Special Thematic Section on "Rethinking Prefigurative Politics"

The Identity Process in Times of Rupture: Narratives From the Egyptian Revolution

Sarah Hassan Awad*[a]

[a] Department of Communication and Psychology, Aalborg University, Aalborg, Denmark.

Abstract

This is a longitudinal study of the identity process through times of dramatic social change. Using a narrative psychological approach this research follows the life stories of five Egyptian bloggers as they write their stories on online blogs over the course of the three years following the 2011 revolution, at which time Egypt has witnessed major social and political changes. The aim is to understand the identity process of individuals as they develop and adapt through changing social contexts and how they create alternative social relations as they engage in prefigurative politics. The findings shed light on how ruptures trigger a process of reflexivity, adaptive learning, and sense-making that facilitates coping and the reconstruction of a positive identity after ruptures. It also suggests that the narration of the experience of rupture through storytelling creates a heightened sense of agency in individuals' ability to create new meanings of their world in spite of the socio-cultural and political constraints. This study presents narratives as an informing methodological resource that connects identity process with social representations and emphasizes the value of storytelling as an integral part of the adaptation process.

Keywords: identity process, ruptures, narratives, agency, blogs, revolution, Egypt

The role of social psychology is to help us understand humans' flexibility in creating and relating to their social worlds (Reicher, 2004). Individuals grow within the sociocultural context through a continuous process of creating meanings and using signs to mediate their relation to the environment (Vygotsky, 1978). As long as everything is going as expected, this process follows the routine, but when ruptures happen we are stimulated to think and reflect (Valsiner, 2003). Ruptures here refer to events that substantially change a person's daily life challenging one's perceived identity. The study of ruptures therefore informs the essence of human psychological capacity to adapt and draws attention to the continuous sense-making processes that humans engage in on daily basis but are taken for granted in the routine life where a lived sense of coherence prevails (Crossley, 2000a).

Revolutions fundamentally disrupt the lives of the individuals taking part in them as they engage in a process of prefiguration creating alternative social relations to their surroundings through imagining a better future and

working with others to create grassroots social movements challenging established order (Yates, 2015). A psychological and epistemological rupture has occurred in recent years in the Middle East region shaking the authoritarian order in many countries (Gerges, 2013). In 2011, Egypt witnessed demonstrations that led to the overthrow of a dictatorship regime that had been in power for over thirty years. From 2011 to 2014 the society witnessed many changes on the social, economic, and political level including regime change between old regime, Muslim Brotherhood, and military. Even though the happenings in Egypt have not led to fundamental changes that would be expected from a revolution such as a structural shift in system of governance or social relations, I would still use the term 'revolution' in referring to those events in this paper, as opposed to riots, protests, or uprising because it is a revolution from the perspectives and intentions of those who took part in it (Gunning & Baron, 2014, pp. 3-6) and that is how the bloggers referred to those historical events. The term will therefore reflect the voice of the narrators and the personal perception of the events rather than the social and political structures.

As an Egyptian the impact of the revolution on my own life triggered my interest to examine how the social change was a personally transformative experience for many who shared the aspirations for a better future but then struggled to make sense as events unfolded in a different direction than they had expected. To understand this transformation, this research looks closely at the life course of five individuals who took part in the revolution as a case study. The rupture of the revolution had not only impacted their shared social context but also had direct consequences on their personal lives. Although the recent revolutions have taken much attention in research, the focus has been mostly on the collective social and political level. This research focuses on the micro level of individuals, looking at how those ruptures have impacted their identity process, their capacity to imagine an alternative reality for their society, and more importantly their coping strategies when the reality they imagined failed to happen in the years following the start of the revolution. This micro interpersonal analysis could help in the understanding of the dynamics leading to prefigurative political and social action.

