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Narration and Identity

**Dealing with social and ideological heterogeneity in
the Kefaya Movement**

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Abstract

In authoritarian regimes all over the world, social movements have attracted attention as loud advocates of political change. Where traditional channels for political opposition are closed, loosely organized networks have paved the way for new strategic coalitions. This phenomenon raises questions about the connection between networks, identity and social action. By using a narrative approach this essay tries to shed light on the shaping of a collective identity, and indirectly collective action, in groups composed of actors from disparate communities with strong identity constructions of their own. The result builds on a field study of the Egyptian reform movement Kefaya.

By combining a narrative framework with theories of network conversations the study directs attention to the complex interplay of unity and diversity within the Kefaya movement. It refines the picture of how factions and individuals within an organization use narrative techniques to emphasize personal or subgroup identities. Finally the study underlines the importance of identity also in movements not primarily engaged with 'identity politics'. Identities are connected to narratives about the world and thereby they are also one of the primary motives of action or non-action. The author requests a greater sensibility to these linkages in future social-movement research.

Keywords: Narrative, Social Movement, Network, Identity, Egypt

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1. Introduction

Kefaya! Kefaya! Kefaya!

A new sound has integrated with the noisy streets of downtown Cairo. Since December 2004 the Egyptian Movement for Change, known by their slogan *kefaya!* (Enough!), has frequented the city centre, demanding political reform and the resignation of President Mubarak. The network-based organization presents itself as a heterogeneous mix of communists, nasserists, Islamists and liberals (Shaaban, undated article) while it in media often is presented as dominated by leftists (e.g. Galal, 050708, Samaan and Schemm, 2005). If recent political turbulence will prove to have a long-lasting effects on the Egyptian society or not is a matter for future research, but the cross-cutting coalition also raise questions on the dynamics of agency in terms of time, space and relationality.

This essay will focus on the connection between networks, identities and collective action within the Kefaya movement. By combining a narrative analytical framework with theoretical tools from the field of social movement and network research, the author wishes to attract attention to the narrated identity as a mainspring of change.

1.1. Research Question

Social movements are keys to the connection between networks, identity and collective action and the Kefaya movement provides an excellent object of study since it represents such a stragglng crowd of ideologies. A useful method to understand these kinds of phenomena is to pay attention to narratives – the stories individuals and collectives use to make sense of their own world. Narratives give insight on issues of power, political action and passivity, affiliation and legitimacy (Robertson, 2003:91, 93). The main goal of this study is hence to give enhanced knowledge on how notions of identity, as a result of time and space relations, are reflected in political movements and social agency.

The study builds upon two research questions; the first is empirically oriented and the second provides a more theoretical challenge.

What different narratives underpin the Kifaya movement?

How are collective identities articulated in a group composed of actors from various other communities with their own strong identity constructions?

In the following section the theoretical, methodological and empirical considerations will be presented. A more thorough revision of the respective element in the research process is found in chapter 2. The ambition is to use the analytical tools with a critical outlook. Suggestions for improvements are presented in the final chapter.

1.2. An Overview of Theory and Method

The study has adopted a narrative approach that is reflected in both theory and method. It affiliates to a definition of narrative spelled out by Patterson and Monroe (1998) and is thereby balanced with further categorizations developed by Somers (1994, 1995) (2.1.2.). More specific analytical tools are borrowed from Mische's studies of conversational mechanisms (2003) (2.2.3.). The theories share the same basic ontological and epistemological understandings and complete each other well.

As a research strategy, the single case study was a natural choice. Yin defines a case study as "an empirical enquiry that: investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (1984:23). Since the study object is built from disparate units and networks an embedded case study design was chosen. Individual experiences and subgroups were considered essential devices to increase the sensitivity of the study while great efforts were made to constantly return to the holistic perspective in order to keep track on the larger unit of study (cf. *ibid*:44-45).

1.3. Notes on the Case Study

Empirical material was collected in Cairo between November 2005 and February 2006¹. Some twenty interviews were conducted, mostly with front persons of the Kefaya movement and young activists from the Kefaya subgroup, Youth for Change². The leadership was considered interesting because of its supposed ambitions to exhibit Kefaya as one unison voice to the public and simultaneously mediate between different fractions within the movement. At the same time many of the leaders had parts of their identity-base in other communities which was expected to affect their narratives. The subgroup was chosen as a contrast to the central activists. In many ways they constituted a separatist group of the umbrella organization, but they were at the same time relationally tied to Kefaya through personal networks and coinciding narratives. The generation gap combined with the more peripheral position of Youth for Change gave valuable perspectives to

¹ The study was financed by SIDA through a MFS (Minor Field Study) scholarship.

² See the complete list of interviews in Appendix A.

the study. In addition to the in-group interviews a few interviews with political analysts were conducted. These gave a wider perspective on the political situation in Egypt and helped the author to switch between closeness and distance in order to move on with the analysis.

In order to identify and get in contact with my informants I initially used personal contacts and Internet sources. My interviewees then helped me to get in contact with other members. I especially tried to reach members from different ideological factions within the movement. The interviews were loosely structured and had no fixed questions. Instead the interviewees were asked to speak about their way into Kefaya, how they perceived the organization and their thoughts about the future. The goal was to give as much room for the informant to direct the dialogue. All interviews were written down and thereby transcribed as soon as possible. About a third of the interviews were accomplished in Arabic and the remaining ones in English.

The interview is an excellent method to collect individual and collective narratives, but no method is flawless. The informant may for different reasons be incapable of conveying his/her experiences in during the interview. Furthermore, the interview situation is an artificial situation which in itself may give birth to, or at least affect, narrative constructions (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973:6). For this reason, the interviews in this study have been supplemented with various written sources³ such as news articles⁴, papers and Internet-sources⁵. In order to keep myself updated on political activities and to pick up alternative analyses, debates and eye-witness reports, I regularly followed the writings on some of Egypt's more renowned political blogs⁶. Further reflections on the field study are found in section 2.3.1-2.3.2.

³ Articles etc. found among the references, if explicitly referred to or quoted.

⁴ Through the Institute de CEDEJ and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung I obtained older news articles and reports. I am most grateful for the generous support from these institutes.

⁵ Kefaya's official website www.harakamasria.net was an obvious starting point.

⁶ These included www.manalaa.com, baheyya.blogspot.com and wa7damasriya.blogspot.com. Many of the comments on these sites were written anonymously and without references which made it difficult to evaluate the information. The blogs were however helpful as sources of inspiration. Their data on activities dates and locations etc., where in general correct.

2. Theory and Method

The ambition of the following sections is to give a basic orientation on the concept of narrative. Starting with a short historical overview (2.1.1.) the discussion moves on towards the understanding of narrative that has guided this essay (2.1.2.-2.1.3.). Subsequently narrative approaches to identity will be examined (2.1.4.). Then, theoretical attempts to combine the study of narrative, collective action and social movements will be examined (2.2.1.-2.2.2.) and Mische's model of conversation mechanisms will be presented (2.2.3.). The last section deals with the methodological aspects of narrative research. After a general discussion (2.3.) much attention will be given to practical aspects of the field study, the role of the researcher, the validation of narrative research (2.3.1.), and finally some details of the case study of this essay will be reviewed in the light of the preceding discussion (2.3.2.).

2.1. Narrative in Theory

2.1.1. A Brief Historical Background

As human beings we surround ourselves with stories. They tell us who we are, why the world looks like it does and where we are heading (Robertson, 2003:93, Patterson and Monroe, 1998:319). We are *Homo narrans* and as such we are bound to take part in the "unending conversation" that surrounds all social life from our birth until the very end (Fisher, 1987:62-63). Maybe the inclination to arrange social events into episodes in a story is a remainder of childhood learning, maybe it is merely a cultural institution or maybe it lies immanent in the constitution of the brain (Tilly, 2002:8-9). Whatever the reason might be the implications of storytelling are immense. "Stories [...] embody ideas concerning what forms of action and interaction are possible, feasible, desirable and efficacious, hence at least by implication what forms of action and interaction would be impossible impracticable, undesirable or ineffectual" (ibid:9).

Storytelling has traditionally been conceived as the antithesis of modern social science (Somers and Gibson, 2003:38). Since the 18th century, the laws of nature have affected our epistemology and social scientists have continuously reinforced the myth of "a unified social system whose parts expressed an inner working autonomous logic" (ibid:42). These metatheoretical attempts to create a holistic science-of-society are explicitly anti-historical and anti-narrative (ibid:45-

46). The constant repetition of the same ontological and epistemological concepts has naturalized them to such a degree that we can no longer recognize them as historical products, instead they appear as universal givens (Patterson and Monroe, 1998:324). Moreover, the birth of the naturalistic epistemology directly invoked the problem of human agency. How could sociology give meaning and cohesion to human action within the setting of deterministic societal laws? The dilemma has remained unsolved over the centuries, leaving scientists in constant debate on “the relative impact of action and structure” (Somers and Gibson, 2003:43).

One answer to the problem is to forget about claims for universal laws and turn towards temporary and spatially limited explanations. Narrative theory provides for that by introducing a vocabulary that allows the contextual setting to affect the relationship between agency and institutions. Before entering deeply into definitions and characteristics of narratives I will give a brief summary of the theoretical roots of the phenomenon.

