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When a Coterie Becomes a Generation: Intellectual Sociability and the Narrative of Generational Change in Sayyid Qutb's Egypt

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The wave of uprisings that swept across Arab countries starting in the winter of 2010 was immediately interpreted as the “revolutions of the youth.” Whether portrayed as the explosive symptom of social, demographic, and political crisis, or, as in the case of Arab revolutions, as the promise of a democratic future in the region, in literature on Arab societies the youth are consistently seen as the main agents of social and political change (Bennani-Chraïbi and Fillieule 2012).

The generational narrative structured on the conflict between juniors and seniors is a widely used analytical approach to social change in many national contexts.¹ Since it was introduced by nineteenth century French

¹For example, the 1968 Revolution in France is typically analyzed through the prism of generational change, see Sirinelli (2008, 113–124); in Egypt, the generational framework is also often used for the analysis of cultural renewals, see, for example Shukri (1971).

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historians to define the Romantic youth who arrived on the literary scene in the 1830s (Diaz 2010), the notion of generations has traveled into other fields of inquiry, such as sociology, history, and the arts, where it gradually replaced the traditional focus on the succession of political regimes as the main site for observing historical change (Mannheim 1972, 276–86).

However, as Pierre Bourdieu has noted, the youth is a sociological rather than a biological category, whose assumed homogeneity and boundaries are subject to intense struggles of classification (Bourdieu 2002, 143–54). Indeed, the notion of generation is used not only by historians to account for social transformation, but by social actors themselves who employ generational rhetoric as a claim to power. To present oneself as part of the junior generation is indeed a powerful claim, since it implies that those defined as seniors are outdated and need to vacate their place.

In academic literature on change, the performative dimension of generation claims often goes unacknowledged. The problem of generations, to borrow the title of the foundational essay by Karl Mannheim, lies in its ambiguity as a term. It is both descriptive and discursive, referring simultaneously to the phenomenon of change and a discourse on change that are not easy to untangle. While a number of social scientists have been attentive to the discursive dimension of generational dynamics, analyzing the formation of “generational consciousness,” “generational identity” and, moreover, the role of culture in creating generational labels (Eyerma and Turner 1998; Edmunds and Turner 2002), the majority of studies tend to either infer a generational change from a historical transformation that has already taken place (cf. Theweleit 1987) or, on the contrary, to rely on generational claims as a sufficient indicator of a change to come (cf. Jayyusi 1995). Yet, the failure to differentiate between the discourse on change and the effective change presents a risk of confusing the cause with the outcome, preventing one from seeing how concretely generational collectives emerge and disappear from collective memory. Indeed, several studies dedicated to the generational phenomena have shown that the semblance of a generational unity, be it aesthetic, intellectual, or political, is usually forged after the collectives defined as generational are formed. The generational narrative allows

to conceal their original heterogeneity (Jacquemond 2003, 202–206; Sirinelli 2008, 113–24).

Focusing on intellectual history, this chapter suggests a way to study social conditions in which the generational rhetoric leads to a cultural renewal. It argues that connecting different scales of change—the emergence of a generational claim and the effective generational change—can be achieved by introducing an additional unit of analysis: the modes of intellectual sociability that socialize actors into collectives variously defined as literary schools, coteries, or generations. The examination of intellectual networks in relation to which a generational claim is made allows one to observe the importance of the public expression of bonds of solidarity in making the announced change a historical reality. This study suggests that collectives defined as generational tend to emerge in tandem with a change in a writer's relationship with his seniors, from a bond of mentorship to that of confrontation. Consequently, the change announced is effective when followed by the concrete actions of shifting one's public solidarities from masters to peers.

To better understand relations between generations in the literary field in Egypt, I draw on Walter Armbrust's concept of *isnad* (1996). Borrowing the classical term from Islamic sciences, where *isnad* refers to the chain of authoritative voices that authenticate a hadith,² Armbrust described different strategies employed by Egyptian cultural producers to either connect themselves to authoritative figures within their shared profession or to write people—and sometimes themselves—out of chains of transmission, in this case either by praising mentorship or by staging generational struggles.

This rhetoric of transmission combines with other narratives of literary history. The accusation towards literary community members of forming inward-oriented cliques became increasingly known as *shilaliyya* in the second half of the twentieth century, a derogatory term for a group (*shilla*) solidarity viewed as compromising to writers' commitment to

²Hadith is a record of the sayings and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, revered as a second major source of religious guidance in Islam after the Qur'an.

the society as a whole.³ Richard Jacquemond astutely shows that the praise of “generation” and the criticism of “*shilaliyya*” function as two opposed argumentative registers to describe the writers’ propensity to form solidarity-based collectives (Jacquemond 2003, 208-9).

