper(-middle) class (IV 1.3.6). Eventually, it is being located at these intersections which constitutes one of the problems in

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[197] Originally, I used the term "Egyptian world". This is insofar more appropriate as it indicates that for Yasmine the conservative world and the Egyptian society at large overlap, and have many commonalities. Yet, the reader might have been confused by this terminology even though it would have better reflected the complexities.

[198] What I mean here is not an *analytical category*, but rather a *cognitive category* used for classification. Related terms would be "concept", "image" or "ideal type".

Yasmine's life story (IV 1.4). This goes beyond the usually conflicting position of women. In Yasmine's case, both the Egyptian conservative world and the Americanised society appear as judgemental and seem to rely on exclusionary mechanisms.

1.3.1 Yasmine – Being disciplined into Egyptian gender norms

In Yasmine's biographical narration, we find a scene which I termed the "swearword scene". It highlights how Yasmine constructs herself as the victim of restrictive norms for female public behaviour since an early age. The swearword scene is not only the first narrative episode in her opening monologue but also seems to function as a *key* episode: it is the only scene illustrating her early childhood and it is framed as having much importance for the course of her further development.

> "When I was young, I was a very ... I still am very perfectionist and I was the kind of girl with the two braids and the perfect lunch box, I was a ballerina. I was always, I was very naive of course as other children were. But I was particularly *talkative*. And I was particularly *curious* about *people* and people on the street – which my family was not a big fan of and it kind of got me in trouble many many times. I used to always like to impress whoever I meet. By many things I can dance I can sing I can talk I can be silly and funny. Or I can speak *English* (...)
>
> So I had cousins that lived abroad – they're gonna come later in the story it's really interesting – *they*, my cousins, they are three boys and they live with my aunt in New Jersey in the U.S. And one – the youngest one – was particularly ... a bad – the bad kid in the family. And so he was like: 'I'm gonna teach you English' and I'm like 'Oh my god that's amazing'. Obviously – I mean, I'm guessing that is what happened then. And he would always dare me to do things, and I would just do them. *But* he taught me how to say swearwords, and I was not aware that these were swearwords. And just this one time, I said to one of my dad's friends a sentence, a really vulgar sentence, and then so I ended up being severely beat that night, and like called a *whore* and things like that. I was just seven.
>
> So, the *idea* of doing something *wrong,* or the idea of as a *woman* feeling like you're doing something wrong just by being *you* or by being sociable, that has been kind of a problem that I have been facing *within* myself just because when I was a *child* every time I would speak to someone in the street I would automatically get beat when I get home because its unethical. Girls should not talk to just anyone. At *that* time. ... my *parents* now are very different from when what they were then."

What happened? Yasmine describes herself as a lovely little girl, evoking the stereotype American primary school girl in school uniform, "with two braids and a perfect lunchbox". Yet, what distinguishes Yasmine from the ideal girl is her sociability: "I was talkative..." Her interest in socialising and her curiosity push her so far as to address random people in the street – a behaviour which is not appreciated by her parents. In her attempts to "impress people", Yasmine would draw on her various communicative and artistic skills such as singing, dancing, being funny,

and speaking English. What could be considered a harmless innocent attempt at showing off with smartness, provokes a serious conflict in the swearword scene. Her cousin who is living in the US teaches her swearwords without making her "aware that these were swearwords". So when little Yasmine says this "sentence, really vulgar sentence" to her father's friend, the parental reaction is harsh: the girl is not only beaten up "severely" later, but also called a whore. This scene has the function of explaining to the audience how an idea was installed in Yasmine that would throughout her life pose a considerable challenge to her identity-construction, for the integration of her self-perception along with the need for self-expression and recognition by her parents:

> "So, the *idea* of doing something *wrong,* or the idea of as a *woman* feeling like you're doing something wrong just by being *you* or by being sociable, that has been kind of a problem that I have been facing *within* myself just because when I was a *child* every time I would speak to someone in the street I would automatically get beat when I get home because it's unethical. Girls should not talk to just anyone."

What springs to 'the social scientist's eye' in this scene, is the introduction of the gender category: Yasmine corrects her first attempt at expressing her idea and specifies " as a woman". In this way, Yasmine makes clear that the ethical code she had violated refers to women only, or women specifically. We do not learn whether the code for males is different, yet the intentional mentioning of "woman" indicates that this might indeed be the case. Also, the parents' verbal abuse is in line with this reading: Yasmine is not called a "naughty child" or a "disrespectful kid" but a "whore". This categorisation by the disciplining parents might be a mere reaction to the (to us) unknown content of the "really vulgar sentence". But overall, the parents' verbal reaction and Yasmine's interpretation of the scene's meaning underscore the assumption that this scene is related to Yasmine being constructed as a girl.

While the gender-content of this scene is rather obvious, a second theme is harder to discover. In this scene, the matter "of foreign language" acquires some importance as well. Language, or the related and more specific issue of "accent", needs to be understood in the larger societal context of the uneasy relations between Egyptians and what they would perceive as "the West". With this in mind, it is interesting to note that the first interaction between Yasmine and her parents revolves around swearwords *spoken in English*. While the explicit content of that scene is the conflict between girl and parents about ethical behaviour as a woman, the similarly pervasive conflict about the stance towards American culture, norms, dress, etc. might already be implied. These issues will be addressed in more detail in the chapters (IV 1.4 on conflicting cultures) and chapter (IV 1.2.5 on language as a marker of distinction).

Beyond the swearword scene, gender norms and inequalities have a significant impact on Yasmine's life and perception. In her biographical narration, most of the time it is Yasmine's mother, although at some points also her brother, who imposes the norms of the Egyptian conservative world on Yasmine's life. In an attempt to free her mother from the responsibility, Yasmine describes her educational background as very limited, and explains were she derived her norms from:

> "I think that my mum is someone who never got the chance of good education. She never got the exposure that I got so I *never* blamed her for any of her ... her *references* seriously were old black and white movies. So she would [use the movie as] reference, she's like: 'You should see this *movie* you know what happens? She *goes* to him and he like manipulates her and he rapes her, and then she's not a virgin any more so this is what's gonna happen to you.' You know what I mean ... her references where *that* because she did not lear... she did not know any *better.* And *that's fine,* this is her circumstance."

Yasmine is confronted not merely with stereotypes about male-female-interaction but observes violence against women in her close social environment. This, she thinks, needs to be fought in the aftermath of the uprising so to make the revolution reach the homes:

> "I *think* that the *real* revolution is the revolution *inside* the homes. For *me,* inside the families ... like my *maid,* the servant at our house, she gets *beat* by her husband twice a week and she's totally cool with *that. A*nd I'm like '*Seriously* you're *cool*?!' She's like 'Yea I mean he's gonna leave me if I say no.' To *me,* I'm like 'Oh my god this is my *fight,'* I *want* to be able to talk to her and talk her into saying no."

For Yasmine specifically, one aspect of the Egyptian conservative world is its way of dealing with, or rather its way of *not addressing* the crime of (sexual) abuse within families. I had already mentioned above how the abuse that Yasmine herself suffers is largely ignored by her mother. Above that, Yasmine learns that her mother herself had been abused when she was younger – understandably these events have a tremendous impact on Yasmine's perception of men:

> "Apparently something happened with her half-brother when she [Yasmine's mother] was younger too so she just said that and I was like *what*?! *That* was shocking to me and it still is, shocking, and I *know he*r half-bro- he's my uncle and I still feel weird around him just because I *know* that ... and that kind of turns every *man* I know into a sexual being. Who just goes after what he wants. Regardless of limitation ... so *that* was *really* shocking, I mean I can't believe ... *that* completely just *ruined* the reality of things to me. I really have to think about, that always comes up ....how men think about sex every seven seconds so *whenever* I meet someone even if he's an older even if he's eighty[199] years old I get scared. So, really annoying. It was also very *difficult* to spend time with my *dad* just because automatically he's a sexual being and that's a problem. I'd rather *not* deal with him at all rather than deal with him and

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[199] A note on the transcript: here the recording was very unclear. It could be 'eight' as well, but eighty made much more sense, given the previous part of the sentence.

think these *thoughts* and *I* keep thinking there's something *wrong* with me. Argh it's so annoying. How can I *not* think of that and stop – why don't you just stop obsessing and get over it. But it's really difficult really difficult it's really annoying." ((laughs small laugh))

It remains open here whether Yasmine's self-criticism is motivated by her wish to reconcile her rational construction of men with her emotions and fears, or whether this self-criticism is the expression of her society's habit to blame any sexual event on the woman involved. Men are hardly made responsible for their sexual behaviour (Froböse 2011). The phenomenon of rampant verbal (and to a lesser extent, physical) sexual harassment in Cairo (Froböse 2011: 56–78; Handoussa 2010: 94, 107) is a case in point.[200] Yasmine finds harassment so ubiquitous that she declares it part of the Egyptian experience: it is "part of the streets, the experience of the street of Egypt". Again, it is Yasmine's mother who represents the Egyptian conservative stance:

> "In the streets whenever I would tell my mum, people are not supposed to hassle ... you are a woman and you're walking in the street and this is not supposed to happen. And my mum would tell me: 'No! This is normal stop with these crazy thoughts of perfection. This is not perfect. The world is not perfect this is our culture these are our traditions and you have to understand that stop being so Americanised' and she would think that this is sort of like this foreign way of thinking ... *even* though I didn't really learn that anywhere it just kinda came to me."

Egyptian society seems unwilling or unable to protect women from their own relatives and public offenders. Paradoxically, it puts at the same time a (rhetoric?) prime on the protection of women, and of their chastity. In particular, if it comes to interaction with the outside world and to the women's outer appearance. Travelling abroad alone for studies or holidays, for example, is an absolute taboo for most Egyptian women, and so it also initially is for Yasmine:

> "Me and my mum had a great fight at some point and then I always wanted to be independent and have my *money* and have my own *space* and so we had a big fight then about travelling I wasn't of course allowed to travel *ever.*"

The idea of protecting women goes much further, though: Yasmine has the impression of living in a "bubble" because all her steps are watched by her family. She is not allowed to use public transport and hardly finds the opportunity to hang out with friends: "At this point I was not allowed to ride taxis or buses or metros or anything. I was from car to car I *was* very just sheltered and living in this *bubble* of you're owning a lo- (...)". The bubble for Yasmine symbolises a kind of

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[200] On the issue of sexual harassment, which drew a huge media echo (in particular after publication of a report by the ECWR), see for example an article on BBC News (Abdelhadi 2008). The Egyptian Newspaper Al Masry Al Youm's English-language online section has launched a series called "The sexual harassment file". In this series, one article per week is published on the issue of harassment (AlMasry AlYoum, http: //www.almasryalyoum.com/en). The popular online magazine Bikyamasr even dedicates a whole section on its website to the issue (http: //bikyamasr.com/section/women/sexual-harassment/).

parental confinement, which is wrong, according to the therapist: "There's such a thing *as* just *having* your daughter live in this *bubble* of confining her." Yasmine is not even allowed to stay over at her female friends' houses over night, or to return back home late at night. Her parents argue this was due to societal norms and pressure: "They were always 'Because okay society, if you go home after midnight all of the your neighbourhood is gonna be talking.'"

Reputation is frequently invoked to justify restrictions and rules, also in regards to another particularly sensitive field of regulation: interaction between men and women. While public and private space in Egypt is not as strictly divided between men and women as in some other Arab countries, mixed-gender interaction is limited and strictly regulated. When Yasmine wants to go to a male friend's place because "his house was kind of like a social *hub* like *everyone* would hang out in [his] house", her mother "was always against that because she's like 'Boys and girls in one building?!'" Yasmine quotes her mother to explain what the idea behind this misgiving is: "I *come* from a *background* where my mum tells me that 'If a guy and a girl are in the same room *then* the third is is the devil' and they're obviously going to have sex. O*bviously.*" While encounters of a man and a woman in private settings are therefore strictly forbidden, their interaction in public space follows restrictive rules as well. A transgression of the limits, for example hugging boys in public, is nothing less than "scandalous". In this case, it is Yasmine's brother who tries to enforce societal norms on her:

> "A day before Mubarak stepped down, he saw me saying hi to a boy by kissing him on the cheek – cause I *don't* have *these* kinds of limits where like: 'Oh! Oh my god it's *so* scandalous if I say hi to a guy like that.' *But* then *he* thinks that this is disrespectful if I do that in front of him. So since we don't really talk and I'm like 'Y*ou* know what, this is who I am and if you think that *me* not restricting myself is disrespecting you then – I mean *respecting* you is restricting myself then, *no,* thank you … '"

And the limitations on inter-gender interaction even extend to the virtual world:

> "I was not allowed to chat on the internet with friends after ten pm I wasn't allowed to talk to boys after 9 pm (…) they thought that … they would say that 'What is everyone going to say about you if you're the kind of girl that stays on the internet until ten … chat with boys … there's *no good* girl or *respectable* woman who does that …*that* is completely unacceptable by all means of *respect a*nd decency. So it just became a rule and once it became a rule I became the one who's defensive."

This way, Yasmine's family even interferes with the only "virtual and uncensored space" (Herrera 2010: 141) where Egyptian youths can interact and present themselves freely. Yasmine's family justifies the internet restrictions with reference to decency, and reputation. If Herrera is right, and the "majority of young Egyptians use facebook for subvertive activity" (Herrera 2010: 141),

Yasmine's family might have entirely different reasons for the prohibition.[201]

The plethora of familial restrictions notwithstanding, Yasmine "only just wanted to be a *good girl,* honestly and truly*", she "always had dreams of being this *perfect ... really* a good girl. I was like *okay,* so I'm gonna work as this TV *anchor* or something and I *get married* and then all this stuff". In her life story, it is the social environment that prevents her from being a good girl. In light of her circumstances, perfection seems impossible to achieve. Even when Yasmine is abiding by the norms, her mother still mistrusts her due to her affiliation with the Americanised society. Also her attempt to be a good girl by donning the veil, eventually fails and results in major tensions (IV 1.3.6).

In Yasmine's narration, the inequality of gender that defines her scope for action goes much further than is described by Spiegel in reference to her female Malaysian interview partners (2010: 64–67). In Yasmine's case the gender norms are not only about the segregation of boys and girls, or men and women. The rules for women are also *limiting female self-expression*, disciplining their behaviour not only vis-a-vis the other sex, but *socialising them into acquiescence*. The latter is also experienced by one of Spiegel's interviewees, Aniza (2010: 64). The young woman's mother reveals a similar take on societal change and tradition as Yasmine's mother. When Aniza asks her mother about the reasons for gender differences, she replies "'That's the way it is'." (Spiegel 2010: 64). Similarly, when Yasmine urges her mother to refuse to accept the issue of street harassment, her mother replies: "No! This is normal stop with these crazy thoughts of perfection. This is not perfect. The world is not perfect this is our culture these are our traditions and you have to understand that stop being so Americanised". This response relies on two patterns: first, the recurrence to culture and tradition clearly serves to isolate existing distributions of power from change (Spiegel 2010: 268–269).[202] And second, the branding of Yasmine's thinking as "Americanised" has the purpose to de-legitimise her initial claim. In the context of Egyptian perspectives on, and stereotypes of, AUCians and the Americanised society, we have already encountered the claim that Egyptian society was xenophobic. We have then also tried to reconstruct the ambivalent mixture of contempt and admiration that people feel and show towards AUCians, partially because of their affiliation with the United States. The distrust of

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[201] The Egyptian Human Development Report gives an idea of what these "subvertive activities" could be: "[a] considerable portion of Egypt's educated youth is now involved in what is known as 'virtual activism'. Youth have created/participated in blogs and e-forum discussions to freely express their views about pressing political, cultural, social and economic issues in Egypt" (Handoussa 2010: 221).

[202] Spiegel makes this argument in reference to public debate. But I do not see why the same mechanisms should not apply to other arenas of discussion as well.

foreign ideational imports, the fear of "a 'Western conspiracy' to undermine Islam" (Sullivan, Abed-Kotob and Kotob 1999: 111), and the anxiety over (cultural) neo-imperialism and corruption of the youth (Abaza 2006: 241; Bayat 2010: 42–43) is intense. Consequently, often any affiliation with "feminism" and "women's rights" is rejected, so to avoid any association with Western norms and ideas (Bayat 2007: 157; Sullivan, Abed-Kotob and Kotob 1999: 111). This goes hand in hand with reaffirming the own cultural background, or to be more precise, with reaffirming that which is *constructed* as Egyptian *tradition*. This is Islamic patriarchy that respects and maintains the value of the family, takes care of women and elders, and shares overarching egalitarian values (Bayat 2007: 157).

Yasmine's case constitutes an exception among my interview partners as she is the only one telling of physical violence and sexual abuse that she confronted or suffered from personally. In that regards, it is important to keep in mind the qualitative character of this study. This means: if one out of twelve interviewees has experienced violence, we cannot generalize from this. We cannot make any statements on numerical distributions. Rather, the purpose is to gain a deeper understanding of individual cases. Nonetheless, for me as the researcher, Yasmine's story inevitably evoked the question how frequent violence against women in general, and sexual abuse in specific, is in Egypt. According to an USAID literature review from 2009, "[i]nternational and Egyptian researchers alike have confirmed that violence against women is both varied and widespread in Egypt" (Somach and AbouZeid 2009: 8). The same report reminds that "[w]omen throughout the world experience violence – regardless of their race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, age, or social class. Men are overwhelmingly the perpetrators" (Somach and AbouZeid 2009: 15). Similarly, the EHDR states that "[b]ased on UNIFEM report findings, gender discrimination is a worldwide problem and not related to developing or underdeveloped countries only"(Handoussa 2010: 95). USAID reports that "according to the 2005 Egypt Demographic and Health Survey (EDHS), 47 percent of ever-married women reported ever having experienced physical violence since the age of 15" (Somach and AbouZeid 2009: 8). The majority of the women was assaulted by their (current or previous) partner, but also nearly half of the respondents report violence committed by another male, about one third of women have been assaulted by other females (Somach and AbouZeid 2009: 8). In regards to non-partner violence, research has focused on family violence, in specific on "honor-related violence (...) FGC/FGM; and early, forced, and/or temporary marriages" (Somach and AbouZeid 2009: 12).

Figures like these are problematic for a variety of reasons. Particularly the above figures are,

because they only refer to one specific group: ever-married women between the age of 15 and 45. Above that, they do not seem to differentiate between women from different socio-economic backgrounds and geographical locations. Also, this kind of numbers alone does not tell anything about the relative frequency of violence in comparison to other countries. Such data can easily be put in whatever context deems the speaker useful. This way, it can serve to substantiate nearly any possible argument. Take the statement that "the rate [of rape] for Egypt was 3.1 percent based on a 1991 survey of 1,000 women in Cairo." Appalling, is it not? Another indicator for the oppression of Egyptian women? A paragraph from the literature review provides one point of comparison:

> "A WHO review of small surveys of crime victims in 20 countries from 1992 to 1997, showed the number of women who reported being victims of sexual assault in the previous five years to range from a low of 0.3 percent in the Philippines to a high of 8 percent in Brazil. The rate for *Egypt was 3.1 percent* based on a 1991 survey of 1,000 women in Cairo. The same WHO report noted that in a national survey conducted in the *United States* in 1998, nearly *15 percent* of women over the age of 17 reported having been raped in their lifetime" (Somach and AbouZeid 2009: 14) [my emphasis].

This brief comparison reminds us how problematic statistical data of this kind is. US-produced statistics on rape might be of a very different quality and rely on very different measures than surveys from Egypt. Moreover, any moment of translation, for example if questionnaires are applied in more than one culture or language, is problematic for the comparability. Furthermore, in measuring violence against women in Egypt, obviously similar problems as in other countries apply: "[R]ape and sexual assault are often under-reported as crimes because of the stigma attached to being a violated woman" (Somach and AbouZeid 2009: 14). "Researchers in Egypt have estimated that as many as 98 percent of rape and sexual assault cases are not reported to authorities" (Somach and AbouZeid 2009: 15). Nonetheless, "studies have uncovered high rates of abuse. [A] (...) study by Egypt's National Centre for Sociological and Criminological Research, reported 20,000 rape cases in 2006" (Somach and AbouZeid 2009: 15).

Unless we have the resources and sufficient training to critically question the method of a survey, and to convince ourselves of the soundness of the process, data like the aforementioned are not of much use. Particular caution is in order with numerical data: they seem to be particularly convincing because they project a notion of *objectivity*. Stating that USAID, ECWR or EHDR data can not convey a reliable image of the experience of Egyptian women is not a justification of the status quo of violence against women. It is a reminder of the necessity to put things into perspective and not to succumb to the compelling force of numbers.

The well-established critique of some quantitative research methods notwithstanding, there is

reason to assume that violence against women in Egypt constitutes a problem of considerable scale. Sexual harassment of verbal and *physical* kind is a constant topic among young women, foreigners and Egyptians alike who move in public spaces in Cairo.[203] The exact figures behind the phenomena of harassment and violence do not matter to my study. Yet it is instructive to take note of that problem because there is a link of violence against women and the norms of female behaviour. This link is what I am concerned with here. Above that, Yasmine's experience of violence acquires a meaning that exceeds the individual case once we ask about the societal structures and environmental circumstances that condition her story. Aida Seif El Dawla, Egyptian Professor of Psychiatry and activist for women's rights, highlights the connection between violence against women and the structural, everyday discrimination against women:

> "We realized that working against violence has to do with challenging the whole gender hierarchy. (...) It then started to make sense why addressing violence against women should be so threatening, even to those who would not batter their wives and daughters, because what is at stake is not violence as a separate issue but violence as the extreme form of discrimination against women. This discrimination covers such a wider spectrum of behaviours and attitudes, many of which men would not give up; even those men who are most liberal and sophisticated. (...) We therefore conclude that addressing the issue of violence against women has to do with challenging hierarchies: the hierarchy of the clinic (doctor/patient), the hierarchy of the researchers and the researched, the hierarchy of men and women and within that, several sub-hierarchies, whether social, economic, class, or religious, that set the norm for gender relations" (El Dawla 1999: 184).

Gender norms support specific power relations. It is for this reason that the thorough understanding of norms for female behaviour is everything but trivial. From the swearword scene we have already gained an impression what kind of expectations vis-a-vis female behaviour exist, and how they are violently enforced. Looking at the other interviewees' take on the topic "women in Egypt" will add different perspectives and contribute to a better understanding of both Yasmine's individual case and the topic at large. Moving beyond the individual case study helps us to grasp the larger context in which Yasmine's life story unfolds, and allows us to contrast her experience with alternative stories.

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[203] I can only draw on my rich personal experience with Cairene women here. The frequency with which online media, blogs and NGOs bring up this topic over and over again might provide a more objective measure though.

1.3.2 Three elements of the "understanding" of women: chastity, dependence, marriage

In regards to gender norms and the role (or 'the lot', if you like) of women in Egypt, the interviewees are less divided than in their perspectives on the Americanised society. Some strongly criticise the double standards in Egyptian society, some ridicule common norms on gender segregation and adequate female behaviour, others refrain from any evaluation but merely state the existence of unequal restrictions on women. Yet, none of the interviewees defends the entirety of these norms and each one portrays herself as deviating from common norms on women in some regards. The norms that my interviewees see themselves confronted with, can be roughly grouped in three clusters: one is the regulation of behaviour between different sexes, negotiated around the issue of female chastity. Female (in)dependence and need for protection are another focus. The third cluster eventually builds around the women's main trajectory in life: marriage and family.

Appropriate female behaviour: maintaining chastity and showing respect

A first realm of regulation frequently mentioned, is once more the behaviour vis-a-vis someone from the other sex. Even though about half of my interviewees have a boyfriend, it is clear that this is not yet recognised as the norm. Egyptian language does not even provide a word for "boyfriend" as Laila wittingly points out. Hugging boys as a way of greeting them appears repeatedly as a particularly controversial practice. As Nadia puts it: "In Egypt we don't go around hugging guys. That's a fact." How factual this fact is, remains doubtable though: Nadia as well as several other interview partners actually *do* hug boys and are even willing to defend this habit against demands of (potential) boyfriends. This might indicate how much at least Nadia dissociates herself from Egypt. While the various attitudes on gender norms within AUC seem to crystallise currently around the issue of hugging people, the rest of Egypt is probably a far cry from even thinking about the possibility that girls could hug guys in a friendly, non-sexual manner habitually.[204] Naima, one of my interviewees from an Upper Egyptian governorate tells me that in her home town, a young woman (like us) could not even *talk* to boys in the streets, not even to her own cousins. Other interviewees from rural areas give an idea of how restrictions on female behaviour evolve when a girl is coming of age. I heard more than one story, where a dear hobby such as dancing or singing has to be abandoned once the girl reached a certain age. The fact that these norms only apply

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[204] I still remember a male friend of mine, a student at GUC, the German University Cairo, telling me in 2011: "you know, in Egypt we would never hug each other for greeting. It is impossible."

once a girl nears puberty highlights their link to sexuality. When Naima's mother explains her daughter why she had to abandon her beloved dancing, the mother recurs to a pattern we had already encountered in Yasmine's story and which will come up at various other occasions: Naima has to stop because of *the people.* The people could have the 'wrong' thoughts when they see her dancing. And thus (and here we encounter a new pattern of justification) the father's reputation would be tainted, which he as a doctor and public figure can not afford.

By the way, among conservatives, even poetry performance is not appreciated as it could be considered a kind of singing. But dancing and poetry are only one out of many examples. As seen in Yasmine's case the regulations also extend to the sphere of *virtual* communication. Nadia's parents attempt to prevent her from making phone calls late at night, as this is considered inappropriate. Nadia rebuts this notion and argues that there was no sexual aspect involved. Her argument substantiates the assumption that most regulations have some 'sexual' foundation:

> "They [parents] might not understand the whole idea of talking on the phone *late*. ... And they're like 'You shouldn't do that' and I'm like 'No it's one and I'm up and even that guys up I just wanna ask him about something, it's *not* inappropriate.' I don't see *at all* how talking at the phone even at four in the morning was inappropriate. It's *on the phone*. I'm not in bed with him. It's *nothing* really bad is going on. It doesn't mean .... on the phone we're not having phone sex. It's not cause it's late it's either or. I am still talking about the *book*. That's the things were ... no, the culture. But my mum does understand I really don't care what people think."

Seemingly, Nadia's intention is to ridicule her parents' ideas about the sexual character of late night phone calls. Two assumptions are possible: either, Nadia ascribes a sexual connotation to these phone regulations in specific. Or Nadia implies that *any* regulations on female behaviour are only *legitimate* if they indeed prevent some sexual activity. While the first tells us how she perceives her parents' standpoint, the second interpretation would indicate that for Nadia herself, regulations are only sensible and legitimate if they protect female chastity.

Another cornerstone of female discipline is the dress. Maybe, even first and foremost, a woman's chastity finds expression in her dress.

> "My father is a bit conservative because we are girls, and this is how the society asks us. It requires us to be conservative: don't wear this, don't wear short blouse, don't wear tight pants, like I can't go to [my home governorate] with these pants. People are like: 'Aaah she don't wear appropriate clothes'."

The veil is a specific element of female dress that perfectly highlights the linkages of the concepts women – dress – morals – judgement. (Un)veiling has a central role in Yasmine's life story, and is helpful to illustrate two things: first, the context-dependency of any (communicative) act and

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second, the complex interplay of religion, gender norms, fashion, class and personal trajectories. The veil is therefore addressed in a separate chapter (IV 1.3.6). A girl's chastity is always in doubt, her reputation constantly in danger. Thus, her behaviour is under incessant surveillance – the parents, the family, the people are "on the watch" (Yasmine), in particular if it comes to situations or behaviour that pertain to sexuality. (As shown, this is open to definition. Even phone calls and online presence can be inscribed with sexual meaning by Egyptian parents).

The situation is entirely different for men. Egyptian men clearly face different standards in regards to sexual behaviour.[205] The norm transgressions by men in the interaction with women are tolerated. Awad speaks of "a value system in which the purity of women is assigned utmost importance, and men's sexual latitude is tolerated" (Awad 2011: 144). Young men are well aware of this, and make use of their leeway. Bayat quotes a 19 year old student to show how young men conceptualise their behaviour in terms of morality: "'During adolescence (...) all young men do the same; there is no *haram* or *halal* at that age.'" (Bayat 2010: 45) Bayat argues that this male experimenting with sexuality corresponded to girls' experimenting with the veil. I agree with Bayat in so far as women's experimenting with the veil can be understood as a practice of accommodating religion. Yet, the much more appropriate comparison was brought up by my interviewees: They contrast the moral immunity of men with the rule that everything a woman does, "sticks to her like mud". Laila recalls how she explained her stance on sexuality in premarital relationships to a European friend:

> "And we do *not* have these intimate relationships *all* of us. Especially in Egypt a lot of people who have them they don't go around *boasting* about them. G*uys* are okay but girls are never okay there's always the *stigma* of ... a guy can walk through the mud and come out clean. A girl would walk around the mud and still get dirty. The reputation is very very ... is a very precious thing."

In her ethnographic study of upper middle class young professionals, de Koning shows that even a women's company is interpreted as a choice that reflects her character. Company could easily be coincidental – meaning that women are requested to take additional care to avoid 'bad' company. This can even require to refrain from a certain locality, because of the mere potentiality of being in the same place as 'dodgy' people. Of course it is plausible to search for a female equivalent when we are speaking about the male "space of experimenting," like Bayat does. Then, however, we risk to turn a blind eye on blatant inequalities. The opportunities for "sexual experimenting" are

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[205] This is also engrained in the legal provisions: in case of adultery, the Egyptian penal code foresees harsher punishment for women than for men. Also in other respects individual legal regulations are discriminatory against women, even though they have nominal equity (Awad 2011: 144).

distributed highly unequally between Egyptian girls and boys. Comparing them directly, sheds a critical light on the double-standard that applies to youthful sin. Paradoxically society's double-standard provides one of the justifications for the need to *protect* girls from men.

Appropriate male and parental behaviour: protecting the female jewellery

As we have seen in Yasmine's case, a woman's behaviour underlies various restrictions. Girls might not be allowed to take up a certain job, women are not allowed to stay out late at night or go to specific places in particular if alone. They are supposed to avoid dangerous situations of any kind and are not expected to travel alone.[206] The later point seemed to pose a considerable problem to some of my interview partners. Apparently, in relation to the issue of travelling, the aspirations of the young women I interviewed clash heavily and frequently with the convictions held by parts of their social surroundings. Besides Yasmine, also Eman, Samira and Nadia for example addressed the topic prominently in the interviews. Their parents allow them to travel – at least in some of the cases that the girls wanted to do so. But, heated discussions, continuous negotiation and a lot of social pressure seem to be involved. Eman tells me that her parents supported her in attending university in a different governorate and in spending a term abroad in the US. But, she also explains how much her mum and dad *differed* from the normal Egyptian parents in that regards. By highlighting this difference from "normal Egyptian parents", she gives us an idea of how travelling girls might be looked at:

> And she [my mother] is not the normal when – I wouldn't say that all the Egyptian families are restrict but some of them are restrict in the sense of they maybe would not let their girls stay in colleges away in different governorates. *Many* are fine but some are not. ...So there is no kind of consensus if this is fine or not. So they were very fine ... First time I have been outside of Egypt to America for New York, it was New York, it was *big* it was in another continent I was alone I was 18 years old and they were *fine.* My father is fine my father is very tolerant in a lot of stuff. He's willing – they know that I am a trustworthy kind of girl, I can depend on myself and they can depend on me to keep myself fine – but not *everyone* would let their *girls,* especially, also boys. Girls are *even more* important ... in everything in Egypt sometimes like as a social kind of treatment we are *more* important we should be more secured. We are taken care of, we are different somehow, so its not, they would let a boy go to America. 90 percent of the families will say yea go – the other ten would let them go but they would be sure that they are not doing bad stuff there because the amount of liberty and freedom you have is is *high* higher. So for girls it's even more complicated, so they did let me go like I've been to America I've been to [Central Asia] twice I've been to Turkey once, I did go six months there and six months, it is a hell of a time especially with all those kind of restrictions."

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[206] This norm finds its expression also in the legal provisions: "an Egyptian woman may not be issued a passport without the prior written consent of her husband (...) a husband can prevent his wife from travelling" (Awad 2011: 144).

Just as Eman, Samira is allowed to study in another governorate and to spend a term abroad in the US. In her case however, this causes noticeable irritation and worries on the side of her parents and their social surroundings. In particular her father's friends ventilate their worries and disbelief. Since then, Samira faces restrictions on travelling as well:

> [She speaks about future plans, in specific about the idea to study abroad] "but my father will have his own interpretation about this ((laugh)) cause when I went study abroad my father's friend said: 'Are you leaving your daughter to go to study abroad at totally different culture?' Egyptian culture is quite closed, especially for the women. So when my father agreed that I go to study at American University [in a city in the USA] his friends said: 'Oh my God you're leaving your daughter to be alone for a whole four months in a totally different place with totally different people with totally different understanding.' You know, people in Egypt think about the Americans they are the drunk people and – no offence – but this is how they think ((laughs)). So they thought that I'll be abused or something. But I didn't I was so strong and I didn't go to clubs I didn't go to bars and my father trusted me. But he was so worried and when I came back now I got the chance to travel to Turkey but my father refused cause he's scared. But I have to convince him yeah. ... So I hate our society our society's understanding about women."

