The struggle to belong
Dealing with diversity in 21st century urban settings.
Amsterdam, 7-9 July 2011

Identity in Egypt: Snapshots of Egyptian Youth

Authors:
Yossra M. Taha
Aya Nassar
Dina Tawfic
Karim Khashaba
Salah ElDin El-Rashidi
Somaia Metwally

Paper Distributed at the International RC21 conference 2011

Yossra Taha Assistant lecturer at the faculty of Economics and Political Science Cairo University, Aya Nassar and Somaia Metwally are Teaching Assistants at the Faculty of Economics and Political Science Cairo University, Dina Tawfik is a Teaching Assistant at the International Academy for Engineering and Media Sciences, Karim Khashaba is MSc Political Science Student, and Salah Eldin El-Rashidy Works for the Information and Decision Support Center

Address: 10 Omar Tosson Street, off Ahmed Orabi Road, Mohandessen, Giza, Egypt

EMAIL: YOSSRATAHA@YAHOO.COM

1. INTRODUCTION

Identity is about belonging. It is about what one has in common with some and what distinguishes oneself from other people. Identity is about relationships and involvements with one's forefathers, which in modern societies are very complex; it is about contradictions and values we share or with others. At its best, Identity gives us a sense of personal location, a sense of a stable core to one's individuality. On a societal level, the notion of identity is a key for social integration. It holds a society together or tears it apart.

This report is the work of a group of six young Egyptian researchers. Based on semi structured interviews and focus groups it explores the notions of identity held by contemporary young Egyptians, 'offline' and 'online'. It sets out to unravel some of the 'distortions' and 'confusions' they are subject to. It was conducted through a period of two years from 2008 till 2010.

The research and its design arose from a problem the researchers observed within the contemporary Egyptian context, and that is the struggle between the forces of tradition and Modernity that the Contemporary Egyptian society faces. This has led to 'distortions' and 'confusions' about what manifests contemporary Egyptian identity. This problem is particularly apparent among young people in Egypt. On the one side, a large number of young Egyptians today feel comfortable adopting 'Western' lifestyles while on the other side, there are those, who categorically reject these 'Western' lifestyles in favor of more 'traditional' ones. And yet others, in fact a large number of young people, adopt both lifestyles, though often in what can be seen as contradictory and inconsistent ways.

An important component that reinforces this 'identity crisis' is the increasing accessibility of the Internet. Although the total number of Internet users in Egypt might still be small, virtual activities (in cultural, social, political ways) are attracting more attention, especially among young people. This is a notable development, potentially with significant social impacts, because, as Ibrahim and Wassif (2000, 161) highlight, "the communication age puts young people in unprecedented contact with cultures other than their own. Whether images of this wider world are distorted or accurate, one outcome of the interaction is that the beholder is made to re-think his own culture in light of new information. The outcome can be to question one's identity or to reaffirm its separateness from the other".

Exploring notions of Egyptian identity among people is a particularly important because in every society young people carry the promise of a better future. Specifically in Egypt, young people aren't only its most important capital, but they also constitute the largest segment of the population. According to the 2006 census (The Egyptian Cabinet Information and Decision Support Center, and the Egyptian Population Council, 2010), approximately 40% of Egyptians are between the ages of 10 and 29. And although "the questioning and reconstructing of identity is occurring in Egypt at all levels today, […] young people are at the center of […] tensions, as the group

expected to carry forward inherited notions of Egyptian identity while leading the nation into the globalized future" (Ibrahim and Wassif, 2000, 161).

The report approaches the issue of young Egyptian identity a three dimensionally . Looking at language, gender and e-identity and their relationship with the Identity of Egyptian youth, it explores questions such as: How do young Egyptians understand being Egyptians these days? What constitutes their identity? To what extent does the Egyptian Youth have a clear 'idea/vision' about their identity? What values or components of Identity do young people relate to "being Egyptian"? What does it mean today for a guy to be "Ibn Balad", and for a girl to be "Sit bi meet Ragil"[1]? Is there a significant difference between 'real' and 'virtual' identities? Are Egyptian youth different online than they are in the real world? What is different or significant about social interaction or self-expression online?

---

[1] These are Egyptian connotations referring to men or women possessing the qualities of reliability and being there for the people in need.

2.   Approach, Research Design and Data

Notions of Identity are hard to grasp; they are not 'out there' to be easily observed and measured.

Given the complexity of the research task, it was agreed that the methodology would be mainly qualitative, because notions of identity can hardly be measured in quantitative terms. Thus representativeness of the sample in a 'traditional', statistical sense was not a primary concern of the project; as such the research presents the notions of identity as held by a snapshot of Egyptian youth.

The research is based on the information received from a sample of 91 young Egyptians. Twenty two semi-structured interviews were conducted, out of which 2 were online. The criteria was simply to interview people the research team had previously established rapport with, have trust in, are young and have something to say about the identity of Egyptian youth in general.

In addition, six focus groups were organized, four of which were held at the British Council in Cairo, while the other two were held in one of Aswan's very authentic villages in the South of Egypt.

Through the focus groups we reached a total of 69 young people. In order to come up to ethical research standards we collected written consents from all participants.

All the interviews and the focus groups were recorded on video, and were transcribed later on in Arabic, some of them were translated in English. The videos and the transcripts were all used in the analysis.

