



“Youth” in Nasser’s time: a class identity

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Abstract

This article questions the relevance of certain terms used in writing the history of post-1952 Egypt and enquires into the specificity of Egyptian socio-economic development in Nasser’s time and after. It argues that studying the conceptualization of the term “youth”, as an alternative to that of “generation” (predominant in the historiography), offers an opportunity to put Egyptian society in a broader context, that of the entry of Third World countries into international capitalism. Both generational roles in modern Egypt and the idea of Egyptian national authenticity can be understood by viewing the progressive definition of “youth” as a sociological category. This perspective allows to offer an alternative view of the Nasserite period that relies on an authoritarian prism which tends to smooth the rough edges and contradictions of that era.

The Problems of Youth

The study of youth in Arab countries is neither rare nor new, and the course of events in the Arab world since 2011 has brought the identification of this demographic category back into the spotlight. This is particularly so where “youth” (*al-šabāb*) have been involved in popular uprisings or simply been targeted by surveys seeking to measure the vulnerability of populations in developing countries.¹ In Egypt, a country that has inherited a long tradition of student protests and a troubled history of authoritarianism, this youth question has, *a fortiori*, had its successes; it is precisely for the same reasons that it has been so closely and irreversibly associated with the notion of “generation” (*al-ǧīl*), understood as a political cohort defined by its opposition to what has preceded it, albeit with a generally fluctuating perimeter. In Egyptian studies – that is, studies of modern Egypt in Arabic and Western languages – the concepts “youth” and “generation” have therefore become synonymous.

1 See for example Henrik Urdal, “A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence”, *International Studies Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (2006): 607–29; Sahar El-Tawila, “Methodological Considerations Related to Studies on Youth and Adolescents in Egypt”, in *Changing Values Among Youth: Examples from the Arab World and Germany*, International Conference, Cairo, 20–21 June 2005, ed. Sonja Hegasy and Elke Kaschl, ZMO Studien 22 (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2007), 83–102. See also Assia Boutaleb, “La jeunesse en tant qu’objet et enjeu de légitimation en Égypte (2000–2004): prodiges et litiges de la légitimité” (Doctoral thesis, Institut d’études politiques, Paris, 2006); and, by the same author, “The Narrow Path: Acts of Citizenship by the Arab Youth. Lessons from Egypt and Morocco”, in *The Crisis of Citizenship in the Arab World*, ed. Roel Meijer and Nils Butenschön (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 471–87.

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Contemporary observers and subsequent historians have examined how youth became “a rhetoric stressing the national role as well as redeeming power of the ‘new generation’”, as Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski pointed out.² Iman Farag has revealed that during the interwar period, youth were increasingly defined by their education rather than their demographic characteristics. Farag demonstrated how age groups were aligned with the educational system in the 1930s, leading to a restricted understanding of youth as individuals who were sent to school.³ As the author noted, “it [was] a question of defining what is appropriate to learn at a given age, that age determining knowledge”, and vice versa.⁴ This association made the student the embodiment of “youth” and linked more closely the social and the political aspects of the youth problem from the 1930s onwards. Because the term “young people” (*al-šabāb*) exclusively designated the graduated or soon-to-be graduated students from Egyptian secondary schools and universities, they became part of what historians have frequently referred to as “the *effendiyya*” (from the plural form of the noun *effendi*).⁵

2 Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 20. See for example Maḥmūd Kāmil, *Miṣr al-ǧad taḥtā ḥukm al-šabāb* [Tomorrow’s Egypt under the power of youth] (Cairo: Dār al-Ġāmi’a, 1939); and Raoul Makarius, *La jeunesse intellectuelle d’Égypte au lendemain de la Seconde Guerre mondiale* (The Hague: Mouton, 1960); Ahmed Abdalla, *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt, 1923–1973* (London: Al Saqi Books, 1985); Iman Farag, “La construction sociale d’une éducation nationale: enjeux politiques et trajectoires éducatives (Égypte – première moitié du XX^{ème} siècle)” (Doctoral thesis, EHESS, Paris, 2001), 119–21.

3 See Iman Farag, “Quand ‘l’éducation forme la jeunesse’: la construction d’une catégorie en Égypte”, in *Jeunes des sociétés arabes: Par-delà les promesses et les menaces*, ed. Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi and Iman Farag (Cairo: CEDEJ – Égypte/Soudan, 2007), 49–78, <https://books.openedition.org/cedej/1659>, especially §23 on the mental, social and educational “homogeneity” of the age groups.

4 Farag §22, online version. And §25, on the logic of competition which determined the threshold between childhood and adolescence, according to the Labour Code (12 years old, 1981), the Education Act (15 years old, 1981) and the Children’s Act (14 years old, 1981).

5 Lucie Ryzova, *L’effendiyya ou la modernité contestée* (Cairo: CEDEJ – Égypte/Soudan, 2004); translated into English as *The Age of the Effendiyya: Passages to Modernity in National-Colonial Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). See also the “aspiring effendiyya”, in Gershoni and Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation*, 11.

This intermediate stratum consisted of educated young men, primarily enrolled in public administration, who were assimilated into a proto-middle class due to their social and political expectations, despite (or perhaps because of) their inability to achieve them. In other words, during the Liberal era, the “youth”, as well as the idea of “middle class” in Egypt, was primarily analysed in its political dimension, that is to say in its relation to national liberation.⁶ It was less a social class than a social force.

From 1952, and particularly after the removal of Muhammad Naguib in 1954, the authoritarian regime established by the Free Officers in Egypt reinforced the association between students and “youth” for several reasons. Firstly, on a demographic scale, Egypt experienced a population explosion, with 19 million inhabitants in 1947 and 26 million in 1962, with an average increase of 2.5 per cent per year in the 1960s.⁷ This strengthened the issue of youth (young people under 15 years old accounted for 45 per cent of the total population). Furthermore, the regime claimed to be creating a “new society” that required young people who were committed to the socialist project and willing to participate in both its defence and development.⁸ The Nasserite regime neutralized national political life, which in turn deprived students of their spontaneous political dimension. Instead, they were restricted to an ever-growing pool of civil servants who were guaranteed a job from 1964.⁹ The increase in the number of university graduates has been attributed to various factors, including a social contract signed with the middle strata of Egyptian society,¹⁰ and the international vision promoted by Nasserite ideology which aimed to train an intellectual elite to serve as the future “pivotal instruments” of pan-Arab politics.¹¹

6 Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi and Iman Farag, “Constitution de la jeunesse dans les sociétés arabes: figures, catégories et analyseurs”, in *Jeunes des sociétés arabes: Par-delà les promesses et les menaces, Dossiers du Cedej* (Cairo: CEDEJ – Égypte/Soudan, 2007), 11–47, <https://books.openedition.org/cedej/1652, §7> online; Lucie Ryzova, “Chapitre II. Conceptualiser l’effendi des années 1930–1940”, in *L’effendiyya ou la modernité contestée* (Cairo: CEDEJ – Égypte/Soudan, 2004), 39–54, <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.cedej.935>. See especially §23 where the author describes the “Effendi problem” according to the Foreign Office.

7 Éric Denis, “Les échelles de la densification. Le peuplement de l’Égypte de 1897 à 1996”, *Géocarrefour* 73, no. 3 (1998): 188, <https://doi.org/10.3406/geoca.1998.4826>.

8 Bent Hansen and Girgis A. Marzuk, *Development and Economic Policy in the U.A.R. (Egypt)* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1965).

9 For the expansion of secondary and higher education in the 1960s, see Haggai Erlich, *Students and University in 20th Century Egyptian Politics* (London: Franck Cass, 1989), 173 and 183.

10 See the most recent version of this theory in Reli Shechter, *The Egyptian Social Contract: A History of State–Middle Class Relations* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023); Erlich, *Students and University in 20th Century Egyptian Politics*, 178. The massive opening up of higher education would respond to the political need to “satisfy the demand of the urban middle classes and the pressure for higher education as the key to upward mobility”, a demand that is difficult to challenge.

11 Erlich, *Students and University in 20th Century Egyptian Politics*, 179 and 183.

The growing authoritarian control of the academic field paved the way for student political protests after 1967, which remained in the national memory as *ġīl al-Naksa* (“the generation of the Catastrophe”): they were greatly affected by Egypt’s defeat in the Six-Day War against Israel, as evinced in historical and literary studies.¹² Viewing students as the embodiment of the new generation implies considering them as a political force similar to the pre-1952 *effendiyya*, a political avant-garde and a burgeoning middle class. This flattens the meaning of “youth” and leaves the polysemic character of that concept unexamined.