Throughout Yasmine's story, it remains rather unclear what was the grounds for the restrictions (on travelling, going out and the like). Were they specific to girls? Or were some particular to her family? Did they only refer to her as an individual (and maybe difficult child)? Samira on the other hand, makes it more than clear: in her opinion these restrictions come to bear "especially for the women." And in a near constructivist take on gender categories she blames it on "our society's *understanding* about women" [my emphasis]. In Eman's above account on her parents' difference, one potential element of this concept had already surfaced. Eman says "Girls are *even more* important ... in everything in Egypt sometimes like as a social kind of treatment we are *more* important we should be more secured. We are taken care of, we are different somehow." Samira speaks about her father's friends objecting her travelling to the States, and her father being too worried to let her travel to Turkey, then she also elaborates more on this "understanding" of women, and leads us into a similar direction:

> "So I hate our society our society's understanding about women. Cause they think that we are... I had this person telling me this like: 'You are a jewellery and we have to keep you in our drawers. And we close the drawer. Cause you are so precious.' This is how Egyptian people think about women. So I think this is not ((amused)) equal opportunities. I have my own mind I have my own energy I want to go outside I wanna work I wanna do something."

Another element of an Egyptian "understanding of women" is their supposed weakness and emotionality.[207] While Samira criticises the first idea, Eman uses her self-ascribed toughness to

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[207] Emmons analyses cultural commonplaces and metaphors in Western narratives of depression. She argues that "chief among them [is] that women are the emotional sex'". A certain degree and scope of emotionality is even

distinguish herself from the "normal girl['s]" dependence:

> "I'm a hard worker I am not the normal girl in the sense of ... normal girls would just be so calm so quiet kind of the *nice ladies* who like people to depend ... they depend on others. They don't like to hold heavy stuff, as long as someone can carry it, for me that's ok. I am not saying they are bad at all I'm just different ... I'm born and raised to, however my bag is heavy I am gonna carry it. No other one is going to carry it for me."

Many interviewees share the notion that women are particularly emotional. In Egypt, like in other societies, this trope has acquired common sense status.[208] The assumption that women *are* less tough is linked to the *norm* that women *should* not be too tough and self-assured. Especially if it comes to marriage, "men don't like bossy women" (Naima), nor women who argue too much or are too educated (Eman). This preference of men acquires importance for young women's lives because marriage is the prime trajectory of a woman's life.

Appropriate aspirations: striving for marriage and motherhood

The assumption that "tough women" are "not recommended" (Eman) for marriage attains high significance in a society where marriage seems to be the main trajectory of women (Handoussa 2010: 106).[209] When I asked my interview partners about their future visions, marriage played a role for all but one. Also founding a family seemed to be an unquestioned goal for them. Eman is about to get married when I meet her, nonetheless she makes it a point that she is not like "many other girls"

> "I have different objectives. I am so much ... I *do* always have a vision somehow. Yet, many other girls are *so* much different in these thing. They just take college for gra- just for ... a degree. They just wanna get married. I am not that kind of mentality."

Taking into consideration their good education and the fact that they were interested in my interviews, it is no surprise that most of my interviewees were "not that kind of mentality". Most

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constitutive for the definition of a woman. The "cultural commonplace of the excessively emotional woman" is thus by no means reserved for the Egyptian repertoire of gender roles and topoi for identity formation (Emmons 2008: 111).

[208] Note that in the 1950s, such an *essential* conception of women- and manhood was propagated also in the *academic* discourse in Germany (Schmidt and Moritz 2009: 98–99). The notion of essential differences between men and women and the resulting complementary roles is not an Egyptian invention.

[209] A survey for the Egypt Human Development Report 2010 yielded the following results: "Respondents were required to give only one response to the following two questions: 'What is the most important thing to young people?', and 'what do young people need most today?' The questions were asked of different groups of young people who, in turn, were asked to address the same questions to their friends and acquaintances but without prior preparation or special arrangements for the interview. The groups extended from freshman to graduation class university students or to those recently graduated. In response to the first question on priorities of importance, the main responses from young men were 'sexual curiosity', 'cell phones' and 'football' (72%) Young women said 'personal safety', 'graduation' and 'marriage'(89%)" (Handoussa 2010: 106). Besides that, the group discussion, the interviews, and my personal experience with Egyptians confirm overwhelmingly the assumption that for an Egyptian woman, becoming a mother and wife is the inevitable role.

of them wanted to work even after marriage. This is not *at odds* with the norms of Egyptian society at large. At the latest since Nasser's policies, female productive labour is an *option*, for many families from the lower classes it is even an economic necessity (Awad 2011: 137).[210] Yet, even for a working woman, being a mother and fulfilling her duty as a mother remains pivotal (Awad 2011: 137). This stance is not only represented by moderate Islamists (Sullivan, Abed-Kotob and Kotob 1999: 109–110) but also by many of my interview partners, and participants of the group discussion. Accordingly, if a woman wants to remain continuously engaged in productive work she will end up carrying the double burden of both productive and reproductive work (Awad 2011: 138–140).[211] Consequently, the best argument for working women – employed by Reem and Samira – is: women can do *both.* They have the energy and capacity to be a mother *and* working women at the same time. Besides these assertions, however, a good career did not represent a major trajectory for my interview partners. If forced to prioritize many expressed a clear tendency to give priority to the family. Also, private joy or the wish to give back to society mattered more than professional success. Also Rana emphasises that women could handle both, and balance the tasks of career and family. The real problem in her eyes was once more society: it puts pressure on the working woman, reproaching her for neglecting her duties as a mother.

Just as much as with the decision to work, societal pressure interferes with the issue of marriage. It might even reinforce traditional patterns against the will of the parents, as Eman shows:

> "So basically for the summer, it wasnt easy with my family to get engaged actually. My mother is the kind of person that would like me to get engaged *after* I get my Masters and maybe my PhD. She really doesn't care – she would like to see me successful. But you can do that in Europe very easily, but in Egypt we have an kind of an age that, after it, your chances of gettig married are not that good. Like this age would be beginning [at] 26, ending by 30. After 30 you have to accept *anything* you can take. A*nything*. While your really good age of chosing who to marry and who to love and you have all the options in the world is between 20 and 25 maximum. Yea, around that. And if its 18 then you're maybe getting married very early. And for my mother, her idea to support me getting married after I finished my masters is because she was married by her first year of college."

Samira also experiences this pressure on girls to get married, which in her case is transmitted by her mother. Samira assumes there is a contrast between the rural governorate she came from, and

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[210] In 1995 21 % of urban women were employed (Awad 2011: 139). Given the huge size of the informal sector in Egypt, numbers like these have to be treated with care, though.

[211] Note, that this is nothing specific to Egypt. Also in Germany, family sociologists have observed that – egalitarian attitudes notwithstanding – women do the larger share of the housework and carry a double-burden (Burkart 2008: 195–204). Moreover, a re-traditionalisation of roles and distribution of labour occurs when the partnership turns into parentship with the birth of a child (Schmidt and Moritz 2009: 97). Especially with a growing family, women end up carrying the primary responsibility for the children and the household (Schmidt and Moritz 2009: 97–98).

Cairo. To her, this provides an explanation why she couldn't really get along any more with her female friends back home. Other than her, these young women are all already set for marriage:

> "Like my friends [back home], the girls, they are 18 and 19 and they got married and they stay at home, they don't go to work. They study and they say 'Hey, why did you go abroad and why did you go to study at AUC?' Girls study and graduate and then they go marry and then get pregnant and they stay at home taking care of the children. And this is how they think and believe about women. They believe this is the role of women in the Middle East. But I don't believe so."

And even though she despises of limiting a woman's role to getting married, Samira is herself subject to more or less subtle pressure of her mother to find herself a husband and thus fulfil her duty as a woman:

> "And she she always asks me about about my relationships ((laughs)) this is what mainly mum cares about (laughs)) cause she wants me to get married as I'm 21 years old and I'm old enough. But I don't really think about this matter these days because of [my project] and because I feel like I have to work more before getting married or getting into responsibilities. So she always asks me: 'Ha? What about the groom?' or something like this. ((laughs)) So I usually say I don't have any time to think about it and we usually have debates about it. (...) I don't like these kind of speeches, when she puts me under pressure – when *the society*, not mama, the society put me under pressure. I hate this. (...)"

1.3.3 The Egyptian Good Girl and the Egyptian Boy

Decent behaviour, the need for protection, the aspiration for marriage constitute cornerstones of the Egyptian "understanding" of women. There is also a recurrent trope which fuses these into one concept: The Egyptian Good Girl. For the first time I came in contact with this term in my interview with Rana. In slight variation, a similar trope – "good girl" – was frequently used by Yasmine, and eventually, the "good girl" also figured in the group discussion. Above that, "good girls" and "good women" are referred to in a variety of academic publications as powerful images(Bayat 2007: 156–157; Griffin 2004: 29; Mostafa 2008: 16). When I ask Rana what the Egyptian Good Girl she had mentioned, looks like, she indicates that this is a very good question and refers to my background knowledge, implying it was *very obvious* what is associated with a "good girl" in the Egyptian society at large: "Oh yea... well, ((amused)) you've lived in Egypt you probably have an idea." She then gives me an account of what such a good girl looks like or does, which reflects most of the aspects we have discussed in (IV 1.3.2):

> "So ... the Egyptian Good Girl is the conservative girl who doesn't .. who speaks to boys very conservatively and has to be shy all the time. And if she smokes then, I don't know, she's some sort of crazy person. And she has to be religious, her voice has to be *low* and she has to, you know al the things all the very – I don't wanna say sexist – but yea, *sexist* ((laughs)). All

the things that society thinks girls should do."

The attributes shyness, speaking to boys conservatively, in a low voice fit in the categories chastity and respectful behaviour. The open reference "all the things that society thinks girls should do" could very well include what we have discussed under the headings "(in)dependence" and "marriage". Furthermore, for Rana, an Egyptian Good Girl is a non-smoker and religious person. Both aspects appear (more or less to my surprise) frequently in the interviews. Indeed, nearly all of my interviewees address the issue of smoking and drinking. They mention it with two distinct purposes: either in order to show me that they do not care about the societal rules which declare such a behaviour indecent for women. Or in order to distance themselves from the consumption of legal drugs, as cigarettes and alcohol, and the attached lifestyle (see also chapter IV 1.2). Another attribute Rana introduced is "religious". "Religion" – an element of Yasmine's Egyptian conservative world – will be addressed in a separate chapter (IV 1.3.5). Frankly speaking: when I conceptualised this chapter's structure, I had not conceived of "religiosity" as part of gender roles. Rather, I saw "religion" as a factor that *shapes* these roles and self-understandings. As Rana's concept of the Egyptian Good Girl shows, it can be seen as an *element of* gender roles as well. Also, in this respect, the topic of veiling conflates both perspectives (IV 1.3.6).

When I asked Rana about the good girl in our interview, she prefixed the above description with a reporting narration. This sequence indicates a) how much the issue of "good girl" is tied to *outer appearance*, and b) how this norm results in a hiding practice or even double lives:

> ""Oh yea... well, ((amused)) you've lived in Egypt you probably have an idea. ((laughs)) ... but ... I mean in AUC where we are now, it's very different. *you can be* whoever you want in AUC. Three years ago when we were at the old campus, that's just an example, that might clarify, when we were at the old campus and it was summer, we'd wear you know sleeveless or whatever something that's very light cause summer here is is terrible. ... But we were – you know the old campus the Tahrir campus[212], right? There are three buildings and they are Downtown. So if you're wearing something that is sleeveless you had to get a jacket with you cause you go inside, for example, the Greek campus, you take of your jacket that's fine you can even sleep in the garden, tan, do whatever you want, you're on campus. But then if you have a class in main and you're going to cross the street ... you have to wear your jacket ... you know what I mean?"

I do indeed know what Rana is speaking of: inside AUC, Western style 'light" clothing is not rated as indecent. Outside of the old campus, however, the students find themselves in the middle of 'normal' Cairo. There, a different dress code applies. And as we had learnt from Mariam earlier:

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[212] In 2008 the AUC relocated most of its courses and faculty to a new campus in a desert settlement, Taggammu al-Khamis. Previously the AUC had been residing at what is now termed the "Old Campus". It is located right at the heart of Downtown Cairo, at Midan Tahrir, which rose to fame in the revolution.

dress defines your ethics. Short sleeves are considered indecent, maybe scandalous (as Yasmine would put it), and always lend themselves as a (fabricated) justification for sexual harassment.[213] The tone of Rana's description suggests she does not approve of the way society constructs the Egyptian Good Girl. Also her description of adjusting to the dress code seems to indicate that she considers the consequences annoying, unnecessary, or even absurd.

But if Rana herself rejects the norms galvanized in the Egyptian Good Girl, who forces them upon her? In the above passage, it seems to be society at large, those who are located 'outside' of the AUC campus and of the Americanised society. Yet, in other situations, it is a *type of man* who seems to reinforce such an ideal of women. According to my interview partners, this man can also be found inside AUC. After defining the Egyptian Good Girl, Rana develops the concept of the "Egyptian Boy", and distances herself vehemently from the ideal that these Egyptian Boys reinforce:

> "(...) all the things that society thinks girls should do. They should be ... things that... you would find the very – we call them at AUC *Egyptian Boy*s, coz they have this mentality that we hate. The mentality of 'The girl I'm going to marry or the girl I'm going to whatever has to be – has to follow this image. And if she doesn't then she's not good enough.' So that's just something that's in society that you can't change. So all of us, we probably have talked about it at one point in time, but all of us – as the girls, the friends in in AUC – we just know that we're not like this, this general mainstream idea of what a good girl is in the Egyptian society. I think I'm a good girl. I think my friends are good girls. I don't know if society would agree, I don't care.(..)"

When I later ask Rana what this Egyptian Boy was like, she laughs and moves on[214]

> "Like they're guys who are very, who have this very – remember when I told you about the Egyptian good girl and what she should look like and I told you Egyptian Boys – and I am making quotation marks so that when you're listening ... ((laughs)) – those guys *are* the one who have this way of thinking that annoys me, okay? The way of thinking that I talk to you about, the whole 'Girls should do this and girls should do that'. There are lot of guys who reinforce that. And because they think that way, girls feel that they should be acting that way because this is what the boys want. You know what I mean? So these guys, we call them, we would say stuff like 'Oooh, do you know XYC?' 'Yea yea yea – but he's very Egyptian!' So this is what we mean. We just mean *hardcore* believes that we hate about the Egyptian society."

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[213] A famous study by the Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights (ECWR), titled "Clouds in Egypt's Sky", published in 2008, revealed that – other than usually argued by men and also many women – women's attire was not related to getting sexually harassed. Or to put it differently: veiled women where harassed as much as unveiled ones. Some methodological critique of the study and ECWR's programmes (Froböse 2011) notwithstanding, the study helped debunk various myths about sexual harassment in Egypt.

[214] At this point, I got the impression that Rana was slightly embarrassed because I insisted that she elaborates on the Egyptian Boy. A concept that obviously carries some of the traits of a negative stereotype. Even though Rana might have felt uncomfortable when she become aware of the judgemental nature of the label Egyptian Boy, it intimates well the complex interdependence of gender roles: both, the Egyptian Boy and the Egyptian Good Girl are trapped in these mutually constitutive roles of the patriarchal system (Nelson 1991: 137).

For Rana and her friends, it seems, the Egyptian Boys are key representatives of the Egyptian conservative society, and what Rana and her friends hate in it. Her idea that Egyptian Boys are responsible for girls' aspirations to become an Egyptian Good Girl resonates well with what we have heard from Eman and Naima: certain girls are not a recommendable choice for marriage. It is not recommended you marry a woman who is tough, educated, and voices her own opinion, and thus clearly does not fit the ideal Egyptian Good Girl:

> "I'm a hard worker I am not the normal girl in the sense of ... normal girls would just be so calm so quiet kind of the *nice ladies* who like people to depend ... they depend on others. They don't like to hold heavy stuff, as long as someone can carry it for me that's ok. I am not saying they are bad at all I'm just different ... I'm born and raised to, however my bag is heavy I am gonna carry it. No other one is going to carry it for me. No matter how it is hard to move from Cairo to Alexandria and do this and that and this and that and then go back to my family at 11 pm while I left here at 5 am – I am fine. I'm just this kind of a person. Work hard, I'm fine with it and consequently I have a tough kind of a personality. I do know how to talk well I can defend myself really well. For a normal Egyptian man … I'm good in my study, that's I'm smart enough to have a good conversation and I'm not the kind of a girl that you say something nice to and she would be nice and satisfied and everything is cool. This is not something *recommended* in the Egyptian culture to get married to by a man. *Not* recommended. Because it's a kind of – there is no rules – but there is kind of, this something that says : well you you want a woman that just makes you comfortable in your home and you wouldn't really talk a lot to and she wouldn't really argue a lot with you. Take her: Successful and everything but in *the normal way,* she doesn't have to argue a lot. Really, she shouldn't. and I am definitely not this."

So, the rules for what constitutes a 'marriageable woman' are strict. There are age limits and she has to fit the ideal of the Egyptian Good Girl. This becomes even more salient as marriage remains the main trajectory in a woman's life (as shown above). The high value of marriage and founding a family, the idea that it is indispensable or even constitutive for being a woman, gives great leverage to men and the ideal of the Egyptian Good Girl.

It is not only submissiveness which seems to be requested by men. My interviewees and the participants of the group discussion share the perspective that many Egyptian men don't want their women to work. Samira tells me a story of an individual event which in the context of her narration is meant to point at a general problem: once on the train she met a guy, who began a conversation with her, said he would like to marry her – and posed the condition that she should not work once they are married. Samira responds:

> "Okay so I had since my kindergarten till my primary school, preparatory, secondary school and then I come to college and I have this all, this whole experience then you ask me to stay at home? You're burying me!"

The perception that men are very concerned with women pushing for work is shared by the female

participants of the group discussion. According to them, one of the first things a guy would ask is: "Are you gonna work?". There might well be some tension between general acceptance and individual life here. In any case: in a society where a woman's goal is marriage, and where the image prevails that the man chooses the bride and not the other way round (because he pays), such criteria set by men obtain noticeable power. This means, that the male preference for housewives, can have an impact on female trajectories *in genera*l. Not only at the point were one specific woman encounters one particular man. Instead, from early on, female choices might reflect the male inclination not to marry an overly successful woman. In the investments for education, the choice of the subject at university, the visions for one's own life, the opinion of a potential future husband is factored in.

Another specific aspect, where the *assumed*[215] male preference foreshadows female trajectories, is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). According to the *Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit* (GTZ),[216] today, 96 % of Egyptian women are circumcised.[217] In her contribution to a round table on reproductive health in Egypt, Nadia Wassef points out that men are not mere sympathetic bystanders but the primary motivators of FGM (Wassef 1999). Speaking about a research project on FGM that targets men, she explains:

> "A family's decision – whether or not to circumcise their daughter – is accompanied with the threat that if they do not, the daughter will not fulfil marriage requirements set by the husbands-to-be and as such will become a social deviant. (...) Catering to the men's needs and preferences is a priority in ensuring a daughter's future." (Wassef 1999: 186)

Male reinforcement of the ideals of female character and behaviour is not limited to the choice of a wife, but can continue throughout the marriage. Divorce is more a theoretical option than a practical one for the woman, while men face less obstacles to getting divorced (Awad 2011). Thus, she structurally has a higher interest to maintain the marriage, and play by the rules that are set by her husband. In order not to play too much into the hands of Western stereotypes of Egyptian gender-relations (Sullivan, Abed-Kotob and Kotob 1999: 111), I would like to note that it is not primarily Islamic practice but the Egyptian legal code which dis-courages women to initiate a divorce.[218] Besides that, societal pressure on divorced women can be immense as Eman tells me. In

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[215] Wassef (1999) further points out that a workshop held in Alexandria with men only, indicated that the majority of men could not even tell the difference between circumcised and uncircumcised women. A very irritating finding, indeed.

[216] The respective publication GTZ, *Violence against Women in Egypt* (2009), was published by GTZ, today it is GIZ.

[217] Deutsche Gesellschaft Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH 2009; ECWR states the number with 90 to 97 % ("Violence against Women in Egypt" 2009).

[218] The adequate regulation for and perspective on divorce in Islam is heavily contested. Yet, there seems to be consent that divorce has always been possible in Islamic (legal) frameworks. Up to now, the Coptic Church of Egypt,

Egyptian society, she informs me, divorce comes close to an insult. People would gossip, men would suspect you do not stick to rules of chastity as you are not a virgin any more, and even your family would "give you a wrong feeling".

But male reinforcement through setting the conditions for relationships happens outside of marriage as well: much earlier, before my interviewees start seriously looking for a groom, they have already encountered male attempts at control. Rana is by far not the only one having an image of the Egyptian Boy who reinforces conservative rules on women. Samira calls it "Middle Eastern instinct" and associates it with men who try to regulate and discipline the woman's behaviour with a plethora of *orders* in regards to their work, their movement, their social interaction, their dress :

> "Usually they still have this Middle Eastern instinct. That 'Don't wear like this, don't talk to this, don't talk to this kind of group, don't go this place' and this kind of orders which I don't like because: you have to trust me and I have to go for work. I don't wanna waste time thinking 'Why shouldn't I talk to this person or shouldn't I wear this pants'."

Several of the young women have already made their own experiences with Middle Eastern instincts and Egyptian Boys. And no matter how tough they present their stance on this issue, they seem to be walking a tight rope. Take Rana as an example: she portrays herself as a staunch opponent of the Egyptian Good Girl norm, and re-defines "good girl" for herself and her group of friends – nonetheless (or because?) she used to 'give in' to an Egyptian Boy before. When I ask how she deals with relationships, she tells me

> "Currently I'm single. And I'm enjoying it, I'm happy that I'm single ((I laugh, she laughs as well)) ... I broke up with ... I've just had one relationship one long-term relationship ...it was 9 months but it was serious and headed somewhere ... and then we broke up ... it was it was little bit tragic but, it's fine. Moved on. And now I'm back to ... exactly where I was before this relationship and I'm happy. I'm myself again cause during that relationship I was very – cause I was dating an Egyptian Boy ... see ... and he expected a certain behaviour of me that wasn't ... *my* behaviour. So I would think that I would either ... do what he wants *or* have to fight with him. Which is physically and mentally exhausting. ((laughs)) so doing what he wants is neither physically nor mentally exhausting. I'm just doing what he wants – so I just do what he wants cause I just really don't wanna fight about it. And so my friends would notice that I'm different and I'm not myself and blablabla ... I was *sad* most of the time so at the end it was just not worth it. you know. they were, we were very very different and we were not good for each other ... so we just broke up."

for example, does not allow divorce.

When I enquire in what regards she did "what he wants" she responds:

> "For instance he said he didn't like the fact that ... when I great my friends my guyfriends we kiss. ... just like girls, girls and guys, it's the same. So he didn't like that, that drove him crazy. ... So I stopped doing that. It's not like it meant anything for me to greet them that way but it's just a matter of concept. This is what I do! And you've known that even before we dated. ...What else? ... I just forgot things ... Things of that sort, so instead of fighting and arguing about it, I would just say: 'Okay, fine, whatever' and I would just tell him 'Listen! I am just doing this so we can move on with our lives. I'm *not* convinced with whatever it is you want to convince me with, I'm *not*. I'm just saying okay fine, I'll do it or okay, fine I'll compromise so we can move on with our lives because I just don't like being sad and I don't like fighting and I don't like arguments. I just don't like that. I'm a happy person."

Zeina tells me of quite a similar experience. And while she does not use the term Egyptian Boy in a conceptual sense like Rana does, it is nonetheless striking how the terminology converges here:

> "The last thing that happened to me recently was I met a guy and it was very nice in the beginning and then ... very strangely ... not very strangely, it's expected from an Egyptian boy. I should have known that from the beginning. He asked me to stop hugging other people. And I told him I could not do that because this is not who I really was. And some of my friends disagreed with me and they told me 'But when you're in a relationship, you should ... change to that, compromise for that other person.' But I told them: 'It just feels very weird to suddenly stop hugging people.' I can't. This is not who I am, until now I am not accepting ... okay, people have different opinions but my conversation with him was you are seeing this something as wrong and if I do this I will be consciously hurting you. So: let us agree to disagree. And we we stopped it at that. We're still talking and everything but it made me realize that I *don't want* to follow this culture in a way. I like hugging people I like being physically in tact with them and I am hoping that one day I meet someone who understands that about me. It's not about disrespect. It's not like okay I'll be married to someone, after I married, I stop hugging people because I am married so to respect him.'

Samira can tell a comparable story: a boy she was interested in, got into a serious fight with her over her behaviour on facebook. She attributes the fight mainly to his jealousy and to his double standards. They would allow a different facebook usage to him than to her. Jealousy by the way seems to be a characteristic of the Egyptian Boy as well, Eman even considers it a universal trait of Egyptian men.

Considering these various experiences it is little surprising that finding 'the right guy' seems to be a difficult task. The age limits and the societal and parental pressure might even turn it into an immediately impending challenge. For most, it is an *inevitable task*, as a fulfilled life requires a family. The young women want to have someone who is tolerant about them working, and being sociable, having their style of greeting people and their independence. In short: he should be "open minded" and not an Egyptian Boy. Rana tells me that

"The non-Egyptian Boys are the ones, the guys who are you know open minded. The guys you can .... the guys who are not sexist, the guys who are not judgemental, the guys who are not ... dogmatic about certain stupid things and not willing to listen to any point of view but their own. These are the non-Egyptian guys."

A man's acceptance, tolerance or even support in regards to women's deviance from the norm of the Egyptian Good Girl becomes the measure of all things. Eman demonstrates this when she speaks about her own impending marriage, and the disagreement she and her mother had about the groom. Her mother thought Eman should care more about the social standing and career options of her future husband, but for Eman it was more important to find a man who is accepting her as she is. As we have learned above, Eman's self-understanding deviates from the norms for Egyptian women.[219] She considers herself tough, educated, outspoken, and ambitious. And thus, feels she needs the complementary husband:

"I value some stuff in my fiancé and I really don't care that my fiancé is the most successful or ...he's from a normal governmental university he's not from AUC or GUC or something that is really prestigious in here while ... something for her [Eman's mother]: 'Why you didn't chose someone from here someone who's going to make Masters and PhD: and travel and do some brilliant stuff' – although he is doing his Masters but, it'smore of you could have something much better than this, but from her perspective the much better should be in the academics, in the ... maybe who have more money a better flat ... stuff of that sort. Like she values me really much in this. But for me I just consider some stuff, much more. Like he does have exactly – nearly the same vision for the future, he's very understanding in the sense of he wants me to work, he's fine with me ... many Egyptian men wouldn't exactly like their wives to deal with men. In general like as minimum as possible. Thats the jealousness thing. He's not exactly not jealous but he's fine with a lot of things. I do have a *lot* of Egyptian men on facebook like *a lot!* And I do have over 800 friends on facebook and ... that's not exactly what would make him comfortable...*khalas*[220]! At all so he's fine with many things, he *does* trust me but of course he's jealous as all other Egyptian men. For sure. So all these things are valued by me but are not valued by her as as much. So she thinks that I could have gotten something better. But I don't think so."

After all I learnt about and from my interview partners, Eman's relevancies and priorities appeared entirely plausible to me. In contrast, I have been pondering for a quite a while on the mother's stance. Clearly, she has the highest ambitions for her daughter. She would love to see her daughter concluding a PhD and marrying some other AUCian. Whether the mother hoped that her daughter's marriage with an AUCian would change the family's social status, remains open. It is mere speculation that the mother wanted the family – which Eman identifies as middle class – to rise to the status of upper middle or even upper class. But even if – would she really condone her daughter marrying an Egyptian Boy who then demands Eman to stay at home after marriage and

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[219]   In regards to chastity she could easily take it up with an Egyptian Good Girl.

[220]   *Khalas* is the Egyptian word for "enough" and "at all".

un-friend all her male friends on facebook? Again, to a certain degree the answer remains speculation, but we need to take into consideration what else we know about the mother. Throughout the interview, Eman has portrayed her mother as a strong, ambitious, educated, independent woman, who does not abide by the societal standards when she feels they run counter her own aspirations ("she's not the normal"). She is married to a man with "not a very strong character" (as Eman describes her father). A potential explanation: Eman's mother depreciates the tolerant nature of Eman's fiancé, not because it was irrelevant to her, but because she *takes it for granted*. Is it possible that Egyptian men have changed so much since Eman's mother had married? Or is it the marriage with a man "who doesn't argue" (Hagar) that has rendered her insensitive to the drawbacks of an Egyptian Boy?

In this respect, Samira's priorities are not much different from Eman's. In describing her ideal husband, Samira refers to the image of women as a jewellery that she had introduced earlier:

> "So if I'm gonna marry I'm gonna marry someone who is open minded who really would encourage me like my mum to go for work, to work more. I would marry someone who wouldn't put me in the drawer and close the door for me. So this is hard to find in Egypt."

The picture we got so far could easily be summed up by the headline "ambitious, tough, independent,[221] young women at troubles to find tolerant men in Egypt". But of course, nothing is what it seems at first sight and reality is more complex: gender is mutually constitutive. This means that *both*, men *and* women are bound by their definition, are ascribed certain features, are confronted with an ideal and are constructed in a specific way, in inter-dependence and in dissociation from each other (Nelson 1991: 136–137). At the same time, the "doing gender"is inseparably tied to the local culture. Laila's experience with her Brazilian boyfriend is therefore very enlightening: during the time he is living in Cairo, Laila realises how much he is dependent on her in some situations, as he is not familiar with "how things are in Cairo". Not being familiar with the culture and its patterns of meaning and habits, the boyfriend also does not react in the way an Egyptian would to certain situations. When Laila gets (verbally) harassed in the street, he does not respond – as an Egyptian man would – by protecting her from other males. From her point of view, it gets even worse: in his presence other Egyptian girls do not show the behaviour expected from an Egyptian Good Girl, instead they leave their role completely and flirt at Laila's boyfriend.

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[221] Of course I had first written "emancipated modern" women. This initial expression reveals how much ambition and self-dependence of women are linked to the concept of modernity, also in my head.

"It was very strange to walk with him in the streets in Cairo when he first came because I'm hearing all the comments, from the boys in the streets, I'm being harassed and he doesn't understand and he's not doing anything about it. We go to Khan al Khalili, we'd have the people selling us things for much more expensive prices because of him being around. We go to a shop where you'd have girls in it, they'd start flirting with *him*. And it was very awkward too. I'm like 'Hello! I'm here!' and they start talking to him in English. He would be flattered in a way and I'd be like 'I'm not jealous but this is very awkward to see this happening'. I had never seen it happening, walking next to a guy and the guy is the one who's being harassed. So in a way I felt very masculine around him. I'm defending him somehow ... making sure he's fine. That was the constant feeling I was having. After I broke up with him I felt a very strange feeling I felt I had this huge weight lifted off of me. It was very difficult to do it but the feeling that came afterwards was a liberating feeling."

This passage shows how eventually Laila even gets confused in her female role: she felt very masculine around him. In Egyptian society, gender roles are very clear. They are sketched according to the idea of complementarity, and attribute different features to men and women. "Feeling masculine" in such a surrounding surely is no easy thing.

Both, men and women, are trapped in patriarchy: "Patriarchy is not simply a system of male domination in which women are perceived as helpless pawns at the mercy of coercive males, but rather as a complex phenomenon constraining men as well as women in a mutually dehumanizing ideology" (Nelson 1991: 136–137). The many double standards we have already touched upon are part of this system: The norm of chastity of the woman corresponds to a norm of "virility" on the side of the man (Nelson 1991: 136–137). Also, the priority of being a mother finds its correspondence on the side of the man: "Fathering sons and supporting a household are fundamental to manhood in Egypt" (Schneider and Silverman 2006: 243). Thus, also for a man marriage and family are indispensable for a 'fulfilled' life. Yet, men can easily marry at a later age, are less negatively affected by divorce, and have a different role within the partnership and family. Also the dependence of women attributes a complementary role to men: they should be able to provide for their dependent women. In an ideal family, the father *alone* is responsible for material sustenance. Above that, "protection of women, family, and society is incumbent on men" (Awad 2011: 143). It is striking when Yasmine refers to this concept of the male role: all her negative experience with men notwithstanding, Yasmine eventually accepts and adopts the idea that her family, and her father in specific, was meant to protect her. Even though she is the victim of male violence, she does not reject the idea that the male members of a family are responsible for protecting the women. She merely criticises the fact that this male protection was lacking in her case. Because her father misunderstood his role,[222] he was not there to protect her. Yasmine faces

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[222] Yasmine's idea of her father's duties as a father is an interesting mix. She demands protection and also that he

a specific dilemma of women and girls: they ought to turn to males for protection from male violence (Mogge-Grotjahn 2004: 96). Eventually, no matter how outspoken my interviewees are, and no matter how much they distance themselves from certain roles and norms, they cannot unlink from the structural force of gender-relations.