To follow the lives of the five cases, a longitudinal narrative approach (Crossley, 2000a; Holland et al., 2006) was chosen where the individuals' entries on their personal blogs were closely analyzed over the period of three years. Blogs were looked at as a space for them to externalize their flow of consciousness (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2012) and document their life stories as they occurred. Their lives and perspectives vary and are analyzed in-depth from an idiographic perspective (Salvatore & Valsiner, 2010) as personal unique cases that could inform the study of identity process through ruptures. The purpose of the analysis was to answer the following three guiding questions: (1) How do individuals make sense of major changes in their social context and reconstruct their identity accordingly? (2) How does this process of reconstruction impact their coping and their perceived sense of agency in facing disempowering circumstances? (3) What role do personal narratives play in this reconstruction and coping process?

Theoretical Background

This paper builds on Identity Process Theory (Breakwell, 1986) together with the concept of social representations (Moscovici, 1984) in a narrative approach. It is argued that using an idiographic approach that focuses in-depth on unique subjective life stories over the life course informs the study of human's psychological transition through changing social context and manifests the constraints and opportunities for agency in adaptation.

Identity Process Through Ruptures

Looking at identity process in times of obstacles, change, and loss gives a perspective into humans' fundamentally evolving nature where such life ruptures are seen as calls for individuals to use resources from their environment

to support their evolving process of transformation (Zittoun et al., 2013, p. 51). It also confirms that our identities are inherently unstable, and that we are in a continuous process of negotiating a positive identity (Howarth, 2002a). Identity Process theory (IPT) offers a useful model to explore the research topic as it integrates the concepts of identity, threat, agency, and coping offering a dynamic model of the identity in relation to social processes and structures (Breakwell, 1986, pp. 8-23).

According to IPT, ruptures are the social changes that threaten the identity process demanding change to content or value dimensions of identity (Breakwell, 1986, p. 47). Ruptures can be also seen as events, which can be experienced positively or negatively, that substantially question a person's daily life (Zittoun et al., 2013, p. 263). The impact of a rupture varies depending on the spheres it affects. When a change happens in one sphere of experience (such as family, career, or political unrest) a person can still depend on continuity in other spheres for transition, but when the rupture is in multiple major spheres of one's life it threatens one's sense of control over the situation (Zittoun et al., 2013, p. 265).

Different ruptures have been proven to lead to significant psychological turmoil. Social unrest and conflict, for example, disrupt the status quo and call for a reconstruction of national identities and social representations (Herrmann et al., 2009). Unemployment also, as a personal rupture, influences change in the content and value dimensions of identity (Jahoda, 1982). Also, loss of a loved one can challenge one's core beliefs and disrupt the coherence of one's self-narrative (Neimeyer et al., 2010).

Coping mechanisms allow the core that defines oneself to be maintained to sustain a consistent melody of one's lives even under such radical changes. Coping can be any conscious or unconscious thought or action that succeeds in eliminating an identity threat (Breakwell, 1986, p. 79). Coping entails three mutually dependent processes: learning new forms of action and understanding, identity changes, and sense-making (Zittoun et al., 2013, p. 263). Based on this, whether ruptures are temporary or permanent, they are considered to be short-lived because as soon as individuals become conscious of the rupture, they initiate strategies to overcome them (Breakwell, 1986, p. 79). Exceptions to this are in cases where ruptures are traumatic and individuals struggle to make sense of unexpected events; in this case intervention might be needed to help individuals in accepting loss and dealing with complicated grief (Neimeyer et al., 2010).

Socio-Cultural Context: Social Representations and Agency

Identity process theories require the incorporation of the socio-cultural context into their analysis to be able to make any predictions (Reicher, 2004; Turner, 1999, p. 34). This context involves social representations, which are the concepts and explanations originating in daily life in the course of inter-individual communications. Situations of unrest stimulate reflective thought that lead to changing social representations (Moscovici, 1984, p. 181).

Investigating social representations is linked closely to the identity process in times of rupture. For any rupture leading to identity changes, there are competing social representations. IPT helps determine which social representations an individual adopts and which ones individuals countervail with other social representations (Breakwell, 1993). This process of elaborating and rejecting certain social representations is essential in an individual's realization of their agency in reconstructing a positive identity after ruptures (Howarth, 2002a) and in protecting the self from negative impacts of stigmatization (Moscovici, 1981).