While acknowledging the clear continuity between the interwar period and the Free Officers’ regime – Omnia El Shakry views the period from the 1930s to the 1960s as a “single historical block”¹³ – it is important to note that the latter firmly established strict social class criteria where the level of education indicated the social hierarchy. The purpose of this article is to complete Iman Farag’s syllogism. Beginning in the 1930s, the education system (i.e., the age groups for each grade) provided a key tool to analyse youth, resulting in students being seen as the only representation of youth. However, the level of education was a key indicator of the Nasserite socio-economic middle classes, which were understood as a statistical marker of development rather than a liberal political force.¹⁴ Therefore, the term “youth” is often used interchangeably with that of “middle class”. According to Reinhardt Koselleck’s terminology, studying “youth” through a *semasiological* method, which involves isolating one term from the other and “[studying] all [its] meanings”,¹⁵ completes the “onomasiological” study of the term “middle class”, which involves analysing “all the names or terms used to designate the same thing”.¹⁶

This approach has the potential to be fruitful on multiple levels. Attention to the progressive linguistic transi-

12 On the “sixties generation” between literary and political Sartrian “engagement”, see Richard Jacquemond, “Un mai 68 arabe ?”, *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, no. 138 (2015): 131–46, <https://doi.org/10.4000/remmm.9247>; by the same author, *Entre scribes et écrivains: le champ littéraire dans l’Égypte contemporaine* (Paris: Sindbad, 2003); Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History* (London: Pluto Press, 2004); Elisabeth Kendall, *Literature, Journalism and the Avant-Garde: Intersection in Egypt* (London: Routledge, 2006).

13 Omnia S. El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 198.

14 This semantic transformation of the term “middle class” in Arabic (*al-ṭabaqa al-wustā* or *al-ṭabaqa al-mutawassīta*), from a liberal political concept to a sociological tool for measuring national development, forms the core of my doctoral thesis submitted to the Sorbonne-Université in March 2024: “Définir le juste milieu: histoire du concept arabe de ‘classe moyenne’ dans l’Égypte de Nasser (1952–1970)” [Defining the middle ground: history of the Arab concept of “middle class” in Nasser’s Egypt]

15 Reinhard Koselleck, “A Response to Comments on the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*”, in *The Meaning of Historical Terms and Concepts: New Studies on Begriffsgeschichte*, ed. Hartmut Lehmann and Melvin Richter (Washington, DC: German Historical Institute, 1996), 64.

16 *Ibid.*

tion of “youth” to a sociological concept is likely to shed light on the intellectual history of Egypt in the 20th century by questioning the nature of the revolution as a rupture. During the Nasser years, the connections outlined in the Liberal era were comprehensively and deliberately acknowledged, exposing a native discourse on its middle classes, whose prosperity and development the regime aimed to ensure. What historiography suggests was a veiled manoeuvre on the part of the Nasserite regime, that is, to allow the middle classes to benefit, contrary to the egalitarian discourse of Arab socialism,¹⁷ appears to be the regime’s obvious and asserted project: to make the country’s educated urban strata the beneficiaries of the regime.

Furthermore, the article highlights the abundance of social studies in Arabic that were published during that period. These studies helped to create an Arab definition of the “middle class” that was not simply a statistical imitation of Western ideas. The focus on the Egyptian discourse on development aims to explore Egypt’s position during the 1950s and 1960s, at the intersection of national evolution and international trends.¹⁸

While reproducing this inherited association between youth and students, the Nasser regime also modified the nature of the student’s ethos: he was portrayed less as an educated free mind, despite being enrolled in the political avant-garde, and more as a white-collar or skilled worker on whom the regime relied to build and implement its economic planning. Let no one be mistaken about this: this is no mere question of quibbling over terms. It is a matter of restoring, through a reconsideration of a key term of the Egyptian 1960s, the thick and contradictory nature of that era. If successful, this new strategy will contribute to a renewal of Egyptian history and its relationship to national specificities and global trends.

To give but one example, in *Abī fawq al-šağara* (My father is up in the tree), a musical produced in 1969, ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Ḥāfiẓ performed a song entitled “Qāḍī al-blāğ” (The judge of the beach).¹⁹ On the Alexandrian coast, while a merry company of young men and women sings and dances, ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Ḥāfiẓ pleads to a burlesque court that he be considered an “air-conditioned first-class summer vacationer” (*muṣayyif min al-darağa al-ūlā takīf*:

see Figure 1).²⁰ The “carefully depoliticized hedonism” presented here deploys an alternative representation of what youth was in the Nasserite era.²¹

In an Egypt suffering the bitter defeat of 1967, whose repercussions in the national memory and political field are well known,²² the representation of Egyptian youth cannot express envy or emulation of the young people



Figure 1. ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Ḥāfiẓ pleading for his status, in “Qāḍī al-blāğ”, 1969 (0’04)

of the West, who are preoccupied with music and leisure. This is a youth simply concerned with “family circumstances, emotional issues, domestic problems” (*ẓurūf ‘ā’iliyya, umūr ‘āṭifiyya, mašākil manziliyya*), far from the political struggles that set campuses on fire in Egypt and elsewhere in the world. One reason for the lightness of this representation lies in the film production apparatus, which was largely state-controlled:²³ it is easy to understand why, at a time of widespread youth uprisings, particularly in the West, and in a troubled national context, the state was keen to sanitize and level out the picture of its youth. Yet that same state chose to depict its young people as a noisy, colourful troupe of singers and dancers. This speaks for itself: youth in Nasserite Egypt could not be apprehended from the sole perspective of a completely ideologized generation, entirely devoted to the revolutionary impulse. Hence the chorus of “Qāḍī al-blāğ”, sung in unison: “Long live the youth, all the youth, all the youth! Bring the umbrellas!” (*‘āš al-šabāb, kull al-šabāb, kull al-šabāb! Duqqū al-šammāsy!*).

17 Hamied Ansari, *Egypt, the Stalled Society* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986); Ferdinand Eibl, *Social Dictatorships: The Political Economy of the Welfare State in the Middle East and North Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), [https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/social-dictatorships\(b44a3071-962d-4ae-f-bb30-9e1362878f35\).html](https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/social-dictatorships(b44a3071-962d-4ae-f-bb30-9e1362878f35).html); Shechter, *The Egyptian Social Contract*.

18 For the first part of the 20th century, see Malak Labib, “The Unforeseen Path of Debt Imperialism: Local Struggles, Transnational Knowledge and Colonialism in Egypt”, in *A World of Public Debts: A Political History*, ed. Nicolas Delalande and Nicolas Barreyre (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 155–74; for the second half of the 20th century, see, by the same author, “Consultants, Technocrats and ‘Model Workers’: The Rise of Scientific Management in Egypt (1945–1968)”, *Arab Studies Journal* 30, no. 2 (Fall 2022). See also Valeska Huber, “Planning Education and Manpower in the Middle East, 1950s–60s”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 52, no. 1 (2017): 95–117.

19 This film, based on a text by Iḥsān ‘Abd al-Quddūs, was directed by Ḥusayn Kamāl and produced by Ḥāfiẓ’s own film company (Afāḥ Sawt al-Fann).

20 An excerpt from this film, containing the sequence described here, can be seen at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kUXYCaaR_8M&ab_channel=Mazzika-%D9%85%D8%B2%D9%8A%D9%83%D8%A7.

21 Frédéric Lagrange, “La chanson cinématographique”, unpublished syllabus prepared for the agrégation d’arabe, the French competitive exam for teaching Arabic, 2016, 22–27.

22 See for example Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice since 1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Abu-Rabi, *Contemporary Arab Thought*.

23 Here I am especially grateful to Amr Ahmed for pointing this out to me. See on that topic Tawfiq Muḥammad, *Šay min al-ḥarb: al-silāḥ al-sirrī* [Quelque chose de la guerre : l’arme secrète] (Cairo: Risha Publishers, 2022).

My first task is to analyse whether, and to what extent, the term “youth” may be understood as a synonym for the “new generation” about which the Egyptian ideologists and journalists were arguing, that is, following the debates that first arose during the interwar period. Then, I must show how the term’s restricted definition makes it coincide with a specific social group, the “middle class”, and how youth was gradually conceptualized as such in the Egyptian social sciences (and, subsequently, in the public policy literature of the time). My thesis is that, beyond Good (an idealistic revolutionary generation) and Evil (decadent young people), “youth” and its nominalized adjective “young” (*šābb* or *šābba*) becomes a synonym for “middle class” – a very convenient synonym in a socialist ideology that refuses to recognize class struggle. This approach through the history of terms has the merit – and therefore the difficulty – of using many different types of sources, from mainstream newspapers to sociological works, produced by academic research and Egyptian pedagogical institutions.