Above that, we should not neglect the impact of ongoing discourses and of my presence on the content of the interviews. My interviewees are aware of the Western stereotypes on Muslim, Arab and Middle Eastern women. They realise that they are often described as silent and submissive. This became evident when they explained their motivation to participate, and also in some explicit and implicit statements during the interviews. In light of their awareness, the women might attempt to portray themselves as (more) outspoken and self-assertive to counter this image. Above that, the interviewees had to ascribe a certain image of "womanhood" or "girlhood" onto me. If they 'read' me as a young woman who is independent of men and parents, not bound by relationships, unwilling to give up her career for the sake of pleasing a man, ignorant of the value of long-term relationships and a happy family life,[223] they might adapt their self-presentation. Maybe they presented themselves more independently than they would have done otherwise, in order to find my acceptance as an equal interlocutor. Additionally, there might be an inclination on my side (and maybe also on the side of the sympathetic reader) to be attentive to signals that underline the interviewee's independence and ignore hints at their dependence. There is not only the tendency in the West to conceive of Egyptian women as oppressed, but also the wish to identify rays of light in the heart of patriarchal darkness[224] which the Middle East represents to us.[225]

Indeed, at several points, my interview partners adhere to conservative norms themselves. Yet, it is important to qualify in two regards: first, a young women's adherence to chastity or her strive for marriage must not necessarily be a reflection of societal or male pressure. Second, even if a young woman abides by some of the norms of "chastity", "dependence," or "marriage", she might refuse

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expresses his feelings.

[223] From my experience with Egyptians it is not absurd at all, to assume that this was the identity ascribed to me by my interview partners. In the eyes of not few Egyptians, the West is a "morally bankrupt society" (Sullivan, Abed-Kotob and Kotob 1999: 111), inhabited by parents who do not care about their offspring, partners who cheat on each other, neglected children and licentious but lonely individuals.

[224] The knowledgeable reader will have recognised the reference to Conrad's "Heart of the Darkness" and excuse the geographical extension of this term to the Middle East.

[225] I am drawing parallels here between some conspicuously similar discourses. The current one focuses on the Muslim world's misogynist and terrorist 'nature', and is closely linked to the Orientalist discourse of the past, which provided justifications for colonialism. Also Modernisation theory, and talk of "civilisations" and "missions to civilise" show some parallels. Unfortunately I do not have the opportunity to elaborate on these issues here.

to be forced into the role of the Egyptian Good Girl. The women frequently claim their right to find their own combination of norms. Wearing a headscarf does not mean you accept the travel ban on women. Similarly, preferring a 'strong' husband does not mean a woman would forego her own career. In this sense, we also have to understand Eman's demands on her fiancé. When she describes to me the ideal husband (or rather: her future fiancé), she deviates from her frequent pattern of portraying herself as "not the normal "Egyptian woman, and tells me that she shares with them that "we just like to look a bit higher to our husbands that we do to ourselves".

> "[As a husband] I would like someone who is *as* strong in personality and the amount of power that I exert in general as me, and even more. In order for me to respect him this is an issue for me ... that's a problem. So he's one of the few if not the only one who is able in an argument just to make me shut up. Just it you know. Just it's not something *good*, I am not saying he's oppressing but, *simply* he has from the character the one that is enough for me and more. And that's an issue sometimes ... I don't know if you think the same way but we just like to look a bit higher to our husbands that we do to ourselves. Just for the sake of when I get ... pregnant ... when I get sick when whatever happens I will trust him enough to do everything that I do and more. Not for the sake of having a strong man or someone who would beat me up nothing of that sort but simply someone that I would trust and depend on as much as I depend on myself. So that's an issue for me that's really something that I care about in a husband."

Moreover, Eman's account of the *engagement procedures* make clear that if it comes to marriage, a man's reputation and his family's reputation can be crucial as well (only the standards for male reputation might be different from those for females). And furthermore, no matter how independent and tough Eman describes herself, it is clear that her husband alone bears the brunt of establishing their own life. He is solely in charge of providing for the flat and the celebrations. Eman acknowledges that he is surely "not having the best time of his life". Yet, she does not question this practice which puts responsibility for the material foundations of a partnership entirely in the hands of the groom.

To a certain degree, it seems symptomatic that in the realm of marriage, Eman holds on to traditional roles: even if a couple, or the members of the family, are flexible to negotiate, open to change and question, the societal norms eventually unfold significant power. In various contexts my interviewees told me that they or their parents (!) did not approve of a certain rule but were unable to ignore it in their own behaviour. Adherence to unwanted rules had different reasons. Either the dominance of this norm in larger society meant that they did not even get the chance to transgress it. Or, they decided not to do so as they were unwilling (or felt incapable) to bear the serious consequences. Or, they referred to "the people" who would not understand or condone the transgression. "The people" seem to be responsible for the reinforcement of the majority of

norms, or they at least provide a major justification for the need to adhere to established rules.

1.3.4 The gaze of the people – tight social surveillance

Samira is most outspoken in blaming the society for the restrictions she is subject to because of being a "precious" woman. She blames the society, the people, the culture for limiting her – and while she does not want to accuse her parents of being too conservative, she reproaches her father for listening to "the people". Samira tells me that even though her father had not allowed her to participate in the Arab Spring demonstrations in her home town, she went to Midan Tahrir, the geographical centre of the uprising in Cairo, once she returned to the capital. I ask her whether she felt "okay with this as long as he doesn't know?" Her response does not only justify her secret disobedience, it reveals her contempt for society's norms and draws a clear distinction between her parents and "the people", indicating that these societal norms unfold some power which is "wider than the ideology of my father and mother". "I told you I hate the Egyptian culture because it always puts restrictions and challenges in front of me." As example for such a challenge she cites the moment when she wanted to go down to the streets of her home governorate during the revolution but was confronted with the fear mongering of her parents, which eventually prevented her from going out. She complains there were many important things to do for her, she wants to investigate, see – and then is restricted.

> "But this culture buries me. And put challenges in front of me ... and I hate be like – sometimes I tell my father: I hate being a girl. Cause I cannot stay out of the home until twelve so being after 12 out home this means that I am a bad girl when I am *not* a bad girl. Maybe I am doing something I am enjoying? So please, let me do what I want to do when you trust me. Please trust me. ... khalas, intu[226], dad and mum you gave me the right regulations during my life, khalas I know what's wrong and what's right. (....)
>
> This is my own opinion. But this is not their opinion. They would say: okay, we *know* you don't do this. But people don't know. So it's wider than the ideology of my father and mother it's like the society, the street, the people around me. Cause at home [a rural governorate] it's totally different than Cairo. Cairo is more open minded. (...)
>
> [Back home] they see and they talk and they have this rumours and they speak: 'She's open minded, her father let her to wear this, her father let her to go out, her father let her abroad.' And you know, this kind of rumours it's always filling the place. It's not only because I got a scholarship they do this with everyone else. Like everyone is talking about everyone. I don't like this culture. I like, what I liked about the American culture: everyone lives his own life.(…)
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> I am not allowed [to travel to Turkey] because he is worried. Not because of something specific thing. Because of the culture and because of people are gonna say rumours 'Oh the

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[226] Arabic word for "you", plural.

girl who travels abroad. She's messy she's so open and my parents are not conservative any more'. But I hate this culture I am talking about the culture [in my home governorate]not the Cairo culture. Cairo culture everyone wanna go abroad. Especially girls to not only boys but in my Daymanhour which is kind of peasant work and stuff people are so conservative. So I don't like that, I cannot adapt to that."

Even though Cairo might be more open minded, the gaze of the people is a powerful reinforcement for the conservative notion of gender norms. Nadia tells me that once her mum refused to let her sister travel in a group with her fiancé. When Nadia tries to counter this on logical grounds ("Isn't it even safer for her if her fiancé is with her?") the mother only points to the people to support her standpoint: what should the people think? If the parents are not in the house, Nadia also has to be at home with her sister and her fiancé in order to guard the young couple. Nadia portrays this rule as entirely absurd considering that her sister and the fiancé could simply make out in the car. (This is a repetition of the pattern analysed previously: Nadia doubts the effectiveness of a rule to *actually prevent* sexual contact and thus doubts its legitimacy.)

While sometimes "the people" might appear as a convenient excuse for parental unwillingness to negotiate, Samira is convinced that her parents themselves are victims of the "closed community" and its norms:

"I don't know I love my father and I like him the way he is because this is how God created him and *now* I understand my father. I don't hate my father, I don't blame him for something. I don't expect my father to be something but I would blame my father for listen for the people surround him like 'girls shouldn't go out' for example. He would come back and say 'Girls shouldn't go out'. This is what I would blame my father."

When her father allows Samira to travel to the States, he has to defend his standpoint against his friends. Samira despises of the fact that Egyptians never mind their own business. Laila on the other hand shows that this surveillance must not necessarily be perceived as 'control' – rather every young Egyptian woman is woven into a tight net of relations and 'protection':

"[Being in Japan meant] not being restricted by very small rules 'Where you going when you coming back?' It was very strange because naturally I would tell <u>my friends</u> I'm going to this place and I'll be back at this place ... and they would be like 'You can do whatever you want you don't have to tell us'. But because it was so embedded in me I'm going there to do what and why am I going, cause here you always have to do that. Till now my parents ask me where you going when are you coming back? *Not* because of what they want to know what I am doing or they don't trust me but safety reasons. Just because to know okay you said you're coming back at nine why are you coming back at 11 is everything okay? And all of that."

It is not absurd to assume that this protection might be necessary. The Arab Human Development Report 2010 draws a shocking picture of people's worries:

"It is remarkable that girls attach such great importance to safety considerations. By safety, they appear to mean worry about their own safety and about safety-related matters. These include harassment and assault in the street, violation of their private space in shopping areas, and even kidnapping. Many comments referred either to incidents that had happened to people they knew, had read about or that they themselves faced or could potentially face. 'People are merciless. They don't leave you alone whether you're wearing a veil or covered from head to toe, even if you are out with your mother or family. Today the most important thing for a girl is to protect herself from the moment she sets foot outside her home till she's back.' (*A female respondent)"* (Handoussa 2010: 107)

Laila on the other hand, shows that it might not be the woman herself but rather her reputation that needs protection, as "the reputation is (...) a very precious thing":

"[Abroad] it was very awkward also. I had this Swedish guy who I had an argument with at the very beginning because he was making jokes about us [Laila and her boyfriend] sleeping together and I'm like 'N*o! Please!* My culture is very strict and you're harming me *directly.* You're offending me very directly.' He didn't think that – he was shocked at the beginning because for him, ... Sweden very normal to ... you're together you're obviously sleeping together. ... So I had to face a lot of these things and in the beginning this was the first conversation, I was very shocked and then bit by bit I realised it – I shouldn't attack the guy I have to talk to him, explaining this is my culture this is your culture and these are the differences....He talked to other friends also about this idea. And we do *not* have these intimate relationships *all* of us. Especially in Egypt a lot of people who have them they don't go around *boasting* about them. G*uys* are okay but girls are never okay there's always the *stigma* of ... a guy can walk through the mud and come out clean. A girl would walk around the mud and still get dirty. the reputation is very very ... is a very precious thing ... and the for me I never ever wanted to do anything wrong. *Not* because of *my* reputation because I would be harming my parents in some sort of form. ... My parents were very open to the extent they let me travel with my boyfriend alone but we did not spend the night in the same room. Not because of their trust or anything they wouldn't have never known but because of me personally I felt I'm betraying betraying who I was in a way. I wouldn't have done that if I was in Egypt, I wouldn't have done that if I was there. I felt like I don't want to *change* because of the society I am in. Or I don't want to change because nobody is seeing me or nobody knows me."

This precious reputation limits the individual's scope for action markedly. Not the girl herself is precious and needs to be kept in the drawer, but her reputation – which is so essential for her marriage prospects and her future social position, defined by the husband – needs to be guarded. In a society were male sexual behaviour is not disciplined, this reputation is highly endangered. A woman's reputation even seems to extend to the whole family. Yet, the reputation is not tied to reality, but it is all about rumours. It does not matter what a woman actually *does* but whether she *could have done* something. The mere *potentiality* is sufficient to ignite people's talk. Thus, situations that contain the potential to do something indecent or meet indecent people need be avoided. No wonder then, that my interview partners emphasise frequently that they do not have sexual intercourse – probably reputation is even endangered in the conversation with me. Even

though my interview partners cannot escape the demand to guard their reputation, they are well aware that Egyptian society operates on double standards if it comes to decent behaviour. And (at least in theory) they are not willing to accept that their husband or boyfriend decides for them in how far they have to abide by the standards of the Egyptian Good Girl.

Mariam has an interesting note on the question how these inequalities are perpetuated in Egyptian society. According to her, it is the women themselves who make men adopt such a 'dictatorial behaviour'. She locates the origin of the double standards of Egyptian society in the education of children, and pledges to be different as a mother:

> "And [in my education] I am not gonna differentiate between a boy and a girl. Cause we are living in male dominated society. Because of: who created this male? It's the female. It's his, the guy's mother who tells him: 'You know what? You're a king and you go and chose whatever girl you want and I will make her marry you'. You have to know that a dictator man is a dictator man because of his mother. It's his mother who made him a dictator. It's not someone else. She made him. Actually this is the irony. A mother who's oppressing her daughter just to please her son."

Bayat claims that the location of youth in the Middle East was specific as "moral and political authority impose a high degree of social control over the young" (Bayat 2010: 28). The social control of young women is enforced by family, young men and "the people" and mediated to a remarkable extent by the gender category. The frequent mentioning of double standards suggests that social control plays out differently on men and women. Another factor in the perpetuation of gender inequalities and the legitimisation of ideals such as the Egyptian Good Girl is the religious discourse. Even if the Egyptian Good Girl was not defined by "religiosity", the other features which I clustered as chastity, dependence, and marriage, still bear the marks of the religious battles that have been waged in Egypt. In the past 30 years, Egypt's religious ideoscape and public space has undergone a remarkable transformation that also conditions the lives of my interview partners. The impact of the re-Islamisation on the self-construction of Yasmine shall be explored in the next chapter.

1.3.5 The traces of Re-Islamisation in Yasmine's life story

Based on the state of research the Re-Islamisation constituted one of my sensitizing concepts. As the foci of this study followed largely the themes and topics that my interviewees, and in particular Yasmine, brought up, I did not pay much further attention to "Islam" – unless it showed (or rather: I saw it) in the interviews. Yet, during the writing up of my research I once in a while encountered people in my German surroundings, and I would happen to speak to them about my research. One of the first questions – whether the interlocutors where themselves academics, political scientists, or not – was: "But what about religion?" Well, what about religion? I am not entirely sure what the Germans I spoke to have in mind when using the term "religion" in reference to my research subject (this would be well worth a study on its own...). If we look to scholarly research, we can find different definitions, which are themselves context dependent and evolving with time (Ernst 2004: 38–47). Religion can be defined as a world-view (being the English translation of the German philosophical term *Weltanschauung*), as a (presumably congruent) set of belief systems, cultural systems and worldviews, or as a mix of practice and belief. Clifford Geertz has prominently theorized religion as "a cultural system" (Geertz 1993). In the academic school of constructionism "religion" itself appears as a construct. The term's symbolic meaning is tied to its historic development and its context of origin, i.e. Christianity (Asad 1993: 27–53; Ernst 2004: 38–47). In her study on Nigérien male youths, Masquelier proposes a distinction of "religious identity (as a sense of belonging to a religious community) from religiosity (the performance of religious acts). (...) Some people perceive religion to be an integral part of their cultural identity even though they do not regularly engage in acts of religiosity"(Masquelier 2010: 226).

Thus if we speak of "Islam as a religion" this requires not only an idea of what Islam is, but also of how religion is understood. If we look at "Islam" alone, the perspective changes again and we can for example distinguish between Islam as a religion and a culture. This distinction however might remain a purely theoretical one, as in effect religion and culture are linked. As Harders puts it, the category "religion" (as the category "gender") cannot be analysed independently of its surroundings and thus need to be contextualised: "Die Großkategorien Religion und Geschlecht bedürfen der politisch-ökonomisch-sozialen-kulturellen Kontextualisierung" (Harders 1999: 62). Harders goes so far to argue that an analytical focus on religion (or Islam) is not only *unproductive* but *dangerous* as it neglects the complex nexus of various factors:

"[Der] Zusammenhang zwischen gelebter Religion, den jeweiligen politischen Systemen,

ökonomischen Kontexten und sozialen Ausdrucksformen wird durch eine solche Perspektive vernachlässigt (...)" (Harders 1999: 62).

Islam is of interest to me not as an abstract category. I am concerned with Islam as it features in my interviews. This means, as a "lived religion" and as a "belief system". Both need to be understood also as an outcome of the various dimensions (societal, political, economic factors) that intersect in a person's situation at a given point in time. I cannot provide an abstract definition of Islam or religion here, but cannot conceal that I have developed a certain concept of Islam in Egypt (through both my socialisation and studies in Europe and my life in Egypt). My take on the issue is reflected in my presentation of the state of research on "Islamic Revivalism in Egypt" (I 3.2).

Given the complexity and vastness of the field, it seems recommendable (even beyond the reasoning of reconstructive research) to stick closely to the interviewees' frame of relevance if it comes to Islam and/or religion. As explained, religion constituted one of my a priori sensitizing concepts, yet I had not defined whether this meant lived religion, observance of religious practice, religious reasoning or something entirely different. Any attempt to refine the sensitising concept would have rendered it a deductive category at that point. As a concept that only guides my attention, however, it did not guide me anywhere: in all of my interviews the issue of Islam was touched on somehow, but it was never made *explicitly the topic* of the conversation. Religion was not *problematised* by my interviewees. It only served as a marker of distinction or self-attribute, it was not explained in more detail, and most important of all: it did not constitute any of the central motives in Yasmine's life story.[227] When we put on slightly different 'eyeglasses', we will come to different results. If we ask (admittedly in a rather deductive approach) 'Where do the effects of re-Islamisation show in Yasmine's life?', we can get an idea of the references to religion in Yasmine's life story. Given the transformative force of the Islamic revivalism (see I 3.2), this is a plausible question to ask. In particular, since the role of women and of the family are at the heart of the ideological battles waged in Egypt today. Highly influential star preacher Amr Khalid for example "based the 'integrity of society … on the integrity of women', and the latter on her *hijab* because 'one woman can easily entice one hundred men, but one hundred men cannot entice a single woman.'" (Bayat 2007: 153). In the neo-conservative trend, women become the representatives of the entire society's ethics. Her individual ethics is expressed in her dress code, and in specific her *hijab.* As the veil is addressed variously by my interviewees and links the topics women's role and

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[227] It is very well possible that had I chosen a different case for the reconstruction of narrative identity, religion/Islam had acquired a much more prominent status in the reconstruction. In this case then, I would probably have felt the impact of cross-cultural research much more.

religion, we will address it in a separate chapter IV 1.3.6. Here, I am concerned with the overall climate which provides the ground for addressing religion in the interviews, or for making it an element of narrative identity construction.

If we look at Yasmine's story and narrative identity construction from this perspective, several linkages become visible: Yasmine attributes the change in her mother's personality at parts to her becoming religiously conservative. In her story, she implies a direct relation between the mother's adoption of a more conservative lifestyle and principles and her opposition to Yasmine's way of dressing. Pervasive anger poisoning their relationship, is the result. The religious trajectory of Yasmine's mother highlights why the distinction between neo-conservatism and religiosity (I 3.2) is useful: like the Egyptian society at large, the mother has been religious even before the re-Islamisation. Yet, with the neo-conservative trend, this religiosity takes on a new form. Its adherents actively display public piety and strengthen conservative norms. The mother's change reflects this: she was wearing the veil anyway, but she becomes more conservative and more hostile towards the Americanised society and its dress code and behavioural norms. Just as in Bayat's account of Amr Khalid lectures, Yasmine's mother has left the encounter with the neo-conservative trend with a different idea of what it means to be a good Muslim. But she had entered already with the *wish* to be a good Muslim, or at least with the *self-understanding* "I am Muslim". Yasmine and her friend, on the other hand, are inspired by the movement to *start donning the veil.* Putting on a veil is Yasmine's attempt to be seen as a good person (maybe even to be an Egyptian Good Girl?), whether this should be called "religious" obliges the observer.

Furthermore, several persons appearing in the story are characterised by their religion – although this information does not seem to import any meaning to the *plot* itself. The wish to take off the veil is met with condemnatory rhetoric and accusations of the religious sort. It is not before her mum gets "bored of her religious phase" in 2010 that Yasmine experiences "a good year". And even the revolution which could be seen as the most secular event ever, was sent by God: "I've been praying or just asking God *every day* in January for something to save me from this *constant* depression and I think that God sent me the revolution". This small summary of the religion-theme in Yasmine's story shows: religion *does* play a role, it is referred to in a variety of contexts, both negative and positive, in regards to other people as well as in reference to Yasmine herself. Besides that, religious *terminology* and *argumentation* permeates the narration. Yet, religion is not addressed as a topic, as an issue that needs reflection, requires decision making or causes conflict. Religion is taken for granted. Also in Yasmine's story it constitutes a cultural system which provides

construction material and defines the context of the life story. Or to speak in Masquelier's terms: Yasmine has "a sense of belonging" to the Muslim community, but she does "not regularly engage in acts of religiosity" (Masquelier 2010: 226). In Yasmine's case, it is impossible to distinguish whether the reason for a certain behaviour, the template for potential action and the construction repertoire for identity construction and meaning-making derive from religion, culture or tradition. In order not to impose my categories on the subject, I cannot draw these border independently from the text. To reconstruct the role of religion or religious repertoires in Yasmine's identity construction, requires detailed text analysis of those segments that could be subsumed under "religion". It would thus constitute a separate research topic. But the issue of veiling, a central motive in Yasmine's story imposes it as an example for several reasons. First, the veil has been central to political and academic debates (see I). Above that, academic research has made considerable effort to dis-entangle the various motives for wearing (or donning, in the first place) the veil. While in the German public discourse it is common sense to treat veiling as a religious practice or a sign of oppression, scholars have shown that veiling cannot uncritically be read as a unidimensional practice. It must be understood as a highly context dependent move. Therefore, the interviewee's experiences, attributions and concepts can be very enlightening. We will thus take a close look at how Yasmine constructs the issue of veiling, the one putatively 'religious' topic in her life story.

1.3.6 Veiling – projecting the image of Islam, myself or tradition? Or: do veiled girls hug boys?

Yasmine puts on the veil at the age of 16 after a friend proposes to do so. This friend "was [with] the Amr Khaled thing", indicating that she has a religious motive for donning the veil. Yasmine on the other hand, connects a different hope with getting veiled:

> "After that my friend was er was [with the] Amr Khaled thing and everything and she's like 'You know why don't we get veiled?' and I'm like '*Oh,* sure' ... if that's what is going to prove to the world that I'm a good person then I'm gonna do that too. So I wore the veil".

The preceding segment gives us an idea *who* might be the *addressee* for the claim to be "a good person": in the previous passage, Yasmine mentions the sexual abuse by her family members, and describes her mother's reaction as follows,

> "At that point my mum would tell me that I'm just living in a nightmare that I am *not* getting out of and I need to stop putting myself in this *box* so I used to believe her because I could didn't know better but to believe her and *again* I was very *naive* and I only just wanted to do the right thing like I only just wanted to be a *good girl*, honestly and truly."

It is no coincidence that putting on the veil follows straight after a segment which addresses three of the major aspects of Yasmine's narrative identity construction: first, the reaction of Yasmine's mum to the abuse of her daughter, then, second, the "larger" themes of modulating the self, and third, the need for acceptance. And apparently, it worked: "My mum was extremely happy and I became her best friend". Of course, a religious element is involved here: Amr Khalid who inspires the girls to don the veil is a religious figure, the same preacher that inspired the mother's conservative turn. And it is due to her religious convictions that the mother welcomes the daughter's move. Yet, the primary motive for Yasmine is a social one.

We can observe a similar mixture when Yasmine struggles with the decision to take the veil off. After her mum's furious rejection, when Yasmine expressed her wish to unveil, she thinks "*First* there was a phase of 'These are satanic thoughts and how can I *fight* them' and '*Shit!* How can I not have these thoughts' and just 'It's *so* bad that I'm having these thoughts.'" Only after considerable struggle with herself, Yasmine comes to the point of "*accepting* that I'm allowed to think that I can ... take off the veil". Then, it is still her mother and her religious entourage that opposes taking off the veil on religious grounds: "My mum had this religious guide woman or something and when she told her that I wanna take off the veil she gave this *shocking* 'Oh my god she's gonna go to hell!'" For Yasmine on the contrary, *wearing* the veil becomes problematic exactly *for* its religious aspects:

> "I feel like I'm a hypocrite I'm wearing this veil and I'm not telling the world ... everyone is expecting me to be a certain person and I don't care about religion any more and because it's not about religion, I'm not projecting the picture of Islam through my veil."

There are several elements to this complex statement which it is worth to disentangle: Yasmine assumes that, in the mind of "the people", the veil is linked to certain values. It is implied that the veil is worn for religious reasons and that it reflects the religious conviction of the bearer. Thus, she "feel[s] like a hypocrite" who is "not telling the *world*" that she is a different kind of person than they might think: she does not care about religion (any more) and she does therefore not represent Islam. Beyond that, the veil is also tied to a specific code of ethics, prescribing a certain way of behaviour. The image of a veiled woman thus incorporates more than only "religious conviction", it also implies that certain things are done (or rather: not done) by this woman. Nadia tells me when a woman wears the veil "people ... have a full image of what you should be doing". Thus, when Yasmine says "everyone is expecting [her] (...) to be a certain person", she is very likely implying that they also expect a certain behaviour from her. The expected behaviour is basically

that of an Egyptian Good Girl (IV 1.3.5). Nadia tries to describe in more detail the weight of the "image" that the veil brings with it.

> "Like for example when I was veiled ... like, in Egypt we don't go around hugging guys. That's a fact. Even [though] for me it's totally fine: I don't think it's a problem I do it openly, cause that is my rule. But it was even harder when you were veiled. Now when I do it, people are like 'Oh, she's one of those Westernised girls'. People have images in their mind ... not totally Egyptian and so on, just like AUC – the whole idea 'She's AUCian'.

> But when you're veiled, even in AUC, people have the image ... because they give you the face of 'You're betraying your religion' and so on. And when I got veiled I never, I never took the responsibility of represent Islam as a whole. Never, never. I didn't sign up with that. It was more of ((laughs)) me doing something because I believed *God* wanted me to do it. And that was all my argument. But when I took it off it was more: see?! Now you don't have to judge me as the image of Islam. Now I'm just one of the other girls that go around in Egypt."

For Nadia, un-veiling is a means of evading public judgement. Behaviour that is not congruent with common Egyptian norms on gender-interaction draws less critique if it is done by a non-veiled girl. If you are recognized as 'Westernised' or 'AUCian' or 'not totally Egyptian' from the start on, it is easier to play "by my own rules". If you are veiled and do not show the behaviour expected from an Egyptian Good Girl, people give you a look that according to Nadia tells you: "You're betraying your religion". And this is exactly the feeling that Yasmine has herself: she feels she is a hypocrite because she is not wearing the veil *out of conviction.* Nadia, however, refuses to accept this representative role: "I didn't sign up with that." She insists she had never accepted responsibility for anyone or anything but herself, the decision to put on the veil was motivated by her personal belief. Nadia declares the decision to wear the veil as being between her and God – not between her and the entirety of the Muslim community and Egyptian society. The decision to take *off* the veil, however, differs. For Nadia, it is directed towards the society, denying them the possibility to judge Nadia as a representative of her religion. At the same time, Nadia succumbs to the logic of a 'package deal': if you smoke and hug boys, you don't wear the veil.

Mariam, who is wearing the veil, makes an effort to explain the *hijab*'s symbolic content to me. When Mariam tells me that – other than her home community had suspected – she had "not taken of the veil" and "not changed" her behaviour at AUC, I asked about the relation between the veil and behaviour.[228] She responds many people had asked her mother whether Mariam had been forced to take off the veil at AUC, because "they think that my veil is a representative of my

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[228] A perfect example of how prior theoretical knowledge had sensitised me: Knowing that Mahmood (2005) and Hafez (2003) distinguish various concepts of the inside-outside-relation, Mariam's comment that combined "veiling" and "acting", instantly triggered my question about their connection.

principles and the way I was raised. So if I took it off (...) it's a symbol for them." It is remarkable that in her interpretation, the veil is not primarily the symbol of religion, but that of the ongoing affiliation with the traditions and principles of her home community (of which religion surely is part). Of course, this specific attribution has to do with Mariam's particular situation: her community of origin is deeply mistrusting AUC, the supposed hotbed of immorality in Egypt and locus of foreign influence. Thus, the observation that Mariam *continued* to wear the veil signifies she has not become alienated and "Americanised". These specificities not withstanding, her case makes clear: the symbolic content of the veil cannot be understand without contextualisation. Above that, the interpretation of Mariam's story gains some theoretical depth, if we consider the central role that women and their ethics acquire in the anti-colonial struggle for the mind (see I 3.2).

For Mariam's community, the veil is the indicator of inner values. Mariam on the other hand, wants to show me that she has left behind this specific concept of the relation of attire and character, after her experience taught her to abstain from her community's stereotyping:

> "If you see that a non-veiled girl is not necessarily [an] unethical girl. I dealt with many girls who are not veiled and actually their dress code may be a little bit provocative for our conservative society. But they are way much better than many veiled girls I know. You know what I mean? So in our society the dress code determines your ethics. You know, chastity is a very important thing because if you're showing off some parts of your body you're unethical. There's a question mark on you. So one of the things that I learnt at AUC: reserving your chastity ... is not necessarily-an indication of your ethics. You may be not veiled, maybe your dress-code is a little bit open, a little bit liberal, but inside you're a good person. And maybe you're veiled, you're praying, you fast, you give *zakat*, and you're veiled and Muslim from outside but inside you're not a very good person. So you know the ratio between outside and inside was very different."

By rejecting the common idea of the "ratio between outside and inside", Mariam also dismisses the package-deal character of the Egyptian Good Girl and other monolithic, inflexible, global concepts of personality. You may not wear the veil, and preserve your (outward) chastity, but still you can be a good person.

Even though (or because of) the symbolic weight that the veil carries, the number of women wearing the *hijab* had been continuously increasing in the late 1990s, especially among the upper echelons of Egyptian society which had not been touched by earlier waves of veiling (such as the one which provided the occasion for MacLeod's study on veiling among lower middle class women in the 1980s). As mentioned before, 80% of women on the streets of Cairo are veiled (consider that between 10% and 20% of Egyptians are Christian). In an upscale mall in Zamalek the percentage of

mughabat (Egyptian colloquial term for veiled women) reached 67%. And even AUC,

> "Egypt's most liberal institution, (...) saw a slow but steady growth of public piety among stuff and students. While in the 1980s the headscarf was a rarity on campus, by early 2000 the *hijab* had become common among students and staff, albeit with the fashion and sophistication that reflected their higher-class background. In 2003, ten students appeared with fully covered faces, causing considerable legal and security complications. The university's prayer halls, non-existent in the 1980s, were now filled with religious students praying, in discussion, and forging new identities. Student activists of the Help Club held ceremonies to celebrate the entry of newly veiled women, born-again Muslims, to their midst. The *hijab* assumed a momentum of its own. As more diverse women turned to veiling, they rendered the *hijab* a hegemonic public symbol, conditioning, even pressuring, others to follow suit. With more and more women from the literate, intellectual, and affluent classes, including chic movie stars, wearing the *hijab*, veiling ceased to be a sign of fanaticism, '*baladi*ness', or backwardness" (Bayat 2007: 147–148).

In this climate, where the *hijab* had become a trend, Yasmine and Nadia had decided to don the veil. And the *hijab* had not lost any of its power as a hegemonic symbol, at the time when the two girls decided to take it off. While Nadia does not portray this move as problematic, already the idea to take off the veil drove Yasmine to despair.

