

**MAKERS OF REVOLUTION: THE CONCEPT
OF ŠABĀB (YOUTH) IN THE DISCOURSE
OF THE EGYPTIAN ARAB SPRING**

1. Introduction

From the initial 18-days sit-in on Cairo's main square, that started on the January 25, 2011 and ended three decades of Ḥusnī Mubārak's rule, to military junta (the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces), the nations' first democratically elected president, who barely survived his first year in office until another general reinstated essentially the same political regime as Egypt had before revolution, the country lived through a period of increasingly violent political turbulence. In public discussion domains, this period was accompanied by the emergence of a strand of discourse reflecting collective effort to bring together, give shape and make sense of the rapidly changing political and social reality of what Egyptians of all political persuasions agreed to call *revolution*. At the semantic level, the mechanism that helps sustain this new Egyptian revolutionary discourse, by making it both distinct from other discussions and meaningful, could, basically, be represented as a set of concepts, both new and old ones, with the latter acquiring significant new aspects of meaning in the new context. The list includes but is not limited to ṬUWĀR (REVOLUTIONARIES), IRĀDA(t) AŠ-ŠA'ĀB (PEOPLE'S WILL) – as the driving force of the ṬAWRA (REVOLUTION), FULŪL – as defeated enemies of the REVOLUTIONARIES¹, the members and clients of the Ancien Régime and ŠABĀB (YOUTH) featuring as the vanguard or the true makers of the REVOLUTION.

In the discourse of the participants, ŠABĀB feature alongside the other key protagonists in the scenario of Revolution, cf.:

‘askar.. ihwān.. fulūl.. šabāb at-ṭawra, matā nufakkir jiddiyan fī jawhar al-‘adāla al-intiqāliya? wa anna al-āḥar lan yaḥtafi ‘an al-wujūd?²

¹ For the analysis of FULŪL see Alexander Bogomolov. Constructing Political Other in the Discourse of the Egyptian Arab Spring. Scripta Neophilologica Posnaniensia. V. XIV, 2014, pp. 7–31.

² Aḥmad Māhir. Is it possible for us to trust [Muslim] Brotherhood one more time? (*hal min al-mumkin an naṭiq fī al-ihwān marratan uḥrā*). Published on www.masralarabia.com on 6 January, 2015 – <http://goo.gl/E7o5sA>

The military... [Muslim] Brotherhood... youth of the revolution, when will we think seriously about the essence of the transitional justice? And that the *other* must not disappear from existence?

This list would perhaps appear quite disparate from the perspective of political science, as it includes a sociopolitical institution, a religious-political movement and supposedly part of an age group. Nevertheless it appears as totally coherent from the discursive perspective and makes much sense to any participant of the events that this paragraph refers to.

A closer examination of a set of collocations with the noun *šabāb*, which we will offer below, reveals a few ideas and idiosyncratic beliefs associated with the concept, including even some hidden social categories, which modify the concept beyond the notion of merely an age group. It is this semantic surplus on top of the obvious semantics of age that affects both the identity of those who would describe themselves as part of the [Egyptian] YOUTH and the way this group is perceived by the society at large in various contexts, including the January 25 revolution.

Numerical data related to the Egyptian revolutionary discourse attest to the salience of ŠABĀB as a key marker of the revolutionary discourse. The phrase *šabāb at-tawra* (youth of the revolution) returned 314,000³, while the inverted combination (*revolution of the youth*) is also quite frequent although not as much. The indefinite form *tawrat šabāb* returned 25,600 Google search results, the definite one – *tawrat aš-šabāb* – 30,100 results and *tawrat šabāb 25 yanā'ir* (youth of the January 25 revolution) – 8,340 results. The fact that the nouns *šabāb* and *tawra* in the revolutionary discourse may easily combine in a Genitive construction both left-to-right and right-to-left points to the capacity of the two concepts to function as mutually defining ones. Other age and gender categories in similar contexts rank far lower, e. g. *rijāl at-tawra* (men of the revolution) brought 6,480 results and only 691 results for the period between 25 January 2011 and 3 July 2013⁴, while

³ All numbers cited in this paragraph date to 5 Aug. 2015.

⁴ I. e. the period between the date, on which an alliance of several oppositional movements and parties, inspired by the Tunisian revolution that 11 days ago brought down president Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, agreed to hold their 1st mass antigovernment protest rally, which triggered a series of even larger

nisā' at-tawra (women of the revolution) registered only 564 results.

A host of political organizations seen as contributors to the revolution or formed in the course of the post-revolutionary politics appear to be *youthful* by definition, and their rank and file are routinely described as *šabāb* (youth, young people) instead of *members*, e. g. *šabāb ḥarakat imsak fulūl* (youth of the 'Catch fulūl'⁵ movement). Some of the self-identified youth groups have even formed a joint umbrella of Revolutionary Youth Coalition (*i'tilāf šabāb at-tawra*)⁶, which was disbanded in 2012, when Egyptians elected their first post-revolutionary president.

Young people and various youth organizations both claim agency in relation to the January 25 revolution, and are eagerly assigned one by the others, cf.:

wa šaddadat al-ḥaraka fī da' watiḥā 'alā annahum lan yatrakū majālan li-rijāl mubārak an yasta'idū mišr marratan ṭāniya mu'akkidan anna aš-šabāb alladī šana' at-tawra huwa man sa-yaḥmī at-tawra wa yukammiluhā⁷

protests across the nation, including the occupation of Cairo's Tahrir square, and led to the overthrow of president Hosni Mubarak 18 days later, and 3 July, 2013, when Egypt's first democratically elected 'revolutionary' president Muhammad Mursi was forced by the military to step down. The date of the initial rally of the revolution, by which it is mostly known today (*tawrat 25 yanār* – January 25 revolution), was deliberately chosen to coincide with the Mubarak-established National Police Day, as police brutality was a key theme in the protest movement at least since June 2010.

⁵ *fulūl* (notches, remnants, particularly of a defeated army) – is a key term used by revolutionaries in reference to elements of the Ancien Régime, for a detailed account of the role of the concept in constructing political *other* in the discourse of January 25 revolution, see Alexander Bogomolov. Constructing Political Other in the Discourse of the Egyptian Arab Spring. Scripta Neophilologica Posnaniensia. V. XIV, 2014, pp. 7–31.

⁶ The Arabic Wiki profile of the umbrella enumerates 8 member organizations, described as either youth movements or *šabāb* (youth) of some party or group, cf. article *i'tilāf šabāb at-tawra* at ar.wikipedia.org

⁷ 'Friday of popular isolation' a call for tearing posters of FULŪL (here political parties and politicians representing the remnants of the Ancien Régime) without demonstrating in the squares' (*jum 'at al-'azl aš-ša'bī da'wa li-tamzīq lāfitāt al-fulūl dūna muḏāharāt fī mayādīn*), published on 18 May, 2012; *al-ḥaraka* (movement) here refers to *ḥarakat imsak fulūl* ('Catch Fulūl')

And the movement emphasized in its appeal that they won't leave space for the Mubarak's men to retrieve Egypt one more time, [having] reassured that *the youth who made the revolution* are [the ones] who will protect the revolution and complete it.

It is notable how the opposition between the Ancien Régime and the Revolution is augmented here by the pair of two contrastive gender/age terms – *men* and *youth*. The pair, however, doesn't appear to be deliberately used as a sort of trope to reinforce the contrast, but rather reflects another underlying belief regarding social roles of the two gender/age groups, which we will address below.