Narrative research originates from literary theories and the introduction of the novel as an acceptable study object in the middle of the 20th Century. In the 1960s the French structuralism widened the field of application for linguistics and the discourse was introduced to the social sciences through groundbreaking efforts by scholars such as Lévi-Strauss and Barthes (Patterson and Monroe, 1998:317-318). A second influential line of literary theory comes from the Russian formalists such as Propp and Bakhtin. Both French structuralists and Russian formalists shared the view that human storytelling can be deconstructed into a few universal plots and that the study of these plots can give valuable insights of the logics behind human knowledge (ibid).

The arrival of post-structuralism with protagonists such as Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard implied a fierce critique of the structuralists’ search for universal laws and emphasized temporal, spatial and even linguistic limitations to truth and narratives. Many contemporary scholars of narratology have been heavily influenced by this approach that on the one hand rejects a holistic view on narratives but on the other hand acknowledges the important role of narrating in all fields of the society (Patterson and Monroe, 1998:318-319).⁷ Today versions of narrative theory are being used in scientific research in a wide range of disciplines; from psychology and history to gender studies and postcolonial theory (Fludernik and Richardson, 2000). Recent examples of narrative research include autobiographical narratives or life stories (Bearman and Stovel, 2000); narratives and identity (Robertson, 2003); narratives in social movements (Polletta, 1998a, b); in political culture (Somers, 1995) and in organization research (Czarniawska, 2000, 1999).⁸

⁷ This brief historic review has no intentions to give a complete picture of all influences of the narrative research. For a more extensive account, see e.g. Johansson (2005) or Polkinghorne (1988).

⁸ For further accounts on recent developments in the use of narrative theory, see Richardson (2000) and Fludernik and Richardson (2000).

2.1.2. Defining Narrative

The straggling group of scholars using narratives in their research has by necessity resulted in a multitude of definitions of the phenomenon. Likewise is narrative sometimes made distinct from stories, myths and anecdotes, while sometimes the terms are used interchangeably (Polletta, 1998b:422)⁹ ¹⁰. This essay side with the latter group and hence narratives and stories; narration and storytelling will be used as synonyms. Concerning the definition, political scientists Patterson and Monroe describe narrative as “*the ways in which we construct disparate facts in our own worlds and weave them together cognitively in order to make sense of reality*” (1998:315). This is a good start but the definition is broad and tells little on how the process of ‘weaving together’ comes about. In order to concretize this Somers and Gibson (2003) are helpful when pointing at four features of narrativity. First, *relationality of parts* implies that events can only be intelligible when placed in relation to other events - a single, isolated event contains no meaning in itself (ibid, 59). In a narrative, however, an event is not just placed in a category together with other similar phenomena or in a sequence solely based on chronology. The second feature, *causal emplotment*, describes the actual act of relating single events with each other and turning them into a structure of meaningful episodes. This action lies in the core of the narrative process and is the tool by which we can construct networks of relationships. Somers and Gibson emphasize the importance of the plot by describing it as the syntax of narrative (ibid:59-60). The plot can not take just any shape. It has to fit into the cultural canon and it has to have a understandable intrigue and moral. A non-canonical plot is simply incomprehensible and not recognized as a story whatsoever (Polletta, 1998b:421, 424). A plot is never a “settled script” but is constantly re-created and re-told. Emplotment is a living process where people take part either as narrators or audience members (Fisher, 1987:18-19). In the swarm of events, institutions and people that surround us, we are forced to make a *selective appropriation* of significant elements in constructing our narrative. This is the third feature of the narrative and implies that we have to choose what is relevant to our story and what is not. The process is accomplished by giving the narrative a theme and events are chosen and given their importance with consideration to this theme (Somers and Gibson, 2003:60). The theme can be regarded as the organizational framework of the narrative (cf. Bar-Tal, 2000:44). Finally, *temporality, sequence* and *place* emphasize how the elements are related to each other within the narrative (Somers and Gibson,

⁹ Polletta (1998a, b) warns that narrativity should not be mistaken for the somewhat similar concept of framing. The confusion is problematic since it “obscures differences between the two in how they organize and represent reality, their connection to collective identities, [...] and their criteria of intelligibility” (ibid, 1998b:421). For examples on the use of framing in social movement research confer for example Babb, 1996; Benford, 1993 and Benford and Snow, 2000.

¹⁰ Barthes enumerates myth, novella, history, drama, cinema, conversation and even painting as *bearers* of narratives. “[N]arrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself” (1977:79).

2003:60). The emphasis on time and place manifests a clear division between the authors' narrative theory and theories that present a static view of societies, stories, and identities.¹¹

2.1.3. Four Dimensions of Narrativity

The narrative approach differs from traditional social science in so far it doesn't only recognize subjectivism but holds it as an absolute condition of research; a narrative cannot be voiceless. It doesn't, however, mean that the narrator's perspective is regarded as 'the reality', but rather as a testimony on how he/she interprets and experiences his/her own reality (Patterson and Gibson, 1998:316). Following this logic, all narratives are hence normative. By deciding how to frame a story we are also suggesting what is normal and what is not and how we want the world to be (ibid:321). As White declares: "Where, in any account of reality, narrativity is present, we can be sure that morality or a moralizing impulse is present too" (1980:26).

Narrative patterns are to be found on different levels of social life. Somers and Gibson count to four separate kinds of narrative; *ontological narratives*, *public narratives*, *conceptual narrativity* and *metanarrativity* (2003:61). The ontological narratives help us understand who we are. Ontology and narration are eternally intertwined; "[a]gents adjust stories to fit their own identities and they tailor 'reality' to fit their stories" (ibid). Within the field of social sciences the study of individual (and collective) life stories has gained ground and has contributed to an enriched understanding of how people interpret their life situation (Johansson, 2005:214). Even though the ontological narratives depict our personal stories they are always social and interpersonal. Stories emerge from active social interchange, modify as a result of social interchange, but in turn constrain social interchange as well. Moreover the narratives are not fixed, but always changing depending on time and place. Since our understanding of self is crucial for knowing what to do, the study of ontology is likewise a prerequisite for understanding human agency (ibid, Patterson and Monroe, 1998:323).

Our own particular stories are in turn dependent on what is possible and valued within our surroundings. Narratives of cultural and institutional formations, ranging from the closest family to big communities such as churches and nations, are sometimes named traditions but in Somers version they are called public narratives (1994:618). The public narratives contain all the basic features of the ontological narratives, such as emplotment and selective appropriation. Our reliance on a particular public narrative might change as a competing collective story grows stronger, but it doesn't change the basic fact that our identities are dependent on being a part of a greater whole (Somers and Gibson, 2003:62). The

¹¹ Somers, although being a sociologist, wants to abolish 'society' as a concept. Instead she prefers the notion of 'relational setting' which is "a pattern of relationships among institutions, public narratives, and social practices" in a specific time and place (1994:626).

concept of public narratives is related to *shared beliefs*, as they are presented by social psychologist Bar-Tal (2000). He considers shared beliefs socially constructed bearers of socio-cultural meanings that are relatively enduring (ibid:1). The beliefs are preserved through “various societal institutions and transmitted by various societal channels of communication” and one of their main purposes is to help society members to understand the world around them; their past, present and future (ibid:39, 43).

The conceptual narratives are related to the preceding category but address the theoretical constructions of social scientists. Somers and Gibson emphasize the need for new theoretical tools to explain narratives in relation to other social forces (2003:62). Finally, there are meta-narratives which are “the grand narratives of our time” (Patterson and Monroe, 1998:326). They tell us the stories of Progress and Enlightenment and comprise all other kinds of narratives. Since their characteristics are anti-narrativity and anti-historicity they often exist beyond our awareness (Somers and Gibson, 2003:62).¹²

2.1.4 Narrative and Identity

It is impossible to discuss narration without mentioning identity. Polletta explains that the construction and maintenance of identities, individual and collective, are made possible by narratives that connect separate events into a comprehensible unity (1998a:140). Traditionally in social science the self has been regarded as an autonomous subject restrained by its cultural and institutional setting. This has resulted in a number of denarrativized dichotomies such as individual-against-society and subject-against-object (Somers and Gibson, 2003:65). When new theories of identity have challenged established, and sometimes discriminating, images of identity they have failed to address these problematical ontological presumptions and merely produced a new set of ‘totalizing fictions’ (ibid:55).

Narrative theory is a tool to develop a more substantial understanding of the connection between social identity and agency (White, 1995:635). Somers has developed a concept of *narrative identity* where achievements of identity politics are combined with her narrative/relational framework (1994:608). Adherents to identity politics claim that agency is driven by identity, by who I *am*, rather than “rational interest or set of learned values” (Somers 1994:608). The danger with this approach is to fall into the above-mentioned ‘theoretical ambush’ of predetermined identity formations (ibid:612). Somers and other scholars of narrativity oppose the idea that identity should be attached to the self or fixed in essentialist categories such as gender and race (Somers and Gibson, 2003:40) “Identities reside in interpersonal relations. [...] Language, culture, identity and class all reside not in single minds but in dynamic, contingent, negotiated relations among human beings.” (Tilly, 2002:19). Alternative theories should hence recognize time and space and relationality as characteristics of identity. The

¹² The conceptual narratives and the metanarratives will be of less importance in this essay-
thereof the summary explanations of these categories.

ontological substratum of narrative identity is explained by Somers: "all of us come to *be* who we *are* [...] by being located or locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives *rarely of our own making*" (2004:607).

