

# Protests and Generations

*Legacies and Emergences in the Middle East,  
North Africa and the Mediterranean*

*Edited by*

Mark Muhannad Ayyash  
Ratiba Hadj-Moussa



BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

# Contents

Acknowledgments	IX
List of Illustrations	XI
Notes on Contributors	XII

<b>Introduction: Conceptualizing Generations and Protests</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>Mark Muhannad Ayyash and Ratiba Hadj-Moussa</i>	

## **PART 1**

### ***Forms of Protest and the Production of Generations***

- 1 Palestinian Youth in Israel: A New Generational Style of Activism?** 27  
*Mohammad Massalha, Ilana Kaufman and Gal Levy*
- 2 From Student to General Struggle: The Protests against the Neoliberal Reforms in Higher Education in Contemporary Italy** 55  
*Lorenzo Cini*
- 3 Lawyers Mobilizing in the Tunisian Uprising: A Matter of ‘generations’?** 73  
*Éric Gobe*

## **PART 2**

### ***Genealogies of Generational Formations***

- 4 2003: A Turning Point in the Formation of Syrian Youth** 99  
*Matthieu Rey*
- 5 Together, but Divided: Trajectories of a Generation of Egyptian Political Activists (From 2005 to the Revolution)** 122  
*Chaymaa Hassabo*
- 6 The Gezi Protests: The Making of the Next Left Generation in Turkey** 143  
*Gökbörü Sarp Tanyildiz*

## PART 3

*Memory, History and the “New Generation”*

- 7 ‘Freedom is a Daily Practice’: The Palestinian Youth Movement and *Jil Oslo* 171  
*Sunaina Maira*
- 8 The Double Presence of Southern Algerians: Space, Generation and Unemployment 198  
*Ratiba Hadj-Moussa*
- 9 “We are not heiresses”: Generational Memory, Heritage and Inheritance in Contemporary Italian Feminism 224  
*Andrea Hajek*
- 10 Echoes of Ricardo Mella: Reading Twenty-First Century Youth Protest Movements through the Lens of an Early Twentieth-Century Anarchist 245  
*Stephen Luis Vilaseca*
- Index 269

# Together, but Divided: Trajectories of a Generation<sup>1</sup> of Egyptian Political Activists (From 2005 to the Revolution)<sup>2</sup>

*Chaymaa Hassabo*

## Introduction

Since demonstrations broke out all over Egypt on January 25th 2011, culminating in the toppling of Mubarak after 18 days of mass protests and inaugurating a “revolutionary situation” (Tilly, 1978), observers have focused on the role of *Shabâb al-thawra*, the ‘youth of the revolution.’ This designation has come to encompass not only the youth activists, groups and movements that called for the ‘making of the revolution,’ but more generally all young Egyptians who participated in the revolutionary events. In fact, both media and academic circles have presented this *shabâb al-thawra* as a ‘concrete group’ of individuals who, because they are young, share a generational belonging and therefore partake in the same attitudes, political orientations and methods of revolution.

This use of the term *youth of the revolution* as a category designating a concrete group has glossed over many questions and issues regarding how the participation of certain strata of society (or, for that matter, of age-based groups of populations) in historical events should be understood, as well as the more complex theme of generational phenomena and the identification of concrete generational groups. Moreover, this categorization denies the peculiarities of people’s different individual or collective trajectories, as well as of the groups and networks these people create. A confusion of sorts is apparent here between *belonging to* an age-based group and having the *same orientation* towards historical events or sharing common political views. This

- 
- 1 Some clarifications should be made regarding the use of the term generation: I use ‘political generation’ and ‘generation(s) of activists’ interchangeably to address those activists who joined a wave of mobilization at approximately the same moment and came into politics together. When generation is used in the singular, it is generally has this meaning. On the other hand, ‘generational units’ is used to identify the decomposition of political generations into groups and networks with ideological affiliations similar to those of the decomposed generation of activists. A ‘youth movement’ designates an organized age-based group, whose members share the same political opinions and attitudes.
  - 2 I would like to deeply thank Nancy Ali and Victor Salama for their editing of this text.

interpretation may originate in generational gap theory, which posits the simplistic assumption that the “‘young’ generation is (always) ‘liberal’ and the ‘old’ generation is ‘conservative’” (Rintala 1963, 512). Thus, a revolution must be a *youth* action that responds to a *youth* demand. Certainly, the major participants in the revolutionary events come from a *younger* age-based group, if we follow a demographic analysis, but this should not lead to the automatic assumption that only one unique group or generation was present.

Furthermore, this categorization has also been largely exploited and manipulated by the various Egyptian governments and regimes that have come to power since Mubarak, either to find the ‘causes’ of this youth participation (generally found in theories of *relative frustration*) or to yield some concessions to relieve the anger of youth (Allal and El Chazli 2012).<sup>3</sup> In other words, by associating the revolution with youth, its causes could be simplistically reduced to a reaction to unemployment and socio-economic deprivation (Jamal and Hoffman 2012), themselves consequences of the substantial youth bulge.

Moreover, substantial attention has been placed on the pivotal role of the Internet and the use young activists made of digital social networks. In a way, digital technology is a marker of these youth, their generational marker. It is therefore commonly proclaimed that this ‘Revolution 2.0’ was created by a Facebook and Twitter generation. All of these interpretations tend, as Jean-François Sirinelli noted of the ‘68 generation(s)’ in France, to identify a “homogenous actor of the events, with an emblematic character, *the young*” (Sirinelli 2008, 116). In the Egyptian context both academic and media circles tried to answer the question of ‘why’ the youth participated or were naturally keen to participate in the Revolution by in general adopting a macro-scale approach, considering the presence of youth as reflecting a single reality and movement.