Swimming against the current: taking off the veil

As shown above, Yasmine was struggling with the representative character of the veil: in Yasmine's story, the inability to project her "real self" in the way she dresses and behaves, leads to a serious crisis. When she addresses her parents for help, her mother takes her to various sheikhs and psychiatrists, who at parts interpret Yasmine's problem at the backdrop of religious concepts:[229] "My mum took me to all these sheiks and psychiatrists 'Oh what's wrong with her oh my god ...she's depressed ... something's gotten into her' and stuff like that." When her mother finally is convinced that "Satan did *not* take over her heart", she gives up the resistance. Yasmine reacts in an unexpected way: "Then I was scared I could not make the decision. It was up to *me* but ... I'm always like 'What are what are these people gonna say and what are *these* people gonna say.'" Although the parental pressure apparently ceased, Yasmine still encounters a dilemma when she wants to take off the veil. It is no longer the religious reference but the people's reaction and opinion that now occupies her mind and makes her wary of taking off the veil.[230] Even after taking

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[229] When I ask Yasmine about the experience with psychiatrists in general, she disqualifies a lot of them as "!S*o*! *bad* they were *really shit.*" She criticises them for the referral to religious-based advice, "A lot of them were like 'you *really* need to *have ...faith.* So a lot of them were religious some were stereotypical, so they were just really horrible".

[230] This again is not to say that religion was entirely irrelevant to this story: it is most plausible to assume that various people will form their judgement of Yasmine's decision to take off the veil on religious grounds. Yet it is primarily through the social aspects, through acts of judgement, attitudes of tolerance (or the lack thereof) and a need for recognition within human interactions, that religion becomes salient for Yasmine.

off the veil, she is obsessed with people's thoughts "*after* that, *everytime* I would meet someone my *heart* would ju- I would pee my pants because I would only be thinking what they're thinking of *me,* now, not veiled, it's *so* weird."

If we consider how girls who take off the veil are looked at, it is little surprising that Yasmine is worried. Eman shares with me her thoughts on the "category" of girls who enter AUC and then take off the veil. In her eyes, this is the attempt to adjust, and therefore reveals their weak, opportunist personality:

> "I don't like this kind of category. We have some girls who entered, they are in their 2nd, 3d year. They enter AUC with veil and even much longer clothes and wider than what I am wearing. And they now wear mini-juppes and juppes[231] and wear very unrespectful stuff and just do whatever they want. From my point of view that's more of pretending to fit into the culture. And we do have some cases that just go and adapt. Try to adapt the culture they got in cause it's really different. So we do have some of them, and some of them keep the veil but their clothes get so different. S*o different*! Much tighter and much different and [by] far for the style rather than the ethics of it. For some people like me, this is more like, it's a personality that is trying to adapt rather than to preserve itself. *Yet,* they are a category. They are definitely a category so they do exist. Much. And boys and girls but girls it's much more empiring in girls. It cans hits you because its the way they look that it differs."

And indeed, once Yasmine has found the courage to take off the veil after three years of struggle, "A lot of people also stopped talking to me because they think that .... 'Oh *my God,* Yasmine*,* you know she hugs boys now and she does these things so she's so scandalous'. It's a *really* scandalous thing to do here *at least.*" Just as wearing the veil causes people to expect Egyptian Good Girl behaviour from you, not wearing the veil seems to be taken as a signal that you transgress widely shared norms of decent behaviour (in public and private). How harsh people's reaction to the scandalous behaviour of taking off the veil can be, is described by Laila who had never worn a veil herself but recalls a close friend's experience:

> "Hannah my friend (...) later on (...) decided to take off her veil and she was *judged* very badly from a lot of her friends. And that bothered me a lot because she's still the same person. Whether veiled or not. And she started joking about the issue because [when we were travelling to our term abroad] on the plane, one of the captains told her: 'Why don't you take off the veil before you go abroad? Nobody will know you were veiled.' She got very offended at that time. Now she looks back at that time and she laughs about it. But I remember it was very difficult for her because *family members* stopped talking to her. And I could not believe why we're so judgemental. Why when a person gets veiled we have a certain image about them or why when they take off the veil they just lost their religion or ... it's *very strange"*.

Laila brings up the *judgemental* character of Egyptian society, which had been bemoaned by my interviewees in previous contexts. Yasmine's fear of people's judgement is another instance of how

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[231] She means mini-skirts and skirts, but uses the Arabic word, derived from the French term.

"the people" as a representation of social control and moral authority figure in her mind. Eman's pejorative description of "the category" of girls who unveil after joining AUC, shows where such a fear might come from. It also gives an idea, how judgement is done. It might be another instance of the "talk" that Samira referred to earlier "they see and they talk and they have this rumours and they speak (...) this kind of rumours it's always filling the place."

If we turn to Spiegel's study of Malaysian women rights activists, we can convince ourselves that similar practices of judgement and exclusion are found elsewhere. Spiegel discusses the issue of veiling at length. For her, the starting point is an observation she made during encounters of Islamic NGOs and the women's rights NGO her interviewees came from. In these interactions, access to the public sphere and legitimate expression in the discourse were based on the 'right' dress that qualifies a woman as Muslim and as a legitimate subject of the public sphere. The individual accounts of veiling (and unveiling) that Spiegel's research subjects gave, are similar to the stories I heard and have portrayed previously. Together, they highlight that the symbolic character of the veil (religious, social, cultural, economic, inter-generational, political) is dependent on the context.[232] There are interesting parallels in the struggle to *take off* the veil: taking it off is perceived as harder than not wearing it. The women share the (sound) fear that everyone would ask, and thus they try to hide from people's judgement. One of Spiegel's interviewee's even mentions the pressure *her mother* put on her: the mother is afraid that people would think bad about her as well, and she threatens that without the veil, the daughter could not go to heaven. The latter reminds of the skheika's reaction in Yasmine's story. Yet, there's much difference as to *the reason* for taking it off: Spiegel's subjects portray it as a statement against a superficial understanding of Islam or religiosity, renouncing religious practices which mainly rely on outward appearance, and thus re-appropriating their religion and renegotiating its meaning. Taking off the veil needs to be read as

> "A public statement showing that they agreed with neither the image of women produced within the type of Islam surrounding them nor the instrumentalisation of the female body in relation to collective identities. The inclusive or exclusive mechanism of the headscarf and the power that is inherent to this mechanism become especially visible in the moment of taking it off." (Spiegel 2010: 260)

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[232] Spiegel calls this insight an "approach", developed by her and Dannecker (2010: 241). To me this declaration seems slightly exaggerated, in particular if we take into consideration that various publications on "veiling" have already explored the various purposes and meanings of veiling, thus *together* giving substantial weight to the assumption that donning the veil has multifaceted purposes and various meanings.

Yasmine's and Nadia's motives are non-religious and especially in Yasmine's case primarily 'private'. For her taking off the veil clearly is a matter of harmonizing her outward appearance (and thus people's impression of her) with her inner feelings and conviction.[233] Also the evaluation of the 'inclusive or exclusive mechanism' is different. In hindsight the exclusionary/inclusionary mechanisms were felt most strongly by Yasmine when she *put on the headscarf*. She even indicates how at the moment she put on the headscarf, people's evaluation of her personality as good or bad, their affection and their support, were dependent *exclusively* on the headscarf:

> [When she put on the veil] "people would always ask like *why* you're veiled cause *my* society isn't the society that is welcoming the veil.

> I *had* that with a group of people that were like 'Oh yea', cheering for me every time I do something just because '*Oh* she's veiled'. *Just* because of that and *that* was *annoying* in *itself* because I'm *not* the veil. I'm *not* my hair, I'm not anything, I'm *me.* And that should not be the reason, the veil should not be the reason why you encourage me in life just because I made a certain choice. I think people should just be welcoming to anyone anyway ... I believe even if that [people's support] was a positive thing, that in itself *is racist.*

> And from the other side [the Americanised society] a lot of people were racist ... in terms of 'Oh you know she's veiled' – there 're all these *preconceived ideas* about you being *veiled.* Like '*What*? Of course you never have boyfriends you're veiled' it's like of course this of course that of course this (...) so the other people were racist too. B*ut however being marginalized* in my society, the sort of Americanised or Westernised upper middle classes. When you're marginalized you see things *so differently. W*hen you're in the crowd or you're like really popular or you're socially accepted by everyone else, that's cool but when you're *marginalized* or when you're stereotyped or people don't call you just because you're veiled (...)

> So that *also* put a lot of things in perspective when people started treating me differently when I put *on* the veil *that* changed my perspective. And then when I took it off, that changed my perspective as well. It shows you what really matters to certain people and it filters them out."

Yasmine's experience draws our attention to a frequent blind spot which seems to be reproduced in Spiegel's study as well: the intolerant character of liberal milieus vis-a-vis conservatives. Yasmine's decision to get veiled does not draw any positive response in her Americanised society.

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[233] For Spiegel the taking off, combined with the statement "Islam is not about dress" constitutes a renegotiation "of the relation between Islam, body, dress and publicness". I wonder whether it isn't rather a renegotiation of the relation inside – outside? Spiegel's subjects are rejecting the notion that the outside is the mirror of the inside (and also reflects back on it). Originally, they had seen the veil as a way of expressing inner religiosity – now it is seen as oppressing real inner (true) religiosity. The veil is now seen as sign of superficiality. Thereby, the women are inverting the discourse also portrayed by Werner (1996), which makes the headscarf an alternative to a superficial Western "objectification of the female body" (Spiegel 2010: 266). Yet, what Spiegel points out: in both readings we find "the hierarchies between the 'surface' and the 'inner depth' of religious commitment" (Spiegel 2010: 266). This indicates her subjects are not following the same self-concept as those women portrayed by Mahmood (2005).

As a veiled girl, Yasmine faces considerable rejection in her school, in the bowling alley of Ma'adi, in her peer group in the Gezira Club, where being un-veiled is the imperative norm for *young* women and girls. While "her society" so far appeared as the tolerant and open alternative to the Egyptian conservative world, a second glance reveals that this society does not leave much *space* for a more conservative comportment and habitus. Yasmine's experience with being veiled illustrates that both worlds are *judgemental*. The members of both worlds do judge, do rely on exclusionary practices and do rely on 'package-deal' preconceptions. Also, both worlds seem to equate appearance with character: the "me" Yasmine claims to be, disappears behind the veil. Regarding the preconceptions attached to wearing the veil it is not even clearly discernible which preconception emanates from which social world. Both sides are likely to assume that a veiled girl does not have a boyfriend, that a veiled girl does not drink, that a veiled girl is conservative and behaves accordingly. They react accordingly with either appreciation or rejection. It is the judgement and stereotyping of both sides and the resulting tensions that does not leave enough "space to be" for Yasmine. And she is not the only one who decries the judgemental nature of Egyptian society.

1.4 An uneasy place in-between – The tensions of being a woman right now right here

Rana explains her uneasy location between the Americanised society and the Egyptian conservative world drastically:

> "*We are* completely westernised and I mean when I say we, me and my friends, because this is something collective ... *we are* completely westernised. Completely Americanised, living in a *very* oriental society. So it's very difficult there is always this dichotomy. There's always this duality if you want. We have to live with it, we can't ...there is nothing that we can do about it. And the only place were we can ... where it's not as *divided* as it is, is AUC. It's the only place were you can be as westernised as you are and it's fine."

For those women like Rana who identify strongly with AUC and the norms of the Americanised society, entering AUC is a relief: a different dress code, different rules of conduct, different interaction between boys and girls. For Lamis, this surrounding gives the chance of "being who you grew to be". AUC is praised for being accepting and tolerant.

We have to question though, whether this apparent tolerance within AUC is not mainly experienced as such by those who affiliate with the Americanised society. Do veiled girls who care about chastity feel accepted to the same degree? Of course they object the neglect of the PDA – but do they feel accepted as individuals with their conservative attire and attitudes? Originally, I

was very critical of AUC for a variety of reasons. I assumed that AUC would project supposedly superior Western values and norms (on consumption, sexuality, mixed-gender interaction, individualism) without much attention to and tolerance towards the norms of Egyptian society at large. This way, I assumed, the students of AUC are not only pressured to follow these ideals at university. They also run into veritable value and identity conflicts. Eventually, the opposite seems to be true: AUC is one of the few spaces in Egypt, where tolerance towards different orientations is *practised*. Diversity is not only *evident* at AUC, but *cherished.* Students have the chance to learn how to deal with and appreciate difference. Many of my interviewees spoke of this learning effect. Even Yasmine, who does not pay much attention to her university experience throughout the interview, tells me she benefited from AUC's tolerant atmosphere. AUC appears as a pocket of diversity in Egypt, which in an important sense differs from the other institutions and locations of Yasmine's Americanised society. When Yasmine graduates from high school and enters university, she encounters a whole new diversity, resulting from the sheer amount of students. AUC by far exceeds the size of an Egyptian private high schools. Another factor is the specific culture mix at AUC (see I 3.3). Yasmine meets a lot of new people, has a lot of fun, and – as a veiled girl – is no longer sticking out.

This is the most remarkable aspect, clearly distinguishing AUC from the other venues and institutions of the Americanised society: as a veiled girl, Yasmine faces considerable rejection in her school and peer group, but not so at AUC. Here she does no longer stick out as a veiled girl. Yet, AUC is only an enclave in the largely conservative Egyptian society. The young women, therefore, cannot comfortably retreat into the tolerant AUC or the homogeneous Americanised society. Rana recognizes this with astonishing clarity:

> "And there *are* a lot of people who are like me. But you have to deal with the rest of the society ... at lots of points in time you know. People who don't share the same ...way of thinking ... and these are the majority in the country, so you're gonna have to deal with them at one point or the other ... so it's good if you can. And I can. I mean I can deal with people who think in a way that is completely different than me and I would be fine with that. I would know what to avoid, what not to, so it's fine."

Rana's strategy to deal with the "contradictory" society (Yasmine) is one of superficial adaptation and tacit subversion. This mirrors her behaviour vis-a-vis her parents: she draws a clear line between things that her parents may know and those things that have to remain a secret. Even though 'double life' might be too stark a term, Rana clearly conceals some part of her life from her parents and the wider society. This does not seem to cause her much trouble, as Rana does not

consider herself part of the Egyptian conservative world at all. She dissociates herself from it, and relegates it to the status of an unwanted external condition of her life.

Other than Rana, Yasmine does not dissociate herself completely from the Egyptian conservative society. Even though she speaks of herself and her society as Americanised, she also affiliates herself with the "upper middle class" *at large*. She notices that – just as the Egyptian society in general – this layer of society is contradictory. She selects people's stance on drinking alcohol as an example: "Even", she says, within her upper middle class society you would find at the same time "people that are *against* drinking, who would never hang out with someone who drinks and the people that drink all the time.. The effect is that whatever behaviour Yasmine chooses, she will face criticism from within "her" upper middle class. It is this criticism and judgement that makes Yasmine suffer.

In their position as *young* women, those who consider themselves Americanised might face an additional difficulty. As Rana points out, it is not only "the society" whom she has "to deal with" but also her parents, who do not share "the same way of thinking". Thus, even though she might completely identify with the norms of the Americanised society, she still has to play by the parents' rules as long as she is not (notice the irony!) *married* and thus lives with her parents:

> "The problem is *with* being Westernised or being Americanised or being whatever the hell they call it. Y*ou think* that by being 21 or by being 18 or whatever, you're more of an independent individual who makes his or her own decisions. But then, *here* you still live with your parents so you have your parents' rules. so you have both ... you have this dichotomy where you have to abide by your parents rules however you have to make up rules for your own for yourself because you are an *adult*. So what you end up doing is that your parents don't know most of it."

Rana's statement indicates that the clash of the two worlds is mediated by the family. Also, it shows, how the affiliation with the Americanised society incites aspirations (for independence) that cannot be matched by the Egyptian reality. Yasmine experiences the conflict between the Americanised society and her family, her mother and her brother to be more precise), much stronger than any of the other young women.[234] In her life story the clash of the two worlds takes a form that can is nothing less than psychologically violent. In Yasmine's self-presentation, it is the mother's hostility and suspicion towards the Americanised society, to its members and ideas, that

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[234] Prior to my interviews, however, I have met at least one other woman with comparably strong conflicts of a comparable structure. Above that, I have encountered several young Egyptian woman, whose studies abroad put them into similar conflicts with parental expectations. These friends have greatly enhanced both my curiosity and my understanding for the lives of Egyptian young women.

renders it impossible for Yasmine to be who she wants to be, or to find "any identity" which she can be comfortable with. It might be her disability to disconnect herself completely from the Egyptian conservative society which prevents Yasmine from adopting the strategy of living (more or less) a double-life like Rana.

The confrontation of the conservative mother with the Americanised daughter can be seen as symptomatic to the wider Egyptian society. As mentioned above, Egypt shows a pervasive suspicion and hostility towards the United States and the West, out of fear of cultural domination and moral corruption. Ironically, the privatisation of the educational system in the wake of the *infitah*, invites foreign influence in such a societally salient field like education. At the same time, Egyptians are *individually* seeking the best education and thus chances for upward mobility for their children (de Koning 2009: 51). This way, society foregoes an important chance to shape their culture, maintain their influence on the young generations, and risks to produce a generational split. This irony – on the one hand despising and fearing the foreign cultural domination and on the other hand opening the educational system up to (and by means of its neglect leaving it prey) to foreign influence – is reflected in Yasmine's story. The mother herself decides to send her children to the American school. The father's success along the lines of the American dream provides the money for doing so. At the same time, the mother remains highly suspicious of the norms which (supposedly) are taught her daughter in this school. Also the mother's fear that Yasmine might get corrupted by the American way of thinking is reflective of a societal trend: as mentioned above, discourses on youth reveal a pervasive fear of moral corruption.

Above that, living a life at 'intersections', navigating conflicting trends seems to be a a general characteristic of womanhood, not unique to Yasmine's life story. MacLeod calls this the general "tensions and contradictions of women's position" (MacLeod 1992: xvi). According to Griffin, it is a general feature also of the construction of girlhood:

> "Contemporary girlhood appears to be an impossible project, caught between competing forces, in a permanent state of dissatisfaction or desire, surrounded by idealized representations of itself, and simultaneously invisible" (Griffin 2004: 42).

In Egypt, each individual woman has to navigate between the "competing forces" of globalisation and the Islamic revival. According to Bayat another third force needs to be added: in contemporary Egypt, urbanization also leaves an imprint, or to put it differently: demands a response from Egyptians (Bayat 2010: 41). While urbanisation is an omnipresent phenomenon, MacLeod outlines the impact of Cairo specific: "The Cairo I eventually came to know is an intense, exciting, and

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insistent presence, contributing to the actions of the women I was to meet in multiple ways" (MacLeod 1992: xv). Also the confusing variety of identity offers that young women face, is conditioned by the workings of the mega-city Cairo. Yet, the way geographical factors play out on individual lives is mediated by the dimension of class and its spatial manifestations, as we will see in the next chapter.

2 The Egyptian Third World[235] – leaving the upper class bubble and entering the Arab street

It was Yasmine's metaphor of the "bubble" that reminded me of the stark socio-economic divisions in Egypt's society. When Yasmine used the spatial metaphor "bubble", I could instantly make sense of that trope: it could be interpreted as another illustration of the restrictions she as a girl needy of protection, is continuously facing in the Egyptian conservative world (see IV 1.3). Yet, the more familiar I became with Yasmine's life story, the less plausible it seemed to take the "bubble" as a symbol for this kind of confinement. While Samira's image of "being kept in a drawer" works well, after all what I have learned from and with Egyptian young women, the "bubble" simply does not seem to fit the limiting of female expression and movement. I therefore looked closer at the concrete associations of the "bubble" in Yasmine's story. In order to make sense of it, I asked what was outside the bubble. This made a different, an "Egyptian Third World" visible: the 'normal' Egyptian world, that we find outside of Yasmine's *upper (middle) class* bubble. The expression fits well, as it is the poor, lower class Egypt that we find, once we extend our gaze beyond the confinements of the bubble (IV 2.1). The reader should be warned: the reconstruction of the bubble's meaning is not easy. Yasmine's narration does not provide us with much help for understanding the "bubble". Myself, I could not have understood what bubble Yasmine lives in, if it was not for my experience with Egyptian society and it's "class based"[236] nature. While the exact shape of the other 'subaltern' world is not in the focus of my research (see I), the interrelation of the upper and lower classes is where it impacts on Yasmine's life story. I will thus complement the reconstruction of Yasmine's bubble with essential information on[237] Egypt's divided society (IV 2.2)

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[235] I was very proud about finding this witty headline. Labelling the outside of the bubble "Third World" fitted perfectly as it hinted both at the existence of two other worlds, the Americanised society and the Egyptian conservative world, and at the same time inumbrated the socio-economic status, i.e. the poverty and exclusion, of its inhabitants. You might imagine how disappointed I was to find de Koning was playing with this term in her conclusion (de Koning 2009: 164), drawing on a well-known essay by Koptiuch about "Third Worlding at Home" (Koptiuch 2001).

[236] My interview partner Mariam uses this expression. As seemingly all of my interview partners, she is well aware of her class position. An awareness that I encountered frequently among Egyptians of the middle and upper class.

[237] Bayat (2007) and Ibrahim (2002d), two sociologists with long-standing experience in Egypt, provided much of my scientific background to class-relations and comportment in Egypt. Unfortunately, neither of them deems it necessary to define their understanding of "class" beforehand. Although the way the term is used in other publications of relevance to my study such as Abaza (2006), Barsoum (2004), de Koning (2009) indicate that there is much less confusion about the meaning of "class" than the German and French discussion around the concepts "class" (*Klasse*), "social estate/estate of the realm" (*Stand*), "social stratum" (*Schicht*) and "milieu" (*Milieu*) makes it seem. (Or is there so much confusion that most scholars shy away from addressing it in a footnote?).
I tried to understand the conceptual character of class-distinctions in Egypt by reconstructing how I usually judge people's class origin in everyday interaction in Egypt: a very easy (and for daily life often sufficient) clue is a person's living district. Above that, the university and school someone attends is a promising guide to a person's wealth. Wealth is one of the primary criteria. In case of youths, occupation does not seem to tell much, in case of

and its spatial manifestations (IV 2.3). These spatial dimensions of Egypt's class system are blatant in Cairo and visible in Yasmine's story at prominent sequences as well as in other interviews. The other interviews also contribute to understanding how the upper class sees the lower classes and the other way round (IV 2.4). This mutual suspicion puts the middle classes in an uneasy position in-between,

> "The presumed decadence of both the poor and the rich brackets middle class identity. The poor are suspect because of their 'failure' to adjust their lives to modern institutions, the wealthy for a rootless cosmopolitanism at the opposite end of the socio-economic spectrum. Thus failure to 'get with the program' is marked by presumed backwardness in the case of the poor, and for the rich, by inauthenticity tainted with foreignness. To be middle class is to refuse both extremes." (Eickelman 2003: 108)

Again, it is women who have to bear many of the consequences: female behaviour and morals are an important marker of distinction in the middle class' attempt to balance between the extremes. Religion, "foreign relations," and language are other fields in which distinction is constructed. Once understood as such, we can look at certain aspects of Yasmine's narration from a new perspective. Women's effort to navigate these contradictions, is visible in Yasmine's interview as well (IV 2.5). I had based my study on the assumption that there is a difference between classes (therefore the focus on one class). Nonetheless, the *major* role that class-structure and class-struggle acquired for the interpretation of Yasmine's interview took me by surprise. Thus, I had to spiral back into literature on class. I did not add this 'new' knowledge to the state of research (I 3). This would have concealed an important development in the research process. Instead, the additional context knowledge is woven into the following chapter.

2.1 The "bubble" in Yasmine's story: being confined to an upper class world

In the narration, the mentioning of the "bubble" is preceded by a great fight between Yasmine and her mother. Yasmine has been suffering from restrictions imposed by her family, she is tortured by a feeling of self-loathing, incessantly asking herself why she was so different. When she comes to accept the thoughts of taking off the veil, she presents her parents again with her intention to do so. Again her mother reacts negatively, beating her daughter and staging a dramatic scene. Thus

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elder adults, education does not provide a good indicator either. For young people, the status of the parents, of course, offered a direct lead, as social status is inherited. Based on my personal experience, I would say that only after studying Egypt's system of stratification one can tell what Egyptians 'mean' when they speak about class. For capturing the lived reality of my subjects and friends in Egypt, and for mirroring the trajectory of a person (and her family) within class structures, Bourdieu's distinction of capital forms (symbolic versus material; cultural, social and economic) proved most helpful (Bourdieu 1983). As for the terminology, however, I will follow Bayat and Ibrahim in this study.

intimidated, Yasmine reacts with an emotional outbreak first,

> "And then, from that day *on* I was like 'You know what? I'm gonna do, if I'm going to live like that for the rest of my life not being able to make my own decisions, then – to hell with this! I'm living a double-life'. At this point, I was not allowed to like ride taxis or buses or metros or anything. I was from car to car I was very, just sheltered and just living in this *bubble* of (...)."

Those who expect Yasmine to elaborate on the nature of this bubble, however, will be disappointed, as she continues with a reflection on her parents' possible reasons for keeping her in that bubble:

> "(…) I *was* very just sheltered and just living in this *bubble* of you're owning a lo..., *I don't* know what my parents faced, to make them think that protecting your kids is *through that*. and I blame this, *now* I actually *can* blame this on the regime on the fact that they were *not taught* how to ... – *what parenting* is or what you know giving like what bringing up your children to *be* good you can sort of control the way that they think, but none in the obvious way of, you don't want them to think like that so you beat them. And also my dad like *completely* out of my life *completely ...* but anyway."

What irritated me most about this paragraph was the continuation of "this *bubble* of" – it did not meet any of my expectations, this "bubble *of*" *what*? Of "you're owning a lo...". There is no way of finishing this sentence without a high degree of speculation. Yet, after a lot more text work, and research on the Egyptian society, *one* plausible explanations seems to be that Yasmine wanted to say "you're owning a lot" – whether a lot of things, a lot in general, or a lot of something specific we can not know. If it is indeed her intention to speak of the negative consequences of her family's wealth, a reason for interrupting this thought (and talk) could be that this would seem ungrateful. Being thankless, not recognising how blessed one is, is not only an undesirable attitude in many interpretations of Islam, it could also be associated with an elitist attitude, and it is reprimanded by Yasmine's mother:

> "She thinks that I um make my problems really huge and I'm like a drama queen and she says that I exaggerate everything and I put myself in this bubble or box[238] or all these like illusions and ... all these problems that she always mentions really worse examples like 'Look, your cousin she doesn't even have the have half the stuff that you have and you're so privileged' and always, all this stuff. I *hate* this argument more than anything in the world. I hate it now whenever people are like 'Egypt is so much better than Palestine and Sudan and Libya'. It's like 'That doesn't mean I don't deserve the best'. B*ut* at *that t*ime I thought that she could be right and I was actually trying to get out of the bubble by not thinking about it but that wasn't *right.* I mean I think that it could have been dealt with of in a better way."

As I said, *why* Yasmine interrupts herself after "*you're owning a lo...*" remains speculation. The

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[238] In this extract from the second interview, bubble and box seem to indicate the same. In the first interview they figured as separate metaphors. Even if the bubble can be used flexibly to symbolise also the gender-specific form of confinement, it *also* refers to another type of restriction, the class-specific one.

assumption, however, that she refers to her family's material wealth fits well with an interpretation of "the bubble" that I developed based on further hints in the text and additional context knowledge. A second encounter with Yasmine gave me the opportunity to ask what was behind blaming the regime for the parents' idea "that protecting your kids: is *through that*" (i.e. keeping them in a bubble)

> "They were always because ... society ... 'If you go home after midnight all of the your neighbourhood is gonna be talking. Why you shouldn't ... all your neighbourhood will be talking about you. If you go down to protest, you're gonna get detained and tortured and stuff. And your family will be *hurt* and you'll be watched.' Everything you do is *watched*. People never mind their own business and this is sort of reflective of the regime, how no one minds their own business, everyone is watched and then everyone watches each other. So this it's very *hostile.* So that's why they're like 'Oh you should be careful of that'. I *think* that's what I meant ((laughs))"

This statement differs markedly from Yasmine's earlier reflections on the issue. She had spoken about the parents beating her, not knowing how to be good parents because they were not taught how to be. Also, it does not fit the connection of the "bubble" to being moved from car to car. How would that be related to surveillance of the regime? How is the surveillance of the people related to the regime? Because the *entire* society is infiltrated by the spies and informants of Amn al Dawla[239]? Or does the people's behaviour simply mirror that of the regime? The latter is an interesting hypothesis that might function well as an explanation for Yasmine. From the point of narrative identity construction, though, it seems that the argument has a specific communicative purpose: it helps to substantiate the revolution as a turning point – for both the public and her private life. If the regime is responsible for her parent's failures as parents, then also them being 'bad' parents can be declared a matter of the past along with the fall of the regime. Given that we have seen several instances of Yasmine's efforts to link the revolution to her private lot (III 1.5), it is reasonable to assume that we have another example here.

If we return to the immediate textual surrounding of *the bubble*, we learn what Yasmine did when 'living a double-life' – which logically is the primary contrast to *the bubble*:

> "So, *at that point* I was just like 'You know what? That's it. 'So I started skipping school for like a month and the remaining two months. So I was really working on my acting skills then because I had to work very hard, I would leave the bus, I would be in the bus and the bus is responsible to put you *in* the school. So I would convince the bus driver to let me out before the school and then I take the metro and I will be like *so* excited cause the metro like you *meet people* like my passion is *people* and meeting different people and just talking with them and just kind of of I'm a *very* community-loving person (...)"

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[239] Amn al Dawla is not only by name but also by purpose Mubarak's equivalent to the GDR's state security.

"(...) So I would convince him and then go oh and then at *that ti*me I had like my first *serious* boyfriend, he was a 21 I was eighteen. He was 21 years old he was American and he was Jewish. So I was like 'What would be the worst thing that I can do ... okay – this is it. So I'm gonna do it.' And then at this point I started I tried *smoking* and I tried *drinking* and I tried *smoking* pot and I tried *kissing* and ... further things ((laughs)) so at this point I was just like that's it. And these two months passed and I would have to go back to school by the end of the day just in time. So it was very *well-timed,* very well-planned two months plan."[240]

So the interesting world outside the bubble is the Cairo *Metro*? Apparently, the metro, Cairo's subway, is exciting to Yasmine because "you *meet people*", "different people" that you can talk to, and who apparently even constitute some kind of "community". Everyone familiar with the Cairene metro knows that it is frequented not by the well-to-do but mostly by the lower echelons of the middle class and in parts by lower class Egyptians. At peak times, it gets quite crowded. Women can use the two women-only carts in the middle of each train. The "different people" that Yasmine "meets" and "talks" to in the Metro are from that group of people which Yasmine would otherwise encounter at the most as her parents' servants, or as workers on a building site somewhere in Six of October City. The description of the double-life reminds in various aspects of Yasmine's childhood. In the swearword scene and the local surroundings, Yasmine depicts herself as a sociable, talkative girl. So is it possible, that – once Yasmine steps out of *the bubble* – she feels free to show the same sociability towards strangers that used to upset her parents when she was a child? Leaving the bubble is thus a move of defying gender norms. Above that, it leads Yasmine to what could be called the "empirical Egyptian street",[241] which is "a vibrant space for encounter, conversation, interaction, for the formation of a public" (Borneman 2010: 11).

Another aspect of her double-life is having an American Jewish boyfriend, drinking and smoking – basically she shows the same behaviour that other interviewees have already described as the norm in the Americanised society, refuting the role of the Egyptian Good Girl. But with only 18 years of age, Yasmine was considerably younger then the interviewees are now. Also, the choice of boyfriend might be called 'extreme', even if measured by the Americanised society's standards. By having a boyfriend who is *American* and *Jewish*, Yasmine does not only forego the rules for an Egyptian Good Girl. She reaches right at the core of the Egyptian conservative world, and provokes their feelings of xenophobia and anti-Semitism. By now, it should be clear that the confinement to

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[240] When I asked Yasmine to tell me of her double-life, the only additional details on what she gave, were: "and then I walk for like five minutes to get to the metro station and then go ... across Cairo to *downtown ...* where my boyfriend lived and we just like you know hang out and like go to Khan el Khalili and stuff like that so it was a lot of fun ((laughs))."

[241] This empirical experience of the street has hardly been considered by scholars. Instead, an ungrounded concept of the "Arab Street" prevails, providing an object for projection of Western fears and hopes on Arab civil society and politics (Borneman 2010: 11).

the bubble is also related to the confinement of women in general (addressed at length in the previous chapter). Yet, Yasmine's enthusiasm about the metro and the connection of the bubble to means of transportation suggests that upper middle class practices of seclusion might enhance our understanding of Yasmine's experience and struggle. We will thus turn our attention to the socio-economic conditions that constitute a force in Yasmine's life.