Therefore, this study builds on Armbrust’s analysis of chains of transmission in Egyptian popular culture and on Jacquemond’s work on generational renewal in Egypt to show how intellectual sociabilities can provide crucial insights into the means of cultural change.

In order to document intellectual sociabilities, this chapter draws from the empirical data consisting of “textual traces” of intellectual practices of socialization. These are book reviews, literary confrontations and criticism, dedications, allographic prefaces, memoirs and all other “textual noise” produced as a result of intellectual interaction in print. This type of data usually falls outside the boundaries of authorial texts that are typically considered in the analysis of literary milieus.⁴ Addressed exclusively to peers, this type of literature is, however, particularly informative in uncovering the complex patterns of intellectual exchange.

The wealth of non-fictional texts on the social dimension of literary life produced in colonial Egypt is directly related to the weak institutional basis of its intellectual field, in which literary activity is pursued through personal networks rather than institutional regulations.⁵ As a result, both mentorship and peer-solidarity play a central role in promoting a literary career. This specificity of colonial Egypt’s intellectual field allows to grasp the multiple ways generational narrative articulates with social change. The absence of institutional efforts to canonize generational collectives reveals the fluctuating nature of generational claims and the ways they

³On the significance of *shilla* in shaping homosocial intimacies in contemporary Cairo, see Kreil (2016); on the function of *shilla-s* in politics, see Springborg (1982).

⁴The systematic use of this type of data is typically restricted to the study of literature of particular historical periods defined by the significance of literary coteries, such as those within nineteenth century France and eighteenth century Great Britain. See, respectively, Glinoe and Laisney (2013), Schellenberg (2016). From the perspective of digital humanities, this type of data had been extensively used in research projects on Belgium’s literary field, see, for example, Dozo (2009).

⁵Formed in the shadow of the British colonial domination, the Egyptian intellectual field can be characterized as “weakly institutionalized,” defined by the quest for both local and international recognition and the organization of literary activities through networks. On “weakly institutionalized” intellectual fields, see Aron and Denis (2006).

result in cultural renewal. Through analyzing the combination of generational claims with narratives on change, using intellectual networks as a unit of analysis and “textual noise” as empirical data, this study is intended as a methodological contribution to the study change within qualitative research.

The chapter’s argument is based on a case study of two generational battles led by the Egyptian intellectual-turned-Islamist ideologist Sayyid Qutb in the 1930s and 1940s, namely “The Battle of Literary Criticism” in 1934 and “The Battle of Juniors and Seniors” starting in 1947. Born in 1906 and executed for a conspiracy against ‘Abd al-Nasser’s regime in 1966, Qutb is mostly known today as a leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood organization whose publications inspired radical Islamist movements worldwide. But before dedicating himself to political activism, Qutb was known within the Egyptian literati as a literary critic and essayist with a pronounced taste for intellectual confrontations.⁶ His position during controversies shows the particular argumentative sets he had at his disposal to either legitimize his peers as members of the literary community or to exclude them from it under the argument of opportunism. Depending on his shifting intellectual relationships with his elders and peers, he defined the relation between writers either as a legitimate endorsement of juniors by seniors or as a battlefield of generational struggles by showing cronyism at work among the former or the latter group.

The article begins with the historical overview of the emergence of generational narrative and of its inversion, the accusation of *shilaliyya*, in colonial Egypt in order to understand how it acquired its argumentative force in intellectual confrontations. Then, it proceeds to the examination of Qutb’s involvement in the two controversies I just mentioned, combined with the parallel analysis of his shifting intellectual solidarities. Eventually, I compare the case of Qutb’s relationship with the postwar intellectual generation with that of Naguib Mahfuz, his former colleague and a future recipient of the Nobel Prize. By this example,

⁶The biographic literature on Qutb is vast. Among the most remarkable contributions are Yunis (1995), al-Khalidi (2007), Badawi (1992), Shalash (1994), al-Namnam (2014), Calvert (2010), Toth (2013), Musallam (2005).

the last section of the chapter considers how generational collectives preserve their identity over historical periods or, inversely, disappear from collective memory.

Generational Rhetoric in Interwar Egypt: Transmission and Rupture

In Egypt, the generational rhetoric spread as a result of the emergence of literary modernity in the first decades of the twentieth century. The British colonial domination to which Egypt was subjected since 1882, both in terms of the physical occupation of its territory and of cultural domination, favored the circulation of European literary models which were perceived as universal and normative. One of the most dramatic developments of this changing literary landscape in Egypt was the introduction of a new image of writers. Based on the Romantic myth of the “uncreated creator” (Bourdieu 1995, 187–91), the image of writers as endowed with a superior sensibility that placed them above the rest of humanity gradually replaced the classical conception of intellectuals, the *adib*, as “a cultivated person, a man of letters and good manners” (Pepe 2019, 181). As a result, literary creativity, originality and genius came to supplant, and in some cases merge with, models of erudition, loyalty to existing aesthetical canons and high moral purpose embedded in the pre-print patterns of knowledge production (Pepe 2019, 197–202).

