

#Sisi_vs_Youth: Who Has a Voice in Egypt?

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Abstract

This article presents voices from Egypt reflecting on the question of who has the right to have a voice in the country in the first half of 2016. In the spirit of the research project “In 2016,” it aims to offer a snapshot of how it “felt to live” in Egypt in 2016 as a member of the young generation (*al-shabāb*) who actively use social media and who position themselves critically towards the state’s official discourse. While the state propagated a strategy focusing on educating and guiding young people towards becoming productive members of a nation united under one leader, popular youth voices on the internet used music and satire to claim their right to resist a retrograde patrimonial system that threatens every opposing voice with extinction. On both sides, a strongly antagonistic ‘you vs. us’ rhetoric is evident.

2016: “The Year of Egyptian Youth” (Sisi style)*

January 9, 2016 was celebrated in Egypt as Youth Day—a tradition with only a brief history. The first Egyptian Youth Day had been marked on February 9, 2009; the date being chosen by participants in the Second Egyptian Youth Conference in commemoration of the martyrs of the famous 1946 student demonstrations that eventually led to the resignation of then Prime Minister Nuqrāshī. Observed in 2009 and 2010 with only low-key events, the carnivalesque “18 days” of revolutionary unrest in January-February 2011 interrupted what

* Rather than a conventional academic paper, this article aims to be a miniature snapshot of how it ‘felt’ to live in Egypt by mid-2016 as a member of the young generation (*al-shabāb*) who have access to social media (ca. 70% of Egyptians aged 10-29 have a Facebook account; my calculation based on eMarketing Egypt: “Facebook in Egypt,” 4th edn., Aug. 2013, and “Demographics of Egypt,” *Wikipedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Egypt>, accessed 26 Dec. 2016) and who position themselves as outspoken members of this generation (*gīl*) upholding the tradition of the 25 January 2011 revolution. In this attempt, the article is no more than a first, exploratory step within the “In 2016” research project. It is primarily based on monitoring social media buzz throughout the first part of this year, not least using <BuzzSumo.com> to track popular issues shared via social media. This was supplemented by informal talks with bloggers, journalists, students, and former activists (from the 2011/12 period) in Cairo in January/February 2016. In the aim of providing a ‘snapshot,’ the present tense is used here to refer to observations pertaining to the ‘scene’ during the first half of 2016; while the past tense refers to specific occurrences. For stylistic reasons, I do not transcribe the name of the Egyptian president al-Sīsī, but use the spelling Sisi throughout. Unless otherwise noted, all transcriptions and translations in this article are mine.—Audio-visual predecessors of the article were presented at conferences at the University of Oslo (*Five Years after the Arab Spring: Political and Ideological Trends*), 10 June 2016, and the University of Southern Denmark (*Formations of Middle Eastern Subjectivities: Cultural Heritage, Global Structures and Local Practices*), 22 September 2016. I am grateful for the feedback received from the audience as well as from my peer reviewers.

largely had been youth processions preceded by police bands marching through provincial capitals.¹ It was only five years later that Youth Day was revived, and on a different date, perhaps to deflect attention from student demonstrations and those who were killed at the hands of the police, perhaps to advance a government agenda aiming at harnessing young people's energy and dedication.²

Marking this day more prominently than its precursors, the President chose the stately stage of Cairo Opera House for the occasion. Surrounding himself with seventeen carefully selected young men and women—all looking very respectable and respectful—Sisi extolled the devotion of these “children” of his as a model when he declared the “Year of Egyptian Youth” (*ʿĀm al-Shabāb al-Miṣrī*). In unreformed patriarchal style, as if he had never heard the sarcastic reactions to Mubarak's last speeches, he pontificated:



شباب مصر العظيم، أتحدّث إليكم اليوم حديثاً متجدّداً نابهاً من قلب أب يتحدّث إلى أبنائه [...] أبنائي وبناتي! إنّ شبابنا من أبطال القوات المسلّحة والشرطة المدنيّة [...] يضربون أروع الأمثلة في التضحية والفداء لحماية الوطن [تصفيق ١٠ ث] ومقدّساته من أهل الشّر اللذين أرادوا أن يزرعوا الفوضىّة والعنف في أرضنا الطيّبة. [...] كان أبنائي وبناتي من شبابنا في الجامعات والمدارس [...] وآخريّن في المصانع والمزارع يصنعون لأمتنا المستقبل ويزرعون لنا سنابل الأمل. أبناء مصر الكرام: إنّ الحديث عن الأمل واقتراجه بالشباب ليس مجرّد كلمة بلاغيّة أقولها في مناسبة رسميّة إنّما هي محاولة لإعادة الأمور إلى نصابها كي يستقيم مصير هذه الأمة وتصحّ خطواتها نحو التقدّم والرفيّه ولذلك فأنيّ اليوم، في يوم الشباب، ووسط هذه الكوكبة من شبابنا الرائع، متقّفين ومبدعين ورياضيين وسياسيين، قرّرت أن يكون العام ٢٠١٦ عاماً للشباب المصريّ [تصفيق ٩ ث].

- 1 Muḥammad SHANAḤ, “Yawm al-Shabāb al-Miṣrī”...tārīkhuḥu 9 Febrāyir wa-ʿaqarrat-hu al-dawla fi 2008 wa-ḥtufila bihi marratayn,” *al-Waṭan*, 9 Jan. 2016, <<http://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/907456>>; Haggai ERLICH, *Students and University in 20th Century Egyptian Politics*, London: Frank Cass, 1989: 152.
- 2 During the event, Sisi officially launched the Egyptian Knowledge Bank (*Bank al-Maʿrifa al-Miṣrī*), an online portal offering free access to a host of international publishers' databases, journals, electronic books and audio-visual media (<<http://www.ekb.eg>>, accessible only from Egyptian IP addresses; <<http://fb.com/EgyptianKnowledgeBank>>). See ElHassan ELSABRY, “Some Thoughts on the ‘Egyptian Knowledge Bank,’” *Backchannels*, 14 Feb. 2016, <http://4sonline.org/blog/post/some_thoughts_on_the_egyptian_knowledge_bank>; Pasha MAGID, “Egyptian Knowledge Bank to Give Free Access to Online Journals, but Will it Fulfill its Promise?,” *Mada Masr*, 16 Nov. 2015, <<http://madamasr.com/en/2015/11/16/feature/society/egyptian-knowledge-bank-to-give-free-access-to-online-journals-but-will-it-fulfill-its-promise>>.

Great Youth of Egypt! I speak to you today straight from the heart of a father addressing his children. [...] My sons and daughters! Our heroic youth in the armed forces and the civilian police [...] provide the most awesome examples of selflessness and sacrifice to protect the nation [*al-waṭan*; 10 sec. *applause*] from the forces of evil who meant to plant chaos and violence in our land of peace (*fī arḍinā al-ṭayyiba*). [...] It is my sons and daughters in schools and universities [...] and those who work in factories and farms who forge the future for our nation (*umma*) and plant for us the seeds of hope. Honourable sons of Egypt: to talk about hope, and to link it to the youth, is not mere rhetoric I employ at an official event—it is an attempt to put things straight again, so that this nation (*umma*) returns to her straight path and takes the right steps to rise and progress. Therefore, today, on the Day of Youth, surrounded by this magnificent youth of ours (*waṣṭa hādhihi 'l-kawkaba min shabābinā al-rā'i*), educated people, creative people, athletes, politicians, I decided to declare this year 2016 a Year of the Egyptian Youth [9 sec. *applause*].³

The networked youth reacted immediately, as in this Facebook post:

السيسي: عام 2016 هو عام الشباب ونعمل بأقصى جهد لاحتواءهم
مصلحة السجون: والله مفيش مكان فاضي يا ريس
#السيسي_vs_الشباب

Sisi: 2016 is the Year of Youth, and We'll do our utmost to include them.

The Prison Authority: There's no room left at all, Mr. President!

#Sisi_vs_Youth⁴

The glaring contrast between Sisi's talk of inclusion and his regime's practice of incarcerating tens of thousands has been pointed out repeatedly during the year and developed into a rhetorical topos used not only by obvious opponents of the regime, but also by people working with it.⁵ It epitomises the tension between the official celebratory discourse of

3 "Kalimat al-Ra'īs al-Sīsī fī ḥafl Yawm al-Shabāb al-Miṣrī," *Akhbār Māspērō*, 9 Jan. 2016, <<https://youtu.be/Ro9VjKx3f8k?t=192>>; "Sisi: 2016 will be the year of Egyptian youth," *Mada Masr*, 9 Jan. 2016, <<http://madamasr.com/news/sisi-2016-will-be-year-egyptian-youth>>.

4 Mahdy KHALED on his Facebook wall, 9 Jan. 2016, <<http://fb.com/mahde.khaled/posts/10208402604039596>>. The hashtag #احتواء_الشباب ("youth inclusion") exploded satirically on Twitter on 9 Feb. 2016, with the same connotation: inclusion=imprisonment.