Still, a burning question remains, a question that is at the core of the discussion about generational phenomenon and that goes well beyond the Egyptian case: *what age bracket does this title of ‘youth’ encompass, and what is youth?* Does ‘youth’ automatically refer to the 15–25 age group? Could it be extended to 30 or even 45?

In Egypt, for instance, the dynamics of politics and of ‘generational’ phenomena are caught up in the opposition between young/reformist and old/conservative. The official representation of what *youth* is, of what a *new guard* is, and the automatic association of these criteria with being ‘more modern, more open to the West’ and with a more reformist vision of politics, was for a

---

3 In their article, Amin Allal and Youssef El Chazli criticize – through a comparison between Tunisian and Egyptian revolutionary situations – the interpretation of the motivation of youth participation in politics implied by such approaches.

long time encapsulated by the former president's son Gamal Mubarak and his clique. When they entered into politics they were between their late thirties and late forties (even extending to mid-fifties in some cases). When Mohamed Morsi, after he was elected president in 2012 after the revolution, decided to make room for some 'young' opposition representatives within the government or in the Constituent Assembly, nominees were in their early thirties or early forties. When a number of activists from many political groups created the 'Coalition of Revolutionary Youth' they were on average between twenty-five and thirty-nine, although the largest mass of young participants in revolutionary events were between fifteen and twenty-five years old. In this sense, this article departs from generalizing patterns and adopts a micro-level approach. Thus the main concern here is not to ask why youth are keen to participate in revolutionary events, but rather how historical and personal trajectories converge at a given moment, in order to observe "what is made by actors who are themselves being made by the events" (De Queiroz and Ziolkowski, cited in Fillieule 2001, 100).

This focus on trajectories has two main goals. Firstly, it helps to identify political generation(s), drawing on Mannheim's definition, as going beyond biological belonging to an age group. Mannheim's definition points to the impact of historical moments on the formation of concrete groups based on self-conscious belonging to a generational 'collective identity' (Mannheim 1952). Secondly, it leads to the question of the impact of historical moments on the individual trajectories of young activists, and how such moments actually determine the decomposition of political generations. Through a particular case study of one Egyptian group of activists, I will argue that they have formed a 'political generation' that acts as a self-conscious group, whose members share the same location from a socio-historical viewpoint (Mannheim 1952). I will show how the members of this generation of activists have changed following contact with a historical event, a 'turning point' (Abbott 2001), in this case the revolution. This will lead to a discussion of the notions of youth and of generation, as well as to an inquiry into how the evolution of events and of mobilization momentum can provide a significant and concrete example of the formation of political generations. At the same time, though, these influences might also enable decomposition into rival 'generational units' that, if we follow Karl Mannheim, relate to how individuals within the same generation can interpret and re-appropriate events and circumstances (Mannheim 1952). More precisely, the main intention here is to discuss the transformation of a political generation when it comes in contact with a revolutionary moment.

To demonstrate how this generation of activists has been formed, and why it can in fact be referred to as a generation following Mannheim's definition, it is necessary to first retrace the historical background in which this generation

of activists was formed. A description of the political context of Mubarak's last few years in power is required to explain how the emergence of a political context marked by a number of events and 'protest moments' (Favre 1990) contributed to the formation of a political generation of activists. (1) A number of theoretical and methodological aspects will be discussed, related to debates on the formation of a generation, on youth, and on how generational phenomena matter for the continuity and the maintenance of mobilization and for the transmission of activist values; (2) Focusing on generational experience, tracing trajectories of individuals will be necessary in order to understand the interrelation between events and generational phenomena; and (3) The shift in focus from a macro-level analysis of youth participation in the revolution to a micro-level analysis of youth trajectories is necessary in order to better understand the particularities of each case. All this will point to the absence of a concrete age-based group of '*shabab al-thawra*' as a political generational grouping that shares the same political attitudes and the same ways of making revolution, and which is systematically opposed to other groups that are not identified or represented as young. The idea here is to *shed light on the trajectories of 'young' activists* who shared the same political generation (the *Kifāya* momentum), and who, even though all are of Leftist political leanings, disagree on every step taken *since the establishment of the revolutionary stance*.

### Notes on Methodology

Some methodological aspects and choices made in this chapter should be addressed, particularly regarding the identities of interviewees and of some groups of youth activists. Even though the interviewees are 'public' figures, i.e. generally well-known activists from before January 25th 2011, who make their ideas and their stances on events and affairs public, and who are 'institutionalized' in that they participate in both conventional and unconventional politics, I will not mention their names. Biographical details will only be given to help contextualize their backgrounds, as well as their socialization process and gradual involvement in politics. The issue of citing the names of youth activists – especially those who are 'well known' – is problematic, since the choice not to cite names is usually either an ethically-driven decision (Onodera 2011, 70)<sup>4</sup> or one imposed from a security viewpoint. In a political situation where the

---

4 I share here Onodera's point of view with regards to the sensitive issue of whether or not to cite the activists' names, especially the ethical argument he makes in his article that many of the observations made by researchers are based on the experiences of those anonymous activists and should thus be accredited to them.

arbitrary use of violence and repression is exercised against many sectors of youth activism, whether to give names or not is a delicate and contentious issue, and it is important to remain mindful of the fact that omitting their names might lead to neglecting the decisive roles these individuals have played in politics.

The interviews presented are biographical, tracing the trajectories of each activist (his/her socialization process, his/her interests, his/her engagement in political activism, his/her periods of abeyance, etc.). Some of the interviews were carried out longitudinally, meeting up regularly with activists since 2006 (or later) during each new mid- to large-scale political event. This long-term broad perspective has also made it possible to reconstruct, through individual trajectories, the trajectories of groups, networks and movements created by these young activists. My observations are Cairo-based, and mainly take into consideration biographical information, political trajectories and actions in the capital. Other studies show the existence of similar groups in other cities.<sup>5</sup>

Since January 25th 2011, I have started to broaden the circles of interviewees to include newcomers on the political scene. The use of longitudinal perspective as well as the widening of the sample of interviewees to include newcomers belonging to other generations of activists have made it possible to observe intra- and inter-generational conflicts between the generations of youth that have interacted together within revolutionary events, while also showing how this has contributed to the larger process of societal and political change. What is interesting about the interviews is that they also function as an important collection of oral testimonies about the recent situation in Egypt. In addition, new factors appeared to be crucial in the process of socialization of these activists, for instance the eruption and intensification of the use of violence as a component of political interaction, and the establishment of elections as a process of institutionalizing popular expression.