APPROACH & THEMATIC FRAME

The research relied mainly on the interpretative approach. And Through the critical evaluation and refinement of initial assumptions and observations gained from the first focus group meetings; we agreed on the following research dimensions and main perspectives:

The two main dimensions of the research are "Young Egyptian Identity in Real Life" and "Young Egyptian Identity Online".

The two central perspectives, which guided the exploration of these two main dimensions, are 'language' and 'gender'. In addition, to these specific perspectives, it was important for us also to capture notions of Egyptian identity generally.

3.   Main Findings

The findings section of the report is divided into two main parts. The first addresses Egyptian Identity in reality or the real space focusing on young people's views regarding the relationship between language, gender and identity. The second part addresses the views of the sample regarding how young Egyptians' Identity is expressed in the virtual space.

YOUNG EGYPTIAN IDENTITY IN REALITY

We explored young Egyptian identity 'in reality' from three perspectives. First, we looked at the views of the young Egyptians on the Egyptian identity in general. Second, we explored their views on the relationships between language and identity. Third, we looked at the relationship between gender and identity.

THEME 1: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE EGYPTIAN?

This first section deals with the general question of how the interviewees view their Egyptian Identity. It explores general questions of how they feel about being Egyptians, what they consider being Egyptian is all about and what important things guide their lives as Egyptians?

WHAT ARE THE NOTIONS OF THE NATURE OF EGYPTIAN IDENTITY - HOLISTIC, SINGLE, OR INDIVIDUALISTIC?

We started off with exploring the notions of the nature of Egyptian identity. The views of the sample regarding the Egyptian identity ranged from viewing it holistically, individualistically or in a singularly.

Overall we found slightly varying perspectives. Most of the participants had a holistic view of their personal identity, that being Egyptian is just one dimension of their identity and not the main one. However, the extent of how holistic they saw their identity varied greatly.

Some have seen the Egyptian identity as a melting pot that encompasses a lot of dimensions, which don't contradict and should be all acknowledged as they all enrich such identity. These dimensions included being Egyptian, African, Arab, and Muslim

Others have restricted their holistic identity in terms of religion. They saw themselves as Muslims, which in their view was superior and wider than being Egyptian. Others went further to admitting that for them Egyptian is merely a nationality nothing more, "Despite the fact one might assume that only religious Egyptian youth have such tendency to identify themselves, the reality is in fact different, as one participant mentions that even though he is not a strongly committed religious person, he still prefers to identify himself as a Muslim … "

Another group was actually the total opposite they extended their holistic view to considering themselves human. There reasons for such extension varied greatly. Some said it's simply a matter of the order of the circles of identity; others recognized a deep identity crisis among Egyptian youth presented in the vagueness, distortion and/or contradictions they see which make them unable to decide upon their own identity and thus they viewed themselves as human because they don't know what else to be; others actually choose to be universalistic in that sense because they are no longer fond of being Egyptian or nationalistic anymore. Most of the reasons they list for that have to do with the unsatisfactory political and socioeconomic conditions in Egypt.

A different group of the sample chose the single approach of defining their Identity, by mentioning that they are Egyptian, proud to be so and placing it as a top identifier. They supported their view by many factors, including blood and origin and factors of being born, raised, educated, and having their families and friends in the country. Others had distinctive opinions of why they identified themselves as Egyptian, for example a participant believed that the Egyptian Identity is older and more eloquent than the Arab, Muslim or other related identities, while another valued placing being Egyptian at the top of his identity ladder because it's what we need most.

The remaining group included the ones who identified themselves individualistically i.e. as persons. In that manner a variation was witnessed as well, some identified themselves very personally mentioning personal traits like being simple, fun, ambitious and adventurous; others identified themselves according to their family origins, class, friends and colleagues. And while one identified herself in gender terms answering when asked to chose one word to identify herself, "I'm a girl, I did not feel I'd be honest saying I'm Egyptian, since my origins aren't Egyptian". What was interesting was this small group of people who identified themselves in geographical terms, however they are terms that are loaded with many personal and social traits e.g. Nubian, or Upper Egyptian who both have separate dialects, that elevates to a separate language in the case of Nubians, certain codes of dress, certain traditions and customs and certain personal traits.

Most interestingly for us was that not a negligible portion of the sample chose to identify themselves as human and belonging to humanity. This struck us as least expected since such identification is usually closer to citizens of western societies and adherents of the western culture ones with a high level of awareness and education.

■■■

What are People's Views of the Distinct Features of 'the Egyptian'?

Interestingly, the question of what the participants perceived as the identifying features of 'an Egyptian' resulted in the most responses. Given this observation, we assume that the participants had a clearer view about the features that *identify an Egyptian* rather than those identifying the *Egyptian identity*. Only a few said that there were no apparent features; some had a critical view and mentioned that the apparent features of the Egyptian are mostly negative

features.

The most interesting was to see that despite the fact that almost all the participants were able to mention one or two traits as the most distinctive about an Egyptian; we can't actually conclude that the majority agreed on a certain set of distinct features, one or two traits might have been repeated but the analysis did not yield a specific trend.

In particular, we identified four different clusters of such features:

NATIONALITY

The first cluster is the simplest, as some of the participants believed the Egyptian is simply one who has the Egyptian nationality, lives on the land of Egypt, has Egyptian roots and origins, his family, friends and relatives live in the country and speaks Arabic.