5 Examples from the Islamist opposition: "[Gamāl] Sulṭān li-l-Sīsī": Kayfa tusammā 2016 'Ām al-Shabāb wa-l-ālāf minhum dākhl al-sugūn?" *Raṣd*, 16 Jan. 2016, <<http://rassd.com/173607.htm>>; Islām RİDĀ, "Ḥuqūqiyūn yugībūn.. 2016.. hal ḥaqqan kān 'ām al-shabāb?" *al-Miṣriyyūn*, 1 Jan. 2017, <<https://is.gd/BwbiHY>>. From the side working with and within the system, note the long and heartfelt applause that the delegates to the First National Youth Conference in Sharm al-Shaykh on 25 October 2016 spontaneously broke into when Sisi announced that he would establish a committee to look into the cases of young people in pre-trial detention ("Ḥaṣad 2016 ... 'ām al-shabāb al-miṣrī," *ON Live*, 28 Dec. 2016, <<https://youtu.be/85vtRvJf44?t=161>>). That this resulted in a meagre 83 people being released was bitterly noted in an end-of-year review on CBC's evening talk-show *Hunā 'l-Āsima* ("Hal

“my sons and daughters,” of “our youth” (*shabābunā*) building Egypt, and between the restless, impatient criticism expressed by many of those who self-consciously identify and act as “*shabāb*.”⁶ This tension was a most striking characteristic of the situation of young people in Egypt in 2016, to such an extent that even pro-regime Egyptian media felt the need to address it as an issue. Only three weeks after announcing the Year of Youth, Sisi himself had to acknowledge, in a live TV interview, that he was out of touch with Egyptian youth. The reporter asked him, somewhat timidly:

[الصحفية: ٦٠ في المئة من هذا المجتمع شباب [...] ما عندهم صبر اللي موجود عند أجيال أكبر. حضرتك [...] تتضيق بعض الشيء بانتقادات الشباب [...]؟
[السياسي: بالنسبة للشباب اسمعي.. أنا عندي اولاد.. وعمري ما ضقت بيهم. فليه هاضيق بأبناء مصر؟ أبناء مصر دا جزء كبير منها.. وخللي بالك بقي.... إحنا اللي مش عارفين.. هه.. أنا باقول لك أهو بوضوح وأنا أرجو إنهم يسمعونني: احنا اللي مش عارفين نتواصل معاهم. احنا اللي مش عارفين نوجد مساحات تفاهم.]

Journalist: 60% of Egyptians are youth. [...] They don't, perhaps, have the same, well, patience that you find in older generations. [...] Does your Excellency, how should I say, get annoyed sometimes by this criticism from the youth?

Sisi: As for the youth... listen: I have children—and I never get annoyed with them. So why should I get annoyed by the children of Egypt? Egypt's children are a big part of her. But let me tell you something: We don't know... ehm... I'm speaking to you openly now, and I hope that they hear me: we don't know how to communicate with them. We don't know how to create avenues of mutual understanding.⁷

2016 kān 'ām al-shabāb al-miṣrī?" *CBC Mubāshir*, 25 Dec. 2016, <<https://youtu.be/3Xa9hrljvQk>>. A few days later, on Dream TV's widely watched *al-ʿAshira Masāʿan*, parliamentarian Rāʿif Timrāz of al-Sharqiyya said the government had not followed up (*lam tafī*) on Sisi's promises when declaring 2016 as the Year of Youth, and that instead of being provided with the means to create a livelihood, “all of Egypt is in jail” (“Barlamānī: al-Ḥukūma munʿazila tamāman ʿan mashākil al-fallāḥ al-miṣrī,” talk show, 28 Dec. 2016, <<https://youtu.be/SguqD8O6XmM?t=106>>).

6 As will become evident in this article, the concept of ‘*shabāb*’ is multi-faceted and not easy to pin down; its precise use during 2016 warrants a separate study into who it is applied to and by whom, in what contexts, and with what values attached. Here, I am less thinking of the irreducible diversity of an age group, but of the multitude of cultural constructions of the concept by a variety of social actors, not only among those who sometimes are stylized as the ‘generation’ of the Jan. 2011 revolution (*gīl al-thawra*) (on the latter, cf. Richard JACQUEMOND, “Un mai 68 arabe? La révolution arabe au prisme du culturel,” *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 138, 2015: 131-46, <<https://doi.org/10.4000/remmm.9247>>).

7 “al-Mudākhala al-kāmila li-l-Raʿīs ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ al-Sīsī maʿa ʿAmr Adīb wa-taṣrīḥāt hāmma li-shabāb al-Ūlṭrās,” *al-Qāhira al-Yawm*, 1 Feb. 2016, <<https://youtu.be/vqrWKaz9KRY?t=838>>. The interview contains other characteristic elements of Sisi's views: “This country was about to collapse in 2011; since 30 June 2013, things are slowly getting better as “we” are trying to build it up again. No patriotic official will ever harm as much as the fingernail of an Egyptian. I have great hopes for this country;



sarcasm.¹¹ Islām Gāwīsh was arrested just as he was in the limelight more than ever, with his second cartoon collection to be presented in print at the 2016 Cairo Book Fair; prosecution then wavered in what he should be accused of—insulting the President and the state? Spreading news on Facebook without government permission? Using

pirated software? In the end, and because scorn was pouring in the minute his arrest became known, Gāwīsh was released under the excuse that it was his employer who had deployed the pirated software...¹²

Similarly ‘hilarious’ was the regime’s reaction to the so-called “condom incident” (*wāqī‘at al-wāqī al-dhakarī*). On the fifth anniversary of the January 25 Revolution—heavy-handedly restyled by the authorities as the Police Day (*‘Īd al-Shurṭa*) that it had been before 2011—two young men braved the security clampdown on Taḥrīr Square to distribute condom balloons to unsuspecting police officers, with the message, “From the youth of Egypt to the police” (*min shabāb Maṣr li-l-shurṭa*).¹³ This can be interpreted not only as a note to the police—as in, ‘We don’t want you to produce more of your kind’—but also as a satirical reaction to the omnipresent slogan, *Taḥyā Maṣr* (“Long live Egypt”) that the regime had appropriated for itself. The video that the two young men produced went viral, receiving close to 2 million hits within 48 hours, and soon, images of ‘security condoms’ appeared on Facebook.¹⁴ Meanwhile, the airwaves were filled with endless talk-shows regurgitating ‘public outcry’ over such indecency.¹⁵ Eventually, the interior ministry refrained from arresting the culprits (who were famous due to their involvement in popular

- 11 The cartoon by Ahmed OKASHA shown here reads: “HEEELLP! An enemy of the state... Regime critic... Rejects any change... Contempt of religion... Brotherhood... [Running:] The dignity of the state...” (“Islām Gāwīsh... ‘il-Waraqa’ ṣana‘at baṭal ‘yā dawla bitkhāf min qalam,” *al-Taḥrīr*, 31 Jan. 2016, <<http://is.gd/xIJZR3>>). For further cartoons, see Sūzān ‘ABD AL-GHANĪ: “Rassāmū ‘l-kārikātēr yataḍāmanūn ma‘a Islām Gāwīsh bi-10 rusūmāt: sa-taḍall il-Waraqa bāqīya,” *al-Bidāya*, 1 Feb. 2016, <<http://albedaiha.com/news/2016/02/01/106057>>; “Caricaturistas egipcios se solidarizan con su compañero detenido, Islam Gawish,” *Fundación Al Fanar*, 1 Feb. 2016, <<http://www.fundacionalfanar.com/caricaturistas-egipcios-se-solidarizan-con-su-companero-detenido-islam-gawish>>.
- 12 “Cartoonist Islam Gawish arrested for anti-gov’t comics,” *Mada Masr*, 31 Jan. 2016, <<http://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/01/31/news/culture/cartoonist-islam-gawish-arrested-for-anti-govt-comics>>; Sāmī ‘ABD AL-RĀDĪ: “‘Āgil | Mufāga’a... ikhlā’ sabīl Islām Gāwīsh dūna tawgīh ayy ittihāmāt nihā’iyyan,” *al-Waṭan*, 1 Feb. 2016, <<http://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/950155>>.
- 13 The video was published by Shady H. ABUZĀID on his Facebook wall on the evening of 25 Jan. 2015 (<<http://fb.com/shady.h.abuzaid/videos/10156459593545402>>); two days later, it had 1.9 million views there. Numerous copies were also republished on other sites.
- 14 E.g. Sanaa SEIF, 26 Jan. 2016, <<http://fb.com/photo.php?fbid=10153951222971340>>; Ammar ABO BAKR, 26 Jan. 2016, <<http://fb.com/photo.php?fbid=10153913219169645>> and <<http://fb.com/photo.php?fbid=10153913332684645>>.
- 15 Muḥammad ‘ABD AL-RĀZIQ: “Shāhid: Wāqī‘at ‘al-Wāqī ‘l-dhakarī’ tuthīr al-gadal bayn al-i‘lāmiyyīn,” *Bawwābat al-Wafd*, 26 Jan. 2016, <<http://is.gd/SfMzjp>>.