Some of the interviews since January 25th 2011 were conducted immediately in the aftermath of events, whereas others were carried out later on, letting activists narrate the events with more distance and perspective. The many events that Egypt has witnessed since the inception of a 'revolutionary situation' also influenced the flow of the interviews and the questions addressed to those activists: important self-criticisms could be tested over time, and connected to attitudes towards both individual and collective trajectories. This relates to the importance of a longitudinal approach in interviewing activists, in order to understand the process of participation and commitment in politics

---

5 Here it is worth mentioning the ongoing doctoral research of Youssef El Chazli on activism in Alexandria between 2000–2011.



(Muxel 2001, 409–430; Fillieule 2005, 17) and how it is transformed by time and events. The objective is also to show how contact between personal trajectories and important political events can influence the unity of one political generation.

### Mubarak's Last Years in Power and the Return of "street politics"

From the year 2000 onwards, Egypt witnessed a renewal of 'street politics' as a mode of *unconventional* political participation (Bayat 1997).<sup>6</sup> This was first directed toward external events and causes, for instance demonstrations in solidarity with the Second Palestinian Intifada in 2000 and against the War in Iraq in March 2003. These mobilizations served as a platform to indirectly confront the Mubarak regime, and furnished a platform for discussing the domestic situation. During these years a new actor entered into politics, prompting a debate over a 'Syrian scenario' where the transfer of power in Egypt would be hereditary. The introduction of Gamal Mubarak, via the National Democratic Party, as an ostensible representative of a new guard, a young generation of reformists who would lead the process of modernizing both the party and the country, and as a man opposed to an old generation of incumbents, led to number of political changes. First of all, it made the regime allow some room for newcomers, adopting new constitutional amendments to potentially 'legitimize' the election of Gamal Mubarak through 'pluralistic' elections. It also changed the equilibrium the incumbents had maintained until then between the government and the party. On the other hand, this newly created situation revived the debate over the transmission of power and opened the way for contestation.

A large front of opposition members was formed to oppose Mubarak's hold on power, directed against both father and son. A number of movements for change were created as early as 2004. One of the first concrete movements of this kind was the Egyptian Movement for Change, better known under the name of *Kifāya* ('enough' in Arabic). Its originality lay in the fact that it was composed of representatives from across the entire political spectrum who were bringing politics to the streets, and was thus without a clear ideological line. Yet its numbers remained limited to a few thousand even at its most heated level of momentum. Movements such as *Kifāya*, or its successors like

---

6 What I call here *unconventional* political participation is the taking of political debate to the streets without seeking institutionalization of any kind, as opposed to conventional political participation through political parties, parliaments, etc.

the Egyptian Association for Change created in 2010, which revolved around the personality of Muhammad al-Baradī,<sup>5</sup> were attempting to create an alternative opposition to the formally existing political parties, those legal political parties that were largely considered to be an opposition tolerated by or in support of the state (Zartman 1988, 61–87). Furthermore, these movements tried to find a third option between the legal and official parties and the Muslim Brotherhood, described often as the only and the most important – but hence controlled – opposition to the Mubarak’s regime. These movements, and other forms of mobilization that touched all spectra of society, especially workers, served between 2004 and 2010 as a platform for the inauguration of newcomers, essentially young Egyptians, into activism. In fact, the years between 2005 and 2010 witnessed multiple youth-initiated movements and networks that led to the major protest moments that occurred during this time. Many of those movements and networks were the same ones that called for revolution on January 25th, 2011.

It must be noted that direct or indirect protests against the regime extended to nearly all sectors of society. This made it obvious that there was a development of a “culture of protest” (Beinin 2007, 234). In general, even though the regime and the political authorities would sometimes bend to the demands of some of the strikes and protests by socio-economic actors, most often they responded by intimidating political demonstrators or repressing them with riot police. It is worth mentioning that one of the main changes that occurred during this period was that Mubarak gave unprecedented power to the Ministry of the Interior and to the State Security Services (*Amn al-Dawla*, a political police of sorts), both of which had (and still have) unlimited and arbitrary powers.

### The Formation of ‘Political Generation(s)’ of Young Activists

I argue that the period of 2005–2010 witnessed the formation of three main political generational units of activists – all located in Cairo – who made up the main spectrum of youth activism and politics in the Egyptian capital. A particular event or moment of mobilization marked each of these groups of activists. In that sense, they form *de facto* a ‘political generation.’ Actually, as Marvin Rintala points out in his essay on political generations, “the major emphasis of a generation’s approach to politics...has been upon the reaction to very specific and concrete historical events of those in their formative years during these events” (Rintala 1963, 518). The common characteristics shared by these generations of activists were, mainly, that their action was directed toward the internal sphere, that their intention was to ‘*change something*,’ that

their uniting feature was their age and thus the feeling of being young, and the fact that they shared a common perception of their socio-political context.