The reformulation of a writer as “uncreated creator” introduced a set of new literary values. The portrayal of writers as inspired geniuses led to their relocation from the social sphere to that of transcendence, posited as the hypothetical origin of artistic inspiration. This shift inevitably entailed that a writer’s subservience to all forms of material power—be they economic, political, or social—become the biggest source of suspicion of his/her authenticity. As a result, “interest in disinterestedness” (Bourdieu 1995) emerged as the most powerful claim of the newly redefined symbolic capital in literature.

The spread of these literary models to Egypt was encouraged by the emergence of a new bureaucracy of cultural production during the

interwar period, including the establishment of the representative political system by the 1923 Constitution, a significant expansion of the press, and the rise of new educational institutions such as the Egyptian university, founded in 1908 and reformed into a public institution in 1925. These developments favored the emergence of a new social class, known in the historiography of the epoch as *efendiyya* (Ryzova 2014). Its members eagerly adopted European literary models as weapons against the established intellectual class of the time.

Portraying themselves as the spokespersons of modernity, members of the *efendiyya* relegated their elders to the sphere of tradition and, in the process, implanted new registers of criticism as the basis of a redefined literary normativity. During the interwar years, the denunciation of writers' political subservience had firmly taken root. This is demonstrated by the numerous attacks the emerging poet 'Abbas al-'Aqqad waged against the quintessential genre of courtly patronage of the arts, the panegyrics (*madh*), through the criticism of its most famous representative, the courtly poet Ahmad Shawqi. Likewise, "the disinterestedness" of literary creation imposed itself as an indisputed value in the press (al-Hakim, n.d., 75–80).

The generational rhetoric traveled to Egypt in tandem with literary models inspired by European Romanticism. The claim of forming a new literary generation was used by modernist writers as early as 1914,⁷ and by the 1920s the generational narrative had become a standard narrative within the history of literature.⁸

This generational rhetoric gained a particularly wide currency in the 1930s, a time when youth were claiming an increasingly assertive presence in politics and culture. Demonstrating a distrust of conventional political participation, young Egyptians formed organizations and engaged in extra-parliamentary political activism, becoming the central source of national anxiety concerning the youth's role in nation-making

⁷See the preface written by the poet 'Abbas al-'Aqqad to his friend's Ibrahim al-Mazni's first poetry collection published in 1914, Ibrahim 'Abd al-Qadir al-Mazni, *Diwan al-Mazni* (2013).

⁸See the book on literary criticism authored by 'Abbas al-'Aqqad and Ibrahim al-Mazni in 1921, in which they classified Ahmad Shawqi as part of the "past generation" (1928). See also al-'Aqqad's more systematic assessment of the "past generation" of literati in his *Shu'ara Misr wa Bi'atubum fi al-Jil al-Madi* (1937).

(El Shakry 2011).⁹ Although largely forgotten nowadays, the November 1935 youth upheaval that swept the universities and streets at that time had a powerful formative effect on young people's subjectivities (Abdalla 1985). This resulted in perhaps the first full-fledged generational battle splitting writers into "seniors" (*al-shuyukh*) and "juniors" (*al-shubban*), each defending their positions using classical arguments of generational struggles: juniors blamed seniors for blocking their careers, while seniors accused the youth of lacking knowledge and seeking rapid success (respectively, Qutb 1996, 5; Husayn 1989b, 170–77).

It is important to consider what the notions of "senior" and "junior" concretely meant in the context of interwar Egypt. As it appears from the debate, "senior" was less an indication of age than of fame. An anonymous author writing in *al-Risala* magazine in the midst of the battle used the notions of "senior" and "famous" interchangeably about writers. Petitioning for the creation of a syndicate for "junior" writers, he claimed to be a "junior" despite his advanced age, arguing for his limited fame (1934). Moreover, fame should be understood in relation to a powerful institution in the literary field of the period: intellectual mentorship. An example of how the playwright Tawfiq al-Hakim reached the status of "senior" illustrates this point. In his public letter addressed to the "Dean of Arabic Letters," Taha Husayn, in 1933, al-Hakim claimed to be a part of the generation of his disciples that would not exist without Husayn's caring guidance (al-Hakim 1933). In this letter, al-Hakim used generational rhetoric in the sense of historical transmission rather than rupture. In a span of two years, al-Hakim would lose the status of a disciple when, catapulted to literary stardom with his play *The People of the Cave*, he joined "the seniors". This transition of status is best attested to by the solicitations al-Hakim started receiving from aspiring writers asking him to preface their works.¹⁰

⁹The creation of the Muslim Young Men's Association in 1927, the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928, and Young Egypt in 1933 was part of this development.