2.2. Social Movements and Collective Action

2.2.1. Collective Action Defined

The formation and development of social movements is a phenomenon in the center of extensive research by contemporary social scientists. Before moving on to analysis of specific social movements a few reflections on the topic of collective action will get an airing. The renowned social theorist Alberto Melucci states that "[a]nalysis cannot simply identify action with that which the actors report about themselves, without taking into account the system of relationships in which goals, values, frames and discourses are produced" (1996:15). Social agency is situated within institutions, structures of power, cultural networks and the presence and characteristics of "others". These settings are understood through narration (Somers, 1994:634). Agency then becomes a reaction on the stories which the actors are embedded in and not a result of imposed interests (Somers and Gibson, 2003:67). To question the independent agent doesn't however mean that structural determinism is the only viable alternative. Network analysts have contributed to a deconstruction of the dichotomy between structure and action by emphasizing that cultural and social structures (underpinned by narratives) not only shape actors, but that they also in turn get affected by these actors (Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994:1445).

In order to couple collective action further with the relational aspects of narrative theory writings of Emirbayer and Goodwin (1996) serve as a good model. According to them, social action¹³ is always "embedded within, and simultaneously shaped by, a *plurality* of relational contexts" (ibid:366). These contexts are relatively stable phenomena that can be divided into *cultural*, *social-structural* and *social-psychological* settings. All three guide action concurrently and overlapping, but they should nevertheless be analytically separated from each other. The cultural context of action is the framework that shapes the actors' normative worldviews and their identity constructions (ibid:354-365). What Emirbayer and Goodwin label social-structural context is by and large synonymous with Somers' relational setting, e.g. the inter-personal and inter-

¹³ Emirbayer and Goodwin are particularly careful in emphasizing the difference between "empirical social action" and human agency. The latter contains features that go beyond the concept of the former and vice versa (1996:370). In this essay the analytic distinction between these two concepts will be of less importance. Likewise will 'collective action' and 'social action' be regarded as synonymous.

organizational context of action (ibid:387). Finally, the psychological context embraces long-lasting psychical and interpersonal attachments; from emotional solidarity to hostility (Emirbayer and Goodwin,1996:388). In this essay the focus lies on the social-structural level.

A crucial question to determine if narrative theory is useful to explain collective action is whether stories are lived before they are told or if social life is always already storied. If one concurs with the latter statement, then the logical conclusion is that “narrative can capture the determinants and consequences of social action better than non-narrative and static sociological concepts like ‘society’ or ‘structure’” (Polletta, 1998a:439). Needless to say, this is the conviction that guides this essay.

2.2.2. Social Movement Networks

Collective action can take many different expressions; mass hysteria may e.g. seem essentially different from folk dancing. This essay is concerned with the dimensions of agency articulated in social movements. Melucci defines a social movement by conferring it three analytical dimensions. “A movement is the mobilization of a collective actor (i) defined by specific *solidarity* (ii) engaged in a *conflict* with an adversary for the appropriation and control of resources valued by both of them (iii) and whose action entails a *breach of the limits* of compatibility of the system within which the action itself takes place” (1996:29-30). With the definition spelled out it is nevertheless important to acknowledge that social movements are heterogeneous and differentiated phenomena¹⁴. They do not only differ from each other but they also contain domestic conflicts and struggle internally with contradictory demands (ibid:13, 21). Narratives, roles and activities are intimately connected to a specific movement and embedded in a specific temporal, spatial and relational setting (cf. Somers 2003:61, 70).

Many contemporary movements reject the traditional way of organizing and accuse party politics and institutionalized organizations of inefficiency and an anachronous approach to social change (Melucci, 1996:113). Instead of the strictly hierarchic model that prevails in most political systems new movements present “diversified and autonomous units” that communicate through networks (ibid). Ann Mische defines these networks as “[m]ultiple, crosscutting sets of relations sustained by conversational dynamics within social settings” (2003:259).

Movements and organizations that have adopted the network model are of very different kinds, but they share a few common features. *Membership* is vaguely defined and activists tend to both enter and withdraw from the movements with ease. Multiple and overlapping memberships are legion (Fernandez and McAdam, 1988:358). *The decision-making process* in a network

¹⁴ A further complicating fact is that the term social movement is both used by researchers as an analytical tool and by activists themselves as a way to describe their organization (Melucci, 1996:28).

organization is affected by the need for fast action and the decision maker differs with the specific situation. *Leadership*, hence, becomes much more diffuse and limited (ibid:344). On the one hand the benefits of a reticulated organization are many; “[n]etworks undoubtedly facilitate mechanisms like the mobilization and allocation of resources across an organizational field, the negotiation of agreed goals, the production and circulation of information [...]” (Diani, 2003a:10). On the other hand, the movement always runs the risk of disintegrating into sectarianism and the decision-making process becomes difficult, as does mediating. Another weakness is the difficulty to pursue political claims over a long period of time (Melucci, 1996:116). The absence of a hierarchic leadership structure and the fragmentary network organization makes heavy demands on the internal system of information, coordination and transmission. In order to preserve movement unity a large amount of resources also goes to the creation and preservation of a collective identity (Melucci, 1996:329, 346).

Within the social sciences the interest for network relations has resulted in a differentiated research domain. Rather than considering network analysis a ‘social theory’, it is perhaps more apposite to regard it as a ‘paradigm’ or ‘a loose federation of approaches’ (Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994:1414). One of the more renowned studies in the field is McAdam and Fernandez’ *Freedom Summer* (1988), which in a convincing manner shows how identity interplay with structural factors when volunteers decide to participate in a movement (also cf. Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994:1431-1432). Other examples of network analysis applied on social movements-research are Rosenthal et al (1985), Somers (1994), Gould (2003) and Ansell (2003).

2.2.3. Conversation Mechanisms in Networks

In order to link network theory to narrative practices this essay will make use of Mische’s (2003) categorization of conversation mechanisms in network movements. She criticizes mainstream network research and accuses it of presenting an overly homogenous image of network ties at the expense of thorough evaluation of political struggle and asymmetrical power relations (ibid: 258-261). Likewise she regards connections *across* networks a neglected phenomenon. Following this line of thought an analysis of overlapping organization memberships and multiple ties can develop and considerably enrich network research (ibid:261).

In order to examine how actors are coping with the multitude of interest coalitions and networks on the political arena Mische has studied narrative practices or what she labels *conversation mechanisms*. She agrees with other scholars of narrativity and claims that “movements are composed of on-going conversations”, and that actors through these talks establish important network relations between each other (2003:263). At the bottom of this reasoning lies the basic hermeneutic assumption that situations are always understood different depending on the position of the interpreter and hence these interpretations are

always unstable, arbitrary and ambiguous. Moreover, Mische takes a clear ontological stance when she claims that discourses are the creators of social relations. Within the framework of these discourses actors have a certain amount of agency and meaning can be activated and de-activated by individuals or groups (2003:263-264).

The conversation mechanisms in Mische's model are divided into four categories. The two opening devices are labeled *compartmentalizing mechanisms*. First, *identity qualifying* describes how the actor can activate one particular identity, for example by explicitly stating "As a ... I believe that...". Other possible identities that the actor occupies are then momentarily played down or deactivated (2003:269). This is an invaluable ability for an activist with multiple organization memberships. "When successful these types of identity qualifiers allow actors to strategically segment different dimensions of their multiple involvements while still maintaining them in play (ibid:270). Second, *temporal cuing* is a strategy that allows for a group or an individual to temporarily adjust its/his/her narratives to other groups or individuals and thereby create a type of short term narrative that facilitate communication. By focusing on the agreement on short time goals and disregarding the dissension on long time goals different groups can cooperate to facilitate for example democratic reform. This proposal implies that ideological content is not the only basis of affinity within a coalition, even if some identities are more easily intertwined than others. Mische gives prominence to a group's ability to "construct political time" as a condition for success in cooperation in broader networks (ibid:271, 274).