In fact it appears here that “...the dynamics of the formation of political generations appears to be that historical circumstances...and mobilization forces...have combined during certain periods in history to form active political generations” (Braungart and Braungart 1986, 217–218). The first wave of these generational movements was formed in the momentum of the *Kifâya* movement. This first generation coalesced in various forms. The most ‘structured’ grouping came under the name of *Youth for Change* (Hassabo 2009), and the loose networks of bloggers-activists grouped in a network called the Movement of February 30th. This federation of youth activists, most of them newly committed to politics, transcended all political orientations and affiliations and went beyond ideological differences. This first generation of activists and early networks of activists and political bloggers operated as a sort of ‘incubator movement’ for other generations. The second generation of activists was created around the aftermath of the 6th of April, 2008, when a Facebook page created by two activists, one of them belonging to the first generation of activists, called for a day of general strike in solidarity with the workers of Ghazl al-Mahalla.<sup>7</sup> Later in June, the two co-founders of the Facebook page created the Sixth of April Youth Movement. This movement was interested in peaceful change, and has been generally compared to the Serbian Otpor youth movement. During the summer of 2010, a young man named Khaled Sa’id from Alexandria was killed after being beaten up by two sub-officers. An anonymously administrated Facebook group under the name of *Kullina Khâlid Sa’id* (We Are All Khaled Said) started to call for simultaneous silent demonstrations in several cities. It would later become news that the page administrator had known Islamist tendencies during the years of political protest in Egypt, and had somehow been linked to the blogosphere network and to the *Kifâya* generation. The murder of Khalîd Sa’id converged with the entry onto the political scene of Muhammad al-Barad’î, who was introduced as a potential president of Egypt and as a symbol for change. Newcomers to politics who began their commitment in this context have contributed to creating a new generation of activists. This third generation’s experience, under the authoritarian rule of the Mubarak regime, differs from the previous ones in their commitment to silent,

---

7 The Workers of Misr Company for Spinning and Weaving, one of the biggest textile company in Egypt, went on one the biggest strikes of the last years of the Mubarak era. On April 6th, 2008, the workers were not successful in going on strike, but their city, Mahalla al-Kubra, saw a three-day riot.

apolitical, 'conservative' demonstrations, at least in the first actions led by the *Kullina Khaled Sa'îd* facebook page.

It should be noted that at each of these moments, previous networks and generations of activists mobilized and created new movements. Between each wave of momentum of political mobilization, structures would not survive, and activists would go into *abeyance* (Taylor 1989). Therefore, in between surges of mobilization momentum there were small-scale events that united those activists again on more focused campaigns and activities, and helped maintain the relations between activists within each generation and between them. More obviously, these in-between moments would also make possible the small-scale entry into politics of new activists who joined any of the existing generations. Furthermore, those in-between moments have had major impacts on the socialization and politicization processes in activists' trajectories. They are 'abeyance' moments, or a suspended time of reflection about activism or course to be taken. They are also moments where activists would take care of personal lives that sometimes were put on hold or even damaged by the risks of activism (this is especially the case, for example, when activists received prison sentences).

### The 'Kifâya Generation'

We have realized that we have lived all of our lives under Mubarak's presidency and under the Emergency Law...This is the keyword of our generation. We are generations who in reality have lived under Emergency Law, we have not known Egypt in any other situation that one of Exception. For us, Egypt has always been a State of 'Emergency' / 'Exceptional' [laws]. We have not known Egypt in any other state.<sup>8</sup>

Margaret and Robert Braungart have noted that "a political generation is said to come into existence when an age group rejects the existing order, joins together, and attempts to direct the course of politics as its generational mission" (Braungart and Braungart 1986, 217). When asked why they became interested in and participated in politics, a number of activists responded with a very simple answer: they had the feeling that 'something must change.' This feeling was further fueled by the opportunity presented to them by the rise of the *Kifâya* movement, which offered them a chance to experience engagement with politics. When a number of relatively young individuals (generally those

<sup>8</sup> Interview with female activist, January 14th, 2008.

born between the mid-seventies and mid-eighties and still in higher education or just entering adulthood) began to interact with the older political activists of *Kifâya*, they realized that their age-group's condition was leading them to develop a generational "self-conscious identity" (Alwin and McCammon 2003, 25). They thus started to do politics in their own way. In other terms, this was clearly the development of a "*generational consciousness that makes possible the creation of a political generation*" (Boumaza 2009, 194). While addressing generational phenomena, it is useful to refer to Mannheim and his definition of generation not as determined by biological age, but as a social definition based on the location of an age-based group in time and its connections with the socio-historical context. By witnessing the same socio-historical context, and by realizing their shared 'collective problem' – having been born and raised under only one president (Mubarak, from 1981 to 2011), and having always lived under the state of emergency (lifted only in July 2011, with new forms established since then) – this *Kifâya Generation*<sup>9</sup> (if a political generation can be named after its adhesion date or its marking event) was an important player in the political dynamics under an authoritarian context.

Each trajectory of commitment in politics has its own paths and particularities, but these newcomers into politics shared certain patterns of socialization, and would sometimes take part in the same events. This could be related to *period effects* and more specifically to the authoritarian political context of Egypt under Mubarak, where critics of the regime were silenced. In general, activists would come into politics at major moments of mobilization or following the arrival of new political figures or ideas: for instance, the Second Palestinian Intifada in 2000 or the War on Iraq in 2003. Those two moments paved the way for the initial development of political consciousness that would lead to political participation in street demonstrations. For some other activists, the catalyst was the aura of certain opposition figures like Ayman Nûr, the ex-president of al-Ghad Party, subsequently imprisoned by Mubarak regime, whose party promoted a 'Third Way' and created a base for socializing newcomers into politics. Moreover, these youth witnessed an important technological development, the introduction of the Internet, which created a platform for the relatively free exchange of information as a tool to express visions of politics and civil rights. For some, the Internet provided a source of information on demonstrations, and created a location to learn about Egyptian and international politics, something not available through mainstream media. In addition, satellite television offered another venue, further opening viewers' perspectives. Talk

---

9 This generation could also be called the 'Emergency law generation,' as Egypt has been continuously under emergency law for the last thirty years. (El Chazli and Hassabo 2013).

shows broadcasted on the satellite private channels, which became popular in the mid 2000s, contributed to the process of providing political information by allowing a 'free' arena where the opposition could debate.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the rise and spread of independent newspapers has marked some of those activists in that they created an arena for opposition viewpoints to be expressed (though still within certain red lines), which was not feasible inside official information channels.