¹⁰It was legendarily difficult to obtain a preface from al-Hakim, who openly despised the social conventions of literature in line with his pose of the ivory tower intellectual. However, in 1935 Salah Dhihni (n.d.), a young novelist, persuaded al-Hakim to preface his short story collection *In the Eighth Rank*. While al-Hakim's preface placed him in the position of mentor, Dhihni strengthened this association when he added a second preface in which he positioned himself as al-Hakim's disciple.

As this example suggests, the notion of “senior” is defined by the capacity of providing mentorship as well as willingness to assume this role through the modern textual practices of intellectual exchange, such as prefaces and dedications. The ubiquity of generational rhetoric, which can be used either in the sense of inter-generational transmission or rupture, is largely due to the centrality of the founders of literary modernity in interwar Egypt, which includes writers such as Taha Husayn, Tawfiq al-Hakim, or ‘Abbas al-‘Aqqad, who hold the power of legitimizing literary productions.

The fluctuating meanings of this generational narrative is related to the emergence of a new population of aspiring writers by the 1930s. Although these new writers considered themselves different from earlier pioneers in the field, they nonetheless attempted to locate themselves as following in the elders’ footsteps. Presenting themselves as the “generation of disciples” allowed aspiring writers to claim a part of the literary authority of their elders. However, the focus on Qutb’s involvement in the generational controversies in 1934 and 1947 shows the conditions in which the generational rhetoric may function as a narrative of historical rupture.

Intellectual Networks and the Shifting Registers of Argumentation: Generation and *Shilaliyya*

Moment One: Sayyid Qutb and the Battle of Literary Criticism in 1934: From Peers to a Mentor

The youth-led irruption in Egypt’s arts and political scene in the mid-1930s provided the conditions for Qutb’s literary breakthrough. Qutb espoused generational rhetoric as early as in 1932, in his first book on literary criticism entitled *The Poet’s Mission in Life and the Poetry of the Present Generation*. There Qutb presented himself as committed to introducing “junior poets” whose voices were marginalized by the clamor surrounding the famous “seniors” (Qutb 1996, 5–6). His commitment

to “junior poets” continued well into 1933, when he joined the Apollo Poetic Society founded a year earlier by the poet Ahmad Zaki Abu Shadi. The Apollo Society functioned as a loose network of poets of different aesthetic backgrounds (neo-classicists, Sufis, Romantics, etc.) structured around the association’s headquarters, a monthly periodical and a publishing house. Qutb published four poems in the periodical and, upon joining the *al-Ahram* journal as a staff writer in the spring of 1934, he used his position to promote Apollo poets as the new rising generation.¹¹

However, Qutb’s solidarity with the “juniors” of the Apollo association was not meant to last. It was soon compromised by a devastating literary battle that flared up between the famous modernist poet ‘Abbas al-‘Aqqad and the association’s founder Abu Shadi, following the latter’s review of al-‘Aqqad’s newly published poetry collection. Qutb had known al-‘Aqqad since the mid-1920s after meeting the famous poet through his uncle who hosted Qutb during his years as a student (al-Khalidi 2007, 37). Fascinated with al-‘Aqqad’s impressive personality, Qutb eventually started to define himself as his disciple (Qutb 1938, 1951), publishing most of his essays on al-‘Aqqad’s poetry and joining his literary salon (Husayn 1989a, 56).

The literary feud between the poets of the Apollo Society and his mentor al-‘Aqqad placed Qutb in a difficult position. The Apollo battle functioned as a “reality test” (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, 40–41), which provided the occasion to redefine the literary order. Eventually siding with his mentor al-‘Aqqad, Qutb threw himself fully in the battle. With the assumption of his public role as al-‘Aqqad’s disciple, Qutb relinquished the generational rhetoric with reference to the Apollo Society and switched, instead, to its inversed language of personal motivation, or *shilaliyya*. Suddenly denying the Apollo poets the status of a rising generation, Qutb began accusing them of cronyism, mutual self-promotion, and selfishness. As they had next to no talent, Qutb claimed, the Apollo

¹¹See, for example, Qutb’s assessment of the poet Salih Gawdat in *al-Ahram*, April 11, 1934, cited in Badawi (1992, 56–57).

poets' literary success was exclusively due to the association's strategies of self-promotion in its periodical and publishing activities.¹²

In his articles, Qutb intended to disclose "the truth" of the nature of the social ties underpinning the existence of the Apollo Society. Yet, the framing of Apollo poets as both a generation and a coterie contains part of the sociological identity of the group. The poets of Apollo Society might have emerged as a generation had the battle not led to the Society's closure, in December 1934, and the subsequent dispersion of its members. The Apollo Society not only represented a possible generation, but it was also a tightly-knit group of poets, engaged in the strategies of mutual promotion through criticism, book reviewing, and publishing. The switch from the generational rhetoric to the language of *shilaliyya* reveals the way these two alternative registers function as the means of legitimizing and delegitimizing literary communities. The choice of words depends on a particular constellation of relationships in which a writer is entangled; in this case, Qutb's shift of public solidarity from his peers to his mentor.