Narratives

Human psychology has an essentially narrative structure (Carr, 1986; Sarbin, 1986a). Narratives create an inter-experience that connects the identity with the socio-cultural context and enables individuals to be agents in changing their experience of the world by symbolically restructuring it (Jackson, 2002, p. 35). Thus, analyzing individuals' narratives helps us understand their identities as life stories (McAdams, 1993, p. 5). Those life stories create stability out of the irreversible flow of time and help to assimilate ruptures through a narrative reconfiguration process (Crossley, 2000a; Jackson, 2002, p. 37; Neimeyer et al., 2010). Also, when those stories are shared in the public sphere (such as in the case of the blogs), they enable writers to convey, produce, and reproduce the social representations of their community (Jovchelovitch, 2012).

Methodology

A qualitative longitudinal research design was chosen as it is useful in interpreting biographical data and is highly sensitive to contextual issues and micro-social processes such as the way individuals subjectively negotiate changes occurring in their lives (Holland et al., 2006). In addition, qualitatively exploring life course data helps focus the research on what is general among trajectories as in the impact of social and historical events affecting many people at once (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2012).

The choice of an in-depth analysis of five life stories was chosen over a general analysis of a bigger pool of data because sense-making is idiographic by its nature and understanding the uniqueness of each story offers a psychological understanding that can be generalized (Salvatore & Valsiner, 2010). The blogs were analyzed using thematic network analysis relying on data-driven codes that emerged from the stories. For the purpose of this exploratory research, it was important to rely on data-driven codes rather than having a ready set of codes to test a certain hypothesis and generalize based on them. Thematic analysis thus facilitated the emergence of important themes and informed the research direction, allowing the exploration of meanings and significance of ideas (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

The Data

Data comprised blog entries of five Egyptians who took part in the Egyptian revolution in 2011. The data track their entries from January 2011 just before the Egyptian revolution to March 2014 marking the course of over three years. Blogs as a data source are treated as an external expression of their flow of thought manifested through the artistic form of storytelling. Blogs as well as social media channels played an important role as an alternative news source during and after the revolution and as a social documentation tool. The relative freedom of expression created a virtual community of people who share their own stories of the revolution and report on the authorities' violations.

The writers are upper middle class Egyptians, two females and three males, and their age range is between 30 to 40 years old. These blogs were specifically chosen because their writers wrote regularly (at least once a month) sharing their personal stories as well as their political perspectives on the social context in a rich and open manner. What further distinguishes those five stories is that they didn't associate themselves with any specific political party. Their stories reflect how they were affected by the social change and they all shared a sense of loss of the

revolution they were aspiring for as events unfolded. Additionally, they all experienced personal ruptures during the course of the three years, such as loss of a loved one, divorce, imprisonment, or unemployment.

The data from the five blogs combined comprise more than 90 thousand words, mostly written in English with few Arabic entries and few supplementing photos. There are many other blogs of Egyptians who were part of the revolution, but they were either too short and not covering the whole period of research, or they were mostly political. The blogs chosen shared a similar exposure to events and experienced a parallel wave of emotions, they also shared similar political and social views. This made analyzing their timelines together meaningful. However, there was the limitation that they are only representative of a certain minority cluster of the Egyptian society, due to a lack of similar online narratives of other groups of the society with different economic background or political views. Another limitation to the data set is that its availability in the public domain might have affected the writers' free flow of consciousness in writing, influencing how they represented themselves and their social context to local as well as international audiences.

Findings

The thematic framework's main themes follow the rationale of the research of looking at the 'sociocultural context' where 'psychological experience of the self' occurs, exploring individual's process through 'ruptures,' and how it is externalized in 'narratives.' The five bloggers will be referred to in the analysis as AD, MS, EN, RO, and AM followed by the date of the blog entry.

Socio-Cultural Context: Where It All Took Place

The blogs provide a rich lively account of their surroundings. They expressed dominant social representations, the social and cultural changes they witnessed, the influence of other cultures, significant symbols in their society, and the revolution as the most significant event in the course of the three years on the social level.