In the formation of some activists' political trajectories, their university years played the classic role of shaping initial political interests and establishing contact with political groupings of students that reflect the general political spectrum (Farag 2007). Some activists were already acquainted with the world of politics, having been raised by activist parents, but others hid their political commitment from their families. They also went through different paths of ideological engagement and indoctrination: some vacillated between several ideologies and political formations before settling on one; others converted to ideas that ranged from moderate Islamism to Anarchism; and still others declared an absence of ideological preferences. The momentum of the *Kifāya* movement, its ideal of heterogeneity and its mode of action attracted these young people interested in politics. In addition, it provided them with the opportunity and framework to create their own political rally. They found a *keyword* for their affiliation to a generation that eventually became a central actor of 'street politics' in Cairo (Bayat 1997). They set up daring actions, such as surprise demonstrations in popular quarters of the capital. They even organized a sit-in at Tahrir Square on the night of 16th to 17th March 2006, in solidarity with the movement of Judges for Independence. During 2005 and 2006, both the Youth for Change and the loose network of activist-bloggers launched a number of demonstrations and campaigns, and their actions were not always in line with their elders, the leaders of *Kifāya*. The latter belonged to the generation of the sixties and the seventies, which became politically engaged while they were students under Nasser and Sadat, and were the main players of student movements during that time (Abdallah 2008; El Khawaga 2003).

The *Kifāya*'s momentum faded after a while with the closure of a 'cycle of protest' (Tarrow 1995), and the unity of youth groups and networks began to split.

---

10 Many channels and talk shows, have benefited from a relatively 'free' tone compared to public media. The talk show *al-'ashira' massâ'n* (10:00 PM) on Dream TV, presented by Mona El Shazli, gave space for bloggers to talk about a famous sexual harassment case that happened in 2006. Also, days before the 25th of January 2011, ONTV invited some activists to talk about their expectations for the day during its show '*Baladna bil masri*' (*Our nation in Egyptian*).

However, it launched processes of reconversion, of transfer to a new group or new networks, or evolution into ‘generational units.’ This *Kifāya* generation of activists still shared the same ‘collective problem’ and, generally speaking, still had the same demands during these years.<sup>11</sup> They participated together in similar protest moments, for instance the April 6th 2008 demonstrations in Cairo, or the Khaled Sa’id demonstrations against torture in the summer of 2010. Still others became militants in favor of more social struggles like the battle for a minimum wage in the public sector launched in May 2010. In brief, they were united in the years preceding the Revolution by sharing the same general values of liberty, by experiencing the same ‘collective problem’ and by having the same objective for their commitment, namely that ‘something must change.’

### Mubarak Leaves, but What is Left of a Generation’s Unity?

Revolutions are without a doubt among those historical moments that make an important impact on those who live them and participate in them. However, they are lived differently by each individual and thus are subjective events. Each individual experiences the same event differently and acts in her/his own way, therefore having his/her own narrative of it. If we consider the *Kifāya* generation of activists, we can observe a multiplicity of attitudes towards the Revolution, a moment which is perceived as ‘traumatizing,’ ‘big,’ ‘unbelievable,’ ‘long awaited,’ and so on. Because of the various perceptions of and attitudes toward this historical event, rivalries between *generational units* become obvious during a revolutionary situation. The ‘collective problem’ that made the members of this generation stand together no longer exists. Their goal has been achieved: ‘things have changed’ and Mubarak was removed. They no longer share the same enemy, and thus find themselves divided on every other matter. In order to illustrate this, three activists’ trajectories will be described in detail to show how attitudes within the same political generation are influenced by the political situation and, as a result, become opposed to one another, thus denying the presence of a united youth movement on a large scale. For this, the political situation since the departure of Mubarak must be briefly described.

Since February 2011, Egypt has undergone a frequent reshuffle of power, with four regime changes. With each new reshuffle, there has been a convergence

---

11 Still, these demands remained vague. They dreamt of a revolution, but knew that demonstrations were not enough, and they agreed largely in their support of demands for general liberties (liberation of prisoners, end of torture and police brutality, freedom of expression, etc.).

between institutional dynamics (i.e., elaboration of new constitutions, the holding of parliamentary and presidential elections) and massive mobilization momentum. When Mubarak stepped down on February 11th, 2011, after eighteen days of widespread demonstrations with violence, culminating in the Day of Anger, January 28th, the Supreme Council for Military Affairs (SCAF) succeeded him. Since the Day of Anger, the Army has become an integral and pivotal actor in the political sphere. The SCAF's eighteenth months in office saw numerous violent clashes between revolutionaries and either army soldiers or riot police. In June 2012, political power was handed to the Muslim Brotherhood following Muhammad Morsi's election in the first presidential elections after the revolution. Soon, however, protests rose against the Muslim Brotherhood's hold on power, in a configuration in which both supporters of the revolution and of Mubarak's ex-regime joined the mobilization against the Muslim Brotherhood, and in which violence continued to mark protest dynamics. Clashes occurred either between civilians and anti-riot troops, or between civilians themselves (pro-Muslim Brotherhood sympathizers and anti-Muslim Brotherhood). A year later, on June 2013, a new wave of mobilization was organized against the Muslim Brotherhood in a day of rebellion that would again bring down the president and bring the army once again into the foreground. This created a new political configuration in which members of the oppositional elite were to gain positions in the new transitional regime. But soon after, the counter-revolutionary tendencies of the new transitional regime appeared, as violence and repression became widely used. The Muslim Brotherhood were the object of harsh repression when approximately 1000 persons were massacred in August 2013 during the dispersion of the sit-in at Rab'a al-Adawiyya. Counter-revolutionary proclivities became even more visible after the Ministry of Defense's Abdal Fattâh al-Sissi was elected president in June 2014, when government restraints were imposed not only on the Islamists but also on protestors and activists who had themselves also opposed the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The positions and attitudes of this generation of activists have been fundamentally transformed by their perceptions of the events involved in this important acceleration of history, and the multiple political changes that took place. They also had to come to deal with new phenomena such as elections or violence. But above all, the fundamental point of contestation was *how to make a revolution*, especially when events far exceeded their expectations: what was basically a Facebook-created event that would have otherwise gone unnoticed ended up amassing millions of protestors in the streets. In the authoritarian context, they once had been only a minority demonstrating against the regime. But in the revolutionary context, they were only a few among millions of protestors. For some, the revolution ultimately changed their