Along with the compartmentalizing mechanisms the model also identifies two *conflation mechanisms*. First, *generality shifting* signifies the actor's movement along sliding scale of how general or specific his/her identity is spelled out. Mische refers to her study of sit-in strikes on American universities where "coupling of [...] broader and narrower definitions of the 'student' identity" were used in order to accentuate the role of the student organizations in the youth mobilization (2003:271). This slide is tremendously important in coalition-building since it helps the actor to establish relations on the public arena and at the same time retain the particularistic entity of its own. "By using categorical ambiguity to create provisional unity in a heterogeneous movement setting, generality shifting can contribute to processes of mobilization and alliance formation in a multi-organizational field." (ibid:272). A variation of generality shifting is the strategic artifice to make use of broad umbrella definitions such as citizenship, nationalism, democracy or society. This is useful in order to reach out to an extremely heterogeneous audience (ibid:276). Second and finally, *multiple targeting* is a strategy to direct one's utterances to many different groups of audiences at the same time. This ability is above all important for the leadership in a political alliance that has to address its own subgroups along with other factions and outsiders. The mechanism "builds on multivocality of discourse by conflating different possible discursive meanings" (ibid:272). There is no straight answer on when each of these mechanisms are used but Mische suggests that the compartmentalizing mechanisms go better when the listeners consists of mostly outgroups and that the conflation mechanisms are being chosen when

there is a heterogeneous audience with members from different networks. Needless to say, the particular situation and political opportunity structures also effects when a certain mechanism is practicable or not (2003:275, 277).

It might seem overly cynical and calculating to assume that activists deliberately make use of the ambiguousness of broad categories and emphasize parts of their identities while downplaying other parts. Without doing this, however, the networks run an impending risk of turning into marginalized activist ghettos. On the other end of the scale there is of course the risk of being absorbed by mainstream and thereby loosing the ability to challenge the system (Mische, 2003:276).

2.3. Methods of narrativity

The triumph of science-of-society brought methodological aspirations to identify and try out falsifiable hypotheses. Since this pattern of investigation doesn't apply to all phenomena of society social scientists eventually discovered the need of interpretation (Patterson and Monroe, 1998:326-327). As Czarniawska states, there is no ideal method and every narrative research calls for its own solutions (2000:30) but interviews that give the informant room to articulate rather freely is nevertheless a typical tool in collecting narratives. Autobiographies and letters, etc. can also be useful sources of information (Patterson and Monroe, 1998:326-327). Understanding and interpreting narratives is a delicate process, filled with pitfalls. "The teller is given wide latitude by the researcher in the telling of stories [...], the teller retains great discretion in deciding what to include and how to relate the story" (ibid:326). The narratives are not only described in words; "[s]ilences and gaps can be as telling as what is included" (Patterson and Monroe, 1998:329). Even though it is difficult to trace the reason for any particular exclusion the outlines gives an image on the world-view of the narrator. What is excluded is often seen as self-evident – "what is included [...] is the exceptional" (ibid). The researcher also has to use caution and not make sweeping statements on the universality of the narratives. "A compelling story seems to speak to the shared experience of a larger group or in its collective voice, but without demonstrating its representativeness" (Polletta, 1998b:425).

2.3.1. Narrative Research, Hermeneutics and Validation

How is narrative theory put into practice in the field study? Czarniawska gives some indications when she identifies three dimensions in the use of narratives in social science research. The actual field work often starts with meeting people, provoking story telling and collecting the stories. At the same time the work to interpret, analyze and deconstruct the stories start. Finally, the researcher

constructs his/her own story and relates it to other stories, e.g. conceptual narratives in the scientific community (2000:5). The researcher doesn't only make use of other people's stories; the report or essay also represent a story in itself (cf. Johansson, 2005:360).

There are several pitfalls in the field of research on cultural aspects of social life. Emirbayer and Goodwin (1996) warn of becoming overly deterministic and presenting actors as slaves under a discourse ascribed to them by somebody else. Actors have in normal conditions a variety of cultural structures to choose from in framing their narratives (ibid:366). That does however not mean that social scientists should give way to explanations solely based on voluntarist action since "cultural formations are themselves structural" (ibid).

Interpretations is another delicate matter in social research and none the least in narrative analysis since the subject of research is the actor's or the group of actors' understanding of the world and their selves. Narrative analysis hence relies on methods developed by the hermeneutic school, characterized by the constant alternation between parts and totality (Kvale, 1996:47).

If the outcome of narrative research just is one reading out of a myriad of possible interpretations – is all interpretations then equally good? And if knowledge is socially constructed, then all attempts at validation must be socially constructed as well? Polkinghorne (1988) suggests that narrative research should forget about claims for a definite truth and consider validity as a "well-grounded conclusion".¹⁵ Reliability should be estimated by the dependability of data (ibid:175-176). The ambition with this essay is to present a clear and honest report, grounded in theory and open for intersubjective validation.

2.3.2. On the Field Study

In a field study it is always a delicate task to distinguish the actual field from its surroundings and the distinction is in general temporary and vague. This is unquestionably true in social movements that "often [are] barely distinguishable from the whole cloth they would attempt to re-weave" (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973:2). The lack of definite boundaries, beginnings and ends accentuates the need for constant of theoretical and practical considerations (ibid). In this chapter some reflections arisen during the field study will be discussed.

The Kefaya movement has no clear membership for its members and some of the interviewees and other people I had brief conversations with where uncertain if they where members or not. I didn't consider it important for my study to exactly define the dimensions of the movement but tried to meet informants that at some point had regarded themselves as active members in Kefaya or one of its affiliated groups. Since I was particularly interested in the mediation between different identities I focused on the leadership and core

¹⁵ Kvale (1996) moreover identifies validation at seven stages of the scientific research. Thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, validating and reporting all have to be characterized by adequacy, trustworthiness and good judgment (ibid:237).

members of one of its subgroups, Youth for Change. As I moved on with the interviewing I found that some of my informants had started to dissociate themselves from the movement. I found these testimonies none the least interesting since they tended to give a more critical view of the topic. Apart from meetings with Kefaya-members I made contextualizing interviews with political experts on the field. These helped me to get a comprehensive picture of the political and social situation in Egypt and to reveal some of my prejudices.¹⁶

The interviews in this study were made without recorder despite of the fact that many scholars of narrative strongly recommend this technical devise (e.g. Johansson, 2005). The decision to take notes manually rests upon the ambition to treat all my informants equal. Some of the interviewees felt uncomfortable with the recorder and in other cases practical circumstances (e.g. interviews in cars and noisy surroundings) would have rendered recording impossible. A positive aspect of this choice was that I felt that the interview situations were relaxed and familiar. Among the drawbacks were that the number of direct quotes I could use in the essay were rather few¹⁷ and that I might have lost some nuances of the discussions along the way.

The loosely structured interviews I made use of likewise had advantages as well as disadvantages. Experienced narrators were pleased with the method and used the opportunity to reflect upon the movement and their commitment rather freely. In these cases I only interfered in order to make slight adjustments on the direction of the conversation or to confirm that I had grasped the information correctly. Other activists expected a more directed battery of questions and had to be encouraged to develop their reasoning. In these situations I found it necessary to be flexible with the narrative criteria in order to find alternative ways to get the interview started¹⁸.

As a researcher in an unfamiliar context the risk of confusion and misunderstandings is obvious. Confusion of languages may cause problem from time to time and culturally specific expressions may cause misinterpretations. The author's believe is that those problems can be minimized by making efforts to be clear and explicit and if necessary by meeting the informants more than one time. Furthermore, the author is of the opinion that her alienation can be turned into an advantage by allowing her to see the prevailing narratives from an outside perspective and thereby escape the blind spots that prevent us to see the hidden structures of our own surroundings. The danger of getting self-censored answers on politically controversial topics is particularly immanent in non-democratic countries. Since I conducted all interviews without interpreter I believe that many of these problems was eliminated. Some of my informants were members of banned political organizations and avoided detailed discussions of about activities within these parties. When it came to Kefaya I didn't experience these kinds of hesitations.

¹⁶ The complete list of interviews is to be found in appendix A.

¹⁷ Only quotes that were written down word by word are indicated with quotation marks in the text.

¹⁸ By starting out with open questions, e.g. on how the informant got involved with the Kefaya movement, the informant mostly got confident in his/her role in the conversation.

3. The Field Study

3.1. Contextual Setting

3.1.1. Political Structure

Egypt is one of the oldest states in the world but also unique as it since ancient times has been a unified and centralized (Korany 1998:39). As an Arab state Egypt shares many of the democratic shortcomings of the region. The Arab Human Development Report 2004 describes the Arab political model as an 'authoritarian state' which lacks free and transparent parliamentary elections, has restricted press freedoms and serious deficiencies in political and human rights. Executive power is extremely centralized and the ruler more or less controls the judiciary and the legislative units. The intelligence apparatus is extensive and intimately connected to the executive. Corruption is widely spread and the legitimacy of the system approaches a 'chronic crisis' (UNDP, 2005:126-129).

Hosni Mubarak is the president of the Egyptian republic since 1981 and the assassination of his predecessor Anwar Sadat. After the death of Mr. Sadat an Emergency Law was established that gives the regime the rights to "take any measures 'required by the circumstances' including the suspension of the constitutional rights of citizens" (Al-Sayyid, 1995:280). The Emergency Law has been in use ever since.

The parliament consists of the People's Assembly (*majlis ash-sha'ab*) and the Shura Counsel (*majlis ash-shura*). The former has 444 elected seats and ten seats appointed by the president. It has been controlled by the National Democratic Party (*hizb al-watani*, NDP) for years. The latter has 176 elected seats and 88 seats appointed by the president. It has only preparatory and counseling function. The legislature is very restricted and has few possibilities to work as a control organ of the executive (KAS, 2005: 6). Furthermore, there is a lack of women in the parliament; in the November 2005 elections only one woman was elected (five were appointed). The legislature furthermore has only five Coptic MPs (El-Din, 2005a).