Social Representations

Egypt is presented as a beloved home and a place of belonging in spite of its "chaotic and unjust" reality (EN, January'11). With a deteriorating economy and "clear signs of a social crisis that has been in the making for decades" (MS, June'11), its traditional image taught in schools as "the center of the universe" is changing (MS, May'13). Egyptian community is presented as torn between loving Egypt and finding living in it to be extremely difficult, continuously complaining about "political environment, corruption, and chaos" (AD, Jan'11).

Cross-Cultural Influence

Narratives involved references to and comparisons with other cultures that have influenced the writers. Cultural diffusion is evident among the writers who are active users of the Internet and have travelled to different places. In the context of the revolution, the writers connected what is happening in Egypt to the regional Arab Spring and found inspiration in the Tunisian revolution:

> Who would have expected (…) the revolutionary volcano in Tunisia (to) travel all the way to Egypt, like a brush fire torching millions of hearts in the morning of the 25th of Jan. (EN, March'11)

Exposure to other cultures also influenced questioning of dominant social representations about issues such as authority and religion:

I have seen those who insult their leaders in the media in the most developed of countries, and societies accept it as a reasonable price for freedom. (MS, May'11)

The cultural intercommunication was evident not only in what they learned from other cultures but also what they offered. The writers used their blogs at certain periods of time as mass media platforms to voice what is happening in Egypt to international media opposing what the government-owned media was portraying.

Socio-Cultural Change and the Revolution

Witnessing socio-cultural changes was a common theme in the data that other experiences revolved around. The social changes expressed can be illustrated in three distinct stages: (1) Beginning of the revolution from January 2011 to Mubarak's removal 11 February 2011; (2) after Mubarak's removal till Morsi from the Muslim Brotherhood was elected (June, 2012) and Morsi's one year of presidency; (3) after Morsi's removal (July, 2013) to March 2014 just before ex-military Field Marshal El-Sisi becoming the president.

The beginning of the revolution marked a very positive change in cultural dynamics: "No one can argue that the Egyptian street has witnessed a leap in behaviors and attitude... we thought we live in our own bubble but since the beginning of the revolution we all decided to hold hands" (EN, Jan'11). It was also described as a time of euphoria and pride for many Egyptians and a promise for a new beginning: "On the 25th we woke up to a new Egypt (…) a country that was in labor for 30 long obnoxious years" (AD, Jan'12). These changes exposed the corruption of the old regime and called for a societal restructuring. However, not all Egyptians shared the writers' perception of this period; "Many Egyptians were either perplexed, astounded, suspicious or outright against the demonstrations" (MS, August'11).

The period after Mubarak's removal witnessed much of the chaos following the revolution, involving military aggression, slow trials of old regime figures, deteriorating economy, and increasing sexual harassments in the streets. People didn't seem as united as during the first days of the revolution; each group started expressing different demands and expectations. The ruling of the Muslim Brotherhood through Morsi further deepened the divide in the society especially in terms of ideologies and religious tolerance.

The period after Morsi's removal and military take-over triggered further division and confusion. This stage is described by one writer as "the most complicated since 2011. It is quite volatile, volcanic and sensitive" (MS, August'13). Another writer makes sense of how the situation has evolved in the following description:

Egyptians had reached a stage of exhaustion and frustration with the Brotherhood that they were in need of a hero. Sisi promised to re-stabilize the country and with the help of propaganda won. Then anyone who made enough trouble was thrown in jail. Because of our short sightedness, impatience, and naivety; we find that we removed one military leader only to grovel and bring another in his place. (AD, January'14)

The urban city space has also transformed during the three years further impacting the routine life of the writers "The first post-Jan25 change noticeable is that in many streets you can see murals and graffiti honoring the martyrs, government buildings surrounded by army, and empty streets due to the curfew enforcement" (AM, April'11).

Self: The Actors

The life story naturally evolves around the person writing it as he/she externalizes feelings, experiences, and perspectives.