status: some were activists transformed into revolutionaries, others became more institutionalized, others more radicalized, etc. To a certain extent, the context imposed the necessity of elaborating decision-making processes and organizing among themselves, as well as managing violence and dealing with a multiplicity of new actors. Divergences started to appear within this political generation. The unity that rallied its members before the revolution against *one enemy* dissipated once this enemy was defeated. Thus, friends of yesterday became enemies of today. ‘Generational units’ became more functional and more apparent, revealing opposing views. Each generational unit began to re-appropriate events differently and therefore to position their attitudes based on these perceptions.

### A Generation across the Revolution: Trajectories of Activists

This generation was maintained above all by its sharing the same location, a socio-historical context that made “many of its members become aware that they are bound together by a shared age-group consciousness and mobilize as an active force for political change” (Braungart and Braungart 1986, 217). The coming together of this generation of activists had set aside its members’ political differences and ideological beliefs: they were Trotskyists, Islamists, Communists, Liberals, Socialists, Nationalistic, Anarchists, etc.; in brief, they had conflicting ways of thinking politics, but shared the same ‘collective problem’ and the awareness that their action must be directed to resolve this collective problem. When the problem is not collective any more, divergences became visible.

Through three trajectories of activists from the *Kifāya* generation, a variety of attitudes and reflections about revolutionary events and how to deal with or achieve political change will be detailed here. Even though the selected activists all share leftist ideologies, their attitudes differ entirely from one another, specifically around topics such as elections, violence, demonstrations and negotiation with officials. In sum, they disagreed on the way to carry out the revolution, what paths it should take, and what kind of processes would best bring about change, and particularly on the question of whether it should follow an institutional path or a revolutionary one.

#### Activist 1: Hassanein

Born in the mid-seventies, Hassanein began his political initiation and process of socialization during the beginning of his university years, in the late

nineties. Nasserism first attracted him, but he then joined a radical left-wing movement. By the time of the *Kifâya* moment, he was already an experienced activist, and was older than most newcomers to activism. He served for some of them as a ‘mentor’ (he is today in his forties). After the *Kifâya* momentum tailed off, he joined several initiatives and co-founded a group of youth activists in 2010. This latter group joined the calls for the Revolution of January 25th, and Hassanein would be a member of a coalition of youth movements, and among those who organized the call for demonstrations in January 2011.

Since that date, divergences of opinion with his comrades started to take a more prominent place. These revolved around how to continue the revolution, what steps should be taken to make a ‘transition,’ and what tools should be used.

### Activist 2: Mohsen

Mohsen, the second activist, was born at the beginning of the eighties. His political career went through some fluctuations and different instances of socialization. The internet also created opportunities for such socialization, through forums and then via blogs. He was also interested in several different ideologies, and after an extensive period of study he converted from a certain strand of political Islam to an extreme leftist ideology.

His first participation in collective action was in *Kifâya*'s demonstrations. He was then arrested during the Mubarak years in 2006 while demonstrating in solidarity with reformist judges. He spent more than a month in prison. He participated in nearly all the demonstrations in the two main protest moments of 2008 and in 2010. Then, too, he was briefly arrested on several occasions. During the revolutionary events of 2011 he was seriously wounded by police rubber bullets.

We can find differences in attitude between Mohsen and Hassanein. Hassanein, for example, went through a ‘partisan’ experience by joining a political party that merged multiple leftist ideologies. He argues that building organization, mainly found in political parties, is the best way to produce change. It is an important tool for regulating political interactions and for doing politics. For instance, elections are important to channel popular demands and to allow political parties to build a popular base; and in revolutionary times negotiations with members from ex-regimes could be necessary.

Mohsen stands on the opposite side, as he refuses hierarchical forms of organization. For him, negotiating with members from the ex-regime is a form of treason. Elections – through the imposed system of representation – are not

genuinely democratic. A few days after Mubarak stepped down from power, a second sit-in, a gathering of no more than one thousand people, was organized in Tahrir Square, with some activists and some of the 'people': the sit-in's main purpose was the removal of the Prime minister Ahmad Shafiq, who had been nominated by Hosni Mubarak. It also aimed to pursue the revolution's demands: a priority was to bring the officials from the Mubarak regime responsible for 'crimes' against Egyptians – mainly those committed during the early days of the revolution – before the courts. Even though Hassanein agrees with these same demands, he thinks that the tools to achieve them must be changed. He was completely opposed to the sit-in, even though he participated in the previous one in Tahrir Square, from January 28th to February 11th 2011. He felt that the sit-in went against the general ambiance (the main debates at this time focused on the return to normality and stability) and would make people hate the revolution. His attitude was mainly shaped by the new revolutionary conjuncture that associates a mobilization's success with the number of people who participate in it. He sees this period as more suited for negotiations and national dialogue. It should mark the start of the building process; in other words, an institutional process should be launched. On the contrary, for Mohsen, the revolution is still in the streets, and pressure from below should be maintained, even if only by a minority. No negotiations should be made until all of the demands are satisfied.