TV series¹⁶), declaring instead: “We left them for society to deal with” (lit., to put them on trial: *taraknāhum kay yuhākimahum al-mugtama*). “What’s that?,” the comedian was quick to react;

تخريص ده ولا اسمه ايه؟ ايوة يعني برضك مش فاهم يحاكمنا ازاي يعني؟ يعني تقولوا علينا في الاعلام
"جواسيس لأمريكا واسرائيل وماسونيين وعملاء للخارج وبلطجية" وفي الاخر تقول "تركناهم كي
يحاكمهم المجتمع" ولا حضرتك ناوي تبعث مخبرين بلبس مدني كالعادة وتأذينا وتقول "ده المجتمع"

“Incitement to violence? [...] So your media label us ‘US-Israeli spies’ and ‘Masonics’ and ‘foreign agents’ and ‘thugs’—and after all that you say, ‘we left them to be dealt with by society’? Or does your excellency plan to send over some plain-clothes informants as usual to abuse us and then say, ‘that was society’?”¹⁷

Generation Stuck

Evidently, when Sisi complained that avenues of understanding were lacking, he merely recognized what many young Egyptians were feeling: that there was a wall between the regime on one side, and ‘the youth’ on the other. “We” face “them;” “they” cause problems for “us”: this rhetoric can be found on both sides.¹⁸ While Sisi wondered why so many young people were not amenable to his paternal exhortations, the young, on the other side, were exasperated over being ‘stuck’. As pop star Ḥamza Namira reacted to the arrest of Islām Gāwīsh:

طب المطلوب مننا ايه ك شباب يعني؟ ما نضحكش؟ ما نرسمش؟ ما نغنيش؟ ما نفكرش؟ ما نلحمش؟
شيينا بدري ونفسنا اتسدت عن الحياة كلها وبرضه مش عاجب

So what do you expect of us, the young? Should we stop laughing, painting, singing, thinking, dreaming? We’ve turned grey before time; we’re stuck with no taste left for life; and still you’re not pleased.¹⁹

An Egyptian activist and blogger I interviewed in Cairo in January 2016 described the situation in similar words. He did, however, indicate that below the political stagnation, this generation was seeking a way out:

16 Shādī Ḥasan Abū Zayd was correspondent to the comedy show “Abla Fāhītā”; Aḥmad Mālik is a successful TV actor.

17 Shady H. ABUZAIID [*sic*] on his Facebook wall, 9 Feb. 2016, <<http://fb.com/shady.h.abuzaid/posts/10156508213150402>>.

18 Examples can be seen in most quotations in this article, beginning with Sisi’s TV interview referred to in footnote 7 above.

19 Hamza NAMIRA’s official Twitter account, 31 Jan. 2016, <<http://twitter.com/hamzanamira/status/693820451357880321>>. On Namira, see further below, p. 335.

We're stuck, he said as his hands moved to illustrate a scene of exuberant energy blocked and stuck. We're stuck—but Cairo has never been as interesting as now. I've lived here for over a decade, and Cairo has never been as interesting as now. There's so much going on, in so many ways, there are so many initiatives, cultural initiatives, social initiatives, neighbourhood projects, moves against gentrification, art cinema clubs where people are watching and debating interesting movies...²⁰ After they took from us the street, blocked us from politics, we went home, but we didn't just go home and sit there; many of us went into another field, work in culture and so on. In a way, it was a good thing that they took the street from us, since we were too engaged in the hot day-to-day fights; we were in a way naïve, many people really believed that we just had to remove Mubarak and everything would be fine. I heard people chanting, 'Yes! Now we can marry!' (*ha-nitgawwiz ha-nitgawwiz!*) on Feb. 11 [2011], can you imagine? They really believed that it was so easy! So therefore there's a good side to that they took the street from us. We forgot that revolutions take time. All revolutions do. [...] Now we're in a phase where there's all this activity on the cultural and the social plan, and that is revolutionary.

But we still are stuck. This generation (*gīl*) is stuck. I'm not optimistic; I'm just observing. And I'm challenging the notion that nothing is happening [after the crackdown following the army takeover in June 2013]. The sense of defeat is misleading. Yes, the defeat was heavy, and yes, there's plenty of depression (*ikti'āb*). But this impression is misleading, given the important dynamics in the cultural and social fields that are noticeable below the political stagnation [and, one might add, the economic crises that increasingly made headlines over the second part of the year].²¹

The same view was offered a few months later by well-known cartoonist Andeel:

A lot of Egyptian culture producers nowadays have zero trust or hope in the government's plans for cultural production, which means more innovative ideas, solutions and possibilities for newer and more liberated arts. This is what has to happen if the government continues making it impossible for people to gather in the streets or public places, or even have access to decent cultural services.

Initiatives like these [independent cultural projects] can grow a generation that believes in freedom and the *right to think and choose* and know

20 For an end-of-year review of some of these alternative cultural undertakings, see "Culture A-Z: Only a Few Shining Moments Punctuated the Gloom in Egypt's Arts this Year," *Mada Masr*, 21 Dec. 2016, <<http://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/12/21/feature/culture/a-sad-dangerous-and-somewhat-dull-year-for-arts-in-egypt>>. For an example of a socioeconomic initiative aiming to improve Egyptians' diet and to re-establish local control over seeds, see Dina HUSSEIN, "On the question of food," *Mada Masr*, 11 Apr. 2016, <<http://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/04/11/feature/society/on-the-question-of-food>>.

21 Interview with an Egyptian activist and blogger in his thirties, Cairo, February 2016; my translation.

about the world a lot more than us and our parents. So many years from now, an [extra-ordinary] event like yesterday's [...] can become a usual thing.²²

“The main thing” Andeel identified in these micro-level cultural initiatives “is a sense of independence. These are people who seem to have visions for themselves.” This sense of independence, of claiming the right to think and plan and act “myself” may be most elaborately celebrated in a few relatively privileged, alternative cultural spaces. My impressions from observing Egyptian social media, and the exponential growth of public uttering on social media itself, however, suggest that this wish to express ‘myself’ resonates on a wider scale.

Listen to me! ME!!

Among the most conspicuous attitudes that young Egyptians display on social media is the insistence to be heard, the claim that *Me* and *My Voice* have a right to be uttered and heard, in spite of and right in the face of the “old men” who “live in the past but want to control the present.”²³ This attitude finds its programmatic expression in the song *Ismaʿnī* (“Listen to me!”) that became the most popular hit among Egyptian youth in 2015. It was performed by superstar Ḥamza Namira, the same singer whose frustration over the young generation being ‘stuck’ we have just noted.²⁴ Ḥamza Namira had issued a number of songs that became emblematic for the mood of Egyptian youth over the past few years. His first big hit, back in 2009, was *Iḥlam maʿāyā* where the refrain was “*iḥlam maʿāyā... bi-bukra gāy / wilaw ma-gāsh... iḥnā nʿgīboh bʿnafsinā*” (“Dream with me / of a tomorrow that’s coming / and if it doesn’t come / we’ll bring it on ourselves!”). On the eve of the 25 January 2011 demonstrations, this was the song that was put on the revolutionary Facebook page *Kullinā Khālid Saʿīd* to underscore the call to realize a common dream.²⁵ When the revolution came

22 ANDEEL, “Bread, Salt, and Film,” *MadaMasr*, 16 May 2016, <<http://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/05/16/feature/culture/bread-salt-and-film>> (emphasis mine).

23 CAIROKEE: “Akher Oghney” (see below, footnote 34). For examples from the Sudan for this demand to be heard, see Albrecht HOFHEINZ, “Broken Walls: Challenges to Patriarchal Authority in the Eyes of Sudanese Social Media Actors,” forthcoming in *Die Welt des Islams*, 2017.

24 Ḥamza NAMIRA, “Ismaʿnī,” from the 2014 album *Ismaʿnī*; the official video reached over 6.8 million views on YouTube by June 2016, <<http://youtu.be/38gWv8vozt4>>; cf. Ayman AL-ŞAYYĀD, “Walākinnahu.. «Ām al-Shabāb» !,” *al-Shurūq*, 7 Feb. 2016, <<http://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=06022016&id=ef9bdbe9-66da-42f8-a797-fcb10f86e3d5>>).