Feelings

The writers' emotions fluctuated over the course of the three years. The data comprised a unique coexistence of many different feelings through the changing contexts. Emotions expressed the most among the five stories were those of pain and anger from "oppression, violence, and injustice" (MS, May'11), and experiencing loss:

> *I write today while in a state of anger and frustration with a lost revolution (…) Life in Egypt post-revolution had become extremely stressful and while all this is going on, I am also going through my own personal challenges. I am unemployed and suffering from major financial loss in a very unstable Egypt at a time of global economic crisis. (AD, Jan'13)*

The fluctuation of emotions over the three years is evident most in relation to the revolution progress. In the beginning, there was a great sense of achievement in succeeding to remove the Mubarak regime: "For me it's a great personal triumph and that was one of the best moments of my life!" (AM, February'11). This feeling was followed by hope for the future and aspiration for change, and at the same time fear of the unknown. At later stages, there were feelings of frustration with the Muslim Brotherhood presidency period, followed by further disappointment with the military take over. The coexistence of many diverse emotions is captured here:

> *Egyptians have witnessed since the start of 2011 some of its most difficult and its most triumphant days. We have experienced the full range of human emotion in its utmost intensity: curiosity, hope, fear, anger, absolute loss, grieving, looking death in the face and boom! Triumph! Then exhaustion. Mental and physical, and a return of grieving, followed by hope, then confusion again. (AD, February'14)*

Experiences

Looking at the actors' background and life experiences helped in the analysis of their identity and the resources available for their adaptation. All five bloggers had access to good education, strong social network, and employment opportunities. Their participation in the revolution was one common key experience among them: "There are very few moments in time that decide the course of history. Our generation's Moment was January 25, 2011" (AM, January'14). In their narratives, they have detailed accounts of their participation in different protests and their confrontation with the security forces and how this has shaped their personality and resilience.

Social Identity

In a direct and indirect manner, the stories presented how the writers identify themselves. They negotiated their association to certain groups (opinion groups, national groups, professional groups) and reflected on the value they attribute to those groups, which constitutes their construction of a social identity (Tajfel, 1978). In spite of how the revolution evolved, the writers' self perception was impacted positively by their involvement in the revolution. They shared a sense of agency in changing their worlds and even when the change expected didn't happen; this agency still had a direct effect on their personal life choices and aspirations for personal freedom. "I am now a strong independent woman. My self-perceived independence emboldened me to aspire to a healthier, happier life and to free myself from an unhappy marriage" (AD, August'11).

Remembering and Imagination

The narratives emphasized the value of memories in shaping their identity and how writing their stories was a way of reconstructing those memories. They were keen to document the revolution, not only for themselves, but also in resistance to how the official media was documenting the revolution:

> *Memories of a revolution, a revolution hardly over and just beginning. Memories I need to document, to share, to lighten my soul. No matter how painful some of them are, they are all dearly cherished and have come to be a part of me and of who I am. (EN, February'14)*

Those memories were presented as shaping their imagination of the future, especially those relating to the revolution. There was a sense of hope in that even if the revolution did not turn out as they wanted, just documenting it and remembering it will keep it alive for the next generation to continue the journey:

> *It takes very little insight to see that our generation has lost its chance. It may take another 50 years for a new history-changing moment to arrive in Egypt. All I can say is that if we're not here when it comes, our children will be. And all I can hope is that when it does come, we will have learned our lesson and we will hold onto that moment for dear life and never ever let it go. (AM, January'14)*

Self Through Ruptures: The Journey of Transition

Following the journeys in the five stories yielded some common patterns in how the writers experienced ruptures and their process of reflection and sense-making.

Experiencing Ruptures

Changing moments are those that define a life story and create a sense of rupture: "I remember there being a heightened sense of realization that this was about to become a defining moment; that I would describe incidences from then on as ones who had occurred before or after it" (RO, August'12). On the social level, the revolution was a major change in how everything was structured: "the realization that the country we knew is indeed forever changed, that a massive chapter of our lives has truly been turned" (MS, August'11). On the personal level, ruptures disrupted daily routines and expectations: "It is very difficult for a divorced parent to wake up in the morning to an empty house… There's nothing like a home full of rowdy children suddenly growing lifeless by their absence" (AD, February'12).