Egypt has a multi-party system since the 1970s and 21 parties are officially approved¹⁹. The plurality could however be put in question since all parties, including NDP, suffers from serious weaknesses when it comes to organization, legitimacy and grass-roots support. The NDP has a huge state-financed

¹⁹ There are considerable legal restrictions surrounding the forming of a new party and in practice the regime controls the whole process. Parties based on a religious foundation, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, are banned and other 'anti-social' parties, such as Labor party (*hizb al-'amal*) are frozen (KAS, 2005:8)

organization and a high visibility through state-owned media²⁰ but the leadership is static and out of contact with the electorate (Korany, 1998:62-63). A clear example of that is the fact that NDP just managed to win 145 (33,6 %) parliamentary seats with official candidates in last year's elections and had to integrate 166 independent NDP adherents (NDPendants) to the party in order to get an absolute majority in the People's Assembly (Lange, 2006:4). The opposition parties are also hierarchical and leader fixated. Many of the party leaders have been in charge of their organizations for three or four decades. Other parties are headed by the sons of former leaders. The parties "lack both transparency and membership" and they often "change policies without any mass discussion, and some express contrasting visions at the same time" (Korany, 1998:63). The low credibility of the major oppositional parties (*al-ghad*, *al-wafd*, *al-nasiri* and *tagammu*) was reflected in the parliamentary elections where none of the leaders of these groups managed to win a seat in the parliament and their total number of seats ended at nine (KAS, 2006:4). In stead the Muslim Brotherhood (*ikhwaan al-muslimiin*) made a strong performance at the elections. Since the party is banned their members ran for parliament as independents, but for the first time ever they where allowed to put their slogan "Islam is the Solution" on their campaign material. Despite reports on violence and ballot rigging the 175 brotherhood candidates managed to win 88 seats (20,4%) (Lange, 2006:4, 7). Analysts claim that the success of the party depends on patience with political persecution, presence on the local level, delivering of goods such as medical and financial aid to the poor (co-funded by local and international Islamic communities). Many of the votes should also be regarded as protest votes on the only serious opponent to the regime (e.g. Dr. Lange, 051206, Mr. Mansour 051210).

Egypt is an authoritarian society and many important changes have been initiated from the top²¹ but different kinds of civil society-organizations have nevertheless existed in Egypt since the early sufi-movements of the eighth and ninth century (Korany, 1998:40). During the rule of Gamal Abdel Nasser the state apparatus grew and suffocated most of the civil institutions but since the regime later on has found itself unable to be the sole provider of welfare some of the restrictions of organizing have been relieved. A large percentage of the civil society organizations are Islamic²². Voluntary organizations are forbidden to deal with politics (Korany, 1998:59-61)

²⁰ The close connection between the NDP and the state makes it difficult to make a distinction between the two. Dr. Mattar describes the NDP as a government agency; a joint venture between security, governance (*idhaara*) and wealth. Nothing keeps the party together, he continues, except from President Mubarak and the activists' aspirations for power (051215). Dr. Fergany hence prefers to call the governing system *the regime*. It's a Western mistake to use the word government but it doesn't fit the context. The government in itself is irrelevant and more of a tool used by the regime. The prime minister is more of the apolitical secretary of Mubarak than an important political person (051207).

²¹ E.g. Muhammad Ali's building of modern Egypt, Nasser's army coup and Sadat's 'democratization decree' (Korany, 1998:39)

²² Because of *zakat*, religious alms, these organizations have less financial problems and are not forced to submit themselves to government funding (Korany, 1998:61).

3.1.2. Recent Political Developments

During the latter part of 2004 and the following year a whole range of political movements and protest groups demanding reform were formed. One of the loudest movements that also managed to reach out to international media is the Egyptian Movement for Change (*al-haraka al-masriyya min ajli 'l-taghiyr*) better known by its slogan *kefaya!* (Enough!)²³ (ICG, 2005:9). Kefaya is a coalition of activists from different political affiliations, HR-groups and NGO's. It is not organized on a membership basis but rather as a loose network or ad-hoc movement. The leadership is vague and autonomous action groups are held together on a relational basis (KAS, 2005:55-56). It works mostly through demonstrations that have gathered up to a couple of thousand activists, but normally amounts to a few hundreds (Poussard, 051204). One of the most prominent messages of Kefaya is the direct critique of President Mubarak, the call for his resignation and protests against the fast career of his son, Gamal Mubarak, within the NDP ranks. Other demands are political reforms, an abolition of the Emergency Law and the end of corruption (Kefaya, 2005:7-18). The lion's share of the Kefaya supporters are found in the political class of experienced activists. The movement has been criticized for arranging its rallies only in the city centre and for its inability to present constructive alternatives to the present political stage (ICG, 2005:10-11). The so-called 'Kefaya effect' has resulted in a large number of sectoral protest groups such as Journalists for Change, Doctors for Change and Judges for Change that combine the calls for reform with more specific demands connected to their profession. Additional groups such as the Streets are Ours (*al-shar'a lina*) and We are Watching You (*shafeinkum*) addresses police brutality and violations against women²⁴ (Ibid.9).

Most of the activities that mushroomed during 2005 were connected to the presidential and legislative elections that were held the same year. In February 2005 President Mubarak announced that he planned to revise the constitution and permit multiple candidates in the presidential elections (ICG, 2005:i). The proposal was initially welcomed by the political opposition, but when it became clear that the criteria of candidature made it virtually impossible for independent candidates and extremely hard for established parties to participate, the critique grew (Lange and Weise, 2005:8). A referendum however gave President Mubarak the authority to enforce the amendment and Presidential elections were held in September.

Besides the president, the leader of Al-Ghad Party, Ayman Nour and the Wafd-leader Noaman Gomaa were the most interesting names in the elections. President Mubarak was supported by state-owned media and won comfortably with 88%. Nour reached the second place with less than 10% and Gomaa's

²³ The movement is mentioned as Kefaya throughout the essay.

²⁴ These organizations were formed after a Kefaya-demonstration the 25th of May 2005 against the amendment of article 76 in the constitution. A horde of thugs and NDP adherents targeted the female activists with assaults and sexually harassments while the massive police squad remained passive (ICG, 2005:6)

support were hardly visible in the statistics (Howeidy, 2006)²⁵. The crushing victory of Mubarak caused disarray within parts of the opposition as the parliamentary elections drew near (Dr. Lange, 051206)²⁶. The voting for legislature where administrated in three rounds and started in late November 2005. The first and the second round where rather fair and the Muslim Brotherhood performed tremendously well with their relatively few candidates. In order to secure a 2/3rd majority in the assembly, the regime obstructed the third round. Judges complained loudly and reported on forgery, bought votes, police squads blocking ballot stations etc (Lange, 2006:3, 4). The tactic worked and together with NDPendents the party managed to secure 311 of 444 elected seats. The Muslim Brotherhood seized 88 seats and the so-called 'secular opposition' only won nine seats altogether (Lange, 2006:4). The political apathy was reflected in the low voter turnout; in total 23% of the registered voters caste their votes (El-Din, 2005b).

3.2. Narratives and Conversation Mechanisms within the Kefaya Movement

At the time of the field study Kefaya celebrated its first official birthday, but from a movement perspective it had already experienced a great deal of success, crises and important landmarks. The turbulent year is reflected in the rich amount of narratives that the interviewed activists could provide about their movement. The following paragraphs has been arranged in order to sort out a few dominating storylines, but it is also an attempt to show how relationality, time and space affects and diversifies the narratives. With this background information in mind, the sections below will embark on the use of conversation mechanisms in the movement discourse.²⁷

Narrative of Origin. Depending on the experiences and position of the interviewee different factors leading to the creation of the movement was emphasized. The founding group mostly referred to the *iftar* (breakfast) in the home of Dr. Maadi during Ramadan in November 2003. The participants where friends during the student movement of the 1970s and had a common history of imprisonment and decades of political activism which had created a mutual respect despite of their diverse ideologies (Mr. Shaaban, 060206). At the meeting an assembly of six people was chosen to develop the framework of the movement

²⁵ Parts of the opposition, e.g. the Kefaya movement boycotted the presidential elections.

²⁶ Dr. Lange also explains how NDP-supporters placed Trojan horses within Al-Ghad and managed to cause some divisions within the party before they where thrown out of the organization (051206).

²⁷ The chapter contains few direct quotes from the interviews since the interviews were accomplished without recorder and only parts of the interviews were transcribed literally. The preserved quotes are distinguished by quotation marks and, if necessary, translated from Arabic to English.

and eventually a manifesto was created (Mr. Ishaq, 060123)²⁸. Other interviewed activists pointed at the large scale demonstrations starting in early 2000 in support of the second Palestinian intifada and later on in protest of the U.S. occupation of Iraq as a prelude to Kefaya. Mr. Khalil explains how the demonstrators gradually started to turn their focus towards domestic issues and when Kefaya was created the people from the existing democracy movements joined the new network. He strongly rejects the discourse of a ‘democracy spring’, evoked by foreign training programs, and finds it arrogant and false (051219)²⁹.