PERSONAL TRAITS: KIND, PEACEFUL, PATIENT, CALM AND DECENT

The second cluster includes some personal traits that identify 'the Egyptian'. Many participants assured that the Egyptian is one that is very kind, peaceful, patient, calm, decent and won't offend others. They also added the Egyptian is "usually a good spirited person, loves to joke and make fun even of himself, he is popular, outgoing, and becomes intimate really quickly with people he might even not know…"

RELIGIOUS, MODERATE, AND TOLERANT, BUT NOT EXTREMIST OR FUNDAMENTALIST

A third cluster is one that relates to religion. Almost all of the participants believe that 'the Egyptian' is religious, moderate, and not extremist. However many of them agreed that the religiosity of the Egyptian is basically restricted to appearance and not in essence, they might look religious but their acts don't usually reflect such religiosity, some have also referred to the fact that the Egyptians are easily mobilized when it comes to offending or humiliating religion, they are religious but in their own way, they take what they want from religion and ignore the rest and very few have referred to the link between hard work and religiosity.

CRITICAL VIEWS

The fourth cluster includes mainly negative traits as apparent features of the Egyptian. The Pessimists have initially mentioned they don't see a common dominator, no special traits, or distinctive features about being Egyptian, they even suggested that what units them are superficial dimensions. While the ones who viewed negative traits were very clear about listing them, some of such traits included corruption, hypocrisy, conspiracy, weak patriotism, having high sense of fake ego, and acting low humiliating themselves by appearing hungry and miser.

...

WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE THINK ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GLOBALIZATION, RESIDENCE AND HYBRID IDENTITIES?

Not many of the participants addressed this point explicitly, nevertheless, there are some interesting conclusions to draw:

We found that most of the responses regarded the impact of globalization and the idea of hybrid identity in a negative manner. Globalization was generally viewed as negatively affecting the Egyptian identity, since it has driven youth to dress and speak in a certain way to be considered trendy, which strips Egyptians of who

they 'really' are.

In that context participants stressed the significance of the issue of residence. Many of the respondents believed that residential areas in the countryside or in upper Egypt are less Americanized, as stated by an interviewee, in the sense that they still have certain restrictions that guide life there; people in these regions preserve the essence of the Egyptian traditions and customs. In contrast to these rural areas, in the cities in general and Cairo in particular, the waves of modernization swapped over society.

The answers of participants from the countryside in Upper Egypt revealed that some of the traditions and norms they hold there make it difficult for them to accept things like youths' new language or specific ways of dressing. ".. a guy with his baggy trousers down and obvious boxers is a scene that disgusts me, this is something we haven't been raised on in Upper Egypt" (Female, Muslim, Luxor).

In terms of addressing hybrid Identities most of the participants have viewed it negatively as well. A lot of the participants feel that merging different dimensions to the Egyptian identity caused the loss of the sense of identity and direction; they feel it led to the fact that today the Egyptians don't know who they are anymore. This is due to the absence of clear common goals, agendas, stances, attitudes, and settled values. In contrast the contemporary situation is shaped by sets of scattered values; it has come down to an individual choice of which of these values to adapt and which to ignore. The choice concerning what to follow and what not to follow is strictly personal not related to any set of codified rules or values.

▪▪▪

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IDENTITY AND BELONGING

We found that the notions of distortion, vagueness and negative hybridity as seen by the participants affect their sense of belonging in various ways.

It was interesting to see that the interviewees expressed their love, loyalty and belonging to Egypt in different ways: some expressed it bluntly, while others said it sadly. Overall, they all expressed some kind of sense of loyalty; yet, there were different "buts".

The findings suggest that there are degrees of loyalty to Egypt among Egyptian youth.

For instance, there are those who explicitly stressed their love for Egypt. These participants made very clear that they would work as hard as they can to improve the situation of the country. Even if they got the chance of leaving Egypt, they would just come back to assist Egypt. Others have said they criticize the conditions out of their love for Egypt, yet, they won't ever accept external unfair criticisms. In a similar vein, many participants said that they shiver when they hear patriotic songs for no particular reason despite the fact the country did nothing to them.

On the other side, there are those for whom this sense of loss has weakened their sense of belonging. One of the interviewees expressed this very clearly: "In the past there used to be things that united us now I cannot find one clear thing to love anymore about Egypt" (Female, 22, Muslim, Cairo, undergrad). Some of the participants felt that Egypt has politically and socioeconomically retreated a lot in the past decades, which has led to a loss of the country's standing among the other Arab countries. Participants named this as a factor that has led to a loss of pride. One participant, who was born in Egypt but with Turkish and Syrian roots, believes that the degrading socioeconomic condition in Egypt has led to the fact that contemporary Egyptians are treated disrespectfully by others. The participant was concerned that stereotypes were formed, which would be hard to challenge and change.

•••

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IDENTITY AND SELF ACHIEVEMENT

A particularly interesting finding of the research was that there is a strong link between identity and the notion of 'self achievement' among young Egyptians. We noticed that almost all participants introduced themselves first with their profession before mentioning their names, their schools or graduation, and their age. Thus, we realized the importance that the profession has in self-identification.

The data itself has confirmed such deduction. A considerable number of interviewees have stated that there's an observable link between one's identity and belonging on one hand and self-achievement on the other. The participants felt that if a person feels his country provides him with his needs he will appreciate it. However, since he cannot achieve his goals and what he wants in his country, he tries to achieve it elsewhere, and thus he is usually upset, unsatisfied and less loyal.