Rediscovering Oneself – Identity Reconstruction

Narratives allow a space for self-reflection and re-evaluation (Jahoda, 1982), which result in new meanings: "I was exposed to different kinds of people and ideologies. I began to see the world, really see it, in a whole new light" (ED, June'13). Those new meanings result from a learning process that follows ruptures (Zittoun et al., 2013, p. 263). This then opens the way for new realizations and connections: "I have come to feel that I am much closer to my Creator" (AD, May'13), as well as new ways of living, "You begin to realize what is truly important, at least for yourself. You realize how, and why, you want to live" (MS, January'13).

Progressive Adjustment to Change

Data coded as progressive adjustment to change were those revolving around coping strategies (Breakwell, 1986) as well as the transition model presented by Zittoun et al. (2013). Transitioning from one point to the next entails realizing the possibilities to act and choosing how to move forward, which is a challenging task after loss: "At

practice, one could just fall and fail or stand up and walk again (…) All I know is that we should try to go on" (MS, July'11). It is also a process that involves weighing the risks of all options: "When one performs an act that may involve the possible harming of oneself, one must at least believe that it is indeed the only remaining solution, or that it is the one that has the best odds of achieving anything" (AM, March'13). New possibilities then emerge from these reflections and become the key to adaptation.

Among the coping strategies captured from the narratives was the 'exit option' (Tajfel, 1978) from the threatening position, which involves psychological and/or social mobility:

> There were times when many of us started thinking it was time to leave the country. It was never an option for me. But with the situation so precarious, I started thinking that maybe leaving the country was my only option. (AD, January'12)

There was also coping by attempting to restore normality to maintain the 'continuity' principle of the IPT: "I find myself longing for normality. But I try to find my personal definition for what normality really is for me" (RO, September'13). There also was coping with, in terms of IPT, intra-psychic acceptance strategies: "Maybe it did leave a scar that will always live with me in one way or another. But I learned to accept that" (EN, March'14).

Other forms of coping utilized the IPT intergroup strategies of dissociating oneself from certain groups:

> I've begun to understand why dissociation is so attractive. People can be extremely judgmental and narrow-sighted. Some people, once you've gone through a difficult time, will only see that part of you when they meet you. (AD, December'12)

Intergroup strategies were also used to protect their threatened identities as activists. Some of them chose to dissociate themselves from politics in the later stages of the revolution: "I will close my eyes and ears off to anything related to politics" (AD, September'13). While others chose to attribute more value to other group memberships such as that of work and parenthood: "I will focus on being good at the jobs that I do. I will try to raise my children to be productive members of the society but I'm done with reading about politics" (MS, December'13).

One underlying characteristic among all the previous examples of coping strategies was a strong sense of persistence to adapt: "In the midst of all of life's agony, we still find that survival is our primary instinct. Something inside of us does not want to let go" (MS, November'11). This dedication seems to stem from hope "I still have a true conviction that there is so much to be hopeful for" (RO, October'11) and the realization that ruptures have added value to them as human beings: "And yet, I am now a more complete human being having experienced those emotions" (EN, July'13).

Reflecting on Dominant Social Representations

Reflecting on dominant social representations seemed to be triggered by the fact that the overthrowing of the regime was in itself breaking many of the previous notions about authority, "For the first time, we will break tradition with our region's dark history, where leaders either rule for life or die of assassination" (MS, August'11). This reflection led to their agency in reconstructing and reevaluating previous dominant representations in the society such as those relating to religion, women's presence in public space, and personal freedoms.

Sense-Making

The theme of sense-making is most central to the focus of this study. It refers to connecting the past, present, and future into a coherent life story, which appears to be a natural outcome of narrative externalization and key to coping (Crossley, 2000a): "I look at my own life, my personal circumstances, and I see a unique story. I see a life full of drama, events, very high highs and very low lows" (EN, September'13). This sense-making is seen by one of the writers as directly triggered by personal ruptures: "There's nothing like the death of a parent to smack some sense into you" (AD, September'11). It is also a way to attribute meaning to unpredictable changes which is one of IPT intra-psychic coping strategies:

