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The American University in Cairo  
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**Youth and the 25th Revolution in Egypt:  
Agents of Change and its Multiple Meanings**

A Thesis Submitted to  
The Department of Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology, and  
Egyptology

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts  
In Sociology-Anthropology

**By Dina El- Sharnouby**

Under the Supervision of **Dr. Hanan Sabea**

**January 2012**

The American University in Cairo

# Youth and the 25th Revolution in Egypt: Agents of Change and its Multiple Meanings

A Thesis Submitted by

**Dina El- Sharnouby**

To the Sociology/Anthropology Program

**January 2012**

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

The degree of Master of Arts

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## **DEDICATION**

*I would like to dedicate this thesis to my Cousin Basant Monier who passed away in July 2011 in a car accident. Since January the 28<sup>th</sup>, Basant was a brave Tahrir companion who fought so dedicatedly for her freedom. We celebrated a great victory on February the 11<sup>th</sup> at Tahrir. May her soul rest in peace with the other martyrs of the Revolution.*

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## **Abstract:**

The 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2011 marks an important date for Egypt and the world. Not only did former President Hosni Mubarak who has ruled Egypt for 30 years step down, but the youth who were once conceived as incapable of change were hailed as those who brought about this transformation. Yet how could the youth organize and bring about such a change that was not only unthinkable for many, but not one who took to the streets on the 25<sup>th</sup> imagined they could topple Hosni Mubarak in 18 short days. In this thesis I thus ask: 1) how have youth been deployed before and after the 25<sup>th</sup> of January Revolution as agents of change, 2) what kind of transformations are youth imagining for Egypt. Several events since the 1990s contributed to sharpening the youth consciousness culminating in taking the streets on January, 25<sup>th</sup> demanding “change, freedom, and social justice”. I argue that, especially since the 1990s, a series of events and protests contributed to the formation of this generational consciousness which materialized on January 25<sup>th</sup> when thousands of mainly youth went on the streets to demand change. During the 1990s the adoption of neoliberal strategies pushed the state to minimize its role and promote civil society activities many of which focused on development. Many members of the organization were mainly focused on helping the poor (as a religious responsibility) without demanding social justice or challenging their own privileges. Secondly, a number of protests in the 2000 onwards were ushered by different protest movements such as Kefaya and the 6<sup>th</sup> of April youth movement. As national strategies failed to employ the majority of the youth, they became a burden on society. Not being able to afford a good education, employment, or marriage, Egyptian youth transformed from being the hope of the country in the 1950’s to a serious social problem by the 1980’s (Ibrahim, 2008). This affected youth’s everyday interactions as they were financially dependent on their families, while their leisure time activities were seen as dangerous or morally corrupt potentially leading to criminal activities, drug abuse, and immorality. To channel particular categories of youth, NGOs offered the path of civic participation as a means to harness their energies toward “development,” while maintaining structurally the status quo of society, economy and polity. By taking the streets on January the 25<sup>th</sup>, Egyptian youth for a short period transformed from being the problem to being the hope of the country. Through the governance of Tahrir square, Egyptian youth proved their eagerness to change and with the ousting of Mubarak they were celebrated as heroes. Tahrir Square thus played a major role in reviving the youth and in transforming them from the problem to the hope of the country. Class, gender, and religion shaped the imagery of which young person can bring about change. A masculine, upper middle class man was mainly attached to the new young person that can change Egypt. However, now, a clash of generations is clearly taking place in which the emerging youth generation fights for political inclusion. Different events such as the protests on Mohamed Mahmoud Street (just off of Tahrir Square) and in front of the cabinet, or the parliamentary elections, are just some examples of power negotiations between the “old” and “new” generations. By developing a generational consciousness, there is hope that youth can bring about change, however, depending on their age, class, religion, and gender, their experiences differ giving them different outlooks on the future and also a potential source of division among this generation. My research project focused on youth who both demonstrated and protested during the Revolution and those who did not. In addition, I analyzed the national Al Ahram newspaper in the years 2000, 2004, 2008, 2010, and 2011 and attended many public talks in order to unveil how youth were conceived as the problem before the Revolution and transformed into the hope of the country during the 18 days of the uprising. With a new generational consciousness, many young people are hopeful for a better future, however, their inexperience in politics makes it a difficult task to achieve.

# Table of Contents

<b>I. Chapter One- Introduction: The Egyptian Revolution.....</b>	<b>1</b>
A. Development Discourses and Neoliberalism .....	1
1. Youth & Development Discourses Pre-25 <sup>th</sup> of January 2011 .....	3
2. Youth Discourses Before the Revolution .....	8
B. Protests and Movements in Egypt since 2000.....	10
C. Egypt After the 11 <sup>th</sup> of February .....	11
D. Research Methodology .....	13
1. Project Design .....	13
2. Research Methods .....	14
3. Participants .....	14
4. Theoretical framework.....	16
E. Conclusion .....	18
<b>II. Chapter Two: Youth: Problem or Solution? Egyptian Youth’s Conceptualization Before the Revolution .....</b>	<b>20</b>
A. Conceptualizing Youth: Who Are They?.....	20
B. Youth as the Problem.....	25
1. National Strategy: Youth and Economic Productivity .....	26
2. The Young People are "Lazy" .....	28
3. The Rise of Protests.....	30
4. The Effect and Discourse on Youth’s Everyday Interactions.....	32
C. January- Youth as a Ticking Bomb.....	34
<b>III. Chapter Three: Tahrir Square - The Rebirth of Youth .....</b>	<b>35</b>
A. Tahrir Square - Youth Imposing Social and Political Inclusion .....	35
1. Tahrir...The Perfect Way of Governance? .....	38
2. Youth Created Tahrir .....	40
B. Youth Participation in Tahrir .....	40
1. Having to Know the Demands.....	40
2. Christians and Muslims .....	45
3. Men Versus Women’s Activism and Presence at Tahrir .....	46
C. Conclusion .....	48
<b>IV. Chapter Four: After the 18 Days of the Uprising .....</b>	<b>49</b>



A.	The Youth Generation .....	50
1.	Parent's Influence on Youth.....	52
2.	NGOs an Extension of the Status Quo .....	55
B.	Generational Units by Age, Class, Gender, and Religion .....	57
C.	Generational Conflict over Social and Political Change .....	60
D.	Conclusion.....	64
<b>V.</b>	<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>VI.</b>	<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>73</b>

# I. Chapter One- Introduction: The Egyptian Revolution

The 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2011 marks an important date for Egypt and the world. Not only did former President Hosni Mubarak (who has ruled Egypt for 30 years) step down, but the youth who were once conceived as incapable of change were hailed as those who brought about this transformation. Yet how could the youth organize and bring about such a change that was not only unthinkable for many, but not one who took to the streets on the 25<sup>th</sup> imagined they could topple Hosni Mubarak in 18 short days. In this thesis I thus ask: 1) how have youth been deployed before and after the 25<sup>th</sup> of January Revolution as agents of change, 2) what kind of transformations are youth imagining for Egypt. Several events since the 1990s contributed to sharpening the youth consciousness culminating in taking the streets on January, 25<sup>th</sup> demanding “change, freedom, and social justice”. In a lecture in October 2010 at Cairo University, Linda Herrera suggested a focus on “generational consciousness” as developed by Karl Mannheim.. Mannheim argued that a generation has to be aware of its strength as a people to be able to demonstrate and bring about real change. I am arguing that, especially since the 1990s, a series of events and protests contributed to the formation of this generational consciousness which materialized on January 25<sup>th</sup> when thousands of mainly youth went on the streets to demand change. During the 1990s the adoption of neoliberal strategies pushed the state to minimize its role and promote civil society activities many of which focused on development. Secondly, a number of protests in the 2000 onwards were ushered by different protest movements such as Kefaya and the 6<sup>th</sup> of April youth movement. Thirdly, the escape of the former Tunisian President Ben Ali after mass demonstrations in Tunisia inspired other Revolutions in the Middle East. The common experience of daily problems has lead to a generational consciousness, bringing about change. However, differences in class, age, religion, and gender play an important role in determining what kind of change they imagine.

## A. Development Discourses and Neoliberalism

Since the 1970s Egypt, has experienced what was then called 'open door policy' (*Infitah*) under the leadership of President Sadat. By the 1990s these processes were intensified in the form of privatization of many institutions and companies, withdrawal of state from service provisions, reliance on private investments (national and foreign) and institutions of social welfare. According to Singerman et.al “the authoritarian, neo-liberal state in Egypt, with consistent encouragement from its patron the United States, had spent the last thirty years repressing the economic claims of its citizens in the pursuit of brutal privatization and speculative projects of oligarchic economic restructuring” (Singerman et.al. 2006:5). With the government minimizing its

role as a welfare state while encouraging investments in the market, new forms of negotiating and contesting social structures appeared. Changes in consumer cultures and class structures widened the gap between classes, regions and social groups with rising poverty and unemployment. While gated elite communities grew around the city, so too, did poor urban neighborhoods and slum areas (Denis, 2006). With the bad implementation of neoliberal economy policies, bad governance, and the state not providing for many basic needs such as education, shelter etc., communities such as Boulaq El Dakrou developed (Ismail2006). Such newly emerging neighborhoods develop then their own forms of governance (creating illegal jobs such as drug dealing, finding solutions to getting water into the neighborhood etc.). Indeed, “structural adjustment conceived by international monetary institutions (World Bank, International Monetary Fund) has not taken into consideration the social fabric of Egypt, hence generating more qualitative poverty” (Khalifa, 1995:6). Khalifa further argues that societal structures have developed fundamental tensions such as “religious versus secular, rich versus poor, and old versus young” (Khalifa, 1995:6). The creation of binaries since the 1990’s has strongly affected Egypt’s social and political spaces and the everyday experience of the Egyptian population in general and youth in particular.

State agents, development organizations and in popular discourse youth have been deployed, as a driving force in the project of “developing Egypt” both in theory and in practice mainly because of a youth bulge. Because youth outnumber the rest of the population, they play a major role in building the country economically. Additionally the “demographic phenomenon has also been accompanied by an accelerated, virtual, unstructured process of urbanization, with urbanization rates (in the Arab World) fluctuating on average between 50-70%” (Munoz, 2000:19). Urban youth therefore developed into a new important actor. Subsequently, media, markets, and the Information Technology has become strongly youth-oriented, as they constitute the main consumers (Herrera, 2006). Yet, with economic reforms, many youth are unemployed and thereby pose a threat to the society if not absorbed in the market or in activities during their leisure time. Youth have physical energy to produce and if this is not directed into a productive way, many public figures in Egypt such as Amr Khaled, argue it could be corrupted. Indeed in Egypt, the government failed to incorporate the youth bulge by providing them with employment opportunities and generally providing them with spaces and/or activities to absorb them. Because many youth got involved in drug abuse or religious extremism, they became a burden and problem on the society at large, which led the government to conceive of them as a problem. This generation of young people therefore more and more are seen as apathetic, caring only about personal advancement, and in their confusion retreating into religious extremism. Class, gender, and religion play a major role in how they are contextualized by the society at large. But also the everyday experience of youth in Egypt is strongly affected by their background, and accordingly the possibilities they might have.

## 1. Youth & Development Discourses Pre-25<sup>th</sup> of January 2011

Before the 25<sup>th</sup> of January Revolution, youth have been rather addressed as objects of development discourse than agents of change. According to Linda Herrera “Youth tend to be treated either as subjects to stimulate neoliberal development, or as essentially religious and ideological beings with either politically radical or benign tendencies. Youth themselves are rarely consulted about their struggles for a lifestyle and livelihood or about the type of citizens they are or aspire to be” (Herrera, 2010:127). Youth did not speak for themselves and for development; rather youth have been regarded as the tools which would bring about a very specific agenda of development whose terms have been set by those in power, such as the United Nations, World Bank, and similar organizations/ institutions (Leal, 2007). This development discourse has affected how youth were and are perceived and constituted as a collective at this particular historical juncture of neoliberal politics .According to Leal it is “naively to assume that empowerment of people is to increase participation while the importance for the World Bank is to create a populist justification for the removal of the state from the economy and its substituting by the market” (Leal, 2007:542). Development discourses address youth in their voluntary participation in NGOs and within the realms of employment excluding them from political spaces.

While development as a project that shall advance societies is criticized, it played an important role in changing policies in Egypt that has affected youth movement whether in the form of youth participating in NGOs or in protest movements. Andrea Cornwell (2007), Gilbert Rist (2007), and Pablo Alejandro Leal (2007) among others who argue that development is a buzzword that is supposed to bring about changes especially in the form of justice to the poor, yet has failed in such a project. The “developed” countries in search for expansion of markets imposed rules and regulations on the developing countries which resulted in emphasizing class structures (Escobar, 1995). Development imposed by those in power silences the poor instead of “empowering” them by conditioning their “empowerment” (Leal, 2007).It is especially the economic strategies of neoliberalism that has affected the development project. According to David Harvey, neoliberalism is the new guideline for the improvement of human conditions through economic means. “Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey, 2005:2). The importance of free economies derives from the idea that humans can compete freely, consequently be free to choose what to do, as well as compete with each other, which in turn, would regulate the needs of consumers, adjusting accordingly the prices and types of products. However, it is not merely economic strategies that determine the effect of neoliberalism on the world, but also its ideological premises of freedom, such as freedom of choice, immersion in the market, and the

promise of prosperity. Harvey argues “the idea of freedom ‘thus degenerates into a mere advocacy of free enterprise’, which means ‘the fullness of freedom for those whose income, leisure and security need no enhancing, and a mere pittance of liberty for the people, who may in vain attempt to make use of their democratic rights to gain shelter from the power of their own property” (Harvey, 2005:37). In addition, Harvey argues neoliberal proponents claim that neoliberal policies would also minimize the gap between the rich and the poor, since they claim that everyone would have access to the market and exercise the choice to work hard; they will be rewarded accordingly and the social gap between classes would automatically shrink. Harvey shows in his book *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* that this is not the case; instead class structures are emphasized, and the rich easily become richer by make use of the liberal economy and expanding markets, inevitably forcing smaller enterprises out. In his article *Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction* Harvey gives examples of countries such as Chile and Argentina which have shown that class redistribution did not take place; instead the ruling elite accumulated more wealth while the poorer segment remained as such. He goes as far as to argue that “this has been such a persistent effect of neoliberal policies over time as to be regarded a structural component of the whole project” (Harvey, 2007:28). It becomes very important to look at Egypt through the lens of the failed project of class redistribution of neoliberalism which has affected the experience of youth in the country and their demands in the 25<sup>th</sup> of January Revolution. Harvey further shows how this class redistribution since developed countries in search for expansions of markets impose regulations like Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) on the developing world, pushing them to open their markets, allowing for foreign investments, at the expense of social welfare and local autonomy. The implementation of SAP in the developing world has strongly affected notions of development and participation of people in the developing world, culminating in the implementation of neo-liberalism which also shaped “development” (Leal, 2007). Thus, with the adoption of SAP, the role of NGOs and civil society has grown. Leal argues in his text “Participation: the Ascendancy of a Buzzword in the Neo-liberal Era” that the World Bank and IMF policies resulted in the disempowerment of the poor in the Third World who are constantly exploited. Only when the Third World's economies have a real place in international markets can we speak of real “empowerment”. The latter also entails the people freeing themselves from authoritarian systems. Leal adds that SAP as practiced by the World Bank and IMF shows that development failed. The World Bank advocates that

“liberation or empowerment of poor people in this rationale is not linked with political or state power. Rather, the implication is that empowerment is derived from liberation from an interventionist state, and that participation in free-market economics and their further enlistment into development projects will enable them to ‘take fuller charge of their lives’, and it is this which is cast as inherently empowering” (Leal 2007:542).

Pierre Bourdieu also argued that neoliberalism is “a program for destroying collective structures which may impede the pure market logic” (Bourdieu, 2008:1). For Bourdieu neoliberalism is an

individualization project which aims to destroy any form of collectivity, whether it is the state or the family.

Neoliberalism, as an economic strategy that has been adopted by countries globally, has left its imprints on Egypt as well, and has also shaped perspectives on youth and what is expected from them. According to Craig Jeffrey and Linda McDowell, “Neoliberal economic and social changes are radically transforming young people’s experiences of youth and early adulthood in many parts of the world. Young people face a greater range of uncertainties than perhaps in any previous era” (Jeffrey & McDowell, 2000:132). Also for Linda Herrera, “Youth in the Muslim Middle East are struggling to exert their youthfulness in the present and prepare for life transitions in the future in a context of ubiquitous neoliberal reforms, authoritarian regimes, and ongoing regional conflicts with no resolution in sight” (Herrera, 2009:1). Neoliberalism is, surely, not an economic strategy absolute and coherent in itself, yet, the drive to open up economies to the so-called free-market, introducing free trade, supporting entrepreneurship and the like, has affected the world, similar to Egypt, greatly in terms of social interactions, ideological notions of freedom and individualization, and expectations concerning the role of employees generally, and youth specifically. According to Linda Herrera,

“in Egypt, as in other countries of the Muslim Middle East, there has been intensified international focus on the ‘youth question.’ Within a climate of deteriorating economies, rising unemployment, growing radicalization and an escalation of regional conflicts, development interventions attempt to steer youth on a path that favors economic and political liberalization”(Herrera, 2006:1).

With neoliberalism, notions of development become central. As Herrera argues “youth tend to be treated more as objects than as agents of social and political reform and economic development” (Herrera 2009:2). In the context of neoliberalism and its effect on Egypt, it is important to look at how adopting the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) has affected the reality of youth and what is expected of them.

“In 1992, Egypt instituted a structural adjustment program policy that promoted privatization, extended market logic into social affairs, eliminated many state provisions of social services, reduced the state’s role in social service and encouraged the proliferation of civil society organizations (CSOs)” (Atia, 2008:37). SAP has greatly influenced the youth question. This can also be seen in how class re-distribution has affected social realities in Egypt. According to Eric Denis,

“gated communities (Egyptian elites who live in compounds or “micro-city communities”), like a spatial plan, authorize the elites who live there to continue the forced march for economic, oligopolistic liberalization, without redistribution, while protecting themselves from the ill effects of its pollution and its risks” (Denis, 2006:50).

Thus, instead of redistributing wealth, the rich become richer. The effect of that on youth is evident in the importance of class differentiation, which shapes how “rich” youth versus “poor” youth are imagined and addressed. Approaching the neoliberal ideology as one that promotes freedom of choice in the market, and as a project for destroying collectivity, widening the gap between the classes, while promoting an economic strategy of free market, privatization, and foreign investments, it makes the discourse on youth and how to perceive and to place them in society a complicated one.

These neoliberal strategies have affected youth’s lives strongly. The state has minimized its role economically while it promoted entrepreneurship and civil society activities. However, eventually the exposure of the middle upper class youth to the Egyptian poor through social activities has developed into a consciousness in which not only the youth shall and could help others but also collectively recognize that as a generation they can bring about greater change. Thus a consequence of the development project now is the question of civil society and NGOs and how they could play a role in empowering youth in Egypt. The appearance of NGOs in Egypt is not new, yet what is new is how attractive these organizations have become, and the huge amount of youth volunteering in NGOs in Egypt. An example is Resala (The Message) which is an NGO in Egypt that “began as a student initiative in 1999, and today it is the largest voluntary youth organization in the Arab world” (Sparre 2008) with 41 branches and over 90,000 volunteers (Ibrahim et.al. 2011). In such a short period of time (approximately over 10 years), Resala, unlike other NGOs in Egypt, managed to recruit and mobilize many volunteers. Resala’s activities vary from supporting orphans, engaging with street children, helping the blind by recoding text books on tapes, distributing food to poor people, selling clothes at cheap prices, to giving free language courses and professional training. Most of their activities target pressing domains and needs in Egypt. Thinking in neoliberal terms, this does not come as a surprise, as Atia stated, since the government’s plan is to withdraw and let civil society deliver many of the needed service (Atia, 2008).

It is worth noting that for many NGOs such as Resala or Alashanyk Ya Baladi, middle class youth are their main targets, whom they aim to engage, empower, and train to help in educating and serving the poorer population. The idea of “developing” others (and by extension the country) is confined to the more educated middle class youth who are positioned as having the means to help the poor. In contrast, the idea of involving lower class youth in enforcing change is rather absent. According to Ong

“the main elements of neoliberalism as a political philosophy are: (a) the claim that the market is better than the state at distributing public resources and (b) the return to a primitive form of individualism: an individual which is ‘competitive’, ‘possessive’ and constructed often in terms of the doctrine of ‘consumer sovereignty’. It is important to note that neoliberal reasoning is based on both economic (efficiency) and ethical (self-responsibility) claims”. (Ong, 2006: 11).

Thus, those who have some kind of capital such as education or money can help in “development” and advancing the economy, while lower class youth have either to be trained to be part of a productive society or are otherwise excluded from social processes. It is not the concern of my research to evaluate “development projects” or charity work of some NGOs, but rather to argue that through the development discourse youth have been objects of wealth accumulation. NGOs have mainly helped poorer youth to enter the market, while important political policies neglected to bring about rooted change.