Youth as a “New Generation”: The Breaking Point of Nasser’s Revolution

Youth under scrutiny: A disappointing new generation

In the mid-1960s in Egypt, a generational conflict emerged between the quadragenarians – the older “young generation” (*al-ǧīl al-qadīm*) that had made the 1952 revolution – and the young people called “the new generation” (*al-ǧīl al-ǧadīd*), whose generational boundaries were loosely defined as lying somewhere between 17 and 25 years old. Using the generational prism to understand social changes is nothing new. One only needs to look at current newspapers to see how human such generational conflict can be: see, for example, the “lost generation” suffering in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic today. Nasser’s Egypt was no exception: the Egyptian mainstream press was overwhelmed by articles written by the quadragenarians which scrutinized young people and their hobbies (TV, dance, moral values, fashion, psychology, etc.). However, behind the universal bewilderment and, sometimes, contempt, expressed by the middle-aged and older generations towards youth, I posit that one can identify the breaking point of Nasser’s society: under the pens of socialist intellectuals, statisticians and sociologists, the shift in generations provided a way of measuring the delicate legacy of the 1952 revolution, ten years after it was launched by the Free Officers. The emergence, by the late 1960s, of a new, younger and disconcerting generation revealed the exhaustion of the revolutionary momentum.

With the advent of the Free Officers’ revolution in 1952, Egyptian leaders and intellectuals began to agitate for a “new society” (*al-muǧtama’ al-ǧadīd*), and this became the national leitmotiv for more than 15 years; across all those years, the challenge was to avoid allowing the revolutionary impetus to falter while at the same time assuring its continuity (*al-tawra al-mustamirra*). By the mid-1960s, the idea of a disappointing new generation had spread into all Egyptian newspapers, including *Rūz al-Yūsuf*. This weekly newspaper, founded in 1925, was headed, during the Nasser years, by Iḥsān ‘Abd al-Quddūs (1919–1990). At that time, it was the soundbox of a substantial section of Cai-

ro’s population.²⁴ In 1963, according to the French chargé d’affaires, this publication had a print run of 29,000 copies and was considered the journal of “Cairene gossip”.²⁵ In the 29 November 1965 edition, the Free Officer Gamāl Salīm (1918–1968) described, with puzzlement, the detachment from politics shown by young Egyptians. One young man he interviewed, a graduate of the Cairo Faculty of Engineering, said:

I am not interested in politics, I am not an activist (*malīš da’wa bi-l-siyāsa, ana miš siyāsī*), I don’t understand anything of it. I only took part to the 1958 demonstration, to support Nablus against the reactionary forces in Jordan. But this was not politics, just sentimentalism.²⁶

Another figurehead of the 1952 revolution, Aḥmad Ḥamrūš, also published a series of articles praising the “sacrifices” that his generation had made for Egypt while they were still students and criticizing contemporary young people for their ingratitude and frivolity.²⁷ “Those who led the July 23rd revolution were also young: none had reached their forties.”²⁸ “They spoil their energy in supporting al-Aḥlī or Zamālik”, concluded a dismayed Gamāl Salīm. Condemnation of young people for their shallowness and lack of interest in national affairs was common in Egypt in the 1960s. In March 1966, *Ḥaqlunā*, a Christian monthly magazine that published a regular review of articles from the mainstream press, quoted, by turns, articles by Muḥammad ‘Immād al-Dīn Ismā’īl, Fu’ād Zakariyā and Muḥammad al-Ḥaffif which were devoted to the football craze among young people, or else to their general nonchalance.²⁹

After more than ten years of Nasserism, the country was confronting a new generation’s entry into the world of work. What was at stake was nothing less than the extent of revolutionary experience in Egypt: “How does this force work? How does it move? How does it take part in building its nation’s future?”, complained Gamāl Salīm.³⁰

A dangerous youth

One should bear in mind the double understanding of the concept of generation in the social sciences. The first one, the “demographic” or “traditional” conceptualization, involves the natural average interval between parents and

24 I refer here to that fraction of the population who shared in literacy, defined as the common unifying feature for an array of social groups that spanned a range from lower middle class to upper class positions. See Ḥasan al-Sā’ūty, “The Middle Classes in Egypt”, *L’Egypte contemporaine*, no. 288 (April 1957): 47–63.

25 Memorandum no. 591/AL of the chargé d’affaires of France in U.A.R. (Froment-Meurice) to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Cairo, 16 October 1963. Series 379 QONT (Relations Egypt–UNO, 1953–1959), 981, 3.

26 Gamāl Salīm, “Why young people are scared of politics?”, *Rūz al-Yūsuf*, 29 November 1965.

27 Aḥmad Ḥamrūš, “The Sacrifices of a Generation”, *Rūz al-Yūsuf*, 27 December 1965; see also “Young people and politics”, *Rūz al-Yūsuf*, 21 February 1966.

28 Ibid.

29 Michel Farah, “Young people, life, responsibility”, *Ḥaqlunā*, 3, quoting *al-Talī’a* edition of February 1966.

30 Salīm, “Why young people are scared of politics?”.

children. Depending on the average age at marriage, this could be as much as 40 years or as little as 20 years, the generational average in developing countries, such as Egypt was at the time. The second use of the generational concept is more social-psychological in character: it refers to the views shared in common by a group of contemporary individuals. An important point here is who defines such a group, in this case Egypt's new generation of the 1960s, the youth. Interestingly, these were the old "young revolutionary generation", the people who had participated in the 1952 revolution and then become a part of the Nasserite establishment in the 1960s: the Free Officers and prominent intellectuals such as Iḥsān 'Abd al-Quddūs, Muḥammad Ḥasanayn Haykal and others. It was precisely this shared political experience that shaped their identity as a coherent cohort and gave them their understanding of youth as primarily a matter of political experience or its absence; the new young people were considered, in this view, as the ungrateful heirs of the valuable legacy their predecessors had been waiting to pass down:

The new generation differs from the old one, in that it has not played a positive role in politics. The one who today is 25 – the maximum age of the youth organization – was an 11-year-old boy on the day of the revolution, when the students and workers of the previous young generation formed the vanguard of the national struggle against colonialism. Those were the young Free Officers who achieved people's will to change the old system in a revolutionary way. As for the young people of this generation, they spent the years after the revolution far removed from revolutionary political work, to such an extent that they became strangers to their society; noxiousness and isolation spread among their ranks. They are fertile ground for reactionary and hostile ideas.³¹

Nağīb Maḥfūz's *Mirāmār*, published in 1967, offers an image of this new generation caught between high aspirations and disillusioned inaction: among the three young characters, Ḥusnī 'Allām (a medium-sized landlord whose social status did not change with the Free Officers), Sarḥān al-Biḥayrī (a successful engineer from a rural background) and Maṣṣūr Bāḥī (the youngest character, a communist sympathizer), none of them really stands out or succeeds in realizing his dreams.³² Moreover, raised within the old world that the revolution sought to overthrow, and seen as future citizens of the "new society", they embody the transitional stage in which Egyptian society found itself, as the social scientist Muḥammad 'Imād al-Dīn Ismā'īl explained in *al-Ṭalī'a* in 1966:

31 Aḥmad Ḥamrūš, "What do we ask of our young people?", *Rūz al-Yūsuf*, 25 July 1966. See also what Amīna al-Sa'īd said about "[her] generation", *Rūz al-Yūsuf*, 1 June 1964, 11 October 1965.

32 Nağīb Maḥfūz, *Mirāmār* (Cairo: Maktabat Miṣr, 1967). Interestingly, none of the characters in this novel really represents the youth of 1952. The older generation presented in the novel does correspond, however, to that of the youth of the 1919 revolution: whether Ṭulba Marzūq (a rich feudal landlord who lost everything after the agrarian reform of 1952) or 'Āmir Waḡdī (an elderly and well-known anti-British journalist enrolled in the late Wafd), both were born at the turn of the 20th century, took part in the revolution of 1919 and witnessed (but did not participate in) that of 1952.

It's not just that the generations living side by side differ in their vision of life, standards, means and ends: don't forget that the young people of the current generation who were educated by their parents, did not live in a socialist society. They then discover that the rising values (*al-qaym al-ṣā'ida*) of the new society are socialist values.³³

Youth is therefore the missing link in the revolutionary enthusiasm, and their middle position, as persons too young to have participated in the revolution and too old to be products of the Nasserite education system,³⁴ means they risk endangering the handover of the 1952 revolution.