Moment Two: Sayyid Qutb and the Battle of Juniors and Seniors in 1947: From Mentors to Peers

The "Battle of the Juniors and Seniors" launched by Qutb in 1947 allows one to observe the reversal of the argumentative registers of generation and *shilaliyya*, this time in the opposite direction. During this controversy, Qutb employed these notions to account for his shifting solidarities from his first mentors to young aspiring writers. The literary confrontation took place amid the political agitation in the wake of the World War II. The war had disrupted the foundations of Egypt's cultural and political life. With the lifting of martial law and censorship, the country witnessed a rebirth of the national movement against British colonial rule. Already shaken, trust in the parliamentary system to achieve the nation's goals dwindled still more as the collusion between

¹²Qutb waged the battle in numerous periodicals associated with the Wafd party, namely *al-Jihad*, *al-Wadi* and *al-Usbu'*.

national elites and the colonial system became increasingly obvious (Gordon 1992, 19–32; Ryzova 2014, 250–59). In this climate, the generational rhetoric evolved. Young Leftist activists gathered in associations, publishing houses and journals used historical materialism to argue that the pioneers of modern literature belonged to a bygone age.¹³ Others accused the famous authors of having monopolized access to the publishing market, blocking their careers, exerting a cronyism of elders.¹⁴ These complaints were compounded by the general feeling that culture should be reformed to meet the requirements of Egypt's upcoming postcolonial future (Di-Capua 2018, 77–107).

Qutb joined the generational confrontation in April 1947. Since the lifting of martial law in 1945, he had been involved in various forms of activism for social justice and Egyptian independence, writing fiery articles in the press and campaigning for the public service reform.¹⁵ Reacting to the ongoing generational talk, Qutb published an article in his edited periodical *The Arab World* declaring that war had begun between “junior” and “senior” writers. Entitled “The Beginning of the Battle: Literary Consciousness in Egypt: Juniors and Seniors,” the article listed the “crimes” committed by the “seniors”: their support for the Allied Forces during the war, involvement in party bickering, and serving the entertainment industry in exchange for material gain. In addition to these socio-political failings, Qutb added an accusation of literary favoritism in which the “senior” writers allegedly promoted their sycophants—or as he put it “their tails and accompanying chorus”—at the expense of other, “honorable men” (Qutb 1951). In other words, Qutb tapped the argumentative register of *shilaliyya* to denounce the selective promotion of disciples by their mentors by the means of criticism, book reviews, or prefaces.

¹³The collective *al-Fajr al-Jadid* was one of these. See, for example, articles published in their journal by Amin Takla (2009), and Nu'man 'Ashur (2009).

¹⁴See al-ʿAqqad's response to such an accusation in al-ʿAqqad (1942).

¹⁵Qutb was particularly active in the campaign for the public service reform in the Ministry of Instruction, in which he worked. The reform was particularly needed, Qutb argued, to abolish the privileges accorded to the graduates of the Egyptian University under the pretext of their proficiency in European languages. See Qutb's article *Naqd Kitab Mustaqbal al-Thaqafa fi Misr* (1969) and especially the articles published in his edited periodical *The New Thought* in 1948.

Qutb's involvement in the generational battle was accompanied by a shift of his public solidarities to different literary communities. In 1947, he publicly announced his breaking of "the literary school" of al-'Aqqad (Qutb 1947, cited in Younis 1995, 81). Gradually, Qutb's offensive against "the generation of *udaba*" spilled over to the majority of his postwar writings published as journal essays or books.¹⁶

The most eloquent testimony of the role the framing of literary groups in terms of *shilaliyya* plays in controversies is Qutb's public letter addressed to one of the representatives of the pioneer writers, the historian and encyclopedist Ahmad Amin. Qutb used his own example to denounce the favoritism permeating the literary world: "I have been a disciple (*murid*), in the full sense of the word, of a man of your generation whom you all certainly know," Qutb wrote, referring to al-'Aqqad. "I have been a friend to many others. I wrote about all of them without exception, and explained their opinions, presented their books and analyzed their works. Then my turn came. My turn came to author books after having published essays, articles, and poems [...]. What was the reaction of my teacher (*ustadhi*)? What was the reaction of your entire generation?!" Apart from two meager references to his work in a daily periodical and on a radio show, there was an overwhelming silence, Qutb noted bitterly (Qutb 1951). Demonstrating the significance that literary criticism had for social ties between writers, this excerpt speaks of broken expectations of promotion tied to his status of disciple.