According to Arthur Escobar, “to understand development as a discourse, one must not only look at the elements themselves (advancement in technology, education etc.), but also at the system of relations established among them. It is this system that allows the systematic creation of objects, concepts, and strategies; it determines what can be thought and said” (Escobar, 1995:40). Development according to him should not be understood as a “natural” consequence, but rather as a systematic form of manipulating power relations on others. Many NGOs in Egypt thus were helping the poor yet excluded their work from the political space as if justice can be brought about without changes in the political and social structures. While youth were involved in NGO activities, most of their work was not within the political sphere, thus leaving youth excluded from the political while their energies were geared towards helping others. Doing some preliminary research on Resala, I have noticed that youth have been involved in many activities to help poorer segments of the society. The main driving force was often religious aspirations to help others which “could in theory contribute to (a) democratic culture (through) the encouragement of social cohesion, where people feel bond to one another by mutual responsibility, shared values, and a sense of good that is greater than the self” (Ibrahim et.al, 2011). “Democratic values” of freedom and social justice were ethical values that guided the interaction between the volunteers and those they help. Such ways of interaction could be now of great value in building a democratic Egypt, however, before the Revolution, youth who volunteered in organizations were less likely to implement these forms of interaction in the political sphere. While youth were “developing” Egypt, ideas about freedom and justice were not explicitly addressed within the political domain, even though they were familiar religious guiding rules in the day-to-day-interaction. It is worth noting that most of the activities revolved around helping the poor and the less privileged. The contrast between the volunteers and their living standards and those they were helping was not questioned in terms of social justice while the assumption religious pious behavior was focused on. Many members of the organization were mainly focused on helping the poor (as a religious responsibility) without demanding social justice on challenging their own privileges. Even though Resala activities helped the youth interact with others and exposed them to very fundamental questions of injustice in the society, these questions were left as “a fact” and or as point of a natural hierarchical order not debated or challenged. In conclusion with the effect of neoliberal political and economic strategies, mainly



the middle class youth were involved in the “development” process and helping the poor. The social structures of the neoliberal order have therefore created more spaces for the youth to enter into the public space through civil activities. In the last decade youth lead NGOs played a major role in “development” projects and helping the poor by providing for their basic needs, while exposing the youth to different socio-economic groups. Even though, many youth who volunteer in these NGOs do not argue among themselves on notions of development, (Ibrahim et.al, 2011), these NGOs provided for a public space in which the youth could meet and be exposed to important social realities, such as poverty. Though, many NGOs such as Resala attracted lower and upper-middle class youth, substantial social change in classes did not take place. While it is remarkable how many young people from different classes participated in civil society, many important social issues, such as poverty, were not questioned in the political sphere. Instead, they were dealt with on a social level in which many youth tried to help the poor to enter the market or help them with services. NGOs played a fundamental social role in helping the poor, exposing youth to different social realities, but did not challenge the political unjust structures. Instead, “in addition to providing a context for self-expression and for developing a sense of responsibility and social injustice, the activities youth engaged with indicate a particular conception of the relationship between religion, politics and social change” (Ibrahim et.al. 2011). The creation “of a culture of virtuous, responsible individuals” (Ibrahim et.al. 2011) such as in Resala, could add now in the rebuilding process of Egypt. By not questioning how the development discourses and practices, and neoliberalism reproduced poverty, upper-middle and lower middle class youth who participated in NGOs served rather as objects of “developing” Egypt than agents of changing the society.

## 2. Youth Discourses Before the Revolution

How were youth constructed in public discourse before the Revolution in Egypt? Gamal Mubarak stated in his message as the chairman of the Future Generation Foundation (FGF) that “Egypt’s youth is its future. In my view, there can be no better way for us, as engaged and responsible citizens, to contribute to economic growth than to help prepare young people for success” (Mubarak, Future Generation Foundation website). He further stated in a gathering with the American Chamber of Commerce that “Our youth need the right tools to compete in a global environment,” (Gamal Mubarak on What the Future Holds for the Country’s Youth - and for Himself, 2010). Gamal Mubarak, as the former deputy general secretary of the National Democratic Party (NDP), the then ruling party in Egypt, expected youth to elevate the country economically by becoming experts and leaders in their fields and within the context of neoliberal Egypt. However, the ruling party and the government failed to make employment available to millions of youth. Unemployed youth eventually became ‘the problem’ and the ‘threat’ to the order in Egypt. In their critical perspective, some activists and scholars such as Mohammed El-

Baradei, former UN Nuclear Inspector and presidential candidate during the upcoming elections, addressed youth as the hope of the country that shall not submit to the discouraging environment of suppression promoted by the NDP. Since he started mobilizing the opposition in Egypt in the hope of changing Egypt into a democratic society, youth started playing a critical role in the political sphere. In an interview with Reuters Baradei said that "if Egypt were going to change, it is going to change through the young people," (Awad et.al., Feb. 2010). Youth who are politically engaged are, thus, regarded as the engine that could change Egypt's political system into a democratic one. Most of the scholarly literature however adopted government stance of perceiving the young as the problem; as a disadvantaged group of people with high unemployment rates, frustrations from the inability to get married, and sometimes even as threats to the social order represented in drug addiction or extremist tendencies. Amr Khaled, for example, who used to preach mainly to youth in Egypt, stated in his second Episode of his TV show *Sunna'a Al Haya* that "Our intention is to reduce the rates of divorce, eliminate misery, enhance dialogues, and to approach this generation (of youth) and to protect them from addiction and extremism" (Khaled, 2010).

Finally there is also the development discourse on youth, in which the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) constructed by the United Nations (UN) focus on youth in five of the seven goals to be achieved by 2012. The goals of the MDG's concerning youth are

"to achieve universal primary education (...), to achieve gender balance in primary and secondary education (...), to improve maternal health; to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis (...), and to develop a global partnership for development with a focus on youth employment" (Herrera, 2006:1428).

The discourse on youth varies between the national-state debates, in which youth were to play an important role to enhance Egypt's economy, to the oppositional debates, who perceived youth as engines for change, whether that be political, and/or social through their own efforts, NGOs, or by following preachers like Amr Khaled,. Youth were simultaneously, perceived as a threat and vulnerable to globalization and westernization (Ibrahim & Wassef, 2000), and as the ones who are expected to play an important role in the world's global economy and developing the nation .

Within civil society organizations, youth were again constructed differently. One important parameter is class and how class position defines how "talk" about youth unfolds. The upper-middle class youth are usually those who can afford a good education, marriage, and employment. Yet they are often perceived as irresponsible towards their society, are alienated from society by virtue of increased westernization, and are accused of moral laxity and decay. Barbara Ibrahim and Hind Wassef state in their article "Caught Between Two Worlds: Youth in the Egyptian Hinterland" that the "national discourse in Egypt increasingly addresses youth as a

group in need of guidance and saving from deviation, the different forms of which, such as drug use, openness about sexuality or mixing between the sexes in adolescences are seen as symptoms of westernization” (Ibrahim & Wassef, 2000:161-62). Also according to Sobhy (2009), Amr Khaled, who influenced many Egyptian upper middle class youth, encourage youth to be proactive in society, helping the poor, for instance, instead of sitting on the beach and doing nothing, dancing, watching TV shows such as Star Academy and the like. He is mainly concerned with youth’s corruption under the influence of the West, most crystallized in the mingling of opposite sexes. However, in his self-presentation, he combines the modern and the religious as reflected in his dress code (jeans and shirts), telling the youth that they can combine being modern while maintaining religion and tradition, as is the case with women wearing the veil (Sobhy, 2009:425). This is one of the reasons that make him so attractive to the elite youth: he allows them to be both modern and religious simultaneously. The poorer youth in turn are addressed in terms of lack of education, unemployment and the inability to get married and the fear of them turning into extremists, harming the society (Assaad et. al, 2007). Ragui Assaad and Ghada Barsoum mention poverty, for example, as a main cause of exclusion in Egypt (Assaad et.al, 2007: 8, Handoussa et.al., 2010: 3). Even though, youth cannot be simply categorized as middle-upper class and working class youth, it is important for my research to make these distinctions. With different problems facing youth in different classes, expectations on how they could add to Egypt’s “development” varied accordingly.

## B. Protests and Movements in Egypt since 2000

According to Huntington, Revolutions “are more likely to occur in societies which have experienced some social and economic development and where the process of political modernization and political development have lagged behind the process of social and economic change” (Goldstone, 1994:39). Egypt is such an example. On the one hand there were clear attempts at strengthening “civil society” activities especially those not threatening to the neoliberal strategies, while in the meantime the different state agents has continued to repress Egyptians. With the introduction of neoliberal economic strategies and the privatization of many sectors, Egypt has witnessed a series of protests especially since 2004. With the appointment of the Nazif government in July, 2004 these forms of collective action that have transformed into protests that appeared in the Egyptian public sphere (Springborg, 2009; Clement, 2009). With many attempts of privatization “industry, energy, water, health, education, etc.”, Nazif added to the uncertainty many felt concerning their life conditions (Clement, 2009).With the rise in prices, reduction of wages, and the fear of getting fired led many to protests. According to Franscois Clement in 2005 about 300 protests took place (Clement, 2009). Many bloggers and online activists were followed and detained in fear of mobilizing others. Examples are Esraa Abdelfatah who was detained in

2008 for mobilizing the 6<sup>th</sup> of April protests, as well as Egyptian blogger Wael Abbas, who has been blogging since 1999 under a hidden name and went public in 2004 when he observed the number of protests that were taking place (Abbas in a panel discussion at AUC on 23/02/2011). Abbas is famous for placing police harassments in prisons and on the streets in public domain through his blog and on Youtube. Since then Abbas has been harassed by national security forces. These activists were inspired by workers' protests such as the Mahala factory labor protests in 2008, among other protest movements in Egypt. Dr. Baradei's mobilization since 2009 further inspired possibilities for change. Finally, the dismissal of Ben Ali played a fundamental role in the possibility of change both for Egyptians and for the Middle East as a whole. The Tunisian Revolution awakened the idea of the ability of the people to topple an authoritarian regime through then collective action symbolized in taking the streets. Right before the 25<sup>th</sup> of January until the 27<sup>th</sup> I would argue no one expected the possibility of the removal of Hosni Mubarak. It is worth emphasizing again that the main demand of "change, freedom, and social justice" managed to incorporate all the different classes. Thus the upper middle class asked for more freedoms such as freedom of speech, assembly and the like, the poor and unemployed demanded better living conditions and equality. Christian or Muslim, old or young, all demanded *Isqat Al Nizam* or the fall of the system to live a dignified and better life. The merger of the diverse demands in one main goal of toppling the regime gave the Revolution the strength to succeed in the removal of Hosni Mubarak. Now with different interests of how to rebuild the political, economic and social system, it becomes more difficult to unify the Egyptians which also make this transformation process such an uncertain and difficult one.

### C. Egypt After the 11<sup>th</sup> of February

"A Revolution is a rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structures, leadership and government activity and policies" (Goldstone, 1994:38). It is clear that a Revolution has begun in Egypt; however, for it to be successful the political system has to be radically and structurally altered. As Goldstone noted, Revolutions are a fundamental and rapid change, and Egypt now is facing a period of uncertainty. Changes are happening very dramatically and rapidly. Few examples are the removal of Mubarak on the 11<sup>th</sup> of February, dissolving Mr. Ahmed Shafik's government that was formed during the Revolution on the 3rd of March that was then replaced with Dr. Essam Sharaf's government which had to resign in November 2011 to be replaced by Dr. Kamal El Ganzouri's government. Yet not only is the government changing, but also a lot of public discourses show the uncertainty, confusion and distress as well as hope and determination. People demand "change, freedom, and social justice" but how to translate that into a fair system is still ambiguous. On the one hand there is a fear of political oppression that either

the National Democratic Party, or the Muslim Brotherhood will dominate the political scene. The fear is driven by the fact that these were the major two politically organized groups that were clearly present during the decades. Now, with the transformation of the political system and the upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections, many Egyptians fear that the time span is not enough for other parties to form, consolidate themselves, and run for elections. On the other hand, there are public disagreements on what “the Revolution” shall focus on next. Dr. Alaa Al Aswany a prominent Egyptian writer is warning from a counter Revolution that could destroy the main aims of freedom of the Revolution (Alaa Al Aswany in a lecture at Alef Bookstore on Friday, 3/3/2011). Dr Rabab El Mahdi, assistant professor of political science at the American University in Cairo (AUC), on the other hand is warning from a pre-mature democratic transition in which notions of citizenship are still not practiced. In a lecture at the Sawy Culture Wheel that the Gerhart Center for Philanthropic Studies at AUC organized in March 2011, Dr. Mahdi stressed the importance of citizens becoming active in civil society to practice their freedoms and rights to avoid a democratic transitions Latin America, where elections, were rigged with bribery and corruption. Mrs. Engi El Haddad, a political activist and founding member of Shayfenkom (which translates as we see you, in reference to watching this in power) warned against a transition to democracy without a well established and independent judiciary who can assure free, fair and regular elections. She thus called for the importance of focusing on judges and the judiciary instead of focusing on the constitutional changes. Before the March 19<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendments’ Referendum active members in Tahrir Square demanded the suspension of the Egyptian constitution. Mohammed, a member on Facebook, expressed his fears as follows: “There are 12 days left until the referendum on the constitutional amendments and there has not been enough debate concerning them in the media. I fear that with a larger turnout in the referendum, people just go and vote yes without considering the full implications of these amendments. How can we start a short and effective campaign which can deliver a concise and well-structured message on why people should refuse the amendments?” (Facebook, 06/03/2011). The uncertainty also remained after the constitutional amendments. The parliamentary elections that started in November 2011 are another such example. The results of the elections show that over 40% of the seats for the Freedom and Justice Party, the political branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, and over 25% for the Salafi Nour Party, raises questions and perhaps concerns of how this “Islamic” rule will look like. List the source for these results Also SCAF’s political repression during the last couple of months adds to the political uncertainties. Since the Selmi document – add a footnote explaining this document that was proposed by the Sharaf government in November 2011, many young people lost their lives and were injured in clashes between the protestors, the police, and the armed forces. The Islamic rule in parliament and the SCAF’s current rule of the government adds to the anxiety regarding where the Revolution will take us. All of these are just some of the experiences that have been taking place

in Egypt since February 11<sup>th</sup>. Every day brings in new ideas and shifts. For my research project I will focus on the constitutional changes which I will detail in later chapters , to gain insights into how Egyptian youth deal with the Revolution and the changes that have been taking place.

My research project concerns how youth have been deployed before and after the 25<sup>th</sup> of January Revolution as agents of change and what kind of transformations they are hoping to see in Egypt. I ask which youth hope for what kind of changes for a better Egypt. To answer these question, (1) I focus on youth who both demonstrated and protested during the Revolution and those who did not. Through interviews and collected narratives I explore how some youth have experienced the historical moments of the 25<sup>th</sup> of January Revolution and how they are hoping Egypt to be now. (2) In addition to my interviews, I take newspapers, blogs, Facebook, and other media to understand the layer context and public discourse in terms of the changing attitudes towards youth and what to be expected from them. (3) In addition to these lectures, forums and discussion groups complement the views gained in interviews and media analysis. In short, my thesis addresses the following questions in my research:

- How does class, gender, age, and sex affect youth's perception about Egypt, and what kind of social, political and economic changes are they hoping for?
- How is youth as a category constructed by young men and women, as well as in public discourses pre- and post January 25<sup>th</sup>?
- What legitimacy did the 25<sup>th</sup> of January Revolution give to the category of youth?
- How do youth imagine the future of Egypt and their role in it?
- How do youth (e.g. in form of blogs and Facebook conversations) and public discourses, specifically the national media such as Al Ahram newspaper, construct youth as a category that could bring about change to Egypt, and how did it differ from before the 25<sup>th</sup> of January Revolution?

## D. Research Methodology

### 1. Project Design

To understand how youth are constructed today as agents of change and how they are imagining Egypt, I have done research on youth who have been involved in demonstrations since the 25<sup>th</sup> of January and those who have not. Class, age, gender, and religion were my main references to analyze differences in how these youth experienced the events before, during, and after the 25<sup>th</sup> of January and what kind of change they are hoping for.

## 2. Research Methods

In terms of research methods, my project relied on the following techniques:

- 1) Ethnographic fieldwork at demonstrations, forums, and discussion groups: Through participant observation I tried to understand the different discourses that prevail and the practices adopted.
- 2) Doing in depth interviews with youth who have and have not been involved in the demonstrations to understand how they have experienced Egypt during the Revolution and afterwards.
- 3) Archival work. Analyzing Al Ahram, the governmental newspapers in the years 2000, 2004, 2008, 2010, and, 2011. I have chosen these years randomly. Because of time constraints I could not analyze every year since 2000. Since 2011 I have added Independent, Al Masry Al Youm, to understand how they have conceptualized youth since the Revolution.

## 3. Participants

The main target group of this research was youth who have been involved in demonstrations and those who have not. I interviewed 29 young men and women and one older person on a voluntary basis. Seventeen of the participants were females and the rest were males. It was hard to categorize the participants along social class lines so I mainly took their job and education as parameters. I have grouped all of those who work in the public sector with a low salary (under 400 LE) or those in the private sector with no university education as the lower middle class. Accordingly, I interviewed 18 from the lower middle class and the rest from the upper middle class. As for participants of the lower middle class I interviewed secretaries, drivers, bus hostess, and cleaning personal who are mainly working at public institutions. None of the women interviewees (with the exception of one) of the lower middle class joined the protests. Only two men joined the protests during the 18 days of the uprising and one after ousting Mubarak. As for the upper middle class participants, they were mainly working in private companies as engineers, testers, Sales persons, kindergarten teachers, or in human rights institutions. Only one interviewee worked in a governmental institute. Only two male participants from the upper middle class joined the protests, along with three of the women. I met the interviewees in various places, either at cafés or at their work place in April and May 2011.

As someone who joined the protests since January the 25<sup>th</sup> and after ousting Mubarak and who participated in various groups to help in rebuilding Egypt, I gained insight into what it means to protest in a dictatorial regime, how to negotiate power with my family and my surrounding, and finally how a young person experiences the political, economic, and social

exclusions. Since the first protests I joined in 2010, the fear from detention, disappearing, or getting physically harassed by the police was on an individual level a great challenge. However, with the support of many “elderly” such as my professors, my friends, and very importantly my family, trying to transform Egypt becomes an easier task. As a young person I experienced during the 18 days the uncertainties of my youth who are fighting for change but do not know how to make this happen, when to stop and when to push for change. Questions like should only Mubarak resign or also the army hand the power over to a civil government became pressing and confusing. My family has especially added to my understanding of fighting for myself and my countries’ freedom. My parents’ support of my decisions to protests, while fearing I could die were important moments in understanding social pressures. On January the 11<sup>th</sup>, my father was so overwhelmed with the Revolution that he started crying, holding me in his arms and telling me “you could have been one of those who died”. The emotional stress of not wanting to hurt someone as close as one’s parents plays an important role in power negotiations as with the discouragement of parents to join protests. Also, talks with various friends who supported or discouraged my activism were important milestones in understanding the role of those who went to Tahrir and those who did not. The experience in the streets, and the fight for freedom, therefore, added to my understanding of the challenges youth faced during the 18 days. But also as a young person I could relate to many answers my interviewees gave me about their economic, social, and political challenges. The common experiences of social injustice, political exclusion, economic instability, the difficulty to find a job and be financially independent are just some of the problems I share with the Egyptian youth. After ousting Mubarak I joined an NGO, later a movement, and finally a political party in search of finding a place to add to the process of change. This gave me insights into the challenges young people face in political decision making.. My personal activism and experiences in the streets since January the 25<sup>th</sup> have given me greater insights to the events and to what it means to be young in Egypt. On the other hand, it also challenged my “objectivity” at times and making sense out of the research during violent events in the Egyptian streets. It was not always easy to separate myself from the street protests and the 'rebellious me' and write about the events, analyze them, or contest them. Also, as an activist it was not always easy to understand the arguments, fears, and discouragements of those who did not join the protests. It was especially the experience with one friend, however, who never joined any protests, that affected my understanding. My friend Christine El Shammaa, stayed the whole of the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of January 2011 online to read what was going on in Tahrir and warned me of police attacks. Being at Tahrir, we often could not estimate what is going on so she tried to help with that. Though, she never joined protests, she was a very valuable “home protestor” as I like to call her, supporting my activism and with it she hoped for a better Egypt. It was an important experience for me that not only those who join pretests but also those who abstained from them are as hopeful of change. Eventually I believe that my position as an activist



in combination with being advised by Dr. Hanan Sabea, who herself has been actively involved in protests, has given depth to my research in understanding key concepts.

#### 4. Theoretical framework

To understand how and why youth have been produced as a category in Egypt, Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, and Pierre Bourdieu are my prime interlocutors. Michel Foucault's notions about power and subjectivity are relevant to analyze how youth are rendered (produced) as subjects of change. Foucault argued that the state with its power imposes itself on the everyday life of people, making them objects of what they should be, while in practice making them subjects of change. "This form of power that applies itself to immediate everyday life categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognize and others have to recognize in him" (Foucault, 2006:331). Thus, for him power cannot be merely understood in terms of power relations, structure or rationality over its subjects, instead subjects are created through relations in society, which make the subjectification of people, or the making of humans into subjects possible. While the power relations in society could be perceived as the main guideline understanding people and what is expected of them through social structures and laws, the collectivity regenerates these structures and imposes them on themselves and each other. In order to understand our realities and structural constraints, Foucault proposes that "maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be to be able to get rid of this kind of political "double bind", which is the simultaneous individualization and tantalization of modern power structure" (Foucault, 2006:336). Power relations for Foucault are not merely the structures in society, but also the possibility of the imagination of the collective in terms of how they understand their role in society. Power relations are always important because even if they are not directly seen, they have always indirect consequences on people. Looking at Egypt now it seems that the possibility of imagining a different, freer Egypt has emerged. However, power structures still influence the making of subjects. One has to be careful of what possibilities Egyptians see now within the current power relations of the Islamists, SCAF, and the liberals.