•••

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IDENTITY AND CRISIS

There has been a wide agreement among the interviewees that there is a direct relationship between the notion of identity and crisis. Almost all the participants stated that identity is more apparent in times of crisis. One example, which almost all of them brought up in order to support this point, was the incidents that followed the Egypt vs. Algeria football match in the African Qualifications for the 2010 World Cup. Almost all of the participants stressed that this incident triggered their sense of identity and belonging to Egypt. They expressed this increased feeling of Egyptian identity in different manners like changing Facebook statuses or adding posts that reflect such bursts of emotions.

On the other hand just one participant believed that claiming that there was a relationship between identity and crisis was utter humiliation to Egyptians as "one should have a sense of belonging and appreciation to his self identity all the time, not just during a crisis." (Male, 25, Muslim Cairo)

THEME 2: YOUNG EGYPTIANS, LANGUAGE AND EGYPTIAN IDENTITY

Moving on to the second theme, it's apparent that this report comes to identify the change aspects that language witnesses in the Egyptian context and among the youth in particular. The researchers were particularly interested in exploring the innovation of the youth slang language and the use of foreign language within Arabic conversations. Researchers also looked at the language that the participants used to fill in the questionnaires, in order to find out if there is compatibility between what the participants said about language and how they actually filled in the questionnaires.

...

WHERE DOES YOUTH LANGUAGE / 'SLANG LANGUAGE' COME FROM AND IS IT A PROBLEM?

Overall, the participants reported that the use of 'slang language' is common in young gatherings; in casual, and in fun contexts. It is particularly popular among young males.

From the perspective of the participants there are three reasons behind the use of slang language:

ECONOMIC SITUATION

The first reason relates to the economic situation and the problem of unemployment. Egyptian youth have too much time, and they do not know how to use it positively. Here we need to highlight the issue of "frustration which led the youth to mock everything around them through the language they use. It is a kind of escaping the reality" (Male, Muslim, Faculty of Medicine, Cairo).

INFLUENCE OF MASS MEDIA

Secondly, participants mentioned the impact of mass media on language; it plays an important role in young people's lives. The problem that participants saw is that the media uses slang language to easily reach the largest segment of audience "youth".

UNIQUENESS & PRIVACY

Thirdly, interviewees stressed the aspect of uniqueness and privacy as key aspects in the creation and use of "slang language". Young Egyptians want to feel a space of privacy from other generations; they tend to code certain phrases to refer to certain expressions, as mentioned above. Meanwhile others believe that older people can understand the codes of the slang language "youth language", but they refuse to use it. Other older people who are able to understand the youth slang language use it, one of the interviewees has mentioned that his parents use youth slang language at home for joking and laughing only.

IS 'SLANG LANGUAGE' A PROBLEM?

Interestingly, most of the participants consider the use of 'slang language' as inappropriate in certain contexts; like in front of older people or in formal situations. They felt this would be disrespectful and might also have a negative impact on their image.

When asked whether or not 'slang language' threatens the Arabic language, many of the participants did not see any problem. They stressed that 'slang language' is a phenomenon that exists all over the world. Others consider it as an innovation because it enables

youth to do and say whatever they want without others intervention.

Despite of the Egyptian youth's awareness of the importance of keeping their original language - classical Arabic - alive between them, and their belief in its important role in preserving their identity, they mentioned different reasons for not using the "classical Arabic language" as a main language in their daily life. Some were afraid of being criticized by the others when they use it.

Moreover, there is a difference between the dialect in Upper Egypt and that in Lower Egypt. Even among the cities of Lower Egypt, the people in Alexandria use a different dialect than those in Port Said. According to the answers during Aswan's focus groups, one of the Nubian participants assured that when he is in Aswan, the city, he has to deal in the Aswan's dialect in order to be able to understand other people.

■■■

EXPLORING THE USE OF ENGLISH PHRASES IN DAILY ARABIC DIALOGUE

It is quite common among young Egyptians to use English words or phrases in their daily communication. Intriguingly though, some of those, who use single English terms in their otherwise Arabic conversations, actually do not know the English language as such. That is why we found it interesting to ask the participants about the reasons for using English words in daily conversations.

We received the following answers:

The Western Development: The progress the West achieved in various fields of sciences is primary reason to make the subjects taught in Universities in English. It is difficult to find a synonym in Arabic.

Universality: English is a universal language, most people all over the world know English.

Context: We can also find that the context where individuals exist in, could affect their spoken language.

Necessity: Related to the market-oriented necessity, some have to use language, foreign language, to fit the trading minimum requirements and be able to sell their goods to tourists.

Some others reject the adoption of foreign language in the application of modern technology, because they are not accustomed to use foreign language and adhere to their native one.

WRITTEN LANGUAGE (THE LANGUAGE PARTICIPANTS USED TO FILL THEIR QUESTIONNAIRES)

Having listened to the participants' views on language as an aspect of Identity, we looked at the language they used to fill in the questionnaires. The interesting thing that we discovered was that although the questionnaire was in Arabic, not all the answers were in Arabic.

Only five participants answered the questionnaire in fully Arabic.

Mostly they used classical Arabic language. However, they don't refuse to acquire foreign language and they disagreed to use foreign word in Arabic dialogue, as they consider it as a kind of distortion.

The rest of the groups mixed languages. A few chose to fill in their name, email, address and date of birth in English, but completed the rest of the questionnaire in Arabic. While the majority filled the above in Arabic, and then they used both Arabic and English to fill the rest of the questionnaire. And only one introduced himself in both Arabic and English.