In parallel to leading the war against his mentor's generation, Qutb strengthened his ties to literary communities of aspiring novelists. The shift of solidarities from the established modernist writers to young authors is visible, first and foremost, in Qutb's choice of literary works for a review in his literary column in the *al-Risala* magazine. From the end of 1944, Qutb began reviewing works authored by the young novelists of a collective known as the Publishing Committee for University Graduates. The launch of the Publishing Committee in June 1942, by the Misr Publishing House, was a direct response to the monopoly held by "senior" writers on the publishing market, which prevented young

¹⁶For example, Qutb criticizes Tawfiq al-Hakim in Qutb (1983, 121, footnote 1); al-Aqqad in *al-Fikr al-Jadid*, February 26, 1948; Taha Husayn in Qutb (1951). He denounced modernist writers as a generation in Qutb (1993, 100–1).

authors from publishing their works (al-Sahhar 1991, 134). Some of the Publishing Committee's members, such as Naguib Mahfuz or 'Ali Ahmad Bakathir, were the rising stars of Egypt's literary competitions, but despite this they were unable to find publisher for their novels. Their dissemination initiative, through the Publishing Committee, aimed to overcome this strain by using cheap paper and limited editions (al-Sahhar 1956).

Qutb joined the collective in 1945. From then until 1951, he used its presses to publish his books, including the two editions of his Islamist best-seller *Social Justice in Islam*.¹⁷ Moreover, Qutb attended the collective's weekly meetings, where he struck up friendships, exchanged books, and conceived common projects.¹⁸ During the following years, the circle transited, with slight changes in membership, to other sites of intellectual practice, such as the short-lived periodicals *The Arab World*, *The New Thought*, and the *Journal of the Muslim Brotherhood*, edited by Qutb in 1947, 1948, and 1954, respectively.

Writing about *The New Thought* three years after its publication, Qutb referred to it as a "battalion" (*katiba*) which had been struggling to establish a "clean society" in Egypt, emphasizing its cohesive commitment to this common goal (Sabaseviciute 2018). There is little doubt that the collective, which was structured around Qutb from 1945 to his imprisonment in 1954 following the crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood, acted as a tightly-knit group based on friendships, gestures of solidarity in the press, and strategies of mutual promotion.

It was the Committee's authors that Qutb had in mind when speaking of the "juniors" in the April 1947 article in which he declared a generational war against "seniors." Qutb's review of Naguib Mahfuz's novel *The New Cairo* demonstrates, once again, how the emergence of generational claims relates to the broken promises of inter-generational transmission. Noting the silence with which Mahfuz's novel was received by the literary community, Qutb suggested that it was due to the author's

¹⁷Qutb published the following books in the Committee's press: *Four Phantoms* (1945), *A Child from the Village* (1946), *Social Justice in Islam* (1949 and 1951).

¹⁸Most of them were published in *al-Risala* between October 1944 and November 1951. See, for example, the testimony by the translator Wadi' Filistin, who met Qutb in the Committee's weekly meetings (Filistin 2003, 283-90). Qutb cooperated with the Committee's co-founder Abd al-Hamid al-Sahhar in producing stories for children.

junior status and lack of protection. He wrote in 1946: "One of the signs of the neglect of [literary] criticism in Egypt [...] is that such a book passes without stirring up a literary or social storm. Is it because of the author's youth?" Reminding readers that al-Hakim's literary success years ago had been due to his placing himself under Husayn's protection, he added: "Or is it because [...] Naguib Mahfuz and his like among the juniors do not throw themselves or their art into the hands of anyone except their readers?" (Qutb 1946a). In Qutb's view, the arrogance with which seniors regarded juniors' literary production amounted to betrayal of their literary mission, part of which was a duty of inter-generational transmission. Qutb's conclusion that this duty had been betrayed contributed to his breaking from his mentors and investing in the juniors' activities in the Publishing Committee.

Qutb's position within the Publishing Committee points to the conditions in which a "senior" becomes part of the "juniors." In many regards, within the Publishing Committee, Qutb was in fact a "senior" among the "juniors." Not only was he forty while most of the Publishing Committee's writers were in their twenties, he was also more advanced in his career and could assume the role of a mentor to his younger colleagues. By the time of his association with the Publishing Committee he was supervising a literary column in *al-Risala*, had connections in the publishing market, and was about to assume the editorship of two periodicals. Yet, in 1945 Naguib Mahfuz defined him as "a spokesperson for our present generation" (Mahfouz 1945). He reviewed his junior colleagues' writing, wrote prefaces to their works, and attempted to place their writing with famous publishers.¹⁹ The literary critic Wadi' Filistin described Qutb's presence in the circle as "encouragement" (*tashji'*), a term which can also be understood in the sense as mentorship (Filistin 2003, 283).