Understanding how larger processes shape youth and make them who they relates to what Althusser refers to as the apparatus of the state. In his "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", Althusser not only looks at the state in its functions, but also refers to it as an apparatus that institutionalizes civilians in a very specific way. Althusser argues that in order to produce humans capable to fit in society and in the labour market specifically, they have to be socialized in a particular way. Thus in any institution such as the family, school, university or work place, humans learn how to act, think, and be. He states "the reproduction of labour power

requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but rather, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order” (Althusser, 1970:6). In other words to serve the system, people have to be socialized in certain ways (schools, universities, family, etc...). The important aspect of Althusser regarding how to go about understanding society is his claim that societies are structured in the way it serves a particular set of interests that define the overall social system. Thus, through the lens of Althusser’s theory I want to observe how institutions try to socialize people now by either demanding change or adding to the stability of the country. To understand how youth are important in the change process today, I will seek to understand forms of institutionalization, and power relations that make them into agents or subjects of change.

Finally, the question of how to bring about change can be understood through the notion of habitus by Pierre Bourdieu. Habitus for Bourdieu is a way of living and acting people get used to and learn through practice. To change a habitus however is not easy as it is based on a social system in which a person learned how to act and be. He proposed that habitus is a way of filling the bureaucratic gap. People act in a system in very specific ways, because of their habitus and what they have learned to do. This can be seen in duties youth have towards their families, their country, their personal goals that usually relate to being economically independent, and starting their own family (Herrera, 2009). While looking at how and why youth are key categories in development today through power relations and ways of institutionalization, incorporating their habitus in what they have learned to do, gives an in-depth understanding of how and why young men and women interpret and act on the world. Power relations and institutionalization should not be seen as absolute modes influencing youth; rather they serve analytically as tools for investigating how to understand different influences on the making of youth. So as not to conclude that only power and institutions are those that form our understanding of youth, I will look at the notion of habitus, through which youth develop a new form being in Egypt. One may ask, with the changes in structures which include the family, schools and universities, and the government can we hope for a lasting change? The changing behavior of taking the initiative to building Egypt, is an important aspect in looking at the role youth play in Egypt at present. It is not clear yet if youth will be able to act now as agents of change by changing social systems or objects of the discourse of change. In other words, will youth be able to change systems and their habitus or only act as an appendage to the change processes. In conclusion, looking at how youth are becoming subjects of change, and how they are socialized, incorporating the notion of habitus should give depth to my analysis of how and why youth are constructed as key categories in developing and changing Egypt now.

## E. Conclusion

Youth in Egypt are often addressed as a homogeneous group that should develop the country in various ways; economically, politically, or socially. However, when talking about youth a fundamental part was always missing, namely, the voices of the youth themselves. They have been transformed into objects of development discourses and projects. Youth are the future that should develop Egypt in all aspects, yet they were ripped of their own youthfulness. Within the discourse on youth they did not have dreams, idols, or even energy. Instead they were/are a "youth bulk" that plays the role of developing Egypt economically, politically, and socially. The importance of the individual was diminished and youth seemed nothing more than objects for talking about development. From a humanistic perspective, Erich Fromm argued that in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century the individual played the most important role by simply being human. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century, nationalism and where one comes from played a more important role than being human (Fromm, 2005:72). I would further argue that the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century are about capitalism; the reduction of humans even more to what they possess, rather than who they are. It becomes more and more important what one has (such as where one is employed) than who one is. Employment, education, and marriage were the three main categories through which youth were perceived in state and public discourses. Such discourses bypass any talk about their freedom, their dreams, or beliefs. In the article "Generation in Waiting: An Overview of School to Work and Family Formation Transitions", youth are depicted as waiting for employment, education, marriage to be able to live a full adult life. It is stated that many problems "leave young people in the situation of waiting to become full adults- a state of *waitthood*- struggling to resolve uncertainty on a number of interrelated fronts: attaining the right education, securing a quality job, and finding ways to afford costs of family formation" (Dhillon et.al. 2009:16). This is not to say that youth in Egypt and the Middle East are not constantly in a state of "waitthood", however, how we perceive of youth is mainly in terms of their level of **education** that would help them **secure a job** to enable them to **marry** (my emphasis). This indeed, was objectifying youth and neglecting them as full humans with dreams and aspirations.

How we used to perceive youth has partially changed since the events of the 25<sup>th</sup> of January. Youth have pushed themselves to be agents of change rather than objects of the development discourse. Youth are now perceived as heroes and their voices were heard in the demonstrations. Nonetheless, youth are still not included in policy changes or the like. Thus, within the transition in Egypt now, it is still not clear how much youth will be included in transforming Egypt politically, economically, and socially. Thus, in my research project I look at both national discourses of changing Egypt and how involved the youth are in these processes. In addition, I narrate the experiences of some youth in Egypt that reflect their experiences of youthfulness before, during and after the events of the 25<sup>th</sup> of January. I further place youth in

national discourse to understand the matrix of power relations which shapes how we imagine youth today. I hope eventually to write a thesis in which the voices of the youth are heard in the midst of the changes in Egypt at large.

I am mainly looking at youth's transformation from being the "problem" before the Revolution to being the hope of the country during the uprising and their ambiguous situation now. The chapters are organized as follows.

In chapter two I look at the discourses on Youth mainly through Al Ahram newspapers. Since the government failed in providing employment for the youth, many youth could not afford to marry or get a good education, they developed into a social burden. In trying to accommodate the youth bulge, the government gave training opportunities to the youth. With the implementation of neoliberal economic policies, privatization and the starting of small and medium enterprises are encouraged by the government. Conceiving youth as the problem and failing to accommodate the youth bulge resulted firstly, in widening the gap between the richer and poorer youth. Secondly, with the rise of unemployment especially since 2004, protest movements rose. This resulted in strengthening the national perception of youth as being lazy, apathetic, and incapable of change which in turn affects youth's political exclusion. All of these factors have affected youth's everyday interactions. Firstly youth's financial dependence on their families rose over the years which strengthened parents' influence on decision making and the everyday life of their children. Secondly, many scholars argued that in desperation of the situation, many young people either resolved to drug abuse or religious extremism. To escape these NGOs have been deployed as the only way in which youth can be included in civic participation, even though, they remain politically marginalized.

In chapter three I look at the 18 days of uprising and how that affected the perception of youth. Tahrir Square in specific played a major role in reviving the youth and in transforming them from the problem to the hope of the country. Class, gender, and religion were another important factors in determining the imagery of which young person can bring about change. A masculine, middle class man was mainly attached to the new young person that can change Egypt. Class, gender, age, and religion also played an important role in the development of the young person's consciousness after the 18 days of the uprising.

In chapter four I analyze the generational consciousness. Through a common everyday experience, youth have developed a common understanding of the world around them taking the streets on the 25<sup>th</sup> to demand change. Adopting Karl Mannheim's idea of generational units, depending on their background, participants of my research see change in Egypt differently. The middle lower class mainly aims for stability and therefore falls back to the old generation such as SCAF and other forces. The clash of generations between the old more stagnant generation and

the new one in hope of fundamental change and political inclusion becomes more apparent today. The political inclusion of the youth that could determine new policies and new life expectations are strongly challenged. The parliamentary elections of 2011 are such an example of the continuation of excluding the young people from politics.

In conclusion, the most difficult task for the youth now is organizing themselves to play an influential role in bringing about change, especially through politics. Through my own experiences in various groups since March 2011 I have observed different problems in the mobilizing of youth. First I joined an NGO which through its bureaucracy finds it hard to adapt fast to the demands that are posed by the changing conditions of Egypt. By joining a political movement, I realized that one major challenge was creating a structure that enables and encourages mobilization among as many young people as possible. And finally, by joining a political party, it became clear that the inexperience of young people in politics and lack of resources makes surviving in the political scene difficult. The clash of generations, and the reforms the young want to reach is still prevalent. The first step of change has been taken by the youth and they have started to mobilize themselves, yet the speed and efficiency of doing so will determine the amount of change they will be able to bring about in the coming period.

## II. Chapter Two: Youth: Problem or Solution? Egyptian Youth's Conceptualization Before the Revolution

### A. Conceptualizing Youth: Who Are They?

The Revolution of the 25<sup>th</sup> of January placed a new dimension and challenge concerning the perception of youth. Youth that were once perceived as incapable of change, and without guidance, managed to take the streets, motivating and inspiring millions of Egyptians to overthrow the Mubarak regime. In order to understand how the perception of youth has changed over the years it is important to regard them within the historical context from the time of President Abdel Nasser until today. This will help explain why youth are significant today; how the category of youth has changed depending on the historical context; and finally whom the category "youth" serves. Youth have always played an important role in bringing about change in any society, often in the form of student movements, for example in Europe and America in the 60s, in Egypt during the 1952 Revolution which was led by young Egyptian officers, the 70s

student movement, and of course the 25<sup>th</sup> of January Revolution which was mainly influenced and driven by youth. "Youth" have always been an important category that brings about change; nevertheless the historical context affects how young people are conceptualized as a social category and accordingly how their role as social actors is defined. The most obvious historical reality now is that there is a youth bulge: young people form the biggest age group in Egypt and in the Arab World. This constitutes many different aspects in understanding the role and importance of youth in Egypt and the Arab World today. With the large number of young people living in the Arab world, according to Linda Herrera, media and markets became more youth oriented, so that the products are "youth cultured production from music to fashion and film" (Herrera, 2006:1432). In addition, the very idea of how to socialize youth has been strongly affected by neoliberal ideals, so that "market-oriented changes by way of increased privatization, individualization and the 'businessization' of schooling, are well underway" (Herrera, 2006:1433). With the Revolution new ways of understanding youth became central as they entered the space of demanding and pushing for better living conditions. In this chapter I will mainly define and examine different notions and ways of conceptualizing youth before the 25<sup>th</sup> of January Revolution. By surveying the main definitions since the 1950s (i.e. with Egypt's independence) I will show how ideas about youth have shifted from being the hope for the country in the liberation struggle of Egypt to becoming a social problem (unemployment, lack of education, overpopulation etc.) in the Sadat era (Ibrahim, 2008). Especially since the 1990s, neoliberal economic policies have affected youth's living conditions, and accordingly were mainly conceived within the realisms of economic productivity.

To include different young people in my study, I did not define youth in terms of a set criterion, however throughout my research several ideas of how to conceptualize youth became clear. Depending on the context, the very definition and reference to "youth" changes. Young people are mainly categorized either by age or as a social category. A premise in classifying youth is age, especially in the context of quantitative research projects. For instance, the Population Council conducted a survey of young people in Egypt between 10 and 29 years of age. They mainly focused on what they call youth's five major life transitions, namely, education, work, family formation, health, and civic and political participation. Because of the importance of governmental and developmental policies youth are grouped by age. According to the United Nations, youth are those aged 15 to 24, while for the World Bank youth are those between 12 and 24 years of age (Herrera, 2006:1427). However, defining youth on the basis of age does not make them a social category. According to Herrera youth may be categorized as a cultural group or a socio-political one instead (Herrera 2006). Identifying youth as a cultural group Herrera explores new forms of communication, which include excessive use of the internet and mobile phones. This serves as an important reference in looking at how young people behave and interact within the society at large. In this context youth are also categorized as the "Facebook"

generation or the “E” generation. She goes as far as stating that a young person can only be considered as such if he/she does not at least have a mobile phone. This new dimension adds to the usage of “youth” as multitasked people who communicate excessively before making decisions (Herrera talk in 2010 at Cairo University). On the other hand, according to Hania Sobhy-who looks at youth religiously influenced by Amr Khaled, a prominent Egyptian Islamic preacher-there is a split in the perception of youth as either liberal or conservative/religious according to/signified by the mixing of the sexes or their segregation. (Sobhy, 2009). I will deal with the term youth in relation to a young person’s gender, class, and religion which affects the everyday experience of a young person.

Tracing the conceptualization of the youth category since the 1950s, it becomes clear that the historical moment of and finally Egypt’s independence shapes the livelihood conditions of the young in accordance to how they are defined. During the 50s and 60s young people represented the hope of the country and were a main drive in the project of Arabism. Young people played the role of regaining the independence of Egypt and the Arab world in general, as well as rebuilding the country. This could be attributed to the fact that when Gamal Abdel Nasser with the free officers overthrew the monarchy of Egypt, he was in his late thirties. Full of enthusiasm and charisma, President Abdel Nasser addressed the young people as the main drive for every citizen to regain his/her freedom and dignity. In his speech, Abdel Nasser talks about colonization and the importance of getting rid of it, saying “we, dear youth, did not gain our freedom yet, and we will only get it if we free ourselves from fear, and after that from the old systems and old methods of doing things.” He further adds “we have to unite and work on two main issues. The first is to free ourselves and the other is to free our country. The influence of feudalism and capitalism have to be controlled and put again in its place<sup>1</sup>” (Abdel Nasser’s Speech at Cairo University, 1953). With the responsibility of rebuilding the country, helping in laying the foundation of the Arab unity, teaching every Egyptian to live a dignified and free life, especially the peasants and workers, Egypt’s youth had an important mission to fulfill. Nonetheless, the living conditions of the young people during the 1950s and 1960s allowed them to be independent and transition smoothly from childhood to adulthood. Not only was education guaranteed, but also every graduate could find a job in the public sector. Also marriage costs were more manageable, youth could live a fairly self-reliant life (Ibrahim, 2008). Young people during Abdel Nasser’s era had both the means (education, employment, and possibility of getting married) as well as a clear goal in life; building the Arab nation. Identifying with this goal, young people’s living conditions during this era gave them a different sense of independence and henceforth the ability for decision making in their lives. To a great extent, young people were independent of their families, while being socialized by the state in ways that fit the vision of

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<sup>1</sup> My translation

Abdel Nasser. As Althusser proposed, through the schools and universities, young people especially learned to love the country and fight for it. Through the building of universities and schools, many young people migrated to the city, making them independent of their families and exposed to the new national goal of freedom of the self and the country. The project of independence from colonialism and the family, while solely being dependent on the country to provide for the young person, has affected the youth's understanding of themselves and the world around them, or in short their 'Weltanschauung'. Abdel Nasser created a structure (institutions such as schools and universities) that defined the whole social system of Socialism and Arabism and youth were the main actors for this project.

Since the open door policy under President Sadat in the 1970s, the reality of the young people in Egypt shifted tremendously, pushing them into dependency on their parents, while the state started to conceive of youth as "the problem" (Ibrahim, 2008). In comparison to the perception of youth today to the past, "arguments that blame youth for their supposed moral laxity and call for a form of guardianship over their personal lives (and interactions with the other sex) were not a central concern in the Revolutionary years (1950s and 1960s), when Egyptian youth had relatively easy access to education, employment, and cheap housing and were less dependent on their parents" (Sobhy, 2009:417). During the 1950s and 1960s youth were not only financially independent compared to the 1970s and until today, but for many they had an important cause too. The "Nasser generation" had a sense of identity and belonging to the project of building the Arab nation" (Ibrahim, 2008:4). However, the 1970s the *Infitah* or the open door policy of Anwar El Sadat changed the perception and reality of youth tremendously. "Since the 1970s, public discourse has associated youth with the problems of unemployment, lack of affordable housing, and, therefore, the inability to marry and the desire to migrate" (Sobhy, 2009:417). During the Sadat era of the loss of faith in socialism, nationalism, and Arabism and the shift to the private sector in the hope of improving the economic and living conditions, many youth aimed to migrate outside Egypt to find better paying jobs.. Also the quality of education declined, while many young people were not prepared for the highly technological jobs that were introduced by opening the markets, young people had to wait longer until they finally found a job (Ibrahim, 2008). According to Ibrahim, it is during this era of Sadat that youth transformed from being the hope to being the problem of the country (Ibrahim et.al., talk at Cairo University, 2010).

The contrast between the 1950s and today is tremendous in terms of shifts in what the state used to offer the young which enabled them to be self-reliant and independent. Instead of treating these problems, neoliberal policies alienated youth even more from their own living conditions, as will be discussed in detail in this chapter. Young people basically became the problem because the state could not provide decent education or employment opportunities, and therefore the young people have to depend on their families to support them in all their life



transitions until they get married, and sometimes even after. Consequently, one of the main challenges today is the question of guardianship (Herrera, 2010). Because most young people nowadays need to be financially supported by their parents, especially financing their university studies or/and marriages, it is assumed that youth have to listen to their parents and do what they believe is right. This creates conflicts, because youth in search for independence and freedom, cannot easily choose their own life path under the guardianship of their parents. In a talk in 2010 at Cairo University, Barbara Ibrahim referred to the youth problem during the last 20 to 25 years as a “culture of exclusion”, where youth cannot find work, marriage, etc. It is not merely the economic and social exclusion that is the problem, but that youth are not asked what they want to work, who they want to marry, and how they want to live. Such exclusion is producing a challenge for the youth of how to be included in the system. It does not come as a surprise that youth eventually took the streets on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January to claim their rights to live freely and independently. During the 18 days of the Revolution, young people managed to generate a new outlook on them. The multilayered meaning of the term "youth" and their participation is fundamental in understanding power relations. With the young Abdel Nasser in power, the focus on youth made them the hope of the country. During the Mubarak era, youth became objects of neoliberal economic drives, and hence were put into context of advancing Egypt economically. It is of concern in this research to understand and further analyze the youth question in the context of power relations, in order to understand different layers in the imagery of youth among the public.

According to Karl Mannheim what distinguishes youth from young people is “when significant numbers of young people develop and express a consciousness of themselves as “youth” and act upon this consciousness according to various lines of division” (Herrera, 2006: 3). When young people understand that they have similar problems, and act upon them, they create enough momentum and power to push for new social forms of inclusion. In addition to power relations, the importance of the youth consciousness as a social category that could bring about or drive change is important in defining and analyzing the young. Hence, there are different perspectives on youth that I will highlight over the chapters to lay out different analytical categories of the youth within the larger historical context. In this chapter I will be looking at youth as a social category, contrasting their social inclusion or exclusion as a result of the government’s policies and discourses on youth as a problem, the discourse on youth by academics, public opinion, and the young’s perspective of themselves in terms of the notion of a problem. In the next chapter I will be looking at youth as a political group that demanded change by taking the streets, and in the process changed the perception from being the problem to being again the hope of the country. In chapter 4 I will focus on life stories of young people and how they as individuals feel about the changes after ousting Hosni Mubarak. I will be further adopting Karl

Mannheim's notion of generational consciousness and contrasting the "old" to the "new" generation in the struggle over power.

## B. Youth as the Problem

Youth in the 1950s and 1960s were seen as the hope of the country; they were the main drive and target of the nationalization project of Gamal Abdel Nasser and that of Arabism. With the shifting perception of youth as the problem during Sadat's era and the persistence and strengthening of this notion during Mubarak's era, being young became a burden in/for the society. The discourse on youth has been affected by this notion which developed as a result of the government not being able to accommodate young men and women with employment opportunities, thus cursing the youth bulge and focusing on "the problem" in society. Indeed, Egypt has a youth bulge similar to the Middle East as a whole, making the category an important one in contributing to the country's economy, polity, and society. As for the economy, with youth constituting the biggest group in the Middle East comprising approximately 47% of the working age population, they are a very important asset (Dhillon et.al, 2009). In Egypt, sixty-two percent of the population is 29 years old or younger and 39.4% of the population is between 10 and 29 years of age (Survey of Young People in Egypt, 2010:2). According to Linda Herrera "a youth bulge becomes an advantage when human capital policies effectively channel the energies of youth for jobs and economic growth" (Herrera, 2010:128). Having a youth bulge as such is not necessarily a problem, Yet in Egypt, the former NDP, has defined youth in terms of a problem because they are a force that failed to be absorbed by the state. Identifying the young from a national perspective as the problem in society marginalized youth and alienated them from social participation.

In this chapter I focus on analyzing how conceptualizing the youth as the problem has affected the discourse on youth, while the national strategy since 2000 focused on employing the young population by training them to become equipped employees, whilst privatizing many companies and encouraging foreign investment. Additionally, the government promoted youth to start their own small or medium enterprises. This resulted in emphasizing class differences among the young people who could enter the highly competitive economic platform and the ones that could not. This was accompanied by a rise in unemployment and with it a rise of protests and youth pressure groups. Perceived as the problem, young people were identified as lazy and apathetic. This in turn affected young people's everyday interaction in that most young people had to depend on their families, adding to the notion of irresponsibility and in need of guidance, particularly against religious extremism or drug addiction. Finally young people's hope was reduced to participating in NGOs, or putting political pressure on the government. In this section I will focus on three sources: 1) national discourse on youth, mainly through Al Ahram, the main

official government newspaper, 2) academic literature, 3) public opinion through different sessions and meetings I attended, and 4) Interviewees of my research.