25 “ElShaheed – *Iḥlam Maʿāyā*,” *Kullinā Khālid Saʿīd*, 25 Jan. 2011, <<http://fb.com/ElShaheed/posts/183815268315700>>. Wāʿil Ghunaym, the admin of this page, used the song repeatedly—first on 2 Sep. 2010—to call Egyptians to “dream of a better tomorrow that we would share in making” (Wael GHONIM, *Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People is Greater than the People in Power*, London: Fourth Estate, 2012: 174; <<http://fb.com/ElShaheed/posts/150668221629621>>; see also AbdElRahman HUSSIEN, “Dream With Me (Ehlam Ma'aya) - 25 Jan Revolution,” *YouTube*, 5 Feb. 2011, <<http://youtu.be/zHZbZm69PCE>>; Ibrahim ELMASRY, “Ḥamza Namira | al-Laḥazāt al-ūlā li-ʿnīlāq al-thawra min masjid Muṣṭafā Maḥmūd,” *YouTube*, 16 March 2011, <<http://youtu.be/ltzXrHPRChY>>; Sean FOLEY, “The Artist of the Revolution: Hamza Namira, the Arab Spring, and the Dream of a Free Egypt,” *Middle East Institute*, 10 Apr. 2012, <<http://www.mei.edu/content/artist-revolution-hamza-namira-arab-spring-and-dream-free-egypt#edn4>>.

under siege in summer 2011, Ḥamza Namira encouraged his fellow human beings, his fellow *Insān*, to *Ḥāṣir ḥiṣāarak*, “Besiege what besieges you / Tomorrow you’ll see victory / you’ll fill the heart of darkness with light / as long as your heart beats on.”²⁶ After Sisi’s takeover in June 2013, Ḥamza Namira dared to call this a “coup,” and the regime banned his songs from state radio.²⁷ Immediately after this move to silence Namira’s voice, “Listen to me!” was released; by June 2016, it approached 7 million views on YouTube:

حياتي عمرها ما كانت باختيار	My life has never been one of my own choosing,
غضب عني لقتيتك بتاخذ قرار	You’re the one who’s been forcing me and making my decisions for me.
بتعاملني كأني مجرد خيال	You treat me like I’m just a shadow,
وإن جيلنا ده كله شوية عيال	Like me and my whole generation are just kids.
لا.. احنا ملينا السكوت	No! We’re fed up of staying silent,
لا.. خلاص بقولها بأعلى صوت	No! I’m going to say this at the top of my lungs:
اسمعي..	<i>Listen to me!</i>
انت اللي بتضيعيني.. للماضي بترجعني	<i>You’re the one making me lose everything, taking me back to the past</i>
وعايز تحبسني فيه	<i>and wanting to imprison me in it.</i>
أحلامي.. انت اللي قضيت عليها..	<i>You’re the one who’s destroying my dreams, when you took control of</i>
لما اتحكمت فيها	<i>them.</i>
طب فاضل ليا إيه	<i>So what’s left for me?</i>
احنا جيل اللي شايب وهو شباب	We’re the generation that’s become grey-haired in their youth.
كل حلم بألم كل خطوة بعذاب	Every dream brings more pain, and every footstep more agony.
شيلنا هم الحياة دوقنا مر السنين	We’ve carried the burden of life and tasted its bitterness for many years,
لأ وعايزيننا برضه نعيش مذلولين	And you still want us to live in humiliation
لا.. كلمة واحدة هقولها ليك	No! In one word I say to you:
لا.. مش هبقى نسخة من ماضيك	No! I will not be a clone of your past!
اسمعي.. [..]	<i>Listen to me! [...refrain]</i>
ليه أبقى زيك تمام..	Why should I be a carbon copy of you,
أهو عايش والسلام	just barely alive?
وتتوهني الحياة	And become lost in this life.

26 Ḥamza NAMIRA, “Ḥāṣir ḥiṣāarak,” on Hamza Namira Official, “Albūm Insān,” *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLqeyfgGgoMdqjOJOEUV1Ax9THS_IC7oR>; my translation. “Ḥāṣir ḥiṣāarak” may be a phrase loaned from Maḥmūd Darwish’s *Madīḥ al-ẓill al-‘ālī: qaṣīda taṣjīliyya* (Beirut: Dār al-‘Awda, 1983).

27 Dīnā ‘ABD AL-KHĀLIQ: “Ra’īs al-idhā’a al-miṣriyya ba’dā man’ aghānī Ḥamza Namira: yarā anna ‘30 Yūniyū’ inqilāb,” *al-Waṭan*, 19 Nov. 2014, <<http://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/600604>>.

لا.. أنا هختار الطريق.. وهعانداكل شيء No, I will choose my own way, and I will stubbornly resist
ودي أيامي أنا.. This is my time to shine!²⁸

Authority, predictably, is taken aback by this popular claim that ‘My Voice’ be heard, and scrambles to maintain control, in no equivocal terms. “Don’t listen to anybody’s words but me,” Sisi thundered when launching his government’s strategic “Egypt Vision 2030” on 24 February. Speaking in front of a backdrop reading “2016—the Year of Egyptian Youth,” his body language and facial expression played up to his words in betraying a wounded patriarchal attitude on the defense:²⁹

شوفوا: أنا عارف مصر زي ما أنا شايفكم كلكم قدامي كده وعارف علاجها برضو زي ما أنا شايفكم قدامي كده وأنا بقول الكلام ده لكل اللي بيسمعني في مصر: لو سمحتم، متسمعوش كلام حد غيري! [تصفيق ٥ ث] ... احنا ... أنا بتكلم بمنتهى الجدية... متسمعوش كلام حد غيري! أنا راجل لا بكذب ولا بلف وأدور ولا ليا مصلحة غير بلدي! بلدي بس! [تصفيق ٥ ث] ومش بس ليا مصلحة غيرها [sic].. وفاهم أنا بقول ايه! فاهم أنا بقول ايه. البرنامج اللي احنا عاملينه ده كان الهدف منه إن احنا لأول مرة نعزف شبابنا قضية مصر الحقيقية من خلال برنامج مدته ٨ شهور.. بنكتمل دراساته بنكتمل وعيه بنكتمل معرفته... لكن احنا النهارده حنقطع مصر ولا ايه؟ أنا مش حاسم بكده. خلي بالكم! [تصفيق ٤ ث] خلي بالكوا! أنا مش حاسم بكده! محدش يفكر إن طولة بالي وخلقي الحسن معناه إن البلد دي تقع. قَسَمًا بالله: اللي حيقرب لها لأشيله من فوق وش الأرض! [تصفيق ١٧ ث] أنا بقول لكم كلكم، لكل مصري بيسمعني.. انتوا فاكرين الحكاية ايه؟.. انتوا عايزين ت.. انتوا.. مين؟ انتوا مين؟.. هه!.. لا!.. دول ٩٠ مليون! وأنا مسؤول قدام ربنا اننا أقف قدامه يوم القيامة أقول له: أنا خلّيت بالي منهم. عايزين تخلوا بالكم منهم: معايا؟ أهلا؛ مش عايزين: لو سمحتو، اسكتوا! [تصفيق ١٠ ث] اسكتوا!

Look: I know Egypt, as intimately as I can see all of you before me here, and I also know the remedy for her [sc. Egypt], as well as I can see you before me here. And I say this to everyone listening to me in Egypt: If you please, do not listen to anybody’s words but mine! [5 sec. applause] We... [goes back to emphasize:] I’m utterly serious: don’t listen to anybody’s words but

28 Lyrics and translation as per the subtitles in the official video (see footnote 24); refrain highlighted.

29 Abdelfattah ELSISI, “Kalimat al-ra’īs ‘Abd al-Fattāh al-Sīsī khilāl mu’tamar istrāṭīgiyyat Miṣr li-l-tanmiya | Ru’yat #Miṣr_2030,” *YouTube*, 24 Feb. 2016, <<http://youtu.be/iht9hEkiAE?t=677>>; the passage translated here can be watched in better quality at the extract posted by Mehwar TV Channel, “al-Sīsī: Ma-tisma’ūsh kalām ḥadd ghērī anā lā akdīb wa-lā aliff wa-’adūr ... anā ma-līsh maṣlaḥa ghēr baladī,” *YouTube*, 24 Feb. 2016, <<https://youtu.be/m1LFp5sbHq8>>. See also ?Sh.?, “Bi’l-vīdēō: kalimat al-Sīsī fī ḥafl tadshīn ‘Miṣr 2030’ (naṣṣ kāmil),” *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, 24 Feb. 2016, <<http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/898741>>; “Sisi: Don’t listen to anyone but me,” *Mada Masr*, 24 Feb. 2016, <<http://www.madamasr.com/news/sisi-dont-listen-anyone-me>>. For the “Egypt Vision 2030,” see its official website, <<http://sdsegypt2030.com>> (which has not been updated further between its launch in February 2016 and the end of the year).

mine! I'm a man of my words; I don't waver; and I have no other interest in mind than my country. My country alone! [5 sec. applause] And not only an interest other than her [sic]—I also have the right understanding of what I'm saying. The right understanding of what I'm saying! This programme that we are putting in place here was designed to let our young people (*shabābnā*), for the first time, know what Egypt's true cause is, through an 8-month programme. We're going to finalise the necessary studies and get a good grip on it... [Sisi pauses, and his focus visibly shifts] ... but are we going to rip Egypt to pieces or what? I shall not tolerate this! Watch out! [4 sec. applause] Watch out! I shall not tolerate this! [Sisi's voice and face take on an increasingly stern expression] No-one should think that my patience and my good nature mean that this country can fall. I swear to God: anyone who tries to trespass on her, I'll erase him from the face of the earth! [17 sec. applause] I'm telling this to all of you, to every Egyptian listening to me... what do you think this is all about!? Do you want to... do you... Who are you anyhow? Who are you? ... Ha! ... No! ... Here's 90 million! [He raises his fist] And I am responsible before Our Lord in that I'll stand before Him on Judgment Day to tell Him: 'I took care of them' [makes a gesture of an enclosure]. If you want to take care of them, with me: welcome! If you don't, well, then please: shut up! [makes a decisive cut-off gesture]³⁰

The president positions himself as the omniscient leader who alone knows and can tell his countrymen how to run Egypt; an expert doctor who alone knows how to remedy what's wrong with her. To listen to anybody else would make the country fall. The young are ignorant; they have never before been told what the country needs; now finally, a wise and strong leader comes to the rescue. But—and it is at this point that Sisi's mood visibly darkens—a few nobodies are trying to disrupt this work and ruin the country. This cannot be tolerated. Who are they anyhow to dare to speak up? They must be silenced. They will be eradicated. Ferociously. This is the righteous leader's duty, in fulfilment of his ultimate responsibility before God to take care of his flock.