Youth is the most dangerous period while forging a people (*al-ṣa'b*): at this time, the individual is characterized by a physical and mental energy well above what his or her own life allows. ... That is why everyone should take an interest in young people's problems, and direct their energies into political action to plan the construction of a new society.³⁵

It was therefore imperative for Nasserite propagandists to set out the criteria for an ideal youth, enlisted in the service of the revolution (a classic phenomenon of any authoritarian state): to be young meant to be of the new generation and therefore invested in the national effort and the socialist cause.

Revolutionary action (*al-'amal al-'awrī*) as an "eternal youth" potion

In spring 1965, Gamal Abd al-Nasser gave a speech requesting that some management positions be made available to the young generation. The editor of *Rūz al-Yūsuf*, Iḥsān 'Abd al-Quddūs, took the opportunity to re-define what is called "the new generation":

It would be naïve to make age the measure of generations: what is the older generation? Is it the one who has reached its sixties, its fifties, its forties? And who is the next generation? Those who are twenty years old, twenty-five, or thirty? Or, as in my case, those who are forty? ... [It would also be naïve to consider] the "criterion of length of service" (*miqiyās al-aqdamiyya*): what is the older generation? The one who has worked for thirty, twenty, ten years? What is the younger generation? The one who has been working for five, one, or eight years?³⁶

33 Muḥammad 'Imād al-Dīn Ismā'īl, "Youth Problems", *Al-Ṭalī'a*, 21 February 1966, 32.

34 See, in contrast, the depiction of the success of national propaganda among the children of the United Arab Republic (Egypt): "Children aged 10 in 1962", *Rūz al-Yūsuf*, 23 July 1962; "What do our children think?", *Rūz al-Yūsuf*, 15 November 1965.

35 Muḥammad 'Imād al-Dīn Ismā'īl, "Youth Problems", *Al-Ṭalī'a*, 21 February 1966, 32.

36 Iḥsān 'Abd al-Quddūs, "A word to the new generation", *Rūz al-Yūsuf*, 1 March 1965, no. 1916, 3–4. See, in Salīm, "Why young people are scared of politics?", the same broad definition of youth as a labour force, within a range extending from 16 to 39 years old. In 1965, this would have represented about 3.5 million individuals, around 51 per cent of the national labour force at that time. Interestingly, Western observers accepted this large and political definition of Egyptian youth, as embodied in Manfred Halpern's comment in 1963: "'Youth' is not a passing phase in the [Middle East]. ... Men in their forties may still have almost all the naïveté of youth – being untouched by careers,

According to him, the real criterion for distinguishing between the two generations is that of “the amount of energy each puts into working and continuing revolutionary progress”. He expands on this concept of energy, defining it as “the energy of change through faith in work, the energy of progress, the energy of renewal of thought, of going through new stages, of bearing responsibility”.³⁷ To be from the new generation is to claim an effective state of mind and to be a guarantor of the revolution’s legacy. Obviously, beyond the official rhetoric, only demographic groups of a certain age were to be truly considered young, as was clearly displayed in the foundation of a Youth Organization in 1965. This organization was linked to the Socialist Union, and its putative aim was to “anchor an intense life in young people and attract them, like a powerful magnet, to the ideas of the revolution”.³⁸ This project echoed the refrain of Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s “Rising Generation” (*al-ḡīl al-ṣā’id*), which Šādiyyah sang in 1961 to commemorate the ninth anniversary of the revolution: “Applaud with me, say with me, long live the rising generation, long live!”³⁹ The martial melody was cadenced by the percussion and then taken up by the male choir with determined voices, underlining the vision of the new generation as a political vanguard, one entirely devoted to the realization of the objectives of the revolution. Here, Egypt fits into the same pattern as other socialist countries, especially the Soviet Union, where “young people were key agents in [the] interplay of [Soviet] political projects” and were “mobilised by state and party structures in great numbers”.⁴⁰ This vision corresponded to what the regime’s intellectuals wanted to make of it in the national press: a youth ordered in tight and disciplined ranks, convinced of the necessity of its effort. In a way, the demands of young students on Egyptian campuses after 1967 underlined a certain amount of success in this approach: it was mainly the feeling that the judiciary was too lenient towards the generals responsible for the country’s defeat that fuelled

status, and power – yet have none of youth’s innocence, for they know what they have missed”: in *The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 65.

37 Iḥsān ‘Abd al-Quddūs, “A word to the new generation”, *Rūz al-Yūsuf*, 1 March 1965, no. 1916, 3–4.

38 Ḥamrūš, “What do we ask of our young people?”.

39 Ḥusayn al-Sayyid wrote the lyrics and Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Wahhāb did the composition and the musical arrangement. Staged in a video clip, it summons the five labour force groups defined by the National Charter (except the national capitalists, replaced by the students here): soldiers (summoned by Warda al-Ḡazā’iriyya), *fillāhīn* (by Naḡḡā al-Ṣaḡīra), intellectuals and artists (by ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Ḥāfiẓ), workers (by Fā’iza Aḥmad) and students (by Šādiyyah). Finally, Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Wahhāb praised Gamal Abd al-Nasser and the Arab people.

40 Stefan B. Kirmse, “Internationalist Nation-Builders: Youth under Brezhnev in the Soviet South”, *Europe–Asia Studies* 74, no. 7 (9 August 2022): 1256, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2022.2110219>; on the same topic, see Stefan B. Kirmse, *Youth and Globalization in Central Asia: Everyday Life between Religion, Media, and International Donors* (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 2013); David Leupold, “Activism under the Hammer and Sickle: Young Internationalists from Czechoslovakia in Soviet Central Asia (1925–43)”, Workshop “Youngsters’ Livelihoods and Movements in Peripheralised Regions”, Friedrich Schiller-Universität Jena (Jena, Germany), 27 February 2020.

student anger.⁴¹ The praise and criticism of the student youth under Nasser, that is, the revolutionary “new generation”, can be classified using Iman Farag’s triptych for the youth of the 1930s and 1940s: the ideal young student is “a potential citizen”, “a political actor” and “an exemplary [individual]”.⁴²

The problematic definition of what a generation can be in the social sciences should remind us of the warning issued by Jean-Pierre Azéma that “the generation effect cannot be reduced to the youth effect”.⁴³ The reverse is also true: beyond the generational question in the strict sense, the notion of “youth” in Egyptian social sciences seemed to be given an enhanced urgency by its context, that is, Egypt’s demographic explosion.

“Youth”, a Targeted Middle Class

From a demographic phenomenon to a restricted social group

The anxieties of governments and experts over Egypt’s rampant population growth has been an ever-present component of the country’s political life since the 1930s, but it has never led to the adoption of any effective family planning policy.⁴⁴ The adoption of the National Charter in 1961 ushered in a new period of political experiments aiming at the control of Egypt’s demographic situation. These included the systematization of media campaigns, the densification of the social services network and the acknowledgement, by al-Azhar, of the need for family planning in 1966.⁴⁵ Throughout the 1960s, the average

41 Erlich, *Students and University in 20th Century Egyptian Politics*, 191–92; Abdalla, *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt, 1923–1973*, 139; Bennani-Chraïbi and Farag, “Constitution de la jeunesse dans les sociétés arabes”, \$14 online.

42 Farag, “Quand l’éducation forme la jeunesse”.

43 Jean-Pierre Azéma, “La clef générationnelle”, *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’histoire* 22, no. 1 (1989): 6, <https://doi.org/10.3406/xxs.1989.2122>.

44 Philippe Fargues explains this failure by the irreconcilable opposition between “developmentalists” who advocated for “exclusively economic action, with control of demographics induced by the raising of living standards and the establishment of social equity” and “neo-Malthusians” who promoted “direct action on demographics”. See Philippe Fargues, “Les politiques de l’État et la natalité en Égypte, du socialisme au libéralisme”, in *Âge libéral et néo-libéralisme: VI^e Rencontres franco-égyptiennes de science politique*, Dossiers du Cedej (Cairo: CEDEJ – Égypte/Soudan, 2013), 215–40, <http://books.openedition.org/cedej/498>; Haifa Šanawānī, “Stages in the Development of a Population Control Policy”, in *Egypt: Population, Problems and Prospects*, ed. Abdel Rahim Omran (Chapel Hill, NC: Carolina Population Center, 1973), 189–217; Warren C. Robinson and Fatma Hassan El-Zanaty, *The Demographic Revolution in Modern Egypt* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007); Elena Ambrosetti, *Égypte, l’exception démographique* (Paris: Éditions de l’Ined, 2011); for a summary of the demographic question under Nasser, see Antoinette Ferrand, “Les socialistes égyptiens face aux réformes de la famille: enjeux de développement social et économique”, *Annales de démographie historique*, forthcoming in June 2024.