## 1. National Strategy: Youth and Economic Productivity

In the previous chapter, I outlined the effect of neoliberalism as an economic strategy, especially the minimal role the government played in direct economic production. This did not mean the absence of government control, but a shift in nature and form of that control. Since Egypt signed the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in 1992, the focus on privatizing many public companies and supporting small and medium enterprises became the crux of the economy, by putting pressure on the young people to navigate a highly competitive environment which necessitated relevant skills and knowledge. By analyzing Al Ahram newspapers in the years 2000, 2004, 2008, 2010, 2011, we find the government's discourse mainly focused on employing the young population, and emphasizing their training to fit market needs. Youth centers (*Marakez Shabab*), which were a focus for the government since 2000, were restructured and equipped with technology (Al Ahram, 17/02/2000; Al Ahram, 13/02/2000) to serve as training centers for the young people to obtain soft skills or generally learn how to read and write (Al Ahram, 30/08/2004). In December 2000, 6 million Egyptian Pounds were spent on the development of these centers (Al Ahram 13/12/2000). In 2004 the amount spent on the youth centers was increased to 22.6 million Egyptian Pounds to buy new equipment (Al Ahram, 25/04/2004). Fields such as environment, agriculture, industry, and tourism (Al Ahram 19/01/2000) were especially supported to attract foreign investors. Young people were supposed to learn many soft skills such as presentation skills, project management, public speaking, etc. to work in national or international projects. For example according to Al Ahram in August 2000, 5000 young people employed in petroleum companies and training centers were trained in how to work on projects in cooperation with France (Al Ahram, 05/08/2000). In addition to these projects, other ones such as grading the roads were central to attracting more Egyptian and foreign investors. In 2008 Aisha Abdelhady, then Minister of Labor and Migration, negotiated with international investors to create job opportunities in Egypt for the youth (Al Ahram 07/02/2008). Christine, a 23-year-old woman I interviewed, like many others, is not working in the field she studied. She is currently working as a secretary in the public sector, while she earned her bachelors in law at Ain Shams University. With courses she took in computer usage and learning skills for secretaries, she managed to enter a career field she was not educated in and with the gained knowledge and professional training earn a better salary. Before working in the public sector she worked at private companies. She started with a salary of 200 Egyptian Pounds a month and with the computer course her salary increased to 800 Egyptian Pounds a month in her next job. According to Christine she benefited greatly from these courses. She eventually got married and had a child; to meet her maternal duties she decided to work in the public sector

again with a lower salary of 101.90 EGP a month. Even though working in the public sector entailed getting a lower salary and being a temporary employee, she prefers working for less hours to meet her demands as a housewife and mother. According to the Survey of Young people in Egypt, 35% of women compared to 8.3% of men work in the public sector (Survey of Young People in Egypt, 2010:91). The highly competitive environment in the private sector with long working hours might be a reason for why women, especially from the working class, prefer the public sector. Before the Revolution Christine was hopeful to be permanently hired after working in the public sector for 10-15 years, just to earn a salary of 854.5 EGP a month similar to that of the private sector. But with privatization, the government does not have to employ people anymore, and finding a job in the public sector, the right connection is usually needed, which was the case with Christine, who got the job through her mother, who works at the same government institution. Many of the young people I interviewed confirmed that they would not even consider applying to jobs in the public sector as the government stopped hiring. Christine considers herself one of the lucky few who benefitted from the Revolution. After the 18 days of the uprising many workers at her work place protested and now there is a chance she will be permanently hired. Christine's example is just one classic case of people who have some form of education, yet have to work for low salaries. To get better salaries in the private sector many youth, especially from the lower classes, take courses that qualify them for better paying jobs.

In support of "training" and "equipping" the young to find employment, Gamal Mubarak, started in 1998 the Future Generation Foundation (FGF), an NGO that is dedicated to job training (Shawky, 2011). According to [techsoupglobal.org](http://techsoupglobal.org)<sup>2</sup>, the FGF has three main programs: the youth academy for Information Technology (IT) aimed mainly at graduates, business English, and interpersonal skills. The second program is dedicated to teaching employees better communication and information technology skills. The last program is tailored for mid-career employees to build leadership capacities (Egypt: Future Generation Foundation). Even though there were many attempts to educate the youth in skills to better their chances in entering the job market, the unemployment rate did not decrease over time (Hassan et.al, 2008). On the one hand, the problem lies in that vocational trainings that were offered by the state were strongly divorced from the private sector. There are 1,237 vocational training centers in Egypt operating independently by 27 different ministries or authorities (Dhillon et.al, 2009). The lack of communication between the ministries pushing the youth to become a productive force for neoliberal policies caused many discrepancies instead of consistency within the economy. Additionally the educational system, especially with many schools lacking in technology (i.e. they continuous high reliance on traditional methods of learning such as blackboards instead of internet-based advanced technologies) was a negative issue that held Egypt back according to Al

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<sup>2</sup> The official website of FGF is not working. After the fall of the old regime much information has been retrieved, hence finding information on the projects was rather hard.

Ahram (Al Ahram, 10/01/2000). In short, the education system itself suffered from poor quality because of the youth bulge, and mismatch between the work opportunities, market needs, and what youth study at universities (Assaad et.al, 2007:15). It is not until 2010 that Aly El Din Helal, Secretary of the Media of the NDP, stated that only through a better educational system will Egypt get rid of unemployment and the problems of the youth (Al Ahram, 04/08/2010). The uncertainties that the young people continue to face as fresh graduates in finding employment remains a critical issue (Hassan, 2008:4).

The other important national strategy in accommodating the youth bulge was to give them loans to start their own small or medium enterprises over the last ten years. According to Al Ahram newspaper in May 2004, for example, 21 thousand small enterprises were created to absorb 50,000 thousand employees (Al Ahram, 21/05/2004). Especially since 2004 with Ahmed Nazif as the Prime Minister, the neoliberal economic drive for privatization and initiating more small and medium enterprises became stronger. The main strategy was to either lend youth money to start their own businesses, or helping them invest in existing ones. Thus in 2004, for example, one million Egyptian pounds have been used to promote and support youth enterprises (Al Ahram, 20/08/2004). Also the Social Development Fund in an agreement with the National Bank for Development gave 25 million Egyptian pounds as loans to youth to start their own enterprises (Al Ahram, 30/09/2004). Young people were pushed to be innovative to attract business people to invest in their ideas and start their own projects (Al Ahram, 19/10/2004). According to Al Ahram newspaper in 2010, youth were given employment opportunities through 37,804 projects that were worth 360 million and 567 thousand Egyptian pounds (Al Ahramonline, 11/10/2010). Yet, the SMEs did not manage to accommodate the majority of the unemployed youth, making the problem a persistent one.

## 2. The Young People are "Lazy"

Young people were, therefore, the focus of the government's strategy of neoliberal policies which in turn perpetuated the notion of the young people being the problem. Within this context, young people were conceived as lazy and not wanting to put the effort to be part of the job market, which put more pressure on the young people to prove themselves in a space that could never absorb all of them in the complexity of privatization and qualifications required. The statement of Dr. Ali El Din Helal, then Minister of Youth and Sports, is the typical public talk about youth which did not change much until 2011. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of January 2000 Dr. Helal stated as he was starting his post as minister that he is not only focusing on football, but rather on the problem of unemployment which is one of the biggest problems youth face in Egypt. He further stated that his ministry is not solely responsible for the employment issue, but that businesses and political parties should also try to find solutions. He further blamed the youth for not understanding what it

means to get and keep a job, taking advantage of job opportunities (Al Ahram, 05/01/2000). Dr. Mostafa Abdel Ghany, writing in Al Ahram, argued that the youth problem is that they do not relate to their country and are ignorant of internal and external influences on Egypt (Al Ahram: 26/01/2004:13). For the government, youth in general were not interested in anything, from finding the right job, to understanding Arab and Egypt's history, and challenges to the region (Al Ahram: 26/01/2004:13). Youth's inclusion in any of the mentioned areas was left unquestioned and their interests and problems were not addressed. Solutions to youth's leisure time, interests, and activities were not given space or focus, and hence youth became a problem, and with no active role as citizens. Youths, thus, were not able to exercise their citizenship rights either in terms of political participation or social activities which were prohibited particularly at public universities (Assaad et.al, 2007:7).

By mainly focusing on economic growth and employment opportunities, pressure placed youth to focus their educational careers on certain fields of expertise and to take certain jobs that earn more money than others. Egypt's Prime Minister in 2000 stated that youth issues are central to the national strategy which makes finding job opportunities central (Al Ahram, 08/02/2000). Thus, Mrs. Suzan Mubarak called for the youth in 2000 to spend their time and efforts on education to prepare themselves for the future (Al Ahram, 05/02/2000), even though the opportunities in the national strategies were limited to certain fields such as telecommunication and information technology (Al Ahram, 2000) leaving thousands if not millions excluded. While some investments were directed to agricultural projects (subsidizing agricultural land for youth (Al Ahram, 21/02/2004)), corruption meant that many such projects failed. Such a failure is manifested in the Tushka project that started in 2000 but never succeeded to serve as an agricultural project that gave work opportunities to youth and add to the economy of Egypt (Al Ahram, 23/02/2004).

For the government, focus on youth was motivated by a drive to incorporate them in neoliberal economic strategies, prepare them for competitive private companies, and foreign investment, while promoting small and medium enterprises. Having this as a focus while not finding a solution to unemployment, the government strengthened its understanding of youth as a problem. Instead of finding new strategies to accommodate youth, neoliberal economic strategies exacerbated class differences among youth, increased the unemployment rate which resulted in many protest movements among the young, putting the blame on those who cannot compete for being lazy and apathetic.

With the government on the one hand mainly supporting university graduates to start their own businesses, and the private companies mainly searching for trained employers with certain qualifications, the living conditions of the upper middle class youth differed radically from that of the lower class. Employment opportunities are the main claim to one's citizenship rights to

live a dignified life and be able to support oneself or one's family. With the privatization of many companies, and the emphasis on information technology, it is especially the "commodifiable qualities" that a person possesses that could help them find good employment. Accordingly,

"on the one hand, citizenship elements such as entitlements and benefits are increasingly associated with neoliberal criteria, so that mobile individuals who pose human capital or expertise are highly valued and can exercise citizenship like claims in diverse locations. Meanwhile, citizens who are judged not to have such tradable competence or potential become devalued and thus vulnerable to exclusionary practices" (Ong, 2006: 6-7).

Hence, the drive to poses more soft skills increased over the years. On the other hand, privatization and the support of medium and small enterprises resulted in a class difference, because the more educated youth could get a loan while the poorer ones became largely excluded. According to Al Ahram newspapers, 100 million Egyptian pounds were given as a loan to university students, excluding the uneducated-lower middle class (Al Ahram, 28/01/2000). Also in September 2000 recent graduates were promised to be trained to work in companies, banks and investment projects under the umbrella of Gamal Mubarak's Future Generation NGO (Al Ahram, 04/09/2000). Finally, in January 2000, Al Ahram announced that Dr. Ahmed Nazif, then Minister of Telecommunication, trained top university students to work in information technology (Al Ahram, 27/01/2000). The realities and life conditions of the youth are strongly determined by their class positions. According to the UNDP and INP 2010, "at least 90% of the unemployed in Egypt are youth" (Survey of Young people in Egypt, 2010: 95). Throughout the privatization of public companies, the government could neither regulate nor afford the employment of the majority of the young people, and with that the perception of youth as a problem remained.

### 3. The Rise of Protests

In 2008 and 2010 medium and small enterprises and privatized companies became the channel for the government to create job opportunities for the youth. During these years governmental officials also started to call on NGOs (Al Ahram, 09/07/2008) and political parties (Al Ahram, 13/08/2008) to help finding ways to solve the unemployment problem in Egypt. Unemployment added to the appearance of protest movements since 2008 and while additionally many workers protests' demanding better working conditions. The most famous were the Mahala protests at the Mahala textile factories north of Cairo. This incident pushed some youth to call on the Egyptian population as a whole to join the protests on 6<sup>th</sup> of April 2008, which later developed into the "6<sup>th</sup> of April youth movement". Many protests movements started therefore to develop out of the unsatisfactory economic liberalization conditions; "the threat of dismissal resulted in lower wages. The owners (of private companies) did not respect most of the workers' legal rights, such as health care, annual bonuses, or limitations on working hours" resulting in the increase in protests (Clement, 2009:107).

Even though youth have been greatly excluded from the political sphere with their frustrating situation of not seeing a bright future, many young people developed forms of social movements, acting mainly as pressure groups on the government. According to the Survey of Young People in Egypt conducted by the Population Council, only 12.2% of their youth sample has a voting card. Fifty-three percent were assisted by the NDP, the former political party of Mubarak, to register their vote and only 16 % of people aged 18-29 have ever voted before (Survey of Young People in Egypt, 2010:142). The rest have been greatly excluded. Much literature addresses this issue and perceives it as problematic. According to the Egypt Human Development Report 2010, it is mainly the NDP that has most of the influence of anyone's political participation through a party, however, like all other parties they leave little room for youth to take an active role (Handoussa et.al., 2010:113). It is noticeable however that in 2004 the government started approaching the youth question differently by attempting to include them in the political sphere, but youth social movements such as the 6<sup>th</sup> of April movement, who challenged the regime, were harshly suppressed. In February 2004 the NDP started to find strategies to involve the youth by emphasizing the importance of having a national council for youth (Al Ahram 22/02/2004). Since 2004 youth's involvement in politics was linked to the many protests that took place during that year. These included demands to change the national electoral system to multicandidate presidential elections. Indeed in 2005 the constitution was amended and elections were held with many candidates beside Hosni Mubarak who supposedly more than 90% of the Egyptian population voted for as president. Nonetheless, protests continued at an accelerated pace since 2004 until the Revolution in 2011 (Clement, 2006). Many activists were detained during these years and movements such as Kefaya (2005) and the 6<sup>th</sup> of April (2008) moved their struggle to the grassroots. International pressure on Egypt not to violate human rights and allow political freedom to the citizens surfaced the Egypt Human Development Report in 2010. Al Ahram newspaper responded to the United Nations Report that appeared in 2010 on Egyptian youth. The national perspective on the criticism on youth involvement in politics was that parties are not big enough to attract enough youth. The Report also pointed out that youth involvement in politics should not be determined by taking the streets, but also on their ability to connect and talk freely on facebook and other virtual means. According to the article, 23% of youth also went to the elections in 2005 and were considered to have the final voice in the elections that were meant to be in 2011 before the Revolution. Finally, students were categorized as not able to understand much in politics which is why it is hard for them to participate in it (Al Ahram, 09/07/2010). In 2010 the National Youth Council hosted a conference for youth members of political groups to discuss their role as voters especially before the parliamentary elections (Al Ahramonline 04/07/2010). Fortunately the parliamentary elections were blatantly fraud with only 3 seats "gained" by the opposition. The persistent perspective of the government perceiving the young as "a problem" who are lazy, incapable and immature to understand politics, and hence



always in need of guidance became embodied in national discourses. Not only governmental agents but also scholars and activists looked at youth as the problem and proposed ways for their social integration.

#### 4. The Effect and Discourse on Youth's Everyday Interactions

As I mentioned earlier, national discourses and policy focused on youth from perspective of the economic productivity of youth. The main problems addressed were employment opportunities and the ability to make youth the driving force for the economic advancement. This pushed youth to become objects of neoliberal change rather than active agents of changing Egypt politically or economically. As Barbara Ibrahim et al. put it "youth as a social category is often used rhetorically to 'refer to these whom society wants to...reform or transform in its own image'" (Ibrahim et.al, 2000:161). It is especially within the academic literature that researchers argued about the exclusion from larger social order. Instead youth (mainly educated upper and upper middle class youth) were only integrated in as far as it concerned economic productivity; otherwise they were categorized as a group that faces many problems.

##### i. Academic Literature and Public Talk on Youth Problems

The scholarly literature on Egyptian youth explored different problems, ranging from marriage to religious extremism, to not finding something useful to do in their leisure time (Bayat, 2010; Survey of Young People in Egypt, 2010; Abdel-Latif et.al, 2010; Herrera, 2010, 2009, 2006; Sobhy, 2009; Dhillon et.al. 2009; Hassan et.al. 2008; Assaad et.al, 2007). In most of this literature, the Mubarak regime was presented as submitting to neoliberal and economic drives, using youth for their benefits without including them as a proactive social category. Since youth were to a great extent perceived as in need of guidance, they were considered children and not as a young social group embodying youthfulness, creativity, and desire for and ability to bring about change (Bayat, 2010). For example Amr Khaled, an influential Islamic preacher in the 1990s and early 2000s, declared in his first episode on *Sunnat Al Hayat* that he would use all forms of media to "wake youth up from their sleep" and to challenge and combat programs such as "Star Academy", "Super Star" and "Star Makers" and the role they play in corrupting Arab youth" (Sobhy, 2009:432).. Hence, a division developed between youth, the state, and the population at large; on the one hand youth constituted the biggest group that has to be used efficiently to manage and rule the city, and on the other hand, these youth were conceived as the problem in all aspects of life (employment, education, marriage, religious extremism, drug abuse, and in general being lazy and indifferent about their lives and Egypt in general). Only when they get married can youth decide their own path. This became predominantly the national perception of youth. According to Abdel-Latif et.al, "the youth of Egypt constitute about 60 percent of the

country's population, feel largely marginalized and would like to play a more influential part in the decision making process (Abdel-Latif et.al 2010:3). Thus not only do youth feel marginalized, they indeed were.

In conclusion, most of the "talk" about youth and how their involvement is being reported in the state owned newspapers of Al Ahram between the years of 2000 until 2011 was silencing young people, by referring to them as a third person, and hence, absent. Youth were mainly mentioned in relation to work, education, or how little youth were interested in or committed to anything, thus rendering them into "the problem of the nation". Indeed, the 1999 presidential decree 'to rename the Supreme Council of Youths (established in 1965) the Ministry of Youth and Sports, displaced official anxiety over the "youth problem". Their protection from political and moral ills had become a matter of "national security" (Bayat, 2010:42). Also, "increasing marginalization of young people due to their economic exclusion might explain their feelings towards losing control over their lives" (Abdel- Latif et.al.2010:37). According to Munoz, many young people as a result of social, political and economic exclusion during the last decades, pushed them to migrate. Youth indeed were not included in the decision making processes, and were not asked about their desires or dreams. According to Khalifa, "with little or no attention given to student's specific needs (...) (this) results in hordes of young Egyptian men and women with big dreams but lacking the skills, the knowledge base and the strength of character to fulfill them" (Khalifa, 1995:6). Thus, "from the viewpoint of young people, the state may seem to have little beyond rhetoric to offer during this era of structural adjustment and a shrinking public" (Ibrahim et.al 2000:164). In order to succeed, one had to go through training to add degrees to their CVs to be able to compete in the labor market. Like Althusser said, those who were more trained were more fit to enter the labor market as they were ready made to the job needs (Althusser, 1970). Not only did universities and curricula satisfy this by giving the students courses in certain fields, but the demand for soft skills escalated. Learning how to present oneself and one's topic, how to speak in public, how to write a CV, and hold a job interview, were popular demands among youth. Those who could acquire these skills, however, were usually the educated youth. The uneducated could be differently trained but as Alashanyk Ya Baladi (AYB) NGO shows, they also had to be trained on how to be punctual, present themselves, and be part of the labor market and civil society. With these trainings the gap between the rich and the poor only widened as those who were educated were more specialized, and had therefore better chances to enter the labor market. The uneducated poor on the other hand, remained as they are. Some NGOs focused on working with the poor, attempting to integrate them in the labor market by teaching them how to speak and behave to be "attractive" to employers. While this opened chances for many to enter the labor market, not having any special qualifications meant that people could be easily replaced any time. Now with the 25<sup>th</sup> of January Revolution it is still

questionable how these neoliberal structures which were so strongly integrated within the system and central to the “economic growth” can be adjusted or even eliminated if necessary.

### C. January- Youth as a Ticking Bomb

The Year 2011 started with a great Revolution sparked by youth. No one could have predicted that youth would be capable of driving this Revolution. According to many Egyptian activists and articles and reports I have read, no one saw the Revolution coming as a result of youth being fed up of oppression. Nevertheless, when looking at the state owned newspaper, Al Ahram, and Al Masry Al Youm<sup>3</sup>, and what they wrote about youth in the 25 days in 2011 before the Revolution, it becomes clear that youth were a ticking bomb about to explode. It is noticeable that youth have been politicized within these months, which was not the case before. According to Al Ahram newspapers, the trial of activists of the 6<sup>th</sup> of April youth movement who were detained got postponed (Al Ahram, 07/01/2011). After the bombing of a Coptic church in Alexandria January 1<sup>st</sup> 2011, Nadia Mansour wrote that youth were a ticking bomb because they have been manipulated by erroneous religious ideas, but still for her Egyptian youth in general did not pose any challenges (Al Ahram, 10/01/2011). According to Al Masry Al Youm, the youth wing of the NDP created a Facebook group to promote the idea of everyone being Egyptian and not classified by religion (Al Masry Al Youm, 04/01/2011). Youth also expressed their support and rage at events in Tunisia when Ben Ali was overthrown and had to flee the country. Also after some Egyptians imitated Ben Azzizi of Tunisia, who has put himself on fire and with that gave a spark to the Tunisian Revolution, according to Al Ahram newspapers, youth in Egypt have not watched the burning of people silently but instead announced their disagreements with such action (Al Ahram, 22/01/2011). Al Ahram however, changed its tone to talk about youth in politics as a source of hope that could bring about change, without questioning their political ideologies, motives, and aims. Morsy Atallah, for example, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January fully sympathized with the youth problems such as unemployment and sees the only solution for them in working hard (Al Ahram, 25/01/2011), neglecting the possible political drives of the youth on this day. Also on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January it was reported that the protests since Tuesday the 25<sup>th</sup> of January are youth demands of employment opportunities (Al Ahram, 27/01/2011), while they were driven by a bigger cause namely complete political change. Al Masry Al Youm on the other hand, often reported on youth demonstrations for national unity and in opposition to religious extremism (Al Masry Al Youm, 06/01/2011). It also reported on the preparation for the 25<sup>th</sup> of January protests (Al Masry Al Youm, 21/11/2011) while Al Ahram elected did not. In conclusion, even though the NDP had a youth wing, it never gave them a voice to participate in politics or in the social or economic spheres. Youth were mentioned only in the context that served the ideology of the NDP

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<sup>3</sup> Al Masry Al Youm is the most popular independent newspaper in Egypt

according to the articles written in Al Ahram newspapers. Al Masry Al Youm on the other hand, mentioned what was happening on the ground and that youth were calling for demonstrations.