2.2 Inequality and class-structure in Egypt: a divided society

Egypt must be understood as a highly divided society.[242] In the last decades, the "social cleavage" has taken dimensions which were "unseen in Egypt's post-colonial history" (Bayat 2007: 165). According to World Bank data from 2005 18,46 % of the Egyptian population live of less than two US-Dollars a day (in purchasing power parity), if the national poverty line is taken as measure, in 2008, 22% of Egyptians were poor (World Bank 2011). Interestingly, shortly after the fall of Mubarak, when Egyptian media and society jumped on the topic of the stolen Egyptian wealth, numbers of 40% were in the air. Also, two of my interviewees stated that *40% of Egyptians were living under the poverty line*, in order to emphasise how exceptional the wealth of AUCians is. In her critique of usual poverty measures, Samira Sabry doubts the governmental data for Cairo. According to them, only 4, 6% of the population live in poverty. Her own calculations reveal that "poverty in the city [is] around 50 per cent". Her estimate seems much more realistic, considering that "close to half of the population [are] living in informal settlements in Cairo governorate" (Sabry 2009: 35). The large poor sector is matched by a tiny elite of 1% according to Schneider and Silverman (2006: 223). Egypt shows strong social inequality.[243] Egypt's class system bears the marks of previous epochs: the colonial past, the socialist policies of Nasser,[244] and the era of economic opening and liberalisation under Sadat, the *infitah*, left their mark on Egyptian society (Schneider and Silverman 2006: 223; Ibrahim 2002b). Under Mubarak, the authoritarian clientelist politics and rampant corruption that had their origins in the Sadat years only deepened. Since the socialist

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[242] For general information on Egypt, its history and society, see Schneider and Silverman (2006), Ibrahim's collection of essays, provides insightful analyses of Islamic Activism in Egypt, the socio-economic development, class structure and civil society Ibrahim (2002d). Abdelrahman (2004) focuses on civil society in specific. Furthermore, the works of Galal Amin, among them "Whatever happened to the Egyptians?" (Amin 2000), the sequel "Whatever else happened to the Egyptians?" (Amin and Wilmsen 2004) and the most recent publication "Egypt in the era of Hosni Mubarak" (Amin 2011), are highly popular in Egypt, and transmit an understanding of not only Egyptian recent history, but also Egyptian mentality and self-understanding. The American University's "Cairo Papers in Social Science" cover a large variety of topics in depth.

[243] Its Gini coefficient according to CIA Factbook 2001 is at 34,4 percent, i.e. rank 90 (136=best) (https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/eg.html); and HDI in 2010 0.620, i.e. rank 101 (http: //hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/EGY.html).

[244] Among them the state's expropriation of land-owners and abolition of titles.

period, the sectors of agriculture and government administration are the largest employers, only about one third of Egyptian employees work in the private economy, the informal sector is massive (Schneider and Silverman 2006: 223–225). The *infitah* happened in a skewed way (Ibrahim 2002c). Liberalisation and privatisation remained incomplete, as in other countries that underwent structural adjustment programmes. Neither did it lead to the creation of a large, private sector nor did it benefit the people. Today, unemployment numbers are high, in particular youth unemployment is peaking, half of the graduates annually cannot find a job, and a quarter of all unemployed has a university degree (Schneider and Silverman 2006: 223–225). The unemployment rate of university graduates has even increased in the previous years (Herrera 2010: 128; Herrera and Bayat 2010a: 357). Jobs in government are not well-paid, but they are secure positions (Barsoum 2004: 40), and provide 'fringe benefits' (Barsoum 2004: 80) and connections[245]. A government job becomes a resource that offers access to further jobs for family members, medical insurance and so on (Barsoum 2004: 77–87). Taking bribes, skimming government funds or having a second (and third) better paid job helps people survive (Schneider and Silverman 2006: 223). Government run factories, administration, and companies remain the most important employers. Thus, owning a business is according to Schneider and Singerman "not the most important source of income or class position in Egyptian society. Much more important is a person's power, or access to government-controlled resources" (Schneider and Singerman 223). While this might be true for the majority of Egyptians, there is a small group of people whose wealth and class status are generated by their private businesses. These are the "nouveaux riches" who profited from the *infitah* and the continuation of similar economic, financial, trade policies under his successor Mubarak (Armbrust 2003). They benefited from the unequal access to business opportunities, economic and political power that were the results (or the purpose?) of the economic transformations. Yet, even for private businesses access to the government is essential, as the whole surrounding is government-controlled (banks, transports, industrial supply producers), and the government issues licenses for import/export, construction etc. (Schneider and Silverman 2006: 223–225). Business and politics have become enmeshed to the extent that often enough economic and political power go hand in hand, especially on the highest levels of government and business.

Usually, descriptions of Egypt's class system distinguish between the lower class, the middle and the upper class. Yet, it is rarely made transparent what common features of a class these

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[245] The Egyptian term for the kind of social capital that secures access to jobs and other resources is *wasta*.

conceptual distinctions are based on (see page 234, fn 234). Above that, the sociological concepts of European origin might not be easily adapted to a different society. Thus we need to pay attention that our concepts indeed capture adequately the reality as experienced by the subjects. Armbrust highlights the problems the researcher encounters when defining "middle class" in Egypt:

> "The problem is that what constitutes 'middle class' in Egypt is difficult to pin down. It does not correlate with a material standard of living. There are, however, certain attitudes and expectations commonly associated with a middle class ideal. Egyptians who have at least a high school education, and therefore basic literacy and familiarity with how modern institutions work, generally consider themselves middle class. Egyptians who think of themselves as middle class expect a lifestyle free from manual labor. In the media, the ideal of middle class is often associated with modernity, bureaucracy, and office work, and it is portrayed as having a degree of familiarity with an ideology of national identity that seeks to balance local Egyptian and classical Islamic cultural referents. Certainly middle class Egyptians, as previously mentioned, consume objects and images that they do not them-selves produce in the first instance" (Armbrust 2003: 107).

Armbrust's reference to education substantiates my earlier assumption that Egypt's complex class-structure can best be analysed by reference to Bourdieu's capital forms (Bourdieu 1983). Ibrahim, a renown Egyptian sociologists, introduces a sub-segmentation of the middle class. He distinguishes lower middle, middle middle and upper middle class, the latter "shades off into the upper class" (Schneider and Silverman 2006: 228):

> "These people are much more secure than the rest of the middle class. They are established professionals, government bureaucrats, army officers, the prosperous owners of private businesses. Upper-middle class Egyptians live in air-conditioned modern apartment houses, or in large apartments in old-fashioned middle class districts. Their homes may be lavishly furnished with inherited antiques or modern European furniture. They can afford servants and even perhaps to send their children to a university abroad" (Schneider and Silverman 2006: 228).

De Koning registers a deepening and solidification of these divides within the Egyptian middle class

> "Cairo's professional middle class has always been characterized by socioeconomic and cultural heterogeneity. However, in Egypt's new liberal age, this middle class has become more and more segmented, and socioeconomic and cultural hierarchies and lines of segregation are increasingly tangible and rigid" (de Koning 2009: 163).

The 'real' upper class, often called the "elite", comprises a small circle of people, most of the members being linked to each other by business or politics or family ties. Given the shape and functioning of Egypt's (late) political system under Mubarak, it is entirely plausible to assume that the large majority of the upper class maintains ties to the regime and is involved in its dealings. While the nouveaux riches of the *infitah* obtain their position largely due to material wealth and

income, they do often neither stem from distinguished families nor do they have good education or prestigious jobs. Like Yasmine's father, many are self-made business men who profited from the economic transformations. The "old rich" on the other hand, are those which formed the upper classes already in colonial times. According to Silverman they live quite separated, and share an affinity to France, its culture and language (Schneider and Silverman 2006: 228). They can be considered a 'cultured colonial elite' that survived Nasser's attempts at redistribution. (Yet, there are of course also those families, who did not materially survive the redistribution, meaning that they look back at a long family tradition, still dispose of considerable prestige, have much cultural and social capital but lack the economic capital to maintain this status, reproduce its cultural and social capital in the next generations.)

The nouveaux riches are an interesting phenomenon insofar as most epochs seem to see the emergence of such a group. There have always been profiteers at specific economic junctures. The *infitah* profiteers are more or less successors, or 'a new edition' of the war profiteers that Armbrust describes (Armbrust 2003). Obviously who is considered and labelled as the "newly" rich is contingent of its specific time and location. The difference between the newly rich and the old rich at a certain juncture lies in the habitus and the family ties, respectively the (lack of) social, cultural and symbolic capital.

What renown Egyptian sociologist Ibrahim observed in the late 1970s, as an outcome of – among other things – the open door policy, holds true also today:

"Relations between education, occupation, and income are no longer congruous. Many of the poor are 'new poor' – often with high school or university degrees. Many of the rich are 'nouveau riche', often engaged in trade, smuggling, illegal currency exchange, land speculation, or other parasitic and dubious activities. Some of the nouveau riche are skilled, self-employed manual workers, such as plumbers, mechanics, electricians, and masons" (Ibrahim 2002a: 105).

The old rich who are victims of (relative and absolute) downward social mobility, or are challenged to defend their class position in society, are endowed with much more cultural capital, maybe also social capital. Their share in economic capital, however, does often not match that of the nouveaux riches. If it is impossible for the old rich to turn their cultural and social capital into economic capital, they will not be able to preserve the cultural capital (i.e. education) for the future generations. This is particularly true in the current Egyptian society, where the quality of public education is in decline and the parallel private educational sector on the rise, where obtaining a degree without private lessons is hardly possible (Barsoum 2004: 34–40).

The possibility to buy[246] good education offers to the nouveaux riches an opportunity to catch up on cultural and social capital. By pampering their children with private lessons and sending them to international kindergardens, schools and universities (Barsoum 2004: 35; 38), nouveaux riches parents can substantiate their upper (middle) class position. Distinguished institutions of education provide high quality education and what is more, endow their students with some of their high prestige. The role of the education system can hardly be underestimated here. School and university education was expanded under Nasser, resulting in an increase in social mobility and changing norms for women (Barsoum 2004: 23–33; Awad 2011). With the *infitah*, under Sadat, the decline of the public education system began, and the establishment of private institutions was permitted. Similar processes could be observed in other sectors of public provision:

> "Another side of Cairo's equity problem is the emergence in the 1970s of parallel service institutions with vast differences in quality. thus, alongside public schools and hospitals, for example, private alternatives have been established: the new services cater to the top five percent of Cairo's population; the former cater to the other 95 percent" (Ibrahim 2002a: 106).

According to de Koning the decline of public institutions alongside the emergence of private alternatives created that gap between higher and lower middle class (de Koning 2009: 159). Public institutions degraded and whoever could afford the private equivalent (or the private segment in the public institutions e.g. universities (Barsoum 2004: 40)) would opt for them, while everyone else was left with the (useless) public pendant. Only 'customers' of the private educational institutions acquire what de Koning terms "cosmopolitan capital" (she contrasts this with "'local qualifications", which do not help secure a job) (de Koning 2009: 160). This cosmopolitan capital, or the habitus of the "cultivated classes" (Barsoum 2004: 41) as Barsoum calls it, has become increasingly indispensable for securing a good job in the private (international) sector. Thereby, the privatisation of the educational system (and other public services) has been decreasing the long-term social mobility noticeably. Since the 1990s even the migration to the Arab Gulf States – a different way of improving one's status – has become more difficult, while poverty remains high and unemployment numbers of university graduates peak.

The dire economic situation of the majority of Egyptians affects my interview partners only indirectly. As graduates from Egypt's most distinguished university they (if anyone) will not have much trouble to find an adequate job, in particular not those who also come from

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[246] Also in other contexts a lack of social capital can be outweighed by economic capital: if a graduate does not have the right connections to secure a job, she can still "pay her (...) way through", as corruption is pervasive in governmental institutions (Barsoum 2004: 87).

reputable upper(-middle) class families and thus depose of the necessary cultural and social capital, and the respective habitus (Barsoum 2004: 49–54). Besides that, as women, they do not have the responsibility of providing for the material wealth of their old or new family. But, the stark contrast to the despair of the masses, makes the privileges of AUC students stick out. When Eman speaks about the wealth of rich AUCians, she states: "I am not blaming them it's just that we have a country that is forty percent poor, forty percent under the poor line, under the poorness line of the United Nations. AUC is above the stars is not is not on the land." This blatant discrepancy might increase the lower classes' hostility towards AUC graduates and the Americanised society at large. Knowing about the socio-economic situation of Egypt and its class-structure, helps to sensitise for the attitudes of the 'other' Egyptian society. Furthermore, it is useful for interpreting the socio-economic location and trajectory of the interviewees' families. In regards to Yasmine's family, there is reason to assume that her family belongs to the nouveaux riches: as we learn in the prologue of her story (III 1.2), her father "comes from a poor background", he never went to university, but obtained some kind of diploma, which might be similar to vocational training. Then he lives the American Dream and becomes an apparently successful entrepreneur. As said before, Yasmine does not provide any details as to the type of business or the father's activities in Holland. His entire story seems to be merely a part of the family's repertoire of constitutive stories. Yet, we can now understand his ideal-type rise from rags to riches as the trajectory of a nouveau rich – with all that might come along with it. What falls to the eye, is the prominent location Yasmine assigns to the rags-to-riches story in her self-narration. One reason might be that the (therapist's) trope of "her father being out of her life" provides Yasmine with a frequently inferred explanation for the course of her life story. Another potential reason is linked to class: could being from the nouveaux riches represent an important factor in Yasmine's life? Is it the family's changing economic status and upwards movement in the class structure that form the frame of her life? This assumption is substantiated by the next segment of her life story, where Yasmine describes the various places she lived in (III 1.2). The residential area of Yasmine and her family changes as the father's career proceeds. Yasmine's story points to a phenomenon of contemporary Egyptian society and Cairo's urban development: the increasing spatial manifestation of social divisions, which perpetuates societal segregation. The places of Yasmine's story reflect the social division of space, in which the current "social cleavage unseen in Egypt's post-colonial history" find their "most glaring (...)" expression (Bayat 2007:

165).

2.3 The spatial manifestations of Egypt's societal divisions in Greater Cairo[247]

According to my own experience, class differences in Egypt are easily visible and Egyptians have a surprising awareness of their location in the class hierarchy (Schneider and Silverman 2006: 226). Drawing on a survey conducted in Cairo in the late 1980s Raymond confirms that Cairene are very well aware of their socio-economic position in Egyptian and Cairene society at large (Raymond 2000). The division lines in people's heads are matched by similarly clear distinctions drawn between different living areas in Cairo. Raymond (2000) speaks of "the social division of space" (Raymond 2000: 361): the differentiation between *raqi* (i.e. fashionable) districts such as Muhandisin and Zamalek and *sha'bi* (i.e. popular, of the people) quarters such as Shubra or the Islamic quarter are based on the degree of noise (of people, cars and donkeys), density (of people and buildings) and dirt or pollution (from waste, traffic, dust, sewage), and on the type of buildings that characterise the area and the shopping opportunities (Raymond 2000: 361). Schneider and Silverman note that different classes do not only *live* in distinct neighbourhoods under disparate living conditions, they also frequent separate venues in their free time (Schneider and Silverman 2006: 223–228). Raymond's classification distinguishes three separate social spaces: zone one are the lower classes and low middle classes, zone two the middle class, and zone three the upper classes (Raymond 2000: 361–364). From the specific quarters that he assigns to the different zones, I can conclude that his notion of middle class does not reflect the increasing divide *within* the middle class. Zone three consequently includes residential areas of the middle middle class (like Agouza), and the upper middle class (like Maadi and Zamalek), while it does not yet capture the recent exodus of the upper classes to desert developments (see below). The description by Schneider and Silverman offers a first impression of the different living realities (Schneider and Silverman 2006: 223-228): lower class Egyptians live in "squatter settlements", called *ashwa'iyyat*, on the fringes of the city or central slums like Bulaq (see Raymond 2000: 361-363). The men spend their (ample) free time in the traditional Egyptian street café called *akhwa baladi* (translates as "rural" or "popular" café). The middle class resides in more spacious neighbourhoods with paved

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[247] As I am familiar with Cairo, most of the information in this chapter draws also on my own experience. In order to substantiate this, I consulted various texts. Among them was the amazing publication "Cairo Cosmopolitan" (Singerman and Amar 2006b), Ibrahim's older "Sociological Profile" of Cairo (Ibrahim 2002a), various publications by Bayat and Denis (Bayat and Denis 1999), Bayat (2007), and two slightly outdated, but foundational texts by Raymond (2000) and Schneider and Silverman (2006). Even though my understanding derives from all of these publications, I try to reference individual authors as far as a possible. If the descriptions and classifications of two scholars differed, I relied on my field knowledge to 'settle' the dispute.

streets and prefer hangouts in the Downtown district. The elite on the other hand, lives in Downtown luxury apartments or enclaves, frequents clubs and hotels for leisure.

The observations of both Raymond and Schneider have been outdated by reality, though. Today, the social separation of space in Cairo, or to be more precise, the *spatial manifestation* of Egypt's social inequality, has acquired new dimensions. While the lower middle class and the poor where pushed to slums and illegitimate settlements on the fringes of the city, the *ashwa'iyyat*, "the rich began a historic exodus to opulent gated communities (...) whose mere names – Dream Land, Utopia, Beverly Hills – spoke of a new cultural anomaly" (Bayat 2007: 165). This exodus to the desert settlements allows the rich to conduct their "dreamlife" far away from the poverty, dirt and pollution of the mega-city Cairo. The earlier developments in the desert, like Six of October City were built to include industrial facilities and living areas for the less wealthy. They constituted an attempt to construct 'complete' cities, meant to dis-burden the capital (Meyer 2004: 139). In Six of October City this attempt failed. "So far the overwhelming majority of new residents [in Six of October City] come from Egypt's uppermost economic strata" (Cambanis 2010: 1). It has become "a posh new community on Cairo's outskirts" (Bayat 2007: 151). The new gated communities in contrast were from the start on constructed exclusively for the rich. The compounds are often of small size, consisting of several houses, grouped around pools under palm trees and guarded by security personal. If they are larger they include a golf course and other luxury amenities, such as lakes, water sport facilities and shopping malls (Denis 2006: 52–54). The website of Madinaty (My City), one of the most recent developments, gives an impression of the glamorous and peaceful life:

> "Madinaty will include not only villas and apartment buildings, but also vast green areas, golf courses, hospitals, business centers, hotels, educational institutions, sports and social clubs, household services, and entertainment facilities which meet the day-to-day needs of its inhabitants. The city will also have innovative and unique services on its fringes which will cater to the needs of nearby towns and even to the needs of the inhabitants of Greater Cairo. These services will include: water sports areas, shopping centers, and varied educational institutions. (...) Madinaty is a city built on 8 thousand feddans, designed to provide a modern life for 600,000 inhabitants in 120,000 housing units, acting as a modern extension to New Cairo" (Talaat Moustafa Group Holding 2009).

Given the equipment with all necessary facilities, the future elite can in theory spend all their life in these high-end settlements without ever being forced to confront themselves with the living reality of the rest of Egyptians. Already today, the upper class districts in Cairo and their "extensions into the desert" for many constitute *"the* city" (de Koning 2009: 162). For Mona Abaza,

this is the outcome of the "obsession of the rich of Cairo (...) to push away the unwanted poor as far as possible" (Abaza 2006: 256). For Bayat, this is the spatial manifestation of a dramatic trend, according to his observations it seems that in the 21st century Egypt was a nation split "into disparate cultural universes" (Bayat 2007: 165–166). Denis remarks that the development of "sprawling cities" (Denis 2006: 53) constitutes the Americanisation of urban development in Cairo (see also Bayat and Denis 1999). The earlier upper class districts, such as Zamalek and Heliopolis, were modelled on the architectural and spatial idea of European Cities, "[t]oday, a hybrid, Egyptianized version of the American dream predominates (...)" (Denis 2006: 54).

For de Koning the ongoing and increasing division of Cairo is more a continuation of previous developments: "[T]he inherently separationist structure of the colonial city and its asymmetrical power relations are being continuously reinvented, albeit in a new, internal colonialist form" (King 2004: 142 quoted in de Koning 2009: 163). Seen from this perspective, the satellite cities in the desert, the gated communities in particular, can be read as the extension of the spatial segregation that was already produced by colonial building. At the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, Zamalek and Garden City, located in the centre of Cairo, provided "choice spots for residents of the upper class – foreign and native" (Ibrahim 2002: 101). Of the natives, only those with affiliations to the outside world, *barra,* and to its colonial representatives inside Egypt resided in the distinguished quarters. In the first half of the 20th century, Heliopolis and Ma'adi were developed, both designed in a (supposedly) European fashion, as "leafy getaway", to the East and South in some distance from the city centre (Cambanis 2010: 2). After the construction in the late 19th and early 20th century, "[t]he more ambitious and successful among its population moved out to the newer quarters" (Ibrahim 2002: 95). At this time, the "new middle class" had already obtained the status of "partners and not intruders on the foreign residents" (Ibrahim 2002: 96). In the 70s, Muhandisin became a "high-rise boom area" (Ibrahim 2002: 102) and the place to be for the upper class. Today, the new developments in the desert have taken up these functions. As indicated before, other than in the older desert developments, the new gated communities, which have sprung up since the late 90s in large numbers, and "New Cairo", designed to be a middle-to-high-income residential community, complete the segregation of classes.

In another reading, put forward by Ibrahim, the links to *barra* acquire more relevance. Ibrahim reads the division of space as the spatial manifestation of two conflicting trends which we have referred to previously (I 3): the assertion of tradition and the forces of globalisation.[248] He is not

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[248] Note that this distinction rests on the equation of globalisation with Westernisation!

concerned with showing the existence of two trends. Without explicitly addressing these, he assumes a dialectic between "traditional culture" and "Western culture". These two orientations also plays out in spatial terms, for example in the heart of Cairo, the old Islamic district:

> "Its [the enclave of Islamic Cairo's] 'traditional culture' gallantly negotiates its survival with other modern and quasi-modern cultures of the megalopolis. One saving grace in this dialectic is that the megalopolis itself represents a bigger enclave in an otherwise semi-traditional society. Thus, the Islamic enclave within greater Cairo draws some of its strength from the larger society outside Cairo. (...) This injection [of non-select migrants] has kept the terms of cultural exchange somewhat balanced within Cairo. (...) Even some of the select migrants (...) have shown an aversion to modern metropolitan culture, if it means as it often does, 'Western culture'" (Ibrahim 2002a: 104).

Another example, which shows even better how he conceptualises the confrontation of Western influence and traditional Islamic culture, is that he contrasts the numeric growth in nightclubs (300 in the 1970s) with that of mosques at the same period (400 new mosques) (Ibrahim 2002a: 104).

Ibrahim seems to recognise a potential for spatial confrontation in the tensions of (invented) tradition and (a certain version of) modernity. As Abaza shows, also the division of social space between rich and poor has significant potential for conflict: luxury projects (such as malls, hotels, apartments for the well-to-do) are "ruthlessly expanded" in areas with insufficient infrastructure. Water and energy consumption for the new developments functions to the detriment of traditional, popular quarters (Abaza 2006: 254). Even the architect of the American University's splendid desert campus is critical of the developments: "'These settlements represent the greed of the rich,' said Abdelhalim Ibrahim Abdelhalim, an architect known for incorporating historic Islamic aesthetics into his contemporary public buildings and parks. Mr. Abdelhalim designed the American University of Cairo's new eastern campus, but he no longer works on elite housing projects" (Cambanis 2010: 1).

It is remarkable that of all people the architect of the new AUC campus would speak out against elite settlements. The new campus is located about 30 kilometres from the city centre in the desert settlement "New Cairo". The size and splendour of the "expansive campus, which cost $400 million and spreads over 260 acres" (Sharp 2009) is impressive to many people, both Egyptians and foreigners, who enter the campus for the first time. "Widely considered one of the best universities in the Middle East, the campus's architecture – inspired by Arab-Islamic motifs and replete with vaulted spaces, water features and palm trees – fits into its surrounds (...)" (Sharp 2009).

The AUC's move to the desert was not uncontested. When I ask Reem about her first day at AUC,

she points out some of the drawbacks of being located in the desert:

> "I remember applying and and paying tuition and stuff. And in the *old* campus – I stayed two years in the old campus before the new campus. It was, for me, I really can't recall any single detail but the old campus was like part of ... part of Egypt. Here it's very, it's more safe. Because but it's more secluded so you don't see how people *live* in a sense. So this is one of the major cons you see here. Back in the old campus you used to see the average and the poor Egyptian living around you and you don't feel as if you're in a bubble. The new campus makes you feel as if you're in a bubble, it's the "geopolitics" of the campus if you think of it that way. So for me to see other people living in extreme poverty around me that made me more *realistic* ...rather than *many* of the students here who have been secluded all their lives in elitist schools and then going to university which is separate from the Egyptian society so ... you need to *see* things. I am not saying that here we don't do things for the Egyptian society, *no* because *this campus* and this student body does – I am not sure statistically wise – but I'm sure that it *does amazing t*hings *for* the Egyptian society. For orphans for street children for single mums for *everything*. I was the head of the development programme here in [a student project] a year ago and we we did amazing things. I as a head we used to visit orphans ...I took my members and the whole team to orphanages to visits to hospitals we even painted the walls of a public school here we used to do so many things it was just we were just 13, 14 and it was amazing. It was amazing. Everyone does amazing things here so ... it's not only the realistic aspect and stuff. it's life ... that's the price we pay if we moved out. And we did move out. So that's it. "

The university's move to the desert fits seamlessly into the upper class' attempt to complete the spatial segregation of the Egyptian society. "The the new campus makes you feel as if you're in a bubble", so you don't "see the average and the poor Egyptian living around you" any longer. And as Reem points out, for many Egyptian youth, coming to the AUC bubble is just the continuation of their life un-touched by the woes of Egyptian society: *"Many* of the students here have been secluded all their lives in elitist schools [even kindergardens] and then going to university which is separate from the Egyptian society". Note that Reem does not make a distinction between boys and girls here. The "protection" from lower classes affects Egyptian youth of both genders. The women-typical confinement intersects with the class-confinement of the elite. Yet, already on my interview partners from the upper classes, these – partially overlapping – restrictions play out in *various different* ways.

But why are we addressing matters of space at such length if de-territorialisation (I 3.1) seemed to be the only academic game in the (global) town? This appearance is deceptive. The lived experience of an individual person is still to a high degree conditioned by the spatial and geographical surroundings. Even though imagination, has come to play an ever larger role in our daily lives and is today a driving source for our actions (Appadurai 1996: 53–54). Images circulate and change shape across various spaces; the communities we belong to are not confined within the borders of our nation-state. Very often, they are not even defined by physical contact or

geographic proximity at all. The imaginaries (as shared aspirations) have become increasingly de-territorialized in the sense that they are not tied to one specific territory any longer (Appadurai 1996: 53–54). And yet, the case of migration – according to Appadurai one of the two forces that distinguish current globalisation from its predecessors (Appadurai 1996: 3–6) – shows that even imagination that transcends the borders of the nation-state still has a *territorial component*. Not necessarily is the imaginary tied to a certain place: it could be the aspiration to go to Los Angeles, but then it is the aspiration to go to the *image* of Los Angeles, it could be the aspiration to go to a Western country or the aspiration to become rich and successful or live in freedom and peace. But, the *action* triggered by the imagination *can not* be space-less. In the end, every concrete act needs to be grounded in a *location, in space*. And in the end, also the imagination is 'caught' by "territory". Migrants for example herald an (imagined) homeland.

Thus, the relation of imagination and geographical space in a person's life is a dialectical one, that cannot easily be conceptualised. Eventually, this tension of being physically 'grounded' on the one hand, and flying to unknown places and heights in one's mind, on the other, constitutes one of the principal conditions of contemporary human life in times of globalisation and modernity. This very tension is also a major theme in Yasmine's life story. Her story also reveals, how even the imagination of the most distant places is tied to local circumstances. Take Yasmine's imaginary America: it's defined by the "American culture of partying", and "the idea of freedom", " the MTV, the ideal music video freedom". Originally, I was quite surprised or even disappointed to find her idea of America to be so shallow and stereotypical. This feeling soon gave way to one of slight bemusement. I considered it quite ironic that the interviewee who associates herself the strongest with America has the least complex notion of the concept. Only much later – when I thought about the relation of space and imagination, I realised that the associations tied to America might not be as shallow and silly as I thought. They could have their origin in the very real local circumstances that Yasmine finds herself in: America is then an anti-Egypt, a counter-project and -locus of the imagination. Freedom is not necessarily an empty buzzword but a value highly desired by those who are living without it. In the Egyptian local context, people are oppressed politically, economically, culturally and socially. Yasmine feels restricted, regulated and oppressed in a variety of ways. No wonder that every imagined destination of hers will be first of all marked by *freedom*. But reflecting on the role of space and territoriality in Yasmine's narrative identity construction, is also interesting in other regards: if we look to Yasmine under a 'spatial' perspective, we can understand how the spatial realities (which are in themselves the expression of class relations and

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divisions, of socio-economic conditions) do not only affect her life but can even become constitutive for her experience. It is the division of Cairo's social space, into two largely disconnected spheres, that makes it possible for Yasmine's parents to keep her in a "bubble" that separates her from the life of lower classes. The upper classes' efforts to separate themselves from the lower classes, find expression in the development of separate settlements, malls and universities and moreover, in their *means of transportation*. Public transports in Cairo are overcrowded, but (for European standards more or less) functional. Nonetheless, Egyptians from the upper classes would never use them. This is an important distinction to lower middle and middle middle class, who are often enough dependent on public transports. The upper middle class therefore is entirely dependent on their private cars, and usually their drivers, to move from one place to the other. Many would usually prefer to steer their vehicles themselves. Yet, the fact that most of them *have* a driver at their disposal, implies that members of the upper classes *can* always ask the driver to drop them off and pick them up directly in front of a venue. Therefore, there is no need to have any contact with the spatial or social surroundings of the respective building. Avoiding 'street' contact this way, seems desirable especially to Egyptian women (and their parents or male family members). This might be what Yasmine means when she says: "At this point I was not allowed to ride taxis or buses or metros or anything. I was from car to car I *was* very just sheltered and living in this *bubble."*

Also, the part of her narration termed "setting the scene" can be seen from such a "spatial" perspective: as the father's business takes off, the wealth of his family increases and so does eventually their social status. The family moves from the poor area of Haram to a "bigger flat" in the popular part of the hip district Muhandisin, to a villa with swimming pool in the desert settlement of 6th of October City. Both the living area as the size and type of the premises, signal a movement up the social ladder. It mirrors the father's economic success and his family's accession to the upper classes of Egyptian society. It might be no coincidence that for Yasmine the last station of the family, the rich settlement Six of October where the rich of Egypt realize their seclusion from the poor Egypt, becomes associated with isolation. Before we re-consider her mother's behaviour at the background of class distinction and class behaviour, we need to take a closer look at the inter-class relations in Egypt. To take the new AUC campus as a case in point: if even the architect of the elite facilities sees them as the representation of greed – what are poor Egyptians supposed to make of the sight of such gigantic and glamorous buildings? These *confrontation*s in space, as much as the otherwise complete *separation* of the segments of

Egyptian society, most surely contribute to existing hostility and alienation between the poor and the rich. We will address the mutual stereotypes shortly.

2.4 Mutual suspicion and mutual fear: the hostile relation of rich and poor in Egypt

It is clearly impossible to draw here a holistic picture of the images and stereotypes that the lower and upper classes of Cairo hedge vis-a-vis each other. Nonetheless, some interesting insights, mostly derived from the interviews help to render more complete the picture of Yasmine's living conditions. A decisive tendency in Egypt's public discourse on the lower classes[249] is the criminalisation of poverty (Singerman and Amar 2006a; Harders 1999). Haders shows how the reshaping of society-state relation under Sadat and Mubarak has increased the importance of informal rights and rendered poverty illegal (Harders 1999).[250] An example for criminalisation of poverty is the portrayal of informal settlements, the *ashwa'iyyat*,[251] as a hotbed of Islamism:

> "(...) gerät Armut als solche in den Ruch der Illegalität. Arme werden häufig zu 'Staatsfeinden', etwa wenn der offizielle Diskurs informelle Siedlungen als 'Brutstätte des Islamismus' bezeichnet. Damit geht eine Abwertung des politischen Handelns der Armen einher" (Harders 1999: 270).

Harders' analysis is in tune with the observations other scholars made in Egypt: "The *ashwa'iyyat* are perceived as 'abnormal' places where, in modern conventional wisdom, the 'non-modern' and thus 'non-urban' people (...) live" (Bayat and Denis 1999: 15). Clashes between security forces and Islamists in the 1990s, "have reinforced the image of the *ashwa'iyyat* as the Hobbesian locus of lawlessness, extremism, crime, and poverty" (Bayat and Denis 1999: 15). In this discourse, the contrast of chaos and order seems to be a major motive. This also fits with a global tendency in security and development discourses to merge the issues of (under)development and security, thereby securitising poverty. Bayat and Denis point out that this securitisation of *ashwa'iyyat* misses an important point: it is "Cairo's youth (...) and the newly married couples – the future of Cairo" (Bayat and Denis 1999: 16) that reside in these areas. The rich's fear of the poor also surfaces in Reem's evaluation of the new AUC Campus: "Here [on the new campus] it's very, it's more safe. Because but it's more secluded so you don't see how people *live* in a sense." Obviously the reasoning "because but it's more secluded so you don't see how people *live* in a sense" might

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[249] It is important to note, that in this discourse the cleavage runs through the middle class. Those people residing in Zones 1 and 2, including the *ashwa'iyyat*, are considered "lower class", but this group includes the lower and maybe even the middle echelons of the middle class.