ŠABĀB (YOUTH) are not only glorified for their role in the revolution, but also blamed for its failure. Cf.:

la-qad addā ḡayq al-ufuq al-fikrī li-l-qāda al-maydāniyīn al-bārizīn li-tawrat 25 yanāyir 2011 min aš-šabāb ilā natā'ij ma'sāwiyya ḡaqqan...⁸

The narrowness of the mental horizon of the prominent field commanders of the January 25, 2011 revolution from the *youth* led to truly tragic results...

While it seems self-evident to the Egyptians, and Arabs in general, that YOUTH was the main protagonist of the revolution for both the better and worse, simply because *they did it*, or, as a more cautious local observer has formulated '*triggered*' it⁹, this perception won't look so obvious if we compare the Egyptian situation with other similar cases. For instance, in the two Ukrainian revolutions of 2004 and 2013–14, the younger age groups have played an essential role in both triggering off the protest movement and sustaining momentum later. The discourses of both Ukrainian revolutions, however, do not specify the role of any particular age group, neither has any specific group within the protest movement claimed to represent or be composed of persons of particular age or gender with the single exception

movement), which was also described as a 'youth movement' – for details see Alexander Bogomolov. Constructing Political Other in the Discourse of the Egyptian Arab Spring. Scripta Neophilologica Posnaniensia. V. XIV, 2014, pp. 7–31 – <http://www.youm7.com/story/0000/0/0/-/681455#.VcIYiPOqqko>

⁸ Dr. Muḡammad 'Abd aš-Šafi' 'Īsā. Let us prosecute the deposed regime (*ḡayya' nuḡākim 'an-nizām al-maḡlū'*). 26 Aug. 2014. Al-Ahram – <http://www.ahram.org.eg/NewsQ/318479.aspx>

⁹ See a quotation from an interview by Dr. Muḡammad al-Barāda'ī below.

of the 39th Female Company (*sotnya*) within Maidan Self-Defense¹⁰. Paradoxically, young age of the Ukrainian protestors was noted by the Russian propaganda, which framed it in a derogatory manner – ‘they are just kids there’ – in early Russian news media reports aiming to discredit the Ukrainian revolution¹¹.

Societies have different ideas about their structure, if taken apart some elements appear to look similar but they may be ascribed essentially different values, when looked at from within a particular culture or language community. In contrast to the briefly described Ukrainian case, we find that not only in relation to the Revolution, but in quite a number of other contexts ŠABĀB will be singled out as a distinct and self-conscious group, while in similar context in modern European languages they probably won't¹². For instance, a host of various organizations in Egypt describe themselves as *youth*_{adj} groups: *ḥarakāt šabābiyya* (youth movements), *munazzamāt šabābiyya* (youth organizations), *hay'āt šabābiyya* (youth bodies), *marākiz šabābiyya* (youth centers)¹³, a Ministry of Youth (and Sport)¹⁴ and, since 2005, even a political party – Party of Egypt's Youth (*ḥizb šabāb miṣr*)¹⁵. ŠABĀB

¹⁰ Cf. 39 Zhinocha Sotnia Samooborony Maidanu at uk.wikipedia.org; Maidan Self-Defense were self-defense units styled as paramilitary but unarmed or armed with wooden clubs and wooden or aluminum shields modeled on riot police shields, which were formed at the final stage of the protests in 2014.

¹¹ The author is grateful to Prof. Galyna Yavorska for pointing out this characteristic use of age rhetoric in Russian anti-Maidan propaganda during 2013 – early 2014; this tactic of framing the Ukrainian protestors as kids was soon dismissed as probably inefficient and Russian media took to calling them Nazis and fascists.

¹² We have said *modern* here, as in diachrony, the situation may differ significantly in this respect, but the discussion of such cases, and the likely implications of such debate, may go far beyond the scope and purpose of this study.

¹³ Interestingly, of these four categories the most frequently mentioned one on the web is *marākiz* (centers) – 11,400 results on Google search as of 12.08.2015; then comes *ḥarakāt* (movements) – 3,710 results, while *munazzamāt* (organizations) account for 981 and *hay'āt* (bodies) for 279 results.

¹⁴ For the ministry's official website see youth.gov.eg

¹⁵ Although initially claiming to be an opposition party, it now is strictly pro-government and publishes sycophantic materials about president Sisi on its official newspaper/website Šabāb Miṣr (Egypt's youth), such as ‘Secret of

is to be found in many contexts, where in European languages age-related markers would probably appear to be irrelevant. For instance it often combines with place names, e. g. *šabāb būr sa 'īd* (the youth of Port Said) or names of collectivities of any size and type, such as, government departments even structural subdivisions within departments. What is particularly notable, YOUTH inside these entities is described as something that has at least a modicum of autonomous existence within the hosting entity, but in order for its voice to be heard, a higher authority would often be expected to give it a chance to speak up, cf.: *kamā nāqaš wazīr at-taqāfa al-mašrū 'āt al-ḥāṣṣa bi-l-majlis al-a 'lā li-t-taqāfa al-muqaddama min šabāb al-majlis wa 'aqqab 'alayhā* (and the minister of culture discussed projects related to the Supreme Council for Culture submitted by the Council's youth and commented on them)¹⁶.

The phrase *šabāb al-wizāra* (youth of the ministry) returned 1,180 as of 20 June 2015 on the Google search¹⁷. A similar search for the Ukrainian equivalent phrase returned 10 results, out of which all but 2 cases may be disqualified on various grounds (repetitions, automatic

Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's genius' (*sirr 'abqariyat 'abd al-fattāḥ as-sīsī*) – <http://www.shbabmisr.com/t~114332>

¹⁶ Nabawi is demanding from the youth of the ministry [adherence] to the rules of presenting data and a thorough examination of their projects (*an-nabawī yuṭālib šabāb al-wizāra bi-qawā'id bayānāt wa bi-dirāsa mustafīda li-mašrū'atihim*). Al-Yawm as-Sābi' newspaper, 1 April, 2015 – <http://goo.gl/6wUumQ>. The text features a host of other structural divisions and subdivisions of the ministry, which all have their own youth: e. g. *šabāb jihāz at-tansīq al-ḥaḍārī* (youth of the Civilizational Coordination Apparatus), *šabāb al-markaz al-qawmī li-t-tarjama* (youth of the National Center for Translations), *šabāb al-hay'a al-amma li-l-quṣūr* (youth of the General Authority for Palaces) etc.

¹⁷ Age could hardly be seen as relevant to performing the formal functions of governance, which is what the employees of a ministry must be preoccupied with, it is, therefore, not surprising that the news items that the Google search has returned for *šabāb al-wizāra* very often fit into the pattern that includes a person in the position of authority addressing the young in a show of special (parental?) care: a minister meets the youth of his ministry to appoint some of them as his aids, or another minister makes arrangements 'to let them gain leadership experience in the future' (*li-iksābihim ḥibra qiyādiyya fī al-mustaqbal*) – <http://www.el-balad.com/1020002>

translation texts, etc.). Out of 167 results for the Russian equivalent, most also may be disqualified (most often the collocations in fact belong to adjacent but different syntactic units), while a limited number of tentatively felicitous occurrences represent non-native or non-mainstream Russian usage (one instance originates from Kyrgyzstan, one from an autonomous region in Northern Caucasus)¹⁸. Age plays such an important role in the way various entities and institutions are structured in the public imagination, probably, because large collectivities in Arabic are all in fact conceived of as families¹⁹. Consider, for instance, such standard usages as *abnā' al-madīna/al-balad* etc. (residents of city, country etc., lit. *sons*), *usrat al-barnāmaj* (lit. *family of the program*, i. e. *program team*, a standard term from Arabic TV jargon).