Us and Them. As will be discussed further in the following sections, the concept of collective identity is extremely volatile in multi-organizational networks. Kefaya is depicted as a pioneering movement that proceeds by trial and error. With the rallies directed straight towards the regime it has broken the barrier of fear paralyzing the opposition and written a new episode in Egyptian history (e.g. Mr. Shaaban, 060206, Mr. Iskander, 060125). The activists almost unanimously describe themselves and their organization as open, peaceful, independent and anti-hierarchical. They are careful to explain the differences between them and the established political parties that are regarded as failed, static and incapable of action (e.g. Mr. Shaaban, 060206, Mr. Thabet, 051219)³⁰. Traditional party and parliamentary politics are sometimes repudiated and described with skepticism. Dr. Said explains how parties for decades have been controlled both from outside and inside (051218) and Dr. Hussein states that he doesn’t believe in elections as a means for political change, but sees demonstrations and civil disobedience as a possible way to a peaceful revolution (060127). There are however dissident opinions. Among the younger activists leaders in the Kefaya movement are sometimes seen as a part of the establishment and too restrained by their social positions to be truly radical (e.g. Hani, 060130).

The obvious *antagonist* of the movement narratives is the regime, personified by President Mubarak³¹. The regime is autocratic and corrupt; it mismanages the state and denies the citizens their political rights (e.g. Dr. Said 051218, Mr. Ishaq, 060123). Many activists talk of submissiveness towards foreign powers. ”You know, our biggest problem in this region is American and Zionist control over politics.” (‘Alaa, 060125). Mr. Shaaban describes how the Egyptians feel like the Western World and Israel are united in oppression and exploitation of their country (060206). EU is described as having too many strategic and economical interests in Egypt for being a supporter of profound political reform in the country (Dr. Thabet, 051219). Instead Dr. Thabet mentions anti-globalization and pro-democratization movements in Brazil and the

²⁸ The original group consisted of Mr. Ishaq, Mr. Iskander, Dr. Maadi, Dr. Idris, Dr. Sattar and Mr. Shaaban.

²⁹ These narratives are widely accepted by informants outside the movement as well. Mr. Mansour from the Egyptian NGO IKCDS also emphasises the opposition from domestic Human Rights organizations that quietly worked for democracy in more than thirty years (051210).

³⁰ Nevertheless, many of the activists remain as members in these parties.

³¹ Apart from the regime (*nizam al-hakm*), the interviewees also speak about the government (*al-hukuma*), the security service/intelligence (*al-mukhabarat al-‘ammah*) and the leading party NDP (*hizb al-watani*).

Philippines as sources of inspiration for Kefaya (ibid.)³² while Mr. Iskander says that Kefaya is positive to human globalization but against Americanization and other drawbacks of the global development (060125).

One of the central ingredients in all storytelling about Kefaya is its relation to *the people*. The relationship between Kefaya and the general public seems to be ambiguous. The interviews speak both of dependency and distance between oppositional activists and the average Egyptian. Dr. Said says that he's sad that Kefaya wasted so much time and energy on demonstration that have failed to attract people. It is hard to mobilize peasants and he feels a distance between him and his colleagues, on the one hand, and the grassroots on the other (051218). Dr. Sattar confirms that Kefaya has difficulties in reaching out to the members and probably will remain elitist (060201). Mr. Ishaq explains that most people are too afraid of the police to become politically active and that they do not see the larger picture in which their acute economical problems are connected to issues of democracy. The government uses this to stay in power (060123).

Development and Results. One of the most important achievements of Kefaya is that they through their demonstrations against the regime broke the barrier of fear amongst the public. This is a statement that comes back in many of the interviews. Kefaya was and continues to be a pushing power for political change in Egypt, Dr. Thabet states (051219) and Mr. Shaaban explains that Kefaya already has made historical achievements (060206). These positive narratives are however mixed with disappointing experiences of defeat and decline. The amendment of the constitution and the elections were the main focus of the movement during 2005. When President Mubarak despite the resistance of the opposition managed to preserve his and NDP's hegemony some of the steam ran out of the movement. The young activists are almost unanimous in this description (e.g. Hussam, 060118). With the loss of the immediate goal disputes about the direction of the movement seem to have gained in strength. Hani explains that he is not inside Kefaya anymore since it's not what he dreamt that it should be. "It's now a movement of individuals and that was not the original goal." Dr. Hussain considers the secularists as trying to make Kefaya to a platform of their own and that the original, simple message is relinquished (060127).

The future of the movement is according to the interviews vague and the leadership expressed the need of finding a new narrative. Dr. Said: "The forming of a new program is very hard. There is a pressure on us to start saying yes to things instead of just *kifaya* and there is a discussion within the organization that has been going on the last four to five months. [...] But the future is open air. I don't know what's going to happen" (051218).

³² Ukraine is another positive example mentioned in several interviews (e.g. Dr. Thabet, 051219).

3.2.1. Identity Qualifying

Many of the interviewed movement members, even the young ones, had experiences as political activists that stretched back to long before the establishment of Kefaya and were still politically active outside the movement. The dynamics between the different identities and narratives that their multiple organizational memberships entailed followed at large the pattern of identity qualifying as suggested by Mische (2003). The change-over between different identities went on smoothly and the interviewees could position themselves alternately as outsiders, party members and Kefaya members during the same interview. Only at a few occasions direct conflicts between different affiliations was mentioned – as when Dina explains how she felt ambivalent when she wanted to give her support for Ayman Nour from Al-Ghad Party in the presidential elections that Kefaya had decided to boycott (060104). In general the “non-Kefaya identity” was used to explain certain standpoints within the movement e.g. when Mr. Khalil says that he as a socialist believes that Kefaya should address social issues (051219). Another way of activating one identity is to do it *within* a larger community and several actors pointed out the contribution of their faction in developing Kefaya. Labor party through Dr. Hussein explains how they were the first ones who said no to Mubarak himself. The others in Kefaya told them that they were extreme but day by day they started to come closer to the Labor party’s position. “Today everybody is an extremist, *al hamdulillah* (thanks God)!” (060127).

One of the most visible dividing lines within the movement seemed to be the division between Islamists and secular left-wing activists. The mutual respect between the two factions was always accentuated but nevertheless the diversity of opinion was accentuated through identity qualifying at several occasions. As when Dr. Said explains how he as HR activist has spend lots of time defending Islamist rights and by direct and indirect means helped them to become more sophisticated (“The new Muslim Brotherhood is our product!”) but at the same time states “We’re still very different”^{33 34}(051218).

Kefaya itself has given rise to new networks and groups, which have become units important to distinction from the parent movement. The interviews with Youth for Change gave clear proof of this phenomenon. Hani says that most activists within their group are driven by ideological conviction rather than the focus on a few political reform demands and that this differentiates them from the larger Kefaya movement (060130). Several examples also indicated that Kefaya and its subgroups in many ways were conceived as a secondary and/or temporary identity. Sometimes the activists questioned the affinity completely as when Dina

³³ The utterance aims at the Muslim Brotherhood as an organization with a few members connected to Kefaya but at large separated from the so-called secular opposition.

³⁴ The interviews were conducted in the aftermath of the parliamentary elections of 2005. The Muslim Brotherhood demonstrated their broad electoral support (despite of them being forbidden as a party) and secured 88 seats in *majlis ash-sha’ab* (the parliament). The unexpected and irrefutable success might have affected the movement rhetoric on the Muslim Brotherhood (temporarily or permanent).

says that one doesn't take standpoints as Youth for Change, "We don't find our identity there" (060104). The statement accords with the fact that all interviewees were cautious in making statements speaking for all Kefaya members apart from the views expressed in the manifest. Instead the actions in which the diversity where emphasized were appreciated. The differences are permanent within Youth for Change, but when they were making demos on the streets; everyone was talking his own language, 'Alaa explained (060124).

Among the interviewed members of Youth for Change everyone, in one way or another, gave utterance to the difficulties of finding their role within the organization. The leaders didn't listen to young people was one complaint (Mona, 060117, Hussam, 060118), they where too restricted by their societal positions (Hani, 060130) and they had no understanding of normal peoples' needs (e.g. 'Alaa 060125, Dina 060104). In these cases Kefaya became something alien – a 'them' rather than a 'we'. Also among those belonging to the founders of the movement seemed sometimes consider the Kefaya-identity as secondary. Dr Hussain explains how he experiences that Kefaya is trying to put him and other members of the Labor party on the margin because of their Islamic ideology and that they are not allowed to put Islamic slogans on the bills in the rallies (060127).

As a final reflection, it was obvious that some of the informants also put a great value in emphasizing their personal (ontological) identities. Dina explains that she knows what is going on in many of the opposition organizations, but that she still keeps her independent identity: "But it's good to be independent. I can cooperate with who I want." (060104).