Egyptians, in the president's vision, fall into two categories. Either they belong to the people—all the 90 million—who stand behind their leader and follow his word. Or else, they have no right to speak. They have no right to exist.³¹

30 The translation and transcription here follow the text as recorded on the video; *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*'s transcription is 'smoothed' a little, replacing a few colloquial expressions with Modern Standard Arabic, and omitting the passage "Who are you anyhow? Who are you? ...Ha! ...No! ...Here's 90 million!"

31 Sisi reproduces here a familiar populist pattern, also expressed by Donald Trump in a campaign speech: "The only important thing is the unification of the people—because the other people don't mean anything" ("Full Event: Donald Trump Holds MASSIVE Rally in Eugene, OR (5-6-16)," *Right Side Broadcasting*, 6 May 2016, <<https://youtu.be/ql7hTkZOjKY?t=2529>>). Cf., i.a., Jan-Werner MÜLLER, "Trump, Erdoğan, Farage: The attractions of populism for politicians, the dangers for democracy," *The Guardian*, 2 Sep. 2016, <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/sep/02/trump-erdogan-farage-the-attractions-of-populism-for-politicians-the-dangers-for-democracy>>.

Sisi cares for Egypt. Sisi leads Egypt. Sisi is Egypt. Nothing else can be true. Anyone who disagrees will be mercilessly crushed by the mighty power of the President and His People.

Defiant hope; no illusions, but ire and persistence

It is no wonder that such an attitude makes it difficult to find “avenues of mutual understanding.” What is more striking is that many of the ‘nobodies’ threatened in no vague terms by Egypt’s strongman continue to raise their voice, right in the face of such threats. Two weeks after Sisi spit out his “silence!” (*uskuti*) command, the band Cairokee defiantly retorted: we are “voice when they want everyone to keep silent.” Cairokee’s “Voice of freedom” (“*Šōt il-ḥurriyya*”) had been one of the emblematic songs of the 2011 revolution;³² on 12 March 2016, they released their “*Ākhir ughniyya*,” their “Last song,” which quickly became a super-hit with over 1.2 million views on YouTube during the first three weeks alone.

“As long as there’s fear, we can’t be free,” is their starting point: *lā ḥurriyya ma’ al-khawf*. They have no illusions about the state of the nation. Fear is back in force; fear dominates. But as obstinately as the creator of the condom prank,³³ the group repeats: “Even if this is my last song, I’ll go on to sing for freedom!” The song is worth reading and translating in full; for—as one of the top comments on YouTube put it—“this is not a song, but a revolutionary communiqué speaking for all our generation” (*dī mish ughniyya, dī [...] bayān ṣawrī bi-’ism gīlnā kulluh*):³⁴

اسمع مني المفيد	Let me tell you something useful:
عاهات كثير وتقالييد	[there are] plenty of defects and traditions;
المجتمع اجتمع ضد التجديد	society is united against change;

32 CAIROKEE, “Sout Al Horeya [...],” *YouTube*, 10 Feb. 2011, <http://youtu.be/Fgw_zfLLvh8>.

33 Shady H. ABUZAID on his Facebook wall, 26 Jan. 2016, <<http://fb.com/shady.h.abuzaid/posts/10156462830755402>>:

ايه ؟ قفشتوا ليه ؟ انا بجزر [...] ...
 في ذكرى 25 يناير 2016 بقي في تواجد أمني رهيب في الشوارع مع تهديدات ووعديات لمن ينزل يتظاهر...محدث فعلا نزل وكله مقهور وكله استوعب اننا مش عارفين ننسى...طيب خلاص...انتو فعلا معاكم سلاح ومعاكم السلطة والقانون...بس كل اسلحتكم ديه احنا هنعمل منها نكت , كوميكس او فيديو صغير وكدة كدة انتو تقادرو تحطفوننا من بيوتنا وتقتلوننا في عز الظهر...بس مش هتقدروا تنكروا وجودنا ولا هتقدروا تنكروا انكم نكتة...بس نكتة سخيفة.
 [...] انا خايف ويزداد خوف يوم عن الثاني [...]؛ ممكن اكون كنت بخاف زمان...بس دلوقتي انا مرعوب...بس هفضل بعمل اللي في دماغني حتى وانا مرعوب
 [...] حاسس ان ايامي معدودة برة القفص...ولما ادخله مش هخرج منه قريب بس لو ديه النهاية خلوني اقولكم اني مبسوط بأصدقائي الكثير اللي دوما كانوا يبتغوا جبي [...] شكرا لمساندة كل واحد...اشوفكم في عالم اخر يا احبائي نكون فيه احرارا نضحك دون أن نُسجن .

34 Cairokee: “Akher Oghneya,” *CairokeeOfficial*, 12 March 2016, <<http://youtu.be/TZu2euuj2GE>>. The comment is by Mohamed Hagag, <<https://is.gd/3TsX7h>>. The Arabic text is taken from the official YouTube site; the translation is mine, adapted from the official subtitles.

فكر الناس تعبنا عيان ومريض ابحث معايا و دور عالمستفيد	the way people think is sick, tired, and weak; come on, let's look together for the one who's benefitting from this!
المستفيد هو المتحكم فيك اللي ممشيك جنب الحيط بيحبيك ويوديك سيطر عليك حابسينك جوه نفوخك قضبان السجن خوفك بتخاف تفكر بحرية لحد يشوفك كلامي مش ضد النظام فقط كلامي ضد العبيد كمان لو ميت الف نظام سقط هنفضل برضه في نفس المكان	The one who's benefitting is the one who controls you, who's moving you around, dictating you where to go, subjugating you. They've imprisoned you inside your own mind, behind the bars of your own fear. You're afraid to think freely 'cause someone might catch you. I speak out not only against the system, I speak out against the slave mentality [lit. 'the slaves'] [since otherwise,] even if the system collapses a thousand times, we'd still be stuck in the same place.
في حاجات وتساؤلات وعادات بقت عاهات وتقاليد محتاجة تجديد والتاريخ عمال يعيد	There are things, problems, there are traditions that turned into defects, there are habits that need to be changed! But history is repeating itself...
في حرب ضد الحرية والحرية دائما ممنوعة كل العقول الرجعية كلمتهم هي المسموعة اتربينا على ان الحيطان ليها ودان طب انزل بالمزيكا سمعهم بالف المليون لو دي اخر اغنيه ليا هنفضل أغني عن الحرية قولوا معايا بصوت عالي حرية	There's a war against freedom, freedom's always forbidden. All these retrograde minds, they are the ones being listened to. We've been raised to always think that the walls have ears. Alright, turn this music down, I want them to hear my full voice: If this is my last song, I'll be singing about freedom. Come on, sing along loudly: "Freedom!"
حرية يعني تغير يعني حرية في التفكير والتعبير حرية يعني اختيارك مش اختيار الغير صراع اجيال عالمكشوف أصبح عيني عينك عاوزينك تمشي علي خط سيرهم مش خط سيرك الكبير عاوز يعيش في الماضي وعالحاضر يسيطر	Freedom means change. It means freedom of thought and expression. Freedom means your choice, not someone else's. It's a generational conflict, it's so obvious, and we all know it. They want you to walk their path and not yours The old man wants to live in the past and control the present;

يفكرون بياعلان اسكنشايزر	these guys remind me of the “Skenshizer” commercial. ³⁵
مهما اتكلم صوتي مش مسموع	No matter what I say, they never listen to me
كلامي دائما بالنسبة لهم فارغ وممنوع	to them all my words are rubbish and must be banned.
سبني احلم حلم جديد وخارج عن المألوف	Let me have a new dream, an extra-ordinary one:
مش عاوز امشي في قطع زي الخروف	I don’t want to be walking with a herd of sheep!
بلدنا شابه يعني اغلبها من الشباب	Our country is young, its majority are youth;
قتلتوا فيه الولاء وقفلتوا في وشه الابواب	you killed their loyalty, you closed every door in their face.
عندنا احلام كتير اديني فرصه اسوق	We have so many dreams, give me a chance to drive;
انا كل هديني اشوف بلادي فوق	all I want is see my country rising.
رقم سبعة ممكن يقمي تمانيه	The number 7 [٧, in Arabic] can become an 8 [٨]
لو بصيت عليه م الناحية الثانية	if you look at it from the other side.
لو دي اخر اغنيه ليا	If this is my last song,
هفضل أغني عن الحرية	I’ll be singing about freedom.
قولوا معايا بصوت عالي	Come on, sing along loudly:
حرية	“Freedom!”
قال ايه يقولوا عليا خايف	Guess what—they say I’m afraid?!
اركن ياض على جنب و حط احمر شفائيف	Get out of the way, put on some lipstick ³⁶ :->
عملت ثورة جوايه ولسه مستمره	I made a revolution inside me and it continues;
الحلم عايش معايا كلمتي لسه حرة	the dream lives on in me, and my voice is still free.
غنيت في كل العهود وكنت الصوت ساعة ما	In every age I’ve been singing; I’ve been voice when they wanted
يجبوا الدنيا سكوت	everyone to keep silent.
الحرية يعني تضحيه و اختبار وانا قد المسئولية	Freedom means sacrifice; it’s a real test, but I’m up to the chal-
وللاخر هكمل المشوار	lenge and I’ll continue until we’ve achieved our goal.
انا مش لوحدي انا فكره زي البزرة هتدفنوها	I’m not alone, I’m an idea, like a seed, if you bury it, it’ll bear
هتطرح بكره	fruit tomorrow.