To sum it all up, an exceptional role in the recent Egyptian revolution assigned to YOUTH or, as the case may be, assumed by it, may hardly be accounted for by the demographic factors alone, and certainly not by the relative activity of the Egyptian young people compared to other nations. It has more to do with the social semiotics and linguistic reality of the age-based concepts being relatively more important to the manner, in which the social space is structured in the (Egyptian) Arab culture²⁰. In the remainder of this article we will add some more detail to substantiate this general understanding.

¹⁸ Still *youth* does combine with a few names of collectives in European languages – in Russian, for instance, the combination equivalent to *youth of the factory* (*rus. molodiozh zavoda*) returned 2,530 results and *youth of the theater* (*rus. molodiozh teatra*) returned even more – 3,110 results; *factory youth* also appears to be quite felicitous in English (22,800 results after the word *zone* had been excluded from search for the high frequency of *factory youth zone* combination, while some portion of search results still may be disqualified on other grounds).

¹⁹ This isn't to say that FAMILY metaphor is not at all applicable to various types of human collectivities in other languages; in Arabic, however, FAMILY metaphor appears to be the most preferred, if not the only conceptual metaphor underlying the very notion of human collective.

²⁰ We are fully aware of the fact that similar role was assigned to young people in other Arab Spring countries, and that the word *šabāb* (youth) shows the same capacity to combine with names of various collectivities in other national varieties of the Arabic language, the only reason why we limit our conclusions to the Egyptian case here is that, for the sake of accuracy, within this study we simply do not analyze any other material but the Egyptian one.

2. YOUTH, REVOLUTION and power relations

The revolutionary discourse often portrays the YOUTH as the sole legitimate claimant to power in the aftermath of the Revolution. Here is a characteristic text that illustrates such believes:

hādā laysa taḥrīd wa lākin ḥuqūq lā budda an ya‘lam bihā kull man šarak fī at-ṭawra al-miṣriya al-‘azīma wa lā tantazirū min allaḏīna yajlisūn fī ġuraf at-takyīf at-taġyīr bi-ma‘nā annahu yajib ‘alā šabāb at-ṭawra fī miṣr an yaqūmū bi-ilġā’ jamī‘ al-ittfāqiyāt ma‘a man hum fī as-sulṭa al-ān, hā’ulā’ ba’d at-ṭawra laysa lahum sulṭa wa innamā as-sulṭa al-ān hiya min ḥaqq šabāb at-ṭawra as-sulṭa al-ān min ḥaqq at-ṭawra²¹

This is not an incitement but rights that everyone needs to know, who participated in the great Egyptian revolution and don’t you expect from [those] who sit in air-conditioned rooms the change meaning that it is incumbent upon the youth of the revolution in Egypt to perform the abrogation of all agreements with [those] who [are] now in power, those after the revolution have no power, but the power now rightfully belongs to (*lit.* is from the right of) the youth of the revolution, the power now rightfully belongs to (*lit.* [is] from the right of) the revolution.

The author of the paragraph describes himself as an exiled revolutionary, whose purpose is not to ‘dictate his opinion’ to the [current] revolutionaries, but merely *to raise their awareness* of the fact that they are specifically entitled to making [political] *change* and in that they have *a privilege* over all other Egyptians:

...wa mā a’nīh li-šabāb at-ṭawra huwa antum aṣḥāb al-ḥaqq bi-taġyīr wa antum aṣḥāb al-faḏl ‘alā al-miṣriyīn wa min ḥaqqikum an taqūmū antum bi-taġyīr wa laysā man yajlisūna fī ġuraf at-takyīf²².

...and what I mean [to say] to the youth of the revolution is – you are those, who have the right to change and you are those, who have the merit over the Egyptians²³ and it is in your right to perform the change and not those who sit in the [air]conditioned rooms.

²¹ Ramaḏan ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān. Letter to the Youth of the Revolution in Egypt (risāla liā šabāb at-ṭawra fī miṣr), published 10 September, 2011 on an Islamist web resource – http://www.ahl-alquran.com/arabic/show_article.php?main_id=8609

²² Ibid.

²³ *faḏl* (merit, virtue) in this context is a bit difficult to translate; the closest English equivalent of the phrase *huwa ṣāḥib al-faḏl fī šay* (lit. he is the owner of merit in smth.) would, perhaps, be ‘he deserves credit for smth.’, meaning that a person has done smth. of value, for which other people will now be obliged to this person.

The author appears to be totally unconcerned about how the young people are supposed to translate their *immanent merit* (*faḍl*) into a practical everyday reality, it seems that for the author the very fact of having performed such unusual service to Egypt as the REVOLUTION appears to empower the YOUTH all at once as if by magic. What props up such belief and what sustains it in public imagination is what we would suggest to describe as REVOLUTION as MIRACLE frame, which is very characteristic for the Egyptian revolutionary discourse. The frame, which functions mainly as part of presupposition or implicature is a representation of the Revolution as a profound irreversible and rapid almost instantaneous change from bad to good, cf.:

al-fulūl hum man ista‘ādū wa tarabbahū wa kasabū min ḥarām amwāl
hādā aš-ša‘b al-miskīn, al-fulūl hum man saḥaw min nawmihim wa-
ktašafū anna dawlat az-ẓulm qad saqat ilā ḡayr ruj‘a wa kānū
yata‘ayyašūna ‘alā az-ẓulm²⁴

FULŪL are [those] who have sought returns and made profit and gained and robbed the forbidden property of this poor people, FULŪL are [those] who *woke up from their sleep to find that the state of injustice had fallen* with no [possibility of] return, while they had been feeding on injustice.

This REVOLUTION as MIRACLE frame should not be dismissed as a blunder of uneducated or uncritical minds, it operates throughout the entire revolutionary discourse, it does not have always to be formulated in such assertive manner as in the example about, but may be only implied or appear in a counterfactual or hypothetical modality. Consider how this mood of living in a dream world of miracle in the early days of 2011 is captured by an Egyptian politician, who hardly could be accused of incapacity to think rationally, Muḥammad al-Barāda‘ī²⁵:

Amazingly, it happened so fast and with such intensity, triggered by the youth, you know, and started with like 50,000 people on 25th January. It ended up with like 50 million. You know, the whole Egyptian people were in the street. It was amazing and it was all a show of unity. Everybody was just an Egyptian and, you know, calling for a

²⁴ <http://www.masress.com/almessa/29168>

²⁵ Muḥammad al-Barāda‘ī (often spelled Mohamed El Baradei) former Director General of the International Atomic Agency (IAEA), participant of the presidential race in 2012 who withdrew his candidacy, Vice President of Egypt on acting basis from 14 July 2013 to 14 August 2013.

change, a change to a society that is based on freedom and social justice. Everybody was so extremely optimistic that things will go smooth. Even the military thought that we will go through the transition in six months. I thought that was naive, frankly. I mean I realised that you cannot go after many decades (six decades, you know) where you had a single party – you know, total lack of democracy and you do it like an instant coffee in six months. However, that was a mood of optimism prevailing in Egypt at that time²⁶.