...

THEME 3: YOUNG EGYPTIANS, GENDER AND EGYPTIAN IDENTITY

URBAN VERSUS TRADITIONAL SETTING

WHAT ARE THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE SOCIAL STATUS OF MEN AND WOMAN IN DIFFERENT AREA SETTINGS?

This section explores the varying perceptions to men/women social status according to different area settings. A lot of participants stressed the fact that communities away from big cities or the capital are more conservative; hold traditional values and even stick to traditional images of what they considered as "the proper gender roles."

One Interviewee actually reflected on an incident of his own where he picked up a girl in public means of transportation in one of the big cities, but he would not dare to do so in a more conservative setting he comes from.

In terms of reasons and explanations offered, one interviewee explicitly mentioned that Cairo is Westernized while other places are not very much Westernized. Another interesting explanation for this came from one of the participants in a focus group held in Aswan: "I'll tell you something, it is normal, boys and girls (in Aswan) talk together but within limits of workplaces, but no one would speak to a girl in the street for example, why? Because here the whole community knows each other, therefore it would not be appropriate to have a word going that X talks to Y's daughter."

For the research team the idea of proximity in small communities is interesting, it resonates with a practice of why people meet away from their own neighborhoods even if the meeting places are not private. The whole idea of seeing people or being seen by people who would know them acts as a very strong social order mechanism that is disintegrating in big cities. In the All- female Aswan focus group, being in a small community posed a lot of restrictions, not only on man-woman relationships as mentioned in the all-male one, but more importantly on freedom of movement for education, jobs or travelling.

Here we could note that the we felt that there was a difference between the Cairo Focus groups and the Aswan Focus groups in the way participants reacted to the issue of gender roles. The team usually got very diverse and fluctuating reactions from the

participants in the early focus groups which were held in Cairo and had mixed participants. This is in comparison to the stable more confident attitudes about gendered roles in the focus groups that were later held in Aswan.

<p style="text-align:center">•••</p>

DOMESTIC RESPONSIBILITIES AND AREAS OF CONTROL:

EXPLORING THE REACTION TO THE TERM "SI EL-SAYYID"

Here we tried to explore the reaction to the term "Si El-Sayyid", which probes discussions about the degree to which perceived domestic roles and responsibilities have changed between genders, the effects of that, and -possibly - the manifestations like the shifting areas of matters in which men become more controlling.

The term "Si El-Sayyid" was used to probe different perceptions of shifting domestic roles. A lot of respondents asserted that they know what does a strong male figure like him should be like, nevertheless we felt that there was confusion, and that the image itself might be nothing more than a stereotype. Only once was the term and its connotation brought up by an interviewee without being probed. He mentioned that the term highlighted the complete financial responsibility of a man; also it referred to a domineering male figure in relationship to his wife and children.

More detailed descriptions varied in assigning specific aspects. A lot of participants would relate aspects of the character to confrontational situations, since for a lot a strong male figure is he who has the last word in any argument, sometimes regardless of the soundness of his opinion.

When we contrast this with responses of the all-male focus group in Aswan we can notice that, although participants in Aswan stressed the importance of traditional differentiated gender roles, they also stressed responsibilities, and offered a more balanced view. Some would highlight the inherent traditional role of men by stressing the ability to reflect and deal wisely on different matters, while others accepted that responsibilities could be shifted between the two partners in times of need.

The idea of mutual respect between a husband and wife was scarcely referred to in Cairo focus groups with exception of a couple of respondents.

What was also interesting for the researchers to note was that a traditional old term like "Si El-Sayyid", which would identify with a father figure, was being applied to young people's boy/girl relationship, as in a boyfriend, fiancé or a husband more than the father in a family.

Nevertheless the father figure remained the prototype against which contemporary practices were compared. For example a participant wanted to differentiate between "Si Al-Sayyid" the father and "Si El-Sayyid" in the younger generation and in the same focus group posited the idea of boys/men being controlling in trivial matters in contemporary relationships, which we could loosely interpret as a

generational differentiation, or changing roles. Also reflecting on contemporary girl/boy relationships one commented that girls would not appreciate a "cool" guy who was okay with everything.

Views reached the level that some of the informants perceived that the increasing domestic roles of women is due to a decreasing or absent role of men.

Reasons participants paused for this change of roles varied and were sometimes confusing. Otherwise, it was usually related to women's increasing economic roles, acting as breadwinners and financially preserving the household, alternatively others posed severe economic conditions that lead men to work in multiple jobs and thus leave to women bigger domestic responsibilities.

Other reasons included: increasing concession on the male's part that coincide with a rising female social role, the effect of education and increased awareness on women accepting of certain roles, the effect of family's upbringing and encouraging girls to pursue education and career paths. Only once an interviewee mentioned westernization as a reason for the decreasing sense of responsibility on the part of men, which results in its turn in distorted relationships.

On a different note we find a lot of the all-female Aswan focus group narrated the difficulties they and girls like them could face in pursuit of an education or a career. These could range from distant schools, difficulties of travelling, parental control…etc. When they were asked what they would like to change about that, they mentioned that they needed to be trusted. For us it was unique to find the arguments posed for values of trust rather than the usual demand for freedom urbanites would usually call for. (Female, 36, Muslim, Qena and Female, Muslim, Luxor).

...

SOCIETAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND ROLES:

EXPLORING THE REACTIONS TO THE TERMS "IBN EL BALAD" AND "SIT BI MEET RAGIL"

This theme works on a similar note to the previous sub-theme, but in public spaces, or rather the changing perceptions of social responsibilities and role between genders through discussing reactions to terms "Ibn El Balad" and "Sit Bi Meet Ragil"; terms which embrace a cluster of societal values, values that each and every man and woman ought to abide by. However, we should point out the fact that there are no specific virtues that "Ibn El balad" and "Sit Bi Meet Ragil" encompass. In fact, any kind of a good deed that includes helping other person can qualify its doer to the title of "Ibn El Balad" or "Bent El Balad" (the female word of Ibn El Balad). Yet we identified the following virtues that interviewees associated with these notions.

Definition of "Ibn El Balad":
Ibn El Balad is that decent man who respects people around him especially the ladies; he is that man who vacates his seat for a woman in the means of transportation, and who carries heavy things for her; a man of chivalry and manhood. Also, Ibn El Balad is

14

that one who tries to bring quarrelling people together. Ibn El Balad is the man who gives hand for both males and females with no distinction.

Is He Still There or Not?

It has been widely agreed that Ibn El Balad is no longer there. Manifestations of etiquette and good manners have completely disappeared among Egyptians.

People in Egypt are no longer caring for others, they became more selfish and self-serving, a tendency particularly observed in means of transportation (a setting for intensive societal interactions) where packed buses and underground coaches make such tendency more likable to emerge. One participant said that she feels the characteristics of Ibn El Balad only show when a guy tries to impose himself on a girl. One of the interviewees believed that the influence of Western values is to be blamed for the vanishing of the good qualities of Ibn El Balad.

Ibn El Balad and Harassments:

Harassments have become one of the most tackled aspects in the societal sphere in Egypt these days, a phenomenon that directly contradicts with concepts of Ibn El Balad.

Interestingly, with the increase in the incidences of harassments, the qualities of Ibn El Balad have become wrongfully perceived in many occasions as a mere attempt to harass a girl in public. One interviewee told the story of a male attempting to help a girl in public, which was misperceived as harassment

Ibn El Balad and Sit bi Meet Ragil:

Overall, some of the participants brought forward that the disappearance of the Ibn El Balad character appears to have provided space for the "Sit Bi Meet Ragil" character to evolve more evidently. In fact, the literal interpretation for the word "Sit bi Meet-Ragil" – a woman acting like 100 men - points out the fact that women in Egypt sometimes take over the roles of men mainly because they failed to do what they should be doing, which is a weird thing in a gender-oriented society. Furthermore, the "Sit-b - Meet-Ragil" notion is always associated with actions of self-defence.

...

FRAMEWORKS OF REFERENCE

On critical reflection not all traditional values are inherently positive, some mutate and become translated into petty behavithes: we note the repeated allusion to mistaken intentions when a guy helps out a girl, or rising interference especially in girls' behaviors and curfews. The traditional image of an organic and caring society could turn into an over-imposing one, but then again some other narratives from respondents showed that incidents rise to challenge this negative image. (Male, Muslim, Assuit, Political Science).

There are several multiple frameworks of references when it comes to values guiding interaction. In a lot of cases religion was cited as a guide of what is and is not suitable (though of these interpretations and views vary), and in others it was social images, value system, and people's opinion about such relationships. In short, the overlapping of different circles of time and space contribute to the confusion that the youth suffer.

YOUNG EGYPTIAN IDENTITY ONLINE

In this second part of the main findings section, we explore how the Egyptian youths express themselves online; how, if at all, their Egyptianity is expressed online; and how the internet helps or hinders self-expression.

HOW DO YOUNG
EGYPTIANS USE
VIRTUAL SPACE?

Most of the participants reported of similar uses of the internet. Most importantly, the internet serves entertainment purposes. With entertainment the participants meant downloading films, songs, programs, and games. For us, the fact that those uses came highest in ranking, indicate the superficiality of the importance of the internet to the participants. Almost all the participants mention their downloading activity as a normal activity unaware of the fact that most of it is acts of piracy.

Another widely and repeatedly mentioned by participants was the use of the internet in work or study related activities, like research, and access to news. Some participants mentioned it was their work or study that was the reason behind them using the internet differently.

The participants also mentioned they use the internet in communication, interaction, and meeting new people. This use did not enjoy consensus among the participants: Some mentioned this in terms of meeting new people, new cultures, widening horizons and exposure; others mentioned that the internet made communication and interaction very easy and quick. However, not a small portion of the participants mentioned that this is not necessarily a positive thing since chatting and communicating with various people could be dangerous and would prefer restricting the interaction with people they know and not just anybody. What's interesting here is that it was participants from cities and educated in private universities, ones that would generally be categorized as more liberal who mentioned this danger and not participants who would be categorized as less liberal.

Related to that use; participants also mentioned that the internet is sometimes used to interact with the opposite sex and start relationships; however, most of the time this answer was received after being induced by questions from the researchers' sides. The reactions also differed in that manner, some mentioned its dangers, as previously mentioned, and preferred not to approach this area and mostly they were females. Others had the impression that "90% of Egyptian youth who use the internet use it in establishing relationships with the opposite sex".

