

“A GENEALOGY OF THE CONCEPT OF YOUTH: EMERGING CATEGORIES IN EGYPTIAN
PUBLIC DISCOURSE”

This paper addresses the following central research problematic: in the state socialist context of 1950s Egypt, youth were viewed as one of the principle motors of development: a site for harnessing the productive capabilities of the nation as well as inculcating socialist ideologies. In contemporary Egypt, however, youth is a metonymic signifier for several crises: education, morality, and capitalist consumerism. How did this historical transformation take place? By analyzing various media—textual and visual—I ask, how did the double birth of independent nationhood and socialism articulate the generational life cycle of the nation-state? What horizons of expectation were linked to youth at the twilight of independence? Even a cursory examination of Nasserist statist, educational, and scientific discourse, I argue, reveals the extent to which youth was an object of physical disciplinization and socio-political governance to be harnessed to powers of the state. Rather than reify “youth” as a category of analysis, however, I ask whether and how the emergence of “*shabab*” as a ubiquitous category of everyday discourse, an object of socio-political intervention and governance, and a subjective category of identity, is best understood against the backdrop of colonialism, nationalism, and identity formation.