No one among ŠABĀB at-TAWRA (the *revolutionary* YOUTH) has ever come as high up the pyramid of power, members of the Ancien Régime aside, in the aftermath of the January 25 revolution as Muḥammad al-Barāda‘ī, who was a key figure in toppling ex-president Hosni Mubarak and providing the legitimacy for what was then hailed as another Egyptian revolution, which toppled the first ‘revolutionary’ president Muhammad Mursi in July 2013²⁷. Nevertheless, neither does he claim any part in *making* the Revolution nor anyone assigns it to him. The reason behind such perceptions appears to be in the semantics of the concept of REVOLUTION in the January 25 discourse. The REVOLUTION as represented in this discourse does not refer to what political science books or Marxist ideologists say about revolutions, instead it refers to a very specific event that happened on Tahrir square in Egypt in January 25 through February 11, which ended the rule of Egypt’s long-standing autocrat. It is this event that constitutes the core referent of the concept alongside a series of other events in as much as these are perceived as legitimate consequences or repercussions of this specific event. A more thorough analysis of

²⁶ Interview with Dr. Mohamed El Baradei at the opening ceremony of the Annual Conference of the International Bar Association in 2011 – <http://www.ibanet.org/Article/Detail.aspx?ArticleUId=ee251c92-4849-4af6-875c-83f3d2380f50>

²⁷ If, as the above-cited examples hold, the role of Youth in the revolution is to introduce *change* (taḡyīr), al-Barāda‘ī is among the founders in 2010, i. e., in the period preceding the January 25 revolution, of a National Movement for Change (*al-jam‘īya al-waṭaniya li-t-taḡyīr*), he was widely expected to be the first (post)revolutionary Egypt’s president, and, ultimately, served as vice president of Egypt on an acting basis from 14 July 2013 until 14 August 2013, filling in the vacuum of official power in the early interim period between the toppling of Mursi and the election of Abdel Fattah as-Sisi as the president of Egypt.

REVOLUTION as concept of this strand of discourse would go beyond the scope of this article and will, therefore, have to be addressed in a separate paper.

3. A *youthful* revolution against the *old* regime?

The persistent portraying of revolutionaries as young males would suggest that the opponents of revolution, by way of contrast, may be described as *old* people. Indeed, the metaphor of age, when applied to contrasting the Ancien Régime and the Revolution seems to find a fertile ground, when it comes to the English-language academic and media discussion on the Arab Spring, cf.:

Finally, it will be a daunting task for any new popular democratic regime to achieve the social justice and the rapid economic growth that will be necessary to provide good jobs, decent housing, quality education, much-needed infrastructure, and equal opportunity. These are the very things that the **old regimes** failed to provide and whose absence triggered **the youth revolution** now sweeping the region. (...) During the decades since the 1960s, **sclerotic authoritarian regimes** have controlled every Arab country, with the (partial) exceptions of Lebanon and Kuwait²⁸.

However, the only two instances of using the closest Arabic equivalent of the word *sclerotic* in Egyptian sources in texts related to the January 25 revolution that we were able to find suggest that human age metaphor in describing the failings of the Ancien Régime doesn't seem to apply. Even, whenever some authors decide to apply it, it does not appear sufficient to them and they feel the need to prop it up with another metaphor, e. g. that of physical world or of historic age, cf.: (1) *an-niẓām al-mutaṣallib al-mutaġammid ar-rāfiḍ li-t-taġyīr wa at-taṭwīr* (sclerotic, frozen regime rejecting change and development)²⁹; and (2) *an-niẓām al-mutaṣallib dāt al-‘aqliyya al-mutaġajjira* (sclerotic regime having a petrified mentality)³⁰. Ageism certainly is not

²⁸ Rashid Khalidi. Reflections on the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. Foreign Policy (The Middle East Channel), 24 February 2011 – <http://foreign-policy.com/2011/02/24/reflections-on-the-revolutions-in-tunisia-and-egypt/>

²⁹ ‘Imād al-Mahdī. Tasā’ulātal-laḥẓaar-rāhina (Current moment's concerns). Al-Ahrām, 17 April 2013; only a cached version of the article is to be found on the web <http://goo.gl/9Qy9js>

³⁰ A comment dating to 23 Oct. 2010 to an article al-Ḥukūma aḍ-ḍakiya wa al-qiyāda al-ġabiya (smart government and a stupid leadership) by Dr. ‘Amr

among the Middle Eastern vices, where greater human age still means greater respect, and the argument that Mubarak or the Ancien Régime altogether had to go simply because they were a pack of old people, out of touch with the modern ways, doesn't seem to be working well for a broader Arab audience. Mere youthfulness of the revolutionaries, hence, is not conceived of as their competitive advantage.

4. YOUTH and gender

While the noun *šabāb* may refer to both the *quality of being young*, a *period of one's life* (e. g. *fī ayām šabābihi* – 'in the days of his youth'), it functions as a collective noun meaning *youth* or as plural to masc. *šābb* (young man, lad)³¹. The latter grammatical nuance appears to be important for the semantic structure of the concept, as we shall see below. A singular member of the class described as *šabāb* would be referred to as *šābb*, in other words both *šābb* and *šabāb* are nominations representing the same concept. Authoritative modern dictionary of Arabic³² describes *šabāb* as a period of life *min sinn al-bulūg ilā at-talātīn taqrīban* (from the age of maturity to approximately thirty); it also mentions a metaphorical meaning *awwal aš-šay'* (lit. *first of thing*, i. e. beginning of something). Although a feminine form *šābba* (girl, young lady) does exist, in actual modern usage a synonym *fatā(t)* occurs almost ten times as frequently (58,900 to 6,670 results for *bint mišriyya*³³), the second most frequent synonym is *bint* (33,900 results), for plural forms of these three synonyms the numbers go in reverse direction – *banāt mišriyyāt* – 7,570 results, *fatayāt mišriyyāt* – 2,490 results, and *šābbāt mišriyyāt* – 1,730 results³⁴.

The nomination *šabāb* covers both *young males* and *youth* in general in the same manner as the word *men* in traditional English usage, az-Zanṭ on al-Miṣrī al-Yawm – <http://today.almasryalyoum.com/article2.aspx?ArticleID=274392>

³¹ The latter function is particularly characteristic for the vernacular Arabic, while the preferred Standard Arabic form would be *šubbān*.

³² al-Munjid fī al-Luġa wa al-A'lām. 33rd edition. Dār al-Mašriq, Beirut 1986, p. 371.

³³ In this paragraph we use Google search data of 28 Oct. 2015 performed on Egyptian web resources for various versions of the equivalent of the English phrase 'Egyptian girl(s)'.
³⁴ Exotic forms of plural also listed in the dictionary – *šawābb* and *šabā'ib* – returned no results.

before the feminist critique of language, would refer to the pluralities of both *males* and *humans*. In the discussion of *young females* as a social category in modern Egyptian Arabic the choice of lexis tends to iconically underscore the distinctiveness of the two gender groups. Young females, when discussed as collectivity or plurality, are, hence, not conceived of as a subset of YOUTH, but rather as a distinct concept³⁵. These conclusions from the observation of the actual distribution of lexis in discourse appear to be also corroborated by the visual representations: Google Images search for the word *šabāb* returned about 450 items with only 6 of them representing females³⁶. To sum up, the concept of ŠABĀB (YOUTH) in Arabic has a group of *young males* as its prototype³⁷.

5. YOUTH and social activity

Comparing the Wiki profiles of two personalities, who became prominent due to their role in the Egyptian protest movement, we found that the concept of YOUTH may function as a comprehensive social description on a par with markers of profession, political affiliation etc. Egyptian female activist Māhīnūr al-Maṣrī (b. 1986) is described as *muḥāmiya* (advocate), *nāšīta siyāsiyya huqūqiyya* (political and rights activist), *‘uḏw bi-ḥarakat al-ištirākīyīn aṭ-tawriyīn* (member of Revolutionary Socialists Movement). Meanwhile Ḥālid Sa‘īd (b. 1982), a victim of police brutality who became an icon of a powerful protest movement that ultimately contributed to the January 25 revolution, is merely described as *šābb miṣrī min madīnat al-iskandariyya* (an Egyptian youth from the city of Alexandria), in the opening paragraph of the profile, and *aš-šābb al-iskandarī* in its closing

³⁵ In structuralist terms in the pair *young females* – *young males*, the former category is marked, the latter unmarked, while YOUTH represents position of neutralization.