45 For the reasons behind yet another failure of these measures in the late 1960s, mainly due to the lack of medical resources and devices and the inadequate training of medical staff, see Robinson and El-Zanaty, *The Demographic Revolution in Modern Egypt*. Haifa Šanawānī’s doctoral thesis, defended in 1967 at Cornell University, reflects these wanderings: *Family Planning: An Equilibrium Response to Demographic Conditions in the United Arab Republic*.

population growth rate was 2.5 per cent. Thus, during a time when young people under 15 years old accounted for 45 per cent of the total population, and those under 29 years old for 65 per cent, the question of how to manage such a large young population became even more acute.⁴⁶ Beyond its common definition (as an intermediary and transitional period between childhood and adulthood), determining the boundaries of this “young population” remained difficult, as was visible in the competing age limits: sometimes 15 (the age set by labour force surveys),⁴⁷ sometimes 20 (the average age for obtaining a bachelor’s degree), or even 25 (the maximum age for enlistment in the Nasserite Youth Organization).⁴⁸ In reality, during the 1950s and 1960s, the term “youth” regained its previous connotation as a concept – in the sense of a linguistic and intellectual tool – designating only a part of the total young population: the educated, or the students (i.e., young people enrolled either in their last secondary year or in university, whether general or professional). The lengthening of education created a gap in the succession of generations, allowing for a period of professional inactivity. With the facilitation of access to education for all, this portion of the population expanded, lending an increased importance to this stage of social life that had become “youth”. In the issue of *al-Ṭalī‘a* previously mentioned, Muḥammad ‘Imād al-Dīn Ismā‘īl identified the “demands of the modern city” (*muqtaḍiyyāt al-madīna al-ḥadīṭa*) as the main factor in the situation of Egyptian youth: urban life was indeed widening the gap between biological and intellectual maturity (reached around the age of 16–18) and economic maturity (i.e., financial independence, reached around the age of 25–30). It was therefore economic pressure and a lack of independence that the majority of educated young people suffered from.⁴⁹ Let us return to the songs mentioned previously. Through Šādiyyah’s voice, “the rising generation” only applies to the student population:

Long live the student the day he sought knowledge,
book and weapon,
He knew that knowledge is the way to achieve
every success,

⁴⁶ Agence centrale de la mobilisation publique et des statistiques, *Annuaire statistique 1952–1964* (Cairo, 1965), 12 (data taken from the 1960 census); see also Abdel Aziz El Sherbini and Ahmed Fouad Sherif, “Marketing Problems in an Underdeveloped Country–Egypt”, *L’Égypte contemporaine*, no. 285 (July 1956): 5–85; Charles Philippe Issawi, *Egypt in Revolution: An Economic Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 12 (Table 6).

⁴⁷ Some labour surveys even set the minimal age at six years old. This definition of youth, as Samuli Schielke has pointed out to me, is statistically vague in that it relies on a range of ages that excludes both those sections of the younger population who have not yet entered employment (being adolescents or younger), and also those young people who are not counted as part of the working population as they are students. It is surprising that this definitional vagueness has persisted.

⁴⁸ Ḥamrūš, “What do we ask of our young people?”.

⁴⁹ Ismā‘īl, “Youth Problems”, 32.

And we heard him saying firmly in primary school
and in faculty,
“Knowledge is a powerful weapon that turns
our night into day,
It strives for light with light and fights fire with fire”.
Applaud with me, say with me, long live the rising
generation, long live!

The very fact that the title of the song, “*Al-ḡīl al-ṣā‘id*”, corresponds to the refrain of this specific group, the students, betrays the definition of “youth” as a politically enrolled body and reveals the automatic link made between the student body and youth as an arm of the regime. In the filmed performance, two views were added as Šādiyyah summoned the young people: the first one is of Cairo University, and the second one is of students in suits and ties emerging from the university’s gates (see Figure 2).⁵⁰ As for the *a priori* more neutral, or at least lighter, “*Qāḍī al-blāḡ*”, a glimpse of Ḥāfiẓ’s parodic defence speech could be enough to convince listeners of the same association. “A lifetime of revisions all year, that gave me a headache and a cold. / I didn’t pass, I didn’t see you, oh success, just for you, oh holidays!” The same relationship to education is evident in the words of the first complainant who addresses Ḥāfiẓ: “I went to middle school, then high school, and I became a university student. / And I’d rather graduate only one year.”



Figure 2: Šādiyyah summoning Egyptian youth in “*Al-ḡīl al-ṣā‘id*”, 1961 (6’47).

Thus, as Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi and Iman Farag explained, “there is no youth but intellectual”.⁵¹ This association between youth and the student population, which can be traced back to the 1930s,⁵² was easily integrated

⁵⁰ This can be seen at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xf5luCGp-sKE&ab_channel=MohamedAbdElWahab-%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A8.

⁵¹ Bennani-Chraïbi and Farag, “Constitution de la jeunesse dans les sociétés arabes”, §11.

⁵² See Florian Zemmin, *Modernity in Islamic Tradition: The Concept of “Society” in the Journal al-Manar* (Cairo, 1898–1940) (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 111–12, <https://swbplus.bsz-bw.de/bsz508117739kla.htm>; Ryzova, *The Age of the Efendiyya; and on the students*, see Makarius, *La jeunesse intellectuelle d’Égypte au lendemain de la Seconde Guerre mondiale*.

into the ideology of the Free Officers' regime. This was especially true after 1957, with the creation of the National Union (*al-Ittihad al-qawmi*). Egyptian Socialism's functionalism divided the population into five groups based on their social identity and their professional skills: *fallahs*, workers, military officers, national capitalists and intellectuals.⁵³ Although Nasser denied the existence of a distinct "class of intellectuals" (*al-muṭaqqafūn laysū ṭabaqa*),⁵⁴ they were effectively considered as such due to their educational qualifications. By building its society around occupational profiles, socialist ideology matched the contours of the regime's growing middle classes defined by their level of education, as Ibrāhīm Rizqān, a professor of geography at Cairo University, explained in 1968:

The role of the Arab middle class – the intellectual class – does not end today, for it still has the task of making the proletarian class aware of its rights and duties until an enlightened labour force is created. ... The economic privileges gained by the peasant and the worker, and the generalized access to education, will enable them to send their children – boys and girls – to school; some will become engineers, doctors, teachers, and will join the middle class, whose numbers will increase according to what the lower class gains from educational services. It is therefore clear that the direction of the Arab revolution is not to undermine the power of the middle class, but to develop it numerically from the lower class.⁵⁵

According to this textbook, which was used in national universities, the national middle classes comprised soon-to-be graduates, civil servants and professionals (*al-mihniyyūn*), in both the private and public sectors. Access to these strata is obtained through the completion of intermediate education (*al-ta'lim al-mutawwasit*), which requires enrolment in or graduation from a secondary school, whether general or vocational.

Scrutinizing the expectations of the young and educated: The middle class and public policies

Despite this sudden rise in student numbers, even in relation to the working population (with approximations ranging from 26 to 29.7 per cent of the total population),⁵⁶ the percentage of individuals who were educated (secondary and higher, technical and general) remained extremely low: in 1963, 94.2 per cent of the Egyptian working population either had never gone to school or had a level of education below secondary school (including primary and preparatory school pupils). Only 3.5 per cent held a secondary school diploma, and only 1.6 per cent had a higher education diploma. In urban areas, the proportions were 87.1 per cent, 8.7 per cent and 4.2 per cent respectively; in rural areas they were 99 per cent, 0.8 per cent and 0.2 per cent. In other words, 85 per cent of children of preparatory school age were not enrolled in school, and this percentage rose to 90 per cent for potential secondary school pupils, and 95 per cent for young people of university age.⁵⁷ The educated population, 5.4 per cent of the total working population, therefore included all individuals over the age of 12 who held at least a certificate of preparatory school. The low demographic weight of this group contrasts with the interest shown in it by the reformers and analysts of Nasser's time: disregarding the statistics, they tended to turn youth into a specific stratum of educated persons, which constrained a full understanding of the group's evolution and its social desires. A quick look at national newspapers of the era shows exactly this recurrent association between youth, students and the "middle class". To give but one example, the surveys that Rūz al-Yūsuf conducted among its readers always rested upon this specific stratum, which the journalists themselves called the "middle class" (*al-ṭabaqa al-wusṭā*, or *mutawassit*).⁵⁸ This is the stratum conventionally described as "al-Azhar professors and their students, university professors and their students" or "young and educated people".⁵⁹