3.2.2. Temporal Cuing

The overall goals of Kefaya are to be found in the manifesto and aims to unite the political opposition in a demand for reformation of the political system, summarized in a few points (Kefaya, 2005). Mr. Shaaban states that the manifesto is written in order that 'everyone' could accept it (060206). Temporal cuing is hence a prerequisite of the existence of Kefaya. The interviews show a continual reiteration of the fact that individuals within the movement are different in many ways but that they work against mutual goals. The arrival at those goals would also imply the phase-out of the movement (Dr. Abu Sattar, 060201). Cuing also implies that ideologies are something that a Kefaya member should leave outside the movement. This cause difficulties for some of the members; "you can't take off your ideology like a sweater" (Mona, 060117) but are depicted as something unproblematic by others; "The mix of ideologies is not difficult. We defend all ideologies" (Dr. Abu Sattar, 060201). Mr. Shaaban says further that that the ambition with Kefaya was to create a movement that doesn't discriminate against women or youth and that proposes equality between Muslims and Christians. This is important in order to unite the society in support of democratic reforms (060206).

Corruption is described as a disease eating itself into the political system of Egypt. Combined with lack of liberties and almost unrestricted power of the president (ironically described as a pharaoh; half president and half God, Mr. Ishaq 060123) this has led to the general decline of the Egyptian state (e.g. Mr. Shaaban, 060206). Of all Kefaya's political objectives, freedom is perhaps the one that is emphasized the most and that seem to unite everyone in the movement (e.g. Mr Ishaq, 060123 and Mr. Iskander, 060125). Many from the older generation of activists referred to personal experiences of imprisonment and state persecution.

In the role as members of opposition, Kefaya and groups such as Muslim Brotherhood can unite into a unison 'we' despite of the fact that they work in different ways, with different resources and visions according to Dr. Thabet. He continues to state that the two organizations are united through general public issues such as protests against the regime and, in most cases, enhanced social rights (051219). The fact that the opposition didn't manage to work closer in the elections is regretted in many of the interviews. Muslim Brother and Kefaya member Dr Abu Sattar express a wish that the Islamists to a greater extent should emphasize the human values and the longing for freedom and justice they have in common with the leftists (060201).

The Kefaya-slogan itself can be seen as a manifestation of the temporal cuing-mechanism. '*Kefaya*' means 'enough' and is a recurrent catchword at demonstrations, on stickers and in articles and public appeals. "Enough of corruption"; "enough of unemployment"; "enough of hereditary positions" are typical slogans. "'Kefaya' sums it all up" as Mr Shabaan explains (060206). The "magical word" (Mr. Ishaq, 060123) has accordingly been used frequently in PR-campaigns and probably contributed to international attention directed towards the movement³⁵ ³⁶. The focus on the regime as a common enemy and the campaigning for political freedom has created somewhat surprising coalitions. Within Youth for Change it appeared that activists from the far left were very pleased of the cooperation with the Islamists, most of them from the Labor party. "They were amazing. It was my first time to work with Islamist and some of them [were so strict that they] didn't even shake my hand" (Mona, 060117). 'Alaa from the Labor party confirms that the activists in spite of many conflicts managed to cooperate and even become friends (060125). Also Dina emphasizes the great experience she gained form working and making friends with people with different ideological backgrounds. She thinks that this will give her a basic understanding of these people and their views even in the future (060104). Dr. Hussein further explains how temporal cuing makes members of the Labor party open for cooperation with Kefaya. He states that they are ideologically closer to the Muslim Brotherhood but can unite with Kefaya in their direct critique of the regime and their demands for political change (060127).

Maybe the reverse of the medal became obvious after the electoral anti-climax in September (when the presidential elections were held) and later on after

³⁵ International Crisis Group refers to articles about Kefaya in *International Herald Tribune*, *Financial Times* and *The New York Times* during 2005 (2005:9)

³⁶ The critics have answered by depicting Kefaya as a party based on discontent (ICG, 2005:10) and members in the movement has called for a more proactive agenda and rhetoric.

the parliamentary elections in November. Many political analysts claim that Kefaya ran out of steam during the fall 2005 (e.g. Mr. Mansour, 051210). A common narrative is an absolute requirement for temporal cuing and when the objective of the coalition is frustrated the partnership runs the risk of dissolving. Dina describes how Youth for Change never could agree on long lasting standpoints. "We just unite against something or in support for something". The conflict starts when there is nothing to do, she continues, and the meetings develop into endless arguments about everything (060104). Mona holds a similar opinion and is sad because the meetings and the yahoo-group now is dominated by people cursing at each other. Nowadays she mostly stays at home. "It's not clear what to do. I guess I'm just waiting for something to happen." (060117).

3.2.3. Generality Shifting

Kefaya is loosely organized and the movement builds upon consent to general statements. There are no memberships in a traditional sense. "The call is the important thing. We don't need membership cards" (Mr. Khalil, 051219). In order to tie supporters to the organization the leadership has created an appeal on their website which anyone can sign; the meetings and seminars are open to the public as well as the rallies and demonstrations. The vague membership numbers inevitably lead to a sliding definition of the in-group. Mr. Iskander informs that the movement started with six persons, who wrote the manifesto, and that it grew to about 5000 people that are tied to the movement in one way or another. About 25 000 has sign the Internet appeal, he continues, and millions sympathize with their demands (060125). Instead of talking about the exact amount of members, the informants preferred to talk about supporters and supporting groups. Dr. Thabet explains that the newspapers el-Arabi and el-Naseri support Kefaya, despite them being official mouthpieces of political parties, and that the judiciary appreciates the movement's endorsement (051219). Mr. Iskander furthermore confirms that his political party, Karama, has about the same philosophy as Kefaya (060125).

Many activists in the opposition are engaged in several networks at the same time and possess multiple organizational memberships (ICG, 2005). This adds to the categorical ambiguity present in the narratives of the political opposition to the regime. Some of the interviewees also reflect upon this uncertainty (e.g. Dina, 060104). The political groups based on profession, typically with the suffix "... for Change" (... *min ajli 'l-taghyir*) constitute a specific category within the opposition.³⁷ These are independent and not a detached Kefaya-group like Youth for Change, but are nevertheless sometimes counted to the movement by the leadership. This intellectual gymnastics is managed by looking upon Kefaya as an umbrella organization for regime critics. Mr. Ishaq states that Workers for Change, Doctors for Change, Students for Change, etc. all belong to the Kefaya

³⁷ Many of the "... for Change"-groups have very few activities and a low level of militancy.

movement. They can do what they want, but under the umbrella of Kefaya (060123). Mr. Shaaban explains that these groups are free when it comes to decision-making and agenda, but partly belongs to Kefaya since their leaders are tied to the movement (060206).

The stress on Kefaya as a movement, above all, is important and recurrent in the interviews. “We wanted a movement – not a party; no ideologies – we wanted a vision” (Dr. Maadi, 060212). “Kefaya is not a party or an organization – it is a pioneering and direct acting movement” (Mr. Iskander, 060125). Also activist Dina notes that she, despite that she consider herself independent, is embraced by the movement. “Kefaya is a big umbrella. In general everything I do can be considered to be under this umbrella. [...] Both Kefaya and Youth for Change consider me in, even if I’m not in the core (060104). The “movement-label” was furthermore used in different ways, depending on the context. Sometimes the movement organization was emphasized and a rather explicit and stable structure was outlined. On other occasions the movement was depicted as a trend (Dr. Hussein, 060127) or a political symbol (Dr. Said, 051218).³⁸ The variations appeared to harmonize with the complicated task of making Kefaya represent both a united opposition and a variety of opinions.

Also in interviews with members of factions within Kefaya, generality shifting is a common way of keeping one’s own narrow definition of identity and at the same time connecting to the movement at large. The narrow ‘we’ is often used to accentuate the faction’s contribution to the development of Kefaya or its independence. ‘We’ were the first who took the demonstrations to popular areas; ‘we’ are connected to the street, ‘we’ didn’t care about them [Kefaya’s leadership], etc. (e.g. Hussam, 060108).

Mische mentions the use of all-embracing definitions as a resource for reconciling the differences of a disintegrated audience (see chapter 2.2.3.). In the case of Kefaya, nationalism seems to serve this purpose and is used as a unifying narrative. According to interviews, articles and information on the website, Kefaya is a nationalist movement and ‘Egypt’ is a unquestioned unit in the political discourse (e.g. Thabet, undated article and Shaaban, 2005). Nationalism is something bigger than ideologies; it surrounds them, Mr. Iskander states. It signifies that Kefaya cares about all parts of the society and all parts of Egypt (060125). It is used as a tool to make people leave particularistic tendencies aside (Dr. Sattar, 060201). Sometimes Nationalism is combined with criticism of the regime which is held responsible for the deteriorating of the society (ibid.) and sometimes as a defense against foreign interests and colonialism (Dr. Hussein, 060127). “If you want to face America and the Zionists you have to be a free nation”, Mr. Ishaq claims (060123).

Egypt is regarded as an important country in the region; it’s full of wealth but suffers under undemocratic rule. Dr. Said says that the unifying factor in Kefaya is the critique of corruption and mediocrity in top of all institutions (051218). Mr. Shaaban explains how Egypt has lost its strength in everything from sport to culture because of a system that restrains rejuvenation of the society

³⁸ In a *Daily Star* article, Kefaya is even described as a PR-phenomenon. “I call it a brand, not a movement” says a quoted advertising agent (Salama, 2005).