35 This refers to a promotion video for Nestlé Crunch screened in Ramadan 2015 that plays on the generation gap and that gained great popularity in Egypt. It contrasts Crunch as a cool chocolate bar for the young with ‘Skenshizer,’ an (imaginary) product old men are nostalgically rattling on about. See “Kayfa sāhamat ‘al-social media’ fī nagāḥ ḥamlat ‘iSkenshizer’?,” *DōtMasr*, 24 June 2015, <<https://is.gd/7e3mgo>>. The video itself can be watched at <<http://youtu.be/37NrOj2NCC4>>.

36 Cairokee were criticised for the male chauvinist tone of this line; they were quick to apologise, saying that it was an expression common in the street (*lughat shāri*), but that it was wrong to use it (May AHMAD, “Vidēo: Aḥad a’ḍā’ ‘Cāirokee’ ya’tadhir ‘an ‘ḥuṭṭ aḥmar shafāyif’ fī ughniyyatihim al-akhīra: mumkin titfihim taqlīl min il-mar’a... āsif,” *al-Bidāya*, 13 March 2016, <<http://albedaiha.com/news/2016/03/13/108856>>).

عمرى ما هبيع احلامنا والشهيد اللي سبقنا	Our dreams I'll never sell, nor the martyrs who fell;
خدني على سجنك خليني اشوف شبابنا	take me to your jail so I can see our youth;
الرجالة بحق في السجون ساكنه	real men today live in jail.
لو دي اخر اغنيه ليا	If this is my last song,
هفضل أغنى عن الحرية	I'll be singing about freedom.
قولوا معايا بصوت عالي	Come on, sing along loudly:
حرية	"Freedom!"

Where Sisi poses as the only legitimate voice of Egypt, Cairokee perform as the persistent voice of the young generation. Where Sisi portrays this generation as in need of his expert guidance, they insist that the old man's prescriptions are perpetuating a sick society of sheep subjugated by fear. Imprisoned in their own slave mentality, Sisi's followers are unable to see that this system only serves the dictator in power and his cronies. It is this mindset that needs to change; otherwise, no regime change can bring real progress. Therefore, the energy and enthusiasm of the young generation needs to be set free. Where Sisi imagines that 90 million are standing behind him, in reality, the majority of Egyptians are young people who feel that all doors have been shut in their face. Like Sisi, the young want their country to flourish; but it can only do so if the doors are opened, if freedom and self-responsibility replace sheepish fear and submissiveness. Sisi may threaten to bury the naysayers underground; but the seed of free minds lives on in many a heart, and is bound to bear fruit one day.

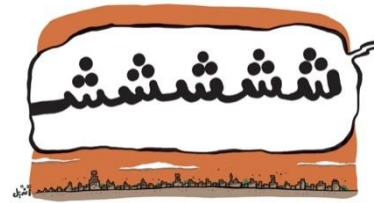
Cairokee filmed their video in selfie style; as commentators on YouTube noted, in the manner of *Aṭfāl Shawāri'* ("Street Children"), a group of six young men who began to release a series of short satirical videos on Facebook in January 2016, all but a few filmed at night in one or other of Cairo's streets, using only their voice and a mobile phone. Visually already, they represent culture from underground, springing up quickly and ready to run if necessary; relying only on themselves after all else has been taken from them. Their first video, "*Barā'im al-Īmān*" ("Buds of Faith") poked fun at the old-fashioned and stagnant performance of religion on the state-run broadcast media.³⁷ The title itself is a satirical comment contrasting the young freshness of the 'buds' promised to the audience with the old-fashioned and sapless reality of the actual performance that "has not changed in five centuries," as one commentator on YouTube put it, and that therefore has lost all attraction for the young generation. The five-minute video strings together commonly used invocations and other religious phrases without making any textual changes, but using vocal exaggeration and facial expression to ridicule the way in which these texts are used by the state's religious institutions. *Aṭfāl Shawāri'* dared to tread treacherous ground here; their mocking of bigotry was denounced as blasphemy by many, as a mocking of religion itself. Undeterred, they continued to caricature the pervasive discourse of social conformism,

37 *Aṭfāl Shawāri'*, "al-Vīdēō al-awwal: Barā'im al-Īmān," *YouTube*, 7 Jan. 2016, <<https://youtu.be/qo2IS1D2ID8>>.

hypocrisy, and media crookedness. Increasingly, they broached political issues as well.³⁸ In May, this proved too much for the regime. They were rounded up and put in custody after they had mocked the mentality of “those who worship the boots of the military” (*‘abadat al-biyāda*); branded the police as thugs (*il-dākhliyya balṭagiyya*); called on Sisi to show some self-respect and leave (*irḥal*—the emblematic slogan raised against Mubārak in 2011); and affirmed that “the revolution continues”.³⁹ The networked youth reacted by multiplying selfie shots under the hashtag *#كاميرا_التلفون_تتهزك* (“the phone camera makes you tremble?”), a theme taken up by Islām Gāwīsh in a cartoon titled, “No video, no photo, no drawing will make tremble anyone but the feeble and weak.”⁴⁰

Hushing which voice?

Truth be told, not everyone is as combative as the examples mentioned here; there are those who after a long fight feel exhausted and fed-up and just want to get out.⁴¹ And the voice of Sisi continues to loom large—though it is difficult to assess just how many Egyptians really do believe every word he says. But as visible on social media, it is clear that the regime is



- 38 “[L]eurs délires assez potaches ont rencontré de plus en plus de succès, tandis que leurs productions s’éloignaient peu à peu des thématiques *a priori* « culturelles » pour aborder des sujets de plus en plus « politiques »” (Yves GONZALEZ-QUIJANO, “La rue interdite à ses enfants : l’Égypte, de moins en moins drôle...,” *Culture et politique arabes*, 31 May 2016, <<http://cpa.hypotheses.org/5956>>).
- 39 Aṭfāl Shawāri’, “‘Abadat al-biyāda,” *YouTube*, 2 May 2016. In September 2016, the four members of the group still in custody (the youngest one had been released on bail immediately, while the police never got hold of the sixth member) were released with conditions; all six are still awaiting possible trial on charges including the “subversion of the fundamental principles forming the basis of the state” (“Miṣr: al-Ifrāg ‘an ‘anāṣir ‘Aṭfāl Shawāri’ alladhīna da‘aw al-Sīsī ‘li-l-istiḳāla,” *France 24*, 13 Sep. 2016, <<https://is.gd/FeGylm>>; Ṭāriq NAGM AL-DĪN, “Miṣr: Ikhlā’ sabīl a’ḍā’ firqat ‘Aṭfāl Shawāri’,” *al-‘Arabī al-Jadīd*, 7 Sep. 2016, <<https://is.gd/AKOOHf>>).
- 40 Islam GAWISH, “Wa’llāhi wa-lā vidēō wa-lā šūra wa-lā rasma bit’hizz illā al-da’if al-‘āgiz,” *Facebook*, 11 May 2016, <<http://fb.com/photo.php?fbid=1024323607636148>>.
- 41 Witness prominent activist ‘Alā’ ‘ABD AL-FATTĀḤ’s letter from prison at the fifth anniversary of the revolution: “The only words I can write are about losing my words. [...] I have nothing to say: no hopes, no dreams, no fears, no warnings, no insights; nothing, absolutely nothing” (“‘I was terribly wrong’ – writers look back at the Arab spring five years on,” *The Guardian*, 23 January 2016, <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jan/23/arab-spring-five-years-on-writers-look-back>>. A similar attitude was also expressed by poet Aḥmad SALĀMA (b. 1985) when I interviewed him in Cairo in January 2016 (cf. his poetry collection *Kāfir bi-ḥubb bilādī*, Ṭanṭā: Ṭanṭā Book House, 2013). At the end of the year, a young social media analyst and former (2011) revolutionary street fighter wrote in a public post, “*Ummiytī al-waḥīda fī 2017 inn’anā u-Maṣr nsīb ba’d*” (“my only wish for 2017 is that Egypt and I part ways”) (Abd El Rahman NADY on his Facebook wall, 31 Dec. 2016, <<http://fb.com/IbNady/posts/1450692274963499>>).