³⁶ Search performed on 28 Oct. 2015.

³⁷ We use the terms prototype here in the Eleanor Rosch’s sense as in Rosch Heider – 1973 – E. Rosch.

Heider. *NaturalCategories // CognitivePsychology*, № 4, 1973; in this seminal article Rosch describes the structure of a category as a fuzzy set organized around a prototype defined as the best member of the class with other members of the set having varying degrees of ‘family resemblance’ to the prototype; to illustrate, Robin in English is a prototype for Birds, while in other language it may be a different species of birds.

line. Two informants of the Egyptian police have apprehended Ḥālid Saʿīd on his entry to an internet café, attempted to search him, met resistance and ultimately beat and killed him. If asked who he was, the two agents would probably also describe Ḥālid, whom they had not known before, as a *šābb* (youth). These two characteristics – young age and the interest in Internet – appeared to be sufficient to arise the suspicion of the police and sealed the young man’s fate, for according to the same Wiki profile the years preceding the incident in Egypt had witnessed *tanāmī inḥirāṭ qitāʿāt wāsiʿa min aš-šabāb fī al-ʿamal as-siyāsī wa... šaḥāfat al-muwāḥiḥīn rāsidīna... fasād al-ḥukūma wa... intihākāt ḥuqūq al-insān...* (a growth of engagement [on the part] of large sections of youth in political work and... citizen journalism observing the government corruption and... violations of human rights...).³⁸ Contrasting these two cases of a *young man*, whose public prominence is accounted for not so much by what he did but by how he died, and a lady activist, incidentally, four years his junior, allows us to conclude that it is not so much the age as the nature of social activity associated with a person that defines, whether he/she would qualify as ŠABĀB. ŠABĀB functions here as part of activity-based definitions set, not age/gender set. Hardly anyone could be defined in a public profile as **rajuḥ miṣrī min al-qāhira* (an Egyptian man from Cairo) or **imraʿa miṣriya min al-iskandariya* (an Egyptian woman from Alexandria). In other words, ŠABĀB appears to be a single group, which in the domain of social activity may be defined without reference to any specific activity, as if to be ŠABĀB is already a type of social activity.

6. YOUTH & social class

The author of Ḥālid Saʿīd Wiki profile notes that Ḥālid had been by far not the first young person to die at the hands of the police in Mubarak’s Egypt, but his prominence and *taʿātuḥ al-jamāhīr al-wāsiʿa* (empathy of the wide public) with him could be accounted for by Ḥālid’s social status as member of the middle class. This observation prompted us to look more closely into the relationship between the notions of YOUTH and CLASS in modern Egyptian media discourse and what we found suggests that the above explanation appears

³⁸ The principal tool of this activism aimed at disclosing the government’s failure was of course Internet.

not merely a random opinion of a Wiki author or anonymous *muḥallilūn* (analysts) who the author has attributed it to, but a belief or a cultural stereotype that appears to be encoded at a deeper conceptual level. By borrowing the language of the same profile and elaborating on it a bit, we have established that phrases: *šabāb aṭ-ṭabaqāt aš-ša'biyya* (youth of the democratic classes) returns only 7 results on Google search³⁹, *šabāb aṭ-ṭabaqāt ad-dunyā* (youth of lower classes) – 4 results, *šabāb ṭabaqat al-'ummāl* (youth of the working class) – 0 results. Meanwhile the phrase *šabāb aṭ-ṭabaqa al-wuṣṭā* (youth of the middle class) returned 1,790 results, and *šabāb aṭ-ṭabaqāt al-mu-tawassita* (youth of the middle classes) – 78 results. There is, however, at least one set of data that seem to undermine the conclusion prompted by this calculation that there is a rather strong correlation between a higher class status and membership in ŠABĀB, when defined as a coherent social group: results for the phrase *šabāb 'ummāl* went as high as 5,170. In our opinion however, these results should be discounted from the calculation for two reasons. Firstly, the majority of the results (at least 2,790 for the *'ummāl* with definite article and 378 for indefinite form) refer to branches of a single organization – the Union of Young Workers (*ittiḥād šabāb al-'ummāl*), a highly ramified group, itself a subdivision of another organization, the National Youth Council (*al-majlis al-qawmī li-š-šabāb*), affiliated with the Ministry of Youth and Sport⁴⁰. Secondly, other instances on the list do not seem to refer to class as a social category, but rather to workers as a profession, cf.: *maṭlūb faṭwan šabāb 'ummāl intāj bi-rātīb 2000 junayh šahriyan*⁴¹ (urgently needed young manufacturing workers with a monthly salary of 2000). It is important to point out also that in the latter case *šabāb* is used as a plural form of *šabb* rather than collective noun, which is evident from the agreement in number, case and gender between *šabāb* and *'ummāl*. The phrase *šabāb 'ummāl* is reversible without any apparent loss of meaning, the

³⁹ We have borrowed the latter expression from the language of the same Wiki profile; all data in this paragraph were collected on 24 Oct. 2015.

⁴⁰ In the sample, we have also found a lot of instances when the phrase *šabāb al-'ummāl* (*workers youth* or *young workers*) is used as an abridged name of the Union of Young Workers.

⁴¹ An add on al-Wasīṭ classified advertisements website <http://google/4FoUe7>

reversed phrase *'ummāl šabāb* has returned 494 results, cf.: *maṭlūb 'ummāl šabāb min al-jinsayn li-l-'amal fī silsilat fanādiq 5 nujūm* (young workers of both sexes required for working in a chain of 5 star hotels)⁴².

7. YOUTH, the *dreamers* and 'the catalyst for the future'⁴³

Of all age groups, YOUTH has a privileged relationship with the FUTURE, and FUTURE is something that is of an utmost importance for 'all of us', as we all 'dream' about a *good* FUTURE, cf.:

wa aḍāf šādī: aš-šabāb hum faras ar-rihān wa niṣf al-ḥāḍir wa *kull al-mustaqbal* wa hum bi-fikrihim al-jadīd wa ḍamīrihim an-naqīyy qādirīna (sic.!) 'alā binā' *miṣr al-mustaqbil allatī naḥlam bi-hā jamī'an* wa la budda min tamkīnihim wa tawfīr furaṣ 'amal lahum fa min ajl ḥādā al-balad ḍaḥḥā wa qaddam al-ālāf min aš-šabāb anfusahum fidā' li-miṣr wa ša'b miṣr⁴⁴

And Shadi added: youth are a racehorse and half present and *all future* and they, with their new thinking and their clear conscience are capable of building *Egypt of the future, which we all dream about* and it is necessary to empower them and provide them with jobs, as for the sake of this country thousands of young people have sacrificed their lives in redemption for Egypt and the people of Egypt.