While there were other participants who were activists, believed in the importance of the dissemination role of internet as for them the internet is a mean for those who are searching for more reach even if they have a voice in real life. Those activists varied:

On one side, some were religious activists who believed the internet provided them with the space they need to spread the good "I have a blog that I can use to publish my writings which I make sure express my developmental and preaching thoughts. Facebook also is a wonderful mean to publish my writings and ideas and communicate with other groups... and yes I can do that in non-virtual channels but virtual channels gives you more reach".

On the other side, others were political activists and believed the internet provided them with the space they need to freely and relatively safely express their views which might be persecuted if expressed publicly. For example, one participant mentions "I'm sure if the state security services got determined on finding me they could track me through my IP Address" (Female, 25 years, Muslim, Cairo).

Also, what should not be missed are the girls of Upper Egypt's Focus Group. Though they were not deeply using the Internet, they drew the attention when mentioning that they have a blog and an e-mail. The blog was entitled "Fe Hob Masr or In the love of Egypt." It was not anticipated that girls from Upper Egypt would have access to Internet in this sense, but they did.

This relates to the identity of the Egyptian youth in the sense that it, unintentionally, reflects the trends of interests among them, where the majority is apathetic in various degrees, and the minority is activist either in religious or political terms.

<p style="text-align:center">▪▪▪</p>

HYBRIDITY AND COMPLEXITY AND THEIR MANIFESTATIONS ONLINE IN TERMS OF LANGUAGE

Under the computer software language spot, we find a participant justifying why he uses non-Arabic software on his Personal Computer saying that this is how he found it. This 'Go with the flow' attitude was found in many of the informants. Though he preferred the computer software language to be in Arabic, he admits its current English settings and finds it not a problem at all. This reconciles with his first stated word that he said it describes him; 'impartial'.

When it comes to the language used online, some preferred to use the Arabic classic language while chatting. And when asked for the reason the justification was a pure religious view point; "you feel proud when you speak with the language of the Qur'an." Also it was indicated that the language chosen depends on the 'other' one is communicating with; the type of language used depends not on one's own independent will to speak/chat with the language he sees most reflecting his identity.

Another participant stated that "Mostly English and then Franco-

Arab" as the online-used language. The participant, while later on states that he is 'Muslim, Arab, Egyptian, Cairene…" which all shows the Arabic background, finds himself better expressing himself using the English and 'Anglo-Arab' language. And when he was asked which language do you prefer to use during the online written interview he said 'let it be spontaneous' (literally in English) and the interview was almost all in English.

This is the most obvious example for hybridity in a way or another. Though he seems to be consistent with his 'practical' term he used to describe himself which does not contradict with his actual words he is not quite certain about his identity and what identity he actually possesses.

What is also worth noting that a few of the participants recognized some of the 'Anglo-Arab' words introduced to them by the moderators; and had mixed opinions about them.

In such context of the Anglo-Arab language, the word 'isA' (which is an abbreviation for "Insha'Allah", means "by ALLAH's will") was not quite clear for more than half of the attendees. What the researchers found surprising is that all of them were youth, the supposedly closest to the online language. Maybe the Internet access for certain portion of youth gave them more privilege in knowing more words about this 'Anglo-Arab' language than others (non-users) from the same age and almost same educational background. Thus, the Internet added new words/language for some (that it is probable to form a culture), while others who did/do not use the Internet –heavily- were not influenced to the same degree. This somewhat implies the hardness of the use of Arabic language (vernacular or classic) online; as if it is relatively hard to find a space of reconciliation between both cultures; the Arabic language and the new technology.

One more interesting finding was in Nuba's Focus Group. Where participants confirmed that the 'Anglo-Arab' online language, widely used in cities, is used too in this extremely far countryside of Egypt.

We can conclude the reasons of using such a language as stated by the participants in the following:

- Similarity between Latin alphabets/numerical symbols and the spoken Arabic language
- It saves time and effort. Some participants find it is easier for them to type in English rather than Arabic while others find difficulty in using English to express themselves on-line.

THE NATURE OF YOUNG EGYPTIANS' IDENTITY AS EXPRESSED ONLINE

A relatively high number of interviewees told us that there are many people, including themselves, who are different on the Internet than the real world. They consider the electronic space as being 'free from the real world restrictions.' Some male participants said that, the internet could be useful –in one sense- when he 'knows' some girl in a 'respectful' frame.

In addressing the issue of self-expression three very interesting

points arose; security, privacy and isolation. Participants were keener about hiding their identity or faking it when it comes to tackling these issues out of security reasons or privacy issues. One participant mentions she will create a new blog with a hidden identity as she became annoyed when her identity was revealed on her first blog when all her friends knew the blog and started interacting on it, "(My new blog) will deal mainly with political follow ups, I will totally hide my Identity and anything that refers to myself or my work".

Another participant mentions that the internet could be used as a mean of expressing one's intimate thoughts, ideas and problems but she did not have the problem of privacy other participants referred to, "Virtual space is a killer of privacy, if someone writes he is tired on his Facebook profile everybody on the page knows, or for instance if a girl comments a lot on a guy's activities people start to think something's going on between them when it's only virtual, this how devilish virtual space is", the same participant and out of different reasons than the mentioned above decided to have another Facebook account dedicated to male friends only, "….because I want to have men talks with men only, since I'm allowed my own private space that I wouldn't want others to intrude on" He mentioned he wants to speak freely and address issues of sex and politics without worrying about the opinions of his female friends. This indicates the strength the factors of security and privacy represent in the minds of most of the participants under study and how aware they are of those factors, even in less aware participants the issue of safety and privacy were also very pronounced in matters of only chatting with people they know as was previously mentioned.