was still dominating the scene. Only one or two brave souls dared to call a spade a spade (“Nuff crap!”) though their voice remained a whisper rather than a whoop. Most of the audience were going “hush!”—but it was not unambiguous whether they were calling for silence to listen to Sisi (out of respect? or out of fear?), or rather meant to silence Sisi. Things had become a bit less clear and unanimously submissive as Egypt entered the year 2016. As the year progressed, dissent became louder. On 13 April 2016, Andeel republished this cartoon on his Twitter account, now using the straightforward hashtag #*irḥal*, “get out,” after Sisi had shut down a man who wanted to comment on a talk the President had just delivered to what was styled as an “Egyptian family meeting” (*liqā’ al-usra al-miṣriyya*).⁴⁴ Sisi’s “I didn’t give anyone permission to speak” (*anā ma-ddetsh il-iḡn li-ḥadd yitkallim*) made headlines as many Egyptians, even prominent talk show hosts, criticized what was widely perceived as his regime ‘selling’ two Red Sea Islands to Saudi Arabia.⁴⁵ This ceasing of Egyptian sovereignty provided the rallying cause for the first open street

42 ANDEEL, “Cartoon: Things are a bit...,” *Mada Masr*, 27 Sep. 2014, <<http://www.madamasr.com/en/2014/09/27/cartoon/u/cartoon-things-are-a-bit>>.

43 LĪNĀ ‘AṬĀALLĀH, “Miṣr 2015: ‘Kōz il-maḥabba itkharam,’” *Mada Masr*, 31 Dec. 2015, <<https://is.gd/Ukuptn>>.

44 ANDEEL, “#Irḥal,” 13 Apr. 2016, <http://twitter.com/_Andeel_/status/720250938796060674>; “Ghur-fat al-akhbār | Liqā’ al-ra’īs al-Sīsī ma’a ‘adad min mumaththilī ‘l-muḡtama’ taḥta ‘unwān ‘liqā’ al-usra al-miṣriyya’ | kāmila,” *CBC eXtra News*, 13 Apr. 2016, <<https://youtu.be/V-zbojIGRc8?t=5530>>.

45 Maḥmūd AL-WĀQĪf, “al-Sīsī li-aḥad ḥādirī liqā’ ‘al-Usra al-Miṣriyya’: ‘Anā mā-ddetsh il-iḡn li-ḥadd yitkallim,’” *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, 13 Apr. 2016, <<http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/928436>>; “Ṣabāḥ ON: Ḥāyḏī Fārūq: Gazīratay [sic] Tīrān wa-Ṣanāfir miṣriyyatān,” *ON Ent*, 9 Apr. 2016, <<https://youtu.be/OjTcnEPeLiE>>; “al-Rāfiḏūn li-tanāzul Miṣr ‘an gazīratay Tīrān wa-Ṣanāfir bi-l-Baḥr al-Aḥmar: waqqī’ū li-inqādh gazīratay Tīrān wa-Ṣanāfir,” *Avaaz*, 10 Apr. 2016, <<https://is.gd/XKiZih>> (16,000 signatures on the first day); “Li-l-tārīkh wa-qabla tabdīl al-mawāqif: mā qāla-hu al-i’lāmiyyūn ‘an qaḏiyyat Tīrān wa-Ṣanāfir,” *al-Mūgaz*, 13 Apr. 2016, <<http://almogaz.com/news/politics/2016/apr/13/2235597>>; Ḥarakat Shabāb 6 Ibrīl, “Bayān min Ḥarakat Shabāb 6 Ibrīl ilā ‘l-Quwwāt al-Musallaḥa al-Miṣriyya,” *6th of April Youth Movement* official Facebook account, 12 Apr. 2016, <<http://fb.com/shabab6april/posts/10154747079573294>>; “Liwā’ sābiq bi-l-ṣā’iqa yuhaddid al-Sīsī li-bay’i-hi guzur Tīrān li-l-Sa’ūdiyya: Tīrān maṣriyya wi-ḥnā mish ha-nuskut yā Sīsī,” broadcast live on ONPlus’ *al-Ṣūra al-Kāmila*, 14 Apr. 2016, many copies on YouTube, e.g. <<https://youtu.be/e8k-LBTeh1Y>>.

protests in the country in over a year.⁴⁶ The April 6 Youth Movement issued a statement saying, “Let today be a new beginning. More important than slogans, parties, political shouting, is that we go down today and say I am here. I am still here and I have an opinion, a voice and worth. The January revolution still lives and its legacy is still within us, despite everything that has happened.”⁴⁷

Sisi’s demand that people should not listen to anyone but him now translated into his warning journalists not to be an echo chamber for social media, but to practice “responsible” journalism.⁴⁸ His regime, however, faced not only the buds of a more assertive public, but also renewed challenges from a judiciary that for a while had been perceived as having fallen fully subservient to the executive, but that now delayed the implementation of the maritime border agreement with Saudi Arabia, and—more importantly—rescinded parts of the controversial protest law enacted by presidential decree in 2013 that had put many of the most outspoken revolutionary activists behind bars.⁴⁹ The struggle for who may raise a voice in Egypt is far from over, and speaking out does not necessarily translate into actual

46 Hishām SHA‘BĀN, “Ghadan: masīrāt gum‘at ‘al-Ard hiya al-‘Ird’ li-rafḍ al-tanāzul ‘an ‘Tīrān wa-Ṣanāfir,’” *al-Taḥrīr*, 13 Apr. 2016, <<https://is.gd/uIukLS>>; “Protests in Egypt against Red Sea islands deal, more expected on 25 April,” *Ahram Online*, 15 Apr. 2016, <<http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/Content/1/64/199636/Egypt/Politics-/Update--Protests-in-Egypt-against-Red-Sea-islands-.aspx>>. The issue flared up again as a focal point for public outcry at the end of 2016, when the government decided to push through the deal without waiting for the final court ruling (Hiba AL-ḤANAFĪ, “Ghaḍab ba‘da muwāfaqat al-ḥukūma ‘alā ‘Tīrān wa-Ṣanāfir’: ‘sa-yantaṣir al-sha‘b’ (taqrīr). Intishār iqrār bi-rafḍ al-ittifāqiyya ‘alā al-shabakāt al-igtimā‘iyya: ‘lam amnaḥ al-Sīsī tafwīḍan,’” *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, 30 Dec. 2016. The hashtag *مصريه_وصنافير_تيران* turned trending again on Twitter on 29 Dec. 2016.—Egypt and Saudi Arabia had left the status of the two islands purposefully open for decades, partly in order to increase manoeuvrability vis-à-vis Israel. Social media buzz, however, made it appear as if the islands always had undisputedly been “Egyptian earth” (cf. Sūzān ‘ABD AL-GHANĪ, “Wathā‘iq gadīda: 22 kharīṭa min muqtanayāt gāmi‘at Stānford tuthbit milkiyyat Miṣr li-‘Tīrān wa-Ṣanāfir,’” *al-Bidāya*, 14 Apr. 2016, <<http://albedaiiah.com/news/2016/04/14/111075>>).

47 Harakat Shabāb 6 Ibrīl, “Khallū il-nahārdah bidāya gidīda,” *6th of April Youth Movement* official Facebook account, 15 Apr. 2016, <<http://fb.com/shabab6april/posts/10154755168683294>>. The slightly condensed translation is taken from “Update: Prosecution reverses release order for 25 protesters,” *Mada Masr*, 16 Apr. 2016, <<http://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/04/16/news/u/update-prosecution-reverses-release-order-for-25-protesters>>.

48 The relevant passage from Sisi’s 13 April speech was republished, i. a., by Al Nahar TV as “al-Ra‘īs al-Sīsī li-l-i‘lāmiyyīn: lā ta‘tamidū ‘alā shabakāt al-tawāṣul al-igtimā‘ī ka-maṣādir lakum,” *AlNahar AlYoum*, 13 Apr. 2016, <<https://youtu.be/oW5soq9AtwE>>. See also Hibā al-ḤANAFĪ and Nevīn al-‘IYĀDĪ, “Kḥiṭāb al-Sīsī fī ‘Liḳā’ al-Uṣra al-Miṣriyya’ (naṣṣ kāmīl): lā nabī‘ arḍanā li-aḥḍad... wa-taḥdhīrāt min shabakāt al-tawāṣul al-igtimā‘ī,” *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, 13 Apr. 2016, <<http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/928512>>.