[250] As support for her thesis she points for example to the state's frequent demonstration of power through raids among street vendors.

[251] Ibrahim defines the *ashwa'iyyat* as "shantytowns on the rural-urban fringes of major cities" (Ibrahim 1994: 168).

not be a very convincing argument, yet the mental link of poverty and danger might already be well established. Those of my interviewees who engage in voluntary work where often warned against the dangers of entering poor areas. This is not the place to judge the sensibility of these warnings, it suffices to note that fear is one of the feelings the rich have towards Egyptian lower classes – the spatial divisions and the near complete segregation perpetuate this feeling.

The other way round, contempt and suspicion, rather than fear, seem to dominate the perception. Once more Eman's account provides a brilliant opportunity to understand the image of the upper class in Egyptian society. Eman is not from the lower classes, she locates herself as middle middle class. Nonetheless, when she speaks about the upper class at AUC, she touches upon many suspicions and attitudes brought up in the public discourse. Even if the distance between someone from the lowest class and an upper class AUCians might be bigger, the direction of the gaze remains the same: upwards.

"That may be a bit discriminative but with all the respect to ... all those who are in AUC with their money? They are not Egyptians from our perspective. Not Egyptians not in *nationality* but in the culture the life they never tasted what it means not to be able to eat what they want to eat, in a day. They never tasted what it means that maybe, the salary of your father is not exactly enough to complete the expenses of this month. They don't know what ... even being near to poor is. Near not to poor, near to what's above the luxury. I am not blaming them it's just that we have a country that is forty percent poor, forty percent under the poor line, under the poorness line of the United Nations. AUC is above the stars is not on the land it's not even near. At all. At all. ...so, I dont know, if you really wanna have a realistic one [interview partner or image?] of the majority, AUC should not be considered. It's not *in* the curve, it's far above. There is this kind of a *class* that exists in Cairo more than anywhere else ...that have their children in American diplomas, a child in an American diploma school is paid per semester 23 thousand. That's not *really* at *all* what's like a normal governmental schools. My parents used to pay to me 50 *pounds* per term. So this difference I am talking about about the normal and about *those*. Yea, there are people who are very well and very educated and everything but ... this category exists in Cairo and a lot because many of them, their parents live abroad, they have ambassadors, they are a different category. It exists and everything but I don't think it's really a representation of the majority. They could be there but it shouldn't be the [topic of the present] study because there are too many others who need to speak and they never have the opportunity. I really doubt if I'm not in here in in AUC with a scholarship that I would have been interviewed for anything ... either this time or the one I was in America. If I was .... simply a *very* same, a very successful hard working girl but in a governmental college and in a governmental university in engineering – and engineering isn't easy to get. But yet, I doubt that those people are being reached. And by the way, my parents could have had more money, while I'm in a normal university like governmental university, actually not all of them are poor at all just the majority. But some of them have their parents living in the Gulf and they have very good money, even more than my own parents, but yet, not as as enough money to get them into AUC...for sure because AUC for a student over .... all their studies, half of an Egyptian million. And that's a hell of a number. So... not all of them are poor, you would find different social classes inside the uni Egyptian

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normal universities but at least they would be much more representative of the different social classes."

Eman first defines the upper class in relation to Egyptian society as a whole, supporting my argument that it was at parts the *contrast* to the rest of the society that makes their wealth so scandalous. The rich AUCians' wealth even makes them *less Egyptian* in Eman's eyes, as they have never tasted the bitterness of poverty, nor even of need. The upper class is not only rich or wealthy, but it lives in incredible luxury, pure abundance, according to Eman. Not only their wealth, but also their relations to America give them the chance (if not the legitimacy) to disregard the usual rules of conduct. When I ask her whether transgression of the norms of chastity happens, she responds:

> "(...) It depends on the social class, I would say I am a middle class (...) but AUC is the top is the top of all classes ... I would say that this [is] existent in the very top and the very bottom – *very* bottom like the *really really* poor because when you are poor you can do anything to get food. Basically. So I would say that this exists there, I am not sure I didn't really touch it myself. But for the very rich, yeah we do have a lot of people in AUC who are "kissing for us is *weird*. It's not only weird it's *bad.* It's bad as *hell.* Just greeting and kissing is *no way!* No way I would do it no way many who are veiled or not veiled would do it but in AUC you see this a *lot.* Really *a lot.* So... that's the normal by all means and most of those who does this in AUC are very rich very. Like very millionaires or billionaires. *very* rich. So at the very upper level, yes it happens, and it happens a *lot.* And it's basically because the religiousness level is far much less cause it's basically a religious thing. It's *also* a tradition thing but you know, when you have the money you do whatever you want. So no one would stop you and tell you what the hell are you doing? Especially we were in a regime that if you crossed the road when you should not, and when you drive on a speed that you should not, if you have sometimes hit someone by the car and you are able to escape with it because you do have the money, so why wouldn't you do something that's outside of the traditions? In the street or whatever. But still people are, even those who are really rich, would not walk in a normal street at least among normal people and do something that is very odd because not that safe for them. But they wouldn't, but they don't have to, why would they be in a normal street? Why not to be in a City Stars mall[252] or something that is poooooh wow wow wow?! Cause there's a lot of people like them ... or at least them some of them so ... it would not be that bad to do something and Especially inside AUC they do a lot of things that they do want. *Though* we do have rule of conduct in here and we do have the public display of affection ... *rule.* It's a very very famous thing,we do even have abbreviation for it PDA – public display of affection. Oh yes! ((laughs)) but it's not really applied because we are in the *American* University and Americans can do what *they want!* They don't have to go strict by our rules (.) and still its in Egyptian land. So we do have a lot of rules. They are not exactly writing it in the constitution as if 'Don't kiss' and 'Don't hug' as religion says but they say that you should be abiding by the norms and traditions of the country. So it mainly depends on if the security member who is staying and seeing for example two persons kissing, if he's stopping them, is basically dependent if I'm as a person who's seeing this going to a security member and saying 'This one is doing this thing, so stop him' but it [she refers to pre-marital sexual intercourse here]

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[252] The City Stars Mall is a "giant shopping mall" (Abaza 2006: 4), opened in Nasr City district of Cairo in 2005 (Abaza 2006: 30). It is part of a gigantic complex, which houses shopping and dining facilities, movie theatres, hotels, office and apartment buildings. As Abaza describes, it exerts considerable attraction on Cairene upper classes.

happens, it happens a lot. But for those people they don't care if she's not a virgin they don't care. If she is even having a baby or they are getting married I once heard a story of this sort they don't care. There are of course these surgeries to get your virginity back and such a things maybe they do it I don't know. But a lot of rules for them are like very lenient it's cool everything is cool for them ... somehow. "

Eman's description makes it seem as if the very rich AUCians showed a blunt disregard for AUC's rules that regulate the public display of affection in accordance with Egyptian norms. They kiss and hug and transgress norms without much further ado. And indeed, that is exactly the behaviour that my Americanised interview partners ascribe to themselves, and defend against Egyptian Boys. From Eman's perspective, the reason for such a behaviour seems evident: they do not care because the are lacking the religion. And they do not have to fear consequences, because they are rich and American. Interesting enough, Eman finds the explanation for this attitude (or fact?) of "money can buy you everything" in the corrupt regime. If you can get away with a serious crime "because you do have the money", why shouldn't you be able to generally buy your rights and cover up your guilt with money? But Eman's claim might even go further: she might not necessarily speak of *bribing* an officer, but rather of getting away because of merely *having the status* of being rich. The difference is essential. And the second interpretation is supported by the statement that "Americans can do what they want." It is mere *status* that issues a carte blanche in Egypt. Yet, even they have limits, they "would not walk in a normal street at least among normal people and do something that is very odd because not that safe for them." Eman seems convinced that outside of the "bubble" the lifestyle of the Americanised society is not tolerated. In the Egyptian street, which lies outside of Yasmine's bubble, which encompasses the metro lines, and the sha'abi surroundings of the old campus in Downtown, the rules of the Egyptian conservative world apply. There, Rana has to put on a jacket, veiled girls are expected not to hug boys, and kissing is considered scandalous. At the same time, Eman seems to suggest that the existence of this world with conservative rules, could hardly bother the upper class, since they have rarely a reason to move outside of their bubble anyway: "Why would they be in a normal street?", if they can always go to a mall like City Stars, or other fancy places like the upscale coffee shops? (see de Koning 2009). This description of upper class trajectories in Cairo daily life is in line not only with my interpretation of Yasmine's bubble, but also the observations of many scholars (de Koning 2009; Abaza 2006; Bayat 2010, Bayat 2007; Herrera 2010; Ismail 2008).

While Eman intended to share with me *her* view on "very upper level" AUCians, Mariam made an effort to portray *her home community*'s take on AUC. As I have cited the respective passages at

length before, I will only repeat the most important parts here:

> "We hear about AUC that they are very liberal and (...) that those are the people who are rich, (...) those who have no ethics. (...) We have this kind of stereotypes (...) people inside AUC are usually looked at as traitors by the society, yet they are highly valued. ...you know this hypocrisy. Same thing is that here's suspense about them, they are these American judes [sic] they love America they have some American agendas. Many people think that yes they are traitors or maybe because they are the sons and the daughters of rich people. So they don't feel like they you know, we are a poor society, we have like 40 percent of those population under poverty line. So there's this class gap that makes people think that those people they are living in their their ivory towers. They don't feel like the suffering that we are living in. So we have all those negative feelings, developing later to be like: you're traitors. By some people we have to fight this stereotype a lot. In many ways."

Many of the images and the arguments behind them liken those of Eman: we have once more the contrast to 40 % of the population living in poverty, the detachment from the everyday realities in Egypt. Yet, the image Mariam portrays is not driven by contempt for the amoral behaviour but primarily by the suspicion of the upper classes' relations to *barra.* AUCians (which seems to equal 'very rich people') appear as traitors, as people who are implementing a foreign agenda (which in the eyes of most Egyptians can only be to the detriment of Egyptian society and sovereignty). But they are also traitors in the sense that they do not feel and suffer with the Egyptian people. In Egypt, the criminal offence of treason often enough seems to be committed when people do not show the sufficient amount of nationalism. These suspicions towards the upper class and their affiliations with America can be attributed to the fear of neo-colonialism, a response to the cultural hegemony of the US, and the country's economic dependence on outside donors. Yet, the roots of this suspicion and hostility reach deeper: since colonial times, material wealth and economic success was dependent on good relations to the colonizers. In every epoch a large share of the respective nouveaux riches became rich because they could exploit their relations to the prime exploiters of the country, be they the colonizers or the government of Sadat or the entourage of Mubarak. In a system where economic and political power are entwined, where corruption is rampant, wealth provokes suspicion. Thus, the whole country's attitude towards foreign culture can be termed at best ambivalent. Cairo's middle class finds itself at the heart of this ambivalence.

2.5 The middle class navigating its way through the extremes

The images of the upper class – unethical and detached – conjured up by my interviewees, are not unknown to scholarship on Egyptian society. Neither is the rich classes' contempt and fear of the poor, who are constructed as some uncivilised, unrefined counter-image to the modern elite. The middle class is often attributed a particularly uncomfortable position in between: according to MacLeod, in their class-distinction behaviour, members of the Egyptian middle class walk a tight rope between "lower class traditional standards" and "upper class Westernised standards" (Macleod 1992: xv). They try to avoid association with the elite's loose life, detached from Egyptian values and morals but at the same time want to distinguish themselves from the lower classes which are seen as unable to modernize. As Eickelman puts it:

> "The presumed decadence[253] of both the poor and the rich brackets middle class identity. The poor are suspect because of their 'failure' to adjust their lives to modern institutions, the wealthy for a rootless cosmopolitanism at the opposite end of the socio-economic spectrum. Thus failure to 'get with the program' is marked by presumed backwardness in the case of the poor, and for the rich, by inauthenticity tainted with foreignness. To be middle class is to refuse both extremes" (Eickelman 2003: 108).

In order to signal their middle position between these extreme poles, the Cairene upper class has developed "conspicuously cosmopolitan lifestyles" which remain "within the bounds of upper-middle class (religious) propriety" (de Koning 2009: 47).[254] Members of the middle class "are portrayed as mediators between local and global, representatives of a modern, cosmopolitan savvy Egypt that is able to face the unruly waters of the global era" (de Koning 2009: 47). They are assigned the ungrateful responsibility to project a certain image of Egypt. Once more, women are invested with a central role for maintaining this image. The roots for their outstanding position in this discourse reach at least as far back as the 19th century: the early struggles for an "indigenous definition of modernity (...) took shape around the woman question" (Booth 2001: xxviii). The fear that "a superficial sort of Westernisation [w]as ruining Egyptian womanhood – and threatening the

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[253] In Eman's earlier statement, both the upper classes and the very low classes were accused of immoral sexual behaviour. Yet, the reasons implied were different: while the upper class simply did not care, the lower class was motivated by need, because "when you are poor you can do anything to get food".

[254] There is a remarkable tension between these analyses of the middle class as a "sandwich class" and the earlier noted observation that the split within the middle class would get solidified and result in an increasing gap between the lower middle class and the upper middle class, which "shades off into the upper class". The lower middle class has education, history, university degrees but the wrong dialect and the wrong type of nail polish (Barsoum 2004), they lack the cosmopolitan capital. After all I know this lack of cosmopolitan capital is conspicuous, thus there is no need to dissociate oneself from the 'foreign' upper class. Rather the lower middle class attempts to imitate the upper class and display "conspicuously cosmopolitan" lifestyles to distinguish themselves from the lower class.

identity and survival of the nation"(Booth 2001: xxviii) has a long-standing tradition in Egypt and makes itself felt in the struggles for class positions today.

It is a a complex combination of class, cultural, economic, social, educational aspects that comes to define divisions and establish hierarchies in Egypt's class system. It is from the complex mix that the practices of class distinction are drawn from. Major societal fields, in which class distinctions are established and reproduced are religion, the role and behaviour of women and the family, outside relations and language, education and the relation to the lower class. We have covered all of these to a certain extent in previous chapters. Of course, also the distinction through space as described above, is another means of presenting and perpetuating class positions. The socio-economic position translates into a physical position/location with significant symbolic and communicative power. The usage of transports across the city, the choice of a segregated neighbourhood in the centre or a gated community in the desert, the building of an exile campus in the desert, all actions contribute to the segregation of classes, and thereby reproduce class distinctions. Similarly, the struggles on cultural and social battlefields are always also struggles for hierarchies (de Koning 2009: 46). According to Willems, enacting (*inszenieren*) the own class-belonging acquires its meaning at the backdrop of class concurrence (Willems 2009a: 105). If we read the behaviour of Yasmine's mum at the backdrop of culture and identity battles, and the continuous struggle to maintain a privileged position and reproduce distinction in the class structure, the references to "culture" and "tradition" in her reasoning appear much more understandable. Also other elements of her behaviour acquire more plausibility (or: a different plausibility) if we interpret them as the reproduction of class distinctions. If de Konings observation of the s*olidification* of the "socioeconomic and cultural hierarchies and lines of segregation" is viable, then the need for hedging the own class position has even increased in comparison to earlier times (de Koning 2009: 163). In the case of Yasmine's family, the accession to the upper classes was achieved only very recently. The fear of downward mobility might thus be particularly strong, with the memory of living under poor conditions still being fresh, and the fragility of the current position tangible. Also, we need to take into consideration that the nouveaux riches are the least regarded among the upper classes, because their cultural and social capital does not match their economic status. It is possible that Yasmine's mother was eager to avoid the association with the nouveaux riches, the frequent reference to culture and tradition could be understood as an attempt to dissociate herself from the un-cultured, rootless nouveau riches. The

rejection of anything Americanised might then not only reflect the common fear that her daughter might get corrupted, but more or in addition, the fear that *the people* could think, Yasmine and her family were striving to meet "Westernised standards" and guilty of "rootless cosmopolitanism". Also the mother's conservative turn fits a class-based interpretation: the neo-conservative reaffirmation of a supposed Egyptian traditional gender and family order (including the Egyptian Good Girl ideal) supports well the claim to authenticity, which immunises against the reproach of upper class foreignness. Also Bayat points to the specific relation between revivalism of Islam, class position and gender in Egypt (2007). The Cairene middle class has to muddle through various conflicts just as much as the young women of the Americanised society do (IV 1.4). In order not to be mistaken for a member of the immoral upper class, the middle class members have to prove their affiliation with Egyptian culture, their rootedness in the country's traditions, and their loyalty to the homeland. Unsurprisingly, it is once more the women who bear the brunt of this task (de Koning 2009). In Yasmine's self-narration the swearword scene reveals how central the young girl's behaviour in the streets is: for a woman it is unethical to speak to people on the streets, contact with the 'low' people of the Arab Street needs to be avoided at any cost. It is maybe not the fear about the young girls well-being that drives her parents, but fear of her reputation as well as the family's standing that motivates their harsh reactions.

Bayat argues that upholding the moral integrity of the family is most challenging for *upper middle* class women, who due to their wealth and the according lifestyle are exposed to all kinds of temptations (Bayat 2007: 147-160). As depicted previously, the double standards even in the upper classes condone male transgressions, not female ones, although their exposure to a sinful lifestyle is the same. At this specific juncture of class and gender, the frequently observed turn to the public piety movement can for upper middle class women represent a way to evade the upper class stigma of impropriety. It is also a means to regret previous "sins" and to arm oneself against future temptations of the high class life (Bayat 2007: 158). Bayat proposes a second explanation for women's turn to religion, based on the concept of distinct capital forms: the women's public status (as of symbolic capital, i.e. importance, visibility) did not match their economic capital, respectively their class position in society. Yet, in a society that is obsessed with social status, this was a serious strain on the women's self-perception, thus they would become religious activists to enhance their social standing, do "something useful", and make a difference to society. This also corresponds to the position of religious authorities as portrayed by Singerman: in Islam, women are supposed to have a social role, as every Muslim is obliged to care for the community of Muslims (1998: 159).

Bayat (Bayat 2007: 161) makes another interesting observation: the exclusion of affluent women from adequate (i.e. status-adequate) positions in the job market, had affected older generations as much as the newer ones. The women of the "old rich", however, responded in a different way to close this gap: charity was their way into the public sphere. Volunteer work for them constituted a means of contributing to the national project and society's advancement. For the women of the nouveaux riches (risen to this status in the 1980s and 1990s) a different way became characteristic. Bayat's portrait of their values, identity and trajectories, however, is excoriating: the women of the nouveaux riches had no interest in charity work or in contributing to national development, "[t]hey were imbued with the general ethics of their class – hoarding wealth, pretending the games of high culture, disdaining civic responsibility, valuing education so far as it brought status, or going after Western passports" (Bayat 2007: 161). To Bayat, this attitude is the "embodiment" of the post-*infitah* period, its values, and ideas of "possessive individualism". If they were nationalist, it was some sort of narrow-minded reduced nationalism, and they were not induced to help the poor for the sake of helping. If they did so (esp. after turning religious) it was purely for their own salvation (Bayat 2007: 159–161).

Many of the young women I spoke to, on the other hand, said they were engaged in some kind of charitable activity or voluntary work. Charity *can* represent another aspect of class distinction: it is the middle class person helping a lower class person to be elevated from an "authentic, yet essentially backward state" (de Koning 2009: 47). Or to put it in different terms "es wird die Fähigkeit zu interessenlosem Handeln denen gegenüber demonstriert, die dazu nicht fähig sind" (Rehbein 2011: 182). In that sense, the essence of charity is to show altruistic, charitable behaviour towards those who are not capable of such an altruistic behaviour themselves. Charity is often portrayed as an obligation, clearly distinguishing those who are capable of helping those who cannot help themselves, thereby reproducing a position of (moral) superiority.

Another frequently inferred dimension of class distinction are the relations to the outside, *barra*, and related, the commandment of a foreign language. De Koning alleges Egyptians a generally shared "desire for First World affluence, sophistication, and membership" (de Koning 2009: 163). This desire is closely tied to colonialism and post-colonial constellations. Barsoum "ascribes the elevated status of what is Western to years of Turkish and British rule of Egypt where those with the 'white' physical traits constituted an elite aristocracy" (Barsoum 2004: 52). De Koning argues that the reference to *barra* is a marker which today separates the upper middle class from its

lower echelons (de Koning 2009) (sometimes also the nouveaux riches).[255] Even in post-colonial Egypt, anything related to *barra* still signals power and sophistication. Often, modernising and westernising are even understood as one and the same (Barsoum 2004: 52). Thus, to be endued with "cosmopolitan capital" (knowing foreigners, having ties abroad, being familiar and at ease with cosmopolitan lifestyles, revealing the corresponding habitus) provides an important foundation for class distinctions and can be necessary for access to certain jobs[256] (de Koning 2009: 159; Barsoum 2004: 49–55). Ironically, the *local* practice of distinction uses the relation to *barra* as reference point.

Yet, the effect of "cosmopolitan capital" is by no means unidimensional. We have at various points already encountered the marked de-legitimising force of affiliation with anything "foreign", in particular the USA. De Koning neglects how much the reference to *barra* can also provide the grounds for stigmatisation, result in the exclusion from the discourse, or provoke denial of the legitimacy of a claim. Another interesting aspect, which I can not elaborate on here, is the recent diversification of reference points for *barra* in the wake of the Islamic revival and the economic accession of the emerging markets. Especially in the increasing Saudi-isation, practices of consumption and the strive for wealth have found a new frame. With the design of the new gated communities, also Cairene urban development, has been influenced by fashions from the Gulf (Denis 2006: 53).

A specific aspect of the more traditional relations to European and American *barra* is the commandment of foreign languages. At first, I was puzzled when one of my interviewees told me at a prominent location in the biographical narration that the AUC summer school for children had

> "Totally affected my life because – well, my school people say "illifint" not elephant. So yeah
> I'm very thankful that I actually did other stuff, so my language would help me a little (laughs)
> so that I don't have the same accent."

Why would someone speak about her accent if asked for her life story? When two interviews later another interviewee emphasised that she made an effort *not* to use an American accent when speaking, in order not to distance herself from her Egyptian culture, I was perplex. Until I learned that the Egyptian accent separates the cultivated classes from the rest of the society (Barsoum

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[255] The divide was produced by the economic development. Structural Adjustmet Programmes (SAP), essentially the liberalisation and reduction of state provision, benefited only a segment of the middle class, while it excluded the entire rest.

[256] As mentioned previously, whoever does not posses the adequate habitus, or symbolic capital, might still be able to "pay her/his way through" (Barsoum 2004: 82).

2004: 44–47).[257] The American accent reveals affiliation with the Americanised society, suggests higher class origin and often is the decisive criterion for success or failure in a job interview:

> "Because English is a capital available only to those who come from privileged classes, it is a direct proxy to social background. (...) Moreover, it is not only (...) fluency that matters, but fluency with the 'right' accent. (...) Having the right accent is a scarce commodity in Egypt. (...) it is contingent on receiving education at a private school" (Barsoum 2004: 45–46).

And even this is not sufficient, as only the more expensive private schools afford native speakers as teachers. While English skills are essential for access to good jobs, their "value (...) transcends [their] practical use." It is a form of symbolic capital and "carries with it profits of distinction (Bourdieu 1993)" (Barsoum 2004: 47). The young professionals from Cairo's upper middle class, and elite families, even converse in foreign languages or a mix of English and Arabic in their free time (Singerman 2006; de Koning 2009). They signal that a person is *raqi* (refined), from a distinguished family. Together with other cues to being *raqi* (such as outward appearance and posture), language skills and accent, are taken as direct "proxy for character assessment on various levels" (Joseph 2005). The matter of accent needs to be understood in the larger societal context of the uneasy relations between Egyptians and what they would perceive as **"the West"**. At this backdrop, it is interesting to note that in Yasmine's story, the first interaction with the parents revolves around swearwords spoken in *English*. While the explicit content of that scene is the conflict between girl and parents about ethical behaviour as a woman, the similarly pervasive conflict about the stance towards American culture, norms, dress and the cross-cutting issue of class distinction might already be implied.

Yet, in regards to language as symbolic capital, I made another remarkable observation. For my interview partners, it is no longer the reference to *foreign* languages exclusively which serves the distinction. Skills of Modern Standard Arabic come to fulfil this function: Rana portrays herself as entirely dissociated from the Egyptian conservative world, or even the entire Egyptian society. She substantiates that claim by casually remarking that she can hardly write Arabic. Her English and French would be much better. At the same time though, the whole language issue can be turned on its head: knowing Arabic shows affiliation with the own heritage, tradition and culture. This

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[257] The importance of speaking foreign languages is also expressed in a categorisation one of my group discussants employed. He said that the people in Tahrir, i.e. those who had "made the revolution", were "bilingual". As he used this expression casually in the middle of his argument, I had to ask him afterwards what he had meant by saying they were "bilingual". His response revealed that it was for him a term commonly employed to classify a person as someone from the upper classes, who might even attend a foreign university, and in any case: speaks a foreign language. The entire package of a "bilingual" reminds of the Bint el Nas (see V 1).

paradoxical move can be observed in Reem's account:

> "My Arabic is pretty good I can *write* in Arabic – most of the AUCians cannot express themselves in Arabic. I *can*. I was very good at Arabic as a child when we came back from [abroad] my mum was afraid that we won't be able to express ourselves in Arabic so we took Arabic lessons, private tutoring. So I can *write* well Arabic and I express myself *orally* and in written words in Arabic. So ... in between I enjoy the Arabic songs and classic stuff and movies."

Given that Reem refers to her ability of speaking Arabic in a sequence that emphasises her ties to Arab and Egyptian culture, the interpretation is plausible: the ability to speak and write Arabic is meant to similarly signal an affiliation with the own Arabic, Egyptian culture. In Reem's case, it does not come as a surprise that she uses "speaking Arabic" as an element in her narrative self-presentation and -construction. Throughout the interview, she is eager to portray herself as not elitist, not naïve, as a woman who is aware of the fallacies that mark the society she lives in. I found the same pattern of self-presentation in other interviews: several interviewees dissociate themselves intentionally, in a rather direct way from the detached elite. Lamis for example portrays herself as shocked by the open and crass elitism of some of her university colleagues. She emphasises repeatedly that she had since early childhood been exposed to the different social worlds within Egypt, and she had been taught to respect and appreciate every other person, irrespective of her social status. Above that, Lamis affirms repeatedly that she is aware of how lucky she is, to find herself in such an elevated socio-economic position and to be nonetheless exposed to diversity. She also portrays her awareness of the different codes of conducts and norms, shared by different layers of society. Lamis shows that she is not detached, not indecent, sensitive to the issues of the wider Egyptian society, respectful and *Egyptian*, as if she had been speaking directly to those whose hostile attitude towards AUCians I have depicted above. Also Yasmine, in the post-revolutionary era, constructs herself as anti-elitist. Like the surprising frequency of voluntary engagement, the anti-elitism might be an effect of the revolution. Also, it can be read as the middle class' attempt to distinguish itself from the upper class. Or we can see it as the attempt to conquer or rather *create* a new, a third space, that is neither identical with the Americanised society nor the Egyptian conservative world. Instead, the young women dissect the 'package deals' of monolithic ideal models and claim certain attributes for themselves, while rejecting others. Rana claims, "I think I'm a good girl. I think my friends are good girls. I don't know if society would agree, I don't care.(..)". Yasmine emphasises "I am not the veil". And Mariam states "You may be not veiled, maybe your dress-code is a little bit open, a little bit liberal, but

inside you're a good person".

V Conclusion

In the chapters on methodology, we developed a theoretical understanding of the principles and foundational assumptions of qualitative research (II 1). Afterwards, I tried to put these to work in a *concrete* research design (II 2). I reflected on the *field experience* and discussed the *subject-specific adjustment* of this research design in our concrete case, across the two hermeneutic fields (II 3). Then I looked at the specifics of the *case study* interview in detail (III). I reconstructed the *plot* of her life story (III 1.2), following the theatre metaphor, gaining a more thorough understanding of the case by looking at the *personae* of Yasmine's lifestory (III 1.3). I traced Yasmine's *identity concept*, which provides a beautiful example for the double hermeneutics in the social sciences (III 1.4). Then, I reconstructed another element of narrative identity: Yasmine's changing *agency* (III 1.5). Her agency changes with the revolution – but also with the progress of her life story. The reconstruction sheds some light on notions of empowerment and agency, and indicates where they might fail to capture the real complexities. Also the change in agency indicates how political factors, structure and individual life are connected: in Yasmine's case, politics provide important construction material for narrative identity. On the same level of meaning, we have reconstructed the two worlds that Yasmine lives in: the *Americanised society* (IV 1.1 – 1.2) and the *Egyptian conservative world* (IV 1.3). While the previous is associated with freedom for Yasmine (IV 1.1), the latter is linked to *confinements*, which are primary due to being a *woman* (IV 1.3.1 -1.3.3). Yet, the topics religion (IV 1.3.5), in particular *veiling* as a (partially) religious practice and symbol (IV 1.3.6), *surveillance* (IV 1.3.4) and *judgement* (IV 1.4) are essential to understand the meaning and interconnectedness of these two social worlds. In a further step of analysis, it becomes clear that another dimension of confinement exists, one which is represented in the image of a 'bubble' (IV 2.1). It is *class segregation* (IV 2.2.- 2.4) and *distinction* (IV 2.3 -2.5) that result in further confinements of women (and men!). Both categories: *gender* and *class* also play a major role in the narrations of my other interviewees. Also, the Americanised society and the Egyptian conservative world can be represented in more detail, and more dimensions, as we add the perspectives of other interviewees. The purpose of this conclusion is to tie together the most important points of these reconstructions, of Yasmine's case and the larger picture in a more coherent image. I attempt to connect the various strands of thought that have developed, point to more abstract concepts in an attempt to conceptualise the findings, pose questions for further research and evaluate the overall research project from a methodological and personal point of view.

1 The problems and conflicts of my interviewees

Yasmine's life story appears to be a continuous struggle to position herself between two contradictory social worlds. The norms, exigencies and identity offers of the Americanised society and the Egyptian conservative world are hard to reconcile. Moreover, the inhabitants of these worlds are even hostile towards each other. Yasmine's mother being the prime example in her life. Also the other interviewees portray a stark contradiction between these two worlds, and give examples of the mutual suspicion. Similar feelings of distrust and contempt also govern the relation between the two upper class worlds, on the one side, and what I termed the Egyptian *Third World* – the Egyptian lower classes – on the other side. My interviewees struggle with the Western influence, and its non-acceptance by others; they attempt to conceptualise and navigate contradictory norms, lifestyles and the respective demands; they "hate" the Egyptian society's "understanding" of women, and reject and renegotiate the limits for women, for upper class, for young people. It is the mix of contradictions, restrictions, and social control and judgement, that puts a heavy burden on my interview partners.

And indeed we can find indications of the alienation that Tawila et al. and Thornton (Tawila, Ibrahim and Wassef 2001: 216–217; Thornton 2001: 459) speak of. Some of my interview partners, in particular those which stem from an Upper Egyptian governorate, have grown apart from their friends and people back home. They indicate that they could not marry a man from there, and that they cannot agree on the girls' obsession with marriage and superficial values like beauty. There is some indication that they do not identify with their less educated mothers, who are house wives. But even if we find that higher education and AUC's more liberal norms have an alienating effect, we need to take a close look at the exact relations. *Whom* do the young women get in conflict with? *Whose* norms are at odds with those of well-educated youth? It must not necessarily be their families, or mothers, who represent different frames of reference. While it happens so in Yasmine's story, Samira is a case in point for the opposite constellation: Samira's mother fosters her daughter's ambitions, and supports her strive for a career. Similarly, Eman's mother wants her daughter to be academically successful. She even seems to ignore societal norms about marriage if they seem to hinder the academic career. In Eman's case the marriage norms of wider society wield significant power even though they are not reinforced by the mother. Societal standards have a direct influence on the daughter, the mother's mediation is not necessary. Also, the perspectives and values of the peer group can be in conflict with those 'modern' norms of

education, or with conservative norms. At the same time, we saw in several examples that like the youth, parents are not free from societal and peer pressure. In all these specific instances, judgement and surveillance play a central role.