> *I now see that everything between Mubarak's speech in February 2011 and today have been folded. Except two thousand people have lost their lives, many more injured and many hopes buried. Our attempt to stand up have showed us that we have a broken back. (AM, September'13)*

This sense-making process also involves internalization of new meanings and values into one's life (Valsiner, 2007). In this case the writer internalized a strengthened sense of agency:

> *I have realized that we are much stronger than the conditions we find ourselves in, more than I had imagined. (MS, May'13)*

Future Imagination After the Rupture

In spite of the constraining social and political context, narrators still found an outlet of the reality in future imagination, which is a space facilitated by narratives (Zittoun et al., 2013, p. 87):

> *A dream is the most beautiful thing life has to offer. I dream of a new Egypt and I will live on hope amongst the confusion of it all, amongst the frustration of it all, amongst the continuing danger of it all. I will live on hope. (AD, February'14)*

Narratives: The Storytelling

In this research, blogs have been regarded as an artistic form of storytelling that manifests the writer's identity. Technology is opening up new resources of expression, which facilitates the easiness of externalization but might affect the quality and depth of it. Writers expressed the benefit they felt from writing their stories: "an incredible opportunity to reflect" (MS, February'14). They also referred to their writing as a tool to guide oneself: "to give myself a renewed sense of my direction" (AM, March'13). The act of publishing their blogs and sharing it with others was seen as a way of "tying (themselves) to (their) true self," as one writer expresses it (EN, December'13). On the social level, their shared stories created a dialogue and a space for communication within the society. In all five blogs, writers asked readers about their opinions and opened space for the exchange of ideas whether about personal issues or shared social struggles.

Certain limitations and risks to this form of externalization were shared. Bloggers expressed concerns in relation to publishing their stories and exposing themselves to societal judgments: "this blog post is not an open invitation to some of you cruel people to dissect, analyze, judge, or criticize my personal life choices" (AD, January'13). In many instances writers chose not to share part of their stories because they felt it was too personal to be shared publicly, in other instances they concealed some identifying information of their friends for security reasons.

Discussion

Though the research framework has been presented in three interrelated sections of self, social context, and narratives, the narrated life stories actually presented an 'inter-experience' where it was hard to separate between the personal and the social realms of experience (Jackson, 2002, p. 32); thus creating by the story a 'subjective in between' the self and the social context (Arendt, 1958, pp. 182-184). This oriented the approach of the study to look at individuals as socio-culturally interdependent (Linell, 2009, p. 27).

The findings illustrated how the individuals' experiences, emotions, identity associations, and relationships with others have shaped their development through ruptures. The five cases have negotiated their identities through a continuous process of self-reflection, adaptive learning, and sense-making (Crossley, 2000a; Neimeyer et al., 2010; Zittoun et al., 2013). This process has led them to come up with different coping strategies to maintain a positive identity (Howarth, 2002a) and eliminate identity threats (Breakwell, 1986).

These findings support the understanding of humans as flexible evolving beings: once their routine is disrupted by the unexpected, they persistently search for meanings and resources in their environment to restore consistency and transform from one point in time to the next. The extent of adaptation is therefore dependent on the resources available to the individual and the outcome of the sense-making process, which either facilitates or limits adaptation (Neimeyer et al., 2010). The five cases chosen for this research had different resources in their environment that facilitated their coping such as the ability to express themselves in writing, the support of others, and the ability for physical and psychological mobility. On the other hand, they were constrained by the growing stigma on their identity as activists as it was gradually losing its popularity in the Egyptian society.

Ruptures played a crucial role in triggering a heightened sense of agency for the bloggers that aided their creation of adaptive new relationships with their worlds. The revolution was for many an unimaginable dream after so many years of living as disempowered citizens incapable of shaping the future of their own society. It shook the ground of many givens, calling many of the social representations into question. The writers mobilized their sense of agency in resisting certain dominant social representations and choosing which ones to incorporate into their identity. Even when individuals experienced a sense of loss in their control over the progress of the revolution, their sense of agency still influenced their personal life choices. The narratives illustrated the continuous power struggle between self and society, where individual's agency in transforming their worlds prevails sometimes and the disempowering circumstances prevail at other times. Externalizing the narratives in storytelling seemed to impact this power relation providing more space for the writers to document their own perception of the socio-cultural context that is in contrast to what the state propaganda portrays. Their narratives gave them agency in reconstructing history and defending their identities (Jovchelovitch, 2012) as well as adapting through the ruptures through an active dialogue with others and within themselves. This informs our dialogical understanding of the social context as dynamic, multi-aspectual and with potential for different interpretations by agentic individuals (Linell, 2009, p. 135).