Hence, to study the profiles of the educated youth (from secondary to higher education) was to analyse the specificities, tendencies, troubles, and socio-economic and psychological demands of a future Egypt whose development escaped, at least partially, from socialist ideology, and whose cultural inclinations were slanted towards Western pop culture. At a time when the Nasserite state was adopting its National Charter, which defined the country's socialist ambitions for the decade to come, the Egyptian social sciences were seizing on the subject of "youth" as the embodiment of the regime's new rising classes – increasingly,

53 It is worth mentioning that although the Nasserite public administration was influenced by the Soviet model, a greater influence was that of Tito's Yugoslavia and its socialist model, incorporating "five popular forces" in its youth organization. I believe this aspect is still underestimated when it comes to understanding Egyptian socialism in the 1960s, and I am grateful to Žiga Smolič for bringing it to my attention. The Egyptian sources are guarded about the actual content of Yugoslavian–Egyptian cooperation, and the role played in it by experts. See for example the minute from the French ambassador in London to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs where he summarizes an article published in *The Times* that mentions "possible Yugoslav counsellors" (Minute no. 74/AL, 15 January 1962, Series 379 QONT (Relation Egypte–ONU 1953–1959), Box no. 987, file 1). See Rami Ginat, *Egypt's Incomplete Revolution: Lutfi al-Khuli and Nasser's Socialism in the 1960s* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1997): 16–17, 155; Kirk J. Beattie, *Egypt during the Nasser Years: Ideology, Politics, and Civil Society* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 164.

54 Transcript of Nasser's speech on the intellectuals broadcast on "Voice of the Arabs" (*Ṣawt al-'arab*), 25 April 1968, translated by the French Embassy, report no. 7998, 2 May 1968. AMEAE, SLC, 2038INVA (1960–1969), 1838 RAU (1966–1970). More details about this paradox can be found in my dissertation.

55 Ibrāhīm Aḥmad Rizqān, *Al-Muṭama' al-'arabī* [La société arabe] (Cairo: Dār al-Nahḍa al-'arabiyya, 1968), 208. This publication is a textbook of "Arab society", a discipline which was added to the national curricula in 1956.

56 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Šāfi'i, "L'enquête par sondage sur la population active de l'Égypte", *Revue internationale du Travail*, November 1960, 483; 'Alī Fu'ād Aḥmad et al., "Appendix A on Employment Data. Research Project on Employment and Unemployment Among the Educated" (Cairo: Institute of National Planning, 1963), 15.

57 Abū al-Futtūḥ Raḍwān et al., "Appendix B on Educational System. Research Project on Employment and Unemployment Among the Educated" (Cairo: Institute of National Planning, 1963), 43.

58 On the use of this specific term to refer to Egyptian intermediate strata, see my doctoral thesis, "Définir le juste milieu : histoire du concept de 'classe moyenne' dans l'Égypte de Nasser (1952–1970)". [depending on the WP publication: possible update in June].

59 "The writer and the class he expresses", *Rūz al-Yūsuf*, 7 October 1957.

and crucially, removed from the *effendiyya* of the interwar period – and attempting to study their social psychology.⁶⁰ Omnia El Shakry has studied how “‘adolescence’ had been transformed into a discrete category of analysis within the newly consolidated disciplinary space of psychology” in Egypt in the late 1940s, namely through the academic journal *Mağallat ‘ilm al-nafs*.⁶¹ She also pointed out how this stage of life “was reconfigured as a psychological stage of social adjustment, sexual repression, and existential anomie”.⁶² In the 1960s, this conception was reinforced in the field of Egyptian social sciences by two joint effects:⁶³ the control of the academic field and research by the regime in order to serve national policies,⁶⁴ and the homology between the “intellectual class” in functionalist ideology and the identity of “youth” as students. Studies proliferated, particularly in the fields of social psychology (*‘ilm al-nafs al-iğtimā’ī*) and empirical studies (*dirāsāt maydāniyya*), whose samples focused precisely on this urban youth.

Take, for example, the collection of scientific articles edited by Luwīs Kāmil Malīka, assistant professor of psychology at ‘Ayn Shams University, titled *Qirā’āt fī ‘ilm al-nafs al-iğtimā’ī fī-l-bilād al-‘arabiyya*. According to the introduction, this volume is as much an anthology as a methodological handbook for students and provides several sections such as “Historical Roots” (on Ibn Sina, Ibn Khaldun, Abd al-Ghazali), “Methodological Problems” (including comparative urban studies), “Social Principles of Behaviour” (socialization of children, Near Eastern students in American universities), “Community Dynamics” (administration), “The Community Bond” (rural studies), “Urban Change and Attitudes” (urban youth) and a more specific section: “Attitudes and their Evolution”. In the latter section, almost every article was based on a sample of educated young people, regardless of whether the title explicitly stated so or not. These include Ibrāhīm Ḥāfiẓ’s two analyses, entitled “Adults’ attitudes towards relationships between the sexes” and “Young people’s psychological attitudes to women’s place in society”; Fu‘ād Diyāb’s account of “Measuring public attitudes in Cairo towards women’s political rights”; Muḥtār Ḥamza’s contribution on “Attitudes of the educated towards employment and

unemployment”; and the study by Luwīs Kāmil Malīka on “The influence of training on attitude change”.⁶⁵ Youth, for all these social scientists, was therefore the barometer of social change.

At this point, it is reasonable to question the apparent continuity between the monarchical period and the Nasserite regime, in terms of both the objects of investigation and the methodology used (social psychology). This similarity only pertains to the perspective from which youth is viewed, that is, “through the prism of ‘crisis’”.⁶⁶ The main evolution lies in the explicit link that the regime and its social sciences made between the educated youth and the national middle classes measured by their level of education. “Youth” is a barometer of social change not solely due to the precarity of its situation, but also because it embodies the “intellectual class” on which the regime built its social planning.⁶⁷ The psychological experience of frustration and anxiety among students, caused by factors such as lack of opportunity and fear of downgrading, was then perceived as typical for an entire class, rather than just a single age group. This class (the middle class) was considered as the foundation and main aim of the regime, embodying the horizon of socialist expectations and achievements, such as education, health, dignity and work.

This phenomenon is visible in the rest of the textbook published by Luwīs Kāmil Malīka mentioned previously, especially in the study by Muḥammad ‘Uṭmān Nağātī, professor of social psychology at Cairo University, on the influence of urban culture on fathers’ tolerance towards their children, and that by Muṣṭafā Suwayf, assistant professor of psychology at the same university, which analysed language violence as a prism of social disorder. Both these authors based their analysis on samples made up of students (whether absolutely for Nağātī, who examined a sample of 2,229 students from five Arab countries, half of whom came from Egypt; or partly, as in the case of Suwayf, who examined “students from Cairo college or higher institutes, [and] others [who] are pupils in primary institutes or secondary schools in Cairo and Alexandria and Abukabir”).⁶⁸ The latter, moreover, openly assimilates them to the “middle class” (he specifies, “in its lower and upper categories”). Suwayf’s survey aimed precisely to “study the impact of an individual’s belonging to a defined

60 Ryzova, *The Age of the Efendiyya*.

61 Omnia S. El Shakry, “Youth as Peril and Promise: The Emergence of Adolescent Psychology in Postwar Egypt”, *International Journal Middle East Studies* 43 (2011): 592, 596.

62 *Ibid.*, 592.

63 At that time, the Egyptian university system had five chairs of sociology: Cairo University (1923, reopened in 1947), Alexandria University (1948), ‘Ayn Shams (1949), Girls’ Faculty (1956) and al-Azhar (1961). See Ahmed Zayed, “Seventy Years of Sociology”, *The Development of Social Science in Egypt: Economics, History and Sociology. Cairo Papers in Social Sciences. Fifth Annual Symposium* 18, no. 3 (1995): 42–43.

64 For censorship in the social sciences, see Mona Abaza, “Social Sciences in Egypt: The Swinging Pendulum between Commodification and Criminalization”, in *Facing an Unequal World: Challenges for a Global Sociology*, ed. Michael Burawoy, Mau-kuei Chang and Michelle Fei-yu Hsieh (Taiwan: Institut de Sociologie d’Academia Sinica, 2010), 188–89.

65 Luwīs Kāmil Malīka, *Qirā’āt fī ‘ilm al-nafs al-iğtimā’ī fī-l-bilād al-‘arabiyya* [Readings in social psychology in Arab countries] (Cairo: Al-Dār al-qawmiyya li-l-ṭibā’a wa-l-naṣr, 1965), 231.