(060206). Many senior activists in Kefaya use personal experiences of war, imprisonment and persecution to underline their devotion to the prosperity of the nation. Mr. Ishaq recollects 1956 and the attack on Egypt and his hometown Port Said³⁹. “From this point I knew what it is to love a nation and how it feels to loose your freedom” (060123). The concept of nationalism has also become a weapon in the debate between Kefaya and the regime. Kefaya is blamed for being a tool of the West to exert pressure on Egypt; an accusation that is heavily rejected by Kefaya members. “It is a joke, because it is they [people in the regime] who are the real puppets [of the West]” (Mr. Khalil, 051219).

3.2.4. Multiple Targeting

The interviews were in all cases but one⁴⁰ accomplished in a private setting with one informant at the time and me as the one-headed audience. The need of the multiple targeting-technique was hence not acute and it is reasonable to believe that the narratives were somewhat adjusted to suit me as a foreigner, student, outsider, etc. On the other hand, the need for a minimum level of concordance of the movement messages remained intact since I openly declared that I aimed to carry out a large number of interviews, read the movement’s publications and eventually present my own conclusions as a thesis. Furthermore, my additional material (articles, website information, other publications) were all directed to a diverse audience.

An obvious example of multiple targeting is the way that several activists that occupied leadership positions in both Kefaya and outside organizations emphasized the coherence between their engagements. Dr. Hussain, chairman of the Labor party and promoter of Kefaya, states that the movement has an open construction that facilitates him to promote the ideas of his party under the slogan of Kefaya (060127). Mr. Iskander stresses the similarities in philosophy between his party Karama and the Kefaya movement (060125). Mr. Ishaq has attracted much media attention as the coordinator of Kefaya and also a Christian member of the Islamist Labor party. The activists often refer to this fact when they narrate on the openness of Kefaya (e.g. Maadi, 2005). Mr. Shaaban further explains that Mr. Ishaq is first and foremost an Egyptian (060206). All these examples illustrate the need to direct the sub-group of one’s own and at the same time prove loyalty and solidarity to the movement at large.

³⁹ In late October 1956 France, Great Britain and Israel attacked their military antagonist Egypt on the pretext of the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company. After strong protest from the UN, USSR and USA the alliance was forced to agree on cease fire in November 1956. The confrontation marked the end of France and Great Britain as world power nations and strengthened the position of Egypt and its president Nasser in the Arab world (www.nationalencykopedin.se).

⁴⁰ During the interview with Dr. Maadi (060212) one of his colleagues was present during the last ten minutes of the meeting.

The fact that multivocality lies in the very core of the movement and is regarded as something necessary and, most of the times, positive⁴¹ can be regarded as a complement to the multiple targeting-technique. By allowing different members to address core-issues in different ways depending on his or her ideological roots makes it possible for different groups to attract the message of the group⁴².

⁴¹ Some activists however expressed frustration over the incoherence of Kefaya. Hani compares the movement to *koshery*, one of the most famous popular dishes in Egypt. “It’s not originally a dish; it’s a mix of leftovers and small quantities of food that the housewife might have had at home a particular day. Koshary consists of a lot of different things from dishes that originally wasn’t meant to be eaten together. For me Kefaya is the same thing” (060130).

⁴² Other analyzers point to the fact that the flat and fragmentized structure of Kefaya runs the risk of confusing people (Dr. Fergany, 051207).

4. Final Reflections

The ambitions throughout the whole research process has been to deal with the topic of identity within social movement networks and this chapter makes an attempt to put words on the experiences gained along the way. In the following section the focus lies on the empirical findings and specific features of the Kefaya movement. This discussion is raised to a more universal level in the second section that concentrates on the methodological and theoretical tools applied.

4.1. *Revising the Empirical Findings*

While Mische and Somers draw their conclusions from an Anglo-American environment, this field study has been accomplished in a rather different setting. That the political situation affects the narratives is evident, but does it also affect the *machinery behind* the narratives?⁴³ This is a complex question that easily could generate an essay of its own, but to begin one could conclude that the choice of organizational mode is in the case of Kefaya by and large an effect of the political restrictions; the arena of party politics is virtually dead in Egypt. The organizational mode, i.e. the movement network, is in turn deeply intertwined with what Mische calls conversational mechanisms. The whole concept of Kefaya could e.g. be understood as a manifestation of temporal cuing – the creation of a common narrative on a momentary basis.

It was thus not difficult to find examples to substantiate the theoretical framework. To begin with, identity qualifying seemed to be a tool particularly important for the more critical members to *mark a distance* between them and the movement. During no parts of my interviews, expressions such as “as a Kefaya member I think...” were used and the notion of a movement ‘we’ was used mostly to refer to the manifesto. Another interesting finding was that identity qualifying was used to articulate new division lines within the organization. While divisions along the horizontal line, i.e. between different ideologies, were immanent in the concept, the creation of Youth for Change gave proof of a vertical division of identities as well. These new ‘conflict-lines’ could at times be more distinct than the ideological barriers. The Islamist-Communist cooperation within the movement witnessed clearly of how time and space constellations both had facilitated the odd couple and now slowly seemed to drive wedges into the organization. That also indicates that even if multiplicity is a conceivable ingredient in a movement’s identity, there has to be concordance in the central

⁴³ Of course, one can ask the same questions about factors such as cultural and social milieu as well.

narratives to keep the group united. It is finally worth to lay stress upon the importance of a ‘sliding we’ within a coalition-based movement like Kefaya. Conversely, one could also see how organizational features such as the absence of a membership directory and the ad hoc character of the movement at large supported rhetorical generality shifting (it was e.g. practically impossible to speak of a fixed ‘we’ within the movement) and thereby initially may have enhanced recruitment, bridged ideological barriers and created a revolutionary image of the movement⁴⁴.

4.2. Theoretical and Methodological Dimensions

In general the theoretical and methodological tools have proved to be well adjusted to the problem and also to complement each other. While Somers provides a clear analytic model and a profound understanding of narrativity by emphasizing factors such as emplotment, relationality and the construction of time and space, Mische offers practical tools for approaching the empirical material. Somers’ separation between ontological and public narratives brings light to the multidimensional aspects of identity construction in a social movement. This insight is manifested in the present case which demonstrates that even (or particularly?) in a setting where a myriad of networks, movements and political affiliations are available, the individual identity is something one stands up for.

The field-study material further suggests that identity has a fundamental value also in movements that don’t deal with what the academic literature often label ‘identity-politics’. In a protest movement one could be pragmatic with the choice of coalition partners and modes of action, but that doesn’t imply that one’s identity is secondary or something that automatically adjusts itself to the new situation. On the contrary, by borrowing Mische’s analytical toolbox one can follow the living process of identity construction within the relational networks. This knowledge is something that to a greater degree should guide future studies on social movements.

Our stories about ourselves and the world around us guide our actions. Following this logic it is in narratives we should look for explanations to how it could be that disparate groups like Islamists and revolutionary communists can manage to form an alliance together (and why they eventually disintegrate). While many theories of social movements seem to stop at the difficulties connected to cooperation (building a long-term agenda etc.) in network groups, Mische stresses that the loose organizational study rather is to be seen as a prerequisite of collaboration. There is however more work to be done to reveal those mechanisms that open and close the opportunities for cooperation and communication.

⁴⁴ As previously mentioned these organizational features might also have caused confusion and blunted the political message.

A final reflection concerns narrative as a methodological approach. Despite compulsory passages on validation and the role of the researcher, much of the literature intimates that storylines are all ready stored within the individual. I believe that the researcher has to take a greater responsibility for his/her part in the stories that ultimately ends up in an academic text. To label one's information 'stories' doesn't mean that the question of validity is of less importance. With that said, I personally found the narrative methodology useful, especially since it gave me courage to let the informants finish their lines of thought and since I found the approach a respectful way to deal with the interview situation.

5. References

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<http://www.nationalencyklopedin.se>

(All Internet sources were available on-line 2006-05-18).

Appendix A

Interviews

Experts

Dr. Nader Fergany 051207
(Director, Arab Human Development
Report)
Dr. Michael Lange 051206
(Region Manager, Konrad
Adenauer Stiftung, Egypt)
Mr .Sherif Mansour 051210
(Project Manager, Ibn
Khaldoun Center for
Development Studies)
Dr. Gameel Mattar 051215
(Director ,Center for Political
and Futuristic Studies)
Ms. Åsa Poussard
(2nd Secretary, Swedish
Embassy, Egypt)

Kefaya

Dr. Magdi Hussein 060127
Mr. George Ishaq 060123
Mr. Amin Iskander 060125
Mr. Wael Khalil 051219
Dr. Abu Ela Maadi 060212
Dr. Mohamed El-Sayed Said
051218
Dr. Said Abu Sattar 060201
Mr. Ahmad Baha' Shaaban
060206
Dr. Ahmed Thabet 051219

Youth for Change (De- identified)

“Dina” 060124
“Alaa” 060125
“Hani” 060130
“Hussam” 060130
“Mona” 060117