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Panel: Widerstand und Umbruch in Ägypten

## A lost generation rising up - Analysing the Egyptian Revolution from a "youth" perspective

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### ABSTRACT

In this paper I argue that instead of asking "Was the Egyptian revolution a youth revolution?" we should deconstruct this question and ask instead "What does "youth" mean?, What "youthful"?, What does it mean in Egypt?", "What does it mean in the context of the Egyptian revolution?". This article is a very tentative account to approach these questions. I first discuss various **understandings** and **connotations** of youth that are of relevance to the Egyptian context. Two aspects are of specific interest: the **image of youth** in Egyptian society, as it has been considerably shaken by the 18 Days in Tahrir, and the importance of a 'successful' youth for the **transition to adulthood**, which has been and still is being blocked for many young Egyptians. Both aspects directly link to the economic, educational, political, ethical grievances of Egyptian youth that might have contributed to bringing about the revolution. I discuss these **grievances** in relation to the **structural changes** that have marked Egypt in the last 30 years. Also the **triggers** of the Egyptian revolution are related to these structural transformations, and resonate in specific ways with young people. The 18 Days in Tahrir then developed a counter-reality to the "old" regime. New and **youthful protest practices, values and styles** gave the Egyptian revolution its special character. Yet, to a large extent, this might draw on previous protest experience, intentionally marketed by revolutionary entrepreneurs from Eastern Europe. I discuss these cross-national influences as an example of a **global reservoir of protest culture**, tapped by young, connected revolutionaries in order to construct revolutionary identities. I further argue that, independent of these youthful attributes of the protest, "youth" suggests itself as a category for political conflict in a **patriarchal system**. While this patriarchal system and the respective mentalities have been dealt a blow in the revolution, the revolution has largely failed to bring about the **youth's inclusion** in the political process. Nonetheless, it might have ushered in a change of mind, sustainably **transforming the image of youth** and inter-generational relationships.

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