66 Bennani-Chraïbi and Farag, “Constitution de la jeunesse dans les sociétés arabes”, §15 online.

67 See for example a report of the Institute of National Planning that I have studied extensively in my dissertation: Mukhtar Hamza, “Research Project on Employment and Unemployment among the Educated (with Appendices)” (Cairo: Institut national de Planification, 1963).

68 Muḥammad ‘Uṭmān Nağātī, “Al-ta’arruḍ li-ta’ṭīr al-madīna al-ḥadīṭa wa-tasāmuh al-abā’ baḥṭ ḥaḍārī muqārīn li-ittiğāhāt al-ṣabāb fī-ḥamas balād ‘arabiyya” [Exposure to the effects of the modern city and the leniency of fathers. Comparative urban research on youth attitudes in five Arab countries], in *Qirā’āt fī ‘ilm al-nafs al-iğtimā’ī fī-l-bilād al-‘arabiyya* (Cairo: Al-Dār al-qawmiyya li-l-ṭibā’a wa-l-naṣr, 1965), 532; and in the same work, Muṣṭafā Suwayf, “Al-istiğābāt al-mutaṭṭarfa ka-miqiyās li-tawattur al-ṣaḥṣiyya” [Extreme responses as indicators of a person’s nervousness], 103.

social category” (*fi’a iġtimā’iyya mu’ayyana*) on his social behaviour (including verbal violence and extreme responses). As for Naġātī, he reused the very recent (at the time) *Individual in Society: A Textbook of Social Psychology* by D. Krech and R. S. Crutchfield (1962) to measure social change in terms of the attitudes of certain groups of individuals. What is most striking about all these examinations of social change is that their authors all agreed that the category most likely to embody this change, or the most representative of those changes, was educated urban youth because they embodied the national middle classes and not solely due to the problematic period of adolescence.⁶⁹ In doing so, they employed a behaviourist grammar which made youth the embodiment of emerging social profiles. This revealed, and made obvious, the influence of the American social sciences, where the same questions were being raised in the context of the baby boom and its effects on American society, including the student revolts of the 1960s.

If one bears in mind the fact that the social sciences have dual descriptive and prescriptive dimensions, the interest of Egyptian social scientists in “youth” as a social class reveals a central ambition of the Nasserite regime: to build up, based on this new educated generation, a national middle class that could embody the average stage of national development. The idea that the 1952 revolution was at the origin of new social classes has its roots in a Marxist reading of the revolutionary event that is largely critical of the regime’s alleged successes.⁷⁰ However, recent historiography of the state’s political and social reforms has endeavoured to show how the very constitution of the Egyptian welfare state betrays its clear project of building a national middle class as the main target: Relli Shechter, for example, has explicated the ins and outs of this “*effendi* social contract” (i.e., built on the 1930s–1940s idea of middling strata). He has done so by analysing the constitutional texts of the period (1954–1956 and 1961) and the budgets allocated to various welfare policies.⁷¹ My own analysis of this phenomenon (a part of my doctoral research) traces the use of the very concept of “middle class” (*al-ṭabaqa al-wuṣṭā/al-muta-wassiṭa*) and its synonyms, and their competitive definition during the period in question. I postulate that if we acknowledge that “youth” was, in Egyptian scientific and political discourse, one of those synonyms, this sheds a

completely different light on the debate over the nature of Nasserite development.

This provides at least a partial answer to a central concern of the experts of the time and those who followed them: the question of whether or not there really was an Egyptian middle class. For those experts and their successors, this was a recurring stumbling block in the evaluation of Egypt’s decade of development. From a diplomatic point of view, the challenge of identifying a national middle class was directly connected to the problem of whether post-independence Arab regimes had either the civilian support or the economic base needed to ensure their stability.⁷² For others, the socialist nature of the Nasserite regime and its open egalitarianism meant that the existence of a middle class, thought of as such, must be invalid. Then there was the possible insight of Christoffel Van Nieuwenhuijze, who saw, in 1971, the emergence of Arab, and especially Egyptian, youth as an alternative to the endless class debate. According to him, youth was merely an outgrowth of society, alienated by its lack of political participation; it was, therefore, first and foremost a social phenomenon or concept, born of what he called the “development syndrome”:

The equally universal urge and effort toward development are conditional upon the achievement of an increase in participation, which hopefully should prove beneficial for mankind. No development without increased mutual involvement of all those concerned.⁷³

Without denying the obvious interest of this analysis, which has been taken up again in recent studies,⁷⁴ it is part of an approach similar to that of political scientists with regard to the middle class: the shared aim is that of discerning a population group that can lead development. Now, I believe that, in the Egypt of the 1960s, this so-called youth population, that is, the educated, embodied the socio-economic achievements of the regime, and in terms that are not entirely socialist. I assume, thanks to Koselleck’s semasiological method, that the restricted definition of youth, as the educated strata, was also that of a middle class seen as the privileged audience for Nasserite public policies. Young people offered typical profiles for calibrating national planification because they were perceived as the regime’s middle classes. It is worth mentioning that many authors who published stud-

69 See also Muḥammad ‘Immād al-Dīn Ismā’īl, “Taġayyur ittiġāhāt al-wālidayn naḥū mustaqbal ibnā’ihim ka-qiyās al-taġayyur al-iġtimā’ī” [Changes in parents’ attitudes towards their children as a measure of social change], in *Qirā’āt fi ‘ilm al-nafs al-iġtimā’ī fi-l-bilād al-‘arabiyya*, ed. Luwīs Kāmil Malīka, vol. 2 (Cairo: Al-Dār al-qawmiyya li-l-ṭibā’a wa-l-naṣr, 1970). First published in the *National Sociology Review* (Al-maġalla al-iġtimā’iyya al-qawmiyya), January 1965. Among the many conclusions that survey comes to, Ismā’īl insists on the great ambition and the deep social mobility of young people from lower classes who gradually join the ranks of the middling strata.

70 See Mahmoud Hussein, *La lutte de classes en Égypte: 1945–1970* (Paris: François Maspero, 1969); Anouar Abdel-Malek, *Égypte, société militaire* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1962); Leonard Binder, *In a Moment of Enthusiasm: Political Power and the Second Stratum in Egypt* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

71 Shechter, *The Egyptian Social Contract*.

72 See the well-known debate: Halpern, *The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa*; Amos Perlmutter, “Egypt and the Myth of the New Middle Class: A Comparative Analysis”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 10, no. 1 (1967): 46–65; Manfred Halpern, “Egypt and the New Middle Class: Reaffirmations and New Explorations”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 11, no. 1 (1969): 97–108; Amos Perlmutter, “The Myth of the Myth of the New Middle Class: Some Lessons in Social and Political Theory”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 12, no. 1 (January 1970).

73 Political participation as a common ground of development is a theme explored in Christoffel Anthonie Olivier Van Nieuwenhuijze, *Sociology of the Middle East: A Stocktaking and Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 662.

74 In a way, this seems to be the very premise that Bennani-Chraïbi and Farag returned to in “Constitution de la jeunesse dans les sociétés arabes”. See the “knock-on effect” of youth, §14 online.

ies on youth social psychology in the 1960s where affiliated with national planning organizations. For example, Luwīs Kāmil Malīka was a member of the board of experts (*maǧlis al-ḥubarāʾ*) at the National Centre for Sociological and Criminological Studies (*al-Markaz al-qawmī li-l-buḥūṭ al-iǧtimāʾiyya wa-l-ǧināʾiyya*), an institute founded in 1955 with US funding,⁷⁵ which published the *National Sociology Review*. Malīka also participated in Commission D's investigation in 1963, led by Muḥtār Ḥamza at the Institute of National Planning, regarding the employment of the educated in Egypt.⁷⁶ This survey was sponsored by the International Labour Organization and offered, among other things, a socio-psychological analysis of these educated who were affected by the 1961 Socialist laws. Indeed, from the 1960s onwards, the experts emphasized certain changes in educational and professional career choices, not least the preference for engineering or highly technical skilled work over the traditional civil servant jobs, and the decreasing number of foreign-educated persons among the ranks of managers.⁷⁷ Measuring the career choices made by the young and educated provided proof of the emergence of a new stratum within the national middle class (called a "managerial class").⁷⁸ It also underlined the diversification of occupational profiles in the intermediate strata with the need for skilled workers (*al-ʿummāl al-fanniyyūn*), as sociology professor Muṣṭafā Muḥammad al-Ḥaššāb put it in 1962:

The middle classes (*al-ṭabaqāt al-wasīṭa*) ... include skilled workers (*al-ʿummāl al-fanniyyīn*), civil servants (*al-muwazzafīn*), engineers, entrepreneurs (*al-muqāwilīn*), the professions, and other members of the socially mobile classes (*al-ṭabaqāt al-mutaḥarrika iǧtimāʾīyan*) who move between different social levels and enjoy social flexibility within this framework.⁷⁹

Educated young people would thus comprise a privileged pool of qualified professionals whose skills would be certified by national and international curricula (whether general or vocational), and who would be integrated by the state

⁷⁵ Nāhid Sāliḥ, *Al-Tārīḥ al-iǧtimāʾī li-l-markaz al-qawmī li-l-buḥūṭ al-iǧtimāʾiyya wa-l-ǧināʾiyya. Šafḥāt muḍʾa* [Social history of the National Centre for Sociological and Criminological Studies] (Cairo: Al-Markaz al-qawmī li-l-buḥūṭ al-iǧtimāʾiyya wa-l-ǧināʾiyya, 2006), 26.