Shortly before the Revolution and within the first days of the protests, the government shifted its discourse about youth in politics to serve the national ideologies of stability and national unity. Academic literature and public opinion mainly focused on the youth bulge that faces many problems such as marriage, education, drug abuse and the like. This exclusion led eventually to youth taking the streets on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January in demand of “change, freedom, and social justice”. The 18 days of the uprising are proof that youth are indeed active citizens who can claim for their rights. During these days, youth enforced their political participation to demand different needs and pose a new challenge to their inclusion in national strategies for change. Most important alternation during the 18 days of the Revolution is the change in the prevailing image of youth from being the problem to being the hope of the country.

### III. Chapter Three: Tahrir Square - The Rebirth of Youth

Throughout the course of the Revolution, the conception of youth as a social category has greatly changed. Contextualizing youth as being irresponsible, apathetic and to a great extent uninterested in anything let alone politics, challenged the idea of youthfulness and the added to the outbreak of this Revolution. During the 18 days of the Revolution, Tahrir Square was iconic in changing the perception of youth. According to my interviewees and Al Ahram Newspapers, young people have become the hope of the country once again. Being youthful and bringing about change also carries strong gendered and class connotations I will explain in this chapter. I will first lay out what Tahrir means to the general public and then discuss the discourse on youth during the 18 days of the Revolution.

#### A. Tahrir Square - Youth Imposing Social and Political Inclusion

Tahrir Square, which literally means the square of liberation or freedom, was the most important space in the development of the Egyptian Revolution in 2011. Even though Tahrir Square was not the only important square in the making of the Revolution, as opposed to those in Suez, Alexandria or other governorates in Egypt, Tahrir Square became synonymous to a successful Revolution. Statements such as “We must educate our children to become like young Egyptian people” (US President Barak Obama), “We must consider teaching the Egyptian Revolution in schools” (Britain’s Prime Minister David Cameron), or “For the first time we see

people make a Revolution and then clean the streets” (CNN). Shehab (2011) refers to the events that happened in Tahrir Square since the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2011 until the 11<sup>th</sup> of February 2011. It acquired its fame from the massive media coverage either locally or internationally. According to Sherif, a 26-year-old, Tahrir became an international symbol for fighting for one’s freedom, which makes him feel proud especially that it was an inspiration for the demonstrations in Spain.



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Similarly the ‘Occupy Wall Street’ signs like Tahrir Square were raised by demonstrators.

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<sup>4</sup> *Democracy Review. 2011. Photograph. Focus on Tahrir*



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For protestors in Egypt, Tahrir Square became “the home” for demanding their rights. Tahrir Square since the 25<sup>th</sup> came to signify a romanticized, utopian world. When people took the streets on the 25<sup>th</sup>, they demanded “Change, Freedom, Social Justice” and Tahrir was the space for the demonstrations (the Egyptian people) which granted the demonstrators their human rights. Tahrir most importantly gave youth the opportunity to become their own leaders, govern others, and bring assurance that they can generate change. The Egyptian youth which were once perceived as incapable of change, achievements, and lacking accountability, found their way to “maturity” and “responsibility” at Tahrir Square. To understand the notion of youth, I will thus analyze what Tahrir means to many interviewees and how Tahrir became the space for transformation of the Egyptian youth from being the problem to being the hope of the country.

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culture of resistance: from WikiLeaks to the Squares

## 1. Tahrir...The Perfect Way of Governance?

Every Revolution has a name and some agreed to call the Egyptian Revolution in 2011 the "White Revolution". "Egypt has set new standards for Revolutions worldwide. Egyptians, in fact, created a White Revolution. "A peaceful, clean, sincere, pure, and totally Egyptian Revolution" (Egypt Today, 2011:4). Also Pope Shenouda in Cairo saluted the **White** Youth Revolution (Al Ahram, 15/02/2011). To a great extent the Revolution was called a White Revolution because it is assumed that it was peacefully staged with presumably little violence over the course of the 18 days. Even though, Tahrir turned out to witness much violence, the Revolution still maintains the view that it was a "clean" one since it was built on the foundations of peacefulness. Looking back at the events of the 25<sup>th</sup> of January, it becomes clear that many demonstrators got arrested across Egypt and in Tahrir specifically. Also, during the 25<sup>th</sup> and the 28<sup>th</sup> of January, there were hundreds of martyrs during the war for freedom and many people were left injured during the clashes between the demonstrators and the police. Finally, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February marked a day of extreme violence when *Baltagya* or thugs of the Mubarak regime attacked the demonstrators at Tahrir to force them out of the square. In a forum on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2011 organized by the Supreme Council for Culture, Ahmed from Al Beheira, a protestor since the 25<sup>th</sup> of January, said that he and his friend had to prepare one day ahead for a war that will happen on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January. They prepared Molotov cocktails and placed them at important street corners where they might have to fight the police. They also prepared some shields to protect themselves from the police. He was one of the few protestors who said that the Revolution was a war and people had to be prepared for it. To Ahmed, we could not have made it through the 28<sup>th</sup> in a *silmyah* way, which means peacefully. To clarify this point, he gave the example of himself standing behind a tree on the 28<sup>th</sup> and throwing stones at the police who blocked Kasr El Nil Bridge. Next to him was a man who did not do anything and when he asked him to help, he did not respond. Suddenly this man left his hiding place from behind the tree and stood in front of the police to tell them that he does not want anything but to voice out his opinion. The police then shot him with rubber bullets and he fell dead. When Ahmed and the other demonstrators saw that, they got so angry and gained more courage and energy to fight back the police and they managed to finally break the police blockade of the bridge. What the story of Ahmed tells us is that indeed violence took place and the demonstrators fought with Molotov cocktails, stones, and other means to protect themselves. When we think of the Revolution, it is still referred to as a non-violent one, which is important in the revival of the youth as peaceful participants in the country. Tahrir, as the most important space of governance of the demonstrators during the 18 days of the Revolution, was portrayed as an ideal state of Egypt that people want to live in as created by Egyptian youth. Therefore, even though violence existed, the notion of Tahrir as the perfect space of living and governing people tamped the idea of violence.

Tahrir became the utopia where people from all classes, genders, religions, and ages managed to interact with each other.

According to all my interviewees, Tahrir was the focal point of all people from different religions, classes and genders. Tahrir provided a space where information could flow fast and people had a high level of awareness concerning what was going on. Thus, people walked around assuring others that the state security were present in the Square dressed in civil clothes and that the demonstrators should be aware that they could cause unrest by making demonstrators clash with each other. Also, in terms of logistical organization, there were demonstrators who volunteered to secure entrances of the Square by physically searching the people at checkpoints to prevent the police or armed people from entering. A hospital was also constructed in the heart of Tahrir for the injured and food donations were available for those “living” in the Square and free water was distributed. Tahrir had its rules that came as a result of the overall awareness and what the media used to say about Tahrir. So it was clear that men shall not harass women, no one chanted the names of political parties or ideologies of certain groups and if that happened, many demonstrators quickly silenced them. In terms of demands, it was clear for the demonstrators that they will not leave until Mubarak left his post as president.

In trying to maintain the purity and beauty of what Tahrir was capable of achieving, all interviewees agreed that all people were equally represented. Hosni, a 31-year-old Muslim who works as a secretary at a governmental institute and went to Tahrir a couple of times, said, “all classes were present at Tahrir since the 25<sup>th</sup>. They were one hand as they say. So everyone who could help did. They got food and drinks with them. Even people who stood there in balconies helped. They would throw stuff to us like water, onions, etc. So we were all one as they say.” (Hosni, Mai 2011). The idea of “all being one hand” is so central in the Revolution and the ability of unifying Egyptians with their different views and ideologies. Also, for Samar, a 22-year-old Christian who works in a human rights organization and participated in the demonstrations since the 25<sup>th</sup> of January, Tahrir managed to incorporate all people. Some couples even got married there, which she perceived as brilliant “because they (the married couples) showed that people want to live a normal life and get back to it. So they got the message across that we (the people) can all continue living and do not need to wait for people to leave Tahrir” (Samar, Mai 2011). The governance of Tahrir in terms of living conditions was perceived as a perfect setting. People got married there, ate, slept, and most importantly, were able to state their opinions clearly and loudly with no fear. Tahrir as the symbol for purity and perfect governance was very important in changing perceptions of the youth from being the problem to being the hope. By managing and governing Tahrir, the youth of Egypt developed into being the hope and future of Egypt.



## 2. Youth Created Tahrir

And who created Tahrir? It was the youth who initiated the demonstrations on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January and ruled Tahrir to a great extent. They secured the entrances, men and women stood close to each other to make human shields as pavements so that people could walk in certain directions in a disciplined way and distribute food and water. Coalitions and youth groups met at night to discuss the next steps and how to deal with each new challenging situation. According to Noha, a 29-year-old who works at the license section of a governmental institute, there were a lot of young people who organized the streets and overall “there was a lot of organization. There were no cars and people regulated traffic. I was afraid to go to Tahrir but when I went I felt more secure” (Noha, April, 2011)., Also, for Rana, a 25-year-old secretary at a governmental institute, she was afraid to go to Tahrir because of the ‘*baltagia* that reside at Tahrir’ which she learned on national TV; but when she went, she felt “that these (youth at Tahrir) are those that can change the country” (Rana, April, 2011). Even though some romantic notions were associated with Tahrir, it was a very exceptional space within the 18 days precisely because of the way demonstrators governed the space, negotiated with different political forces, and how they expressed who they want to be, their desires and dreams, pains and frustrations and finally being able to speak out after being silenced for so long. But for the purpose of this research, Tahrir played another very important role in the lives of youth perception in Egypt. According to my interviewees, the perceptions of youth as the hope of the country varied greatly depending on their class, religion, and sex.

### B. Youth Participation in Tahrir

Youth as a social group started to transform from being the problem to being the change agents. The image of these youth has strong masculine connotations. Even though women were at Tahrir, the image of those who could bring about change was gendered, whereby notions of manhood and responsibility were central in the war for freedom. Similarly class played an important role in the imaginary of my interviewees and the newspapers in defining who can bring about change. Mainly upper middle class youth were celebrated as the heroes who started the Revolution and gave the spark to it. The lower middle class was given credit for joining the demonstrations at a later stage and leading to its success.

#### 1. Having to Know the Demands

Depending strongly on the motive of the person going to Tahrir, participants in my research classified them as activists and demonstrators or visitors who were only curious about

what was going on in Tahrir. Even though everyone could go to Tahrir, many of my interviewees were frustrated at youth and others who went to Tahrir to have a drink, out of curiosity to see what Tahrir was like, or to hit on women or vice versa. Sherif, for example, a 26-year-old Muslim who works at a governmental institute after finishing his Bachelors Degree in Economics at the American University in Cairo, had to mocked rumors he heard that women go to Tahrir to find a suitor. He also heard that men go there to hit on women. He was shocked that some demonstrators sleep at Tahrir and suffered in the struggle of freeing Egypt, while others go to Tahrir to find a partner or have fun. He believes that Tahrir was turned into a “cultural outing” and where festivals could be held (after ousting President Hosni Mubarak) (Sherif, May 2011). Sherif like many of my interviewees is strongly critical about not being serious about the real motives for going to Tahrir. To him, at first protestors went with clear demands and later on many like himself went out of curiosity or because it was “cool” to go to Tahrir. Also for Abdo, a 30-year-old who works as a secretary in a private company and did not join any demonstrations during the 18 days, compared the demonstrators with the audience at a concert by Amr Diab, a famous pop singer in Egypt. To him the majority who went to Tahrir were not those who carried out the demonstrations but rather were those who went to watch. “Only a few participated in the Revolution while the majority watched as is the case in a concert where the majority claps” (Abdo, May, 2011).

The purity of the protestors, their demands, their actions, and their vision in the fight was central in the understanding of which youth went to Tahrir. Heroes have a very clear goal and have a clear understanding of what they are fighting for, so also the youth at Tahrir to be heroic meant they had to be serious, but most of all be educated in articulating the demands they made for. Hence, in analyzing who were the youth who went to Tahrir during the 18 days according to my interviewees, it becomes clear that class was a very important factor in the imaginary of a young person that could bring about change as they are to a great extent educated and organized. Hence, heroic youth who made Tahrir were strongly related to the image of middle class, educated, decent looking men. For Noha, for example who saw pictures of martyrs on the streets over the 18 days believes that these were not martyrs or the youth of the Revolution (*Shabab EL Tahrir*).

“They looked as if they just came out of prison. They are not looking like demonstrators or people who love their country. I got the feeling they are youth who went out to steel and then died. The look (of the ones in the pictures) says it all. They have a scary look on their face. If they would pass by you on the street, you will get the feeling they are *baltagya*.” (Noha, April, 2011).

Noha, who did not join any demonstrations, could not further describe how a young demonstrator who goes to Tahrir should look like, but as it stands, for Noha, in line with the idea of purity of those who demonstrated at Tahrir, the young people who went there should look “decent”. In

addition to this for most of my informants to go to Tahrir one is expected to know the demands and be serious about how to transform Egypt. This requires a good sense of organization and gathering information which was rather ascribed to the educated upper middle class. Amr, a 25-year-old who works as an engineer at a private company and went to Tahrir since the 25<sup>th</sup> of January, believes that those who went first to Tahrir were from the upper middle class.

“ (...) someone that is dressed nicely and goes on the street to chant without the usage of swear words while focusing on his<sup>6</sup> freedom. I saw some in the demonstrations where I felt they have nothing to do with the Revolution; like some looking at women and just going for fun. Someone who is exposed and somehow educated. Someone who saw people abroad and understands things. Someone who understands basic human rights” (Amr, April, 2011).

Also, Maissa, a 27-year-old who works as a kindergarten teacher at a private institute, believes that one can discern class distinction from the way a person talks. For her, educated youth are those that know how to talk and are those that went first to Tahrir (Maissa, May, 2011). This assumption that mainly the youth from the upper middle class went first is strongly related to the fact that this Revolution started through Facebook groups that managed to mobilize the youth.

Many called the 25<sup>th</sup> of January Revolution the “Facebook Revolution” as the mobilization happened mainly through Facebook and especially through the famous Facebook group *Kolena Khaled Said*<sup>7</sup> (We are All Khaled Said). For many of my interviewees it became a youth Revolution as they are the ones who use the internet. Tamer, a 32-year-old secretary at a governmental institute who went once to Tahrir during the 18 days of the Revolution, believes that it was a youth Revolution because they are the ones who have access to the internet and Facebook. According to many participants in this research, the upper middle classes were the first to demonstrate as they have access to the internet and could have an account on Facebook. That the “Facebook” youth would wake up and demonstrate for their freedom surprised many of my interviewees, especially as the government used to conceive youth as uninterested in any change. There was also a strong correlation between youth using the internet to watch pornography or play games while depoliticizing them. According to Mariham

“the first people who started the demonstrations are youth from Facebook who got to know each other through the internet. They are the ones who are well educated. The government thought that the ones who would demonstrate, however, can only be from the poor who cannot live. So this was new that the Revolution does not come from the poor and hungry but from educated who are upset. (...) The old regime did not see this coming as they were all old and do not know anything about the internet. (...) They (the NDP) thought the youth only sit on the net to chat or watch sex movies and really everyone thought so” (Mariham, May, 2011).

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<sup>6</sup> Many interviewees spoke about the youth in Tahrir in the masculine form as I will analyze later

<sup>7</sup> Khaled Said was tortured to death by the police before the Revolution. In honor of him some activists created the group Kolena Khaled Said (We are All Khaled Said) to protest against police violence.

Moreover, for Ahmed, a 25-year-old janitor at a governmental institute told me how surprised he was that upper middle class youth who use the internet could take the streets. According to him, “they (people in general) even made jokes about them (the youth who started the demonstrations) that Susu and Tutu (Egyptian names to refer to spoiled kids) who have nothing to do with politics and their parents give them money to play on the streets (take the streets)” (Ahmed, April, 2011). Furthermore, for Oma, a 24-year-old engineer who is working at a private company, confirmed that the youth who went to Tahrir on the 25<sup>th</sup> were the Facebook youth, who were expected to have no clue as they are from the upper-middle class (Omar, May, 2011). Facebook was either known to be used by political movements such as the 6<sup>th</sup> of April, or had a reputation of “corrupting” the youth. According to Linda Herrera shortly before the 2010 parliamentary elections, “they (adult pundits) expressed their paternalistic concern about the potentially corrupting force of Facebook on the youth in a familiar moral panic mode. On her popular television talk show, for instance, Hala Sarhan lamented the lawlessness of Facebook, asserting it to be a dangerously free zone in need of restrictions” (Herrera, 2011 “Egypt’s Revolution 2.0: The Facebook Factor.”). In alliance with the governmental perspective about the upper-middle class and “Facebook youth” as having no idea of what is going in real life and hence shall not be trusted, many informants as Mariham believed that the youth who use internet only do so for sexual reasons or to kill time. According to Abdelwahab Hamed, a columnist in Al Ahram Newspaper,

“Egyptian youth are fine. Listen to them as they represent half of the present and all of the future. The current events (the Revolution) falsify the repetitive saying that there is no hope in the internet youth and those of Facebook. But instead it shows that most of the Egyptian youth who drank from its Nile are holding on to the Egyptian values” (Al Ahram, 01/02/2011).

That Tahrir and the Revolution were started by the upper middle class youth according to most of my interviewees, gives a new understanding of youth from being apathetic, uninterested and spoiled to unexpectedly being patriotic who indeed cared about freedom and social justice.

Even though it is assumed that the upper middle class youth started the demonstrations, the notion that they are spoiled and could not fight the police is fundamental. Henceforth, for many, only with the help of the lower middle class was the Revolution a success. According to Abdo, for instance, who is a 30-year-old who obtained a business diploma and is currently working in administrative affairs at a public sector of low income, the upper-middle class youth who went to Tahrir

“could not do a demonstration without the Muslim Brotherhood and especially the class that was there (at Tahrir). The upper middle class who has some money, their purpose in life is so different than ours. He (one from the upper-middle class) might be upset that a police would stop him and look at his car, etc.. These are things he (the upper-middle class man) would be upset with but I would not be upset of these things” (Abdo, May, 2011).

There is thus the clear discrepancy between the rich and poorer youth. Youth from the upper-middle class have more privileges as opposed to the poor but are not so rough to take the fight on the street. The lower-middle classes, on the other hand, have seen so many bad experiences and police encounters which makes them resistant to the violence of the police and unjust behavior. In this context, many referred to “the Muslim Brotherhood as the backbone of the Revolution” (Abdo, May, 2011), which could have never succeeded without them as they are experienced in being detained and fighting security forces for years. Yet also for Abdo, the Muslim Brotherhood are from the lower middle classes and are tough enough to resist. While most of my interviewees agreed that the upper middle class went first and the lower middle classes joined later, many like Maissa questioned why the middle upper classes went to Tahrir “because these people have the means and the money” (Maissa, May, 2011). Yet she was surprised that the educated youth went to Tahrir and that they were insisting on either living a good life or dying. In contrast, many interviewees believed that the lower middle class people, who have much less to lose and are able to withstand the toughness of sleeping on the streets in Tahrir, were the ones who maintained the 18 days of struggle until Mubarak resigned.

The lower middle class who were tough enough to sleep in Tahrir and protest throughout the 18 days were assumed by some informants to be unemployed, or only staying at Tahrir because they have nothing better to do. Comparing the educated upper class to the lower uneducated one, Martha Revolution believed that at the beginning of the Revolution there were demonstrators “but then the others came to put up their tents and started settling there. They have nothing to do so they are sitting there. For them Tahrir was an outing each Friday” (Martha, May/2011). Also for Ahmed, a 25-year-old janitor at a governmental institute who did not go to Tahrir, “there (before the 25<sup>th</sup> of January) were so many unemployed and youth were sitting in cafes in the morning so since they have nothing better to do they just go to Tahrir to demonstrate.” (Ahmed, April, 2011).

For many interviewees, two types of people were present during the 18 days of the Revolution. Either the tough but unemployed lower middle class or the upper middle class youth whose parents financially support them and hence have no commitments. For the latter group this also meant for some interviewees that they are not in touch with real life and hence incapable of bringing about change. Islam, who is a 28-year-old driver, said that he could not go to Tahrir as he had to work in order to make a living. As a driver he makes money on daily basis and hence could not afford going to Tahrir. To him, “youth who went to Tahrir were happy (meaning well off). They get money from Mama and Papa and can afford going there. They are from the upper class so they are satisfied” (Islam, May, 2011). To Ali, who also works as a driver, “If I had the money that would cover me for a week then I would take the streets but I unfortunately don’t, so the day I do not work has a very bad effect on us (his family). So unfortunately I could not protest but my heart was with the protestors” (Ali, May, 2011). Moreover, for Ahmed, who earns his income on

daily basis, "If I would not have saved money at home, we would not have been able to eat during the 18 days. We used to stay in line in front of the bakery and pay EGP 5 for bread, potatoes and vegetables. I get paid on daily basis so the situation was horrible" (Ahmed, April, 2011). Indeed the demands of protesters at Tahrir differed according to class because of wages. For Amr, who participated in the demonstrations since the 25<sup>th</sup>, "The main drive to take the streets is to get back our human dignity. I did not think of the minimum wage as I get enough money" (Amr, April, 2011).