Consistent with literature on narratives and rupture the findings emphasized two important roles for narratives: First, narratives as an informing methodological resource for the study of identity process through ruptures in connection with social representations. Following the five life stories captured the transition process as writers expressed it at different points in time. This naturally occurring data provided a rich source of data that would have been hard to capture by other methodologies such as self-reported interviews at one point in time. This emphasizes

the value of inter-disciplinary research that connects narrative studies with different fields such as social psychology, anthropology (e.g., Arendt, 1958; Jackson, 2002), and psychotherapy (e.g., Neimeyer et al., 2010).

Second, the findings also emphasized the value of narratives – storytelling in particular – in the adaptation and agency of individuals. Narrative externalization aids the reconstruction of an individual's shattered sense of identity as they cope with personal and socio-cultural changes (Crossley, 2000a). The benefits of narratives discussed in the findings open up practical implication for this research. While there are different intervention approaches to help individuals after traumas (Neimeyer et al., 2010), less attention is put on the more common ruptures that every person goes through in his/her life span, and therefore many stories go untold, preventing much needed dialogue and obstructing the healing of communities that have gone through dramatic social ruptures. The safe space for narrative externalization is much needed in the Egyptian society today. By 2015, as this article is being written, many activists are imprisoned, opposition voices are silenced, and many forms of documentation for the past years is sanctioned and replaced by the government's narrative. Spaces, whether physical or virtual, that offer a venue for expression are essential for adaptation based on the founding psychological belief in the healing value of self-narration and that every person's story is worthy of attention:

> *If no one turned round when we entered, answered when we spoke, or minded what we did, but if every person we met "cut us dead", and acted as if we were non-existing things, a kind of rage and impotent despair would ere long well up in us, from which the cruelest bodily tortures would be a relief; for these would make us feel that, however bad might be our plight, we had not sunk to such a depth as to be un-worthy of attention at all. (James, 1890/1950, pp. 293-294)*

Conclusion

Tracing the five stories offered valuable insights into the more general ways in which individuals experience ruptures. Understanding their transformation on an individual level could inform how collective social change happens and how it could lead to prefigurative politics promising more sustainable changes. This study found that ruptures have the ability to produce novelty into people's lives that could deeply transform their identity. Narrative extern-alization has not changed the life events individuals have been through, but it did affect their perspective on what happened and their ability to cope. All through their stories coping was a mechanism to sustain continuity in their identity rather than a passive acceptance of the reality.

The revolution in Egypt is still fresh material for research. Understanding the capacity for resistance by individuals and the impact that social changes have on them informs the complexity of social movements. The case study in this research reflects the revolution supporters, a group that is gradually becoming a minority as the popularity of the revolution decreases under the current regime. It is questionable whether this minority can succeed in presenting an alternative future. According to Moscovici et al. (1969, p. 336), minorities can have a remarkable influence in spite of their lack of power if they maintain consistency in their principles and efforts. However, their consistency in the call for freedom in Egypt is severely constrained under the current authoritarian political system.

On the political level, it is negotiable whether the Egyptian revolution was a success, a failure, or a revolution in progress. The toppling of the regime was a major achievement, but the change in the social values and perceived agency of individuals is a much more complicated task that if achieved could promise a more sustainable prefig-uration of the politics of the country and prevent the thriving of a similar regime for another thirty years. This study

argues that on the individual level of the cases observed, the revolution made an irreversible positive effect on the bloggers' self-perception and empowered them with a sense of agency in the reconstruction of their realities – an effect that supports the hope that another world is possible.

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