¹⁹See Qutb's preface to 'Abd al-Mun'am Shumayyis' *Suqut al-Qahira* (1951) and his letter addressed to Husayn in 1945 asking him to publish or at least to "write a word" on a manuscript by his junior colleague, 'Imad al-Din 'Abd al-Hamid. The letter is reproduced in *Akhbar al-Adab*, no. 970, 26 February 2012, 17.

Qutb's status within the Publishing Committee points again to the centrality of mentorship as a condition of intellectual circulation across the generational divide. By assuming mentorship, a "senior" can be accepted within the ranks of the "juniors," while the status of discipleship confers privileged access to the world of the "seniors."²⁰ In both cases the vertical bond of transmission has the effect of blurring the generational boundary.

Writing Oneself Into and Out of Generations: The Cases of Naguib Mahfuz and Sayyid Qutb

The Publishing Committee's collective, which both Qutb and Mahfuz referred to as the "junior generation" during the late 1940s, provides an illustration of the disintegration of generational collectives. Despite the historical significance of the role the collective played in laying the groundwork for the Egyptian realist novel, the Publishing Committee has no other presence in Egypt's literary history than as "the fathers of the Sixties Generation."²¹

Examining later, more "successful" cases of generational renewals in Egypt, such as the Sixties generation, the Seventies poetic generation, and the Nineties literary generation (Linthicum 2017, 229–61), Richard Jacquemond has noted that generational collectives tend to implode when some of their members accumulate a sufficient amount of symbolic capital allowing them to pursue their literary career on the individual track (1999, 353). This analytical framework could be expanded in two directions. First, the case of the Publishing Committee suggests that the

²⁰This observation is confirmed by other examples of inter-generational transmission in Egypt, namely the presence of the "senior" novella writer Edward Kharrat within "the Sixties generation" and, in the opposite case, the acceptance of "the juniors" 'Abd al-Hakim Qasim and Gamal al-Ghitani within "the seniors." In the first case, al-Kharrat's place within "the sixties generation" comes from his promotion of young writers through his co-edited magazine *Gallery* 69, while in the second case, Qasim and al-Ghitani "earned" their place within "the seniors" by paying tribute to them. In both cases, inter-generational transmission is possible under the condition of mentorship and of tribute. For the discussion of these cases, see, respectively, Jacquemond (2003, 207–8), Ramadan (2012, 424–25).

²¹This is the title of Muhammad Jibril's book on the Committee (Jibril 1995).

acquisition of a sufficient amount of fame leads authors to claim a place in the history of literature as heirs of the pioneers of modern literature rather than as representatives of their generation. A second observation concerns the choice of the argumentative register through which this claim is made; rather than speaking of intellectual influence, famous authors tend to slip again to the language of personal relationships and mentorship when paying homage to older Egyptian authors.

Multiple factors may explain the historical disruption of the postwar literary generation, among which the 1952 revolution and its transformative effect on individual destinies played a crucial part. Some of the Committee's authors stopped writing literature, others joined Nasser's cultural establishment, and others such as Qutb transited into the Islamist movement. But what also contributed to the disappearance of the postwar generation was the fact that its most famous representative, Naguib Mahfuz, located himself within the heritage of famous writers of the interwar period rather than crediting the Committee for his literary emergence.

In understanding Mahfuz's self-positioning regarding Egypt's literary history, Jacquemond's model of the formation of generational collectives could be combined here with the mechanism of *isnad* described by Armbrust (1996). The diverging positions that Mahfuz and Qutb occupy in contemporary Egypt's official literary history—the former representing the pinnacle of Egypt's literary accomplishment and the latter cast as the dark force seeking Egypt's destruction—exemplifies the different uses of *isnad*.

By joining the Muslim Brotherhood in 1953, Qutb effectively wrote himself out of not only the postwar intellectual generation but also Egypt's literary history at large. Rather than claiming association with Egypt's literary figures, in his post-1954 activities, he slotted himself into the tradition of political Islam. Qutb's decision to re-publish Hasan al-Banna's, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, treatise "My Will" (*Wasiyati*) in the inaugural issue of his edited *Journal of the Muslim Brotherhood* in May 1954 testifies to his ambition to connect himself to the founding figures of Islamic activism.²² This shift is clear in the direction

²² *Majalla al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*, May 1954, n. 1, 1.

that his literary criticism took: the overwhelming majority of the authors whose work he reviewed and prefaced from the early 1950s onward were local or transnational Islamic activists.²³