Dreaming is often presented in such type of texts as the main mode of connection to the FUTURE, and of all social groups the YOUTH is ascribed a unique predisposition to *dreaming*. YOUTH appear to be the only group that could be approached seriously with a question 'what are you dreaming about?' cf.:

wa tawajjahat ḥawā' ilā aš-šabāb li-ma'rafat aḥlāmihim wa ru'yatihim li-n-nuhūd wa at-tanmiya wa al-iṣlāḥ al-iqtiṣādī wa al-ijtimā'ī...⁴⁵

⁴² An add on al-Wasīṭ classified advertisements website <http://goo.gl/4yeC79>

⁴³ The latter part of this subtitle is taken from Dr. Mohamed El Baradei's keynote speech at opening ceremony of IBA Annual Conference, Dubai 2011 – transcript – <http://www.ibanet.org/Article/Detail.aspx?ArticleUid=D2215C36-2805-4274-B732-BEF51F62A8D4>

⁴⁴ 'Youth of the Revolution' are asking the president to put youth on the top of his priorities (*šabāb at-tawra yuṭālib ar-ra'īs bi-waḍ' aš-šabāb 'alā ra's awlawiyyātihi*). al-Yawm as-Sābi', 10 Sept. 2014 – <http://goo.gl/VwQgbY>

⁴⁵ Dreams of the youth after the January 25 revolution (*aḥlām aš-šabāb ba'd tawrat 25 yanāyir*), Ḥawā' magazine, 14 May 2011 – <http://hawaamagazine.com/posts/261420>

and [the magazine] ‘Hawa’ approached the youth in order to know their dreams (typical Standard Arabic style of relating in 3rd person such questions as ‘what are your dreams?’ or ‘what are you dreaming about?’ – A. B.) and their vision of the growth and development and the economic and social reform...

What might strike a speaker of a European language about these *dreams* as somewhat unusual is their rather practical and non-private nature, cf.:

wa ba‘d at-ṭawra aṣbaḥ aš-šabāb *yaḥlum* bi-ziyādat al-intāj li-n-nuhūd bi-l-iqtisād al-miṣrī wa muwājahat irtifā‘ al-as‘ār wa azmat al-miyāh wa ḍarūrat i‘ādat al-amn wa al-amān ilā aš-šawāri...⁴⁶

and after the revolution the YOUTH began *dreaming of the rise of production* and the advancement of the Egyptian economy and confronting the rise of prices and the crisis of water [resources] and the need for restoring security and safety on the streets...

Answers to the above cited question regarding their dreams that were provided by the young people also appeared to be quite practical, e. g. *aḥlum bi-muwājahat ġiṣṣ wa talā‘ub at-tujjār bi-l-as‘ār* (I dream of confronting fraud and price manipulation by traders).

Similar propensity to *dream* and through it to connect to the FUTURE was widely attributed to YOUTH in the Soviet official discourses. Songs celebrating YOUTH, described in clearly ideological terms, may be seen as a genre on its own right in the art of Soviet propaganda. The lyrics of these songs often portrayed the YOUTH as *dreaming about future*, here is a characteristic example: [*the one*] *who believes in dreams, wing-bearing like songs, will reach one’s goal*⁴⁷. Even the word *dreamers* (Rus. *miechtateli*) could sometimes be used as a poetic synonym of *youth*.

YOUTH is believed to be a source of innovation, all things new, creativity⁴⁸, resulting from what could be described as their natural

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Rus. *kto vierit krylatym kak piesnia miechtam tot tseli svoiei dobiot-sia* – ‘One needs to dream’ (rus. *nado miechtat’*), lyrics by S. Grebennikov, N. Dobronravov, music by A. Pakhmutova.

⁴⁸ Cp. again *The unity of peoples, the camaraderie of muses – the talented and young Soviet Union* (Rus. *yedinstvo narodov sodruzhestvo muz talantliv i molod Sovietskii Soiuz*) – ‘On the first call’ (Po piervomu zovu), lyrics by N. Dobronravov, music by A. Pakhmutova.

productivity and energy. It is notable, that the latter qualities may be described in rather poetic and culturally idiosyncratic idiomatic expressions, such as *rūḥ wattāba* (lit. jumping spirit)⁴⁹, cf.:

kamā nāqaš wazīr at-ṭaqāfa al-mašrū‘āt al-ḥāṣṣa bi-l-majlis al-a‘lā li-ṭ-ṭaqāfa al-muqaddama min šabāb al- majlis wa ‘aqqab ‘alayhā qā’ilan: innahu kāna yataṣawwar an yakūna amāmahu mašrū‘ madrūs bi-‘ināya li-taṭwīr al-jihāz al-idārī li-l-majlis bi-fikr jadīd wa ru’ya jadīda taḥmil malmaḥ ibdā‘iyya mustamidda min rūḥ aš-šabāb al-wattāba...⁵⁰

The minister of culture has also discussed projects related to the Council on Culture submitted from the YOUTH of the Council and commented on them by saying that he was expecting (lit. imagining) that he would [see] in front of him a thoroughly studied project on the development of the administrative apparatus of the Council with *new thinking* and *new vision* [that] carries a trait of *creativity derived from the ardent* (lit. jumping, leaping) *spirit* of the YOUTH...

The fact that the speaker is citing the above qualities as a base for critically attacking the project submitted by his young subordinates only underscores the normative nature of these qualities, which are seen as typical characteristic appropriate to YOUTH. The fact that YOUTH are concerned about CHANGE and CHANGE is something others expect to come from the young revolutionaries hence appears to be embedded in the semantics of the concept. In a conservative society YOUTH may be seen as the only group for whom it is natural to *change* – it is a natural change by maturing/growing older that they are expected to undergo. The metaphor of CHANGE/REVOLUTION

⁴⁹ We have translated this idiom as *ardent* in the example below, which is, of course, another metaphorical expression, whose source domain is different (*temperature* instead of *basic physical movements*); in a similar context we have also encountered another metaphoric expression, which on the contrary has *temperature* as its source domain, referring to a quality attributed to the YOUTH, which in more neutral language could be perhaps described as ‘speediness of mental processes’: *fikr waqqād* (lit. burning or incinerating thought).

⁵⁰ an-Nabawi is demanding from the youth of the ministry [adherence] to the rules of presenting data and a thorough examination of their projects (an-nabawī yuṭālib šabāb al-wizāra bi-qawā‘id bayānāt wa bi-dirāsa mustafīda li-mašrū‘ātihim). Al-Yawm as-Sābi‘ newspaper, 1 April, 2015 – <http://goo.gl/6wUumQ>

as GROWTH is reflected in a political cartoon by the Egyptian artist Muḥammad Turkī, represented on Image 1. Caption under the cartoon goes ‘in my country they kill the future’ (*fī bilādī yaqtulūna mustaqbal*)⁵¹.

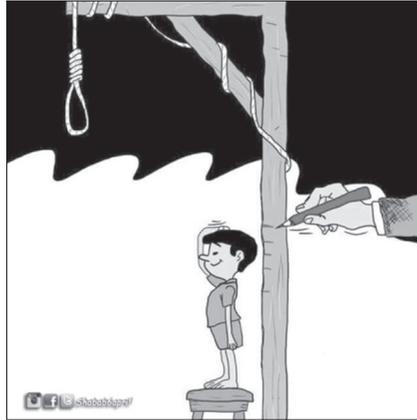


Image 1

The big ideas of January 25 revolution – Bread, Freedom, Social Justice and Human Dignity, which are usually described as *maṭālib* (demands) or *ahdāf* (goals) of the revolution in Standard Arabic may become *dreams*, when the conversation shifts into colloquial Arabic, cf.:

wa taḥta šī‘ār mā’ idat al-majd li-š-šuhadā’ nazzam aš-šabāb al-mā’ ida bi-š-šārī ‘ muḥammad maḥmūd ma‘a bidāyat šahr ramaḍān al-mubārak wa ṭālab al-qā’imīn ‘alā al-mā’ ida min al-muwāṭinīn bi-ḍarūrat at-tabarru‘ li-stimrārihā mu‘akkidīna anna al-mā’ ida ‘alā rūḥ kull šahīd ustušhid fī aṭ-ṭawra wa aḥdāṭihā ‘alāšān ḥāṭir yuḥaqqiq *ḥulm* inna al-balad dī takūn fihā ‘ayš – ḥurriya – ‘adāla ijtimā’iya – karāma insāniya⁵² and under the slogan ‘table for the glory of martyrs’ the youth have organized a table on Muhammad Mahmud street at the beginning of the blessed month of Ramadan and requested the participants of the

⁵¹ Image reflects the intensified campaign of persecutions of the revolutionary YOUTH by the military – it was found on the April 6 movement’s Facebook page – <https://www.facebook.com/shabab6april/photos/a.379736183293.203343.32847763293/10153845800338294/?type=1&theater>

⁵² A news item titled “Youth of the Revolution organize a table [of] ‘Glory to the Martyrs’ (šabāb aṭ-ṭawra yunazzimūna mā’ idat al-majd li-š-šuhadā’)”’, 20 June 2015, published on almesryoon.com (<http://goo.gl/Hd6Yxu>)

table from the citizens with the need to donate for it to continue, [having] assured that the table [is dedicated] to the spirit of every martyr, who died in the revolution and its events for the sake of fulfilling the *dream* that there be *bread – freedom – social justice – human dignity* in this country.