## 2. Christians and Muslims

In terms of the presence of Christians and Muslims during the 18 days of the uprising, it was stated by most informants that all were equally present, emphasizing the spirit of unification that is related to Tahrir. According to Hosni, "(during the demonstrations) there were both Muslims and Christians and we were all siblings and one hand. On the 28<sup>th</sup> there was a Christian next to me and we were all caring for each other. Also when we used to pray, they (the Christians) used to protect us and the opposite is also true. So we used to take care of each other" (Hosni, May, 2011). Yet, according to Noha on the 25<sup>th</sup> "there were few Christians because they were told not to participate. And then after the burning of the church you felt them stronger. They were asked not to go of course because Hosni (Mubarak) was their love and gave them all their rights and so on. So why would they hate him?" (Noha, April, 2011). For Alia, a 28-year-old Muslim woman who did not join the demonstrations, the only thing that upset her was that Christians were told not to take to the street so she was sure that only few if any Christians went on the 25<sup>th</sup>; for Alia this was disappointing, since all are Egyptians and should fight for change. "We are all in the same country so they (the Christians) should have started thinking and not just go by what people (Pope Shenouda) tell them. (...) So I was upset that mainly Muslims went yet it is not a Muslim Revolution. So when they (Christians) started going on the 28<sup>th</sup> I was very happy" (Alia, May, 2011). The ongoing tension between Muslims and Christians was another fundamental issue at Tahrir that the youth who brought about this Revolution tried to supersede. Even though for some informants Christians were not present at all times as Muslims, they eventually joined the protests to demand freedom and social justice.

In terms of participation, some informants of my research believed that the demands of freedom differed depending on the level of religiosity. Amr, for example, has a friend who is a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. His friend joined the demonstrations during the 18 days to demand the Muslim Brotherhood's freedom for political participation. Another friend of his who is not "religious" demanded a different kind of freedom of not having religion stated on the national ID. In a nutshell, Amr stated, "some Muslim Brotherhood youth feel there should be more religious enforcement and for others there should be more bars" (Amr, April, 2011). Not only the

demands at Tahrir but also the experience of the 18 days of the uprising differed greatly for the Christian and Muslim participants of my research. Peter, a 31-year-old Christian, only went to demonstrations at Maspero after the Church at Soul Village was burned down. He did not go to Tahrir and only to Maspero, which became a symbolic site for protests demonstrating Christian causes. He added, "because we (the Christians) want the country to change. Now there is freedom" (Peter, May, 2011). Christians and Muslims according to some interviewees demanded freedom, yet this freedom meant different things for each of them. In that respect, Tahrir as it was governed by the youth, had to overlook the idea of religion while there was only one cause which was personal freedom that every protestor demanded. During the 18 days of the uprising no religious or ideological signs or slogans were allowed to be chanted or posted as protestors maintained freedom of religious identity. The cause of freedom had to precede all ideological slogans and the youth were the guardians of that freedom.

### 3. Men Versus Women's Activism and Presence at Tahrir

Most informants of this research talked about the demonstrators in a masculine form. While most of them stressed that all people including men and women were equally present during the demonstrations, Rana believes that "men more than women have brought about the change" (Rana, April, 2011). For many to maintain the purity of the demonstrations and the idealistic intentions, many referred to the "heroic men". Noha, a 29-year-old woman who earned a diploma and is working at the license sector of a public institution stated, "The man (who went to Tahrir) was free in nature and has a strong courageous heart. He would not agree to injustice" (Noha, April, 2011). The idea of being fearless, courageous, full of motivation and having a clear direction, is a common understanding of the characteristics of the youth who went to Tahrir. The patriarchal nature of the Egyptian society could be felt in answers interviewees gave regarding whom they expect capable of bringing about change. Mariham, a 31-year-old kindergarten teacher, informed me that her sister who was supporting the ongoing protests at Tahrir told her that, "if she would not have had a child she would have gone to Tahrir" (Mariham, May, 2011). In the mean time, Mariham's sister expected her husband to go to the protests and at times was threatening him to lock him out of the house if he did not go. Mariham also told me that her sister used to imitate an interview with her daughter at which "she would surely make a male's voice and say I do not like the countries' condition and have to feed so many people and the school expenses are too high, etc..." (Mariham, May, 2011). For Mariham's sister it was very natural and clear that men rather than women would go to Tahrir as they were always present in the public sphere. Also for her, men are responsible for the household in terms of financially supporting the family, men would take the streets as they are upset of the injustice they were feeling. Finally, since men are the ones who cannot get married it was men that took to the streets. Thus, for Heba, a 25-year-old who works as a janitor at a public institute and never participated in a

demonstration before, the main demands at Tahrir were “better living conditions. Better salaries, men cannot marry with EGP 150 a month. If one works in a government place how much will they get? EGP 300 and what will they do with it. The main thing they wanted is better salaries not other things” (Heba, April, 2011). Because of the patriarchal nature of the Egyptian society, women had an effect in motivating men to take the streets and fight for freedom. Amr, for example, told me that during the march on the 28<sup>th</sup> towards Tahrir, a woman who kept on chanting motivated him very much precisely because she was a woman and so energetic (Amr, April, 2011). Also, according to Tamer “I found out two days before the 25<sup>th</sup> by watching a video about it (the call to protest) by Asmaa Mahfouz (an activist at the 6<sup>th</sup> of April Youth Movement). I felt we should really go down. Especially since a woman said that and will go” (Tamer, May, 2011). Furthermore, Noha claimed that, “It made sense that women do not go (to Tahrir) because there are *Baltagyah* and it is dangerous and difficult to sleep there” (Alia, May, 2011). The man as the protector of women and society is strongly attached to the notion of freedom and protests at Tahrir. Not one of the interviewees mentioned women protecting the houses during the 18 days through *legan shabyaa*, and it was taken for granted that men would take the streets. Noha, for example, was not allowed by her husband to go to Tahrir, even though she really wanted to go. Even her parents-in-law were surprised that she wanted to demonstrate. So she had to stay at home, while her husband protected the house with the neighborhood militias (Noha, April, 2011).

Some activities indeed resulted in excluding women such as the activists meeting after midnight when the square was calm and they could discuss what to do next. Yet this meant excluding especially women who could not sleep there or people who wanted to be home before the imposed national curfew, which was imposed by the army at that time (at around 6 pm). On a personal account, when I went once with my friend to the square to talk to activists and how we can help, they told us that they meet at 12 am. When we told them that we will not be able to stay that long at Tahrir and this in fact means excluding many people, these activists stated that they can only do these meetings when Tahrir was silent and all the people who come to look at Tahrir out of curiosity were gone. Omar, a 24-year-old engineer at a private company who did not demonstrate, believes that maybe at night there were more men than women since women could not sleep there. The notion of bringing about change was thus strongly gendered and attached to a very masculine form of being courageous. Rana felt that during the 18 days there were real men. She could have never expected the Egyptian youth

“who are only concerned about themselves, their hair and the latest fashion, but then I realized that they are men. They are tall and I feel that they are really men not as we expected. I felt there (at Tahrir) were less women and more men. I felt that men are really men who are not afraid but women could be....men have the courage to do that (take the streets) and so they are really men. So men who went there can be so proud of themselves” (Rana, April, 2011).



For many interviewees having the courage to take the streets and bringing about change was strongly gendered.

### C. Conclusion

While in the past the Mubarak government focused on youth as being the problem who are not employed, cannot afford marriage, youth became a burden on society. The young Egyptian person was believed to be apathetic, selfish, and could never bring about change. Yet during the 18 days of the Revolution, youth were transformed into the hope of the country. This transformation took place because it was mainly youth who took the streets on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January and secondly they were the main actors at Tahrir during the 18 days in terms of organizing and governing the square. In hope of the young people to bring about change, Tahrir represented for many informants a pure idyllic space that could incorporate people from all classes, religions and sexes. Yet on a closer look to what Tahrir Square meant to many informants it revealed itself that the young person who occupied Tahrir and brought about change was imagined and constructed as male, upper middle class person. Applying Foucault's notion of subject creation, the everyday experience of Egyptian youth made them imagine change in a masculine, upper middle class form. Being a patriarchal society, power structures define the everyday experiences of men and women. According to Foucault "power exists only as exercised by some over others that underpins a permanent structure" (Foucault, 2006:340). Power structures can thus be felt in the everyday experience and not necessarily by consent of one over the other. Indeed, the Egyptian police force, for example, which are only males, makes it more "feasible" for men to protest and fight against them than women. The inherent difference between men and women in their everyday life is defined by the social structures. Thus, not only the police force is only males but also politicians and generally the public space is mainly occupied by more men than women. Therefore, who drives change and "does" politics are mainly men. Coupling the social structures with its underlying power relations with Bourdieu's notion of habitus, the Egyptian society at large has "learned" that rather men are present in the public space and can bring about change. Not only the predominant presence of men in the Revolution is defined by the habitus but it also explains the imagination of most informants of my research of the upper middle class person to be the one who protested at Tahrir. With neoliberal drives, gated communities and the glorification of the upper middle class on the expense of the lower middle one, the social system is formed in a way to evaluate people on appearances and "trust" the decent looking, upper middle class person more than the one from the lower class. Especially with neoliberal policies and the widening gap between the rich and the poor, the Egyptian society learned to see the poor as dangerous to the rich; henceforth within the last years several compounds have been built in Egypt (Denis, 2006). The habitus in perceiving the poor as dangerous, uneducated, and not

decent prevailed over the perception of who could bring about change in Egypt, Hence, it was assumed that most people who went to Tahrir were young men, responsible, organized, and decent looking. But as the hope of the country, the overall idea is that the youth at Tahrir could supersede what was not possible before, namely class differentiation, men and women being at the same place on equal terms, and Christians and Muslims acting in alliance. During the 18 days, therefore, young people became the hope and change agents of Egypt. This flame of glorifying youth however did not maintain long after the 18 days of the uprising and new challenges have developed while integrating the youth as the change agents. During the 18 days the young people have achieved a very fundamental and irreversible change, namely that they can indeed bring about change, how that looks like and what kind of change is still a challenge that will be discussed in the following chapter.

## IV. Chapter Four: After the 18 Days of the Uprising

Revolutions per se are a very inspiring period. With Revolutions come change and change means hope for a better future. With the youth Revolution in Egypt, especially the youth got affected by it. Now after the ousting of Mubarak, youth became the hope of the country who can bring about economical, political and social change. A generation develops a common consciousness and understanding about the world to bring about the change they hope for. According to Jose Ortega Gasset “a generation is a dynamic compromise between mass and individual, and is the most important conception in history. It is so to speak, the pivot responsible for the movement of historical evolution” (Gasset, 1974:3). Not every generation can bring about change. According to Gasset,

“Life (...) for each generation is a task in two dimensions, one of which consists in the reception, through the agency of the previous generation, of what has had life already, e.g. ideas, values, institutions and so on, while the other is the liberation of the creative genius inherent in the generation concerned” (Gasser, 1974:4).

Therefore, either the young generation submits to the rule of the older generation or they confront these and try to change them which Gasser called periods that “belong to the young and are years of innovation and creative struggle (...)” (Gasset, 1974:5). Egyptian youth are now as such a historical structure, and the struggle over power and change with the older generation is evident. Youth for the first time began to organize themselves through various means such as politics and art in order to contest the old structures. The new generation, the 25<sup>th</sup> of January generation, have some common world view which makes them one generation that can bring about change or submit to the rule of the older generation. We have come to a very critical

political situation at which the struggle over the “old” versus “new” powers is challenged. Both the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) and the Islamists are forces that have been present since the past and with their “stable” internal structures use old methods of “doing” politics compared to the newly emerging youth sector. SCAF and the Islamists especially the Freedom and Justice Party, the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood use political maneuvers, while youth are pushing for Revolutionary ones<sup>8</sup>. The clashes between youth and the SCAF at Mohamed Mahmoud Street in November 2011 and the start of the parliamentary elections at the very same month have surfaced the generational conflict over power. The old powers pushed for the conventional means of doing the parliamentary elections, while some youth at Tahrir preferred boycotting the elections after many young people were detained and died when the SCAF pushed protesters out of Tahrir in (since) March. The Revolutionary way would entail just court laws for all those responsible over the years and the necessity of including the Revolutionary force, in this case–youth. However, it is evident from the parliamentary elections that only a small number of youth have obtained seats in the parliament. The imagination of the collective in the role of political actors in society, as Foucault proposed, is a main hindrance to the emerging of new powers. The old powers have influenced the population through the media and public talks that conventional forms of power are preferable in the name of stability. The conventional means of electing the parliament on the regulations of the 1952 Revolution, the socialist Revolution that should have brought about equality to the workers and farmers, with 50% of the seats in parliament having to be taken by workers and farmers, is a clear loss to the Youth Revolution. The habitus of the population at large, to accept the “old” status quo is challenging new forms of youth inclusion in the political space. New forms of interpreting politics and the everyday life are fundamental in a new social inclusion of youth. Probably only a blend in the ideologies to bring about change between the old and new generation will be a possibility for the inclusion of the new generation. Young people will have to learn to mobilize and negotiate power with the old “generation” to create a new system to change the youth’s experience from being a social burden to being prominent players in the political sphere.

## A. The Youth Generation

According to Karl Mannheim, a generation does not only consist of people of the same age, but also similar historical and social experiences are fundamental in making them one generation. “Individuals of the same age, they were and are (...) only united as an actual generation in so far as they participate in the characteristic social and intellectual currents of their society and period, and in so far as they have an active or passive experience of the interactions of forces which made up the new situation” (Mannheim, 1974:8). He further claims that even

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<sup>8</sup> This thought was inspired by Emad Sayed Ahmed in January 2012

though a generation could have common historical and social experiences, subgroups of this generation experience and interact with their surroundings differently. He calls them generational units. In his view to be part of a certain generation, the individual does not only accept the ideas, values, and actions of this generation, but more importantly “see(s) things from its (the generation’s) particular “aspect”” (Mannheim, 1974:11). A common understanding of problems, social issues, and historical moments has developed into a generational consciousness that enabled youth in Egypt to act in accordance with each other to demand “freedom, justice, and social change” on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January. The common historical understanding, as I have shown in chapter two, includes how youth have been treated during Gamal Abdel Nasser’s era as the hope of the country which slowly started to change into them being the problem during Anwar Sadat’s and Hosni Mubarak’s regimes. Having youth being viewed as the problem during the last couple of decades, youth in Egypt had very similar experiences of being excluded from the political platform, while most of the young generation experienced problems in finding a job, a marital partner, or in affording a good education. Injustice was a common experience for most youth in the public space either by being harassed by the police on the streets, or women being verbally or physically harassed by men, or teachers and professors harassing students in the classrooms of schools and universities. The young Egyptian person before the 25<sup>th</sup> of January has been conceived by society in general as a burden. Yet also two very fundamental issues have played a role in the generational consciousness of the Egyptian youth; namely the influence and guidance of the parents and the development discourse in empowering youth. There are two fundamental influences on this generational consciousness; the influence of parents and the development discourse. On the one hand, youth’s financial dependence on their families is a hindrance for their political participation. During the dictatorial Mubarak regime, parents feared their children would be harmed by the regime if they participated in politics. This left the participation of youth only feasible through civic participation. Development discourse in the last couple of years and especially with the Millennium Development Goals encourages youth participation. Yet many NGOs rather accept the status quo than challenge it making structural political change rather impossible. According to Foucault, subjects are created through relations and their everyday lives which already include suppressive power interactions. Thus, the Mubarak regime already excluded youth from political participation and seemed to empower them through the development discourse and the implementation of neoliberal policies. However, most NGOs were rather submitting to the status quo to make youth believe they are subjects of change, while they were objects of the development discourse. The everyday experience of the young person as a burden hence was not influenced by the development discourse, and the habitus of political exclusion kept on being emphasized. Adopting Althusser’s idea, the family and the NGOs were two main institutions that the state used as an apparatus to silence the youth and exclude them from structural political change,

## 1. Parent's Influence on Youth

The nuclear family in Egypt has a very strong influence on youth. Until an advanced age, or usually until young men and women get married, youth in Egypt live with their parents. Consequently parents provide food, shelter, and other living expenses even if their children work and have their own income. Youth are financially dependent on their parents since the range of salaries for recent graduates is generally low. "Given the lack or inadequacy of government programs for unemployment compensation, health insurance, and retirement benefits, most people must look to their families for those assurances" (Joseph, 1994:197). Suad Joseph also points out that many families in the Arab World often find jobs through their families or by entering in family businesses making "the family as primary source of economic security" (Joseph, 1994:197). This carries many implications to youth and as Joseph argues to women in specific (women thus sometimes do not inherit at all to remain connected to the family in case of divorce). The dependence on family usually affects youth in all major decisions in their life transitions; their choices of their universities, specializations, spouses, professions, etc... Consequently, parents often decide or at least try to influence youth's lives including their social participation and political exclusion. Joseph further argues that "family provides a person with his or her basic political network: family contacts are usually the starting place if one needs access o a government agency" (Joseph, 1994: 198). Thus, when youth fall in political trouble, they usually have to resort to family connections to get them out of prison (if they got detained for no criminal act) or use their support in the most basic governmental services (getting driving license, paying for car fees, etc... According to Ibrahim et.al. "they (youth) desired change, but articulated a sense that almost all opportunities for progress appeared closed. Adult-run NGOs did not include them, families were placed in which elders dictated to the young, and political expression, even internet use and writing blogs could lead to arrest and incarceration" (Ibrahim et.al., 2011:20). While young people might search for new ways of living, "a strong sense of connectedness keeps them within limits, out of fear that adopting new behavior puts that social network at risk. Thus young people may question tradition, negotiate their position within boundaries, but eventually function within it" (Ibrahim & Wassef, 2000: 165). Young people are "caught between worlds" (Ibrahim & Wassef 2000). There is a drive for the young person to "set free" and be independent of their families and take his own decisions, but the "prize" and uncertainty makes this a difficult decision. Indeed, this also affects youth's perception of change as many eventually submit to their families' will and believe that they are safer in taking the conventional way of not participating in politics. On the other hand, youth being exposed to the internet and other means, develop a different consciousness and understanding of the world and that make them resistant to their families' suggestions and pressures. According to those participants of my research who protested, many did not tell their parents that they will join the demonstrations. Thus youth develop a different

consciousness and ways of their political and social inclusion that fit the tension between their families' wishes and their own hopes, dreams and desires.

Most of the informants of this research reported having problems with their parents because they wanted to demonstrate; some of which did not tell their parents in the first place that they intend to join the protests in order to avoid problems. Amr, for instance, a 25-year-old engineer who studied Engineering at a private university and is currently working in a private company, demonstrates a very interesting case of conflict with his parents. His mother used to be an active member of the National Democratic Party (NDP), the former ruling party, until it was dissolved after the fall of the Mubarak regime. When Amr went to the demonstrations on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January he did not tell his parents. He was detained on that day but managed to escape and on the 28<sup>th</sup> he was even more eager to fight for his freedom. His parents had very contradictory reactions to his actions once they found out. While his father did not welcome his actions in the beginning for fear he could be detained, his mother completely disapproved of his actions and at times would insult him and the protestors at Tahrir calling them traitors and irresponsible. Without much argument, his mother continued her activities with the other former NDP members, while insulting Amr every now and then. She would call the protestors stupid and when the police cracked down on protesters, she would salute them by arguing that this is the least they deserved. Being on the street, Amr felt exhausted, disappointed, and at times even a traitor who abandoned his fellow protestors. Over the days he was in conflict between his parents and his fight for freedom, which led him to develop a different consciousness; that of a young person who is fighting for his freedom. When the fights with his parents intensified, Amr considered moving out as he did not want to live with his mother anymore. His mother represented the enemy he was fighting, the former NDP and the stagnant thinking that did not allow for change. Even though he eventually did not move out, he decided not to interact with his mother anymore. After many fights over different incidences related to protests, Amr decided not to eat her food nor talk to her, just as his mother decided not to cook for him or ask him for any help. During the protests, Amr developed a different way of looking at the world. A couple of incidences before the 25<sup>th</sup> of January Revolution resulted in conflicts with his mother, but the escalation of their damaged relationship only came with the fall of the regime. An argument he had with his mother before the 25<sup>th</sup>, for instance, was during the 2010 parliamentary elections. His mother supported an NDP member for the parliament and she wanted to hang his campaign banner in the balcony of their apartment. While she was busy on the streets campaigning for that member, she told one of her campaigners to go to her house and put up the banner. Amr was the one at home at that time and when the campaigner told him what he wanted to do, he closed the door and did not allow him to enter. This resulted in a fight between them, especially when he argued that she should do whatever she wants but not include any of the members of their family in the dirty politics of the NDP. At that time Amr started to develop a rebellious consciousness which reached its peak

when he started going to the demonstrations and also when he physically experienced injustice and being part of a group of protestors with one common goal “change, freedom, and social justice”. Amr could not understand “how could she (his mother) think this way (that the protestors are stupid) after they (the police) arrested me?” (Amr, April, 2011).

Other informants also spoke about not telling their parents that they will take the streets as they would not approve of it. Hosni, a 31-year-old who works as a secretary at a governmental institute said that he had problems with his parents who did not want him to protest. His argument, which was “this is the only chance we have (...) and if something happened to me as happened to others you should not be upset” (Hosni, May, 2011), became the new conceptualization of change. According to Mariham, a 31-year-old kindergarten teacher,

“our parents were differently educated and raised. Surely a father who says something like this (preventing their children to protest) is afraid something could happen to them. Parents are only afraid. Some youth might not have told their parents that they are going to Tahrir not because they didn't want the parents not to know but because they didn't want their parents to worry about them” (Mariham, May, 2011).