The third issue in that manner is the issue of isolation; many participants have mentioned that the internet may lead to the isolation of its users from their real world and their families. Remarks like one is physically there but not actually there and unaware of the surrounding incidents were mentioned; however, isolation was also referred to in terms of people intentionally pretending to be someone else.

Although, Social Networks have introduced new aspects to relationships among the youth generally, the impact it had on the Egyptian society is apparently different from that of the non-Egyptian societies. Due to the special nature of the Egyptian society which combines a great deal of religious values and traditions, guys/girls relationships have been characterized by certain features outlined by a handful of constraints and restrictions. Even though these constraints and restrictions have gradually been toned down with western values surging in, a framework of boundaries – though a hazy one– is still there putting some limitations to the relationship between a guy and a girl.

Some interviewees believed that sometimes young people may be unable to express themselves openly in real life to the opposite sex, and therefore they tend to be more comfortable using the applications offered by the Internet for them to overcome their timidity and shyness.

Furthermore, the Social Networks present themselves as "proper" outlets for young people to meet, avoiding the constraints put on them otherwise; for instance, girls need no permission from their parents to get online and start chatting, while such permission is required if they are to meet somebody in real life.

While most of the people interviewed think that Social Networks are providing a good compromise for boys and girls to have relationships and doing no direct breach to the jurisdictions of religion, one of the interviewees emphasized the fact that interaction between boys and girls through Facebook and similar Online Social Networking facilities are as inappropriate (from the religious point of view) as the real life interaction. In fact, he considered the online venues to be of more danger as they open the door for encroachments that may be hard to find in real life; for instance, young people are more willing to express their emotions (I miss you!!) in a way they won't be doing in a face-to-face interaction.

It may happen in Egypt that some guys and girls may get along with each other through Facebook, and never try to meet in real life, and if they met they may not be able to manage the relationship. We might put it that way: the youth in Egypt are not raised to have open and healthy relationships.

4. Young Egyptian Identity: Conclusion

The findings showed some extremely crispy and interesting insights and facts throughout all the themes.

For example, it was blunt that globalization had its impacts on the core concept of this research which is hybridity. Globalization effects were negatively impacting the identity of the Egyptians

according to the sample under study.

What was also interesting is the fact that the relationship between the identity and crisis was referred to as something negative and positive at the same time. Though some found it humiliating that the Egyptians only remember their identity during crises, others found it only more obvious during these times with no positive or negative tangible implications.

On the language front, many participants highlighted slipping English phrases/words into their day to day dialogue. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that those who said they use it aren't fluent English speakers, or even cannot speak the language at all, while the analysis of the written language implied a sort of hybridity; some members of the sample spoke Arabic though they filled in the questionnaire in English, writing some English and some Arabic, or filling in the questionnaires fully in English Also, it is important to note that the sample indicated that slang language is an exclusive creation for the Egyptian youth.

When it comes to gender, a key finding could be that Egyptian Identity is at its clearest forms in the gender theme, especially when it comes to religion and religiosity. Also, the connotations of the concepts of *'Ibn Al-Balad, Sit Bi Meet Ragil, and Si El Sayyid'* have witnessed slight changes nowadays differing relatively from that perceived by older generations.

Finally, the analysis in E-identity theme showed that different aspects of identity were practiced (sometimes only) virtually. The predominant language of the software used was English. The language used online, while chatting and socially networking, varied between Arabic, English, and the Latinized Arabic. Yet, though some preferred the Arabic language online, many did not use it but only in exceptional situations or not at all. Furthermore, identity was expressed online by some to avoid the real world restrictions when expressing themselves. Others felt no problem in dealing with both worlds in the very same way, but the internet was only a wider space for spreading the word. It also showed that practices online had its implications on the real world and it also allowed transcending reality barriers particularly for gender communications and relationships.

Reference List

Reports:

1- The Egyptian Cabinet Information and Decision Support Center, and the Egyptian Population Council, "Survey of Young People in Egypt: Preliminary Report", February 2010

Books:

1-   El-Messiri, Sawsan; *Ibn Al-Balad*: *A Concept of Egyptian Identity* (Leiden : Brill, 1978.)

2-   Ibrahim, Barbara, & Wassef, Hind; "Caught between two worlds: Youth in the Egyptian hinterland" in: Roel Meijer (ed.), *Alienation or integration of Arab youth: between family, state and street* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), pp 161-185

3-   Werbner, Pnina; "Hybridity", in: John Scott (ed.), *Sociology: The Key Concepts*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2006) , pp 83-84

Periodicals:

1-   Warschauer, Mark, El Said, Ghada R. and Zohry, Ayman; "Language Choice Online: Globalization and Identity in Egypt", *JCMC*, 7 (4), July 2002, <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol7/issue4/warschauer.html>, 18/04/2010

2-   Lockman, Zachary, "Imaging the Working Class: Culture, Nationalism, and Class Formation in Egypt 1899-1914", *Poetics Today*, 15:2, Summer 1994

Papers:

1-   Fearon, James D., "What is Identity (As We Now Use the Word)?", Mimeo, Stanford University, November 1999, <www.stanford.edu/~jfearon/papers/iden1v2.pdf> , 17/04/2010

2-   Hall, Stuart; "The Question of Cultural Identity", <http://www.csuchico.edu/~pkittle/101/hall.html>, 17/04/2010