49 Saḥar ‘AZIZ, “al-Qaḍā’ al-miṣrī taḥt al-sayṭara,” *Ṣadā*, ed. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 20 Aug. 2014, <<http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/?fa=56427>>; Sāra AL-SHALAQĀNĪ, “Buṭlān ḍamm Tīrān wa-Ṣanāfir ilā ‘l-Sa‘ūdiyya... hal yaḥḍamm al-qaḍā’ ilā mu‘araḍat al-Sīsī?” *Al-Monitor*, 23 June 2016, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ar/originals/2016/06/egypt-court-decision-void-transfer-islands-saudi-arabia.html>>; al-Maḥkama al-Dustūriyya al-‘Ulyā: “Iṣḍār al-ḥukm fī al-qaḍiyya raqm 160 li-sanat 36 qaḍā’iyya ‘dustūriyya’ wa-ḥakamat al-maḥkama : bi-‘adam dustūriyyat naṣṣ al-faḍra al-ūlā min al-mādḍa al-‘āshira min qarār ra‘īs al-gumhūriyya bi-l-qānūn raqm 107 bi-tanzīm al-ḥaqq fī ‘l-igtimā‘āt al-‘amma wa-l-mawākib wa-l-tazāhurāt al-silmiyya [...],” *al-Garīda al-Rasmiyya* 50, 15 Dec. 2016, <<http://www.cc.gov.eg/Images/L/373831.pdf>>.

impact, but at year's end, it appeared that Sisi's insistence on being the only one listened to meets with growing assertiveness on the part of those who defend the right of free speech also for those who don't agree.

In lieu of a conclusion

This article has explored voices on the question of 'who has a voice' in Egypt in 2016. It has stayed relatively close to the 'event' level and not attempted to reduce this snapshot to an in-depth analysis of arrays, codes, and broken codes in the Gumbrechtian spirit.⁵⁰ Such an analysis must remain the subject of a future publication. Nevertheless, in lieu of a conclusion, I would like to offer some ideas on what appear to be organising principles in the material here presented, and draw some parallels to my fellow researchers' work.

You vs. Us is one such principle, dividing a potentially multifaceted community into two polarised camps that end up both using this code, if conversely. It appears in the hashtag *#Sisi_vs_Youth*, in Sisi's "Who are you anyhow? Here's 90 million!" and in most any example quoted in this article. This code—which may be particularly apparent in the social media's filter bubbles—is of course not new; it perpetuates the same attitude of exclusion from legitimate participation that was expressed in pop star 'Alī al-Ḥaggār's 2013 song "We are a people, and you are [another] people" and that provided the moral backdrop for the violent eradication of the Muslim Brotherhood.⁵¹ As we have seen, Sisi is still quick to use the same discourse of eradication and nullification when faced with opposition. Sisi's "we" includes 'his' sons and daughters, 'his' children, those who constitute 'our noble youth': those who follow Sisi's fatherly guidance. The young people who speak out against this attitude, on the other hand, position themselves as spokespeople for 'the youth' in general, for 'our generation,' who valiantly resist the slave mentality keeping society subservient to the tyrant dictator, and claim to be willing to offer their lives for this goal. They do not go so far as to sing of patricide, but they do present a rather one-dimensional image of the 'fathers,' of a retrograde older generation that seeks to perpetuate the past and to kill young people's dreams and their future.

It is interesting to see, however, that this clear-cut "you vs. us," which at first sight has a straightforward correlation with powerful patriarchal rule facing a handful of feeble underdogs, does point to an inverted power dimension, which we may comprehend as a collapsed code where **the Nobody = Omnipotent**. When Sisi warned journalists not to rely on the social media, he explained that this was a "very dangerous" thing since it was possible today, with only one or two 'electronic brigades,' to create a closed circle of false infor-

50 Hans Ulrich GUMBRECHT, *In 2016: Living at the Edge of Time*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.

51 'Alī al-ḤAGGĀR, "Iḥnā sha'b wi 'intū sha'b," *alīhaggar1*, 5 July 2013, <<http://youtu.be/YJw-miMUOPc>>; cf. Albrecht HOFHEINZ, "#WhyIHateIkhwan: Islamist-Secular Polarisation in Egyptian Social Media," *NewME Report*, Oslo: University of Oslo, 2013, <http://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/english/research/projects/new-middle-east/publications/2013/6_hofheinz.pdf>. On ways of exploiting—and of trying to challenge—antagonistic divisions in Egypt, see also Elene CHITI, "The Crisis as an Institutional Tool: Challenging Anti-Institutional Challenges in the Egyptian Cultural Field," forthcoming.

mation amplified by ‘irresponsible’ journalists and thereby to spawn an issue out of nothing, undermining people’s sense of security, and splitting the nation.⁵² The ‘nobodies’ have to be crushed all the more relentlessly since they are, despite their small numbers, capable of disrupting all ‘our’ efforts, of destroying what the ‘90 million’ Egyptians are striving to achieve. This collapsed code can also be recognized in the revolutionaries’ self-portrayal as the ‘buds’ of a better future, the tiny ‘seed’ that is buried underground, but that is bound to blossom and bear fruit in the future.

These two pairs appear to me to be the most prominent ‘Gumbrechtian’ organising principles in the material I have presented here; especially so since they are shared across the lines of confrontation. It is tempting, however, to propose a few others as well; and the first one that comes to mind is the idea that **Reality = a Joke (Satire)**, that what happens in Egypt can only be properly understood, and is bearable only, if taken as a form of dark humour.⁵³ In the examples introduced here, this collapsed code appears specific to the ‘youth’ side of the spectrum; it should be interesting, however, to investigate this further by linking it to the proverbial Egyptian humour that is sometimes held to be an essential pre-requisite in the ability of the people of this country to survive the relentless challenges of everyday life. In this regard, the view of reality as dark comedy relates to the broken code **Ordinary Citizen = Hero** explored by Elena Chiti.⁵⁴ And this ordinary hero presupposes, one may say, a broken code **Order = Chaos**, which in turn contains the sub-sections **Police = Criminals** (“*il-dākhlīyya balṭaḡīyya*”; Shady ABUZAIID’s satirical Facebook comment, “do you plan to send over some plain-clothes informants as usual to abuse us and then say, ‘that was society?’”)⁵⁵ and **Care = Imprisonment**. All this contributes to the **dystopian** view of the **present** that Chiti also describes and that, to close the circle, is only manageable through satire.

These broken codes elicit quite a bit of emotive energy, as broken codes in the Gumbrechtian sense are bound to do. It is, however, also possible to identify some codes that seem to function in a relatively uncontroversial manner, at least in the material I have investigated here. There is **Courage vs. Fear**; all actors claim to be brave, despite being weary of the dangers threatening on all sides (one may explore this as a broken code as well, however, where the open admission and declaration of being afraid is an act of courage).

52 «إوعوا يكون مصادركم شبكات التواصل الاجتماعي! [...] دا خطر جدد! دا انا النهاردا حاقدرا أعمل حكاية جوه (Sisi in his 13 Apr. 2016 speech, see footnote 48; cf. also Nūr RASHWĀN, “al-Sīsī yuḥadhdhir min ḥurūb al-gīl al-rābī‘ wal-khāmis: ‘fī katā’ib elektrōniyya wi-qīṣṣa kibīra bitit‘imil,” *al-Shurūq*, 13 Apr. 2016, <<https://is.gd/Ve90A2>>).

53 This obviously inspires a lot of satirical cultural productions, whether on YouTube (the multitude of successors to Bāsim Yūsuf), on Facebook (*il-Waraqā* is only one example shutdown !!), on stage (*Masraḥ Maṣr*, criticized by some as superficial but hugely successful also via its multiplication via MBC TV [<<https://is.gd/lfnset>>] and social media; cf. Ḥusām KAMĀL, “Masraḥ Maṣr... al-ḍiḥk li-l-ḍiḥk,” *al-‘Arabī al-Jadīd*, 21 Jan. 2016, <<https://is.gd/zGrmZa>>), or in print as *adab sākhīr* (cf. Richard JACQUEMOND, “Satiric Literature and Other ‘Popular’ Literary Genres in Egypt Today,” in this dossier special).

54 Elena CHITI, “‘A Dark Comedy’: Perceptions of the Egyptian Present between Reality and Fiction,” in this dossier special.

55 See footnotes 39 and 17.

The old **Male vs. Female** stereotypes not only sneak in through Cairokee's lipstick line. The equation of activeness with the male is positively affirmed in the group's singing the praise of "real men;" it also remains visible in the condom prank. And the reactions to Aṭfāl Shawāri's videos suggest that **Piety vs. Blasphemy** continues to be an influential code also among large sections of the youth.⁵⁶

The most prominent array (an artefact, a role, or an activity that influences bodies) in the material collected here would seem to be **Prison**—the ever-expanding place where Sisi shuts away all elements threatening his nation-building project; the practical joke played on those he purports to embrace; the abode of a whole generation; the realm where "real men" live today. **Thugs** (*balṭagiyya*, see above) play a supportive role in this context. And both the **Screen World** of YouTube and Facebook videos, and **Music** (hip-hop and other) certainly have an effect on Egyptian bodies in 2016, though this is not directly documentable in the present article. Perhaps it is the **Voice**, the activity of **Speaking Up**, of trying to have an impact through sermon or satire, that itself constitutes a characteristic array of this year?

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56 Cf. the comments to Aṭfāl Shawāri's video "Barā'im al-īmān" (see footnote 37), many of which express disgust, often conveying the opinion, 'I used to like your videos, but this blasphemous stuff is not acceptable.'