For *dreams* to have an ideological content again was a common trait in the Soviet official discourse. A key point that needs to be made regarding *dreaming* in this context is that, if even the ideas presented as the subject of *dreams* appear to be rational and practical, the connection between these ideas and reality on the ground is represented as essentially irrational. Dreaming is not the only possible relation that may occur between the person and potentialities of the future, but unlike *planning for* or *working on* (the Arabic equivalents of which would be *ḥaṭṭaṭ li* and ‘*amal ‘alā*, respectively), it places these potentialities totally beyond the person’s control, in the sphere of *miracles* and *divine interventions*⁵³.

8. YOUTH as an object of CARE

In terms of their social role and status ŠABĀB are an ambivalent, liminal group – *adults* in some ways, *children* in others. People who run the state, occupying important positions in it, in the standard Arabic are described as *rijāl* (lit. men, i. e. *officials*), e. g. *rijāl ad-dawla* (statesmen), *rijāl al-amn* (state security officials). Members of the Ancien Régime, therefore, can only be described as RIJĀL, not ŠABĀB⁵⁴, as, for all its setbacks, the regime was certainly perceived as a mature enterprise. For an implied opposition between *youth* and *adults* cf.:

fa-s-siyāsa ‘ilm miṭla ‘ulūm al-kīmīyā’ wa al-fīzīyā’ wa ar-riyāḍiyāt
wa al-luġa fī ḥāja ilā dirāsa ‘amīqa wa qirā’āt mutanawwa‘a fa-lā
yumkin li-šābb aw kahl [an] ya‘ī umūr as-siyāsa dūna an yulimm
bi-t-tārīḥ wa juġāfiyā wa al-iqtisād wa ad-dīn...⁵⁵

⁵³ In the case of the totalitarian discourse events of ‘bright future’ that the Soviet youth would ‘dream’ about were beyond their control as something already predicted by the party’s visionary ideology.

⁵⁴ Google search has brought only one result for *šabāb an-nizām as-sābiq* (youth of the Ancien Régime) and even that appears to be a rather unusual usage located on a Coptic website – <http://www.copts-united.com/friendly-Print.php?A=44900>

⁵⁵ Sisi and the call for the youth to participate (*as-sīsī wa da ‘wat aš-šabāb li-l-mušāraka*), published on al-Yawm as-Sābi‘ (www.youm7.com) – see <http://goo.gl/MyZd1f>

and politics is science like the sciences of chemistry and physics and mathematics and language [which] needs deep study and various readings as [it is] impossible for a *young* [man] and an *adult* to grasp matters of politics without a thorough knowledge of history and geography and economics and religion...

In the example below *youth* features as part of another opposition, that of *active* (able bodied) vs. *passive* (beyond the age of active social life), while the previously cited term *rijāl* is entered as part of gender-based opposition cf.:

hādā maydān at-taḥrīr šabāb wa šuyūḥ rijāl wa nisā' muslimūn wa masīḥiyyūn asāṭidat jāmi'a wa ummiyyūn...⁵⁶

This is Tahrir square – *youth* and *old people*, men and women, Muslims and Christians, university professors and illiterate [people]...

If YOUTH are children for *rijāl ad-dawla* (statesmen), the latter should of course *care* for them. A plethora of governmental agencies and government-sponsored entities exist in Egypt, whose mandate is to take *care* of YOUTH. Among these entities, collectively referred to as *hay'āt wa munazzamāt šabābiyya* (youth bodies and organizations) is the National Financing Fund for the Care for the Youth and Rising Generation (*ṣundūq at-tamwīl al-aḥlī li-ri'āyat aš-šabāb wa an-naš'*), established by a specific law in 1981. In September 2013 during the transition period, when the Muslim Brotherhood affiliated president was already deposed and general Sisi not yet elected as a new president, this body was elevated in status to be chaired by no less a figure than the prime-minister⁵⁷. In 2005, the National Council for Youth (*al-majlis al-qawmī li-š-šabāb*) was established by a presidential decree, whose purpose is described as *tawfīr al-ḥidamāt aš-šabābiyya* (provision of youth^{adj.} services)⁵⁸. The Council presides over a ramified hierarchy, which includes district authorities for *youth* (*mudīriyyāt aš-šabāb*), *youth* centers (*marākiz aš-šabāb*), *youth* houses (*buyūt aš-šabāb*), *youth* camps (*mu'askarāt aš-šabāb*), boy scouts and girl guides (*al-kaššāfa wa al-muršidāt*) associations, General Union for Workers' Youth (*al-ittihād al-'āmm li-šabāb al-'ummāl*), *youth* cities (*mudun šabābiyya* – i. e. compounds with various facilities) in a number of localities, including Alexandria, Port-Said, Hurghada, etc. A

⁵⁶ <http://www.masress.com/adab/2303>

⁵⁷ Cf. a news article on this in <http://www.el-balad.com/621543>

⁵⁸ Cf. appropriate article on the Arabic Wiki – ar.wikipedia.org

study of the evolution and operations of what appears to be an enormous governmental effort targeting youth could reveal much interesting detail regarding the social semiotics of age and gender in Egypt, but this is, of course, beyond the scope of the present research.

In 2013, the government opened a Youth and Sport Development Center (*markaz at-tanmiya aš-šabābiyya ar-riyāḍiyya*) in Cairo suburb Shubra el-Kheima, hailed as *akbar mašrū' šabābi riyāḍi* (the biggest youth^{adj.} and sport project) and *naqla ḥaḍāriyya* (civilizational turning point)⁵⁹. Interestingly, the project was undertaken by Military Works Department of the Armed Forces (*idārat al-ašgāl al-'askariyya li-l-quwwāt al-musallaḥa*), indicating the level of care on the part of the country's true rulers for its restive YOUTH. The list of facilities available at the Center provides an insight into what the mysterious *youthful services* could actually represent. Aside from football playground, swimming pool and other 'sporting facilities for collective and solitary games', the Center hosts two cinema theaters⁶⁰, culture halls and forums (*qā'āt taqāfiyya wa nadawāt*), to be used for cultural events (*muntadayāt taqāfiyya*), places for families and gardens (*amākin li-l-'ā'ilāt wa al-ḥadā'iq*), shopping mall and garage, the Center is also meant to provide security, construction and maintenance jobs for youth (*a'māl al-ḥirāsa wa at-tašyīd wa aš-šiyāna*). The Egyptian Government obviously, even in the dire straits that it ended up in after the protracted period of political unrest, hasn't spared any effort to keep the YOUTH busy with anything but politics. Such detailed elaboration on the theme of recreation and entertainment, as presented above, evokes a deeply embedded belief regarding the prototypical preoccupations of youth, reflected in Arabic dictionaries. The two activities that a modern Arabic dictionary associates with ŠABĀB are that of *lahw* (amusement/pleasure/fun) and *ġazal* (flirtation/dalliance)⁶¹. The scope of what the modern bureaucratic Egyptian

⁵⁹ <http://goo.gl/1ULO3W>

⁶⁰ Interestingly, the construction of the Center was suspended during the Mursi rule in view of the alleged reluctance on the part of Muslim Brotherhood dominated government to include cinema theater among its facilities.