Let us consider the latter for a second: the constant gaze of the people, the permeation of all spheres of life by societal control, and the relentless gossiping that fills the air are problems addressed by my interview partners, and also by many of my Egyptian friends. The restrictions on thinking, the lack of openness, the closed mindedness, and the importance of reputation reflect society's (aspired) homogeneity, inflexibility, and its inability to accept difference. It does not seem too far fetched to consider this suffocating atmosphere one of the societal preconditions of the revolution. Several of my interview partners are convinced of a rather straightforward (but unaccounted for) linkage of the authoritarian political system and the surveillance in society: no one minds their own business – everyone watches, talks and judges. A particularly interesting aspect of the societal judgement are the 'package deals'. They provide some kind of 'shortcut' to judging people. They can therefore be called a 'category' or 'concept' in the sense of cognitive psychology. Yet, other than in the psychological terms, each instance of the category the Egyptian Good Girl automatically has to have all defining attributes. Also, the existence of only one attribute indicates that all the other features necessarily pertain to the subject as well. Reciprocally, if one of the traits is missing, the others cannot be there at all. It is within this rationale that a woman's entire character is evaluated on the basis of single cues. These can often be even *outward* markers like dress, in specific the *hijab*. The latter indicates that the notion of the Egyptian Good Girl is entwined with religion and a certain understanding of femininity.

With the concept of the Egyptian Good Girl, we have encountered one example of a 'package deal'. The Egyptian Good Girl, is a coherent image of a woman, prescribing a certain attire and behaviour, and linking it directly to specific character traits. This function implied in the Egyptian Good Girl image becomes most clear, when Mariam rejects this direct connection: a woman who wears provocative clothes, can still be a good person. Now the question is, whether the formation of such a category to provide a shortcut to moral judgement is an exception. There seems to be at least one other example for such a concept: the *Bint el-Nas* (literally: a girl from people). This category does not draw the line between a member of the Americanised society and the Egyptian conservative world, but between these women from the upper class, and those from the Egyptian Third World. In her ethnography of the Egyptian job market for female university graduates, Barsoum describes three classes of attributes expected from job applicants: skills in foreign

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languages (no accent!), computer skills and classy appearance. The latter is nearly identical with the habitus of the cultivated classes. All are cultural capital necessary for finding a good job. Once more, the three classes of attributes come in a 'package', and can be fused in the concept of *Bint el-Nas.* Being a *Bint el-Nas* provides a direct cue to distinguished family background. When I asked Egyptians about the *Bint el-Nas*, they told me she was rich, classy, polite, well-mannered, had social respect and a certain authority – and was a very good candidate for marriage. The most different contrasting concept is that of *'bia'.* Other than *bint* or *walad el-nas* (i.e. the male form), it pertains to people who live in the *ashwa'iyyat*, have only low class education, are often illiterate, not well-mannered and originate from a dirty, bad environment.[258] For lack of empirical data on this issue, I could not look at these categories closer. Yet, it is important to notice that the Egyptian Good Girl is not the only such category for shortcut judgement. A specific feature of this operation of judgement is the *direct* conclusion from *outside* markers to *character* traits. It would be interesting to figure out whether the same kind of global categories exist for men, and also in how far this type of social categorisation is particular to Egyptian society.[259] For the time being it shall suffice to note that in the perception of the young Egyptians I interviewed and got to know throughout the last years, *judgementality*[260] is a defining attribute of their society. This currently lamented judgementality of the Egyptian society might be linked to the Islamic revivalism, or to be more precise, to it's neo-conservative articulation in Egypt. Bayat vividly describes the judgemental and exclusionary practices of women who joined the piety movement.

> "What appeared to be novel since the late 1990s, however, was that many lay Muslims, notably the young and women from affluent families, exhibited an *active piety*: not only did they practise their faith, they also preached it, wanting others to believe and behave like them. The adverse effect of this extraordinary quest for religious truth and identity became apparent before long. Unlike the passively pious, who remained indifferent about other people's religiosity, the actively pious began to judge others for what and how they believed. By privileging their own forms of devotion, they generated new lines of division and demarcation. This kind of piety was largely the stuff of the comfortable and privileged classes" (Bayat 2007: 150).

Bayat also indicates that the *Christian communities* responded with even more conservatism, leading to a conservative spiral (Bayat 2007: 148). Whatever the reasons for the judgemental

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[258] The counterpart of the Egyptian Good Girl would be the Americanised Girl. Eman would see this American Girl impersonated by Rana, Nadia, and Yasmine. Even though the Bint el-Nas is not the direct counterpart of the Egyptian Good Girl, we can link the two categories to the two orientations introduced previously (I 3.1 and I 3.2), the turning East and West, respectively the Islamic Revivalism and the Westernisation.

[259] My personal experience with my home country would suggest it exists there as well but wields less force.

[260] The noun "judgementality" is my own creation. It connects well the youth's claim that the Egyptian society was *judgemental*, and Yasmine's and Samira's idea that this was related to a certain type of *mentality*.

character of Egyptian society: it is the resulting pressure for homogeneity that my interview partners suffer from.

2 The interviewees' strategies in dealing with tensions and restrictions

As the interviews and the case study have shown, young women can apply various strategies in dealing with the contradictions, restrictions and judgement. A frequent response to the irreconcilable norms and parental demands is the clandestine subversion. This ranges from smoking and drinking to veritable double-lives as in the case of Yasmine. The flexible adjustment of behaviour seems to be a way of avoiding unnecessary and unproductive confrontation with the wider society. In regards to parents it is considered a matter of respect not to confront them openly but to conceal defiant behaviour from their eyes. Also, the parents are ascribed considerable authority. If they became aware of their daughters' behaviour, they had a veto power, for example in regards to potentially self-destructive behaviour as smoking and drinking.

Such clandestine disobedience might not question a norm instantly, but of course, if it accumulates, habits, perceptions and eventually mindsets are changed. The most striking example in Cairo today are the transforming standards for romantic relationships between men and women. The majority of my interview partners say they had a relationship. This is remarkable as it clearly deviates from the idea that young people can only form romantic relationships in the framework of an engagement and marriage. One could assume that my interviewees were willing and able to be in a partnership even prior to marriage because of their belonging to the upper classes. But it affects the girls with a scholarship as well. And even Naima, who does not have a boyfriend, feels compelled to give a reason for this – an indication that being a couple even before serious engagement is the *norm* among youth at AUC. Bayat's observations (which coincide with mine) indicate that this practice is not limited to AUCians, though, but, nowadays, is also frequent among lower class youth.

The clandestine disobedience is sometimes paired with another strategy – the attempt to understand and *de-personalise* the norms and restrictions. The point is to understand that *society* functions in a certain way, maybe even to understand, why it functions this way. Attributing the own conditions to the societal setting renders them more abstract. They appear as a fact that has to be accepted, but is not an outcome of one's *personal* behaviour. For some of the young women this seems to provide the grounds for a purely instrumental relation to norms and norm adherence.

The outright critique and rejection of a norm is rare. Especially vis-a-vis the parents, open confrontation is likely to be considered an affront, as a lack of respect. Nonetheless we can

observe that the young women renegotiate certain rules with their parents. Many do for example reject the institution of *gawaz salonat*. In the case of *gawaz salonat*, the families arrange a meeting between two (often unknown) young persons in order to initiate a process which shall end in marriage after certain clearly defined, institutionalised steps. None of my interviewees feels comfortable about this kind of marriage arrangement, and they seem to find some understanding on the side of their parents. The women refer to a variety of restrictions they can neither understand nor accept without resistance: not being allowed to stay in Cairo for work once the study years are over; not being allowed to participate in the *hadj* (the Muslim pilgrimage to Mekka) without a *mehrem* (a male companion, who is a relative or the husband); not being allowed to travel alone. In how far these limitations are only rejected or also ignored, remains open.

In most of these cases, though, there seems to be room for negotiation. Discussions and debates take place, and styles of conflict resolution and constellations vary. One frequent motif is the idea of "knowing the psyche of the family" as Naima calls it. This label designates a strategy of subtle manipulation: neither the parental authority nor the norms are questioned. Yet, the interviewees get their way, initial resistance by the parents notwithstanding. They balance different powers and navigate between decision-makers in the family; they negotiate and manipulate by not putting all the cards on the table. An entirely different strategy is adopted by Yasmine after the revolution: she refuses to accept parental authority and decision-making power any longer. This is to say, she does not only negate the specific rules set by her parents but she "snatches" from them the *right to set rules* in the first place. This way, she rejects the force of outside exigencies and claims the right to follow her 'inside'. Prior to the revolution though, Yasmine responds differently to the tensions and limitations. At first, she attempts to adjust to the norms of the Egyptian conservative world, when donning the veil. Yet, her attempts to fully identify and associate with *one orientation* fail. Instead, she then tries to renegotiate rules with her parents, and as this fails entirely, decides to live a double-life, secretly defying the parental and societal norms as much as possible (just remember the Jewish American boyfriend!). Next, she adopts an inward-directed strategy and tries to reshape her self, change her feelings, perception and thinking. This follows the rationale that it was upon her to "get yourself out of the box" and that she had to force herself to "stop obsessing". Before the revolution, this kind of stage-management is requested in regards to the abuse, her depression, her longing for freedom. But even after the revolution, Yasmine reproaches herself for seeing all men as sexual beings, and asks herself to halt these thoughts.

This notion of a malleable self, as well as the focus on stage-management and disciplining, is something we encounter in the ethnographies by Mahmood (2005) and Hafez (2003), and in Hirschkind (2001). Also in regards to various notions of the veil, a specific concept of inside-outside appears. If the veil is a means of affirming a woman's identity, then it does so because the outward appearance reflects back on her internal constitution. In order to explain this effect Mahmood (2005) and Hirschkind (2001) employ an Aristotelian conception of the relation between virtues and comportment. Given this theoretical knowledge, I might be overly sensitive to issues of self-formation. Yet, it also resonates with some other observations: Rana is likewise concerned with this self-development. Also for her, the Egyptian Good Girl provides a cognitive shortcut from appearance to character. Even more, the shelves of Cairo's bookstores are full of recommendations how to become a better person, wife, son, human being, believer, etc. Therefore, I would consider the results of my interviews an indication, that practices and concepts of self-formation, and notions of the link between virtues and behaviour are an interesting topic for further research.

As shown at length in chapter III, only the post-revolution strategy of open confrontation seems to bear fruits that match Yasmine's expectations. As Bourdieu notes, the same action can have different meanings in the various social fields. Each action needs to be evaluated at the backdrop of the general societal and the concrete situational context, only then do we know which strategy the interviewee follows in a certain instance. This is very evident in Yasmine's case: she constantly *acts* – but she feels trapped and unfree nonetheless, and does not have the feeling that she was *actually* able to have any impact on her situation (which would be understood as the essence of agency). The same behaviour can not only have different communicative and interactive content, but can also be driven by different motives. In the process of narrative identity construction, in hindsight, a life story is again endowed with very different meanings. Examples are the veiling in Yasmine's story, the smoking, and the kissing at university referred to by my interview partners. Listening to Bob Dylan and travelling alone to London, taking drugs and accepting Israelis as potentially good people – all these actions are endowed with meaning *in hindsight*. As Amir-Moazami (2010) shows, even an action that serves as a marker of distinction at times, should not be disqualified as an instrumental act. There *are* women, also among my interviewees, who *voluntarily*, out of *conviction* stick to modest dress, decent behaviour, respectful comportment vis-a-vis elders and parents. They appreciate religiosity, cherish traditional ideas of family life and women's roles, and share conservative visions for their future. This is not to say, however, that there was no pressure to adopt such norms from society, family and peers. Yet: these pressures

come from different sides, push into different directions, and come to bear on *each* of my interviewees in a specific constellation. Take, for example, Leila: in puberty she has "a religious phase", against the will of her parents. Also Nadia dons the veil against her parents' advice. Noha on the other hand, dons the veil in order to become an adult. For her it is a sign of maturity – her mother warns her not to take the step too early. Eman opts for a more 'traditional' way of life than her mother would prefer, she marries before even finishing her first degree. Taking off the veil can be a means to evade public judgement – this puts on their head those explanations that assume women wear the veil in order to enlarge their freedom. Reem feels the need to *justify* that she does *not* drink or smoke, and Naima sees herself obliged to argue why she can *not* have a boyfriend. The point is to acknowledge two things: a) any practice can have several meanings and motivations *at once,* and b) in post-colonial settings, more 'Western' does not automatically mean more inclusive or tolerant. We thus have to refrain from analytical reductionism (see IV 1.6 on potential interpretations of veiling).

3 The self-development and progress of my interview partners

For some interview partners, *maturing* seems to be related to a change in strategy. Rana for example has found a standpoint where she simply accepts the societal norms, without making them her own. She is well aware that as long as she lives at home, she is unable to be as independent as the Western *ideal* of youth implies. In regards to both, parental control and social limitations, Rana tries to reduce the occasions for conflict and tensions, by adapting herself to the respective situation. Other than in earlier times, she does not rebel outrightly. We could say, she has adapted her behaviour more to external exigencies, in order to create more *harmony* and reduce friction. As in Yasmine's story, Rana's narrative identity construction allows us to understand how she balances the internal needs with external demands at different times in her life. This reaffirms the notion of identity as the pivot of society and self. Most of my interview partners portray some (self-)development in their life story. Yet, the trajectories are very diverse: in particular those who come from what they term "a closed community", emphasise their increasing tolerance. Mariam, Naima, and Samira tell me how in particular their stay in the US and their education at AUC has taught them to accept and even appreciate diversity. The stays abroad enhance the women's understanding for cultural differences. Nonetheless, an essentialist concept of culture prevails. Different cultures and the respective lifestyles and norms can be discerned. The resulting differences cannot provide the basis for judgement, instead they need to be approached with tolerance. This position is acquired by those interview partners who had enjoyed intense intercultural contact. They tend to adopt a cultural relativism, drawing on an essentialist (instead of a constructivist) notion of culture.[261]

Another motif was emancipation from stereotyping and from what I have termed judgemental schortcuts above. Especially the direct relation of appearance and character was questioned. My interview partners indicated that their experience had led them to adopt more sophisticated and complex concepts, rather than the 'package deal' categories they had shared in the past. In the wake of the revolution, taking over social responsibility and being helpful to people and society is a popular motif of self-development in my interviews. Another trajectory, the change towards a strategy of non-confrontation has already been mentioned. In contrast to this non-confrontational balancing of needs, there is also another trajectory, towards increasing independence of decision making. This seems to be realised in Yasmine's story. With the revolution, she becomes freer from

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[261] A very appropriate critique was: isn't a non-essential concept of culture a very Western idea? Besides this, it also contradicts our naive understanding and experiencing of culture as a social fact.

rules, or to be precise, she seems freer to *decide which rules apply* in a specific situation. She does not portray this as maturing but as the event of "finding yourself". The confrontation with religion, and in specific, donning the veil, seemed to represent a step towards adulthood in several interviews. This is comparable to a strategy described by Amir-Moazami (2010). She suggest that for Muslim girls in Germany and France, active piety (e.g. donning the veil) constitutes an alternative to the 'Western' ways of asserting youthfulness. Moreover, it can also provide young women with a means to assert themselves in inter-generational struggles (Amir-Moazami 2010: 193). To two of my interviewees, it seemed to fulfil this function. The turn towards more religious attire and behaviour seemed to provide an opportunity to confront the parents and occupy a field of expertise. Taking into consideration these examples of trajectories for self-development and transformation, it makes sense to apply "agency" and "youth" as two analytical categories, that provide a key to interpretation.

Agency as a concept shares several commonalities with identity. Most importantly, both are collectively and individually grounded. They are defined by cultural structuration and resources (Homfeldt, Schröer and Schweppe 2008: 9). The actors are individuals – but also tied to and defined by the collectives and institutions that they belong to. Agency can be defined as the ability to control social relations and the transformation of these*,* or as the "capacity of people to act upon their world" (Holland et al. 1998: 42 quoted in Homfeldt, Schröer and Schweppe 2008: 8). In another take, the first step of empowerment is to acquire *knowledge* about the *structural* patterns that condition the individual('s scope for action), and the capacity to transfer this knowledge (Homfeldt, Schröer and Schweppe 2008: 8). "Agents are empowered by structures, both by knowledge of cultural schemas that enables them to mobilize resources and by the access to resources that enables them to enact schemas" (Sewell 1992: 20 quoted in Homfeldt, Schröer and Schweppe 2008: 8). In Yasmine's case, the importance of *knowledge* about *structures* is essential: the moment she perceives of the mother's and brother's mentalities as an *outcome of societal conditions*, she sees a starting point for *change*. This leads us back to the above strategy of de-personalising one's restrictions. Such a strategy of de-personalising might precede the historisation. So far, however, Yasmine has an essentialist conception of society and societal norms. Obviously the prime source for knowledge about the structural patterns is formal education. Hence the assumption that education enhances the agent's capacity to act upon her (social) environment. Spiegel's study on female Malaysian activists for women's rights (2010) gives an idea of how familiarity with certain concepts does not only *enhance* the capacity to act, but also *change*

the agents' very *perception* and *interpretation* of the world. The activists' degree of reflexivity, particularly in regards to gender issues, is much higher than that of my interview partners. Especially the concept of gender provides them with an overarching explanatory system. In the case of Spiegel's activists, this might be much closer to an expert system than to common sense. Moreover, they have adopted a near constructivist stance. They question and historicise, and thereby de-naturalise social 'facts' such as cultures, norms, or roles for men and women. For my interviewees, the *revolution* and the *knowledge* and *(mis)information* that quickly spread in its wake, provide the grounds for changing agency. Yasmine's narrative identity construction and agency is only the most extreme among my interview partners.

At the same time, Yasmine's agency change shows that empowerment for her cannot happen outside of given structures of dependency, affiliation, and attachment. This obviously *confirms* a notion of the human individual as *connected* and *interdependent* with others (see I 2 and I 3.5). Nonetheless, I doubt that we need to draw on notions of a Middle Eastern self, or a Middle Eastern family concept distinct from Western concepts. If we abstain from the (historically contingent, *modern*) tendency to work with dichotomous concepts and dualistic categories, the idea of a continuum seems plausible. In any case, there is no need to construct a contradiction between family affiliation and agency, as is done in the Egyptian Human Development Report 2010: "No doubt, the high percentage of youth supporting the importance of family in developed countries which champion values of individuality and autonomy is one of the paradoxes that need further examination" (Handoussa 2010: 70). Yasmine's changing agency reveals that even after "snatching" away from her parents some decision making power, *familial recognition* of her self-empowerment remains important. Other interviewees demonstrate very different degrees of freedom and independence – but *all* are attached to their families. For them, there does not seem to be an inherent contradiction. Rather, it is individually problematic constellations that result in a tension between family affiliation and individual desires.

4 Their visions and alternative narratives

Accordingly, the interdependence of family members is not addressed as a *problem* in my interviews. Also, the women do not lament oppression by men. This is in clear contrast to the "Western stereotype of relations between men and women in the Islamic world as the interaction of sheer power and abject obedience" (Sullivan, Abed-Kotob and Kotob 1999: 111). This is not say, however, that women were satisfied with their position in society and in the gender hierarchy. They clearly point to various instances of discriminating practices and attitudes, and heavily criticise society's double standards. Yet, interestingly, they attribute prime importance to the *society* here. Rather than attributing certain sexist concepts, judgementality, and discrimination to individuals, they often point to societal structures. This is remarkable: their naive understanding of the issue corresponds well with scientific analyses of the persistence of gender roles and the *structural* aspect of discrimination.

The young women I encountered develop alternative visions in various regards. Yasmine for example rejects her brother's notion of respect, claiming that respecting him cannot be dependent on her limiting herself. She also claims that her family did not fulfil their duty of protecting her, other than her mother and brother claim. In that context, she shifts the focus of protection from the street to the home, and accuses that she was "not even protected in my own house!". Yasmine also refutes the idea of the family father as the mere material provider. In the common Egyptian notion, a father's role is fulfilled if he provides for the material wealth of the family. Yasmine does not leave any doubt: this is not enough. She suffers from her father's absence, and even attributes enough importance to this circumstance to make it a *frame* of her story (see III 1.2). Yasmine thus puts new demands on her father, which are hardly part of a classical notion of fatherhood: he should express feelings of love and show interest and attachment. Apart from that, she also redefines the meaning of the veil and rejects the judgemental shortcut from veil to good character. In that context, she also makes a thorough judgement a principle, stating that superficial judgement was bad, even if it resulted in support for her. On a very large scale, the revolutionary experience provides her with construction material for an alternative vision: the society and along with it the "*social stupid mentality* that's been in my mum's head and my brother's *head*" can be changed. And most important of all, Yasmine's story is constructed to demonstrate that even if upfront disobedience is not an option, self-empowerment can still work, by questioning the parental decision making power on a more fundamental level. For Yasmine, it is this development

of alternatives visions, where everything converges: the clash between the social worlds, the lack of agency, the political situation, the turning point which offers the opportunity for self-empowerment.

Also the other young women frequently engage in developing alternatives. They redefine certain images and redress, for example, what they perceive as a misconception of women. Above that, they also reject the judgement, and in particular the judgemental shortcuts that are so detrimental to a woman's reputation. Most of the previously outlined strategies of dealing with restrictions and tensions carry an element of formulating an alternative narrative. An important aspiration, shared by those belonging to the Americanised society, is the normalising of inter-gender contact. These women claim repeatedly the a-sexual character of their contact with men: "When I greet my friends my guy friends we kiss... just like girls, girls and guys, it's the same" (Nadia). Furthermore, the women envision an active role in society, be it by means of their career or voluntary activity. They want to take over responsibility, define a social role for themselves which is in parts motivated by the wish to change society. Just like Yasmine, others want to contribute actively to overcoming the "closed" mindsets that they and others suffer from. All my interview partners reject and counter-act one specific norm for the Egyptian Good Girl: all of them claim and defend their sociability. Most of them also enact this (as part of the interactive and performative dimension of identity construction) in the interview situation. They do not accept the most common restriction on a woman which is the limiting of her self-expression as a sociable interlocutor. Moreover, they are steadfast in defending their sociability and their personal vision of inter-gender contact against men. Correspondingly, it becomes an important goal to find a spouse who accepts this kind of behaviour from a woman. Above that, my interview partners state their determination to raise their children in a way that allows for their self-expression. Also, the young women redefine gender roles in a partnership, and family. Once more Yasmine provided us with an example. Yet, the limited presence and involvement of a father in his children's life is not unique to Yasmine's case, it appears to be a repeated constellation in Egyptian families. As in other regards, youth, men and women alike, develop alternative visions and renegotiate their concept of family. Particularly in this context, men also stand to win a lot if they redefine their role as a father in order to include some educational responsibility (and influence!).

What I have termed alternative visions here, is related to the "imaginary" by Appadurai (1996) (or to the "imaginaire" in Bayart (2005)). It is the imaginary conveyed by intensified streams of communication and image production that provides important construction material for

alternative visions. The Western notion of partnership is most likely one of the models for the interviewees' idea about their marriage. A tolerant, accepting guy resembles more the image of a 'Western Man' than an Egyptian Boy.[262] Yet, neither the alternative visions, nor other imageries are *pure imports*. They respond directly to the very real local conditions that the women face. It is absolutely no coincidence that those features of life in the UK which amaze Yasmine so much, mirror the restrictions in Egypt. She feels freer in liking boys (obviously) for two reasons. First, there are no comparable *social limitations on inter-gender interaction*, and second, she does not have to fear that the man is instantly judged or 'rated' by her parents. She also gets away from the pressure to *get married* before the age of 26, and evades the general judgementality. Above that, Yasmine admires the youth's *independence* she perceives in London. This way, even the alternative exactly reproduces the three dimensions of chastity, dependence, and marriage. A very instructive example for the locality of the imaginary, and the complex interaction of the foreign and local.

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[262] I still recall the near hysteria that befell the female public some two years ago because the main male protagonist of the soap opera "Noor" appeared to be the 'man of the dreams ' of many. Egyptian men were less happy about this virtual concurrence from a 'Western' type of man.

5 Applying different perspectives and analytical categories: women, class, barra, youth

All the above can be analysed from different vantage points. When we apply different categories, different foci and evaluations are the result. Also, shifting perspectives shed light on questions for further research. I would like to discuss briefly, which topics and further questions come into focus if we adopt a gender or class perspective, if we concentrate on the role of "*barra*", or choose "youth" as the underlying analytical category.

Let us start with the "women"-perspective, also prevalent in the reconstruction of the two social worlds, the Americanised society and the Egyptian conservative world. From this vantage point, we first of all come to adopt a *structural* perspective. Being a woman is not an individual feature only, but an attribute linked to an entire *system* of categorisations. Thus, gender can be understood as a structural category, that defines both men *and* women *interdependently*. From this angle, several topics impose themselves: we have to question, for example, how the 'normal', everyday discrimination (which we have reconstructed in chapter IV 1 and 2 at length) is conditioning violence. Furthermore, we ought to enquire into the persistence of such a structure, and into the potential for change beyond the individual act. At a round table discussion on reproductive health, published in the Cairo Social Science Papers (Kennedy 1999), a women's right activist, Aida Seif El Dawla summarises this issue in light of her personal experience:

> "*W*e realized that working against violence has to do with challenging the whole gender hierarchy. (...) It then started to make sense why addressing violence against women should be so threatening, even to those who would not batter their wives and daughters, because what is at stake is not violence as a separate issue but violence as the extreme form of discrimination against women. This discrimination covers such a wider spectrum of behaviours and attitudes, many of which men would not give up; even those men who are most liberal and sophisticated. (...) We therefore conclude that addressing the issue of of violence against women has to do with challenging hierarchies: the hierarchy of the clinic (doctor/patient), the hierarchy of the researchers and the researched, the hierarchy of men and women and within that, several sub-hierarchies, whether social, economic, class, or religious, that set the norm for gender relations" (El Dawla 1999: 184).

El Dawla's statement explains well why it can be so hard to redress a state, even if it might be considered wrong by the majority of people involved. The direct link between discrimination against women and violence against women is a key to understanding why violence is not addressed differently. Yasmine's mother might be a case in point. Yet, as we have seen above, her behaviour, in various situations, can also be explained by reference to class and social status. In the last sentence, Dawla seems to point to this complex kind of interrelations that define a woman's life. Nothing else but the intersecting (and at times interlocking) effect of categories such as class,

gender, race, and age is captured by the term "intersectionality", which is very much en vogue in contemporary feminist and post-colonial studies. Also the reconstruction of Yasmine's narrative identity and the analysis of the central motives thereof, has shown that my interview partners are positioned by gender and class alike. In addition, their *age*, or their belonging to the category *youth*, could provide us with a useful perspective for analysis. Before we turn to the issues of class and youth, let us remain with the gender perspective a bit longer. An important consequence of the structural conception, is the interdependence of the dichotomous categories "man" and "woman". In order to challenge profoundly any of these two roles, a change of entire structure is necessary. Just as much as women, men are caught up in the dual construction.

At the same time, they stand to loose more than women if prevalent gender hierarchies and norms are transformed (Tawila, Ibrahim and Wassef 2001: 218). The latter has nearly acquired the status of a common sense argument, yet we need to be cautious: there seems to be a tendency to ignore the pressure that rests on men in the respective system. I would like to repeat a poignant quote by the renown Cynthia Nelson here:

> "Patriarchy is not simply a system of male domination in which women are perceived as helpless pawns at the mercy of coercive males, but rather as a complex phenomenon constraining *men as well as women* in a mutually dehumanizing ideology" (Nelson 1991: 136–137, my emphasis).

The role of men in the Egyptian system that builds on double standards, the importance of female chastity and dependence, is as complex and manifold as that of women. Nonetheless, in the accounts of my interviewees, Egyptian men are literally pulled into pieces. Also in this regards, Yasmine's case is (as we have seen repeatedly) extreme: "And that kind of turns every *man* I know into a sexual being. Who just goes after what he wants. Regardless of limitation ... so *that* was *really* shocking, I mean I can't believe ... *that* completely just *ruined* the reality of things to me."

The perception, however, that often a man simply "goes after what he wants", irrespective of the costs for the female does not seem limited to Yasmine's experience. The Egyptian Boy tries to control his wife or girlfriend, does not get 'muddy' himself – no matter what he does. He profits from the double standards and is pampered by his mother, who tells him he would get whatever he wants. Yet, eventually, the Egyptian Boy is also fulfilling a role attributed to him. Laila's statement can be read in that way:

> "The last thing that happened to me recently was I met a guy and it was very nice in the beginning and then ... very strangely ... not very strangely, it's expected from an Egyptian Boy. I should have known that from the beginning. He asked me to stop hugging other people."

It is expected from an Egyptian Boy to act that way. As much it is expected from a veiled girl not to hug boys.

Even though there is still a lack of research on Arab women, the situation might be worse for men. The counterpart of the female in a gender system has hardly been studied. A study with a focus on Egyptian young *men* would constitute an essential complement to my research. Also, the *interaction* between young men and women could provide cues to the *doing gender* in young Egyptians' lives. Although my interviewees account of various negative encounters with the Egyptian Boy or Egyptian men in general, they do not appear to lay the blame at their doorstep. Might the Egyptian women I interviewed have a better understanding of the systemic pressure that shapes men and women to the same extent?

As indicated above, an individual's location is defined by various intersecting forces. As shown in my analysis, the category class produces various interlocking effects with gender. For upper middle class women, two overlapping kinds of confinement apply. The argument I want to make in this regards is that the problem of class is *as constructed* as that of gender. It even comes to acquire the character of a self-fulfilling prophecy. In Egypt, the fear of the poor and exclusion of the poor go hand in hand and reinforce each other. At the same time the cultural and social reproduction of class conditions the agents' behaviour. 'Freeing' women will not do the job, if a more equal and less exclusionary society is the goal. In these struggles for class reproduction, another category has proven central: *barra*. The reference to the outside world is a feature specific to the former colonies. Through colonisation, the Western world left its mark on Egyptian society. That means, Egyptians "became intimately familiar with their non-Muslim rulers and the European cultures they imposed" (Ernst 2004: 29). Until today, the Western influence is strongly felt in Egypt, Egyptians are more familiar with the West than the other way round, and most important: self- and other-positioning in Egypt makes frequent use of the reference to *barra*. The relations to *barra* also play a decisive role in defining female behaviour in Egyptian society. *Barra* touches on the individual imaginary and societal self-understanding, i.e. collective identity. It reaches far into politics, and connects individual experiences to the larger political picture. The contemporary power relations and colonial history provide Egyptians (and us) with an understanding and evaluation of the relations to *barra*. This way, in individual Egyptians' lives, the nation's past is never irrelevant. Even if the individual woman might not share in any nationalist convictions, her actions nonetheless acquire meaning at the backdrop of the ongoing struggle for cultural decolonisation. Therefore, hybridity is much more problematic than Saalmann et al. make us

believe:

> "It seems that most people who do mix and hybridise in their everyday practices do so without an explicitly political agenda and irrespective of theoretical claims. People seem to have a rather relaxed attitude towards their constantly mixing and reforming cultures" (Saalmann, Schirmer and Kessler 2006: 17).

Indeed, hybridity does not acquire political meaning in the sense that people would intentionally create hybridity in order to communicate a political message. Yet, hybridity as an everyday practice is not only *relevant* to my interviewees' life narrations in various ways, it is also highly *politicised* in Egypt. First of all, we need to understand that hybridity is *not recognised* as such. As mentioned, the naive understanding of culture is essentialist.[263] This means, Egyptian culture is not considered to be a fluid, constantly changing, dynamic shape. It is not understood as subject to reconstruction and invention. Instead, Egyptian culture and tradition is constructed as a *fixed* object that needs *protection*. If no natural evolution is possible, no mixing necessary, the attempt to immunise the own culture suddenly acquires plausibility. Any appropriation of apparently Western or foreign concepts then appears as a danger. This perception has been intentionally fostered by the state and the talk of foreign interference. If the larger discourse addresses the issues of cultural globalisation and neo-colonisation, as is the case in Egypt, the introduction of supposedly 'foreign' practices is highly contested. The *mixing itself* becomes the issue of political debate and is instrumentalised for political purposes.

The results of my research project question the concept of "hybridity" as a third space. In reference to Bhabha's understanding, Andrews praises that "the product of hybridization is a new entity, one that is not reducible to its component parts. It is, rather, an integration of two or more worlds that are integrated one into the other " (Andrews 2007: 490). Considering the life stories of my interview partners, the impression remains that Andrews' depiction is overly optimistic.

Indeed, the interviewees themselves live a 'hybrid' life – their practices and imageries mix and fuse contemporary Egyptian mainstream culture with American and cosmopolitan influences. Other than in their individual actions, though, the "integration of two or more worlds" does not occur. The Americanised society and the Egyptian conservative world remain worlds apart, not to speak of the totally seceded Third World of the Cairene street. I cannot see that a third space emerges by the doing of Yasmine and the others. Instead, the insertion of their hybrid selves into one of the

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[263] In this regards, however I would like to refer back to the development of cultural tolerance discussed earlier. If we want to take the de-centering seriously, we need to ask whether a non-essential understanding of culture isn't Western in itself.

two worlds causes considerable friction.