Indeed this is a very fundamental and important conceptualization of the parents' preventing the children to take the streets because they fear something could happen to them and not because they do not want them to voice out their opinions. However, eventually this develops a common consciousness among young Egyptian persons who assume their parents would not encourage such actions, and thus they would either take the streets against the will of the parents or submit to their wishes. Omar, for instance, a 24-year-old engineer working in a private company, did not join the demonstrations because his mother was afraid something could happen to him, which is something she would never be able to live with. Susi, on the other hand, a 22-year-old political activist long before the 25<sup>th</sup> of January who had been detained in 2010 and whose family are also political activists, had her parents' support to protest. In 2010 when she went with other political activists to Naga Hammadi to give their condolences to Copts who died there in the clashes, she did not tell her mother she was going so as not to make her anxious. When she got detained she told her uncle who is a prominent political activist to get her out of prison. While some parents supported their children to take to the streets, most of the parents discouraged their children. Many argued that the parents feared something could happen to their children. No matter what the argument was, what is apparent is that a common understanding has developed among the young that their parents would discourage them from taking unconventional actions. This leaves youth with little hope for change. Contrasting the state's role and influence on youth in the last decades to the 1950's, it becomes clear that during the 1950's the state by providing for the youth minimized the effect of the family on them. A major difference was that a young person's main difference was the socializing effect of state intuitions in the project of Arabism and rebuilding the nation. The Egyptian state by minimizing its role in helping the youth while the families' influence

grew, the family institution developed to a great extent in silencing them. As Althusser put it, through institutions, youth learned how to act, think, and be. The family influence on Egyptian youth hence taught them to submit to the system and not conquer it. Yet, if they wanted to change the country did so through NGOs. "With a climate that discouraged political participation and yet was receptive to religious activity, youth found it easier to gain approval for social service from their families, teachers, and other mentors" (Ibrahim et.al, 2011). With the political suppressive situation, if youth wanted to do something in their leisure time, most families supported their children in voluntary activities.

## 2. NGOs an Extension of the Status Quo

Most parents discouraged their children from participating or developing an interest in politics. A very prominent Egyptian young activist of the 6<sup>th</sup> of April youth movement said in an interview that her parents strongly discouraged her political participation especially when she was harassed by the police several times. A common way adopted by the police was putting pressure on the family by telling them that their daughter or son has misbehaved and was involved in immoral activities (Interview, 2010). The main reason for protesting for the interviewees were the fear of police harassments usually as reflected in their parents' stances. As most parents discouraged their political participation, youth naturalized the idea of violence and police harassment. Other reasons for lack of involvement were not reflected in the interviews. Young people have thus learned not to be directly involved in politics and, if they wanted to participate, it was through civil participation. Organizations like Resala and Alashanyk Ya Baladi (AYB) are just some of examples of youth's initiatives to bring about social reform. To fill in the gap of providing services to the poor that the state no longer provided, young people were encouraged to participate in helping the destitute. The religious motivation to help the needy, however, eventually developed into an extension of state provisions rather than trying to bring about any fundamental structural changes. During my fieldwork in Resala that I conducted in August and September 2010, I was surprised about the religious mood that accepted poverty as a given. My fieldwork was during the month of Ramadan, the fasting month for Muslims, so it was a very religious atmosphere and many of the young people I talked to in fact only participated during this month. As August and September fall during the summer holidays for those who attend schools and universities, it was time to do some civic work. The holidays coinciding with Ramadan encouraged many of those I talked to help the poor. On our trips to different *ashwayaat*, poor informal areas, some verses of the Quran and *ahadeeth* (prophet sayings) were recited. When the young people in the bus laughed a lot, usually an organizer would ask them to recite some verses to ensure their religious intentions. Upon arrival in the poor areas, some organizers advised us not to talk to anyone on the streets or to the families whom we offer food. We should only tell them some nice words when we give them the food and then move on to the next family.





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This picture is of Egypt's garbage city in Mokkatam, which demonstrates how the poor areas look like. This picture has been taken from *Cairo's Garbage City: Breaking Through Poverty by Recycling*

Neither poverty nor the request of the organizers to the volunteers not to speak to anyone was questioned at anytime. Instead it appeared to me that poverty was accepted as a given. The young people I talked to on the bus believed that they are doing something good in helping the poor and that this is their religious duty. The role of religion also indicates an important class difference. It is the upper middle class youth who feel or should feel responsible to help the poor ones. According to Sobhy

“the role of youth in charity (volunteer work) is another theme clearly targeted at elite youth and well reflected in the surge in charitable donations and youth volunteering in charitable causes, especially those that can be linked to practices that were emphasized at the time of the Prophet in early Islam” (Sobhy, 2009:425).

Sobhy argues that preachers such as Amr Khaled, who address the elite, support youth's volunteer activities while “neither Khaled nor other key preachers of elite piety challenge the state on how corrupt, unjust, developmentally dysfunctional, or repressive it is. They do not challenge

the existing legal, economic, and political arrangements of privilege and power” (Sobhy, 2009:427). Instead of criticizing policies and the economic and social order, NGOs and voluntary activities gave a space for the youth not to be “lazy and apathetic” but rather contribute to the social welfare. NGOs such as Resala hence seemed to be an extension of the state to accept the status quo and accept poverty as a given without eradicating it or questioning the phenomenon. Althusser’s notion of the ideological state apparatus helps in understanding the importance of the reproduction of youth in such a way that fits the interests of the state. Indeed in the interest of the Egyptian state to exclude youth from political practices while it reassures its neoliberal policies of minimizing the role of the state from the public, NGOs and civil society served that logic well. Harvey argues that NGOs and civil society serve the theory of a self-governing while it does not lessen the discrepancy between classes. Thus, within neoliberal drives, civil society activities should play a major role in monitoring the government’s performance. However, Harvey further argues that through NGOs and human rights, the individual’s isolation from the market and his passivity in the system, are institutionalized instead of questioned (Harvey, 2005). I do not doubt that Resala has both helped the poor and affected some young volunteers in “experiencing” poverty, while it taught leaders some important skills of public speaking, organizing, and so forth. Nevertheless, with such NGOs, young people were encouraged to help the poor without interfering in changing the roots of the problem or demanding structural changes. Precisely because these youth NGOs divorced their activities from politics, it was therefore a secure space for anyone who is hoping for change to feel they’re making a difference through the conventional means.

Parents on the one hand tended to discourage the young from taking an active role in bringing about structural and fundamental change, while NGOs provided on the other hand a space for civic participation creating a generational consciousness that perpetuated the status quo. The generational consciousness was based on the idea of passivity, fear of change and the unknown, and the aim for stability. Depending on their social class, sex, and religion, young people have developed into two main generational units: some youth submitted to the old system of thought in their search for political and economic stability, while others demand structural change that would result in another kind of stability (i.e. a democratic system that represents people from all classes, genders, religions, and ages and that is not being abusive with its security apparatus of the state).

## B. Generational Units by Age, Class, Gender, and Religion

The common everyday experiences of problems and hopes in the last decades have added to a generational consciousness. They have developed a common understanding of the world around them. Young Egyptians had similar experiences in negotiating power with their families

precisely because, as previously mentioned, most young men and women were financially dependent on their families. Youth had also similar experiences in being discouraged from participating in politics, as well as the understanding of how to help in the development process of Egypt. The NGOisation as shown before had a very important effect on youth consciousness where it was assumed that development comes through participating in NGOs and helping the poor. This generation of young people faces now a very clear split in their hope for a different Egypt. Social class, sex, and religion are some very important factors in determining youth's conceptualization of social change by either submitting to the old generation's concepts of stability or searching and demanding new forms of social transformation. Adopting Mannheim's concept of a generational unit, Egyptian youth - depending on their class, religion, and gender - develop a common understanding. Thus, depending on their background, young people demand different kinds of change and social transformations. According to the interviewees, the middle upper Muslim men joined the protests during the Revolution demanding structural change. Those who come from the lower middle class and make their living on daily basis prefer stability. This stability is rather represented through the SCAF and to a great extent the Islamists who push for political stability through conventional means. Thus, after the first 18 days of the Revolution they counter discourage protests and rebellious means and prefer politically "stable" means such as the execution of parliamentary elections. For those who earn a living on daily basis, fear economic instability and hence frown upon the many protests that have taken place since ousting Mubarak. Hence the background of the people I have interviewed and their day-to-day experiences plays a fundamental role in their perception of their future and how they analyze the events after ousting President Hosni Mubarak.

Hani a 26-year-old Christian who works as a security guard in a governmental institute, has a rather pessimistic view on the changes the Revolution brought about and the future in general and is searching for stability through the very conventional means of the old generation. The first moment of frustration that affected his current understanding of the Revolution was changing his engagement plans. On February the 10<sup>th</sup>, one day before ousting of Mubarak, he got engaged and the ceremony was held at home. The planned engagement in the church was cancelled because of the unstable situation, yet with the uncertainty of what was to come and the eagerness to get married, Hani decided to do the planned engagement at home. His worldview of stability and injustice made him skeptical about the people who went to Tahrir. Hani believes that stability will not come through dramatic change, but youth should rather be patient for change to happen. Thus, he believes that Mubarak was about to leave his post in 6 months and protestors could have just waited till then. He does not hold Mubarak responsible for his actions, instead he believes that the his officials who were responsible to convey the reality in Egypt did not do so and hence he could not change much. "For us in Egypt, we think the President is like a father. This is since Gamal Abdel Nasser. This is not in our culture but it is in our genes. Like the

pharaohs” (Hani, May, 2011). The environment around him has made Hani believe that change will not come radically, instead because Egyptians are genetically followers of leaders, they have to both respect old leadership and wait for new ones to bring about change. Hani did not go to Tahrir and but watched the national TV channels at home. He disliked Al Jazeera, for example, because he believed that they were one-sided and supported the protesters and encouraged them to take the streets. Hani acknowledges that the police under the Mubarak’s regime were violent and used to torture civilians and he himself was afraid of the police. However, for him this should not push the people to protest. Within his world of problems, wanting to get married, living a decent life, and not being harassed by *Baltagya*, Hani cannot conceptualize how people could eventually take the streets on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2011 if they had the option to wait six months until Mubarak’s end of term. What Althusser called the Ideological State Apparatus (the influence of religion, education, family, the political order, and the media) in his day-to-day experiences developed existential fears that made him resistant to the idea that protesters in Tahrir wanted fundamental structural change. The effect of the media and public talks instead made him convinced that there is some foreign agenda pushing for that. “People in Tahrir do not want to reveal why they are there and every now and then they reveal parts of it. So someone has a big plan and is moving the people. (...) I do not like conspiracy theories but I think that also Iran, for example, had a problem with Mubarak” (Hani, May 2011). The state manipulation of discourses about youth as incapable of change, while the development of Egypt can only come slowly, has affected Hani’s perceptions. He further wondered why the poor did not take to the streets but rather, university students and workers at banks were the ones demonstrating. He understands and acknowledges that Egyptians have lost their dignity over the years; but for him many of his friends would not have minded Gamal Mubarak to follow his father and the only ones who did were academics such as Hassan Nafaa and Belal Fadl, who are writers at the independent Al Masry Al Youm and Tahrir Newspapers. To him, people went to Tahrir for sightseeing, out of curiosity, or for the fun of it not knowing what they want. His major concern now is security. He would have preferred politicians stealing people’s money than living an insecure life. Also within one month three churches have been burned down, placing Christians in danger. In addition to these problems, the Egyptian / Israeli borders is at a risk, there are problems of poverty, the economy is deteriorating, and tourism has been on the downfall. Hani’s surroundings, the media, conversations with friends, and his day-to-day experiences made him fearful of the future and skeptical about a just Egypt. He did not and would not have taken to the streets, as he prefers stability and a secure life. For Hani, his purpose in life is to work hard, make a living, and secure an average life for himself and his future wife. Because of his understanding with his surroundings as a middle class Egyptian Christian, Hani is an example of a young man who prefers the old system and the status quo. He disapproves of fundamental change and prefers stability even if this means that a bit of corruption would be going on.

Samar, on the other hand, a 22-year-old Christian who graduated from the American University in Cairo with a degree in Political Science and is currently working at a Human Rights Organization, has been an activist prior to the 25<sup>th</sup> of January. Her understanding of her surroundings and the conceptualizations of justice and hope for a better future make her an example of a generational unit that wants dramatic and fundamental change. Samar has worked in reporting human rights violations since 2010. Being within these circles of political activists, she knew about the 25<sup>th</sup> before it happened. She joined the demonstrations from day one and helped in organizing lawyers in cases of human rights violations. Her conceptualization of justice and change started developing when she demonstrated for the first time between 2006/2007. She did not demonstrate again until September 2010 because university took all her time and “blocked such activities” (Samar, May, 2011). Being exposed to different protests, Samar questions why there were so many police cracking demonstrators. This proves to her that Egypt is a police state that suppresses the opposition. Her surroundings proved to her that “the older generation now sees us differently. The senior colleagues at work give us more responsibilities than before; especially in finding solutions for a better Egypt. Especially in terms of democracy and transition, I feel our opinions are more important now and they take it into consideration” (Samar, May, 2011). Even though Samar is optimistic in terms of youth inclusion in decision-making and the Egyptian population to fight for freedom and justice, she is critical of SCAF and feels they are using the same strategies as the old regime. Her social context and exposure to political events make her oppose old structures such as the army. Instead she wants to change the status quo, fight for different and new structures and eliminate all of what is remaining of the old regime. Often generational units such as Hani conflict with those of Samar as they have a different understanding of the world around them and change in general. Even though they belong to the same generation and had common experiences in the past the context they live in has put them in “opposing” world views in how to bring about change resulting in a conflict within the same generation.

### C. Generational Conflict over Social and Political Change

After the 18 days of the Revolution, there is a moment of stagnation that people have experienced. The generational consciousness that pushed many youth to act united as a result of their common experiences of being the problem that eventually led them to bringing about this Revolution, is divided now. In their different worldviews and hopes for change, the young people have split between those who want radical and fundamental change and those who accept the status quo. For those who want radical change, these young people entered a generational conflict between the “old” and “young” generation in which power negotiations over political change is apparent. Even though in public talks and according to my interviewees, youth with

their youthfulness embody hope for something new, it is assumed that young people have little political experience. The older generation, on the other hand, embodies stagnation and is old fashioned in ideas, approaches, or technology, which results in a conflict over who shall lead the coming period: the visionary youth, or the old generation that brought little change.

Right after the 18 days of the Revolution many Egyptians anticipated the rise of the new youth coalitions or youth political parties. According to the third issue of the *Shabab El Tahrir*, the section in the national Al Ahram Newspaper that has been dedicated to the youth of the 25<sup>th</sup> of January Revolution, Ahmed Amer writes that it is not only great that youth brought about the Revolution but when asked about someone responsible no one tries to be in the spot light and everyone says that they can only speak for themselves and not as part of the whole. The great morality and concern about the Revolution is present and out of the youth groups that started the Revolution namely, 6<sup>th</sup> of April, *Kolena Khaled Said* group, Coalition of Anger, Muslim Brotherhood youth, each group will choose two representatives to be part of the youth coalition that will then form a political party or a coalition for the Egyptian population to plan strategies for the future (Al Ahram, 10/02/2011). On March 2011 at El Sawy Cultural Wheel, the Gerhart Center for Philanthropic Development invited four activists from the youth coalition to speak to the public about their vision of the future including their strategies for the coming period and what they are hoping for. The audience as a whole seemed disturbed not to see the young people and the youth coalition organizing street protests to push for their demands, but instead they were busy appearing on TV and giving interviews. In 2002 the average age of an Egyptian politician was 77 years old (Bayat, 2010), the political understanding of many people in Egypt is challenged when they imagine young people leading the nation. Certain important events that happened since 2011 show the tension between the young and old generations over power and space they are expected to occupy.

Many incidences after the 11<sup>th</sup> of February show the current political, economic and social uncertainty. One example of the generational conflict was the launch of the Egyptian student union. This initiative was taken by the student union of Cairo University, Ain Shams University and the American University in Cairo. Student union representatives of many public and private universities in Egypt including Banhaa, Suez, Fayoum, Alexandria, Kafr El Shaikh, Al Zakazik, Al Mansoura, Al Monofya, Port Said, Tanta, and private ones such as the French, German, and Nile University met from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> of August 2011 to revive the national student union that was banned during Hosni Mubarak's era. Analyzing the event and its development, the ongoing tension of where to place youth becomes apparent. The meeting started with the student union presidents of the organizing universities namely Cairo University, Ain Shams University and the American University in Cairo stating what the student representatives accomplished within the two days of the meetings. Like the army, they organized

a couple of points that they wanted to share with the audience. In a very firm voice, they announced their concluding points such as how to vote, present universities, etc... Finally they assured that the students will remain close to the streets and will push for the demands of the Egyptian population. They announced their disapproval of the incidences at the Israeli borders on August 2011 when Egyptian soldiers were killed by the Israeli police force on Rafah borders, and henceforth demanded the Egyptian ambassador in Israel to be brought home. The choice of language and the way the young were acting was strongly criticized by Dr. Abdelmoniem Abouelfetouh, Presidential hopeful and an active student union representative of the 70's. As a guest speaker, Dr. Abouelfetouh stated on stage that he was totally against what was said and decided upon by the students. He also disapproved of the language and way they were speaking which sounded like old people. To him, instead of talking about intentions and demanding the ministers and people in power to take actions, the youth should better take the streets and just go to the borders and demonstrate there instead of taking such strategic decisions in asking the Egyptian ambassador to retreat from Israel. It must be pointed out that the guest speakers were all of the older generation who were once part of the student movement in the 1970's and 1980's in Egypt and came to share their experiences so that the students could learn from them. By the end of the event, a student union president got up to state that he did not appreciate how Dr. Abouelfetouh described the role of youth and thinks that indeed they also should put strategic demands as all other pressure groups in Egypt. In response to that Dr. Essam Soultan, founding member of the Wasat Party and a guest speaker argued, "students have always more demands and are not so wise therefore it does not fit youth to be smart and wise but rather impulsive and spontaneous"<sup>9</sup>. Dr. Soultan did not mean to offend youth by describing them as "unwise" but rather placed them in a certain space that does not entail any borders nor restrictions which in that regard he was implying taking to the streets.

Contextualizing youth as energetic, risk takers and spontaneous rather than strategic thinkers have put them in the context of taking to the streets rather than being involved in politics. The attitude of the voters in the first phase of the parliamentary elections supported this view. Only two young men, both 31 years old, won seats out of 54 seats for individuals in the first phase. Suggestions of Dr. Saad Eddin Ibrahim that 40% of the seats should have been dedicated to young people below 40 years old, remained elusive. Dr. Ibrahim built his argument on the Egyptian history that after the 1952 Revolution, Gamal Abdel Nasser reserved at least 50% of the seats for workers and farmers in the name of the people's Revolution at that time. Hence, the 25<sup>th</sup> of January Revolution in its virtue of being a youth Revolution should have taken the same approach (AL Masry Al Youm: 10/12/2011). Also presidential hopeful Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei in an interview with Al Masry Al Youm stated, "youth have done the Revolution. And I will retreat my

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<sup>9</sup> My translation

candidacy for presidency if youth will run for this post<sup>10</sup> (Al Masry Al Youm 11/12/2011). Even though some political activists supported the youth's presence in political and strategic change, the young people did not get the trust of the majority of voters in the parliamentary elections and the clash over power remains. Both young men who won seats in the parliament were still eager to promote the Revolution, its spirit and solidarity with the youth in public talks. Dr. Mostafa El Naggar, who won the seat in Nasr City and the surrounding area, is a 31-year-old and is the cofounder of the Adl Party. In his first announcements after winning the seat in the parliament he stated to Al Ahram that "he will be the voice of the Revolution inside the parliament and that he will do whatever it takes to achieve the aims of the Revolution through political means by assuring that he came from the (Tahrir) Square to the parliament<sup>11</sup>" (Al Ahram, 08/12/2011). To gain credibility both candidates who made it to the parliament used their Revolutionary spirit as their main sources of inspiration and gaining support. For Ziad El Elemy, a 31-year-old who is a member of the Egyptian Democratic Socialist Party who won a seat through the Egyptian bloc while he is also a member in the Revolutionary Youth Coalition stated in an interview on TV that "it is wrong to have a parliament without meeting the Revolutionary demands" (ONTV, Dec 2011). The recent clashes between the police and protestors that happened in Mohamed Mahmoud on November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2011, which resulted in many deaths and injured protestors demonstrate the tension between those who want stability and those who want to take the Revolutionary way. The first phase of the parliamentary elections, which started on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November 2011, was not welcomed by many protestors at Tahrir and hence El Elemy assured that he as a Revolutionary is critical of the behavior and violence of the police He also assured that change could only take place through the square and not through the parliament.