### Activist 3: Mourad

Mourad, born in the early eighties, was politicized before university when he joined the Salafis. In his university years, he joined the Muslim Brotherhood but then decided to leave them. He made a career shift as part of his professional trajectory. He became close to the *Kifâya* groups and the associated youth. He became active on internet forums and blogs, and he even started a blog where he wrote about several subjects. He defines himself as a leftist, and more precisely as center-left. After the revolution, he was a co-founder of a league for progressive youth. He also joined a center-left political party but was not particularly active in it.

It can be said that Mourad occupies a conciliatory position between those of Mohsen and of Hassanein. For him, negotiating with former members of ex-regimes is not bad, if pressure is still maintained on the streets. Negotiations could be good, or at least helpful for understanding how the 'other' thinks. Participating in elections is important: the revolution must have its voice in parliament.

The period of the elections and constitutional referendums provided an ideal moment to observe, for instance, how these activists' attitudes differed with regards to the voting. Let's take into consideration a concrete case of divergence: the presidential elections of 2011. In the second round, the ballot boxes opposed Ahmad Shafiq, the Prime minister under Mubarak and during the first days of the SCAF in power, to Muhammad Morsi, a representative of the Muslim Brotherhood. Hassanein, even though he is a leftist, voted for Morsi, considering the latter to be the better choice because the Muslim Brotherhood were in some way 'our' allies, at least during the early days of the revolution. Mohsen decided to completely boycott the elections from the very beginning, even though he had considered participating in March 2011, when a number of public figures and politicians declared their intentions to run, among them an eminent judge. Mohsen even criticized the idea of electing Muhammed Morsi. According to him, the Muslim Brotherhood were not to be considered comrades of the square (*rufaḡâ' al-midân*), since they sat at the negotiation table with Omar Sulayman, the former chief of intelligence and Mubarak's vice-president in his last days, when "there [were] still people bleeding." Later on, both Mohsen and Hassanein would oppose Muhammed Morsi and support the demonstrations against his rule on the 30th of June, both standing firm in their position: *no to Muslim Brotherhood, no to a military regime*. Even though recent developments since June 30th would slightly change their positions, in the sense that they were firmly opposed to the 'massacre of Rabi'â,' when new elections arrived Mohsen insisted on boycotting them, this time again even more convinced that the 'results were known in advance.' These elections pitted the former minister of Defense Marshall 'Abdal Fattâh al-Sissi against the Nasserist Hamdin Sabahi, and everyone knew al-Sissi would be elected president. By contrast, Hassanein considered that, even though results were known beforehand, going to ballots boxes was a way to prove that *the voice of the revolution* still exists.

### Conclusion

In one of his interviews, Pierre Bourdieu insisted that "youth is only a word" (Bourdieu 1992, 143–154), and that it is actually a 'category' that can be manipulated and instrumentalized by authorities. In the Egyptian context, the term *youth of the Revolution* (Shabâb al-Thawra) has been widely used by successive regimes: every regime attempts to talk to the youth, for instance Mubarak depicting the revolution's demands as those of the young (mainly unemployment), or the SCAF releasing communiqués on Facebook to be 'close to youth.'

Thus, when the regime associated the revolution with its youth, it thought it would be easier to canalize the massive mobilizations.

Therefore, the ways in which this category has been an 'object of manipulation' from the start of the revolutionary situation in Egypt are, I argue, of utmost importance and demand nuanced analysis. The category of the *Shabâb al-thawra* has been represented as the 'mainstream' figure of the young Egyptian *active* in the revolution. In fact, this figure represents educated, politicized, non-violent, urbanized, internet-savvy Egyptians who should and would vote in elections and participate in political debates and political parties. Youth who do not fit this description are not considered representative of the revolutionary youth. Furthermore, the expression *shabâb al-thawra* is also used to refer to a 'concrete group,' a single generation of *all* youth who are interested in the public domain, who share the same vision and political orientation, and who give voice to the demands of the youth since it is, after all, a youth revolution. In effect, this has led to delegitimizing every other youth expression that did not adhere to those dominant representations. In many cases, the young front-liners in conflict with anti-riot police or soldiers would be described as thugs (*baltaguiya*), people not at all representative of the image of the revolution.

The perception of the existence of a unified 'youth movement' and a united 'young generation' participating in the revolution, described and explained by academic and media circles on the one hand, and by every regime in power, whether Mubarak or any of the authorities who succeeded him (the SCAF, Mohamed Morsi, the interim regime of Adly Mansour, and most recently with Marshall al-Sissi) on the other, has not generally taken into consideration the micro-level of the individual. Nor has it answered what seem like simple questions: How has each of the trajectories of experienced activists belonging to the same political generation been affected by revolutionary events? How have attitudes been shaped and how have political commitments been restructured?

The focus here on a micro-level approach to these trajectories, addressing them through a generational lens, was meant to reflect the heterogeneity and the multiplicity of the generational belonging of the youth who participated in revolutionary events. From a macro-scale perspective, we observe that the formation of generational units takes place around the ways that individuals experience particular events and develop their political views in response to such events. This observation leads to several questions. For instance, does geographic location influence the way individuals react to particular events? More specifically, do the youth living in cities that witnessed little or no mobilization during the revolution share the same political views as those who participated in the violent events in the cities of Cairo, Alexandria and Suez in

early 2011? Furthermore, what sort of effect does “occupational milieu” (Berger 1960, 10–23) have on the creation of generational units? For instance, can we talk about a generation of young journalists who covered the revolutionary events or a generation of young physicians who volunteered in the makeshift ‘field hospitals’ during the clashes, and so on?