It is remarkable that many of the interviewees' conflicts, particularly the *inter-generational* ones, seem to revolve exactly around this hybridity. The rejection of package deal categories such as the Egyptian Good Girl can be read as the attempt to assert hybrid practices and self-understanding against pressure for homogeneity. For example, the way romantic relationships are managed by my interviewees is a prime example of hybridity in practice: on the one hand, American dating rules are appropriated, on the other hand, premarital sexual intercourse is not at all an option for my interview partners. The same is true for marriage: while the gawaz *salonat* is rejected, the marriage 'deadline' of 26 years of age is maintained and reproduced. Also, the division of labour within a marriage adjourns the homely duties and reproductive labour to the mother, while the father engages exclusively in productive labour. Even if these complementary roles and a complementary notion of men and women might remain unchallenged, the idea of a marriage is already that of partnership inspired by a Western pattern. In addition, also the practice of veiling can be read as a *hybrid practice* (Young 2003: 84).

These phenomena are extremely interesting, and their observation and analysis reminds us of the necessity to refrain from reductionism. Yet, calling them *hybrid* seems to suggest that there was such a thing as an 'untouched', genuinely Egyptian form of marriage, or a 'purely' American idea of dating. Obviously, this is nonsense – the very idea of hybridity implies that *all* cultural formations are hybrid. Thus, if we speak of a mix of two cultures, or cultural practices, or concepts, this can only refer to a 'snapshot' of the respective culture at a specific point in time, in a specific context. If the idea of hybridity and a non-essentialist concept of culture were adopted, the relation to *barra* would lose some of its threat and thus of its (de)legitimising force in discourses. But even if the fear of cultural domination and decline of Egyptian culture was reduced, the affiliation with *barra* would still indicate a powerful position and remind of the unequal and exploitive societal power relations.

By making young women the subject of my study, I excluded *a priori* the male perspective.[264] While this was a sensible limitation to my research topic, it came at a price. Women specific issues were more likely to gain attention[265] than say for example commonalities between men and women. An essay by Herrera on the perspective of Egyptian youth, reveals interesting parallels: her *male* interviewee, Karim, complains that he was not living his live. For him, living his life would require certain choices, conditions of freedom, and opportunities based on fairness, and respect. All this he finds generally lacking in society (Herrera 2010: 142).

Take into consideration that this is the statement of a young *man*. He decries the lack of freedom and choice – very similar to my female interview partners. Him feeling he is not living his life, indicates that there are other reasons for and types of restrictions than those resulting from the trias *chastity – dependence – marriage*. We have previously (see IV 2) pointed to *class-based limitations*, which *overlap* with the gender restrictions. Karim's experience substantiates the assumption, that it might be most of all the judgemental character, the closed community, and the inflexibility in thinking that bother young people in Egypt.

According to Herrera, the issues of jobs and justice are what matters most to young people and thus makes them long for an escape, for going abroad. Due to their endowment with (institutionalised) cultural and social capital, my interview partners might not have problems to find an adequate job, nonetheless leaving the country can be an option for them. The reasons are the desire for fun or dignity, the preference of an 'open' society and the need for one's own space. The strive for freedom and equal chances, irrespective of family origin, are further motives. Many

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[264] This limitation had conceptual, normative and practical reasons. On the practical side, I expected the interaction with the young women to be much easier than it would have been with men – due most of all to the restrictions on inter-gender relations that usually apply in Egypt. Besides that, my normative interest was to disprove the Western stereotypes of Arab Muslim women (as argued in I 1.1 and I 1.2). (As might have become clear by now: even though I could disprove the most extreme elements or variant of this stereotype, the basic thrust of it was confirmed: young women in Egypt might not be silenced and oppressed, but they are heavily discriminated against. And they suffer from this situation. See also IV 8.)

[265] It would be a gross misunderstanding though, to assume that the topic "female roles", discussed in chapter IV 1.3.1-1.3.3, was a priori imposed by the target group. If the interviewee of the case study had referred to herself as a "young person" or as a "student" rather than as a woman, the topics of the analysis would have been different. Also the focus of the interpretation would be distinct, if the two social worlds, the Americanised society and the Egyptian conservative world differed primarily in regards to preferred leisure activities, future visions, adult-youth relationship, notion of politics, or the like. Yet, it was gender norms that seemed to be the most decisive feature in Yasmine's conception of the Egyptian conservative world. She hardly employs youth as a self-defining category. A different case study might have emphasised this more. Rana, for example, seems to attribute some importance to her age, especially as a Western notion of youth and young adulthood is not reconcilable with Egyptian biographical patterns. But even in Rana's interview, the category "gender" seems to trump "youth" in importance. This could well be an outcome of my previous description of my research interest: the women knew that I was interviewing women only. If I had said that *youth* in Egypt were my interest, I might have co-produced different narrations.

of these goals, finding a good job as much as having one's own space to live, imply increasing *independence from the family*. Reducing parental dependence should then be considered a *common trajectory of youth*[266] (Herrera 2010: 142).

The short contrasting of Herrera's results with my study suggests that "youth" could provide a useful category for re-analysing my interviews and extending the scope of my research. Many of the conflicts we have discussed in light of women and class issues, would acquire a different meaning if seen from a youth perspective. Yet, rather than providing an alternative understanding youth should be seen as an additional category, producing additional meanings, and thereby adding another dimension to topics and phenomena we have already discussed. The relations to *barra,* for example, clearly intersect with issues of youth: young people have an entirely different perspective on *barra*, and many inter-generational conflicts in Egypt today, seem to revolve around this issue. Yet, these conflicts can neither be reduced to *barra* nor to their generational aspect. Rather, parental fear of corruption through foreign influences and the rejection of Americanisation by Yasmine's mother, are concrete articulations of common inter-generational patterns. Whereas my reconstructive research design resulted in the reconstruction of contradictory social spaces, youth as a focus emphasises the *inter-generation*al aspects over the issue of *barra*. Several of my interviewees argue that they had to adopt a strategy of clandestine disobedience, concealing their actual behaviour because their parents *could not understand*. This was not blamed on their lack of empathy or inflexibility, instead, the young women seemed to consider this a normal effect of a generation gap. As the young had been exposed to an entirely different, much more diverse surrounding than their parents, the latter had no opportunity to understand the nature of the youth's world. Thus, avoiding outright confrontation was a matter of respect, and a way to circumvent unproductive conflict.

Yasmine also excuses her mother's earlier educational practice with her lack of education and limited exposure.[267] She also renders clear that her parents had no clue what mattered to her as a teenager. Eventually, she even reproaches her parents for mis-judging what kind of attention a (young) girl needed (nowadays?). Bayat shows, that this gap between parents and children is a phenomenon affecting the entire society:

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[266] Bayat defines "the fact of being 'young' – that is, a distinct social location between childhood and adulthood, where the youngster experiences 'relative autonomy' and is neither totally dependent (on adults) nor independent, and is free from responsibilities for other dependents" (Bayat 2010: 28).

[267] In Yasmine's narration it remains vague, what kind of "exposure" she is speaking of. I originally assumed it referred to education, of a formal and informal type. In light of Bayat's observations on youth (see quote below, 2010; 2007) and on upper middle class women (2007), as I have referenced them in this study, it could also mean exposure to Westernisation, and to the various temptations of a Western or cosmopolitan lifestyle and consumption.

"For more than a decade, young Egyptians were seen in the image of Islamist militants waging guerilla, penetrating college campuses, or memorizing the Quran in the back street mosques (zawaya) of sprawling slums. Moral authorities, parents and foreign observers expected them to be characteristically pious, strict, and dedicated to the moral discipline of Islam. Yet in their daily lives, the mainstream young defied their constructed image, often shocking moral authorities by expressing defiance openly and directly. (...) 'Our generation is more exposed than yours, and this is a simple fact'" (Bayat 2010: 45).

The new generations are exposed to entirely different environments which older generations do not understand. At the same time the turn to the West also transforms the very *notion of youth*. Rana highlights the resulting discrepancy:

"The problem is *with* being Westernised or being Americanised or being whatever the hell they call it. Y*ou think* that by being 21 or by being 18 or whatever, you're more of an independent individual who makes his or her own decisions. But then, *here* you still live with your parents so you have your parents' rules. So you have both ... you have this dichotomy where you have to abide by your parents rules however you have to make up rules for your own for yourself because you are an *adult*. So what you end up doing is that your parents don't know most of it."

The Westernised notion of youth, as a phase of relative independence, incites aspirations that cannot be matched by Egyptian reality.[268] Werner argues that the promotion of a Western concept of youth also has an *economic* aspect to it. According to her, the strive for autonomy is fostered by market agencies, it aims at the construction of youth as independent consumers and customers of separate spaces. Examples for 'young' spaces of consumption are the cosmopolitan coffee shops that the young professionals observed by de Koning frequent.

Such a ('Western') notion of youth as referenced by Rana and defined by Bayat, is not only in conflict with traditional biographical patterns in Egypt, it is also at odds with the economic situation of the majority of young people. If youth is defined as the state of relative independence (i.e. neither being completely dependent on the parents, nor being responsible for anyone), then youth ends and adulthood begins when one takes over responsibility for the own family. Yet, in Egypt, today, many young people cannot marry early because they lack the financial means. These people literally 'get stuck' in their youth. At the same time, paradoxically, they feel they are not able to "live their youth", because of restrictions (Yasmine), injustice and lack of opportunity (Karim), or – in general – the inability to satisfy their needs and aspirations. My research subjects are not at risk of 'getting stuck' for economic reasons – in that sense, the reproach they were not

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[268] This is comparable to the alienation that supposedly the first generation of educated girls experiences vis-a-vis their families and social environment.

experiencing the lot of the normal Egyptian holds true. This could be a further reason for societal envy and contempt.

Research that chooses youth as an analytical category is only emerging. A very interesting, nearly prophetic publication of a recent date is the volume "Being young and Muslim", edited by Bayat and Herrera (Herrera and Bayat 2010b). Bayat's take on youth as an analytical category seems to provide a much more promising access to the issue than the distinction of various development phases, outlined briefly in the state of research (I 3.5). He distinguishes being young, youthfulness and youth movements. In regards to the youth's redefinition of religion, Bayat shows the same enthusiasm that other scholars develop for hybridity:

> "Such a state of liminality, this 'creative in-betweeness', illustrates how the young attempted to redefine and reimagine their Islam to accommodate their youthful desires for individuality, change, fun, and 'sin' within the existing moral order" (Bayat 2010: 43).

Even if some sympathy for the creative in-betweenness is understandable, in light of my interviews, I would emphasise the *tensions* and *problems* inherent to the youth's position over its creative potential. In particular, we must not mis-construct the Egyptian youth as a homogeneous group or entity. The divisions that run through society do not spare the younger generations:

> "[T]he simultaneous processes of urbanization, Islamization, and globalization had fragmented the young generation in Egypt. Alongside actively pious and provincial adolescents had emerged new generations of globalized youths who had been increasingly exposed to the global cultural flows. Clearly, different class and gender experiences had given rise to multiple youth identities. Whereas harsher social control in the Islamic Republic [of Iran] had pushed male and female youth to develop closer aspirations, gender distinction in Egypt remained more evident." (Bayat 2010: 41)

Both, the class divisions and the gender distinctions have been reconstructed at length in the previous chapters. The more heterogeneous sample, which included scholarship holders, definitely helped to gain an understanding of the class cleavage within Egyptian youth. The divisions notwithstanding, the political environment and events managed to unite a large part of the Egyptian youth around a common cause on January 25, 2011. It must not be forgotten that it was the death of a young blogger, Khaled Said, brutally killed by Egyptian police in public in June 2010 in Alexandria, which provided the grounds to a facebook group and to the first steps of civil disobedience. Of course I am aware that the January 25 uprising built on previous protests of the working class, existing movements like "April 6", and several crushed demonstrations in the last years. Nonetheless, it was the despair of the 'lost generation' which provided this protest with a powerful narrative.

6 The relation of politics and society, the issue of surveillance, and further research questions

Bayat was aware of the problematic position of youth in the Middle East, and thus highlighted the political significance of the youth's dissatisfaction prior to the Arab Spring:

> "Yet, given the prevalence of the doctrinal religious regimes in the Middle East with legitimizing ideologies that are unable to accommodate the youth habitus, the youth movements have great transformative and democratizing promise." (Bayat 2010: 28).

Bayat even raises the question whether the youth was the next revolutionary class after the proletariat (2010: 29). Bayat's occupation with youth movements therefore links youth with the political conditions and developments. This comes handy at this point, as so far the influence of politics on my research subjects has remained analytically underspecified. The linkages between the youth's position in *family*, *society* and *politics* are manifold. First, there is the issue of language: in my interviews, the current political events and discourses clearly have an effect on the content and in addition also on the semantics. Mariam for example, speaks of a *dictator* man (see IV 1.3). At the same time, the ousted president Mubarak portrayed (*inszenierte*) himself as the Egyptians' father in his last speeches after January 25. His play on people's emotions relied heavily on terminology and images drawn from the realm of the family. Thereby, he also instrumentalised the uncontested authority of elders in family and society, in order to immunise himself from critique. Similarly, the uncritical approach to parents and elders is mirrored in the unconditioned obedience and lack of criticism in the political sphere. Not surprisingly, the question how to deal with *elder politicians* after Mubarak's resignation became a matter of heated debate in Egypt, which reflected also on my interviews' content. Besides these *ideational* effects, the very real *distribution of power* favours elders in the political realm. Youths were[269] blocked from political success and the rise to power. One effect was that they were pushed to different spheres (e.g. redefining their religion), another was their increasing disenfranchisement (Handoussa 2010). Not only the political *status quo* and existing power relations mirrored the intra-familial generational conflict. Also the recent, at times breathtaking, dynamic of the Arab Spring has captured both spheres. The Egyptian revolution was soon termed a "youth revolution" by the Egyptian (and foreign) media. And indeed, claims to youthfulness had been one of the motivations for the uprising in Egypt. The revolution brought these to the light and contributed to sensitising the country for the youth's need and also heaved young activists into prominent positions. But the youth's decisive participation as vanguard

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[269] I write in the past tense here, because one of the aspirations of the youth revolting in Egypt in the Arab Spring is to change this status quo (see below). They have definitely already challenged it – how sustainable their success is, only the future can show.

has had even more effects: it also had some impact on the *inter-generational* relations in *society* and in the *families*. To speak of a 'change' seems a bit far fetched, as I can only convey my impressions gathered in the first weeks after the uprising. Yet, in Yasmine's story, the revolution definitely has a decisive effect: it shifts the power relations markedly and also raises her stakes, suddenly she is taken seriously, and considered an equal interlocutor regarding politics. Also outside the family, the position of youth vis-a-vis elders seemed different: from interview partners and discussants, I heard that the younger generation's statements were suddenly having some weight. Moreover, the young had the impression that they were approached with more respect by elders. These observations notwithstanding, Yasmine laments that the revolution has not yet reached the homes. Yet, in her story, the example to substantiate this claim, refers to the position of women, not to that of youth in specific. No matter how far reaching and sustainable the revolution's effect on the youth's position is, any analysis of the Egyptian revolution needs to factor in inter-generational (power) relations and dynamics.

Also in another sense, the results of my research raise the question of how politics and society are linked. As mentioned above, several interviewees assume a direct connection between the authoritarian regime and societal practices. One question broached by Yasmine is, in how far regime surveillance conditions certain family practices. The assumption that authoritarian education produces a specific kind of political system[270] is here put on its head: the authoritarian regime brings forth overly protective and controlling styles of parenting.[271] Yasmine's notion of this causal relation remains rather vague, but some of the discussants of the group discussion explain the suggested connection to me: they understand the parental control, protection and the literal *isolation* of the children as an outcome of the brutal regime repression of Islamists in earlier years. While this interpretation was new to me in regards to Egypt, it is said of Syria that the brutal crackdown on the Muslim Brothers in the city of Hama silenced much of Syrian society – until very recently. In light of existing research we could also ask, how the interlocking effects of politics and society change when the family is central to politics, to society, and to debates about morality and national identity.

Another link of society and politics is suggested by Bayat. His observations confirm the relevance of surveillance and social judgement that showed in my interviews: He considers the youth in the Muslim Middle East a particularly interesting subject because of the specific setting "where moral

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[270] Put forward prominently for example by Max Horkheimer in his essay "Autorität und Familie" (1988).

[271] While my interviewees do not draw any parallels here, one could ask as well in how far inter-gender relations or male/female styles of interaction are influenced by the character of the political system.

and political authority impose a high degree of social control over the young" (Bayat 2010: 28). Bayat links this social control to the transformative potential of youth movements: "If anything, the political or transformative potential of youth movements is relative to the degree of social control their adversaries impose on them" (Bayat 2010: 29). Following this line of argumentation, the youth revolution in Egypt was predictable – for years young Egyptians had been complaining about the judgemental society and suffocating atmosphere in the country. Living and studying abroad constituted a way not only to better jobs, but also to a freer life. My study of young women in post-revolutionary Egypt gives an idea of how salient the experience of surveillance, judgement and control is in a (female) individual's life.

A very interesting question is, how surveillance is done in everyday practice. The spatial dimension could provide important clues. For example, the extreme *proximity*[272] of Cairene neighbourhoods might be the condition for certain practices. At the same time, this extreme density is only the visible manifestation of Egyptian preferences for community organisation and for creation of social space. Once more, space appears in its double function. On the one hand it is a manifestation of various other categories, on the other hand it appears as a 'fact' with a marked effect on people's experience. We can also ask, how practices and experience of surveillance are changed by different living arrangements. Today, young families are often forced to move to different neighbourhoods, away from their family, and the well-known neighbours. How does this change the extent and mechanisms of social control? Now that the old *harra*[273] is not the living reality of the majority of Cairenes any longer, the material basis of social relations has changed.

The latter also applies to the gated communities and the new desert settlements, remote from the density of the city proper. Yet, if measured by European standards many parts of New Cairo are reproducing the narrowness of Cairo's streets. Huge pompous houses are often surrounded by only a tiny garden strip. The villas bordering the main street (Road 9) in the Fifth Settlement of New Cairo are built so close to each other, one can easily catch a glimpse into the neighbour's living room. As if there was not enough space in the desert... It is thus not clear, in how far the move to the desert and gated communities indeed *reduces* social control. We can furthermore also pose the question in how far surveillance is linked to class. Traditionally, in Cairo, a lot of surveillance work obliges the *bawab*, the doorkeeper and a veritable institution in Egypt. The bawab and the servants are constantly paying attention to the occurrences in 'their' building. The

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[272] I mean proximity here in terms of "narrowness", of "being densely populated".

[273] The term for the 'classical' type of alleyway in Egypt. It is today still found, for example, in Islamic Cairo which Ibrahim praises as a bulwark against the Westernisation of the city space (see IV 2.3).

move away from the poor might shield the rich upper classes from many critical eyes – but what about their employees? Rana's story is an example: it was the driver who blew the whistle and told her father she was smoking. It could be due to her age or gender that the driver feels entitled or even obliged to squeal.[274] But does surveying and squealing only work in one direction? Or does the presence of servants constitute the presence of a moral institution in general? Is the move to the desert (where proximity to the neighbours is not necessarily reduced) the attempt to ensure that social control is only exerted by the 'right', i.e. classy people, who share in the same values – servants being the sole exception? Is the tendency to engage non-Egyptian servants from Asian or African countries[275] an expression of the wish to avoid contact with people from Egypt's internal Third World? It might also be worth to enquire how *parents* perceive of the issue of surveillance. Does their reference to "the people" (see IV 1.3.4) indeed reflect their inability to counter societal pressure? Or is it rather an easy way to evade arguments with their daughters? Other questions refer to the related concept of reputation: how is the reputation of an Egyptian man or woman constructed, and how can it be destroyed? How do different persons manage the threat of reputation damage? Does a certain degree of cultural and social capital immunise against the threat of a damaged reputation? What is the men's pendant to the Egyptian Good Girl?

The latter question leads us to another topic: the prevalence of stereotyping and judgement based on global[276] concepts. My study indicates how this way of thinking and categorising works. It also suggests that many of my interview partners suffer from this, and distance themselves from it. Is this kind of thinking and judging characteristic of Egyptian society at large? Is it related to the low level of education in Egyptian society? Or rather to the discouragement of critical thinking in Egyptian school and university education? Do men perceive of this in a similar way? Would a different way of thinking and the development of more sophisticated concepts reduce discrimination and hostility? Could it even severe the connection between female discrimination and violence against women? In the sense that the 'de-humanisation'[277] of a woman based on *one* single act, character trait, or piece of dress would then not be viable anymore. Obviously most of

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[274] It might be even more specific, the combination of action, gender and age, that provokes the driver's reaction: smoking is unhealthy, destructive behaviour. If young smoke in front of their parents, it is considered disrespectful. Smoking for women is even scorned.

[275] This is an observation I made during my last stays in Egypt. I do not have any information on the extent of the phenomenon.

[276] With a "global concept" I mean the type of holistic category described above, referring to the Egyptian Good Girl and Bint el-Nas.

[277] This term might be too strong in most cases, but it hints at the mechanisms of collective identity construction that become relevant in intricate intergroup conflicts.

this is pure speculation. Yet, among well-educated young Egyptians, it has become common sense that formal education in Egypt does not foster critical thinking. (This critique applies fully to governmental schooling, and, to a certain extent, also to private education.) In particular, the final exam of high school draws excoriating critique because it exclusively encourages and rewards learning by heart. The dire state of the educational system is mentioned by many of my interview partners. Especially the distinction of governmental and private schools, and the importance of private lessons was addressed frequently, and at length. The issue of 'thinking' is definitely on the agenda of my interview partners, and of public discussion in Egypt.

Another topic of public debate that figures prominently in my study is the varying perspectives on and the relations to *barra.* My research focuses exclusively on the upper classes*,* even on those who attend a *foreign* university. They constitute a very specific segment of Egyptian society. Other societal groups and classes might reveal entirely different perspectives. An analysis of the public discourse could reconstruct the Egyptian pendant of the German discourse on Islam, for example. In regards to Egyptian sensitivities, we could enquire further into the parallels to colonial times. In how far has the relation to and evaluation of *barra* evolved since formal independence? Do we observe continuity, or a return to a previous situation? Are the years under socialist rule an exceptional period in Egypt's relations to *barra*? If the re-Islamisation is the struggle for cultural independence, has it failed? What parallels are there between Egypt's relation to the world and its citizens' stance on *barra?* Has the 'mind' of the Egyptian elite been lost to superficial consumerism? What role do imageries of a free West play for the most recent political transformations? How does the changing role of the *imaginary* affect the *barra*-dynamics? Can we assume that my interviewees' attempts to distance themselves from elitism, to emphasise the connection to their own culture, to develop an individual articulation of piety reconcilable with their own ideas about the inside-outside relation and with more complex moral judgements, constitute also a way of making the relations to the colonial powers more complex?

7 Critical evaluation of the method and process

Indeed, my research has raised more questions than it has answered. In this regards, it corresponds exactly to Rosaldo's description of the interpretive approach. I began "research with a set of questions, revise[d] them throughout the course of the inquiry, and then in the end emerge[d] with different questions than [I had] started with" (Rosaldo 1993: 7). Indeed, I started my research with a vague interest and many 'un-scientific' questions in mind. Then, I formulated a research question, which after certain reformulations became "How do young Egyptian female Muslim upper class students at cultural and biographical intersections construct their identity in interaction with the researcher in regards to the essential themes of the particular phase of their life?". In order to turn this question into practical research I had to pose many methodological questions in-between. The method(olog)ical problems and – along with them – the questions changed in the course of the research; the answers that I came up with have been depicted at length in chapter II. Soon, the field research and the empirical data led me away from the overly cumbersome research question. The reconstruction of Yasmine's narrative identity was guided by the questions proposed by the specific method and by interpretive text analysis in general. As soon as some central motives had been reconstructed, they provided the starting points for further questions. First, the *revolution as a turning point,* and Yasmine's usage of *drama terminology* caught my attention. Then, I enquired into the meaning of the *Americanised society*. Its reconstruction made me wonder, what the alternative world looked like. In the reconstruction of the *Egyptian conservative world*, I was concerned with understanding the position of *women*, and the role of *religion*. The *veil* seemed to connect the two topics in my interviewees' accounts. The more I learnt about the two social worlds, the more I wondered *what exactly* it was that caused the intense conflicts for Yasmine. Once I had reconstructed the motives "*surveillance*" and "*judgement*", I also discovered them in other interviews. Another thing I wanted to understand, was the meaning of "the *bubble*". Throughout the entire time, I was also eager to find *connections* and *parallels* between these different topics. Due to my interest, my research design, and the intention to be open and work reconstructively, the questions that I posed in the research process led into a variety of topics, *broadening* the horizon rather than deepening the analysis. In that regards, my research failed to meet another demand expressed by Rosaldo. The above quote continues: "One's surprise at the answer to a question, in other words, requires one to revise the question until lessening surprises or diminishing returns indicate a stopping point" (Rosaldo 1993:

7). My surprise indeed lessened once I had started to focus on the *role of women* and of *class* in the narrative identity construction of Yasmine. This indicates that both concepts have considerable value for the interpretation of Yasmine's story. Yet, by no means do I feel that I have already reached a 'stopping point'. Rather I would love to understand better the issues of surveillance, social control and reputation, and their relation to the political oppression in 'Mubarak's Egypt'. Thus, many of those questions that I emerged with, can be considered ideas for further research that addresses more *bounded* topics in more *depth*. The stopping point, however, is – other than in Rosaldo's idealistic description – not set by the *subject* under investigation but by my *resource* and *time constraints*. Even though this is often the case in academic research, the effect is aggravated in my study. First of all, the initial research problem was *too large* for a diploma thesis. Second, the (involuntary) attempt to formulate a detailed research question drawn from a priori assumptions complicated matters and enlarged this study. Much of the knowledge gathered prior to field research, and presented here in the state of the research (I 3), constitutes interesting and helpful, but lastly expendable context knowledge. Nonetheless, it had to be addressed in this study, in order to make transparent the notions and concepts with which I entered the field. Third, the inherent contradictions of a hypothetico-deductive research question and an interpretive, reconstructive approach posed a considerable challenge. It put various methodological problems in front of me, and above all, led to various insecurities in the research process. I dealt with these problems and insecurities by putting extreme effort into *understanding* the idea and principles of qualitative research, and by putting this process and my reflections down in writing. Even though the critical reflection on these issues in the chapters on methodology (II) enhanced *transparency*, they expanded this study considerably. I have eventually succeeded in doing justice to the demands of qualitative research, yet, I have not overcome a problem, formulated poignantly by the German historian Jörg Calließ at a workshop of the German Association for Peace and Conflict Studies (AFK) held in Augsburg in July 2010: "How are we supposed to be reflexive without boring the reader?".

The method of biographical interviewing proved to be one adequate approach for getting an idea of the perspectives and orientations of female Muslim upper class students. Crossing cultural boundaries played a role in the research, but did not seem to pose insurmountable obstacles. In parts, this is owed to the cosmopolitan milieu of the research subjects (and the researcher). It might be likely that similar constellations become more common in the social sciences, due to the increasing cosmopolitanism of youth. In an interesting instance of "double hermeneutics", the

same globalising forces that influence the life world of the research subjects, might also transform the academic world. Appadurai has already in 1996 undertaken an attempt to reformulate the idea of anthropology for the global era (Appadurai 1996). Increasing attention to and practice in intercultural qualitative research could be another vision for social science research to come.

The text interpretation along the lines of narrative identity indeed enforced a very thorough confrontation with the text, 'alienating' me and forcing me to hold back on my own frame of relevance. Even though the reconstruction remained slightly colourless and did not seem to represent the case as well as the 'drama perspective', the method of narrative identity fulfilled its function for interpretative text analysis. The decision to focus on one case study proved extremely helpful. It ensured the *inductive* and *reproductive* character of the interpretation and at the same time limited the amount of data so to allow for more focused and thorough work. The confrontation of Yasmine's case and its central motives, with the perspectives from other interviews, was nonetheless essential to the results of this study. The extracts from other interviews made it possible to draw a more *holistic* and *colourful* picture of the Americanised society and the Egyptian conservative world. In addition, they enabled me to understand the *tensions* and *frictions* caused by the *parallel* existence of two social spaces. For understanding the bubble, consultation of additional research on *class* and *space* proved as necessary as the other interviews, because due to my sample, the perspective 'from below' was largely missing. The previous parts of this conclusion attempted to point to overarching and connecting themes in this reconstruction, and to highlight the effect of different conceptual perspectives. A focus on women, class, *barra*, and youth emphasises different aspects, and leads to alternative questions for further research.

8 Autoethnographic concluding remarks: saying goodbye to cultural relativism

Given the subjective quality of this study and of the entire research project, I do not want to end with the above evaluation of the method, but would like to conclude with a more personal remark. Even if it might not satisfy the criteria for an auto-ethnographic account, it shall suffice to bracket this study (see I 1.1) and set the end point to this research endeavour. Ever since if have returned from my first stay in Egypt, I was appalled by Western stereotypes of Arabs, Muslims, and Islam. Not surprisingly, my attention was drawn primarily by the stereotype of female oppression, because it constitutes the linchpin of so many political and academic debates. I had seen with my own eyes that Egyptian women are not silent or submissive. I have also seen with my own eyes that many Egyptians consider Islam a force for the *good*, and *voluntarily* make it a cornerstone of their lives. Both is a far cry from the images of violence and oppression that we have come to associate with this religion. Given that I started my research with the intention to show that the stereotypes about Islam and women were wrong, I missed my goals in at least one sense: Egyptian women *are* suffering from discrimination. And even though my interview partners come from the upper classes, which are often assumed to be the most 'modern', they *suffered considerably* from the place their society puts them – as women – in. Of course, the stereotype is *not confirmed* in its *simplicity*. Egyptian women are *not silent* and it is not the '*inherently* violent Egyptian man' who oppresses them. The women themselves do not seem to blame men as individuals, and certainly they do *not blame Islam* for their discrimination. Instead, they draw a *complex* picture of exclusionary practices, restricting prescriptions, generalising judgement and constant surveillance. In order to explain these conditions, they even point to the importance of the *authoritarian* character of the Egyptian *regime*. Yet, the essence remains: my young, female, Muslim, well-educated, upper class Egyptian interview partners tell stories of a society that discriminates against women, and threatens their physical and mental well-being (see also Mostafa 2008).

Considering that I did not want to focus on the *role* of women in my study, this result surprises me even more. I originally hoped to gain a better understanding of how young women who are located at the *intersections of socio-cultural trends*, *deal with the resulting tensions*.[278] I assumed that reconstructing their experiences and strategies would show the *diversity* and *complexity* of an Egyptian woman's life, thereby counteracting stereotypes which rest per definition on simplifications and generalisations. Globalisation, re-Islamisation and the interaction of the global

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[278] I limited my study to women for various reasons outlined above, but I had not intended to make it a study about gender or women issues.

and the local, provided sensitizing concepts. By reconstructing the three social worlds, I succeeded in understanding and showing the interplay of global forces and local appropriations and transformations. Yet, in my interviewees' perspective the *main features* of *all* these social worlds pertain to *women* and *class,* to *exclusion, surveillance* and *judgement.*[279]

Eventually, it is evidence of the 'qualitative' quality of this study that my results counteract my normative intentions. For me, personally, this meant: first, I had to adjust my idealised image of Egypt and its society. Second, I had to question myself critically in how far I did wrong by not using my privileged position as an educated wealthy Western woman, student, and researcher. Instead of fighting blatant injustice, I had been following an unproductive relativism. Third, I had to make up my mind again, whether I really wanted to live in a county like this.[280]

But for now, rather than taking the reader further into my personal ruminations, I would like to draw her attention to two important aspects of my interviewees' accounts of a more hopeful kind. For *none* of my interviewees is Islam the root or the articulation of their problems. When discussing the role and position of women in Egypt, or other countries, we should keep that in mind. Moreover, the Arab Spring might have ushered the beginning of a new era in Egypt. The Egyptian Revolution was celebrated in the country's media and the streets, in the coffee houses and at the dinner tables as a *show of unison* – between Christian and Muslims, rich and poor, secularists and Islamists.[281] First of all this emphasis on unison is a reflection of the strongly divided society I have portrayed in this study. But besides that, it could also indicate the wish to heal the cleavages that are so characteristic for the appearance of contemporary Egypt. And above all, the Egyptian revolution endowed Yasmine and other interview partners with the conviction that *change is possible,* in both the *societies* and the *homes*.

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[279] Even though this is once more extreme in Yasmine's case, the other interviewees show similar tendencies, as is indicated by the inventories, and can also be deduced from the rich amount of interview material that 'fits' these topics.

[280] Indeed, prior to and still shortly after the field research, this had been my intention.

[281] I do not want to state here that Islamists are the only or most adequate counterpart to secularists.

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