The clashes in Mohamed Mahmoud Street resulted in dissolving the cabinet of Dr. Esam Sharaf and in the army appointing AlGanzouri as Prime Minister. AlGanzouri is a 78-year-old politician who also served as a Prime Minister during Mubarak's era until he resigned his post because of conflicting opinions. Prominent politicians such as ElBardei, Abou El Ela Madi, ruling member of Al Wasat Party, Alaa El Aswany, a prominent Egyptian writer and political critic, as well as the protestors at Tahrir, disapproved of this move because he was not one of the prominent Revolutionary figures, and because of his advanced age. To calm people down, Al Ganzouri promised to include young people in his new cabinet and in fact talked to Mostafa El Naggar, for instance. El Naggar, like many other politicians, rejected working with Al Ganzouri as they disapproved of him taking this post. During these incidences, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of November 2011, Al Masry Al Youm dedicated two pages on the conflict between generations. With the aim of reaching stability as none of them was charged in front of the court yet, the youth had to be silenced by the old generation (this generation includes General Tantawi, acting president of

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<sup>10</sup> My translation

<sup>11</sup> My Translation



Egypt during the transition phase). On this occasion, the media started to shift its focus on youth again from being the heroes to being the *motahawereen*, meaning being irrational for their spontaneous actions and youthfulness. Daren Farghaly wrote that youth are not afraid of power and are not tempted to be in power. They are not experts in politics but are internet savvy, and full of energy, fast in action and spontaneous which embodies change and advancement. Youth for her also embody a new vision and is in constant contact with the world. Finally, youth are adventurous and love discovering new things while at the same time are fast in decision making (Al Masry Al Youm, 26/11/2011). In contrast to youth, according to Hisham Allam, the old generation 'walks close to the wall', which literally means being fearful of change. They fear the army. They submit to the situation and do not try to change much. The old generation is concerned about their daily bread and they were raised on the state media (such as TV and newspapers and not the internet such as Facebook). The old generation is unaware of the effect of the new technology because they live in the past rather than in the future. Finally, they cannot accept change (Al Masry Al Youm, 26/11/2011). The tension between generations, between change and stability, between the old and young, between being spontaneous and stagnant becomes apparent during the days of clashes at Tahrir and Ganzouri's appointment as Prime Minister. Ten months after ousting Mubarak, the generational consciousness of change reached a critical conflict over power with the older generation. Youth who took the streets to demand "change, freedom, and social justice" are greatly excluded from politics, thus to negotiate power they take to the streets. One major difference between the past (before the 25<sup>th</sup> of January) and now is that many young people have developed a new understanding of putting pressure to bring about change by going to the streets, as they do not want to remain apathetic and passive anymore. Young people in the last decades have experienced a lot of injustice mainly because they were conceived as the problem in society, and today young people have proved to themselves that they are the hope and that they can bring about bring a greater impact.

#### D. Conclusion

During the 18 days of the uprising youth have become the hope of the country. Since then, the socio-political and economic situation in Egypt has been very challenging and adding to many uncertainties of the population at large. The generational conflict between the new and old ideas, structures, and ways of "doing" politics are one important lens in positioning Egyptian youth today. In an interview by Linda Herrera with Aly El-Raggal, a twenty-seven-year-old Revolutionary and researcher, he stated in October 2011:

"A difference between us and the older generation is that their mental structures are part of the old system. They still want to plant the tree, have that single, identifiable leader to put forward. We are at a critical moment now in the Revolution because the Revolutionaries cannot lead the state. The old generation has stepped in to provide leadership. I accuse the older generation of being responsible for much of the mess we

find ourselves in now” (Herrera 2011: Generation Rev and the Struggle for Democracy: Interview with Aly El- Ragga).

Youth have been largely excluded from politics while they have been very active on the streets. The current socio-economic situation in Egypt is one major unclear factor that affects the political situation and the ambiguity of placing the youth. Problems in gas, shelter, salaries, and the like were only some raised concerns after the Revolution. Yet many of the economic problems have been used for some in their political interests. In the belief that the youth are politically inexperienced and the wish for economic stability, many, especially from the lower middle class as my research has shown, prefer the “older” generation over the newly emerging one. Thus, with economic instability the drive for “old” powers and structures, such as the parliamentary elections and the distribution of seats where at least 50% of them have to be occupied by workers and farmers, make the political inclusion of the youth challenging. It is not merely the generational conflict between elder and younger people that is troubling, but rather the idea of *Esqat El Nezam*, the removal of the old regime, structures, and ways of socializing that is of concern. The many years of corruption, political stagnation and exclusion of youth, who form the biggest age group in society, are posing the biggest challenge now. While the Revolution has shown that the majority of Egyptians are urging for change, because of the economic and social problems, the fundamental change in political and economic structures is very hard. However, with the Revolution that was inspired by youth and they are indeed the main actors on the streets, youth are the greatest hope for the fundamental structural change. Even if this requires years, youth are major actors in society in the process of transformation. Combining knowledge and level of expertise of the elder generation with the energies, motivation, and new ways of understanding the world of the youth, would be the best possibility for transformation. Yet, the interplay between the two to transform Egypt is still under way. Of the main challenges is how to socialize the Egyptian population through what Althusser called the ideological state apparatus. State institutions, the schooling system, universities, and the like are the major interlocutors to the forms of the populations’ understanding of transformation and bringing about change.

## V. Conclusion

Youth who used to be conceived as the problem before the Revolution, played a major role in ousting Mubarak on February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011. The young Egyptian people were immediately celebrated as the heroes who can do the impossible; yet overthrowing a regime is completely different than ousting one person. After interviewing 39 young men and women about their experiences before, during, and after the Revolution, coupled with analyzing the state owned Al Ahram newspapers in 2000, 2004, 2008, 2010, and 2011, in addition to attending various forums and discussions since March 2011, it becomes clear that the exclusionary practices of the state since the 1970's have harmed the perception of youth until today. With the changing perception of youth from being the hope for the rebuilding process of Egypt and the project of Arabism during Abdel Nasser's era to being the problem since the 1970's has affected the everyday life of youth in Egypt. Changes in economic policies since the *Infitah*, open door policy, during Sadat's era are just one challenge to the youth's livelihood opportunities. Being unprepared for the international market, the open door policy, intensified the problems of youth. With the Structural Adjustment Programs that have been introduced with neoliberal economic policies, the economic uncertainties and life expectations of the youth were strongly affected. The inability of the market to absorb the youth bulge, and the unwillingness and disability of the state to provide youth employment opportunities or substitute them have added to the exclusionary practices of the youth. Youth transformed into a problem in being unemployed, not able to marry or get good education. This in turn resulted in youth resorting to drug abuse or religious extremism. In approaching the "youth problem" mainly two schools of thought proposed a solution. For political activists such as El-Baradei, youth should transform the country politically while for development organizations, civic participants, and religious preachers such as Amr Khaled, the "youth problem" should be approached in trying to include them in social activities. The number of youth led NGOs and youth involvement in organizations such as Resala raised indeed since 2000. While youth civic participation has changed the social perception of many youth by being exposed to different social and economic classes and in providing the poor with services, structural socio-economic changes remained largely unchanged. With the lack of employment or bad working conditions, the amount of social protests started to raise since 2005 leading to the development and mobilization of many youth movements such as the 6<sup>th</sup> of April Youth Movement. What indeed came as a surprise to many is that youth, who were conceived as the problem and as lazy and apathetic, were the main actors in the Revolution.

The 18 days of the uprising has changed the perception of youth completely. Youth suddenly transformed into heroes, capable of change, and became main actors in Egypt's

political “transformation”. Not only the ability of the youth to mobilize the population to demand “Freedom, Change, and Social Justice” affected the changing youth contextualization, but also the “proof” of governing Tahrir Square during the 18 days contributed to this shift in ideas. Youth managed to transform Tahrir Square into a space that is regulated by rules to adjust to the various needs of the people “living” there such as the provision of shelter and food. Additionally, securing entrances to the square as well as regulating the square in terms of demands that are chanted or behaviors such as protecting women against harassments were managed by youth. This changed the social perception of youth at which they became the heroes who called for protests, took to the streets, and governed Tahrir Square with the great outcome of ousting Mubarak. With the euphoric idea of Tahrir Square that gives the space of protestors to demonstrate peacefully and voice out the demands of the population at large, youth became the hope for a better Egypt. Yet, because of the imaginary perception of Tahrir Square as a perfect space, it led to frustrations of who is to become the major changing force. Class, religion, age, and gender were determining factors which affected opinions of my research participants in that regard. Middle-upper class, educated, organized, man was imagined as the young person who resides at Tahrir and has brought about this Revolution. But also these factors have added greatly to a generational conscious to bring about this Revolution and to contest power structures after the fall of the regime.

Religion, social class, and gender were major sources of the youth consciousness and understanding about the world. The everyday problem experiences from the family to the state, have contributed in developing a generational consciousness that finally enabled youth to take to the streets. However depending on their background and ways of socialization, the change youth hope for differs. Youth from the lower middle class, especially those who depend on a daily income, aim for stability which to a great extent embodies the “old” generation. Many from the upper-middle class, on the other hand, urge a Revolutionary way and call for their political inclusion. A generational conflict is at stake at which it becomes ambiguous how youth will be included in social, political, and economic transformations.

The young in Egypt during the past view month have realized that bringing about change is a very delicate issue. It is not necessarily the inexperience of the youth that puts a challenge to building new structures, but rather the stagnant ideas of the older generations and the issues related to organizing themselves that puts a challenge to the role youth can play now in Egypt. Many young Egyptians have realized that to bring about structural change and bring about a different generational consciousness: of a generation that is hopeful of a better future, one that is creative, young, and simply new in its strategies and policies, young people will have to enter the political space. In order to change the everyday experience of the youth in Egypt, by using young people’s claim for youthfulness, “a series of dispositions and ways of being, feeling, and carrying

oneself (e.g., a greater tendency for experimentation, adventurous, idealism, autonomy, mobility, and change)", they will have to enter the public space (Bayat, 2010: 30).<sup>12</sup> The biggest challenge as Asef Bayat shows is that youth have to first transform into a social category to become effective social actors (Bayat, 2010:30). Thus, not only youth as a generation have to be aware that they as social actors can bring about change, but they have to be equipped with very basic skills such as ways of mobilization and organization to claim power and new forms of being.

The current situation in Egypt marks very important and challenging conditions that are of fundamental importance for the youth's claim for youthfulness. Leading up to June 2012, when the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) promised to hand over power, young people have to be very careful, strategic, and smart in their reactions and mobilization over important political issues that will determine either a new generation with new forms of youth's inclusion, or having to compromise their claim for youthfulness and hope for a better and more just future. Three main issues are currently at stake that will determine that path. The first is the current rule of the SCAF. To a great extent, the SCAF represents the old regime and, most importantly, a challenge to the young person's empowerment. With all the clashes that have taken place in the past ten months in which the police and the army cracked down on protestors which resulted in many casualties and left many injured, challenges youth inclusion and the transformation of conceiving youth activists as *baltagya*. Whether the clashes at Maspero in October 2011 that left at least 28 dead according to the Egyptian Health minister, or the clashes at Mohamed Mahmoud Street in November 2011, or the most recent ones in front of the parliament cabinet in December, puts a challenge to power negotiations between the young protestors and the SCAF. According to Steven A. Cook "the country has retreated from the moment of empowerment and national dignity that the uprising symbolized and is now grappling with a squalid politics and the normalization of violence" (Cook, 2011:1). Young people instead of being empowered, or playing a role in national politics, have been violently suppressed once again. The challenge over political power is far from being over and indeed the most important "battle", as many like to call it, is still to come, namely the constitutional changes. With many young people residing at Tahrir over the past few months in response to the political violence that is taking place, the Islamists are playing a critical challenge in the management of the coming phase. Both the Salafi's Nour Party and the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party have almost 70% of the seats in the parliament after the second phase of elections. It is still ambiguous whether the new parliament (which consists mainly of the Islamists) or also other actors will decide on the 100 people who will develop the constitution that will then be voted on by Egyptian people. The Islamists, with their great presence in parliament, indeed pose a very fundamental question of freedom to many. Examples of Afghanistan, as a country that suppressed its population in the name of Islam, or Iran, with similar

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<sup>12</sup> Bayat 2010 Muslim youth and the Claim for Youthfulness

Islamic constraints, are close to the memories of many “liberal” Egyptians who do not want to pass through a similar experience. Adopting the Turkish model by allowing Islamic rule, yet assuring the civil liberties of every citizen, is a dream to many. The claim for youthfulness over the space of “freedom” in which young people can experiment, be adventurous, and most importantly hopeful for a better future, might collapse if strict Islamic rule is put in place. All of these debates, the role of the SCAF, the power of the Islamists and especially the Muslim Brotherhood, and finally the “battle” over the constitutional changes, have or will have a significant effect on the daily experience of every young Egyptian person. To play a role in politics, the young have to mobilize themselves in some form and this in itself is far from easy.

Since the demonstrations on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2011, that I joined with many other Egyptians, I have dreamed of a more just Egypt, in which every Egyptian citizen can enjoy a dignified life (such as an efficient and just health care system, wages that guarantee a decent life for every family, and most importantly not being exposed to any form of harassment on the streets whether from the police, men, or any other person or state institution). After ousting President Hosni Mubarak, I, as many others, have realized that to bring about change, the young have to mobilize to transform Egypt in a form that would match the ideas of “change, freedom, and social justice”. This is difficult to handle both strategic and organizational wise. During the last ten months I have joined various groups to find a role I can play in bringing about change and each of them had its complications. The two most challenging questions to the organizations I joined are, first, how can youth organize themselves in such a short period to play an active and influential role in political change now? Second, how can those youth who have taken the streets in Tahrir, be tamed to follow what the majority of people in an organization decided on and not act on an individual basis?

In March 2011, I first joined a group that was formed after ousting President Hosni Mubarak, and is working on being registered as an NGO. All participants are young, between 20 and 35 and many participants work in international companies or international NGOs. Hence, the approach from the start was very structured and somewhat organized in having a written agenda, a set time and place to meet, and a somewhat structured cycle of “developing” ideas and changing habits of participants. It was hence easy to join the group and play a role in their activities, which was mainly related to educating people in Egypt on their citizenship rights and duties. More or less every participant has a function, we were divided into groups to work with each other, and finally, those who manage the groups put all outcomes together. However, it is still a relatively bureaucratic organization, making it inflexible in activities and approaches the organization wishes to implement. The hierarchy of an elected board that has to be informed and give consent to activities does not make the implementation of new projects easy which is often needed in such an uncertain time that Egypt is going through. Very structured and often

complicated models used by various organizations such as the United Nations or Amideast are used as models in transforming the habits, ways of thinking, and generally educating people. The outreach and the number of members in the organization (around 20 who meet frequently) combined with the bureaucracy, has a limited effect on the transformation process as a whole despite its limited successes at the grassroots level. Being apolitical, this organization does not play a role directing anyone towards certain ideologies but rather aims to educate Egyptians to play a role in transforming their societies.

In June 2011, I joined another group, a political movement. It was very easy to enter the group yet very difficult to find a role to play that could improve Egyptian society. This movement was formed in March 2011 by some friends who have common beliefs and want to play a role in transforming Egypt. As most of them are activists, they do not want to choose one leader among them as most members have dominant personalities with very concrete ideas of change. Because there was no clear leadership or organizational structure I found it hard to enter and play a role through the movement. This problem was raised by members of the movement who wanted to develop some structures which was objected by others. Those who rejected a structure believed that this would be constraining, and hence, only those activities that are of value to the movement and the society at large will succeed and be effective while activities that do not gain popularity will simply fail. The ambiguity over the importance of the number of people that are mobilized in a movement to bring about change versus not having a clear organizational structure for those members to play a role was apparent to many. In December, many members of the movement acknowledged that the movement was rather inefficient in the last period. Yet, what is striking is the difficulty over power negotiations that this movement had to pass through in the last months. Even though, the movement started with over 200 members, it now only has around 20 active ones making it a small movement.

Since August 2011, the movement had to play a very fundamental role on the street like all other movements, namely contributing to the sit ins with resources, people to sleep at Tahrir, or by helping in organizing the square and managing its entrances. Upon deciding on a declaration of the demands of the protests at Tahrir, most movements signed the declaration to show their support to the demands. In the movement I joined this decision usually took place in the form of a mail sent to all members with a deadline. What usually happened is that a limited number of members, around four or so, replied to these mails agreeing to the declaration and then the name of the movement was put on it. Some demands in the declaration were at times criticized by the members, but eventually, it was understood by all that as we are a small movement so we could not be too picky of the demands. We had to be part of the bigger movement which required fast decisions. Thus, if only a couple of activists agreed to the declaration, we signed those. The challenge of mobilizing a big number of members to act as a

pressure group on the streets, versus not having a clear structure that organizes the movement, challenged the efficiency of the movement. Developing a clear structure requires leadership and since most activists came from Tahrir, and have dominant personalities, developing such a structure did not seem easy. In December 2011, a mistake happened that one member signed a declaration that was not agreed upon by all, and some members criticized the movement harshly and questioned its integrity. However, the power negotiations within the movement on the one hand and between the pressure groups as well between the older generation on the other (whether that is the SCAF, *Hezb Al Kanaba*, these who want the youth to leave Tahrir to regain stability, or the *Feloul*, the remnants of the old regime) are far from smooth. In their fight for a better Egypt, the movements have to keep a close eye on how they manage members, and the internal communication, or decision-making processes, to be part of the fight over power. Yet this also causes a challenge to the credibility of these movements from within, and from the outside. An example are activists at Tahrir, who are expected to be managed by the movements who are usually present at sit ins, such as the 6<sup>th</sup> of April Youth Movement, at times break the “rules” of *silmya*, peaceful demonstrations. According to Cook, who explains the last clashes in front of the parliament as follows “the young toughs who descended on Qasr al-Aini Street after news spread of the Army’s efforts to clear the area seemed less concerned with principle than combat” (Cook, 2011:2). In response to the violence of the army, the youth threw rocks and Molotov cocktails which was a strong popular critique to the changing behavior of the protestors. The very peaceful Revolutions, have turned bloody, and the young protestors endure the price to be paid. Their credibility is decreasing in public opinion, while many protestors are accused of their lack of political vision, in which only two young men won seats in the first round of parliamentary elections. The role of the movements is fundamental and has caused the change of two governments since the fall of Mubarak, however, their demands of a transitional government and just trials for the protestors are still not met. Instead the SCAF imposed a government led by Al Ganzouri, which came as a huge disappointment to the activists at Tahrir, leading to the last cabinet clashes in November 2011. The negotiation over politics on the streets has shown to be much harder and bloodier than many would have hoped and dreamed of.

Finally, I joined a political party in early December 2011. Despite that one month is not enough to give a complete picture of the challenges and the role that the party plays, I want to point out the difficulty of political participation for youth. The political party has a clear vision, an ideology, and at times assumes a long term vision for the future. Being part of an “organized” group is surely a benefit. Of the main challenges of the party is to organize itself to be able to compete in the political market. It is of course impossible to build a stable ground similar to the biggest and most organized Freedom and Justice party and compete with it, yet young people that make up the party are extremely energetic and hopeful for a better future. With their enthusiasm they sit for hours discussing political issues with various groups and people, join and



initiate projects that serve to deepen the understanding of Egyptian “reality” while building its reputation in the market. With over 60 political parties currently competing in Egypt this is not an easy task. Unexpectedly many of the founding members of the party, who are in their early thirties, have a good understanding of politics and indeed have been active in political parties before 2011. Many have been exposed to police harassment in prisons and on the streets as a result of their activism, making them as competent in understanding the dynamics of the political game as those of the more established parties. As with the movements, the party I joined has so many competent activists with clear ideas of the future, making it difficult for some to submit to the rule of the many. As it is a newly emerging party, the public in general is unfamiliar with the leadership of it and assumes those who appear the most on TV run the party. In the hope to decentralize the party, members get into heated debates over such issues. Still having an unclear structure, way of management, prominent leadership, and fame in society, the party fights over an identity of its own mainly in relation to the other parties. Clear ideological differences are not needed at this time. Instead strong cooperation between parties with similar visions (liberals, Islamists, etc.) is needed. This also causes a challenge as some parties might cease to exist eventually. With every moment, the party has to be ready to redirect its efforts in what is needed for the country at this time, decide wisely on its battles, and mobilize its members. The flexibility which is usually not given in a party with a structured form of management causes a challenge to mobilize the whole party into a certain direction. Power negotiations with other parties with similar ideologies, or contrasting ones, and the ruling SCAF becomes difficult. Yet in the fight for their youthfulness and in the ambition to see a better and more just Egypt, many young people deal with these challenges.

With the 25<sup>th</sup> of January Revolution, a new generation is on the verge of playing a very fundamental role in changing Egypt. This transformation carries many challenges and the young people negotiate power very intensively with many different actors in society. The biggest challenge is yet what kind of Egypt all of the actors see. The lack of a clear vision for Egypt’s political rule and a clear form of ruling the country makes it difficult for different political activists to cooperate, develop new strategies, and challenge old ones. Most political activists talk about the importance of democracy to rule Egypt but what that means is not clear. The vision of how to transform Egypt, how to combine Islam with democracy, how to find a new form of democratizing Egypt, is a project that is just starting. The debates, confrontations, and challenges of existing ideas are very important and not having a clear vision might indeed be of great value to “democratizing Egypt”. By not having one clear leadership, different activists with different opinions, ideologies, and strategies are negotiated and hence a dictatorship of one rule might be avoided<sup>13</sup>. The very stability that we all wish for in Egypt can be translated into a representative of

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<sup>13</sup> This thought is inspired by a discussion with Dr. Hanan Sabea in Tahrir in March 2011

all people equally only if not one person with one ideology rules. Even though stability might come easier with one person inspiring and ruling the rest such as was the case with President Gamal Abdel Nasser in the 50's, avoiding a dictatorship is a more complex process that requires patience and negotiations. The youth have caused great changes and with their ambitions for a better way of living equally. Even if it is not clear what role exactly they will play to bring about change, youth cannot and shall not be the social problem anymore but instead empowered as the main actors for change. The youth have not waited to be empowered but instead fought for their inclusion making them one of the major actors on the political scene.

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