⁶¹ It comes as part of the explanation of the 5th form derivative verb *tašabbab* – *ḍakar ayām šabāb wa lahw wa al-ġazal* (remember the days of youth and amusement/pleasure/fun and flirtation/dalliance), – al-Munjid fī al-Luġa wa al-A'lām. 33rd edition. Dār al-Mašriq, Beirut 1986, p. 371.

describes as *hidamāt šabābiya* (youth^{adj.} services), as presented above, appears to rather neatly overlap with that of the former term and, in one instance at least, (*amākin li-l-‘ā’ilāt wa al-ḥadā’iq* – families and gardens) proposes a decent substitute for the latter.

The opening of the Center came to pass in the period after the downfall of president Mursi, when the Egyptian military were working on consolidating their grip on power and when many iconic figures among the revolutionary youth, such as the leaders of April 6 movement, were arrested on the basis of a draconian Law on Demonstrations (*qānūn at-tazāhur*).

The emphasis on YOUTH is also a noticeable feature in the discourse of power (news items on events attended by military, police and civilian officials, their speeches, etc.) since Sisi’s election as president. This new discourse aims to gradually supplant the images of revolutionary martyrs with young servicemen sacrificing their lives while fighting the Islamists in Sinai and is portraying the former revolutionary youth organizations as engaged in sycophantic celebration of the new regime’s accomplishments⁶². That stands in sharp contrast to what such youth organizations were doing back in 2011, cf.:

nazzam *takattul šabāb as-suways* wa a‘dā’ bi-l-ḥarakāt aš-šabābiya fī muqaddamatihā 6 ibrīl *salāsil bašariya* fī kurniṣ as-suways al-jadīd *muṭālibīna* bi-‘azl al-muraššaḥ li-r-ri’āsa aḥmad šafiq mu’akkidīna anna al-fulūl yurīdūn al-qaḍā’ ‘alā aṭ-ṭawra⁶³

The Suez Youth Block and members of youth movements, foremost among them the April 6 [movement], *organized human chains* on the waterfront of New Suez, *demanding* the isolation of the presidential candidate Ahmad Shafiq claiming that FULŪL (remnants of the Ancien Régime. – A. B.) want to get done with the revolution.

Again in a different cultural context, such as Ukrainian, it would be hard to imagine any entity claiming to represent age-based community of some specific locality and making political demands in its name. One may be reminded here of the connection between the standard Arabic *maṭālib* (demands) and *dream* (*ḥulm*) as a characteristic

⁶² See, e. g., news article Revolutionary Youth Alliance is celebrating [New] Suez Canal on the Nile Palace bridge (*taḥluf šabāb aṭ-ṭawra yaḥtafil bi-qanāt as-suways ‘alā kūbrī qaṣr an-nīl*), dated 5 Aug. 2015 – <http://www.tahrirnews.com/posts/272293>

⁶³ Source: www.akhbarak.net(<http://goo.gl/iw7x7P>)

attribute of the young that we have highlighted in section 5 above. That special connection to *future* that YOUTH is believed to have through *dream*, might it not, perhaps, be seen as a source of some peculiar symbolic power that gives more value to their demands? After all, the whole January 25 revolution was nothing but a series of demands raised by protesting crowds, in contrast to bloody military coups that the Arab World used to call revolutions. And once its key demand *irḥal* (go) addressed to all-powerful autocrat materialized, belief in the power of words spoken by crowds to change reality strengthened. It is this power of youth to dream things into reality that the new autocratic regime seems to be trying to hold back now by stepping up its investment in the network of government-controlled youth organizations, but also by keeping the most active part of them in confinement.

9. Conclusions

In the Egyptian (and, apparently, Arab) context the concept YOUTH is applied to making sense of and constructing a class of distinct self-conscious social groups, who prototypically represent communities of younger members of middle class describing themselves as age-based groups, but actually defined not merely by age but also by the level and type of their social activity. The concept serves both as an identity tag for such groups and marker for the larger community of speakers. A number of idiosyncratic beliefs associated with this category of people are encoded in the concept. These ideas, when presented as a list and not the way they actually function in the discourse, appear to be somewhat contradictory, which corresponds to the status of YOUTH as a liminal group in transition between *childhood* and full social *maturity*. YOUTH, on the one hand, is portrayed as an exceptionally potent class of people, characterized by a special relationship with the *future*, *imagination*, capacity to *innovate* and *change*, while on the other hand, members of the group are not necessarily expected to be engaged in certain responsible adults activities, while leisure and entertainment would rather be their normal occupations. The state and adults, who run it, should take care of YOUTH and keep them busy by offering them special *youth^{adj.} services* (i. e. essentially means of entertainment, education and healthy lifestyle) until they become responsible members of the society –

rijāl (men). It merits to be reiterated here again that age and gender based identities are relatively more important for Arab cultures in terms of how societies, social institutes and activities are structured compared to the European ones, and this is encoded in the discourse.

The reason why young people distinguished themselves in making the January 25 cannot be accounted for by merely a demographic fact that Egypt has a larger than other nations portion of younger ages. It happened to be the case because of how people construct the Egyptian society, the ideas they have about the role of its various strata and groups defined by age, gender and class, which also are linguistically encoded in the semantic structures of language and discourse. The sense of affiliation with a particular group such as YOUTH, for instance, appears to be relatively stronger among younger generations of the Egyptians compared to their peers in some other cultures. This sense of affiliation, and the urge to do something remarkable or commendable on behalf of the group, which comes as part of this strong sense of affiliation, is not merely a function of one's perceived age, but is intertwined with other social markers, such as, notably, class, gender but also a distinct social role, a characteristic type of social behavior, which involves certain privileges but also constraints. In the discourse of the Egyptian Arab Spring specifically, ŠABĀB refers to a relatively narrow group or a community, defined by their role in staging the January 25 – February 11 protests on Tahrir square in Cairo, whose prototypical members (in the Eleanor Rosch sense) are young male members of the middle class, students or young professionals.

The ambiguity surrounding the ŠABĀB as a concept of revolutionary discourse, could be accounted for by the difference in the way it functions in two interwoven strands of discourse – the common official one, or the discourse of power, and the narrative of the revolution. The latter one portrays the reality of the revolution as the 'dream come true', and YOUTH as some epic heroes (or in the native terminology also *šuhadā'* – martyrs). The standard discourse of power, which couldn't be completely abandoned even though the media had been flooded with texts glorifying the revolution, represents the social reality in line with what could be described as Big Family metaphor, whose entailment is to treat the YOUTH as elder children, the darlings of fortune, who even if they have achieved some success will still be in need of parental care on the part of the adults, habitually

described as *men (rijāl)*, a notion that refers not merely to an age/gender group but to a group of mature people of power and means. In line with their capacity to *innovate* and surprise, as described above, the YOUTH have come up with something truly new and completely unusual, which no one else had ever done before, not in Egypt at least. They toppled the regime that had lasted for 30 years. In all other respects the Revolution, created by the YOUTH, appears to bear many other, less advantageous, characteristics associated with the concept – it has remained a *dream*, a promise to be fulfilled some day in the *future*, as if for it to mature its makers had to mature too.