Mahfuz took the opposite road and inserted himself into the lineage of the literary giants of the interwar period. His aspiration to make himself the heir of Egypt's founding fathers of modern literature is visible in his post-Nobel-Prize public writings. In his foreword to a collection of Husayn's letters, Mahfuz presents himself as his disciple ('Abd al-Aziz 2000, 7–11). He adopts a similar stance in his memoir edited by the literary critic Raja' al-Naqqash in the early 1990s. In its section "Writers I Have Known" one would expect to find the details of his relationship with the Committee authors with whom he had shared the miseries of the aspiring writer. Yet Mahfuz dedicates the section to discuss his relationships with the famous writers of the interwar period (al-Naqqash 2011, 73–85).²⁴

By paying public homage to these writers Mahfuz contributed to creating the *isnad* of literary modernity, into which he slotted himself. Such an act might have been determined as much by Mahfuz's personal choice as by the numerous pressures he visibly received from his contemporaries, who, by recording his memoirs or soliciting him to write a preface to the writings of interwar luminaries, pressured him to position himself in regard to the founders of literary modernity.

As a result, Mahfuz lost his identity as part of the postwar literary generation in exchange for the much more coveted position of a purveyor of literary tradition. His case invites reflection on how literary fame affects self-positioning with regard to collectives: an extraordinary literary success singles out a writer and allows him to claim a place as a heir of the pioneers. This explains the observation made by Alain Roussillon that generations in Egypt are defined by a sort of "simultaneity," with no acknowledgeable way to surpass the founding ones (Roussillon 1990,

²³In 1953 he prefaced the books by Khalid Ibrahim 'Argun, the Azhari poet and activist, the Jordanian Muslim Brother Yusuf al-'Azm, and in 1951, Qutb wrote the introduction to the second edition of the best-seller *Madha Khasara al-'Alam bi-Inhītat al-Muslimin* by the South Asian scholar Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi. Qutb's preface to Mahmud's Abu al-Wafa's collection *Anashid Diniyya* in 1953 is an exception to the rule; Abu al-Wafa was a poet and close friend of Qutb.

²⁴Namely Tawfiq al-Hakim, 'Abbas al-'Aqqad, Ibrahim al-Mazni, and Salama Musa.

250–51, cited in Jacquemond 1999, 33). What is striking, however, is that in order to claim a place in this pantheon, authors would use means based in the world of intellectual sociability, such as an assertion to discipleship. In this regard tribute features as a condition of literary authority, revealing the structural role that the institution of mentorship and the practice of tribute play in regulating Egypt's literary tradition and memory.

Conclusion

In the Egyptian context, the notions of generation and *shilla* function as two different language registers describing the writers' tendency to form solidarity-based collectives. The difference between the two lies in their performative value: while the notion of generation acts as a device to legitimize collectives in literary terms, the language of *shilaliyya* aims to delegitimize them as personal bonds, undercutting the commitment to literature as a whole. Qutb's involvement in two literary controversies in colonial Egypt demonstrates the pivoting relationship between these argumentative registers, at the core of which lies the institution of mentorship. While during the 1934 generational crisis, Qutb's aspiration to be al-'Aqqad's disciple made him abandon generational rhetoric, in 1947 the reverse occurred: the feeling that the promises of inter-generational transmission had not been fully fulfilled contributed to his decision to launch a generational war. Because of their strong performative value, the categories of generation and *shilaliyya* work as weapons adopted in reaction to a particular reshuffling of intellectual relationships within which the users of these categories find themselves.

The institution of mentorship plays a determining role in flipping these categories around. The narratives of marginalization that accompany the postwar generational claims indicate that the latter emerges when the bond of inter-generational transmission between juniors and seniors is severed. But besides the usual horizontal generational collectives of peer writers, Egypt's literary history rotates around filiation to pioneering writers who, by virtue of their direct connection to the origins of modernity, hold the power of authorizing literature. The position

of competition or discipleship that a writer adopts in relation to those who are deemed “seniors” determines whether generation functions as a narrative of change or of tradition.

The method used in this chapter can be extrapolated to the study of change in other social contexts defined by the dynamics of competition and collaboration. The majority of modern literary worlds are characterized by an ambiguity between the claim of individualism, rooted in the Romantic image of a writer as “uncreated creator,” and the tendency to form collectives, such as literary coteries, schools and generations, as a means to pursue literary activities. In the scholarship on literary milieus, this specificity of literary practice has often led to the exaggerated significance of rhetoric when analyzing cultural renewals. As a result, cultural innovations have often been studied as the succession of literary styles, aesthetics, and ideas attributed to the genius of famous individual authors. This chapter aimed to suggest a way to make use of the ambiguity between individualization and collectivization in studying change. It suggested that in order to understand how these contradictory tendencies articulate with each other, one should take a closer look into the formation of these collectives by means of textual data produced as the result of intellectual socialization in print, such as literary criticism, battles, prefaces, and dedications. The combined analysis of intellectual sociabilities and rhetorical claims can thus provide fresh insight into the microdynamic forces underpinning larger social and historical processes.

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