In this chapter, I have attempted to analyze the problem posed by a categorization that homogenizes the youth movement by unifying all its units. Considering all the youth who participated, called for or initiated the successive events that shaped the reality in Egypt over the past four years as part of the same politically united ‘group’ does not take into account the variety of their profiles – their geographical location, their social class, their experiences in politics, etc. In addition, the notion of ‘political generation’ or the more complex concept of ‘generation’ (in the Egyptian context generally understood as biological generation) overlooks the diversity of the subjects. By analyzing young activists, along with their trajectories, the dates they joined a movement and entered politics, and the ‘events’ that motivated them to engage in politics, we have been able to uncover the existence of multiple (political) generations of activists in the revolutionary moment. Even though these generational units converged on general demands, they disagreed about every other step that was taken to pursue revolutionary goals and to actualize evolutionary changes. Such momentum can thus reinforce the rivalries between generational units, the groups and network of activists resulting from the decomposition of political generation(s).

## References

- Abbott, Andrew. *Times Matter: On Theory and Method*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001.
- Abdallah, Ahmad. *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt 1923–1973*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2008.
- Allal, Amin and Youssef El Chazli. “Figures du Déclassement et Passage au Politique dans les Situations Révolutionnaires Egyptienne et Tunisienne,” in *Sens Politique du Travail*, edited by Ivan Sainsaulieu and Muriel Surdiz, 321–336. Paris: Armand Colin, 2012.
- Alwin, Duane F. and Ryan J. McCammon. “Generations, Cohorts and Social Change,” in *Handbook of Life Course*, edited by Jeylan T. Mortimer and Michael J. Shanahan, 23–50. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2003.
- Bayat, Asef. *Street Politics: Poor People’s Movements in Iran*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

- Beinin, Joel. "The Egyptian Workers Movement in 2007," in *Chroniques Egyptiennes 2007*, edited by Hadjar Aouardji and Hélène Legeay, 217–238. Cairo: CEDEJ, 2007.
- Berger, Bennet M. "How Long is a Generation?" *The British Journal of Sociology* 11, 1 (1960): 10–23.
- Boumaza, Magali. "Les Générations Politiques au Prisme de la Comparaison: Quelques Propositions Théoriques et Méthodologiques." *Revue internationale de politique comparée* 16, 2 (2009): 189–203.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. "La 'Jeunesse' n'est qu'un Mot," interview with Anne-Marie Métaillée, in *Questions de Sociologie*, 143–154. Paris: Editions du Minuit, 1992.
- Braungart, Richard G. and Margaret M. Braungart. "Life-Course and Generational Politics." *Annual Review of Sociology* 12 (1986): 205–231.
- El Chazli, Youssef and Chaymaa Hassabo. "Socio-Histoire d'un Processus Révolutionnaire. Analyse de la 'Configuration Contestataire' Egyptienne (2003–2011)" in *Au Cœur des Révoltes Arabes. Devenir Révolutionnaires*, edited by Amin Allal and Thomas Pierret. Paris: Armand Colin, 2013.
- El Khawaga, Dina. "La Génération *Seventies* en Égypte. La Société Civile Comme Répertoire d'Action Alternatif," in *Mobilisations et Protestations dans les Sociétés Musulmanes*, edited by Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi and Olivier Fillieule, 271–292. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2003.
- Farag, Iman. "Quand 'l'Education Forme la Jeunesse': la Construction d'une Catégorie en Égypte," in *Jeunesses des Sociétés Arabes. Par-delà les Promesses et les Menaces*, edited by Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi and Iman Farag, 49–78. Paris: Aux lieux d'être/CEDEJ, 2007.
- Favre, Pierre (ed). *La Manifestation*, Paris: Presses de la FNSP, 1990.
- Fillieule, Olivier. "Propositions pour une Analyse Processuelle de l'Engagement Militant. Post Scriptum." *Revue Française de Science Politique* 51, 1–2 (2001): 199–215.
- Fillieule, Olivier. "Temps biographique, temps social et variabilité des retributions," in *Le disengagement militant*, edited by Olivier Fillieule, 17–48. Paris: Belin, 2005.
- Hassabo, Chaymaa. "Du Rassemblement à l'Effritement des *Jeunes pour le Changement* Egyptiens: l'Expérience de Générations qui ont Vécu et Vivent Toujours Sous la Loi d'Urgence." *Revue Internationale de Politique Comparée* 16, 2 (2009): 241–261.
- Jamal, Amaney and Michael Hoffman. "The Youth and the Arab Spring. Differences and Similarities." *Middle East Governance and Law* 4 (2012): 168–188.
- Mannheim, Karl. "The Problem of Generations," in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, edited by Karl Paul Kecskemeti, 276–320. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1952.
- Muxel, Anne. "Les Choix Politiques des Jeunes à l'Épreuve du Temps. Une Etude Longitudinale." *Revue Française de Science Politique* 53, 3 (2001): 409–430.
- Onodera, Henri. "A Few Reflections on Not Naming Egypt's Young Revolutionaries." *Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society* 36, 4 (2011): 70–74.

- Rintala, Marvin. "A Generation in Politics: A Definition." *The Review of Politics* 25, 4 (1963): 509–522.
- Sirinelli, Jean-François. "Génération, Générations." *Vingtième Siècle, Revue d'Histoire* 98 (2008): 113–124.
- Tarrow, Sydney. "Cycles of Collective Action: Between Moments of Madness and the Repertoire of Contention," in *Repertoires and Cycles of Collective Action*, edited by Mark Traugott, 281–307. Durham (N.C.): Duke University Press, 1995.
- Taylor, Verta. "Social Movement Continuity: The Women's Movement in Abeyance." *American Sociological Review* 54, 5 (1989): 761–775.
- Tilly, Charles. *From Mobilization to Revolutions*. Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishers, 1978.
- Zartman, William. "Opposition as Support of the State." In *Beyond Coercion: The Durability of the Arab State*, edited by Adeed Dawisha and William Zartman, 61–87. London: Croom Helm, 1988.