⁷⁶ Mukhtar Hamza et al., "Appendix D on Social Psychology. Research Project on Employment and Unemployment Among the Educated" (Cairo: Institut national de Planification, 1963).

⁷⁷ Ahmed et al., "Appendix A on Employment Data, 34–5. This reaches the same conclusions as those of a PhD dissertation about the new managerial elite in Egypt, defended in 1967 by Maḥmūd Sāmī Qāsim, "The New Managerial Elite in Egypt: A Study of Their Background and Careers with Significant International Comparisons", (Graduate School of Business Administration, New York University, 1967).

⁷⁸ Fouad Sherif, "Developing New Managers for the Socialist Enterprise Sector in the UAR" (Cairo: Institut national de Planification, 1965); Kassem, "The New Managerial Elite in Egypt: A Study of Their Background and Careers with Significant International Comparisons" (Doctoral thesis, Graduate School of Business Administration, New York University, 1967).

⁷⁹ Muṣṭafā Muḥammad al-Ḥaššāb, "Dirāsāt al-bināʾ al-ṭabaqī fi l-muǧtamaʾ" [Étude de la structure de classes dans la société], in *Uṣūl ʿilm al-iǧtimāʾ* [Principes de sociologie], by ʿAbd al-Bāsiṭ Muḥammad Ḥasan et al. (Cairo: Maṭbaʾa laǧnat al-bayān al-ʿarabī, 1962), 74.

for its socio-economic development.⁸⁰ In this respect, they could be considered as the "insiders" par excellence of the Nasserite regime, as opposed to the "outsiders" (peasants, unskilled or less skilled workers) left behind by the welfare state.⁸¹ Incidentally, even within the National Centre for Sociological and Criminological Studies, where juvenile delinquency remained a predominant subject of analysis, the concept of "youth" was not applied to the lower social strata. Therefore, those young people who worked but did not study were rendered invisible. Ultimately, however, they were "young" only in terms of age, and of no particular interest to Egyptian reformers. This is a perfect illustration of the extent to which "youth" is less about age than about socio-economic status, and therefore about rising classes. In turning this social group into a specific middle class with the strategic social role of being "a driving force of development and growth",⁸² Egyptian experts linked the national economic context to the global one and its evolution (studies of Western youth should be compared with this case).

Conclusion

I hope to have demonstrated in this article the importance of the choice of terms erected as concepts, whether by Egyptian actors or later historiography. Because of its political connotations, the term "generation", for example, drowns out the competing voices of the time and erases the diversity of the projects that are attributed to it. One could say, in other words, that those who choose to write the history of the term "youth", including in its progressive conceptualization, must offer a new perspective on what Nasserite intellectuals worried about for the future, called "the new generation". The point is not so much to reveal the extent of the generational gap in terms of values (political commitment, attachment to socialism, moral respectability) as to put the finger on a discourse of social change and development, and on Egyptians' complex perception of the singularity of their national experience. Preferring to speak of youth at a time of a global demographic boom and youth-oriented pop culture means resolutely taking the side of those who are placing post-1952 Egypt in its wider context. This is not so much a question of writing the history of revolutionary Egypt as of the long history of social transformations, which, as recent historiography has shown, have multiple heritages.⁸³

⁸⁰ Egypt's nagging interest in its student population can also be explained by the government's difficulties in truly integrating them. See for example the minute of the French ambassador (Roux) to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in May 1968: "In April 1968, the decision was taken to appoint all 1967 graduates to posts in government departments or national companies. ... Their salaries are extremely low, frequently £18 a month, and their career prospects are unattractive. This raises the issue of student numbers and employment" (Minute no. 641/AL, "Des problèmes estudiantins en R.A.U.", 25 May 1968 (2038INVA 1966–70; box no. 1856, file 5). Autre dépêche, no. 641/AL ROUX au MAE, 25 May 1968.

⁸¹ On the dichotomy "insiders"/"outsiders" as a definition of southern welfare states, see Einar Øverbye, "Disciplinary Perspectives on Welfare States", in *The Oxford Handbook of the Welfare State*, ed. Daniel Béland et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 222–40.

⁸² Ahmed et al., "Appendix A on Employment Data", 17.

⁸³ El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory*; Sara Salem, "Hegemony in

The conceptualization of “youth” was altered from its original ideological use (meaning the future society that was expected to come out of the regime’s achievements) to a socio-economic definition. In that respect, the Egyptian social sciences of the Nasser years displayed a tremendous interest in the youth concept and contributed to the making of this “youth” as a real, intermediary stratum, crystallized in a transient state and significantly influenced by the search, in a capitalist world, for a new middle class. To the argument that the concepts of youth and generation come together in that of the “new generation”, I counter that a proper consideration of what constituted Egyptian youth at the end of the 1960s cannot be reduced to what political memory and historiography have assimilated to the post-1967 “Naksa generation”: because it also designated “middle class”, “youth” reveals a certain social reality beyond the wounded memory and the explosion of socio-economic expectations that occurred under Anwar Sadat. Indeed, the term “youth” was not limited to a specific group, as it was in interwar social sciences. Instead, it referred to a social avant-garde, including intellectuals and students, associated with the class most likely to bring about, participate in and benefit from social change. The regime’s social scientists openly stated that this class was the middle class in the economic sense. In other words, some historiography has focused on studying “youth” as a means of avoiding the debate on the existence and nature of social classes in Arab countries. However, by examining Nasserite social sciences, it becomes clear that there is a close assimilation between the two. This finding then answers both the nature of the revolutionary transition and the discourse on social hierarchy in Egypt in the second half of the 20th century. For the attentive observer of Egypt’s recent developments, this characterization of youth as an educated social class, which the Nasserite period firmly established, must seem familiar: the famous *šabāb al-tawra* of 25 January 2011 were also young, educated people with political aspirations (justice, democracy, freedom), and, as such, they were effectively rendering the other youth invisible in the national memory, even though those other youth also took to the streets, for more prosaic reasons. The same could be said about the World Youth Forum created by President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in 2017: this is just as much an embodiment of the restriction of the qualifier “youth” to a socio-economic stratum, and the exclusion of “youth” as a demographic category. It nearly erases the other Egyptian youth, whether those in uniform performing endless military service or those working (for example) at the wheel of the shoddy vehicles criss-crossing the country.⁸⁴

Egypt: Revisiting Gamal Abdel Nasser”, in *Anticolonial Afterlives in Egypt: The Politics of Hegemony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 80–156.

⁸⁴ On this subject, see Muḥammad Abū al-Ġīt’s remarkable article presenting alternative faces of the martyrs of 2011 (thanks to Mariam Aboughazi for pointing it out to me): “Al-Fuqarā’ awalan yā walād al-kalb. Lafat nazar li-l-ša’b al-miṣrī” [Poor first, you dog! Pay attention to the Egyptian people], 17 June 2011. See what the author said about these other young people: “They didn’t take to the streets to demand the constitution ... or the elections, they didn’t come out to make Egypt liberal, civil, Islamic or pagan! They only came out for reasons that affect their reality: the price of food, clothing and

In both these contemporary cases and their precedents from Nasser’s time, Egyptian youth provide a first-hand observation point from which to measure their country’s national discourse on social stratification in a time of global capitalism, beyond solely ideological or political narratives. “Youth”, seen in this light, is a concept that opens up a way to study the Egyptian welfare state in both its project and its structures.

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housing, which are going madly up; the police secretary who stops his brother’s microbus to steal fifty pounds; the officer who took him to prison and tortured him for days for no reason; his penniless sister, his uncle who was killed, his early retirement after the privatization of the factory, his cousin who lost everything, ... his aunt who died of cancer [without] any bed to be found in the government hospital, etc.”

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